

Neuroscience and Management Consulting: “Unlocking New Frontiers for Success”

Written by Dr Alvin Oh,

PhD (Education) ; Doctor of Leadership & Management (*honoris causa*)

Assoc Prof (adj), NTU, SUSS-IAL, DukeNUS

In my work in Human Resource & Organizational Development, I have been consulting and providing coaching, coach training for organizations and Individuals. It is almost inevitable that I will have to work with my clients on their professional as well as personal challenges, be it at work or at home. This is because of the complexity of business issues and the dynamics of change at the marketplace which will always present challenges for their organization. As a behavioral psychologist, I see management consulting in the NEW order of things, from the lenses of neuroscience and how it can further the cause of consulting in the present era and the future, augmented by the *MindPowered* approach.

This underscores an important lesson organizational leaders should take serious note of. Total Organizational Effectiveness is incomplete unless we have a strong culture of development through both technical/functional as well as behavioral/soft skills embedded in the process of business re-engineering.

Many consulting solutions do not address the ‘people aspect’ adequately, neglecting the human behavioral aspects which have significant impact on a company’s / organization’s performance. MindPowered Consulting focuses on aligning Human Capital solutions with business issues to engender an impactful transformation. A good consulting model should adopt a learning orientation and include a series of ***powerful coaching questions*** to challenge the individual to make self-discoveries incorporated from how our Mind functions to reinforce the consulting process.

I am glad to share my Thought Leader perspective from neuroscience research on how our Mind works in balance with our Emotions and Soul to bring about a pragmatic consulting approach where organizations are enabled to transform themselves through continuous improvement and learning!

Introduction

Management consultants play a pivotal role in shaping the strategies and operations of organizations across the globe. They are the architects of change, guiding businesses toward greater efficiency, profitability, and sustainability. However, in today's complex and rapidly evolving business landscape, the demands placed on management consultants are more significant than ever before. In this context, neuroscience research offers valuable insights that can revolutionize how management consultants perform and excel in their roles.

Neuroscience, the scientific study of the nervous system and the brain, provides profound insights into human behavior, decision-making, and problem-solving processes. By applying principles from neuroscience, management consultants can gain a deeper understanding of their clients, enhance their problem-solving skills, and foster more effective communication and leadership within organizations. In this article, I will explore how neuroscience research can be harnessed to empower management consultants to perform better and deliver exceptional results.

1. Enhancing Client Understanding

Management consultants often work closely with a diverse array of clients, each with unique needs, challenges, and personalities. Neuroscience research can help consultants gain a better understanding of their clients by shedding light on cognitive biases, emotional responses, and decision-making patterns. Armed with this knowledge, consultants can tailor their approaches to be more empathetic and effective.

- **Empathy and Emotional Intelligence and Resilience:** Neuroscience reveals the importance of empathy and emotional intelligence, even resilience in building strong client relationships. Consultants who can accurately perceive and understand their clients' emotional states can adapt their communication and recommendations accordingly, leading to stronger client trust and collaboration.
- **Decision-Making Biases:** Cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias and anchoring, often cloud decision-making. Management consultants can apply insights from neuroscience to help clients recognize and mitigate these biases, ensuring that decisions are based on rational analysis rather than instinctive reactions.

2. Improved Problem-Solving and Creativity

Management consulting frequently involves tackling complex problems and devising innovative solutions. Neuroscience research can provide consultants with tools and strategies to enhance their problem-solving abilities and foster creativity within client organizations.

- **Neuroplasticity:** The brain's capacity for neuroplasticity means that it can rewire itself and adapt to new challenges. Management consultants can leverage this concept by encouraging clients to embrace change and adopt innovative approaches. By focusing on the Mind and emphasizing a growth mindset, consultants can help organizations become more agile and adaptable.
- **Divergent Thinking:** Neuroscience highlights the importance of divergent thinking, which involves generating a wide range of possible solutions to a problem. Management consultants can employ techniques that stimulate divergent thinking in client teams, such as brainstorming sessions and creative problem-solving workshops.

3. Effective Communication and Leadership

Successful management consultants are not only problem solvers but also effective communicators and leaders. Neuroscience insights can enhance consultants' abilities in these critical areas.

- **Neuroleadership:** Neuroleadership is a field that applies neuroscience principles to leadership and management. Consultants can incorporate neuroleadership strategies to improve their leadership skills, enhance team dynamics, and foster a more positive workplace culture.
- **Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP):** NLP techniques, rooted in neuroscience, focus on how language and communication impact behavior. Management consultants can use NLP to improve their communication with clients and facilitate more productive interactions among team members. A higher form of NLP is the TA (Transactional Analysis) which examines deeper issues than what seems apparent on the surface.

4. Stress Management and Well-Being

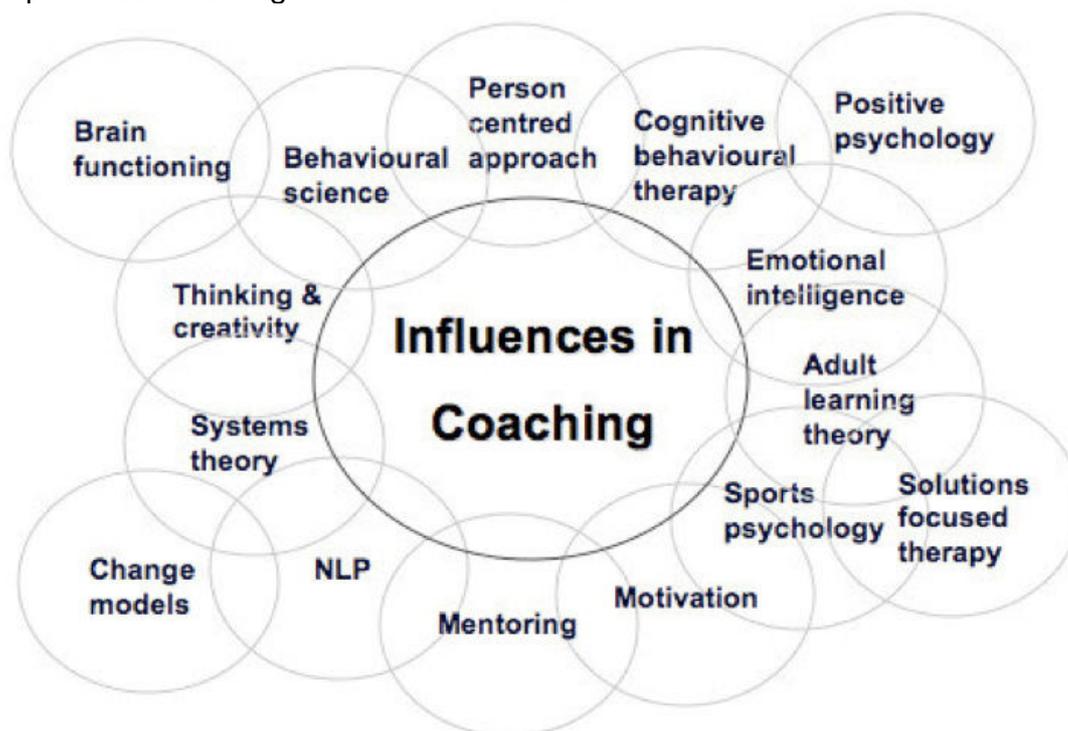
The demanding nature of management consulting can take a toll on consultants' well-being. Neuroscience research can offer valuable insights into stress management, resilience, and overall mental health, ensuring that consultants perform at their best while maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

- **Stress Reduction Techniques:** Understanding how the Mind responds to stress can help consultants develop effective stress reduction techniques. Techniques such as mindfulness meditation, which has a neurological basis, can help consultants manage stress and maintain focus during high-pressure situations.
- **Emotional Regulation:** Neuroscience research provides insights into emotional regulation, helping consultants manage their own emotions and soul which support clients in emotionally charged situations. This ability to stay composed under pressure is essential for effective consulting.

Hence, Management Consulting, in the NEW world order, needs to tap more on the behavioral aspect of the human asset inventory often known as organizational Talents to foster organizational development. Trying to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness on the business / organization is impossible without working through their human capital i.e. people. It is a key consulting skill, which all practicing management consultants need to have towards achieving high performance solutions for their clients.

The influences in all types of consulting

From a distance it looks like consulting might be just the simple act of coming up with the right solutions to address their clients problems. In reality, it emerges as a rich and complex field, with a wide range of influences. These influences include related disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, coaching, learning theory, change theory, systems theory and others. In the NEW world order, consulting works can be enhanced and become more impactful with coaching capabilities. The diagram below illustrates these influences:



Fields which influence Consulting

Within each of these fields there are hundreds of insights, models and approaches that consulting either draws from, or is influenced by. For example, within the person-centred approach is the idea of asking people questions using the Socratic method, commonly used in coaching and teaching. This idea of bringing people to their own insights through questioning is at the heart of coaching, and is one of the oldest ideas within philosophy, dating from around

400 B.C.

While trying to understand all these influences could be overwhelming and confusing, at the same time it is helpful to know that consulting does have a heritage, and what this heritage is. This gives the practicing consultant greater confidence in their skills when engaging with Management.

Some activities are important in people-centered consulting,

- A. SETTING THE STAGE**
 - 1) Meeting the needs for engagement
 - 2) Establishing a consulting platform

- B. CO-CREATING THE RELATIONSHIP**
 - 3) Establishing trust and intimacy with your client
 - 4) Creating a expert presence

- C. COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY**
 - 5) Active listening and questioning
 - 6) Powerful engagements
 - 7) Direct communication

- D. FACILITATING LEARNING AND RESULTS**
 - 8) Creating awareness
 - 9) Designing actions
 - 10) Planning and goal setting
 - 11) Managing progress and accountability

Let's see how our Mind functions that affect these processes through a trajectory called 'hardwiring'

Brain Rule Rundown

Rule #1: Exercise boosts Mind power.

The human mind evolved under conditions of almost constant motion. From this, one might predict that the optimal environment for processing information would include motion. That is exactly what one finds. Indeed, the best business meeting would have everyone walking at about 1.8 miles per hour.

Researchers studied two elderly populations that had led different lifestyles, one sedentary and one active. Cognitive scores were profoundly influenced. Exercise positively affected executive function, spatial tasks, reaction times and quantitative skills.

So researchers asked: 'If the sedentary populations become active, will their cognitive scores go up?' Yes, it turns out, if the exercise is aerobic. In four

months, executive functions vastly improve; longer, and memory scores improve as well.

Exercise improves cognition for two reasons:

- Exercise increases oxygen flow into the brain, which reduces mind-bound free radicals. One of the most interesting findings of the past few decades is that an increase in oxygen is always accompanied by an uptick in mental sharpness.
- Exercise acts directly on the molecular machinery of the brain itself. It increases neurons' creation, survival, and resistance to damage and stress.

Rule #2: The human Mind evolved, too.

- The brain is a survival organ. It is designed to solve problems related to surviving in an unstable outdoor environment and to do so in nearly constant motion (to keep you alive long enough to pass your genes on). We were not the strongest on the planet but we developed the strongest brains, the key to our survival.
- The strongest brains survive, not the strongest bodies. Our ability to solve problems, learn from mistakes, and create alliances with other people helps us survive. We took over the world by learning to cooperate and forming teams with our neighbors.
- Our ability to understand each other is our chief survival tool. Relationships helped us survive in the jungle and are critical to surviving at work and school or home today.
- If someone does not feel safe with a teacher or boss, he or she may not perform as well. If a student feels misunderstood because the teacher cannot connect with the way the student learns, the student may become isolated.

There is no greater anti-mind environment than the classroom and cubicle.

Rule #3: Every brain is wired differently, so the Mind

- What YOU do and learn in life physically changes what your brain looks like – it literally rewires it. We used to think there were just 7 categories of intelligence. But categories of intelligence may number more than 7 billion—roughly the population of the world.
- No two people have the same brain, not even twins. Every student's brain, every employee's brain, every customer's brain is wired differently.

- You can either accede to it or ignore it. The current system of education ignores it by having grade structures based on age. Businesses such as Amazon are catching on to mass customization (the Amazon homepage and the products you see are tailored to your recent purchases).
- Regions of the brain develop at different rates in different people. The brains of school children are just as unevenly developed as their bodies. Our school system ignores the fact that every brain is wired differently. We wrongly assume every brain is the same.
- Most of us have a “Jennifer Aniston” neuron (a neuron lurking in your head that is stimulated only when Jennifer Aniston is in the room).

Rule #4: We don't pay attention to boring things.

- What we pay attention to is profoundly influenced by memory. Our previous experience predicts where we should pay attention. Culture matters too. Whether in school or in business, these differences can greatly affect how an audience perceives a given presentation. We pay attention to things like emotions, threats and sex. Regardless of who you are, the brain pays a great deal of attention to these questions: Can I eat it? Will it eat me? Can I mate with it? Will it mate with me? Have I seen it before?
- The brain is not really capable of multi-tasking. We can talk and breathe, but when it comes to higher level tasks, we just can't do it.
- Driving while talking on a cell phone is like driving drunk. The brain is a sequential processor and large fractions of a second are consumed every time the brain switches tasks. This is why cell-phone talkers are a half-second slower to hit the brakes and get in more wrecks.
- Workplaces and schools actually encourage this type of multi-tasking. Walk into any office and you'll see people sending e-mail, answering their phones, Instant Messaging, and on MySpace—all at the same time. Research shows your error rate goes up 50% and it takes you twice as long to do things.
- When you're always online you're always distracted. So the always-online organization is the always-unproductive organization.

Rule #5: Repeat to remember.

- The human brain can only hold about seven pieces of information for less than 30 seconds! Which means, your Mind can only handle a 7-digit

phone number. If you want to extend the 30 seconds to a few minutes or even an hour or two, you will need to consistently re-expose yourself to the information. Memories are so volatile that you have to repeat to remember.

Improve your memory by elaborately encoding it during its initial moments. Many of us have trouble remembering names. If at a party you need help remembering Mary, it helps to repeat internally more information about her. "Mary is wearing a blue dress and my favorite color is blue." It may seem counterintuitive at first but study after study shows it improves your memory

- Mind Rules in the classroom. In partnership with the University of Washington and Seattle Pacific University, Medina tested this Brain Rule in real classrooms of 3rd graders. They were asked to repeat their multiplication tables in the afternoons. The classrooms in the study did significantly better than the classrooms that did not have the repetition. If neuroscientists get together with teachers and do research, we may be able to eliminate need for homework since learning would take place at school, instead of the home.

Rule #6: Remember to repeat

- It takes years to consolidate a memory. Not minutes, hours, or days but years. What you learn in first grade is not completely formed until your sophomore year in high school.
- Medina's dream school is one that repeats what was learned, not at home, but during the school day, 90-120 minutes after the initial learning occurred. Our schools are currently designed so that most real learning has to occur at home.
- How do you remember better? Repeated exposure to information / in specifically timed intervals / provides the most powerful way to fix memory into the brain.
- Forgetting allows us to prioritize events. But if you want to remember, remember to repeat.

Rule #7: Sleep well, think well

- When we're asleep, the brain is not resting at all. It is almost unbelievably active! It's possible that the reason we need to sleep is so that we can learn.

- Sleep must be important because we spend 1/3 of our lives doing it! Loss of sleep hurts attention, executive function, working memory, mood, quantitative skills, logical reasoning, and even motor dexterity.
- We still don't know how much we need! It changes with age, gender, pregnancy, puberty, and so much more.
- Napping is normal. Ever feel tired in the afternoon? That's because your mind really wants to take a rest. There's a battle raging in your head between two armies. Each army is made of legions of brain cells and biochemicals — one desperately trying to keep you awake, the other desperately trying to force you to sleep. Around 3 p.m., 12 hours after the midpoint of your sleep, all your brain wants to do is nap.
- Taking a nap might make you more productive. In one study, a 26-minute nap improved NASA pilots' performance by 34 percent.
- Don't schedule important meetings at 3 p.m. It just doesn't make sense.

Rule #8: Stressed minds don't learn the same way.

- Your mind is built to deal with stress that lasts about 30 seconds. The mind is not designed for long term stress when you feel like you have no control. The saber-toothed tiger ate you or you ran away but it was all over in less than a minute. If you have a bad boss, the saber-toothed tiger can be at your door for years, and you begin to deregulate. If you are in a bad marriage, the saber-toothed tiger can be in your bed for years, and the same thing occurs. You can actually watch the mind shrink.
- Stress damages virtually every kind of cognition that exists. It damages memory and executive function. It can hurt your motor skills. When you are stressed out over a long period of time it disrupts your immune response. You get more sick more often. It disrupts your ability to sleep. You get depressed.
- The emotional stability of the home is the single greatest predictor of academic success. If you want your kid to get into Harvard, go home and love your spouse.
- You have one brain. The same brain you have at home is the same brain you have at work or school. The stress you are experiencing at home will affect your performance at work, and vice versa.

Rule #9: Stimulate more of the senses.

- Our senses work together so it is important to stimulate them! Your head crackles with the perceptions of the whole world, sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, energetic as a frat party.
- Smell is unusually effective at evoking memory. If you're tested on the details of a movie while the smell of popcorn is wafted into the air, you'll remember 10-50% more.
- Smell is really important to business. When you walk into Starbucks, the first thing you smell is coffee. They have done a number of things over the years to make sure that's the case.
- The learning link. Those in multisensory environments always do better than those in unisensory environments. They have more recall with better resolution that lasts longer, evident even 20 years later.

Rule #10: Vision trumps all other senses.

- We are incredible at remembering pictures. Hear a piece of information, and three days later you'll remember 10% of it. Add a picture and you'll remember 65%.
- Pictures beat text as well, in part because reading is so inefficient for us. Our brain sees words as lots of tiny pictures, and we have to identify certain features in the letters to be able to read them. That takes time.
- Why is vision such a big deal to us? Perhaps because it's how we've always apprehended major threats, food supplies and reproductive opportunity.
- Toss your PowerPoint presentations. It's text-based (nearly 40 words per slide), with six hierarchical levels of chapters and subheads—all words. Professionals everywhere need to know about the incredible inefficiency of text-based information and the incredible effects of images. Burn your current PowerPoint presentations and make new ones.

Rule #11: Male and female brains are different, and hence the Mind

- What's different? Mental health professionals have known for years about sex-based differences in the type and severity of psychiatric disorders. Males are more severely afflicted by schizophrenia than females. By more than 2 to 1, women are more likely to get depressed than men, a figure that shows up just after puberty and remains stable the next 50 years. Males exhibit more antisocial behavior. Females have more anxiety. Most

alcoholics and drug addicts are male. Most anorexics are female.

- Men and women handle acute stress differently. When researcher Larry Cahill showed them slasher films, men fired up in their brain's right hemisphere, which is responsible for the gist of an event. Their left was comparatively silent. Women lit up their left, the one responsible for details. Having a team that simultaneously understood the gist and details of a given stressful situation helped us conquer the world. Men and women process certain emotions differently. Emotions are useful.
- They make the mind pay attention. These differences are a product of complex interactions between nature and nurture.

Rule #12: We are powerful and natural explorers.

- The desire to explore never leaves us despite the classrooms and cubicles we are stuffed into. Babies are the model of how we learn—not by passive reaction to the environment but by active testing through observation, hypothesis, experiment, and conclusion. Babies methodically do experiments on objects, for example, to see what they will do.
- Google takes to heart the power of exploration. For 20 percent of their time, employees may go where their mind asks them to go. The proof is in the bottom line: fully 50 percent of new products, including Gmail and Google News, came from “20 percent time.”

How does our Mind affect the way we think?

1. The brain is a connection machine

The brain creates millions of new connections each second. Wide-scale connections that are novel, new links between points, are energizing. When we make new connections like this, useful neurotransmitters like adrenaline and dopamine are generated that drive people to want to take action. The brain wants to connect. When we are unable to make a connection, when we can't 'think our way out of a problem', we have hit an 'impasse'. Coaching helps people resolve impasses that they have not been able to solve themselves. This could apply to consulting as well if well incorporated.

2. Up close, no two brains are alike

Everyone has a unique set of connections for how they think about things. Your pathways are different to everyone else's, when it comes to higher-level issues. Basic physical and mental functions like moving a limb use similar circuits, but thoughts about more subtle issues, such as motivation, involve complex individual sets of circuits. How you solve a problem is just how you would solve a problem, other people are likely to use quite different mental

pathways to get there.

3. The brain hardwires everything it can

New ideas or behaviors use what is called 'working memory', a very limited resource in the brain. Therefore, any behavior, thought or activity that is repeated becomes hardwired.

4. Hardwiring drives automatic perception

Our perceptions are driven by deeper hardwired circuits, old habits, much more than by receiving data fresh from the world. As a result people perceive the world according to their belief and attitudes, rather than seeing things as they are or as they could be.

5. It is practically impossible to deconstruct our wiring

Attention itself creates change in the brain. Quantum mechanics provides an explanation of the idea that where we focus attention, new circuits can be created in the brain, through the Quantum Zeno effect. This means that trying to get rid of circuits is often ineffective – we end up deepening them instead. This explains why focusing on solutions creates solutions, whereas focusing on problems seems to create more awareness of problems.

6. It is easy to create new wiring

The brain creates new connections all the time. Every time we travel to a new part of a city we create a map of the area, or meet a new person, or understand a new idea. Creating new circuits can be quite easy. The key, if we want to create a long-term circuit, is to pay lots of attention to it. Attention, in the form of quality and quantity (seconds) of focus, is what changes the brain over time.

How does knowing the way our Mind works affect consulting?

- Reinforces positive organizational culture
- Generates insights towards coming up with a strategy
- Improve thinking amongst stakeholders
- Leads to action
- Embeds new habits to foster a new culture
- Facilitates positive change by improving the quality of thinking.

The consultant is there to offer solutions or to 'enable'. **The focus is on transformational change**, a type of Change for the organization (a.k.a. Organizational Development (OD)–positively focused, as opposed to a deficit-focused change. This definition allows for the idea of understanding the Mind, in order to improve one's own and other people's thinking. The role of the consultant is to help people think better, before guiding them with recommended solutions, and insist they should follow ritualistically, of which they seek to have ownership.

This approach to **people-centred or behavior-centric consulting** focuses on how it is done through an understanding of “**Mind functioning**”, where a body of knowledge based on a wide range of research by thousands of neuroscientists working on issues including:

- Self Awareness
- Attention
- Reflection
- Insight
- Action
- Expectations
- Self-reflection
- Working memory
- Learning
- Emotions
- Social interactions

were established.

Creating the ‘NEED’ for consulting

For those practicing as Management Consultants for some time, we would have hopefully considered quite a bit about our own consulting approach/style. We must, however, also consider the environment or climate in which consulting should best occur.

When we consult, we are doing it to help someone find a solution for their organization/business. It might be to help the organization learn something new. It could be to help them overcome some difficulties they have been having with their performance. It could be to help them rise above their expectation. It could be to help them with many other things, but it is never to embarrass, punish or push them around.

Develop a long term Transformation Action Plan (TAP) to facilitate Culture Change:

Like any other important part of consulting work, consultants need to have a plan for project management and relevant milestones and goals, which can be reviewed and monitored.

Get up front agreement and involvement from the stakeholders you are consulting with:

- Your vision for consulting
- What you see can be done, the opportunities, the gaps the time frame
- How the strategies you will use to maximize learning opportunities
- How progress will be assessed and measured – the standards of performance and target for improvement
- What 'stretch' is involved and how development 'stretch' targets might be achieved
- What happens if something goes wrong
- How often you will sit down for face to face feedback sessions on progress

Seven steps to transformational change using the MindPowered approach

1. Desired Outcome

These are the exact goals of consulting, that we set when we define a goal, or when we ask 'what do you want out of this situation' during the fact find. If you don't start with a solution, goal, objective or outcome, it's very likely the project will start with a problem. Problem-focus is the default mode of our Mind due to the nature of the limbic system, where potential problems get a lot of attention.

2. Current Reality

This is where we define the current state of affairs, where the client is currently standing in relation to an issue. We tend to get a little detailed at this point.

3. The Big Picture

This is where we establish a clear pathway to discussing the issue. We can never start consulting without having the BIG picture.

4. Questioning

Questioning is our 'power tool' as a consultant. It's the only way of working with the client in a self-directed manner so that they are doing all the thinking. The questioning process sits within the Consulting Cycle: the steps of Permission, Placement, Questioning and Clarifying come before and after questioning – asking powerful questions during fact find. The consultant continues to question until an insight emerges that feels like it could have an action coming after it.

5. Insights

Insights are the 'aha' moments, the moments of clarity and learning that deliver real value to the client.

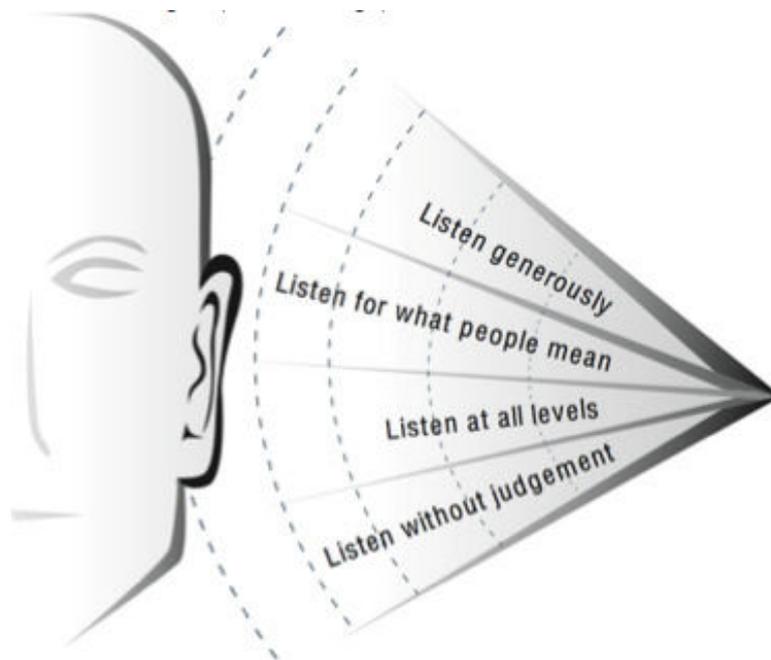
6. Actions

Without actions, insights can disappear. Actions move the client along the path to their expected outcome.

7. Habits

New habits make the Change sustainable and should be the end game of the consulting process; habits that enable the organization to move forward.

How should we LISTEN?



We Listen for Potential

Being a great listener is essential for the consultant. Hearing is not good enough as a consultant needs to know how to communicate effectively with the client. The skill of listening underlies most qualities of a great consultant including being insightful, being a great communicator and being committed to others. Consultants 'Listen for Potential'. This is a way of focusing your attention on the client in such a way that you see the organization's strengths, their goals, their possibilities and their potential. It is a powerful stance to listen from, compared to how most people naturally listen, which is listening for problems or gaps.

There are four main keys to Listening for Potential:

1. Listen generously
2. Listen for what people mean
3. Listen at all levels

4. Listen without judgment

The clarity of distance

Science is the art of discerning patterns within seemingly chaotic systems, in order to further understand the world, and then mastering the use of these patterns in order to invent new possibilities. In order to study something as a science you first have to have an observer. The observer watches events unfold and seeks knowledge. The observer cannot be the same as the event – there must be some distance between the two.

One of the most powerful gifts we offer as a consultant is being an observer of our clients' behavior and then giving feed back to them what we see. From across the desk or in the workplace we become aware of how they run their lives, what their habits are, and where their choices could be changed to create more alignment with what they want. It is our job to use the clarity of distance to give value to people we consult with. We are able to do all of this because we are the observer, not the observed, because we can see things they cannot see directly, because we have the clarity of distance.

The clarity of distance and science of emergence

The science of emergence is the science of understanding how collective properties arise from the properties of individual parts. Emergence studies how behavior at a larger scale of the system arises from the behavior at a finer scale. Emergence looks at how a flock of birds fly together as a flock for example, without needing to know the biology of the particular bird. When we think about emergence we are moving between different vantage points in our minds. We see the trees and the forest at the same time. We see the way the trees and the forest are related to each other. To see in both these views we have to be able to see details, but also ignore details. The key is to know which of the many details we see in the trees are important to know when we see the forest.

In conventional views the observer considers either the trees or the forest. Those who focus on the forest tend not to see the details. Those who focus on the trees consider the details to be essential and do not see the broader patterns that arise in the context of the forest. When we can shift back and forth between seeing the trees and the forest we can start to see which aspects of both are relevant. In assisting our clients with their problems, we need to be able to move easily between the trees and the forest, without getting too stuck in either perspective. We need to maintain some distance from the subject so that we are an observer, a guide, able to help people find a path through to their desired destination, not lost in the woods ourselves.

The value of clarity

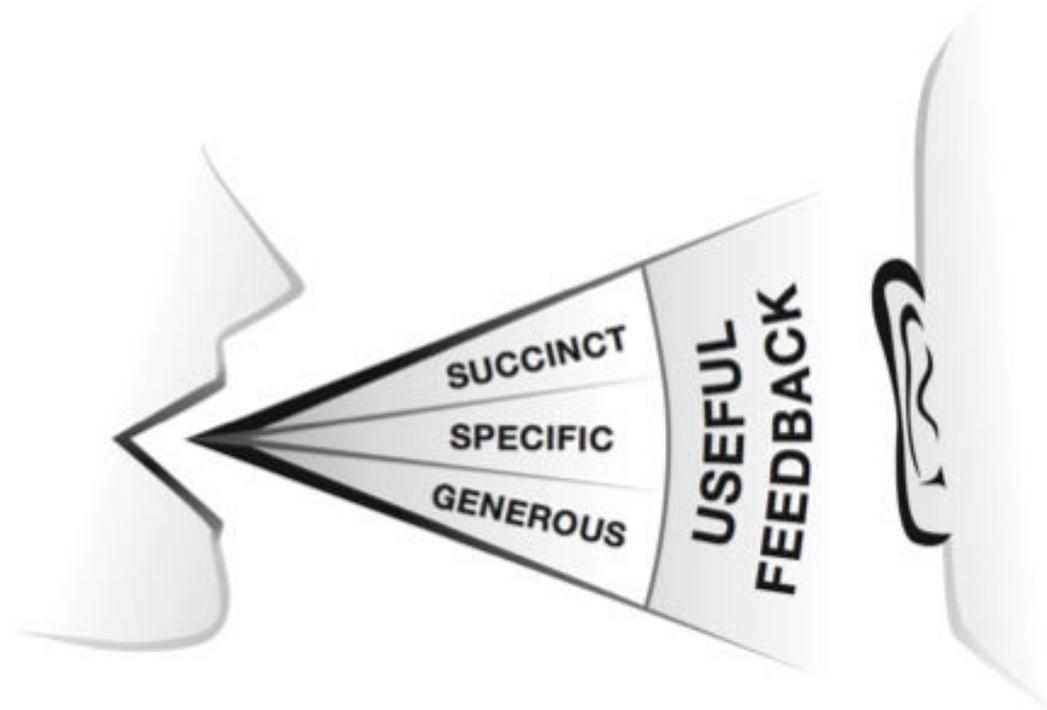
Getting really clear on something in our lives is what gives us 'aha' moments, those moments when we realize what it is we do, our role in doing it and what we can do differently next time. These moments are tremendously energizing and rewarding – it's like we see ourselves in a whole new light, we see a range of new choices. We remember these moments years later as turning points in our development as an individual.

The value of these moments is that they empower us to choose from an informed perspective. They give us the freedom to choose who we want to be and how we want to get there. In the business world, people pay handsomely for clarity - for the power of a fresh perspective. One great idea can change an organization's course. The clarity that comes with distance is one of the reasons many major industries exist including management consulting, creative agencies, mentoring and coaching.

The challenge of not having clarity

Life without clarity is like chronic physical pain. It is like fogginess that does not lift. It is a struggle and it saps your energy. You know there are insights but you cannot see them clearly and you cannot process the important ideas.

How we ought to SPEAK?



To make the most impact in each consulting session, we need to be in a direct, focused dialogue with our client. Rather than the consultant speaking while the client mentally wanders off, we need to be closely aligned in a conversation during an intervention, talking about and thinking about the same things.

We speak less than one hundred words a minute but think at over three hundred.

To make the biggest impact as a consultant we have to speak in a way that captures and keeps the client's attention. After learning to "Listen for Potential", this is the next golden rule of consulting. The three fundamental elements for speaking in a way that keeps us connected to our client, which we call 'Speaking with Intent', are to be succinct, specific and generous. Each of these elements is necessary to make every moment of consulting count.

Being Succinct

We all like to explain ourselves. Many people think that others need to hear the 'whole story' to understand what they have to say. However, most of us have very short attention spans, drifting off if the person speaking to us goes off even on the smallest sidetrack. When we are speaking as a consultant, we want the person we are speaking with to generate **mental maps** about what we are saying, and then compare these with their existing maps, so that they might make connections between the two. However, the part of the brain used for processing new ideas, called working memory, is very small, easily

overwhelmed, and requires a lot of energy to use. Therefore the more simply and clearly we can describe an idea the more chance there is that new connections might occur.

Padding out sentences with extra words dilutes the message and takes away the power of what we are trying to say. People easily suffer from information overload, unable to process ideas that take too long to hear.

For example:

Let's look at two ways that a Trainer could give some background about himself/herself in a trial session: "I trained as a trainer about six or so months ago, back in June last year, starting just after I left my job. Since then I've been working with all different kinds of people on their goals. My recent professional background is in sales in the corporate arena, and before that I worked in various sales roles on the West Coast, and sometimes working on the East Coast as well. I train because I really care about people - that's one thing that training gives me that my other work doesn't. I'm ready to really work with people in a group, and am excited to have a chance to do work that enables me to help people in a more personal way. As a trainer you can expect me to be supportive of what you want and really committed to making a big difference in your work performance."

Now let's take that example and make it more succinct:

"I have been training for six months. My background is in corporate sales. I train part-time in this role and plan to train full-time soon. What I love about training is the opportunity to help others perform better. I'm committed to making a big difference in all of my trainees' performance."

This is just one example of how to make the first example more succinct, and there are many ways you could shorten and focus the statement. The point to notice is that the second example still gets the key information across, the important bits, but is easier to process for the listener. The big ideas do not get lost in the wall of information.

Be succinct. Make every word count. By cutting to the heart of the issue when communicating, you keep people's attention and interest. Being succinct is a learned skill. It will require you to think carefully before you talk, decide quickly on the essence of what you want to say, then say it in as few words as possible. Practice saying things in as few words as possible while in training as a consultant.

Ask your client to be succinct

If they start to tell you an entire story, interrupt them and ask them:

"What are the key points to what you are telling me?" or "Can you tell me the whole thing in three lines?" "The challenge of using simple, clear language is that you have to know what you are talking about."

Being Specific

As well as being succinct, you also need to be specific, so that whoever you are talking to understands exactly what you mean. Make sure you give people all the specific relevant information needed to really illustrate the point you are making.

Not being specific can sound to the listener like you are being vague, avoiding an issue, or not completely engaged with them. Imagine that you are completing a first consultation session with a potential client: Saying: “That was a great session” – this is succinct however it does not have enough information for the client to understand exactly what the consultant is saying. It also does not have the same impact as:

“That was a great session – the way we bounced off each other in setting the goals tells me we should work well together.”

Or imagine that a client has just told you their experience of completing a really tough action: Saying: “Well done on completing that.”

Doesn't show you've heard them as much as saying something like:
“Well done on making ten calls even though you felt sick about it and went to stop yourself three times.”

Being specific takes a little effort – it requires you to pay close attention to what the client is saying and make that extra effort to write down, or mentally note, the key points so you can be accurate and detailed in your feedback. Being specific builds trust and intimacy and moves the client along their learning journey.

Being succinct AND specific means including everything that is relevant, and nothing irrelevant.

Being Generous

Being generous takes your intervention to another level. It's one thing to use as few words as possible and be specific, but your dialogue can still be dry. Being generous means going to the extra effort to make sure your client totally gets where you are coming from. Being generous means putting in extra effort to be real, to talk about difficult issues, to share your humanity, to speak so that the client really connects to your words.

Being generous means speaking for the client's benefit rather than for yours.

Being generous creates a safe space for the other person to be real with you. Being generous in consulting includes sharing things about yourself that will make the client feel more comfortable with you, for example sharing your learning journey.

Being generous is a way of showing you care about the other person. It builds more of the trust and intimacy between you that enables the work of consulting to be done. Being generous invites them to take the intervention to a deeper level, away from surface facts and concepts into thoughts, feelings, emotions and learning.

Imagine a client who comes to you to check out what consulting is like. Saying: "Thanks for your time" is not very generous. An example of being generous is saying:

"Thanks for putting aside a whole block of time to check out what consulting is about. I know it can be a bit scary to talk about yourself and think more deeply but I promise it will be fun and rewarding." Or after a consulting session where a client trusted you with something that had been bothering them for a long time. Saying: "I can see you are relieved about what's happening at work with your boss."

Is less generous than:

"I appreciate how open you were about what's been going on at work with your boss. It feels like our session today went deeper than usual. Thanks for making this hour really count."

All three elements together:

Imagine a client had an action to call ten people at work that they had been avoiding calling for a long time.

Not very succinct:

"I'm really happy for you that you were able to make sure you managed to fit this action in this week, even though you were really busy and had to go off to the country to finish that project with your boss and had three less days in the week, and with so much on your plate with your new job it must be challenging for you."

Succinct but not specific:

"Well done for doing that, I know it was tough."

Succinct and specific but not generous:

"Well done for calling all ten people and getting to a point where everything is now handled between you."

Succinct, specific and generous:

"Well done for calling those ten people and getting to a point where everything is now handled between you. I know it was a real stretch for you to pick up the phone and call. I can see just from the look on your face that it's made a difference to how you feel about yourself."

As consultants, we need to bring these elements of succinct, specific and generous into all of our consulting interventions. It takes considerable practice and focus to achieve this, but once you do, you'll notice a big difference in your ability to engage the Mind for more powerful and effective interventions.

A final example of all three elements woven together in a completion at the end of a first session: "That was a great session – it's left us both really energized. The way we bounced ideas off each other in setting the goals tells me we would probably work really well together. Thanks for being willing to be so open with me about your thoughts and feelings."

CREATE New Way of Thinking

This approach takes the client from their current reality to exploring the alternatives to reach a resolution or a way forward. Without this process, client may have lots of good ideas, but not necessarily do anything with them. It supports the client to develop momentum in the most efficient way in solving their problems.

Current Reality

The first step is to explore the Current Reality of the client's thinking about the situation. At this point, people become aware of their dilemma, they reflect, and then, if you ask the right questions, have an insight of some kind. When we ask about the Current Reality we ask people to step back from their own thinking and notice its nature: To become scientists of their own thinking. Helping someone identify the current reality of their thinking allows them to make new maps to self correct their thinking. As a result, people make their own decisions about what to do next. Their thinking has literally been improved, and they have possibly developed useful *new wiring* to call on again.

Examples of *thinking questions* to establish the current reality:

- How long have you been thinking about this, in days, weeks, months, or years?
- How often do you think about this, how many times each hour, day, or week?
- How committed are you to changing this issue, on scale of one to ten?
- How do you feel about the thinking time you have given this so far?
- Are you close to an answer already, or are you at the start of this journey?
- What is the insight brewing at the back of your mind?

Other points to be aware of in exploring the current reality:

- **Numbers count** – defining our thoughts and feelings in numbers makes us think more deeply and makes it easier for the working memory to hold the information and thus make connections.
- **Ask lots of questions** – it usually takes six to ten thinking questions for an insight to emerge. Sometimes you won't get to one, but it will emerge in the explore alternatives phase.
- **Look for the Faces of Insight** – watch to see if you are getting closer to an insight by focusing on body language and tone of voice. When people get close to an insight they go quiet, which is a necessary part of the process. Give them space to do this.
- **Trust your gut** – listen to what your client is saying and only then form your next question. Base your next question on what they just said. Follow their words, their energy, and trust your instincts. When people have an 'aha' you can see it written all over their face, or you'll hear their voice shift to a higher pitch. When an insight does occur, stop and pay attention to this, ask lots of questions about the insight itself.

Explore Alternatives

Exploring the current reality often generates insights for the client. When someone has an insight they are energized, they feel inspired to take action. However, the first actions that people come up with are often what they are most comfortable with, not necessarily the best ideas. When we explore alternatives we open people up to new possibilities. Also sometimes people do not have an insight in the current reality phase and will do so when we explore alternatives instead.

Moving to the explore alternatives phase means asking people to think more deeply. Make sure you establish **permission** to do this. In starting off the explore alternatives phase you will not have the tendency to ask for permission as explicitly as when starting a dialogue; it's subtler here. It might be a simple question like, "Are you ready to explore some different ideas about how to move forward in this area?"

Once you have got **Permission**, again use a bit of **Placement**. You might just say, "So let's explore lots of possible ideas here." Then ask a question to get them thinking, clarify their answer, and go back to placement.

Example questions:

- “What are some of the possible paths we could take from here?”
- “How do you think we might move this insight forward?”
- “What do you think are some ways to move this forward?”
- “What other options come to mind for you?”

When exploring alternatives, stay light and try lots of ideas, without being attached to any. Be flexible and open-minded. Listen for people’s energy, instead of worrying about what the right answer is. This phase allows for surprises, so be open to them.

Tap Energy

The key to this step is directing the intervention towards where the client seems to have energy. Listen for emotive words, for their feelings and energy in their voice, and focus your questions in this direction.

Another way of summing up this stage of the process is to ‘work with what’s there’. In other words, go where the energy is for the client, work with the issues that come up from the client, in the moment, not with how you think the consultation should go. Follow the client’s lead.

Example questions:

- “Shall we focus on x and get more detailed on that?”
- “What specifically would you like to do in this situation?”
- “Do you want to take some kind of specific action around this?”

The Tap Energy phase is when we get specific and set actions with clients. It is where we move from **dilemma, to insight, to deciding to get into action**. This stage of the conversations tends to be faster and simpler. The elements of **Permission, Placement, Questioning and Clarifying** are there, but they are less explicit and more subtle. Do make sure you establish permission in some way before moving into this phase.

Consulting: A personalized approach?

If you are serious about helping the people you work with you need to make time to set up some regular formal consultation sessions. These might be sessions where we formally review performance and progress, or set new targets and goals, or design formal development plans, or explore career options for the future.

Whenever you are consulting, even if you have a few minutes, you need to be able to create a quiet, reflective space without distractions and interruptions. This is important because full attention and focus is a critical foundation upon which good consultation is built. Your challenge as a consultant is to find quiet quality time not just when you control the situation in the privacy of your office or a meeting room, but also when you don't – for example, this might be when the consulting happens in a more open and public environment. If you can't create an appropriate space you need to think seriously about deferring the consulting intervention or making a move to a better place. Trying to consult when there are distractions and absolutely no privacy is virtually impossible because one or both of you won't have your mind on the task.

Find opportunities to build relationships

Because good consulting takes time, "one off" discussions are not usually enough. You need to always be on the lookout for the opportunities which give you a chance to work with the individuals you are consulting with. These opportunities might take planning and time or they may be something which can be done on the spur of the moment. Whatever the case, try not to miss even one opportunity to work together. This is how the relationship will be built and strengthened.

One of the things you can do to make sure that you are both getting the most out of the time you are investing is to develop specific goals, objectives and timeframes for the person you are consulting. By having goals and objectives and an agreed time to achieve them you will avoid the pitfall of getting lost on your consulting journey and not achieving as much as possible. **By creating achievable goals which stretch the organization you are working with you are helping them build a vision of the future - vision of the success they can achieve.**

One of the best ways to build a vision of the future is to ask them questions so that they can start thinking about it and making it happen for themselves. Some of the questions you might ask are:

- How will things be different if you are successful?
- What does success look like?
- If you have been successful and you look around, what will you see happening?
- What needs to change for success to happen?
- What do you need to do differently or better?

Helping your clients to set goals and objectives which stretch their performance is very important, but you must make sure that they are not setting themselves up to fail. If someone you are working with is setting the bar too high you can always help them to set goals that will remain out of their reach is not helpful to

them as repeated failures will demoralize and demotivate them. It is much better to help them take small but achievable steps than large leaps which they can't make. As someone once said, you can't cross a large gap by taking more than one leap! So it's much better to find lots of small gaps and bridge them.

Your role is to set the goals with your client, and offer guidance to them as they take responsibility for working out how they want to achieve improvement and how much is possible along each step of the way.

Design a solution by CRAFTING Actions using the MindPowered Approach

Your effectiveness as a consultant is not just to facilitate insight and get your client to want to take action, but to ensure the strategies are implemented as close as possible to 100% likelihood of being done. A good recommended solution is one that guides and ensures adoption by your client. The key elements to ensure that your clients really do their actions are to make sure the actions your client writes down are clear, realistic, accurate, focused and timely.

Clear

Consultant and client must understand exactly what the action entails. If there is any ambiguity you may find the week has been wasted for that goal.

For example:

"Exercise three times this week". Is this clear enough? It could vary from playing a full game of rugby to walking up the stairs. Be clear. For example: "Swim at least 20 lengths without stopping, three times this week." This is much clearer for both consultant and client.

Always check what the client is writing down so that you can be certain that they know what is required.

If you discover you have set an inappropriate action you may need to call the client and get it cleaned up.

Realistic

It is important that the actions you set are challenging, but they also must be realistic and achievable. Ideally, you want your clients to do all their actions every week, and for the actions to take them into new territory. It's all about having just enough stretch, that drives change, but isn't too much. If the actions are too hard, the clients may not tackle them at all and resent you or be annoyed at themselves. The way to find out is simply to ask the client about this very issue. The client is the person to ask whether something is realistic or not. Trust their immediate visceral response to this issue. When they are not quite sure, or you feel they are holding back, you might discuss creative ways to make the action realistic.

For example:

If the action is to “meet with five customers this week to build the relationship” and their week is booked out already, you might suggest inviting all the customers to an industry event or having breakfast or dinner with them.

Accurate

To ensure the client does the action it can be useful to include precise numbers in the wording of the actions.

For example:

Instead of “Meet with staff this week” it would be more accurate to write “Meet with ten staff this week”. Or Instead of “Do staff performance reviews” it would be more accurate to write “Do 50% of the staff performance reviews”.

Be accurate with details and the client is much more likely to do the complete action, or at least know how much of the action they have done.

Focused

When you’re creating actions, make sure the action is relevant to the client’s objective, strategy, goal or insight. This ensures that the client stays on track and progresses towards the achievement of the desired outcome.

For example:

The client has an insight that their sales team needs to speak with intent when communicating with potential customers. So the action is “Set up at team meeting to talk about speaking with intent with potential customers”. This is better than “Talk about communication with my team”, which isn’t as focused on the central issue.

Timely

When setting actions make sure both client and consultant are clear about the timing of the action. In other words, be clear about the deadline for the completion of the action.

For example:

A client that has an action to complete staff performance reviews might set an action “To complete four performance reviews by Tuesday”.

Encourage communication and feedback

Consulting is a two way process. As the consultant you are in the position of looking for opportunities which will help to stretch and develop your client. Just giving them the task or the responsibility for something is not enough. You need to get into a two way communication process which allows the both of you to give

each other feedback about how things are going and where they might be improved.

To make sure that feedback takes place you need to do more than invite the other person to give you feedback from time to time. Set up regular sessions where you are able to give them feedback on how they are going and they can give you feedback about how they see themselves going, how helpful you are being, the kinds of problem they are having, that sort of thing. As well as general feedback about progress, you need to be able to give and get feedback on progress towards the goals which have been agreed. Planning the feedback sessions so there is time for both general and specific feedback and making sure that the feedback is given, received and understood should be the consultant's responsibility.

The "feedback hamburger" is a useful tool for consulting when they are trying to give straight but balanced feedback. The meat of the burger is main communication e.g. "Could I suggest that you use more graphs in your reports in future". However around this meat are the top bread roll, e.g. "I am really pleased with the quality of your latest reports" and the "bottom" roll, "the layout changes are very good".

When giving feedback you need to make sure that you are being specific and that the feedback is focused on specific events or behavior. When you are going to be given the feedback is also an important consideration. Will you be doing it before something is planned to happen or are you giving feedback after? If its before the event its likely you will be offering some advice and encouragement, whereas if its likely you will be offering some advice and encouragement, whereas if its after its probably going to involve some positive feedback or some constructive criticism. Whether you are giving feedback before or after concentrate on things they can do something about. It is rather pointless and can be demoralizing to focus on things which are out of the person's control.

In giving feedback it can be very helpful to use "I" statements instead of "you" statements. By doing this you will increase the possibility of being heard by diminishing the chance of the person getting defensive about the feedback. Also, be careful to avoid judging or using general labels in your interventions.

If you want to be listened to you have to work hard at listening and not talking, which most consultants love to do. Think about how you feel when someone talks at you. Do you pay attention? Do you maintain eye contact? Do you want to hear more? Do you feel that your contribution is respected? Well, why would anybody feel any different about you if you are talking at them?

Learning to listen and being able to provide feedback to people so that they can hear it and then act on it are skills which need constant honing. The key to good listening is to stop talking and to start asking questions. It sounds too simple to

be true, but by asking questions we encourage the other person to talk and it allows us to listen to them. Hence, the more we listen, the more we understand.

Most of us have the greatest difficulty in listening when we have a vested interest in the intervention:

- When we really want to “win” the argument or discussion,
- When want to convince the other person of something,
- When we have something at risk, etc.

Manage their FEELING...to deepen the interventions in order to review clients's actions



A good way of monitoring a Client's actions is to review what the Client has done since the last intervention. Consultants can adopt the FEELING approach viz.

Facts: Were the actions completed? How specific are they?

Emotions: How they felt about completing or not completing the actions

Encourage: Acknowledge the client, what they did do

Learning: What have the organization learned from doing the action

Implications: Additional value for the individuals...helping them to connect the pieces

New Goal: Identify new goal / action to enhance learning / deepen insight

And turn Actions into HABITS...

What are Habits?

Patterns of activity, ways of acting, thinking or feeling

New habits don't take very long to develop. If we do something just a couple of times, the process of creating long-term memories begins in the Mind.

Once a habit is hardwired, it becomes second nature....consulting helps to foster a culture ingrained in an organization through individual values and organizational values

Habit sustains achievement of workplace goals e.g. key performance indicators, work benchmarks, budgets, sales, time management, communication skills, leadership, team management, work-life balance, etc.

HABITS...

Small habits have Big Impact

Consultants help their clients discover the habits that will help them succeed in overcoming their problems/challenges.

Consultants help their clients focus on their mind maps (paradigms) and develop new mental maps, rather than trying to change the old wiring.

Developing HABITS...

1. Physical Habits
2. Mental Habits
3. Emotional Habits

Supporting Change – Working on HABITS

The role of a consultant is to get the client to come to their own realization that there is a habit that needs to be discussed.

They need to have their own insights in order to feel motivated enough to change them.

To Achieve the....DESIRED OUTCOMES

Offering solutions to the New Challenge(s), in

For example:

- Lowering of business costs and increasing profit margin
- Acquiring real talents for the business
- Raising productivity through improved business processes
- Establishing impactful leadership that influences positive Change
- Fostering great teamwork, positive work culture, etc.

CONCLUSION

In the ever-evolving world of management consulting, the integration of neuroscience research can be a game-changer. Consultants who harness the power of neuroscience gain a deeper understanding of their clients, enhance problem-solving and creativity, improve communication and leadership skills, and prioritize well-being.

It is important to recognize that the application of neuroscience principles in management consulting is not about replacing human judgment with scientific data. Instead, it is about leveraging scientific insights to inform and enhance the human aspects of consulting—empathy, creativity, communication, leadership, and well-being.

As the field of neuroscience continues to advance, management consultants have the opportunity to stay at the forefront of innovation, delivering even greater value to their clients and contributing to the success and growth of the organizations they serve. By embracing the marriage of neuroscience and consulting, we can look forward to a future where consultants empower organizations to thrive in an increasingly complex and dynamic business landscape.

Consulting is neither coaching nor training. Coaching is applicable to any area of life but may require some of these to enable learning and Change. It has no preset curriculum to follow, and the consultant diagnose, analyze, design

solutions, to be imparted to the clients. There are specific expected outcomes, which clients can expect.

Real consulting happens when the agenda is driven inclusively by the clients. Consulting is a different experience for each and every client.

Consulting has more structure than coaching, such as having defined OBJECTIVES and Outcomes.

The consultant is usually generous in willing to stretch and challenge a client with feasible solutions that address their needs.

Consulting is giving people advice based on consultant's experience. There is an interesting fact that people find interesting when they first hear about consulting: the more you already understand of an organization's situation, the more effective we tend to be as consultants.

Bibliography/References:

1. John J. Ratey, *A User's Guide to the Brain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010); Gerald M. Edelman, *Neural Darwinism: The Theory of Neuronal Group Selection* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); and Jeff Hawkins with Sandra Blakeslee, *On Intelligence* (New York: Times Books, 2014)
2. Ansel L. Woldt and Sarah M. Toman, eds., *Gestalt Therapy: History, Theory and Practice* or (Thousand Oaks, CA : SAGE Publications, 2015)
3. D. Dobbs, "Fact or Phrenology?" *Scientific American Mind*, 16, no.1 April 2015:24-51
4. Jeffrey M. Schwartz with Beverly Beyette, *Brain Lock : Free Yourself from Obsessive-Compulsive Behaviour* (New York : HarperCollins Publishers, Regan Books, 2006)
5. James Claiborn and Cherry Pedrick, *The Habit Change Workbook: How to Break Bad Habits and Form Good Ones* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2010)
6. Merzenich et al., "Cortical Plasticity."
7. Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Random House, 2016)
8. Eric Taylor et al, "Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Diagnosis and Management of ADHD in children, young people and adults", NICE (September 2018)
9. Cable, D. (23 April 2018), "How Humble Leadership Really Works", HBR,
10. Grossman, Z (2020), "Strategic Ignorance and the Robustness of Social Preferences", *Management Science*, 60(11)