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EXPLORING THE NLP BELIEF STRUCTURE TO UNDERSTAND HOW
CHANGING LIMITING/NEGATIVE BELIEFS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN MY
CLIENTS' LIVES

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Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is an art of achieving excellence or success. It revolves around how people think, act, and interact. It also reflects on how the brain functions and how language is used to perform at a peak level, both intrapersonal and interpersonally (Shaari and Hamzah, 2016). I was so impressed with the knowledge I gained in my NLP Practitioner course, that I felt compelled to do the NLP Master Practitioner Course. I am confident that the additional knowledge I gain would not only help me coaching clients, but it would also give me an opportunity to improve on myself.

The main purpose of this assignment is to apply the learning I have gained in my NLP Master Practitioner Course. I will discuss the developments and challenges associated with coaching and the methods I used to improve my practice. I will also identify the relevant theories and methodologies and critically assess them. Moreover, I will explore beliefs in the NLP context and why it is important to understand them when coaching clients, explain some types of beliefs, present some NLP tools that can change limiting beliefs, and discuss the importance of eliciting the full structure of a belief in a coaching session. Finally, I will evaluate the impact of the methods used on my practice.

The Developments and Challenges Associated with my Chosen Field of Work

Coaching as a field of work refers to the personal and professional training and development of individuals to enable them to function at their maximum potential. Specifically, business or executive coaching is the process of engaging in meaningful communication with individuals in businesses, organizations, institutions, or governments with the goal of promoting success at various levels of the organization by affecting the actions of those individuals (McCarthy and Ahrens

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2011). Coaching is, therefore, an important field of work in terms of its impact on individuals and society.

Developments

The field of coaching emerged out of the need for self-improvement and personal and professional growth. It has been influenced by such disciplines as psychology, business, sports, and adult education (Brock 2009). It achieved global recognition during the turn of the 21st century as training in organization and professional associations became popular (Hawkins 2008). Over the past 35 years, it has risen exponentially and continues to do so (Hawkins 2008). In fact, coaching is often an active part of workshops, forums, and conferences, both face-to-face and virtual.

Challenges

As managers and supervisors take on the role of coaches, and the coaching profession continues to grow, there are several challenges that have emerged. Organizations face the issue of having to do more with less resources (Hawkins 2014). Hence the overarching difficulty coaches face is to ensure the needs of both the coachee and the organization are being met. Coaches struggle with moving the coaching sessions from personal, individual development to leadership development, which is what stakeholders need (Hawkins 2014). The writer believes that when coaching is moved from individual to collective leadership, both the leader and the leadership team benefit.

Another issue coaches face is their inability to sustain their effectiveness at both the personal and professional training levels. Coaches must be regularly trained and supervised so that they can maintain a high standard of professionalism and

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effective coaching skills (Hawkins 2008). McCarthy (2014) views this as the challenge of creating a culture that emphasizes both experience and training. Brock (2009) believes that a major crisis coaches face is access to a common body of knowledge, independent of other disciplines to provide them with clear insight into the perspectives governing coaching. Hawkins (2014) also sees the need to have coaching established as a profession distinct from psychology, psychotherapy and counselling. The success of any venture or field of work lies in its ability to have strategies for continuity. Coaching is no different. As a professional and to attain personal development and organizational success, coaches must work to overcome their challenges and aim for continued growth and development.

Relevant Theories and Methodologies

NLP-based coaching focuses on people's communication styles and their interaction with others. It also emphasizes people's unique view of the world and how they use language to communicate their experiences to others (Linder-Pelz and Hall 2007). Several theories explain how to change people's behaviour by changing their thought processes. Grimley (2021) defines a theory as "a coherent group of tested general propositions, commonly regarded as correct, that can be used as principles of explanation and prediction for a class of phenomena" (p58). One such theory is Dilts' theoretical model of neurological levels in the form of a pyramid, which explains how to motivate people to change their behaviour. According to Dilts, change that occurs at the top of the pyramid will be reflected at the bottom levels of the pyramid. It is a "model of coaching that can be used both in personal and organizational" levels (Sandu 2016, p35). As such, it is a very useful concept.

Kamarudin (2020) believes that "the GROW model developed by Sir John Whitmore" is also a very beneficial coaching technique that can help individuals and

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companies to improve their performances (p296). He advanced the view that “learning is about learning how to learn and learning how to think differently” (p294). This model is like the limiting beliefs concept in the sense that it focuses on people’s thoughts and how they impact their lives. Coaches can, therefore, help individuals to maximize their potential and improve their performance if they employ some of these techniques. The writer asserts that this model is solution-oriented since it helps people to solve their problems and achieve their goals by assessing their current reality and the impediments to their success (Kamarudin 2020). Clients should be able to identify the obstacles to the achievement of their goals and choose the right solution for their problem. The coach must also create the right environment for the client to feel safe to discuss the situation.

Another important method is the NLP sub-modalities tool. Coaches use this method to encourage clients to think about themselves in a positive light and to envisage that accomplishing a task is possible if our frame is an optimistic one. For instance, according to Collingwood (2015), at a personal development workshop for women, they were encouraged to repeat the words, “I am a magnificent, radiant, successful woman and I express my beauty freely” while seeing themselves as that individual in the desired state (p4). Beliefs are “created by engaging the person’s truth submodalities (Collingwood 2015, p16). Submodalities, therefore, help people to view the world and themselves in a hopeful way if they frame their thoughts and experiences in a positive way. Sleight of mouth is a vehicle for reframing beliefs. It is a system with many different patterns of response to a specific belief (O’Brian 2010). It helps individuals to change their frame from a negative one to a positive one.

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Critical Analyses of Relevant Theories and Methodologies

Many of the theories and methodologies focus on people's thoughts and behaviours. What they have in common is that all of them work fully or partially on beliefs. They highlight people's view of the world and their internal processes and how they affect their behaviour. They also emphasize people's ability to change their reality by changing the way they think and experience the world. For instance, Dilts' theoretical model of neurological levels and Whitmore's GROW model are all linked to the idea of limiting beliefs or a lack of motivation to accomplish one's dreams, which all stem from our internal dialogue or our thought processes. However, the sub-modalities tool focuses on the visual, kinaesthetic and auditory characteristics of the representation of the belief. People just need to envision the picture or image attached to the belief to attain positive results. Therefore, by encouraging people to think optimistically and to change the way they view themselves and/or those around them, individuals can achieve greater success in life. Organizations can also attain their goals.

Methods Used to Improve Practice

Figure 1 below illustrates the neurological levels of change. The NLP Practitioner Course focuses on the environment, behaviours, and capabilities. Since this assignment is from the NLP Master Practitioner Course, I intend to keep the discussions in this paper more focused on beliefs because I think that this concept is more relevant at this level. I will use the sub-modalities belief change and the Sleight of mouth tool. Dilts discusses the different levels at which we process information and deal with situations. He calls the changes from capability and below, transactional changes and the ones from beliefs upwards, transformational changes (Lazarus 2019). In Figure 1, Lazarus (2019, p10-11) provides a diagram of the

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neurological levels of change and what they correspond to. Therefore, I have followed these steps of learning and have made transformational changes to improve my practice and these concepts also inform my advice to my clients.

Figure 1: Dilts' pyramid of neurological levels of change



Lazarus (2019, p10). NLP Practitioner Manual

Definition of a Belief

According to Dilts (2017), beliefs is not a strategy, but it is a generalized idea of a relationship between experiences. Beliefs are essentially judgments and evaluations about us, others, and the world around us. Based on this definition, it is reasonable to conclude that when we observe goes in our mind and our mind interprets the event giving meaning to them. The meaning we give to the events is based on what we believe, and our beliefs are based on our memories, strategies, values, and life experiences. Sometimes they are based on nothing,

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I find this definition to be an excellent description of how I feel about beliefs. However, if students are just beginning their NLP journey, they might feel a little confused. My understanding of the definition is that we cannot perceive the truth, but we tend to generalise reality based on our life experiences. Consequently, our beliefs could be true, could be a mixer of the truth, or could be a belief based on an assumption, and not true. Therefore, if our beliefs are not serving us, we should change them for beliefs that add value to our lives.

What are Limiting Beliefs?

A limiting belief is one that will, in some way, limit people from being, doing, or having what they want to be, do, or have (Lazarus 2013). This means that if human beings keep doing what they are doing, based on their beliefs, they will keep having the same result. If they are not happy with their results, then they should change their beliefs. Some people can change their beliefs without assistance from others while other individuals will need help to change their beliefs. These people can attain help from a coach, a psychotherapist, a counsellor, or a friend. Based on my readings, I have created the table below to summarise different kinds of beliefs.

Figure 2: Kind of beliefs

Kind of belief	Explanation	Example	Not having it
<i>Outcome expectancy</i>	This means that you believe that your goal is achievable.	Buying a new car.	Feeling of hopelessness.
<i>Self-efficacy expectancy</i>	This means that you believe that the outcome is	Believe that you have the necessary	Helplessness

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	possible and that you have whatever it takes in order to reach your goal.	resources to heal yourself.	
<i>Response expectancy</i>	It is what you expect to happen to you either positively or negatively as a result of the actions you take in the situation.	The placebo effect illustrates an example of response expectancy.	

Considering these three kinds of beliefs will assist coaches to identify a negative belief. For instance, one of my clients had the belief that he would never be able to purchase a new car. It was a limiting belief. However, once a limiting belief is uncovered, it can be changed. Another way of recognizing a limiting belief is by questioning individuals about their feelings. For instance, if a client comes to me and says, "I feel hopeless", I will feel curious and ask him/her to elaborate. In this way, we can uncover the belief behind the label "Hopeless". After I learned about the kinds of beliefs, it became easier to recognise the limiting beliefs when working with clients. Based on my readings on limiting beliefs from the book by Dilts, Hallbom and Smith (2012), I have created the table below which summarises the beliefs.

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Figure 3: Types of beliefs

Types of beliefs	Explanation
<i>Beliefs about cause</i>	you can have beliefs about what causes something, like what causes cancer
<i>Believes about meaning</i>	You can have a belief about what an event means
<i>Believes about identity</i>	includes cause, meaning and boundaries. What causes you to do something? What do your behaviours means? What are your boundaries and personal limits?

DILTS, HALLBOM, SMITH (2012). *Beliefs: pathways to health and well-being*.

One's behaviour, boundaries, and personal limits are influenced by one's identity. Therefore, when one changes one's beliefs, behavioural changes will be noted. Some examples of limiting beliefs of identity are "I am worthless", "I don't deserve to succeed," or "If I get what I want I will lose something."

I had a client in 2020 who believed that he would not be promoted because his boss didn't like him. After two coaching sessions, he asked his boss why he didn't receive the promotion and the boss said, it was because he never fill in the promotion application. That is a good example of how a belief can stop you from progressing in your life.

Justification for Methods Used

In this section of the paper, I will explain why I used the NLP tools in my practice and their impact. Often, when clients come to me, they inform me of their

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goals for the session and their need for my assistance. I always look for patterns when I listen to them since these patterns may be limiting beliefs. Additionally, at some of my sessions with clients (January-February 2022), I noticed that most of them presented with a negative/limiting belief that is hindering them from achieving their dreams. Consequently, I will discuss the techniques I utilized in my practice to change my clients' negative beliefs.

As I analysed my work with clients, I realized the importance of beliefs in the coaching field. From my coaching session with clients, I noticed that often the issue is at least one limiting belief. For that reason, I decided to explore the topic of limiting beliefs in this paper. It seems to me that what I have learned in my NLP Master Practitioner Course was a good foundation and I can utilize my knowledge in this paper. By challenging client's belief system, I have helped many of them to achieve their goals.

I had a belief before I started this MA programme. I believed that "even without any academic experience, I would be able to do the assignments, which wouldn't be that difficult". Where was that belief based? How did I know? How did I know that it was true? I am writing my second paper, which presupposes that I have completed one paper and have passed. Was it easy? No. It was very challenging, and I struggled. So, I can now say that only a part of that belief is true. Sometimes, the full belief is not true, it is based in assumptions. Nevertheless, I believe that if I can help clients to see when their beliefs are not serving them, their life would change for better.

As you can see in the transcription, I am submitting in my Portfolio, Client C brings from nowhere, the belief that she is not a good mother. I have noticed that some of their values originate from specific beliefs. I would like to understand better

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the full structure of a belief. For instance, in the book by O'Brien (2010), he presents a specific structure to explain the full belief process: cause, effect, and meaning, initially introduced to him by Robert Dilts.

Beliefs give us direction. They either motivate or demotivate us. Most of my clients are hindered from accomplishing their goals because of their limiting beliefs. Therefore, if I can understand beliefs and limiting beliefs better, I will be more empowered to help them my clients to find solutions to their problems. I will be using the Rolf Reflexive Model to do so.

1. **What?** What happened?
2. **So What?** What does it mean?
3. **Now what?** What needs to happen next?

TPS (2014). Learning through reflexion manual.

In NLP we have different tools that can be used for changing beliefs, below I have listed some of them and when they could be used. The diagram below depicts some of the NLP tools.

Figure 4: Some NLP tools to change or update beliefs

Tools	Description	When to use
Sub-modalities Belief Change	Technique used to change a limiting belief into a new belief	When you have a limiting belief and know what belief you would like to have instead
Perceptual positions	Using different perspectives, this technique helps us to	Use when you have disagreements between two or more people

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	consider different perceptions	
Future Sourcing	Create the ability or emotional state you desire	Use for future presentations, meetings, visualization boards
Sleight of Mouth	You have sixteen reframe patterns to use on any part of the full belief	Arguments, in court, any kind of negotiations
Dissociative Techniques, like Phobia Cure	A process to deal with stronger beliefs, normally when the belief feels as a synaesthesia (when we feel more than one sense at the same time)	Used for phobias and some mild traumatic situations
Re-imprinting	It is a type of timeline that can work in different types of beliefs.	Limiting belief from our childhood
CBT approach on beliefs	A type of therapy that helps people to think in a healthy way. They could use meditation, yoga, muscle relaxation. They incentive the clients to develop new heathier beliefs	Most cases, the CBT approach helps to improve the client present situation.

Applying the Tools in my Practice

My intention in this section is to use some points from the coaching session I submitted in my portfolio to illustrate some of my learnings and reflections related to beliefs. The coaching session started with contracting and ethics, since I believe that

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it is very important for me to set a frame or to appear to the client as a professional and also that they are my priority in the coaching session.

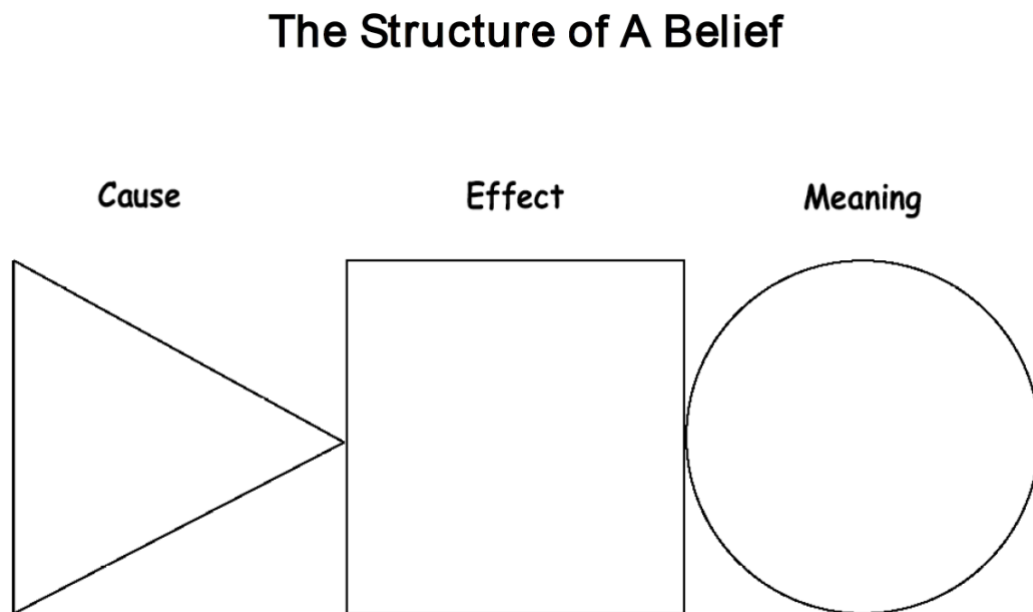
The client was very clear about the goal for the session. However, I still paraphrased her goal because sometimes when clients hear their goals, they change them. She confirmed that she needed a strategy to manage her workload and personal life. She started pondering some things that she could change, so she could achieve that goal. She mentioned some of the changes she would make and then realised she needed the cleaner to come more often, but she had the belief that she couldn't afford that.

The first limiting belief she depicted was the statement *"Money. I can't afford"* when she considered asking the cleaner to work an extra hour daily. As the name suggests, limiting beliefs are restrictive. They are shown through such statements as "I am not good enough", "I am not beautiful", "I am useless", "I don't deserve happiness", and "I am not good in Math and others." In this case was, my client believed that she couldn't afford to pay her cleaner for an extra hour every day.

I then asked her a basic question: "And how do you know that?" By asking this specific question, I was trying to ascertain the origin of the belief. She replied that she didn't know and maybe she can afford it. She also stated that she can make more money working than cleaning. She then reframed her statement *"Money. I can't afford"* into *"Maybe I can afford to pay my cleaner for an extra hour a day to reduce my workload."*

On reflection, while rereading the transcript of the session, I realized that perhaps I could have explored the full structure of the belief if I had utilized the belief structure from the book by O'Brien (2010, p12) as depicted in Figure 5 below.

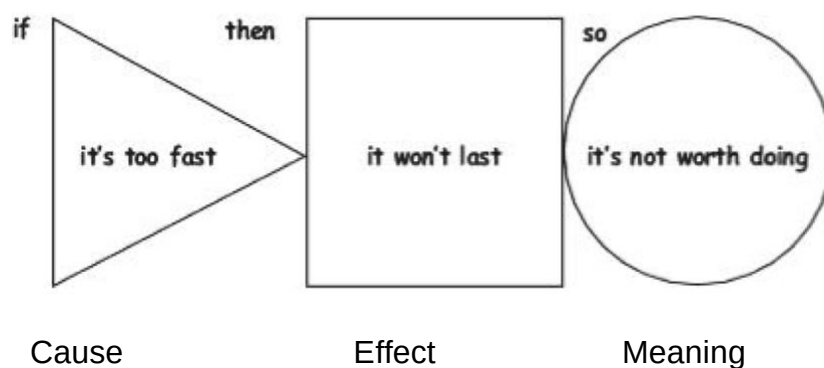
Figure 5: The structure of a belief



O'Brien D. (2010, p12). The User's Guide to Sleight of Mouth.

Using this approach, I could have asked her why she felt that she couldn't afford to pay the cleaner more money in order to determine the origin of her belief. Then I could have asked her to explain the statement "*Money. I can't afford.*" Based on the full structure, I could have reflected on both sides of the belief. The example from O'Brien (2010, p20) in Figure 6 below illustrates my point clearly.

Figure 6: Structure of a belief



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O'Brien D. (2010, p20). The User's Guide to Sleight of Mouth.

The belief structure in Figure 6 illustrates the differences between NLP tools and their effectiveness as illustrated in the two scenarios below.

Belief: "It won't last."

Question: What causes you to believe that?

Answer: It's too fast.

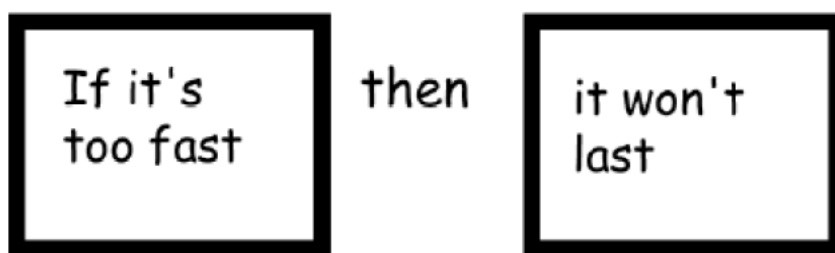
The above scenario shows one side of the belief. The other side of the belief is illustrated below:

Question: What does the statement "**It won't last**" mean to you?

Answer: It's not worth doing.

I will now discuss how to challenge this part of the belief using some patterns from O'Brien (2010, p21).

Figure 7:



O'Brien D. (2010, p21). The User's Guide to Sleight of Mouth.

If - it's too fast - then - it won't last.

Apply To Self (Cause)

Don't jump to conclusions so quickly.

Apply To Self (Effect)

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That belief won't last because changes are taking place.

Change Frame Size

O'Brian (2010) posits that many breakthroughs in the history of science were met with disbelief. Yet, over time, their value became obvious. When working with clients, we should encourage them not to change their negative beliefs suddenly, because some of them have had some of those beliefs for decades. However, If the coach can induce doubts in the client, it is a good beginning. With time, change can and will occur.

After we talked about the new structure that would help her to manage her workload, she said *"It's not just mummy that is a bad mum."* Nevertheless, I didn't comment on her statement. Instead, I asked her whether my summary of her new structure was correct, and she said that it was perfect.

I then recapped the goal and asked her if she had achieved her objective for the session. She responded in the affirmative. She further explained that she was cognizant of her problem and was now equipped with the right tools to address the issue. Since we still had some time before the end of the session, I asked my client's permission to ask her another question. She agreed.

I asked her, what was the belief behind her *"bad mum"* words. She smiled and described what she perceived as bad behaviour that a good mum wouldn't have. Reflecting on my use of language, I believe that *"What causes you to believe that?"* would be a better question. In the attempt to shift the belief, I asked her *"What does a good mum look like?"* She made all the definitions for a bad mum into positive behaviours. After that, I asked if something unexpected happened what she would do to keep the new structure in place and she said that she just needed to focus on what is important: her family.

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Evaluation of their Impact on my Practice and Performance

I believe that in these pandemic times, life has changed, and new challenges have appeared. I have been using some NLP tools daily to address my limiting beliefs as a result of the pandemic. I also use these tools in my practice with clients, and this approach has had a positive impact on my business.

After reflecting on the effectiveness of the tools I used with clients, I realized that it is important to be acquainted with as many tools as possible so that the most effective ones can be used depending on the situation. For instance, the submodalities belief tool can be employed in such situations as the bad mom imagining herself as a good mom. However, it is ineffective in situations where the cause-and-effect relationship of the full belief need to be elicited. For example, with the bad mom client, I utilized the sleight of mouth tool after I failed to elicit enough information. It is also significant to note that when she pictured herself as a good mom, it was the application of the visual aspect of the submodalities belief change. I could have asked her to imagine herself in the future being a good mother and really connect with the feeling of being a good mum. In that way, she would have had a better chance of becoming the type of mum that she wants to be by reminding herself of her good qualities and seeing in the future as a good mum.

On reflection, I realise that beliefs are a key factor in my practice. I realized that I was not exploring my clients' limiting beliefs even further. The knowledge I acquired while preparing this paper strengthened my intention to use these specific NLP tools to improve my service to my clients. I also changed my beliefs to guide me as I coach clients, which means I would have a better idea of which tool to use for specific types of limiting beliefs. Sleight of mouth is a very useful tool, which can reframe almost any statement.

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My biggest learning came from O'Brien's 2011 book "The Structure of a Belief." It has changed the way I coach clients. Additionally, by doing this assignment I have learned, to classify the beliefs, which has made me into a more effective coach because I am better able to assist my clients since I am more enlightened about the source of the client's belief.

Additionally, exploring the limiting beliefs with my clients made me more efficient in helping clients to achieve their goals. However, I noticed that some clients didn't want to explore the limiting beliefs further. They explained that they were not ready to talk about that aspect of their lives because it would take them back to their unhappy childhood. At times, the NLP tools chosen didn't have the desired effect. In these cases, my approach was to try a different approach to move the client towards a solution for their problem. I believe that the NLP tools are effective because they help coaches to identify the cause of the problem (limiting beliefs). In my next assignment, I would like to explore how the concept of limiting beliefs can negatively affect companies. I can explore what companies need from a coaching perspective in relation to their goals. I can possibly implement this idea by using a psychometric tool, like eDISC, Clarity4D, or iWAM. Since most companies already know about these psychometric tools are, they may be willing to explore the structure of beliefs to determine whether they complement each other.

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