

International Coaching Psychology Review

Subscriptions

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The *ICPR* is an international publication with a focus on the theory, practice and research in the field of coaching psychology. Submission of academic articles, systematic reviews and other research reports which support evidence-based practice are welcomed. The *ICPR* may also publish conference reports and papers given at the British Psychological Society Special Group in Coaching Psychology (BPS SGCP) and Australian Psychological Society Interest Group in Coaching Psychology (APS IGCP) conferences, notices and items of news relevant to the International Coaching Psychology Community.

Case studies and book reviews will be considered. The *ICPR* is published by the BPS SGCP in association with the APS IGCP.

1. Circulation

The circulation of the *ICPR* is worldwide. It is available in hardcopy and PDF format. Papers are invited and encouraged from authors throughout the world. It is available free in paper and PDF format to members of the BPS SGCP, and free in PDF format to APS IGCP members as a part of their annual membership.

2. Length

Papers should normally be no more than 6000 words, although the Co-Editors retain discretion to publish papers beyond this length in cases where the clear and concise expression of the scientific content requires greater length.

3. Peer review

This publication operates a policy of anonymous peer review. Papers will initially be desk reviewed by the editorial team, to confirm they meet the scope and focus of the journal. At the sole discretion of the editor/s the paper will be sent to two independent reviewers, with the aim of a review within 21 days. The reviewers will not be aware of the identity of the review and any markings, references, etc., will be removed from the paper to ensure the anonymity of the author/s. Authors are asked to remove any information about the authors, including self-citations, acknowledgements, affiliations, etc., to ensure a blind review. These can be added following the review if the paper is accepted.

4. Online submission process

(a) All manuscripts must be submitted to the editor by email: Jonathan Passmore – jonathancpassmore@yahoo.co.uk

(b) The submission must include the following as separate files:

- Title page consisting of manuscript title, authors' full names and affiliations, name and address for corresponding author.
- Abstract.
- Full manuscript omitting authors' names and affiliations. Figures and tables can be attached separately if necessary.

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Special Issue – NLP Coaching



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Editorial

Jonathan Passmore

IN THIS edition of *International Coaching Psychology Review (ICPR)* we are focusing on a single theme, NLP Coaching.

NLP is one of the four most popular coaching approaches, along with behavioural (GROW), solution focused, and cognitive behavioural coaching across most of Europe, according to a large scale survey of 3000 coaches from 50 European countries undertaken in 2017 (Passmore, Brown & Csigas, 2017). However its validity as a tool for behavioural change is widely challenged. In this issue we called for papers making the case for NLP Coaching and papers adopt a more critical stance. In this way we hope to deepen your understanding of NLP, and what role it may play in evidenced based coaching psychology. All four papers included in this issue were submitted to a blind review process and comments were passed back to the contributors to revise and adapt their papers prior to resubmission.

We hope an exploration of what is a contentious issue will both offer an engaging edition and provide fresh insights on this topic.

We plan to continue with periodic special issues. Our current Call, due for publication in 2020, will focus on thematic and systemic reviews of coaching and supervision. This may include health coaching, mentor coaching, mindfulness coaching or team coaching reviews. We would welcome submissions on this theme for possible inclusion.

Finally, *ICPR* is keen to continue to drive up the quality and range of coaching research papers. If you are an academic or a student engaging in coaching research we welcome submissions to bring understanding and new insight to the world of coaching psychology.

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The evidence for NLP

Lisa de Rijk, Lucas A.C. Derks, Bruce Grimley
& Jaap Hollander

After 45 years of strong development, global application and ongoing criticism, the contours of what constitutes NLP remain vague, to insiders and outsiders alike. NLP experts use more or less different definitions and criteria for the tools, techniques and foundation principles of NLP. This situation has made it nearly impossible to satisfy the request for research evidence of NLP's effectiveness in coaching.

The purpose of this paper therefore is to commence a discussion of the challenges facing NLP in gaining legitimacy as a coaching approach without an evidence base. The paper critiques the extant literature on NLP coaching, and briefly reviews wider literature of NLP evidence in other contexts, notably the therapy world. This paper offers a summary of and critique of a recent Delphi Poll conducted to identify which of the tools, techniques and theoretical frameworks are considered to be NLP. The paper discusses the challenges for NLP evidencing its effectiveness in coaching and proposes empirical outcome based research utilising the core principles, skills, tools and techniques that have gained consensus in this Delphi Poll.

Keywords: *NLP, Neurolinguistic Programming, Coaching, Delphi Poll, Behavioural Change.*

Introduction

THE PURPOSE OF this paper is to commence a discussion concerning the use of NLP as a coaching approach when there is little if any empirical evidence to support its application in coaching. The paper commences with a brief history of the development of NLP and moves into a literature review. The review offers a critique of the extant empirical literature on NLP coaching and refers to the existing evidence base for the application of NLP in wider contexts, notably the therapeutic world. The paper then offers a summary of and a reflection on a recent Delphi Poll conducted to identify which of the tools, techniques and theoretical frameworks are considered to be NLP. The rationale for using this method is discussed and critiqued. The paper concludes with a discussion of the challenges facing NLP in gaining legitimacy without an evidence base.

History of NLP

NLP was originally modelled by Richard Bandler, John Grinder and Frank Pucelik from the linguistic patterns of psychiatrist and hypnotherapist Milton Erickson, founder of Gestalt therapy Fritz Perls, and pioneer family therapist Virginia Satir (Bandler & Grinder, 1975; Grinder, DeLozier & Bandler, 1977). These pieces of work were later integrated with concepts from the general semantics of Korzybski (1933), transformational linguistics by Chomsky (1972), therapeutic communication strategies of Watzlawick (1978) and Bateson (1979), the behavioural psychology of Pavlov (1927), the cybernetic theories of Miller, Galanter and Pribram (1960), the archetypes of Jung (1921, 1972) and the personality theory of Myers and Briggs (Myers, 1962). NLP became mainly spread in the shape of easy reading books and training programmes. The training programs were

only partially standardised and not centrally regulated and the trainees could stem from a wide variety of professional backgrounds.

Beyond this early spread NLP has been incorporated into the coaching world as an applied psychology, enhanced through the development of NLP-based Master's degrees. The first of these was an MA in NLP and Organisational Development at Kingston University. This later evolved into an MA in Applied Coaching at Derby University. Despite a number of students completing these Master's programmes with dissertations focusing on NLP coaching, there is little empirical literature evidencing NLP as an effective coaching approach. Wider literature however does suggest that there is an interest in NLP as a coaching tool (Burton, 2011; Grimley, 2013; Henwood & Lister, 2007; Linder-Pelz, 2010; O'Connor & Lages, 2004). Each of these publications are methodological, providing a 'how-to' of the coaching process rather than evidence of the effectiveness of NLP coaching.

NLP as a contested applied psychology

Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) is a contested applied psychology that has only limited evidence for its effectiveness under specific controlled clinical conditions (Gray & Bourke, 2015; Gray, Budden-Potts & Bourke, 2017; Gray & Teall, 2017; Tylee et al., 2017; Wake et al., 2013). NLP appears to be rather a methodology to gather information than a specific therapeutic or coaching method. It is based on practical principles rather than on a theory and as such NLP users are focussed on how people conduct their behaviours rather than on why the behaviours are present. This has often caused a flow of diffuse negative evaluation from social scientists, in the shape of criticism about missing regulations, theoretical underpinning, research evidence and ethics, aimed at something vague and undefined.

More widely there are many critics of NLP who view NLP as variably a pseudoscience, pop psychology or even a cult, with no evidence base for its effectiveness (Druckman & Swets, 1988; Heap, 1988; Sharpley, 1987). Wake

et al. (2013 pp.194–216) have responded to the criticism regarding lack of evidence for NLP's effectiveness noting that, much of the research on NLP until very recently, has been based on the researchers flawed assumptions about its theory: *'many of the myths have been perpetuated by the continual reliance on a series of ill-informed studies that proceeded on the belief that the preferred representation system (PRS) (the preferred sensory system that someone uses to receive information) was some kind of theoretical foundation upon which the rest of NLP depended. Anyone who has carefully read the literature... would have discovered that the concept fell quickly from favour as unverifiable...Despite a fairly steady stream of research that supports many of the basic concepts of NLP, researchers return to the flawed data from 30 years ago'* (p.195).

Andreas (in Wake et al., 2013) refers to the challenges that NLP faces in being accepted as a valid method for psychological change: *'Personalities, turf wars, hangers-on, and marketing get-rich-quick artists have often distracted observers from thoughtfully examining its (NLP's) core principles and methods'*. (p.xii). Some within the NLP community have not been silent to this with the drive towards a more academic and researched approach, which was gaining momentum with the development of a peer reviewed NLP Research Conference and journal, initially hosted at the University of Surrey in 2008. A significant number of research papers have been presented at these conferences and published in the three volumes of the journal (ANLP 2009, 2011, 2013). Yet none of these provide an evidence base for the application of NLP in coaching. Subsequently researchers in the field recognised the need to become less self-referencing and submitted more clinically oriented papers to wider journals for peer review and publication (Bigley et al., 2010; Gray & Bourke, 2015; Gray & Liotta, 2012; Simpson & Dryden, 2011; Stipancic et al., 2010; Wake & Leighton, 2014). Wake et al. (2013) has more recently brought a group of 13 psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists and clinicians together, from around the world, to offer a critical appraisal of NLP clinical research to date. Each of the studies included

by Wake (2013) are in therapeutic contexts, where practitioners use NLP as an adjunct to their core clinical or psychological training.

As described above, the published research of NLP has been conducted predominantly in therapeutic communities using specific protocols, composed from the catalogue of techniques that are thought to make up NLP.

Literature review

A literature review was conducted from the main academic databases and a total of 90 articles were retrieved for consideration. The purpose of the literature review was to identify empirical research studies evidencing NLP in coaching. Sixty articles were excluded as they were not in peer reviewed journals. Of 30 articles included for further review 13/30 were discursive papers rather than providing empirical evidence for the effectiveness of NLP as a coaching methodology. These were then excluded from the final literature review. (Grimley, 2009, 2012; Jakovljević 2009; Jenkins, 2009; Kotera, 2018; Kudliskis et al., 2009; Linder-Pelz & Hall, 2007, 2008; Losada, 2009; Mill, 2010; Moliușyté et al., 2013; Ward, 2006).

A further 6/30 articles were book reviews, and 5/30 articles were responses to letters in a journal. 1/30 article was an introduction to a journal edition, and 1/30 article provided an anti-NLP stance, with no empirical data included. Each of these were also excluded from the review.

The remaining 4/30 papers are critiqued here. The first study uses action-based research to assess a benchmarking process that identified coaching competencies in a specific NLP community context (Linder-Pelz, 2014). The second study is similar to this and uses the Access Model of assessing a professions maturity to evaluate the status of the coaching industry in Norway (Svaleng & Grant, 2010). The remaining two studies offer a more empirical research study through a randomised trial of NLP as a coaching approach for developing mental preparation in Judo (Boughattas et al., 2017), and a mixed methods study

measuring the perceived effectiveness of NLP based coaching for SME business owners (Gray et al., 2011).

Linder Pelz (2014) utilises action-based research to assess the development of standards in the NLP coaching field following a benchmarking methodology. Benchmarking is a continuous improvement methodology that is widely used in business development, human resources and professional development. The methodology enables the development of standards and best practice through the identification and development of professional competencies. Linder-Pelz used deductive analysis (Ladkin, 2004) to reflect on the approach adopted by Hall to develop benchmarked competencies for coaches in the NLP based Meta-Coach community. Nine coaches were selected from the coaching community using purposive sampling. The demographics of participants were from seven countries with each participant having attended a minimum of two advanced meta coach trainings.

Linder-Pelz conducted semi-structured interviews and compared the benchmarking of Hall with data from the analysed interviews. A number of skills were identified as core coaching competencies: Support, Listening, Questioning, Meta-Questioning, Receiving Feedback, Giving Feedback, Inducing States. Findings were triangulated through checking of themes and conclusions with study participants. The study does not measure the effectiveness of these skills, neither does it focus on specific NLP skills.

Ladkin's 12 criteria for action research was used by Linder-Pelz to assess the benchmarking work of Hall for robustness and trustworthiness. Hall's process is reported to have met most of these criteria with participants validating the development of the competencies. Two of the participants reported that the process had not been 'truly democratic' (p.54), however Linder-Pelz does not elucidate further.

Linder-Pelz concludes that Hall's process does meet the criteria for robustness and trustworthiness. Linder-Pelz then compares Hall's process with other approaches in the

coaching field. She suggests that Hall's process is more 'fine-grained' (p.56) because of the development of sensory and behavioural competency indicators rather than the self-report that has been relied on in other coaching benchmarking exercises. Recommendations are made by Linder-Pelz for further research to test reliability and address issues of fairness, as well as studies to measure predictive validity of the benchmarking rating scale. She goes on to propose that the field develop outcome-based research including the development of randomised control trials to compare coaching competencies. This study is the first in the NLP field to attempt to evaluate the development of coach competencies using a specific coaching methodology – meta coaching. Although driven by the developer of meta-coaching, Hall, his use of action-based research has been assessed independently by Linder-Pelz and found to be sufficiently robust to warrant further investigation as an effective coaching approach. Although Linder-Pelz has applied a recognised research methodology to assess the action-based research of Hall, this is an internally assessed benchmarking process driven by Hall as the leader of the NLP meta-coaching community. This paper in itself does not add to the evidencing of NLP tools and techniques within a coaching skill set. We would add therefore to Linder-Pelz's recommendations and suggest that these competencies are generic coaching skills and could be used to develop an NLP coaching protocol that could then be tested for effectiveness.

Svaleng and Grant (2010) also offer a perspective on the development of core competencies of coaches, albeit as a result of the fragmented nature of the coaching community in Norway. The authors suggest that the reason for fragmentation in the field was three-fold: the difference in philosophical tradition between Nordic and North American models of coaching; the content and method of working; and the argument between the rigor offered by academically based programmes and the more practically oriented non-academic programmes.

Rather than extend the debate about competencies, Svaleng and Grant adopted an industry maturation and professionalisation approach, utilising ACCESS criteria to analyse the status of the NLP coaching industry in Norway. Each of the six criteria of Autonomy, Commitment, Collegiality, Extensive education, Service orientation and Special skills and knowledge are discussed in turn. The more these characteristics are shown, the more professional and mature a field is deemed to be.

Svaleng and Grant discuss the challenges of gaining Autonomy as a field because of the dichotomy between the regulation, license to practice and ethical codes required of psychologists and counsellors and the lack of barriers to entry into the wider coaching industry. The authors describe this lose:win scenario with those already holding government 'sanction' (p.8) having more to lose as the field could be opened up to more coaches who lack regulation, leading to credence being given to an unregulated field.

This perception was then evaluated against the criteria of Commitment, with the authors suggesting that a lack of commitment towards nationally recognised standards for all led partially to the derailment of the standard work by the industry. Svaleng and Grant suggest that to address this potential of conflict of interest independent professionals should be included in future standards development.

Svaleng and Grant identified that there was a lack of Collegiality in the industry again because of the different factions across the professional and the general coaching community. The authors refer again to the need for common coaching standards and an educational framework for potentially fostering collegiality and an opportunity for joint identity. This then links to the fourth criterion, Education. Svaleng and Grant call for the inclusion of mental health awareness into coach training, identifying that one in two Norwegians will experience mental health challenges in their lifetime and may use coaching as a socially acceptable form of ther-

apy. The authors refer to an article reporting coachees who had become clinically depressed following coaching and suggest that within Norway, coaches may be subject to prosecution for offering an alternative to public health, i.e. coaching for mental distress.

Service orientation within an ethical framework is identified as the fifth criterion. The authors refer to the lack of enforceable ethical codes globally for coaching and where there is a deemed breach of an ethical code, the coach may lose licensure under organisations such as the ICF yet may continue to practice outside of one of the professional bodies.

The final criterion of Specialist skills and knowledge links back to the lack of competency, standards and ethical framework across the Norwegian coaching industry. The result of the turf war amongst the coaching bodies in Norway resulted in an NLP based Norwegian coaching company developing a Norwegian industry standard for coaching. This has been met by some coaches in the wider coaching industry with a critique that the standard is NLP specific and not coaching specific.

Some concerns have been raised through this theoretical discussion by Svaleng and Grant, the most important of which is the issue of non-psychologists working with mental health issues. The authors conclude with a call for collegiality amongst the Norwegian coaching industry towards the development of ethical coaching standards and practice. The article by Svaleng and Grant appears to be more of a meta-comment on the status of the coaching community in Norway and does not add evidence for NLP as a coaching tool. The authors do not offer a critique of the wider NLP community in Norway, nor do they comment on how the development of NLP based coaching standards was accepted by other Nordic NLP organisations.

The final 2/30 papers Boughattas et al. (2017) and Gray et al. (2011) offer empirical studies in the sports and SME arenas. These are reviewed here.

Boughattas et al. (2017) conducted a control trial measuring the effectiveness of some NLP techniques as a form of mental preparation for judo competitors. The authors have been unable to access a translated copy of this article therefore a summary is provided from the available abstract and we have been unable to critique the approach taken by the authors. The study measures a group of 20 judokas from the national judo team against a control group. Coaching techniques used included setting fitness goals and anchoring from NLP. The study group demonstrated improvements in mental skills in the male group, and in both groups, the study found that utilising the anchoring technique enabled improvement in the ability to solicit mental skills. Anchoring is a technique based on operant conditioning, enabling the accessing of positive resource states that can be utilised across contexts. As we have not been able to access the full article we are not able to provide a critique of the methodology or findings.

Gray et al's (2011) research is a mixed methods study measuring the perceived benefits of coaching by SME business owners. Random sampling was utilised to recruit 30 managers, with a further 16 recruited utilising theoretical sampling ($N=46$). The mixed-methods approach of semi-structured interviews was triangulated with a 60-question quantitative questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed using competencies from the National Occupational Standards for Managers. The study authors used Framework as the data analysis tool. 13/22 coaches were reported as NLP ($N=12$) or psychotherapy trained. These coaches were chosen by 73 per cent of the coachee cohort. The authors report this as statistically significant. Coachees referred to their selection of these therapeutically informed coaches as a 'sanity' or 'personal health check' rather than for a specific coaching outcome. The results of this study demonstrated that coaches utilised coaching more for the perceived personal development opportunity that coaching offered. Two main benefits

were reported to have been gained from the coaching: managing self-control and managing self-emotions. This would support the selection criteria stated earlier of the desire for a personal health check. The authors report limitations of the study as a small sample size from which generalisations cannot be made. Additionally the authors suggest that the immediacy of data collection post coaching and subsequent findings cannot be extrapolated to longer term benefits. Similar to the Linder-Pelz (2014) study, there is no assessment of the efficacy of NLP as a coaching model using any of the tools and techniques that are considered to be NLP.

In summary, there are no empirical studies that offer evidence for the effectiveness of coaching based solely on NLP tools and techniques. Linder-Pelz (2014) and Svaleng and Grant (2010) both offer a theoretical review of existing coaching practice with the development of NLP based coaching standards, in meta coaching as a development out of NLP (Linder-Pelz, 2014) and in one NLP Association in Norway (Svaleng & Grant, 2010). Both of these papers could be developed further to inform research studies measuring outcomes in NLP coaching.

Methods

The authors recognised that for NLP to develop evidence of its effectiveness in coaching there needed to be a way of defining NLP specific tools and techniques that could be used in a coaching context and measured for their efficacy and effectiveness. It is from this stance that the authors conducted a Delphi Poll to gain consensus within the field of NLP of precisely what constitutes NLP. This section summarises the rationale for methodological choice of a Delphi Poll, describes the application of the methodology selected and presents the results.

Boughattas (2017) and Gray's (2011) studies both offer NLP coaching interventions to specific client groups, yet do not specifically describe the methodology used within the coaching therefore it is not possible to correlate the use of NLP technique to

outcome. The Norwegian study by Svaleng and Grant (2010) is a theoretical commentary on the status of coaching in Norway that has seen an NLP based coaching association drive forward standards for that specific modality. The paper by Linder-Pelz (2014) offers a commentary of a benchmarking process for the development of core competencies in an off shoot from NLP, meta coaching. It is against this backdrop of lack of coding or utilisation of a specific NLP methodology that we conducted a Delphi Poll. The purpose of this was to try and reach common agreement of what can be identified as NLP. It is then anticipated that the NLP coaching industry can follow the innovative research studies within the NLP therapy community (Gray & Bourke, 2015; Gray, Budden-Potts & Bourke, 2017; Gray & Teall, 2017; Tylee et al., 2017; Wake et al., 2013) and conduct outcome-based studies that measure the effectiveness of NLP coaching.

Delphi poll

It is against the above discussion and a drive towards a more evidence-based field that the authors decided to conduct a Delphi Poll within the NLP Training Community to identify the core elements of NLP's concepts, principles, tools and techniques. This would then enable the codifying of the technology for future research.

A Delphi Poll can be used to ascertain the views of experts particularly when the problem being investigated is complex and where there is a hierarchical structure of expertise (Cantrill et al., 1996; Linstone, 1978; Walker et al., 1996). The methodology is specifically designed to be used as a group communication process where there is a difference of opinion and is particularly useful in real world situations (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). The technique uses a number of iterations of data collection from a panel of subjects to develop consensus of opinion.

NLP has already been included in a Delphi Poll (Norcross et al., 2006) assessing experts' opinions on discredited psy-

chological methods, with NLP scoring 3.87 (3=possibly discredited, 4=probably discredited). In comparison, the same poll scored EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing) at 3.06. EMDR is a therapeutic approach to trauma that developed out of Shapiro's (1985) observation of the eye tracking process in NLP that can be used to manage trauma responses. However, unknown to many, EMDR shares its historic roots with NLP but developed into a NICE (National Institute of Clinical healthcare Excellence) approved evidence-based trauma treatment, i.e. it is an NLP based protocol, albeit a very limited set of NLP derived tools, whereas NLP appears to have more tools than any one expert can master.

The authors of this paper started the Delphi Poll process by searching for a widely agreed upon catalogue of tools and techniques that are considered to be the core to NLP (Hollander et al., 2016). An initial list was developed utilising the standards laid out by the International Association for NLP. This list was compared with the standards set out by the Institute for Eclectic Psychology (IEP). The data was then compared to other NLP training associations globally and further refined after a comparison with the Encyclopaedia of NLP (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000). Items were omitted if they were highly specific, internationally unfamiliar or explicitly attributed to another school of psychology or psychotherapy. It should be noted however that NLP was developed through the modelling of perceived experts in the therapy field, hence it does hold similarities to many other therapeutic approaches. Where NLP differs from other approaches is by providing a model of 'how' to act, e.g. unconditional positive regard is a core condition of person-centred counselling, NLP may refer to this as a process of gaining rapport with processes of how this can be achieved. This initial list of tools and techniques resulted in 78 items.

The second phase of the Poll recruited all members from the so called 'International NLP leadership Summit' which informed

the final list (Hollander et al., 2017). The Leadership Summit (www.nlpleadershipsummit.org) is an international group with about 120 members that have yearly meetings. Membership criteria for the group are that members have been teaching NLP for over 15 years, are reputed as leaders in the field and as authors of NLP literature.

Among the inclusion criteria for the Poll were core skills and techniques that were listed by more than 10 major international NLP training accreditation institutes. Techniques were included irrespective of their contextual application e.g. education, therapy, business, coaching etc. Finally, a total of 112 techniques were listed and subdivided into seven categories. Four false techniques were also included to check for false negatives.

Categories were distinguished on the basis of the presuppositions and areas of basic competence that underpin NLP, the conceptual distinctions that are thought to support the NLP tools and stem from other psychologies, the practitioner attitudinal components, the implicit and explicit theory of change and finally the skills and techniques taught in trainings.

The categories were codified as:

- Axioms
 - Premises about experience
 - Premises about communication and change
- Method
 - Distinctions
 - Attitude
 - Model of change
- Technology
 - Skills
 - Techniques.

Items were listed alphabetically in the Delphi Poll, with a description offered for each element.

The items consisted of the standard names of the piece of NLP tested. The basic question was: Does this belong to NLP? The response options were on a three-point Likert scale

with the scales being yes (score of 1), no (0), and don't know (-1). The researchers were clear that they wanted to elicit responses where there may be lack of knowledge of the source of a technique, or uncertainty about the inclusion of a technique as core NLP as this would also give insight into the spread and adoption of the more recent developments within the field.

Expert panel

The panel of experts ($N=59$) were selected from the NLP leadership summit. This group of experts had a combined NLP teaching experience of 1363 years, with the minimum NLP teaching experience of each expert being greater than 20 years. The combined experience of the experts included a total of 231 books authored on NLP.

Results

The aim of this Poll was to establish a very clear overview about what the experts from within the NLP community considered to belong to NLP. This question was pressing because of the wide range of applications that are on the market under the umbrella of the NLP name. The unbridled creative development over the last 45 years, where there was no central platform to decide what was NLP or not, created a situation of freedom on the one hand but an impossible situation for researchers if it came to testing the value of NLP tools let alone testing its effectiveness in its entirety. To solve this, a cut-off percentage of 70 per cent agreement was chosen (Hollander et al., 2018) for a criteria to be included. The rationale was, that when the agreement was less than this number, the concept, principle or technique could still be very valuable, but was not widely recognised as NLP. After the raw data was analysed and reported (Appendices 1–3), the mean scores were analysed (Appendices 4–7).

Each of the components of the conceptual model, which was based on the original presuppositions of NLP, were agreed by 88–100 per cent of the respondents. The map is not the territory, which was adopted

from Korzybski's (1933) work, was agreed with by all respondents. The only principle that did not gain consensus agreement was the mind operating with a feed forward system that predicts the future. Each of the premises about communication and change reached consensus agreement, which provides universal support for the presuppositions. This data is presented in Appendix 1.

In considering the theoretical framework of distinctions, attitude and model of change, there is more disagreement with certain approaches in the method. Each of the original methods are supported by more than 70 per cent of the respondents. Newer methods such as meta and core states have less agreement. Where methods have been brought across from other disciplines rather than modelled, there is almost universal disagreement, i.e Graves drives. This suggests that the leadership group recognises that Graves drive is an adopted rather than modelled method. When considering the attitude of NLP, only 44 per cent of respondents agreed that Coach state was core to NLP. This raises a question of whether NLP is coaching. The model of change as a method was universally agreed by the majority (Appendix 2).

Each respondent was asked about their agreement with the skills, tools and techniques offered within the NLP model. There is universal agreement with the core linguistic patterns that were originally modelled by Bandler, Grinder et al. When newer skills such as the LAB profile (63 per cent agreement) and clean language (32 per cent) were considered, there was less agreement. Even newer skills such as Mindsonar metaprofile analysis had less agreement (24 per cent). Of the techniques assessed there are lower levels of agreement, compared to the skills, where the majority consensus for a specific skill was in almost every instance was 98–100 per cent. The techniques that reached consensus found an agreement score of 73–85 per cent. Again these were for techniques that emerged from earlier in the NLP history and those techniques that were newer find less agreement (Appendix 3).

After the initial raw data was analysed, the data was revisited to ascertain the mean scores and Standard Deviation (SD). The lower the SD score, the more significant the findings were. This process saw a considerable change in the ranking of some of the tools and techniques (Appendix 4). This further reinforced greater acceptance of techniques that emerged from the original teachings, suggesting that these techniques have held true through time.

When the conceptual model was analysed for mean scores there was almost no variation from the raw data scores (Appendix 5). Only one model changed and developed more agreement, *people make the best choice available to them*. The meaning for this is not known and could be investigated through qualitative inquiry. The same minimal change occurred for assessing the Mean and SD for the methods (Appendix 6).

There were some changes when analysing the mean score and SD of the tools and techniques (Appendix 7). Some of the techniques gained greater consensus. These were the meta-mirror format which was described in the early writings in NLP, and remodeling which is a newer variation of the modeling process upon which NLP was founded, amongst others. One of the false techniques gained greater consensus when the mean and SD scores were included – the Godiva Chocolate Pattern!

Discussion

The lack of evidence for both the content and effectiveness of NLP coaching is unsurprising given the diverse and mainly non-theoretical nature of the field. By conducting a Delphi Poll and through the quality of data that emerged it is possible to offer some conclusions about what can be considered to be NLP, which then makes it potentially easier to evidence. There is some commonality of agreement of which tools, techniques and appear to belong to NLP. Of these components some of them are being used as protocol delivered interventions to treat clinical conditions such as PTSD (post traumatic

stress disorder) and depression. For instance, one of the most classic approaches to extend a person's capabilities particularly in depression, is 'The New Behaviour Generator.' This tool has a 97 per cent agreement score, with a mean score of 2.97 and is ranked 9. Equally the VKD (visual-kinaesthetic dissociation) trauma process has a 98 per cent agreement rate with a mean score of 2.97. This process is the foundation of a series of controlled trials conducted and published in the US, where the protocol has been used with veterans suffering from PTSD (Gray & Bourke, 2015; Gray, Budden-Potts & Bourke, 2017).

An analysis of the 79 elements that was agreed through the Delphi Poll shows that nearly all of them date from before 1990 and can be found in each of the core textbooks dating from that era. At that time the communication among NLP practitioners was much tighter than after 2000. There were less people involved and they were trained by fewer trainers, therefore the coherence in what was transmitted would have had more commonality. Through the development of international journals, initially with Anchorpoint and NLP-world, and more recently through Rappoport and the *NLP Research Journal*, people are becoming more informed about new developments. This possibly leads to greater adoption of the newer techniques but less agreement of what is core NLP in the elder network.

Limitations

The use of a Delphi Poll is a recognised approach to gain consensus across a community. It could be argued that by staying internally referenced, i.e. within the NLP community, the findings of the Delphi Poll are invalid. This is countered by considering the adoption principles of any given approach. It is only by gaining agreement amongst experts who use the tools daily of precisely what constitutes a methodology that these tools and techniques can then be tested in an empirical manner.

The authors of this study were only able to further the use of the data into a Delphi Poll after the initial data was returned, there-

fore the set-up of the study was biased from the beginning with inclusion of data only from those who responded. It is likely that these respondents had a vested interest in the outcome. Equally it is recognised and stated that each of the authors of this paper have a vested interest in the outcome, as each is a recognised expert in the field of NLP and is a member of the NLP Leadership Summit. This inevitably provides a strong bias in this study. By presenting the data that emerged from the study we are offering transparency of process. We also recognise that many tools and techniques that are deemed to be NLP will have commonalities with other psychological approaches. This is inevitable as NLP was developed out of modelling other therapies. This does not discount them as NLP rather that they are models of processes that have been identified from these other therapies.

Conclusions

Here we need to emphasise that NLP was never designed as a closed system or a structured research program. NLP is a modelling methodology therefore there will inevitably include components from other widely recognised approaches within the skill set of NLP. The variety of conceptual roots and the development of technical complexity that emerged out of the modelling work for each of the NLP elements is considerable. Although in the 1970s the NLP elements were initially developed by the three originators assisted by three successive groups of students from the University of California, from the beginning of the eighties the group of contributors grew beyond what could be overseen and

registered. Even today new NLP elements are being created through the process of systematic modelling that is core to NLP. By clearly stating what is and what is not NLP it then becomes possible to begin to measure and evidence NLP as a potentially effective coaching tool.

The goal of the Delphi Poll was to enable researchers to show that what they evaluate belongs to the applied psychology of NLP, albeit having historical roots in other therapies or psychologies. This has largely been achieved. In the future the results can be used as a reference for measuring the effectiveness of coaching using specific techniques and concepts from NLP.

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Appendix 1

Axiom		Total (N=59)	Mean	SD
Premises about experience	The map is not the territory	100%	3.00	0
	Structure is more important than content	92%	2.86	.47
	Life and mind are systemic processes	90%	2.85	.48
	Experience can be reduced to sensory elements (VAKOG)	88%	2.83	.53
	The mind is a feed forward system that predicts the future	66%	2.46	.84
Premises about Communication and Change	The meaning of communication is the response elicited	98%	2.98	.13
	There is no failure only feedback	98%	2.97	.26
	People make the best choices available to them	98%	2.98	.13
	People have the resources they need for the changes they desire	97%	2.95	.29
	If what you are doing does not work, it is useful to do something else	97%	2.95	.29
	All behaviour has a positive intention	97%	2.95	.29
	If one can do it, others can learn to do it	97%	2.95	.29
	Submodalities determine the effect of an experience	97%	2.95	.29
	The system with the greatest flexibility survives	88%	2.80	.61
	Resistance is a signal of insufficient rapport	86%	2.86	.39

Appendix 2

Method		Total (N=59)	Mean	SD
Distinctions	Sensory modalities	100%	3.00	0
	Submodalities	100%	3.00	0
	Association vs Dissociation	100%	3.00	0
	Elements of the structure of subjective experience	97%	2.95	.29
	Focus outside versus focus inside	95%	2.92	.38
	Analogue versus digital	93%	2.92	.34
	Meta programs	92%	2.90	.36
	Sensory experience versus categorisation (complex equivalence)	90%	2.85	.48
	Neuro-Logical levels	85%	2.75	.63
	Presupposition versus explicit statement versus implication	78%	2.68	.65
	Meta states	69%	2.56	.73
	Core states	68%	2.47	.82
	Separating versus joining	46%	2.20	.85
	Graves drives	3%	1.22	0.49
Attitude	Modelling orientation	97%	2.93	.37
	Sponsoring attitude	61%	2.29	.82
	Coach state	44%	2.05	.97
Model of change	Well-formed outcomes	100%	3.00	0
	TOTE model for goal directed change	98%	2.97	0.26
	Utilisation	97%	2.97	0.18
	SCORE model for choosing or designing interventions	83%	2.68	0.86

Appendix 3

Tools/ techniques		Total (N=59)	Mean	SD
Skills	As-if frame	100%	3.00	0
	Calibrating internal states and processes	100%	3.00	0
	Eye accessing cues, detecting and working with	100%	3.00	0
	Meta model questions	100%	3.00	0
	Milton model language patterns	100%	3.00	0
	Modelling	100%	3.00	0
	Rapport (mirroring/pacing)	100%	3.00	0
	Strategies	100%	3.00	0
	Verbal reframing	100%	3.00	0
	Anchoring	98%	2.97	.26
	Ecological check	98%	2.97	.26
	Time lines, working with	98%	2.93	.37
	Leading, verbal and non-verbal	95%	2.93	.31
	Stacking realities	83%	2.78	.53
	LAB profile	63%	2.39	.85
	Double induction	59%	2.32	.88
	Clean language	32%	1.68	.82
	Mindsong metaprofile analysis	24%	1.81	.8
Techniques	Future pacing – adapting a change to future contexts	100%	3.00	0
	Six step reframing	100%	3.00	0
	Change personal history	98%	2.97	.26
	Changing a strategy	98%	2.97	.26
	Collapsing anchors	98%	2.97	.26
	Negotiating between parts	98%	2.97	.26
	Swish pattern	98%	2.97	.26
	Trauma process using VK dissociation	98%	2.97	.26
	Communicating with a part	97%	2.95	.29

Continued

Appendix 3 *continued*

Tools/ techniques		Total (N=59)	Mean	SD
Techniques	Circle of excellence	97%	2.93	.37
	Eliciting a resource, using a reference experience	97%	2.95	.29
	Eliciting a resource, using a role model	97%	2.95	.29
	New behaviour generator	97%	2.97	.37
	Reimprinting format	97%	2.95	.29
	VK squash	95%	2.93	.31
	Eliciting a resource, using communicating with the future self	93%	2.90	.40
	Eliciting a resource, using physiology	93%	2.88	.49
	Aligning perceptual positions	92%	2.88	.43
	Metaphor for inducing change	92%	2.78	.59
	Compulsion blow out	86%	2.81	.51
	Shifting the importance of criteria	86%	2.83	.46
	Aligning neuro-logical levels format	85%	2.73	.67
	Disney strategy	85%	2.76	.60
	Allergy Model	83%	2.69	.65
	Auditory tempo shift to change string feelings	80%	2.75	.54
	Timeline reframing format	80%	2.73	.58
	Integrating conflicting beliefs format	78%	2.75	.51
	Criteria for NLP techniques	76%	2.58	.91
	Core transformation	76%	2.46	1.02
	Belief audit for identifying limiting beliefs	75%	2.68	.60
	Belief outframing	73%	2.66	.60
	Grief resolution, shame resolution, guilt resolution, anger/forgiveness process	73%	2.47	1.09
	Operating metaphor	73%	2.61	.70
	Meta mirror format	68%	2.61	.62
Transforming negative self talk	64%	2.56	.65	
Remodelling	64%	2.61	.56c	

Continued

Appendix 3 *continued*

Tools/ techniques		Total (N=59)	Mean	SD
Techniques	LAB profile	63%	2.39	.85
	Sponsoring attitude	61%	2.29	.87
	Double induction	59%	2.32	.88
	Godiva chocolate pattern	59%	2.47	1.09
	Spinning feelings to change strong feelings	54%	2.29	.91
	Last straw threshold pattern	52%	2.36	.74
	Generative change format	51%	2.29	1.03
	Forgiveness model	47%	2.22	.81
	Building belief bridges	46%	2.37	.64
	Separating versus joining	46%	2.20	.85
	COACH state	44%	2.05	.97
	Symbolic modelling	42%	2.17	.81
	Bateson strategy	41%	2.29	.74
	I wonder how technique for generating practical new ideas	39%	1.97	1.25
	Identity matrix	39%	1.92	1.25
	Wholeness process	37%	2.07	.83
	Engaging the body's natural process of healing format	37%	2.05	.80
	Provocative change techniques modelled from Frank Farrelly	36%	1.90	.90
	Social panorama technique	36%	2.02	.80
	Resonance pattern	34%	2.17	.67
	Generative collaboration	32%	1.85	1.27
	Clean language	32%	1.68	.82
	Imperative self-format	32%	1.98	1.09
Core finding engine for identifying limiting beliefs	31%	2.12	.67	
Criteria spin	30%	2.07	.78	
Hero's journey format	29%	1.37	1.54	
Collective intelligence techniques	25%	2.00	.72	

Continued

Appendix 3 *continued*

Tools/ techniques		Total (N=59)	Mean	SD
Techniques	Dynamic spin release	25%	2.00	.72
	Co-dependence format	24%	2.07	.67
	MindSonar meta profile analysis	24%	1.81	.80
	Inner child work	22%	1.10	1.58
	Integrating archetypal energies	19%	1.58	.79
	Gift of nature	8%	1.64	.61
	Family constellations	5%	1.22	.53
	mBit multiple brain integration techniques	5%	1.51	.60
	Graves drives	3%	1.22	.49
	Deep tissue massage	2%	1.15	.45

Appendix 4

Tool/Technique	Total (N=59)	Mean	SD	Tool/Technique	Total (N=59)	Mean	SD
Tool/Technique	Total (N=59)	Mean	SD	Tool/Technique	Total (N=59)	Mean	SD
Future pacing – adapting a change to future contexts	100%	3.00	0	Sponsoring attitude	61%	2.29	.87
Six step reframing	100%	3.00	0	Double induction	59%	2.32	.88
Change personal history	98%	2.97	.26	Godiva chocolate pattern	59%	2.47	1.09
Changing a strategy	98%	2.97	.26	Spinning feelings to change strong feelings	54%	2.29	.91
Collapsing anchors	98%	2.97	.26	Last straw threshold pattern	52%	2.36	.74
Negotiating between parts	98%	2.97	.26	Generative change format	51%	2.29	1.03
Swish pattern	98%	2.97	.26	Forgiveness model	47%	2.22	.81
Trauma process using VK dissociation	98%	2.97	.26	Building belief bridges	46%	2.37	.64
Communicating with a part	97%	2.95	.29	Separating versus joining	46%	2.20	.85
Circle of excellence	97%	2.93	.37	COACH state	44%	2.05	.97
Eliciting a resource, using a reference experience	97%	2.95	.29	Symbolic modelling	42%	2.17	.81
Eliciting a resource, using a role model	97%	2.95	.29	Bateson strategy	41%	2.29	.74

Continued

Appendix 4 *continued*

Tool/Technique	Total (N=59)	Mean	SD	Tool/Technique	Total (N=59)	Mean	SD
New behaviour generator	97%	2.97	.37	I wonder how technique for generating practical new ideas	39%	1.97	1.25
Reimprinting format	97%	2.95	.29	Identity matrix	39%	1.92	1.25
VK squash	95%	2.93	.31	Wholeness process	37%	2.07	.83
Eliciting a resource, using communicating with the future self	93%	2.90	.40	Engaging the body's natural process of healing format	37%	2.05	.80
Eliciting a resource, using physiology	93%	2.88	.49	Provocative change techniques modelled from Frank Farrelly	36%	1.90	.90
Aligning perceptual positions	92%	2.88	.43	Social panorama technique	36%	2.02	.80
Metaphor for inducing change	92%	2.78	.59	Resonance pattern	34%	2.17	.67
Compulsion blow out	86%	2.81	.51	Generative collaboration	32%	1.85	1.27
Shifting the importance of criteria	86%	2.83	.46	Clean language	32%	1.68	.82
Aligning neuro-logical levels format	85%	2.73	.67	Imperative self-format	32%	1.98	1.09
Disney strategy	85%	2.76	.60	Core finding engine for identifying limiting beliefs	31%	2.12	.67
Allergy model	83%	2.69	.65	Criteria spin	30%	2.07	.78

Continued

Appendix 4 *continued*

Tool/Technique	Total (N=59)	Mean	SD	Tool/Technique	Total (N=59)	Mean	SD
Auditory tempo shift to change string feelings	80%	2.75	.54	Hero's journey format	29%	1.37	1.54
Timeline reframing format	80%	2.73	.58	Collective intelligence techniques	25%	2.00	.72
Integrating conflicting beliefs format	78%	2.75	.51	Dynamic spin release	25%	2.00	.72
Criteria for NLP techniques	76%	2.58	.91	Co-dependence format	24%	2.07	.67
Core transformation	76%	2.46	1.02	MindSonar meta profile analysis	24%	1.81	.80
Belief audit for identifying limiting beliefs	75%	2.68	.60	Inner child work	22%	1.10	1.58
Belief outframing	73%	2.66	.60	Integrating archetypal energies	19%	1.58	.79
Grief resolution, shame resolution, guilt resolution, anger/forgiveness process	73%	2.47	1.09	Gift of nature	8%	1.64	.61
Operating metaphor	73%	2.61	.70	Family constellations	5%	1.22	.53
Meta mirror format	68%	2.61	.62	mBit multiple brain integration techniques	5%	1.51	.60
Transforming negative self talk	64%	2.56	.65	Graves drives	3%	1.22	.49
Remodeling	64%	2.61	.56c	Deep tissue massage	2%	1.15	.45
LAB profile	63%	2.39	.85				

Appendix 5

Axiom		Mean	SD
Premises about experience	The map is not the territory	3.00	0
	Structure is more important than content	2.86	.47
	Life & mind are systemic processes	2.85	.48
	Experience can be reduced to sensory elements (VAKOG)	2.83	.53
	The mind is a feed forward system that predicts the future	2.46	.84
Premises about Communication and Change	The meaning of communication is the response elicited	2.98	.13
	People make the best choices available to them	2.98	.13
	There is no failure only feedback	2.97	.26
	People have the resources they need for the changes they desire	2.95	.29
	If what you are doing does not work, it is useful to do something else	2.95	.29
	All behaviour has a positive intention	2.95	.29
	If one can do it, others can learn to do it	2.95	.29
	Submodalities determine the effect of an experience	2.95	.29
	Resistance is a signal of insufficient rapport	2.86	.39
	The system with the greatest flexibility survives	2.80	.61

Appendix 6

Method		Mean	SD
Distinctions	Sensory modalities	3.00	0
	Submodalities	3.00	0
	Association versus Dissociation	3.00	0
	Elements of the structure of subjective experience	2.95	.29
	Focus outside versus focus inside	2.92	.38
	Analogue versus digital	2.92	.34
	Meta programmes	2.90	.36
	Sensory experience versus categorisation (complex equivalence)	2.85	.48
	Neuro-Logical levels	2.75	.63
	Presupposition versus explicit statement versus implication	2.68	.65
	Meta states	2.56	.73
	Core states	2.47	.82
	Separating versus joining	2.20	.85
	Graves drives	1.22	0.49
Attitude	Modelling orientation	2.93	.37
	Sponsoring attitude	2.29	.82
	Coach state	2.05	.97
Model of change	Well-formed outcomes	3.00	0
	TOTE model for goal directed change	2.97	0.26
	Utilisation	2.97	0.18
	SCORE model for choosing or designing interventions	2.68	0.86

Appendix 7 continued

Skills/Tools/techniques	Mean	SD	Previous ranking	Current ranking	Skills/Tools/techniques	Mean	SD	Previous ranking	Current ranking
As-if frame	3.00	0	1	1	Belief outframing	2.66	.60	31	29
Calibrating internal states and processes	3.00	0	2	2	Operating metaphor	2.61	.70	33	30
Eye accessing cues, detecting and working with	3.00	0	3	3	Meta mirror format	2.61	.62	34	31
Meta model questions	3.00	0	4	4	Remodeling	2.61	.56	36	32
Milton model language patterns	3.00	0	5	5	Criteria for NLP techniques	2.58	.91	28	33
Modelling	3.00	0	6	6	Transforming negative self talk	2.56	.65	35	34
Rapport (mirroring/pacing)	3.00	0	7	7	Grief resolution, shame resolution, guilt resolution, anger/forgiveness process	2.47	1.09	32	35
Strategies	3.00	0	8	8	Godiva chocolate pattern	2.47	1.09	40	36
Verbal reframing	3.00	0	9	9	Core transformation	2.46	1.02	29	37
Anchoring	2.97	.26	10	10	LAB profile	2.39	.85	37	38
Ecological check	2.97	.26	11	11	Building belief bridges	2.37	.64	45	39
Time lines, working with	2.93	.37	12	12	Last straw threshold pattern	2.36	.74	42	40
Leading, verbal and non-verbal	2.93	.31	13	13	Double induction	2.32	.88	39	41
Stacking realities	2.78	.53	14	14	Sponsoring attitude	2.29	.87	38	42
LAB profile	2.39	.85	15	15	Spinning feelings to change strong feelings	2.29	.91	41	43
Double induction	2.32	.88	16	16	Generative change format	2.29	1.03	42	44

Continued

Appendix 7 continued

Skills/Tools/techniques	Mean	SD	Previous ranking	Current ranking	Skills/Tools/techniques	Mean	SD	Previous ranking	Current ranking
Clean language	1.68	.82	17	17	Bateson strategy	2.29	.74	49	45
Mindsonar metaprofile analysis	1.81	.8	18	18	Forgiveness model	2.22	.81	44	46
Future pacing – adapting a change to future contexts	3.00	0	1	1	Separating versus joining	2.20	.85	46	47
Six step reframing	3.00	0	2	2	Symbolic modelling	2.17	.81	48	48
Change personal history	2.97	.26	3	3	Resonance pattern	2.17	.67	56	49
Changing a strategy	2.97	.26	4	4	Core finding engine for identifying limiting beliefs	2.12	.67	60	50
Collapsing anchors	2.97	.26	5	5	Wholeness process	2.07	.83	52	51
Negotiating between parts	2.97	.26	6	6	Criteria spin	2.07	.78	61	52
Swish pattern	2.97	.26	7	7	Co-dependence format	2.07	.67	65	53
Trauma process using VK dissociation	2.97	.26	8	8	COACH state	2.05	.97	47	54
New behaviour generator	2.97	.37	13	9	Engaging the body's natural process of healing format	2.05	.80	53	55
Communicating with a part	2.95	.29	9	10	Social panorama technique	2.02	.80	55	56
Eliciting a resource, using a reference experience	2.95	.29	11	11	Collective intelligence techniques	2.00	.72	63	57
Eliciting a resource, using a role model	2.95	.29	12	12	Dynamic spin release	2.00	.72	64	58
Reimprinting format	2.95	.29	14	13	Imperative self-format	1.98	1.09	59	59
Circle of excellence	2.93	.37	10	14	I wonder how technique for generating practical new ideas	1.97	1.25	50	60

Appendix 7 continued

Skills/Tools/techniques	Mean	SD	Previous ranking	Current ranking	Skills/Tools/techniques	Mean	SD	Previous ranking	Current ranking
VK squash	2.93	.31	15	15	Identity matrix	1.92	1.25	51	61
Eliciting a resource, using communicating with the future self	2.90	.40	16	16	Provocative change techniques modelled from Frank Farrelly	1.90	.90	54	62
Eliciting a resource, using physiology	2.88	.49	17	17	Generative collaboration	1.85	1.27	57	63
Aligning perceptual positions	2.88	.43	18	18	MindSonar meta profile analysis	1.81	.80	66	64
Shifting the importance of criteria	2.83	.46	21	19	Clean language	1.68	.82	58	65
Compulsion blow out	2.81	.51	20	20	Gift of nature	1.64	.61	69	66
Metaphor for inducing change	2.78	.59	19	21	Integrating archetypal energies	1.58	.79	68	67
Disney strategy	2.76	.60	23	22	mBit multiple brain integration techniques	1.51	.60	71	68
Auditory tempo shift to change strong feelings	2.75	.54	25	23	Hero's journey format	1.37	1.54	62	69
Integrating conflicting beliefs format	2.75	.51	27	24	Family constellations	1.22	.53	70	70
Aligning neuro-logical levels format	2.73	.67	22	25	Graves drives	1.22	.49	72	71
Timeline reframing format	2.73	.58	26	26	Deep tissue massage	1.15	.45	73	72
Allergy model	2.69	.65	24	27	Inner child work	1.10	1.58	67	73
Belief audit for identifying limiting beliefs	2.68	.60	30	28					

The need for neuro-linguistic programming to develop greater construct validity

Bruce Grimley

Abstract: *This paper tracks a practitioner's journey through his attempts to understand the nature of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). It draws from the author's self-study, being both a master NLP trainer and a chartered psychologist and also from the author's own PhD research, (Grimley, 2016) which explicitly asked the question 'What is NLP?' The author discusses the importance of finding an answer to this question should NLP as a field, and its application to coaching specifically, wish to validate its modality. Taking from psychometric literature the idea of construct validity, the author concludes that NLP needs to develop a more well defined and standardised definition as well as a more well defined and standardised certificated training route to NLP practitioner before it can usefully answer the question does NLP coaching work in a predictive way? The paper acknowledges and signposts the reader to the important work currently undertaken by the NLP Leadership Summit in this respect. The style of this paper is oriented towards an Action Research paradigm where 'reflection in action and reflection on that reflection in action' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000, p.2) is regarded as an appropriate research protocol to produce valid knowledge for consideration, especially when adopting an insider perspective as was recommended for research into NLP by Einspruch and Forman (1985).*

Keywords: *Neuro-linguistic programming, (NLP), construct validity, research, evidence, reflection.*

Objective

TO PROVIDE THE reader with an informed perspective based upon the grounded theory research of the author, (Grimley, 2016), concerning why NLP still attracts much criticism and is not understood by many, the reasons for this and a proposed solution.

Introduction

Having completed his undergraduate degree in Psychology in 1993 and practitioner certificate in NLP in 1995, the author decided to pursue a psychology career that focused on one to one work and the individual. He registered with the Neurolinguistic Psychotherapy and Counselling Association (NLPtCA), which is a member organisation of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), and began to offer coaching and counselling services. In the interim years he has had much time to reflect on the ethical and professional consideration that NLP as a modality of 40

years standing had done very little to develop itself by way of research and publication in relevant academic journals (Grimley, 2017; Sturt et al., 2012; Tosey & Mathison, 2009; Wake et al., 2013; Witkowski, 2011).

In this paper the author reflects on 23 years of NLP practice making reference to his Ph.D research which was the culmination of living with such professional tension. There is not enough space in this paper to provide details of that research and for those who would like to understand the author's reflections more fully 'What is NLP?' (Grimley, 2016) is published in the *International Coaching Psychology Review*, and provides a more comprehensive context. 15 NLP subject matter experts and 19 NLP informed professionals were interviewed and asked the question 'What is NLP?'. Their answers were transcribed, coded and eight interacting themes emerged from this process.

NLP has not in the past been interested in conducting research, with what little being done peaking in the 1980s (Witkowski, 2011). One participant in the author's PhD research put it this way;

Yes well what you are talking about is interest and funding. I think NLP has not been interested in that because we see it working every day in people's lives and our purpose has been to do business instead of doing research, so there's not been that much interest in it and somebody has to collaborate. (Participant 7, Grimley, 2016).

Even though there have been attempts to do this research on a broad front in Europe where NLP has been applied to psychotherapy (EANLPt, 2018), generally speaking when break out groups begin to go down this road they choose to drop the letters NLP and brand themselves differently to make headway. Examples would be Clean Language, Mental Space Psychology, The Lightning Process, Reconsolidation of Traumatic memories, Research and Recognition Project, and Neuro Semantics (Grimley, 2016). Alongside the domain of psychotherapy, there has been a brief foray into randomised controlled studies to assess the effectiveness of specific NLP patterns in the context of education (Churches & Allan, 2013).

What is NLP?

Tosey and Mathison (2009) are the first to attempt a comprehensive academic review of what NLP is. They describe NLP according to six faces (Figure 1). Tosey and Mathison (2009) found NLP is still based on theory, despite being very practically oriented (the three descriptors above the waterline in Figure 1), however that theory is poorly articulated. They found also that NLP lacks a research ethos and a thorough evidence base, leaving it over reliant on claims that it works and therefore operating as a self-sealing belief system. Often it is the three faces above the waterline that attract the attention the authors argue. They further argue the more 'substantial' aspects of NLP are below

the waterline, being communication in action, methodology and also epistemology. However Grimley (2016) found that even under the waterline, the more 'substantial' aspects of NLP still needed organising further before anything approaching construct validity can be obtained.

To enquire whether NLP works before developing reference points concerning what NLP is, is to put the cart before the horse. Sturt (2012) makes a similar point after a Freedom of Information request revealed that the NHS in the UK spent over £800,000 on NLP from 2006–9, and a further estimated £105,000 on training staff. She says; 'the very fact that there is no agreed definition of NLP indicates how little evidence we have of its benefits.' (Sturt et al., 2012; Sturt, 2012b).

Construct validity is important because it concerns the nature of something. Bartram and Lindley (1994) tell us validity is dependent on reliability. When NLP practitioners have reliability and in their experience they see what they do works on a regular basis, (test-retest reliability), it is then incumbent upon them to tell the world what it is that regularly works so others can test what they do, validate their claims and learn from that process. The confusion this brings about when NLP practitioners cannot do this is nicely illustrated by participant 9 in the author's research,

I went to a day thing only a month ago with psychotherapists from all sorts of schools and I sit and I listen and you are given a case study and they say what they are going to do and after all this time I still go; 'none of you are doing anything remotely like NLP.' You know it is really hard to put your finger on exactly what that is, that when you see another practitioner working (therapists I'm talking about), it is so obvious they are not doing NLP, so what is it that we do? (Participant 9, Grimley 2015)

In attempting to define NLP from an insider's perspective using a grounded theory methodology, Grimley (2016) found NLP naturally was divided into eight interacting themes These were:



Figure 1: The Six Faces of NLP after Tosey and Mathison (2009, pp.13–24).
Photo: © istock. 2018.

- NLP is commercially motivated.
- NLP is saturated in anecdotal evidence.
- NLP is lacking in published empirical evidence.
- NLP has historical and current disagreement.
- NLP wants to be ‘accepted’, but is disappointed with the continual pattern of not being accepted by ‘mainstream’.
- NLP has a lack of standardised definition, curriculum and professional practice code.
- Development of break out groups, dissatisfied with the culture of disagreement

within NLP sometimes using a different brand.

- All NLP practice is generally associated with worst practice.

One of the participants in the author’s research made the point this was a good description of the current state of NLP but did not constitute a theory, so it was necessary to clarify what ‘theory’ meant in this context:

‘A theory for the purpose of this research was regarded as a coherent group of tested general propositions, commonly regarded as correct, that can be used as principles of explanation and prediction for a class of phenomena. From

this research the 8 ‘propositions’ or categories which emerged from the substantive and theoretical coding are regarded as both interacting and stable, thus the theory is not only explanatory and descriptive but it is also predictive of NLP practice in the future. The propositions are regarded as tested in the sense that not only did they emerge from the source data but were fed back to those who provided the data for both clarification and amendment before saturation of the data was reached.’ Grimley (2016, p.58).

The lack of coherence in defining NLP from a theoretical perspective can be appreciated by listing just 14 of many attempts, with the

Table 1: 14 descriptions of NLP within the context of definition.

1	'Defies easy description' (Overdurf Et Silverton, 1998, p.viii).
2	'The unexpected by-product of the collaboration of John Grinder and Richard Bandler to formalise impactful patterns of communication' (Dilts et al. 1980, p.ii).
3	'In some respects it is simple. An internationally prominent practice in business, management development and professional education, a method used by facilitators of various kinds – coaches, trainers and consultants – who claim to offer some innovative and highly effective approaches to human development... in other respects NLP resembles more of a mystery story.' (Tosey Et Mathison, 2009, p.3).
4	'An explicit and powerful model of human experience and communication' (Andreas 1979, p.i).
5	'The study of the structure of subjectivity' (Dilts et al. 1980, p.ii).
6	'A behavioural model that consists of a series of tools and techniques modelled on performance excellence' (Wake, 2010, p.7).
7	'A model from cognitive psychology' (James Et Woodsmall, 1988, p.3).
8	'The art and science of personal excellence' (Alder Et Heather, 1998, p.xii).
9	'An extension of linguistics, neurology or psychology' (Dilts et al., 1980, p.i).
10	'The Frankenstein Grandchild of Post Ericksonian Hypnosis' (Brown, 2007, p.128)
11	'It is not a set of techniques it is an attitude.' (Bandler, 1985, p.155).
12	'Whatever works' (Attributed to Robert Dilts. Evans, 2018).
13	'A user oriented metaphor designed to generate behavioural options quickly and effectively' (Dilts et al., 1980, p.12).
14	'A modelling technology whose specific subject matter is the set of differences that makes the difference between the performance of geniuses and that of average performers in the same field or activity' (Bostic St. Clair Et Grinder, 2001, p.50).

below excerpts all contextualised within discussions on the definition of NLP, see Table 1 below.

Even without a unified definition, NLP has defied expectation and rather than fall into a state of decline as predicted by some academics (Elich et al., 1985), it has retained its popularity. In light of the eight rather negative descriptors found above, the author wanted to understand why NLP's continued popularity existed in the light of his research. Reflection on his own NLP journey of over 20 years and further questioning of participants generated an answer in the form of an acronym; PEAS which stood for;

- P.** **P**rocess oriented, **P**ragmatic, **P**ositive, **P**layful, **P**henomenological, eliciting **P**atterns, and **P**racticing within the **P**resuppositions of NLP.
- E.** **E**clectic, **E**xperimental, **E**xperiential, with a focus on obtaining **E**legance/**E**cology in all practitioners do.
- A.** Focused on **A**pplication rather than theorising, however evidence for the effectiveness of such application is mainly **A**ncedotal.
- S.** **S**ystemic in orientation with a strong emphasis on **S**ales in the market place for ideas and utility. A focus on **S**tructure rather than content.

These themes the author found are highly favoured by customers in the market place for self-development and coaching. NLP in taking an ideographic and anti-positivist approach that can be all things to all people has enjoyed great popularity with one participant pointing this out as one of the signature strengths of NLP:

While the nature of NLP has led to the fragmentation and issues that the field currently has, I believe it may have also been directly responsible for NLP being a huge and successful field. I say this to mean that NLP was always commercial, eschewed science (while borrowing eclectically and heavily from it) and didn't try to self-regulate. This meant it has really become quite a big field over the last 40 years. There aren't many

other personal development modalities that have quite so many trainers, so many practitioners and made such a huge impact across so many domains. You find NLP now being used in or accepted by HR, Leadership, Coaching, Psychotherapy, Training, Education, Negotiation, etc., etc. Indeed, it is difficult to identify any other personal development modality that is as big or as extant. So while the commercialisation, etc. of NLP has been bad from one perspective it has helped the promulgation of NLP, its take up by trainers (looking to make a buck doing something they've become infatuated in) and its spread around the world. (Participant 12. Personal communication, 15 June, 2015).

The need to assess NLP holistically

Talking about the ethical aspect of NLP coaching, Grant (2001) makes an assessment of Anthony Robbins and his development of NLP called Neuro-Associative Conditioning (NAC), saying that

The exaggerated claims made by Robbins as to the efficacy of NAC may well be harmful to individuals experiencing strong dysphoric states, and could increase their sense of failure when the promised results do not eventuate. Indeed, it could well be argued that Robbins' marketing of NAC comes close to breaking the Code of Ethics of the Australian Psychological Society (1997) (Grant, 2001, p.236.)

Sixteen years later Robbins owns 33 companies and expects to generate \$6 billion in annual revenues this year says, Mazarakis and Feloni (2017). Being commercially successful is one of the drivers for NLP practitioners (Grimley, 2016) and when assessing NLP practice it is important one understands NLP in the wider context of the eight themes uncovered in the author's research. Robbins' separation from NLP to trade under the NAC brand illustrates the relevance of commercial orientation in defining the field of NLP and is archived for us by Hall, (2010);

...Another Bandler lawsuit occurred sometime later (1988 or 1989) against Tony Robbins.

That one was against Robbins because he was not certifying people as NLP Practitioners or Master Practitioners through The Society of NLP. Settled in 1990 out of court with Tony promising to 'certify people through the Society and pay his \$200 for each one certified in NLP,' he promptly stopped training 'NLP' as such and invented a new name, NAC – Neural Associative Conditioning. (Hall, 2010).

Often academics in attempting to characterise NLP in accordance with positivist criteria struggle to appreciate the value of anecdotal evidence and the evidence of individual case studies (Briner, 2016). This is because they don't fundamentally understand NLP as an open system which continually reinvents itself according to what is popular and what NLP practitioners find to be useful and effective in psychology and related disciplines at the time.

Writing in 1985 when NLP was in its heyday, academics concluded their brief report thus:

It is as if NLP has achieved something akin to cult status when it may be nothing more than another psychological fad that will go its merry way until it is replaced by the next fad. Elich, Thompson & Miller, 1985, p.625)

During this same period Sharpley (1984, 1987) and Heap, (1988, 1988b, 1989) were conducting reviews of research in an attempt to understand the evidence for eye accessing cues (EAC) and Preferred Representational systems, but again not in the context of other aspects of NLP which emerged from the author's research. Wake et al., (2013) also critique the reductionist nature of this research pointing out it missed the point and the studies were not reflective of the tenets and practices of NLP. Such a reductionist research orientation also was the case with the research of Wiseman et al. (2012) when his team researched the straw man argument that one can tell through eye accessing cues whether or not somebody else is lying or not.

Entropy of NLP knowledge

When one looks at the beginning of NLP we see a talented man who had a natural proclivity for imitation, Richard Bandler. In researching for the book *Eye Witness to Therapy* (Perls, 1973), Dr Robert Spitzer, Bandler's employer, said Bandler used to come away from the headphones and films sounding and acting just like Fritz Perls, to such an extent that Spitzer found himself calling Bandler 'Fritz' on several occasions (Spitzer, 1992, p.2). As a result of adopting the Perl's persona Bandler found along with Frank Pucelik at Santa Cruz University, they were good at running Gestalt workshops, but did not know how they were achieving the successful outcomes. Subsequently Bandler contacted an Associate Professor at Santa Cruz University who specialised in language. Grinder agreed to look at the language they used through his specialised filters and noticed the similarity between the language patterns of Bandler and Pucelik and those elicited through Transformational Grammar (TG). (Grinder & Elgin, 1973; Bostic St. Clair & Grinder, 2001).

The NLP **model** that was the outcome of the Perls modelling project, along with further similar modeling of Virginia Satir, was the Meta Model and resulted in the first two NLP books; *The Structure of Magic Volumes 1 and 2* (Bandler & Grinder, 1975; Grinder & Bandler, 1976). Even though the *Structure of Magic* obtained favourable words from Gregory Bateson, the mentor to NLP in the early days, the subsequent volumes which represented the Milton Model did not attract such favour from him. After suggesting that they model Milton Erickson, Bateson's response to *Patterns volumes 1 and 2* (Bandler & Grinder, 1975b; Grinder et al., 1977) was 'shoddy epistemology' (Bostic St. Clair & Grinder, 2001, p.117). It may have been the distraction of great demand for workshops and associated revenue towards the end of the 1970s that resulted in this decline concerning reflection and theoretical development, however what seems apparent is entropy continues to this day with Tosey and Mathison (2009) saying

the knowledge base is somewhat anachronistic being rooted in the 1970s and currently being recycled rather than extended. The possible exception to this rule is the work of those who have extended NLP in certain areas yet dropped the name, with a few examples being given above.

When we look at learning cycle theory (Kolb, 1976), it is possible the Achilles heel of NLP is it has focused almost exclusively on concrete experience and active experimentation and excluded the development of reflective observation and of theoretical/conceptual understanding. When Kolb tells us; 'Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb 1984, p.38), NLP practitioners have focused on the experience aspect and the effective transformation of that experience in certain contexts to the exclusion of theory building. This is aptly emphasised by the co-founders of NLP when they say,

Neuro-linguistic programming is the discipline whose domain is the structure of subjective experience. It makes no commitment to theory, but rather has the status of a model – a set of procedures whose usefulness not truthfulness is to be the measure of its worth (Dilts et al., 1980, Foreword, Paragraph 2).

TG the early theoretical base for NLP

For Grinder and DeLozier there was a recognition of the dangers of a model based too much on language and syntax in that it removed perceptual choices leading to what they called a Jackdaw epistemological stance of only being able to appreciate what surrounds us from one perspective (Grinder & DeLozier, 1987, p.xix). In this sense the critique of Jackendoff was anticipated when he pointed out the syntactocentric architecture

of TG is a mistake and talks of both semantics and phonology as being generative as well as syntax (Jackendoff, 2002, p.107).

Indeed in that TG already existed and the Meta model and Milton model were mapped from that as well as the exemplars is accepted (Bostic St. Clair & Grinder, 2001). However, we are told the non-verbal patterning which had been modelled had no comparable initial stable code to utilise. These NLP design variables; (patterning of essential variables uncovered and partially coded by Bandler and Grinder), were arrived at inductively and include rapport, manipulation of state, multiple perceptual positions, certain anchoring formats and framing. In NLP when we begin to include these NLP design variables we move considerably away from the epistemology of TG and its syntactocentric assumptions. Bostic St. Clair and Grinder (2001), attempt to clarify for us what each and every NLP pattern boils down to, using the language of F1 to refer to initial uptake of information and transformation of data through our sensory systems and F2 to refer to the interaction of such transformed data with our linguistic representational system:

1. The Meta Model, designed to verbally challenge the mapping between first access to the outside world through our senses (F1), and our linguistically mediated mental maps (F2).
2. Operations defined over representational systems and their sub-modalities, for example the Swish technique.
3. Reframing patterns, where representations are placed in a different cognitive structure.
4. Anchoring, where undifferentiated ¹groupings of representations are

¹ '...they are not undifferentiated, on the contrary, they are rather precisely differentiated (far more so that a linguistic label would offer), but rather are unnamed, unlabelled, managed by the non-dominant hemisphere without (in fact, ideally better without) any left hemisphere intrusions – like labelling. This is, of course, yet another example of the essential role and power of both hemispheric functions and the crucial importance of calibration as the mother of all skills sets in the application of NLP'. Grinder, personal communication, 9 August, 2014).

brought together for purposes of integration.

5. The Milton Model, where representations at F1 (first access through our senses to the world) are shifted by using F2 (linguistically mediated maps) patterning without the need to map those representations into the client's conscious understanding. (Bostic St. Clair & Grinder, 2001, pp.198–199).

Ontology, epistemology and frustration

When we begin to factor in these other NLP design variables subsequent to the Meta Model the author's research suggested that NLP indeed may have moved its practitioners away from a jackdaw epistemology, however, they have replaced it with another ornithological metaphor, that of a magpie epistemology:

Magpies, as we all know, like shiny things which often makes them symbols of superficiality. As Handler and Gable wrote in their wonderful book The New History in an Old Museum about Colonial Williamsburg, 'a magpie is a bird that weaves odd trinkets – tinfoil, gum wrappers, coloured yarn – into its nest. (Rizzo, 2013, Para 4).

Derks (2000) seems frustrated when he notes number 4 from above, 'anchoring', has been borrowed from Behaviourist Psychology and integrated into the NLP toolkit, and in the way a magpie would integrate, without any consideration to ecology, ontology, epistemology or methodology

Before 'NLP' existed, people were confronted with the Meta Model, the 4Tuple, the Milton Model and the Satir categories. But after putting these inside the magical box, it was the box that drew all the attention. Now people started to argue about the box, its color, its size, how it compared to other boxes and whether it was really new and whether it was ethical. For instance, instead of asking if the use of anchors is supported by scientific research, people wonder if 'NLP' is scientifically sound. But

anchors are just another name for classical conditioning, something based on the Pavlovian paradigm (Derks, 2000).

Indeed as Rizzo (2013) points out the trouble with magpie epistemology, which she contrasts with mole epistemology, is that magpies need to be trained to weave their shiny objects into a coherent whole and not only see, but present to the public, the interconnected and nuanced coherence.

Concerning NLP epistemology and construct validity, and how a singular NLP technique is not viewed as a coherent part of a larger interconnected whole, a similar voice has been heard from an academic reviewer who was confused at the mention of NLP when a visualisation technique was tested, known within NLP circles as The Phobia Cure;

The attempt in this manuscript to apply a randomised control trial design is to be applauded. However, the case for why 'NLP' should warrant our attention after 40 years of failing to produce any evidence is not established. As such, I would strip away any reference to 'NLP' and focus purely on calling the intervention what it actually is – a visualisation technique. (Arroll & Henwood, 2017, p.25).

Content validity and the NLP leadership summit

That the construct of NLP is not really clear seems to be supported by the co-founder, John Grinder, who after describing what NLP is, tells us that for 99 per cent of people in the world NLP has nothing to do with what he had just described as NLP (Inspirative, 2008b, 3:50). However maybe the NLP world can agree on what does go inside the box, even if the arms and legs, and head and chest might resemble what Brown refers to as 'Frankenstein's Grandchild' (Brown, 2007, p.128). Content validity is related to construct validity (Bartram & Lindley, 1994) and by improving this we can begin to build a more coherent construct.

One of the participants in the author's research put it this way in answer to the question 'What is NLP?'

So, that can all be thrown into this list, because it's that we, as NLPers agree, yes, yes, and yes and maybe it will have 100 items. It can be put somewhere, like the safe of the International Association of NLP in Switzerland, where organisations say, 'Yes, that's what we agree on' (Participant 14., Grimley, 2015).

This indeed is precisely an ongoing project for a group within the NLP Leadership Summit (2018), a group of experienced NLP practitioners founded in 2012 who associate with the intention of learning from each other and developing NLP practice around the world. The group is headed by Jaap Hollander and Lucas Derks and was created after recognising the difficulty and many impasses defining NLP produces. They came up with the idea of a vote of what NLP is and what it is not in an attempt to solve the quality problem due to a lack of standardisation within NLP;

When consistency is lacking, NLP is weakened as a brand. Brands of soap, for instance, are cautious to always use the same formula. If different soap factories would use different ingredients and package them in the same wrapper, the public would no longer buy that brand of soap. They would never know what they would find inside the wrapper. (Hollander et al., 2016, p.31).

So in 2016, over 40 years after those first two NLP volumes describing the modeling of Perls and Satir, when being confronted with the question 'What NLP is and what it is not?' Hollander et al. (2016, p.29) agreed it is still 'Not a simple discussion'. However it could be. As Hollander et al. (2016) point out in the Netherlands a three wheeled car is in fact legally a motor cycle. The authors argue this confusing state of affairs is remedied by asking 100 car engineers who have been practicing for 15 years

whether a three-wheeled vehicle with an engine is a car or a motorcycle they will say it is a car, but clever manufacturers have created three wheeled cars to allow people with no car license to legally drive them. Thus this initially confusing state of affairs is easily remedied by having access to expert knowledge that can agree and answer the question is a three-wheeled vehicle a car or a motorcycle? The sub-title of Hollander et al. (2016) is; 'Using Expert Validation to Define the Boundaries of NLP' and is a useful project that can hopefully harness the expert knowledge of the NLP Leadership Summit in the same way as 100 car engineers, to at least have a unified understanding as to what the **content** of a standardised NLP curriculum could look like.

In helping the NLP community understand what happened at the 2018 NLP Leadership Summit, Hall (2018) points to some of the problems NLP still needs to address: Misuse of NLP, variation in Standards; no international body, lack of clarity about what NLP is and what 'Practitioner' means, lack of supervision, lack of research, little assessment of competence (Hall, 2018, p.6).

At the same 2018 Summit Turner provided her understanding, referring to the voting of what NLP is and what it is not according to the 'elders'; (NLP practitioners with over 20 years of experience):

The items listed by the elders to answer the question 'What is NLP' do reflect what trainers are familiar with, and possibly choose to teach or ignore. Listening to exchanges and comments, I was reminded how over the years training standards have evolved to sequence the history of NLP developments. Eye-movements, predicates, the meta-model and so on are taught at first often making it difficult for participants to apprehend NLP overall as a coherent system. The Master Practitioner level standards usually take the same tack, ending curiously enough with some notions of modelling – hopefully providing a new base from which the newly certified Master-Practitioner will continue learning and integrating although this

does not always seem to be the case. (Turner, 2018 p.151).

For the author, in Turner’s account it is the words ‘possibly’, ‘difficult to apprehend NLP overall as a coherent system’, ‘curiously enough’, ‘some notions’, ‘hopefully’, ‘does not always seem to be the case’, which create the NLP zeitgeist as something rather lovely, but also something incredibly vague, intangible and incomprehensible to many, a bit like the magpie’s nest. The ‘notion’ of modelling which Turner talks of can be appreciated as just that when we realise Burgess (2014) identified eleven different types of NLP modelling within three categories (see Figure 2); intuitive, metaphoric and cognitive modelling (Burgess, 2014). With Grinder being insistent on 10 types of modelling which Burgess refers to in her latest research of 15 years as have nothing to do with NLP, then NLP seems to be at odds with itself and is not elegant, congruent or coherent. The essence of what is under investigation (ontology), how we know it is real and how we test it for ‘reality’ (epistemology) and how

we investigate and obtain this knowledge (methodology) not only is quite different for each person in the NLP world, but also not thoroughly discussed, evidenced and shared in the appropriate academic journals for the contexts within which such NLP patterns operate.

Pure NLP as a failed ideal

Grinder’s insistence that 99 per cent of practitioners are not doing NLP, but rather teaching the application of NLP patterns is a bit like Ellis claiming the psychologists who had taken over his institute and removed him from the board of directors were moving REBT away from what he intended in the 1960s and 1970s. (Carey & Hurley, 2005).

Participant 5 (Grimley, 2015), talks of NLP as a set of patterns which can be generalised to different contexts, she says:

The whole idea of training people as practitioners, it’s still operating inside an old frame where people think of NLP as a therapy or now may be as a form of coaching and so if you think about it that way you are turn-



Figure 2: The Methodologies Framework. After Burgess, (2014, p.94).

ing out NLP practitioners with the skill to coach others, that's all fine but that's just one area of application of NLP so if you are to teach NLP, what are the fundamental patterns that would be appropriate to teach somebody? (my emphasis). I don't know if you could even call them a practitioner however there are some fundamental patterns that are a part of the body of NLP and when people incorporate those pattern they can generalise those patterns to a context whether it be therapeutic, educational, personal relationship, self-management, intra personal creating a distinction between conscious and unconscious mind and how they live in the world (Participant 5, Grimley, 2015).

The patterns she alludes to would probably fall into a category of patterns subsumed by the five NLP patterns mentioned above (Bostic St. Clair & Grinder, 2001). However even if such basic NLP patterns could be generalised to a context and taught, Bostic St. Clair and Grinder (2001) and Burgess (2014), are quite adamant that the application of such patterning could and indeed should be tested. This is where NLP also really falls down, it has just not done this research in the 40 years it has been in existence and it is this failure that possibly cause Tosey and Mathison (2009, p.173) to equate NLP to a social movement fulfilling the equivalent needs of a pseudo-religion. The experiential and experimental nature of many NLP group trainings certainly may be enough to scare many into tarring the whole enterprise with a cultic brush. The resolution in the minds of Tosey and Mathison (2009) is that NLP is still a system of belief in which Guru like figures hold out the promise of changing lives possibly expecting allegiance to their authority (Op. cit., p.174). Elsewhere NLP is likened to Dianetics which also 'worked' (Op. cit., p.126) and popular self-help movements like Norman Vincent Peals 'The Power of Positive Thinking' (1952) and Dale Carnegie's 'How to win friends and influence people' (1953) (Op. cit., p.39).

To his credit, Grinder is quite explicit about how to do NLP, with number 5 below being eminently falsifiable (Popper, 1959):

1. Identification of an appropriate model/exemplar.
2. Adopt a 'know nothing' state and suspend all of your cognitive filters. Attend only to sensory patterns. This is known as unconscious uptake.
3. Rehearsal of the assimilated pattern until one can match the performance of the exemplar within the same time frame and context and produce the same results. Until this can be done behaviourally one continues with stage 2 and loops back to stage 3 until this can be achieved.
4. Code the assimilated pattern and the pattern within the exemplar. Within NLP this is still regarded as an art. According to Grinder there is no known useful and explicit strategy for digitalizing analogue processes (Bostic St. Clair & Grinder, 2001, p.146).
5. Test the coded pattern by training interested learners in it. Do they achieve the same mastery as measured by behavioural outcomes within the same time frame and context as the exemplar?

However despite such explication of what NLP is, it is the case that in over 40 years NLP has not produced one pattern which has been tested and shown to demonstrate significant predictive validity within a context of application that accords with best research practice with Wake et al. (2013, p.1) reminding us; 'There are no 'A' studies yet completed for NLP techniques'

Conclusion

Both the content and the construct of NLP are not yet sufficiently well-defined and agreed upon by experts in the field. This lack of agreement extends to who is regarded as legitimately qualified to practice NLP as there is no current standardised curriculum at NLP practitioner level or NLP Master practitioner level. This means asking the

question does NLP work is meaningless. The NLP Leadership Summit was created in 2012 because it recognised that professionals within the NLP community disagreed about many things and it wanted rather to emphasise the areas of agreement (Hall, 2012). Disagreement amongst trainers and practitioners of NLP was one characteristic identifier of NLP in the research of Grimley (2016). It is sincerely hoped that the continuance of the NLP Leadership Summit can productively address the other seven identifiers by focusing on what the author found to be positive in NLP as represented in the acronym PEAS. Until that time arrives the author argues there is not sufficient understanding of the construct of NLP to meaningfully ask the

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A personal perspective on neuro-linguistic programming: Reflecting on the tension between personal experience and evidence-based practice

Anthony M. Grant

Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) has been a significant presence in the business training and personal development fields since at least the early 1980s. NLP as a change methodology has attracted significant controversy over the years with claims and counter claims as to its effectiveness and validity. Although there is little to no empirical support for the central tenants of NLP, many coaches, psychologists and reputable agents of change who are otherwise committed to an evidence-based approach to their practice, utilise and engage with NLP methodologies. Not surprisingly, such practitioners often experience dissonance, tension and confusion about NLP. In this paper I reflect on the tension between my personal experience of NLP and my own commitment to an evidence-based approach to coaching. My assumption here is that the tension and ambivalence that I have personally experienced in relation to NLP is not singularly mine and that others have experienced similar feelings. I conclude that, coupled with the lack of empirical evidence for many core NLP constructs, the multiple misrepresentations made by many in the NLP industry over a significant period of time have effectively ruined the NLP brand. The demise of NLP is a salutary lesson for all who are engaged in the personal or professional development genre. This serves to remind us to ensure that our coaching methodologies and the broader coaching industry remain firmly grounded in evidence-based approaches, that we adhere to professional ethical standards and through practicing critical thinking and open-mindedness we remain forever vigilant against the onset of 'guruism'.

Keywords: *Neuro-linguistic programming, evidence-based coaching, coaching psychology, evidence-based practice.*

NEURO-LINGUISTIC programming. The very phrase 'Neuro-linguistic programming' (NLP) may well have elicited more passionate negative and/or positive knee-jerk reactions than any other phrase in the psychological domain. Indeed the history of NLP is replete with passionate controversies, vigorous claims and counter-claims about everything from its effectiveness to its actual definition (Biswal & Prusty, 2011; Suciu, 2017). This is in addition to the fervent debates about the partisan nature of the practitioner community and the relative status of various NLP training schools, and the role and character traits of

NLP founders and 'thought leaders' (Tosey & Mathison, 2007). Without a doubt, this is a convoluted, complex and contested area (for an informed discussion on these issues see Tosey & Mathison, 2009a).

Conceived in the US during the early 1970s, NLP has held a significant presence in the business training and personal development fields since at least the early 1980s. NLP as a change methodology has been heavily marketed in a wide range of areas including change management (Potter, 2018), leadership development (Joey & Yazdanifard, 2015) and personal development issues ranging from 'quit smoking

in 10 minutes' (Beardsell, 2018), to achieving one's wildest dreams (Robbins, 1991), to its use in organisational and personal/life coaching (Hall & Duval, 2005). In 2007 Tosey and Mathison (2007) estimated that 50,000 participants have attended NLP practitioner training courses in the UK in the past 25 years. Presumably, now that figure is considerably higher.

NLP: Origins

Richard Bandler and John Grinder, the founders of NLP, aimed to develop a methodology that would allow them to understand how highly effective people developed their expertise and achieved their results. Originally Bandler and Grinder's interest was in therapeutic domains (Bandler & Grinder, 1975), but this notion of 'modelling' expert therapists (e.g. Virginia Satir, Milton Erickson and Fritz Perls) subsequently focused on a range of other areas of professional expertise including sports, sales and marketing and weight loss, amongst many others.

Bandler and Grinder (1975) argued that experts have specific personalised patterns of behaviour and thinking which make them highly effective, and that others could learn to achieve similar results by modelling such thoughts and behaviour patterns. This notion of modelling is clearly not an original concept (Bandura, 1977). However, it is claimed that NLP's unique contribution to the human change genre is its micro-analysis of language, cognition and behaviour, its delineation of the role of sub-modalities (visual, auditory and kinesthetic) in human experience (O'Connor & Seymour, 1990), and a range of NLP-specific techniques and patterns.

Key conceptual and theoretical assumptions of NLP

Harris (1998) details a number of the key conceptual, philosophical and theoretical assumptions which underpin NLP and related modalities such as Neuro-semantic (Hall, 1995) and Neuro-associative Conditioning (Robbins, 1991). As Grant (2001)

notes, these philosophical and theoretical assumptions include:

1. *Experience has a structure*; there are patterns in the way individuals organise their experiences. If these patterns are changed, experience changes.
2. *The map is not the territory*; individuals' perceptions are a subjective account of reality, we see the world through selective 'filters'.
3. *The mind and body are one system*; there is a reciprocal relationship between mental and physical states.
4. *People work perfectly*; it is more useful to think of people as being effective at getting particular results (even if these may not be the 'best' outcomes) rather than thinking of them as being faulty or dysfunctional.
5. *Individuals have all the resources that they need*; people have a vast reservoir of abilities and talents which are generally untapped.
6. *There is no failure, only feedback*; 'failure' to achieve a set goal is better taken as useful information to help future endeavours, rather than evidence that one is incapable or incompetent.
7. *If what you're doing is not working, try something else*; to be effective one must be flexible and adaptive.

The above theoretical assumptions, which form much of the conceptual grounding for NLP, are in themselves hardly controversial. Indeed, the notion that our lived experience is structured can be found in the works of Aristotle. The idea that individuals' perceptions are a subjective rather than objective account of reality can be found in Plato's analogy of the Cave (see e.g. Taylor & Kraut, 1997), in the phenomenological work of Bishop George Berkeley (see e.g. Dicker, 2011), in the work of cognitive psychologists such as Beck (1975) and Ellis (1962), and latterly in the contemporary constructionists (e.g. Gergen, 2015; White, 1991). The assumptions that humans are essentially sound and healthy, rather than intrinsically

'broken' or 'dysfunctional' draws on a range of humanistic traditions (e.g. Allport, 1955; Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961). Given that the theoretical and conceptual foundations of NLP are essentially non-problematic, the question now arises as to why NLP has attracted so much controversy over the years.

Many commentators have addressed this question – typically through critical analysis of core NLP techniques and literature reviews. To those familiar with the academic and practitioner NLP literature, such publications seem to represent a table-tennis match, in which the players keep serving and returning the metaphorical ball back and forth, back and forth. There are a number of different themes to these 'table-tennis matches'. For example, one side might argue that NLP is not evidence-based (i.e. there is little peer-reviewed evidence to show that NLP actually works). The other side might then respond that practitioners know that it works because they have personally witnessed significant change in NLP clients. The other side then responds in a predictable fashion; back and forth; back and forth; back and forth. Yawn.

The aims of this paper

in this paper, rather than engaging in more metaphorical table tennis, I thought this would be good opportunity to explore, from a personal perspective, the tension and ambivalence that I have personally experienced in relation to NLP. My assumption here is that (although the experiences that I recount are of course uniquely individual) my personal tension and confusion about NLP is not singularly mine; rather I assume that many psychologists, coaches, and coaching psychologists have felt the same confusion about what to think or feel about NLP.

In order to reflect on the tension between my personal experience of NLP and my own commitment to an evidence-based approach to coaching, I firstly recall and write about my personal experience of NLP, reflecting on the times when I have been an NLP client. I will then discuss my experiences of being trained and certified in NLP (I hold two NLP certifications). In the second section I will present a very brief overview of some core NLP techniques and models, and briefly discuss the evidence for and against the effectiveness of core NLP techniques. I will then reflect on what I have found useful about NLP in my own coaching practice. Finally, I discuss how the tension and dissonance that I experience in relation to NLP may be resolved.

The key aim of this paper is to constructively reflect on NLP and possibly resolve some of the tensions between my personal NLP experiences and my commitment to evidence-based coaching practice. I should emphasise that this is a personal reflection article rather than a technical or academically-analytical paper.

My personal experience of NLP as a client and trainee

My first personal experience of NLP was, as for many people, through the personal development genre. I was introduced to NLP in 1984 by a personal friend, 'Bill', who was completing an NLP training programme in the UK. Each week following his own train-the-trainer training he would teach a small group of friends the NLP models and techniques he had learnt himself. We learnt about core NLP models including establishing rapport – matching and pacing; modelling; representational systems; eye accessing cues, the Meta Model and the Milton Model¹,

¹ The Meta Model was developed by observing Virginia Satir's use of language. Akin to the Socratic questioning techniques found in cognitive psychology, the use of the Meta Model allows practitioners to identify specific cognitive distortions, such as over-generalisations and to recognise and challenge client's assumptions about what 'should' or 'must' occur. The Milton Model is the converse of the Meta Model in that it provides a framework for using series of abstract ambiguous language patterns and can be used to induce hypnotic states. Both are core NLP models.

anchors, parts integration and the like – all of which was intriguing, fascinating and full of promise. We then enthusiastically tried to apply these to ourselves and in our lives.

Initial informal training and practice

I recall learning the NLP approaches to establishing rapport, matching and pacing. Bill taught us that if we could match someone else they would respond positively. The principle sounded logical; people tend to like people who are similar to themselves and the notion of rapport or matching on physical, linguistic and emotions levels seemed to work enough in everyday conversation as we tried it out. Bill also suggested that if we wanted to get quick service at the bar in a pub we should hold (for example) a five pound note in our hand and tap our hand on the bar at the same rate as the bartender was moving. This he assured us would establish unconscious rapport with the bartender and that we would then get served quicker. I tried this technique many, many times, trying my hardest to follow Bill's directions. On a few occasions this seemed to work – and I would get served quicker than others.

However, mostly it did not seem to work. On those occasions I assumed that I had not performed the NLP technique correctly and, cursing myself, I would revolve to master this skill. This was my introduction to what I later come to know as 'confirmation bias' – the tendency to search for and interpret information in a way that confirms one's pre-existing beliefs or hypotheses. Strangely enough, confirmation biases have been shown to maintain or strengthen beliefs even in the face of contrary evidence (Nickerson, 1998). In my case, because it felt so 'right' when I was served quicker, I interpreted this as confirmation of the validity of the technique and when it didn't work, I interpreted this as a clear example of my incompetence. Needless to say I have subsequently witnessed the same bias frequently in others during discussions with NLP proponents about the validation and effectiveness of specific NLP techniques.

My personal experience as a client

My first personal experience of NLP as a client was in 1989–1990. Like many others, I reached a point in my personal developmental journey where it became important to me to explore family of origin issues. I enrolled in an NLP-based 'Inner Child' programme. Having had some prior exposure to basic NLP methodologies I was able to identify the NLP components of the six or seven week-long programme. As with many such programmes, it was a mix of family-of-origin therapeutic modalities including the use of genograms to explore the quality of relationships and behavioural patterns across generations, and the identification of various 'roles' within the family system (Bradshaw, 1990).

We practiced numerous future-oriented visualisation processes, using NLP future pacing, the swish pattern, and parts integration processes amongst others. I particularly recall, following an in-depth NLP hypnosis induction process, drawing personal symbols that represented my 'best self' using the non-dominant hand technique. We were told that being in a hypnotic highly relaxed state, and then drawing our ideal future state with our non-dominant hand, would allow us to tap into a different part of our brains, and by letting our unconsciousness guide the process, new and powerful symbols would appear.

This was one of the most powerful parts of the programme for me. At that point in time I had no academic qualifications (having left school at the age of 15), I was operating market stalls and generally floating through life with little sense of direction or purpose. At that time, I had a vague desire to try to get into a university to study psychology so that I could work with people to help them on their developmental journey.

The symbol I drew was a shining golden Greek temple column, with me standing next to it, and with small (very poorly drawn) people clapping and saying 'well-done', 'well-done'. Whilst it is tempting to dismiss this as naïve and simplistic (which in many

ways it was), the fact is that drawing this symbol in that particular mood state at that time in my life had a profound affect on me. The symbol kept coming to mind many times over the following years. Many years later (in 1999) as I stood in the Great Hall at the University of Sydney to receive the University Medal in Psychology for my undergraduate degree, with hundreds of people clapping and saying 'well done, well done' I again recalled that symbol and thought to myself – 'it's come true'. I still have that drawing today.

Disillusionment phase number one

However, as has happened many times during my experiences with NLP, my initial enthusiasm and engagement with NLP techniques was unfortunately followed by a rapid disillusionment process. In this case the person who was running the programme who (without a shadow of a doubt was an outstanding facilitator) had represented himself/herself² as holding a PhD. I was impressed. As often happens to participants in such programmes, I put him/her on a pedestal. I held him/her in the highest regard. Such idealisation of a psychotherapist is extremely likely (Hughes & Kerr, 2000) and is also found within closed-group therapies that are outside of the mainstream evidence-based therapeutic modalities especially where one individual acquires guru-like status (Temerlin & Temerlin, 1982).

At the end of the programme, as I was considering enrolling in an undergraduate psychology degree I asked him/her where he/she taken his/her PhD and what was the PhD's topic, expecting him/her to say 'psychology'. He/she replied somewhat sheepishly that 'it's in religion' and when pressed for more detail named the institution. On looking this up I discovered, much to my horror, that this was a well-known 'degree mill' – an unaccredited US for-profit institution (for an insightful discussion on such

institutions see Contreras & Gollin, 2009). Needless to say I felt deflated, disillusioned and, despite the undeniable benefits I felt I had received – I felt that I'd been conned.

It might well be argued that I should not have let my subjective personal judgement about this issue interfere with my therapeutic experience. But discovering this was undeniably disturbing. Although I was not able to articulate this at the time, the discrepancy between the way the NLP facilitator presented himself/herself (confident, educated, and authentic) and the actual reality of his/her fake PhD qualifications (inauthentic, deceptive, and status-seeking) created significant dissonance for me – a hard-to-articulate dissonance and tension that I have found time and time again with NLP.

Despite this disillusionment I remained interested in NLP. It seemed to hold much promise. As I progressed through an undergraduate degree, a Master's and PhD in psychology I read many NLP books and listened to NLP training recordings. I found myself particularly drawn to the NLP use of language, framing and reframing, the Milton and Meta Models, and the idea of purposefully creating specific cognitive and emotional states, amongst others. The more mechanical rote-learned techniques such as the swish pattern were of little interest. As my university psychological education progressed it became clear to me that many of the so-called NLP methodologies were long established in psychology and were 'NLP' in name and marketing only.

My first personal experience of nlp as a formal trainee

During the early 2000s I decided to complete an NLP face-to-face training programme which focused on NLP presentation and facilitation skills. This programme was run by an American NLP 'guru' – and despite my recollections of disillusionment, I enrolled. I told myself that maybe my disillusionment

² Throughout this paper in order to preserve personal anonymity I have referred to any individuals in the NLP community as him/her. I have also changed some other identifying details.

experience was a one-off. Maybe this time it would be different. It was not.

This was my first experience as a formal NLP trainee and I had persuaded a (rather sceptical) colleague to come along with me. I had assured him/her that I believed that there was value in some of the material in NLP and that we would benefit from the two-day programme – after all, this was a NLP Master.

Disillusionment phase number two

The first part of the programme started half an hour late. The material itself consisted of an introduction to some core NLP communication models including rapport building techniques. Lunch on the first day was scheduled for one-and-a-quarter hours ostensibly so that we could informally discuss what we'd been taught with each other. The after-lunch session started about 20 minutes late and we had a tea break in the afternoon and went home. There were approximately 50 individuals in the training group.

The afternoon material mainly consisted of the group of trainees standing at one end of the room, whilst being told to stare at an A4 sheet of paper with a large dot on it which was pinned to the wall opposite. The idea, we were told, was to develop our peripheral vision. We stared at that dot for a considerable amount of time because in this way we could fine tune our visual skills and senses. According to our Master Trainer this would give us the capacity to 'zone them through the floor'. I was not sure at the time what that phrase meant, and still to this day I am none the wiser.

Day two started again about 30 minutes past the scheduled time. During this section we were taught a specific NLP format for structuring presentations. The presenter/s were again about 20 minutes late in starting the post-morning tea section. By this point in the training programme myself, my colleague and (based on conversations with other group members) the whole group was extremely irritated at the presenter's consistent tardiness. It felt disrespectful, demeaning and rude.

Despite the tangible tension, no one in the group seemed to have the courage to address this issue with the people organising the programme. However, as the post-morning tea section of the programme started and we were all again in our seats, my colleague said quietly to me that he/she couldn't stand it anymore. I responded that he/she should say something before the programme got underway in order to clear the air. My colleague then politely asked the presenter if he/she could make a comment, and then said that he/she was finding it really frustrating that we had spent so much time waiting about.

Instead of simply apologising profusely and blaming the time-keeping issue on jet-lag or some other logistical problem and offering to make it up to the group in some way (a tactic surely found in any presenter's 101 guide to group facilitation) we all witnessed the most incredible sight: The NLP Master Trainer rose out of his/her seat and proceeded to crawl on hands and knees down the centre aisle loudly saying (something like) 'Your lordship, I am so sorry to have upset you' over and over again. This was the most extraordinary sight! The Master Trainer crawled all the way to where we were sitting and started saying 'Please forgive me, please forgive me'.

The whole room was in shock. My colleague looked down at the person on his/her knees and quietly said 'Get up. You're making a fool of yourself'. The presenter then got up, walked back to his/her seat and carried on with the presentation as if nothing had happened!

Not surprisingly we did not stay. We quietly gathered our materials and left the room, to be followed by the presenter who then demanded the workshop training materials back from us and accusing us of not being teachable. After some considerable discussion we were promised a refund. Needless to say the refund never materialised. Of course I am not implying that all NLP trainers are like this, but it would be interesting to know how many other participants in NLP

training courses have observed manipulative or disturbing behaviour from their trainers.

My second personal experience of NLP as a formal trainee

Despite these negative experiences, I still remained interested in NLP techniques. I rationalised that my disappointing experiences were due to the personality characteristics of the individuals concerned, rather than NLP as a positive change modality itself. I enrolled in a discount-price (AU\$97) three-day NLP Practitioner certification course in 2010, and along with about 500 other individuals I went through a three-day course³. I had very little personal contact with the programme administrators, and what contact I had was professional and polite. I had no contact at all with the trainers. The whole experience could be described as ‘bland’. The course covered basic NLP presuppositions, models and techniques.

As could be expected for a total price of AU\$97 there were many ‘opportunities’ to sign up for highly priced NLP-based business programs that would teach you how to work with clients to help them quit smoking, lose weight, make \$1000 a day and the like. We were also invited learn about the Alchemist Within, and secrets from the Land of the Pharaohs – well guarded secrets that we were assured would show us how to attract abundance and prosperity in all areas of our lives. Success, we were assured, was guaranteed. I have no idea about the content of these programmes.

Disillusionment phases numbers three, four, five and six

What I did find disconcerting is that after three day’s training with no personal contact with the trainer at all I became a certified NLP practitioner. Apparently, through my three-day programme attendance I now

had the skills to cure people of multiple phobias and various anxiety and traumatic disorders. I was also able to psychologically profile people using my understanding of their meta-programmes and sub-modality preferences, and I was now apparently able and qualified to induce deep hypnotic states as part of my NLP practice.

I should add that I do not recall any discussion of the potential ethical or moral issues related to using NLP to treat people suffering from diagnosable mental health problems; no words of caution and no talk of the potential harm that could occur, particularly in inducing hypnotic states in people who may have experienced past trauma. As a registered psychologist with over eight years of university level training I found these omissions to be deeply disturbing.

In addition to three disillusionment phases I have mentioned above, I have experienced a number of other disillusionments with NLP. These have included NLP ‘gurus’ writing to me to demand that I cite their work as they had cited mine – a *quid pro quo*; encounters with NLP Master Practitioners who are convinced that the NLP founders ‘invented’ cognitive psychology, and a general sense that the NLP training industry *per se* is riddled with factionalism, ego-driven conflicts and disputes, untenable claims about efficacy, as well as manipulation and commercial greed (for detailed discussion on these points see Hayes, 2006; Tosey & Mathison, 2009a).

However, this is not to say that there are not many ethical and well-intentioned people involved in NLP. For example the coaching psychologist Dr Bruce Grimley and university-based individuals such as Dr Paul Tosey and Jane Matheson from the University of Surrey have put considerable effort over many years into trying to establish a more solid foundation for NLP research, ining and practice – and such work is of course to be applauded.

³ I subsequently completed an online NLP Practitioner Certification programme over a two-month period, but space precludes detailed analysis. Suffice it to say that the online programme was a far more satisfactory NLP training experience – possibly because I had no personal contact with any NLP ‘gurus’.

Absorb what is useful

As the Master Kung-fu expert Bruce Lee is reputed to have said; ‘absorb what is useful and discard the rest’⁴. The question then arises as to what I have found useful in NLP – what have I absorbed and what have I discarded?

Personally I have found models such as the ‘Milton and Meta Models’ of language to have been extremely useful. These provide an elegant framework for understanding and clarifying the kind of cognitive distortions and ‘irrational’ beliefs central to much applied cognitive psychology (e.g. Beck, 1975; Ellis, 1962). These models also provide an excellent guide for developing questions that help clients explore their personal subjective experience as well as being very useful in developing goal specificity.

In my coaching practice I have also found the NLP concept of ‘anchoring’ to be very useful. With anchoring the idea is to get the client (or coachee) to identify a specific state of mind or behaviour with some kind of situational cue. In my coaching practice I often suggest that coachees place a notepad or journal on the table when they are in meetings, and that they use the notepad or journal as a situational cue to engage in some specific behaviour – for example not interrupting other during the meeting. Of course such conditioning techniques have a long history in psychology, predating the emergence of NLP (e.g. Skinner, 1963; Stein, 1963).

I have also found the aphorisms or presuppositions of NLP to be of great use. These include concepts such as; the meaning of communication is the response you receive (not necessarily your intended meaning); every behaviour has a positive intention; people are doing the best they can with the choices they have available; there is no failure – only feedback; people already have all

the resources they need to succeed; choice is better than no choice (and flexibility engenders choice). Although clearly articulated in many NLP training programmes, these presuppositions are not specific to NLP and can be found in a range of classic and contemporary humanistic psychologies (Maslow, 1954; Peterson, 2006).

Other techniques that are taught in NLP programmes that I use regularly include ‘future pacing’ – asking a client to imagine doing something in the future and ensuring that the new behaviours are congruent for the client. This is a useful mental rehearsal process and mental rehearsal has long been found to be an effective means of enhancing performance (Epstein, 1980). In addition, ‘reframing’ – using language to change one’s perception of a situation, experience or event – is an invaluable coaching technique, as is the use of metaphor. Indeed, reframing (or cognitive restructuring) is a well-validated technique in cognitive therapy and has been used in clinical settings from the 1960s onwards (Beck, 1975)

NLP concepts that I have found to be of less use (although still useful in some contexts) include preferred representational systems, eye accessing cues and meta-programs. Although there is no empirical evidence for preferred representational systems or eye accessing cues (Bliemeister, 1988; Witkowski, 2011), I have found these ideas behind concepts useful as they help focus my attention (as a coach) on how a client is responding in the moment. For example, during a coaching conversation, when a client looks away or down I take this as a sign that they are processing information and this helps me match and pace the timing of my interactions with them. I cannot infer from their eye movement that they are accessing a specific representational sub-modality, but the fact that

⁴ Interestingly, Bruce Lee’s ‘absorb what is useful and discard the rest’ exemplifies the core principles of self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 1989) – principles that are also found in the NLP TOTE model of learning and change (Test, Operate, Test, Exit) as well as all models of self-regulation. Despite some NLP trainer’s claims, such notions are not NLP-specific, rather these are general principles of behavioural science (Kanfer, 1970; Vohs & Baumeister, 2016).

they are displaying these signs allows me to be more nuanced in my communication.

Discard what is not useful

In addition to the hyperbole, misrepresentation and arrogance that seem to be somewhat endemic in certain NLP training circles, what I have found most unuseful in NLP is the sense of ‘doing’ things ‘to’ the client. The mechanistic approach to many NLP techniques sits in stark contrast to the commonly-held coaching perspective where the coach is seen as a ‘guide on the side’ rather than the ‘sage on the stage’ or the ‘expert in the client’s life’. It may well be that a truly experienced NLP practitioner can integrate mechanistic NLP techniques such as the Swish pattern with a client-centred coaching approach but I have failed to do so.

It was not until I came to write this personal reflection that I took the time once again to review in some depth the empirical literature on the effectiveness of NLP. Having done so, I need to discard the notion that NLP is anything like an empirically supported therapeutic or change methodology. In their excellent and well-balanced book on NLP in business settings, Tosey and Mathison (2009a) review the NLP literature and come to the conclusion that there is little or no support for NLP and that ‘the existing body of empirical research makes for uncomfortable reading for NLP practitioners, and gives no substantive support for NLP’ (p.143). More recent reviews have come to the same sorry conclusion (Thyer & Pignotti, 2015; Witkowski, 2011). As Witkowski (2011, p.64) says in his damning review of the empirical NLP literature: ‘My analysis leads undeniably to the statement that NLP represents pseudoscientific rubbish, which should be mothballed forever’.

Resolving the tension and dissonance?

How then can I resolve the tension between my own personal experience of NLP as a useful change methodology (as both a client and a coach)? My assumption here is that my own personal experience is to some degree

shared by others and that my reflections may be of some interest or use to others.

I fully appreciate that some psychologists who hold a strong personal commitment to both evidence-based coaching practice and to the use of NLP (which is not evidence-based) may not experience the same dissonance as I. Without being disparaging I could speculate that perhaps such individuals are able to hold dual belief systems (Pössel & Holzhay, 2006) – that is they are able to hold different sets of beliefs depending on the situation; or possibly they engage in double-think – simultaneously accepting two mutually contradictory beliefs as correct (for discussion see McArthur, 1992).

That is not my situation. Undoubtedly, prior to my university psychology education the ideas presented in NLP helped me see myself and the world in a different way. Undoubtedly, I have found aspects of the NLP industry distasteful. In order to resolve this dissonance, I needed to separate my unsatisfactory experiences with NLP ‘gurus’ and the NLP industry from the personal benefits that I have received by partaking in various NLP programmes.

It was also helpful to me to recognise that most, if not all, of the aspects of NLP that I have found to be beneficial were not NLP-specific but in fact originated in mainstream psychology. Finally, it is interesting to note that what I have found most useful in NLP are the theoretical concepts and ideas rather than the specific mechanical NLP techniques themselves.

It’s a shame: But that’s the game!

In its time, NLP showed much promise as being an elegant way to package core solution-focused cognitive-behavioural therapeutic and change methodologies and to make those accessible to the general public. Whilst the notion of ‘giving psychology away’ to the general public (Miller, 1969) is indeed worthy, in practice the general public may not have been taught the critical thinking skills typically acquired in university psychological education. This means that the vast

majority of NLP trainees may not have the skills to assess the veracity of the claims made in NLP trainings. Coupled with the natural human inclination to idealise one's teachers, this created a context where rigorous and critical thinking was not encouraged. Indeed, as I have personally experienced, questioning NLP 'gurus' was met with scorn and derision, somewhat akin to a narcissistic rage (Horowitz & Arthur, 1988). Given NLP's espoused emphasis on flexibility and open systems it's ironic that this attitude represents a closed system, one orientated towards entropy (for an interesting discussion on NLP and entropic systems see Tosey & Mathison, 2007, p.189).

Further, as the NLP industry developed over time it appears that the industry as a whole became more focused on generating income than developing knowledge (Gareth, 2009). Indeed a cynic might argue that the anti-science rhetoric espoused by the NLP founders (Tosey & Mathison, 2009b) was a deliberate ploy to avoid potential debunking of NLP methodologies and thus reduce their income. I make no such assertions.

The evidence-base for NLP is sparse to say the least (Heap, 1988; Thyer & Pignotti, 2015; Witkowski, 2011) – in no way can NLP claim evidence-based status. Although NLP proponents may well argue that research to date has not been properly conducted (e.g. Baddeley & Predebon, 1991; Beck & Beck, 1984), or that the clients' subjective experience has not been adequately explored (Tosey & Mathison, 2009a) or that NLP deserves the attention of researchers because it is widely used in organisations (Tosey & Mathison, 2007) – the fact remains that the multiple misrepresentations by many NLP trainers in the NLP industry over many years has effectively trashed the NLP brand. In my experience, few academic researchers are interested in being associated with the NLP brand – and that's a shame, but that's the game. Social capital in any context is not

unlimited, and the NLP industry has effectively gone into overdraft.

Conclusion

Although some may argue that NLP is at a crossroads (Tosey & Mathison, 2009a) I believe its time has actually passed. The core ideas in NLP can be more rigorously found these days in contemporary evidence-based behavioural science and in solution-focused cognitive-behavioural coaching psychology. One way forward would be to systematically incorporate the most useful NLP concepts into standard university psychology education programs and discard the non-validated techniques and concepts. This would require the academics that design university psychology programmes to understand NLP and to also be kindly disposed towards NLP. I suspect this is a rare combination within academic settings.

Personally I feel that NLP represents a missed opportunity and also a warning to all who are involved or invested in the personal or professional development genre. Those of us who are passionate about using coaching methodologies as a means of facilitating goal attainment, human development and wellbeing should heed the lessons from NLP's demise. We need to ensure that our coaching methodologies and the broader coaching industry remain firmly grounded in evidence-based approaches, that we adhere to professional ethical standards and through practicing critical thinking and open-mindedness we remain forever vigilant against the onset of 'guruism'.

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Neuro-linguistic programming: A review of NLP research and the application of NLP in coaching

Jonathan Passmore & Tatiana Rowson

The huge popularity of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) over the past three decades has in some ways mirrored the growth in coaching psychology. This paper is part of a series of four papers in a special issue within ICPR that aims to explore NLP coaching from diverse perspectives, offering personal insights or reviews of evidence. As part of this process a pair of authors were invited to advance the case for and the case against NLP. This paper aims to adopt a critical stance; reviewing the concept of NLP, exploring the claims made by advocates and critically reviewing the evidence from a psychological perspective. In undertaking this review we completed a series of literature searches using a range of discovery tools to identify research papers, based on pre-determined search criteria. This review led us to the conclusion that unique NLP practices are poorly supported by research evidence.

Keywords: *Neuro-linguistic programming, NLP coaching, critical literature review, preferred representational matching, eye-movement, fast phobia fix.*

Introduction

FOR MORE THAN three decades trainers, sales people, therapists, and coaches have been drawn by the claims made by NLP (Bandler & Grinder, 1979). The approach has enjoyed enormous popularity, offering an alternative approach to psychologically training and has been widely used by commercial organisations, therapists and coaches.

NLP has over the past three decades been used by global brands including IBM, McDonald's, NASA and US Army. In the UK, academics have argued that it provides real value to educationalists (Tosey & Mathison, 2003). While in coaching there has been a profusion of NLP coaching books.

Yet despite this popularity, few in depth critical reviews have been undertaken, which have sought to examine some of the key claims of NLP. Those which have been published, for example Sturt et al., 2012, seem to have been largely unread by practitioners outside of the specific domain, such as health.

In the context of coaching, little empirical focus has been applied to the ideas, and

the approach remains popular across Europe (Passmore, Brown & Csigas, 2017). To undertake this review, we choose to focus on the distinctive features on NLP, as opposed to ideas and concepts which are published and credited to other approaches, or which are used across a wide range of approaches. The focus of this paper is thus restricted to the unique and distinctive features of NLP and NLP coaching, as opposed to the ideas that may be common across some or many practices, such as open questions, scaling or perceptual positions.

Defining NLP

A useful starting point for any study of this kind is to begin by defining the key terms. However, Neuro-linguistic programming is difficult to define. Most texts do not offer a definition, or instead share a story in the hope of communicating what they believe NLP does. In essence NLP is a tool that delivers transformation change.

Grinder and Bandler's definition from 1980 was widely cast; '*The study of subjec-*

tive experience' (Dilts, Grinder, Bandler & DeLozier, 1980). The definition could include almost anything and fails to move us closer a clarifying what can be included in NLP, and what should be excluded.

A second example is the definition offered by Ready and Burton (2015, p.11) *'the study of the structure of your subjective experience...the art and science of communicationthe manual for your brain...'*

A third example shifts the focus towards a focus on excellence: *'NLP is the art and science of personal excellence. Art because everyone brings their unique personality and style to what they do and this can never be captured in words or techniques. Science because there is a method and process for discovering the patterns used by outstanding individuals in any field to achieve outstanding results'* (O'Conner & Seymour, 1990, p.1). In this sense, position NLP as being the outcome of a rigorous review process to identify evidenced-based practice across multiple fields, has echoes of the aims of psychology.

However, in some ways all of these definitions are unsatisfactory and fail to adequately delineate NLP from other approaches.

The very nature of NLP, has seen it adopt ideas and techniques from other disciplines to create a commercial model, suggesting that NLP is in some way unique, with claims of magical powers. In itself, the idea of an eclectic model, which is based on evidenced-based practice that acknowledges the origin or source of the idea is a noble cause. For the purpose of this paper, the focus will thus be to separate out common methods from unique NLP methods.

The foundations of NLP

In the 1979, Richard Bandler and John Grinder published *Frogs into Princes* (Bandler & Grindler, 1979). They argued that outstanding psychotherapists acted on the basis of theory, which contributed to their effectiveness and enabled rapport with clients. Furthermore, they concluded that observation of the most skillful therapists would result in the discovery of common or core principles, which could be gener-

alised, verified on an empirical basis and put into therapeutic practice. This sounds a noble cause and one which reflects current research trends towards establishing common principles in coaching, and a desire to move away from multiple models, (cognitive behavioural coaching, solution focused coaching, psychodynamic coaching, gestalt coaching, MI, mindful coaching, etc) towards a unified approach; 'coaching'. Such a pathway of development has occurred in other domains, for example medicine, which has a single approach, as opposed to multiple 'schools' of training and practice within medicine.

For several years Bandler and Grinder observed the leading therapists of the time who including Fritz Perls, Milton H. Erickson and Virginia Satir. They gathered material, formulate

NLP tenets and hypotheses, which they believe were the common factors in therapy, and which had wide applicability to all communication.

A number of differentiating concepts arise within the literature. One is the idea that *'the Map is not the territory'*. The term was borrowed from Korzybski (1950), a linguist. This concept summarises the idea that each individual holds a unique internal representation of the world (the 'map') and not the world itself (the 'territory'). The maps that each person creates is limited and distorted through their past experiences and cultural context. Applied to behavioural change, the therapist's task is to understand and then work using the client's map to help them navigate a passage, both expanding their awareness and journeying from their condition to a more productive space.

The maps that people make of their world are represented by five senses: visual; kinesthetic, referring to tactical and visceral sensations; auditory, including noises and sounds; olfactory, including smell; and gustatory, including taste. Each experience in the world informs the continual development of the map. Bandler and Grinder suggested that each of us processes the majority of information

using one primary representational system. Further, they claimed that the most effective therapists matched the patient's primary representational system. These ideas, developed into primary representational system (PRS), are discussed below.

A second central concept is the idea of accessing cues, these are gathered from observing eye-movements. Bandler and Grinder suggested that careful observation of these movements would enable the NLP practitioner to unequivocally identify the primary representational system of the client and enable matching.

Having identified these hypotheses, most scientific researchers would move to the stage of formulating a hypothesis and seeking to test that hypothesis through a series of empirical studies. For a reason that is unclear, Bandler and Grinder, missed this step of the scientific process and moved forward to publish their ideas, as if they were scientific fact. One explanation that has been proposed is that Bandler was contemptuous of traditional scientific methods. This led him to reject the tradition methods of hypothesis and testing (Witkowski, 2010). As a result the claims made sound scientific in nature, but lacked the underpinning scientific testing.

Synthesis of previous reviews of NLP

Over the past decade a number of other reviews have been conducted. These provide a useful insight into NLP and the science which underpins the work.

Early reviews of NLP

One of the first reviews of NLP research was conducted in response to the growing claims from NLP practitioners of the effectiveness of NLP therapy. Einspruch and Forman (1985) in response called for a systematic review of the evidence. Only through this process could a clear and evidenced-based undertaking of the effectiveness of NLP could be established. (Heap, 1998) responded with a systematic reviewed the limited data available at the time. He noted the mismatch between the claims of

practitioners, which suggested miracle cures and the preliminary studies, which were yielding less promising results. The chapter concluded *'If it turns out to be the case that these therapeutic procedures are indeed as rapid and powerful as is claimed, no one will rejoice more than the present author. If however these claims are no better than the ones already investigated, then the final verdict on NLP will be a harsh one indeed'* (p.276). Subsequent studies have answered this question.

Health focused NLP

In a health study, Sturt and his colleagues undertook a systematic review of NLP in health, prompted what clinicians saw as NLP practitioners targeting the sector offering services, from training for health professionals to therapies available for GP referral (Sturt et al., 2012). A UK Freedom of Information (FOI) request to NHS organisations to identify spending on NLP training or services over a three-year period leading up to 2009. The research targeted all 143 primary care trusts, 73 mental health trusts, 166 hospital trusts, 12 ambulance trusts, 10 care trusts, and 10 strategic health authorities. A total of 326 (79 per cent) NHS organisations responded to the request and the unpublished data revealed an NHS monetary spend of £802,468 on NLP-related activity. Over 700 NHS staff undertook NLP training during the time period with the majority (75 per cent) being in administrative/managerial roles. Clinical staff included counsellors and clinical psychologists also attended. Five trusts had developed NLP based services, with weight loss being the most popular.

The research team noted *'no systematic review of the NLP literature has been undertaken applying Cochrane methods. 17 The aim of this study was to conduct a systematic literature review and appraise the available evidence'* (Sturt et al., 2012, e758). The team gathered data from 1459 studies, and excluded 1345 as not relevant, reviewing 114 abstracts, reducing the list to 93 before a final set of 41 papers that were reviewed in their analysis. A further 31 of these papers were excluded as they

were descriptive in nature. This left a small sample but the researchers concluded based on their detailed review, in typical scientific language *'there is currently insufficient evidence to recommend use of NLP for any individual health outcome'* (Sturt et al., 2012, e763). For a clinical study this is damaging evidence, that form a comprehensive review of the health literature no robust evidence exists to support its use within health settings.

Psychological study

In a comprehensive psychological study the researchers identified 315 articles of which 63 studies were published in peer-reviewed journals (Witkowski, 2010). Once the descriptive studies were excluded, the statistical data revealed that only 18.2 per cent showed results supporting NLP, 54.5 per cent revealed results non-supportive of NLP and 27.3 per cent offered results which could be described as 'uncertain'. In considering these results, and taking account of the bottom-draw effect, where unsupported data is more often not published, the evidence offered in support of NLP appears weak, with the positive results akin to what could be expected from the placebo effect.

Witkowski (2010) noted that the number of scientific studies had peaked during the 1980s and 1990s but had declining, as if *'the world of science was apparently losing its interest in the concept of Bandler and Grinder'* (p.64). The author was significantly more damning in his language in concluding his analysis: *'My analysis leads undeniably to the statement that NLP represents pseudoscientific rubbish, which should be mothballed forever'* (p.64).

In wide ranging Delphi study Norcross and Koocher (2006) surveyed a panel of 101 leading psychologists to identify the most discredited theories within mental health practice. Their list include NLP as a treatment for mental health conditions. NLP came 18th on the list of most discredited, but was beaten by interventions including 'Angel Treatment', 'Chrystal healing' and 'Dolphin mental health therapy'. Overall the researchers concluded experts had selected these interventions due to the lack of evidence to support their claims.

Educational studies

An education review on the impact of NLP approaches in education the researchers found more positive results (Carey et al., 2011). In this first systematic literature review of research evidence the researchers drew on data from both peer review and self published sources from the NLP Research and Recognition Project.

The research team identified a total of 111 studies. These included both quantitative and qualitative studies, including individual case studies and self-report data. While this offered a more comprehensive coverage of the available evidence, it lacked the robustness of more traditionally structured reviews which would exclude single sample studies and experiential data. When reviewing the final set of papers, very few of the final papers were from peer reviewed journals.

Carey et al. (2011) concluded, the majority of published work was supportive of the use of NLP in schools and education. The authors went on to note that given the scale of the research, diverse methods and variation in the quality of the research they reviewed, their results should only be considered as 'an interim finding' and that more research was needed.

Counselling review

Sharpley in a pair of studies (1984, 1987) reviewed the application of NLP in therapeutic relationships. His work included a review of 44 papers. His results revealed a total of six of these papers contained positive evidence in support of NLP. His conclusion questioned the value of NLP as a discreet method. With respect to individual tools, he suggested an PRS could not be reliably assessed by therapists and must be seriously questioned.

Overview

In summary, a review of these sector specific studies, suggest there is little evidence to support the claims in health, psychology and counselling. In education the picture is less clear, but when considering the methodol-

ogy used, which included multiple non-peer review sources and single case studies, a question may also be raised over these findings.

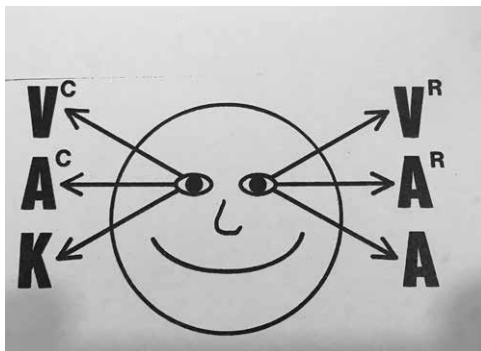
Specific studies

In addition to the large-scale reviews across health, education and therapy, we decided to also review a number of specific studies that have look at individual interventions within NLP. We selected eye movement and PRM as two interventions to review as they are considered essential ingredients of NLP (see de Rijk, 2019).

Eye movement

Proponents of NLP claim that certain eye-movements are reliable indicators of thinking patterns, including truth-telling or lying. According to this notion, a person looking up to their right suggests a lie whereas looking up to their left is indicative of truth telling. This is further explained by diagram X, based on the original claims made by Bandler and Grinder (1979, p.25; 1975).

Diagram 1: Eye movement.



Despite widespread belief in this claim, no research was undertaken to test its validity. A recent series of studies by Wiseman et al. (2012) examined this claim. In the first study the eye movements of participants who were lying or telling the truth were coded, but did not match the NLP patterning. In the second study one group of participants were told about the NLP eye-movement hypothesis whilst a second, control, group were not. Both groups then undertook a lie detection test. No significant differences emerged between the two groups. In a third study involving coding the eye movements of both liars and truth tellers taking part in high profile press conferences. Once again, no significant differences were discovered. In reviewing the results from the three studies the researchers claim the results of the three studies fail to support the claims of NLP, and this *'pseudo-scientific claim of eye movement can be reliably dismissed'* (Wiseman et al., 2012).

A more recent study (Ahmed, 2013) reexamined the claims regarding eye movement. Ahmed noted the criticism of Einspruch and Forman (1985), who argued that all 39 of the previously published studies (for example, Appel, 1983; Brockman, 1981; Cody, 1983; Ellickson, 1983; Dorn, 1983; Dowd & Pety, 1982; Ehrmantraut, 1983; Falzett, 1981; Green, 1981; Hammer, 1983 and Paxton, 1981) which had sought to test NLP claims were all false due to methodological concerns. These concerns included the researchers were not trained NLP specialists, or that the statements or inventions used were not consistent, in some way, with NLP methods. Ahmed used a student sam-

Table 1: Eye movement cue codes.

Vc	Visual constructed images	Vr	Visual remembered images
Ac	Auditory constructed sounds or words	Ar	Auditory remembered sounds or words
K	Kinesthetic feelings (also smell and taste	A	Auditory sounds of words

(Bandler & Grinder, 1979).

ple of 33 postgraduate MBA students, who were invited to answer a number of questions while their eye-movement was measured. The results show that, except for visual recall, less than half of the respondents exhibited the eye patterns (i.e. visual

construct, verbal recall, verbal construct, kinaesthetic and auditory digital), posited by the founders of NLP. Ahmed concluded '*NLP eye patterns as claimed by the founders, do not apply to this sample of students in Abu Dhabi*' (Ahmed, 2013).

Research questions to measure eye movement responses (Ahmed, 2013)	
1	'Do you remember clearly the house you grew up in?' (This question involves visual recall and the eye pattern should be towards the top right.)
2	'Can you imagine what the house would look like if it was bright pink (or had more levels)?' (This question involves visual construct and the eye pattern should be towards the top left.)
3	'Do you have a favourite song/music? Can you play that in your head?' (This question involves verbal recall and the eye pattern should be towards the lateral right.)
4	'Can you imagine what the song would sound like if it was played at twice the speed (or if the singer had a voice like Donald Duck)?' (This question involves verbal construct and the eye pattern should be towards the lateral left.)
5	'Can you remember how it feels like to walk on soft sand/carpet?' (This question involves kinaesthetic and the eye pattern should be bottom left.)
6	'Can you say the times table?' (This question involves auditory digital and the eye pattern should be bottom right.)

Preferred representational matching

A second commonly used model is Preferred Representation Matching [PRM]. According to Bandler and Grinder (1975) words, phrases and sentences are indicative of an individual's referencing of each of the representational systems. So for example the words 'green', 'see-through', 'spiral' and 'image' reference the *visual* representation system, while the words 'silent', 'ringing', 'moo' and 'blast' reference the *auditory* representation system. These two are part of the three systems; visual, auditory, and kinesthetic that humans use, and are sometimes known as VAK.

In his studies, Shapely (1984; 1987) reviewed the use of PRM in counselling domains. In a set of 15 studies using PRS Shapely concluded there was little supportive evidence for the use of the PRS.

Since these studies little further work has been done to review the application of PRS through a scientific lens. Further work within a coaching context may help further provide

evidence on our understanding about the claims for PRM.

In summary, in reviewing generic studies of NLP the evidence suggest that there is not enough evidence to support NLP claims for specific interventions such as eye movement and PRM. In light of the lack of robust evidence validating unique NLP models, we set to explore NLP with a specific focus on coaching research. Our aim was to draw together published studies and examine the empirical research within NLP Coaching.

Method

The method for this review was to undertake a series of searches using commonly used databases, through the Henley Business School One Source search tool. The tool combines data from multiple search tools including EBSCO, Science Direct, Business Source, Emerald, Text-direct and others. A search of peer review papers published between 1980 and 2018 produced 19,154

items, using the initial search term ‘NLP’. However in reviewing papers from this list it was clear that the term NLP has multiple meanings, being used as an abbreviation for a variety of terms. The search was narrowed to ‘NLP and Neuro-linguistic Programming’. This reduced the number of items found to 224 peer reviewed papers in the period 1980–2018. This was further refined in a search to ‘NLP- Neuro-linguistic Programming – Coaching’. A total of 40 peer review papers were identified. A detailed review of these 40 papers was undertaken. This process is summarised through the PRME diagram (Figure 1) showing the source and process. The full list of papers is detailed in Table 2.

Analysis

In reviewing these papers a number of striking observations appear. Firstly, given the period of nearly 40-year period the number of papers is relatively small. This may in part reflect the wider issue of a lack of research within coaching, although the

appearance of a number of meta-studies and systematic reviews of coaching research (Theeboom et al. 2014; Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018), suggests the size of the literature pool has grown significantly in the past decade.

Secondly, the list is dominated by conceptual papers, with a lack of robust scientific design or traditional research methods being used to empirically test the ideas offered by NLP within the coaching domain. In considering the 40 papers included in Table 2, more than half were either conceptual papers, literature reviews or book reviews. Only two quantitative studies were found through this search, with a further seven qualitative studies. Not a single randomised control trial was identified. This compares with more than 40 RCT’s in coaching in the past twenty years, which is itself considered an under-researched area.

Thirdly, several of the papers only make passing reference to NLP, for example Reece (1999).

Figure 1: PRME diagram

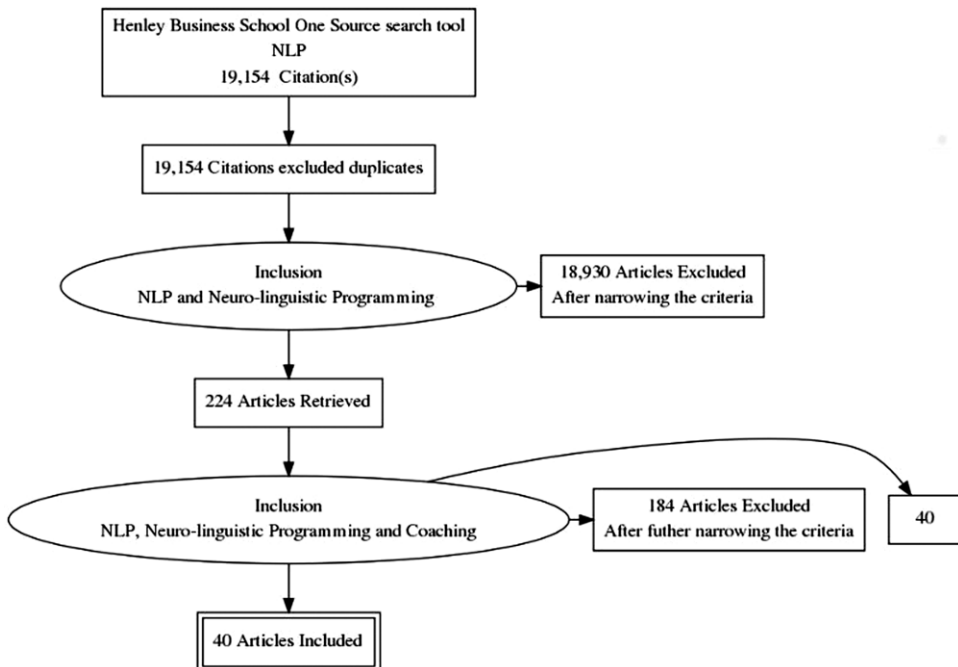


Table 2: Summary of NLP Coaching Peer review papers.

Research study	Brief summary
Grosu, E.F., Grosu, V.T., Preja, C.A. Iuliana, B. B. (2014)	Study of Romanian Judo team members using Grindler and Bander questionnaire.
Cassidy-Rice, J. (2014)	Case study of a business manager suffering with phobias.
Peng, T. Yun, L., Weiquan, W., Jincong, Y. Dong, W. Yang, X, Jinzhi, X., Zengzhen, W. (2015)	180 patient RCT, measuring depression and anxiety, and the awareness of stroke knowledge.
Kudliskis, V. Et Burden, R. (2009)	Case study reviewing application of NLP in sixth form (Year 13) students in one secondary school in the South West of England.
Blaskova, M., Blasko, R., Matuska, E. Et Rosak-Szyrocka. (2015)	Questionnaire survey of Universities in Slovak Republic and Poland, with suggestions for how teaching quality could be improved.
Boughattas, W., Mlssoum, G. Et Moella, N. (2017)	French language journal paper using experimental design with a sample of 20 junior judo competitors, with control group.
Grosu, E.F., Grosu, V.T., Popovici, S. Dumitrescu, M. (2015)	Experimental design, 11 to 15 years, from Romania ski competitors. A planned study to explore attention and anxiety comparing NLP and a control group, and exploring gender differences. No results reported.
Linder-Pelz, S. Et Hall, M. (2008)	A conceptual and case study paper with a life coaching client.
Moliušytė, S Et Kvedaravičius, J. (2013)	A conceptual paper in Lithuanian exploring the potential of coaching and NLP to improve management performance.
Knight, J. (2012)	A conceptual paper review the application of NLP to qualitative research.
Moliušytė, S Et Kvedaravičius, J. (2012)	A survey of business managers and their assumptions about learning styles of employees. The results revealed managers assume employees have same learning styles as they do.
Laposi, E. Et Dan, I. S. (2014)	A review of NLP concepts in Romanian.
Joey, L. Et Yazdanifard, R. (2015)	A conceptual paper arguing the case for NLP.
Stockdale, S. (2013)	A qualitative study using NLP modeling techniques as a guide to the interview process with driving instructors exploring their teaching methods.
Tosey, P. Et Mathison, J. (2010)	Conceptual paper exploring links between psychophenomenology and NLP.
Bimba, A., Idris, N., Al-Hunaiyyan, A. Mahmud, R. B., Abdelaziz, A., Khan, S. Et Chang, V. (2016)	A literature review of modeling relevant to knowledge-based business management.

Continued

Table 2: Summary of NLP Coaching Peer review papers *continued*

Research study	Brief summary
Tee, S., Jowett, R. M. & Bechelet-Carter, C. (2009)	A mixed methods study, using survey and interview with 10 nursing students on the value of coaching as a learning approach.
Chuecos J. R. (2015)	A conceptual paper on NLP.
Alexanders, J., Anderson, A. & Henderson, S. (2015)	A literature review study that reported physiotherapists appreciate the importance of using psychological interventions within their practice.
Hodgson, D. (2014)	A qualitative study exploring cancer patient and carer's attitudes. Concluded that training curriculum enhancements must focus on developing care and compassionate behaviours.
Vlok, A. (2012)	A conceptual paper proposes a competency profile for innovation leaders derived from research in a South African, with reference to NLP among a wide range of other models.
Gray, E., Ekinci, Y. & Goregaokar, H. (2011)	A mixed methods study examining the impact of a leadership development programme. Coaches with therapy or NLP backgrounds performed better than those with no therapy background. However, managers on the programme did not perceive the coaching to have had a significant impact on their development.
Anderson, J. (2007)	A practitioner paper examining the role of imagination, calling and emotions in leadership, and the role intuition can play in helping leaders, with reference to an NLP exercise for leaders to help them stay intuitive.
Boussebaa, M. & Morgan, G. (2008)	Case study focusing on management development, passing reference to NLP.
Reece, R. (1999)	Interview with a medical doctor about his practice, with passing reference to use of NLP as a communications tool.
Linder-Pelz, S. (2014)	A qualitative study based on a sample of nine exploring the value of meta-modeling. The study concluded the approach was a valuable tool in coach competency development.
Segers, J., Vloeberghs, D., Henderickx, E., and Inceoglu, I. (2011)	Survey of Belgium coaches, sample of 83 exploring coaching practice. Noted the popularity of NLP coaching in Belgium, and the fact this was due to one of the first training schools in the country using this approach.
Kay, D. (2013)	Conceptual paper about a splinter method from NLP.
Jinks, D. & Dexter, G. (2012)	Conceptual paper about the limitations of coaching setting in coaching, with a passing reference to NLP.
Bailey, L. F. (2014)	Conceptual paper review qualitative research methods, with a passing reference to NLP as a possible research tool in qualitative research interviews.

Continued

Table 2: Summary of NLP Coaching Peer review papers *continued*

Research study	Brief summary
Turaga, R. (2016)	Conceptual paper offering a range of communications skills from open questions, non-verbal communications etc, with a passing reference to NLP.
Losada, S. J. V. (2009)	A Spanish paper in a practitioner journal advancing the case for role of NLP as a useful tool in coaching and consulting.
Titkos, C. (2012)	A conceptual paper exploring the role of personality development. The paper argues that NLP is a specialist tool for enabling this change along with psychodrama.
Tosey, P. Lawley, J. & Meese, R. (2014)	Conceptual paper making the case for 'clean language' as interview tool in qualitative research.
Shyamsunder, A., Anand, S.; Punj, A.; Shatdal, A. et al. (2011)	Series of case study about leadership development and the role of NLP as a communication skill forming part of a programme.
Fontannaz, S (2017)	Book Review.
Woodall, J. & Douglas, D (1999)	This wide-ranging paper examined ethical practice across leadership training. It noted the development of NLP, questioned its lack of ethical practice and also noted that few NLP practitioners were willing to engage in their research study.
Wruk, B. & Hebert, D. (2003)	Conceptual paper about the role of NLP tools in financial planning interviews to map client personality.
Hrop, S. (2004)	Book review.
Huczynski, A. A. (1993)	Conceptual paper review of management fads, with passing reference to NLP.

Fourthly, in a number of papers the authors make claims that are unsubstantiated. One example, a paper by Cassidy-Rice (2014) which presents a case study of an individual 'Nick Burnside' who following NLP training is 'cured' from a collection of phobias. The exact method is not described, nor how the phobia were diagnosed, nor the measures used. The author however claims an almost miracle effect of NLP which goes beyond the initial phobia, making the client both a superior boss and a super athlete: *'Among the interventions that helped were the removal of negative states, the changing of limiting beliefs, the*

elimination of performance-inhibiting mental blocks and hypnosis. Such techniques have also helped him to achieve personal goals which he never thought possible, including grueling endurance races such as the Snowdonia marathon and the Hadrian's Wall ultra event, where he covered 68 miles in just over 17 hours... He has transferred this new positive thinking directly into his workplace, enabling him to undertake employee coaching across the organisation in areas such as time management, presentation skills, motivation, influencing and confidence building' (Cassidy-Rice, 2014, p.39).

Of the papers which do, there are questions about the methods employed, which leave the reader with more questions than answers. One example (Peng et al., 2015) reviewed the use of brief NLP-health education to help post-stroke patients through a blended NLP and psych-education programme. The researchers were measuring anxiety and depression of stroke patients. The results from this study revealed an initial difference in depression levels, although in the follow-up stage the difference between the control group and the NLP-health education intervention group was not sustained. However, by including two interventions in a single study it is impossible to identify which was the active ingredient in bringing about the initial change; NLP or the education aspect of the programme.

One possible explanation for this lack of evidence is the bottom draw effect, where studies with unsupported hypotheses results are more likely to be either rejected by journals or not submitted.

Integrating the evidence

So where does this leave the case for NLP coaching? The review of the research evidence within coaching suggests there is almost no evidence to support the multiplicity of claims made about its effectiveness as a 1-to-1 coaching interventions to facilitate behavioural

change. This contrasts with the evidence which has grown over the past two decades which does support the view that coaching has a small to medium effect size across a number of aspects of behavioural change (Theeboom et al., 2014). In reviewing the evidence from NLP, we may conclude that the lack of evidence suggests that NLP coaching has very little to offer coaching practitioners, as a separate and distinct set of interventions.

Conclusions

In this paper we aimed to review the evidence for NLP and specifically for NLP coaching. Given this review, we have no hesitation in coming to the view that coaching psychologists and those interested in evidenced based coaching would be wise to ignore the NLP brand in favour of models, approaches and techniques where a clear evidence base exists. However, moving forward, we might take with us the dream which NLP offered of drawing the best practices from multiple traditions to create a unified model of coaching and behavioural change.

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Book Review

Introducing NLP: Psychological Skills for Understanding and Influencing People

Joseph O'Connor & John Seymour

ISBN: 8601200631081

Reviewer Steve Couch

NEURO-LINGUISTIC programming (NLP) generates conflicting passions between proponents and detractors, perhaps in greater numbers than any other area of coaching practice. Current proponents extol the value of NLP as the technology of choice for Fortune 500 companies; detractors rejoice in the latest neuro-scientific finding that contradicts an aspect of NLP practice. The arguments put forward by each side of the divide bring to mind increasingly entrenched positions in the Brexit debate. The intense Trumpian conviction of Richard Bandler, one of the founders of NLP, is matched by the open disdain shown by other leading coaches trumpeting the most recent confirmation that NLP, every single aspect of it, is a mere pseudoscience.

Introducing NLP by Joseph O'Connor and John Seymour provides an accessible and concise guide on the subject. Although first published in 1990, it remains a significant introductory text. It was only published for the first time in the US in 2011, and since then Dutch (2012), Spanish (2014) German (2015), Canadian (2016) and Vietnamese (2016) editions have been added. Contrary to O'Connor and Seymour's initial expectations, *Introducing NLP*, remains an influential text.

In contrast to many deliberately opaque earlier NLP texts, *Introducing NLP* helps the reader to understand what is being explained at the first reading. The layout is straight forward, with succinct individual chapter summaries, clear headings and a reference section that includes a simple, yet highly effective, glossary of over 100 NLP terms. The glossary is not only of value when reading the book itself, it can also act as an *aide-memoire* for those who choose to explore the further reading guide of over 80 NLP books provided in the reference section. The reading list is supplemented with helpful, brief comments on the nature of each book and how the practitioner might use it.

Introducing NLP benefits from being largely dispassionate in its views of the effectiveness of NLP techniques. Other than in the brief Epilogue, there is little sense of NLP being a paradigm shift, nor claims for the ability of NLP to change lives overnight. *Introducing NLP* steers well away from the path of populist NLP books making such unsubstantiated claims. Instead, approaches such as Anchoring and the Phobia Cure are covered with a simplicity of style that allows the reader to understand what is being described, without having to make judgment on the effectiveness or otherwise

of the approach. The reader is encouraged to find out, through personal experience, whether or not the approaches work for him or herself.

Descriptions and explanations of NLP applications are broken up with relevant examples and colourful back-stories. A story of Picasso seeing a photograph of a stranger's wife as 'small' and 'a little bit flat', rather than as a representation of the thing of beauty she appears to her husband, and an Arab saying: 'What a piece of bread looks like depends on whether you are hungry or not.' set the scene. They provide powerful examples of what is then expanded on in discussion of perceptions of the map and the territory. Stories such as Gregory Bateson introducing Bandler and John Grinder to Milton Erickson are sufficiently descriptive to evoke visual content that complements the reader's understanding, without breaking his train of thought.

For the developing coach, *Introducing NLP* provides the appropriate level of information to meet initial coaching curiosity about the nature of NLP. The coach can decide whether sympathies then lie with NLP proponents or detractors by undertaking further experiential learning. Better still, coaches can consider the option of selecting some NLP applications to integrate into their personal coaching style and approach. Rather than accept or dismiss NLP in its entirety

coaches can use *Introducing NLP* as a checklist of available interventions. The book allows coaches to be curious – why do some coaches and clients find this convincing – and selective – what aspects of NLP might work for me as a coach and for my clients.

Although O'Connor and Seymour express a preference for NLP training in a 'safe environment... with sympathetic people, under skilled supervision', more should have been said about the coach's obligation to do no harm to clients. The potential to awaken and then abandon previously hidden aspects of a client's subconscious, requires a coaching duty of care that is not sufficiently emphasised.

The British Radio critic Gillian Reynolds said recently of Beethoven that his music matters '...because there has to be another way of saying things without words'. O'Connor and Seymour give their readers guidance about what we say in so many ways, both with and without words. Whether it be looking at the use of language, sensory acuity or Walt Disney creativity, *Introducing NLP's* most significant contribution, and the reason for its longevity, may be its role as a primer in increasing coaches' awareness of possibility.

Steve Couch

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NLP Coaching: An Evidence-Based Approach for Coaches, Leaders and Individuals

Susie Linder-Pelz

ISBN: 9780749454524

Reviewer Joanna Simons

LINDER-PELZ RISES to the challenge made by many that NLP lacks evidence. Her contribution, one of the few to focus on NLP's evidence base is well written and easily accessible. It demystifies the jargon of NLP and grounds it firmly within the context of other disciplines whilst arguing the case for NLP as a blended distinct approach.

Susie Linder-Pelz's background is as an behavioural scientist academic, supplemented by considerable experience as an NLP coach. She draws on these perspectives throughout the book, mixing science with practice.

The author's bite sized style for individual chapters makes it easy to dip in and out of, yet it is thoroughly grounded with references making the title suitable for both academics and practitioners. What makes the title most distinctive however is that whilst many other books consider *how* to coach with NLP, this one in contrast asks three different questions: *What is NLP coaching? What is the evidence base? and What does an agenda for research look like?*

Linder-Pelz sets the scene in an excellent introduction that defines NLP and highlights how she seeks to 'shine a laser beam on what is common to all coaching and what is different about NLP coaching'. This provides good navigation for the story which is to follow.

The book is divided into three parts; part 1 looks at NLP and coaching, part 2 examines the evidence base and part 3 moves focus on best practice. The author has a very clear approach and explains NLP in simple language which makes it much more accessible.

Part 1 is a short guide to what it means to carry out NLP coaching, looking at the goals and highlighting modelling as the key. She goes on to look at the skills needed, pointing out that an NLP pattern is a complex set of skills in itself and describing how an NLP coach would combine many ways to install new mental strategies in a coachee. The 'magic' of NLP is then grounded in a down to earth explanation from Knights (2002, p.6) that 'NLP is not magic, it is merely an awareness of what makes the difference that is so often missing in more traditional methods and techniques'.

NLP techniques can produce extremely impressive results but ironically, given the focus on the use of language, I find much of Bandler and Grinder's actual writing very hard to navigate. Linder-Pelz translates the jargon of NLP into plain English and in doing so clarifies the process and provides useful definitions that can be used by coaches in explaining what NLP is actually aiming to do.

Part 2 takes the premise that best practice is evidenced based and considers how NLP

measures up, again taking care to define key terms before moving on to the arguments. In doing so she differentiates between links to theory and links to effectiveness, commenting that Bandler and Grinder's original concern was always with what worked as opposed to why it did.

The main part of this section helpfully goes through each of the systemic principles of NLP and grounds them in their theoretical origin, influences from psychological theories and practices, recent supporting evidence from neuroscience and some of the coaching practices that reflect that principle. There is a very helpful table on page 100 that distinguishes NLP coaching from things that are common to other cognitive behaviour and solution-focused coaching.

While many aspects of NLP are linked to existing theory, she ensures an even-handed approach by going on to highlight the areas she believes to be unsubstantiated. Part 2 concludes with links to psychology and a summary of the historical approach to research in NLP and a review of the current evidence.

The final part explores the author's work as a practitioner researcher including infor-

mation on recent developments and her thoughts on a range of areas for future research. She quotes Paul Tosey's NLP research project (Tosey & Mathison 2009) and their argument of the importance of encouraging a research-mindedness approach amongst practitioners.

She concludes with a nice link back to the questions posed at the beginning of the book with a helpful summary of answers to the classic 'So what has NLP got?' question which is well worth any practitioner having to hand next time they are asked something similar.

This is a well-written book that would be useful for both practitioners and commissioners of coaching and anyone practising in the field will find it an indispensable reference manual.

Joanna Simons

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CPIG Australia Chair's Report

Vicki de Prazer

THE AUSTRALIA coaching psychology group, while physically remote, remains very keen to contribute to international dialogue around the interface of psychology and coaching.

As I mentioned in my last report we recognise that coaching is evolving and as researchers, educators and practitioners we need to ensure we remain informed and relevant, while providing an evidence-based perspective.

Our state-based committees have continued to source amazing presenter, who offer great professional development opportunities for psychologists and coaches.

Topics over the last six months have included:

- Coaching leaders for systems thinking.
- Coaching leaders facing mergers and acquisitions.
- Profiles of Power: 'assessing power intelligence'.
- Dealing with the dark side of Leadership.

Additionally, a very well received event offered the opportunity to view a live 'coaching in action' session, addressing the challenge of 'managing ethical issues in the work place'.

I note Forbes (April, 2018) speculate on 15 Trends that may redefine coaching, as workplaces evolve and the need for an agile and adaptive skillset becomes more valuable than specific qualifications, and leaders seek support around both performance and soft skills. Forbes hypothesises that coaches will need more industry specific knowledge and expertise, will need to be even more accessible via various technologies beyond the coaching session, they highlight an increased emphasis on regulation and measurable results, among other ideas.

So, while leadership facilitation, organisational change, individual development and self-actualisation across various domains, e.g. business, health and education remain the key areas where coaching is embedded; how we move forward is an exciting challenge.

As also previously mentioned in my last report, we would like to develop a set of interviews, with highly experienced members of the global coaching network around some of these and other hot topics.

The aim being to make these interviews available to our global network, promoting, conversations, ideas and learning.

Please email me if you are interested in supporting this project vicki@deprazerconsulting.com.au.

We also remind you of the exciting collaboration between CPIG and QUT (Queensland University of Technology) to host the 2019 Leadership Coaching Congress, this November in Brisbane, Australia. This unique event encourages conversation and innovation between academics, researchers, psychologists, coaches, and leaders around the application of evidence to the evolving needs of individuals and organisations embracing disruption, AI and digital capabilities. Please visit the APS events page for more details: www.psychology.org.au.

We are also pleased to announce that Dr Michael Cavanagh, University of Sydney, who is an esteemed presenter, researcher and educator in Coaching Psychology has agreed to join Dr Jonathan Passmore in the editor role.

Vicki de Prazer

APS CPIG National Chair

SGCP Chair's Report: Would you coach the cabinet?

David Webster

THROUGHOUT MY time as Chair of the SGCP, Brexit has not been far from the headlines, in one form or another. As I write, the British government, the cabinet, political parties, and the country, are all divided. By the time you read this, the story will have moved on – if not to complete resolution then certainly to the next chapter. In the hope that the country now feels a little more at ease itself by the time you read this, it is perhaps interesting to reflect on what we as a nation may have learnt from the Brexit tale, remembering Churchill's (borrowed) adage that *'those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it'*.

As someone whose firm enables companies to develop adaptable teams and learning organisations, a number of questions arise in my mind:

- What have we learned about the often quoted 'cabinet responsibility'?
- What have we learned about how complex adaptive systems could and should be led in a modern and more connecting world?
- What have we learned about how complex change can be managed?
- How can we enrol all of the different parts of huge human system in order to journey through change together?
- How can we engage large numbers of people in a shared sense of purpose and meaning thereby retaining a good sense of emotional and mental health, and make desired outcomes more achievable?

These are all open questions; and in the defence of the current political class it is often difficult to learn when you're in the sit-

uation unless you slow down long enough to understand truly what is going on. Directing ones attention with curiosity and without judgement, or be 'mindful', is where it is at. Underneath all these 'wicked' problems (by which I mean problems that keep returning) are a whole variety of assumptions about all sorts of things, of course, forged over time. If slowing down a little was possible, I wonder what role might high-quality learning and performance conversations have in this context – what could coaching and coaching psychology contribute to these kinds of situations?

I may be way off beam here but I see there being a big opportunity for those kinds of conversations; and perhaps as coaches and coaching psychologists it's useful to explore how our skill and experience in a whole variety of contexts and from different psychological disciplines might be applied to such a fascinating, challenging and important situation as Brexit.

Big questions and the SGCP International Conference 2019

As I have said number of times in these pages the broad nature of the SGCP membership affords all members a great opportunity to share the responses to the big questions about how to apply the great skills that we all have, from a whole variety of different psychological disciplines top bear on the great challenges of our time. Long may it continue to seek to do just that – and in fact your next opportunity to do that will be in June 2019 at our International Conference in London. We very much hope you are able to join us for two days of great keynotes,

fascinating workshops and the sharing and discussion of research and practice stories, which will energise and delight in equal measure.

A huge thank you

All that remains is for me to sign off from my role as Chair. In December 2018, I handed-over to the brilliant Dr Laura Rees-Davies, our new Chair. I would like to thank my very excellent members of the Committee, all of whom are volunteers, for their hard work and dedication, and on a personal note, their understanding and support. I wish I had achieved more, though am proud of what the team has created, as the BPS continues to change around us and the profession evolves and offers us great opportunities to lead the coaching psychology debate in the

years to come. We hope to be sharing more news particularly in areas of professional standards, our super publications which go from strength to strength, more cross disciplinary working within the BPS, and importantly, our research agenda which is really taking shape. TCP will carry in more detail progress in each of these endeavours, so a give a huge thank you to the membership and my colleagues on the Committee for the opportunity to serve the profession. I look forward to supporting Laura who has been a pleasure to work with – thank you Laura – and I wish her every success in this rewarding role.

David Webster
Chair

SGCP Chair Elect's Report

Laura Rees-Davies



AS THE Chair Elect of the SGCP, I look forward to continuing the momentum in developing professional standards for our members and the public. In the year ahead, we have an exciting series of 12 Practice Webinars and Research Podcasts, Masterclasses adding to our already popular member publications *International Coaching Psychology Review* and *The Coaching Psychologist*. I believe we can create a dynamic environment where our diverse range of current and future members can collaborate to create new knowledge in theory, evidence and practice. I look forward to meeting you and hearing your views on how the SGCP networks can be developed further at future events.

The 2019 conference theme reflects the membership profile of the Special Group in Coaching Psychology. In the UK we are an ever-increasing group of 2500 members. The SGCP embodies inclusivity: it attracts members from a diverse range of disciplines including core psychological professionals and non-psychological backgrounds who are interested in the application of psychological theory and evidence in their practice. There is also diversity in the practice of Coaching Psychology. We are keen to complement the theme of our 2017 conference 'Giving Voice to Variety' in our 2019 conference with four streams relevant to the diverse areas of Coaching Psychology: Mental Health and Wellbeing; Artificial Intelligence in Coaching; Neuropsychology in Coaching; and Team Coaching. More broadly, our members can expect the SGCP 2019 conference to be a professional event where there is equal space to collaborate and network, alongside reflecting and learning.

As an undergraduate in the 1990s, I had wanted to become a Clinical Psychologist: I wanted to help clients to recover from mental health issues, develop resilience, and achieve happiness. I decided to contribute to the field of research in clinical psychology, and completed a PhD research study exploring service user experience of treatment for anorexia nervosa. While I studied, I became a Specialist Wellbeing Mentor for higher education students. I found that both the students and participants of my research study noted the benefits of a positive approach to the goal they were trying to achieve. I was motivated to work with clients to enhance their performance using evidence-based, positive psychological frameworks. After my PhD was complete, I chose to complete a qualification in Coaching Psychology. I have found my coaching practice to be how I envisaged I would work with clients back when I was an undergraduate student. I am a now Chartered Psychologist and Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Worcester and have a private Coaching Psychology practice with nine years' experience of specialist coaching and mentoring in the public and private sector.

I am proud and motivated to be the Chair of the SGCP conference 2019. I am also particularly keen to develop our relationship with undergraduate and postgraduate students as I understand how important our role can be in your professional development. If you are a learner coach or research student, we encourage you to attend and present at the SGCP 2019 conference where we have a dedicated competition category for student entries.

Special Group in Coaching Psychology – ICPR Research Paper of the Year Award

AS PART of our commitment to encouraging and supporting coaching psychology research, the Special Group in Coaching Psychology offers an award for researchers who are actively involved in research and have published their work in the *International Coaching Psychology Review (ICPR)*.

The winner of the Award is made in recognition of the best paper published in ICPR in the previous year.

The winner will receive:

- A complimentary place at the SGCP Coaching Psychology Conference 2019 where the award will be presented.
- The opportunity to present their research at the conference.

The award will be made to the person whose research paper published in ICPR is deemed to make the most valuable contribution to the field of coaching psychology. Innovation will be considered alongside scientific rigour in the conception, design and analysis of the study. The award winner will be selected by an Awards Committee and editor of *ICPR* whose decision is final.

The award will be presented at the SGCP Coaching Psychology Workshops and Conference on 6–7 June 2019. The recipient should ensure that they are able to attend.

Attendance at the Conference will be free of charge for the award winner. However, it will be responsibility of the award winner to cover their travel costs, accommodation and any other expenses.

Dr Jonathan Passmore
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The British
Psychological Society

Special Group in
Coaching Psychology

SGCP Practitioner Masterclass and Webinar Programme 2019

Masterclass: 'Neuroscience and coaching'

Professor Patricia Riddell, School of Psychology, University of Reading

10 April 2019; 09:30–17:00

www.bps.org.uk/events/neuroscience-and-coaching

Webinar: 'Using psychological tools and techniques with clients'

Dr Natalie Lancer, Immanuel College, UK.

25 June 2019; 12:30–13:30

www.bps.org.uk/events/using-psychological-tools-and-techniques-clients-webinar

Webinar: 'Working with goals in coaching psychology'

Professor Anthony Grant, University of Sydney, Australia

TBC September 2019; 12:30–13:30

See www.bps.org.uk/events for further info

Masterclass: 'Using motivational interviewing in coaching'

Dr Tim Anstiss, Health and Wellbeing Coach

10 & 11 October 2019; 09:30–17:00

www.bps.org.uk/events/using-motivational-interviewing-coaching-2-day-masterclass

Webinar: 'Coaching Psychology research update'

Dr Rebecca Jones, Henley Centre for Coaching, Henley Business School

6 December 2019; 12:30–13:30

www.bps.org.uk/events/coaching-psychology-research-update-webinar

For any queries regarding a webinar or masterclass session
please email membernetworkservices@bps.org.uk
quoting 'SGCP Practitioner Masterclass and Webinar Programme'
in the subject line.



The British
Psychological Society

Special Group in
Coaching Psychology

SGCP Research Series: Webinars

This series of free webinars is aimed at postgraduate students and those interested in undertaking coaching research.

Session 1: 'Understanding research epistemology'

Nigel Spinks, Tuesday 29 January 2019, 12:30–13:30

Session 2: 'Critically appraising qualitative and quantitative coaching research studies: An overview'

Dr Jonathan Passmore, Thursday 7 February 2019, 12:30–13:30

Session 3: 'How to conduct systematic literature reviews'

Dr Rebecca Jones, Thursday 14 March 2019, 12:30–13:30

Session 4: 'Introduction to the types of qualitative research methods'

Dr Tatiana Rowson, Wednesday 24 April 2019, 12:30–13:30

Session 5: 'Introduction to quantitative research methods'

Dr Rebecca Jones, Thursday 9 May 2019, 12:30–13:30

Session 6: 'How to design and conduct small-scale research projects'

Nigel Spinks, Monday 10 June 2019, 12:30–13:30

Session 7: 'Sharing your research in coaching journals'

Dr Jonathan Passmore, Thursday 4 July 2019, 12:30–13:30

Session 8: 'Sharing your research through conference presentations'

Dr Jonathan Passmore, Thursday 25 July 2019, 12:30–13:30

Further information available shortly at www.bps.org.uk/events

For queries about these webinars please email membernetworkservices@bps.org.uk quoting 'SGCP Research Series' in the subject line.

Delivered in partnership with Henley Centre for Coaching,
Henley Business School, University of Reading, UK

5. Manuscript requirements

- Contributions must be typed in double spacing with wide margins. All sheets must be numbered.
- Tables should be typed in double spacing, each on a separate page with a self-explanatory title. Tables should be comprehensible without reference to the text. They should be placed at the end of the manuscript with their approximate locations indicated in the text.
- Figures can be included at the end of the document or attached as separate files, carefully labelled in initial capital/lower case lettering with symbols in a form consistent with text use. Unnecessary background patterns, lines and shading should be avoided. Captions should be listed on a separate page. The resolution of digital images must be at least 300 dpi.
- For articles containing original scientific research, a structured abstract of up to 250 words should be included with the headings: Objectives, Design, Methods, Results, Conclusions. Review articles should use these headings: Purpose, Methods, Results, Conclusions.
- Overall, the presentation of papers should conform to the British Psychological Society's Style Guide (available at www.bps.org.uk/publications/publications_home.cfm in PDF format). Non-discriminatory language should be used throughout. Spelling should be Anglicised when appropriate. Text should be concise and written for an international readership of applied psychologists. Sensationalist and unsubstantiated views are discouraged. Abbreviations, acronyms and unfamiliar specialist terms should be explained in the text on first use.
- Particular care should be taken to ensure that references are accurate and complete. Give all journal titles in full. Referencing should follow BPS formats. For example:
Billington, T. (2000). *Separating, losing and excluding children: Narratives of difference*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
Elliott, J.G. (2000). Dynamic assessment in educational contexts: Purpose and promise. In C. Lidz & J.G. Elliott (Eds.), *Dynamic assessment: Prevailing models and applications* (pp.713–740). New York: J.A.I. Press.
Passmore, J. (2010). A grounded theory study of the coachee experience: The implications for training and practice in coaching psychology. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 5(1), 48–62.
- SI units must be used for all measurements, rounded off to practical values if appropriate, with the Imperial equivalent in parentheses.
- In normal circumstances, effect size should be incorporated.
- Authors are requested to avoid the use of sexist language.
- Authors are responsible for acquiring written permission to publish lengthy quotations, illustrations, etc., for which they do not own copyright.

6. Brief reports

These should be limited to 1000 words and may include research studies and theoretical, critical or review comments whose essential contribution can be made briefly. A summary of not more than 50 words should be provided.

7. Publication ethics

BPS Code of Conduct – Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles and Guidelines.

Principles of Publishing – Principle of Publishing.

8. Supplementary data

Supplementary data too extensive for publication may be deposited with the British Library Document Supply Centre. Such material includes numerical data, computer programs, fuller details of case studies and experimental techniques. The material should be submitted to the Editor together with the article, for simultaneous refereeing.

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11. Checklist of requirements

As a general guide we would expect most papers to include the following sections, and approximate word lengths:

- Abstract (100–200 words – this should include a sentence or two summarising each of the main sections)
- Title page: Including title, author name, author affiliations, full contact details, a brief 25–word maximum bio)
- Full paper (4500–6000 words, double spaced with number pages and anonymised) including:
 - References
 - Tables, figures, captions and images (suitable for reproduction in black and white)

12. Ethical standards for publication

This publication has adopted a statement of compliance with COPE, as part of its ethical standards of publication. A copy of the policy can be downloaded from the ICPR website.

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