team as **ORGANISM**

APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS OF ALCHEMY

element one: **PERCEIVING** APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS TO TEAM AS ORGANISM





TEAM AS ORGANISM: PERCEIVING

Every team has collective sight—what can be perceived as a whole through the integration of each individual's ability to notice what lies beneath the surface. And what one person notices may be quite different than what another person notices. We often invest more in trying to reconcile how we see things differently than we do in developing greater capacity to see collectively.

1 UNIQUE PERCEPTION. Who on the team has the best sense of people? The best sense of difficult situations? The best sense of what's likely to occur in the future? The best sense of danger?

2 COLLECTIVE PERCEPTION. What do we collectively see most easily—and least easily? It's usually easier to know what you've seen than what you've missed. But recurring situations that surprise us—or even blindside us—offer clues to what we collectively may not be taking into account. Describe the strengths and weaknesses of our collective perception—and our individual perception.

3 BIAS. Often we misstep because of the difference between what's really happening in a situation and our colored interpretation of it. So we collectively tell a story that is influenced more by our assumptions than it is by the inherent nature of whatever is at the focus of the story. What stories have we told as a team that have ended up being more about us than the situation we were observing? And what stories are we currently writing that may be overly influenced by our history?

element two: RESONATING APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS TO TEAM AS ORGANISM



TEAM AS ORGANISM: RESONATING

Teams have a collective resonance—they continuously broadcast *who they are*. Which is often experienced even more powerfully by others than *what they do*. A team in doubt radiates the *quality of doubt*. A team that is resilient radiates the *quality of resilience*. We may think that what is going on behind the scenes doesn't matter as long as we *get it together in front of our people*. But the ongoing qualities of the team as a living organism induce an in-kind response in everything around. All of the time.

INDUCTION. What group radiation could we further emphasize that would induce a desired in-kind response in those we lead and in the organizations we serve?

2 CONFLICT. In its base expression, conflict produces dissonance—the way between things is narrowed. In its highest expression, conflict produces resonance—the way between things is accentuated. We tend to associate conflict with discomfort and dissolution, so we are hesitant to speak up and go against *the group tide*. Describe the conflict style of each member of the team. How can we foster a higher expression of conflict as a group?

3 ONE MIND. Often our agreements are not mature enough to translate powerfully amidst difficult, ambiguous, or changing conditions. Around what issues do we have overt surface consensus but not the deeper *one mind* necessary for the greatest clarity and coherence? Where might the stuckness of the people we lead actually be a reflection of *our stuckness* as a group?

element three: **PURIFYING** APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS TO TEAM AS ORGANISM

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TEAM AS ORGANISM: PURIFYING

Much of what bogs down a group is impurities—old ways of thinking, structures that no longer serve, limiting beliefs, or unhelpful habits. Because of this, the energy needed to propel our best work is partially exhausted on things that don't matter—or even worse, on things that hold us in place. Purification removes what is no longer needed to make space for the new. It *drains off the dross*.

1 ENERGY SINKS. Impurities often produce energy sinks—no matter how much attention and energy we invest, things remain in stasis. Energy sinks are often attachments from our past that are still sucking energy from our present. Like unforgiven events. Until we burn through the ties that bind, no amount of efforting will move us easily ahead. Describe your personal energy sinks.

2 UN-LEARNING. Un-learning is often more difficult than learning—*the new* is held captive by *the old*. What is the most important un-learning for the team? What's an example of something we were right about in the past that, unless released, will limit our movement into the future? What did *you* learn in your past that's most important to *un-learn* now?

3 DROSS. Dross often consists of emotional baggage, fuzzy thoughts, mixed intentions, bad motivations, or self-serving suggestions. What dross do you recognize in your life? What dross do you recognize in the organization?

element four: **STAGING** APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS TO TEAM AS ORGANISM



TEAM AS ORGANISM: STAGING

Staging is how we build the matrix supporting a thing's emergence—how we design a habitat that shapes and nurtures the emerging form. Staging relies not only on a clear sense of what's necessary for something to *begin*, but also the ability to sequentially build the spaces supporting each step of its evolution.

1 CONTEXT. Some of the best initiatives fail not because of the merit of the idea, but for lack of a stage designed well enough to integrate the surrounding contexts. We often spend too much time *building the thing* and not enough time understanding and designing *its interface*. As a team, what context must we better understand now to build the best interface for what we create next?

2 MYSTERY. Staging may involve certainty about a beginning and end point, but uncertainty about the steps in-between. Or, staging may involve certainty about the first few steps, but only a general sense of the destination. In either case, a tolerance for mystery is needed. On a scale of 1-10, rate each member of the team—with 1 being the *least able* to embrace mystery and 10 being the *most able* to embrace mystery.

3 PERFECT DAY. An array of experiences can be staged using what's readily available in almost every existing context. We don't have to delay our bliss until something new comes along—we simply need to stage what's already here differently. Describe the essential qualities of your perfect day. How could you stage within your existing context to experience more of these qualities more of the time?

element five: CONCENTRATING

APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS TO TEAM AS ORGANISM



TEAM AS ORGANISM: CONCENTRATING

Often we have the collective ability to accomplish something but lack the required *concentration* of the ability in a particular time and place necessary to precipitate movement. So instead of creating something new, we keep slipping back into the old equilibrium. It's important to understand the difference between situations requiring an adequate *sum of effort* and situations requiring an adequate *concentration of effort*.

1 Aggregators and Concentrators. Some people are aggregators—they create effects through sustained effort over time. Other people are concentrators—they create effects through highly concentrated effort in specific moments in time. Describe why each team member tends toward aggregation or concentration—or possibly a balance of both. And describe the tendency of the team as a whole.

2 ENERGY. Learning to concentrate energies is essential to alchemy. Often our attention is so divided we can't generate the force necessary to precipitate movement. As a team what energies are we best and worst at concentrating? What energy—or quality—are *you* best at concentrating?

3 DILUTION. Even if we start with a high concentration of a quality, characteristic, or ability, it may become diluted. Sometimes this happens when other things compete for time, resources, or attention. Other times this happens because of fuzzy thinking or lack of distinct action. Something may even become diluted simply through the passage of too much time. Describe a situation where the team started with an adequate concentration of something that became too diluted to work well.

element six: ENERGIZING APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS TO TEAM AS ORGANISM

TEAM AS ORGANISM: ENERGIZING

Energy is the one element needed for all transformation. Without it, nothing happens. Energy breaks old bonds so new ones can be formed. Energizing is how leaders overcome internal and external inertia. And energy is the lifeblood of executive presence and key to powerfully sharing vision. The ability to concentrate and radiate the specific energies needed to shift a situation is essential in becoming an alchemical leader.

1 FIRE. Some situations require a burst of energy—without it, transformation can not occur. This burst can be built and delivered by a person or a team. But it requires high physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual vitality. Which members of the team can generate the most potent energetic punch? Describe a situation where their particular kind of fire is well suited.

2 MITIGATING ENERGIES. You can shift a situation much more easily with your energy than with your words. And it's possible to mitigate unhelpful energies in a group without saying anything—you simply radiate the missing or counteractive energy. Pick a member of our team and describe what energies they can mitigate most easily. What energies are the most difficult for us to mitigate collectively?

3 ENERGY DRAINS. What tends to drain our vitality as a team most quickly? What drains *your* vitality? As a team, how can we minimize unnecessary energy drains across the organization?

element seven: **CONNECTING** APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS TO TEAM AS ORGANISM

TEAM AS ORGANISM: CONNECTING

Everything is connected to everything—whether we recognize it or not. So it is as important to understand *how a thing is connected* as it is to understand *what a thing is.* The more aware of our connections we are, the more we can harness them and affect change. We are more often limited by our connectivity than we are by our resources.

ISOLATION. Fear is isolating—it cuts us off from our resources, and cuts us off from each other. Even if we think nobody notices when we withdraw internally, often it is sensed by everyone in the room. What causes you to isolate yourself from the conversation—or the team in general?

2 BOUNDARIES. In their more limited form, boundaries are for *keeping things in* and *keeping things out*. In their more expansive form, boundaries create a space in between where just the right part of *you* meets just the right part of the *other*. How could we create even more intelligent boundaries where the edges of our individual domains meet?

3 THE PULSE. High connectivity allows us to sense the pulse of the organization and the pulse of our adversaries and allies. As a team, where are we connected most and least to the things that matter? If the team had a pulse, what would it feel like? And in what way could we refine our collective pulse moving into the future?

element eight: FUSING

APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS TO TEAM AS ORGANISM



TEAM AS ORGANISM: FUSING

Alchemists know that just because two things are *highly dissimilar* doesn't mean they are *non-related*. And the more polarized two things are, the more potential there is in bringing them into cooperation—this is the element of fusing. The alchemist may fuse dissimilar ideas, people, organizations, value systems, personalities, strategies, or areas of expertise. Fusing allows us to see everyone and everything as a potential ally no matter how diametrically opposed to us it may appear to be on the surface.

1 TEAM POLARITIES. The greater the distance between poles, the greater the potential of any creative system. Identify some of the *opposites* in our team. How could we both accentuate these polarities and bring them into greater relationship?

2 RECONCILING OPPOSITES. More than one thing may be true—even if the two truths initially appear contrary to each other. The ability of a team to reconcile opposites requires a greatly expanded frame of reference. Think of a time when the truth offered by one team member seemed contradictory to the truth of another, but from a higher view, both were contained by a *more inclusive truth*.

3 PROXIMITY. Because opposites have the potential for dissonance and disruption, we tend to either quarantine them or quickly prove one over the other. But things brought into closer proximity with the right amount of creative tension tend to come into greater relationship naturally. Are the opposites in our team in competition with each other—or even siloed? How could we be better fusers?

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TEAM AS ORGANISM: PUTRIFYING

It's important to be as skilled at ending things as beginning things—a good birth and a good death. But often we associate death with failure and end up putting relationships, initiatives, or organizations on life support instead of designing the best transition. Putrification is the total breakdown that creates the space and fundamental ingredients for something new.

1 INTENTIONAL DECLINE. Some things have to get a lot worse before they can get a lot better. Unless they are intentionally putrified, very little will ever change. Over the next year, what's most important for you to putrify personally? What's most important for us to putrify as a team?

2 CONSTRUCTIVE CHAOS. Chaos permits the ultimate expression of creativity. When things are falling apart, energy is released, resources are freed, and old bonds are broken. But often our need to be in control causes us to unnecessarily associate chaos with risk. Where would more organizational chaos be a good thing over the next year, and as a team, how could we best design for it? Where is there currently too much chaos and unnecessary risk—where should we immediately step in?

3 PRESERVATION INSTINCT. Our base instinct is to preserve things at their peak. But just when some things are most successful, they are also most ready to transform into something else. In what ways could our past success as a team hold us hostage as we move into the future?

element ten: INCUBATING APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS TO TEAM AS ORGANISM



TEAM AS ORGANISM: INCUBATING

The best ideas often fall short for lack of an incubation space. In their infancy, some things need specialized protection and specialized nurturance—without it, the *bud never becomes the blossom*. Alchemists use the element of incubation to design habitats. Some of these may be large scale—like the habitat for a new venture. And some may be small scale—like the habitat for an idea.

1 GIFTS. The gifts most overtly expressing for each of us are usually only a fraction of what's available. Describe a gift you suspect another team member has that they've likely never thought of. How could the team create an incubation space for its emergence?

2 PROBLEMS. Often we either want to go in and fix something or have someone else go in and fix it. But just as great ideas need an incubation space, many people problems need an incubation space too. When we intervene too soon and don't let a problem mature, we may shift the symptoms but not understand the habitat from which they arose. Think of a situation facing the team where instead of trying to fix the problem explicitly, we design the best habitat for a more organic resolution.

3 HABITAT FOR CONVERSATION. When someone shares an idea or perspective, it's up to the team to create the best habitat for sharing. We often jump on someone's contribution so quickly it doesn't have time to take root—or to evolve into a more mature form. What are the qualities of our team habitat for conversation? And what could we do right now to foster richer interchange with one another?

element eleven: DENSIFYING

APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS TO TEAM AS ORGANISM





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TEAM AS ORGANISM: DENSIFYING

Everything in the world exists along a spectrum of density. A *brick* is denser than an *emotion*. And an *emotion* is denser than an *idea*. Densification is about adding mass. An idea becomes a new school, or an inspiration becomes a new product. The alchemist works along the entire spectrum—bringing something from its most subtle form all the way down into its most physical expression.

1 TEAM DENSITY. If we think of the entire spectrum from the highest-level concept to the most concrete thing we can build, describe how each team member functions across the spectrum of density. Who is able to function across the largest span? Who is more specialized and concentrated in one part? Where are we strongest and weakest as a team?

2 REDUCTION. Densification is different than reduction. Reduction seeks to identify and isolate fundamental parts. An idea that is over-reduced may become more easily shared and understood, but be devoid of the essential qualities that matter most. Densification, on the other hand, seeks to build increasingly material forms that retain all of the essential qualities of the original inspiration. In the press to *make things real*, where are we currently reducing the essence out of our original idea?

3 THE INTERFACE. Some groups work along one part of the spectrum more than other parts. But where two groups or two individuals interface, there must be a person *making the way in between*—someone who understands the entire range of both parties. Do we have the right people in these interface roles?

element twelve: **PRECIPITATING** APPLYING THE 13 ELEMENTS TO TEAM AS ORGANISM



TEAM AS ORGANISM: PRECIPITATING

Precipitating is about using *one small shift* to create a *big shift*. Often everything is present in a situation but a single missing ingredient. The alchemist recognizes what's missing and then supplies the ingredient to unleash the potential of the system. Precipitating and staging are polar elements—they are as *unlike each other* and also *more related to each other* than any of the thirteen. Because of this, when used in concert, they are the two most powerful elements in alchemy.

1 RIPENESS. All of us have stores of potential waiting to be released. Intuitively, what element or quality would you gift each member of the team that would precipitate the greatest shift? What element would precipitate the greatest shift in you?

2 RELEASING STORED ENERGY. Often we invest more and more into something, but it never gets its wings. Think of a project you've invested *in most* with the *least return*. Instead of assuming faulty design or poor execution, imagine adding a single element that would immediately precipitate its success. What's the element?

3 MISSING INGREDIENT. Many leadership teams aren't functioning as well as they could be because of a missing ingredient. When viewed as a system, what's the missing ingredient for our team? Could one of us provide that ingredient, or do we need to bring it in from the outside?





TEAM AS ORGANISM: SYMBOLIZING

A symbol is a container—it holds the essential elements of the thing it represents. Because of this, we can often predict future events by understanding the symbols preceding them. And we can also change something simply by incorporating symbols holding the qualities we most desire—the symbol creates the matrix in which the resonant material expression builds out.

1 OMENS. *Material events* are often preceded by *symbolic events*—by omens. What omens can you recognize as a team that preceded significant events in your history? What omens can you recognize now that are preceding events likely to occur in your future? Describe an omen you are experiencing in your personal life.

2 PERSONAL SYMBOLS. *Who we are* stems from our archetypes—the fundamental patterns and tendencies at our foundation. And each archetype has an array of corresponding resonant symbols. What symbol best represents each member of the team? If somebody picks a symbol for you that's surprising, what might that mean?

3 SPACE IS SYMBOLIC. Think about some distinct spaces in your current organization. What are they symbolic of? Think of a part of the organization that is not functioning ideally. If you redesigned the space to symbolically represent a preferred future, what would you add, remove, or change?



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