

# The Language of Awareness:

## Taking Responsibility for Meanings

*... differences that make a difference ...*

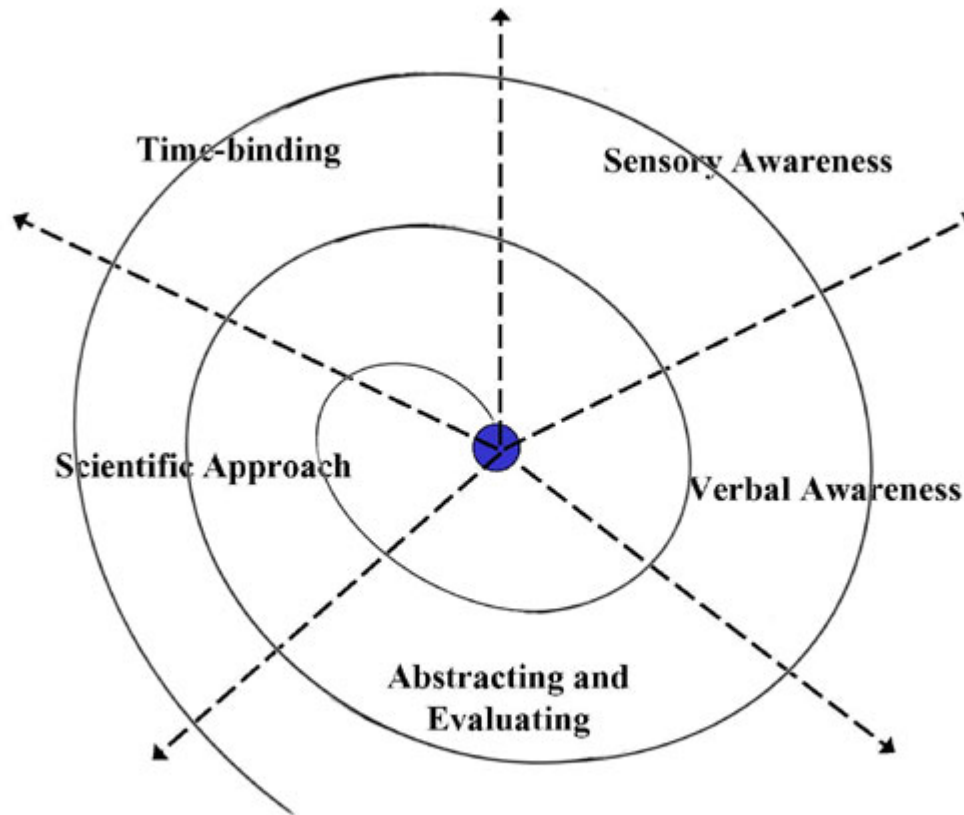
**This** is not *That*

The trouble with people is not so much with their ignorance as it is with their **knowing so many things that are not so.**

— William Alanson White

# Overview

A Map of General Semantics (Steve Stockdale)



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# “Time-binding”

- ▶ How is it that advancement in technology, engineering, mathematics, and medical science has been so rapid?
- ▶ How is it that advancement in human relationships – from person-to-person to inter-cultural to international – is far less evident?

What accounts for the advances of **science**?

What accounts for the **lack** of advancement of **societies**?

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# “Time-binding”



## Alfred Korzybski (1879 - 1950)

- born in Poland, a “nobleman”
- raised in four languages
- studied engineering, mathematics
- wounded in World War I serving in the Russian calvary
- experienced the devastating effects of men’s **inhumanity** against men
- published *Manhood of Humanity* (1921), *Science and Sanity* (1933)

What makes humans ‘human’?

How do they differ from other living things?

This is not That

# Time-binding

**Plants:** bind (organize) *chemicals* - nutrients, soil, water, oxygen; photosynthesis

**Animals:** bind (organize) *chemicals* like plants  
+ bind (organize) *space*; self-moving

**Humans:** bind (organize) *chemicals* like plants  
+ bind (organize) *space* like animals  
+ bind (organize) *time*

Humans possess the unique ability to “*bind time*,” or to build on the accumulated ‘knowledge’ of others

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# Time-binding

- ▶ Humans can build on the knowledge of prior generations.
- ▶ Alfred Korzybski referred to this capability as ***time-binding***.
- ▶ Language serves as the principle tool that facilitates time-binding.
- ▶ Time-binding forms a basis for an ***ethical standard*** to evaluate human behavior.
- ▶ Dispels us of the 'self-made' notion and encourages us to 'time-bind' for the benefit of others.

# Time-binding

Language is the tool that enables time-binding

- **Intra-generational:**
  - ▶ transfer knowledge and wisdom from generation to generation; avoid *"re-inventing the wheel"*
  - ▶ child can build on the work and discoveries of the parent, and all those who have preceded
  - ▶ word of mouth, books, plans, diagrams, maps, pictures, instructions, libraries, music, codes, signs, symbols, etc.
- **Inter-generational:**
  - ▶ exchanging knowledge and within a generation, learning from each other

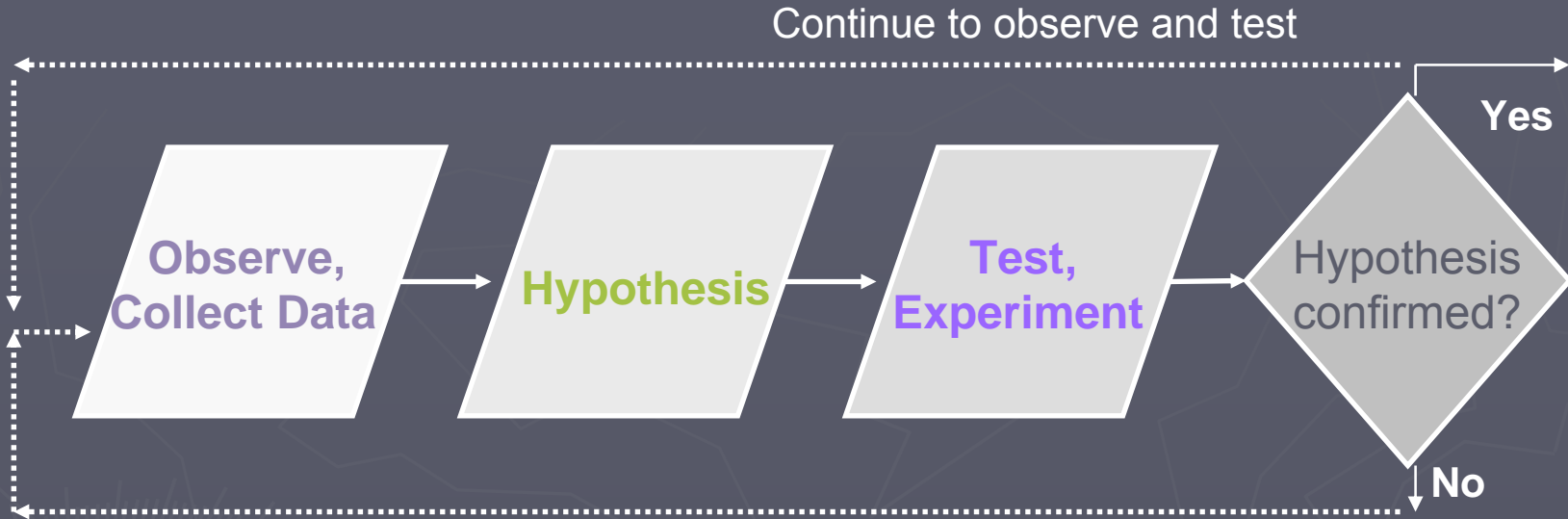
# Scientific Approach

- ▶ Apply a scientific approach in our evaluations and judgments.
- ▶ Continually test assumptions and beliefs, gather facts and data, revise as appropriate, hold conclusions and judgments tentatively.
- ▶ Hidden assumptions guide our behavior; make a special effort to become more aware of them.
- ▶ Everything changes all the time, including microscopic and sub-microscopic changes. We cannot sense or experience everything.

**Observe → Hypothesize → Test → Revise, etc.**

**This is not That**

# A Scientific Approach



## Scientific Orientation:

- *Facts* first, then assumptions, conclusions, beliefs
- Tentative conclusions due to available data
- Tentative conclusions due to ever-changing *processes*
- Theories accepted as *theories*, based on data *to date*
- *Predictable outcomes* - a key objective

# We've discussed ...

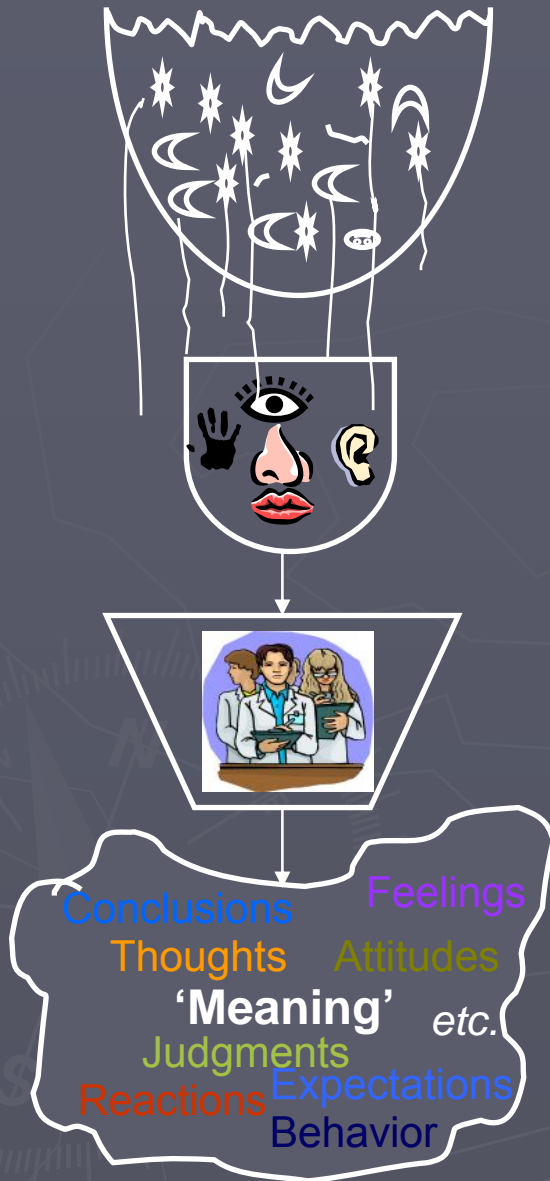
- ▶ Do we apply what we 'know'? (Do *you* apply what *you* 'know'?)
- ▶ Korzybski's "*time-binding*" distinction: *the ability of human beings to transfer knowledge and build on the achievements of others*
- ▶ **Language**, and manipulation of symbols, serves as the tool that enables *time-binding*
- ▶ Humans have been more effective *time-binders* in science, engineering, mathematics, etc., than in our sociological endeavors (i.e., we're still killing each other)
- ▶ A certain approach, or orientation, has facilitated the advancement of the sciences - a **scientific approach**

# Abstracting/Evaluating

- ▶ We have limits as to what we can experience.
- ▶ We can never experience 'all' of what's to experience.
- ▶ We 'abstract' only a portion of what we can sense.
- ▶ Our awareness of 'what goes on' outside of our skin, is not 'what is going on.'
- ▶ With ever-changing environment, we never experience the 'same' person, event, situation, 'thing,' more than once.
- ▶ We copy Pavlov's dog when we respond as **conditioned**.
- ▶ We behave like humans when we respond **conditionally**.

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# Abstracting Model



1. Something Happens  
("What Is Going On")

2. Sensory, Nervous System  
Experience of *WIGO*

3. Evaluation (Report of  
the Experience)

4. 'Meaning,' Significance,  
Judgment, etc.

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# Abstracting Model

1. Something Happens

We cannot 'know' all that happens

2. Sensory Impact

What we sense is not what happened

Non-verbal

Verbal

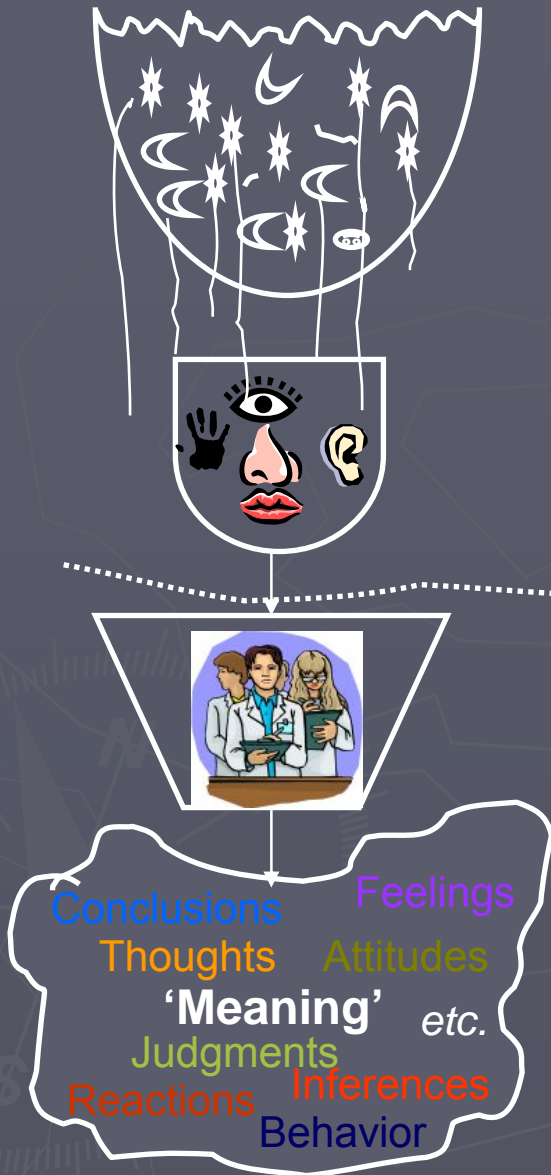
3. 'Evaluation'

What we describe is not what we sense

4. 'Meaning'

What it means is not what we describe

**This** is not *That*



# Abstracting

- ▶ Humans can only perceive a fraction of *'What Is Going On'* around us
- ▶ Our experiencings of *WIGO* are limited and incomplete
- ▶ Our understandings of *WIGO* are limited and incomplete
- ▶ What we sense **is not** *WIGO*
- ▶ What we can describe **is not** what we sensed
- ▶ What we infer, assume, conclude **is not** what we described
- ▶ We project our 'meaningful' abstractions forward into our future *WIGOs*

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# Abstracting/Evaluating

- ▶ We experience uniquely, according to individual sensory capabilities; integrate past experiences and expectations.
- ▶ We ought to maintain an attitude of ‘to-me-ness.
- ▶ **What Happens**
  - ≠ What I Experience
  - ≠ What I Report
  - ≠ What I Infer, Believe, ‘Meaning’

**Perceive—Construct—*Evaluate*—Behave**(think, talk, act, etc.)

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We should be careful to get out of an experience only the wisdom that is in it - and stop there; lest we be like the cat that sits down on a hot stove-lid. She will never sit down on a hot stove-lid again - and that is well; but also she will never sit down on a cold one anymore.

— Mark Twain

Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.

— Anonymous (tacked to Einstein's board)

**This** is not *That*

# *"The map is not the territory"*

**"Manhattan"**



- ▶ Structurally similar
- ▶ Relations, order
- ▶ Limited features
- ▶ Made by mapmaker
- ▶ Static - must be updated

≠



- ▶ Dynamic, complex
- ▶ Process-oriented
  - Macroscopic
  - Microscopic
  - Sub-microscopic

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# Verbal Awareness

- ▶ Language(s) serves as the tool that enables *time-binding*.
- ▶ Language(s) has structural flaws; does not properly reflect the structure of the world we sense and experience.
- ▶ Mistakes we commit:
  1. confuse the word itself with what the word stands for
  2. act as if words have 'meanings' on their own, without respect to individuals and context
  3. confuse facts with inferences, assumptions, beliefs, etc.
  4. do not account for "shades of gray," simplistically look for black or white, right or wrong, good or bad, etc.
  5. use language to 'separate' what can't be separated; *mind* from *body*, *thinking* from *feeling*
- ▶ Practice with *extensional devices* to become more aware: *indexing, dating, quotes, hyphen, etc., E-Prime, and EMA*

If your language is confused, your intellect, if not your whole character, will almost certainly correspond.

— Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

Who rules our symbols, rules us.

— Alfred Korzybski

# Sensory Awareness

- ▶ We sense and experience on silent, 'non-verbal' levels.
- ▶ Our ability to experience the world is relative, unique to our own individual sensing capabilities.
- ▶ Humans can build on the knowledge of prior generations.
- ▶ Our language habits can affect our physiological behavior; we can allow what we see, hear, say, etc., to affect our blood pressure, pulse, rate of breathing, etc.
- ▶ As we become more aware of our own non-verbal behaviors, we can practice techniques to achieve greater degrees of relaxation, less stress, greater sense of our environment, etc.