Managing conversations that we find challenging

This workshop was prepared

by Shirley Duckett

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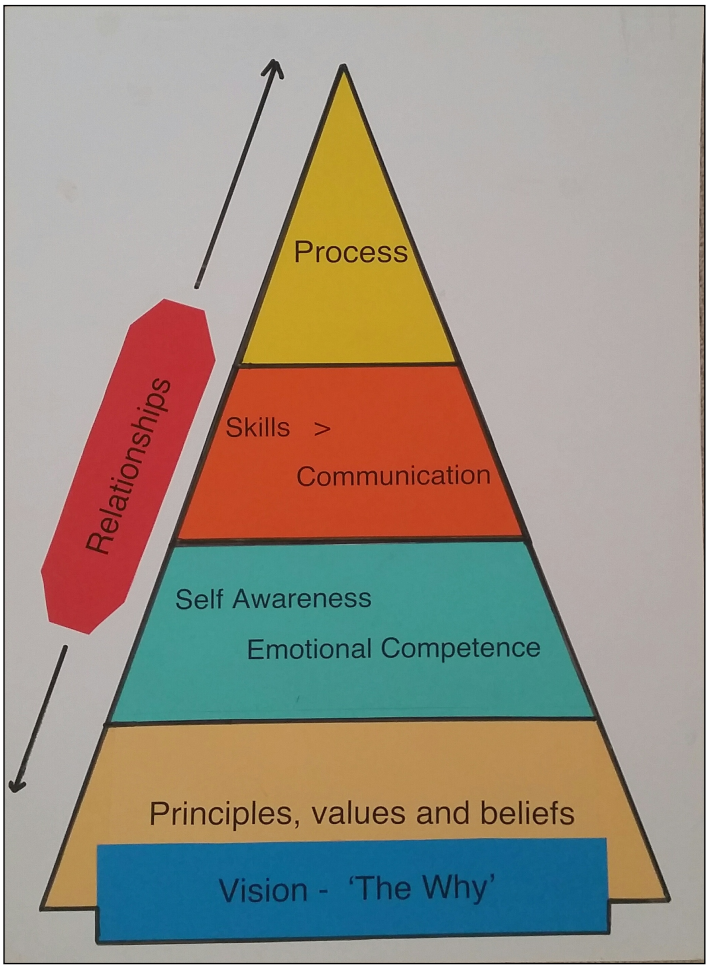
Quality communication is needed in all relationships. This is fundamental to our work with clients and with staff. There are times when we need to raise issues that might be challenging for everyone. In potentially emotionally charged or tricky situations enhanced skills and strategies are needed. This workshop will consider:

- 'Pyramid of Skills' for leaders
- A brief overview of the neuroscience research on leadership and change and its usefulness to guide management practices
- Application of the SCARF model
- A framework / process for holding conversations that might challenge

Pyramid of Skills for Leaders



References for

'The Why' Simon Sinek (2009) *How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* www.startwiththewhy.com

'Emotional Competence' Taken from Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Training, Cornell University

Managing with the Brain in Mind

(*Managing with the Brain in Mind* David Rock)

Neuroscience

…" the fundamental organising principle of the brain is to

minimise danger and maximise reward." (Evian Gordon)

The human brain is a **social organ**. Social interactions are important.

There is a strong **social component** to workplace performance.

The ***threat and reward*** response - neurological mechanism that governs human behaviour.

When leaders trigger a threat response the employee's brain becomes much less efficient.

SCARF - five qualities

- ***Status*** (Significance) - our relative importance to other people within the social domain we are operating in.
- ***Certainty*** – our ability to predict accurately what is about to happen.
- ***Autonomy*** – our perception of our sense of control over events, the importance of giving choices
- ***Relatedness*** – our perception of safety and connectedness with those around us
- ***Fairness*** *(*Equity*)* – the perception of a fair deal, a fair exchange

Reducing the threats – How do we apply this in our work?

- **Share information** particularly during times of restructuring.
- Give staff some scope to **make as many of their own decisions** as possible.
- **Inclusive planning processes** can prevent unconscious sabotage that results when people feel they have played no part in a change that affects them every day.
- Address perceived **threats to fairness.**
- **Status** can be enhanced by giving the employee greater scope to plan their schedule or the chance to **develop meaningful relationships** with those at different levels in the organization.
- Engagement can be induced when people working toward objectives feel **rewarded** by their efforts, with a manageable level of threat.
- As a leader, the more practiced you are at reading yourself, the more effective you will be. When a leader is **self aware**, it gives others a feeling of safety even in uncertain times.
- Focus upon creating an environment of **self assessment.**

	Threat activators	Reward activators
Status	Title, formal power, belittling	Acknowledge, find strengths, appreciate
Certainty	Constantly changing the goal posts and having unclear expectations	Clear roles, timing, agenda
Autonomy	You should, if I were you….	A perceived level of choice
Relatedness	Social exclusion, not looking at a person when addressing a team	Connecting, checking in, spending time with people
Fairness	Unequal treatment, reward structures that seem to favour particular people	Share work equally, check for fairness

(Referenced from Coursework – Dip. of Neuroscience of Leadership – *Neurocapability*]

The challenges to facilitating sustainable change

Challenges

- We are biologically programmed to resist change.
- Our natural tendency is to first see everything as a threat
- We are pessimists rather than optimists around change
- Change requires effort and self control – this can be very tiring.
- Generally people feel change is imposed upon them from above or outside – past experience often is that they have had no say in the change or the process and negative memories may heighten their sense of insecurity and powerlessness (domains identified in SCARF model).
- Change is often expected to be achieved very quickly.
- Individual biases can get in the way – influenced by past experience and the value attributed to the change.

What processes will assist to address these challenges:

- **Create safety** for participants going through the change ('toward state')
- **Start small** and build momentum from there. Provide direction and hold conversations that give good information (small chunks) being clear about the known and the unknown (Circle of Certainty)
- **Identify the reward** that will make this worth the risk
- **Be clear about the process** and ensure that people have a **sense of participation** and ownership of the process.
- **Well planned conversations** will help to set direction, build commitment, create alignment, invite people to think about the future for themselves and feedback the impact for them.
- Providing a clear context for the conversation, engaging through **skilful questions which increases status and autonomy** and being solution focused.
- The **importance of creating insight** is noted in that with insight the brain changes. New networks are created. There is an increase in status and reward which leads to an increase in dopamine and a release of energy.
- **Managing emotions** – for the facilitators of the change and the participants – Create support systems for those facilitating the change so that they have opportunity to reflect on the process and on their feelings / reactions to raised emotions and any resistance that they experience. Facilitating a change process takes a lot of energy – self care for the facilitators (attending to sleep, exercise, diet and quiet time.) Where the change process is a long one – how will the facilitator be sustained to provide the best that they can?

The implications of neuroplasticity

- Firstly provide a **positive emotional context**
- **Build social connections** through opportunities to talk about the move, listen to people's perceptions of their experience and their feelings / worries about the new work group. This will help dampen limbic reactions and enable the prefrontal cortex to do its job in attending to new information around different work place practices.
- **Skilful questions** may also promote opportunities for developing insight around reactions to the move and opportunities in the future. Providing emotional support and the opportunity for 'aha moments' reinforce sustained attention and create a space for learning and change.
- **Seek feedback and input** giving new staff a greater sense of ownership of their transition into this new workplace.
- New information is more likely to be taken on board and new neural pathways developed when threats and **emotions are calmed**.

Brain friendly change checklist:

Starting with the '*why'* – the *purpose* – being clear about why we do what we do and want to do in the future and communicating this often, consistently and 'living this' in our actions and conversations

Creating a change team responsible for planning, noticing and monitoring change and using reflective feedback around the process

- Progressing change as the sole facilitator can have its risks including isolation and draining resources and personal motivation. There may also be concerns around individual bias, the false consensus effect (false assumptions)

- Using *reflective questions* for the team draws on the teams collective experience and input helping to ensure processes are consistent with brain friendly practice and the team provide support and share strategies should resistance be experienced.

The importance of *relationship* - for building trust, safety, creating the emotional environment that sets the scene for learning and behavioural change and also the context for creativity, risk taking and reflection for when things work out well and do not work out.

Knowing the work group as ***individuals*** and remembering that no two brains are alike will ensure individual differences are considered in our processes.

Acknowledgement*:* Linda Ray of *Neurocapability* (www.neurocapability.com.au)
Dip of Neuroscience of Leadership Program and on YouTube

References and further reading / YouTube Clips / TEDx Talks :

David Rock
- *Your Brain at Work (2009)* D. Rock.
- Article*: Managing with the Brain in Mind* www.oxfordleadership.com
- YouTube and TEDx Talks *SCARF Model – Influencing Others* with Dr. David Rock

Simon Sinek
- Simon Sinek (2009) *How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*
- www.startwiththewhy.com
- YouTube Clips *Start with the Why*

Martin Lieberman
- Article*: The brain's braking system* (*and how to 'use your words' to tap into it*). M. Lieberman 2009. www.scn.ucla.edu/pdf/leadership

The Circle of Certainty www.linksuccess.com

Australian Community Management – www. com-management.org

The challenging conversations - a process

A process for when it can be difficult to say what I feel needs to be said…..

Plan the discussion - Be clear

- What information / knowledge am I using? e.g. observations, information
- What am I worried about? What are the issues to be addressed?
- Who do I talk to about this situation? Check relevant policies, procedures, guidelines, roles, authority etc. Depending upon the issue - discuss with senior colleague if appropriate
- Has this matter been raised before? If so, what was the outcome?
- What information / resources do I need for this discussion?

Prepare for the discussion – Be 'clean'

- Check the person's situation - personal energies / challenges
- What is the person doing well? Use the opportunity to recognise and affirm
- What are the concerns?
- What assistance do they need?
- How are they likely to respond?
- What are my expectations?
- From previous experience with this person what approach works well?
- Check myself - my knowledge, skills, attitudes, perceptions, potential for bias
- Ensure appropriate venue (privacy) and time

Conduct the discussion - Open, honest, respectful, transparent

- Explain of the purpose and process of the interview (This may include grievance procedures).
- Describe in detail what concerns my and why – with actual examples.
- Where appropriate, refer to relevant policies, procedures, previous discussions or agreements made.
- Invite a response to the concerns raised. Actively listen - avoid judgement, clarify facts.
- Acknowledge what the person is doing well, their strengths and contributions.
- Ask for suggestions to address the concerns. Be prepared to assist in finding a solution.
- Develop a plan and the responsibilities of all parties.
- Finish by creating a sense of hope.

Follow up - Celebrate success

- Record a summary of the discussion where appropriate
- Follow through and make sure any agreed actions take place.
- Monitor future interactions particularly if issues have been raised
- Ensure change is noticed

Reflect on the discussion

- Take a little time at the end to review how it went.
- What did I want to get out of this discussion? Did I achieve that?
- What else did I achieve?
- What could I have done differently?
- What will I do next time?
- Are any feelings being held? Can these be resolved?