



The Oxford Review

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Learning, Organisational Development and
Human Resources Edition

Contents

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Why knowing things is less important than creativity and planning

To exploit and explore, engaging all your assets

The paradox of cooptition

Success in business – women versus men?

SMEs should use human resources practices

Management flexibility increases the value of small firms

Live and learn?

Knowledge intensive process competencies are lacking

How supressing your emotions makes it harder for you to achieve your goals

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Blind rage – how anger slows thinking in the brain

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Contents

Table of Contents

Sex difference in perceived emotional responses	6
Why knowing things is less important than creativity and planning	8
To exploit and explore, engaging all your assets	11
The paradox of cooptition	14
Success in business – women versus men?	19
SMEs should use human resources practices	21
Management flexibility increases the value of small firms.....	24
Live and learn?	26
Knowledge intensive process competencies are lacking	28
How supressing your emotions makes it harder for you to achieve your goals.....	32
The ‘polythink syndrome’ and elite decision-making	35
Control vs resources: how stepping aside early may benefit your startup... ..	39
Blind rage – how anger slows thinking in the brain.....	41

Sex difference in perceived emotional responses

A new study looking at views of perceived emotional responses to anger and sadness stimuli found that people from the West expect different emotional responses from men and women, but this does not impact their perceptions of the individual's overall judgement.

What the researchers wanted to see was whether restraint in reacting to another's emotional reactions such as anger or sadness is perceived as a sign of both emotional and general competence.



In two studies, 59 people were asked to watch four video and still picture sequences of people reacting to someone else's emotions. The videos and images of the person reacting to the other person's emotions showed either restraint or a lack of restraint (anger or overt sadness) to the emotion they observed. The viewers were then asked to make a judgement about the level of competency, judgement and intelligence of the person responding to the emotion.

Emotional competence

Passionate restraint is often viewed as a sign of emotional competence, whereby an individual can control their emotions in the presence of

heightened emotions from others, whilst still being able to operate emotionally (not shutting down) and still express empathy and concern.

Findings

The research found a series of interesting results from this study.

Firstly, they discovered that men who display emotional restraint and had a delayed emotional response when faced with heightened emotional displays are rated as being both more emotionally competent and more intelligent in general.

Secondly, they found that when women acted with restraint and a delayed emotional response they were seen as less emotionally competent and intelligent.

In short, the emotional competence and intelligence of a woman depends in the speed of their emotional reaction to presenting heightened emotions. The faster they react the more competent they appear. Conversely with men, the slower they react the more competent and intelligent they appear.

Another interesting outcome was that when women respond with sadness to an emotional stimulus that the males responded to with anger, this improved people's perceptions of their emotional competence too.



Regarding the sex / response difference, the authors concluded this may be due to the 'shifting standards model', which "proposes that social judgments are made according to standards or expectations, which may shift for members of different groups as a function of group stereotypes."

The authors suggest that "a longer delay may be seen as indicative of restraint for men but as strategic or inappropriate for the more emotionally competent women."

General conclusions

The idea of Passionate Restraint is raised by the researchers, which means having control and awareness of one's authentic emotions, a term akin to emotion regulation. The authors suggest that, "what differs between the sexes is what is perceived as authentic and appropriate for them. In consequence, showing restraint or "manly" emotional control has positive consequences only for men."

Where a man will be judged negatively for having an immediate emotional response, women will not.

Reference

Hess, U., David, S., & Hareli, S. (2016) Emotional Restraint Is Good for MenOnly: The Influence of Emotional Restraint on Perceptions of Competence. *Emotion*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/emo0000125>

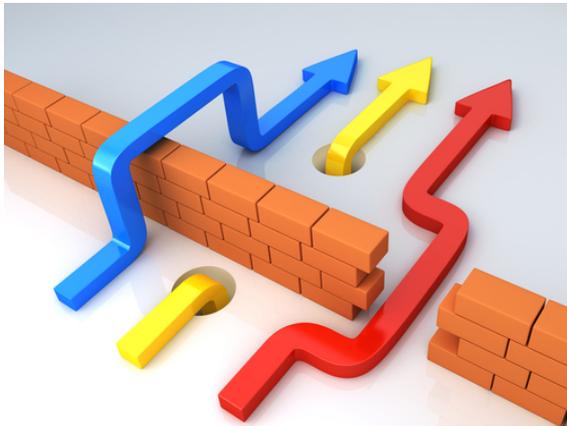
Overview

This new study looks at the perceptions of people to men and women responding to heightened emotions displayed by others. What they found was that men are perceived as being more emotionally competent and intelligent if they act with restraint and with a delay to the heightened emotions of others.

Women on the other hand were found to be more emotionally competent and intelligent the faster they responded to another's heightened emotional response.

Why knowing things is less important than creativity and planning

They say that a sign of madness is doing the same thing over and over again yet failing each time. So it is with setting up a business – there are likely to be frequent setbacks and problems as the fledgling business moves forward to find it's space however success usually comes down to how you do things differently each time to get over or around those obstacles. It is usually this ability to reinvent and solve problems and take different directions (pivot) that dictates ultimate success or failure.



A newly published research paper in the International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research looked at 198 small and medium sized enterprises and illustrates this fact by looking at the three elements of driving a business forward:

1. Optimism,
2. Persistence and
3. How these are moderated by
 - a. Cognitive knowing style,
 - b. Creativity, and
 - c. Our cognitive planning abilities.

It is all very well being pathologically optimistic and having the persistence of a toddler trying to walk, but often it is how you learn that makes the difference as opposed to just simple optimism and determination.

Optimism and persistence

Previous research has found that optimism is linked to persistence. Persistent people tend to be more optimistic and conversely people who give up tend to have a more pessimistic outlook.

If someone believes that they are going to fail, then they are unlikely to have the huge drive necessary to make their idea work. If they have the belief in their idea and themselves (self-efficacy) then they will drive it forward. The authors found that persistence "... generally implies not only multiple attempts oriented toward a particular course of action but repeated efforts in the face of adversity, challenge, or difficulties."

Persistence can have positive or negative consequences: persisting with something that isn't ever going to take off like a business based on selling cellophane socks is unlikely to take off unless you can convince people of some hitherto unknown benefits.

The researchers found that two particular styles of thought tend to moderate peoples course of action when faced with problems:

1. The cognitive creating style and
2. The cognitive planning style.

Conversely, the cognitive knowing style will tend to imbue conservatism and a certain cautiousness.

Cognitive Creating Style

People with high levels of Cognitive Creating Style tend to fly by the seat of

their pants and work intuitively. The authors defined this attribute as the ability and tendency to “see problems as opportunities and challenges.” They also “possess high risk preferences, and they tend to have likeness for uncertainty and freedom.”

Cognitive Planning Style

People who have higher levels of Cognitive Planning Style “...favour an objective, structured, conventional and efficient problem-solving approach. Planning to organize and control tends to leverage entrepreneurs goal pursuit.”

The researchers found that one’s planning style impacts persistence thus: “the more pronounced the entrepreneurs’ cognitive planning style, the more likely it is to leverage their optimism into enhanced persistent effort because in planning activities they have to engage in a way that makes them more optimistic about the feasibility of an outcome.”

Cognitive creating and cognitive planning styles were both found to have a strong positive correlation and impact on persistence and optimism. The authors suggested that this is good because, “optimism may be important element in entrepreneurs’ decision to persist, but cognitive creating and planning styles may be important moderating factors that can effectively translate optimism into higher persistence.”

Cognitive Knowing Style

Cognitive knowing style was found to be a negative moderator of optimism and persistence. Cognitive knowing is defined by the authors as, “individuals who prefer a logical, rational and impersonal ways of information

processing. Research suggests that individuals with a cognitive knowing style look for facts and data and are inclined to think they know exactly the way things are and tend to retain many facts and details.”



In understanding where things went wrong last time, so modifications can be made to the next approach. People with high levels of Cognitive Knowing Styles tend therefore to be over cautious, and ultimately the authors suggested, “when entrepreneurs take their time to make decisions, postpone decisions until data are collected for more information (cognitive knowing style), the relative usefulness of entrepreneurs’ optimism for stimulating persistence gets subdued.”

Conclusions

One of the most important things for an investor to consider when thinking about putting money into a new venture is whether the entrepreneur will drive it to the next level. Looking at the way they think could be a factor in this – if they are creative thinkers or planners, this suggests that they will be more optimistic than their cautious cognitive knowing colleagues. Additionally people who think they know and who wait for more data or information are slower problem solvers

and solve problems in more narrowly defined way. Additionally, they tend not to move on as quickly as creative optimists.

Reference

Adomako, S., Danso, A., Uddin, M., & Damoah, J. O. (2016). Entrepreneurs' optimism, cognitive style and persistence. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 22(1), 84-108.

Overview

An interesting study of 198 SME's looking at the success or otherwise of entrepreneurs found that two things often denote the success of the entrepreneurs in dealing with and overcoming the battery of problems most businesses face. Their levels of:

1. Optimism and
2. Persistence

Further they found that:

1. Knowing
2. Creativity and
3. Planning

tend to moderate or regulate the level of persistence and optimism an entrepreneur has when solving problems and overcoming obstacles the business faces.

Higher levels of creativity and planning tends to lead to higher levels of optimism and persistence and consequently success. Higher levels of knowing (a belief in facts, data and being right) is conversely negatively correlated with optimism, persistence and success.

To exploit and explore, engaging all your assets

Companies have two main aims – to exploit existing markets and to explore new markets to exploit further down the line. Ideally they must be ambidextrous in this – equally good at exploitation and exploration to keep up the pace in competition.

Three main organisational asset bases of organisational ambidexterity

A new paper just published in The Journal of Product Innovation Management suggests that in order to achieve good levels of ambidexterity, three main organisational asset groups need to be used effectively to achieve this:

1. Organisational capital and knowledge
2. Human capital and knowledge
3. Social capital.

The study

The study, a large scale research survey over 300 senior and middle managers assessed how the most competitive companies aligned their assets to compete and create organisational ambidexterity.

Human capital

Human capital is one of the most important assets that an organisation can bring to bear in the battle to remain competitive. It is composed of the knowledge, skills, abilities and experience that the individuals in the organisation have.

Social capital

Social capital is the way individuals interact within a company. For the purposes of this research it was broken down into:

- a. The structural (who people talk to) and
- b. Relational (how they communicate).

At one level organisations are actually networks of human capital using social capital in order to have an impact. The efficiency of the human and social capital systems largely denote how effectively the resources and knowledge will be used.



Organisational capital

The non human knowledge assets and systems of a company are the organisational capital. This is described as, “the repository of the firm’s manuals, systems, processes and databases.” In effect organisational capital is how the organisation organises and uses its human and social capital to produce the outputs (products, services and profit).

Sum of the parts



How a company aligns these assets is key to how it competes. Its two main outcomes will be in exploring new markets and products or services (innovation) whilst continuing to exploit existing ones. Where Apple stunned the technology world with the first

iPhone it is still exploiting the market it created with updates like the iPhone 7.

3 Findings

1. Firstly, that “a greater amount of organisation capital relative to human capital had a positive impact on an exploitative innovation strategy.” Essentially this means that it is the organisational design and systems that create the environment for the human capital to be wielded and focused in the direction needed to create successful exploitation.
2. The next key point is that “the relationship between a greater amount of organisation capital relative to human capital and exploratory innovation strategy is moderated by social capital.” This means that the key to the organisational systems and structures successfully using the human capital is the effectiveness of the social capital.

3. Creating organisational ambidexterity, the ability to keep the current business or service going and develop the next generation of products or services, requires the agile and purposeful continual shifting of the combination of organisational, social and human capital to best effect all the time. However, the business continuity and the innovation areas often need to be separated from each other to maintain organisational ambidexterity.

Reference

Hsing-Er Lin, Edward F. McDonough III, Jie Yang, and Chihyuan Wang (2016) Aligning Knowledge Assets for Exploitation, Exploration, and Ambidexterity: A Study of Companies in High-Tech Parks in China. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*

Overview

To enable an organisation to be able to both continue with its present business and innovate and develop future business directions (organisational ambidexterity) requires alignment of:

1. **Human Capital** – the knowledge, skills and experience of the members of the organisation
2. **Social Capital** – how the networks within and without the organisation get things done
3. **Organisational Capital** – the organisation’s systems, structures, procedures and policies that define how the organisation adds value and achieves its aims.

Crucially the research finds that this requires constant monitoring and agility in shifting and experimenting with these three components to produce the ambidexterity needed.

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The paradox of cooptition

In the dog eat dog world of business, a concept of structured cooperation has emerged over the last 21 years or so where competing organisations simultaneously cooperate and compete, a process known as cooptition. Properly managed cooptition can benefit all involved. Poorly managed, it can result in losses sustained by one and gains gained by the other.



Basically cooptition means that the entities are cooperating at one level and competing at another level. Car manufacturers and some airline businesses engage in cooptition. A number of car manufacturers have developed vehicles together and yet sold them under their own brand with their own additions, competing against each other. Airlines frequently form strategic alliances with each other to reduce the cost of lounges or loyalty schemes whilst still competing for passengers.

In a research paper just published researchers from The Montpellier Research in Management Dept, University of Montpellier, Montpellier Business School and the Management Theory Department, University of Economics in Katowice looked at the paradox of cooptition and have made recommendations about how best to manage cooptition.

Win-win

In an ideal world, both organisations entering into a cooptition agreement would pool resources to benefit each other in the wider competitive environment. In short, cooptition should be a win-win arrangement.

This research showed that: “Cost savings, resource access and sharing, enhanced value creation and stimulation that promote innovation are listed among the potential gains from this strategy.”

Usually competition and collaboration between the two cooperative partners help drive innovation and come up with new competitive product combinations. On the cooperative side of the partnership, the two organisations pool and share resources such as skills, infrastructure, systems and knowledge that are necessary to both organisations in order to cut costs and increase innovation.

This is meant to be a win-win scenario.

Win-lose

At the same time as they cooperate, organisations are competing. There tends to be a natural urge to break the symmetry of gains between the two organisations, with one trying to get more knowledge from the other to gain a degree of asymmetry.

The research showed that: “Knowledge sharing turns into knowledge plunder. One competitor wins at the expense of the other. This outcome can often be the real ‘hidden

agenda' of cooptition”.

Herding cats? Tensions within cooptition

With two organisations seeking asymmetry in the market by cooperating with a chosen competitor, there will be tensions at some levels between the two partners. These tensions have been identified at three levels:



The 3 levels of cooptition tension

1. Inter-organisational level (tension between the organisations),
2. Intra-organisational level

(tension inside the organisations)

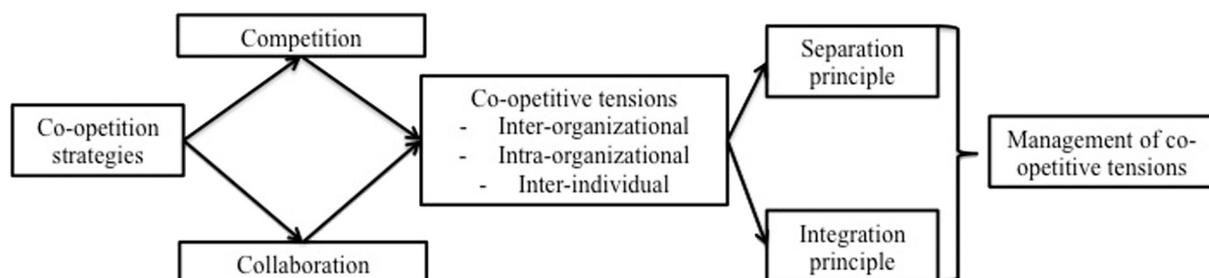
3. Inter-individual level (tension between people who should be collaborating).

As well as the to be expected and ingrained inter-organisational rivalry, the researchers found that coepetitive managers often end up in conflict with their internally focused colleagues for “financial, technological, human and other resources from the parent firm.”

In addition, where employees are involved in common activities, “They must find a position when a partner becomes a competitor or when a current competitor becomes a partner”

At the individual level, the authors also pointed out, “tensions come from the difficulty to create a common identity in coepetitive activities. The psychological equilibrium of the individuals involved can become disturbed.”

Managing the partnership



The diagram above shows the complexity of managing cooptition. There are two schools of thought about how to best manage cooptition scenarios:

1. Separation and
2. Integration.

Separation is where the collaboration

and cooptition are managed separately (with different managers and often teams) within the parent organisations. This can cause a line of tension between those tasked with cooperating and those competing within the organisations with protectionism of knowledge, computing time and other resources for example right to the extreme that the cooperators are often

accused of being '.

More difficult to manage is the integration option. The organisation will have both teams working together and have a firm sets of rules as to what is shared and what is not.

,There is no research evidence yet as to whether separation or integration works best to achieve the perfect symmetry of mutually beneficial cooptition .

5 Good cooptition management practices

The researchers make 5 recommendations for successful cooptition:

Formal and informal management

This research does show that both formal and informal management between the two organisations works best where there is a formal structure but managers have the freedom to blur the lines, raise concerns, talk to teams and other managers and leaders traditionally out of their line of command, without having to escalate the issue up the line of their hierarchy. In other words if a managers sees that an issue needs to be resolved they can simply (and are expected to) walk to the other team or managers concerned (in either company) and voice the concern regardless of the department or division.

Information sharing rules

Secondly, the research found that having set rules on information sharing

is important and that any change to these rules are managed at an inter-organisational level so they remain clear to both organisations.

Governance rules

Thirdly, the researchers found that clear rules of governance are important both to lay down at the start and then to develop collaboratively.

Giving ground and flexibility

It was also found that successful cooptition requires that both organisations involved need to learn to give ground for the greater good and not hold on to everything as a point to be negotiated. It is only by showing willingness to make the partnership work over their natural suspicions and rivalries that cooptition can work.

Equitable resource sharing

Equally it has been found that the technology or information shared needs to be as equitable as possible. Trust needs to be built over time.

Asymmetric relationships in a cooptition situation almost invariably lead to a win-lose situation and a rapid decline in trust and the ability to operate together.

Reference

Le Roy, F., & Czakon, W. (2016). Managing cooptition: the missing link between strategy and performance. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 53, 3-6.

Overview

In cooptition (competition and collaboration between rival organisations) there are three points of tension:

The 3 levels of cooptition tension

1. Inter-organisational level (tension between the organisations)
2. Intra-organisational level (tension inside the organisations)
3. Inter-individual level (tension between people who should be collaborating).

There are two ways to manage cooptition

1. Separation or
2. Integration

of the functions competing and cooperating.

5 recommendations for successful management of a cooptition scenario:

1. Use both formal and informal management styles
2. Have good information sharing rules
3. Have and develop good governance rules
4. Be prepared to give ground and be flexible
5. Have equitable resource sharing



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Success in business – women versus men?

What motivates you at work? Is it all financial, or are there other factors that drive you? Do you work all the hours humanly possible or do you have a home life?

A study just published in the International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research has examined success factors in business and then compared women's views with men's to see what gender differences there were in terms of perception of importance. The researcher, Jodyanne Kirkwood, from the Department of Management, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand noted that, "There appears to be a global trend away from primarily financial success factors that were described in early research ... to more multi-faceted success factors that include both financial and non-financial success criteria which may be impacted on by the changing nature of work and the increasing emphasis on work-life balance and lifestyle."



Men vs women

Traditional gender stereotypes have it that men 'go out and kill the bison' while the women tend to the family. Kirkwood has shown however that this is now changing, with men putting increasing emphasis on other factors as measures of success, while

conversely women are putting more emphasis on financial security as success.

Previous research has invariably reported differences in perceptions of importance of the various success factors along gender lines. However, Kirkwood found that there was no significant difference between the sexes when it comes to business owners in terms of what they consider to be success factors.

The reason for this finding could be that global perceptions have changed since the 2008 financial crisis, causing non-monetary factors to rise in importance.

Perceived success factors - in order

1. Financials

No matter the other factors that determined their values of success in business, the financials seemed to be most important for their business. Kirkwood showed, "Financial security was important and respondents described having a good income and a passive income stream or money for their retirement. The second factor mentioned was profit, a good return on investment and wealth generation."

2. Personal satisfaction

Personal satisfaction from work was the next important factor in business. You may pay the bills and perhaps be able to invest in a pension, but most important is the need to enjoy doing it. Business owners said that, "they felt they were successful if they were satisfied with various things – such as doing a good job, job satisfaction,

creative and intellectual satisfaction and satisfaction from achieving results and goals.”

3. Work / life and family / life balance

A third of respondents said that work-life and work- family balance was a major driving factor in their self-perceived business success. Being able to see one’s children grow up and enjoying time with friends is a significant driver and differed little between men and women. The paper stated, “they were focused on both having a good work-family balance, as well as work-life balance in terms of leisure time, time to travel and have hobbies.”



4. Stakeholder satisfaction

This included customers, staff and other stakeholders. It is interesting to note that being a good employer and making a contribution to the economy and society are seen as significant

drivers here.

Conclusions

Other research has shown that men still focus on their gender roles of going out and working hard while women tend to focus on the family side. However, Kirkwood observed that many of the questions used in this research may well have been using leading questions that gave a biased response: “the way researchers ask questions about success appears to impact the answers business owners give and that question wording, particularly in a highly individual area such as “success” should be focused on self-perceived definitions, rather than lists that have likely been created from outdated literature.”

In short, previous research may have hidden the truth of the matter – that men and women value their lifestyle as much as the financials. This research may actually be uncovering a trend that started long ago.

Reference

Kirkwood, J.J. (2016), "How women and men business owners perceive success", International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research, Vol. 22 Iss 5 pp. 594 - 615

SMEs should use human resources practices

When businesses are growing it is tempting to see services like HR and L&D as a cost rather than a force multiplier. Often when people think of Human Resources or HR they assume they are for large employers with thousands of employees and a team of highly qualified human resources practitioners who hire, train and develop their staff.

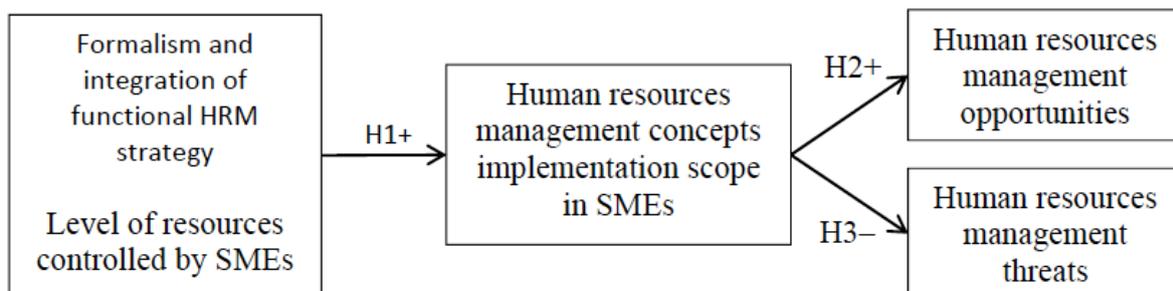


Research just published in the journal, Human Resources, shows that those SME's who fail to implement Human Resources management practices are probably not going to grow as fast as they could.

The researchers state that, "Human resources management is one of the basic functional areas of the organizations, which offers a number of managerial solutions (concepts and methods), which if implemented in business practice ... increases the performance of the modern enterprises ... including those of the SME's..."

The paper shows through a simple model how micro, small and medium enterprises can benefit from practices developed in larger business to improve the potential of the business.

The model



Essentially, through having a formal human resource management (HRM) strategy, systems and practices can be used to benefit the company and reduce the risks associated with things like recruiting the wrong people, poor performance, attendance issues etc.

The research

The research looked to identify the range and measure the benefits and

threats of the implementation of selected human resources management concepts in small business. This was done through surveys of 356 companies across the European Union.



Findings

What the research found was that at the point a small company start to use the concepts and systems inherent in Human Resource Management to mitigate risks and develop good practice, they tend to grow faster and more consistently.

The areas the research found that were particularly useful to SME's are:

- Finding the right staff and using social media recruitment and online screening tools
- Formalised learning strategies to help staff improve their skillsets including and especially e-learning
- Performance management
- Keeping management practices legal
- Helping companies help their staff to have a good work-life balance
- Increased work related

- engagement
- Reduction of turnover
- Helping the leaders stay in touch with the workforce and practices as the organisation grows
- Helping structure the company as it develops.

The researchers also identified that significant threats arise for SME's from a poor or non-existent HRM systems and practices. These include inadvertent law breaking, reduced staff motivation, and reduction in efficiency, due to lack of training for instance. Additionally, the research found that HRM practices are key to achieving the workplace culture the owners want.

Reference

Matejun, M., & Sitkiewicz, P. (2016). Human Resources Management Concepts: Implementation in Small Business. *Human Resources*, 2(2).

Overview

Many SME's only use Human Resource Management as an afterthought rather than using the methods and expertise as they are growing. This study found that there are significant benefits to aid growth that the use of HRM methods help with.

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Management flexibility increases the value of small firms

It is often assumed that successful businesses have a slow steady march of increasing sales as they grow. However new research has shown that this isn't actually the case.

A study into the activities of 512 small US tech firms (of less than US\$100 million value) has shown that the companies who invest in research & development (R&D) have two patterns of complementary activity, only one of which shows a steady increase in revenue:

1. A gradual increase in turnover from exploitation activity and
2. A spike in returns from an R&D project that is launched into a market.

This differs from their larger counterparts who tend only to have a single pattern of activity.

Exploitation vs exploration

There are two primary activities of any business:

1. Exploitation of existing assets, services and products
2. Exploration of new services and products.

Organisational ambidexterity

The dual functions of exploration and exploitation requires what is known as organisational ambidexterity – the ability to exploit and sell existing assets, services and products to keep the revenue coming in, whilst at the same time exploring new possibilities through research and development.

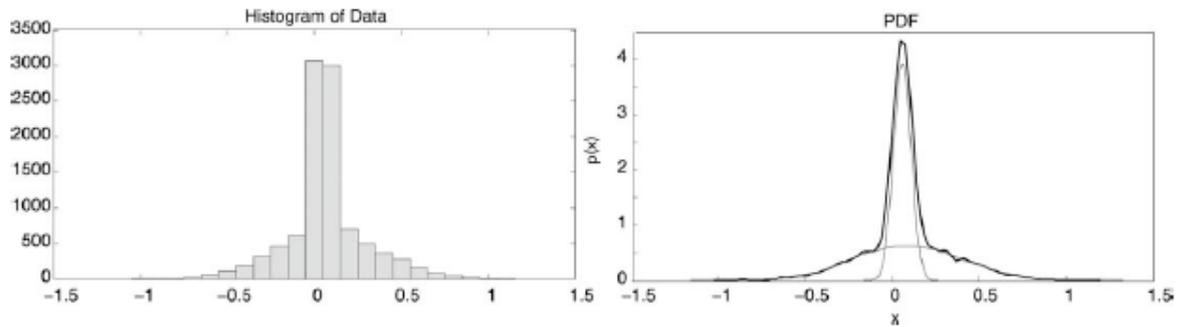
The management of the company needs to successfully flick between the two types of activity. Previous research and practice has shown that it is often best to keep the two types of activity separate as middle managers in particular find it difficult to keep switching between the two. However, the senior management/leadership have no option but to have an eye on both.

Random walks

Statistically anything an organisation does has a 50-50 chance of success. So an activity can either increase or decrease the firm's value. This then describes why most firms have waves of value increase and decrease or a normal distribution of value increase followed by a period of value decrease until the next new thing kicks in and starts its own random walk.

However, what this research has done is shown that this normal or Gaussian distribution of value with long tails on either side isn't actually correct for ambidextrous companies.

The first or left hand tail shows an increase in value through exploitation of an existing technology where the value increase starts slowly and has a steady increase up to a point where there is a sudden take-off and an exponential increase in value to the company of that product or line of products. As either competitors enter the market and start to affect the price or other competing products start to steal market share or disrupt the growth curve then the value will start to decline in a similar pattern to the growth.



What this research has shown, however, is that smaller tech companies have a double spike. The normal exploitative spike that most companies have as they extract the value from some asset, service or product and a further spike based on their R&D efforts as new products and services move from exploration to exploitation.

In terms of value, this second spike is often seen as an outlier and not real as the exploitative (sales) spike often commands the attention. The exploitation phase is however just a realisation of the explorative phase. These smaller companies spend considerable amounts of time in the state between exploration and exploitation. This is important as both phases require very different

management approaches and outlooks.

What the researchers are arguing is that all too often it is just the sales side of things that attract the valuation and attention of an organisation rather than the firm's ability to successfully manage both states.

In effect it is the agility of the organisation that is important for long term success.

Reference

Casault, S., Groen, A. J., & Linton, J. D. (2016). Towards a better understanding of the dynamics of value creation in R&D intensive small firms. *R&D Management*.

Overview

Small firms have two main challenges:

1. To exploit existing assets, services and products (extract the maximum value through sales) and
2. To explore new products and services (research and development)

Most small firms spend most of their time doing both activities concurrently and in different phases of development. The companies that do so most successfully and therefore have the highest value are those that have the highest level of organisational ambidexterity and management agility.

Live and learn?

Who are the people most willing to learn in an organisation?

The answer may surprise you.

When you look at the spend in most organisations on things like learning and development, often it is the younger staff that get the most invested in their development. In part this is caused by the perception that older members of staff already know a lot, are usually pretty skilled and that they are less enthusiastic about personal development and formal learning.

A study just published in the Journal of Social Issues by researchers from Queensland University of Technology and the Department of Human Resource Studies at Tilburg University in the Netherlands has shown however that it isn't someone's age that dictates their willingness to learn new workplace skills.

The willingness to learn



Counter-intuitively, it turns out that age has no predictive value when it comes to willingness to learn. There is one two tier factor that does however predict someone's willingness to learn:

1. The time the person feels they have left in the organisation and
2. The importance that individual places on work in their lives.

The researchers also found that there was significant age discrimination when it comes to learning and development in many organisations.

The researchers found that it is not the age of the person that dictates their willingness to learn, their learning orientation or their general attitude to learning, rather it was an individual's perception of the amount of time they still had to work.

State retirement ages in Europe were set a long time ago when people in their early to mid 60's had relatively little time to live after they retired. Life expectancy has lengthened considerably since most of these ages (between 60-65) were set and now people will often live 20-30 years beyond retirement. This is why most countries in the EU are revisiting retirement ages, while the US has no retirement age whatsoever. In doing this, the authors of the paper showed that, "organisations can stimulate learning and development by offering Human Resource Management practices that lengthen perceived remaining time, such as career counselling to discuss future career opportunities and favourable employment and working conditions."

In other words, when the researchers manipulated the perception of the length of time someone had left in the organisation / to live / had left in the work environment, people's interest in and attitude towards learning increased in most cases.

Work centrality

The factor which facilitated this effect is what is known 'work centrality' or how important the work is in their lives generally. The higher the importance work plays in an individual's life the more likely they will be to want to engage in and have a better attitude towards learning in the workplace.

What the researchers found was that when people have more autonomy, responsibility and interesting and varied work the relative importance of their work (work centrality) increases significantly and, with it, their willingness to learn.

Age and experience

In rapid technologically advancing workplaces, older members of staff often add a great deal of value to the team, particularly if they have been working at the organisation for a long time. This time put into the organisation will imbue a lot of wisdom and knowledge in the intricacies of the organisation that cannot just be inculcated through a few training sessions.



They tend to see and know the nuances and detail that their younger colleagues are less able to pick up. Further it was found that older workers frequently add a calming and wiser perspective on things. This in turn confers value in the older person who may sit quietly in their corner, but will have greater intrinsic value than their newly graduated colleague who knows everything but understand little.

Reference

Kooij, D.T.A.M. & Zacher, H. (2016) Why and When Do Learning Goal Orientation and Attitude Decrease with Aging? The Role of Perceived Remaining Time and Work Centrality. *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 72, No. 1, 2016, pp. 146—168 doi: 10.1111/josi.12160

Overview

Ageism in organisations is rife and in particular investment in learning and development tends not to be directed at older members of staff. The assumption is often that older members of staff are unwilling to engage in learning. However, this study found that age isn't a factor in willingness to learn, rather that there is one, two tier factor that predicts an individual's willingness to learn or their orientation and attitude towards learning.

1. The time the person feels they have left in the organisation and
2. The importance that individual places on work in their lives.

Knowledge intensive process competencies are lacking

Every organisation will have knowledge intensive parts of its business, from customer records to the accumulation of management practices, procedures, policies, learning etc.

Organisations often strive to understand their knowledge assets and how they may be used either to improve their services or to gain a competitive advantage. As such, organisations try to have their knowledge management strategies align closely with their business process management. Developing the alignment between these two areas is essential for knowledge-intensive business processes that represent core (and often complex) processes within the organisation.



A knowledge-intensive business process is any process that requires an individual's judgement, where that judgement is based on the individual's experiences and knowledge. This knowledge can be obtained through a variety of sources for example knowledge repositories such as manuals, databases, reports,

analyses, experts etc. The key point about knowledge-intensive business processes is that they require the individual to actually use the knowledge they have together with their experience and critical thinking to make an informed judgement or decision.

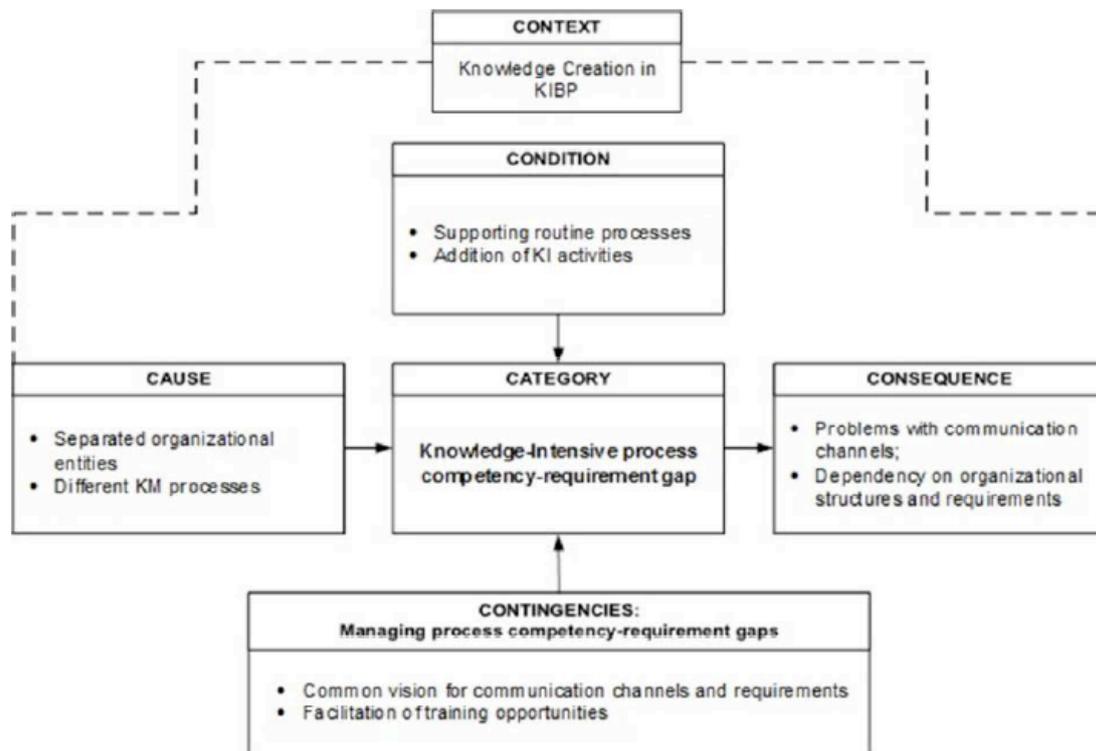
A study just published in the Journal of Knowledge Management has shown that in order to process the amount of knowledge, make good decisions and make it useful, knowledge intensive process competencies are vital. That is to say, people need to be skilled in the retrieval, selection, processing and active use of the knowledge in question, together with the ability to analyse and engage in critical thinking to make good judgements based on the evidence available.

The research

Researchers from the Department of Computer Science, Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa and the Robert J. Manning School of Business, at the University of Massachusetts in the US interviewed staff from healthcare, higher education and financial services organisations to ascertain what competencies exist in the workforce and whether they are being used. The participants came from a spread of seniority, from senior management to frontline workers, and were assessed on their experience and skill level with knowledge-intensive business processes.

Findings

Common issues



The diagram above describes the common issues found in knowledge intensive business processes. These issues lead to a competency requirement gap, which can lead to problems with communication channels, as well as dependency on organisational structures and requirements.

Competency requirement gap

The authors found, “Employees need to be supported and encouraged to rely on their intuition and build inferences in regards to how knowledge intensive business processes are handled and what knowledge is needed. By increasing levels of task engagement and perspectives, task reasoning skills can be developed to allow for critical-thinking and problem-solving capabilities leading employees to provide a higher perceived value for

the organization.”

Whilst all the target organisations provided training in things like data entry and other skills such as learning to access information from databases etc., no organisation gave adequate training in using the information, critical thinking and how to make good judgements from the available knowledge.

Silos of knowledge

The researchers also found ‘interdepartmental knowledge siloing’. This is where certain knowledge is only acquired and disseminated within internal departments and is often jealously guarded from the other parts of the organisation causing knowledge deficits and gaps across the organisation. Further there were also problems with different processes being used for the management of the

knowledge in different areas of the organisation with little interlinking or overall strategy. This is bad for the organisation as a whole: “When knowledge and information is not disseminated as needed, [knowledge intensive business processes] will be impacted negatively since the knowledge required is not provided or available.”

Communications were also identified as a problem when it came to knowledge intensive business processes: “Participants expressed the desire and need for effective communication; however, participants also expressed varying levels of frustration with how or when communication occurred.”

These issues not only apply to collation and use of knowledge across the organisation but also to learning how to use the knowledge (knowledge handling competencies), decision making and critical thinking abilities (judgement competencies).

Solutions...

The two solutions raise by the authors were

1. Having and supporting a common vision for communications channels about knowledge-intensive business process and
2. Engaging in multiple approaches for training opportunities, particularly in terms of knowledge handling and judgement making competencies.

With regard to the communications

channels, the researchers found that “By supporting and encouraging the opportunities for interactions, the organisation can help enable the flow of information and knowledge across the departments. As employees understand how knowledge-intensive business process are connected and who is involved, information flows more efficiently and new knowledge can be developed.”



In terms of training, “Informal opportunities for interactions and training were perceived to provide greater value for the employees. These sessions often occurred at the instigation of the employees and provided an opportunity to discuss specific situations and provided a more immediate reaction or discussion for quicker responses.” The researchers found that when such events had the most positive and beneficial effect when focused on decision making and critical thinking development..

Reference

Little, T.A , Deokar, A.V.
Understanding knowledge creation in the context of knowledge-intensive business processes, Journal of Knowledge Management, Vol. 20 Iss: 5, pp.858 - 879

Overview

Knowledge-intensive business processes need excellent knowledge management competencies to ensure the organisation gains the most benefit from the knowledge it holds. This research found that there is a knowledge competency gap in most organisations where people are trained to operate the mechanics of the organisation's knowledge management system, but not to make good judgements using it.

Additionally, they found that knowledge siloing (keeping knowledge and practices within departmental silos) helps to maintain the knowledge-intensive business process competency gap.



How suppressing your emotions makes it harder for you to achieve your goals

One of the most common ways of dealing with unwanted emotions, such as anxiety, distress or dread, for example, is to suppress the emotions, stiff upper lip style and carry on. However in the emotion regulation field it is now well known that suppression makes things worse. There is now ample research evidence to show that emotion suppression strengthens the emotions and weakens the mind's ability to process and deal with the emotion. Suppression also leads to lower levels of psychological health and well-being.

It has also been found that emotion suppression significantly reduces cognitive performance, the ability to think clearly, and reduces the individual's ability to control their own emotions and actions.



New study

In a new study, researchers from the School of Psychology at The University of Auckland in New Zealand wanted to go a step further and see what effect emotion suppression has on people's goal seeking behaviour and their achievement of those goals.

Our ability to progress and achieve our goals is strongly associated with higher levels of psychological well-

being, self-efficacy and confidence. When people, as they will do, encounter problems and challenges whilst pursuing their goals how they deal with the resultant emotions generated by frustration, annoyance, failure etc. appears to matter.

What the researchers wanted to know was what how emotion regulation techniques like suppression affect goal achievement.

Two types of emotion regulation techniques

Largely there are two main ways people tend to try to deal with their emotions:

1. Emotion suppression, which means the individual tries to hide, ignore or otherwise conquer or control the emotion by suppressing it, or
2. Cognitive reappraisal, which basically means changing the way you think about and reinterpreting the issue in a different way. So rather than taking something personally (i.e. "this always happens to me" or "I can't do this" to "Hey everyone faces challenges, this is just part of the learning process. I will get better as I practise."

The researchers ran a series of experiments with between 100 and 146 participants where they tracked the participant's emotions over a two months period as they worked towards their goals.

The participants were then asked to identify their immediate goals over this

period. They were then measured for the emotions elicited over this period and the emotion regulation techniques they used (suppression or cognitive reappraisal) were observed. Additionally, the researchers also had the participants keep a log of how motivated towards their goal.

The participants were then measured for:

1. Goal effort – how hard they were trying to achieve their goals at any moment in time
2. Goal competence and
3. Goal success.

Findings

What the researchers found was that people who used emotion suppression to deal with the anxiety, frustrations and down moods whilst they were working towards their goals were significantly more likely, compared to those using cognitive reappraisal, to

- a. lose motivation
- b. feel less confident about achieving the goal
- c. abandon the goal and
- d. feel generally less satisfied with their performance and achievements.

In effect what the research found was that emotion suppression reduces and impedes both the effort and motivation towards a goal and how likely it is someone will achieve that goal.

Conversely people using cognitive reappraisal to deal with their emotions

during goal striving and seeking behaviour are significantly more likely to:

- a. keep going
- b. become more competent and
- c. achieve their goals.

Additional findings

The researchers had two additional and unexpected findings over the course of the studies:

1. That emotion suppression reduces and impedes people's problem-solving abilities and their ability to incorporate new information and
2. That people using cognitive reappraisal techniques were significantly less likely to remain in negative mood states for any length of time.

Emotion regulation in organisations

This study not only adds to the existing research body of evidence about emotion regulation and its impact on our daily lives, but it also strengthens the call for emotion regulation to be taught and developed in organisations.

Reference

Low, R. S., Overall, N. C., Hammond, M. D., & Girme, Y. U. (2016). Emotional Suppression During Personal Goal Pursuit Impedes Goal Strivings and Achievement. *Emotion* (Washington, DC).

Overview

In a new study just published researchers from the University of Auckland found that people who suppress their emotions are significantly more likely to find it difficult to achieve their goals and are also significantly less likely to achieve them.

Additionally they found that emotion suppression impedes people's problem solving ability and increases their chances of having and remaining in negative mood states.



The 'polythink syndrome' and elite decision-making

How do governments make big decisions? How does any professional group or board actually make important decisions?

What happens to the big decisions when you have a group of people who have to make them? What we often find is that such groups either make suboptimal decisions or become frozen with inaction and indecision, frequently putting off such decisions.



Alternatively, it has been found that a lot of elite decision-making succumbs to 'groupthink' whereby groups agree to suboptimal decisions due to their desire for uniformity rather than conflict. Groupthink often leads teams to overestimate the likelihood of success of a decision and ignore any limitations and conflicting evidence.

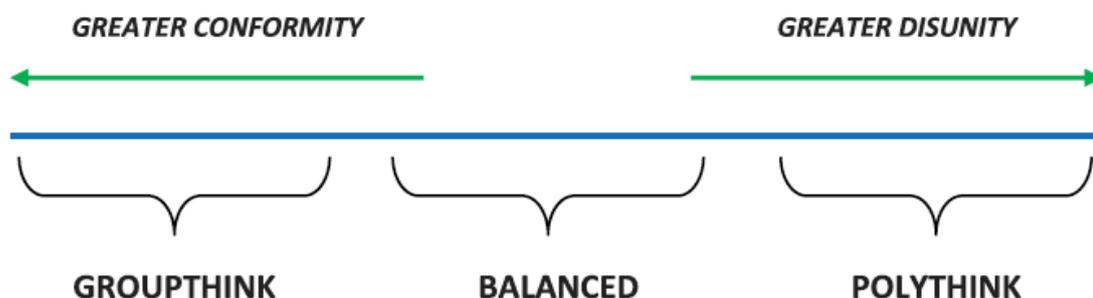
At the other end of the spectrum is the phenomenon of 'polythink', where the group has strongly held diverse views and prescriptions and even has fragmented opinions as to what the goals of the decision are. Polythink frequently leads to disjointed decisions, decision paralysis, conflict - whether overt or hidden - and the inability to arrive at a substantive decision.

In a study published in the journal *Advances in Political Psychology* Mintz and Wayne explore the attributes and effects of polythink.

Groupthink vs polythink

Mintz and Wayne show that there is a continuum between groupthink and polythink.

What the researchers found was that there are a range of more optimal decision-making processes which are more balanced:



Polythink has been shown to be behind some of the greatest disasters to befall the USA in recent times. 9/11 is widely held to be one of those, with the FBI, CIA and military all knowing their own piece of the puzzle ahead of

the attacks, but jealously guarding their knowledge, and then blaming each other when the Twin Towers fell.

Whilst polythink can be destructive it is also the basis of good decision-making

as well, if it is harnessed and managed appropriately. Wildly differing outlooks and opinions make for a vibrant decision-making process. The trick is

Harnessing polythink

Mintz and Wayne found that there are five stages or ways of harnessing polythink to develop a more balanced approach:

1. Design and form a decision making unit

The decision making unit is where the leader or leaders “need to carefully compose the decision unit in advisory groups to ensure high-quality decisions. Other things being equal, a quality process is likely to lead to better decisions than a non-systematic, intuitive, unstructured process.”

This involves harnessing “healthy” divergent perspectives among group members whilst having a general consensus on policy goals and overall direction of the group. The trick here is that the decision-making unit focuses on helping the group arrive at a good decision and on focusing on the end result needed.

1. Brainstorming – think outside the box

The issue here is to get all of the ideas out into the open as early as possible, so everyone can see and debate the potential outcomes and effects of each of them.

2. Understand bias

It is important that the decision makers are aware of and

to bring the differences together into a unified whole, to help create coherent and robust decisions.

trained to spot and tackle a range of the more destructive cognitive biases including:

- a. Shooting from the hip bias. This entails making spur of the moment, unplanned decisions.
- b. Locking in. “Locking in” is focusing exclusively on a preferred policy option while ignoring critical information that contradicts this policy option.
- c. Wishful thinking where people attribute unfounded and unevidenced positive effects to a particular view point.
- d. Ignoring critical evidence. This particularly occurs where the critical evidence goes against the preferences of the group or the leader discounts it.
- e. Poliheuristic bias. This is a two stage decision-making bias where all the politically unacceptable choices are removed before more traditional decision-making processes are applied only to the remaining politically acceptable choices.
- f. Focusing on short-term benefits rather than on long-term costs.
- g. Preference over preference bias. This is where a particular course of action is already preferred (say taking military action) and people only focus on the sub-options, for example ground troops or air attacks first.

This is a kind of forced choice bias and closely related to the lock in bias (see 4 above).

- h. The over-confidence bias or positive illusion where people assume success even though the data does not support such confidence and risks still occur.

3. Collecting and using opposing forces

Use polarised teams to run a trail of the subject or issues by having each of the teams with differing views to present their evidence and arguments to a jury. This includes the ability to question each other and present concluding arguments.

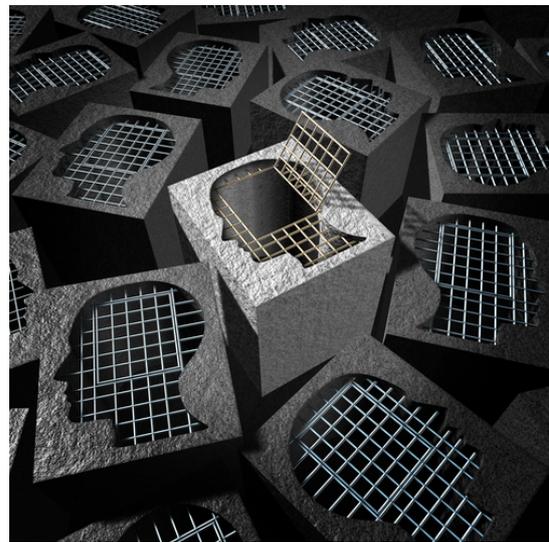
4. Finally, use a decision support system

Decision support systems include Monte Carlo Simulations whereby a programme arrives at a set of probabilities occurring as a result of the possible decision choices.

Connected to (but not the same as) the Monte Carlo Simulations are 'what if' scenario generators. These produce a range of possible (not probable) scenarios that may occur as a result of each decision possibility. So if there are say seven possible decisions that could be made then the 'what if' analysis will provide 3 or 5 different possible scenarios from each decision from worst case scenario to the best case scenario.

Conclusions

Polythink, like groupthink can produce some pretty poor decisions if not handled correctly, largely because most people don't understand how to harness the power of the conflict generated in a polythink situation. Instead they often act to reduce or remove the conflict (as an emotional avoidance reaction) as opposed using the situation to arrive at a better decision.



Editor's note:

Having run polythink workshops and coached boards and government departments through polythink scenarios I can attest to the power of the tools for harnessing polythink. They often arrive at much better decisions, especially in situations where politics is involved.

Reference

Alex Mintz, Carly Wayne, "The Polythink Syndrome and Elite Group Decision-Making" (2016) *Advances in Political Psychology*, Vol. 37, Suppl. 1, 2016

Overview

This paper looks at the phenomenon of 'polythink', where there are numerous often conflicting views about a situation and how to harness polythink to make better decisions where there is conflict.

The research shows there is a continuum between groupthink and polythink and promotes a five step process for harnessing polythink for making better decisions:

1. Design and form a decision making unit
2. Use brainstorming to get the issues out into the open early on
3. Understand bias
4. Collect and use opposing camps
5. Use decision support systems

Control vs resources: how stepping aside early may benefit your startup...

Looking at the two consumer electronics behemoths Apple and Microsoft one may be led to believe that having the visionary who founded the business at the tiller while it goes from a garage based business to a multibillion dollar company is essential.

Far from it – new research that looked at over 6000 US IT and life sciences companies found that often the founder *devalues* the company by between 17.1 – 22% by retaining control of the business after three years of operation. In short, if you as an entrepreneur wants your ‘baby’ to grow into a giant, you should make succession plans at an early stage and bring in professionals to run the company for you.

Resources / control

Entrepreneurs will have an amazing idea in setting up the business they wish to make good money from. Entrepreneur / owners tend to be technical experts, few having Masters in Business Administration (MBAs), but rather a combination of experiences and learning that leads to that spark for setting the world alight with their idea. In order for a business to survive once it is off the ground it must survive in a competitive environment and operate successfully against other businesses.

To do this, a start-up business needs resources. The research found that “Failure to attract missing resources can be particularly harmful because it can heighten the liability of newness, harm growth, and increase the chance of failure”.

These resources include:

1. The right human resources
2. Social resources and
3. Financial resources.

As the business grows and develops the founder needs to cede some control in order to gain more of these resources. For example, in order to get venture capital, they will have to give some seats on the board over to the venture capitalists who in return will give a lot of business expertise in the entrepreneur’s field as well as a relatively large sum of money to add to those resources.

It has been shown in other research that businesses funded by venture capital are floated on the stock exchange up to four years earlier than their rivals who are not so funded.



Another example is that the entrepreneur may well be a brilliant product developer but have no idea whatsoever about marketing. They would need to bring in marketing expertise and cede control even more. The list of holes in the entrepreneur’s knowledge, expertise and ability to act makes giving up control part of the

story of business growth.

Ceding overall control

The researcher, Professor Wasserman from Harvard Business School and the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, California, U.S.A., found that, “On average, each additional level of founder control (i.e., controlling the board and/or the CEO position) reduces the pre-money valuation of the start-up by 17.1–22.0 percent.”

At some stage, therefore, in order for the business to really take off and achieve its true potential, the entrepreneur should seek to prepare to cede overall control of the business.

It is often best that the entrepreneur retains a financial interest and thereby

takes a decent dividend every year, but they should leave business to the experts. The successful entrepreneurs who build huge companies often do this early whilst they stay on the board but hand over the reins to the experts in building the business and dealing with the competition. The experts may not have the talent or vision to come up with the idea that sparked the business, nor the drive to fight the early battles before proof of concept, but they are often better at stabilising the business and moving it on.

Reference

Wasserman, N. (2016) The Throne vs The Kingdom: Founder Control and Value Creation in Startups. Strategic Management Journal November 2016

Overview

A new study has shown that founders who stay in control of their companies once they have become established often hold the progress and growth of the company back. The researcher, Professor Wasserman from Harvard Business School and the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, California, U.S.A., found that, “On average, each additional level of founder control (i.e., controlling the board and/or the CEO position) reduces the pre-money valuation of the start-up by 17.1–22.0 percent.”

Blind rage – how anger slows thinking in the brain

Research just published in the Journal of Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience by a team of scientists from the University of Sussex, Maastricht University, Campus de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Universitari Quirón Dexeus, Barcelona, the Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Neurologico Carlo Besta, Milan, Leiden University and Ohio State University has shown that while people who are angry are often quick to respond to situations they actually slow down their thinking and their ability to respond physically also slows.



Research to now has understood anger as a 'positive motivational emotion', explained in the research thus: "Anger is linked to 'high optimism, positive expectations and experiences of high coping potential' ... and, importantly, anger is associated with perceived task ease".

However, along with the 'fight' response often comes a 'flight' response. This has been shown in previous physiological experiments: "Anger elicited in the context of harassment or personalised recall increases cardiac output... In contrast, physiological responses to angry facial expressions presented both supra and subliminally can induce cardiac states

more reminiscent of fear, such as heart rate decreases instead of increases, as well as increases in heart rate variability."

The research

In one experiment two groups of young people were tested in two separate experiments. The first group watched a screen and had to press a button when they saw a word flash up in amongst a lot of letter sequences that had no meaning. Every so often the word ANGER or RELAX was flashed up before a sequence of letters so quickly that it could not be consciously registered, so they had a subliminal response to the next word sequence. Members of this group were wearing blood pressure monitors.

Members of the second group were also being tested for blood pressure but in addition were in an fMRI scanner that took pictures of their brain activity as they did the same tests.

Results

What they found was that when subjects were subliminally told ANGER they processed the task significantly more slowly than when they were shown the word RELAX or when they were given no subliminal messaging. Further the researchers found "that for the contrast of ANGER versus RELAX prime conditions, reduced activation of visual areas predicted slower reaction times." This goes quite a long way to back up the idea of 'blind rage'. In effect what this series of experiments show is that anger slows the brain's ability to process information and produces both visual and cognitive tunnelling. This means that people in an angry condition cannot take in

peripheral information and tend to focus on one action only, often the subject of the anger. Additionally the ability to reason is also significantly impaired.

Reference

Garfinkel, S et al, "Anger in brain and body: the neural and physiological perturbation of decision-making by emotion" *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 2015, 1–9

Overview

A paper just published using fMRI data has shown that whilst people who are angry act faster and expect good outcomes from their behaviour, the speed at which they actually process information slows, their vision becomes impaired and they often lose the ability to assimilate new or peripheral information. Additionally, their ability to reason is also impaired.





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