

COGNITIVE APPRAISAL

CHALLENGE OR THREAT?

When faced with a new situation we make an instantaneous appraisal of potential threats, risks and benefits. This cognitive appraisal is an evolved survival response to protect us from harm.

Subconsciously we ask ourselves 3 questions:

1. HOW BIG IS THIS TASK?

How large and complex is this problem? How long will it take to overcome?



2. DO I HAVE THE RESOURCES TO ACHIEVE A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME?

Do I have sufficient skills, knowledge, time, tools and assistance to overcome this problem?



3. WHAT WILL SUCCESS OR FAILURE MEAN FOR ME?

Will I benefit from a successful outcome? e.g. financially or reputationally.



What effects would failure have on me?

Following these 3 questions we generate 2 possible appraisals of the situation: threat or challenge.

THREAT



This problem is too large and too complex. I don't have the skills and resources to achieve a successful outcome. The result will be catastrophic for me.

Surge in stress hormone release. Fight or flight response. Frazzle or freezing. Poor performance.

CHALLENGE



This is difficult but I have the knowledge, skills and assistance to achieve a positive outcome. The result will be good for me.

Low level release of stress hormones. Zone of high performance flow.

MANAGING A COGNITIVE APPRAISAL OF THREAT - RIDE IT OUT

The cognitive appraisal process is subconscious and instantaneous. We can't stop it happening.



High performers recognise initial threat appraisals and resist reacting to them. They wait for their brains to rationally process information from the situation before making judgements and taking action