

Behavioural Digest

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The Leader Trap By Howard Lees

I have been researching my latest book for the last three years. My research has revealed that the organisational landscape is strewn with people in Leadership roles impaled on various traps, unable to operate sufficiently to be effective in their role. There is a serious shortage of competent leaders out there. There is also a serious lack of feedback getting to people in leader roles.

Organisations do not appear to be setting out to train up competent leaders. Not a day goes by without me hearing of another artless comment made by a leader to one of their own wealth creators that will undoubtedly make the future worse, not better, for the individual, the organisation and of course, eventually, the guilty leader. For a while there I was leaning to believing that organisations had simply decided to promote stupid people into their top jobs! It has emerged that many of these people are trapped in numerous stereotypical pitfalls.

The Leader Trap is real, it's a thing and my new book will set out to describe and demystify what's going on behaviourally in the whacky world of organisational leadership. If you wish to send me your examples of great leadership or dysfunctional leadership and all points in between, I will look to add them into the book.

Being Reinforced by Failure By Bryony Sherry

'Shaping' in the world of Behavioural Science refers to the process in which any small attempt towards a desired behaviour is reinforced, ultimately leading to a behavioural change. This can be a long process which takes time and effort. If changes are left to nature, extinction for the new behaviour is bound to occur, and other behaviours fill the space - desired or otherwise.

What does this look like in real life in an office? Take a monotonous job that requires repetition of a task many times before reaching the goal: Cold-calling people trying to make a sale. If you make 99 calls before you make one sale, the reality is that there will need to be some conscious reinforcement of your efforts to maintain motivation. At the end of each call (even unsuccessful ones) you can think of one thing that went well, and - depending on whether you are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated - try to purposefully reinforce the pinpointed behaviours.

If you view each instance of failure as a step closer to reaching the final goal, this is shaping in practice. "I have made 99 calls, the next one is a definite sale!"

Shades of BMT

- Pilot new initiatives first, then you can iterate out all your bad guesses.
- "Brains are machines for jumping to conclusions." (Kahneman).
- Difficult things can become easy things with the right conversations.

The Befuddling Matrix Organisation

By Howard Lees

Matrix organisations don't work as corporations would like them to. A matrix structure can deliver uncertain outcomes with the added problem of breakdowns in collaboration due to the left hand and right hand acting independently of each other. Any attempt to open discussions on the matrix can send executives into a tailspin; any cogent critique is often aggressively stamped out, which is deeply ironic. In matrix organisations there are multiple 'bosses'. People choose the person above them or to one side of them as today's 'boss'. They usually pick the one they like best or maybe the least threatening.

A lack of a chain of command causes confusion and uncertainty. If they used matrix organisations in the army and Captain Smith said "Attack the enemy, right now" and Captain Jones said "Go to the mess and get some food," what would you do?

On The Bright Side

By Bruce Faulkner

Narcissism can emerge where a person with low self-esteem manipulates their colleagues - even their family and friends - in order to succeed or look good. I guess you can imagine some politicians that fit this description; people that have abused and or betrayed the people close to them in order to gain personal success. In their study of narcissism and leadership Paunonen et al. (2006) measured egotism, which they took to represent the bright side of narcissism, and Machiavellianism as the dark side.

Their results notably supported their theory that the highest rated leaders had the 'bright side narcissism' profile, high in egoism and self-esteem but low in manipulateness and impression management. Indeed, they concluded that they are 'hard pressed' to think of any situation where dark side narcissism would not threaten the leader-followership relationship to lead it to inevitably collapse, sooner or later. Take a look around, who do you see?

Mixed messages

By Lynn Dunlop

It is perfectly possible for teams, or whole organisations, to have a culture where it's common that people are asked for one thing, but rewarded for something else. A senior person might say "We value transparency." But if people continue to thrive – bonuses, promotions, staying on the good side of the boss – by being less than transparent, then that verbal message fails. Dr John Austin has noted that "a behavioural view of culture is that it is a function of the behaviours that are reinforced and punished." Are there any instances of mixed messages in your workplace? Have any of your leaders looked behind the curtain to see what's really happening?

Stop Reading My Mind

By Bryony Sherry

Being a psychology graduate, people often ask me "Can you read my mind?" First of all, I have a degree in Psychology from Liverpool Hope. I'm not a superhero, and I can't see into your soul. Even psychiatrists who study for many years will not be able to "read your mind". Psychology is a field of Behavioural Science, it is the scientific study of the mind and behaviour.

At Hollin, we teach Behavioural Science, we start by defining behaviour as "what we say and do". This helps to keep people grounded in what is actually happening and away from telepathy. The aim of our work is to equip people with the tools and knowledge to maximise their environment to support positive behaviours. We are not trying to coach people to be psychiatrists, and much less psychics. And so we steer clear of subjective observations about who is thinking what. We pinpoint behaviours of interest and highlight antecedents and the possible consequences to the performer.

This piece was inspired by the quote from Aubrey Daniels that was included in last month's digest:

"Don't mess with other people's minds. It's unreliable. It's not necessary. And, it's none of your business anyway."

A Wise Old Owl

By Howard Lees

One day, a long time ago, I was asked to walk with my boss around a construction site. He said to me "For the avoidance of doubt, this is a coaching session." He said "You have 10 years' experience now. Do you think you have learned multiple things each year or have you just learned the same things 10 times?" It's 40-odd years later now, and I finally think I know what he meant!



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