

An investigation of clean language questions benefits in managing relationship conflict: A narrative review

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This narrative review explores whether clean language questions can resolve or prevent relationship conflicts. Six peer-reviewed articles informed this review; these articles were found in EBSCOhost and published between 1984-2022. Additional literature searches were conducted in Google Scholar and ResearchGate. This review presents a multidimensional synthesis of the evidence on using clean language questions for conflict resolution. While research on relationship conflicts is extensive, literature specifically examining clean language techniques remains limited. The reviewed studies involved diverse adult participants across races and socioeconomic statuses. Key inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed articles in English examining clean language and conflict resolution. The essence of these articles suggests clean language questions may aid understanding of different viewpoints, thereby resolving or preventing relationship conflicts rooted in misunderstandings, unclear expectations, and poor communication. However, more research is needed to conclusively demonstrate the efficacy of clean language for mitigating relationship conflicts. Teaching clean language techniques in conflict-prone settings could equip people with tools to eliminate disagreements and live harmoniously. Overall, this review highlights the potential of clean language questions to improve relationship conflicts, while calling for additional rigorous studies on this emerging approach.

Keywords: clean language; communication; conflict resolution; interpersonal relationships; literature review

Clean Language Questions are successfully used in positive coaching. Applying those questions in my practice as a coach and with family and friends, I realised that they are a good intervention to eliminate relationship conflicts when people know to listen and use the set of questions seen in Appendix 1. An example of Clean Language Question: “(And) is there anything else about X?, where X are client’s words to describe his metaphor” (Sullivan & Rees, 2008, p. 51).

Existent research has investigated the effect of Clean Language Questions over individuals (James Lawley, 2017), when two people are asking each other ‘clean’ questions, they are finding the real meaning of their words, metaphors, and implicit gestures. Having patience and listening will open new perspectives over the interlocutor’s thought and this will lead them to avoid conflicts.

The aim of the present narrative review is finding out if Clean Language Questions can affect relationship conflicts and conflict resolution (Adegbonmire, 2016; Cohen, 2010; Jeremy Sutton, 2021) research papers on conflicts in relationship are read (Adegbonmire, 2016; Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2011; Cramer, 2000; Hysi, 2015) and research articles on closing or eliminating conflicts (Brinkert, 2006; Cozzolino et al., 2018; Hysi, 2015; Martha Peaslee Levine, n.d.; Schwarz et al., 2006). To answer the question if Clean Language Questions can help in managing relationship conflicts first, we must understand what Clean Language and relationship conflicts are.

Clean Language

Clean Language Questions are a set of questions (see Appendix 1) elaborated by the psychologist David Grove in 1989. These questions are asked in a certain way that avoids leading, limitation and gives interviewee the liberty to think and reveal freely their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. It is most important that the person who is asking the questions to be receptive and listen without any bias, suppositions, or judgements (Campbell, 2013; Heywood, 2013; Sullivan & Rees, 2008). Effect of those particular questions on the interlocutor is revelatory, they discover in subconscious new perspectives of their thoughts and feelings and sharing them with the discussion partner leading to a better understanding of each other’s feelings and behaviours (David J. Grove and B.I. Panzer, 1991).

To find what can be done to close or avoid conflicts, first the researchers found what are the main negative causes for conflict in qualitative relationship. The research on the subject is not extensive and the opinions are varied. Common conflict causes are contract ambiguities, “opportunistic and adversarial behaviours, communication and misunderstandings” (Babaeian Jelodar et al., 2022).

Clean Language Questions were used primarily in psychotherapy and because of their efficiency are now used in coaching, mentoring, education, leadership, health, and business. They are simple questions easy to use that are helping the receiver to reveal “the meaning of one’s inner symbolic world” (Tosey, P., Lawley, J., Meese, R., 2014) or to explain what the person is “really meant or think about a specific topic” (Sullivan & Rees, 2008).

Clean Language Questions help develop “skills for interpersonal communication (Lichtstein, 2022), self-awareness” in relationships (Stonehouse, 2015), psychological growth (Meyers et al., 2015), increasing “functionality” in unstable conditions (Rogers, 1959). These questions eliminate miscommunication (Abrams, 2020) in any type of conversation dissolving causes for relationship conflict (Adegbonmire, 2016).

Clean Questions were discovered and elaborated in early 1980s by David Grove and are categorised in three types: “developing questions” to support the client to “understand the meaning of the metaphor” and the address (Sullivan & Rees, 2008, p. 53), “sequence and source questions” to assist explain the “order of events” and what generated the “symbols” utilised (Sullivan & Rees, 2008, p. 64), and “intention questions” that bring the initial purpose of the metaphor used and determine “causality and possible obstacle” (Sullivan & Rees, 2008, pp. 71–74).

We are living in the Fourth Industrial Revolution era, where people are inundated with data and tend to neglect the “symbols”. To evade conflicts by eliminating the confusion and misinterpretation, it is

necessary to ask each other the right questions. This is why Clean Language Questions can be used to find “the profound significance of metaphor” (Sullivan & Rees, 2008). For that to be possible, the person receiving the Clean Language Questions will inspect their unconscious world and will bring the hidden meanings on the surface and will share them with the interviewer (Lachter, n.d.; Lawley & Tompkins, 2011). This effect is possible with conditions such as: the questions to be free of judgements, presumptions, polluting words (James Lawley and Susie Linder-Pelz, 2016; Sullivan & Rees, 2008, p. 79).

The person asking Clean Language Questions must listen and abstain from giving advice or helping with their own words, to keep asking more clean questions until the interviewee will find all the significative meanings for his own metaphors. We can give an example of question for this: “And...X [X=interviewee’s word, expression, or gesture], when X, what kind of X is that...X?” or “And...is there anything else about X?” Is used ‘and’ with a silent break to not come across as judgemental (Sullivan & Rees, 2008, pp. 130–131).

Another major strategy of Clean Language Questions is that using the full syntax, expression, or gesture of the client, named coachee or interviewee or interlocutor. This approach will determine the interlocutor, in order for them to analyse deeper their metaphor, finding new dimensions and new perspectives and explanations on why they are using certain symbols or gestures when they talk about important matters (Campbell, 2013; Soltan & Girguis, 2017; Sullivan & Rees, 2008, p. 14–16).

Relationship Conflict

Conflict is “a competitive or opposing action of incompatibles, antagonistic state of actions, interests, or persons” (*Conflict & Meaning - Merriam-Webster*, n.d.). research on conflict is extensive, and we noticed that conflicts are classified in diverse ways. There are three types of conflict according with Katie Show (2020) “task conflict, relationship conflict and value conflict”. We are interested only in relationship conflicts (Adegbonmire, 2016; Brinkert, 2006; Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2011; Cozzolino et al., 2018; Cramer, 2000; Martha Peaslee Levine, n.d.; Prager et al., 2019; Schwarz et al., 2006; Simons & Peterson, 2000). We observed conflict starting point is “difference of opinion, taste, perspective, personality, or beliefs” (Munteanu, D.,2022, Literature Review submitted at UEL).

Relationship conflicts have a negative effect on individual’s mood leading to a diminished cognition process (Forgas, 2017), dissatisfaction in relationship (Cramer, 2000), relationship withdrawal and even attachment disorders (Prager et al., 2019), and stress as a psychological response (Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2011). These negative effects build up if are not addressed and can bring anger, anxiety, depression (Dein Simon, 2006; Özgüç & Tanrıverdi, 2017). Is so important to eradicate these effects. Therefore, we desire to find a solution to relationship conflict using Clean Language Questions. Rees McCann wrote about this in her blog ‘*How to Resolve Conflict Using Clean Language*’ (Rees McCann, n.d.), though we could not find a peer reviewed article on resolving relationship conflicts with help of Clean Language Questions. The search was made in PsycArticles and PsycInfo and in other databases and with the help of Library of University of East London. The search for articles on use of Clean Language to manage relationship conflicts did not show-up with results in the list of references of the articles or books studied and read mentioned in Introduction.

A relationship defines as “the way in which two or more people or things are connected or the state of being connected” (*Relationship Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster*, n.d.).

Article ‘Task Conflict and Relationship Conflict in Top Management Teams: The Pivotal Role of Intragroup Trust’ published in 2000 in *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(1):102-111, by Tony Simons and Randall Peterson is presenting causes of relationship conflict in top management (Simons & Peterson, 2000).

There is a paper about conflict resolution in couples’ relationship resolution, published online on PositivePsychology.com by Jeremy Sutton in 2021, called ‘Conflict Resolution in relationships and Couples: 5 Stages’ (Jeremy Sutton, 2021). Papers looking into relationship conflict from different

perspectives present ways on how these conflicts can be resolved and are finding new ways to eradicate or avoid conflicts through therapy, counselling, and positive interventions. There were no papers found that proposing the use of Clean Language to manage conflicts, which shows that there is space for research in this area.

Andrea Chiou said at Agile Games conference in 2018 that Clean Language Questions can be utilised to “discover underlying rules, expressed values, and coping mechanisms in organisations and to gain clarity and promote diverse ideas in groups” (Andrea Chiou, n.d.).

From research it can be observed that causes of conflicts appear when partners are using different data from the beginning, this leads to “misinformation, polluted judgement on one or both parties” - an answer to this would be to verify the original data and how each partner understands them (Martha Peaslee Levine, n.d.).

Reducing the possibility of escalating conflicts increases the chances to have healthier and stronger relationships, which are ways to a flourishing life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Research reveals that conflicts in relationships induce stress, stress generates negative affect, and that triggers illnesses (Cozzolino et al., 2018; Hysi, 2015; Scott Ketring, n.d.).

METHOD

Documentary research design (Ahmed, 2010) is method used for this study. This paper is the result of the analysis of research academic articles identified, textbooks and filtered peer-reviewed publications focusing on Clean Language method of questioning in coaching and relationship conflict resolution, between January of 1991 and July of 2022. The researcher drew conclusions based on logical links between those two domains. Data was read, summarised, classified and assessed to extract information.

A comprehensive search in EBSCOhost Research Databases interface, in Databases: Academic Search Ultimate, APA PsycArticles, and APA PsycInfo was done for conflict resolutions, relationship conflicts papers and Clean Language.

To find if there are papers analysing links between Clean Language Questions and relationship conflict resolution, search was done in EBSCOhost using the queries as: (“clean language” OR “clean language questions” OR “clean language interviewing”) AND “conflict resolution” AND (“relationship conflict” OR “relationship-conflict”) in same Databases – Academic Search Ultimate; APA PsycArticles; APA PsycInfo, on Advanced Search, using Expanders :Apply equivalent subjects, and Boolean/Phrase. Search only for English articles, because the concept of Clean Language is not yet accurately translated in other languages, or in cultures as East-European or Asian it is not possible to translate the concept. The search in Google Scholar, Scopus and Science Direct gave same result: no papers written on this subject. Search for “Clean Language” AND “Efficient Method” AND “Positive Coaching” ended with zero articles. Therefore, the contribution of this narrative review is necessary.

Basic search for sentence: clean language was in Interface EBSCOhost in all Databases, were found 352 results. Eliminating databases as: eBook Academic Collection Trial, Child Development & Adolescent studies, CINAHL Complete, ERIC, Green FILE, Hospitality & Tourism Complete, Library Information, Science & Technology Abstracts, SPORT Discus with Full Text, eBook Collection, eBook Academic Collection, were 292 results. By refining the search, we eliminated following databases as irrelevant: Communication Source, Education Abstracts, Educational Administration Abstracts, Regional Business News, Teacher Reference Centre, and 217 results remained. Reading the titles of remaining articles, we found more irrelevant papers pertaining to the databases: British Education Index and Education Research Complete, 198 articles were left. For the same reason Business Source Complete database was eliminated resulting 150 articles.

Duplicates disappeared when Academic Search Complete database was eliminated, obtaining eighty-two results in following databases: Academic Search Ultimate, APA PsycArticle, and APA PsycInfo, with sentence: clean language. Using sentence: “clean language,” with expanders: Apply equivalent subject and search mode: Boolean/Phrase we had twenty-four results. Were kept only the results with Full text access to remain thirteen articles, from which were eliminated ones that were not peer reviewed and were nine articles left. Using limitation only English were six articles between years 1984 and 2022.

The result for the search of the Boolean Phrase “clean language” with the Limiters: Full Text, Peer Reviewed, Published between 20140101 – 20220731, in databases: Academic Search Ultimate, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo. The studies’ population included were all ‘adults older than 18 years’, ‘humans.’

Special limiters for Academic Search Ultimate: ‘Academic Journals’ and ‘English language.’

Special limiters for APA PsycArticles database are articles published between 1984 and 2022, ‘fully published’, age group ‘adulthood’, population group ‘humans.’

Special limiters for APA PsycInfo database are ‘Open access,’ published between 1984 and 2022, publication status ‘fully published’, ‘peer reviewed’ journals, only in ‘English’, ‘adulthood’ age group and ‘human’ population. Applying these settings, six articles were found. The process of searching can be seen in Appendix 2.

Among the studies three are on human in general, two about female and one study only man. As a methodology among those studies two are empirical, two interviews and two qualitative studies. Age was specified in two studies adulthood population, other two on middle age (49-64 years) and one study on 30-39 years old.

Inclusion criteria of search were peer-reviewed articles published between 1984 and 2022 in Academic Search Ultimate, fully published, age group adulthood of any gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race or social class, population group humans, only articles in English.

Exclusion criteria were articles published before 1984, not fully published, not peer-reviewed, not humans, age group before 18 years old, and any article written in other languages than English.

Articles found are ‘Using Clean Language to explore the subjectivity of coachees’ experience and outcomes’ an article by Susie Linder-Pelz & James Lawley in Vol.10 of International coaching Psychology Review in Sept. 2015; ‘The Use of Clean Language and Metaphor in Helping Clients Overcoming Procrastination’ by Judy Rees and Alexandru Ioan Manea; an article in Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy, vol. 21, no 2 (82) June 2018: ‘The Analysis of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy from a Clean Language Perspective’ by James Lawley, Penny Tompkins, and Alexandru Ioan Manea; ‘The Use of Clean Space to facilitate a “Stuck” Client – a Case Study’ in December 2017, by James Lawley, Alexandru Ioan Manea and The Developing Company, in Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy, vol. 20 (4), p.80; ‘Sensing Feminism’ (2018) by Baxter et al. published in Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization, vol.18(4): 855-864; and ‘Eliciting Metaphor through Clean Language: An Innovation in Qualitative Research’ (2014) by Paul Tosey, James Lawley, and Rupert Meese, published in British Journal of Management, vol. 25: 629-646.

To identify which data to extract we used PICOT framework: population, intervention, comparison, outcome, type of study (Riva, J.J., Malik, K.M., Burnie, S.J., Endicott, A.R., & Busse, J.W., 2012).

Writing this narrative review we followed PRISMA- Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic review and Meta-Analysis Protocols checklist: recommended items to address in a systematic review protocol (Mother, D., Liberati, A., Retzlaff, J., Altman, D.G., PRISMA Group, 2009; “Preferred

Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (PRISMA-P) 2015: Elaboration and Explanation,” 2019), this helped to not lose track of all the elements an academic paper needs.

The bias is present as the researcher interpreted the peer-reviewed articles on how clean language questions can eliminate relationship conflicts. From this viewpoint one can argue that this paper is more a philosophical review (Krapu, 2016). However, the bias was reduced at maximum in the selection of articles used in the present review (cf. Appendix 2). Only peer reviewed journal articles were chosen (Ferrari, 2015). The bias cannot be eliminated for good since humans are involved in the reasoning, as Shahram Heshmat stated “humans are programmed to try to look for patterns, that is how we navigate the world” (What Is Narrative Bias? n.d.) thinking that they can control their reality.

RESULTS

All six articles focus on Clean Language technique and the effect this method had on interviewees. Journal articles analyse the use of metaphors, which is implicit when using Clean Language Questions. These are presented in Table 1.

The paper ‘Using Clean Language to explore the subjectivity of coachees’ experience and outcomes’, by Linder-Pelz and Lawley, revealed “many insights of coaches and demonstrates that Clean Language Questions are useful for understanding coaching through the lens of the coachee” (Linder-Pelz, S. & Lawley, J., 2015). At the beginning coachees “did not have favourable opinion on the Clean Language Questions” (Linder-Pelz, S. & Lawley, J., 2015) founding questions irritable. However, during the session they realised that self-awareness, responsiveness, questioning, focus increased. Two days post-session, 36 out of 38 clients “reported beneficial outcomes” (Linder-Pelz, S. & Lawley, J., 2015). This is a qualitative study using Thematic Analysis and mixed method: coaching with Clean Language Questions and two interviews post coaching. The paper reveals that coachees had positive reactions “when coaches were able to display relationship qualities, facilitate coachee’s self-awareness and insights, maintain focus of the session, and challenge and confront appropriately” (Linder-Pelz, S. & Lawley, J., 2015). This reveals the effect of Clean Language on people receiving these questions, allowing them to reflect profoundly when answering and post-meeting. Proving that use of Clean Language Questions creates self-awareness and increase consideration of interlocutor’s opinion. The same self-consciousness is revealed in article B, D, E and F.

The study ‘The Use of Clean Language and Metaphor in Helping Clients Overcoming Procrastination’ by Judy Rees and Alexandru I. Manea, is a case study on a participant who is coached with Clean Language Questions. The results show how Clean Language Questions changes the client’s way of thinking. The coach is using the client’s words, expressions, and gestures, that makes the questions to look different each time (including those in Clean Language Questions, see Appendix 1), and each time the client’s attention is directed back to its metaphors, which are changing and revealing new meanings. Consequently, the client’s feelings shift and “the client becomes aware of feelings that previously were outside consciousness” (Rees, J & Manea, A.I., 2016). The metaphor named connected with real feelings becomes “alive”, this process is “transformative” (Rees, J & Manea, A.I., 2016) and that means it can help people be reasonable with one another. The articles B and E are looking at Clean Language Questions as a tool in coaching and psychotherapy. Paper B is very meticulously elaborated. Article E is well organized, however I believe it is missing important perspectives of the clients, when being asked the Clean Language Questions.

In “The Analysis of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy from a Clean Language Perspective” by James Lawley, Penny Tompkins, and Alexandru Ioan Manea, they compare the Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) with Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling “at three levels: intention, process and practice” (Lawley et al., 2018). The conclusion of the authors is that “with minor modifications, some of the basic principles, process and practices of Clean Language Questions could be incorporated into SFBT and some of the methods of SFBT could be given more attention in Symbolic Modelling” and the methods will be improved. (“Clean Language Research Papers - Academia.edu”). The article exposes the benefits of Clean Language Questions and how they help in revealing the client’s subconscious

thoughts. This research paper brings an extremely unique angle on Clean Language used in one of the most efficient methods of therapy, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy. However, this article is only for a

Article	Year	Author	Title	Publication Title	Pages	Issue	Volume
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highly qualified auditory, being well documented and hard to read for a novice in therapy.

Research ‘The Use of Clean Space to facilitate a “Stuck” Client – a Case Study,’ by James Lawley and Alexandru Ioan Manea, demonstrates how the client uses the clean space -facilitated by the coach who is using Clean Language Questions, keeping their opinions and presence minimal- to help the client discover why they are “stuck”, and give them space to reflect and find new ways in working through their issues. The “clean space enables the client to use the interplay of physical and mental space, to externalize thoughts, feelings, metaphors...engaging own creativity” in a transformative process (Lawley, James & Manea, I. Alexandru, 2017). It was quite easy to read and understand the main objective is to explain advantages of Clean Language used in clean space, and how those are affecting mental spaces, when the clients are analysing their own metaphors.

The articles B and D, with common author Alexandru Ioan Manea, are similar on the style they present the examples. It is brilliant how the client’s stories are presented. Article B’s subject – Dave becomes David and an expert in Clean Language, after he understands the mechanism of Clean Language Questions. Article D’s Alyson realises one month post Clean Space and Clean Language sessions the “impact” of externalization of feelings, leading to resolving her internal conflict. That helped to change her attitudes towards colleagues. The lives of both protagonists have improved due to the sessions with Clean Language that provoked a deeper self-understanding.

In “Sensing Feminism” by Lynne F. Baxter and colleagues (2018) the authors offer us an overview on how Clean Language used in the five senses exercise can be “useful for facilitating diverse groups in context such as workshops, teaching, meetings at work to build inclusion and fresh perspectives” because the Clean Language Questions creates a safe space for “courageous conversations about new forms of resistance and renewal” (Baxter et al., 2018). I believe that from the practical use of Clean Language were discovered more aspects, which were not revealed to us in the paper. From my experience in group coaching are infinite aspects that are escaping our attention. Is useful the innovative approach of the use of Clean Language in group sessions. This is an area which is worth of more empirical research.

The last article, ‘Eliciting Metaphor through Clean Language: An Innovation in Qualitative Research’ (2014) by Paul Tosey, James Lawley, and Rupert Meese analyses interview samples of six participants, mid-career managers, aged 40-50 of all genders, full time employees in three different companies. None had training in Clean Language. All ethical requirements were followed and explained in detail. The participants were interviewed twice, about work and life balance, by the specialist in Clean Language, Rupert Messe. The transcribed interviews were analysed “highlighting key metaphors and themes” (Tosey, P., Lawley, J., Meese, R., 2014, p. 635) by James Lawley, renown specialist in Clean Language. He “validated the accuracy of the transcript analyses” (Tosey, P., Lawley, J., Meese, R., 2014). This qualitative research “demonstrated the potential of Clean Language as a systematic method for eliciting metaphors in order to provide in-depth understanding of a person’s inner symbolic world” (Tosey, P., Lawley, J., Meese, R., 2014, p. 642). The second contribution of this paper is to have “shown how Clean Language can enhance the rigour and authenticity of interview-based qualitative research” (Paul Tosey, James Lawley, and Rupert Meese, 2014, p. 642), this is the common theme of all journal articles used in this narrative review.

All papers praise Clean Language Questions mechanism that determine people examine their feelings, thoughts and discover new aspects that were hidden in unconscious. This process helps people who are answering the questions and clarifies to the interlocutor the meanings of their metaphors, expressions, and gestures.

A	2015	Susie Linder-Pelz & James Lawley	Using Clean Language to explore the subjectivity of coaches' experience and outcomes	<i>International Coaching Psychology Review</i>	1–22	2	10
B	2016	Judy Rees & Alexandru I. Manea	The Use of Clean Language and Metaphor in Helping Clients Overcoming Procrastination	<i>Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy</i>	30–36	3	19
C	2018	Lawley, James; Tompkins, Penny; Manea, Alexandru	The Analysis of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy from a Clean Language Perspective	<i>Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy</i>	03–20	2	21
D	2017	James Lawley & Alexandru I. Manea	The Use of Clean Space to Facilitate a “Stuck” Client—a Case Study.	<i>Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy</i>	62–70	4	20
E	2018	Lynne F. Baxter et al.	Sensing Feminism	<i>Ephemera: theory & politics in organization</i>	855–864	4	18
F	2014	Paul Tosey, James Lawley, and Rupert Meese	Eliciting Metaphor through Clean Language: An Innovation in Qualitative Research	<i>British Journal of Management</i>	629–646		25

Table 1
 Journal articles used.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research provide evidence that Clean Language interviewing is a useful method in helping the receiver of the questions reflect more on their arguments when they have a discussion. These questions help interviewee to think profoundly and reveal to oneself and to interlocutor the new sides of the subject discussed., allowing the interlocutor to develop a deeper understanding. The person asking the question will be surprised by the reflections of the interviewee and must be patient to hear the analysis of their thoughts. Also, if necessary to ask new clean questions using the new symbols (Lawley, James & Manea, I. Alexandru, 2017; Linder-Pelz, S. & Lawley, J., 2015; Rees, J & Manea, A.I., 2016).

From journal articles A, B and D the following are the most crucial elements. People are asked Clean Language Questions manifest raised self-awareness caused by profound introspection. Introspection allowing them to understand the symbols or expression used and where it derives from. How they come to use that specific metaphor and what is the event in the past that made the link between that metaphor or gesture and a specific event (Lawley, James & Manea, I. Alexandru, 2017; Linder-Pelz, S. & Lawley, J., 2015; Rees & Manea, A.I., 2016). This deep reflection reveals clients' unconscious thoughts and new aspects about themselves. Through this process it is generated a sense of awe once they connect the symbols with the thoughts and feelings, realising what triggered the consequent behaviours.

When comparing research-A with journal article E, it is incredibly important to remark how in research A the Clean Language is used and analysed by Susie Linder-Pelz and James Lawley (2015) to

observe and understand what are the “coachees experience” and how they “evaluate coaching” (Linder-Pelz, S. & Lawley, J., 2015, p. 2) with Clean Language Questions. Journal article A is very elaborated and profound analysis on how Clean Language produces changes in thoughts and feelings of the coachees. These remarkably changes continue days and even weeks after the coaching with Clean Language. The clients’ feelings and thoughts become so profound that they determine changes on behaviour (Linder-Pelz, S. & Lawley, J., 2015). On the other hand, paper E is not clear and does not bring new perspectives on how Clean Language works. However, it does reinforce the known benefits of Clean Language when used in group coaching. Clean Languages’ clients can keep the story for their self and tell only through metaphors. The message comes easier relieving the pressure from clients’ traumatic events without saying specific details that could be embarrassing (Baxter et al., 2018).

The journal article F is by far the most elaborate research paper featured in this narrative review. Paul Tosey, James Lawley, and Rupert Meese enterprise interviews with Clean Language on six mid-managers to analyse the rapport of work life balance for them (Paul Tosey, James Lawley and Rupert Meese, 2014). It is interesting to see samples of each interview and notes how different each person utilizes symbols and metaphors to convey the same thoughts and facts. The articles’ methodology is beautifully written and the ethical is closely followed and delivered in the paper rigorously. The sole limitation of this research is that they did not analyse other categories of workers since it discussed the work life balance only for mid-managers. This is a general matter affecting all categories in the working-class population.

After the clients’ introspection, they can explain and justify why the meaning of that symbol is so important for them. By voicing these thoughts and explanations to the interlocutor, they clear all misunderstandings from the conversation. With all facts explained, there will be no reason for dispute to continue and transform into a conflict. Since the main cause for relationship conflicts is misunderstanding, if we eliminate misunderstandings using Clean Language Questions will result a relationship clean of conflict (Navarro, n.d.).

Keeping that in mind, building, motivating, and maintaining a relationship requires finding agreeable ways to avoid conflicts or variants for relationship conflict resolution (Cohen, 2010). To obtain a positive outcome, both parties must be patient and listen first to each other’s opinions enabling them to find a common agreement, to see if they have the same goals or at least they understand each other, and sometimes to find room for negotiation to avoid conflict (27 Conflict Resolution Skills to Use with Your Team and Your Customers, n.d.). Prior negotiation is important both partners to be patient and understand the conflicting parts and then to clarify them. In most of the cases this is the very best way to eliminate any conflict, both parties can obtain that clarity with the help of Clean Language Questions (Tompkins, P. & Lawley, J., 1997).

It is not easy to find one set of lenses to observe all causes of relationship conflicts, in literature are articles which present differently the causes of conflicts, and the causes can be managed through different approaches. This review could not find connections to resolve or avoid conflict in relationship for all causes with the Clean Language. The misunderstanding, miscommunication and judgement can be eliminated using Clean Language (Lawley, James & Manea, I. Alexandru, 2017; Linder-Pelz, S. & Lawley, J., 2015; Paul Tosey, James Lawley and Rupert Meese, 2014; Rees, J & Manea, A.I., 2016) by reducing this way the development of relationship conflict.

From research, it is known that the causes of relationship conflicts are power and control, illegitimate demands, selfishness, criticism, lack of communication, elevated expectations, and misunderstandings. This narrative review analysed the relation between Clean Language Questions and miscommunication. There is evident that future research must be initiated to link other causes of interpersonal conflict and how Clean Language can help with managing them.

Recommendations for future research

Clean Language research can be challenging since key aspects are changing for both partners in the studies. For the receiver of the questions the reflections generate shifts in thoughts, feelings, and

behaviours. For the interviewer of Clean Language Questions, it is a transformative process as well, they find new perspectives on subjects that did not exist until the questions were answered. It is a necessity for separate studies of these phenomena to understand what is happening for the interviewer in separate journal articles. To help study the effect of Clean Language Questions for the receiver of the questions, it is noticeable the need for more research on both directions, as it would be beneficial for more data.

It is important to discover possible findings in a quantitative study on an organisation where the mechanisms of clean language can be learned by the employees in a workshop and reinforced at least at an interval of three months. After that the researcher to make notes of the behaviour changes regarding relationship conflicts.

Would be necessary empirical studies to break down what is happening in large groups of people when they use Clean Language. An interesting research project would be to see if Clean Language Questions (and how to be used) would be learned in schools in early years. Over a period of three years children are to be observed and interviewed about what is happening regarding conflicts among them.

In my view, it would be useful if Clean Language Questions could be “taught in primary schools as a skill from early years, or in free courses” (Munteanu D., 2022, Literature Review submitted at UEL), webinars available in all institutions or on internet. These courses would be used for the families where conflicts are breaking the peace of partners and children. Another place for courses on how Clean Language would be used can be delivered in organisations by specialised psychologists. People will learn this way to build a healthy environment in the institutions where they are working. When people will master the use of Clean Language technique, conflicts in relationship generated by misunderstandings and misjudgements will cease to exist – meaning they will have healthy relationships.

There are currently no links between the remaining causes of relationship conflict and Clean Language. And for future research this narrative review is a starting point to open discussion and empirical studies to demonstrate present findings and other perspectives and effects of Clean Language Questions or new utilizations of this method. There are, as we have shown, only six peer reviewed journal article and are all qualitative studies. There is an essential need of quantitative studies to empirically demonstrate the present research findings.

CONCLUSION

Advantages offered by Clean Language Questions are: first, cognitive, and emotional development is enhanced; second, raised awareness; third, person using Clean Language Questions appreciate the diversity in rationale, which leads to increased respect for themselves and others, creating a better rapport with the interlocutor; and fourth, self-efficacy of the person answering Clean Language Questions (Lawley et al., 2018; Lawley, James & Manea, I. Alexandru, 2017; Linder-Pelz, S. & Lawley, J., 2015; Rees, J & Manea, A.I., 2016). These advantages are present to every person using Clean Language Questions, as they are helping to understand each other’s’ opinions and realities, leading to less conflict relationship. This is emphasised in research A by one of the interviewees – when he commented on “What worked? ‘I left the session having developed a strategy to be able to deal with that conflict, which was extremely beneficial’” (Linder-Pelz, S. & Lawley, J., 2015, p. 17).

From outcomes of coaching with Clean Language Questions, we conclude that clean language is a method which helps person asked and the interviewer to better understand metaphors and expressions used and misunderstandings are eliminated (James Lawley, 2017; Lawley, James & Manea, I. Alexandru, 2017; Rees, J & Manea, A.I., 2016; Tosey, P., Lawley, J., Meese, R., 2014). Is known that misunderstandings lead to conflict (Babaeian Jelodar et al., 2022; Common Causes of Conflict, n.d.; Nwogbaga, n.d.). Is noticeable how Clean Language diminish conflicts in relationships and more research needs to be done to prove it.

The findings of present review highlight how the use of Clean Language Questions can eliminate three causes for relationship conflicts. First, misunderstandings do not have space in a relationship or conversation when both parties are having patience to hear each other's opinions and perspectives. Second, misinterpretation does not take place when the participants to the conversation or relationship understand each other's point of view. Thirdly, judgement is taken out of equation in a relation where both parties have subsided bias and do not use their own ideas when listening and interpreting the information discussed.

A limitation of present narrative review is that connections between Clean Language and other causes of relationship conflict were not found; misunderstandings and free of judgement were causes addressed. There is a large field open for research on how relationship conflicts can be managed with the help of Clean Language. Solution can be revealed through practical application of Clean Language in adverse situations and fields prone to conflict that should be further analysed and researched.

A lack of collective understanding, poor communication skills and unclear expectations are causes of relationship conflict, which I believe can be targeted using Clean Language. However, the causes such as: unfair expectations, power plays or manipulations are causes of relationship conflict that cannot be resolved with the help of Clean Language Questions (Khan et al., 2017).

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Appendix 1

Core 12 Clean Language Questions

“The basic Clean Language questions of David Grove, where X and Y represent the person’s words or non-verbal.

Developing Questions:

(And) what kind of X (is that X)?

(And) is there anything else about X?

(And) where is X? or (And) whereabouts is X?

(And) that’s X like what?

(And) is there a relationship between X and Y?

(And) when X, what happens to Y?

Sequence and Source Questions:

(And) then what happens? Or (And) what happens next?

(And) what happens just before?

(And) where could X come from?

Intention Questions:

(And) what would X like to have happen?

(And) what needs to happen for X?

(And) can X (happen)?

Where X client’s word(s) to describe his metaphor and Y second word(s) to describe another metaphor”

(Sullivan & Rees, 2008, p. 51).

Appendix 2

The Search Flow Chart

