



On Reframing Mental Models

Essential Considerations for Effective Leaders

1. We do not operate directly on the world in which we live but rather each of us creates a representation of the world in which we live
2. We create models or maps of the world and use these to guide our behaviour; our representation of the world determines to a large degree what our experience will be, what choices will be available as we live in the world
3. The models that each of us creates will be different and this can be demonstrated in a number of ways – neurological constraints, social constraints, individual constraints
4. We use language systems to represent our experience; our collective and personal metaphors are of critical importance

Some Background for Thought

1. Neurological Constraints

This is what the human system can experience through touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell. Much research exists to show the differences between the world and our experience of it. (eg: sound waves of below 20 cycles per second or above 20,000 cannot be detected by humans.) Our neurological system, initially determined genetically, constitutes the first set of filters which distinguish the world from our representations of it – the map.

2. Social Constraints

The function of the brain and the nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed by a mass of 'stuff' by providing filters and a 'shutting out' system leaving only a selection which is likely to be of practical use. In addition, we have a set of social constraints or filters as we are all members of a social system – our language, accepted ways of perceiving and socially agreed upon 'fictions'. This can be of great benefit to effective leadership but it can also be a great limitation.

Take language, for example, which is a common aspect of the richness of human experience; yet, we all differ in this. For example, in Maidu, a Native American Language, there are just 3 words available to describe the colour system – red, green-blue, yellow-orange-brown. Humans in general are capable of making 7,500,000 different colour distinctions in the visible colour spectrum. Similarly, in English, we have one word for snowflake, whereas there is a whole vocabulary for this in Intuit.

Unlike our neurological limitations, which are shared by all human beings, social filters are easily overcome. They are shared by members of the same socio-linguistic

community of which there are a large number. Thus, the second set of filters begins to distinguish us by group.

3. Individual Constraints

Individual constraints are the basis of the most far-reaching differences as these are formed as a result of individual, personal history. Just as every person has a unique set of finger prints, we all have unique histories and set of experiences. These are the uncommon ways each of us represent the world that result in a set of habits, behaviours, interests, preferences....rules of behaviour that are distinctly our own. Research shows that even identical twins have individual and therefore different 'maps.'

Individual filters are the ones that either enrich or restrict our experience; offer us choices or impoverish them, limit or enrich our ability to act effectively.

Development and Change

Some of us perceive we have a range of options while others feel their options are few. Effective leaders develop a level of self-awareness and self-management that enables them to realise their potential and go on to develop others.

EquiLearn offers a range of leader and leadership development approaches tailored to individual and team circumstances.

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