

What level is your team?

If you work in an organisation with more than one other person, then it's likely you work as part of a team. It might be sales, production or the management team. These teams will interact with other teams, effectively creating what could be termed a 'tribe'. Even outside work, you will find yourself part of a wider group. Those groups can include family and friends as well as educational, religious, geographical and sporting groups, just to name a few. You may notice, across the different teams and communities to which you belong, that some function far more effectively than others.

David Logan is a business professor at The University of California. Like you, Professor Logan also noticed the disparity of efficiency between work groups. Professor Logan has extensively researched the notion of tribal behaviour in modern society. He notes that there are a number of ways in which we may choose to come together with others to form our 'tribe'. Some form spontaneously to fulfil a present need. Others are enduring communities, with a purpose toward a lasting cause or vision.

Research into modern work tribes has defined the critical factors involved in their effectiveness. Interestingly, the effectiveness of a tribe is not influenced by the number, or level of experience of, its members. Nor is it the age or vision of the members. Two associated factors have been identified to have

the greatest influence on the success of a tribe. Not surprisingly, culture is one. Strongly related to culture, the second is the stage in which the community operates. What does that mean?

Professor Logan describes five stages of community, which are represented in figure 1 below.

Stage One: People in Stage One communities are united by their dislike or hatred of society. Stage One communities tend to act out their despair through destructive behaviours. Gangs and prisons are examples of tribes that operate at Stage One. This level rarely exists in the workplace. Only 2% of workplace communities are at Stage One.

Stage Two: Those in Stage Two groups are mostly united through circumstance rather than choice. Individuals tend

to be despondent and do only what needs to be done, nothing more. They can be almost effective when someone is watching. You have experienced a member of this type of community when you have experienced terrible service. Here is an example of a Stage Two interaction: You want to buy a lamp. It's displayed in white. You ask the sales assistant if this lamp can be ordered in blue. Her only response is "I don't know." There is no attempt to find out or help you further.

Stage Three: This is the results focused stage. These community members are confident. They pursue results chiefly for personal gain. They are not in tune with the big picture. Members of this community acknowledge their own value, but struggle to acknowledge the contributions of others. For instance, "The sales team bring in all the business. Marketing has no idea what we do." Political parties are good examples of Stage Three tribes!

Stage Four: People in Stage Four communities are united by values and a shared vision. Stage Four communities have a positive group culture, appreciate individuals within the community and have a big picture view. These tribes are full of highly motivated individuals, aware of the great impact they can make as a group. This is the type of community where people support one another, embracing creativity and innovation. They thrive on having fun while they make a difference.

Stage Five: At the highest level, these communities have the same qualities as a Stage Four community. There is one additional characteristic that moves a community from Stage Four to Five. Stage Five communities recognise that moving their noble

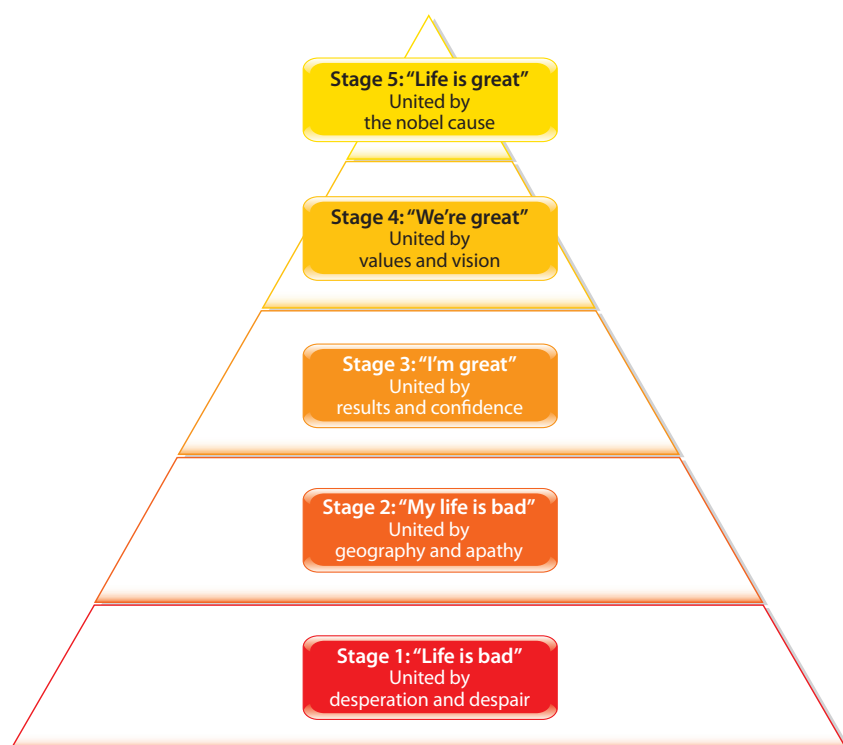


Figure 1: The five stages of community

cause forward in a considerable way requires the community to unite with other like minded communities. When this happens, visions are transformed into movements.

By now, you are probably assessing the stage of the various tribes to which you belong. Research has shown that almost half of all people in the workforce are in Stage Three tribes. There are important things to know when considering moving your team up a stage.

Firstly, a tribe can only move up one level at a time. So if your team is at Stage Two, your first goal is to get to Stage Three. You won't be able

to skip a stage. Secondly, a tribe can only hear one level above or below its current stage. That means that if your team is thinking that they are great and others are not (Stage Three) and you start talking about uniting with others to start a movement in support of our noble cause (Stage Five), they may think you're crazy. But if you start talking about values and shared vision, they may stop and listen.

73% of teams function at Stage Two or Stage Three. The variation in efficiency and happiness as you move up the scale is enormous. We don't all have to create a movement. But we could all

benefit from a serious assessment of where we are at, where we could be and how we can get there.

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