A Study on NLP impacting Human Behavior

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Abstract

Neuro Linguistic Programming is highly unorganized and skeptically criticized as pseudo-science by many scholars. In this paper, we are trying to analyze if there is any positive impact on human’s behavioral change. The research methodology used in this paper is In-depth interview. A set of questions were asked to respondents at different timings to ensure the validity of answers. In this paper, we have found that, there's a positive impact on people who have undergone NLP therapy in terms of understanding the self, open up more possibilities for life. NLP helps in inculcating the most powerful skills in humans to control responses and events around them. NLP also assists us to explore the thought process and the way humans feel to scrutinize the inner language we use to symbolize our own experiences. It also helps in business transformation in humans in terms of improved leadership and enhancing personality to enhance excellence.

Index Terms— NLP, Human Behavior, Pseudo science, Psychology, NLP Modeling.

I. INTRODUCTION

Neuro-Linguistic Programming is an alternate approach to understand, and transform human behavior. Developed in 1976, by Dr. John Grinder and Richard Bandler, NLP is spread all over the world. The models of NLP were legendary in their respective fields and had exceptional success with every patient they work with. Milton worked using Hypnotherapy, Virginia-Family Therapy, Fritz Perls- Gestalt therapy. John and Richard worked on what made their therapy work, exceptionally every time, whereas many people in the same field and context couldn’t get results. These were the foundational models of NLP. They took away the ritual and extra fluff around it and got the necessary process which when applied created desired changes in a person’s Neurology resulting a shift in his Behavior. NLP is all about self-discovery, exploring identity and mission. NLP involves a revolutionary process of the study of human thoughts and experiences. It is an understanding of the mind, using the brain and creating what we call as experience. Concept that it consists of a series of tools and techniques modelled on performance excellence. Although NLP was first used in the world of therapy, it soon established itself into varied fields. One such field where NLP is applied and has shown successful outcomes is Organization Development. An organization’s development may be subject to numerous aspects such as employees, contribution to the business, organization psychology and many other disciplines. To become effective, productive and satisfying to its employees, organization’s need to change. In today’s world, change is a significant part of the organizational life. A successful organization with the achievement of professional goals depends on more than the qualifications, experience and job-related skills. The ability to change continually and to become an excellent influencer thereby achieving the goals and improving performance can be achieved by applying NLP in organization development. NLP tools and concepts can be effectively used by leaders who want to develop their organizations and make them more successful. Its emphasis on developing well-formed outcomes can greatly assist leaders in their vision for the organization as well as for themselves and for every employee in their organizations.

In this paper, we are exploring

1. What is NLP and its influence on human behavior?
2. Real time case studies, the problem, the internal shift in neurology and the resultant change experienced by the person.

The field is unorganized and skeptically criticized as Pseudo science by many scholars, while NLP experts claims it is a Framework which has distilled the best piece of psychology, hypnotherapy, Gestalt therapy, Family therapy and many more. The founders have coded and tested the processes on many before making it a “Classic NLP Pattern”. The results have been amazing, like people getting rid of Phobias, fears, bad habits, addictions and more in less than 90 minutes. This has lead NLP to be used by Influential Leaders and Personalities like Barack Obama, Robin Sharma, Oprah Winfrey, Deepak Chopra and more. Some references on authority of NLP in the field of Human Behavior---
“NLP is one of the biggest breakthroughs in the technology of achievement and human excellence” Times Magazine.

“A new Standard for Psychology” Psychology Today

“NLP could be most important synthesis of knowledge about human communication to emerge since the explosion of humanistic psychology in the sixties” Science Digest.

II. HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Human Behavior refers to the quantum of response of a human to external world based on his beliefs and past experiences, cultural background, societal values and more.

Human behavior refers to the array of every physical action and observable emotion associated with individuals, as well as the human race as a whole. While specific features of one’s Personality may be more consistent, while the other behaviors will change as one progress from birth through adulthood and so on. In addition to being dictated by age and genetics, behavior, driven in part by thoughts and feelings, is an insight into individual psyche, revealing among other things attitudes and values.

In this context, we are exploring Neuro Linguistic Programming as a tool to explore human behavior and how can it help us in creating sustaining, permanent and generative changes in real time. In my study, I am exploring the works of two NLP based therapists, Antriksh Tatia and Abhishek Bohra and using their documentation for the researching and decoding their use of NLP interventions for their clients. Antriksh Tatia, Emotional Mastery Coach claims, “Since NLP is highly unregulated industry, an NLP practitioner needs to have skills and capabilities in addition to theoretical knowledge of patterns, some of them are- Calibration, Sensory acuity, Unconscious rapport and wisdom of which pattern to use for a desired behavioral change”. Calibration is observation with a reference, no assumptions or categorization, profiling as done in traditional psychometric analysis or therapy format. Sensory Acuity is important to understand, observe the existing patterns and communicate with the Neurology of a person to create the necessary changes in a person. It’s like dual work as it involves the following tasks.

1. Teaching brain the corrective measures and reprogramming the behavior.

When a coach is successful in doing the above, the possibilities of generative changes unfold.

III. THE NLP MODEL

A. NLP:

NLP also known as Neuro-Linguistic Programming is a study of how people think, remember experiences and learn, i.e. Subjective Experience. The ‘Neuro’ relates to Neurology, to the ways in which we process information from our five senses through our Brain and Nervous System. Linguistic relates to the language system of Neurology, which is not just the words, but holistic quantum of verbal and nonverbal communication. How we attribute meanings to our internal representation of world and how we communicate it. Programming relates the way our experiences and learning are coded into our life, i.e. as habitual patterns similar to how software runs computer. Developed in 1970s by Richard Bandler and John Grinder, gives you a set of tools and skills that allows you to make real changes fast and ecological. It is recognized form of Psychotherapy in US and many other countries.

B. NLP MODEL

We experience external world through our five senses, i.e. Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Gustatory and Olfactory. There is so much continuous information coming in our direction we consciously and unconsciously ignore i.e., Delete the information, what we didn’t pay attention to. While the remaining information we filter based on our past experiences, beliefs and values. What we end up having as primary sensory based information is incomplete and in accurate, because the original information has been deleted, distorted and generalized. The Filtered residue becomes our Internal “Map”, which directly influences our physiology and “state of being” This becomes our Behavior. The behavior, and approach to it creates the difference in life. Applications of NLP focuses on making the use of the way brain encodes our experiences to alter/ change our mental map so that our approaches are widened and scope of our thinking grows. These patterns are used to alter behaviors, limiting beliefs, phobias and more into the field of Human Excellence.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tomasz Witkowski in his paper “Thirty-Five Years of Research on Neuro-Linguistic Programming. NLP Research Data Base. State of the Art or Pseudoscientific Decoration?” conducted a study on to determine the depth of empirical research on NLP. He states that out of all the books, none of the psychology textbooks presents an in-depth discussion of the concept. Among the studies classified as NLP supportive, there were none to indicate in unequivocal terms the existence of different
representational systems. Similarly, there was no support found for the claim that subjects were using primarily one predominant representational system in different life situations.

Cătălin Zaharia, Melita Reiner and Peter Schütz in their paper Evidence-Based Neuro Linguistic Psychotherapy: A Meta-Analysis” presented a meta-analysis of studies, observational or randomized controlled trials, for evaluating the efficacy of Neuro Linguistic Programming in individuals with different psychological and/or social problems. The paper summarized the effects of NLP interventions compared in 12 trials. Of the twelve studies selected, only one study had a large number of participants (N=115 psychotherapy clients). In that randomly controlled trial, the NLP therapy group showed a significant improvement and longer lasting effects of psychotherapy than the control group.

In the paper “Peculiarities of Using Neuro-Linguistic Programming Techniques in teaching”, indicates the preferences of students, establishing mutual understanding with students, and achieving better learning results. The terms “visual”, “auditory”, and “kinesthetic” were used to describe the ways of learning. Their typical features are described. The paper states that activation and optimization of the educational process requires introducing into the learning activity of students. Elements such as positive anchoring, rapport, and exchange of strategies is necessary to pay special attention to multi-sensor communication with students and multi-channel presentation of information.

V. FUNDAMENTALS TO HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND CHANGE

A. NLP presuppositions:

Dr. John Grinder, Co-founder of NLP, classic code tells- NLP presupposition may not be a Universal truth, but here we are borrowing the presupposition as a belief, a framework which opens up possibilities, that’s why they are called presuppositions and not rules! An NLP presupposition increases the choices in a particular situation and helps you choose the best option which could act as leverage for you to standout in the crowd. Some of the relevant presuppositions are:

1) The map is not the territory:

Our experience of world is not the world, ie our map (perception of world) is not the territory. The world exists and operates independently of our experience of it. Many people believe the world outside is exactly what their perception about it is, but it’s just one perception of it. Expanding map is expanding the choices, for example, loosing temper of boss on an employee’s nonperformance is be a choice, when the map expands there arises many other choices to meet the intention of losing temper.

2) Experience has a structure:

The way we experience world has a structure to it, as we explored in the NLP model above. The way we code memories, beliefs and other experiences in our mind are not random, there is a complex structure of our filters and patterns we process through our five senses. The primary work of a coach is to identify the structure which is automatically giving rise to the “Problem behavior” and do necessary changes that would solve the issue internally thereby changing the external Human Behavior.

3) People make the best choices available to them

However inappropriate a behavior of a person in a context is, it’s the best choice available to them at that particular state of being and context based on life history, knowledge, beliefs and resources, when viewed from their frame of reference or map of the world. When we see it from different reference it may be misguided behavior, mistake or stupid based on the consequences but at that particular context and time, the person choose best choice available. A Coach, uses all the tools he has to expand the choice on neurological level, for example next time instead of getting angry, the person chooses different responses which are elegant and gets results.

4) Underlying every behavior is a positive intention

It is sometimes difficult to understand and also digest that people behave in destructive ways which are bizarre, careless, and stupid to situations like excessive drinking, self-sabotage at work place, sticking to an abusive relationship, acting aggressively to others and more… if you see human behavior from NLP framework, it is not random. When this complex behavior is chunked down, there is always a purpose, a “useful positive intention” behind it. A client Antriksh worked with used physical abuse to his children to correct their mistakes, though the action is condemnable and violent, the underlying intention is positive. So a Coach helps the neurology to find alternatives of the behavior for fulfilling the positive and useful intention instead of resorting to Unresourceful behaviors.

5) There are no failures, only feedbacks

As Babies, humans learn everything from the base, walking, language and more. They don’t have sense of failure; they fall, make mistakes, find out what works for them and eliminate the things which are not working. They update their maps based on ongoing feedbacks. They never close the doors by categorizing it as a failure and then going on the loops of pointing fingers and sabotage. It’s better to choose resourceful course of action that is taking feedbacks and updating behavior on it.
VI. TOOLS OF MEASUREMENTS

Noticing the difference is unit of Intelligence- antano solar Flaws in measurement systems make not see the reality but give a picture of carefully dressed form of the reality. Having stringent measurements and qualifying standards sets apart a skilled nlp practitioner from other crowd of people claiming NLP and also others in Change industry. In NLP change industry and also in evaluating the case studies used in this study, we have used the following criterion without compromising on the standards.

A. Sustaining change vs State elicitation

Many forms of psychotherapy, healing and motivation often lead to temporary state elicitations. These are transitory with validity based on the intensity of the tool, mode and delivery by the therapist. These are sometimes like New Year resolution of Gym/fitness, it starts with super energy for a week and in a fortnight as the intensity of motivation subsides the old behavior is back. Whereas for a Coach using NLP tools, it’s important to focus, and notice on a sustaining reprogramming of internal representation of the behavior rather than inducing positive and comfortable states in a person which may revert after a couple of weeks. Creating real change involves the Neurology of a person, the automatic system which governs the behaviors. When it is involved in a holistic way, and the skilled NLP practitioner uses the right pattern for a desired state, it leads to sustaining and generative changes that grow with time. It’s important for a change created to be generative as it has to adapt with the changes in the dynamic structure of a person’s life and grow with it. That’s how our body functions, it adapts with the environment and the current ecology.

1) Sensory calibration

Calibration is observation with a reference. As we noted that the experience of external structure of world is processed into a complex structure and coded in our neurology. And the primary tool of accessing this information is through the five senses, it’s the same way in which we code our experiences, and it influences Human behavior.

To understand this, answer this question—Is your mother tall or short? How does she look? The moment you see this question your neurology automatically recalls a previously coded picture of your mother. Caution, this is not creative visualization, these are naturally occurring processes. It is a reference for internal coding of the experiences and Human Behavior.

When interviewing Antriksh, he explains that a client had come to get over her social media addiction. And during the coding process, the naturally occurring picture for the “urge to use Social media” (State-instinct) was picture of her hand holding the mobile with the screen of face book notifications. The client’s brain makes this image to convey brain to release necessary chemicals in to create the internal and natural urge to use Social Media. This is how complex and simple is the sensory process, that a skilled coach notices while working with the client. The skills of a NLP practitioner or coach is to identify the right internal process which makes a person respond differently and the next step is applying appropriate NLP pattern to reprogram the behavior. This is example for having sensory acuity. Moreover, its also a measurement for the coach, that the change is happened, when the internal representation changes, instead of making horrible or addictive images, the person starts making resourceful images, naturally. This is one of the ways on the process level, change is verified.

2) Real life performance

The next measurement is to evaluate the client’s performance in real life. For instance, a client has got intervention for responding with Anger and Rage when someone over takes him on the road. After the intervention is complete, the client is put into similar challenging situation again, to test the automatic responses, multiple times. This is following up with the client after regular intervals of time, 3 months, 6 months, one year and more. If the change made is not generative it will revert back in few weeks or month. For the change to sustain, it has to adapt according to the changing and dynamic life of the client.

VII. THE PROCESS CONTENT DISTINCTION

As stated earlier NLP doesn’t have new philosophy of its own. It’s not a content model. It has successfully identified the Processes of Geniuses like Virginia, Milton and Fritz. The models of geniuses had their own content framework and philosophy around what they did and got results. Dr. John Grinder and Richard Bandler observed it on Process level, of what they are doing, and what are the differences that make the differences? And eventually it contributed to the early developments of NLP.

A couple is having a heated argument over parenting behavior. Both want to sculpt a leader out of their child. The father uses harsh physical punishments to teach and mother uses soft lessons and counseling the child about the ills of bad habits. On content level, when we see the story, there is so much to do with the parent’s behavior, inefficiency of them as parents and the loop of gossips can go on & on. When we see the process model, we see the useful intention behind their behaviors and also notice their end goal is same, so finding peace and solving becomes so easy.
Every Human behavior is outcome of an internal process which is passing through filters of Past experiences, Beliefs and state of being a person is in. Instead of focusing on content, NLP framework works on Root of it, asks the question, “What is the person doing so naturally inside is that he is landing into ‘A’ Behavior automatically?” the answer to the question is the problem pattern and using tools of NLP, a skilled practitioner changes the internal structure, thereby changing the outcome behavior.

A. Therapy approach (settings and sessions)

There are many approaches to work with NLP for therapy and Coaching adopted by different schools, Antriksh uses this approach:
1) Consultation: Understanding what client needs and identifying the internal process.
2) Change work: Intervention for rewiring the internal processes. Here is the leverage, and the part of having wisdom of which NLP pattern to use to achieve what change a person requires.
3) Testing of Change work: As given above, the testing of change work is done.
4) Follow ups at regular intervals

VIII. Real case studies

The names of the clients are changed and not revealed for confidentiality clause.

A. Mr Ramesh Tater (Businessman):

He came for consultation when he was collapsing and having anxiety attacks. When asked him to list his problems it were--

Depression
Mood Swings- Emotional Instability. He would wake up in the morning and after a couple of hours, he will lose his cool and go into Unresourceful states of emotions just by external triggers. He would end up not working and sleeping at home, procrastinating important priorities of his business leading to losses of money, opportunity and goodwill. Later when analyzed in the process framework, he has “fear” of failures, and many unpleasant past memories of past failures which would, trigger the unresourceful states and leave him unproductive for rest of the day. We used NLP pattern, Collapse anchoring to train his unconscious to have better states in the same context and expand its emotional response choices. Later we used Fast phobia cure pattern for helping him get over his limiting past.

Money Insecurity despite having money and prosperous business. He has good business and earns pretty well. To his financial status, he also takes his family for foreign vacation once a year and also makes sure that all its luxury needs and wants are taken care of. Even after having achieved all this, he would still waste hours together in stress and thinking about Money insecurity, and being in a stuck situation and not knowing what to do.

Unable to Present ideas in a group of more than 3 people. In his social club which he is a member of, or in his peer group, he felt “what if, what I tell is wrong, I may have to face embarrassment.” And many limiting self talks, which were part of his negative thoughts loop. These thoughts would trigger emotional states of nervous, and physical feeling of throat suffocation in the context and he would not open up and speak even though he has resources and experience to add on to the conversation. We used New code NLP pattern to train the neurology to access peak performance states in the challenging situation and post intervention he started communicating well and improved his social presence in a way people recognize him.

Anger Issues: He had terrible and uncontrollable rage and anger when he has argument with his mom, someone overtakes him in traffic. He would loose calm and resort to violence. We used Meta Model framework to sort his internal priorities and make him realize that it’s a wrong thing to do and socially unacceptable. Later we used collapse anchor for rewiring the anger response and installed state choices like Calm, Funny, Let go as emotional responses. In further sessions the NLP patterns adopted by Antriksh, in addition to Emotional Mastery Coaching format were: Reframing, Collapse Anchors, Sanctuary, Fast Phobia Cure, Swish.

Results:

After the first session, he started talking to his mother, which had not been doing properly because he had fierce fights with her, in calm and composed fashion. The family, business staffs were amazed and surprised by change in his approach, and emotional response in challenging situations which he used to get angry. He started trusting right people after analyzing them based on his experiences and expanded his business.

To complete the above patterns it took 3 sessions of 60-0 minutes each over 2 months. The client’s changes are growing with time and sustaining, it has been 3 months till date.

B. Mrs Jain for panic attacks (Home Maker)

Mrs Jain had suffered 2 miscarriages back to back which had become traumatic and had lead her to chronic depression and panic attacks for 8 years now.

She has a supporting family, and 2 healthy children, inspite of which the panic attacks and anxiety from depression would spoil the environment at home. They had tried Counseling, Energy Healing, Exorcisms, Psychiatric medicines, all of the modalities without much help.
would give pain relief and not cure, even the relief would be temporary.

Nature of Panic attacks:

Sudden Memories of past will trigger Panic Attacks. She will end up locking herself in room and cry for days. She would not work, display range of anger, frustration and grief. The state of panic attacks would be about 3 days to 10 days. The frequency of panic attacks is twice a month or sometimes more. Since this was a complicated case we chunked roles of life part by part and did an unconscious reframing pattern in which we establish communication with the neurology by involuntary and honest signals for yes and no and continue the process. Post reframing we used Alphabet game for better emotional state choice. Later we gave her a small sub modality exercise for state shifts on demand. Patterns used in addition to Emotional Mastery Coaching processes: Reframing, Collapse anchor, Sanctuary and Alphabet game for Peak performance

Results:
With first session lasting for 2 hours she started sleeping well and the frequency and intensity of panic attacks reduced. Subsequent session after a month helped her to open up more for possibilities of life and the panic attacks stopped completely.

C. Mr Sarvesh, IT professional

Sarvesh is an IT professional at middle level management, with good performance. With increasing work and family related stress, he had been procrastinating his work and had been missing deadlines, this had created friction between he and his boss because of non-performance. This also had bad effect on his promotion despite being eligible for it. During consultation, it was discovered that every time he would think of completing the work, the Images he would make in his mind was of boss unhappy and furious. This would de motivate him and lead into depressing states. He also had associated his work, work place with bad emotions in his mind and the moment he will go to his work place, he will get inside unresourceful emotions. We used Meta Model Distinction to make him see his life in different perspectives and how if he continues to do it, it will lead to consequences he doesn’t want to create in his life. This installed an inborn motivation to excel at work. Later we also did alphabet game for better state choices. Patterns used with Emotional Mastery Coaching: Sanctuary, Alphabet game for peak performance.

Results:
Upon one session of 2 hours, Sarvesh delivered exceptional performance at his work and started to enjoy it.

D. Ms. Kamya

Married for one year, she was devastated when realized that her husband had been cheating on her with another wife, which he had, even before they got married. Later when questioned and raising objections the relationship started being abusive, self-sabotage for her. She went into depression and started accepting her life as it was and lost almost 15 Kgs in weight. She quit social media, changed numbers and cut connections with her friends, being not able to face herself. Later when her parents knew this, they were insisting her to return, but in vain. She also had to escape from her in-laws place to save her life in an attempt to murder her by her in-laws. She couldn’t eat, talk or do anything as a normal human. It had been six months at her parent’s place, when she was brought for consultation. During consultation, we used Identity Model and Meta model to help her get back her self-esteem and take charge of her life and emotions. Post that we had a Fast phobia cure to help her get over her traumatic memories.

Results after One Session over 90 minutes with Emotional Mastery Coaching:
She came over the unpleasant past and depression. After a week she filled up application for higher studies and now tops her class. She has taken a break and lives in hostel in north india. She choose to recreate her life now and settle down in life if she finds someone she can trust

E. Mr Karanjeet

After College, Karanjeet was into a professional degree which he was failing in final paper for many attempts. Moreover the family issue and her sister’s traumatic marriage had taken off his interest for completing the course and went into acute mood swings and lethargy which would end up into roaming out. He would sleep or watch youtube instead of studying and get distracted. After 3 months of Emotional Mastery Coaching and a session of Meta Model exercises, he completed his professional degree exam in next attempt and also started his path for passion and is now a blogger.

IX. Conclusion

Human behavior is influenced and learnt from the ecology of person, people around, environment and also his life style. Human behavior has a structure. Using the structure we can change behaviors. NLP may not be real or may be true, but it is a framework which can be adapted to change perspectives on conscious and unconscious level. NLP is an effective tool for working with Human behavior. Real changes in a person’s personal limitations and internal structure can create real changes in a person’s life, for which a tool like NLP will always be handy.
X. LIMITAION

Every technology has its gain and limitations. Let’s explore where NLP is limited:

1. Lack of Skilled practitioners: NLP’s course and content can be learnt in courses for 6-10 days and you can become subject matter expert by understanding it. But to build superior skills as a coach, it takes intensive grooming and mentoring. This is lacking and there are so many practitioners claiming to be Practitioners who are incompetent.

2. There is no central authority for NLP: You can get an online certification for 50US$. Moreover as there is no central authority people have started for their own versions of NLP. There are New age gurus who have lost the essence of Content Process distinction and have started Zen NLP, Tarot Cards NLP and many more abused versions of it

3. NLP techniques can be used for malicious and self-serving purposes: There are documented cases where mentalists and hypnotists have used NLP and NLP language patterns to mesmerize and also create momentary illusions in mind of people and have leveraged it for personal use. Few years ago, a politician was accused for using NLP to influence his audience during election campaign

XI. REFERENCE