

Metaphors@Work

Systemic Modelling for team building and conflict resolution

What is it?

Stage 1: The preparation work introduces participants to self-reflection and engages their interest prior to training, which increases motivation to learn. It gives people time to generate and begin to develop metaphoric thinking.

Stage 2: 'When I'm working / learning / operating at my best, I'm like what?' An ideal team for me, in which I can operate at my best, is like what?

We elicit and develop individual models for ideal working. This stage results in participants engaging in the uniqueness of their way of being in the world and making sense of the specific behaviours that are inherent in their values and beliefs.

Stage 3: Sharing and negotiating between the individual metaphoric models.

In this stage individuals ask each other clarification questions about each other's models. These questions are useful for revealing the values, styles and needs of the questioner and a skilled metaphor modeller can feed this information back into the group. This is the stage when the group's understanding of one another and the dynamics between them makes a quantum leap.

Stage 4: Participants negotiate a shared metaphor, for a specific outcome, i.e. perfect team, project, merger, which supports each to operate at their best and to which each can fully commit. The way in which the group works together at this point should be symbolic of their new dynamics and understanding.

Stage 5: Using the shared metaphor as the basis for communication, the group now begin to discuss the real issues and tasks involved in the team, project, or merger and begin allocating resources and roles to each other. The speed and ease with which they do this will be markedly different from the ways in which they have worked before.

What is so special about metaphors?

People tend to believe that others will think, act and react to situations in the same way that they do – despite a lifetime of evidence to the contrary! As a result, when we experience somebody doing something unexpected – very different to the way we would do it – we often react judgmentally and critically.

In a fast changing world, organisations tend to be experiencing change on a continual basis. When staff need to be at their most open and adaptable, they can instead become even more deeply entrenched in their own ways of thinking. People are more inclined to hold onto, and defend, their positions, to not understand different views, and to undermine others.

Within organisations therefore, mutual misunderstanding and miscommunication are commonplace, despite extensive meetings, training in communications skills and a strong intention to make things better.

This is because dialogue can be laborious. Words have to be interpreted through each individual's experience to make sense in their way of thinking, thereby inevitably distorting the meaning. In contrast,

metaphors are excellent carriers of information, which makes them a highly efficient and effective media for gaining shared understanding.

For example, Susan is frequently asked to undertake urgent tasks for others, in addition to her own workload. People often remark: "Oh ask Susan to do anything and she will snap at you, she always does." Eliciting Susan's metaphor allows others to appreciate Susan's experience: Susan says: "Every time I am asked to do additional work by someone outside the department it is like putting more and more water in an already full kettle, which then boils over to let off steam."

What People Say about Metaphors@Work

"Metaphors have enabled my meetings to become more focused. I find the process useful in determining purpose, establishing an effective process and a clear measure for outcomes when using a shared metaphor" - *Training Resource Manager, Youth at Risk*

"There is a better perception of each other's skills and roles within the company. We're a more effective team, quickly getting to a shared model and therefore don't have to spend time on clarification... minimal pussyfooting." - *Marketing Manager, system development company*

"It is now clear why some communications go completely awry. There's a greater responsibility on me to appreciate the receiver, including the general public, customers etc." - *Chris Vallé, Director, NIP*

"I think about what the other person is hearing rather than what I am saying. I'm keener to communicate - knowing the improved level of success. Metaphorically, it's has been like a dyno-rod through the communication channels." - *Pharmaceutical Project Manager, software company*

Where does it come from?

Metaphors@Work was created by Caitlin Walker and is based on the work of David Grove, Penny Tompkins and James Lawley. It has been the subject of postgraduate research, evaluation and practice by Nancy Doyle and Caitlin Walker since 2001.

How do I get involved?

You can buy the Metaphors@Work process for your team of 15 or less for £2500 plus VAT. Concessions are available for charities and non-profit organisations.

We often run courses for people interested in learning more about Metaphors@Work for £200 plus VAT per person. You will form part of a learning group and go through the 5 stage process with each other before reflecting on the experience.

Next course:

Email Nancy [nancy@trainingattention.co.uk] for further details and to book yourself a place on the course. The course is for people who already have a background in Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling.



Training Attention Ltd
systems thinking in practice

158 Western Road Haywards Heath RH16 3LQ
telephone: 01444 458 552 email: info@trainingattention.co.uk

company no: 4835175 registered in England & Wales VAT registration no: 799353959