

## *The Neuroscience of Leadership*

*What can we learn from how the brain works to help us understand how to improve personal performance and leadership?*

### **The essence of Leadership is about CHANGE.**

Some people are content to accept the latest psychological theories and research on behaviour whereas others will be given comfort that **neuroscience actually supports those theories** and gives them even greater credence. In turn this may provide leaders with greater insights into why they need to change their behaviour.

**The human brain has developed genetically at a much slower pace than society** which provides a behavioural conflict. Genetically, how the brain works is all about the inter-relationships between energy, memory and neural wiring which defaults the brain to resist change while at the same time wanting to be creative.

**There are three kinds of neural connections.** Serial connections (like a row of christmas lights) provide our IQ, instinct and learned habits. Associative connections are where bundles of brain cells connect with each other creating new intra-serial wiring – this provides for our emotional intelligence and conceptual thinking. Synchronous neural oscillations is where wave motions form in all the parts of a brain that relate to a particular event providing unitive and holistic thinking which ranges from the the relative simplicity of understanding the totality of a coffee mug up to the high order of things such as the meaning of life.

**However, the brain also resists being told what to do** (it takes so much of the brain's energy) and therefore any **change is most effectively implemented by the individual having an insight and thus developing their own solution.** The insight also uses up a lot of energy but it simultaneously releases adrenaline-like chemicals that sustain the energy.

**Continued focus and attention keeps neural circuits open** and stabilises the new neural connections (created by insights) thus becoming memorable and a new habit. This is how behavioural change occurs.

### **The conclusions for enabling improved personal performance and leadership are:**

1. Leaders must support individuals and provide them with the right environment to reach their own solutions through insights.
2. Leaders telling people what to do does not provide sustainable effective change.
3. To learn new behaviours, leaders must provide the opportunity and environment for their people to focus on and spend time learning new behaviours in order to sustain change.
4. As the essence of leadership is change, it is equally important that the leader uses this approach for personal change as for enabling the change of his / her followers.
5. Coaching, group facilitation, reflection, action learning and experiential learning, as well as contemplation and meditation are all excellent techniques to support people in finding their own solutions, embedding change into habits and sustaining new behaviour .
6. Happy people have more insights especially when in a calm frame of mind. Combine this with a happy environment where people think about future possibilities rather than past performance and you have a formula more likely to lead to sustained change.

A final conclusion of all this is that Leaders should engage their people in the development of vision at the conceptual stage in order to effectively implement sustainable visionary change.

**A 17 page document which explains these findings in more detail is available on request**