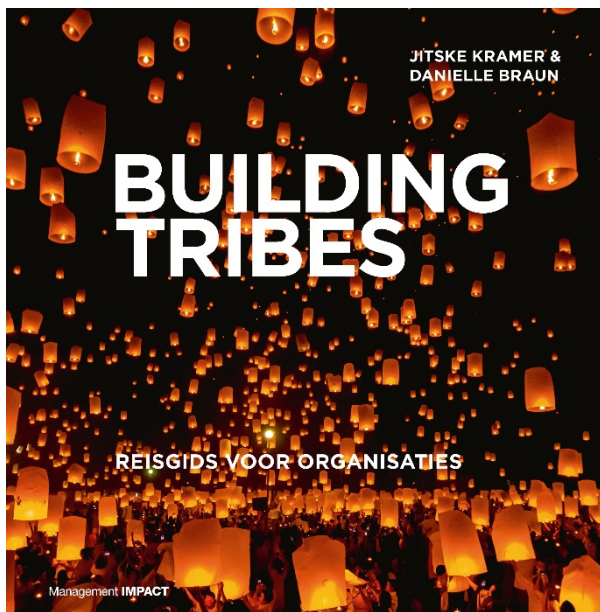


# Building Tribes – Travel Guide for Organizations

Jitske Kramer & Danielle Braun

Lessons from anthropology for anyone who would rather build a tribe than manage an organization.

Published in 2018, 408 pages, ca. 110,000 words, fully illustrated, full English translation available in 2019



*Building Tribes* is the next step after the prizewinning book *The Corporate Tribe*, a new book with organizational lessons from anthropology. In *Building Tribes* Jitske Kramer and Danielle Braun answer the question of How? How do you create a culture of excellence, how do you change an organization into a tribe, which anthropological lessons can you apply as a leader, a game changer, or consultant?

For this book, Braun and Kramer flew all over the world again, to find answers to common organizational problems in different cultures. Through beautiful stories you meet with leaders, tribe members, and change makers from around the globe. You see the world through their perspectives and you witness how they engage in dialogue, make decisions, and transform a group of people into a tribe. The authors interviewed a Batak king's granddaughter in Sumatra about (true) headhunting and meeting the competition in the boardroom. They learned how to determine the value of products according to the Iranian ta'arof, a cohesive set of rules for social decorum and an implicit code of conduct. They submerge themselves in a silent Quaker's meeting to answer complex questions without using words. They traveled to the Little White Wedding Chapel in Las Vegas, for some extraordinary field work – marrying yourself – to discover the essence of mergers. And a whole lot more.

This isn't your average management book, this is a book with which you learn what you already knew. It is also a practical book, full of anthropological insights and activities which you can start doing with your team, division or organization today. If we approach organizations like living tribes, we will never need meetings again, we will light the campfire.

“Much recognition and lots of new insights.” — Marieke Heesakkers

**Jitske Kramer** and **Danielle Braun** are the co-authors of *The Corporate Tribe* that won the Management Book of the Year Award in 2016, sold over 25,000 copies and will be published in US and UK (Routledge), Germany (Schäffer-Poeschel), Russia (Alpina), Vietnam (Nha Nam), and the Netherlands (Management Impact).

**Jitske Kramer** is an expert in the fields of diversity, international teamwork and corporate culture. As a trained ethnographer, she did research in Botswana and Uganda before becoming an organizational consultant. She is the best-selling author of *Deep Democracy*, *Managing Cultural Dynamics* and *Wow! What a Difference*. In 2019 she will publish *Jam Cultures* about inclusion, the dynamics of power and differences.

**Danielle Braun** is an expert in the fields of leadership, change and organizational culture. After her studies in African and Asian witchcraft and religions, she did her PhD in leadership and organizational culture, focusing on the Dutch police force. A highly sought-after speaker who takes you on an unforgettable journey, Danielle is co-founder and director of the Culture Academy. She is the author of *That's Crazy*, on how we perceive normal and abnormal.

# For everybody that would rather build a tribe, than manage an organization

## INTRODUCTION

Organizations are more than a sum of organograms, budgets, and KPIs. They are living communities in which people act according to age-old tribal logic. Even in context to computerization, project planning, and IT tasks, we react from ancient human needs for safety, trust, connections, power, loyalty, collaboration, and leadership. If you understand the anthropological laws that determine how people work and live together, you are able to build a strong tribe. That is how you establish an energetic and agile organization that is able to cope with setbacks and change.

*Building Tribes* is a practical book. Full of anthropological insights about how people build tribes, and full of specific activities you can undertake with your team, department, and entire organization, today. This isn't a regular management book. This is a book with which you learn what you already knew. With cultural best practices from people and tribes from around the world, which we translated for use within organizations. We attempt to surprise you, make you think, and provoke actions. If we start viewing organizations more like living tribes, with chiefs instead of managers, with village squares instead of meeting rooms, we will be able to realize projects, make products, help customers, support clients, raise children, improve processes with a more profound inspiration. And you'll never have to attend another meeting in your life!

Danielle Braun and Jitske Kramer are corporate anthropologists. They travel around the world to learn what we already knew. Continuously searching for wisdom that organizations can use to create and sustain solid tribes. They want to change organizations into tribes that will embrace diversity and are able to react fluently to change. From their experiences in and with organizations, their entrepreneurship with the Academy for Organization Culture (Danielle) and HumanDimensions (Jitske), they are constantly reminded how everybody is dealing with the same organizational issues. Recurring organizational questions, that have dominated the human agenda for centuries. How do you reach decisive decisions in which everyone is included? How do you say 'sorry'? How do

you achieve a successful merger? What should you do to get good sales and healthy customer relations? How can you unleash change? How do you stay ahead of the competition? To counter these questions Danielle and Jitske started their quest for best practices that deal with these human issues. And they didn't look at organizations, but at various cultural rituals from tribes from around the globe.

For this quest they surfed the internet, studied books and articles, and traveled, separately and together, to the far corners of the earth to observe and experience forms of dialogue, rites, and activities. For this book they have flown to Iran, England, Indonesia, and the US, to interview in formal and less formal settings. In the meantime, they reflected how all this wisdom and knowledge can be translated to the practical corporate world of organizations. Searching and collecting these wonderful stories was a beautiful, informative, confronting, and creative process. Some of the people and stories came to them spontaneously. Sometimes they had to dig a search for the right entrance to find the story, or even get married. Some stories simply couldn't be captured.

### **Some stories come to you spontaneously**

Danielle traveled to Sumatra to learn from the Batak, who used to do literal headhunting, how to build a strong, proud and competitive tribe.

"It seemed complicated to find the right connections and form a relationship with the old cannibalistic traditions and corporate reality. But from the first day in the hotel, Mrs. Tobing joined me at the breakfast table. Out of the blue. Mrs. Tobing senior, who owned the hotel, turned out to be the granddaughter of the last Batak king. She was eager to be interviewed and wouldn't stop talking about her people's pride, the old Batak kings, about how she used to eat a bite of human meat as a little child. 'But there is no need to exaggerate this.' And about how you can build and manage a hotel, based upon the traditional Batak values and standards, and why you should always put your portrait above the cash register. How to outsmart your competition."

## **Sometimes, stories don't want to be told**

Jitske travelled to the Egyptian Sinai-desert. Looking for the Bedouin stories on leadership and decision making, and to find out how people cope with all the local conflicts. But she failed at every attempt to find the lost story. It became clear that the story didn't want to be told.

"The Sinai-desert: rocks and sand plains in various shades of yellow and red. The air vibrating in the heath, the occasional scream of a raven. On the plateaus between the mountains we set up our camp. Two camels, two Bedouin men, a Dutch travel guide, and me. One of the men was the son of a local sheik. I had heard that the sheik was such a skilled negotiator, that even different tribes would seek his guidance. That could lead to wonderful conversations and insights by the campfire, so I thought. But things went differently. Through a small event, I learned much about vulnerability, willpower, the greatness of the small things, loneliness, connection, and the interaction between man and nature. This was the story that wanted to be told...

During an afternoon nap, I woke up screaming. A dabour, a desert wasp, had launched an attack on my little toe. I have never felt such pain in my life. Suddenly everyone jumped into action. While one man scorched the sting with a flaming ember and wrapped my foot in a cloth, drenched in lemon juice, another ran into the desert, searching for semwa, a medicinal herb from which I had to drink tea and bathe my foot. Despite all their efforts the searing pain remained. And the camp fire stories weren't about leadership and decisions anymore, but about medicinal herbs and how nature possess everything to create problems but create a solution for those same problems at the same time.

The first day, the swelling was absent but the next day my foot grew bigger. It became necessary to return. Staying was no longer an option as we ran out of water. The first hour of the journey back included traveling a rocky and difficult mountain path on foot. It took considerable effort to put my shoe on. Take a deep breath and continue walking. The grandeur of nature, the increasing heat, the humming of the flies. I hobbled along the zigzag path to the rhythm of the rattling pans in the camels' packs. When there is no other way, you have to move on. Once we reached the other valley, my foot had swollen to gigantic proportions. How I longed for an ice compress and a hammock. No way, first a few hours on a camel's back. With growing reverence, I looked to the surrounding mountains. Gone were the stories about the sheiks,

but I had the impact of a minor action by a relatively small animal on my mind.

Along the way, the Bedouins showed me all the trees and sometimes minute plants. They told me the names of the herbs and their use. I didn't remember them, I don't have an umbrella to capture the stories nor the ears to hear them. It made me realize how many wonderful stories, wisdom, and insights we lose in our lives and in our organizations, because we can't hear them or because we're looking for something else.

Back in the desert I nestled myself in my hammock besides my reed hut on the beach. My foot was red and painfully swollen. I felt vulnerable and alone and at the same time deeply connected to the land and its people. Help came from all sides. Ice cubes for my foot, internet access to check for insect bites and allergies. Someone drove twelve miles to the drugstore for the right salve. How a small action can trigger a huge quest for meaning and connectivity between people and networks. Remarkable.

I said my goodbyes to the Sinai. To get the story on sheiks, leadership, and decision making I have to return again another time. I cherish the insights that I have obtained through the powerful intervention of that one dabour. That of the solidarity that I have felt with strangers and the deeper sense that sometimes the story you're looking for isn't the story that wants to be found. Stories don't always show themselves but present themselves. You just have to listen...

Part 1 of this book shows what dials to turn to create a lively tribe. Anthropological tribal logic reveals how leaders and employees form firm and healthy tribes by playing their tribal roles. In part 2 you read about the issues that matter to all organizations. Presented in the form of campfire conversations, with specific methods and beautiful colorful stories. Practical tips, step-by-step plans, and models for conversation, peppered with worldly wisdom and easy to use ingredients for leaders and members of the tribe. The first part will provide more background information, to strategically implement the lessons and practical tips from the second part. Read the book from front to back or crisscross. Be surprised and be amazed. We hope to transform organizations and companies into living communities, where people matter, and differences are celebrated.

People are primates and have traditionally lived in tribes. Groups in which we feel at home, that protect us, and to which we want to be loyal. We need each other to be able to live. People aren't solitaire creatures. Together we work, fall in love, and fight our fights. Always have been. Because we share our lives and work together, we develop cultures. And in turn, these cultures influence the behavior of people. Building tribes, living organizations, means using power and love, power and connection. It is all about implementing a clear vision and embracing diversity, bringing together people that share a belief, and that have different approaches to obtain that goal. We want to have strong discussions and support passionate debates. We're going from calm to crowded and from darkness to light. Tribes are created because of the relationships that people start. Connections are made by talking, discussing, whispering, gossiping, fighting, negotiating, dealing with each other... since the start of mankind itself. The cohesiveness is created by communication, dialogue, and debate. Decision making and storytelling, these are the core businesses for leaders.

Safe travels,

Jitske Kramer

Danielle Braun