

**E-mail to Allan Woodhouse
In reply to Michael Hall's paper
Re the place of WHY in human languaging**

23 March 2002

My dear Alan,

Maybe, it is not necessarily for me to do this. However, I feel that to be on the safe side, I think it is best I share with you my commentaries on Michael Halls counter positions concerning ours that he put to pen in his latest book, Communication Magic.

For the sake of these commentaries, I will have to stomach that there is such a thing as Cause => Effect. Therefore, I will write from the position as if there is Cause and Effect. However, I hope you will remember that I do not, even as I do not believe that the world is FLAT.

Simple cause—effect statements imply a linear world., Of course it is possible to see that there can be an effect that results from an apparently confabulated and seemingly confusing set of antecedent variables that would be its causes. If this is so, then it is possible to utter complex Cause => Effect statements. However, one thing is clear, it will not alter the structural nature of the relationship between the variables and their end result. It is as computer science has abbreviated it to – C => E and any dissertation on such a process will at the end evaluate it as such. For me all Cause => Effect is simple because of its inherent structural nature. What could be more simple than C => E? It is like 1 + 1 = 2. It is not S = k log w (Boltzman Equation for entropy). To the extent that it does, it goes wrong. I do not know how he comes to this conclusion that a linear relationship must necessarily go wrong, unless he is trying here to find an accommodation with the current scientific positions that this world is complex by virtue of its intrinsic non-linear nature. I have known of many linear relationships that have born the most productive fruits and benefits in its life. In a world of complex systems, most 'causation' involves multiple factors and systemic influences. **MY GOD!** The complexity of world systems is **NOT** because of causal multiple factors and causal systemic influences but because of the intrinsic non-linear nature of their transformations. Simple causation leads to another toxic response, blaming. Dr. Dennis Chong has written a small book on this, *Don't Ask Why?!* But he goes too far in absolutely rejecting and forbidding any causation. I feel sad that he cannot see that complex causation leads to complex blaming. To imply that if it is complex, there is no blaming is nonsense. You only have to see the complex blaming that is extant now that has unfolded out of the Enron debacle. By contrast, systemic, non-linear causation that describes multiple contributing factors facilitates owning responsibility and staying solution-focused. This is an incredible leap in logic. To claim that a system undergoing non-linear transformations apparently on a causal track is the genesis for personal responsibility and staying solution-focussed is clearly mixing things of different logical levels. He is utterly confused. All systems that undergo transformation, whether they are linear or non-linear can be described by mathematical equations. This an example of an equation that describes the transformation of the system. The system concerns the transforms that appertain to a straight line, $y = mx + c$. Now, below is an equation that describes a non-linear system, $(a + b)^n = a^n + {}^n C_1 a^{n-1} b = \dots + n C_r a^{n-r} b^r = \dots + b^n$. This is the classical Binomial Theorem. It is the intrinsic nature of all mathematical equations that they do not speak to C => E relationships between the variables. Which school boy was ever taught that they radius of a circle caused or made the circumference. The boy knows that the relationship is a functional one in which the value of one at a moment time varies as the other according to the circumscription of the equation, i.e., by 2 pi.

Misunderstanding ‘Ill-formedness’

The Meta-Model speaks about, and focuses on, ‘semantic illformedness.’ This refers to the magic of mind that encodes ill-formed maps via our words. This brings me to the interesting, but strange, version of the Meta-Model that Dennis Chong (1993) has created. While his expertise as a medical doctor shows up in his 1994 book, *The Knife Without Pain*, on using hypnotic communication for surgery, his attempt at updating the NLP communication model leaves much to be desired. Mostly he seemed to take the phrase, ‘semantically ill-formed’ to mean something really ‘bad.’ It is very clear that Hall has a unique if not tilted understanding of this phrase “semantically ill-formed.” When something, a thing, person, event, statement, opinion is ill-formed it is the converse of well-formed. It is therefore misshapen, twisted, warped, bent, askew, deformed. When one says that the “semantics” of a thing, person, event, statement, opinion is ill-formed, one is saying that the meaning of it misshapen, twisted, warped, bent askew, deformed. It means it is illogical. When things are illogical but there is humour, then there is fun and laughter, However, as a therapist, you can note that when there is no humour to illogicality as in the life and the understanding of life by your clients there is only woe, tears, pain and suffering. And his bugaboo is the cause—effect distinction. His reading led him to think that Bandler and Grinder “denounced” cause—effect (p. 105). I do not think it. I know it because:

It was at the Mission Street groups that we first began acquiring our information gathering tools that were later to become the meta model patterns. The foundations of the information gathering tools began with the how, who, and what questions from the Gestalt framework, deleting that unspoken question, why.

We used to get yelled at and sometime bopped on the head for saying why.

In a very therapeutic way of course.

Terrence L. McClendon: *The Wild Days NLP 1972 -1981* Meta Publications 1989 page 40.

I knew McClendon, he was with Dilts and Gordon in those very early days when NLP was just beginning. Unfortunately Bandler did not like him, He, in turn, left the United States to live in Australia where he was to bring NLP to that continent.

His quote is critically significant because what he has to say about Bandler and Grinder’s attitude towards the question “why” serves to index their implicate concern for Cause => Effect. You know that “why” is the linguistic channel into Cause => Effect.

This misunderstanding of what an ill-formed representation meant in TG and how NLP has used it as a way of testing for more enhancing structures, led him to write off *causation* as a totally useless concept. ‘Causal modeling’ he wrote ‘is a complete mismatch of the territory’ (p. 168). He goes further when he asserts in his own denunciations against causation:

..it has been clearly shown that a system based on the structure of $Y \rightarrow X$ is the condition for a mad world.” (p. 231)

Well, don’t tell that to architects, engineers, designers, etc. Scientists everywhere use the concept of ‘causation’ to great effects even though *philosophically* we recognize that it’s not real, but only

a concept. Newtonian physics, which mostly uses linear causation, has enabled us to experience the scientific revolution of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It has empowered us to build bridges, skyscrapers, engines, tools, cars, trains, planes, etc. It has allowed us to model billiard playing, sports, and many other fields involving movement, change, speed, etc. I feel truly sad by this passage because he is asserting contrary things that I have advised and informed him about. Clearly, what I took such trouble to share with him has just sailed past him. The riposte to him is to be found here:

The causality principle requires that every effect be preceded by a unique cause. This idea had served for over a century as a basic assumption of practically every form of rational research. The French mathematician Laplace is credited with perhaps the simplest definition of causality as applied to Newtonian mechanics: if the position and momentum of a particle are accurately known at a given moment, then, its motion is fully determined by the mechanical equations for all future time.

The uncertainty principle, Heisenberg asserted, denies this: “in the strict formulation of the causal law - if we know the present, we can calculate the future - it is not the conclusion that is wrong but the premise.: The initial values of the momentum and position cannot be measured simultaneously with absolute precision. As such one can calculate only a range of possibilities for the position and momentum of the particle at any future time. The causal connection between the present and the future is lost, and the laws and predictions of quantum mechanics become probabilistic, statistical, in nature.

Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle was profound and far-reaching in nearly every respect.

David C. Cassidy: *Heisenberg, Uncertainty and the Quantum Revolution* Scientific American May 1992 pages 110-111.

David Cassidy is a respected name in the community of physicists and mathematicians. In this quote which I shared with Michael Hall, Cassidy is saying the position of $C \Rightarrow E$ is finished because of the Heisenberg Principle. I also told him that understanding of reality by Newtonian physics by the Scientific community is over, finished, caput because of Einstein. It is Relativity not Causality from here on in.

This misunderstanding led Chong to conclude that every ‘why’ question must also be bad and inevitably lead to ‘blame.’ Now certainly asking existential *why* questions that invite a negative framing, can create semantic distress.

“Why am I this way?” “Why can’t I get my act together?”

“Why is she such a snob?” “Why can’t things go better for me?” etc.

‘Why’ questions do frequently lead to blaming and accusing. And true enough, many people ask *why* questions in order to escape responsibility.

“Why did you do that to me?” “Why can’t you learn to think before you speak?”

In this, I agree with Chong on his general emphasis about not asking ‘why.’ Yet there are other kinds of why questions, *why questions* that increase our resourcefulness and enable us to create very empowering maps. This is utterly childish. It is like saying, arsenic is bad for you but there are certain kinds of arsenic that can be good.

Intentional Why: Why do you want that? Because I am a greedy pig! What will that do for you?

Value Why: Why do you feel that's so important? **Because I am a pompous ass.** Why do you care about it as you do and invest so much of yourself into it? **Because I am a shortsighted idiot.**

Explanation Why: Why do things fall to the ground when I release them? **Because I am not in the space shuttle when it would float up into the air.** Why does it seem that the sun moves through the sky? **It does not seem so. It does, anyone can witness that by inspection!**

Causation or Source Why: Why do you repeatedly undermine your success in that way? **Because I am humble person and I believe in the good of poverty.** Why do you frame things as you do today? **Because of your lack of foresight and depth in thinking.**

“Communication Magic” – Michael Hall, Pg 153 – 155

It has been quite tiring if not exhausting to go over these passages by Michael and to answer them. I just feel so sad for him. He is pissing in the wind in spite of all my efforts to save him.

Virginia Satir once said in her delivery as a Keynote Presenter at a conference, “WHY is a mind fucking question.”

kindest regards,
Dennis