

IT'S ALL IN THE BEHAVIOUR

Richard McPike on why behavioural training is the foundation for team effectiveness and resilience



In the past five years there have been astonishing improvements in the immediate performance of teams who have undergone behavioural training together, rather than more traditional team development sessions. An emerging benefit is that long-term team resilience is also boosted as a result of changed team behaviours.

Behavioural training is the observation, analysis, feedback, replay and coaching on group interaction behaviours while performing typical tasks.

In these sessions individuals identify, correct and master the behaviours that have been limiting their effectiveness.

The challenge of teams

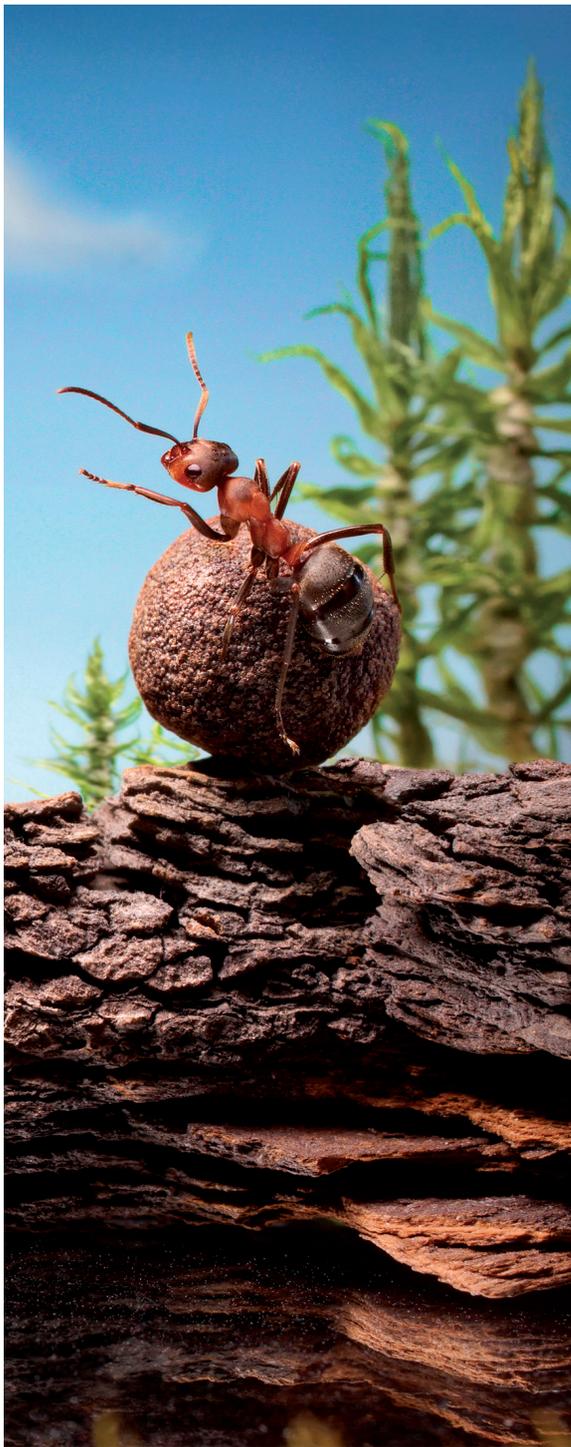
There are many types of teams: work or operational teams, management/ leadership teams, project teams and also taskforces which are set up to address issues that organisations are not naturally structured to undertake.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a range of approaches has evolved which aim to help teams perform at a high

level, as quickly as possible. Team-building processes are often repeated due to the rapid turnover of team members, or continuously changing organisational goals and structure.

A further complication is emerging for teams. For the first time, there are five different generations in the workplace, often not co-located and perhaps never having met.

The need to work together in teams cohesively and productively is more vital than ever and, as Patrick Lencioni¹ states, perhaps this is the



one remaining unexploited competitive edge that organisations have.

Unfortunately, some leaders believe that once the principles of teamwork have been applied in one team, it should be straightforward to repeat in the next team. This mindset views teamwork as a skillset rather than a social group interaction process.

Roots of behavioural training

It is this group interaction process² that led to the field of behaviour-based training. The work of Robert F Bales

is considered especially pivotal in this field. He established a code for small group, face-to-face interactions that was to occupy researchers to this day, including its application to non-face-to-face (online/virtual) collaboration.³

Bales and his researchers codified and counted small group exchanges using pairs of interactions such as: asks questions/responds to questions; shows solidarity/shows antagonism. His work culminated in the SYMLOG⁴ (SYstematic MultiLevel Observation of Groups) method of group observation, which has been used extensively to build behaviour-based coding and training. Many models to categorise and describe both positive and negative behaviours have proliferated based on this work.

Focusing on improving team behaviours, as a first foundation step, enables challenging team tasks to be completed successfully and builds resilience.

Resilience and energy efficiency of teams

When providing resilience feedback and coaching using the PRQ (Personal Resilience Questionnaire by ODR, see Figure 1), it was clear to see how a team's positive interactions increased, or dysfunctional interactions reduced, their energy and collective team resilience.

A typical definition of resilience is “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress”. It is recognised that resilience will be vital for individuals and teams to thrive in the volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA) world we live in.

When teaching resilience to teams, ‘energy’ can be offered as an almost equivalent meaning to consider. When teams examined the components of resilience, beyond physical where the relationship to energy is obvious, they would readily recognise that many concerned conserving or collecting energy. For example:

- ▶ Purposeful – not wasting energy on activity that does not make progress towards goals at this time.
- ▶ Socially supported – harvesting energy through others’ ideas or drawing on the assistance of team members.

Only one resilience component was clearly about the release of energy – being proactive, where conserved

Figure 1: Descriptors for Resilience Components^{5,6}

Resilience Component	Description
Optimistic	This is the root of resilience ⁷ and involves identifying opportunities even in messy, chaotic environments.
Self-assured	Related to optimism and concerns having personal confidence when faced with uncertainty.
Purposeful	Having a clear vision of what you wish to achieve and using it as a guide even when disoriented.
Innovative	Tendency to generate a wide range of ideas for responding to a situation.
Socially supported	Drawing readily on others’ resources for assistance and support.
Organised	Effective in developing and applying systems, processes and structures to work through difficult changes.
Proactive	Initiating action when faced with uncertainty, taking measured risks rather than seeking comfort in caution and inertia.

and collected energy is released. (Proactivity also stops the energy drain caused by procrastination.)

Energy conservation in a team is further supported by effective feedback among team members, as Lisa Doogan, director of customer relationship management, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, explains: “I took my newly formed team through a behavioural training team session 18 months ago as I knew I needed something different from traditional personality feedback team sessions and fun days, which although nice, wouldn’t get near to the core of building a proud team.

“Talking to my team now, we realise that session was pivotal for all our subsequent work. We now have trust at our core, so everyone says what they mean. Giving and receiving feedback without restrictions and non-defensive listening have become our trademarks.

“What’s more, even though we work under continuous regulatory and customer pressure, we maintain a high positive energy, which is noticed by others outside the team. We don’t waste energy bottling up or holding back. I →

believe the intense behavioural training we went through together has also helped us build and conserve our energy, making us more resilient as a team.”

Behavioural training approaches

The behavioural model example cited (Figure 2) gives a foundation for behaviour-based team training and describes how energy is released in behavioural terms.

It has roots in Bales’ observational research with builds and modifications that we have found to be hugely helpful to teams like Lisa Doogan’s.

First, the model has trust at its core, as defined by Charles Green et al,⁸ citing the behaviours that display high credibility, reliability, intimacy and low self-orientation.

Second, the observable behaviours are granular to a fundamental level; so all group interactions can be codified and also linked to an organisation’s leadership values.

More critical than any behaviour model is how to immerse the team in the model. There are three key practices that are critical for behaviour training with teams:

Precision feedback

Teaching the team members to observe and feedback precisely and unambiguously what others are doing and the effect it has on them, either positive or negative.

Disciplined practice

Repeated practice of realistic, engaging, individual and group tasks

that are standard in business, such as conducting a selection process.

Identifying limiting behaviours

The whole team help each other identify their individual limiting behaviour (the characteristic that reduces their positive impact) and correct it during the session.

The purpose of a behaviour-based team training process is to deliver true behaviour change – not merely to attain skills, nor leave with an action plan to change. It should aim to habitualise each individual’s behaviour improvement at the session, as well as institutionalise the key outcomes.

Once the trust and supporting behaviours are in place it becomes merely sophisticated mechanics for the team to progress tasks (such as goals, roles, and resources), using diagnostics such as the Drexler-Sibbet Team Performance Indicator⁹ or Lencioni’s Five Dysfunctions Questionnaire.

Boost team resilience

The behaviours the team master together help conserve and efficiently use their individual energy. They also strengthen team collective energy, as feedback is offered precisely and supportively, as well as received graciously, building on a platform of trust among team members.

The positive behavioural improvements are applicable to day-to-day interactions, as well as high-pressure events, so these positive behaviours become habits and are more readily accessed during setbacks, where resilience is vital. Leaders have reported this longer-term positive impact on team

energy and resilience as an unanticipated bonus. Like Lisa Doogan, Andrew Huthwaite, director of commercial and connections at SSE Networks, emphasised the team strengthening benefits: “Behavioural training at times makes you feel vulnerable and exposed, but the honest feedback and emotional connection generates and builds great

“
The honest feedback and emotional connection generates and builds great strength in the team

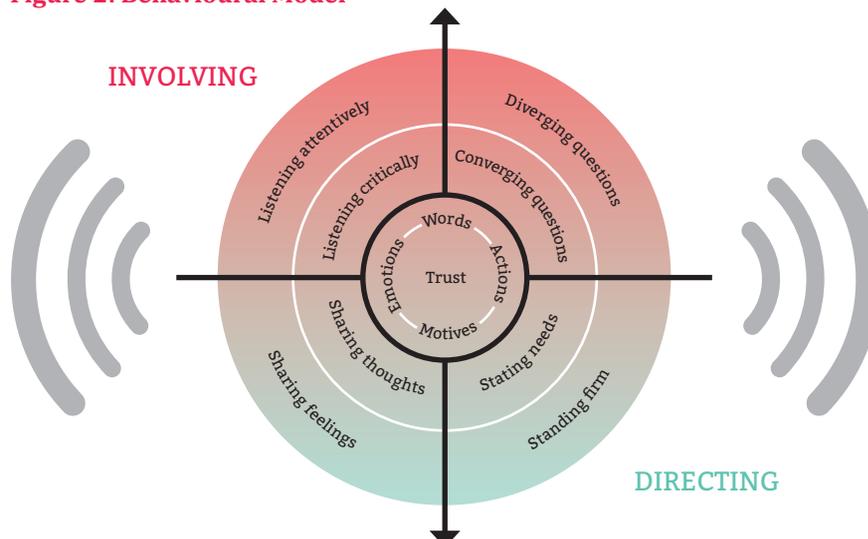
strength in the team. Everyone felt enthused and able to make a step behavioural change, leading to more positive individual role and team impact.”

Behaviour-based team training is designed to transform limiting behaviours into strengths for individuals, make supportive ongoing behavioural feedback in a team the norm, and result in immediate performance improvement.

The emerging additional impact is that this type of training is also significantly strengthening longer-term team resilience, which will be vital in helping teams face the setbacks that the VUCA world presents. **TJ**

Richard McPike is co-founder and director of EZOZ. Find out more at www.ezoz.co.uk

Figure 2: Behavioural Model



References

- 1 Lencioni, 2002, The Five Dysfunctions Of A Team: A Leadership Fable
- 2 Bales, 1950, Interaction Process Analysis – A Method For The Study Of Small Groups
- 3 Fahy, 2005, Online and Face-to-Face Group Interaction Processes Compared Using Bales’ Interaction Process Analysis (IPA)
- 4 Bales, Cohen, 1979, SYMLOG – A SYSTEM For The Multiple Level Observation Of Groups
- 5 Hoopes, Kelly, 2004, Managing Change With Personal Resilience
- 6 Hoopes, 2017, Prosilience – Building Your Resilience For A Turbulent World
- 7 Seligman, 1990, Learned Optimism
- 8 Maister, Green, Galford, 2000, The Trusted Advisor
- 9 Drexler, Sibbet, Forrester, 2005, The Team Performance Model Indicator Application