

Science sheet

Minimising threat and maximising reward in the brain

Threat and reward are triggered in the brain in social environments such as a workplace.

The brain registers something like 3-5 times as many threats as rewards.

A sense of threat reduces attention, creativity and increases the likelihood of stress.

Feeling threat takes up a lot of the brain's energy, reducing our willpower and ability to think logically.

People sensing threat avoid or move away from that threat, resulting in procrastination on projects and resistance to change.

People sensing reward move towards that situation or person.

A sense of reward is associated with learning, being open and engagement.

Use the CORE tool to understand threat and reward.

The CORE Model™

The CORE model as a quick and easy way to help understand and manage potential responses in yourself and in other people when influencing people, suggesting change or building a relationship. It's based on research that has identified that people experience threat or reward in four key social situations (such as are found in day-to-day office life). Understanding when a threat response might be triggered and how it could be avoided or minimised, and when a sense of reward can be created in each of these areas is essential for managing areas like change, performance management, learning – and of course communications.

Social experience can be broken down into four areas where we experience the threat or reward responses, and it's these that give the model its name:

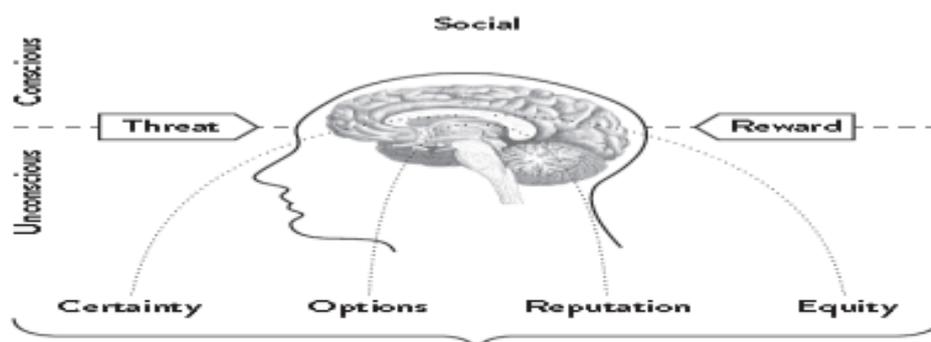
Certainty: our confidence that we know what the future holds.

Options: the extent to which we feel we have choices.

Reputation: our relative importance to others (our social ranking).

Equity: our sense of fairness.

The CORE model



The CORE elements operate at an unconscious level. Once triggered by a perceived **threat** or **reward** take the following steps:

1
Sense what has happened

2
Explore which element has been triggered

3
Take action by mitigating, compensating or removing (**threat**) or maximising or magnifying (**reward**)

These four elements can activate either the reward or threat circuits in our brains. For example, a perceived threat to our sense of equity activates similar brain networks that a physical threat would. Similarly, a perceived increase to our reputation or social standing gives us the same buzz as a monetary reward might. The reaction happens automatically and instantaneously, before we've even had a chance to consider it rationally.

Where threat and reward play out	More on this research
Check your leadership style for threat	Video -The CORE model http://www.headheartbrain.com/core-model/
Check policies for threat, and seek to increase opportunities for reward.	Video - Reactions to Change http://www.headheartbrain.com/reactions-to-change/
Negative feedback is especially threatening especially if given in public	Case study - Performance management that works, balance the power http://www.headheartbrain.com/performance-management-that-works-balance-the-power/
Praise creates a sense of reward	Case Study - Brain-savvy change http://www.headheartbrain.com/brain-savvy-change/
Learning can be rewarding especially in when it takes place in a social setting	Guide: Brain-savvy change for leaders. http://www.headheartbrain.com/developing-brain-savvy-leaders/
Giving positive feedback on progress towards a goals which matters is rewarding	Evian Gordon, <i>Integrative Neuroscience: Bringing together Biological, Psychological and Clinical Models of the Human Brain</i> , Singapore Harwood Academic Publications, 2000
Helping others achieve success creates a sense of reward so encourage volunteering, support and teamwork	Video- Evian Gordon, <i>Know your Brain</i> : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKt_toIXtAw
	Matthew Lieberman & Naomi Eisenberger, 'The Pains and Pleasures of Social Life: A Social Cognitive Neuroscience Approach', <i>NeuroLeadership Journal</i> , vol. 1, 2008