

I can't find my mindset



...says Dr Leandro Herrero

Concepts such as creating a 'will to succeed', entrepreneurial spirit, dynamism and a winning culture can be very inspiring in the workplace. The trouble with these ideas is that they have virtually no predictive value in behavioural terms...

At her latest advanced sales training course, Monique has been given very clear messages. Things need to change! She has been with the company for almost five years, during which time she has worked as a medical rep in a niche specialist market where her company once had the leading market share. One reason for attending the course is the rapid change in competitive forces in the market. New products from companies of significant critical mass have seriously destabilised Monique's firm's dominant position. And the company has amalgamated two sales forces into one. The 'old ways' of doing things need to be replaced with new ways; this is a clear message.

In a series of modules and sessions over an intensive week, Monique has been told that all of her colleagues now need to change their mindsets and adapt to that significant change in competitiveness. What we need today, Monique's notes say, is a different attitude. Complacency is gone, healthy restlessness is required, big time! We need a 'will to achieve', a 'will to surprise' and a 'will to succeed'. Monique's notes continue: what is needed now, more than anything else, is an 'esprit conquerant' – as the French affiliate says, a 'spirit of conquest' – coupled with confidence in front of physicians and pharmacists. Also, more than ever, one of the company's old values – 'entrepreneurship' – is required and it needs to be revived. Entrepreneurial spirit is key, particularly at

district level, where they now have been given more flexibility in the use of resources. Conviction and confidence 'need to show', Monique has highlighted in her notepad.

After a break, Monique returned to the classroom for a second week of advanced sales training, where the main theme was 'culture'. Monique's notes grew longer and longer. There was more groupwork this time. A consolidated output of many hours of work with colleagues, some of them more experienced than herself, pointed to very clear directions. Monique's accurate notes read: "We need to create a solid 'winning culture', where dynamism, creativity, optimism and confidence in the future are part of everybody's mindset. We need to project a new image, living the values of the company: integrity, excellence and with a customer-centric mentality." This new mindset of self-belief, 'conquering spirit', customer-effectiveness and entrepreneurship, Monique's notes say, is the key to the new culture, the only way to face the significant new challenges.

Monique is very excited. She says the course was excellent and that it lifted everybody's spirits, which quite frankly had been a bit low after people were first confronted with the new realities. A couple of weeks later, her district manager held a meeting with his small group of specialist reps. This was a routine meeting, but an important one, because a new territory

management system (TMS) had been implemented recently and they were all trying to make the most of the new tool installed on their personal laptops. HQ had just released new benchmarking and market data as well. There were new updated lists of 'Class A' doctors and quite a lot of new information on local hospitals. During the meeting, Monique and her colleagues looked at sales targets – at both the individual and the district level – call rates, completion of input/feedback into the TMS and some competitive benchmarking. They all had clear goals to improve physician call rates by 15% within the current six-month period and cover 95% of assigned hospital pharmacists. Overall, Monique's district was achieving 85% of its sales targets and, compared with what was happening in other districts, this figure wasn't bad at all!

The missing connection

The meeting is over and Monique is driving home, stopping first for an extra visit to the local hospital. She had promised to take some scientific papers to the pharmacist and she thought she would take this opportunity to do that. In the waiting room in front of the hospital pharmacy, she has a sudden revelation, thanks to the peace and quiet of the place and the unexpected delay in the pharmacist's availability. What was the connection between the two-week advanced sales training course and this morning's district meeting? She struggled for a bit until her mind comforted her (the mind is wonderful at comforting us). "It's all there," she thought, "in the background, in the mindset". The waiting continued, apologies were given. Monique secretly welcomed the delay because it was rare that she could 'stop and think', as she liked to put it. But the restless revelations seemed to come in waves like a 'migraine' of thoughts. "What is the mindset? What kind of mindset do I have? Where is my mindset?" she thought. She found it silly at first, but all sorts of other questions started to bombard her, all centred on the same mindset-thing. And then it was back to: "Where is the connection?" She had her old training notes on her laptop. She went through all of them quickly: 'esprit conquerant', will to succeed, confidence, conviction. She then opened an Excel spreadsheet by mistake: sales targets, call rates and Class A physicians were all there in front

of her. Where is the connection? Where is the connection? Monique's anxiety was put to rest by the sudden appearance of the hospital pharmacist who went on and on about the ridiculously long and boring management committee meeting she had just attended.

Monique is not unique as a sales force rep. Not too junior, not too senior, she has been around long enough to get through recurrent training programmes, most of them on product knowledge and a few on selling skills. This recent advanced course was a bit different because it focused on a series of qualities that were required for success. Like her colleagues, Monique thought highly of the course. It all seemed to make sense, but she kept trying to understand 'the connection' (as she puts it) between the last bit of training, the operational targets and the old basic generic selling skills. On reflection, Monique thought the district manager would have provided the connection, but the reality is that they spent the time on sales targets, sales planning and review of benchmarking data.

If you work in sales, you may relate to the above scenario. If you work in other parts of the firm, the same principles apply. There are two fundamental, and if I may say so, colossal flaws in this very real-life scenario:

1. Monique is quite right that she has not been given 'the connections'. First of all, her performance-related compensation and incentives are mainly focused on sales targets and call rates, so these are the themes that occupy the reviews with her district manager. None of the new list of qualities in her notepad has been connected with rewards, although there is some talk about linking 'will to succeed', 'entrepreneurial spirit' and 'projecting the values' next year.
2. The advanced training course contains a rich, comprehensive, beautifully-crafted, inspiring, energising and skilfully organised framework of close-to-useless non-operational concepts. Mindset, attitude, complacency, healthy restlessness, 'will to achieve', 'will to surprise', 'will to succeed', 'esprit conquerant', confidence, entrepreneurial spirit, conviction, 'winning culture', dynamism, creativity, optimism 'project a new image', 'living the values', integrity, excellence, customer-centric

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It is better to have no connection between lists of new qualities and the performance management system than to have one based on non-operational concepts

mentality, self-belief, and customer-effectiveness may have come from a company-wide, undoubtedly expensive 'research on behaviours', but they all share the same problem: a negligible predictive value in behavioural terms.

To put it more bluntly, the word 'behaviours' appears in Monique's training binder but there are no behaviours inside. The long list above doesn't contain a single behaviour. It is impossible to know, to extrapolate or

to infer from the list what it is that a rep has to do, what not to do, what to do differently, do new, stop doing, do more or do less so that the famous 'new mindset' shows. People don't have a mindset in the same way that they have a car, a pair of eyes or pneumonia. Monique can't find 'her mindset', but has no trouble in finding her call rate data, so she is going to focus on what she can find. Monique hasn't been given any 'translation' of the comprehensive quality-based framework to bring into her real life. There is a gulf between 'all these things there in the background' (the new mindset) and what she has to do differently. In the absence of a behavioural bridge, Monique would probably use her intuition by unconsciously using the energy and excitement of the course and applying them to her customer interface. Which may result in a more-of-the-same-otherwise-more-energised way of doing things. If she is successful in the new competitive conditions, she will probably be told: "The new mindset works," even if nobody in the district would have ever seen a mindset. If they do well collectively, they will probably be told that the new culture is paying off, even if nobody has ever described in behavioural terms what the new culture should be.

Concepts into behaviours

Contrary to what you may have thought I would say, the lack of connection between the list of new qualities in the binder (which they now call 'new behaviours' in a serious case of mistaken identity) and the performance management system is a blessing. It is better to have no connection than to have one based on non-operational concepts. Like many companies I know, Monique's sales operations management system falls short of a behavioural-based framework, although, like many companies I

know, they say they have one. The process of translating concepts into behaviours is not necessarily complex but it needs to be done professionally. Concepts such as 'will to succeed' or 'entrepreneurial mindset' need to be operationalised and the only way to do it is through a true behavioural framework.

The district manager needs to know what is expected of Monique in the way she does things that would qualify for the label 'good mindset' since no complex neurosurgery in Monique's brain will ever find that mindset. Perhaps, once a simple set of behaviours is in place – what to do, what not to do, whether they are flexible or non-negotiable, in situations such as A, B and C – then 'the connections' have been established (and therefore the loop with the performance management system can be closed). Once this operational level is clarified, the label automatically becomes less relevant. Whether you still call it 'entrepreneurial mindset' or if I prefer to call it 'winning attitude', it is not going to change the fact that Monique will know what to do and her district manager will know what to look for, measure and reward. So now we are in business.

This real life example from a sales management perspective should not provide any comfort to colleagues in R&D where they think that (a) either they don't need this stuff or (b) they have a very well crafted performance management system, obviously based on hitting milestones and filing applications. Some R&D organisations are beginning to suspect that there is more life beyond hitting the milestone and that they have a similar problem when trying to define things such as their 'culture of innovation', 'creative environment' or 'drug-hunting mentality'. My experience with R&D is that they are, on the whole, in worse shape behaviour-wise than many sales operations organisations.

P.S. Monique did very well that year. She managed to get to the top of the sales target ranking at district level and won the rep-of-the-year President's award. Following a long-standing sales management tradition of withdrawing the best sales reps from the field, she has been promoted to a new position in a new sales force effectiveness unit where she will be in charge of training programmes and, in particular, the roll-out of a new corporate one entitled 'Leadership excellence'. Please join me in wishing Monique every success.



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