

Our beliefs are more powerful than believed

The human brain is a belief creating machine. Beliefs derive from our personality, the environment we are part of, the influence we receive from others, our heroes and role models, our life history, books we read and many others.

Let's be clear. Beliefs have no relationship to intelligence. That's the reason we might face highly intelligent people defending what we consider to be peculiar beliefs. Once a belief is shaped and becomes ingrained, the more intelligent people are, the higher their capacity to rationalize it.

A belief is a proposition which is accepted as truth, although it can be based on questionable or unsubstantiated evidence.

According to psychologist Michael Shermer, our brain filters facts according to the lenses through which we see the world: paradigms, theories, prejudices which have been accumulated throughout our lives. Among all facts, we select the ones which confirm what we already believe in and ignore or minimize the ones which contradict our beliefs.

Our tribal tendencies lead us to make coalitions with people who think like us and to demonize or maintain a distance from those who have different beliefs. Beliefs trigger our actions, so those of us in a leadership position need to periodically revisit our people management beliefs in order to assess how our actions are impacting our direct reports.

As leaders, our mission is to create the conditions for our team to be successful in achieving expected results. Also, as a leader, we need to work at the individual level to ensure that each person is being developed so as to achieve their career objectives. Some topics for reflection:

1. The problem of accepting without questioning

Because of the tribal tendency, leaders can put up a team where every individual has the same characteristics, the same worldview and the same beliefs. That team will miss the opportunity to bring innovation and find diverse solutions to complex problems. This happens because there is no opposite view to force the team to explore other perspectives and solutions. Solid solutions come from the healthy conflict of ideas. As mentioned by a participant in one of our leadership classes some time ago, "if everybody agrees with me, one of us should not be here."

2. The nature of work is changing

Every activity that can be translated into an algorithm will sooner or later be performed by artificial intelligence. Humans will take care of the complex tasks which require creativity and soft skills. If we continue to think that repeating the old success formula is enough, we will for sure lose many opportunities, and see our market value shrink. This is true and applicable for us and our team members. Bring up this reflection when coaching your team members' performance or their careers.

3. The self-fulfilling prophecy

If a leader believes that a team member can't carry out his/her tasks, most probably that prophecy will end up being confirmed. Not because the initial judgment was right, but because the leader did nothing to develop and encourage the team member. What is really perverse about this prophecy is that the belief will be reinforced as the prophecy is confirmed. Leaders have the development power in their hands, so when they do not believe in the other person they will not invest a minute to help the direct report to succeed. The problem, therefore, is not with the other person. The



problem lies in our beliefs, which triggers our actions; which will subconsciously do everything to confirm the entrenched belief.

To change our beliefs, we need to first understand how they were established. We need to analyze the assumptions used to build them. We also need to ask which other assumptions could have been used to arrive at different conclusions.

In other words, we need to widen our premises by adding different perspectives, challenging our most ingrained truths and being open to understand and value different worldviews. Acting this way, we contribute to a richer dialogue and we strengthen ourselves to make a difference.

MAPA Consulting can help you and your team to develop these competencies.

See you next time. As always, we welcome your feedback.