



Those war cries sure looked scary!



BOOT CAMP SA

'Intelligence Team Building Mission'

HPRU's last team building session, when the whole unit got together, was held 4 years ago. Add to this the fact that of the 205 HPRU staff, 80 were new – and it is clear that a team building session was well due. Boot Camp SA in Giba Gorge is where 198 HPRU 'recruits' reported on 5 March 2010. Here is a summary of what came out of this mission, along with photos taken along the way.

It was quite a sight as hundreds of HPRU staff arrived at registration, and slowly started transforming from a brightly arrayed delicatessen of diversity into a more uniform mass of people, all attired in Boot Camp SA T-shirts emblazoned with "Pain is weakness leaving the body!" on the back. HPRU is the largest group that Boot Camp

has hosted for a day, although they have had groups of up to 300 over a longer period.

Things kicked off with drilling by the various 'Sergeants', including Razor, Force – and the smallest but scariest of them all, Sergeant Horror. It was soon learnt that failure to respond quickly by one recruit meant the whole group had to suffer!

Once warmed up, everyone was divided into a total of 18 teams, each with their own name, war paint and war cry. There were two groups called 'Tigers', and the other names were:

- | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Eagles</i> | <i>Ama Warriors</i> | <i>Shaka</i> |
| <i>Hawks</i> | <i>Leopards</i> | <i>Dynamite</i> |
| <i>Rockers</i> | <i>Cheetahs</i> | <i>Tigers</i> |
| <i>Mshini Wami</i> | <i>Tigers</i> | <i>Snipers</i> |
| <i>Toxic Terrors</i> | <i>Tau</i> | <i>Terminator</i> |
| <i>Bush Whackers</i> | <i>TDF (To defeat)</i> | <i>The Untouchables</i> |

What is **HPRU team talk** all about?

The HPRU is, with good reason, the largest single unit of all the MRC's research units. There are over 200 staff now, and HPRU team talk is here to feature HPRU staff news, achievements, and personal milestones.

Want to tell your fellow staff mates about something or spread some news that will be of interest or use? Let us know!

Send news, comments or letters to Leverne at leverne.getting@mrc.ac.za





On the obstacles, great teamwork really came into play. . .

Six teams each made up the larger groups A, B and C, which soon got down to business. Although teams completed tasks in different orders, all completed the following: *Mud Crawl*; *Commando Obstacles*; *Radio Towers*; *Landmine Disarming*; *Path Clearance*; *Team Building workshop*.

Each of these, although fun, required certain life skills in order to be able to complete them.

Some examples:

Mud Crawl

Not all the recruits liked getting dirty, so for many this was a new experience. With support and motivation from their team, all recruits leopard-crawled through a very wet mud pit! The mission assisted in:

- Forgetting normal 'society' opinions



- Offering and accepting support
- Realising that no matter what one looks like, it is the inside that counts.
- Understanding that we do not always look forward to or want to do some tasks, but should not procrastinate, and with the support of others can easily accomplish what is required.

Commando Obstacles

The most physical of all, this required recruits to navigate through a number of obstacles, and assisted in:

- Understanding the importance of teamwork
- Offering and accepting both verbal and physical support
- Overcoming fears
- Understanding the importance of communication as well as of listening
- Belief in self and own abilities.

Radio Towers

This required the recruits not only to strategise but to work effectively to achieve a common goal - the strongest and highest towers (made from marshmallows and spaghetti!) - using communication, teamwork, listening, planning and strategising, and setting a goal.

It was noticed during this that despite what the teams indicated, communication was not optimum. To further explore this, they were asked to explain the difference between effective communication and communication, and asked to define 'communication'.

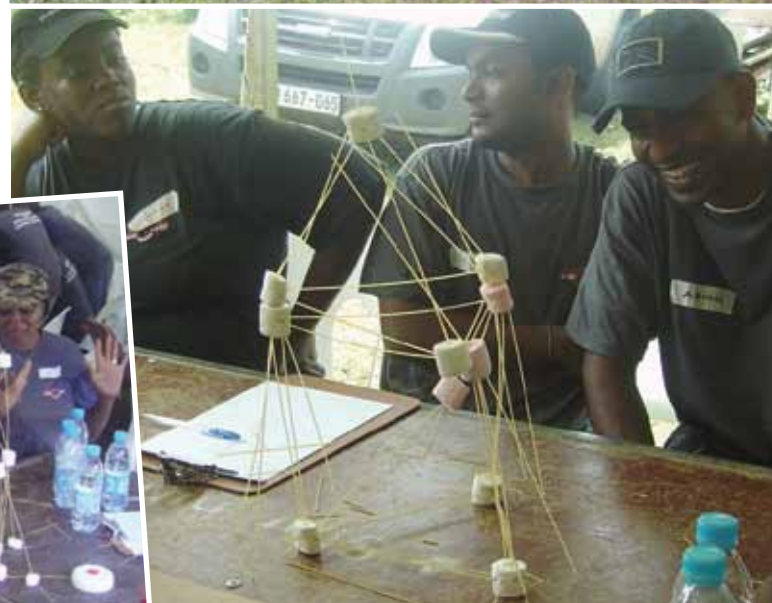
Answers ranged from talking to others, body language, and passing on information, but no group identified that the most important part of communication is *understanding*.

All participated in a Teamwork Breakaway Session facilitated by Sgt Driller. This was divided into two parts and conducted/presented differently to each group based on feedback from their Sarges.

It included recruits identifying characteristics within their own team and areas requiring development, which they presented to the group. Strengths identified included teamwork, communication, respect, enthusiasm, good planning, focus, trust, support, motivation



The infamous mud crawl (with Sgt Horror far left) – thank goodness for the river, which was a popular place to clean off.



The strongest tower – nobody bump the table! Right: And the tallest – by one strand of spaghetti!

and being goal-orientated. Areas requiring development that were identified included time management, lack of skill or of confidence, poor planning, lack of delegation or consultation, strategising,

listening, and leadership skills.

Each team was allocated a word from the areas requiring development, and was required to explain if effective, what would be achieved; barriers to being effective; and overcoming barriers. Results were presented to the whole group.



THE TEAM!

During teamwork debriefing, the following points were raised:

- Support is not just physical, but verbal too;
- You cannot just talk, you also have to listen;
- By just trying you can succeed; and
- It is easier to achieve goals when you have the support of your team.

The day ended with each team identifying which characteristic of team building helped them the most through the day, and how they can take what they have learnt back into the workplace. The outcomes for most, as reported by Boot Camp SA, were as follows:

Perseverance

Recruits were not allowed the option of giving up. With the help of their team they persevered through tasks which either they did not want to do or were afraid to do. The outcome is that they felt better about themselves and achieved the respect of the team for not letting the team down. They learnt that by just persevering through tasks, they can accomplish a lot.

Communication

This comes in many forms, categorised as verbal or non-verbal. No one method is the best way to communicate - one needs to identify the need for communication and

from there look at the best means possible to ensure understanding. In the workplace one must not be afraid to communicate, even if one is scared. By communicating, awareness is raised and any possible problems can be addressed before things get explosive.

Encouragement and Trust

It is important to encourage others, since this is the first step in overcoming fear. Also, working together and trusting each other helps you believe in each other, thereby easily offering encouragement. The two (encouragement and trust) therefore go hand in hand.

Support

Not everything in life can be completed on your own - you will need support. In order to get support you have to have trust in yourself and others. One must not be afraid to ask for support, whether it be mental, physical or emotional. In the workplace team members must offer support to others in order to be more effective.

As can be seen, the day resulted in some valuable lessons to bring back to the HPRU - and to one's daily life.



Some of the HPRU staff who attended M2010.

Back (fltr): Ian Naicker, Nicola Coumi (obscurred) Charlene Harichund, Jothi Moodley, Nonhlakanipho Makeka, Anitha Gupta, Arendevi Pather and Zakir Gaffoor; front: Salo Pillay, Yuki Sookrajh, Dale Peters, Claire Whitaker, Anika Naidoo and Lwazi Mdlwane.

Absent: Jessica Phillip, Kubashni Woeber, Kumeshini Haripersad, Mduduzi Ngubane, Nalini Naidu, Neetha Morar, Philisiwe Buthelezi, Photini Kiepiela, Rashika Maharaj, Sarita Naidoo, Sharika Gappoo, Shay Ganesh, Vijay Guddera, Vimla Naicker and Zola Msiska

HPRU has most abstracts submitted to and accepted by M2010

At the recent MTN meeting in Washington DC, the MRC CTU (HPRU) received First Place Award for their scientific contributions to M2010, with most abstracts submitted and accepted. M2010 – the 2010 Microbicides Conference – Microbicides: Building bridges in HIV Prevention, was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on 22-25 May.

Eighteen posters were presented by HPRU staff, and five oral presentations made. Five staff who did not present received scholarships to attend – with a total of 26 scholarships awarded to HPRU staff. Only five of the abstracts that were submitted were not accepted.

Well done to all those of you who attended the M2010 conference and made HPRU proud of our achievements!

Gita

Professor Gita Ramjee

Director, HPRU

CONGRATULATIONS!



Brodie Daniels has been awarded a PhD from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth for her thesis in Biochemistry titled 'Molecular and cellular analysis of the interaction between soluble CD23 and CD11 integrins'. In her study she genetically engineered soluble CD23

(an antibody receptor) and beta-2 integrins (cell adhesion molecules) and proved their association, in addition to studying the activation of cancerous white blood cells under the influence of genetically engineered CD23. The study proved that CD23 regulates the oxidative burst used by white blood cells to communicate with each other and to kill pathogens injected by these cells, and that it alters the activation state of these cells through its association with beta-2 integrins.

Brodie is working as a Project Leader for VOICE. She says she is single and child-free – “and left the rest of my family behind to move to Durban for this job!” Her interests outside work are outdoor adventures, reading, ballroom dancing, classic cars and motorcycles.



Charlene Harichund has just received her Masters in the field of Microbial Biotechnology from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Westville Campus). Her thesis was titled 'Characterization and industrial application of heavy metal removing bacterial bio-

flocculants'. Microbial flocculants (Bioflocculants) provide an environmentally friendly alternative, since they are biodegradable and non-toxic. This study demonstrated the potentials of using bioflocculants as an alternative remediation tool for industrial effluent treatments, especially for heavy metal removal at low heavy metal concentrations.

Charlene is currently a Research Assistant to the MTN003/MTN015/MTN016 Principal Investigators. She resides with her parents and two younger brothers, and says: “My parents have always been there to guide me and provide financial support, and have given me the opportunity to further my studies, which I am eternally grateful for. I have a boyfriend of 9 years, who has been there for me throughout my studies and has motivated, encouraged and supported me every step of the way.”

Outside of her work at HPRU her interests include shopping for shoes, reading and watching comedy movies.

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Also welcome are interesting photos, comments and suggestions.