

# Like attracts like

Project managers can learn to communicate more effectively by learning to operate inside someone else's world. **Garry Ingram** introduces some of the key concepts of NLP

**O**ne of the key skills of any project manager is the ability to communicate and relate to their team. This can be a somewhat 'hit and miss' affair as approaches that worked one day may well fail the next. It can be difficult to create the ideal working relationship, particularly when managing multiple teams across diverse environments. However help is at hand.

NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) was developed in the 1970s as a mechanism for deconstructing and modelling 'expertise'. It is based on the principle that, because of the way individuals filter and distort the information their senses receive, everyone's view of the world is unique. We all effectively create our own 'map' of the world, and NLP is concerned with identifying how our and other people's maps affect the way we operate and communicate.

To support this modelling process NLP developed a number of techniques for creating rapport. Rapport is the process of securing someone's attention and creating in them a feeling of belief and trust. As project managers we can utilize NLP rapport techniques to :

- **Communicate more clearly**
- **Avoid or resolve misunderstandings or conflict**
- **Create trust within the team**
- **Better understand an individual's goals and objectives (the key to motivation)**
- **Deliver projects more efficiently and easily**

## Author profile

**Garry Ingram is a senior consultant, trainer and project manager with OCS Consulting (Borehamwood), with over 11 years' experience of working in IT consultancy. Garry is also a master practitioner in NLP, and has adapted a number of the NLP techniques to the field of management and leadership.**

The starting point for creating rapport is on the non-verbal level, because even before we speak we begin establishing (or not) rapport with others. Studies have shown that communication can be broken down into:

- **55% body language and posture**
- **38% tonality**
- **7% content**

The key to rapport is the age-old adage that 'like attracts like'. The idea is to create rapport by matching and mirroring the physical movements of the person with whom you are communicating. When rapport occurs spontaneously then this physical matching also occurs, and as things progress the matching strengthens the rapport which in turn increases the matching. Effectively creating a feedback loop. The purpose of consciously matching/mirroring is to 'kick start' that loop, which will then ultimately create the same state as spontaneous rapport.

Matching is a process whereby you perform the movements like for like with the other person. So if they move their left hand, you match by moving your left hand. Mirroring is whereby you act like a mirror; they move their right foot you move your left foot. The difference between these two approaches is the level of rapport which is established. Typically mirroring creates less deep rapport than matching, and so is usually more appropriate in a business context.

The secret to making this successful is subtlety, techniques to support this include:

- **Time Delay** - Allow time between the other person's movement and your own
- **Associated Matching** - Match or mirror the movements with a different part of your body, e.g. they cross their legs, you cross your ankles
- **Breath Matching** - One of the most effective and subtle applications is to match the breathing rate of the other person

After physical movement the pitch, tone and tempo of your voice is the next most important factor in communication. Match-

ing voice tone works in the same way as physical posture, i.e. by carefully listening to the sound the other person makes when they speak and then matching that when you speak. This can be particularly powerful if you are managing a team remotely and need to use the telephone a lot.

This process of matching can also be extended to the type of words/phrases that people use. NLP breaks these down into three categories:

- **Visual** – to do with seeing things or pictures
- **Auditory** – to do with hearing things or sounds
- **Kinaesthetic** – to do with physical feelings and emotions

Each person uses words and figures of speech from all three categories, though typically individuals use one or two of the categories more than others. The categories people use can be identified by listening to their words e.g. a visual person would 'see what you mean', while an auditory person would 'like the sound of an idea'.

As with the physical matching, linguistic matching is another example of recognizing the map that people are using and operating within it. So by using similar language you reduce the chance of your words getting caught in someone's filters, and increase the possibility of getting your message through.

By learning how to operate within someone else's map of the world we create a framework for clearer and more effective communication. Building upon this supports us in creating a working relationship that is not only more effective, but also feels 'better' for everyone concerned.

This article covers only a very small subset of the tools contained with NLP. There are many others which further allow us to appreciate the world from another person's perspective and through that develop more motivated, effective and cooperative project teams. The key now is what you do with the subset you have, for as the witch doctors of Papua New Guinea say 'knowledge is only rumour until it's in the bones'.

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