



Who Do You Trust?

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Museum of Tolerance





Robbers' Cave Experiment

Muzafer Sherif et al, U of OK, 1954

22 12-year-old boys in two balanced groups

**Similar backgrounds: same year in school,
settled, lower-middle-class, Protestant, well-
adjusted psychologically, normal physical
development**

**Groups transported separately by bus to 200-
acre Boy Scout camp in Robbers Cave State
Park in SE OK**



Phase I

Each group:

- lived in its own cabin**
- had no knowledge of other group**
- had its own swimming hole, hideouts, group activities: pitching tents, hiking, cooking**
- evolved rules, leadership, flag, identity**
- “Rattlers” or “Eagles”**



The next phase

Toward the end of Phase I (~a week), each group gradually “led” to awareness of the other group (but not visible yet)

Strong territorial reactions - “They better not be in OUR swimming hole”

Immediate classification – “us” vs “them” – even though others had never been seen

Racial slurs and profanity applied to “them”



Phase II

Groups introduced to each other

Competitions: baseball, tug-of war, staff-judged events such as cabin inspections

Scoring and prizes fueled competition

Groups began eating in a common dining hall where prizes displayed



War broke out

After one loss, Eagles burned Rattlers' flag. Next day the Eagles' flag burned in retaliation. Fighting erupted. Staff intervened.

After another loss, Rattlers launched a night raid on Eagles' cabin. Next day, Eagles took revenge on the Rattlers' cabin. Eagles began to store rocks against possible reprisal. Again, staff intervened.



Phase III

Staff experimented to resolve conflict. Have fun together!

Non-competitive activities scheduled, e.g., watching movies while eating together in dining hall

Efforts failed

Groups remained apart, yelling at each other, food fights



We quickly categorize others

In just one week, Rattlers & Eagles emerged.

We might expect this in religious groups or political parties.

But we also see it in development teams and the most trivial of settings.

We are all too ready to see “others” as the enemy.

Yet we believe we are unbiased, rational, realistic.



From the evolutionary psychologists

**Our hunter-gatherer ancestors had to
answer classification questions quickly to
survive.**

Can we eat these berries?

Is that a stick or a snake?

Who is friend or foe?

A fast labelling system served us well.



It keeps us busy

We continually sort others into in-groups and out-groups

We label others (unconsciously and consciously)

Research shows managers sort employees into ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ as early as 3 weeks (sooner?)



And, this can be a bad thing

Easy to see why stereotyping is bad.

People are complex.

Labels mean we lose all their talents.

**What's really bad - we do this to
ourselves!**



Framing the stereotype

University math students were given a difficult math test. When reminded of their gender, men outperformed women.

When assuming the role of a female avatar, players gave up sooner and performed poorly playing against a male avatar (regardless of gender of player).



Stereotypes are prophetic

Stereotypes change our behavior. Our behavior affects other's behaviors – vicious negative feedback cycle -- a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Michael Hill – Rule #1 for good management: Catch them doing something right.

Norm Kerth's Prime Directive.

Pygmalion in Management," J. Sterling Livingston, Sept/Oct 1988 *Harvard Business Review*.



How to bring peace?

Staff devised “real” projects with solutions requiring everyone’s help

Camp water supply cut off. Staff suspected a leak in the supply pipe. All boys had to inspect mile-long pipe, found a clogged valve at the tank. They celebrated together when the problem was fixed.



More projects

Joint use of a rope on a partly cut-through dangerous tree.

Truck carrying food for both groups had gotten stuck; all the boys were needed to pull it out.

When it was time to leave, they decided to ride in the same bus, sang all their songs, and shared prize money to buy treats for everyone.



Follow-up experiments

1963 11-year-old boys in Beirut, 8 Christians + 10 Muslims

Historic tensions between religious communities in Lebanon

In Phase II, serious fights broke out between the groups—Blue Ghosts & Red Genies

3 Genies threatened a Ghost with knives stolen from the camp kitchen—researchers ended experiment without reconciliation (no Phase III)



Why this was interesting

Groups not defined by religion

**Blue Ghosts & Red Genies each made up of
5 Muslims + 4 Christians**

3 Genies with knives were Christians

So was their Ghost victim

Ties to the group stronger than religion



The good news

Historians, anthropologists, political scientists now believe that human “categories” depend on context.

Yes, we’re hardwired to classify others, but we are also hardwired to love working in small groups.



Cooperation on shared goals

Cooperation in work toward shared goals seems to be a part of conflict resolution.

This cooperation must be nourished at all levels in the system, building a sense of interdependence that lies at the heart of a culture of peace.

Could this be what makes a culture “agile” ?



How agile practices help

Daily stand-up

Pairing

Short timeboxed iterations

Retrospectives

...



What collaboration is not

**Friendship and liking are not required and
may not result from collaboration**



What collaboration is

Everyone is connected so no one can succeed unless others do (and vice versa) — you must coordinate your efforts with the efforts of others to complete a task.

The result — respect for others' abilities and contributions.

We really like being trusted and respected.



Measurable impact

Increased effort to achieve – both in individuals and the group

More positive relationships – give and receive social support

Improved psychological health – increased self-esteem, decreased anxiety and depression

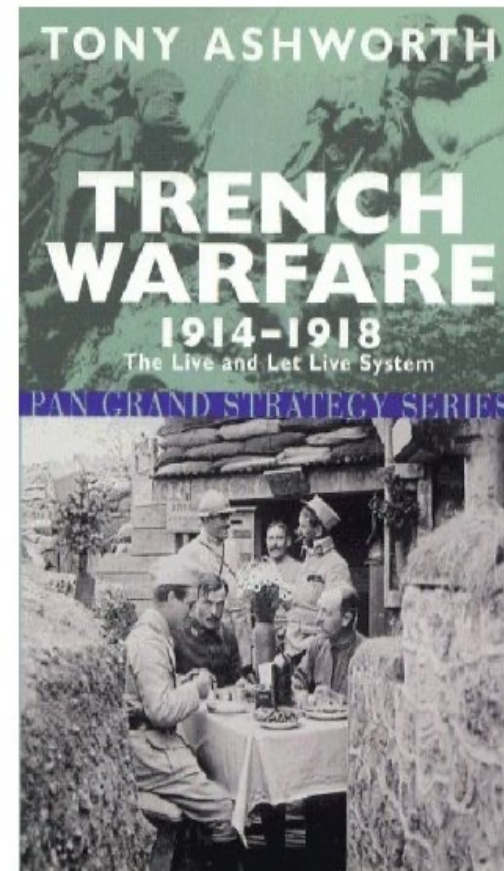
Could this be why agile teams are better?

Closing, encouraging story

At points along the line,
peace broke out.

Closeness of trenches meant
the groups could see each
other, learn others'
habits, cooperate.

Friendship is not required
for cooperation!



The Movie Joyeux Noel – Christmas 1914





Other primates?

Experiment with juveniles: rhesus macaques (quarrelsome, violent) housed with stump-tails (tolerant, easy-going).

All became friends, played together, groomed each other, slept in large, mixed huddles.

Rhesus developed peacemaking skills.

When separated, rhesus retained grooming and reconciliation behaviors.

Reason for hope



Braver Angels

<https://braverangels.org/>

The name was inspired by the words of Abraham Lincoln, who not only called on Americans to summon the “better angels” of our nature but also called on us to find the courage needed to pursue a more perfect union, “with malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right.”





Thanks for listening!

Questions?