

Models, Levels & Multiple Worlds

By Charles Faulkner

One the least appreciated forms of hypnosis is naming. Naming something separates it from the rest of experience. If it is an 'object,' it is separable from its surroundings by what could be described as some natural interfaces and transformations. A tree does stand in some ways apart from the grass and greenery around it. A dog is a self-propelled entity. Still, a tree draws air and sunlight from the sky as well as water and nutrients from the earth. If it is separated from any of these for a time, it ceases to a tree – at least a living one. The same is the case for the dog. There is a natural sustenance entry and evacuation exit built into the animal. Still, most of the time, on hearing these words we imagine our mental dog and tree removed from any of the particulars of time and space.

So, how much more of a remove is there when our naming involves processes? Naming separates these processes from other processes as well as from the 'things' they operate on, within and between. There is also the possibility that there are several distinct processes categorized within that one name. Such are the processes of reification and nominalization – both well-known names in NLP for turning processes into things and nouns respectively. And such was the case of naming a number of perceptions and processes Neuro-Linguistic Programming. It does have a multi-syllable hyphenated name to signal its unlikely combination of disparate domains of knowledge, and it still has one, albeit long, name and an adapted acronym; NLP. Thus, NLP is one thing, right?

Of course, it isn't. The term NLP categorizes a wide variety of perceptions, processes, principles and presuppositions as one 'thing.' My claim is that each of these can be accurately assigned to one of seven distinct modes of experience, one of seven distinct models-of-the-world. These are: the Sensory Modalities (and their submodalities), Anchoring, Strategies, Beliefs (and values), Metaphors (including identity), Meta-Programs and Language Patterns. These are different models in that they account for different perceptions and processes, and operate on different principles and presuppositions. For example, the sensory modalities are visual, auditory, kinesthetic tactile, proprioceptive and visceral, olfactory, gustatory and vestibular. Through these modes of perception we come to know our 'outer worlds' and represent our 'inner worlds' to ourselves. In the flow of the experience of our lives, the ones we recognize and return to again and again can be called anchors. These anchors are recurring combinations of our inner and outer sensory modalities. In that, the perception of an anchor is different than a sensory modality, as are the processes that create anchors, the principles that govern them and the presuppositions that apply.

A visual experience is not an anchor. An anchor is when a particular 'outer' experience – visual for example – prompts an 'inner' complex of sensory modalities and their submodalities. Anchors are a different 'order' or model of

experience than sensory modalities. Like wise, a sequence of anchors does constitute a behavior, but not a strategy. For a strategy, two additional conditions must be met. An anchored experience must be going to happen (in the future) and a behavioral sequence must be accessed in an effort to attain it. Behavior as such has no teleology orientation. It is 'simply' stimulus-response.

Further, these three models are distinctly different from processes of evaluation. Evaluations are applications of values to certain experiences, not just to anticipated anchors for experiences (outcomes), but to most of our life processes from our morning latte to lunch to love to life purpose and most everything in between. The wider the range of time and experience these evaluations cover and the more distinct they are in their evaluation, the more they are referred to as beliefs. It has become popular to think of beliefs as only applying to total life interpreting experiences, but as beliefs are a form of generalization, we have beliefs for all sorts of experiences. These include, but not limited to, how to cook or cleaning, what is good-looking clothing, what's worth conserving, and how to convince others. When we come to the question of who is doing all this evaluating, we need a model of identification – which is also the structure of metaphor – a fundamental process of language. In fact, almost all of our experience is almost completely immersed in some language or other. We know from historical reports and some tragic circumstances that human beings who are not raised as children in a language community are limited to a dog-like signal system of communication. They never develop the neuro-linguistic capacity to mentally manipulate their inner experience in ways that we take for granted. There are many detailed studies of the structure of language and language processing, both anecdotal (Milton Erickson, Carl Whitaker, Steve DeShazer, Bill O'Hanlon, etc.) and more formal (General Semantics, various schools of Linguistics) that continue to discover how our various elements of speech (Meta-Programs) and syntactic structures (Meta-Model, Milton Model) affect and reflect our 'inner' experience.

I have surmised that all of these modes of experience, and the models associated with them, and more are going on simultaneously at most of the 'levels' of our experience most of the time. We only become aware of them if we are of a self-reflective nature, or when self-reflection is foisted upon us by the repetition of some particular form of unpleasantness again and again. We begin to wonder what is going on, and we make an enquiry through the mode or modes of experience that are most familiar to us, most developed through our life experience. If you are more oriented to your senses (sensory modalities/representational systems), you are more likely to try to change your outer environment – move location, redecorate, get the lights turned up or sound turned down and so on.

If you are more aware of your behavior and/or the behavior of others, you are more likely to try doing something to produce a change in the situation. This

is likely to be something that has worked before that is short term and bears results quickly – request, confront, challenge, buy off and so on.

If you are consciously outcome oriented, you are more likely to engage in some kind of assessment and planning strategy. What can you figure out about the nature of this difficulty? What skills and strategies are likely to be most effective? What level of sophistication is the other side bringing to this? What backup plan do you have?

If you are more aware of your values (and feelings it turns out) and/or have ideas of societal fairness and like beliefs, you will tend to focus yourself on these and are likely to try to get others to take on your values and beliefs. Of course, when you do this, your response can vary from a knee-jerk reaction to strategizing a multi-year program for change. Also, there are a few people who attempt to appreciate the beliefs of others and work with them.

If you are more aware of yourself and/or of the other selves in the situation, you will attend to that. Depending on your sophistication, you might expect that they will have ideas and beliefs at odds with your own and attempt to create some mutual understand. However, keep in mind that none of these modes of experience guarantees a more enlightened answer. It is equally possible to be very aware of the other selves in the situation and use everything one knows to try to establish some kind of dominance over these others. Recent events on the international political stage show this is not only possible, but fairly common and all too frequent.

Much less frequent these days, and perhaps in any era, are individuals who are aware of the effects of their communication and will vary their rhetoric – that is the old fashioned word for it – according to their audience. This was the path of the Sophists Socrates hated so much, and later in the Middle Ages the Rhetoricians. Much later brings us to Dr. Milton H. Erickson, MD. and from him we follow a path through Gregory Bateson to the Brief Therapies and NLP.

If the reader has discerned what s/he thinks is some kind of summary of Robert Dilts' levels, there is that and more. My claim is that not only are each of these models a complete and coherent model-of-the-world – each with its own perceptions, processes, principles, presuppositions and associated NLP techniques. Each model is also a practical working expression of an established area of enquiry. This shouldn't really surprise anyone. Each of these models describes some aspect of the same territory and is as distinct from the other as a weather map is from a street map is from a topographical map of the same area. In fact, they have much the same relationships. Certain maps will be more useful at some times than others. Useful maps tend to get borrowed, copied and improved upon. In the case of NLP, modeling individual excellence in human communication was likely to bring forth at least some of the better models. In the case of the models discussed so far, Identity and Metaphor have their origins and

expression in stories going as far back as human history can – our oral traditions. In the case of Values and Beliefs and Reframing, the more recent developments can be traced to Virginia Satir and Family Therapy. Of course, negotiation goes as far back as there have been politics. Capabilities and Strategies also have this dual history and the recent strands fit with computer programming and its associated discipline, decision theory. Meanwhile, Behavior and Anchoring have their origins in 20th Century behaviorism as well as later cybernetics. The most original model of these is the Gregory Bateson hailed discovery by Grinder and Bandler of the senses – as sensory modalities and as representational systems – as the basic units of a communications calculus.

From this perspective, Dilts' levels are a kind of "meta-model" that is, a model of how one might arrange the various models. This kind of arrangement is called an information architecture. I have retained Dilts' information architecture for as a heuristic it makes a great deal of sense. Dilts has the Environment as the base, that is, closest to the 'ground.' How can we know any environment, either outside us or in our mind's eye and ear without our senses? The sensory modalities of our outer experience and our inner experience are actually the only environments we can ever know, so there is a correspondence between Dilts' Environment and the Sensory Modalities as well as the Representational Systems.

Like a building rising from the ground of experience, Behavior is the next Dilts' level. Behaviors are anchored sequences with the emphasis here on Anchoring. The correspondence is a natural fit, with one caveat. Keep in mind that if we find ourselves in the same situation, my behavior is embedded in your outer environment — and your behavior is embedded in mine. It is only separated if you or I respectively think of it that way.

Next up this ladder of abstraction, for that is what it is as we move further away from sensory-based experience, is Dilts' Capabilities. When we talk about moving up, there is an old and understood meaning of being removed from lower more 'earthly' concerns, being able to look around, as the phrase 'ivory tower' also communicates. This is another code congruent experience with natural language that makes this a useful heuristic. Capabilities are called upon when we need them – a creativity strategy, a motivation strategy. So, there is a strong correspond with the Strategies model. It's also worth noting that a strategy is a sequence of inner and outer representations – anchors all: the representations and the processes that make them a sequence – leading to an outcome. This means that a strategy is more than just representations and anchors. It is the first model, and only model, that has direction. It is teleological – drawn toward ends. So it constitutes new mode of experience and a separate model with its own perceptions, processes, principles, presuppositions and NLP change techniques.

Next up this hierarchy are Dilts' Values and Beliefs. As I noted earlier, having Values and Beliefs so high up this information architecture automatically

orients the viewer to think of “higher” values and beliefs. This is a good utilization of our natural cognitive organization – after all, we do want to appeal to people’s higher values, don’t we? I would say yes provided we remember we also have values for such lowly things as lunch and beliefs about such simple-minded things as what is ‘fresh,’ or ‘clean,’ as well as wellformed outcome and an effective strategy and the rest. Some of the principle ways we go about revising our values and beliefs is with reframing and its closely associated idea of parts or aspects of self, so the corresponding model is Reframing.

Which brings us to Dilts’ Identity level. Of course, identification is seeing one ‘thing’ as – or in terms of – another and the literary name for this is Metaphor. The correspondence of these is complete and ushers us directly into the forms of language patterns.

Dilts' Levels as an Information Architecture with Models, Principles, Elements & Techniques

Level Techniques	Model/Origins	Principles	Elements	NLP
IDENTITY Change [who]	Metaphors [Stories, plays]	Isomorphism Identification	Metaphor Narrative	'Covert'
VALUES BELIEFS Skills [why]	Reframing [Family Therapy] [Politics]	Rapport Perceptual Positions Congruence/Agreement Ecology	Parts Criteria Meta-Outcomes Content/Context	6-Step Reframing Negotiation Visual Integration Content Reframing
CAPABILITIES [how] Strategy Outcome Generato	Strategies [Decision Theory] [Programming]	Outcome Wellformedness Planning	Rep. Systems Syntax (time) Goal/Test Operations	V, A, K, O, G Decision Wellformed New Behavior
BEHAVIOR Pace/Circle [what] History	Anchoring [Behaviorism] [Mechanism]	Stimulus–Response Operant Conditioning	Behaviors Emotional States Anchors	Future Change Personal Phobia/Trauma Relief
ENVIRONMENT Mapping Across [when/where] Phobia/Trauma Relief Pattern	Sensory Modalities [Neuro-Linguistic] [Codes]	Codes Experience; Timespace, Scale, & Values	Submodalities Timelines Hierarchies	Swish

I know that Dilts extended his hierarchy some time ago to include Spirit and then to higher categories as well. I want to pause here in as much as making a competent account of the perceptions, processes, principles and presuppositions of Spirit is more than an article in itself. It is enough for now to consider how having a description of the multiple models used by NLP can enlarge our understanding of models-of-the-world and generative change.

Early on I stated that an individual, even ourselves, on entering a difficult situation would resort to the model-of-the-world most familiar to him or her and use the existing flexibility as best s/he could. This suggests several possible interventions. First, rapport can be established easily by matching their familiar model-of-the-world. Then there is a choice point. You could help them to increase the number of perceptions and processes available within their familiar model thus increasing their flexibility. And/or after establishing rapport by pacing their familiar model, begin to lead them into a model-of-the-world they have little experience with, thus dramatically expanding their worlds and introducing an entirely new category of options.

Those of you who are executive coaches will be familiar with this scenario. You are talking strategy and execution with the senior executive and so you are also establishing a good rapport. You notice that the range of options is rather restricted and so you decide to elicit some higher level criteria in order to facilitate more flexibility. You ask in your usual off-hand conversational manner some form of "So, what's important about that?" The executive tosses off an operational answer. That is, a strategy, not a criteria. You decide to reiterate a few of the criteria words you have heard him say, just to get things going, and ask another version of the question again. This time, your executive pauses. He knows you are up to something, and wanting to make the most of you, answers ... with the same criteria as before. Here is someone very familiar with certain models-of-the-world and may not even be aware that there are any other models.

Ok, I exaggerate ... a little. It's an example of what every one of us experiences in one way or another – some models-of-the-world are more accessible to us than others. I think an NLP development program would be to increase the participant's experience with each of these models way beyond the currently described NLP techniques. For me, each of these many NLP techniques represent one reliable way to make use of the perceptions, processes, principles and presuppositions found in each of these models. The further work of the five original co-founders as well as the Andreas and many others is evidence these models contain worlds of experience yet to be fully explored.

Charles Faulkner is an internationally recognized NLP trainer, modeler and author. His work includes the ground-breaking *Metaphors of Identity* (1991), the popular book and audio program *NLP: The New Technology of Achievement* (1994), and the Systemic NLP training and coaching game Trimurti (2001). As the new Director of Training for NLP Comprehensive, he created the NLP Immersion Program (2005) which uses a *natural approach* to accelerate the learning of NLP. This article describes research begun in the early 90s connecting NLP modeling, the semiotics of models and modern neuroscience. Recently married to a UK citizen, he divides his time between the UK and the US, and between research, coaching, training and trading. For more on Charles' work see www.influentialcommunications.com and www.nlpcomprehensive.com

©2005 Charles Faulkner. All rights reserved in all media. Printed with permission.