
Are we Addressing Entrepreneurship at the Wrong Level? Applying the Theories of NLP & Change Management

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This paper presents an alternative view of how it may be possible to provide aspiring entrepreneurs with the required skills and behaviours, using the relatively new approaches of Neuro-linguistic programming currently in vogue in many businesses and organisations today. This paper presents a concept, providing both the ideas and the rationale behind the suggestions. It has not yet been validated by thorough research.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is regarded by many as vital to the survival and enhancement of any economy (Driesler et al, 2003). As a result, considerable effort has been expended during the last few years to understand how organisations, industries and whole countries can increase their entrepreneurial abilities. Now, almost every developed and developing country in the world has a policy associated with cultivating and nurturing entrepreneurial talent.

Many authors (e.g. Gibb [1999], Klappa [2004]) have advocated that entrepreneurial qualities can be developed through education and, today, many higher educational establishments worldwide offer undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses in Entrepreneurship. However, despite the considerable government intervention and effort that has gone into training and education in this field, the level of entrepreneurship, particularly amongst young people, is still disappointing. For example, Jesselyn Co and Mitchell (2006) conducted a survey across Southern Africa which indicated that, despite several years of training and education, entrepreneurship is still only at a 'developmental' level. They expressed some serious concerns regarding the effectiveness of training and education in producing entrepreneurial behaviours in young people. So despite the considerable time and attention being devoted to developing entrepreneurship internationally, relatively little success has resulted from this effort.

One approach that may provide some insight into the reasons for this lack of success is Neuro-Linguistic Programming or NLP.

NLP

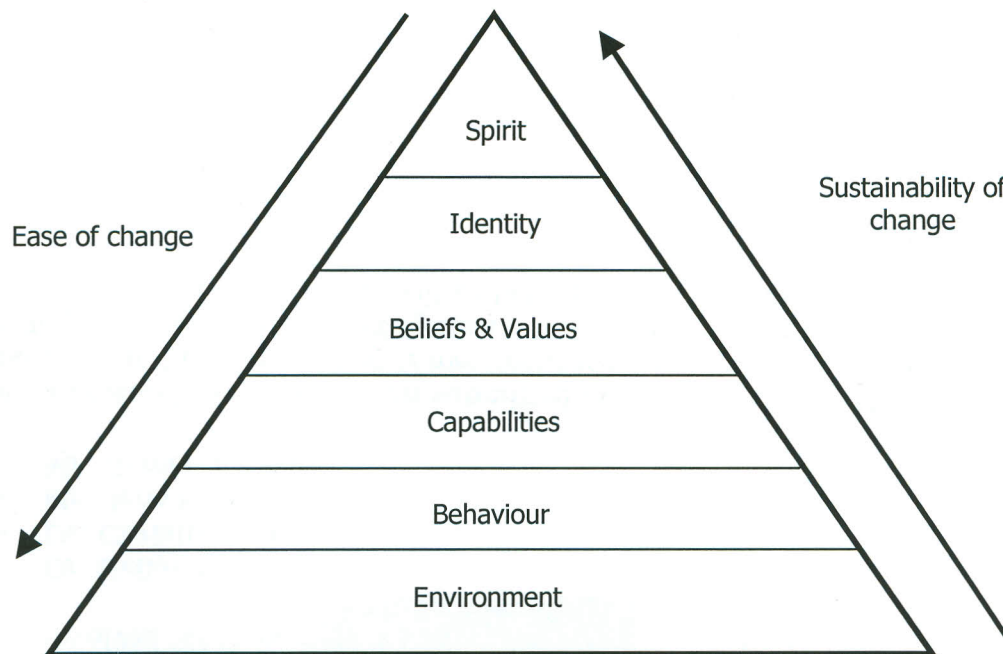
Neuro-linguistic Programming has been in use for over 20 years as a recognised and respected set of diverse tools and techniques for creating change. It explores the relationships between how we think (neuro), how we communicate (linguistic) and our patterns of behaviour and emotion (programmes). Amongst other things, NLP involves the development of behavioral competence, but also involves strategic thinking and an understanding of the mental and cognitive processes behind these behaviours (www.nlpu.com).

Robert Dilts (1990) identified a hierarchy of 6 levels of identity which he called logical or neurological levels. According to this model (see Figure 1), we identify ourselves in terms of where we live and work (Environment), what we do (Behaviours), the range of things that we can do (Capability), what is important to us and what we believe (Values and Beliefs), who we

are and what our purpose is (Identity) and how we relate to something bigger (Spirituality) (Clayton, 2007).

The premise of this model is that when any change is implemented at an environmental or behavioural level, i.e. a low level in the model, it will have less impact and is less likely to be sustained than when a change addresses a higher level in the pyramid. This model can be applied to both personal and organisational changes.

Figure 1: Dilts Neurological Level Pyramid (Dilts, 1990)



Changes that address and look at changing our values and beliefs or even our identity are more likely to be successful and sustained. Changes made at the lower levels on the pyramid, such as the formulation of policies and guidelines or the provision of skills training are easier to make, and are often the main outputs from change programmes aimed at changing our behaviours. However, unless we focus on the higher levels in the pyramid, the changes we wish to make will be less effective. In support of this argument, Lavan (2006) shows that as little as 8 to 12% of traditional skills training results in measurable performance improvement and argues that this is largely because skills training focuses on changing behaviours and competences.

Dilts (1990) suggests that our behaviours are affected by what is important to us and what we believe. That is why we need to address changes at the value and belief level in order to effect change at a behavioural level. This phenomenon is not new! We can also see it in the 'corporate values' many organisations espouse with the knowledge that when organisations start to make changes at a values and beliefs level, it will have a knock on impact on individuals' and organisations' behaviours (see Figure 2).

Applying this logic to the Entrepreneurship issue, it follows that in order for someone to become an entrepreneur, he or she has to have the 'values' and 'beliefs' of an entrepreneur. An aspiring entrepreneur will never become an entrepreneur if he or she does not believe the same things as successful entrepreneurs. Only by changing their beliefs, will their attitudes and ultimately their capabilities and behaviours change.

Thinking Differently

Entrepreneurs come in all shapes and sizes. They behave differently from one another. Some are pragmatic in their approach and others are more people focused (Thompson, 2005). The one thing they all have in common is that successful entrepreneurs believe and value many of the same things. They don't wait for opportunities to come to them – they seek them out (see Figure 3). Entrepreneurs believe that in order to be successful you have to take risks, expecting some of them to fail. They believe that even though they fail with some things, they will succeed with others. They believe that there are a huge number of opportunities out there. Often they are driven by the sense of identity, connectedness or spirituality referred to by Robert Dilts.

Figure 2: Impact of Values and Beliefs on our Behaviours



Many famous entrepreneurs of past and present provide good examples of entrepreneurial values and beliefs. For example, Walt Disney once said "All the adversity I've had in my life has strengthened me... you may not realize it when it happens, but a kick in the teeth may be the best thing in the world for you". Only a true entrepreneur understands that you have to take lots of knocks, lots of hardship - but if you believe it is the right thing, you will keep going. (www.entrepreneurs.about.com)

"When you reach an obstacle, turn it into an opportunity. You have the choice. You can overcome and be a winner, or you can allow it to overcome you and be a loser. The choice is yours and yours alone. Refuse to throw in the towel. Go that extra mile that failures refuse to travel. It is far better to be exhausted from success than to be rested from failure," said the founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics. (www.entrepreneurs.about.com)

"Business opportunities are like buses, there's always another one coming."
- Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Enterprises

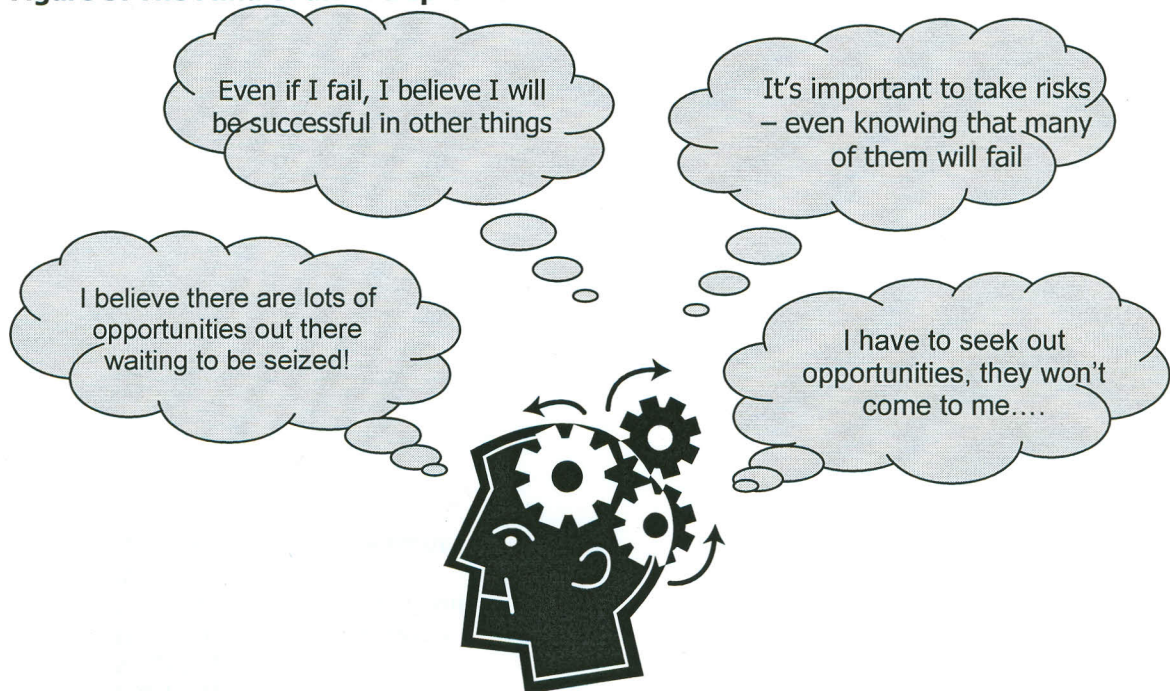
Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop in the UK and USA, once said "Entrepreneurship for me is a sense of contributing to the world", which demonstrates that sometimes entrepreneurship goes beyond values and beliefs - and into spirituality and connectedness with the world.

Can This Knowledge Help us to Address Entrepreneurship at a Different Level?

The acquisition of entrepreneurial values and beliefs will not come from a traditional training aimed at improving a particular skill. It will not come from an education course in entrepreneurship, which may develop a person's understanding of what it takes to be an entrepreneur. To truly change someone's behaviours in a sustained way requires a different way of working. By exposing people to entrepreneurial role models and getting into the minds of successful entrepreneurs, young people can learn to understand what drives and motivates successful entrepreneurs. Further, it is necessary to work with young people to help them

change their values and beliefs into those which are more entrepreneurial, using techniques such as NLP.

Figure 3: The Mind of an Entrepreneur



So, in summary, it may possible to create an entrepreneurial pool of young people if we consider approaches of a very different nature from that which has been used to date, by considering the adoption of NLP techniques to help change attitudes and beliefs. The entrepreneurial behaviours and skills will then follow.

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