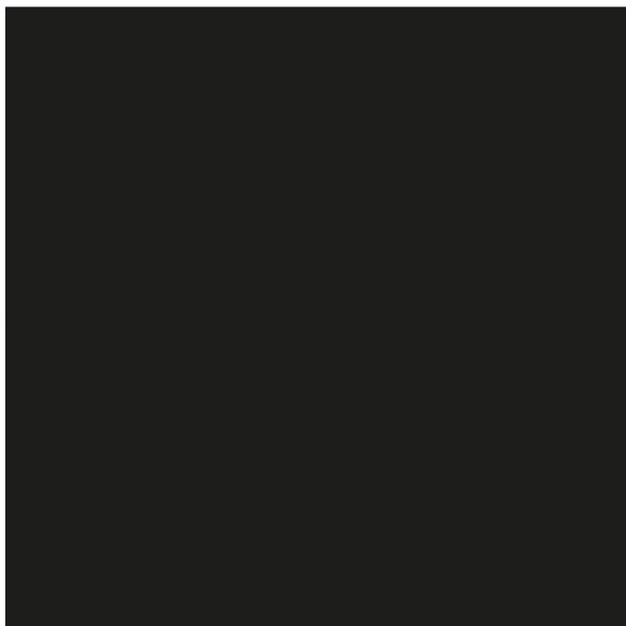
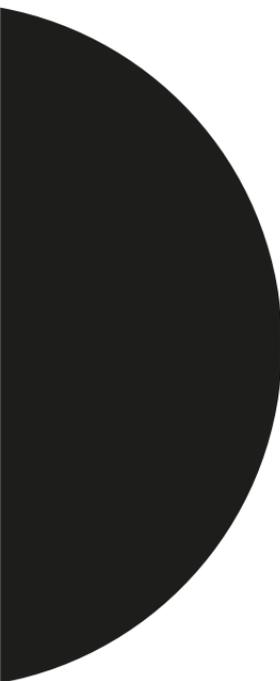


Matevž Medja

Business Genome White Paper

Decode, design, and manage corporate DNA.

Build organisations, develop brands and
grow companies in line with values.



Matevž Medja

Business Genome White Paper

The Business Genome guides and informs business decisions, feeds the company's culture, steers product development, and defines brand communications.

There has long been a consensus that corporate DNA is one of the most important defining characteristics of every organisation.

Yet surprisingly, there has been no standardised way to decode, design, and manage it.

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Simplicity is over-rated. Confucius may have declared that ‘Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated,’ but he wasn’t trying to run a large organisation or brand, in a highly competitive market and facing the unrelenting scrutiny of shareholders, stakeholders, activists, employees and legislators. Our understanding of the world and our institutions and brands is not enhanced through the over simplification of complexity or illusory faith in some artificially imposed sense of order. This is why the analogy between a corporate structure and a genome is compelling. Each genome is created by a unique genetic code within its DNA. Generations of brilliant scientists have discovered how to identify and codify DNA. None of them would describe the outcome of their work as simple, it is as complex as can be

imagined, but it has transformed our understanding of living organisms and heralded the development of customised treatments that meet our individual needs.

The term ‘corporate DNA’ is long-established as a way of describing corporate structures and culture, but it has tended to be an abstract concept – difficult to measure or codify. The Business Genome seeks to address this weakness by providing a structured, logical way in which to plan activities and investments. In this whitepaper, Matevž Medja explains the theory behind the Business Genome and how the approach can be applied to a wide range of real-world situations, from consumer brands to political parties. He starts from the perspective that, just like a genome, every organisations is unique, innately complex and dynamic – it changes, evolves and mutates in response to changing circumstances and contexts. He doesn’t promise simplicity, but instead a clear and coherent narrative through a complex reality - the aim is not to make things simple, but to make them intelligible and comprehensible.

Don Norman, described by Business Week as ‘one of the world’s most influential designers’ and author of *Living with Complexity*, makes the very important distinction between things that are complex and those that are complicated, suggesting that: “We must distinguish complexity from confusion, perplexity and unintelligibility. The goal is complexity with order, lucidity and understanding.” This is the ambition of the Business Genome. By stripping down an organisation or brand into its different elements – analogous to the DNA strands within a genome – it enables directors and their teams to codify what makes their organisation unique - what you might describe as their ‘unique genetic code’. It can also be used to identify areas of inconsistency – rogue genes!

Using a series of structured workshops (either physical or virtual) the Business Genome methodology captures knowledge and intelligence about the organisation from a wide range of stakeholders. This is repurposed into a practical roadmap or framework for future investments and activities. It allows abstract concepts such as corporate values to be translated into specific actions across every element or aspect of an organisation -

from product development to employee recruitment. It will challenge the way that leaders think about their organisations or brands but, above all aid their understanding of how to build and manage stronger and sustainable businesses. It will make the complex, comprehensible.

— Martin Thomas,

Marketing consultant and author, June 2020

It has happened time and again:

The strategy consultant claimed aggressively – but somewhat guiltily – that she had done her job, and that she was not responsible for anything else, thank you.

The agency assumed a “garbage in, garbage out” position too often.

A government bureaucrat explained to me patiently that citizens should adapt to the different bureaucratic procedures of every single ministry or agency as “a price of being a citizen.”

We all knew there was a brand book somewhere.

Our designers were so innovative that they designed an awkward, clumsy suitcase-hauling-like vehicle for a

company that held the world land speed record in their industry.

Why on earth did you design your new flagship product line in the colour of your competition?

No one will see your artisanal tradition beneath this machined plastic.

The use of photogenic products of a superstar brand – which brags about design in sleek ads – reveals cheapish materials, shoddy joints, unintuitive interfaces, and even worse customer support.

They knew all about their customers, but had no idea who they themselves were and how that matters.

These and similar unrelated experiences have piled-up over the years of my career as a designer and creative director just like non-degradable plastic waste in the sea. First, it seems harmless – some nonsense here and a piece of rubbish there – but eventually, it becomes overwhelming.

I see the same patterns appearing everywhere. And they are the same for sophisticated, multi-brand

companies and fast-growing startups, the same with PMs, MPs, CEOs, CMOs, and NGOs, and the same across industries; services, FMCG, hardware, or software.

We cannot prevent crap from being developed and sold by the sheer force of advertising, or implemented from a position of power. But, we can help those with the right ideas, products, or services — who have the will to create value for their users, and who care about society and the planet — to develop better products and more powerful, resilient, and future-proof brands.

We want to provide those who want to develop great businesses and organisations with the framework and a toolbox to do so. Not an academic concept to be taught in detached classrooms or boardrooms, but a real hands-on framework to decode, design, and deploy the genome of an organisation to every member and to embed it into every process.

In other words: my somewhat audacious goal is to provide you with a programming language to design and build great organisations.

— Matevž Medja, April 2020

THE BUSINESS GENOME FRAMEWORK

According to a 2019 Gartner strategy agenda poll, 70% of corporate strategists expressed a low level of confidence in their ability to translate strategy into action, and 82% cited the complexity of delivering change initiatives as a critical barrier to effective execution.

The gap between vision and implementation causes brands to become irrelevant and businesses weak. Money and resources are wasted on daily activities that are not aligned with the core of the business. Combined annual spending on strategy consulting, business consulting, and advertising is worth almost 1 trillion USD alone.

This also has a human toll. The number of burnouts (with severe consequences) is rising, and one of the

main reasons is overwork caused by a lack of clear focus and sense of meaning. According to Perry Timms, overwork-related absences cost the UK economy 12.5 million people-days per year.

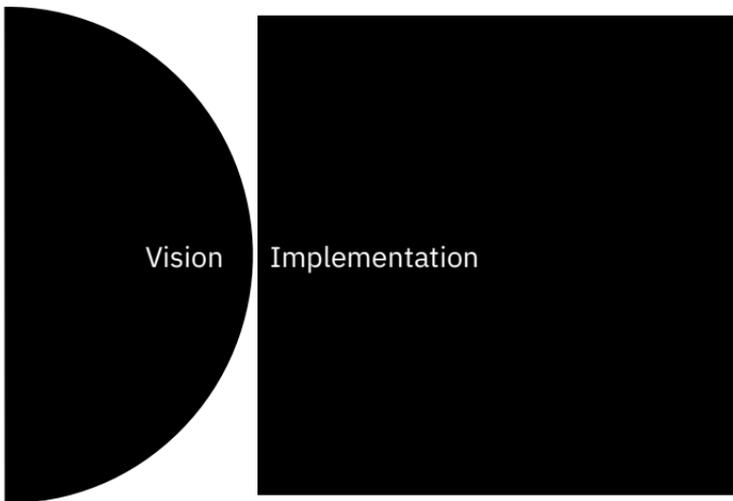


Fig. 0. Even a slight gap between the vision (strategy) and the implementation can cause substantial loss of money and resources.

The world is moving at increasing speed. We cannot predict and control everything anymore. Technology, culture, and markets are moving ever faster. New channels of communications are appearing; the old ones' roles are changing.

User demographics are frequently irrelevant; behavioural profiles seem more fitting. A 55-year-old white male in Europe might have the same interests as a 25-year-old female in China and a 35-year-old transgender person in the US. We know increasingly more about the users and their behaviours; we can practically track them in real-time. This data is becoming ubiquitous and a commodity.

A user-centric approach and market insights are a table-stake. Therefore, it will become increasingly important to turn the focus back on our own organisations, and to understand not only how we are different, but what constitutes our identity – what is our genome. Even more relevant, we should be able to apply it to everything we do.

Over the past decades, we have become excellent in simplification. We simplify in order to make complex

concepts and systems easier to understand and therefore, easier to control. We reduce the number of components, merge some of them into new ones, replace others with shorthand or universal symbols until there is nothing left to take away. However, there is a danger that we will become generic and lose much of our identity in the process.

By reducing a highly developed organisational culture or corporate DNA to a set of values, we are only halfway there. We have managed to distill a complex set of behaviours and beliefs into a set of values. What we are missing, however, is the other half of this process, namely the question of how to recode these values into concrete and organisation-specific actions. For example, Apple, IBM, Microsoft (and countless other companies) would describe themselves as “innovative”, but the same value manifests itself differently. Each organisation is innovative in its own specific way. The key, therefore, is how to transition from generic values to specific manifestations.

We cannot simplify the complexity of our world itself, it is becoming more complex every day. However, we can

strive to make it understandable - to decode and recode it. This will enable us to embrace the complexity, not fight it.

“Organisation design can seem unnecessarily complex; the right framework, however, can help you decode and prioritise the necessary elements,” argue Gary L. Neilson, Jaime Estupiñán, and Bhushan Sethi, in Forbes¹.

Stephen Bungay in the Harvard Business Review² is clear: *“A strategy is not a plan, it is a framework for decision-making, a set of guiding principles which can be applied as the situation evolves.”*

Martin Thomas in his book *Loose*³ argues that “Rapidly changing customer expectations are also forcing institutions to operate and respond in real time, placing a premium on agility, flexibility, and an ability to

¹ Gary L. Neilson, Jaime Estupiñán, and Bhushan Sethi, (2015). 10 Guiding Principles of Organization Design, Forbes April 1, 2015

² Stephen Bungay (2019). 5 Myths about Strategy. Harvard Business Review April 19, 2019

³ Martin Thomas (2012). Loose: The Future of Business is Letting Go. Page 12/251

improvise. Longer-term planning and cautious, careful deliberation are increasingly becoming luxuries that few organisations can afford.”

For businesses and brands to be flexible, resilient, and future-proof, we have to design and manage them less as architecture and more as biology.

To achieve that, we have to decode and recode the corporate DNA of an organisation and structure it in a way that will enable us to recompose and re-use it time and again according to specific needs and requirements. To be able to do this, we need to invent a language.

A language that will enable different parts of the business to have the same understanding of the same values; be it a manager or a front line worker, a sales rep in Brasil or an accountant in Germany.

The language of the Business Genome is built on four core categories - values, manifestations, domains, and briefs.

Values are principles and standards of behaviour; one's judgement of what is essential in life. They set the sense of right and wrong or what "ought to be". They tend to influence attitudes and conduct, and act as guidelines in any situation.

Often people in an organisation can recite the values for which it stands. They give them a sense of belonging; many of these people joined the organisation because of their shared values. They are loyal, not only to the organisation and its people, but to the values themselves.

However, people rarely share the same idea what a particular value means in their daily work. That is hard

to achieve with obviously less abstract concepts, let alone with values that are an inherently abstract concept.

Take an example. If a group of people is tasked with each a simple task to drawing a tree on a piece of paper, the result will be a variety of visualisations of a “tree concept.” Some will draw a leafy variety, others a pine tree, and maybe even some will produce a palm tree. Even the style of the drawings will vary from the simplest symbolic ones to elaborate attempts to detail every leaf, needle, or fruit.

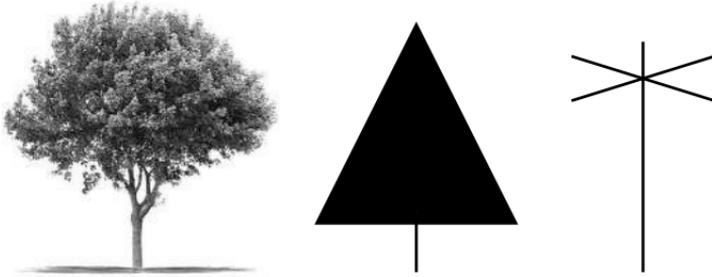


Fig. 1. When it is time to define the exact meaning of even such fundamental concepts as “a tree,” different people will have a different idea about the same challenge.

The spectrum of how we understand and implement different concepts is extensive. Sometimes we need to embrace the widest range of possibilities, whereas at other times we are expected to implement a concept with precision. The Business Genome framework allows for the fine-tuning of where at this scale – from broad to the precise – one wants to be.

The values of an organisation usually don't change over time or space, otherwise it would become a different organisation. However, the manifestations or behaviours they induce may vary through different environments or contexts and over time. That might depend on the culture of various markets, the specifics of communication channels, or regulatory frameworks. The Business Genome framework allows adaption to an ever-changing world.

A brand and a business or organisation are two sides of the same coin. A brand is merely a perception in people's mind of everything a business or an organisation does.

All the decisions, relationships, services, products, artefacts, and communications affect the perception; therefore, the brand. Each business operates in a multitude of domains that are spheres of activity and knowledge relevant to the organisation. Not all organisations require all of them, and certain organisations even have their specific domains in addition to general ones.

There is a wide variety of domains related to a business model; pricing; decision-making in a range of functions; knowledge such as standards and guidelines - for instance, corporate identity standards; tone of voice, rules for corporate communication, or quality standards. We roughly group these domains into six main groups.

Business

Business model-related domains such as category, products and services range, pricing, partners, suppliers, channels, revenues.

Relations

Related to stakeholders and the environment. How to treat employees, customers, suppliers, local community, investors or regulators.

Product

Domains related to physical and digital products or services (if sold as a product). From feature sets to

shapes and materials, ergonomics, usability, interfaces, interactions, packaging, unboxing, and onboarding.

Content

Related to the content across all channels: internal, PR, marketing, and social. From verbal content such as the type of language, tone of voice, descriptions, anecdotes, to visuals such as colours, typography, style of photography and illustrations, iconography, information graphics, patterns, and the like.

Spatial

Everything to do with the space around us, exterior to interior, urbanism, architecture, and interior design - features, standards, light, materials, locations, offices, retail spaces, galleries, shops, fair stands, and pop-up places.

Services

Services as a support for users and customers (not to be confused with services sold as a product). Over the entire customer lifetime; before they are customers, over the time of using products, and after the purchase.

Customer support, subscriptions, return policy, customisation, concierge service, or advice.

Do not oversimplify or confuse domains for brand touchpoints; they are not the same. A touchpoint occurs every time someone interacts with the brand. Very few, if any, touchpoints are singular or one dimensional. Most of them are connected to a preceding and succeeding touchpoints in a customer journey and consist of multiple domains.

For instance, an e-mail that is considered one of the simplest brand touchpoints is defined by a brand tone of voice, copy style guides, product or service descriptions, company's service policy, company software selection, typical brand typeface, colours and composition to name a few.

It gets complex with products. By definition, a product fulfils a desire, solves a problem, gets a job done for its user, and has enough value that the user is prepared to pay for it. No matter if they are physical or digital, we should think of them more or less the same way, for

example, the software or a user interface is an integral part of a physical device. The packaging should provide an intuitive unboxing experience and increasingly must implicitly convey the brand's position on sustainability. The shape of a device should support the functions of the physical world, ergonomics, and of the software that runs on it. The user interface, not only supports best patterns of user experience design but is also a part of a corporate identity. Decisions that the AI takes on behalf of users and the recommendations it gives should follow the values of the brand.

Computing has become ubiquitous, and the same goes for the physical devices that enable it and the information processed and delivered by them. Even the decision-making done on our behalf by embedded artificial intelligence, enabled by cognitive computing, has become ubiquitous. Technology, design, and quality have become commodities, and the right combination of them is what counts.

Certain domains are common to virtually all organisations, be they companies, associations, foundations, or countries. All have their members, with

whom they have specific relationships; regardless of whether they are employees, volunteers, citizens, or correspondent members. No organisation exists in a vacuum. We all have stakeholders with whom we work, and with whom we have relationships whether they are users of products and services, customers, suppliers, partners, regulators, supervisors, or anyone else. Every organisation communicates — even if it does not communicate, this is exactly what it communicates — and has a name, a description, tone of voice, and colours.

Certain domains are specific only to individual organisations or a small group of them. “Support at breastfeeding” is one such domain, as is “On slope ski grooming service.” This type of domain specificity may be industry-specific and common to most organisations within the industry, or it may be unique to a single organisation and thus represent a comparative advantage over competitors.

To make the concept applicable and to give it a real-life value, we have to transform an organisation's values into tangible activities across all relevant domains. We have to turn abstract concepts – values – into actual actions over all of the organisation's domains. These are what we term *manifestations*.



Fig. 2. The fundamental goal of the Business Genome is transforming an organisation’s values – an abstract and inexplicit concept – to every part of the organisation’s knowledge and activities.

A manifestation by definition is an event, action, or object that clearly shows or embodies something abstract or theoretical. It is explicit and unambiguous.

As with the “tree concept,” we all think it’s quite clear what a tree is, but still, each of us can see it a little differently.

The role of manifestations is to define how broad or how precise a concept is. The purpose of the

manifestation is to determine what a “tree concept” means for our organisation. Is it merely any plant with a trunk and some greenery on top, is it all conifers, is it the pine family, or is it the exact species of Pinus Pinea? Or is it only a two-year-old Pinus Pinea from a particular tree nursery in northern Italy and nothing else? We decide how vaguely or specifically we want to define the manifestation.

Besides the manifestation’s content, it is essential to which value and which domains it applies.

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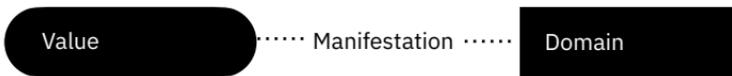


Fig. 3. The basic building block of a business genome consists of a value, a manifestation, and a domain. This combination defines how a particular organisation’s value manifests itself at the specific companies’ domain.

.....

The result is a complex, but clearly structured “genome” that informs all areas of the company. It is a unique pool of specific and concise principles of operation.

Usually, a genome consists of hundreds, and in some cases thousands of manifestations. It can grow to be enormous and complex. But, since its basic structure is precise and straightforward – value-manifestation-domain – it is perfectly manageable. Each component in the genome has clear relations to other components; therefore, we can look at the content from different aspects, filter it by specific criteria, compose and combine it, or even compare the two different genomes with one another.

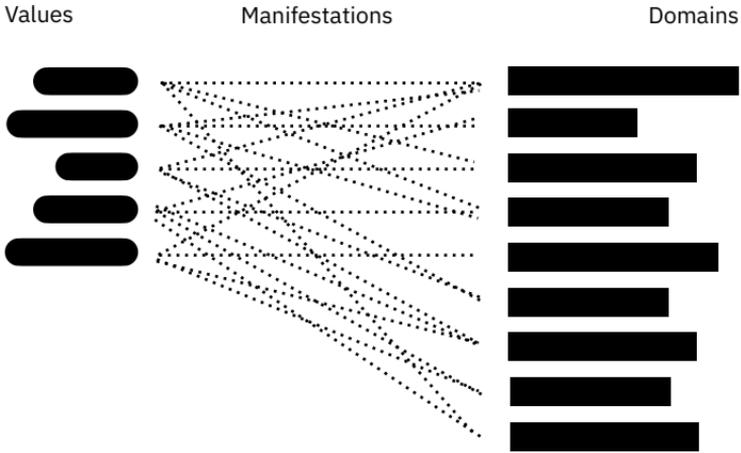


Fig 4. A business genome is complex, yet highly organised and clearly structured.

Let's illustrate how it works with an example. Boba.com is one of the world's most successful brands of baby carriers. It started in 2007 as a scrappy wife and husband startup, when Elizabeth and Robert were traveling the world with their young kids on a tiny

budget. Boba grew consistently over the years, established itself first in the online space, expanded into retail in more than 50 markets, and along the way acquired its main competitor and integrated vertically.

Robert, Boba's co-founder and VP of Sales and Marketing, attributes the success to being consistently true to themselves and their values. As the company grew, it was necessary to adjust the business focus along the way such as promotion, sales, customer support, partnerships with retailers, and opening new markets.

The marketing and media environment at the time was dynamic; they were quick to Facebook, Google, Amazon, and Instagram. According to Robert, it was always easy for them to enter new channels and apply new tools because they knew who they were and what they stood for. The rest was just the characteristics of each channel or toolbox.

The effect of this consistency was proven in a 2012 brand equity research study in which the Brand Insistence Component Summary showed that their brand's weakest component is "Awareness," which was

expected due to their relatively modest advertising budget. Still, their strongest components were “Relevance,” “Differentiation,” and “Loyalty” – the core features of a strong brand.

Together with the Boba co-founders, Elizabeth and Robert, we reconstructed their business genome for this case.

Five values define Boba and everything it does:

“Human closeness.”

“Parents by nature.”

“Positive force.”

“Superior customer experience.”

“Original, yet rooted.”

First, we take the first value “Human closeness,” and take a look at how it manifests itself at various domains:

“Human closeness”

—> *Product/Features:*

Our products enable maximal contact between mother and child

“Human closeness”

—> *Relations/Employees:*

We encourage our people to spend time together

“Human closeness”

—> *Content/Photography:*

Our photos convey relationships

At this point, we turn the viewpoint around, we take a single domain, in this case, “Product/Features” and take a look at how various values manifest themselves at the chosen domain:

“Human closeness”

—> *Product/Features:*

*Our products enable maximal contact
between mother and child*

“Parents by nature”

—> *Product/Features:*

*Our products should be intuitive to mount
and use*

“Original yet rooted”

—> *Product/Features:*

*Look for inspiration in indigenous and
traditional baby carriers*

When we contract it, we end up with a genome snippet that determines a single domain, the features of a Boba product:

PRODUCT/FEATURES

*Our products enable maximal contact
between mother and child*

*Our products should be intuitive to mount
and use*

*Look for inspiration in indigenous and
traditional baby carriers*

To determine the desired specificity of each manifestation — remember the breadth of understanding of the 'tree concept' — we can add a short description to the basic definition of the manifestation, which more precisely defines what a particular manifestation means to our organisation.

The “*Our photos convey relations*” manifestation, for example, is still quite an abstract concept, however, by adding a description we define it unequivocally:

“Our photos should not appear staged. Feeling the genuine connection between subjects of photos is more important than perfect models, scenography, or lighting.”

This is a very clear instruction that leaves no doubt of the intention, but still leaves enough creative space in which the art director and the photographer can work.

Human closeness : Photography

Our photos convey relations

Our photos should not appear staged.

Feeling the genuine connection between the subjects of photos is more important than perfect models, scenography, or lighting.

#love #care #authentic

Fig 5. The complete structure of a manifestation consists of the value-domain pair that determines the location of a manifestation in the genome, the manifestation itself and optional description and tags.

It's an example of only a small part of the genome, but let's consider the implications of its utility. When used as an integral part of the product brief, it will inform and guide the internal team of technologists, product managers, and designers.

If the company commissions the product development or design to an external team, that partner will have the same guidelines as the internal team.

And perhaps the essential point is that by setting the genome as guidelines for specific activities, in this case as part of a product brief, it also sets the criteria for evaluating the adequacy of decisions made and solutions obtained in this way. It significantly increases the capability to manage the intangibles and to apply metrics to a previously elusive or arbitrary process.

In general, a brief is a compact set of information, directions, or instructions to inform decisions and guide activities.

A business genome brief is a selection of manifestations that are relevant to a task or process, a specific business function, or a geographic or organisational unit.

If we re-use the Boba example, by applying the manifestations of several values to a single domain – the features of a product – we create a part of a product brief.

PRODUCT/FEATURES

*Our products enable maximal contact
between mother and child.*

*Our products should be intuitive to mount
and use*

*Look for inspiration in indigenous and
traditional baby carriers*

By further applying manifestations of values to other product-related domains, the “product brief” grows more comprehensive.

“Superior customer experience”

—> *Product/Packaging*

Our packaging provides easy reach to customer support

“Parents by nature”

—> *Product/Materials*

We use natural materials and simple forms

Presenting only a fragment to illustrate the point, we created a genome snippet that guides the Boba product design:

R&D/PRODUCT DESIGN BRIEF

Our products enable maximal contact between mother and child.

Our products should be intuitive to mount and use.

Look for inspiration in indigenous and traditional baby carriers.

Our product provides easy reach to customer support.

We use natural materials and simple forms.

...

To use the same example to demonstrate the application for various functions. The genome can

inform business decisions, in this case, a decision on a new product line.

R&D/NEW PRODUCT LINE BRIEF

We don't follow the hype.

*We do not develop products that divide
parents and children.*

*Our products have a minimal environmental
effect.*

...

When a company is present in 50+ markets (both in retail and online) just the effort to achieve and maintain a consistency of marketing communications can be overwhelming for the marketing team.

MARKETING/AGENCY BRIEF

Our tone of voice is friendly, yet not too funny nor patronising.

Our photos convey relationships.

We are transparent in the use and origin of the materials we use.

We are a positive force in a society.

We are modern, but we draw inspiration from indigenous traditions.

...

The genome can establish unexpected criteria in different decision-making areas.

FINANCE/SPONSORSHIP BRIEF

We are a positive force in society.

We support education and information on parenting.

We are environmentally responsible.

We don't support divisive initiatives or organisations.

We are an active force in our local communities.

...

Notice how the same manifestations appear in various briefs in different combinations.

OPERATIONS/NEW WORKSPACE BRIEF

We encourage our people spending time together.

We are a positive force in society.

We are active in our local communities.

Our spaces have plenty of natural light.

We use natural materials and simple forms.

Think of modern interpretation of indigenous and traditional spaces.

...

It is a well-known adage that “A” people hire “A” people and that “B” people hire “C” people. It is essential to recruit in line with organisation's values, not just required skills or qualifications.

.....
HR/RECRUITMENT BRIEF

Everyone in customer support should have parenting experience.

We are kind people.

We like to help.

...
.....

Briefs make the genome useful in everyday life. They are structures into which we can assign specific sets of the genome. A brief can be used in two basic ways:

1. As a collection of manifestations that are relevant and useful to individual processes and functions within the organisation, that inform decision-making, brief

internal and external team-members, and set criteria for evaluating work results; and

2. Briefs are useful in genome-building itself. In small and simple organisations, a leadership team can decode and define the genome by themselves, but in case of more complex organisations, it is usually not enough. To get a more comprehensive genome, we need to engage more stakeholder or domain specialist groups, and we can organise their work around briefs. For example, by functions within the company, by individual markets, by purpose, by professional specialisms and the like.

In this way, through briefs, we can obtain quite specialised manifestations, which in turn become part of the basic genome, enriching it in depth, and so also in its value for the organisation.

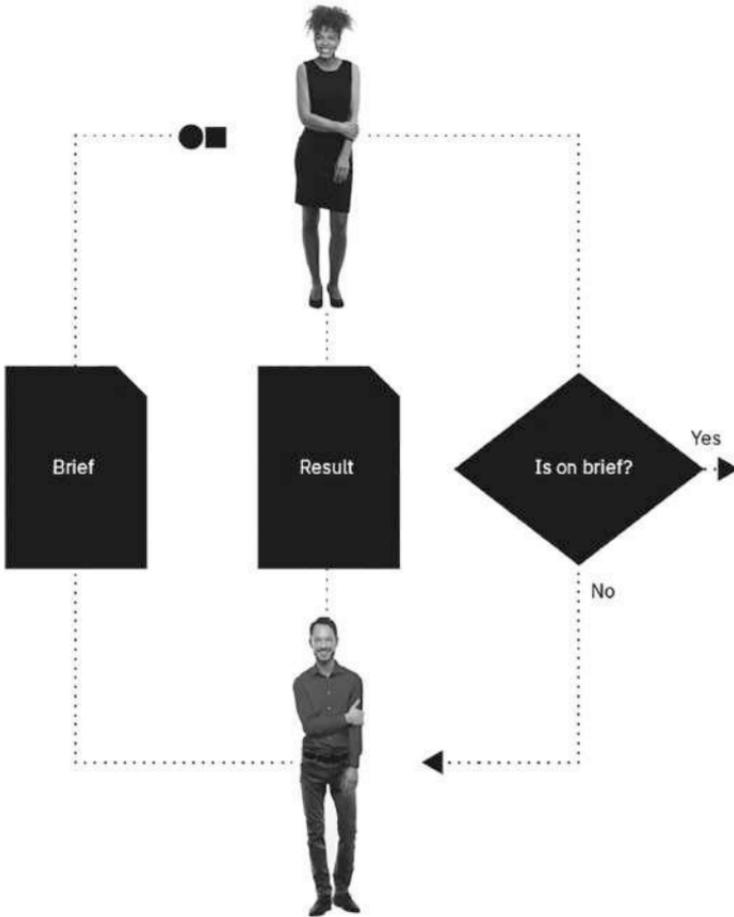


Fig. 5. Regardless of how the genome is implemented in the daily work of an organisation – whether as copy-pasted in an email or via a sophisticated Brand Genome App (available Q3 2020) – the basic process is the same. Define the criteria and evaluate against them. “Is it on brief?”, “Is it in line with our values?”

To ensure the framework viability in real life, we have tested it with real users in real organisations and talked to numerous stakeholders in various industries.

Hansen Beck is a newly formed management consulting and training company of over 50 management training professionals from over 25 countries. Over the late summer of 2019, they were in the process of setting up an organisation, procedures, products, brand, and everything that a newly formed global company needs. We provided them with the Business Genome framework, and they applied it to one of their company building sessions. They not only found it essential to the development of their own business; they want to start use and implement it in their work for their clients.

“We were able to do amazing work, with tangible results in a structured manner, and we came up with actionable items and a lot of buy-in. It is a fundamental exercise every company has to go through!”

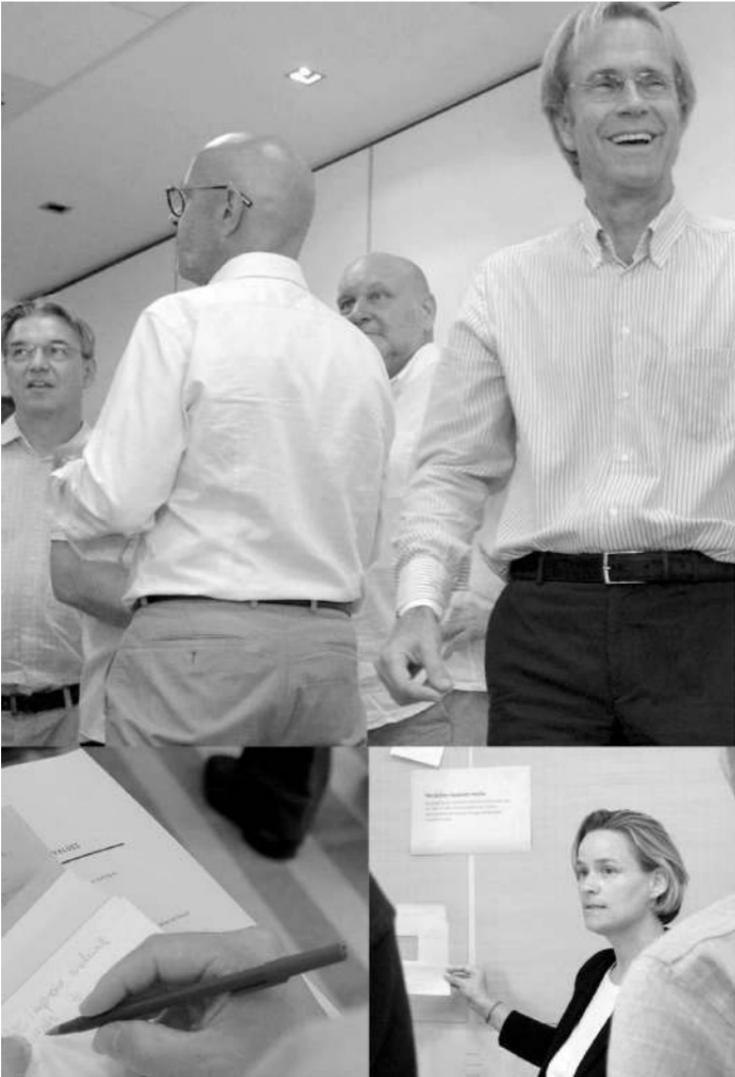
Aaron Marko

Co-founder and partner Hansen Beck

“I already have at least three or four of my clients in mind where I can immediately apply this model.”

Antonia Kornprobst

Management consultant and trainer Hansen Beck Germany



ORGANISATION TYPE:

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

ORGANISATION STAGE:

STARTUP

WORKSHOP FORMAT:

IN-HOUSE PRACTITIONER

Elan Sports is one of the leading world skiing brands. In late 2019, the entire leadership team met for a two-day off-site retreat. The systematic and structured workshop led by Vesna Marđonović led them to several surprising insights and uncovered a gap between the written strategy and the understanding of how different parts of the company and different markets should implement the shared vision. The leadership team shared the view that the Business Genome provided a framework that systematised and put to use the results of various methodologies and strategic activities; they engaged in recently.

“We’ll make this an annual event.”

Leon Korošec, CEO Elan Sports Winter Division

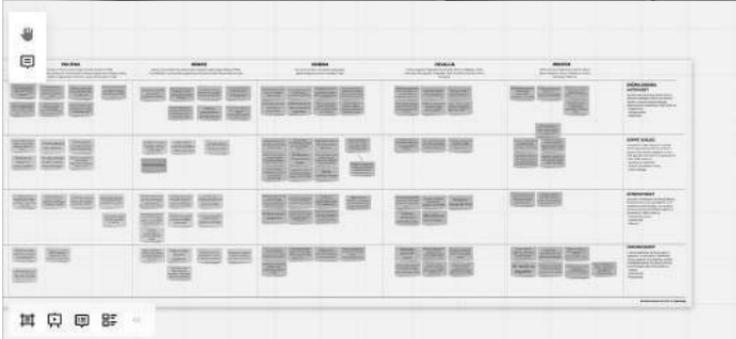
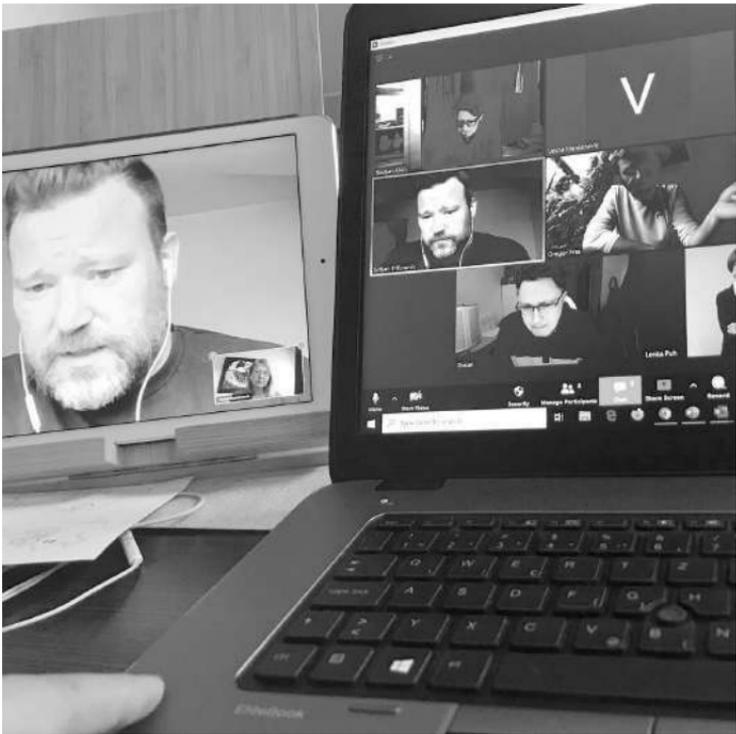


ORGANISATION TYPE: HARD GOODS
ORGANISATION STAGE: 75 YEARS TRADITION
WORKSHOP FORMAT: IN-PERSON WORKSHOP

ADS is a social movement of active citizens, which has grown through social media and has developed into a political party based on agreed-upon values. In spring 2020, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, an in-person workshop was not possible. Vesna Marđonović developed and conducted a two-day online workshop. According to the feedback, the satisfaction of the participants with the online approach and the workshop methods was comparable to live workshops. The Business Genome for a political party led by values was all set.

“I am fascinated by the simplicity of the mechanism of how values translate into everyday actions. To me, the Business Genome is also a sort of self-checker of how my own behaviour reflects my personal values.”

Participant



ORGANISATION TYPE: POLITICAL PARTY
 ORGANISATION STAGE: STARTUP
 WORKSHOP FORMAT: ON-LINE WORKSHOP

Interviews in early 2020 produced further confirmation of the concept's viability in different industries and opened up a broad spectrum of its applications.

The head of fundraising and the head of workforce of one of the world's largest charities found it invaluable to incorporate the Business Genome framework into the onboarding process for their employees, volunteers, and partners in different continents and territories where they are active. The discussion also opened up the need to align the values of individuals and the organisation that employs them. Surprisingly, the short debate revealed that the case of a specific employee-organisation value alignment – for which they have so far thought to be incompatible – is

perfectly compatible when viewed through manifestations of values at the organisation and individual levels.

They believe that the business genome would help to make difficult decisions, explain and justify them, understand why they were made, and result in more buy-in, trust, and motivation.

The head of the workforce of a large NHS (British National Health Service) organisation sees a vital role of the framework in establishing a common understanding of the organisation's values in people with very different national, cultural, and educational backgrounds.

An acclaimed veteran global HR (Human Resource) consultant had a clear idea of what to do from a management consultant point of view. "Do one Business Genome workshop with a leadership team, and a second one with any function or department in an organisation, and by that we will determine the size of the gap between the vision and implementation. Then we can work from there."

Senior partners of one of the top 10 most prestigious consulting firms see it as “a company culture decoder” that can be used annually to measure the progress of any change initiative undertaken in an organisation.

Interestingly, they perceived the Business Genome framework to work both ways. The original purpose of the Genome is to take an organisation’s values and project them on the domains to design the future behaviour of the organisation. However, they see the value in applying the framework in the opposite direction as well; to determine the organisation’s real values by identifying and recording the actual manifestations of the organisation and determining their common denominators, i.e. the values.

The head of global sales for a chemical corporation helped formulate an irrefutable argument for his CFO (Chief Financial Officer) for why their company should implement the Business Genome. “It helps measure the previously unmeasurable.” In his opinion, it transforms the intangible into tangible, and helps prove the value of the unmeasurable.

He also perceives the framework as a platform that enables people across the entire organisation to share not only knowledge, but the experiences as well. That way, he sees, experiences can be transformed into data. In that he finds the connection between an organisation and its members to be healthier, he believes the manifestations of values in everyday work touch the very core of human purpose.

A serial entrepreneur who is considered by some as almost an oracle of the London tech scene found the concept “a gamechanger.” What then followed was a debate on technology implementation, data structure, and software architecture that will allow various services and users to connect to, and use the Business Genome in their products and services. We addressed the case of growing a universal anonymised business genetic pool, and what would be the opportunities, potentials, and implications of applying AI (Artificial Intelligence) to the global business genome.

A senior investment banker in one of the leading global banks assumes that “If done right, it would be possible

to avoid company merger blunders, or at least predict where it will break.”

An authority on the future of work holds that organisations strive to be flat and agile, seek self-management, and that business genome enables flat, agile organisations make decisions on the spot.

“This is what is missing for both the creative industry and the consulting industry,” said a seasoned media and advertising CEO with extensive management experience at a global level working across a multi-billion dollar client investment portfolio. He further believes that “When taking charge of an organisation, having its DNA decoded in such a way, would help me enormously in motivating, managing, and delegating.”

The utility of the Business Genome may vary depending on the different requirements of organisations – their size, the stage of their development, the nature of their industry. Generally, a Business Genome's utility can be divided into five areas: as a framework, process, tool, platform, and data.

The Business Genome as a framework helps us understand the connections of the organisation's or individual's values to actual tangible activities that form behaviour. The simplicity of the basic structure – value-manifestation-domain – makes it possible to comprehend and deconstruct more complex structures and processes into individual building blocks.

Once we understand the concept of manifestations, we begin to recognise them everywhere. It adds another perspective to observe the functioning of the world around us, and it gives us another tool in the toolbox to understand how it works.

Now we can learn from the environment around us by observing and discerning which manifestations – they

can be from entirely different industries and spheres of life — might be relevant for us as well.

It gives us a chance to build our own set of manifestations to live by, to include them in our organisations, and reassemble them into new combinations according to newly established needs or opportunities as they arise time and again.

The Business Genome is also useful as a process. It sets the stage for reflection on the basic building blocks and mechanisms of the organisation, and helps the team cover all relevant areas in a structured way. Since organisations are quite different, the role of the process is different as well.

In small organisations, at the beginning of their journeys – such as startups or new projects within larger organisations – the role of the Business Genome process is quite clear. It has to guide the leadership team in a structured way through all the areas they need to think through. In this case, the most important point is that all team members align around the essential elements of their organisation's genome; its values (what they are and what they mean), the

domains that regard their organisation, and the manifestations of the values across the domains. In this way, the entire team has a shared and coherent understanding of how to bring their vision to reality.

In larger organisations with multiple hierarchical levels, various divisions, numerous functions, and geographical dispersion, the genome process can play another role. If different Business Genome workshops are conducted with the top management team and other executive teams, we can determine if there is a gap between the strategic and operational levels of the organisation, and where and how wide it is.

Leading change is one of the most challenging and critical tasks in any organisation. In that process, it is essential to have change leaders at every organisation's level aligned to the company's vision and equipped to execute their specific missions. By involving more people in the Business Genome planning process, we gain a substantial buy-in through the sense that people have contributed their inputs and are therefore a part of the solution.

An annual or more frequent organisation-wide Business Genome survey can offer a method to measure the progress of change initiatives at an organisation culture level, which has been up till now mostly unmeasurable.

Usually, we apply known organisational values to the domains through manifestations. In this case, we know values and domains, and we define manifestations to match them. However, in a case that we want to identify the unknown values of an organisation, we can invert the process by first identifying the actual manifestations of the organisation. In this case, the manifestations are the record of the actual behaviour of the organisation through which we can identify the values that drive it. By clustering manifestations, according to their common denominators, we can extract actual values of the organisation.

One of our primary goals is the application of the Business Genome in everyday life throughout an organisation. To achieve that we have to create tools that would utilise the power of the Business Genome in a way that will make people's day-to-day work easier and better. This tool not only enables input and editing of the genome but above all, it facilitates its use in day-to-day operations.

The primary tool is an online application that allows users to access it anywhere and on any device. To illustrate its utility, let's take a look at a couple of basic user scenarios:

1. CREATING A BRIEF

A marketing manager in Europe needs a brief to brief a Milanese marketing agency for an upcoming campaign. In the web application on his computer, he creates a new brief, names it “Marketing Campaign Brief,” and selects the manifestations that are relevant for the purpose. He chooses all content domain manifestations that range from the tone of voice to the style of the photos. In the review of the brief on her phone, the Head of Marketing adds a few manifestations that she feels need to be a part of the brief. These manifestations are added not only to the brief at hand, but also become an integral part of the entire organisation’s genome.

The in-house team may also include external domain experts who can add their specialist knowledge in the form of manifestations from their respective expertise — for example, an art director, screenwriter, and a social media expert. Also, the manifestations they add to this brief become an integral part of the entire genome of the organisation, which gains value with each new entry.

The brief is saved, its content can be shared to the agency, or the genome snippet it contains can be simply copy-pasted into an email that includes other relevant information, and then sent to the agency account director.

No matter how manifestations are used, they represent instructions and guidelines on how something should be done or what something should be. And therefore, even more importantly, they serve as the criteria by which the adequacy of the solutions or quality of decision-making can be evaluated.

2. CONSISTENCY IN BRIEFING

When a head of US marketing needs to brief a US campaign agency, she looks through the briefs in the application and selects the very “Marketing Campaign Brief.” She copies the genome snippet — manifestations from the brief — and pastes it into her email to the agency along with her campaign business goals, budget, and some other specific requirements that are all tangible and therefore measurable. And now, thanks

to the business genome, she has metrics for the intangibles as well.

3. BRIEFS INFORM DECISIONS

Even more than consistency in appearance and communication, long-term consistency in decision-making is essential. It is precisely the basic decisions of an organisation that have the strongest influence on its real identity. From the perspective of product development or R&D, it can be quite tempting to follow the loudest signals from the market and most frequent user demands. It might be confusing and frustrating when design research identifies several virtually equal innovation opportunities. In both instances, the decision about which product to develop and launch next should be taken according to the organisation's genome. It will ensure the long-term consistency of decision-making in line with the core values of the company. For instance, two manifestations like "We enable our users to be up to date with the latest trends" and "We don't follow hype" will trigger different considerations and consequent decisions.

A genome is a dynamic set of instructions and guidelines that is available through the app in real-time to all members of the organisation, no matter where they are. The latest manifestations are available to everyone at the very moment they occur in the genome, and those that are no longer current are no longer available. Anytime anyone pulls the brief, it is current.

A genome as a platform, however, is two-sided. It is not only up-to-date dissemination of content among the organisation, but it is also about getting feedback to present manifestations, as well as discovering new ones. Different environments, expertise, insights, experiences, cultural specifics, niche trends, and early disruptive signals influence the evolution of the genome.

The genome changes and adapts during time as would one of a species. It will mutate according to changes in the environment, significant events, or by gradual optimisations.

The genome is a pool of collective knowledge that is different and exceeding the mere librarian document collection. It can ingrain a values-driven behaviour into every part of an organisation. It is a platform for sharing not only knowledge but also experience. It will enable the debate about the organisation's values and conduct, and so ensure people awareness of and buy-in into the culture.

The organisation's genome will stay actual, and relevant through time, making the organisation more resilient and future proof.

The Business Genome is inherently predisposed for the complexity and — at least for human comprehension — relatively large scale. However, its utility is increasing with its size only in conjunction with the ability to use this information. If there is a large amount of data and the ability to organise and manage it is not there, the complexity is too high, and the data becomes opaque and useless.

The most apparent use of genome data is as the content of the briefs. This system uses manifestations as the basic building blocks of information, arrange and re-arrange them for various purposes such as instructions, processes, decision-making, HR. The data at this high level is directly dependent on the human

language and understanding. At this level, the system's worth — more than the sum of its parts — is established through human understanding. For instance, manifestation “We communicate casually.” might be interpreted as permission for profanity in interpersonal communication, but when used in conjunction with “We are always respectful.” puts it in a more precise framework. The connection at this level is made exclusively by a human.

At the opposite side of this spectrum is meaning-agnostic data consisting of data points such as a number of hits, duration of stay, frequency of use. At this level, we can primarily compare numerical and statistical data detached from the content and create information based on a combination of these data. In addition to basic metrics, such as the number of hits on individual manifestations or briefs over time, it can also be a source of insights such as which briefs are most attractive to newly logged-in users, where they stay for longer periods, what content they copy or save.

In this case, still, the information is a result of human interpretation of data obtained through counting and

computation. At this level, it becomes interesting to combine genome data and data from other systems of the organisation and to combine these different data sets. The more variety of data available, the more options there are for asking questions such as whether a change in a particular part of the corporate DNA may affect the cash conversion cycle over a certain period.

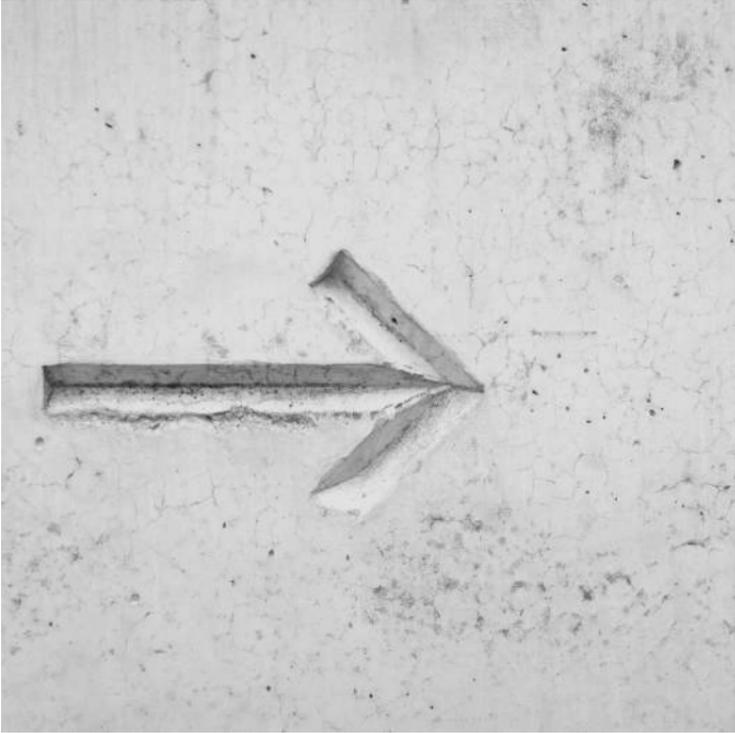
The greatest potential lies in the third area, where numerical data and genome content are linked. In this case, more sophisticated AI technology is required to process such data. The more data available in different areas of the organisation and its environment, the more potential this model has. An AI method called 'deep learning' can spot patterns or cause-and-effect relationships from the data it has access to.

In such cases, surprising patterns might emerge, for instance, something like a link between a part of the organisation's business genome, economic trends, trending content in social media, mainstream media history of idea adoption, and weather.

The preceding examples relate to the use of proprietary data in conjunction with publicly available data. If the

genome data included an open data layer in the public domain, the analytic potential would increase by order(s) of magnitude. The most apparent cases would be the ones like exploring the connection of particular cultures of organisations and their success, identifying the most culturally compatible business partners, identifying potential problems in cultural differences before mergers of companies, etc.

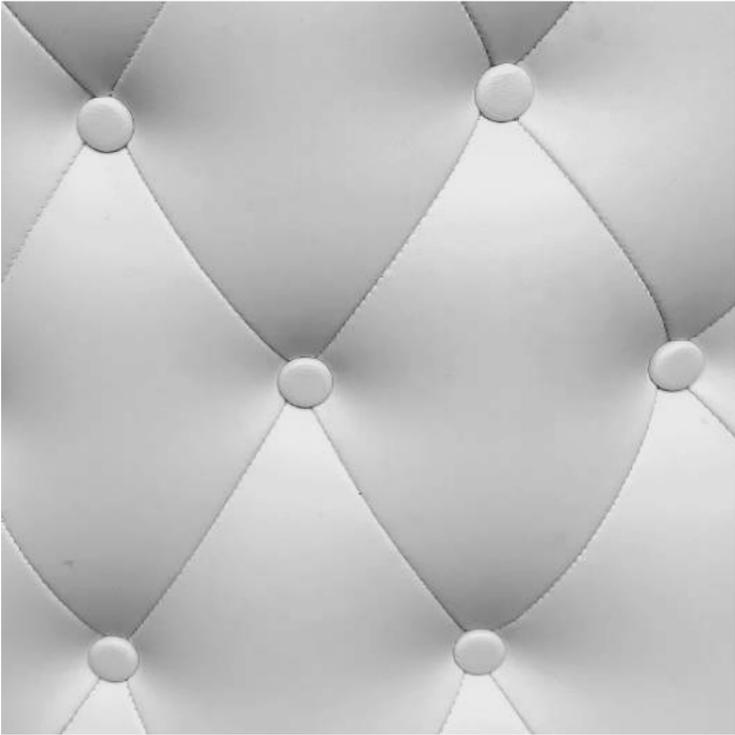
The availability of the corporate DNA data in the public domain data pool would mean enormous addition to research in a lot of other areas of the economy, e.g. psychology, politology, and the social sciences.



We have to divest ourselves of the delusion that we can command the market. Firm rules of yesterday are often an impediment today.



In organisations with multiple hierarchical levels, different departments and many functions, there is an inherent discrepancy between the expectations of the leadership team and the actual situation at the implementation level.



Combined annual spending on strategy consulting, business consulting, and advertising is worth almost 1 trillion USD alone, and yet an overwhelming majority of corporate strategists express low confidence in their ability to translate strategy into action.



If there is a gap between vision and implementation, there is a lot of time and human potential lost on daily activities that don't have an apparent purpose.



Burnout is usually not only caused by too much work but by uncertainty, lack of focus, clarity, and guidance.



UK economy alone is losing 12.8 million human-days each year due to burnout-related absences.



We cannot predict and control everything anymore. We have to start treating organisations less as architecture and more as biology.



An organisation needs to understand the reasons for decisions made not only the goals to be achieved. Buy-in, motivation and focus of team members critically depend on understanding the reasons why.



Organisations strive to be flat and agile, seek self-management. Business genome enables flat, agile organisations as it helps decide on the spot.



It is essential to have every organisation's level aligned to the vision and equipped to execute their specific missions at their own pace according to their teams' best abilities.

The manifestations on the following pages are collected arbitrarily and are not arranged in any particular order. They are torn out of the context of their respective companies or industries in which they operate. Some examples are part of the actual genomes of specific companies; some are taken from accessible documents of large corporations, and some include statements from several people.

For example, the “10 Commandments of Good Design” by one of the most significant industrial designers of all time, Dieter Rams, are still completely relevant and up-to-date a few decades after he wrote them, and they can read as the genome snippet of a company like Apple.

Ray Dalio's principles are a brilliant example of personal and corporate values in action. His model is an excellent example of how to transfer values from the wall in the lobby of an office building, where they are printed in glossy letters into the company's operating system to incorporate them into all levels of the organisation.

Following manifestations lack context and specific descriptions that would make them more exact and relevant for their respective organisations, but they can illustrate the variety and serve as an inspiration.

Always ask yourself if the established beliefs still relevant.

I don't look at my watch during a conversation.

When facing an angry customer, listen.

Be direct.

At meetings, one topic at the time.

Give and be willing to take feedback instantly.

Collect project post-mortem and make it available to everyone.

"We" before "I".

Think!

We are never the first major brand to a channel.

Take time and invest in relationship.

Mistakes are okay.
(So far as we learn from them)

Archive all meaningful prototypes for current and future employees.

We don't follow the hype.

Price structure is simple and transparent.

Be the brand - live the brand.

We are kind people.

Invite clients to the factory to experience the tradition, landscape, and people.

Put yourself into your customers' shoes.

We prioritise by long-term brand objectives. (not short-term goals)

Always think how can you pleasantly surprise our customer

Avoid red.

Overdeliver when no extra cost involved.

Good design is good business.

Don't be a bully.

At events, we want consumers to feel the brand, not just see the products.

We select partners who challenge us.

We don't sell to market troublemakers

We don't talk bad about the competition.

The worst idea at one point can be a starting point to a good idea.

Good design is self-explanatory.

Hire for attitude, skills can be taught.

Our tone of voice is friendly, yet not patronising.

Let people take care of their personal matters.

Always say "thank you."

Challenging matters need to be addressed as priority.

Don't be a dick.

Lead by example.

Our faces are our ambassadors.

Don't be evil.

When you believe you can contribute,
do it.

Don't fake emotions and beliefs.

Listen to gut feelings.

We allow mistakes create opportunities for change.

It is okay to say “I don’t know.”

We blame the problem, rather than the person.

Don’t lower the bar.

When in doubt, use Caslon.

Design should be visually powerful and intellectually elegant.

Treat all customers equally.
(Independent of volume)

Think radically.

Challenge your boss.

Always be respectful.

Be a part of a solution not the problem. (Always bring solutions)

Memento mori.

Done is better than perfect.

Move fast and break things.

We don’t compromise on quality.

Don’t interrupt people.

Treat everything like a prototype.

We challenge others and ourselves to have courage to address unpleasant topics.

Everyone in customer support should have parenting experience.

We call/talk before sending an e-mail.

Don't jump to conclusions.

I feel healthy, I appear healthy.

Ask "Why?" 5 times.

We encourage small scale test drivers in different countries.

What would our founder do?

We have regular reviews of the business model and procedures.

We use a global CRM for maximum transparency.

Maintain transparent and simple processes.

We create pictures to explain business topics.

Ask "How?" 5 times.

Modernism is a state of mind not a style.

We change the decision if the solution clearly did not work.

Is what client wants what client really needs?

Done is better than perfect

Always show two or more people.

We stay in touch with our customers on a regular, but not annoying basis.

Shape of the product should show underlying technology.

We encourage knowledge and experience — good & bad — sharing.

Good design is as little design as possible.

We provide salespeople with brand services and key product facts relevant to the consumer.

Minimalism is a thought process.

Sales reps assist stores on the floor to promote sales.

Each meeting has goals and agenda.

Try new things but don't sacrifice the brand rules.

You are here to have an opinion.

Think like an owner.

We are different and we like it that way.

Always check for new materials and technologies.

You can talk to anyone in a company without anyone else's permission.

Spend where it counts.

It's your responsibility to understand what is expected of you.

Worry if you are not worried.

We are willing to rethink everything.

Don't take shortcuts.

Every regional office must – in addition to us – serve something else that is good for the local community.

Taste the soup.

Practice what you preach.

We take results of entire company personally.

If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.

Could it be better?

Recommend breast feeding over use of our own products.

The opening hours of the regional offices are adjusted to the working hours of the users.

Make sure we are not complicit in any human rights abuses.

Focus at the task at hand.

Privacy is a human right.

Learn from “No.”

Ask yourself how we can positively surprise our customer.

One customer at a time.

Don't work for assholes. Don't work with assholes.

Scepticism is good. Put it to productive use.

No waste at our events.

Don't compromise on the safety of a product.

Upcycling is the central guiding principle in furnishing our regional offices.

Orville Wright did not have a pilot's license.

Don't focus on rare and trivial problems.

Clearly assign responsibilities.

We are in an infinite game.

Probe to the level below the people who report to you.

We're competing with sleep.

Distinguish between a failure in which someone broke their "contract" and a failure in which there was no contract to begin with.

Don't confuse goals and tasks.

Go back before going forward.

What broke?



Matevž Medja is a co-founder of the multidisciplinary design agency Gigodesign. He has decades of experience with building, leading, and supervising interdisciplinary teams on complex projects, and helping clients to employ design to achieve their business goals.

He is an award-winning designer of complex identity systems and creative director with a background in computer sciences. He has worked with presidents, CEOs, and startup founders.

Through his work, he noticed the same patterns and problems in organisations of all kinds, and realised that he could use design and software principles to help them design their culture. It laid the groundwork for the Business Genome.

Vesna Marđonović and the Gigodesign team are vital in developing the concept and a community.

Robert P. McKenzie copyedited this white paper while being buried by his other work.

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Business Genome

www.businessgenome.com

hello@businessgenome.com

The Business Genome White Paper provides a clear blueprint with practical guidance and inspirational examples. It provides both the understanding of a framework itself and its practical use in day-to-day life to deliver growth in line with the core organisation's values. Whether in a startup or corporate world, in the civil society or the public sector.

“It is essential for every team that wants to transform their dreams into reality.”

— Mike Adamsky, Partner and CEO Hansen Beck US

“It will challenge the way that leaders think about their organisations or brands but, above all aid their understanding of how to build and manage stronger and sustainable businesses. It will make the complex, comprehensible.”

— Martin Thomas, Marketing consultant and author

