

The Nomadic Mindset The Human Powered Explorer Tells!



TNM_Podcast Episode #010:

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson

with Kevin Cottam

Transcription



Kevin Cottam 0:04

Welcome to the nomadic mindset season one. My name is Kevin called him a global Nomad and the author of the leadership book, the nomadic mindset never settle for too long. Over the season, we will go on a journey to discover what is the nomadic mindset and how you can tap into that. For this I will be interviewing of a diverse group of cross cultural thought leaders from all walks of life. So let's get on with it. Let's go nomadic together.

Kevin Cottam 0:37

Welcome to the nomadic mindset. And if you're tuning in for the first time today, thank you for taking the time to come and explore ideas and thoughts. In this episode, the nomadic mindset meets the amazing human powered explorer grant x. Rowlandson grant or X, as he likes to be called is not only a human powered Explorer, but a team decision. Making coach X has certainly adapted his explorations of climbing and cycling and rowing and walking complex environments to help teams working in organisational complex environments transform their decision making culture so they can work more effectively to gather when the consequences of failure are high. X has a lot to share. So let's hear it from x. x. Can you please tell our audience what is a human powered explorer?

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 1:34

Well, basically, well, ever since I grew up as a little boy in New Zealand in a remote rural environment. I've always loved travelling and exploring by my own human power that means not using any motors not using any and emotional like riding any horses not using any wind or sails even just either walking or riding my bicycle pedalling my boats, rowing my boats etc or climbing mountains. So, the last 25 years of my life I've really dedicated myself to human powered exploration and in particular making long journeys around the world using nothing more than my my own human power. And this. This may include, you know, making journeys of thousands of kilometres, walking across countries cycling across continents, rowing across seas and climbing some of the tallest mountains in the world and including Mount Everest.

Kevin Cottam 2:30

God, I don't know I'm exhausted already just listening to your explorations.

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 2:38

Conversely, it actually gives me a massive amount of energy during this kind of stuff. It may sound tiring and it is physically exhausting, but spiritually, emotionally, it gives me so much energy I find it so much. It's so so so very exciting and inspirational. Just planning them and thinking about them gets me excited.

Kevin Cottam 2:57

Yeah, I can relate to that also, because of the numbers mindset in the journeys that I'm taking with that for exploration as well and adventure, but also the learning. Now, when you say the powered human powered now this is very interesting because I was just thinking that you were saying that is there's not really a lot of devices like for example, if we think about today that people have all sorts of devices, which are not necessarily human powered, but the human power is really coming from your internal desire and your your feats that you can do with not only your

mind, but your heart and your whole body, the completion. So how is this how can you relate that to organisations in the work that you do?

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 3:41

Yeah, so interesting question.

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 3:45

My journeys vary, the format of my journeys, the way that I conduct my journeys, just happens to be my by my preference, which is human power. Now, when I work with organisations, I'm very much Dealing with the human aspect of organisations. And in particular, I focused on two main areas, I focused on what I call the explorers mindset. And I focused on critical decision making, that organisations need to make to really thrive in these complex, ambiguous, uncertain environments. So, you know, there's a lot of AI there's a lot of machines, there's a lot of gadgetry these days, but at the end of the day, human beings are the ones who really need to be involved making these complex decisions, especially in highly volatile times.

Kevin Cottam 4:41

Hmm, yeah, the human has not been sort of extracted from the sort of technology, which we think that it's going to scare us all into. We won't have any part in in this whole sort of future, but it's true. We need the human right. And and you said, you talked about Is mindset. So can we just talk because this is the nomadic mindset podcast is what is the explorers mindset? I'm just wondering if it's similar to the nomadic mindset?

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 5:10

What would you say? Yeah, so my definition of the explorers mindset really is how you can be number one, or how you can lead your field by being unique by acting differently than everybody else, instead of playing in the same field as everybody else. So in my world, the world of adventure, for example, it's a very competitive environment. You know, there's lots of people going on adventures. There's lots of people vying for the same parts of sponsorship. There's lots of people vying for the attention and trying to do different things. And what I realised early on was that in this world of adventure, there's two types of people. There's people who queue up on Mount Everest and climb with thousands of other people. There's people who do things, they may be daring, they may be thrilling, they may be very challenging, but they've been done before. And these people are trying to do them faster or you know, in a slightly different way. But then there's the people who do things completely differently. And these people do things which no one has ever thought of before. And you know, the first time we heard you go, Wow, what do you not think of that? Oh, that's crazy. You know, and these people in the world of adventure get to explore us. and explore is a very different, they have a different mindset than just adventurous. explorers think differently, they have a different mindset. And I've really devoted the last 20 years of my life to human powered exploration, which means looking for different things to do looking for unique things to do, looking for things that no one has ever tried before. And that's my definition of the explorers mindset and I define the very first step as being bitten by a bug. bug is my acronym for a bold, unique goal, beginner adult explorers mindset, then your goals, they need to be unique by definition, and no one's achieved them before you're literally being creative. You're disrupting, you're innovating. You're trying something new. And because of this

fact that your goal your challenges is, is unique. And it's never been done before. There won't be very much information about it. And this can be very scary, you know, especially when you're planning big projects. So, by very definition, there's not much information about it. You don't even know if it's possible. It's going to be bold as well, in some bold, unique goals First, if in the explorers mindset.

Kevin Cottam 7:44

Wow, I saw lots of bugs recently in Namibia.

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 7:49

Did you get bitten by one?

Kevin Cottam 7:51

I didn't get bitten by one but I actually was very fascinated with termite hills and termite hills. actually quite wonderful looking hills. And I realised and I found out from them that in actual fact, the termite Hill, the ants are the ones that are the creating it or building it for the termites. So they're the slaves of the termites. And then they have also allow for space for the bees to come in and to be able to if there's a hole in the, in the termite Hill, the bees can come in and create their little hives and develop their honey. But also, if there is another hole into it, a snake can come in and get out from the because it's nice and chilly and cool in there. They can get out from the sun. So the bug, so is this uniqueness that you're talking about this new, unique goal? Do you find though, that when you go into organisations, that it's very difficult for a lot of people to tune into your mindset and be in your realm? And how do you Get into their realm.

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 9:01

Well, we don't need to be rocket scientists these days. To understand that in the business world, organisations need to disrupt, they need to innovate. They need to think creatively, they need to try new things. Otherwise, they're just going to be left behind. This is not a nice to have part of your organisation. This is absolutely critical. And I love to use the analogy of children that human beings in general, and when we think about this mindset within organisations, Kevin, if we think about children, and what they're like, and we think, in the way we live our lives and two modes exploring, we're either exploring with trying new things, or we're exploiting with taking advantage of things we already have, we already know. And I don't use the term exploit here in a negative have since I just mean exploit in the terms of the fact that you already have something available, you know, having to go out and try and develop something new. So, exploring were either generally in one of these two modes, we're not in both of them at the same time, you're either an exploring mode, trying something new, or you're in exploiting mode, you're sticking with what you've got, and you're taking advantage of it. Now, as children, children are generally highly exploratory, they're very much in the exploring mode, that terrible at exploiting, you know, they, they, they would, they're, they're doing them got short attention spans, they're always learning. They're trying new things. I've got two little girls who are four and a half years old. And it's wonderful to see that it can be a bit frustrating sometimes, you know, trying to get them to teach them and teach them to do to do certain things, but they're always trying new things. But conversely, when we get to the end of our lives or approaching the end of our lives, people seem to be much more in the exploiting mode, you know, they're eating the food that they know that

they like. They're reading the books that they know, they're like they watch the movies, they know they like they visit the places they hang out with the people that they know. They're not really highly motivated, coming towards the end of their life to explore new things in general. And what this really signals to us as really as a really important lesson in business, in business organisations, which are more heavily in exploiting mode or, or investing the majority of their of their time purely exploiting, purely just dealing with their own products and systems and services and processes that they've already developed. They're only spending their time doing that are displaying the same symptoms that humans that they're displaying. fact that they may be coming to the end of their lives as well. So, is it hard for me to relate exploring the explorers mindset to business? Not really not at all. I think most of the organisations that I work with, they understand that exploring is absolutely critical that innovating. thinking creatively thinking out of the box is absolutely critical. The challenge is not getting people to understand that exploring is important. It's getting them to implement it. It is the implementation of thinking creatively and driving creativity. That is the challenge in organisations today, not just getting people to think creatively.

Kevin Cottam 12:46

And this is a really great point is the implementation. Right? It's very interesting. In many ways, implementation is actually like action learning in many ways, I would suspect and what I was Think and what I find very interesting about nomadic cultures. And also what you talked about with children is that they're learning and the nomadic cultures that I spent with, it's all about action learning. It's about actually physically doing stuff. It's not just about thinking about it, but it's actually doing it. And so they give some thought to it, and some ideas and some creativity to the ideas and solutions that they need, but then they act it. There's not really a time for procrastination, simply because it's a survival. And so I like what you're talking about this implementation, and it is it's about survival if those organisations are just exploiting, as you say. So then if that's the case, how can you help them to move into that implementation phase?

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 13:59

Well, this is where explorers mindset is so critical because the explorers mindset is not just about thinking creatively and coming up with a new idea, you know, ideas, there is billions of ideas around the planet being generated all the time. The majority of them are completely crap. Right? is pretty complete. Yes, exactly. The majority of most of my ideas are completely good. I don't even they don't they don't even get very far. There's a few ideas, you know, which have some merit, and there's a tiny, tiny minuscule percentage of ideas, which are really good ones, okay. Now, the problem is that we have a massive conflict in corporate life in the world of business, when it comes to explore thinking experts who are driving exploratory behaviour. And this conflict is basically around this. Yes, organisations know they have to disrupt they have to innovate, they have to explore they already know that we've gone over that already. But When it comes to driving exploration in their organisation, they have one side of them. Okay? It's almost like two people in the same organisation two mindsets in the same organisation, we get one mindset, which is like, we want flawless execution. We want to drive down errors, and we want to drive up productivity. We are six sigma black belts. We do not fail, we cannot afford to fail. There are no mistakes. We need to get out there. We need to make this happen within the next six months. And the challenge was having the explorers mindset and ever since I adopted it over 20 years ago, is that my failure rate and my expeditions started going up, you know, dramatically

when I started trying new things. Now I've tried things like rowing over the Tasman Sea via the southern Tasman route and failed time after time, after time. That's the problem with the explorers mindset. It's not a magical pathway to success. In fact, most exploratory, innovative disruptive techniques or approaches or attempts end in failure. So on one hand we have these organisations trying to motivate their teams to say you've got to try new things you've got to think disruptively, you've got to be creative. And now the hand you've got say, but whatever you do, don't make a mistake. Okay, don't get anything wrong here. We can't afford that. So, you're trying to run while your legs are tied. And another thing about exploring versus exploiting and developing and explorers mindset. You know, organisations cannot be in fully an exploit mode and they cannot be fully unexplored mode. Because exploit when you're exploiting when you're dealing with what you've got existing. That's how you generate Cash Flow, you know, you've created a wonderful product. Now, you go out there and you manufacture it, and you get economies of scale and you distribute it, and you really, you know, you exploit it. And this is where your cash flow comes. This is where you make money. When you explore, generally you're not making any money, it's, it's an expense, or you could call it an investment, I would call it an investment, but it's not generally generating any cash flow for you at that stage. So you can't be 100% and explore mode, because you're not generating any revenue, or at least in a long term, strategic point of view can be totally just exploring all the time. You have to have a balance of exploit versus explored. But the real the real challenge in the organization's Kevin is this conflict between not making any mistakes, you know, flawless execution, which is a word I absolutely can't stand in the corporate world. Flawless execution. Let's go and explore and innovate better Let's let's do it with flawless execution. It's just it just doesn't happen. If we're going to encourage our people to be explorers and try new things, we have to realise that not every project not every idea is going to be successful.

Kevin Cottam 18:14

Absolutely, you got to get messy, it's gonna get messy at times, right, and you need to allow that messiness to happen. I mean, it's absolutely true. I mean, the nomadic mindset is very similar to what you're talking about with the explorers, and what I call it as the movement of the mind and which allows that fluidity of being able to explore but at the same time, being able to as you talk about exploit to keep some sort of semblance of order. I mean, I find it really fascinating what you're talking about with regards to the exploitation and imple implementation on an ongoing basis that it has to be. So how are you helping organisations to get around that so that they don't have that condition? Your focus? And what what are you doing with leaders to to get them to see the bigger picture?

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 19:08

So, so I, there's the inspirational piece for us that people in organisations just by default, you go into, I mean, I worked in the corporate world myself for 17 years, you know, and it's very easy to get stuck into the cycle, where you go into the office, and every day, you may be in the same role for seven years without changing. You know, when you first go in for the first six months, everything's new, new, new question everything. But then after a while, it all becomes kind of the status quo, it becomes normal, you settle down, and then without knowing it, you become lazy. And I don't mean lazy from the physical sense, but I mean lazy and your thinking and your creative thinking especially. So so many people are stuck in what I call operational mode. They're just doing the daily stuff, the data Grind, day after day, and they lack the ability to be able to step

outside the picture. I don't remember, I don't remember who made this quote. But I love the quote is that to be able to see the full picture, you need to step outside the frame. Now, what I do with my teams and my clients is give them an ability to step outside the frame, to step outside their frames. So they can look at their picture from a completely different view. I give them this opportunity for half a day or a full day or on these journeys that we go through with these team development journeys. To really think strategically, critically and collaboratively together about what they need to do to drive their business and more specifically, what they need to do, what decisions what critical decisions do they need to make In order to adopt the explorers mindset, and I think this is an opportunity, which everyone can grow from even myself and my own business, you know, and you know what it's like yourself, Kevin having your own speaking coaching and training business, you get so busily wrapped up in day to day stuff, you know, writing your blog posts, designing your curriculums, doing your selling and marketing for you, you know, doing this podcast here. And really, there's always a to do list of 500 things on which you're never going to get to the bottom of it. And sometimes, you just need that opportunity to be pulled away to be pulled outside of your frame. So you can look at the bigger picture and say, hold on, is this the direction that I'm really going in? Is this the right direction? Is this based on my purpose and values and strategy, or do I need to realign somewhere? So that's basically that a high level what I do Kevin is give teams give leaders the opportunity to stand back and look Deer picture from a different angle.

Kevin Cottam 22:03

I like that very much. I mean, I think you know of the quote that I learned in Mongolia from a young student to Mongolians, students, and she said that nomads think vastly act narrowly. And that's really what you're talking about is that expansion so often that people come into a space in a very narrow space, but they have a very hard time to expand to see the bigger picture. And what they the nomads that I see an experience is they see this wider expansiveness and then they see all the possibilities of what they need to do with their, with their animals or the strategies that they need and when things are changing, the weather is changing or whatever. But then for the community, they have to narrow in focus very fast and make a decision.

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 22:56

You know, I absolutely love that concept and the way you Explain. Coming back to this the the idea of exploration innovation, when we're in the ideation phase, then we need to think, you know, diversity. This is the stage in decision making where it's great to have lots of people involved throwing ideas around, and 360 degree views and no ideas, a bad idea and just think out of the box and expansive thinking and as you put it with an emetic mindset thinking thinking vastly right yet, but once we once we select an idea, which is a critical phase of this as well, once we choose a project, an idea or a system, in my case, an expedition then the thinking has to change completely. And we have to go from this diverse thinking, okay to convergent thinking from divergent thinking to converge and thinking and acting very narrowly as you You put an eye. And I think that's also one of the challenges as well as understanding these different types of thinking, and the whole face, and how the thinking needs to change. And it may even be different people within the organisation, you need to have involved in different stages here because very creative types of people who can sink you know, at different kinds of levels and have these very, very broad horizons. They may not necessarily be the right people to as you put

it act narrowly, because because they've really struggled to focus and concentrate for extended periods of time.

Kevin Cottam 24:39

Yeah, that's absolutely true. And so often, people approach ideation many ways in a very narrow space to start with. And so consequently, how do you help them like we do in coaching people come to us right with challenges or problems and they're seeing it in a very small way. Instead, how do you sort of inch them out to see the bigger picture and all the possibilities? So it's the same thing. How do you get them from there in that ideation to start looking at the decision from a bigger and then to, as you say, divergent, and then to converge?

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 25:16

Yeah, sorry, sorry. You're asking me how do I,

Kevin Cottam 25:19

how do you go? How do you How are you able to move them from that sort of narrowing convergent end to open them to divergent before they come back to convergent again?

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 25:32

In a nutshell, the most practical way of doing this is by introducing cognitive diversity in your teams. Cognitive diversity is having people who think differently, and now team's cognitive diversity is different to demographic diversity. You know, there's a lot of people banging on about demographic diversity today, which is more about inclusion. Okay. I'm not an inclusion expert by any means, but what I have noticed is that teams who have cognitive diversity are always more successful in my decision making workshops. And this transpires, the way I first noticed this was that every team that seemed to win, because my decision making workshops have a competitive element, every team that seemed to win my decision making workshops seemed to have a balanced mix of males and females in them. The all female teams or the all male teams never seem to win. And initially, I thought this was just happening by chance or lack. But the more and more it happened, the more I realised something's going on here. This is not just purely chance. And what I'd stumbled on completely by accident, was this hidden power of cognitive diversity. So without having to introduce models or go into design, thinking workshops, etc. If you want to do one thing with your teams to increase Their ability to make more effective decisions together and think creatively and solve complex problems and driving innovation and be disruptive, increase their cognitive diversity.

Kevin Cottam 27:12

It's great to hear that. And I think we talked about this at one point and I just wanted to share with us study that was done in with nomadic cultures with a Himba woman by the name of Sarah Pope. She is a cognitive psychologist and she did a test to see about the difference in thinking pattern of the Himba which is a very ancient tribe in Namibia, and also with Western cultures. And what she found was that she was doing this exercise and she they were to do online, so on an iPad, they were to just press different figures that were on there. She just told them there was a goal to the end of it. And but she also noticed that there was also a short Cut that she introduced which was a separate icon. The first time she went through it, the handbook came out much more

cognitively flexible, because they chose the shortcut, something different. Whereas the Westerners did everything as she said, so just lined up. But then when she said, No, you can use shortcuts, you can do all sorts of things. You can be creative, whichever it came out equal. So there must be something to do with the education and the way we run our organisations as well as that you have to think this way that people don't want to have the fear of failure and all sorts of things. But to be able to say, okay, you can take shortcuts, as long as they're within the vision and and you know, they're not hurting anyone in whichever. But there's something there, which you're talking about. You know, she's scientifically proven that in so many ways, so. I love what you're talking about. This is fantastic. You know, I think we probably do we could go on forever talking about the explorers mindset and your wonderful world of exploring and just share with the audience, what you're going to do on your next exploration.

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 29:12

So my next project given is to

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 29:17

cross the Bay of Bengal, which is the world's largest Bay, and it sits in between a number of countries, India and Sri Lanka on the waste side, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Malaysia and Indonesia. So I plan to try and cross it completely by human power, and a brand new boat, pedal powered boat, which I'm designing and building at the moment, and the crossing will take place from starting in Singapore and travelling up the Straits of Malacca for 1300 kilometres to Phuket in Thailand, and then heading out west into the Bay of Bengal, hopefully in January of next year, which is the time of the year when I The wind will be favourable blowing in the wind. direction. And hopefully I won't be hit by one of the massive cyclones which the Bay of Bengal has, as well noted for now, one of the differences on this expedition which is really exciting me is the higher purpose of the expedition instead of just being about, you know, making these journeys by human power, because that's, that's my purpose. I'm working together with a scientific research institute called Indigo five. And I'll be collecting water samples all the way across the Bay of Bengal to contribute to a global ocean health map of the world's ocean at the by studying the micro biology. So it's going to be really, really interesting project Coronavirus is throwing up a few little unexpected speed humps at the moment but I'm still hoping that we can keep on track so I can sit off in January of next year.

Kevin Cottam 30:55

Wow, that sounds so exciting. And I'm sure that everybody supports you. That's listening and then If they're not listening, they ought to be supporting you. This is a fantastic expedition that's coming up for you. And I'm sure that you're doing it not only for yourself, but also for the good of mankind. And I think that's a wonderful purpose. And so, I want to thank you grant for your wisdom, your thoughts, your your explorations, your mind, the way you see things, the way you think, the way you can explore, not just for us, but you help us to do that. And through your stories, and also your practical courses as well. So thanks very much. And if there's one last thing that you want to say to our audience, what would that be?

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 31:40

Well,

Kevin Cottam 31:43

in short,

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 31:44

that's your that's your hardest question. You've asked me this question you've asked me. This is one thing I'd like to say to the world at the moment, because we're in this crazy time with Coronavirus, and the one thing that's shown to me about decision Making in general is that if we scan enough the entire world can join together on an align purpose of stopping a virus spreading around the world. And this is showing true alignment the way that almost every single country in the world has responded. Why can we not do this with even more pressing issues which are confronting our planet? And I'm talking about major environmental issues, you know, climate change and things like this. We need to align together and fight these massive challenges to humanity to the human rights which is much more important than Coronavirus and the bigger term and Coronavirus. We should take inspiration from the fact that we can do this.

Kevin Cottam 32:45

That's it. Ah, you know, what a beautiful message grant. Again, many thanks for being on the show today with us and sharing your thought leadership with the audience. Again, thanks very much and see you soon.

Grant 'Axe' Rawlinson 33:01

Thanks, Kevin.
Have a great day.

Kevin Cottam 33:05

You've been listening to the nomadic mindset season one. My name is Kevin caught him and invite you to find out more about the nomadic mindset at the [nomadic mindset.com](http://nomadicmindset.com). Until next time, make it a point to go nomadic and start discovering your nomadic mindset.



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