

ICF · INTERNATIONAL COACHING WEEK · 12 MAY 2026

What 5,218 tests reveal about how leaders really think.

Head Brain

Heart Brain

Gut Brain

Cross-cultural · 15 languages · 42 countries · 33 professional categories

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Founder, 3 Brains Intelligence Academy · ICF Master Certified Coach

Thank you.

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Head Brain

Heart Brain

Gut Brain

We have 3 biological intelligence systems, not one brain

Head Brain

Logical Analysis

~40bn neurons · cranial neocortex

Prediction, structure, cause and effect.

Operates across time, past and future.

Core question: Is this logical, and what comes next?

Heart Brain

Emotional Connection

~40,000 neurons · cardiac nervous system (Dr Armour, 1994)

Belonging, connection, emotional truth.

Operates in the present moment.

Core question: Am I accepted, and does this honour my values?

Gut Brain

Instinctive Action

500m+ neurons · enteric nervous system (Dr Gershon, 1998)

Survival, action, resource acquisition.

Operates in milliseconds.

Core question: Am I safe, and will this succeed?

97% of us are dominant in 1 or 2 Brains, the third is almost never listened to,
only 3% of professionals have this

McKinsey's four leadership behaviours map cleanly to 3 Brains.

*McKinsey studied 189,000 leaders across 81 organisations.
Four behaviours account for 89% of the difference between strong and weak leadership.*

Solving problems effectively

HEAD BRAIN

Analytical reasoning, structured thinking, cause and effect.

Operating with strong results orientation

GUT BRAIN

Drive, decisiveness, execution under pressure.

Seeking different perspectives

HEART BRAIN / HEAD BRAIN

Relational awareness, openness, listening to environment.

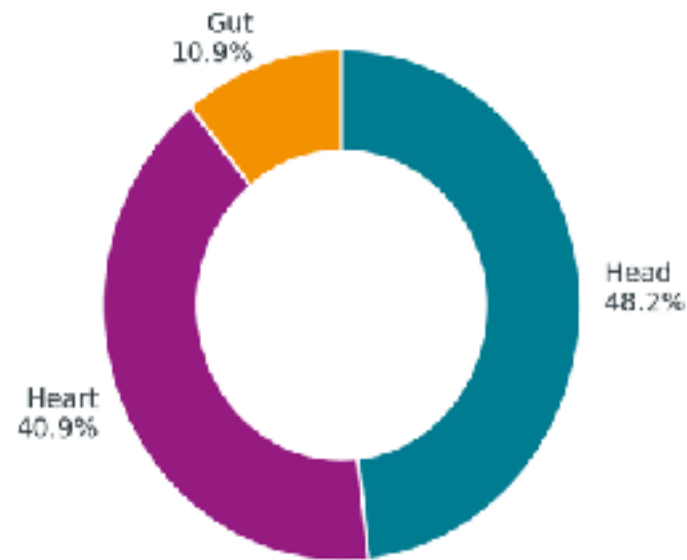
Supporting others

HEART BRAIN

Empathy, trust building, sensing what people need.

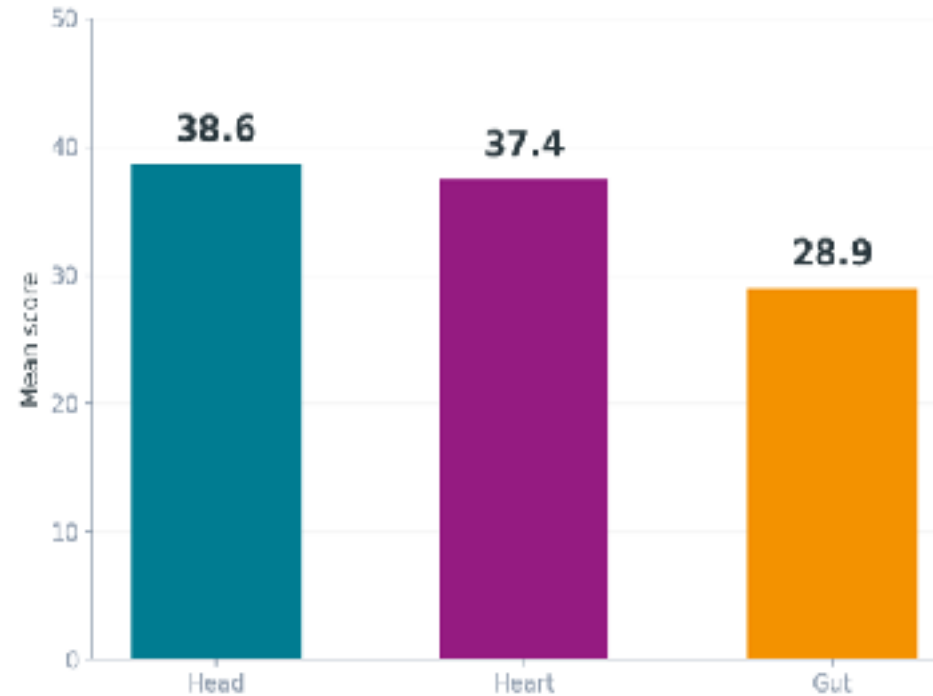
Dominant Brain and Mean Score across 5,218 professionals in 42 countries.

Dominant brain — global population (n=5,218)



Dominant Brain — global population (n = 5,218)

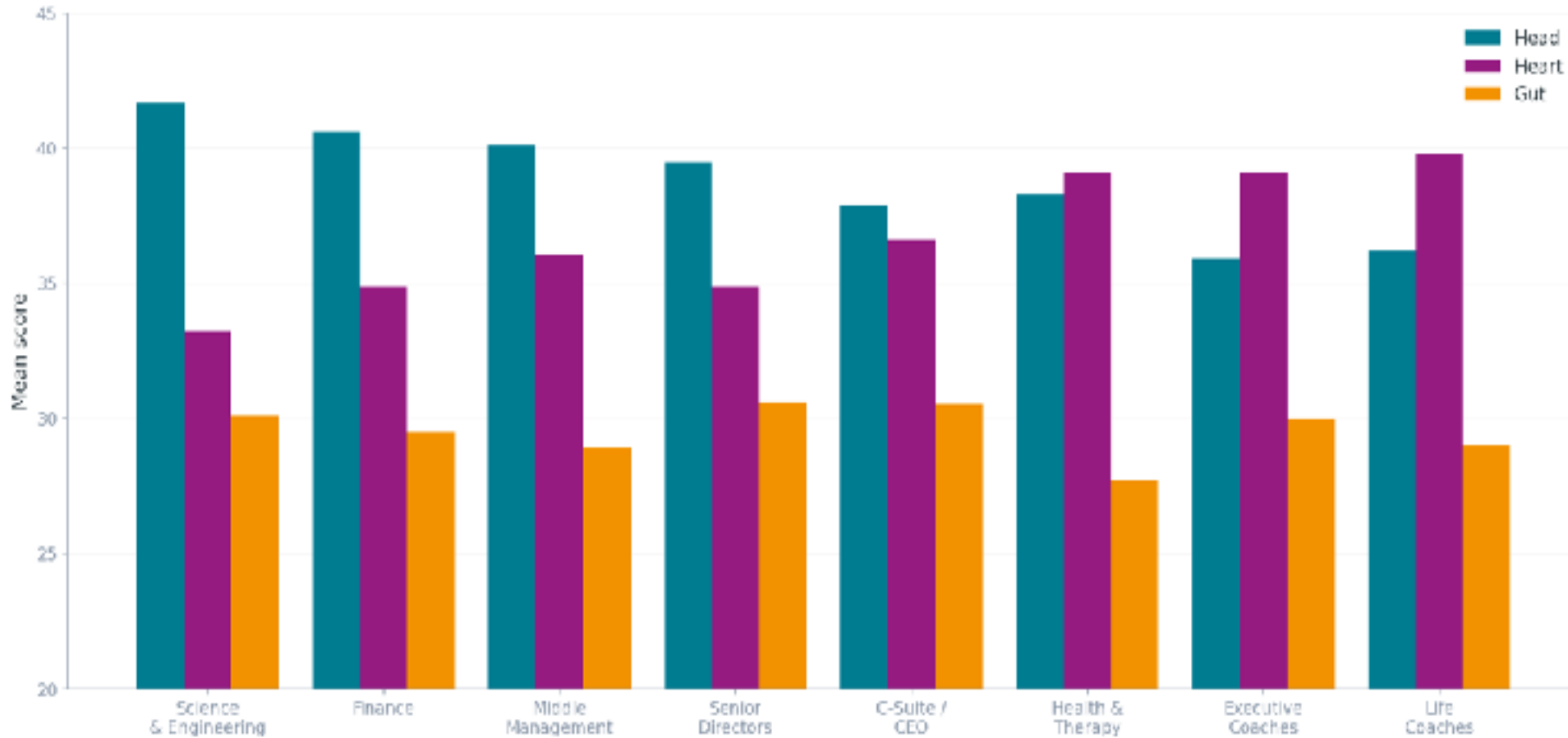
Mean scores — global population



Mean scores — global population

Brain Dominance predicts Profession

Brain dominance varies by profession



Coaches & therapists: Heart exceeds Head — the only professions where this happens.

Science & finance: highest Head scores. The profile most at risk of the analytical trap.

You and your C-suite client are most likely in different Brains.

YOU, AS A COACH

Heart-dominant

- Listen from connection.
- Track emotional shifts.
- Feel the session going deep.

With the different coaches in the dataset: Heart exceeds Head in every subgroup.

YOUR CLIENT, C-SUITE

Head-dominant

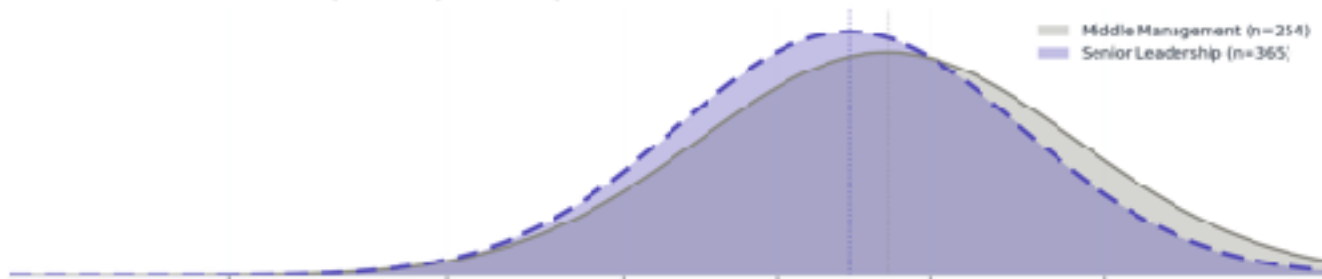
- Process from analysis.
- Decides with incomplete data.
- Interested in their benefit.

They don't have the patience for all the questions and reflections. They take action without all the information.

How the 3 Brains shift from middle management to senior leadership.

How the three brains shift from Middle Management to Senior Leadership
Smoothed score distributions for 619 leaders. Same scoring scale across all three brains.

Head Brain · Mean shift: -1.8 pts · Top tail thins · $p = 0.009$

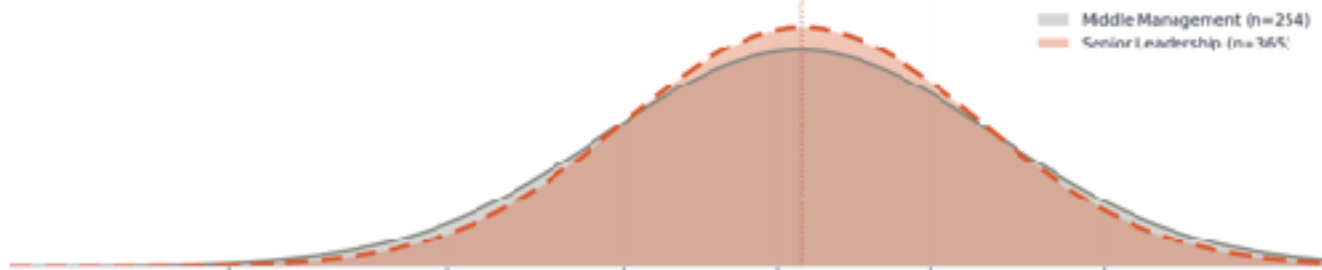


$p = 0.009$

Head softens at the top

Very-high Head (45+) drops from 26.8% to 21.4%. The hyper-analyst profile thins out as people rise.

Heart Brain · Mean shift: +0.1 pts · Distributions overlap · $p = 0.88$ · no difference

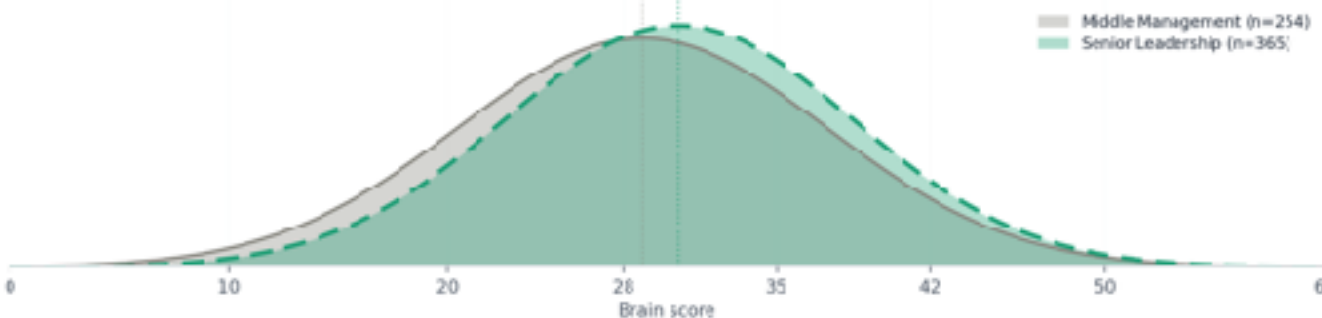


$p = 0.88$

Heart barely moves

Means differ by 0.1 points. Distributions overlap almost perfectly. EQ is not the differentiator.

Gut Brain · Mean shift: +1.7 pts · Bottom tail thins, top thickens · $p = 0.014$

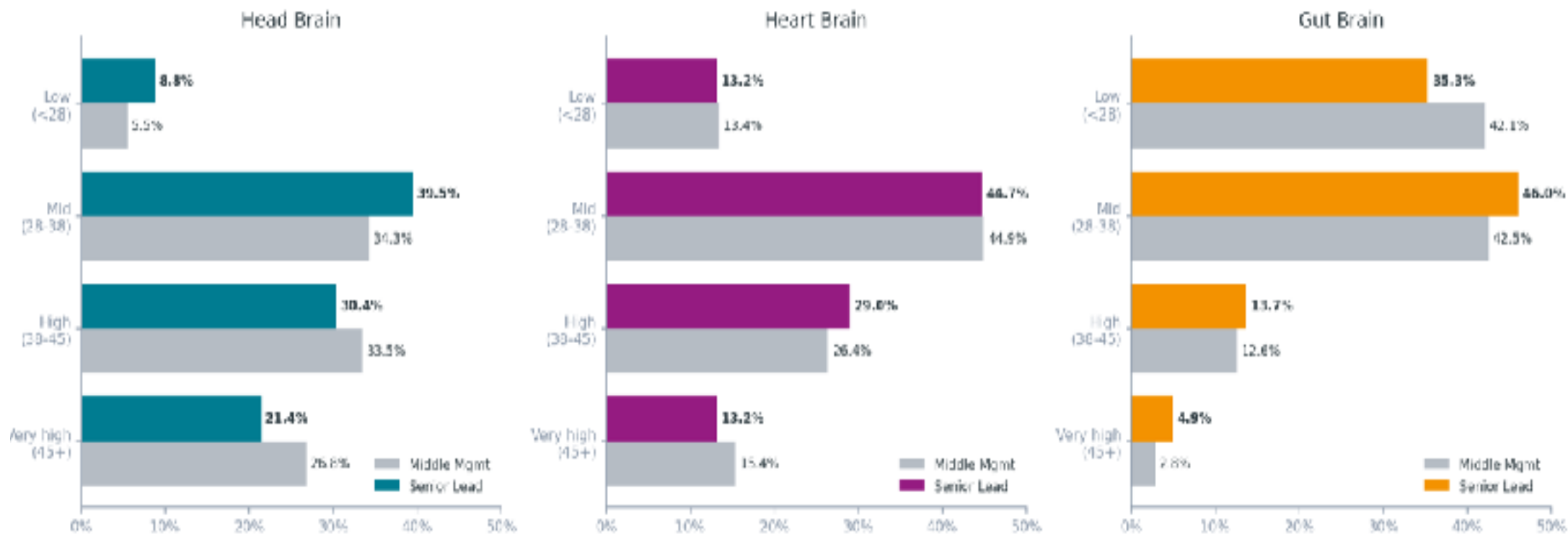


$p = 0.014$

Gut activates

Bottom tail (under 28) drops from 42.1% to 35.3%. The instinct-suppressed profile disappears.

Distribution of Brain scores: Middle Management vs Senior Leadership.



Head: Very High (45+) drops 5.4 pts. Mid range thickens. The pure analytical specialist thins out.

Heart: Almost no movement across any bucket. $p = 0.88$. Not the differentiator.

Gut: Low bucket drops 6.8 pts. Mid and high both thicken. Gut-dominant rises from 12.2% to 15.9%.

Here is what 5,218 tests reveal that is (maybe) surprising.

01

Many development paths target the wrong variable

Heart Brain capability is nearly identical at middle management and senior leadership level ($p = 0.88$). It is not what changes. The data contradicts the majority of the leadership development literature.

02

Gut is the rarest Brain, and probably the most decisive factor

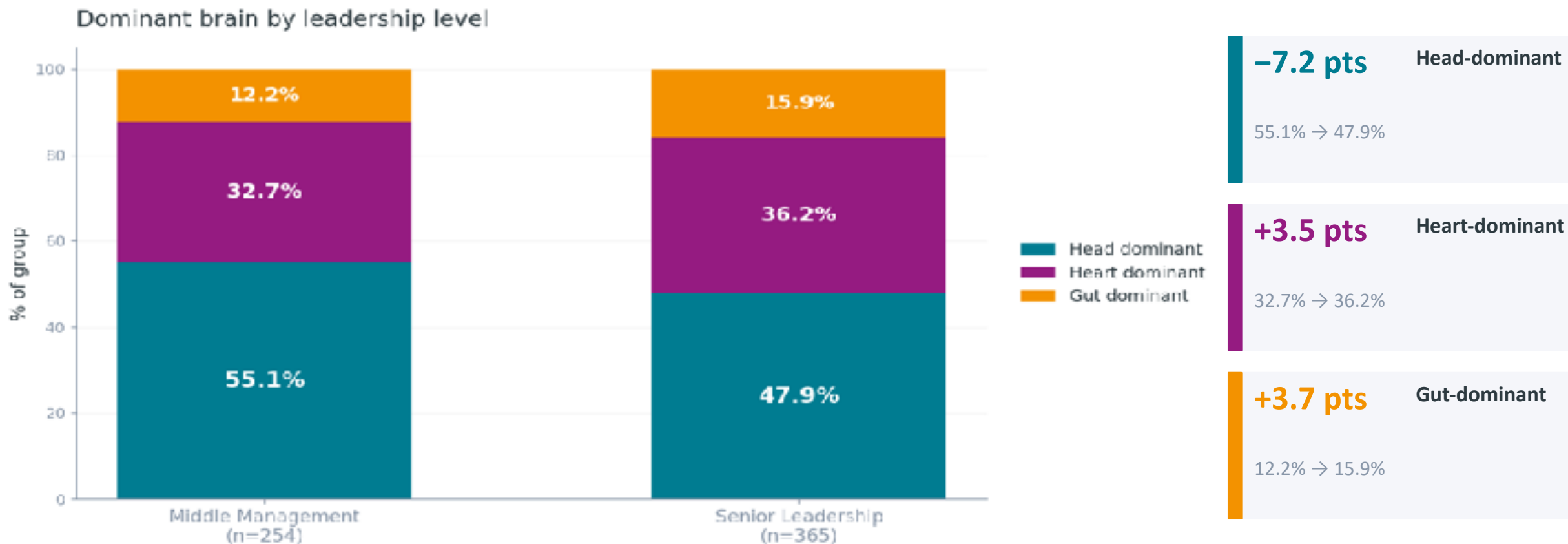
Only 10.9% of professionals lead from instinct. Yet the disappearance of very-low Gut scores is the single clearest signal distinguishing senior leaders from middle managers ($p = 0.014$).

03

Coaches and our C-suite clients have different Brain dominance

If you are a coach, you are most likely Heart-dominant. Your executive client is most likely Head-dominant. The data makes this gap visible and makes it an important eye-opener when working with them.

The dominant Brain shifts as people rise, and one profile disappears.



The Head-dominant majority shrinks. Both other Brains grow. The extreme analytical specialist and the instinct-suppressed performer both disappear at the top. What survives is balance.

What the data is actually showing us.

Senior leadership is the development of trust as an operational capacity.

Gut activation is not about becoming more decisive. It is the development of trust in self, in the process, in others, and in incomplete information. That trust is what allows the Heart and the Head to fully operate.

THE 3 BRAINS STATE — THE FRAMEWORK THAT DESCRIBES WHOLENESS

OPEN MIND

Curiosity

about what is happening, what is possible, and what we do not yet know.

Closed Mind: judgement, clinging to old learnings.

OPEN HEART

Compassion

for self and for others, allowing emotional flexibility.

Closed Heart: indifference, disconnection.

OPEN GUT

Trust

in yourself, in the process, and in the capacities of others.

Closed Gut: fear, anger, analysis paralysis.

What looked like Gut activation in the data is actually trust capacity emerging. Senior leaders dare to trust.

But how 'great' are the leaders actually?

23%

Global employee
engagement

Gallup 2023

25%

Find their leaders
engaged & inspiring

McKinsey

26-41%

Culture change projects
that succeed

McKinsey, BCG, Accenture

56%

Employees globally
struggling

Gallup Life Evaluation

These are not separate problems.

They are the predictable output of leaders who have not yet developed the trust capacity that unlocks the other two Brains.

Heart is present in the assessment. Without trust, it cannot be expressed in the room.

Paul Zak: how trust shows up in the body.

TRUST RUNS ON OXYTOCIN

Paul Zak, neuroeconomist

Two decades of research mapping the biochemical signal that builds trust between humans.

When people feel safe and recognised, the brain releases oxytocin. Oxytocin produces empathy, generosity, and willingness to cooperate.

No oxytocin signal, no trust. No trust, no engagement. No engagement, no performance.

ORGANISATIONS IN THE TOP QUARTILE OF TRUST

Zak study · n = 1,095 employees · Harvard Business Review, 2017

+76%	more engagement	+50%	higher productivity
+106%	more energy at work	-40%	less burnout
+74%	less stress	+29%	more life satisfaction

When the Gut is open, trust flows. When trust flows, oxytocin releases. When oxytocin releases, performance follows.

All 3 Brains, operationalised by Zak's research.

TRUST

GUT · Open Gut, oxytocin release

82%

Honesty & vulnerability

65%

Open information sharing with colleagues

65%

Delegation

PASSION

HEART · Open Heart, relational engagement

84%

Caring & building relationships

72%

Investing in people

LOGIC

HEAD · Open Mind, cognitive structure

83%

Clear expectation of performance

67%

Praise & recognition

Percentages = relative contribution to engagement, derived from Zak's eight trust factors. Source: Paul Zak, *The Trust Factor*.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Lencioni's 5 Dysfunctions, re-read through the 3 Brains lens.

Each dysfunction is a specific Brain that is not active. Coaching it requires activating that Brain — not just naming the dysfunction.

#5	Inattention to Results	GUT	<i>"What does the team need to win, and are you willing to act on it now?"</i>
#4	Avoidance of Accountability	GUT	<i>"What do we need to share honestly, what we are willing to do and can and can't do?"</i>
#3	Lack of Commitment	HEAD	<i>"What needs to be there so that we understand, are passionate and energised?"</i>
#2	Fear of Conflict	HEART	<i>"What do you need from each other to disagree without being afraid to be rejected?"</i>
#1	Absence of Trust	GUT	<i>"What would you need to share your strengths, pitfalls, and mistakes without fear?"</i>

Trust + Conflict = Heart · Commitment = Head · Accountability + Results = Gut. All three must be active for the team to function.

THE MECHANISM

How does Gut activate? What suppresses it?

The data shows Gut activation between middle management and senior leadership. The literature shows how it happens, and how organisations accidentally suppress it.

WHAT ACTIVATES GUT AWARENESS

→ **Stakes with reversible consequences**

Real decisions where the outcome matters but recovery is possible. Builds calibrated risk tolerance.

→ **Mentorship from Gut-active leaders**

Modelling, not instruction. Interoception is transmitted, not taught.

→ **Somatic and reflective practice**

Body-based attention. Meditation. Embodied learning. Builds interoceptive accuracy.

→ **Failure that is named, not hidden**

The leader who can say 'I was wrong' grows Gut. The one who covers it suppresses Gut.

WHAT SUPPRESSES GUT AWARENESS

X **Cultures of too much certainty**

Where 'I don't know' is treated as weakness, leaders learn to perform analysis instead of feel direction.

X **Over-reliance on data and frameworks**

Every uncertain moment outsourced to a model. The interoceptive signal goes unused, then quiet.

X **Promotion based purely on analytical strength**

Selecting for high Head selects against high Gut. The 'best performer' often has the lowest Gut activation.

X **Punishment of named mistakes**

Suppresses the somatic markers that build calibration. Leaders stop trusting their reads.

The development goal is Trust (Gut) activation.

WHAT MANY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES OFFER

- Emotional intelligence training
- Improve self-awareness
- Strengthen relationships
- Better communication skills
- Build psychological safety

*All of this is valuable.
Not much of it changes between levels.*

WHAT THE DATA SAYS TO TARGET

- Development of vulnerable confidence
- Decisive presence with incomplete data (uncertainty)
- Development of whole-system metacognition
- Commitment practice (act before full analysis)
- Interoceptive sensibility and interoceptive awareness

*This is the coaching conversation that is missing.
This is where the gap lives.*

THE SCIENCE OF GUT ACTIVATION

What we call Gut activation has names in the literature.

These are not new ideas. They are well-established constructs in neuroscience and adult development. The 3 Brains framework operationalises them for coaching.

INTEROCEPTIVE AWARENESS

The capacity to sense the body's internal state, and to know how reliable that sensing is.

Garfinkel, Seth, Barrett, Suzuki & Critchley (2015), Biological Psychology, 104:65–74. Three dimensions: accuracy, sensibility, awareness.

This is the measurable substrate of Gut intelligence.

SOMATIC MARKER HYPOTHESIS

Decisions under uncertainty are guided by bodily signals processed in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex.

Damasio (1994, 1996). Patients with vmPFC damage retain logic but lose the capacity to decide.

This is why Gut-suppressed leaders stall at complexity.

VERTICAL DEVELOPMENT

Not more knowledge, but more complex, systemic, interdependent thinking. The capacity that senior leadership actually requires.

Petrie, Center for Creative Leadership (2014, 2015). Horizontal = competencies. Vertical = stages of mind.

What our data shows is vertical development — biologically.

SELF-AUTHORING MIND

The order of mind that holds its own internal authority, not subject to others' expectations.

Kegan (1982, 1994). The transition from socialised to self-authoring mind is the central developmental task of adult leadership.

Trust capacity = self-authoring confidence in incomplete information.

Coaching middle managers toward senior leadership is, in measurable terms, training interoception, somatic markers, and the move from socialised to self-authoring mind.

DOMINANCE IS NOT STATIC

Under stress, many fall back on protective behaviours.

The 3 Brains profile at rest is the leader's default. Under pressure, fatigue, or uncertainty, the profile narrows and one of four Protectors per Brain comes to the foreground.

HEAD-DOMINANT UNDER STRESS

- **More Analytic**
- **More Perfectionism**
- **More Order Keeping**
- **More Observing**

HEART-DOMINANT UNDER STRESS

- **More Pleasing**
- **More Caretaking**
- **More Approval-Seeking**
- **More Peacekeeping**

GUT-DOMINANT UNDER STRESS

- **More Enduring**
- **More Controlling**
- **More Rebellious**
- **More Performing**

Three findings that change how you select and develop leaders.

01

Same profile ≠ same performance at the next level

A high-Head performer in middle management is often promoted on the strength of that capability. There is a huge change if they are not coached and mentored; they will struggle at the top, where the extreme analytical profile is rarer.

02

Low Gut is the structural ceiling

The strongest negative predictor for senior leadership success is not low Head and not low Heart. It is low Gut. A high-Head, low-Gut middle manager faces a real ceiling.

03

EQ development without trust biochemistry is incomplete

Heart capability is equally present at both levels ($p = 0.88$). What separates organisations is whether the Heart capability becomes oxytocin-releasing trust behaviours, the eight Zak factors.

WHAT TO BUY, WHAT TO BUILD

A 3 Brains-aligned development programme has four bands.

Not a curriculum bolt-on. A redesign of what 'leadership development' targets — based on which Brain the leader needs to grow.

01 ASSESS

3 Brains Dominance + interoceptive baseline

Map dominant Brain. Measure interoceptive sensibility (self-report) and accuracy (heartbeat tracking). Establish where Gut development needs to start.

02 ACTIVATE

Trust biochemistry, not abstract EQ

Train the eight Zak factors as observable behaviours — not the Heart capability they already have. The capability exists; the trust expression is missing.

03 EMBODY

Decisive presence with incomplete data

Somatic practice. Interoceptive training. Commitment under uncertainty. This is the variable that actually differentiates senior leadership.

04 INTEGRATE

Whole-system metacognition

The capacity to observe one's own Brain dominance in real time, name it, and choose differently. The vertical-development outcome.

Honest about what the data is, and what it is not.

The assessment:

3 Brains Dominance Test, three scores summing to ~105. Score of 35 per brain = perfect balance. In practice only 3% achieve this. Used in professional development contexts since 2010.

5,218 self-selected professionals, 2021 to April 2026. 15 languages, 42 countries, 33 professional categories. English speakers ~75%, followed by Croatian, Turkish, Italian, and Norwegian.

Leadership comparison:

n = 619 leaders. Middle management: n = 254. Senior leadership: n = 365 (C-suite, Senior Director, Managing Director). Only categories with n ≥ 70 included.

Statistical tests:

Independent t-tests and Mann-Whitney U tests. Head p = 0.009 · Heart p = 0.88 · Gut p = 0.014. Head and Gut significant at p < 0.05; Heart is not.

Selection bias:

Participants sought out the test. They skew toward self-development-oriented populations. Results are representative of that group, not the general workforce. Causal direction cannot be determined from cross-sectional data.

ACROSS CULTURES

Does this hold globally?

The dataset spans 42 countries and 15 languages. Three caveats matter for HR and L&D leaders deciding how to apply these findings.

01**Main findings are stable across language groups**

Head-softens / Gut-activates pattern is consistent across the largest language sub-samples (English ~75%, Croatian, Turkish, Italian, Norwegian). Effect direction does not reverse in any sub-group with $n \geq 70$.

02**Baseline dominance shifts by culture**

Mediterranean and Latin American respondents show higher Heart baselines. Northern European and East Asian respondents show higher Head baselines. The development arc is the same — the starting point differs.

03**What is currently unanalysed**

Gender-by-Brain interaction. Industry-by-Brain interaction. Generational shifts (Gen X vs Millennial vs Gen Z). All require larger sub-samples and are in the next research phase.

Five findings at a glance.

1 Gut is the rarest dominant Brain 10.9% of professionals lead from instinct. Only 1 in 9.

2 Profession predicts dominance Coaches = Heart. Scientists & finance = Head. Gut is low everywhere.

3 McKinsey maps cleanly to 3 Brains Half of leadership effectiveness lives in the Heart. Most training ignores this.

4 Head softens at the top. Gut activates. Not an analytical upgrade. The hyper-analyst profile disappears ($p = 0.009 / 0.014$).

5 The absence of low Gut is the ceiling Not low Head. Not low Heart. Low Gut is the structural barrier to senior leadership.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The leaders at the top are not better thinkers than middle managers.
They are not more emotionally intelligent.

**They have developed the trust capacity
that lets the other two Brains operate.**

What survives the climb is balance, not specialisation.

And balance, expressed through trust, is what employees actually need.

I love to challenge you

Now you know and feel the power of your 3 Brains.

How are you going to use and embed it?



OPTION 1

You leave with the model.

You try a few exercises. And probably, pitifully within two weeks — like 90% of professionals — you will back to your old way of working..

And the 3 Brains becomes another thing you once heard about.

OPTION 2

You embody it.

You commit to a 4-week structure, 8 times 4 hour live zoom sessions and as a bonus 40 ICF CCEUs.

And by 17 July, the model is in your 3 brains.

**My gift to you to €185 off
because you came.**

4 Weeks. 8 Sessions. Everything changes.

Here is exactly what you learn – and what it does for your clients.

40 CCEUs

28 CC · 12 RD · ICF-accredited

8× 4 hours live

Zoom · Thursday & Friday

30% of coaches join

specifically to recertify every 3 years

WEEK 1

The Science of the 3 Brains

- Why Head, Heart & Gut are 3 separate neural networks, not a metaphor
- Each Brain's role, responsibility, and decision-making authority
- How to read your own 3 Brains language, so you can hear it in clients

Your client feels understood at a depth they've never experienced before.

WEEK 2

Detect. Align. Coach.

- Master the CCT State (Curiosity · Compassion · Trust) to activate mirror neurons
- Identify in real time which Brain is speaking, and which one is blocking
- Use conscious breathing to regulate the vagus nerve and align all 3 Brains

Sessions become precise. You know what to do, and why it works.

WEEK 3

Rewire Beliefs. Release Patterns.

- Coach the 3 Brains Belief Rewiring process, where Heart & Gut store old limiting beliefs.
- 2 powerful techniques that put clients into a coaching state in minutes
- Understand the Autonomic Nervous System as the bridge between all 3 Brains

Clients release patterns they've carried for 10, 20, 30 years, safely, in the present.

WEEK 4

Embed Change. Full Sessions.

- 3 Brains Stuck Release Coaching, for patterns rooted in earlier experiences
- Full-length coaching sessions weaving CCT + Belief Rewiring + Event Rewiring
- How to build a complete 3 Brains session from opening to transformation

You leave with a complete coaching method, not a collection of tools.

The only method that reaches where change actually lives.

Head · Heart · Gut, all 3 saying yes, that is when change and success last.

INSIGHT ABOUT COACH PREFERENCE

Data from 5,218 Test

Heart dominant



Head dominant



Gut dominant



As a Heart-dominant coach, you feel your client. This method gives you the language and tools to coach with all 3 of your brains.

WHY COACHES SIGN UP

3 reasons — all valid

30%

Need the 40 CCEUs

Every ICF coach recertifies every 3 years. 40 CCEUs covers the full requirement in one programme.

45%

Clients aren't changing

Great sessions. No lasting results. They want a method that reaches the Heart and Gut, not just the Head.


25%


AI is taking their edge


They want to be irreplaceable. The biological depth — presence, sensing, co-regulation — is what AI cannot replicate.


WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE


No one else does this

 **Detect which Brain is talking**
from the client's words alone — in real time

 **Coach the Heart & Gut directly**
where patterns and decisions actually live

 **Present-moment only**
no re-entering the past, safe, fast, effective

 **Proven neuroscience**
Dr. Armour + Dr. Gershon research · 5,812 data points

 **AI-proof coaching identity**
biological presence is what no AI can replicate

3 BRAINS COACHING, EVERY DAY – NOT JUST THE GOOD ONES

Become irreplaceable. Starting June 4.



€185 off — because you came.

Use code: 3BRAINS10

COHORT A

4 June – 3 July 2026

16:00 – 20:00 Madrid time

Thursdays & Fridays

COHORT B

25 June – 17 July 2026

09:30 – 13:30 Madrid time

Thursdays & Fridays

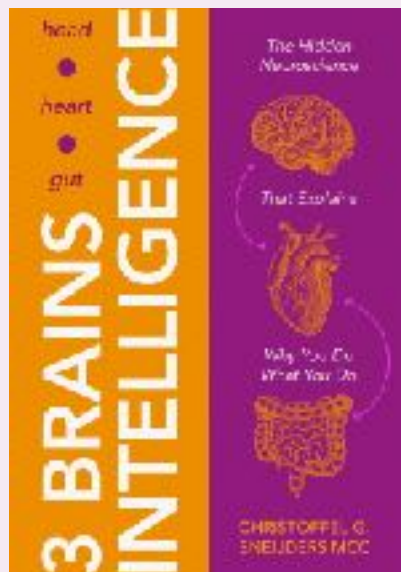
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THE EASIEST WAY TO LEARN MORE AND MASTER YOUR 3 BRAINS

Read one of my books — or even better, all of them. 😊



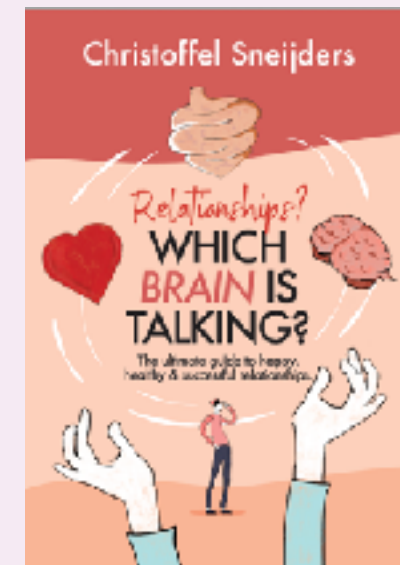
3 Brains Intelligence



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3 Brains & relationships



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Reveals your dominant Brain and what it means for your leadership and coaching.



Head Brain

Heart Brain

Gut Brain

Which Brain is talking in you, right now?