

Neuro-Linguistic Programming Can it be a Profound Integrative Psychotherapeutic Model?

An Exploration and Demonstration

**with Pamela Gawler-Wright MSc
UKCP Registered Psychotherapist**

Director of Training for

BeeLeaf Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy

34 Grove Road London E3 5AX

020 8983 9699

www.beeleaf.com pam@beeleaf.com

The Mixed Parentage of NLP

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) was first constructed as a “meta-discipline” to provide ways to observe, code and thus be able to replicate, the excellent patterns of communication and behaviour of outstanding human beings. It grew out of the post-structuralist developments of the 1970s that identified language as both a coding or “representation” system, and a force with a life of its own, that could influence people’s perceptions of reality, even influence new realities, in the experience of human beings.

The creators of NLP, John Grinder, Richard Bandler, Judith DeLozier and Robert Dilts, met on the Santa Cruz campus of UCLA. This was a rich and creative environment for new approaches to studying the social sciences, supported by a visionary education and research policy to integrate different areas of study such as linguistics, physics, biology and anthropology.

The emergent academic zeitgeist of post-modernism issued forth many new ways of thinking about and researching the relationship between individual and system. Grinder, Bandler, DeLozier and Dilts, managed to encapsulate many of these new ideas into practical applications for bringing about better results in communication, creativity, problem-solving and personal healing.

NLP is easy to locate within a constructivist philosophy, as its main presupposition is that we do not experience the world, but rather our own neurologically contained sensing and meaning-making processes. The product of these subjective processes provides us with an individually edited construct or “map” of reality. This uniquely constructed and ever changing map necessarily deviates from the full experience of the “territory” or the empirical world.

In order to construct and maintain a working map for our lives we have to delete details, make subjective associations and connections and form generalisations. To make changes in our experience we need to deconstruct and explore rigid aspects of our map that are holding “reality” in a shape that is unsatisfying or harmful to our functioning in the world we share with others, with society and with nature.

The main tools for exploration in NLP were originally questions that revealed the inner sensing of a person in their process of constructing their reality, exploring the “how” of their subjective experience in making evaluations and decisions. Like Gestalt Therapy, this brought the focus on internal sense processes of perception that generate behaviours, rather than on the “why” of constructs about behaviour.

The originators of NLP did not set about to create a school of psychotherapy. However their subject of focus brought them to observe and model the processes of communication used by great psychotherapists in assisting others to deconstruct and reconstruct (or, as Milton Erickson describe it, reorganizing and resynthesising) their own experiential life. In exploring the patterns of great communicators and influencers, the NLP developers designed their questions by observing and modelling the Gestalt Psychotherapist, Fritz Perls and the popular Family Systems Therapist, Virginia Satir.

They called their system of questions the “Meta Model” in an attempt to describe its potential to decode other models of thinking and communicating. At the suggestion of the great anthropologist Gregory Bateson, the Meta Model was joined with practices

of “perceptual positioning” to further model the work of the now legendary psychiatrist and psychotherapist, Milton H. Erickson.

As NLP caught on, more contributors joined in developing the field, including Leslie Cameron, Stephen Gilligan, David Gordon and Todd Epstein to name but a few, many of whom went on to apply NLP in psychotherapeutic practice. As NLP digested more of the Ericksonian map of solution focused psychotherapy and positive psychology a debate began over whether NLP is an integrative psychotherapy or an applied psychology that “magpies” from whatever works.

Some others saw its potential for commercial enterprise and in order to pass on NLP in marketable training units, NLP began to be packaged as sets of procedures and techniques. This contrasted dramatically with its original intent as a fluid attitude and methodology that was infinitely flexible to individual and context. While these brief trainings remain popular to this day, especially in the business sector and arenas such as stage hypnotism, they represent something utterly other than the essence and ethics of the psychotherapists that were originally modelled through NLP.

These highly marketed spin-offs of NLP, which at times have been consciously transmitted using the methodology of therapy-cults and theatrics, have brought much embarrassment to the field and much energy is spent by those respected in the field to present the alternative face of NLP which held as central the individual and autonomous integrity of each human being’s system.

These events prompted Grinder and DeLozier to create “NLP New Coding” which reclaimed the importance of “mastery” of mental and somatic relationship into our own developed management of our attention and neurological state.

In support of this movement, Robert Dilts added prolific development to establish the further distinction of Systemic NLP. This re-aligned with those original NLP students who had progressed as Ericksonian psychotherapists such as Stephen Gilligan, whose principles and practices of Self-Relations reintroduced the concepts of cognitive-somatic relationship and accompanying elements of Buddhist Psychology that had described much of Milton Erickson’s apparently “magical” therapeutic interventions.

These evolutions are often referred to as 2nd Generation and 3rd Generation NLP. Like the models of psychotherapy that inspired NLP, the presupposition central to “New Code” and Systemic NLP is that resources and expertise are within the client, rather than within a therapist’s theory or techniques, and that change is an inevitable process of ecological shifts in perception and experience brought about through a co-created field of communication.

NLP, and especially Systemic NLP, has become an influential force for better in fields as diverse as education, business, health, psychotherapy, politics, mediation, the arts and spiritual practice.

As much NLP was modelled on the beliefs, values, behaviours and language of leading psychotherapists, there are implicitly present in NLP many of the core presuppositions and models of the main modalities of psychotherapy such as psycho-dynamic, Gestalt, family systems, hypno-psychotherapy and solution focused therapy.

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NLP has always been the art and science of asking questions in order to study and model subjective experience and this additional acuity of the practitioner heightens their skills, whatever tradition of psychotherapy they come from.

These methods of seeing and working through the disciplines of NLP provide an opportunity to uncover the underlying patterns and differences in maps and models used by clients and psychotherapists. This empowers both to flexibly utilise the strengths in each and observe too the limitations of each. Learning NLP with these additional nuances, frames and information supports the development of a more flexible and ecological application of psychotherapy and NLP.

Those practicing NLP work with an awareness that the client is an ever-resourceful, self-balancing system. Within the unique system of each human being, we believe that “resistance” is a force field around important values that the client wishes to integrate into any change they decide to make, whether this happens consciously or unconsciously. Highly influenced by the Positive Psychology movement, NLP equips the practitioner with a “realistic clinical optimism”.

Those practitioners of NLP who continue to work with process (rather than procedure) believe that theory, model and intervention are useful as a way to begin a conversation and exploration with the client until the organic co-created process of the creative, self-restoring individual takes over.

As Milton Erickson put it, when the technique fails – the psychotherapy begins!

Maps and Limitations

(Alfred Korzybski, Humberto Maturana, Paul Watzlawick, Bandler & Grinder)



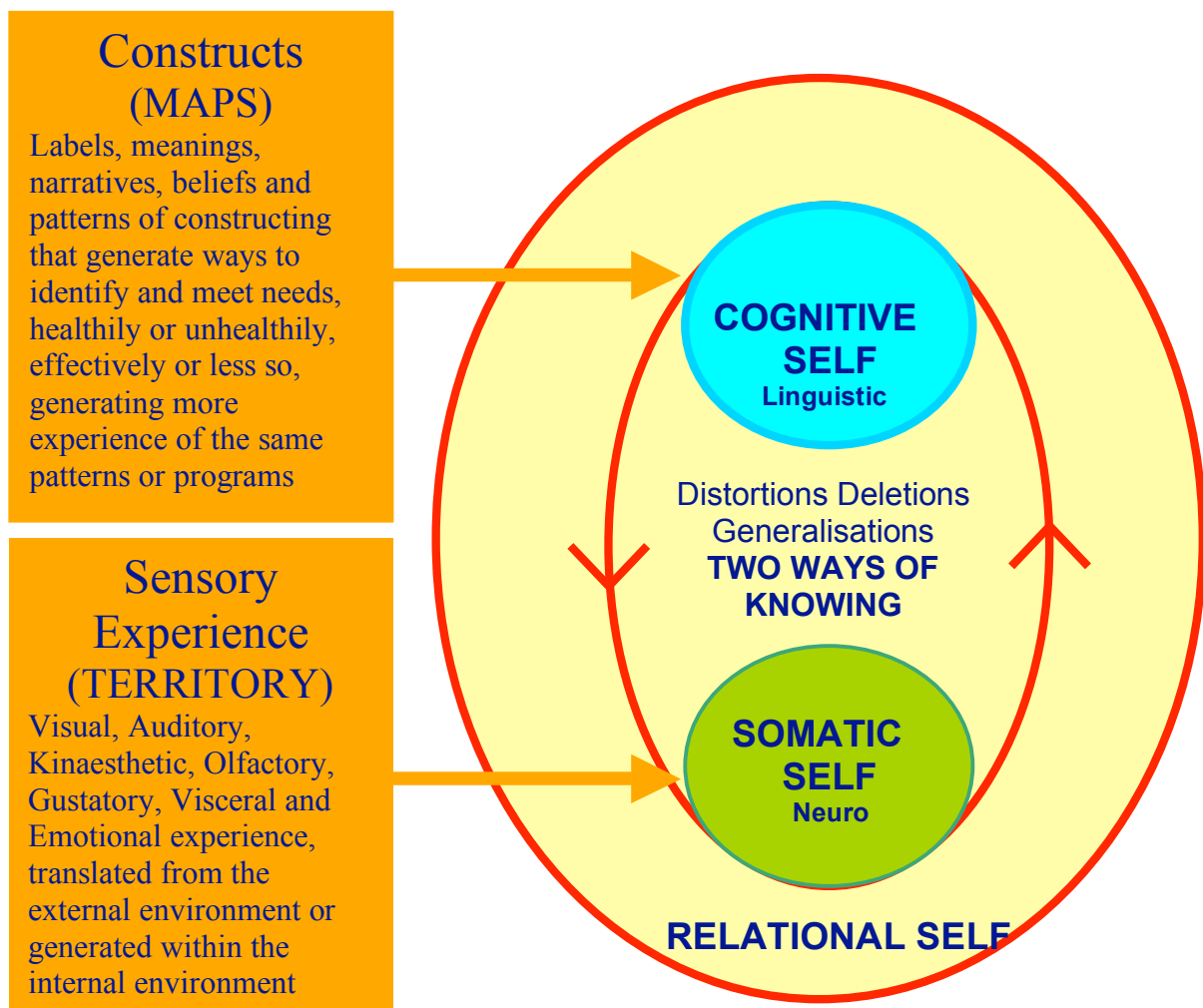
What is a Neuro-Linguistic Model of Mind?

The Neuro-Linguistic model of mind is subject to many interpretations, probably because, being situated in so many different disciplines (education, psychotherapy, performance, anthropology, politics), it takes on qualities of models in these different fields.

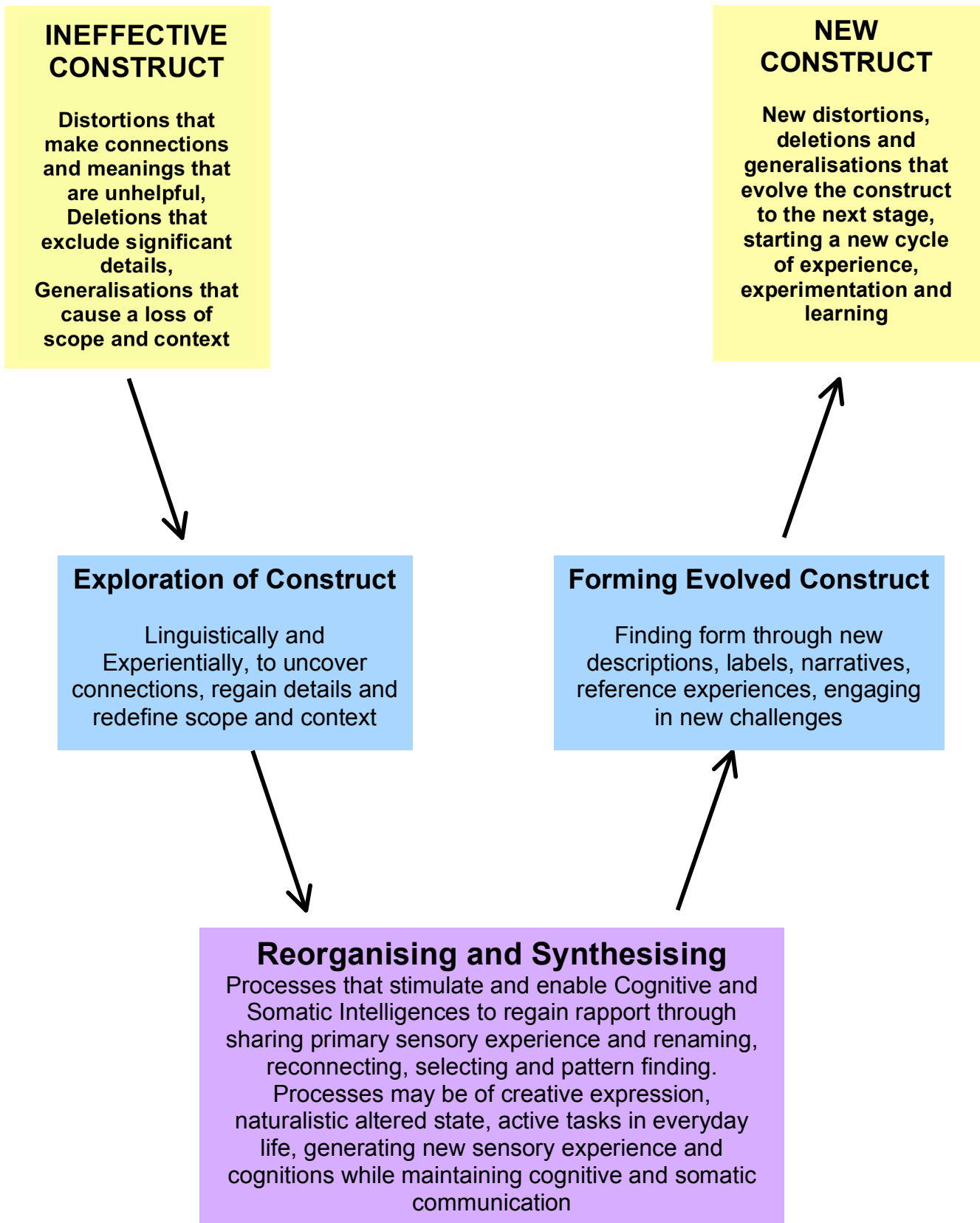
The model below is an amalgam of Gregory Bateson's vision of the cybernetic system of mind and Stephen Gilligan's model of the Relational Self, which in turn is heavily based on the work of psychiatrist and psychotherapist Milton H. Erickson.

Although coming from a different academic starting point, the model is also reminiscent of Humberto Maturana's autopoietic (self-creating) system, connecting it to another constructivist theorist Paul Watzlawick, whose continuation of solution focussed therapy was highly influenced by the collaborations of Gregory Bateson and Milton Erickson in systemic approaches to schizophrenia.

This model suggests that balance is an alignment between construct and sensory experience and distress is caused by a loss of rapport between the two inter-dependent intelligences that must find a common language for communication.



Therapeutic Process – An Ecological Deconstruction and Reconstruction to Invite a Realignment of Cognitive and Somatic Process



“I shall suggest then that ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among individuals, or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognised that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him, and that ‘it was *really him* who was hailed’ (and not someone else). ...

Naturally for the convenience and clarity of my little theatre I have had to present things in the form of a sequence, with a before and after, and thus in the form of a temporal succession.... But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.”

Louis Althusser

Modal Operators

Modal operators are sneaky little pieces of language that creep into our speaking and thinking and, literally, can define reality. Our modal operators dictate to us what is real, what is possible, what is necessary, even what is morally right or wrong. Here's the whammy - they can float into any context of our lives, without logic or truth, and leave that context, and all that it contains, irrevocably changed, limited, binding – OR broadened and liberating!

Because of their power to define what is possible, necessary and permissible, modal operators have a huge impact on the reality we create and what we allow ourselves to achieve. If we believe something is not possible or permitted, any attempt that we make to turn it into an outcome is going to meet with conscious and unconscious obstacles. If a desired state or goal is coded as morally impermissible we will come up against ecological objections which will inevitably defeat our efforts to reach it. That may be a good exercise of moral control, or it may be an outdated injunction that no longer deserves the power of censor in our life.

Equally, our strength of *motivation towards* or *away from* certain things is going to be determined by the emotional state connected to it. Some modal operators have the ability to change our state in a moment, to repel us from what would normally be attractive, or compel us towards something we wish to avoid.

So who are these little hoodlums? How do we identify, track down, arrest and rehabilitate language that is responsible for such widespread fear and coercion?

Learn to recognise them. It is not hard. Understand that their influence was caused by their being misunderstood, untrained and without discipline. All they need is a little guidance to come through. It does not take long to realise that we control them, not the other way around.

On the next page you will find modal operators in line-up for a simple identity parade. I am sure you will find that you have seen them somewhere before. There is also an experiment to help you reconstruct the comings and goings of your modal operators, to ascertain the part they have played and are playing in major events in your life.

Modal Operators are often at the heart of “resistance”. If I tell you that you *must* do something I am denying you choice. Very often “choice” or “free will” emerges as the value that the resisting behaviour is serving. Changing your language to something more permissive can create overnight changes in your level of rapport and the co-operation that you receive from others.

Modal Operators are a pattern of Generalisation that is challenged in the Meta Model.

Modal Operators - Some Further Distinctions

The P-P.O.N.D. Model

(Gawler-Wright 1996) (Revised 2006)

Modal Operators of Possibility

Operational modes that are defined and driven by what is possible and realistic.

CAN, CAN NOT, POSSIBLE, IMPOSSIBLE, PERHAPS, MAYBE

To challenge these we can uncover counter examples and possibilities.

“Do you know any one who can?”

“Have you ever been able to?”

“Who let’s him?”

“What would it be like/what would happen if you could?”

“What would you do if it were possible/impossible?”

Modal Operators of Permission

Operational modes that are defined by what is perceived as permitted and allowed.

MAY, ALLOWED, PERMITTED, OK, ACCEPTABLE, APPROPRIATE

To challenge these we may identify the source of permission, values behind rules, consequences of actions or change the frame of reference.

“Who says? Acceptable to whom?”

“Would you be OK with letting some one else do that?”

“What is the important value that that rule protects?”

“What will happen/not happen if you do?”

“How can you uphold this value even if you do/do not do that?”

Modal Operators of Obligation

Operational modes driven by moral consequences (such as spiritual decline, loss of self-worthiness, retraction of love or approval, rejection from individuals or society).

SHOULD, SHOULD NOT, OUGHT, OUGHT NOT

To challenge these we need to imply the subjective nature of these moral injunctions and relocate them within context.

“Who says you should?”

“In what circumstances would that be/not be right?”

“In what circumstances did you adopt that rule?”

“What is the purpose/higher good/value of that rule?”

“Does that rule help or hinder us to achieve that purpose/higher good/value here?”

Modal Operators of Necessity

Operational modes that imply, and are driven by, unavoidable consequences.

MUST, MUST NOT, HAVE TO, NEED TO, NEED NOT TO, NOT NEED TO

To challenge these we need to regain the implied consequences.

“What would happen if you did?”

“What would happen if you didn’t?”

“Have you ever known anyone do this and that didn’t happen?”

“Who says?”

“Can you imagine anyone doing differently and still getting good results?”

Modal Operators of Desire

Operational modes defined and driven by desire, longing, Jung's 'libido', Freud's pleasure/pain, the fulfilment principle.

LONG, CRAVE, WANT, DESIRABLE, UNDESIRABLE, NOT WANT

To challenge these we can reveal the limited scope of the objectification of desire.

“Is that all you want?”

“What will that give you?”

“Is that the best way you can get that?”

“Any chance you get that and yet you still want something/want something else?”

“Ever know anybody who had that but didn’t have what they really wanted?”

Exercise: Modal Operators as Neuro-Logical Motivators

Take an outcome or goal and express it in simple terms in the present.
For example:

“I earn XK per year”
“I go to evening classes”

How does it feel to say that? What internal representations, pictures, dialogue, words, associations do you get? Any emotional experience? How motivated are you?

Now take that sentence through each of the modal operators of necessity, possibility and obligation, positive and negative.

“I must go to evening classes”
“I need not go to evening classes”
“I can go to evening classes”
“It is impossible go to evening classes”
“I should go to evening classes”
“I want to go to evening classes”

Go through the entire list, each time checking the effect of the modal operator on your physiology, internal representations and motivation.

What modal operators are already naturally present in connection to your outcome or goal?

Are they the most useful modal operators to be using?

Change the modal operators and experience what difference that makes to your state when contemplating or working on your outcome?

What other effects do the modal operators have on you?

Find what suits you best to improve your optimism and motivation towards your outcome.

Collapsing States into Modally Operating Options **(A Learning Level I Process, see Gregory Bateson, 1964)**

Exercise: In Pairs. 20 minutes each way

1. The Guide facilitates the Explorer through the following steps. Matching physiology is especially important in this process.
2. Explorer selects something in their life that would be beneficial to do but which they have not yet done. We'll call this "x" in these instructions.
3. Guide elicits in which of the P-POND modes of operation the Explorer is expressing themselves around this issue. For example, do they say to themselves "I must do x." (Necessity), or "I can't bear to do x" (Possibility), "I long to do x" (Desire) or "I should do x" (Obligation).
4. The Guide facilitates the Explorer to find the physiology connected to this statement and to exaggerate it into a metaphorical stance or gesture.
5. Break State
6. Guide now asks Explorer to consider putting the statement into another mode of operation, that is to make a statement that could also be true about doing "x". It is important that this statement feels as if it could be true – a direct contradiction of what is true for the Explorer will not do the same job.
7. Elicit the physiology attached to this statement and exaggerate it into a metaphorical stance or gesture.
8. Break state and repeat steps 6 and 7 so that you have three distinct statements and their accompanying physical metaphor.
9. Now repeat the three gestures and statements, one after the other. Repeat several times and allow them to "collapse" or synthesise into a connected series of movements or possibly they might evolve into a whole new synthesise gesture.
10. Test the effect of the process by exploring how the Explorer feels now about "x". What new feelings, thoughts, anchors, ideas, associations, possibilities are emerging. Future pace to the next opportunity to do "x".
11. Swap and repeat.

“Do not suppress desire, because then you would become lifeless. You’d be without energy and that would be terrible. Desire in the healthy sense of the word *is* energy, and the more energy we have, the better. But don’t suppress desire, understand it. Understand it. Don’t seek to fulfil desire so much as to understand desire. And don’t just renounce the objects of your desire, understand them; see them in their true light. See them for what they are really worth. Because if you just suppress your desire, you are likely to be tied to it.”

Anthony de Mello

Structural Play invited by Modal Operators

Possibility

On the level of **RESOURCES**

When stated in +ve: (e.g. "I can") Identify current resources and take them 'off the map' to new contexts.

When stated in -ve: (e.g. "I can't") Go 'off the map', to other times, contexts or people, to discover and retrieve new possibilities for familiar contexts.

Some Utilisations: Anchoring, New Behaviour Generator, Disney, Modelling

Permission

On the levels of **ENVIRONMENT, BEHAVIOURS** and **SPIRIT**

When stated in +ve: (e.g. "I am allowed") Identify source of permission (who else says?), location of boundaries surrounding permission and consequences of specific actions upon self, others and things.

When stated in -ve: (e.g. "I'm not allowed") Identify source of injunction (who else says?), location of boundaries beyond injunction, consequences of specific actions and alternative actions.

Some Utilisations: Self-Relations, Sponsors, Re-Imprinting, Perceptual Positions

Obligation

Often on the level of **VALUES**. Moral judgements and obligations exist in a temporal scale - guilt is about past events. Moving them into the future brings events back under own control. This is the motive behind "making amends". Translate "I should have done..." into "I should be able to.... by....(plus specific time/specific action)".

Identify if the value is internally generated (by the subject) or externally generated (by culture, society, other). Bring back to internal (own) generation of value.

Stated in +ve (eg. 'I should') : Retrieve and own the value that is being upheld.

Stated in -ve (eg. 'I should not') : Retrieve and own the value that would be violated.

Some Utilisations : Outcomes, 4th and 5th Perceptual Positions, Values Holoarchy

Necessity

Often on the level of **BELIEFS** because this is bound in **cause-and-effect**, ie. "in order to...it is necessary to".

When stated in +ve (eg. 'I must'): Retrieve the nature of the belief sequencing by exploring "in order to do what?"

When stated in -ve (eg. 'I must not'): Retrieve the nature of the belief sequencing "in order to avoid what?"

Some Utilisations: Re-Imprinting, Decision Review, Beliefs Systems, Strategies

Desire

Manifesting on all levels, but as a primary subjective driver, we can look to the level of **IDENTITY** and the processes of **IDENTIFICATION (x=y)**.

Stated in +ve (eg. 'I long for'): "How would you be different if you had that?" "If you had that (x), what would that give you (y)?"

Stated in -ve (eg. 'I long not to'): "How would you be different if you stopped?" "If you didn't have that, what would you lose?"

Some Utilisations: MetaOutcomes, Core Self and Mission, Self-Relations, Parts

And Finally.....

Just in case you've encountered stage hypnosis, therapy cults, "accelerated" therapy training and trademarked procedures that use the name of NLP to describe themselves, overleaf are some basic contrasts in presupposition that differentiate these practices from NLP and its psychotherapeutic applications

Beliefs Contrast – Distortions of NLP

“Therapy Cult”

You are responsible for everything that happens to you.

There are “positive” emotions which are good and “negative” emotions which are bad. The goal is to make negative emotions disappear.

There are only two emotional states, love and no-love.

Fear is a delusion.

NLP and Psychotherapy Culture

Mental health depends on accepting what we cannot change, finding courage to change the things we can and developing the wisdom to know the difference.

Virginia Satir 1976

Locus of control and personality development

J. B. Rotter 1954

Self-efficacy, positive psychology and Attributional style

Abraham, Seligman and Teasdale 1978

*The freedom to say what one feels and thinks, instead of what one should according to judgments.
The freedom to feel what one feels, instead of what one ought according to injunctions.*

V. Satir (ibid)

Gestalt Psychotherapy - Healthy functioning is seen as access to both polarities of dyadic emotional experiences, such as sad/happy, angry/loving and the ability to flexibly experience any place in between as the situation calls for.

Fritz Perls 1969/70

Emotions are highly varied, mutable and developing over time.

Milton H. Erickson 1978/85

Humanness, creativity and self-generation emits from the richness and variety of emotional sense.

Stephen Gilligan 1999

Neuro-Science - The human emotional system is highly evolved beyond the reptilian binary response (fight-flight) into a great variety of mediated processes involving limbic, neo-cortex and whole body activity

A. Damasio 1999

Psychobiology – Emotional variation, from elation to terror of abandonment, and sympathetic holding of its wide accompanying experience is the basis of healthy personality formation

A Shore 2001

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