



## An Introduction to Team Academy

### Introduction

A Team Academy is a highly-networked learning community created with the specific aim of developing in young adults the skills, knowledge and personal qualities required to run their own business. The methodology is also attracting interest from organisations keen to develop flexibility and creativity in their people, for which the term ‘intrapreneurship’ is starting to be used.

Having developed over the past 20 years from a small pilot project to a nationally-acclaimed pedagogy, Team Academy as an organisation is in itself an example of how tacit knowledge becomes explicit. The lessons learned from the real business of running degree programmes have been filtered through an eclectic mix of concepts and theories to create a coherent supporting framework. This has resulted in a dynamic movement which as an evolving entity can adapt to the emerging needs of new members.

### History

Team Academy began as a single programme in the marketing department of Jyväskylä Institute of Science and Technology (the Finnish equivalent of a UK Polytechnic) in 1993. Now it is an entire department of the Institute with around 60 students joining each year to study for a Bachelor in Business Administration. The founder and former head coach Johannes Partanen has recently received the Finnish equivalent of a knighthood for his services to education and the approach has been taken up by other universities in Finland for undergraduate and post-graduate programmes.

### Characteristics of a Team Academy

Team Academy is a values-driven organisation and any establishment using the name will be committed to equality and diversity. Underpinning every process and activity are the importance of personal responsibility, commitment to action and to learning, team entrepreneurship, free sharing of knowledge and creating value for posterity. Taking risks, focussing on solutions not on problems, experimenting, making mistakes and learning from them, tolerating chaos as an essential first step in the creative process – these are the guiding principles which ensure that philosophy and practical application are aligned at every level in the organisation.

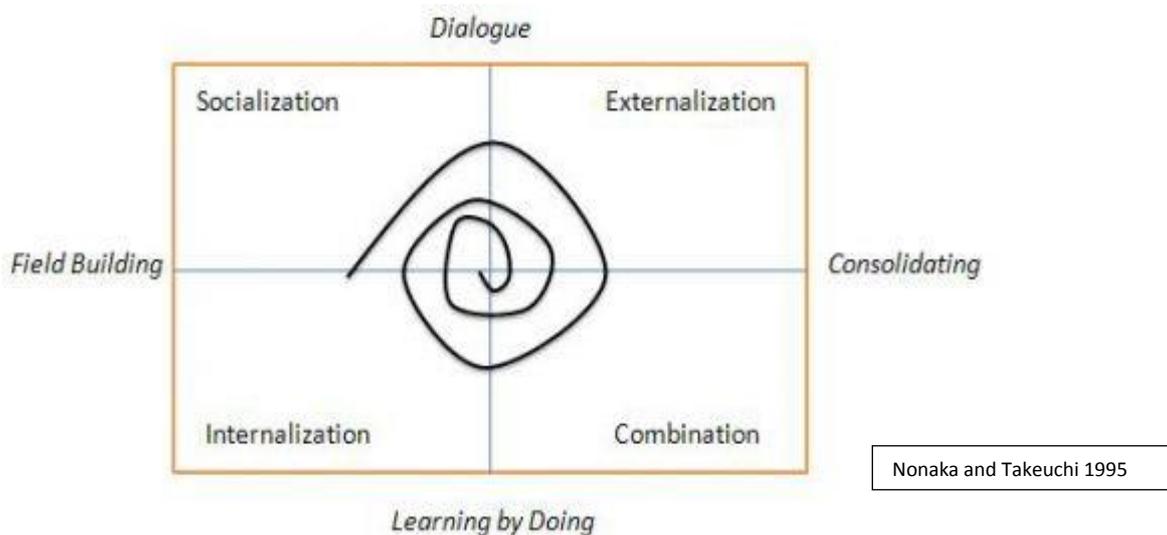
A core principle is that a Team Academy programme leads to a degree or formal study credits. It is not a bolt-on to a traditional programme, but the vehicle through which learning takes place. Students form into teams (typically of around 20 but has been anything from six to 24) for the start of the programme and stay in their teams with the same coach for its duration. Each team business has its own dedicated space and team spaces are co-located to enable networking.

The businesses are owned by the students, and every student has an agreed financial stake (100 euros in Finland) in the start-up capital. These businesses are expected develop their own core values and guiding principles, trade profitably, agree a shared goal for how the profits will be used, pay the appropriate taxes in the country of incorporation and be wound up at the end of the programme. To do this, each company has its own team leader and management team covering the traditional disciplines of finance, sales, marketing and

operations. In addition to their primary team roles, students have a secondary role in helping to run the unit and develop the sustainability of the community.

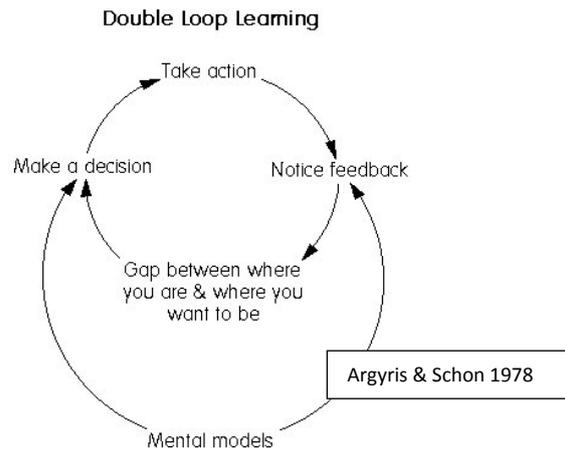
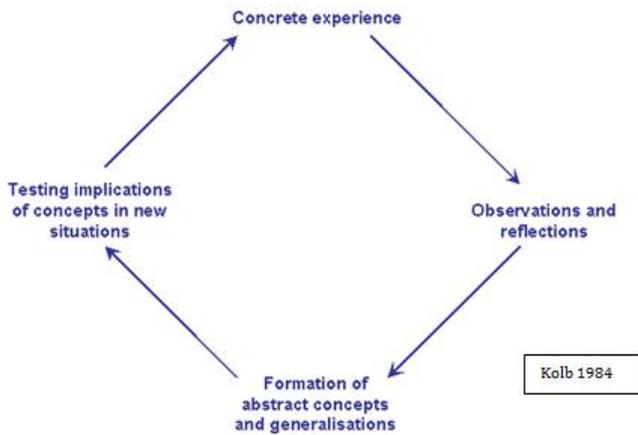
### Learning methodology

Team Academy operates on socio-constructivist principles, emphasising experience as the driver of a series of processes which deliver knowledge – both individual and collective - as the output. Drawing on a wide range of adult learning and organisational development theories, a suite of models has been developed which describe how this knowledge is generated. Core to the theoretical basis of Team Academy is Nonaka and Takeuchi’s theory of knowledge creation.



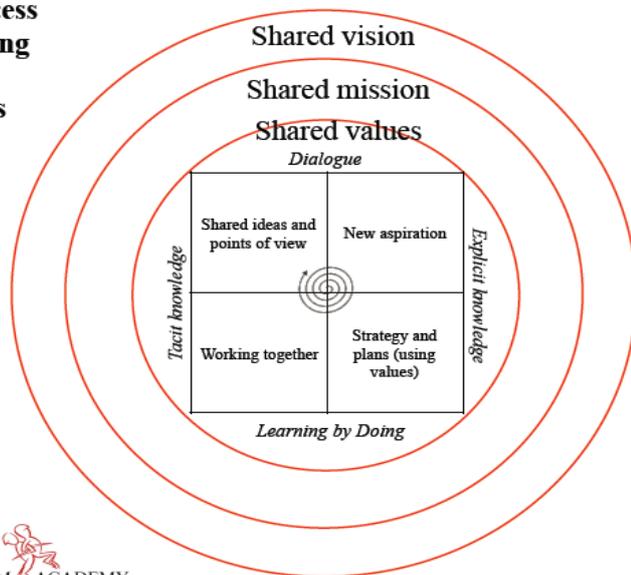
Through face-to-face communication (socialisation) tacit knowledge is codified and made explicit. It can then inform practical actions and be applied in different ways (combination) that in themselves create new ways of understanding and lay the foundations for new tacit knowledge (internalisation).

The concept of reflection on experience as a modifier of the paradigm is another central concept of Team Academy, using Argyris and Schon’s transformation of the Kolb learning cycle into the double loop learning model.



Bringing these concepts together, the team academy models describe a series of processes, each of which contains the core elements of dialogue, practical experience and capturing new learning. Knowledge generation operates at a number of different levels; individual, team, customer and ultimately the wider community. For example, this is the model which illustrates how a company's guiding principles are generated:

**The Process of Creating Guiding Thoughts**



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The other processes in the framework are learning, customer relationships, innovation and creating value for customers. All are underpinned by the coaching process and the finance process, and brought together in Team Academy's Rocket Model (see last page).

## **Tools and Technologies**

The influence of Open Space Technology to harness passion and encourage action is clearly present in the team dialogues, meetings and Birth-Givings. Teams are expected to self-organise and manage the dynamics of getting things done through the efforts of a diverse group of people. They are encouraged to use other teams as a resource and collaborate across year groups.

The tools used have been developed by experimentation and are designed to be used together and over a sustained period. They mix individual events and activities with tools for sustained learning support. The purpose of using the tools is to develop patterns of behaviour and ways of seeing. Some of them also play a dual role in the university system of being used for assessment (essays, Quality 47, 360 feedback, one-to-one meetings with the coach, degree thesis).

*Individual tools:* Learning contract, learning log, 360 feedback, reflective essays, one-to-one meetings with the coach, degree thesis.

*Team learning tools:* Training sessions, Birth-Givings (generating and presenting ideas), Internal Forums, Network Forums, Quality 47 (the Team Academy equivalent of KPIs), Cross-pollination (learning from other teams), Student exchanges, Learning Sets, Pre and Post Project Motorolas.

## **Team culture**

Team Academy has a personality and identity which is reinforced at every level of the organisational culture. Personal responsibility is paramount, with students taking on roles in the classic business disciplines within a flat, non-hierarchical structure. Physical spaces are open plan, utilitarian, business-like. In the circular layout of the team meeting rooms there is no place to hide. English is the language of Team Academy, but used in a bold and inventive way to bring freshness to familiar concepts. For example, project reviews (what went well, what didn't go so well, what could we do differently?) are Motorolas and the process of working through a challenge and presenting the team's ideas is called Birth-Giving. Having its own language gives the community a sense of its own uniqueness and cohesion.

## **The Book of Books**

It would be a mistake to suppose that Team Academy students miss out on the academic rigour of a university education. Considerable emphasis is placed on learning through reading. Students are provided with The Book of Books, a reading list of over 1000 seminal works on adult learning, business and management with each book rated at between one and three credits. They are expected to accumulate 120 credits during their undergraduate career by choosing books which are relevant to the stage of their businesses and writing reflective essays on how the books have helped them address their real world challenges. Says Johannes Partanen: "I think everyone should read books from cover to cover. It is important for learning how to handle information and for development as an entrepreneur. Reading good books helps you perceive large entities instead of fragmented information and teaches you to concentrate."

## **Team coaches**

The role of the coach is to create a shared space where learning can take place and facilitate the learners' developing ability to self-manage and take responsibility for their own processes.

Typical tasks for a team coach are attending team meetings, which are held for half a day twice a week, carrying out evaluation and ratification of individual student achievement, coaching individual students and providing support and guidance in a non-directive manner.

## **Assessment**

Each student is assessed on the number of points they collect against a range of individual and team business criteria. Individual criteria include book points, 360 feedback ratings, performance against targets for customer meetings and contribution to business delivery. Company performance is assessed against the Team 47 framework, which includes financial targets and customer relationships.

Self-assessment is an important part of the model and this is done using the learning contract, which is updated twice a year. Students are encouraged to reflect on their journey, understand where they are in relation to the skills and knowledge they wish to acquire and plan their own strategies for reaching their learning goals.

## **Alignment with university curriculum**

Mapping Team Academy activities against a credit-based university curriculum is done by identifying the competencies required for each 'subject' (eg finance, marketing, leadership) and aligning these with the processes and learning tools. For example, demonstrating competence in event marketing would be done through project work, Motorolas, one-to-one sessions with the coach and reflective essays. The total work time in a full study term is allocated against the different subjects in proportion to the number of credits they attract.

## **The spread of Team Academy**

With the support of influential thought leaders like Peter Senge and Ari de Gues, the methodology has spread outside Finland, and programmes are now running in Spain, France, Hungary and Holland. A driving force in international expansion has been the educational arm of the giant Spanish Mondragon Corporation, the world's largest co-operative with business activities across the globe. Brazil is in the next wave of programme launches and there is interest from China.

International interest in the methodology has created a problem for the core coaching team in Finland. They are neither resourced nor mandated to take the model out to Europe and cannot not respond to the growing number of requests for visits, information and consultancy support.

A group of Team Academy graduates saw the potential of creating a social enterprise to license the trade mark and provide the resources necessary on a commercial basis to take Team Academy into universities and business schools outside Finland as well as developing adult markets at home. They set up Partus Ltd, which owns the Team Academy brand and have been training new coaches since 2007. In 2013 they partnered with Akademia CIC to design a programme for academics from three UK universities interested in developing Team Academy-inspired programmes.

## Akatemia CIC

We are a group of enthusiastic volunteers who want to bring Team Academy to Britain. To do this we have formed a Community Interest Company to raise sponsorship, build political support and find universities interested in developing a Team Academy approach in their programmes.

In September 2013 the business schools of two UK universities – University of West of England, Bristol and University of Northumbria, Newcastle upon Tyne – launched UK undergraduate degrees in with University of Westminster aiming to start their programme in 2015. Northumbria and West of England between them had almost 200 applicants for a maximum of 60 places.

## The Rocket Model

### The process of creating team entrepreneurs

