



Commerce is in Our Biology

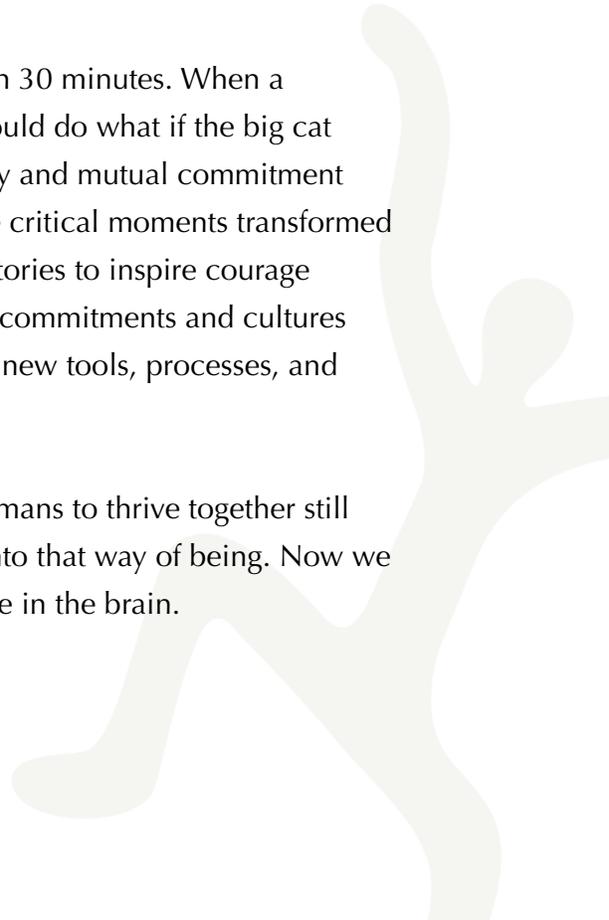
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Exchanging with others is an inescapable dimension of human life. The roots of commerce are an ancient legacy: coordinating action - exchanging energy, information, and material - to ensure that our people thrive.

Remember the innovation scene from Apollo 13? Did your heart rate change? How else did you respond? The engineers in Houston had 30 minutes to figure out a solution before the Astronauts started dying.

Early humans on the plains of Africa had a lot less than 30 minutes. When a predator approached, how did they figure out who would do what if the big cat went left, or alternatively, if it went right? The ingenuity and mutual commitment that allowed those small hominids to succeed in those critical moments transformed our ancestors. They invented language. They created stories to inspire courage and exploration. They designed roles and networks of commitments and cultures that embedded knowledge and loyalty. They designed new tools, processes, and materials.

The ingenuity and mutual commitment that allows humans to thrive together still feels great to us. Top-performing teams regularly tap into that way of being. Now we know that the pleasure comes from a shot of dopamine in the brain.





Those cooperative practices are 3+ million years old. Commerce and the brain evolved together. Their legacy impacts us all: somatically, cognitively, and emotionally, much to the despair of many who - blind to the biology of commerce, to its foundation in vulnerability - struggle to understand why employee, customer, and shareholder enthusiasm has become so elusive. And why what they 'know' no longer seems relevant.



Commerce is not just business; it's the way people function together. It's the source of power in the modern world. Valuable exchanges are as important in the not-for-profit and governmental sectors, and in our personal and 'volunteer' relationships, as is in commercial enterprises. And what makes them valuable? the extent to which they address our inevitable vulnerability. We exchange in order to be viable.

Distilled to the essentials, commerce is nothing more - and nothing less - than an exchange of promises. For most of human history, those promises meant the difference between life and death, ("You get the kids up the tree; I'll throw stones at the lion". "I'll be back by sunset with fish; you bring firewood.")

Somehow, sometime - I suspect during the Industrial Revolution - the simple power and seminal importance of promises became opaque. In the modern world exchanges can seem complicated, value hard to generate; integrity rare. I suggest viewing that 'complexity' as noise. Those who have the courage and ingenuity to address their own and others' vulnerability will win the day - as they always have.



Ignore the biology of commerce at your peril.

