



TEAM ASSESSMENT

TEAMWORK:

Mandate it, Measure it, Manage it!

TRANSEARCH
EXECUTIVE SEARCH & LEADERSHIP CONSULTING

John O. Burdett



TEAMWORK:

Mandate it,
Measure it,
Manage it!

John O. Burdett



“Tomorrow’s AI-enabled organization will be a team of teams.”

Leaders **must** lead! In a world where uncertainty rules, those in charge have to take charge. Not so easy when the future can only be viewed through a cloudy glass. Not so easy when, as a species, we are, even after 40,000 years of evolution, little more than cultured cave dwellers dominated by tribal loyalties. Disagree? By the age of 40, about 50% of people in the West will have had a mental illness. As for tribal loyalties, one need look no further than the current US political scene for undeniable evidence.

This overall complexity and confusion is made more so by the echo chamber of noise that expresses the belief that tomorrow’s enterprise will be little more than a group of thinking





machines surrounded by a tall, barbed wire fence. The barbed wire fence, of course, being to stop anyone messing with the machines.

Meanwhile, if we take the time to interrogate reality – rather than buy into the hype – there are four things that we can say with certainty about AI. One: in its current form it contains not a scintilla of “intelligence.” Two: no one will lose their job to AI; they will be made redundant by someone successfully accessing AI. Three: the more companies learn about AI the less they trust it. And four: in the fullness of time we can largely ignore the first three issues because, moving forward, AI will, without question, redefine what an organization is. To wit, investment in AI needs to be strategically intentional, that is to say, focused on the competitive advantage that comes from reinventing the organization and not merely immediate financial savings that job redundancy and productivity gains suggest. Don't settle for a candle when you need floodlights!

In the midst of unprecedented change, the saving grace for our kind lies in the warp and weft of our survival story. The warp is found in the unfolding reality that we are prodigiously resilient. Not simply bouncing back (as the dictionary defines) but learning from the experience. Here, as a society, we lean heavily on the 10% of any population who are early adopters ... and a far smaller group who are truly innovative. The dilemma? As is the case with a thoroughbred racehorse – when those with innovative flair are held back, they become difficult to manage. Also note that in Canada and the US at least a third of successful entrepreneurs are dyslexic (resilient outsiders who follow their own drummer).

And the weft? Throughout our evolution, in our very being, we are a team animal. We don't practise teamwork, it's simply who we are. Sadly, the Industrial Revolution (1700s); the Age of Steam (1800s); the basic assembly line (1913-1939); the advanced assembly line (1940-1959); the integration of robots into the assembly line (1960-until today); and the microchip that left many of us tethered to an electronic box (1980-until today) ... all shaped work in a way that went against our inherent nature.

That scenario is about to change. There is no secret about the kind of organizations we must create. Success means flat, focused, fast, flexible and fertile to new ideas. In a world where competing on ideas is at a premium, it also means moving from cooperation to collaboration. The former implies sharing the benefits of working together more or less equally. The latter implies altruism – where “your success is more important than mine.”

As for design, assume that above all else, tomorrow's AI-enabled organization will be a team of teams. Teams supported and brought to life by an AI hub. A hub that delivers:



- *Connection*: highlights changes to the context, calibrates risk, facilitates strategic alignment and provides a real-time operational scorecard.
- *Communication*: provides insight as to the state of the market, triggers early warnings regarding competitive initiatives, highlights the customers' emerging needs (current and potential) and supports market-oriented agentic AI.
- *Collaboration*: complements hiring fit, enhances idea generation, builds shared best practice, enriches organization and personalised learning, delivers ongoing team measurement/development and facilitates peer-to-peer coaching.
- *Culture*: provides key measures of both the formal and the informal culture, monitors employee retention, provides a validated platform for executive and middle management succession, and is the centrepiece for all work on employee engagement.

The challenge? Where to start. You eat an elephant a piece at a time. Working an AI initiative? Start not with the technology but by assessing the DNA of the team. Even the healthiest plant withers and dies in stoney ground.

To dig deeper, go to the team DNA assessment that follows.

*“Every additional organizational level doubles the noise
and significantly reduces the speed of response.”*

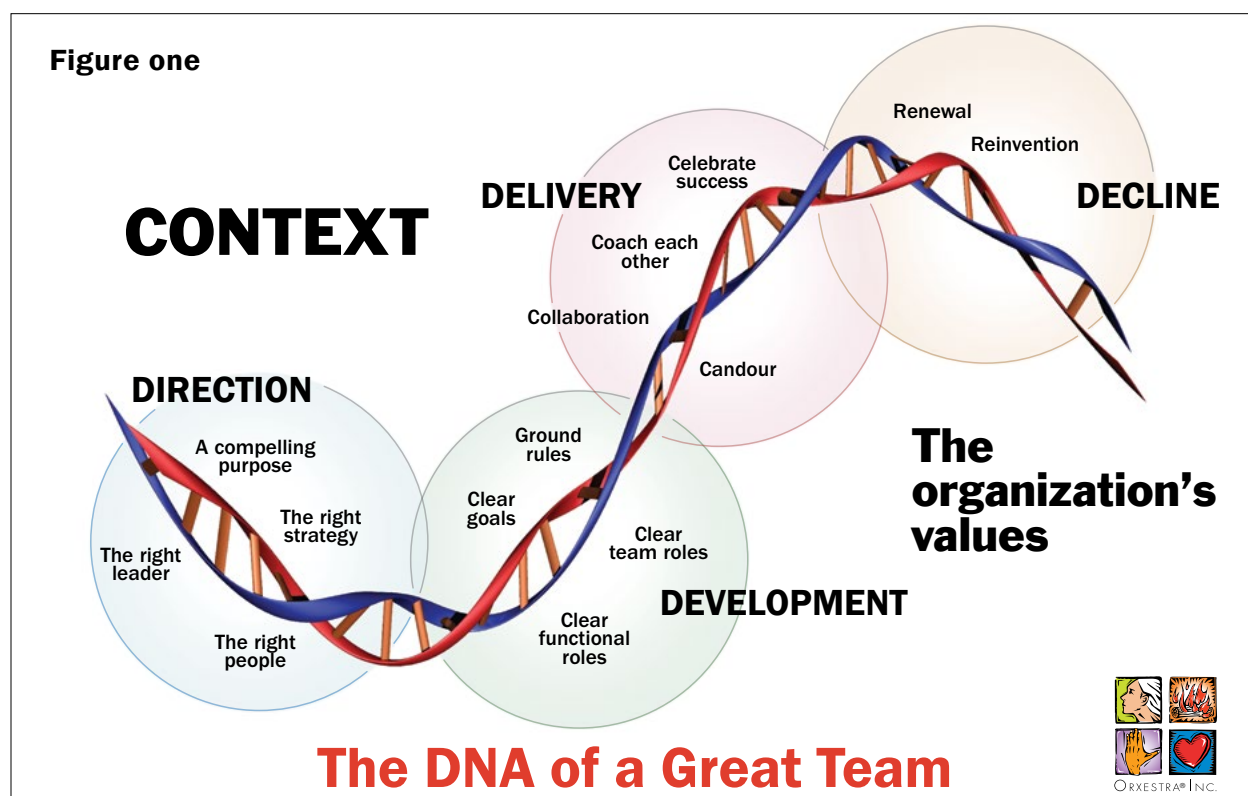


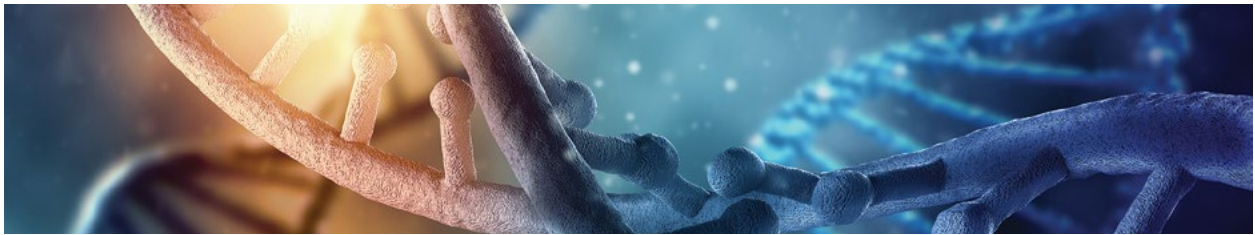


The Team DNA

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 AI, the team is an essential building block; (3) the HR executive, team leader or external recruitment specialist who, in orchestrating team fit, needs to understand the team they are hiring into; (4) shaping the effectiveness of a remote team; and/or (5) the team leader or internal resource faced with the challenge of coaching the team through a period of change.

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.



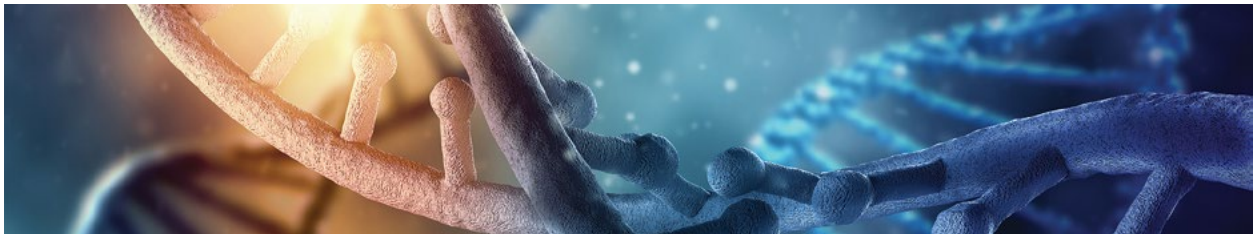


One strand represents results; the other relationships. A successful team commits to and invests in both. Results and relationships are the central tenets in a series of synergistic subprocesses that move from Direction, to Development, to Delivery and, eventually, to Decline. As it evolves, a great 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 among them are the level of engagement, symbolism, courtesy, language, story, the use of metaphor, agility, psychological safety, comfort with ambiguity, leadership reach (working across cultures), speed of learning and taking advantage of the technology available (AI). The assessment that follows, while 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, technology 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, 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, 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.

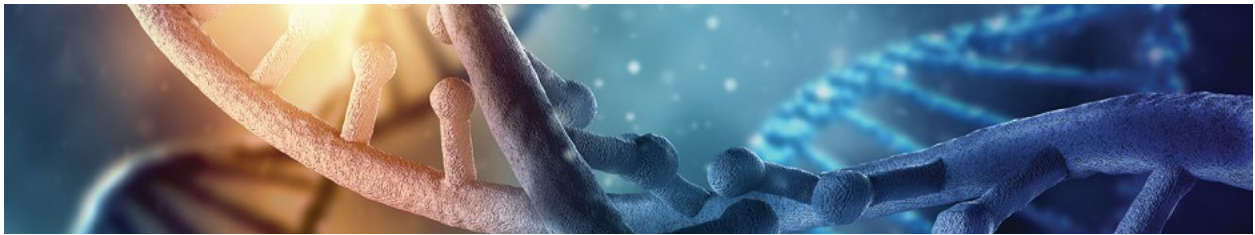
The assessment. Even though you are very much part of the team, you are encouraged to look objectively at the way the team behaves from a detached standpoint. Do your best to do exactly that, especially if you are the team leader.

Scoring. Consider the three statements in each of the 15 clusters (e.g., context, organization values, the right strategy) 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 8. Respond to all 15 clusters. Select only one statement in each cluster. Total your answers on page 16. Page 17 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 successfully compete tomorrow ... and the values deemed to have primacy in shaping behaviour across the organization.

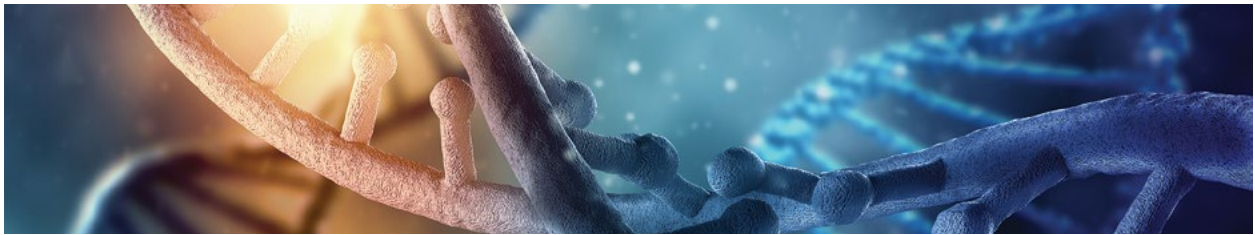
1. Context:

- 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 has 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."

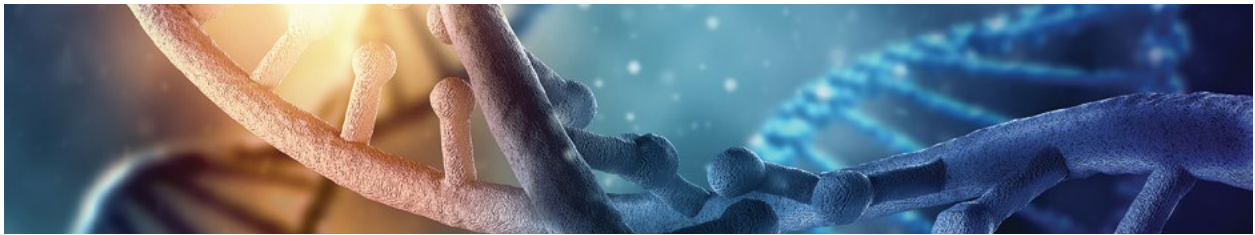
3. Compelling purpose:

- 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 does 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 does what it does. 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 their 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)

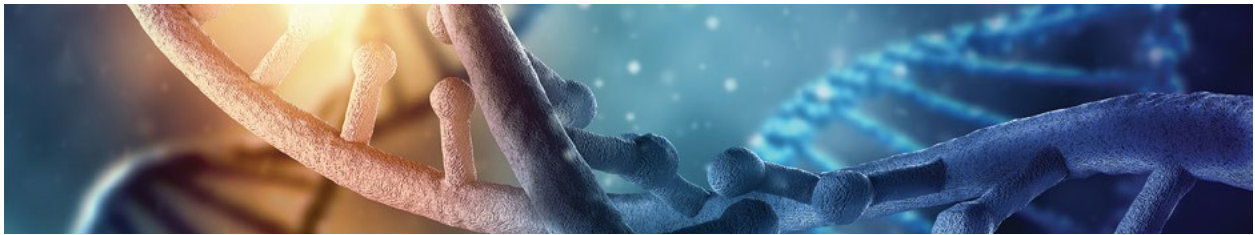
5. The right strategy:

- 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 rigour 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.

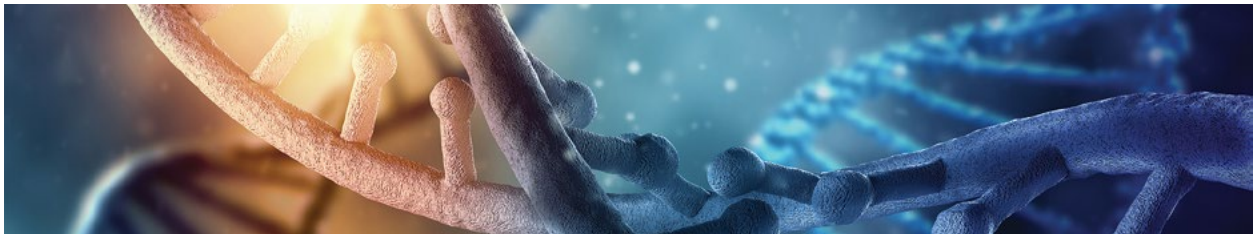
7. Clear functional roles:

- 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 (introduces new ideas); Warrior (drives to deliver); Maverick (challenges the status quo); Navigator (focuses 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)

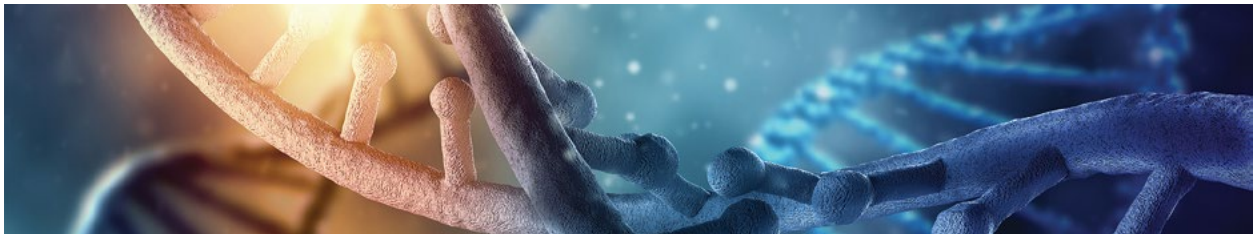
9. Clear goals:

- 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 has developed both output (results) and process criteria (when we will be successful as a team). As a result, four to six “ground rules” specifically describe 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.

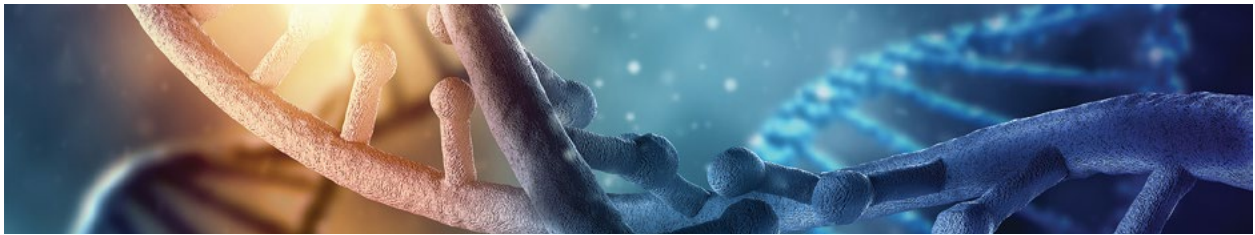
11. Candour:

- 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)

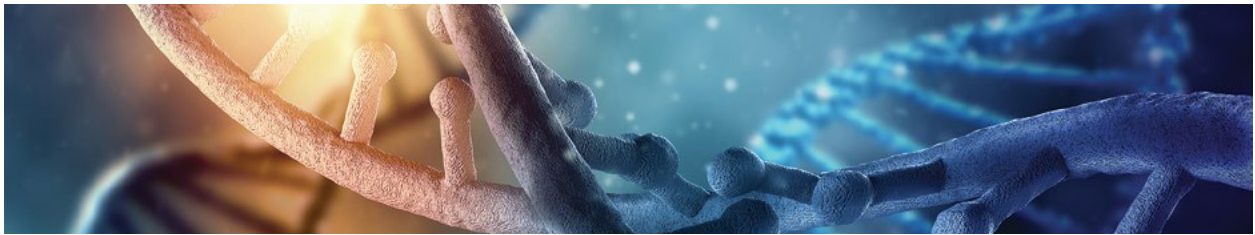
13. Coach each other:

- 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. They set 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 their coaching skill but team members go out of their way to coach each other. It can truly be said, “The team has 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 celebrates 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 celebrates 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.

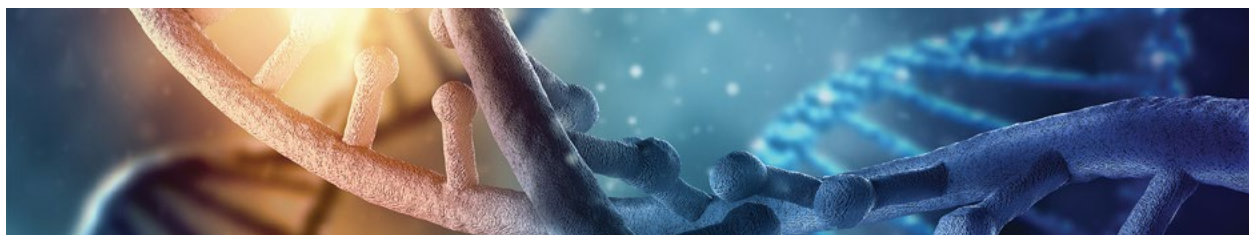
15. Renewal:

- 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 respond 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 re-energising 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.”



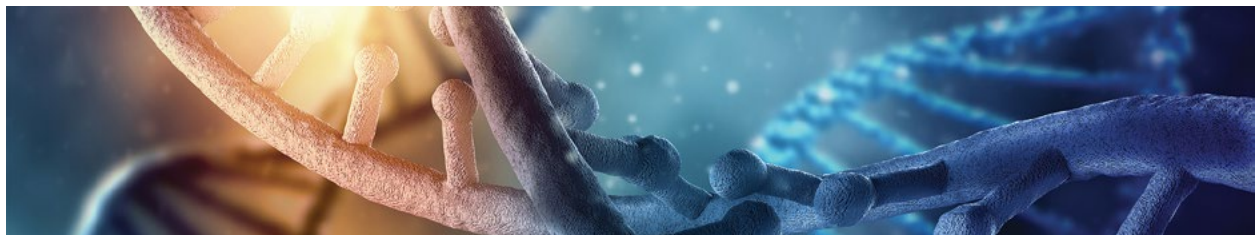
TEAM DNA: SCORING

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		AMBER		GREEN	
x1		x3		x5	
=		=		=	

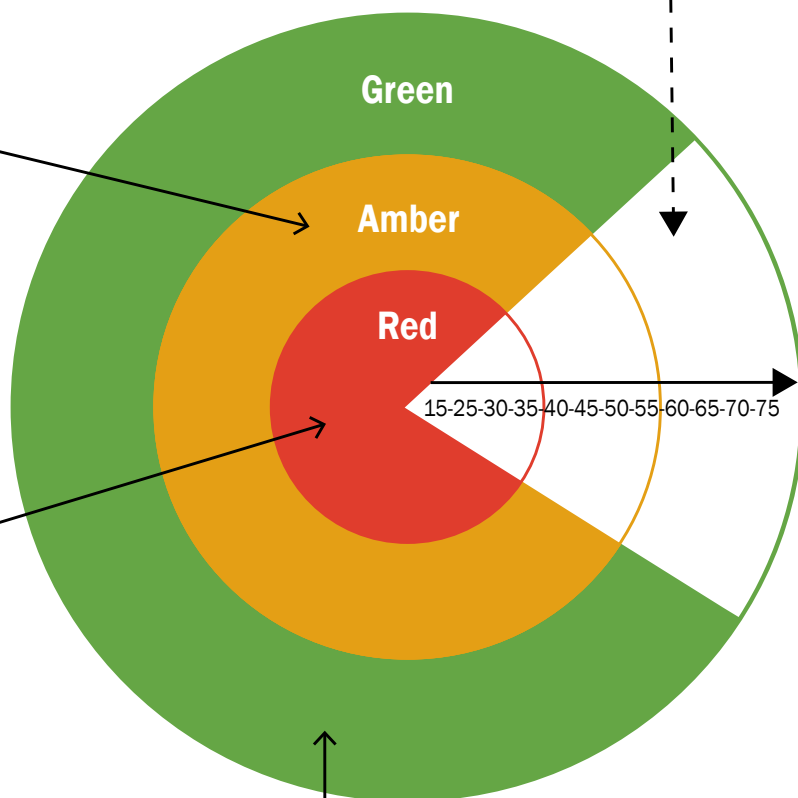
Add your three scores together

= **TOTAL**

CAUTION: We are describing a “middle of the road team.” Unless an action-bias prevails regarding where and how the team needs to improve, introducing new technology will be an uphill battle.

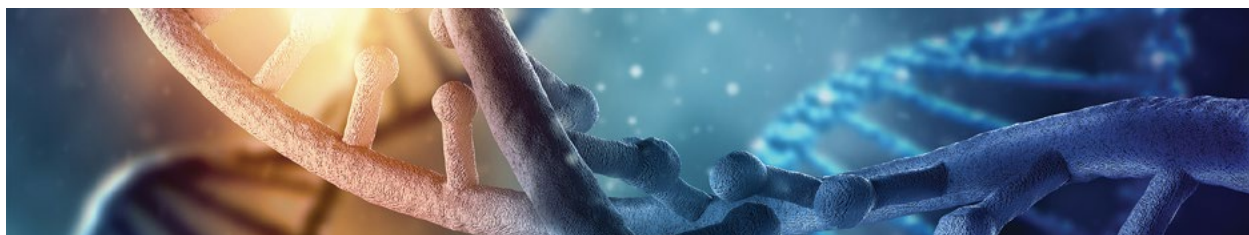
STOP: In a world marked by uncertainty, speed of change and the need for organization agility, a struggling team is a competitive handicap.

Apply your score on the scale below



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





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, they work for the team.”*





John O. Burdett

*“Tomorrow’s
organization will
be a team
of teams.”*

- John O. Burdett

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

In 2019, his work with ABB’s top 240 executives received a major international award for the most innovative leadership development initiative of that year. His ongoing partnership with 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 has written extensively on executive coaching and was awarded international coach of the year by the Finnish Institute of International Trade. Business graduates at the University of Texas indicated that his material on coaching was the single most valuable learning source they took away from their undergraduate degree. He has also coached numerous executive teams

around the world in how to coach. He currently coaches a select group of CEOs.

Apart from a range of corporate leadership workshops, he has taught at business schools on both sides of the Atlantic. His work on the MBA program at the University of Toronto received a teaching excellence award. John holds a doctorate in management development and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

In addition to numerous business articles and twice being awarded article of the year by MCB publications, John has published 16 books on leadership, talent management, coaching and organization culture. A number of them bestsellers. His most recent book is a fully revised version of his international bestselling book on executive integration: *Without Breaking Stride*. To download his current business articles go to www.transearch.com/orxestra/downloads

