The Neuroscience of Leadership

Improving Organizations by Understanding the Brain

Dr. David Rock
Cofounder, NeuroLeadership Institute
CEO, NeuroLeadership Group

NeuroLeadership.Org NeuroLeadership.Com

Why the brain matters

People are thinking for a living.
Or trying to influence other's thinking.
All of this happens in the brain.

What isn’t budging much...

Improving self awareness of leaders
Lifting the quality of managers
Increasing engagement
Leading change

Change effectiveness

1995 = 30%
2000 = 30%
2005 = 30%
2010 = 30%

McKinsey Quarterly, 2010
NeuroLeadership Institute

Annual summit  Journal  Certificate, Post-Graduate & Masters Programs

Informing HR, OD, L&D, Change Management and related communities

What is NeuroLeadership?

The neuroscience of:

• Making decisions & solving problems
• Staying cool under pressure
• Collaborating with others
• Facilitating change

What brain research does

Deepens human skill development,

with more people,

at more senior levels.

A real challenge for leaders

Level of Importance

Individual  Line manager  Manager of managers  Executive

Technical skills  Self & social awareness  Capacity for self & social awareness
Circuits for goals v people

Being goal-focused switches off the circuits for thinking in terms of people.

Spunt & Lieberman (in press)

Four surprises

1. The rational is overrated
2. We’ve got emotions backward
3. Social issues are primary
4. Attention changes the brain

Working memory limitations

Understand
Decide
Recall
Memorize
Inhibit

Respect attention

6,000 workers were asked where they do their best thinking.

10% said ‘at work’.
39% said ‘at home’.
59% said first thing in the morning.
Respect attention

What is the optimum physical office environment?

‘People with control over the design and layout of their workspace were 32% more productive’

Most problems aren’t solved rationally

In the lab, 60% of problems are solved in a way that people can’t explain

The four faces of insight

1. Awareness 2. Reflection
3. Insight 4. Action

Rock (2006)
2. Reflection

- Quiet
- Internally focused
- Positive
- Not trying to actively solve the problem

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The skittish limbic system

The brain’s organizing principle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Away</th>
<th>Toward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>Reward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem focused</td>
<td>Solution focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>Approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extend</td>
<td>Contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunnel vision</td>
<td>Global view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data focused</td>
<td>Connection focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengaged</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bad is stronger than good

Away

Toward

Threat

Reward

Threat responses

• Reduce subtle perception
• Reduce PFC resources
• Reduce insights
• Activate accidental connections
• Increase ‘why not’

Emotional regulation

Suppression

• Same or more arousal
• Bad memory
• Others uncomfortable

Cognitive change

• Less arousal
• No change to memory
• No affect on others

"The boss put his picture up to inspire us. But it just isn’t having that effect on me."
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Suppression       Reappraisal

- 50                + 50

Optimism          Environmental Mastery
Positive Relationships
Life Satisfaction

Gross (2005)

Cyberball

Exclusion
The deeply social brain

Social pain = physical pain

Status

1
2
3
4
5

The brain is a prediction machine.

Uncertainty arouses the limbic system.

The deeply social brain

Away
Threat
Toward
Reward

Status
Certainty
Autonomy
Relatedness
Fairness

Rock (2008)
The brain likes to be able to predict and have a say in the future. A feeling of having a choice dramatically impacts stress levels.

Friend or foe
Trust or distrust
Connect or don’t connect

Foe is the default

Brain regions associated with primary rewards – food, pleasant touch or pleasant memories, money, a picture of a loved one - those same regions were active when people received fair offers, compared to unfair offers of equal level.

Golnaz Tabibnia, UCLA

Your SCARF Order

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
Multiplying and offsetting

Away
Threat

Toward
Reward

Status
Certainty
Autonomy
Relatedness
Fairness

Rock (2008)

Implications of SCARF

• Engagement
• Leadership practices
• Organizational change
• Motivation
• Incentives
• Managing performance
• Teams & collaboration

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How brain research helps

Adaptive behavior
Integrated brain
Self-regulation capacity
Language for mental experience
Willingness to change
Brain research
An important disclaimer
Learning about your brain can be addictive.

We think it’s a positive addiction.

With similar benefits to mindfulness training.

A challenge…

When will we make the same breakthroughs in the way we relate to each other, as we have made in technology?

Theodore Zeldin, Philosopher

Thank you!

David@NeuroLeadership.com