

Psychologists cut executive stress with brainwave course

TWO psychologists are convinced the human brain can be taught new ways of working which will avoid stress and enhance concentration.

The pair behind the Swansea-based PeakMind have adapted "neurofeedback" techniques used to treat alcoholism, heroin addiction and attention-deficit disorder to give executives improved mental agility.

PeakMind, launched in September of last year by Søren Andersen and Neil Rutterford as a spin-out enterprise from Swansea University, studies customers' brainwave patterns and then provides coaching in new ways of thinking.

Dr Rutterford said, "Neuro-

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feedback is all about self-regulation. The method simply encourages the brain to regulate itself differently and this has a healing effect."

Acknowledging that the technique has not been embraced by the medical community, he said, "If it was, it would be offered on the NHS... We are aware more research needs to be done.

"It isn't the be-all and end-all. Any neurofeedback therapist would say the same."

However, the enterprise, which has been awarded a grant from Finance Wales and receives sup-

port from the department of psychology at Swansea University, has already won fans.

Jake Major, creative director of Swansea architectural rendering company iCreate3d, recently went through the "peak performance" training programme.

He said, "Neurofeedback training with PeakMind has been a very valuable experience for me. I have seen a significant improvement in my ability to focus at work, and my colleagues have noticed the same thing.

"I am now more productive and less anxious as a result of the

training, and I am steadily improving with each neurofeedback session. The techniques that PeakMind has taught me have enabled me to control my stress levels and learn to concentrate better, whilst remaining relaxed."

An attraction of the programme is the lack of drugs, which has encouraged people suffering from attention-deficit disorder to try it.

Dr Rutterford said, "[It] is a non-invasive, non-pharmacological treatment method and unlike Ritalin, appears to result in long lasting changes once treatment finishes."

But he added that it is not a quick-fix solution.

"A course lasts for about 10 sessions, one per week," he said.

"It does depend on the individual; the important thing is to persevere."

Sports teams and musicians have also had their brain activity studied and been coached in developing healthier patterns of mind activity. The technique was pioneered in the 1960s by University of California, Los Angeles researcher Barry Sterman.

Dr Rutterford lectures at the Swansea Institute of Higher Education and has worked on research projects including the investigation of the long-term effects of traumatic brain injury. His colleague and business partner, Dr Andersen, 33, is conducting research on the effects of neurofeedback on dieting and on reducing anxiety.

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COLEG Menai has been named the overall winner at the Wales Quality Awards.

The competition assesses every aspect of an organisation, from customer service and people development, through to financial records, the environment and corporate social responsibility.

David Phillips, chief executive of Wales Quality Centre, said, "Discovering your strengths and areas for improvement are the real benefits of this award process. It's about understanding where you are strong and where you need to improve, remembering that continuous improvement drives competitive advantage and keeps you ahead of the competition."

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