



# CUTTINGS

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## Cognitive Science and Change

**H**uman behaviour in the workplace doesn't work the way many executives think it does, which helps explain why many leadership efforts and change initiatives fail. Tapping into several key findings in neuroscience research can shed some light according to David Rock and Jeffrey Schwartz in a recent article:

**Change is pain:** when our habits are challenged, error messages are created and there is intense brain activity that over-rides our rational thought. We respond emotionally and impulsively – and therefore tend to avoid these feelings.

**Behaviourism doesn't work:** the carrot and stick approach works in the short term only, but still prevails in most organisations

**Persuasion doesn't work in the way we typically practice it:** as managers we often point out the right way and correct errors, which invokes a defensive reaction in the brain. But when we solve problems for ourselves there is a rush of brain activity that reinforces rather than resists.

**Focus is the key:** Attention continually reshapes the patterns of the brain creating a physiological difference which results in us seeing the world in a particular way. People who practice a specialty every day literally think differently, through different sets of connections, than do people who don't.

**Expectations shape reality:** People's mental maps, their theories, expectations, and attitudes, play a more central role in human perception than previously understood – the placebo effect has recently been shown to reduce pain by 28.4%, equivalent to a dose of morphine. So two customer service operators can hold different mental maps of the same customers. The first, seeing customers as troubled children, would hear only complaints; the second, seeing them as busy but intelligent professionals, would hear valuable suggestions for improvement.

The impact of mental maps suggests that large-scale behaviour change requires a large-scale change in mental maps. This in turn requires some kind of event or experience that allows people to provoke themselves, in effect, to change their attitudes and expectations more quickly and dramatically than they normally would.

**Insights are personal and necessary:** Being told is not the same as discovering it yourself. Employees need to develop new mental models themselves through insight. They need to have an "ah-ha" moment. Leaders wanting to change the way people think or behave should learn to recognise, encourage, and deepen their team's insights.

**Practice:** For new insights to take root, they need to be revisited. Attention must be focused on new ideas repeatedly for a long enough of time.

### Focus on Two Things

The theme is that when managers introduce change, they should use the knowledge about how the brain functions to facilitate the effort.

First they should use solution focused questioning that helps people come up with new ways of looking at the situation or thinking about it. Rather than focusing the brain on why something doesn't work focus on what would make it work.

Secondly, they should use the power of attention wisely. Managers can try to repeatedly bring the person's attention around to the behaviour or action that is desired. Having one conversation isn't enough.

What the brain wants to do is to focus on solutions instead of problems, let it come to its own answers, and keep it focused on its insight. In essence we need to think more like coaches. Coaches are good at helping players see the game in new ways and change their behaviour. Great coaches demonstrate a technique or a play so others can visualize it. They stop the play to focus on a particular aspect.

What you say and how you say it can have a major impact on whether someone focuses on solutions, develops new insights or simply retains their old mindset.

*The Neuroscience of Leadership, David Rock and Jeffrey Schwartz strategy+business Summer 2006,*

## Improved cross-cultural communication increases productivity

A study by Accenture, found that adopting cross-cultural communication training can increase productivity by 26 percent, on average, where organisations have outsourced globally.

Two thirds of all respondents said they had experienced issues of miscommunication in their global operations, even higher for those not offering any cross-cultural training.

Chief factors causing problems were different communications styles (76 percent), different approaches to completing tasks (53 percent), different attitudes toward conflict (44 percent) and different decision-making styles (44 percent).

So that while physical obstacles to global working have largely been

resolved, the soft issues continue to present challenges.

Long-term savings of both time and money are clearly possible if cross-cultural communication issues are identified – and resolved – at an early stage.

*Improved cross-cultural communication increases global sourcing productivity, Accenture, July 2006*

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# Snippets

A collection of thought provokers and quotations ...

- ✂ “Thought is a system. That system not only includes thought and feelings, but it includes the state of the body; it includes the whole of society – as thought is passing back and forth between people in a process by which thought evolved from ancient times.” *David Bohm*
- ✂ “We must welcome the future, remembering that soon it will be the past; and we must respect the past remembering that once it was all that was humanly possible.” *George Santayana*
- ✂ “In organizations, real power and energy is generated through relationships. The patterns of relationships and the capacities to form them are more important than tasks, functions, roles, and positions.” *Margaret Wheatley*
- ✂ “It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.” *Upton Sinclair*
- ✂ “There are eternal laws that cannot be erased, even if they are not written” *Antigone, Sophocles*
- ✂ “Each of us speaks, moves, thinks and feels in a different way, each according to the image of ourselves that we have built up over the years. In order to change our mode of action, we must change the image of ourselves that we carry within us.” *Dr Moshe Feldenkrais*
- ✂ “Experience is a flame that lightens only those whom it has burnt” *French saying*
- ✂ “People’s minds are like parachutes, they only function when they are open” *Leanne Hastie*
- ✂ “Questioning is the door of knowledge” *Irish saying*
- ✂ “It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers” *James Thurber*
- ✂ Be careful of your thoughts, for your thoughts become your words;  
Be careful of your words, for your words become your actions;  
Be careful of your actions, for your actions become your habits;  
Be careful of your habits, for your habits become your character;  
Be careful of your character; for your character becomes your destiny. *Author unknown*
- ✂ And two stories from web postings:

## ✂ Perspective

One day, the father of a very wealthy family took his son on a trip to the country with the express purpose of showing him how poor people live.

They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm of what would be considered a very poor family.

On their return from their trip, the father asked his son, “How was the trip?”

“It was great, Dad.”

“Did you see how poor people live?” the father asked.

“Oh yeah,” said the son.

“So, tell me, what did you learn?” asked the father.

The son answered: “I saw that we have one dog and they had four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden and they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lanterns in our garden and they have the stars at night. Our patio reaches to the front yard and they have the whole horizon. We have a small piece of land to live on and they have fields that go beyond our sight. We have servants who serve us, but they serve others. We buy our food, but they grow theirs. We have walls around our property to protect us, they have friends to protect them.”

Then his son added, “Thanks Dad for showing me how poor we are.”

*Isn't perspective a wonderful thing?*

## ✂ Babemba

In South Africa the Babemba tribe treats people who step out of line in a remarkable way. Instead of using judgment and punishment, the tribe uses love and appreciation.

If a member acts irresponsibly or unjustly, he or she is placed at the centre of the village, alone. The entire tribe gathers in a large circle around the violator. Then each person in the tribe, regardless of age, speaks to the accused, one at a time, recalling all the good things the person has done in his or her lifetime.

All the individual's positive attributes, good deeds, strengths and kindnesses are recited carefully and at length. No one is permitted to fabricate, exaggerate or be facetious. This often lasts for several days and does not end until everyone is drained of every positive comment.

At the end, the circle is broken and the person is symbolically and literally welcomed back into the tribe with joyful celebration.

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**Internal Consulting Skills** –focusing on consulting and interpersonal skills for internal consultants.

London, UK: 23-24 November

**Focus on Influence**—developing interpersonal skills, reflection, insight, responsibility and flexibility in achieving goals with others.

Netherlands 21-24 November (a few places only still available)

**Developing Managerial Excellence**

Kuala Lumpur: 7-11 August;

27 November-1 December

**Negotiation & Conflict Management**

Kuala Lumpur: 21-25 August

**Mastering People Management and Decision Making**

Dubai: 9-13 September

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Dubai: 16-20 September

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