

What is NLP?

The development of a grounded theory of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, (NLP), within an action research journey. Implications for the use of NLP in coaching psychology

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Despite the wide use of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, (NLP), within coaching psychology very little literature of a critical nature examines what NLP is, how it works and whether it works. This paper seeks to address that void by asking 15 subject matter experts what their definition of NLP is. In order to develop a theory of NLP that was not skewed, data from a discussion between 19 NLP informed professionals concerning the authenticity of NLP, (44,000 words), was also used in the coding process to generate a grounded theory of NLP. The emerging theory was recycled back to the 15 subject matter experts and 19 informed professionals a number of times and compared and contrasted with the extant literature before the final theory emerged and became somewhat substantiated as a result of saturation. This paper examines the use of NLP within coaching psychology in the context of such a new theory of NLP and suggests developments in the light of such an examination.

Keywords: *Neuro-Linguistic Programming, research, theory, epistemology, methodology, evidence, testing, definition, coaching psychology.*

Introduction

It is suggested by Grant (2001) that the claims of Tony Robbins to empower the individual through the approach to behavioural change known as Neuro-Associative Conditioning™ (NAC) is unjustified and that the unsubstantiated claims made by Robbins raise serious ethical issues.

However it is possible that NAC is only one of the many proprietary coaching labels to describe techniques that have emerged from the practice of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, (NLP). Other proprietary NLP coaching labels would be meta-coaching, clean coaching and provocative coaching to name but a few.

The relevance of this exploration for coaching psychology is the scenario where the coaching psychologist cites the practice of NLP as a part of their coaching approach.

Would they truly know what they were talking about and would their description be consistent with what others say?

This paper presents a grounded theory of NLP generated as part of a PhD thesis, (School of Psychology, University of Nicaragua).

The academic journey incorporated the learning principles of action research and a key motivation in undertaking the research was to obtain what I regarded as a comprehensive and valid definition of NLP to assist me to improve my practice as a chartered psychologist.

Literature search

A search through back copies of *The Coaching Psychologist*, *International Coaching Psychology Review* and *Coaching* showed many coaching

modalities are engaging with the academic community in an attempt to develop and refine both coaching techniques and theoretical orientation through the peer review process.

Coaching for example, published by Routledge showed this was so for; Mindfulness, (Spence, Cavanagh, & Grant 2008) existential approaches, (Spinelli, 2008), self-determination theory, (Pearson, 2011), narrative coaching, (Stelter, Nielsen, & Wikman, 2011), emotional intelligence and coaching, (Cremona, 2010), cognitive-developmental approaches to coaching, (Bachkirova, 2009) and cognitive-behavioural approaches to coaching, (Karas & Spada, 2009). Also such coaching tools as the GROW model and GROUP model, (Brown & Grant, 2010) the mastery window, (Drake, 2011), and the cultural orientations framework, (Gilbert & Rosinski, 2008), were present as well as the use of psychometrics within the coaching context, (Pasmore, 2008). This is just a selection of what was available for critical review and discussion. However the pattern of an absence of NLP was matched in both of the other journals, with one exception being the contribution of Linder-Pelz & Hall (2007) and replies to that paper from Grimley (2007, 2012) and Rowan (2008).

Methodology

In understanding and researching NLP it was important to pay attention to the suggestions of the little there was in the critical academic literature.

Tosey & Mathison, (2009) in suggesting NLP is at a crossroads put forward a number of ways NLP practitioners could usefully conduct research into NLP to move it forwards from its current state which they regarded as being an entropic recycling of old proprietary NLP materials. A summary of the research methods put forward are:

1. Action research
2. Case studies and evaluations
3. Modelling projects
4. Testing and review of specific NLP models and techniques

5. Surveys of the incidence of NLP
6. Critique and elaboration of the epistemology of NLP
7. Studies of NLP as a social phenomenon
8. The use of NLP to enhance existing research methods.

In using action research supported by a grounded theory approach this research took a very specific epistemological standpoint. Action researchers always see themselves in relation to others in terms of their practice and ideas. Their world is a dynamic world and it is always probabilistic. They can divide it into apparently systematic and non-systematic components and consequently improve on prediction, however, there will always be a significant amount of non-systematic variation. This means that even the predictions they make are probabilistic. This anti-positivist approach assumes an open system which is consistently reinventing itself. This is to be contrasted with the world of the positivist who sees the world more in terms of a closed system. For the positivist, the fact that our world, and especially our social world, is not entirely predictable is only due to stochastic variation that we as yet have no explanation for. When we do have an explanation for it, as our understanding develops, then we too will have greater predictive power, until eventually we can predict everything perfectly. King, Keohane & Verba, (1994) make the point that these two perspectives can be regarded as observationally equivalent. Because of this equivalence a choice between the two perspectives depends rather on faith or belief rather than on empirical verification. My methodological concern was positioning myself thus, this research could be misinterpreted by those with a more positivist persuasion who assumed an unbiased and passive observer, the separation of fact from value, the existence of an external world separate from scientific observers and their methods. Such a stance inevitably leads to a quest for valid instruments, replicable research designs,

and reliable findings. In my research even though a dynamic process of inquiry needs to occur within a stable structure of rules, and the rules of both grounded theory and action research needed to be adhered to in order to render the results as valid as possible, the results are not regarded as objective truth, but rather a subjective truth and the validation is found in the integrity of enquiry as one reads through the 90,000 word dissertation, Grimley (2015).

Sampling considerations

One characteristic of NLP is the fracturing of opinions concerning both the co-founders and also other practitioners who are regarded as the first generation. Originally a snowball methodology was adopted to select participants, however quickly this method returned a skewed sample.

As an alternative expert purposive sampling seemed to meet all needs of this research. By using insider knowledge to talk with experts representing different sectors within NLP I could realistically reduce the number down from the 'total population' without missing anything. My operational assumption was individual experts with over 20 years practicing NLP would collectively cover the huge scope of activity within the NLP community, without the need to talk, hierarchically speaking with people lower down on account of less experience and possibly less understanding. Ensuring the resulting 15 participants came from around the world to account for culture bias was another consideration which was met.

A characteristic of both action research and grounded theory is that it is carried out by those with insider knowledge. This interpretive style of research calls for creativity, closeness to the respondents and their claims, immersion in the field and an ability to interpret situations and statements, (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Such insider knowledge inevitably creates personal biases, or as Blumer, (1969) calls them sensitising concepts. However this knowledge is useful to appreciate

the territory of the research topic more thoroughly than outsiders and make appropriate distinctions, whilst rigor in coding can assist prevent any sensitising concept bias arising in the emergence of theory from the data.

In order to obtain further balancing perspectives on what NLP is, I asked permission to code 44,000 words of 19 professionals who discussed the authenticity of NLP on a psychology LinkedIn forum, (Munro 2013).

Definition of NLP

The variety of current definitions within NLP can be seen by looking at a selection:

- a) 'Defies easy description' (Overdurf & Silvertown, 1998, viii)
- b) 'The unexpected by-product of the collaboration of John Grinder and Richard Bandler to formalise impactful patterns of communication' (Dilts, Grinder, Bandler, & DeLozier. 1980, ii)
- c) '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 & Mathison 2009, p3).
- d) 'An explicit and powerful model of human experience and communication' (Andreas 1979, i).
- e) 'The study of the structure of subjectivity' (Dilts et al. 1980, ii).
- f) 'A behavioural model that consists of a series of tools and techniques modelled on performance excellence' (Wake 2010, p7).
- g) 'A model from cognitive psychology' (James & Woodsmall 1988, p3).
- h) 'The art and science of personal excellence' (Alder & Heather, 1998, xii).
- i) 'An extension of linguistics, neurology or psychology' (Dilts et al, 1980, i).

- j) 'The Frankenstein Grandchild of Post Ericksonian Hypnosis' (Brown, 2007, p128).
- k) 'It is not a set of techniques it is an attitude.' (Bandler, 1985, p155).
- l) 'Whatever works' (Attributed to Robert Dilts by www. GrassRoots.com, 2013).
- m) 'A user oriented metaphor designed to generate behavioural options quickly and effectively' (Dilts et al, 1980, 12).
- n) '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 & Grinder, 2001, p50).

The above list of 14 definitions is by no means exhaustive; however it demonstrates the problem of being able to accurately define NLP.

Richard Churches in talking about researching NLP and in particular one of the NLP Models, the Milton Model says; 'Just this aspect of NLP alone, the fact that it has been a largely oral tradition for the last 30 years and a "community of practice", provides enough ammunition for the critical academic to dismiss NLP' (Churches, 2013).

It seems logical that if we cannot effectively define something we cannot research it. This is because the nature of our research will be shaped by the definition of that which we are researching. If what we are researching keeps on changing according to whom we talk, then the paradigm becomes incapable of either falsification or validation.

The importance of defining NLP in a standardised way is to allow us to research it effectively. This is brought into a clearer focus when public money is at stake. Professor Sturt makes a point after a Freedom of Information request revealed that the NHS in the United Kingdom 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, 2012). Concern-

ing the use of NLP within the context of the first NLP modeling projects, namely counseling and therapy, Sturt concluded: 'This systematic review demonstrates that there is little evidence that NLP interventions improve health-related outcomes. The study conclusion reflects the limited quantity and quality of NLP research' (Sturt et al, 2012b, p762).

Indeed the research of Sturt could only use 10 of 1459 NLP citations as a result of her review. The low quality of NLP publication is also an observation of Witkowski in his review of NLP, (Witkowski, 2010).

The emphasis on paying attention to the testing of claims made by NLP practitioners when public money is at stake is recently reiterated in the Sports and Exercise context by Tod who points out,

'If practitioners can make money offering NLP services that is fine, if they are not violating laws or ethical codes of practice. Within these constraints, caveat emptor. On some levels, however, I am uncomfortable with my position. If the athlete, coach, or sport is spending public money, for example, I hope there are checks to ensure that sensible evidence-based decisions are being made.' (Tod, 2015, p73).

What is a theory?

This research journey started with a very different question, and a necessary skill for a grounded theory researcher is to suspend personal bias, (sensitising concepts), and allow the data to inform the emerging theory. After initial scoping interviews and during the initial interviews I needed to reduce considerably the scope of enquiry to simply, 'What is NLP?' Another research consideration is to position the emerging theory within the context of enquiry. When recursively presenting the emerging theory to participants for fine tuning as a result of feedback, participant 2 pointed out:

'I do not think you have presented a theory of NLP at all. Without a set of princi-

ples on which the practice of an activity is based there is no theory. A theory of education provides guidelines to produce “educational activities”. Your description of NLP’s practice as “commercial, controversial, and unproven” are good facts about many of its current practitioners, their motivation, their professional standing as well as the basic reason for that professional standing, but it fails to set forth a set of principles on which the practice of NLP is based and does not comprise a theory.’

I therefore believed it was important to emphasise and articulate precisely what I meant by the word theory in this research.

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.

Coding

It is felt that it is not within the scope of this paper to go into detail concerning how the coding of transcripts and saturation of data was arrived at. NVivo version 10 was used to facilitate both substantive and theoretical coding and to make comparisons and contrasts. A coding diary helped me log my own reactions and responses and the relevance of such to the coding process. For the interested reader more can be found in chapters 3 and 4 of Grimley, (2015). Below are very brief descriptions of the 8 interacting propo-

sitions (categories) which emerged from the coding process with examples of transcript which contributed to the development of the category.

Findings

1. NLP is commercially motivated

What threw this category so much into the fore was the lack of evidenced educational material within the appropriate academic literature. NLP claims to be able to make explicit the unconscious patterns of those who are excellent and after testing and coding, then transfer these skills to other people. Excellence is quantifiable in many domains and is characterised by being at least 3 standard deviations from the norm, however there is no empirical evidence an NLP model which is a collection of NLP patterns has ever provided such a transition within any population.

‘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, 21:05)

2. NLP is saturated in anecdotal evidence

When asking many of the NLP practitioners for evidence of what they called NLP working, almost exclusively personal experience was cited. For some signposts were to the grey literature, (conference papers, PhD theses etc.) and there was an acknowledgement that NLP is not represented in peer reviewed literature.

‘Researcher: When you mention the “swifter intervention”, is it important to have the empirical evidence to support those claims?’

‘Participant 6: I think it is, I think it’s essential, because otherwise it’s just anecdotal and it’s just us saying, “It’s this, it’s that,” or whatever. It just doesn’t stand up. We have to have some empirical evidence.’ (Participant 6, 34:10)

3. Lacking in published empirical evidence

Just because a practice is saturated in anecdotal evidence does not mean it necessarily lacks good published empirical evidence. However in the case of NLP I found this to be the case and a defining feature.

'One of the things which I got from NLP, and especially Bandler was that what satisfies people is what satisfies them it doesn't have to be true, it doesn't have to be proved, it just has to be plausible to them and therefore a lot of the NLP trainings give stuff that satisfies the answer when, even though it's rubbish, they give that and it satisfies people. That's fine, but what you are discovering is that won't satisfy the academic community and what we haven't addressed is what we need to do to satisfy them and it isn't necessarily any more true, it just has different criteria. NLP could have been an established methodology by now, but the reason it couldn't is historical, we know because the founders had an anti-academic position, and mummy and daddy have influenced the entire field ever since, and they went further they even rubbed academics noses in it, they rubbished academia they made fun of professors, so you don't win friends like that.' (Participant 9 25:10)

4. Historical and current disagreement

NLP practice is defined by an inability to work together as a team for the greater good. The split between Bandler and Grinder and the characterological components which Bostic St Clair & Grinder, (2001), saw as present in them both, notably egotistical and arrogant seem to have framed the NLP world. Tosey & Mathison, (2009) liken NLP to a pseudo religion for some, with no accountability and providing confidence as a main outcome. They continue to paint the picture of adherents sometimes displaying unquestioning commitment to their leaders, with some trainers insisting they alone follow the true party line. They also in the first critical appreciation of the NLP phenomenon surmise that the NLP

body is so fractured that it is difficult to imagine it recovering from its self-inflicted injuries.

'The concern I have about that is I talk to various NLP trainers and a lot of trainers I've spoken to don't even have a definition of NLP that fits with my understanding of what it is.' (Participant 5, 16:10).

5. Wanting to be 'accepted', but disappointed with the continual pattern of not being accepted by 'mainstream'

This dynamic represents the sense that within NLP there is sometimes the application of good practical psychology and a frustration that others cannot see the effects of NLP at work. In talking with participants it seemed either to represent an inability or lack of desire to match and pace the academic rigour which is needed to demonstrate validity in 'mainstream' or an acceptance that the market place is the best place to test ideas. Whilst people still sign up to NLP courses, the face validity which that represents to them that NLP works suffices. What threw this category into focus as a defining feature was the consistent unease NLP practitioners felt when reminded that their practice talks about making the implicit explicit and training others so they can become better, yet at the same time having never been able to demonstrate this for any of their NLP patterns using the accepted academic protocols of social science.

'I'd like to see NLP nicely established as a distinct discipline and secondly from that as a profession and for that to be achieved I think there needs to be an agreed-upon, first of all definition of what NLP actually is.' (Participant 5, 18:00).

6. Development of break out groups, dissatisfied with the culture of disagreement within NLP sometimes using a different brand

The diversity within NLP has created many patterns and products, however what char-

acterises NLP is breakaway groups who wish to separate from what the three letters NLP have come to stand for.

'We don't really want to call it NLP. We are not going to market it under NLP. We are going to call it something different. We will honour where it came from.' (Participant 12, 20:21).

7. Lack of standardised definition, curriculum and professional practice code

One of the many changes which took place during the course of this research as a result of listening to the 15 NLP practitioners was to change the research title from 'What is the Definition of NLP?' to 'What is NLP?' The word definition was regarded by some NLP practitioners as restrictive. Concerning the lack of NLP definition, a similar idea to that of Sturt (2012) was recorded in the words of O'Connor in the LinkedIn group; 'Such is the circularity of arguing evidence when we haven't looked at "Evidence for what?" A question which might be more important than its easier cousin, "Evidence of what?"' (O'Connor in Munro, 2013). On pressing O'Connor on what he meant by this in private communication he did so by reference to 'a common error in psychology – that of confusing explanandum with explanans (the phenomenon that needs explanation and the explanation itself)', (Reicher & Haslam, 2015). This theory of NLP seeks to address a perceived need that if NLP is to be used by professional coaching psychologists it needs a more comprehensive, cohesive and consistent definition than is presently current. As to the explanation of this new definition it is for others to discern its validity. What is believed to be beyond dispute by the author is such a discussion needs to be had at this juncture in the development of the coaching industry. Ouellette (2013) seems to mirror such sentiments when he says:

'The mere fact of bringing together techniques based on several theoretical backgrounds does

not make it a theory; it just makes it a bunch of techniques. Moreover, the NLP "practitioner" does not have a theoretical background to substantiate their "techniques"' (Ouellette in Munro, 2013).

Other portions of transcript which contributed to the emergence of this category are below.

'One of the ways the academic community builds its quality is through self-criticism. I think it can take it too far and I think it can be horribly painful, but the bottom line is if you don't examine the holes or the false statements, or the statements that don't have any backing then they just carry on, and that's kind of low quality. A lot of the statements which are made about NLP and are trundled out under the guise of NLP have no basis whatsoever they are nice marketing statements, no wonder NLP is accused of psychobabble.' (Participant 9, 24:30).

'What it's missing is the fourth condition which is some form of aggregation.' (The first three being diversity, autonomy and decentralisation) (Participant 15 2:01:56)

'That's okay that's how I see NLP now, I see it as being a bit of a dog's breakfast.' (Participant 5 24:30)

8. All practice generally being associated with worst practice

Often what NLP participants regarded as good NLP practice could not get traction because those outside of the NLP community would immediately associate their professional practice with the worst that NLP had to offer which was often much more visible to the professional and general public. This was a consistent theme.

'So most NLP people don't miss-market but there's enough who do that create the bad publicity for us and so what we lack is a community that can police itself and kick out those who are doing the misrepresentations.' (Participant 7, 24:30).

'Once we're in a situation where it's more acceptable, there will be more people looking at it as an option who, maybe haven't even heard of NLP at the moment, but it will be more available from an educational perspective and they won't go on Wikipedia and see a negative story on there, which is what we've got at the moment, of course.' (Participant 6 18:15)

'Peter's point though is valid. There is a real sense of "fake" associated with the founders and many of the enthusiasts of NLP – and it is an issue. Try typing: how do I become a master NLP practitioner into Google.' (Munro in Munro 2013)

'Although the originators of NLP didn't view "constructed" thoughts as lies, this notion has become commonplace, leading many NLP practitioners to claim that it is possible to gain a useful insight into whether someone is lying from their eye-movements.' Wiseman, Watt, Ten Brinke, Porter, Couper, & Rankin. (2012).

Implications for the use of NLP in coaching psychology

Participant 12 made the very interesting point that the fragmentation of NLP and many aspects outlined in this theory whilst problematical from one perspective are also directly responsible for its continuing popularity.

'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, Educa-

tion, Negotiation etc. etc. Indeed, I can't think of another 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, it's take up by Trainers (looking to make a buck doing something they've become infatuated in) and its spread around the world.' (Personal communication, 15 June, 2015 00:48)

I was asked by my supervisors to account for this popularity of NLP in my dissertation after my theory of NLP had emerged from the research. Using my own understanding both from 20 years of NLP practice and this research I developed the acronym P.E.A.S. NLP thus has continued, I believe, despite its inconsistency on account of the following attractive variables which indeed 'satisfy' customers:

- P.** Process oriented, **P**ragmatic, **P**ositive, **P**layful, **P**henomenological, eliciting **P**atterns, and **P**racticing within the **P**resuppositions of NLP.
- E.** Eclectic, **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.** Systemic 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.

This grounded theory of NLP can be represented very generally as a Venn diagram, see Figure 1. If as this theory suggests the interaction of these defining variables is stable and therefore predictive of NLP practice in the future, when using NLP as a coaching psychologist there are certain themes one should be aware of.

1. Without a standard definition of what constitutes NLP and what does not, as

well as a standard curriculum which supports such a definition, the term NLP is effectively meaningless.

2. NLP continues to be both epistemologically and methodologically incoherent. Burgess, (2014) attempts to explicate exactly what NLP modelling is. In pointing out the 'real' NLP modeling of Co-Founder John Grinder is only one of

thirteen methods of NLP modeling, she is concerned her work will only interest a fraction within the global NLP community. Such intuition concerning the culture of NLP is reflected by participant 1 who said; *'I didn't get anything back, nobody is really willing to really grapple with the serious questions in NLP.'* (Participant 1, 18:40). Any coaching psychologist wish-

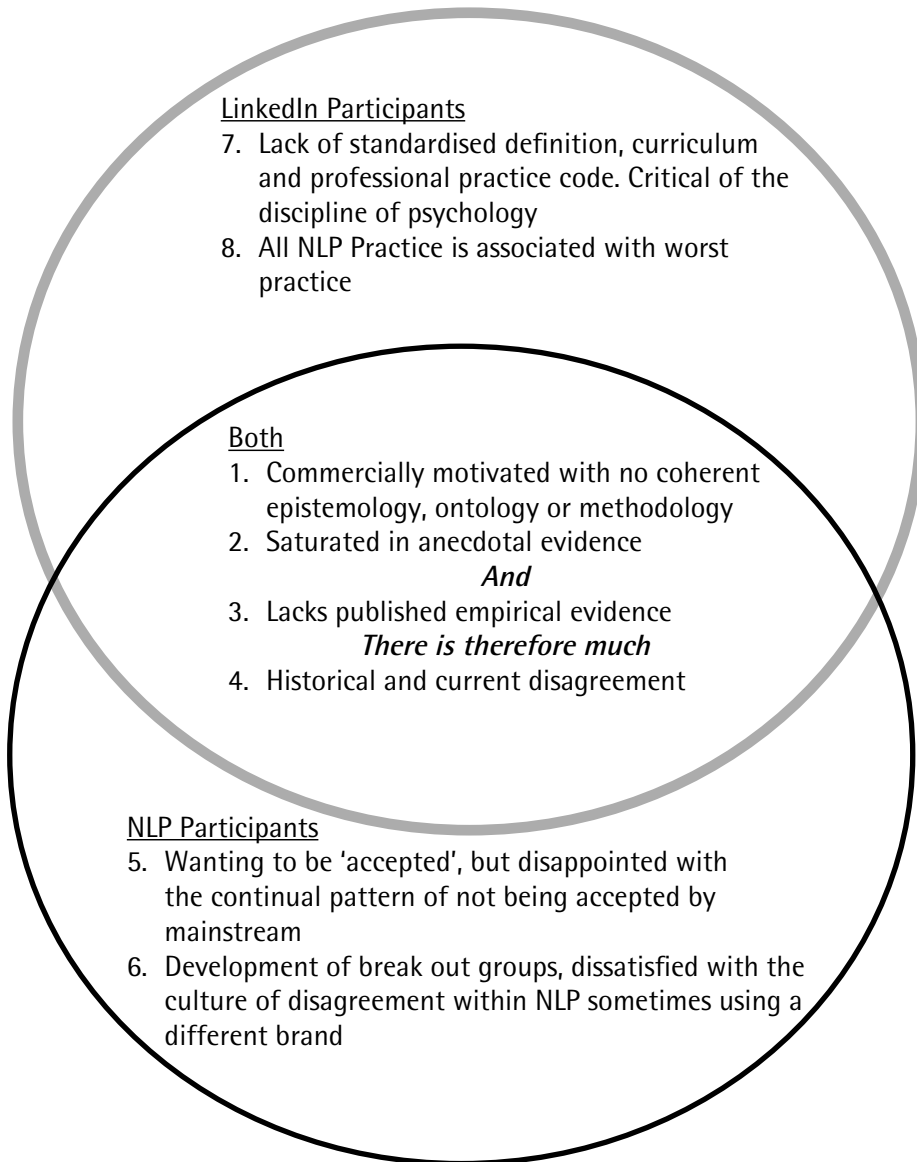


Figure 1: Venn diagram showing 8 defining categories of NLP

ing to cite their practice as NLP would need to do so from a standpoint of much greater epistemological and methodological coherence than is current within the NLP community.

3. Whilst Briner points out concerning the coaching industry generally: 'Given the limited evidence for coaching, some of the claims made by the coaching industry as a whole are fairly incredible.' (Briner, 2012, p9) he is unequivocal concerning the need to test the claims we make publically, pointing out; 'So, does coaching work or is it dodgy? I don't think we yet have a clear answer to that question. But I do know what's really dodgy. And that's not to care.' (Briner, 2012, p11). This theory of NLP suggests that despite the rhetoric concerning the testing of NLP patterns robustly and such processes being an implicit part of the methodology of modeling, no such activity takes place within the NLP community currently on a regular basis.

Conclusion

The special group in coaching psychology in the UK was formed in response to concerns about untrained or poorly trained coaches, and the related need to promote improved standards of practice for the benefit of the profession of coaching, coaches, their clients and the public at large. It is little surprise that so much of NLP coaching practice 'satisfies' as it is based in psychology. As Derks points out:

'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).

Coaching modalities/communities such as meta coaching and clean coaching have emerged from NLP, however have made more precise distinctions ensuring they are not aligned with NLP coaching and the possible adverse effects that could have. These new modalities have already begun to flirt with the academic community and have demonstrated not just the ability to publish, but also the intention to support their modalities with a much more coherent epistemology and methodology.

When a coaching psychologist makes use of NLP patterns outside of such modalities he or she would do well to align such work with that which has been more thoroughly discussed in the academic literature and indeed as Einspruch and Forman suggested '... these practitioners would provide a service to the field by presenting their data in the literature so they may be critically evaluated.' (Einspruch & Forman, 1985. p.590)

The fact that NLP as a modality has followed both 'mummy and daddy', and ever since the Sharpley reviews of the 1980s chosen to avoid the difficult discussions and not publish findings in the appropriate academic journals is problematical for the modern coaching psychologist. It could also be interpreted as compelling evidence the NLP coaching community does 'not care' to use Briner's words concerning the important task of validating our coaching interventions and discussing the parameters of such validation within the academic coaching literature.

Indeed one of Sharpley's conclusions following his reviews of NLP in the 1980's still seems incredibly fair and to the point:

'Perhaps NLP principles are not amenable to research evaluation. This does not necessarily reduce NLP to worthlessness for counselling practice. Rather, it puts NLP in the same category as psychoa-

analysis, that is, with principles not easily demonstrated in laboratory settings but, nevertheless, strongly supported by clinicians in the field. Not every therapy has to undergo the rigorous testing that is characteristic of the more behavioural approaches to counseling to be of use to the therapeutic community, but failure to produce data that support a particular theory from controlled studies does relegate that theory to questionable status in terms of professional accountability.’ (Sharpley, 1987, p.105).

As a piece of action research it became clear

to me at the end as a chartered psychologist I needed to step up to the mark on this account. However unless NLP as a modality does so too the future, though commercially attractive, will always be ethically and professionally problematical.

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