



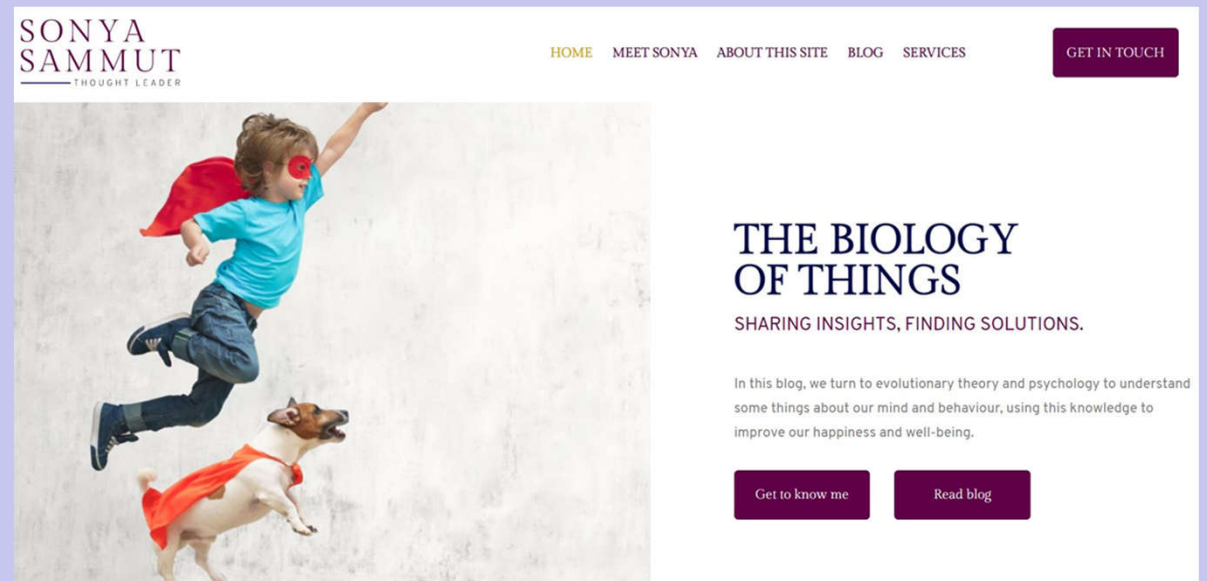
The Behaviour of People at Work

UNDERSTANDING THE HUMAN
NATURE OF PEOPLE AT WORK

SONYA SAMMUT B.SC., M.SC., M.ENT.

About myself

- I'm a mum.
- A scientist with academic background in biology and chemistry, agriculture and food sciences, and entrepreneurship.
- Passionate about teaching, training, mentoring, and writing.
- Policy advisor in food and agriculture; Malta's Ambassador for Organic and Sustainable Food.
- Lecturer at the University of Malta's Centre for Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Institute of Earth Systems.
- Run a blog 'The Biology of Things' at www.sonyasammut.com



About you


- What brings you here on a Monday evening?
- How is any of this related to your competences; your interests and curiosities; your motivations; and your feelings?
- What do you expect to take from this course?



About this course

"...gives participants knowledge, skills and abilities that are needed to support their work in a number of occupational and professional areas. ...especially relevant and highly valid for workers in human resources, people management, training, mentoring and coaching, communications and public relations, project management, business advisory and business engineering, social policy development, marketing and consumer behaviour, and even more technical and technological fields such as research and innovation and artificial intelligence.

It mainly focuses on what may be learned about human nature and the biological basis for behaviour, and how it can be used to strengthen communication skills, such as presentation, writing, public relations, marketing, training, etc."





Course

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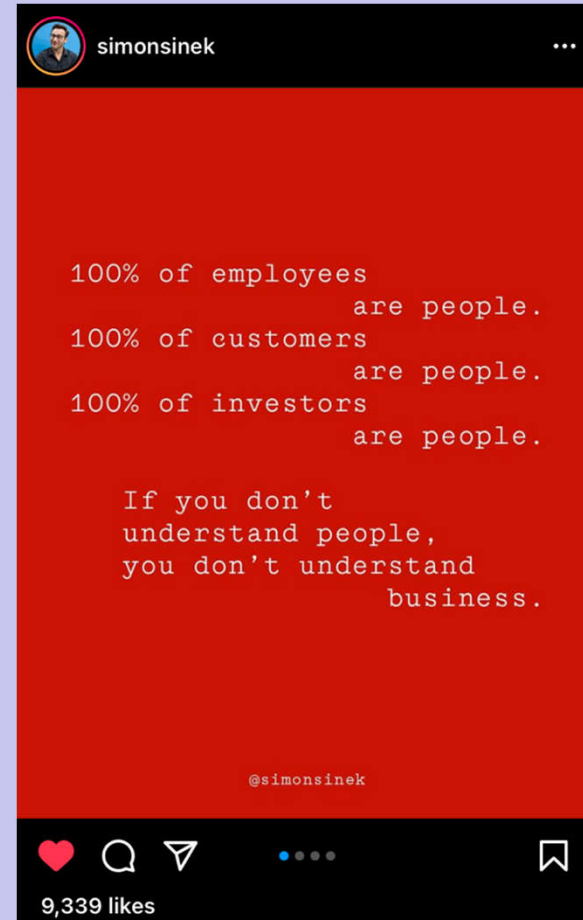
It's all about people

We might think of **enterprise as a process** – all of those things that are necessary to establish and run a successful business.

But we need to keep in mind that, as a process, the enterprise is built around a series of **human activities** that are prescribed by the business organisation.

And as **Simon Sinek**, author and inspirational speaker, says, companies are made up of people.

If we want successful enterprises and an attractive workplace, we need to understand human nature, and the **biological basis of human behaviour**.



And why should you learn about people?



Sonya Sammut

Talented leader | Change agent | Solutions scientist

3w • 🌐

Are you curious about human nature and the behaviour of people at work? Are you interested to learn about the motivations and mechanisms that drive your colleagues in different directions, from ambition to apathy? Do you think that the relationships between co-workers are predominantly selfish or altruistic? And what about sex differences? Is that a myth that threatens to undo our efforts to achieve gender equality? Is it true that men tend to be more aggressive and competitive than women and that this, in turn, is what disrupts fairness in promotion and progression? Do the people you work and interact with on a daily basis have a 'fixed' personality, and do they wear their personality traits like a suit? What about emotions? Are we to trust our gut and let our feelings and our instincts guide professional judgement and decisions? Is that even ethical?

If you would like to learn about the biological basis of people's behaviour and join me [Sonya Sammut](#) at @21 Academy [Angelito Sciberras](#) [Roselyn Borg Knight](#) as I lead the conversation around some of these topics and more, register for the newly accredited Award in The Biology of People at the Workplace, a bespoke training course that translates the science of evolutionary psychology into useful insights for the benefit of people and organisations.

I promise these 10 weeks will be a journey of education, awareness, and a touch of entertainment that guarantees to change your vision and perspective.

[#trainingcourses](#) [#behavioralscience](#) [#evolutionarybiology](#) [#accredited](#)
[#psychology](#) [#workplace](#) [#entreprise](#) [#organisationalbehaviour](#) [#learning](#)
[#scienceeducation](#)

The knowledge we will share

“... you will gain knowledge on:

- **enterprise, entrepreneurship, and the workplace;**
- **evolutionary** theory and psychology;
- the Central Six and the Big Five **personality** traits;
- the biological basis of **sex differences;**
- the biological basis of **emotions;**
- the biological basis of **parenting** and parental care;
- the biological basis of **status** and **esteem, dominance, and leadership;**
- the biological basis of **co-operation, altruism, and friendship;**
- the business model and the **modern organic** enterprise and workplace.”



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With overall skills objectives:

“... learning outcomes in:

- Organisational capacity building;
- Recruitment and selection;
- Job descriptions and personnel specifications;
- Performance agreements and appraisals;
- Project management;
- Communication;
- Policy development;
- Conflict management and resolution;
- Negotiations;
- Occupational well-being.”



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Course content



Module 1. About people and about the workplace: an introduction



Module 2. A trip to the biology and psychology departments: evolutionary theory



Module 3. A focus on the individual: the Central Six and the Big Five personality traits



Module 4. A focus on the individual: sex differences



Module 5. Emotions at work, and their function as coordinating mechanisms



Course content (part 2)



Module 6. Life outside work: parental care and relationship with kin



Module 7. The individual in the team: esteem dynamics



Module 8. Solutions for the team: status, rank and dominance



Module 9. Solutions for the team: cooperation, alliances, and friendships



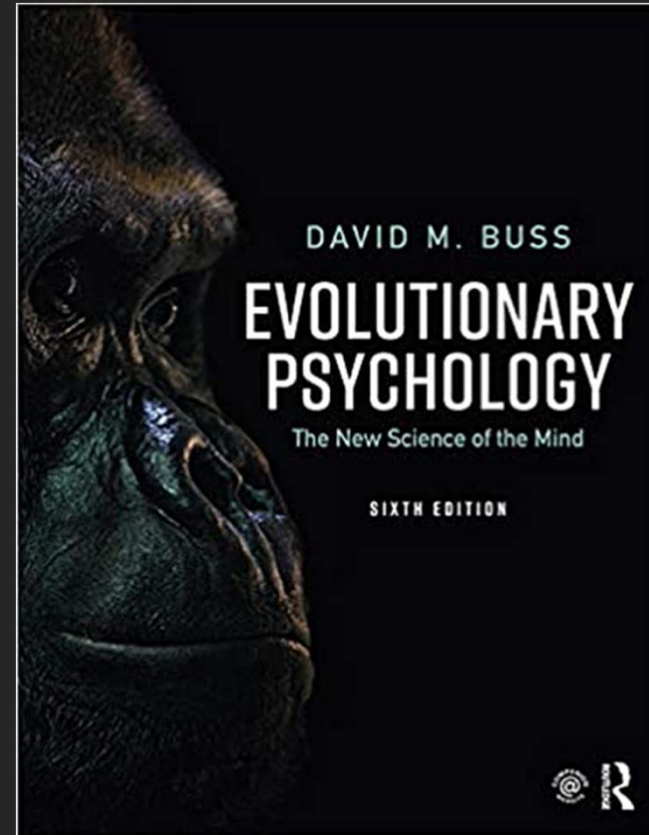
Module 10. The modern organic workplace: built around human nature



Why this approach

If you look at the contents of this book, you will see that it is 'arranged' around problems:

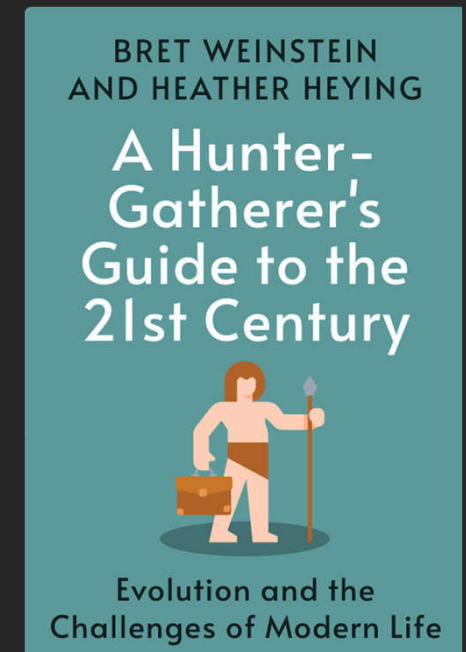
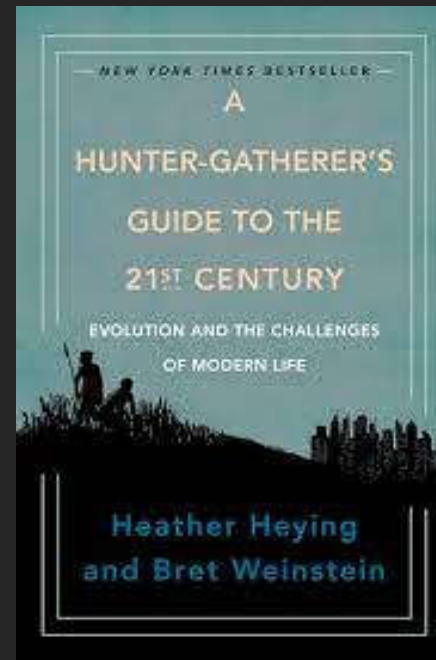
- Problems of survival, and how to combat the hostile forces of nature;
- Challenges of sex and mating, including sexual strategies;
- Challenges of parenting and kinship;
- Problems of group living, including cooperative alliances, aggression and warfare, conflict between the sexes, status, prestige, and social dominance.



Another, more modern, approach

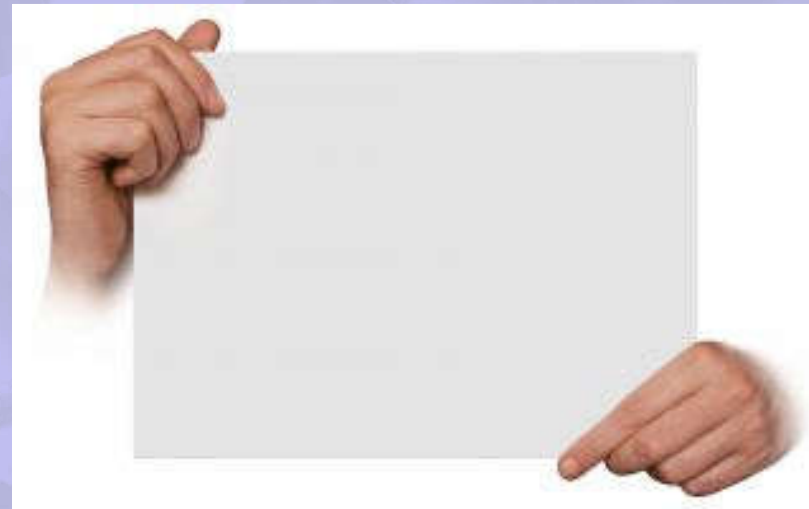
This one, published in 2021, takes an even more 'modern' approach, applying the evolutionary perspective on topics such as:

- Medicine
- Food
- Sleep
- Sex and gender
- Parenthood and relationship
- Childhood
- School
- Becoming adults
- Culture and consciousness



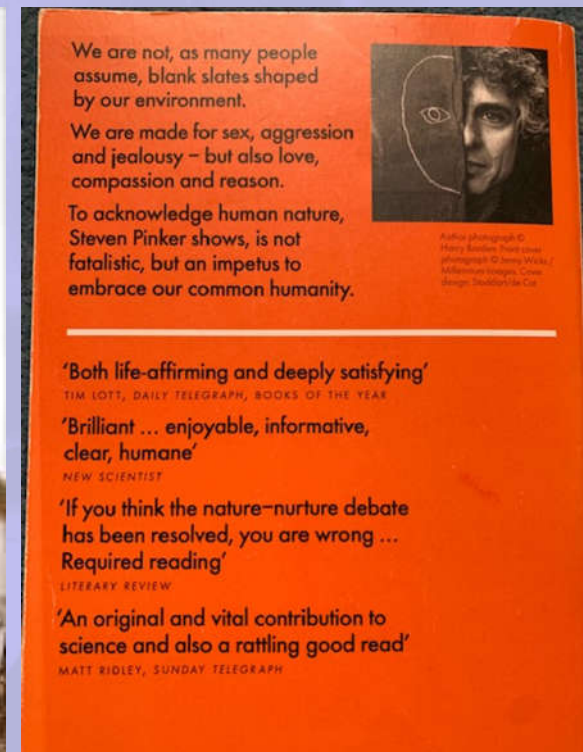
Blank slates

- The prominent anthropologist Ashley Montagu, summing up a common understanding in twentieth-century social science, wrote in 1973 that *“With the exception of the instinctoid reactions in infants to sudden withdrawals of support and to sudden loud noises, the human being is entirely instinctless . . . **Man is man because he has no instincts, because everything he is and has become he has learned . . . from his culture, from the man-made part of the environment, from other human beings.**”*
- This is the assumption that human beings are “blank slates”: instinct-free animals capable of learning anything.



A human nature

- From this perspective, biologists can contribute precisely nothing to the understanding of the human mind or behaviour.
- For many decades, this was the view held by most academics. Until sociobiology and evolutionary psychology came along.
- According to evolutionary psychologists, many of our tendencies – hunger, disgust, fear, pain, parental love, etc. – are not mere inventions of culture. They are part and parcel of human nature.
- No doubt, learning and culture influence them to a greater or lesser extent, but some things come more naturally to us than others. This is because there's such a thing as human nature.




What is this science?


- It's the **science of human nature**. The basic premise is that if you want to understand human behaviour, whether this is sexuality, mating, survival, conflicts, relationships, cognition, etc., you need to ask where we came from, what type of challenges did our ancestors face in the past. Why do we fear snakes and heights? It's because if we didn't, we would have died. Why do we look for certain qualities in mates, like kindness? It's because if we didn't, we'd have bad relationships and bad kids.
- It's a way of **looking at the past to inform the present**.





"I can't imagine anything more fun than studying human nature for a living."


This is what they said...

 *"It all makes so much sense! It is like something is in front of you the whole time but behind a curtain and evolutionary psychology opens that curtain to reveal what was hidden from you in plain sight!"*

 *"...in all cases evolutionary reasoning offers a complete explanation that helps us understand the reason for our actions."*

 *"...evolutionary psychology is giving me a more holistic understanding and more appreciative outlook on life in general and on the human species"*

 *"...it is liberating...I now can understand men much better, my husband, my colleagues at work, and I also know how to get what I want"*

 *"evolutionary psychology is not a solution per se, but it gives you a whole new understanding, it's really like wearing a new pair of glasses"*





Not just learning


- This is not just another chapter in your journey of learning, but an experience that **transforms** you.
- The idea is that, similar to how we apply the fundamentals of business science to our business plans and organisational strategies, we can apply evolutionary psychology to understand people and behaviour, starting with ourselves, and those around us.
- The knowledge-based insights lead us to find solutions to some of our problems, and this is **empowering**.
- The same knowledge can be applied to gain **skills** in the desired areas.




Let's start with some of the problems we have at work.

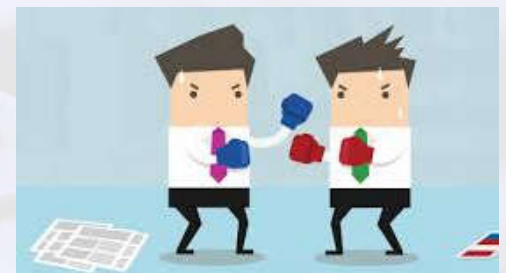
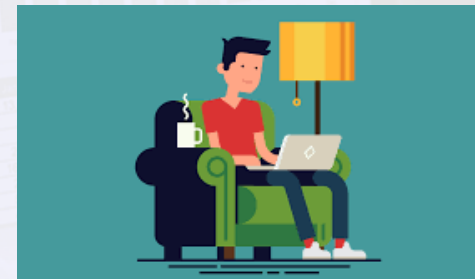
 Business vision not clear. Poor communication. Building not comfortable. Low motivation. Unhealthy corporate culture.

 Fear of failure. Risks. Low performance. Work-related stress. Anxiety. Conflicts.


 Family unfriendly work policies. Limited opportunities for progression. Sexual harassment.


 Poor leadership. Tolerance to aggression and manipulation tactics. Unfair competition.


 Favouritism. Poor relations with customers. Negative reputation, no pride.





And consider which skills we need to solve them.

 Organisational capacity building. Recruitment and selection. Preparing employee job descriptions.

 Setting performance agreements. Conducting performance appraisals.

 Project management. Communicating effectively and with impact.

 Ensuring employees' well-being and satisfaction. Policies for people management.

 Resolving conflicts. Building trust, consensus, and cooperation.



So where is the biology?

- Evolutionary psychology, or sociobiology, as it was originally known, is simply psychology that is informed by the knowledge that evolutionary biology has to offer.
- And as Theodosius Dobzhansky, geneticist and evolutionary biologist, famously said, *'Nothing in Biology Makes Sense except in the Light of Evolution'*.
- It means that when it comes to the study of the mind and behaviour, biology matters.





A tool for new perspectives


- For example, **parental care** can be understood as a behavior that has relevance because it is important for the success of future gene transmission.
- **Emotion** is an innate response to an environmental stimulus. Fear is activated by neural circuits that identify something as a threat.
- **Compassion** has benefited evolutionary success by generating stronger social ties; but it is a trap, because there is always someone who can use it to benefit in a egoistic way.
- Understanding **altruism** and **leadership** through the evolutionary lens helps us rethink business strategies, reduce negative behaviors at work and understand different market and consumption behaviors in target consumer segments.



Business and human nature: some examples.

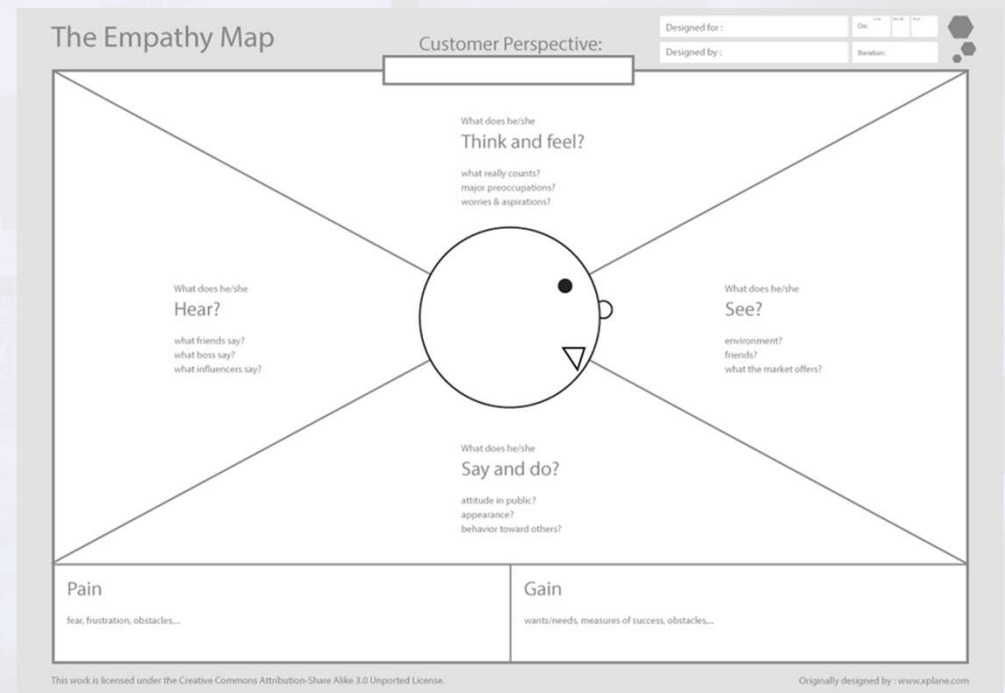
 **Trade:** an exchange between parties, and the concept of reciprocal altruism.

 **Competition:** in business is similar to intraspecies competition in humans because of limited resources.

 **Consumer behaviour:** learning about what our customers are thinking and feeling, and their 'pains' and 'gains'.

 **Threats and opportunities:** most of our biological adaptations are systems of defense or motivation.

 **Conflict:** and the strategic interference theory.



A quick look at the next few weeks

- Today: An introduction that hopefully intrigued you.
- Week 2: Fundamentals of evolutionary science
- Week 3: Personality
- Week 4: Sex differences
- Week 5: Emotions
- Week 6: Parental care
- Week 7: Self-esteem
- Week 8: Status, rank and dominance
- Week 9: Cooperation alliances and friendships
- Week 10: Putting it all together for a better workplace.



Your homework

- What are the **problems** that you would like to solve at work?
- Are there any aspects of **human nature** that you are more interested to learn about than others?
- Which **work-related skills** would you like to acquire or improve through this course?





Thank you!

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