

Leo Advancement Sessions

Working in Teams



Participant Manual



Session Objectives

At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify five characteristics of effective teams
- Define psychological safety and its benefits
- Incorporate the attributes of psychological safety when working on a team

Activity: Snowball Fight

Please write your first and last name really large in the space below and then remove this page and the next page from the participant manual. Crumple each page up into a ball. You will have one snowball with your name and one snowball that is blank.

Name:

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Small Group Discussion #1: What Makes an Effective Team?

Think about a time when you were on a team that worked well together.

What was it that made it an effective team? Were there certain characteristics?

Was it the experience of the people on the team or was it the way the team interacted that made it effective?

Google Says The Best Teams Have These 5 Things

Zack Friedman

Former Contributor

CEO, Mentor (mentormoney.com). Bestselling Author, *The Lemonade Life*.

It's called Project Aristotle.

The goal was to answer this question: "What makes a team effective at Google?"

Here's what they found.

The 5 Elements That Make A Great Team

Google analyzed data from executives, team leads and team members to determine the key dynamics of what makes a successful team. Importantly, the Google research team found that the best teams were effective because they worked together well, regardless of who was on the team.

Here are the 5 qualities that make a great team:

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

Let's breakdown what the Google research team found.

1. Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is about environment. It's about creating a safe culture in which team members feel "safe" enough to take an interpersonal risk. Encouraging team members to voice their opinions, even if it goes against the group, can be risky. However, teams that exhibit high psychological safety encourage risk-taking. Plus, when team members take risks, they aren't viewed as disruptive, disrespectful, or incompetent.

When teams promote psychological safety, there is a free flow of ideas, which can lead to better outcomes. You can ask for help without fear of retribution or adverse impact to your reputation. Team members feel comfortable asking questions and sharing opinions, which can lead to healthy debate and help the team thrive.

2. Dependability

Dependability is about accountability. It's about reliability. It's about trust.

When everyone on the team is accountable, reliable and trustworthy, the team succeeds.

How many teams have you been on when one person shirks responsibility? We've all seen it before. A team can crumble when even one person can't be trusted to do the work. On a highly dependable team, every team member can trust that high quality work will be produced on time.

3. Structure and clarity

All teams need structure and clarity, so long as rules are not too rigid that they stifle progress.

When teams have structure and clarity, there are specific and clear performance standards and directives for the team to work and achieve. With these inputs, team members understand their function, purpose, expectations, and performance objectives.

With structure and clarity, specificity is key. Team members will thrive when they have goals that are clear, specific, and transparent so they know what is expected of them. For example, at Google, Objectives and Key Results (OKR's) are a management tool used to establish and communicate both long-term and short-term goals. Some teams even establish a common vocabulary to start introducing norms that reflect the team identity.

4. Meaning

No one wants to work in a job or organization without meaning or purpose. So, you can imagine how a team member feels working on a team without either meaning or purpose. There are many ways to create meaning within the construct of a team. For example, you can create meaning in the work itself or in the final product.

Google found that other ways to create meaning in work include creating financial security, supporting one's family, helping the team succeed, or exhibiting self-expression.

5. Impact

Work is about creating value and impact for others. Team members want to know - from their subjective perspective - that the work they are doing is creating impact. Also, team members want to feel that the team's work is helping to advance the organization's overall goals, mission, and impact. Reserving time for each team member to reflect on their impact can be a valuable exercise to further purpose and meaning as well.

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
- Hesitance around expressing divergent ideas and asking “silly” questions

Questions to ask yourself:

- Do all team members feel comfortable brainstorming in front of each other?
- Do all team members feel they can fail openly, or will they feel shunned?

Tips for leaders:

- 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

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?

Tips for leaders:

- Clarify roles and responsibilities of team members
- Develop concrete project plans to provide transparency into every individual's work

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?

Tips for leaders:

- 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

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?

Tips for leaders:

- 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

Impact

Signs that your team needs to improve impact:

- Framing work as “treading water”
- 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/burnout?

Tips for leaders:

- 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

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Small Group Discussion #2: Discussion Guide

In addition to communicating the study results, the Google researchers wanted to empower leaders and employees within Google to understand the dynamics of their own teams and offer tips for improving. So, they developed a team effectiveness discussion guide around these five effectiveness pillars.

How can this guide be useful for teams within your Leo club, district, or multiple district?

Psychological Safety

<https://rework.withgoogle.com/>

Organizational behavioral scientist Dr. Amy Edmondson, Professor of Leadership at Harvard Business School, first introduced the concept of “team psychological safety” in 1999 and defined it as *“a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.”*

This means that the team has a culture in which:

- Team members are comfortable admitting mistakes or bringing up difficult topics
- The team learns from these errors together
- The team creates a safe environment where members openly share ideas with “a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish someone for speaking up”
- Teams become stronger, have increased engagement and morale, and have the data they need for better decision-making and innovation

Amy Edmondson – Psychological Safety & Google Aristotle

<https://youtu.be/DXgMV0Gmf08>

Video Transcript:

So this, you've probably heard of this already, but this is what I think put psychological safety on the map in recent years, I had been studying this construct for quite a long time when a widely publicized study at Google, called Project Aristotle, that set out to answer the simple question, which is, “Why do some teams sort-of outperform others? What is it? You know, is it their education? Is it the gender mix? What is it?”

All this research, all this data...analytic capacity that google has...three-year study, 180 teams, and what did they find? Well as Julia Rosovsky who led that study, PhD psychologist said, psychological safety emerged, to their surprise, as the crucial factor. The factor differentiating higher performing and lower performing teams. That got their attention. That got them interested in, “Well what can we do? What can we do to increase the psychological safety of our teams?” Now, one thing you have to make sure to take away from this study is not that Google had particularly high or low psychological safety, but rather that Google had particularly high variance in psychological safety. Otherwise, it could not have emerged as a predictor.

So, what we learn is this is not a function of organizational culture. The organizational culture at Google is fairly strong and recognizable. But what we learn is that this thing called psychological safety, which describes the interpersonal climate, varies. It varies across teams in the same organization. Right? So, this is something we want to keep in mind going forward. It's kind of the good news and the bad news. Right? The bad news is it could be very hard to say, “Okay, let's have a psychologically safe organization. The whole thing. We're going to get it right.” That's going to be difficult to do. But the good news is wherever you work, wherever you stand, you have the opportunity to create psychological safety in your team. It's a pocket. It's a bubble that can be created, and we'll talk about how, and without worrying so much about the whole organization.

5 Benefits of a Psychologically Safe Environment

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By taking time to dig in, really pay attention, and intentionally build a psychologically safe environment, you might find some areas of improvement that could really impact your team for the better. Here are 5 proven benefits of maintaining a psychologically safe environment:

1. Increased retention

Retention has become a big problem for a lot of companies over the last few years. One reason many people give for leaving is that they didn't feel secure in their work environment. Whether an impatient trainer made them feel stupid for asking questions or they just never felt their contributions were meaningful, a psychologically unsafe environment is one of the quickest ways to lose your best people.

2. Improved productivity and performance

Be honest: when is the last time you can truthfully say performance anxiety helped you do a good job on something? Unless you're a rare breed of superhuman, you likely function a lot better when you're not stressing over little mistakes or are afraid of being fired for asking for a deadline extension. It is a well-studied fact that people who feel secure and appreciated perform infinitely better than people who are constantly on edge.

3. Greater creativity and innovation

In order for the terrain of a team to be fertile for creativity and innovation, the soil must contain a certain level of trust. When that trust is there, people feel confident in their ability to ask questions and make mistakes—and creativity and innovation are natural byproducts.

To build that trust, there must be connection. Storytelling is a powerful way to create connections between people in a way that can inspire confidence and action. The overall result will be more efficient work processes, a deeper well of ideas for company improvement, and a much more satisfied team.

4. Higher inclusion and empathy

In today's culture, inclusion and empathy are no longer "nice-to-haves"—they are critical if you want to cultivate a productive environment. A study by the Center for Creative Leadership found that "empathy in the workplace is positively related to job performance."

Through storytelling we create the opportunity for empathy and inclusion by offering the chance to see the world through another's eyes, even if only for a short time. Stories can help people understand one another—and help your leaders better understand their people. If you want to boast "great organizational culture" on your recruitment ads, then this level of emotional safety is absolutely essential.

5. An environment for happy people

This one ought to be obvious, but if you've ever had a job where you were absolutely miserable, you can likely pinpoint the ways in which the team made you feel unsafe. If leaders are making the effort to create psychological safety in the team, then not only will people be happier, but they'll also feel safe enough to bring up any issues (sooner rather than later) that might cause them to become miserable if left to fester.

Really, this all comes down to listening. It's critical to create an environment where people feel safe enough to open up because they are heard. *That* is what creates the human connections we all crave.

Phil Boissiere Video

<https://youtu.be/0AurgIDbrJ4>

Video Transcript:

The thing that's often missing in a healthy team dynamic is a sense of safety. Now I'm not talking about physical safety. I'm talking about psychological safety. When you say psychological that's very simply just what we're thinking and what we're feeling. Is your team a place where everyone actually feels included or is it just a select group of people, a select group of leaders? Without the ability to feel safe, to communicate and to try new things, innovation will be stifled, conflict will be heightened.

When reflecting on your own team dynamics I want you to be thinking about is it an environment where people can actually speak up and challenge the status quo? Do they feel welcomed to the table? Do they feel encouraged to share? Or maybe it's an environment where people just are rewarded for group think and staying in the middle of the road and not making waves. That's certainly isn't psychologically safe. I can't tell you the amount of times that I've worked with a team just to have somebody at the very end of a meeting, raise their hand, offer their perspective. And that was the game changing idea.

Last step, if you're a leader, are you walking the walk? Do you actually embody the culture and values that you're trying to foster? Are you making yourself vulnerable? Are you admitting fallibility and encouraging people to give you feedback? Are you able to apologize if you make a mistake? If you're a leader and you're not doing that, you're certainly eroding psychological safety faster than you could ever try to build it. When your team is safe, you don't have to be afraid of conflict. Don't let your blind spots get in the way. Don't let things fall through the cracks. Check in with yourself. Invite people to be open. They just might have the answers that you need to lead the team forward.

Now, think about a current team you are on within your Leo club. It could be committee team or a service project team. How effective is that team? Do you feel that people on the team have a sense of psychological safety?

Psychological Safety – Team Survey

On great teams, people feel psychologically safe: they feel comfortable speaking up, asking questions and admitting mistakes. To help us better understand our own team's climate for psychological safety, please complete this survey.

Rate the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	Part 1: Individual Safety	1	2	3	4	5
1	In this team, it is easy to discuss difficult issues and problems.					
2	I won't receive retaliation or criticism if I admit an error or mistake.					
3	It is easy to ask member of this team for help.					
4	I feel safe offering new ideas, even if they aren't fully formed plans.					
	Part 2: Team Respect	1	2	3	4	5
5	In this team, people are accepted for being different.					
6	My teammates welcome my ideas and give them time and attention.					
7	Members of this team could easily describe the values of others' contributions.					
	Part 3: Team Learning	1	2	3	4	5
8	On this team, people talk about mistakes and ways to improve and learn from them.					
9	We take time to find new ways to improve our team's work processes.					
10	Members of this team raise concerns they have about team plans or decisions.					
11	We try to discover our underlying assumptions and seek counterarguments about issues under discussion.					

Source: Amy Edmonson, "Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams," 1999.*Administrative Science Quarterly* 44, 350 - 83.

Activity: Story Around the Circle

Overview: Participants improvise a story

Objective: Learn how to listen closely, accept each other's ideas and opinions, and come with creative solutions

Time: 10 minutes

Number of participants: 8-10 people

Instructions:

1. Form teams of 8-10 people.*
2. Stand or sit in a circle.
3. Select a person to start with the phrase, "Once upon a time a Leo..."
4. The person to the right of the first person will continue the story by adding 1-2 sentences. The story should make sense as it progresses.
5. Continue in order around the circle until everyone on the team gets a turn to contribute 1-2 sentences to the story.
6. The last person must conclude the story in 1-2 sentences.

*If you are in a classroom setting at tables with 5-6 people, this can be your team. In this case, the story should go around the circle two times before it concludes.

How to Foster Psychological Safety on Your Team

Demonstrate engagement

- Be present and focus on the conversation (e.g., close your laptop during meetings)
- Ask questions with the intention of learning from your teammates
- Offer input, be interactive, and show you're listening
- Respond verbally to show engagement ("That makes sense. Tell us more.")
- Be aware of your body language; make sure to lean towards or face the person speaking
- Make eye contact to show connection and active listening

Show understanding

- Recap what's been said to confirm mutual understanding/alignment (e.g., "What I heard you say is..."); then acknowledge areas of agreement, disagreement, and be open to questions within the group
- Validate comments verbally ("I understand." "I see what you're saying.")
- Avoid placing blame ("Why did you do this?") and focus on solutions ("How can we work toward making sure this goes more smoothly next time?", "What can we do together to make a game plan for next time?")
- Think about your facial expressions- - are they unintentionally negative (a scowl or grimace)?
- Nod your head to demonstrate understanding during conversations/meetings

Be inclusive in interpersonal settings

- Share information about your personal work style and preferences, encourage teammates to do the same
- Be available and approachable to teammates (e.g., make time for ad hoc 1:1 conversations, feedback sessions, career coaching)
- Clearly communicate the purpose of ad hoc meetings scheduled outside normal 1:1s/team meetings
- Express gratitude for contributions from the team
- Step in if team members talk negatively about another team member
- Have open body posture (e.g., face all team members, don't turn your back to part of the group)
- Build rapport (e.g., talk with your teammates about their lives outside of work)

Be inclusive in decision-making

- Solicit input, opinions, and feedback from your teammates
- Don't interrupt or allow interruptions (e.g., step in when someone is interrupted and ensure his/her idea is heard)
- Explain the reasoning behind your decisions (live or via email, walk team through how you arrived at a decision)
- Acknowledge input from others (e.g., highlight when team members were contributors to a success or decision)

Show confidence and conviction without appearing inflexible

- Manage team discussions (e.g., don't allow side conversations in team meetings, make sure conflict isn't personal)
- Use a voice that is clear and audible in a team setting
- Support and represent the team (e.g., share team's work with senior leadership, give credit to teammates)
- Invite the team to challenge your perspective and push back
- Model vulnerability; share your personal perspective on work and failures with your teammates
- Encourage teammates to take risks, and demonstrate risk-taking in your own work

Sources

- Edmondson and Lei (2014). "Psychological Safety: The History, Renaissance, and Future of an Interpersonal Construct," Annual Review Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior.
- Edmondson (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. Administrative Science Quarterly June 1999.
- Goman, Carol Kinsey Ph.D.. 'The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help--or Hurt--How You Lead.' Jossey-Bass Publishing, April 2011.

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