

SCARF

*Adapted from David Rock, Editor of the NeuroLeadership Journal
http://www.davidrock.net/files/NLJ_SCARFUS.pdf*

In a world of increasing interconnectedness and rapid change, there is a growing need to improve the way people work together. Understanding the true drivers of human social behavior is becoming ever more urgent in this environment. Two themes are emerging from social neuroscience. Firstly, that much of our motivation driving social behavior is governed by an overarching organizing principle of minimizing threat and maximizing reward (Gordon, 2000). Secondly, that several domains of social experience draw upon the same brain networks to maximize reward and minimize threat as the brain networks used for primary survival needs (Lieberman and Eisenberger, 2008). In other words, social needs are treated in much the same way in the brain as the need for food and water.

Status

Many everyday conversations devolve into arguments driven by a status threat, a desire to not be perceived as less than another. When threatened, people may defend a position that doesn't make sense, to avoid the perceived pain of a drop in status. In most people, the question 'can I offer you some feedback' generates a similar response to hearing fast footsteps behind you at night. The research suggests that status can be increased in more sustainable ways. For example, people feel a status increase when they feel they are learning and improving and when attention is paid to this improvement.

Certainty

The brain likes to know the pattern occurring moment to moment, it craves certainty, so that prediction is possible. Without prediction, the brain must use dramatically more resources, involving the more energy-intensive prefrontal cortex, to process moment-to-moment experience. Some examples of how to increase certainty include making implicit concepts more explicit, such as agreeing verbally how long a meeting will run, or stating clear objectives at the start of any discussion. In learning situations, the old adage is 'tell people what you are going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them', all of which increases certainty.

Autonomy

Autonomy is the perception of exerting control over one's environment; a sensation of having choices. Several studies in the retirement industry find strong correlations between a sense of control and health outcomes (Rodin, 1986). People leave corporate life, often for far less income, because they desire greater autonomy. The statement 'Here's two options that could work, which would you prefer?' will tend to elicit a better response than 'Here's what you have to do now'.

Relatedness

Relatedness involves deciding whether others are 'in' or 'out' of a social group. Whether someone is friend, or foe. The concept of relatedness is closely linked to trust. One trusts those who appear to be in your group, who one has connected with, generating approach emotions. And when someone does something untrustworthy, the usual response is to withdraw. The greater that people trust one another, the stronger the collaboration and the more information that is shared. In any workplace it appears to pay off well to encourage social connections. A Gallup report showed that organizations that encourage 'water cooler' conversations increased productivity (Gallup, November 2008). Small groups appear to be safer than large groups.

Fairness

Studies by Golnaz Tabibnia and Matthew Lieberman at UCLA showed that 50 cents generated more of a reward in the brain than \$10.00, when it was 50 cents out of a dollar, and the \$10 was out of \$50 (Tabibnia & Lieberman, 2007). The following statement is an example of what employees might say in reaction to a threat to fairness 'He has a different set of rules for Mike and Sally than for the rest of us.' The threat from perceived unfairness can be decreased by increasing transparency, and increasing the level of communication and involvement about business issues. For example, organizations that allow employees to know details about financial processes may have an advantage here.