Teambuilding can ruin the Performance

The times of lone warriors are over, teamwork is in demand, everybody agrees on that. The attention of organisations on teambuilding activities is accordingly high. In this field adventure-oriented formats still enjoy great popularity. They're mostly about holding your own against adversarial conditions, such as surviving the rain forest without a can opener, crossing a wild river on a self-made raft etc.

The thing is, unfortunately: this is a model from the stone age. We against fierce nature, against wild creatures or against the rest of the world. Of course this welds a team together– which, above all, then learns to care for itself in the first place. This *was* useful in the Cretaceous period, indeed…

If you're lucky, the team will not be able to transfer this learning from a jungle context that couldn't be further away from daily business in the first place. Psychologically a group defines itself not least by it's separation from the outside: „we" and „the others". The bigger the group cohesion, the clearer the group will draw this line. If you are unlucky, monday after the teambuilding event team members will appear in the office armed with a mental Indiana Jones costume, and suddenly you sense a strange loneliness: „They have been riverrafting, and now they won't talk to me anymore." Next thing, your organisation is composed of coexisting self-awareness groups.

Many teambuilding approaches have a fundamental constructional flaw: they focus solely on the internal functioning of teams, but not on their ability to collaborate with other teams or other parts of the organisation. But that's where it's happening.

I am not against traditional teambuilding events, I just urgently recommend that apart from the question of how a team will work internally, the question of how it connects externally, how it is integrated in an organisation, and how it manages exchange with its surrounding environment is treated at least with the same care.

Maybe teams will even be transcended in the future, because every time a new member joins, a group will go through all the phases of group dynamics: struggle for power, regulating nearness and distance, dealing with authority etc. But some organisations are so volatile that teams change at a high rate. In such invironments teams never get close to a mature stage of their development, and accordingly will have consistently low performance. That might work as long as your competitors aren't more stable, either, but it's not really inspiring.

One way out of this might be to think bigger, towards organisations people commit themselves to emotionally , with a collaborational culture stretching across the organisation. In this scenario teams would merely be congested areas of collaboration, not just of cooperation, pursuing *common* goals.

Thinking about development measures this would mean to foster autonomy of teams to a high enough extent so that team members develop a regional sense of home (a need we still have kept form the stone age, after all), and to a small enough extent so that the hurdles to collaboration with other parts of the organisation remain low.

The condition to achieve this is the development of the ability of individuals to cooperate and an according mindset – which then would be transformed to true collaboration by the felt sense established by mindful leaders. And then, I can tell you, things beyond anyone's dreams can happen.