

ISSN 0302-9298

Contemporary SOCIAL SCIENCES

Global Impact Factor : 0.765; General Impact Factor : 2.495
Index Copernicus ICV : 62.45; NAAS Rating : 2.88; InfoBase Index : 3.64

Founder
S. S. Shashi

Chief Editor
Dharam Vir

Volume 29, Number 1 (January-March), 2020



Research Foundation International, New Delhi

Affiliated to United Nations Organization (UNO)

(Autonomous, Regd. Recognized Charitable Organization of
Social Scientists, Authors, Journalists & Social Activists)

Contemporary Social Sciences

Double-blind Reviewed, Indexed & Refereed Quarterly International Journal

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Contemporary Social Sciences (CSS) is a quarterly peer reviewed & refereed international journal published since 1972 under the auspicious of Research Foundation (an autonomous, registered (1972), recognized charitable organization of social scientists, authors, journalists and social activists). The journal is published regularly in the months of March, June, September and December. The annual subscription is ₹ 2000 in India and US \$ 80 abroad, including postage by Registered Post/Airmail. All the subscriptions must be prepaid in favour of M/S Saksham Computers, payable at Meerut.

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ISSN 0302-9298; DOI : 10.29070/CSS

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Journal of National Development

Aims and Scope

The Journal of National Development (JND) is an interdisciplinary bi-annual peer reviewed & refereed international journal committed to the ideals of a 'world community' and 'universal brotherhood'. The Journal is a joint effort of like-minded scholars in the field of social research. Its specific aims are to identify, to understand and to help the process of nation-building within the framework of a 'world community' and enhance research across the social sciences (Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, Psychology, History, Geography, Education, Economics, Law, Communication, Linguistics) and related disciplines like all streams of Home Science, Management, Computer Science, Commerce as well as others like Food Technology, Agricultural Technology, Information Technology, Environmental Science, Dairy Science etc. having social focus/implications. It focuses on issues that are global and on local problems and policies that have international implications. By providing a forum for discussion on important issues with a global perspective, the *JND* is a part of unfolding world wide struggle for establishing a just and peaceful world order. Thus, the *JND* becomes a point of confluence for the rivulets from various disciplines to form a mighty mainstream gushing towards the formulation and propagation of a humanistic world- view.

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Subscription and Business Correspondence GIF : 2.8186

The annual subscription is ₹ 1500 in India and US\$ 80 abroad, including postage by Speed-Post/Airmail. Special issue in Hindi is free with annual subscription. All the subscriptions must be prepaid in favour of *The Journal of National Development*, payable at Meerut.

ISSN 0972-8309; GIF : 0.842; NAAS Rating : 3.12; IBI FACTOR : 3.46

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The Neuroscience of Employee Engagement

*Richa Vats** and *S. K. Sharma***

Employee Engagement has gained a significant importance in the past years. Organization use engaged employees as a tool for strategic collaborator in the business. This study explores how neuroscience can be applied to employees brains, in the form of procedures, small actions that can optimistically improve engagement at the workplace. This study will also through light on how leaders can enlighten about processes involved with their own leadership, but also about the minds of their employees. In terms of neuroscience, there are threats and reward domains that emphasize the workplace behaviour are activated in the brain. Director of the Neuroleadership Institute, David Rock's SCARF model describes these domains as: status - our relative importance to others; certainty - our ability to predict what lies ahead; autonomy - a sense of control over events; relatedness - a sense of connectedness and safety with others; and fairness - a perception of fair exchanges between people. High levels of engagement occur when people experience rewards from all five of these domains, but they become disengaged when experiencing high levels of threats.

[**Keywords** : Organization, Threats, Rewards, Behaviour]

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CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCES, Vol. 29, No. 1 (January-March), 2020

1. Introduction

Employee engagement can be a constant struggle for many leaders. They need to be thinking of new behavior to keep employees engaged in order to boost job satisfaction, efficiency, and employee maintenance. One of the growing factors in employee engagement is neuroscience.

Neuroscience, the study of the nervous system, can enlighten leaders about processes involved with their own leadership, but also about the minds of their employees. Since the brain is plastic, it is always adjusting and adapting based on the surroundings. When managers create supportive and collaborative environments, the brains of employees can process the information easier, leading to more effective change. But if the brains of employees perceive things as threats than the ease, enthusiasm, and contentment decrease.

By knowing more about the brain, one can learn to limit fear. Often, those fears or threats can come from the normal business practices of judgment, opinion, and assessment. Because of the lasting negative impacts threats have on our brains, one can also have to learn to decrease the amount of pressure in the workplace; in order improve employee engagement and motivation.

According to a recent study by the Hay group, employee engagement is on the rise worldwide. More and more employees are stating that they intend to stay with their current employers and that they find their work significant and tricky. This is good news for the international economy, since several studies point to the economic advantages of engaged, dedicated employees. The likelihood of an individual's "intent to stay" increases with age, indicating that some kind of development is taking place to enhance the level of engagement.

While professionals long have known that levers like reward and appreciation have a direct effect on engagement, neuroscience now gives us an understanding of why and how these levers work. It's a complicated dance between our brain's reward and threat response systems.

In a recent study by Queen School of Business and Gallup Organization, it was found that organizations with low engagement scores experienced 18% drop in productivity, 16% lower profitability, 37% reduction in job growth and 65% lower share

prices. Engaged employees have a significant effect on the functioning and the success of a company.

Strong engagement is defined by a few psychological factors like feeling connected with colleagues, rewards, feeling of being a significant contributor and a sharp learning curve. David Rock, Director at NeuroLeadership Institute, also shared how neuroscience helps to understand, what makes our brain perform at its best and how this information can be effectively leveraged to increase engagement, thereby increasing profitability and business growth for companies.

2. Neurological Factors that affect Employee Engagement

2.1 Leadership and Business Tactics

The capability of top management to give a clear understanding of an employee's contribution to the organizational goals is the prime requirement to improve engagement. Organizations must have a tale to express which talks about how every employee is contributing towards their accomplishment and make the contribution noticeable to the extent of business growth. It provides an employee with a sense of being precious and making a difference to the business they are working for.

2.2 Mentoring

Mostly employees agree that engaged managers who enthusiastically contribute in their usual task, make sure that every employee feels a part of the team and provide effective communication and feedback, which drives more job happiness and efficiency.

2.3 Trust and Veracity

All organizations have a vision and mission statement which talks about core values that must be followed and assimilate into the company culture. However, many of them fail to bring it into practice within the organizations and they remain a carved part of a wall which is usually ignored. The values an organization talks about and preaches must boom with what an employee experiences on a day to day basis. Our brains energetically sense activities, supporting deviating values and this can create ambiguity and lack of faith towards an organization.

2.4 Right to Voice Opinion

A research from Harvard says that employees feel less worried in a culture which promotes comprehensiveness and motivates its employees to speak up or ask for help, primary to better performance and knowledge.

These factors play a major role in increasing performance at the workplace and creating positive attitude towards employer and organization.

3. Leveraging Neuroscience for Better Employee Engagement

A positive workplace environment plays a vital role in ensuring effective engagement. To progress employee engagement effectively, one must act on the neurological factors which have an elevated impact on employees. Here are four action items that leadership teams & managers can adopt for higher engagement.

3.1 Evade Threat

One of the quickest triggers to the brain is when it senses a threat. At the workplace, this is caused by lack of continuous feedback. In organizations which have infrequent feedbacks systems like annual reviews, feedback is received by the brain as an attack and it naturally draws up defence strategies to avoid the threat. Hence, most leaders in employee engagement and recognition believe that uninterrupted feedback and listening enables these reviews to be guiding machinery for employees to work upon rather than making them feel undervalued and become defensive. When brain feels in jeopardy, it closes itself to ideas and employees can begin to see the workplace as a more unfriendly environment.

3.2 Rewards and Recognitions

The Human brain is wired to be motivated when it sees rewards and incentives as a result of any task. As revealed in surveys also, that pay raise is considered as the most important form of appreciation. An international report revealed better levels of employee engagement, preservation and efficiency by adopting rewards and appreciation strategies.

3.3 Assurance

The mind often doubts the unknown. This is also reflected in an employee's focus on his work. If the brain feels susceptible by

uncertainties, it becomes highly vigilant and makes a person feel less protected and attentive. Here, the clarity provided by the leadership in terms of individual and organizational goals and expectations helps employees to be more secure and comfortable about their jobs and coere better engagement.

3.4 Societal Associations and Comprehensiveness

Humans are wired to feel associated both in individual and professional space. At the workplace, we are continuously trying to be a part of a squad and feel linked to our manager and the organization. Approval and acknowledgment in a social circle are one of the main motivational drivers for the brain.

Continuous engagement depends on an employee's capability to be at their innovative best, work as a part of the group and his involvement towards effective problem-solving.

4. The SCARF Model

Dr. David Rock is a neuroscientist who has formed a model for improving the relationship between leaders and employees. He calls this model SCARF. This model stems from research that states the brain is always trying to lessen threats and maximize rewards. The model is based on neuroscience research that implies that these five social domains activate the same threat and reward responses in our brain that we rely on for physical survival.

Feeling threatened blocks our creativity, reduces our ability to solve problems, and makes it harder for us to communicate and collaborate with others. But, when we feel rewarded, our self-confidence increases, we feel empowered, and we want to do a good job.

The SCARF Model can help us to minimize perceived threats, and to maximize the positive feelings generated through reward when working alongside others.

Dr. Rock uses the SCARF acronym to explain these social forces.

S - Status

C - Certainty

A - Autonomy

R - Relatedness

F - Fairness

Status : When people feel vague of their social position or feel they are being evaluated, the brain interprets that environment as a threat. This threat is treated the same as a physical threat. In order to be safe, the brain has mechanisms that help us clash or run from the threat. In the case of social threats, sometimes those may not be an option, but our brains stay on high alert, making it difficult to focus on other things until the threat is gone.

As a leader, one can work to create an environment where it is not perceived as a threat. Start by allowing employees to evaluate themselves and gain insights into their behaviors. Encourage change to come from the employee rather than from the leader. This way, one can decrease the threat level but also improve the engagement the employee has with company and their personal growth.

Certainty : The brain has developed to be aware of threats. Some people are more sensitive to threats than others, but everyone is able to recognize threats to some degree. The indefinite can often be worse than being able to see the threat. Not knowing what will happen next increases the awareness of threats and puts the brain on high alert, making a person feel less safe and less focused on tasks.

Offer more certainty by working in order to increase communication with staff. Be clear in communication and state expectations, goals, and other information that makes it evident that one feels confident and relaxed. When employees feel protected and certain in their jobs and in their workplace, they will be more engaged in their work.

Autonomy : Usually with any kind of change comes a choice. We have to think about when we react and how we react. Without this choice, the change (or threat) becomes even more powerful and overwhelming. It can stop us from being able to move forward and leave us unmotivated and feeling hopeless.

Make employees aware that they have choices and that they have some control over their jobs. One should limit minimal interference in an employee's daily tasks. The members should be trusted to do their work without anyone constantly checking on them. This is a perfect way one can improve employee engagement using neuroscience.

Relatedness : People relate to one another in various ways, but often they view others as reliable and friendly if they feel the other person seems similar to them in some way. Often people have ways

that protect them from the threat of someone new or different. These defenses can block out the things that others say or do when they are not perceived as a member of the group.

Relationship building is a vital part of a dynamic team. One should look ways to connect to employees and for employees to connect with each other. When everyone in a work environment is viewed as friendly, then the brain's threat alert system is lowered, allowing people to feel more in sync with the team and with their work.

Fairness : Our brains can be very sensitive to fairness and we are usually responsive of and react strongly to situations that we feel are unjust. These threats and the reactions to them can often be emotionally charged, possibly leading to annoyance and resentment.

To improve a sense of fairness, try to be conscious of how you interact with all employees. One should not show any sign of discrimination or unique behavior. One should be transparent in all decision making processes. When fairness is at wager, address the issue at hand immediately so that there can be some understanding of why things occurred.

The SCARF model uses a very basic aspect of human reality, threat and security. We may not think about these two things on a minute to minute basis, but our brains are always reacting in ways that relate to the pathways that were created in our ancestral pasts.

As leaders or employees, we can probably all think of ways in which something we were affected by could have been looked at as our brains raising the threat alarm. With this in mind, we can learn to be more engaged leaders and employees on a brain-based level.

5. Conclusion

Neuroscience helps us to understand what enables our brains to perform at their best and provides a scientific lens through which to see engagement. It is proving very influential with even the most skeptical leaders.

Constant success depends on employees' ability to think at their finest, collaborate and innovate. Neuroscience, the study of the nervous system including the brain, is still in its infancy.

What is particularly interesting for organizational leaders is that we can apply learning from neuroscience to the workplace. It provides the insights into what helps our brains to work at their best.

It also demonstrates that improving employee engagement doesn't have to be difficult - many little procedures can put our brains into an optimistic shape.

Creating a brain-friendly workplace does not have to be complex but it does need attentiveness of what helps the brain and what hinders. We pay far too little attention to our brains' need to be connected socially. Small actions can make a big difference to our brains. If every leader and every manager understand what our brains wishes to perform at their best at work, what a difference this would make to their understanding of employee engagement.

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