

## THE NEUROSCIENCE OF LEADING IN TURBULENT TIMES

Whilst our brains are remarkably complex organs, their core function is quite simple: ensure survival. This means they are constantly assessing risk to gauge if we are moving into a threat or reward state, and then determining how to respond. Knowing this simple insight can be hugely useful as a leader, especially in times of disruptive change. When in a reward state we respond differently, from a place of opportunity not fear. The neuroscientist, Dr David Rock, identified five broad factors that cause this reward-threat state in the workplace, which he called SCARF: **S**tatus, **C**ertainty, **A**utonomy, **R**elatedness and **F**airness.

Astute leaders do the following to create a reward-state in their people:

Dimensions	Solutions
<p><b>Status:</b></p> <p>Feeling important, learning and developing, mastery, respected by others, feeling valued.</p> <p>(valued)</p>	<p>Reminding people of past achievements activates the same parts of the brain as if the person was experiencing that achievement right now. Treating people like valued citizens NOT minions by providing them with meaning, autonomy, growth, impact and connection opportunities reaps long-term benefits.</p> <p><b>Reality check:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you make people feel valued (in the manner they desire)?</li> <li>• What have you done recently to facilitate that winning feeling?</li> <li>• How do you harness and showcase people’s unique work strengths?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Certainty:</b></p> <p>Knowing what is going to happen and when, clarity about responsibilities, clear short-term goals.</p> <p>(predictability)</p>	<p>In uncertain times you need to be providing certainty about the controllables, however small e.g. the communication process, what will be staying the same (e.g. organisational values) and short-term goals that people can achieve.</p> <p><b>Reality check:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you keep your people well-informed about upcoming changes, and their impact?</li> <li>• Do they have realistic short-term goals they can reach?</li> <li>• What regular feedback loops have you implemented so people can get a sense of their progress?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Autonomy:</b></p> <p>Perception of having control over events or environment, influence on decisions (even small ones), not feeling micro-managed, feeling your voice will be heard.</p> <p>(control)</p>	<p>A sense of autonomy is important for us both mentally and physically. It generates a feeling of being trusted and in control. People will be significantly more supportive of change if they have been genuinely involved in the solution generation process.</p> <p><b>Reality check:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you are under pressure, do you tend to micro-manage?</li> <li>• How are you building competence and clarity (big picture understanding) in people, so you can delegate control with confidence?</li> <li>• What are you genuinely doing to involve people? Can you do more?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relatedness:</b></p> <p>Feeling connected to other people, feeling part of an in-group, feeling safe with others, a sense of belonging.</p> <p>(belonging)</p>	<p>Being part of an in-group provides people with a sense of belonging. The very use of the word “together” or “we” can have a positive psychological impact on people. Making time to be with people (virtually) and feeling listened to shows people that they are truly valued. Working from home can be difficult because of the lack of direct social connection with others outside their inner circle. Place a premium on meaningful opportunities for connection between people during this change e.g. buddy systems, team brainstorming sessions, access to tech collaboration platforms. By praising in public and punishing in private people do not feel “cut from the tribe”, which maintains their relatedness.</p> <p><b>Reality check:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often do you transparently speak to each team member individually, thus preventing in/out groups?</li> <li>• What opportunities do you create for people to talk about how they feeling regarding this disruptive period, not just the work at hand?</li> <li>• How would others describe your listening capability?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fairness:</b></p> <p>Perceiving exchanges to be fair, transparency, both the process and outcome will be fair.</p> <p>(congruency)</p>	<p>Promoting a sense of fairness by allocating rewards/privileges based on clear, objective criteria that are agreed upon. In times of pressure we may overly-rely on our top people to deliver, but ultimately performance levels are undermined by the poor performers. Don’t run your top performers into the ground by not managing the under-performers. You get what you settle for in life.</p> <p><b>Reality check:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often do you challenge your own thinking (potential for bias) and gather alternative views on a subject/decision?</li> <li>• How do you ensure even distribution of work within the team, so that top performers are not burnt out?</li> <li>• Are you soft on underperformance, to the detriment of the rest of the team?</li> </ul>