

Integral NLP

Definition and Basic Principles

by Surinder Deol

Integral NLP, or iNLP, is the name of a new sub-discipline that is shaping up slowly and gradually as new practitioners are entering the field with a view to using their skills and orientations to serve the ends selected by NLP founders more than two decades ago—to model human excellence and to help clients overcome their psychological and mental challenges. While the ends are the same, the ways of approaching problems are different, more comprehensive, more unified, and more integral. It is not one fix here and another one there. Integral NLP addresses the needs of the whole person—not only the whole person at the present moment in time but in an evolutionary context. Integral NLP treads the path of creativity and innovation. It does not rely simply on the tried and true solutions; it challenges the practitioner to come up with new approaches and solutions that best meet the needs of the client in the context of a holistic relationship.

Integral NLP honors the body of knowledge and best practices that bear the name and badge of NLP. It honors the work and creativity of its founders, Richard Bandler and John Grinder, and the geniuses that inspired them (Milton Erickson, Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir, Gregory Bateson). It also honors the great contributions

of other visionaries and practitioners—people like Leslie Cameron-Bandler, Judith DeLozier, Robert Dilts, David Gordon, Steve and Connirae Andreas, who have expanded the range and depth of issues and problems that NLP is addressing today.

Integral NLP honors NLP presuppositions like the map is not the territory, experience has a structure, the mind and body are parts of the same system, people already have all the resources they need, and underlying every behavior is a positive intention. It is possible that in due course integral NLP will come up with its own set of subsidiary presuppositions, but that stage is still far away into the future.

This article is an early attempt to define Integral NLP and its basic principles. Everything written here is deemed to be a “work in progress” as all such endeavors take a long time to take concrete shape and require the contributions of dozens of individuals who are not afraid to think in new ways. Integral NLP draws its inspiration from the work and ideas of Ken Wilber, one of the greatest living philosophers, who has successfully blended the Eastern and Western philosophies and psychologies, and who has beautifully outlined his integral vision through his four quadrant model.

Definitions are always tricky and contentious. But in the spirit of whatever is written here is going to be falsified anyway with the passage of time, I am presenting the following definition without too much concern for its precision or accuracy. **Integral NLP or iNLP is a sub-set of NLP that accepts multidimensionality of human life as an established fact and therefore endeavors to provide solutions that are holistic in the real sense of the term, covering inner, outer, objective, subjective and intersubjective realities with a view to serving the needs of human body, mind, heart, and soul as well the needs of human systems like organizations and communities.**

Basic Principles: A Vision of iNLP

Visions are fuzzy by their very nature because when we see into the distant future everything seems to be shrouded in some misty or vaporous unreality. That mist is reflective either of our own thought processes or it is the shadow of the future time—uncertain and unpredictable and very cloudy. Therefore, anything we might say about this new vision of NLP at this time will

be an approximation—it is at best a statement of direction rather than an attempt to describe its component parts in minute details. With this spirit of broad exploration of various possibilities, I have come up with a set of 10 principles that should govern the development of this new sub-discipline within the broad umbrella of NLP.

First and foremost, **Integral NLP is evolutionary and developmental.** As the term “evolution” is used in several ways we need to be clear what we mean by it. As I define it, evolution is a movement of all life and all matter (planetary and cosmic) toward the Spirit, toward perfection, and which means that this is an evolution which has a purpose, and it is directed by the Spirit on its path, avoiding all possible accidents and catastrophes that could result in total disintegration of life and matter. Human development is evolutionary inasmuch as we have the potential to grow into higher beings if the Spirit in choosing a path for our inner development guides us. Integral NLP focuses on the discovery of this evolutionary path, draws key lessons from these discoveries, and incorporates these findings and best practices into its pedagogy that people might use in realizing their true potentialities.

Second, consistent with its belief in evolution **Integral NLP allows for the existence of higher and lower states of human consciousness.** It accepts the fact that human consciousness unfolds in different states. There are many models and theories that illustrate this point. Integral NLP honors these ideas coming from different cultural and spiritual traditions. But the basic thrust here is to help

people, who need help, to move them from one state of consciousness to the next or from lower states of consciousness to higher states of consciousness.

Third, **Integral NLP is inclusive rather than exclusive.** It gives complete freedom to its practitioners to draw from a very large reservoir of orientations and practices. It does not say what is right or wrong. It allows its practitioners to make those decisions consistent with their needs or the needs of clients served by them. It does not mean that Integral NLP cannot and will not have a set of professional standards. It only means that Integral NLP respects the autonomy of its practitioners to make the best possible decisions.

Fourth, **Integral NLP is eclectic in its methodologies.** The word “eclectic” is used here to mean selective, versatile, resourceful, discriminating, universal, catholic, general, and diverse. This point is important because under no circumstance Integral NLP allows and blesses the so-called “scientific” approach as the only authentic way to study human condition. This approach, as we know, at its worst has become the code word for gross reductionism.

Fifth, **Integral NLP studies both subjective and objective states,** which means that it deals equally with mental and spiritual changes on the one hand and behavioral and systemic changes on the other. NLP, as we know it, is heavily invested in individual growth and development. It does not address change issues at systemic level: organization, community, society, nation, and global community. Integral

NLP leaves nothing out. It selects challenging issues at all levels and tries to find the best possible solutions using knowledge from all disciplines and oral traditions.

Sixth, **Integral NLP emphasizes the importance of values and beliefs in shaping human consciousness and personality.** NLP also emphasizes belief changes. So where is the difference? The difference lies in the fact that Integral NLP will preselect a set of values that will become the universal standard for all human beings in all countries and all cultures. The idea smacks of authoritarianism or cultural imperialism. But that is not the case. In fact, this thought is inspired by Maslow's statement of B-values (a list of 14 values) that he thought were essential for self-actualization. These values should include things like truth, beauty, justice, compassion, and love—the values, which are cherished in all cultures and spiritual traditions. The interpretation of these values could vary from one culture to another but the substance is universal. Integral NLP practitioners will work around these values and assist people transcend their inner conflicts and imperfections and help them reach a level of perfection or self-actualization that they seek.

Seventh, **Integral NLP embraces the idea of levels, stages, states in terms of links in developmental hierarchies that are an essential part of our life and being.** Different levels need different prescriptions. Solutions that might work at one level could be worthless as solutions for problems at the next level. The same is true about states and stages. This has two practical implications: (1) one size

does not fit all, and (2) our material and spiritual reality unfolds in an evolutionary fashion with each level, stage, or state posing different challenges. The deeper we look into this evolutionary cycle, the more challenges we are likely to find in terms of diversity that all psychological approaches put together have not gauged very well so far. There is great amount of homework that remains to be done and Integral NLP will do it.

Eighth, **Integral NLP is a comprehensive approach to human transformation.** It responds to the needs of body, mind, heart, and soul. It draws from the body of work that has been completed in NLP so far—different theories and best practices. In addition, it spreads its net much wider

to cover other psychological approaches, including older traditions like Freudian psychoanalysis, Jungian psychology, Maslow's humanistic psychology, and new breakthroughs in cognitive and relational therapies. Integral NLP incorporates the best and most enduring parts of Eastern and Western philosophies, including contributions of great religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and religions of native peoples, particularly Shamanism. Integral NLP accepts human body as the source of energy, intelligence, creativity, and consciousness. Physical fitness and physical exercise are valued and the sub-discipline draws heavily from the rich reservoir of Eastern martial arts and Yoga (Chakras, Kundalini, breathwork, etc.) and Western advances in sciences

like bioenergetics. Integral NLP respects different medical traditions, old as well as new, scientific as well as oral, and particularly recommends treatments that are based on natural ingredients and holistic in their reach. Integral NLP also draws useful lessons, wherever applicable, from modern disciplines like economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, management sciences, systems and complexity theories.

Ninth, **Integral NLP is about true integration of different facets of reality.** We can think about it in terms of Wilber's four quadrants—there are inner realities and outer realities, there are subjective realities and intersubjective realities. Any discipline that denies any of these four

dimensions is an incomplete discipline. True integration deals with each dimension on its own ground without any kind of reductionism.

Last but not the least, **Integral NLP believes in the sanctity of human spirit that knows no boundaries between life and death.** People need to accept the fact of their mortality and prepare themselves for their future evolution—either as Oneness or reincarnation in another body. While our body needs to be prepared for the work of this life, our soul needs preparation for a future life. The needs of the body and that of the soul therefore overlap but they are also separate and unique. An integral NLP practitioner is not expected to do the job of a priest but he or she will act as doctor of the spirit helping people sort out their life and death issues, the issues that are at the very center of spirituality—what is God, what is my connection with God, do I live after death, how can I

attain enlightenment, and what meditation or spiritual practices are best for me. Each practitioner will find a unique way to deal with these questions, but Integral NLP recognizes that these are important questions and that there are different ways to address them. No judgment will be made of the validity of answers to these questions as long as the answers given by the practitioner represent his or her deep-seated beliefs and spiritual awakening.

In summary, Integral NLP is not a new branch sprung from an old tree called NLP; it is like the energizing fluid within the bones and the body of the tree that should bring the whole tree to a new level of health and flowering—never seen before. And it is not only about the quantity of the bloom; it has to do with the variety, diversity, and the whole spectrum of colors and hues.

This article is an invitation to anyone who wants to be part of this vision and who is willing to contribute

from the perspective of his or her training and orientation. New visions are dangerous because they threaten the existing power relationships, but without a new vision there is no progress. Whether we call this a good idea or a bad idea, the world is not going to wait for us. There are people who need help. There are systems that are broke and need to be fixed. NLP was always intended to be an integral discipline. Now is the time to formally acknowledge the unified and integral nature of our theories and practices. We should try to reach for a higher integration, even beyond the vision of NLP's original founders.

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