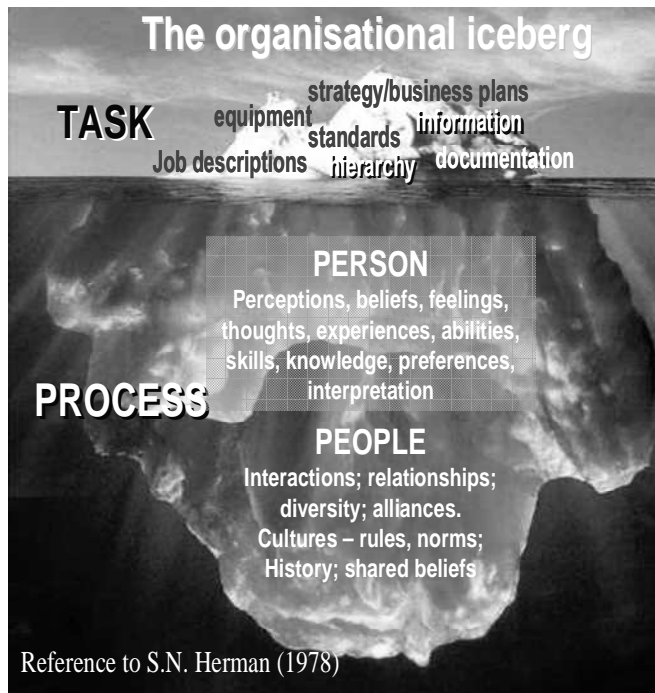


## A Team as an Iceberg



A great pub quiz question is: “How much of an iceberg is visible above the sea?”

Usually people say 10, 15 or 20%. The answer is 11% so remember that next time it comes up. It could be that one point that makes the difference.

89% of the iceberg lies underneath the ocean, out of sight. What this figure tells us is that the mass that keeps the iceberg stable in stormy waters is the part that’s invisible and below the surface.

It is only as the warm salty seawater eats away at the iceberg that it becomes unstable and at a critical point its centre of gravity shifts causing the iceberg to flip dramatically.

How does this relate to teams?

Does it tell us anything useful?

### TASK – above the sea level

It’s common for managers to be focused on the transactional aspects of teams such as business planning, policy and procedure. As sensing human beings we are automatically drawn to what is obvious, visible and tangible. As practical people we like to be able to work with what we can see, touch and do something with.

This natural tendency causes team leaders to focus on plans, information, documentation, equipment, hierarchy, written rules, descriptions and events. However, applying the iceberg metaphor means that this focus is on only 11% of the whole. As with an iceberg, it is that which is invisible and intangible that brings stability to the team.

So, what should a team leader focus on to get the most effective team? What time should a team leader devote to that which is out of sight?

### PROCESS – below the sea level

With an iceberg, it’s what’s beneath the sea, 89% of the mass, which keeps the whole iceberg stable. Applying this idea to teams means that it’s the process and relationships that gets the task done – that which is above the sea level. You can’t have one without the other. It is safe to say that people are not straight forward. Each team member will have their own perception of the world, what is important, what “hard” work is, what “team-work” means,

what “good” looks like. It is near impossible to control this without putting time, effort and thought into addressing it.

It’s through good process, the people and relationships that a team achieves success. Teams can have wonderful, articulate and glossy mission and vision statements; fantastic policies and the most accurate documentation and up to the minute equipment. But without people, and good relationships, none of that matters. So if 89% of the process is unseen, team leaders need to make sure they focus a good proportion of their effort to the process of relationships and team work unless they want to see their team flip and become dysfunctional.

Are you focusing most of your thinking, time and effort on what is above the sea level? If you are, you need to rebalance your time and focus and attend to what is unseen. It’s worth it.

## **Ground Rules - a Working Ethos**

There are few team leaders who enjoy tackling unhelpful behaviour, language and attitude within a team. So why don’t team leaders make sure they spend some time with their team listing some key ground rules that can be referred back to when such issues arise?

Whether it be a courting couple, a quiz team, a family do, a football team or a global corporation – all of them need a shared set of ground rules that all can sign up to and can agree with – even if reluctantly. It’s this basic and fundamental factor that keep groups of human beings on track. So why is it that this is often missed out?

If this hasn’t been explicitly done with a team then individuals will eventually have their own ideas of what is acceptable and unacceptable. Sometimes this works but when it doesn’t it can have a drastic and damaging effect on the health of the team.

Investing an hour or more into this enables the team leader to address the “bottom-of-the-iceberg” factors of a team. Including the whole team in this is important and then coaching team members to come up with a list of key ground rules that behaviourally describe how they are going to work together as a team.

It also gives the clear message that if they want to be effective at the tasks, the team needs to make the “bottom-of-the-iceberg process” a priority.