



Secrets of a Logical Processor (LP)

Shannon Nelson

Abstract

The LP style is action oriented. The behaviors that accompany it are visible for all to see. The interpretation of these behaviors are often filtered through the lens of the other strategic styles. This gives rise to misunderstandings. The behaviors become mysterious. This article seeks to lay bare the "secrets" of these often observed (and misunderstood) behaviors.

Secrets of a Logical Processor (LP)

By: Shannon Nelson

Introduction

Most of the people you will meet in the course of your life will be Logical Processors (i.e., LPs). Society has more roles for this style than any other. They keep the social machine running and provide the environment within which other styles can prosper. They are the bedrock for large-scale organization.

Organizational Engineering outlines the character of the LP. However, the descriptions do not do justice to the depth and scope of the behaviors or the forces that guide them. I am an LP who has been involved in Organizational Engineering for 3 years. I am able to give some texture and depth to the barebones descriptions offered in the formal books, papers and reports.

Whether you are an LP or use another style, LPs are important to you. You are likely to be dependent on an LP. You may have married one. You might have one (or more) working for you. Or, you may be working for an LP. Somewhere in your firm there is an LP who makes sure you get your paycheck on time. You cannot avoid us. We are everywhere. While you may not be one of us, you need us. Knowing what makes us tick will go far toward making your life better.

The place to begin is to define what we are talking about. Organizational Engineering teaches that we all have elements of all four styles within our behavioral repertoire. To some degree this manual applies to all of us, however, the real target is the committed LP.

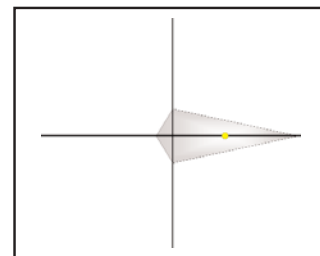
The LP Style

A Logical Processor uses a structured method and an action mode. The structured method seeks and accepts information that fits with a plan already in mind. The action mode focuses on "doing" things rather than thinking about them. The LP's method and mode starts a "behavioral cascade" (Salton, 2003). This gives rise to predictable behaviors.

We all have an element of LP. However, this article will focus on people whose strategic profile resembles Graphic 1. Secondary tendencies may obscure pronounced LP tendencies by starting parallel cascades. Here the person's secondary style is distant. The LP behaviors and tendencies stand out in high relief.

The LP behavior cascade that is launched by this kind of profile can produce complex patterns. This manual only covers some of the major elements. The place to start is with the most dominant feature of the LP, their response to change.

Graphic 1



Coping with Change

The LPs strategy does not like change. Change is defined as anything that disrupts established patterns. The LP uses patterns (i.e., structured method) to reach tangible goals (i.e., action mode). Change disrupts the method and negatively impacts their ability to fully realize results with efficiency, effectiveness and certainty.

Like any other human being, LPs can and do change. However, they do this in an LP way. They want to know that the change will actually work. They need to know exactly how it is to be done. They want the time to see if the change impacts any allied methods they may be using. This is a measured, deliberate and logical methodology. It is the LP way.

Not only can LPs accept change, they can also initiate it. The LP's central interest is in efficiency, effectiveness and certainty. Like anyone else, they can sometimes see ways that things can be done better. Usually this involves improvements and refinements on existing processes. Constant refinement and improvement can yield titanic results. For example, Japanese automakers introduced their products to the American market in the 1970s. Their cars were cheaply made. Then they began refining both the processes and the product. Within 10 years the Japanese had overtaken their Detroit counterparts—one small step at a time. Today, Japanese automobiles are recognized as being among the finest in the world. Small steps do not have to yield small results.

Time is one key to the LP's change

equation. Sorting through the effects of change on the multiple structures the LP uses can take a while. The other key is for the LP to understand the how of the change. These two "keys" interact. Explaining the how of the change enables the LP to quickly sort through the total effects the change might have on all of the things that the LP is involved in.

A personal example can help illustrate the LP's response to change. I began my career at Professional Communications Inc. (PCI) as a part-time helper. Initially, expectations were not high. This gave me time to learn the ropes in a non-threatening environment. I learned both the process and the product to a point where I began to see where improvements could be made.

As I became more confident, I began to carefully reach out beyond my current responsibilities. Dr. Gary Salton showed me the subroutines that affected the changes I was considering. Since he did not hire me as a programmer, his expectations were low. He pretty much told me where to go in the program, what it did and then answered questions I had along the way. This explicit, factual and emotionless posture is exactly what I needed. I began making improvements. Things got faster and our products got better.

As time passed, I found even more things that could be improved. I addressed our accounting system, client communications and support material in the same manner. Like the Japanese automakers, the effects were cumulative. Everything began to fit together better. PCI is an R&D firm whose focus has been almost exclusively on creating

giant breakthroughs. My initiatives helped PCI to develop a "production" arm that put those breakthroughs in the hands of people who could benefit from them.

The point of the story is that LPs can accept and initiate change. These are not the giant leaps of the RI or the in-depth insights of the HA. However, they can be every bit as important. The trick to realizing them is to understand the conditions needed to get them. For the LP, these conditions are:

1. Time: Do not expect things overnight (that is the RS turf). Allow time for the LP to sort through things, many of which you may not even know exist.

2. Understanding: You can expedite the process by delving into how the change is to be done. The more precise, the better. Knowing exactly what is needed helps the LP to fit the change into the other things that may be going on.

The LP can handle changes that meet the natural conditions in which the LP works. The problems arise when the LP is expected to perform on limited information. Problems can also arise when things are allowed to compound beyond the LP's processing level.

Snowed Under

LPs are people who would agree that the "devil is in the details." The strength of the LP style is that it is able to handle massive quantities of detail. The vulnerability of the style is that this capacity has limits.

The behavioral expressions of reaching capacity differ by age and expe-

rience. Young and inexperienced people can become overwhelmed. They can literally freeze up. I have felt this condition when work had piled up beyond my ability to handle it. It seems like you should be doing everything at once. Everything appears to have equal importance. Your mind shifts from one thing to another. Nothing gets done. Frustration builds since an LP defines success and self-worth in terms of things that get done. Frustration feeds back and compounds the condition. It is an ugly situation for all involved.

Over time the LP develops processes (LPs love process) that handle the situation. In an earlier issue of "JOE", Rebecca Wilkinson (Wilkinson, 2000) described how she used a "bit at a time" strategy to overcome this condition. In my case, I reached out and got others to help me devise a strategy that would work given my circumstances. In other cases I have seen LPs simply ignore the excess work. They literally impose their plan on reality and proceed as if reality did not exist.

A point to be made here is that LPs do have limits. When these limits are encountered, the response of the LP can take various forms. Some of these will be more dysfunctional than others. However, all will be ways of returning the LP to some form of stability and predictability.

If the LP maintains their style as they mature (remember, styles can change) they figure out that this condition will reoccur. They tend to develop standard ways of handling the condition. The exact form this takes will depend on the environment in which they exist.

For example, have you ever met a retail clerk, bank teller or doctor who bristles at your "out of the ordinary" request? Have you ever talked to a telephone customer care rep who keeps repeating the same resolution method that you have rejected three times? Does your wife or husband seem to fail to grasp that your common situation has changed? These can be examples of an LP who is attempting to maintain order. The environment in which they work has given explicit or tacit approval to this response. It may not be ideal for the organization, but it works for the LP. They will use what works.

The "take home" from these stories is that it is to your benefit to be alert to capacity conditions. When they occur, reach out and help devise a process that will allow the LP to overcome the condition in a way that meets their needs. Remember, an LP gets satisfaction from completion. The method devised has to provide for a stream of opportunities to get things done.

When attempting this strategy, resist the tendency to use your own style in resolving the issue. For example, an RI is likely to offer new, untested ways of doing things. The LP is looking for things that already work, not for things that *might* work. An RS will tend to dismiss everything but the immediate. This will fail when applied to a person who needs to know where everything fits. An HA will tend to sketch a conceptual outline. The LP needs operational specification.

A second "take home" arising from the above observations is that the LP must be addressed on their terms, not yours. If attempts are made to impose a

foreign solution, you may encounter another secret of the LP—classification.

Classification

Social interaction is based on expectations. Your expectations of the other person's response tends to set the tone for the behaviors that you will exhibit. For example, if you expect the other person to be supportive, it is likely that you will take a rather open posture. On the other hand, if you expect the other person to be critical, you will probably adopt a more defensive stance.

The LP tends to use their successful rule-based methods in all aspects of their lives. This also applies to their expectations of you. If you are a strong RI and tend to flitter from one idea to another, it is likely that a strong LP will classify you as "a bit scatterbrained." If you are an RS who tends to react quickly it is likely that the LP will classify you as impulsive and, perhaps, sloppy. The highly committed HA may be classified as lazy since they tend to ponder rather than act.

The issue here is that once someone has been classified it is very difficult to change the LP's mind. This happens even when the person exhibits behaviors that run counter to the LP's labeling. For example, I had an occasion where I witnessed an individual asking questions that appeared to me to be superfluous. The ideas that were offered seemed to be speculative and unrealistic. I classified this person as flaky. Later, I had occasion to witness this individual doing things that were truly impressive. Yet, in spite of this direct contradiction, I found myself still thinking of this per-

son as a bit odd and undisciplined. I knew what was going on and yet could not seem to stop myself.

This classification tendency is merely a derivative of the general tendency of the LP toward structure. It is an efficient and effective way to select from the repertoire of behaviors you have available. Unfortunately, it is not always accurate. The "take home" from this observation is that you should make every effort to get off on the right foot with the LP. If you do not, you could have a devil of a time recasting yourself in a more favorable light.

While misclassification is always an issue with an LP, it is unlikely to lead to outright hostility. The reason for this lies in another secret of the LP—avoidance.

Conflict Avoidance

The committed LP will go out of their way to avoid open conflict. They will feel the anger. They will experience resentment. They may even seethe inside with rage. Yet they will try not to confront the situation directly. The reason again lies in the implications of the LP style.

The committed LP values certainty of outcome and knowing exactly what to do in any situation. Arguments and disputes are inherently uncertain. Just what will be said is unknown. The dynamics of disagreements are laden with emotions, a condition the LP dislikes. Overall, it is less painful to avoid conflict than to engage in it.

When conflict cannot be avoided another secret of the LP becomes visible. All of the emotions that have been suppressed can suddenly be released. The great storage and retrieval abilities

of the LP apply to emotions as well as facts and processes. The result can be rather startling and difficult for all involved.

An example of the durability of emotions for an LP can be drawn from the personal experience of an old friend. This individual has been married to the same woman for many years. His wife's LP approach has been consistent from the beginning of their relationship. Like any other marriage, there have been bumps in the road. When a new one occurs, my friend reports that his wife resurfaces similar transgressions that occurred over 30 years ago. To his wife, they are as vivid as if they happened yesterday. The latest wrongdoing is added to the litany as further evidence of thoughtlessness, insensitivity and/or purposeful intent. LPs can sometimes forgive but they seldom forget.

The "take home" from this secret of the LP is the adage that "what you see is what you get" may not apply. A real human being exists below the measured, deliberate and logical exterior the LP presents to the world. In work situations, you will usually be better off complying with the LP's reluctance to engage in conflict than trying to resolve it by "letting it all hang out."

Conflict has another effect on an LP. It interrupts a work stream. More than any other style, the LP needs to have long, unbroken periods where attention can be focused

Unbroken Streams

The LP invests heavily in creating structures that work. These typically involve step-by-step procedures that start at the beginning and stop at the

end. They usually represent the most efficient and effective way of getting something done. This outcome resonates well with the LP who finds great satisfaction in seeing tangible results from their effort.

Viewed as an economic model, the LP invests in structures and gets their return by applying them in the real world. Working in long, unbroken streams allows the LP to optimize their return on an investment. It is a natural outcome of the process they use to navigate life. "Do one thing at a time and do it right" could be the LP's model.

The detailed, step-by-step methods used in the structure gives the LP an uncanny ability to focus. The world can be in turmoil and they continue to work. Paper airplanes can be flying every which way and they continue to work. Phones can be ringing and they continue to work. The ability of the LP to concentrate in a single purpose manner is usually something for other styles to behold.

Another LP secret resides in their way of working—interruptions are VERY costly. Typically, an LP will develop a rhythm when executing one of their procedures. It is almost like a dance. One thing follows another almost effortlessly. Break that rhythm and the LP must work to reestablish it.

Compare this to an RS or RI, who uses an unpatterned method. Interruptions are no problem. They usually do not know what they are going to do next and so they lose little if their stream is interrupted. The HA is in a little worse shape. They are using structure but it is of a conceptual variety. They are focused on relationships.

There are fewer of these relationships than the literal specifics of the LP's world. Interruptions are costly but not nearly as costly as they are to the committed LP.

The "take home" from this aspect of the LP's behavioral repertoire is that other styles should not infer that the effect of an interruption on the LP is the same as they will experience. It is most assuredly higher. Frequent interruptions can be expected to result in frustration. This is an emotional response and it will go into the LP's secret storehouse to be retrieved at a later point. Limiting interruptions will pay dividends in terms of the amount of work done, as well as exposure to the onslaught if the emotional dam were ever to break.

Reality

Everyone knows what reality is. Unfortunately, it is not the same for everyone. To the RI, reality is what could be. To an RS it is what will be. To an HA it is what might be. To an LP it is what is. Literally, it is what exists NOW.

Once again, this is the natural outcome of the LP's method and mode preferences. The detailed, step-by-step processes of the LP can only be applied to literals—things that exist with known and certain characteristics. To the LP, the reality of the other styles is merely "pie in the sky."

This view of reality exposes another secret of the LP. The things that excite and inspire the other styles are merely distractions to the LP. The leadership strategy of envisioning the future (Kouzes and Posner, 1995) falls on deaf

ears when applied to the LP. The speculations of the RI seem more like ravings than opportunities. The options of the HA are a bit more real but of no interest until one is put into play.

LPs are bright people too. They understand that the future begins with an idea. The reason LPs are not moved by future possibilities is that these do not fit into their structured framework. As a strong LP, what would you have me do—put together a detailed procedure for programming a computer that has not yet been invented? How about developing a medical protocol for a drug that has not yet been developed? My focus is on doing things today. I am comfortable leaving tomorrow to people whose strategy better suits them to the vague and nebulous world of possibilities. If I enter that world I lose traction in the world *today*.

The "take home" from this observation on LP behavior is to focus on the present when dealing with LPs. We know that the future is created by ideas. However, we are not prepared to appropriately assess or move them toward realization. It is best to locate this activity elsewhere. If you choose to move it to our zone of influence, you can expect to encounter the next "secret" of the LP—the half-empty glass.

Half-Empty Glass Syndrome

LPs are born pessimists. They tend to focus on all of the things that could go wrong. This is a natural consequence of using processes to guide behavior. These processes must anticipate and correct for all of the things that can possibly go wrong. Being able to see the "bad" things that can happen is a pre-

condition developing these effective processes.

The processes an LP uses are not confined to the task oriented procedures that surround work. The approach is applied to life in general. In my case, I have a system for cleaning house. For me it is the right way. It considers all aspects of a clean house that are relevant in my family. Similar processes that I have developed or chosen govern other aspects of my life. I know these processes work, and they are an efficient and effective way of living.

The LP will tend to assess proposals and ideas as if they were to become future processes they will have to live with. This is not an unreasonable posture. If these proposals were to come true it is likely that they will become standard fare. The people who invented them will move on to more new ideas. The LP will be stuck living with them day in and day out.

Since the LP views things as potential processes, it is natural for them to focus on all of the things that might cause that process to fail. This gives us a bit of a "wet blanket" image. We seem to always focus on the downside. This is because we really do. It is worth pointing out that this posture is just as accurate at seeing the glass as half full. Both postures are looking at half a glass. The true picture is probably obtained in the interaction of people who see the glass as half full and those who see it as half empty.

The "take home" from this section is to avoid superlatives and optimistic scenarios when attempting to enlist or engage the LP. A better strategy is to take a cold, logical approach. Cover all

of the bases. List the exposures and how they will be handled. You will be talking the LP's language if you use this approach. Even when using this approach you should expect the LP to find exposures and omissions. When they do, consider their contribution as a positive. You can now prepare for something that could have hit you unexpectedly in the future.

Another "take home" is that you should probably not involve the committed LP in the early stages of idea generation. During this phase only the broad parameters are at issue. The LP's natural focus is on detail. Introducing the LP too soon could prematurely close options.

The downside perspective of the LP supports the final "secret" of the LP to be covered in this paper—the search for certainty

Certainty

The highly committed LP lives in a world governed by rules, processes and normative behavior. This is not the world of a robot. These are methods the LP chooses as a way to lead their life. Other styles will choose other ways. These are no better or worse, just different. However, one consequence of an ordered world is the implied need to know what is going to happen. This predictability is the major reason this life pattern was chosen in the first place.

Perfect predictability is certainty. A natural outcome of the LP process is that the LP will come to value certainty as good, in and of itself. To a highly committed LP, certainty is more important than optimality. In other words, having half a loaf with 100% certainty

is better than having the whole loaf with 97% certainty. The LP does not live in a probabilistic world.

The way this comes about is not difficult to see. When the focus is on detail it is difficult to assign a probability to each exposure that is uncovered. A rational, if inaccurate, course is to assume that all vulnerabilities will have the same consequence—a failure of the process. If everything is vital, the only good solution is one that fully satisfies all possible contingencies. "Almost certain" bets are foregone—almost is not good enough. A probabilistic optimality is sacrificed for a literal certainty.

The "take home" from this behavioral observation is that you will fare better if you provide the LP with a certain world within which to live. LPs are not stupid. We know that the world is uncertain. However, if we do not have to provide for this uncertainty our lives are much more comfortable and productive. The other styles are better able to accommodate variability. They should assume it. Shielding the LP from all but those things they must know to make important decisions in their lives is generally a good idea.

Summary

The picture that has been painted of the LP conforms to my personal experience. It also matches what I know from talking with other LPs. Perhaps most importantly, it is firmly grounded in Organizational Engineering theory. The behaviors are really only an elaboration of the basic behavioral cascade that makes all of our behaviors, regardless of style, predictable. The characteristics cited arise because they must arise.

The LP style is a vital component of the society which we all share. Without the consistency the LP style brings in its wake, civilization and culture would not be possible. This alone is enough to merit the respect of other views and postures. The fact that the absolute amount of work getting done using the LP style probably exceeds that of any other style, only reinforces the basis of respect. The characteristics I have cited are not good or bad. They just are. If they are discomforting to people using other styles, it is simply the reverse side of the same coin that produces the value which these other styles partake.

The LP posture is not suitable for all jobs. It is also not unchangeable. Over time I have assumed increasing responsibilities at PCI. I have been edged into the world of uncertainty, forward planning and probabilistic decision making. As this happens I can literally feel the LP component of my strategic profile slipping away. The money is better and the challenges are exhilarating. However, I also feel the loss of a very comfortable existence. In my case, the trade has been made. For me, it was right. It may not be right for everyone. Changing from an LP to another style is not "growth," it is simply change. Those that choose to remain LP's will continue to command my respect and I hope they also command yours.

Author

Shannon C. Nelson is Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Professional Communications Inc. She is a Certified Organizational Engineer and has extensively interacted with people of all levels and all strategic styles on all manner of organizational issues. This exposure combined with her strong theoretical grounding and her highly committed LP posture has given her a unique perspective which she shares in this article.

Ms. Nelson can be reached in her Ann Arbor, MI office at (734) 662-0250.

Bibliography

- Kouzes, James M. and Posner, Barry Z. (1995). The Leadership Challenge, (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Salton, Gary J. (2003, October 6 & 7) The Behavior Cascade. Organizational Engineering Seminar, Ann Arbor, MI.
- Wilkinson, Rebecca (2000). Navigating a Strategic Style Transisiton, Journal of Organizational Engineering 1, (1).

©2003, Organizational Engineering Institute. All rights reserved.

Organizational Engineering Institute

101 Nickels Arcade
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Phone: 734-662-0250

Fax: 734-662-0838

E-Mail: OEInstitute@aol.com

ISSN: 1531-0566

For additional copies of this article please visit
www.oeinstitute.org

“I Opt”® is a trademarks of Professional Communications, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America