

## MODELLING EXCELLENCE WITH NLP

Everyday experience suggests that performing like an expert requires years of practice in addition to having "talent" that is inborn and virtually impossible to teach. In Knowledge Management terms, it is "tacit knowledge" that the expert possesses and uses but probably can't put into words or pictures (which would be examples of "explicit knowledge"). Traditionally, the master-apprentice relationship is where tacit knowledge is transferred over a long period of time.

In NLP it is presupposed that "If one person can do something then anyone can learn to do it". Talent is learned and not inherited! What we take to be *natural* ability is actually a set of values, beliefs and unconscious behaviours that have been learned, perhaps by chance, and then reinforced by subsequent experience.

In outline, the NLP modelling process is to identify an expert and to elicit the underlying values and beliefs that relate to the context. Then we map the "strategies" that they use, the actual steps in thinking and acting that they perform.

In a physical skill, such as hitting a golf ball, the mental state is crucial to making the muscles act together in the desired sequence. In an interpersonal skill, such as influencing, the mental state will also be reflected in external behaviour. This time though it is language, tonality, pace, gestures, posture, breathing, facial expression etc. to which others unconsciously respond.

The complexity of these behaviours is such that most people could not perform them consciously, even if they had them perfectly scripted. This is why they seem to be "natural" for those who do them and impossible for everyone else.

As well as the mental and emotional state, the strategy is essential to the model. This is the precise sequence of mental and physical steps that the expert performs. A combination of observation and questioning allows the strategy to be notated. Frequently, the person being modelled is initially unaware of exactly how they do this but can describe it after some concentration

When the model has been constructed and refined, it can be "installed" in others. Typically this involves mental rehearsal of the strategy as well as the alignment of values and beliefs to make the unconscious behaviours effective. NLP brings a range of techniques for facilitating change at this level.

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For more background see, for example:  
*"Introducing NLP" by Joseph O'Connor and John Seymour (Thorsons).*