

focusu

ALL
ABOUT
YOU!



THE GOOGLE FORMULA TO BUILD
HIGH
PERFORMING TEAMS





Being a part of an important project, I was in a meeting with the rest of my team and had a question in mind about something I didn't quite comprehend. When I looked around, I saw no one else asking a question or even saying anything, for that matter. They were just nodding with what the manager had to say, which made me feel uncomfortable. Therefore, I decided not to ask the question and figure it out myself later.



Do you relate to this scenario?

Why is it that employees sometimes tend to be silent when they should be speaking up? Do they fear repercussions or consequences? Or do they feel that others can't respectfully consider their ideas without an onslaught of criticism? But most importantly, why do they hold back their potential contributions to a project if they know that it can be improved or is heading for disaster?

Many team members worry that if they make incorrect suggestions, they could be laughed upon or worse, criticized in front of everyone. Some workplaces tend to condition their employees to avoid speaking up and perform their jobs precisely as dictated by their management. Hence, they don't offer any insight, or even admit their mistakes. No wonder then that we see a spate of organisations that are high-stress and low involvement workplaces. At the heart of this phenomenon is a phrase that is getting increasing currency from discerning organisations: "Psychological Safety."





While physical safety is something that has widespread awareness amongst corporates, “psychological safety” is a rather new addition in the corporate vocabulary. The origin of this phrase goes back to the quest by Google to find an answer to the question: “What makes a team effective?” By researching over 190 teams and doing more than 200 interviews, Google arrived at some interesting answers.



Project Aristotle - The Whole is Greater than the Sum of its Parts

Much of the work that is done in Google, and in many successful organisations, is done collaboratively by teams. And why not? The team is, in fact, the molecular unit where actual and real-time production takes place and innovative ideas are conceived. However, it is also where interpersonal issues, unclear group goals, and ill-suited skill sets happen - which hinder productivity and create chaos.



After the success of Google’s Project Oxygen research - where they studied what makes a great manager, Google researchers applied a similar method to discover what makes teams effective. The research was called ‘Project Aristotle’ - a tribute to Aristotle’s quote, “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”

Using over 30 different statistical models on several hundreds of variables, Google sought to identify factors, which:



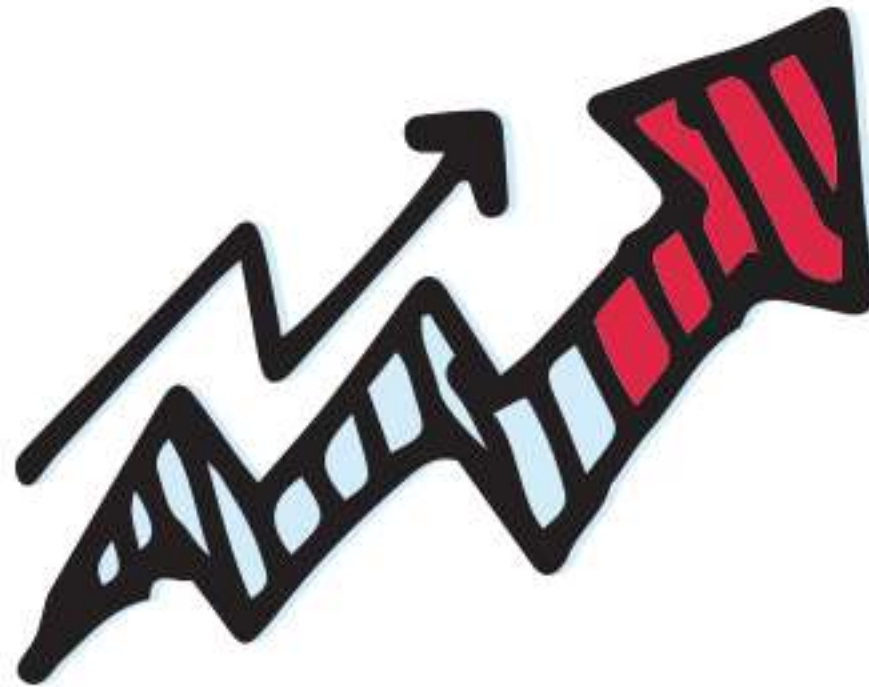


- ⦿ Impacted multiple outcome metrics
- ⦿ Were applicable for different types of teams across organisations
- ⦿ Showed robust and consistent statistical significance



Much to their surprise, the researchers found out that what truly mattered to make an effective team had less to do with who is on the team, and more with how the team works together. The five key factors they concluded that made up high-performing teams were:

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





Out of these five critical dynamics of high performing teams that researchers identified, **psychological safety** stood out to be the most important. The Google researchers found out that employees on teams with higher psychological safety were less likely to leave organisations and were more likely to harness the power of diverse ideas from other team members. They also brought in more revenue and were rated twice as effective by executives.



Psychological Safety - Let's Talk About It!

Have you ever been a part of a discussion where no one voiced their ideas and opinions, had little to zero discussion, and simply went along with what the manager had to say? If you have, you would perhaps also realize that decisions reached by such teams without any debate or conflict of opinions were not necessarily the best decisions!

A truly successful team can bounce ideas off each other, help solve issues, bring crazy insights, and strengthen action plans. One defining characteristic of such teams is that they do not shy away from challenging each other's thoughts and opinions. Conflict (in a positive manner - not mean-minded or personal) in such teams is viewed of as "good" since they help the teams reach rich, considered decisions. What we see happening in such teams is - "psychological safety" in action.

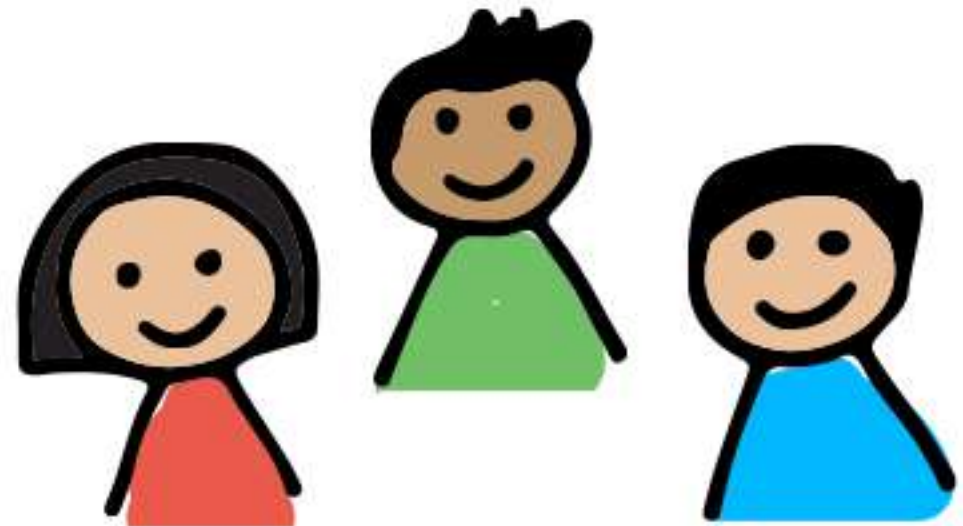




In essence, it is a belief that an individual won't be punished or laughed upon for speaking their ideas, opinions, and queries. Dr. Amy Edmondson, a professor at Harvard, defines this term as **"a climate where people are comfortable being (and expressing) themselves."** Edmondson has also confirmed that psychological safety ensures quality improvements, learning behavior, and productivity.



A culture of psychological safety enables team members to stay engaged, take risks, and experiment. You might be wondering, "Is this just a fancy way of saying trust?" Although these two terms have a lot in common, the key difference is that psychological safety is experienced at the group level, while trust refers to the interaction between two individuals.





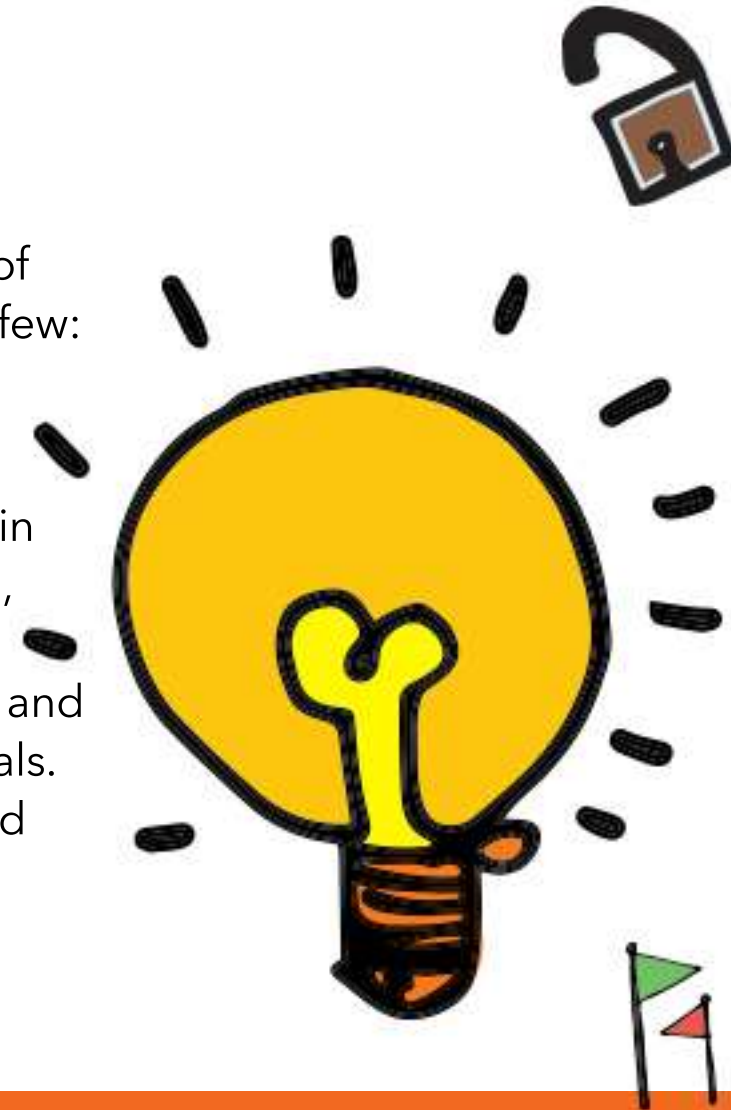
Such a climate of psychological safety makes it easier for people to speak up their minds and tentative thoughts. As employees share their opinions, respond respectfully to others' feelings, and engage in healthy debates, they establish vital relationships as psychological safety is a property of the team as a whole. It won't be enough for a few employees to feel comfortable at speaking up, it has to be a wholesome experience.

So what are the upsides of fostering Psychological Safety?

Why should you as a Leader be interested in this? The upsides of creating a psychologically safe workplace are many. Here are a few:

1. It creates an Innovative Environment

Employees tend to remain quiet based on factors such as ignorance, incompetence, intrusion, and fear of negativity. This in turn steals the organisation of essential moments for innovation, improvement, experimentation, and collective learning. In psychologically safe cultures, employees overcome this anxiety and stress, which profoundly facilitates progress towards mutual goals. Therefore, a healthy environment is created where the perceived risk of speaking up is low - which is critical for organizations to learn, adapt, improve and innovate.





2. Encourages Collaboration

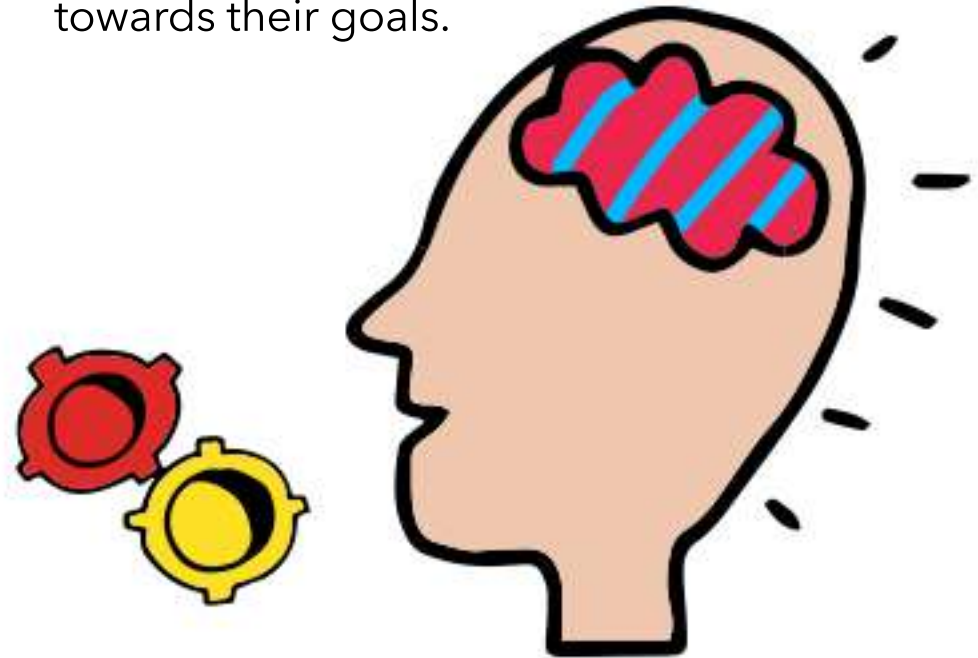
Psychological safety helps in ensuring that employees – despite being in different roles, designations, and functions – do not feel competitive and try to outperform each other. Instead, such a culture helps to develop healthy interpersonal relationships and work in collaboration towards achieving company goals.

3. Inculcates Active Participation

Team members are able to see that their opinions matter and are permitted to make decisions in their areas of expertise. This creates a great incentive for them to actively get involved in all initiatives of their own will. This also fosters loyalty in employees towards the organisation. They are happier and satisfied – which eventually makes them much more effective at what they do.

4. Fosters Commitment

Companies that foster psychological safety are able to create higher levels of engagement and performance among employees. It is a win-win situation for both – the organisation and the employees as it has a dramatic effect on the mental well-being of members and enables them to contribute significantly to the workplace. It also empowers employees to enjoy their work vastly and develop higher commitment towards their goals.





The Road Map to Psychological Safety

If Psychological safety can be so powerful for teams, the next logical question is: How do we as Leaders go about establishing this fragile element in our teams? For sure, establishing psychological safety is not a quick-fix which can be done in 5 easy steps. However, there are pointers that can get you going on this journey:

1. Include everyone

Make everyone feel included and important. When planning a task or discussing something, make sure to ask everyone's opinion.

2. Inculcate a safe space

Make employees feel at ease with the concept of making mistakes. They need to know they won't get in much trouble for doing something wrong. After all, errors are natural and inevitable.

3. No room for fear

Make sure everyone on the team is not afraid to speak up their ideas, opinions, and questions. Be explicit and let your employees know they're safe.

4. Don't be afraid to admit mistakes

When you admit your mistakes, it makes others feel comfortable disclosing their failures too.

5. Always be available

Let your team know you're always there to help and they shouldn't be scared to approach you for anything.





Nurturing Psychological Safety

Regardless of whether you are a service delivery team, a crack commando team, or a high-strung corporate team – building a psychologically safe environment for your employees could be the most significant ROI initiative for your organization.

Though the quest for establishing psychological safety in teams is a long journey, it can be given a significant boost through a workshop experience for the entire team that is facilitated with sensitivity and understanding. Think of a workshop like this as a kick-off meeting that will help your team be aware of the concept and get it started in the journey towards achieving it.

A few components of such a workshop include:

1. Experiential learning activities
2. Psychometric tools like Emergenetics
3. Johari Window methods
4. Coaching on Feedback





Experiential learning methods create a safe space for team members to engage while talking about a sensitive topic like this. If people do not feel safe, they will just not engage even in a workshop scenario. It is hence up to the Facilitator to create an environment where team members are first able to drop their guard and engage in an open and honest manner with each other. The very nature of Experiential activities that forces team members to laugh, work together, engage openly - often gets the ball rolling.

Once a safe workshop environment is created though, it is important to drive understanding. One effective way to do this is by using a psychometric tool like **Emergenetics** - a tried and tested tool that is based on patterns of thinking and behavior that emerge from the genetic blueprint and life experiences of an individual. Emergenetics provides a clear way to understand this intersection of nature and nurture through the Emergenetics Profile of every individual. It is built on four Thinking Attributes and three Behavioral Attributes that every person exhibits.



The four attributes being -

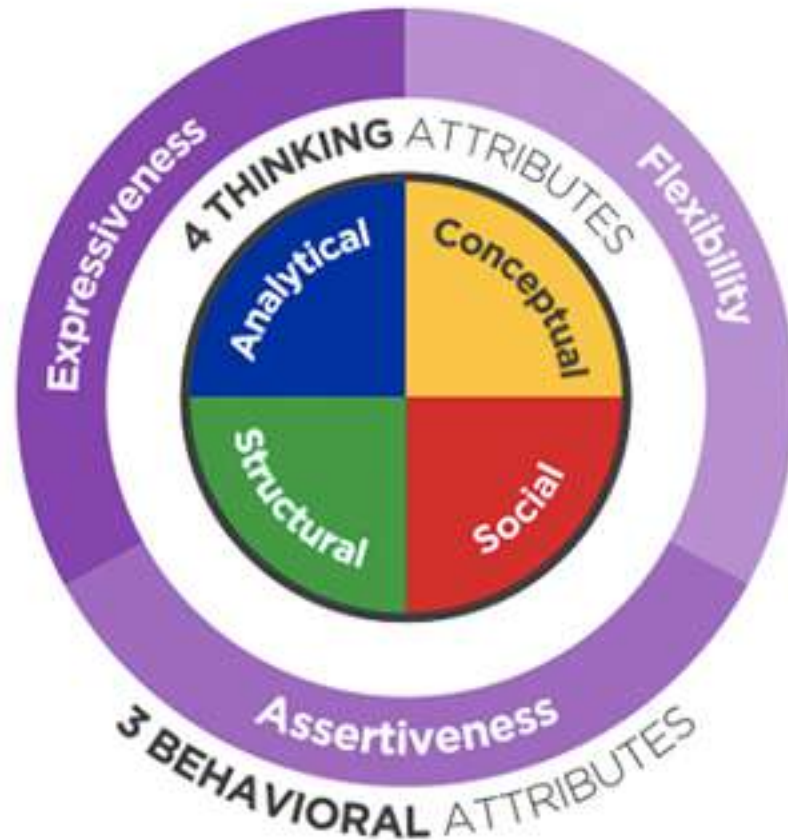
- ⦿ Analytical
- ⦿ Conceptual
- ⦿ Structural
- ⦿ Social





The 3 behavioral attributes being:

- ⦿ Expressiveness
- ⦿ Assertiveness
- ⦿ Flexibility



The Emergenetics Profile is designed from a psychometric foundation to give each person an in-depth knowledge of their unique psychological make-up, and provides an understanding of the person that they are. By knowing each other at a much deeper level, understanding and insights spring up between people and within teams.





Without getting into too many details, here is a sample of the Emergenetics profile of two colleagues working together - Annette and Jian.

EMERGENETICS® | PROFILE

ANNETTE

HOW YOU THINK: PERCENTAGES

ANALYTICAL = 32%

- Clear thinker
- Logical problem solver
- Data driven
- Rational
- Learns by mental analysis

STRUCTURAL = 3%

- Practical thinker
- Likes guidelines
- Cautious of new ideas
- Predictable
- Learns by doing



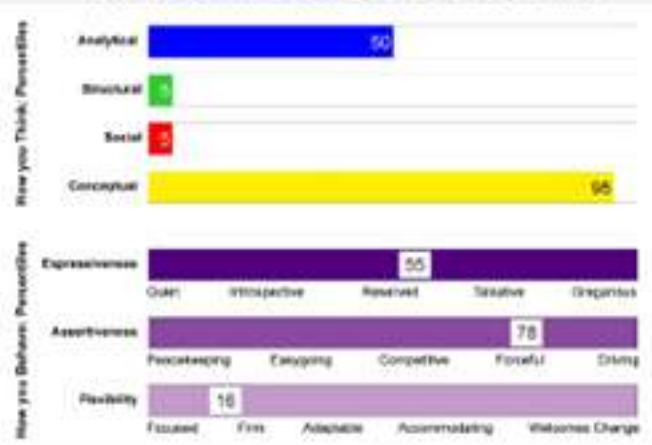
CONCEPTUAL = 61%

- Imaginative
- Intuitive about ideas
- Visionary
- Enjoys the unusual
- Learns by experimenting

SOCIAL = 3%

- Relational
- Intuitive about people
- Socially aware
- Empathic
- Learns from others

HOW YOU COMPARE TO THE GENERAL POPULATION



EMERGENETICS® | PROFILE

JIAN

HOW YOU THINK: PERCENTAGES

ANALYTICAL = 21%

- Clear thinker
- Logical problem solver
- Data driven
- Rational
- Learns by mental analysis

STRUCTURAL = 8%

- Practical thinker
- Likes guidelines
- Cautious of new ideas
- Predictable
- Learns by doing



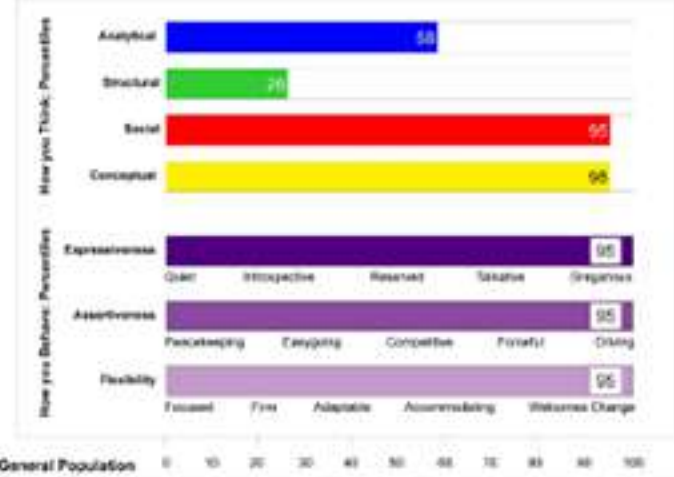
CONCEPTUAL = 35%

- Imaginative
- Intuitive about ideas
- Visionary
- Enjoys the unusual
- Learns by experimenting

SOCIAL = 35%

- Relational
- Intuitive about people
- Socially aware
- Empathic
- Learns from others

HOW YOU COMPARE TO THE GENERAL POPULATION





A cursory glance itself brings out the fact that these are two individuals (like any two individuals) who have some similarities - and some differences too. Through skillful facilitation, both individuals can be led to the insight and understanding of how best they can appreciate the strengths that each brings to the table, while complementing each other on the team.

Change in individuals and teams, however, do not happen only by "knowing." It is only when emotions are touched that change actually can happen. A few other tools that Facilitators hence use in helping teams make this journey are the ones based on the Johari window construct like:

- ⦿ The River of Life
- ⦿ The Personality Tree
- ⦿ The Shield of Achilles



	Known to Self	Unknown to Self
Known to Others	Open Self Information about you that both you and others know	Blind Self Information about you that you don't know but others do know
Unknown to Others	Hidden Self Information about you that you know but others don't know	Unknown Self Information about you that neither you nor others know





Through sensitively done Facilitation, team members are led to discover many more aspects of each other by knowing each other's life journey, hopes, challenges, achievements, and deepest values. Through the use of these tools, team members gradually get rid of the "attribution bias" - a cognitive bias that refers to the systematic errors made when people try to find reasons for others' behaviors.

The workshop also uses a few pre and post-workshop questionnaires to bring forth how much the team has actually progressed in the course of the workshop, in establishing Psychological Safety. They also act as quick dip sticks that the team can use from time to time to monitor their own progress in this journey.

The very essence of psychological safety is how leaders respond when team members put themselves on the line. Workshops when done well help create this supportive environment where the team members have the freedom and luxury to raise concerns and opinions without the fear of appearing intrusive. Communication between and within teams is a critical issue and improving this through a workshop often fosters psychological safety profoundly.

After all, as Paul Santagata, Head of Industry at Google, rightly states,

“There is no team without trust.”





Explore the workshop -
Building Psychological Safety

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