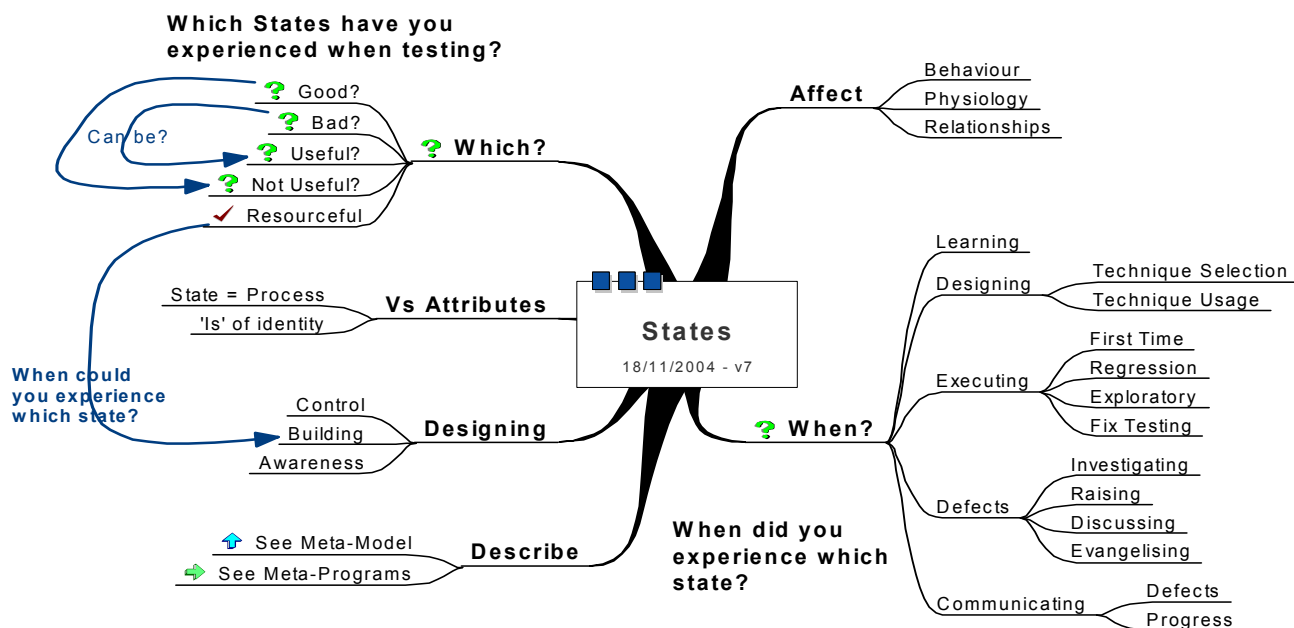# States

State: A condition or mode of being, as with regard to circumstances

States are one of the *inner* secrets of NLP, and only once you are initiated into the mysteries of the NLP mythos do you get told how important they are.

How many things have you not done well because you were not in the 'right mood'? Even though you applied the techniques, when you didn't 'feel like it', did it work out?

Have you heard "He doesn't have the technique but he has the right attitude and he's going for it?"

One of the keys to doing NLP well is – constructing the right state, getting in to the right state for the context, and maintaining the state. Many NLP interventions are based around changing a person's state in certain contexts.

Attributes vs States

Attribute: A quality or characteristic inherent in or ascribed to someone or something

Attributes for testing (A good tester should be ...) e.g. Curious, Tenacious, Courageous, Honest, Objective, Methodical

We *can* build a list of attributes that we can associate with a tester. *But* it is not enough to just name an attribute, a name is not the thing. An attribute is something that someone *has*. People *have* attributes in reserve, they don't display them all at the same time. An attribute manifests at different times. And if possible manifests at an appropriate time, and is manifested consciously and skillfully.

An NLP Assumption: The Map is not the territory

A State is something experienced - what having, and manifesting, attributes feels like,

> *Curiosity*:
> *When was the last time you have become curious about something? what was it? How did you become curious? How did you know you were curious?*

Attribute Identity
One of the many things that psychotherapy has identified as a problem for people is the identification with an attribute. "I'm a shy person", "I'm just not smart", "I'm not curious"

Korzybski [KOR1] calls this the 'is' of identity and in General Semantics - "Science and Sanity" in particular, removing the 'is' of identity is described as method for becoming more sane and aware.

The identification of this process, and removal of it from a person's language is a common element in the psychotheraputic process.

And so the attributes are converted in to states. "I feel shy". Made conditional "I feel shy at times". Made specific "I feel shy when I'm with people I don't know". Which can be moved on to "I sometimes feel shy when I'm with people I

don't know" and, by adding some responsibility for the state, can become "I sometimes choose to feel shy when I'm with people I don't know". Which is very different from "I'm a shy person".

When to have which states

The most obvious example of states that comes to mind is when dealing with defects.

If I am in a *bad* state when raising a defect then it can show in the writing that I use, I may use non-objective language, and emotive language. I may not think clearly about the way I'm writing the description and the defect may not be clear, I may not review the defect in a way that allows me to identify these flaws and I may end up writing a poor defect report..

Now the phrase 'a *bad* state 'doesn't really tell you anything about the state but one such state would be:

When I've found *another* simple defect in the software. I may be 'blaming' the developer by yabbering inside my head "... wasting my time, foisting poor quality software on the user without testing it first, such a basic error all they had to do was type this in..." yada yada yada. Everyone pretty much knows how to generate that state in them.

But it is not a conducive state for writing defect reports in. Other states which are not condusive to defect report writing:

* when I'm feeling tired and thinking about going home.

* When I'm thinking about the tests that I still have to run instead of the defect that I'm writing.

A conducive state, and a resourceful state, would be one that lets me focus on the defect objectively, so I'm looking at it dispassionately from a distance. A state that allows me to ask questions of the defect report to ensure it is complete. A state that allows me to evaluate and edit the language. I can't think of an obvious single name for that state since it contains a whole set of attributes, so that is my "Defect Raising State".

Maintaining State

In State Transition Diagrams we are used to seeing the system 'being' in a certain state, and then moving from one state to another in a very definite way, with no blur between the states. People don't always do that. Creating discrete states isn't always easy. States are actually a dynamic process: in software in that there is usually a loop, and unless some input occurs which causes us to change state then we keep the software in the same state.

When people maintain state, they do it the same way, we have a loop going and then some stimulus comes along and we choose to react to it and change state. And if we are not doing it discretely then we might even believe we are still in the same state and not notice the change. People are good like that.

State Control is one of the skills that underpins NLP and is something that NLP'ers practice.

* Can knowledge of a technique help get you in the right state?

* Can knowledge of a technique compensate for not being in the right state?

* Can a state compensate for lack of technique?

* Can the *right* state be made better?

Language used to describe states

This leads on to the Meta-Model and to Meta-Programmes

When we talk about states we are really talking about processes, and by naming them we are engaging in a process of nominilisation, and when we combine states and name them then we are engaging in a process of generalisation.

Exercises Relating to State

List some attributes that are important for a tester:

List some states that you have experienced during testing:

Describe some of the important attributes listed above as states:

- name the state,
- can you feel it now? what do you have to do to feel it?
- describe what that state feels like,
- give an example context of when you experienced it during testing
- is it a good state or a bad state?
- did it help you or hinder you?
- were there other states mixed in with that one or was it discrete?

List some states that are important for testers and when they are important:

References

[KOR1] Science and Sanity, Alfred Korzybski,

  related web links:

- online version [http://www.esgs.org/uk/art/sands.htm],
- institute of General Semantics [http://www.generalsemantics.org/]