

Assessment for Development and the “New Science” of Teamwork

Since our founding in 1983, we (now TEAM International®) believe we have worked at the forefront in the science of teamwork. We began our business and training operations under the aegis of the Center for Creative Leadership®, and in the context of the “Assessment for Development (AfD)” technology: it was the Center’s research finding that an executive who didn’t know and understand his/her impact on others was doomed to failure (and what became known as “derailment” in the CCL lexicon). So the AfD technology was solidly founded in the use of multi-rater instruments for feedback, also called “360° surveys”, which sounded out opinions on our impact from above (superiors), alongside (peers), and below (colleagues/direct reports). And, going further beyond, the 360° feedback was anchored in other testing instrumentation to explain the “why” of the impact, i.e. what is there in my styles and behaviors that cause the impact I am perceived to be projecting?*

It appears that this technology is still at the forefront of our field, as evidenced in a recent issue of the *Harvard Business Review*, which is cover-titled with the headline “The New Science of Teamwork”.¹

Yes, and there’s a new focus in the science presented in this issue, one that links AfD technology with an important new field of research called “neuroscience”, the study of how the brain works under the influence of cerebral chemistry.

Here’s a track on that research: some years ago, Daniel Goleman, of Emotional Intelligence² renown, introduced in 2006 a new look at behavioral impact in teams under the title of *Social Intelligence*.³ The emphasis was mainly theoretical (and somewhat anecdotal) around what happens when one brain interacts with another, largely through verbal behaviors, but even as subtly as by means of a corporal or facial expression.

I have noted in a previous article on this website (“Social Intelligence – Restated and Redefined”) what Goleman wrote in the prologue of his 2006 book:

During the early days of the second American invasion of Iraq, a group of soldiers set out for a local mosque to contact the town’s cleric. Their goal was to ask his help in organizing the distribution of relief supplies. But a mob gathered, fearing the soldiers were coming to arrest their spiritual leader or destroy the mosque, a holy shrine. Hundreds of devout Muslims surrounded the soldiers,

*As a review of our current practice, we continue to use (now updated) versions of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Step II) which contrasts cognitive styles and behaviors along the following axes: extraversion/introversion, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling, and judging/perceiving; FIRO-B. inter-personal preferences around inclusion, control, and affection; and the California Psychological Inventory (CPI -260), which presents comparative statistical profiles in such areas as Dominance, Responsibility, and Flexibility. It bears noting that TEAM International® is equipped to do this assessment and feedback in Spanish or English.

waving their hands in the air and shouting, as they pressed in toward the heavily armed platoon. The commanding officer, Lt.Col. Christopher Hughes, thought fast. Picking up a loudspeaker, he told his soldiers to “take a knee”, meaning to kneel on one knee. Next he ordered them to point their rifles toward the ground. Then his order was: “Smile.” At that, the crowd’s mood morphed. A few people were still yelling, but most were now smiling in return. A few patted the soldiers on the back, as Hughes ordered them to walk slowly away backwards – still smiling.

This is a graphic example of the powerful impact we have on others, and Goleman’s book delves into the scientific discoveries about the workings of the human brain that have emerged since Emotional Intelligence appeared in 1995 – particularly as they refer to our interactions in an interpersonal world.

So now the stage is set to delve directly into brain chemistry, and this has been furthered with the work of Paul Zak, who has used the technology of fMRIs (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) to study what is actually happening in people’s brains as they interact -- essentially the study of the chemical substances that are flowing when behaviors are taking place. His book, *The Moral Molecule*,⁴ is seminal in this study, and Zak’s article in a recent *HBR* makes it more easily digested and applied.⁵

The *HBR* article referenced immediately above advances the concept of the “Moral Molecule” – which is a chemical brain substance called *oxytocin*, linked to empathy and positive connection with others. This substance interacts with another one, better known and called *testosterone*, which is tagged as linked to expressions of more tough-minded and assertive behaviors.

For those of you who have experienced our seminars, the Paul Zak opposing oxytocin/testosterone- inspired behaviors are associated with a “relations” orientation as juxtaposed or complementary to a “results” one, which we have energetically emphasized in our seminars for many years. The R-R model we use is thereby supported by its linkage to the brain chemistry modes that interact together in teamwork.

Also, if you have been in a TEAM International seminar, you will likely recognize how neuroscience plays out in our elements on teamwork – we’re very sensitive to the impact of team members’ behavior on the inner-workings of their teams’ productivity. A word here, a grimace there, a pat on the back or sharp criticism – all these add to or subtract from team synergy.

There are other scholars and practitioners engaged in this work. In the same recent issue of *HBR* referenced above, Alison Beard, Senior Editor at *HBR*⁶, cites Helen Fisher’s path-breaking work⁷ in fMRI research, which gives additional insight on brain chemistry: not only are oxytocin and testosterone to be considered important, but also system levels of dopamine and serotonin -- the former associated with curious, spontaneous, and mentally flexible expressions, leading to more risk-taking and novel behaviors; and the latter tending to be more sociable and eager to belong, and thus tending to express behaviors that are more traditional and less inclined to exploration. By the way, all of these systems can be detected with reference to the “why” testing instruments referred to above in our AfD technology.

So the old is new, and the new is old: AfD technology is reinforced by the new science of brain chemistry, and the “neuroscience approach” has its roots in differences in the

way our brains work and manifest themselves in our personality styles and behaviors. More importantly, researchers such as Zak and Fisher have discovered new depths in our practice of understanding and resolving differences in the leadership and teamwork programs we've carried out over the years. Our past participants can now connect more easily with current ones, and vice-versa, and a leadership and teamwork conversation becomes further enabled among us all....

REFERENCES:

¹ Various authors, *The New Science of Teamwork*, Harvard Business Review, March–April, 2017.

² Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, Random House, New York, 1995.

³ Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence, the Revolutionary New Science of Human Relationships*, Random House, New York, 2006.

⁴ Paul J. Zak, *The Moral Molecule, The Source of Love and Prosperity*, Penguin Group, New York, 2012.

⁵ Paul J. Zak, "The Neuroscience of Trust", *Harvard Business Review*, January–February, 2017.

⁶ Alison Beard, "If You Understand How the Brain Works, You Can Reach Anyone", *Harvard Business Review*, March–April, 2017.

⁷ Helen Fisher, *Why We Love – the Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2004.