

# BMTFedNewsletter



Photography by Andy Stairmand

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## **\*\*News\*\***

This year's **Behaviour Based Safety** conference will be a workshop, interactive style conference and will be held on 18th November at the Park Royal Hotel, Stretton. For more information please e-mail [Jean@hollinconsulting.co.uk](mailto:Jean@hollinconsulting.co.uk)

*Behavioural Management Techniques (BMT) is a science-based approach focused on using behaviour analysis for the improvement of business and safety performance.*

## Co-operation is at Least as Natural as Competition

By Denis O'Hora, Ph.D.

It seems that competition is everywhere these days. The waves of reality TV that flood our daily media provide many examples. Who's the best singer in Pop Idol/X Factor/Eurovision? Who's the best designer (Project Runway) or model (Next Top Model)? It should be no surprise then to see competition at work. In fact, competition is often thought to be the most important feature of effective business practices - are you competitive in the Asian market?

At work, most of us take competition as a given; 'It is only natural that when resources are limited, there will be winners and losers.' In my experience, this acceptance of competition is often employed as an excuse for workplace aggression, whether that aggression is in the form of direct bullying or indirect undermining of others. This is just part of work, part of what it is to compete with others for bonuses, for status, for the nicest office, for promotions, or just to be the funniest guy or girl at the water cooler. With some exceptions, companies rarely interfere to discourage competition, presumably on the assumption that competition 'brings the best out of' the employees in the company. It's the same kind of thinking behind 'Employee of the Month' awards, which we all now know can be terribly divisive.

Questioning whether competition is necessary is likely to lead to being labelled a hippy, delusional or just wrong, but I'm going to do it. Why? Because humans are at least as biologically disposed towards cooperation as they are towards competition. No? Well, Felix Warneken, Michael Tomasello and others in the Max Plank Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig have compared human children and chimpanzee children and have shown that from a very early age, children seek to co-operate. In one example, an adult drops a peg while putting clothes on a line and the child runs over, picks up the peg and returns it to the adult. Biologically speaking, the child engages in a very expensive behaviour for no obvious reward. Young chimpanzees, on the other hand, who are adapted to live in highly competitive societies, do not spontaneously co-operate in such situations.

Still not buying it? Our biological adaptation for co-operation even affects how we look. Human eyes have a bright white sclera (the 'white' of the eye) that surrounds the pupil. This allows others to know where we are looking. We do this at a subconscious level, knowing what others refer to based on where they look; if you look over a friend's shoulder during a conversation, he/she will want to know what you are looking at. Chimpanzees, on the other hand, do not have a white sclera. It is more important for chimps to hide their intentions. Chimpanzees would probably be amazing poker players! In fact, humans find poker fun precisely because it is difficult to hide our intentions. If competition were as natural as we are often told, why would we not be better equipped biologically to deceive?

So, next time intra-organisational competition gets to you, just remember that it's because you're not a chimp!

Videos from Warneken and Tomasello's work: <http://email.eva.mpg.de/~warneken/video>





## Are We Really Sick Here or Have We Just Got a Bit of a Cold?

By Howard Lees

I have been observing the habits of bureaucrats for some years now, there are some easy things to look out for if you are on the hunt for a bureaucrat, the species commonly give themselves away in the terms they use, here are some to watch out for:-

1. **“I agree with your point of view and in principle there is no problem in us acting as you suggest”**, the introduction of the term ‘in principle’ usually means there is not a snowball’s chance in hell anything is going to happen.
2. The inclusion of phrases in minutes of meetings like ‘ongoing’, ‘awaiting a decision’, ‘to be dealt with in a further report’ and of course not forgetting ‘to be discussed at the next meeting.’
3. Meetings – the holy grail of bureaucrats, the length, lack of purpose, lack of logic when choosing who needs to attend, lack of strategy, lack of actions closed out, the provision of a home for all passengers, prevaricators and, well, tossers.
4. **“We are working within our budget”**, this is the classic bureaucratic justification for anything which even whiffs of waste. The budget was created in a storm of activity, lots of assumptions were made, lots of numbers with pithy descriptions of what was to be achieved with the money. The use of working to budgets allows bureaucrats to continue spending money without thought for efficiency or value for the whole of the following year.
5. **“If it was in your annual training plan you could have it”**, the training plan was created, just like in (4) above, with the same crazy downstream impacts. The plan is used as the reason to refuse something which is needed.
6. **“I can’t give you an ‘A’ for your appraisal, we are only allowed three A’s and I have used them all up on others”**, this process is used in order to justify a ‘B’ score.
7. **“It is imperative that we follow the process to the letter”**, bureaucrats value the process itself significantly higher than the desired result or even the original desired result intended by the original process.
8. This phrase was used by a bureaucrat in a meeting set up to discuss a critical situation in an organisation close to meltdown. **“Are we really sick here or have we just got a bit of a cold?”** – Beautiful!

## Flirtation: Art or Accident?

By Rachel Edwards

“Get your coat darlin’, you’ve pulled”. Witty and sophisticated? No. Straightforward? Yes.

The art of flirting; some of us have it, some of us don’t. The nature vs nurture debate certainly applies here – how much of our flirting ability is innate, and how much can be taught (with a good enough teacher)?

Armed with knowledge from body language books and TV programmes, I’ve been perusing the fertile grounds of airports, coffee shops, restaurants and open plan offices to see how easy flirting is to spot. And replicate, if necessary.

Ladies - beware a man who is mirroring your body language. Women are four times more likely to mirror another woman’s body language than a man is (unless he’s in courtship mode). Male flirting behaviours include: the straightening of posture, grooming behaviours such as straightening a tie or rearranging a shirt, his body turned towards you, perhaps a foot pointing in your direction, a wider standing stance, knees positioned wide apart when sat, and sometimes thumbs in belt loops or pockets.

Men – studies into courtship show that women initiate the ‘first move’ 90% of the time. Typically, this is a series of subtle signals, aimed at the chosen subject. Such signals may include: holding your gaze for a few seconds across a crowded room or preening behaviours like the smoothing of hair, lip licking, or the adjustment of clothes or jewellery. Additionally, dangling her shoe from the end of her foot, slipping it on and off, exposed wrists, and hair tossing are likely expressions of interest.

It’s worth noting however that the above body language displays are only significant if they differ from baseline behaviour, if it’s all going on as standard it isn’t flirting (it’s just weird – run!)

*Disclaimer: please consult a professional before applying any of this advice.*

“when putting cheese in a mouse trap, leave enough room for the mouse”