

In this book, world-leading experts in evolutionary psychology and strategic leadership come together to offer a primer on how to get the best out of teams. They show how an understanding of our 'social brain' can help us build productive, successful relationships. They explain how group dynamics work and what size group dynamics work and what size group is most suited at the task at hand. They offer practical insights on how to diffuse tensions and encourage cohesion. And they demonstrate the vital importance of balancing a sense of unity with the need to encourage different outlooks and strengths.

The result is both an analysis of how our brains function in group environments and a practical guide to creating collaborative, high performing teams.

Please forward this summary to friends / colleagues for their private educational purposes. If you wish to discuss the summaries, then email - wietp@quest-worldwide.com.au

Obviously, I still recommend that you purchase and read this plus other seminal books I've summarised, examples include:...

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## The 150 (The Dunbar Number)

For this number of people to live (or work) together in proximity, it is necessary to adopt behavioural management mechanism that mitigate the stresses that arise from living in close physical proximity to many other people. These usually involve such activities as laughter, dancing, feasting and storytelling.

One hundred and fifty represents the number of people we can engage with socially through personal relationships - the group of lifelong friends and extended family who we will happily turn up for those once-in-a-lifetime events like a wedding celebration. It marks the limit of the number of people we are willing to act altruistically towards on a basis of personal knowledge and out of a sense of obligation.

The mid-point between fifty and 150 appears to be an unstable group size.

One key lesson is that failure to continue investing at the requisite rate for a particular circle within which an individual sits results in a rapid weakening of a relationship. Importantly, casual friendships developed among work colleagues decay faster than 'home fiends', and these in turn decay faster than family relationships.

### Applying the lessons, first steps

If you are leading a growing business, then always have the Dunbar graph at the front of your mind. Make sure that you understand the dynamics and implications of each group size (five, fifteen and fifty) and be particularly sensitive to the relational challenges that occur once a group reaches 150.

Given that you typically spend 60 percent of your social time and attention on the inner circle of fifteen, it's crucial to make sure that all those fifteen are relevant to the task in hand. Don't let freeloaders keep their seat at the table and don't be tempted to add new voices without being prepared to swap out old voices to make room.

## A Sense of Belonging

The findings of the 2021 World Happiness Report reinforce that the most important factor in making people feel happy in their work, was a sense of belonging.

How do we create a sense of belonging? There are two important components. In everyday life, one factor is simply biological relatedness: it defines family and is extended by analogy to cover in-laws (to whose family, after all, our offspring belongs). The other factor is what is known as homophily 'the 'birds of a feather flock together' effect. Between them, these two factors explain most of our social preferences as to whom we spend our time with.

We are more willing to act prosocially, or altruistically, towards kin than non-kin, and towards close kin than less close kin.

Biological relatedness notwithstanding, friendships, and even family relationships, are strongly influenced above all by one overriding factor - homophily, the tendency for our friends to resemble us in different ways.

Homophily comes in two forms: endogenous (elements that are part of our human make-up that you can't do much about) and exogenous (traits that you acquire or learn as you traverse life's convoluted pathway). The first consists of a disparate group of variables that define you as an individual: gender, age, ethnicity, personality. The second identifies the cultural community you belong to: it consists of what has become known as the Seven Pillars of Friendship, a set of cultural traits that you acquire during your formative years that, to some extent, define your life. Between them, these identify, first and foremost, the community you belong to.

### The Seven Pillar of Friendship:

- Language (or, better still, dialect)
- Growing up in the same location
- Educational and career experiences
- Hobbies and interests
- Worldview (an amalgam of moral, religious and political views)
- Sense of humour
- Musical tastes

That these homophily effects have much more to do with easing the process of social interaction is evident by the fact that the endogenous factors (including ethnicity) are quickly overtaken by the exogenous effects: if you and I share the same Seven Pillars, I am much less interested in whether we are the same gender, ethnicity, age or personality.

This feature of human behaviour has two important implications for organisations. First, it means there will always be a tendency for like-minded people to gravitate together, creating natural silo fault lines when set against the natural limits on the number of people with whom we can maintain relationships. Second, no matter what people may say to the contrary, how well people will get on will always be informed by their degree of homophily, and that degree will always influence, for better or for worse, how well they will work together.

### Applying the lessons, first steps

If you detect tension between departments and units within your organisation - a sense of 'us' and 'them' - find people who can work across these divisions to reconnect groups and act as bridges between them.

Test your organisational language, including acronyms. Make sure that the language that is most often used reflects the desired culture and doesn't exclude or complicate a collective sense of belonging.

## Introduction

It is a leader's job to create an environment within which people can thrive both as individuals and as a collective. It may sound easy, but it's not.

The book doesn't focus on the new but instead explores what is unchanging in the way humans behave. It brings the science of our inherited biology together with the practice and politics of life in organisation.

No two organisations are the same and the authors offer no one-size-fits-all panacea. Instead, their aim is to provoke useful conversations and opportunities for reflection for those who wish to lead organisations into a future in which people - and hence the organisations of which they are part - thrive.

### The well-being of a group is dependent upon the following principles:

1. **Group size is a strong determinant of a group's well-being.** People flourish in situations where they know people and are known themselves.
2. **The quality of relationships diminishes as the size of a group increases.** Sixty percent of our social time is spent with just 15 people.
3. **Our changing hormonal responses can change our equilibrium.** Too much cortisol caused by fear and stress contributes to a range of negative outcomes. By contrast, neurotransmitters such as endorphins create feelings of safety.

These three principles are fundamental to humans - they are hard wired into our biology. We ignore them at our peril.

Creating effective groups and teams demand careful balancing of the three principles with a clear sense of what these groups and teams are there to achieve.

*The central question is: how can we more effectively exploit human social behaviour to create organisations that perform better in terms of our traditional metrics because they are built on our natural psychology, honed by million or more years of evolution, and, at the same time, also create more satisfying social environments for those who work in them?*

## Leading by Numbers

*'People can be themselves only in small comprehensible groups. Therefore, we must learn to think in terms of an articulated structure that can cope with a multiplicity of small-scale units.'*

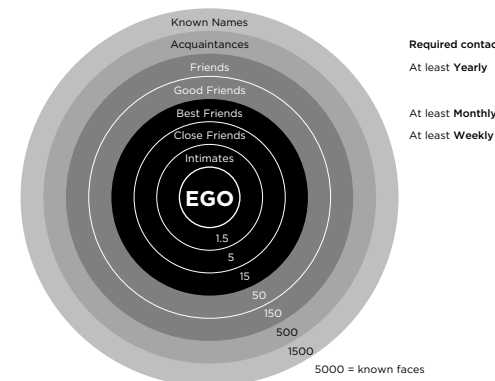
E.F. Schumacher

In the simplest terms, the Dunbar Number is the natural limit on the number of meaningful social relationships that an individual can manage at any one time. This is commonly said to be 150.

In terms of our personal social networks, the Dunbar Number defines the maximum number of people for whom we feel a sense of obligation based on a relationship that involves seeing the person on a reasonably regular basis (say, at least once a year) and has a history (we have known that person for some time).

The importance of the 150-person limit is that, so long as a community remains below this size, most things can be managed on a democratic, person-to-person basis. Above the 150 level, 'scalar stresses' kick in that increasingly destabilise the group. Some kind of formal management system becomes necessary to control relationships and transactions.

One hundred and fifty is not the sole element of the Dunbar Number. In fact, it is just one of a series of circles or layers in personal social networks.



These layers (patterns) are everywhere and although, each number varies somewhat amongst individuals, in part as a function of their personality, these numbers are remarkably consistent across populations and cultures.

For the authors purposes, there are four significant numbers associated with the Dunbar Graph.

### The Five (your 'support clique')

This represents the number of close relationships a person can have.

This number plays a crucial role in buffering against the stresses of living in groups, as well as countering mental and physical ill-health.

It is also important in the context of a work team that is focused on delivering an outcome. When a team or group contains between four and six members, it requires no formal leadership and can self-direct.

### The Fifteen (your sympathy group)

This represents the layer of people who can be considered best friends - the people you socialise most regularly and with whom you exchange favours such as childcare. Within this layer lies the four to six people in the support clique.

Sixty percent of our social effort is devoted to this group of fifteen people.

Relationships involving fifteen people have a shorter natural shelf life - they require some form of regular connection to be maintained and this is always best done face-to-face.

### The Fifty (your main social circle)

In modern life, fifty contacts represent your main social circle, the people you would invite to a social gathering like a big garden BBQ or major birthday event.

In hunter-gatherer societies with no formal leadership structure, fifty represents the largest number of individuals that can live together at a campsite for any length of time without disputes escalating out of control.

When (work) groups exceed this size, they need some sort of management structure to give them coherence.

## Bonding

Bonding processes help individuals feel part of a larger social group, encouraging commitment to the organisation as well as prosocial behaviour.

Time for team bonding is often overlooked in a time-pressured modern world.

Similarly, organisations tend to focus too much on the individual and not sufficiently on the group. Personal development is regarded as key. Group development attracts much less attention.

This chapter explores the natural dynamics of our small-scale social world. Understanding just how these social bonds are built up and, through these, how communities are created will help us to understand how and why they contribute to the formation of the social capital of an organisation.

We form social bonds with each other through taking the time to engage in shared activities and experiences that include eating and laughing together, singing and dancing, storytelling and reminiscing.

Such behaviour, along with physical touch, activates an evolutionary bonding mechanism (common to all monkeys and apes) involving the brain's endorphin system, creating a sense of elevated mood, belonging and trust. Beneath the consciousness horizon, this is a primal bonding mechanism that connects us with our inherited biology.

Behavioural synchrony (moving together, singing to a beat, dancing, marching, jogging or laughing together) magnifies the endorphin effect, creating a super-binding effect.

Bonding comes with a health warning. It can create a sense of 'us' vs 'them' and can lead to acts of exclusion and a culture of inward-looking clannishness. For bonding to benefit the many not the few, these experiences need to be carefully designed and monitored and occasionally disrupted to break bonds.

### Applying the lessons, first steps

Actively make time for people to get together and benefit from such synchronous activities as eating, drinking, walking together, laughing and telling stories.

Scrutinise meetings that occur on a regular basis. Do they fulfil a definitive purpose (practical, strategic, or social) or are they just calendar fillers?

Find out what people really feel about working for – and with – your organisation. Ask them.

## The Medium and the Message

The problem is that humans are for the most part better talkers than listeners, and this tendency becomes more pronounced the higher status they enjoy. Most corporate communication is devoted to the talk, not the listen.

In this chapter, the authors show how a deeper understanding of how we communicate can help forge a tighter social bond in the workplace and elsewhere, and also help us avoid the pitfalls of miscommunication that are likely to have the opposite effect by causing distress, dissension and conflict.

Failure to recognise the implication of how we say things – rather than what we say – places serious limitations on our ability to function well as a group, both in the workplace and elsewhere.

Conversations are the foundation of effective decision making, but too often we pay too little attention to how best to conduct them.

Language is all around us and structures our world. It is a vital tool for establishing and maintaining social bonds. It is, however, inherently ambiguous, and we need to understand how we might be misunderstood – or how we might misunderstand others. The message received rather than the message given should be the focus.

We need to be aware that our limiting mentalising powers impose strict constraints on the size of conversational groups. If the group is too big, we quickly become unable to cope with the complexity and nuance of conversation or with people's motivations and thoughts.

Much of what we say is conveyed in non-verbal signals (tone, expression, emphasis, etc) rather than by words themselves. It is essential to pay as close attention to how a message is delivered as it is to words.

When it comes to connecting with an audience, stories can prove a very powerful tool. They allow for emotional connection.

### Applying the lessons, first steps

If you have an important message to share, always map it out first and consider what impact it will have: huge damage can be caused by a thoughtless use of language or an inappropriate tone.

We tend to focus on what we have to say and how others react to the message we are imparting. Next time you're in a meeting, stand back a little and seek to assess the mood of the room, people's body language, and the tone they adopt when speaking. You will quickly establish whether the group functions well together or whether work is required to make it gel.

## The Size of Trust

Trust is based on the simple premise that what is promised is what will be delivered.

Trust maps very closely with the Dunbar graph. It operates most naturally within a tribe of around 1,500 people. These individuals hold certain values, certain ways of thinking about the world, in common. They share a sense of obligation.

Most large groups – and certainly most organisations – fail to build the bonds necessary for trust. In contrast, organisations that are designed to encourage bonding end up reaping all the benefits of employee cooperation, knowledge-sharing and problem solving. And more trusting employees are more committed to their organisation and end up staying longer.

In this chapter the authors focus on why trust is so often lost, and how to regain and build it.

Trust acts as a lubricant of our social relationships, allowing us to build integrated networks both at a social and business level.

Friendships and business networks, as well as organisations, are social contracts held together by trust: we all agree to abide by the unspoken rules of the game to behave honestly and with due consideration.

Trust, and the reputations that it gives rise to, build slowly over time, but can be lost in an instant.

In large groups of people, and in the absence of 'knowing' each other; a strong sense of collective purpose and a feeling of belonging can fast track trust between people.

In any social contract, there is always a strong temptation for some individuals to act as freeriders – taking the benefits offered by the community, but not paying the costs.

The double jeopardy imposed by freeriders on those who abide by the rules of the game causes trust to be lost. As a result, networks fragment as individuals (or businesses) seek the shelter and security of those on whom they can feel they can rely.

Equally, trust should not be given away too easily. We are seduced into placing trust in institutions, brands, technology and data, none of which can be easily triangulated or checked. Our pull towards simple stories can easily override our judgment.

### Applying the lessons, first steps

A trust environment is built through give and take and a willingness to express vulnerability. Asking for help not only makes practical sense, it also creates bonds of trust.

Learn to spot the 'freeriders' within your system – people who will exploit others' goodwill and trust. It's also important to identify those who display narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy traits. All need to be dealt with swiftly, as their effects can be deeply corrosive.

Make sure that the people you listen to, especially at times of decision-making or stress, are not simply those who will tell you what you want to hear. You need to ensure that they are people you can trust. The two groups are not interchangeable.

## Social Space, Social Time

Organisations often ignore the fundamental truth that our sense of self-worth and wellbeing doesn't just derive from what work we do, but where we do that work.

Spaces influence our mood & productivity as much as people do. Creating the right environment is more important than having the right 'mission statement'.

Casual meetings are often the single most important source of innovations. Creating opportunities where these occur (over coffee, lunch or a beer after work) is crucial.

New joiners, especially if they come from abroad, can have trouble finding friends outside the work environment; enabling them to establish themselves in the wider community may smooth the transition to a new job and minimise undesirable consequences in terms of depression and ill-health.

Hybrid work patterns need to be managed carefully: there is a risk of people losing contact with both the organisation's sense of community and its sense of purpose. Working from home also risks people missing out on casual contacts that later turn out to be formative.

Online meetings rarely provide the kind of social environment in which new relationships can easily be built up.

### Applying the lessons, first steps

Never underestimate the impact of physical environment (space, light, layout and location) on people's sense of wellbeing and their creativity.

Creativity demands diversity. Make sure you draw on as wide a range of voices as possible, and that group sizes are calibrated to allow all opinions to be aired.

Give individual groups the time, budget and permission to build their own sense of belonging and team identity.

## The Social Brain at Work

A large part of the unique gifts and capabilities we possess as human beings involves our sophisticated powers of connection and our social capabilities. It is surprising that, even today, in the twenty-first century, the dominant metaphor for the organisation is still the machine.

Machines are narrowly brilliant. Speak to any leader, however, and they will tell you that the hardest part of their role is leading people in all their illogical, creative, emotional, different guises. In comparison to unleashing people's social powers, the technical stuff is easy.

### The Social Brain in Action

Humans evolved to thrive in small groups where each member knows all the others, and where bonds of trust are accordingly created.

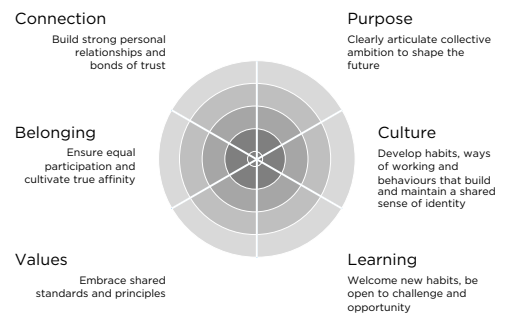
To replicate this universal biological need in large groups requires thinking in circles – fives, fifteen, fifty, one hundred and fifties and beyond.

<b>4</b>	<b>Conversation groups</b> No outcome needed, discussion in the moment, everyone is involved
<b>5</b>	<b>Fast decision-making group</b> No facilitation needed to arrive at an outcome, no hierarchy, equal share of voice
<b>6-12</b>	<b>Work group</b> Facilitation needed, outcomes clear, agenda needed, processes defined, each person has defined role, each person has a share of voice (unlikely to be equal due to time constraints)
<b>12-15</b>	<b>Complex decision-making group</b> Facilitation or chairing multiple perspectives encouraged to arrive at a better decision, each person to be allocated a share of voice and point of view more formal process & agenda needed
<b>50</b>	<b>Information sharing &amp; sub-group work</b> Strong facilitation, clear agenda, outcomes defined
<b>150</b>	<b>Town Hall, information sharing &amp; sub-group work</b> Clear 'front of room' and facilitation needed, clear agenda and outcomes needed

## Leadership and the Social Brain

If organisations are best served by a ripple structure, then that suggests leadership needs to be similarly flexible and non-monolithic. The ability to develop leaders – lots of them – right through the organisation, regardless of tenure or position, is one of the most important capabilities for anyone to foster a thriving environment. These will be the people who lead the sub-sections of the orchestra, the teams of fifteen who share a purpose and a sense of values. Effective management depends on trusted people at all levels who can relate to and activate their own networks to build the future. These leaders need facilitative skills, the ability to empathise with others and exercise judgment to make decisions.

### The Thrive Model™ - Environments for Performance, Innovation and Impact



Organisations only flourish when people do. There are six dimensions to an environment that enables this flourishing. These dimensions are most generative where relationships is strongest, at the centre of the circle. As the layers radiate outwards, the effect diminishes.