



our quest to build the most

effective teams at Google

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What kind of team are you on?

What kind of teammate are you?

What kind of leader are you?

According to the US Bureau of Labor
Statistics:

Each day we

spend:
8.8 hours

working
7.8 hours

sleeping
2.6 hours doing leisure and sports

activities
1.2 hours caring for

others

Improving the effectiveness of
teams in the workplace can make
a meaningful difference in
people's lives

My experience with teams

What sets apart
our best teams
from the rest?

What does effectiveness mean?

EXECES



Results

TEAM LEADS



Ownership,
Vision & Goals

TEAM
MEMBERS



Team Culture

It took many inputs to attack the question.

201

interviews
with 50 Tech leaders
and 151 Tech team
leads

180

teams
surveyed (115 Tech
teams and 65 Sales
pods)

250+

inputs
looking at team
dynamics and team
composition

3

outputs
on team
effectiveness

35+

stat models run
3,000+ lines of code
written, 170K+ words
coded

Our search for the perfect algorithm.

Dependability of teammates

Personal meaning derived from team's work

Performance ratings of team members

Structure of team and roles

Extroversion of team members

Manageable workload for team members

Number of top performers on the team

Tenure of team members

Co-location of team members

Impact of team's work

Average level of team members

Tenure of team to the company

Team practices consensus-driven decision
making

Psychological Safety

What were the difference
makers?

Psychological Safety

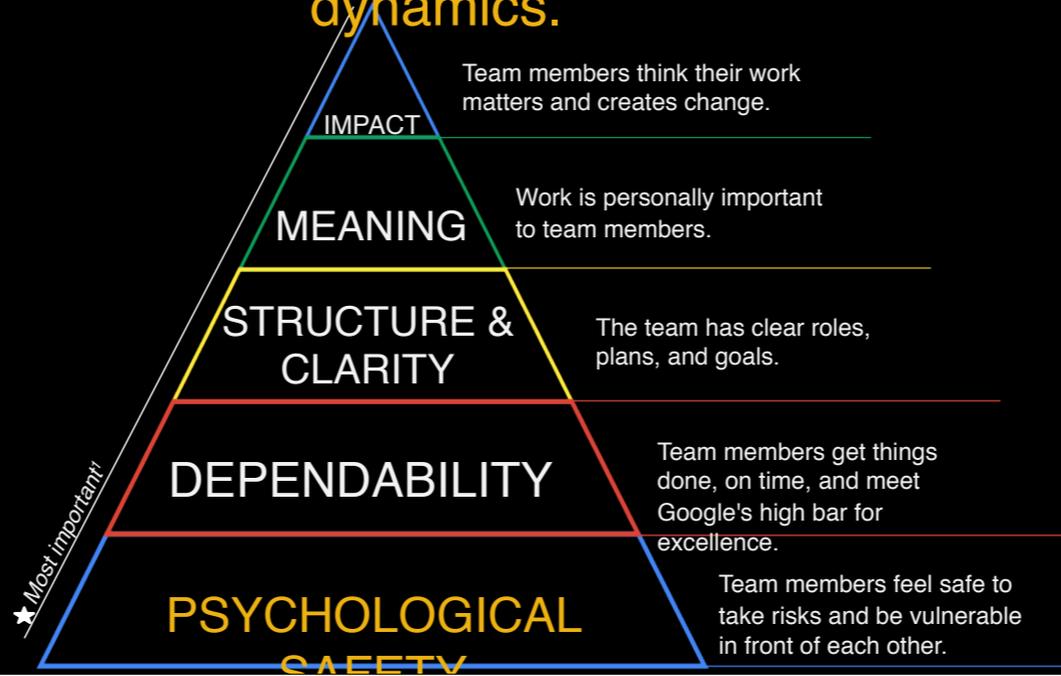
Dependability

Structure and Clarity

Meaning

Impact

Effective Google teams exhibit five dynamics.



1. Compounding items, in order of importance.

★ Most important!

Takeaway

HOW A TEAM
WORKS
matters more than
WHO'S ON THE
TEAM

Teams that feel safe beat their sales targets.



Teams that feel safe are rated high on effectiveness by leaders.

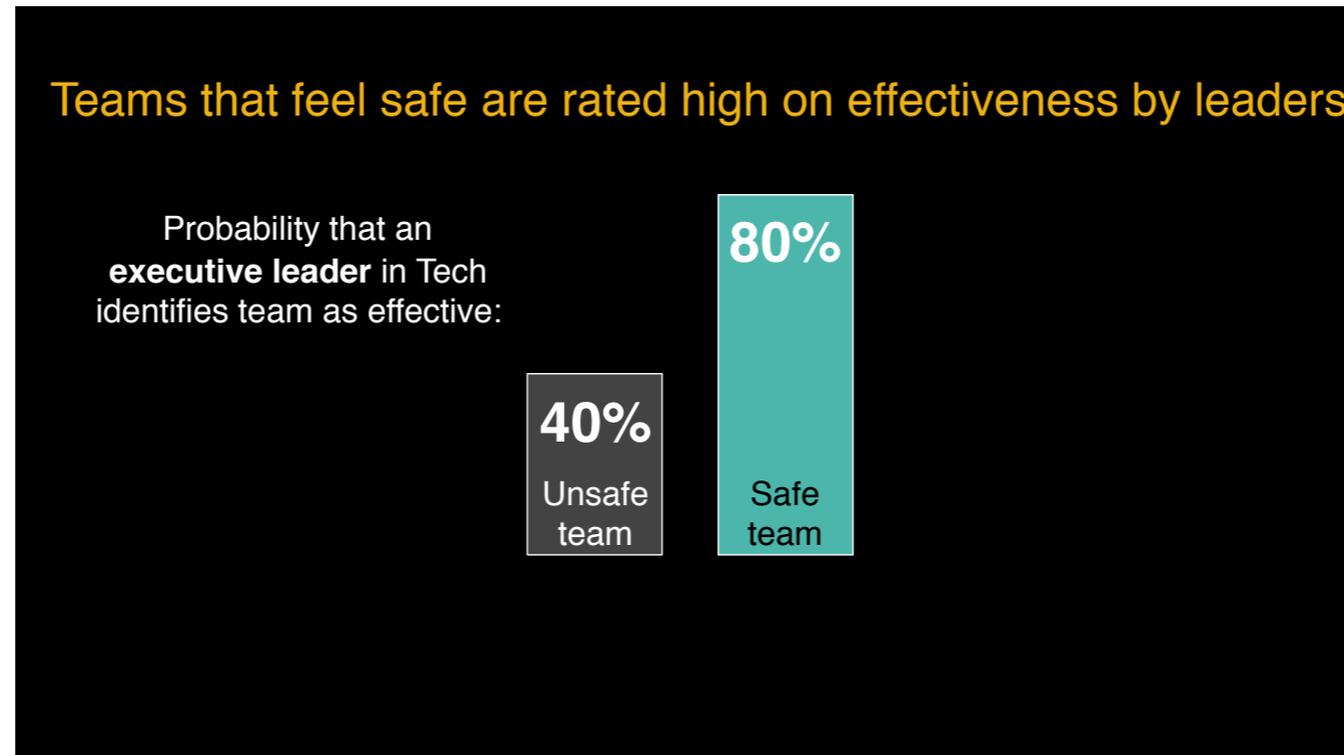
Probability that an
executive leader in Tech
identifies team as effective:

40%

Unsafe
team

80%

Safe
team



Googlers break down psychological safety into three components.

Voice

Trust

Inclusion

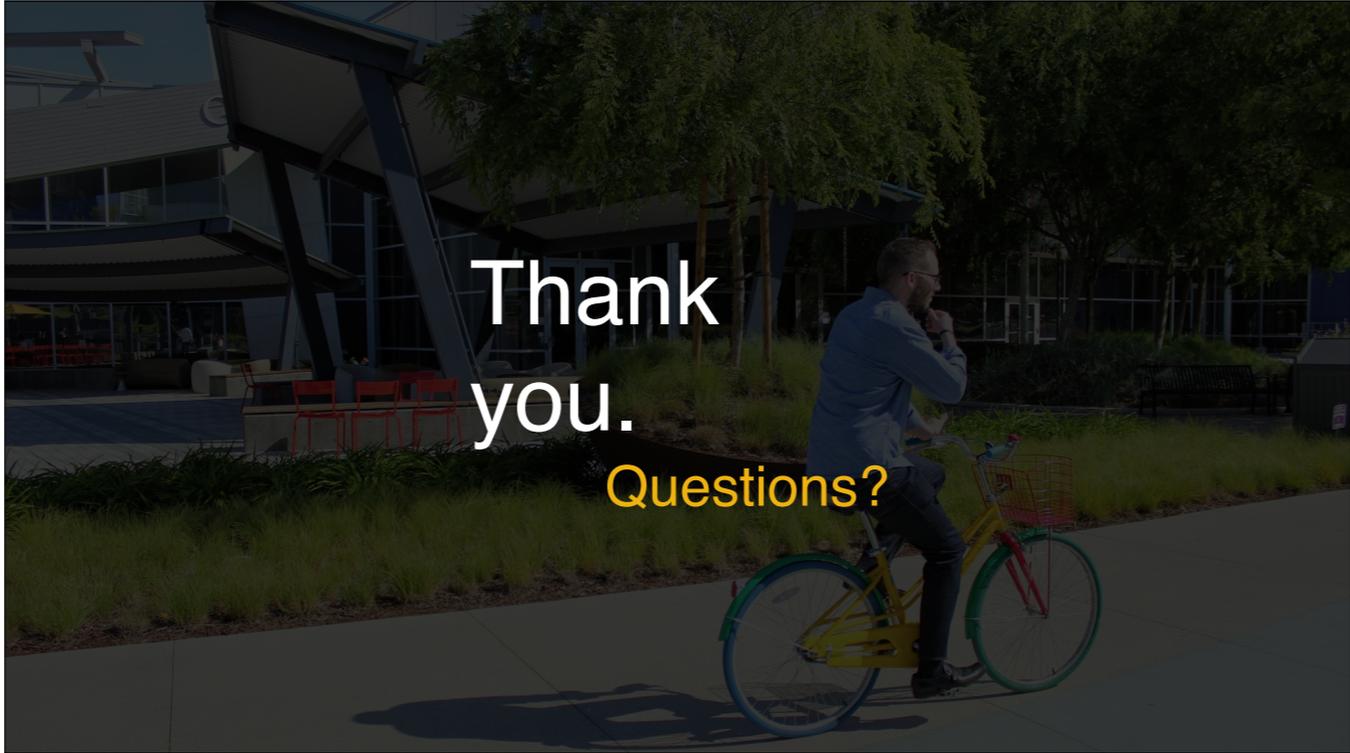
Takeaway

Amy Edmonson: [TedX](#)

Set the tone for psychological safety.

- 1 Frame work as a series of learning problems, not execution problems.
- 2 Model curiosity and ask more questions.
- 3 Admit your own fallibility.

Parting thoughts



Thank
you.

Questions?

Appendix

Let's dig into psychological safety.

Psychological Safety Scenario 1 | Ideas & Innovation

Uli is a long time ABC 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/process for Google. He upholds very high standards, but in the past 6 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 submitted 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

Let's dig into psychological safety.

Psychological Safety Scenario 2 | Career Conversation

Jessica is an ABC manager who leads a team of 5 analysts. Jessica and her team are working on an important project with a key deliverable due in 4 months. Sarah, an analyst on Jessica's team, is a significant contributor to this project.

Sarah has been in her role for 2 years and is interested in transferring to another role in Android to develop new skills. She has identified an open role and wants to apply. Sarah is nervous about bringing this up with Jessica, but Sarah works up the courage to schedule time with Jessica.

Jessica listens to Sarah and is surprised to learn Sarah is considering leaving the team. Jessica is focused on ensuring her team hits their goal and asks Sarah to defer applying to a new role until after the deadline. Sarah is frustrated, but also has concerns about how Jessica will view and evaluate her over the coming

Let's dig into psychological safety.

Psychological Safety Scenario 3 | Decision-making

Director Bob leads a team of L6 and L7 sales managers. Bob considers himself to be an inclusive manager and very often invites the team out for drinks after work. They have great conversations when they are off-site and often come up with their most exciting plans and ideas in that relaxed environment.

Last night, when out together, they “re-wrote” some parts of the strategy for the next 3 months. Everyone was there except Joan who could not make it (and often can't). Bob told Joan this morning, very excitedly, and sure she'd be happy, about the new direction. Joan didn't say anything but she was very upset to have been left out and feels this is a regular occurrence.

Let's dig into psychological safety.

Psychological Safety Scenario 4 | Credit + "wins"

Director Sumi leads the Winterfell sales team in LCS. Andre is a sales associate on Sumi's team. In their past few 1:1s, Sumi is uncensored and candid with her view on the Lannister team (another sales team in LCS that works on similar accounts).

Sumi doesn't think highly of Lannister team's work and often calls out the Stark team wins by slamming the Lannister misses -- and she does this in front of her team. This week, SVP Ned sent a congratulatory note to the whole Thrones org for hitting their numbers, and Sumi forwarded it to her team giving them a shout-out for edging out the Lannister team.

Andre feels this is not Googley and isn't sure what to do or how to frame this to

Let's debrief psychologically safe & unsafe behaviors.

1

What behaviors do you see that reflect psychological safety?

2

What behaviors may signal that psychological safety is lacking in the scenario?

3

Why is psychological safety so important? What difference does it make in a team? What have you seen on your teams?

Dependability

Members trust one another to deliver quality results on time.

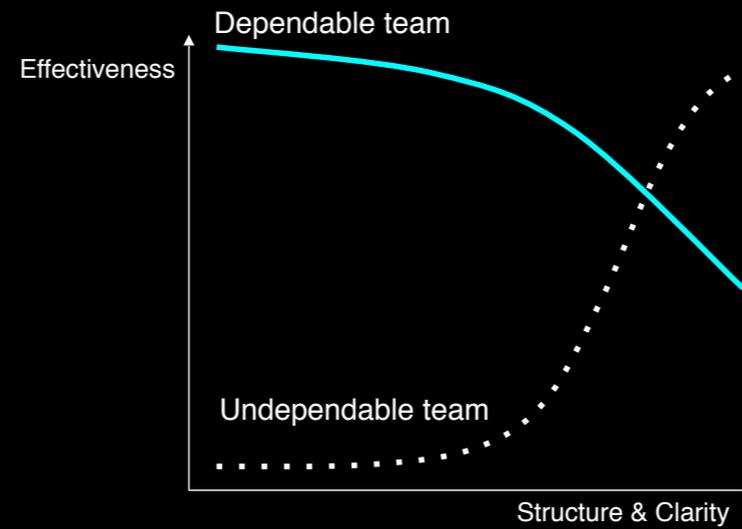
1. **Clarify** individual roles and ensure members know one another's responsibilities
2. **Coach** members throughout and if necessary help them **prioritize** and organize their tasks
3. Ensure everyone understands which tasks are of highest **priority** and importance.
4. **Check** each individual's **bandwidth** and give them the **autonomy** to 'own' their tasks
5. **Celebrate** their work to foster trust and positivity

Structure and Clarity

The team has clear roles, plans, goals and decision-making

1. In 1-1s and team meetings, **clarify/agree** any roles and the decision making process (or options) in advance, include team in goal setting and defining roles
2. **Encourage ownership** of particular areas
3. Take time to **review and adjust goals** over time
4. Provide clear definition of the team's **decision-making process**

How much structure? Depends on dependability.



Full Speaking Notes

Results:

We tested hundreds of variables so there were many possible stories that could have surfaced. But here are FIVE things that we found, at Google, to be differentiating the highly effective teams from the rest. In order of importance...

- One.** They 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 throwing out an idea.
- Two.** They feel as if teammates are **dependable** and can really be counted on to do high quality work on time.
- Three.** They have sufficient **structure and clarity** to guide their work: 1) know what the short & long term goals are, 2) know their own role and the role of their team members to get there, and 3) understand the plan to get that done.
- Four.** They feel as if work is personally **meaningful**, whether it's the people they're surrounded by or the output that they've created.
- Five.** They feel as if their work has **impact**, and clearly connects to what the organization is trying to accomplish.

Reflections:

Before we talk about these in a little bit more detail, let me share some meta reflections that we had as a research team about these findings...

How not Who.

When we started this research, we imagined that building an effective team would be more like putting together a human puzzle of ideal characteristics. We thought we'd find an algorithm for just the right number of MBAs, and extraverts, and people from technical backgrounds to build a dream team. But, we didn't find that to be the case. The things that popped to the top of the list, that differentiated teams based on effectiveness, were less **about WHO is on the team, and more about HOW they interact**.

Hiring Process.

One hypothesis we had for why we're seeing this is because we have a super stringent hiring process. Hiring process already screens super highly for technical ability, and general aptitude... So the small variation between the aptitude of the smartest genius at Google and the dumbest genius actually doesn't make as much difference as how well the geniuses interact. The second hypothesis is that some of the compositional variables are much more tangible, if you don't have a SWE or a PM, it's very obvious and easy to adjust for. However, these dynamics are much more subtle and harder to perceive...and as a result make a great deal of difference to the performance of team.

What's not on the list.

If you look at the list in isolation, it's not a huge a-ha, hopefully it's very similar to the list you would have put together yourself. What's interesting to us is all the things that COULD have been on this list...but weren't. For example, we looked at "**consensus driven decision making on the team**," didn't seem to vary too much between effective and ineffective teams. The amount of **workload**, is it manageable or not...also didn't seem to differentiate. Being **co-located**...big hypothesis at Google. Number of **top performers** on the team, and generally how smart they are...we saw this in both the teams that were rated very effective and in the other extreme.

Although many things are important when leading teams, this is a shortcut of where to focus your Energy.

[When talking to managers or leaders] Manager Role.

Last important thing for this group in particular, is that while the manager role didn't pop in our models as a direct predictor of effectiveness, we'll show you towards the end of this talk... That the team lead has huge influence over how each of these dynamics shows up on the team. Managers have a super critical role in ensuring this works.

Meaning

Members achieve personal meaning from the work.

1. Give team members responsibilities they are passionate about.
2. Give team members **positive feedback** on something outstanding they are doing and offer **help/coach** them with something they struggle with or don't realize they can do more effectively.
3. Be open to **learn from your team**; show them that their ideas and work are meaningful to you so that your team is involved in meeting goals together.
4. Frequently **advocate** (update and remind) **your team's accomplishments** to your manager / senior leaders of and how they support the broader organization's goals.

Impact

Members feel the team is focused on high-impact work.

1. **Identify high-impact opportunities** for your team to get involved in by sharing your team's work cross-functionally and with senior leadership and asking for feedback
2. **Quantify the output** of your team's work to reinforce your team's impact
3. Be an **advocate** for your team by sharing the impact your team is having on the organization/market
4. **Help** your team members **prioritize/focus** on the most meaningful and impactful tasks
5. **Co-create a clear vision** that reinforces how each team member's work directly contributes to the team's goals and how they relate to the broader organisation's strategic goals

Takeaway

A great manager at Google does eight things.

1. Is a good coach.
2. Does not micromanage. Empowers the team.
3. Shows concern and interest in teams' personal well-being + professional success.
4. Is productive and results-oriented.
5. Is a good communicator. Shares information. Listens.
6. Helps with career development.
7. Has a clear vision/strategy for the team.
8. Has key technical skills that help them advise the team.

“Unsafe” teams



“Our team meetings don't always feel like a safe zone for questions or thoughts. The tone in meetings can be condescending and aggressive at times.”

“I sometimes get a bit scared to speak my mind. I feel like there are so many individuals here that have been on the team for so long that it gets intimidating to say something.”

“I think it is harder to take big risks on this team. We are rewarded on completing our deliverables and moving things along. There hasn't been an example of a big risk or failure that we all agreed was the right thing to do.”

“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.”

“We frequently ask each other questions about difficult privacy issues throughout the day. Everyone is open to questions from anyone at any time, and no question is considered a dumb question.”

Define: psy·cho·log·i·cal safe·ty

Shared belief held by team members
that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking

A sense of confidence that the team will not
embarrass, reject, or punish someone for
speaking up

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Tenure of Googlers on the team

Colocation of Googlers on the team

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“The people I work with define
everything.”

People decisions at Google are based on data and analytics.