

Good leadership can positively change people's brains

January 14 2015, by Kate Bourne

Do leaders of successful and adaptive organisations think differently? Yes, according to a University of Adelaide organisational and neural complexity specialist.

Dr Fiona Kerr says while it's [common knowledge](#) that a leader plays a critical role in the success of a company, the research she conducted as part of her PhD (based on 25-years' experience) uncovered how strong leaders think and what they do to make the companies they lead more adaptive over time.

"What my research has revealed is that leaders of truly adaptive organisations (organisations with the capability to successfully evolve) possess a unique set of skills and thought processes; and simply being strong and successful is not an effective basis for leading and shaping an innovative organisation," says Dr Kerr, Systems and Neural Complexity Specialist at the University of Adelaide's Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Innovation Centre.

"Critical to a good leader is their ability to create and guide a flexible organisation by establishing and maintaining a shared understanding amongst colleagues, guided by deeply held and clearly stated values," she says.

Dr Kerr says truly strong leaders are pragmatic optimists. They are trustworthy, have the ability to make complex decisions, have a high level of self-awareness (emotional and stress regulation), have sound

communication skills and combine analysis with intuitive reasoning.

"Good leaders strive towards building a trustworthy work environment with a high level of honesty, listening, and the support of information 'cascading' through the organisation with minimal controls and blockages," says Dr Kerr.

"Such leaders also create a low blame / high risk culture. Employees are encouraged to try new things and learn from what did and didn't work. Strong leaders have a good radar – a solid idea of how their employees are progressing."

According to Dr Kerr, good leadership can actually change employees' brains for the better.

"Effectively leading an organisation actually changes the way people think and changes their brains – they become better at dealing with complex problems and they grow to be more creative.

"However, this doesn't mean organisations shouldn't be necessarily managed. Maximum creativity comes when there is a boundary, which identifies tangible goals, within which to be creative," she says.

Dr Kerr says her findings can help people improve their leadership style and also aids those recruiting for the top job.

"For those wanting to be better leaders, it's important to understand the difference between controlling and steering," she says.

"Steering allows people to flourish and think more analytically and creatively, while controlling restricts staff – it's about telling and showing people what needs to be achieved but not how to get there."

Provided by University of Adelaide

Citation: Good leadership can positively change people's brains (2015, January 14) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-01-good-leadership-positively-people-brains.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.