

# TJ

Training Journal

JUNE 2015

The publication  
for learning  
& development

[www.trainingjournal.com](http://www.trainingjournal.com)

## The power of coaching with questions



*TJ reveals the effectiveness of questions in coaching*

Neuroscience | Coaching | Management

# From the brain to the team

**Talan Miller** explores a new neuroscience model that provides insight into team development

**W**hen cutting edge neuroscience is partnered with a tool that serves the needs of the social brain it is a potent combination.

Research in neuroscience, and more specifically into the social systems of the brain, is delivering wonderful insight into how the ‘emotional fuel’ that each person brings to any situation drives teams, leaders and organisational culture.

Neuroscience is such a highly complex field that it demands an equally high level of expertise to understand it, let alone apply it daily. Therefore, it can be risky to expose busy people to masses of material that they simply do not need or have time to properly absorb. The potential benefits can be quickly lost.

Fortunately, there are proven tools that can help to build a bridge between the current neuroscience and the practical development of people, teams and leaders via the brain.

To help apply useful components of neuroscience intelligently yet pragmatically, it is useful to match relevant insights to a known and reliable model. This integrated approach relies heavily upon the selected model being robust enough to meaningfully gel with emerging lessons from neuroscience. Some models make the cut, and some don't.

I use the Belbin Model to build such bridges of understanding and I am also privileged to work closely with expert, author and researcher in the fields of neuroscience and the social brain, Peter Burow and his team at Neuropower.

They have spent in excess of 20 years researching the social brain and its impacts upon team development, leadership and organisational culture with leading neuroscientists and universities around the world. They have created

a model and an elegant acronym that they refer to as RELISH. It helps to identify the crucial social needs of the human brain as individuals, teams and organisations develop.

The progressive and ongoing engagement of these social systems of the brain helps people and teams to better understand themselves, their peers and learn how to perform together (especially when under pressure).

The RELISH acronym illustrates six major, social systems of the human brain at play as teams develop – most of which occurs sub-consciously.

Individuals and teams can exhibit these systems along what we sometimes nickname a ‘Goldilocks’ scale of ‘too much’, ‘too little’ and ‘just right’. An in-balance in one system can cause poor alignment in others as a team develops.

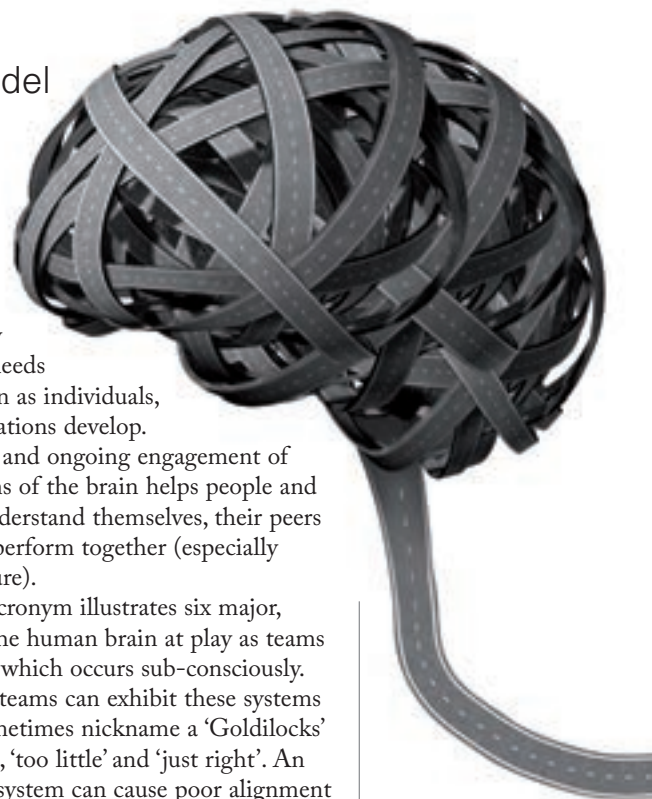
## **The RELISH acronym** **Relatedness (the P1 system)**

This system is driven by functions of the brain that automatically attune to habitual patterns, rules and tribal and cultural norms where teams need:

- Sense of optimal security
- Rules and structure
- Sense of purpose or definition of why the team exists
- Clear rules and expectations
- Fair enforcement of rules
- Leadership setting examples
- Team role clarity and understanding
- An enforced code of conduct.

## **Expression (The C1 system)**

The system based on brain functions that regulate →



## *Oxytocin has been linked to an increase in the level of generosity people show for others*

emotion and chemically reward for certain patterns of thought or behaviour. Here teams need:

- To allow spontaneity
- Freedom of individual expression
- Encourage creativity
- Ease friction and find ways to deal with conflict rather than avoiding it
- Encourage fun and enjoyment at work
- Brainstorm ideas
- Balance individual expression with healthy ways to deal promptly with conflict.

### **Leading the pack (The P2 system)**

These are the elements within the brain that enable us to challenge and break habitual patterns, identify and seek what we want and to compete. Here teams need:

- Realistic yet challenging objectives and goals
- Willing engagement and effort
- Establishment of systems for recognition and reward to motivate and engage
- Competitive strategies for the team
- Quick wins to boost collective sense of success
- Careful management of people falling behind or losing momentum.

### **Interpersonal Connection (The I2 system)**

These are the elements within the brain that enable social interaction, empathy with others and understanding of others feelings and contributions. Teams need:

- Interpersonal support and understanding
- Genuine interest in and recognition of varying strengths and contributions of individual members
- Active listening and willingness to

- leverage individual strengths
- Push for authentic interpersonal communications
- Ensure internal negotiations are “win-win” in nature.

### **Seeing the facts (The I1 system)**

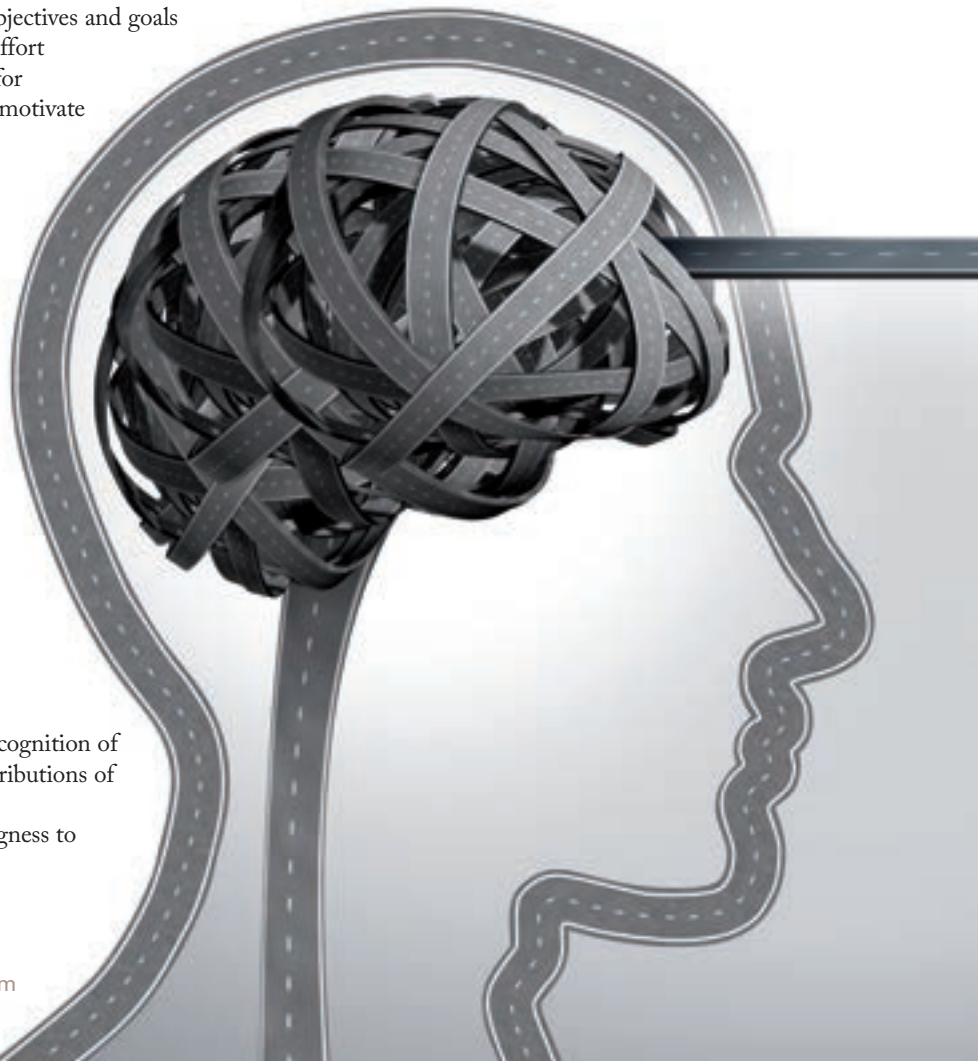
This is the set of functions within the brain that helps recognise patterns, cause and effect, data and factual inputs. Here teams need:

- Factual measures and feedback on performance against strategy
- Encourage ongoing learning and countering of biases and emotion in decision-making
- Factual de-briefs and milestone review sessions to identify lessons learnt and to carry them into real world application
- Seek to apply team knowledge and intellect.

### **Hope for the Future (The C2 system)**

These are the elements of the brain that can process ‘big picture’ visions and concepts and enable openness to new ideas and collective optimism. Teams need:

- To create a sense of optimism and forward progress for the team
- For people to have confidence in their own roles and future within the team





- Flexibility and openness to new ideas and ways of doing things
- Ability to visualise ideal outcomes and future of the team.

These key insights from the neuroscience and the six crucial social systems of the brain have the capacity to radically improve team performance when paired with good facilitation and a pragmatic profiling tool such as Belbin.

### The importance of recognising value

The most basic psychological need is to belong or relate to others. From an evolutionary perspective, being part of a tribe has ensured our survival.

This means that teams are at the very core of all social and commercial structures. In order to secure our role in a team, we must add value to that team.

This is particularly relevant as the P1 social system of the brain is engaged in the formation of new teams and as any changes unfold. Humans will sub-consciously seek security and relatedness in this way. More than being liked, the brain also needs to be needed.

We have found Belbin's team roles very useful here to help describe and then allow teams to

measure and work with the different values and contributions that people actually bring to the team.

This in turn provides a solid foundation and ongoing language to progress, eventually, to the later and more open C2 system of the brain where high performance collaboration can be sustained naturally.

As organisational structures become flatter and roles more flexible, the ability to articulate the specific value that each individual brings to the team (and how they help the team achieve its objectives) becomes even more important.

In the spirit of Lean Six Sigma, waste and duplication of human effort can be minimised with enhanced awareness of how our team roles play out in achieving our daily missions.

### Conflict and language in teams

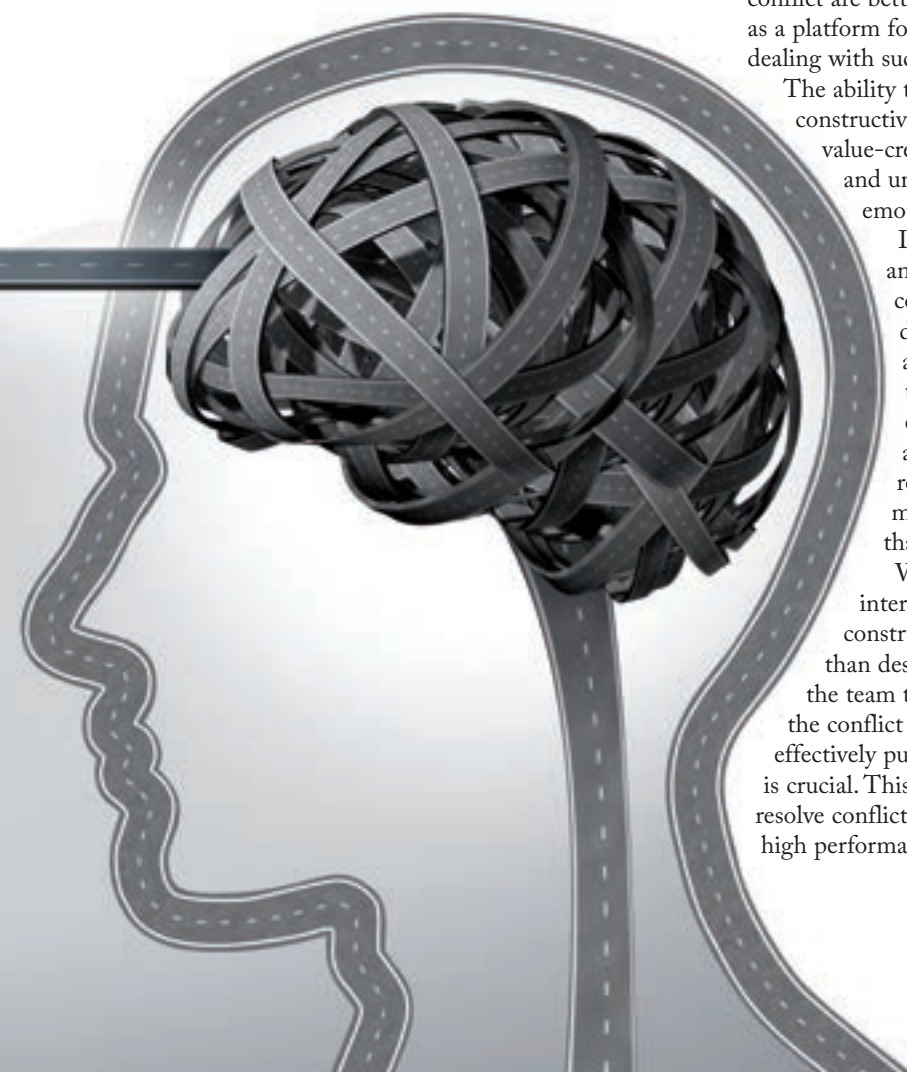
There is an all too common misconception that high performance teams have little to no conflict. This is simply not true. Conflict in teams is normal – and teams need a language to express it.

High performance teams have higher than average levels of conflict because they constantly challenge the status quo. It's just that the emotional fuel and behaviours driving this conflict are better understood. This can be used as a platform for appropriately and constructively dealing with such conflict as it arises.

The ability to discern the difference between constructive conflict (based on different value-creating mindsets or behaviours) and unconstructive conflict (based in emotional reactivity) is the key.

Disagreements on the 'right answer' are a common source of conflict in teams. Not surprisingly, disagreements lead to conflict and frustration, which activate threat responses in the brain that dramatically reduce an individual's ability to think rationally and resolve the issue constructively. The more primitive limbic system rather than the rational system is engaged.

What teams need is a way to interpret differences of opinion in a constructive way that creates value, rather than destroys it. Providing a framework for the team to understand differences, manage the conflict that comes from diversity and effectively put emotional responses into words is crucial. This allows the team to manage and resolve conflict as it arises in order to reach high performance.



## *Current neuroscience is opening up wonderful new levels of understanding around what drives humans as leaders and as useful team members*

The science behind emotional reactivity when explained properly to people can help them achieve better objectivity and manage unwanted biases. The brain's natural fear response can thus become less intense, easier to manage and quicker to bounce back from when higher levels of understanding exist.

The neutral 'Team Role Language' that Belbin provides enables a team to manage and resolve conflict as it arises and reduce the 'amygdala moments' or fear responses in order to reach higher levels of performance together. For example, ensuring that your 'Shapers' are not bringing about too much conflict on the one hand, or that your 'Teamworkers' are avoiding the conflict that is required on the other.

Humans are emotional creatures and the reactivity that comes with human interaction cannot (indeed should not) be removed, it just needs to be better managed.

### **Teams with empathy perform better**

Teams that understand each other and display prosocial behaviour will by default have greater empathy for one another.

A high degree of empathy or affiliation for a person triggers the release of a neuro chemical called, oxytocin and oxytocin has been linked to an increase in the level of generosity people show for others.

As such, a genuine understanding of different perspectives, team roles and world-views is crucial to the development of a cohesive, trusting and generous team.

A meaningful and immediate framework for building closer affiliation and empathy for the views and behaviours of others via individual and team profiling is useful here. Through exactly this form of understanding, leaders and teams can accelerate the natural stages of team development.

It is fine for people to drive us nuts at times but it's critical that we learn to understand why this occurs and that this is linked to a valuable contribution they may be making that simply differs from ours (or may in fact be too similar to ours). Generosity and decency of intent within teams enhances engagement and reduces unnecessary friction that occurs when the oxytocin levels are low.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, current neuroscience is opening up wonderful new levels of understanding around what drives humans as leaders and as useful team members.

The social systems of the human brain have a profound impact on individual, team and organisational performance.

Developing a better understanding of what the 'emotional fuel' is that actually drives behaviour in teams and organisations can be used as a powerful enabler for genuine and lasting team and leadership development.

Emerging neuroscience become a valuable tool in developing teams and leaders when it can be carefully vetted for relevance to the end users and their needs.

The science is validating the accuracy and utility of some established models such as Belbin, Tuckman, Blanchard and Hersey's Situational Leadership, while helping to create some new and useful ones such as the RELISH tool. **TJ**

### **Further reading**

NI. Eisenberger and MD. Lieberman, "Why rejection hurts: a common neural alarm system for physical and social pain", *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences* Vol.8 No.7 July 2004. Department of Psychology, Franz Hall, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563, USA

MD. Lieberman, "Subjective Responses to Emotional Stimuli During Labeling, Reappraisal, and Distraction", *American Psychological Association*

*Emotion*, 2011, Vol. 11, No. 3, 468-480

PJ. Zak, AA. Stanton and S. Ahmadi, "Oxytocin Increases Generosity in Humans"

*PLoS ONE* 2(11): e1128. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0001128, 2007.

M. Kosfeld et al, "Oxytocin increases trust in humans", *Nature*, Vol 435, 2 June 2005.

### **Talan Miller**

is managing director at Sabre Corporate Development and can be contacted at Tal@SabreHQ.com/www.TeamBuildingSabre.com.au  
00 +61 +7 5530 5522