


How to keep our brains at ease in a brave, new world

*Neuroscience 101
for HR Professionals*



Our brain knows we are safe when our experience is:

- *Predictable*
- *Familiar*
- *Repetitive*
- *Socially connected*



We are trailblazing a new frontier of organisational life and while technology is racing on, our brains change much more slowly.

Our brain's basic operating system is hundreds of thousands of years old.

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The next ten years will bring
continuous and unimaginable change.



In 2's or 3's...

What is happening in your organisation, or is intended to happen in the coming months, that might register as a 'threat' (*unpredictable, not routine, requires new ways of working, etc.*) to your colleagues' brains?

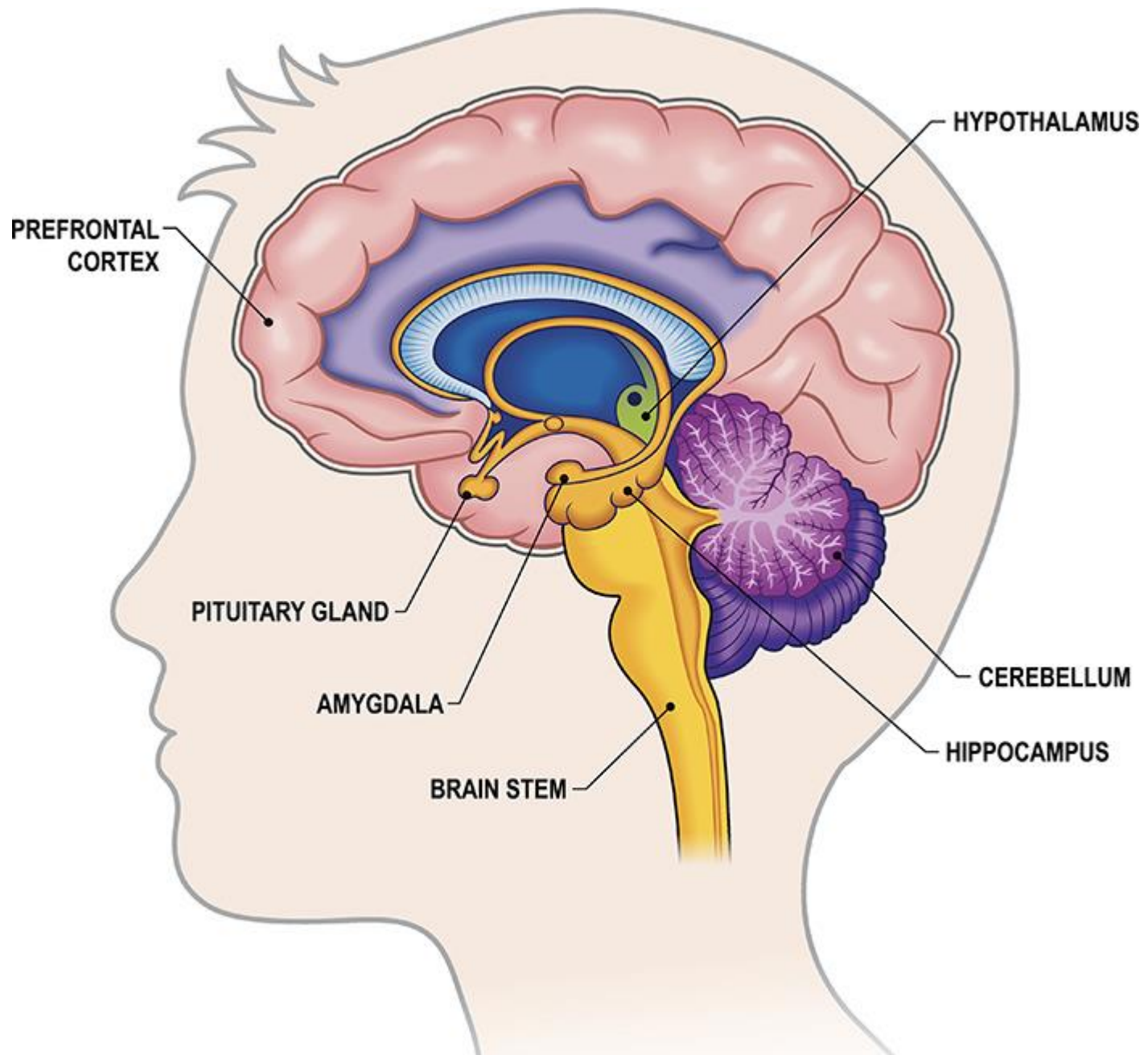
Feel good, does good...

Research has shown that happiness (*feeling at ease*) has a very important evolutionary purpose – **Barbara Frederickson** calls it ‘broaden and build theory’.

Instead of narrowing our actions down to fight or flight, as ‘warning’ emotions do, positive emotions broaden the number of possibilities we process, making us more thoughtful and creative, and open to new ideas.

Positive emotions produce dopamine and serotonin, which not only makes us feel good, but amp up the learning centres of our brains – ***helping us organise, store and access information faster; increases our skills for analysis, complex problem solving and invention, and more interested in one another.***

A business case for attending to how people *feel* at work!




What does neuroscience say?

- Our brain's negativity bias has served us well – so *work in ways that honour it.*
- Information, certainty, and predictability reduce our sense of threat -*this is what you can expect, here is the date, this is how it will happen, this is what **you** can do...*
- ‘Neurons that fire together wire together’ – neuroplasticity enables our brains to change and grow. Offer opportunities for practice, rehearsal, repetition.

Change vs. Transition

- *Change* is external
- *Transition* is internal/psychological - and can take longer for some people than others

It is the transition period that requires our attention and support, in order that real change can happen.
Reduce threat and increase awareness of, and focus on, anticipated rewards.




Our related past-experience will be a major influence on our perception of the threat and its degree of seriousness.

Remember, our brains are always trying to conserve energy, and it takes more energy to fully understand the present than to make assumptions based on the past.

Expectations colour how we see, understand and experience the world around us.

William Bridges Transition Theory

- Ending
- Transition Zone (*the wilderness*)
- New beginning



Much of what is termed *resistance to change* is the struggle people have, individually and collectively, with reorganizing their sense of identity, meaning, values, and sense of possibilities.

They're not resistant. They're struggling with an inner journey.

- Eric Klein, *Resistance Free Change*

It is okay to acknowledge *this is tough*

Encourage people to reflect on times when things at work have been tough, maybe other significant changes that have happened.

What was helpful/supportive for them...helped them arrive at the 'new beginning'?

What do they know about their own *resilience engine*?

What do you need?

- From the organisation/your manager?
- From your team?
- What do you need to do for yourself?

Neuroscience tells us

- Remember that emotions are 'contagious' - *put your own oxygen mask on first.*
- Don't miss the good stuff!
- Don't start your day with email – start with your own 'to do' list.
- Schedule tasks in relation to what you know about managing your energy – when are you at your best/*in flow?*

- Block out thinking time – especially when important decisions need to be made.
- Keep your blood sugar in balance
- Get enough sleep, take a nap (*breaks are good, but your brain is still active rather than re-booting!*)
- Move your body, breathe
- Focus on being *productive*, rather than active

Tuning-in to what we can control

C - what is within my **control**?

I – what am I able to **influence**?

A - what must I simply **accept**?



Interesting Reading

Neuroscience for Organizational Change

Hilary Scarlett, Kogan Page 2019

Alive at Work

Daniel M. Cable, HBR Press 2018

The Happiness Advantage

Shawn Achor, Crown Business 2010

Primal Leadership (HBR article) by Daniel Goleman

What Lies Beneath: How Organisations Really Work

Ajit Menon and Trevor Hough, Karnac 2021

[Into the Unsaid](#)

https://open.spotify.com/episode/4rV35xdmIM1OnUeTSvSZJN?si=Kwx8sQ4iQrqJyffLriegBw&dl_branch=1

<https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/faculty-profile/barbara-l-fredrickson-phd>

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