



**Head
Light**

Learning from Neuroscience to improve Performance Management

part of our We think... series

Talent **Cloud®**. Breakthrough **software**. Raise **expectations**.





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The application of Neuroscience

An interesting lecture on ‘navigating neuroscience’ by Dr Vaughan Bell of UCL highlighted a particularly entertaining trend – ‘neuroessentialism’. This is the misguided tendency for writers, advertisers or anyone presenting an argument or trying to sell something to use neuroscientific research to ‘trump’ all other kinds of research (“*it’s more true if we can somehow relate it to brain studies*”). Or using neuroscience as ‘biological proof’ for a non-biological concept.

We certainly see this at work in our own space, with neuroleadership, neuromanagement, neuromarketing and neuroeconomics being terms that have crept into our consciousness.

The SCARF Framework

Trend or no trend, one piece of work to emerge from this area that is useful is David Rock’s SCARF framework. It is a relatively simple way to understand some of the factors that influence the way we react, interact, behave and feel at work.

Dr David Rock actually coined the term ‘Neuroleadership’ and is the Director of the NeuroLeadership Institute, being recognised as a leading authority on the leadership and the brain. He developed the SCARF concept (Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, Fairness) as a way of tying together they key social domains that can provoke either a defensive mechanism in the brain (fight or flight, moving away) or a positive, reward response.

SCARF can be easily applied as a checklist to talent management practices, encouraging us to challenge ourselves on how to avoid or minimise defensive reactions and negative feelings towards processes – or to maximise engagement in them.

For instance, looking at some organisations’ recent shift away from forced rankings and numerical ratings in performance management, what might the SCARF framework tell us about the best way to shape performance management?

SCARF applied to Performance Management

Using the SCARF framework, below are some of the areas that might enable Performance Management to be viewed more positively.

Status

- Provide positive feedback and recognition to help people to understand what they contribute, how they’ve progressed, grown, developed or improved. Don’t link this to a forced, once-a-year conversation. Make sure it’s genuine.
- Provide up to date information on where people are on the achievement of goals, how they’re doing.
- Help them to understand strengths, what they’re really great at, what the company values in them.
- Set goals which clarify their role and importance to the team. Provide feedback from both colleagues and customers.

<p>Certainty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear in your expectations of people. Agree sensible goals or objectives. Set milestones, review dates. • Put dates in diaries for check in conversations so people can plan ahead more effectively and see that there is a commitment from their manager to their growth, performance and development. • Ensure everyone has a development/growth plan, and can see how that plan will either help them to be even more effective in their current role or prepare them for future roles or changes. • Enable people to plan their own career paths, and consider their future within the organisation by providing a platform where they can actively research other roles. Encourage each employee to plan for the longer-term in their development and career plans.
<p>Autonomy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow people to set their own goals and objectives (providing training or support to help them do this), rather than having goals inflicted on them by their manager. Ensure managers challenge, check and agree goals but give the initial responsibility for setting objectives to the employee. • Allow individuals to set the schedule and frequency for their reviews or performance conversations; given their working patterns and responsibilities, what makes sense for them? • Give people the opportunity to assess their own performance/ progress/behaviour – again with the manager acting as sounding board, check and challenge. • Make all documents, information about processes and supporting materials and resources readily available to employees, without them having to go to lengths to find things out. • Trust people to do what they need to do, in a way which makes sense to them.
<p>Relatedness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that managers have frequent, regular dialogue with everyone in his or her team, and increase the frequency with which people have the opportunity talk about career, development plans and progress. • Allow people to collect feedback from their peers, colleagues, customers and others. • Help people to create collaborative goals and to share expectations and objectives with the team. Using tools and processes which increase people’s awareness and understanding of the interdependencies within the team, how their work impacts on co-workers, how their efforts help others to do their jobs and how roles fit together. • Give people direct access to customers, and customer feedback. Help them to see the results of their efforts by connecting them to those that are impacted by their work. • Link some objectives to corporate projects, or CSR initiatives, as well as to the core purpose and strategic priorities of the organisation.

Fairness

- Be open, honest and transparent about the process, with an emphasis in the communication around how individuals will benefit, what's in it for them.
- Show that people are being treated equably and equitably. Ensure that some don't get masses of extra time devoted to them unless that makes sense given their role, or their performance management requirements. Be able to evidence and justify reward decisions when linked.
- Hear the voice of the employee. Involving them in the design and creation of the process.
- Give feedback and finding other ways of rewarding and recognising effort, which go beyond financial reward. Acknowledging contributions at all levels.
- Manage underperformance in a timely and constructive manner – equip managers to have those really tough conversations. Having someone in your team who is underperforming for any reason, not having that underperformance dealt with by the manager and having to pick up the slack will definitely challenge someone's perception of 'fairness'.

Vaughan Bell's point was that neuroscience may not tell us any more than other research fields or methodologies would, and that often there are more valid sources of information or evidence than brain studies.

In the case of performance management we think we could have drawn this list up without the help of SCARF, but it's a useful checklist and one with which to challenge our thinking when it comes to how we're developing our software and services.

Next steps

Why not get in touch to talk about how you could make use of such frameworks in your business.

About Head Light

Head Light is an award-winning talent management software and consulting firm that works with clients to define and implement impactful talent management strategies.

Talent Cloud® is our cloud-based portfolio of integrated talent management software tools designed for those who expect the maximum return from talent management processes. Our training and consulting services uniquely complement our breakthrough software that engages employees, managers and senior leaders in the selection, development and progression of people in their businesses.

Companies in the FTSE 350, public sector, large and small, from retailers to high tech innovators have all benefitted from our tools, techniques and expertise. Founded in 2004, we are headquartered in the UK.

Head Light has attained the ISO27001 standard for Information Security. Certificate No 217613.





How do I...

transition to Continuous Performance Management

How do I...

introduce robust Succession Planning

How do I...

spot High Potentials and Future Leaders

How do I...

drive Engagement through Career Conversations and Development

How do I...

embed new values and improve culture

How do I...

conduct Skills Assessments and a Gap Analysis

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