Know Your Brain

How your brain dictates your personality, and how colours affect productivity. Pages 6-7

Welcome the non-conformists

Embracing the heretics in your organisation can lead to innovation and creative solutions, says Be A Leader. → Pg 3

Influencing Power

How well do you influence the people around you?

Culture Connection

Culture plays key role in our career choices, studies show

Female Advantage?

Do women have an advantage when it comes to leadership skills?
ATTITUDE POWERS YOUR BRAIN

LILY SAYS

LET’S think about our brains for a moment. It’s a strange thought to digest that this organ weighs about 1.3 kg sitting within our skulls possesses such a power over the way we operate.

If we were a ship, that would be where the captain would sit. This command centre of our bodies allows us to store memory, process information and space, follow the thread of logic, express creativity, move different parts of our body, and the list goes on.

The fact is, if we’re truly hungry to develop ourselves and to learn, we can’t ignore our important friend, the brain. At least a general understanding of its potential and function is very valuable in our growth journeys. This is why we have Terry Small’s fascinating Brain Bulletin, which we know is one of your favourite columns.

The exciting thing about the brain is that it’s not stuck with one version of it from the day we’re born. The brain is able to evolve as we learn new things. As we put ourselves through difficult challenges, or keep practising a certain set of skills, the pathways in our brain that are utilised in those activities grow stronger.

If we embrace this ability for the brain to grow, we will find ourselves doing things we never thought we could have done, like learning a new skill or controlling anxiety or anger.

What does this all mean? If our brains have the ability to develop (even in our adulthood), this means that the only thing holding us back from continuing to grow and challenge ourselves is our attitude. It’s not the old dog’s body capacity that prevents him from learning new tricks. The old dog just doesn’t want to.

If the attitude is right, however, there is massive potential for continuous growth. Check out our centrepiece pages this week for some insights on how the brain influences our personality and productivity.

Brain bulletin also delves into the concept of brain plasticity on page 5.

Be a leader this week encourages leaders to embrace the rebels and trouble-makers in your organisations, while Hard Talk gives insight into how our culture influences the career decisions we make.

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To those who didn’t manage to respond to our movie voucher giveaway in last week’s issue, there will definitely be more opportunities. We hope to plan more events in the near future. As you know, if you enjoy our articles and are keen to read even more, hop on to leaderonomics.com/articles. We have a fantastic cartoon on Work-Life Balance from Zara Harun that you must check out. For feedback and comments, write to us at mystarjob@leaderonomics.com.

For our female readers (men are also welcome), we’re launching a brand new segment on Capital FM next Tuesday. Catch me with Deb and Non from 6-7pm on Tuesdays on 88.9fm (Klang Valley). Why not get a few personal development tips while you’re stuck in traffic and on your way home, right?

Have a great growth-filled week ahead.

Until next Saturday,

LILY CHEAH
Editor, myStarjob.com

“INTELLIGENCE WITHOUT AMBITION IS A BIRD WITHOUT WINGS” — SALVADOR DALI

BY EVA CHRISTODOULOU
eva.christodoulou@leaderonomics.com

SALVADOR Dali is one of my favourite artists. Even though I am not a huge fan of surrealist art, his work has something fantastic about it.

Born in a small town in Catalonia, Spain, Dali took art to the next level, collaborating with artists from all sorts of areas, be it photography, film, sculpture, even architecture.

An artist to the core, he combined styles from various eras as well as regions, and he came up with pieces so incredibly peculiar that one wonders how someone can even imagine such imagery, let alone draw it, act it, or tailor it out.

My first exposure to him and his work was when I visited Park Güell in Barcelona, where they were showing an old video of him laying huge canvases in the middle of the magical park, and with his renounced eccentricity was spilling paint in such a casual, yet meaningful manner to create a masterpiece.

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AClaim year, I have a personal tradition of quiet reflection of the year passed. Last year I reflected on death, as there were quite a few funerals attended. Death has permanence about it. Your game is up.

One significant death was Steve Jobs. His death reminded me of the greatest resurrection of a company nearing death.

By 1997, Apple was pretty close to its funeral ceremony. Its death was imminent. Then came “Think Different,” one of the greatest ad campaigns, bringing about Apple’s resurrection.

“Think Different” was based on a poem called “The Crazy Ones” by Craig Tanioto. It goes, “Here’re the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They’re not fond of rules and they have no respect for the status quo.”

You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can’t do is ignore them, because they change things.

They push the human race forward. Good business people may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius.

Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.

This campaign championed heretics in the workplace. They “push the human race forward” by breaking rules, disregarding tradition and disrupting. Throughout history, these heretics changed the world.

Galleo developed the early telescope and proved that the earth rotated around the sun. Yet, he was tried by the inquisition, found “vehemently suspect of heresy,” tortured and spent his life in prison.

Joan of Arc was 19 when burnt at the stake in Rouen. She defied the Inquisition, found “vehemently suspect of heresy,” tortured and spent his life in prison. Galileo developed the early telescope and is revered today as a great scientist. He explains, “there’s a difference between religion and faith.” Religion is a set of rules, rituals and tradition surrounding a faith. Heretics embrace the purpose of a business but would attack these “rituals” if they didn’t make sense.

CONVENTIONAL YET, behind many of the greatest business practices, which we now call “conventional wisdom,” lies a heretic, someone who fought for that idea when it seemed outlandish, implausible, and impossible.

In a previous role, being true to form, I challenged some of the norms in that organisation. I changed how we worked and we saw results. The leaders were enthusiastic with the outcomes but the senior HR folks were not thrilled to see their “rules” broken.

Before long, the threats of job loss and labels of being rebellious and insubordinate, wore us down, forcing conformity to convention. This is typically what happens to heretics — forced to conform or “be burnt at the stake.”

Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM. That cliché has mutated from a cardinal rule of entrepreneurship to conform or be “burnt at the stake.” But what some may see as the crazy ones, we see genius.

The list doesn’t stop there. Sir Jack Welch showed scant disregard for theBe A Leader

rules in the watch industry, by creating low-cost, high-tech, fun, and emotive watches. Fortune is rarely won by those playing it safe; they are won by those willing to be rebellious to the status quo and attack orthodox beliefs or institutions.

Apple’s Tim Cook bought two cardinals of entrepreneurship: investing in an industry he knew nothing about, and ignoring the “location, location, location” mantra by purchasing a seedy motel in a dodgy area.

A decade later, Conley is celebrated for his entrepreneurial genius in building his Joie de Vivre boutique hotels, beating giants like Marriott, Hilton and others, to the No. 1 customer service award in 2010.

Jack Welch showed scant disregard for GE’s 100 years of legacy in the 80s when he closed businesses, streamlined processes and fired people. Today, his “heretical” actions are regarded by many as management dogma, just as Galleo is revered today as a great scientist.

The list doesn’t stop there. Sir Richard Branson rebelliously built Virgin breaking every known business convention in the process. Sam Walton built Walmart into the largest company in the world with his unconventional daring approach.

Walton says, “I always prided myself on breaking everybody else’s rules, and I always favoured the mavericks who challenged my rules.” Li Ka Shing, Andrew Carnegie and Jeff Bezos succeeded, because they were partly heretical in their approach to life.

YOU NEED HERETICS

Yet most organisations detest heretics, viewing them as troublemakers not toeing the company line. Most companies prefer compliance and are designed to wield tight control at the expense of autonomy. Modern heretics are not burnt at the stake but are “old-storaged,” ostra-cised or pressured to resign.

In 1988, Sony and Nintendo were working together on the Super Disc. Nintendo withdrew from the partner-ship and the project was closed. Ken Kutagari, head of research and development of this project, was transferred to Sony Music.

However, he became “rebellious” and insisted on going ahead with the project. Sony initially resisted the crea-tion of the PlayStation, but Kutagari kept fighting the system and perse- vered, finally convincing Sony.

If Kutagari the heretic did not react, Sony would have never enjoyed the sig-nificant profits the PlayStation brought.

Pisaco broke the rules on what a face should look like and Gaudi broke the rules on what a building should look like. Are you a heretic like Kutagari, Pisaco and Gaudi?

If we want progress, we should ensure our organisations are filled with people who flout convention, question constantly, and experiment fearlessly. They are annoying and inconvenient, but we need these rebels and the troublemakers because “they change things. They push the human race forward.”

On Sept 11, 2001, airlines were forced to shut down with passengers stranded. Instead of merely waiting, a “heretical” leader at Southwest Airlines took passengers out to the movies and bowling to pass time. While other air-lines fired people post-9/11, Southwest retained all employees thanks to ava-tion “heretics” in employment.

Heres to the Crazy Ones

If you’re a heretic, you’re not your enemy. They are trying to help. They are not your problem — they are the start of your solution.

Develop your heretics early

The Minnesota Twin Family Study concludes that if youths are stimulated early in life with challenges and situ-ations where they are forced to break rules modestly, their leadership poten-tial is accelerated.

Interestingly, we teach children to cover inside the lines, and then expect adults to think outside the box.

Innovation is driven by a willingness to discard old ways of thinking and doing things. But beware; you want to raise a Steve Jobs; not the next Bernie Madoff.

There is nothing like someone facing death to truly understand disregard- ing status quo and living. Like Apple in 1997 and Steve Jobs recently. Jobs famously said, “Remembering that I’ll be dead soon is the most important tool I’ve ever encountered to make the big choices in life. Because almost everything just falls away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important.”

So go ahead and embrace your mis-fits. Cling and listen to your heretics. Remember, a heretic sees a truth that contradicts conventional wisdom, yet remains loyal to both entities: your organisation and the truth.

Heretics are not apostates; they do not want to leave the “faith.” Instead, they want your business to change and meet the truths they see. If the rigid CIA and Sony can welcome (and profit from) heretics, what’s stopping you? Start now by leveraging your “crazy ones.”

— Rosihan Thiran is CEO of Leaderonomics, a social enterprise pas-sionate about developing heretics in the workplace that transform organisations. For more information on leadership programmes to transform your organi-sation, contact +62123473176 or email people@leaderonomics.com
Influence Your Way to Success

By Eric Quah
eric.quah@leaderonomics.com

Leadership has many forms: some leaders cleave the way for others to follow, some inspire others to build a brighter future, while others form phalanxes with their followers and sit out a crisis as a close-knit pack. Leadership qualities are as varied as the people who embody them, but all forms of leadership involve some form of influence on the behaviour of those they lead.

Defining Influence

But what exactly is influence? In a 2007 article in NeGuide, a research-based, peer-reviewed publication by the University of Nebraska, Lincoln Extension, educator Anita Hall and leadership specialist Levere Barrett define influence as “a force one person (the agent) exerts on someone else (the target) to induce a change in the target, regardless of whether the action is unwarranted.”

Influence tactics are usually targeted at certain individuals to affect the behaviour of others in a particular direction. A leader will use strategic or tactical influence designed to change another person’s attitudes, goals, needs and values and “the ability to affect the behaviour of others in a particular direction.”

Influencing Methods

Typically, influence falls into two broad categories: push and pull. A leader might need to get an employee to agree to some proposal or to achieve certain goals.

While both categories produce results, push tactics usually yield short-term results while pull tactics garner support rather than compliance. Hall and Barrett eventually proposed a table in which they observed the different forms of tactics that were used by effective leaders.

Called the Power Use Model (see table below) it categorises influence tactics in terms of its “softness” (as opposed to “hardness”), which relates to the amount of freedom afforded to an employee to either yield or resist the influence. Hard tactics leave individuals with less freedom than soft tactics.

Soft tactics allow more latitude to the employee to decide whether or not to accept the influence. Hard influence tactics place more strain on the relationship between the influencing person and the target, especially if the action is unwarranted.

Hence, the target usually has three ways to react. Firstly, the target could resist the influence by ignoring the influence or refusing the influence attempt, by making excuses or by seeking support from a higher authority.

Secondly, the target could be compliant with the decision but unenthusiastic about the change. The third possible response, which is the best, is to get the target to commit towards the leader’s vision.

Role Modelling

In a 2005 study by Linda K. Treviño and Michael E. Brown called Managing Organisational Deviance, it was shown that followers learn most from the way a leader carries himself or herself. According to Treviño and Brown, this behaviour modelling is recognised as the “most powerful means for transmitting values, attitudes, and behaviours.”

By observing leaders’ behaviour and the results of that behaviour, employees learn what companies expect of them. The implied notion is that leaders are taken to exemplify the ideals for the company due to their position and the status and power that comes with their roles.

New World Order

In today’s rapidly changing world, work has become more knowledge-based and less rigidly defined, as noted by EIM Small Business Research and Consultancy Jeroen Pi de Jong, and University of Amsterdam Business School of the Netherlands’ Deane N. Den Hartog.

In their research published in the European Journal of Innovation Management in 2007, they aimed at providing an inventory of leadership behaviours that are most likely to enhance innovative behaviour among employees.

By reviewing research material and in-depth interviews, they found that leaders, especially those in knowledge-intensive services, influence innovative behaviour through their common everyday ways of going about business. Jong and Hartog also found that different leaders use different methods when they consult, delegate and monitor employee behaviour.

Jong and Hartog suggest that leaders trying to enhance employee innovation could try consulting with them often, ensuring they have the autonomy in deciding how to do their work, and support and recognise their initiatives and innovative efforts.

Mastering the art of influence is part and parcel of being a leader. A successful leader is one who understands which influence tactics work best for the situation and the person or group.

As a leader, you should be able to influence your subordinates in a positive way. Here are some tips on how to exert influence as suggested by author, trainer and Forbes contributor Joseph Grenny.

1. Recognise That You Need to Address Entrenched Non-Productive Habits

Most leaders spend so much time engaging in product development and sales that they fail to realise that they need to lead their employees.

Few leaders understand that the deciding factor in the success of their grand design hinges on how influential they are to their employees.

The most influential leaders tend to spend most of their time actively developing and encouraging behaviours that will lead to top performance.

2. Formulate Your Own Theory on Mass Influence

Just as every individual is different, every group is also unique. Look at the people you lead and understand what influences them.

Find out what the various influence tactics are, but application and adaptation to your own context is crucial.

Spend time with your people, and you will have a better idea of which methods can best mould their behaviour.

3. Get Rid of the Idea That Talking Is Equivalent to Influence

Many leaders think influence consists of merely talking people into doing things. Power point presentations and rallies may convey information, but influence is totally separate concept.

Profound, persistent, and overwhelming problems demand more than just verbal persuasion. Anyone who’s tried to “talk” a smoker into quitting knows there’s a lot more to behavioural change than words.

4. There Is No One-Technique-Solves-All Method to Changing Behaviour

Understand that behaviour is ingrained in a person’s psyche and it takes continuous and subtle ways to encourage change.

Incentives, presentations on acceptable behaviour and performance-linked bonuses will have to match with other methods of persuasion.

The Power Use Model from Influence, the Essence of Leadership by Anita Hall and Levere Barrett.

### Tactic Definition Characteristic Effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactic</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>Behaviour includes demands, threats or intimidation to convince others to comply with a request or to support a proposal.</td>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>Behaviour includes repeatedly making requests, setting timelines for project completion or expressing anger toward individuals who do not meet expectations.</td>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimising</td>
<td>Behaviour seeks to persuade others that the request is something they should comply with given their situation or position.</td>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>Behaviour seeks the aid of others to persuade them to do something or uses the support of others as an argument for them to agree.</td>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>Behaviour makes explicit or implicit a promise that others will receive rewards or tangible benefits if they comply with a request or reminds others of a favour that should be reciprocated.</td>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upward appeals</td>
<td>Behaviour seeks the approval/acceptance of those in higher positions within the organisation prior to making a request of someone.</td>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
<td>Behaviour seeks to get others in a good mood or to think favourably of them before asking them to do something.</td>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational persuasion</td>
<td>Behaviour uses logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade others that a proposal or request is viable and likely to result in task objectives.</td>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal appeals</td>
<td>Behaviour seeks others’ compliance to their request by asking a “special favour” for them or relying on interpersonal relationships to influence their behaviour.</td>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational appeals</td>
<td>Behaviour makes an emotional request or proposal that arouses enthusiasm by appealing to others’ values and ideals, or by increasing their confidence that they can succeed.</td>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Behaviour seeks others’ participation in making a decision or planning how to implement a proposed policy, strategy or change.</td>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>High</td>
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WHAT are the most popular jobs among Malaysian graduates today? According to Citi Media, they are: network engineer, sales/marketing executive, accountant, electronic/electrical engineer, HR executive, software engineer, IT consultant, telecommunication engineer, corporate banker, and petroleum engineer. A predictable list, and admitted-tly, not so diverse.

This tendency to veer towards numbers and technology-related roles isn’t isolated to Malaysians alone. Census data in the United States indicate that Asian-Americans are over-represented in areas like science and technology, and professional occupations. According to data collected in 2007 by the US Census Bureau, although Asian-Americans constituted only 4% of the US population, they represented 25% of computer engineers, 30% of medical scientists, 17% of physicians, and 14% of dentists.

Meanwhile, they are under-represented in roles in production, social sciences and humanities, and entertainment. Only 1% of social service workers are Asian-Americans (Xuqua Qin, family impact on Asian Americans’ Career Choice).

CARRY ON FROM CULTURE

Careers New Zealand (careers.govt.nz) identifies six key factors that influence the career decisions of teenagers: friends, extended family, parents, teachers, counselors, the media, and finally, culture.

Culture refers to the community we live in, and the values that we hold. It plays a large role in the career choices of individuals. Culture can also affect financial priorities. For some, giving money to family members is crucial. Others may be saving for retirement, or for an overseas experience. Inevitably, this will impact what employment they decide to take up.

There have been many comparative studies done with the aim to understand how cultural factors affect the way people around the world make career decisions. Unfortunately, none of these are specific to Malaysia.

However, there are numerous studies that look at how Asians living abroad make career decisions, compared with their native counterparts.

THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY ON ASIAN-AMERICANS

Data on Asian-Americans reveal many points of interest. According to Xuqua Qin and numerous other academic researchers, when compared to the rest of the American population, Asian-Americans are more likely to choose a career path based on their family’s wishes rather than their own interests. This choice can lead to occupational incompatibility. To understand the effect of familial pressures in career decision making, Qin looks at three cultural-specific indicators, namely intergenerational conflict, family obligation, and perceived opportunities.

Qin’s research indicates that while intergenerational conflicts and perceived opportunity are negatively associated with interest-choice congruence, family obligation acts as a positive contributing factor. “Family obligation can function as a protection for Asian-American children when they select majors/careers since their career path has been filtered to a relatively safe direction where networking and role models have been established for them by elders in their family system,” says Qin, citing other research.

However, family obligation can also function as a barrier to Asian-American children in that obligations may hinder children from pursuing their true passion if their choices are quite different from what elders have chosen for them.” Qin adds.

In another study titled Cultural Differences in Career Decision-Making Styles and Self-Efficacy, Wei Cheng-Mau looks at the career decision-making style and self-efficacy of American and Taiwanese students, each living in their respective countries. The study aimed to further investigate previous findings that showed Asian Americans to be less autonomous, more dependent the person was in career decision making, the less confident he/she was in dependent decision-making, which applies regardless of cultural context.

Confirming previous studies, Wei’s research concluded that Taiwanese students are more likely to follow a dependent decision-making style, in line with the Taiwanese culture that emphasizes social conformity and collective decisions. American students, on the other hand, tend to make their own career decisions.

Cognitive style studies in the past have shown that individuals brought-up in a culture that encourages obedience and conformance to parental authority are usually associated with the field-dependent cognitive style. Taiwanese, and likely Asians as the whole, tend to conform more to familial and societal expectations. On the other hand, North American culture generally highlights the importance of making personal choices and forming your own judgments.

Taiwanese students also scored significantly lower than the American students in decision-making self-efficacy. Commenting on other studies that compared Chinese with American students, Wei observes that while Chinese students tend to attribute their success to hard work, American students credit their abilities and talents.

We notes that the individual-oriented culture that is pervasive in the US may have led the American students to overestimate their own capacity, making them more confident to make big decisions on their own. “In other words,” writes Wei, “the culture that is individual is more conducive to fostering self-efficacy, while the collective-oriented culture may have inhibited the development of self-efficacy.

The study concludes by reinforcing the link between independence and confidence, which applies regardless of cultural context. So even “for American students, the more dependent the person was in career decision making, the less confident he/she was in making career decisions,” writes the study.

“For Taiwanese students, the more rational the person was in approaching career decisions, the more confident he/she was in making career decisions.”

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THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

But what does all this mean for us in Malaysia? The studies above are specific to Asian-Americans, Taiwanese and Americans. But would it make that much of a long shot to assume that these results could also be representative of the Malaysian reality?

It does seem that Malaysians prefer careers that are science-maths oriented, which explains the list of the most popular careers for university graduates at the beginning of this article.

Even Malaysian university courses mostly revolve around sciences, accounting and finance, and IT, with the humanities usually lagging behind.

When I first moved to Malaysia, being a political science graduate, I wanted to look for a position at a university in the Department of Political Science. However, I soon found out that such departments are rare here. When living and studying in the UK, however, courses such as political science, sociology, psychology, journalism, drama and music were commonplace.

It is interesting that this list includes some of the best paid jobs in the country, and around the world. This may indicate a preference for careers that are traditionally seen as more profitable.

Whether these jobs have landed into the preferred list by reason of family pressure, or personal choice, that is the question for us all to ask.

Perhaps this is a good time to think and analyse our own career choices, and see how we ended up with the decisions we eventually took.

Have we been led by our personal values and intentions, or have our careers been moulded by the experiences of others? In the latter scenario, is there a need to make an adjustment?

Or if there is no need nor space for a career shift, how can we at least ensure that our self-efficacy and career confidence increases?

How has your culture and community affected the way you have made your choices, and how happy are you with these decisions?


Black

Agreeableness is the most “cold” of all the Big Five personality dimensions, which are:

- Agreeableness
- Conscientiousness
- Neuroticism
- Openness
- Extraversion

In general, extraverted people are more likely to experience feelings of reward and to be more socially oriented. This is reflected in the promise of a reward.

Economists have long relied on the deduction of the colour red to, for instance, boost sales. In a study published in 2010 in the Journal of Consumer Research, researchers found that the colour red was more effective in increasing sales than blue.

The study was conducted by researchers from the University of British Columbia and the University of Western Ontario. They found that the colour red makes people more likely to buy products, particularly those that are associated with aggression or violence.

However, the study also found that the colour blue has a calming effect on people and is more effective in reducing stress levels. This is because blue is associated with tranquility and peace.

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In conclusion, the colour red is more effective in increasing sales and boosting aggression, while the colour blue is more effective in reducing stress levels and promoting tranquility.


did you know?

Red improves focus, blue helps generate ideas, says study

By LILY CHEAH

Can colours help us perform better cognitive tasks? In an interesting research, colour and task matching (i.e., tasks that require focused, careful attention and tasks that require broader, more exploratory, risky manner. Thus, blue versus red and green versus red). Based on the associations to our culture and environment, we observe green being used in environments that are explorative, whereas red is used in environments that are more focused on tasks and involving details, while blue improves the ability to reshape and create pathways.

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In conclusion, the colour red is more effective in increasing sales and boosting aggression, while the colour blue is more effective in reducing stress levels and promoting tranquility.


did you know?

Red improves focus, blue helps generate ideas, says study

By LILY CHEAH

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THE FEMALE ADVANTAGE

WHAT DISTINGUISHES WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE?

By EVA CHRISTODOULOU

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attended the Women Summit 2013, organised by the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry recently. Among the interesting speakers the organisers gathered for this event was internationally acclaimed author, speaker and consultant Sally Helgesen. A leadership guru focusing on women leadership, Helgesen is the author of various books. Among them, is her international best-seller The Female Advantage: Women’s Ways of Leadership.

What Helgesen has to say, is refreshing different from the usual conversation about women in leadership. “Women should be equal to men in the workplace and can lead an organisation in the same style,” she affirms. In her research, Helgesen compiled information by a variety of methods, including the study of various books on how women can be successful, and by following men and women in various leadership positions from different fields and environments and observing how they worked. She felt that rather than solely relying on interviews, following women around in their daily tasks and observing their behaviour would yield more pragmatic, objective and accurate results. Her study yielded a few conclusions about the advantages women have in leading people, and raises some challenges that they may face.

BEING FEMALE IS GREAT

Rather than having to “behave like men,” Helgesen shares that women need to embrace their differences. They need to realise that some advantages were identified in Helgesen’s research, it is far-fetched to assume that all these advantages were identified in Helgesen’s research, it is far-fetched to assume that all women inherently possess these attributes. Furthermore, it is false to assume that their male counterparts lack such characteristics. What the study demonstrates, however, is that in fact, areas that are traditionally thought to impede career progression – for example, mixing work and personal life, caring too much about relationships rather than concentrating on results, and non-hierarchical leadership models – are areas that can immensely help the development of a successful leader.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

In her research, Helgesen also found that women face common leadership and career challenges that seem to be specific to their gender. Females face external barriers that differ by culture, be it country or organisation-specific. These may include gender discrimination policies or male-favouring norms. On some occasions women may not really have to deal with such issues.

Helgesen argues that every one of these characteristics have become crucial to organisations today. Current writings on leadership seem to agree.

A Forbes article entitled Top 10 Qualities that Make a Great Leader list commitment, honesty, good communication, intuition and creativity as key attributes of an effective leader.

The University of Oregon’s Holden Leadership Centre says leaders should be proactive rather than reactive, flexible/adaptive, a good communicator, respectful, confident, enthusiastic, open-minded, resourceful, rewarding, well-educated, open to change, interested in feedback, evaluative, organised, consistent, a delegator, and willing to take initiative. In this respect, the female disposition to valuing relationships and good communication, being open to diversity and sharing from all experiences, even from personal lives, and their comfort in leading from the centre, gives them a head-start in their leadership journey.

Additionally, at a time when work and home have become harder to separate, women are well-suited to use and manage this inseparability successfully, given their flexibility to intermingle the two areas and let them co-exist in their daily lives.

However, it is unfair to deduce from this that women are inherently better leaders, given their advantages in the above areas. Even though these advantages were identified in Helgesen’s research, it is far-fetched to assume that all women inherently possess these attributes. Furthermore, it is false to assume that their male counterparts lack such characteristics.

Helgesen argues that powerful people want to mentor you based on how visible you are, and how connected you are. Equally, people would prefer a leader that is better connected, because such an individual could help them expand their own contacts and therefore possibilities.

Some of the characteristics predominantly found in women place them at an advantageous position when it comes to leading and managing people. These include their focus on building relationships, their confidence with diversity and leading from the centre, and their openness to drawing from personal life experiences.

Here are three challenges she found to be consistent among working women:

VISIBILITY

Women seem to be at a disadvantage when it comes to using the relationships they develop for progression and help. Women need to be more proactive at building networks and identifying men that could help them by being champions for them. Helgesen argues that powerful people want women to stand out and be noticed without bragging about it, or, that they worry that by drawing attention to the work that they do. Helgesen notes that when some women are asked why they do not want to draw attention to the quality of their work, they say that they expect good work to be noticed without bringing about it, or, that they worry that by drawing attention, they would appear as pushy.

BUILDING SUPPORT

Women tend to be less skilful than men when it comes to using the relationships they develop for progression and help. Women need to find a way to interact with technology that serves their needs, but avoid addictive usage. Even though they are known for their multi-tasking abilities, women should always remember that “every time we choose to do two things at once, we choose not to do one thing in full,” Helgesen argues.

Results of a study conducted by Traning Zone in the UK looking at the 360-degree feedback results of almost 14,000 UK leaders found that men are more strategic, whereas women make better project managers.

Similarly to Helgesen’s study, women scored high in terms of planning, managing, respect and empathy compared to men, but men scored much higher in terms of strategic vision, commercial focus and personal impact.

The study found that men are better at making a strong first impression, at expressing their views with confidence, at being visible, and at making their presence felt. It is a recurring outcome that women have certain characteristics that are, overall in their favour. However, the list of challenges above seems to impede their progress in leadership development.

What women need to do, is overcome the obstacles within, find a way to push themselves to be more visible, build strong networks of support and use them effectively, make their presence felt, and use technology to their advantage.

There is little that can be done overnight to fight gender policies in the workplace; however, addressing these areas can be easily done, and much progress can be made, seeing more women in the leadership routes of all organisations.

At the end of the day, “What really distinguishes leadership is the ability to be fully present,” concludes Helgesen. It is therefore up to every woman out there to do as much as possible to work on her advantages, put in the time and effort, and fight hard to overcome all challenges, which more often than not, appear to come from the women themselves.
Since his college days, Joe Ng Kim Chew, head jewellery designer of Joe’s Design and managing director of Calanthe Art Cafe, had always known that he wanted to be his own boss. The Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators graduate started off his career in a Taiwanese and Malaysian joint-ventured stainless steel manufacturing factory in Malacca as a personal assistant. As his career progressed, he soon found himself in charge of three departments, overseeing administration, personnel and general affairs.

“I started off working in a factory because I knew that in order to pursue my dream of starting my own business, I had to master the skill of handling people,” shares 41-year-old Ng.

“I was thrown all types of issues that needed to be settled. This training and experience made me even bolder in my decision-making and widened my knowledge. All this was extremely helpful when I started my own business.”

In 2005, Ng and five of his friends ventured into the food and beverages industry by opening an eatery called Calanthe Art Cafe, which promotes locally grown coffee. According to Ng, the initial stages were tough given that Malacca’s tourism sector was not very strong at the time.

THE JUMP INTO JEWELLERY

Ng always revered to the creative and innovative. It was for this reason that he ventured into business, believing that it would lead him to exciting opportunities that would put his talents to good use. Upset when his café was not doing well, Ng was unsure what to do, when advice came from his better half.

“Business was bad in the beginning and I did not know what to do. My wife then suggested that I take up jewellery making classes whilst looking after the café. I took her advice, and it has proven to be the right move.

“In 2006, I started displaying my products in the café. They were simple glass bead necklaces and full-beaded glass bracelets, priced from RM3.90 to RM5.90 per piece.”

Ng’s first creation was a necklace made of thread, wood, beads and shells. Although he felt it looked ordinary, he displayed it at the Calanthe Art Cafe. To his surprise, it sold quickly. Successful sales like this and encouraging feedback from his customers motivated Ng to continue with his new-found talent.

“Through trial and error, I slowly mastered the skill of making copper wire artisan handcrafted jewellery. I began incorporating shells, pearls, crystals, semi-precious stones and precious stones as well as fossils into my creations. I eventually started my own studio to display and sell my work.”

A TYPICAL DAY

“My day starts at 9am when I arrive at my studio. The mornings are busy, because there are usually quite a number of tourists who visit the studio to purchase jewellery. I attend to the tourists and chat with them.

“During the holiday season, we get even more customers. My employees man the studio while I work on my designs. This goes on until the afternoon,” says Ng.

“At around 2pm, Ng and his workers take a break for lunch. Naturally, they head over to Calanthe Art Cafe for their meals. The studio resumes business at 3pm.

Ng explains that he spends most of his time after lunch working on his existing creations or designing new ones. A coffee lover, he always has a cup beside him as he says it helps him find inspiration.

“Recently, I started taking a course to be a professional tour guide, offered by Tourism Malaysia. So from Monday to Wednesday, I attend classes from 6pm to 9pm. When I am at class, my wife looks after the shop.

“On other days, after spending hours at my work table, I take a break at around 6pm to walk around the streets of Malacca. This is refreshing for my sore eyes after all the time spent designing in a closed room,” says Ng.

Rejuvenated after the walk, he continues with work and attends to customers at the studio. Ng enjoys mingling and talking to his customers, sometimes even assisting them by pointing out the best tourist spots in Malacca.

He closes the studio at 10pm. After a hard day’s work, he catches up with his wife and 5-year-old daughter over supper.

OBSTACLES AND TRIUMPHS

Ng’s challenge is coming up with new ideas and techniques when creating various jewellery pieces. He aims to continually come up with unique and creative designs that will attract more customers.

“Thanks to today’s technology, I have easy access to information. So I can do my own research to get new ideas and improve my skills.”

“My work involves intricate craftsmanship and because of this, it’s difficult to mass produce designs. Even though I employ helpers, somehow, many pieces still require my final touch,” he explains.

When Ng first ventured into the jewellery business, he did not get much support as people did not see this industry as a profitable one.

“However, with his perseverance and belief in his capabilities, he has managed to attract tourists who visited the Jonker area, where his studio is located. They find my jewellery to be perfect souvenirs since it is handcrafted locally.

“Besides purchasing my creations, they have recommended their acquaintances to visit my studio as well. The praises and recognition from these people give me great satisfaction and motivation to do even better.”

Ng’s creations have not gone unnoticed. Throughout his career, he has created unique and intricate jewellery pieces, which have resulted in invitations to Japan to display his works at jewellery exhibitions. These moments have been his proudest ones.

LESSONS LEARNT

“Having been in this industry for about seven years now, I have evolved from a person who knew nothing about jewellery to a person who understands the likes and preferences of people when it comes to the various types of jewellery pieces.

“This insight was gained from years of research and speaking to people from all walks of life to gauge their interests,” Ng shares.

For those contemplating to go into this industry, Ng’s advice is to give it their best without holding anything back. “Be innovative and have lots of perseverance as you won’t hit the jackpot at your first try,” he advises.

“Believing in yourself and never giving up are the keys to achieving success and happiness in your career.”

This video won the second prize in this year’s A Day in the Life competition organised by Leaderonomics in collaboration with TalentCorp. To view this video as well as other winners, visit www.leaderonomics.tv/adl
H
OW Starbucks Saved My Life is the true story of Michael Gates Gill, a successful man who had it all, and then lost it all when he was suddenly removed from a top position in a large American organisation.

In this book, Gill writes about how he accidentally meets a young African-American woman who offers him a job opportunity when he is deep in the pits of despair.

Gill shares 12 months of this redeeming journey in the chapters of this book. In this book summary, we take a look at what happened in two of these months.

MARCH: FROM DRINKING LATTES TO SERVING THEM UP

“Would you like a job?” Gill was awakened from his daydream by this question as he sat in a Starbucks store one day looking for some comfort in a latte. The latte was one of the last few treats he could afford at that moment of his life.

He looked up to the person who had asked him the question and found himself face-to-face with an attractive young African-American woman in a Starbucks uniform.

At 63, Gill, a former creative director of J Walter Thompson Co (JWT), the largest advertising agency in the world, had to ask himself, “Do I want a job at Starbucks?”

What happened? Gill had suddenly been called to breakfast with young Linda White, a senior executive at JWT. He was 25 years into his career with JWT, now who had Martin Sorrell as its new owner.

Sorrell was very particular about his bottom line. With his preference for young, energetic workers, Gill had now become an overhead that made a difference to Sorrell’s bottom line.

That morning at breakfast, White broke the bad news to Gill that they had to let him go.

So, yes, he needed a job. He had not had to look for one for the last 35 years of his life. But today, without much thought, he responded to this confident and smiling African-American lady, “Yes, I would like a job.”

Gill grew up as a lonely boy whose parents were often not home. He spent a lot of time with Nana, an African-American woman who was like a mother to him. As he sat there looking at Crystal, this young African-American woman, the memories of his relationship with Nana returned to him. He felt he could trust her.

“Would you be willing to work for me?” asked Crystal, to which Gill immediately replied, “I would love to work for you.”

Happy with this answer, Crystal informed him that it was Starbucks’ Open Day and she was there to interview people for barista roles.

All remaining resistance towards the job vanished the moment Crystal explained the health benefits that Starbucks offered. Gill’s financial situation had become so bad that he had to give up his health insurance.

Even more troubling was that he had just been told by his doctor that he had a small tumour at the base of his brain which affects his hearing. He was due for a follow-up MRI in a few months.

Gill was also relieved to know that the insurance could cover all five of his children. He really wanted to be able to provide for Jonathan, his youngest child whom he had with Susan, Jonathan’s mother.

It was a moment in his life when he had gotten carried away by his emotions and pursued his attraction towards Susan, whom he had met at the gym. Eventually, one morning, Susan informed him that she was pregnant. When Jonathan arrived, Gill finally told Betsy, his wife, and they had a divorce.

Although Gill had left the house and family money to Betsy and their four children, he knew that was not sufficient, for he had ruined all their lives and his own. Now, he lived alone in a small apartment in a New York City suburb.

Gill had given all his life to his career. He was rarely around to see his children grow up. It was only when Jonathan suddenly looked at him one day, and said, “Da da,” that his heart broke.

He could tell that Crystal sensed his sincerity and willingness to work for her. Even though he knew that he had a lot to learn, Crystal seemed willing to take the risk.

“The humble improve” – Wynton Marsalis, jazz musician, a quote published on the side of a cup of Starbucks Double Tall Skimmed Latte.

APRIL: REALITY SHOCKS

As the weeks went by, Gill had to face the reality that he was not able to support himself any longer. What was worse, was that Crystal had not called him.

As he waited daily for the phone to ring, he remembered how he had no hesitation rejecting people during casting sessions for any imperfections in his days at JWT. He had this tendency to choose only those who were like him. Perhaps Crystal was doing the same, he thought.

She finally rang one morning and asked him again if he really wanted the job. Yes, he said, and she asked him to show up at her store at 93rd and Broadway the next day.

Gill had never been to Broadway and expected it to be a very different community.

As he pondered on how Crystal had treated him, he felt sorry for how he had mistreated a young African-American woman who worked for him at JWT.

Now, he had personally experienced what it was like to be treated differently just because he was of a different race.

Remorsefully, he also remembered how he had always brushed off his daughter Laura’s desire to help the less fortunate. He had often called her “hopelessly naive”.

Finally, he understood what Laura meant when she said that the perfect college campus he had chosen for her had no diversity! Diversity was Laura’s view of the “real world”, and it was the correct one.

As he made his way into the 93rd and Broadway Starbucks, he was able to confirm one of the anxieties he had. It was obvious that all the partners at that store were African-Americans.

No wonder Crystal repeatedly asked him if he really wanted the job and was willing to work for her. He suddenly realised that he would stick out as the minority in his community.

Gill looked around him and observed the rapid pace at which everyone was working. They were functioning at top, efficient speed, at the cash register, taking orders, calling them out and recalling orders.

What he had thought was below his ability suddenly appeared to be a task beyond him. He had stepped into a job that would be challenging in every aspect – mentally, physically and emotionally.

To his delight, Crystal greeted him with a cheerful and friendly tone, helping him to be more at ease. Soon, he found himself having coffee with Crystal, as she introduced him to a good cup of coffee. Gill told him that he had to learn the different types of coffee at Starbucks.

Later, she introduced him to Kester, a well-built, muscled six-foot-something African-American, his training coach.

Gill was about to learn two things:

1. At Starbucks, no one ever orders anyone to do anything. It’s always asking for a favour. As his training coach, Kester calls it, it is “training by sharing.” “We do things together. I learn from you by helping you learn.”

2. At Starbucks, Gill gradually discovers that it is not about it. It is about serving others. Less of Gill, more of others.

“Differences need not divide us. Embrace diversity. Dignity is everyone’s human right” – partial quote from Bill Brummel, documentary filmmaker, published on the side of a cup of Starbucks Decaf Grande Cappuccino.

Koh Earn Soo and his team take the best books and summarise them into shorter, readable content in the hope of inspiring people to read more and learn more. To read the rest of this summary and summaries of other bestsellers, subscribe to www.thebestbooksummary.com

Michael Gates Gill

By KOH EARN SOO & TEAM
mystarjob@leaderonomics.com

mystarjob.com, Saturday 7 September 2013

LESSONS LEARNED

THE HARD WAY

MICHAEL GATES GILL ON VALUABLE LIFE LESSONS FROM STARBUCKS
The 21st century looks set to be the season for geeks. It is the age of The Big Bang Theory, thick-framed glasses, computer wizardry and futuristic gadgetry. It is prime time for individuals like Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Jack Dorsey and Tina Fey; their success stories seem to play out like a Revenge of The Nerds sequel.

The shy, awkward teenager in high school now holds more celebrity tracity than any local prom queen or star athlete could ever hope for. It is rumoured that Gates himself once said, “Be nice to nerds. Chances are, you’ll end up working for one.”

It seems like the perfect karmic ending for the high school nerd. The teenage social outcast finally blooms into his/her own in adulthood, while the popular bully fades into obscurity. But does life ever deal out such a fair trade of events?

Recently, the Washington Post ran an article on a study that followed the success of popular kids versus nerds after the end of high school. The study showed that contrary to widespread belief, popular students earned a higher income in the long run compared to those who were less popular.

Data was obtained from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, a survey conducted on 10,000 male and female participants who graduated from a Wisconsin high school in 1957. At graduation, the students were asked to name three people whom they considered their closest friends; the names that recurred the most were deemed the most popular.

Social characteristics and career achievements were tracked and used as data. Over time, it turned out that for every nomination a student received in 1957, it corresponded with a 2% increase in income 35 years later. So it appears that apart from the Tina Fey’s and the Bill Gateses of the world, life hardly ever appears to be balanced for the nerd. It does seem somewhat unfair that those who had it all in high school continue to have it all later in life, but before we become all bitter and resentful, let’s dissect the title of the popular kid.

POPULARITY DEFINED

Alexandra Robbins, author of The Geeks Shall Inherit The Earth – a book about traits that made nerds more successful in life – pinned popularity down to three characteristics according to the American high school paradigm: visibility, recognition and influence.

Although there may be some parts of that definition which may be applicable, we ought to recognise that popularity is also about being “commonly liked” or “suitable to the majority”, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

That means that popularity is about being accepted, as well as recognised. It’s too easy to stereotype the popular kid as the mean cheerleader or the bullying jock (thanks to numerous American high school movies). The popular kids are not necessarily mean or stupid; they too have their own skills and values to contribute to the workplace.

Coming back to the Washington Longitudinal Study, it’s easy to see how the most well-liked translated into the most nominations, and how that corresponds into greater success in the workplace. Popular students possess a fair amount of social skills that help them navigate through different social dynamics. The current workplace no longer operates in isolation, but requires that people work in teams of varying demographics. Therefore, those with social skills who are able to relate to different kinds of people are the greatest beneficiaries of these environments.

Furthermore, social acceptance is easily internalised to become self-acceptance, which in turn boosts self-esteem. Popular kids usually also exhibit self-confidence and extraversion, traits which prove to be useful in the face of peer pressure, especially when it comes to destructive behaviour. They are able to deal positively with stressful social situations while also learning to build emotional and psychological foundations outside of the nerd mentality.

But aside from personal circumstances, the world has also evolved to celebrate the nerd. The digital age renders the geeks and techies comparatively necessary. No longer are the computer literate considered the rump of the modern societal bodies. They provide career insights for students at www.thenakedceo.com as part of The Naked CEO initiative spearheaded by their chief executive Alex Mulley.

At the end of the day, the war isn’t between the geeks versus the jocks. It isn’t about which rung of the social ladder you were on and how that determines the trajectory of your life. What is important is what we learn from both the Prom King and the Mathlete to achieve our own success. The Prom King employs social skills, personal appearance and social clout to his advantage in the workplace. Similarly, the Mathlete uses technical prowess, management tactics and independence to advance his career.

A combination of both abilities then gives us the best of both worlds. It is the skills we pick up that matter the most when it comes to developing life outside of the protection of school. Being a quick learner and having self-confidence will do more for your career than being a part of The Plastics.

1. CHANGING JOBS TOO OFTEN

Even though the concept of a “job for life” has fallen by the wayside, multiple job changes can be seen as a sign of instability in an applicant. Employers want to know that you are reliable and dedicated – a history of starting a new role every six months does not fill them with confidence.

2. LACK OF BULLET POINTS

The best way to present your experience and achievements to date is in a bullet point form. A lack of bullet points may have led recruiters to think that you either have few achievements or do not know how to clearly explain them. Long, wordy paragraphs will not be read – bullet points will be.

3. LACK OF DETAIL

If you don’t include any details about these achievements, your credibility is called into question. Don’t give the reader any reason to think you might not be telling the truth about your experiences – always briefly list specifics about your previous roles, and always make sure they are accurate. Do keep the list brief though – this leaves room to discuss your experience in more detail in an interview.

4. FAILURE TO EXPLAIN ANY RED FLAGS IN THE COVER LETTER

Your cover letter is your chance to introduce yourself to your potential employer. If there is anything about your job history that is questionable, such as that gap in your employment history while you were traveling or the fact that your roles have all been “temp” so far, your cover letter is the place to explain it.

Being aware of how these red flags might look and taking the initiative to raise them will impress the reader – failing to address them is a red flag in itself.

This article is courtesy of CPA Australia, one of the world’s leading accounting bodies. They provide career insights for students at www.thenakedceo.com as part of The Naked CEO initiative spearheaded by their chief executive Alex Mulley.
DEAR CAREERNOMERS,

How does a fresh postgraduate or Masters degree holder fare in the current job market in terms of employability and future career advancements?

I have recently completed my degree in mechanical engineering and will be starting a postgraduate programme in a similar field at a local university. I have asked several managers during career fairs about this matter. They told me that companies prefer not to hire postgraduate because they would be over-qualified for the job they are applying for, and years of working experience are more important than academic qualifications.

A few working seniors also advised that getting a Masters degree would be more beneficial after working for a few years and not fresh from college/university. I am wondering if I should go for a postgraduate programme? Please advise.

Regards,
ALEX

DEAR ALEX,

It’s good that you are doing your own research at this juncture as to the “need” to continue your postgraduate studies.

You may want to find out which field you wish to pursue in the future. If you plan to get into mechanical engineering in a company, then the reality is what you have already heard from your seniors.

Working experience is actually more valuable especially when it comes to a technical expertise like mechanical engineering.

Getting in at degree level and learning the ropes for a few years enables you to build on your expertise and understand the nature of the job.

As you develop better skillsets, you can decide whether or not you want to pursue a Masters degree, and also whether there is a need to do so.

Some organisations have an internal career development path crafted for their talents and those development paths may or may not include the necessity for a postgraduate qualification.

If you plan to get into the field of education, then a Masters qualification would be an added advantage.

In some consultancy fields, a Masters qualification also comes in handy and may set you apart from the rest of the players.

Another thing to consider is “which university” you are planning to pursue a postgraduate education. Please ensure that it is a recognised institution and one that is well known for the area of study you want to pursue, otherwise it may not add value at the end of the day.

Best of luck!
ANG HUI MING

DEAR ALEX,

Thank you for your question and congratulations on your decision to pursue a post-graduate programme. Alex, I cannot think of the disadvantages of not taking up a Masters but here are the advantages of pursuing a Masters programme:

1. As a graduate in mechanical engineering, you are in possession of a degree that is in demand as there is a huge shortage of engineers in Malaysia and also in our region.

As a subject, engineering graduates have excelled in the last 30 years in management and there are many engineering graduates who have done very well – having gained entries into top-notched consulting firms, going into management roles and also reaching the CEO suite.

Personally, I have met many engineers graduating and hired many of them in my current and previous roles. Some of them have also done tremendously well in finance.

2. Traditionally, engineering graduates follow three tracks in their careers – academic, technical and also the management route.

By pursuing a Masters programme, you will enrich your current knowledge base with strong research and project management capabilities. Depending on the kind of Masters programme you are pursuing (a specialist Masters or an MBA), I would think that both of these programmes would expose you to management subjects such as organisational behaviour, knowledge management, accounting and finance, production, marketing and distribution, project management and also strategy. These subjects would expose you to the workings of organisations and how strategic decisions are made.

Upon graduation, you should also introduce yourself to a wider set of recruiters and organisations.

So, you could join an established organisation that you have made the right choice academic or technical route.

I hope this helps in reassuring you that you have made the right choice in investing in your education.

Enjoy the learning.

Regards,
NANCY S Y SIM-LIM

Feedback and Career Advice 12

DEAR CAREERNOMERS

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