

Corporate Blindness and Optimal Performance

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### **Introduction**

An individual as participant in social systems can be defined in terms of observed interaction as well as individual, subjective cognition of such interaction. However, the degree of awareness for any action differs due to various factors. According to Zajonc (1965) arousal strengthens dominant responses. Dominance may either be facilitated by biology or prior mastery of skills (conditioning). Cognitively straining tasks are best performed with moderate arousal. Even in pigeons increased drive levels cause generalization towards more intense stimuli (pp. 363-368).

Both the perception of self and individual arousal are expected to change as soon as individuals evaluate themselves in the context of groups. With the presence of stimuli and observation individual arousal increases, for example, by evaluation apprehension that facilitates reactivity (Myers, & Twenge, 2013, p. 270). As groups by definition come with sets of ideals and norms as a basis for participation, individual ideals and oughts are expected to shift as a consequence of mutual influence. Along with this shift, prevailing discrepancies change, and new dissonances arise (Festinger, 1957; Higgins, 1987).

### **Corporate Blindness**

Internalization of a stipulative corporate culture may lead to poor decisions in organizations. Corporate culture is often displayed as a set of reductionist, idealized norms. If firmly held by the group's members as an in-group bias, any out-group will subsequently be stereotyped in opposite to these ideals. As stereotypes shade individual perceptions, they influence decisions. As a consequence, beneficial alternatives may be devalued up to a point where they no longer appear attractive. Via decisions on organizational structure, stereotypes

feedback on organizational awareness and contingency, particularly in turbulent environments. (Roberts, 2004, 27-31)

One subcontractor in one of the author's former projects was dismissed although clearly offering the best solution for a project. In another engagement for the same company involving different people of both parties, disagreements had arisen that subsequently biased contracting decisions, leading to group polarization and subsequent termination of all contracts between the two companies. A former employer successfully launched an innovative product for eight years in an agile, trial and error fashion. With their next enterprise management decided to dwell on its experience and take an expert approach. Not only did it lose its adaptivity to turbulent modern markets, but management itself appeared as a mind-guard defending the blindfolded way of doing things. Although warnings were constantly brought up by many staff, they never had an impact on decisions, producing an illusion of invulnerability that ultimately led to almost nine-figure failure.

### **Optimal Performance**

Pool billiards players often ask for the presence of an audience, but then tell them to be quiet. What seems contradictory at first makes sense from a psychological point of view. Although the execution of shots is highly automated, prolonged competition demands a great deal of concentration that depletes mental resources and self-control. The presence of an audience may facilitate the arousal that is required to enter the zone of optimum performance, helping to sustain self-control. At the same time, additional stimuli may distract players. Following distraction-conflict theory, the conflict of attention may quiet distracting inner chatter. This may improve the performance of athletes who did not learn to manage their internal dialogue for their own benefit. (Baron, Moore, & Sanders, 1978; Harmison, & Casto, 2012, 703-722)

## References

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