

Kim's response to a question posted on LinkedIn

How can neuroscience be applied to leadership development and management training?

There are many important applications! Understanding how the brain works helps explain the “why” behind sound leadership practices. I think there are three levels at which content/practice can be useful in leadership development:

1. It's very helpful to have an understanding of basic brain morphology and biology of some primary elements, primarily the multifaceted neocortex and some subcortical structures, especially the limbic system. Understanding some topics, e.g. the peripheral nervous system and neurotransmission, are not unimportant but (in my opinion) less directly impacting leadership. This might sound complex and unnecessary in the context of leadership development, but pilots who understand the basic physics that enable flight and basic mechanics of aircraft design are better pilots. If you want to apply neuroscience, it helps to understand brain basics.
2. At the next level is understanding brain how the brain parts work together to deal with our environment. Important topics (these are high-level), include:
 - Threat and Reward Networks
 - Learning and Memory
 - Relationships and Socialization
 - Stress and Emotions
 - Focus and Attention
 - Intuition and Expertise
 - Judgment and Decision Making
 - Planning and Prioritizing
 - Language and MeaningThere are other functions that are (in my opinion) less directly impactful of leadership, e.g., vision and spatial orientation.
3. Understanding the above helps us apply neuroscience to do the following as leaders:
 - Create an environment of threat-free urgency – the ultimate high-performance environment
 - Build trust and solid relationships with and between others in the organization
 - Align the values, energy, and sense of purpose in those we lead
 - Leverage conflict and constructive debate to optimize decision making
 - Enhance intuition and deepen expertise
 - Accelerate shared learning in our teams and across the organization

Neuroscience explains the “why” behind good leadership and gives leaders rationale for doing the right things. It is a predictive, diagnostic, and instructive. Neuroscience should be a foundational element of leadership development!