

HOW A GROUP BECOMES A TEAM

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The Hedgehog Effect: The Secrets of Building High Performance Teams

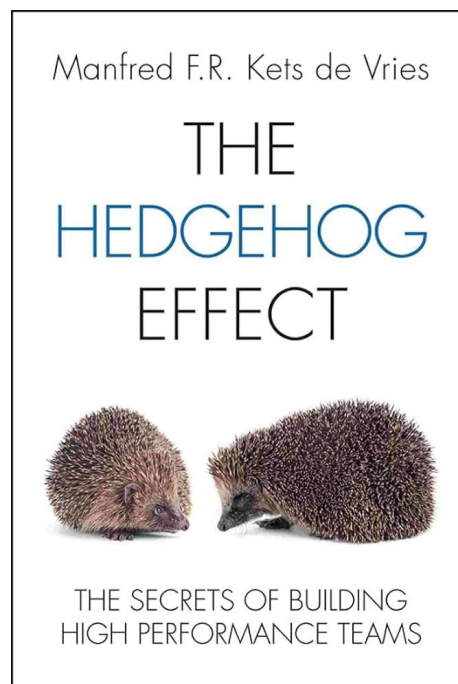
by Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries

In *The Hedgehog Effect*, Manfred Kets de Vries presents the case for leadership group coaching as an experiential training ground for learning to function as a high performance team. His group coaching model, incorporating living case studies, has been developed over more than 20 years of delivering programs to top-level executives and sets the standard in the field of leadership group coaching.

Written for coaches, consultants, leadership development directors, and anyone working in or with teams, *The Hedgehog Effect* begins with an in-depth analysis of what teams and groups are all about. The intricacies of leadership coaching are illustrated with an elaborate example of a team coaching intervention. In Part Two, the author applies a psychodynamic lens to the dynamics of teams and groups, taking a close look at relationship patterns, how groups evolve, and the phenomenon of the group-as-a-whole. Part Three takes a more systemic perspective, addressing the challenges that change processes pose for people in organizations, and how to create best places to work. Kets de Vries supports the whole with the story of an organizational change initiative accomplished through group coaching.

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Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.

Ryunosuke Satoro

Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable.

Kenyan Proverb

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

Getting' good players is easy. Getting' 'em to play together is the hard part.

Casey Stenge

The hedgehogs' quandary is also our own.

Arthur Schopenhauer, in his series of essays, *Parerga und Paralipomena* (1851), included a tale about the dilemmas faced by hedgehogs during winter. The animals tried to get close to one another when it grew cold, to share their body heat. However, once they did so, they hurt each other with their spines. So they moved away from each other to be more comfortable. The cold, however, drove them together again, and the same thing happened. At last, after a great deal of uncomfortable huddling and chilly dispersing, the hedgehogs discovered they were best off remaining at a little distance from one another.

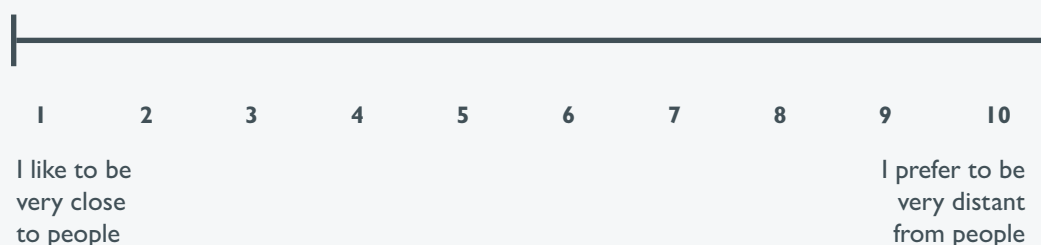
Almost every long-term emotional relationship between two people or more contains this "sediment" of negative feelings, which escapes perception because of the mechanism of repression. As the hedgehogs' dilemma suggests, human relationships have a substantial degree of ambivalence, requiring us to contain contradictory feelings for the other person. We can see Schopenhauer's parable as a metaphor for the challenges of human intimacy. Are we destined to behave like these fabled hedgehogs—forever jostling for a balance between painful entanglement and loveless isolation? Will we always struggle with the fear of engulfment and the fear of loneliness?

Societal needs drive human hedgehogs together, but we are often mutually repelled by the many prickly and disagreeable qualities of others. We all have a simultaneous need for and fear of intimacy, creating a dilemma for common sense living. The distance that Schopenhauer's hedgehogs at last discovered to be the only tolerable condition of mutual interface represents our common code of conduct. A certain amount of distance is part of the human condition. Although our mutual need for warmth is only moderately satisfied by this arrangement, we are less likely to get hurt. We will not prick others—and others will not prick us.

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We also see the hedgehogs' dilemma in group settings. How much closeness is too much? How much can we open up to others? What can we disclose about ourselves? What degree of intimacy is enough? And when is it necessary to set boundaries? Opening up too much can lead to an exposure of our weaknesses and make us vulnerable to shame and guilt reactions. This conundrum—our simultaneous need for closeness and distance—is a fundamental reason why people often find it so difficult to work successfully in groups and teams.

**Where do you rate yourself on the intimacy-avoidance axis?
What kind of "hedgehog" are you?**



**How does your position on this axis affect your relationship with other?
Reflect on your relationships. Where would you place each of them on the axis?**

Why do so many teams fail to live up to their promise?

The answer lies in the obstinate belief that human beings are rational entities. Many team designers forget to take into account the subtle, out-of-awareness behavior patterns that are part and parcel of the human condition. Although teams are created as a forum for achieving specific goals, the personality quirks and emotional life of the various team members can cause deviations from the specified task. Indeed, there is often a degree of naivety among an organization's leadership, who fail to realize that a group dynamic can derail a scheduled direction, so that the team's real goals can deviate widely from its stated goals. Many people in positions of leadership fail to appreciate the real complexity of teamwork. They don't pay heed to the hedgehogs' dilemma.

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To create and maintain effective team-based work environments, focus on both the structural and the human aspects of organizational life.

Innovative work arrangements provide a structure and platform for team organizations, but these are not enough. The leaders of the organization must also instill, through their own example and through well-communicated codes of conduct, an internal, interactive coaching culture in which participants can engage in candid, respectful conversations, unrestricted by reporting relationships, or fear of retribution. It means establishing, and perhaps even enforcing, core values of trust, commitment, enthusiasm, and enjoyment. It necessitates a degree of openness throughout an organization. It requires a willingness to change from a mindset of “me first” to “what’s best for the team.” This can be a daunting challenge.

It is through cooperation, rather than conflict, that we attain our greatest successes.

“One for all, and all for one”—the famous oath from Alexandre Dumas’s *The Three Musketeers*—symbolizes the quintessence of teamwork. As d’Artagnan and the three musketeers understood, their fate as individuals was tied to their fate as a group.

The Three Musketeers dramatizes significant events in the history of France—the action begins in 1625 and ends three years later—and entertains the reader with spectacular displays of bravery, loyalty, and wit on the part of the three musketeers and their young comrade-in-arms, d’Artagnan. The four heroes of the tale are involved in labyrinthine intrigues concerning the weak King Louis XIII of France, his powerful and cunning advisor Cardinal Richelieu, the beautiful Queen Anne of Austria, her English lover, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and the siege of the rebellious Huguenot city of La Rochelle.

With great ambitions, d’Artagnan, the main protagonist of the story, sets out for Paris with three gifts from his father: the modest sum of 15 crowns, a horse, and a letter of introduction to the captain of the King’s Musketeers, a military unit that serves as the protectors of the Royal Household. D’Artagnan wants to become a musketeer himself, and must prove himself worthy of such a position; however, he doesn’t have much going for him except his wits and his skill as a swordsman. But with the help of his fellow musketeers—the legendary and noble Athos, the devoted Porthos and the cunning Aramis—d’Artagnan succeeds in gaining glory, and fulfills his destiny.

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Teamwork saves the day in *The Three Musketeers*. Loyal to each other to the death, the musketeers have no compunction at pulling a fast one on their enemies. The strength they have in working as a team, their devotion to excellence, their willingness to sacrifice, their great trust in each other, their generosity of heart and spirit, and—the most powerful virtue of all—their unshakable dedication to a cause greater than themselves, inspire the reader's imagination. It is a tale that can be viewed as a moral lesson, highlighting the importance of cooperation, unity, and perseverance.

In many ways, the adventures of d'Artagnan and the three musketeers are universal—teams are an inspiring feature of human life. To quote a Japanese proverb, “None of us is as smart as all of us.”

The Musketeers' battle cry—“All for one, and one for all”—reveals some of the signifiers that make teams work. The musketeers believed that when one of them was in trouble, they were all in trouble. If one of them needed help, they all provided it. If one succeeded, they all succeeded.

Alexandre Dumas's fictional 17th-century adventure remains an effective prescription for our third millennium workplace; the underlying, out-of-awareness psychodynamic individual and team processes of his musketeers were aligned with the task at hand.

Before discussing teams, let's first specify the difference between a group and a team.

A group is any number of individuals who form a recognizable unit, cluster, or aggregation. In contrast, teams are specific groups of people with complementary skills and abilities who join together to collaborate. People in a team possess a high degree of interdependence geared toward the achievement of a common goal or completion of a task for which they hold one another mutually accountable. In contrast to most groups, teams often identify and reach consensus on their common goals and approaches, rather than looking to a leader to define them. What's more, the outcome of a team's activities will affect team members as a whole, not just each member individually. In the organizational context, generally, team members are empowered to share responsibility for specific performance outcomes, and work together for a limited period of time.

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Are you part of a team or do you merely belong to a group of people?

Study the following statements and label them either TRUE OR FALSE

1. Do the people you work with have a degree of interdependence, geared toward the achievement of a common goal or completion of a task for which they hold themselves mutually accountable?
2. Do you belong to a group of people with complementary skills and abilities who come together to collaborate?
3. Does the outcome of your activities affect not merely you, but all the people you work with?

If you answered TRUE to all the statements, you are most likely part of a team

Intrinsic rewards may be even more important to individual members than financial or other tangible forms of compensation.

While teams may initially be formed to fulfill a task, they may also meet other needs at an individual level. Many people like working in teams because they desire a sense of affiliation with a community, social interaction, and pride of accomplishment.

Most people have a powerful desire to be part of a group in which they feel recognized and understood. Belonging—being part of a social context—is essential for the development of self-esteem and self-confidence. Individuals in teams are less anxious about the work they need to accomplish when they are part of a team that takes the time to build a sense of community and belonging for all members.

Many aspects of human social relations exist within a complex web of kin and reciprocal altruism. Working in teams that have a meaningful purpose may help people feel that their own ability to make a difference is magnified by the power of the group. The Musketeers were not only a band of brothers, in a sense, but together they were serving a great cause.

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Team Success

Think about effective and ineffective teams you have been a member of. What has made one type of team a success and the other a failure? Write a description of both teams.

Working in an effective team was like:

Working in an ineffective team was like:

Compare the two descriptions and figure out the differences between these two teams.

The dark side of dysfunctional teams .

A powerful lion, a donkey, and a fox decided to go out hunting together. That way, they thought, they would get much more than if they each hunted alone—and they were right. At the end of the day they had amassed a huge heap of food. “Right,” said the donkey, “let’s divide it all up between us.” And he shared it out in three equal piles. When the lion saw what the donkey had done, he roared, “What’s this?” jumped on the donkey, killed him, and ate him. Then he turned to the fox, saying, “Now it’s your turn to divide the food.” The fox had more emotional intelligence than the donkey. He made two piles—a very big one, and a very small one. “Hmm,” said the lion, pulling the big pile toward him. “Who taught you to share things out so well?” “That would be the donkey,” replied the fox.

Senior executives can also play a highly dysfunctional role.

Too many leaders have no idea how to put together well functioning teams. Their fear of delegating—losing control—reinforces the stereotype of the heroic leader who will do it all. For many, teams represent a hassle, a burden, or a necessary evil. This often becomes, not surprisingly, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

One of the most dangerous ways to manage the dynamics of a team is to allow the most forceful individuals to drive decisions about resources, thus creating a profound sense of unfairness and helplessness among the other members of the team. And group dynamics can become even more dysfunctional when the organization is in the throes of a succession process. In such instances, a zero-sum-game mentality—“I win, you lose”—may dominate team dynamics, with each member of the team trying to position him- or herself for the top job.

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Is your organization beset by team killers?

Study the following statements and label them either TRUE or FALSE:

- Does your team suffer from fuzzy goals/changing priorities?
- Do you think there is a false consensus among the members of your team?
- Does your team have unresolved overt conflicts?
- Does your team suffer from “underground” conflicts?
- Does your team find it difficult to reach closure?
- Are calcified meetings characteristic of your team (i.e., people coming late or arriving not at all)?
- Does your team suffer from uneven participation?
- Do the members of your team not feel accountable to one another?

A critical moment in team building comes as each member is integrated into the team.

It should be clear what skills he or she has, and what contribution can be expected. Newcomers quickly, albeit instinctively, figure out how they fit within the team and the complementary roles they can play. At some level, their own individual hopes and wishes will also come into play as they enter the team.

However talented a person may be, no one has all the skills needed to do everything—although we may be able to hold a tune, we cannot whistle a whole symphony by ourselves. Working as a team reduces the burden placed on any single individual; large tasks can be broken up into smaller assignments and assigned to the people best suited to the job.

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What role do you play in a team?

Review the following statements. Which role fits you best?

In teams, is your role more task-oriented?

Do you take on a more social role?

- Is your role more divergent?
- Are you the deviant?
- Are you the rebel?
- Are you the martyr/scapegoat?
- Do you play the clown?
- Are you the aggressive one?

Do you play a more marginal role?

- Are you the silent type?
- Are you the private one?
- Are you the cautious one?

It is important that team designers recognize complementarity of talent to be able to create executive role constellations. For example, some people excel at generating ideas. Some love detail, while some prefer to focus on the big picture. Some can be counted on for implementation and follow-up of a project. While an individual tends to look at a problem or issue from only one perspective, teams present a variety of working hypotheses. Team building should be seen as an opportunity creatively and constructively to maximize each individual's strengths and compensate for weaknesses, enabling the team to produce top quality results.

As we can see, the degree to which a team works well together is dependent on a multi-factorial process.

From a factual point of view, it depends on the team's members, environment, and tasks. Superficially, team cohesion depends on the extent to which the individuals in the group want to accomplish its primary task. Less obvious contributing factors include the members' attraction to the group, the developmental phase the team is in, normative and informational influences, and external sources. Given the influence of all these variables, the team dynamics can influence its participants in significant ways, including disruptive acting out caused by unconscious motivators.

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What do you view as the virtues of teamwork?

Answer the following questions YES or NO, depending on how closely each reflects your own situation.

- Do you believe that teamwork fosters greater efficiency and effectiveness?
- Do you think that the quality of output is higher due to teamwork?
- In your opinion, are decisions made more quickly when working as a team?
- Do you think teamwork builds greater commitment among team members?
- In your opinion, does teamwork foster the maximum use of each individual's capabilities?
- Do you think teamwork helps the cross-fertilization of ideas?
- Do you believe that teamwork creates a greater sense of belonging?

If you have answered YES to most of these questions, you have the mindset to benefit greatly from teamwork.