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NLP, Science and Intersubjectivity

JAAP HOLLANDER's recent article, 'NLP and Science – Six Recommendations for a Better Relationship' (Hollander, 1999) is a welcome and informed addition to the debate about NLP and science. I particularly like his suggestion of the 'modelling trail' method of description, which would help others to be more clear about the claims and limitations of models derived using NLP (or any other methods). I also acknowledge the stubbornness and closed-minded reception accorded to NLP ideas by 'scientists' with little understanding or interest in the field. In my view these people devalue their profession by failing to find out about NLP before commenting.

The relationship between NLP and science is an interesting one, with potential for misunderstandings on both sides. As a one-time professional scientist myself (with a physics PhD to show for it) I will address some of the points raised by Jaap Hollander, and hope to outline a number of alternative ways for improving the relationship. I will start off by examining the question as to what scientists believe, which in my view turns out to be more NLP-friendly than Hollander might suppose. We will follow this with the ways in which science could investigate NLP, and finally look at how similar methods are being used to investigate other psycho-social processes.

The process of 'science'
Let's start by looking at a definition of science. Microsoft Encarta 2000 defines it as 'the systematic investigation of objectively verifiable material phenomena. In the purest-minded view of the profession, its tools are rationality, experimentation, objectivity, and the free exchange of reliable information.'

It is this desire for reliable information that lies at the heart of the scientific endeavour. It is tempting to look at the concept of reliability here as a digital parameter – either something is reliable, and hence