

# Metaprogrammes

## What are Meta - Programs?

*"I don't like that man, I am going to have to get to know him better"*  
*Abraham Lincoln*

If we can understand our own meta-programs we understand our motivations, ways in which we like to give and receive information, how we like to act – and what that is driven by. They determine the information that we seek, the kinds of people we find it easy to work with, our philosophy on the world!

Meta-programs are not a description of our personality but rather a code for how we interact with different people, environments and contexts. They help us to understand how different people get motivated, process information and make decisions.

Metaprogrammes are **thinking patterns** which give us a useful way to recognise and understand the preferences in our thinking 'Auto-Pilot'. You may have experienced looking at these kinds of patterns before – especially if you have taken any of the psychometric tests that assess personality traits such as Myers Briggs Type Index or the Emotional Intelligence Quotient. If you think about your iceberg – everything that lays below the surface of the water will drive our meta-programs

These are based on the work of Shelle Rose Charvet, Author of Words that Change Minds, and her deep exploration of 'Meta-programs'- 'Meta' meaning above or over-arching and Programmes being habitual ways of thinking and acting. They are continuums of thinking and behaving that run from one extreme to another. We all tend to have a preference, driven unconsciously, for a position on each of these continuums – they are part of our Auto-Pilot.

They are a continuum - no end of the continuum is good or bad, they are just different. Flexibility on any of these continuums is useful across different contexts although you may notice which is more "natural" for you.

## Being mindful of the assumptions we make

*'A person's behaviour is not who they are.'*  
*NLP Pre-supposition*

How quickly do we move to judge another's actions without knowing what is going on in their world at this moment? The person who just turned up late to the meeting, the team member who never goes out with the others

for lunch, our boss who is never available to us...

So often, we are bound up in our own agendas and world maps and we judge others actions by our auto-pilots – ‘I would never do that’; ‘if that were me I’d be X, Y or Z’; ‘that’s rude / weird / inappropriate etc’. ‘Treat others as you would like to be treated’ – an old English saying which actually assumes that we all want to be treated the same way!

We make assumptions all the time in order to make sense of things. Usually the sense we make of things is through our filters and may completely ignore those of the other person. If we want to influence someone we need to keep an open mind to their meaning behind what they say and do. Assumptions can shut down our curiosity and limit our flexibility in influence.

One way to explore this is through looking at the different ways in which people like to gain, process and communicate information.

Meta – programs or Thinking patterns are a useful way to recognise and understand the preferences in our Auto-Pilot for thinking and acting in a number of different dimensions.

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### **Why understand our own and other’s Metaprogrammes?**

If we can understand our own metaprogrammes we understand our motivations, ways in which we like to give and receive information, how we like to act – and what that is driven by. If we can understand someone else’s thinking patterns we can increase our ability to step into their shoes, understand them, build rapport and then communicate the message we want them to get in a language they can understand.

Understanding Metaprogrammes can help in many situations for example:

- Building self-awareness and flexibility
- Building high performance teams
- Avoiding conflict / preventing misunderstandings
- Managing performance and development
- Hiring employees who perform well in the role
- Negotiating
- Influencing stakeholders

Metaprogrammes help us to understand our preferences for how we think and act in different situations.

They determine the information that we seek, the kinds of people we find it easy to work with, our philosophy on the world! How we exercise them is to a degree circumstantial and so it is useful to check in on our own thinking in any scenario we are trying to understand.

If you ask someone what is important to them about a presentation, for example, you may get some standard remarks, such as it must be interesting and relevant, but if you listen closely to the person's language you will hear their metaprogrammes being expressed. For example:

*"I like a presentation to give me the big picture. If there's too much detail I get bored very quickly."*

*"I don't agree. I like a presentation to be thorough, and you can't see the big picture unless you have all the detailed facts in there too."*

These are examples of two very different views – the preference for detail, or lack of it, and the need to see things on the grand scale before dealing with any detail. Each metaprogramme is represented as a continuum. No end of the continuum is good or bad, they are just different. Flexibility on any of these continuums is useful across different contexts although you may notice which is more "natural" for you.

A key element in building a relationship is recognising these differences in other people and gaining an understanding of how to influence them well. Some people seem easy to each of us to get on with, they seem to be immediately on our wavelength. Others seem to be much harder work to understand. The chances are that the people you get on with have similar metaprogrammes to you and those who you may describe as 'difficult' may run different thinking patterns or metaprogrammes to you.

**Here are some of the core Metaprogrammes:**

<b>Big picture</b>	<b>Detail</b>
<b>Towards</b>	<b>Away from</b>
<b>Options</b>	<b>Procedures</b>
<b>Internally referenced</b>	<b>Externally referenced</b>
<b>Similarity</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>Match</b>	<b>Mismatch</b>
<b>People</b>	<b>Task</b>
<b>Planned</b>	<b>Last Minute</b>

You could plot your own metaprogrammes on this scale and try to assess where others may be in relation to you. Think about how best to match them in order to enhance and improve relationships and interactions.

**BIG PICTURE** - Wants an overview, to see things overall in big 'chunks' of information – a generalised sense of what we are talking about e.g. ask them what the room is like they are in they may answer in general words like light, dark, airy, pokey.

**DETAIL** - Wants precise, detailed, small chunks of information – to see the rigour behind the big picture. E.g. ask them what the room is like they are in and they may answer in specifics such as the dimensions of the room, the specific colours of the carpet or walls, the numbers of chairs and tables in there.

**TOWARDS** - Wants to move towards a positive goal – knows what they want and how to frame it in what will be achieved and possible e.g. I want a new job that is fulfilling, uses my skills to the maximum and in which I can learn and grow

**AWAY FROM** - Sees and is motivated to avoid problems/dangers - knows what they don't want and how to frame it as a set of problems to be solved e.g. I don't want a new job that gets me out of my comfort zone, that doesn't use the skills I have and gives me challenges I can't face.

**OPTIONS** - Looks at /needs the options for each decision. Looks at alternative ways of doing/achieving things. What's possible? E.g. will look for innovative answers, think outside of the box.

**PROCEDURES** - Wants to follow set and proven methods. The rules and the order in which they apply will be followed. What is the right way to do this? E.g. will follow steps 1-5 in that order, will feel uncomfortable with deviations from this

**INTERNALLY REFERENCED** - Have their own internal standards, criteria and evaluations. They are their own judges. They use their feelings to tell them whether they have done a good job. They are convinced when you appeal to something they already know from their experience.

**EXTERNALLY REFERENCED** - Look to others and external/environmental measures for feedback on what is good and which way to go. Draw conclusions based on others' reactions. Conform to others' standards and beliefs.

**SIMILARITY** - Want the world to stay the same – they will look for change

every 15-25 years!

**DIFFERENCE** - Want change to be constant and drastic – major changes every 1-2 years

**TASK** - Focuses first on what is to be done and what that will take. Talk about the process, system or task.

**PEOPLE** - Focuses first on who is there to do it and how to work with them. They focus on feelings and thoughts about self and others. They name individuals.

**PLANNED** - Have an ordered sense of time and like to plan in advance. Time is something linear 'in front of them' that can be looked at and broken down. On time! See work and play time differently.

**LAST MINUTE** - Time is in the moment. Will be spontaneous and often late (by a planned person's map!). They will be engrossed in the 'now' and not have a specific plan for how to spend their time.

**MATCH** - Will align themselves to you, get in tune with your mood and thinking by agreeing with your point of view.

**MISMATCH** - Will disagree, think the opposite of whatever you are saying as a way of seeing if you are right.

### **How can you build your awareness and flexibility by spotting and using metaprogrammes to improve communication?**

- Firstly, understand your own preferences for the core metaprogrammes. If you are unsure ask those that know and work with you where they might place you. This will give you information about both how you see yourself and how your behaviours are received.
- If you instinctively feel that you like (or dislike) someone, notice the programmes you each run and notice the areas of difference and work on improving rapport using metaprogramme matching.
- Experiment with tailoring your communications style and content to match someone else's metaprogrammes in order to increase your influence and expand your leadership impact.
- Map out team members on the continuums and make sense of their interactions