

CHAPTER 1

INTERACTING

Animals are inherently social beings. They operate within social structures, they interact as prey or predator, and they sustain and are sustained by their natural environment.



INTERACTING

In our world, our social structures mirror those of the animal kingdom. We operate within social groups such as our immediate and extended family, our sports team, our community, our business department and our organisation as a whole. We have friends and colleagues who stick by us when the going gets tough, and we are sometimes forced to interact with people whom we consider our enemies. Our natural environment consists not only of the air we breathe and the physical landscape that surrounds us, but also our history, our shared legacies and our past experiences.

Understanding animal group behaviour is essential if we are also to understand how and why it is that certain animals function as a team. In my career, I have realised that by observing animal group behaviour we can learn more about our own.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND GROUPINGS

Animals operate within various social structures and groupings. But the mere fact that a grouping exists does not necessarily mean that a team exists. However, each of these groupings exhibits elements of teamwork with which we can identify and gain knowledge. The interaction between animals in these different social structures – as well as with animals in other structures – is critical in ensuring their respective survival.

Social organisation among animals ranges from solo



What might appear to us as innocent playing is, for the lion cubs, a critical lesson in how to interact with one another and form strong bonds.

wandering, pairing and loose aggregations to stable groupings with a high degree of collaboration – not so different from human social structures. Think, for example, of a sole partnership, a small entrepreneurial business or even a large institution, not to mention family and other informal social structures.

The solitary animal

Solitary animals are generally adults that live alone and

Like humans, animals operate within a complex network of social structures. We all know about the strong social bonds that exist within a herd of elephant, the playful romping of lion cubs, and the division of labour in certain bird species. These animals also interact with other individuals and groups in their vicinity, as well as with their natural environment.

What you might find surprising is that the delicate social balance operating in the natural world is not so different from the world in which we live.

INTERACTING

interact with other members of their species only during the breeding season. After courtship and mating, the male and female part company and have nothing more to do with each other until the next breeding season. Examples of solitary animals include the caracal and the leopard. In these species, both the male and female are solitary animals. The male interacts with the female only during the mating season, and she herself is a loner unless she has a litter of cubs.



The caracal (also known in Africa as the 'rooikat') is an expert hunter. Even though it hunts alone, the caracal often manages to kill prey its own size or larger. Similarly, sole proprietors who prefer operating alone can survive and prosper by understanding how to interact with others big and small.

In solitary species, the female usually takes full responsibility for raising the young. However, there are instances where the male assumes the parental role — the African Jacana and button quails being two examples. In the case of the African Jacana, the male is the primary carer, and it is his responsibility to incubate the eggs and to keep the chicks warm and dry under his wing.

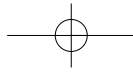
- Often referred to as the 'lily trotter', the African Jacana's claim to fame is its polyandrous mating system — the female associates herself with two or more males during the breeding season.
- The female is also larger than the male (referred to as reversed sexual dimorphism), and as a result she can lay a large number of eggs in record time.

It is not uncommon to find examples of human behaviour that is solitary. We are probably all aware of people who live alone and interact with other members of their species infrequently — often only to satisfy their own needs and requirements.

In business, sole proprietors prefer operating alone most of the time. They do occasionally interact with one another; at small business breakfast forums or annual gatherings, to share ideas, network, and so on. Such interactions are critical to these individuals, as they are able to return to their solitary existence stimulated by new plans and initiatives that will sustain them over the coming months.

Pairing

Where parental duties are too much for a single parent, the male and female may form a strong attachment and live together as a pair — sharing hunting and caregiving duties. More than 90% of all bird species form monoga-

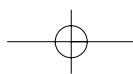


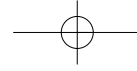
INTERACTING



There are many diverse social structures that exist in the animal kingdom. Some species form monogamous pairs, while others aggregate on an informal basis. There are also species that live together in very stable, collaborative groupings, which is in direct contrast to those creatures, such as the African Jacana, which prefer to live alone.

In the business world, a similar breadth and diversity of social structuring is also visible. From the single businessperson working in relative isolation to the multi-departmental conglomerate, the business environment presents a differentiated range of social structuring.





INTERACTING



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Due to the high incubation and feeding demands of their chicks, more than 90% of bird species form monogamous pairs – including the Egyptian Goose. As with most small antelope, steenbok are usually found either alone or in pairs. This type of non-herding strategy serves to minimise competition for scarce resources and prevent detection by predators. Similarly, some businesses choose to remain relatively small in order to maintain their flexible, adaptive nature. A partnership can probably adapt to a new technological development more quickly than a multi-national conglomerate can. Endemic to Africa, the black-backed jackal – like all other jackals – is territorial and works in pairs, forming a monogamous bond for life. A black-backed jackal will only seek a new mate if its original partner dies.

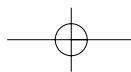
mous pairs, since incubation and feeding demands are extremely high. In many bird species – including the Blue Crane and Fish Eagle – partners are chosen for life.

Pair bonding in reptiles is, however, rare; neither is it a typical mammalian grouping. However, some mammals – such as certain jackal species and most steenbok, klip-springer and duiker – are monogamous. As an interesting aside, monogamous species tend to have very little sexual dimorphism, meaning that there is little difference in the appearance of the male and the female.

Though nearly always seen alone, black-backed jackal

live in pairs that remain together for life. Both parents contribute to the care of the young. Until the pups wean, the male assumes responsibility for guarding duties, as well as for regurgitating food for the pups. During weaning, both parents regurgitate food for the pups. Once the pups are old enough to begin fending for themselves, they accompany both parents on foraging trips. Interestingly, family members are only attracted to the contact calls of other family members.

Most people realise that there is more to be gained by joining forces than by remaining apart. The result is usu-



INTERACTING

ally some form of cohabitation where income may be pooled, expenses shared and joint responsibilities agreed. These arrangements are often formalised through the institution of marriage, though not always.

So, too, sole proprietors often agree to some kind of cohabitation; where premises, meeting rooms and switchboards are shared. While they may prefer working separately, they acknowledge the reality that a united approach serves their respective needs best. Such people have potentially more to gain from working in this collaborative manner than those who only meet infrequently.

Aggregation

Some animals, such as the blue wildebeest, zebra and springbok, congregate during migrations because they share localised feeding areas. However, even though they move together in search of food, there is no evidence of true social cohesion.

For example, blue wildebeest generally occur in herds of up to 30 individuals, but have been known to move in herds of several thousand members (the annual Serengeti-Mara migration numbers 1,3 million). These large concentrations are formed outside the breeding season when the wildebeest need to migrate to new feeding grounds. There is some benefit to this large-scale aggregation as it increases each individual animal's chances of survival.

Groups of people who traditionally isolate themselves from other groups may also form aggregations. They do

so because there is strength in numbers and they receive an advanced level of protection, just as the blue wildebeest do. For example, if one group hears of something that could impact negatively on their particular industry body or association, they alert their fellow members of the aggregation. With their common welfare threatened, the aggregation can then

'herd' together for support and security.

Temporary associations

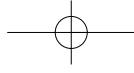
Giraffe are a good example of temporary association. These animals are not particularly bonded to each other but live together in loose, open herds that have overlapping home ranges. These home ranges have indefinite and changing boundaries, and much wandering takes place.

The reason why this type of social structure works well for the giraffe is that it, like many other herbivores, spends most of its time feeding, and therefore needs to be able to move freely and independently from one tree to the next.

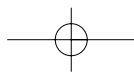
Many working people and businesses share the same infrastructure, such as buildings, parking areas and canteens. Some of these businesses will eventually move to different premises, but while they share the same area they will tend to forge temporary associations with each other. There is no obvious or tangible benefit to this association – they just happen to co-exist in the same area for a period of time.

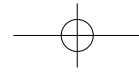
Most people realise that there is more to be gained by joining forces than by remaining apart.

Within an aggregation, there may be many smaller groups that retain their separate identity. For example, territorial blue wildebeest males may defend the area around their females even during migration, and bachelor herds often withdraw to the edge of the main herd.



INTERACTING



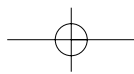


INTERACTING



The annual Serengeti-Mara migration is considered to be the largest and longest overland migration in the world. In October each year, nearly 1,3 million herbivores make their way from the northern hills of the Serengeti through to the southern plains, crossing the Mara River in the process. They then return to the north after the rains in April.

This mass gathering in the world of nature is not too different from annual industry conferences or exhibitions. At these events, a large number of businesses from around the country (and sometimes the globe) meet to discuss new developments and share their knowledge and experiences. Of course, conference organisers can only wish for a comparable number of attendees!



INTERACTING



The temporary associations formed by giraffe are similar to the relationships that develops between individual businesses sited in office parks. The separate business entities may share buildings, parking lots and canteens – and could even have informal discussions over a cup of coffee – but the relationship is seldom structured.

Harem

This is a social grouping that consists of a group of females under one dominant male. For example, a dominant male impala is capable of collecting and controlling a large number of females during the breeding season.

A male impala becomes the dominant male by fighting off other males in the ranks. He then spends a large part of his time shepherding the females and maintaining his position, often at the expense of eating and resting. When the group of females becomes

Successful teams harness the skills and abilities of all their members

too large for him to control, splinter groups are stolen by less-dominant males on the outskirts – referred to as bachelor herds.

A dominant male seldom maintains his position for long, and is soon relegated back to the bachelor herd – where he then attempts to regain his strength. A new male will then emerge from the bachelor herd to take over the harem as the dominant male.

It is interesting to note that impala only form harems during the breeding season (which is why they are known as temporary harems), while zebra usually have a permanent harem.

I am aware of some instances where men dominate a particular grouping. These individuals will fight for supremacy, they like making all the decisions, enjoy taking the credit, and usually end up deriving all the benefits. There may also be a number of contenders for the ‘top job’, and the particular individual who is the favourite for this position may rotate frequently.

However, in today’s world there is no place for gender bias, and a team cannot be effective if it is dominated exclusively by men. Successful teams harness the skills and abilities of all their members. Domination by any gender needs to be dealt with swiftly and decisively.

Family

A family group is merely an extension of a pair. The young often remain with their parents throughout their lifetime. During the later stages of development, the young start moving around with the adults, creating a larger family grouping. A pack of wild dog, discussed in detail in the introduction, make use of this type of structure.

INTERACTING



The interaction in an impala harem resembles the patriarchal system that used to be the norm in the business world. In the male-led and dominated corporations of earlier times, men dominated team structures and women were relegated to lowly positions. Although this situation has improved and women can now achieve far more than they used to, there is still, sadly, gender inequality in some workplaces. It is important to understand that teams cannot be successful without the full participation of all their members.

A family-owned business is a good example of this form of interaction. The younger members of the family are usually introduced into the business at an early age. Over a period of time, after gaining the requisite experience and confidence, they generally end up taking over the reigns of the family business.

Matriarchy

Within this grouping arrangement, females and their calves form the core of the social structure. Males, after

reaching sexual maturity, operate on the outskirts, only joining the herd to search for females in oestrus.

Oestrus refers to those days during the female reproductive cycle when she is at her most fertile. Oestrous, on the other hand, refers to the entire female reproductive cycle.

The basic social unit of the African elephant is a group of related females. The matriarch is generally the oldest and largest female, and the rest of the matriarchy consists of both her young and adult daughters, as well as her grandchildren. Male elephants live alone or in bachelor herds.

The matriarch determines the activity, rate of movement and direction of the herd. If the matriarch is injured, the rest of the herd will walk around in a blind panic. If the matriarch becomes too sick or old to continue leading, she is replaced by the next-oldest cow.



The matriarch in a herd of elephant most definitely 'wears the pants'! Without her leadership, the herd would walk around in a panic without knowing what to do or where to go.

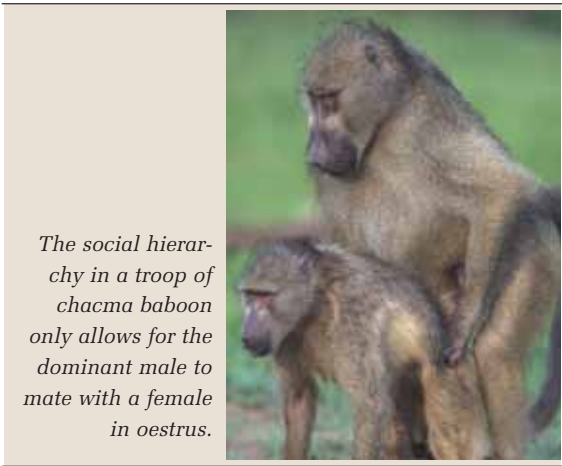
INTERACTING

Interestingly, elephants are one of the few species where the female, after ceasing reproduction, continues to live for a long time (approximately 45 years).

Oligarchy

This is a complex social structure where power is maintained by an elite gang of males – a kind of ‘boys club’! The chacma baboon is probably the best example of this type of social composition. A number of very powerful male baboons, together with their shared females and offspring, form the troop, which can number between 15 and 100 baboons.

A strict social hierarchy exists: all adult males are dominant over all adult females, and the adult males also have a strict ranking order among themselves. For example, only the dominant male may mate with females in oestrus. The dominant male determines when the troop



The social hierarchy in a troop of chacma baboon only allows for the dominant male to mate with a female in oestrus.

will move, and the females with infants remain close to him.

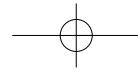
There are still a few business structures and groupings that follow a male-only approach to management. In these old-school-type organisations, it is the male that directs business operations and makes all the managerial decisions. This management method will not sustain a business in the long term. Like the business ‘harem’, the business oligarchy will only succeed if it incorporates the inputs of all its members.

Arena

This social grouping is prevalent among birds, notably, widow finches. An all-male grouping develops in the breeding season on a special patch of ground known as a ‘leek’ or arena. Each male is afforded the opportunity to display himself as vividly as he can to the attending females. Each female then selects a male, they mate, and the females depart to lay their eggs.

It is fascinating to note that female widow finches do not rear their own chicks – they are parasitic brooders that lay their eggs in a host bird’s nest. Roughly 1% of the world’s bird species are brood parasites – including cuckoos, honeyguides, whydahs and widow finches.

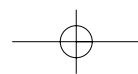
At various stages during their lives, most people will market themselves in order to get something they want. For example, young, single adults spend time and effort – not to mention money – ensuring that they are seen to be ‘attractive’ by others. Most people remain sensitive to the fact that they need to take care of themselves, dress decently and behave responsibly if they want to be liked, loved and respected.



INTERACTING



The interaction between bees in a hive is so developed and specific that some beekeepers make use of a wire or plastic grid (called a 'Queen excluder') to confine the queen to the lower boxes of the hive. Since the queen cannot pass through the grid, the eggs are laid and hatched in the lower boxes and only honey is stored in the upper boxes – making it easier for the beekeeper to remove the honeycomb.



INTERACTING

In business, we often engage in tendering our products and services, and in many instances this kind of 'show-casing' has become the norm. If people like what they see and hear, they will engage your services – no different to the behaviour of widow finches 'marketing' their own unique characteristics!

Caste system

Termites, wasps, ants and bees all display various forms of the caste system, each showing a level of differentiation not found in any other vertebrates besides man. Within this system there are kings, queens, workers, soldiers and drones – each performing a separate and distinct task that ensures the survival of the colony as a whole.

I believe that the best example of a caste system is found with termites. Termite eggs hatch into nymphs – tiny immature creatures that are incapable of feeding themselves. Nymphs are capable of developing into any caste, and the role they ultimately assume – worker, soldier or alate (winged termite) – depends on diet, pheromones (scent) and the time of year. I discuss termites in more detail in Chapter 5.

The overwhelming majority of businesses have various combinations of different individuals, each performing certain roles – some highly specialised and some more generic. Their success is dependent upon a combination of different skills sets – each contributing in its own way to the ultimate success of the business.

For example, although the sales team in a business comprises a group of experienced salespeople, their ultimate success is inextricably linked to the effectiveness of the administrative or servicing team. Both have to perform in order for the business to succeed. The information technology (IT), human resources (HR), marketing and compliance teams (all specialists in their own right)

are just as important to the business, and the business as a whole cannot succeed unless the teams work together.

THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

These examples of social structuring, action and behaviour in the natural world are, to a greater or lesser extent, related to our own social structures and groupings.

Perhaps you identify with the caracal: you enjoy working on your own as a sole-proprietorship, performing a fairly solitary and sometimes very specialised role. Maybe you and your business partner are like the pair of steenbok, sharing responsibilities and tasks within your business.

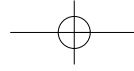
Your team may even resemble an aggregation: you all come together for staff meetings in the boardroom and appear to be working towards the same goal, but in reality your team has splinter-groups that are pursuing their own agenda. Or your business could be led by the oldest and most experienced woman – or a bunch of elitist men!

In our teams – as well as in nature – matters are further complicated by individual personalities within the social structure. To a large extent, an individual determines the personality and characteristics of a particular grouping.

For example, not all lion prides work equally effectively. Within a pride, the dominant female is the primary hunter and it is usually her responsibility to execute the most dangerous part of a kill. If she is physically injured or lacks courage, the entire pride will suffer and the team dynamics of the pride will change.

BURCHELL'S ZEBRA: KEY PLAYER IN THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

Our teams and team dynamics are influenced not only by the particular team structure or grouping, but also by the personality and characteristics of individuals within the



INTERACTING



In our teams, the team dynamics and structure are influenced by the personalities, skills and attributes of the various team members. The same is true in nature. As the primary hunter, the dominant lioness in a pride of lion needs to have the courage, skill and experience to execute her role successfully – or the entire pride will suffer.

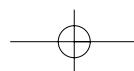
team. But there is more to it than that.

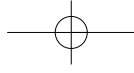
As humans, we do not operate in isolation – and neither do our teams! For example, your family may also form part of a broader extended family, a school governing body, a religious institution, and a community. Your particular business team interacts with other teams in the organisation, and your organisation in turn interacts with suppliers, customers, stakeholders, and the public at large.

In nature, we call this set of interrelated groups an ecosystem. An ecosystem is a complex set of relation-

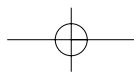
ships between a variety of different species, resources and natural elements. This includes not only living (biotic) components, but also non-living (abiotic) components, such as climate and topography. Although each component in the ecosystem functions as a distinct unit, the system as a whole works only if each component is able to operate effectively.

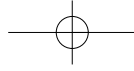
For example, if you add an acidic fertiliser to the soil in your garden, some plants may thrive but others may die. Change or destroy one component, and the impact will be felt across the ecosystem.





INTERACTING

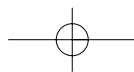


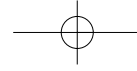


INTERACTING



Most of us who have spent time in the bush have come across the Burchell's zebra. These zebras – like all animals – play a key role in the ecosystem. Investigating how they interact with one another, with other species and with their environment demonstrates just how interlinked and interdependent the natural world is. The same is true of our human teams.





INTERACTING

I would like to use the Burchell's zebra to explain this phenomenon in more detail.

The zebra harem

Unlike impala, zebra form a relatively permanent harem, which can last for nearly the entire lifespan of the dominant stallion. A zebra harem consists of the dominant stallion, his mares (which can number from two to six) and their foals. Other stallions wander around the periphery either as solitary animals, or as bachelor herds.

The life of a stallion is fraught with competition. When a filly comes into oestrus for the first time, up to 18 stal-

lions will fight against one another and against the dominant stallion for her. The winner takes all, and the filly then moves on to his existing harem, or becomes the dominant mare in his newly established harem.

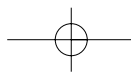
Harems may aggregate temporarily – such as when there is good grazing in a particular area – but competition between the stallions can become quite brutal. Each harem remains a set unit, and the dominant stallion must be constantly aware of his mares to ensure that they are not stolen by other stallions.

Just consider the following: the zebra harem size is determined primarily by the number of harems in the specific area and the competition between them. These,



The life of a zebra stallion can be fiercely competitive. Fillies are won through often-violent interactions between stallions. The males will kick at each other with their forelegs, and bite one another on the shoulders, necks and flanks, until one emerges victorious. The dominant stallion in a zebra harem can often be seen displaying the flehmen grimace, through which he receives information on the identity and sexual status of the fillies in his harem.

Burchell's zebra must drink at least once a day and are seldom far from a water source. Their dependency on water determines the type of natural environment in which they can survive.



INTERACTING

in turn, are affected by the number and skill of the resident predators, and by the natural habitat. For instance, the denser the bush, the more difficult it is for the dominant stallion to co-ordinate the harem's movements and control the mares, and therefore the smaller the size of the harem.

The zebra's environment

Zebra are primarily grazers, even though they sometimes browse on twigs and leaves as well. Although they are less selective than many other herbivores, zebra prefer short grasses, and these types of grasslands occur on alkaline and volcanic soils that are unsuited for deep-rooted grasses. This suits zebra well, since grazing, trampling and manuring stimulates the growth of new grass on these grasslands – as long as the ground is sufficiently moist.

Abiotic components also play a definitive role in determining the lifestyle and survival of the zebra. The alkaline and volcanic soils – which exist as a result of topographic, geological and climatic occurrences – are necessary for production of the short grass that sustains the zebra, blue wildebeest and impala. But the zebra don't only need the short grass; they also need an adequate water supply, which is again dependent on the topography of the area, the climate and rainfall levels.

Predators

The zebra's primary predators are lion and spotted hyena. If a harem is chased, those mares with foals run in front, followed by the remaining mares and finally the stallion. The harem flees at half pace, to ensure that all the members remain together. If a predator closes in on a zebra from behind, it can kick backwards – sometimes breaking the lion's jaw or even killing a spotted hyena.



Lions are one of the Burchell's zebra's primary predators. Although the zebra can defend itself – primarily through kicking backwards – many succumb to this expert hunter.

The stallion defends his mares and offspring against all threats. If a member of the harem goes missing, the stallion will set off in search of it. If one of the zebra is sick or injured, the entire harem will adjust its pace to ensure that the stricken member is not left alone.

Relationship with other species

Zebra can often be seen grazing with blue wildebeest and impala. Some regard zebra as pioneers within the grazing community: they are the first to enter tall or wet pastures, and once they have trampled and cropped the grass, the wildebeest and impala move in to enjoy the feast.

Others believe that zebra, wildebeest and impala each have particular strengths that, when used together, increase all three species' chances of survival. For example, zebra have a very keen sense of smell, while impala have omni-directional ears, which improve their sense of hearing. By combining their strengths, these creatures

INTERACTING



Seeing zebra and wildebeest grazing together provides evidence of the interdependency that exists between different animal species.

stand a better chance of detecting predators in their environment.

Perhaps it is a combination of the pioneer and shared-strength theories. It is indeed true that all three species favour shorter grass. The wildebeest is as water-dependent as the zebra, and impala prefer to remain close to a water source, even if their need is not as great as the other species.

Whatever the reason, there can be no doubt that their chances of survival increase when the three species graze together, even if this is simply because there are more ears, eyes and noses to detect danger.

So what makes it all work?

The example of the Burchill's zebra shows us that each animal's social structure is linked to the structures of a wider ecosystem. The dominant stallion interacts with his mares and their foals, and with other stallions. The harem as a whole interacts with other harems, and with species such as blue wildebeest and impala. The zebra

are preyed upon by lion and spotted hyena, each of which have their own social structures and which compete with one another.

The lion and spotted hyena will follow their prey, but so will the jackal, dung-beetle, mites and termites. The hyena and jackal feed on the carrion; the dung-beetle need the dung to maintain their way of life; and the mites assist in the decomposition of the carcass and its eventual re-introduction into the soil.

There exists an unbelievably complex interaction and interrelationship between all these species and components, and each needs the other in order to survive.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MY TEAM?

Working effectively as a team has to do with a lot more than a group of people sitting together, discussing and agreeing upon common goals. Individuals in your team are in fact influencing the team dynamics – either negatively or positively. The team also operates as a social group or structure with its own rules of engagement, rituals and modes of operation.

As a member of a team, we operate according to the team's *modus operandi*, not our own. Generally speaking, we can't choose to arrive late for work or to leave early. We have allocated times for meal or refreshment breaks, and we have certain rules and procedures governing our leave entitlement. We are often expected to dress in a specific way. More often than not, the business's mission statement, vision and values dictate our behaviour at work.

However, your team does not operate in isolation. Your team has interrelationships with other teams in the larger organisation. For example, if you are a member of the sales and marketing team, you can only achieve your goals if you get timely information on new products and services from the product development team.

INTERACTING

You also need insights into consumer buying behaviour from the customer services team; you need product updates from the technical team; and you need market analysis from the market research team. Each of these teams varies in size and works within its own distinct parameters. However, your organisation will only reach its goals if all these teams work together effectively.

Your organisation also works with other organisations, and these organisations are themselves the product of different teams. You interact with, among others, suppliers, product manufacturers, stakeholder groups, local, provisional and national government, trade unions, lob-



All animals interact with members of other species to some extent or another. Even large mammals such as blue wildebeest, rhino, giraffe and impala listen to the call of the small oxpecker warning them of a predator in the vicinity.

byists and the media. You also interact with your competitors, with whom you may form a national industry sector. Your sector interacts with other sectors that together constitute the economy of the nation. And as a nation, our economy interacts with economies of other countries to produce a global economy.

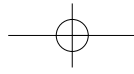
And at the root of all this interaction lie the key principles of effective teamwork. In the animal kingdom, it is the mutually supportive behaviour of individual animal groups ('teams' in the human context) that determines their survival.

The same is true for the teams in which we operate. The members of our team need to have a solid *relationship* with one another and with other teams. We need to *communicate* effectively if we want to work well together. We need to encourage the development of new members in the team, and we need to plan for future *growth*. We need to understand our own areas of *specialisation* and how our unique skills can contribute towards the effectiveness of the team as a whole.

The same line of reasoning applies to the family unit. Strong relationships and effective communication are critical, as is ensuring that everyone in the family group understands the division of responsibilities. Your family in turn interrelates with other families. Different families then coalesce in the school environment, at community centres or at places of worship. Working together effectively as a family team means that your school, place of worship and community are strengthened.

What about the abiotic components that form part of our everyday lives? Abiotic factors provide a background against which we watch the events and actions of life unfold. The background itself, which includes our shared histories, personal experiences and cultural identities, strongly influences our behaviour as individuals and as teams.

The legacy of apartheid, our country's rich history, the

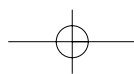


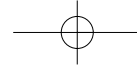
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You may look at this photograph of the dung beetle and feel that it most accurately describes your position in your team. Perhaps you feel that you are simply one person in a large team dominated by powerful individuals, or maybe you are always left to complete the lowly tasks, rolling 'dung', while others get all the attention and accolades.

However, even though the dung beetle is often ignored by visitors to the bush, it plays a pivotal role in the ecosystem ... and so do you!





INTERACTING

changing world of business, our own personal goals and aspirations, social transformation and general nation-building – all these ‘non-living’ components impact on the environment in which we work as teams. Ignoring them would be as disastrous for us as it would be for a zebra harem to ignore the importance of remaining close to a water source.

We all interact within an advanced meta-system – an intricate and complex cycle where everyone and everything is joined at the hip.

WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME?

All this may leave you feeling a little downhearted, like a very small dung beetle working in a very large and incomprehensibly complex ecosystem! You may be wondering: ‘What’s in it for me?’

The truth is that every member of every team – regardless of how small they might consider their role to be – contributes to the effective functioning of the team, the department, the business unit, the organisation, the industry, the economy, the country and, ultimately, the world.

Take the dung beetle, for example. I am sure we have all watched in fascination as a dung beetle rolls a ball of dung with seemingly endless patience and in what looks like a very uncomfortable acrobatic position! But what’s the whole story?

A dung beetle locates dung using its extremely keen sense of smell. Once it finds suitable dung, it rolls and compacts it, and then makes its way to an area with moist soil. The journey is treacherous since the dung beetle may have to stave off other members of its species who would like to steal its cargo. Luckily, all the nutrients the dung beetle needs to sustain itself can be found in the dung. It does not even need to stop for a drink of water – all it does is squeeze and suck the juice from the manure.

When an area with moist soil is found, the dung beetle will bury the dung, mate with its partner and then prepare the brooding ball. When the ball is finished, the female lays her eggs inside it.

Don’t underestimate how critical your role might be.

The ecological role of a dung beetle is often not fully appreciated. This small creature occupies a vital position within the ecosystem and is

responsible for re-introducing essential nutrients (such as nitrogen) into the soil. In doing so, the dung beetle helps to ensure the survival of trees, grasses and plants – and by extension the herbivores, the carnivores that prey on the herbivores, and the scavengers that finish off the carcass.

Sometimes you may feel that you are always left working with dung. Don’t underestimate how critical your role might be.

Your contribution to the team is immeasurable – you *do* make a difference. Your role *is* critical. Other individuals and teams *are* affected by what you do or don’t do.

Working effectively as a member of a team will also better position you to reach your personal goals. Whatever your goal – owning your own business, becoming a lawyer, planning for retirement, representing your country, or raising your children properly – you cannot do it alone. You will need to work with others in order to get what you want from life.

In South Africa, we have a term for this: *ubuntu*. The philosophy of *ubuntu* maintains that we are who we are through others, that the success of one person is dependent on the success of others, and that the solitary human being is a contradiction in terms.

The zebra’s survival and success in the ecosystem depends on the success of myriad other individual creatures, groups and components – both living and non-living. And the same is can be said for teams in a business environment.

