

When it comes to developing team competencies, businesses have much to learn from jazz musicians and footballers. **Richard Finn, Tim Mills** and **Shaun Tyson** look at what makes high-performing teams tick

United notions

follow the Spice Girls' example, what are the collective, as opposed to individual, competencies that they need to develop?

These were the types of questions that prompted a recent study by HR consultancy Crane Davies and the human resource research network at Cranfield School of Management. We aimed to identify the "special ingredients" of high-performing teams. Our premise was that these collective competencies are different from the individual competencies that people bring to teams - that they are the product of a group of people working together. So the research looked at the relationship between collective competence and other factors, such as individual expertise and team roles, in developing high-performance teams. We also asked what effect these collective competencies had on how the teams performed.

It was our belief that team competencies would be most visible in non-

business teams, where training and practice are designed to produce a good performance in a public arena. The problem with focusing on one kind of team is that researchers may miss factors that are relevant to other types, so we looked at a variety of groups.

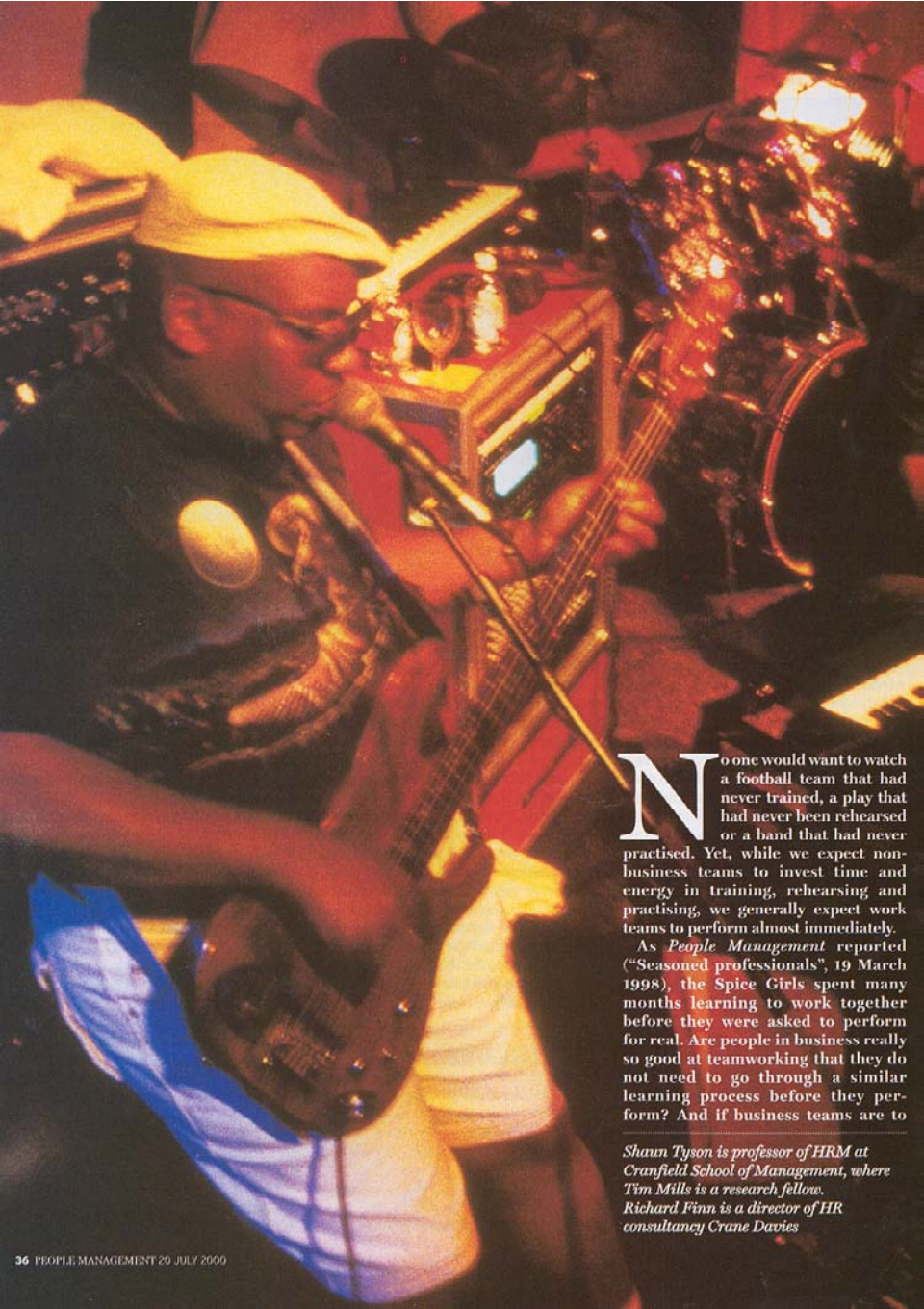
Previous research has suggested two important characteristics that define the context within which teams operate. The first is the degree to which the task to be undertaken is structured. For example, the routines and rules for performing the task may be rigid and constant over time. Alternatively, there may be very little structure to the task; the work may be more spontaneous, highly improvised, giving rise to one-off problems.

The second factor is the stability of the team's membership. Some teams undergo very little change in membership over time; others are unstable, coming together for a short period and then disbanding, or having a continually changing, "open" membership.

The position of a team in relation to these two criteria should have an impact upon the collective competencies required by that team. The two-by-two matrix below indicates the relative positions of the teams that were selected for study.

Our research methods were designed around the working practices that our





No one would want to watch a football team that had never trained, a play that had never been rehearsed or a band that had never practised. Yet, while we expect non-business teams to invest time and energy in training, rehearsing and practising, we generally expect work teams to perform almost immediately.

As *People Management* reported ("Seasoned professionals", 19 March 1998), the Spice Girls spent many months learning to work together before they were asked to perform for real. Are people in business really so good at teamworking that they do not need to go through a similar learning process before they perform? And if business teams are to

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