

Changing minds

by Michael Morgan and Ann Herrmann-Nehdi

“Changing the behaviour of people is the most important challenge for businesses trying to compete in a turbulent world.”

John Kotter, Harvard Business School

Heart surgery

Imagine you are in recovery after a triple bypass. You are not feeling your best but at least you are alive. You open your eyes only to see your doctor leaning over you checking your pulse.

He smiles and says, “Welcome back.” You try and smile back. He then says, “I hope you will learn from this. You need to take better care of yourself. You need to change your lifestyle.” You nod your head and mumble, “Of course I will.” The reality is that if you are like most people, you will not!

According to Dr Edward Miller, Dean of the medical school and CEO of the hospital at Johns Hopkins University, 90% of people who have bypass surgery do not change their lifestyles.

If 90% of people do not change when faced with a life threatening situation, imagine how many people do not change for smaller, less important things. And if it is so hard to get one person to change, imagine how hard it can be to get a group to change. And even harder still is to change an entire organisation, made up of people with different agendas, different mindsets and different ideas.

Changing your own mind is hard enough. Changing someone else's is almost impossible. But change is exactly what organisations and the people in them need to do. Organisations will not survive in this highly competitive world unless they learn to change quickly. And the people in them need to change just as fast.

Why is it so hard to change your mind? Even when the facts are overwhelming and the reasons for change are undeniable and life threatening, we still struggle to do it.

One reason is that our minds have already made themselves up. We already know what we are going to do. We have what we call ‘mindsets.’

Mindsets

A mindset is the way we see things, the way we think about the world. We develop them at a young age and stick to them for most of our lives. For example, you might have been brought up with a mindset that says owing money to someone else is bad and should be avoided. In many instances, no amount of persuasion will make you change your mind.

Someone else might have the mindset that an employee's rights should be guaranteed, regardless. Again, no amount of persuasion will change that.

Some mindsets are small and personal; others can be bigger and shared by an entire nation. For instance, in Australia the national mindset is that sport is a very important part of life. In contrast, in Singapore, sport is of little consequence.

Giving someone a whole lot of facts about why they should change will do little to change their minds. Their current mindset will reject them, often before they have had any chance at all to break through the individual's mindset for full consideration. You have to discover what their mindset is on a specific issue and why they have it. Then you might be able to do something about it.

Life is continually shaping and refining our mindsets

So where do mindsets come from? We start developing mindsets the moment we are born and we never stop. The ones we form as a child are deeply ingrained in our brains and are the hardest to change.

As a child we are developing mindsets all the time, from our parents and our friends. As we grow older they come from school, from work, from what we read, from the news and from our personal experience. Life is continually shaping and refining our mindsets.

It is just as well this is so, because we could not live effectively without mindsets. They help us make our minds up quickly about things and deal with them. In terms of our survival as a species they are essential. But they can also be limiting as they can close us down to other options and make it hard for us to see other points of view, to change our opinions, and to behave differently.

For example, if you have a mindset that says starting your own business and running it from home is too risky, then you might miss out on a great business opportunity.

Organisations, and indeed entire industries, can also get locked into their mindsets. When everyone in an organisation holds the same mindset it becomes self-reinforcing. No one questions it so it becomes reality. Any other view gets blocked out and ignored. This is why it is so hard to change organisations from the inside. Most radical changes come from outside an industry, or from those who bring to an industry a different mindset and dare to think differently.

For example, Virgin changed the airline mindset; Apple is changing the music and now phone mindset. There are serious consequences to getting stuck in a mindset. Digital could not change their mindset about personal computing and are no longer with us.

Most of us have tried to change not only our own minds, but other minds as well. Our guess is that more often than not we have failed.

There are a number of reasons for this.

1. Mindsets are part of our 'cognitive unconscious' where we have already formed mental maps that become our point of reference as we look at the world. Most of the time we are unaware of these mental maps or the impact they have.

Our mental maps are literally built from our experiences in life. As we process information, most often unconsciously, we are looking for patterns and scanning the mental maps we have already formed neuronally, based on our experience. Sometimes our maps are helpful and sometimes they are not.

You are often encountering mental maps when you travel to a new place, and attempt to make purchases in a currency you are not accustomed to. This is also true when interacting with the differences that may appear in dress, road signs, habits, customs, food, etc. Our maps are often of little help and create confusion as we are challenged by some subtle differences in a system we think we already know. In fact, our experience and knowledge actually stops us from looking around for other options and ideas that might help us solve those challenges.

Most change requires that we challenge our mental maps and form new connections in the brain. This takes energy and motivation. When we understand how our mental maps are working and how they have created our mindsets, we are better prepared to adapt and respond to the change that is constantly occurring around us.

2. Mindsets are firmly ingrained in the brain. They are reinforced by the structure and very nature of the brain itself.

The brain is where we go as we are processing any new information, and we need to learn how to develop, practice and maintain it. Dr Michael Merzenich, an expert on the brain's ability to change (known as plasticity) at the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) stated it this way: "The brain was constructed to change." It is the single body organ that is the central processor of all our mental processing. Our neurological system is involved in all aspects of the change process. Each and every brain is as unique and different as your thumbprint. We literally build that uniqueness throughout the course of our lives, creating and fine-tuning our own unique style and building our mindset.

Our maps lead the brain to fill in gaps we might initially see and then quickly move on, but often with incomplete information. This is helpful when the map matches the situation and provides us with great efficiency so we do not have to sit and think about how we start our car every day. However, this is critical to understand as all learners are constantly filling in the blanks unconsciously, based on their prior experience. Look at the diagram and read what you see:

ICE CREAM IS GOOD

What did you say? Ice cream is good? Groups around the globe who have completed this exercise are 100% sure that is the phrase provided. However, when you reveal the entire phrase you see: JGF GPFAM JS CQQD. (If you do not believe me take a piece of paper and cover up the lower portion of the letters, JGF GPFAM JS CQQD and you will see how this works.) Thus, all of our experiences will preprogram what we see and how we think about or feel about a given topic or model. Years ago a participant in a program stood up during a segment and declared: "Excuse me, I do not DO metaphors."

It was clear that this person was shutting down his own mental process because of a previous experience. Think of the times that has happened to you, to your team and to your organisation. When we engage others in a change process we are asking them to challenge their previous mental maps and make new neural connections in their brains.

3. Isolated facts have little effect on mindsets. If the fact does not fit the current mindset it gets rejected instantly.

When 90% of heart patients do not listen to their doctor, then you know something is wrong. What is it about our brains that resists change so tenaciously? Why do we fight, even what we know to be in our vital interests?

The reason is that our thinking relies on our mental maps and mindsets, not facts. Neuroscience tells us that each of our mindsets, the long term concepts that structure the way we think, is instilled in the synapses of the brain.

Dr Michael Merzenich found in his research that habits actually showed up on MRI scans. In studying flute players he found their brains had developed larger representational areas that control the fingers, tongue and lips. He could see that flute playing had physically changed the brain.

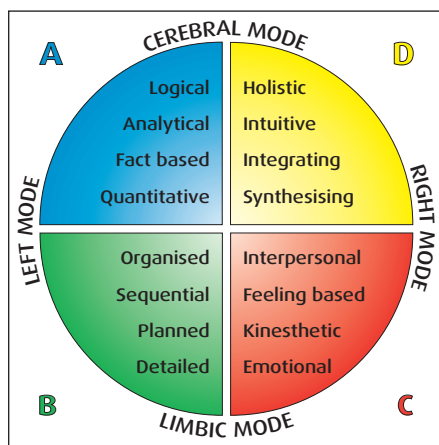
This is why mindsets are not things that can be changed by someone telling you a few facts. Facts get rejected if they do not fit with our mindsets and the mental maps that form them that are wired into our synapses, get rejected.

Business people are just like flute players. They have developed thinking habits or mindsets which have changed their brains. The cumulative weight of knowledge and experience and the mental maps that have formed make it very hard to change your mind.

Breaking through the mindset barrier

If you cannot change someone's mind by giving them the facts, how can you engage their minds in such a way as to break through the mindset barrier? The answer is with time and a 'whole brain' approach.

The concept of Whole Brain Thinking is based upon our distribution of specialised modes throughout the brain system. The metaphoric model, developed from research done by Ned Herrmann at GE, is divided into four separate quadrants, each one different and equal in importance. The model has been highly validated over the last 30 years with over 2 million learners worldwide. This model can be useful to describe our mindsets in an easy to remember and practical way.



In the Whole Brain Model®, a more logical, analytical, quantitative and bottom-line approach to change appears in the Upper Left A quadrant. The more planned, organised, detailed and sequential change style

is processed in the Lower Left B quadrant. Synthesising, integrating, holistic, and intuitive approaches to change reside in the Upper Right D quadrant. Finally the interpersonal, emotional, kinesthetic and feeling change modes are associated with the Lower Right C quadrant. If you think of each of these quadrants as four different people dealing with a change issue, imagine how each might approach the process.

Mr A would want to approach the challenge quite logically but may be uncomfortable with emotions and feelings that change and the unknown creates. Ms B on the other hand would be ready and organised, expecting a clear plan and process, but may feel a lack of security and be uncomfortable with new approaches that changes may bring.

Mr C would often prefer to engage in dialogue about the change, but may over-react emotionally and tune out before understanding all of the facts at hand. Ms D will often react spontaneously and not be too worried about the details at first, but may feel confined, or worry about loss of freedom of choice, perhaps wanting to 'jump ship' quickly. Anyone trying to introduce change will probably confront all four of these mindsets at any given time. Fortunately, our research has shown that 93% of the population around the world prefers two or more of these mindsets and all have access to all four. Thus, we are in fact 'hard wired to be whole', with each of us having some degree of the four characters above available to us.

Changing your own mind

John Kotter of the Harvard Business School says that "The central issue for business is never strategy, structure, culture or systems. The core of the matter is always about changing the behaviour of people."

Mindsets get in the way of change and unless addressed correctly will stop any change from ever taking place. Neuroscience is showing the part that the brain plays in change, and in particular, in resisting change. It is also showing the way to address change by recognising our mindsets and setting out to change them.

Dee Hock, founder of Visa International said: "When you seek to lead, spend 50% of your time leading yourself." One way to do that is to think about your mindsets and how you might want to challenge or change them.

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How to change/challenge your own mindsets

Define and analyse it: What is your current mindset? (A quadrant)

- ◆ What is the current mindset that is shaping your thinking?
- ◆ What is its strength and weakness?
- ◆ What are some of the recent decisions you have made that might have been influenced by this mindset?
- ◆ How has your own education and experience shaped this mindset?

Challenge it: Why do you hold this mindset and why won't you let go of it? (D quadrant)

- ◆ What are the potential blind spots from holding this mindset?
- ◆ What are some of the blocks/barriers that might be holding you back and keeping you locked into a mindset?
- ◆ What can you do to challenge this mindset?
- ◆ What are the challenges and opportunities in exploring a new mindset?

Talk about it: How do others see it? (C quadrant)

- ◆ How do your feelings and emotions drive this mindset?
- ◆ How is your current mindset different from those of other people?
- ◆ Who can you talk with to gain greater clarity on the situation at hand?
- ◆ Who can help you look at things differently than you normally do in this situation?

Develop a plan: Should you change it and how? (B quadrant)

- ◆ In what way are your current mindsets working or not working for you in this situation? What is tempting about them? Lacking?
- ◆ How can you change or modify your current mindset to improve results?
- ◆ What are some of the other mindsets out there that you might adopt and use?
- ◆ What are the low cost, low risk ways of testing these new mindsets?

Changing other people's minds

In a world where the only constant thing is change, changing people's mind is a critical skill. Howard Gardner, in his book *Changing Minds*, describes a number of levers or persuaders that are needed to alter the mindsets of others.

He calls them:

- ◆ Reason and research
- ◆ Resources and rewards
- ◆ Resonance
- ◆ Representational redescription

When used together they create a powerful and *whole brained* approach to changing minds and mindsets:

A. Reason and research:

Having the facts and the research behind the change.

B. Resources and rewards:

Making sure people have the resources to make the change and the reward system to sustain it.

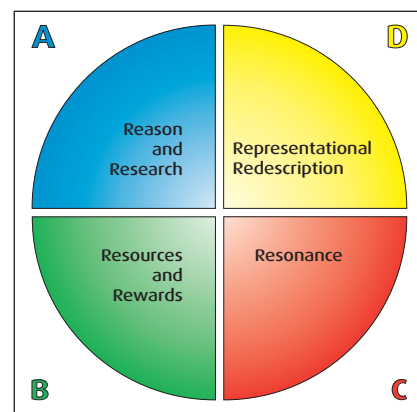
C. Resonance:

Making sure the change feels right with people and is in line with their values.

D. Representational redescription:

Explaining the change in as many ways as possible, using as many different mindsets to explore the change and its impact.

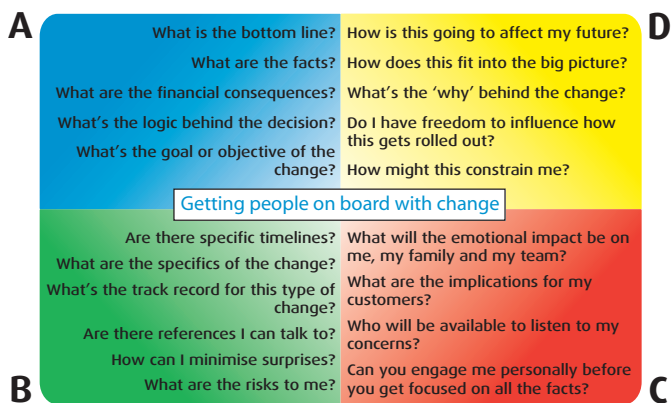
Changing minds



Keep in mind that the change process in itself requires Whole Brain Thinking

To *know* change requires an understanding of the mindsets and thinking involved. When change happens successfully, it is because the brains behind the initiative were engaged, focused, aligned and synergistic. All change initiatives require the involvement and the thinking of everyone.

When communicating change, be sure to visit each of the four quadrants of the Whole Brain Model® and answer the following questions to ensure you are speaking to all of the mindsets you may encounter.



Better yet, ground each person involved in the change process in an understanding of their mindset, *their thinking style*, and how that will impact their role and effectiveness in the change process.

This information provides a benchmark, common language and frame of reference to guide the organisation through the change process in a more predictable and successful way.

Keep in mind that the change process in itself requires Whole Brain Thinking, organised in a slightly different sequence this time:

- A. What is the business case for change?
- D. What is the vision of the new future state?
- B. How do you mobilise energy and move forward to make it happen?
- C. Who needs to be involved? What partnerships need to be developed?

Use your whole brain to avoid the mindset traps we are all susceptible to. If what Plato said is true: "Nothing endures but change", then whatever we can do to change our mindset to adapt more easily to a changing world, will help.

Myths about changing your Mind

- ◆ **Crisis drives change:** Not necessarily. Research shows that up to 90% of coronary bypass patients do not change their lifestyles.
- ◆ **Fear drives change:** Not necessarily. A compelling positive vision is often far more powerful.
- ◆ **Facts drive change:** Not necessarily. Facts that do not fit our mindsets are rejected.

About the authors

Michael Morgan

Michael Morgan, is the founder and CEO of Herrmann International Asia, and is one of the region's leading experts on Whole Brain Thinking. He presents widely to professional audiences and has written two major books: *Making Innovation Happen* and *Creating Workforce Innovation*. Since the early 1980s, Michael has been working with leading Australian and multinational corporations and institutions to harness and develop the true power and potential of their people. Through Whole Brain Thinking, Michael and his team have been providing Australian and Pacific region clients with a powerful, new, scientific approach to helping their people at all levels become more creative, intuitive, innovative, analytical, cooperative, productive and sensitive.

Ann Herrmann-Nehdi

Ann Herrmann-Nehdi is CEO of Herrmann International, publisher of the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument™ (HBDI™) which is based on extensive research on thinking and the brain. Multiple applications of Whole Brain Technology include creativity, strategic thinking, problem solving, management and leadership, teaching and learning, self-understanding, communication and team/staff development. Ann seeks to apply the principles of Whole Brain Technology to her varied responsibilities: from day-to-day operations, to sales, to workshop design and presentations. Having resided in Europe for 13 years, Ann brings a global perspective to the company. Since joining Herrmann International USA 20 years ago, Ann's personal goal is to promote a better understanding of how individuals and organisations think and become more effective, as well as enhance learning and communication technologies worldwide through the application and development

of the whole brain concept. Herrmann International, with affiliates world-wide, continues to research and develop products and applications in the fields of thinking, creativity and learning.

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Herrmann International Asia works with leading companies and academic institutions to improve employee and team performance.

About Herrmann International Asia

Herrmann International Asia works with leading companies and academic institutions to improve employee and team performance.

Herrmann's work focuses on practical ways to leverage differences in individual thinking styles. Building on research originally begun at General Electric, the company has developed applications that range from developing strategy at the executive level to increasing sales force productivity.

More than a million people have completed the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI™), the assessment tool at the heart of the company's approach. Herrmann International Asia is headquartered in Sydney, Australia with offices and affiliates in:

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Asian Headquarters—Sydney

PO Box 383
Pymble NSW 2073
Australia
Phone: +61 2 9880 2333
Fax: +61 2 9880 2343

Auckland

PO Box 300 546
Albany, Auckland 0572
New Zealand
Phone: +64 9 415 0590
Fax: +64 9 428 5293

Melbourne

PO Box 332
Camberwell VIC 3124
Australia
Phone: +61 3 9813 3332
Fax: +61 3 9882 2843

Singapore

150 Orchard Road
#07-02 Orchard Plaza
Singapore 238841
Phone: +65 6 738 8330
Fax: +65 6 275 5028