

Does a team's influence affect an individual's personal competence?

The answer is an obvious "Yes", so the real question is how to make that influence one that improves performance instead of deteriorates it.

If you wish to influence the dynamics behind superior team performance, you need to understand the psychology that drives human reaction.

In the beginning...

The caveman needed to survive. Man found safety in groups. It was not a matter of preference, it was a matter of necessity. If you were not a part of a group, your chances for survival were slim. Conformity to the majority became necessary to stay in a group and physical strength was the dominant factor for group leadership. Those who were strong and successful in the art of survival had the majority influence toward that conformity and only the strong challenged these leaders. If you challenged the leadership, you needed to be prepared to fight. And, if you lost, you were forced to leave the safety of the group and fend for yourself. The risk was great so there were few challengers and it became an ingrained survival response to gain acceptance from the group, so people just kept quiet.



It was a time of compliance!

...Then came the significance revolution

The caveman's brains got bigger and more developed. Individuals became torn between finding their own path and gaining their own recognition, versus conforming to the group. Physical strength was no longer the dominant factor for influence. Now, people could think! Survival was no longer the acquisition of food and shelter; it had become a fight of ability. The more intelligent you were (and able to apply it), the more valuable you had become. The more influence you could exert over others, the more powerful you became. We began to compete for significance trying to show others how important and able we are, and if they believed us, or in some cases feared us, we became even more important.

We created a civilization that needed to be right!

Then came the industrial revolution...

...and groups evolved into teams but the fundamentals of our survival instinct, our emotional evolution and the emotions that drive us were still there, and a major part of our psychology. Our ability to work at our peak in teams depended on the way these emotional drivers and understanding the dynamics they promote.

Today, the caveman has evolved and the awareness of our psychology has expanded.

We now seek better ways to improve our selves and our performance, but our caveman nature sometimes gets in the way. While our modern brain is influenced by numerous factors of emotional drive, the three that came from our caveman days are still central to our performance in teams:

“The greatest obstacle to high performance is the caveman’s reactions to loosing significance...”

The drive to belong

The drive for security

The drive to be significant

As with our caveman ancestors, our fear of loss is more important than our potential for gain. Loosing (or the potential of loosing) our sense of belonging or our sense of security or significance are materialize in caveman like reactions. These reactions are sometimes subtle.

Our caveman reaction for conformity is driven by our need belong and feel secure in the group, so we keep quiet and comply. And if we do challenge, we are probably depriving others of their significance or security, causing them to react to “protect” themselves. This can either escalate to greater conflict, or it may revert back to compliance and conformity to prevent conflict. Either way, these are still caveman reactions and are NOT useful to high performance teams.

The greatest obstacle to high performance is the caveman’s reactions to loosing significance, in order for the caveman to be right, he must make someone else wrong, and that means, more caveman reactions from the other team members! And the worst part is that reality is not what matters, the caveman reacts on emotion without fact, and so “perception” influences reaction. When someone feels wrong, they feel less able; they may feel like they have less control and therefore are less secure, they react with aggression or submission out of dissatisfaction, and a lesser desire to cooperate affects their performance and the entire team.

So how do we get the caveman out of our teams so we can stop reacting and act like the evolved humans we have become, able to perform at the peak of our abilities?

There are 4 stages to our evolution into “**awakened**” team members



Each stage is a stage of awareness. It awakens our greater perception. But for it to be effective, the entire team has to take this journey. But there are consequences, once team members have awakened, they will never view teams again in the same way. They can never go back to the way it was and can never be satisfied with mediocrity. Each stage opens our eyes to the caveman within ourselves and others, and it lets us use the intelligent part of our brain to send this caveman back

when he tries to invade our minds and body. Different team members may be at different stages in their evolution, where are you?

These 4 stages are as follows:

Stage 1: Acknowledge the primitive caveman in you

Look at the behavior you have had in the past. How many times have you gone against your better judgment to “go with the flow”? Discover your need to belong to the group, to be accepted by your peers. How has this need manifested itself in your interaction with others? What has it prevented from achieving? Would your relationships Really be damaged if you expressed your views and opinions or confronted someone else’s potentially bad decision, or is it possible you would gain more respect. As a leader, is it more important for you to be liked than to get the expected results?

By reflecting on the behaviors you have displayed in the past, and realizing the damage you are doing to your personal effectiveness and the effectiveness of those around you, you can see the primitive caveman for what he is. This is the first step in your evolution.

“Don’t make others wrong so you can be important! ...”

Stage 2: Soothing the significant caveman

Now the caveman in you has become more expressive. You tell people what you want and how it should be. The problem is they react to you. There are two types of reactions you receive:

1. If you speak out with little confidence and conviction, you have only evolved in actions and not in mindset. Others react to you with insignificance; they make you wrong or unimportant. They do not pay much attention to you and you will accomplish little. Your actions are the beginning but you must be consistent and find your conviction. Imagine the alternative if you do not... Extinction!
2. You have the conviction and the confidence and now need to show how great you are and how much better than everyone else your ideas and abilities are. Others react by rebelling, some rebel externally and create open conflict. Others rebel internally and while they quietly go along with what you say, they feel that you treat them with insignificance, that you make you wrong or unimportant. Here your ability to overcome fear of not being accepted has brought you to this stage, but now you must learn to apply it effectively.



You are at stage two because your significance is central to your being, you tend to react to others that “appear” to take it away from you. This creates confrontation and brings out the caveman in your other team members. Then they react back and just make a big mess! So before you can transcend to stage three, you must awaken to the reactions that YOU create. Knowing your weaknesses is the foundation to your evolution. FIRST though, you need to admit you are the cause of much of this reaction. IT’S NOT OTHER PEOPLES FAULT! Don’t make others wrong so you can be important! You need to take full responsibility before anything can change. You can find other more productive ways to fill your need for significance.

Significance is about feeling important, so what if you had the power to make others feel important, the ability to bring out the best in them, their passion, and their motivation? Would you gain gratification from this power? Would you get significance from the better overall results that could be achieved?

Stage 3: Keeping the caveman away from your team

The caveman shows up when your modern (intelligent) brain shuts off. The more you can keep it on, the less time the caveman spends with your team.

Remember, when the caveman shows up, he brings out the caveman in the rest of your team members. And before you know it, you've got a group of cavemen either beating each other or hiding in the background. So STOP IT!

The key to using the Intelligent part of your brain, is to map the areas that might cause reaction and tagging them with a "caveman alarm".

Write a list of issues that make you frustrated, angry, submissive, fearful, etc. Put this list in a place where you will often see it. There is a part of your brain that retains this knowledge in your subconscious, so when one of these issue comes up and you begin to react (using the primitive part of your brain), you remember the list and you remember that you may be letting the caveman out. At this time the intelligent part of your brain kicks in and allows you to work through the issue in an evolved manner.

“Knowing that that caveman can appear in others instantaneously, how would you communicate when others react...”

Stage 4: Evolving into the awakened team member

By this stage you can stop the caveman from coming out in you. You have gone beyond your primitive emotional reactions to “fear of not being accepted” and “fear of not being important”. You don't always need to be right, and you don't make others wrong. You don't avoid conflict because you're afraid others won't like you or your need to belong.

You have awaked to an evolved individual that can think and act without fear, an individual that gives value to the team instead exploiting them for your personal emotional gratification. You take action in place of reaction. You have cultivated the courage of an evolved individual.

But many of your team members often still react. At this stage, you understand them more, so you don't react to their reactions. You can use the intelligent part of your brain instead of the primitive reactive part. So how can you affect those around you that do react?

Look at the way you express yourself. Knowing that that caveman can appear in others instantaneously, how would you communicate when others react, what would you do or say to make the caveman in these team members go away?

Well first, you must identify what stage in evolution they're at. Knowing this gives you the understanding of what they fear. Do they fear losing their security and acceptance the team provides, or do they fear being unimportant, insignificant? This knowledge provides the platform for you to help them fill these emotional needs and put aside their fears.

Second, give them this article for disclosure of your intentions and awareness of what's happening. If you all have the same understanding, it becomes easier to achieve results as a team. And, as this Team centered article is based on the Directive Communication™ psychology, attending Directive Communication™ based workshops would accelerate the process. Find a DC practitioner near you at: www.directivecommunication.com

Finally, use questions to fill there emotional needs of belonging and significance. Ask questions, DO NOT teach or lecture. Discover how your team members fill these needs and how the team can support each member in achieving them without the caveman.



The journey to the evolution of highly effective teams is scattered with the angry beatings and quiet disillusionment of cavemen everywhere. Effectiveness is against our nature. Only in the face of our inadequacies can we evolve, can we increase our ability to be intelligent in our actions, and can we assist others in there evolution.

The advantages of this growth is a happier, less stressful, and more productive life.

The consequences of not evolving, are a life full of reaction, stress and un-fulfillment.

The caveman will always be in you, the question is do you really want him around in your teams, friends, and families?

Today, evolution is a choice.

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