

The Man Who Fell To Earth

A study published by Knowledgepool in 2010 shows that up to £9.5 billion of training spend in the UK has either a nil or a negative effect on performance. There are many possible reasons suggested for this including line manager support after the course and selecting the right course in the first place. Another possible reason is that individual training is a default response where in fact team coaching could have a better and wider outcome.



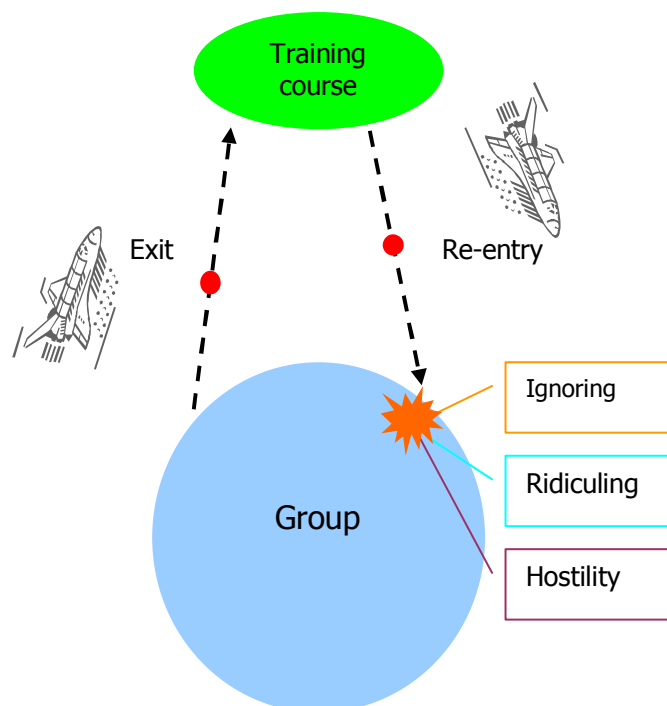
The concept of re-entry

David Bowie's enigmatic portrayal of the alien who fell to earth was a film rich in metaphor. What if the metaphor wasn't an alien but a team member who has been away from the workplace on a training course and on **re-entry** finds themselves back in the team, feeling bewildered and treated with suspicion by his colleagues! They come back in to the group and workplace that they left temporarily, enthused with the new techniques that they have learned and determined to create changes. The group finds it hard to understand this and develops a natural allergic defence to their enthusiasm knowingly or otherwise. The group appears bemused at what the trainee is saying and may even be openly hostile. They will use phrases such as "oh we tried that before" and "well if you think that will work you just give it a go" and display no genuine enthusiasm. As a result nothing, or very little, changes. The trainee feels rejected and disillusioned and may easily slip into blame about the culture of the team and the organisation. The net result of the training is not even nil, it is negative.

The team is resistant to any change; its members ignore, ridicule or are openly hostile to the new ideas making it a 'closed' system. The diagram opposite shows the sequence of events and it doesn't take too long for anyone's enthusiasm to fail.

False Idols

William Isaacs in his book *Dialogue: the art of thinking together* says of concepts such as empowerment and learning, that the danger is that we make idols out of them, that we fall into a trap of seeing them as 'things' to achieve not paths to follow. The same is true of collaboration in this sense, collaboration is a practice, a path to follow we don't achieve it and move on. Training is a familiar



response but it may not help much with collaborative working. So the point is that the **team [the collaborative group] as a whole needs to develop the capacity and the means of collaboration** and crucially - **the capacity to get back to collaborating when things go wrong.**

Methods that address change in the sense of better, more collaborative working need to be **collaborative in themselves** and not simply pushing more knowledge into individuals who we then expect to implement them in hostile environments. If we don't think about this then we run the danger of losing the most precious commodity – enthusiasm.

Team Coaching – a collaborative approach

Team coaching is a way of getting the whole team to focus on an area that could be improved, what is more – it can be highly effective in a much shorter space of time. Having a team really focus on process has huge benefits for its work in the future. It builds capacity and team performance is raised across the board. All members are involved and as a result are more motivated to change.

Solutions Focus is an approach that is perfect for this. The stages that a team might work through are:

- Future Perfect - identifying the solution to the known issue such as time management or project planning. What could things be like if this problem was solved and/or the team worked well together?
- Counters – where does it work well now, what are the notable exceptions and how can we build on these?
- What are the next small steps we need to take – not a leap to complete resolution of the issue but the tangible changes we can make today or tomorrow.

A Solutions Focus facilitator works with the team to help them through this process. The team develops and owns the solution and as a result develops a joint commitment to do better. In addition the team can also learn the Solutions Focus method so that they can work on their collaborative working improvements themselves in the future.

Ideas such as Action Learning and Reflecting Teams help the team to develop capacity to self repair, a generative approach to change and very different to the situation that the man [or woman] who falls to Earth finds themselves in after their training course!

Summerhouses: dialogues at work can help you develop your team and your organisation's generative capacity. Team coaching is a highly cost effective solution for collaborative working.

Call on 01617488845 or e mail me on philaspden@summer-houses.eu