

Businesses can learn from meerkats

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The concept of lockdown is not new to the meerkat species. As a consequence, meerkats have become highly skilled and successful at dealing with lockdowns underground and navigating their uncharted "business world".



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There are parallels in the way meerkats handle crises which can be a lesson to organisations trying to find their feet and their voice in an unfamiliar and unknown post-Covid-19 industry environment.

The 'marketplace' of Meerkats offers a fascinating look into their behaviours necessary to survive in times of uncertainty. Their rigorous teamwork and focus on communication are thought-provoking examples that can be replicated for success in companies and associations.

Three key strategies help meerkats become more resilient, agile, and adaptive so that they survive and thrive.

1. Team communication

Meerkats lockdown for predator threats like jackals, snakes, and eagles. Environmental perils like fires, flash floods, dust storms and lightning strikes can also result in lockdowns.

Thus, they have to have strong communication protocols if they are to survive. They're constantly sharing information. Meerkats make reassuring sounds and groom one another to make each other feel safe and maintain the bond as a team.

They are trained to be alert at all times; sniffing the wind, scanning the horizon, and evaluating every sound for danger.

When meerkats face an uncontrollable threat, they escape down bolt holes and burrows which they've meticulously dug into a network of tunnels.

2. Strategy-driven leadership

Meerkats cannot stay in lockdowns for prolonged periods. They need a sound exit strategy or risk dying of hunger. They emerge from a lockdown with a clear, battle-tested strategy, always directed by a sure-footed matriarch (CEO).

Meerkats don't rush out of their burrows and reclaim their territory. It's a gradual and systematic process. They assess risk by popping their heads out of their burrow to check for danger. The experienced leaders (dominant females and males) lead the path to safety through "managerial" practices like tail signals, scent-marking, and barking sounds.

The impact of lockdown is profound. They have to figure out how to protect their "business" resources, adapt to a changed "workplace" and resume "income-generating" activities (foraging). Sometimes they have to fight off direct competitors; rival Meerkat groups.

3. Meerkats prepare for future lockdowns

Meerkats know the next lockdown is coming so they make sure to plan and prepare.

They regularly clean out the burrow and renovate the tunnels for easy movement and safety. Meerkats teach their babies survival techniques from early on so that they know what to do when there's a lockdown scare.

Their courageous leadership structure helps the team navigate from uncertainty to certainty. They future-proof their "business" by forward-thinking and preparation for worst-case scenarios.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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