

PAINTING THE PICTURE

Many team creation processes are geared towards awareness, cooperative and teambuilding methods. Generally, someone outside the relevant team – often an external facilitator, i.e. a Consultant, Coach or Mentor – will have prescribed these methods.

The conviction behind my approach is essentially different. I believe that most of the time there are sufficient qualities, ideas, skills and knowledge within the team to tackle a sustainably vitalized team formation within their areas of responsibility. Because of *unspoken and sensitive* issues (fears, concerns, complaints) in the areas *relationship, processes and content*, team members are unable to speak their mind and *share* their opinion to achieve *outside-the-box* synergy. This roadblock can be illustrated by the English metaphor: *The Elephant(s) in the Room*. Everyone *knows* there is an elephant in the room, but no one has the spirit to point it out (see Figure 1.1).

Team members are afraid to confront these issues, and that's why they linger and simmer under the surface. This contributes to a deterioration of mutual relationships: Team unity (or coherence). The Iceberg Analogy shows us that *relationships* are the *leverage* that ensures effective *processes and content*. The iceberg not only shows what is visible and what is not (say 15 and 85 per cent), but according to experts it can also weather a storm. This says a lot about the leverage it has against the sea current, or in this case the *undertow*: Relationships (see Figure 1.2).

The role of the head of the team – from now on the *Team Leader* – is also of great influence when it comes to leveraging relationships. When the Team Leader's style is unable to mobilize and unlock the competencies of team members – for example by encouragement or invitation – the team's maximum potential will not be obtained.

In many cases I have witnessed that when the Team Leader becomes aware of a lack of team effectiveness (in which they have a fundamental role), they unintentionally lean towards even more control, more direction and manipulation of processes, more structure, and content (*above water*). To improve team effectiveness, an *external* advisor could be hired to provide support, and come up with solutions based on structural and substantive organizational themes. In my view, this is only relevant after addressing the (*under water*) relational issues first.

In my books, leadership (not management) is to encourage the use of each team members' full potential. Likewise, it's the ability to create unity of mind and unity of effort. As a Team Coach, I value the contribution of the Team Leader in a facilitating role... that of a *leader*. This role ensures that a sustainable and safe environment is created where dialogue instead of discussion takes place. In turn, this stimulates the co-creative process that everyone seems to want but nobody really knows how to create or visualize (at least not with ease). In essence, I have been inspired by these definitions (or quotes):

- An inspired leader: Someone who motivates me to do more than I initially expected to be capable of
 - B.M. Bass, *A New Paradigm of Leadership: An Inquiry into Transformational Leadership*
 - B.M. Bass and B.J. Avolio, *Full Range Leadership Development*
- When people stop bringing their problems to you, you stopped leading them
 - O. Harari, *The Leadership Secrets of Collin Powell*

METHODOLOGY

Before I start using my preferred tools as a Dialogue Facilitator, I begin the session by facilitating awareness and encouraging development and possible reconstruction within *relationships*, and acknowledge the leadership role of Team Leader. This is phase 1 of my approach. Focused on the *bottom part of the iceberg*, illustrated in Figure 1.3, it creates a framework for self-reliance, and supports my *Exit Strategy* to the benefit of durable team development. I like distinguishing myself as Team Coach and Dialogue Facilitator by presenting myself as a *temporary* external player. The method I use is based on training, developing and facilitating **Dialogue**. A number of basic paradigms apply, which I have featured as Universal Wisdoms in the next frame.

Phase 2 of my approach is close behind. When intentions are distinct and the air is cleared so relationships are once again malleable, I (Dialogue Facilitator) will commence with a form of team development. The choice of applicable methods for team development and implementation emerges from the (facilitated) dialogue within the team itself. In so doing, team members will inherently 'own' their development process. This phase can be geared towards current themes concerning both the *top* and *bottom* parts of the iceberg.

- *To the heart, being heard is like oxygen to the lungs:*
Every person wants to be heard, not necessarily to be right
- *The air should be cleared before building a relationship:*
Identify/name the elephant in the room
- *Discussion divides, dialogue unites:*
Talking-stick approach
- *Behind every complaint there is a need:*
We tend to say what we **don't** want, instead of what we **do** want

ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM

Often enough annoyances and complaints within collaborating teams have stacked up over time because regular *maintenance* simply wasn't performed. Note that the meaning of the term maintenance is striking with regard to *things/items* and *relationships/people*. This can be a simple but important step towards sustainable development in your team's *cooperation* – by integrating regular maintenance among team members into the management's operational routine. In case of overdue maintenance it's imperative to first address invisible simmering annoyances and issues the team members experience with(in) the organization.

This train of thought about team maintenance is encompassed in Stephen Coveys' *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* when he writes about investing in people as means of production, and not, as often reveals to be the case, merely investing in the production facility or process. Investing in personnel *out of habit* as a means of production is seemingly hard to integrate into our daily business, even though Coveys' metaphor (the Goose with the Golden Eggs) is so easy to understand. The goose is the *means of production* whereas the golden eggs are the *produce* itself. In his analogy our habitual management style leans more towards butchering the goose to get to the eggs. I couldn't provide you with a clearer picture to demonstrate the value of investing in people, thus in *relationships*.

Paying attention to lingering invisible mutual irritations and problems within the organization, are usually called *clearing the air* or identifying the elephant in the

room. It's a *reality check*; it is necessary so mutual conflicts, and current personal needs and concerns can be shared.

The elephant represents issues that are unspoken within a group, and that members are reluctant to come forward with openly. However, the issues are present in daily operations and cause irritation if not hazards. These *elephants* undermine the progress of effective cooperation if they are not shared openly, which can only be done when there's enough sense of security to express divergent opinions.

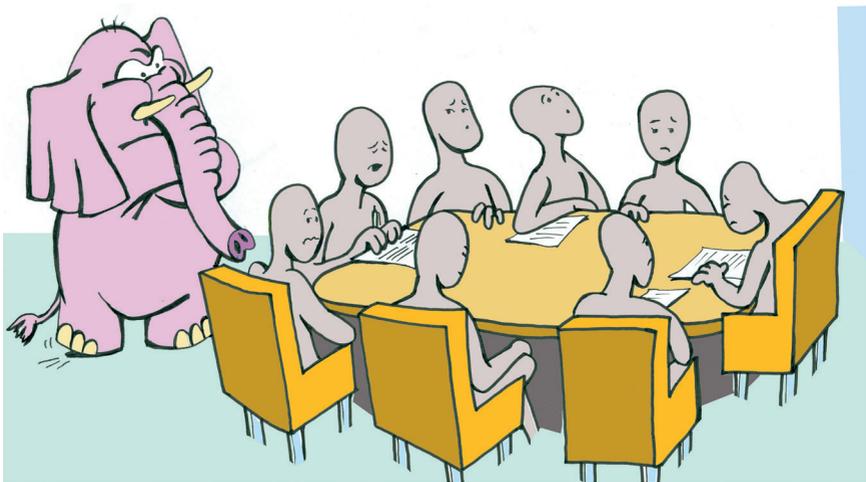


Figure 1.1
The Elephant in the Meeting Room

The elephant doesn't just refer to annoyances or complaints. Possibly, it's unclear which individual interests and needs exist *within* the team to be able to actually contribute *to* the team, or it could be unknown what the common (team) objective is, for example. These cases share one common ground: If you're afraid to say that you don't know *what* it is that should be constructed, *who* you can count on, and *how* you are allowed to do it, then it's going to be difficult to help *build* anything. Team development doesn't really make sense when there's no dedication to a common objective. In the world of management, we can name this driver the *undercurrent* or *undertow*.

THE UNDERTOW

Back to the Iceberg Analogy. As pointed out before, this isn't just a symbol for what's visible and what's not, it also serves to outline that an iceberg can move against the strong pushing wind. Regardless of the forces applied on the iceberg from one direction above water, it can still move in the opposite direction. So alongside the dimension *visible versus invisible* – let's say at a 15/85 per cent ratio – a second dimension of this analogy appears: The power of the *undertow*.

The Iceberg Analogy is invariably used to illustrate that the *visible* part of an organizational issue is proportionate to the *floating* and *invisible* causes under water. Below is how I illustrate it for team members. *Figure 1.2: The Organizational Iceberg:*



To make the concept more palatable, I have summarized it according to Daniel Offman's view: The I, We and It Perspective in organizations. (Source: *Inspiration and Quality in Organizations*, D. Offman.) Then, the Iceberg Analogy can be illustrated as featured in Figure 1.3 on the next page.