



The Social Conditions for High Performance, from 'Belonging', (extract)
– Owen Eastwood, (2021) p23

Summary

- Feeling we don't belong drives 'fight or flight' physiological responses
- By contrast, experiences of belonging help us 'rest' into high trust, communication and collaboration
- High Performance requires meeting high challenge (stress) in a social context that supports high quality attention to achieving results as opposed to primitive survival

"Feelings of insecurity over belonging trigger our [fight, flight or freeze response](#). Our attention cascades into the present emergency. [Stress hormones](#) and adrenalin take control. Our heart races, our breath speeds up, digestion pauses, blood vessels constrict, eyes dilate. We literally tighten up. Tunnel vision takes over. Our thinking ability is reduced. Our capacity to communicate with those around us diminishes.

On the other hand, when we experience a sense of belonging our body produces a hormone soup that enables oxytocin, serotonin, dopamine and endorphins to work their collective magic. Stress hormones are still there but in balance; our anxiety and fear are lowered and we feel calmer and safer. This allows us [to trust, communicate and co-operate](#) at a higher level. Our oxytocin system makes us more empathetic to those in our group and sensitive to their approval. Our serotonin system guides our mood. Our dopamine system shifts motivation from self-preservation to meeting others' expectations. Endorphins signal moments of social bonding.

[Our need to belong is, therefore, not just in the mind, but a physical state](#). It is hardwired into our biology. When social relationships feel under threat, we respond both emotionally and physically as though our survival is threatened. The same area in our brain is engaged as if we were suffering physical pain. It is an example of how our biology has adapted an ancient system in order to drive our need to belong.

... performing at something that is important to us involves stress. The question is whether our hormone blend is enabling motivation, engagement and focus, or disabling us through distraction, wasted energy and disconnection from teammates.

