



# Build stronger teams

Presented by: Kristen Gyorgak

## What do high performing teams need?

Google set out to answer this question in 2014. They wanted to find out why some of their teams were outperforming others, when they felt like their recruitment processes brought in the best people. So they interviewed and studied over 160 of their internal teams.

Interestingly, they found that some factors didn't matter as much to performance as they had expected: co-location of teams, consensus-driven decision making, extroversion of team members, individual performance, seniority, team size and tenure.

What is important for high performing teams are these five key pillars:



Interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves and openly discuss mistakes and weaknesses.

Team members are reliable, accountable and do what they say they will.

People know and understand their roles and responsibilities. Team members know what's expected of them. Decision making, workflows, and processes are clear.

People take meaning from the work they do. It's important to them. While work means something different to everyone (job, career, calling) team members feel connected to the work they're doing.

Team members know their work matters and creates change. They recognise the role they each play in helping the team succeed and the impact the team's work makes on others.

# Understand the individuals in the team



## The power of connection

Truly high-performing teams put psychological safety and connection at the forefront. Part of building psychological safety is about understanding the individuals in your team.

It's obviously important for leaders to build this understanding with their team members. But equally as important, is that there are conversations for team members to build this understanding and connection with each other.

*"The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.*

~ PHIL JACKSON

Here are some activities that can help build personal understanding of those you work with.

Each of them start with curiosity - a genuine want to know and understand the people you work with. This curiosity can lead to connections and empathy, genuinely wanting to bring the best out of that person at work.

Again, it's all about [building social chemistry](#). **And social chemistry greases the wheels of operational chemistry.** Which is really what we're looking for!

## Grow your team connections

**1. Take self-assessments to build your self and social-awareness.** [Self-assessments](#) are a wonderful tool to give teams a shared language. However - it's just a tool. It's a hammer but it won't build the shed. Taking the assessment is step one. Discussing the results is step two. Implementing actions based on your discussions is step three.

The shared language can help us understand our own styles/preferences and how those impact on others. They can also give us each a better understanding of how other people work best and what they expect from us.

Here are four quick prompts you can use to debrief any self-assessment:

- What brings out the best in you?
- What brings out the worst in you?
- What value can you add to the team and our work?
- What do you need from me?

**2. Give people the time and space to share about themselves.**

This can happen informally (*"How was your weekend? What are your plans for break?"*) or through more formalised activities. Here are some group activities you can use to find out more about the individuals in your team.

### Lencioni Trust Building questions.

The idea behind these questions is that people can stay quite surface level if they want to, or they can open up and go as deep as they'd like.

- Where were you born?
- How many siblings do you have? Where do you fall in the order?
- What was your first job? Lessons from there?
- Share a challenging / unique / powerful experience from your childhood.

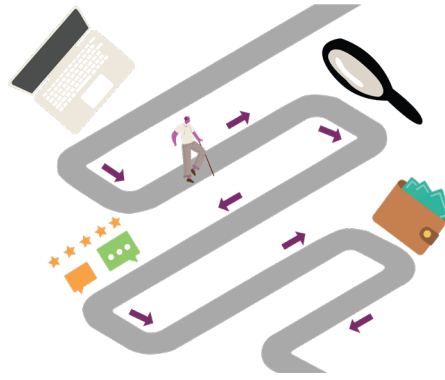
*Want more questions?*

- Where does your name come from?
- What's something outside of work that you're really proud of?
- If money wasn't a barrier, what would you spend the next year doing?

**Roadmap to here.**

Ask people to identify ten stops from birth to now that got them into your team. They can choose whatever ten stops they find meaningful and would like to share.

How does this help? It allows people to get a deeper context of each other’s back stories and meaningful moments.



**Use quizzes and games to learn about each other.** Tired of the Stuff Quiz? Make your own. Here’s two:

- **All about me:** Each person creates a 5 – 10 question quiz about themselves. One quiz per day, so that you can keep the focus on things you learned (or already knew) about the quizmaster.
- **In my head quiz:** Each person thinks of a quiz question or two that they already know the answer to. Put them all together for a group quiz. It’s amazing to see what’s common knowledge to one person might be a complete mystery to another.

**What makes you, you? Explore your diversity.**

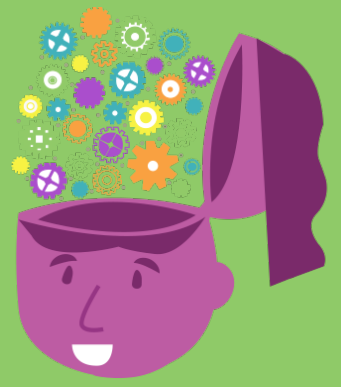
We use the ICES model to help explore our personal diversity. It’s broken down to four elements: *identity, cognition, experience, and skills*. This breakdown pushes us to recognise ourselves and others more fully.

Once we think about ourselves, then it’s about reflecting on how our diversity shows up at work. How does this shape our expectations? Our perceptions? Our sense of normal or right and wrong? In order to avoid any possible team tensions – have a discussion on what makes you, you – and how this shows up at work – in your ways of working, expectations of others and your success criteria.

ICES	Examples	You
<b>Identity</b> groups formed by shared identities	<i>Ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexuality, socioeconomic status, body type, physical abilities, clothing styles, hobbies, preferences, family relationships, political affiliation.</i>	
<b>Cognitive</b> the way you think and how you communicate what you think	<i>Your cognitive processes, capabilities and communication style. Big picture vs. detail, memory capabilities, thinking patterns, values &amp; beliefs vs. data &amp; information, structured vs flexible, introvert vs extrovert.</i>	
<b>Experience</b> experiences you’ve had	<i>Your lived experiences, values and traditions, positive and negative associations based on experiences.</i>	
<b>Skills</b> what you bring into a situation	<i>Job roles, subject matter expertise, trades, skills.</i>	



# Expectation Setting



## Why are expectations vital to team success?

Our brains are constantly creating expectations. Expectations are the core of how our brain makes sense of the world. Our brains are constantly generating expectations and then comparing our experiences against them.

In other words, we create stories about our expectations of each other personally, our expectations of how the team should work and our expectations of organisations.

Employment NZ recommends setting individual and team expectations within the first few weeks of someone's job. Complete agreement from me here. It's critical.

### Manage people's magical thinking

Magical thinking is the false belief that something will happen because we want it to. It may be quite unrealistic. But that doesn't stop people from reacting negatively when their expectations go unmet!

When our expectations aren't met, we get a hit of cortisol, the stress hormone. Unmet expectations make people feel bad.

On the other hand, if you meet or exceed people's expectations, they get a good fix of dopamine.

### Openly discuss expectations

Expectation setting is crucial to setting stability in the team and provides a foundation for accountability.

There are expectations about what you're doing, why you're doing it and how you'll organise. Then there are the behavioural and cultural expectations about how you work.

## Expectations clash?

One thing to consider is that people's expectations come from their backgrounds, experiences and preferences. (*Refer back to our [Inclusion @ Work notes](#) to see how these may vary - or use the ICES conversation listed above.*)

For example, if you previously worked at an organisation that offered flexibility to WFH everyday and then move to an organisation where you can only WFH for two days - that needs to be clearly outlined at the beginning, otherwise there's an expectations clash and discomfort.

### So how can we avoid uncertainty around expectations?

1. As much as you can, and via different communication channels, make it clear what people can expect from you and what you expect of them.
2. Refer to expectations at the start of the work - build this into your agreed ways of working.

On the next page you'll find a useful way to breakdown the expectations you need to set within the team and with your stakeholders. Remember, this is a conversation, invite people to be involved in co-creating these.

*In fact, if organizations could increase the number of employees who knew what was expected of them, it could reduce turnover by 22%, reduce safety incidents by 29%, and increase productivity by 10% ([Gallup](#)).*

-EMILY MAY

## Setting our team expectations

1	Mission & Vision	What we're trying to achieve and why	
2	Principles and values	What guides our decision-making and grounds us?	
3	Goals	What does success look like? What are we trying to do?	
4	Objectives	What are the steps which will achieve our goals?	
5	Strategy	Overall plan for how our project will achieve its objectives	
6	Assumptions	Being clear upfront about your assumptions ( <i>what is known and unknown?</i> )	
7	Constraints	Identify and agree constraints ( <i>time, resources, budget, scope</i> )	
8	Operations	Task identification and knowing how we keep each other up-to-date	
9	Quality	Technical / legal / regulatory standards - what does good look like?	
10	Productivity	Output expectations for each role ( <i>timelines and deliverables help here</i> )	
11	Metrics	What you measure to determine success? What are our KPIs?	
12	Communication	How does this team connect? What channels or mediums? Boundaries and scope?	
13	Culture	Identify the behaviours, culture and team environment. <i>What do we want to be known for? How do we do that?</i>	
14	Feedback and celebration	Deciding how you will provide feedback when expectations are / aren't met. How does your team celebrate successes?	
15	Continuous improvement	How do we learn, grow and try new things?	



# Line of sight



Do you feel your work matters and makes a difference? It may make a difference to your customers, your organisation or New Zealand as a whole. What's the impact each role plays in the bigger picture?

## The janitor who put a man on the moon

You may have heard this story. In 1962, US President John F. Kennedy visited NASA. During the tour of the space centre, he began talking to one of the janitors.

When he asked the janitor what his role was, the janitor replied *"I'm helping put a man on the moon!"*



Bingo! The janitor realised something every employee should – their role is connected to the larger organisational goal.

This is called a line of sight, and it's vital for creating stability and hope in your organisation.

Zeno Group, "Barriers to Employee Engagement" Study (2014) showed people thought they would perform better if they understood the company's direction and their role in that. That's a line of sight. Simply, this connection increases engagement across teams and organisations.

*"Connect the dots between individual roles and the goals of the organisation. When people see that connection, they get a lot of energy out of work. They feel the importance, dignity and meaning in their job."*

–KEN BLANCHARD

## Creating your line of sight

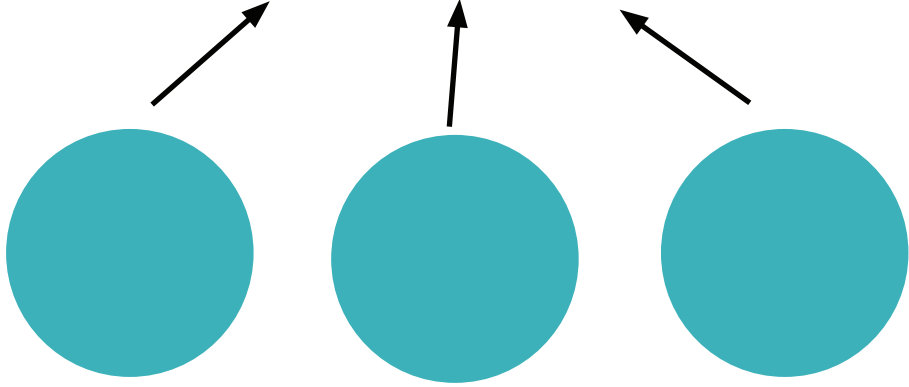
Here are some steps your team can take:

- **Know your organisational vision and mission.** And be familiar with your strategy to get there.
- **Create a team mission statement.** Identify a common goal that everyone on the team can rally behind. And embrace the corny. This is for your team to rally behind – it should be memorable, punchy and agreed to!
- **Put a human face/emotion behind your mission.** Your 'why' cannot be to process forms. That's what you do. Your 'why' has to be about something larger– who benefits from your job, and how? Why does it matter? If you're struggling to answer this try the next step.
- **Remove yourself from the equation.** What would happen if no one was doing your role? What loss would there be to the organisation and to the customer?
- **Get onto the balcony.** Martin Linsky and Ronald Heifetz advocate for this in their book *Leadership on the Line*. Get off the dance floor (day-to-day operations) and onto the balcony to get perspective on how everything fits together.
- **Create workflows.** Know the work process from start to end. Everyone should be able to identify where your work is coming from and where it goes after you finish with it. See page 8 for more details.

Organisation's vision and purpose



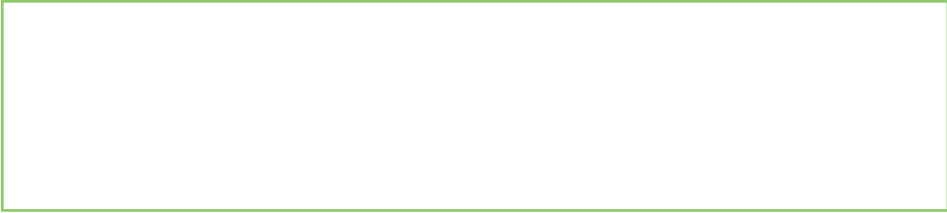
Organisation's strategic goals



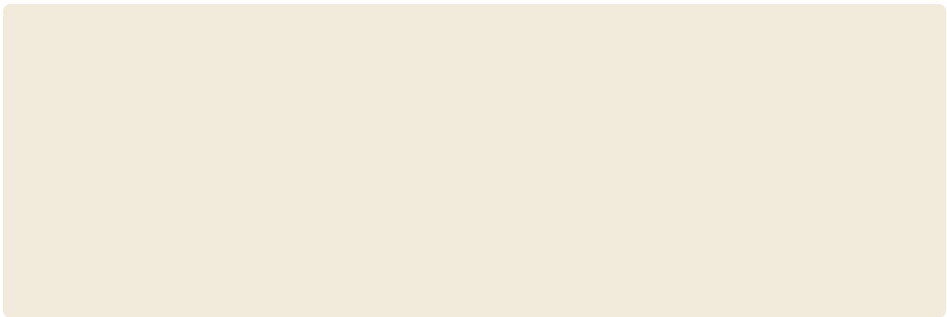
Directorate/  
Programme goals



Team contribution



Your contribution



Your why / values





# Know your workflows



## Find the Cotton-Eyed-Joe of your workflows

A workflow is simply the series of actions and steps that are needed to complete a task.

Remember the song Cotton-Eyed Joe? *Where does he come from? Where does he go? Where does he come from Cotton-Eyed Joe?* Well, that’s how we can think about our team’s work.

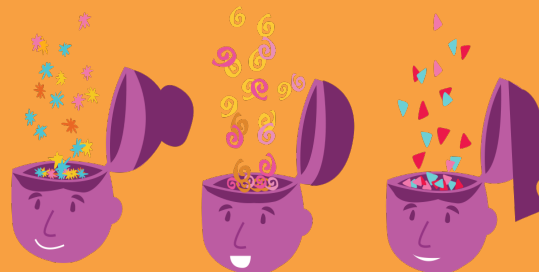
### As a team, consider:

- Where does the work come from?
- Where does it go after us?
- How is it used by others?
- Who is involved at each stage?
- What do people expect or need from us?
- What do we expect or need from others?
- What channels or mediums are we using?

TASK:					
	START / IDEATION	COORDINATION	CONTENT CREATION	REVIEW & SIGN OFF	WHO GETS THE INFO / WORK?
DESCRIPTION					
PEOPLE INVOLVED					
TOOLS / SYSTEMS USED					
PAIN POINTS					
WHAT'S WORKING					
IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES					



# Elicit diverse thinking



## New thinking, new perspectives, new futures

If we think in the same way, we'll get the same results. Back to the ICES of diversity – the 'C' stands for cognitive diversity. Edward De Bono's thinking hats can help you bring out different perspectives. People might naturally wear or gravitate towards different hats. As a team, you want to make sure you've taken the time to view the task / problem with each hat on. You can use Thinking Hats:

- **To build self-awareness:** Recognise your natural preferences and reflect on your blind spots
- **To plan a discussion:** Consider the different aspects or thoughts that surround a topic beforehand
- **To reach the team:** Think about people's preferences and what they need to commit to decisions
- **To make decisions:** Purposefully consider different options and decide how to move forward

<b>White Hat:</b> Facts	<b>Way to solve the problem:</b> Use data, facts and logic to lead us to an answer. Extract insight from the information you have available and highlight the information you lack but need. <i>What do we <b>know</b> about what we're trying to do?</i>
<b>Red Hat:</b> Feelings	<b>Way to solve the problem:</b> Check in on what everyone's instincts are telling them. Use expression of feelings and gut instincts, without having to offer a rational explanation. <i>How do you <b>feel</b> about where we're at or where we want to go?</i>
<b>Green Hat:</b> Creativity	<b>Way to solve the problem:</b> Encourage new, creative approaches and innovative solutions. Think about creative alternatives you haven't considered yet. Don't criticise or debate any idea at first – just brainstorm. <i>What other <b>options or ideas</b> can we try?</i>
<b>Yellow Hat:</b> Optimism	<b>Way to solve the problem:</b> Take an optimistic but logical view about benefits and feasibility. Displays <a href="#">Appreciative Intelligence</a> and sees the positive of a situation by focusing on benefits and opportunities that are possible. <i>What's the <b>best</b> that can happen here? How can we use our strengths to make this work better?</i>
<b>Black Hat:</b> Caution	<b>Way to solve the problem:</b> Caution, critical judgment and assessing risks. Use logic to consider any weak points and work to avoid or counter them. Overuse of this hat can kill creativity, ideas and positive thinking. <i>What do we need to be <b>mindful</b> of before we can move forward?</i>
<b>Blue Hat:</b> Control	<b>Way to solve the problem:</b> Implement processes to work through. Summarise, move conversations towards decisions, identify next steps and create action plan to move forward. <i>What <b>processes</b> can help us think everything through and then move our thoughts into actions?</i>

# Expect continuous improvement



## Embrace the Mamba Mentality

The late, great Kobe Bryant coined the term 'Mamba Mentality.' He describes it as getting 1% better everyday and to constantly try to be the best version of yourself.

From an individual, team or organisational lens, we should be striving to get better. Continuously. There is no end to our improvement journey.

It's not enough to promote continuous improvement, we have to expect it. And if we expect it, we have to give people the time, space and support to be able to do it.

## Make time for improvement

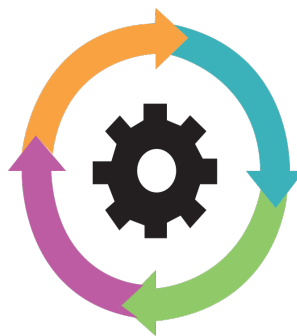
On a personal or team level, improvement won't happen overnight. And it is especially hard when the person is under immense time pressure. Build in the expectation that continuous improvement is not a nice to have - it's expected.

Think about what people need to have in order to personally improve: safety to try, time and space to think, support to work through it and reflections afterwards.

## Look backwards to look forwards

How? Build regular reviews and retrospectives into your ways of working. After you finish a large task or project, get the team together and ask:

- What should we **START** doing?
- What can we **STOP** doing?
- What should we **KEEP** doing? (no changes)
- What should we **KEEP** doing? (some tweaks)



You can use an analogy to creatively reflect. This example can be focused on operations/tasks or behaviours/culture.

### Use a sailing boat analogy:

- What gave you wind in your sails?
- What anchored you down?
- What led you to calm and clear waters?
- What led you into a storm?
- What helped us reach port safely?
- Was the compass working?
- Who should have been on the ship that wasn't?

"The greatest danger a team faces isn't that it won't become successful, but that it will, and then cease to improve.

- MARK SANBORN

## Diagnose 'why' not 'who'

Teams that focus on improving aren't immune from mistakes. In fact - they might make more as new people try new things in new ways.

If a mistake happens, avoid blaming. A blame culture will stifle innovation and continuous improvement. Instead, do a mistakes diagnostic. Forget about *who* make the mistake and focus on *why* the mistake happened.

Was it just human error? We all do make mistakes afterall! Or was it a symptom of something bigger?

Is this a training issue? Was it a timing or workload error? Is it a problem with the systems or processes? Is the documentation unclear (or non-existent)? **The goal is not blame - the goal is to make the mistake unrepeatable from here!**

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# Thanks for coming!

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*Lumina Spark for teams*