

Understanding the difference between affect and effect can transform your team

By Matt Jackson



The commonly understood difference between affect and effect is that you use affect as a verb and effect as a noun.

Eg.
How will the new CEO affect the

direction of the business?
What will be the effect of the new CEO on the direction of the business?

Put in a business context you can think of affect as the change or

impact and effect as the result or outcome. In business we are results driven and often adhere to the mantra that if it can't be measured then it doesn't exist. Results can be measured because they have already happened and are static.



So, like most things that stay still when we tell them to, we like them. On the contrary, current change that is happening now is impossible to measure. To get a sense for current change you need a strong sense of intuition or gut feel. Strong intuition is a strength common to all complex thinkers and great team leaders. Great leaders know that you can't perform ahead of the competition by focusing on the past. They have the ability to make decisions in real time as the change is occurring. They pay attention to how things are being affected as well as the effect that has already occurred and the effect that they desire in the future.

Successful teams all possess the ability to tune into changes in feeling as they occur as these are precursors to the effects. Think of a conductor with their symphony orchestra. Every member of that orchestra is in tune with what has happened in past rehearsals, the desired performance they hope to achieve and, most importantly, the changes that are happening in the moment. Every member of a high performance team understands that what is happening now is both the most volatile influence on the outcome and the one they have the most control over.

Because cause and effect relationships are linear and predictable we have preferred to focus on them since the Industrial Age. However, unlike machines, people's thoughts and feelings are not linear. People are volatile. This explains why many business people would prefer to automate their whole business and not have to deal with people's unpredictable thoughts and feelings. The problem with this strategy is that people's thoughts and feelings are the strongest influences on their behaviour (I also shudder at what the end game of a business that no longer employs, manages or serves people is).

If you can't relate to how the people in and around your business are thinking and feeling then your predictions about the outcomes of the business are self-centred. Most of us over inflate the amount of control we have over the outcome when it comes to dealing with people. When it comes to human interaction you have much greater control over how you affect another person than the result of the interaction because the result is influenced by so many things outside of your control. Having a positive affect on someone is the most reliable way to ensure successful

and sustainable results. A meeting that is an enjoyable experience will lead to another meeting and, when the time is right, a positive outcome.

Have you ever been in a meeting with someone who was pushing for an outcome so intensely that the experience was so unenjoyable that not only did the person not get the outcome they wanted but you decided you would never meet with them again? That is an example of a person who places more importance on the effect of the interaction than the affect. Now consider the last time you were that person and what action you can take to not be next time.



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