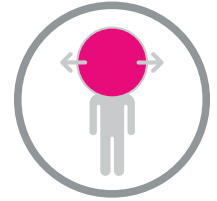


A BRAIN-BASED APPROACH TO MOTIVATE PEOPLE: SCARF.

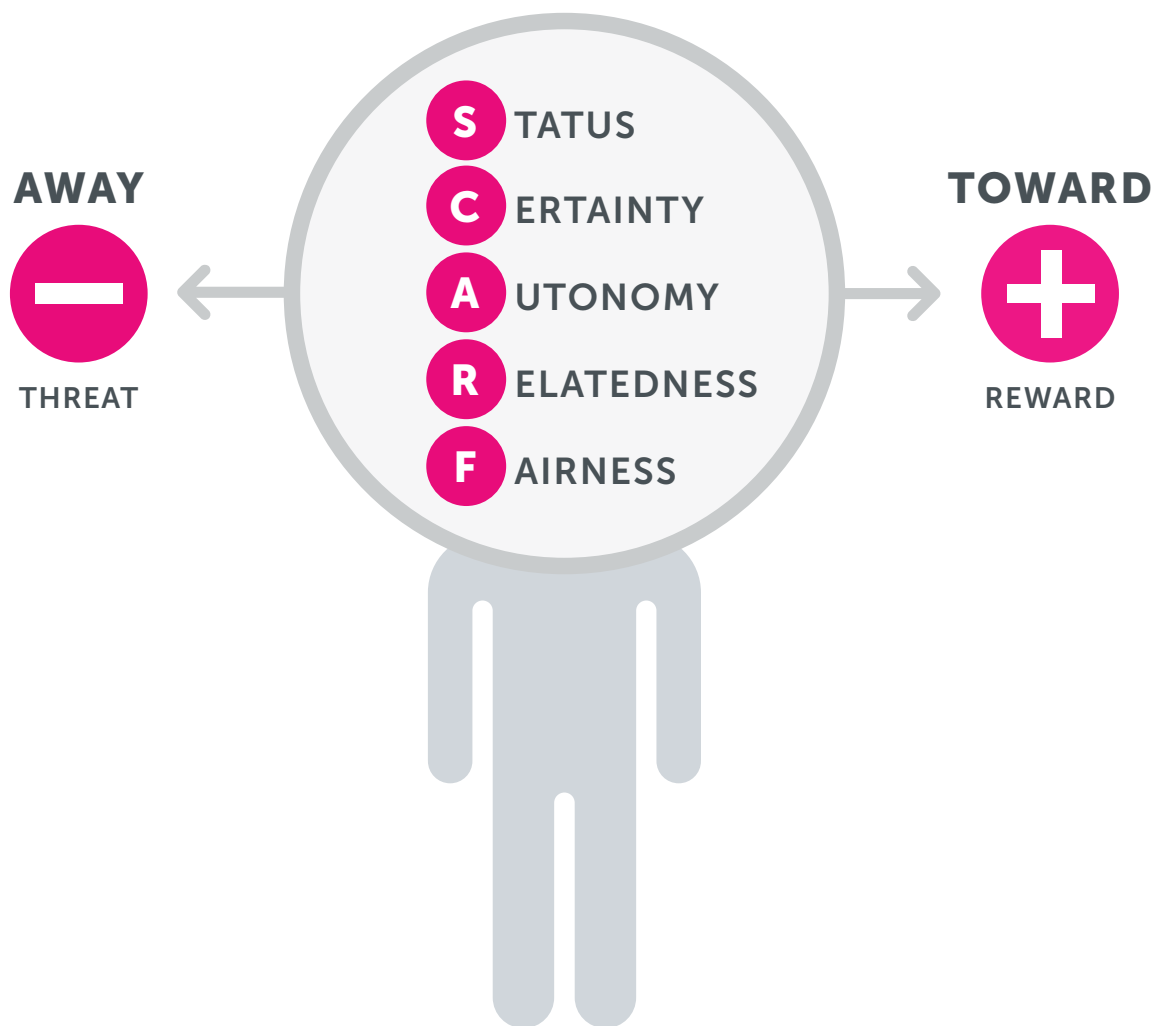


In recent years, neuroscience, the study of the brain, has started to provide some insights into the true drivers of human social behaviour. This can help us to improve the way people work together and how we as leaders can motivate our team members at work.

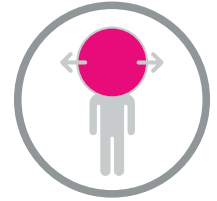
Two key themes have emerged from social neuroscience:

1. Much of our motivation driving social behaviour is governed by an overarching organising principle of minimising threat and maximising reward.
2. Social experience draws upon the same brain networks to maximise reward and minimise threat, as the brain networks used for primary survival needs. In other words, social needs are treated in much the same way in the brain as the need for food and water.

These two themes are summarised in the **SCARF** model that captures the common factors that can activate a reward or threat response in social situations. You can apply this model in any situation where people collaborate in groups, including all types of workplaces.



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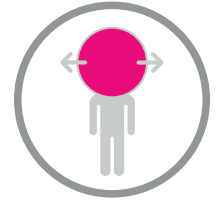
Keeping people in the 'reward' frame of mind

As a leader or manager, the SCARF model can help you understand how to keep your team members in the 'reward' frame of mind and away from the perception of threat. The model involves five domains of human social experience:

STATUS – a person's relative importance to others	At work, a person's status is determined in relation to others around them, the 'pecking order' and seniority. It can be diminished by criticism, failure and exclusion from meetings or conversations. Pay attention to maintaining each person's status in ways that are constructive for the whole team.
CERTAINTY – concerns being able to predict the future	The brain is a pattern-recognition machine that is constantly trying to predict the near future. The act of creating certainty for people is rewarding; but any kind of significant change generates uncertainty and is perceived as a threat. In a fast-changing business environment, it's very easy for people to begin to feel uncertain about the future, so this is an area where leaders can make a big difference with very little effort.
AUTONOMY – provides a sense of control over events	This is the perception of exerting control over one's environment; a sensation of having choices. An increase in the perception of autonomy feels rewarding. A reduction in autonomy, e.g. when being micro managed, can generate a strong threat response.
RELATEDNESS – a sense of safety with others, of friend rather than foe	Involves deciding whether others are 'in' or 'out' of a social group i.e. whether someone is a friend or foe. People naturally like to form 'tribes' where they experience a sense of belonging. The sense of relatedness is easily lost when meeting new people or when someone you know excludes you from a meeting or a discussion. As a leader, to avoid triggering the threat response in your people, it's important not only for them to feel safe with each other, but also with you as their boss.
FAIRNESS – a perception of fair exchanges between people.	At work, fairness – or its absence – is noticed in many different ways. Is there a 'fair exchange' between individuals, between leader and team, between organisation and employee, between customer and supplier? If something seems unfair, it rapidly triggers intense emotions and the 'threat' response. It uses up a lot of mental energy and distracts from everything else.

Remember all these reactions are hard-wired into our brains and are not the result of conscious choices. An emotionally, intelligent, self-aware adult will have some capacity to suppress or manage the 'threat' response and generate their own 'reward' state. But can you count on everyone in your team having that level of emotional intelligence and self-awareness?

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It's part of your responsibility as a leader to create the conditions where it's easy for each person to perform at their best. Here are some tips on what to do to ensure that you are driving the reward responses on your team rather than the threat.

STATUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regularly give feedback, praise, recognition and promotion• Keep everyone informed and consult them often• Share important information.
CERTAINTY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set out your plans for the year, establish a routine and keep your team informed• Have clear goals, strategy and plans – tell your team about them• Create routine for your team e.g. having team meetings at the same time on the same day every week.
AUTONOMY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where possible, give individuals discretion at the point of decision making• Build individual decision making into the organisational processes• Avoid lengthy procedures that require the approval of multiple levels of management• Employ people whose judgement you trust.
RELATEDNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generate a sense of safety by building rapport with your team members• Show an interest in non-work interests• Consider employing coaching, mentoring and one-to-one meetings.
FAIRNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take time to explain contentious decisions and processes that seem unfair (this will restore a sense of fairness and also increase status and feeling of relatedness at same time)• Ensure transparency and increase the level of communication and involvement around business issues• Allow your team to identify their own ground rules.

Links & References

1. Rock, D. (2015) SCARF: A brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others. http://web.archive.org/web/20100705024057/http://www.your-brain-at-work.com:80/files/NLJ_SCARFUS.pdf