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A Research Journal of Coaching, Mentoring, Supervision and NLP

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Editor's note

Welcome to Issue 2 of *The Performance Solution: A Research Journal of Coaching, Mentoring, Supervision and NLP*. Thanks to our Masters students' hard work we have been able to produce an issue of this journal which brings insight into the world of coaching in current times.

We are grateful for the permission to reproduce their work here. All the contributors to this journal are currently studying for an MA in Coaching and NLP and in doing so are raising the bar for the fields of coaching and NLP in academia. We are extremely proud to see them produce such high levels of research which will help the credibility of our profession to continue to grow.

Megan Thompson, Editor.

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HOW CAN EXECUTIVE COACHING FACILITATE THE EVOLUTION OF A PERSON'S VALUES LEADING TO A POTENTIAL CHANGE IN ATTITUDE

Anna Casey

[This paper was first submitted as an assignment for a Post-Graduate Diploma in Coaching and NLP at Kingston University]

Abstract[i]

"A compass has 360 degrees, and if we do not know where we are, we have 359 chances out of 360 to go where we don't want to be in the first place." (Maxwell, J. 2011)

It has been an underlying premise that it is more beneficial for an employer to invest in employees who have the required attitude, than if a person has the required competencies yet not the desired attitude. It has also been suggested that a person's attitude may not be an easy thing to change, as Dr Allan Parker (2010) noted *"The successful strategy is to 'hire for attitude and train for competence'."*

Notwithstanding, it has been demonstrated that it is possible that a person's attitude can be altered along with his values through a flexible coaching approach which explores and cultivates an understanding of what motivates the person. This approach includes developing a deep understanding of their core personality types, how people learn, why they have certain attitudes and why behave or perform, be it in the personal or professional environment.

Introduction

This paper is a reflection on how a coach's understanding of a person's values, intrinsic to their personality, can help the executive to create the desired change in attitude and behaviour. When the business and employee's values, attitudes and skillsets are aligned, this can facilitate the flexibility required in modern business practice today.

In this paper, first, coaching, executive coaching and leadership will be briefly described.

Second, how background information on the coachee is important will be discussed. This will include personality types, behavioural analysis, learning styles, and motivational systems, to indicate how they relate to coaching for change in the business executive or leader.

Third, values and value themes (core values or Memes) will be discussed, how they affect attitudes and how they impact on the individual and group performance.

In conclusion it will be postulated that a person's attitude can be altered with a flexible coaching approach which works on the premise that change in a person's values or value systems can lead to a change in attitude towards what the business desires when creating self managing flexible teams.

1a Coaching?

The ICF defines coaching as

> *"partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential."*

The characteristics of a 'good' coach are wide, varied and could be summarised as follows: unconditional positive regard, being non-judgmental, acceptance of emotions, an ability to develop rapport, sensory acuity to understand the coachee's communication verbal or otherwise, inter and intra-personal intelligences, analytical, strategic planning ability, the facility to create a comfortable atmosphere interlaced with creativity and fun, and awareness:-

> "A coach recognizes that the internal obstacles are often more daunting than the external ones." Whitmore (2007)

The International Coach Federation (ICF) lays down core competency skills required which are defined under the following headings.[ii] These are:-

1 Meeting Ethical Guidelines & Professional Standards.

working within the recognised coaching modalities.

2 Establishing the coaching agreement.

ensuring the client's meaning and agenda is followed.

3 Establishing trust and intimacy with the client.

being genuine supportive of client's desired changes, trusting their resourcefulness and observation throughout the coaching journey.

4 Coaching presence.

being there for the client, observing and responding to client's learning processes and planned actions, letting client choose.

5 Active listening.

attentive and careful listening, being aware of the client's way of communicating verbal on all levels, noticing incongruencies, emotional content, descriptive language, to develop an understanding of the underlying values and beliefs.

6 Powerful questioning

astute questioning in line with the client's agenda, designed to explore and tease out the underlying core values, beliefs and their impact on the core issues. Questions are designed to evoke deeper thinking by the client.

7 Direct communication.

Using the client's communication methods while sharing one's feedback (based on client's agenda), including thoughts, perspectives, and intuition. Also encourage the client likewise.

8 Creating awareness.

understanding how the client processes, creates and takes action. Includes creating an atmosphere which focuses on new perspectives, actions, leading to solutions. Acceptance of the client's intuition, thinking and expression is involved, while creating awareness of existing and new resources, techniques and opportunities.

9 Designing actions.

being in tune with the client's way of thinking, learning, creating and integrating while designing actions leading to solutions. These actions are appropriate, realistic and geared towards a shift leading to the desired outcome.

10 Planning and goal setting.

being in tune with the client's way of thinking, learning, creating and integrating while setting appropriate goals in tandem with the client, which can have appropriate intermediate steps. The goals have a clear purpose and potential and fit into the SMART[iii] profile.

11 Managing progress and accountability.

exploring and deciding with the client, ways and means for knowing when steps are taken and tasks are progressing in accordance with the set objectives. The client is held responsible and accountable for action. Guidelines laid down and agreed which can help measure accomplishments and the rate of progress.

In business, when coaching executives the emphasis in particular turns to developing their leadership attributes with a systems perspective, so that they can in turn elicit an alignment of business and personal values, leading to an increased potential to create and sustain efficient self managing teams which perform and provide desired results.

1b Executive Coaching?[iv]

> *"each one of us has within, all the tools and solutions necessary for a more effective life. We sometimes just need some help in knowing where to look." (Heller, S. 1991)*

There are many definitions of coaching today, and the following sums it up neatly, has a broad flexible spectrum and describes both an inner transformation and an external manifestation, be it personal or executive coaching.

> *"Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them."*- (Gallwey, T) 1986

Bluckert (2008) further described executive coaching, (delineated by a number of seasoned coaches) as a facilitation process leading to and supporting growth which can change a person's perspective, attitude or behaviour. Its purpose is to create improved effectiveness and performance, personal satisfaction, and achievement of desired objectives in the business workplace. It is a process of learning and development both for the coachee and the coach which also includes positive directed action and feedback. It could even lead to transformation, with the coach as “the catalyst for change”.

> *“Coaching is the facilitation of learning and development with the purpose of improving performance and enhancing effective action, goal achievement and personal satisfaction. It invariably involves growth and change, whether that is in perspective, attitude or behaviour.”* – (Bluckert, P. 2008)

This author has further summarised[v] that it can be seen as a flexible partnership, whereby a combination of skills, tools and techniques can be wisely used by a supportive, knowledgeable, experienced person to instigate positive proactive transformation in another willing person so that they can adjust their values to improve their perspective both of themselves and of their environment.

1c Leadership?

In ‘How to Involve and Inspire Teams’ (Leigh & Maynard, 1998) Geoff Keeys was quoted:

> *“Increasingly people will follow only those who demonstrate willingness and an ability to accommodate their needs, and the tools of fear, social position and the like will be less available. A different paradigm for leadership is needed*.”

This section begins with the presupposition that a goal of the successful executive is also to be a successful leader.

What set successful leaders apart from the mainstream is their beliefs values, focus, perspective, strategies behaviours and other internal operations, which guide and set their perspective of life experiences. This includes a high level of Emotional Intelligence (EI) described by Goleman (1995) as awareness of self and of others:-

> *“...the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.”*

This includes an awareness of values.

While leadership capacities can be inherent and learned, the most successful, inspiring leaders do not hold beliefs that their reality is the true or only reality. (ibid). Instead they work on their expansion of their knowledge of themselves and their teams while remaining flexible, continuously evaluating assumptions, and adjusting as necessary their current perceptions versus perceived reality. Korzybsky (1933), emphasised training in ‘*awareness’ or ‘consciousness of abstracting’*, so that if one approached a situation with the attitude of awareness of the underlying factors, or the ability to work on the premise of *"I don't know; let's see,"* this would allow the ‘realities’ to be revealed, evaluated and adjusted. Today this concept of awareness is also a key characteristic of a good coach. Korzybsky further expostulated that “*the map is not the territory*” to explain how reality is represented by our minds (our interpretation) the same way as territory is represented by a map. As each map can vary in detail, scope, and interpretation, likewise each person’s perspective of reality is subjective and thus can vary. This was further supported by Bandler and Grinder (1975) when researching, exploring and developing Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). A core presupposition of NLP is that a person can change or reframe their limiting beliefs about ‘reality’ to empowering beliefs, which are underscored by their values. (Values are developed in a later section). Through coaching, executives can discover how to become more proactive leaders and can develop awareness of the individual realities behind the attitudes of their team members. By exploring how to motivate them with a focus on values and taking any necessary steps to change, they can minimise any gaps between the individual's 'reality' and the business's 'reality'.

It is purported that when a person increases their leadership skills that they can achieve an exponential increase in the results by motivating and influencing their team to align their vision, mission and goals and get a greater amount accomplished. (Maxwell, J. 2010)

2 Background Information

2a Personality Types and Behavioural Analysis

For executive coaching, it is useful have background information on a coachee to facilitate quicker analysis of their current situation in the creation of well formed outcomes taking the person from present state to desired outcome.

To start with, an analysis of the characteristics of the coachee's personality type can help identify and utilize the inherent strengths and weaknesses to create clearer goals and raise the coachee's potential at work.

The Extended DISC psychometric assessments are behavioural analysis. Based on the work of Carl Jung, (1921) and developed in 1994 to also explore team dynamics, they explore 'standard' concepts of human nature and can identify important information about the employee's (and team's) behaviour both inherent and learned. It describes 4 different behaviour types, or quadrants; 'D' Dominant, 'I' Influence, 'S' Steady, and 'C' Compliant (DISC) none right or wrong. A person can exhibit behaviour from more than one quadrant and usually have strong or 'high' traits from one main quadrant, with less noticeable or 'low' traits from others. Through a process of measurement and 360 degree feedback (i.e. Feedback from all people involved e.g. the coachee, the employer, the employee, self) the existing condition can be analysed in conjunction with creating options to generate the proposed end results. Typically a well balanced team will have a complementary mixture of all personality types.

When the coach understands what behaviour styles she favours along with the leading behaviour exhibited others, this facilitates better communication and team creation and leading and managing.

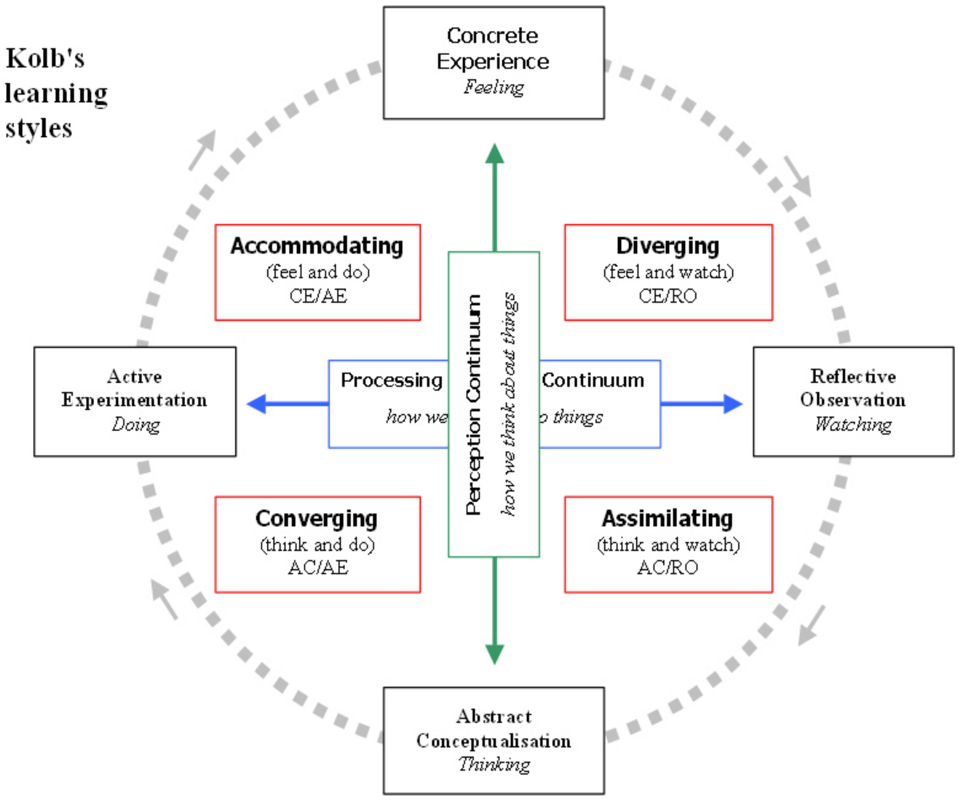
2b Learning Styles

Today executive coaching is being employed at an ever growing rate so that executives can develop better leadership skills. This includes gaining an understanding their values, learning styles and motivations, so that they then create teams which function at a higher level more efficiently and effectively. (Swanson, G., 2011)

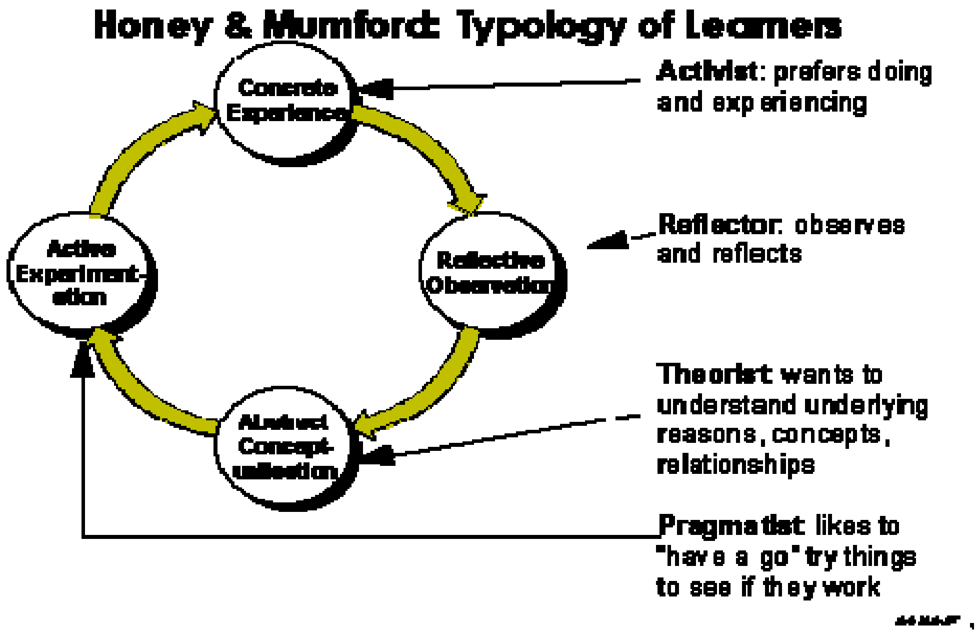
Kolb (1984) theorised 4 learning stages which follow each other circuitously. [vi]

He labelled the stages as Concrete Experience, where the person is involved in the 'doing' of the experience; Following this is the Reflective Observer, when the person observes and ponders, or reflects on what has transpired and its effect on him or the group; following this is the Abstract Conceptualisation stage where the person derives rules or theories related to it; then comes Active

Experimentation whereby the person constructs new ways to approach similar experiences in the future, this is followed by the Concrete Experience stage again. Knowledge of this cycle can allow the coach to be aware of which stage the coachee is presently at, and thus formulate questions, using clean language, metaphors, etc to encourage him to also become aware of his experiential learning cycle, spend sufficient time there and can thus move to the next stage. (Atherton, J.S., 2010)



Because the coaching relationship is also a learning process, one of the many powerful tools which can lead to a better understanding of what motivates an employee is the use of psychometric testing. One of the best known is the Honey and Mumford (1982) Learning Style questionnaire, which is a development from Kolb's theories. It provides insights on whether the person has predominantly Activist, Reflector, Theorist or Pragmatist tendencies while learning. The coach or leader can then adjust his interaction style accordingly to elicit better team performance. The individuals can adjust their learning capabilities by using their preferred style more to increase their potential, work towards improvement in the areas they least prefer, be aware of potential mental blocks before they arise and look for opportunities to improve. Furthermore, in a team, with awareness each member can improve the internal relationships by facilitating their colleagues to work mostly within their preferred styles and avoid their least preferred where possible. For example, a team leader would be aware to give advance warning of deadlines to a Reflector, and could ensure the Activist is kept active, i.e. not doing repetitive mundane tasks as they may flourish on tight deadlines.



2c Motivational Systems

Another powerful psychometric tool is the (inventory for Work Attitudes and Motivation) iWAM questionnaire developed in 2001 by Merlevede, P. It is not a personality profile but is a system designed to measure a person's attitudes and motivations in the work situation. It uncovers the various aspects of the persons Emotional Intelligences (EI) and their Emotional Quotient (EQ), which is the measure of EI, or how a person shows levels of emotional intelligence. It shows how the person prioritises, be it people, money, systems, activity, information, status, time, place, tools. It creates a comprehensive picture of the person's existing thinking pattern, problem solving, focus, changes, interpersonal, intrapersonal, time, strategies, attitudes and motivators. The results allow the coach or leader to understand what is the best workplace environment to create to best motivate the employee. It is an efficient and reliable tool which quickly provides data which can guide the leader towards the best complementary mixture of people to create each complete team.

2d Progression of Change

Dilts (1990) devised a progression of behavioural change which laid out 5 levels of change whereby the greatest changes occur when there is a change in the person's identity. The progressive levels of change are as follows:-

The environment, which impacts on

Behaviour, which impacts on

Strategies or mental maps, which impact on

Beliefs, which impact on

Identity or the highest level.

Identity can be seen to relate to the person's values since

> *"values reflect a person's sense of right and wrong or what "ought" to be". Wikipedia (2011)*

The NLP Master Practitioner Programme then developed the following progression of change:-

Change in behaviour or performance is a result of a person's attitude.

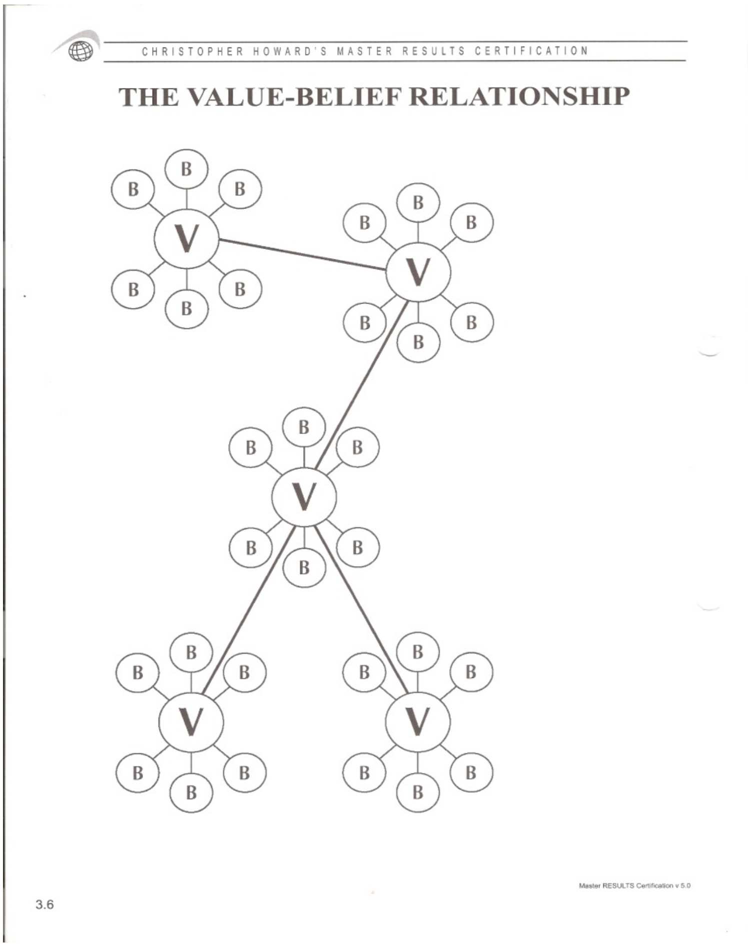
A person's attitude is guided by their beliefs.

Beliefs are guided by a person's surface or individual values.

These values are guided by core values or memes.

3a Beliefs and Values

A belief is something we hold to be true. It is affected by the deeper level of values.



B = Belief; V = Value

*"Values are those ideas in which we are willing to invest time, energy, and resources to either avoid or achieve." (*Vanson, S. 2010)

A value is at a deeper unconscious level usually, it is an intrinsic worth, which guides our thoughts, attitudes and behaviours. It is what motivates (or de-motivates) people at a deep level and what can drive people forward beyond their perceived boundaries to achieve a higher level of accomplishment. They are hierarchical in that a person can place greater emphasis on one value over another. They are different for each aspect of life, for example a person can have different family versus business values. Sometimes there is incongruence between these two sets of values which can lead to great consternation, and when the coach or leader can be aware of these, he can make great inroads towards resolving such conflicts and gaining the alignment of the employee. Values can be created, modified or changed by numerous situations or events. For example, environment, family, friends, social standing, location, age, the media, web and more all have bearing on how values are developed.

According to the socialist Massey, M. (1979) values are formed at various ages of our lives.

Birth to age 7	The Imprint Period, This is where a person begins developing their basic values based typically on parents, and environment
Age 8-13	The Modelling Period The child develops the values and potential behaviours of his role model(s).
Age 14-21	The Socialisation Period. The teen develops peer and mentor values. These values guide the person for a long time – according to Massey – this is it – however, he allowed for significant emotional experiences to create further developments.
Age 21-35	The Career Stage. [1]This is a later development of Massey's earlier stages and it is presently being researched and studied. This is where the young adult takes on the values of the esteemed career leaders.
Age 36-?? And more to be explored!	These stages are yet to be explored. However, as the development in adult education proceeds apace exponentially, combined with unimagined developments in technology, the delineation of the following developmental stages are eagerly awaited.

Diagram (Vanson, S. 2010) P 261.

Furthermore, through the natural evolution and emergence of core values systems it can be also seen that attitude change can occur through an evolution (re-formation) of value systems or memes.

3b Memes or Value Themes and Spiral Dynamics

"It is not that we need to form new organisations. It's simply that we have to awaken to new ways of thinking. "Beck & Cowan (1996)

While we may be aware of personal values which guide attitudes, there is an even deeper level, or a core level of values, basic to all mankind. It is envisaged as ever transient, evolving, which today has newer, higher levels of 'self-actualisation', a progression from Maslow's Hierarchy[vii],

Notwithstanding, the evolution of values, value systems / themes or Memes are the unconscious values level at which an individual or group operates. (they too are evolving with the rapid rate of progress today). Memes are the

[1] Howard, C. (2008??) *Breakthrough to Success,* thinkbigeducation, Australia.

> *"basic package of thoughts, motives and instructions that determine how we make decisions and prioritise our lives". (Vanson, 2010)*

Memes are the internal unconscious propulsion systems which direct a person's attitudes and behaviours. They are structures of thinking, or values, and affect how we create beliefs and decisions, resulting in attitudes and behaviour. They can be a process of learning, growing and evolving for a person, or unfortunately, they can also be a place where a person remains, rests – or perhaps even stagnates.

Memes, as a framework for worldwide values, intuitively reflect the major thought systems that run throughout societies of the world at large. They are universal mindsets, thought patterns, 'realities' that cultures hold true, which have been passed down through generations. They are also thought of as the scaffolding upon which the values are built.

'"The Emergent Cyclical Levels of Existence Theory" (ECLET) was designed in the 1950's by Clare Graves as a model of understanding how people value, think and behave helps us understand what the inherent values a person may have, related to life circumstances and the level of their personal development. It is also a study of core intelligences and deep values underpinning the beliefs, not people's personality types.

Spiral Dynamics' was a further development by Beck and Cowan. At certain stages of development in life, and influenced by many external and internal factors, people tend to exist for a time in distinct categories or levels, related to what they consider important in life, i.e. Their Values.

The spiral delineates how individuals progress through a sequence of fundamental universal core-value developmental stages, which affect how they behave in relation to groups or teams. The person or group will tend to have patterns of behaviour, reaction, attitude and thinking patterns depending on where they are currently on the spiral. This model demonstrates how when the person progresses from one values level to the next, their core values change leading to fundamental attitude change which in turn leads to behaviour change. This would lead one to surmise that, with aware coaching and leadership, an employer can in fact be flexible when employing, without too much concern about attitude because this is yet another human trait that can be assessed, explored, and more importantly adjusted to align with the desires of the business.

Although they evolve in a hierarchical manner, an upward spiral, one level is not necessarily perceived to be better than another, as it relates to what exists in the persons environment. However, it is quite common for people at certain levels imagining people at other levels as something different; usually they imagine them to be operating at a lower level. Quite often people in relationships, personal or otherwise, can be attracted to others at different levels because they complement each other and thus fill any perceived gaps (for example a man at level 5, competitive, solution focused etc, may be attracted to a woman who wishes to stay home with the kids, at level 2, tribe focused. Furthermore, it is quite common for people to operate in one level for personal life and another for business.

Because the perception is that as a person progresses up to the next level, each level brings inherent issues, attitudes and solutions, so he needs to continuously adapt, change attitudes and create new solutions. Also as a person progresses up the spiral, his thinking and attitude can evolve to allow him to handle and operate with volition in the lower levels easier. Each level can be thought of as a response to and a progression from the previous level. One of the key concepts is that the solutions today can be the problems tomorrow (and vice versa).

While there has been substantial research to identify 8 levels recognisable in human society to date numbered from 1 upwards to 8, recent developments have led to the speculation that this spiral is ever growing and future research may yet establish higher levels. The odd numbered levels i.e. 1,3,5,7 relate to an ego-centricity with a locus of control which is internal. People operating at these levels feel that they are in charge of their destiny. At the same they focus externally, i.e. they work towards creating the external world in the way they desire.

The even numbered levels, i.e. 2,4,6,8, relate to people who are centred on others with a locus of control which is external. People operating at these levels are focused internally i.e. Self-sacrificing, with an emphasis on who they become as a result of working with and for others, for a just cause. Their locus of control is external, i.e. they concentrate on making things work for others in the world. At the same they focus internally, i.e. they work towards self improvement.

It is argued that these Memes, or sets of globally imbued instructions, provide for us the means whereby we can replace old thinking, behaviours and values with newer more empowering ones as our age of technology and rapid development marches onwards and upwards.

Evolution of Values Diagram [viii]

No.	**Meme** **Colour**	**thinking**	**structure**	**process**
1	Beige	automatic	Loose bands	survivalist
2	purple	animistic	tribal	Circular/ tribal
3	red	egocentric	empires	Exploitative/ aggression/ power
4	blue	absolutistic	pyramidal	Authoritarian/ hierarchy / rules
5	orange	multiplistic	delegative	Strategic/ achievement
6	green	relativistic	egalitarian	Consensual/ group and cause
7	yellow	systemic	interactive	Integrative/ systemic results
8	turquoise	holistic	global	Ecological/ global interdependence

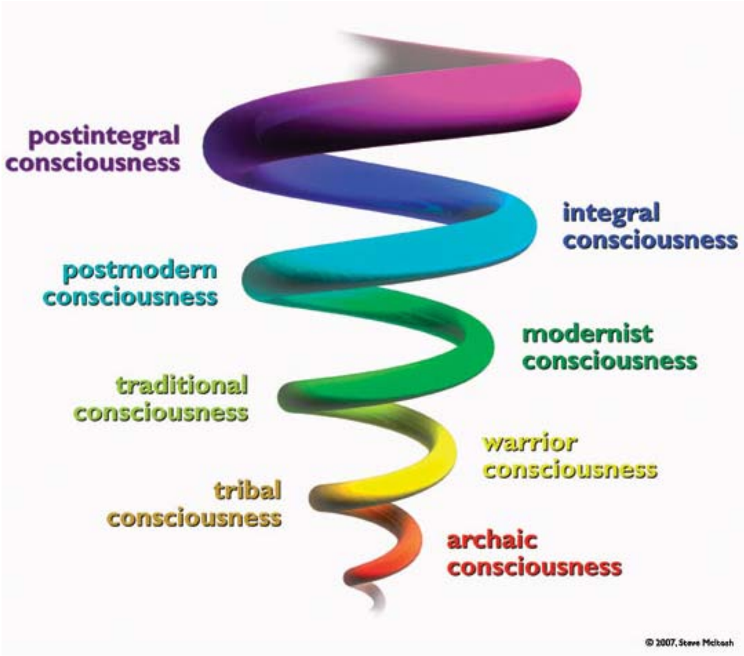
9	Coral - To be determined	Evolution perhaps of a '5' self cantered	Delegative	strategic Delegative - open ended
10	To be determined	Evolution perhaps of a '6' – others focused	egalitarian Delegative - plus	consensual Delegative – open ended

Because good Leadership involves communicating a particular vision, mission or goal while creating value for all, and which also causes others want to be part of and support that mission, sincerely understanding their core values is a vital key. It is about how the coach can help the executive become more flexible to make attitudinal change in himself along with his team which can lead to lasting alignment of their values and attitudes. His communication can be adjusted to match the internal propulsion system of his team. One of the presuppositions of empowered leadership is that:

> *"If you help enough people to get what they want most, you will surely get what you want most."* Howard (2008).

Spiral Dynamics was researched by Clare Graves using many years of observation of students, also it has such a broad practical application (Vanson, 2010) it can be taken as a 'valuable' system to base further understanding of the team's values.

Notwithstanding, the Pareto principle[ix] It can also be highly valued by leaders who wish to develop attitudinal changes in employees. Previously it was presupposed that '*one hires for attitude and trains for performance*' now it can be seen that by adopting a flexible open attitude, one can understand more why and how people think, have attitudes and behave under certain circumstances, thus the good leader or coach can elicit interventions based on reframing or shifting values to newer higher levels. Typically the leader will often be one or two levels above the group as she can be aware that while she may remain at one level or Meme for a length of time, the possibility is that her team members may in fact be changing, growing evolving at a different rate than she is, perhaps even a faster rate. Because change, growth and transformation are ever continuous, this system, the evolution of Memes, as a dynamic model, can become an even more valuable tool in the coaching and leadership repertoire.



[x] **Spiral Dynamics**

4 Reflection on Developing a Change in Values leads Change in Attitude as a Result of Coaching

Through the process of researching this article, I have become more aware of my client's values and memes along with a critical assessment of when my own deep values are evident. I have attempted to determine which meme each client is currently responding to, and have often noticed that two or even three may typically may be simultaneously part of their repertoire. I have chosen two case studies of small business executives which demonstrate this phenomenon along with my premise that changing values can create a desired change in attitude.

4a Case Study 'A'

An executive client, who presented with the goal of developing her fledgling business of fitness classes, with an attitude that she was not and would never become competitive, it 'was not in her'. She exhibited a strong desire to please others, her locus of control was external in that she placed the owner of the gym figuratively on a pedestal and allowed him to dictate. Her focus was internal in that she desired to give her students the best service dedicating long hours perfecting her skills. I surmised that she was at that stage operating on a blue or 4 values level, the objective of the coaching sessions included raising her awareness so that she could develop an orange or 5 values level. This would allow her adjust her locus of control to internal to become more self confident, trust her own decisions, and promote herself. Simultaneously, her focus could become external as she created a studio environment in which she became the boss.

She surprised herself and quickly improved her self awareness through the coaching process which included psychometric testing (Honey and Mumford) and NLP confidence development techniques, and as she admitted, she dramatically changed her attitudes towards herself, her capabilities and her competitiveness, over a period of 3 weeks. She evolved to assimilate the orange or level 5 values and capabilities / traits when networking, in meetings and promoting herself, while also easily and effortlessly traversing to blue or level 4 values when working with her students.

4b Case Study 'B'

An executive client, in the business of creating flexible websites which were easily and effortlessly managed by his clients, presented with the goal of improving his own motivation so that he could provide the best level of service for his clients. Through clean language questioning he became aware that he valued his own coaching skills more in the swimming arena. His attitude was that because he was in control, able to exhort and lead his swimming teams to medals, and be seen as a high achiever, this should automatically mean that clients would notice this and turn to him for business, without him needing to explain his service to them. His locus of control was internal in that he stated the terms and conditions as leader of successful teams. His focus was external in that he desired to have his skills acknowledged and recognised by many. Deducing that in his business at this stage, he was mainly operating on an orange or blue or 5 values level, yet with a keen desire to provide a service for others, the objective of the coaching sessions included raising his awareness so that he could develop values more in line with the blue or 6 values level. This would allow him to adjust his locus of control to external to become more motivated to help others by creating the templates he had designed. Simultaneously, his focus could become internal as he developed his perceptions of what he needed to improve so that he could address what his various client types could require from his service.

As he developed his self awareness through the coaching process which included a Work Values Inventory with an exploration of his work values along with the Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire. As he focused more on what he could do for his clients, he rediscovered a forgotten enjoyment he had for the web design process and adjusted his attitude towards working on his web business. Over a period of 5 weeks he assimilated the green or level 6 values evident when working on improving his service, while also maintaining his orange or level 5 characteristics when marketing his business.

It can therefore be recommended that in order to elicit the desired change in attitude, it is important for the aware coach or leader to develop a deep understanding of the person's existing personality, the learning styles, the motivation and also to develop a keen understanding, knowledge and awareness of their values in conjunction with where they are in their evolutionary progress along the 'spiral.' In this way, a holistic approach to assessing the existing skills, resources and attitudes along with the wealth of potentialities of future team members, when thus guided, developed and encouraged by the best leaders and coaches will ensure that the best teams are created and developed and lead progressive firms ever forward.

> *"The ability to perceive or think differently is more important than the knowledge gained."*
> (Bohm, D. 1989)

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed coaching and how executive coaching helps in the development of leadership qualities in business.

We have touched upon the importance of the coach or leader gaining background information on the person or team member, based for example on personality types, behavioural analysis, learning styles and work attitude motivation.

We have then explored behavioural change with particular emphasis on individual or surface values, and how values impact on a person's attitude and behaviours, which is also connected with the developmental stage the person is at currently.

We have followed this by exploring value themes (core values) or Memes indicating how they affect the individual and the group or team attitudes and performance or behaviour.

We have summarised case studies to demonstrate how an executive's attitude and values can change and develop in accordance with the .evolution of their memes.

Finally we have recommended that within the coaching environment it is important to develop deeper awareness, knowledge and understanding of values and memes to elicit the progressive evolution of the person and in the process evolve as a more holistic coach.

> *"Sometimes the greater value lies in the knowledge learned and the experience gained."*
> Bev, J. *(2010/11)*

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LEADING IN DIFFICULT TIMES: THE ROLE OF EXECUTIVE COACHING IN DEVELOPING CONSTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOURS

Carina Furlong

"People ask the difference between a leader and the boss… The leader works in the open, and the boss in the covert. The leader leads and the boss drives" **Theodore Roosevelt**

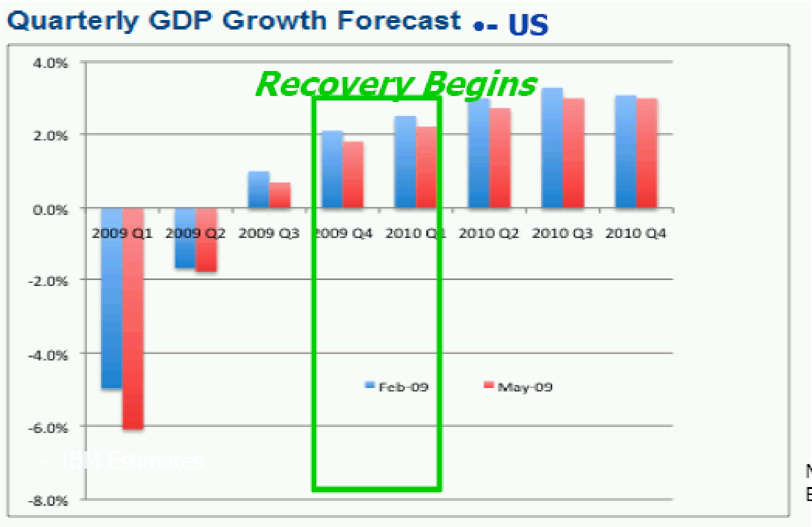
Introduction

We are living in extraordinary times. Our political, economic and social structures have been exposed, challenged and threatened, leaving us in an unprecedented situation. We are experiencing the deepest economic downturn since World War II (National Association for Business Economics). Business requirements are evolving to cope with this changing environment, and so too are the roles, competencies and required behaviours of our leaders.

This paper will examine the role for executive coaching in the evolution of leadership, specifically focusing on developing constructive behaviours. I will reinforce this argument with the use of three case studies bringing together the results of coaching processes in relation to the behaviours and development of leaders, and the resulting changes to how those leaders operate within their organisations. The theme that I will be exploring is that the coaching process's most valuable function is to create awareness in the leader of his behaviours and the impact they have on relationships within the organisation itself. Once this awareness is in place the leader can go forward with chosen constructive behaviours, understand and practice them which, in turn, will help and support him coping with the challenges and pressures of today's business environment.

<u>The Global Economic Recession: An Overview</u>

Since the beginning of the recession in America in December 2007 (National Association for Business Economics), we have experienced uncharted territories that have spread to global levels. The Irish and American economies are closely linked as we look to them for indicators for future growth. Below is a brief overview of expected projection for the American economy.



National Association for Business Economics , June 2009

According to the National Association for Business Economics (NABE), "*projections for real GDP growth remain sub-par through the first quarter of 2011, but accelerate gradually through the forecast period. Factors restraining growth going forward include ongoing balance-sheet restructuring by consumers and businesses, and a diminished contribution to GDP growth from inventory restocking and government stimulus. Confidence in the expansion's durability is intact, but panelists remain concerned about high levels of federal debt, a continuing high level of unemployment, increased business regulation, and rising commodity prices*." (NABE November 2010).

Whilst the outlook for America is positive, Ireland continues to struggle and remains entrenched in difficulties. Unemployment has increased from 4.8% to 13.4% in the last three years, to the highest level since 1995. The number of industrial disputes doubled from 2008 to 2009. The value-added of the building and construction industry has decreased by 31% in 2009 from 2008, and personal expenditure has decreased by 8.4% in real terms from 2007 to 2009 (Central Statistics Office Ireland, 2010).

The primary ray of hope comes from the export sectors dominated by multi-national companies (chemicals, computers, online, media), which has experienced growth of 13% over the same period (Central Statistics Office Ireland, 2010).

It is in this challenging context that our leaders find themselves operating, and face challenges the likes of which many have never experienced in their lifetimes.

Defining and Understanding Leadership

Leadership is a vast and constantly evolving concept that is open to many interpretations. In understanding leadership, Dilts argues it is important to distinguish between *"(a) the "leader", (b) "leadership", and (c) "leading". The position of leader is a role in a particular system. A person in the formal role of a leader may or may not possess leadership skills and be capable of leading. A good deal of leadership can come from people who are not formal "leaders". "Leading" is the result of using one's role and leadership ability to influence others in some way*." (Dilts, R., 1996).

This is a powerful distinction as, in reality, not all perceived 'leaders' demonstrate the required leadership attributes. True leadership is not about hierarchy, it is about demonstrating and living by a set of behaviours that set the tone in an organisation and leading others through the prevailing challenges and onto a better place. I believe that the most effective way in which a leader can influence others is through their behaviours. Kouzes suggests that *"Leadership is not about personality, its about behaviour."* (Kouzes, J. Posner, B. 2008). This further illustrates the importance of how a leader behaves and how then this can help or hinder him when leading in a stressful economic climate. Within the context of the environment in which the leader operates, there are generic challenges that he has to be aware of as well as understanding what his strategy is when navigating through them.

Current Leadership Challenges:

The Leadership Trust has identified six leadership challenges (Damon, N. 2007), which I believe generically capture the essence of what all leaders have had to deal with in recent times, particularly given the increasingly global aspect of many leaders' responsibilities.

1. Generational Leadership - managing an older workforce, as well as the digital generation.

2. Sustainability - protecting today's environment and protecting consumers' needs.

3. Virtual Leadership - leading an internet-based environment.

4. The Developing World - responding to a changing economy.

5. Diversity - leading a workforce comprising ethnic minorities, mature workers.

6. Globalisation - managing a geographically-extended workforce.

However these do not go far enough in the current environment, which has introduced some more here-and-now challenges – such as uncertainty of employment, a change in the personal financial status of many employees, and a paradox between the need to change and increasing fear of change. The leadership landscape has shifted immeasurably over the past three years.

The range and impact of these new challenges on the leader creates increasing pressures in terms of how they lead, engage their staff and colleagues, and create the future. It is pivotal that they take the time to invest in strategies to successfully navigate through these difficult times, firstly coping with the challenges at hand and then thriving through them.

Developing and demonstrating effective behaviours is critical to creating the right environment to manage these challenges.

Defining Coaching

The Irish Coaching Federation (ICF) describes coaching as "*partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential"*. Whitworth describes coaching as being "*about discovery, awareness and choice*" (Whitworth et al. 1998). The main theme in this definition is the creation of awareness which is pivotal to any coaching relationship. The more aware you are, the more choice you have in any situation.

There are many interpretations and definitions of executive coaching and the one that resonates most with me is Downey's definition where he describes executive coaching as "*the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of others*" (Downey 1999). I am attracted to this definition as it captures what I perceive as a successful outcome to an executive coaching relationship - where learning, development and increased performance have occurred for the individual. Facilitation is also, in my opinion, critical to both leadership and the executive coaching process. My approach to coaching has always taken a facilitative style as I view the client as the natural resource with the answers, and their role is to self-resolve. Bacal makes reference to the fact that "*the facilitator's responsibility is to address the journey, rather than the destination*" (Bacal 2003). In my view this is an important principal in the executive coaching process as it is the coach's facilitation of the executive's behavioural development journey that should lead the executive to the desired outcome - at which point these behaviours are established and continually practiced and evolved.

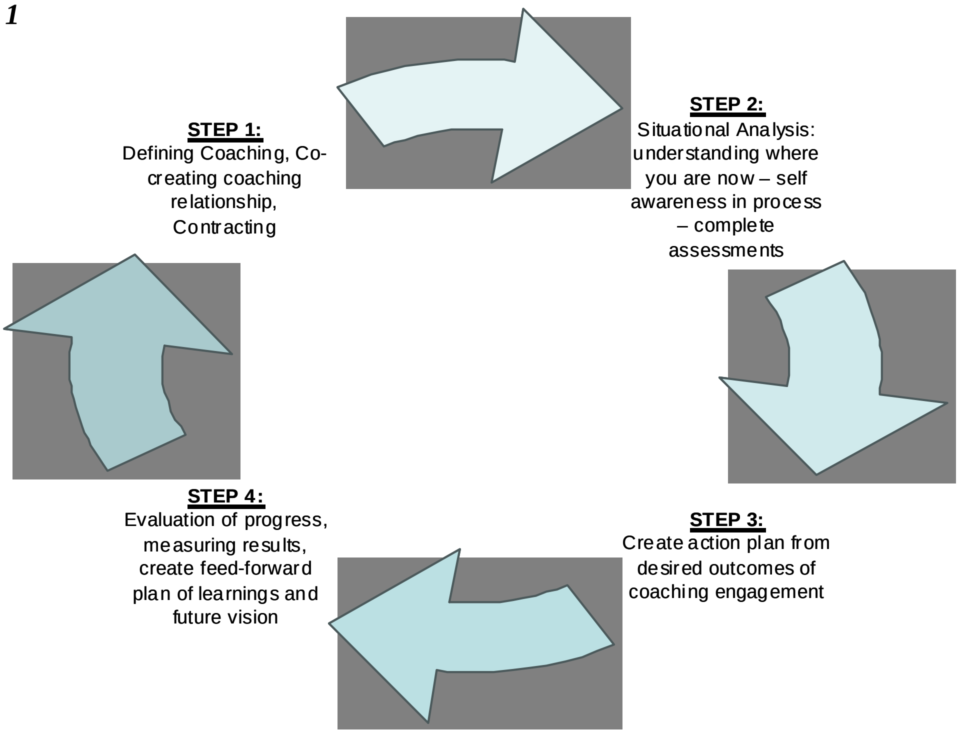
The Executive Coaching Process

The most well known and utilised model of coaching is the GROW model, developed by Alexander Graham at the end of 1970 and popularised through Europe mainly by John Whitmore (Whitmore 1992). GROW is an acronym for Goal, current Reality, Options and Will - which are seen as the key elements of a coaching session. When I was first introduced to the GROW model, I found the structure quite easy to follow however, whilst the model proved beneficial initially, I did experience limitations when using it with clients. I found myself becoming quite entrenched in the structure and adhering to each stage so closely that I missed out on vital information that the client was presenting with. An example of this occurred when I was working with a particular client, and began the session using the GROW model but quickly abandoned this as the client started to disengage and experience frustration at the structure of the questioning.

At the goal phase there is also a danger that, where the goal is not clearly examined and defined, the session can lose focus. It is on this basis that I concur with Whitmore's view that "*if a goal is not REALISTIC, there is no hope, but if it is not CHALLENGING, there is no motivation. So there is an envelope here into which all goals should fit*" (Whitmore 1992).

However, in my experience, this model can also work quite effectively with clients whose conversation tend to drift where they appreciate the use this model to help them maintain focus. It is from these experiences that I constructed my own coaching methodology ***(Figure 1)***. However even within this model I have learned to be more flexible and adapt in line with my clients' needs, as it too is based around a structured approach. Where the GROW model stops with the 'Will' stage at the end of the structured coaching process, my model facilitates ongoing evolution of the learning process through the feed forward mechanism in Step 4, where the executive will continue to look for feedback in terms of their behavioural development after the formal coaching contract has ended.

Figure 1



Within this approach it is important at all times for the coach to constantly look for areas where the executive can unlock their potential and increase their performance at a behavioural level.

Executive Coaching and Leadership Development

According to Joy McGovern, executive coaching surfaced as a leadership development practice over a decade ago and is now among one of the widely used executive techniques. (McGovern, J. et al 2001). Peter Bluckert also maintains that "*executive coaching is becoming more wildly used in large organisations throughout the western world*" in Leadership Development (Rothery,G. 2007). Kevin Cashman further rubberstamps this case with his view that "*coaching ourselves and others is the key to taking action in leadership and catalyzing our fullest potential*" (Cashman K. 2001). Diane Coutu and Carol Kauffman maintained that, *"Ten years ago most companies engaged a coach to help fix toxic behaviour at the top. Today, most coaching is about developing the capabilities of high potential performers."* (Coutu D., Kauffman,C. 2009).

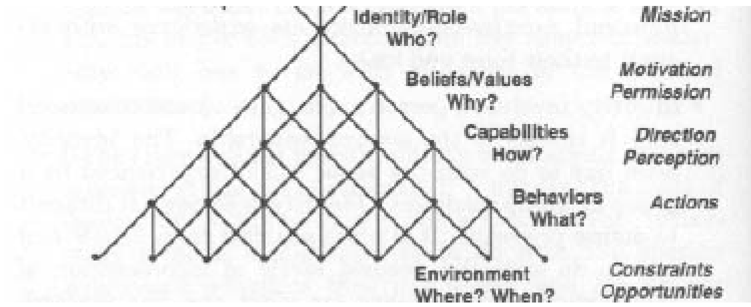
I agree that coaching is about developing high potential performers, but I would argue that whilst there is a shift away from identifying toxic behaviours, leadership development is still all about behaviours but should be focused on the development of constructive behaviours. In **Case Study 1** (Appendix I) the client wanted "*leaders within its business to take full ownership of their leadership responsibilities*" and, from there, "*a programme was designed to facilitate attitudinal and behavioural change*". The feedback from the client and participants has been "*tremendous to date*" and "*the desired outcomes according to the client have been surpassed".*

The executive coach has a number of tools available to them to assist in the development of the leader's behaviours. What I will be specifically focusing on is the building of the executive's awareness level of themselves and their environment. With reference to meeting the challenges for today's leaders Sharon Turnbull, director at The Leadership Trust's Centre for Applied Leadership Research, explains that we need to *"think of the starting point as self-awareness and understanding yourself – because that is a good starting point for understanding other people"* (Damon, N. 2007). This, for me, captures the essence of how behavioural development can lead to the accelerated performance of leaders.

Awareness of Behaviours through the Neurological Levels:

When working with leaders it is important to help them build an awareness of the system they are operating in and their role in it. This can be done quite effectively through the Neurological Levels – a concept developed by Robert Dilts, based on the "neurological levels" proposed by anthrolpologist Gregory Bateson. (Ellerton, R. 2003). Also known as the 'logical levels of change' or the 'logical levels of thinking', it is a model to explain the influences on human behaviour. The life of people in a company, as well as the life of the company itself, can be described and understood on a number of different levels.

Dilts presents the model as a pyramid style hierarchy.



(Dilts, R. 1996)

Dilts explores the physiological point of view where there are five levels that you work with most often.

(1) The basic level is your **environment**, your external constraint;

(2) You operate on that environment through your **behaviour**;

(3) Your behaviour is guided by your mental maps and your strategies, i.e. **capabilities;**

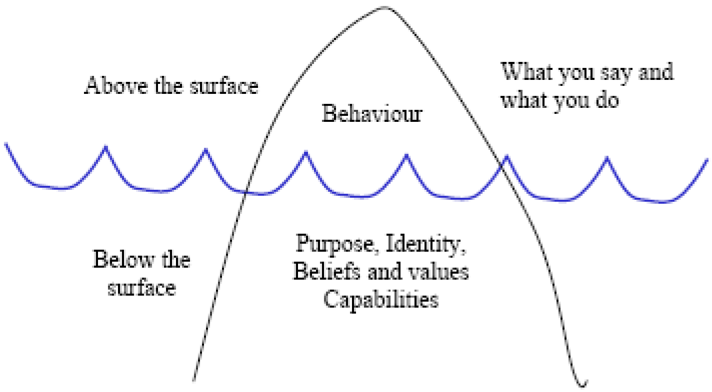
(4) These capabilities are organised by your **belief systems**;

(5) Beliefs are organised by **identity**. (Dilts, R. 1990).

Dilts further explores this and uses an example of when a person is experiencing a difficulty, what you might want to know is whether the difficulty is coming from his external context or is it that he doesn't have the specific behaviour required by that environment? Is the reason that he hasn't developed the appropriate strategy or map to generate that behaviour? (Dilts, R. 1990)

Another aspect to this was explored by Cheal where he explains how interconnected these levels are, and how they cannot operate independently of each other. 'Environment' is at the base and, without environment or context, 'behaviours' either cannot take place, or are meaningless. 'Capability' can be considered a logical level up from behaviours because without behaviours we cannot develop capability. 'Beliefs and values' are a jump up from capability, although it could be argued that we could not have beliefs without the capability of thinking. With 'identity', maybe we would not be able to develop a sense of self without our beliefs and values (Cheal, J. 2007).

To understand the role of behaviours in the logical levels, Cheal describes a situation where if someone behaves inappropriately in an environment we could change the environment but the problem is still there. We could suggest an alternative behaviour to the person but even if there is a short term change the behaviour is likely to return if something hasn't changed in the person's capability. So what is the role of 'behaviour' in the logical levels? Ian Stephenson offers a metaphor of the behaviour at the tip of the ice berg, the part above the surface, where as purpose, identity, capabilities, beliefs and values are internal thoughts and feelings.



Source: Stephenson, I. *"The Identity of a Wealth Builder: Dilts ladder of influence"*

Logical levels is a very effective tool to in the executive coaching context as it offers the client an overview and awareness of themselves, the organisation and the interconnected structure of it all. In **Case Study 2** (Appendix II), one could apply the logical levels to the case at hand. The client's leadership style was described as "*hostile and competitive*" – this affects the behavioural and capabilities levels leaving the environmental level hostile. The identity level was also under threat as his position was in clear jeopardy if his behaviours were not changed. Once the client gained insight as to why he behaved in this manner, this insight enabled the client to begin to change the perceptions (beliefs) of the board members, and repair those relationships.

Understanding Behaviour

'Behave' as defined by Collins English dictionary is "*to act or function in a particular way*" and 'behaviour' is defined as the "*manner of behaving*". It can be described as what you do and say, what you express externally to the world around you. Constructive behaviours in the context of this paper are behaviours that are important to the individual in any given situation to attain a positive outcome. Runde, C. and Flanagan, T. describe a set of seven constructive behaviours for leaders dealing in conflict, four of them active and three of them passive (Runde, C., Flanakan T., 2007). They argue that the practice of constructive behaviours is not only the antithesis of destructive behaviours, it can be the foundation of personal and organisational success in ways previously unimagined and unrealised. This was evidenced in both **Case Study 1**, where a specific programme focused on attitudinal and behavioural change facilitated real leadership development across the organisation, and in **Case Study 3**, where an individual coaching programme delivered newfound respect and improved relationships through ongoing practice of new behaviours.

Active Behaviours - this involves an overt behaviour that typically reduces tension

Behaviour No. 1: Perspective Taking

Pertains to understanding the others person's point of view. This was particularly evident in **Case Study 2** where the client's hope was "*that someone outside the organization could offer fresh perspective*". Within the coaching process the coach is always challenging the client to seek out fresh perspectives and from there open up choices.

Behaviour No. 2: Creating Solutions

Working with the other person instead of focusing on who is to blame. In **Case Study 3** the coaching process identified the behaviours that were leading to a perception amongst the board members where they viewed the client's leadership style as "*hostile and competitive*". The coaching led the client to understand the specific behaviours that led to the board members' perceptions and alternative methods were suggested and agreed upon. There was no blame culture in the process. The coaching process is itself solution focused and while there is a reality check of the situation you are always striving for possible solutions.

Behaviour No. 3: Expressing Emotions

This means that it is better to express emotions in a forthright, appropriate way rather than having pent up emotions gush out. According the Carl Robinson most research shows that executives who are rated high on Interpersonal Effectiveness (Emotional Intelligence) outperform low-rated executives by 15-20% on yearly revenue targets (Robinson, C. 2010).

Behaviour No. 4: Reaching Out

Requires you to take the first step in communication and in making any necessary amendments. This was apparent in **Case Study 2** where "*During the coaching, Joe developed a plan that included working with each person on his team*". This proactive approach was to increase his communication skills with them.

Passive Behaviours - involve withholding actions in order to reduce conflict

Behaviour No. 1: Reflective Thinking

Weighing up the pros and cons of a particular situation. It is closely linked to perspective thinking as it is difficult to weigh up the pros and cons of various approaches without appreciating the needs and issues of both sides. The essence of the coaching relationship is reflective in manner as you are constantly questioning your client to get them to gain insight through reflection, asking key questions such as 'what worked?', 'what didn't work?', and 'what could you do better?'.

Behaviour No. 2: Delay Responding

This involves calling a time-out to let a situation calm, it does not mean avoiding or ignoring, just a break so that people are better able to listen to one another. The coaching process facilitates this by slowing everything down through effective questioning techniques to allow the client process and understand their own behavioural responses to certain situations.

Behaviour No. 3 Adapting Behaviour

Staying flexible and trying to make the best out of a situation. Leaders who are adaptable can make adjustments wherever necessary. In **Case Study 1** the client wanted a programme designed for their "*leaders to cope effectively with increasing global and internal business challenges and complexities*". Within that programme there was a workshop designed "behaviour and me", this will effectively allow them to be adaptable to any of the new changes. This I think is the most important of the behaviours as within the context of today's environment leaders have to continually adapt to keep up with the presenting challenges.

When understanding what are the key behaviours that will make the biggest positive change in increased leadership effectiveness, Morhan, H. et al developed a behavioural leadership coaching process (Morhan, H. et al 2005) (Appendix IV). What was interesting in this process was where the leader gets "*coached in determining the desired behaviour*". They cannot change their behaviour unless they understand what their desired behaviour looks like. This is very important information to capture between Steps 2 and 3 of my coaching methodology (see Figure 1, page 9).

<u>Behavioural Assessment - DISC Profile</u>

It can be argued that to be an effective leader, individuals need to raise their self-awareness to be able to understand themselves and the impact they have on those around them. Different types of psychometrics can be used to increase understanding of both personality and ability. The psychometric that I want to focus on is the DISC profile. The online DISC profile and other disc profiles are based on the research of William Moulton Marston Ph.D. (1893-1947). Marston, who was influenced by such contemporaries as Carl Jung sought to find theory to explain the behaviour of "normal" "healthy" people within a specific situation or environment (Goodman, J. 2010).

DISC is an acronym for Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness reflecting a four-dimensional model of human behaviour. The model provides detailed and personalised reports on how you prefer to communicate, how you approach problems, what motivates you and what stresses you. DISC can also help you better communicate with those of different styles. One of the main benefits of DISC profile is understanding behavioural strengths and challenges in yourself and in others (DISC Profile, January 2007).

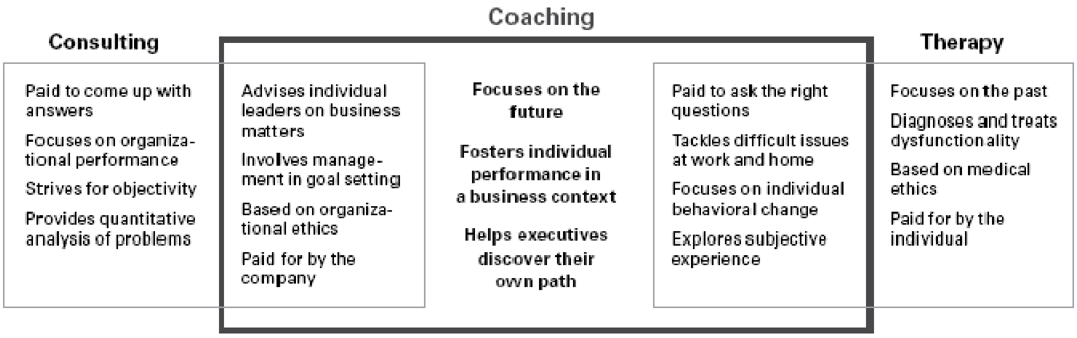
This is illustrated in **Case Study 2** where the client 'Joe' was having difficulty "*communicating with his staff*". Their perception of Joe was that he tended to be arrogant, demanding, and egotistical. The goal of the coaching process was "*help Joe have an understanding that others do not communicate or respond to communication in the same way that Joe does*". After taking the DISC profile analysis Joe became more self aware and "*realized how those who did not know him well could perceive him as distant and unapproachable*". He developed a plan that included working with individual team members and began to recognise how others process information and built relationships from there.

This increased understanding provided a powerful foundation for developing the skills needed to be an effective leader and manager.

<u>Where Coaching Can go Wrong – How to Avoid the Pitfalls</u>

It has been argued within the coaching arena that the coaching relationship can inexplicitly develop into a form of psychotherapy when operating at a behavioural level.

This risk can be mitigated at Step 1 of the executive coaching process (Contracting), where the nature of the coaching relationship should be clearly discussed and agreed, along with the appropriate boundaries in terms of what is acceptable in relation to the methodology to be applied. Whilst coaching does borrow from both consulting and therapy, there are clear distinctions between the two. The table below illustrates these differences, and where the two cross over.



Source: HBR Research Report January 2009

A survey was carried out by Harvard Business Review (HBR) of 140 leading coaches and invited five experts to comment on the findings. While speaking about the ingredients of a successful coaching relationship they concluded that a coach should not be engaged to fix behavioural problems, arguing that "*blamers, victims and individuals with iron clad belief systems don't change*". (Coutu, D. Kauffman, C., Jan 2009). I do not agree with this generalisation. It is when working at a belief level with a client that more transformational changes in behaviour can occur.

Also important is that there is a supportive environment for the coaching process to take place. Marshall Goldsmith argues that when working at changing leadership behaviours, there has to be three factors addressed for this to be effective:

– Are the client's issues behavioural?

– Are the clients willing to try to change?

– Are the clients going to be given a fair chance?

He maintains that "*leadership coaching can be a very valuable process when the clients issues are behavioural, they are motivated to change and when they are given a fair chance*" (Goldsmith, M. 2008).

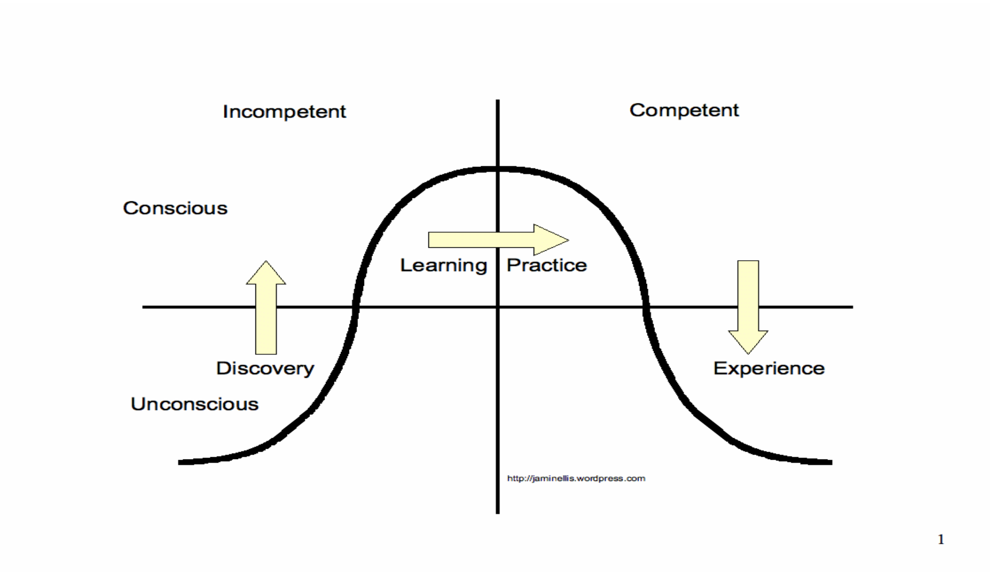
In summary, the success or failure of the executive coaching relationship is critically dependent on upfront agreement of the terms of engagement, and the support and commitment of all the key stakeholders.

Making the New Behaviours Last

I think herein lies the most fundamental point. We have already discussed the importance of awareness in the coaching process for behavioural development and understood and identified what constructive behaviours look like. We have looked at how the executive coaching process supports behavioural development with the use of DISC profile and creating inter and intra-personal awareness within the leader.

This now leads us to understand the importance of follow-up and feedback and what happens when the coaching contract finishes. In **Case Study 3** the coach and leader "*repeatedly practiced the new behaviours until they seemed natural and automatic*". This is extremely important as behaviours are learnt over a period of time and it takes time, effort and practice to ensure that the leader does not revert to old behaviours while integrating the new ones. It takes practice as seen in this case study where it was only through practicing the new behaviours that allowed the client to put his new mindset into practice quickly.

The learning model of Conscious Competence can be applied to this.



Source: http://redcatco.com/blog/leadership/learning/you-live-you-learn-learn-to-learn-learn-to-live/

***Step 1 Unconscious Incompetence* -** This is at the beginning of the coaching process where the leader is not aware of constructive behaviours

***Step 2 Conscious Incompetence* -** Becomes aware of constructive behaviour- identifies his desired ones

***Step 3 Conscious Competence* -** This is where he starts to consciously practice his new behaviours and takes effort not to revert to old behaviours

Step 4 Unconscious Competence – through practice, feedback and coaching leader integrates new behaviours and practices them at an unconscious level requiring no effort.

You can see in **Case Study 3** how the coach brought the leader from a stage of unconscious incompetence to conscious competence. This is where you want your client to be by Step 4 of the coaching process. As seen in **Case Study 3** the coach completed a 6-month follow-up with the board members and the leader to make sure that *"the new behaviours had become fully established, and that they were working well together"*. What is interesting about this model of learning is the importance of feedback throughout the process and here it can be linked to the coaching process in this regard.

Conclusion - Connecting the Pieces….

"When nothing is sure, everything is possible" **Margaret Drabble**

The current economic climate is presenting extreme challenges for our leaders today. It is now more than ever that our leaders need to develop themselves to cope with these challenges, as well as seeing the opportunities to propel themselves and their teams forward with a clear vision.

What is the role of executive coaching in developing the constructive behaviours needed in these challenging times?

The executive coaching process facilitates the development of the leader's constructive behaviours by creating the environment and structure to:

a) identify the desired constructive behaviours;
b) create more self-awareness of the leader's current behaviours through facilitated assessment;
c) understand the effects their behaviours have on people and the organisational environment;
d) create a plan to make sure new constructive behaviours are developed, integrated and repeated at an unconscious level.

Within the three cited case studies we can see how the coaches worked with the leaders to develop and embed new behaviours, and the positive impact this change had on the individuals and organizations involved.

In conclusion, the role of executive coaching in developing constructive leadership behaviours is more relevant than ever in the context of today's challenging global business environment.

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AN INVESTIGATION OF HOW EI, COACHING & NLP TECHNIQUES CAN BE USED TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM) PROCESSES IN THE RETAIL SECTOR

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Abstract

Customer Service (CS) is a critical element to the success or failure of any business. However, many companies spend considerable time either ignoring it, oblivious to what is going on, or focusing on gathering customer data and calling that operation CS. Many of the theorists focus on the data collection and mathematics of CS and pay only a cursory nod towards the softer face to face skills required. Contrary to the belief of some theorists these softer skills can be learned and the exercise with Company X has proven this. Using simple EI, Coaching and NLP techniques, it was possible to help the staff of Company X to identify and overcome previously held misconceptions in relation to the service they were offering and to make some real and measurable changes in their CS practices.

1.0 Introduction / Background:

As consumers we interact with businesses. From the purchase of a newspaper to a car, we deal with sales people every day. Some of these experiences are great while others are very poor. We tend to remember the bad instances of what we call poor Customer Service (CS). We blame the Sales person who dealt with us, we blame the company and we blame the product or service.

From a commercial point of view the term CS falls under the area of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). Susan and Derek Nash (teamtechnology.co.uk) state that CS is what companies provide to customers while working to develop a longer lasting relationship. While good service will provide the opportunity for competitive advantage, poor CS can have a very negative effect on profitability. CustomerEngagementClub.com and others cite work by Professor Merlin Stone which states that UK companies have lost £3.4bn as a direct result of poor customer service.

I believe that poor CS can also be a reflection of the culture within the organisation. In many cases in Ireland, people are afraid to complain and let companies know how they feel. Instead, they tend to 'vote with their feet' (CustomerEngegementClub.com report on Stone's research) and just not return to the company. It is important, for companies to change how they interact with their customers and yet they do not. With so much at stake, what can businesses do to ensure consistent excellent CS and therefore attract new customers and ensure future customer retention?

In this assignment I intend to examine some of the current CRM processes that exist in the Retail and Foodservice sectors in Ireland. I will also look at some of the key areas in Emotional Intelligence (EI), Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Executive Coaching to see how these areas might benefit CRM processes in the future. To demonstrate the benefits of using EI, NLP and Coaching techniques in CRM (and to comply with the Action-based Learning Question (ALQ) of this assignment, I conducted an exercise with a Small to Medium sized Enterprise (SME) in the retail sector in Ireland. This business (who wished to remain anonymous) is an independent retailer of fashion products with a staff of 14 people. The owner of the company had begun to notice a reduction in customer levels above what they considered to be applicable to the economic downturn.

2.0 What is CRM?

BusinessDictionary.com defines CRM as "Information-technology enabled *strategy aimed at identifying, targeting, acquiring, and retaining the best mix of customers. CRM helps in profiling prospects, understanding their needs, and in building relationships with them by providing the most-suitable products and a very high level of customer service. It integrates back and front office systems to create a database of customer contacts, purchases, information requested, technical support, etc. This database helps the firm in presenting a unified-face to its customers, and improves the quality of the relationship"*

Greenberg (2009, p345) defines CRM as *"the customer care activities that surround the purchase of a product or service"*.

Woods (1999, p3) defines CS for companies as *"...a relationship with people who are an essential part of everything you do"*.

There are numerous definitions for CRM. Many depend on the vantage point of the definition creator. Taking the examples above it can be seen that the Business Dictionary definition would appear to be very much a senior management definition of the function as it primarily relates to the systems required to capture data which will help the company to present "*a unified-face to its customers*'.

Sigala (2004) notes that while CRM is one of the fastest growing management approaches, it has not always delivered the expected results. She also notes that while much of the current research provides evidence of how ICT management processes impact on CRM, there is little that examines the performance aspects of this subject area. Webb (2000) also noted the lack of consideration given to the *"'role' of the customer in the service encounter"*.

Greenberg (2010, p3) notes that customer demands on businesses have changed considerably which has necessitated changes in the ways that businesses interact with them. He highlights what he refers to as the growth of 'Social CRM' where businesses must develop and sustain relationships while balancing customer demands and the need for continued profitability. Hurley (1998), Webb (2000), Blodgett et al. (1995), Shemwell et al. (1998), Gagliano et al. (1994), Schmitt et al. (1995), Johnson et al. (2005), Hennig-Thurau (2004) and Parasuraman et al. (1991) all indicate that a key requirement for successful CS lies in the attitude and personality of the employee dealing with the customer. However, Hennig-Thurau (2004) also states that an employee's capacity for empathy is largely determined in their youth. Modern EI thinking has proven that it is possible to change a person's capacity for empathy which opens up the possibility for people to be trained for CS roles.

Although relating to the Health sector (rather than the focus of this document on Retail, it is worthy to note that Scotti et al. (2009) noted that the intensity of the level of customer contact with employees has an effect on the congruence between employee and customer perceptions.

Even though it is an older publication, Quinn (1990), coming from the retailer perspective focuses on the need for customer retention rather than attraction. Eastham et al. (2001, pp169-171) echo this philosophy citing customer retention as a key element in marketing strategies and ultimately in profitability. In *Crowning the Customer,* Quinn emphasises the fact that customers are people. He states that it is very easy to look at customers in an impersonal way which will affect how you deal with them.

Taking another angle, Giddins (2001, p. 296) suggests that *"need merchants"* such as advertisers, marketers, fashion designers, style consultants, etc. influence customer expectations while class pressures apply a pressure to conform with a specific 'look' that matches each person's place in society.

So is Customer Service a 'soft skill'? Much of the published research indicates that there is an absence in the amount of focus on the interaction between the customer and the employee. Many companies seek to gather information about customers and buying patterns under the heading of CRM. While this is sound business practice, it would appear that at least some companies can become too reliant on data collection and not enough on ensuring that customer facing employees have the necessary skills and tools to interact effectively with customers. Hurley (1998) cited personality traits such as extroversion, adjustment and agreeableness as underlying traits required for successful CS. He also noted that employee personality does influence customer service.

Brandi (1998) notes that *"most companies don't take the time to understand what [customer] service means specifically in terms of both belief and behaviour".* This is evident in the case of the company used in the case study of this assignment and I believe it to be true of many companies today. Despite the recessionary times, customers continue to receive poor service from unmotivated staff. When instinct suggests that in the current environment, companies should be striving to provide superior service in order to attract and retain more customers, the opposite appears to be the case.

While companies spend time gathering information on their customers and using it to develop their overall operational plans, it is also necessary to understand exactly what customers want. Throughout the review of articles and books for this assignment, I noticed that there was little use of the terms Customer Expectation and Customer Perception. The table below shows the key elements of each:

Expectations	Perception
Word of mouth	Real time
Requirements	What the customer experiences at the time
Nature of Product or Service	How the Product/Service is delivered

Table: Customer Expectations vs. Perception

As customers we have expectations that can derive from what we hear about a company, product or service, what we actually need from the product or service and the nature of the product or service. For example, I would have certain expectations if I were about to purchase a Rolls Royce and these would be completely different if I were about to buy a Toyota. Unfortunately, many companies fail to see this and manage it. Karten (2003, www.nkarten.com/mce.html) suggests that companies can achieve customer satisfaction if they meet customer expectations through their performance. She developed a formula for customer satisfaction as follows:

$$\text{Customer Satisfaction} = \frac{\text{Your Performance}}{\text{Customer Expectations}}$$

So what then about customer perception. This is what the customer experiences at the moment. From an NLP perspective, it relates to the customer's view of their world at the particular time of the transaction. We tend to balance our perceptions on what our expectations were. This is where many companies fail. Karten (2003) notes that many companies have developed a view of how they are perceived. Unfortunately, this is not necessarily the same view as the customer. Where an employer might consider staff to be extrovert (Hurley, 1998), customers might view the staff as pushy.

The concept of CS then must be very 'fluid'. Stone (n.d.) states *"Organisations have to work harder than ever to keep their best customers. Consumers have become increasingly demanding and discerning, and with the rise of price comparison websites for example, it is now much easier to compare and switch products."*

Employers therefore must ensure that customer facing staff is equipped with the necessary resources to meet customer requirements (Parasuraman et al. 1991). Data collection is relatively easy, but as we have seen (and will be seen in the ALQ), it is not enough. Hurley (1998) and others recognise that staff must have the necessary 'soft skills' to be able to deal with customers.

The next section will introduce the soft skill areas of Emotional Intelligence (EI), Executive Coaching and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and will examine them from the perspective of Customer Service processes.

3.0 How EI, Coaching & NLP Techniques can influence CS processes

Coaching, NLP and EI processes developed over the last 30 years or so as a means of helping people overcome personal and professional difficulties. This is achieved through a greater understanding of both the person and how they interact with their environment.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is widely accredited to Daniel Goleman (1995). Goleman defined EI as *"...the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships."* During the 1980's Dr. Reuven Bar-On developed a hypothesis called Emotional Quotient (EQ). Bar-On believed that EI was made up of overlapping skills and attitudes (Stein & Book, 2006, p2). The Bar-On EQ-i (Emotional Quotient Intelligence) model measures EI under five general theme areas. These areas are subdivided into fifteen sub-scales as follows:

Int**RA**personal Skills
- Self-Regard
- Emotional Self-awareness Assertiveness Independence
- Self-actualisation

Int**ER**personal Skills
- Empathy
- Social Responsibility
- Interpersonal Relationships

Stress Management
- Stress Tolerance
- Impulse Control

Adaptability
- Reality Testing
- Flexibility
- Problem Solving

General Mood
- Optimism
- Happiness

By studying these skills, it is possible to see how each individual views his/her own world. Contrary to Hennig-Thurau's (2004) article, it is now know to be possible to change any or all of the traits listed above and thereby alter how we interact with our environment. Langley (2008) also states that NLP can be used to change our behaviours in order to achieve different results.

She further suggests a three step process that involves NLP as a means of achieving improved customer satisfaction. These are:

1. Make Qualitive Outcomes more Measurable. Using goal setting, NLP allows for the definition of sensory based evidence for success which will provide the business owner with defined criteria against which staff can be measured.

2. Model Excellence. Langley (2008) suggests that using the NLP tool of modelling, it is possible to *"crystallise how outstanding performers think and act"* and to amend existing processes to reflect this.

3. Train People to be Flexible. Langley believes that NLP can be used to provide staff with the tools and techniques which will enable them to hone in on customer moods and respond appropriately.

Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) began in the 1970's as a result of the work of John Grinder (Linguistics) and Richard Bandler (mathematics and gestalt therapy). According to the NLP University (1999), *'NLP is a multi-dimensional process that involves the development of behavioural competence and flexibility, but also involves strategic thinking and an understanding of the mental and cognitive processes behind behaviour'*. NLP presupposes that:

1. As human beings we experience and respond to the world around us through our sensory representational systems. It is these experiences that give us our 'reality'. In turn the 'reality' that we experience determines how we behave.

2. The processes that take place within us (INTRA) as well as between us (INTER), other human beings and our environment are systemic. Together these processes form a network of complex systems and sub-systems which interact and influence each other.

The profession of coaching has its origins in North America in the 1980's when a former Financial Planner, Thomas J Leonard recognised the need to provide professional coaching to help people. He developed his skills over the next ten years and set up the Coaching University in the early 90's. Since then coaching has evolved as a global profession.

Coaching focuses on helping the client to determine and achieve personal goals. It is a thought provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential. Because the coach works with the client, the coach/client relationship must be a partnership in order to be successful. According to the FCG Executive Coaching Guide (2007) *"coaching is a collaborative partnership between an executive, his/her organization, and an executive coach"*

In his book '*Looking for Spinosa*' (2003), Antonio Damasio separates emotions from feelings and suggests that "*...emotions are actions or movements, many of them public, visible to others as they occur in the face, in the voice and in specific behaviours*". He further suggests that "*Feelings are always hidden...playing out in the theatre of the mind*". Throughout his book, Damasio echoes the theory put forward by the philosopher, Spinosa in the 17th century that link the processes of the body and the mind together. This view appears to support that of NLP.

From this discussion we begin to see how the three areas of Coaching, EI and NLP inter-relate with each other so closely; the INTER and INTRA aspects of EI and NLP as well as the Emotions and Feelings elements of Coaching, NLP and EI are just a couple of examples of how these fields of study work together.

Zeus et al. (2000) suggest that many companies are still manager oriented rather than customer centred. This concept echoes the findings of many of the theorists in CS that have been mentioned already. From a CS perspective it is necessary to identify the specific traits that are required for an employee dealing with a customer. Hurley (1998) suggests that *"superior [customer] service providers tend to be higher in extroversion and agreeableness"*. As social beings we naturally gravitate towards situations that are friendly and relaxed. This is true in CS situations as much as in anything else; we tend to approach the friendlier staff member and we notice the difference when our friendly advances with a staff member are ignored. When this happens we make statements like "they really didn't want to be there", or, "they must hate their job".

The danger for the company is that we may not return and we may not recommend the business to our friends. It is generally accepted that when we experience good service, we will tell an average of three others if they receive a good service from a company, but they will tell between 12 and 16 if they receive a bad service. It is important, therefore for companies to understand how their customer facing employees interact with customers and how they deal with everyday customer issues. It is one thing to see CS as a means of gathering information on customers, but it is another thing to actually understand your customers and to provide the service that is expected.

4.0 Methodology

In order to fulfil the ALQ part of this assignment, I decided to find a SME in the retail sector that would be willing to allow me to review its CS processes, work with its staff and speak with its customers. While the selection of a SME may restrict some of the findings of this ALQ, I believe the concepts used and the situations experienced are indicative of many retail operations big and small. I believe that the selection of a SME provided an additional benefit in that unlike many larger organisations, the SME would have a greater limitation on financial resources to implement significant change, that is, unlike many larger organisations, the SME would not be able to simply 'throw money' at the problem.

In order to select the test company, I approached my local Business Network and organised a workshop on the basics of CS. During this workshop, I encouraged attendees to share experiences (good and bad). These were then discussed by all present. During the workshop, I noted that one participant appeared to be having more 'issues' than the others. At the end of the workshop, I approached this business owner to see if they would be willing to be part of this research. They agreed on the basis that their identity would be kept confidential and that there would be complete anonymity for their staff and customers. I agreed to this and set up a plan for the project.

The selected company (Company X) is a fashion and accessory retailer offering mid- to higher-end fashion products. The typical customer ranges from the mid- twenties to mid-fifties looking for good quality designer products at affordable prices. The store has a total of 14 employees made up of 6 full time staff and 8 part time staff. Full time staff range in age from mid-twenties to mid-forties while part time staff is predominantly late teens to late twenties. Company X has been in business for almost 10 years and had built up a good reputation for quality and service (or so they thought). During the workshop, the owner of the company began to wonder whether the fall off in business that she had experienced over the last year or so was solely down to the economic environment (as she had previously thought), or whether there were more straight forward CS issues at stake. As a result, she agreed to become part of this project.

The process involved the following steps:

1. Meeting with the store owner at the store to gather information about the business. This included staff numbers, staff ages, product range, customer ages (estimated), current CS methods, staff training, etc. The meeting also gathered information on the owner's views on CS.

2. A follow-up meeting was held with the store owner to review the previous meeting and agree next steps.

3. Meeting with staff members to explain what the project was about and what I was hoping to achieve. Each staff member was asked to complete the BAR-ON EI test (paid for by the business owner). The results were kept private to each staff member and overall areas of improvement were targeted for the group.

4. A full day spent in the store, observing staff in action. While traditionally, this may be considered an action that could affect the outcome of my findings (staff may perform differently when they know that they are being watched), I believe that the reassurances at the staff briefing session alleviated these fears in some way.

5. An evening event where I met with some of the stores key customers. This was an informal event held in the store and was an opportunity for me to network with the customers. Each attendee was asked to fill out a questionnaire on how they felt about the service they were getting from the store. For the questionnaire, I decided to use a simple format that I found on the internet at http://sbinfocanada.about.com/od/customerservice/a/customersurvey1.htm. Each questionnaire was submitted anonymously.

6. A review of all of the gathered information was undertaken and a plan was put in place to improve relevant areas.

7. Individual and group training sessions were conducted after which points 3 and 4 were repeated to see if any changes had been observed.

5.0 Discussion

During our initial meeting, I decided to jump straight in and use clean language techniques to minimise any possible influence that I may have had on gathering information. I provided the owner of Company X with the environment that enabled her to challenge her views of what CS was and what were the elements that could affect it. During our meeting (which lasted three hours) I also used recovery questions to recover missing information and challenge her belief that business was suffering solely due to the economic environment.

Noticing that she was quite a visual person, I decided to work with her to draw up a mind map of what effective CS meant to her. After our meeting I added in the elements of Coaching, EI and NLP that I believed would enhance effective CS. My second meeting with the store owner reviewed this mind map and it was decided to use it as a training tool for staff members. A copy of the mind map can be found in Appendix 1.

It was decided that the best way to meet all staff was for the owner to arrange a social evening where all staff would attend and I could meet with them and chat in a relaxed environment. I suggested that the owner should leave early and allow me to meet with the staff without the fear of having the owner listening in. This was a pleasant evening where I focused on building rapport and easing the concerns of the individual staff members. I noticed that the permanent staff seemed more cautious and suspicious of the proposed process, but after discussions, they were happy to continue. During some individual discussions (taken off-line during a break in proceedings) some of the full time staff gave clear indications that they were not happy with the part-timers. This was confirmed by observing their body language during the group discussions. As part of the process, I explained the EI test procedure and gave the staff their log in details in sealed envelopes.

The next step was to spend a day in the shop observing the staff. As the only male in a female store, it was a little difficult at first, but staff soon got used to the fact that I was there and got on with their work. I noticed that staff members dealt more effectively with customers of their own age rather than having to deal with a customer much older or younger than themselves. I also noticed that the part- timers seemed to be much less disciplined than their more mature colleagues. In some cases, the part-timers appeared to move in groups rather than deal with customers individually. I believe that this could be intimidating for some customers.

On completion of the EI tests I noticed that the more mature full timers scored higher on areas like Adaptability, Stress Management and IntERpersonal skills than their younger counterparts. However, before reaching conclusions on this, I decided to wait until after meeting with the customers before I discussed the results.

At the customer evening, I met with a number of the main customers who ranged in ages similar to the full time staff. Each customer was asked to complete a short questionnaire (Appendix 2) which I reviewed after the event. The customer questionnaire confirmed what I had observed in the store and established from the EI tests; customers were happier dealing with full time staff. They felt that they could build a greater rapport with the full time staff so that return visits didn't involve so much information gathering by the staff, e.g. measuring, etc. Customers (even those in the mid-twenties bracket) also felt that the part-time staff (because of the nature of their jobs) was really not that interested.

Using this information, I worked with the staff both on a one to one basis and in group sessions to change how they approached CS. I encouraged part-timers to model the actions of full time staff through observation, in-house training and practice. I used Woods (1999, p.3) definition of CS as a mantra for all staff to help them understand the importance of what they were doing.

Unfortunately, some of the part-time staff were not willing to make the changes necessary and left the company. This highlighted the fact that a person must want to be coached in order to achieve lasting change.

One month after the first customer session, we held a second session with the same customers. Again, they were asked to complete the questionnaire. Even though it was only a month and the process is ongoing, regular customers did notice some very positive changes in staff focus and attitude. At the time of writing (about 2 weeks after the last customer session), I contacted the owner to see if she had seen any further improvements and she noted that she had noticed a slight increase in clientele with some new customers coming in. However, as it is close to Christmas, she was slow to confirm whether the new customers were the result of the process or the holiday season. I suggested that she might encourage her staff to ask new customers where they heard about Company X and measure the responses. She undertook to implement this.

A further day in store followed by group sessions with staff and customers is planned for early 2011 (after the holiday season) to measure the changes and to put in place, a process of ongoing customer contact and relationship building.

6.0 Conclusions

George Bush said in an address in 2006; "*We live in troubled times*". He was referring to the need to protect the USA from attack. However, this same statement is very relevant today for companies of all sizes all over the world.

As evidenced with Company X it is very easy for business owners to blame downturn in sales on the economic environment, when in fact it may have more to do with poor staff training and attitude towards their customers. As indicated by Sigala (2004), Hurley (1998) and others, it is easy to focus on the commercial aspects of CS, collecting data, etc. This means that, as per Webb (2000); there is a lack of consideration given to the *"'role' of the customer in the service encounter"*.

Company X also demonstrated the need for care when mixing full and part time staff. Full timers can feel threatened by part timers and the part time staff tends not to have the same level of ownership for their roles as full time staff. Internal tensions such as these can cause friction which, if left unchecked may become evident to customers. This confirms the views of theorists like Hurley (1998), Webb (2000), Blodgett et al. (1995), Shemwell et al. (1998), Gagliano et al. (1994), Schmitt et al. (1995), Johnson et al. (2005), Hennig-Thurau (2004) and Parasuraman et al. (1991), all of whom highlighted the importance of the correct employee attitude.

It amazes me how many companies fail to arrange to physically meet with their customers and ask the simplest of questions such as "how are we doing for you?" Karten (2003) notes that *"even if you're working yourself to the proverbial bone, if customers view you as unresponsive, then you are unresponsive — in their eyes"*. Graves (2010) questions the validity of focus groups, yet I believe that when held in a manner similar to that of Company X, it is possible to obtain very valuable "how am I doing?" information from the people who matter (Woods, 1999, p.3); the customer

Company X is only at the beginning of a process that will enable a change of focus and approach towards CS. Staff training is only a couple of months in place. It will require ongoing monitoring over the Holiday/New Year period. However, initial results have demonstrated that using the combined tools of EI, NLP and Coaching, it is possible to change a company's approach to CS. It will be interesting to see how the process and learning from this exercise can be transferred to larger companies and different industry sectors.

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DECISION-MAKING STRATEGIES OF PROJECT MANAGERS.

Tim Lyons

Abstract

This paper summarises at high level some recent research into whether there are discernable strategies being used by expert project managers (PMs) when they made decisions. The day-to-day work of a PM in any industry involves making decisions – it's at the core of what they do.

A study was made of a group of PMs from different sectors, including assessment of their metaprogramme traits, observations 'on the job' and a 1:1 interview on camera, using a standard script. Results were examined within the context of existing decision theories and emergent patterns were identified.

What became clear during the study was that decision-making is not formally taught and that experts have 'learned how to do it' by trial and error. There were some patterns observed but not what could be called a systematic approach.

The author has attempted to synthesize some of the more useful aspects of existing decision theory with the predominant patterns found in research subjects and proposes a new model for decision-making (in a project context) based on a metacognitive tool known as the Vee-diagram. This new model is presented here as the Decision Vee Model.

INTRODUCTION

Put simply, projects usually result in change and often deal with uncertainties. Decisions made in a project context are typically not easy to undo once made. This makes the critical nature of decision-making in a project environment an interesting subject for study, since the stakes are high.

This research set out to establish whether a representative group of project managers used any identifiable decision-making strategies. If they did, were there unique recognisable patterns in the strategies of experienced project managers? And finally, how do these compare to existing theories of decision-making?

DECISION THEORY

DECISION-MAKING GUIDANCE FROM RELEVANT PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEXTS

British Standard BS6079 (BSI, 2002) is a good place to start in studying how the industry understands decision-making. The standard has this to say:

> *"Individuals should be able to evaluate alternatives and make authoritative decisions by means of the following attributes:*
>
> *a) Being able to sift through and understand volumes of project data, identify important material and seek out any missing information, to make an informed decision on the facts presented;*
> *b) Getting to the root of project issues, identifying key relationships, political implications and applying a pragmatic cause and effect approach to the decision process;*
> *c) Understanding the project objectives, establishing the correct priorities and choosing the most appropriate course of action."*

However this largely describes what a PM would apply their decision-making skills to, not how they are to do it, so it gives few clues about strategy.

Next to be examined was the Association for Project Management's 'Body of Knowledge' and associated 'Competency Framework', publications which form the 'bible' for project management in the UK and elsewhere. Once again, the emphasis is on what things a PM would need to competently decide, but no guidance whatsoever on how to make the decision.

DECISION-MAKING STRATEGIES DESCRIBED IN NLP TEXTS

Many NLP authors converge on the description that O'Connor sums up economically as:

> *"Strategies are those sequences of thought that we use to achieve our outcome" (O'Connor, 2001 p.115)*

Gordon & Dawes propose a slightly different definition of strategies:

> *"… sets and sequences of internal processes and external behaviours intended to attain particular outcomes" (Gordon and Dawes, 2005).*

The authors define a 'Set' in this context as a group of steps that are normally used together, or as it were 'pre-assembled'.

Readers will doubtless be familiar with the TOTE as a fundamental NLP model shown typically as Fig. 1.

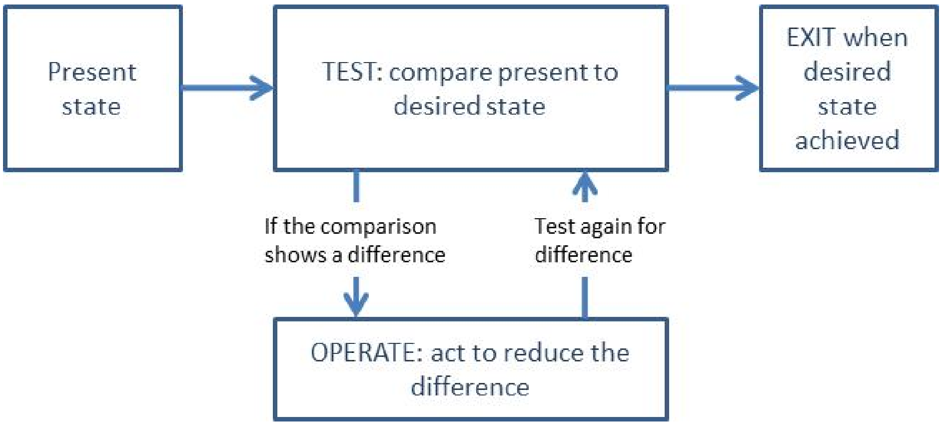


Fig.1: Commonly used configuration of a TOTE (Dilts et al. 1980 p.28)

A key point suggested by Dilts et al. is that TOTEs can become 'habituated' meaning they can become an automated or unconscious response. They argue that much of human experience, including what we refer to as 'expertise' occurs in our unconscious, which is why modelling expertise requires elicitation processes to bring them into consciousness in order to codify them.

Joseph O'Connor and John Seymour suggest that building a model typically requires:

> *"…a system of recursively nested TOTEs or, to put it more simply, skills within skills…" (O'Connor et al. 1990: p.186).*

Hence a strategy to model decision-making may turn out to be complex, and if it does, it may involve a number of TOTEs.

Wyatt Woodsmall further refines the standard TOTE model by defining its structural and functional well-formedness conditions when used as a strategy:

- He introduces the concept of the Trigger – which starts off the process.
- He suggests that the trigger carries with it the final criteria to be used as a standard of comparison.
- In considering what happens when a simple TOTE fails to match during its feedback cycle he suggests:
    - Adjusting the criteria or chunking laterally or re-orienting;
    - Refining or further specifying the outcome;
    - Accessing other alternatives or more data;
    - Changing the outcome or redirecting the strategy.
- He introduces the concept of the 'Decision Point' which determines the next step based on the congruence or incongruence of the test comparison.
- He adds the element of outcome to the output of the TOTE:

These refinements modify the TOTE to a more rounded and functionally complete process, although at the expense of adding complexity. Fig. 2 below is a suggested representation of Woodsmall's modified TOTE.

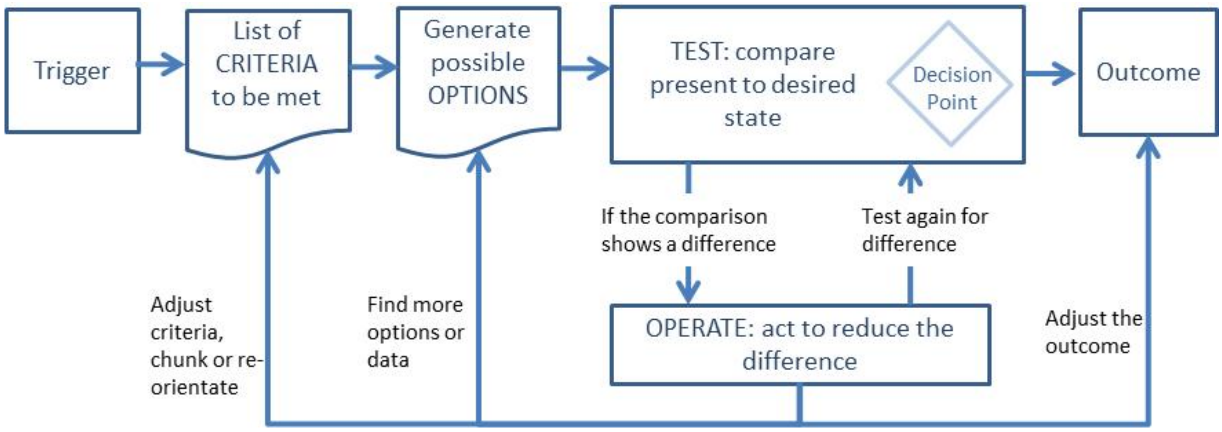


Fig.2: Suggested configuration of the extended TOTE model (Woodsmall, 1988)

Decision points and their utilisation are also identified by Robert Dilts:

> *"Here, the individual makes a decision by looking at possibilities, describing them to himself and then deriving internal feelings on the basis of those descriptions. The internal feelings constitute the decision point in the strategy. If the feelings are congruently positive (+), the person decides in favour of that particular verbal representation; if the feelings are congruently negative (-), the individual decides against it." (Dilts et al., 1980)*

Thus Woodsmall, Dilts and others agree on there being a point of congruence, which is a kinaesthetic manifestation, and happens at the decision point.

The author considers the conventional TOTE notation as not helpful in logic, and offers a representation (of a simple TOTE) based on commonly-used ISO flowchart notation as Fig. 3.

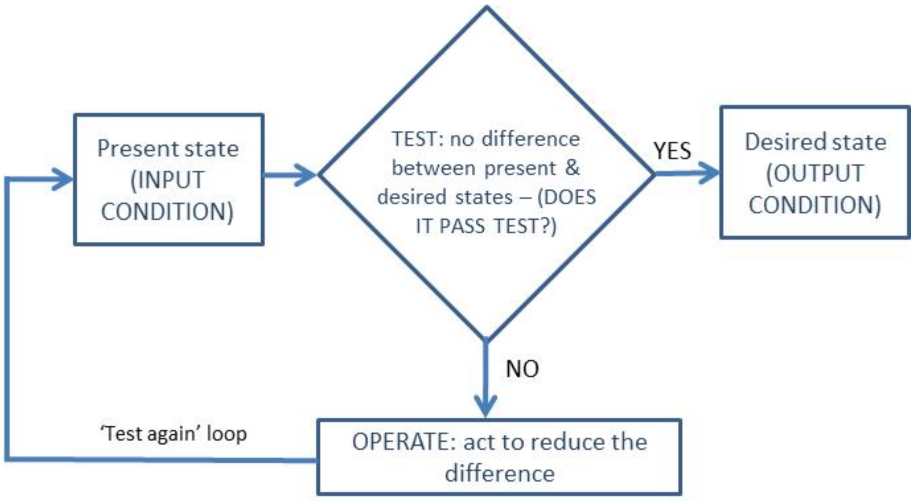


Fig. 3: The author's suggested configuration of a simple TOTE using ISO notation

This notation allows TOTE functionality to be extended where further TOTEs are nested within the OPERATE/Test Again loop.

No study of decision-making strategy would be complete without mention of the Walt Disney / Imagineering strategy researched by Robert Dilts:

> *"The various thinking styles encompassed by 'Dreamer', 'Realist' and 'Critic' apply differently in achieving and implementing ideas, and in solving problems:*
>
> - *The Dreamer helps to generate alternatives and possibilities;*
> - *The Realist helps to define actions;*
> - *The Critic helps to evaluate payoffs and drawbacks." (Dilts, 1998 pp. 179-183)*

In particular, it becomes clear that the Dreamer primarily accesses through Visual representational systems, the Realist through Kinaesthetic and the Critic through Auditory, as shown in Fig. 4 below:

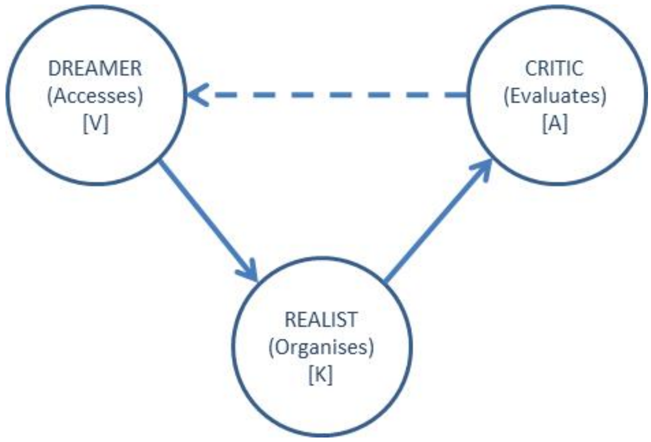


Fig. 4: The Disney Strategy (O'Connor et al., 1990, p.197)

Finally in this section, a consideration of what is not known in a decision context: Richard Bandler clarifies as follows (Bandler, 1985 Ch.VI):

> *"There are a lot of things that you don't understand, because you don't know enough about them. You probably don't understand open-heart surgery or how to design a hydrogen bomb. You're not confused about them; you just don't have the information you'd need to understand how to do these things. Confusion, however is always an indication that you're on your way to understanding. Confusion presupposes that you have a lot of data, but it's not yet organised in a way that allows you to understand it." (Bandler, 1985, p.83).*

In the research that follows, more experienced PMs said they knew why confusion was important as a state in its own right, while those with less experience saw it as an obstacle to be overcome.

DECISION THEORY – BACKGROUND & RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Much of traditional Decision Theory developed in the last 60 years springs from cybernetics where the increasing speed and complexity of modern systems has driven a reliance on fast decision support. Surprisingly, there appears to be little cross-referencing with NLP.

A number of mid-Twentieth Century decision theories were examined. The development of one early school - the Rationalists - coincided with the development of systems theory and software. It assumes we can learn all we need to know (in order to make a decision). In simple terms, these methods test every Option in turn using every Criterion and decide the winner using a numeric model. However as system complexities grew at a geometric rate, Rationalist methodologies were not able to keep up.

The Satisficing method (Simon, 1955) was faster. This considers Options individually (in the order they appear in the set) against a pre-determined cut-off value for each Criterion. If any Option does not meet the cut-off value for any Criterion, it is rejected. The first Option that passes all the Criteria cut-off values is selected (thus a selection can be made <u>before</u> all Options have been tested). The portmanteau term 'Satisficing' simply means to make a choice that suffices to fulfil the minimum requirements – in short, selecting the first option that works.

Yale professor Charles Lindblom developed the 'Disjointed Incrementalism' method of decision-making which takes a series of small steps that are never large or vastly different from steps taken previously. This allows for quick processing of decisions that are already familiar, and it avoids considering too much evidence.

Amitai Etzioni proposed a method called Adaptive Decision Making; this builds on elements of Rationalist and Incrementalist traditions and instead uses a process of 'mixed scanning' which seeks to make the best use of incomplete knowledge – often a feature of the project environment.

John Adair suggests a 5-step process for making an effective decision:

1. Define the Outcome;
2. Collect relevant information;
3. Generate feasible Options;
4. Make the decision – this has sub-steps:
    - Establish the Criteria for selection;
    - Prioritise the Criteria from critical to nice-to-have;
    - List the advantages/disadvantages (of each Option);
    - Examine the consequences of choosing each Option;
    - Test the proposed Option against the yardstick of the Outcome;
    - Consider risks against expected gains
5. Implement the decision & evaluate.

Adair's model proposes a well-structured sequence, considers uncertainties and also introduces the unconscious as an element in decision-making, though does not adequately explain its place in the process.

Naturalistic Decision Making (NDM) is a recent and developing decision-making methodology. The key factor that marks out NDM from many other methods is its reliance on expertise and experience. In examining this, it is worth looking at how expertise has been studied.

Hubert Dreyfus considers the development of human expertise and suggests a five-level model (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986). This is shown in Table 1 below juxtaposed with NLP's Levels of Learning as suggested by O'Connor:

Evidence of Skill Level (Dreyfus et al.1986)	NLP Level of Learning (O'Connor, 2001)
Expert Behaviour is intuitive, holistic and synchronic, in a given situation releases a picture of a problem, goal, plan, decision & action in one instant.	**Mastery** Not only highly effective but also has aesthetic quality; does not need to try, skill is fully embedded
Proficient Performer Identify problems, goals & plans intuitively from own experientially-based perspective. Intuitive choice is checked by analytical evaluation before action.	**Unconscious Competence** Skill is habitual & automatic; Now skill is largely unconscious, allows conscious mind to do other things simultaneously
Competent Performer Characterized by the involved choice of goals & plans as basis for their actions. Goals & Plans store both context- dependent and –independent information	**Conscious Competence** Has the skill, but not yet consistent & habitual; needs to concentrate on skill
Advanced Beginner Uses situational elements which they have learned to interpret on the basis of their own experience from similar situations	**Conscious Incompetence** Practises the skill; learning fast; starts to get immediate results
Novice Acts on the basis of context-independent rules	**Unconscious Incompetence** Does not know anything about the skill

Table 1: Dreyfus Skill Level model compared to NLP Levels of Learning

Dreyfus argues it is to the extent that the elements and principles of a domain are understood, manipulated and internalised that we measure a person's mastery of that domain. Furthermore, as we have seen, this understanding may operate below the level of consciousness.

Gary Klein, a leading researcher in the NDM field developed the interpretation shown in Fig. 5 below (Klein 1999) – which has come to be known as the Recognition-Primed Decision (RPD) model, previously discussed by John Spiers in Vol. 1 of this journal:

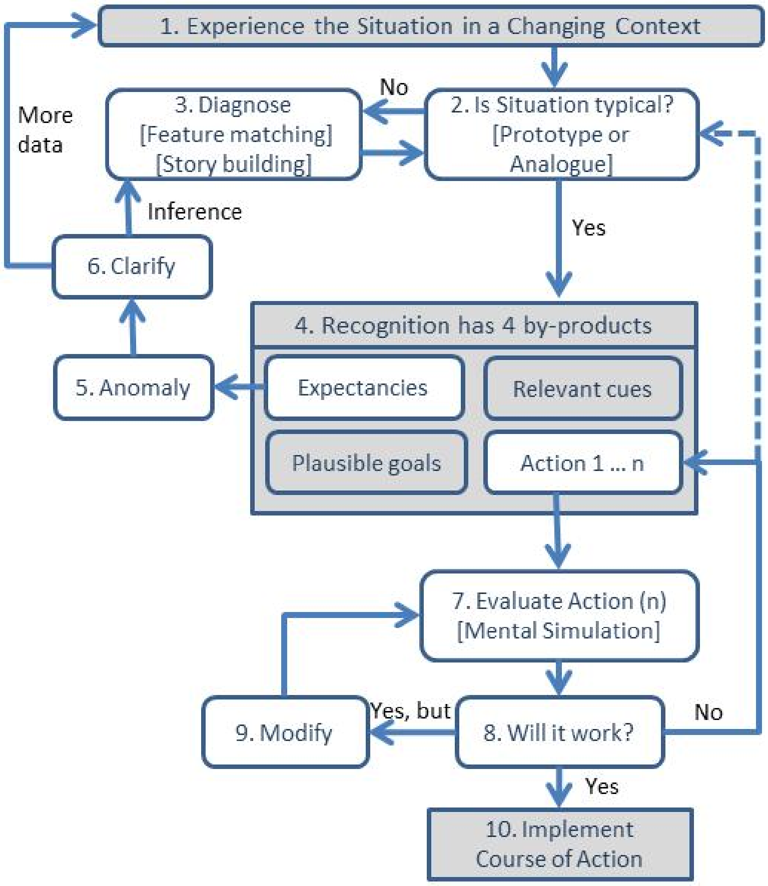


Fig. 5: Recognition-Primed Decision model (Klein, 1999)

The basic thrust of the model is that decision-makers handle decision points, where there are several options, by recognizing what the situation calls for rather than by formulaically calculating the strengths and weaknesses of different options – in other words there are times when you need to compare options, and times when you don't.

Klein defines 'typical' to mean recognisable from experience; 'analogue' to mean a useful example drawn from the same domain; 'metaphor' to mean a useful example drawn from a different domain; 'prototype' to mean a novel situation (which in project management often indicates a risk). Critically, the Expert has more Analogues and Metaphors to draw upon, also has been here before and 'got the tee-shirt'.

Other researchers who concur with Klein and Dreyfus include Entin, Serfaty et al. (also working in NDM) in their study of battle command decision-making, where they found that:

> *"… expert tacticians organize their knowledge base in order to store a large amount of information in their domain, and they are able to 'chunk' information by grouping details together into patterns. They store and retrieve information about their domain in a different way than (sic) novices, and are able to very quickly bring to mind relevant experience and information" (Entin et al. 2009).*

Clearly there is considerable synergy here with the 'Sets' of Gordon et al. and NLP's chunking construct.

Overall analysis of the decision theories sampled yields a commonly-found set of elements:

- A Problem that triggers the need for a decision;
- An Outcome that will provide a Solution to the Problem;
- A number of Options that could be selected by the decision to get the Outcome;
- Patterns of recognisable cognitive and physiological elements in the subject’s experience;
- Ranked Criteria that will test whether an Option will deliver the Outcome;
- Uncertainty or confusion (particularly when no previous experience exists);
- TOTEs or similar that apply the Criteria to test an Option;
- A decision point (where congruence is tested) where a single Option is selected
- Some Action that Implements the Outcome and terminates the process as the Solution.

THE ROLE OF PHYSIOLOGY IN DECISION-MAKING

Hayashi considers the linking of neurology and mind, quoting Herbert Simon:

> *“…intuition and judgement are simply analyses frozen into habit.”(Hayashi, 2001 p.181)*

Hayashi says that in an expert, complex patterns of cross-indexed experiences are chunked together in such a way that when they are accessed there is a sensation, although the subject may be unaware of the underlying complex structure of the information that has been chunked. If true, this might simply suggest a similar process to NLP’s anchoring. In the expert, such a sensation could be a profoundly helpful one allowing them to perform quickly and with confidence that their ‘gut reaction’ is right. Some of the studied project managers refer to this sensation.

Francis Hartman in his paper ‘Preparing the mind for dynamic management’ describes some of the neurological mechanisms that science is now able to accurately map:

> *“Mapping of states within the insular cortex leads to ‘‘gut feelings” of desire or aversion. Mapping of bodily states at the subcortical level such as within the mesolimbic dopamine system occurs in a nonconscious fashion so that selection of an advantageous option occurs without the ‘‘feeling”. This is consistent with the work of Paulus, Rogalsky, Simmons, Feinstein and Stein (2003) who identified that activity in the insular cortex is greater in high risk decision-making.” (Hartman, 2008, p.262)*

This has interesting synergies with Simon’s suggestion that intuition and judgement are simply analyses frozen into habit, the ‘chunking’ of experiences noted separately by Adair, Hayashi and Entin, Serfaty et al., and the ‘Sets’ of Gordon et al.

RESEARCH CARRIED OUT

RESEARCH METHOD

The research objectives are set out in the Introduction above. A total of 18 PMs were studied, across industry sectors spanning construction, transportation and IT. The Skill Level of each PM had been pre-assessed and they were designated a skill level based on Table 1. To preserve anonymity, individual PMs are referred to here in a simple code. Project managers taking part were examined as follows:

a. The intention was to measure certain aspects of subjects’ cognitive processes. The iWAM System was selected as it provided a measurement of Metaprogrammes.
b. During project meetings the author observed and noted Metaprogrammes, eye accessing and physiological changes, gestures and approach to decisions.

c. Subjects were interviewed on camera using a prepared script and responses transcribed for easier pattern observation.

iWAM & OBSERVATIONS

The iWAM questionnaire has a ranking of 1 to 5 for each question. For this research, responses were translated onto a 5-step scale for each pair of polarities (A and B) so that the range appears as:

A2 ← A1 ← Neutral → B1 → B2

The results from iWAM and the Metaprogrammes observed in project meetings were broadly in alignment, and results are summarised in Table 2 below, using the Skill Level colour-coding described in Table 1:

Option A	A2	A1	Neutral	B1	B2	Option B
Towards	B01, B04, B05, C14	C16	B02	B03, B06, C10, C13	B07	Away from
Proactive	B02, B05, C16	B04, C10		B01, B06		Reactive
Big Picture	B04, C08	B06, C14		B01, B07, C10, C13	C16	Detail
Options	C16		B01, C08, C13	B03, B04, C10, C14	B02, B05, B07	Procedures
Self	C13	B05, B07, C10, C16	C08	B01, B02, B06	B04, C14, C16	Other
Internal	B01, C16	B04, B07, C10, C14				External
Things		B07, C14	C10, C16	B04, B06	B01, B02, B05	People

Table 2: Metaprogrammes observed in iWAM survey and project meetings

A typical pattern emerges of a proactive and internally-referenced profile with a strong preference for procedures (especially the experts – shown in red). Overall results seem roughly split on big picture vs. detail and there was a bias away from 'self' and towards 'other' – PMs rely on cooperation from their teams, so this is unsurprising. One noticeable trend is that all the experts showed an affinity with 'away from' orientation – in project terms, avoidance of risk.

Another characteristic noted was that although roughly equal numbers were In-Time and Through-Time, the majority of the experts were Through-Time. This makes it more likely that they remain disassociated from the process at hand, and makes individual steps (as used in procedures) more visible and connected.

INTERVIEWS

The last intervention was filmed interview, following a standard script. An analysis based on what each PM said about how they made decisions resulted in the chart shown in Fig. 6. Commonly encountered factors are noted (X-axis), and the number of PMs that referred to them form the columns.

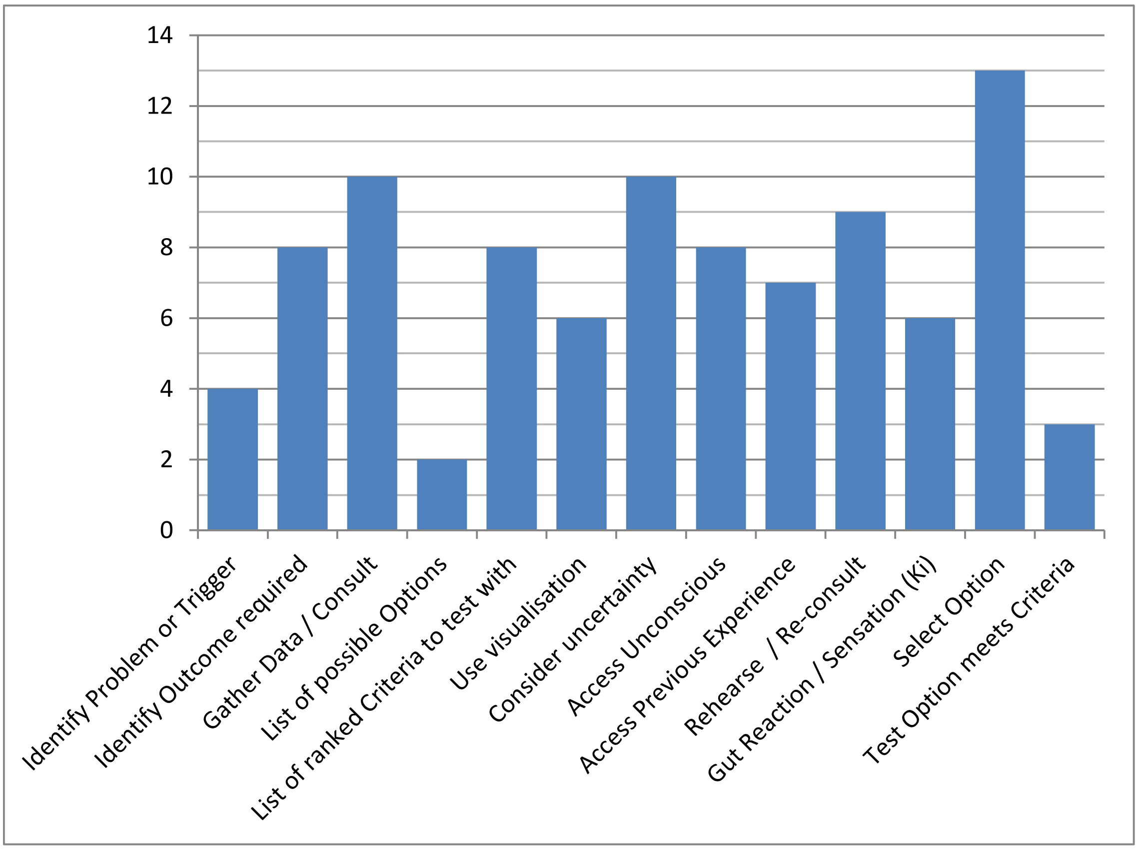


Fig. 6: Profile of factors encountered in making decisions.

A detailed analysis of interviews revealed a number of common characteristics:

- Most PMs applied some Criteria – usually the ‘Iron Triangle’ of time/cost/quality;
- Three Options were considered a minimum;
- Most PMs followed a procedural approach;
- More experienced PMs considered confusion as a positive factor and some actively introduce it in order to challenge the status quo;
- All PMs considered uncertainties – modern PM competency places strong emphasis on Risk Analysis, so this was to be expected;
- Unconscious processing is used by many – whether simply ‘sleeping on a problem’ or in physically stepping away and doing something else temporarily;
- Visualisation and rehearsal/’What-If’ were strongly cited – often to reconsider the ‘rightness’ of an option;
- Past experience was critical to informing present decisions, particularly when considering complex problems;
- Many said that a ‘Gut Reaction’ was what told them a decision was right;
- Most mentioned a ‘Thinking’ phase (getting resources, consulting and rehearsing, agreeing criteria), followed by a ‘deciding point’ (which could be near-instantaneous if informed by past experience), followed by a ‘Checking’ phase to ensure consensus and likelihood of success.

CONCLUSIONS

In considering the primary research question it would appear that PMs studied have arrived at their own methods of decision-making through trial-and-error, and not through any formal taught models. One meta-pattern that stands out among cited models and the research findings is the 'Thinking-Choosing-Checking' pattern.

The author examined epistemological models in use which might be applicable. A strong contender was found in the 'Vee-Diagram' originally introduced by Novak, Alvarez and Gowin (1984, 1990, 2005) as a means of describing a process where theoretical and methodological issues are integrated around a single event or focussing element. A variant of the Vee model was developed to which was added the concept of the 'Problem Space' and the 'Solution Space'. In a simple form this is shown below as Fig.7:

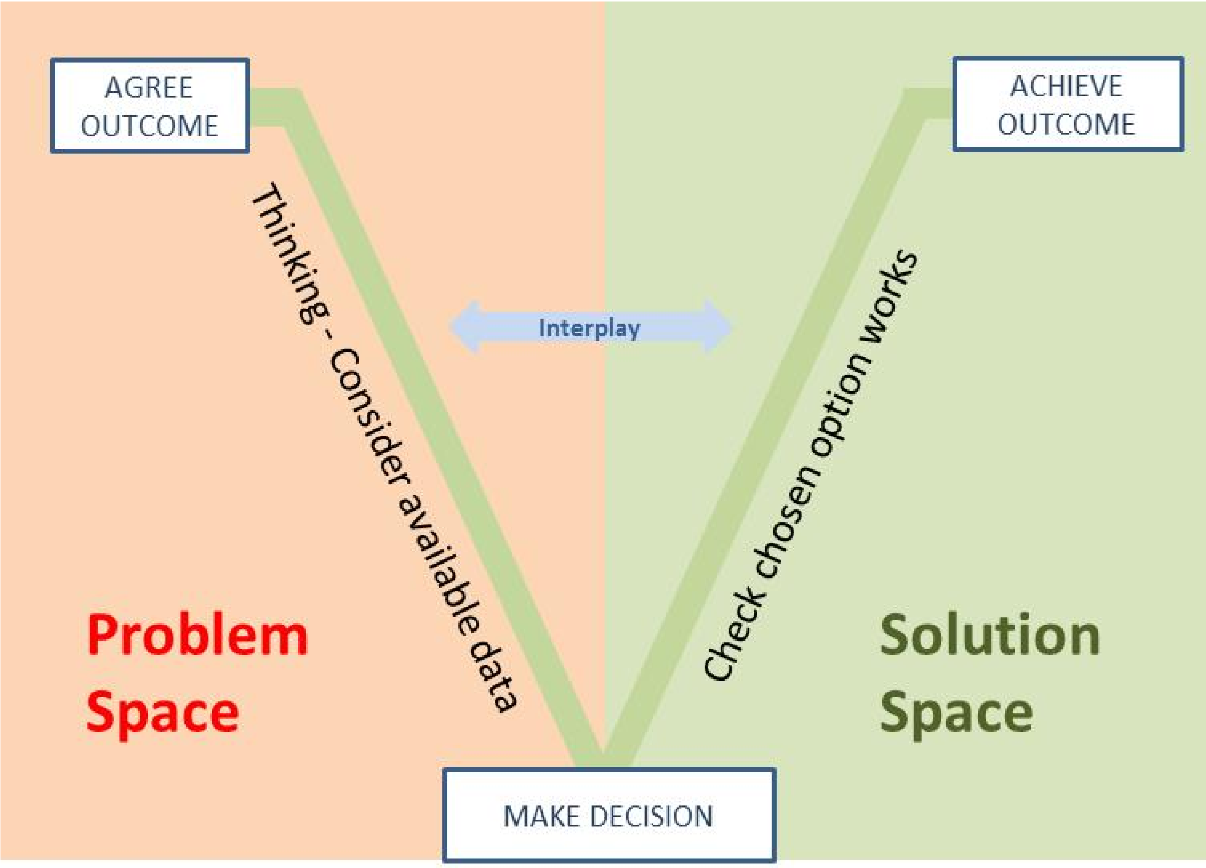
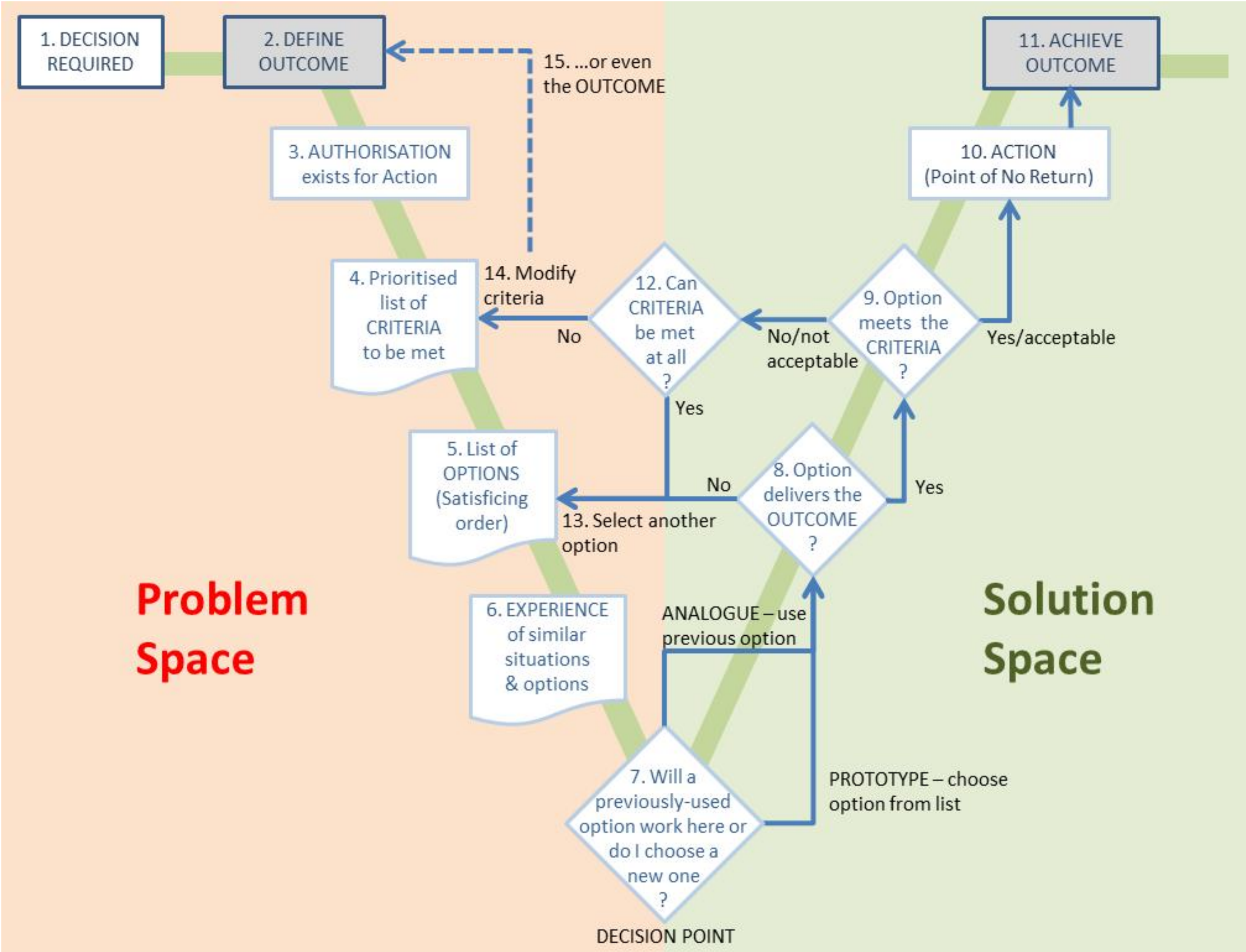


Fig.7: Vee Diagram as applied to (high-level) decision-making pattern

As described, this simple model lacks much of the detail found in the many strategies cited here, therefore more functionality is required. Defining the Outcome and eventually achieving it form the decision boundaries and the Decision Point forms the vertex. The addition of other elements identified above, such as Outcomes, Criteria, Options, reference to past experience, etc. suggests a possible arrangement as shown below in Fig.9 (which uses the ISO format for TOTEs):



<u>Fig.8: Functionally-expanded 'Decision-Vee Model' ©Lyons</u>

To describe its operation in detail (WRT the numbered steps in Fig. 8):

1. A problem is encountered which must be solved. At this point it is agreed whether a decision must be taken or not.
2. An outcome is agreed that will solve the problem.
3. The PM may need to obtain budgetary Authorisation for the cost of the Action.
4. A prioritised list of 'success criteria' is agreed – in effect Chunking Down from the Outcome.
5. To solve the problem something must be done, so a list of Options is generated. Options can only be listed once the Outcome is known.
6. The decision-maker may have previously experienced a similar problem as an Analogue or Metaphor so this experience is accessed.

7. The TOTE at the Decision Point tests recognition, although this may not necessarily be in consciousness. If the present problem is analogous to a similar past experience, this may cause a sensation (Gut Reaction) when accessed, although the subject may be unaware of the underlying complex structure of the chunked information. Such sensations may be associated with a previous successful decision or with one that was disastrous – although these may give different sensations. If there is no Analogue or Metaphor in experience (i.e. this is a Prototype), then one of the previously-listed Options is selected. A PM will likely select the Option with the lowest associated risk as the first choice, consistent with the principle of Satisficing (if the choice is successful, no other Options need to be considered).
8. The second TOTE assesses whether the Option selected can realistically work here (especially if it is an Analogue/Metaphor). If the TOTE output is 'No', then the model loops back to allow another Option to be selected from the list (in Step 13). If the TOTE output is 'Yes' the logic moves to Step 9.
9. The Option must now be assessed against the prioritised list of Criteria. If no Option can meet them, the Criteria must be re-examined in Step 12. If the Criteria are still reasonable and the Option passes, the logic moves to Step 10.
10. This is the point at which the decision has been made, but not yet 'enacted'. This is the counterpart of the Authorisation step, since if the former is in place, the Action can proceed.
11. 'Achieve Outcome' is in truth the closure of the Decision Vee Model and represents the boundary of the decision.
12. If any Option fails to meet the Criteria, the final TOTE asks the question 'Can the Criteria be met at all?' and if the answer is 'Yes', another Option must be selected, in Step 13.
13. The model logic will invoke Step 13 and choose a new Option if a previously-selected Option was judged not to be able to deliver the Outcome at all, or if it failed to meet Criteria acceptably.
14. If no Option can meet the Criteria, the latter must be re-examined, as the bar may have been set impracticably high.
15. If adjustment of the Criteria will still not allow an Outcome to be achieved, that Outcome may not be achievable. This prompts re-evaluation of whether a decision is required at all (Step 1), or whether a totally different Outcome must be pursued.

Other aspects of this model that should be considered, but are not shown in Fig. 8 for clarity include:

- If few Options and Criteria exist, progress through Steps 2 to 11 would be rapid.
- Equally, if an effective Analogue/Metaphor exists in experience the process can fast-track, since success at steps 8 and 9 is more likely.
- If only one Option is found in Step 5, then the decision becomes a dilemma between using this Option and not making the decision at all.
- The Satisficing principle applies so that the first Option that passes all tests could be chosen with a clear conscience;
- Whatever the outcome at Step 11, the PM's bank of experience is enhanced; thus there exists a feedback loop from Step 11 to Step 6 (although this may be processed below the level of consciousness).
- Steps 2 to 6 align more with the Dreamer and can be accessed more quickly using visual representation (making lists, prioritising etc.), Step 7 aligns with the Realist, and may even have a kinaesthetic element (Gut Reaction) and Steps 8, 9, 10 and 12 align with the Critic

The Decision Vee Model model thus provides a structured transformation from Problem Space to Solution Space. At its core a scalable Recognition-Primed strategy draws on the best elements of other known models, yet is consistent with the specifics of the project domain, where consultation and authorisation play a big part. Unlike Rationalist strategies, it gives permission for the decision-maker to access their unconscious in the pursuit of an optimum decision and to select quickly. Importantly the model celebrates and encourages mastery, and suggests that this is progressively enhanced through unconscious feedback. This opens the door to intriguing further study of the process of improvement in decision-making.

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