



Coaching & Consulting: Of Journeys and Spaces

People asking for any kind of counseling support want to get somewhere where “something is different” compared to where they are. They may search for support either for defining their goal more clearly, or for navigating their way, or for overcoming obstacles on their way. Whether expert consultants focus on problems and obstacles, or solution focused coaches focus on hopes, goals, resources, and exceptions, two kinds of metaphors are already hard wired into all those descriptions.

The first one is a “way” or “journey” metaphor, including a “start”, a “goal”, and the “path” between the two. (Without a difference between where you are and where you want to be there would be no reason for change (“creative tension”), let alone for counseling. Without hope for a way from the former to the latter, the desired change would not be started.)

The second one is a “field”, “room” or “container” metaphor, with the core elements of “inside”, “outside”, and a “boundary” in between the two, just like the skin is the “boundary” between body (“inside”) and environment (“outside”), both separating and connecting the two. You may feel “stuck” in a “dead end” or “in” a problem (like in some container), and “to get out of it” you may have to “to go a long way”, and you may have to “cross a threshold” first. The latter two combine the two fundamental metaphors that in cognitive psychology [Feldman, 2006] are called “source-path-goal” and “container” schema, respectively.)

Systemically, moving “out of the problem, around obstacles, towards goals” (and “miracle” states, in SF) succeeds or fails depending on the constellation of context factors. The constellation of the ingredients of the two fundamental metaphors, e.g. the start, goal, vision, resources, rules, restrictions, obstacles, and actions together create the relevant “systemic context” of solutions. These are illustrated in my “wishbone” model.

SF matrix, scaling, and meta (-phorical) level

One way to explore clients’ issues is to listen very carefully to what their descriptions say about times and value judgments: Do they talk about the past, the present, or the future? And is what they talk about repulsive or attractive for them, do they want to move towards or away from what they describe? Combining these two dimensions (time and value) results in my version of an “SF matrix”, which consists of four fields (sic): the good and bad past, and the desired and the dreaded future. The square (or metaphorical “container”) of the “desired future” is identical with the “solutions” SF focuses on.

For each of those four quadrants certain questions are useful to refocus attention towards solutions (= that “solutions” square of the SF matrix) (hence “solutions focus”). As “energy flows where attention goes” ways towards solutions are being neurologically primed by the questions that focus the attention. The path is further developed by scaling questions that create steps like the rungs of a ladder. These steps have to be both large enough to make a difference, and small enough to be feasible!

Access and detours on the way to solutions

When obstacles stop the move towards solutions, one of the most promising and most efficient „detours“ is a shift to a special meta-level: the metaphorical level. Four practical types (and two subtypes) of accessing this level (of moving from the “source domain” to the “target domain”, as linguists metaphorically call the two sides of each metaphor) will be introduced here. On this level, solutions often are easier to be developed than non-metaphorically, and their constellation afterwards can be “back-translated into reality”.



Four (plus two) accessing interventions to the metaphorical level

1. Your questions may target changing to a metaphorical level directly:
 - a. “Suppose your situation / your problem / your solution were an animal / a movie / a country / ... , what kind of animal / movie / country ... would that be?” Here, the target domain is pre-set by the question (= by the coach). If you choose, for example, the animal kingdom as source domain, different animals can be selected by the client for problem, solution, and intermediate steps, respectively (or they may be drawn by chance from a stock of toy animals or picture cards).
 - b. “And as you describe that (your situation / your problem / your solution), that is LIKE WHAT?” Here the invitation goes for a comparison, a metaphor or symbol, while the client is given free choice of a suitable domain. (The same question is used in „clean language“.)
2. You may utilize the source domains of clients’ own descriptions directly. The most frequent source domains are the body and the environment (inner and outer space). Which bodily or space-related metaphors do clients prefer to use in their accounts? You may pick up comments involving organs like “That went under my skin” or “I took it to heart”, or constellations in space like “I was besides my shoes” or “that problem is far away”: Then you follow up with playful questions along structural similarities (part-whole-relationships) and explore the metaphor further (including by other clean language questions). Alternatively, you may address more directly: “Where exactly (in your body, in the space around you) do you experience the problem (or, respectively, feel the solution)?”
3. Gestures, mimics, and „paraverbal“ signals (sounds of your voice that are not words) can be utilized and „reified“, treated as if they were things or persons, and further explored by appropriate questions. “If that coughing had a message to deliver, what kind of message could that be?” “If your smile had a subtitle, what would be its text?”
4. You may utilize different kinds of ambiguities :
 - a. *Semantically ambiguous* are words with more than one meaning, especially those with one concrete and one abstract variant: clarity, view, contact, touched, nuts ...
 - b. *Phonetically or acoustically ambiguous* are words that sound similar, but have different meanings (with or without different writings): right/ write; apart / a part; dying / dyeing; nose / knows...

Here those „semantic fields“ (areas of meanings) that otherwise would be far apart from each other can be easily “bridged” by the acoustical closeness. Some kind of deliberate misunderstanding helps the coach to step from one side of the ambiguity to the other – and open up a new area of meaning. (That may be easy also because our brain seems to rapidly scan through all possible meanings of any heard sound or expression before deciding to choose the one that in this situation creates the most probable meaning.)

Moving on beyond the access ...

Each and any of these types of access allows to open up new spaces where new moves are possible and new constellations may be explored. Within those spaces, the whole repertory of solution focused questions and nonverbal interventions can be applied (including plasticine, as I have described elsewhere) to create solutions on this metaphorical level. This may finally be “translated” back to the level of the clients’ reality. At times, it may take more than metaphor to close the process.

Enjoy the creative abundance that you may discover exploring this approach!



Metaphors – some further reading ...:

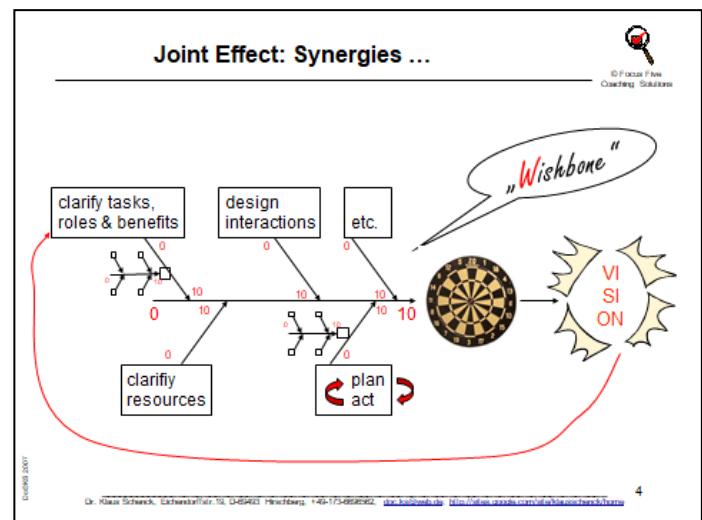
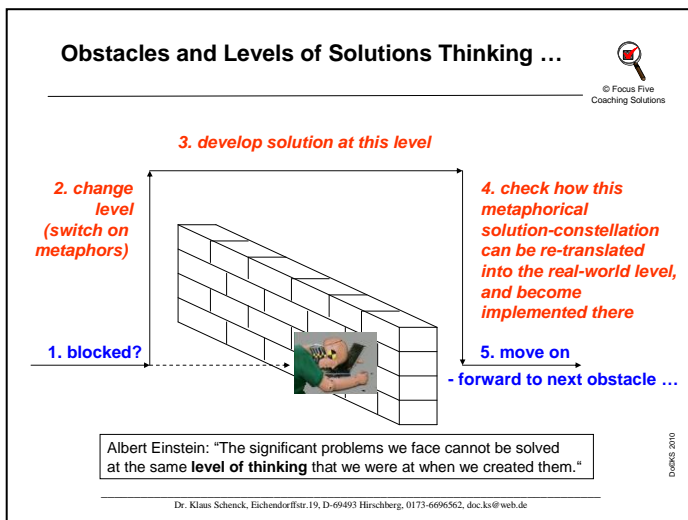
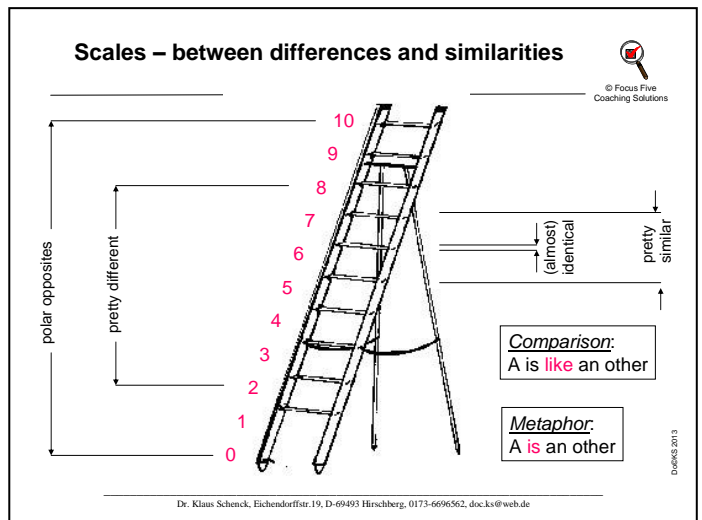
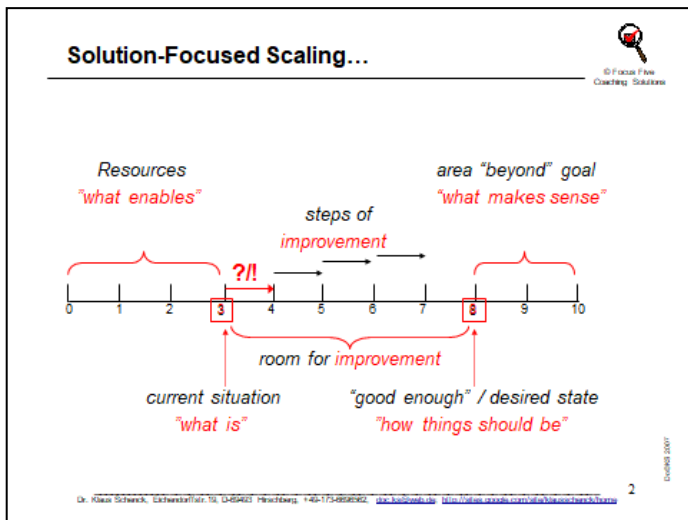
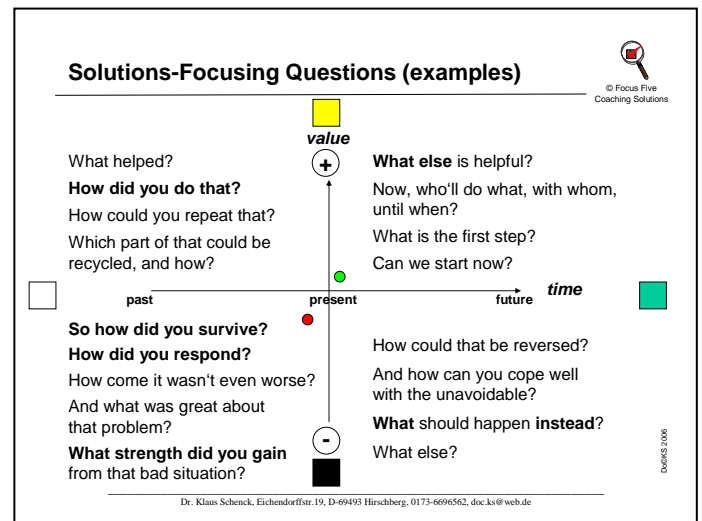
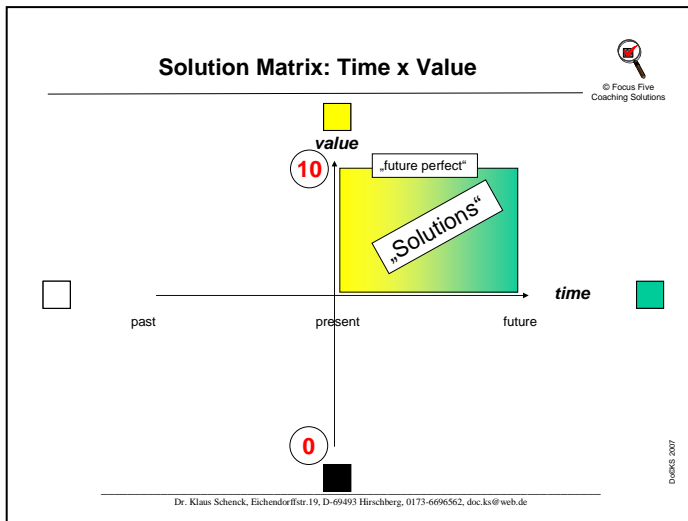
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seminar offering (in German language):

3-tägiges Metaphernseminar mit dem Referenten **30.10-1.11.2017**,
„Der Sprache auf die Schliche kommen“ – Nutzen von Metaphern für Beratung
WISL, Wiesloch (<http://wieslocher-institut.com>)

Comments, questions, nice metaphors? – welcome anytime!
Mail to: **doc.ks@web.de** or call **+49-0173-6696562**

Klaus





Converting "Problems" into Solutions ...



Stressor / "Problem"	My Opposite to Stressor: Translation into "Solution"	Exceptions to utilize: Solution parts (even tiny) already happening
(What to change?)	(What to change to?)	(what works already, what to do more of ...)

"Problems" are solutions in working clothes. Throw away the packaging, and use the energy!"