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Dead projects cast long shadows, argue **Paul Brown** and **Brenda Hales**. This two-part series examines the place of fear and trust in coaching, particularly within complex project management settings.

Part 2: Drawing on applied neurosciences to help leaders work with organisational complexity

DARK DESTROYER

Those who coach individuals in complex project settings often face the mutual antagonists of the emotional energising system all the time: fear puts the brakes on, while trust is the accelerator.

Brain-based systemic coaches need to understand the emotional energising system and organisational systems, and find ways to work effectively with both, understanding how networks in the brain are expressed in networked behaviours.

We explore these systems in this article and examine one instrument to help coaches work with both.

Emotions

We've seen how the attachment emotions will risk the unknown while the survival emotions stay with the known. Though he did not have the advantage of a

neurologically based understanding of the emotions, this is very close to what Argyris (1980) observed in his formulation of single- and double-loop learning when he explored why change in organisations (and individuals) was such a difficult thing to accomplish. We've also seen how a great deal of observable energy can be used up by the survival emotions.

'Learning lessons' that become blaming exercises or fault-finding, and result in excessive, inflexible mandatory processes in order to prevent re-occurrences of past failures, fail to distinguish effectively between actions that are the output of a self-

regulating adaptive system freely engaged with the organisation's goals (the limbic contract) and those simply meeting fear-driven demands.

This is neither good for an organisation's capacity to respond to the shifting demands of complex projects and the wider external environment nor, and perhaps more importantly, is it good for the individual.

Trust

Secure attachment data tells us trust is fundamental to human wellbeing and life effectiveness (Mischel et al, 1989). Might it not be fundamental to corporate life too, we wondered.

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In 2010, PricewaterhouseCoopers published two reports, *Trust, the Overlooked Asset* and *Trust, the Behavioural Challenge*. Despite concerns about a startling lack of understanding concerning neurosciences and human behaviour, and the apparent reduction of trust to a transactional process (like relationships, in 'relationship manager'), we were interested to note that a significant international consultancy was beginning to consider and promote the topic.

Another consultancy is also trying to establish its own brand in the interpersonal trust field, promoting the idea of "building trust in leadership" for which "there is a solution: intimacy" (PA Consulting Group, 2011).

These superficial understandings of the nature of trust should give all brain-based coaches deep cause for concern that an emerging science is to be misused before it has had a chance to flourish.

Steare (2006), though, has applied good social science to this field in his work developing the concept of 'ethicability' to track behaviours that appear deeply based (emotionally powered) within individual value systems.

With our own perspective and an awareness of a developing commercial focus on matters connected with the concept of trust, we are using the attachment emotions to explore with our clients what the

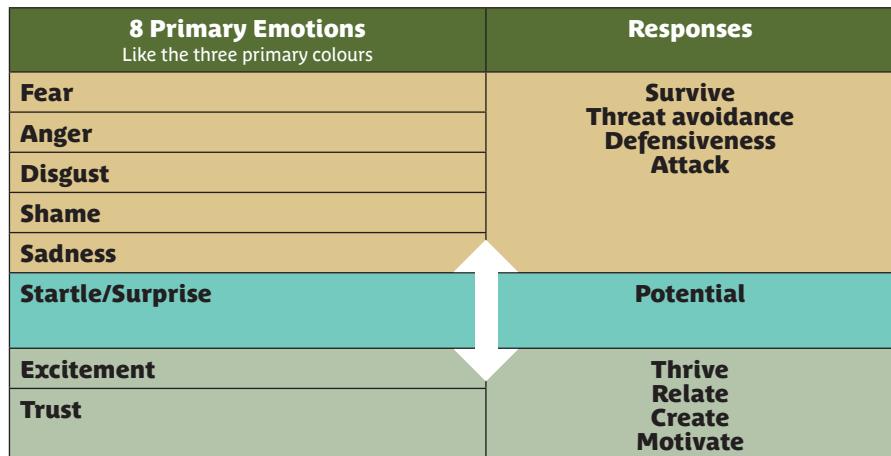


Figure 1 Organisational outcomes of engendered emotional states

mainspring of organisational behaviour might be. *Figure 1* shows one formulation.

Organisational context

It is one of the curiosities of organisational life that although there is lots of theory, there is no shared professional agreement about what an organisation actually is. One of OD's failures is not having found ways of representing networked organisations more effectively. Organograms still fail to display the complexity of modern organisations.

As a consequence, individuals typically default to hierarchical, linear models when explaining where they are located within an organisation. Or they refer to matrix structures, which are more appropriate to the functionality of machines in despatch warehouses than human beings

interacting for a wide variety of complex purposes.

New tools

Only when there are adequate tools for understanding how networks in the brain are expressed in networked behaviours, will the power of brain-based coaching and organisational consultancy free itself from the current performance-driven paradigms of human behaviour in organisations that, we have suggested, risk the defeat of their own objectives in lacking an understanding of how the brain works.

Let's look at one such tool.

In a study about human energy and organisational performance in the built environment, Brown (2010) reported on work from the Cousins Downs Partnership in Miami, USA, which set out to specify the vital organs of any organisation or any part of an organisation and show how they were interconnected.

It also sought to demonstrate that an organisational model could also specify the characteristics of how a science of comparative organisational performance might be developed

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CASE STUDY: the human touch

We arrived at the plush offices of a global organisation recently to be given the remit to improve the performance of a team in delivering technical support services into the rest of the organisation. They had been failing to meet time, cost and quality criteria.

We first briefed the whole team, encouraging awareness of the inevitable fear that this kind of exercise will generate. They quickly became fascinated about how their brains worked. We spent time with each key stakeholder, developing a semi-structured questionnaire to explore the situation. We quickly discovered a catalogue of frustrations, from several perspectives. The team was working incredibly hard, had bright, committed people and some innovative technical solutions: but they did not listen or respond to the concerns of the stakeholders they were delivering to and therefore had lost their trust.

While receiving this feedback was tough, the SCARF model (proposed by Rock, 2009) enabled them to foresee how interactions needed the human touch. We coached leaders to embed this way of being, and stakeholders reported much greater satisfaction, becoming helpful rather than obstructive. Positive trust spirals replaced mutual fear.

and individual performance within an organisation assessed.

Figure 2 shows the basic 11-sphere structure of this model derived from stratified systems theory (Jaques, 1997) and developed from a nomothetic reductionist semantic analysis of the kind that Osgood and his colleagues proposed for the measurement of meaning (Osgood et al, 1967).

Figure 3 shows this model in use. It comes from a study in a major gallery in the Smithsonian Institution, where the director wished to know how what he understood to be inadequate back-of-house facilities affected individual organisational performance (focal point question).

Colour coding

The model is constructed through proprietary algorithms in response to a 66-item survey completed independently on screen by each of the participants. The sphere colours convey how well respondents consider the activities to be working: green – working well; yellow – uncertain; and red – not working well.

The resulting mix of colours in any one sphere is the accumulation of individual responses.

The green interconnections between the spheres show respondent agreement with a survey statement about some aspect of the interconnected functioning of the two spheres involved, and in the width of the connector the strength of the accumulated agreements.

A red hammer-head shows respondent disagreement with a survey statement about some aspect of the interconnectedness of the two spheres involved, and also by its width, the strength of

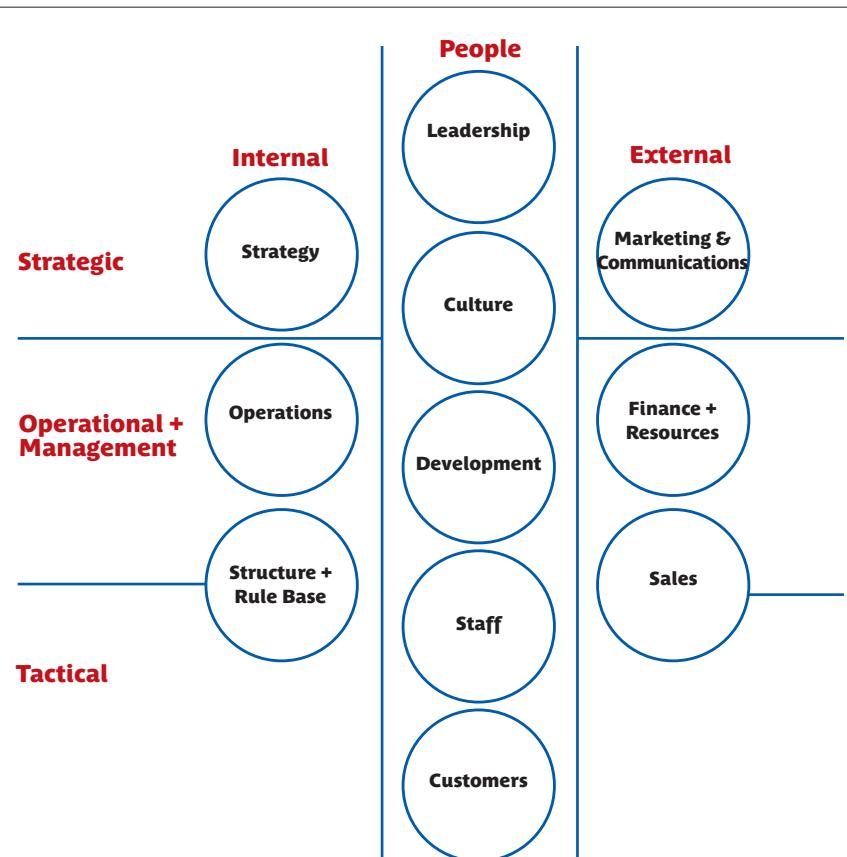
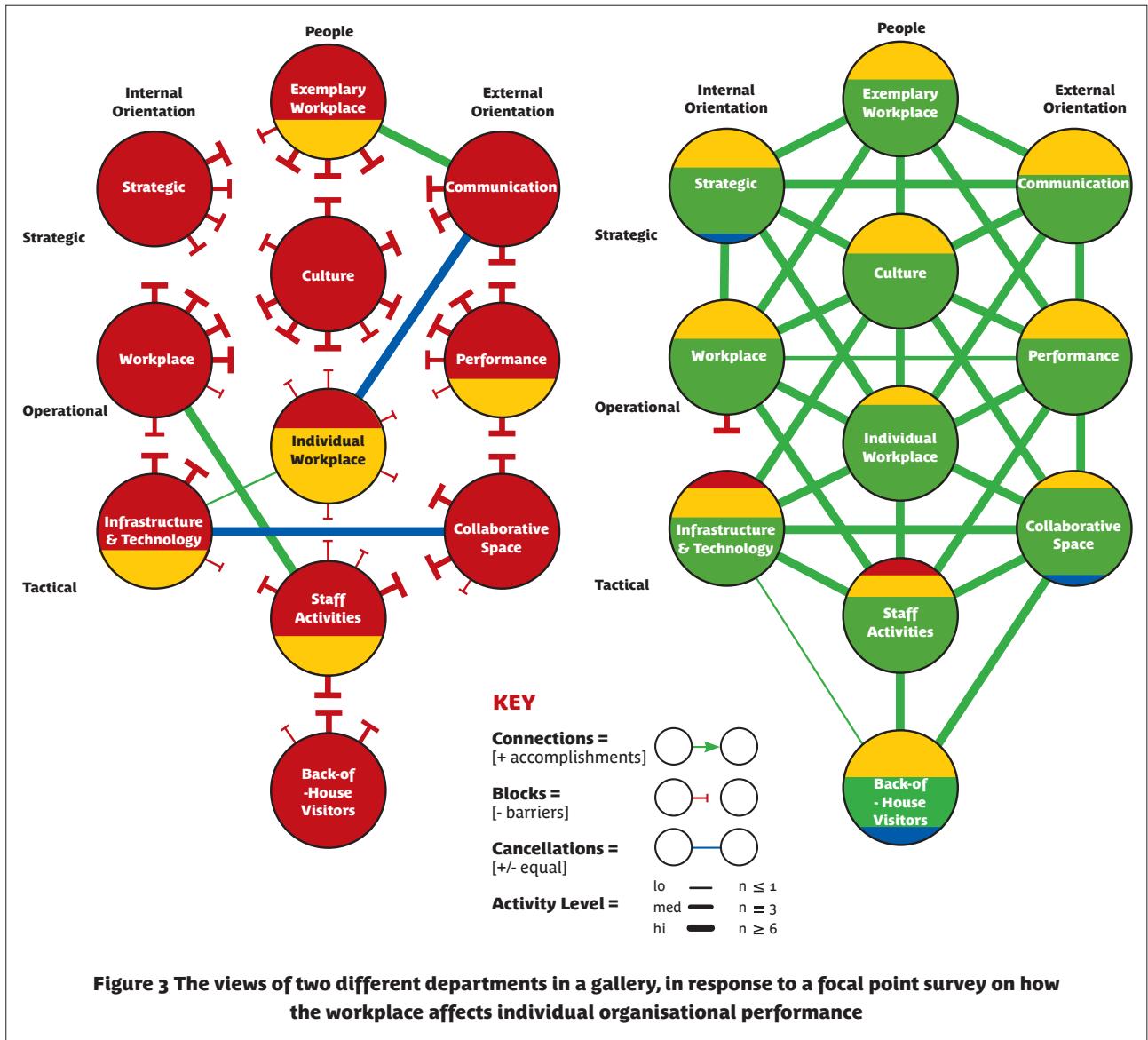


Figure 2 Spheres of Influence (SoFi) model defining the necessary and sufficient elements (the vital organs) necessary for effective organisational functioning. The names of Spheres can be changed as long as their essential function stays the same



that in the responding group.

Blue in spheres means that a respondent did not have enough information upon which to make a judgment; and in connectors means that there are as many agreements as disagreements and that they cancel each other out, giving an ambivalent connection in which the direction of flow is in opposition with itself.

An aspect of this approach that we are not elaborating here is that this instrument – Sphere of

Influence or Sofi® – uses as its point of enquiry the perceptions of each individual involved in the system being mapped. With the observations that the science of epigenetics (the study of changes in gene expression) is now making on the neurobiology of perception as the precursor to effective action (Lipton, 2008; Siegel, 2008, 2012), this tool has added value as a means of capturing dynamically in a systematic and replicable manner that most elusive and

'softest' data of all – how individuals 'see' their world.

It is posited within the model, and a good deal of beta-testing confirms the proposition, that the interconnectors show energy flow around the system; and that where there are three spheres connected into a triangle by green interconnectors, there is effective organisational energy flow between those spheres, and hence effective organisational functioning.

The red hammer-heads, on the other hand, show where there is energy block in the system and dysfunctional (non-productive/unfocused) organisational activity or lack of it.

Blue interconnectors show an apparent equilibrium of competing flows state not conducive to effective organisational functioning.

The model conveys very vividly that the answer to the focal point question shows widely different perceptions among two different groups of staff (there were 48 different groupings in the study): and that intended changes would have different implications for different groups.

Conclusion

Fear produces faces that turn down in stress, trust produces faces that light up in smiles. One creates shadows, the other lightness. Brain-based coaches have the power to help individuals and organisations understand the emotional energising system and find ways of working with its effects in the pursuit of high individual and organisational performance – and high profits. ■

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● Brenda Hales is an executive coach, a visiting lecturer at Kingston Business School and a director of Montydog Consulting.

Paul Brown is speaking at the Coaching at Work conference on 2 July.

“Brain-based coaches have the power to help individuals and organisations understand the emotional energising system and find ways of working with its effects”

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