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Team Bonding White Paper

The Tribal Lesson

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1 Abstract

Building high-performing teams is an essential foundation for business success, requiring effective leadership supported by appropriate training. This paper outlines the nature of this leadership, the effect this has on the time to build teams, and describes one approach that enables team members to learn the characteristics of high-performing team behaviour in less than a day, in a way that enables them to transfer this behaviour into the workplace.

2 Team Building Challenges

Effective teamwork is essential to business success. Companies invest significant funds in team-building activities, and then question the value when team problems surface once the mood of the team-building event has gone, or when a re-organisation moves people into new teams. Good managers know that sustained investment is necessary to build good teamwork over time, but find it difficult to justify the cost of what appears to be duplicated training. Good executives know that they need to set the priorities and take the tough decisions - and when the business demands it, pull the best team-players out into a task force, even if that disrupts the line manager's long term plans.

In parallel, good trainers seek out the "magic bullet" – the training event that will enable them to deliver something persistent that transfers back into the workplace. Until they find this, many are moved to offer after-care services, often at reduced rates, in a conscientious attempt to achieve the outcome they know their clients deserve.

Many companies and individuals have documented the challenges and the need for improved teamwork, providing excellent articles, a sample of which are included below as references. Most organisations understand that good teamwork means greater efficiency. A few understand that there is more – sub-optimal teamwork is costing them money. They understand this because they understand the symptoms of sub-optimal teamwork – such as duplication of effort, people doing work that is ultimately not required, extra paperwork, and bureaucratic procedures that have no value.

3 Team Building Approach

When faced with the challenge of improving team capability, organisations initially look to the responsibility of the managers for building effective teams. Frequently the first reaction is to refine the definition of their role as being leaders, not just managers. This is advantageous to some, while being disenfranchising to those who desire to continue in a straight management role. Those managers who see themselves as leaders will take an action that lies somewhere in the following range of responses:

- **Natural** leadership: the leader applies personal experience to give feedback to the team to try to guide them to better performance. The results depend on the personal experience – great leaders will build high-performing teams within months, possibly even weeks; not-so-great leaders will never build high-performing teams.



- **Informed** leadership: the leader learns techniques from training and applies those to the team situation, leading to improvements in the areas where the leader has become adept in practising the techniques. This is supplemented by a variety of team building events and training courses (see Ref [1] & [2]). The results are constrained by the effectiveness of training transfer into the workplace (see Ref [3]). In the absence of comprehensive studies in this area, it is difficult to assess the time required. From personal experience, a competent leader can build a high-performing team in 12 months.
- **Structured** leadership: an external agency observes the team, analyses the fit to the template of a defined Group Modelling theory, then guides an *intervention* to improve the team performance. The intervention can take many forms, including training events tuned to address specific problems in team dynamics and individual behaviour (for an example focussed on conflict management, see Ref [4]). This results in the team moving towards the next stage as defined by the particular theory. This is an iterative process, applied until the team reaches the required level of performance, which can be accomplished within 12 months.
- **Supported** leadership: an external agency with trained personnel – such as formal Human Resources practitioners, or Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) Practitioners – supports the leader in observing the team, analysing problems and areas of improvement in depth, then guiding the intervention (as above) to the optimum improvement, which can be achieved in a few months. Ref [5] gives a comprehensive description of one agency that provides these services.
- **Evolved** leadership: the leader applies advanced techniques to build teamwork as rapidly as possible. Ref [6] illustrates this with an informed approach by one organisation, while Ref [7] gives an explanation of one method of evolved leadership built around project management disciplines. This approach includes – for example – situational leadership, behavioural leadership and experiential training programmes such as that described in Ref [8]. With highly-trained leaders (such as a leader trained to NLP Practitioner level), these enable high-performing teams to be built in a matter of weeks.

4 The Tribal Lesson

The Tribal Lesson fits into the space of Evolved leadership, and is the fastest available method of developing high-performing team behaviour. It is a fresh approach to Team Building and Team Bonding, with the outcome that individuals have the ability to establish strong bonds quickly in new teams, through a carefully orchestrated fusion of the Olympic combat sport of Fencing along with Anchoring and other techniques. In an event that is completed in a single day, participants both learn to Fence under the guidance of a National Champion, and go through an accelerated process of team development, experiencing the emotional state of a high-performing team player, in an environment that creates a primal sense of fighting for the tribe. Anchoring is used to capture this state, enabling the participants to replay the state when back in the workplace.



4.1 Event Sequence

The Tribal Lesson triggers the “fight or flight” instinct, and then evokes the sensation of fighting for their tribe. The trainers reinforce positive, supportive team behaviour to create a strong emotional state associated with being a high-performing team player, then use Anchoring techniques to capture that state and associate it with a trigger. Participants can subsequently fire this, to bring them back into this state when in a new team. When doing this, they replay the behaviour of a high-performing team player, boosting their own and their team’s performance.

4.2 “Fight or flight”

This instinct is triggered by using a modified version of training for the Olympic combat sport of Fencing, with this part of the training delivered by top-class athletes who are fully-qualified coaches, in an event endorsed by the National Governing Body of the sport. The training sequence is the result of many months of development to enable complete beginners to become sufficiently effective Fencers (albeit with a constrained set of moves) that they can realistically and competently compete against each other inside 3 hours, reaching the position of using metal weapons and protective kit complying with British Fencing and International standards for safety.

4.3 Fighting for the Tribe

Although fencing is a “one-on-one” combat sport, there is a team format used in the sport, which – with numerous changes and additions, and building on the moves taught – makes it a very effective vehicle for a team to learn to share information with and to support each other to the point where participants have reported feeling extraordinary emotional commitment to their team, beyond anything they have ever felt before. When individuals are in this state, they put the needs of the team above all else, up to the point where the individual will push themselves to their limits.

4.4 Anchoring

Anchoring is a technique developed from the work done by psychologists on conditioning, and is well-researched and documented. The references given below (References 9-14) give sources of more information. An essential element of an effective Anchor is the presence of a strong emotional state associated with the desired behaviour. The sequence described above guides the participants into such a state, and then qualified professionals help them to build the Anchors and to reinforce them. The professionals in this instance are drawn from the community of trained and certified Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) Practitioners, who have significant practical experience of working with clients to establish Anchors for a variety of situations.

4.5 Booking

For more on The Tribal Lesson and to book, visit <http://www.mikemcewan.co.uk/>



References

The following give further information on Team Building, Group Dynamics and Anchoring:

1. A summary of an approach to team building through setting out a charter for the team, with reference to the need for team building sessions:
http://www.worksystems.com/newsletter/newsletter_november.html
2. A summary of events offered by one provider adopting a standard approach to team building events: <http://teambuildingactivities.org/>
3. On training transfer back to the workplace:
<http://www.corptrainingusa.com/pdf/whitepaper/UnderstandingTeamBuildingTransfer.pdf>
4. A description of conflict and conflict management:
<http://www.opp.eu.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/pdfs/conflictwhitepaper.pdf>
5. Description of what a high-performing team looks like and how to get there following the current paradigm <http://www.drakeintl.co.uk/Publications/Team-Building-Magic.pdf>
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7. Good description of high-performing team and the classic approach to building one:
http://www.versatilecompany.com/Data/Sites/1/original_files/WhitePapers/ProjectTeam_BuildingGuidelines.pdf
8. East Lothian Council approach using experiential training:
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11. Paper on NLP Anchoring Techniques: <http://pro-psychology.com/articles/nadeida/psy-article-33.pdf>
12. General introduction to NLP for business people:
<http://www.businessballs.com/nlpneuro-linguisticprogramming.htm>
13. Summary on the background to Anchoring
http://www.2knowmyself.com/neuro_linguistic_programming/anchor
14. A brief commentary on and example of Anchoring from a Psychology perspective:
<http://mrhansson.weebly.com/1/post/2011/6/nlp-anchoring.html>

