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## Clear and Creative Communications Carry Companies Clear of Crisis



**Jonne Ceserani** argues that carefully considering the language we use can have a dramatic influence on how people and organisations respond to extraordinary times, like a world financial crisis.

News headline, "Tonight the world is in crisis as markets continue to fall." How do you feel as the stories (fairy tales?) continue? Depending upon your personal resilience you may shrug this off or it may have a significant effect on your behaviour.

The economy cycles mostly within 'normal' parameters and sometimes within more extreme parameters. The UK Chancellor of the Exchequer recently told the world that the UK will survive this financial crisis. What does he think will happen? The world will end! Of course we will survive and just how helpful is it to keep banging on about a 'crisis'?

For some there are hard choices to make. Many people go about their lives and little if anything changes. Others do something drastic and start a cycle of change that need never have occurred, which is why most pension advice at the moment is doing nothing. The 1930s crash has had little effect on UK house prices in 2008.

People concerned with communication have an opportunity to help others put a **useful** perspective on current events. They can use their skills with language to help build resilience and capacity to enter the upturn strong and resourceful, fully prepared to take advantage of new opportunities.

How you use language is fundamental to the outcome.

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***"Deep structure describes our deeper internal minds, values, beliefs, prejudices and experiences that we bring together in order to form our moral outlook, behaviours and language."***

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## Use of language

### Surface structure

### Deep structure

We use labels, called surface structure language, in order to communicate. "I would like a cup of tea" only makes sense if you know what the labels 'I', 'cup' & 'tea' mean and on a continuum of complexity a cup of tea rates as pretty simple.

Deep structure describes our deeper internal minds, values, beliefs, prejudices and experiences that we bring together in order to form our moral outlook, behaviours and language. Deep structure is where our sub-conscious, and the many unknowns within, resides. We use surface structure instead of deep structure because communication about the day-to-day at the deep level, having to describe all of the detail of what is in our minds for every little thing, would be impossible.

Surface labels are very useful because they facilitate easy communication. It is easier to get my tea if I know that the person I am speaking to has the same knowledge and experience that I have. I can then just make a straightforward statement rather than my having to resort to a deep structure conversation where I access the other person's value, beliefs and sub-conscious just to have a simple conversation. Even then I may have difficulty: milk or lemon? India or China?

Surface structure labels can however also be minefields because we **imagine & assume** we have communicated one idea, based upon the meaning the label has for us, when we might have communicated something completely different, or more than we intended. My current favourite is the label, 'political correctness'. As a label it purports to communicate a huge range of values, beliefs, behaviours and opinions, so much so that it means nothing.

No one label can have useful meaning when it attempts to encapsulate such a diversity of perspectives that often conflict. It is too 'surface', too superficial.

Language directly influences the chemistry of the brain. Tell someone, "We are in crisis and must act" and they are likely to freeze or panic. Tell someone, "How to respond with extraordinary flexibility, is the focus I'd like you take", will still convey urgency and that person's brain will begin to consider options because it is the 'right' language to develop a **useful** perspective.

## Articles by Author

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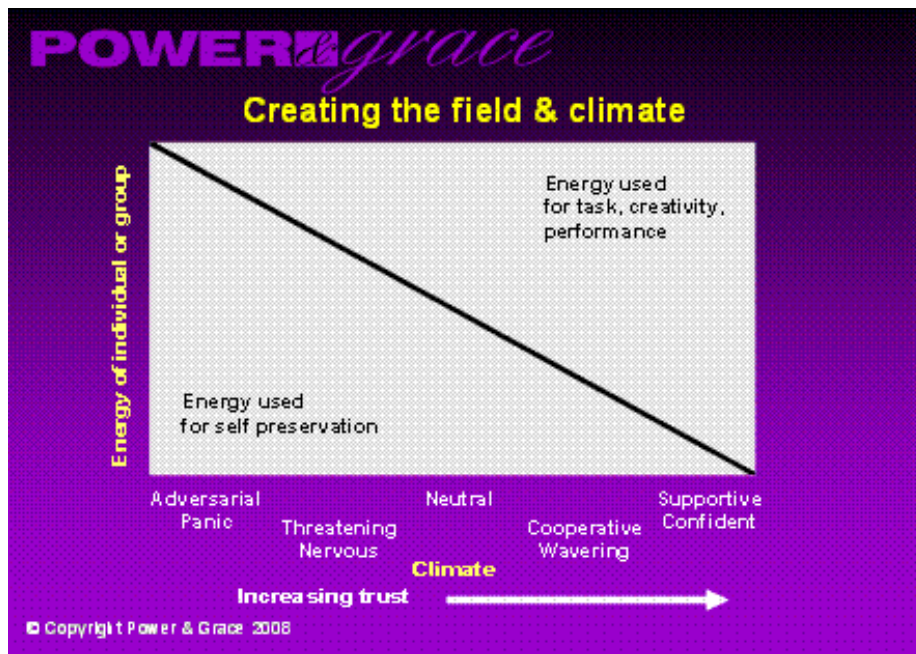
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***“People concerned with communication have an opportunity to help others put a useful perspective on current events.”***



The diagram is showing that the energy of individuals and organisations can be directed towards personal survival or achieving flexibility, creativity and high performance.

All communicators have a responsibility to consider in advance **‘what outcome do I want from what I am about to write or say?’** Consider the words that are most likely to get that outcome and how useful is that outcome in the context of the bigger picture or the longer term.

When my customers ring asking if I will be in business next week I want employees saying, “Yes, business is challenging and we are accepting wage cuts to remain competitive and maintain cash flow while keeping our core skills employed for the future.” JCB are taking just these steps. Or “Oh God I don’t know, we just don’t know which way to turn!” Think about the different effects these two statements will have upon the customer. Which would you prefer your employees/ clients to use?

Internal communications can play a fundamental role in coaching people to use language that puts a helpful perspective on a situation and develops both resilience and flexibility. This in turn will pass outside the organisation as people speak with and write to customers and suppliers.

External communications can reinforce the message.

Be lazy with your language at y(our) peril, life is hard enough, no need to make it harder!

## The Author's Details

Jonne Ceserani is Managing Director of Power and Grace, a company he formed 5 years ago. Jonne works with clients to help them integrate creativity, innovation & leadership in order to achieve high performance. He works with individuals, small teams, whole enterprises and conferences, tailoring the approach to match the audience. He is an internationally published author. Previously he was a partner in Synectics, an innovation consultancy and before that a manager with DuPont (UK) Limited. He is a fellow of The RSA.


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