Change Your Business Now

How to win with teams

A special report from Thinking Managers with TAM TEAM ACTION MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

Robert Heller

There's a missing word in the vocabulary of management. Sometimes an absent word can tell more truth than one that is present. This particular word is 'behaviour'. Outside the human resources department, which talks sometimes, and often glibly, about 'behavioural' science, neither the noun nor the adjective has much currency or use.

Yet it's abundantly clear that managers spend much of their time trying to persuade or compel others (including other managers) to change their behaviours. Wearing their subordinate hats, the victims of this drive for better behaviour often spend and waste their time protesting about the bad behaviour towards them exhibited by their bosses.

The assumption has long been that if you get the soft background right, the hard behaviour in the foreground will meet the wishes of the organisation's leaders. But culture without behaviour is meaningless

If everybody behaved unto others as they wish to be treated themselves, life within organisations would be demonstrably not only better, but also unquestionably more effective in terms of the organisation's tasks and objectives. As it is, behaviour is subsumed in the larger, more nebulous word 'culture'. Behaviour is defined by the dictionary as 'conduct', which includes treatment of others and the 'manner' of action. It is a 'hard' word, while culture is as 'soft' as you can get: 'The attitudes and values which inform a society'.

The assumption has long been that if you get the soft background right, the hard behaviour in the foreground will meet the wishes of the organisation's leaders. But culture without behaviour is meaningless. Indeed, behaviour quite plainly creates culture. If you have a company which expounds cultural virtues like togetherness and shared mission statements, but is actually run by managers who behave like pocket dictators, any efforts spent on generating a desirable culture are pure waste.

As the founders of the TAM philosophy and practice found out, people all have cultural attributes and values which are their very own, not the

Introduction

The exciting discovery made by the architects of TAM was that this opposition between the manager and the managed, the firm and the individual, is a source of great potential strength, not weakness

invention of some corporate programme. People may pay lip-service to the prevailing cultural concepts in the firm, but if these conflict with personal objectives and ideas, the individual will win and the cultural programme of the organisation will be a mere façade.

The exciting discovery made by the architects of TAM was that this opposition between the manager and the managed, the firm and the individual, is a source of great potential strength, not weakness. Identify what individuals want, and adapt these needs and desires to the corporate purposes, and you have an extremely powerful, practical tool. Each TAM programme is a plan of action which, for its construction and execution, relies on the natural requirements of the members of the team. The aim is to produce the most natural behaviours apposite to the purposes of the organisation – which vitally include all that is summed up in another powerful word: fairness.

This is not a secretive activity. On the complete contrary, it depends on everybody knowing everything required to achieve the ends of the organisation or the project in a fair, generally accepted and universally applied manner. We all know that remarkable results can and do flow when teams of people are formed ad hoc to tackle a crash programme under dedicated management. TAM takes this phenomenon and turns it into a systematic way of getting much better management – which, of course, can only be defined as the continuous achievement of willing, creative and winning performance.

Team Action Management

Robert Heller

Team Action Management

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Only one common bond binds all the people in an organisation. The fact is that the latter is simply a collective, brought together by legal contracts which promise money and status to those who choose an employment. Commonly held ideas about collective visions, missions and objectives are beside the point. Acting as organisational contractors, people buy in at a superficial level to what is expected of them; yet in part they must continue to be distracted by notions of personal survival, personal justice and the link back to their real personal values and supporting beliefs.

Employees do allow part of themselves to subscribe to espoused organisational expectation – but they are constantly distracted by personal needs and opposing values

What evidence can executives provide to show that their organisation is anything more than this collective of people? Employees do allow part of themselves to subscribe to espoused organisational expectation – but they are constantly distracted by personal needs and opposing values. The latter are what cause people to slow down, to dilute the effort of the organisation as they do just enough to fulfil a legal contract which pays just enough to get the employees back tomorrow.

Four decades ago, the underlying issue of poor performance was identified by a team of researchers at SRI as FAIRNESS. The research suggested that 'fair play' in relation to the organisation's people enables them to respond in a more contributive way than where fairness is absent. While fair play is frequently promoted, it is often offered at the expense of individuals' personal ambitions and personal justice. In other words, where no formal systems are developed to promote and instil fairness, whether or not fairness exists is a matter of perceived relativity in the eyes of the beholder.

Lack of perceived fairness leads to less than expected performance, simply because the personal justice assessments of those involved are often violated and sometimes ignored. The team at SRI, led by the late Albert Humphrey, measured an average performance drop of 35% where fairness was not present and not promoted proactively. A team under

Team Action Management

A mechanism has to be found that acknowledges the individual's personal justice systems, so that maximum engagement can be found, without the potential disproportionate costs of individual and collective psychological analysis!

Hal Eyring researched into planning and performance. It examined the notion of personal justice and the phases of discomfort that eventually lead people to rebel against whoever or whatever situations cause the individual to be inconvenienced, made uncomfortable, or blatantly exploited.

The psychology of this idea was brought to life by Otis Benepe, another member of the SRI team, who offered the decision process as a means of understanding that each individual, when presented with a developmental or change request, will first refer to their personal values and beliefs and experiences before taking the sequential steps towards deciding on the most appropriate or desired behaviour response.

So organisations are about a 'group of individuals', not an 'individual group'. To harness the true collective energy and performance of the group, then, we need to examine how we engage with the personal needs and belief of each person within the group. This, of course, is hardly feasible. Larger organisations would find it impossible to achieve, and even smaller ones would struggle to justify the costs and time involved.

A mechanism has to be found that acknowledges the individual's personal justice systems, so that maximum engagement can be found, without the potential disproportionate costs of individual and collective psychological analysis!

The most successful developmental changes are made when:

> There is a defined NEED for the change
> The change is delivered in a SIMPLE way
> The organisation has the essential ABILITY to make the change

There must also be SUPPORT from the executives at the top. And there should also be ACCEPTANCE at the point of impact

As most organisations are in a state of constant change, why haven't many more of them found and adopted a system that allows successful management of that change?

Team Action Management

A framework is needed to provide a safe place in which executives and individuals (and teams made up of individuals) can come together and work unhindered on the organisational success factors

In a recent study reported in The Times, over 80% of the organisations studied declared that they had developed a comprehensive VISION, MISSION, OBJECTIVES framework for the organisation, which they communicated throughout. That same group of firms, when questioned about their success in delivering against the declared strategy, reported that this was only being achieved in 18% of the cases.

A huge gap exists in most organisations between the strategic aims and ambitions and the ability or focus of the operations to deliver against these objectives. Many organisations appear to start with good intentions, but then become totally distracted by the here and now, the challenges of today, the problems of the now.

Managers have been driven against the wall by process, by legislation and by the culture of 'audit' that exists and thrives as a disease inside organisations. If managers are sent on an 'away day' to explore strategy and forward thinking (which are – or should be – significant parts of any managerial job) they are seen to be 'on a jolly', skiving off, etc.

Change and strategy have become synonymous and have been relegated to a process of inconvenience. Personal justice is constantly challenged by unmanaged change, and consequently many organisations have become a collective of wage slaves who provide ever more sophisticated reasons why things can't, shouldn't and won't be done. The role of the CEO and senior executives has become too operational, too hands-on and far too regulated to get the most out of the organisation.

Change, of course, like strategy, is often poorly defined in ways that cannot be understood and translated into actions which are seen as fair and supportive of the individual's personal justice systems.

A framework is needed to provide a safe place in which executives and individuals (and teams made up of individuals) can come together and work unhindered on the organisational success factors. The framework needs rules which are adopted and accepted by all those involved, and it must recognise all the views of those who will be affected by the resultant actions. That framework was authored by Albert Humphrey at SRI in 1967, and patented in the US in 1970 as TAM.

Team Action Management

When deployed, TAM allows every person in the organisation to input their views and opinions, using a pre-recorded views system. This allows the change team to acknowledge that everyone has a valid input and voice in the organisation. This in turn contributes to the sense of fairness and personal justice of the individuals who form the teams that make up the organisation. The senior team is selected, stripped of job titles and made into the TAM Committee. It is they who will receive the knowledge transfer that shows how to operate TAM as the constant change vehicle within the organisation.

TAM is found to be hugely attractive to all those involved, as for the first time the organisation has used a system that addresses fairness, the individual, justice and the wants and desires of all those who work there

During the actual three-day development session, the rules of TAM are accepted and followed to the letter. This provides a safe framework enabling the TAM committee to explore changes, developments, ideas and methods, free of the normal personal challenges and fear of rejection and ridicule that normally form the backdrop to such an exercise.

The participative framework (acknowledgement of the stakeholder and employee views) and the framework of the strategic changes, mapped out by the TAM committee, come together to form a very powerful alliance, driven by the framework of fairness. This approach seeks to close the chasm that divides strategy and operations in most organisations. It drives out the opposing and destructive forces of fear, personal affront, and other emotive responses that seek to undermine and cause lower performance.

TAM becomes recognised within the organisation. It is found to be hugely attractive to all those involved, as for the first time the organisation has used a system that addresses fairness, the individual, justice and the wants and desires of all those who work there. TAM effectively becomes a 'Me-Me' in the Organisation. It becomes the culture of the working environment and it perpetuates and reproduces to be re-run periodically. It is a learned programme which can be run independently by the TAM committee, with little or no external support.

To discuss how Team Action Management can improve your organisation's performance, contact TAM plc at
http://www.thinkingmanagers.com/team-action-management-form

Change Management and Corporate Arthritis

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The consultants have had some success in persuading clients not just to outsource, but to revamp their key business processes to match the outsourcing and maximise its benefits. If that revamping isn't 'change management', what is? Leaving that question aside, spending under the 'change management' title has boomed – doubling in a single year. That remarkable boom clearly demands some explanation.

A faster rate of change is the starting point. For sure, companies live in fast-changing times – indeed, a more turbulent age than ever before. But that's been true for many years. What's happened is that more recently managers have become (or been made) aware that failing to change in good time does more than just miss opportunities (which it does); it can kill or petrify the company. Even when an organisation plunges into belated change, it may be too late to avert chronic corporate arthritis.

M&S knew that it needed conversion into a retailer that is fleet-of-foot, a magnet for dynamic suppliers and managers, and a fashion leader. But M&S has never been any of those three things

Thus, there were once no European corporations more respected than the retail cynosure, Marks & Spencer, and the smooth-running oil colossus, Royal Dutch-Shell. The latter was nastily damaged, not only by its confessed lies about the size of its reserves, but by the management shambles revealed as the cover-up unravelled. M&S, after staging what seemed to be a solid recovery from heavy blows to its profits and reputation, slipped back again with a bunch of miserable sales figures and an embarrassing row over boardroom roles.

What's most worrying is that the dim statistics were accompanied by anecdotal evidence – poor selection of women's wear, lack of stock, unattractive stores – which served to confirm that the old problems had not been solved by the new management. M&S knew that it needed conversion into a retailer that is fleet-of-foot, a magnet for dynamic suppliers and managers, and a fashion leader. But M&S has never been any of those three things.

Change Management and Corporate Arthritis

During the long reign of the dominant Rick Greenbury, it consolidated the unhelpful characteristics of the past: top-down, slow-moving and deeply conservative. There's a similar sad tale to tell at W.H. Smith, where a six-year CEO reign ended in dismal performance and urgent need for radical change at this High Street chain. This once had the reading market, from newspapers to encyclopedias, in the palm of its hand. Canny observers expected this unhappy result from the moment Edgar Handover was appointed – a company veteran who had shown little external sign of cracking the mould.

The true company vet is the company itself. Like the in-house top appointee, the corporate being can become deeply conservative, very unwilling to change and, even worse, loath to concede that change is required

COMPANY VETERAN

Greenbury of M&S was another vet, a man steeped in the top-down traditions of what for most of its great years was a family business. Family traditions also loomed large at Philips, the Dutch electrical and electronics leader – although you can hardly give the name 'leader' to a corporation that lost $5.6 billion in a single year, when it failed to surpass the revenues achieved a whole decade before.

All this happened, remember, to a company seemingly well-positioned in the wonder-markets of the Western world (and the East, for that matter). After losing that $5.6 billion, Philips recovered to $36.5 billion of sales and $872 million of net profits under the chief executive tutelage of Gerard J. Kleisterlee. His provenance will come as no surprise to readers. Kleisterlee is another company vet. Not surprisingly, Business Week, in a laudatory piece, interrupts the praise to note that 'Philips has staged apparent turn-rounds before, only to see them flame out'.

Does the prevalence of company vets have anything to do with this phenomenon, which is by no means confined to Philips? M&S, after a false start with a vet anointed by Greenbury, gave charge of its turn-round to an outsider, Luc Vandevelde. After a personally lucrative spell as CEO, he remained chairman, but handed over his executive role. Critics link the two events, the handover and the renewed setback. But even if the linkage is correct, why did the retreat occur?

Change Management and Corporate Arthritis

DEEPLY CONSERVATIVE

The true company vet is the company itself. Like the in-house top appointee, the corporate being can become deeply conservative, very unwilling to change and, even worse, loath to concede that change is required. As at ICI after the late Sir John Harvey-Jones retired, old managers resurface, give a sigh of relief and return thankfully to their previous unproductive ways. The ICI vets even opposed the Great Man over publishing his account of what was by any standards a terrific turn-round.

The fundamental question is whether real, deep and lasting change can ever be achieved without a radical change in the management. It's not that you can't teach old dogs new tricks; you can't teach some dogs any tricks at all.

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Harvey-Jones was appointed because he had shown himself to be a maverick, a radical by temperament and ideas. At WH Smith under Peter Bennett, Handover had proved himself to be the opposite. The odds are that such experienced insiders will nearly always back away from the change to which they pay lip-service.

That's where those management consultants come in. You can make a good case for them. They are not committed either emotionally or intellectually to the status quo. In theory, they not only can see what changes are needed, but have acquired expertise – which their hosts have not – in structuring a change programme, selling it to the participants (willing and unwilling), and easing the strains and pains that change is bound to bring. But the consultant is, of course, tied to the people who pay the fees. If the executive management can't make a clean break from the past, all the consultants in the world can't help to achieve radical change.

The MIT professor Clayton M. Christensen, author of The Innovator's Dilemma, accidentally illustrated this general truth when working later on how you can nurture a major, real innovation within the large established company. His answer was blunt: you can't. There is no

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Buffett appoints CEOs who he believes to be able, and then leaves them alone to prove it. He doesn't participate in their strategies, and is content with the control provided by budgets and financial reports

alternative, he concluded, to setting up an independent unit, completely apart from the rest of the company and given all the necessary freedom to bring the innovatory project to fruition.

There's a catch, of course – the same catch that dooms change programmes ordained by insiders. If the parent is so mired in the culture of the past that it cannot accommodate innovation, what are its chances of providing a suitable home after the innovators have brought home the bacon? Surely the independence of clearly defined business units should be the organising principle of the whole culture. Many companies have adopted the principle of the SBU (strategic business unit) in the past three decades. But the device has seldom lived up to its promise, for exactly the same reason that Christensen spotted.

ILLUSORY INDEPENDENCE

The independence of the SBU proved illusory because the central managements simply imposed too many constraints on the units. They operated within order-and-obey or command-and-control cultures as if there were no alternative. There is. Anybody can follow the simple approach of Warren Buffett, the US genius whose Berkshire Hathaway firm is a giant conglomerate of totally unrelated businesses. Buffett appoints CEOs who he believes to be able, and then leaves them alone to prove it. He doesn't participate in their strategies, and is content with the control provided by budgets and financial reports.

Buffett limits himself to two functions at the centre: allocating capital (his favourite hobby) and rewarding and picking the top executive. Most came in with their companies, and 'When we buy a business, the sellers go on running it just as they did before the sale; we adapt to their methods rather than vice versa'. Then the sellers are left alone: 'Some Berkshire managers talk over some of their decisions with me, some don't. It depends on their personalities and, to an extent, upon their own personal relationship with me'.

Don't get the idea that Buffett is a weak manager. Far from it. One of his few rules is that he expects to hear bad news immediately – but he makes

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sure that this event is rare by sticking to the obvious winner in these three statements:

1. I do not trust this person to do a proper job, and will replace them as soon as possible.
2. I do not trust this person to do a proper job, but control them tightly to ensure that they do.
3. I trust this person to do a proper job, and will let them get on with it in their own way.

Any change management programme worthy of the name has to begin by examining and challenging basic questions, like that of people's ability and authority to do their work to excellent standards

THE BASIC QUESTION

Like any sensible person, Buffett plumps for the third alternative. Yet the majority of managers, perfectly sensible in other ways, gravitate towards the second. If the person is not competent to do the job, why are they still in the position? If they are competent, though, why are you not allowing them to demonstrate that competence? Any change management programme worthy of the name has to begin by examining and challenging basic questions, like that of people's ability and authority to do their work to excellent standards.

This requires a major upheaval in corporate culture – or, which comes to much the same thing, managerial behaviour. In the Business Week account of the turn-round at Philips, there's no hint of real reform of the human relationships which determine performance. Kleisterlee didn't reform; he reorganised. That meant dropping businesses worth $850 million, cutting operating expenses by $1.2 billion, closing 12 factories and outsourcing nearly all consumer electronics and appliance manufacture – plus chip production. That's a classic (or standard) down-sizing prescription.

The human side had some attention; for example, a drive 'to break down the walls separating Philips' fiercely independent divisions' and get them to communicate, to become transformed into a single company, under the legend 'One Philips'. This sounds exciting and revolutionary, but is again standard – and dubious. The reality is that Philips is not one company, and never will be. Some of its major remaining businesses have as little in common as Berkshire's – and those range from candy to reinsurance, executive jets to furniture.

Change Management and Corporate Arthritis

The true change manager starts with redefining the purposes of the organisation in the light of fully analysed external change. Next come the internal changes required if those purposes are to be met. Then you tackle the people, starting at the top

The true change manager starts with redefining the purposes of the organisation in the light of fully analysed external change. Next come the internal changes required if those purposes are to be met. Then you tackle the people, starting at the top. Will they or won't they wholeheartedly accept the new purposes and internal reforms? If they won't or can't, they can't stay – especially if their job is chief executive.

High Speed Business Planning with Team Action Management

Albert Humphrey

Most senior managers, in both the private and public sectors, find it difficult to develop one activity, let alone two or more. The problem lies more in the area of making and controlling timely changes which are required to update the operations, rather than with the day-to-day routine management of the operations.

We have found there is seldom a shortage of ideas or people. The problem is to get the agreement and commitment of those people actually working in, or for, the organisation to doing the right things at the right time – and also to ensure that there is adequate attention to the control and quality of the actions of people who must somehow work together to carry out the purposes and objectives of the organisation. Managers are also concerned that employees don't rush off at half-cock to make idiot mistakes which cost money and – even more important – lose time.

For years it was hoped that some form of teamwork methodology or business planning would be the answer to this problem of managing change. This was the motivation which drove the development of a team approach to development planning. It was called Team Action Management and over the past 35 years TAM has been proven to produce major results. Even so this development has been largely ignored in favour of the traditional annual budgeting exercise and the annual executive retreat.

Business or strategic planning is older than oatmeal, and yet it is not clearly understood nor well practised. Understood or not, it still remains vital for individual and organisational success – more now than ever before. This is because of the rapid transportation and communication systems developed over the past two decades. These have created global competition instead of regional competition, and have accelerated product obsolescence and the need to replace existing business with new presentations and offerings.

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High Speed Business Planning with Team Action Management

Managing change and setting realistic objectives which carry the conviction of those responsible is difficult and often results in questionable compromises

Perhaps this lack of understanding and appreciation results from presentation of the subject by academics in an academic way. Moreover, those who somehow unconsciously plan strategically cannot connect what they are doing to the theory and practice. In short, they do Strategic Planning but don't call it that.

Managing change and setting realistic objectives which carry the conviction of those responsible is difficult and often results in questionable compromises. The one and only missing link is how to get the management team agreed and committed to a comprehensive set of action programmes.

In 1964 R.F. Stewart of SRI in California led a research team to discover and create a system for getting this management team agreement and commitment to managing change. In 1970 the prototype was brought to the UK, under the sponsorship of W.H. Smith, Peter Bennett and Sir Richard Troughton, and completed by 1973. The operational programme was used to merge the CWS milling and baking operations with those of J.W. French. The process has been used successfully ever since.

By 2005, this system had been fully developed, and proven to cope with today's problems of setting and agreeing realistic annual objectives without depending on outside consultants or expensive staff resources. The system presents a practical way of assimilating internal and external information about the business unit. It delineates short and long-term priorities and allows an easy way to build the management team which can achieve the objectives of profit growth.

This approach captures the collective agreement and commitment of those who will ultimately have to do the work of meeting or exceeding the objectives finally set. It permits the team leader to define and develop co-ordinated, goal-directed actions, which underpin the overall agreed objectives between levels of the business hierarchy. It makes possible setting results-oriented objectives and provides action plans, which can be monitored to ensure that these objectives are reached.

High Speed Business Planning with Team Action Management

Yet even this TAM system did not operate quickly enough for widespread use. I found myself discussing the hopes and aspiration of an executive who a year earlier had been given the job of turning round a five-company group clustered within a very large conglomerate. In one of the companies, having reduced all costs to absolute minimum, he was now looking to double sales.

A plan to double sales was needed, and we agreed to cut the standard TAM planning process in half. We would ask the nine sales people to come to their pre-arranged monthly sales meeting; we would ask them to remain a second day to develop a plan to double the sales. It was agreed to impose the TAM step-by-step process up to step 10 and quit.

The concept of a 'mini-TAM' session was proven to work. This experiment opened up an opportunity to deal with a niche problem involving very few people to produce good results without major cost

Believe it or not, this gamble created a team planning process which produces quick-fix solutions to solve corporate issues at any level: global, divisional, subsidiary, or departmental. Within a couple of days, the process focuses the energy, attitude and sense of priority of the team to achieve the results wanted.

Working together in this experiment, the concept of a 'mini-TAM' session was proven to work. This experiment opened up an opportunity to deal with a niche problem involving very few people to produce good results without major cost.

We had 63 planning issues which turned into 31 allocated actions and work statements created and agreed by all the members. It all took from 10am Tuesday to 1pm Wednesday: a day and a half. Since then there have been two reviews where positive results were reported. Morale was and remains high, and a bright future is envisioned by all participants.

The business is a subsidiary of a multinational packaging company. It produced street waste containers for councils and shopping centres, using giant rotational moulding machines, and agricultural plastic products. There were about 90 people on site after going through a major restructuring to restore profitability. With that completed, the target was now to double the sales volume in two years.

A new sales manager was hired along with three other regional sales

High Speed Business Planning with Team Action Management

people, giving a total of nine. Two administrative staff translated the sales orders into factory production planning instructions. The key issues were poor site-wide communication; a need for teamwork between regions; and (because of the number of management replacements) a real need for a company-wide sense of stability and job continuity.

As the objective was to double the sales volume it was decided to use a reduced TAM programme as the team-building method, involving only the sales departments. These nine people were to produce the 'Strategic Sales Development Plan'.

Most executives realize that the best way to build a pre-action plan is to use the very people who will do the work to plan the work. But they realize that such an approach is hopeless because of poor group human behaviour

It was difficult to bring the nine together, so we decided to quickly prepare the team to work out the plan on the 19th July – only two weeks away. E-mail was used to announce the 'plan to plan' and distribute the planning issues, along with instructions. The Purpose and Strategic Analysis were prepared by the Sales Manager along with the keynote speech.

On the 19th all members of the team arrived and met me for the first time as their guide through a truncated TAM process. As noted earlier, 63 planning issues were brought out, read, sorted and converted into 31 action programmes. These were allocated to individual team members who then produced the work statement and work schedules. Next, the priorities were produced.

The programme started at 10am on the 19th, ending the first day at 7pm with the team adjourning for a team dinner at 8:30pm. The second day started at 11am and ended at 1pm with a short lunch. All members left to go back to their regional offices at 2pm.

There was at first a concern that nothing would happen. That was eliminated by agreement to publish, after the end of the session, the 31 actions alongside the names of those who would do the work. The actions were divided into Priority Groups. The first of these gives a clear idea of the importance and depth of the work.

Every member agreed that the working party was successful in every respect and that they would meet again for a review of progress at the

High Speed Business Planning with Team Action Management

next monthly sales meeting. Each member expressed surprise at the amount of work achieved, the opportunity for a full discussion of issues, the openness of the attitudes of all assembled, including the group chief executive – who also attended the working session. The sales manager reported following the first review meeting: 'We had a very positive meeting yesterday and (in spite of some heavy schedules and the usual holiday delays) we are making some good progress on the most important of the issues.'

Never before could an executive pre-fabricate 'teamwork' for a specific job. Now one can! It is now possible to literally bring a group of people required to get the job done, to a conference room, people who may or may not know each or like each other

Most executives realize that the best way to build a pre-action plan is to use the very people who will do the work to plan the work. But they realize that such an approach is hopeless because of poor group human behaviour. So the executive has to work with woolly, fuzzy and often inaccurate, indecisive or unsupported, pre-action plans which inevitably overrun in budget and time – or, even worse, fail.

At last there is a method which can be imposed on the pre-action planning team which makes the ideal approach not only practical but actually produces results and almost guarantees success in both achieving the benefit and meeting the time/cost budget.

Never before could an executive pre-fabricate 'teamwork' for a specific job. Now one can! It is now possible to literally bring a group of people required to get the job done to a conference room, people who may or may not know or like each other. And then apply a mini TAM process and they turn into a team, plan the work they will do, and then actually do it… all this because of the TAM process.

All of us, from time to time, need to have a team to work out a problem. Such problems normally are important. It is at that very time that the team leader needs TAM in order to guarantee that he will succeed.

Because instant teamwork is made possible using TAM, it can give the team the power to produce a development plan in two days. The plan so produced is more reliable. Having produced it themselves the team is more focused and dedicated to getting the results and therefore almost guarantees the results planned for.

High Speed Business Planning with Team Action Management

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TEAM ACTION MANAGEMENT
EVENTS – SEQUENCE AND TIME

Events and Maximum Time Allowance Elapsed Time
Example: 400 Issues 10 Team Members

1. Opening Remarks. 15 mins. (15 mins)
2. Prepare Issues for Reading. 5 mins. (20 mins)
3. Issues Read Silently Form 1hr 68 mins. (1 hr 28 mins)
4. Read out and sort issues 2 hrs 16 mins. (3 hr 44 mins)
5. Form unbiased syndicate teams. 15 mins. (3 hr 59 mins)
6. Create Actions (Form 2a). 1 hr 40 mins. (5 hr 39 mins)
7. Actions reviewed and agreed (form 2b). 3 hrs 30 mins. (9 hr 09 mins)
8. Actions Assigned and Status. Recorded 2 hr 19 mins. (11 hr 28 mins)
9. Action Status Agreed. 2 hr 6 mins. (13 hr 34 mins)
10. Action Programme work statements defined and approved. (form 3a) 59 mins. (14 hr 33 mins)

End of working session

11. Action Programmes planned - Cost & Schedules: 2 Hrs 6 Mins (19 hr 39 mins)
12. Action Programmes agreed by Team: 7 hrs (23 hr 39 mins)
13. Calculation of Financial Summaries: 3 hours (26 hr 39 mins)
14. Set Action Programme Priorities: 2 hrs 6 mins (28 hr 45 mins)
15. What If analysis: 4 hrs (32 hr 45 mins)
16. Purpose/Creed and Objectives agreed: 1 hr (33 hr 45 mins)
17. Strategy agreed: 1 hr 20 mins (35 hr 5 mins)
18. Presentation Rehearsal: 3 hrs 18 mins (38 hr 23 mins)

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Evolution and Creativity: Why evolution in business won't work without the help of creativity

Edward de Bono

Although it is rarely expressed directly, there is a background belief that 'evolution' applies to matters outside the biological world. There is a belief that ideas themselves are formed by Darwinian evolution. Products, services, methods and processes are all also supposed to be shaped by evolution. This belief in the universal effects of evolution has several unfortunate effects. In many cases the effects are more than unfortunate – they are dangerous.

The first unfortunate effect is that a belief in 'evolution' means that the pressures of the environment will take care of all improvement. So there is no need to do anything consciously. Things will gradually evolve to provide the change that is necessary. It is never said how the 'random mutations' of Darwinian evolution actually happen in nature. With non-nature matters it is supposed that tiny incremental changes gradually shape the product or service to fit the needs and pressures of the environment.

Because creativity is seen as a 'big step' process, and evolution is seen as a series of small steps, there is the feeling that evolution is more likely to get it right than creativity

Since evolution is going to take care of everything, why try to be creative? Why take a risk when evolution takes no risks at all? This is not strictly true, since evolution in nature does sometimes take blind alleys. A line of evolution can develop and then peter out. This is a 'risk'. There is a belief that you are very unlikely to guess the future right, so why bother? Let the future arrive in its own time through evolution. Because creativity is seen as a 'big step' process, and evolution is seen as a series of small steps, there is the feeling that evolution is more likely to get it right than creativity.

Small-step creativity may be seen as the 'random mutation' factor in evolution, but the steps do have to be very small. Small steps are seen as

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low risk. If they do not work, it is not a disaster. So sit back and let evolution do the shaping of products and services. You do need to be alert and to see what is happening. You need to be able to spot an emerging market trend and then to capitalise on this. If 'others' develop successful products then you jump in with a 'me-too'.

It is not surprising that this philosophy, sitting back and leaving it to evolution, is very appealing to those who do not like the uncertainty of creativity and to those who do not feel themselves to be creative. There are several weaknesses to this 'sit back and wait' approach. Note that this approach is not quite the same as 'do nothing and then copy success', although the two do overlap considerably.

Creativity can look at the way something is done and come up with a much better idea. Creativity applied to perfectly adequate and satisfactory matters will offer far more potential than creativity applied to problem-solving

The second part of this belief is that the shaping effects of time and circumstance must have resulted in something that is ideally adapted to the real world. Note that 'creativity' does not have this 'adaptation' credential. The danger here is that the product or service may be way below the potential of the field – or the use of available assets.

If the field is a very tough one, then a 'method' which has survived obviously has value, because it has been 'tried' by time. But if the field is not tough at all, then almost any initial method would have succeeded. If we then stay 'locked in' to that method we are acting way below potential. The real danger of the 'must be best' philosophy is that we make no effort at all to challenge products and services that seem to be 'adequate'. There is no problem, so we do not direct any thinking at the matter.

As a result, the biggest creative changes never happen. Creativity can look at the way something is done and come up with a much better idea. Creativity applied to perfectly adequate and satisfactory matters will offer far more potential than creativity applied to 'problem-solving'. Yet it is only in 'problem-solving' that we see a need for thinking about things. If you really believe that evolution has given you the best possible way of doing things, then what is the point of higher risk creativity?

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EVOLUTION OF ACCEPTANCE

Given our present state of technology and experience, the current form of a motor car is probably way below potential, both from the user's point of view and also from the manufacturer's. If, however, someone came up with a radically different design for a motor car (which is not so difficult), the market would not be eager to embrace the change. It is not enough that the product evolves. Taste and acceptance also have to evolve.

I would suggest that in any business, profitability could be increased by a minimum of 25%, over a five-year period, through a single new idea which might take minutes to generate. That is a very conservative estimate

How would people who are accustomed to the present shape of a car react to a radically different shape? Individual purchasers might indeed like the new design – but then they consider the re-sale value. 'I might like this but when I come to sell it, how do I know others will like it?' This same phenomenon applies even more to special architect-designed houses that are innovative.

Painting today is very different from what it was two hundred years ago. Whenever there was a radical change (Impressionism, Cubism, conceptual art, etc.), there was an initial huge resistance. In time this was overcome, and huge prices were paid for styles that were initially derided. In the art world there were avant garde critics who wanted to distinguish themselves by disagreeing with most of their colleagues. There were also far-seeing dealers who saw that the new idiom would mean far more business. There were also a few buyers who were genuinely bored with the older styles.

In other words there were 'fashion leaders' who, over time, would ensure the success of the radical change. In the world of products and services, such fashion leaders do not exist because such a leader would be seen to be so out of touch with the market that he or she would lose his or her job. The idiom is that of 'leading from behind'. That means sensing the way everyone is going anyway and then pretending to lead in that direction. Politicians do it all the time.

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CREATIVE BELIEF

No one can prove to you that there is a better way of doing something until that better way has been found, demonstrated and proved. There has to be a 'belief' that change for the better is possible. It is possible to show mathematically that creativity is essential in any self-organising system; otherwise we get locked into stable states that are far from optimal. At this point creativity is no longer a 'belief', but becomes essential.

It could be that 'creativity' provides the mutation that evolution demands. The real danger is when we 'sit back' and hope that evolution will do for us what we find difficult to do for ourselves!

I would suggest that in any business, profitability could be increased by a minimum of 25%, over a five-year period, through a single new idea (which might take minutes to generate). That is a very conservative estimate. When you invest in advertising, you do not know exactly how or where it is going to work. Possibly, a lot of your money is wasted. But you do know that if you do not advertise at all, then your business is going to decline.

It is the same with creativity. You do not know exactly when or how the powerful idea is going to emerge (or even how you would recognise it). But you should know that if you do not invest in creativity, you are going to be operating way below opportunity level.

EITHER OR

It is not a matter of evolution or creativity. It is not a choice between the two. It should not be a polarised situation. Both are needed. It could be that 'creativity' provides the mutation that evolution demands. The real danger is when we 'sit back' and hope that evolution will do for us what we find difficult to do for ourselves!

Success through effective management and teamwork

Robert Heller

Nobody needs to instruct sportsmen, in non-individual sports, to form teams: no team, no game. Even in individual games like tennis, golf and athletics, teams form: not only doubles partnerships, foursomes and relay teams, but whole groups of golfers, tennis players or athletes, competing under the same banner for prestigious international trophies. Cricket, highly individualistic, is also played in teams – but nobody doubts that the sum of a good team, in any sport, is greater than its parts.

The same is true of business. Top managers always, but often falsely, speak proudly of their teams. But in most companies, the leader is never a non-playing captain – like Tony Jacklin, under whose leadership Europe first took the Ryder Cup from the US. The business captain, the chief executive, not only plays, but plays from a position of unique strength. In Germany, he is more likely to be primus inter pares, first among equals, which roughly describes the England captain in rugby or cricket. But in business the British chief executive is far more equal than the others.

Team-based organisation is far more successful than the one-man band. The most basic of the principles that have to be followed for teams to reach their enormous potential is that leaders must be genuine team-leaders — and the necessary behaviour doesn't come naturally

This runs counter to proven fact. Team-based organisation is far more successful than the one-man band. The most basic of the principles that have to be followed for teams to reach their enormous potential is that leaders must be genuine team-leaders – and the necessary behaviour doesn't come naturally. As an American consultant, Erika Anderson of Proteus International, notes, 'At first it's hard to persuade them to let go of control. But once they become actively self-reflective, they realise they don't know all the answers. That sort of humbleness is very charismatic, because it makes the others on the team feel useful and powerful.'

Her emphasis on 'self-reflection', or introspection, may seem odd in the context of leadership. But self-mastery is the key to mastery in any sport or any management activity. Paradoxically, time spent on developing

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individual skills and attitudes pays off in working more effectively with others. One vital skill, as Anderson implies, is thinking about yourself – yet managers complain that they lack enough time to think about the business, let alone their psyches.

This can't be true. Pressures of day-to-day work are never so massive that every last second is preempted by operations. Any expert on time management can uncover great chasms of misspent time. Peter Drucker's neat catechism never fails. What am I doing that needn't be done by anybody? That could be done by somebody else? That can only be done by me? Honest answers will provide a surprisingly short third category. But this refers to activities within the manager's control. When working in teams, much activity is dictated by other members.

In a good team, everybody wins. Differing views come forward, and good leaders, having listened to their exposition, sum up the consensus

Help is nigh. Networked personal computers should not only discipline managers through diary programmes, but should also speed teamwork by file-sharing, information retrieval and minimising meetings. Rank Xerox holds out hopes of dramatic change in the executive day from the present routine, which divides time in equal fifths between gathering information, communicating, organising, meetings and thinking. Instead, thanks to networking, the breakdown could be 10% each for the first four – leaving six times as many hours for independent thought or team-thinking.

Thinking time must be used, for reasons both corporate and personal. Research reported in Fortune suggests that lack of introspection raises executive stress and lessens managerial effectiveness. You need time to reflect and introspect in order to acquire vital abilities: objectivity, learning, self-confidence, responsibility, tolerance for ambiguity and paradox, balance in life, creativity and intuition, and subjugation of ego.

Those attributes, all plainly good and essential to effective teamworking, sound imprecise. Can the process of team-thinking leadership be tightened up? For a start, you must abandon the adversarial thinking which Edward de Bono attacked in I Am Right, You Are Wrong. One of his great escape routes is the Six Hats method: six-hatted people follow different modes of thinking, which are symbolised by different colours.

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When a group dons White hats, everybody concentrates on what information is available, what's needed, how it can be obtained. Switching to Green, everybody concentrates on developing new ideas, new possibilities. Wearing Black hats, the same people apply caution and risk assessment to their brilliant Green ideas. Under the Yellow Hat, they look for benefits in a 'logical positive' manner. Blue-hatted, they study the whole thinking process – what are they thinking about and how?

Six Hats has the added virtue of excluding one purpose altogether: victory over another team-member. That takes politics out of the equation; you can no longer attack people by attacking their ideas

Eureka! thoughts are red-hatted; the team relies on intuition and emotions, with no requirement to justify the idea. Using the hats, the team brings all its intellectual horsepower to bear positively, instead of wasting time because one side is arguing with the other. As one chief executive ruefully admitted to De Bono, 'I used to wait until somebody said something with which I disagreed, and then jump on him.' With Six Hats, that's out – thinking consequently becomes much quicker, and teamwork more real.

Six Hats has the added virtue of excluding one purpose altogether: victory over another team-member. If, say, the Green Hat has been ordained, you have to join in creative thinking. That takes politics out of the equation; you can no longer attack people by attacking their ideas. The Japanese, the world's most successful exponents of teamwork, start here with an advantage: their intellectual tradition isn't adversarial. That's in marked contrast to the West, where the more powerful you are, the more you like to 'win' an argument.

In a good team, everybody wins. Differing views come forward, and good leaders, having listened to their exposition, sum up the consensus. De Bono's book, Parallel Thinking, shows how team-thinkers can create parallel possibilities, different and possibly contradictory hypotheses, from which they create a new design. Traditional analytical thinking says move from A to B as soon as possible; the parallel model is more akin to Japanese modes, where people don't know what they're thinking until they've heard and considered all the possibilities.

Ben Heirs, author of The Professional Decision Thinker, was convinced that much public and private error would be avoided if teams properly

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executed their prime function: thinking. Even the greatest individual intelligence has limits: the ceilings of combined brainpower are much higher. As he says, if the team is effectively led, and its thinking processes properly structured, 'Alternatives and their possible consequences can then be created and explored more fully and intelligently, without the debate becoming divisive, unfocused and unprofessional.'

Does that fit your last meeting – or many that you have ever attended? If not, 'considerable damage and waste' probably resulted. Heirs stresses that leadership of the team is crucial – but that the skills involved are those most often neglected when picking leaders: or letting them stay in office. Lacking the ability (for which read training) to harvest other minds, the leader gravitates towards one-man-bandmanship: or one-womanship.

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One well-known female boss, for example, takes every single product decision. She's nearly always right. But in the process of being right, she destroys the ability of others to go beyond their present horizons. When Lee Iacocca abdicated the Detroit boss's godlike right of final yea and nay on new models, Chrysler took a giant step towards becoming America's most profitable car company. There was once a panel show entitled 'Does the Team Think?'. If it isn't a team, and doesn't think, you can't be surprised if disaster follows.

Today, moreover, it's a team or nothing. A UK boss for a globe-girdling multinational once had some disturbing news for his top team. Henceforward, careers wouldn't progress from post to post, each more senior and better-paid than the one before. Instead, roles and success would relate to skills – what the team members could do, rather than where they did it. That's the logical inference from the changing pattern of managerial work. As more and more time goes into multi-disciplinary project teams, task forces and the like, functional roles and hierarchical titles mean less and less.

That's nothing new in companies: technologists have always worked that way. The best available scientist or engineer leads the R&D project – and then moves on to the next. Today management must increasingly

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Many companies rightly bring executives together for combined sessions to seek better strategies and leadership – and it's immediately clear that internal barriers impede realisation of generally shared and sensible aims

operate in similar style, simply because it saves time, money and mistakes to have all disciplines involved from start to finish. Yet the great majority of managers still operate in their functional and hierarchical cocoons.

Many companies rightly bring executives together for combined sessions to seek better strategies and leadership – and it's immediately clear that internal barriers impede realisation of generally shared and sensible aims. In that multinational example cited above, for example, there was one flaw. The executive team had never heard its leader's ideas before. As it happened, they agreed with the new strategic line. They should, of course, have been involved from the beginning. True teams are led from the front: but only in the sense that an orchestra is 'led'.

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