Embodied Modelling and
a Development of the Satir Categories

Joe Cheal, MSc

This article is divided into two parts. The first part is an introduction to a grounded form of modelling called Embodied Modelling (based on the principles and research behind embodied cognition). The second part is an application of Embodied Modelling as applied to the Satir Categories (which leads to a series of suggested developments to the Satir Categories model).

Part 1: Introducing Embodied Modelling

Embodied Cognition

Consider the concept of love for a moment. How do you feel love? Do you keep love in your heart? Does it give you a warm glow? Does it make your head swim? Does it give you butterflies in your stomach? Does it lift you?

Embodied cognition is based on the principle that the mind uses the body, the body's environment and its relationship to the environment as a reference for understanding concepts[1]. In other words, abstract concepts (e.g. nominalisations) are processed and expressed in concrete terms. Although perhaps not a completely new perspective (philosophically), recent interest and research into neuroscience has added credence and support to embodiment. The notion of embodied cognition was popularised more recently by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and embodiment is also the premise of the interconnected fields of cognitive linguistics, grounded cognition, embodied metaphor and embodied simulation.

Concepts will often be expressed as kinaesthetic, physical metaphors, either to parts of the body or tangible things around that we can truly *grasp*. Alternatively, these metaphors will be in location or movement (using prepositions). We *search* for love, *fall in* love and then love *lifts us up*. Our love gets *deeper* as time *passes by*[2]. Take any nominalisation and you will find that in order to 'make sense' of it, we tend to embody it in some way. This embodied language may refer to any of the senses, particularly visual, auditory and

kinesthetic. In NLP we refer to this language as 'predicates', i.e. the language of the modalities and submodalities.

For this article, we are particularly interested in the language and embodiment of location and movement. Steven Pinker (1999) suggests that there are two significant types of metaphors: 'location in space' and 'force/agency/causation'; these would apparently correlate with one of the two pathways (i.e. the 'where' pathway) in the brain that process visual information (Bergen 2012, pp51-52). Signals travel from the eyes to the primary visual cortex and then information travels along the two pathways, in effect 'what and 'where':

1) 'What' : This pathway is responsible for determining what the object is, its shape and its colour. The pathway runs down and forward through the temporal lobe.
2) 'Where': This pathway is responsible for spatial maps, location and movement direction. It runs up and forward through the parietal cortex.

Whilst still in its infancy and not yet unequivocally demonstrated, research into 'mirror neurons' (e.g. Iacoboni 2008) suggests that when we see, hear about, read about or talk about an action, there may be a network of motor neurons in the brain that will activate *as if we are carrying out the action*. In addition, according to Bergen (p54), it appears that we actively "construct visually detailed simulations of the objects that are mentioned".

Embodied Modelling

The concept of embodying cognitive processes is not necessarily new to NLP. Carmen Bostick St Clare and John Grinder (2001) use embodiment in their modelling process to acquire the skill of an exemplar. Robert Dilts (2010) introduced the 'somatic mind' for a 'third generation NLP' set of change-work processes. Charles Faulkner (2005) brought the concept of embodied metaphor into NLP with his 'Metaphors of Movement and Change' and Andy Austin has since built on Faulkner's work (2013). However, this article is designed to formalise a new 'sub-field' of NLP called 'embodied modelling'.

Embodied modelling begins with the client, from their point of view, taking them as the centre of the model. The model itself will then develop from them. According to the embodied cognition hypothesis, we make sense of the world from our own physical and sensory perspective. Hence embodied modelling, by its very nature, is a sensory approach.

Embodied modelling could be realised in two distinct ways: *Static* and *Dynamic*:

1) Static

In this type of modelling process, we use the metaphor of 'embodied location', where we are at the centre and there is a 360 degree 'field' or landscape around us which contains things we have a relationship with. Lucas Derks' Social Panorama (2005) would be an example of this, where we imagine people we know around us. We are static in this form of modelling, whilst the panorama may change. The people (or more correctly the internal representations of those people) will likely be in different locations around and distances from us. They may differ in other submodalities too – some might be brighter, more colourful, bigger, more in focus, louder etc than others. This form of modelling could apply to anything we have a relationship to, for example, different memories, foods, animals or jobs.

It could also be argued that James Lawley and Penny Tompkins' Symbolic Modelling (2003) would also be an example of static embodied modelling - where we help a client build (or realise) a metaphorical landscape around them. Whilst the client's attention may move from one metaphor to another, the building process works from the client's perspective.

2) Dynamic

If we have a mental space around us, or as David Grove called it: a 'psychoactive' space (Lawley, 2006), can we utilise this space to actively move around in?

In this type of modelling process, we use the metaphor of 'embodied movement' to give us a sense of direction from where we are currently positioned. The standard directions of movement would be: forward/backward, left/right (or NSWE compass points) and up/down. This would give us an 'XYZ axis' (3 dimensional) model (as introduced by Charles Faulkner in his 2007 NLP conference presentation).
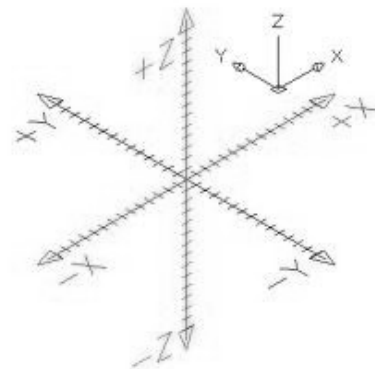
Whilst this might initially seem restrictive, our language uses these directions to embody various metaphor types. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) give some great examples of what they call *orientation* metaphors, and of particular interest here is the language of *up* and *down* (p15-17):

- Happy is up: "I'm feeling up today". Sad is down: "feeling down".
- Conscious is up: "wake up". Unconscious is down: "fell asleep".
- Health/life is up: "peak of health". Sickness /death is down: "he came down with flu".
- Having control is up: "top of the pile". Being controlled is down: "he fell from power".
- More is up: "income rose". Less is down: "income fell".
- High status is up: "rise to the top". Low status is down: "fell from grace".
- Good is up: "things are looking up". Bad is down: "things are going downhill".
- Virtue is up: "high standards". Depravity is down: "underhanded".
- Rational is up: "high brow discussion". Emotional is down: "base emotions".
- Unknown is up: "up in the air". Known is down: "the matter is settled".

To add to the model and to move it forward, here are some further examples of how many people (particularly in Western cultures) appear to embody meanings in the directions of movement:

Forward	(Metaphor type/context)	Backward
Towards	*Motivation*	Away
Advance	*Force*	Retreat
Push	*Influence/Leadership Style*	Pull
Future	*Time[3]*	Past
Progression	*Development*	Regression
Zoom in (close view)	*Camera Lens*	Zoom out (wide view)

Left	(Metaphor type/context)	Right
Past	*Time (Western)*	Future
Rewind	*Video*	Forward wind/play
Smaller/Less	*Numbers (Western)*	Bigger/More
Start	*Western language, journey*	End
Wrong	*Moral judgement*	Right
Not okay/Alone	*Feeling*	Okay
Random/unstructured	*Resources/Ideas*	Trusted/structured
Chaos	*State*	Order

Up	(Metaphor type/context)	Down
Higher	*Achievement/Status*	Lower
Bigger	*Height/Size*	Smaller
Awake/awareness	*Trance state*	Deeper
Joy/happy	*Emotional state/feeling*	Depressed/miserable
Good/better	*Grades/Scores*	Poor/worse
Big Picture/Meta	*Chunk size*	Detail
Louder	*Volume*	Quieter

The process of dynamic embodied modelling when working with a particular context/skill (e.g. relating to a person/group, coaching, presenting, influencing, motivating, problem solving, reframing, negotiating, selling, buying, working, playing a sport, playing an instrument, dog/horse training), is to take each direction in turn and ask the embodied modelling questions.

Select a context/skill that you would like to model. Have the client stand with eyes open or closed (according to preference). With each 'direction', whilst the client stands in the same place, have the client rock *slightly* in that direction. If that is not enough movement, have the client *step* in that direction.

Then ask the embodied modelling questions for each direction in turn:

1) Elicit information and resources about a direction:
   - *And in the context of X, when you move [direction], what does that mean to you?*
   - *And in the context of X, when you move [direction], what do you do there?*

2) Elicit the benefits/positive intentions of the direction:
   - *And how might that be useful?*

3) Elicit helpful contexts/applications of this direction:
   - *And where might that be effective?*

4) Do an 'ecology check' (to determine the potential limits and scope of this direction):
   - *And how might that* not *be useful?*
   - *And where might that* not *be effective?*

For example:
   And in the context of influencing, when you move forward, what does that mean to you?
   "I'm pushing information at people."

   And in the context of influencing, when you move forward, what do you do there?
   "I go into telling mode... I tell people."

   And how might that be useful?
   "It's quicker... I can get more information across. It feels more in my control."

   And where and when might that be effective?
   "When people don't know about the topic. When they need me to give them information and maybe expect it. When they believe in me and trust me."

   And how might that not *be useful?*

"If people already know what I'm telling them, I might be 'teaching them to suck eggs'."

And where might that not *be effective?*
"If they don't know who I am or I don't have credibility with them, they may reject what I'm saying or want to argue with me."

When this questioning process is repeated through the different directions, it should give the client six different options that they can utilise when they are in that context/using that skill. (If we include 'do nothing'/'not moving in any direction'/'stay in neutral' as an option, then this will give us a seventh option.) In order to develop a 'directions of movement' model further, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) also refer to 'near' and 'far', which might bring about further distinctions to an individual's 'embodied model'.

Of course, we all have individual and culture differences and these differences may create variable models. One person's model may not match another person's model; however, some ideas may be generalisable, learnable or at least a springboard for individualised adaptation.

An Application of Embodied Modelling: Developing the Satir Categories Model

As an exercise, I wanted to explore the Satir categories in the context of embodied modelling. Before explaining the outcome, here is a brief overview of the categories as outlined in and about Satir's work (e.g. Satir 1972[4], Satir et al 1975, Satir et al 1991, James & Shepherd 2001, Churches & Terry 2007):

Satir Category	Characteristics & Qualities
Blamer	Fault finding, superior, loud, tyrannical, accusing, finger pointing, name calling, critical, aggressive, inquisitorial, pushing the point home, telling, shifting responsibility, generalising, domineering, dominating, finding fault.
Placater	Ingratiating, trying to please, apologising, never disagreeing, 'martyrish', 'syrupy', vulnerable, approval seeking, seeking sympathy, accepting/taking the blame, giving power away, being nice.
Distracter	Irrelevant, nonsensical, dizzy, focussing nowhere, lopsided, constantly spinning, changing subject/changing mind, ignoring questions, asymmetrical, angular, fluctuating, unpredictable, causing confusion, moving, multitasking.
Computer	Ultra-reasonable, correct, hiding emotions, unfeeling, calm, cool, collected,

	disassociated, monotone, abstract, logical, rational, data driven, details focussed, wordy, prone to complicated jargon.
Leveller	Congruent, real, whole, responsive, appropriate to context, showing feelings, moving freely, say what they intend to say, accept the consequences of their own behaviour, integrated, flowing, alive, open, balanced, centred, symmetrical, true to what they think, in touch with head, heart, feelings and body. Act with integrity, commitment, honesty, intimacy, competence, creativity.

The first four categories outlined above (Blamer, Placater, Distracter and Computer) are from Satir's original work (1972) and were used to describe dysfunctional aspects of personality; particularly in the context of family dynamics (indeed she sometimes called them the 'survival stances'). The Leveller was then introduced as the congruent, balanced personality. In addition, Churches & Terry (2007) introduced a sixth category (in the context of teaching) that they called the Sequencer. I have also added some additional characteristics and qualities to Churches & Terry's brief description:

| *Sequencer*	Unemotional, thoughtful, makes sequential order, communicating time passing, planning ahead, indicating movement, processing, placing, ordering, chunking, identifying patterns, organising, practical, structured.

By using the embodied modelling approach myself (i.e. self modelling), it seemed that the four original categories (Blamer, Placater, Distracter and Computer) followed the pattern of forward, back, left and right. For me, this is like a 'mental-joystick' where I can move around the four points. My initial process, revealed the following:

BLAMER

DISTRACTOR ⟷ COMPUTER
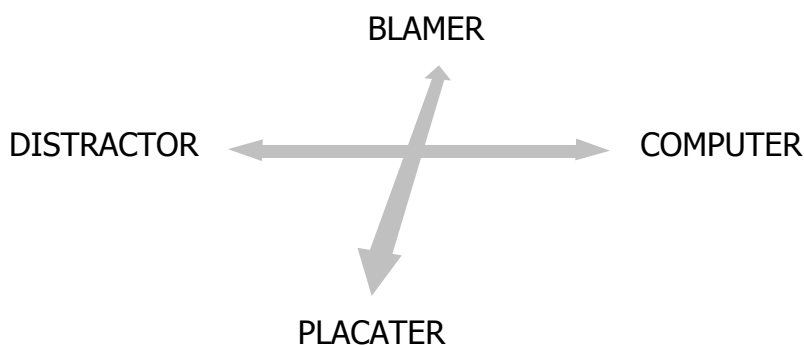
PLACATER

In explanation, the Blamer felt aggressive, pushy and forward. The Placater was withdrawing, pulling back. The Distracter felt rather 'left field', gauche and quirky. The Computer felt as if it was about being right and correct. Satir et al (1991) suggest the Blamer and Placater are "diametrically opposed" (p.41) and that the Distracter and Computer are the "antithesis" (p.48) of one another which would also fit this model.

The Leveller and Sequencer felt different in nature. The Leveller felt like the place in between Blamer and Placater. Indeed, Satir herself suggested that the Leveller is not like the other four (Satir 1972).

It is an assertive stance, in the middle of the continuum from aggressive (Blamer) to passive (Placater). Then, the Sequencer felt like the middle of the continuum between Distracter and Computer. It seems like a place in between chaos and order. Adding these traits in created the following, where Leveller and Sequencer became the X, Y continuums between the other four traits:

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BLAMER

DISTRACTOR ⟵ *SEQUENCER* ⟶ COMPUTER

LEVELLER

PLACATER

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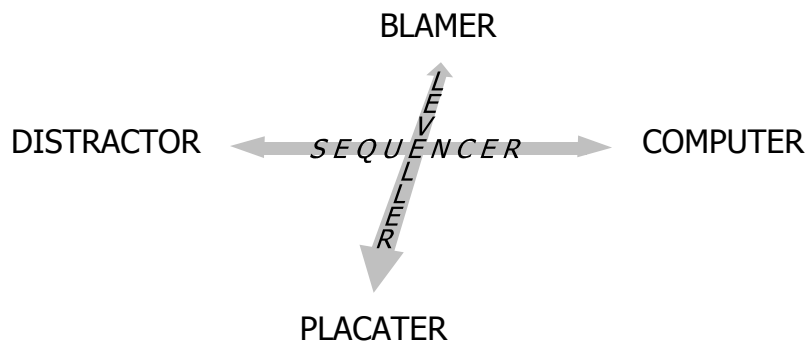
In addition, there seemed to be a sweet spot in all of the personality styles, particularly when used in a dynamic model. It felt like there are useful qualities and elements in each type. This implied that there are useful applications for all directions (which fits with the NLP presupposition that 'every behaviour will have a context in which it is useful'.)

As previously mentioned, the literature on Satir Categories seems to define the Blamer, Placater, Distracter and Computer in relatively dysfunctional and pathological terms. However, they are taught in some NLP trainings as presentation/teaching styles. This would suggest that there needs to be some development to the Satir category model as it stands in order to allow for the positive strengths of each type. As an example outside of the NLP field, the same process was applied in Transactional Analysis to the Driver types (Kahler 1975) which were later developed into Working Styles by Julie Hay (e.g. Hay 2009). This allowed a shift from the pathological disease-model of 'what's wrong with people' through to a more balanced 'what are the strengths and weaknesses of each style'.

Returning to the embodied modelling process, it felt like there is a centre area where the Satir Categories *could be* resourceful and useful. However, the extremes (outside the centre circle) become more pathological and unhelpful, particularly if someone gets locked into an extreme position. Perhaps this might also suggest a way that someone could get 'unlocked' by moving in a different direction and back into the centre area.

When a type is used 'in moderation' and there are useful qualities therein, it is important that the label for the positive version is reflective of it being a strength. The terminology of 'Blamer' in particular may create a less than positive association. For this reason, here is a development with four moderated frames for the original Satir Categories:

Resourceful Frame	Moderated	Characteristics & Qualities
Expresser	*Blamer*	Push influence, direct, telling, focussed, emphatic, strong and powerful communication, evaluating, give feedback, clear expression, instructions and requests.
Engager	*Placater*	Pull influence, gentle, empathic, inviting, consulting, involving, asking, open, including, in service, apologise if done something they didn't intend.
Entertainer	*Distracter*	Amusing, light-hearted, diffusing, cheerful, charming, quick to laughter, fun loving, joking, variety, spontaneous and creative.
Educator	*Computer*	Factual, evidence based, referenced, intellectual, credible, academic, demonstrating intelligence, explaining, giving directions.

By adding in the healthy qualities to the model, we get the following:
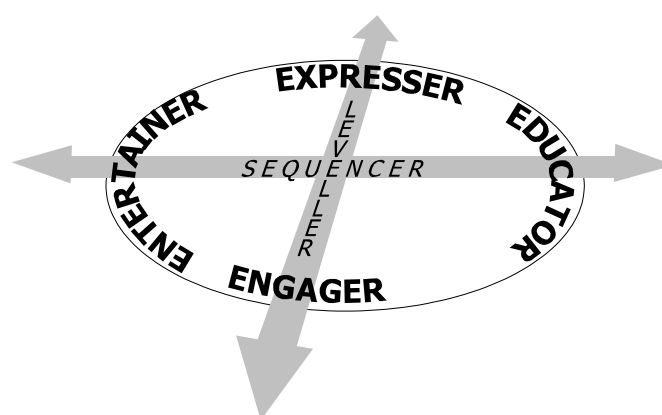
In terms of completing the model by adding the third dimension of up and down, the Satir categories (as a model from my perspective) doesn't require this dimension. If I were to add anything, it would probably be 'up' to working with 'bigger picture' ideas and 'down' into to working with 'detail'.

An example of the Satir Categories model in action:

I was running a half day workshop on Effective Appraisals for a local authority. One of the delegates (who expressed a view at the start that he had been sent) was more vocal than others and at every opportunity early on the course would go into a Blamer/Distracter position. His strategy seemed to be: taking the course off tangent by going big picture and putting the blame as far away from himself as possible; thus making him the victim to the system and hence making anything that I would be "teaching" him "all very well" but not going to make a "blind bit of difference" to his job. He used large frame size phrases like: "It's nothing we can do anything about… it's ultimately the Government" and "twenty years ago we didn't have this kind of problem". The interesting thing was, he had evidence to back up what he was saying and actually, I agreed with him (inside my mind)!

My goal was to manage him so he was satisfied and then to move on so that the other delegates weren't just observers to a potentially irrelevant debate. Rather than match him immediately, I 'completed the transaction' by using the opposite end of the continuum – the Engager (modified Placater). I told him that from the view he was taking he may well be right and that I was sorry it was the case. I then shifted quickly to Entertainer (modified Distracter) by giving a shrug to indicate: "what can you do… it's not my fault!" then "let me show you something" (in a rather 'conspiratorial' tone). I introduced a model (as Educator - modified Computer) and then moved to Expresser (modified Blamer) suggesting to everyone in the room: "if you keep choosing to see the world that way (i.e. big picture/out of my control), then that way lays insanity". This was said in a tone of voice (and with a facial expression) indicating that doing so would be idiotic! Then finally back to Leveller: "Okay, let's get back to the storyline (i.e. the agenda)" I took control of the process (Sequencer) and continued the course.

Whilst I'm not suggesting that this was a perfect way of handling the situation, it worked there and then. I found out at the coffee break that this chap was known by colleagues as the 'Riddler' because he liked to talk people (especially management and management trainers) round in circles! I'm sure there were many other ways of working through this situation but at the end of the session, the 'Riddler' said he came in sceptical but was now feeling more positive about the appraisal process. This could have been part of the game for him, of course, but his colleagues looked genuinely surprised.

Conclusions

Currently, embodied cognition and simulation appear to be part of an academic field leading primarily to research based theory. Might NLP provide a fruitful ally to embodied cognition in providing practical applications for personal (and perhaps professional) development? In addition, might embodied cognition research prove useful to NLP? Since NLP is a field of modelling and application, it is hoped that 'Embodied Modelling' will provide a platform for the development of new practical models.

Notes

1. As a point of interest, it is possible that Embodied Cognition may create a challenge to the NLP internal representations model. According to Shapiro (2011, p4): "An organism's body in interaction with its environment replaces the need for representational processes thought to have been at the core of cognition. Thus, cognition does not depend on algorithmic processes over symbolic representations. It can take place in systems that do not include representational states, and can be explained without appeal to computational processes or representational states."
2. Back to love for a moment... Do you feel it in your fingers... do you feel it in your toes? According to Bergen (2012), it is likely that it will have taken your brain a little longer to process 'feel it in your toes' than 'feel it in your fingers'. In order to establish whether you feel it in your toes or not, neural signals are sent to that area of your body and then back. Since toes are further away than fingers it takes a slightly longer time to process.
3. Research by Lynden Miles et al (2010) suggests that when people think about the future, their body rocks slightly forward. When they think of the past, they rock slightly back.
4. Information about the Satir Categories in Satir's book *Peoplemaking* (1972) is duplicated in Bandler, Grinder & Satir (1976) and Grinder & Bandler (1976).

Biography

Joe Cheal has been working with NLP since 1993. As well as being a master trainer of NLP, he holds an MSc in Organisational Development and NLT, a degree in Philosophy and Psychology, and diplomas in Coaching and in Ericksonian Hypnotherapy, Psychotherapy and NLP. He is also a licensed EI practitioner.

He is the author of '*Solving Impossible Problems: Working Through Tensions and Paradox in Business*' and co-author of '*The Model Presenter: Developing Excellence in Presenting and Training*'.

Joe is a co-founder of the Positive School of Intrinsic Neuro-Linguistic Psychology (www.psinlp.com) and a partner in the GWiz Learning Partnership (www.gwiztraining.com), working as a Management & Organisational Development Specialist.

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