The 3 Rs – Respect, Recognition, Relatedness – Essentials in Conflict Resolution

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Recent brain research has proven scientifically what many religions and cultures have known over centuries, and what a team of innovation catalysts in the USA discovered in the late 1950s: Treating people with respect not only benefits our relationships – it also helps us to resolve conflicts by creating a positive, collaborative climate while we work together to develop creative solutions to problems.

In this summary to accompany a poster presentation we show links between a well-proven approach to collaborative innovation, with various concepts such as the African Ubuntu culture, emotional, social and cultural intelligence, and "Power and Love" (Kahane, 2010). Neuroscience research, well summarised in David Rock's SCARF model (2008), also shows why the "positive behaviours" demonstrating respect, recognition and relatedness promote mutual understanding, reduce stress levels, enable the brain to function well – and so enable people to develop shared and implementable solutions to sticky problems.

Particularly when seeking to resolve conflicts, the ability to create a climate of trust and collaboration is important. At the same time, the ability to develop a variety of possible, creative options from which parties to the conflict can choose, and hopefully achieve consensus rather than mere compromise, can be invaluable. (Nolan, 2004)

Underlying the ability to create a positive climate are three important elements – which I call **The Three R's – Respect, Recognition and Relatedness.** These three are closely related and reinforce one another. They also resonate with the traditional African Ubuntu culture:

- **Respect** in the way we treat both ourselves, and others. This means knowing our own value, having a healthy self-esteem, and also treating others with respect, showing appreciation when appropriate, in order to also help to strengthen the other's self-esteem. In particular, we need to control the tendency many people have to put people down or "discount" others. In a situation of conflict, the temptation to "score points" may be very strong. Rather than being witty or clever – such put-downs often have lasting negative effects on both self-esteem and relationships, and in conflict situations, they could reduce chances of achieving workable solutions.

- **Recognition** of both our own culture, rights, beliefs and value systems, and of the cultures, rights, dignity and viewpoints of other people. Only if we know and fully value our own culture, can we be open-minded enough to appreciate and value that of others. Then we can realise how various cultures not only can exist and remain valid alongside one another – but also enrich our and others' worlds by sharing and exchange. Community facilitator Ishmael Mkhabela (Kahane, p 94) said "*Recognition means the acceptance of the other and their interests and values, even if they are opposite to yours. Our job is not to preach or to convert them, but to be comfortable in the same space*".

- **Relatedness** is about how we behave towards others, and how we allow or enable others to come closer to us. The African concept "Ubuntu" has been simplified to "I am, because you are." Our relatedness to others gives meaning to our lives, and to theirs. "*A person*

with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole, and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed. – Desmond Tutu, 1999

Two important factors in relatedness are Power and Love. "*Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change…. Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic"* – Martin Luther King, in Kahane, 2010. Power can be used positively to take initiative, and achieve and create opportunities or change – Power TO.., and often WITH others. Or it can be negative or abusive, as Power OVER others, where we consider our own interests first, and may use others for our own interests. Similarly Love can be positive or generative – bringing people together in respectful, supportive, enjoyable relations, through which they can achieve more than alone – or it can be degenerative if it makes individuals too dependent or submissive – so that they allow others to over-use or even abuse Power over them. (Kahane, 2010)

Creating a positive climate that can assist with Conflict Resolution

Over 50 years ago – after audio-taping and analysing their own innovation sessions – Synectics (see www.synecticsworld.com and Nolan & Williams, 2010) discovered those "positive behaviours" that promote not only creativity and innovation, but also participation, collaboration and commitment to shared solutions. And they identified "negative behaviours" that get in the way of new ideas, collaboration, healthy relationships and performance.

Figure 1 shows the key behaviours that create an idea- and innovation-friendly climate in firms or work groups – and Figure 2 shows those that, in contrast, inhibit the generation and development of novel ideas, while usually also reducing motivation and participation. As a top executive once said to me, "Sadly the 'red behaviours' are the default behaviours of most South African managers". We do not mean that the "green behaviours" are the only acceptable ones – but it would be helpful if they could become the "default" behaviours, and the more power- and hierarchy-related "red behaviours" were used only when required. "Red behaviours" can be essential in times of crisis or poor performance. The positive behaviours can be seen as combining both Generative Power and Generative Love.

There are many reasons why individuals, groups and companies may find it difficult to make the positive behaviours a way of life, or the basis of their relationships:

- In many organizations – in business, government and academia – authoritarian, highly analytical approaches and hierarchy have been a way of life for decades – if not centuries – and they often give people on various levels a sense of security and place.
- Many managers have learnt or read about the benefits of participative management and more people-oriented approaches, and sincerely want to change – but find it hard to change old habits, and may fear a loss of power or control if they "let go" of the old ways.
- Many people – particularly managers, academics and professionals, and also negotiators – believe they prove their ability and intelligence, and they contribute to insight, by challenging or questioning almost all statements or ideas put forward by others – "I am just playing devil's advocate". Such questions may be very useful in analytical problem solving,

2

investigations and diagnosis. However, most people do not realise that – in situations requiring creativity and trust – questions could stop the flow of ideas, make people defensive, and create a climate in which people feel it is risky to speak up.

- Much of our education and professional training – in law, accounting, engineering, business, science, philosophy or whatever – is strongly based on facts, logic, structure and analytical approaches. The kind of open-mindedness, flexibility, informality and tolerance of ambiguity – even playfulness – needed for creativity is seldom encouraged.
- A deep-seated barrier in most individuals is that people get anxious and defensive if they feel that others treat them with disrespect or "put them down". They then almost unconsciously revert to negative behaviours, either by counter-attacking or by withdrawing. (In Prince, 2003, the Synectics founder described how they discovered the "discount-revenge" cycle, defensiveness, the rule of "assuming positive intent" and "how emotional field affects performance" - www.georgemprince.com.)

Figure 3 below shows the contrast between a climate in which people feel threatened, are very competitive, and focus mainly on their own interests (on the left), and a more open climate. A negative climate is typically both created, and reinforced, by the "red" behaviours being dominant. In contrast, the positive behaviours create a climate which people share ideas, build on one another's ideas and thus unlock energy and collaboration. Synectics and SynNovation (the process as adapted and used in South Africa since 1996) use a way of facilitating and a set of ground rules and other techniques that help to create this solution-sharing climate. It is so positive that we have often been brought in where the main problem was conflict – after a merger, around issues of perceived racism, radical change and diversity after 1994. And the people went away with both new ways to work together, and creative business solutions and agreements in which all had a high level of ownership.

Figure 1   Positive behaviours
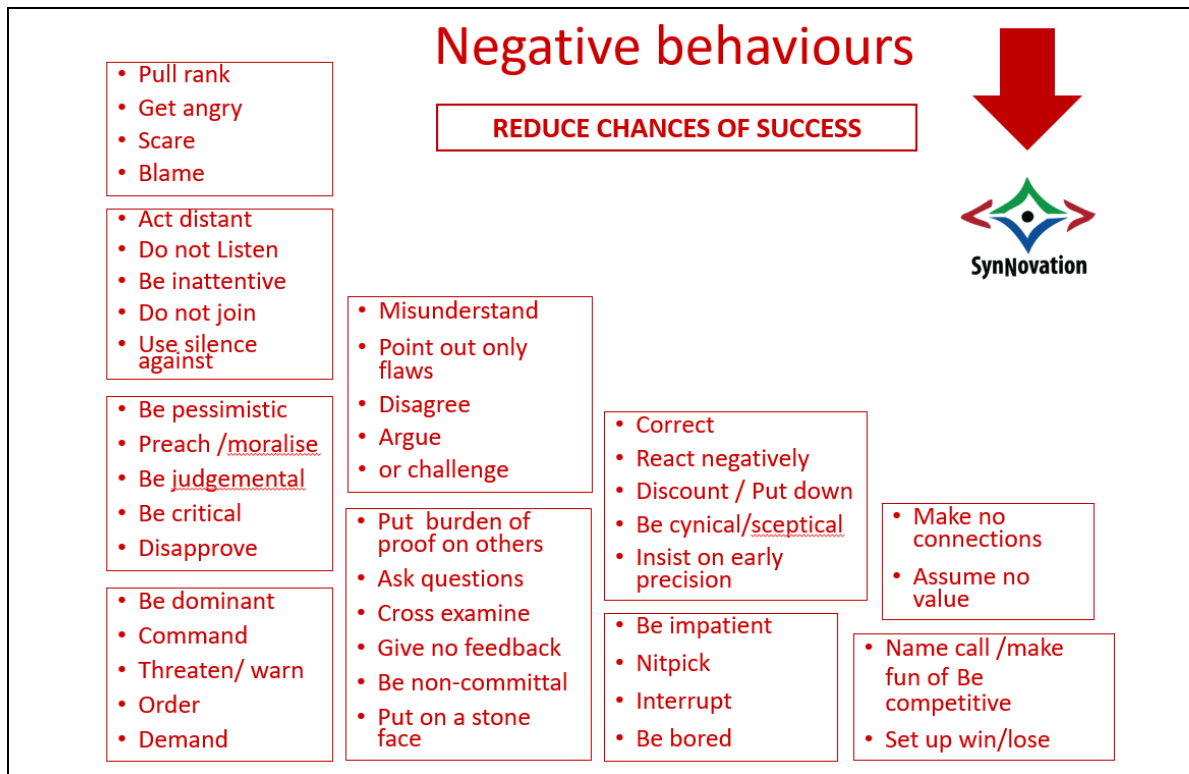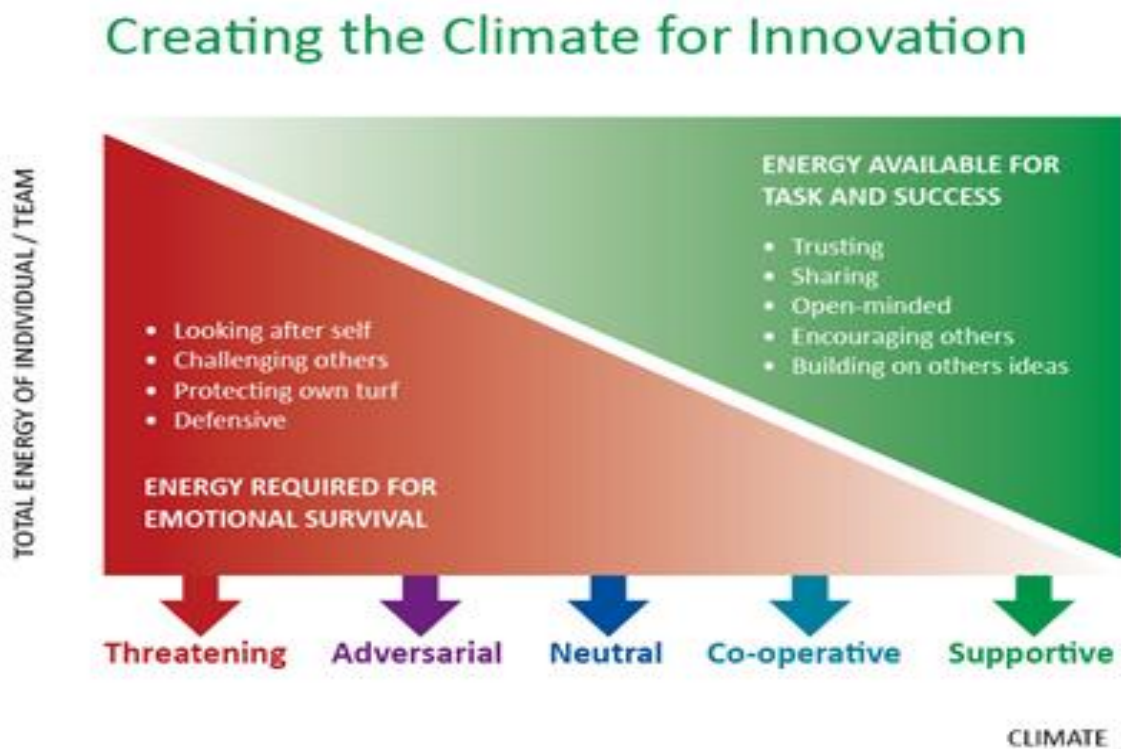
Figure 2   Negative behaviours

Negative behaviours

REDUCE CHANCES OF SUCCESS

SynNovation

- Pull rank
- Get angry
- Scare
- Blame

- Act distant
- Do not Listen
- Be inattentive
- Do not join
- Use silence against

- Be pessimistic
- Preach /moralise
- Be judgemental
- Be critical
- Disapprove

- Be dominant
- Command
- Threaten/ warn
- Order
- Demand

- Misunderstand
- Point out only flaws
- Disagree
- Argue
- or challenge

- Put burden of proof on others
- Ask questions
- Cross examine
- Give no feedback
- Be non-committal
- Put on a stone face

- Correct
- React negatively
- Discount / Put down
- Be cynical/sceptical
- Insist on early precision

- Be impatient
- Nitpick
- Interrupt
- Be bored

- Make no connections
- Assume no value

- Name call /make fun of Be competitive
- Set up win/lose

Figure 3   Creating a climate that promotes collaborative creativity and innovation

Creating the Climate for Innovation

TOTAL ENERGY OF INDIVIDUAL / TEAM

ENERGY AVAILABLE FOR TASK AND SUCCESS

- Trusting
- Sharing
- Open-minded
- Encouraging others
- Building on others ideas

- Looking after self
- Challenging others
- Protecting own turf
- Defensive

ENERGY REQUIRED FOR EMOTIONAL SURVIVAL

Threatening   Adversarial   Neutral   Co-operative   Supportive

CLIMATE

In recent years business leaders and negotiators world-wide – and far more so in South Africa – have faced dramatic changes. It has become clear that management models of the past no longer suffice to guide us and our organisations through the challenges of our times. This does not mean we do not value the benefits and strengths of many of the approaches contained in past management models. Managers certainly still need various skills, structures and disciplines to ensure tasks are done, and are done well. However, we also need to broaden and adapt our leadership and problem-solving approaches to incorporate a wider repertoire of styles to cope with the demands and the people of the present and future.

In the past, leadership styles mostly tended to be individualistic, rational, hierarchical, competitive, strongly power- and goal-oriented, focussed, and generally *forceful and directive*. To steer organisations through changes and challenges in the environment, leaders **also** need to become more concerned about others, flexible, adaptable, intuitive, innovative, open-minded, aware of "the big picture" – more *thoughtful and responsive*

Figure 4 Leadership styles linked to climate
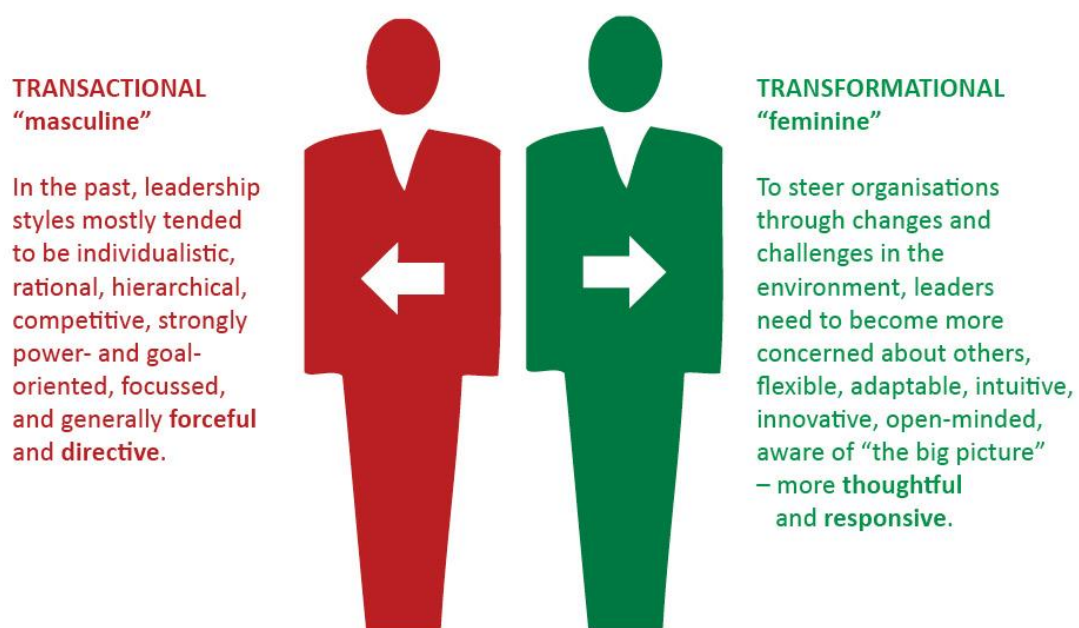
Workforces and individuals have become more diverse, and more aware of their rights. This requires the "leader as master" to also become "leader as colleague". Many "transformational" leaders have adopted a more open, egalitarian and participative style. They realise they need to be more collaborative, supportive and aware of relationships and feelings. These insights are essential if leaders want to ensure that people on all levels are committed to the long-term success of organisations. This wider spectrum of attributes and behaviours empowers both

leaders and followers to function more effectively. The positive "green behaviours" are a valuable tool to help leaders and others to move from the traditional, "transactional", hierarchical, more authoritarian "red behaviours", to establish a climate that promotes innovative planning and collaborative problem-solving.

Internationally, leaders who have achieved success in their companies and beyond, by introducing new, more participative, flexible approaches serve as examples: Richard Branson of the Virgin Group, Anita Roddick of Body Shop, and the "maverick" Brazilian entrepreneur Ricardo Semler. Exceptional political and church leaders like Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu are also examples of the power of openness and "positive behaviours" based on respect, recognition and relatedness – or "the Ubuntu culture".

How to create a supportive climate that creates trust and space for agreement

In many workgroups, people are competitive, and shoot down one another's ideas. In fact, challenging others' ideas is part of business culture in many organisations, and some believe it is the best way to "test" how good an idea is. "If you can't shoot it down, it must be a good idea". However, this often results in more energy and time going into point-scoring and protecting turf, than into problem-solving or trying to reach agreement.

A key ground rule that helps to create a supportive climate is "*Assume positive intent*". A secretary phoned us after her company's top managers had attended a strategy and conflict management workshop. "What have you done to the guys?" *"What's wrong?"* "No, what's right! They're no longer shouting at each other – they're talking to each other!" In the workshop, they had discovered new ways of relating and working together. *Assume positive intent* helps to build trust. Usually we don't know whether others mean what they say or do positively, or negatively. Unsure, particularly when we suggest new or untested ideas, if others have criticised us or our work, or if the climate is conflictual, we easily become defensive and counter-attack, shoot down the other person's next idea; or else we withdraw. Thus the relationship spirals downwards. If we assume others' intention is positive (give them the benefit of the doubt, or "turn the other cheek"), the effect on us, and thus our response, can become positive. Thus we build co-operative relationships, or an "upwards spiral". Although this may seem a bit optimistic or naïve, it is amazingly effective.

The positive behaviours are very similar to the behaviours suggested in recent decades, in terms of Emotional Intelligence, and subsequently also in terms of Social and Cultural Intelligence, as shown in Figure 5 (Goleman, 2006), and to the traditional African Ubuntu culture. These are also the behaviours prescribed (but sadly not always practised consistently) by many religions all over the world. At the same time, they link to "The Three Rs" of Respect, Recognition and Relatedness.

Green behaviours usually "bring out the best in people" because they help to build their self-confidence, engagement and a sense of belonging. Red behaviours – when needed, for example in times of crisis or under-performance - are most effective and have the most impact when they are used sparingly and fairly, and when a positive climate has been built by respectful interactions and green behaviours in everyday relationships.

Figure 5 Four Different forms of Intelligence – Linked to positive behaviours
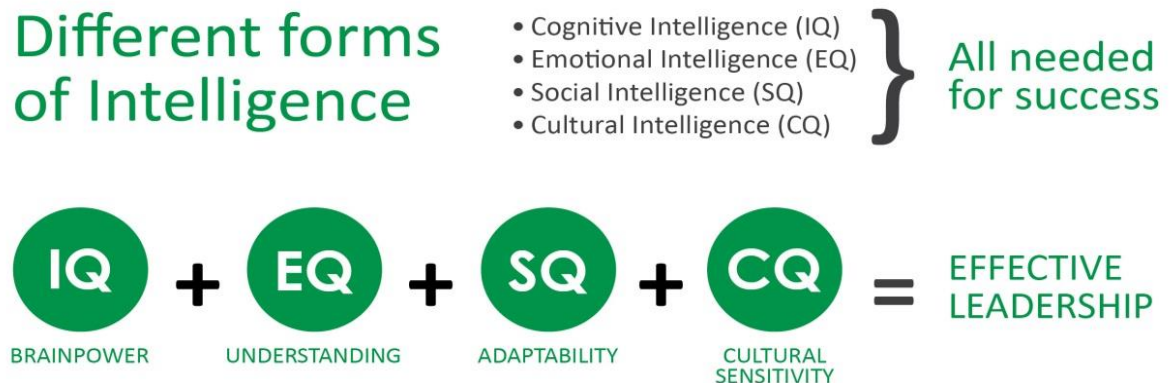
Adapted from an unpublished presentation by Lize Booysen.

Linking this to Neuroscience – and to finding shared solutions to conflict

The lasting results and effectiveness of the Synectics and SynNovation principles, process and practical tools in creating a solution-minded climate and managing conflict, can now be explained by neuroscience (Rock, 2008, 2009). Behaviours, ground rules and facilitation that create a positive climate, clarity in roles and process, a variety of fun group activities, recognition and reward of ideas, even informal seating and healthy "brainfood" provided during workshops or meetings, all enhance a positive experience or "well-being" in participants, and release positive neuro-transmitters. This encourages participants to use the positive behaviours and tools afterwards, and thus also enhances "durability" of change.

The organising principle of the brain is to minimise threats and to maximise reward. Chemical messengers – neurotransmitters – let the brain know if it is receiving "good news or bad news", and then activates specific parts of the brain. The reward response is transmitted by dopamine to stimulate the nucleus accumbens (NA).

Key neuro-transmitters include Serotonin (mood, sleep, appetite), Dopamine (DA) (interest, gratification) and Noradrenaline/Norepinephrine (NE) (alertness). Fear (real or imagined, in work or nature, life-threatening or emotional) releases NE, triggers the amygdala and induces stress. Under stress or conflict conditions serotonin and DA drop, and NE increases and stimulates the amygdala.

While feelings like fear, anxiety, and anger trigger the amygdala – the nucleus accumbens is associated with feelings of interest and gratification. However, activation of the nucleus accumbens can suppress the amygdala, and vice versa.

In many companies, or if individuals are faced with a big problem or conflict, people may experience the climate as threatening, with feelings of fear or anxiety for some, or most, of the time. In simple terms the SynNovation ground rules, used to create a positive climate, can reduce the "threat" response by reducing fears in several ways. At the same time, thinking tools and fun activities are likely to increase dopamine production to stimulate the NA, the

brain's "pleasure centre" associated with psychological well-being. The more dopamine release activates the NA, the more the amygdala is suppressed, reducing fears.

Managing fear and enhancing pleasure has an added side benefit – it ensures that the neurochemicals are at "just the right" levels for peak performance. Table 1 shows the key conditions required for effective brain functioning, with strategies that Rock (2009) proposes to manage these, and tools and principles SynNovation and Synectics use to manage these.

Table 1 Managing optimal neurochemistry for performance and problem-solving – Achieving David Rock's strategies by using SynNovation tools and principles
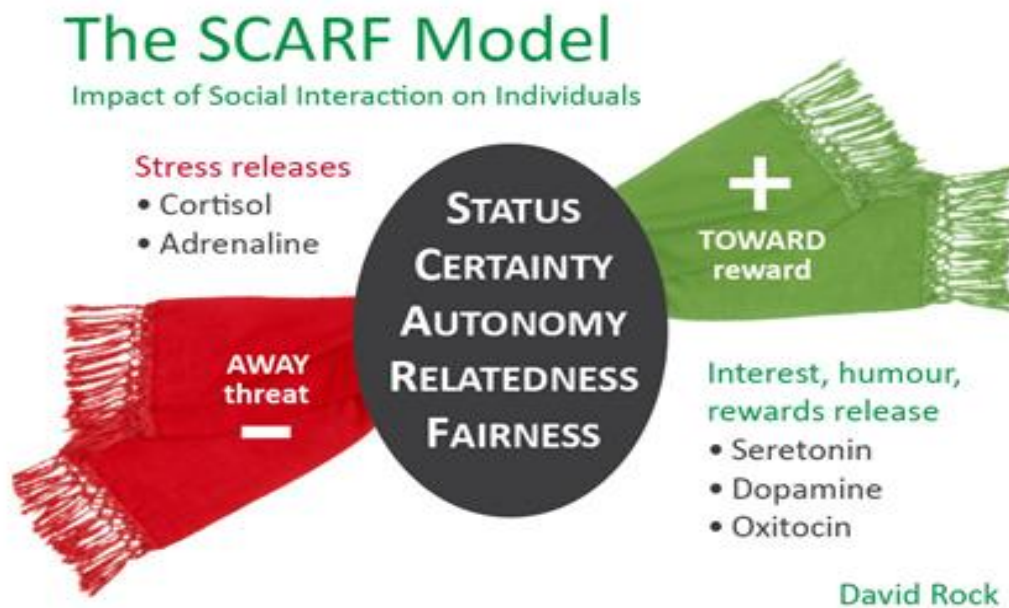
Required for effective brain functioning	David Rock strategies	SynNovation tools that help to meet requirements
Reduce ANXIETY	Reduce information in prefrontal cortex Activate other parts of brain	Structure of process Practical tools and steps All ideas are captured, verbatim All senses are involved in various "excursions" and tools
Increase ALERTNESS Noradrenaline, Norepinaphrine	Create urgency Visualise and verbalise the "scary"	Tight time limits to solve problems (10 – 60 min.) Target to generate many ideas Clear Task Statement Listening for ideas Clearly stating, and building on, ideas
Increase INTEREST, GRATIFICATION Dopamine	Novelty Humour Changing perspectives	Expectation for newness, surprise, AHA! Humour in sharing connections or triggers to thoughts, variety of triggers Walking around during "excursions" Changing roles, using different techniques

Credit: Lu-Marie Sobey

David Rock (2008), has developed the "SCARF Model", (Figure 6) in which he identified five main social dimensions that are essential for our effective functioning: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness and Fairness. If we feel these needs are met, we feel rewarded, move "toward" the situation, and our brains function well. If we feel short-changed, or threatened in terms of social interactions affecting one or more of these – the negative chemicals, emotions and behaviours come into play, and undermine our performance.

Insight into these triggers, both in ourselves and in others, is invaluable in managing our interpersonal relations, and particularly in building mutual understanding if we need to manage conflict, or find mutually acceptable solutions. If we feel threatened, "labelling" or reframing the situation by assuming positive intent and by responding positively ("turning the other cheek") is often useful. And if we can try to understand where the other party/ies come from in terms of the SCARF model, we can seek to find those concessions or gestures that may be needed to move them from negative to positive, and towards conflict resolution.

Figure 6 The Scarf Model

The SCARF Model
Impact of Social Interaction on Individuals

Stress releases
- Cortisol
- Adrenaline

STATUS
CERTAINTY
AUTONOMY
RELATEDNESS
FAIRNESS

AWAY threat −

+ TOWARD reward

Interest, humour, rewards release
- Seretonin
- Dopamine
- Oxitocin

David Rock

In summary – How can the above concepts help us in conflict resolution

Positive climate and setting to build trust, collaboration, respect for, and recognition of others' views and needs

Open-mindedness and listening to various views and possible approaches

Emotional security – perceiving possibility of reward (not threat) helps people to think more clearly, and respond constructively. Awareness of what could make others feel threatened.

Many creative options to choose from – to be generated together to allow possibility of shared ownership of eventual solutions.

Selection of one, or a combination of creative suggestions, and turning that into agreement.

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