

WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY LEADERSHIP?

Exploring Leadership with NLP*

By **Sergio Hernandez Ledward** and **Martijn Nas**

“My manager is telling me that I have to improve my leadership” said tiredly one of our coachees. And I promise I am doing my best. I’ve tried everything, but nothing seems to satisfy my manager.”

We:
Ok, do you really know what leadership is for your manager?

Leadership is a big word. Tons of books, theories, workshops and still leadership needs to be clarified. And even then leadership needs to land from the-

ory to action, or from head to hands (and building bricks). It is one of those words that can be understood in many different ways and that can easily lead to confusion.

As we can see in the example above there is no way our coachee can fulfill his manager’s expectations until or coachee truly understands what the manager means by leadership. It seems like they both use the same word but with different meanings.

So let’s clarify leadership

As LSP facilitators we would address this challenge following our core process and start by posing a question. A question that may lead to stopping the habitual way of thinking and help to reflect, clarify and generate new insights.

From the NLP (Neuro-linguis-

tic Programming) side we also have a tool to reconnect words with their meanings. The NLP metamodel is a set of language patterns and questions used to uncover and clarify the meaning behind someone's statements. The metamodel is also used in coaching and organizational development to identify and challenge limiting beliefs and assumptions that may be hindering personal or team growth.

In an organizational context, an NLP coach will use the metamodel to facilitate team building, problem-solving, and any other communication challenge, such as how do we understand leadership. By using the metamodel questions, facilitators and coaches can help team members identify and challenge their limiting beliefs, assumptions, and values, leading to more productive and effective team interactions.

When using the metamodel on a typical NLP session we would ask for a specific example, and start by asking at least 5 clarifying questions: what, when, where, who and how. For example

- What is leadership for you?
- When have you experienced it? Find a specific moment to observe. Was it inside or outside? Was it in an office, school, open field, walking by the beach, attending a meeting?
- Where were you at that time? Was it long or short ago? Did it happen during the morning or the evening? Was it a weekday or occurred during a Saturday or Sunday?
- With whom? Who was in-

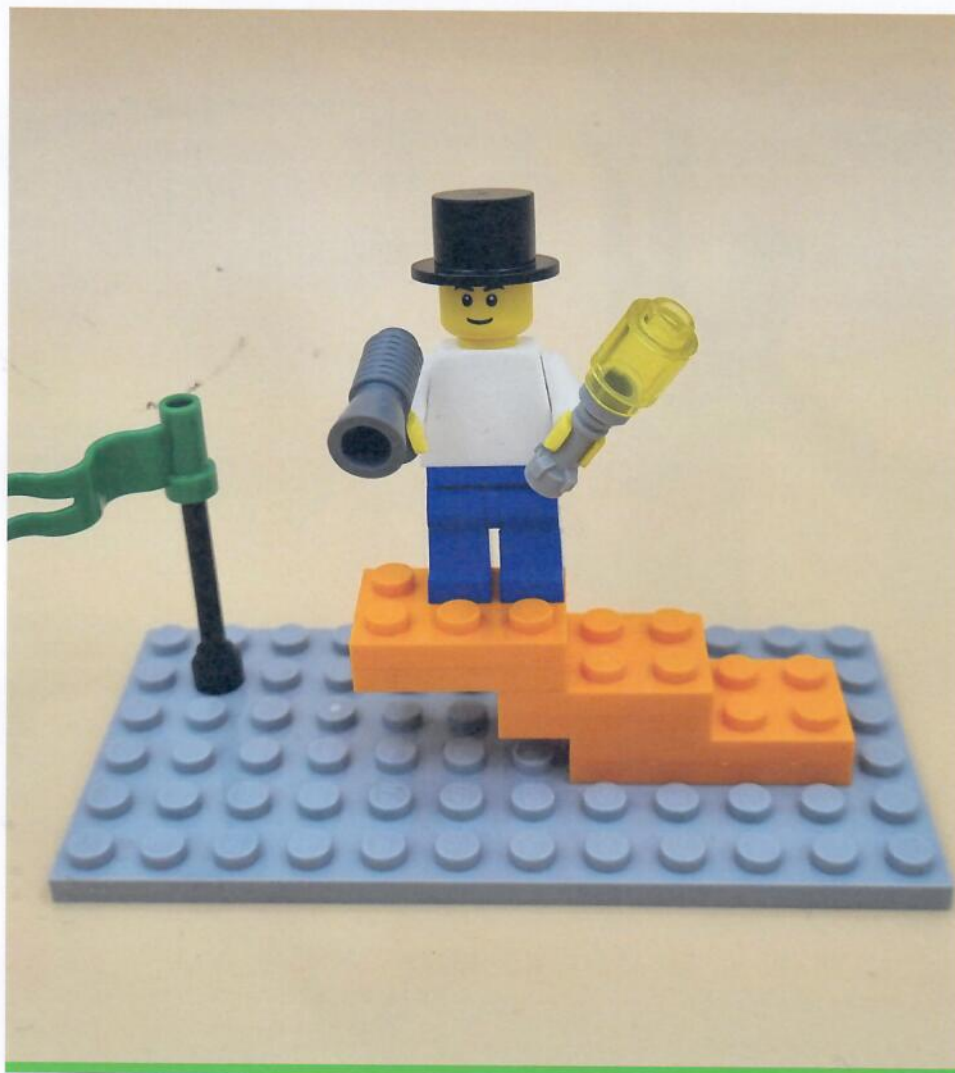


Image 1: A Lego model depicting the meaning of leadership

- How was leadership performed? How did the process unfold?

Answering these questions takes us from a general idea to a specific example – from the label “leadership” to the actual moment when we experienced it- avoiding generalizations, omissions and distortions. It ensures clarity and takes the conversation to the next level.

Let's build!

Up to now we have used language to clarify language, but as LSP'ers we know that after posing a question is time to grab some bricks and build an answer. LEGO® Serious

Play® transcend the mere label “leadership” and get to its deeper meaning.

So we invite you right now to reflect on a moment when you experienced leadership. It can be an experience where you behaved successfully as a leader or one where you observed directly another person leading. You can reread the questions above, grab some LEGO® bricks and build a colorful answer to what made that moment so special.

What were the elements for you that made that leadership experience unique? (see image 1)

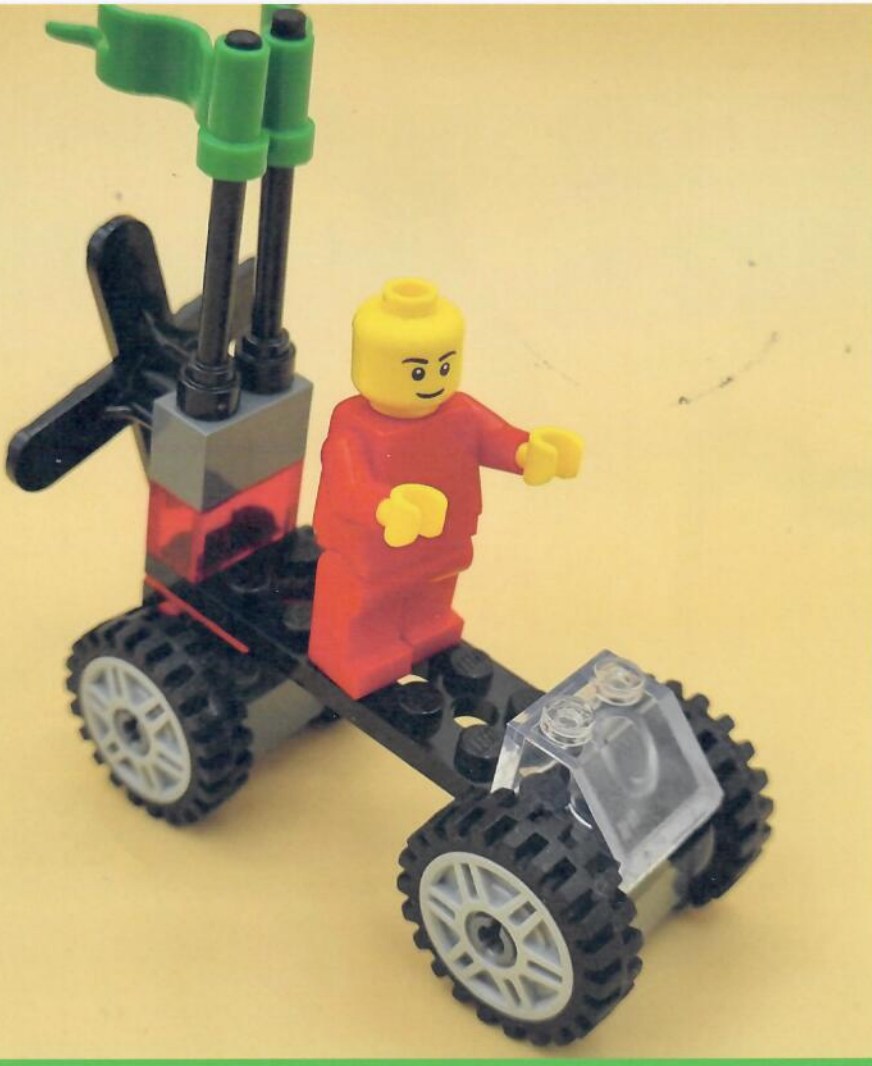


Image 2: A Lego model depicting the meaning of leadership

Time to share

Now you have a model of what leadership is for you, a nice AT1 connected to your own life experiences.

So we invite you to keep on playing with it. Have it at hand when reading the amazing articles in this issue of the magazine, compare your model with the ideas presented here, share it with some peers to open a good conversation and please send us a picture or share it with us on our LinkedIn page! There is no LSP without sharing!

...and reflect

Going back to the NLP Metamodel, its goal is to make

communication very precise. It recognizes a number of limiting patterns in language. We call them language infringements. Examples are; unspecified things, unspecified verbs, nominalizations, universal quantifiers, model operators of necessity and impossibility, cause-effect, lost performative and mind reading.

For example, a team member might make a statement like “We can’t do that because that leadership approach is too risky.” As NLP-er we hear that “risky” is un-specific so we use a metamodel question. “How do you know it’s too risky?” “What specifically is at risk?” or “Risky compared with..?” With those questions we encourage the person to examine their assumptions, consider alternative perspectives and so lead the person into a more insightful view of the issue. When playing with LSP, one could ask; “Where in the model can we see that risk” or make a second building round with some extension or expansion questions.

Every time we hear one of these infringements, we could specify them by asking questions. As LSP facilitators we have the opportunity to help teams to think more critically and deeply about their beliefs, assumptions and values, clarify their ideas leading to more meaningful conversations, better problem-solving and stronger team relationships. And for the same reason it is such an important tool for leadership in general.

So next time you’re facilitating an LSP session, consider incorporating the metamodel questions into your facilitation toolkit.

We are sure your team will thank you for it!

Bibliography

Bandler, G., Grinder, J., (1975)
The structure of magic, USA

**NLP -short for Neurolinguistic Programming- is a discipline that explores how people create and communicate models of reality (our inner AT1s), how we create shared understandings (invisible AT2s) and how to play meaningfully with the bricks that make up those models to improve our chances of success.*

Martijn and Sergio have been NLP practitioners for years and have found its tools of great value while coaching, training and facilitating LSP workshops.



Image 3: A Lego model depicting the meaning of leadership

Sergio Hernandez Ledward
Facilitator of LEGO® Serious Play® Method
sergio@NLPLSP.com
Mexico

Martijn Nas
Facilitator of LEGO® Serious Play® Method
martijn@NLPLSP.com
Netherlands

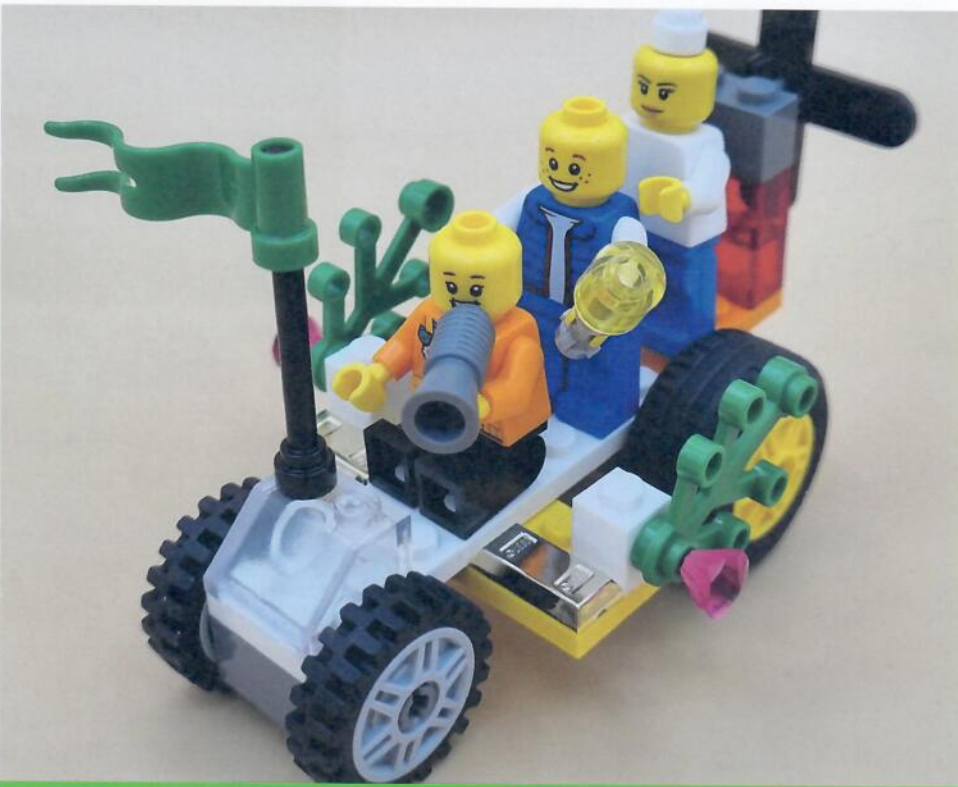


Image 4: A Lego model depicting the meaning of leadership