

SPECIAL PREVIEW

People & Strategy

PERSPECTIVES

Impacting Leadership with Neuroscience

David Rock, Founder of Neuroleadership Institute

Counterpoints:

Paul R. Lawrence/Terry Hogan/Christine R. Williams/Tobias Kiefer/Marshall Goldsmith

HR | People & Strategy



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From the Perspectives Editor

Anna Tavis, Perspectives Editor

As the first decade of the 21st century draws to a close, we can look back confidently at the 20th century and call it the management century. Peter Drucker's centennial in 2009 became a testimonial to the success we have had in management development. The situation is quite different, however, when it comes to leadership "science." There are more than 60,000 books on leadership on our shelves, and we still have not "cracked the code" on what true leadership really means and how it can be achieved.

Twenty-first century neuroscience is now attempting to come to leadership's rescue. Brain research is entering leadership discussions center stage and may help to close the gap between our goals and our practices. *People & Strategy* invited David Rock, the pioneer of brain-based thinking about leadership and the founder of the NeuroLeadership Institute, to lead our discussion for this special issue. Rock's article "How Neuroscience will Impact Leadership" sets the stage for a breakthrough conversation among Paul Lawrence, a Harvard scholar, Marshall Goldsmith, the world's

best-selling leadership author, and three practitioners: Terry Hogan of Citigroup, Christine Williams, of NASA and Tobias Kiefer of Booz and Co.

According to David Rock, we now are able to access those areas of the brain where important leadership brain functions take place. We can even pinpoint specific training and development activities to influence brain centers to drive more effective behavior in four key domains, including the leader's ability to: 1) solve problems and make decisions 2) regulate emotions, 3) collaborate, and 4) facilitate change.

The following exchange of ideas is a mere anticipation of the breakthroughs yet to come. Our selection is an invitation to all students of leadership to continue to follow the hard science that is radically changing the ways we train and develop 21st century leaders.

Impacting Leadership with Neuroscience

By David Rock, Founder of NeuroLeadership Institute

While speaking at a conference recently, I asked a room full of HR and training professionals if they wanted to improve the quality of the leaders in their organizations. Everyone raised a hand. Then, I asked who was confident they knew how to develop their leaders. Not a single hand went up.

This situation is not an isolated occurrence. A 2008 study showed that 'improving leadership' was the second most urgent human capital imperative for most companies' business strategies. Given how widespread the problem is, perhaps we need a breakthrough here, something so fundamental that would offer a new approach to the very foundations of leadership thinking.

Up until now, most of our leadership theories evolved out of behavioral observations, or through social psychology research. It appears that this approach has not delivered what it was supposed to do. Despite the fact there are now more than 60,000 books on leadership, there is no broad agreement on what exactly leaders do, or what it takes for them to do their jobs successfully.

Recent developments within neuroscience have given us the ability to shed some new light on how the brain functions in real time. This new brain research may provide the missing link between leadership behavior and leadership development. Since 2007, there has been an effort to gather relevant neuroscience findings into a new field called 'NeuroLeadership.' NeuroLeadership

explores the neuroscience underpinning four key leadership skills, called the four domains of NeuroLeadership. These domains include:

1. The ability to solve problems and make decisions;
2. The ability to regulate emotions;
3. The ability to collaborate with others; and
4. The ability to facilitate change.

While the NeuroLeadership field is still new, there already are identifiable benefits to applying neuroscience research findings to our understanding of leadership characteristics. Clearly, there are tangible benefits to improving leadership development techniques. Multiple studies show that the best

Neuroscience is offering more theoretical breakthroughs that already are making a big difference. Using neuroscience to explain leadership issues now is happening across major, corporate, government and non-profit organizations...

leaders have both strong business and interpersonal skills. Yet many leaders have focused on their business skills and let their interpersonal skills lag. Telling leaders to be more self-aware, authentic or to create trust can be both a tough sell and mission impossible for the trainers and coaches.

How do you take someone who has become a hard-nosed executive and build his or her soft skills, after decades of being rewarded for driving results? To begin, you need to speak in a respectful language, which means a language based on hard data, like brain research. Drawing on the four domains of NeuroLeadership, program designers and facilitators are able to explain the theoretical foundations, in biological terms, of most aspects of self and social awareness. At our annual NeuroLeadership Summit, hundreds of leadership practitioners discuss the benefits of underpinning a leadership development intervention with neuroscience. In short, science gets leaders turning to programs they normally would not do. It has them switch off their BlackBerry devices while they are there, and helps them ease into ideas that otherwise could be personally threatening.

Several other benefits to drawing on neuroscience are just emerging. We are beginning to test leaders' brain functioning to gain clues about how they will operate in certain conditions. For a while we could test how well someone could solve linear and non-linear problems. Now, we also can test for how well people regulate their emotions, how well they connect emotionally with others, and how well they focus their attention, all based on

brain tests rather than questionnaires. We even have a way to measure overall neural integration, a marker for adaptability. As these technologies become more widely available, we can get better at putting the right people into the right jobs, as well as target development needs to the individual.

Another emerging area of research involves the ability to predict directly a leaders' effectiveness. In a lab at MIT, scientist Alexander Pentland is able to accurately predict who will succeed in an influencing task, without needing to hear what the leader says. The approach draws on biological signals like body movements and tone of voice, based on research called 'Honest Signals.'

Finally, with a more accurate understanding of what leaders do and an ability to quantify a leader's abilities, we can begin to measure and therefore improve leadership programs more successfully. Currently, billions of dollars a year are spent on leadership development, with very little

understanding of what we are trying to achieve, and minimal capacity to measure outcomes with hard data.

Improving the quality of our leaders has never been more important. Neuroscience is offering some theoretical breakthroughs that already are making a big difference. Using neuroscience to explain leadership issues now is happening across major corporate, government and non-profit organizations, including NASA, the National Defense University, Citibank, Microsoft and other firms around the globe. While the research is still new, the benefits are available to change the way we lead.

David Rock is the founder and CEO of Results Coaching Systems (RCS), which has operations in 15 countries across the globe. He co-authored a feature article with neuroscientist Dr. Jeffrey Schwartz, called 'The Neuroscience of Leadership.' He also wrote, 'Managing with the Brain in Mind.' He is the author of several books including 'Coaching with the Brain in Mind' (Wiley & Sons, 2009), and 'Your Brain at Work,' (Oct. 2009). Rock founded the NeuroLeadership Institute and Summit, a global initiative bringing neuroscientists and leadership experts together to build a new science of leadership development.

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How the Brain Enables Good Leadership

Paul R. Lawrence, author of *Driven to Lead: Good, Bad, and Misguided Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 2010).

Leadership has yet to make the leap from art to science. I believe that recent research into how the human brain makes decisions, combined with recent discoveries in human evolution, now offer the building blocks of a useful science of leadership.

From Animal Instinct to Human Decision Making

Other animals have instincts and physical traits suited to their environments. Humans have instincts, but these only get the decision-making process started. We take a wide variety of information into account and only then figure out what to do. And while humans are not individually very strong, quick or deadly, they are very effective in groups because, unlike other animals, they can trust their companions to help them rather than opportunistically rob or abandon them. A human making a decision, unlike an animal obeying an instinct, has to consider others' survival as well as his or her own—even when those imperatives conflict. Such decision making is the foundation of complex human societies, organizations of all kinds and leadership.

The Four Drives

How does this apply to everyday leadership? Let's look inside the brain. Humans evolved four basic drives, each essential to both survival and good leadership.

- The drive to acquire—to get what we need or value, from food, shelter and offspring to expertise and promotion at work.
- The drive to defend—to protect what we need or value, including our company's market share and reputation.
- The drive to bond—to form long-term, trusting, caring relationships that go beyond mutual benefit, including relationships with coworkers, customers, suppliers and investors.

- The drive to comprehend—to make sense of the world and ourselves, which enables forecasting, inventing and problem solving.

Each of these drives monitors signals from our sense organs, adds its own evaluation, and sends the signals to other parts of the brain. Imagine a CEO whose company has just lost a key long-term contract because a competitor dropped its prices. The drive to acquire tells him to push sales harder. The drive to comprehend tells him to learn how his competitor cuts prices. The drive to defend tells him to downsize. The drive to bond tells him not to cast good employees overboard. Clearly, these last two imperatives conflict.

These four drives are not a metaphor. Researchers can now see them at work inside the brain. For example, brain-imaging studies have shown the *nucleus acumbens* “lighting up” with increased blood flow when people choose a generous rather than a selfish option—the drive to bond in action.

The Four-Drive Decision

Amazingly, the variety and even conflict of the drives is not the problem—it is the solution. It stimulates another part of our CEO's brain, the prefrontal cortex, to formulate possible responses that are sent back to the drives for review until a solution is “good enough” for all four.

Paul R. Lawrence is the Wallace Brett Donham Professor of Organizational Behavior Emeritus at Harvard Business School. During his 44 years on the Harvard faculty, he taught in all the School's programs and served as chairman of the Organizational Behavior area and also of both the MBA and AMP programs. He did undergraduate work in sociology and economics at Albion College and did MBA and doctoral training at Harvard. His research, published in 26 books and numerous articles, has dealt with the human aspects of management.

Neuroscience Provides Tools to Navigate the New Business Reality

Terry Hogan, Director, Executive Development, Citibank

The four domains of NeuroLeadership; problem solving, emotion regulation, collaborating and facilitating change provide an interesting lens through which to examine the field of global leadership development. Leaders today face greater challenges than ever before as they work across multiple geographies, functions, product lines and national cultures. Leaders in a globalized business world are often managing this multiplexity with the same toolkit they had previously, long before the tall technical silos and corporate hierarchies, which at one time helped to bring efficiency and productivity, gave way to a cross-border, matrixed, digital, virtual and protean workplace.

Problem formation, intercultural acuity, co-creation and the balance between change agency and adaptation are the new cardinal points for global leaders, who must now charter new mental maps. The neuroscience of leadership juxtaposed on the global mindset suggests that there is no longer an option for teaching leaders business skills or soft skills, because there is no longer a difference between the two. A mechanistic view of leadership cannot apply to an unpredictable, global world. We need a holistic view of the leader, leadership competencies, and the models, frameworks and methods for development.

Neuroscience provides a useful framework for understanding how leaders gain insights while learning to work in new ways across traditional boundaries in a borderless world. Leadership, and especially global leadership, is a transformational learning experience, wherein new ways of thinking and behaving occur through fundamental paradigm shifts. Global leaders must be able to scan the environment for meaningful data points that allow them to formulate effective strategies and plot new courses of action. These data points often come from unexpected sources

in another part of the company or the world, or come through combining products and services in a new way for an emerging market, or by being able to recognize and understand the cultural influences that make for differences in local business practices. Leaders, therefore, need to be able to see and process information in new ways, making connections between phenomena that have never been linked before in their minds. This is systems thinking, and it is the hallmark of resourceful and innovative leaders throughout history.

The dialogue between the science of the brain and the art of leadership demonstrates this kind of systems thinking. This missing link is actually one of many that will help us to develop people to lead in an interconnected world. Another such critical link is cultural neuroscience. It looks at the mutual influences of biology, cognition and social psychology, and promises exciting implications for the development of global leaders.

Disparate academic disciplines are but a mirror image of the silos in corporations. The need for systems thinking in the development of leaders also calls for us to work across the functional support silos of learning and development, organizational development, expatriation, human resources, talent management, diversity and compensation. Reductionist thinking from academics or corporate HR practitioners cannot develop the skills required to perform effectively in a global world. The multiplexity of an interconnected world calls for our collaboration as well. As this continues to happen, we will finally have an opportunity to develop these skills in global leaders.

Leaders, therefore, need to be able to see and process information in new ways, making connections between phenomena that have never been linked before in their minds.

Terry Hogan is director of Citi's Executive Development where she is responsible for the design and delivery of senior leadership development programs, team training and other organizational support interventions. Her current research focuses on linking overarching business objectives and learning and organization development to global leadership and intercultural competency. She holds a master's degree in Intercultural Relations and Global Leadership from the School of International Studies at the University of the Pacific and the Intercultural Communication Institute and a Bachelor of Science degree from Oregon State University.

Applying Neuroscience to Leadership Development: Designing Learning with the Brain in Mind

Christine R. Williams, Director, Systems Engineering Leadership Development, NASA

As a science and technology organization, NASA has always had strong commitment to employee training and development. Technical learning involving the hard sciences aligned well with our culture and mission, and as a result was well-received by our employees and managers. This was not always true of the leadership-development activities that focused more on

self-awareness and learning to improve employee and organizational performance. This learning was normally referred to as soft science or the more commonly used, and less complementary name "touchy feely."

In 2008, as part of NASA's efforts to enhance the critical skills of systems engineering, NASA leadership took a deeper look at the factors that contributed to mission success. By studying successful systems engineers,¹ it became clear that technical expertise was only a part of the equation. The defining factor between good and great systems engineers was indeed the effective implementation of the softer sciences, such as the ability to engage and motivate employees, build effective teams, communicate well at all levels and think systemically. Mission success depended on what was then defined as the "Art and Science" of systems engineering.² To build on this understanding, NASA initiated a new developmental program to accelerate the development of the Art and Science of systems engineering.

While an understanding of neuroscience already had been introduced into a few NASA leadership programs, with the creation of a new Systems Engineering Leadership Development Program we now had an opportunity to integrate what we learned about neuroscience into every part of our program design. From the start of the program, we taught participants about the brain and discussed how we intended the design of the program to work with human needs and our evolutionary preferences rather than against them.

We designed every aspect of the program with the brain in mind, from the length and flow of learning activities to how we introduced and built the learning community. Logistics was a major factor in creating the right environment for learning. We changed factors such as lighting and even the food we served for breaks. The design of stretch assignments was particularly challenging as it took these leaders completely out of their comfort zones. We had to make it safe for them to not only give up the usual control of selecting their

own assignment, but we also had to create an environment that made it safe for them to fail, recover and grow.

While creating a more effective learning environment was our first step, our ultimate goal was to have these developing leaders understand what we were doing and how we changed the program to meet their needs more effectively, and reduce, overwhelm, and mitigate the fight, flight or freeze response, so they could do the same when they returned to their organizations. This next step is still emerging as part of the program's design to help these leaders take their personal experience out of the classroom and back into their organizations where they can implement structures and processes that improve employee effectiveness and success.

Christine R. Williams serves as the head of the Systems Department within the NASA Academy of Program, Project and Engineering Leadership (APPEL). Her programs are considered world-class by both industry and government standards, and she has been invited to speak internationally on the topics of leadership development, executive coaching and the application of advances in neuroscience to improving employee learning. Williams received her BS in Oceanography, and later graduated Summa Cum Laude from The Johns Hopkins University with an MS in Organizational Development and Applied Behavioral Science.

¹ Williams, C. & Derro, M.E. (2008). *NASA Systems Engineering Behavior Study*. National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Retrieved September 19, 2010 from http://www.nasa.gov/news/reports/NASA_SE_Behavior_Study.html

² Ryschkewitsch, M., Schaible D., Larson, W. (2008). *The Art and Science of Systems Engineering**. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Retrieved September 19, 2010 from http://www.nasa.gov/pdf/311198main_Art_and_Sci_of_SE_LONG_1_20_09.pdf

Neuroscience has started to impact leadership development and it will further shape it.

NeuroLeadership is more than a framework. It influences entire training designs and approaches...

Neuroleadership—More Than Another Leadership Framework

Tobias Kiefer, Global Director Learning & Development, Booz & Company

It is a cold and rainy winter day. I am in the process of designing a new leadership program. I experience the frustration of more than 60,000 leadership books. I decide to go a different route: Design a change program with the “learner’s brain in mind” – by combining deep emotional moments that require peak attention from participants and finally bring participants to generate their own insights and takeaways. No frameworks, no preselected leadership skills participants should memorize.

Neuroscience has started to impact leadership development and it will further shape it. NeuroLeadership is more than a framework. It influences entire training designs and approaches—on multiple levels:

1. The Value of Leadership Programs: The data neuroscience is providing is certainly the meat for rationalizing investments into people development. It helps to stop the myths around leadership development and adds data to the rumors about human behavior. It will help to sell the value of leadership programs. NeuroLeadership links changed behaviors to business results—with data and metrics.
2. Training Design and Investment: Remembering one of the key insights about the brain, that no two brains are alike, will help to shape training and coaching toward positive change. By considering

key factors like Attention, Generation, Emotions and Spacing (AGES-Model), we can design programs that will radically change the nature of training for both facilitators and participants. It offers chances to reduce costs for training. We already have first indicators that the average cost structure will change dramatically: From spending almost 50 percent of training costs on travel and accommodation towards spending more than 80 percent on real learning.

3. Understanding Fundamentals of How the Brain Works: Explaining the core functions of the brain to participants (and I am really talking about the core) will help drive the changes in people further.

Looking at the current environment, with cost pressures on the one hand, and more than ever the need for innovation, creativity and leadership, on the other, we need more effective change approaches than what we have today. We need more than training—we need real change. Change starts with understanding the current status, the system (the brain), and creation of insights.

NeuroLeadership—the conversion of the art and science of leadership development should be considered a great tool to make this happen. It is the tool that rationalizes the kinds of programs designed a few years ago—by coincidence and by trusting intuition and insights. It led, in our case, to a program full of deep emotional and experiential moments of silence and learning spread over two weeks. The program has become one of our flagship programs and serves as the framework for more AGES-based models. It is NeuroLeadership put into practice. ▶

Dr. Tobias Kiefer is the Global Director Learning & Development at Booz & Company—a global management consultancy. Kiefer is known for his approach to tie highly experiential modules into high performance leadership programs. As coach, trainer and motivational keynote speaker he uses experiential and neuroscientific elements to enable smarter thinking and to achieve better results with his clients. His experience from extreme outdoor sports and his experience as consultant and leader of a global team create a variety of insights in his programs. Since March 2010, he is participating in the Postgraduate Certificate of Neuroleadership.

Removing Obstacles to Leadership Development when Leaders Are Already Successful

Marshall Goldsmith, best-selling author of MOJO and What Got You Here Won't Get You There.

NeuroLeadership is a fascinating field, which may uncover the key to helping leaders develop the soft skills they need to take themselves, their teams and their organizations to the next level. This can be a significant challenge when what these leaders have been doing has been met with success.

We tend to repeat behavior that is followed by positive reinforcement. The more successful we become, the more positive reinforcement we get, and the more likely we are to experience the success delusion. This forms our belief “**I behave this way. I am**

successful. Therefore, I must be successful because I behave this way.”

The good news is that our positive beliefs about ourselves help us become successful. The bad news is that these same beliefs can make it tough for us to change.

Belief 1: I Have Succeeded

Successful people have one consistent idea coursing through their veins and brains: “I have succeeded. I have succeeded. I have succeeded.” This strong belief in our past success gives us faith to take the risks needed for our future success. This positive belief can become a major obstacle when behavioral change is needed, as we all tend to reject or deny feedback from others that is inconsistent with the way we see ourselves. Thus, it is very hard to hear negative feedback and admit that we need to change.

Belief 2: I Can Succeed

Successful people believe that they have the capability to have a positive influence on the world—and to make desirable things happen. They believe that through the sheer force of their personality, talent and brainpower, they can steer situations in their direction. This unshakeable belief presents another obstacle to helping them change behavior. When we believe that our good fortune is directly and causally linked to our behavior, we can easily make a false assumption. “I am successful. I behave this way. Therefore, I must be successful because I behave this way. It can be especially challenging to help successful leaders realize that their success is happening in spite of some of their behavior.

Belief 3: I Will Succeed

Successful people are optimists. Optimists tend to chronically over-commit. It can be extremely difficult for an ambitious person, with an “I will succeed” attitude to say “no” to desirable opportunities. This ‘I will succeed’

belief can sabotage our chances for success when it is time for us to change behavior. When I ask people who attend my programs why they did not implement changes they said they would, the most common response is, “I meant to, but I didn’t have time.” They believed that they would get to it later, but ‘later’ never came. Our excessive optimism and resulting over-commitment can be as serious an obstacle to change as our denial of negative feedback or our belief that our flaws are actually the cause of our success.

Belief 4: I Choose to Succeed

Successful people believe that they are doing what they choose to do, because they choose to do it. They have a high need for self-determination. This usually works in favor of successful people when they apply it to achieving their mission. It can work against them when they should “change course.” The old saying ‘winners never quit’ is often true.

These four success beliefs all filter through us and create in us something that we do not want to believe about ourselves. I call it the success delusion. Few of us are immune to the success delusion. Pick one of your own quirky or unattractive behaviors. Now ask yourself: Do I continue to do this because I think it is somehow associated with the good things that have happened to me? Does this behavior help me achieve results? Overcoming the success delusion requires vigilance and constantly asking yourself, “Is this behavior a legitimate reason for my success, or am I just kidding myself?”

Marshall Goldsmith is the million-selling author of *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* – a New York Times bestseller, Wall Street Journal No. 1 business book, and Harold Longman Award winner for Business Book of the Year. His newest book, *MOJO*, is a *New York Times* (advice), *Wall Street Journal* (business), *USAToday* (money) and *Publisher's Weekly* (non-fiction) best seller. It is now available online and at major bookstores.

Few of us are immune to the success delusion.

HR People & Strategy

New Name Supports Changing Needs of Membership

This spring, HRPS became **HR People & Strategy** (formerly the **Human Resources Planning Society**). The impetus behind the change was HRPS's drive to stay in front of the ever-changing and dynamic business environment. "HR Planning" had different connotations in 1977 than it does today, and HRPS is taking the next step to recognize the overwhelming importance that Talent places as the great strategic and competitive differentiator for organizations.

As part of redefining its identity, HR People & Strategy has a brand new Web site, too. Explore and engage in the many new features at www.hrps.org.

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