

Be SAFE & Certain

The model that explains

why teams stumble

and how you can help them soar

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Why teams need to Be SAFE & Certain

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*Our **Be SAFE & Certain** model describes six factors that lead to destructive behaviour*

The limbic system is quite effective in helping us survive

Like a high-quality instrument, a high-performing team also requires regular maintenance and tuning. Without conscious attention and adjustments, teams will default to behaviours that destroy performance. Behaviours such as: strife, conflict, competition, petty grievances, blame and revenge.

The brain automatically and unconsciously generates destructive behaviours as part of its quest for survival. When we better understand this quest, we can reduce those negative tendencies and then choose behaviours that lead to high performance.

Here, we present a model to describe how the limbic system influences individual and team behaviours – both productive and destructive. We then offer a simple way to shift from survival-based behaviours to more productive ways of being and working together.

The human limbic system evolved over millennia and is quite effective in its primary job of ensuring survival. It is itself a well-crafted instrument that is highly attuned to what goes on around us. When the limbic system perceives that something is a threat to our survival it issues a fear response, causing us to react. If it decides that something is good for survival, it encourages us to go for more of that. In this way the limbic system unconsciously but powerfully influences our behaviour.

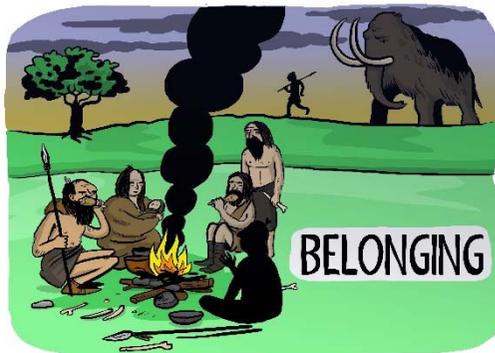
Neuroscience research shows us that the limbic system is primarily focused on social factors. We name six of these social factors in the **Be SAFE & Certain** model: Belonging, Status, Autonomy, Fairness, Expectations and Certainty.

Monitoring these factors ensured survival of humans on the savannah.

The limbic system is still using those same factors even though the modern day world is a completely different environment. This sometimes creates surprisingly strong reactions to other people or events, leading to a spiral of reactions and ultimately, breakdown.

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Limbic system factors, designed for survival on the savannah, have a different impact in the 21st century.



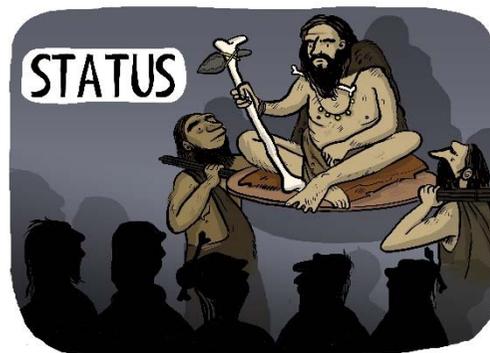
We needed to belong to a tribe to stay safe and be cared for.



A sense of belonging helps a team form and creates the foundation for collaboration.



A fear of being kicked out of the tribe will keep people from speaking an unpopular opinion, offering an innovative idea or sharing key information, e.g., that a project is not on-track.



Knowing one's place in the tribe created stability and strengthened the tribe.

When people feel relevant, special and needed they are more likely to be positive, to contribute and to recognise others' contributions.

When individuals have an unfilled need for status they may become self-focused, critical of others or "ego-driven."



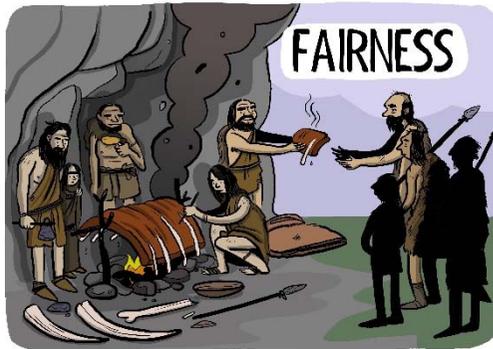
At times we needed to be able to find new ways of doing things

Autonomy allows for independent thinking and sets the stage for new ideas and innovation.

Micro-management and too many rules or restrictions can create low morale and possibly revenge.

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With a fair environment more people survived.



People appreciate being treated fairly and are more likely to be generous in their contributions when a culture is fair.



A sense of unfairness (to self or others) creates a deep-seated emotional reaction and revenge.



We needed to be able to anticipate what would happen.

Meeting expectations creates stability. Exceeding expectations creates a reward response.

When expectations are not met, people experience (sometimes very strong) disappointment and emotional pain. This often happens because people make assumptions when information is lacking.



We needed to know how to find sustenance and where danger lurked.

A sense of certainty helps people relax and trust. If their basic needs are met, they can more easily focus on tasks.

A lack of direction, vision or planning creates instability, lack of trust and discomfort. It might lead to a need in some people to over-control events and other people.

How you can help your teams be their best

To get the most out of your teams, train them to use their Prefrontal Cortex

Given its strong social nature, our brain gives us a powerful innate ability to work and create together.

But, if the limbic system is in charge, our social interactions will more likely be negative and destructive.

We need, instead, to rely on another part of the brain: **the prefrontal cortex** or **PFC**. This is the most evolved and sophisticated part of the brain. It has many functions including pointing attention, setting goals, using logic, making decisions, solving problems, seeing other's perspectives, delaying gratification and emotional regulation.

Unfortunately, the PFC is much slower than the limbic system, it burns up much more energy and it tires quickly. It is easy for the PFC to become tired and allow the limbic system to take charge.

It takes work and practice, but we can train ourselves to keep the PFC in charge more often. It can still include emotions created by the limbic system but we don't have to be run by those emotions.

Helping people to understand these different parts of the brain and training them to access their PFC sets the stage for a collaborative team culture.

Tips for helping teams be their best:

Reduce limbic reactions by **Being SAFE & Certain** as much as possible: Reduce potential threats to people's belonging, ensure their status is intact, allow some autonomy, be fair, communicate well so people set realistic expectations and create as much certainty as possible.

Teach teams to tap into their PFC and use mindfulness - see the **ABC** steps on the next page.

Once a team is adept at using their PFCs together, they will have more stability to work through conflict or disagreements. The creative process will no longer be stopped by fear of conflict or fear of judgement.

Invite diverse viewpoints and create from differences rather than trying to find common ground. If people are able to stay in their PFC, they can more easily entertain paradoxes and consider new thinking that might lead to new innovative solutions.

Positivity, appreciation and gratitude are also helpful in teams that co-create well together. These can generate oxytocin and build strong bonds between team members, building more trust and openness.

ABC - for mindfulness



AWARENESS

Awareness - become aware of our own reactions, adrenaline and stress chemicals. Just by taking a moment or two to be aware of what is happening in the brain and body will begin to reduce the impact of the limbic system's reactions.

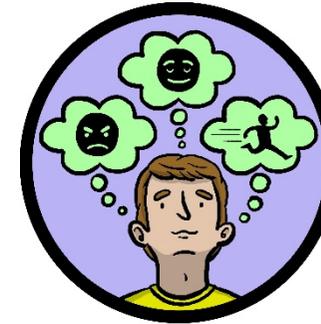
This is the beginning of a mindful state. A focus on breathing will also help to strengthen mindfulness.



BREATHE

Breathe – breathe and relax the body to flush out stress chemicals and return to a balanced, neutral state. Then we can more easily observe events from a non-judgemental and more objective perspective.

Mindfulness is being able to be aware of one's own thoughts and stepping out of judgements of right/wrong and good/bad – at least for a moment.



CHOOSE

Choose – Once we know how to recover from reactions, we have a choice about how we respond to others:

We can respond EITHER from a limbic, reactive state OR from the PFC which is better able to reason, to see the whole picture, to embrace paradox, to delay gratification and to have empathy for others.

We can also choose to practise mindfulness. The more we experience this state, the more we are able to access it in the moment.