

Leadership Brain | “we perceive the world according to our wiring”¹



Research within the field of neuroscience is stimulating an alternative way of thinking about leadership development. There are times when we all assume others share our view of the world but in reality the multitude of possible connections between neurons in the brain results in us all holding very different perspectives. These connections are shaped by both environmental factors and by our experiences. When we encounter a new experience the brain compares this data to its existing neural pathways, or mental maps, attempting to identify a fit between new data and existing frameworks. The creation of these new neural pathways is less energy efficient than following an old habituated path and the brain can tire easily.

Assuming other peoples' brains work in the same way as ours can lead to complications when leading others. Our brains will go to extreme lengths to defend our existing mental maps negatively impacting change efforts within organisations. The reality is that change is hard because:

- Change requires you to rewire your brain
- When external realities change, people's internal realities do not change as quickly.

The ability of the brain to create new connections and to 'rewire' itself is neuroplasticity. This does not just happen when life changing events occur but on a daily basis when you experience something for the first time, for example: taking a different route to work, visiting a new client, replacing your computer or phone with a different make or model. Repetition then facilitates ensuring these new connections are stable and helps to create new habituated ways of achieving results.

With this understanding of brain functioning, how then do we help people to achieve change at work?

Allowing others to identify new ways of working and new approaches to problems allows for the development of new wiring. This essentially involves solution focused working rather than being constrained by problems. Helping people identify their existing mental maps and create new ones is an important skill for leaders to develop. Similarly, creating the right environment for this to happen is critical to its success.

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References

¹Rock, D. (2006), *Quiet Leadership; six steps to transforming performance at work*. HarperCollins, New York

