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NLP: THE SCIENCE OF EXCELLENCE... ...THE ART OF CHANGE

NLP consultants

Penny Tompkins and James Lawley

report on why it is that

If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got!

The message is clear...if what you're doing isn't working -- do something else.

"Yes, but how?" you might ask.

Unlike other approaches that tell you WHAT you need to do, NLP is a HOW TO technology. It tells and shows you HOW TO achieve what you want and HOW TO become the person you want to achieve your goals. So you can have the personal success you want now!

With NLP we have choice about what we want to change, and how we want to change it.

My first introduction to NLP was from a friend in the States whose sales had jumped 40% in one year after training in NLP.

After some research, I decided to take an NLP training myself, thinking "If this stuff works, everyone would be doing it." In order to test the principles of NLP and convince myself of its merit, I decided to apply the techniques to my weight - a long-standing problem. Having dieted all my life I was convinced 'dieting makes you fat'. So eating and body size had to have something to do with the mind. I threw away my scales. I safely and effortlessly lost three stone, and have weighed 9 stone for the last two years.

How did it work? Through applying NLP and examining my beliefs, capabilities, and behaviours around my eating. A key part of this process, which surprised me, was realising I benefited by being over-weight. Once in this was in my awareness, NLP provided the tools by which I could satisfy these benefits in healthier and slimmer ways. The methods I applied to get to my natural body size can be applied to many areas: creating confidence, motivation, sales, improved memory, athletic performance, learning strategies -- anything humans do and want to know HOW TO do better. There is a saying, "If it works, it must be NLP!"

IN THE BEGINNING

In the early 1970's, while Tom Peters was studying excellence in organisations and looking for winning strategies, a linguist, John Grinder, and a mathematician, Richard Bandler, were studying individuals who were excellent communicators and technicians of personal change.

"What is the difference between somebody who is merely competent and somebody who excels at the same skill?" was the question asked by Grinder and Bandler. The answers produced NLP: The Science of Excellence...The Art of Change.

ANTHONY ROBBINS

More and more people are coming to realise the impact NLP can make in their lives. For example, leading peak performance manager, Anthony Robbins says, "I think a major person, a role model, was a gentleman called Dr. John Grinder, who created a science of change, which was called neuro-linguistic programming. It was one of the things that gave me my competitive edge. I think the number one edge I have is the technology of change."

Others, too, have recognised the power of NLP. Time Magazine reports: "NLP has untapped potential for treating individual problems and has become an all-purpose self-improvement programme and technology."

WHAT IS NLP?

NLP stands for Neuro-Linguistic Programming and encompasses the three most influential components involved in producing human experience: neurology, language and patterning.

We are in contact with the external world through our five senses: sight, hearing, feelings, smell and taste. Our neurology takes external stimuli and represents them to us with a matching set of "internal representations." These form our subjective experience. Our internal world is made up of the pictures we see in our "mind's eye". It is the conversations, dialogues or arguments we have with ourselves in our thinking. It is our feelings and emotions over which we used to think we had no control.

The important point to realise is that our experience is created by combinations of these internal representations which form repeating patterns or "programmes." These patterns (or habits) run over and over again unless they are interrupted or redirected. It is like a record playing the same song unless it is rerecorded.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Nobel Prizewinner, Professor Gerald Edelman has spent thirty years researching how the brain functions. He concludes that the ten billion or more brain and nerve cells we have arrange themselves into groups in order to form "maps" that respond to our experience. These maps allow us to make sense of the world and ourselves. Connections between the cells that are frequently stimulated will survive and thrive; others atrophy or become diverted to other tasks "It is," he says, "a simple case of contacts that work best work again."

A phobia is a good example of how the brain works. A particular situation or trigger (heights, spiders, and so on) produces a particularly strong physical response (sweaty palms, fast breathing, panic, etc). The brain learns quickly and thereafter, every time the person is presented with the same stimulus, their body knows to have the same response. The amazing thing is, people with phobias NEVER forget to have this response. This is the perfect one-time learning strategy!

Whilst in the Austrian Alps recently we met a woman on a skiing holiday who had a fear of heights! To get from the hotel to the top of the mountain required a 20 minute trip in an aerial gondola. Needless to say she was not enjoying her holiday. By taking her through the NLP Phobia Cure, in under an hour her fearful response became just another memory; although she had yet to be convinced. As luck would have it, the very next day the gondola system broke down and left her suspended several hundred feet in the air. Much to her surprise, whilst it was not a pleasant experience, she did not "remember" to have the old phobic response. NOW she was convinced!

Just as this automatic patterning works to our disadvantage in a phobia, it works to our advantage when we tie our shoelaces, drive a car, or do a million other things without having to think.

So NLP is the exploration of HOW each individual experiences their own unique set of patterns. With NLP we can identify which patterns resource and serve us. Then we can choose to add new patterns to our behaviour and be more productive in those situations where we have under performed in the past. If we understand how we are the way we are, we can create choice about how we would like to be in the future.

THE "LINGUISTIC" IN NLP

Language determines how we influence and communicate with others, and ourselves. It is how we label our experience and much more. Empowering language generates empowered behaviour. Likewise, negative thinking is the result of disempowering thoughts...often out of our awareness, which limit choice.

Positive or negative thinking is our internal dialogue, or what we say to ourselves. Try this, say the following one at a time (filling in the 'X' with something that applies to you): "I need X," "I want X," and "I CHOOSE X," and notice the difference in your response. So even changing one word can have a significant influence in your thinking, and therefore in your behaviour.

It is estimated that 93% of communication is non-verbal. This means how you say what you say (intonation, volume, speed, etc.) carries five times more information than the words spoken. And how you use your body (gestures, facial expressions, posture) is even more influential. NLP transcends traditional "body language" theory by showing you how to identify and respond to the TOTAL communication of another person.

So NLP describes the fundamental dynamics between mind, language and behaviour.

The same underlying methodology has been applied to decision making by the Board of one of Britain's leading banks; identifying Walt Disney's creative strategy; rehabilitating young offenders; training American Express operators in telephone rapport skills; studying longevity and to producing impactful advertising.

NLP recognises the importance of physiology in changing and sustaining internal states. This means, for example, if you are in a bad mood you have a choice to create a good one for yourself. The benefits of this are apparent... imagine feeling powerful when you go to see your bank manager, confident before giving a presentation, loving when your partner is having an off-day. How will you act differently? And how will this influence others? When you are more resourceful other people probably will be too.

Want to try a taste of NLP right now?

- Try a little experiment. Look way up at the ceiling or sky, smile, raise your arms and ... try to be depressed!
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- Now, lower your head and look down to your right, slump your shoulders and try to be happy. Tough, isn't it?

Which state of mind did you prefer? You can choose to experience it, now or any time. And, you don't need to go through your whole day staring at the ceiling either.

Pick a state you want to feel. By reliving a time when you experienced these feelings strongly you will be able to have that state now. Make sure you really are in the situation: See what you saw then ... hear what you heard then and ... FEEL what you felt then.... Hold that for a minute and it's your's NOW!

There is obviously more to being in control of your internal states and ways of responding than this simple exercise. Yet it demonstrates a measure of self-determination that few ever get to experience.

WHAT IF YOU COULD?

Here's another experiment to try.

- Every time you catch someone saying "I can't..." try saying, "What if you could?". Notice how they HAVE TO consider doing the very thing they said they couldn't do!

Of course, you can always ask yourself the same question...!

APPLICATIONS OF NLP

Perhaps most easily recognisable, NLP is being used in **sports** psychology to help access those states of mind and body needed to ensure the repetition of peak performance. The key is being able to reproduce the peak state at the precise moment required. An athlete can use positive statements like "I'm going to win this race," but if a little voice in their head is saying "No, way" there's not much chance of success. With NLP, that voice can be changed to "Go for it!"

Neuro-Linguistic Programming is being used in **education** to teach spelling and highly effective learning strategies to children. Did you know that most good spellers use a very similar method to spell? NLP has discovered the HOW TO of good spelling which can be taught in under an hour.

Also in education, teachers are learning how children who sort and store information visually have different learning strategies from those who sort and store information auditorially or kinesthetically (internal feelings). Having this information enables teachers to adjust their language so that what they say can be comprehended by more children.

In different fields, **doctors** and barristers are making use of the same NLP techniques for gathering high quality information from patients and clients alike.

NLP is also used to study how belief systems influence illness. It is beginning to be realised that HOW doctors give information can either be a powerful tool for recovery, or unwittingly introduce a 'thought virus' into their patients thinking. No where is the maxim, "If you believe it's possible, or you do not...you're probably right!" more true as in the area of health.

NLP in **personal development** focuses on what you want, how you want to be, and how to find the resources and attributes you already have to assist you in making changes. NLP offers a radically different approach to traditional psychotherapy and counselling methods which tend to focus on the problem and the causes of the problem, rather than the solution.

It also means dramatic improvements in people's lives can be accomplished in a relatively short period of time.

One of the more unusual applications is its use in teaching **driving skills**. A recent study indicates 66% fewer accidents in those who had taken a two day NLP training than the control group.

BENEFITS TO BUSINESS

Whilst NLP is a powerful tool for change at the level of the individual, the potential benefits to business and organisations can be nothing less than phenomenal.

A perfect opportunity to measure the effectiveness of NLP in an organisation was in 1986. After employing an NLP consultant, the U.S. Army were able to reduce their small arms marksmanship training from 6 weeks to 3 days with no detrimental effect on the pass rate!

In business and industry NLP is already being used to improve sales performance, decision making, presentation skills, motivation, stress management, team building, and almost every other area you can think of. Members of the business community trained in NLP are coached to excel with their own personal success strategies, as well as to incorporate proven formulas of excellence from others. How would you like to have access to Walt Disney's Creative Strategy whenever you needed?

You can also apply the same powerful NLP tools and techniques on a macro level within your corporation so the whole organisation will benefit.

Fiat in Italy is a prime example. For a number of years they have employed NLP experts to study "natural leaders" in their organisation so that these special leadership skills can be transferred to others. Fiat is exploring in detail what business in general is discovering. A new type of manager and leader is required to see business through these turbulent economic times and into the next Century. Concepts of corporate identity, vision, mission, and aligning the individual and the organisation behind shared values are pointing the way to the future.

The framework of the individual in business, the larger system (the political, social, and physical environments) and how these interrelate and inter-depend, form the basis for the new systemic approach. This needs to be underpinned with long-term wisdom and demonstrably living our values. In other words... learning to "walk our talk." It is in this area that NLP can make a unique contribution.

AND FINALLY...

There are many, many different NLP techniques you can use to improve yourself, and others. We can have control and choice over our lives in ways only dreamed of before NLP. And this article is just a taste of what is possible.

NLP can enable you to achieve those professional and personal goals you desire, to keep on the leading edge of the latest technology of change, to manage your own life, and to have the excellence and skills of anyone you have ever admired.

As Anthony Robbins is fond of saying, "What would you do if you knew you could not fail?"

Penny Tompkins and **James Lawley** are psychotherapists registered with the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP). They live in London and teach throughout the world. For information on their work, their forthcoming trainings and over 50 articles, visit www.cleanlanguage.co.uk. They are co-authors of [Metaphors in Mind: Transformation through Symbolic Modelling](#) available at £17.95 (plus p&p) and the training video "[A Strange and Strong Sensation](#)" available at £25.00 (plus p&p and VAT).

Other NLP articles by Penny Tompkins and James Lawley:

- [What Is NLP?](#)
- [Change your Thinking - Change Your Life with NLP](#)
- Rapport: The Magic Ingredient - [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)
- [I See, Hear, and Feel What You Mean](#)
- [Thinking Virtually Creates Your Reality](#)
- [The NLP Group: Building Community with NLP](#)
- [The Application of Metaprogrammes to the Classroom](#)
- [Vision is Not Black and White: The Colourless Case of Mr. I](#)
- [Introducing Modelling to Organisations](#)