

Clean Language Interviewing

Being able to conduct interviews as effectively as possible is a vital skill in 'the interview society'. This accessible and ground-breaking book supports practitioners and academics to minimise their assumptions to produce authentic data from interviewees when it is important to do so.

- Tawfik Jelassi, Professor of Strategy and Technology Management at IMD, Switzerland

If you are a qualitative researcher, or curious about how to conduct interviews in a variety of contexts, you will be intrigued by this book. Starting with an introduction to the epistemological foundations of clean language, each chapter examines how clean language principles can help interviewers gain deep insights into individuals' experiences. Even if you are an experienced interviewer or researcher, you will find yourself returning to this book to learn more about how clean language can help you approach interviews in a qualitatively distinct way.

- Carole Elliott, Professor of Organisation Studies, Sheffield University Management School, UK

This book reminds us that the most useful data for a variety of purposes including research, diagnosis or evaluation are, as much as possible, untainted by external categories and schemas. What sociologists call first-order perceptions can be accessed through the clean language interviewing approach described here. Interventions or other types of initiatives based on such an approach are more likely to hit the mark since they are informed by valid data and understandings.

- Loizos Heracleous, Professor of Strategy and Organisation, Warwick Business School, UK

Asking good questions is an art which we should never take for granted. This thought-provoking book helps us develop our skills by inviting us to understand the experiences of others in their words, without judgement. A must-read for any researcher or practitioner.

- Professor Almuth McDowall, Assistant Dean, Department of Organisational Psychology, Birkbeck, University of London, UK

When reading my post-graduate students' transcripts of the semi-structured interviews in their qualitative research, I noticed that they paraphrase the participants' words into their own. This bothered me, and when Prof. Heather Cairns-Lee introduced me to 'Clean Language' interviewing, I was delighted. This book comes for me at an opportune time as it offers a solution to the problem I identified in the credibility of our qualitative research. We realise that qualitative research studies rarely found space in our high-level journals in Management and Leadership studies, unless, as a colleague of mine described it – the methodology and findings 'are glowing in the dark'. I think that this book on 'Clean Language' would offer us as qualitative researchers practical guidelines on securing a home for our research output in highly respected journals. As an executive coach, I was struck by the enormous potential of this work on 'Clean Language' to augment our coaching mindset on non-directive facilitation of growth of our clients. Prof. Heather Cairns-Lee's work on metaphors to crystallise leadership identity, using clean language, offers 'how to' practical guidelines for executive coaches, and I am inspired to use it in my work, and confident that other coaches would find it useful too. Congratulations on the publication of this relevant and rigorous work on 'Clean Language'. We are grateful for your contribution to enhance the credibility of our qualitative research and coaching practice.

- Professor Caren Brenda Scheepers, Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, South Africa

If you gather information through interviews, put this book on your must-read list. Packed with insights from a collaboration of top experts around the world, this text is a treasure of guidance to improve the competency for cleaning the interview of the interviewer's assumptions, frames, and worldviews. Thanks to these authors, my clean interviewing competency increased in a range of academic and organization practice interview applications including exemplar modelling, evaluation, recruitment, specification, and phenomenological interviews.

- Pamela Ey, Adjunct Professor at McColl School of Business at Queens University in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Gathering insight from people and not only data is essential to understanding the business performance. Yet the way that questions are framed is often highly leading, which constrains the ability to gather insight. This book on clean language

interviewing describes the principles and practices of asking questions with minimal assumptions that can support business leaders to gain relevant information.

- Natasha Sandoval, Senior Vice President Marketing,
Scandit, Switzerland

Lots of professionals *think* they avoid leading questions when wanting to uncover people's actual knowledge, thoughts and feelings. *Clean Language Interviewing* is a game-changer because it spells out why you might be mistaken about the quality of your questioning, and how you might be unintentionally skewing the information you gather. It demonstrates how to upgrade your approach so that the decisions you make are based on a much stronger foundation. Essential reading for anyone who gathers information through conversations.

- Judy Rees, Partner Rees McCann, UK

Clean Language Interviewing is a learnable skill that can help with truly listening such that people feel heard, and establishing authentic connection. There is no better predictor of outcome in therapy than the relationship between the therapist and client – using Clean Language interviewing can help establish this critical connection. In the world of safety, where incident investigations tend to mimic courtrooms (without the necessary checks and balances), Clean Language can begin to make a real difference – changing the way data are collected. If interviews can be done using Clean Language in an investigation process, we have a game-changer – we will learn far more than we ever have about how work is actually done because we will truly listen and be aware of how our presence as an interviewer can influence the outcome of the interview. I feel this is the way forward – there is a massive move towards authenticity and genuine connection that Clean Language interviewing can support.

- Tanya Hewett, PhD, Owner of Beyond Safety Compliance, USA

Clean Language Interviewing offers a unique, powerful and insightful method of conducting interviews that keeps your stuff out and gathers their stuff in. This is the most useful and available training for investigatory interviewing I have come across in my career.

- Dick Swanson, President at Performance Management
Initiatives Inc., USA

I see a growing usefulness of Clean Language Interviewing in the business world, especially as leadership practices evolve for the digital age. We introduced Clean Language into our company two years ago to increase collaboration. Then we saw its benefits in detecting and managing conflicts. Now, we are taking the next step in the use of Clean Language Interviewing: uncovering hidden assumptions. Without bringing out hidden assumptions into the open, we are missing out on 'people-data' important to assure project success.

- Shail Jai, Chief Executive Officer and Cofounder,
Farragut Inc., USA

As a qualitative scholar, I know just how important effective interviewing skills can be to generating impactful research. This book provides a comprehensive treatment of clean interviewing, a technique that helps interviewers avoid allowing their own assumptions to colour their subjects' responses. The editors have drawn together a diverse spectrum of up-to-date and practical perspectives on the subject to help guide readers in applying the technique knowledgeably and effectively, through all stages of the interview process. I would highly recommend it to anyone seeking to improve their interviewing skills.

- David Oliver, Associate Professor,
The University of Sydney Business School, Australia

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Clean Language Interviewing: Principles and Applications for Researchers and Practitioners

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of Dr Karen Hanley.

Karen approached me with the idea of a book about the application of clean language to research five years ago. She shared the idea with James Lawley, a leading authority on clean language, who supported it. Sadly, Karen passed away in 2020 before work could begin. The book has come to fruition in its present form thanks to the caring and careful curation and editorial work of clean language experts, Heather Cairns-Lee, James Lawley and Paul Tosey and the contributions from the chapter authors.

Karen was a keen and enthusiastic activist in community, democratic and spiritual circles. This commitment extended to her belief in the value and usefulness of clean language in many personal and professional areas of life. She applied clean language interviewing within her doctoral work as the first researcher to use this approach in the Danish language.

Karen's study aimed to increase understanding of older workers' experiences through examining the factors enabling and hindering older workers to remain longer in the labour market in Denmark. To produce individual case histories, data were collected from 18 people aged 60+ who had not already retired, through in-depth semi-structured interviews about their perception of working life and a detailed written questionnaire administered at the end of the interview, which captured the timing of the participant's key life events. Karen was diligent about data collection and its application and enthused by the potential for applying clean language within these interviews.

With its deliberate removal of the metaphors or hooks from interview questions, clean language enabled Karen to liberate each individual interviewee's inner knowledge. She used clean language questions crafted in English, translated into Danish and checked by a native Danish speaker so that the meaning would remain the same for Karen's participants. This approach meant that she could obtain participant's own experience and understandings and not those imposed or projected by the interviewer/researcher. Complemented by her innate ability to facilitate people and situations, Karen enabled these older people to have a voice through eliciting their life histories.

By comparing these individual case studies, Karen identified factors that either enable or hinder longer working. Her findings emphasised a mismatch between national and employer policies and the lived experience of the participants. The study suggests that employees need a lifelong, holistic and integrated approach to employment based on an understanding of the working life course.

Karen is remembered by many with great affection, and especially by her husband Peter and me, for the insights she helped people to perceive. Karen, like her mother, was always ready to strike up a conversation. A natural skill, which made her a great researcher and facilitator.

Anthony Chiva

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Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables	xv
About the Contributors	xvii
Acknowledgements	xxiii

Part 1 Principles

Chapter 1 An Introduction to Clean Language Interviewing for Research	3
<i>Paul Tosey, Heather Cairns-Lee and James Lawley</i>	
Chapter 2 Eliciting Interview Data Cleanly Through Minimising Leading Questions	17
<i>Heather Cairns-Lee, James Lawley and Paul Tosey</i>	
Chapter 3 Metaphor, Clean Language and Qualitative Research	31
<i>Jan Nehyba</i>	
Chapter 4 Enhancing Clean Language Interviewing With Modelling	45
<i>James Lawley</i>	

Part 2 Applications

Chapter 5 Exploring Experiences of Work-Life Balance: A Pilot Study of Clean Language as an Interview Method	63
<i>Margaret Meyer, Wendy Sullivan, Paul Tosey and James Lawley</i>	

Chapter 6 Drawing Lessons Learned From Mental Models of Leadership	75
<i>Heather Cairns-Lee</i>	
Chapter 7 The Potential of Clean Language Interviewing for Journalists	89
<i>Jacqueline Ann Surin</i>	
Chapter 8 Using Clean Language Interviewing to Explore the Lived Experience of Neurodifferent Job Applicants	101
<i>Nancy Doyle and Uzma Waseem</i>	
Chapter 9 Making the Unspoken Visible Through Clean Language: Interviews With Families Facing Encephalopathy in Their Child	117
<i>Tania Korsak</i>	
Chapter 10 Modelling Excellence: Using Clean Language Interviewing to Research Exceptional Performance	131
<i>Lynne Cooper</i>	
Chapter 11 Coding-in-the-Moment and Other Hidden Skills of Clean Language Interviewing	143
<i>Caitlin Walker and Marian Way</i>	
Chapter 12 Facilitating Change in Organisations: Applying Clean Language Interviewing Through Action Research	155
<i>Maaïke Nooitgedagt and Wendy Nieuwland</i>	
Chapter 13 Clean Neutrality in Conflict	167
<i>Martin Snoddon</i>	
Chapter 14 Clean Language Interviewing in Management Systems Auditing	179
<i>Yuji Yamagami and James Ramirez</i>	
Chapter 15 Adding Value and Insight: Applying Clean Language Interviewing to Market Research	191
<i>Wendy Sullivan and Di Tunney</i>	

Chapter 16 Interviewing for Cause: When Interviewing Is About Life and Death	205
<i>Sharon Small</i>	

Part 3 Reflections

Chapter 17 And, Whereabouts Is Clean Language Interviewing Now?	221
<i>Paul Tosey, Heather Cairns-Lee and James Lawley</i>	

Index	235
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List of Figures and Tables

Figure 5.1.	Interviewee B (Work-Life Balance at Its Best) – Riding the Crest of a Wave.	66
Figure 5.2.	Interviewee B (Work-Life Balance Not at Its Best) – Going Up a Hill Dodging Boulders.	67
Figure 6.1.	Image of Safety Net as Part of Metaphor for Leadership.	81
Figure 11.1.	My Visual-Spatial Model Using the Data Parcels.	147
Figure 12.1.	Red Threads in the Project.	162
Figure 14.1.	Yamagami-Small Process Sheet.	184
Figure 17.1.	Schematic of the Cleanness Rating.	223
Table 1.1.	Classically Clean Questions.	9
Table 1.2.	Progressive Levels of Clean Language Practice and Principles in Interview-Based Research.	10
Table 2.1.	Leading Features of Interview Questions With Examples.	20
Table 2.2.	The Six Categories in the Cleanness Rating.	23
Table 2.3.	Application of the Cleanness Rating to an Interview Transcript.	24
Table 3.1.	Three Continua of Metaphor Characteristics.	37
Table 4.1.	Extract From the First 15 Minutes of a 40-Minute Interview With Robert Dilts, Interviewed by James Lawley and Penny Tompkins.	52
Table 6.1.	The Cleanness Rating of Natalia’s Interview Transcript.	83

Table 6.2.	Four Most Commonly Used Clean Questions in Cairns-Lee Study.	84
Table 8.1.	Survey Questions for the Focus Group.	106
Table 8.2.	Example Questions for Facilitating a Focus Group Discussion.	106
Table 8.3.	Feedback From the Focus Group.	108
Table 9.1.	Examples of Metaphors and Their Intentions.	126
Table 9.2.	The Capable Model.	128
Table 12.1.	The Steps of the Modelling Shared Reality Process.	157
Table 14.1.	Issues in Traditional Management Systems Auditing.	180
Table 15.1.	The Value-Strings Process.	196
Table 16.1.	Interview Improvements Using Clean Language Interviewing.	214
Table 17.1.	Part II Chapters Mapped Onto the Four Levels of Clean Language Interviewing.	225
Table 17.2.	Key Features and Benefits of Clean Language Interviewing.	231

About the Contributors

Heather Cairns-Lee is adjunct professor at IMD, a visiting scholar at the University of Surrey and president of Business Professional Women Lake Geneva. She focuses on developing leadership, understanding group dynamics and sense-making in organisations. Her teaching, writing, research, facilitation and coaching concentrate on the development of self-awareness and authenticity; communication, enquiry and clean language; the role of metaphor in sensemaking and creativity; and diversity and inclusion. Her research and programme designs have won awards for innovation and impact.

Heather's PhD study was the first large-scale application of clean language interviewing in a managerial setting. Her 2017 thesis on how leaders make meaning through metaphor won the Emerald/EFMD award for outstanding doctoral research for leadership and organisational development. She aims to make clean language accessible to the academic and managerial communities.

Lynne Cooper is among the pioneers of the use of clean language in coaching, training and facilitation over the last 20 years. She is an accredited Master Executive Coach and an Honorary Life Fellow of the Association for Coaching. Specialising in performance improvement, she coaches senior leaders, high potential individuals and teams to improve effectiveness and transform outcomes. She co-developed the Five-Minute Coach Clean Coaching methodology and trains clean language approaches to coaches and managers. Lynne's publications include two books (*Business NLP for Dummies*, Wiley, 2008; and *The Five Minute Coach*, with Mariette Castellino, Crown House, 2012) plus book contributions and articles.

Nancy Doyle, PhD, is a Chartered Psychologist who has specialised in neurodiversity at work for over 20 years. She is the Chief Research Officer for Genius Within, a non-profit company that provides assessment, coaching, training and HR consultancy for neurodifferent adults and their employers. Genius Within also works with those who are unemployed and incarcerated, and created the Blooming Genius Foundation for supporting neurodifferent young people. Alongside Prof. Almuth McDowall, Nancy is the Co-Director of the Centre for Neurodiversity Research at Work at Birkbeck, University of London. Nancy is a neurodifferent entrepreneur and researcher, working in teams which are majority neurodifferent, promoting neurodiversity inclusion. Nancy's work includes

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Tania Korsak is a freelance facilitator based in Brussels. She has degrees in Anthropology and Social Research Methods and has trained in pedagogies of gesture and speech including Feldenkrais somatic education, the Montessori method and Process Orientated Psychology. Tania worked closely with, and was supervised by, David Grove, originator of clean language. Tania is a clean language supervisor, trainer and an active member of the Core Group France.

Tania's research in social anthropology aims to empower parents through enabling them to make sense of their encounters with medical systems. She uses clean language to support parents facing their child's rare disease and currently is facilitating focus groups and collaborating with teams of medical experts on how to better include families in caring for their sick ones. Tania has written about her work in a variety of publications (Dulac et al., n.d.; Korsak et al., 2017; Korsak et al., 2018; Korsak, 2021).

James Lawley is an independent researcher and a partner at The Developing Company. He has cooperated with and conducted training for a number of universities and organisations involving the application of clean language, metaphor and symbolic modelling to qualitative research, resulting in the publication of several academic articles. James qualified as a psychotherapist in 1993 after a career as a senior manager in large corporations. His twelve-year study of David Grove, originator of clean language, has resulted in two co-authored books, *Metaphors in Mind* (2000) with Penny Tompkins, and *Insights in Space* (2017) with Marian Way, and over 100 articles freely available on cleanlanguage.co.uk.

Margaret Meyer is a clean language-trained therapist, community projects facilitator and director of Brave New Words, a mental health charity specialising in writing for well-being. She uses clean language and symbolic modelling across the span of her work. With Wendy Sullivan and Paul Tosey she has developed numerous applications of clean language for use in a wide range of contexts including coaching, addiction recovery and ex-offender mentoring, market and social research, and organisation development.

Jan Nehyba, PhD, Mgr., works as a researcher in the faculty of Education at Masaryk University. His research focuses on psycho-phenomenology and embodied metaphors. He co-edited the book *Becoming a Teacher: The Dance Between Tacit and Explicit Knowledge* (Švec, Nehyba & Svojanovský, 2017), which is based on using clean language interviewing in researching tacit knowledge by teacher candidates. He has also authored other articles related to clean language interviewing in social science.

Wendy Nieuwland is co-owner of Gewoon aan de slag (literally translated: 'Just do it'). Based in the Netherlands, she facilitates organisational change processes in

both public and private organisations. She has an academic background in social studies, communication science and languages and is driven to translate desired changes into daily (behavioural) practice. Since her introduction into clean language and symbolic/systemic modelling, she has been applying these methodologies in the context of her work in organisational change. Amongst others is the application of Modelling Shared Reality (MSR), an approach to systemic change in organisations about which she published a book with her business partner Maaïke Nooitgedagt, *Change 3.0: Seven Essential Principles for Organisational Change from Within* (Van Lindonk & De Bres, 2018).

Maaïke Nooitgedagt is co-owner of *Gewoon aan de slag* (literally translated: ‘Just do it’). Based in the Netherlands, she facilitates organisational change processes in public and private organisations. She has an academic background in clinical psychology and sees her role in change processes as ‘the desired outcome staunch supporter’. Since her introduction to clean language and symbolic/systemic modelling in 2004, she has applied this in the context of her work in organisational change, and in her previous work in personal therapy and coaching. She is a certified clean language trainer and assessor, and uses clean language in various applications, such as Modelling Shared Reality (MSR), an approach to systemic change in organisations about which she has published a book with her business partner Wendy Nieuwland, *Change 3.0: Seven Essential Principles for Organisational Change from Within* (Van Lindonk & De Bres, 2018).

James Ramirez is an authority on nuclear safety, corrective action programme development, and serious injury and fatality investigations (SIF). James began his career in 1976 in the United States Navy Nuclear Power Program. He went on to a 35-year career with Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) working in a management role in nuclear operations, radiological controls, gas distribution and the corporate safety organisation. He later managed, provided oversight and direction for the corporate safety team, developing their SIF investigation programme and team through the application of clean language interviewing methodology. The group conducted root cause analysis for all SIF incidents for PG&E’s 25,000 employees.

James holds a BS in Business, an MBA and is currently working on a doctorate of management in organizational leadership. He is a certified clean language facilitator and a national trainer for the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI).

Sharon Small is an international authority on clean language interviewing (CLI). Sharon is the founder and CEO of the Clean Language Institute, with 14 years’ experience in nuclear power generation, holding a BSc in professional studies and a master certification in Neuro-Linguistic Programming. In 2006, Sharon introduced clean language questions and principles to a major nuclear power facility, focusing on interactions between field personnel, management and leaders. Sharon has trained others on symbolic modeling and clean methodologies since 2008. In 2013, she introduced clean language to Japan and has been training CLI since 2017. She works with James Lawley to develop clean language interviewing

and bring it to global participants while focusing specifically on safety and root cause investigations where serious injuries or fatalities have occurred. Sharon is the co-editor of *Who is Using Clean Language Anyway 2015*.

Martin Snoddon has worked in the field of conflict resolution since the early 1990s using peace-building approaches to address the legacy of violent conflict and to support victims of violence. His background includes extensive work in Northern Ireland and intensive work in the Balkans, later journeying into the battle-scarred West Bank, Gaza City's danger zones, Nicaragua and the Ukraine.

Martin was director of the Conflict Trauma Resource Centre in Belfast for 11 years and is currently director of Northern Spring, an independent training and consultancy. He has used clean language interviewing skills throughout his research and facilitation, often combining the two roles in a form of participatory action research. Clean language interviewing was a key part of his research resulting in the publication of *Legacy of War: Experiences of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment* (Snoddon, 2005) and *Mental Resilience Through Violent Conflict Project – Personal Stories* (Snoddon, 2014).

Wendy Sullivan has worked in the field of clean language for around 20 years and is one of the most experienced trainers in the field. Her career experience includes coaching, training, facilitation and consultancy within the public and private sectors. In addition to work within organisations, her business, Clean Change Company, delivers extensive open trainings in clean language internationally. Together with Judy Rees, Wendy authored a highly successful introduction to the field, *Clean language: Revealing metaphors and opening minds* (Crown House, 2008). She is also a clean language assessor, certifying clean language facilitators, and delivers an Association for Coaching certificated coach training called *Professional Clean Coach*.

Jacqueline Ann Surin, before becoming a full-time clean language coach, facilitator and trainer, was an award-winning and widely published journalist in Malaysia for 20 years. Before leaving journalism, she was the co-founder and chief editor of www.thenutgraph.com. Currently, she is a certified clean language facilitator and systemic modeller, and has a level 5 coaching and mentoring certification from the UK-based Institute of Leadership and Management. She has been training teams and organisations since 2005, and currently trains internationally both in-person and online. She has written for the Association for Coaching in the UK on her coaching and facilitation practice. She continues to contribute to the development of clean language and its applications through her writings at the UK-based Training Attention, Clean Learning and Clean Collection websites. Jacqueline gained an MA from Sussex University in the UK as a Chevening Scholar. She was also a Hubert Humphrey Scholar in the US.

Paul Tosey, PhD, is a freelance consultant and researcher. He first undertook training in clean language in 2006 and participates in the field as a coach, author and research supervisor. His career experience includes public sector organisation development and university roles, most recently as Senior Lecturer and Head of

PhD programmes in the Surrey Business School, University of Surrey, UK. He has a long-standing research interest in exploring and understanding people's experiential worlds and in qualitative research methods for that purpose. Paul has published widely in academic journals, authored *NLP: a Critical Appreciation for Managers and Developers* (with Jane Mathison, Macmillan 2009) and co-edited the *Handbook of Research Methods on HRD* (with Mark Saunders, Edward Elgar 2015).

Di Tunney is a consultant with over 25 years' experience in market research. She uses clean language and Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques in qualitative research to provide clients with a deeper understanding of customer values, beliefs, behaviours and buying motivations than can be achieved using traditional research methodologies. Di's clients have ranged from SMEs to large corporates across a wide range of market sectors. Di is also an industry skills coach at Nottingham Trent University, where she designs and delivers Chartered Institute of Marketing accredited training programmes for SMEs in the East Midlands of the UK.

Caitlin Walker, PhD, is an educational and business consultant who has been using a form of clean language interviewing since 1997 to engage participants in reflectively co-designing their own change processes. This work is written up in *From Contempt to Curiosity: Creating the conditions for groups to collaborate* (Walker, 2014). Caitlin uses this approach in a wide range of projects including facilitating teenagers outside of the school system to develop sustainable paths to education; helping police interviewers to gather prima facie evidence and supporting corporate and community sector organisations through systemic, sustainable change processes. In 2021 she earned her doctorate from Liverpool John Moores University: *Using Clean Language Interviewing to Model Curriculum Design in Higher Education: Curriculum Design is Like What?* Together with James Lawley and Marian Way, Caitlin is designing and delivering clean interview training and assessment programmes to standardise the practice.

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Marian Way is a clean language facilitator, coach and trainer who has developed and delivered clean language-based training across the world. She is the author of *Clean Approaches for Coaches* Clean Publishing, 2013, co-author, with James Lawley, of *Insights in Space* Clean Publishing, 2017 and co-author, with Caitlin Walker, of *So you want to be ... #DramaFree*. Marian was previously a leading

innovator within the Weight Watchers organisation, which included developing the ‘points’ strategy, a local idea that went on to become a global innovation. More recently she has worked with James Lawley and Caitlin Walker to develop an assessment process for students of clean interviewing and is currently using clean language interviewing herself to research for a new book as well as for new training programmes.

Yuji Yamagami is the chief executive officer and sole owner of the consulting firm Ennovation Incorporated, in Japan. He attended the University of Oregon, in the US, graduating from Sophia University Japan with a degree in comparative culture. In 2001, he left his position as executive vice president of Yamagami Construction Co., Ltd. In 2012, he trained in clean language and symbolic modeling with Sharon Small, CEO and founder of Clean Language Institute. In 2013, he was the first to apply the clean language methodology, devised by David Grove, to quality management systems for internal auditors.

Yuji is a member of the Super ISO Research Group, a member of JIS Q 9005/9006 Revisions Review Committee (2014), Japan Quality Management Society Regular member, and JAB Management System Study Group. Yuji has published five ISO books, over 50 articles, and worked with over 50 companies conducting audits and training over 1500 auditors in ISO 9001.

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We thank Tony Chiva for helping to initiate the development of this book, which we believe to be a milestone in the development of the principles and practice of clean language interviewing. We echo his thoughtful dedication to Karen Hanley, who we each had known personally.

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It is probably easy from the outside to underestimate the work involved in editing a volume such as this. This work has been a true collaboration, and we are fortunate to have been able to share the tasks between three of us. We discovered numerous ways in which our respective strengths complemented each other, and we are very glad to have co-created this book together.

Last but not least, our respective partners and families have been highly supportive and understanding of the time we have spent with the book and away from them. Thank you.

Heather Cairns-Lee
James Lawley
Paul Tosey
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