Logical Levels of Bateson & Dilts (Ask these questions!)

Original: https://hetnlpcollege.nl/logische-niveaus-bateson-robert-dilts-nlp/ Translated, edited and modified

Summary

Logical Levels of Bateson & Dilts

The logical (or neurological) levels by **Gregory Bateson** and **Robert Dilts** form a powerful reflection model used in coaching, problem-solving, and meaningful conversations. Understanding this model allows for deep insights and effective change.

The Six Logical Levels (from lowest to highest):

1. **Environment** – External possibilities or limitations: *Where, when, and with whom?*
2. **Behavior** – Observable actions or reactions: *What do you do?*
3. **Capabilities** – Skills, knowledge, and talents: *How do you do it?*
4. **Beliefs and Values** – Motivation and permission: *Why do you do it?*
5. **Identity** – Sense of self: *Who are you?*
6. **Mission / Purpose / Spirituality** – Contribution to the world: *What is your deeper purpose?*

Each level represents a different way of thinking, feeling, and communicating. Lower levels are more concrete; higher levels are abstract and transformative.

Applications for the Logical Levels:

- **Coaching & Therapy**: Helps clients gain insights and shift perspectives.
- **Conflict Resolution**: Aligns communication and understanding.
- **Personal Development**: Encourages reflection on identity and purpose.
- **Decision Making**: Clarifies values and motivations.
- **Organizational Consulting**: Aligns team and company values with goals.

Examples of Questions per Level:

- **Environment**: Where am I? When does this happen? Who is involved?
- **Behavior**: What do I do? What actions are visible?
- **Capabilities**: What skills do I have? What am I capable of?
- **Beliefs/Values**: What do I believe? What motivates me?
- **Identity**: Who am I? What role do I play?
- **Mission**: What is my purpose? What do I contribute to the world?

Advanced Insights:

- **Higher levels influence lower ones**: A change in identity or mission often leads to changes in behavior and environment.
- **Spiritual dimension**: The top levels (identity and mission) are beyond words and are experienced through silence, meditation, and self-awareness.
- **Role vs. Essence**: You are not your roles (e.g., parent, student, employee); you are the consciousness behind them.

Introduction

The (neuro)logical levels of Gregory Bateson and Robert Dilts form a beautiful reflection model for various purposes. If you understand this model, you can achieve many powerful and meaningful results while coaching others, analyzing and solving a problem, or having a meaningful conversation.



The logical levels of Bateson & Dilts – These are all 6 levels:

The logical levels of Bateson and Dilts, from low to high:

- **Environment:** external possibilities or limitations: where, when, and with whom?
- **Behavior:** specific actions or reactions: what (do you do well)?
- **Capabilities**, in other words knowledge and skills: how?
- **Beliefs and values**: reinforcement, motivation, and permission: why?
- **Identity**: sense of self: who?
- **Mission / Purpose / Spirituality**: What is your deeper purpose and/or contribution to the world?

The levels in this NLP model indicate different degrees with which we can think, feel, know, and speak.

The lower levels contain trivial, concrete matters and thoughts.
The higher levels are more complex, more abstract, and almost always lead to more meaningful conversations, insights, and solutions.

Note: This honourslab focuses on level four and higher (beliefs and values/identity and Mission/Purpose/ Spirituality)

What can you use them for?

The logical levels are a useful tool for many purposes. They can, for example, be used to thinking about changes, to align conflicts, to create new insights by looking at a problem from a higher level, and to make changes at each level.

Sharp questions to move higher in the logical levels of this NLP model

Here you will find the right questions to move up in the logical levels of Bateson.

First level: Environment / Context

This is the lowest level. This is the location/context where you show it, and it is about concrete things that you can observe.

When you work at this level, you are facilitating.
– Peter Dalmeijer

Questions you can ask are:

- Where, when, and with whom (not)?
- Where am I?
- When do I do this?
- What is there to see?
- With whom am I?
- What do you respond to?
- What is the context?

Second level: Behavior

One level higher we find behavior. This is the only level that is measurable, and together with the environment level it is the only level that is visible. At this level, it ultimately has to happen.

You can work on this level by instructing.
– Peter Dalmeijer

Now we are already thinking in a completely different direction:

- What can I do?
- What do I (already) do?
- How do I do that?

- What are my actions?
- What can others observe about me?
- What is the result, sensorially perceptible?

Third level: Capabilities / Skills / Abilities

Now we speak about skills, capacities, talents, qualities, emotions, and virtues. Here we touch a person on an even deeper level.

You can work at this level by teaching.
– Peter Dalmeijer

It is an excellent idea to place encouragement and compliments at the capability level. When people want to pursue a dream, for example, they often hear criticism – and they are told not to do it. As a result, many people never make that big decision. Suppose someone wants to go abroad to start a new creative project, you can address that person based on his or her capacities:
"You seem like a motivated/dedicated/adventurous/determined person because you do that. It takes a lot of courage and bravery to go to a new place where you don't know the language and must leave everyone behind. You want to put your creativity into it."

Simpler ways to get information about this level – or to guide someone to this level – are the following questions:

- What can I do?
- What are my skills, regardless of whether I use them or not?
- What skills, virtues, capacities, and abilities do I have?
- What am I capable of?
- How can I do this next time?
- The how-question.
- What have I learned / what do I need to learn?
- What are my gifts?
- What are my core qualities and virtues?
- Which states of mind and emotions can I invoke?
- What do you need to be able to do to be {Peter}?
- What do you need to be able to do to perform {behavior}?
- Also ask the negative question: what can't you do? What are your inabilities?

Always use strength-based thinking. Think in skills/ capabilities/ competencies**.**

Fourth level: Values & Beliefs

Again, a complete step higher. On this level, changes take place most easily. Beliefs and values are drivers and provide energy to get moving.

When you coach at the level of values and beliefs, you inspire motivation
– …

You can also coach someone powerfully at this level if you use it in combination with the 'consistency principle.' If you first ask about someone's values and beliefs and then

mention the desired result, that person will agree with the solution. The values and beliefs must, however, be relevant to the solution. It's helpful to constantly ask yourself: what motivates this person?

There is also a high chance that beliefs are unconsciously present. By asking the questions of this model, you can make the beliefs conscious and clear.

Beliefs:

- Why do you do it this way?
- What do you believe in (about the goal)?
- What must you be convinced of in order to be able to do that? What must you believe in?
- What are you convinced of? Are you absolutely convinced of that?
- What do you know for sure?
  (and then: how do you know that? What do you base that on? For example: how do you know it is important for people to trust their own judgment? What are the experiences on which he bases his belief?)

Values:
The #1 question to know someone's values is: What do you find important?
For all questions about values: see this article on eliciting someone's values.

<u>Fifth level: Identity</u>

The identity level is one of the most powerful domains to move people to something.

Whoever works at identity level is an inspirer.
– Peter Dalmeijer

However, something important should be noted about this level: Of course, you can perfectly use 'identity' at a linguistic level. For example, to reach insights. We focus on concept of self and self-awareness. However, if we look deeper, you truly know your identity only when words cease and the self-concept dissolves. When we stop using words, we discover our authentic identity.

You can achieve this through meditation and silence. Only then will you discover that you are confusing the lower logical levels with your identity. If you attach words to your identity, it becomes a belief (again). For example: "I discovered that many of my beliefs about success were based on societal expectations rather than my personal values. From now on I will try to separate my identity from these imposed beliefs." Or: "I noticed that I believe I must always be busy to be valued. I began to let go of this belief and embraced moments of relaxation without guilt."

"What are the words that follow 'I am…'? Those two tiny words possess a powerful magic."
– Jeff Foster

Questions to reach the identity level linguistically:

- What does that say about me?
- Who am I?
- What role do I fulfill in this context?
- What role are you in here?
- How do I see myself?
- Metaphor: With what or who do you identify yourself?

Also questions regarding Personality characteristics like:

- What are some of your most important character traits?
- How would you describe yourself in a few words?
- What are your strongest character traits?
- What traits do you value most in others?
- What is a character trait you would like to improve?

You can identify yourself with all logical levels: I am a Dutch person, I am a copywriter, I am someone who can learn well, I am a creative person, I am an atheist, etc.

Sixth level: Mission/ Purpose/ Spirituality

We have arrived at the highest neurological level.

At the highest level, you are an awakener, and you discover what a person contributes to the world.
– Peter Dalmeijer

The universe is greater than identity, thus greater than every individual. Everyone is part of a larger whole, and at the same time everyone is a reflection of this larger whole.

Because mission is the highest level, this level contains the most power.

"I am not afraid. I was born to do this."
– Joan of Arc

It is a beautiful exercise to discover how your lower levels can support this highest level and to what extent they are congruent with your mission. If you change this level, the lower levels will automatically change as well. This effect also applies to all other levels. The mission shines through everything!

"The meaning of life is to find your gift; the purpose of life is to give it away."
– Pablo Picasso

It is also good to be aware of the question: can you discover your mission, or can you create your mission? If you create your mission, then you try to remain an invention of what you would like to be. This is a mismatch with yourself. If you discover your mission (which cannot be expressed in words), then you become aware of what you were already doing anyway. You can give expression to this, and that leads to congruence and spiritual development.

Questions on the mission level:

- What is your essence / heart's desire / longing? Your mission nourishes you, was there for you, and goes much further/deeper than you!
- What for (are you in this world)?
- What was your motivation for which you did it?
- What did you want to contribute by doing that?
- What is my effect on others? What do others ask of me?
- What do you want to mean for your environment?
- What is your dream? Calling? Which dream do I express?
- What makes your light bulb go on? (Suppose you were a lamp)
- Who else am I serving as a congruent person?
- What is the vision I live by or represent?
- What is the larger whole from which your inspiration arises?
- What is the meaning of your life?
- What do I want to mean for the environment of which I am part?
- What do you contribute to the world?
- For what greater purpose do I do this?
- Where does this come from?
- From what larger framework do I act?
- What am I realizing?
- What do I live for?
- What is my sense of purpose?
- What do you want to pass on to others with this?
- What is your goal for the future?
- Suppose this is the last day of your life. Ask yourself: Have I lived? Did I matter? Did I give love? Open, honest, and abundantly? Or did I hold everything back?

It is about becoming a pure channel that brings forth the beauty that is meant to move through you.

More about the functioning of the logical levels of Bateson

Some closing remarks about the functioning of this reflection model of Bateson.

- The higher the level, the greater the influence it has (on the lower levels). So be aware of this if you want to persuade and influence someone. The top level – mission – therefore has the greatest influence. "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how" (Nietzsche) and change. Viktor Frankl discovered during his imprisonment in Auschwitz that the prisoners who could no longer experience meaning in life were the first to be doomed.
- A solution is often not at the level where the problem is discovered, but at another level.
- Lower levels are easier to change than higher levels.
- The levels are dependent on each other.
- If you change something at a lower level, it may lead to a change at a higher level. If you change something at a higher level, it always leads to a change at a lower level.