



Part Four

Covid Book Series

Great Organizations Are Built Around **GREAT TEAMS**

TRANSEARCH
YOUR WORLD PARTNER IN EXECUTIVE SEARCH

John O. Burdett



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The TRANSEARCH COVID BOOK SERIES

Welcome to **Part Four** in the TRANSEARCH Covid Book Series.

Part One, *Coming Down the Mountain*, looks at how to come out of this crisis stronger. Recognising, as we move forward, how important organization culture is, **Part Two** outlines the **Culture Conversation**. **Part Three** explores the need for leadership agility and what that implies: **Leadership Agility and Learning – The Way of the Dolphin**.

Drawing on the reality that tomorrow's organization will be a team of teams, **Part Four** examines what it means to be an outstanding team: **Great Organizations Are Made Up of Great Teams**. **Part Five** moves beyond leadership as a philosophy and drills down into essential skills – **When the Trees Get Bigger and the Forest Gets Deeper, It's Time to Sharpen Your Saw**.

The Covid Crisis Will End

Our attention right now, as it should be, is on this terrible scourge ... the lives taken, how to get through this and hopefully how to respond to the next pandemic. We will come down the Covid mountain. We will move beyond this. The emergency will end. This doesn't mean the world will be as it was. Indeed, Covid has truncated into months what would normally have evolved – especially in areas like remote employment – over the next several years.

There is no “new normal,” only **the** normal. Now! That now is currently dominated by Covid. That's entirely undesirable but to think tactically is a pretty good way to describe what managers get paid for. Leadership, as it must be, is strategic. It's to step back, see the big picture and, to the extent possible, create tomorrow in the room, today.

That “big picture” includes: the environment; robotics; cobotics; the speed of change; breakthrough technology; new materials; a new workforce; ongoing uncertainty; the political push back against globalization; and a host of other truly dynamic factors. Moreover, because of Covid, as we have discovered, to our cost, everything is connected to everything else.

The dictionary definition of “chaos” is “complete disorder and confusion.” We have been engulfed by a “hurricane.” However, instead of, as one might expect, being greeted by a period of settled seas, our hurricane is but a harbinger of an even bigger storm. The good news? The more things change, the more they stay the same! In the midst of a storm there is always a calm. The calm at the centre of this storm, the consistent feature, the priceless gift our long past kith and kin passed on to us – “the team.”

That's what this Covid book is about. And yet, as you move through the book, what unfolds is what might be called a "self-fulfilling contradiction." Other than in the introduction, we don't say much about Covid. And yet the book is all about Covid. Not Covid as a stand-alone issue. Not how to get through Covid. Not even the key questions executives should ask as they come down the mountain. But Covid as part of the biggest picture. As but one piece of a chaotic and ever changing political, economic, societal, business and interconnected leadership puzzle.

Make no mistake, technology has and will continue to change how teams operate. In the fullness of time, even in the virtual world, creativity will catch up with connectivity. And, yes, we will evolve organization forms that unlock the human spirit in full measure. Not tomorrow, but there is a generation at work, now in the majority who, as they move into key leadership roles, will push the boundaries that those who went before established.

At the centre of all of this is the team. "Team," being far more than simply a collective noun but as: (1) A way to think and act based on altruism and, given its competitive edge, through collaboration; (2) An enduring link to our hunter-gatherer past; (3) Deeply embedded habits; (4) Behaviour locked in our DNA; (5) A pre-programmed expectation enshrined in every group interaction – be it home, project, virtual, remote, self-organizing, operational, or executive team. In short ... a basic and fundamental blueprint for organizational and personal success.

The Shamrock Organization

More recently, a number of invaluable team processes have emerged. Scrum technology, the team as being central to Holacracy and Miro (a virtual whiteboard), being examples. We can't rest on the hope that "fringe plays" find their way into the mainstream, however. With challenges that lie ahead, we can't afford to squander one of our most valuable gifts: working in teams. Step one? To reframe our basic assumptions about work and the organization and start to see our post-Covid agenda through a team lens.

In looking to the future, there are contingencies that lie over the horizon we can't know. The biggest surprises, however, are likely to be those things that we think we know that, as things unfold, prove not to be so. In thinking through how the Covid crisis has changed our assumptions about work, the following five examples are a good place to start:

1. There is a demand from employees to continue to work from home. Others find the stress, blurring of work and personal life and the sheer loneliness of it all carries an emotional burden that they want to put behind them. A third group who would like a blended work experience – part of the time in a traditional work environment and the balance operating from home. In the future this throws up a challenging recruitment issue – identifying and assessing the personality and personal situation of candidates with those three options in mind. Building the team? Challenging, because the legislation in some parts of the world, the US for example, make questions that delve into an individual's family background and lifestyle subject to legal action based on discrimination.

2. Continued work from home puts a premium on “leadership at a distance.” This means: (1) reestablishing the meaning that lies behind the organization’s purpose; (2) reinforcing the organization’s values in everything the team does; (3) total clarity regarding goals and expectations; (4) communication excellence – especially listening; (5) finding new ways to unlock the team’s creativity; (6) a degree of transparency that hitherto leaders have been uncomfortable with; and (7) changing the patterns of play – making what can quickly become a repetitious, daily Zoom existence interesting and, when appropriate, fun.
3. The growth/expansion of contingency and Gig employment. Welcome to the Shamrock Organization: (1) full-time employment, working in traditional, face-to-face teams; (2) employees working remotely either part of the time or all of the time; and (3) contingency employees who, whether it be remotely or not, are only called up for a special project, work part time or engaged only during times when the demand from customers or clients makes it necessary.

In the quest for flexibility and, indeed, to save costs, expect organizations to increase the number of remote and contingency employees. The natural evolution of this is to offer these employees very different terms of employment to those working in full-time, traditional, face-to-face teams. Expanding the virtual workforce has four key compelling benefits.

- i. It expands the recruitment pool to include not only remote parts of the home country but offshore.
- ii. Organizations benefit from significantly reduced wage and benefit costs – especially if a large number of administrative roles can be moved offshore.
- iii. Remote work is far easier to monitor which, in turn, makes tracking productivity and delivery of key outcomes easier to follow.
- iv. By separating roles which are mission critical from those that are largely supportive/administrative, the number of those working in full-time, traditional, face-to-face positions can be trimmed to an absolute minimum.

And the behavioral cost of the increased flexibility offered by the shamrock organization? Until the technology catches up – an additional layer of complexity, the erosion of trust, heightened uncertainty and confusion about what it means to be part of a team.

4. The video interview. The cost benefits, the time saved and the overall convenience will resonate long into the future. Having become comfortable with the format, the video interview is likely to herald an overall push to digitalise as much of recruitment as possible. Already well underway, assume further advances in specialised search engines, gamified assessment, dedicated chatbots, online psychometric testing and AI-based induction support. With advances in digitalised recruitment expect new, tech-enabled entrants into what is already a very crowded market.

5. Business travel and all forms of training. If you have any investments in the airline industry, move it to an online training organization. Business travel is costly, time consuming and, even where jetlag isn't a factor, very tough on the body. Once mastered, Zoom and other video conferencing techniques make attendance at many of past meetings unnecessary. For "meetings" read in-house training sessions, workshops and seminars. At senior levels, the personal interaction that some conferences and leadership development sessions provide can be invaluable but even there expect cost savings to override past practice. With universities and large swathes of society moving in the same direction, know that the supporting technology will move forward in leaps and large bounds.

Great Teams Don't Just Happen

It is little short of managerial incompetence how often internal promotions, hire decisions, coaching initiatives and, yes, issues such as the move to remote working, take place – without the key decision-makers stepping back to assess the nature, needs and norms that shape the behaviour of the team(s) involved.

What follows is intended as a practical guide for: (1) setting the scene for a virtual team; (2) a new or established leader who needs to take the team to the next level; (3) the executive who feels that, as the organization navigates the turbulent waters of change, the team is losing its impact; (4) the HR executive, division head or external recruitment specialist (e.g., the executive search consultant) who, in orchestrating team fit, needs to understand the team he/she is hiring into; and/or (5) a manager or external resource faced with the challenge of coaching the team.

Although the book is about "the team," I didn't want to simply jump into a dialogue about what it means to be a great team. It is important to set the scene. Without context, content is incomplete and often misleading. The first four chapters seek to pave the way, while the final chapter, on building the team, deliberately stands on its own.

Consider having the team go through the material and then use the insights gained to shape ongoing dialogue about how to become a better team. Even in a world where reading gets pushed to one side, the accessibility of the book's content makes this a practical option. Remember, those who don't read are little better off than those who can't read. Without meaningful stories you won't keep the dream alive. Without commitment you won't survive. Without hard work you can't thrive. Without a great team you won't arrive.

See also the team assessment that concludes the book. Take the time to go through it with your own team in mind.

CONTENTS

Chapter One: Who We Were is Who We Are	Page 1
Chapter Two: It's All About Culture	Page 5
Chapter Three: Organizational Lessons from Nature	Page 9
Chapter Four: The Organization of Tomorrow	Page 13
Chapter Five: Building a Great Team	Page 19
Team Assessment	Page 29



Who We Were is **Who We Are**

Connecting to Our Hunter-Gatherer Past

Four million years ago, we were the master of our domain – the humble tree. Life on the ground was more dangerous but terra firma expanded our ability to forage for food. The not-so-simple task of standing erect also gave us the ability to see over the tall grass and carry useful objects over relatively long distances.

About three million years ago, our ancestors added meat to their diet. Firstly it was the flesh of dead animals. We lived as scavengers. Two million years ago, we had evolved to the point where we started to hunt small and, eventually, larger prey. Bringing down larger animals was initially through traps and ambush.

Discovering how to “manage” fire – around 800,000 years ago – changed everything. Eating predigested food led to a shorter digestive track. Energy that previously supported digestion fueling a larger brain. The result? Better weapons and more effective ways to work together





as a team. And evolution being what it is, only those bands that excelled at teamwork – survived. You and I are here because in our primitive past there were great teams.

Our kind emerged 300,000 years ago. Language, myths, story, and worship of various Gods followed. The birth of Homo sapiens heralded in a hunter-gatherer era that, in large parts of the world, only came to an end relatively recently. It's a culture where every unsuccessful hunt was a crisis. Team-dependent behaviour that dominated our very existence until augmented by crop planting 9500 BC; supplemented by animal husbandry around 8500 BC; and in the earliest cities in Mesopotamia, replaced by specialised trades 7,500 years ago. Even then, hunting was needed to supplement the diet of all but the poorest city dwellers.

For the wealthy Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, “the hunt” became the one organized sport that bestowed “manhood” ... as it was for the nobility in the middle ages. For the Colonists to the New World, your skill as a hunter was a matter of life and death. And anyone who has watched a traditional British foxhunt (now rightfully banned) quickly became aware of the overt symbolism, strict rules and elaborate protocols that dictated how that particular “team sport” was played. “A gentleman always knew the rules, of course.”

After three million years of social evolution; after outcompeting others on the homolid tree (at least a dozen humanlike species competed for the same resources), in no small measure, because of our ability to organize – it would be naïve to even suggest that we are not a “team animal.” And if you are of a mind that a hunter-gatherer way of life is currently restricted to a few primitive tribes in the Amazon, think again. Today, hunting and gathering is called “shopping” and “gambling.” It is also found in the need for inclusion that makes Facebook and much of the rest of social media so addictive. Who we were, is who we are.

We are describing a precious heritage that, in the last century, business chose to set aside. There were pockets of interest, of course. The Hawthorne studies in the 1920s; the evolution of skunk works at Lockheed Martin in the 1940s; invaluable work on socio-tech in the 1950s; sensitivity training in the 1960s; Volvo's willingness to look beyond the assembly line and have small teams build cars in the 1970s; Toyota's use of teams to reengineer processes in the 1980s; and the full adoption of smart manufacturing in the 1990s – all speak to the power and value of teams. But these were team-based solutions to specific challenges. The individual ruled. And, even today, in many organizations (the majority?), the team is still not a central feature – a systemic building block – in the overall design of the organization. Think about your own team:

1. What you don't measure, you can't manage. Do you regularly **measure** team performance and, as a result, address where and how to take the team to the next level? “Team performance,” in turn, meaning not just “results” – but how team members work with, support, collaborate and coach each other?



2. All (as in **all**) talent acquisition is strategic. Is “team fit” a critical dimension of the hiring process? This implies: (1) measuring both the culture you have and the culture you need in the future; and (2) access to the tools/capability needed to assess team fit. The major reason a newly hired leader fails is either: (1) he/she cannot adapt to the emerging culture; and/or (2) he/she isn’t fully integrated into the team.
3. Diversity is the handmaiden of innovation. Does the team truly reflect “diversity?” And not just racial, gender and/or socioeconomic differences but representing a blend of cognitive diversity. If the majority of those on the team “think” and approach problems in the same way, you have stripped the team of a key competitive advantage.
4. Tomorrow’s organization will be a team of teams. Is the performance management approach (including compensation) largely about individual performance or is team contribution a **significant** part of both the ongoing conversation and the reward system?
5. If they don’t land, they won’t stay! When someone new joins the team is a mentor appointed from within the team? Is it recognised that whenever a new team member is added, in many senses, a “new” team is formed? The implications for remote working and the need, as a result, to revisit “what is a team?” are no less profound.
6. How people learn is invariably more important than what they learn. Have team members been fully trained to coach each other? Do they? Recognising that as the team leader you work for the team, is “coaching mastery” how team members describe your commitment to their success?
7. The freedom to act unlocks the opportunity to create value. Is time set aside (one day a week?) for team members to step outside of the prescribed role? In doing so, are they given the freedom to act such that in concert with colleagues, they form self-managing teams? The role of the latter to create value for tomorrow’s customer? Other than the need to seek permission to spend outside of agreed budgets, no other constraints exist?



It's All About **CULTURE**

The Soul Of the Organization

There are two distinct ways to look at culture: (1) as interpreted through the eyes and hands-on touch of the artisan or (2) through the feelings, holistic sense of harmony and interpreted drama of the artist. The world of the artisan implies the quest for truth, deliberate design, measurement, technology and transformative tools. The artisan observes/interprets culture through the artifacts that either deliver utility and/or inspire people.

The artist perceives culture as a constructed reality ... a community bound by a common purpose and shaped by myths, beliefs, values, symbolism, ritual and story. As a contrived reality, however, culture is only real for as long as those involved believe that it's real. And it's meaningful and sustainable only for as long as those in key leadership roles reinforce that reality through their day-to-day behaviour. What a leader does is far more important than anything he/she might say!

Without effective processes that support a customer-centric, quality-driven, end-to-end value chain, confusion, conflict and lost capacity are inevitable. Without measurement, organization culture is destined to remain of secondary importance; overwhelmed by the operational emergencies that all too often dominate decision-making. And one need look no further than organizations that have survived down the ages – the Catholic Church and the Freemasons (early 17th Century) – to understand the power of myth, beliefs, symbolism, ritual and story. To lead, to inspire, to take people where they otherwise would not go is to be both artisan and artist. Think of these capabilities as the bricks and mortar (glue) of culture. To instill something that goes deep, to build something that lasts ... both are essential.

Culture isn't out there. It's not of secondary importance. And it's not a project, a by-product of the engagement survey, the exclusive domain of the HR department, a silent drumbeat that echoes from the past,¹ a change management program, and/or "something we need to get to." It's now, it's practical and it's the very essence – one might call it "the soul" – of the organization.²

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- 1 Some might argue that is exactly what culture is. It's certainly a feature that has to be recognised and, where necessary, expunged but, as exponential change becomes the new norm, what worked (or didn't work yesterday) becomes less and less influential.
 - 2 Indeed, that is exactly how the CEO of Microsoft, Satya Nadella, describes culture.



In his book **Team of Teams**, General Stanley McChrystal refers to the organization's "collective consciousness."³ What does that mean? Think of the organization's strategy. The strategy, be it one page or an overly complex plan, contains within it deep-rooted cultural assumptions. All projects and/or strategic initiatives are imprinted by, intended or, more often than not, unintentional "messaging" that shape how those charged with delivering the strategy define success.

In an organization with a strong and agile culture (StrAgility), the signals that shape culture are deliberate, overt and consistent – that is, aligned with the culture the organization needs to create. In organizations that have fallen into "culture drift" – we might not invest much time on culture but there is an overall feeling that we are on the right track – the absence of the deliberate cultural intent carries its own message – "the status quo rules."

The dilemma with a philosophy of "more of the same" is that culture changes whether you want it to or not. And at times, dramatically. When he wrote **Good to Great** (2001), Jim Collins reported, "We were surprised to find that fully 80 percent of the good-to-great executives didn't even mention technology as one of the five factors in the transition." He went on to add that, "Only two executives of the 84 ranked it number one." The response today would be very different.

In an organization that "manages culture," the signals that emphasise "team" are integral to the organization's very DNA. To that end, consider the questions below.

- Is the strategic direction being driven into the organization a single, linear, unidimensional plan ... or is "managing uncertainty" supported by a series of well-thought through strategic scenarios?
- In team review meetings, coaching sessions, business development approaches and all things to do with performance management, is the culture the organization needs to create: (1) aligned with what tomorrow's customers want to buy; (2) drawn out of sound measurement; and (3) fully supported by middle managers?
- Are the organization's values clear? Do those values reinforce the importance of teamwork?
- The real challenge with strategy is implementation. Meanwhile, turning direction into delivery rests, in no small measure, on buy-in from the middle kingdom. Is the strategy presented as a series of numbers and charts or has it been translated into a compelling story? Information, as the term implies, "informs." The right story inspires.

3 General Stanley McChrystal with Collins, Silverman and Fussell, *Team of Teams* (2015).



- Do the stories that dominate celebrate the lone hero/heroine ... or do they recognise that no one makes it on their own?
- Do the hiring, promotion, high potential and success processes emphasise team fit? As we move to more flexible organization forms – as the team becomes the basic building block of organization performance – success as both a team leader and a team player becomes the difference that makes a difference.
- Does the definition of “diversity” include not just gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and the like but cognitive diversity? The latter recognising the need for teams to be made up of members who not only come from different backgrounds but who “think differently.”
- Is it recognised that, without support and exemplary teamwork from those in the middle of the organization, the direction the organization needs to take is likely to remain little more than “what might have been?”
- Does the organization’s design support or work against a strong team culture? Even a simple carpenter recognises how problematic it is to work against the grain. See Chapter Four.

“The way I think about culture is that modern humans have radically changed the way that they work and the way that they live. Companies need to change the way they manage and lead to match the way that modern humans actually work and live.” Brian Halligan, CEO, HubSpot

If the competition is managing its culture and you are trapped by culture drift, no matter how good your product, you don’t have a future ... you have a problem.



Organizational **LESSONS** from Nature

We Are Part of Nature

It might surprise you to know that one of the largest living things on the planet is a tree. Well perhaps not a single tree but a colony of quaking aspens. Estimated to be over 80,000 years old, the colony in question has a root system weighing over 6,000 tons. And that's what makes it special – its extended and single root system. Meanwhile, a traveller passing through Pando (Utah) will see thousands of what appear to be beautiful aspens. In the fall they are truly spectacular. What is less obvious is that what is on display is, literally, only one tree ... with many erect stems (each of which look like individual trees). ***It's a living example of nature ... as a network of networks.***





Not too long ago a remarkable discovery in Brazil unearthed an abandoned megalopolis. With vast subterranean roadways, hundreds of chambers, carefully constructed fungus gardens, air-conditioning shafts, planned transportation routes and rubbish pits ... it was nature's version of a sophisticated underground city. To address the hazard it represented, it took ten tons of cement just to fill the air-conditioning shafts. Who built it? Hundreds of millions of leafcutter ants, each capable of carrying 50 times their own weight. Second only to human kind in terms of complexity and self-organization, leafcutter ants form enduring societies built around specialised roles ... roles that adapt to fit the challenge at hand. ***Self-organizing groups can be extraordinarily effective.***

Wolves are magnificent creatures. They can also teach us a good deal about leadership. The size of the pack is an indication of how rich their prey base is. Even so, the pack often travels up to 30 miles (48 km) a day in search of food. They are superb hunters. In short bursts, when in pursuit of prey for example, the healthiest animals can reach 35 mph (58 kph). At the front of the pack is a very strong animal whose sole role is to create a path through the snow (the lead wolf). It's hard work. To take advantage of the established "track" the pack moves in single file. The older and injured wolves follow the lead wolf. Were that not the case they could easily lose touch with the pack. The "offence" – four or five wolves that are fast and healthy follow next. The main body – the majority of the pack are in the centre. Supporting and watching over the main body is a second small cadre of strong and healthy wolves – the "defensive line." Bringing up the rear is the alpha wolf (male or female). He/she sees everything. The older wolves decide on the pace. The healthy wolves are positioned to either respond to a hunting opportunity or defend against attack. And the leader, in seeing everything, serves the needs of the pack.¹ ***A successful team is made up of different team roles.***

During flooding in Houston (August 2017) two things were very apparent. One: in times of crisis, the tribe (the African American tribe, the Latino tribe, the Anglo Saxon tribe, etc.) quickly takes on the form of a community. Two: fire ants have remarkable qualities of survival. The rising water was a signal for the ants to escape their nests. Upon doing so, in as little as 100 seconds, using sticky pads under their feet, they formed water-repellent, buoyant islands ... circular, pancake-like structures that float for weeks without drowning the ants. No less remarkable, upon hitting solid ground the same structure reforms in a structure not unlike the Eiffel Tower – up to 30 ants tall. Assuming that it is still raining this keeps the vast majority of the colony dry. Once built, the ants continue to work on the integrity of the pyramid-like structure. ***It's not the biggest or the strongest that survive ... it's those with the capacity to adapt.***

1 There is a good deal of debate among naturalists as to exactly how a wolf pack behaves. The scenario outlined is one of the more popular.



One of the most beautiful animals on the planet is the cheetah. Hitting a top speed of 70 mph (110 kph), it is also the fastest. Moreover, it has unbelievable acceleration: hitting top speed in just three seconds. That's faster than a Ferrari Enzo, a McLaren F1 and a Lamborghini Gallardo. Although something of a wimp in defending its kill, in full-flight it's an awesome sight. With incredible eyesight, an unbeatable ability to stalk their chosen prey (*focus*) and its turn of pace means that the chase rarely lasts more than 220-330 yards (200-300 metres). Simply put, the cheetah is the perfect predator. On the African savannah it's a case of ... be fast or be last. ***Speed (in human terms – speed of learning) is the only truly, sustainable competitive advantage.***

“For the 99 percent of the time we’ve been on Earth, we were hunter and gatherers, our lives dependent on knowing the fine, small details of our world. Deep inside, we still have a longing to be reconnected with the nature that shaped our imagination, our language, our song and dance, our sense of the divine.” Janine M. Benyus

If those you compete with work on the belief that the organization is a highly adaptable network of networks, built around self-organizing teams, where speed of learning is a competitive imperative ... and you are still trying to drive a digital direction into a traditional, 20th century, hierarchical structure, no matter how good your product is you don't have a future ... you have a problem.



The **ORGANIZATION** of Tomorrow

The “F” Word

Two things are perfectly clear. One: the 20th century organization that got us here isn't going to get us where we need to be. Two: to meet the needs of all the stakeholders, to be agile, to innovate, to respond faster, to deliver a “serving” and not just a “service” mentality – means greater involvement of more people, in more places, more of the time. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Unless everyone is given an opportunity to make a difference, no one can!

To support the organization forms we need to create to survive, let alone thrive, we must act on the reality that tomorrow's organization will, and must be, a team of teams. As if being pulled through a time warp, the primacy of the team – the very essence of who we are as a species – returns in full measure from our hunter-gatherer heritage. For the last six decades





we have talked up the team. The 21st century organization calls on us to now draw fully on the team DNA that made us who we are.

Language isn't important, it's everything. Those who see organization design through the lens of "structure" are trapped in a mental cul-de-sac of their own making. *Structure* summons up imagery of control, hierarchy and decision-making in the hands of the few. Conversely, the term "performance platform" describes an organization that is flat, where decision-making is pushed close to the customer and, of necessity, a team of teams.

In that, as a society, we are in the act of reinventing it, it's not easy to lay out exactly what tomorrow's organization will look like. Six things can be assumed, however. The organization of the future will, of necessity, be Flat, Fertile (to new ideas), Followership-based, Flexible, Focused and Fast ... especially fast.

Flat: Tomorrow's organization won't look very much like the traditional hierarchical model – a mechanistic framework where every level doubles the noise and halves the effectiveness of communication and where every unnecessary level – and in most organizations there are more than a few – adds both unnecessary cost and puts a brake on the speed of decision-making. Indeed, if the heart of your organization is staffed by "information carriers" – organization levels made up largely of administrators – and your customers demand innovative products/services, rapid-fire decision-making and speed of follow-up action, you may not realise it, but your business is in decline.

Research at Cambridge University suggests that the degree of connectivity between nerve cells that make up the brain determines intelligence. The stronger the network the better the brain is at processing information! In like vein, think about the organization as **a network of networks**. A team of teams where people have the ability to act without asking permission. A risk-oriented, collaborative, ideas-driven culture that puts decision-making as close to the customer as possible. A business context where the space between teams is considered as important as the work that goes on within the teams.

Two challenges emerge. One: the stronger the network, the better the organization is at processing information and, in doing so, making decisions. Two: quoting Sloan Professor of Management Emeritus at the Sloan School of Management at MIT, Edgar Schein, "With the changes in technological complexity, the leadership task has changed. Leadership in a networked organization is a fundamentally different thing from leadership in a traditional hierarchy."¹

Hierarchy evolved to transmit decisions made at the top. It represents a social architecture dominated by the few. Networks are dynamic, they are an enabler of change and they empower people to make decisions that eschew the long-established "ask permission"

1 Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (2010).



safety net. Hierarchy is about control. The network thrives on the freedom to act. If you like rules, the assumption of being in charge and have problems letting go, you are going to hate working in a network organization.

“Flat” doesn’t mean an organization totally devoid of hierarchy. It’s an idea that sounds good on the book circuit but it’s impractical. “Vision” isn’t a collective activity ... and someone has to make tough decisions.

In that a system can never be more effective than its most recalcitrant part, it’s important to recognise that where the organization operates as a team of teams, mediocrity from even one team impacts the effectiveness of the whole. No chain is stronger than its weakest link. Great organizations are built on great teams.

Fertile: The essence of a fertile organization – one where creativity is the currency of competition – is to distinguish between cooperation and collaboration. In confusing the two those involved perpetuate self-serving habits. As for the difference? Cooperation is two or more people who, in getting together to solve a problem or respond to an opportunity, assume that everyone will benefit from the outcome. Collaboration is two or more people who, in getting together to solve a problem or create an opportunity, work on the presumption that “your success is more important than mine.”

Cooperation can work well in addressing an established challenge. An explicit customer request, for example, that involves several teams or divisions from across the business. Collaboration is demanded if you want to create something new. An offering, for example, that the customer hasn’t directly requested or, in some instances, doesn’t even know they need. Shades of Steve Jobs!

Cooperation demands the kind of trust that comes from everyone keeping their pre-agreed promise. The trust that lies at the heart of collaboration is far more about shared values and the spirit of altruism. When competing on ideas the difference is important.

We are describing an environment where loyalty to the tribe gives way to a true sense of community; where doing right is more important than being right and where a shared name gives way to a shared story.

Follower-ship-based: The ideal organization design reflects how people, given the choice, would choose to work together.

As Russia discovered in the 1920s, when Stalin attempted to copy the highly integrated business model that distinguished the technological and production miracle unfolding in Detroit, an overdependence on centralised planning – especially when accompanied by ponderous hierarchy, rigid control and decisions in the hands of the few – resulted in only one thing – gridlock.



Every organization is a network of informal networks. If it were not ... if the assumption were that the organization actually worked the way the organization chart described how it should work ... it would close in a week.

There is a natural force inside every organization, large and small, for people to work together that, if afforded the opportunity, optimises their contribution. The organization form of tomorrow, in recognising that, strips out tribal boundaries (silos), rules, barriers, impediments and roadblocks that prevent that from happening. In doing so we are tapping into a survival instinct that goes back to our hunter-gatherer past. When how you work together dictates whether you will survive or not, you tend to figure out how to get it right.²

Given the opportunity – assuming the context supports it – few groups are more involved, inventive and innovative than a self-organizing team.

Flexible: The capacity to adapt speaks to a way for people to work together that allows leadership to emerge regardless of their functional role. Leadership is a response to a challenge and/or opportunity ... not a title.

If everyone on the team sounds and acts the same, being adaptable is highly unlikely. This speaks to diversity. It also outlines the need for the team to contain within it the capacity to deliver a range of behaviours that contribute to the overall success of the team (team roles). A successful team is built around six distinct team roles: (1) Visionary; (2) Explorer; (3) Pioneer; (4) Warrior; (5) Maverick; and (6) Navigator. All six team roles are covered in more depth in Chapter Five – Building a Great Team.

Like a team of two horses pulling the same plow, flexibility and resilience travel in harness. Resilience isn't just adapting to change; it's facing a new tomorrow with a passion to learn. It's not just bouncing back after a setback; it's becoming stronger as a result of the challenges faced. And resilience isn't a solo endeavour; resilient leaders surround themselves with, and are strengthened by, resilient people on the team. Then again, perhaps Winston Churchill best described resilience, "Success is going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm."

The capacity to adapt is, ultimately, a mindset. Andy Grove, a pioneer in the semiconductor industry, perhaps put it best, "Only the paranoid survive." Intel, the company he helped create, went on to become not only the largest chipmaker on the planet but one of the world's most admired companies.

Focused: Have you ever noticed how those who display mastery in something always seem to have more time? It's impossible to be fast at something you don't excel at. No less important ... speed without clarity is the business equivalent of driving too fast while having a badly cracked windscreen.

² Larger organizations (settlements) drew on the written word, the ability to grow surplus food and shared myths. In particular, myths changed the perception of time such that "the future" became a tangible and meaningful concept.



When Bill Gates and Steve Jobs were brought together by their respective wives, they were each asked to write down on a piece of paper what it was that fuelled their success. Independently, they both wrote down one word – “focus.”

My own experience is that leaders who have the laser-like focus demanded in a turbulent world do a number of things remarkably well. They know how and when to say “No.” They don’t let the immediate overwhelm the essential. They are curious. They constantly ask tough questions ... deliberately go out of their way to meet those who have a different point of view ... and seek new ways to penetrate the veil of tomorrow’s possibility. As a result, they develop thoughtful and informed insight about *what* to focus on.

It seems like only yesterday that General Electric had six major divisions. Today it has only three. What does your organization, literally, do better than anyone else (your core competency)? Outsource, shut down or seek to off-load the rest. That doesn’t mean that defining your core competency is always a straightforward exercise. It might be assumed that what makes Airbnb and Uber special is their respective expertise in the hotel and taxi business. It isn’t. Like Bloomberg, they are in the knowledge of knowledge business.

A shotgun will hit the target. It’s an excellent weapon when the target is standing in front of you. A rifle demands more skill and greater concentration. The benefit being is that it will hit a target some distance away. If you want to be successful in the short term, a scattergun approach may deliver early results. If you want to create tomorrow, today you need to be able to focus on both the immediate and the strategic targets.

Fast: Today is the slowest things will ever be. Technology, the aggression and agility of new market entrants and the ever-increasing clock speed that technology affords means that if you are not fast you are not going to stay in the game.

How people learn determines not only how and where future value is created but how the organization deals with uncertainty. In the world we are moving into, speed of action is a given. Even more important, however, is **speed of learning**. Indeed, how quickly your organization (collectively) learns is almost certainly the only sustainable competitive advantage. Put it this way – if the competition is learning faster than you are, you are falling behind. And if they learn faster than you for an extended length of time, it will be very difficult to catch up.

There are three dominant ways to learn. At each level the speed of learning increases exponentially.

- I. Simple learning ... as in instruction. Simple learning is essential when it comes to issues like safety but if the learning orientation is limited to instruction (tell and listen and tell and sell), instruction begets only two things ... incremental change ... followed by the request for more instruction.



- II. Learning how to learn. In learning how to learn the learner is encouraged (given permission) to explore different ways to expand on the basic knowledge or skills. Different ways to deepen and expand his/her competency. You don't really learn to drive your car until after you have passed the test.
- III. Learning how to learn limited only by the imagination of the learner. Think painting outside of the lines. Think breaking established patterns. Think being given the opportunity for part of the workweek to operate outside the restriction of a role, the agreed objectives and how things have always been done. Think about an organization that is naturally fertile to new ideas and where teams are encouraged to create the space for people of like minds to "bump" into each other.

Imagine buying a new table from Ikea. Simple learning is following the instructions. Learning how to learn is assembling it and then reading the instructions afterwards. Learning how to learn limited by imagination is deciding halfway through the project to use the materials to build something entirely different.

If you want to better understand the culture you have and the culture you need, explore (measure) how people in your organization learn.

"In a learning organization, leaders are designers, stewards, and teachers. They are responsible for building organizations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models – that is, they are responsible for learning." Peter Senge

If the competition is building an organization that is flatter, more fertile, to a greater degree followership-based, with greater flexibility, faster than you are, and with a laser-like focus on critical outcomes ... no matter how good your product, you don't have a future ... you have a problem.

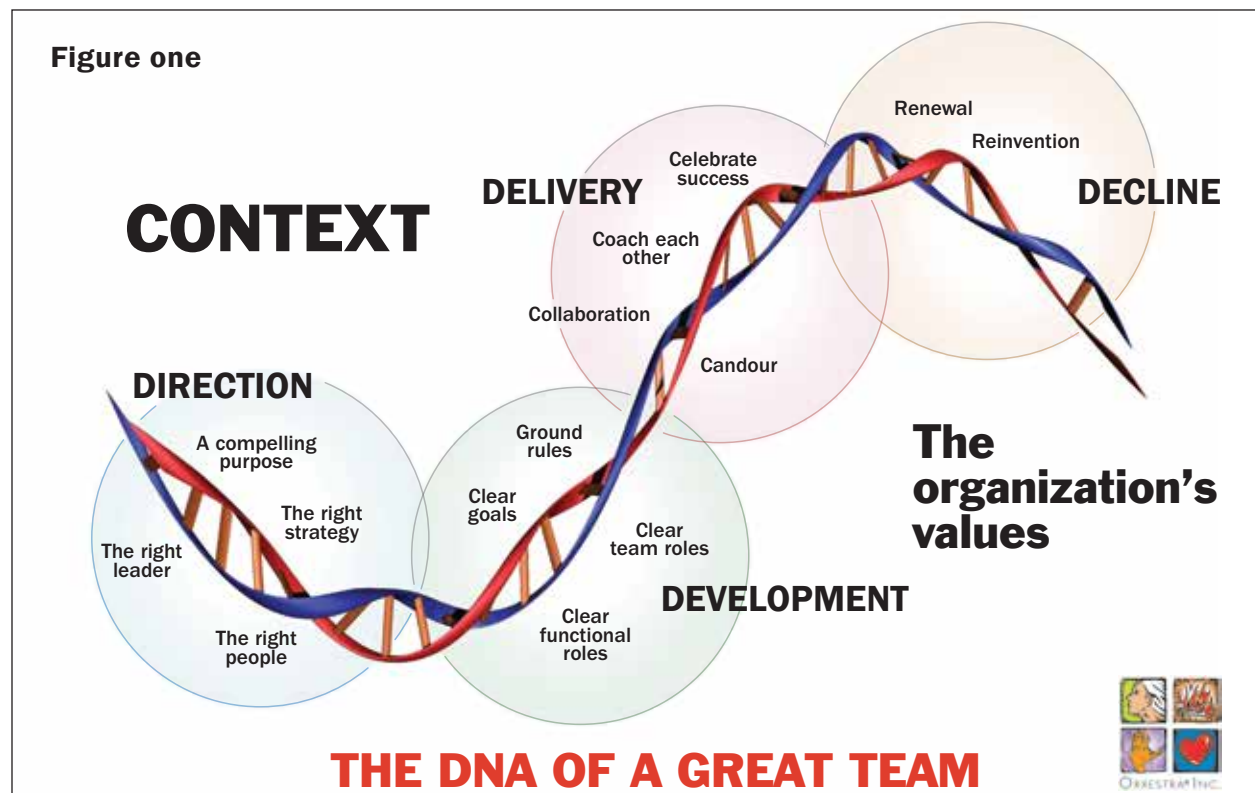


Building a **GREAT TEAM**

The Team DNA

Carl von Clausewitz made the point that the purpose of war wasn't to kill people. It was to forge a political solution that couldn't be achieved by any other means. Striving to create a great team isn't simply to end up with a nice, bright, shiny and highly admired group of people. The **only** reason for building a great team – the utility implied – is to better facilitate tomorrow's winning value proposition, create value, bring about change and retain talent. Anything less is to shortchange everyone involved.

It goes without saying that there are different types of teams: project teams, problem-solving teams, temporary teams, cross-functional teams, quality teams and virtual teams to name





but a few. In reviewing the suggested team development steps that follow, one question quickly surfaces. “Are all these steps necessary in every type of team?” The answer is ... “well, yes.” Not necessarily in the detail outlined but, by way of example, consider for a moment a newly formed, cross-functional team that neglects or overlooks several (one even) of the building blocks described. The only thing more impactful than a great team is a group of highly talented individuals devoid of a purpose, fighting with each other and/or generally going in the wrong direction. Change is a state of affairs with two potential outcomes ... one positive ... the other not.

A word here about remote working. It’s tempting to take a *laissez faire* approach to working from home. Out of sight, out of mind. There could be no bigger mistake. The more diverse, the more remote, the greater degree to which team members are separated by space and time – the more the right glue is needed to keep them together – the more the basic disciplines of teamwork have to be instilled – the more the DNA of the team has to be nurtured.

The emphasis on group dynamics is all prevalent in work around the team. Important as the chemistry of interaction is, it is no less important for those on the team to display the qualities of a successful team member. Five qualities in particular are a given: (1) loyalty; (2) commitment; (3) no games playing; (4) help each other out; and (5) to listen.

Figure one – The DNA of a Great Team – maps out the building blocks of a great team. Central to **Figure one** are two intertwined threads of DNA. One strand represents results; the other relationships. A successful team commits to and invests in both. Results and relationships are the central tenets in a series of synergistic sub-processes that move from **Direction**, to **Development**, to **Delivery** and, eventually, to **Decline**. As it moves through each of the building blocks, a great team leans heavily on these DNA markers.

Context: The influence of the team on individual behaviour is often (invariably) underestimated ... as is the impact of the wider organization culture on the team. Attempts to transform the organization (or team) one person at a time are destined to be both time-consuming and, ultimately, frustrating.

The most powerful “change tool” in the leader’s arsenal is to reframe the context. “Context” is found in – although not limited to – the emerging customer’s needs, how the space is organized, the team leader’s behaviour, who is brought onto the team and/or who is asked to leave, imagery, the organization’s values, group norms, the degree of transparency, access to best practice, storytelling, the metaphors introduced, work that has meaning, the spirit of affirmation and giving back. For millennials, giving back includes a high priority to the environment.

- Do team members have a full and unambiguous understanding of the organization’s values? Values aren’t rules; they give people permission to act. Without shared



values, trust, collaboration and what it means to be “customer-centric” have to be constantly thought anew.

- Does everyone on the team fully understand the culture the wider organization is seeking to create?
- If the team is dispersed, how are team members who don’t have day-to-day contact made to feel part of a team?
- Is it understood why today’s customer buys and how and why that will change in the future?
- Brand means **Better Results And No Disappointment**. Is the promise implicit in the brand integral to how the team faces new challenges and/or makes decisions?
- Is the team imbued with a sense of urgency?
- Is simplicity the watchword in everything the team seeks to do?
- Where English (French, German, Japanese, etc.) isn’t a common language, what extra care is taken to explain the meaning (concisely) of those words that **must** have a shared understanding? The organization’s values being a case in point.
- Is the organization’s story clear? That story answers five important questions. Why do we do what we do? Where is the organization headed? What do we believe in? What makes us special? How do we make a difference in people’s lives? A great team – as does a great organization – draws inspiration from a great story. Moreover, team members know how to share it (consistently). See also “Compelling Purpose,” below.
- Trust is a huge issue on a successful team. In studying what makes a team successful, Google identified a special kind of trust – “psychological safety:” a feeling that it’s comfortable to take risk; that you won’t be punished for admitting mistakes, asking questions and/or offering ideas.¹
- Psychological safety is especially important for those new to the team. If they don’t land, they won’t stay. They might be present physically for a while ... but if a feeling of “belonging” isn’t established quickly ... expect an early exit emotionally.

Compelling purpose: The team’s purpose is obviously drawn out of the organization’s purpose. Purpose should answer two questions – one, essentially, a subtext of the other. Why do we do what we do? How does what we do make a difference in the world? I recently met with a bionics company. When I asked them about their purpose they answered, “To make the wheelchair redundant.” Now that’s a purpose! With a big enough “why” ordinary people can and do achieve the extraordinary.

1 Project Aristotle.



- Does the “why” have real emotional impact ... both within the business and with customers? Does it inspire people?
- In what ways does the purpose give team members a deeper sense of meaning?
- What unanswered questions does the purpose raise?

The right leader: To lead is to be the first one to smile and the last one to speak. Those who excel as leaders blend courtesy, compassion and comfort with ambiguity into an in-the-moment presence. Peter Drucker referred to courtesy as “the lubricant of leadership.”

There is no such thing as a leaderless team. Power moves into a vacuum. Lack of a leader runs the risk of introducing the wrong leadership. That said, as the team matures, there are times when the leader has to follow and members of the team are asked to lead.

- Is there a clear leader? Is he/she the right leader? Who should the leader be? In the case of an outgoing leader, what was his/her most significant contribution?
- Does the team leader live the organization’s values every day in every way? How does he/she deal with those who don’t always live the values? A leader who doesn’t live the values represents a dysfunctional role model for others ... especially for young, high potential leaders. “That’s how you get on around here.”
- What is the team leader’s leadership point of view? If he/she cannot articulate a clear leadership point of view, he/she either needs coaching or is the wrong leader.
- In the way he/she leads, does he/she deliver leadership “balance?” Balance implies – clarity of **D**irection – an unwavering focus on the **D**iscipline of **D**elivery – a commitment to **D**evelop self and others – and that the **D**ay-to-**D**ay **D**ialogue draws on humility, authenticity, resilience and caring. In my own work these four domains equate to the Head (direction); the Hand (delivery); the Heart (development); and the Spirit (ongoing dialogue).
- One of the leadership tasks often underestimated is the need to keep everyone on the team fully informed. Not only do team members give this a high priority but the depersonalised nature of digital connectivity only serves to emphasise the need for, and value of, face-to-face communication.
- More or less on a par with keeping people informed is that the leader “go to bat” for team members when criticism, concern and/or unhealthy politics arise from outside of the team. When and how does that happen?
- In the absence of an appointed leader, who takes the lead?
- How does the team leader deal with conflict? What conflict will a future leader need to deal with?



- How are rivalries dealt with?
- How much freedom to act do team members have? How much freedom to act should they have?
- How does the team leader delegate?

The right strategy: The strategy describes “what” needs to be achieved. The organization’s values outline “how.”

- Is the long-term direction for the team clear? Is it congruent with the strategy of key teams one level up?
- Are the delivery assumptions built into the strategy consistent with the organization’s values?
- Does the strategy contain within it messaging that reinforces the culture the organization needs to create?
- In what ways does the strategy balance the short and the long term?
- Who, if anybody, on the team disagrees with the agreed strategy? How have they been given a voice?

The right people: Whom you hire and/or promote dictates what’s possible. The default selection process in most organizations is skewed towards hiring the “best” person. Great teams are built on finding the “right” person.

Based on the situation, the right candidate will be someone who can grow and continue to grow in the role, who adds to the team beyond the horizons of the functional role and who is a natural fit with the leadership development agenda offered within the organization.

If you can’t attract top talent, you can’t hire top talent. Top performers are drawn to an organization with a great story.

- With the agreed strategy in mind, do those on the team have the basic talent needed to thrive? What’s missing ... as a team ... and/or on an individual basis?
- Is the behaviour of those on the team aligned with the culture the organization – and by implication – the team need to create?
- Is there an obvious successor to the leader? How has the potential success of that individual been validated? What development steps are under way?
- How does the team add someone new? Is that approach effective? Talent acquisition is about fit. Fit, in turn, means a great story; a robust measure of culture (today and tomorrow); a balanced scorecard; role-specific leadership competencies; an exacting



assessment of the team; and a self-guided approach to integration that allows the recently landed candidate to manage his/her own integration. If any of these risk-mitigating steps are missing, the inevitable outcome is that talent acquisition becomes a beauty contest (the best candidate).

- Are those who make recruitment decisions fully trained in interviewing? In that key hire decisions at the top of the organization are worth many times the annual salary – at times they amount to betting the business – it is surprising (shocking) how few key decision-makers know how to interview. Uninformed practice doesn't make you perfect; it merely makes the value destroyed incrementally greater.

Clear functional roles: There is a distinct difference between a job and a role. The former is defined by standards. No matter who holds down the job, the expectations will always be the same. The role is defined, initially, by the requisite core (contribution) demanded from the role. Outside of that requisite core, however, the individual in the role is able, to a degree, to shape the nature and scope of his/her contribution. Jobs are designed to fit together like the bricks in a wall – no overlap. In a high performing team, as individuals expand their contribution, a degree of role overlap is both inevitable and desirable. It's the challenge, creativity and collaboration derived from this overlap that often transforms a good team ... into something special.

- Are roles and responsibilities on the team clear?
- Do those on the team know, with great clarity, the decisions: (1) they can make; (2) they cannot make; and (3) that are shared?

Clear team roles: In addition to functional roles, the team must cover off six critical team roles: (1) Visionary (bring tomorrow to life, today); (2) Explorer (business savvy); (3) Pioneer (new ideas); (4) Warrior (delivery ethic); (5) Maverick (challenge the status quo); and (6) Navigator (team process).

- In which role does the team leader excel?
- Are all of the six team roles present and accounted for?
- If one of the team roles is missing, how is that shortfall addressed?
- Note: in teams in the middle of the organization it's quite possible for a talented team leader and/or member to deliver more than one role. The more senior the team, the more mastery in each of the six team roles is demanded. At the top of the organization it is unlikely that a leader will be masterful in more than one team role.

Clear goals: Expectations must encompass both “the what” (results) and “the how” (behaviour demanded). According to UCLA Neurobiology Professor, Dean Buonomano, our



brains are hard wired for the here and now; the “vision” amounting to little more than, “a conversation with a stranger.”² To turn the intangible into the attainable, means breaking the journey down into eminently practical steps. While it’s true that the stonemason was inspired by the belief that the Cathedral was being built for the glory of God, he also knew that every morning, at the break of dawn, he had to reach for his hammer and chisel.

- Do people know what is expected of them?
- Is at least one of those goals strategic (beyond the next 12 months)?
- Is feedback ongoing?
- Is “feedforward” a common approach?
- Is the tough conversation alive and well on the team?
- Are those who don’t live the organization’s values separated?
- Not everyone wants to receive feedback in the same way. This is an especially important issue in a multicultural team. How is this managed?

Ground rules: Outstanding teams agree on both output criteria (results) and how to successfully work together (relationships). The former is taken for granted. The latter, more often than not, is given only passing recognition. You can’t achieve what you haven’t defined. If you don’t know what you are looking for, it is highly unlikely that you will find it.

- In what circumstances does the team simply jump into the problem or issue?
- What agreed, four to six, easy to understand, team process criteria describe “team” success? How can those success criteria be introduced?
- Is time set aside regularly to review how the team is living up to the commitment framed by the agreed ground rules?
- Does the team take time out at the conclusion of a meeting and at the end of a project to discuss how they worked together?
- Is that learning folded into the next meeting/project?

Candour: Membership of a successful team isn’t always a comfortable experience. High performers, when faced with an unexpected barrier, unwarranted resistance and/or a drop in quality, don’t hesitate to use “their elbows” to achieve the outcome needed. Without candour the truth is destined to remain hidden. Without candour, manipulation, hidden agenda and decibel decision-making (who speaks the loudest) come to the fore.

Humour is candour’s best buddy. Indeed, humour can be a powerful way to burst the bubble

² Dean Buonomano, *Brain Bugs* (2012).



of pomposity ... but it has to be the right humour at the right time. Where humour is lacking, something important is missing from team chemistry. If you have just inherited a problematic team and humour is lacking ... the team is in worse shape than you were led to believe.

- Does everyone on the team speak up? Who doesn't? Why?
- How and when does the team leader ask for/receive feedback on how he/she behaves as a leader?
- When and how are those on the team who don't live the values confronted?
- When and how does the team leader take on (or not) the tough conversation?
- How and in what way does humour surface?
- In a team that draws membership from different cultures, humour can be a very sensitive issue. Is that cultural dynamic fully recognised? Is it factored into how the relationships on the team are shaped?

Collaboration: Cooperation is two or more people working to solve a problem or build on an opportunity where all of those involved gain, more-or-less, equally in the outcome achieved. Collaboration is two or more people working to solve a problem or build on an opportunity where the success of the others on the team is more important than one's own success. Cooperation is about sharing the gain. Collaboration is, ultimately, altruistic. See: **Fertile** in Chapter Four.

- Do team members stick up for each other?
- Is the success of the team more important than individual success?
- Do people on the team care for each other?
- Is appropriate humour part of how team members work together?
- Do those on the team look like they belong and want to belong ... or do one or two (possibly more) act as if they would rather be someplace else?

Coach each other: Coaching is **servant leadership** personified. And it is never about the coach. In today's business environment those who can't or don't coach are ill-equipped for any form of leadership that involves managing others.

- Is the team leader a role model as a coach?
- Do team members display coaching mastery? Do they ask to be coached?
- How and when do members of the team coach each other?
- Are "great questions" central to how team meetings move forward?



- Listening is a critical team strength. In what ways do team members go out of their way to listen to each other?

Celebrate success: If you don't use it, you lose it! Teams that don't celebrate success lose touch with the emotional impact of what it means to be successful. Celebration is defined by both the "end of project" event and ongoing affirmation.

- How do team members celebrate?
- Affirmation. Do team members go out of their way to "catch each other doing it right?"
- Are criticism and negative comments related to the goal sought and never personalised?

Renewal: Even the very best teams, at some time, lose their way. The time to address that loss of momentum is before it happens.

- What does the team need to stop?
- What does the team need to start?
- What does the team need to do differently?

Reinvention: Reinventing the team is, essentially, an act of creative destruction. With reinvention we come full circle. That is to say, we return to the first steps outlined in the team DNA.

- Does the team have a compelling purpose?
- Is the right leader in place?
- Are they approaching strategy in a meaningful and effective way?
- Does the team have the right people?

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." Leo Buscaglia

If the competition is building stronger, more agile, faster learning and higher performing teams than you are, no matter how good your product, you don't have a future ... you have a problem.



Conclusion

Faced with a raging storm, “the captain” has several options: stay in port and wait for the bad weather to pass; step back and develop a strategy that anticipates what tomorrow will bring; redesign the ship to enable it to ride the crest of the waves; replace those on board who aren’t up to the task; retrain the crew such that they are equipped to deal with turbulent weather; and/or ensure that, working together as a great team, the crew displays all the attributes needed to respond to an environment where the unexpected can be expected.

Staying in port only makes sense if calm sailing can be anticipated. When faced with an unprecedented level of turbulence, as we are, the harsh reality is that today’s storm is but a harbinger of the even greater storms ahead. Drawing on nature, anticipation, redesign, replacement, training and building a great team are clearly options ... but only if they are forged into holistic, cohesive, unambiguous, meaningful and compelling action steps. Underscoring those critical actions is a mindset. As a leader, do I want to be a follower or do I want to **create** the organization’s – and with it my own – future?

Without meaningful stories you won’t keep the dream alive. Without commitment you won’t survive. Without hard work you can’t thrive. Without a great team you won’t arrive.



Team Assessment

Great Organizations
Are Built Around
GREAT TEAMS

TRANSEARCH
YOUR WORLD PARTNER IN EXECUTIVE SEARCH

John O. Burdett

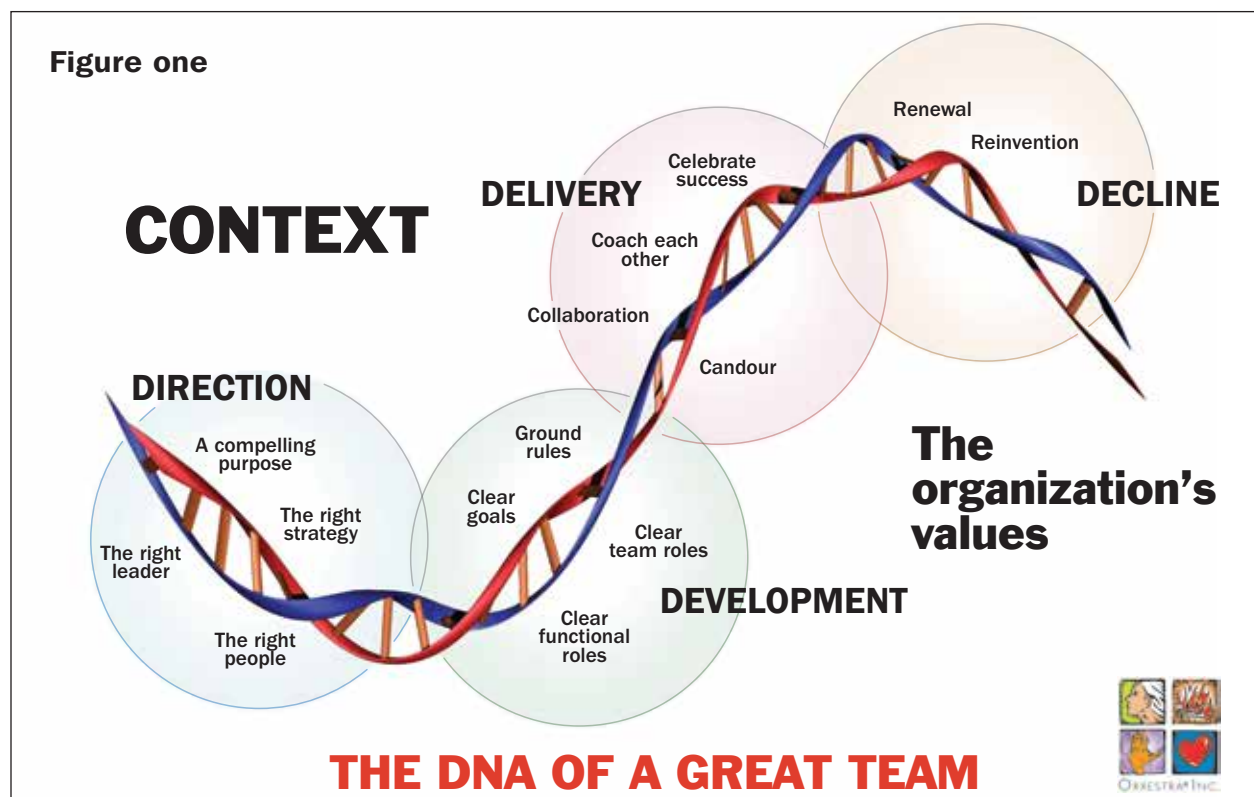




The Team DNA

Who: What follows is intended as a practical guide for (1) a recently appointed team leader; (2) the executive who feels that, as the organization navigates the turbulent waters of change, the team is losing its impact; (3) the HR executive, team leader or external recruitment specialist who, in orchestrating team fit, needs to understand the team he/she is hiring into; (4) shaping the effectiveness of a remote team; and/or (5) a manager or internal resource faced with the challenge of coaching the team.

A great team: Figure one – The DNA of a Great Team – maps out the building blocks of a truly successful team. Central to **Figure one** are two intertwined threads of DNA.





One strand represents results; the other relationships. A successful team commits to and invests in both. Results and relationships are the central tenets in a series of synergistic sub-processes that move from Direction, to Development, to Delivery and, eventually, to Decline. As it evolves, a great team leans heavily on these DNA markers.

Take the time to get it right at the beginning. There are any number of characteristics of a truly outstanding team. Counted amongst them being the level of engagement, symbolism, courtesy, language, story, the use of metaphor, agility, comfort with ambiguity, leadership reach (working across cultures), speed of learning and taking advantage of the technology available. The assessment that follows, whilst not all encompassing, focuses on, what are deemed to be, the *essential* building blocks of team success. Think of them as the “backbone” of a great team. Without a sound base to build upon even the most elegant of interventions, processes and/or structures will fall.

Think slow in order to be able to act fast: Obviously there are different types of teams: project teams, problem-solving teams, temporary teams, cross-functional teams, quality teams and virtual teams to name but a few. In reviewing **Figure one**, a central question quickly surfaces, “Are all the steps outlined necessary in every type of team?” The answer is ... “well, yes.” Consider for a moment a newly formed, cross-functional, project team that neglects or overlooks several (or even one) of the steps described. The only thing more impactful than a great team is a group of highly talented individuals devoid of a purpose,



The need for agility, innovation and speed of action means that tomorrow's successful organization will, of necessity, be a team of teams.



unclear about the role each plays and/or generally going in the wrong direction.

Unless you change the conversation the status quo is assured. It is worth emphasizing that although, in any change agenda, knowing where you are is essential, the assessment, above all else, affords an opportunity to enter into a deeper and richer conversation about what it means to be a great team.

The assessment: Even though you are very much part of the team, you are encouraged to look objectively at the way the team behaves from a detached standpoint. Do your best to do exactly that, especially if you are the team leader.

Scoring: Consider the three statements in each of the 15 clusters (e.g., context, organization values, the right strategy, etc.) and determine (✓) which one statement comes closest to your current reality (a, b, or c). Not where you want to be (aspirational) ... but where you are.

The assessment starts on page 34. Respond to all 15 clusters. Select only one statement in each cluster. Total your answers on page 42. Page 43 will explain what your result means.

*“What holds people back isn’t lack of desire or the need for a dream.
What makes the ordinary inevitable is being trapped by past success; by continuing
to do what we have always done; by taking the easy option.”*





MANAGING THE TEAM FROM THE OUTSIDE-IN

A great team is managed from the outside-in ... but draws on leadership from the inside-out. From “the outside-in” equates to taking account of the social and economic climate, what’s happening in the marketplace, the culture the organization needs in order to compete, successfully, tomorrow ... and the values deemed to have primacy in shaping behaviour across the organization.

1. Context:

- a. The team appears to be trapped by “culture drift” – the assumption that today’s behaviour and thinking (the status quo) will, by default, support the culture the organization needs tomorrow. **RED**
- b. Although no work has been done on culture measurement, any and all recent actions taken and/or deliberate changes within and by the team were fully mindful of the organization’s intentional culture. **AMBER**
- c. Measuring culture, and with it a focus on the culture the organization must have to remain competitive, is central to any discussion about future success – be it in support of the organization and/or for the team. **GREEN**

2. Organization values:

- a. Although the team have spent time on the organization’s values, not everyone on the team, if asked, could tell you what they are and/or exactly what they mean. **RED**
- b. Although there is a consistent understanding of what the organization’s values mean, the team doesn’t always display the discipline needed to consistently bring those values to life. **AMBER**
- c. If asked, everyone on the team would describe exactly what the organization’s values mean. Indeed, they frame every decision, every action and every interaction. Simply put, the organization’s values give people permission to act. Team members who don’t live those values are quickly confronted and, if nothing changes, separated from the organization. **GREEN**

“Content without context is momentum without meaning.”



DIRECTION

Direction is setting the stage. It's tilling the soil. It's giving the team a sound foundation. Teams that lack a compelling purpose, that want for the right leadership, that don't have a sound strategy and/or have even one person on the team who is a misfit are, at best, a disparate group going through the motions of being "a team."

3. Compelling purpose:

- a. There is confusion around "the difference the organization and, by implication, the team makes in the world." The motivation behind "why" the team collectively do what they do ... is equally unclear. Note: If the latter is simply to make money, expect a problem with retention. **RED**
- b. Although most of those on the team are comfortable discussing how and in what ways the team makes a difference, an engaging "why" has yet to emerge. **AMBER**
- c. Everyone on the team has a passionate commitment to both how the team makes a difference in the world and why the team do what they do. It's also clear that the "why" connects with what tomorrow's customers will demand. **GREEN**

4. The right leader:

- a. A leader who, to an outsider, would appear to be trying to find his/her way. **RED**
- b. An experienced and talented leader ... who, although "successful," doesn't always deliver "leadership balance." By the latter is implied clarity of direction; the discipline of delivery; a commitment to developing self and others; and that the day-to-day dialogue draws on humility, authenticity, resilience and caring. **AMBER**
- c. The leader is a clear role model in terms of embracing disruption, displaying resilience, living the organization's values and in being able to articulate a future-oriented, customer-centric leadership point of view. It is also very apparent that the team leader exemplifies leadership balance. **GREEN**

*"To be a better leader ... **first strive to become a better you.**"*



DIRECTION (continued)

5. The right strategy:

- a. Strategy contains three key elements: (1) strategic thinking; (2) strategic planning; and (3) strategic doing (delivery). In considering the direction being charted by the team, it's very apparent that one of these isn't fully present. **RED**
- b. The strategy is clear. The balance between the short and long term is well thought out. If there is a deficiency it's that the "messaging" contained in the strategy doesn't always reinforce the culture the organization needs to create. **AMBER**
- c. Not only is the strategy well thought through and "the customer's voice" fully present but all of the key constituencies needed to support and deliver the strategy are fully on board. In that middle management support is absolutely essential, the team leader, in particular, when sharing the strategy with those in the middle – through imagery, metaphor and story – makes tomorrow come alive in the room, today. **GREEN**

6. The right people:

- a. Although team members are held accountable for short-term results, it's not clear that all of those on the team are currently equipped for the ideas-driven, fast-moving, digital, turbulent world we are moving into. **RED**
- b. Assessment and meaningful coaching focusing on tomorrow's success is underway. If there is a dilemma it's that, in the hiring process, potential team members aren't always subjected to the rigor needed to effectively determine fit: the emerging culture (this implies measurement), a robust scorecard, role-specific leadership competencies and a deep understanding of the team. **AMBER**
- c. The hiring process embraces all the critical determinates of fit. Ongoing coaching is anchored in future-oriented, role-specific competencies, there is a recognition that diversity and innovation walk hand in hand and a clear successor to the team leader is in place. **GREEN**

*"When the work to define fit is either inadequate or incomplete, the default action is to land on the best candidate. Mastery is to hire the **right** candidate."*



DEVELOPMENT

If direction is setting the stage, development is where the players learn their lines. When those on the team are confused about the scope of their responsibility, what it truly means to be part of a team, the outcomes demanded and/or how to surface and deal with conflict, they are turning their back on what is truly possible.

7. Clear functional roles:

- a. From time to time, there is a degree of confusion regarding exactly who is responsible for what. **RED**
- b. Team members fully understand the scope of their responsibility, the decisions they can make, the decisions that amount to shared accountability and the decisions that must be referred to others. That said, the thinking on the team tends to view individual roles as though each were a separate brick in a wall: clear boundaries, no overlap and “do your job.” **AMBER**
- c. Team members have a full understanding of both the scope of their responsibility and the decisions that they are accountable for. There is also a shared understanding that beyond those core responsibilities (what must get done), each team member has an opportunity to shape the nature of their contribution. The resulting role overlap is recognised as an opportunity for breakthrough thinking and innovation to flourish. **GREEN**

8. Clear team roles:

- a. The team melds their skills and capabilities together without thinking too much about the “team role” each plays. **RED**
- b. Although not always deemed a priority, there is a general understanding that a great team covers off six essential team roles: Visionary (a team member who looks to the horizon); Explorer (brings business savvy); Pioneer (new ideas); Warrior (drive to deliver); Maverick (challenge the status quo); Navigator (a focus on team process). **AMBER**
- c. In meetings and on projects, if a key team role is missing, that role is allocated to a team member, e.g., asking a team member to deliberately play the role of “Maverick.” **GREEN**

*“In a wired and connected world, you need super teams
more than you need superstars.”*



DEVELOPMENT (continued)

9. Clear goals:

- a. Team members know what is expected of them. If there is a concern it is that, with some individuals, slippage against the agreed goals is often tolerated for longer than it should be. **RED**
- b. Clear goals, a tough-minded attitude to results and a recognition that “the how” is as important as “the what.” **AMBER**
- c. Stretch goals, ongoing feedback and a work climate where, based on capability, team members are afforded the opportunity to develop their full potential. It’s a learning environment supported by masterful coaching. **GREEN**

10. Ground rules:

- a. Faced with a challenge or a problem, the tendency within the team is to simply “jump in” and look for a solution. **RED**
- b. The team have developed both output (results) and process criteria (when we will be successful as a team). As a result, four to six “ground rules” describe, specifically, how those on the team, when working together, commit to behave. If there is a dilemma, it’s that those ground rules aren’t always deemed to be a priority. **AMBER**
- c. The ground rules are unambiguously defined. There is also a shared commitment from everyone on the team to ensure that the agreed team behaviour (consistently) shapes how team members support each other. At the beginning of every team meeting, for example, the ground rules are always quickly reviewed. **GREEN**

“Like a benevolent burglar, it’s the listener who steals the show.”



DELIVERY

Having prepared the ground a great team starts to deliver. This is where being part of something special starts to be recognised. This is where deep-rooted trust starts to emerge. The team can't reach this stage, however, unless setting the "direction" and putting in the work around "development" happens first.

11. Candour:

- a. For the most part people don't speak up. **RED**
- b. Speaking up tends to be situational and based, in no small measure, on who is in the room. Reluctance in speaking to power (upper management), waiting until others take the lead and/or relying on the team leader to challenge the way things are tends to be the norm. **AMBER**
- c. Regardless of the context, people speak up. Challenging the status quo, comfort with expressing a personal point of view and "going to bat for the customer" are enshrined in the team's DNA. Moreover, appropriate humour is alive and well. **GREEN**

12. Collaboration:

- a. Although some degree of cooperation is necessary, individual success often appears to be more important than the needs of the team. **RED**
- b. When a challenge or problem emerges, you can count on team members to cooperate with others both inside and outside of the team. That cooperation tends to be driven by a degree of self-interest and the assumption that everyone on the team or project will, in some way, benefit/gain from the outcome. **AMBER**
- c. Team members strive for and create opportunities for people both inside and outside of the team to collaborate. Collaboration is enacted not just as a response to a challenge or a problem but to create customer value in areas that the market hasn't yet asked for or to create innovative products/services that don't currently exist. The genesis of collaboration is the altruistic belief that "your success is more important than mine."
GREEN

*"Candour is made more likely when the team leader
is willing to be personally vulnerable."*



DELIVERY (continued)

13. Coach each other:

- a. Although there is a recognition that coaching is an essential leadership skill, for the most part, coaching is something that happens on other teams. **RED**
- b. The team leader is an extraordinarily good coach. He/she sets time aside to coach, is both tough-minded and empathetic and can be counted on to help team members become the best version of themselves that they can be. **AMBER**
- c. Not only is the team leader admired for his/her coaching skill but team members go out of their way to coach each other. It can truly be said, “the team have created a coaching culture.” **GREEN**

14. Celebrate success:

- a. Even when those on the team significantly exceed expectations or do something to collectively take pride in, little, if any, time is spent celebrating success. **RED**
- b. The team always celebrate success ... be it meeting a tough milestone, a major accomplishment or turning, what appeared to be, a losing hand into something memorable. **AMBER**
- c. The team always celebrate important milestones and/or major achievements. Team members also go out of their way, each and every day, “to catch each other doing it right.” **GREEN**

*“In today’s uncertain and rapidly changing business environment,
if you can’t coach, you can’t lead.”*



DECLINE

Decline is the inevitable conclusion of accepting the status quo as the natural state, a creeping sense of complacency, a softening of commitment and/or attempting to manage the team from the inside-out. At the end of the day, context is everything. If the customer's voice is muted, if emerging changes in society are ignored, if the value of diversity is discounted, if the competition is better equipped to deal with a turbulent world, and/or if the pace of learning on the team starts to slow, decline is inevitable.

15. Renewal:

- a. There is a general sense within the team of being on the right track and that if the status quo is maintained the future is assured. **RED**
- b. Be it in sports, in business, or in life generally, teams, no matter how successful, lose their way. If that does happen the team has the character to react accordingly. **AMBER**
- c. Even great teams can find that their performance moves into a period of decline. The inherent passion, drive and commitment to act ensures that the team will act before that happens. To that end, the team regularly takes time out to challenge engrained assumptions, use a range of tools to assess team strengths and shortfalls and regularly ask for feedback from those served. **GREEN**

Reinvention:

If the opportunity for “renewal” is ignored, if reenergising the team happens too late and/or if team members lose the respect of those they serve, there will be little choice but to break the team up and, essentially, start again. Don't let that happen!

“The time to bring about change ... is long before you have to change.”



TEAM DNA: SCORING

From the assessment (✓) determine how you responded to each cluster. You should have identified only one response in each of the 15 clusters. If you have omitted or overlooked one of the clusters you will get a false score.

NUMBER	Red (a)	Amber (b)	Green (c)
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			
TOTAL			

“Even as we faced extinction on the plains of Africa, the best of us knew that out there, somewhere, was a better pointed stick.”





TEAM DNA: RESULT

Transfer your totals from the previous page **Red**, **Amber** or **Green** to the chart on the right. Multiply your score by the factor given. →

Red	<input type="text"/>	Amber	<input type="text"/>	Green	<input type="text"/>
x1		x3		x5	
=		=		=	

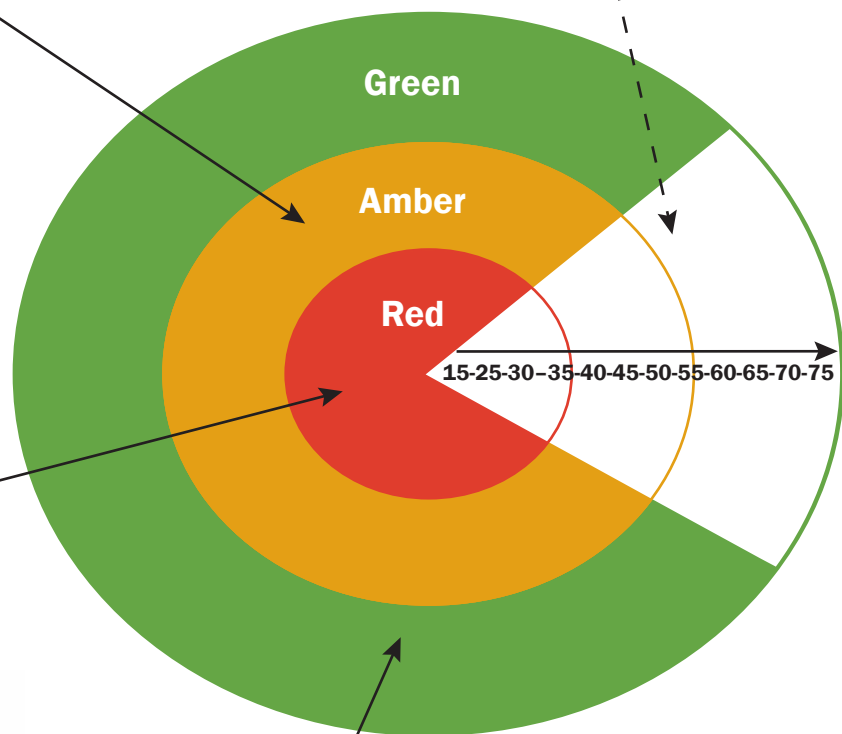
Add your three scores together

= **TOTAL**

Apply your score on the scale below

CAUTION: What we are describing is a “middle of the road team.” Unless an action-bias prevails regarding where and how the team needs to improve, mediocrity beckons.

STOP: In a world marked by uncertainty, speed of change and the need for organization agility, a struggling team is a competitive handicap.



GO: The building blocks of a great team are in place. The challenge: There are still areas where the team can do better.



For more on the issues brought up in the assessment see *Great Organizations Are Built On Great Teams*. John O. Burdett (2018).



ACTION STEPS

After reviewing the Team DNA assessment and with the wider business challenges for the organization that lie ahead in mind, consider:

Beginnings start with endings. What does the team need to stop doing?

Change means consolidating positive habits. What does the team need to do more of?

Change implies adopting new habits. What does the team need to start doing or do differently?

*“Yesterday’s team leader was deemed to be ‘in charge.’
Today, he/she works for the team.”*





John Burdett has worked in over 40 countries as an executive and as a consultant for businesses that are household names. He has worked on and continues to work on leadership development and organization culture for some of the world's largest corporations.

His ongoing partnership with the Bedford Consulting Group and TRANSEARCH INTERNATIONAL means that his proprietary work on talent acquisition, in any one year, successfully supports many hundreds of top leadership appointments on six continents.

He holds a doctorate in management development and since 2000 has published fourteen best-selling books on leadership, talent management, coaching and organization culture. His Talent Trilogy was completed in 2016. The first in the series, *Attract, Select, Develop & Retain TALENT*, was published in 2013. The second, *TEAM: Align, Build, Connect and Develop*, came out in early 2015. *The Empty Suit*, in 2016. *The A-Z of Organization Culture* came out in 2017. *Tomorrow Will Be Different – Will You?* was published in 2020.

John has a number of books available for download. Go to any of the major, online bookstores. Access using author's name: John O. Burdett

