



Compete or Collaborate

For the return of the Debate in Rapport, we turn our attention to the difficult question of compete or collaborate. In any given situation, we always have choice. The choice we make determines what happens next. So do we work together or against each other? How does this question affect the NLP community now and in the future? Andy Coote talks to four key players on the UK NLP scene.

We often associate competition with denigrating others, but competition is not necessarily a bad thing, in fact it is essential. Michael Beale, for example, suggests, "I'm much more doing my own thing based on the basics of attitude, modelling, helping people and exploring. I'm happy to be judged on my results." Karen Moxom uses the example of reality TV show 'The Apprentice' to highlight the parallel need for collaboration. "Everyone is out for themselves, but unless the team wins, everybody is at risk of losing."

Sue Knight recognises that a level of cooperation, if not collaboration, is needed.

"Competing with parts of your industry may be competing with yourself", she tells me. Sue does feel that sometimes she needs to "respond to things that I don't agree with. When I do, I'll write a reasoned response but I don't invest a lot of time or energy in that. I don't want to place time and energy in endless acrimonious debate when I can invest time, energy and thinking in the important things to me, based on my values and what I can do well."

Michael Beale highlights a paradox, "To some, it does seem easier to destroy in the short term rather than to build for the longer term but they may damage the market when

they do."

Both Michael Beale and Sue Knight admit to being selective with their collaborations. Michael chooses to "collaborate on a values-based level" and Sue operates some clear criteria for collaborating. "I collaborate with people like Penny Tompkins and James Lawley who to me epitomise the spirit of NLP having modelled David Grove and captured the essence of his work. I also work with Frank Farrelly, applying his Provocative Therapy work to business. When I'm looking for partners in new countries, I like to work with people who can reach a wide range of people and are able to take the work on their own

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initiative.” Sue also has a long term, symbiotic relationship with The Academy for Chief Executives in the UK.

Nick Kemp highlights some examples of collaboration in the NLP world including the Research and Recognition Project, which is a substantive project to get proper recognition for NLP so that it can access US Government funding and IASH (The Institute for the Advanced Studies of Health). He also mentions the Advanced Mastery Training in Boulder, Colorado. “Steve and Connie Rae Andreas who run it are true collaborators, they are genuinely interested in investigation and figuring things out. In all these cases, it is not who trained you that matters but what you can do for others.” Karen Moxom cites the ANLP Advisory Board as an example of good collaboration. “Members come from a wide variety of

backgrounds but they engage with each other and out of their discussions has come a revised ANLP accreditation scheme (see last issue) which we intend to use to support the recognition of NLP by a wider audience.”

In the early days of NLP, collaboration was an important feature. One source suggests that Gregory Bateson introduced Richard Bandler to John Grinder and both of them to Milton Erickson. L. Michael Hall (in an interview to be published in *Rapport* in 2011) highlights the links between members of the Human Potential Movement – including Virginia Satir, Bateson, Fritz Perls as well as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow – and their role as key influences in NLP thinking in the early days.

Is that spirit of collaboration still alive? Nick Kemp believes that “NLP was more academic then. It was all about enquiry and discovery. The arrival of a commercial motive changed things and brought with it more competition.”

When we turn our attention to the potential for more collaboration in the NLP Community, Michael Beale asks “is there such a thing as an NLP Community? And is

NLP the right thing around which to build a community? We are about developing useful outcomes for people by exploring what works so with collaboration would there be merit in getting to one community? I think that that's daft and sounds a bit too totalitarian.” Nick Kemp also questions the community aspect, “The dictionary definition is of a group of people with common interests and in my opinion there isn't a unified interest amongst people practising NLP.” Michael Beale adds, “NLP is mainly an attitude about curiosity and understanding how things work, to be able to replicate useful stuff and make it something we can repeat and use.”

Karen Moxom suggests looking at it from the client's point of view, “We need to remember that a client doesn't 'need an NLP' and certainly doesn't buy one - they'll want to stop smoking, deal with phobias, perform better or help others and there are other methods available to do that. We need to get NLP recognised as a way to deal with those requirements rather than focusing on the technical side of NLP. The market is huge and could provide more business for all. In my view, it is worth putting in the effort to define and sell the NLP idea.” Sue Knight agrees, “A better reputation for NLP benefits everybody”, she suggests.

There are some big issues to be tackled, not least, the reputation that NLP has in some quarters. Nick Kemp asked for some feedback on how NLP appears to outsiders and responses raised concerns such as incongruence, too much use of jargon and, in some cases, an apparent arrogance. “Some seemed to suggest that, with a few days training, they know more than medical or education professionals. The whole 'get rich quick' approach doesn't seem to be in keeping with NLP, either. There is a happy clappy element to NLP which, I think, oversells the benefits.” He also dislikes the “fan worship that is encouraged by some and the tribal warfare that it seems to engender. It's like watching the behaviour of Leeds United and Manchester United football fans. The internet has made it possible for NLP to become more akin to entertainment and soap opera and we are paying the price.”

There is some agreement that NLP is at a crossroads. As well as seeing benefits from collaboration, Karen Moxom also sees dangers if the NLP world doesn't resolve issues of standards and ethics. “Other similar sectors have been moving towards regulation. It would be the worst of all



▶ worlds if regulation was imposed on the NLP community. We need to work together to avoid that." Karen's efforts to collaborate with other NLP bodies are beginning to make some progress but more could be done at that level. "We need a Coalition of NLP," she told the London NLP Conference in November. "If NLP were a garden, then there is room for many different types of plant – flowers, trees, shrubs, all have their place and everyone can see how to find them and know how best to use them."

Dr Jane Mathison of Surrey University, at the First International NLP Research Conference in July 2008, asked the question, "in 10 years will NLP be an historical oddity or a mainstream therapy?" Two years have passed since then. There are many areas for a coalition to address if we are to avoid becoming an 'oddy'. Nick Kemp cites the confusing qualifications that are awarded, often by the training organisation itself, and the escalation of titles, especially 'master'. "As Frank Farrelly says, how can anyone be a master of anything in 2 or 3 weeks?"

So what is to be done? There is some agreement that all of the interested parties first need to be engaged in a conversation. Michael Beale suggests, "To increase market share for everybody, we need to work together at least on some norms of approach. If we give value, it will grow." Sue Knight agrees, with a caveat, "Accreditation is a good thing but it must not operate to a fixed agenda - the field moves and accreditation must move with it."

Once a conversation is established, says Karen Moxom, "we can build a recognisable market, one that will be obvious to end users. We can then compete within that market." Michael Beale supports that, "What will help is for healthy competition to grow. If you emphasise what's good about what you do, rather than trying to downplay others, the market will grow. In my view, 'knocking' marketing not what NLP is about." To which

“ Collaborate on a values-based level ”

Nick Kemp adds, "To get the market to a critical mass, we need to reduce the hype and replace promises with delivery."

In order to move towards this coalition, those who support the approach will need to be very clear in their communication, Karen Moxom tells me, "If individuals decide to act against the interests of the coalition, there are no sanctions anyone can use. Our only leverage in this campaign is persuasion and the first need is to get enough people around the table and engaging in conversation."

Sue Knight calls on a higher purpose to put NLP into context. "As part of my work in India, I spoke with a Hindu monk and explained what we teach in NLP. He said to me that what we are teaching is what they have been saying for centuries. Learning to value difference is a two-way street and there is learning for both sides. Maybe learning from each other, even within the NLP community, is the ultimate in collaboration."

Successful industry or interesting oddity? We will decide – all of us. And all of us are better than any one of us. ■



Participants

Sue Knight - www.sueknight.co.uk

Nick Kemp - www.nickkemp.com

Michael Beale - www.ppimk.com/NLP/michael-beale.html

Karen Moxom - www.anlp.org

Links

Penny Tompkins/James Lawley - www.cleanlanguage.co.uk / Frank Farrelly - www.provocativetherapy.com

NLP Research and Recognition Project - www.nlprandr.org / IASH - www.nlpiaash.org

Advanced Mastery Training - www.toolsfortransforming.com/2010-advanced-mastery-training/program

International NLP Research Conferences - www.nlpresearchconference.com