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## Overcoming Irrational BEHAVIOUR AT WORK

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By Victor S.L. Tan

One of the best opportunities to understand human behaviour is when you work closely with people and are tasked to develop them. In managing many client projects over the years, I noted that there are some common irrational behaviours people have when it comes to leading change in organisations.

### HANGING ON TO IMAGINED FEARS

One reason people resist change is fear. A typical case in point is a client organisation, which was converting its information from physical files to digital. Many, especially the older workforce, were worried that they could not learn new skills and adapt to the new technology. This was proven untrue as with training and encouragement, the workers eventually learn to adapt to the new technology.

In fact, a study by IBM in 2008 on 1,500 change management executives from 15 countries shows that about 60% of projects fail due to the mindsets of people.

To implement successful change, leaders must first change the mindsets of people: convince them to let go of the old and develop new skills to embrace the new.

### ANALYSIS PARALYSIS

I often run into leaders who love to analyse. They come up with a complete SWOT analysis and change assessment impact. The leaders have become irrational due to their over-fixation with analysis and the process of change. They are unable to make critical decisions and move forward with the change.

Effective leadership is not just about knowledge and skills, it is very much about the ability and courage to make decisions and move forward to implement change.

### ENGAGING IN UNPRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES

Many leaders pride themselves in setting smart goals which are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound. In my book, *Releasing Trapped Minds*, I pointed out that one great tragedy in the workplace is that people do not do what they are supposed to do. Knowing what to do and doing what you know are totally different.

In fact, one reason why people often fail to meet their work deadlines is that they engage in unproductive activities, such as chatting online, attending to unrelated work matters or simply procrastinating.

The key role of leaders here is to get people focused on achieving their set KPIs and holding them accountable.

### MISHANDLING PEOPLE

I have witnessed corporate leaders who lost their cool, shout and verbally bludgeon their staff into submission. These leaders have not taken time to learn about more effective ways to deal with people.

When I was 13 years old, I read *"How To Win Friends And Influence People"* by Dale Carnegie, which contains the right approach in working with people.

1. Begin with praise and honest appreciation.
2. Call attention to people's mistakes indirectly.
3. Ask questions instead of giving direct orders.
4. Let the other person save face.
5. Praising slightest improvement. Be "heartly in your approbation and lavish in your praise".
6. Give the other person a fine reputation to live up to.
7. Use encouragement. Make the fault seem easy to correct.
8. Make the other person happy about doing the thing you suggest.

### STOP LEARNING AND IMPROVING

There is a better way to learn and improve. It is by doing new things or doing things in a new way.

Too often, we notice people who are at the same job stop learning and improving altogether. The figure they already know everything there is to know.

The best way for such people to learn is to engage them in new tasks which require new knowledge or skills. The famous painter, Pablo Picasso, said it best: "I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it."

### NOT TAKING CHARGE

It is indeed irrational behaviour, when leaders who want change, stand idly merely providing suggestion for change. Somehow they see it fit to lower themselves to a state of being "powerless, helpless and hopeless".

Leadership is as much as diagnosing the problems as finding their solutions.

In essence, every leader's creed should be: "My organisation transformation begins with me." A leader should begin change in his own department, of which he has control. And with each achievement chalked up, his department will build credibility which can influence other departments to change.

It is time leaders stop behaving irrationally and take heed of former United States president Barack Obama's advice in change: "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the one we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

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