

# Brief

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## Effective leadership works through emotions

***The essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action while reason leads to conclusions*** Donald Calne, neuroscientist

When leaders use emotions positively, they produce results – it leads to resonance. Negative emotions leads to dissonance. Until recently there has been little research into the role of emotions in the leadership of an organisation. This is a summary of recent insight and evidence from neuroscience and psychology.

### **New evidence, new insights**

Brain activity can now be analysed with techniques such as MRI, chemical analysis and tomography to see how it responds to the day-to-day experience at work. Emotions are how the brain makes fast choices. Without an emotional response an employee is unlikely to do something different or new, or with full commitment. Hope, fear, empathy, anger, pride. All can be harnessed to engage and lead employees.

### **Key emotional drivers of active dysfunctional behaviour at work - it's not a choice.**

We now know the four things most likely to trigger dysfunctional behaviour: *Surprise*, *Loss of control*, *Threat to status and role*, and *Uncertainty*. These create negative reactions in the brain as strong as a physical blow – or feel as bad as lack of food or shelter – outweighing, reward, incentives, or 'rational' reassurance.

Also, being *ignored* can be more psychologically traumatic than being bullied or harassed. *Anger* makes the brain shut down options for quick predictable actions. Employees learn to disengage to reduce the pain.

### **The powerful impact of positive emotional drivers: especially empathy and inclusion**

Handled well, pressure and challenge release endorphins and energy to galvanise people, changing neural networks and modifying entrenched behaviours. Despite the temptation, 'protecting' people from difficult change or external challenges is not the best way. Being involved in change builds resilient and motivation.

Feeling *empathy*, *inclusion* and increased connection helps significantly. Brains will secrete the hormone oxytocin. It drives affection, generosity and selflessness and can be produced by things as simple as a handshake, a pat on the back or a smile – but people have to feel it to be real.

### **Emotionally meaningful work: essential to engage people, unlock it whenever you can**

1. *Work which matters to others*: People expect fair reward, but what motivates us is to do something that matters: making a difference to *colleagues* (the satisfaction, fulfilment of teams); making a difference to *customers* (an impact on their lives in small or big ways); making a difference to the *organisation* (beating competitors, building a reputation); making a difference to the *world* (environment, economy, society)
2. *Experiences that are poignant, not just positive*: The emphasis on positive psychology has led us to focus on trying to make employees happy and enthused throughout the working day. But, meaningfulness often comes more powerfully through facing tough challenges and adversity.
3. *Connect with the personal*: Meaningfulness can come through a connection with personal life - doing something your parent's are proud of, or that resonates with something you care a lot about

### **Other ways to let emotions in**

- *Powerful ideas* that challenge and fire the imagination (an idea, not just fact or metric)
- *Concrete*: sounding real, practical and relevant will improve trust and confidence
- *Unexpected*: the unexpected opens our eyes for new information, danger or opportunity (there is of course a fine line between 'unexpected' - which can be good - and 'surprise').