

## NANO TECH POWER DECK

# Games as a Way of Presenting NLP

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Those of us who use NLP professionally, often feel a desire to do more with NLP for ourselves in our own personal lives. Just as we would like to do more for our clients, our colleagues and our students. But a busy schedule with multiple time pressures often prevents us from using NLP as much as we would like. There is always that article to finish, that meeting to prepare, that extra session to do... And thinking about our clients and students, we would certainly like some of them to do more with NLP! But again, we simply don't have the time or the energy to do provide all the extra NLP exposure we would like to offer them. And that's where the Deck comes in. In this article we will first take a look at the Nano Tech Power Deck, an NLP card game, and from there we will examine the broader issue of pro's and cons of games as presenting forms for NLP-techniques.

The Nano Tech Power Deck is a card game, designed to provide a source of NLP that is not limited by the amount of time and energy available from an NLP-trained professional. It embodies many of the principles and procedures of NLP in a playful format. It is only a deck of cards, and yet it often brings about personal developments and insights that people had wanted but not achieved before. The Deck helps people, each time in a different way, to achieve goals, to solve problems, to develop personal strengths, to overcome personal weaknesses, to obtain unexpected advice and last but not least: to relate in a new way to the other people they play with. No need to make an appointment or to go to someone's office. With the Deck at hand, one has a readily available source of NLP, one that is especially effective when people have already had some NLP training.

Essentially, the Nano Tech Deck combines the modern psychological techniques of NLP with the old principles of the oracle, as they were passed on to us from Greek, Celtic and Germanic civilizations. The NLP aspect is represented by the general structure of the game, which has a phase where an issue is defined and a phase of general orientation followed by a series of small change techniques. The game ends with a systematic future pace. The oracle aspect comes in where a live NLP practitioner would normally determine the general direction the change work should take. In the game this general direction is offered by an oracle system that gives advice on a high level of abstraction. This general direction is developed further by the use of three small change techniques. The change techniques used are called Nano Techniques, 'nano' meaning 'very small'. A nanosecond for instance, is one billionth

of a second. The word Nano Technique refers to a very small NLP technique that only takes a few minutes. The whole game, including finding an issue to play with, obtaining the advice from the oracle, doing the three Nano Techniques and doing the future pace, takes between fifteen and forty five minutes.

The game progresses through four steps or phases:

1. The Entrance
2. Consulting the Life Processes Oracle
3. Doing Three Nano Techniques
4. The Future Pace

The structure of this four steps process are represented by seven Instruction Cards which are laid out in a pattern that forms a sort of gaming board.

In the first phase, the player draws an Entrance Card. There are nine of those, each representing either a problem, a resource or a goal, in either the past, the present or the future (see illustration 2: The nine Entrance Cards). Having drawn an Entrance Card, the player defines a real life situation that is represented by the card and relives this situation for a moment (See illustration 3: Example of an Entrance Card). For example, if he had drawn 'A Recent Goal' as the Entrance Card, he would think of a moment that made him realize he had this goal. Or if he had drawn 'A Problem in the Future', he would imagine a future situation where he expects he will have a certain problem. The instructions for stepping into these Entrance situations are: "As fully as you can, step into the real life situation that is indicated by the Entrance Card. Live it (or relive it, as the case may be) for a moment. See again what you saw (or will see), hear what you heard (or will hear), feel the feelings, smell the smells, taste what you tasted (or will taste) and think your thoughts of that moment". By starting the game through one of these nine generic issues, remedial changes (fixing problems) and generative changes (developing resources) are balanced out in the long run.

After the player has started the game, he first receives some general advice regarding the Entrance issue. This phase in the game is similar to where a live NLP professional would determine the general strategy for the change work. For this same purpose of general orientation, the Deck has nine Life Processes Oracle Cards (See illustration 4: Example of an Oracle Card). The player draws two Oracle Cards: one that tells him what to do less of and one that tells him what to do more of. The distinctions the oracle uses, are based on the processes that every living organism must do to survive, like eating, digesting, reacting to the environment, etc. On a very global level, leaving room for many diverse projections and interpretations, the oracle gives the player instructions about how to

act and perceive and how not to act and not to perceive in order to change or develop the Entrance issue.

With the Entrance issue and the advice of the oracle in mind, the player goes on to do three different Nano Techniques. He draws three Nano Tech Cards, each of which has a small NLP technique that can be completed in a few minutes (See illustration 5: Example of a Nano Tech Card). There are 32 different Nano Techniques in the Deck. After having done the three Nano techniques, the player combines the three results. People are often surprised about how well these three results fit together. Sometimes, it almost seems as if the three Nano Techs had been specifically designed to complement and enhance each other.

For the future pace, the fourth and last phase of the game, the player mentally goes forward to a specific life situation in the future where he will want to use the results of the three Nano Techniques. He takes the Future Pace Cards from their stack one by one, in the order in which they sit in the stack and answers each of their questions (See illustration 6: Example of a Future Pace Card). The Future Pace Cards ask him (in the order they have been shuffled into): "In that specific situation in the future... what will you understand? ... how will you perceive things? ... how will you feel? ... what will you be thinking? ... what will you do?". And how will that be different from what you have understood, perceived, felt, thought and done before.

Communication professionals (therapists, trainers, educators, counsellors, coaches, et cetera) may use the Deck to provide their clients with a source of guidance and inspiration along NLP-lines. Normally, a live person delivers NLP processes, or maybe we should better say: normally a live person expresses his or her being and beliefs through the channel of NLP processes. With the Nano Tech Deck, similar NLP processes are presented by a deck of cards. How effective can this be? There are, of course, a great many reasons why a live person can be much more effective in change work than a deck of cards. I have however, observed many instances where the Nano Tech Deck has seemed equally effective or even more effective than a live person. Playing the Deck, people will sometimes get to the core of an issue that they had been avoiding before. Or they will make a change that they had been unable to achieve before. Or they achieve a result in ten minutes that I suspect would have taken at least an hour, had they been working with a live person.

How is this possible? This intriguing question relates to the broader issue of the advantages and disadvantages of games (in the sense of card-, board- and computer-games) as a presenting form for NLP-structures (in the sense of NLP-models, -techniques and - processes). Roughly speaking, I would say that there are three main reasons why a live person

(especially someone trained as a change agent) is more effective than a fixed structure like a game: (a) relationship, (b) nonverbal communication and (c) complexity. A person establishes a relationship with another person. A deck of cards doesn't. And it seems to be in the context of relationships that we learn and change most, both as children and as adults. Furthermore, live human interaction has a massive interchange of nonverbal messages. This enables a live professional to diagnose and influence a client in many more ways than a game can. And finally, there is the matter of complexity. In a game like the Nano Tech Deck there are more than two million (2.142.720) possible combinations of cards. You would have to play the game every day for 5870 years, statistically speaking, before you would encounter the same combination of cards a second time. But even though it has that many different possible combinations, the total amount of information contained in the Deck is still incredibly limited compared to the information stored in the brain and body of a live person.

It is easy to understand, therefore, how a game can be less effective as a change agent than a live person. But to me, it is much more difficult to understand how a game can be more effective. And yet, this is what I have repeatedly observed. In terms of the relationship, a deck of cards or a board with pieces can not, by themselves, establish a relationship. But when a game is played with other people involved as co-players or witnesses, which changes the situation. The game affects the relationships of the people playing it. A game offers a clear structure in terms of rules and procedures that spontaneous group interaction does not usually provide. Using spatial markers like stacks of cards, spots on a game board or the positions of game pieces, a game helps people maintain complex structures of interaction. A modern board game like 'Heist of the Century', that our nine year old super child Florian Hollander plays very well, has a structure that is easily as complex as NLP techniques like six step reframing or change personal history. Human interactions that take place within a game structure may be influenced significantly by that structure. And this may result in relationships that are different from the way we ordinarily relate to each other. A classical example is the peacefully married couple that gets into a fight over the bidding in a game of Bridge. Another example are the emotionally charged alliances that are formed during a game of Risk. It is not so much the game itself, but rather the total interactively connected system of the game, its rules and procedures and the people playing it, that can create special relationships. In short: a deck of cards or a board with pieces can not have a relationship with a person, but the people who play with him can. And through them the game can have an relational influence. In this sense a game is much like a principle or a technique: principles and techniques themselves do not have relationships with people, but they do influence the relationships between the people using them.

One of the relational influences that a game like the Nano Tech Deck has, is that people tend to take each others instructions more seriously. When I ask you to imagine a realm where every species of animal is present, you are bound to demand an explanation. Why do I want you to do that? And if I told you it is because I think this will help you, you might want to know how precisely it could help you, who has asked me to help you in the first place, and do I think you have animalistic urges? But if you had drawn the 'Animal Magic' card in the Nano Tech game and I had read the very same instruction to you, you would probably follow it without question. The situation sometimes reminds me of oracle reading. When someone tells you what they think of your situation, you are bound to question them. But when they make similar statements based on an oracle system, say Runic Tablets or Tarot Cards, chances are you will be much more attentive.

When we look at the second variable, nonverbal communication, obviously a game doesn't communicate, nonverbally or otherwise. It just sends messages, it doesn't receive or process what comes back. The disadvantages are clear. In terms of the TOTE-model, a game has no input and no test. It only has operations which it fires off blindly, so to speak. One consequence is, that if a player does not understand or follow a certain procedure, a game can offer no help. It does not solve instructional problems and it does not adapt to the player. Interactive computer games go a little further in this respect than board or card games, but not nearly as far as humans. But surprisingly, not communicating - and still giving instructions - can have its advantages too. A game does not acknowledge a clients unconscious nonverbal instructions to avoid certain issues. A live person will respond to those messages and may not touch upon certain subjects, avoid certain lines of thought, decrease certain emotions, stay out of certain types of relationship, et cetera. Because a game simply doesn't do this, it can sometimes lead a person to areas of thought and feeling that a live person would not touch upon.

An interesting, although limited, example of this, is the one-trial learning that often takes when people use my multimedia computer program 'Mentor' (a virtual NLP practitioner). When the program asks a question and the user gives a short answer, it tells them that the answer is too short and it returns them to the question once more. I have noticed that after this has happened once, most people will thereafter always give long answers to Mentor. It has repeatedly surprised me, how fast and robust this one trial learning is. I assume that people presuppose that the program will never accept a short answer. This message is given - or rather implied - to them without any nonverbal qualifiers as to how absolutely it is to be taken. So I guess they interpret it as an absolute rule.

Like the Donkey that doesn't bump its head against the same rock twice. The donkey knows that the rock won't change its mind about being a hard place... A live person would include nonverbal qualifiers in the message 'I want long answers', and it would take more trials for someone to comply with this demand. The client would probably give short answers with a nonverbal metamessage of 'I know you want long answers, but I'd like you to accept this short one anyway'. With the computer they cannot do this. This is an example where different, faster learning takes place with a computer than would take place with a live person. The situation is reminiscent of a research finding from the seventies - for which I am sorry to say I lost the reference - where it was found that people will give more confidential information to a computer than they will give to a live person. Presumably because they fear the other person's negative evaluation. Here again, the lack of communication gives the computer an advantage rather than - as is usually the case - a disadvantage.

A second issue here, is people's ability to construct coherence. I understand - again without producing the references to the literature - that scientists have begun to view both perception and memory as active constructional endeavours of the central nervous system, rather than passive receptions or reproductions of reality. This development is pleasantly supportive of the old NLP adage that the map is not the territory and that we create our own maps. With the Nano Tech Deck I have found that people often experience a striking 'fit' between the different elements in the game. The Entrance issue, for instance, is precisely what they already felt they needed to look into. Or the oracle tells them exactly what they were already half-conscious of themselves. Or the Nano Techniques fit so well together, it is as if they were made to be used together (even if they are randomly drawn from a stack of 32). One person expressed this by saying, jokingly, that 'these cards must have electronic chips in them that register what you are thinking'. I attribute this to people's ability to construct a coherent whole from random elements. A game can support this ability through wording - along the lines of the Milton model - that is aspecific in a meaningful way and through defining a clear structure in which people can fill in their own content. In this manner, people who play a game can compensate for the game's lack of communication. People have a striking ability to construct a coherent whole from a collection of randomly selected parts. Based on my experiences with the Nano Tech game, I have, by the way, started to wonder if this process does not play just as important a role when a live professional selects a number of non-random elements.....

As for the third variable, complexity, there is the total amount of available information and the way in which this information is used. It's the difference between complexity itself and the way in which it is being expressed. A living human is infinitely more complex than a game. A live

professional has an enormous number of life experiences that he can use to generate behaviours that can help the client. A game can not do this. A game can only use the few principles and procedures that are built into it. But most professionals, no matter how broadly they have been trained, tend to use only a limited number of favourite distinctions, principles, models and procedures. My estimate is that most NLP practitioners for instance, use only two or three techniques frequently, another three to six occasionally and the rest not at all. A range of seven plus or minus two techniques can be comfortably overseen and if they are good techniques, they will work fine with most clients. A live professional therefore, will usually express his complexity in the form of sensitivity and creativity adapting a limited number of procedures to the client. A game in contrast, has no sensitivity and no creativity in adapting a procedure. But it will, on the other hand, make use of every single distinction, model and procedure that has been built into it. A game like the Nano Tech Deck for instance will, given a sufficient number of games, eventually use all of its 32 techniques. It can therefore lead a client to places where his therapist, trainer or counsellor never goes.

To summarize: a game can obviously never offer the relationship, the nonverbal communication and the complexity of a live person. Let me state very clearly that I am absolutely not propagating a game as an alternative to counselling by a live person. A game can not operate within the TOTE-model. A live person can do that and more. Generally speaking, I would therefore expect a live person to achieve far more in terms of change and development than a game ever can. That having been said, I have observed that a game like the Nano Tech Power Deck can occasionally be more effective than a live person. I have been surprised by this and I suspect there are interesting lessons to be learned from this observation. I believe it is possible for a game to be an effective change agent because (a) a game maintains, by rules, procedures and spatial markers an often highly complex structure in which relationships between players can take new forms, (b) a game does not respond to unconscious messages to avoid certain issues nor does it qualify its own messages and (c) people have a striking ability to construct a coherent whole from the random elements a game offers them (d) a game uses all of its distinctions, principles and procedures, rather than a limited part of them.

And of course, the game has some practical advantages over a live professional. It is very cheap by comparison, it is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and it is associated with fun rather than with work or problems. I believe therefore, that the game is a useful presenting form for NLP models and procedures and that it can be used fruitfully as an adjunct to training, therapy and counselling.

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