Systems Awareness

Tool: *Network model for designing compelling ideas and harnessing the power of collective leadership*

Systems-Awareness (*n.*)
Understanding the relational dynamics amongst individuals and organizations for the purpose of achieving objectives

The Short Story of Bill, an Employee with Systems-Awareness
Bill and Steve walk out of a meeting at work. Steve starts to chat with Bill, "I've been working here for 5 years now and every time I speak at our meetings, Susan intensely glares at me across the table. I think she's into me." Bill recognizes Steve's misjudgment of Susan's expression, but agrees with Steve that Susan is into him. Steve continues, "So Bill, how's your work going." Bill responds, "Oh me? I'm looking for that sweet spot between getting fired and being promoted."

Although short, this scenario provides insight into a few crucial elements of Systems-Awareness.

Empathy: The ability to understand and share the feelings of someone else.
Here we see that Bill recognizes Susan's expression of glaring is more closely associated with anger, as opposed to attraction. Additionally, Bill chooses to agree with Steve rather than mocking Steve because Bill remembers a negative experience when he accidentally misinterpreted his boss's emotions during a feedback session and wants to spare Steve the pain.

Social Skill: The ability to identify the needs, goals, and motivations of others.
Bill mentions he is balancing getting promoted and getting fired. Although this may seem contradictory, Bill realizes that he must perform well enough to be recognized by his manager as a competent employee, however must be careful not to outshine his manager.

A group of Harvard Business School professors recently published a paper outlining the new pinnacle of leadership development, which they coined **Meta-Leadership**. Meta-Leadership was created for the purposes of outlining the necessary competencies new leaders will need to cope with out increasingly complex and interconnected international business environment.

The Five Dimesnions of Meta-Leadership

1 **The Person**
Self-Awareness, Introspection, Self-Discipline, Psychometric analysis, authenticity

2 **The Situation**
Situational-Awareness, Decision-making, risk analysis, problem identification, complexity theory

3 **The Base**
Organizational followership leadership, personnel management, ability to motivate

4 **The Boss**
Leading up, influence beyond authority, persuasion, feedback seeking, confidence and humility

5 **The Network**
Inter-organizational relations, systems theory, multi-party goal alignment, vision realization

If you are interested in reading the full publishing, please refer to the following link: https://cdn2.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2013/04/meta-leadership_primer.pdf

At Actualize, we aim to develop "The Person" and "The Situation" dimensions through our Self-Awareness and Situational-Awareness sessions, while grouping "The Base, The Boss, and The Network" dimensions into Systems-Awareness. The notable distinction between dimensions 1-2, and dimension 3-5 is the shift in orientation from a **focus on Self** to a **focus on Others.**

This shift in focus towards Others in our Systems-Awareness sessions prompts us to consider the two crucial skills mentioned earlier, **Empathy** and **Social Skill**.

Empathy

Empathy, one of the five emotional intelligence competencies. Defined as the ability to understand and share the thought and feelings of others, empathy should not be confused with its distant cousin sympathy. The following empathy considerations were derived from Chade Meng Tan's *Search Inside Yourself*.

Developing Empathy: Getting people to like you

1. **See Similarity**– Loot at every human and say "this person is just like me." We are all more similar than we are different. The goal here is to improve your ability to see similarity in others by drawing upon anything you and others share in common.

2. **Create Happiness** – Look at every human and say "I want this person to be happy." Your wish for others to be happy is unconsciously reflected in your body language, which in term is unconsciously recognized by the other person. In other words, the person you are trying to make happy will feel that they like you.

Empathy Developmental Stages: Measuring your empathy growth

1. **Understanding Others**– Your ability to understand intentions, desires, and beliefs of another person to make decisions on how to respond to them.

2. **Developing Others** – Your wish to see others motivated, succeeding, and developing their own capacities. You give constructive and positive feedback through 'process praise' in order to stimulate a growth mindset in others.

3. **Having Systems-Awareness**– Your perspective of empathy grows from one person to a group of many. You begin to accurately read power relationships within organizations, detect crucial social networks, and understand the complex forces that shape the views and actions of others.

Social Skill

Before we jump into Social Skill, lets remind ourselves about the three different parts of the brain from our Self-Awareness module.

The Evolution-Designed Brain

Neuroscience tells us that we have three distinct parts of our brain:

1. **Brain Stem & Cerebellum (Reptilian Brain)** – Survival by reacting to threats, the fight or flight response, autopilot functions such as breathing.

2. **Limbic System (Mammalian Brain)** – Survival through Social bonds, creates emotions, memories, and habits.

3. **Neocortex (Human Brain)** – Survival by learning patterns & creating connections from experience, origin of language, imagination, and self-awareness.
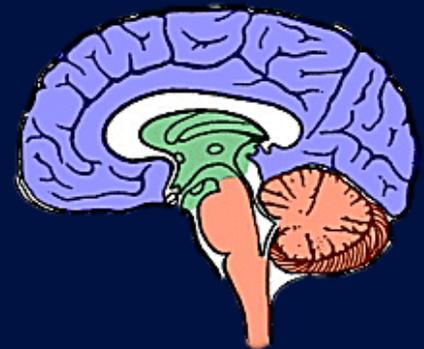
As humans, we learned to understand other humans before we ever learned how to understand ourselves. We developed our Mammalian Brain, our **socialized mind**, before we did our Human Brain, the mind that gives us self-awareness. When we were babies, we relied on our parents to survive. As a child, we cried when we were hungry. We smiled when our parents tickled us, because we liked it. We understood our parents' behavioral patterns well enough to continue using emotional cues, such as crying and smiling, because we learned to read others thoughts before our own. Even now, we often find ourselves more concerned with the thoughts and feelings of others than we do our own.

In our complex and ever evolving world, the greatest leaders realize that it is simply impossible to the create a business solution of even define the scope of a problem without the help of others. So the question becomes, how do we get others to help us?
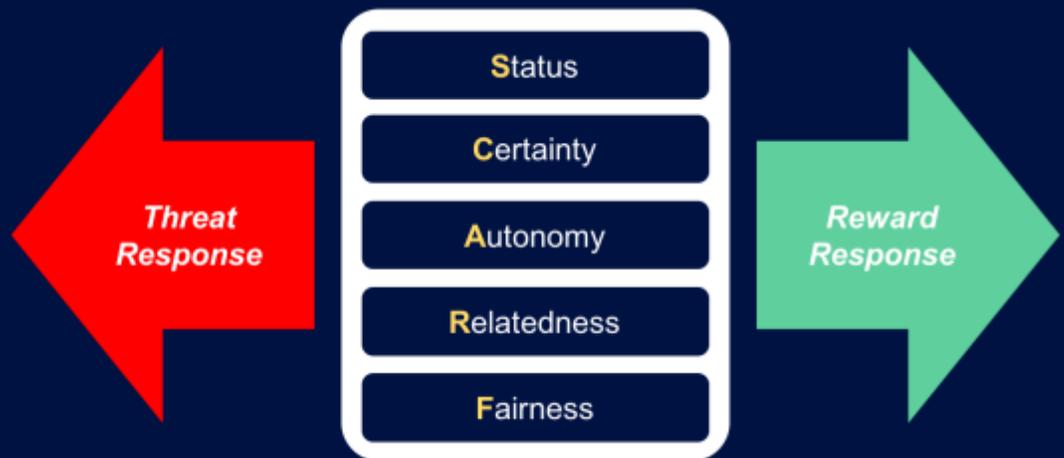
Let's take yet another step back into our brain. We developed our Reptilian Brain, responsible for the Fight or Flight response, before we even learned to interact with other humans! Unfortunately for us, even though we have evolved into highly intelligent and complex individuals, we are still subject to takeover by the Reptilian Brain. Although we no longer have to worry about getting eaten by a lion (at least most of us don't have to worry about this), we still face many social threats. The **SCARF Model** outlined above depicts the five most common social threats/rewards we face in our modern society. For example, if you are selected as a candidate for a job promotion offer, you would see it as an obvious reward in the **Status Dimension**. However, if you see your up-and-coming apprentice get better and better at their job, you could potentially feel threatened that they may take that job promotion over you.

- **Status**: Personal sense of worth, your job title, background, personality, etc.
- **Certainty**: Clarity and familiarity of situations, you use less energy in familiar situations
- **Autonomy**: Sense of control in situations, your ability to determine the outcome
- **Relatedness**: Desire to form groups, build relationships, trust in others
- **Fairness**: Equity and/or equality of treatment in situations, your innate human rights

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As a future leader, it is important for you to continually identify how to provide each of these 5 SCARF Model dimensions to your followers and/or employees. The best way to determine if you are meeting these dimensions or not is through the tactic of **Effective Communication**.

Every conversation you have with another individual is under the influence of much more than just the subject matter content in discussion.

- **Content**: What is being discussed, the Subject?
- **Intent**: What is the purpose of the conversation, what is/are the goal(s) of each individual talking?
- **Emotion**: What emotional factors may be influencing the conversation?
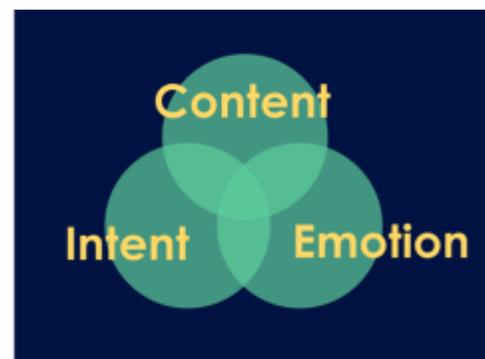
The Human Mind is an extremely complex system, influenced by many different factors. *Are you aware of all the factors at play?*