

3.22 Summary of Part 3 - NLP for project management

In this chapter we have seen that there are a lot of NLP tools and techniques that can help to develop awareness of ourselves and those around us, and also to control ourselves and influence social engagement. All of this helps us to be even more effective and to deliver projects successfully.

We started off by considering ethics within the wider framework of professional communities and aligned the need to be ethical in our approach to NLP. We built on the work of Covey and other management gurus who promoted the need to 'sharpen our saw' and maintain a thirst for continuous development. We were introduced to a process for changing limiting beliefs. From Plato onwards, we were advised that our most fundamental requirement is for self awareness, and we explored the use of language and behaviour profiling of our sixty-plus meta-programs to understand ourselves and where we needed to develop flexibility.

After doing some exercises to know ourselves better, we moved on to exercises to help to manage our emotional state. In NLP we believe that we can choose our state, and prefer to be in resourceful ones, especially as we are often presenting ourselves in some way. We learned the 'circle of excellence' technique to manifest additional positive resources when we needed them. We were introduced to further meta-programs related to handling stress, and in particular where, when and how to move between associated and dissociated behaviour.

Assertiveness is an important skill for PMs, and we discussed how to occupy the high ground between the troughs of submissive and aggressive behaviour. More importantly, we explored the different leadership models, and the TOTE model was introduced to help develop flexible behaviour.

The NLP pillar of being outcome focussed was described and mapped over to goal setting in projects, and simple tools for prioritisation were practiced.

Timelines are a big theme in NLP, and tools for developing flexibility in being people focussed or task focussed were introduced. Better ways to match the natural inclinations of different stakeholders using language patterns were discussed.

Sometimes in projects we need to be able to see the big picture, while at other times we need to manage the detail. Sometimes we need to explore options, while for some activities we need to manage the process. NLP techniques to choose preferences were practiced, as was matching of language to different stakeholders with different preferences.

We covered a lot of different techniques to help us to build rapport with a wide variety of stakeholders, all underpinned by an attitude of genuine curiosity. An appreciation that everyone has different maps of the world and sees things in a different way to ourselves is required to establish the need for a structured approach. Different levels of rapport were introduced, from the superficial to those at an identity level, alongside examples of how to achieve them. Illustrations were given on matching of representational systems, predicates and the language of preferred meta-programs. Implications for progress reports and presentations were illustrated.

NLP for project management: making soft skills less hard

The meta-model of the deep structure of meaning of language was a cornerstone in the development of NLP and its usefulness in helping us, in the words of Peter Drucker, 'to hear what isn't being said', was exemplified through several exercises. Models for good and contrasting poor listeners were presented.

The use of re-frame to change our interpretation of events, particularly in difficult situations, was described. Examples of how to do this and where it had been successful were given. As well as reframing of context, use of 'as if' and 'future pacing' were introduced to help to overcome difficulties and blockages.

Use of 'meta-positions', exploring first, second and third person perspectives, was described as a tool to help us deal with difficult situations and people. Various techniques for helping to reach agreement were discussed, including 'chunking' to common purpose. An end to end process for reaching agreement was laid out.

One of our biggest challenges as PMs is to harness the potential of the project team. The fact that the team is a collection of individuals with different worldviews, values and behaviours was discussed. Different working rule structures, and their impact on the team, were described. Ways to create a project identity and norm behaviours were illustrated, e.g. through a 'team charter'. Common reasons for people not doing what they are asked were discussed, before addressing some of the root causes of these. Use of presupposition, metaphor and subtle command were illustrated.

All of this may be worthless unless we get feedback on what works and what needs further practice, so we dealt with giving and receiving feedback. The 'sandwich feedback' model was described, and an end to end process for seeking and receiving feedback was laid out.

We concluded with an introduction to the modelling of excellence – the starting point for the development of NLP. An end to end process for the modelling of a simple strategy was given, with an example of its use.

I am convinced that this approach and these and similar tools will improve your performance in the world of project management. I am also assured by family and friends that they help in our private lives too.