

Using a Behavioral Model of Excellence to Improve Organizational Performance: Benefits and Pitfalls

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Abstract

Introduction: Behavioral models of excellence are used to profile successful human behavior and, through a training program, to teach others the characteristics of success.

Objectives: The objectives were to profile an application of the NLP LifeSets[®] MOE and highlight considerations for successful implementation of MOE-based training programs.

Methods: To develop a model of excellence, data is typically gathered across four components: meta programs, contextual beliefs, cognitive strategies and physiology.

The patterns revealed through interview, observation and the structured survey are confirmed through component-specific validation processes and analyzed to determine the prevailing patterns for the 'star performers'. The resulting NLP LifeSets[®] Model of Excellence profile is a synthesis of this analysis and is accepted as the operational MOE once reviewed and agreed with the client. From this NLP LifeSets[®] MOE, a training program is developed.

Results: This paper describes one study and discusses some of the advantages of this approach to organizational training, as well as some of the challenges in the successful implementation of new behaviors and attitudes.

Conclusions: The article concludes with emphasizing the importance of management commitment to behavioral modelling projects and suggests some further uses of model of excellence profiling.

Keywords: Behavioral Modelling, Model of Excellence, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Organizational Training

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I. Introduction

Behavioral modelling is a process for replicating successful human behavior. Successful behavior is defined differently, depending on the environment being considered and the criteria established. In organizations, for example, success could be defined as the achievement of pre-determined levels of sales, productivity, financial goals or the adoption of organizational cultural values. In sport, success could be classified as winning, as beating one's own personal best time or as improving endurance levels. In many arenas – professional, social, athletic – there are star performers; those people who achieve success beyond the standards reached by their peers. These star performers typically practice behavioral patterns that can be learned by others.

Behavioral modelling is a way to decipher the unconscious patterns of star performers and to make them explicit. The resulting profile is a Model of Excellence (MOE). The MOE unearths the behavioral and cognitive drivers that influence how a star performer thinks, achieves, decides, creates, self-motivates and remembers. Through a targeted training program, based on the MOE, people are provided with the skills and techniques to emulate and replicate the successful patterns of others. In developing the MOE, the patterns identified are the innate values (meta programs), contextual beliefs, cognitive/ behavioral strategies and physiology that successful people employ to undertake specific tasks. Meta programs are unconscious personal filters that “describe our habitual style of noticing, thinking, emoting, sorting, valuing, choosing and behaving. However, meta programs can be changed by making conscious decisions to delete processes and strategies that no longer work well” (Hall, Bodenhamer, 2007) and, conversely, to add processes and strategies which will be more effective in changed circumstances. In an MOE application, contextual beliefs are those that describe a person's key beliefs about the task at hand and their contribution to the task's successful completion.

The NLP LifeSets® Model of Excellence (NLP LifeSets® MOE) was developed by the author drawing on the tools of NLP and the representation of behavioral modelling shaped by Wyatt Woodsmall around 1988 (Hall, 2019). The specific elicitation methodology and techniques used in the NLP LifeSets® MOE were refined by the author and based on his own extensive work and experience as a NLP Master Trainer. The NLP LifeSets® MOE employs the typical steps of behavioral modelling: observing excellent performance and capturing what a person does (their behavior and physiology), how they do it (cognitive strategies) and why they do it (beliefs

and values) to achieve excellence, then extracting and synthesizing the key activities and behaviors of excellent performers and finally designing a program to teach the skills and replicate this excellent performance more broadly. Built into the NLP LifeSets® MOEs are mechanisms for checking and validating the findings of each of the components.

Projects where the NLP LifeSets® Model of Excellence has been employed cover a range of industries, professions and activities. It has focused on sales success for both for-profit and non-profit organizations; it has been used to identify the key success attributes of an organization's supervisory team, to define success among customer consultants, forensic scientists and creative chefs and to determine characteristics of success in sports, among other uses. In each case, information gathered from star participants was used to develop a NLP LifeSets® MOE.

After a Model of Excellence is developed, a tailored training program is designed to teach the behaviors of success which were identified in the model. The training program is first piloted and refined as needed and the polished training program is then implemented. The final measure of success for a Model of Excellence program is a positive shift in successful performance indicators, as determined by an organization's management team.

This paper outlines a case study undertaken by the author to illustrate the processes involved in the development of a MOE profile and then discusses some of the challenges in the implementation of the resulting training program.

II. Objectives

The objectives were to profile an application of the NLP LifeSets® MOE and highlight considerations for successful implementation of MOE-based training programs.

III. Method

To develop a model of excellence, data is typically gathered across four components, as defined in Table 1.

| <i>Component</i> | <i>Definition</i> |
|--------------------|--|
| Meta programs | The determinants of behavior that motivate an individual to expend energy and resources to achieve a particular outcome. |
| Contextual beliefs | The philosophies, presuppositions and attitudes that enable an |

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|----------------------|---|
| | individual to perform a particular task in a competent manner. In this case study, they influence an individual's perception of an organization and his/ her job within that organization. Beliefs are critical to motivation and commitment. |
| Cognitive strategies | The specific sequences of mental and physical processes involved in performing a particular task. |
| Physiology | The physical movements performed in carrying out a behavior. These consider, among other movements, posture, breathing, voice tone, position of the head and position of the eyes. |

Table 1: Input components for the development of a model of excellence

Developing a comprehensive model of excellence project involves a number of stages:

- The commissioning organization (the client) identifies the indicator(s) (e.g. sales volume or value, percentage of successful contacts, production rates etc.) that it wants to improve.
- The client, in consultation with the MOE consultant, selects the staff members (the 'star performers') whose performances best match the identified success indicators.
- The meta programs, contextual beliefs, cognitive strategies and physiology of the star performers are then elicited.
- The information gathered is then synthesized and a Model of Excellence is developed.
- The resulting Model of Excellence forms the basis of a targeted training program. This training program focuses on teaching the values, contextual beliefs, strategies and behaviors of the star performers.
- The training program is piloted with a selected group. Assessment of the pilot program includes the demonstration of an understanding of the successful beliefs and behaviors and an ability to reproduce these. If practical, a measurement of 'post-pilot' performance can also be taken.
- The training program is then refined as needed to ensure that the training will provide staff members with the proven skills and techniques to achieve the organizational performance indicators that formed the objective of the project.

For the NLP LifeSets® MOE, the beliefs and behaviors are elicited through the data collection methods listed in Table 2.

| Components | Information gathering method |
|----------------------|---|
| Meta programs | Written completion of the NLP LifeSets® assessment survey. |
| Contextual beliefs | Via interview: participants identify 3 beliefs about one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ about the role of the organization; ○ the relationship between the participant and the organization; ○ the participant's perception of their task in the organization. |
| Cognitive strategies | Via interview: the NLP LifeSets® MOE consultant elicits, via visual and auditory observations, what participants say and do when performing a particular task. The NLP LifeSets® MOE consultant then codes the resulting strategy. |
| Physiology | NLP LifeSets® MOE consultant observes individuals as they perform activities. |

Table 2: Information gathering steps for NLP LifeSets® MOE

The patterns revealed through interview, observation and the structured survey are confirmed through component-specific validation processes (Table 3). The validation of meta programs, beliefs and strategies seeks to gather external confirmation of internal processes. The outcome is confirmation that the expressed meta programs, beliefs or strategies are real, consistent and congruent. Physiology, on the other hand, is exclusively an external process that can be observed and recorded so explicit validation is not required.

| Components | Validation |
|---------------|--|
| Meta programs | NLP LifeSets® MOE consultant analyses the language used during interview and compares this with the meta programs obtained via survey. Congruency is satisfied if the same characteristics dominate in both survey and language for most of the elements measured. Any major inconsistencies |

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| | are discussed to identify root causes and the innate tendency (rather than learned) is confirmed. |
| Contextual beliefs | Participants confirm their beliefs are real by accessing their memories via sub-modalities. These sub-modalities are representations of how a participant feels, what they see and hear when stating their beliefs. If the belief is just ‘made up’, then the participant will be unable to spontaneously describe sub-modalities that resonate with the belief. |
| Cognitive strategies | NLP LifeSets [®] MOE consultant rehearses the participant undertaking a relevant task and notes whether the behavior is congruent with the coded strategy. If inconsistency is observed, the NLP LifeSets [®] MOE consultant adjusts the strategy until it matches the participant’s behavior. |
| Physiology | If observing repeated tasks, the NLP LifeSets [®] MOE consultant checks if any apparent inconsistencies occur. |

Table 3: Validation steps for NLP LifeSets[®] MOE

The information collected is analyzed to determine the prevailing patterns for values, contextual beliefs, strategies and physiology from these star performers. The resulting MOE profile is a synthesis of this analysis. Specially, the profiling process involves:

- for META PROGRAMS: the results of each of the 6 elements of the NLP LifeSets[®] assessment survey are reviewed. Any outlying results are noted and, where extreme variation is observed, can be deleted from the final analysis if excessive distortion results. The remaining data for each element are then averaged. The results are reviewed with the client to confirm that the ensuring meta program profile aligns organizationally. In some cases, an adjustment is made to strengthen the alignment.
- for BELIEFS: the three most common beliefs are identified. These are drawn from between one and three areas (see Table 2).
- for COGNITIVE STRATEGIES: the most common strategy is elicited from a synthesis of the strategies coded for individual participants and then tested to ensure they are consistent for well-formed and ecological conditions.

- for PHYSIOLOGY: the most common physiology is elicited from a synthesis of the physical movements of individual participants.

The NLP LifeSets[®] Model of Excellence profile is then reviewed with the client and, once agreed, is accepted as the operational MOE. From this NLP LifeSets[®] MOE, a training program is developed. This training program embeds the successful behaviors and attitudes of the star performers across a broader group of colleagues or team members.

IV. Case Study

The Australian branch of a large, international, not-for-profit organization raised revenue through door-to-door canvassing by sales teams. In the field, these canvassing teams provided information about the organization and its role in promoting social and environmental good and asked people to donate money, through an ongoing payment plan, to help fund the work of the organization. The management of this organization noted that the success rates of their canvassing teams varied substantially. Success was defined, by management, as securing a plan for regular donations over a specified time period.

The organization commissioned the author to undertake a behavioral modelling study to identify the meta programs, contextual beliefs and behaviors of the highly successful canvassers and, based on the resulting profile, to develop a NLP LifeSets[®] MOE and then a training program. After analyzing past performances, the organization’s management selected the star performers to take part in the initial MOE development phase.

A total of 11 canvassers took part in the initial phase. The information gathering process was undertaken in three steps. Each canvasser:

- was personally interviewed for approximately 2 hours to:
 - identify their beliefs with relation to the organization and their place in it;
 - determine the cognitive strategies they used in the execution of their role (i.e. in canvassing for donations);
- self-completed the NLP LifeSets[®] assessment survey to determine their meta programs;
- was observed undertaking their canvassing activity, in order to determine their physiology.

During the face-to-face dialogue the interviewer (the MOE consultant) asked a number of questions, each of which was designed to elicit information on a specific aspect of the MOE profile. At the same time, the interviewer was observing the level

of congruency between verbal responses and non-verbal behavior as part of the validation process (Table 3).

V. Results

For this organization, the meta programs of successful canvassers demonstrate that canvassers have a clear bias towards positive motivation (looking to rewards rather than considering consequences) and towards difference when making decisions (as opposed to deciding on the basis of similarity). Successful canvassers rarely consider the past; rather they focus on the present and the future. They also demonstrate flexibility; an attribute that is usefully employed in responding to comments from potential donors and in keeping the exchange open. For example, they can adapt their language to express information in the relationship framework (self/ other) that resonates with the potential donor and can present information in a way that corresponds with the potential donor's way of learning. Contextual beliefs describing the relationship between the successful canvasser and the organization are centered on the importance of organizational effectiveness, on communication skills, as a tool for successful engagement with potential donors and on a personal belief in the canvasser's own ability to survive in the organizational environment. The cognitive strategies used by successful canvassers focus on gaining rapport with potential donors, using sensory acuity to gather information and then formulating appropriate responses. The successful canvasser maintains an erect posture, maintains eye contact and matches his/ her volume and tonality with that of the potential donor. More detailed descriptions of the results follow.

Meta programs

Specifically, the meta programs identified for a successful canvasser (Chart 1) for the canvassing role in this organization reveal:

- a personal *motivation* towards pursuing positive goals and thinking in terms of advantages. The model canvasser perceives obstacles as opportunities and, consequently, can turn objections into agreements. The successful canvasser responds well to positive encouragement and reward;
- an ability to make choices when composing *feedback*, based either on their own intuition or by responding to external physical expressions (e.g. posture, language) exhibited by the potential donor;

- an ability to *relate* to the potential donor by 'stepping into their shoes' and responding accordingly;
- an ability to contextualize information to accommodate the donor's *learning* style, either 'big picture' first and then specifics, or the reverse;
- a *time* orientation towards the present and the future with little reference to the past. Past failure does not hinder the successful canvasser's motivation: the present enables the canvasser to actively engage with the potential donor and to deal with day-to-day tasks while still reaching for future goals and rewards;
- a clear choice for *making decisions* based on difference rather than sameness.

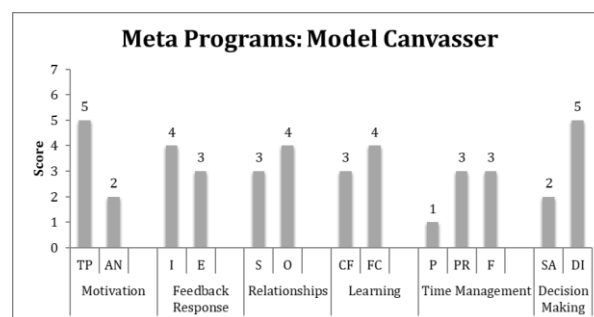


Chart 1: The Meta Programs of a Model Canvasser for a specified organization

| Chart Legend | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| MOTIVATION | Towards Positive (TP) | Away from Negative (AN) | |
| FEEDBACK RESPONSE | Internal (I) | External (E) | |
| RELATIONSHIPS | Self (S) | Other (O) | |
| LEARNING | Content→Form (CF) | Form→Content (FC) | |
| TIME MANAGEMENT | Past (P) | Present (PR) | Future (F) |
| DECISION MAKING | Same (SA) | Different (DI) | |

Beliefs

The 3 core beliefs for a successful canvasser in this organization are:

- that the organization is effective and this attribute is important in creating social and environmental change;
- that personal contact and communication with people is needed to achieve organizational goals;
- that the canvasser can be successful and survive using his/ her own resources while acknowledging that there is always room for improvement.


These core beliefs consider the organization and its role in doing good, how the canvasser's role contributes to this and the self-confidence of the canvasser in undertaking his/ her role. Many of the other beliefs expressed reinforced the themes identified in these core beliefs. For example, some canvassers commented on negative global situations and implied a role for the organization in addressing these. Others talked about the power of people uniting to achieve goals. Only one belief ("not a bad job"), relating to a canvasser's view of his/ her own work, was expressed somewhat negatively.

Cognitive Strategy

For this organization, the cognitive strategy employed by a successful canvasser focuses on three key areas:

- feedback: actively noting a potential donor's verbal and body language and responding with appropriate feedback;
- sensory acuity: listening to and observing the potential donor and their environment;
- rapport: utilizing information about the potential donor as a basis for rapport building.

The resultant NLP LifeSets® MOE strategy is a synthesis of the content and sequence of each successful canvasser's strategy.

Vi/Ki/Aid - [Ve - Ve/ae - - Ki+- - Ve/Ae - K+- -] exit


This sequence summarizes the following steps:

1. The canvasser is motivated to succeed by internally generated feelings, pictures or dialogue. This representation is closely linked to the motivational value (towards positive) and the beliefs that the canvasser has about his/ her role in the organization's success.
2. In the field, when the canvasser first approaches a house, he/ she notes the style and presentation of the house and its immediate surrounds. The canvasser uses this information to assist in establishing rapport with a potential donor.
3. The canvasser then makes contact with the potential donor and notes, by listening and looking, the potential donor's response after an introductory greeting. In this environment, the canvasser is using external feedback to facilitate early engagement with the potential donor.
4. Based on the initial exchange, the canvasser then gets a stronger feel for how the potential

donor will interact during contact. If the feeling is positive, the successful canvasser will continue introducing the organization, highlighting its goals and the need for support. If the feeling is negative, the successful canvasser will attempt a creative tact to gain rapport or will politely terminate the exchange.

5. If the exchange continues, the successful canvasser watches and listens to responses from the potential donor and uses these to guide the style of presentation, what to say and how to say it. The successful canvasser is, unconsciously, drawing on his/ her flexibility in regards to feedback, to a self or other orientation and the potential donor's preference for 'big picture' or detailed information.

Physiology

The physiology of the successful canvasser includes:

- an erect and primarily stationary posture with head held upward, ongoing eye contact and relaxed muscles. Any materials being discussed are held so that the potential donor can see them. A distance of about 1 meter (3 feet) is maintained between canvasser and potential donor;
- the canvasser's voice tonality, volume and modulation either matches the voice of the potential donor or is evenly/ neutrally delivered.

In summary, the key strengths found in the star performers for this organization are:

- a high value placed on the work of the organization;
- an ability to think in terms of benefits;
- flexibility and creativity in gaining rapport and closing the sale;
- an ability to balance present needs with future goals;
- thinking and behaving optimally for successful outcomes.

VI. Discussion

MOE profiling is a robust and discriminating tool for capturing the behavior of individuals who perform well in a particular activity. Study participants are not randomly selected and MOE profiles prepared in one situation should not be expected to fit broader populations, other jobs or work environments. The use of each MOE profile is therefore limited to

implementation for the task, context and environment where it was created, particularly where these profiles are proprietary to the commissioning client.

Developed profiles uniquely reflect the studied population's best-performance characteristics. Contrasting with the case study presented in this paper, a project which profiled the characteristics of excellent waiters found that contextual beliefs all focused on the individual (not the organization), postures were relaxed, time orientation was strongly focused on the present, details dominated over the 'big picture' and external cues and 'other' relationship orientations were prominent. Among a study of medical students, the preferred learning style order was 'big picture' first and time management concentrated on the past and the present with little reference to the future.

Similar profiles can emerge. The MOE profile of membership consultants for a health club largely mirrored that in the case study. The fundamental role of both canvassers and membership consultants is similar, that is, they are direct selling their organization's services to new customers in return for some personal benefit to the customer (altruism or wellbeing). One key similarity in this comparison was the positive relationship between the star performers and his/ her organization, as articulated in their contextual beliefs. Contextual beliefs are organizationally and personally bound. In a second study of canvasser activity for a different organization, the three most common beliefs articulated by the star performers reflected their confidence in their own capacity to perform well. In this second study, the star performers had a weak relationship with their employing organization; their focus was on making money for themselves. The other components of this second MOE profile also showed clear differences from the case study. This suggests that success in similar activities can be achieved via different profiles.

The MOE tool is culturally sensitive. Meta programs among some Asians tend to exhibit more 'away from negative' motivation and a more 'other' relationship focus than is evident among other geo-demographic groups where the author has undertaken profiling. Psychology and beliefs also tend to be culturally bound¹.

The MOE profile can be flexibly applied. Star performers who participate in the information-gathering phase of a MOE are selected on the basis of pre-set success criteria as determined by the organization's management. Success is not dependent on the length of prior experience; inclusion is based on the superior

performance of some employees relative to other team members. Nonetheless, this selection process does not guarantee best possible performance for this activity, just that relative to other team members, the selected participants are better than their colleagues. If appropriate, the management and the MOE consultant can agree to modify a derived MOE profile to accommodate prevailing internal or external circumstances or to aim for more ambitious success. In the author's experience, any such modifications have been minor and, in most cases, it is the derived profile that forms the basis of the training program. The derived model, properly installed, can still deliver improved performance results, using past performance as the organization's benchmark.

A key strength of MOE profiling is the ability to design a precise training program based on the profile created; a program that focuses on the skills and behaviors needed to maximize success in the selected job and context. The ultimate measure of success for a MOE-based training program is the successful assimilation of the new behavior and attitudes among the targeted population, as measured by improvements in the pre-determined performance goals.

The implementation of a successful training program relies on real commitment from the organization. Any number of internal or external events can interfere with this. In the case study presented here, an unexpected shift in global fundraising strategies coincided with the development of the MOE training program; consequently, management lost its appetite for the implementation process. In another case, also a non-profit organization raising funds through canvassing, the canvassers participating in the training program were a mixture of star performers and non-star canvassers. This mix created some tensions among the group; the star performers (whose collective best practices formed the basis of the training program) felt a sense of superiority over their colleagues. The non-star performers were not fully committed to undertaking the training; this attitude was largely a failure on the part of management to get buy-in among that group. Management itself had unrealistic expectations, anticipating an immediate shift in results rather than a more gradual improvement as participants practiced and perfected the modelled skills and techniques. Additionally, in this case, the project had been conducted in only one Australian location. The canvassers at this location represented the top echelon of the organization's performers across Australia. From this

¹ Observations from some of the author's commissioned projects in Asian countries, Australia, Middle East and Europe.

elite group, the star performers were selected. The gap between star and second tier performers at this location was relatively small, compared to other locations, so that incremental improvement in performance was unlikely to be dramatic. A better measurement of the efficacy of the derived MOE-based training program would have involved implementation in a location where performance was relatively poor, compared to the top location.

The ease with which new behaviors and attitudes are assimilated can vary substantially. Sometimes, people are unwilling to change their own values and beliefs. Some people find it difficult to shift from a dissociated to an associated state in a training environment; this limits the capacity to fully learn and integrate the modelled behaviors and can impact on a person's ongoing success in the role.

In many projects, expressed beliefs have aligned well with organizational philosophy and culture; in others misalignment is evident. The beliefs identified in the case study echo the mission and philosophy of the organization and the role of the star performers in achieving those ideals. Customer consultants, the participants in another NLP LifeSets[®] MOE project, recognized that they worked for a good company and they placed high value on achieving good customer relations in the successful execution of their jobs. Elite members of a sports club expressed pride in the quality of their club, they recognized the vital roles of skills and techniques for successful play and they accepted that they had personal responsibility to keep themselves fit. In contrast, when the structure and philosophy of organizations did not embed a cultural commitment to the respective organizations, the employees showed strongly focus on getting their own needs satisfied. This situation created obstacles for training, including difficulty in cementing shared beliefs between employees and their organizations.

The development of both the MOE profile and a training program requires a mastery of both communication skills and the techniques and skills of NLP. A quality MOE profile largely depends on accurate elicitation via interviewing and observation and then on the ability to interpret and record findings so as to precisely reflect the behaviors of participants. The MOE consultant needs extensive experience to select, and adapt, relevant NLP skills and techniques in order to build a comprehensive and targeted training program. If the trainer lacks deep knowledge of communication skills and NLP techniques, the risk is that the instruction is superficial and the capacity of the participants to effect real behavioral change is compromised.

VII. Conclusions

For MOE-based training, the content of the training program has been generated from successful behaviors practiced within the organization. This contrasts with many other training programs where external expertise and knowledge is brought into an organization. While the commitment of management is pivotal to the success of any training program, for MOE-based training it is critically important that management work with the MOE consultant from the inception of the project, before the training program has been developed. This requires management to have a clear understanding of the process, realistic expectations of successful implementation and awareness of any risks likely to impede success and to share those insights with the MOE consultant. The consultant should also be aware of any pending organizational change to policies, operations or strategic plans that could affect the long term relevance of the training; training which has been built on the success of current practices and roles. Difficulties can occur when either the management has unrealistic expectations and insufficient commitment to complete execution of the full project or when the MOE consultant is not fully cognizant of factors influencing the successful delivery and implementation of a program. Both the MOE profiling and the training program need to align with the organization's mission statement and corporate values.

Understanding the profile of successful operators within an organization can guide its recruitment process and maximize the opportunity for early productivity from new employees. Caution should be exercised in this process to avoid accusations of discrimination being levelled at the organization. A mismatch of beliefs about organizational values and those of (potential) employees can lead to lack of loyalty to an organization and affect retention rates.

MOE profiling could potentially have a role in the development of job-specific training templates for tasks where precise sequencing is essential and variation can result in sub-optimal performance. Using a MOE approach, the training would surround the technical skills required with high-performance values, beliefs, strategies and physiology.

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