

The Pleasurable Power Of Cooperation¹

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Some fascinating findings reported by Natalie Angier in the New York Times² suggest that the act of cooperation is “hard-wired.”

Researchers at Emory University studied neural activity in a group of subjects playing a classic laboratory game called the *Prisoner's Dilemma*, in which participants can select from a number of either greedy or cooperative strategies as they pursue financial gain.

When people chose a cooperative strategy, rather than a greedy strategy, brain scans revealed that the mental circuitry in the brain normally associated with reward-seeking behavior lit up. The small, brave act of cooperating with another person, of choosing trust over cynicism, generosity over selfishness, made the brain light up with quiet joy.

And, the longer they engaged in the cooperative strategy, the more strongly blood flowed to that area of the brain.

When they analyzed the brain scans, researchers found that cooperation activated two broad areas of the brain that are rich in neurons able to respond to dopamine.

Dopamine is the brain chemical found when responding to pleasurable behaviors, such as eating dessert, looking at a pretty face, getting some money, and even addictive behaviors, such as cocaine.

The New York Times report goes on to say that “scientists have no trouble explaining the evolution of competitive behavior. But the depth and breadth of human altruism, the willingness to forgo immediate personal gain for the long-term common good, far exceeds behaviors seen even in other large-brained highly social species like chimpanzees and dolphins, and it has as such been difficult to understand.”

¹ From: <http://arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm> —Please take a moment to look at Arnie's site: www.arniedahlke.com

² *Why We're So Nice: We're Wired to Cooperate* by Natalie Angier, New York Times, July 23, 2002.

Anthropologists have theorized that humanity's ancestors needed teamwork to hunt large game or gather difficult plant foods or rear difficult children. So the capacity to cooperate became linked to survival!

We have made altruism a positive value in our lives for centuries. Somehow we have known that it is an important ethic for us. Somewhere in the dim awakenings of our logical thinking we already knew that *our ultimate individual survival depends on our group survival*. The value of surviving as a group becomes important because it holds out the potential of a richer, fuller, more expanded life experience.

This is truer today than at any other time in human history. We have more contact with a greater diversity of people and cultures than we've ever had before, thanks to many advances in technology. Transportation connecting us around the globe. Print, television, and texting streaming to every corner of earth. A world-wide, wireless circuitry connecting peoples who don't even speak the same language. We are living in a "shrinking world." There is no longer any question that we human beings are all in this together. And the more we wrap ourselves in complex techno-socioeconomic structures, the more we become aware of how interdependent we are.

Surviving and flourishing in an individual organization is no different. *Organizations are all about relationships—connections among individual people*. Every person wants to survive and thrive at work. The more that happens, the more organizations survive and thrive.

It is therefore up to each of us in any organization to make choices that not only benefit us individually, but benefit our fellow-workers as well:

Choose To Be Courteous To Others.

Choose To Respect Others.

Choose To Be Considerate Of Others.

Choose To Be Helpful To Others.

Choose To Be Responsible In Your Commitments To Others.

**ALWAYS KEEP OTHERS IN MIND
WHEN YOU MAKE YOUR OWN CHOICES!**

Make choices that lead to consequences that maximize the positive outcomes for both you and others.

COOPERATE!

Remember, cooperation pleases your brain!

