

SCARF

Self-Coaching Guide

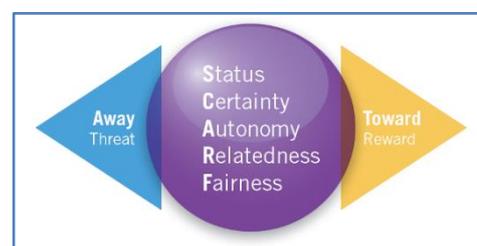
What is SCARF?

Most of us don't like 'change' or having to change some aspect of our life. However, as change is inevitable, rather than just react to change, we need to learn how to consciously handle it appropriately.

Neuroscience has revealed that, in social situations, there are several 'social domains' that activate the same threat and reward responses in our brain that we rely on for physical survival. And these responses influence our behaviour in social situations. This explains why sometimes we can have strong, emotional reactions to some situations, and why it's often hard for us to control them. These reactions are instinctive and 'hardwired in' and, unfortunately, we can't just 'switch them off'.

When we feel threatened (physically or socially) our brain releases cortisol (the 'stress hormone') which affects our creativity and productivity. We literally can't think straight, this increases our feeling of being threatened, and we 'move away' from the change – resisting it. However, when we feel rewarded (e.g. when we are praised) our brain releases dopamine (the 'happy hormone') which causes us to want more. So, we look for ways to be rewarded again and we 'move towards' the change – embracing it.

The SCARF model suggests there are five social domains that activate the brain (as shown in the diagram opposite):



1) **Status** – *our relative importance to others*

Our sense of status goes up (or down) when we feel 'better than' (or 'worse than') someone else.

2) **Certainty** – *our ability to predict the future*

We constantly try to predict the future and seek certainty by looking for patterns and relationships.

3) **Autonomy** – *our sense of control over events/environments*

We feel happier when we have a choice, and unhappy and helpless when choice is taken away from us.

4) **Relatedness** – *our sense of how safe we feel with others*

We feel better (or worse) when believe we are 'in' (or 'out') of a particular social group (friends or foes).

5) **Fairness** – *our sense of fairness in the exchanges between people*

We feel better when we believe we are treated the same as other people and not disadvantaged.

How can I handle 'change' better?

Understanding how the brain behaves helps you to (a) notice how you are reacting to a change and the trigger(s) involved, and (b) consciously choose the most appropriate action(s) in response to the change (e.g. having open and honest conversations, gaining fresh perspectives on the situation).

Also, understanding the brain can help you try to reduce perceived threats and increase feelings of reward when collaborating with others, thus helping others handle times of change much better.

Further reading:

SCARF: *a brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others* by David Rock (2008).

"Change is inevitable. Growth is optional." John Maxwell

More Information

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