

A MANUAL FOR REPERTORY GRID TECHNIQUE

Second Edition

Fay Fransella, Richard Bell and Don Bannister



John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

A MANUAL FOR REPERTORY
GRID TECHNIQUE
SECOND EDITION

A MANUAL FOR REPERTORY GRID TECHNIQUE

Second Edition

Fay Fransella, Richard Bell and Don Bannister



John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester,
West Sussex PO19 8SQ, England

Telephone (+44) 1243 779777

First edition published by Academic Press 1977

Copyright © 2004 Roma Bannister for material by Don Bannister

Email (for orders and customer service enquiries): cs-books@wiley.co.uk

Visit our Home Page on www.wileyeurope.com or www.wiley.com

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except under the terms of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4LP, UK, without the permission in writing of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 8SQ, England, or emailed to permreq@wiley.co.uk, or faxed to (+44) 1243 770620.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the Publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Other Wiley Editorial Offices

John Wiley & Sons Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, USA

John Wiley & Sons, 989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741, USA

Wiley-VCH Verlag GmbH, Boschstr. 12, D-69469 Weinheim, Germany

John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd, 33 Park Road, Milton, Queensland 4064, Australia

John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte Ltd, 2 Clementi Loop #02-01, Jin Xing Distripark, Singapore 129809

John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd, 22 Worcester Road, Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada M9W 1L1

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fransella, Fay.

A manual for repertory grid technique / Fay Fransella, Richard Bell,
and Don Bannister. – 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and indexes.

ISBN 0-470-85489-8 – ISBN 0-470-85490-1 (pbk.)

1. Repertory grid technique. I. Bell, Richard. II. Bannister, D.
(Donald) III. Title.

BF698.8.R38F72 2004

155.2'8–dc22

2003014732

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-470-85489-8 (hbk)

ISBN 0-470-85490-1 (pbk)

Typeset in 10/12pt Palatino by Dobbie Typesetting Ltd, Tavistock, Devon

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Antony Rowe, Chippenham, Wiltshire

This book is printed on acid-free paper responsibly manufactured from sustainable forestry in which at least two trees are planted for each one used for paper production.

CONTENTS

<i>About the Authors</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
1. The Basis of Repertory Grid Technique	1
Grids: What Are They?	1
The Grid as Part of Personal Construct Theory	5
Grids: a Measure of What?.	5
Grids are about Constructs.	7
Some Personal Construct Theory Corollaries	9
Different Kinds of Construct	12
Constructs in Transition.	12
Conclusions	12
2. Constructs And Elements	15
What is an Element?	15
What is a Construct?	15
Elements in a Grid.	18
The Nature and Types of Constructs in a Grid	23
Ways of Eliciting Personal Constructs from 'Elements'	27
Eliciting Personal Constructs in Ways other than from 'Elements'	30
Eliciting Constructs from Constructs	39
To Elicit or to Supply Constructs?	46
Classification of Constructs	49
Which are more Important in a Grid – Elements or Constructs?	50
Constructs and Elements: the Debate	50
Comment	52

3. Varieties Of Grid In Use Today	54
The Grid Form of the Role Construct Repertory Test	54
The Split-Half Method of Allocating Elements	56
A Grid Using Rankings	56
A Grid Using Ratings.	59
Implications and Resistance-to-Change Grids.	65
Resistance-to-Change Grid	70
A Bipolar Implications Grid	73
Dependency Grid.	76
A Textual Grid.	78
A Qualitative Grid	79
Comment	80
4. Analyzing Grid Data.	82
Repertory Grids	82
Analyzing Constructs.	83
Analyzing Elements	91
Joint Representations of Constructs and Elements	93
Representations of Multiple Repertory Grid Data.	98
Dependency Grids	101
Implications Grids	104
Comments	108
5. Some Summary Measures Of Structure	113
Cognitive Complexity	114
Extremity and Ordination	121
Conflict	122
Element Indices	124
Measures of Superordinacy	126
Measures of Intransitivity.	127
Implications Grids	128
Dependency Grids	129
Comment	130
6. Reliability and Validity	132
Reliability.	132
Conclusions	143
Validity	143
Conclusions	151
7. Specific Ways Of Using Grids	153
The Individual and the Grid	154

A Decision-Making Grid	162
Wholly or Partially Standardized Grid Formats	163
Conclusions	167
8. Some Uses To Which Grids Have Been Put	168
Grids in General	169
In the Clinical Setting	170
Working with Children	188
Teachers and Teaching	192
The Construing of Professionals	195
Those With Learning Difficulties	196
Social Relationships	199
Language	204
Dependency	210
The Use and Abuse of Drugs	211
The Family	212
Forensic Work	213
Maps, Planning and Environment	215
Market Research	217
Politics	218
Careers	219
Sport	220
Organizational and Business Applications	220
More Unusual Uses of Grids	226
<i>Appendix Computer Programs and Websites</i>	<i>230</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>232</i>
<i>Author Index</i>	<i>258</i>
<i>Subject Index</i>	<i>262</i>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Fay Fransella is Founder and Director of the Centre for Personal Construct Psychology, Emeritus Reader in Clinical Psychology, University of London and Visiting Professor of Personal Construct Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire. She has written 11 books, eight of them specifically relating to personal construct psychology and the use of repertory grids, and she has published over 150 journal papers and book chapters. She wrote the first edition of *A Manual for Repertory Grid Technique* with Don Bannister for Academic Press in 1977.

She trained and worked as an occupational therapist for 10 years before taking a degree in psychology and a postgraduate diploma in clinical psychology in 1962. It was during her first job as a lecturer at the Institute of Psychiatry, London, that she was introduced to George Kelly's personal construct psychology and his repertory grid method. Both were revolutionary alternatives to the dominant behaviourism of the time. She found the view that we are all free agents responsible for what we make of the events which continually confront us particularly liberating. Since that time she has conducted research, together with teaching and writing, within the framework of Kelly's ideas. Her main area of research has been stuttering, for which she used a form of repertory grid. She has also conducted research on weight disorders and various psychological problems.

Richard Bell is an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Melbourne. He is interested in practical problems of measurement in clinical, organizational and educational settings. He has written extensively on the analysis of repertory grid data and has authored widely used software for the analysis of such data.

The influence of **Don Bannister** in arousing interest in George Kelly's theory and methods of assessment has been profound. Even after his untimely death in 1986 his influence continues, through those he inspired, through his professional research and writings, and also through his four novels. In the

year in which this second edition of the *Manual for Repertory Grid Technique* is published the 15th International Congress in Personal Construct Psychology was held in Huddersfield, UK, focusing on that outstanding influence. He spent much of his professional life carrying out research for the UK Medical Research Council, which included a year working with George Kelly at Ohio State University in 1965. He saw the psychology of personal constructs as an approach to the person that was empowering, democratic and, above all, valuable in helping people understand themselves and others. He was insistent that psychologists should use what power and influence they have to make a difference in the lives of people. The main tool he used in his own research was the repertory grid. He would have taken great interest in the vast amount of new work that has been carried out with and into that tool which is detailed in this second edition of the book that he co-authored in 1977.

PREFACE

When we planned this book we did not think that the task would be too difficult. All we had to do was 'update' it. After all, the first edition had been on sale for 20 years or so, suggesting that it served a purpose as it was. Best not to mess too much with something that people seemed to like.

What extraordinary naivety! Repertory grids are now used in nearly every walk of life. New measures seem to appear almost daily. People have been exploring the nature of the grid itself. As a result, we found ourselves faced with the writing of a largely new book.

First a word about 'we'. Don Bannister died some years ago, but we want to recognize his role in bringing personal construct psychology and repertory grid methods to the attention of many people, and so retain both his presence as an author and some of his contributions to the first edition of the book. Fay Fransella remains as an author, and the other author is, of course, Richard Bell. He is essential to the informed coverage of this book, being an authority on the analysis of grid data. His expertise can be seen throughout this second edition of the book, but particularly in Chapters 4 and 5.

We hope that the reader will find a balance between information on the grid methods, often in a research context, and discussions of the use of grids in practice. It has been a balancing act, and perhaps on occasion you may think we have fallen off the tightrope, but we hope not too often.

So much for the change in authors. However, some things have not changed – for example, the nature of the grid itself. Grids are like people. They come in many shapes and sizes, they ask questions and give answers, they can be studied as a group or individually, on one occasion or successively over time, and they can be used well or distorted out of all recognition. All of this means that we make no attempt to be definitive.

Apart from a willingness to contemplate a few statistical ideas, no specialized knowledge is required. In 1955, George Kelly in fact described a very simple method for 'going beyond words'. His Rep test enabled him to see how one idea has linkages with a number of other ideas, and how one person

can be seen as similar to some people and yet different from others. These linkages are such that the person may not easily be able to put them into words. The first part of the book deals with the development of grid technique from its inspired beginnings to the many forms that are now used.

As in the first edition, we have included an annotated bibliography on grid usage at the end of the book. So great is that usage now that we have made it a whole chapter rather than merely an appendix. The annotated list is not definitive, nor was it planned to be so. No attempt has been made to select 'the best' work – for 'the best' will usually be defined within specific contexts. We have aimed for as wide a spread as possible. However, some attempt has been made to group papers under specific headings, although the distribution is of necessity rather arbitrary, as in many cases one paper could be placed under several headings. There is also considerable overlap between the annotated bibliography and the References section, but this is a manual, not a general academic text, so we felt that it was important that the grid user should be able to lay hands on a reference quickly.

Our general aim is that this book should be of use to two types of reader. For those who think they would like to use grids in their research or in practice, we hope to provide enough information to enable them to set about designing their own grids for their own specific purposes, while at the same time making them aware of the underlying assumptions and limitations. For those who already know how to design and analyze grids, we aim to provide information on how different aspects of grids (length of rating scale, the ways in which constructs are elicited, whether constructs are supplied or elicited) can produce different results. There are also chapters on current methods of analysis and specific measures that are in use at present.

We believe that grids are best used within the theoretical system from which they came. Therefore, as in the first edition, we start with an outline of personal construct theory, focusing on those aspects of the theory that are relevant to grid usage. In places it may seem as if we are obsessed with certain ideas – such as bipolarity and range of convenience – and this is probably true. It comes from many years of advising students and professionals alike on the design of grids and, in particular, on dealing with problems that arise because of ignorance of some of the basic requirements of this form of measurement. In the end, grids and personal construct theory are about people, and we have been awed by the sheer imaginative and creative way in which so many people have used grids and explored their innermost workings. We hope that this book will encourage people to explore new ways of using grids and to create new ones. Perhaps there will even come a time when people create ways in which a grid can tell us something about how a person who is unable to use language construes the world.

Fay Fransella

Richard Bell

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our appreciation of the thoughtful, caring, professional and efficient way in which those at John Wiley & Sons treat their authors and editors and products – the books. Our thanks go first to Vivien Ward, the psychology editor, who gave constant support while the book was being written, and then to all those people involved in the course that a manuscript takes on its way to publication.

The publishers would like to thank Joseph Kelly for granting permission to use the previously unpublished material by George Kelly. Quotations throughout the book from G.A. Kelly (1955/1991) *The Psychology of Personal Constructs, Volumes 1 and 2* are reproduced by permission of Thomson Publishing Services.

Chapter 1

THE BASIS OF REPERTORY GRID TECHNIQUE

A scientist's inventions assist him in two ways: they tell him what to expect and they help him to see it when it happens. Those that tell him what to expect are theoretical inventions and those that enable him to observe outcomes are instrumental inventions. The two types are never wholly independent of each other, and they usually stem from the same assumptions. This is unavoidable. Moreover, without his inventions, both theoretical and instrumental, man would be both disoriented and blind. He would not know where to look or how to see.
(Kelly, 1969a, p.94)

GRIDS: WHAT ARE THEY?

George Kelly, physicist, mathematician and would-be engineer, loved mathematics. He regarded mathematics as 'the purest form of construing' (Hinkle, 1970). It would therefore have been surprising if he had not brought mathematics into his psychological theory in some form or other. He chose to do this by creating the *repertory grid*. He saw the grid as no more and no less than another way of stating his theory of personal constructs. It is not an 'add-on'. It is personal construct theory in action. He gives a detailed account of this relationship in the first in his series of three lectures on the function of interpretation in psychotherapy (Kelly, 1959).

His argument goes something like this. Suppose that Fred believes that people with *cold eyes* tend to be *mean with their money*. Let us suppose also that Fred is a psychologist and will undoubtedly yearn to give his notions a statistical foundation. Therefore it will not surprise us when he sets out to

survey his landscape of people and judge them, in each case, in terms of the dimensions *cold-eyed* vs. *warm-eyed* and *mean* vs. *generous*. He may then cast his observations on, say, 100 people into the form of a Chi-square which may appear as follows.

	Cold eyes	Warm eyes
Mean	28	19
Generous	2	51

Chi-square=36.9 ($P < 0.001$)

We can view these data in two ways. First, we can look upon them as telling us something about the nature of eye temperature and miserliness in people. We can say (given the customary cavils about experimental design) that at a given level of significance, *cold* vs. *warm* eyes are related to *miserliness* vs. *generosity*. We can proceed from there to offer explanations to account for the relationship, formulate consequent hypotheses and design further experiments to test them.

Alternatively, we can view these data as information about how Fred sees his world. The significant association that was found could be regarded as a sign that, for Fred, the constructs of *cold-eyed* vs. *warm-eyed* and *mean* vs. *generous* are related. We could go on to discuss further constructs of Fred which might be interlinked, and the total construct system of which these constructs are a part. We could consider what lines of action Fred might be prompted to take, viewing people thus – what kind of validating or invalidating experiences might strengthen or modify his mode of construing, and so on.

One approach does not deny the usefulness of the other, and personal construct theory takes the first into account in concerning itself with validation. Construing is the lively way in which we go about trying to anticipate events – real events as we construe them – in the outside world.

However, if we consider the second approach for a moment and comment on the data as revealing aspects of Fred's personal construct system, then in his Chi-square we have the beginnings of repertory grid analysis. Many such Chi-squares are in grid data. We can also look at Fred's construing in another way. According to Bell (in press), instead of thinking of Fred's constructs in terms of degree of association (correlation) and Chi-square (statistical significance), we can see them in terms of prediction. To what extent does Fred predict that a person who is *warm-eyed* will thereby be *generous*? The correlation between these two constructs is 0.61. The correlation of course gives us more information than the Chi-square. It tells us that, for Fred, there is

37% of meaning in common between his two constructs. However, it does not tell us which is the more important construct to Fred – that is, which is the predicted and which is the predictor. This is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Whichever approach we use to understand the relationship between constructs, behind each single act of judgement that a person makes (consciously or unconsciously) lies his or her implicit theory about the realm of events within which he or she is making those judgements. Repertory grid technique is, in its multitude of forms, a way of exploring the structure and content of such implicit theories. Each of us has many such implicit theoretical beliefs about billiards or love affairs or accounting or children or God. In turn, our smaller theories (such as construct subsystems) are linked into the overall theory that we call a personal construct system.

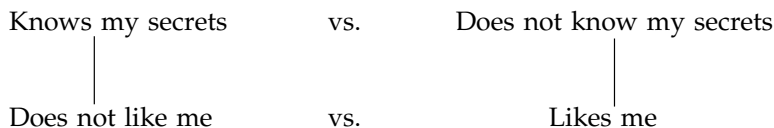
In using the metaphor of ‘theory’, we are not arguing that such theories are formal and articulated. They may be verbal, non-verbal or pre-verbal, they may be tightly structured or loosely structured, they may be easily testable or almost too tangled to test, and they may be idiosyncratic or commonly held. However, they are theories in the sense of being networks of meaning through which we see and handle the universe of situations through which we move. In this sense, our theories – our personal construct system – might be referred to in other psychological approaches as our ‘personality’, our ‘attitudes’, our ‘habits’, our ‘reinforcement history’, our ‘information-coding system’, our ‘psychodynamics’, our ‘concepts’, our ‘philosophy’ or our ‘central nervous system’.

Kelly argues that it would be convenient and useful to view personal construct systems as being made up of hierarchically linked sets of bipolar constructs – *nice–nasty*, *here–there*, *two-stroke–four-stroke*, *ugly–beautiful*, *alkali–acid*, *past–future*, *master–servant*, *odd–even*, and so on. Thus a dictionary is a record of how verbalized constructs are publicly related. The difficulties of exploring construct systems, by grid or any other means, force us to focus more on verbalized and easily accessible constructs. However, we should never assume that a construct is the same as its verbal label. A construct is a discrimination, not a verbal label. We should accept that in talking about an individual’s personal construct system, we are talking about his or her stance towards the world – we are talking about a *person*. Thus Kelly describes a construct in the following terms:

A construct is like a reference axis. A basic dimension of appraisal, often unverballed, frequently unsymbolised, and occasionally unsignified in any manner except by the elemental processes it governs. Behaviorally it can be regarded as an open channel of movement, and the *system of constructs* provides each man with his own personal network of action pathways, serving both to limit his movements and to open up to him passages of freedom which otherwise would be psychologically non-existent.

(Kelly, 1969b, p.293)

Suppose that I am haunted by the feeling that the more people know my secrets, the less I will be liked. This can be summarized in diagrammatic form as follows.



It is possible to demonstrate by the mathematics of a grid that these particular constructs are linked for me in this way. However, even when the argument is supported by the mathematics of a grid investigation, it is necessarily an oversimplification of the probable state of affairs. We are singling out a pair of constructs from what is a very complex network. The value and meaning of these constructs can only ultimately be assessed in terms of their location within this entire network, which is a changing network in any case. However, suppose that the grid has revealed this aspect of my construing to you. You may then use it as a source of information about me, either as it presents itself or as subsumed under some higher-order construction of your own – for example, that it is essentially ‘neurotic’ (vs. ‘normal’). For indeed our constructs are not all equal – some are more meaningful or important to us than others.

However, I may use this revelation about my construct system to ascertain to what degree I think my interpersonal relationships are limited by this mode of construing – this kind of anticipation of how other people will respond to me. Yet more aspects of my construing may need to be examined in order to locate other constructions which I place upon the world, which in some way contradict or cut across this belief that the more people know my secrets, the less I will be liked. It may be that even while I am believing this I make special and exceptional cases, such as psychotherapists, priests or women. It may be that if I am drunk I believe I have a licence which takes away the effect of the ruling. It may be that I am changing my secrets and believe that they are becoming less objectionable. Finally, it may be that I am ceasing to operate the construction as a self-fulfilling prophesy, and new evidence may yet become available to me which radically alters this aspect of my interpretative system.

The purpose of grids is to inform us about the ways in which our system is evolving, and its limitations and possibilities. The results of the grid have often been regarded as a map of the construct system of an individual – a kind of idiographic cartography as contrasted with, say, the nomothetic cartography of the semantic differential (Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957). To the extent that a grid gives us a map of an individual’s construct system, it is probably about as accurate and informative as the maps of the American coastline which Columbus provided. At that, it may be a great deal more sensitive to the

nature of the person than, say, a questionnaire. This issue of accuracy is referred to again in relation to the interpretation of one grid in Chapter 7.

The grid is perhaps best regarded as a particular form of structured interview. Our usual way of exploring another person's construct system is by conversation. In talking to each other, we come to understand the way in which the other person views the world, what goes with what, what implies what, what is important and unimportant, and in what terms the person seeks to assess people, places and situations. The grid formalizes this process and assigns mathematical values to the relationships between a person's constructs. It enables us to focus on particular subsystems of construing, and to note what is individual and surprising about the structure and content of a person's outlook on the world. Yet the information it gives us is not novel or some peculiar product of our 'scientific method'. It is a formalized version of the kind of information we are always seeking about each other, and the kind of understanding we are always in the process of gaining about each other.

THE GRID AS PART OF PERSONAL CONSTRUCT THEORY

People often behave as if all that is needed for effective research or applied work is a single idea and an instrument. They ignore the fact that behind any single idea is a whole series of assumptions, and underlying any instrument is yet another series of assumptions. The assumptions underlying the 'instrument' may well contradict the assumptions implicit in the 'idea'. Thus the grid method is often used quite without relation to its parent theory. It has often been regarded as some kind of measure of 'attitudes', 'meaning', 'personality' or 'concepts'.

Yet people who use the grid thoughtfully will find themselves assuming the 'truth' of many of the assumptions of personal construct theory, even if they are ignorant of the theory as such. In the following account, attention is drawn to those aspects of the theory from which the grid is directly derived and where the relationship between theory and instrument needs to be borne in mind.

GRIDS: A MEASURE OF WHAT?

The model underlying personal construct psychology is explicitly the idea of 'every man his own scientist'. Kelly suggests that we strive to make sense out of (give meaning to) our universe, ourselves and the particular situations that we encounter. To this end each of us creates and re-creates an implicit theoretical framework which, whether it is well or badly designed, is our personal construct system. In terms of this system we live, anticipate events, determine our behaviour and ask our questions. It is in terms of this same system that we evaluate outcomes and elaborate changes in the interpretative

system itself. Thus in Kelly's terms, we are 'scientists' who derive hypotheses (have expectations) from our theories (our personal construing). We subject these hypotheses to experimental testing (we bet on them behaviourally, and we take active risks in terms of them). We observe the results of our experiments (we live with the outcomes of our behaviour), we modify our theory (we change our minds, and we change ourselves), and so the cycle continues. We can, of course, also look inward and try to understand some of the mysteries of our own selves.

Kelly devised the repertory grid technique as a method for exploring personal construct systems. It is an attempt to stand in others' shoes, to see their world as they see it, and to understand their situation and their concerns. Kelly grounded his theory in the mathematical relationships he saw between the constructs. For instance, he says:

Now let us turn to a personal system made up of a whole lot of constructs. Such a system is a complex, or, if you don't mind the term, a conceptual grid within which events can be seen in depth or in their psychological dimensions.

(Kelly, 1959, p.13)

He talks of a series of events, $a, b, c, \dots k$, which are dealt with by construing them as being identified with one pole or the other of construct A – that is, falling into two categories. Now the events can be dealt with in a more complex fashion by employing a second construct B. The events can now be described by four categories. With a third construct C, eight categories can be abstracted. The number of such groupings in a system of dichotomous constructs will be equal to 2^n , where n is the number of constructs applied. Kelly continues as follows:

By this same process events are ascribed individuality – I won't say 'uniqueness', since that implies concrete discontinuity between events – but an individuality which makes each event distinguishable from all other events – distinguishable, not because of its unrelatedness to them, but because it is indeed related to them in a complex pattern of likenesses and relevant differences. For the purposes of psychological response, then, each event becomes *psychologically* a sequence of pluses and minuses as it is scanned in succession by a series of constructs.

(Kelly, 1959, pp.13–14)

Suppose that a small child is given a sweet to suck. This, for the child, is an event, and one that takes on other meanings as he sees it is related to smiles, a nice taste, and kind words. He makes sense of this by it being contrasted with frowns, a nasty taste and scolding voices. Kelly states that:

We can represent this relationship as a rectangular grid – a Repertory Grid – with the events $a, b, c, \dots k$ arranged along the top with each event respectively heading a column of cells, and with constructs... arranged along the vertical margin, each at the left end of a row of cells. Since the constructs are bi-polar, we can make an entry in each cell to indicate whether the construct in that row is applied one way (+) or the other (–) to the event represented in the column.

(Kelly, 1959, p.14)

As can be seen, grids for Kelly were not just an add-on – they were a crucial part of the way in which he conceptualized his theory. It could even be that he viewed his whole theory mathematically and then had to translate it into words.

GRIDS ARE ABOUT CONSTRUCTS

Kelly offers several definitions of a construct. For example, a construct is ‘a way in which two or more things are alike and *thereby* different from a third or more things’. This definition manifests itself directly in one of the procedures for eliciting constructs for grids. At another time, Kelly stated that ‘a construct is a way of transcending the obvious’. Here Kelly is emphasizing that when we make a new abstraction out of events, we are escaping from the limitations of the ‘facts’ of earlier abstractions.

It is worth noting that another essential feature of personal constructs as stated in the Construction Corollary is the notion that they enable us to anticipate future events. Hinkle (1965) focused his theory of implications and his implications grid on this by equating ‘implications’ with ‘anticipations’. However, in general, little attention has been paid by researchers to this aspect of the theory in relation to grids. Yet in practice we are trying to understand what predictions a person is making when we subsume the construing of another person from the output of their grid (*see* Chapter 7) and when we try to explore their construing by ‘laddering’ (*see* Chapter 2). When we attempt to look at the world through another’s eyes, we are attempting to understand what their construing leads them to expect from their world of people and events.

Of great importance here is the idea that we have been talking ‘as if’ there is a thing which is a ‘construct’. In fact we are not. What we are talking about is the *process* of construing, which consists of the application of personal constructs we have each created during our lives and which are formed into our personal construct system.

Constructs are Bipolar

In all of his definitions, Kelly retains the essential notion that constructs are bipolar, as stated in his Dichotomy Corollary. His argument is that we never affirm anything without simultaneously denying something. This makes the notion of a construct quite different from the notion of a concept. When we say that Mary Bloggs is *honest*, we are not saying that Mary Bloggs is *honest* and she is not a *chrysanthemum* or a *battleship* or the *square root of minus one*. We are saying that Mary Bloggs is *honest* and she is not a *crook* nor is she *evasive* – or whatever is the opposite of the construct for Mary. It is often the opposite pole of a personal construct that gives us a clear meaning of that construct. We do not always, or even very often, specify our contrast pole, but Kelly’s argument

is that we make sense of our world by simultaneously noting likenesses and differences. It is in the contrast that the usefulness of the construct subsists. The bipolarity resides in the construct itself, not in the two sets of elements that are sorted by the construct. *North-south* is an axis of reference, so that elements which in one context are *north*, in another context become *south*. The essence of a construct is that it is a movable feast. It is a vehicle whereby we move from one situation to another. It is one way we have chosen to discriminate between events in our personal world.

It is this very bipolarity that makes the designing of grids possible. Suppose that we try to use 'concepts' to build a grid, and we start with the concept *honest*. We could designate some of our acquaintances as honest and leave the rest outside the concept. Then we might go on to the concept *cruel* and put some of our acquaintances under that heading, leaving the rest outside once more. All we can now do is to make some statement about class inclusion or exclusion. We can make statements about the number of people who are in one category and who are or are not in another. However, we cannot directly examine the *relationship* between the concepts except in terms of overlap.

When creating a grid, we may use a simple bipolar grid where we allot each of our elements to one pole of the construct or the other, or we rank our elements from 'most like' to 'most opposite', or we rate them on, say, a seven-point scale. In each case it is the dimensionality – the bipolarity – of the construct which enables us to arrive at some kind of matrix of the pattern of interrelationships between constructs.

It is this capacity of the grid to look at the *relationship* between constructs that enables us to go beyond the issue of whether the person's construing is 'correct' or 'incorrect'. If we limit ourselves to the idea of the concept, then we are liable to end up working in terms of such notions as 'over-inclusion' and 'under-inclusion'. However, to say that a person's concepts are over-inclusive or under-inclusive inevitably involves us in the argument that there is a correct and right level of inclusion of objects within the concept, whether we define 'right' in terms of normative standards or some set logic. We can, if we wish, compare a person's manifest relationships between constructs in grid form with normative standards or with any other standards that we care to erect. However, we are not limited to this venture. We can consider the individual person's construct system as a system *within itself* and move from there to issues such as communicability, and so on. References are made to the bipolarity of constructs as a theme that emerges throughout the other chapters in this book.

Constructs Have a Range of Convenience

All grids involve a consideration of the issue of range of convenience. The Range Corollary states that a construct (or a subsystem of constructs) always

operates within a context, and that there is a finite number of elements to which it can be applied by a given person at a given time. This is something we recognize very readily in speech when, for example, we categorize furniture as *antique* or *modern* or numbers as *prime* or *non-prime*, whereas it bends our minds to consider *antique* or *modern* numbers and *prime* or *non-prime* furniture.

Obviously the range of convenience of our constructs can be and sometimes is extended, as in poetry, intoxication and inspiration. However, for a given act of construing at a given time, the range of convenience of our constructs is always limited. From this argument about the nature of construing, Kelly derived a prime rule of grid construction. For given individuals completing a grid, all elements must be within each person's range of convenience. Otherwise we are inviting that individual to commit a nonsense. For example, he may sort his people into *attractive* and *unattractive*. However, because we have not allowed him to tell us that, for him, *attractive-unattractive* is a construct whose range of convenience is *limited to women*, then what he may do is put some of his women into *attractive*, some of his women into *unattractive* and all of his men into *unattractive*. He is forced to do this because we have left him no alternative. Obviously, when we come to relate the construct *attractive* to others in the grid, we will be bound to produce a distorted picture of his system.

It is interesting to note that in constructing the semantic differential, Osgood ignored the range of convenience rule, and this enabled him to make some interesting statements about precisely those constructs which have the *most enormous ranges of convenience*. His famous trio of *good-bad*, *active-passive* and *weak-strong* essentially represents what Kelly called major superordinates. The type of problem that is created by ignoring range of convenience is nicely illustrated by Brown's (1958) question in relation to the semantic differential: 'Is a boulder sweet or sour?'

SOME PERSONAL CONSTRUCT THEORY COROLLARIES

Organization Corollary

This reads as follows: 'each person characteristically evolves for his convenience in anticipating events a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs'. Here Kelly is pointing to the fact that construct systems are hierarchical, with constructs standing to each other in what he terms subordinate and superordinate relationships.

This is something that is recognized in formal logic, in that *modes of transport* subsume *boats* which subsume *sailing boats* which subsume *dinghies* which subsume *Mirror dinghies*, and so on. It is recognized in common argument when we talk of important ideas, central ideas, or the main features of this or that, as contrasted with detail, trivia, and so on. However, standard use of

grids may in some cases have led to the impression that constructs are to be seen in terms of a Euclidean geometry, lying flat and side by side rather than being viewed as pyramidal in relation to each other. Early grid studies such as those of Hinkle (1965), with his description of 'laddering', and Landfield (1971), with his description of 'pyramiding', have focused on the organizational qualities of construct systems (see Chapter 2).

Kelly complicates our understanding of this corollary by describing two types of ordinal relationship. One construct can subsume another as one of its elements in two ways. First, 'it may extend the cleavage line intended by the other'. That is, *good* vs. *bad* may subsume *intelligent* vs. *stupid*, with *good* including things that are *intelligent* plus many things that are neither *intelligent* nor *stupid*. On the other hand, one construct may 'abstract across the other's cleavage line'. In that case, *intelligent* vs. *stupid* may be subsumed by *evaluative* vs. *descriptive*. *Intelligent* vs. *stupid* would be identified as *evaluative*, and in that sense would be different from *giants* vs. *pygmies*. Several authors (e.g. Slater, 1969; Ryle, 1975; ten Kate, 1981) have pointed out ways in which Kelly has created some confusion in his theorizing with this dual definition. On the other hand, Jankowicz (2003) uses these two definitions to underpin his 'laddering down' as well as his 'laddering up' methods.

Individuals and Grids

The Individuality Corollary states simply that people differ from each other in the way in which they construe events. No one has ever responded to a 'stimulus'. They respond to what they *perceive* the stimulus to be. The aim of grids is to increase our capacity to explore the individual worlds of meaning in terms of which we live. In Kelly's terms, the aim is 'to get beyond the words'. Even the most 'public' of constructs (e.g. those of mathematics or science) are personal in that each of us must individually give them a meaning and make them part of our total system. 'Public' constructs may have agreed support from a group of people, with repeatedly demonstrated predictive implications and often rehearsed meanings, as emphasized in Kelly's Commonality Corollary. Thus neither personal construct theory nor grids are exclusively concerned with those ambiguous constructs about feeling and relationship that people most often refer to as 'personal'.

Commonality and Groups of Individuals

The Commonality Corollary states that 'to the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his processes are psychologically similar to those of the other person'. This is the contrast pole of the individuality corollary but, in the context of the total theory, it reminds us that the grid is most useful when it follows through the lines of implication of a construct. At the level of

the exact relationship between two constructs, two people may appear to be construing in a very similar way, but if the lines of implication of these constructs are followed through for the two individuals, radical differences may emerge.

These differences can also be seen at group level. For example, Fransella and Bannister (1967) showed that both British Labour Party and Conservative Party supporters saw a positive relationship between the constructs *proud of being British* and *likely to vote Conservative*. If we follow the relationships through the network, we then find that for Labour Party supporters, *proud of being British* related positively to *being prejudiced*, while for Conservative party supporters it related negatively to *being prejudiced*.

This corollary is of direct relevance when research needs to be conducted with groups of people using the same grid (e.g. in organizations). It is argued (e.g. Fransella, 1988) that this is quite compatible with personal construct theory provided that the constructs are elicited from people in the specific group, a sample of whom will all complete the final grid.

Sociality Corollary

This is a key corollary within the theory. It states that 'to the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person'. This is key because it describes how we try to understand others. It also implies that to construe the constructions of another person is not simply to hold or mimic those constructions. If someone points out to you that two aspects of your way of interpreting your world are contradictory, that person is certainly not simply reproducing your constructions, but is construing them. Another crucial point here is that, in Kelly's terms, to play a role in relation to another person does not mean that we do this consciously. We can, and probably do, most often come to an understanding of how another person sees the world at an 'intuitive' or non-verbal level. We then test out that understanding by behaving 'as if' it were true, and we soon find out whether it is or not by the response of the other person.

Choice Corollary

This is the main motivational corollary of personal construct theory. It states that 'a person chooses that pole of a construct that is likely to lead to the greater elaboration and extension of his or her system'. It is argued that we choose that pole of a construct which is likely to lead to our making increased sense of our world. This choice is not always, of course, made at a conscious level. In personal construct terms, we strive after meaning. We strive to make our world more and more predictable. It is in this sense that we can be said to have 'chosen' to be the sort of person we are now. We have indeed created

ourselves, and by that same token we can 'choose' to re-create that person if they are not to our liking. However, that re-creation can be enormously difficult. This corollary is relevant to Hinkle's (1965) implications and resistance-to-change grids and laddering. In each case, people are asked to state which pole of their constructs they 'choose' to describe themselves. It is also important for our understanding of the results obtained from grids, because it helps to explain why, for instance, people provide lopsided ratings – that is, why they rate more elements on one pole of a construct than on the other pole.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF CONSTRUCT

Construct theory offers different ways of categorizing constructs. They can be 'pre-emptive' (if this is a lie, it is *nothing but* a lie), 'constellatory' (if this is a lie, then it is also *unfair, punishable, a sure sign of moral decay*, and so on) or 'propositional' (this may be considered *as if it were*, among other things, a lie). It is surprising that grids have seldom been used to explore these ideas within the theory. Perhaps they are ideas that are taken for granted. This, of course, should not be the case, and perhaps this edition of the *Manual* will encourage those interested in research to explore these ideas further.

CONSTRUCTS IN TRANSITION

Kelly argues that 'man is a form of motion', and has offered a number of constructions designed to deal with the idea of constructs in transition. His notions of guilt (the awareness of dislodgement of the self from one's core role structure) and threat (the awareness of an imminent comprehensive change in one's core role structures) are examples, as is his notion of *hostility* (the attempt to extort validation evidence in favour of a type of social prediction which has already been recognized as a failure), which is designed to stop the threat materializing. These all aim to cast light on the way in which our construing systems change and resist change as we experience varying validation fortunes. Once again there has been little research using repertory grids to explore these theoretical ideas. It is to be hoped that people will become interested in elaborating forms of grid method that are designed to detect and explore these ideas further and so assist people whose constructs are in transition and who are dealing with their own guilt, threat, hostility and aggression.

CONCLUSIONS

This is a very superficial account of what is a very complex theory. However, it points to aspects of the theory that underpin or relate to our understanding of repertory grid data.

Although it is an often repeated truism that the grid is a method, not a test, it is still a largely ignored truism.

This is exemplified by our constant failure to recognize that the use of a grid involves all the types of problems that we confront in designing an experiment. Whatever the question that is being asked experimentally, to use a grid is to involve the researcher in a whole series of problems. These concern the nature of the elements to be used, the forms of construct elicitation and the format (e.g. ranking, rating or bipolar allotment) in which the subject is to respond. In addition, there is a multiplicity of ways in which grid data can be analyzed and many types of inference that it is legitimate to draw from these data. Yet whether the focus of concern is with an individual case in psychotherapy or large-scale research, grids tend to be too readily used, and the user often becomes buried in the mountains of data which are generated.

The potential usefulness of the grid method has been amply demonstrated in practice, and can reasonably be argued in principle. The great advantage of the grid is that data from a single individual can be subjected to many of the types of group statistics which we have hitherto reserved for populations of people. Cluster analysis methods, principal-components analysis, *t*-tests of group differences, correlational consistency measures, significance of correlation methods, coefficients of concordance and a range of other measures are all technically feasible.

Grid data are potentially rich in the light that they may throw on the underlying structure and manifest content of the construing which underlies the person's grid responses. The use of group statistics within the population of responses of a single individual enables us to establish the meaningfulness of the single grid, in that it can be readily shown that a given grid is most unlikely to have been produced randomly. The pattern of associations within the responses is demonstrably *meaningful*, in statistical terms, however difficult it may be to interpret its psychological meaning (Draffan, 1973).

Although the grid was logically derived from construct theory, it is illogical to argue that it must only be used within the context of the theory. What can be argued is that any person who is using the grid should be aware of the assumptions underlying it and should make these assumptions clear to his or her audience. Thus the researcher will be involved in an internal and public dialogue with personal construct theory, and it is *in this sense* that the method cannot be separated from the theory.

Constructivism and an emphasis on qualitative measurement have been adopted by many psychologists. However, empiricism is still a strong tradition in many countries, and it seems to have led many researchers and practitioners to value instruments more than they value the ideas and arguments from which those instruments derive.