

## Individual behavior: The grass roots of your change initiative



Terms like 'digitization' and 'artificial intelligence' are fast becoming conversational bedrocks, and with this rapid progress, it's inevitable that change is a key part of the dialogue too. Change is a key theme in almost every conversation we have about talent assessment today.

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When recruiting people, our clients frequently ask us, 'Will this person be able to drive change?'. It was surprising then, that during a recent assessment centre, we found that 21 out of 25 leaders who were slated to be 'change-drivers' were in fact personally closed to change. Their personality questionnaire results indicated that they had a low need for change. In addition, their responses to the business simulation exercise showed that they were risk averse and strongly anchored in the 'known'.

These individuals deployed conventional solutions and generally failed to notice change when it occurred – choosing to instead discard it as a 'non-serious event'. A significant proportion were essentially in denial of change, even when it was happening at full force around them.

This left us and the client wondering how these 21 leaders could be equipped to drive change, when they needed space to move their own personal compass. The challenge is that the psychology of change goes beyond its management counterparts. Change is

really a never-ending neuro-behavioral connection; impacting the way an individual perceives their environment and the choices they make in response to it.

We know that our brains are agile and soft wired. This means we can actually change the way in which we respond to stimulus. However, this isn't a magic solution that can be quickly rolled out to alter behavior. It is not easy to re-code deeply rooted patterns that have been formed throughout our lifetime. I recently read an article covering some interesting research points on how change occurs in our brains, I've summarized them below.

### **5 key ways change takes place in our brains**

1. The brain only releases the neurochemicals necessary to enable change when you are motivated for it. The harder you try, the more you'll be motivated. If you're engaged with a learning experience, you'll be more alert and it's likely to have a greater impact on your brain.
2. The more something is practiced, the more connections the between neurons are changed to include all elements of the experience.
3. Learning-driven changes in the brain's connections increase cell-to-cell cooperation. This results in better coordination between teams of cells, producing more powerful and reliable behavioral results.
4. These changes also build connections between teams of neurons representing separate moments of successive things reliably occurring in serial time. This means your brain can predict what happens next and generate a continuous "associative flow."
5. Initial changes are temporary. They only become permanent if your brain judges the experience to be new or fascinating enough or if the behavioral outcome has real importance.

Given what we know about the brain's capacity to adapt and change, we can take this knowledge into how we look at change management within organizations. Here are some tips to help you step back and evaluate whether your initiatives are contributing to sustainable change.

### **5 Tips for evaluating your change initiative**

1. If people are not excited by change, their brains will not respond to it.
2. It is crucial to explore what behaviors are needed to drive the change that your organization is looking for. With this awareness, you can ensure that leaders are clear about the behaviors they need to display.
3. Identify the experiences and feelings that accompany the display of change behaviors, and set tangible incentives to reinforce this behavior.
4. Make sure that individual leaders are not acting as a lone wolf, and that their teams continuously derive energy from one another to feed change.
5. To help establish a change culture, change stimulus should be embedded in the day-to-day working environment.

#### About Radhika

Radhika is passionate about behavioral research and enjoys finding answers to how people respond to various organizational expectations. She specializes in qualitative research methods. Radhika leads assignments in the space of attrition management, career mapping, potential assessment and psychometrics.

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#### References

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