

## Workshop: Needs

The objective of this third workshop is to provide insight into our needs and the relationship between our needs and our behavior. We are still building awareness at this second level within the Hierarchy of Motivation<sup>©</sup>.

The concept here is that, as depicted in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, all human beings have basic needs (like health, safety and belonging), which are more or less the same for everyone. In addition to those standard-issue health and safety needs, every individual has a set of more nuanced needs. The rapid-fire response we experience when we are charged by a bear in the woods is the same response process put into play, when we are afraid of losing face in a human relation, or when someone "presses your buttons" in a heated conversation.

Furthermore, these Needs actually govern our behavior. For instance: they make us run from the bear or lash out at a colleague – even before we know what we are doing. Try to remember an instance where you lost control and, for example, reproached someone with a severity that you realized afterwards was completely out of proportion with what happened. A surge of neural reactions, adrenaline and stress hormones are released when:

- We believe that our personal needs will not be met
- Someone is preventing us from meeting our personal needs, or
- It turns out that we do have the possibility to satisfy a need, though we will have to fight for it.

Our ability to recognize and respond to our own and others' needs is not only essential to motivation, it is also an important way to prevent stress. We are constantly confronted with things that threaten our needs, and the more frequently our needs are threatened, the higher the state of mental distress. This long-term state of alert can bring about the condition we now recognize as burnout.

In addition to the above, understanding and managing our needs has a further impact on our development. When the brain perceives a threat, it releases the stress hormone cortisol in addition to adrenaline. This cocktail shuts down the neurons that enable us to store new information and absorb new knowledge.

Though we may well be able to focus and act quickly when we are driven by fear or anger, our learning skills and ability to change will be restricted. By understanding our own and others' needs, we free our brain up to more effectively learn, grow and manage change. This is the core of Emotional Intelligence.

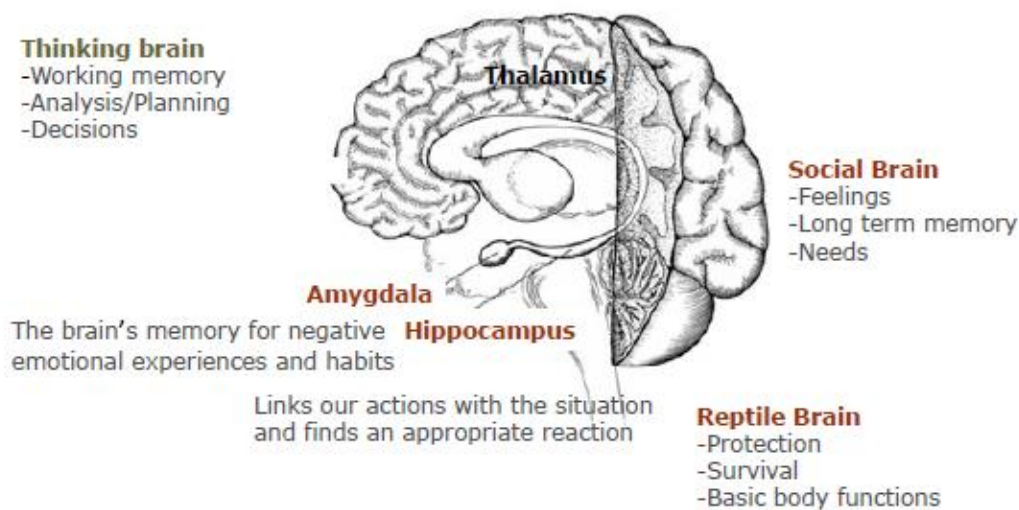
### Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence can, as described in the theory section, be defined briefly as the ability to:

1. identify your own (and others) feelings and states of mind in a current situation
2. identify what caused the state of mind (the emotional trigger) and
3. based on 1 and 2, choose the right response among different possibilities

Put another way, emotional intelligence is about developing an effective balance between allowing reason to control your emotional reactions and allowing your emotions to inform your rational thinking.

## Theory of Emotional Intelligence



When we work with emotional intelligence we train the limbic system. It is linked to the oldest part of our brain where many of our reactive patterns of response are ingrained.

The human brain can be said to be comprised of three layers:

- The reptilian or reactive brain (instinct, sensory)
- The mammalian or social brain (limbic system, emotive)
- The rational or thinking brain (cortex, neocortex, thinking)

The brain has its own hierarchy for processing sensory inputs and information and for how the interplay between the three layers is handled.

The reactive brain is always on the lookout for things that can either harm us or make us feel good. When the reactive brain receives sensory inputs it provides a reaction in the form of three questions:

- Can it harm me (fight or flight?) If the answer is no, then
- Can I eat it? If the answer is no, then
- Will it reward me?

Our response to these three questions comes automatically, without giving us a chance to think about it; we react instinctively.

Research has shown that the amygdala, part of the limbic system, is our "threat sentry" or "alert center": quickly and constantly scanning the environment for potential threats. If the amygdala recognizes even a weak similarity between the current situation and a potential threat, it will send out a distress signal.

The amygdala's extensive net of neural connections enables it to take control of a large portion of the rest of the brain in such an emergency, including the area related to rational thinking. Indeed, the amygdala is capable of hijacking the rational resources of the brain if it discovers something that can be interpreted as a threat. With this information, we can see how sayings like "I was scared silly" or "I couldn't think straight" have more truth to them than we may have realized.

## Amygdala and Hippocampus

It is the amygdala which triggers the release of adrenaline and shouts "Run!" when we see a bear for instance. But it is the hippocampus which either calms the response with "Relax, you are at the zoo and it is caged", or reinforces the fear by adding cortisol - an adrenaline booster - to say "Yes! Run! It is after you!".

The amygdala and hippocampus are key elements for understanding how brain processes are related to behavior - especially in relation to stress. Brain researcher Kjeld Fredens from Vejle Fjord Neuro Centre in Denmark has used brain scans to show that the area around the hippocampus, which acts as the brain's stress management center, can shrivel when exposed to sustained pressure. Fredens says: "Usually the hippocampus sees possibilities and finds solutions during temporary stress, but being pushed too vigorously, the hippocampus can become overloaded and the risk is that it can short-circuit.

That causes the stress hormone, which normally regulates the area, to begin to break nerve endings in the hippocampus which can lead to memory failure. At the same time another area in the brain grows - the amygdala."In relation to the example of the bear, it means that you can no longer distinguish whether the bear is caged or free.

## Training the brain

The largest projection of sensory inputs connects the thalamus to the brain's cortex (the thinking brain), where intentional actions - and emotions pertaining to such actions - are planned. This process allows us to reflect on how best to respond emotionally. As the "circuits" in your brain are in constant formation as a result of your experiences in life, it is never too late to change and develop your circuits. You can actually train your brain to create more or different neural paths by learning to understand your emotional patterns and what triggers your emotional responses. As a matter of fact, the most recent brain research shows that simply verbalizing your needs helps to reduce the amygdala's state of alert. This is why it is so important that you understand your personal needs. Once you know them, you are much more capable of seeing a situation for what it is, managing your stress reaction and responding productively.

Moreover, you can learn to compare your mental dialogue with the actual situation you are in. You can learn to tell the difference between what you can change and what you can't. In essence, you can learn how to master your mental processes rather than being at their mercy.

## Personal needs

Central to our work in the Needs workshop is finding out where in life one's needs are not being fulfilled and what consequence there might be. For example, a person who does not feel respected by his spouse may increasingly seek to have his need for respect fulfilled at work. A person with a strong need for security may often seek work in a place where job security is a priority. A person who does not feel accepted at work may tend to seek acceptance outside of work, etc.

Each of us, either consciously or unconsciously, establishes "rules" to determine whether our needs are being satisfied. It is important to uncover those rules in order to become aware of and discover ways to better manage the interplay between needs and behavior.

**EXAMPLE:** We could ask a person who has the need for respect: "When do you feel respected?" in relation to work and home. And they might say:

At work:

- When my boss doesn't keep piling more work on to my desk
- When my colleagues deliver on time
- When customers speak nicely to me

At home

- When my children make sure to tidy up before I get home
- When my partner asks my advice

How easy would it be for this person to ensure his needs are met? How many times a day will his amygdala go into a state of alert? What reactions or behavior might result? Here again we find personal satisfaction dependent on the behavior of others – which we know we cannot change. Therefore, the better we are at satisfying our own needs, the less reactive we naturally become. For this reason, it is important to shift our needs satisfaction to things we can influence, and it is important that we continue to improve our ability to generate and choose from **our possibilities** (as we practice in the Energy workshop)

Here's how it might look to do this using our example above:

I feel respected when I demonstrate self-respect. Therefore:

- I let my superior know, when I have reached the limit to how much work I can take on
- I commend colleagues who deliver on time and set boundaries with those who don't
- I do not take it personally if my children have not tidied up before I get home
- I understand that sometimes my partner needs to find her own way and that this is no reflection of her respect for me.