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Collapsing Generalizations and the Other Half of NLP

Introduction

Recalling our own introduction to the field of NLP and some of its excellent trainers and practitioners, we remember an almost overwhelming sense of excitement, importance, and tremendous possibility as we learned to utilize this model of communication and change. Through ten-plus years of completing practitioner and master practitioner trainings, attending advanced workshops and seminars, and developing our own courses, approaches, and articles in the field, we have sustained a deep conviction that NLP offers both valuable insights concerning the human condition, and clear-cut maps for guiding people to desired outcomes. We have also observed that, despite announcements and claims of breakthroughs, watershed developments, and generative changes in the field, there has not been much new development since the codification of submodalities and the application of (neuro)logical levels to NLP patterns. We acknowledge that there have been some elegant syntheses, clever re-combinations and streamlining of techniques, but the field itself has not experienced significant conceptual or paradigmatic growth since the early 1980s. In NLP, “cutting edge” seems often to involve thinking about the design of the next new workshop or training.

We think we know why there has not been more truly generative change in the field of NLP in recent years, and we will explain what the major problem is: an over-reliance on *reductionistic thinking and paradigms*. However, our purpose is not only to offer a critique, but to also explain what we call “the other half of NLP”, which is using Neuro-Linguistic Programming to enrich people’s Maps by encouraging them to create powerful, elegant, and appropriate *generalizations*. In discussing generalizations we will write about what they are, why they’re important, and how to build them. Throughout the article we

will utilize the metaphor of Maps to compare and contrast reductionistic thinking (deductive—low scale) with generative thinking (inductive—high scale).

At the conceptual level, NLP is a study of people's Maps of reality. At the practical level NLP is a model used to intervene—encouraging the growth and enrichment of these Maps. In this article we present a perspective for the structure, function, and organizational placement of Maps. In particular, we focus extensively on a major characteristic of all Maps: scale. We argue that, while NLP has been effective in working with people's Maps at a low-scale, the other half of NLP—high scale Maps—is vastly under-explored. We consider how this is so, and then demonstrate the kinds of thinking and processes which can be developed in the realm of the high scale.