

# Navigating through transformation

Insights into how we can tap into the knowledge of brain science to bring out the best in ourselves and the people we lead



A neuroscience-based toolkit for change

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## SECTION ONE

### Introduction

## Rethinking our practices

Ninety per cent of what we know about the brain has only been discovered in the last five years. With these new insights, we are challenged to apply a new perspective to how we experience and lead change.

We can rethink our existing practices and look at things with ***a fresh perspective***. The competitive global landscape demands that we continuously improve our approach to derive business benefits and shareholder value.

## About this toolkit

This toolkit builds on an earlier article titled “*Change Hurts: myth or reality?*”. Using David Rock’s SCARF model, this toolkit provides ideas on what leaders can do to reduce the hardwired threat response, particularly during change.

It is designed for both leaders of change and initiators and receivers of change, by providing practical suggestions to bring out the best in ourselves and others.

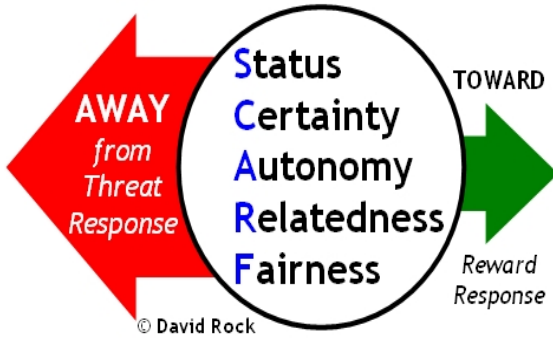
It also includes change management templates that consider the neurological basis of resistance.

New insights



## SECTION TWO Into Practice

SCARF Model of Social Threats and Rewards



### SCARF model

As humans, we are hardwired to minimise threat and maximise reward. David Rock’s SCARF model looks at the primal reaction in the human brain to situations of threat or reward, that can now be measured by imaging technology such as fMRI.

This model helps us understand the triggers that provoke an emotional response to change and new information.

Minimising THREAT EMOTIONAL DRIVERS	Ask yourself/are these questions being addressed?
<p><b>Status</b> About relative importance to others.</p>	<p>Will I be seen as competent in this transformation/change? How will my capability be seen by others? By my new leader? Does the change negatively impact on my sense of status? My employees’ status?</p>
<p><b>Certainty</b> Concerns being able to predict the future.</p>	<p>Do I know what the future holds for me? What level of certainty is there for my team, or has there been lately? Does the change provide certainty regarding timelines, outcomes?</p>
<p><b>Autonomy</b> Provides a sense of control over events.</p>	<p>Do I have control and any choice in this change? Do employees have enough autonomy to complete their work, and decide how they will work through the change? To what extent has my level of autonomy changed? My team members’ autonomy?</p>
<p><b>Relatedness</b> A sense of safety with others, of friend or foe.</p>	<p>Do I feel connected to anyone or isolated in this change? Does the change negatively impact how employees interact with one another? To what degree have teams shifted, regrouped, have new leaders, or “lost” team members to restructures? Is there a sentiment of “survivor guilt”?</p>
<p><b>Fairness</b> A perception of fair exchanges between people.</p>	<p>Am I being treated fairly in this transformation or change? Will the change/transformation be perceived as fair by my team? How do I recognise good effort? Do I do this fairly across my team/s?</p>



# Applying SCARF in how we lead and experience change

Thinking about the neuroscience of change is just the beginning. We can put our new insights into action and apply the SCARF model as a framework for understanding and planning for our responses to change. Even if you are not in a formal leadership role, you can apply these ideas to lead yourself and support team members.

Keep in mind that we **vary** in our responses or perception to each element in the SCARF model. One team member may feel strongly about relatedness, while another is threatened by a change in status. In all elements, **perception** is as powerful as reality, and perception alone provokes a threat response. SCARF elements are **inter-related** as one event can trigger emotion in more than one area. For example, a drop in status can be regarded as unfair.

## STATUS

### About relative importance to others

*When status is threatened, people may defend a position that doesn't make sense, to avoid their perceived pain of drop in status.*

- Seek out subject matter expertise (SME) feedback and acknowledge it, to help them lead and drive the change.
- If a team member's status has been reduced, find another way to reward them that gives them a form of status within the group.
- Give regular feedback – catch them “doing it right”. Even automated feedback, such as a computer saying “good job”, lights up the reward area of the brain.
- Reframe performance feedback by asking first “how do you think you are going?”. Just saying “I have some feedback” provokes the same response as hearing ‘footsteps in the dark’.
- Give people a reason to want to leave the current state, and provide a clear picture of the impact on their role and responsibilities (status) so there are no surprises.
- Ensure you lead by example - practise what you preach. Don't use positional power to exempt you from what you expect others to do.
- Tap into the “hidden hierarchy” in your organisation – who are the hidden influencers? Who are the people who can influence without formal authority or positional power?
- When providing feedback, make it positive and specific with examples of behaviour. Avoid using the word “but” when providing formal feedback in a performance conversation.

### **Remember...**

*Performance reviews present a situation when status threat is likely to occur.*



### CERTAINTY

#### Concerns being able to predict the future

*When uncertainty increases, memory and commitment decline. This validates existing change models that acknowledge a period of low productivity during periods of transformation.*

- If you cannot communicate details, communicate when details will be confirmed to provide some anchor points.
- Ensure information is cascaded as quickly as possible.
- Discuss rumours openly. Provide a forum for rumour busting. Plug into the grapevine to find out what may be creating anxiety.
- Repeat key messages and be explicit. People can see through the “spin”.
- Identify what is creating anxiety. This can be uncovered via surveys, focus groups run by an objective facilitator, or other non-threatening feedback channels.
- Acknowledge that some things will remain ambiguous, so look for what can be confirmed or defined – to provide anchors of certainty.
- Break change into smaller chunks, smaller steps.
- Ensure leaders have received training to uplift their change leadership capability. This will help them deal with uncertainty and ambiguity themselves, and will better equip them navigate others through change with empathy.

#### ***Expectation shapes reality...***

*Our primal need for certainty means that we develop mental maps of how we perceive the world. When pieces of information are missing or unknown, we try to fill the gaps to make sense of the situation. Some of this “gap filling” may lead to inaccurate conclusions or belief about what is really happening.*



## AUTONOMY

### Provides a sense of control over events

*With autonomy, small things go a long way in creating a sense of autonomy. For example, a study carried out in an aged care facility gave half its residents a plant to look after. The other half, whose plants were taken care of by facility staff, were less happy, healthy and active than the group with autonomy to take care of their plants.*

- Explain the need for change and look for ways to involve impacted people in the solution or give options to promote the sense of involvement.
- Presenting facts alone will be rejected if they do not fit in with existing mindsets and mental models – therefore top down approach with facts will not work. When introducing new information, position it in a way that allows people to reach their “AHA” moment on their own.
- Provide broad picture of change and ask others how this could work. Establish a network of change champions who become peer advocates.
- Trust that they can do the job and can decide how it’s done. Micromanagement reduces autonomy, promoting the threat response.
- Ask for opinions on how work should or could be completed. Don’t tell, but ask. For example, ask questions that offer autonomy:
  - What are some options that can make this work? Which would you prefer?
- Offer flexible work practices where there is choice in where and when work is done, as long as it meets agreed outcomes and timeframes.
- Seek feedback via non-threatening channels such as change readiness surveys to monitor morale temperature check and progress. Consider other channels to gather feedback, eg. Discussion forums (online and face to face), Yammer, Yam Jam sessions on Yammer.
- When seeking feedback, act on it and explain what will be done with feedback. Provide reasons as to why specific feedback was not adopted.
- Try to give people as many choices as possible, eg. Training session times., engagement forums – to promote a sense of autonomy, the ‘sensation’ of having choices. This will create an opportunity for people to influence some outcomes and work effort.
- Provide channels for self-directed or self-paced learning portals to help with sense of control.

***Even the perception of autonomy is important!***



### RELATEDNESS

#### A sense of safety with others, friend or foe?

*Social connection is a primal need. It helps the brain release oxytocin which disarms the threat response. Social neuroscientist have found that exclusion from group activity activates the same neural circuitry in the brain as physical pain.*

- Establishing rapport takes time as the brain sorts ‘friend or foe’ very quickly when meeting someone new. Keep this in mind with virtual teams and teleconferencing and engage face to face as much as possible to accelerate connection.
- Sense of belonging to a work group is critical. Look for opportunities to introduce or encourage your team to participate in buddy systems and mentoring arrangements.
- Provide a face-to-face forum for myth busting through discussion and FAQs. For larger forums, allow time for smaller groups to gather to engage in natural “gossip”. Have leaders and change champions circulate to hear what the smaller groups are saying to tap into the organic grapevine.
- Support informal collaboration channels, such as Yammer , to provide another form of “community”.
- Use “language of leadership” techniques in communication to appeal to emotion and logic (heart and mind), to humanise the message. Include storytelling.
- Show your human side – acknowledge any previous mistakes and what you learned from them.
- Establish common ground with inclusive behaviour and language to promote a sense of team.
- Let your people know that “you’ve got their back” and that you are prepared to support and back your team.
- Understand and acknowledge ‘survivor guilt’ if change involves organisational restructure. (also closely links to fairness) as some team members may be “grieving” the departure of their colleagues.

**Remember the quote by John Kotter**

*“Behaviour change happens mostly by speaking to people’s feelings”.*





### FAIRNESS

#### A perception of fair exchanges between people

*People perceive fairness in relative terms. Even if not motivated by money, they will see the situation as unfair if they feel they are underpaid or unfairly paid by comparison to others.*

- Put yourself in others' shoes to see the change from multiple perspectives. Who will see it as fair? Who will see it as unfair?
- Be clear and transparent about why and how decisions will be made. Consider this when making public acknowledgement (awards, recognition, selection processes) and be clear on criteria and decision making processes.
- Consider how and when the message is delivered – who is told first? Who might find out through informal channels when it should be formal channels?
- Keep private and sensitive conversations private – be especially careful in open plan work environments.
- Understand and acknowledge 'survivor guilt' if change involves organisational restructure. (when team members leave, the loss may also be experienced in relatedness).
- Keep an eye on workload to ensure it's fairly and appropriately spread.
- Provide many opportunities for membership of working groups, so all have access to information and involvement.
- Watch out for what can be perceived as favouritism – are the same employees receiving public praise or enjoying access to privileges, such as events and courses? How are underperformers managed? Do they get away with undesirable behaviour?

#### **Good to know**

*If we feel we have been treated fairly, it activates the same reward centre as eating chocolate!*

## SECTION THREE

### Endnotes

## Threat comes at a cost

Threat has a significant impact on overall organisational productivity. When we consider the effects of the threat response on an individual's decision making ability, rational thinking and motivation, we can see how any form of threat, perceived or real, can make a difference to employee output, morale and engagement.

When leaders are aware of typical triggers to threat, they can make a conscious effort to reduce this response. Working towards activating a positive, reward state for their team members demonstrates that leaders acknowledge that resistance has a neurological basis, manifesting as a threat response, and that comes at a cost to the organisation.

## Acknowledgements

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The author would like to thank the AHRI members who attended the OD&D networking event and shared their thoughts and experiences that have been included in this toolkit.

## References


Rock, D. (2009), Managing with the brain in mind, *Strategy and Business*, Autumn, Issue 56.

## About the author

Lena Ross is a change management consultant with decades of experience and research into how we are hardwired to learn and change. With her passion for bringing out the best in others, she is able to help people recognise the AHA moment that is needed to effect sustainable change. As an experienced public speaker and facilitator, her divergent thinking and approach will challenge an audience just enough to nudge them out of their comfort zone to devise plans for personal change.

Her experience is well complemented by her academic qualifications as she is able to apply proven theory to the development of practical solutions.

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The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but having new eyes.

Marcel Proust

## **Appendix A**

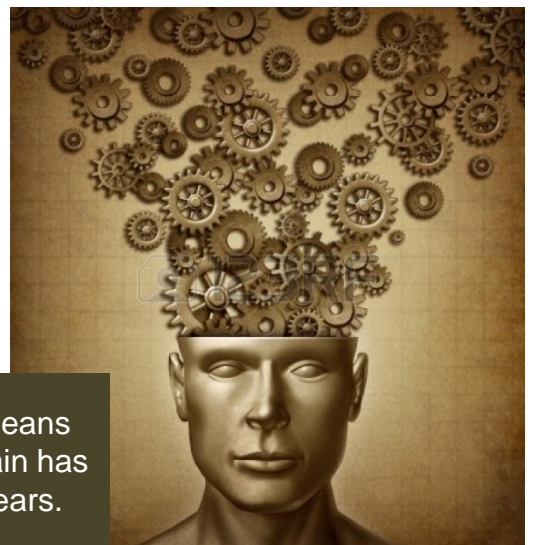
Self Assessment Tool

## **Appendix B**

Impact Assessment Example

## **Appendix C**

Stakeholder Analysis Example



The increased use of neuro-imaging means that 90% of what we know about the brain has only been discovered in the last five years.

## INDIVIDUAL AND/OR TEAM SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL

Individuals can use this template to carry out a self assessment, or leaders can use it for a team, to evaluate the scale of emotion associated with each SCARF element. If using it for a team, explain the SCARF model and ask each employee to assess how they felt (or are feeling) during the transformation or when change has just been announced.

Team members each mark their own assessment on a flipchart to see a picture of how the team overall is feeling (threat or response scale) about each SCARF element.

This activity drives a valuable discussion on what is causing threat and/or reward responses for team members, on each element. In turn, this provides clues for the actions leaders need to take to lead through the change.

Element	How are you feeling?
<b>Status</b> <i>About relative importance to others.</i>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>THREAT</span> <span>REWARD</span> </div>
<b>Certainty</b> <i>Concerns being able to predict the future.</i>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>THREAT</span> <span>REWARD</span> </div>
<b>Autonomy</b> <i>Provides a sense of control over events.</i>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>THREAT</span> <span>REWARD</span> </div>
<b>Relatedness</b> <i>A sense of safety with others, of friend or foe.</i>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>THREAT</span> <span>REWARD</span> </div>
<b>Fairness</b> <i>A perception of fair exchanges between people.</i>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>THREAT</span> <span>REWARD</span> </div>
<b>Overall THREAT RESPONSE</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>THREAT</span> <span>REWARD</span> </div>

SAMPLE ONLY

NOTE: Template has been inspired by David Rock's SCARF model.

## IMPACT ASSESSMENT EXAMPLE

How can we anticipate the **threat response** in order to minimise it?

If we consider the SCARF model in our change planning, we can ensure that our communications, training, business impact assessments and stakeholder engagement plans have taken into account the expected level of threat that will be felt.

**The High Level Impact Assessment** (sample below) will assess this by business unit whilst a stakeholder analysis (next page) will assess potential threat by stakeholder group.

**CASE STUDY:** This organisation is planning to outsource its call centre, to save money. The Executive team will be rewarded with financial bonuses if cost effectiveness is immediate. Some groups (business units) are impacted more than others.

IMPACTED GROUP	EXEC	HR	SALES	MARKETING	TECHNOLOGY	CONTACT CENTRE	SERVICES
Status	REWARD	REWARD				THREAT	
Certainty	THREAT	THREAT	THREAT	THREAT	THREAT	THREAT	THREAT
Autonomy	REWARD	THREAT	THREAT	THREAT	THREAT	THREAT	THREAT
Relatedness	REWARD					THREAT	
Fairness	REWARD				THREAT	THREAT	
OVERALL	REWARD	MODERATE THREAT	LOW THREAT	LOW THREAT	MODERATE THREAT	HIGH THREAT	LOW to MODERATE THREAT

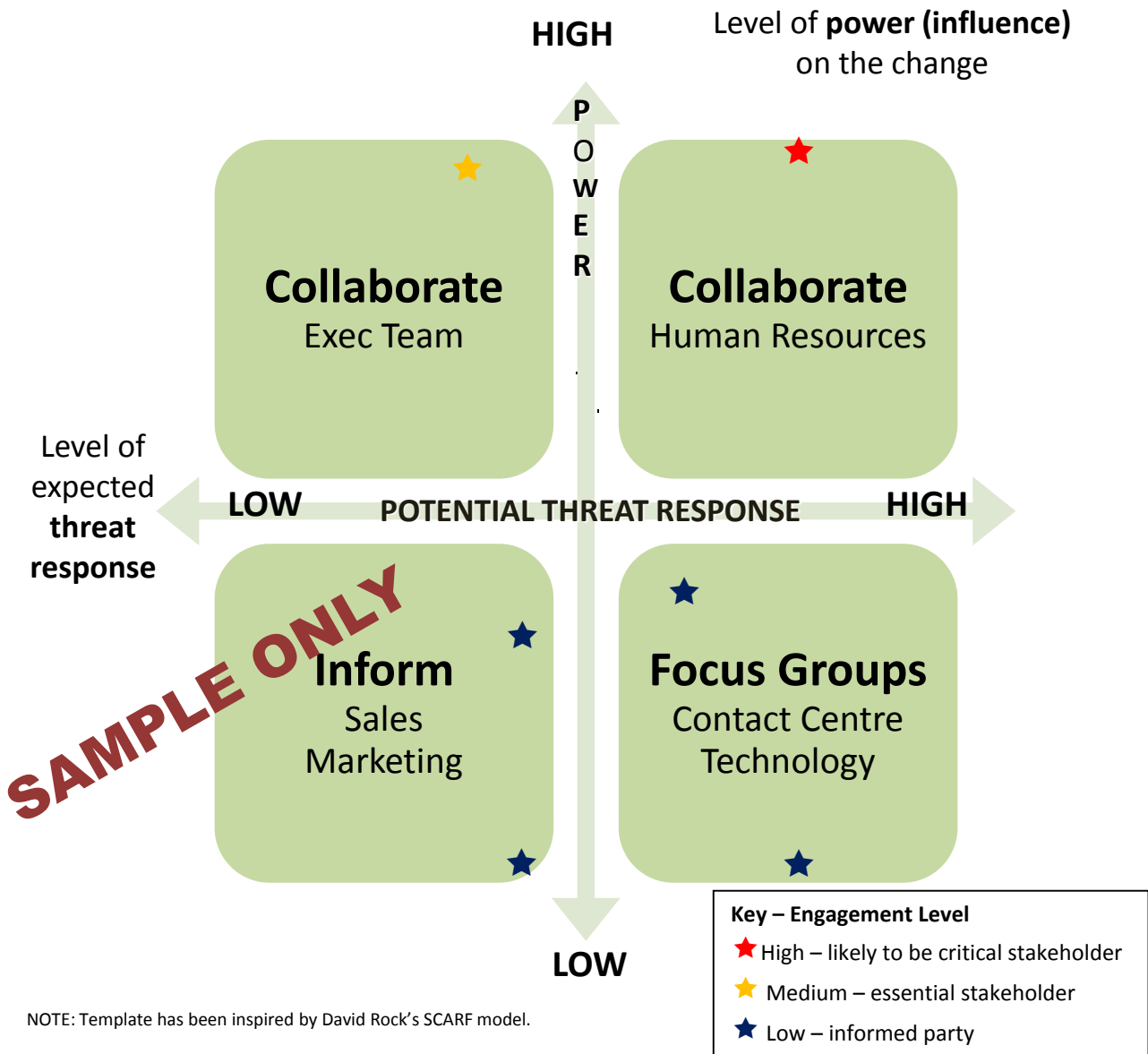
NOTE: Template has been inspired by David Rock's SCARF model.

# STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS EXAMPLE

The purpose of carrying out the stakeholder analysis is to identify the key people and groups in the organisation who can influence the success of the transformation. A stakeholder analysis carried out using the 2x2 matrix will identify and help plan stakeholder engagement and communication effort.

**SCENARIO/EXAMPLE:** Using the same case study, this **stakeholder analysis** identifies where the threat response is likely to be high and where and how to target engagement. Stakeholder owners will aim to move their stakeholders to the “low threat” quadrants on the left hand side of the matrix.

The stakeholder analysis shows stakeholder groups by level of **power** (influence) on and the expected **level of threat** experienced by the change.



NOTE: Template has been inspired by David Rock’s SCARF model.