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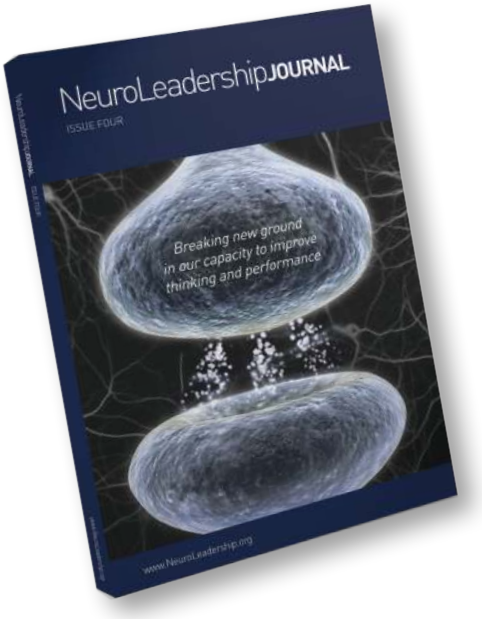
Anette Prehn, MA



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Create reframing mindsets through Framestorm

Anette Prehn, MA

MA in social science, brain-based executive coach (PCC), author of "Play Your Brain"

Summary

With constantly changing environments, complex decision-making processes, and cross-pressure coming from within organizations, the ability to nurture cognitively flexible and self-regulating individuals and teams has become a leadership virtue. The capability to reframe a situation, a product, a mental model, or an organization is crucial – yet the down-to-earth paths towards such transformations of meaning are scarcely understood. This paper outlines a three-step method – Framestorm – detailing how to co-create reframing and pave the way for learning, innovation, and relational success in everyday leadership. The article demonstrates how Framestorms are relevant to the domains of NeuroLeadership and it assesses what actually happens in the brain during such reframing processes.

A metabolically expensive gold nugget

Reframing "should be in the water we drink", says Professor James Gross, the founding father of emotion regulation research (Rock, 2009). Just as many countries add iodine to table salt and Vitamin D to cornflakes to improve the health impact of those items, Gross and other leaders in emotion regulation research believe that humans would gain enormously if the powerful cognitive strategy of reframing was undertaken with the same frequency with which we drink water.

Reframing – also called "cognitive reappraisal" or "recontext-ualizing" – means "changing how we think about a situation in order to decrease its emotional impact" (Gross, 2001). When you reframe you deliberately reinterpret an event to feel better. This is done by viewing the situation from new angles. In other words, the situation is seen through other "frames." This contributes to healthy adaptation (Mauss, Cook, Chen, & Gross, 2007), decreases emotional responding (Jackson, Malmstadt, Larson, & Davidson, 2000), and has powerful behavioral, emotional, and cognitive effects through greater focus, enthusiasm, and performance (Leroy, Grégoire, Magen, Gross, & Mikolajczak, 2012; Gross & John, 2003; Nezlek & Kuppens, 2008).

The greatest business leaders are also masters of reframing.

A leader's job begins and ends with reframing. The greatest business leaders are also masters of reframing. Steve Jobs, Li Ka-shing, and Irene Rosenfeld are good examples of this.

Reframing is considered a cost-free, cognitive neutralizer of potentially emotion-eliciting situations (Gross, 2001). This makes it a very attractive alternative to more counter-productive emotion regulation strategies such as suppression. Suppression leads to greater constriction of blood vessels and a worsened memory in the suppressing person. It also leads to an increase in the blood pressure of the people interacting with the person suppressing. Whereas reframing genuinely transforms the meaning of a situation, and thus the emotional experience related to the situation as well, suppression does not.

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Reframing increases left lateral prefrontal cortex (PFC) activation which decreases activation in brain regions involved in the processing of "negative emotion" such as the amygdala and the insula (Oschner, Bunge, Gross, & Gabrieli, 2002; Jackson *et al*., 2003; Oschner *et al*., 2004; Urry *et al*., 2006; Kim & Hamann, 2007). Furthermore, neuroimaging studies show that successful reframing activates regions associated with various aspects of cognitive control and adaptive integration: Dorsal and ventral lateral PFC (dlPFC and vlPFC), medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), and dorsal anterior cingulate cortex dACC (Miller & Cohen, 2001).

In one of the more famous examples of how scientists test the effects of reframing, participants are shown a photo of a woman crying outside of a church. Understandably, this scenario typically makes participants feel sad as they associate the crying women with a funeral. They are then asked to either "attend" to the photo, which has the effect of deepening their sad emotions, or to "reappraise" it, i.e. reframe, by imagining that the scene is a wedding and that the tears are in fact tears of joy. The point demonstrated by this example is that you can interpret any given situation in a number of different, meaningful ways. "What I see is down to me" is the underlying principle of reframing.

...neuroimaging studies show that successful reframing activates regions associated with various aspects of cognitive control and adaptive integration...

However, it is often stressed that reframing is metabolically expensive, not easy to do, requires a lot of resources, and causes cognitive pain in the person doing the reframing (Rock, 2009). Even though neuroscientists and psychologists agree that reframing is crucial to our mental health, flexible and co-created methods for everyday reframing are still not readily available. As such, it is now evident that the field of applied neuroscience and NeuroLeadership needs to develop – and evidence-base – reframing methods that work powerfully in leaders, employees, and organizations. Framestorm has been created to meet this need in a playful and impactful way.

The Framestorm method, which will be presented in depth later in this article, is a reframing method that draws upon findings from neuroplasticity and memory reconsolidation research while offering a user-friendly entrance to changing one's perceptions. It is a three-step process where one taps into a current framing and the emotional effects the frame and estimates the real-life consequences of this framing. This first step is followed by a reframing brainstorm where at least 15–30 reframings are identified. Finally, in order to ensure the operationalization of the brainstorm, two reframings are chosen as relevant and attractive alternatives to the current framing.

Reframing turns out to be core for all four domains of the NeuroLeadership field, as defined by The NeuroLeadership Institute:

- Make decisions and solve problems
- Regulate emotions
- Collaborate with others
- Facilitate change

The real-life examples of this article illustrate how Framestorming was successfully used in two of these NeuroLeadership domains: "Facilitate change" and "Regulate emotions".

The first case shows how a Framestorm changed the perception of a huge IT transformation in an organization – moving people from fear and worry to optimism and resourcefulness. The second case illustrates how a branch manager of a bank learned to cope with the latent risk of robbery – leading him to conclude that if reframing "can be done successfully in such a sensitive area, it can be done in all areas!"

The article is structured in three parts:

- Firstly, the core neuroscientific principles at stake during a Framestorm are assessed.
- Secondly, the three steps of a Framestorm are introduced and explained in detail.
- Finally, two cases from NeuroLeadership domains are presented to illustrate how the method works when applied in real life.

Core neuroscientific principles at stake

This part of the article assesses what actually happens in the brain during a Framestorm.

Hebb's Law

At the heart of the Framestorm method is Hebb's Law. This law tells us that *Neurons that fire together, wire together.* When neurons in the brain start firing simultaneously, they team up. From that point on, when one neuron fires, the paired neuron or neurons will fire as well. This connection continues to grow stronger and stronger.

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Any framing creates emotions, and following Hebb's Law every time they are triggered simultaneously their inter-connectedness grows stronger and stronger. We end up experiencing that the habitually strengthened connections are indeed our reality and that, say "difficult tasks" do naturally cause "fear."

Any framing creates emotions, and following Hebb's Law every time they are triggered simultaneously their inter-connectedness grows stronger and stronger.

However, just as *Neurons that fire together, wire together*, we also know that *Neurons that are out of sync, fail to link* and that *Neurons that fire apart, wire apart*. These are the other truths that govern neuronal activity in the brain (Doidge, 2007; Doidge, 2010). This means that the connections sustained in the brain will be changed if one manages to unsync the neurons. The syncing between neurons is "disturbed" through the creation of new associations and connections. So there is a strong element of timing – even musicality – in dealing with and changing neural connections (Prehn & Fredens 2011).

When an individual initiates a Framestorm, he or she identifies and thereby acknowledges the original link between frame and emotions. However, when the reframing brainstorm begins the individual gently "pauses" this connection – redirecting attention to constructive alternatives that induce resourcefulness – and allowing the neurons that originally fired together to get out of sync.

Reconsolidation of memories

Another process that is likely to take place during a Framestorm has to do with the reconsolidation of memories. According to neuroscientists, when a memory (and a frequently activated framing is a memory too) is recalled, a particularly high level of neuroplasticity follows. The state is called "transient plasticity" (Hardt, Einarsson, & Nader, 2010). In this state, the memory can be modified in various ways (Doidge, 2010; Nader & Einarsson, 2010). This allows for a memory update as well as a modulation of memory strength.

Some very interesting work, led by Alain Brunet *et al.* (2008), explores this "transient plasticity". In Brunet's work, sufferers of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) reactivate their traumatic memories by writing down their experiences in great detail. The description is recorded and subsequently read back to the sufferers after they have received a low dose of propranolol, a drug which lowers the blood pressure and dampens anxiety. This process takes place once a week. The effects of this process are seen quickly, often in as little as five weeks. As many as three quarters of the sufferers no longer meet the criteria of PTSD after this treatment. For these individuals, recalling the traumatic event becomes similar to simply reading a book. Rather than being something that is relived vividly again and again on an ongoing daily basis, the trauma becomes a memory that belongs to the past. Alain Brunet himself calls the process "deceptively simple" and that is very much the common thread in neuroplasticity research and interventions: Change is noticeably easier than we have previously believed. We just need to continue to identify the tiny changes that work the best in eliciting this sort of change.

To gain further understanding of the effectiveness of Brunet's work, and of Framestorming, we must look at the window of time subsequent to the reactivation. An existing memory is destabilized and modified in the minutes and hours following a reactivation. A quick recalibration then takes place: New knowledge is added and certain memory contents are weakened or strengthened. Reconsolidation thus allows for "modifying the contents of reactivated long-term memory by allowing new stimuli that are present at the time of retrieval to be associated with the transiently malleable memory" (Hardt, Einarsson, & Nader, 2010). This phase is also called a "window of vulnerability" (Nader *et al.*, 2000).

It seems likely that Framestorms create such windows. When the original framing is recalled, it is susceptible to disruption by the interfering events that follow. In a Framestorm, a state of calm is induced through the process, whereas the PTSD sufferers are induced into a state of calm via anxiety dampening pharmaceuticals. Both, however, create a new, safe context whereby the original framing is modified while more resourceful emotions are activated. Relevant reframings and more resourceful emotions thereby get to be stored together in the brain. Research shows that the memory trace takes a relatively short time to re-stabilize which may be why Framestorms seem to work at a surprisingly quick pace (Davies, Renaudineau, Poirer, Poucet, Save, & Laroche, 2010).

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Attention Density

Other core aspects of a Framestorm seem to be mindfulness and "attention choreography" (West Allen, 2009). This refers to the gentle and playful redirection of attention in ways that create resourcefulness. The word "attention" comes from Latin and means "to reach towards." Whether or not you really want more or less of whatever it is that you are giving attention to is unimportant; you will regardless get more of it, because you "reach out" for it and allow it into the attentional spotlight.

The more you sustain your focus on something, the denser your attention gets and the more hard-wired that habit or interpretation will become...

Attention turns out to be the maker and shaper of neural circuits in the brain. Regular sustained attention can change the neural circuitries. A core term here is "attention density" (Schwartz, Stapp, & Beauregard, 2005). The more you sustain your focus on something, the denser your attention gets and the more hard-wired that habit or interpretation will become (Schwartz & Gladding, 2011). Using a term coined by Jeffrey M. Schwartz, this is "self-directed neuroplasticity" and it reminds us to mindfully observe our focus and its effects (Schwartz *et al.*, 2011).

Quantum physics tells us that the rate of observation has marked measurable effects on the phenomenon being observed. This "Quantum Zeno Effect" for applied neuroscience states that the mental act of focusing attention can hold in place brain circuits associated with what is being focused on (Schwartz & Gladding, 2011). When one focuses attention on a particular experience, the relevant brain circuitry with which that experience is associated will be held in a dynamically stable state (Price, Verne, & Schwartz, 2006). The more one focuses on a particular interpretation of a situation the more this is held stable and becomes "the reality."

Many leaders find themselves stuck in "the old groove," repeating particular interpretational and behavioral patterns that are less useful, drain their resourcefulness, and undermine their relational power and results. The way forward lies in selective attention and "willful activation of one circuit over another, thus nudging the brain into processing one signal and not another" (Schwartz & Begley, 2002).

Antecedent- and response-focus regulation

Returning to the idea of emotion regulation that began this article, a further distinction can be made by dividing the concept into two parts: So-called "antecedent-focus regulation" which helps an individual prepare for a future situation so that they are able to act with the utmost resourcefulness and able to respond constructively; and so-called "response-focus regulation" which takes place once an individual has experienced emotional arousal and down-regulate those negative emotions (Gross, 2001).

As Richard & Gross put it: "Response-focused regulation mops up one's emotions; antecedent-focused regulation keeps them from spilling in the first place" (Richard & Gross, 2000). Adjustments made early in the emotion trajectory turn out to be the most effective for emotion regulation (Gross, 2001).

Adjustments made early in the emotion trajectory turn out to be the most effective for emotion regulation...

As a practical method, Framestorm works on both levels: It affects the antecedent-focus as well as the response-focus. By creating new ways of interpreting a challenging situation before it happens, the constructive reframings pre-empt a full-blown emotional response to such situations. For the novice Framestormer, the Framestorm takes place before an upsetting situation kicks in, so that the brain gets trained in responding constructively when the situation occurs (or when the situation may occur). For the more advanced Framestormer, a Framestorm can also take place while being in the situation.

What is really interesting about, for instance, the reframing of bank robberies described in case 2, is that it is an antecedent-focus regulation that not only dampens amygdala activation in the present moment while doing the

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Framestorm but that also builds the Framestormer up to cope with a future situation in an utmost resourceful way and allows him to undertake response-focus regulation. What would be happening if such a robbery were to happen to Kevin is what scientists call "a kind of race" between the emotional information and the reframing information in the brain (Blechert, Sheppes, Di Tella, Williams, & Gross, 2011).

Researchers used to think that people had to feel a negative emotion in order to get rid of it – but new research challenges this idea...

The implications are that it is possible to prepare yourself for challenging situations ahead. In a Framestorm you expose yourself to a little bit of a situation that may happen in the future – only you connect "the potentially unpleasant situation" with "resourceful reframings" said out loud in a mindful, calming, and reflective voice. You reactivate a memory from your semantic memory, thus creating a window of vulnerability which paves the way for practicing this connection and letting neurons fire and wire together. Thus you "store" a more resourceful response to the situation in the brain – and can tap into that in the future.

The powerful, brain-based process of "Mind Sculpture," developed by Ian Robertson, can help in making this even more vivid (Robertson, 1999): ...bringing about constructive reframings and calm emotions, thus helping the brain to feel on "home ground" should the situation occur. This allows for a more resourceful response.

Bleckert, Sheppes, Di Tella, Williams and Gross, have found that reframing wipes out the signals of the so-called "negative emotions" people may otherwise get when they are face-to-face with an unpleasant situation. The adjustment of one's attitude and attention is core. Researchers used to think that people had to feel a negative emotion in order to get rid of it – but new research challenges this idea: If people have prepared themselves for an event coming up, getting over the difficult part of the event can be a much faster and deeper process (Blechert, Sheppes, Di Tella, Williams and Gross, 2011).

What happens in the Framestormer's brain

At this stage it is apparent that the three neuroscientific principles of Hebb's Law, reconsolidation of memories, and attention density are the core principles to tap into in order to understand what takes place during and after a Framestorm. It also seems that the Framestorm process not only creates antecedent-focus regulation but also response-focus regulation. The principles shed light on why the disturbance of the original framing plus the implementation of more resourcefulness-boosting reframings can take place rather quickly. However, more research – in the form of randomized, controlled trials – is needed to establish this more precisely.

The same Dr. Jeffrey M. Schwartz, who coined the term "self-directed neuroplasticity", assesses that three potent processes are likely to take place during a Framestorm:

1. The emotional reactivity is diminished via a pathway from the vlPFC via the mPFC to the amygdala, which dampens anxiety and upset related to the original framing (Lieberman, Eisenberger, Crockett, Tom, Pfeifer, & Way, 2007).
2. Through the cognitive and creative aspects of the method, you activate the dlPFC, which holds the key to working memory, planning and decision-making. There is thus an arithmetical logic to the Framestorm process: Every time you add a new reframing, you strengthen useful circuits in the brain. This will be additive. Through the Framestorm, you thus integrate the ventral and dorsal lateral PFC. You exercise them by creating and maintaining these reframing perspectives (Schwartz & Gladding, 2011).
3. When you change your perspective – and see things from someone else's perspective – you move brain activation from ventral medial PFC (vmPFC), which Schwartz has termed the "it's about me" brain area, to the dorsal medial PFC (dmPFC), which is a brain area associated with making evaluations about the mental states, beliefs, and intentions both of your own mind, as well as other people's mind and intentions. (Han *et al.*, 2008). This is thus a way of increasing your empathic connectedness to others.

The three steps of a Framestorm

A first indicator that a Framestorm may be a useful endeavor is when one feels out of balance, drained, angry, stuck, sad, confused, fearful etc. – when one experiences what emotion regulation scientists call "negative emotions." For Tom, a senior executive, his perception tricked him into believing "my employees do not take responsibility" which triggered "anger" in him. And for Paul, a middle manager, his perception tricked him into believing that an upcoming performance review was "hard" which triggered "fear" in him.

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Many leaders can experience "amygdala hijacks" frequently in relation to particular situations: Being overwhelmed by negative emotion and feeling trapped in a less useful behavioral and cognitive repertoire.

A Framestorm can be initiated when such negative emotions are identified. The emotions intertwined with such framings direct behavior (Brown & Hales, 2012). The more often the framing and the emotion fire in synchronicity, the stronger the link between them gets. This is Hebb's Law. The cortical maps in the brain merge over time. Therefore it is important to spot underlying and intertwined framings and emotions, so that one may gently change that connection and choose more appropriate action.

A Framestorm consists of three steps which can be remembered by their ABC-order:

1. Ask calibrating questions

- "What is my current framing (of the situation/person)?"
- "Which emotional effects does this create in me?"
- "Does it make me more resourceful?" or "Is that helping me get closer to my goal?" (Yes/No)
- "If I continue to give life to this framing, where will that take me? Which reality will I create?"
- "Do I want that scenario to become my reality" (Yes/No)

If two No's are stated above... it is relevant to begin a Framestorm process.

2. Begin the framestorm

- Visit different Framestorm perspectives (please see below). When you run out of energy in relation to a particular question, choose another one. If that is also a blind road, choose a third one. The experience of "drying out" in a perspective is completely normal and to be expected. Just keep going! Keep momentum until you have at least 15–30 alternative reframings. Keep even the ones you may consider irrelevant or of low quality. A Framestorm process is not about criticizing and excluding options – but about identifying options at this stage (step 2) and then choosing the ones of highest quality (step 3).

3. Choose your reframings

- Read your alternative framings and "taste" their effects.
- Choose one or two that make you resourceful and that you would like to try out as an experiment.
- Notice the different effects these new reframings have for you and others.
- If your chosen reframings work well and boost your resourcefulness in the situations – great! If not, know that you have plenty of other reframings to choose from and test out.
- Be aware that the choice you make does not automatically install the reframing in you as some sort of "quick fix". Nevertheless, most people are surprised to experience the ease with which they can use the method – and how radically and quickly their original framing and emotions can be transformed.
- What happens is that the neural connection between, say "difficult" and "fear" comes out of sync. During the process a new context is created which allows for new neural connections to form and strengthen and for the current one to fade correspondingly. A neural rewiring is taking place. Also, the more the Framestormer focuses on these two chosen reframings the more this interpretation of reality is held stable and becomes "the reality." This is the Quantum Zeno Effect in its essence.

Below you will see an illustration of some of the perspectives worth visiting during step 2:

- A person who loves this situation (or finds it easy), how may s/he frame it?
- Which benefits/positive side effects does the situation give you/others?
- If you were to reframe the situation in a humorous way how might that sound?
- How could you frame the situation – so that you would not want to miss out on it?
- What does this situation look like from the other's/someone else's point of view?
- If your friend/child were in a similar situation, what advice would you give?
- How would a wise person (such as one of your personal role models) view the situation?
- How would a fictional character view the situation (Donald Duck/Pippi Longstocking/Gandalf)?
- Play with words/meanings that highlight different takes on the situation.
- Which mottos/sayings may be useful to tap into here?
- If we go to the world of sports: How might a professional XX-player view such a situation?
- Which of your values (or skills) are strengthened through this?
- Looking back at the situation 10/20 years from now, what may be your constructive learning?
- Which metaphors would make you see genuinely new things/create new connections?
- Which aspects of the situation could you pay attention to that you seem to overlook today?

The point of a Framestorm process is to pause and disturb a (typically) hard-wired connection in the brain by gently redirecting attention to completely new and different perspectives on the situation. Instead of coming up with one or two reframings the aim is to create an arsenal of constructive reframings that boost resourcefulness. This is different from most research designs that often lead to "forced reframings" – one or two reframings – that do not necessarily land well in the mental maps of the person in question and thus will not be integrated cognitively.

Being a co-created method, the Framestorm facilitator is the prime stimulator of reflection – asking well-timed questions that nurture the creative processes taking place inside the Framestormer's mind. It is important to challenge the Framestormer with both concrete questions (such as:

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"If your friend/child were in a similar situation, what advice would you give?") allowing the slow, verbal system of the brain to work – and more abstract questions (such as "If you were to reframe the situation in a humorous way how might that sound?") allowing the fast, visual system of the brain to engage too (Prehn & Fredens, 2011). Positive, optimistic humor turns out to be a more effective coping strategy than solemnity and cynicism (Samson & Gross, 2012). Therefore, the more lightness, playfulness, and constructive quirkiness that can put into a Framestorm, the better: It forces a change of perspective and energy.

"Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving." The same applies to the process of reframing.

The Framestorm facilitator is allowed to invite her or his own reframing options to be added to the plate. This can be useful to stimulate the process and help the Framestormer past a mental impasse. However, such suggested reframings are seldom the ones the Framestormer ends up choosing, as ownership is low, and they may not have caused any insights. Therefore, the Framestorm facilitator should strive for an unattached coaching attitude. After all, neuroscience has also shown us that as much as people love giving advice to others, especially when this advice is taken, we also hate getting advice that we have not asked for (Mobbs, 2010). In fact, if we feel that someone tries to dictate to us an idea or a solution, we resist and start searching for flaws in what they are saying and for reasons not to obey (Rock, 2009).

Albert Einstein said "Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving." The same applies to the process of reframing. As we are not searching for "right" or "wrong" answers in a Framestorm, but seeking dynamic in the process (so that the Framestormer can come up with many different reframings) – it really is a matter of keeping moving. Instead of letting a judgemental mindset take over ("I cannot do this" or "This will not work for me") when momentum is temporarily lost, gently redirect attention to a new perspective.

Cases from two NeuroLeadership domains

Now we will look into real-life cases of how reframing is powerfully used in core domains of NeuroLeadership:

Case #1: Facilitating change

Big change processes have the potential to paralyze employees. Not only is the goal too much of a mouthful and linked to a lot of uncertainty, the process also involves the potential loss of status for employees. Thus Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness (the SCARF-model factors) are deeply at stake here (Rock, 2008).

This was the case with Nuevo, a huge IT transformation initiative in an organization that would basically mean that all the well-known IT programs and procedures would change overnight. The lead up to this event took in excess of 2 years. There was latent resistance and fear in parts of the organization, including among senior and junior managers. One Department Head, Steve, shared his concerns and did the following Framestorm.

1. Ask calibrating questions

- *Current framing:* The Nuevo Change Process = New = Dangerous
- *Emotional effects:* Fear, uncertainty
- *More resourceful?* No!
- *Current framing will take me/us to:* Stress, moaning, performance drop
- *Want that reality?* No!

2. Begin the Framestorm

1. Nuevo is an opportunity to:
   a. To get the same starting point
   b. Increase employee and customer satisfaction
   c. Use humor
   d. Stick together/help each other
   e. Step into character for me as a leader
2. Competency development is a good thing in order to do your job (eg. the "German Coast Guard" video on You Tube)
3. Future generations in the organization will thank us for:
   a. The paradigm shift
   b. Our willingness to take responsibility
   c. That we were ahead of our time
   d. Our courage
4. If big changes had to be put out for referendum, we would never have gotten computers
5. Nuevo is:
   a. A common job we will go through together
   b. A leadership challenge that prepares me for the next level in the organisation
   c. An investment
6. Nuevo will ease our daily work and release resources
7. We save £20 million per year

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8. We become first movers in the industry
9. We play offensively now/This is the end of passive play
10. Mergers will be easier in the future: The organization can continue its conquest
11. Past employees hated the initiation of processes, we now treasure/take for granted
12. Nuevo will boost healthy competition through greater visibility across departments
13. A change that will be noticeable in generations!
14. We get rid of some of the heavy, old-fashioned luggage
15. Nuevo is a chance to prioritize/know our "need-to-have's"
16. Nuevo is an occasion to tidy up the toolbox (600 different Excel templates scraped already)
17. A much needed spring-cleaning!
18. Growth is the only evidence of life
19. Our only security is our ability to change
20. Nuevo = a mirror of life/evolution/a gift/a fresh start

...reframing in reality is linked to themes and situations that individuals are emotionally attached to...

3. Choose your reframing

This process shifted Steve's own thinking about Nuevo. Before, his approach had a problem focus and created clear amygdala activation when he talked about it. Now, he saw more nuances and benefits of this change process and he felt equipped in his communication and strengthened in his mental flexibility, empathy, and execution. To make it operational, he chose his favorites, but even when applying these he knew that he could draw upon some of the other reframings from his Framestorm whenever needed.

Notice the playfulness created by the large number of reframings. Reframing here is not just about installing "the woman in front of the church is crying tears of joy *at a wedding*" as a substitute for the perception that she is *attending a funeral*. It a process much richer and deeper, more lyrical, philosophical, and practical and it draws upon the Framestormer's unique body of experience and wisdom across all areas of life.

Also this case shows us that reframing in reality is linked to themes and situations that individuals are emotionally attached to (contrary to more restricted research designs which may cause upset or anger to allow for a subject to reframe, but will typically not ask subjects to reframe interpretations they have held – and been emotionally attached to – for years).

The reframings created by the Framestorm are not about staying within the same box of thinking, swapping "Nuevo = dangerous" to, say "Nuevo = exciting." Such other-side-of-the-coin reframings happen to be very common with people who are inexperienced with or unprepared for reframing. They also tend to be the default mode of people trying to push a "positive reframing" unto a person who has a "negative framing" – "Can't you just think of it as exciting? It will be!" However, such attempts are both superficial and insufficient – and they disable our ability to find coherent and congruent answers. Such black-and-white pushing seldom leads to genuine reframing and transformation of the meaning, but rather paves the way to suppressing what the "negative person" actually feels.

Case #2: Staying cool under pressure

An unfortunate consequence of working with money can be that you expose yourself and your team to robbery. A branch manager of a bank, Kevin, found himself starting to fear such robberies, particularly after his wife, who also worked in a bank, experienced such an event herself.

An unfortunate consequence of working with money can be that you expose yourself and your team to robbery.

He realized that his framing of robberies leaked his resourcefulness and might very well, in the end, lead to him leaving the banking business (which he loved) altogether.

1. Ask calibrating questions

- *Current framing:* Robbery = A threat
- *Emotional effects:* Anxiety, anger
- *More resourceful?* No!
- *Current framing will take me/us to:* Resisting/fearing work, inner wear and tear, leaving the banking industry
- *Want that reality?* No!

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2. Begin the Framestorm

1. Robbery = an experience on the way to...
   a. a richer/deeper life
   b. a stronger leadership presence
   c. a stronger collaboration
   d. deeper empathy
2.. Robbery = an opportunity to
   a. support one another
   b. feel the support of the communities we are part of
   c. tune in on my priorities in life
   d. give my employees full attention
   e. make important choices in life
   f. become sharper in my priorities
3. Robbery reminds me of:
   a. Focusing on the important things in life
   b. Living my dreams
   c. Life's fragility – and seizing the day
4. Robbery = an unpleasant event with a potential
5. Robbery... sometimes happens!
6. Even the most challenging experience holds the seed of something valuable (say: A stronger collaboration)
7. When people are challenged enough they will go a long way to feel better
8. My job in the bank = big job, little risk
9. Robbery normally ends with the employees going home to their families again
10. Robbery shakes you – but the earth does not have to crack
11. An earth quake causes less disruption/destruction, if the buildings are earthquake proofed. What is our equivalent to "earthquake proof"?
12. Unexpected situations can arise everywhere, any time
13. You do not know you own strength until you have been challenged
14. An experience of a robbery will increase my empathy with the employees/others who have experienced this themselves
15. There is lots of learning in even the most challenging of situations
16. What you have not tried you have not learnt from
17. You can protect yourself from many things – but not from life
18. In every robber there is anxiety too
19. Robbery is... a person's hope of a better life
20. Robbery = an event that may lead to a deeper, more fulfilling, life
21. Sometimes life can gain from a "before" and an "after"
22. Inner calm is a matter of practice
23. I can access my meta/helicopter perspective at all times
24. Robbery = an opportunity to train my overview/inner peace
25. I have all the resources I need

3. Choose your reframing

Visiting the varied perspectives in the Framestorm had a strong, immediate impact on this branch manager. He started feeling a stronger relatedness and more calm about robberies. After having tested his reframings in real life for a period of three months, he even concluded that "with a wise focus you can turn any experience into something positive". He highlighted that doing a reframing on something as extreme as a robbery boosted his ability to use reframing in his leadership on a more general level, completely internalizing it and regularly living it: "When it can be done successfully in such a sensitive area, it can be done in all areas!"

A reframing can often take place in the form of a new "heading", "stamp", or "categorization" of a particular situation or person...

A reframing can often take place in the form of a new "heading", "stamp", or "categorization" of a particular situation or person, such as "robbery =". But it can also happen by going to a metaphorical place such as drawing a parallel to earthquakes. It can also add nuances to go to a 2nd position: Looking at a robbery from the robber's perspective. And it can tap into words of wisdom like "You do not know you own strength until you have been challenged".

There is no "right" order of questions. The point is to create a mental stretch that brings about a richness of perspectives not habitually visited by the Framestormer. Identifying such reframing arsenals builds a powerful reframing mindset over time: A mindset that deeply strengthens relevant self-regulation when faced with complex interpersonal or intrapersonal challenges.

The last freedom of man: to choose his framings

Victor Frankl, a Second World War concentration camp survivor, came to realize during his experiences that we can always influence how we think about things.

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He called it "the last freedom of man" to be able "to choose your attitude to any situation; to choose your own path" (Frankl, 1959). With a bit of neuroscientific knowledge, this ability to choose your focus of attention, attitude and behavior can boost leadership, engagement and organizational change (Schwartz *et al*., 2011).

The brain is the organ of relationships (Brown & Hales, 2011). A leader constantly interacts with others and with his or herself. How a leader frames a situation very much determines how much he or she can make of it: The framing sets the performance ceiling.

A leader constantly interacts with others and with his or herself.

Ever-changing environments, complex decision-making processes and cross-pressure is not the odd event any longer – it is the general condition for most people working in organizations. It takes highly flexible and self-regulating people to successfully cope with and navigate in this landscape. Reframing lies at the heart of this. It allows us to change a memory/frame quickly when relevant information becomes available. It changes how the brain responds to situations.

When individuals create different interpretations of a situation, as in a Framestorm, they activate crucial parts of their brain by:

- Bringing their "original framing" to the table (working memory),
- pausing this (i.e. decrease/inhibit the salience of that framing),
- generating reframings (working memory manipulation and verbal ability),
- choosing the reframings that seem most useful (selection amongst alternatives, set-shifting),
- keeping those reframings in mind (working memory maintenance), and
- mindfully monitoring the success of regulation (McRae, Jacobs, Ray, John, & Gross 2012; Oschner & Gross, 2008).

This can seem overwhelming unless you have access to methods that make these multiple cognitive control processes more fluent and accessible. A playful, semi-structured, and co-created process like Framestorm is a good starting point for such explorations – and for internalizing the crucial reframing ability.

Neuroscience has only just embarked on the journey of understanding how this "last freedom of man" works in us. The next big question is how to "get it into the water we drink."

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