



Putting Cultures under the microscope

Integrating teams from different backgrounds

A Merry Marine Case Study

3M Microbiology is recognised as a trusted leader in microbiological testing within the food industry worldwide. The Company designs, manufactures and markets a full range of innovative quality testing and monitoring products that aid in-house laboratories and contract laboratories to manage the detection of microbial contamination in food prepared within the food industry for consumer use. *3M's* acquisition of *Biotrace International plc* has allowed the company to expand its offerings into the pharmaceutical and industrial sectors.



The combined skills of people from *3M* and *Biotrace International* makes the new division a force to be reckoned with – and recognising that bringing together people from completely different backgrounds and corporate cultures needs to be managed carefully and professionally, the company brought in *People Evolution* to make sure that the newly integrated team develop into a high performing unit capable of growing the business through great team work and communication.

People Evolution needed a high-impact and thought provoking learning event where individual beliefs about personal achievement and group support could be stretched, a climate of high performance could be highlighted and topics surrounding cultural change and those associated with the integration to the new company could be explored in a unique and unforgettable way. Here's how it was achieved...

Merry Marine was engaged to provide a sailing event over about 30 hours that would allow the team to explore such topics – and to have a fabulous experience whilst doing it. After a careful assessment of both *3M's* and *People Evolutions'* needs, we chose to stage the sailing event on England's South Coast, sailing from Hamble, near the Solent. We chose two 46' Bavaria sailing yachts, "Whistler" and "Southpoint" and (unknown to the team until day 2 of the event) a Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB) with a 225hp engine capable of propelling the boat to over 40 knots. The event started at the Royal Southern Yacht Club at Hamble where

Richard Pascall of *People Evolution* introduced the team to concepts in team working and high performance, then helped them explore some of their thoughts on the integration and differences in the corporate cultures that they had been used to. Richard also explored some of the pre-conceptions of what was about to happen over the next 30 hours. As is usual with this type of event, there was a combination of apprehension of an unknown environment and anticipation of a new experience – none of the team had been exposed to sailing yachts in the past.

The event was designed to ease the participants into the event – after all, just walking on the ever so slightly moving pontoons was a new concept to be experienced – before moving on to exercises that progressively allowed the team to participate in increasingly complex team situations. Hence, the initial safety briefing was followed by a gentle motor out into Southampton Water whilst eating lunch and getting used to steering and being on the boats. The next step was to raise the sails and with expert coaching from *Merry Marine's* skippers, the team were encouraged to discover how to sail the boats.

Here, the team immediately experienced differences in learning styles. It was also here that the *Tuckman* team development concepts of Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing became starkly apparent – although it could be argued that the latter two stages were not that visible at this point in the itinerary. As the afternoon progressed, the team was able to observe and experiment with team concepts as their proficiency in working together to sail the yachts gradually improved.

The afternoon culminated in an informal race to Yarmouth, Isle of Wight. According to the crew of "Whistler", they were the clear winners – and in a manner befitting the 'best' business meetings, "Southpoint's" crew introduced procedural issues to challenge that perception, hence providing plenty of material for the review session. The afternoon certainly armed the team with a greater understanding of team development stages – and that was before Merry Marine's original *Flashlight Challenge™* activity was briefed. This is a sailing



exercise where in this case, nominal revenue was earned en-route to a given final destination. We set complex 'business' rules, from which the team decides the route to take – and therefore the monetary target – and success is achieved by reproducing many aspects of leadership and business process.

In this case, the Challenge was designed such that both boats had to communicate and work together to achieve success in a collaborative way. It was at this point that the participants were introduced to the fact that a third boat (the high speed RIB) would be available for the challenge – greatly increasing their earning potential, but also greatly increasing the complexity of both the execution and planning of the Challenge.

A briefing on navigation and tides gave the team more of the knowledge required to undertake the task. To further complicate things, the yachts' crews were also shuffled in order for the team to experience and deal with changes in team dynamics. This would be put even more to the test during the challenge, where additional crewing criteria had to be achieved for the RIB. As well as kicking off a whole new cycle of *Tuckman's* model, the team now had the opportunity to experience real issues in leadership and strategic planning. With the amount of planning they had to do, it hardly seems possible that the team had chance to enjoy dinner at the original 'On the Rocks' restaurant where you cook your own food at your table on a block of hot volcanic rock.

The following morning, Mother Nature supplied another business analogy – in this case, fog! This change in circumstances obliged the team to negotiate a change in the start time of the challenge – and then they had to deal with the knock-on effects of other conditions such as tides and finish times. The fog did allow Richard more time to brief the *Belbin Team Profile* – one of many awareness tools that are invaluable for understanding behaviours during these events and in the workplace.



The fog did finally lift and the challenge started a little later than planned. The next circumstantial change that the teams had to deal with was the lack of wind

meaning the yachts had to operate under engine power. This incurred financial penalties, necessitating some tactical revision and planning. During the challenge, communication problems, independent decision making, changing dynamics, timing clashes and many more issues were experienced – all allowing the facilitators to ask the appropriate questions and providing plenty of material for review, both immediately after the event and back in the workplace.

Bringing together people from different cultural backgrounds brings great dividends but can also be a challenging task. In the workplace, some of the integration issues can be masked by the subtleties of business process and activities, taking months or years to come to light. In less than two days, this development




experience created a myriad of problems, allowing the people to work closely together, sharing the same new experiences, frustrations and successes and acting as a catalyst for creating their own new culture.

"All my business objectives were well met, we all came out of it knowing more about each other, saw what we were capable of and most of all thoroughly enjoyed it. We worked in unfamiliar surroundings and applied our skills to complete tasks set and did it rather successfully. I think that although we don't all spend a lot of time together it has made me more aware of the personalities I'm surrounded by and how they can help me to become better at my role. Keep up the good work and thanks!"

Brad Thomas – Territory Manager, 3M Microbiology

"Taking time out to really focus on building your team is vital if you are to function effectively as a business; People-Evolution and Merry Marine considered our needs and provided a uniquely tailored and inspirational event. Thank you and I know it opens a new chapter for 3M Microbiology."

**Stella Hegarty
Sales & Marketing Manager, 3M Microbiology**



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People Evolution work with organisations to design and deliver a complete and relevant learning experience, providing increased motivation and inspirational outcomes. A determined, focused and practical approach ensures clients' needs take priority and the solutions produce real results. www.people-evolution.co.uk



Merry Marine provides leadership and team development services and specialises in using offshore sailing as a relevant, real, challenging and inspirational environment to reinforce concepts in leadership and management. Using the same principles, we also deliver events focussed on developing strong business relationships and in conjunction with associated business psychologists, learning and organisational development specialists, we provide a full range of organisational and people development services. www.merrymarine.com
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