



LESSONS FROM THE WILD

Watching the behaviour of wild animals on safari to witness teamwork at its ultimate may seem a romantic notion, but one woman passionately believes that there are very real and profound lessons to be learned. **James Graham** visited Lindsay McKenna to discover more about her approach.

DARKNESS falls as a pride of lions hunt zebra. Working in concert, encircling the herd, utterly focused, quivering with anticipation, crouching, stalking, until the chosen target is isolated and within striking distance. Then one goes in for the kill. With expert skill, awesome power and perfect timing the prey is taken. The rest move in...

From a distance it looks like a perfect team in action, but Lindsay McKenna knows that this is a temporary situation.

"Many people assume that lions always operate as a team, but in fact they only co-operate when the benefits to the individual outweigh the costs. When hunting, the chance of a successful kill is significantly higher working as a team than operating solo. But as soon as they start to feed, teamwork rapidly disintegrates and it is every beast for himself – often with drastic consequences for cubs and weaker pride members."

In contrast, African wild dogs provide an excellent example of teamwork. Their alignment to common goals and continuous close co-operation results in an amazing 85 per cent success with hunts from hare to zebra and the ability to protect kills from lions and hyena. She recalls one pack with nine pups where, confronted with the death of the mother, the

adult males collaborated to nurture 'their' young successfully to adolescence.

Lindsay McKenna (sharing a surname and associations with, but no relation to, Virginia McKenna of Born Free fame) believes that profound lessons in teamwork and leadership can be learned by observing nature at its most raw and magnificent. This is why she chooses to set some of her high performance teamwork programmes in Madikwe, an unspoiled area near the Kalahari Desert.

"These experiences take people back to where effective teamwork makes the difference between life, death and species survival. They are designed to challenge teams and leaders to confront, and then strengthen, their own effectiveness and commitment."

"So many teams are a team in name only. With the complexity of matrix, virtual and cross-functional teamwork, the leader is often left struggling with members who – at best – are passive bystanders. We look to excite teams, shifting participants from passivity, or 'every beast for himself', into full-blooded team involvement."

Although the majority of her high performing team training takes place in offices and hotels around the globe, her Madikwe-based programme integrates team and leadership

development sessions with walks in the bush and game drives (in open-top jeeps) under the careful supervision of a fully trained ranger, witnessing real-life teamwork in action.

All the profits from Lindsay's African events are channelled back into the Madikwe Game Reserve and the Born Free Foundation, to support wildlife protection, research and conservation.

Passion

If observing animal behaviour fascinates Lindsay, her background as a psychologist and successful business executive drives her passion to create teams that really mean business, operating with enhanced skills and awareness to create sustainable change.

This aim is not unique, but her starting point is different in that it starts with the project-change frame model, where technical and softer aspects of project management are integrated, facilitating a future progression to the high performance team approach, which builds upon the 'soft' aspects of teamwork.

The project-change frame has four main stages: foundations for change, developing the optimum solution, implementing change and review. These stages decompose into 32 sub-processes which are applied through 10 phases, starting with project initiation and ending with post implementation reviews.

An outcome of this approach is that there is a strong link between the strategic aims of the change being implemented and the actions required to deliver it, with proper plans being prepared, as would be the case with any robust methodology.

Framework

"Change is primarily a human story", says Lindsay. "As people go through the process, they need a framework to provide a common approach and understanding. The project-change frame was created because successful project delivery and securing sustainable results demands simultaneous attention to, and management of, both the 'hard' processes of project management and the people aspects of change."

Where the project-change frame offers an interesting approach is in the holistic way that the process and human elements are interwoven to provide one pathway from the alpha to the omega of a project. There is no need to bolt on a 'change management' module to this tool, as this is engineered into the approach.

This approach emphasises that getting to grips with the people side of projects is not a mere 'nice-to-have' but an essential. Involvement of teams and stakeholders from the outset ensures, for example, that realistic plans are produced. It also helps teams to recognise the importance of quickly identifying potential problems.

"There is sometimes a perception that reporting risks or potential variance from plan is in some way negative. In reality, the business needs visibility on the risk/benefit balance, and

profits from an early 'heads-up' whilst mitigation or avoidance is still feasible," says Lindsay.

It is not restricted to the initiator of changes. She and her team also work with those experiencing change, providing the often-neglected stakeholder with 'the opportunity to take an active, responsible role in change, as opposed to positioning themselves as the victims of change'.

"Unless businesses engage their stakeholders, providing direction and support, they are paying one set of employees to initiate change and another to resist it!"

But she is no hatchet-wielding corporate pruner. "To cope with change, people must be treated sensitively and make the commitment themselves to support change, for only then will changes become self-sustainable and ultimately successful."

Lindsay McKenna seems to have found a niche area, bridging the gap between formal project management and traditional 'soft' interventions, using the power of high performance team working to integrate both disciplines and exploit their synergies – it will be interesting to follow her progress.

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IN THE FRAME: Lindsay McKenna combines technical and softer aspects of PM in her project-change frame.