New Age Leadership

What makes teams successful? – Google's Project Aristotle came up with these five factors that matter



Google's Project Aristotle. Google spent 2 years and enormous amounts of resources studying over 180 teams to figure out the answer to the question – What makes teams successful? These are the five factors they found are essential to any high-performing team. The most important factor is "psychological safety" a

term coined by Harvard Professor Amy Edmonson. It affects organizational culture and team effectiveness.

by Mehul Surati | Leadership

Table of Content: Click to jump to a specific section [hide]

1 The Why of Google's Project Aristotle

2 Individual brilliance vs. team effectiveness

3 To quote Michael Jordan – Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships.

4 Google's Project Aristotle – Google's quest to answer – What makes teams successful? What makes a team effective?

5 The "recipe" for what makes teams successful

6 What factors didn't matter a lot for the team effectiveness

7 5 Factors common to effective teams at Google

8 Psychological safety:

- 8.1 Read my article on Psychological safety at work – Why you need it and how to develop it
- 8.2 Dependability:
- 8.3 Structure and clarity:
- 8.4 Meaning:
- 8.5 Impact:

9 How to apply the learning of Google's Project Aristotle to your teams at our organization?

- 9.1 Our team coaching process is both impactful and resources efficient (both time and money). Find out about our team coaching process that

delivers measurable and guaranteed team growth.
10 Harvard professor and Organizational behavioral scientist Amy Edmondson coined the term “psychological safety”
11 What does it all mean? Conclusion of Google’s Project Aristotle
12 Our team coaching that delivers guaranteed and measurable growth in team effectiveness
12.1 TEAM Coaching–Year-long Executive Coaching program using Stakeholder Centered Coaching
12.2 Resource-efficient
12.3 Changing leaders and teams at the same time and culture
12.4 Create a Team Culture of Openness to continuous change
12.5 Insider expertise
12.6 Coaching culture is a leadership skill
13 Here are some features of the Marshall Goldsmith executive coaching program
14 Schedule an exploratory 15-minute conversation with our leadership adviser today

by Tushar Vakil | Leadership

The Why of Google’s Project Aristotle

Individual brilliance vs. team effectiveness

Individual brilliance is great, but the team cohesiveness is more important. Most of the work done today is in the form of projects that involve multiple people working in teams. An article, published in The Harvard Business Review in Jan-Feb 2016, title "Collaborative Overload" states the following. Over the last two decades – "The time spent by managers and employees in collaborative activities has ballooned by 50 percent or more"

Talent management's primary focus has been on measuring and managing individual performance. But it is not enough. Analyzing and improving individual performance does not translate into the performance of teams or workgroups. Hence the focus on what makes teams successful let to Google's Project Aristotle.

To quote Michael Jordan – Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships.

It is true in sports and business. **In cohesive teams, the whole is a lot greater than the sum of its parts.** When teams work in synergy, they achieve extraordinary performance. **In dysfunctional teams, it is vice versa.** The whole ends up being a lot less than the sum of the parts. You can put a group of 6-10 high performing individuals on a team, and yet, their performance together as a team may be disappointing. How a group of individuals

performs together as a team is unpredictable at best.

Google's Project Aristotle – Google's quest to answer – What makes teams successful? What makes a team effective?

In 2012, Google set out to answer this important question – What makes teams successful? Google coined it "Google's Project Aristotle". Obviously, this is not a new idea! Many companies, academicians, sociologists, and psychologists have attempted to find the answer to this exact question. A lot of this previous research on what makes teams successful often included easy subjects. These experimental teams often comprised Graduate students – in an artificial environment of college and not real-life work at the office.

However, Google wanted to study real work. With Google, things are a little different. **Google is a very successful company with access to enormous amounts of resources. They spent 2 years studying 180 real and diverse teams at Google.** These were not experimental teams but were real teams doing "real" work in a corporate setting. Google has a data-driven approach. They conducted over 200 interviews conducted. They analyzed over 250 different attributes of teams. They defined what comprised a team. They also defined how to measure team effectiveness. They measured it in terms of performance,

and opinions of the leader, team manager, and team members. They collected both quantitative and qualitative data and used their brainpower to analyze the data. They sought to find the "algorithm" that would predict what makes teams successful.

The "recipe" for what makes teams successful

Google wanted to find a "recipe" for what makes teams successful. The ingredients could be

- Put in a few of the high performers
- add an experienced manager
- give them a free pass to all resources

And the expectation was that you will have the output in terms of a high-performing team. Google found that this wasn't true at all! The constitution of the team or its Geographical location didn't matter a lot. What mattered more were the "team norms". Team norms are how the teams interacted. Who was on the team didn't matter much. **Instead, how the teams worked together made the difference.**

What factors didn't matter a lot for the team effectiveness

To their surprise, Project Aristotle researchers discovered

that several common factors didn't matter to what makes teams successful. **Below are the variables that didn't matter much to the team effectiveness at Google:**

- The collocation of teammates (sitting together in the same office)
- Consensus-driven decision making
- Extroversion of team members
- Individual performance of team members
- Workload size
- Seniority
- Team size
- Tenure

5 Factors common to effective teams at Google

Google found 5 factors common in their quest to answer – what makes teams successful. These five factors are listed below in the order of their importance.

Read: Team coaching – Everything you wanted to know about it

Psychological safety:

Team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other without the fear of being embarrassed, ridiculed or face any other consequences. Psychological

safety refers to an individual's perception of the consequences of taking an interpersonal risk or a belief that a team is safe for risk-taking in the face of being seen as ignorant, incompetent, negative, or disruptive. In a team with high psychological safety, teammates feel safe to take risks around their team members. They feel confident that no one on the team will embarrass or punish anyone else for admitting a mistake, asking a question, or offering a new idea.

Read my article on Psychological safety at work – Why you need it and how to develop it

Dependability:

On dependable teams, members reliably complete quality work on time. The opposite of dependability is shirking responsibilities. **Team members get things done on time and meet Google's high bar for excellence.**

Structure and clarity:

Team members have clear roles, plans, and goals. Every team member clearly understands job expectations. He/she also knows the process of fulfilling these expectations. The consequences of the individual team member's performance are also clear. They can set goals individually or at a group level. The goals must be specific, challenging, and attainable. Google often uses Objectives

and Key Results (OKRs) to help set and communicate short and long-term goals.

Meaning:

Finding a sense of purpose in either the work itself or the output is important for team effectiveness. Work is personally important and meaningful to the team members. The meaning of work is personal and can vary amongst many factors. These factors can be: financial security, supporting family, helping the team succeed, or self-expression for each individual.

Impact:

Teams have to feel that their work and their output are making a difference. When teams see their efforts contributing to the organization's goals they feel that their work has an impact. Team members believe that their work matters to the company and the customers.

Image credit – https://rework.withgoogle.com/print/guides/5721312655835136/



How to apply the learning of Google's Project Aristotle to your teams at our organization?

Google research team wanted team members to understand what was going on with their teams. So they created a **survey for teams to take and discuss amongst themselves**. Survey items were questions based on the five factors of team effectiveness. **Your team can use these**

same questions in your organization.

Psychological safety – "If I make a mistake on our team, it is not held against me."

Dependability – "When my teammates say they'll do something, they follow through with it."

Structure and Clarity – "Our team has an effective decision-making process."

Meaning – "The work I do for our team is meaningful to me."

Impact – "I understand how our team's work contributes to the organization's goals."

After everyone on the team had anonymously completed the survey, the scores were shared with the team. A facilitator would be present to start a dialogue and a discussion to understand the details of the survey scores and to make a plan to improve team effectiveness.

Our team coaching process is both impactful and resources efficient (both time and money). Find out about our team coaching process that delivers measurable and guaranteed team growth.

Harvard professor and Organizational behavioral scientist

Amy Edmondson coined the term “psychological safety”

Amy Edmondson defines psychological safety as **“a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.”**

She has devised a **7 question survey to measure the level of psychological safety within a team.** Team members anonymously answer these questions on a scale of 1 to 7. Here are the 7 questions.

01. If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you.
02. Members of this team can bring up problems and tough issues.
03. People on this team sometimes reject others for being different.
04. It is safe to take a risk on this team.
05. It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help.
06. No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
07. Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.

What does it all mean? Conclusion of Google’s Project Aristotle

Google spent a lot of time and used their enormous resources to provide a research-based answer to the question of what makes teams successful. They also studied "real work teams" at Google. To their surprise, the team constitution (who was on the team), didn't matter a whole lot. What mattered was how the team members interacted – or the team norms or culture. They found five factors common to effective teams at Google. The most significant factor was "psychological safety" – a term coined by Harvard researcher Amy Edmonson. The 7 question survey and ensuing discussion with a facilitator is the best way to work on improving effectiveness on your teams.

Our team coaching that delivers guaranteed and measurable growth in team effectiveness

We offer team coaching based on Marshall Goldsmith's stakeholder centered approach that delivers a measurable and guaranteed improvement in team effectiveness.

Team coaching a very effective and cost-efficient way to grow leaders, change teams, and develop the organizational culture that ensures that teams deliver results.

TEAM Coaching–Year-long Executive Coaching program using Stakeholder Centered Coaching

TEAM coaching engagements create measurable leadership growth for the leader as well as for the team as a whole using Marshall's unique Stakeholder Centered Coaching process. **The team coaching approach has several benefits.**

Resource-efficient

Since one executive coach works with all team members supporting each other in this TEAM coaching process the whole coaching program is **very time efficient and reduces coaching fees per team member** while still delivering a majority of the benefits of 1:1 coaching for the leader.

Changing leaders and teams at the same time and culture

The team as a whole articulates one leadership growth area and each team member defines their leadership growth area that relates to the team focus. This creates an interdependent team effort with a **common focus on producing results for their effectiveness and team productivity simultaneously.**

Create a Team Culture of Openness to continuous change

When team members collaborate as stakeholders in the TEAM coaching programs, **it creates an open culture for leadership and team culture change.** Team members feel comfortable to use feedback and feedforward around the organization to drive change for themselves and their teams.

Insider expertise

Team members should be able to **provide expert advice and an insider view of each other as it relates to their business, their people, and their team culture challenges.** They become de facto coaches.

Coaching culture is a leadership skill

Some organizations use coaching as an 'executive intervention' or to 'fix a problem', but this is a suboptimal approach to coaching. **Coaching is a leadership skill and leaders in organizations should be skilled coaches to help their teams develop and grow.** Same as we expect effective leaders to be highly skilled in e.g. communication, decision making, and empowerment, leaders should be highly skilled in coaching others. TEAM coaching is a great program to instill coaching as a leadership skill in the organization.

We offer Marshall Goldsmith coaching in India, the middle east, and southeast Asia. It is the best coaching program in India because it is exactly the same executive coaching process used by Marshall Goldsmith to coach CEOs of Fortune 500 companies worldwide and we guarantee measurable leadership growth or you don't pay at all.

Here are some features of the Marshall Goldsmith executive coaching program

- **Guaranteed, measurable leadership growth as assessed–not by us–but by the leader's own stakeholders**
- Unlike leadership training or executive education programs, it will involve the entire team while doing their day to day work
- The leader becomes the coach, and it has a cascading effect on the team increasing the team effectiveness and improving organizational culture
- It is a system for continuous improvement for leaders themselves and their teams – although it is leadership coaching for the individual leader; we realize the benefit of team coaching through the involvement of the entire team
- In a study of 11,000 leaders on 4 continents–95% of the leaders using this leadership coaching process improved!
- This is the exact same executive coaching process that has been used by 150 of the Fortune 500 companies to grow their leaders through CEO coaching and leadership coaching at C-suite levels
- **We are so confident of the process we work on a no growth no pay basis (don't try that with other vendors, lol!)**

Tushar Vakil

I help leaders & teams create EXTRAORDINARY & SUSTAINABLE RESULTS. GUARANTEED. I am a leadership and team coach certified by Marshall Goldsmith – World's number One Leadership Thinker!

Leadership development impacts all kinds of organizations – profit, non-profit, social, or political. It is the best lever available to make a positive impact on organizations and society at large. My hobbies include reading, writing, traveling, and connecting with people from

The New York Times Magazine

THE WORK ISSUE

What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team

New research reveals surprising truths about why some work groups thrive and others falter.

Illustration by James Graham

By Charles Duhigg

Feb. 25, 2016

THE GREAT READ: *Every weekday, we recommend one piece of exceptional writing from The Times — a narrative or essay that takes you someplace you might not expect to go.*

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Like most 25-year-olds, Julia Rozovsky wasn't sure what she wanted to do with her life. She had worked at a consulting firm, but it wasn't a good match. Then she became a researcher for two professors at Harvard, which was interesting but lonely. Maybe a big corporation would be a better fit. Or perhaps a fast-growing start-up. All she knew for certain was that she wanted to find a job that was more social. ''I wanted to be part of a community, part of something people were building together,'' she told me. She thought about various opportunities — Internet companies, a Ph.D. program — but nothing seemed exactly right. So in 2009, she chose the path that allowed her to put off making a decision: She applied to business schools and was accepted by the Yale School of Management.

When Rozovsky arrived on campus, she was assigned to a study group carefully engineered by the school to foster tight bonds. Study groups have become a rite of passage at M.B.A. programs, a way for students to practice working in teams and a reflection of the increasing demand for employees who can adroitly navigate group dynamics. A worker today might start the morning by collaborating with a team of engineers, then send emails to colleagues marketing a new brand, then jump on a conference call planning an entirely different product line, while also juggling team meetings with accounting and the party-planning committee. To prepare students for that complex world, business schools around the country have revised their curriculums to emphasize team-focused learning.

Every day, between classes or after dinner, Rozovsky and her four teammates gathered to discuss homework assignments, compare spreadsheets and strategize for exams. Everyone was smart and curious, and they had a lot in common: They had gone to similar colleges and had worked at analogous firms. These shared experiences, Rozovsky hoped, would make it easy for them to work well together. But it didn't turn out that way. ''There are lots of people who say some of their best business-school friends come from their study groups,'' Rozovsky told me. ''It wasn't like that for me.''

Instead, Rozovsky's study group was a source of stress. ''I always felt like I had to prove myself,'' she said. The team's dynamics could put her on edge. When the group met, teammates sometimes jockeyed for the leadership position or criticized one another's ideas. There were conflicts over who was in charge and who got to represent the group in class. ''People would try to show authority by speaking louder or talking over each other,'' Rozovsky told me. ''I always felt like I had to be careful not to make mistakes around them.''

So Rozovsky started looking for other groups she could join. A classmate mentioned that some students were putting together teams for ''case competitions,'' contests in which participants proposed solutions to real-world business problems that were evaluated by judges, who awarded trophies and cash. The competitions were voluntary, but the work wasn't all that different from what Rozovsky did with her study group: conducting lots of research and financial analyses, writing reports and giving presentations. The members of her case-competition team had a variety of professional experiences: Army officer, researcher at a think tank, director of a health-education nonprofit organization and consultant to a refugee program. Despite their disparate backgrounds, however, everyone clicked. They emailed one another dumb jokes and usually spent the first 10 minutes of each meeting chatting. When it came time to brainstorm, ''we had lots of crazy ideas,'' Rozovsky said.

One of her favorite competitions asked teams to come up with a new business to replace a student-run snack store on Yale's campus. Rozovsky proposed a nap room and selling earplugs and eyeshades to make money. Someone else suggested filling the space with old video games. There were ideas about clothing swaps. Most of the proposals were impractical, but ''we all felt like we could say anything to each other,'' Rozovsky told me. ''No one worried that the rest of the team was judging them.'' Eventually, the team settled on a plan for a microgym with a handful of exercise classes and a few weight machines. They won the competition. (The microgym — with two stationary bicycles and three treadmills — still exists.)

Rozovsky's study group dissolved in her second semester (it was up to the students whether they wanted to continue). Her case team, however, stuck together for the two years she was at Yale.

It always struck Rozovsky as odd that her experiences with the two groups were dissimilar. Each was composed of people who were bright and outgoing. When she talked one on one with members of her study group, the exchanges were friendly and warm. It was only when they gathered as a team that things became fraught. By contrast, her case-competition team was always fun and easygoing. In some ways, the team's members got along better as a group than as individual friends.

''I couldn't figure out why things had turned out so different,'' Rozovsky told me. ''It didn't seem like it had to happen that way.''

Our data-saturated age enables us to examine our work habits and office quirks with a scrutiny that our cubicle-bound forebears could only dream of. Today, on corporate campuses and within university laboratories, psychologists, sociologists and statisticians are devoting themselves to studying everything from team composition to email patterns in order to figure out how to make employees into faster, better and more productive versions of themselves. ''We're living through a golden age of understanding personal productivity,'' says Marshall Van Alstyne, a professor at Boston University who studies how people share information. ''All of a sudden, we can pick apart the small choices that all of us make, decisions most of us don't even notice, and figure out why some people are so much more effective than everyone else.''

Yet many of today's most valuable firms have come to realize that analyzing and improving individual workers — a practice known as ''employee performance optimization'' — isn't enough. As commerce becomes increasingly global and complex, the bulk of modern work is more and more team-based. One study, published in The Harvard Business Review last month, found that ''the time spent by managers and employees in collaborative activities has ballooned by 50 percent or more'' over the last two decades and that, at many companies, more than three-quarters of an employee's day is spent communicating with colleagues.

In Silicon Valley, software engineers are encouraged to work together, in part because studies show that groups tend to innovate faster, see mistakes more quickly and find better solutions to problems. Studies also show that people working in teams tend to achieve better results and report higher job satisfaction. In a 2015 study, executives said that

profitability increases when workers are persuaded to collaborate more. Within companies and conglomerates, as well as in government agencies and schools, teams are now the fundamental unit of organization. If a company wants to outstrip its competitors, it needs to influence not only how people work but also how they work *together*.

Five years ago, Google — one of the most public proselytizers of how studying workers can transform productivity — became focused on building the perfect team. In the last decade, the tech giant has spent untold millions of dollars measuring nearly every aspect of its employees' lives. Google's People Operations department has scrutinized everything from how frequently particular people eat together (the most productive employees tend to build larger networks by rotating dining companions) to which traits the best managers share (unsurprisingly, good communication and avoiding micromanaging is critical; more shocking, this was news to many Google managers).

The company's top executives long believed that building the best teams meant combining the best people. They embraced other bits of conventional wisdom as well, like ''It's better to put introverts together,'' said Abeer Dubey, a manager in Google's People Analytics division, or ''Teams are more effective when everyone is friends away from work.'' But, Dubey went on, ''it turned out no one had really studied which of those were true.''

In 2012, the company embarked on an initiative — code-named Project Aristotle — to study hundreds of Google's teams and figure out why some stumbled while others soared. Dubey, a leader of the project, gathered some of the company's best statisticians, organizational psychologists, sociologists and engineers. He also needed researchers. Rozovsky, by then, had decided that what she wanted to do with her life was study people's habits and tendencies. After graduating from Yale, she was hired by Google and was soon assigned to Project Aristotle.

Project Aristotle's researchers began by reviewing a half-century of academic studies looking at how teams worked. Were the best teams made up of people with similar interests? Or did it matter more whether everyone was motivated by the same kinds of rewards? Based on those studies, the researchers scrutinized the composition of groups inside Google: How often did teammates socialize outside the office? Did they have the same hobbies? Were their educational backgrounds similar? Was it better for all teammates

to be outgoing or for all of them to be shy? They drew diagrams showing which teams had overlapping memberships and which groups had exceeded their departments' goals. They studied how long teams stuck together and if gender balance seemed to have an impact on a team's success.

No matter how researchers arranged the data, though, it was almost impossible to find patterns — or any evidence that the composition of a team made any difference. ''We looked at 180 teams from all over the company,'' Dubey said. ''We had lots of data, but there was nothing showing that a mix of specific personality types or skills or backgrounds made any difference. The 'who' part of the equation didn't seem to matter.''

Some groups that were ranked among Google's most effective teams, for instance, were composed of friends who socialized outside work. Others were made up of people who were basically strangers away from the conference room. Some groups sought strong managers. Others preferred a less hierarchical structure. Most confounding of all, two teams might have nearly identical makeups, with overlapping memberships, but radically different levels of effectiveness. ''At Google, we're good at finding patterns,'' Dubey said. ''There weren't strong patterns here.''

As they struggled to figure out what made a team successful, Rozovsky and her colleagues kept coming across research by psychologists and sociologists that focused on what are known as ''group norms.'' Norms are the traditions, behavioral standards and unwritten rules that govern how we function when we gather: One team may come to a consensus that avoiding disagreement is more valuable than debate; another team might develop a culture that encourages vigorous arguments and spurns groupthink. Norms can be unspoken or openly acknowledged, but their influence is often profound. Team members may behave in certain ways as individuals — they may chafe against authority or prefer working independently — but when they gather, the group's norms typically override individual proclivities and encourage deference to the team.

Project Aristotle's researchers began searching through the data they had collected, looking for norms. They looked for instances when team members described a particular behavior as an ''unwritten rule'' or when they explained certain things as part of the ''team's culture.'' Some groups said that teammates interrupted one another constantly and that team leaders

reinforced that behavior by interrupting others themselves. On other teams, leaders enforced conversational order, and when someone cut off a teammate, group members would politely ask everyone to wait his or her turn. Some teams celebrated birthdays and began each meeting with informal chitchat about weekend plans. Other groups got right to business and discouraged gossip. There were teams that contained outsize personalities who hewed to their group's sedate norms, and others in which introverts came out of their shells as soon as meetings began.

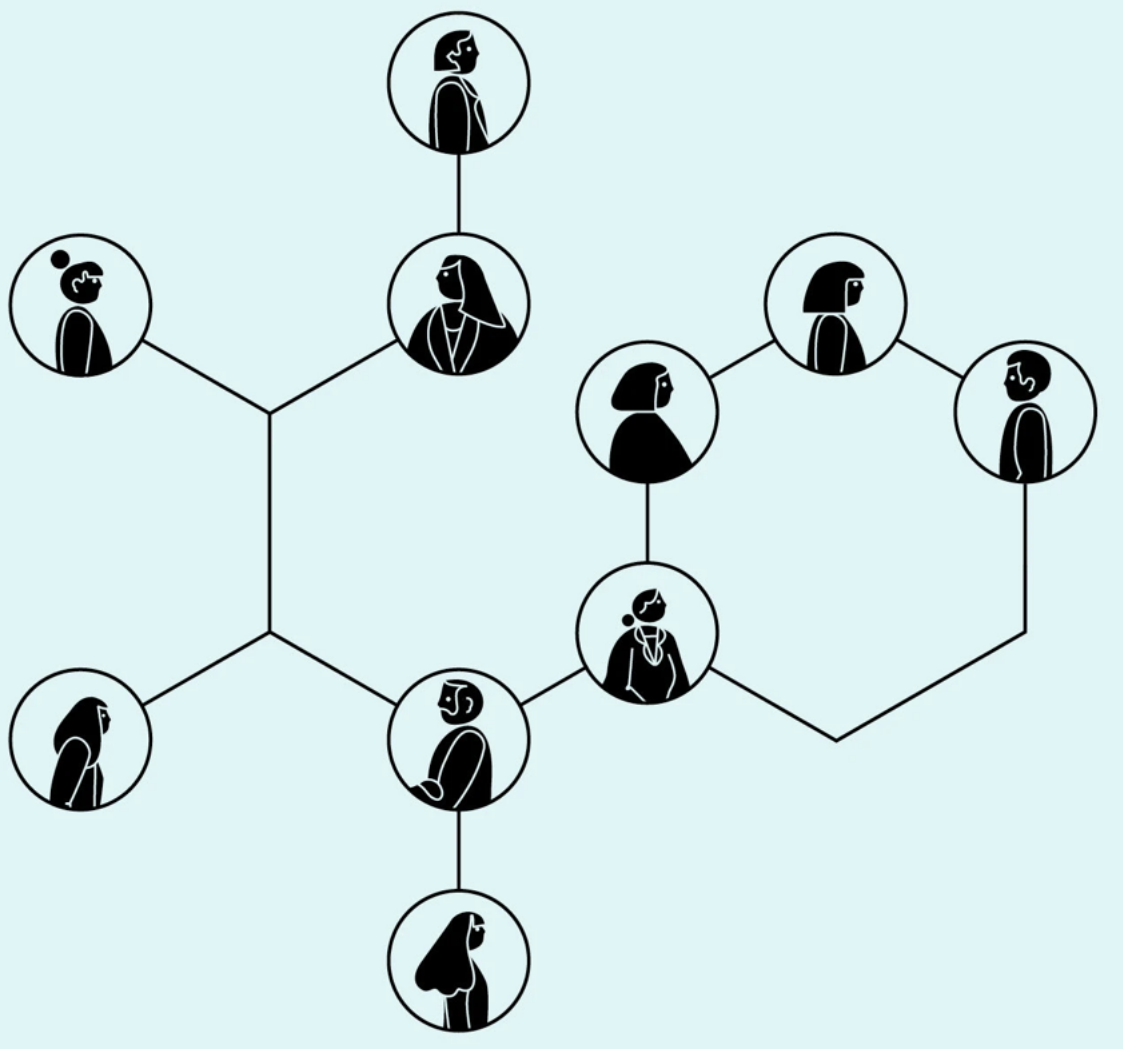


Illustration by James Graham

After looking at over a hundred groups for more than a year, Project Aristotle researchers concluded that understanding and influencing group norms were the keys to improving Google's teams. But Rozovsky, now a lead researcher, needed to figure out which norms

mattered most. Google's research had identified dozens of behaviors that seemed important, except that sometimes the norms of one effective team contrasted sharply with those of another equally successful group. Was it better to let everyone speak as much as they wanted, or should strong leaders end meandering debates? Was it more effective for people to openly disagree with one another, or should conflicts be played down? The data didn't offer clear verdicts. In fact, the data sometimes pointed in opposite directions. The only thing worse than not finding a pattern is finding too many of them. Which norms, Rozovsky and her colleagues wondered, were the ones that successful teams shared?

Imagine you have been invited to join one of two groups.

Team A is composed of people who are all exceptionally smart and successful. When you watch a video of this group working, you see professionals who wait until a topic arises in which they are expert, and then they speak at length, explaining what the group ought to do. When someone makes a side comment, the speaker stops, reminds everyone of the agenda and pushes the meeting back on track. This team is efficient. There is no idle chitchat or long debates. The meeting ends as scheduled and disbands so everyone can get back to their desks.

Team B is different. It's evenly divided between successful executives and middle managers with few professional accomplishments. Teammates jump in and out of discussions. People interject and complete one another's thoughts. When a team member abruptly changes the topic, the rest of the group follows him off the agenda. At the end of the meeting, the meeting doesn't actually end: Everyone sits around to gossip and talk about their lives.

Which group would you rather join?

In 2008, a group of psychologists from Carnegie Mellon, M.I.T. and Union College began to try to answer a question very much like this one. ''Over the past century, psychologists made considerable progress in defining and systematically measuring intelligence in individuals,'' the researchers wrote in the journal Science in 2010. ''We have used the statistical approach they developed for individual intelligence to systematically measure the intelligence of groups.'' Put differently, the researchers wanted to know if there is a collective I. Q. that emerges within a team that is distinct from the smarts of any single member.

To accomplish this, the researchers recruited 699 people, divided them into small groups and gave each a series of assignments that required different kinds of cooperation. One assignment, for instance, asked participants to brainstorm possible uses for a brick. Some teams came up with dozens of clever uses; others kept describing the same ideas in different words. Another had the groups plan a shopping trip and gave each teammate a different list of groceries. The only way to maximize the group's score was for each person to sacrifice an item they really wanted for something the team needed. Some groups easily divvied up the buying; others couldn't fill their shopping carts because no one was willing to compromise.

What interested the researchers most, however, was that teams that did well on one assignment usually did well on all the others. Conversely, teams that failed at one thing seemed to fail at everything. The researchers eventually concluded that what distinguished the ''good'' teams from the dysfunctional groups was how teammates treated one another. The right norms, in other words, could raise a group's collective intelligence, whereas the wrong norms could hobble a team, even if, individually, all the members were exceptionally bright.

But what was confusing was that not all the good teams appeared to behave in the same ways. ''Some teams had a bunch of smart people who figured out how to break up work evenly,'' said Anita Woolley, the study's lead author. ''Other groups had pretty average members, but they came up with ways to take advantage of everyone's relative strengths. Some groups had one strong leader. Others were more fluid, and everyone took a leadership role.''

As the researchers studied the groups, however, they noticed two behaviors that all the good teams generally shared. First, on the good teams, members spoke in roughly the same proportion, a phenomenon the researchers referred to as ''equality in distribution of conversational turn-taking.'' On some teams, everyone spoke during each task; on others, leadership shifted among teammates from assignment to assignment. But in each case, by the end of the day, everyone had spoken roughly the same amount. ''As long as everyone got a chance to talk, the team did well,'' Woolley said. ''But if only one person or a small group spoke all the time, the collective intelligence declined.''

Second, the good teams all had high ‘‘average social sensitivity’’ — a fancy way of saying they were skilled at intuiting how others felt based on their tone of voice, their expressions and other nonverbal cues. One of the easiest ways to gauge social sensitivity is to show someone photos of people’s eyes and ask him or her to describe what the people are thinking or feeling — an exam known as the Reading the Mind in the Eyes test. People on the more successful teams in Woolley’s experiment scored above average on the Reading the Mind in the Eyes test. They seemed to know when someone was feeling upset or left out. People on the ineffective teams, in contrast, scored below average. They seemed, as a group, to have less sensitivity toward their colleagues.

In other words, if you are given a choice between the serious-minded Team A or the free-flowing Team B, you should probably opt for Team B. Team A may be filled with smart people, all optimized for peak individual efficiency. But the group’s norms discourage equal speaking; there are few exchanges of the kind of personal information that lets teammates pick up on what people are feeling or leaving unsaid. There’s a good chance the members of Team A will continue to act like individuals once they come together, and there’s little to suggest that, as a group, they will become more collectively intelligent.

In contrast, on Team B, people may speak over one another, go on tangents and socialize instead of remaining focused on the agenda. The team may seem inefficient to a casual observer. But all the team members speak as much as they need to. They are sensitive to one another’s moods and share personal stories and emotions. While Team B might not contain as many individual stars, the sum will be greater than its parts.

Within psychology, researchers sometimes colloquially refer to traits like ‘‘conversational turn-taking’’ and ‘‘average social sensitivity’’ as aspects of what’s known as psychological safety — a group culture that the Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson defines as a ‘‘shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.’’ Psychological safety is ‘‘a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up,’’ Edmondson wrote in a study published in 1999. ‘‘It describes a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves.’’

When Rozovsky and her Google colleagues encountered the concept of psychological safety in academic papers, it was as if everything suddenly fell into place. One engineer, for instance, had told researchers that his team leader was ‘‘direct and straightforward, which creates a safe space for you to take risks.’’ That team, researchers estimated, was among Google’s accomplished groups. By contrast, another engineer had told the researchers that his ‘‘team leader has poor emotional control.’’ He added: ‘‘He panics over small issues and keeps trying to grab control. I would hate to be driving with him being in the passenger seat, because he would keep trying to grab the steering wheel and crash the car.’’ That team, researchers presumed, did not perform well.

Most of all, employees had talked about how various teams felt. ‘‘And that made a lot of sense to me, maybe because of my experiences at Yale,’’ Rozovsky said. ‘‘I’d been on some teams that left me feeling totally exhausted and others where I got so much energy from the group.’’ Rozovsky’s study group at Yale was draining because the norms — the fights over leadership, the tendency to critique — put her on guard. Whereas the norms of her case-competition team — enthusiasm for one another’s ideas, joking around and having fun — allowed everyone to feel relaxed and energized.

For Project Aristotle, research on psychological safety pointed to particular norms that are vital to success. There were other behaviors that seemed important as well — like making sure teams had clear goals and creating a culture of dependability. But Google’s data indicated that psychological safety, more than anything else, was critical to making a team work.

‘‘We had to get people to establish psychologically safe environments,’’ Rozovsky told me. But it wasn’t clear how to do that. ‘‘People here are really busy,’’ she said. ‘‘We needed clear guidelines.’’

However, establishing psychological safety is, by its very nature, somewhat messy and difficult to implement. You can tell people to take turns during a conversation and to listen to one another more. You can instruct employees to be sensitive to how their colleagues feel and to notice when someone seems upset. But the kinds of people who work at Google are often the ones who became software engineers because they wanted to avoid talking about feelings in the first place.

Rozovsky and her colleagues had figured out which norms were most critical. Now they had to find a way to make communication and empathy — the building blocks of forging real connections — into an algorithm they could easily scale.

In late 2014, Rozovsky and her fellow Project Aristotle number-crunchers began sharing their findings with select groups of Google's 51,000 employees. By then, they had been collecting surveys, conducting interviews and analyzing statistics for almost three years. They hadn't yet figured out how to make psychological safety easy, but they hoped that publicizing their research within Google would prompt employees to come up with some ideas of their own.

After Rozovsky gave one presentation, a trim, athletic man named Matt Sakaguchi approached the Project Aristotle researchers. Sakaguchi had an unusual background for a Google employee. Twenty years earlier, he was a member of a SWAT team in Walnut Creek, Calif., but left to become an electronics salesman and eventually landed at Google as a midlevel manager, where he has overseen teams of engineers who respond when the company's websites or servers go down.

''I might be the luckiest individual on earth,'' Sakaguchi told me. ''I'm not really an engineer. I didn't study computers in college. Everyone who works for me is much smarter than I am.'' But he is talented at managing technical workers, and as a result, Sakaguchi has thrived at Google. He and his wife, a teacher, have a home in San Francisco and a weekend house in the Sonoma Valley wine country. ''Most days, I feel like I've won the lottery,'' he said.

Sakaguchi was particularly interested in Project Aristotle because the team he previously oversaw at Google hadn't jelled particularly well. ''There was one senior engineer who would just talk and talk, and everyone was scared to disagree with him,'' Sakaguchi said. ''The hardest part was that everyone liked this guy outside the group setting, but whenever they got together as a team, something happened that made the culture go wrong.''

Sakaguchi had recently become the manager of a new team, and he wanted to make sure things went better this time. So he asked researchers at Project Aristotle if they could help. They provided him with a survey to gauge the group's norms.

When Sakaguchi asked his new team to participate, he was greeted with skepticism. ''It seemed like a total waste of time,'' said Sean Laurent, an engineer. ''But Matt was our new boss, and he was really into this questionnaire, and so we said, Sure, we'll do it, whatever.''

The team completed the survey, and a few weeks later, Sakaguchi received the results. He was surprised by what they revealed. He thought of the team as a strong unit. But the results indicated there were weaknesses: When asked to rate whether the role of the team was clearly understood and whether their work had impact, members of the team gave middling to poor scores. These responses troubled Sakaguchi, because he hadn't picked up on this discontent. He wanted everyone to feel fulfilled by their work. He asked the team to gather, off site, to discuss the survey's results. He began by asking everyone to share something personal about themselves. He went first.

''I think one of the things most people don't know about me,'' he told the group, ''is that I have Stage 4 cancer.'' In 2001, he said, a doctor discovered a tumor in his kidney. By the time the cancer was detected, it had spread to his spine. For nearly half a decade, it had grown slowly as he underwent treatment while working at Google. Recently, however, doctors had found a new, worrisome spot on a scan of his liver. That was far more serious, he explained.

No one knew what to say. The team had been working with Sakaguchi for 10 months. They all liked him, just as they all liked one another. No one suspected that he was dealing with anything like this.

''To have Matt stand there and tell us that he's sick and he's not going to get better and, you know, what that means,'' Laurent said. ''It was a really hard, really special moment.''

After Sakaguchi spoke, another teammate stood and described some health issues of her own. Then another discussed a difficult breakup. Eventually, the team shifted its focus to the survey. They found it easier to speak honestly about the things that had been bothering them, their small frictions and everyday annoyances. They agreed to adopt some new

norms: From now on, Sakaguchi would make an extra effort to let the team members know how their work fit into Google's larger mission; they agreed to try harder to notice when someone on the team was feeling excluded or down.

There was nothing in the survey that instructed Sakaguchi to share his illness with the group. There was nothing in Project Aristotle's research that said that getting people to open up about their struggles was critical to discussing a group's norms. But to Sakaguchi, it made sense that psychological safety and emotional conversations were related. The behaviors that create psychological safety — conversational turn-taking and empathy — are part of the same unwritten rules we often turn to, as individuals, when we need to establish a bond. And those human bonds matter as much at work as anywhere else. In fact, they sometimes matter more.

''I think, until the off-site, I had separated things in my head into work life and life life,'' Laurent told me. ''But the thing is, my work is my life. I spend the majority of my time working. Most of my friends I know through work. If I can't be open and honest at work, then I'm not really living, am I?''

What Project Aristotle has taught people within Google is that no one wants to put on a ''work face'' when they get to the office. No one wants to leave part of their personality and inner life at home. But to be fully present at work, to feel ''psychologically safe,'' we must know that we can be free enough, sometimes, to share the things that scare us without fear of recriminations. We must be able to talk about what is messy or sad, to have hard conversations with colleagues who are driving us crazy. We can't be focused just on efficiency. Rather, when we start the morning by collaborating with a team of engineers and then send emails to our marketing colleagues and then jump on a conference call, we want to know that those people really hear us. We want to know that work is more than just labor.

Which isn't to say that a team needs an ailing manager to come together. Any group can become Team B. Sakaguchi's experiences underscore a core lesson of Google's research into teamwork: By adopting the data-driven approach of Silicon Valley, Project Aristotle has encouraged emotional conversations and discussions of norms among people who might otherwise be uncomfortable talking about how they feel. ''Googlers love data,'' Sakaguchi told me. But it's not only Google that loves numbers, or Silicon Valley that shies away from

emotional conversations. Most workplaces do. ‘‘By putting things like empathy and sensitivity into charts and data reports, it makes them easier to talk about,’’ Sakaguchi told me. ‘‘It’s easier to talk about our feelings when we can point to a number.’’

Sakaguchi knows that the spread of his cancer means he may not have much time left. His wife has asked him why he doesn’t quit Google. At some point, he probably will. But right now, helping his team succeed ‘‘is the most meaningful work I’ve ever done,’’ he told me. He encourages the group to think about the way work and life mesh. Part of that, he says, is recognizing how fulfilling work can be. Project Aristotle ‘‘proves how much a great team matters,’’ he said. ‘‘Why would I walk away from that? Why wouldn’t I spend time with people who care about me?’’

The technology industry is not just one of the fastest growing parts of our economy; it is also increasingly the world’s dominant commercial culture. And at the core of Silicon Valley are certain self-mythologies and dictums: Everything is different now, data reigns supreme, today’s winners deserve to triumph because they are cleareyed enough to discard yesterday’s conventional wisdoms and search out the disruptive and the new.

The paradox, of course, is that Google’s intense data collection and number crunching have led it to the same conclusions that good managers have always known. In the best teams, members listen to one another and show sensitivity to feelings and needs.

The fact that these insights aren’t wholly original doesn’t mean Google’s contributions aren’t valuable. In fact, in some ways, the ‘‘employee performance optimization’’ movement has given us a method for talking about our insecurities, fears and aspirations in more constructive ways. It also has given us the tools to quickly teach lessons that once took managers decades to absorb. Google, in other words, in its race to build the perfect team, has perhaps unintentionally demonstrated the usefulness of imperfection and done what Silicon Valley does best: figure out how to create psychological safety faster, better and in more productive ways.

‘‘Just having data that proves to people that these things are worth paying attention to sometimes is the most important step in getting them to actually pay attention,’’ Rozovsky told me. ‘‘Don’t underestimate the power of giving people a common platform and operating

language.''

Project Aristotle is a reminder that when companies try to optimize everything, it's sometimes easy to forget that success is often built on experiences — like emotional interactions and complicated conversations and discussions of who we want to be and how our teammates make us feel — that can't really be optimized. Rozovsky herself was reminded of this midway through her work with the Project Aristotle team. ''We were in a meeting where I made a mistake,'' Rozovsky told me. She sent out a note afterward explaining how she was going to remedy the problem. ''I got an email back from a team member that said, 'Ouch,' '' she recalled. ''It was like a punch to the gut. I was already upset about making this mistake, and this note totally played on my insecurities.''

If this had happened earlier in Rozovsky's life — if it had occurred while she was at Yale, for instance, in her study group — she probably wouldn't have known how to deal with those feelings. The email wasn't a big enough affront to justify a response. But all the same, it really bothered her. It was something she felt she needed to address.

And thanks to Project Aristotle, she now had a vocabulary for explaining to herself what she was feeling and why it was important. She had graphs and charts telling her that she shouldn't just let it go. And so she typed a quick response: ''Nothing like a good 'Ouch!' to destroy psych safety in the morning.'' Her teammate replied: ''Just testing your resilience.''

''That could have been the wrong thing to say to someone else, but he knew it was exactly what I needed to hear,'' Rozovsky said. ''With one 30-second interaction, we defused the tension.'' She wanted to be listened to. She wanted her teammate to be sensitive to what she was feeling. ''And I had research telling me that it was O.K. to follow my gut,'' she said. ''So that's what I did. The data helped me feel safe enough to do what I thought was right.''

re:Work

GUIDE: UNDERSTAND TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Introduction

Much of the work done at Google, and in many organizations, is done collaboratively by teams. The team is the molecular unit where real production happens, where innovative ideas are conceived and tested, and where employees experience most of their work. But it's also where interpersonal issues, ill-suited skill sets, and unclear group goals can hinder productivity and cause friction.

Following the success of **Google's Project Oxygen research** (/guides/managers-identify-what-makes-a-**great-manager/steps/introduction/)** where the People Analytics team studied **what makes a great manager (/guides/managers-identify-what-makes-a-great-manager/steps/learn-about-googles-manager-research/)**, Google researchers applied a similar method to discover the secrets of effective teams at Google. Code-named Project Aristotle - a tribute to Aristotle's quote, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (as the Google researchers believed employees can do more working together than alone) - the goal was to answer the question: "What makes a team effective at Google?"

*Read about the researchers behind the work in **The New York Times: What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team (http://nyti.ms/20Vn3sz)***

GUIDE: UNDERSTAND TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Define what makes a "team"

The first step in answering this question of “what makes an effective team?” is to ask “what is a team?” More than an existential thought exercise, actually figuring out the memberships, relationships, and responsibilities of individuals all working together is tough but critical to cracking team effectiveness.

The term team can take on a wide array of meanings. **Many definitions and frameworks exist (http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1396&context=articles)**, depending on task interdependence, organizational status, and team tenure. At the most fundamental level, the researchers sought to distinguish a “work group” from a “team:”

- **Work groups** are characterized by the least amount of interdependence. They are based on organizational or managerial hierarchy. Work groups may meet periodically to hear and share information.
- **Teams** are highly interdependent - they plan work, solve problems, make decisions, and review progress in service of a specific project. Team members need one another to get work done.

Organizational charts only tell part of the story, so the Google research team focused on groups with truly interdependent working relationships, as determined by the teams themselves. The teams studied in Project Aristotle ranged from three to fifty individuals (with a median of nine members).

GUIDE: UNDERSTAND TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Define “effectiveness”

Once they understood what constituted a team at Google, the researchers had to determine how to quantitatively measure effectiveness. They looked at lines of code written, bugs fixed, customer satisfaction, and more. But Google’s leaders, who had initially pushed for objective effectiveness measures, realized that every suggested measure could be inherently flawed - more lines of code aren’t necessarily a good thing and more bugs fixed means more bugs were initially created.

Instead, the team decided to use a combination of qualitative assessments and quantitative measures. For qualitative assessments, the researchers captured input from three different perspectives - executives, team leads, and team members. While they all were asked to rate teams on similar scales, when asked to explain their ratings, their answers showed that each was focused on different aspects when assessing team effectiveness.

Executives were most concerned with results (e.g., sales numbers or product launches), but team members said that team culture was the most important measure of team effectiveness. Fittingly, the team lead's concept of effectiveness spanned both the big picture and the individuals' concerns saying that ownership, vision, and goals were the most important measures.

So the researchers measured team effectiveness in four different ways:

1. Executive evaluation of the team
2. Team leader evaluation of the team
3. Team member evaluation of the team
4. Sales performance against quarterly quota

The qualitative evaluations helped capture a nuanced look at results and culture, but had inherent subjectivity. On the other hand, the quantitative metrics provided concrete team measures, but lacked situational considerations. These four measures in combination, however, allowed researchers to home in on the comprehensive definition of team effectiveness.

GUIDE: UNDERSTAND TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Collect data and measure effectiveness

Using input from executives across the globe, the research team identified 180 teams to study (115 project teams in engineering and 65 pods in sales) which included a mix of high- and low-performing teams. The study tested how both team composition (e.g., personality traits, sales skills, demographics on the team) and team dynamics (e.g., what it was like to work with teammates) impact team effectiveness. Ideas were pulled from existing research as well as Google's own experience with what makes an effective team.

They conducted hundreds of **double-blind** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blind_experiment) interviews with leaders to get a sense of what they thought drove team effectiveness. The researchers then looked at existing survey data, including over 250 items from the annual employee engagement survey and gDNA, **Google's longitudinal study on work and life (https://hbr.org/2014/03/googles-scientific-approach-to-work-life-balance-and-much-more/)**, to see what variables might be related to effectiveness. Here are some sample items used in the study that participants were asked to agree or disagree with:

- **Group dynamics:** I feel safe expressing divergent opinions to the team.
- **Skill sets:** I am good at navigating roadblocks and barriers.
- **Personality traits:** I see myself as someone who is a reliable worker (informed by **the Big Five personality assessment (https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~johnlab/bfi.htm)**).
- **Emotional intelligence:** I am not interested in other people's problems (informed by **the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2775495/)**).

Demographic variables like tenure, level, and location were also collected.

GUIDE: UNDERSTAND TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Identify dynamics of effective teams

With all of this data, the team ran statistical models to understand which of the many inputs collected actually impacted team effectiveness. Using over 35 different statistical models on hundreds of variables, they sought to identify factors that:

- impacted multiple outcome metrics, both qualitative and quantitative
- surfaced for different kinds of teams across the organization
- showed consistent, robust statistical significance

The researchers found that what really mattered was less about who is on the team, and more about how the team worked together. In order of importance:

- **Psychological safety: Psychological safety refers to an individual's perception of the consequences of taking an interpersonal risk (http://www.jstor.org/stable/2666999?origin=JSTOR-pdf&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)** or a belief that a team is safe for risk taking in the face of being seen as ignorant, incompetent, negative, or disruptive. In a team with high psychological safety, teammates feel safe to take risks around their team members. They feel confident that no one on the team will embarrass or punish anyone else for admitting a mistake, asking a question, or offering a new idea.
- **Dependability:** On dependable teams, **members reliably complete quality work on time (http://amj.aom.org/content/53/3/535.short)** (vs the opposite - **shirking responsibilities (http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/258490.pdf?acceptTC=true)**).
- **Structure and clarity: An individual's understanding of job expectations, the process for fulfilling these expectations (http://www.jstor.org/stable/1556372)**, and the consequences of one's performance are important for team effectiveness. Goals can be set at the individual or group level, and must be specific, challenging, and attainable. **Google often uses Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) (/guides/set-goals-with-okrs/steps/introduction/)** to help set and communicate short and long term goals.

- **Meaning:** Finding a sense of purpose in either the work itself or the output is important for team effectiveness. The meaning of work is personal and can vary: financial security, supporting family, helping the team succeed, or self-expression for each individual, for example.
- **Impact:** The results of one's work, **the subjective judgement that your work is making a difference, is important for teams (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18211139)**. Seeing that one's work is contributing to the organization's goals can help reveal impact.



The researchers also discovered which variables were *not* significantly connected with team effectiveness at Google:

- Colocation of teammates (sitting together in the same office)
- Consensus-driven decision making

- Extroversion of team members
- Individual performance of team members
- Workload size
- Seniority
- Team size
- Tenure

It's important to note though that while these variables did not significantly impact team effectiveness measurements at Google, that doesn't mean they're not important elsewhere. For example, while team size didn't pop in the Google analysis, **there is a lot of research showing the importance of it (/blog/many-hands-may-not-make-light-work/)**. Many researchers have identified smaller teams - containing less than 10 members - to be more beneficial for team success than larger teams (**Katzenbach & Smith, 1993 (https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Wisdom_of_Teams.html?id=FMJn4RmmiAkC)**; **Moreland, Levine, & Wingert, 1996 (http://goo.gl/5kQS8l)**. Smaller teams also experience better work-life quality (**Campion et al., 1993 (http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1993.tb01571.x/abstract)**), work outcomes (**Aube et al., 2011 (http://psycnet.apa.org/psycarticles/2011-21070-001)**), less conflict, stronger communication, more cohesion (**Moreland & Levine, 1992 (http://www.amazon.com/Advances-Group-Processes-9-1992/dp/1559385162)**; **Mathieu et al., 2008 (http://jom.sagepub.com/content/34/3/410.abstract)**), and more organizational citizenship behaviors (**Pearce and Herbik, 2004 (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15168430)**).

Tool: Help teams determine their own needs

Beyond just communicating the study results, the Google research team wanted to empower Googlers to understand the dynamics of their own teams and offer tips for improving. So they created a survey for teams to take and discuss amongst themselves. Survey items focused on the five effectiveness pillars and questions included:

- Psychological safety - “If I make a mistake on our team, it is not held against me.”
- Dependability - “When my teammates say they’ll do something, they follow through with it.”
- Structure and Clarity - “Our team has an effective decision-making process.”
- Meaning - “The work I do for our team is meaningful to me.”
- Impact - “I understand how our team’s work contributes to the organization's goals.”

After completing the survey, team leads received aggregated and anonymized scores to share with team members and inform a discussion. A People Operations facilitator would often join the discussion, or the team lead would follow a discussion guide created by the People Operations team.

🔧 MAKE IT YOUR OWN: CUSTOMIZE THE TOOL BELOW

Team Effectiveness Discussion Guide

This discussion guide is focused on the five team dynamics Google found to be important for team effectiveness. The guide can help teams identify areas where they might want to improve and elicit ideas of how to do that.

OPEN AS GOOGLE DOC (HTTPS://DOCS.GOOGLE.COM/DOCUMENT/D/1LGIZ6MWZEYWEAJXN_NMI-TI5QIJV2BHH27DPLESLE40/EDIT)

Tool: Foster psychological safety

Of the five key dynamics of effective teams that the researchers identified, psychological safety was by far the most important. The Google researchers found that individuals on teams with higher psychological safety are less likely to leave Google, they're more likely to harness the power of diverse ideas from their teammates, they bring in more revenue, and they're rated as effective twice as often by executives.

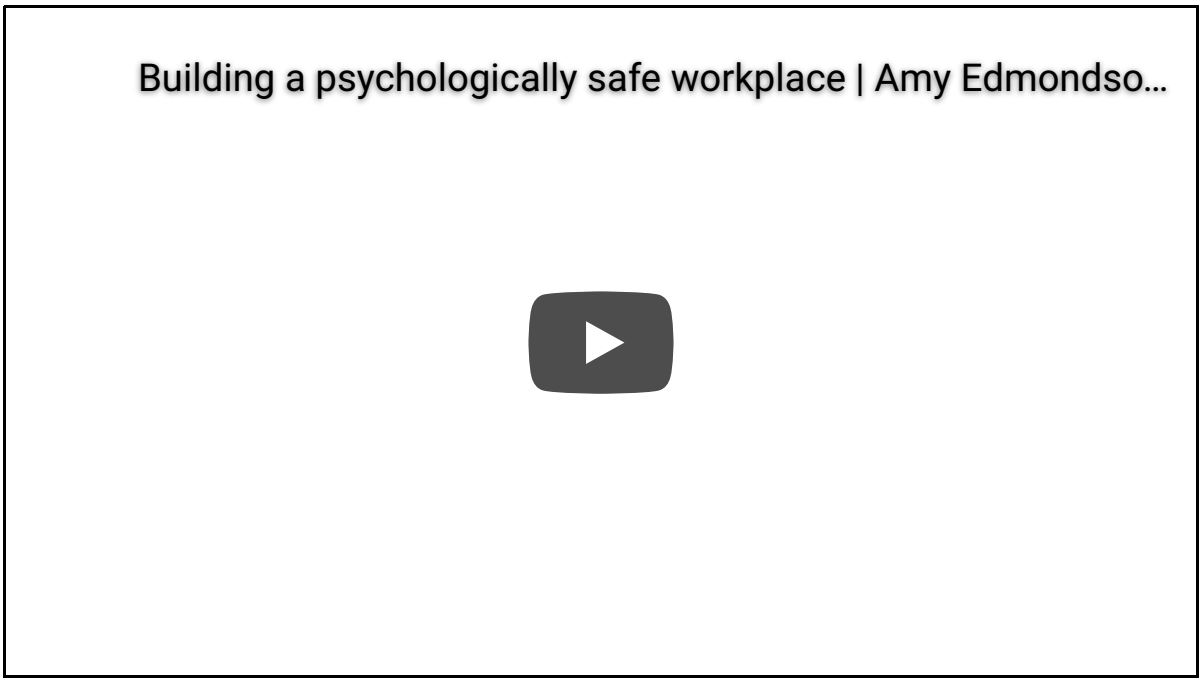
Organizational behavioral scientist **Amy Edmondson** (http://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/profile.aspx?**facId=6451&facInfo=pub)** of Harvard first **introduced the construct of "team psychological safety" (http://www.jstor.org/stable/2666999)** and defined it as "a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking." Taking a risk around your team members may sound simple. But asking a basic question like "what's the goal of this project?" may make you sound like you're out of the loop. It might feel easier to continue without getting clarification in order to avoid being perceived as ignorant.

To measure a team's level of psychological safety, Edmondson asked team members how strongly they agreed or disagreed with these statements:

1. If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you.
2. Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.
3. People on this team sometimes reject others for being different.
4. It is safe to take a risk on this team.
5. It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help.
6. No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
7. Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.

In **her TEDx talk** (https://youtu.be/LhoLuui9gX8), Edmondson offers three simple things individuals can do to foster team psychological safety:

1. Frame the work as a learning problem, not an execution problem.
2. Acknowledge your own fallibility.
3. Model curiosity and ask lots of questions.



In promoting the results of Google's research internally, the research team has been running workshops with teams. In the workshops, anonymized scenarios have been used to illustrate behaviors that can support and harm psychological safety. The scenarios are role-played and then the group debriefs. Here's an example scenario:

Psychological Safety Scenario | Ideas & Innovation

Uli is a long time manager known for his technical expertise. For the past two years he's worked as manager of team XYZ, which is responsible for running a large scale project. He upholds very high standards, but in the past few months Uli has become increasingly intolerant of mistakes, ideas he considers to be "underpar," and challenges to his way of thinking.

Recently, Uli publically "trounced" an idea offered by an experienced team member and spoke very negatively about that person to the wider team behind their back. Everyone else thought the idea was strong, well-researched, and worth exploring. Ideas have since dried up.

Uli's ideas drove the recent project proposal, but it was ultimately rejected by the executives because it lacked creativity and innovation.

Debriefing questions:

- What behaviors do you see that reflect psychological safety?
- What behaviors may signal that psychological safety is lacking in the scenario?
- Why is psychological safety so important? What difference does it make in a team? What have you seen on your teams?

If you're a manager, consider these recommendations when **coaching** (/guides/managers-coach-**managers-to-coach/steps/introduction/)** team members and teammates.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN: CUSTOMIZE THE TOOL BELOW

Manager Actions for Psychological Safety

This guide can help managers think about how they model and reinforce psychological safety on their teams. Based on research, this guide offers actionable tips for managers and team members to help create team environments where everyone can contribute.

OPEN AS GOOGLE DOC (HTTPS://DOCS.GOOGLE.COM/DOCUMENT/D/1PSNDMS2EMCPLGMLFAQCXZJO7C4J2HJ7ZNOQ_G2ZKJGK/EDIT)

GUIDE: UNDERSTAND TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Help teams take action

The five key dynamics of effective teams that the Google researchers identified are rooted in the wider world of team performance research. Whether you're coding at Google, **riffing in a writers room (https://youtu.be/3AuVv1ydWZ4?list=PLfjGR5Brkh9gi3rhQLC9qoWP3VBqXaQJK)**, **preparing for a trip to Mars (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cviVwBeCPqA&feature=youtu.be)**, or **skating in a hockey rink (https://youtu.be/Sy6-qJmqz3w?list=PLfjGR5Brkh9gi3rhQLC9qoWP3VBqXaQJK)** - teams are essential to the work experience and output. At Google, now that the Project Aristotle team has identified what makes for an effective team at Google, they're conducting research to figure out how take the next steps to create, foster, and empower effective teams.

Whatever it is that makes for effective teams in your organization, and it may be different from what the Google researchers found, consider these steps to share your efforts:

1. **Establish a common vocabulary** - Define the team behaviors and norms you want to foster in your organization.

2. **Create a forum to discuss team dynamics** - Allow for teams to talk about subtle issues in safe, constructive ways. An HR Business Partner or trained facilitator may help.

3. **Commit leaders to reinforcing and improving** - Get leadership onboard to model and seek continuous improvement can help put into practice your vocabulary.

Here are some tips for managers and leaders to support the behaviors the Google researchers found important for effective teams. These are based on external research and Google's own experience:

Psychological safety:

- Solicit input and opinions from the group.
- Share information about personal and work style preferences, and encourage others to do the same.
- Watch **Amy Edmondson's TED Talk on psychological safety** (https://youtu.be/LhoLuui9gX8).

Dependability:

- Clarify roles and responsibilities of team members.
- Develop concrete project plans to provide transparency into every individual's work.
- Talk about some of the **conscientiousness research (http://www.businessinsider.com/conscientiousness-predicts-success-2014-4)**.

Structure & Clarity:

- Regularly communicate team goals and ensure team members understand the plan for achieving them.
- Ensure your team meetings have a clear agenda and designated leader.
- Consider adopting **Objectives & Key Results (OKRs)** (/guides/set-goals-with-**okrs/steps/introduction/)** to organize the team's work.

Meaning:

- Give team members positive feedback on something outstanding they are doing and offer to help them with something they struggle with.
- Publicly express your gratitude for someone who helped you out.
- **Read the KPMG case study on purpose.** (/case-studies/KPMG-purpose/)

Impact:

- Co-create a clear vision that reinforces how each team member’s work directly contributes to the team’s and broader organization's goals.
- Reflect on the work you're doing and how it impacts users or clients and the organization.
- Adopt a user-centered evaluation method and focus on the user.