



MetaPrograms

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What makes people tick? How do they see the world? Is their view different from yours?

Wouldn't it be helpful to understand what motivates a person and how they prefer to work – for example, what sparks their interest; how they communicate, make decisions and connect with others; and what persuades them to buy your services? Susanne Hall introduces seven MetaPrograms, which provide a greater insight into a person's mental maps and can improve our interpersonal relationships at work and at home.

Definition

MetaPrograms are learnt experiences, which are specific to a certain context (work, home, leisure) and can change over time. These language and behaviour patterns were originally developed by Leslie Cameron-Bandler and Richard Bandler; Roger Bailey subsequently streamlined their list of 60 types and categorised them into motivation and working traits.

Tip: Notice your preferences for one of the descriptions over the other. This will give you an indication of your current behaviour and language traits.

Similar to values, beliefs and time, MetaPrograms are filters that automatically delete, distort and generalise the environmental inputs, experiences and thoughts processed by us, leaving only seven plus or minus two pieces of information to get through to our conscious mind.¹

It is these filters that shape our unique view of the world: our reality. To illustrate, ask two people to describe a project they both worked on. One might go into great detail, while the other might give only a rough outline; one might focus on the team and the other on the systems used; one on what worked, the other on what didn't. Neither is right or wrong, but rather both reflect

how a person interprets their environment and, ultimately, how they live their life.

The different MetaPrograms

I shall describe MetaPrograms by contrasting the two most opposing behavioural/language patterns in the work environment (imagine both ends of a bell curve). However, you, colleagues or friends might display a different intensity, or a combination of the traits. It is worth remembering at the outset that neither pattern is superior; each behaviour will have benefits and drawbacks in certain contexts.

Watch out: Take care not to label a person or to pass judgement. Although MetaPrograms are habitual, they are very much context specific and can change over time (home vs work, present vs future).

A *proximity* pattern is characterised by a person requiring a clearly delineated task/realm of responsibility. They like being in charge, but their task needs to involve other people.

- Language clues: I did it with the help of my team.
- Language of influence: you will be in charge, the responsibility between you and XYZ will be divided as follows.
- Likely professions: management.

An individual with a *co-operative* pattern does not require defined responsibilities or specific tasks. In order for them to be effective, they need to share the experience with others, irrespective of whether they are leading or following.

- Language clues: we, our job, together, everyone contributed.
- Language of influence: as a team, share responsibility, let's do that together.
- Likely professions: any environment where teamwork is crucial.

3A How do individuals become convinced?

People utilise one or more channels to become convinced. These are related to a person's representational system: *see, hear, read* and *do (feel)*.

They need to:

- (a) *see* examples of the product, for example the car;
- (b) *hear* the sales pitch about the car;
- (c) *read* specialist magazines, venter brochure;
- (d) actually *use* the product: for example, test drive the car.

Language of influence:

- (a) *visualise* yourself driving the car;
- (b) *listen* to the sound of the engine;
- (c) *read* the performance statistics, feedback;
- (d) *try it out* and *experience* the power and comfort.

Tip: The above also applies to how someone most effectively learns new skills

3B What triggers a person to buy?

Once individuals have gathered information through the above channels, they can manage it in a number of ways (*convincer* mode):

- (a) *automatic* – these individuals extrapolate from one experience, whether good or bad;
- (b) *number of examples* – these people need to see, read, hear, do something a number of times to become convinced (for example, two to three times);
- (c) *period of time* – these people require a certain length of time to become convinced (for example, over one to two months);
- (d) *consistent* – these individuals require constant selling, as they are never fully convinced; however, if you fail them once, they are unlikely to give you another try.

Application – why are MetaPrograms important?

Imagine, for example, a *general, towards, proactive* and *internally referenced* boss and a *specific, away from, reactive* and *externally referenced* employee. What issues are they likely to face?

References

¹ G Miller, 'The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on our Capacity for Processing Information', *The Psychological Review*, 63, 1956, p. 8197.

Further reading

For a comprehensive illustration of MetaPrograms, please refer to Shelle Rose Charvet, *Words that Change Minds* (Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company). For an introduction to NLP, see Joseph O'Connor and John Seymour, *Introducing NLP* (The Aquarian Press).

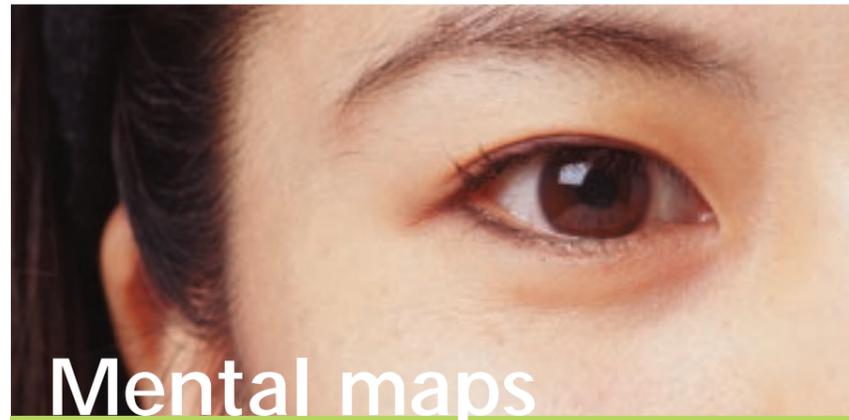
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Misunderstandings and strong frustration on both sides spring to mind. The boss might feel that their employee is unable to see the bigger picture, is not proactive enough, requires too much feedback, and focuses more on fire fighting than on important priorities. The employee, on the other hand, might experience confusion as to the communication of the goal, and be concerned about their boss not evaluating potential pitfalls before acting and about their lack of follow through. They might also feel unheard when providing feedback.

Mediation is one area in which MetaPrograms can be usefully applied – for example, to establish key traits of each party before engaging in the conciliation process. Other business applications include career selection; recruitment, development and motivation of staff; change management; creation of powerful teams; teamwork; negotiation; target marketing; effective promotion and presentation materials; increasing customer satisfaction and conversion rates; and networking.

However, MetaPrograms have a much wider relevance: they allow for increased rapport and improved communication in all areas of life, from day-to-day personal relationships to business, education, politics and, of course, coaching.



Mental maps

define the way we see the world

After explaining some of the behaviour patterns, together with the language clues the individuals are likely to provide and the language that will positively influence them, I shall briefly explore the real-life applications of MetaPrograms in the world of business.

Motivation traits

1 What compels an individual to take action: the carrot or the stick?

Individuals with *towards* orientation know what they want, and will focus on achieving their goals. A *towards* pattern usually goes hand in hand with a great ability to prioritise and a strong motivation to meet targets as well as obtain rewards. However, these people are less aware of potential problems and could be viewed as naïve.

- Language clues: accomplish, want, get, have, reach, attain, obtain, rewards.
- Language of influence: you can achieve X, this is beneficial, the solution is.
- Likely professions: any goal-oriented position.

An *away from* motivation is characterised by what the person doesn't want. They are motivated

by avoiding the proverbial stick. These individuals have a sixth sense for what could go wrong and are keen problem-solvers. In the extreme, this might mean that they are likely to lose sight of their priorities and goals. This pattern of behaviour could be perceived as lack of enthusiasm and negativity.

- Language clues: don't want, prevent, avoid, stay away from, solve, eliminate.
- Language of influence: fix it, it's not 100 per cent, let's find out the cause.
- Likely professions: art criticism, quality control, crisis management, proofreading.

Note: We always move *towards* and *away from* simultaneously: *towards* a more balanced life, success, wealth; and *away from* imbalance, failure, poverty. One motivation direction will usually be stronger in any given context.

2 Does an individual take the initiative or like to follow others?

Proactive people are go-getters; they initiate projects and are motivated by doing things and moving forward.

Individuals with extreme traits will act first and then consider the consequences. Their usually high level of energy and drive is put to good use when pursuing new ventures and getting things done.

- Language clues: short complete sentences, active verbs; just do it, let's go for it.
- Language of influence: go for it, why wait, right now, get it done.

- Likely professions: field sales, entrepreneurship.

Reactive individuals usually wait for others to make the first step and take a long time to reach a decision. They may believe that they aren't in control of their environment and often wait for the 'right' time to act. Extreme types will overanalyse to the point of paralysis.

- Language clues: long, convoluted sentences, passive verbs, nominalisations, use of conditionals; let's wait, analyse first, buy later, think about it carefully.
- Language of influence: you might want to consider, as you now fully understand, this will come in useful.
- Likely professions: analysis, customer service.

Note: About 60-65 per cent of people are a combination of proactive and reactive in the work context.

3 How do people know they have done a good job?

Internally referenced individuals provide their own motivation from within themselves and judge their performance internally.

They are self-starters, and they place little value on the opinion of others, whether positive or negative. If strongly internal, they can prove to be a challenge to supervise: they rebel against decisions made on their behalf, and question the judgement of the person giving feedback if that is not in line with their own internal view. However, they require little supervision.

- Language clues: I know that I can do this, I just know.
- Language of influence: only you can decide, what's your opinion on this?, you know what's best.
- Likely professions: ones in which they can make their own decisions (for example, self-employment, entrepreneurship).

Externally referenced people seek and require ongoing outside direction in order to remain focused and motivated. Clear communication of what is expected from them as well as regular feedback is essential; otherwise they feel lost and unable to do their work. They are not good home workers.

- Language clues: I know I am good at what I do because sales are up and we receive a lot of positive client feedback.
- Language of influence: leading experts recommend, you will be appreciated, signed off by the head of the department.
- Likely professions: sales, reception, customer service.

Note: The motivation to seek feedback is not necessarily a sign of low self-esteem.

4 How does a person deal with choices and rules?

People motivated by *options* always like to find new and better ways to do things. They enjoy developing procedures, only to break them later. They crave novel ideas and opportunities, and will thrive if tasked with setting up new systems and processes. But if routine sets in, they find it difficult to follow through with projects. They may also find it difficult to make decisions, as they fear that this will reduce their choices.

- Language clues: the possibilities, there has to be a solution.
- Language of influence: just for you, infinite alternatives, the sky is the limit, flexibility.
- Likely professions: architecture, design.

Procedure-oriented people feel overwhelmed by too much choice. Not very good at setting up processes and rules themselves, they like to follow 'correct' procedures, often without asking why they exist. They are motivated by the step-by-step approach and are excellent at following through with projects. Little is more horrifying to them than another person suggesting they circumvent the rules.

- Language clues: it's a necessity, the correct way to do this, let's follow the usual process.
- Language of influence: to be correct, proven to work, follow these steps.
- Likely professions: commercial pilots, surveying, bookkeeping.

Working traits

1 Does the individual focus on the big picture or on details?

Individuals with a *general (global)* pattern tend to focus on the big picture. They provide abstracts and

summaries rather than detail and description, a communication trait that may be perceived as ambiguous and unclear.

- Language clues: nominalisations, simple sentences; the key element, in general, in essence.
- Language of influence: the big picture, our key aim, in general.
- Likely professions: top management, strategists.

Specific-oriented people are very precise and provide a lot of information in a linear and structured fashion. They pay great attention to detail, which in extreme cases prevents them from seeing beyond the next step.

- Language clues: qualifiers, mentioning people's names, places, dates, times.
- Language of influence: first/second/third, follow the steps, specifically, in particular.
- Likely professions: writing instruction manuals, assembly line work, dentistry.

2 Does an individual prefer to work alone or in a team?

People with a strong *independent* pattern are most productive if they can work alone and uninterrupted, and are solely responsible for the results. They do not tend to share or delegate work easily and rarely seek advice. Such individuals usually find it difficult to establish rapport, and given the choice they prefer to work in separate rooms rather than open-plan offices.

- Language clues: myself, my responsibility, I have done (even if others are involved).
- Language of influence: do it alone, by yourself, without interruption, you are totally responsible for the outcome.
- Likely professions: specialists and