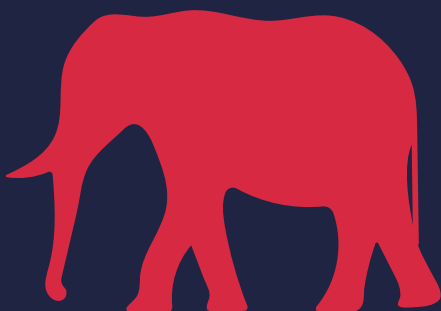
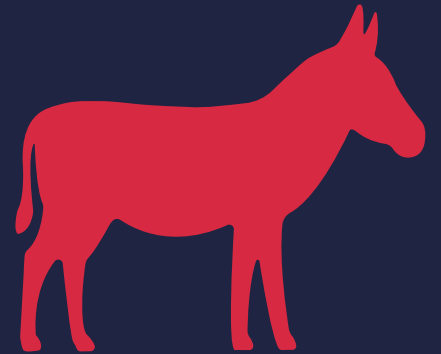


**The Social**

**Animal: Finding**

**Fulfilment**



Many years of sociological research have identified a number of primary social needs that drive human behaviour. During periods of change and disruption, we can experience a particular threat to these needs, which may translate into anxious, stressed and even aggressive behaviours. Often, our emotional reactions are an expression of these deeper needs not being met.

As the work of [Brene Brown](#) underlines, being able to put words to the experience and emotions of ourselves and others (i.e., expanding our emotional literacy) is essential to meaningfully addressing them. Leaders who are able to better understand the motivations of their teams and their needs in team situations are optimally equipped to support and engage them to grow.

More than ever before, emotional literacy is at the heart of how we lead, how we seek fulfillment, and how we carry ourselves in the world in relation to others.

## Our Key Social Needs

In order to understand what can cause us to feel threatened, and how to best support our teams to make sure their needs are met, it is helpful to become more closely acquainted with the specifics of what makes people tick.

As human beings, we have fundamental psychological and biological needs, such as food, sleep, play, and the desire for safety. “Social” needs are a subgroup of human needs that are met or not met in relation to other people. Social needs therefore hold a central place in leadership.

Through our research, we see nine social needs which are particularly important for modern leadership. Let’s consider these needs for teams and how we might work towards meeting them:



### 1. Certainty

Certainty about our own and our team’s future figures deeply in our need to be able to predict and control what’s coming. We’ve all experienced at one time or another that sense of anxiety about a big unknown.



### 2. Significance

It’s important for us to feel that we are valuable and that the work we do is relevant and useful. This need is fulfilled when we see this significance reflected back to us in our social relationships.



### 3. Learning & Growth

We have an inherent desire to expand our knowledge and capabilities, particularly in areas that interest us. Opportunities for personal and professional growth satisfy this need.



### 4. Love & Connection

As inherently social animals, we want to feel connected to and loved by our fellow humans. While love isn’t something we often associate with the professional sphere, we still have a deep need to go beyond transactional workplace interactions and create more meaningful connections.



### 5. Novelty

Humans love the stimulus of new or unknown phenomena and things. Mechanically performing the same task with the same information over time can lead to disengagement.



## 6. Contribution

We love to feel that we are making a meaningful contribution to something larger than ourselves. This is connected to the idea of significance but also related to concepts such as social justice, vision and purpose.



## 7. Autonomy

Having a sense of autonomy allows us to feel in control of ourselves and our circumstances. In recent times, we have seen a revolution in this space with the move to flexible and remote working. Though this is an environment conducive to fostering autonomy, it is not always the case.



## 8. Belonging

Belonging to a team or tribe is a deep social need of humans. If we feel that we are on the 'outer', we can start to be defensive and oppositional in the way we relate to others.



## 9. Fairness

Finally, we have a need for fairness in the way we are treated and in the way we see others being treated around us.

# Finding and Addressing

## the Root

As we work towards better understanding our "social" self and, in turn, our teams, think about the following:

1. Listen for the underlying needs that sit beneath language and behaviour as emotions will often point directly to these needs,
2. Have open discussions with your team members to gain insight and perspective around their experience,
3. Clarify with yourself and others your role and boundaries as a leader when it comes to supporting your team's needs to be met,
4. Draw on the following tools to work towards meeting team needs:
  - **Communication** – this is a big one for meeting the need for certainty, and there is a constant dance around how much certainty we can and should provide as leaders. Try to be clear and transparent in addressing a situation, even if you cannot always provide 100% certainty about the outcome.
  - **Identifying strengths** – if you don't know your strengths, you're more likely to step up everywhere, even where you are not strong or not needed as a way to feel significant or make a contribution. However, trying to be all things to everyone in this way can lead to disappointment and actually detract from the meeting of your needs. Know your strengths and play to them in supporting yourself and those around you.
  - **Developing skills and mastery** – working towards high levels of competence in our chosen areas, in turn naturally leads to a higher sense of significance, contribution and autonomy. Build your team's skills so that they feel capable and confident in their work. Promote opportunities for career and learning development such as internal and external training and courses.

- **Creating a culture of care and inclusion** – we know that loneliness is a significant problem and actually linked to burnout. This was happening before COVID, so just going back to the office is insufficient alone to redress the lack of connection and belonging in teams. Be particularly mindful about developing connection and care in teams through team building exercises, aligning on values and social events. One way to approach this may be through exploring a jointly created social contract which outlines communal expectations on behaviour and the workplace we aspire to create.
- **Leveraging touchpoints** – connection can take time and it is easy to de-prioritise it in favour of task-focused behaviours. Ensure to schedule and make the most out of meetings and feedback conversations across the team to check-in and get to know people on a personal level.
- **Acknowledging and celebrating success** (and people!) – taking the time to celebrate the wins of individuals and the team is one of your greatest tools for building connection, joy and purpose in the workplace. It's in human nature to mark special occasions with ritual – bring this to your team too.
- **Design jobs to enable meaning** – with continued advancement and integration of artificial intelligence and automation, digital technologies are playing increasingly prominent roles in making decisions and standardizing human work. Through this transition, leaders must be mindful of supporting teams in finding joy and meaning in their work – and avoiding [some of the iterations](#) we have already seen arrive elsewhere. Encourage team members to find novelty and variety in their work and avoid micro-managing by focusing on work outcomes over formal requirements.

## Knowing Ourselves

While it is helpful for leaders to understand the needs of their team members, it's equally important to turn that lens on ourselves. What is it that we are missing out on? What are we receiving in abundance? How can we attain a better balance?

We might think about our needs as cups we need to fill. We can't pour from an empty cup, and so our needs must be met to some degree for us to work effectively with others. Moreover, the size of each of our needs' cups differs in relation to each other, and to those of other people. For example, some people inherently crave certainty, while others are more comfortable in certainty if they feel they have sufficient autonomy.

This time spent on self-reflection is an investment in our own health and well-being. When we are deeply satisfied, we tend to be more resilient and able to serve others. Maintaining levels of self-care and self-insight also ignites our compassion and empathy towards others. It makes us more curious, attuned and present to another person's situation. In short, the more we care for ourselves, the more equipped we are to see that others are fulfilled.

By better knowing ourselves and the people around us, we can begin to operate at higher levels of leadership. In the end, and as always, it's our shared humanity which will connect us.



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