

Institution: University of Sussex		
Unit of Assessment: 4 – Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience		
Title of case study: Transforming team performance in elite sports, the military, and business by harnessing identity motives		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2001 – 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Vivian Vignoles	Reader in Social Psychology	2001 – present
Rupert Brown	Professor of Social Psychology	2004 – 2019
Matthew Easterbrook	Senior Lecturer in Psychology	2014 – present
Maja Becker	Postdoctoral Researcher	2008 – 2011
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Aug 2014 – Dec 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Well-functioning teams are crucial for success in sporting, military and commercial domains. Sussex-led research into social identity processes and motives was adapted into a new consultancy intervention – TRIBE – which boosts team performance by developing and instilling a strong sense of shared identity among team members. TRIBE-based team-building and training interventions have been used successfully with eight elite sports teams, ten military clients, and 13 commercial organisations, leading to changes in training practices, sporting successes, adoption of the model by senior leaders, and improved satisfaction and performance in corporate teams. The same Sussex research has also underpinned separate consultancy interventions with a further 11 commercial organisations.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Research into social identities examines how people come to see themselves as belonging to groups or social categories, and the consequences of doing so. Previous research has thus established the benefits of social identities for health and well-being, for collective action, and for organisational and group outcomes. For example, social identification among employees has been shown to predict organisational commitment, stronger work motivation, higher performance, more “organizational citizenship” behaviours, lower attrition, and better customer service. Boosting social identification is thus a valuable goal for organisational interventions.</p> <p>To foster social identification and hence obtain these benefits, it is crucial to understand the motives underlying people’s identity processes. Sussex social psychologists have originated and led the way in research into <i>identity motives</i>, with contributions from international colleagues for cross-cultural comparisons. Vignoles lead-authored an influential 2006 paper (R1) which combined ideas from social, personality, and developmental psychology to investigate the roles of six identity motives in identity formation: Participants in four studies structured their identities so as to feel they were positively valued (<i>self-esteem</i>), persistently the same over time (<i>continuity</i>), distinct from others (<i>distinctiveness</i>), competent and capable (<i>efficacy</i>), included and accepted by others (<i>belonging</i>), and that their lives mattered for something (<i>meaning</i>). Hence, Vignoles developed <i>Motivated Identity Construction Theory</i> (MICT; R2) to illuminate which forms of identity people will find most appealing, what kinds of events may threaten people’s sense of identity, and which actions they might take to bolster their identities. MICT highlights the importance of five identity motives (continuity, meaning, distinctiveness, belonging, efficacy) over and above the already well-researched self-esteem motive (R2). Sussex-led studies have demonstrated the relevance of these motives to shaping people’s sense of personal identity (R1), their desired and feared future identities (R3), and their identification with groups and social categories (R1, R4). Predictions of the theory received cross-cultural support in a large ESRC-funded project among over 50 cultural groups spanning all inhabited continents, led by Vignoles and Brown with Becker (e.g. R5).</p> <p>In 2014, Brown was asked by the private consultancy company <i>Centre for Team Excellence</i> (CfTE) to explore the utility of applying MICT to enhance team performance. They expected that harnessing the six identity motives could be useful in enhancing team identification and hence team performance. From 2014, Will Thomas (PhD student of Brown and Vignoles) was jointly</p>		

funded by the ESRC and CfTE to examine this. With Brown, Vignoles, Easterbrook, Holt (CfTE), and two international colleagues, Thomas conducted a longitudinal study to examine the role of the six identity motives in predicting changes in group identification among members of amateur teams from 14 different sports. Findings published in 2017 showed how each motive contributed in specific ways to predicting how strongly an individual identified with the team over time (R4). The researchers also monitored the success of each team over a 9-month period. They found a positive relationship between team identification and performance, such that teams in the strongest identifying quintile outperformed those in the weakest identifying quintile by 53%. Crucially, time-sensitive analyses confirmed that higher team identification preceded positive performance, rather than vice versa, which supported their theoretical expectation that team identification has a causal impact on performance (R6).

3. References to the research

- R1. Vignoles, V.L. Gollidge, J., Regalia, C., Manzi, C., Scabini E. (2006) Beyond self-esteem: influence of multiple motives on identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 308-333. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.2.308>
- R2. Vignoles, V.L. (2011) Identity Motives. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V.L. Vignoles (Eds), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (pp. 403-432). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_18
- R3. Vignoles, V. L., Manzi, C., Regalia, C., Jemmolo, S., & Scabini, E. (2008). Identity motives underlying desired and feared possible future selves. *Journal of Personality*, 76, 1165-1200. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2008.00518.x>
- R4. Thomas, W.E., Brown, R., Easterbrook, M.J., Vignoles, V. L. Manzi, C., ... Holt, J.J. (2017). Social identification in sports teams: The role of personal, social, and collective identity motives. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 43, 508-523. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167216689051>
- R5. Becker, M., Vignoles, V. L., Owe, E., Brown, R., Smith, P. B., Easterbrook, M., ... & Yamakoğlu, N. (2012). Culture and the distinctiveness motive: Constructing identity in individualistic and collectivistic contexts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(4), 833-855. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026853>
- R6. Thomas, W.E., Brown, R., Easterbrook, M.J., & Vignoles, V.L., Manzi, ... Holt, J.J. (2019). Team level identification predicts perceived and actual team performance: longitudinal multilevel analyses with sports teams. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 58, 473-492. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12277>

R4, R6 funded by ESRC (CASE, £28,000, 09/2013-08/2016, ES/J500173/1); R5 funded by ESRC ('Motivated identity construction in cultural context', PI: Vignoles, £257,652, 08/2008-08/2011, RES-062-23-1300). Total citations for R1, R3-R6 = 498; average field-weighted citation index for R1, R3-R6 = 3.06. Citations for R2 = 97; field citation ratio = 16.07 (Scopus).

4. Details of the impact

Translating MICT into a consultancy model: TRIBE

From 2014, Jeremy Holt, Managing Director of CfTE, worked with Thomas to transpose the research insights of MICT into a suite of consultancy interventions to enhance team identity, motivation, and performance—which they called the **TRIBE** model (C1, C2). They translated MICT's five identity motives beyond self-esteem into non-academic language as **T**raditions (*continuity*), **R**elevance (*meaning*), **I**ntity (*distinctiveness*), **B**elonging (*belonging*) and **E**ffectiveness (*efficacy*), making the acronym: TRIBE (Fig. 1, C1). The TRIBE consultancy model focuses on harnessing these five identity motives to boost team identification and hence desired outcomes, comprising four stages: (1) an online assessment tool to evaluate initial satisfaction of identity motives (TeamMARK: adapted by Holt, Thomas, Brown and Vignoles from measures developed at Sussex for R4), (2) workshops designed to build identity motive satisfaction and thus team identification, (3) a one-month follow-up session, and (4) monitoring subsequent progress (C1, C2). Two white papers produced by CfTE outline the main principles of team-building in TRIBE, explaining in detail that MICT and the Sussex research provide the basis of the programme (C1).



Traditions – Our Golden thread. How past events have shaped the team, connecting the past to the present and future.

Relevance – Our purpose. Why what the team does matters, is meaningful and relevant.

Identity – Our edge. The distinctive edge, the “magic” that gives the team an “unfair” advantage?

Belonging – Our glue. What holds the team together, so members feel included and accepted.

Effectiveness – The capabilities the team needs to succeed.

Fig. 1. The TRIBE model (from C1).

The TRIBE model is now at the centre of CfTE’s consultancy work (examples below) to build team identification and hence performance for clients, including elite sports teams, armed forces, commercial and educational organisations (C2). Between 01/08/2013 and 31/12/2020, 33 clients benefited from the TRIBE model, including eight elite sports teams, 13 corporations, 10 areas of the British military and security services, and three university clients. Revenue from interventions with these clients exceeded [text removed for publication] (C2).

Enhancing team identity and performance in elite sports teams

Since 2014, CfTE has worked with the Olympic Gold Medal winning GB [text removed for publication] team, [text removed for publication] County Cricket Club, the [text removed for publication] Rugby Team, the [text removed for publication], and the GB Speedway Team, using the TRIBE model to develop stronger team identities, often followed by performance gains (C2).

After an unsuccessful season in 2015, [text removed for publication] County Cricket Club worked with CfTE to develop a compelling team identity, reduce dressing room conflict, and increase collaboration and commitment. Performance subsequently improved, culminating in winning the [text removed for publication], one of three domestic trophies (C2). Similarly, following input in 2016 from CfTE on the team’s identity, [text removed for publication] team won the [text removed for publication] for the first time in 6 years (C2). From May 2015 to February 2016, CfTE worked with the GB [text removed for publication] team, coaches and sports psychologist to strengthen team identity and build resilience (C2). Statements by team members evidence the role of team identity motives in their subsequent Rio 2016 Olympic [text removed for publication] Medal victory, which was the first time the team had achieved [text removed for publication]. Team member [text removed for publication] explained at the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Ceremony: “*We worked really really hard as a squad to create our **identity***” (C1, p. 9 of pdf). In a video published days after the victory, team members described their sense of shared identity in terms that reflected the MICT/TRIBE motives:

- “*We are 31 women who are **driven**, very **dedicated**, who come together with a very common **goal**.*” (group meaning / relevance)
- “*This team is very **special**.*” (group distinctiveness / identity)
- “*As long as we **stick together** as a group then that’s what’s key.*” (group belonging)
- “*It’s competitive but you’re fighting to make the team **the best it can be**.*” (group efficacy / effectiveness) (C3).

Direct corroboration of the causal role of TRIBE, and hence the Sussex research, in improving sports team identity and performance comes from two elite teams: the GB Speedway Team and the [text removed for publication] Team, each of which have used the TRIBE since 2018. The Managing Director of the GB Speedway Team reports that: “*We have used the TRIBE model to develop a new distinctive team identity focused on “Breaking the Mould”, which has contributed to significant changes in our culture, the way we approach performance and operate as a team.*” His testimonial details how they have worked with each of the five identity motives to effect positive changes in the teams’ sense of identity, training processes, and engagement with stakeholders (C4).

[text removed for publication] sports psychologist cites the Sussex research in his account of the first seven months of [text removed for publication] use of the TRIBE model, explaining how the

model was embraced first by team coaches and then by the players, and describing initial interventions and outcomes (C5). The team later developed their TRIBE “identity canvas” through several iterations (Fig. 2, C5), which played a prominent role in induction and training of players. [text removed for publication]

According to the team’s psychologist, recent successes are attributable to TRIBE and the Sussex research into identity motives:

“team members have embraced TRIBE and have spent many hours discussing and agreeing a clear compelling statement of “who we are” based on the Sussex University research on identity motives. [This] has had a profound impact on team strategy, training and performance in tournaments. In 2019 we won our first ever world ranking tournament [text removed for publication], and we believe we are on track for a medal in [text removed for publication] ... The TRIBE programme and the use of the identity motives model have enabled us to implement meaningful changes to our programme which reinforce our identity and drive key behaviours which in turn have driven improved performance.” (C5).

Leadership training and organisational interventions for military clients

From 2016 to 2019, CfTE worked with senior and middle leadership teams in MOD [text removed for publication] (~1200 employees, [text removed for publication] for Royal Navy and Fleet Auxiliary), using TRIBE to develop strong team identities, improve staff satisfaction, and reduce turnover (C2). In early 2017, CfTE used the TRIBE model to review the [text removed for publication] identity, after negative media coverage of violent incidents; confidential recommendations to “*reboot and strengthen* [text removed for publication] *identity*” were accepted by [text removed for publication] and “*implemented subject to budget constraints*” (C2).

CfTE has developed TRIBE-based leadership training for the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom (C2, C6). As part of this, TRIBE-based training has included lectures delivered annually (for three years) to a total of 900+ officers (70% from British armed forces, 30% from NATO/international allies), and a training course attended annually by 15-20 security service officers (C2).

TRIBE was used in the [text removed for publication], in a module for senior British military officers and civil servants (e.g. Colonel, Brigadier: ~400 attendees to date) to help build more efficient teams across services and with international allies (C2). Comments from module participants evidence change in senior officers’ thinking following attendance of the course, for example: “*TRIBE tool is very useful and I intend to use it straight away*”; “*I will definitely be trying this with my team. It genuinely made me think differently about collaboration and embracing diversity*” (C6).

Improving multiple outcomes for commercial organisations

CfTE has used the TRIBE model with 13 corporations, including major and emerging tech ([text removed for publication]), financial (e.g. [text removed for publication], Rabobank), and pharmaceutical ([text removed for publication]) companies, to improve employees’ commitment, performance, resilience and well-being (C2). Separately, MICT has been used directly in consultancy work with 11 commercial organisations in Italy and the UK, including the Italian state railways (FS), an international fashion company (YNAP), an international TV channel (Discovery), a cooperative bank (Banca Etica), a government agency (Invitalia), an engineering and construction company (Gavio), and a major national services provider (Coopservice), as well as an association of over 200 Italian and multinational companies that seeks to promote diversity and inclusion in business (Valore D: 34 companies directly involved) (C7). Prof. Claudia Manzi, who collaborated with Vignoles in much of the original research into MICT (R1, R3-R6), delivered these consultancies which included measuring the satisfaction of identity motives among >29,000 employees and members of these organisations and offering advice on how to foster motive satisfaction, organisational identification, and desired outcomes (C7).

For [text removed for publication], CfTE ran “train-the-trainer” seminars in Europe, North America, the Middle East and East Asia, teaching an adaptation of the TRIBE model to 150 trainers responsible for training 6000+ managers of a workforce of 20,000+ employees (C2).

Direct evidence that these interventions improved multiple outcomes comes from a testimonial from the Global Head F&A Sector Banking for Rabobank. He describes the use of TRIBE to foster team identity among their Acquisition Finance team (65 professionals and dedicated credit staff), in words reflecting the MICT/TRIBE motives:

“The TRIBE methodology was very helpful in starting to rebuild a sense of team and purpose. Working on a history and timeline of the team brought an agreed sense of what the team had achieved and where we had come from and allowed us to identify what we were good at and what needed to improve. ... [It gave us] an agreed history and set of values - sense of team, who we were was clear , ... Our goals and values were not bland corporate bullshit but meaningful to the team” (C8).

Developing a stronger sense of team identity helped the team to maximise benefits from a new organisational strategy. These benefits included:

“a far more effective MT [Management Team], less conflict, better meetings due to improved skill and trust, clear rules of engagement and clarity and agreement on what we were trying to do... Delivering two deals out of the new strategy was another moment where everyone started to believe a little more” (C8).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1. [The Science](#). Pages from website of Centre for Team Excellence, Jeremy Holt; CfTE White Paper *The new science of great sports teams: Understanding the psychological foundations for sustained high performance in sports teams.*; CfTE White Paper *The new science of great teams: New research insights into how to lead your team to greatness.*
- C2. Testimonial & email from Jeremy Holt, CEO of CfTE, 24 Jan 2020, 4 Jan 2021.
- C3. [text removed for publication]
- C4. Testimonial from Rob Painter, Managing Director, GB Speedway Team, Jan 2021.
- C5. [text removed for publication]
- C6. Module feedback from [text removed for publication], Nov 2015.
- C7. Testimonial from Prof. Claudia Manzi, Catholic University of Milan, Jan 2021, and excerpts (including translations) from two consultancy reports. [Italian]
- C8. Testimonial from Simon Parker, Rabobank, September 2017.