



# Rising to the Challenge:

Calm, Clarity, and Courage in Continuing Education

Closing Keynote

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# Why This Conversation Matters

- The world has changed
  - More uncertainty and pressure
  - Faster decisions, higher emotional load
  - Leadership feels heavier because it is
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# Why Continuing Education Feels Different Right Now

- Faster labour market shifts
  - AI disruption changing curriculum cycles
  - Pressure to innovate with fewer resources
  - Learners arriving with greater complexity
  - Revenue expectations + social responsibility
  - Institutions expecting agility without instability
  - Constant adaptation with little recovery time
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# This is Not Normal



<b>Volatility</b>	High expectations
<b>Uncertainty</b>	Limited Control
<b>Complexity</b>	Strong emotions
<b>Ambiguity</b>	Public PResure



# VUC'D World



Volatility	Rapid rate of change
Uncertainty	Unclear about the present
Complexity - > <b>Chaos</b>	Chaos on all level
Ambiguity -> <b>Division</b>	Division and polarization

# Continuing Education Has Become the Front Line of Adaptation

- Faster labour market shifts
  - AI disruption changing curriculum cycles
  - Pressure to innovate with fewer resources
  - Learners arriving with greater complexity
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-



“When everything  
**shifts**,  
our only hope is to  
be  
**Unshakable.**  
Our best strategy is  
**CALM”**

# CALM The VUC Down



**Volatility → Values**

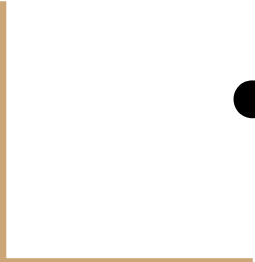
**Uncertainty → Upekkhā  
(Equanimity)**

**Chaos/Complex → Compassion**

**Division → Discernment**

# The Reality You are Holding



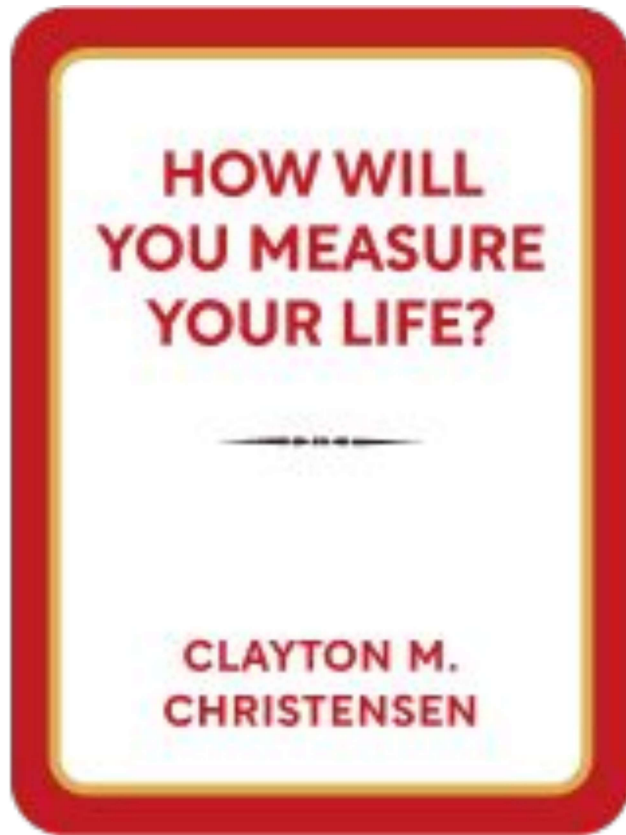
- Commitment to students
  - Responsibility to colleagues
  - Frustration with systems
  - Uncertainty about what comes next
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**Volatility → Values & Principles**



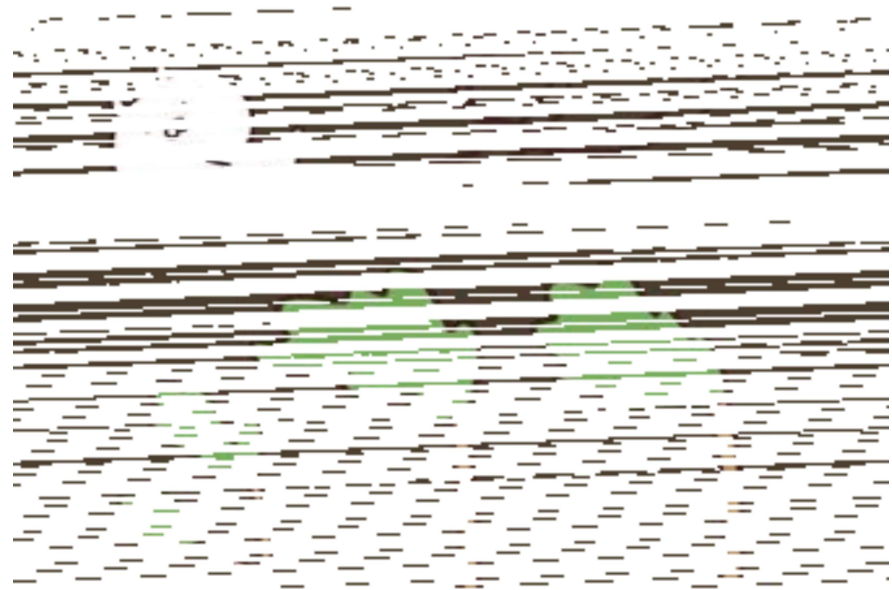
# Volatility → Values & Principles



- Volatility breeds panic
- Values ground us
- Clayton Christensen: *“Easier to stick to values 100% than 98%”*
- Your line in the sand = your anchor
- Values keep your grounded

# The Cost of Values Drift

- Reactive decision-making
- Inconsistent standards
- Short-term wins, long-term erosion
- Quiet loss of trust (self + others)



**Uncertainty → Upekkhā**



Let's look inside our brains

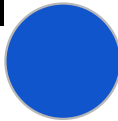


# Major Networks

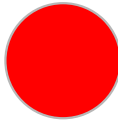
- **Saliience Network**



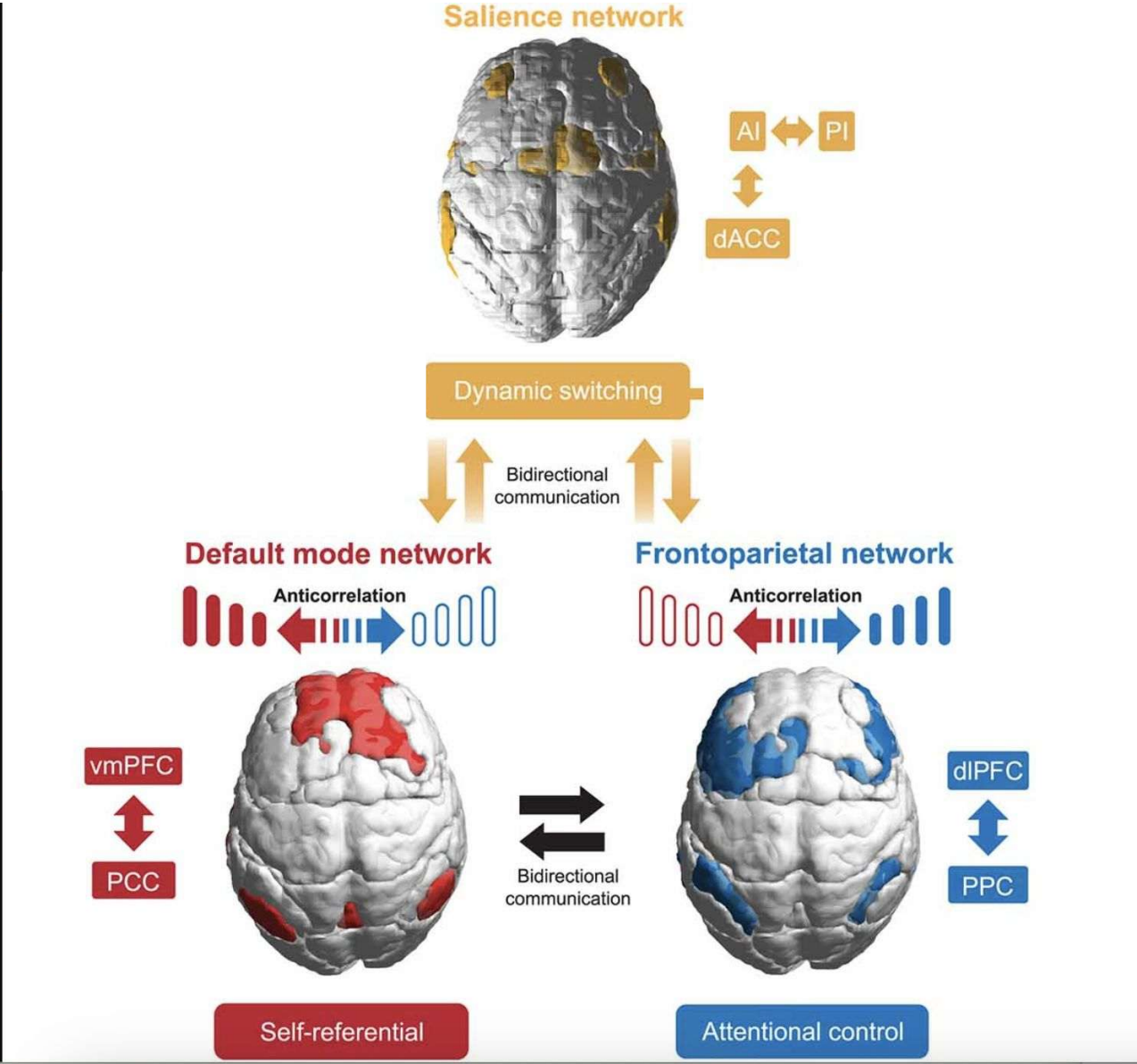
- **Frontoparietal Network**



- **Default Mode Network**



Schimmelpfennig, J., Topczewski, J., Zajkowski, W., & Jankowiak-Siuda, K. (2023). The role of the saliience network in cognitive and affective deficits. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 17, 1133367-. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2023.1133367>

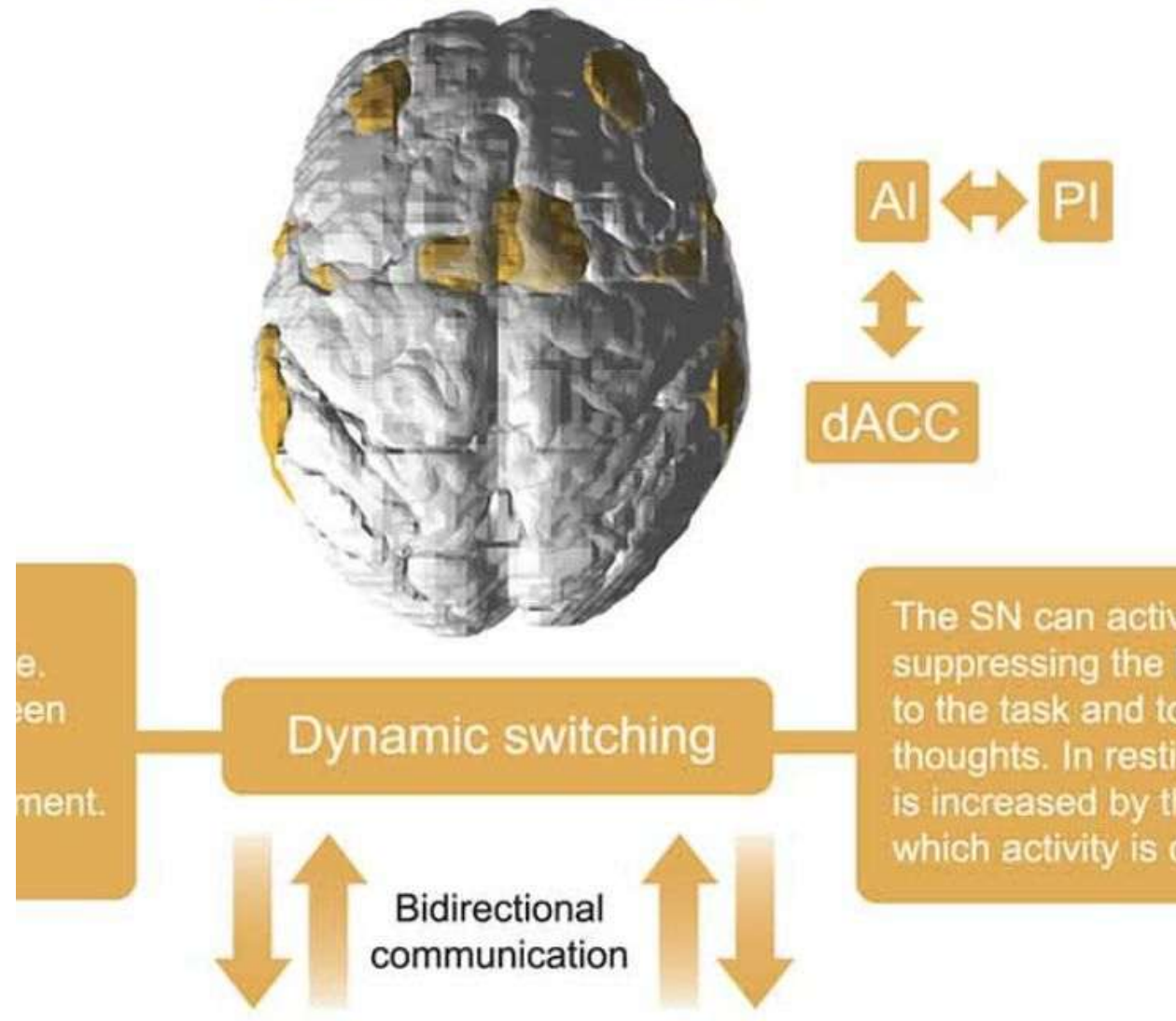


## The Scout

### Yellow Zone (Caution)

- Scans for what matters most
  - threats
  - opportunities
  - social cues
- **What are you paying attention to?**

### Saliience network

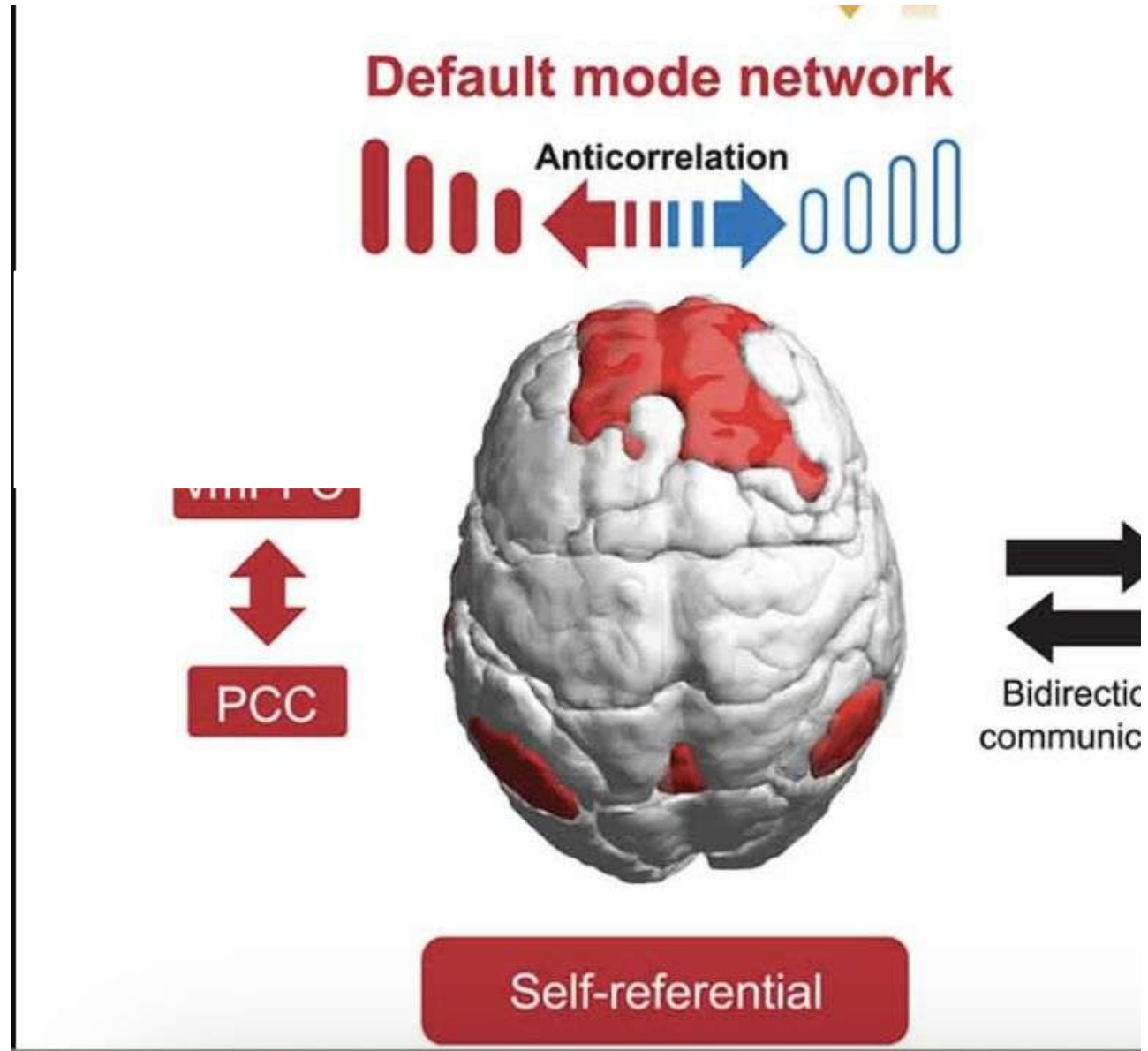


## The Storyteller

### Red Zone

- builds our sense of self by integrating memories and values into a coherent story.
- Keeps us consistent with who we believe we are

**What story are you telling yourself in this moment?**

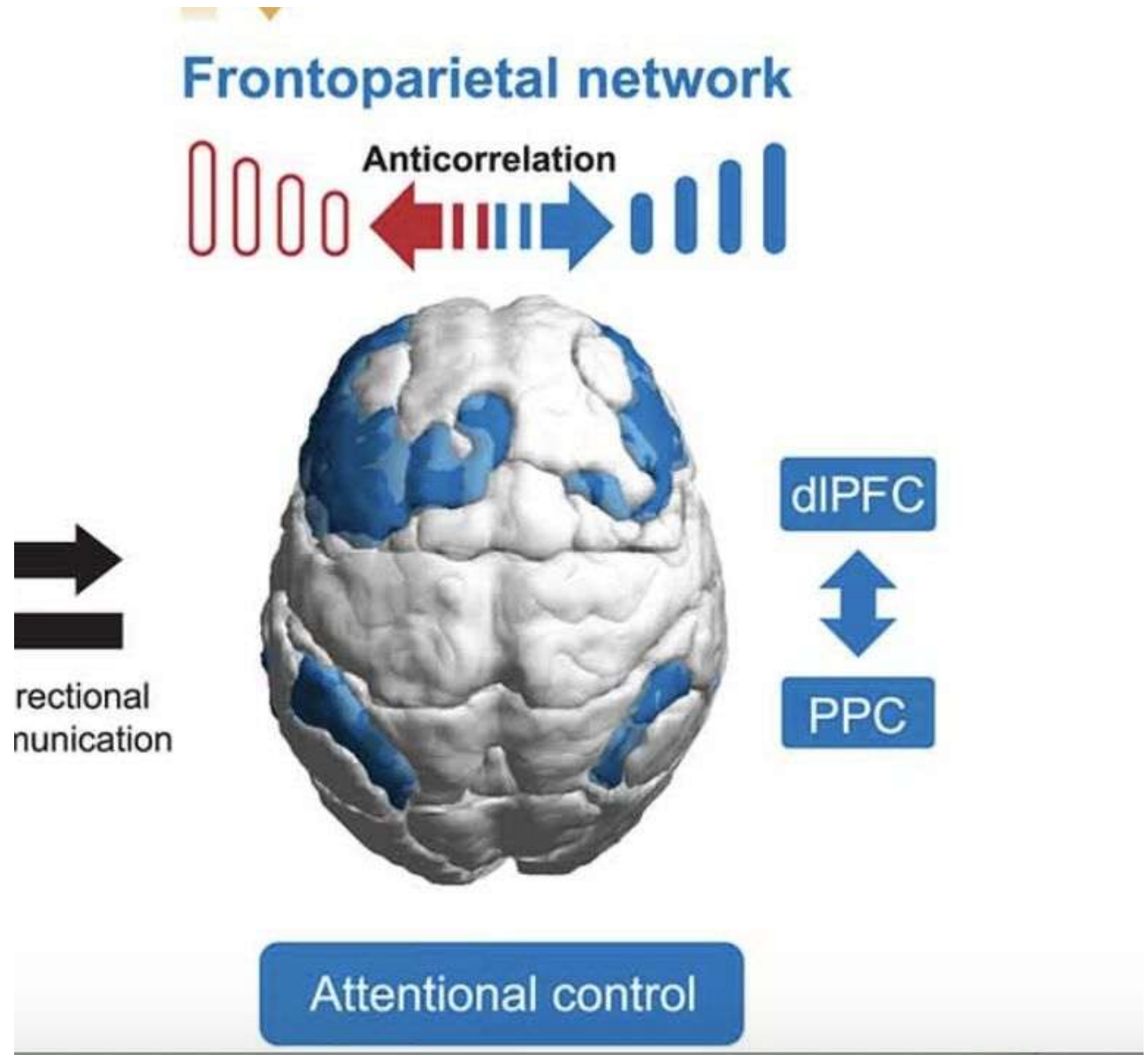


## The Strategist




### Blue Zone

- evaluates goals, plans steps, and keeps focus on tasks.
- decision-making and follow-through hub.

To get out of flight-fight-freeze, get into the blue zone



# Why Leadership Gets Harder Under Uncertainty

- The brain prioritizes safety over sense-making 
- Threat detection activates before reflection
- Story fills the gap when information is incomplete 
- Speed replaces discernment (aka we react before we think) 

# Pay Attention to your Day

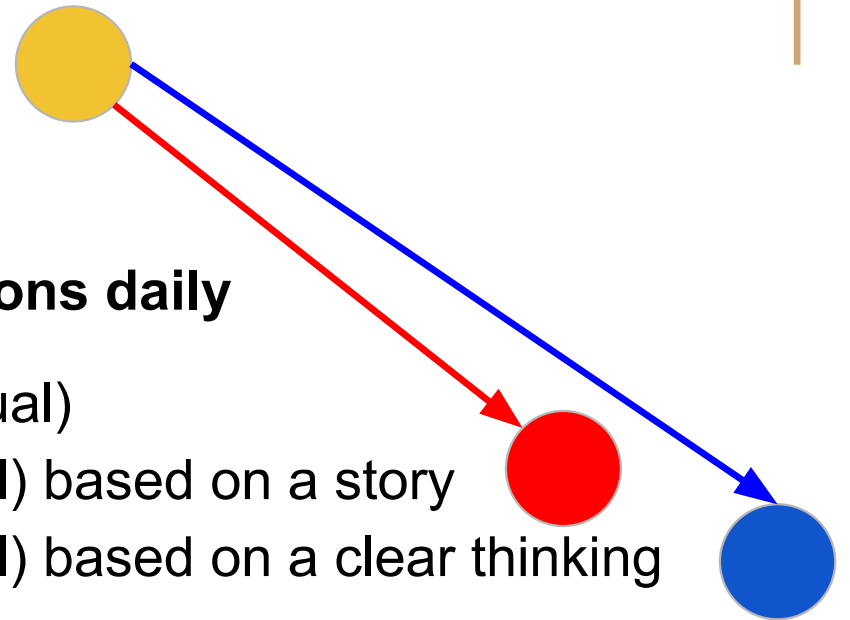
We're exposed to **millions of bits of information per second**

- Consciously process only **50–120 bits**

Average person makes about **35,000 decisions daily**

- Most are unconscious (automatic, habitual)
- Some are conscious (deliberate, effortful) based on a story
- Some are conscious (deliberate, effortful) based on a clear thinking

**Brain uses 20% of body's energy!**



# Uncertain Brain vs. Upekkhā Brain

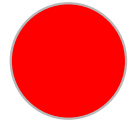
Uncertain Brain	Upekkhā Brain
Stories feel urgent and personal (Red Zone)	Can hold uncertainty without rushing to resolve it
Certainty is mistaken for clarity	Separates signal from story
Empathy narrows	Maintains empathy under ambiguity
Listening becomes selective	Pauses before concluding
Reaction precedes reflection	Keeps the strategist online

**PAUSE → NAME → MOVE**

**PAUSE → Regulate the Scout (Salience Network)**



**NAME → Engage the Storyteller (Default Mode Network)**



**MOVE → Activate the Strategist (Central Executive Network)**

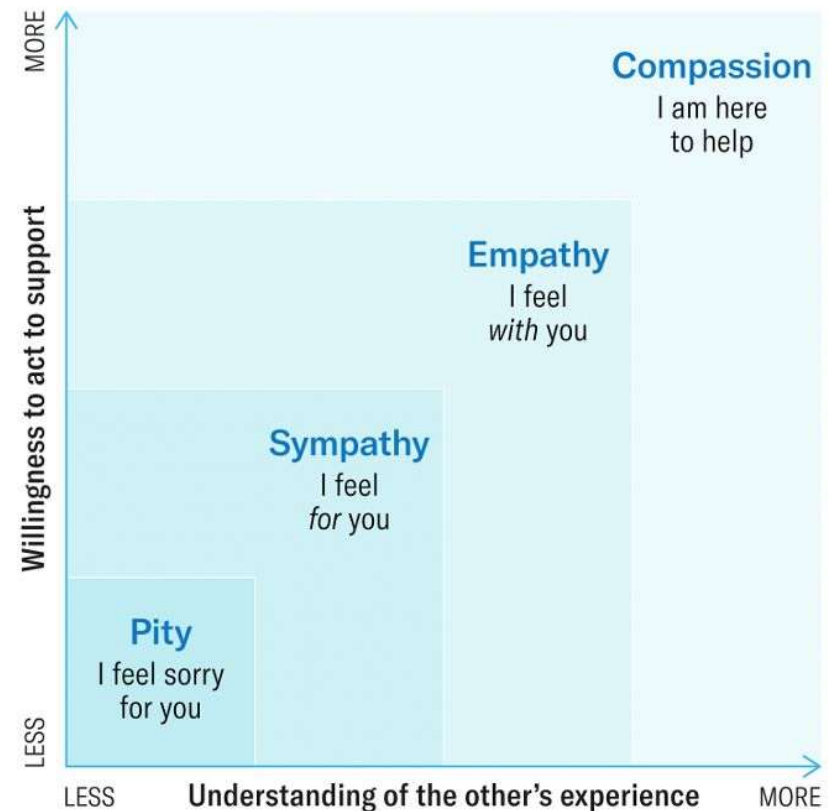


**Chaos → Compassion**

# Chaos → Empathy → Compassion

- Chaos isolates; compassion connects
- Compassion = empathy + action (Hougaard)
- Build bigger tables—not just more seat

## Compassion Goes Beyond Sympathy and Empathy



Hougaard, R., Carter, J., & Afton, M. (2021, December 23). *Effective leaders move beyond empathy to compassion*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2021/12/connect-with-empathy-but-lead-with-compassion>

**Division → Discernment**

# Division → Discernment

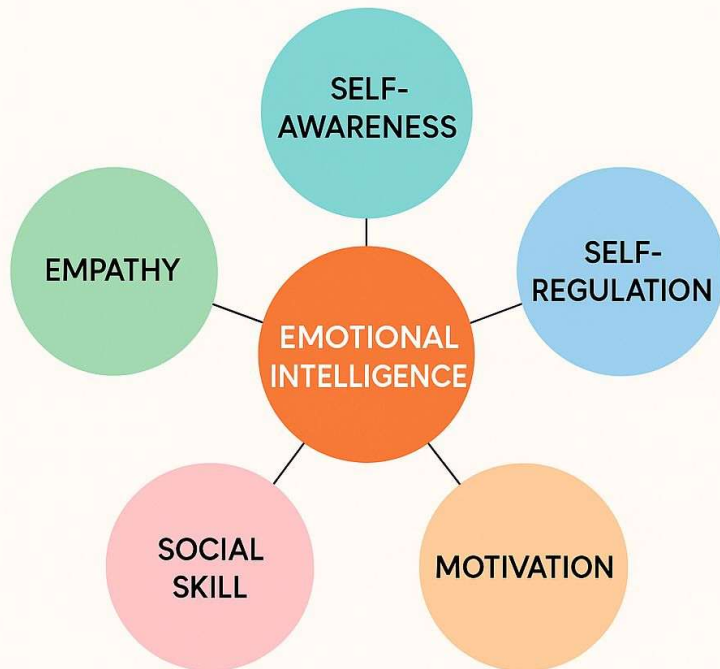
Discernment is the capacity to **accurately**

- **perceive,**
- **interpret, and**
- **respond**

to yourself *and* others.

# Emotional Intelligence

## Elements of Emotional Intelligence



“...not only was it (EI) twice as important than technical or cognitive skills, but its importance was proportional to the rise in rank of the individual increased within the organization.”

# Discernment Is Leadership

*Emotional intelligence is the discipline of discernment under pressure.*

# Summary

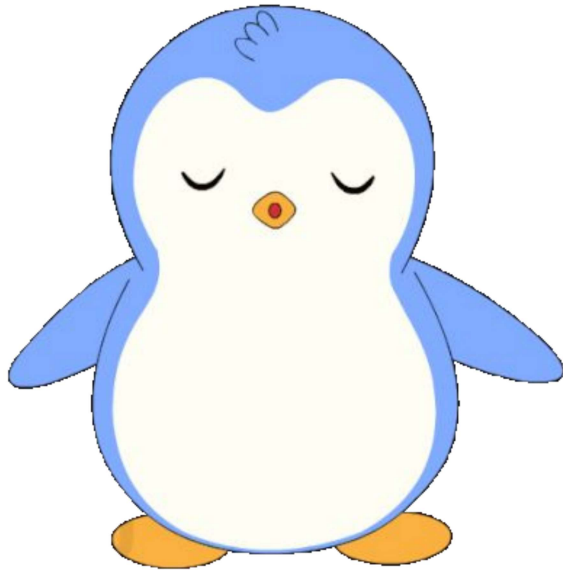


# What (CALM) Leadership Requires Now



- **Unwavering values**
- **Deep cognitive alignment**
- **Compassionate connection**
- **Deliberate discernment & internal understanding**

# CALM Leadership Begins Internally

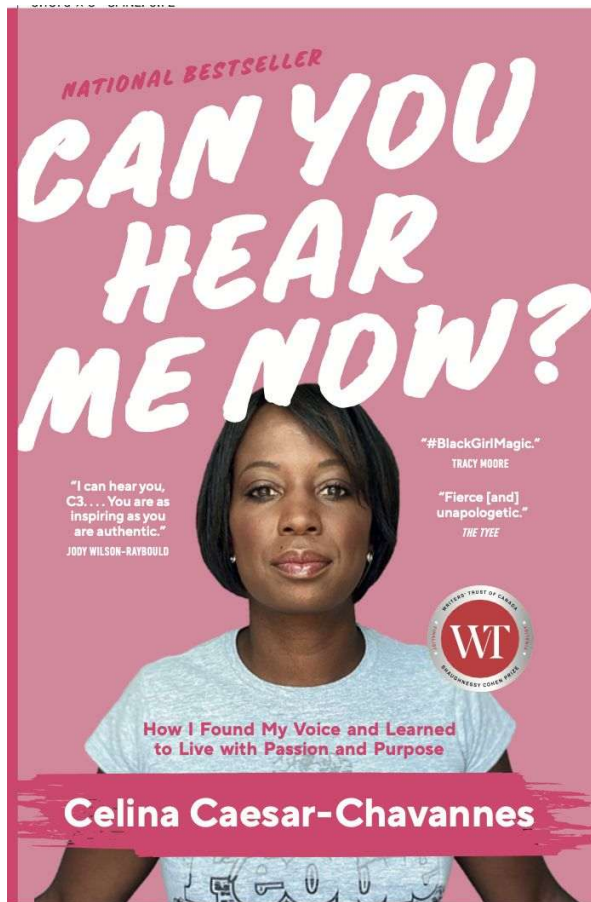


- Calm is regulated presence
- Slower reactivity
- Clear attention

*You can't lead calm out there  
without calm in here*

# Reflective Call to Action

- **Where can I embody stillness amid volatility?**
- **Where am I out of alignment?**
- **Who needs my compassion right now?**
- **What would a discerning response look like—rather than a reactive one?**



“To the people of Canada, and beyond, your value is not determined by your title and leadership does not require a title.

The power has always belonged to the people. It is time that people realize their power.

It is not enough to hear my voice.

We need to hear you too.” p. 261



THE  
AWAKENED  
LEADERSHIP  
INSTITUTE

# Thank you



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Additional questions?  
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