



The Structure of Magic I: A Book about Language and Therapy

Richard Bandler, John Grinder

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These seminal works in neurolinguistic programming (NLP) help therapists understand how people create inner models of the world to represent their experience and guide their behavior. Volume I describes the Meta Model, a framework for comprehending the structure of language; Volume II applies NLP theory to nonverbal communication.

The Structure of Magic I: A Book about Language and Therapy Details

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From Reader Review The Structure of Magic I: A Book about Language and Therapy for online ebook

Brian Hohmeier says

Pro-tip: Skip to the conclusion; see the TOC if you have questions about anything concluded; proceed to Volume II.

Irma Walter says

I studied it and started evaluating my own language. What surprising things I found out about myself. We get strangled by our own habits and interpretations.

Talk is powerful. However, we would have to agree to be healed by words. Otherwise, we'd just generalise again: it's just smooth-talking.

Rafael Alves says

This book is NOT about mind manipulation, it's NOT about reading minds, it can't even be used for misguided purposes for if anything, this book will tell us how in a simplified way, we operate in the world through our minds and build different internal representations of the world based on what we have experienced - some chances for improvement and action, or lack of choice and freedom. And even the techniques distilled by Bandler and Grinder from all sorts of therapeutic are confined therefor to the walls of therapeutic work, this is NOT to be used idly or for sports but in careful closed guided consideration one must have to fix our learned disabilities if i can use such a word i don't agree with myself.

Now The Structure of Magic specifically applies to the explicit grammatical structure of a person's understanding of the world, it focuses on the 'well formed in therapy'. syntax and consistency between ideas and uttered sentences by the client and the therapist has first and foremost to grasp enough of the client's model of the world so that he can, by asking the right questions, show a hidden option that the client can take or was always able to take but couldn't see.

Very excited about Volume II, should go into integrating sensorial perceptions more bravely with the digital, that is words themselves. A must read for every potential and current therapist, and enthusiasts of the field.

Jose says

This book is amazing!

Not only the content but the way it is written shows that the authors live by their own standards in working through the subtleties of language.

This book elucidates the nature of human reality, the only reality that humanity knows. It ties language to the essence of our reality and implies if we can learn how to handle our language, we learn how to handle reality itself (or that which we perceive reality to be).

Learning the content in this book is empowering, I don't say that in the motivational or emotional sense, I say it in a practical sense. "Enrich" your "model", open your mind, and realize the power inherent in you through mere existence.... I'm starting to sound too abstract...

This is exciting.

I can't wait to read volume 2!

Morgan says

The Structure of Magic refers to the mental structures that people have about how the world works, and how those structures impact the words that they say in therapy. The book's argument is that understanding these structures can dramatically improve the effectiveness of a therapist, regardless of what type of therapy they practice.

The semantics of the sentences that people say in therapy is determined by their conception of their own experience. So a therapist is two levels removed from what's actually been happening to the person.

A person's experience -> their model of the world -> what they say about the experience

Each level of the structure is different from the preceding level in many ways. These differences all fall into the categories of deletions (ignoring something from a lower level of abstraction), generalizations, and distortions.

By paying attention to what deletions, distortions, and generalizations are in somebody's descriptions of their experiences, a therapist can get a good idea of what that person's model of the world is. By strategically challenging a person's model of the world, it can be enlarged to allow them access to new options.

Overall, I thought this book was great. It's clearly written and full of good examples. It also helped me to understand some things about human interactions that had been confusing me.

For one thing, the idea that people are experts on their own experience seems to conflict with other people being able to come up with better approaches to certain problems. These two observations are harmonized by the idea that people are the experts on their own experiences, but their model of the world may be limiting them such that they can't identify certain options. This also explains why people often fail to follow advice: if the advice conflicts with their model of the world then they will be very unlikely to see it as an option even after the advice has been given.

This book is full of similar realizations.

I was at first put off by the title, and worried that it would be full of wishful thinking about how to solve problems. Instead, the book offers lots of concrete advice backed by case studies and examples.

Stuart Macalpine says

Bandler and Grinder set out to show how coaches or therapists who are very effective, use a range of very similar skills which the authors here try to pull together: in book 1 they mainly deal with language (book 2

mainly deals with verbal and non-verbal representation systems).

The text of book 1 I found to be much simpler than book 2 which is very hard. Book 1 is similar to 'questions for specificity' in cognitive coaching, but with a much fuller picture of the differences between 'deep structures' (residues of real experience in the mind) and 'surface structures' which are the distorted, deleted and wrongly generalised things one chooses to say about those experiences.

The basic idea is that by mediative questioning about what has been 'left out', the client can more fully engage with the original experience, rather than their simplification of it, and therefore can have more options about how to respond. In this case, some of the work on causality is very close to mindfulness; in other parts it is like cognitive coaching paraphrase work.

The biggest 'plus' of the text, is it makes complete sense of the rather obscure way that cognitive coaching talks about 'deep structures': these words make more sense when you know they come from these texts.

Sergio Ledward says

Un gran libro para entender como las personas estructuramos el mundo y como lo compartimos y re-creamos a través del lenguaje.

El énfasis está en la práctica terapéutica, sin embargo puede ser extraordinariamente útil para cualquier persona interesada en entender el comportamiento humano.

Este libro es la base de Programación Neurolingüística antes de que se llamara así

David Fleming says

THE STRUCTURE OF MAGIC

This is a little gem of a book which, perhaps more so than any other, helped me understand how our minds work on a linguistic basis (a topic of, no doubt, interest to avid readers).

The downside is that it's basically a textbook writing for psychologists. But, if you can stomach the dryness, the rewards of insight are well worth the effort.

As many know, this series of books along with Frogs into Princes helped to establish the field of Nero Linguistic Programming or NLP.

Manglio Reyes says

oriented to licensed therapists
too theoretical for my interests but a serios book

Brian says

An attempt to turn 1960's linguistics into a therapy technique. Despite the absurdity of such a quest, the model presented is very impressive and useful.

The authors have a deep admiration for the work of therapists that are so effective at causing the patients to look at their blindspots and develop new, richer models, that it seems like downright magic. They repeatedly mention the work of Virginia Satir, one of the pioneers of family therapy, as one of their big inspirations.

Through their curiosity about those feats of Magic, they came to map out the Structure of the process into concrete mechanical steps even a simple Python script could follow. I'm very fascinated, as my amateurish attempts to follow the model yielded results, though it's hard to know how useful it would have been without Focusing. Overall, I put this model in the category of "things that attempt to get people to do Focusing if you poke at them enough"

Their two full transcripts were very elucidating and I think every therapy book should do this. It also reminded me how 95% of a therapy session is the client trying to not really look at the problem, and 5% is the actual breakthrough into new territory.

Despite the authors' admiration of people like Virginia Satir and the work of other great healers of the heart, they don't strike me as Bodhisattvas such as Marshal Rosenberg or Mr. Rodgers. Looking at their Wikipedia pages and websites, I get the sense they're now some kind of second-rate overly-tanned snake-oil salesmen. Bandler's website informs me that "Dr. Bandler has been nominated for Global Guru in the area of NLP." Too bad.

Their explanation of modeling (map vs. territory) is pretty thorough and contained some new insights even for experienced LW readers. They present properties of maps that are orthogonal to its contents, and also interesting things about congruity between overlapping maps of the same territory, such as language vs. body incongruities.

I really liked their description of double binds and kind of want to go around double-binding everyone just for the fun of it.

Giuseppe Zangari says

It's divided into two parts. The first part is the useful one.

I think this one is the most valuable book ever written by me.

It explains how thoughts are shaped by words, and it explains how to think. Literally, how to think.

This one is the first book about NLP, and yes I am an NLP enthusiast.

Paul, says

I just finished reading an interesting book called The Structure of Magic. It is actually not about magic at all, but about psychology. This book contains some eye-opening insights into the relationship between models

and reality. It is an attempt to find the common elements in language-based therapy, a meta-model as they call it, in order to advance the state of the field of therapy as a whole. It also presented the case that concreteness is the key to understanding a person's model of the world. This review will summarize the book by chapter, with my own thoughts added as notes to the side.

Warning to the Reader

The central task of psychology is understanding human behavior. Human behavior is infinitely complex, though not unbounded. For instance, there are infinitely many subtle variations of one's daily routine (infinite complexity), but people can't fly (bounded). In a similar fashion, language is also infinitely complex while remaining bounded. This book is based on the insight that human language and human behavior as systems are related. In particular, Transformational Grammar as developed by Noam Chomsky in the 1960s, has shown that infinitely complex entities can be governed by a finite set of rules. It is possible to describe an infinite number of things using English. However, all English sentences must conform to the rules of English grammar and syntax. Grinder and Bandler posit that human behavior acts in the same way. This book is a first attempt at producing a "grammar" of human behavior. This behavioral "grammar" will try to show the basic ground rules that make up a person's model of the universe and determines that person's action. It goes on to show how to improve that person's behavioral grammar, so that he or she can live a more successful life.

The Structure of Choice

"Human beings do not operate directly on the world. Each of us creates a representation of the world in which we live – that is, we create a map or model which we use to generate our behavior."

This map is not identical to reality. Our model is limited by our physical ability to perceive (neurological constraints), our social background (cultural constraints), and by our life experiences (experiential constraints). So, no one sees reality as it really is. We always have a limited picture. We can only be in one place at one time, we can only hear so far, and see so far. And let's face it, our physical limitations are the least of our problems. We are also conditioned by culture to accept certain things, and our own life experiences condition us even more strongly. Has anyone ever got a new car and then suddenly noticed how many other cars on the road were exactly the same? That is an instance of perceiving things only after they enter our model of reality. Every person has an incomplete, somewhat distorted model of the world (even me, BLAST!), that is close enough to reality so that we can muddle our way through life without too much trouble.

Of these three, the experiential constraints are the most profound for the authors. People who come for counseling are typically in pain because their model does not allow them to see or make the right choices in a given situation. To be successful, a therapist must be able to expand his client's model of reality. Any model of reality can be affected in three different ways: Generalization, Deletion, and Distortion. Generalization refers to the process of applying a singular occurrence to a broad range of related, but different occurrences. Deletion refers to a person's inability to perceive happenings that contradict his or her model. Distortion refers to a person's unconscious shaping of their perceptions to fit their internal model.

The Structure of Language

Language is a tool with one purpose: presenting our views/model. This representation can be either internal (thinking) or external (communication). Language can be thought of as a subset of one's model of the world. It is, in effect, a model of a model. As such, it is subject to the three universals of human modeling: generalization, deletion, and distortion. Language is also subject to the three universals of linguistics.

1. Native speakers can always tell if a sentence is well-formed (that is, if it follows the syntax and grammar

of that language).

2. Native speakers can always tell which elements in a sentence are related, and they can determine the logical semantic relations (presupposition, ambiguity, etc.) that are present.
3. Syntax and grammar are governed by a finite, regular set of rules (which may or may not be known to the speaker).

The two key concepts in this chapter are the ideas of the Surface Structure and the Deep Structure. The Surface Structure is whatever the speaker actually says. The Deep Structure, on the other hand, is the full linguistic representation of what the speaker wants to communicate. It is easier to think of the Deep Structure as the Surface Structure with all of the details filled in. For example, a man says to his wife, “I went to the store.” “I went to the store” is the Surface Structure. The Deep Structure could be something like “I went to the store at 6:00 pm in my truck to buy bread so that we could make sandwiches for dinner.” The Surface Structure weeds out the elements that the speaker considers implicit, irrelevant or undesirable. The authors contend that the Surface Structure is generated from the Deep Structure mostly by unconscious action.

The Structure of Magic

The one commonality of all successful therapy is that the patient changes in some way. This chapter presents an overview of the Meta-model of therapy. It gives a summary of how generalization, deletions, and distortions in a person’s model can be identified and corrected. Deletions result in an impoverished model of the world, which results in a limited range of behavioral options in any situation. The process for recognizing deletions at the Surface Structure level is to take a given utterance by the patient and to use our linguistic intuition to try and imagine the same sentence with more noun arguments. If you can think of any, then the client’s surface Structure is incomplete. The therapist can then choose between ignoring the deletion, asking for the missing piece of the sentence, or guessing at the deletion.

“In general, the effectiveness of a particular form of therapy is associated with its ability to recover ‘suppressed’ or missing pieces of the client’s model. Thus, the first step in acquiring this set of tools is to learn to identify the fact that linguistic deletion has occurred. The pieces that are missing in the Surface Structure are the material which has been removed by the Deletion Transformation. Recovering the missing material involves a movement toward fuller representation – the Deep Structure.”

Presuppositions are another form of deletion. They are the underlying unstated assumptions of a model. All presuppositions should be explored. When one understands a person’s presuppositions, their behavior no matter how bizarre, makes sense.

“The therapist’s task is to challenge deletions which are not useful; those which cause pain ...”

There seem to be two parts to challenging a deletion. First, the therapist must work from the Surface Structure to the Deep Structure. Then the therapist must find where the Deep Structure does not correspond with reality. This second step is accomplished by imagining options that the client should be aware of, but isn’t. At this stage, the therapist should not suggest these missing options as solutions to the patient’s problem. The patient is unable to fit these ideas into his model, and will resist them. Instead, the therapist should work to expand the patient’s model of reality until it becomes rich enough to contain these alternative options. Distortion is a reference “to things which are represented in the client’s model, but are twisted in some way which limits his ability to act and increases his potential for pain.” One example of distortion is when the patient perceives a dynamic process as a static event. Viewing a process as an event gives the client the false sense that this happening is fixed and unchangeable. The task of the therapist in this case is to reintroduce the “event” as an ongoing process. Another example of distortion is assigning responsibility to people for actions outside of their control. For example, Bob made me angry. Bob is incapable of “making”

me feel a certain emotion. The authors reject this sentence as “semantically ill-formed.” The therapist’s task here is to challenge the client’s model to assist in them in their quest to correctly assign responsibility for their responses.

My Conclusions

The natural question is, "So what?" The reason that all of this is important is because everyone, no matter how WEIRD, is acting in ways that are logical IF you share that person's model of reality. The only real way to change a person's behavior is to change their model of reality. That is one of the reasons why Jesus was such a powerful influence on his disciples. His parables (and his life) were designed to kick the legs out from under the disciples' model of reality, so that he could reshape and expand that model to match God's reality. Amazing how Jesus got as far as he did without a Ph.D in psychology.

I think that this book does a great service in pointing out that no one's perception of reality is identical with reality itself. I also think that their presentation of the different ways that people typically distort reality to fit their model was helpful. Negatively, I think that they labored under the burden of Transformation Grammar far longer than was helpful. I also think that they are too optimistic about the truthfulness of human beings. They assume that people are trying to faithfully represent their actual remembrances with their words. These things need to be taken into consideration as we attempt to move some of the findings of this book from the counseling arena to the mentoring arena.

Vaas says

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Lopamudra Banerjee says

Excellent reference book for those who provide Coaching and Therapy

Justin says

Mostly about hypnosis.I was expecting this to be more about the power of language and psychology.
