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A German Reaction to
Bandler and Grinder's Reframing

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ABSTRACT: This article represents a German interpretation of Reframing. The author suggests an action relevant conceptualization of the dialectics of individuals and systems.

From discussions in Europe with colleagues and from my four years of experience in teaching the Neuro Linguistic Programming patterns of intervention, developed by Bandler and Grinder (1982), I am aware of a particular attitude of interested professionals. They have been busy reading the books written by Bandler and Grinder; they are skeptical, curious, and have been refreshed by the authors' unorthodox and sometimes provoking style. They have trouble with the explicitly announced a theoretic and pragmatic character of the NLP models. Unlike their American colleagues, in order to *congruently* learn, incorporate, and apply those enormously effective patterns of intervention, they need something like a spiritual home. They need a theoretic framework for their own thinking and doing. The certainty of being able to sortsome points of reference into a coherent theoretic belief system.

A useful framework may emerge from an explicit back-reference of the structure of the metaphorical reality. That constitutes the therapeutic context of the NLP reframing models. These models correspond to the "realities" which are established and utilized by the therapeutic approach of Virginia Satir and by the trance work of Milton Erickson.

A structural comparison of those therapeutic contexts shall be drawn with regard to Satir's "family reconstruction." Such a comparison with the Erickson trance work would also be basic to an understanding of the reframing models. Only one essential point shall be considered here: The change work with individuals occurs in both the reframing process and Erickson trance work inside a special "metaphoric reality." This is established by the therapist's verbal and nonverbal communications congruent with his belief systems which constitute the context of the therapeutic interaction. Both metaphoric realities define the

therapeutic situation as a triadic one: The consciousness of the client, his unconscious mind (in it's entirety or just the relevant parts), and the therapist form a change-effective triadic system. Inside this system each element is initiating, protecting, and fostering the interactions of the two others.

Inspite of all their differences, Satir's and Erickson's change work is identical with regard to this basic triadic structure. In Satir's approach, the essential changes occur inside the interactions which she as the third person initiates, protects, and fosters.

This basic structural feature which characterizes the innovative approaches of Satir and Erickson can be found - dialectically preserved - in the NLP reframing models. The interventions of the therapist inside this triadic constellation can be described as being generated, corrected, and validated within a double-circuit feedback system. In this way, they maximally protect the integrity of the involved persons and preserve the ecology of the systems. These systems are the individual he is treating as well as that one which he himself is coconstituting in the course of this treatment.

The metaphoric reality consti-tuting the interfactional context of the reframing process is structurally defined by the "psychotic delusion" which the therapist teaches the client. This is a new reality conception for a more adequate comprehension of the person he is presently. The therapist is working towards a sophistication and stabilization of this delusionary perception, and most important, on it's utilization for the requested changes. For the client it provides a new perceptional frame for the disassociated way he experienced himself which brought him to therapy (symptoms, problem behaviors and incongruities in his actions, experiences and future plans). During the reframing process the client is internally filling in relevant scenery ma-terial from his relationships' history and using it for this history's reconstr-uction. This metaphor, a delusionary reality, contains essentially the following structural elements.

The client as a whole person is organized systemically. The elements of this system are his conscious mind and the parts of his unconscious mind. The conscious mind, capable of self-recognition and self-transcendence, is constru-cted as a two-fold entity. It, too, is the protagonist in Satir's family reconstruction process, who is recognizing and transcending himself in the person of the role player of his younger self. The parts of the person at an uncon-scious level of functioning are defined by the present developmen-tal state of their repertoire of skills. These skills are context-depending, unconsciously init-iated, and sequenced behavioral elements that the person is exhibiting in reoccurring situations in his life. These unconscious parts are also defined most importantly, by their positive functions within the systemic wholeness of the person.

The consciousness is usually only familiar with the unconscious parts mediated by the condemned. They do something particular and not by their positive intentions and outcomes. The consciousness almost never knows anything about their systemic interconnectedness. When this is the case; the more irreconcilably the client treats himself with regard to unwanted problem behavior. It holds true mainly for those responsible for the problem behavior that the unconscious parts do "their very best" in order to fulfill the functions they have taken responsibility for in the life of the person. While working on the well-being for the person, the unconscious parts which are using the unacceptable problem behaviors occupy a hierarchical position with respect to the conscious mind. They have much more power and can access much more information than the conscious mind. This includes the sensory data necessary for a decision when it's time to do the problem behavior, and their functions (i.e., the secondary gain: the functions of "protection against", and "one available way to make possible . . ."). This is defined as the total of the presently occurring situational contexts in which the person behaves internally and externally.

The metaphoric reality which constitutes the therapeutic context of Satir's family reconstruction (intensive individual "trance work" inside a group setting) is of an isomorphic structure. The protagonist is taught the reality conception which states that an intensive and an extensive dealing with his family of origin and the families of his parents and grandparents will lead him to a new and change-producing understanding of his current person in it's total complexity. This metaphoric reality, which is built, sophisticated, stabilized, and utilized for change during the family reconstruction process, is characterized by the following structural elements.

The acted-out and closely watched "family of origin" constitutes a systemic whole. It's elements are the role-played substitute for the protagonist, (who represents him usually in childhood age), and the other persons of his family of origin and those of their parents, etc. All are represented by role-players.

The systemic similarity between the original family of origin and the role-played reproduction is amazing and often as far reaching as a duplication of somatic symptoms. The role-played family is nothing more than a living metaphor for the original one. It is also a metaphor for the protagonist's present situation of significant relationships. (This is mediated by the mechanisms of projection and transference during the protagonist's decision-making process which leads to the selection of role-players from group participants). The protagonist is filling in this dramatized living metaphor with more, previously not externalized scenery material out of his own relationships' history. At the same time, he is using it for the reconstruction of this same history.

An additional characteristic is that of this metaphorical reality. The involved persons do their very best to fulfill certain functions and responsibilities inside the systemic whole family of origin and families of parents and grandparents. Their options are restrained by their systemic interwoveness and their current repertoire of skills. This applies particularly for those persons whose specific behaviors the protagonist initially judges problematic and/not acceptable. They are usually persons who have much more power (generational hierarchy) and who have access to more information and more explicit information than he himself. This concerns their interconnectedness inside the systemic overall structure of the families and their positive intentions.

During the reconstruction process the protagonist learns to perceive the behaviors of those persons inside a new frame. This is defined by the now perceivable positive intentions and by the now more explicit knowledge about the necessities and restrictions of their specific behaviors (due to their functional-systemic interwoveness). The reorganization of the protagonist's intrapsychic representations is occurring during the trance periods of intense identificatory watching and during the trance episodes of the "direct" encounters with the role-player father, mother etc. This will lead him to very intensive experiences of reconciliation with those real persons whom he hallucinates inside this metaphoric reality.

The therapeutic contexts of the reframing procedures and of the family reconstruction procedure are isomorphic with respect to the structure of their metaphoric realities. The processes the client/protagonists are running through are very similar in their phases. There are states of normal waking consciousness in the periods of information exchange while the shared-with-the-therapist reality is established and sophisticated. These alternate with trance states of internal intimate-biographical meaning-making processes, and meaning-transformation processes *and* intensive shifts in the client/protagonist's physiology. With respect to content reframing, Bandler/Grinder call shifts from sympathic to parasympathic "activated physiology." In the reframing processes, these shifts occur exactly at those points in time when the client is starting to accept and/or to know the positive function of a part of himself which he formerly rejected, depreciated and fought against. I call this shift the "reconciliation physiology" in order to appreciate Virginia Satir's fundamental impact on the development of the very change-effective NLP reframing models.

Just as in the change processes of Satir's family reconstruction and her "parts party," this physiological shift is simultaneously goal and prerequisite of an effective reframing process. It is the physiological basis on which an effective new learning can take place. It occurs in both six-step reframing and family reconstruction process, on both conscious and

unconscious levels. In the six-step-reframing process the reconciliation physiology *precedes* the new learning of alternative behaviors which will replace the problem behaviors as one way to accomplish a certain positive function. In the family recons-truction process Virginia Satir asks the protagonist *after* reconciliation took place: (Now that you know their intentions . . .) . . . "How would you teach them to do better?"

The looked for frame of reference which may be clarified by these considerations shall now be alluded to with a working hypothesis and some questions. The processes of change occur during the trance periods which are made possible through and structured by the metaphoric reality shared by therapist and client.

Does that mean that the protagonist reconciles with his real persons of reference inside the reality (metaphor) role-played family? Or does the latter, a metaphor inside a metaphor, mean that he reconciles with the transference and projection persons of his present relationship-life? On an additionally and simultaneously occurring level of the protagonist's metaphor-processing, meaning-making process, does it mean that he reconciles with parts of his own person? Does the isomorphy of the metaphor structures of family reconstruction and reframing suggest that the client, during the trance periods of the reframing process, is learning to accept parts of his own person anew and to generate an alternative set of behaviors? In the sense of an "intrapsychic family therapy," does it mean that he reconciles with persons out of his present and past social system as a prerequisite for him to generate new behaviors? Do these interactions with those persons make it possible for *them* to also come up with new approaches for their positive intentions?

An explicit back-reference of the NLP reframing models, which deals with the basic structures rather than particular techniques or sequences of intervention, to the innovative and revolutionary approaches of Satir and Erickson also provides a new frame of perception. A new frame is necessary for a full appreciation of the creative stroke of genius Bandler and Grinder executed in condensing and streamlining those very basic structural character-istics of Satir's and Erickson's approaches to the NLP reframing models. With the NLP reframing models a precise, explicitly ecological and systemic trance work has become possible. The way is shown to an action-relevant conceptualization of the "dialectics of individuals and systems."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thies Stahl has extensive training in NLP. He is a NLP trainer who is recognized throughout the European Community. He resides in Hamburg, Germany.

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