A Summary of Key NLP Presuppositions

This chapter based on an article "Presuppositions in NLP" by Robert Dilts.[1] Dilts is one of the leading thinkers in the field of neurolinguistic programming (NLP) and has provided a wealth of theoretical and practical learning and application to the field of psychology. This portion of his article concentrated on the fundamental presuppositions of NLP.

The Fundamental Presuppositions

The fundamental **Presuppositions of NLP** form the basic epistemology upon which all the rest of its methodology and technology are built. NLP presuppositions are like the core concepts of Euclidian geometry. They are the primary ideas and assumptions from which everything else in the field is derived. They form the philosophy behind all of the NLP models, distinctions, and techniques.

Like many other aspects of NLP, the basic NLP Presuppositions have been synthesized from a number of different fields, including: general semantics (Alfred Korzybski), transformational grammar (Noam Chomsky), systems theory (Gregory Bateson), cybernetics (W. Ross Ashby), pragmatism (William James), phenomenology (Edmund Husserl), and logical positivism (Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead).

The following is a summary of the basic presuppositions of NLP, and their corollaries.

The Map is not the Territory.

1. People respond to their own perceptions of reality.

2. Every person has their own individual map of the world. No individual map of the world is any more "real" or "true" than any other.

3. The meaning of a communication to another person is the response it elicits in that person, regardless of the intent of the communicator.

4. The 'wisest' and most 'compassionate' maps are those which make available the widest and richest number of choices, as opposed to being the most "real" or "accurate".

5. People already have (or potentially have) all of the resources they need to act effectively.

6. People make the best choices available to them given possibilities and the capabilities that they perceive available to them from their model of the world. Any behavior no matter how evil, crazy or bizarre it seems is the best choice available to the person at that point in time - if given a more appropriate choice (within the context of their model of the world) the person will be more likely to take it.

7. Change comes from releasing the appropriate resource, or activating the potential resource, for a particular context by enriching a person's map of the world.

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[1] http://www.nlpu.com/Articles/artic20.htm. All material in this article is used with the permission of the author, Robert Dilts.

Life And 'Mind' Are Systemic Processes.

1. The processes that take place within a person, and between people and their environment, are systemic. Our bodies, our societies and our universe form an ecology of systems and sub-systems all of which interact with and mutually influence each other.

2. It is not possible to completely isolate any part of a system from the rest of the system. People cannot not influence each other. Interactions between people form feedback loops - such that a person will be affected by the results that their own actions make on other people.

3. Systems are 'self organizing' and naturally seek states of balance and stability. There are no failures, only feedback.

4. No response, experience or behavior is meaningful outside of the context in which it was established or the response it elicits next. Any behavior, experience or response may serve as a resource or limitation depending on how it fits in with the rest of the system.

5. Not all interactions in a system are on the same level. What is positive on one level may be negative on another level. It is useful to separate behavior from "self" - to separate the positive intent, function, belief, etc. that generates the behavior from the behavior itself.

6. At some level all behavior is (or at one time was) "positively intended." It is or was perceived as appropriate given the context in which it was established, from the point of view of the person whose behavior it is. It is easier and more productive to respond to the intention rather than the expression of a problematic behavior.

7. Environments and contexts change. The same action will not always produce the same result. In order to successfully adapt and survive, a member of a system needs a certain minimum amount of flexibility. That amount of flexibility has to be proportional to the variation in the rest of the system. As a system becomes more complex, more flexibility is required.

8. If what you are doing is not getting the response you want then keep varying your behavior until you do elicit the response.

Conclusion

As Robert Dilts has shown with his work over the years, NLP and its associated elements such as metaprograms are not isolated from the larger presuppositions of human behavior and interaction. Further, the presuppositions which underlie NLP are a product of a synthesis of the arts and the sciences. The global, integrated roots of the presuppositions and their implications for the application to motivational and attitudinal patterns make them an essential part of the foundations of professionals.