

## Seizing a Thought: Learning from Method of Levels

### Introduction and Preparation

#### BACKGROUND

A few years ago we were introduced to a therapeutic process called *Method of Levels* (MOL)[1]. For the past few months James has been modelling MOL to assess whether any of their approach could be of value to symbolic modellers. Many of MOL's *principles* about how individuals change are similar to those of Symbolic Modelling (SyM). However comparing the *processes* of both approaches reveals significant differences. And when it gets down to actual *practice*, although both almost exclusively make use of questions, of course only one uses David's Grove's Clean Language.

While we are convinced MOL practitioners could benefit hugely from using Clean Language, our aim has been to discover what an MOL approach can offer symbolic modellers.[2]

So far we have identified five features of MOL which we think can enhance the *flexibility* of SyM facilitators. These are to have more adeptness to:

- Notice 'disruptions' in the flow of what a client is saying or doing [3]
- Intervene immediately after a disruption
- Ask concise questions about those disruptions (i.e. keep questions as short as possible with minimal or no repeating of the client's words)
- Attend more to the here-and-now
- Invite clients to 'go up-a-level' in their perception.

All of these things already happen in Symbolic Modelling but not to the degree they happen in MOL. On November 14-15 we will delve into the myriad of ways David Grove's work and Symbolic Modelling make use of 'disruptions' and consider how the above five features of MOL can inform the SyM process.

To emphasise, during the Developing Group workshop we will *not* be learning or practicing MOL. We will be incorporating some MOL practices into SyM in order to see if (a) they add to our flexibility as facilitators and (b) there is anything to add to the model of SyM.

Below you will find more information to help you prepare for our exploration into this fascinating topic!

Our motto for the workshop will be *Carpe Cogitatu* (seize the thought).

Penny and James

## Method of Levels

On [Wikipedia](#) it says:

The *method of levels* is a cognitive approach to psychotherapy based on *perceptual control theory* (PCT). Using MOL, the therapist aims to help the patient shift his or her awareness to higher levels of perception in order to resolve conflicts and allow reorganization to take place.

The core process is to redirect attention to higher level control systems by recognizing 'background thoughts', bringing them into the foreground, and then being alert for more background thoughts while the new foreground thoughts are explored. The theory is that when the level-climbing process reaches an end state without encountering any conflicts, the need for therapy may have ended. When, however, this 'up-a-level' process bogs down, a conflict has probably surfaced, and the exploration can be turned to finding the systems responsible for generating the conflict—and away from a preoccupation with the symptoms and efforts immediately associated with the conflict.

In terms of practice, MOL has two goals, to:

1. Ask about a current problem focusing on the process of the client's present perception of their *distress* rather than the content of their symptoms.
2. Facilitate the client's awareness of *disruptions* and/or higher level thoughts and perceptions by asking about them when they spontaneously happen.

*Disruptions* often indicate a background thought and are assumed to indicate a sudden shift of awareness. Often, but not always, these shifts will be to a higher level of perception than the problem itself. Disruptions can take many forms, mostly they are indicated by nonverbal breaks in the conversational flow (a gesture, laugh, look away, pause mid-sentence, become teary, change in intonation, etc.) or by meta-comments and evaluations of what is being described.

## Preparation

In particular we would like you to consider:

(1) What verbal and nonverbal client behaviours indicate they have either 'interrupted' their own thought process or are having a 'background' thought?

(2) Which Clean Language questions invite the client to attend to those interruptions or background thoughts?

## Resources

As mentioned above, some aspects of Symbolic Modelling have clear overlaps with MOL. Here are a few links to related articles on our website:

**Levels** [cleanlanguage.com/levels/](https://cleanlanguage.com/levels/)

**Interruptions** (MOL disruptions)

**Non-verbal behaviour**

[cleanlanguage.com/clean-language-without-words/](https://cleanlanguage.com/clean-language-without-words/)

**Meta-comments**

[cleanlanguage.com/if-only-god-would-give-us-a-sign/](https://cleanlanguage.com/if-only-god-would-give-us-a-sign/)

There are plenty of resources online about MOL and although it's not necessary for your participation in the Developing Group, if you are interested to know more about MOL we suggest you start with this website, [methodoflevels.com.au](https://methodoflevels.com.au) and in particular we recommend watching a few of the explanatory and short session videos at [methodoflevels.com.au/mol-in-action/](https://methodoflevels.com.au/mol-in-action/).

MOL was derived from a model of human function called *Perceptual Control Theory* (PCT). You don't need to know anything about PCT but if you are interested we have put a short summary in your [devgroup.thinkific.com](https://devgroup.thinkific.com) dashboard with a list of introductory books on MOL and PCT.

## NOTES

1. Thank you Sharon Small.
2. There are a few within the MOL community (such as Lynndal Daniels) who see the value of Clean Language and are attempting to use a 'Clean MOL' but so far the leaders in the field have shown little or no interest.
3. We prefer to think of these behaviours as 'interruptions' rather than 'disruptions' since the latter has connotations we'd rather were not associated with this natural process. Dictionary definition of disrupt: (1) to "interrupt (an event, activity, or process) by causing a disturbance or problem; (2) to "drastically alter or destroy the structure of".