

# Moving Metaprograms Beyond Flatland



Metaprogram Research by Patrick E.C. Merlevede, MSc. of jobEQ – www.jobEQ.com

NLPers apply metaprograms in a range of fields: therapy, coaching, sales and marketing, recruiting, management, and more. However, this concept predates NLP, and is also used by cognitive scientists. This article reconnects metaprograms to other fields of research and indicates in which directions further research would be beneficial.

*"The mind is defined as the sum total of all the programs and the metaprograms of a given human computer, whether or not they are immediately elicitable, detectable, and visibly operational to the self or to others."* (JOHN C. LILLY, 1967)

Metaprograms are programs *about* other programs that guide and direct other thought processes. Because we use our metaprograms to filter our perception in relationship to our criteria, they predict how we will react in a given situation and are the building blocks of our attitude and motivation.

## The History of Metaprograms

John C. Lilly coined the term metaprograms in 1967 in his book *Programming and Metaprogramming in the Human Biocomputer*. As many cognitive scientists do, Lilly drew the parallels between our brain and computers (another idea NLP took over). His book already quoted several classifications of metaprograms, including references to neurophysiology, Jung and Freud.

At the same time, researchers like Geert Hofstede were applying "thinking styles" to culture, which resulted in the book *Culture's Consequences* (1980).

Most sources in NLP refer to Leslie Cameron-Bandler as one of the persons that spearheaded the research into metaprograms around 1980, maybe inspired by the MBTI. Rodger Bailey and Ross Steward, two of Leslie's students at the *NLP Center for Advanced Studies* (then in San Francisco)<sup>1</sup> continued this research and streamlined 13 categories into a tool now known as LAB Profile®. Shelle Rose Charvet, one of Rodger's students, wrote down her experiences with the LAB Profile in the book *Words That Change Minds* (1995).

NLPers like Wyatt Woodsmall, Michael Hall, and Bob G. Bodenhammer have collected metaprograms from various sources, inventorying over 50.

## How Metaprograms are Seen

Most sources present metaprogram categories as a continuum, going from one pattern to another.



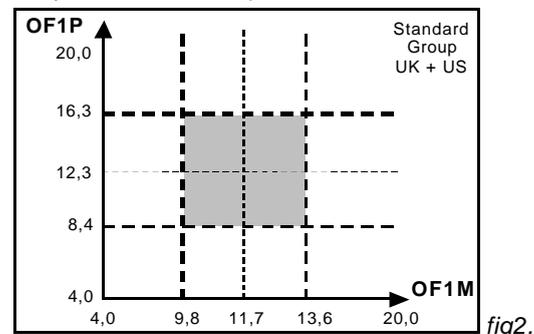
For instance, one can be very *option oriented*, always looking for alternative ways or one can be very *procedural*, following a path or checklist to get a certain task

done. And then some people are more balanced, sitting somewhere in the middle. Moreover, these patterns may vary with the context. Of course, we tell our students that these are only generalizations and that people can be anywhere in between.

We teach NLP students to recognize these patterns by asking specific questions and to adapt their use of language and behavior. For instance, "Why did you choose your current job?" would be a good question for finding out about one's interest for options or procedures in the context of work.

## Possible Improvements

Figure 2 shows how one's jobEQ's iWAM test score for proactive (OF1P, tendency to initiate) and reactive (OF1M, sense for patience, will to follow or to be responsive) is mapped on a two-dimensional representation which also takes into account cultural differences. Measuring both variables separately creates two improvements:



First, the idea that *proactive* and *reactive* are opposites is a "flatland." The flatland representation corresponds to drawing a line connecting point 20 on the axis OF1P and 20 on the axis OF1M. All other points are mapped on this line. In other words, Flatland does not differentiate between someone who considers both proactive and reactive as unimportant (e.g. the point 8/9) and someone who thinks both are important (the point 17/14).

Secondly, metaprogram appreciation differs from one culture to another. For instance, some cultures will be more proactive. I have experienced that a very proactive Frenchman won't be considered proactive in England, and that a very proactive Englishman is way too proactive (out of range) in France. The gray area indicates where 66% of one test population scores on the iWAM test. This area moves with the culture. Compared to the population shown, for the English population, this area will move up and slightly to the left. For the French population, this area will become less high, ending around 13, and move a few points to the right.

Figure 2 indicated the complexity involved in combining just 2 patterns, but iWAM measures 48! This page doesn't allow us to expand these findings further, but we at jobEQ know that we needed more nuances to describe a person's complex mental process.

<sup>1</sup> In 1986, the NLP Center for Advanced Studies was acquired by PNL-REPERE. It is now a part of the INTEGRAL PERSPECTIVES GROUP.

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