THE CASE OF THE
COLORFUL LEADERSHIP TEAM

Dave Winsborough

When a new CEO took over at GeneBank*, a global supplier of dairy and beef genetics, the Board gave him a strong mandate to double the size of the business to $1 billion. This was a dramatic shift and required new skills in acquisition, global marketing, data science, and logistics. The team would also have to lead a deeply skeptical, science based organization into a future with much higher expectations.

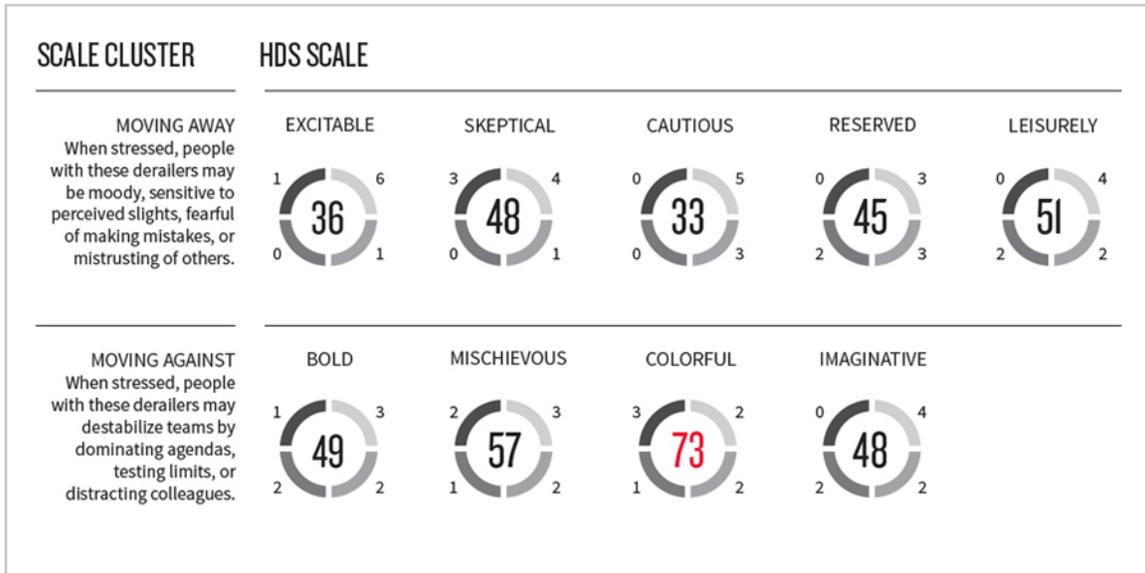Naturally, he began by developing a new executive team.

THE PEOPLE ARE THE TEAM

We understand that people play two roles: their functional role – such as global logistics lead – and also their psychological role, which might be their ability to generate ideas or to hustle and drive results. Our research shows that the players on top teams are invariably dominant and outgoing , which can hinder the development of psychological safety and an overarching goal, key conditions for performance. So it proved here, as the team excelled at driving for results and low on process:

TEAM SCORES

RESULTS	PRAGMATISM	INNOVATION	PROCESS	RELATIONSHIPS
88	38	38	25	50
People who organize work, clarify roles, coordinate, and provide direction for others. They enjoy taking charge and pushing for results.	People who provide practical, hard-headed evaluations of ideas and proposals. They advocate pragmatic solutions, and their views are not influenced by the need to maintain harmony. They are direct and grounded in reality.	People who recognize when conditions have changed and when the team needs to adapt. They spot emerging trends and patterns quickly, enjoy solving problems, and generate creative solutions.	People who are concerned with implementation, the details of execution, and the use of processes and systems to complete tasks. They are reliable, organized, and conscientious about following procedures.	People who are concerned about morale and how team members are getting along. They are positive and optimistic, attuned to people's feelings, and good at building cohesive relationships.

*Not the company's actual name.

This team also had a distinctive, shared dark side risk of being colorful:

SCALE CLUSTER	HDS SCALE				
MOVING AWAY When stressed, people with these derailers may be moody, sensitive to perceived slights, fearful of making mistakes, or mistrusting of others.	EXCITABLE 1 / 6 **36** 0 / 1	SKEPTICAL 3 / 4 **48** 0 / 1	CAUTIOUS 0 / 5 **33** 0 / 3	RESERVED 0 / 3 **45** 2 / 3	LEISURELY 0 / 4 **51** 2 / 2
MOVING AGAINST When stressed, people with these derailers may destabilize teams by dominating agendas, testing limits, or distracting colleagues.	BOLD 1 / 3 **49** 2 / 2	MISCHIEVOUS 2 / 3 **57** 1 / 2	COLORFUL 3 / 2 **73** 1 / 2	IMAGINATIVE 0 / 4 **48** 2 / 2	

The organization soon saw the impact of the team's profile. As the Board had wanted, the team was strongly goal driven, competitive, and ambitious. The organization felt as if it had received a huge shot of energy. Targets were increased, standards were raised, and individuals held to account (and non-performers exited). The team was exciting to be around and made strong efforts to connect with each other and the wider organization.

At the same time three other behaviors emerged that caused frustration and resentment. Although driven and focused, the team didn't listen well to the organization, spending its time in broadcast mode. Secondly, goals stacked on goals as they emerged from the long, tough meetings of the top team, and little attention paid to sequencing or resourcing. Finally, the team was distractible, and the strategy began to accumulate pet projects.

The CEO was astute enough to hear grumbling from the organization and the unhealthy patterns forming in his team. He used the Hogan Team Report to reveal a clear picture of the behaviors and dynamics to be expected from the unique mix of team members, and to build a strong coaching and development plan for the group and each member.

He instituted a two year program of team meetings, at which they reviewed their collective and individual profiles, reflected on their improvements and progress, and studied feedback from the organization.

"THE TEAM REPORT HELPED ME UNDERSTAND NOT JUST WHAT WAS HAPPENING, BUT WHY IT WAS OCCURRING. THAT GAVE US THE SHARED LANGUAGE TO CALL BAD BEHAVIOR OUT; AND SPECIFIC SKILLS AND ROUTINES TO STAY CONSTRUCTIVE."

THE CASE OF THE
MISSING RESULTS

Dave Winsborough

The Environmental Sustainability Agency* (ESA) is a mid-sized government body that maintains a large estate of parks and wild ecological zones. Principled in pursuing its aims, it was also regarded as preachy and self-righteous in its dealings with others. As a result, nearly 30% of baseline funding was cut by successive administrations over a 6-year period, and the ESA was forced to become more entrepreneurial. It was told it must generate returns from its parks, and work with operators who help fund its activities.

The organization responded first by cutting peripheral programs, squeezing operational efficiencies and freezing all new hires. As funding cuts continued, the top leadership accepted that to survive fundamental change had to occur. A three-phase plan called for co-funding of programs with corporate sponsors, a cost-cutting reorganization, reducing non-core programs and cutting staff numbers, and creating a cultural shift to a commercial and fiscally disciplined mindset. This message was a cultural abomination.

The finance team was core, as the plan required them to educate staff and managers, build new financial management tools, and become close partners with line management. At planning retreats and regular top-table meetings the Finance Director not only helped build the plan, but was exceptionally supportive; all could see he worked diligently for the cause.

But he and his team failed over and over again to deliver the tools, guidance, and support that the turnaround plan required. Operating much as they always had, finance developed a reputation as isolated and defensive amid layoffs and heart-wrenching change.

THE PEOPLE ARE THE TEAM

We profiled the individuals of the finance team and generated a comprehensive view of the whole group. We looked at the team through the lens of the five roles that people play on a team.

Results Role - People who are keen to drive forward and get things done, who like to win, and who take on the role of directing the team.

Relationships Role - People with a focus on connections, personal involvement, and networking. They empathize with others and understand how those outside the team will see things.

Process Role - People with a focus on structure and ensuring there is a process for implementation. They will be the ordered, conscientious, and detail-focused team members.
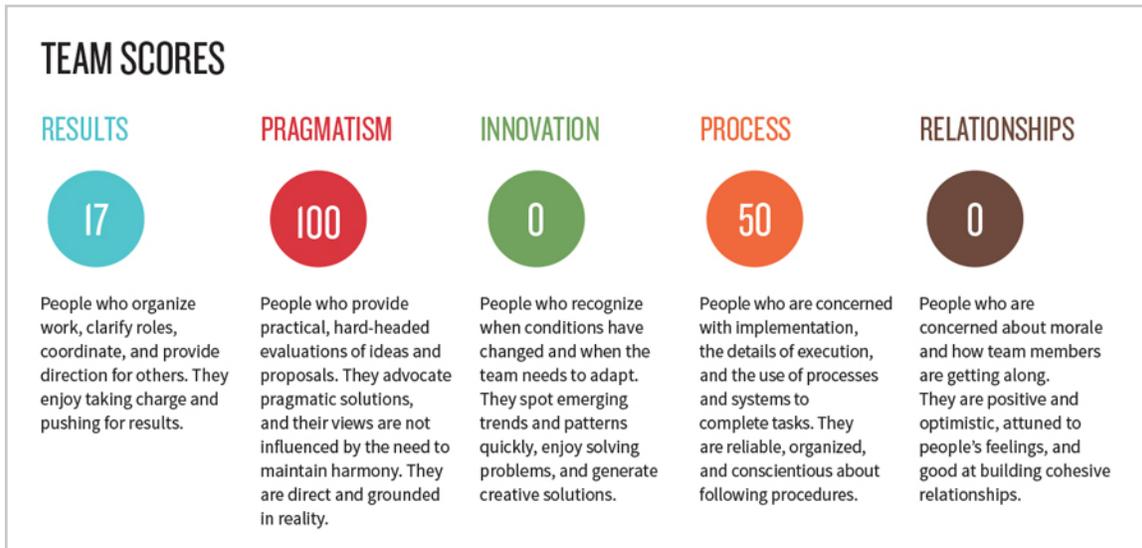
Innovation Role – People who are creative and envision the future of where the team could go. They have a focus on change, vision, and ideas.

Pragmatist Role - People who are grounded and straightforward, who prefer real world experience to theory and unconventional thinking.

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* This is a real case, although the agency name has been changed.

This picture of the team as a whole provides a visceral sense of how it will tend to behave, and allows us to surmise how the team will be seen by others. Let's walk through the implications of the team profile.

TEAM SCORES

RESULTS	PRAGMATISM	INNOVATION	PROCESS	RELATIONSHIPS
17	100	0	50	0
People who organize work, clarify roles, coordinate, and provide direction for others. They enjoy taking charge and pushing for results.	People who provide practical, hard-headed evaluations of ideas and proposals. They advocate pragmatic solutions, and their views are not influenced by the need to maintain harmony. They are direct and grounded in reality.	People who recognize when conditions have changed and when the team needs to adapt. They spot emerging trends and patterns quickly, enjoy solving problems, and generate creative solutions.	People who are concerned with implementation, the details of execution, and the use of processes and systems to complete tasks. They are reliable, organized, and conscientious about following procedures.	People who are concerned about morale and how team members are getting along. They are positive and optimistic, attuned to people's feelings, and good at building cohesive relationships.

The finance team was the antithesis of natural born team players. Not one person was able to play the relationships role or the innovation role, and only a few in the results role. The team report predicted three key behaviors that would get in the way of their task:

First, the team preferred to be told what to do, and lacked drive and energy. It would come across as reactive and passive.

Second, it would avoid building connection. Talkative meetings with line colleagues were frustrating and irrelevant, and expecting the team to spend time on outreach was always a stretch.

Third, they were the opposite of visionary and creative. The hope it would develop innovative and useful tools to help managers monitor their budgets and spending was unlikely. When it came to producing new ideas they simply weren't capable.

The profile also enabled the team to see itself as others did – and to develop conscious and deliberate actions to change. This was difficult and felt unnatural but, with effort, coaching, and strong measurement, the team responded.

While it's common for functional work groups to attract people who have a similar makeup – for example research has reliably shown that accountants en masse really are boring[1] – such homogeneity may intensify weaknesses or can lead to overplaying strengths. Understanding the task and matching it with people who can perform appropriately is always the rule[2].

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[1]Levy, J. J., Richardson, J. D., Lounsbury, J. W., Stewart, D., Gibson, L. W., & Drost, A. W. (2011). Personality Traits and Career Satisfaction of Accounting. Individual Differences Research , 238-249.

[2]Hollenbeck, J. R., DeRue, D. S., & Guzzo, R. (2004). Bridging the gap between I/O research and HR practice: Improving team composition, team training, and team task design. *Human Resource Management, 43*(4), 353–366. http://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20029

THE CASE OF THE
THE TEAM THAT WENT NOWHERE

Dave Winsborough

One of the assumptions many people make in thinking about team performance is that getting along with each other is the most important thing[1]. Using that logic, many team building sessions and interventions focus on soothing issues between people and reducing conflict. If that is achieved, the team will have a firm foundation of trust and will produce positive results.

But that's incorrect[2]. What matters more than anything is having a clear mission – a sense of purpose – and the right people to deliver it. Without a mission and appropriate membership, a team is nothing more than a group of people.

Consider the health and safety function of a very large organization. In the face of widespread and systemic safety failures, including worker deaths, they had been positioned as a new group, with stronger policies and powers. Six months into the mission, the team was meandering and hadn't made any impact at all.

THE PEOPLE ARE THE TEAM

We understand that people play two roles: their functional role – such as social media lead – and also a psychological role, which might be their ability to generate ideas, or to hustle and drive results.

Although the mission was really clear, the team consisted of people who were powerfully driven by relationships but with no drive or ambition for results. These were nice and genuine people who reached out across the organization, and who talked a good game but simply didn't deliver.

TEAM SCORES

RESULTS	PRAGMATISM	INNOVATION	PROCESS	RELATIONSHIPS
0	0	29	29	86
People who organize work, clarify roles, coordinate, and provide direction for others. They enjoy taking charge and pushing for results.	People who provide practical, hard-headed evaluations of ideas and proposals. They advocate pragmatic solutions, and their views are not influenced by the need to maintain harmony. They are direct and grounded in reality.	People who recognize when conditions have changed and when the team needs to adapt. They spot emerging trends and patterns quickly, enjoy solving problems, and generate creative solutions.	People who are concerned with implementation, the details of execution, and the use of processes and systems to complete tasks. They are reliable, organized, and conscientious about following procedures.	People who are concerned about morale and how team members are getting along. They are positive and optimistic, attuned to people's feelings, and good at building cohesive relationships.

Their shared derailers exacerbated the tentative, indecisive style. These tendencies often emerge about six months into a role, as people begin to drop their guard and relax, no longer being so concerned about managing their good impression. This team had a high proportion of individuals who wanted to avoid hard calls or quick decisions, out of concern they would get it wrong, or be challenged. Most of the team were keen to go along with the status quo and not challenge existing norms. In the face of push back or resistance from managers – which was exactly the situation they were hired to break through – they tended to acquiesce and fold.

SCALE	IMPLICATION
DUTIFUL 0 — 0 **66** 4 — 3	Teams with a shared Dutiful derailer may respond to stress by becoming excessively ingratiating or conforming to the needs and desires of sponsors or superiors. Such teams often experience difficulties making independent decisions without the express approval of those above them in the organization. In contrast, team members who do not share this derailer may be frustrated by the team's seeming unwillingness to be courageous within the organization. To mitigate this shared derailer, members of these teams should work on thinking independently, challenging assumptions, and pushing back on requests. Carefully considering when to say no or to "push back" on outside demands may be valuable in addition to creating a team position or perspective on key issues. This derailer may be accelerated by the team's having a low proportion of members who fulfill the Results role, especially if they heavily populate the Relationships role.
CAUTIOUS 1 — 1 **64** 3 — 2	Teams with a shared Cautious derailer may seem slow to act because of a fear of negative judgment and a resulting tendency to reassess and rework plans and proposals. To outsiders, such teams may appear indecisive and paralyzed by ambiguity. These teams often need to learn to stop procrastinating or obsessing over what might go wrong. Instead, working to shift the team's perspective towards viewing mistakes as opportunities to improve can help it act quicker and more decisively. These teams often need to focus on making the best, not the least risky, decision, and team members who do not share this derailer may become frustrated by its slow decision-making process and unwillingness to take risks. Teams with high proportions of members who fulfill the Process and Pragmatism roles may experience accelerated impact from this shared derailer.

In this instance, our advice to the CEO was that team coaching was singularly unlikely to change much, and that he would be better off changing the membership, starting with a stronger, more assertive leader.

That was a tough call, and in light of the recent shift to install this group, one he was reluctant to take. He persevered for another 12 months, providing stronger and stronger direction for the team. But personality is hard to change, even more so when unconscious group norms and preferences are shared across the group. Two years later, there was another restructure, and the team went nowhere.

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[1]Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team: A leadership fable*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[2]Curphy, G. J., & Hogan, R. (2012). *The rocket model: Practical advice for building high performing teams*. Tulsa, OK: Hogan Press.