

# Behavioural Digest

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Behavioural Leadership  
Conference and Workshop  
May 15th & 16th 2024  
Manchester, UK



## Optimally Aroused By Bryony Sherry

When optimal arousal theory was mentioned at university, it was usually met with one or two sniggers. It actually refers to the concept that there is an optimal level of brain stimulation: Too little and you are bored, too high and you become stressed. In this state, organised, productive working becomes unlikely.

There are obvious applications for this theory within the workplace - individuals need to find balance, to have a workload which is sufficiently challenging without wandering into over-loading. Leaders creating a psychologically safe workplace maximise the likelihood that people will engage in appropriate coping mechanisms – that their people will speak out when they want help and will make robust plans. People are more likely to feel comfortable communicating as early as possible when it becomes unlikely that tasks will not be completed. It is also worth noting that feeling 'too busy', or 'having a list as long as your arm' is detrimental to concentration, productivity and over-all wellbeing.

*“A person who has been punished is not less inclined to behave in a given way; at best, he learns how to avoid punishment.”*  
B.F. Skinner

## Do as You're Told By Howard Lees

Here's a common tale: A complaining boss says "I must have told them a hundred times, they are not listening." Or "How many times do I have to say?" It won't help our frustrated bosses to suggest that it takes skill to set up what's called stimulus control. If the goal is for other people do what they ask them to do, every time they ask, high levels of stimulus control are required. Perhaps the boss could consider whether this is a request too far and in order to achieve this goal they may risk killing off key relationships, I guess they don't want scorched earth, they just want some simple things doing by someone.

There are common misconceptions where bosses think that once they have spoken, the message was heard, understood, and acted upon straight away. They assume compliance, but often don't check. When the sad truth comes to light, they respond emotionally. People with children will know that setting up an environment for 100% obedience is akin to attempting to set up cuckoo land in utopia!

## Behavioural Leadership Conference and Workshop 2024

Our two-day event comprises the Conference (15th May) and the Workshop (16th May). To mark the 20th year of Hollin, the 2024 theme is longevity.

Visit [www.hollin.co.uk](http://www.hollin.co.uk) to book tickets.



[Click here](#) to join the BMT group on LinkedIn.

# Every Project Faces Ruin, Few Escape

By Bruce Faulkner

Change is a constant in the business world. To survive, we have to change the way we work. That's why there's always a project on the go. And each of these projects has a set of assumptions about what's needed to meet these new challenges.

But the world continues to change. What was true yesterday may no longer be true. If we ignore these changes to our environment, then we become fragile (stupid!). Our behaviour no longer aligns with our environment; it's become 'Maladaptive'. And when we fail to adjust, there is an inevitability to our ruin. All that's left to debate is the timing. However, a simple question could change that outcome — Which of our decisions are no longer valid?

To figure out what's still valid, we need to do two things. First, seek an accurate view of what's happening. Second, use that data to make new decisions. Those behaviours are 'Adaptive'. And every leadership team agrees to do the first step.

But as the data comes in, many leaders partake in maladaptive behaviours. These leaders now want an 'acceptable' version of the truth. It's as if they're looking to confirm their biases. Or maybe they're just trying to save face? Either way, the irony of this situation is lost on them.

## CVs - Part 3

By The Hollin Team

Structure is important when writing a CV. The person reading might have dozens of CVs to get through, so the writer's job is to waste no time in their attempts to deliver reinforcers for the reader. This means putting the key things that the reader is searching for on the front page of your CV, and listing your job history (relevant, but much less useful from a delivering-reinforcement-for-the-reader point of view) after that.

Unless your educational or professional qualifications are directly relevant for the role, consider prioritising them accordingly. If you predict that the reader won't get any reinforcement from reading a detail about you, just leave it out. A 50-year-old candidate for an MD's role has no need to describe a junior role they were doing in their early 30s: All their subsequent experiences have made that - for the purposes of a CV - much less relevant. Use the structure of your CV and some careful editing to help your reader see why you are the best candidate for the role.

## Shades of BMT

- They do what they do to protect what they have.
- Uncertainty prevails with low levels of engagement.
- Making a mistake is just another opportunity to get to know other people better.
- Do you want the truth or something beautiful?
- Leaders who fall for the temptation of 'too busy' can frequently say stupid and counterproductive things to their people.

# Another Passive Organisation?

By Howard Lees

Many senior knowledge workers have happily admitted to us that they turn up to meetings late and unprepared, don't measure how they spend their time, don't respond reliably to email and phone calls, and tolerate boring meetings. We make the point that people can't be successful at anything more complex until they fix these simple daily behaviours. All the 'day to day' behaviours of people in organisations need to be effective, starting with the basic essentials.

Many organisations are matrixed (which rarely work as intended), and many are bureaucratic, some massively so. Commonly, knowledge workers are not given the freedom to deliver on their goals; they are frequently constrained in some way, either by their bosses or by the local environment or wider company culture. These constraints can be discovered very easily by asking people if they feel constrained in any way.

If the leadership is willing to act on their answers, then future success really depends on just how much the light bulb really wants to change.

## Open To Interpretation

By Bryony Sherry

The funny thing with Behavioural Science is that the key principles seem so obvious that people often think they are already doing it. For example, leaders will try to reinforce – offering a reward and/or recognising 'good behaviour'. When a behaviour is successfully reinforced, the person repeats that behaviour. Most workplaces are filled with attempts at reinforcement, but without careful measurement – they are just that... An attempt to reinforce.