

Meta-coaching: a methodology grounded in psychological theory

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Abstract

In this conceptual article we suggest that understanding clients' self-reflexive processes enables coaches to become even more effective in helping clients make changes in how they think, feel and act. Our aim is also to throw light on the relationship between metacognition, change and coaching. We begin with an overview of theories of metacognition and then set out 10 principles of meta-level processing which, together with an understanding of NLP (neuro-linguistic programming), lead Hall to propose the Meta-States model of self-reflexivity (Hall 1995/2000). We then describe the Meta-States model and how it in turn led to the development of the Axes of Change model (Hall and Duval 2004). Following that we outline how the NLP, Meta-States and Axes of Change models underpin the Meta-coaching methodology and we illustrate with case studies. Finally we reflect on how the ideas presented here address issues raised in the coaching literature.

Keywords: Metacognition, self-reflexive consciousness, NLP, meta-levels, meta-states, meta-coaching, developmental coaching.

Introduction

Coaching is about facilitating a client's performance, experience, learning and growth and about actualising goals. In the fields of psychology and coaching there are various explanatory models of adult learning, decision-making and change but none details the intra-personal mechanisms of change that underpin a coherent set of coach practices that enable people to think, feel and act differently or to get a person to the critical action stage (Franklin 2005). Although self-reflexive consciousness and metacognition are central constructs in coaching change (Beddoes-Jones and Miller, 2007; Grant 2001), up until now little has been done in the psychology of thinking, reasoning, meaning-making and decision-making to model the structure and experience of self-reflexive consciousness in order to explain how metacognitive processing actually occurs and how it can be enhanced. Modelling is making explicit the specific thinking and language patterns, beliefs, assumptions, perceptual filters, and mental movies that create an experience, emotion and/or behaviour and being able to specify steps for replicating that experience (O'Connor and Seymour, 1993).

In order to describe the theoretical development of the meta coaching method the first section of this article discusses the relevance of the psychological construct metacognition to learning and change. In the second section we present a set of principles about meta-level processing derived from some key theorists. Third, we look at how the Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) model

of communication explains the relationships among sensory perception, internal representations, language, beliefs and states and is about modelling subjective experience. Fourth, we describe the Meta-States model of self-reflexivity—with its component constructs of states and meta-states, feedback and feed forward loops, meaning-making and thinking patterns— which explains how meta-level processing occurs and creates beliefs, personality patterns, feelings and actions. Fifth, we relate how the Meta-States model lead in turn to the development of the Axes of Change model. Finally we describe and illustrate the Meta-coaching methodology which is underpinned by the three models presented here and we illustrate with case studies how the coach works with clients' self-reflexivity to get desired changes or outcomes.

1. Metacognition

The Cognitive Information Processing model of Sampson et al (1999) shows the importance of clients not only knowing themselves and their options but knowing how they make decisions (generic information processing skills) and thinking about their decision-making (metacognitions). Similarly Moses and Baird defined metacognition as a higher-order executive process; any knowledge or cognitive process that refers to, monitors or controls cognition (Moses and Baird 1999).

Self-reflexive consciousness, or metacognition, is a central construct in coaching change as the coach enables the client to reflect on potentials they previously may not have believed they had and on beliefs and feelings that may be holding them back (Grant 2001, Hall and Duval 2004, Beddoes-Jones and Miller 2007).

In his levels of abstraction model, Korzybski (1933/1994) described how people summarise (or abstract) from the outer world via their sense receptors and again abstract as they say sensory-based words; then they again abstract using evaluative words, about which they again abstract with more evaluative words. Korzybski described these different experiences as second-order abstractions, third-order abstractions and so on. Reflexivity described the mechanism that drives these levels of abstraction and the meta-level thinking/feeling experiences. When we reflect back onto ourselves, our minds no longer focuses on things out there but on things inside.

Bateson proposed (1972) that meta-messages always modify lower-level messages. He used the term meta-function in relation to complex human experiences and explored the logical levels of learning. Feedback systems featured in his systems thinking. Following Bateson, Holland (1988) described metacognitive processes in terms of feedback and feed-forward loops. He explored how we create, interpret, and transfer knowledge, basing his inferences also on the current state of knowledge in the neurosciences, Chomsky's work on language, Lakoff and Johnson's work about language and metaphor, Minsky's use of the term frame, the TOTE model of self regulation of Miller, Gallanter and Pribam and William Powers' hierarchical model of mind. Holland studied how language works in interaction with human consciousness at various levels; how we understand, create and interpret language.

Metcalfe and Shimamura (1995) also did groundbreaking work in relation to higher-level cognitions. They addressed the meta-cognitive devices, processes, and tools for the everyday experience of self-monitoring and proposed a model of feedback showing how higher levels of meta-cognition govern our first levels of thoughts and memory's knowledge of its own knowledge.

2. Meta-level principles

Based on the above sources Hall (1995/2000) enumerated ten principles of meta-level processing:

1. Hierarchical levels function as a self-organising system: the higher levels arise out of the lower ones and feed back information into the system to influence the lower levels. As a system with feedback properties the system is cybernetic; it feeds back on itself and changes itself.
2. As a cybernetic system, new features emerge as information moves up logical levels. The emergent property does not exist only as a sum of the parts but new properties arise within the system
3. Self-reflexive consciousness is one such new feature that emerges; reflexivity describes the mechanism that drives second-order abstractions, third-order abstractions and so on and creates meta-level thinking/feeling experiences. When people reflect back onto themselves, their minds no longer focus on things 'out there' but on things inside.
4. Higher frames govern experience—including subsequent thoughts, feelings, ideas, beliefs, expectations, solutions—and so a person who sets his/her higher frames takes charge of their subsequent experience.
5. Higher levels are more encompassing and impactful than lower levels; they organise and control information on lower levels
6. The ability to identify a higher frame enables us to change it and set a new one; this installs a new self-organising attractor at the top of the neuro-semantic system and thereby transforms the system
7. Higher level frames are set by the cultures, languages, families or professions in which the individual and are normally out of conscious awareness (Searle 1995).
8. Higher frames govern experience, so when people have high level, unconscious negative thoughts and feelings their relationship with themselves becomes disturbed in the sense that self-condemning or self-repressing thoughts feed forward into unhealthy or unwanted actions, reactions and behaviours.
9. The paradox of meta-level solutions: When we transcend from state A (e.g. anger) to state B (e.g. calm), we set the state B over as a frame over state A and include B inside A. This gives up calm anger. In doing so they put the anger inside the state of calmness and thereby change the internal logic of the nervous system. Hence the paradox of meta-level solutions: the only way people can rid themselves of unwanted thoughts, feelings and behaviors is to apply/take on a higher, more positive state
10. Setting a new frame requires neuro-linguistic energy and repetition. In order to set a new frame of meta-state, we need to do more than just think about it: we need to use language, repetition and involve the whole mind-body- system

3. The NLP model of communication

Despite the interest in metacognition (or executive processing), little has been done to model the multi-level structure and experience of self-reflexive consciousness in order to explain how metacognition actually occurs and how it can be enhanced.

The NLP model is about the internal representation of experience and how people communicate with themselves as well as with others. The 'neuro' refers to the way humans experience the world through their senses and translate sensory experiences into thought processes, both conscious and unconscious, which in turn activate the neurological system; 'linguistic' refers to the way we use language to make sense of the world, capture and conceptualise experience and then communicate that experience to others; and 'programming' addresses the way people code (mentally represent) their experience and adopt regular and systematic patterns of response (Hall & Belnap, 1999; Corsetty and Pearson, 2000).

Modelling is at the heart of NLP (O'Connor and Seymour 1993). NLP practitioners help clients access, amplify and change their internal representations, language and physiology in order to change behaviours; they do this by modelling the way clients internally represent their experience and construct meanings by using words as symbols (language) that get embodied and create feeling states and meta-programmes which in turn induce reactions, actions, more thoughts and meanings (Hall and Bodenhamer 1999, 2003). The practitioner uses precision questioning (McMaster and Grinder 1993) as well as language that induces and utilises states as well as framing, reframing and deframing meaning.

NLP grew largely out of the same cognitive behaviour, constructivist and human potential approaches that have informed the solution-focused approaches to counseling and coaching over the past 20 years (Linder-Pelz and Hall 2007). Another very significant influence on NLP was Bateson's cybernetics and the dynamics of calibration and feedback (Bateson, 1972; Tosey, Mathison and Michelli 2005, Linder-Pelz and Hall 2007).

During its first years, NLP focused on the level of primary states and responses (for example, lack of confidence in a job interview); language was at a higher or second level to sensory experience. Grinder and Delozier (1987) conceived of a 'controller' state at a higher logical level; a second-order level or executive state. Dilts proposed 'logical' levels of experience and an internal hierarchy that is progressively more encompassing and impactful. The system feeds back onto and changes itself; the effect is that each level organises and controls the information on the level below but changing something at a lower level change does not necessarily affect higher levels (Dilts, Epstein and Dilts 1991).

In 1995 Hall started studying more closely the process whereby we become aware of our states, their precise sensory qualities and the meanings we give them. With his understanding of meta-level principles Hall modeled the way these higher levels of thought-and-feeling govern experience; in other words, he modeled neuro-linguistically the way in which people think and feel about primary states and thus experience and create 'states about states' or meta-states.

4. The Meta-States model of self-reflexivity

The Meta-States model explains how our reflexive consciousness creates layers of thoughts-and-feelings and embeds unconscious belief frames that affect our reactions, actions and behaviours. This involves two loops, the feedback loop and the feed forward loop. The feedback loop constructs information as it maps out an understanding of the world; the feed forward loop converts the information into energy. The first is information encoding of triggers and stimuli; the second is the energy response to those triggers. The first is the stimulus coming into our system; the second is the response to that stimulus.

The Meta-States model claims that individuals follow the feedback loop of information into their neuro-linguistic states as they represent information from the outer world. They then frame or meta-state that information as they feed back to themselves more information about that information; they feed back to themselves layer upon layer of ideas, beliefs and understandings. Each new progressive layer sets the frame for the previous layers. Then they feed forward that information back down the levels of their mind, brain and neurology. Doing this literally informs. That is, it forms the individual on the inside and so creates various energy manifestations. This feed-forward process manifests as emotions or somatic movements in the body and in behaviour. The feed-forward loop of energy is what happens as the individual responds to stimuli in the outer world.

So we can then, as it were, step back from ourselves to experience another level of thoughts-and-feelings about the first meta-state. Thus each time a person steps back to experience more thoughts-and-feelings as another mental and emotional state they create layers of meta-states or layers of frames; this layering creates their belief system (beliefs embedded within yet higher beliefs).

While NLP focuses on primary level states and responses, the Meta-States model proposes the layering of thoughts and feelings (e.g. embarrassment about lack of confidence) that with repetition crystallises into frames of mind, personality patterns or meta-programmes (Hall and Bodenhamer 1997).

The primary states and meta-states distinction parallels the distinction in neuroscience between primary and secondary emotions (Damasio, 1994/2006). The formulation of neuro-linguistic feedback and feed-forward loops of information and communication, and semantic reactions (how mind/body/emotion system respond to meaning, not only to external stimuli) implies the role of memory and is supported by findings in neurobiology. There are detailed explanations of how feelings are related to perceptions—including of bodily biochemical states or unlearned reactions to stimulus outside or in body or memory—through the construction of meta-representations of our mental process (Damasio, 2003/2004)

Also informing the Meta-States model was Assagioli's (1965, 1972) psychosynthesis model and form of therapy that was based on the principle that clients can learn step outside a problem state to think deeply about it from the standpoint of the 'higher self' and Searle's (1995) evidence that groups of people construct higher-level realities. From Frankl (1959) and from constructivism generally came the central concept of humans as meaning-makers. Like other constructivist approaches, the Meta-States model emphasises the subjectivity of human learning and changing. Where it differs from other constructivist approaches is that it grounds all learning and changing in emotional state.

4. The Axes of Change model

In 2004, Hall and Duval started thinking about change in terms of levels of change and learning, drawing on Bateson's (1972) levels of learning and change as well as the work of Weakland, Fisch, Jackson and Watzlawick (1974), Watzlawick (1984) and Dilts (2003).

Noticing that Prochaska et al's (1994, 1998) trans-theoretical model of change did not fully explain how to get people to think, feel and act differently, Hall and Duval postulated that there are not only steps and stages in the process of change but also levels of change which need to be taken into account for a full, robust and effective change model. They distinguished four levels of change, from lowest to highest: modifying existing skills and behaviours, learning new behaviours and beliefs, changing identity or sense of self, and experiencing a whole new way of living (Hall and Duval, 2004). Thinking about change in terms of levels of change and learning means that the coach needs to ask about and understand the level of change the client wants.

In thinking about change Hall and Duval observed that it usually involves discovering a new idea and having it alter the way we represent and classify information and this in turn leads to new responses in feelings, speech, and action. This is the principle of conditioned learning: associating external triggers with internal states. After that, people move to a higher (meta-cognitive) level and learn about learning. This is a move from associative learning to conceptual learning.

Hall and Duval conceptualised change as a verb, indicating a process of moving from one state to another according to four mechanisms or variables. The four mechanisms (as in many other change models) are motivation, decision, creation and solidification. Each mechanism is an axis with polar thinking styles or patterns. These thinking patterns are 'perceptual filters' or 'meta-programmes' and derive from the 16 PF (Cattell 1989), Type Theory (Myers and Kirby, 1994) and the Taylor-Johnson temperament analysis (Taylor and Johnson 1986). The resulting eight variables are as follows (with theoretical and/or empirical work that corresponds or supports them cited in parentheses):

1. *Aversions/move-away motivations* (Lewin 1947, Maslow 1970, Woodsmall 1988, James and Woodsmall 1988, Carver and Scheier 1998, Prochaska, Velicer, DiClemente et al 1998, Gardner 2004)
2. *Attractions/move-towards motivations* (May 1964; Maslow 1970; Woodsmall 1988, James and Woodsmall 1988, Carver and Scheier 1998, Grant and Greene 2001, Sheldon and Kasser 2001, Gardner 2004)
3. *Awareness/reflective understanding* (Bandura 1986, Gallwey 1974, Gallwey 2000; Sampson, Lenz, Reardon and Peterson 1999, Grant 2001, Franklin 2005, Gardner 2004)
4. *Decision* (Rank 1936/1972, Assagioli 1965, Glasser 1965, James and Woodsmall 1988, Gardner 2004)
5. *Planning/creative design* (Latham and Locke 1991, Locke 1996, Nelson and Nairns 1990, Grant 2001, Franklin 2005, Gardner 2004)

6. *Action/feed forward* (Korzybski 1933/1994), Bateson 1972, Gallwey 1974, Gallwey 2000, Carver and Scheier 1998, Nelson and Nairns 1990, Grant 2001, Gardner 2004
7. *Reinforcement* (Miller, Galanter and Priban 1960, Glasser 1965, Bandura 1986, Seligman 1991, Carver and Scheier 1998, Prochaska, Velicer, DiClemente et al 1998, Grant 2001, Gardner 2004)
8. *Testing/monitoring and evaluating* (Bandura 1986, Miller, Galanter and Priban 1960, Carver and Scheier 1998, Grant 2001).

The structure of the Axes of Change model has been confirmed by modelling (observing and listening) to the questioning used by several very effective coaches as they coached their clients through changes (Hall and Duval 2004a). There is case-study evidence of the efficacy of the Axes of Change model (Hall and Duval 2004, 2004b).

5. The Meta-Coaching methodology

Based on the NLP, Meta-States and Axes of Change models, Hall and Duval developed a methodology that enables coaches to work with clients' self-reflexivity in order to facilitate change of higher-level frames of mind and feed those changes forward through the mind, body, emotion system. This is described below:-

Skills

The meta-coach starts by using the skills that all coaches use: rapport-building, clarifying outcomes, active listening and supporting, precision questioning, giving and receiving feedback, tasking clients to take actions to develop skills and holding clients accountable. In addition they draw on the 26 meta-coaching skills (Hall and Duval, 2004), including:-

- *modeling* the structure of the an experience; identifying and working with a client's language patterns, personality style and perceptual filters, emotional states and the mental movies they make of their experience and being able to specify steps for replicating that experience.
- *profiling* how the client operates in terms of meta-programmes, thinking and feeling states and detailed visual, auditory, kinesthetic representations.
- *detecting patterns* of thinking and feeling; distinguishing the client's mind-body-emotion process from the content they are presenting
- *meta-questioning*: moving from immediate thoughts and feelings to exploring the structure of frames, beliefs and states about inner experiences; making inner experiences explicit. The coach asks questions such as, 'Given that you see, hear, and feel that, what to you think or feel about that?' 'And what's behind that?' The coach shows clients how to 'move up' the levels of mind in order to understand and transform unwanted beliefs or frames of mind and to set and embody new frames which are then fed forward 'from mind to muscle' in order to get the desired changes in thinking, feeling and acting.
- *facilitating the client through eight states of the Axes of Change model* : moving back and forth depending on where the client is in the change process. He coach uses 'meta-questioning' that engages the higher levels of the mind and uncovers the hidden or assumed frames govern the client's thinking, feeling, speaking and perceiving. Thus the

coach uses questions that awaken move-towards motivation for change, questions that challenge in order to build move-away motivation, probing questions that increase awareness of need to change, provoking questions that facilitate the client's commitment to a particular course of action, questions that co-create the client's plan first in their mind (beliefs, values, etc) and then in action, questions that actualise the decision and plan by having the client try new ways of doing/speaking, questions that reinforce and celebrate success, and feedback questions that solidify the gains and identify further learning, planning and actions. It is not a linear process but rather a 'dance' through the change process with the coach knowing where the client is and where to facilitate the process next. The importance of questioning in coaching is well documented (Whitworth et al 1998, Zeus and Skiffington 2000).

- *using language for change*: the artful use of language to access internal resources and meanings and to facilitate changes in those internal representations and thereby in states and behaviours.

Processes

Two key processes derive from the Meta-States model. One is modelling and teaching the step-back skill: using self-reflexive awareness to step back from one's current and immediate mind-body-emotion state to become aware of it; just noticing the experience, emotion, thinking pattern without judgment. The step-back skill is key to self-reflection and to the coaching process.

The second key process is that of accessing a desired state that would make one's first state more resourceful and then applying it to the first. So for example, accessing a state of calmness and applying that to one's anger would create a meta-state of calm anger. One could extend this to gentle anger, respectful anger or thoughtful anger and with each meta-state one is texturing and qualifying the first state with higher-level frames. This meta-stating process is more fully described in six steps: awareness of a resourceful state to use as a frame or feedback loop for the first state, accessing that state, amplifying it so that there is enough mental-and-emotional energy within it, applying or linking it to the first state, connecting or appropriating it to the life-context where it is needed (e.g. business or family) and then stepping back to evaluate it's usefulness and effectiveness.

The coaching conversation

In a coaching session therefore, the coach applies the framework for a well-formed coaching conversation: rapport-building; setting well-formed outcomes; clarifying with the client what's working and not; questioning to detect intricate and layered patterns of thinking and feeling and to invite introspection and reflection; running patterns or processes that enable the client to change beliefs and emotional states (like the basic meta-stating pattern described above); tasking clients to take actions to develop skills; holding clients accountable; setting SMART goals and finally, assessing outcomes of session (Hall and Duval 2004b).

6. Illustrating with case studies

Linder-Pelz's approach to developmental career coaching draws on Meta-coaching in addition to key career development theories (Linder-Pelz and Hall, 2004). Her six-step developmental career coaching framework includes: exploring work motivators and wants; exploring and evaluating options; taking career action steps; understanding ones motivational and decision-making strategies; resolving unwanted thinking-feeling states; and learning how to think, feel

and act in order to get desired results. The steps are not followed in a linear fashion but according to the client's objectives. At each stage/session was a coaching conversation and the starting point was the step-back skill of self-reflexivity—the ability to explore, notice, hear, think about and understand one's thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

When Sylvia came for coaching she was very stressed about looking for work after being out of the workforce for many years. The coach used questions to probe so that Sylvia could become aware of her state and could articulate what she wanted from coaching. Sylvia wanted to explore her options, identify her ideal role, set goals, achieve work/life balance and gain confidence about getting back into the workforce. She enjoyed the process of clarifying what role she wanted, making a decision and learning how to go about the job search. But still she felt very “down” and unmotivated and she had no idea why.

The coach used questions to challenge Sylvia and awaken her motivation to deal with this bothersome situation. With probing and provoking questions the coach enabled Sylvia to see and articulate that she felt embarrassed about loving doing such ‘boring’ things as spreadsheets. In addition, she had an untested belief that her age was working against her. She also came to realise and acknowledge that money was an issue. Using a whiteboard the coach guided Sylvia in ‘unpacking’ her negative thoughts and beliefs until she got to a core and deeply unconscious belief about her value as a person. When Sylvia saw the layer upon layer of thoughts and feelings she was astonished at how effectively she had set herself up to feel stressed and unmotivated about going back to work. Gently provoked by the coach, Sylvia asserted that she had definitely had enough of living with those feelings. So the coach then used questions to co-create a solution; suggested she ‘invite magic’ into her life and imagine waking up thinking and feeling differently, and asked what that would be like. Sylvia's response was that she would be feeling excited about the future, so the coach asked her what would she be seeing and saying; how would she be looking and sounding? What beliefs and frames of mind would she need to have about herself and her situation that enabled her to genuinely feel excited about the future? Sylvia came up with 22 new and empowering beliefs and then, with anchoring techniques, she learnt ways to strengthen the feeling of excitement and to access it whenever she wanted it.

This version of the Miracle Question (de Shazar and Lipchik 1984) and laddering (MacKay and Fanning 1997) is a Meta-stating pattern using feedback and feed-forward loops. It involved ‘unpacking’ the beliefs and feelings behind Sylvia's unwanted emotional states, installing new and empowering beliefs and enabling the client to learn how to access positive and resourceful emotional states. It enabled Sylvia to get out of the ‘stuck’ unmotivated state and take the action she wanted. The coach the used language and neuro-linguistic processes to test and reinforce Sylvia's new learnings and behaviours.

Roger had been made redundant. When he came for career coaching he spoke of having “made bad choices, wanting to change industry and feeling angry, procrastinating, fearful”. His aim in coming for coaching was to "... relish what I'm doing, feel self assured and be more self-reliant with regard to getting feedback and finding motivation". Helping clients like Roger close the knowing-doing gap is a great challenge coaches and counsellors (Franklin 2005).

With probing and provoking questions from the coach, coach Roger clarified his new career objective and his vision of where and how he would be working. But he had trouble putting into

practice the changes he wanted to make. How Roger learnt to translate his career intention into action is another example of feed-forward as proposed by the Meta-States model.

A five-step process, called Mind-to-muscle or Closing the knowing-doing gap, enabled Roger to turn his intention into a neurological (mind-body-emotion) pattern with which he would close the gap between what he wanted and what actually happened. It involved Roger identifying his intention, describing that intention as a set of beliefs, turning those beliefs into a decision he was making right now, noticing the positive emotional state or experience that came with those beliefs and that decision, and then turning that emotion into an action. Through her questioning, the coach guided Roger to actively talk and walk through these five steps, turning the intention into a new mind-body-emotion pattern and reinforcing it. The whole process took about 45 minutes. Afterwards, Roger reflected aloud: "The new Roger is centred, confident and has his own imperative. He is going forward with confidence and approaching the future with the anchor words 'I have reason to be confident'. From the haze a clear horizon is emerging." He had learnt that to know something he not only needed to describe it with words but to fully experience it in his body.

Marny, a business process improvement analyst, had experienced redundancy twice. The first time it took her five months to find work. The second time she had career coaching and it took her only three weeks to get short-term contract work and after that she had two job offers. Her feedback a couple of months later: "I have used the process you showed me for 'closing the knowing-doing gap' when going for interviews. It has been invaluable. I use it by planning the interview out on the floor and walking through the process. I've prepared myself in terms of emotional state even more than preparing the content of interviews! I'm more confident and productive at work. I have learnt to modify my behaviour and am getting good feedback and testimonials from colleagues."

In order to change, Sylvia, Roger and Marny needed the opportunity to change, the desire to change and knowledge of how to change. The coach's ability to facilitate change involved understanding the structure of the clients' subjective experience: how they internally represented their experience and how they learnt, made decisions and got motivated (or not). Knowing the structure of limiting and unwanted beliefs, emotional states and behaviours she was able to help the clients de-structure and re-structure those beliefs, states and behaviours. She showed them how to become aware of the way they create mental movies and scripts that directly affect their feeling and acting. Once they understood the structure (or pattern) to how they had run their thinking, feeling and behaviour, it was surprisingly easy for them to change those patterns.

Discussion

The Meta-States model explains how self-reflexivity, in the sense of self-awareness and insight (Grant 2001), occurs. Metacognition in the Meta-States model has both the self-knowledge and self-regulation facets distinguished by Schraw and Moshman (1995). The self-reflexivity it enhances is a skill that can be learnt even by people not predisposed to it (Applebaum 1973) and the Meta-coaching methodology thus builds the skill of psychological mindedness: "A person's ability to see relationships among thoughts, feelings and actions, with the goal of learning the meanings and causes of his experiences and behaviour" (Applebaum 1973 quoted in Grant 2001).

The Meta-coaching methodology, based on the Meta-states model, enhances those metacognitive skills. Clients such as Roger, Sylvia and Marny continue to use and reinforce these processes after the coaching sessions and programme, supporting the finding that processes of self-reflection and insight are central to the enhancement of self regulation and goal attainment (Grant 2001). Meta-stating processes like those offered to Sylvia, Roger and Marny in the course of their career coaching programme helped them develop the “private self-consciousness and self-knowledge which may be important when coaching is directed at enhancing interpersonal skills or intrapersonal skills” (Grant 2001); it helped them understand the “experience of experience” (Jackson 2004).

Enhanced performance requires individuals to monitor, evaluate and adjust their performance in order to better meet their goals (Carver and Scheier 1998). The Meta-coaching methodology is a way to develop these high-level state-management skills. By stepping back from (or rising above) primary emotions and reflecting, gaining insight to how they make meaning/beliefs, clients understand how their language affects their emotions and how emotions affect reactions. They can then feed forward and thereby change behaviour or convert intentions into actions.

Results with clients such as Sylvia lend support to the finding that the factors most strongly associated with the anticipated speed of future progress in dealing with their central issues are the client’s ability to make sense of their own thoughts and feelings, to understand others’ emotions, to manage their own emotions and to be flexible in their thinking (Franklin 2005).

Case studies such as those presented here and elsewhere (Linder-Pelz 2002) suggest that NLP-based coaching gets quick and lasting results. However, there is an obvious need for more systematic research. In a forthcoming paper (Linder-Pelz (2007) other outcomes evidence is described and compared to other published findings thus posing further research questions regarding the effectiveness of NLP-based coaching.

This paper has addressed both Linley’s (2006) call for coaching to be based on “explicit psychological principles and grounded in a solid evidence base” and Grant’s call (2006) for “the development and validation of psychologically-based coaching methodologies that are effective and engaging for non-clinical populations”. We would claim that the Meta-Coaching methodology constitutes evidence-based developmental coaching that is collaborative, solution-focused, results oriented, systematic and facilitative of performance, life experience, self-directed learning and purposive growth.

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