

Uncovering the Unconscious in Qualitative Research

BHBIA One-Day Workshop – April 2014

“The unconscious mind is the real driver of consumer behaviour. Understanding consumers is largely a matter of understanding how the unconscious mind operates; the first obstacle to this is recognizing how we frequently react without conscious awareness. As long as we protect the illusion that we ourselves are primarily conscious agents, we pander to the belief that we can ask people what they think and trust what we hear in response. After all, we like to tell ourselves we know why we do what we do, so everyone else must be capable of doing the same, mustn't they?”

Philip Graves

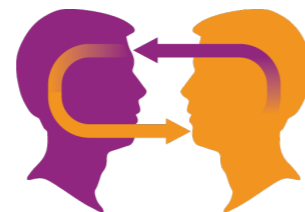
Neuroscience tells us that we make the vast majority, **90%**, of our decisions unconsciously, in the so-called 'unconscious mind', a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges and memories that are outside our conscious awareness, but influence our behaviour and decision making.

Market research often remains focused on conscious customer thinking and rational decision-making processes; the ability to recognise and explore higher order consciousness will unblock the road to the unconscious thoughts and feelings that motivate most customer behaviour.

The question then, is **how** do we reach into the unconscious mind of our respondents to truly understand their beliefs and value systems.

The challenge to delegates was to explore alternative methods of 'dialogue' and 'inquiry' from different disciplines, with an open mind. For example:

How can '**Intentional Dialogue**' and '**Circular Questioning**' help unlock the unconscious mind of the customer?



Intentional Dialogue

Creates 'space' for respondents to reveal themselves by demonstrating empathy and deep listening



Circular Questioning

Used to uncover the respondent's deeper mental landscape. Questions are formulated to bring forth the patterns that connect persons, objects, actions, perceptions, ideas, feelings, beliefs, values etc.

What can '**Metaphor**' reveal by acting as a bridge between the conscious and unconscious mind and becoming the route to a deeper understanding of thinking and behaviour?



The inspiration for the BHBIA One-Day Workshop 'Uncovering the Unconscious' came from collaborating with a range of individuals and organisations dedicated to working at this deeper level, including counsellors, therapists, psychologists, sports coaches and the Samaritans.

The aim of the workshop was to introduce delegates to new ways of interacting with respondents whilst building a new level of self-awareness within the research process.

Enabling the Metaphor

Evidence from cognitive linguistics indicates that metaphor is at the heart of the way we think. Exploring an individual's metaphor landscape provides a way into the unconscious mind, so that what is hidden is revealed. Specific techniques such as '**Clean Language**' and '**Clean Space**' provide a way to uncover personal and cultural metaphors



One of the best ways of understanding how people think is to get them to tell **stories**, then listen closely to how they connect things in their mind - ideas, themes, influences, personal identity, social responsibility etc.

Narrative Inquiry



'Storytelling' and 'Narrative' are now recognised as important components in revealing deeper, unconscious levels of thinking and communicating these to the listener. Do we truly engage in this practice within the qualitative research process?

One of the basic premises of the workshop was the need to understand the person first, if you are to have any hope of understanding why they do what they do and why they think the way they think. However, this deep level of understanding is best achieved by paying attention to ones self and developing greater level of self-awareness. So, the concept of '**Connection**' was also explored, introducing delegates to the idea that you

can discover all you need to know about the person in front of you by staying connected with yourself and the other. This is achieved by engaging in the right type of relationship with the respondent. The more clear you are about yourself and relaxed, the more present you will be and the less likely you will be to lose that important connection.

The speakers on the day included:

- **Julia Armstrong**, a counselor, relationship therapist and healer who practices all over the world. As well as her therapy work, Julia is also a writer, broadcaster and an Ultra runner.
- **Alison Dunbar-Dempsey** who began her career as a qualitative market researcher for a large advertising agency trained as a child psychologist using a range of therapeutic approaches with children, families, teachers and administrators.

Perhaps we as market researchers, both client and agency, would do well to reflect on the following quote from Albert Einstein, and apply it to our own working practices;

“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift”

Jane Fligelstone - Consortium
Winner - Ian Burgess Award

BHBIA Awards for Excellence at Training Events

Each year the BHBIA presents two awards to recognise excellence at training events. These are awarded to the facilitators/presenters achieving the highest scores, as assessed by the delegates attending the event.

The **Julie Stacey Award** is presented to the Best Speaker at a Foundation Training Course/Ethics & Guidelines Workshop.



2013-14 Winner: Rachel Medcalf, Adelphi Research UK for Legal & Ethical Guidelines Course (March 2014).

The **Ian Burgess Award** is for the Best Paper at a One-Day Training Course.



2013-14 Winner: Jane Fligelstone – Consortium for Uncovering the Unconscious in Qualitative Market Research (April 2014)