

VERNON CRESSWELL

Natural Teamwork Lessons from Nature

From Bushveld to Boardroom

Successful teams harness the specialist skills of each individual member. Nature provides a myriad of examples of the importance of specialist skills.....

In a pride of lion, for instance, it is customary for the lioness to hunt and kill prey. Although all lionesses are capable of performing this specialised role, it is sometimes the case that one or two females in the pride exhibit this specialisation at an advanced level. These females are the ones who are always taking the lead in the hunt. It is these specialists who take the risk and jump on the buffalo's back. I have witnessed instances where the rest of the pride seem to stand back while the specialist hunter does what she does best – bringing down the prey.



A female lioness on a hunt – silent and focused. Lionesses often play the role of specialist hunter in the pride.

Specialists exist in the business world as well. Indeed, most companies rely upon specialised staff to undertake key activities. Without the differentiated skills sets of these team members, such as market researchers, finance managers and IT personnel, the viability of the team, and organisation, is threatened. The most effective business teams have a *combination* of specialist and generalist skills.

Generalists are those people who possess a number of different skills sets. They may start out focusing on one particular area of expertise, but as time goes by, they hone their skills in other fields. I believe that these generalists are as vital to a team's success as the specialists.



Foam Nests



Foam nest frogs are often found around structures in the bushveld – preferring to sit quietly in the shade during the heat of the day. They turn white to assist with cooling themselves

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EXCITING BOOK

NATURAL TEAMWORK

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using lessons from nature



Vernon is the author of a truly remarkable book entitled "Natural Teamwork" which contains many wonderful examples of teamwork in nature – supported with beautiful colour pictures to illustrate each example. The book is an ideal corporate gift or handout at his talk or workshop

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The generalist offers the team balance – being able to apply him or herself to a range of tasks – sometimes in a supportive capacity. The specialist concentrates on his or her well-defined, relatively narrow range of tasks, while the generalist operates across a broader spectrum of activities. Neither is superior to the other; they both offer equal value to the team and to the organisation

DID YOU KNOW?

We often see these white “foam balls” (picture bottom right) in the bushveld and wonder what they are. Foam Nest Frogs are responsible for them – they usually construct these nests in low vegetation or in trees overhanging water.

The female lays just over 1000 eggs in these “foam” nests after she constructs them by churning, with her hind legs, an “oviducal secretion” she releases. Egg laying starts about 10 minutes after the start of foam production. It can take several hours for the female to make her nest and she usually rehydrates herself every hour or so because of the strenuous work. The amplexing male usually dismounts when she leaves the nest to rehydrate and is replaced with a different male upon her return. After a few days, the outer surface of the nest dries to form a crust. The fat and protein contained in this substance provides all the nourishment required for the developing embryos. The fact that the nest is constructed out of water protects them from predation that would otherwise take place in water. As they gain weight and as the nest structure weakens, the “tadpoles” drop into the water below and their lifecycle continues...

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