CLASP

Bridging the Gap To
High Team Performance

A workbook

Francis Cormack

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A Workbook.

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To mum, the greatest example I know of high performance.

This is for you, and all that you have provided me with.

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INTRODUCTION

There are many books on teams and high performance. Why should you read this one? Well, this is a shorter book than most. And, I do know how busy you all tell me you are. This book is free. And, who doesn't love a freebie?

Most importantly, this is the book that is going to help you. It will simplify the complex. Make clear the complicated. And have you building bridges to high performance in no time.

How do I know this? I know this because I have been where you are. Working with teams, and groups, in organisations that we now classify as complex adaptive systems (CAS). And I have read every book on teams. OK, perhaps not every book. But a lot of them. And I have applied the lessons from these books, synthesised with my 30 years of experience working in organisations large and small, across the globe, and I know what works. And, more importantly, what doesn't.
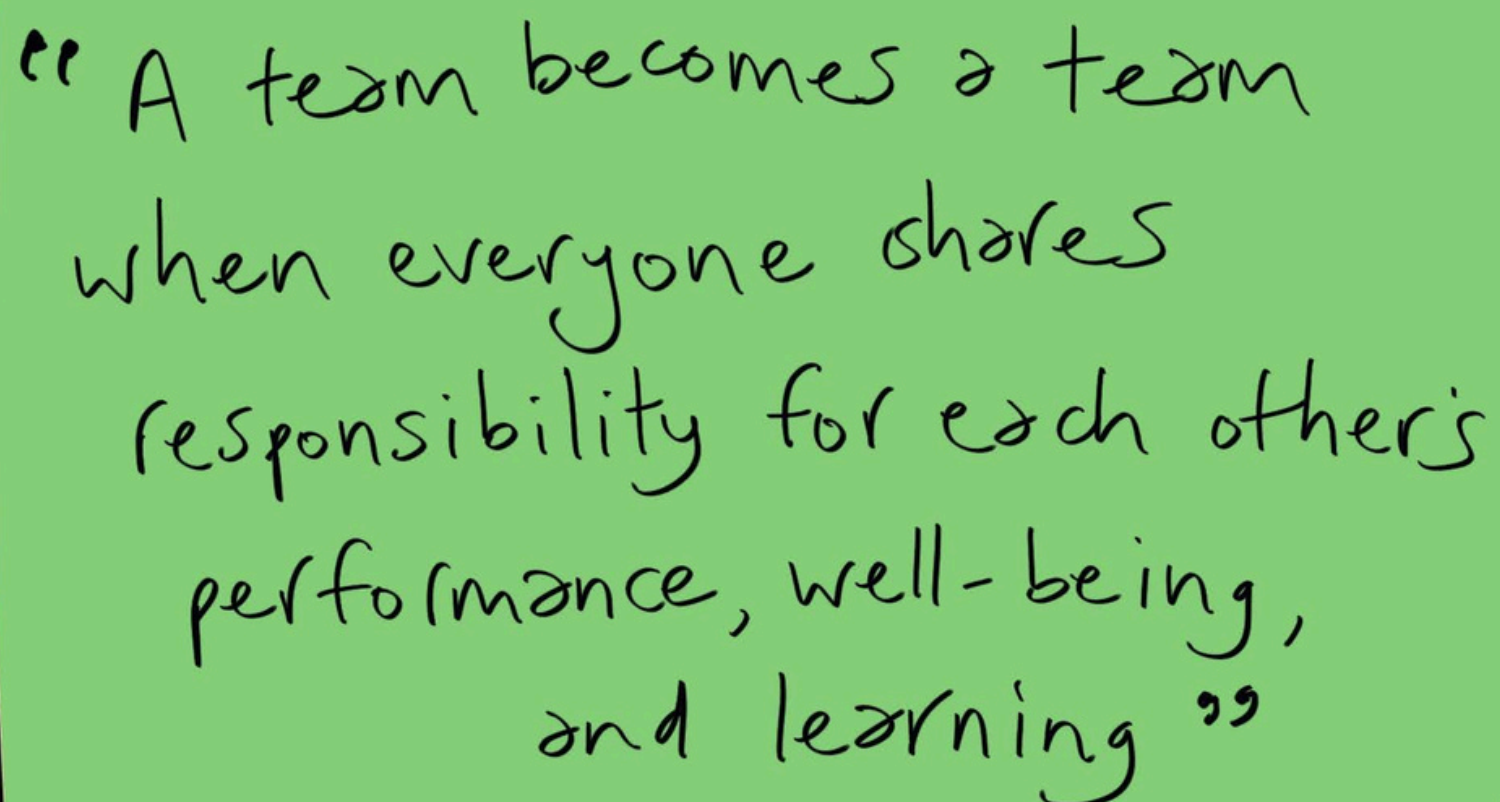
Through reading this book my intention is that you learn some of the lessons I have learnt along the way. Avoid some of the (very) common pitfalls that we fall into when we think of "team building". Trust fall, or marshmallow towers, anyone? With a combination of the research into high performing teams, and my lived experience in applying this to the hundreds of teams that I have worked with, my hope is that you finish the book with a few concrete steps you can take immediately with your teams and groups.

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A WORD ON TERMINOLOGY

I have already made reference to teams and also to groups, separately. I think it is worth spending a couple of minutes together exploring what I see as the difference. Spoiler alert, there is a difference, despite many people using the terms interchangeably.

All teams are a group. Not all groups are teams.

What makes the difference is that a team is created to serve a common purpose. They are interdependent on each other to collectively achieve their common goal. They succeed, and fail, as one cohesive unit.

"A team becomes a team when everyone shares responsibility for each other's performance, well-being, and learning"

David Clutterbuck

A group of people may well come together and work, but they are not dependent on other members of the group for their outcome. They could achieve their goal, succeed, alone. Groups provide a massive source of support, inspiration, and learning for each, but collectively they don't share the same purpose. We will come back to **Purpose** later in the book.

A very common example for you to reflect on is the concept of the senior leadership team (SLT), common in almost every organisation. Usually the heads of a number of departments that are told they are the SLT. Are they a team, working together for a common objective, dependent on each other?

Or, are they a group, with their main loyalty being with the teams they lead? Who would be the leader's "first team?" In what way is the performance of the leader being measured? Is it through the success of the SLT, and achieving the colective goals of the organisation, or the success of the teams and the department where they work on a daily basis?

Throughout the book I intend to remain neutral as to who is doing the doing. The "team" is the team. The "group" is the group. And the "leader" is the leader. If I mistakenly use a gendered term throughout the book, I apologise now.

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WHY NOW?

A great question in coaching is why now? When a counterpart, often referred to as a coaching client, brings something into the coaching space, as a coach we stay curious as to why they have brought that issue, at that moment. What was the trigger for it? Is this significant? The same goes for the writing of this book. Why write it now?

If not now, then when? As I mentioned earlier, I have bookshelves bulging with books on leadership. Books on leaders. Books on teams. Many of them continue to provide inspiration and have proved to be invaluable on my journey as a Team Coach. A lot of them have left me feeling bereft. Lacking substance. Full of platitudes. Regurgitating old theories and not critiquing them. They have left me thinking, surely, we can do better.

I am not sure you will see this book as being any better, though I do hope that you will find it useful. And I hope that when you go back into the world of your organisational system, what you learn between the pages of this thin book at least has you building the foundations for that bridge to high performance.

This book is your scaffolding. My hope is that you build on this book, in your practice, and find out what works best in the context you find yourself in.

Whilst we acknowledge, and have for many years now, that we live in a world that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA), many people still think that their current LAMO (linear, anthropocentric, mechanistic, ordered) lens of approaching the world is sufficient.

It isn't. Not by a long stretch. We can not control the world. And we need to let go of the illusion that we can. How can we shift our mindset from deterministic, to probabilistic?

There is no crystal ball. You can do all the plans you like and things will still turn out in a way that you never expected. Welcome to life.

"Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face" - Mike Tyson.

As individuals, we are a living system, nested within other living systems. What we can only hope to do, is to influence. And through this book, and the model I will share, I hope that you are starting on solid foundations.

THE CURRENT STATE

In a world of 8 billion people, I can not even begin to guess how many of these people work in teams. Why don't we just agree that the number is high. Very high. And how many of these teams are currently thriving in high performance? We will never know for sure but a recent study indicates that the number is as low as 30%. Globally. If we blend in the levels of reported engagement from employees, the picture looks even worse. Gallup's 2023 report showed a global level of engagement at 23%.

As you have picked up this book on building high performance, I know you would agree that this is bleak. If not downright distressing. We spend a large portion of our lives at work. If we are not engaged, this has a knock on impact across all areas of our lives. The ripples are massive. Our health. Our relationships. This is why there is so much written on the subject.

Do a quick internet search with me.

Type "books on teams". What result did you get? At the time of writing, I got 648,000,000 results. Read that number slowly. Count the number of zeros. I appreciate this is not how many books there are on teams, but the size of the number tells us something. And yet, despite all this content, from the world's brightest minds, we still only have around 30% of teams that are high performing. We can, and we must do better.

This book is a short guide on how.

THE CLASP MODEL

As a step to better, this book will introduce you to my proprietary CLASP model of building high performance. A simple, easy to remember framework that will guide you through the essential foundations for team and group high performance. A framework borne out of years of lived experience working in, and working with teams. A framework that blends in the latest research of team dynamics. High performing teams. And what happens when you bring a group of people together and ask them to be a team.

It will also include lots of hands-on, practical activities that you could experiment with straight away. Activities that have been shown to be very effective. I don't recommend that you just take my word for it. Use the activities yourself. In the spirit of agility, inspect and adapt until you find a flavour of the activity that suits you, your teams, and their very specific context. Build your own models and share them with me. I may even include them in the second edition of this book, with you credited, of course.

CLASP is a five step framework. Not a linear progression through stages, or up levels, but stages to be visited and revisited over time. Iteratively. A team is a living system in a much larger living system, the organisation. The organisation is part of an even bigger living system, society. And society, yes, you guessed it, is itself part of an EVEN bigger system, the world.

If you haven't grasped it by now, we are all interconnected. Nobody and nothing happens in isolation. To succeed we need to be doing everything through a systemic lens. How does the work we do affect and impact others? If we change one part of the system we are working in, where does this have a knock on impact elsewhere in the system?

This is an important point worth stressing. If you only focus at the team level, and make individual teams high performing, you are only optimising one part of the system. And elsewhere in the system something will be affected, usually negatively. You must always be working systemically.

Working systemically, you will have a much greater impact if you continuously go around the CLASP framework, each time building on what you have learned along the way. Because you will learn things. The world will keep turning. Events will happen outside your control and how can you bring that knowledge, and new learning, back into the system you are working within?

C - COLLABORATION
L - LEARNING
A - ACCOUNTABLE
S - SAFE
P - PURPOSE

This book will be structured around each component of the CLASP framework. Taking time to explore the importance of that component. How you will see it play out with the teams and groups you work with. And what can you do to build and strengthen that concept within the teams and groups you work with.

Not all teams and groups need to be "top of the class" in each of these components. But, to be a team working towards high performance, they must embrace every component of the model, and commit to getting better in each.

It is important to keep front of mind that everything and everyone is connected. Be aware of sub-optimising other teams, other parts of the system as you work towards high performance.

Let's get started.

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WHAT IS A TEAM?

We should perhaps start right at the beginning, and ask, what is a team. Earlier I shared a quote from the coaching pioneer, David Clutterbuck, with his definition of a team. There are many definitions, and I particularly like David's. I like it because the sole focus is not on performance. It also has an emphasis on well-being and relationships. Teams are a collection of human beings. Our deepest and strongest need as humans is the need to belong.

This is why before you do any work on team effectiveness, you need a strong foundation of relationship within the team.

"Relationships before results"

And to build these relationships you need to understand a little about team and group dynamics. How teams form, and some of the process they go through on their journey to "teaming".

When starting out with a new team, I purposely create space for the people to build a relationship with each other. I have used a full day for everyone to just be. Share stories of their journey. Visually, usually. The use of creativity at this stage has such power. Allow the people to get to know each other as people.

Connection

I have since discovered that this is a technique that was used for new actors to better get to know each other in the TV shows Seinfeld, and Friends. And look how they turned out. It appears I am onto something.

Connections are being made between the team members. They are starting to build a level of trust, an element that is vital for the team to create their own psychological safety, a topic we will return to later in the book. They are starting to feel like they belong, tapping into our greatest need as humans. Once team members feel a sense of belonging, with safety, they can start working towards our third greatest need as humans, Recognition.

With a solid foundation, the people, slowly becoming a team, can turn their gaze backwards. Through a facilitated process, I run an activity that allows for each person in the team to reflect on their past experience. They can bring that past experience into the room and talk to others about it.

As each member of the newly forming team does this, the team starts to get a sense of what they would like, and would not like, this new team to be. We are starting to create a shared understanding of what "good" looks like for this team.

High Performance

As one of the aspirations is for the team to experience high performance, we will talk about what high performance means to them. Words are personal. We make sense of our experience and verbalise it in words. As we are all individuals, no two people's experiences are the same. We need to be aware of this and go a little deeper with what people say and the words they use. Taking a coaching approach, staying curious, and without judgement, explore what high performance means to each team member.

One way to help this process is to have the team talk about examples of high performing teams. A discussion on high performance in teams would not be complete without reference to the famous All Blacks. The national side of New Zealand. There are literally books written about them and their unique philosophy. Their infamous "no dickheads" rule and the clear statement that you leave the sacred black jersey in a better place than you found it.

Why are they an example of a high performing team? What do they do that makes them a high performing team? And how do they maintain such a high level of performance for so many years? Most examples of high performance in teams are from the sporting world.

In a corporate setting, high performance remains elusive for many teams. In a 2023 study by the Dale Carnegie Institute, only 30% of teams considered themselves to be high performing.

Team Diagnostic

Clearly, there is work to do. And this work for me would start with a simple diagnostic. A tool to understand where the team is currently. What is the starting point? Meeting the team where they are at is great advice. And revisiting the team diagnostic a few months later is a great way of measuring the impact of coaching through the CLASP framework.

For this I would use the TDS (Team Diagnostic Survey) from the 6 Team Conditions. This work breaks down the foundations of a high performing team into 3 essential conditions, and 3 enabling conditions.

3 Essential Conditions

- These are, does the team have a **compelling purpose?** Purpose is a subject that we will cover in more detail in the CLASP framework.
- Does the team have the **right people** in it?
- Is this a **real team**?

3 Enabling Conditions

- Does the team have good **work design?** IS it small, with meaningful tasks, and clear ways of working?
- Is the team within a **supportive organisational context?**
- Is **team coaching** happening?

The results of the TDS is a great jumping off point into which conversations are the next best conversations to have with the team.

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A LITTLE OF THE THEORY

Whilst this book is a practical guide to working with teams towards building high performance, it would be remiss of me to not share a little of the theory on team process. I stress the "little" as there are libraries full of books on team theory and team development. This book is not headed for those library shelves. This book is headed for your desk.

If you have done any leadership training you will be familiar with the Tuckman model of team development. Developed in 1965 by psychologist Bruce Tuckman, his model has gifted us with the memorable, "forming, storming, norming, performing", language so often heard in organisations today.
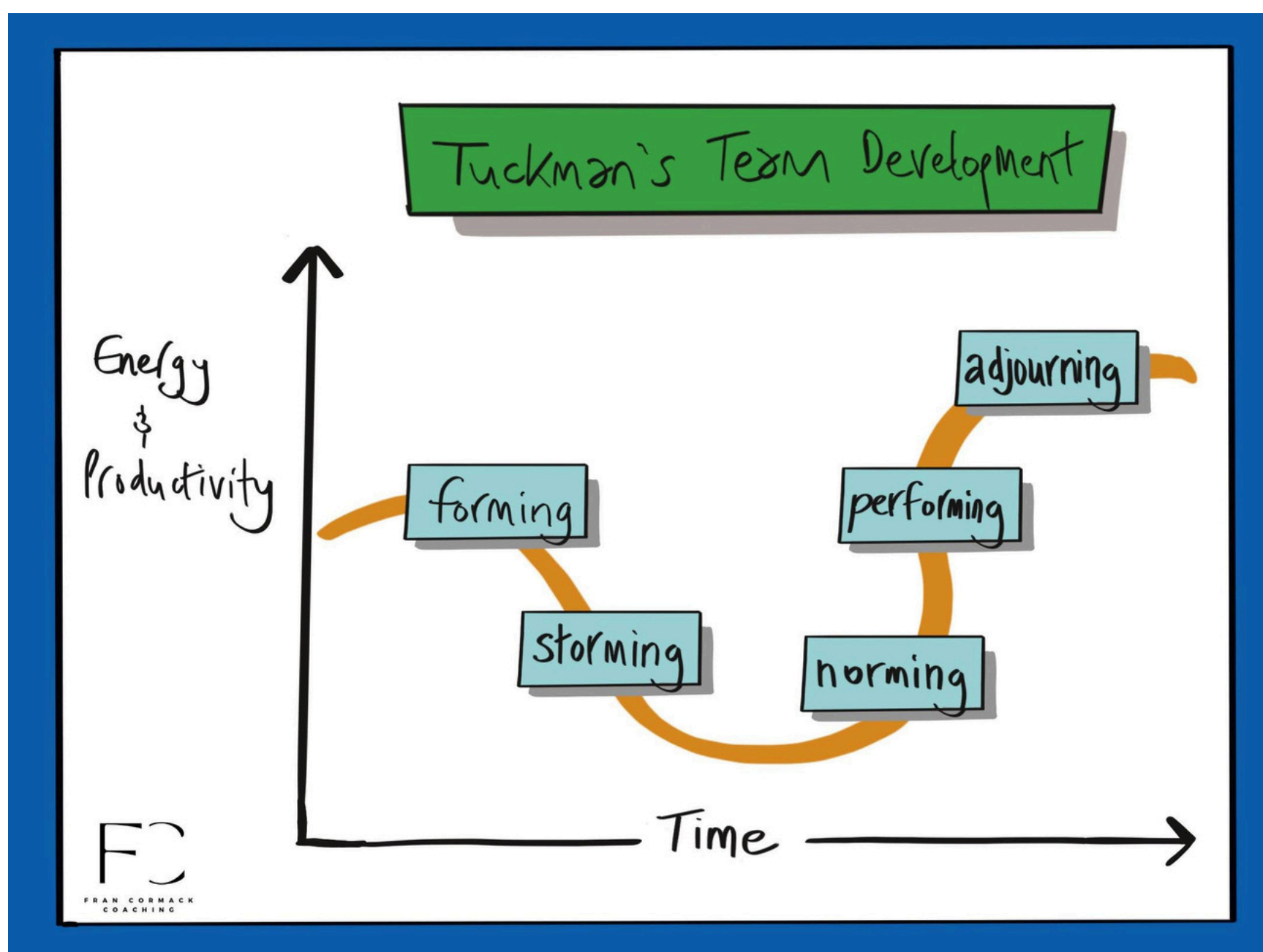
And clearly, there is a lot of merit in this. That Tuckman later challenged his own model, and that others in the years since have questioned its validity, it still has a great role to play in framing how a team might develop.

You will have seen this yourself in the teams you have worked with. As the people, with their individual personalities, come together, they start to form. Move from a collection of people, into a group of people. The dynamics that emerge from this coming together can result in what is called "storming", in Tuckman's model. Personalities clash. Differences of opinion get aired. People fall out and argue.

Working with a team coach, this process is normalised with the team. They are made aware that this is a normal part of the process. And that conflict, kept healthy, is a requirement for them to nurture if they aspire to high performance. This can result in the team moving through the model to the next phase, "norming". Where people now understand each other a lot better. They know more about the team's collective strengths and weaknesses. They are familiar with some tools and techniques to manage the necessary healthy conflict that they will inevitably face.

They start to become a team that performs. Delivering on outcomes. Working smarter and taking the right breaks. Managing the energy of the team. Knowing when to sprint and when to recover. You will hear laughter as they team celebrate the intelligent failures that resulted in a learning breakthrough. Given autonomy they craft their North Star, a clear and shared purpose driving them on.

This all sounds like utopia, doesn't it? If only team life was as simple and linear as that. Spoiler alert. It isn't.

As Connie Gersick, (1988), found out in her research. Gersick also studied teams, across a number of organisations, and her findings did not match those of Tuckman. In fact, Gersick found that none of the teams progressed through a series of stages. They did something very different. Something Gersick came to call "punctuated equilibrium".
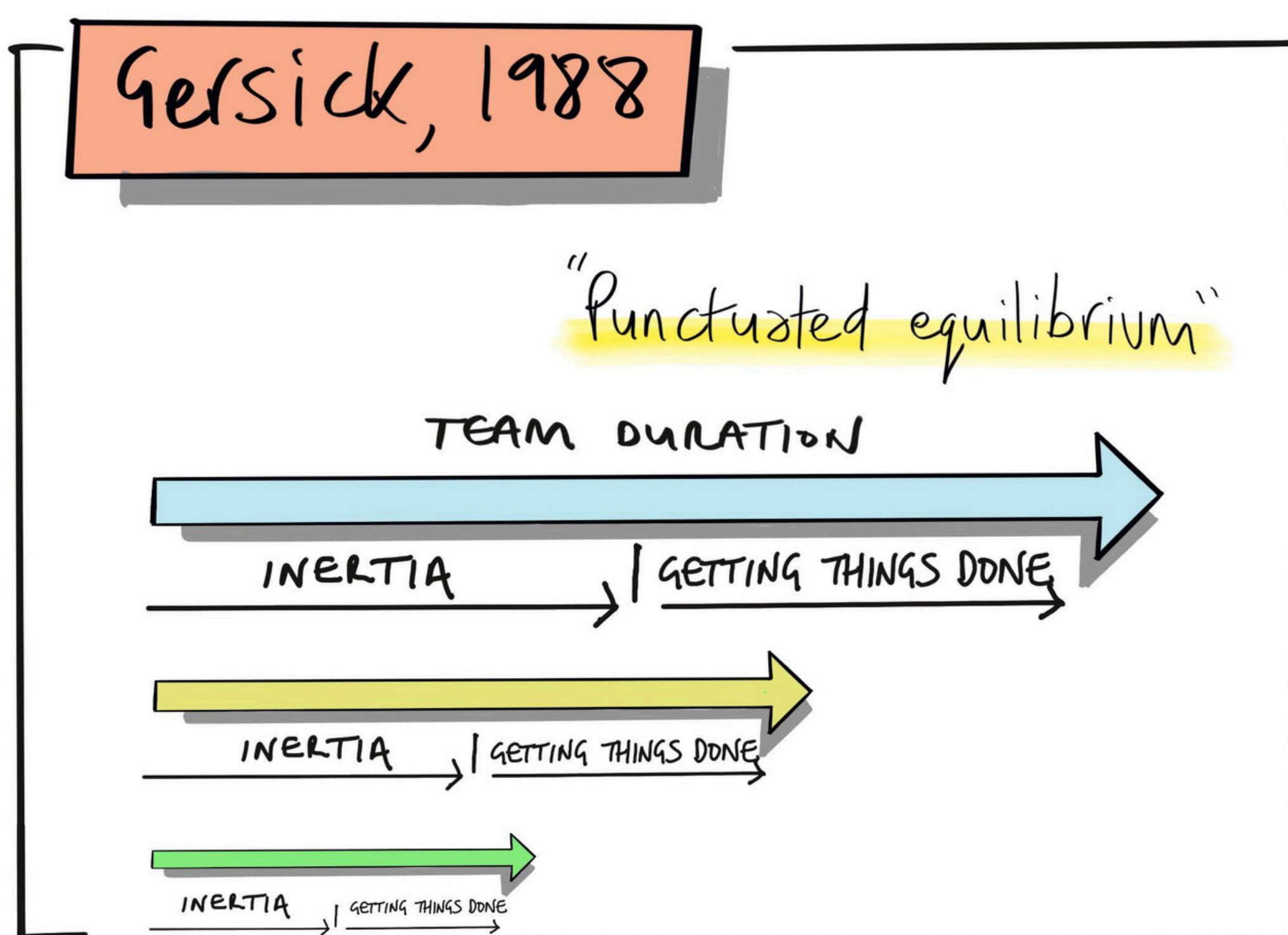
Progress in the team appeared to be driven by the team's awareness of time and deadlines. Periods of inertia were followed by periods of activity. It was argued by Gersick that whatever the length that the team were due to be working on a project, the first half of the time was marked by inertia, and the second half by getting things done.
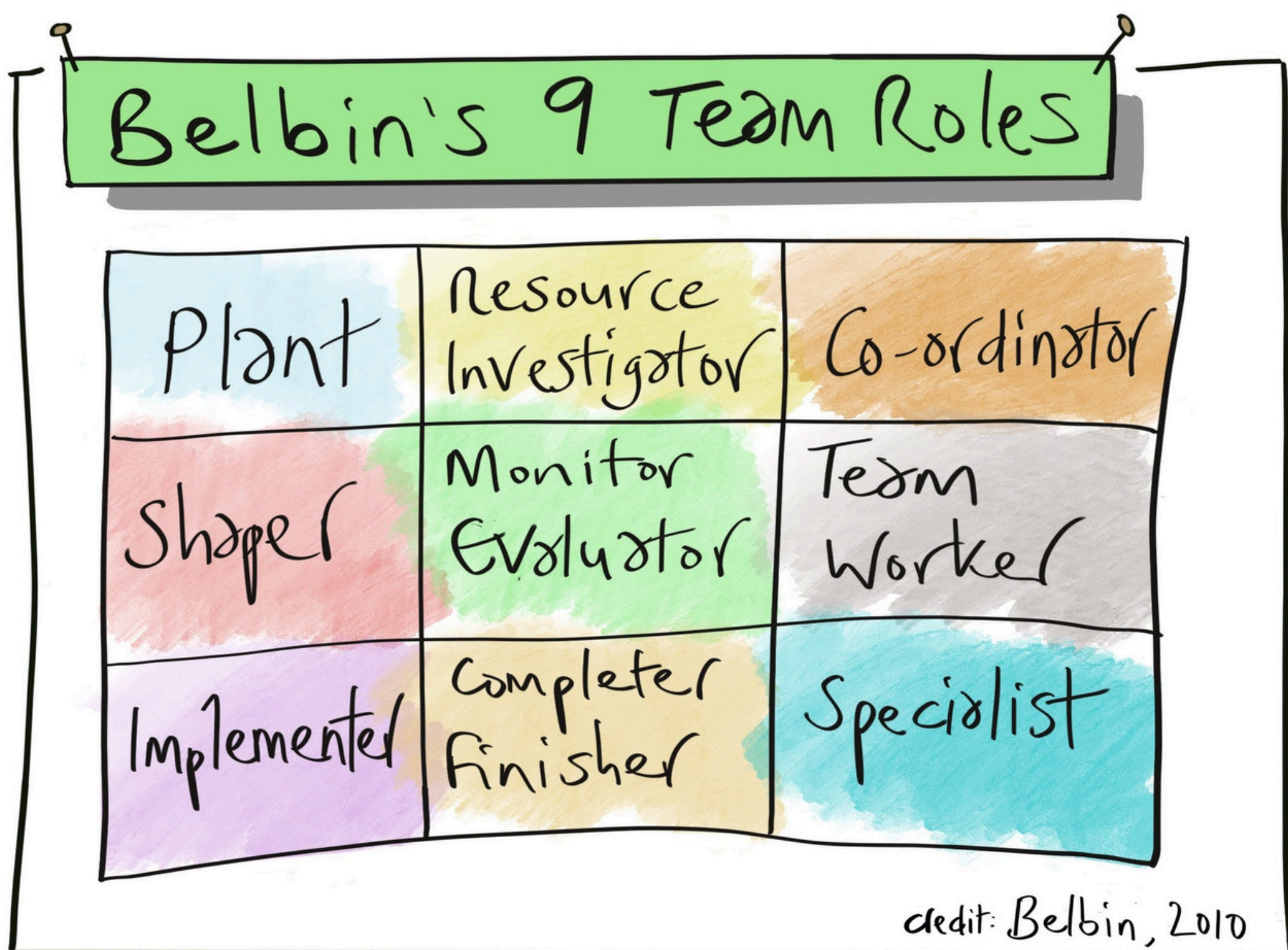
Tell me if this sounds familiar. Teams in your organisation are created simply by who has available capacity. In almost every corporate setting I have worked in this usually involves an elaborate excel spreadsheet. Containing all the "resources", which are actually people, and the percentage they are available.

How we can split people into percentages will forever baffle me. From who is available a team is created. How well does this work out?

Teams are a collection of humans. And every human is different. Complementary skills and experience, not to mention very different personalities. It stands to reason that for a team to be effective they need a blend of different people.

One framework that describes this well was designed by Dr Meredith Belbin, (2010). Belbin identified nine roles that a team requires to be effective. Roles that work together, utilising an individual strengths.

Ensuring that the team's sum was greater than its parts. In Belbin's model you would find roles such as "coordinator", "shaper", "team worker", and "completer finisher", amongst others. All playing a vital role.

Belbin's 9 Team Roles

Plant	Resource Investigator	Co-ordinator
Shaper	Monitor Evaluator	Team Worker
Implementer	Completer Finisher	Specialist

credit: Belbin, 2010

To contrast with the Belbin model, research by Hada, Noble, Marshall, (2010), looked at roles that emerge from with self organising teams. Classed as "informal" roles, again, it shows that having a diverse mix of skills and experience is essential for team success.

As with Belbin, we again see the need for the "coordinator" role, highlighting the importance of teams not to solely focus on the need to get stuff done. It has to be the right stuff, at the right time.

Credit: Hada, Noble, Marshall, 2010
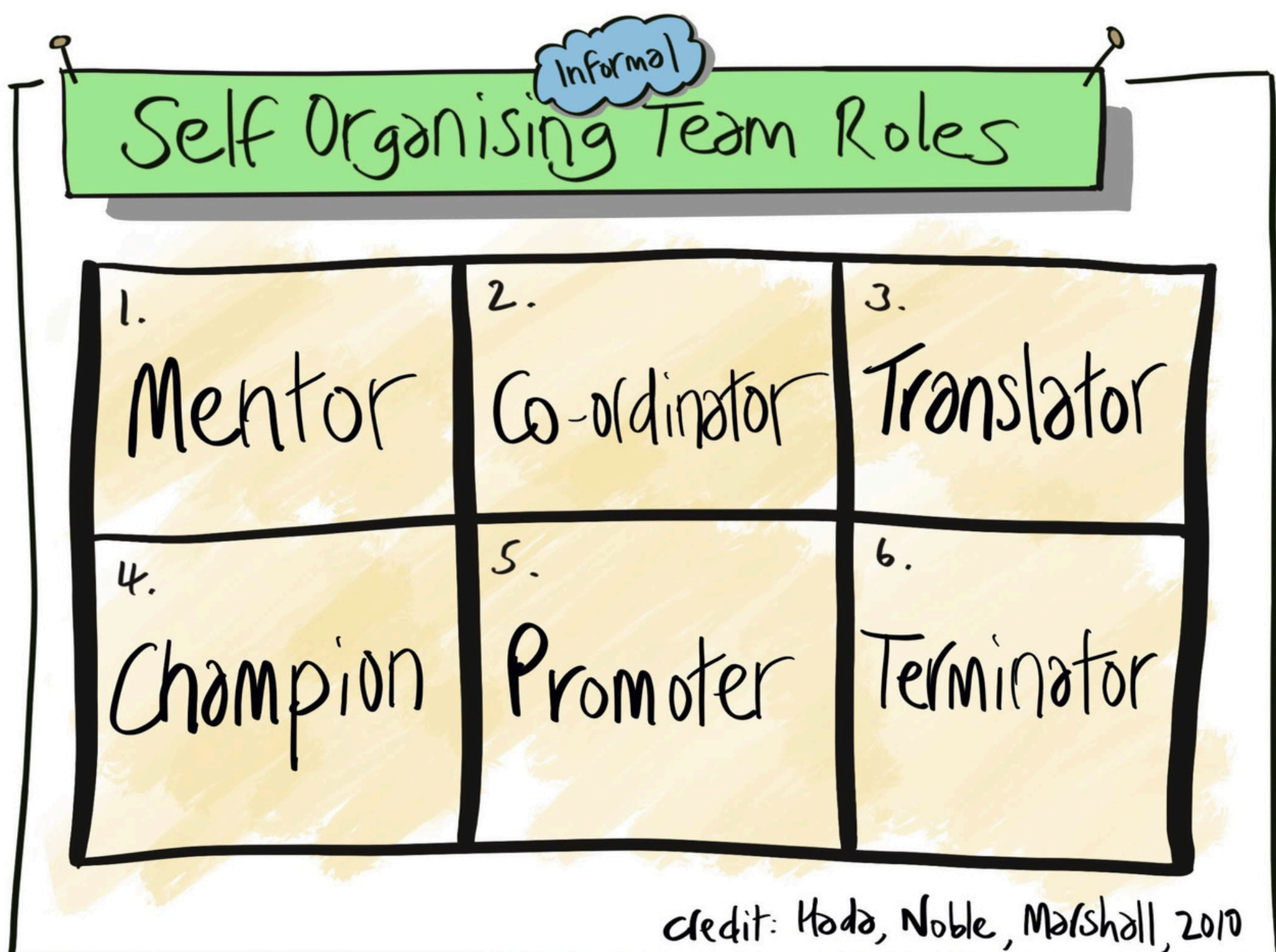
I share these models for a number of reasons. Firstly, they are a foundational part of the work and research done in the field of teams. You should be aware of the foundations you are walking on. Secondly, to show you that, in the words of George Box, (1976), "all models are wrong, some are useful". Take what is useful from the models, nothing else.

Finally, I shared these models to show you that nobody really knows what will happen when you put a group of individuals together and ask them to become a team. There are emergent qualities that you can neither predict, nor prepare for. You are working in the "complex" domain, (Snowden, 1999), in a complex adaptive system.

Also, there are group dynamics at play. You need to increase your ability to "read the room", Kantor, D. (2012).

This book will help you understand some of the complexities of teams, and provide a framework through which you will be able to have a better chance of building a bridge to high performance.

Now the framework.

Reflection

Now you have read through the opening to this book, I am sure some thoughts have started to emerge for you. As you think back to your experience working in teams, and leading teams, what has resonated with you, and what hasn't?

Take out a pen and your journal, and spend a few minutes answering these questions:

- How do you see the difference between teams and groups?
- In your experience, what might be the cause of such low engagement scores?
- What models have you, and are you, currently using to build team performance?
- What has been most effective, and what has been least effective in these models?

8

COLLABORATION

In one organisation that I worked with, the presenting issue from management was a feeling that people were "over collaborating". I had to let this sink in. I had to stay curious. Ask a few questions and try to understand what the real challenge was. Surely, people collaborating was a good thing. How were people defining "over collaborating?"

Our working group was similarly stumped. Do we tell people to stop working together? To start working more in isolation? To start fostering the silos that we had worked to create bridges between.

The real challenge was not that people were "over collaborating". The challenge was that the organisation, and the people within it were not clear what collaboration was. And what it wasn't. One example provided by leadership was that meetings had too many people in them. And for leadership, this was people "over collaborating".

I saw this very differently. This was not a collaboration problem. It was a clarity problem.

People were not clearly identifying who they needed in the meeting. Heck, it started even before then. The meeting organisers were not clear on why they were meeting. Why they were convening so many people. What they needed from each person that they invited. No wonder the invitees were confused. And what happens? Everyone accepts the meeting invite. And everyone turns up to the meeting. And it is a great waste of money. And everyone's time.

Meetings fall into four categories. Are we meeting to **decide?** To **bond?** To **create?** To **learn?**

Our starting point within this organisation was to come up with some clear definitions. Help everybody in the organisation understand what collaboration was. And what it would look and feel like in the context of this particular organisation.

A collaborative team is one that trusts each other. They engage in healthy conflict. And they work together to achieve their interdependent goals.

How to get there?

When starting out with a new team I always come back to the mantra, "relationships before results". And would take at least a whole day just to start building these relationships. I would do this by designing some activities that would scaffold that day. Activities that would build on each other. Activities that would bring fun and creativity into the team. Two essential components of a high performing team.
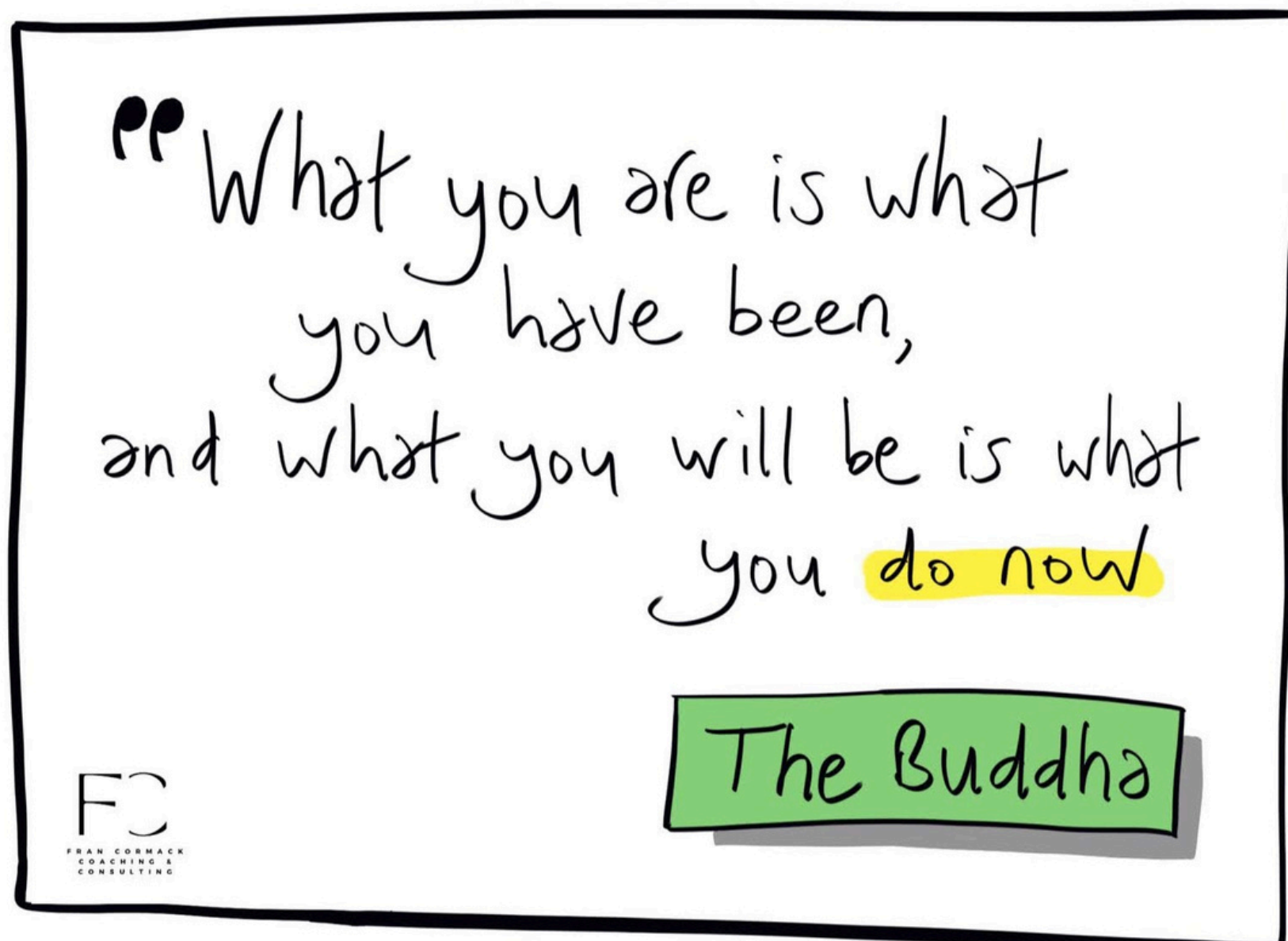
Taking a systemic lens, understanding the history of the team, and the people who have been in the team, and left the team, is a great place to honour the "living history".

Often, teams pay scant regard to people joining and leaving teams. I have even worked with teams who didn't know a teammate was leaving, until they had actually left. The first they knew was the email that morning telling them that a co-worker was no longer with the organisation.

I find this a staggering oversight, and leaves the system unsettled. And the contribution of the person who has left does not get acknowledged.

Another important aspect is the living history of the team. Who was here first? Who joined most recently? Usually, the most senior member of the team is viewed as being in "first place".

When we honour the time aspect of the system, we often find that the most senior person is the one who joined the team most recently. There are others in the team who were there before them. The leader needs to "lead from last place." Something that is not the subject of much discussion.

Borrowing from organisational constellations, there is an activity that I would do with the team, as a starting point for our work together. An activity that honours the principle of Time, and gives people in the team their rightful place.

Activity - Living History

Time required - 1 hour
Tools - none

For this activity you will need a large floor space. Large enough for the team to be able to form a large circle.

Ask the team to imagine a clock face, and for the person that was the first in this team to stand at 12 o'clock. Working clockwise, the next person joins the circle. On and so on until all the team is in a circle, in the place of when they joined the team. Have the team do this in silence for the first round. Trusting their "felt sense" of their true order. Once the circle is complete, they can then discuss with others how accurate they were, before moving to their correct place in the team's history.

The other "clock numbers" are not relevant to this exercise, so have the team space out in the circle, to avoid the team bunching up.

Starting with the most recent starter in the team, offer them the sentence to speak to the others, "The work you did before I joined meant that I could join the system later. Thank you."

For the members that have been in the team the longest, offer them a sentence such as "Everything we have learnt by being here for longer we will pass onto you gladly, so you can use it for the good of the system".

These systemic sentences help the team, and the system to rebalance.

The team is now in a good place to start their work together. The Time principle has been honoured. Resonant, systemic sentences have been offered. The system is settled. Your work can now continue, with having the team get to know each other as humans a little better.

A very effective exercise to start getting individuals to open up and share with their team is a "Journey Map." You may also see this activity labelled something such as "life stories".

Activity - Journey Maps

Time required - 1 hour minimum
Tools - Flipchart paper / flipchart pens

- Ensure everyone has a piece of flipchart paper and a pen.
- Set a timer for 15 minutes and tell people to draw, with no words, as much or as little of their life journey to date. The "no words" rule is not strict, but encourage creativity and vulnerability by asking people to draw.
- When the 15 minutes are up, have everyone share their journey with everyone else in the team and see what conversation emerges.
- Very often, this is a sure fire way for people to learn something new about each other.

Now that the team has opened up a little, and started to share on a more personal level, I would move on to the next activity. The "individual user manual". How does each team member like to work, and what do they need from others.
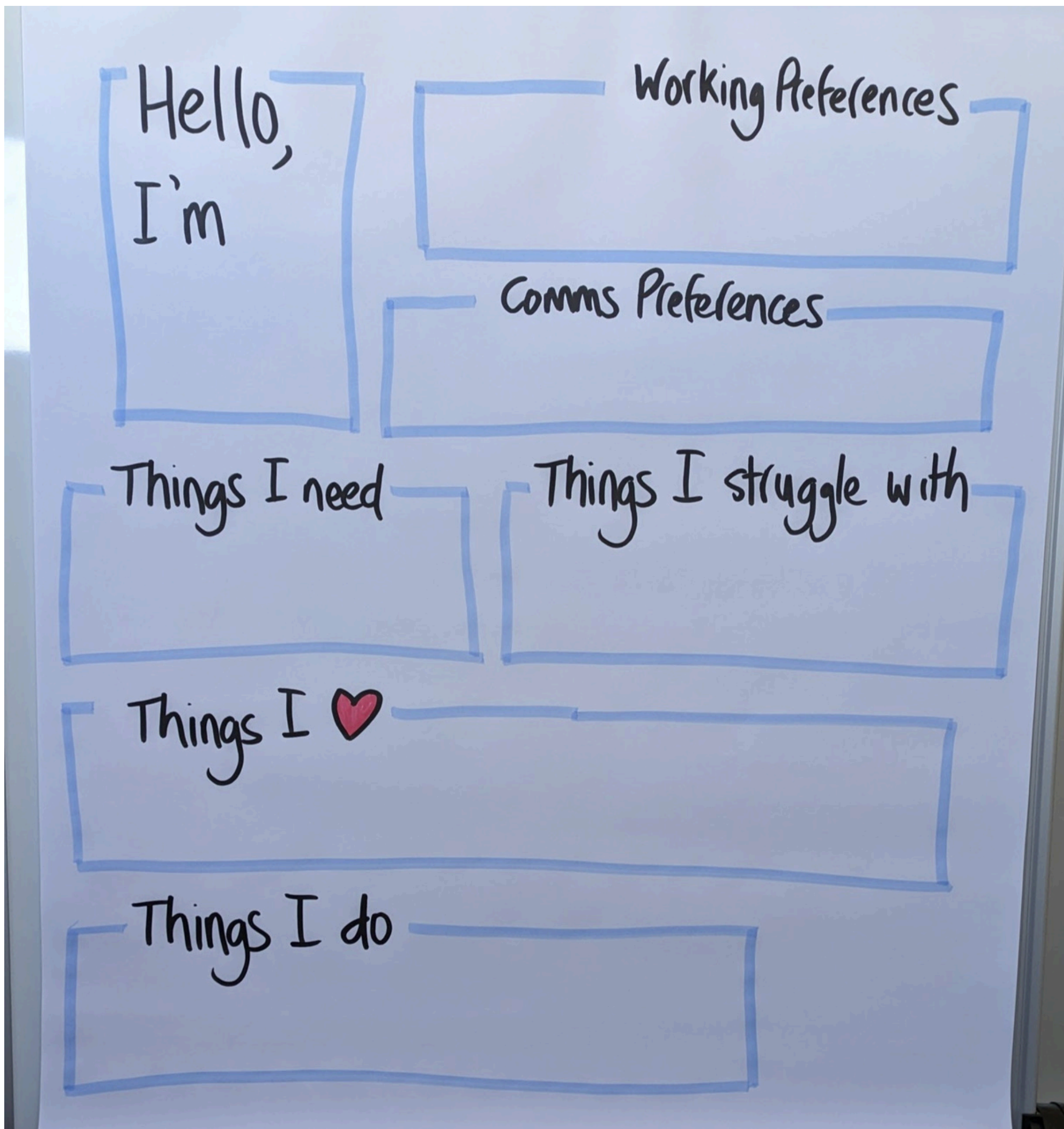
This activity is great in having people realise not everyone is like them. And that not everyone wants to have meetings first thing on Monday morning, or late on Friday afternoon.

This activity provides a creative way for the team to have this discussion.

Activity - Individual User Manuals

Time required - 1 hour minimum
Tools - Flipchart paper / flipchart pens

Feel free to create a template that works for you and your team. The above is one that I have used previously.

- Ensure everyone has a piece of flip chart paper and a pen.
- Have them create a template similar to the one above.
- Set a timer for 15 minutes and have everyone complete their individual user manual.
- When the 15 minutes are up, have everyone share their user manual with everyone else in the team and see what conversation emerges.

By this point in the day, people have shared a lot about themselves. Ensure that you build in plenty of breaks and physical movement to ensure everyone remains energised.

Encourage people to have a walk outside and get some fresh air. This might be a good time for a coffee and tea break.

Refreshed, and re-energised, it is time to start bringing the morning activities together and synthesise them as we move from "me to we". Called various names in my experiences with teams, we now move on to the team's "working agreements".
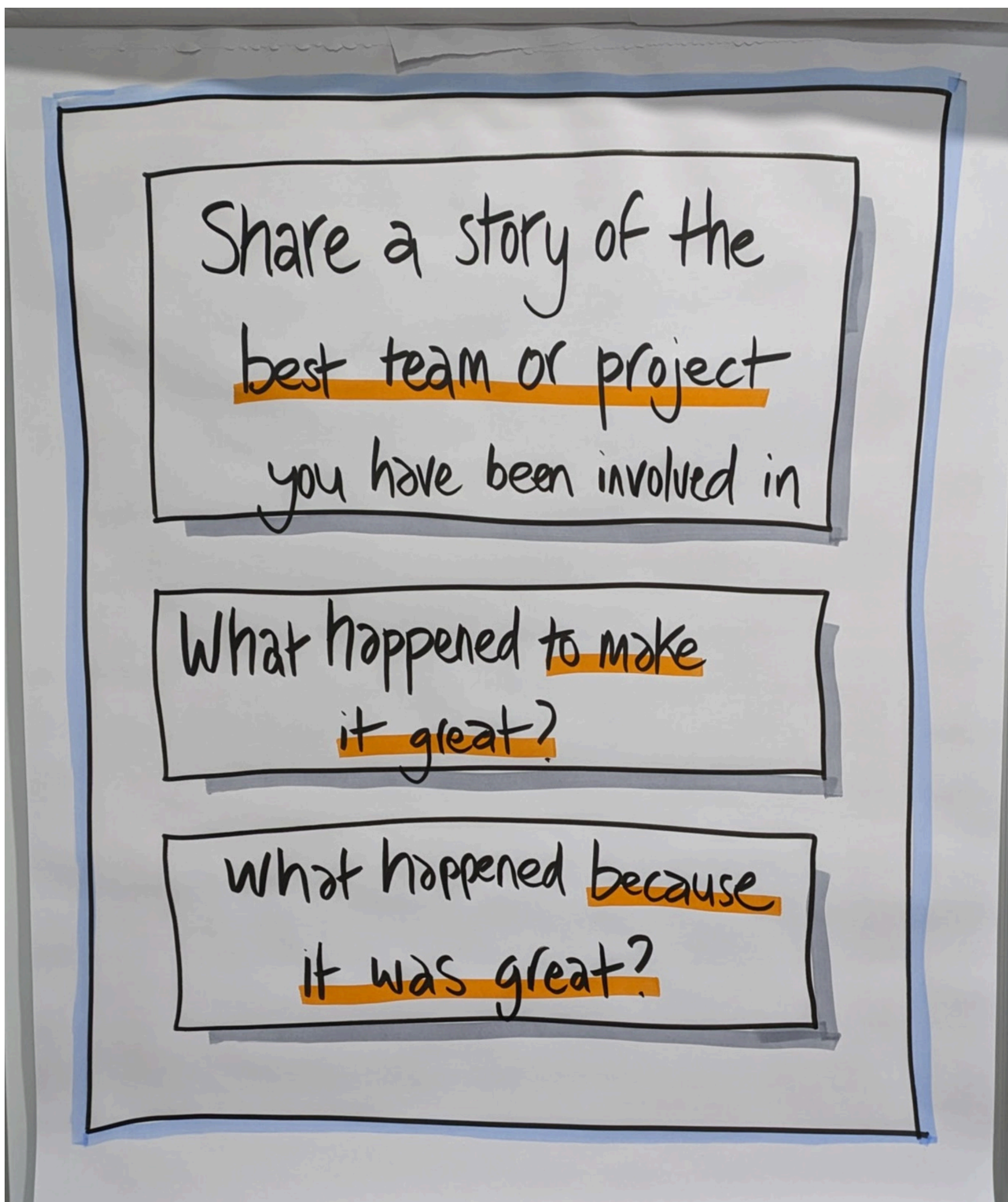
Activity - Team Working Agreements

Time required - 2 hour minimum
Tools - Post Its / Sharpie pens

It is important that all the team attend this session.

Share a story of the best team or project you have been involved in

What happened to make it great?

What happened because it was great?

Part 1

- Do a "round robin" with everyone sharing their answers to the above.
- This will get everyone thinking about what they have experienced in an effective team.
- Importantly, it will also get them thinking about what they don't want to include.

Part 2

- Ask everyone to "silent write" on Post It notes for 2 minutes on what they would like to include in their team working agreements.
  - Ideas that usually emerge include non meeting time, asynchronous time, how they like to contact each other, how they will celebrate, what they will do about conflict. The list is long and what is important to the team is the only thing that's important.
- Have everyone come and stick their Post It notes on the whiteboard, with a volunteer doing clustering of common themes.
- Facilitate a conversation about what the team is noticing.
- Have the team discuss amongst themselves which of the ideas they want to include in their "working agreements".
- *Tip* - use the "goldilocks" philosophy here. The team doesn't need too few, nor too many agreements.
- *Tip* - do not rush the process. Leave space and time for the team to think, and reflect on what they are noticing.
- *Tip* - stick the Post Its to a sheet of flip chart paper. Title the paper with the name of the team and have everyone sign their "commitment" to the agreements. This creates a psychological tie that increases each person's commitment.

By this stage, the team is starting to feel like a team. They understand each other's life story better. They understand each other as humans better. And now they have a set of agreements in how they want to work and team together.

This is not the end, but rather the start of the process. We have started to build psychological safety in the team, an emergent property that we will cover in more detail later in the book.

One very important point is that the creation of the team's working agreements is not "set and forget". These working agreements should be visible in the workspace of the team. And referred to often. How are the team keeping each other accountable to the agreements?

If the team is geographically dispersed, the agreements should be discussed at least every couple of weeks in a regular team meeting.

Now you have a team that understands each other better. They know why they exist as a team. And they have a clearer understanding of how they would like to work together. The challenge is how to maintain this when the team comes to collaborate.

Brainstorming. No.

When a team collaborates, we are looking to ensure we are bringing creativity to the process. For this, we need to get one thing cleared up.

Brainstorming is not how we cultivate creativity and build this collaborative team. Brainstorming, whilst popular in the management literature many years ago, is no longer seen to be effective.

There are a whole host of hidden dynamics at play when people come together. And as a result of this, brainstorming does not give you the results you expect.

If you haven't built psychological safety in the team, some people will fear speaking out and giving their ideas. They will be fearful of being judged, or criticised.

Very normal human reactions. It is safer to keep your ideas to yourself.

Also, if there is a power dynamic in the team, perhaps through hierarchy, people will not want to contradict ideas presented by someone more senior in the organisation.

We have a danger of falling into the trap of "Groupthink", (Janis, 1972), as we default to the opinions of the highest paid person in the room. The well known "HIPPO" effect.

How to do it differently? One powerful technique comes from the world of Liberating Structures, (Lipmanowicz, H., McCandless, K., 2014) and is a classic in team and group work for a reason. It is very effective.

1 - 2 - 4 - All

Using the 1 - 2 - 4 - All technique will allow a greater number, and diversity of ideas to surface. Using this technique you harvest ideas whilst also allowing for psychological safety to emerge. It is a timeboxed technique and is very easy to run. Here are the steps:

- Each person has a set of sticky notes and a Sharpie pen
- For 1 minute, individually, everyone captures an idea per sticky note
- For the next 2 minutes, people pair up and discuss their ideas.
- For the next 4 minutes, pairs of people match up and see what ideas and themes have emerged.
- Finally, we have an open team discussion on what ideas were generated.

There are many other tools and techniques that you will find very useful in the Liberating Structures book. I would highly recommend that you check it out.

For those that are more digitally minded, there is a very good Liberating Structures app available in both the Google Play and the Apple stores.

Creativity and Play

Creativity deserves a section of its own. As it is so important. A high performing team becomes high performing over time, and through purposefully designing how they work.

Certain elements are foundational and without them there will be no high performance.

Creativity is one of these foundational elements.

Six year olds laugh an average of 300 times a day. Adults only laugh 15-100 times a day. Be six again.

Picture Cards

You can certainly get creative when thinking about creativity. A powerful way of getting people out of their cognitive brain is to use pictures and images. Start working with metaphor. A deck of picture cards can be used in so many ways, such as:

- Ask each person to select a card that represents the team for them, and discuss
- Ask each person to select a card that represents the organisation they work for, and discuss
- In pairs, select a card that represents the team's project, and discuss

The use of pictures often makes it easier for people who are struggling to find the right words for a situation. The visual metaphors that people have unlocks a creative side that they have perhaps not previously had an opportunity to tap into.

Lego Serious Play

Created in the 1990s, at Lego, Lego Serious Play is a facilitation method used across the world in teams and organisations. Since 2010 it has all been open source so there are no barriers to entry for using it with your teams.

Taking from constructivism, constructionism, and complex adaptive system theory, Lego Serious Play allows people to build 3D models to represent a challenge or a situation they have in work. Research suggests that we think with our hands, and having tactile bricks to play with as we explore an issue brings out lots of creativity.

To be clear, you don't need to have boxes and boxes of Lego. You don't need to have been on a training course. All the material is available online and you can teach yourself. Start small. With a few bricks.

And a relevant question for the team. Ask them to build their project. Or build their team. With a selection of Lego bricks people have to get very creative and present something back to the team that represents something meaningful to them.

The key is that there is no judgement from others, and that you have fun.

Lego Serious Play open source

A word on the word "team"

A team is a construct. A name we give to the people working together on the thing. Whatever that thing may be. And in today's workplace, teams are often fluid, with a porous border around the people.

That being said, don't lose sight of the fact that whenever a new person joins the team, this is a new team. The team has a new set of dynamics. A new personality to work with. A new life story to learn.

And remember those working agreements you created? The new team member was not part of this. They have not signed up to and committed to those agreements.

This means that the team needs to review them again. Not necessarily going through the whole process but as a minimum having a team conversation about them and do any need adding, amending, or removing.

This last step gets missed time and time again. With leaders saying, "it is only one new person".

Please do not fall into this trap. The system, in this case, the team, is changing. The dynamics will change with it. The new person has a burning human need to belong, so welcome them in the correct way.

Pay attention to beginnings, endings, and the transition between them.

For a deeper understanding of Transitions, which I recommend to all leaders, is to read the book, "Managing Transitions", by William Bridges.

Reflection on Collaboration

Now that you have read this far in the book, and have some practical tools that you can apply immediately, what are your reflections?

- What are you noticing about your leadership and the teams you have, and are working with?
- What is working for you?
- What might you experiment with?
- What will you do first?

9

LEARNING

The second foundation for a team to achieve high performance is for that team to be a learning team. A team that is insatiably curious. A team that knows they do not know. To quote a Buddhist saying, you need to "empty your cup". Make space for new learning to emerge and fill the cup.
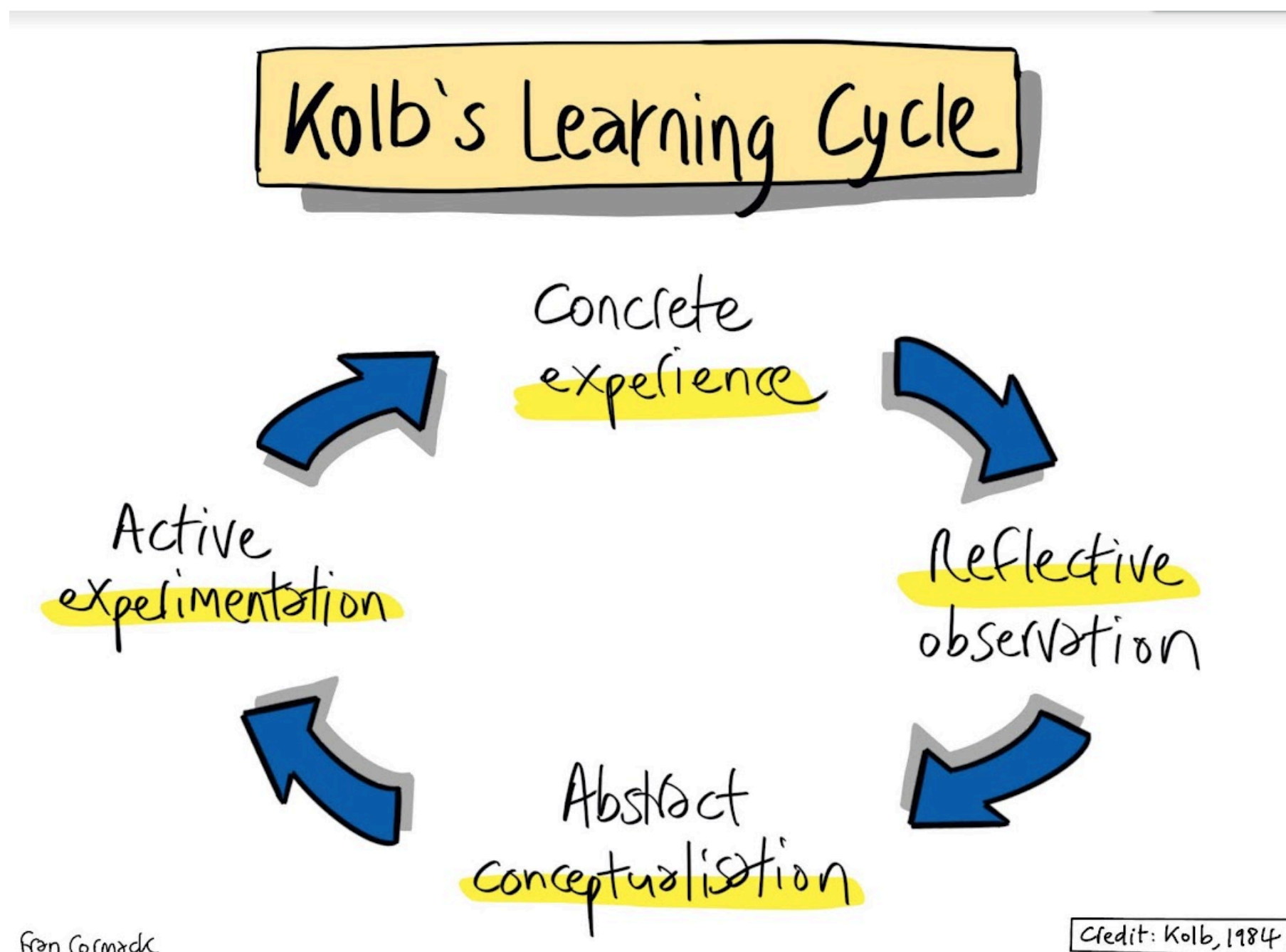

"I am still learning - Michelangelo"

Some teams, not many in my direct experience, are fortunate enough to be working in a DDO. A deliberately developmental organisation. A term coined in the book, "An Everyone Culture" Becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organisation", by Lisa Lahey and Robert Kegan, (2016), a DDO has a laser-like focus on personal growth. It becomes the culture that people work within.

For teams not working in a DDO, they have to be more deliberate themselves. Be explicit about the relationship to learning that the team has, and how the team, and thus the organisation, will benefit.

Being deliberate means understanding how we learn. We all went to school, and many to universities, yet how many of us actively, and purposely reflect on the "how" of how we learn? Hands up if you have had this reflection recently.

So let's start with a model, whilst keeping George Box in mind, "all models are wrong, some are useful".

Kolb's Learning Cycle

Concrete experience

Reflective observation

Abstract conceptualisation

Active experimentation

Fran Cormack

Credit: Kolb, 1984

Published in 1984, by David Kolb, it posits that we start with an actual experience. We do something. And the important next step is that we then pause, and purposely reflect on the experience we have had.

From our reflections we consider what we might do differently, more of, less of, when we next do the thing. Closing the loop is the "active experimentation", as we experience the thing again. And so the loop goes on.

Credited to John Dewey, "we do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience", captures this succinctly.

What you might be noticing is that this goes against the grain of our relentlessly busy lives. Our "get stuff done" culture. "Time is money", and all that other nonsense. Please.

We know how we learn, and we know what is most effective. Like a lot of this book, this concept is a simple one. Most of them are. What I am asking for is a return to basics.

Bring back some of the humanity we have lost over the years. Our brains are the same brains that we have had for thousands of years.

Let us start using them in the way they were intended.

Ways a Team Might Learn

How might a team start to become a learning team? What are some of the activities that they can be doing, individually, and as a team to stretch the learning muscle?

Here are a few examples just to get you started. There are many, many ways to learn, and people will have their preferences.

Some ways that I have seen very effectively are captured in this image:
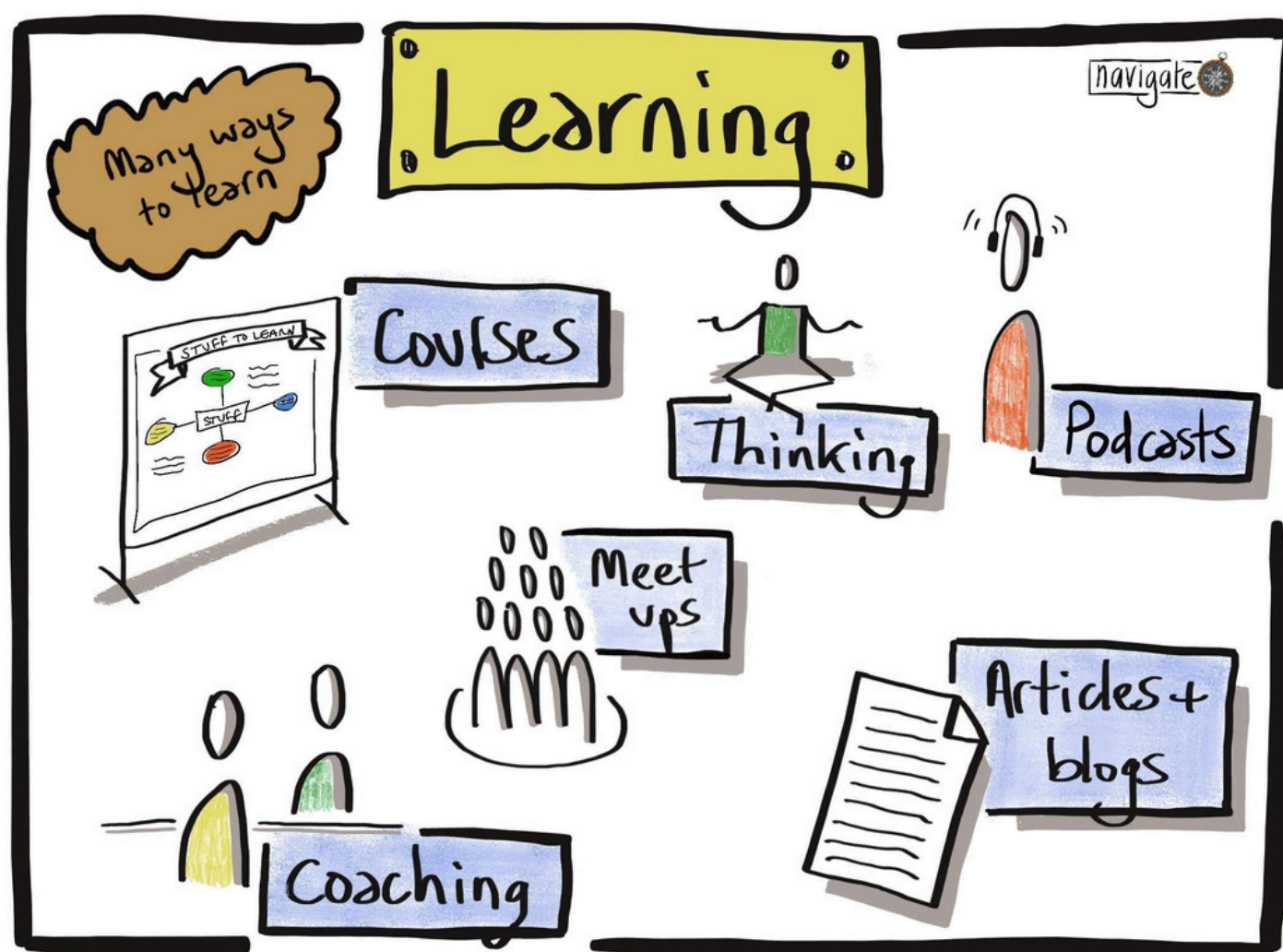
A lot of people in organisations hear the word learning and often default to "is there a course I can do?" And I am sure there is. I am sure there are many courses. What I am not sure of is the efficacy of the course, or the trainer.

In one organisation that I spent some time with, the consistent feedback from course attendees was, "they provided a good lunch". Nothing about the learning outcomes or behaviour change since they attended the said training. A sad indictment.

Courses do have a place and they are only one component of a learning journey. Remember not to forget the Ebbinghaus Curve. Spaced learning has been proven to be most effective.

Encourage the team to share recent articles and blogs they have read. What podcasts are they listening to on their commute? What was the last Meet Up they attended and what did they take away from it?

A personal favourite of mine is to create a book club. Keep it casual and not rigid. I usually create the space each month and invite people along. Whoever turns up are the right people, to borrow a concept from Open Space Technology.

And rather than all read the same book, I ask for a volunteer to facilitate a discussion on a book that has inspired them. Very often the conversations are illuminating.

Communities of Practice are very effective as a social learning group. Passionate volunteers gather around a topic or a theme. Meet on a cadence that suits your context.

Monthly usually works well. Use the concept of "see one / do one / teach one" and create a ripple of learning across the community. How can you create connections across the white space of your organisational chart?

Networked, rather than siloed.

How much time do the team put aside for thinking? Time with no pressing demands, no incoming Slack messages, and no meeting to dash to. Time to just be and reflect. This time to think is crucial in the learning process. No distractions. How often does the team look back, retrospectively, and perform an after action review?

*"Life is lived forwards, but can only be understood backwards" - Kierkegaard*

This should be a regular team event. What are some of the things the team is doing that is contributing to their success? What is holding the team back? And what can they do differently going forward?

Facilitate this conversation with the team and invite everyone's voice to be heard. Using the marginal gains philosophy, made popular by Sir David Brailsford, one time British Cycling Coach, what are the 1% improvements?

You will know by now that if the team were to improve just 1% each day, by the end of the year they would be 37% better.

Have the team considered holding Lean Coffee events? A low process way of having teams learn from each other. Click [here](#) for details of how to run a Lean Coffee.

I have used them in many organisations. They create a buzz and a sense of curiosity, not knowing what will emerge in the time allocated.
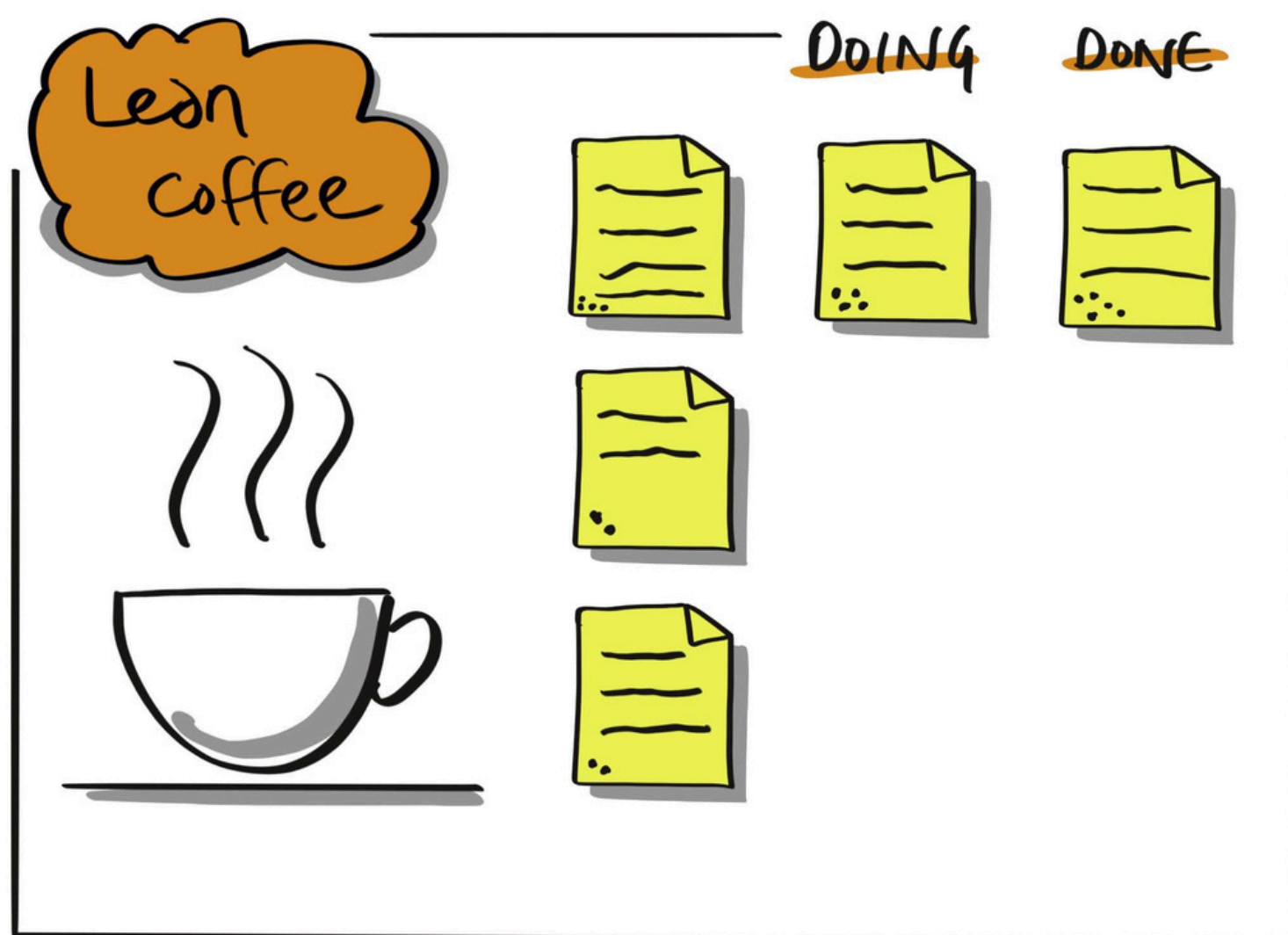
Fortnightly sessions, with a volunteer as a host, and timeboxed to 1 hour. All you need is coffee, (or tea), Sharpie pens, Post It notes, and a timer, which is usually on someones mobile phone.

What is a Growth Mindset?

Dr Carol Dweck, a Stanford University professor, published research in her groundbreaking book, "Mindset", arguing that we all have the capacity for two mindsets. Fixed, or Growth.

People who display a fixed mindset typically believe that their abilities are fixed. The cards they have been dealt. They can do a task, or they can't. And so, they will avoid trying hard tasks for fear of failing. You could argue that learning stops.

People who display a growth mindset, on the other hand, think very differently. They believe that skills can be developed. With effort and hard work they can achieve hard tasks. They believe that failing is just another learning on the journey to discovery.

How can you share these findings with the team and explore what mindset they are bringing to the team?

It might just be the difference between being a team, or being a high performing team.

Learning to see differently

Becoming a learning team is not easy. And it doesn't happen overnight. We have to work at it, with regular team coaching. The mental models our brains hold, called heuristics, help us navigate a dizzy array of stimulus, much of which the brain discards.

However, these same mental models, the heuristics we have created, are the things that are holding us back from being a learning team.

We need to slow down and examine our thinking. Examine our assumptions. Start to see what we are seeing, and to think about what we are thinking.

How do we unlearn some of the dated practices that are no longer serving us?

Only by getting to this meta level, and regularly practicing will we start to see, and think differently.

Reflection on Learning

How would you reflect on the chapter you have just read?

- What is the "what / so what / now what" for you?
- What have you seen teams do effectively to foster a learning mindset?
- What have you seen organisations specifically do to encourage learning?
- Have you experimented with Communities of Practice? What has been your experience?
- What might happen if you start a book club in your organisation?

10

ACCOUNTABILITY & AUTONOMY

High performing teams are driven. They want to perform. The team takes accountability for their commitments, individual and team. They know that they can not succeed individually. That they are a unit. A team. And their sum is greater than their parts.

How does a team build this accountability? Where do they start? How do they move from "me to we"?

When we discussed "Collaboration" earlier in the book, we did the exercise for the team to create their working agreements. A set of living standards that they have agreed to abide by. They all physically signed up to these agreements and we have full team commitment.

The key is to keep these agreements alive. Have them as an "information radiator", on a large poster, displayed somewhere in the team area.

Somewhere that people will see them every day.

Somewhere that will prompt conversations amongst the team.

And at periodic team meetings, at after action reviews, start with a discussion on them and ask some team coaching questions around them.

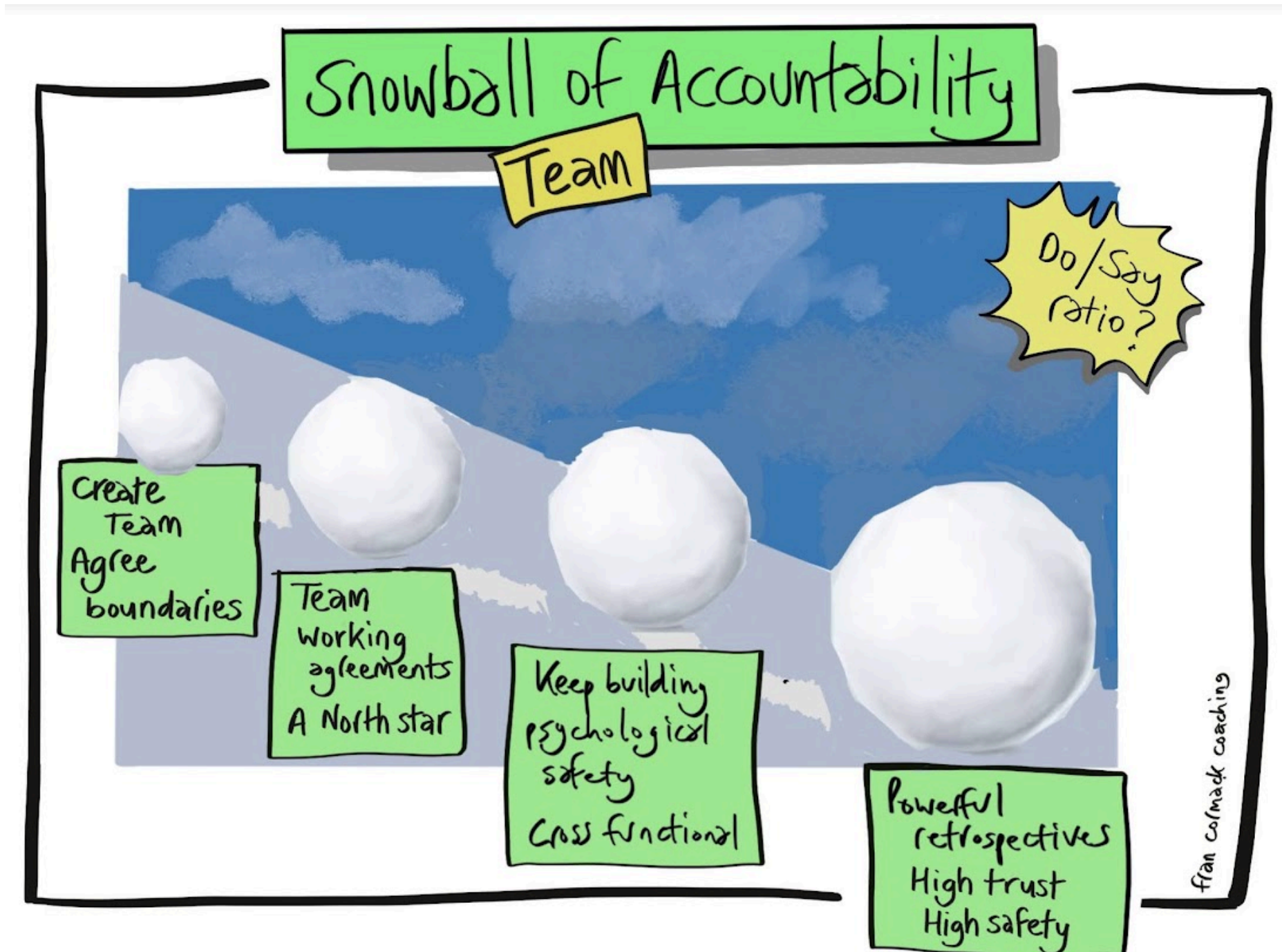"How are we doing as a team in line with our working agreements?"

"Has anything changed since we committed to our team agreements? Do we need to update them?"

"How are the team agreements helping the team maintain accountability to each other?"

"What is our do / say ratio?"

Team accountability is like a snowball. It builds and gets bigger the more it rolls down the hill.

By keeping the team working agreements alive, and continuing to have the conversations about team accountability, it becomes normalised for the team to be having these conversations. The team is starting to build trust, which in turn will allow for psychological safety to emerge.

A high performing team is a team that has high trust and high safety. And they will need to keep working on maintaining it. It is not a destination for the team, but a journey. There is an old proverb that captures the need to keep working on trust within the team.

"Trust arrives on foot and leaves on horseback"

What would you expect to see in a team that has high levels of trust? If you joined one of their team meetings what would look and feel different to a low trust team?

You would see team members openly engaging with each other. Challenging ideas and concepts whilst remaining respectful.

There would be an element of forthrightness that is not evident in all teams, especially low trust teams.

You would see team members who were confident that could rely on their teammates to deliver.

There would be laughter, and a sense of playfulness. It would feel a safe place to be. It would feel good.

Motivation Theory

Readers of motivation theory may have come across the work of Dan Pink, captured in his book, "Drive", (2011). Pink explains that what we may think are motivators, such as money and bonuses often have the reverse effect.

There is a large body of research that now backs up these findings. The more we financially compensate people for work, the less they are motivated to complete the work. Sounds counter intuitive, right?

It comes from what is known in psychology as intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is your inner desire to complete a task, perform a hobby, in fact do pretty much anything.

You do something because you love to do it. You get a sense of purpose from doing it. You feel good doing it. You enter a state of "flow", (Csíkszentmihályi, 1970), whereby time passes as you are engrossed in your activity.

Extrinsic motivation is having an external factor provided to encourage you, such as money and financial rewards. This is where it gets interesting. If you paint pictures because you just love losing yourself in the canvas, you have no concern for monetary rewards.

You love the creativity that comes from painting. You paint for pleasure.

Now, if someone said I will pay you $50 for every painting, you are being extrinsically motivated. You are painting for the money, not the love and passion. And at this point, you may lose interest.

Painting now becomes a chore. A job. Something you HAVE to do to get the $50. It is harder to get into flow when you are painting by commission. Painting for somebody else, not for you.

Back to my original point. People want autonomy. To decide for themselves. Decide whether they will paint today, or do something different. Having this autonomy is foundational to motivation.

Taking from Pink's work, they also need mastery and purpose. Purpose is a topic we will cover off later in the book.

In many organisations teams are managed by someone above them in the hierarchy. There is always a hierarchy. Often, decisions are made for the team and cascaded downwards. Teams become order takers.

Leadership scholars and management theorists know that this is a legacy of a way of working from over 100 years ago.

A way of working that does not fit these modern times and yet it has become so solidified within many organisations that they struggle to see a better way.

Scientific Management

Frederick W Taylor is known as the father of "Scientific Management", a way of working from the early 1900s that had workers acting like a cog in a machine. People were seen to be just "resources". Imagine that. Taylor had little time for worker autonomy. In fact, he wrote that they didn't have the intellectual capacity for thinking and this was best left to the managers.

A peer of Taylor, Henry Gantt, created a way of managing people around the same era, troop movements in World War I, when the world was very different.

Yet, in the majority of organisations that I work with, I still see people creating the charts that still carry his name. In a world that is unrecognisable from 100 years ago, this tool is still being used.

With organisations clinging onto these outdated ways of managing that pay no heed to what we now know about what motivates us, little wonder that Gallup reports that globally, only a mere 23% of people reported feeling engaged at work.
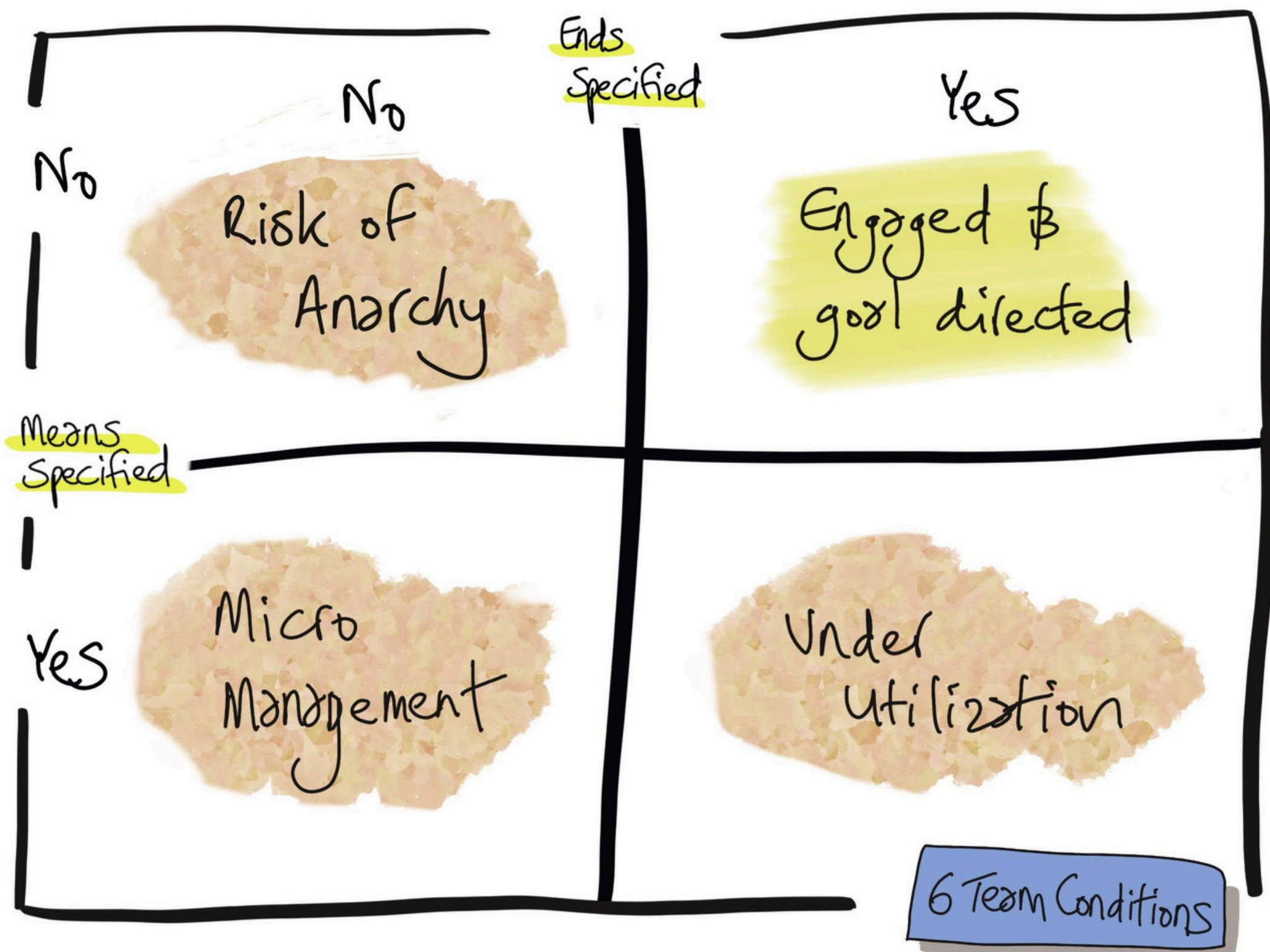
We can do better, as is borne out by the statistics from "best practice organisations", reported by Gallup as having 70% engagement.

Which organisation do you and your teams want to work in?

Start with giving the teams more autonomy. Let them make the decisions that affect the work they do. Set clear objectives, not outputs. What is the difference?

Means and Ends

If the team were driving from San Francisco to New York, an objective would be, "be in New York by Friday".

Outputs would include telling the team exactly which roads to take and when. Taking away all decision making from the team on the best way to make it to New York.

Let go of the need to control the team. Trust them more. Support them more. A useful frame I like to use is moving from reporting lines to supporting lines.
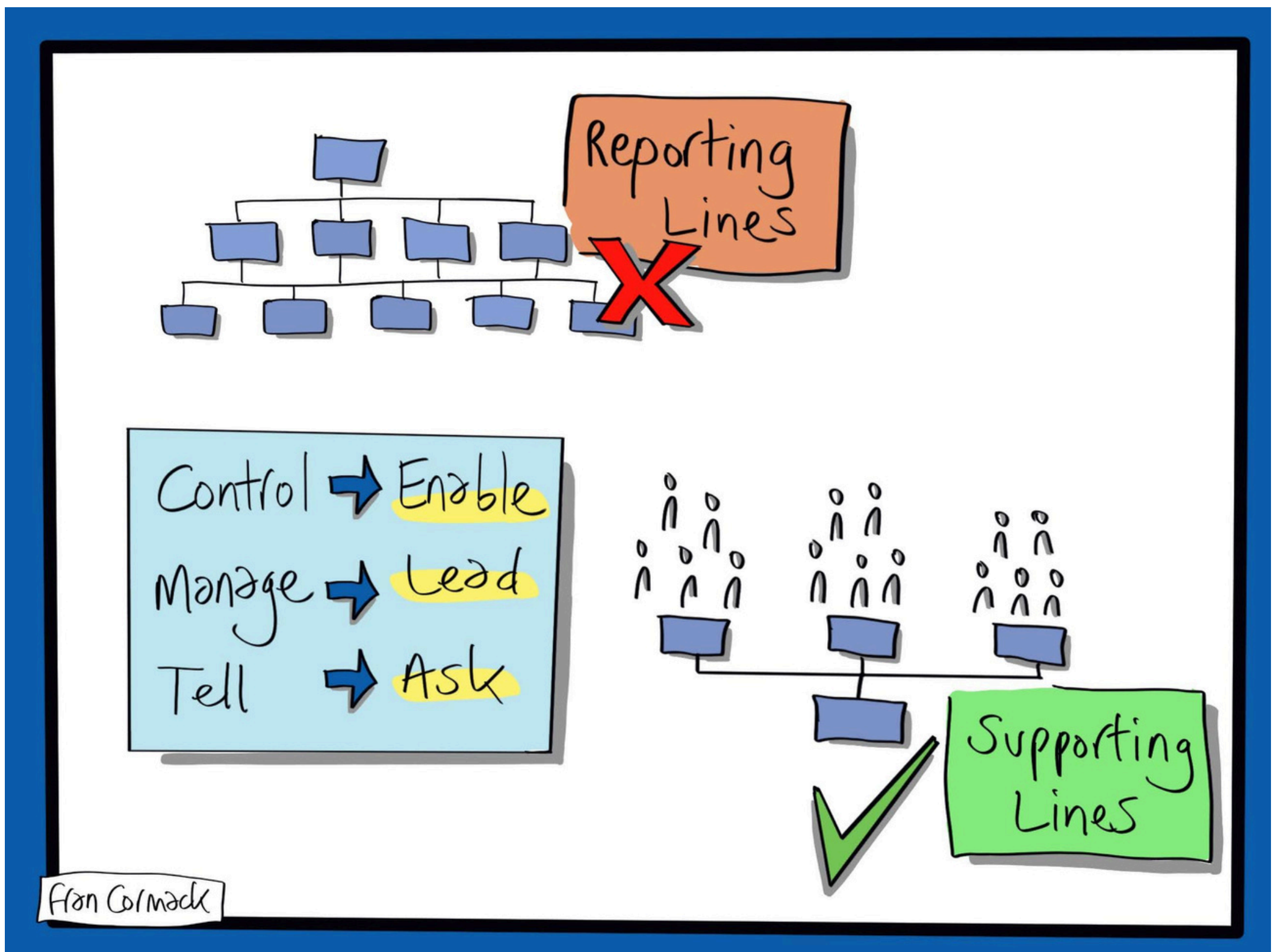
High performing teams want to succeed. And they usually do. Managers can feel that if they let go of control and hand it over to the team then results will slip. Performance will drop.

Not in high performing teams. They won't allow this to happen. They have a very clear North Star, they know how to hold each accountable, and they know how to deliver.

Support them and let them go.

Leader as coach

A phrase you will no doubt be familiar wwith is "leader as coach". And what does this mean?

It doesn't mean that you have to spend years of your time, and invest large amounts of money too train as a professional coach. Whilst this is a laudable profession, it may not be where you want to be right now.

I would say, simply add coaching skills to your leadership tool kit. Learn to tame your advice monster, Stanier, M. B. (2020). Start with curiosity. Ask questions. Start to GROW.

Developed by Sir John Whitmore and his peers in the late 1980, GROW is a model used in coaching, Whitmore, J. (1996).

Goal
 • What is your goal?

Reality
 • What is your current reality?

Options
 • What options do you have?

Way Forward
 • Which way forward will you take?

The above is just a jumping off point to get you started. By deeply listening, and asking open ended questions, your team will feel heard, and in the driving seat of how they want to take things forward.

Reflection on Accountability and Autonomy

As you close this chapter, spend some time journaling your reflections.

- What has been your relationship to accountability?
- How has this shown up in how you have worked with teams?
- What have you specifically done to foster autonomy in teams?
- How do you perform your leadership role when you have granted teams both accountability and autonomy?

11

SAFETY

Safety covers a multitude of areas. Some you will be very familiar with. And some less so. There are even probably areas you think you know, due to their ever increasing popularity, I'm looking at you Psychological Safety, and yet perhaps you miss a lot of it's essence.

A high performing team feels safe to engage in experiments, knowing that failure is an inevitable part of innovation. They make "intelligent failures", (Edmondson, 2023).

The people in the team feel safe to speak up and speak out. Conflict is encouraged, not something to be avoided at all costs.

And through all this, the team feels safe to have fun. Somewhere along the way a mindset has crystallised in corporate organisations that work is, and has to be serious. There is no place for fun and laughter.

> " **People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing.** "

-Dale Carnegie

I disagree.

Not with the "work is serious" part. It very often is.

No, I disagree with the reluctance to have fun whilst doing the work. Research suggests that happiness is a cause of high performance, not a result of it.

We are intelligent adults. We can do serious work, with levity.

Laughter is like a release valve. Letting the steam out of the pressure cooker.

Laughter brings us together, as humans. Laughter is contagious. It generates positive energy across the team.

Laugh more.

Psychosocial Hazards

In Australia, in April 2023, new work health and safety laws were introduced across many states regarding Psychosocial Hazards. A term you may not be familiar with, and should be.

Not to be confused with psychological safety, a psychosocial hazard is a hazard that can cause psychological harm through things such as the design or management of the work. The working equipment. Workplace interactions or behaviours, including obscene language.

Common psychosocial hazards include things that I am sure you have come across yourself. Lack of role clarity. Poor support. Poor organisational change management. Bullying. Job demands being too high, or too low. Do any of these sound familiar?

Since the laws were introduced, there have already been large penalties to organisations that have failed to identify their workplace psychosocial hazards, and plan for their reduction or mitigation. As of the time of writing, the largest fine was in excess of $300,000 in the state of Victoria.

Who is responsible for your psychosocial hazard management plan? How familiar are the team with this plan? When was the last time you had a conversation on the impacts of psychosocial hazards on the people in your teams?

In August of 2024, a change to the workplace laws in Australia gave workers the "right to disconnect". There are now more than 20 countries with similar laws, which is a step in the right direction. How does this affect you and your teams?

Psychological Safety

There are conflicting stories of the origin of the phrase, between Carl Rogers in the 1950s, and Edgar H. Schein and Warren G. Bennis in 1965, in their book, Personal and Organisational Change Through Group Methods: The Laboratory Approach.

Either way, the term was not popularised until Professor Amy Edmondson's later research in 1999, and her subsequent book "The Fearless Organisation", (2018). Since then, definitions of psychological safety have exploded. Barely a day goes by in organisations now without at least one reference to psychological safety. But, are we getting it right?

Anecdotally, I would say we are not. And as a result, psychological safety as a concept gets disparaged, and thus does not get the focus it needs and deserves.

A leader telling a team that they have psychological safety is not psychological safety. I would argue that the mere fact that the leader feels a need to mention it indicates that psychological safety is absent in that team.

Psychological Safety is not the absence of conflict. It is not everyone being nice to each other. It is not getting a free ride and no accountability. It is not being able to say whatever you want to another member of your team.

There was a large piece of work done at Google, whch they named Project Aristotle, which is worth you researching. Ultimately, across a multi year study, of hundreds of teams, the number one factor that determined high performance was the presence of psychological safety.

Here is a one definition of Psychological Safety.
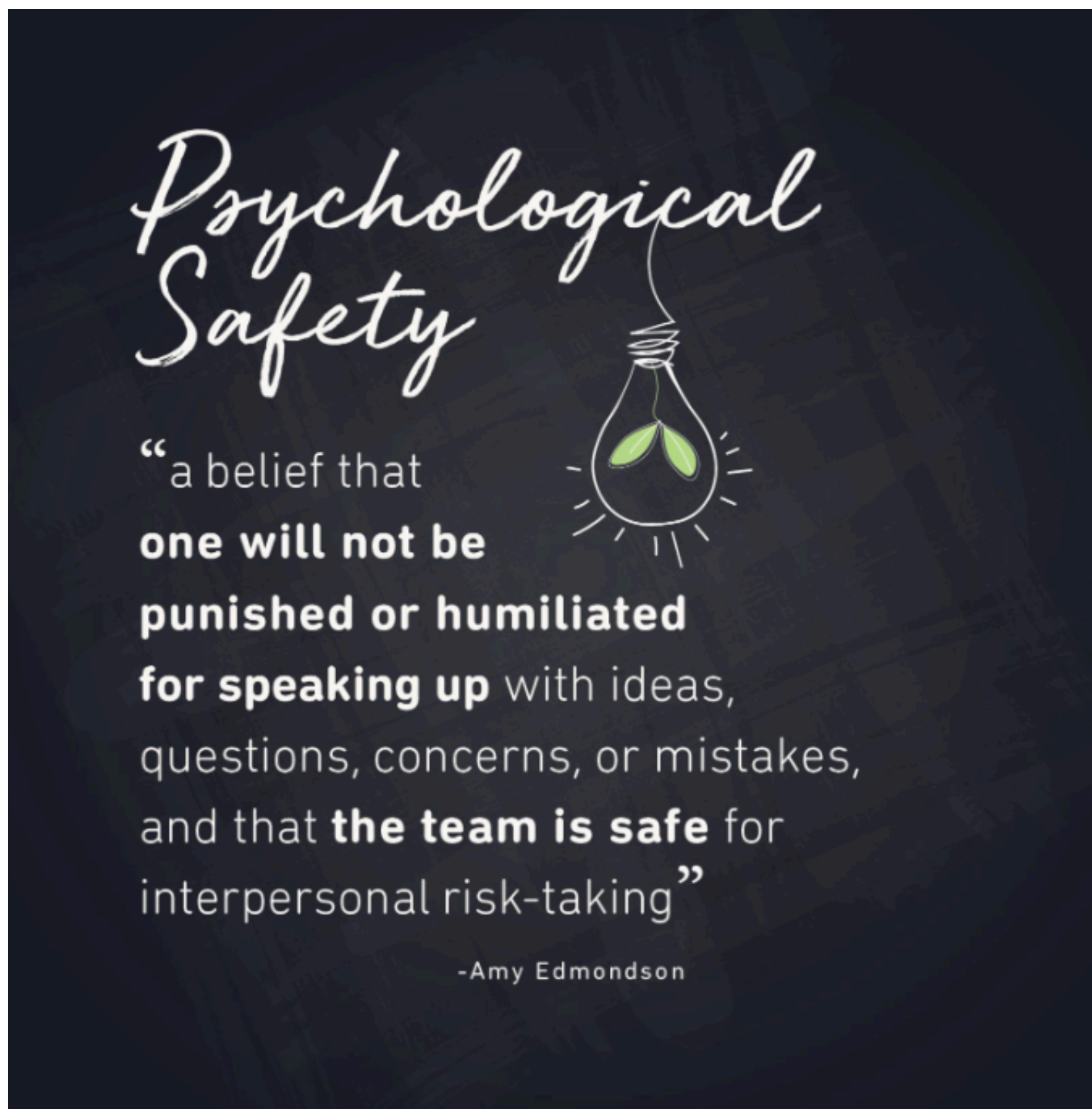
Psychological safety is an emergent property within groups. That is, you can't give it to a team, the team has to have the right conditions for it to emerge.

There are ways to assess the level of safety within a team, the most popular one is to ask everyone to answer a short number of questions.

Activity:

Let's take an informal measurement of psychological safety with your team.

On a scale of 1 (don't agree) to 5 (highly agree) how would you rate the following:

- My co-workers welcome opinions different from their own
- Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues
- I feel safe to take a risk on this team
- It is easy to ask others members of this team for help
- I can make mistakes and my co-workers won't hold it against me

The answers to these questions are a good jumping off point for a team conversation on how they view the levels of psychological safety, and what they might do next.

As a leader there are ways that you could start to foster an environment of psychological safety. You could start by making it an explicit priority, something the team consciously focuses on.

You could work with the team and establish norms for how failure is handled, and celebrated. Teach the team models for handling conflict and embrace productive conflict.

Celebrate wins.

Conflict

Utter the word "conflict" amongst any team and many people run to the hills. The notion a lot of people have of conflict is war zones and battle grounds. This results in teams not having conversations on what conflict means for them as a team and what strategies they will use to manage it.

Because, in groups of people, conflict is going to happen.

Start here. Conflict is inevitable and it will help you all if you know what to expect and how to work through it.

We need to normalise conflict in teams.

As this old story shows, you can't just sweep it under the rug, as it will keep reappearing.

Once upon a time there was a rug merchant who saw that his most beautiful carpet had a curious bump in the centre.

Aware of the carpet's value, he carefully tiptoed over to the bump and pressed on it gently with his foot. He succeeded in flattening it out.

But the bump reappeared in a new spot.

The rug merchant walked over to the new location and jumped on the bump.

Once again, it disappeared for a moment and then reappeared elsewhere.

Again and again the rug merchant jumped on the bump, flattening it briefly only to have it appear in a new location.

Of course, he'd lost all patience and failed to take care with the beautiful carpet, which was now scuffed and mangled from all the stomping and jumping.

Finally, he lifted a corner of the carpet to peak underneath.

An angry snake slithered out and away, relieved, no doubt, finally to be released.

The conflict, the bump under the rug, needs to be addressed.

A word on types of conflict. The conflict I am referring to is productive conflict. The type of conflict that is about ideas, not people. Task conflict rarher than relationship conflict.

It is very important for a high performing team to have a diverse range of ideas and perspectives. Opinions. Opinions that will be in conflict with their teammates' opinions.

This is desired and not something to be swept under the proverbial rug.

Tying into the emergent property of psychological safety, a team needs to build trust so that they feel comfortable challenging each other's ideas without fear of rebuke.

This does not mean that we accept people in conflict with each other, with their beliefs, or how someone chooses to live their life.

We value respect.

Lencioni's Conflict Continuum

The leadership scholar, Patrick Lencioni has a model called the "Conflict Continuum". A model that I have found very effective when facilitating team conversations around conflict.

Activity:

1. Introduce the model in a team conversation. Explain the different parts of the model.
2. Using blue painters tape, mark a long straight line on the floor.
3. Using large sheets of paper, have "conflict avoidance" at one end of the blue line and "destructive conflict" at the other end.
4. Ask the team to place themselves somewhere along the continuum in relation to their personal relationship to conflict.
5. Facilitate a conversation about what emerges. What insights do people have?
6. Then, ask them to place themselves along the continuum in relation to where they personally think the collective team's relationship to conflict is.
7. Facilitate a conversation around what changes. Why did people move? How does the team look on the continuum? Is this team aligned around what conflict means to them?

Lencioni's Conflict Continuum
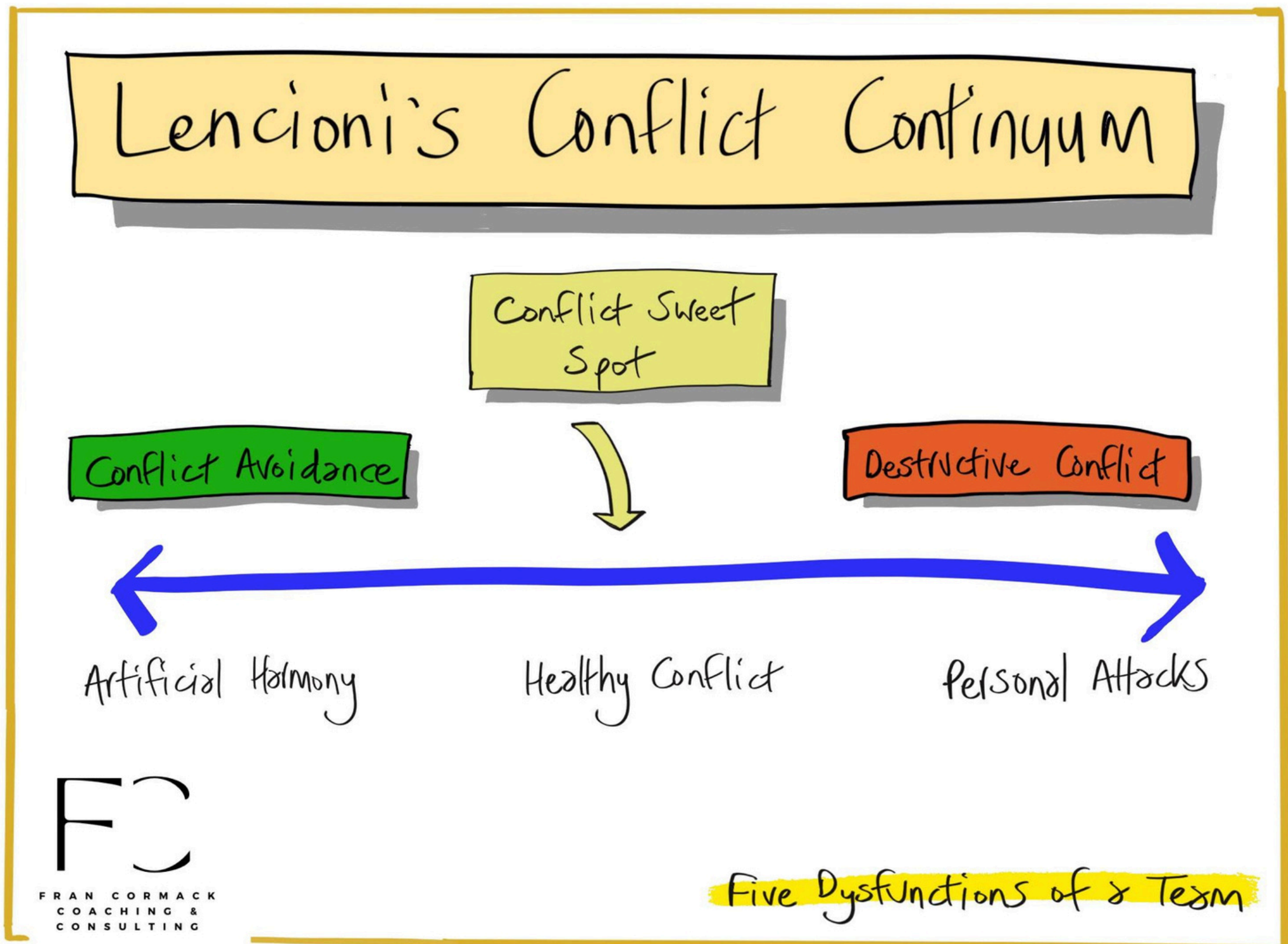
Thomas Kilmann model

Another model that can be used with a team to better understand conflict and conflict styles is the Thomas Kilmann model. Developed in the 1970s by Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann, this model argues that everyone has a natural approach to conflict. By understanding these approaches, and the approach each person in the team takes, you can start to collaborate better on how you choose to handle the conflict.

Working through the five handling modes in the model the team can develop a course of action to follow in conflict situations.
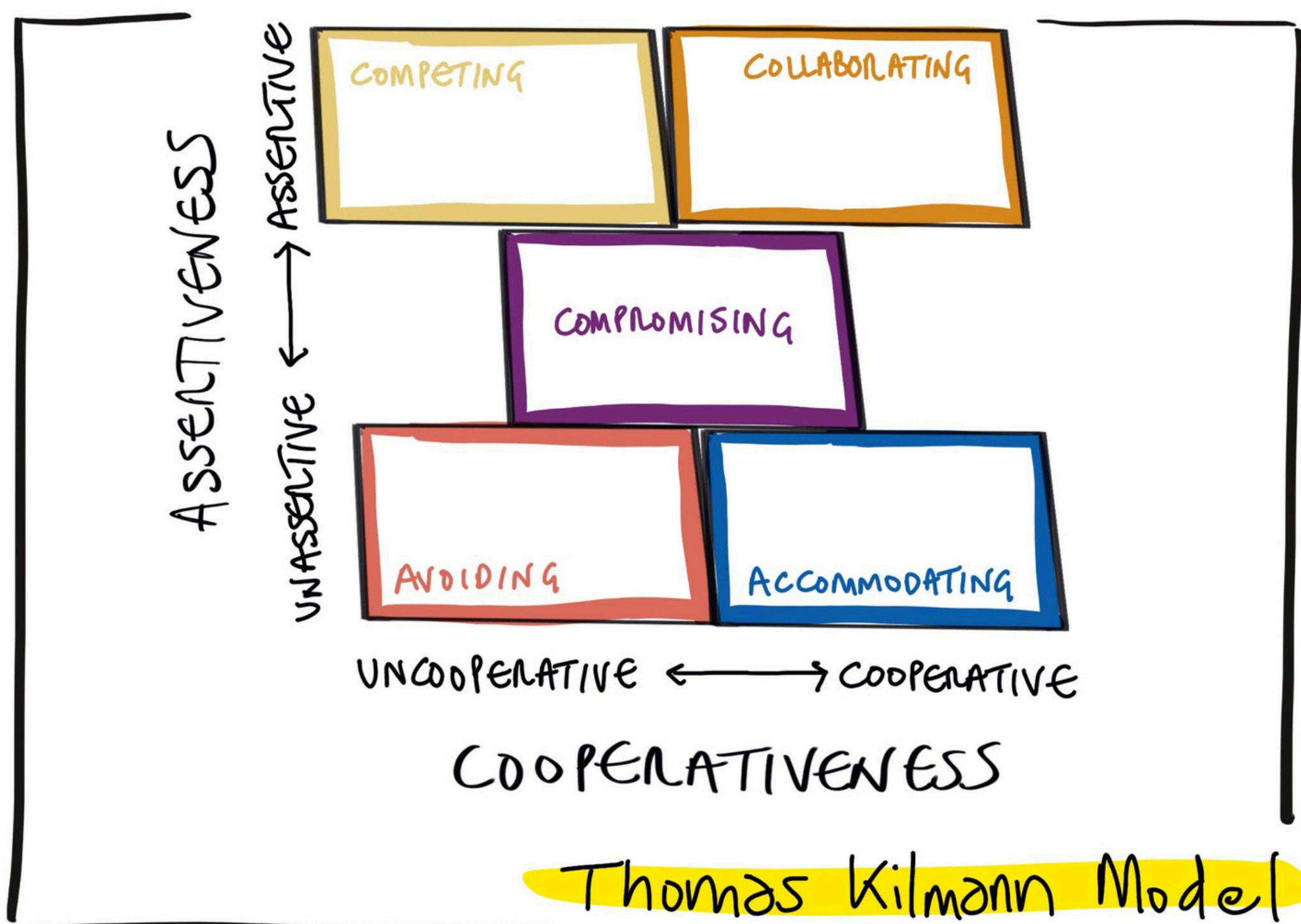
The handling modes are:

1. Avoid - side step
2. Accommodate - satisfy the other person
3. Compromise
4. Compete - satisfy your own concerns
5. Collaborate - win/win

As I am a firm believer in the magic of movement when working with teams, I would facilitate this conversation as an activity which will involve the whole team moving around a large space.

Activity

1. Each of the conflict handling modes would be on a large sheet of paper, laid out in the style of the model.

2. I would ask the team to move around the room and place themselves where felt right for them.

3. Ask each team member to look around and see where others had placed themselves.

4. Facilitate a conversation amongst the team. Do they see anything that surprises them? Are people where they would expect them to be? What is different?

COMPETING
COLLABORATING
COMPROMISING
AVOIDING
ACCOMMODATING

ASSERTIVENESS
UNASSERTIVE ← → ASSERTIVE

UNCOOPERATIVE ← → COOPERATIVE
COOPERATIVENESS

Thomas Kilmann Model

Revealing the Hidden Dynamics in Teams

Each and every time people come together, be that in a group, or a team, there will be lots of dynamics at play. You have different people, different values and beliefs, and different personalities. This creates a unique field of energy. And, whether you accept this or not, this will also bring conflict.

However, you can not see these hidden dynamics. If this is the case, how can you work with a team on these hidden dynamics? Enter the world of Constellations.

Based on the work of Bert Hellinger, and the Famlily Constellations work he created, organisational constellations are a way of working on the health of organisations and teams.

John Whittington, (Whittington, J., 2020), wrote the book "Systemic Coaching & Constellations", in which he describes a number of ways you can be useful to teams through using constellations.

One powerful technique is the "3 Flip Chart" activity.

- Create 3 flip charts and set them out in the shape of a triangle.
- Write one of 3 words on each Flipchart. Examples in the appendix.
- Invite the team to stand and walk around the space between the 3 flip charts.
- Then invite them to individually stand where feels true to them, in the space.
- Ask each person to share what feels true to them, from the space they are inhabiting.
- Observe what the shares and conversation reveals.
- Ask each person what a "step to better" would look like, if there was one.
- Ask each person to share what feels true from this new place.
- Observe the conversation and what is revealed.

Central Marker

This is another simple, and very powerful structural constellation that you can do with an in tact team. It often brings hidden dynamics out into the physical world.

- Create a central marker with a theme relevant to the team. I often use "team purpose" for this, but anything that makes sense in the team's context will work.
- Invite the team to stand and walk around the space, around the central marker.
- Then invite them to individually stand where feels true to them, in the space.
- Ask each person to share what feels true to them, from the space they are inhabiting.
- Observe what the shares and conversation reveals.
- Ask each person what a "step to better" would look like, if there was one.
- Ask each person to share what feels true from this new place.
- Observe the conversation and what is revealed.

Reflection on Safety

As we close the chapter on the "Safety" component of the CLASP model of high performance in teams, spend some time reflecting on:

- What did you notice shifting for you as you read through this chapter?
- How will this inform how you work with teams on safety?
- What other models have you used when working with teams?
- What role does safety play in your personal philosophy of leadership?
- What will you do to foster an environment of psychological safety?
- How might the "right to disconnect" impact yoour team?

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PURPOSE

As human beings we have an innate need for purpose. A sense of meaning. For thousands of years people have been searching for the "holy grail". The meaning of life. Asking the "why are we here" questions. Why are we put on earth for such a short space of time and what is the purpose of us being here?

OK. I won't get too existentialist on you here, but you know what I mean, right? You have asked yourself the same questions from time to time. We all have. And we will all come up with our own answers. None of them are right. None of them are wrong.

What we do know is that searching for a sense of purpose is part of the human condition. And that purpose led employees are four times as engaged as those without a sense of purpose.

The Three Stonecutters

One day there was a person walking down the street and they came to stonecutter. The stonecutter looked a little grumpy and was huffing and puffing as they toiled away at a pile of rocks in front of them.

"What are you doing?" asked the passerby.

The stonecutter looked up angrily and said, "can't you see I am too busy to talk. I have all these rocks to cut. I have to get through this pile of rocks today before I can go home. Leave me alone."

With that the passerby kept walking and soon came to a second stonecutter. This stonecutter looked a little happier and had the beginnings of a beautiful stone wall nearby.

"Good morning, what is going on here?"

The second stonecutter looked up pleasantly and replied, "I am cutting up these rocks so that I can continue to build this wall. I am making good progress today. I need to finish this part of the wall before I go home tonight, so thanks for chatting, but I need to get back to it."

The passerby reflected on the temperaments of the two stonecutters just as a third stonecutter came into view.

The passerby could hear this stonecutter whistling an uplifting tune. Breaking out into song now and again. What is happening here, mused the passerby.

"Good morning, you seem in a good mood. May I ask what gives you such pleasure?"

The third stonecutter looked up with a smile.

"Of course, I would love to share the important work that I am doing. You see, I am making bricks out of this pile of rocks so that I can build a glorious cathedral that will be enjoyed by my children, their children, and the children of the many generations that follow."

What this short parable shows is that if we can attach a sense of purpose to the work we do it starts to have meaning.

High performing teams have a common purpose, a North Star, a clearly expressed goal. They need this in order to maintain alignment and ensure that they are all rowing in the same direction.

When asked by stakeholders they can clearly articulate their "why?" They know why this team exists.

Is the team building a wall, or a cathedral?

Team Coaching Questions

A great exercise to have with the team is run through some team coaching questions. Coaching the team as a single entity, as opposed to the individuals within the team, will start having everyone move from "me to we".

Here an example of some powerful team coaching questions:

- Who would care if this team didn't exist?
- What key things wouldn't happen without this team?
- How does being in this team give your work meaning?
- What's the difference this team is intended to make to the business?
- How honest is this team with itself?
- What does a healthy team culture look like? How does this team compare?
- What mechanisms do you have for addressing conflict between team members?
- How can you create space to think creatively at team meetings?
- When you make decisions together, how do you ensure they meet your values?
- In what ways is the diversity within this team a source of strength and a potential weakness?
- What do you do together to energise each other?
- What are you going to regret in a year's time not addressing today?

Self Care

Self care should be an ethical mandate, not a luxury. Let that sink in. It needs to be, based on the high levels of burnout we are collectively experiencing. The "always on" culture. The "hustle" culture. The "hero" culture.

Where and when did all this start? When did people start wearing their "busyness" as a badge of pride? When did sleep become the enemy?

If humans are to remain at their best, and sustain it over long periods of time, then self care needs to be something that we all pay much more attention to.

Our energy levels are like a battery. They deplete, despite how many times you tell yourself that you are different. You aren't. You are also just a human, like the rest of us.

And we have four different types of energy to look after. Spiritual. Mental. Emotional. Physical, Loehr, J., & Schwartz, T. (2006). Consider them all like the battery in your mobile phone.

When you are well rested, after a good sleep, your battery will be full. As you go through your day, and navigate life's ongoing challenges, your battery will start to get depleted. By mid afternoon you may even start to feel tired. Drained.

The problem is, many people think their battery is different. That they are special somehow. That they alone have been blessed with the skill to multi task. That they alone have a different brain. Not a brain like the rest of the world, one that can only single task

Burnout has become insidious, and endemic in many cultures. And how do people learn this painful lesson? Their body tells them. Their bodies shut down.

And it this point, it is too late. You suffer. Your family suffers. And, it is very often preventable.

The body knows, and the head will catch up.

Self care can look very different for everyone. The important thing is that you each have your own self care practice.

What works for me incudes a blend of exercise, lots of sleep, daily journaling, and mindfulness.

Here is one tool that you may find helpful and can be used with teams.

The Wellbeing Wheel.
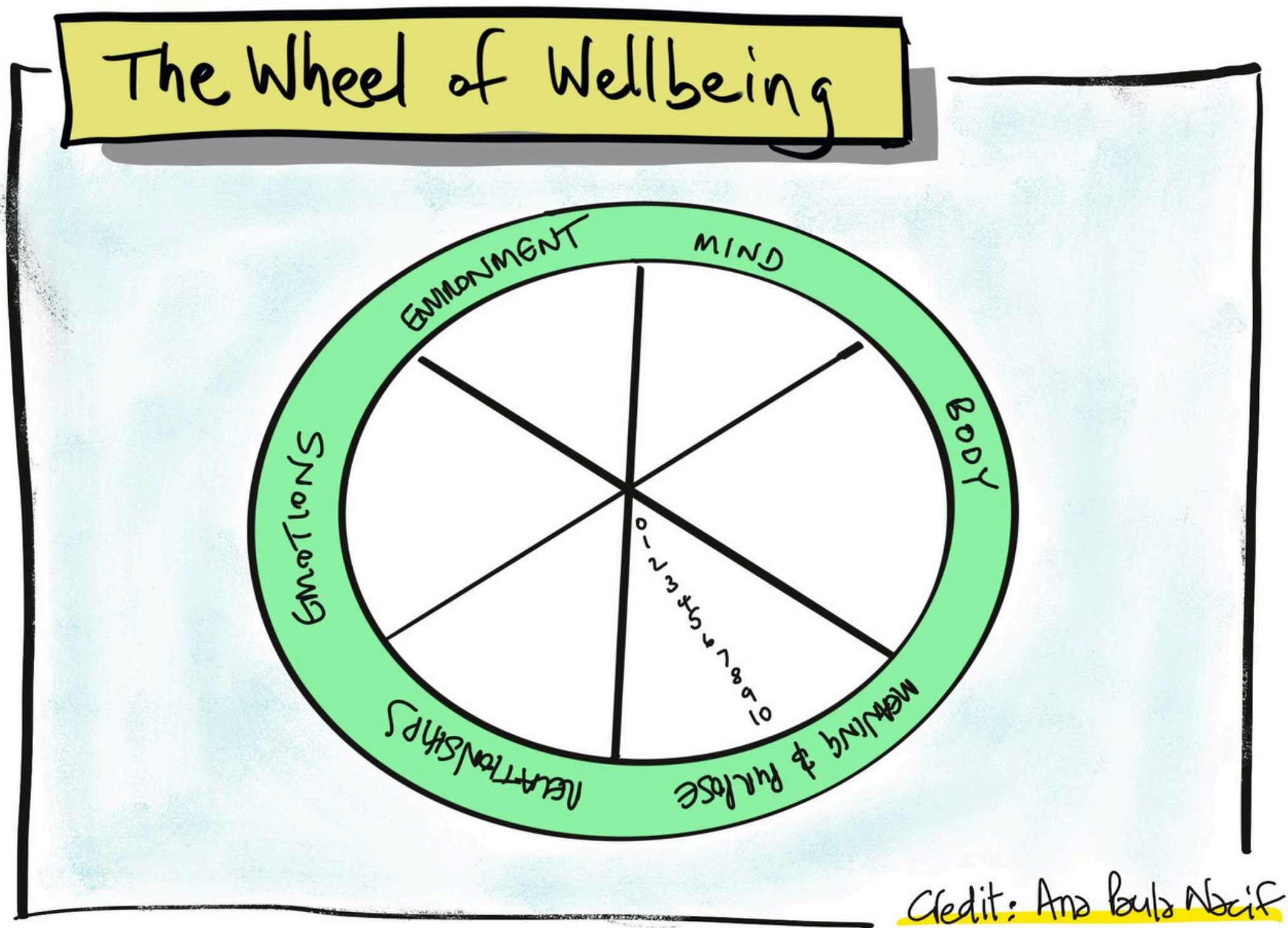
Taken from the book, "Coaching for Wellbeing", Nacif, A. P. (2023), you choose which segments are important to you in your wellbeing plan.

Working around the wheel you then score yourself between 0 to 10 on each segment. Finally, reflect on what has emerged. Is this reflective of where you want to be in terms of your wellbeing? What would a step to better look like?

Team members could do this individually, in a group setting and share if they are comfortable. Understanding how others manage their wellbeing could be useful to the other team members.

Perhaps, even do a team level "wheel of wellbeing". That could be an interesting experiment.

Work out what works for you and the teams you are working with.

And start looking after yourself.

Reflection on Purpose

As we close the chapter on the "Purpose" component of the CLASP model of high performance in teams, spend some time reflecting on:

- What did you notice shifting for you as you read through this chapter?
- How will this inform how you work with teams on creating a compelling purpose?
- Are your teams building walls, or building cathedrals?
- What other models have you used when working with teams?
- What role does purpose play in your personal philosophy of leadership?
- How will you start a conversation on Wellbeing with your team?

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FINAL WORD ON HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS

With research suggesting that less than 30% of teams globally report as being high performing, we have both a lot of work to do, and also a massive opportunity.

We know what high performance looks and feels like. And we know that people in high performing teams are happier and more productive.

High performance can feel elusive, and it is achievable. By following the framework laid out in this book, and constantly inspecting and adapting to fit your context, you have a roadmap to high performance.

Good luck on the journey, and let me know how you get on.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francis Cormack is a Systemic Leadership Coach, Team Coach, and now author, from Yorkshire, England. Based in Australia, Francis is accredited with the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and through his training, brings an integrative approach to the coaching he does.

With over three decades of experience across many sectors, and countries, he is passionate about humans and what it takes for us to thrive and live a life of meaning.

The world needs more flourishing humans. And to flourish we need to change how we are approaching work and life.

Francis would love to walk side by side with you on this journey.

This is his first book.

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