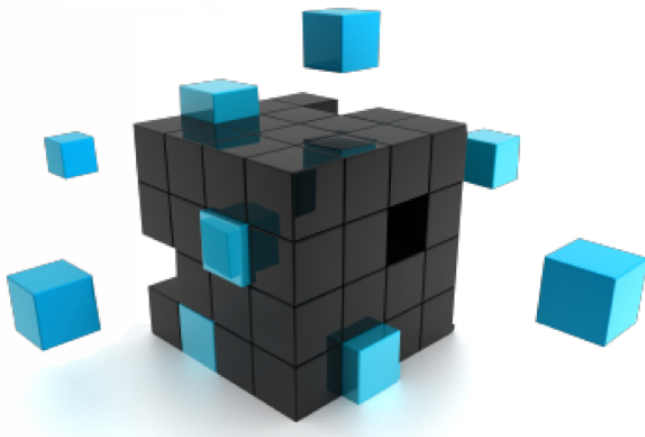


Reprogramming the Business Brain



Abstract

Companies are continually in a state of change. But change remains a challenge and few companies navigate the process and achieve the outcomes they want. Despite the evolution of change management practice about 70% of change initiatives still fail. And the change struggles exert a heavy human and financial toll on organisations.

We believe success can be significantly improved by leveraging brain plasticity and real world simulations that prime business brains to change, literally overnight.

Introduction

Can you REALLY reprogram your brain overnight? And why would you want to?

You may have heard that some breakthroughs in Neuroscience postulate that it is now possible to reprogram one's brain in the span of a sleep cycle, literally overnight.

The new world of Neuroscience could soon replace the failing "science" of Change Management. In fact, since this branch of Neuroscience deals with human behavior in an industrial setting, it applies equally well to all forms of business disciplines involving performance improvement such as Human Resources, Operations, Strategy, Innovation, Technology Implementation, New Product Introduction, Organizational Effectiveness, Business Development, the list is endless.

How does it work?

A few of us in the business of helping organizations optimize performance, reduce cost, increase market share and achieve better results have been disenchanted with the "science" of Change Management for years, and figured that there had to be a better way to implement change quickly and permanently – words that are not traditionally found in the same sentence with Change Management.

Let me explain the REAL and LASTING difference that these new developments in Neuroscience promise to deliver - overnight.

Countless articles have been written the failure of Change Management in all the top business publications for the last two decades. Gartner's industry analysts recently reported that "a staggering 55 to 70 percent of CRM projects fail to meet their objectives."

Scientists are critical of the Change Management field too. "The Change literature has been characterized as a few theoretical propositions, repeated without additional data or development, a few bits of homey advice reiterated without proof or disproof; and a few sturdy empirical observations quoted with reverence but without refinement or explication." [3]

To be fair, there are lots of moving parts in any Change Management initiative. There are many factors that can screw the process up, like lack of clear goals, a poor needs analysis, insufficient project management, middle management and front line worker 'resistance', inflexible culture, and so on. However, these causes when fixed are not enough to make the desired change happen. Something is missing.

This is a big problem. The 2004 CHAOS report found total U.S. Project waste to be \$55 billion (in lost dollar value and project overruns). [4] No wonder many decision makers are averse to contractors and change projects! Organizations of all sizes fail every year because they do not adapt quickly enough to changing times.

The problem is: OUR BRAINS. Are you ready for a new paradigm?

We need to reprogram them. That sounds strange but it will make sense once you think about it.

Over the millennia, nature and Darwinian selection have developed a system that enabled the human brain to learn tasks very quickly and make the associated thinking processes become automatic. Once the brain has learned a way of completing a task that produces a satisfactory outcome (e.g. driving a car, solving a problem or making a decision), it seeks to automate the process (i.e. make it an automatic unconscious behavioural habit) to conserve energy and save time. It does this by imprinting automated neural pathways.

These automated neural pathways don't normally change easily - especially when in most contexts they are useful and deliver desired outcomes. Seen from an evolutionary perspective, 'resistance to change' is really a function of how the brain has wired itself. 'Resistance' is simply an old 'neural imprint' that has been learned and reinforced (by success) over years. The automated circuit and the behaviour pattern run outside of our conscious awareness and dominate our perception.

Unfortunately, no amount of classroom readiness training or conscious exhortation will affect these circuits. Why? Because the information that comes from classroom training does not reach these automated circuits. Without getting too technical, the theoretical classroom information gets stored in the wrong place; it gets stored in the auditory cortex close to your left ear. The circuits we want to change are held in a different spot, behind your upper forehead in your prefrontal cortex. That's where plans for action are stored.

It is for those reasons that most Change Management and behaviour management interventions fail – they are focused in the wrong place.

Neuroscientists specializing in business problems have discovered ways to reprogram these prefrontal circuits and to coax the brain into enriching its old way of thinking and doing things with new behaviour patterns, without losing the underlying expertise or knowledge. This work has been over twenty years in the making, with painstaking research. There is no need to cover the whole of this science but here are a few of the salient ideas to help you grasp how it works.

The brain can be coaxed into relinquishing its hold on old patterns by disrupting the stuck circuits with corrective feedback (what we sometimes refer to as "pain"). Not physical pain, but the "pain" of failure. The "mental discomfort" that comes from having done everything you could to achieve the results you were hoping for, and failing.

In business this can be done by building a suitable simulated replica (what we call an isomorphic metaphor) of the organization's business, allowing the employees and their brains to experience the cause and effect nature of their decisions. The simulation is important for two reasons. First it allows mistakes to be made learning to follow without real world costs and consequences for the business. Second it allows speeding up of time and thus immediate feedback of results flowing from decisions made in the simulation.

With rapid feedback, the brain can link decisions and consequences in a way that is not possible in the real world. And the brain can perceive its way of working is resulting in failure. This recognition of a significant mismatch between desired outcome and actual outcome is "painful" to the brain, and the "pain" provides the impetus to interrupt old automatic patterns and neural pathways and it 'changes its own mind' very rapidly. Like the response to the physical pain of touching a very hot stove – the brain literally reprograms itself to avoid the pain of failure and to achieve the desired business goals.

By immersing employees in specially constructed replicas of their business and forcing them to fail repeatedly in achieving a new business goal, we can now reprogram new behaviors in these individuals as quickly as in the span of a sleep cycle.

In fact, it is possible to see these changes happen overnight. If you were to put the sleeping brain through an FMRI scan, you could actually see the connections reorganizing themselves.

Does it really work?

This approach has been tested successfully in a range of industries and business over the last fifteen years.

A Brain Reprogramming exercise conducted in a Pharmaceutical Company saw their back order inventory problem diminish from \$800,000/day to \$20,000/day within a few months, even though initially the workers thought this was an unsolvable problem.

A large Transit Authority wanted to track, coordinate and improve its bus maintenance schedules by implementing a new IT system. Using Brain Reprogramming, the hourly staff reached independence with the new system in 2 weeks and line supervisors, who had more to do, managed this in 6 weeks rather than the expected 12 months. The Organization also shifted from a reactive to a proactive maintenance approach, reduced cycle times and increased the "mean distance between failure" on an aging fleet, which resulted in a \$40 million cost savings.

A failing Bronze Foundry, close to bankruptcy, used Brain Reprogramming to quickly improve its on-time delivery, increase its cash flow and reduce its scrap rate. It went on to achieve sustained profitability and acquired another foundry.

A leading Gold Mining Company used Brain Reprogramming to improve operations, improve exploration and expand its business development activities. The Company increased production, reserves, revenue and cash flow in a way that led to doubling its market capitalisation in 18 months.

Brain Reprogramming has been used successfully in nuclear fuel reprocessing, mineral exploration, railcar maintenance, consulting IT engagements, mining safety, new product introduction, healthcare, education and many other applications.

We can now look forward to the day when in response to changes in the marketplace, or changes in technology, an organisation could routinely change the way it gets work done to stay ahead. In this new environment, apart from some technical tweaks and teething problems, the workers quickly adapt to the new system, routinely develop better ways of doing business, improving productivity and quality.

Although the fundamental research has taken over twenty years, there is a growing group who are working in this emerging field of Accelerated Change Management through Brain Reprogramming, and you will hear more about it as delivery platforms become more accessible and popularized in the market place.

For more information on this promising business science breakthrough, please email the author using the link <http://www.onirik.com.au/content/contact-us>.

References

[1] <http://gbr.pepperdine.edu/2010/08/the-business-impact-of-change-management/>

[2] Research study by Bain Consulting Group. Integrating, People, Process and Technology. by Anton, Petouhoff and Schwartz, Santa Maria, CA: The Anton Press.

[3] Studying Organizational Change and Development: Challenges for future research Pettigrew et al 2001 Academy of Management Journal

[4] The Standish Group, CHAOS Survey (2004, 2006, 2009, 2011) www.standishgroup.com

About the Author:

Dr. Clifford Saunders is a dedicated innovator in the art of Organizational Effectiveness. With 30+years of experience working at the CEO, Board and Senior Executive levels with Fortune 500 and Blue Chip Corporations, he has seen failures of astronomical proportions in organizations bent on perpetuating the proverbial “way we’ve always done it around here”. This has led him on an ongoing quest to understand what keeps corporate cultures stuck in the same old destructive ruts, and how to pull them out of the box and change the way they plan their next big strategic moves.