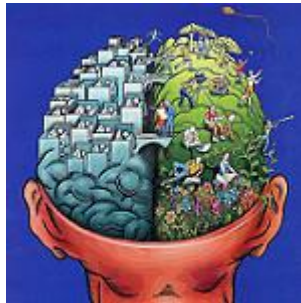


## Two Sides of the Brain at Work

The Association for Coaching ran a brilliant webinar series on Neuroscience with Professor Paul Brown, in which he talked about the power of the brain in influencing good behaviours to develop potential and capabilities in the workplace.

Traditionally businesses and organisations tend to favour left brain activity which is task oriented, logical, rational, analytical. It has been perceived that having people with good attention, focus, memory recall, ability to get things done quickly, to analyse, process and complete, is the holy grail of the good employee.



What has been missed out are the benefits of the right side of the brain, where lies our innovation and creativity, our ability to see the big picture, imagine, float and integrate ideas, collaborate and synthesise.

And another dimension, interestingly Professor Brown tells us that women tend to think in a weaving pattern across the two sides of the brain, whereas men tend to think vertically up and down each side. Helen Fisher in *The First Sex*, calls this female thought process '*web thinking*' and demonstrates how in a work environment women have a broader perspective, consider more variables, options and outcomes when making decisions. They pick up on body posture, object positions, nuances that equip them to be holistic about what to do next.

Which is why the whole colouring book thing is so wonderful. Colouring brings both sides of our brains together collaborating in the process of colouring. The right-brain problem-solving, spatial reasoning, creativity and the left brain processing, focusing and attention to detail. Brilliant! And the best thing about it all is that it makes us feel good, there is a sense of achievement and pleasure.

Supposing every morning you went into work, your first ‘task’ was to colour in a drawing or an image. How might that change your state of mind and set you out for the day ahead? In neuroscience terms it might make us more flexible, open to ideas, able to process more in order to innovate. Using this approach and incorporating good neuroscientific research can help us focus people’s energies and behaviours in the workplace more effectively to achieve strategic and operational goals.

Some ideas to kick-start how you could incorporate web-thinking in your organisation (apart from distributing colouring books to your people):

1. Use John Stroop’s test: write colour names in different pen colours e.g. write ‘yellow’ with a blue pen. Ask your employees to read out the words quickly. This challenges both parts of the brain and activates the anterior cingulate, which helps resolve conflicts between the two sides of the brain.
2. Introduce a Stream of Consciousness exercise when you have your next strategy meeting. Ask everyone to take a pen and paper and for 2 minutes, without taking the pen off the paper, write their ideas relevant to that strategy. You may get a lot of gobbledegook, but you will also find some gems.
3. Have some soft juggling balls around the office. Juggling promotes bilateral efficiency, is challenging and fun.
4. Introduce tasks that stretch people beyond their habitual methods of doing. This could be asking everyone to use a mind-map rather than a spreadsheet, or it might be having everyone stand and swap positions instead of sitting through a meeting. Disrupting patterns can bring great results!

Remember this isn’t about whether or not people are dominantly left or right brained, it is more about HOW they use each side of their brains.

And in case you are still doubting, here are some results from a survey conducted by Staples on the use of colouring books at work:

1. 85% of users thought it enhanced creativity, 91% that it lowered stress levels, 68% that it boosted productivity.
2. Over 25% thought businesses should embrace colouring books.
3. The industries using colouring most were manufacturing (51%), construction (44%) and the creative industries (44%).

What we don’t know is the percentage of men to women that use colouring books!

*Isla Baliszewska*  
2016