White Paper

What is modelling top performance?

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Abstract

Modern corporations have a reputation for attention to performance management. In particular they have had success with process management and asset management. Top performers (experts) have skills and capabilities (expertise) that often remain an untapped resource in terms of developing commercial effectiveness and productivity. Corporations do not have a track record for replicating the talent of top performing managers and front line staff that have direct impact on revenue, cost, productivity, quality and customer satisfaction.

It is now possible using neuroscience, applied cognitive psychology and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) modelling techniques to discover how top performers produce their outstanding results. Custom-designed training and coaching programs can teach these effective strategies to average performers, improving their results and enriching their organisations.

Why Model?

The world is filled with human beings manifesting an endless variety of behaviours and abilities. These human abilities are as diverse as being able to effectively negotiate, tell a joke, lead a large group, or operate a dragline. Many human beings are repositories of abilities in which they are expert, or "exemplars."

Is there a way to quickly transfer the ability of an exemplar to someone who needs and wants that ability? The purpose of modelling is to enable us to answer this question with a "Yes."

Duplicating the talent of top performers (modelling) can produce measurable financial results. Just as successful athletes take on trainers and coaches, and copy the most effective moves or swing to improve their game, so can senior, middle and frontline management and key front line staff in successful organisations.

The primary objective of modelling is to take a skill inherent in several experts' behaviour and transfer that skill to other persons in similar roles. For the skill transfer to be deemed effective, the learners must be able to replicate the results of the models. It'd make a big difference to your business if everyone on your team were a top performer.

Depending on the complexity of the job, researchers have found that performance one standard deviation above the mean is worth between 19% and 120% productivity increase. Modelling experts also adds economic value by shortening the learning curve for new employees. Employees in key roles with direct impact on business results (i.e. valuable jobs) can leverage significant economic benefits from these increases. For example, top salespeople sell 120% more than average performers. Similar considerations apply for other job roles and teams that have a direct impact on revenue, costs, productivity, customer satisfaction and quality.

What is Modelling

Modelling can be thought of as cloning expertise. Note – it is about replicating the DNA of the talent of an expert – not cloning the top performer. In the field of neuroscience modelling has two meanings. It can involve a suitably trained adult individual using an analysis free learning state to model experts in order to learn a new skill for him self or her self. It can also involve a qualified trainer and practitioner modelling exemplars in order to create useful descriptions of their abilities so others can learn them. Whichever it is - the purpose of modelling is to transfer the ability of experts (i.e. top performers) to someone who needs or wants the ability of the experts in a manner that quickly develops unconscious competence. Done effectively, modelling can deliver significant performance improvement quickly.

A Practical Modelling Example

Take for example a retailer who asks, "Why do some of our sales staff perform at a high level while others do not?" As behavioural researchers, like the ethnologists, we go to the environment to see what the top performers were doing that was different from the other sales people.

One discovery was that the average performers greet customers entering the store with the standard “May I help you?” which triggers an automatic predictable response mechanism “No thanks, I'm just looking.” The opportunity to build rapport is lost in the very first interaction with the customer.

Meanwhile top performers were asking very different questions. For example, “Is this your first visit to our store?” If the customer responds "Yes," the top performer has created the opportunity to further engage the customer by showing them around. If the customer replies "No," the top salesperson has created the opportunity to further engage the customer by asking what they found interesting previously. Either way, they have the opening to establish rapport with the customer. Another successful question was “What have you come here for today?”

How Is Modelling Done?

Human experiences are comprised of various elements: behaviour, emotions, patterns of thinking, and the beliefs or assumptions on which those patterns are based. The fundamental presupposition of modelling is: human experience has structure. Differences in experiences are a direct result of differences in how these elements are structured. That is, expert behaviours, what experts are feeling, what experts are thinking, what experts are believing, and how all of these elements interact with one another, combine to give rise to an expert’s experience at a moment in time. That array of content and relationships constitutes the structure of the experience.

While the example above talked about readily observed external behaviour – modelling goes well beyond this surface level. It is within the structures that we find the differences that distinguish someone who is adept from someone who is not. In modelling, we are "mapping" out the underlying structure of experience that makes it

possible for an expert to manifest his/her particular ability. If we - or anyone - structure our experience to match that of the expert, that structure will enable us to manifest (to a great extent) that same ability.

Modelling, then, is the process of creating useful "maps" (descriptions of the structure of experience) of human abilities.

- Such maps are useful because they allow us to understand the experiential structure that makes it possible for a person to manifest a particular ability.
- Such maps are useful because they can make it possible for anyone to have that experience or ability by making that map their own.

Modelling is a process, i.e. it is something that happens over a period of time and, at the very least, involves:

(a) Observing some expert who is achieving something; and

(b) Establishing a map or sequence (a model) of what they are doing.

While this might be the bare bones of modelling, there is a lot more to it. To start with, there is more than one type of modelling. Second, there are a number of stages to the modelling process and third, a variety of skills are required to perform each stage.

Richard Bandler and John Grinder invented the label Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) to describe the modelling processes they discovered. John and Richard used a special state of mind with external attention and activated mirror neurones (Gallese, Fadiga, Fogassi, Rizzolatti, Giacomo (1996); Ferrari 2003; Rizzolatti & Fabbri-Destro 2010) to examine the micro-behavioural and linguistic patterns of geniuses in the hope of being able to reproduce what these experts could do.

They elicited a range of patterns that were the basis for the amazing results obtained by these archetypes. Those modelled were later to remark that they were unaware of much of what John and Richard discovered they were doing! That is, they were unconsciously excellent, and so when asked “How do you do it?” could not answer with more than “I don’t know, doesn’t everyone do it like me?” The next step for John and Richard was to develop these models so they could be passed on to others. Thus was devised the process for the ongoing dissemination of models of top performance.

Robert Dilts came up with another process for modelling called Conceptual Modelling or Analytical Modelling (Dilts, Robert 1994 & 1995)

More recently researchers have added Symbolic Modelling, a process for identifying how people represent their experience through metaphor and symbol to the modelling suite (Grove David, 1991; Thompkins P & Lawley, J 1997). A linguistic metaphor is but the verbal 'surface structure' of an untapped mine of meaning. In the 'deep structure' (which can be accessed with clean language communication models) lies a complete symbolic representation of performance excellence which has information encoded in visual, auditory and kinaesthetic constructs.

Onirik draws upon all of these techniques in modelling experts combined with ongoing developments from the fields of cognitive science, neuroscience and brain plasticity.

Learning to duplicate experts and expertise effectively requires a major commitment of at least 50 days of training for our consultants.

What Does The Modelling Process Look Like

The overall modelling framework, applicable to all types of modelling, can be summarised, in its simplest form, as a five-stage process:

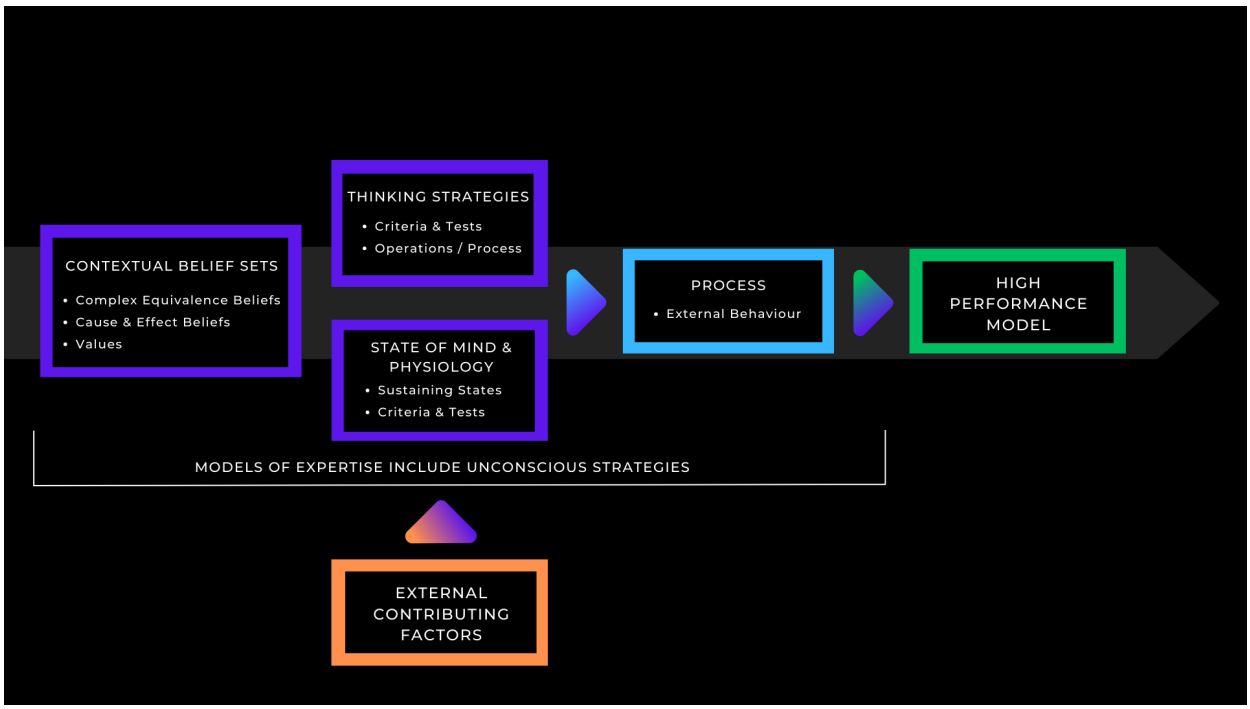
1. Identify experts of the ability to be modelled.
2. Modelling - Observe each model in action and unconsciously assimilate “how they do it.” This entails employing a purpose-designed state of mind with ‘mirror neurones’ activated.
   Analytic and Symbolic Modelling - For each exemplar, gather information through observation and interview with respect to what and how s/he is thinking, feeling, believing and doing when manifesting the ability. (The Experiential Array and Belief Template are information-gathering tools.)
3. Use contrast and comparison of context examples to identify the essential structural patterns for each expert.
4. Use contrast and comparison of experts to identify the essential structural patterns for the ability. Remove the personal idiosyncrasies.
5. Test and refine the Model. Verify the modeller and trained subjects can duplicate the results of the expert.

Although we describe the five stages as a linear process, it should be obvious that it is systemic as each stage feeds-forward to the following stages and feeds-back to the previous stages.

What Does A Model Look Like?

In mapping human abilities, we use distinctions about patterns of thinking ("Strategies"), feeling ("Emotions"), doing ("External Behaviour") and believing ("Criterial Equivalences" and "Cause Effects"). Most human abilities involve the simultaneous expression and interaction of these "elements of experience." The dynamic relationships between these elements of experience are captured in the Experiential Array.

All of these elements interact simultaneously to make possible the expression of the ability. They do not, however, necessarily exert equal influence on each other, as indicated by the relative size of the arrows in the Array (figure below).



How Does Neuroscience Modelling Contrast with Conventional Approaches?

The traditionally held understanding of modelling is that we take whatever we can see a successful person does and teach it to other people using the conscious learning strategies. Unfortunately this traditional view of modelling embodies a slow and rarely sustained three step learning process and three errors and assumptions that limit success.

The three step learning process from conscious incompetence to conscious competence to unconscious competence is usually slow (taking some weeks of daily practice) and characterised by negative de-motivational feedback (repeated failure to achieve the desired outcome until the skill is developed). The process does not sustain itself.

The first error in the traditional approach is that the models are usually based on only one super performer. The second error is that traditional models focus on observed behaviour content (e.g. word for word use of the guru's opening script/line) rather than behaviour patterns. The third error is that models are generalised. Attempts are made to apply them in many situations when they may work best in limited contexts (e.g. the guru's approach to transactional sales of tangibles is translated to complex sales of intangibles).

Successful models must be built from at least three exemplars so that the modeller can isolate successful patterns from personal content and idiosyncrasies. Successful models must also go beyond just externally observable behaviour to incorporate the normally hidden internal thinking processes and supporting beliefs and values (or

mental state). And finally effective models must include a description specifying the contexts and situations in which the models work best and those where they don't apply.

Neuroscience based modelling addresses all three errors and can build models that lead to extraordinary performance improvements for existing staff and a very short learning curve for new hires. The process of codifying neuroscience models is far more sophisticated than I've described here. It normally requires a skilled modeller with a Graduate Certificate qualification. The qualification comes after completing at least 40 days of training to master the competencies required to elicit and develop deep structure models of excellence. However, any person can learn a model.

John Grinder states that contrasting Analytic, Symbolic Modelling, neuroscience and NLP Modelling requires respect for two criteria that apply only to modelling in NLP:

1. the suspension of any conscious mind / taxonomic and / or analytic attempt to understand consciously the patterning of the genius or model of excellence during the assimilation stage of patterning and until the following criterion is met.
2. the modeller must demonstrate the ability to reproduce the patterning of the model in parallel contexts and in such contexts elicit roughly the same results with roughly the same quality and time commitment as the original genius or model of excellence.

The essential difference of consequence between the processes of NLP modelling and other forms is the relative contributions of the model and modeller to the final work product. This difference resides principally in the degree of imposition of the perceptual and analytic categories of the modeller during the modelling process. In the case of NLP modelling, the imposition is minimal; in the case of Analytic Modelling, the imposition is maximal (Grinder J & Bostic St. Clair, C, 2005).

The requirements that the development of all cognitive representations be systematically suspended by the modeller during the unconscious assimilation phase (employing mirror neurones) and the requirement that the modeller demonstrate the ability to perform as does the original model or genius prior to beginning any cognitive coding describes the source of these profound differences.

Modelling Case Studies

Onirik has conducted a number of modelling projects with clients. For one client Onirik observed and modelled a number of the organisation's top performing front-line sales staff, including the best performing salesperson with an average close ratio around 90%. Our consultants delivered the model to sales managers and front-line staff.

Prior to our intervention the average close ratio was less than 15%. Four weeks after adopting the high performance models the average conversion ratio of their teams of new sales people increased to over 70%. The project ROI exceeded 400%.

Another client operating an open cut coal-mine had high productivity operation with some excavators operating in excess of benchmark. There was a 14% gap in productivity (measured in BCM per hour) between the top excavator operators and the least productive operators. Top operators were also more consistent; their production figures varied little between simple digging situations and technically complex or otherwise more difficult digs. Previous traditional training approaches and attempts to

copy the easily observed “external” behaviours of the top performers had yielded little lasting improvement.

Onirik modelled the top operators, taught the model to and coached the low productivity workers. The results were quick and satisfactory. Within weeks the productivity of the excavator operators increased by 19%. The increases endured along with continuing high utilisation and availability measures. The project ROI was over 900% and the payback period less than two months. The project had paid for itself before it was complete – essentially becoming a self-funding exercise.

Over the years modelling projects have ranged from very specific behaviours to highly general competencies. Some examples include:

❖ Small Arms Shooting	US Air force
❖ Safe Driving	Metropolitan Police
❖ Project Management	British Telecom
❖ Futures Trading	Chase Manhattan Bank
❖ Creativity	Walt Disney Inc.
❖ Stocks and Derivatives Trading	Ray Barros Trading Group; Trading State Ltd.
❖ Effective Leadership	A range of private and government sector companies
❖ Facilitating Effective Meetings	A range of private and government sector companies

Conclusion

Whichever way you evaluate skills in your company, you are likely to find an approximately normal distribution of capabilities (that familiar bell curve). Most people fall into the middle range, a few are top performers and a few are at the other end of the scale. The top performers have skills and capabilities that are a potential gold mine in terms of developing organisational effectiveness and productivity.

The problem has been how to get at these riches. Now it is possible to discover, from top performers, exactly how they produce their outstanding results using modelling techniques. Then, custom designed training can be built to specifically teach these effective strategies to average performers to improve their results. Learning a model makes it possible to compress into a short period the many years of trial and error experience that usually accompany excellence. Completing the process with real time on-the-job observation and coaching shortens the learning curve and ensures that the improvements last the test of time.

As the old saying goes, “If you think staff development is expensive - try ignorance.”

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About the Author

Geoffrey Wade (BSc, BE, GCNLP, MBA) is the Founder of Onirik.

Onirik is a team of professionals who focus on business value and measurable outcomes, as the reason for our clients to listen to Onirik. Onirik helps their clients get fast and lasting quantum leap improvements in revenue and margins.