



Topics:

- **Group discussions - A meeting of minds?**
- **Management - A rude awakening and what a relief**
- **Perceptions - If you could only see it my way**
- **Personal mind control - Mind out!**
- **Are you using your whole brain?**
- **The human condition - Beware. Human beings at work**



Group discussions - A meeting of minds?

I've often sat in on meetings where the manager has stated that he would like a frank and open discussion about the topic of the meeting. I have heard managers say, "I would like to know what you really think about this." Do you think the ensuing discussions could be described as frank and open? Not really. A more accurate description would be guarded and limited.

Honest and open communications are often cited by members of workgroups when they are compiling a list of desired values to govern their way of working together. But bring those people together in a meeting and this desired value is often missing in action.

In an idyllic world people may be open and honest, but in the imperfect world we live in it is a hard ask that people express themselves openly and honestly. Here are some of the many reasons (in people's minds - conscious or sub-conscious) why we don't express ourselves openly and honestly in meetings.

- If I really say what I think, I'll just be seen as negative and obstructing.
- I haven't really got a clue about this. But I'll keep that to myself.
- I think I'll just wait and see where this is going before I commit myself one way or the other.
- I know what is going to put me in the boss's good books. I'll say what I know she wants to hear.
- I have no interest in this debate. The decision won't change anything I do. It won't be followed through properly and then it will just disappear.
- I'm not going to embarrass myself in front of the others.
- If I say what I really think, the boss will just attack my views so why bother?
- It's obvious what the company policy is here so if I speak against it I'll suffer later.
- I won't say what I really think, but I will say something that makes me look good.
- The decision's been made. We're just going through the motions here.
- I have no strong view either way, but I am happy to go along with whatever the group decides.
- My gut feeling tells me that it is a dumb idea, but I'm not going to oppose it because I haven't really thought it through. If I try and explain why I don't like it, I'll look stupid.
- No one wants to hear the truth. If I truly say what's on my mind, it will only upset others and I don't want to put up with the tension that creates.
- I know from past experience that if you contradict the boss, he doesn't like it. He doesn't handle people challenging his point of view very well.
- I don't know whether this will work or not. I am 100% for it, but if I support this too enthusiastically and it doesn't work too well, that may be held against me.
- I'll try and think of something to say that sounds intelligent.
- If I'm asked to comment, I'll just reinforce what seems to be the popular sentiment.

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- I haven't prepared myself for this discussion so I will just formulate some seemingly intelligent questions.
- I've got opinions on this, but I don't really know the facts. I'm not going to show my ignorance in front of others.
- The last time I spoke my real thoughts it was assumed that I was unwilling to go along with the proposal, but I didn't get the chance to explain myself fully. My comments were brought up later out of context and used against me. I'll keep my real thoughts to myself.

If you want to increase the degree of openness and honesty existent in your meetings, copy and discuss this article with your group at your next meeting.



Management - A rude awakening and what a relief

Management texts tend to be written as if people in the workplace behave rationally, maturely and logically. Fortunately, many do. Some don't – which is why we need management texts I guess. In any workplace, you will find examples of irrational, immature, illogical and downright childish behaviours. And at all levels. Consider the case of Allen who took over as a supervisor of a group of 'dozer operators after filling the role of worksite mechanic.

He found going from being one of the boys to a position where he was accountable for their behaviour and performance a tough journey. He found that he had to now contend with a number of incidents. Here is a sample:

- Allegations by one operator of another of drug-taking on site (not substantiated by the accuser) which incensed the accused (regardless of whether he was guilty of the allegation).
- Suspicions of one operator starting his shift still incapable of functioning safely due to excessive alcohol consumption the night before.
- Suggestions that an operator's car had been deliberately set on fire – the car was destroyed.
- Signs of tampering with an operator's lunch box.
- Abusive and obscene language being used over the two-way radio.
- One operator telling another to "get f...." on five separate occasions in response to five requests to do something that needed to be done.
- Threats involving violence offsite and damage to property made by one operator to another through a third party known to both.
- Deliberately leaving jobs incomplete at handover from one shift to the next.
- Derogatory rumours being started by one operator about another.
- One operator telling another to "piss off, maggot" in response to a request.
- Spreading lies about what one operator was purported to have said which then riled the other party.

Allen was beginning to wonder what he had let himself in for and did he want this level of aggravation. Life was a lot less stressful when he was not the supervisor. He was thinking that this supervisor stuff wasn't much fun and feeling a bit overwhelmed by it all.

As part of his development, he attended a supervisory training program along with 20 other participants from a variety of private and public sector worksites. He was a mightily relieved man when he discovered that he was not alone in having to deal with this stuff. Every other supervisor had their own stories to tell of equally disruptive behaviour.

It didn't make his problems go away, but he was buoyed to know that his problems – or variations thereof – were commonplace in many worksites. Which is why I write about Allen's situation so that if you are new to the game you will at least be armed with the knowledge that this happens. And not only to you or, necessarily, because of you.

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Take nothing on its looks; take everything on evidence. There's no better rule.

Charles Dickens, 1812-1870, English novelist, *Great Expectations*

Men might be better if we better deemed of them. The worst way to improve the world is to condemn it.

Philip James Bailey, 1816-1902, English poet, *A Mountain Sunrise*



Perceptions - If you could only see it my way

Who's right and who's wrong? Everybody. How many individual workers in a workgroup believe that their way of seeing and understanding the workplace is right? All of them. How many workers believe that management's way of seeing and understanding the workplace is more 'right' than their way? Not many, if any.

The same question and answer can also be applied to management in relation to workers. This condition of everybody believing that they are right is a major – the major – cause of frustration, friction, conflict, stress, 'us versus them' positions, damaged relationships and inefficiency in the workplace.

No one likes to be wrong. It is very uncomfortable. Believing that they are right is something that people hang on to with tenacity. And the fun part is that – with few exceptions – no one knows what the other person is really thinking. Even when they say that they are being forthright and honest. Most of us filter our thoughts and feelings before expressing them. Silence is not compliance.

How do you convince somebody that your view is 'righter' than their view? Simple. Shout at them. If that doesn't work, shout louder and add a couple of personal insults. Maybe throw in a few swear words as well. You think I'm kidding? You're right, I am. But I've met plenty of people who seem to believe that the louder they shout, the more the other person is convinced to their point of view.

For most situations there is a 'best' view. But it is always debatable who holds the 'best' view. The 'best' view will usually, but not always, be a combination of integrated views.

How does a manager change the mindsets of people from a perceived 'wrong' view to perceived 'right' view? Is it possible? Yes, but it is a real skill. To change people's mindsets, firstly you probably need to accept this concept of everybody believing that their view is right for them and that maintaining being in the right is important for their self-esteem and sense of dignity. These are some of the things you can focus on – they need to believe that:

- They can trust you.
- You accept the 'rightness' of their view for them.
- You have listened to them and heard what they are saying.
- You understand what it is like to be in their place – what they are thinking and how they are feeling. (Hipspeak – walked in their shoes. To which could be added – worn their underpants, gargled with their mouthwash, bathed in their bath, lain in their bed, chewed their fat. Sorry).
- You value their opinion and incorporate it in your response.
- You have explained your rationale for your thinking.
- You have clarified any assumptions upon which you have based your view.
- You have provided them with better context.
- You have given them better information and knowledge.
- You have shown them better perspectives and interpretations.
- You will acknowledge it if your view is inaccurate.

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Some managers will dismiss the opinions of workers because the worker doesn't fully understand the situation. And if they knew all the facts, they would think otherwise. This is dangerous thinking on the part of the manager. Whatever people perceive about the situation – no matter how ill-informed or lacking their perception may be – is the 'fact' of the matter for them.

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Personal mind control - Mind out!

You have a mind, yet you are not your mind.

Most of us identify ourselves with our mind and behave as though we are our mind. We follow our thoughts and let them rule.

We forget we have our mind and body to fully experience life and instead our mind can make us fearful and negative.

Collaboration between two eminent scientists, neuro physicist Sir John Eccles, an Australian Nobel Prize winner, and quantum physicist Friedrich Beck, has shown that we are not our mind and that we control our mind externally from our brain.

We are now being led to the possibility that we are in essence, spiritual beings with control of our material form.

This idea is gradually gaining acceptance - you can choose to accept, reject or remain open to it.

So, would you like to control your mind, instead of it ruling you?

Why have we habits that we want to change, yet haven't?

Why do we feel one thing, but would prefer to feel differently?

How come we'd like to do something else, but haven't?

Why does our mind think things we don't want it to?

If you want something different to your mind, then how can you be your mind? And who is dominant – you or your mind?

Because you are not your mind, you can learn to control it. Indeed, you have already done so by your positive behaviour.

Some previous instructions you gave your mind have become habits which do not suit the present, and so it is beneficial to question your mind, particularly when stressed.

Controlling your mind is important to experience life fully. In its completeness, your mind is represented by your ego, which you often think is you. Your mind is so powerful that it can be mistaken to be you – yet it is not. This is because you are meant to experience *through* your mind, not *from* it. Your mind must learn to operate under your command!

You know when your mind is in control when you would prefer it not to be so negative.

When your mind is being positive it is under your control. But how should we communicate with it?

Firstly **listen** to observe how it influences you. We do not let our mind run on automatic - we give it careful attention.

For example, what happens when you make a mistake? Your mind may be automatically critical and judgmental. So, we can notice what our mind is saying and yet remain uninfluenced by its negativity.

Secondly, we direct it with **great questions**. Our mind is perfectly designed to seek answers to questions.

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For example, instead of letting our mind run its critical program, we could make it *STOP* and ask: “OK, what can I learn from this mistake?” Now, instead of criticising, our mind must answer questions.

Great answers come from great questions. So ask your mind great questions.

“The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.” William James

“The truth is that we can learn to condition our minds, bodies, and emotions to link pain or pleasure to whatever we choose. By changing what we link pain and pleasure to, we will instantly change our behaviors.” Anthony Robbins

“If you never change your mind, why have one?” Edward De Bono

“Some minds are like concrete, all mixed up and permanently set.” Source Unknown



Self-esteem. Worth your time (1)

Be a friend to thyself and others will be so too.

Sir Thomas Browne, Christian Morals (1716), 1.

"Shyness has a strange element of narcissism, a belief that how we look, how we perform, is truly important to other people."

-André Dubus, Broken Vessels, 1991

"Happiness hates the timid! So does science!"

-Eugene O'Neill, Strange Interlude, 1928

What is this self inside us, this silent observer

Severe and speechless critic, who can terrorise us

And urge us to futile activity,

and in the end, judge us still more severely

For the errors into which his own reproaches drove us?

T.S. Eliot The Elder Statesman (1958), 2.

Self-esteem and a positive self-image are largely established well before adulthood. You may ask.... "What can I do, as a manager, to help improve both of these in the limited time that I have with the staff member?" For that matter, is it your job at all to be worrying about developing self-esteem?

Yes, because the research shows that some of the benefits for you will be in the form of better performance, greater staff loyalty, respect, commitment, motivation and morale. This might be worth pursuing after all.

For many people work defines their life. It provides many things missing from their personal life. You may not be able to change their self-esteem, but at least in their workplace, you can show them that they are esteemed.

Managers who look for the positives in their staff really do help with the development of their self-esteem. Some people only need a taste of success to start blossoming. On the other hand others need some firm foundations built before any growth can take place.

What are the indications that a person may have low self-esteem? Look for behaviours which indicate a perceived lack of self-worth such as:

- constantly putting themselves down and being self-deprecating
- saying, 'I can't do it' without even having attempted the task
- refusing to take on new tasks
- taking excessive time to complete a task
- procrastinating on tasks
- holding their head down and avoiding eye contact

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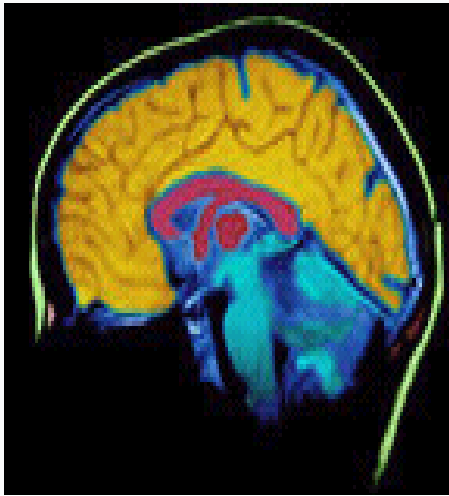
- making negative comments about things they don't understand
- refusing to attend staff functions and making excuses, which you know are not true, about not attending.
- blaming others for their problems.
- being overly defensive when an error is pointed out to them.
- being withdrawn in groups.
- Nervous mannerisms such as constantly rubbing their thumb and forefinger together.
- being overly critical of others and of events.
- being overly apologetic and backing down quickly if something they have said contradicts another person's point of view.
- Speaking hesitantly and showing a lack of confidence in their point of view.

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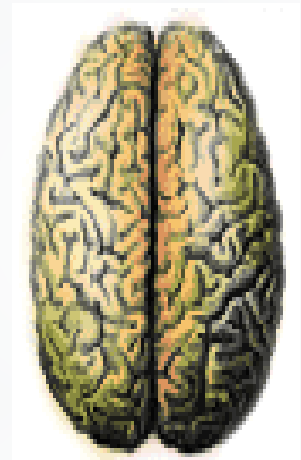
THE BRAIN



Yellow – Neo-cortex: “human” brain - cognitive, intelligence

Red - Paleo-mammalian brain: non-cognitive, emotional centre

Blue – reptilian brain: non-cognitive, instinctive.



Right – intuitive, creative, visual, pattern seeker

Left – linear logic; mathematical; speaking; pattern user.



Are you using your whole brain?

Your brain controls your mind and body. Your ability to use your whole brain is a key factor in maximising your life experience. Let's look at some useful facts.

Evolution of the Human Brain

1. The reptilian brain evolved first and is common in reptiles and mammals. It cannot think (non-cognitive: non-verbal, non-linear and non-logical, no sense of time) and acts instinctively. It is responsible for movement, basic body functions, and survival.
2. The paleo-mammalian brain evolved next and is present in all mammals. It cannot think and is responsible for emotions and long term memories.
3. The neo-cortex evolved last and is still evolving. It is most developed in humans. The neo-cortex is cognitive – capable of abstract thinking, creation and innovation. It is split into two hemispheres - right and left.
 - a. the Left: responsible for reasoning and speech
 - b. the Right: responsible for receiving input from the lower parts and intuition, creation and 'big picture'.

What Do You (Your Ego) Favour?

When in survival mode, or you (your ego) are dominated by fear/anger, your reptilian brain is dominant – not thinking!

When other emotions are triggered, old beliefs (many less than useful) are operating and you are dominated by the paleo-mammalian brain, which also is not thinking!

When you are purely logical, you (ego) are being dominated by the left brain – ethics and others are not an issue.

When you are purely creative and intuitive, you are not being logical and are right brain dominated.

We use parts of our mind more than others and this leads to dominance which causes us to respond in more limited predictable patterns. **Ideally you will use your entire brain, creating synergy between the parts.**

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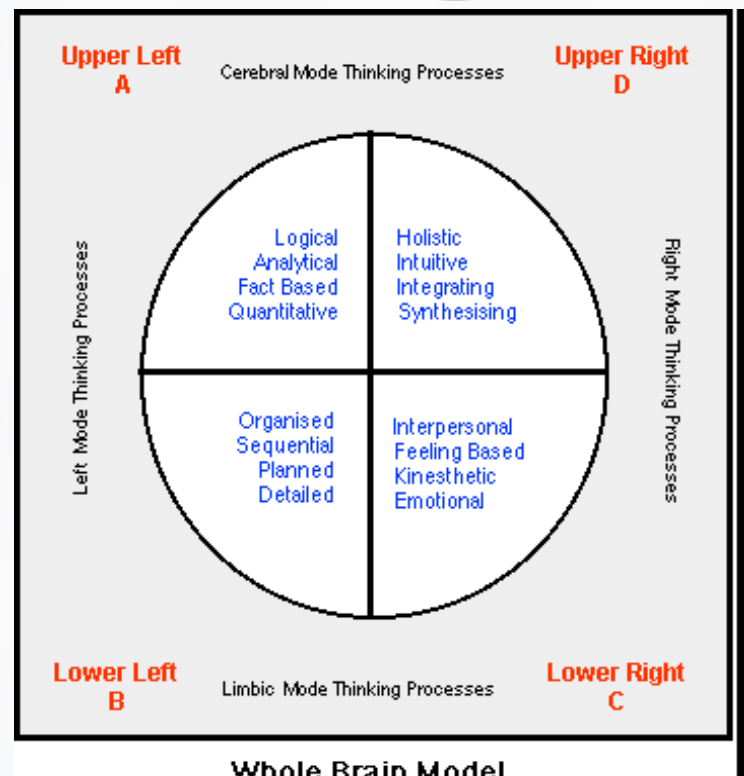


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Hermann's Whole Brain Model

Ned Hermann developed a model showing the four dominant trends in brain use. Understanding these will help you to get more out of your brain functioning.

You can train your brain to be more balanced by 'Cross-crawling' exercises – crossing your right and left limbs, causing both sides of your brain to function.



Finally Consider This!

Nobel prize-winning Neuro physicist Sir John Eccles gives evidence that each human brain is controlled by its individual self which resides beyond the quantum threshold; and not in the three brains defined by Paul MacLean.

In his book, "How the SELF Controls Its Brain," (Springer-Verlag, 1994), Eccles demonstrates how human WILL emanates from quantum activity which he and quantum physicist Friedrich Beck trace to three of the six layers (laminae) in the human neocortex.

So, the SELF that I am and the SELF that you are is sourced beyond the ten percent of baryonic matter, which we call reality. It is part of the ninety percent of the universe of which we know very little.

Consider this: the physical brain has its three levels - the reptilian brain, the paleo-mammalian brain, and the neocortex. The non-physical, ever present fourth element is the SELF emanating from quantum thresholds (similar to a movie director). At the level of essence, the SELF is who we are individually and it is connected to the entire universe in an incomprehensible (for now) way. Scientifically, we don't know what lies beyond the quantum threshold.

Adapted from the following:

The Creative Brain - by Ned Herrmann - published by Brain Books 1988

Journal of Scientific Exploration, 11:1, Spring 1997

"The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift." Albert Einstein

"If the brain were so simple we could understand it, we would be so simple we couldn't." Lyall Watson

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The human condition -Beware. Human beings at work

Contentious issues will occur in every work group. Here are some observations about the human condition in the workplace. You could use this to have an interesting discussion with your group to raise the collective consciousness about working in harmony. They are listed in no particular order.

- Every person in this group believes, of him/herself, that he/she does a good job.
- Every person in this group believes that his/her personal style works for him/her. Every person believes that his/her approach is the 'best' approach for him/her.
- Each person can identify things that other people do which they wish they didn't.
- Not one of us is perfect. Each of us has personality characteristics that engage and dis-engage other people. Each one of us has things we do well and things we could do better. Each one of us has assets and liabilities to our personality, to our style, to our approach to workplace relationships.
- As much as we might try to hide our liabilities, they are evident to those with whom we work.
- We act in good faith according to how we perceive things and according to the demands and pressures on us. Mostly, we do not maliciously set out to make life harder for others.
- We are not going to like all the people we have to work with, but when we are smart we can work out ways to work with the strengths and weaknesses of others. Relationships are a two-way street – each person is responsible for his/her 50% of the relationship.
- Most people find it easier to criticise others than to accept criticism of themselves.
- All of us have the right to be treated with dignity even if some things we do are not liked by others.
- People have differing levels of self-awareness – from the very aware to the very unaware. I can't change or modify anything about myself until I become aware of it and how it affects other people.
- Criticism of only specific parts of a person's whole make up and performance is unfair, unbalanced, irresponsible and likely to be counter-productive to what you think that you are achieving.
- Acknowledgment is a powerful act in reconciling the differences between two parties at odds with each other. It takes a strength and courage to acknowledge that I may have got some things wrong in the past or my behaviour was inappropriate or counter-productive.
- Our behaviour is dictated by our perceptions which are based on :
 - Our personal set of values
 - Our awareness of the context surrounding an issue
 - The information / knowledge we possess about the issue
 - The perspectives we choose to take about the issue
 - The interpretations we choose to make about the issue



And all of the above are 'correct' or 'right' for each of us.

- All of our individual perspectives and interpretations make perfect sense to the person who holds and acts on those perspectives and interpretations.
- It helps if our goal is to find the 'best' argument not to win the argument.
- In the resolution of every contentious issue, there can be other goals beyond the achievement of the obvious goal, ie in relation to relationships, sense of dignity, desire to work in concert with the other, mutual respect and trust, level of job satisfaction and enjoyment, etc.
- In the settlement of contentious issues, it helps if we can accommodate or incorporate, at least to some degree, the needs and wants and personal style of the other.
- Reflect on your last approach to a contentious issue. Was it to win the argument, to get it done your way, to score the point and too bad about the consequences for others? Or was it to look for accommodation of needs and styles of others with your needs and style?
- Do you believe that the consequences on the relationship, the way the other person feels, the degree of cooperation you will get, the impact on the quality of work life, the impact on the persons dignity is as important as winning the argument? And does your intellectual belief transfer into your behaviour? What's more important? The goal? The journey? Or both the goal and the journey? When entering into a conversation about a contentious issue, what is your goal?
- It will sometimes pay us well to concede ground even when we know absolutely that we are right. But it is very hard to do. It is a painful working with someone who is always right – in their mind.
- At any given moment in any contentious issue, each one of you is 'right' in your mind.
- No one is expecting any of us to change who we are, but a focus on working to our assets and minimising our liabilities and operating with an awareness of the needs and 'rights' of the other person will enhance the quality of work life for all. Importantly, it sets the tone for the rest of the workforce.
- What we put out, we get back.

Food for thought. As I heard on the radio one day, if you don't like the harvest you are reaping, look at the seeds you are sowing. And as Abraham Lincoln once said, "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."