Welcome to Google: What Makes Teams Effective
with Michele Wolfenstein Aptman & Cathy Chen

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What makes teams effective?

Michele Wolfenstein Aptman & Cathy Chen
People Development
2018-10-17
People decisions at Google are based on data and analytics.
What sets apart the best teams from the rest?
What comes to mind when you think of effective teams?
What does effectiveness mean?
Team Effectiveness Design

- 3 outputs
- 180 teams
- 201 interviews
- 35+ stats models run
- 250+ inputs
What we looked at

**Dependability** of teammates

**Personal meaning** derived from team’s work

**Performance ratings** of Googlers on the team

**Structure** of team & roles

**Extroversion** of team members

**Manageable workload** for team members

Number of **top performers** on the team

**Tenure of Googlers** on the team

**Colocation** of Googlers on the team

**Impact** of team’s work

**Average level** of Googlers on the team

**Tenure of team** as a whole

**Consensus-driven** decision-making

**Psychological safety** of the team
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It’s about how the team works together
Five Dynamics

1. Psychological Safety
2. Dependability
3. Structure & Clarity
4. Meaning
5. Impact
Psychological Safety

Team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other.
In pairs, please discuss (5 mins)

What does the lack of psychological safety look like at your company?
At your table, discuss (5 mins)

If you have a situation with bad Psychological Safety, what could you do as an HR professional?
“Safe” Teams

“The response to mistakes on this team is consistently in the spirit of ‘gotta break eggs to make omelettes.’ ”

“The team is very supportive if someone makes a mistake. We just find a way to fix it or deal with the consequences, whatever they are, when they come up.”

“We make it pretty obvious that it's OK to be wrong and not to know something.”

“Everyone is open to questions from anyone at any time, and no question is considered a dumb question.”
Teams that feel safe are rated high on effectiveness.

Probability that an executive leader in Tech identifies team as effective:

- Unsafe team: 40%
- Safe team: 80%
Team members get things done on time and meet Google’s high bar for excellence.
Structure and Clarity

The team has clear roles, plans, and goals.
Effectiveness

Dependable team

Undependable team

Structure & Clarity
Meaning

Work is personally important to team members.
Impact

Team members think their work matters and creates change.
gTeams@Google

Survey
Assessed on the five underlying dynamics of team effectiveness

Report
Entire team reviewed

Discussion
Team set aside 90 minutes to talk through results

Action Planning
Consult resources to take action
### Team Effectiveness Discussion Guide

Below is a sampling of improvement indicators and guiding questions:

#### Psychological Safety

Signs that your team needs to improve psychological safety:
- Fear of asking for or giving constructive feedback
- Resistance around expressing divergent ideas and asking “silly” questions

Questions to ask yourself:
- Do team members feel comfortable brainstorming in front of each other?
- Do all team members feel they can fail openly, or will they feel shamed?

#### Dependability

Signs that your team needs to improve dependability:
- Team has poor visibility into project priorities or progress
- Diffusion of responsibility and no clear owners for tasks or problems

Questions to ask yourself:
- When team members say they’ll get something done, do they?
- Do team members proactively communicate with each other about delays and assume responsibility?

#### Structure and Clarity

Signs that your team needs to improve structure and clarity:
- Lack of clarity about who is responsible for what
- Unclear decision-making process; owners, or rationale

Questions to ask yourself:
- Do team members know what the team and project goals are and how to get there?
- Do team members feel like they have autonomy, ownership, and discrete projects?

#### Meaning

Signs that your team needs to improve meaning:
- Work assignments based solely on ability, expertise, workload; little consideration for individual development needs and interests
- Lack of regular recognition for achievements or milestones

Questions to ask yourself:
- Does the work give team members a sense of personal and professional fulfillment?
- Is work matched to team members based on both skills/ability and interest?

#### Impact

Signs that your team needs to improve impact:
- Framing work as “boring” or “drudgery”
- Too many goals, limiting ability to make meaningful progress

Questions to ask yourself:
- Do team members see their work as creating change for the better?
- Do team members feel their work matters for a higher-order goal?
- How are current team processes affecting well-being/turmoil?

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**Questions to ask yourself:**
- When team members say they’ll get something done, do they?
- ...
Visit g.co/rework for more

re:Work
practices, research, and ideas to #makeworkbetter
Example Activities

- Insights Discovery™
- MBTI® / Hogan / DiSC®
- Process consultation (Schein)
- Coaching / 360-feedback
- Group values discussion
What you can do - Team Leaders

1. Frame your work as learning problems, not execution problems. Be curious, and admit your own fallibility.

2. Let your team members own the process of creating new team norms.

3. Show that you care about team dynamics.
What you can do - Team Members


2. When someone is vulnerable, show curiosity and compassion.

3. Help your team get clarity on goals and roles.