

# Who am 'I'?

## What is 'me'?

How the NLP Logical Levels can help us with the Big Question. NLP Trainer Joe Cheal talks to Caitlin Collins

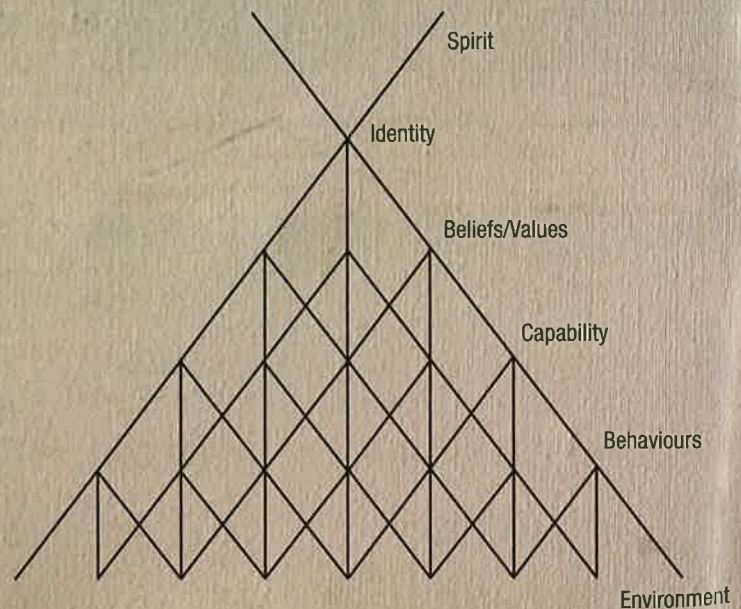
It may be true to say there's something childlike about many NLP enthusiasts. I hope so! It's certainly true to say that many NLP enthusiasts are keen to go for the Big Questions, the ones about Life, the Universe, and Everything; the ones that most people probably asked as children, before the wall went up (thank you, Pink Floyd).

Joe Cheal is one such enthusiast; he's been asking the Big Question: Who am I? And he's been finding the NLP model of Logical Levels a helpful resource in his enquiry.

This model, which used to be known as 'Neuro Logical Levels', was introduced to the NLP world by Robert Dilts. Many people have found it a useful analytical tool for gaining insight into how they are living their lives, and great for highlighting areas that are working well and areas where changes might be beneficial.

For those not familiar with the model, Joe offers a quick overview of the levels. Environment is at the base; without an environment or context, Behaviours either can't take place, or are meaningless. Capability can be considered a logical level 'up' from behaviours because without behaviours, we can't develop capability. Beliefs and Values are a bit of a jump from capability, although perhaps it could be argued that we couldn't have beliefs without the capability of thinking. Regarding Identity, we might find it hard to develop a sense of self without our beliefs and values. Spirit is a bit of a question mark in the model; however it appears to include our connection with others who are, indeed, a collection of identities.

As illustrated here by Joe, Robert Dilts presented the model as a pyramid in which each level contains the one directly below (eg a capability or skill is a collection of behaviours). We can also see that a higher level can't develop properly until the preceding level is in place (eg a skill cannot develop without the necessary behaviours). A change at any level will affect those above and below it although a higher level change is likely to have more effect on the lower levels than vice versa.



So, given the interconnectedness of the levels, rather than asking the question ‘Who am I?’ simply from the obvious level of Identity, Joe suggests that it may be more enlightening to check out the whole lot. He sets out how this might work in this table.

Level	Personal Identity Question
<b>Spirit</b>	How is who I am connected to the bigger picture, the human race? What legacy am I creating?
<b>Identity</b>	What is my sense of self? (Also, when I ask ‘Who am I?’ at this level, is my ego playing self-referential tricks?)
<b>Beliefs and Values</b>	How did I develop my beliefs and values and how might they help and hinder my being ‘true to myself’?
<b>Capability</b>	How did I know to develop the particular skills and capabilities I have?
<b>Behaviours</b>	How are my behaviours an expression of me?
<b>Environment</b>	Who am I in different contexts and environments? Does this change or stay constant?

**Developing The Model: Inside/ Outside Logical Levels**

Joe has developed the Logical Levels model by adding a new dimension of ‘internal’ and ‘external’. ‘Internal’ is the inner working, that which others do not see or hear; while ‘external’ is the manifest, that which is revealed to others. Joe came up with this distinction after a discussion about applying the Logical Levels to an organisation. As he explains, “There was confusion as to whether the environment of an organisation is the décor and the appearance of the reception and restaurant etc, or whether it’s the market place and/ or the geographical site. So in this instance, ‘internal’ would apply to the inner environment and ‘external’ would apply to the outside world.”

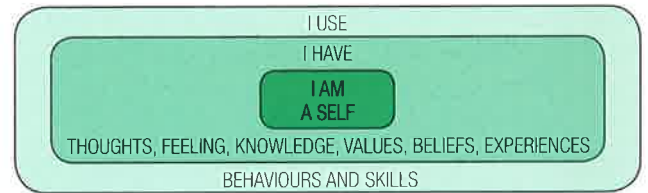
The internal/ external dimension when applied to an individual is not meant to imply a division or split in a person, but is simply a convenient way of distinguishing different expressions of the same self. The next table illustrates how this distinction might work.

Level	‘In Side’ (Internal eyes)	‘Out Side’ (External Eyes)
<b>Spirit For Whom?</b>	Inner connectedness, my ‘transmission’ across lifetimes	Family, community, transmission with others
<b>Identity Who?</b>	Sense of who I am, self image, ego, my mission in life	Mask, expression of self (eg clothing, physical body)
<b>Beliefs, Values Why?</b>	What I hold to be true and important	Expressions of beliefs/ values (eg written, spoken, facial expressions of acceptance or rejection)
<b>Capability How?</b>	States, memory, imagination, innovation, skills, abilities, knowledge, thinking, accessing cues	Demonstrating knowledge and skills, expression of thoughts, adapting to different situations
<b>Behaviour What?</b>	Physiological functions, breathing	Visible actions, reactions, responses, interactions, movements
<b>Environment Where/ When?</b>	Sense of here and now, ‘inside my head’ Internal environment	Location, place, space, time

The inside/ outside distinction can also be useful when using the Logical Levels as a modelling tool. We can model a person’s ‘external’ from first ‘Self’ and third ‘Observer’ perceptual positions; then we’ll need to move to the second ‘Other’ position to model the person’s ‘internal’ (particularly if they’re not there to answer our questions).

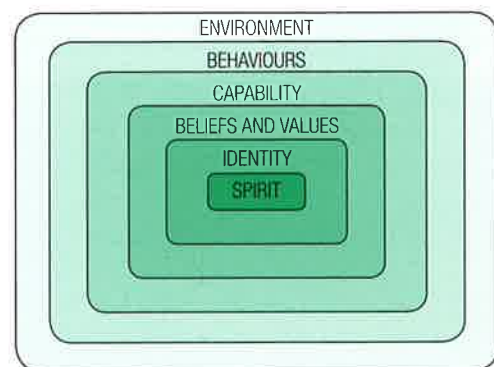
**Logical Levels Or Simply Aspects Of Self?**

Before encountering the Logical Levels model, Joe used to use a simpler but similar model called Aspects of Self, depicted by concentric circles. This model could demonstrate two things: firstly, that a person is more than just the sum of his or her thoughts, memories, experiences etc., and, secondly, that it’s possible to separate a person from his or her behaviour – a crucial requirement for any kind of positive change-work.



*“ This is a great device for explaining and exploring aspects of an individual, a team, a family or an organisation ”*

Joe suggests that this concept might offer a new framework for depicting the Logical Levels in a non-hierarchical way, as a set of concentric circles, with Environment outside the circles and Spirit at the core as an interconnection with the ‘spiritual realm’. Rather than a vertical arrangement, this is a horizontal one; it reminds me of a mandala diagram, depicting how we manifest from the centre of our being out into the world. Any investigation of ‘who or what I am’ has to take into account the relative ‘me’ that is alive in the world. Whatever I am, I don’t think it’s any kind of isolated, findable ‘thing’ in a vacuum; interdependence is inescapable! Joe suggests that looking at it this way could allow us to say that we are the stuff of spirit with an identity; we have beliefs and values, and we use our skills and behaviours in the environment, which seems to me to offer a nicely holistic way of understanding ourselves as multifaceted beings in relationship with our world, not separate from it.



**Practical Problem-solving**

As well as being a tool for exploration into the larger questions such as purpose and identity, the Logical Levels model is helpful in seeking solutions to problems. As Joe points out, Einstein’s often-cited notion that ‘a problem cannot be solved on the level in which it was created’ is >

Level	Possible Language Indicators	If not connected to level directly above
<b>Spirit</b> For Whom?	Vision, purpose in bigger picture, community, transmission, beyond self, global systems, interconnectedness, unconditional love	?
<b>Identity</b> Who?	Mission, roles, self, sum of parts, personality, purpose I am, me, ego	Isolated, egoic, selfish, lack of connection
<b>Beliefs, Values</b> Why?	Motivation, permission, meanings, willingness, desire, important, reinforcement, should, ought, must, generalisations, rules	Disassociated: 'I'm not myself today', split parts, parts disintegration, conflicting priorities/ values
<b>Capability</b> How?	Mental maps, plans, strategies, states, memory, imagination, innovation, adaptation, skills, abilities, knowledge, thoughts, direction, can/ can't	Can but don't want to, unmotivated, bored, lack of drive
<b>Behaviour</b> What?	Actions, reactions, responses, interactions, movements, do, activate, use, utilise, activate, implement	Random behaviours, habits, repeating old behaviours even though they don't work, 'freezing', procrastination, knee jerk reaction rather than response
<b>Environment</b> Where/When?	Location, place, space, time, external conditions, surroundings, here, now, opportunities, constraints, see, hear, feel, taste, smell, sense	Empty environment, nothing happens or gets done

a key to the power of Robert Dilts's original hierarchical model: a lasting solution will tend to be found at a higher level than the one on which it is manifesting. For example, if we find ourselves behaving inappropriately in a certain environment, we could of course change the environment – but our tendency for that behaviour to recur is likely to remain. We might be able to come up with alternative behaviours, but even then the old behaviour would be likely to return if something hasn't changed in our capability. We need to know how to change, not just what to change! Or, in another example, if we're having difficulty developing a skill, we can practise and practise without much effect; however, once we begin to gain confidence and positive belief in ourselves, the skill can take off and fly.

Joe finds that there are certain typical indicators that can help to establish the level of a problem. The next table shows some indicators that we might hear in our own or someone else's language, and also suggests some likely problems that might occur at each level if that level is not aligned with the one above. When all the levels are appropriately aligned we are likely to experience a sense of completeness or coherence in our life.

**Map Or Metaphor?**

Joe remarks that past criticisms of the Logical Levels model seem to stem from the mistake of taking the model as a map, and therefore expecting it to be a more or less literal representation of reality. As he points out, 'Some people have criticised the model for not really being "logical" levels at all! However, if you take it more metaphorically, then you free it up to become a very useful tool for exploration. It promotes reflection and



discussion and hence leads to new understanding.'

The Logical Levels model can be a great device for exploring aspects of an individual, a team, a family or an organisation. I certainly find it useful both for individual clients and for groups on courses; for example, used early on and then repeated at intervals, it provides a measure of the changes taking place as people gain increasing insight into who or what they are and how they express themselves in relationship with the world.

So, after all this: Who am I? What is me? Last word must go to Joe, who responds to our original Big Question with an unbeatable one-liner from John Overdurf and Julie Silverthorn:

'Whatever you think you are, you are so much more than that!' ●

**About Joe Cheal**

Joe Cheal, from the GWiz Learning Partnership, has been working with NLP since 1993 and runs both Practitioner and Master Practitioner courses with his partner Melody. As well as being a licensed trainer of NLP, he holds a degree in philosophy and psychology and diplomas in Coaching and in Ericksonian Hypnosis, Psychotherapy and NLP. He is currently undertaking an MSc in Organisational Development and NLP. Joe uses the Logical Levels model in training courses, in executive coaching sessions and in consultancy work to help clients understand and work through their goals and issues on a personal, team and organisational level. For more information about the GWiz Learning Partnership and its courses, email [joe@gwiztraining.com](mailto:joe@gwiztraining.com) or visit [www.gwiztraining.com](http://www.gwiztraining.com).

A more detailed article by Joe Cheal about the Logical Levels can be found on the ANLP website.

**Further Information**

- For more detail about the Logical Levels, see: <http://www.nlpuniversitypress.com>.
- For a critique of logical levels, see: <http://www.bradburyac.mistral.co.uk/nlpfax07.htm>
- For more information about the Logical Levels of Organisations and the 'Logical Level Loops of Learning', see: <http://www.gwiztraining.com/Articles.htm>