

# What is NLP?

Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) can be regarded as the study of excellence. The challenge, however, is that demonstrated excellence is mostly outside of our conscious awareness. Therefore if you recognise someone doing something with excellence and ask them about it, you will often find that they have taken that excellence for granted. Not only that but they will not therefore be able to tell you how they do what they do. But with the tools of NLP, their strategy for excellence can be elicited. For example, in modelling an outstanding salesperson who invariably builds instantaneous rapport with the people that they meet, the following may be apparent:

- They have a belief that everyone they meet will be interesting.
- They expect to have a rapport with anyone with whom they come into contact. They create an image of them smiling and connecting with each person they expect to meet in the day.
- When they meet someone (whether a customer or not) they are super alert in that they tune into the person's patterns of moving and speaking.
- They intuitively match those patterns so that they are using the same kind of vocabulary, accessing the same senses and adopting the same signature rhythm of that person.
- They create and hold a vision for that person of how the service or product will make a positive difference for them in the future.

This pattern of thinking and behaviour that gets the desired result is referred to as a strategy. So NLP is a way of eliciting strategies of excellence so that they can be reproduced with consistency.

## What is the history of NLP?

The process of modelling excellence is not new. Children model intuitively and learn to talk and walk is by modelling parents or parent figures. But many natural learning skills can be diluted or lost over time so learning NLP is a way of reawakening the inborn talent to learn with the whole body.

The founders of the term NLP are Richard Bandler and John Grinder, two Americans who worked and studied together in California in the 1970s. They identified several outstanding hypnotherapists who demonstrated excellence in the change they facilitated with individuals and families. These therapists included people like Milton Eriksson (known for his hypnotic language and story telling), Virginia Satir (famous for her work with family groups), Frank Farrelly (known for his powerful provocative therapy) and several others. They wanted to be able to achieve the same lasting results that these therapists were achieving with their clients. Bandler and Grinder watched and listened to these therapists in action, then developed models and tested them out by adopting the models for themselves. In the process of doing this they

discovered powerful strategies for building rapport, influencing change and consolidating those changes in lasting ways.

One of the by-products of this work was that the early training in NLP was associated predominantly with therapeutic work. Only later in its development did it start to be used in business.

NLP is now a part of the training and development strategies for many developing companies. It is either an overt or covert part of most coaching, sales training, leadership development, management, communication, negotiating, cultural awareness, teambuilding and personal development programmes. Its applications are infinite. Not only is it used in work but it is also used increasingly to train people working in sport, medicine, the performing arts, or broadcasting to realise their true potential.

## **How is NLP used personally?**

Most NLP programmes, even if they are business oriented, will start with personal applications. It is only by learning how people manage and coach that it becomes possible to learn how to manage and coach others.

What are sometimes described as the pillars of NLP are: awareness, sensitivity, outcome thinking and rapport. But the heart of NLP is the process of modelling. What most people do not realise is that the excellence that they have in some areas of their life can be mapped across into other areas. In this way NLP techniques can help them learn how to be alive and excellent in all of life.

People attending NLP programmes regularly comment on:

- an increased sense of well-being
- success in their ability to influence themselves and others in the way that they want
- improved relationships
- success in their work
- a realisation of their true calling
- greater self-reliance and confidence.

NLP helps people learn that the only person they can change is themselves, but that in doing so it is possible to influence the bigger system of which they are a part.

## **How is NLP used in business?**

Given that the true meaning of NLP is the process of modelling excellence, the applications in business are about learning to be the best from the best.

For example, a multi-national retailer recognised that some of its customer-facing staff were outstanding in the loyalty that they inspired in their customers. There were many other “good” staff but a few had this outstanding quality. No standard customer satisfaction programmes were able to raise the rest of the staff to the standard of the excellent few - until they decided to use NLP to model the outstanding performers. They were then able to elicit the differences that made the difference in their thinking and their behaviour. They discovered unique beliefs, attitudes, listening and questioning skills that were unique to their type of business and that varied according to the context, place and time. Eventually they were able to be so explicit about what it was that made this difference that not only were they able to raise the standard of the rest of the staff, but even to further increase the excellence of those that they had modelled in the first place.

So NLP is a way of modelling the best and reproducing that talent. The best might be the best in one’s own company or in another. It might be the best in a colleague or the best in oneself. Consequently the contexts in which NLP is increasingly used are infinite. It is possible to model any of the following:

- the ability to connect immediately with customers
- the charisma of an inspiring business leader
- the ability to create a compelling vision
- the capacity to maintain motivation towards a goal
- a state of congruence and truth
- an ability to resolve situations of conflict
- the skill of coaching people to achieve their best performance.

Whatever is admired is a possible subject for modelling.

## **Choosing a provider**

There is a world of difference between the many providers of NLP training and coaching, so it is recommended that you find out as much as possible in advance to ensure a fit with your development needs. This is because NLP is an unregulated field and currently there are no “official” standard guidelines, though there are a number of groups, organisations, associations, boards and bodies who have set up their own certification schemes in order to reflect how they believe NLP should be taught and practiced. These organisations often differ in their opinions – it’s all down to personal choice.

In any NLP training, it is important to consider:

- the values and style of the trainer(s)
- the connection with the trainer(s) throughout the programme
- number and quality of assistants
- the group size
- the criteria for successful certification
- levels of supervision and personal coaching
- the environment for the learning

- previous delegates' experiences and levels of skill
- the length of the training and time for integration
- the type and mix of delegates
- the opportunity to sample the style
- the support before and after the programme
- support materials.

## Certification in NLP

Practitioners can gain qualifications in NLP at a number of levels:

- **NLP Practitioner** - includes the thinking and tools of NLP modelling and some of the formats that have evolved over the years as a result of modelling excellence.
- **NLP Master Practitioner** - further development of modelling skills and the completion of a modelling project.
- **NLP Trainer** - able to train and certify students in NLP, knowing how to facilitate and train the NLP thinking and approach.

## Typical questions about NLP

### Is there scientific evidence to prove NLP works?

NLP is a method of study of excellence, not a given model. The measure that it works is the ability to reproduce the same result as the person modelled. There are now hundreds and thousands of success stories with NLP but the true test is how it works in any particular situation.

### Can people expect to achieve results by reading a book on NLP?

Yes, it is possible depending on your style of learning but it is better to undertake training or coaching in NLP as ultimately it is a topic that involves the whole body and some learning can only be gained through experience. Add to that the value of feedback from an impartial facilitator who can open the window to any blind spots that might remain hidden if studying alone.

### Will learning NLP make a difference to the bottom line of the business?

If we believe that there is a direct relationship between excellent personal performance and business performance, then NLP techniques, like other effective learning techniques, have the potential to increase both personal and business performance. At a minimum, learning NLP encourages an openness

with feedback so that the members of a company learn with and from each other.

## **If I model Lance Armstrong can I expect to cycle to his standard?**

Only if you are prepared to model everything that makes the difference for him. You can model his beliefs and his thinking and his way of concentrating and you will probably short cut many years of experience that it has taken him to get to that level of thinking. And there will be a part of his performance that is based on fitness levels and response times. You may only be able to get those with same discipline to training that he has had. You may find that some results come with his physical attributes so if your lung capacity is half of his then you might want to find someone with the same lung capacity as you who has achieved high results and model that part of the strategy from them. You will probably find that Lance Armstrong, for example, was prepared to risk death to cycle and descend the hills the way that he did. And you might need to decide if you are prepared to pay the same prices to achieve the same results. Nevertheless the principle is that if someone can do it, anyone can do it. And there is no doubt that by modelling Lance Armstrong and adopting his strategies for success you will be closer to his standard than if you did not.

## **CIPD viewpoint**

Like all the learning techniques in a trainer's repertoire, an intervention using NLP techniques can be a very useful way of helping people learn. Its success depends on it being the right choice of technique for the individuals in their particular context. Trainers need to be aware of their own skills if they are delivering the intervention, but also in terms of choosing the best technique to use, or assessing the skill of any practitioner they bring in to carry out the intervention.

## **Useful contacts**

- [Global Organisation of Neuro-Linguistic Programming](#)
- [NLP Conference](#)
- [NLP Comprehensive](#)

## **Further reading**

CIPD members can use our Advanced Search to find additional library resources on this topic and also use our online journals collection to view

journal articles online. People Management articles are available to subscribers and CIPD members in the People Management online archive.

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## Books

ALDER, H. (2002) *Handbook of NLP: a manual for professional communicators*. Aldershot: Gower.

ANDREAS, S. and FAULKNER, C. (1996) *NLP: the new technology of achievement*. London: Nicholas Brealey.

BANDLER, R. and GRINDER, J. (1979) *Frogs into princes: the introduction to neuro-linguistic programming*. Boulder, Co.: Real People Press.

BRADBURY, A. (2006) *Develop your NLP skills*. (3rd ed.) London: Kogan Page.

KNIGHT, S. (2002) *NLP at work: the difference that makes the difference in business*. (2nd ed.) London: Nicholas Brealey.

## Journal articles

HILPERN, K. (2007) A kind of magic? *Coaching at Work*. Vol 2, No 1, January/February. pp32-40.

This factsheet was written by Sue Knight, consultant in the use of NLP for people in business <http://www.sueknight.co.uk/>

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## Training courses

- [Developing Skills in Neuro-linguistic Programming \(NLP\)](#)
- [Coaching Using NLP](#)

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151 The Broadway, London SW19 1JQ, UK

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