

Amy Hissom

Article Critique #2

TECH 50000 - Quality Standards

Monday, January 31, 2011

Leading Minds Instead of Managing Behavior

By: Charles S Jacobs – Leadership (January/February 2011)

This is a very interesting article which talks about neuroscience and how three fundamental discoveries regarding how the brain works can (and probably should) be utilized by managers to lead minds instead of managing behavior. These discoveries suggest that (1) our world is mental, not physical; (2) our reasoning isn't objective; and (3) ideas change the brain. The author uses vision as a means of explaining how our world is mental, not physical, by going through each process of vision from the time an image enters the eye to the final output of what the person viewing the image actually sees. According to the author, "As the output travels to the seat of consciousness in the prefrontal cortex, it receives input from the areas of the brain responsible for memory, emotion, and even our desires." So, what we finally see at the end of all this processing is our own unique version of the object, which is created according to everything going on in our minds. Regardless of how information enters the brain, whether through sight, sound, smell, touch, etc., the final output of how we perceive the information obtained is based on our own genetic code, ideas, and past experiences. This makes perfect sense to me and explains how two completely different people can look at the same exact thing and perceive it in totally different ways.

The author explains that reasoning logically is one way around subjectivity since it eliminates emotion and its validity can be checked. However, reasoning isn't objective because it is always shaded by our emotions. And, even if there wasn't any emotional input, our reasoning would be suspect because of cognitive dissonance reduction. Dissonance is a very uncomfortable feeling one gets from holding two conflicting thoughts in the mind at the same time.

What the author is trying to explain in terms of the third discovery that "ideas change the brain", is that everything we do in the course of our lives, from reading a book to chatting with our friends, causes our brains to change. As we learn, the brain must adapt to store that knowledge. The brain creates memories by strengthening or establishing new connections between cells.

Traditional management methods used to boost performance such as feedback, punishment, and rewards are not working anymore. People perceive things differently in terms of the value they place on rewards. Punishment and feedback that criticizes causes fear within the workplace. Since our decisions are driven by our emotions, and the fact that we are driven genetically to pursue our own self-interest, managers would be better of asking what to do instead of telling what to do.

I know this is a little long, but I wanted to summarize the author's main points so that I could explain why I agree. The bottom line here is that managers need to engage the ideas of their employees to improve performance. Doing so will not only encourage employees to self-assess themselves; they will often point out their own mistakes without being told what they are, and want to improve them. The way I see it; utilizing how the brain works, when managing employees, can be looked at as a type of reverse psychology. Asking an employee what to do instead of telling them what to do, makes the employee feel like his or her ideas are of value, which in turn will boost their self-esteem and cause their performance to excel. To me, being asked "how to do something" or "to do something in general," holds more value than any incentive or reward. Reasons being that maybe you are being asked because you do it good. For example, I had been asked a couple of times by a professor at the East Liverpool campus to speak in front of her HTML class. This made me feel very good and boosted my self-esteem because she must have thought I was good at HTML or she would not have asked me to visit her class. I had no problems whatsoever speaking to the class and offering tips concerning the projects they were working on. I was honored to be asked to do this. As an opposite of that example, I was enrolled in a communications class that required the students to conduct three different speeches. Although I am very good at talking, and thought that this would be a breeze for me, I was totally wrong. Even though I memorized my material inside and out, when I stood up in front of the class, high anxiety set in immediately and I froze. I honestly believe that the anxiety set it because I had to do it. If this was something that I had been asked to do, the outcome would have been totally different.

I have always believed that if you are told you cannot do something, it makes you want to do it even more so. Being told you have to do something often makes you dread having to do it. And, if you are asked to do something, it makes you want to do it that much better!

Reference

Direct Link to Source: <http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/leading-minds-instead-of-managing-behaviour>