



Neuroscience is Changing “Change”

GMD helps you understand the cutting edge of organizational thought with straightforward writing for practical application and insight.

As a leader in your business, you are tasked with solving a wide variety of issues in order to create value. It is the norm that your actions lead to some sort of ‘change’ in the organization.

Whether that change is acquisition of a major competitor, I.T. system implementation, or company right-sizing, you have an impact on people: what they see, how they interpret, how they feel, and how they act.

In this article, we will cover five insights from Neuroscience represented by the acronym: SCARF.

S.C.A.R.F.

The five areas are: Status, Control, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness. Each speaks to a part of the brain that drives Reward or Threat behavior. Being familiar with the model will allow you to engage with your team and organization in ways that will

provide the best chances for success. Bringing these aspects into your team’s conscious awareness will allow them to act broadly within a change framework, rather than seeing each challenge to the process as a separate issue.

STATUS

SCARF begins with Status. This is the importance a person attaches to himself or his position in the organization. It can be the “pecking order”, an organizational title, or a portfolio of activities that makes that person feel superior to some and subordinate to others. Threatening this perception, sometimes referred to as the “organization in the mind”, drives a very strong “Threat” response in the brain, distracting even the most dedicated and capable employees from the important

tasks toward the urgent need to protecting one’s status or world view.

GMD can help you understand how to avoid actions that drive status loss as well as enhance or maintain an employee’s personal prestige. But, suffice it to say that even a friendly, “may I give you some feedback?” to a change-reluctant employee, triggers the same level of anxiety as hearing fast footsteps behind you on a dark, rainy night.

CONTROL

The research on SCARF calls the “C” – Certainty. Based on our M&A and transition experiences we prefer using “Control”.

Control occupies a very precious place in the minds of most business leaders. As an example: imagine your boss states that you are ‘not in control of your department’. The angst this drives is intense, but it helps us see that we



have such a commitment to being in control, that we often feel we cannot give any Certainty to employees. For example: We only communicate during a change when we are absolutely sure we should; but this often occurs only as the project or initiative is being wrapped up leaving no possibility of employees being able to understand the change or anticipate the shock before it is upon them.

We would like to see managers help their causes, not by indiscriminately divulging sensitive information to employees, but by giving employees some control over aspects of the change process.

Our brains need to be able to absorb and to predict what is about to happen so that we can act coherently in the new situation.

Give as much Certainty as you can without making a Career Limiting Move (CLM) but make your change processes stronger by involving some employees in key change processes; the result will surprise you positively and lead to a more robust change.

AUTONOMY

By giving employees some sort of influence, or voice,

through a measured amount of Control, you've taken a huge step towards enhanced Autonomy. Autonomy is the sensation of being able to control your environment.

The neurological benefits of higher Autonomy have been confirmed in everything from lab rats, to dogs, to apes, and human studies.

Unfortunately, it is exactly in times of change that micro-management, lack of control, uncertainty, and dependence are most evident in organizations. GMD can help you craft the right sorts of solutions to these problems for your organization.

RELATEDNESS

This is the "friend" or "foe" aspect of the model, with a direct connection to Status. Being "in" or "out" of a group will drive neurological responses that are impossible for people to ignore, like a dripping faucet or the 'ping' of a new email on your mobile phone.

Who do I feel close to? Who is close to me? The feeling that you know how you fit into the big picture brings the issues of Status, Certainty, & Related-ness clearly into play and has a direct effect on Autonomous performance – right at the moment you need

effective execution from your people.

FAIRNESS

Humans seem to have a universal, in-built system for detecting what is fair or unfair. Violation of the parameters in our "B.S.-detectors" can increase reluctance to execute on key aspects of your change initiative, even in the event of threats or incentives.

Examples would be having different rules for "pet" employees or talking about "deeply held values" while top management is seen not to live them.

USE IT OR LOSE IT

SCARF is a mutually-supporting framework based on how our brains actually work. In many cases, you already understood much of it implicitly. Perhaps you recognize much of your own leadership style in the model.

However, making it 'explicit' brings enhanced control over the change process while increasing execution effectiveness where it counts. Let GMD help you find more depth, insights, and practical SCARF applications to your change process for enhanced value creation. ❖

Dr. Peter Gillies is a freelance organizational development consultant and owner of GMD. He employs psychological concepts to understand and enhance organizational effectiveness. Dr. Gillies is a resident of the Netherlands and actively teaches and consults across Europe.

