

GENESIS MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

“Improving lives through better decisions”

Reframing behaviour to make change happen

*Commentary on an article by J. Schwartz, P. Gaito, Dan Lovallo and D. Lennick entitled
“The way we (used to) do things around here”*

published in the strategy + business magazine by Booz & Co.

Available at: strategy + business: www.strategy-business.com

The main theme of the article is that changing behaviours and practices (at organisational and individual level) is often difficult – and requires more than a “command” to make it happen. The study of neuroscience is beginning to shed light on why this is so; and the article discusses how this knowledge can be used to better effect change.



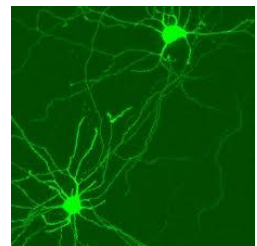
At Genesis Management Consulting, in our work in strategic decision-making, we believe that this article has value in two ways:

1. In enabling organisations to better implement their decisions (which almost always require fundamental change to happen), and
2. In application of the ideas and recommended process to impact on our ability to deal with the pitfalls of behavioural economics (see comments at the end of this article).



The underlying principle is that habits and behavioural patterns are often lodged in the circuits in the primal parts of the brain where semi-automatic activities take place (examples of such are given in the article). These habits are often sub-conscious or barely conscious and moreover, when enacted, are often accompanied by feelings of wellbeing. In addition, the more these neural patterns are invoked, the more ingrained they become.

Therefore if we wish to set new behaviours in motion, we need to dislodge the old ones and replace them with the new ones. That means consciously overriding the circuitry in place – which is often uncomfortable and painful and requires using parts of the brain that require more effort and energy.



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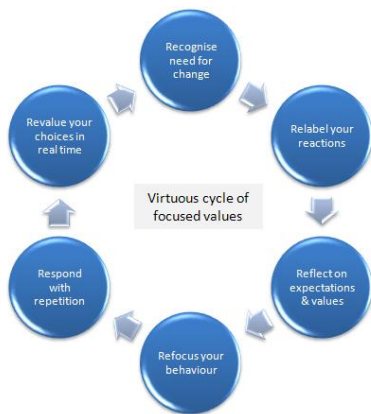
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The good news is it is possible to change almost any thought patterns by using what is termed “meta-thinking” – that is thinking about what you are thinking about; or “meta-awareness” which is moment-by-moment awareness of where your attention is focussed. This is, in fact, the key to the thesis of the article – that by ***being aware of what we are thinking*** (individually or in a group) causes brain activity to move towards the more conscious and deliberate areas and away from the more primal areas. The article goes into more (and more complex) detail along these lines and I would recommend reading the full text if this is of interest.

The document then discusses a six-step cycle for producing change (“The Virtuous Cycle of Focused Values”).



Step 1: Recognise the need for change

Step 2: Relabel your reactions

Step 3: Reflect on your expectations and values

Step 4: Refocus your behaviour

Step 5: Respond with repetition

Step 6: Revalue your choices in real time.

The article concludes by stating the application of neuroscience to organisational behaviour is still mostly unrealised – but claims that processes such as that outlined in the article are a good starting point.

At Genesis Management Consulting, we believe that from a strategic decision-making perspective the findings and recommended process are useful in another way. That is the impact of behavioural economics that can impact on our judgement (such as seeking confirmatory evidence, anchoring or the halo effect) can be reduced by techniques such as these. In fact the current literature around behavioural economics highlights the fact that although we know about these pitfalls, it is often difficult to do much about them. However, we believe that utilising ideas such as “meta-awareness” and “meta-thinking” supported by independent observation or facilitation can go a long way to reducing this impact.



If you would like to discuss how the decision-making capability of your organisation can be improved through these techniques, or in other ways such as process improvement or the utilisation of specific tools and technologies, we would be delighted to have a discussion with you – our contact details are below.

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