Talent Acceleration Group
Executive Development & Talent Management Consulting
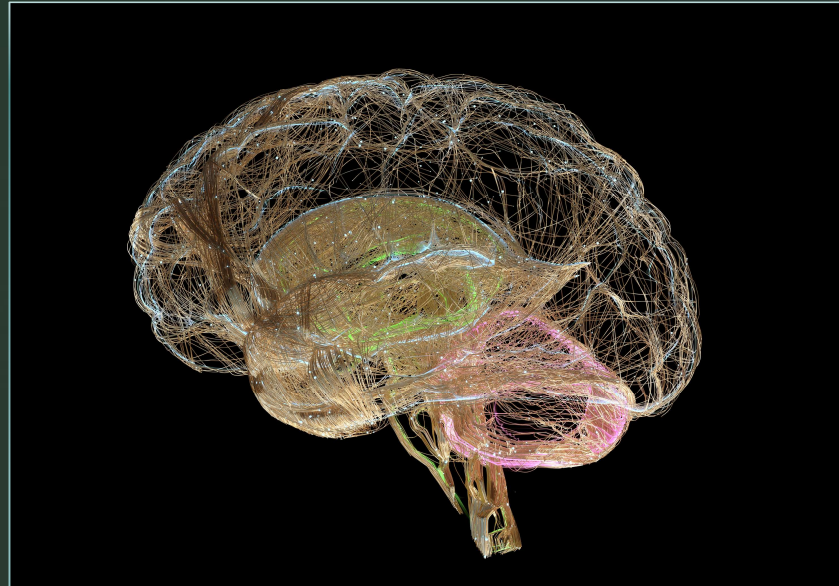
SCARF MODEL
The Impact of Perceived Threat

Understanding Human Responses to Perceived Threat

- Social interactions perceived as threats or rewards

- Our brain reacts to social threats similarly to physical threats

- Perceived Threat - Decrease trust, engagement, innovation and belonging

- Perceived Reward = Increased collaboration, engagement and innovation

What is the SCARF Model?

The SCARF model, created by David Rock (2008), explains how social experiences trigger threat or reward responses in the brain. It highlights five domains that significantly impact behavior, motivation, and collaboration in the workplace:

- **Status** – Our relative importance to others

- **Certainty** – The ability to predict the future

- **Autonomy** – The sense of control over events

- **Relatedness** – The feeling of safety with others

- **Fairness** – The perception of fair exchanges and outcomes

By understanding and managing these domains, leaders can create environments that reduce threat responses and foster trust, engagement, and innovation.

Leadership Tips for Applying SCARF

Status: Relative importance to others.

- Recognize and celebrate individual and team contributions.

- Provide opportunities for people to demonstrate their expertise.

- Offer constructive feedback in private settings.

Leadership Tips for Applying SCARF

Certainty: Ability to predict the future

- Communicate clearly and consistently, especially during change.

- Set clear expectations and provide regular updates.

- Be transparent about what is known and unknown.

- Establish clear goals and priorities.

Leadership Tips for Applying SCARF

- **Autonomy: Sense of control over events**

  - Involve employees in decision-making where possible.

  - Provide choices in how work is completed.

  - Encourage self-directed learning and growth.

Leadership Tips for Applying SCARF

Relatedness: Sense of belonging and trust

- Foster team connection through regular check-ins and team-building.

- Demonstrate empathy and active listening.

- Encourage collaboration and mentorship.

Leadership Tips for Applying SCARF

Fairness: Perception of fair treatment

- Be transparent about decision-making processes.

- Ensure consistency in policies and treatment.

- Address perceived inequities openly and constructively.

Team Exercise – Part 1

- **Small Group Discussion (10 min)**

☑ Which SCARF domains feel most important for YOU personally?
☑ What do you think our team does well?
☑ Where do you think we could do better to support safety and belonging?

- Pairs or trios (2-3 people)

- Encourage personal reflection + ideas for the team

Team Exercise – Part 2

- Read out – Each group shares 1-2 insights and suggestions for the team (avoid duplicating) (15 min)

- Close & Commit (5 min)

☑ What is one thing YOU can personally do this week to contribute to team psychological safety?

- Everyone shares 1 action aloud (round-robin or popcorn)

Personal Reflection

Step 1: Self

- Which SCARF domain(s) are most important to me?

- When do I feel most "threatened" in my work? What domain is likely triggered?

- When do I feel most "rewarded"? What domain is likely supported?

Step 2: Team

- Which SCARF domains might be most important to each team member?

- How might recent changes or events be impacting each domain for the team?

Step 3: Action Planning

- What actions can I take to reduce threats in each SCARF domain for my team?

- What actions can I take to increase rewards in each domain?

- How will I know if my actions are having the desired impact?

Final Thoughts

- Using the SCARF model helps leaders and coaches foster environments where people feel safe, valued, and motivated. By intentionally supporting the five domains, we can enhance engagement, collaboration, and performance across our organizations.