

MINDSET, EMOTIONS AND PERFORMANCE

OUR EMOTIONS ARE CONTAGIOUS

- In any conversation, the physiological state of individuals can be positively or negatively affected through the mindset and emotions of others.
- Humans are open-loop systems; through our mirror neurons, we are receptive to emotions and environmental factors.
- Emotions are contagious, transmitted in milliseconds below the level of consciousness. They 'leak' into the conversation even if we are consciously trying to hide them.
- We 'read' others' emotions through the impact they have on our physiology.
- We transmit signals that alter the cardiovascular and hormone balances, sleep patterns and immune systems of those around us and we can do this without speaking a single word.
- Our mind state in a conversation has a significant impact on others and vice versa.

THE LINK TO CLIMATE AND PERFORMANCE

- Groups follow the behavioural and emotional cues of their leaders. As a leader (whether that be in a formal or informal sense) we set the emotional tone and therefore we have a very direct impact on the performance of the group we are leading.
- Climate (as opposed to culture) is the emotional tone of the group immediately around us. Culture on the other hand applies to larger systems, like organisations, departments etc.
- If we can create a positive emotional climate in the group immediately around us, we will get:
 - Higher levels of engagement
 - Better cognition and increased levels of creativity
 - More openness to feedback
 - More discretionary effort
 - Increased performance

WHY?

- Two different neural systems and states drive how we react:
 - The Empathic or Default Mode Network, sometimes referred to as the 'Green Zone' and operating from within the Positive Emotional Attractor (PEA) state.
 - The Analytic or Task Positive Network, sometimes referred to as the 'Red Zone' and operating from the Negative Emotional Attractor (NEA) state.
- They create forces that pull our behaviour, attitudes, feelings etc. around them but not into them. It can be helpful to think of them as two nearby planets, each with their own gravitational field.
- We can't be in both states at the same time, and it takes a 'tipping point' to move from one state to the other.

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- We need both states:
 - We need to be in the NEA (the Red Zone) to get things done, but too long in this space results in cognitive, perceptual and emotional impairment and chronic stress with the resulting negative impact to our health.
 - We need to be in the PEA (the Green Zone) for creativity, openness to ideas and renewal, but too long in this space can leave to a lack of attention to threats, distraction and a lack of focus.
- Research suggests that at work a 3:1 ratio in favour of the PEA (while some researchers suggest that the ratio should be 5:1 in our personal and most intimate relationships).
- The table below shows the characteristics typical of each network

POSITIVE EMOTIONAL ATTRACTOR (PEA)	NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL ATTRACTOR (NEA)
Empathic Network (Default Mode Network) Green Zone	Analytic Network (Task Positive Network) Red Zone
Perceive others positively	Perceive others as threatening or negative
Open to feedback and new ideas	Closed-down, not open to feedback
More cognition	Impaired cognition
More creative	Less creative
Focus is on how we see ourselves	Focus is on how others see us
Look at strengths, opportunities, able to see the bigger picture	Look at gaps, weaknesses, threats, narrow focus on fixing problems
Consider future possibilities and dreams,	Look for problems, pessimistic, fearful
Open to learning and experimentation	Inhibited from learning, feelings of 'should' and expectations,
Can pick up nuance; more aware of others and their feelings	Closed down to others, displays avoidant behaviour
Forward-looking and growth mindset	Past looking, fixed mindset
Resonance, calm, optimistic, hopeful	Dissonance, annoyed

NEED TO THRIVE

NEED TO SURVIVE

Almost all sustained desired behavioural change starts in the PEA.

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How?

A lot of the time we are at work, we are in the NEA, so the key is to create the tipping point that shifts us from the NEA into the PEA. Below are several ways to consciously and deliberately invoke the positive emotional state of the PEA.

Hope:

- Creates a sense of contagious optimism, positively impacting our brains and hormones.
- Affects our perception of the world around us, causing us to view things more positively.
- Slows breathing, lowers blood pressure, strengthens the immune system, and engages the parasympathetic nervous system (the opposite of the stress response).
- Makes us feel calm, happy, amused and optimistic; up for the challenges ahead.
- Enables us to believe our future vision is attainable, and to move toward our goals.

Question: Imagine if our wildest dreams for this project came true – what would that look like and how would it feel?

Compassion:

- Is defined as noticing someone in need, empathising with him or her, and moving towards the person to help.
- Enables us to understand people's wants and needs and feel motivated to act on our concern. Caring invokes compassion – curiosity, respect and real empathy.
- Is a fundamental human experience sparking personal renewal and organisational resonance.
- Involves a renewal of the innate curiosity with which we were born.

Question: Who helped you the most become who you are or get to where you are?

Mindfulness:

- Is a state of full, conscious awareness of one's whole self, other people and the context in which we live and work.
- Begins with self-awareness. Knowing ourselves enables us to make choices about how we respond to people and situations. Deep knowledge about ourselves enables us to be consistent, and to present ourselves authentically.
- Allows us to notice the subtle clues that tell us to attend to self, others or our surroundings, or to ask, "am I acting in concert with my values?"
- Allows us to see ourselves as others see us.

Question: What are your most important values? What kind of person would you love to be?

Playfulness:

- Laughter, joy and playfulness stimulate the renewal process in the human body.

Question: If you won \$50 m after tax in the lottery, how would your work or life change?

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- Other things that stimulate the PEA include:
 - Stroking or caring for a pet (cat, dog, horse, monkey – not goldfish).
 - Listening to music.
 - Walks in nature.
 - Meditation, yoga, Tai Chi, prayer (to a loving, not a vengeful or blaming god).

PRIME YOURSELF BEFORE YOU ENGAGE WITH OTHERS

- Understand what keeps you in equilibrium and what knocks you out of balance.
- Create your 'ideal behaviour' ahead of time and visualise yourself acting in this way, because thinking about doing something can activate the same neural networks as actually doing it...
- Imagining in vivid detail activates the same brain cells that are actually involved in doing the activity.

BE CAREFUL ADOPTING A PROBLEM-SOLVING ORIENTATION

- Identifying problems starts early...
- As children we are encouraged to solve problems – to put the right shaped object into the toy, to work out which piece of the jigsaw puzzle might fit.
- We also learn to externalise problems onto others and our environment.
- The 'problem' becomes a separate entity and is therefore less threatening.
- But 'blaming' something else becomes a trap and sometimes we may decide that 'we are the problem'.
- A person isn't a problem – a problem is a problem.
- Focussing on problems and their cause distracts us from finding solutions.
- Problems can be broken down and solved.
- But remember over-focusing on problem-solving arouses the NEA and suppresses the PEA leading to 'cognitive impairment', 'fight or flight response', and a narrowing our both our attention and the potential solution space (both for us and for our teams/colleagues).

WATCH OUT FOR THE PERILS OF GIVING ADVICE

- When we adopt a coaching approach with others, not just our team members, and work to tip the other person/people into PEA, we can activate neural circuits and endocrines that invoke cognitive, perceptual and emotional openness. The person being 'coached' is physiologically and then psychologically better able to consider new ideas.

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- In contrast, when you give someone ideas as to what they 'should' do and how they should 'change' to be more effective, it often has the opposite effect, arousing defensiveness and closing the person down.
- If the tone/content of the conversation is evaluative/judging and/or focused on what needs to be fixed or on overcoming weaknesses and gaps, then regardless of the intent of the advice giver, the receiver:
 - Is neurologically more closed to new ideas or to work on learning or changing.
 - Is likely to be defensive and discount any benefit of the recommendations or advice.
 - May engage their power motive and actually create an episode of power stress for the leader.
- While giving advice may invoke compliance-oriented behaviour, any positive effect of such activities or desire for improvement will probably be short-lived.

A FINAL WORD ABOUT STRESS

- Preparing for an event or even just thinking about it, causes stress if any of the conditions below are present:
 1. The outcome or activity is important.
 2. The outcome or consequence is uncertain.
 3. You are being observed or evaluated.
 4. Someone or something angered or upset you.
- Unless we take steps to mitigate this, we and/or others are likely to be in a stressed state for at least some part of our conversation. This can compromise the outcome.
- Even exercising self-control is stressful. Inhibiting an impulse, denying an urge, or holding back from saying something requires energy, conscious or unconscious.
- Chronic stress causes rifts in awareness and eventually erodes our cognitive, perceptual, and emotional openness and performance.

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IN SUMMARY

- Emotions are contagious passing between people below the level of consciousness.
- If we can create a positive emotional climate in the group immediately around us, we will get higher levels of engagement and creativity, more openness to feedback, more discretionary effort and increased performance.
- Almost all sustained desired behavioural change starts in the PEA.
- You need a tipping point to move between the PEA and the NEA.
- You can prime yourself to be in the PEA before engaging with someone else.
- You can invoke the PEA through hope, compassion, mindfulness and playfulness.
- Overly focusing on problem-solving arouses the NEA, reducing our cognitive capacity and the potential solution space.
- Giving advice may invoke compliance-oriented behaviour, and any resulting positive effect will probably be short-lived.
- We tend to focus on solving problems. When you take a coaching approach, you don't solve problems; rather you work with other to help them build their capability, which they can then use to solve problems.
- Coaching with compassion puts others into the PEA so that they can consider possibilities, take on feedback and be motivated to try out new things.
- Sustained stimulation of the NEA leads to chronic stress and poor outcomes.
- Balance is critical to thriving; we need a ratio of at least 3:1 PEA:NEA in our day-to-day work lives.
- If you can tip the other person into the PEA, through emotional contagion, you will go there too!