

IN BRIEF: Types of Affect Regulation Systems

Three types of affect regulation systems are incorporated by the International Center in its leadership, employee engagement, conflict management, customer/client relations, and other areas of focus. The identification and descriptions of these systems was developed by Paul Gilbert, PhD, FBPSS, OBE at the University of Derby in the United Kingdom¹ and is based upon the neuroscience and research on attachment and affiliative processing. Dr. Gilbert is the founder of the Compassionate Mind Foundation,² an International Center partner.

The graphic to the right illustrates these systems in a simplified way. It serves as a practical diagram for these important areas that impact interpersonal dynamics in organizational settings.

Successfully incorporating the lessons from these types of affect regulation systems makes working with others, removing the inhibitors to motivation and creativity, and building commitment easier.

Here are brief descriptions of the three systems:

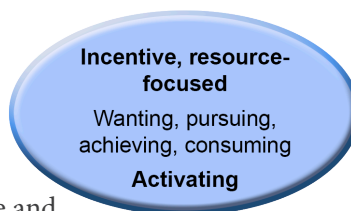
Incentive and Resource-Seeking System — This system provides positive feelings that move us toward successfully surviving and thriving. The establishment of new skills, goals, safety, predictability, positive connections with others, and social success are driven by this system.

Soothing and Contentment System — This system moves us to unwind, be comforted, and heal from the abrasions encountered in our daily life and affairs. Free of striving, we are able to experience a relaxed, comforting, and safe happiness that is free of problems and the demands of achievement.

The Threat and Self-Protection System — The function of this system is to identify threats, mobilize our body's resources, and focus us on responding in order to survive. It manifests in a variety of ways, including feelings such as anxiety, anger or disgust. Responses generally fall into five categories — *fight* (physical, emotional, and/or mental), *posture* (become threatening to intimidate the

DRIVE

Drive, excitement, vitality



SOOTHING

Contentment, safety, connection



Derived from material from the Compassionate Mind Foundation and from *The Compassionate Mind: A New Approach to Life's Challenges* by Paul Gilbert, PhD, FBPSS, OBE

threat source without actually fighting), *flight* (flee physically, emotionally or mentally), *submit* (surrender to the threat), or *freeze* (do nothing).

All three systems function in both personal and social contexts. We accumulate resources for ourselves and the ones we love and care about. Soothing is provided by and given to those close to us. Threats include those made against us personally, but also to family, friends, colleagues, those in our ethnic group, our fellow citizens, or other relationships with which we identify.

Each of these systems have an important role in understanding suffering and compassion's response. The threat system is the source for much of the suffering people encounter. Compassion mobilizes the other two systems to neutralize the impact of damaging threats.

Notes

1. While we reference Dr. Gilbert's work in this paper, any errors in interpretation and application are solely the responsibility of the International Center.
2. The Compassionate Mind Foundation provides a rich set of resources. We recommend supporting this excellent organization. Visit their website at: <http://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/>



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