

COLLABORATION AND TEAMS: HOW HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS BUILD TRUST

by Ron Friedman
January 10, 2024

Summary. It's no surprise that trust is at the core of high-performing teams. But conversations about cultivating trust at work often focus on the relationship between managers and employees. As important — if not more so — is establishing trust between teammates. To understand how the best teams build trust among themselves, researchers interviewed 1,000 U.S.-based office workers and identified five key behaviors that set these teams apart: 1) They don't leave collaboration to chance; 2) They keep colleagues in the loop; 3) They share credit; 4) They believe disagreements make them better; and 5) They proactively address tension.

If you're like most seasoned leaders, you've heard a lot in recent years about the value of trust.

Employees who trust their organizations show higher engagement, creativity, and productivity. Those who don't experience more stress, increased burnout, and are more likely to quit. Fostering trust, therefore, represents a crucial imperative for any leader looking to create a high-performing team.

Conversations about cultivating trust at work often focus on the relationship between managers and employees. While useful, this approach represents only half the equation. As important — if not more so — is establishing trust between teammates. After all, most employees work in teams, and the lion's share of their daily experience involves interacting with colleagues, often in the absence of a boss.

So, how do the best teams build trust among themselves?

To find out, my team at ignite80 (ignite80.com) surveyed 1,000 U.S.-based office workers, with the goal of pinpointing behaviors that differentiate high-performing teams and understanding we can learn from their approach.

To identify members of high-performing teams, we invited respondents to complete a survey about their attitudes, experiences, and behaviors at work. Embedded within our questionnaire were items asking workers to: 1) rate their team's effectiveness, and 2) compare their team's performance to other teams in their industry. Workers who scored their team a 10 out of 10 on both items were designated members of high-performing teams, allowing us to compare their behaviors against those of everyone else.

Our research found that high-performing teams are exceedingly rare; only 8.7% of respondents gave their teams qualifying scores. We also identified five key behaviors related to trust that set these teams apart.

High-Performing Teams Don't Leave Collaboration to Chance

When launching a project, many teams follow a predictable cadence: They assign tasks and start working. High-performing teams, on the other hand, are more than three times more likely to begin by first discussing how they will work together, paving the way for fewer misunderstandings and smoother collaboration down the road.

How exactly do you have a conversation about collaborating? In his new book, *How to Work with (Almost) Anyone*, Michael Bungay Stanier provides a series of prompts teammates can use to conduct what he calls "Keynote Conversations" before starting a project. Colleagues take turns sharing: 1) the tasks at which they excel, 2) their communication preferences, and 3) successful and unsuccessful collaborations they've experienced in the past. Critically, Stanier also recommends proactively creating a strategy for when things go awry, by inviting team members to devise a plan for handling any breakdowns in collaboration, should they occur.

Ultimately, the precise prompts your team uses to establish collaboration

norms matter less than engaging in a dialogue on how you will work together. Doing so contributes to trust by signaling respect for one another's strengths and preferences, securing agreement on process, and inviting team members to speak up when they notice opportunities for improvement.

High-Performing Teams Keep Colleagues in the Loop

Another factor that differentiates high-performing teams is their tendency to proactively share information.

Greater transparency doesn't just foster trust — it's also been shown to fuel creativity, performance, and profitability. In contrast, when colleagues withhold information from their teammates, there are frequently deeper issues at play. "Knowledge hiding," as it's referred to in academic literature, often suggests a lack of psychological safety or an underlying power struggle.

In our study, we found that members of high-performing teams are significantly more likely to take responsibility for keeping others informed rather than expecting a manager to do so. In other words, they don't just avoid hoarding information — they go out of their way to keep colleagues in the loop, creating a culture of inclusion.

High-Performing Teams Share Credit

Receiving praise for a job well-done isn't just rewarding, it also contains an important team-building opportunity — one that high-performing teams leverage often.

Instead of soaking up praise alone, members of high-performing teams are more likely to share recognition for their accomplishments with teammates by acknowledging or thanking those who played a role in their success. In so doing, they increase the likelihood of their colleagues feeling appreciated and



COLLABORATION AND TEAMS: CONT.

promote a norm of reciprocity, both of which contribute to the experience of trust.

It's a clever approach — and not just because it fosters better teamwork. Recent studies indicate that when we share credit for our accomplishments, we appear more likable without seeming any less capable.

High-Performing Teams Believe Disagreements Make Them Better

Years ago, psychologist John Gottman noticed something odd about happy marriages: thriving couples often fight more than unhappy ones. More important than the sheer number of disagreements, Gottman's research revealed, is the way a couple navigates them.

Happy couples do all sort of things that make for more productive disagreements: They avoid name-calling and sarcasm, focus on what they need instead of their partner's failures, and use "I" statements to communicate in a way that makes their partner less defensive.

Like thriving marriages, high-performing teams don't experience less conflict. Where they differ is the way they interpret and respond to disagreements. Our findings indicate that high-performing teams are more likely to believe that workplace disagreements lead to better decisions (as opposed to damaging relationships). They also rate their teammates as more effective at preventing disagreements from getting personal.

These two observations are likely connected. A workplace disagreement can be perceived as an opportunity or a threat, and our interpretation influences the way we respond. Among high-performing teams, viewing conflict as a source of strength makes disagreement less harrowing, reducing the frequency with which colleagues lash out.

High-Performing Teams Proactively Address Tension

Members of high-performing teams don't just interpret conflict more adaptively — they're also more prone to taking the initiative in resolving it. In our study, we found that they are significantly more interested in "hearing if they upset a teammate," and more willing to proactively reach out if "something didn't feel right between me and a teammate."

Both responses reflect a broader tendency among high-performing teams to embrace a growth mindset when it comes to colleague relationships. This term is typically used to describe the way successful people respond to setbacks: by believing that outcomes can be improved through effort, learning, and perseverance.

Members of high-performing teams hold a similar perspective when it comes to workplace relationships. In our survey, they were significantly more likely to agree with the statements "even the best work relationships have their ups and downs," and "most work relationships can be damaged and repaired."

In other words, they believe tension is temporary and, with a little effort, thorny relationships can be salvaged. Those views make them more likely to take action in the face of the occasional relational blip.

...

It's no surprise that trust is at the core of high-performing teams. What our research reveals is the degree to which that trust emerges as a result of everyday peer-to-peer interactions that facilitate better communication and stronger teamwork.

Building trust in the workplace can't and shouldn't fall solely on the shoulders of management. After all, trust isn't

relied from the top down. It's built organically on a foundation of behaviors exhibited by all team members that empower everyone to produce their best work.

-RF

*Ron Friedman, PhD, is an award-winning psychologist and the founder of ignite80, a learning and development company that teaches leaders science-based strategies for building high-performing teams. His books include *The Best Place to Work: The Art and Science of Creating an Extraordinary Workplace*, and more recently, *Decoding Greatness: How the Best in the World Reverse Engineer Success*.*



LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS: TO BE A GREAT LEADER, YOU HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO DELEGATE WELL

by Jesse Sostrin
October 10, 2017

Summary. One of the most difficult transitions for leaders to make is the shift from doing to leading. As a new manager you can get away with holding on to work. Peers and bosses may even admire your willingness to keep “rolling up your sleeves” to execute tactical assignments. But as your responsibilities become more complex, the difference between an effective leader and a super-sized individual contributor with a leader’s title is painfully evident. To raise the ceiling of your leadership potential, you need to extend your presence through the actions of others, engaging people so that they contribute their best work to your shared priorities. To set the table for effective delegation, make sure you express why something is important to you, confirm that your expectations for the work have been clearly communicated, ask how much of your involvement they need, and practice saying no. Don’t let a focus on execution hold you back from the big-picture work of leading. If you delegate with these principles in mind, the work will get done, because the right people will be focused on the right tasks.

One of the most difficult transitions for leaders to make is the shift from doing to leading. As a new manager you can get away with holding on to work. Peers and bosses may even admire your willingness to keep “rolling up your sleeves” to execute tactical assignments. But as your responsibilities become more complex, the difference between an effective leader and a super-sized individual contributor with a leader’s title is painfully evident.

In the short term you may have the stamina to get up earlier, stay later, and out-work the demands you face. But the inverse equation of shrinking resources and increasing demands will eventually catch up to you, and at that point how you involve others sets the ceiling of your leadership impact. The upper limit of what’s possible will increase only with each collaborator you empower to contribute their best work to your shared priorities. Likewise, your power decreases with every initiative you unnecessarily hold on to.

While it may seem difficult, elevating your impact requires you to embrace an

unavoidable leadership paradox: You need to be more essential and less involved. When you justify your hold on work, you’re confusing being involved with being essential. But the two are not the same — just as being busy and being productive are not necessarily equal. Your involvement is a mix of the opportunities, mandates, and choices you make regarding the work you do. How ancillary or essential you are to the success of that portfolio depends on how decisively and wisely you activate those around you.

This means shaping the thoughts and ideas of others instead of dictating their plans, having a sought-after perspective but not being a required pass-through, and seeing your own priorities come to life through the inspired actions of others.

On the surface this advice may sound like common sense; it’s what motivational leaders should do. Yet too many of us are in a constant state of overextension, which fuels an instinctive reaction to “protect” work. This survival instinct ultimately dilutes our impact through an ongoing, limited effect on others.

To know if you’re guilty of holding on to too much, answer this simple question: If you had to take an unexpected week off work, would your initiatives and priorities advance in your absence?

If you answered no or if you’re unsure, then you may be more involved than essential. To raise the ceiling of your leadership potential, you need to extend your presence through the actions of others. Regardless of your preferred methodology for delegation, here are four strategies that I’ve found work for leaders at all levels.

Start with your reasons. When people lack understanding about why something matters and how they fit into it, they are less likely to care. But if you give them context about what’s at stake, how they fit into the big picture, and what’s unique about the opportunity, then you increase personal relevance and the odds of follow-through. Instead of giving just the business justification, make it a point to share your reasons. You can’t motivate somebody to care when you can’t express the reasons why it matters to you, so this essential step sets

the table for effective partnering. Otherwise, you leave people to come to their own conclusions about what you’re asking them to do and why. The risk of misalignment is highest during the first conversation, so make sure you articulate your reasons from the start.

Inspire their commitment. People get excited about what’s possible, but they commit only when they understand their role in making it happen. Once you’ve defined the work, clarified the scope of their contribution, and ensured that it aligns with their capacity, carefully communicate any and all additional expectations for complete understanding. This is crucial when you have a precise outcome or methodology in mind. They can’t read your mind, so if the finished product needs to be meticulous, be equally clear-cut in the ask. Once clarity is established, confirm their interpretation (face-to-face, or at least voice-to-voice, to avoid email misinterpretations). “But I told them how I wanted it done!” will not be the reason the ball got dropped; it will simply be the evidence that you didn’t confirm their understanding and inspire their commitment.

Engage at the right level. It’s essential to stay involved, but the degree matters. You should maintain engagement levels sufficient for you to deliver the agreed-upon mix of support and accountability. However, there are risks when the mix is not right: Too involved, and you could consciously or inadvertently micromanage those around you; too hands-off, and you could miss the critical moments where a supportive comment or vital piece of feedback would be essential. To pick your spot, simply ask people what the right level is based on their style. This not only clarifies the frequency of touchpoints they will find useful but also gives them autonomy in how the delegated work will move forward.

Practice saying “yes,” “no,” and “yes, if.” This is the art and science of being selective. Successful investors don’t divert their money into every opportunity that comes their way, so we should be equally discerning with our time. Start by carefully assessing every



LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS: CONT.

demand that comes your way, and align the asks with the highest-valued contributions that you're most skilled at making. For those requests that draw on this talent, you say yes and carve out the time and attention to be intimately involved. But for those requests that don't align, you say yes, if... and immediately identify other people to accomplish the goals through their direct involvement. You may still consult, motivate, and lead — but you're essential as the catalyst, not as the muscle doing the heavy lifting. This discerning approach may mean delegating some tasks to others, negotiating a reduction in your direct contribution, or just saying no while making the business case for why your effort and attention will have a greater impact elsewhere.

To illustrate these strategies in action, consider Anika. The word no was not in her vocabulary, and as a result she involved herself in every team priority. As demand continued to rise, Anika could no longer remain credibly engaged in everything. But since she staked out her territory in the middle, various initiatives began to stagnate. As members of her team stood idly by waiting for some of her precious time to consult on, review, or approve various items, their frustration grew. Anika found herself on the edge of burnout, while confronting a potential loss of credibility with her team.

The first step for Anika was challenging the definition of her leadership mandate. Up to that point, she defined her core responsibility like this: "I'm the one in charge of getting the job done." As she reflected on this, she recognized it as doer's mindset that lowered the ceiling of her potential impact. The proof was that in recent months her peers were included in various strategic conversations and business development opportunities with senior leaders, yet Anika, with no energy or space for these endeavors, was dealt out of these opportunities to demonstrate her upside.

She recognized that her focus on executing work was not only holding her back from the big-picture work of leading but also was the source of frustration among her junior staff. Although it was uncomfortable, she wanted to start giving them more rope. As Anika considered her obligation to develop others

— upskilling, providing tangible leadership experience, and so on — she redefined her leadership mandate to avoid being involved and not being essential: "I lead people, priorities, and projects — in that order — and the work will get done because the right people are focused on the right tasks."

With this refreshed vision, her next step was to reassess her portfolio. She looked at her calendar for the two weeks prior and two weeks ahead, then she counted the hours devoted to each effort (for example, through meetings, working sessions, and conference calls). Once she finished the time count, she ranked each item on a 10-point scale to assess how important the initiative was to the team's overall success.

This two-column exercise quickly revealed a few mismatches where Anika was devoting too much time and energy to priorities that were not in the top five. These were candidates for delegation, so her next step was to consider each team member's unique mix of skills and development needs in order to make an intelligent match regarding who could take on more responsibility. Some of the initiatives could be completely handed off, while others could be broken down into a few smaller pieces in order to involve others without a full transfer of responsibility.

With these new assignments in mind, she devoted 15–20 minutes preparing for each conversation. She brainstormed ways to share her reasons for the change, as well as how she could inspire their commitment. With eight team members, this was a significant investment of time on an already overloaded schedule, but Anika recognized it as a short-term cost to create long-term benefits.

Within a short period of time, Anika became considerably less involved in the details, but she remained essential to the purpose and momentum of each critical initiative. Said differently, her influence was ever-present, but the bottleneck dissolved.

Finally, with the additional bandwidth she created for herself, Anika was concerned that her knee-jerk tendency to say yes could

quickly erase the gains. So moving forward she made a commitment to apply the strategy of saying yes, no, or yes, if to new requests in order to avoid diluting her impact through involvement in areas that didn't align with her desired growth and personal brand. And to ensure an objective perspective, Anika asked a colleague to act as an ongoing sounding board for her when the factors were ambiguous and the right answer wasn't evident.

Staying mindful of these four strategies, working out the kinks like Anika did, and becoming proficient at empowering others to deliver their best builds your capacity to get the job done through the contributions of others. With this momentum you'll be able to focus on the secondary potential of your deliberate collaboration: to leverage each delegated task as an opportunity for others' development. Then, over time, they too can be more essential and less involved.

*Jesse Sostrin, PhD is a Director in PwC's Leadership Coaching Center of Excellence. The author of *The Manager's Dilemma*, *Beyond the Job Description*, and *Re-Making Communication at Work*, Jesse writes and speaks at the intersection of individual and organizational success. Follow him at @jessesostrin.*



EARLY CAREER: HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR WORK STYLE AS A NEW MANAGER

by Claire Hughes Johnson
March 03, 2023

Summary. Self-awareness in the workplace is always a superpower, but when you're new to management, it's even more important. You need to understand and communicate how you do your best work. Here are two exercises first-time managers can use to develop self-awareness:

First, identify your work style: Are you more introverted or extroverted? Are you more task-oriented or people-oriented?

Ask yourself: Do I do my best work in collaboration with others or by myself? Do I tend to place more value on doing things quickly and efficiently or on bringing people along in the process and generating consensus for the path forward? Where you fall will determine which of four work styles you fall into: the analyzer, the director, the collaborator, or the promoter.

Then, articulate your values. Imagine yourself late in life, reflecting on your career. In the end, what was most important to you? Write down 10 values that represent your ideal of that fulfilled life. Narrow the list down to five values, then three. Then, write down activities that embody each value. If your value is excellence, for example, an activity might be that you never deliver a project unless it's nearly perfect.

As a last step, be open with colleagues and direct reports about your work style and key values so they can understand what motivates you and how best to work with you — and provide feedback on the unconscious biases your values will inevitably create. You can even create a "Working with Me" document that clearly outlines how you like to work, your management style, your communication preferences, and more.

When I was an executive at Google, I worked with a talented manager who had one big flaw: He told his team everything.

"Eli" often broke company news to his team before anyone else had a chance to share it, or worried his team members by telling them how stressed he was about, say, a reorganization of our division. When I talked to him about it, Eli agreed that this was a problem. But he would not change his behavior.

Soon after one of these conversations, Eli and I took part in a training session in which we each reflected on the values that were most important to us. I'll never forget the story Eli told. When he was seven or eight, Eli's mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. Nobody told Eli what was happening — his family tried to pretend everything was okay. Eventually, Eli's mother was hospitalized, and he wasn't allowed to visit her. One day, Eli's stepfather picked him up from school and took him out to his favorite diner. Over pancakes, Eli learned his mother had died.

Eli's value was transparency.

Both Eli and I came away from that exercise changed. I learned that when you're dealing with a difficult behavior — in yourself or in others — there's often a deeper root cause. Eli gained a stronger awareness of why he communicated the way he did.

This episode underscored a core principle I've emphasized throughout my career and in my new book: Self-awareness in the workplace is always a superpower, but when you're new to management, it's even more important. You need to understand your strengths and challenge areas in order to do your best work and help other people do theirs.

Here, I'll share two exercises first-time managers can use to develop self-awareness, and communicate your work style and values to your teams.

Identify your work style.

Throughout my career, and in studying many personality and work style assessments, I've found that two main

criteria often determine people's work styles: 1) whether they're more introverted or extroverted; and 2) whether they're more task-oriented or people-oriented.

To determine whether you're more introverted or extroverted, ask yourself:

- Do I talk to think or think to talk?
- Do I do my best work in collaboration with others or by myself?
- Do meetings and group work make me feel more energized or depleted?

I don't consider myself a heavy extrovert, for example, but I do need to talk out my ideas to arrive at the best answers. If you're more extroverted, you may find that talking through a challenge with a colleague or collaboratively problem-solving with your team will help you come to a more thought-out conclusion. If you're more introverted, you may find it more productive to think through plans or solutions independently before sharing them with a wider group for feedback, probably in an email or document rather than a meeting.

To determine whether you're more task-oriented or people-oriented, consider:

- Am I more likely to focus on the work itself or on the people doing it?
- Do I tend to place more value on doing things quickly and efficiently or on bringing people along in the process and generating consensus for the path forward?
- When faced with a problem, am I more likely to start thinking about solutions or gathering perspectives on the situation from others?



EARLY CAREER: CONT.

Task-oriented people tend to pay more attention to the most efficient way to get things done and less to generating buy-in around the right approach. Folks who are more people-oriented tend to build consensus around the path forward, but they may lose sight of completing the task efficiently in the interest of bringing people along.

Where you fall on the axes below will help you determine which of four work styles you fall into. I call them the analyzer, the director, the collaborator, and the promoter:

What's Your Work Style?



Source: Adapted from *Scaling People: Tactics for Management and Company Building*, by Claire Hughes Johnson

HBR

What's your work style? Two main criteria often determine people's work styles. The first is whether they're more introverted or extroverted, and the second is whether they're more task-oriented or people-oriented. This two by two chart will help you identify your work style based on where you fall on these continua.

Four quadrants represent the four work styles: Analyzers, in the top left, are introverted and task-oriented. Directors, in the top right, are extroverted and task-oriented. Collaborators, in the bottom left, are introverted and people-oriented. Promoters, in the bottom right, are extroverted and people oriented.

- **Analyzers** make rigorous, deliberate, and data-driven decisions. They're great at coming to the right answer, but they may have trouble acting without data. They may not be as skilled at collaborating, building processes, or seeking consensus.

- **Directors** are opinionated and great at establishing a vision. They have a bias toward action because they care about getting to the right outcomes quickly, but that means they often dictate exactly what needs to be done, which can disempower others, or do the work themselves without bringing others along.

- **Collaborators** care a lot about stakeholders or customers, whether that's an internal customer (like another team) or an external one. They're great at building systems and processes, but they may overcomplicate those systems because they don't want to leave anyone out.

- **Promoters** tend to have a lot of ideas. They're great at building relationships, and they're able to articulate an inspiring narrative that others want to get behind. But they're less concerned with details or administration, so they're often great starters but not always finishers.

Knowing your work style — and, ideally, that of your direct reports — will help you be a more effective and empathetic manager. In terms of your team, you can use the work style assessment to ensure it's well-rounded, representing a mix of work style preferences and strengths. For yourself, it will help you be mindful of your weaker points and when they're likely to show up, allowing your to prepare a plan around how you'll address them.

For example, as a director, I know that when faced with a problem or an urgent situation I tend to be too quick to jump to action. Instead, I try to follow this rule in team settings: Before jumping to

solutions, I ask a question first. This keeps me from moving too quickly and helps my team work on their own problem-solving skills.

Articulate your values.

The next step is to identify the values that motivate you. The combination of your work style and values guides how you lead and collaborate with others. Try this exercise:

1. Imagine yourself late in life, reflecting on your career. In the end, what was most important to you?

2. Write down 10 values that represent your ideal of that fulfilled life. (Some examples might be accomplishment, balance, community, joy, impact, and learning.)

3. Narrow the list down to five values, then three.

4. Write down activities that embody each value. If your value is excellence, for example, an activity might be that you never deliver a project unless it's nearly perfect.

5. Consider the positive outcomes of those values as well as the trade-offs. Valuing excellence, for instance, might also mean you push your team to deliver great work, but often set unrealistic expectations or unattainable deadlines.

Think about the values you identified. How do they intersect with your work style? Recognizing this can help you uncover and address your unconscious biases, lean into your strengths, and communicate both of them better with others. For example, if you value community and are a collaborator, you may go the extra mile to connect with and create psychological safety for your team, but perhaps through this exercise, you noticed that you don't give people enough autonomy. Or maybe you value



EARLY CAREER: CONT.

impact and are a director. You may be excellent at driving results, but less experienced at slowing down and teaching your direct reports the skills they need to learn on their own.

Communicate your work style and values.

Be open with your direct reports about your work style and the values that drive you so they can understand how best to work with you and provide feedback on the unconscious biases your values inevitably create. You can even create a “Working with Me” document that clearly outlines how you like to collaborate, your management style, your communication preferences, the areas you’re working on, and more. Better yet, have your team members walk through the same exercise as a group, with a greater focus on their communication preferences and work habits. Then, adjust to meet each other halfway and watch how you quickly your collaboration improves.

The values exercise Eli and I did was a masterclass in self- and mutual awareness. It became clear that Eli wanted to communicate with his team in a more productive way, but withholding information felt like a betrayal of his commitment to transparency. Understanding this, we were able to find a path forward: Eli would consult his peers and manager before sharing critical decisions with his team, and he would be more measured in how he communicated those decisions. But we would also committed to trustworthy and clear communication as part of every plan we made. He and his team were stronger for it, as was our entire organization.

Self-awareness is a skill that will serve you throughout your career, and one that you should continue to develop and nurture over time. It can be the key trait that differentiates you from others early on, and it will help you steer toward work that makes the most of what you have to offer — now and in

the years ahead of you.

Claire Hughes Johnson is a corporate officer and adviser for Stripe, a global technology company that builds economic infrastructure for the internet. Prior to Stripe, Claire spent 10 years at Google leading a number of business teams. She is the author of Scaling People: Tactics for Management and Company Building.

“Working with Me” Template

My role

Describe your role and goals.

About me

Describe your personality, communication preferences, and boundaries.

Operating approach

Include how you like to work, your day-to-day cadence (including 1:1s, other recurring staff meetings, and your operating cadence), what to loop you in on, longer-term strategic and planning cadence, and how you keep a pulse on your team and meet with them.

Management style

Add a few bullet points that summarize how you manage people. Are you collaborative, hands-on, or hands-off? Explain how you make decisions and give and receive feedback, context you like to get, and any principles or North Stars you reference.

Supporting you and your team

Set expectations around how you’ll discuss individuals’ careers, development, and goals together, as well as check in on progress. Also, indicate how you’d like to be included on teams’ work, including materials and forums.



LEADERSHIP AND MANAGING PEOPLE: WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY?

by Amy Gallo
February 15, 2023

Summary. What exactly is psychological safety? It's a term that's used a lot but is often misunderstood. In this piece, the author answers the following questions with input from Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson, who coined the phrase "team psychological safety": 1) What is psychological safety? 2) Why is psychological safety important? 3) How has the idea evolved? 4) How do you know if your team has it? 5) How do you create psychological safety? 6) What are common misconceptions?

No one likes to deliver bad news to their boss. But that's exactly what I had to do when a project I'd been working on wasn't delivering the results we expected. I'd been a big advocate for our team taking on the initiative and, personally, I'd invested a lot of time into it — and convinced others to do the same.

When I met with my manager to present the data, which showed that we hadn't recouped our investment and the initiative had performed worse than planned, I was nervous. I would've understood if she had been frustrated or even angry and I expected her to at least ask "What went wrong?" or "How could we have prevented this?" (both questions I'd prepared answers for).

Instead, she asked a simple question: What did you learn?

I now understand that what she was doing was building psychological safety. She understood that learning was key — my (and her team's) future performance depended on it. Psychological safety is a critical concept for teams and the people that lead them. It's also a topic we've covered quite a bit at HBR. But not everyone knows or fully understands it, so I reached out to Amy Edmondson, the Harvard Business School professor and author of *The*

Fearless Organization, who coined the phrase "team psychological safety," to get a refresher on this important idea. I asked her about where the term originated, how it's evolved, and, of course, how people can think about building psychological safety on their own teams.

What is psychological safety?

Let's start with a definition. Team psychological safety is a shared belief held by members of a team that it's OK to take risks, to express their ideas and concerns, to speak up with questions, and to admit mistakes — all without fear of negative consequences. As Edmondson puts it, "it's felt permission for candor."

Edmondson first landed on the concept when she was doing research for her PhD. She had set out to study the relationship between error making and teamwork in hospitals, expecting to find that more effective teams made fewer mistakes. But what she found was that the teams who reported better teamwork seemed to experience more errors. When she dug into the data, she began to suspect that better teams might be more willing to report their mistakes — because they felt safe doing so — and conducted follow up research to explore that hypothesis.

The "team" in team psychological safety is important. "This is a group level phenomenon — it shapes the learning behavior of the group and in turn affects team performance and therefore organizational performance," she says. As Edmondson explained to me, the sense of safety and willingness to speak up is not an individual trait, even though it's something you do feel and experience at the individual level; "it's an emergent property of the group." In fact, in most studies, people who work closely together have similar levels of psychological safety compared to people in other teams.

Why is psychological safety important?

First, psychological safety leads to team members feeling more engaged and motivated, because they feel that their contributions matter and that they're able to speak up without fear of retribution. Second, it can lead to better decision-making, as people feel more comfortable voicing their opinions and concerns, which often leads to a more diverse range of perspectives being heard and considered. Third, it can foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement, as team members feel comfortable sharing their mistakes and learning from them. (This is what my boss was doing in the opening story.)

All of these benefits — the impact on a team's performance, innovation, creativity, resilience, and learning — have been proven in research over the years, most notably in Edmondson's original research and in a study done at Google. That research, known as Project Aristotle, aimed to understand the factors that impacted team effectiveness across Google. Using over 30 statistical models and hundreds of variables, that project concluded that who was on a team mattered less than how the team worked together. And the most important factor was psychological safety.

Further research has shown the incredible downsides of not having psychological safety, including negative impacts on employee well-being, including stress, burnout, and turnover, as well as on the overall performance of the organization.

How has the idea evolved?

I asked Edmondson how the idea has changed in the 20 years since she first starting writing about it. Academics have discovered some important nuances. For example, she points out



LEADERSHIP AND MANAGING PEOPLE: CONT.

that psychological safety seems to matter more in work environments where employees need to use their discretion. As she explains, “The relationship between psychological safety and performance is stronger in situations where the results or work aren’t prescribed, when you’re doing something creative, novel, or truly collaborative.” She has also written about how hybrid work requires that managers expand how they think about psychological safety.

She and others have also been looking at how psychological safety interacts with diversity on teams. New research by Edmondson and Henrik Bresman, a professor of organizational behavior at INSEAD, has shown that on teams with high psychological safety, expertise diversity was positively associated with performance. While their study is a single one in a single industry (drug development), it’s an important proof point “that psychological safety may be the key to realizing the promise of diversity in teams.”

How do you know if your team has it?

This is likely the question on many leaders’ minds. Edmondson has developed a simple 7-item questionnaire to assess the perception of psychological safety (if you want to run this survey with your team, there’s an instrument you can sign up to use on Edmondson’s website).

How people answer these questions will give you a sense of the degree to which they feel psychologically safe:

If you make a mistake on this team, it is not held against you.

Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.

People on this team sometimes accept others for being different.

It is safe to take a risk on this team.

It isn’t difficult to ask other members of this team for help.

No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.

Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.

Edmondson cautions however that the scores are not definitive; what matters is the variance. “Anyone filling out a survey is doing so in a way that is relative to their expectations,” she says. “For example, if I say ‘yes, I can ask for help’ I’m doing that relative to what I think it ‘ought’ to be.” She suggests managers use the data from the survey to reflect on your team’s experience and be curious about what you could change to improve that experience. Which leads to another critical question: what can you do to foster psychological safety?

How do you create psychological safety?

Edmondson is quick to point out that “it’s more magic than science” and it’s important for managers to remember this is “a climate that we co-create, sometimes in mysterious ways.”

Anyone who has worked on a team marked by silence and the inability to speak up, knows how hard it is to reverse that.

A lot of what goes into creating a psychologically safe environment are good management practices — things like establishing clear norms and expectations so there is a sense of predictability and fairness; encouraging open communication and actively listening to employees; making sure team members feel supported; and showing appreciation and humility when people do speak up.

There are a few additional tactics that

Edmondson points to as well.

Make clear why employees’ voices matter.

For most people, it feels safe to hold back and stay silent — they default to keeping their ideas and opinions to themselves. “You have to override that instinct by setting the stage for them to speak up,” she says. Explain clearly and specifically why you need to hear from them, why their viewpoint and input matters, and how it will affect the outcomes of the work.

Admit your own fallibility.

If you, as a leader, can own up to and demonstrate how you’ve learned from your mistakes, it paves the way for others. It’s important to model the behavior you want to see in your team and normalize vulnerability. This includes things like being respectful, open to feedback, and willing to take risks.

Actively invite input.

Don’t assume people will tell you what they’re thinking or that they understand that you want their input. “Explicitly request it,” says Edmondson. She suggests asking open-ended questions like: What are you seeing? What are your thoughts on this? Where do you stand on this idea?

Respond productively.

You can tell people you want their input or it’s OK to make mistakes, but they won’t do those things if they feel like they’re being blamed or shut down. Edmondson suggests asking yourself: When people speak up with a wacky idea or tough feedback, how do you respond? Be “appreciative and forward-thinking.” Also, replace blame with curiosity. As author and coach Laura Delizonna writes, “If team



LEADERSHIP AND MANAGING PEOPLE: CONT.

members sense that you're trying to blame them for something, you become their saber-toothed tiger... The alternative to blame is curiosity. If you believe you already know what the other person is thinking, then you're not ready to have a conversation. Instead, adopt a learning mindset, knowing you don't have all the facts."

What are common misconceptions?

I also asked Edmondson if there are any myths or misconceptions about psychological safety and she pointed to two.

"It's all about being nice."

Edmondson says that creating a psychologically safe environment isn't about being "nice." In fact, there are many polite workplaces that don't have psychological safety because there's no candor, and people feel silenced by the enforced politeness. "Unfortunately, at work, nice is often synonymous with not being candid."

"You must feel comfortable in a psychologically safe environment."

"Too many people think that it's about feeling comfortable all the time and that you can't say anything that makes someone else uncomfortable or you're violating psychological safety," says Edmondson. That's simply not true. Learning and messing up and pointing out mistakes is usually uncomfortable. Being vulnerable will feel risky. The key is to take risks in a safe environment – one without negative interpersonal consequences. "Anything hard to achieve requires being uncomfortable along the way." She shares the analogy of an Olympic gymnast. In her training, she pushes herself and her body; she takes risks but does so in a way that she won't get injured. Edmondson reminds us, "Candor is hard but non-candor is worse."

My boss's simple response when I came to her feeling defeated has had a huge impact on me. That one question – What did you learn? – changed the way that I view my own missteps – with more compassion and understanding – and how I treat others when they make mistakes. As my experience shows, by making psychological safety a priority, leaders set up their teams for success now and long into the future.

Amy Gallo is a contributing editor at Harvard Business Review, cohost of the Women at Work podcast, and the author of two books: Getting Along: How to Work with Anyone (Even Difficult People) and the HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict. She writes and speaks about workplace dynamics. Watch her TEDx talk on conflict and follow her on LinkedIn.



LEADERSHIP QUALITIES: WHAT MAKES A LEADER?

IQ AND TECHNICAL SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT, BUT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IS THE SINE QUA NON OF LEADERSHIP.

by Daniel Goleman
From the Magazine (January 2004)

Summary. When asked to define the ideal leader, many would emphasize traits such as intelligence, toughness, determination, and vision—the qualities traditionally associated with leadership. Such skills and smarts are necessary but insufficient qualities for the leader. Often left off the list are softer, more personal qualities—but they are also essential. Although a certain degree of analytical and technical skill is a minimum requirement for success, studies indicate that emotional intelligence may be the key attribute that distinguishes outstanding performers from those who are merely adequate.

Psychologist and author Daniel Goleman first brought the term “emotional intelligence” to a wide audience with his 1995 book of the same name, and Goleman first applied the concept to business with this 1998 classic HBR article. In his research at nearly 200 large, global companies, Goleman found that truly effective leaders are distinguished by a high degree of emotional intelligence. Without it, a person can have first-class training, an incisive mind, and an endless supply of good ideas, but he still won't be a great leader.

The chief components of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill—can sound unbusinesslike, but Goleman, cochair of the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, based at Rutgers University, found direct ties between emotional intelligence and measurable business results. The notion of emotional intelligence and its relevance to business has continued to spark debate over the past six years, but Goleman's article remains the definitive reference on the subject, with a detailed discussion of each component of emotional intelligence, how to recognize it in potential leaders, how and why it connects to performance, and how it can be learned.

Every businessperson knows a story about a highly intelligent, highly skilled executive who was promoted into a leadership position only to fail at the job. And they also know a story about someone with solid—but not extraordinary—intellectual abilities and

technical skills who was promoted into a similar position and then soared.

Such anecdotes support the widespread belief that identifying individuals with the “right stuff” to be leaders is more art than science. After all, the personal styles of superb leaders vary: Some leaders are subdued and analytical; others shout their manifestos from the mountaintops. And just as important, different situations call for different types of leadership. Most mergers need a sensitive negotiator at the helm, whereas many turnarounds require a more forceful authority.

I have found, however, that the most effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: They all have a high degree of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence. It's not that IQ and technical skills are irrelevant. They do matter, but mainly as “threshold capabilities”; that is, they are the entry-level requirements for executive positions. But my research, along with other recent studies, clearly shows that emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership. Without it, a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive, analytical mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but he still won't make a great leader.

The Five Components of Emotional Intelligence at Work

	Definition	Hallmarks
SELF-AWARENESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Self-confidenceRealistic self-assessmentSelf-deprecating sense of humor
SELF-REGULATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moodsThe propensity to suspend judgment—to think before acting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Trustworthiness and integrityComfort with ambiguityOpenness to change
MOTIVATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or statusA propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Strong drive to achieveOptimism, even in the face of failureOrganizational commitment
EMPATHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The ability to understand the emotional makeup of other peopleSkill in treating people according to their emotional reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Expertise in building and retaining talentCross-cultural sensitivityService to clients and customers
SOCIAL SKILL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Proficiency in managing relationships and building networksAn ability to find common ground and build rapport	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Effectiveness in leading changePersuasivenessExpertise in building and leading teams

HBR



LEADERSHIP QUALITIES: CONT.

In the course of the past year, my colleagues and I have focused on how emotional intelligence operates at work. We have examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and effective performance, especially in leaders. And we have observed how emotional intelligence shows itself on the job. How can you tell if someone has high emotional intelligence, for example, and how can you recognize it in yourself? In the following pages, we'll explore these questions, taking each of the components of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill—in turn.

Evaluating Emotional Intelligence

Most large companies today have employed trained psychologists to develop what are known as “competency models” to aid them in identifying, training, and promoting likely stars in the leadership firmament. The psychologists have also developed such models for lower-level positions. And in recent years, I have analyzed competency models from 188 companies, most of which were large and global and included the likes of Lucent Technologies, British Airways, and Credit Suisse.

In carrying out this work, my objective was to determine which personal capabilities drove outstanding performance within these organizations, and to what degree they did so. I grouped capabilities into three categories: purely technical skills like accounting and business planning; cognitive abilities like analytical reasoning; and competencies demonstrating emotional intelligence, such as the ability to work with others and effectiveness in leading change.

To create some of the competency models, psychologists asked senior managers at the companies to identify the capabilities that typified the organization's most outstanding leaders. To create other models, the psychologists used objective criteria, such as a division's profitability, to differentiate the star performers at senior levels within their organizations from the average ones. Those individuals were then extensively interviewed and tested, and their capabilities were compared. This process resulted in the creation of lists of ingredients for highly

effective leaders. The lists ranged in length from seven to 15 items and included such ingredients as initiative and strategic vision.

When I analyzed all this data, I found dramatic results. To be sure, intellect was a driver of outstanding performance. Cognitive skills such as big-picture thinking and long-term vision were particularly important. But when I calculated the ratio of technical skills, IQ, and emotional intelligence as ingredients of excellent performance, emotional intelligence proved to be twice as important as the others for jobs at all levels.

Moreover, my analysis showed that emotional intelligence played an increasingly important role at the highest levels of the company, where differences in technical skills are of negligible importance. In other words, the higher the rank of a person considered to be a star performer, the more emotional intelligence capabilities showed up as the reason for his or her effectiveness. When I compared star performers with average ones in senior leadership positions, nearly 90% of the difference in their profiles was attributable to emotional intelligence factors rather than cognitive abilities.

Other researchers have confirmed that emotional intelligence not only distinguishes outstanding leaders but can also be linked to strong performance. The findings of the late David McClelland, the renowned researcher in human and organizational behavior, are a good example. In a 1996 study of a global food and beverage company, McClelland found that when senior managers had a critical mass of emotional intelligence capabilities, their divisions outperformed yearly earnings goals by 20%. Meanwhile, division leaders without that critical mass underperformed by almost the same amount. McClelland's findings, interestingly, held as true in the company's U.S. divisions as in its divisions in Asia and Europe.

In short, the numbers are beginning to tell us a persuasive story about the link between a company's success and the emotional intelligence of its leaders. And just as important, research is also demonstrating that people can, if they take the right approach, develop their emotional intelligence. (See the sidebar “Can Emotional Intelligence Be Learned?”)

Can Emotional Intelligence Be Learned?

For ages, people have debated if leaders are born or made. So too goes the debate about emotional intelligence. Are people born with certain levels of empathy, for example, or do they acquire empathy as a result of life's experiences? The answer is both. Scientific inquiry strongly suggests that there is a genetic component to emotional intelligence. Psychological and developmental research indicates that nurture plays a role as well. How much of each perhaps will never be known, but research and practice clearly demonstrate that emotional intelligence can be learned.

One thing is certain: Emotional intelligence increases with age. There is an old-fashioned word for the phenomenon: maturity. Yet even with maturity, some people still need training to enhance their emotional intelligence. Unfortunately, far too many training programs that intend to build leadership skills—including emotional intelligence—are a waste of time and money. The problem is simple: They focus on the wrong part of the brain.

Emotional intelligence is born largely in the neurotransmitters of the brain's limbic system, which governs feelings, impulses, and drives. Research indicates that the limbic system learns best through motivation, extended practice, and feedback. Compare this with the kind of learning that goes on in the neocortex, which governs analytical and technical ability. The neocortex grasps concepts and logic. It is the part of the brain that figures out how to use a computer or make a sales call by reading a book. Not surprisingly—but mistakenly—it is also the part of the brain targeted by most training programs aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence. When such programs take, in effect, a neocortical approach, my research with the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations has shown they can even have a negative impact on people's job performance.

To enhance emotional intelligence, organizations must refocus their training to



LEADERSHIP QUALITIES: CONT.

include the limbic system. They must help people break old behavioral habits and establish new ones. That not only takes much more time than conventional training programs, it also requires an individualized approach.

Imagine an executive who is thought to be low on empathy by her colleagues. Part of that deficit shows itself as an inability to listen; she interrupts people and doesn't pay close attention to what they're saying. To fix the problem, the executive needs to be motivated to change, and then she needs practice and feedback from others in the company. A colleague or coach could be tapped to let the executive know when she has been observed failing to listen. She would then have to replay the incident and give a better response; that is, demonstrate her ability to absorb what others are saying. And the executive could be directed to observe certain executives who listen well and to mimic their behavior.

With persistence and practice, such a process can lead to lasting results. I know one Wall Street executive who sought to improve his empathy—specifically his ability to read people's reactions and see their perspectives. Before beginning his quest, the executive's subordinates were terrified of working with him. People even went so far as to hide bad news from him. Naturally, he was shocked when finally confronted with these facts. He went home and told his family—but they only confirmed what he had heard at work. When their opinions on any given subject did not mesh with his, they, too, were frightened of him.

Enlisting the help of a coach, the executive went to work to heighten his empathy through practice and feedback. His first step was to take a vacation to a foreign country where he did not speak the language. While there, he monitored his reactions to the unfamiliar and his openness to people who were different from him. When he returned home, humbled by his week abroad, the executive asked his coach to shadow him for parts of the day, several times a week, to critique how he treated people with new or different perspectives. At the same time, he consciously used on-the-job interactions as opportunities to practice "hearing" ideas that

differed from his. Finally, the executive had himself videotaped in meetings and asked those who worked for and with him to critique his ability to acknowledge and understand the feelings of others. It took several months, but the executive's emotional intelligence did ultimately rise, and the improvement was reflected in his overall performance on the job.

It's important to emphasize that building one's emotional intelligence cannot—will not—happen without sincere desire and concerted effort. A brief seminar won't help; nor can one buy a how-to manual. It is much harder to learn to empathize—to internalize empathy as a natural response to people—than it is to become adept at regression analysis. But it can be done. "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson. If your goal is to become a real leader, these words can serve as a guidepost in your efforts to develop high emotional intelligence.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the first component of emotional intelligence—which makes sense when one considers that the Delphic oracle gave the advice to "know thyself" thousands of years ago. Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives. People with strong self-awareness are neither overly critical nor unrealistically hopeful. Rather, they are honest—with themselves and with others.

People who have a high degree of self-awareness recognize how their feelings affect them, other people, and their job performance. Thus, a self-aware person who knows that tight deadlines bring out the worst in him plans his time carefully and gets his work done well in advance. Another person with high self-awareness will be able to work with a demanding client. She will understand the client's impact on her moods and the deeper reasons for her frustration. "Their trivial demands take us away from the real work that needs to be done," she might explain. And she will go one step further and turn her anger into something constructive.

Self-awareness extends to a person's understanding of his or her values and goals. Someone who is highly self-aware knows where he is headed and why; so, for example, he will be able to be firm in turning down a job offer that is tempting financially but does not fit with his principles or long-term goals. A person who lacks self-awareness is apt to make decisions that bring on inner turmoil by treading on buried values. "The money looked good so I signed on," someone might say two years into a job, "but the work means so little to me that I'm constantly bored." The decisions of self-aware people mesh with their values; consequently, they often find work to be energizing.

How can one recognize self-awareness? First and foremost, it shows itself as candor and an ability to assess oneself realistically. People with high self-awareness are able to speak accurately and openly—although not necessarily effusively or confessionally—about their emotions and the impact they have on their work. For instance, one manager I know of was skeptical about a new personal-shopper service that her company, a major department-store chain, was about to introduce. Without prompting from her team or her boss, she offered them an explanation: "It's hard for me to get behind the rollout of this service," she admitted, "because I really wanted to run the project, but I wasn't selected. Bear with me while I deal with that." The manager did indeed examine her feelings; a week later, she was supporting the project fully.

Such self-knowledge often shows itself in the hiring process. Ask a candidate to describe a time he got carried away by his feelings and did something he later regretted. Self-aware candidates will be frank in admitting to failure—and will often tell their tales with a smile. One of the hallmarks of self-awareness is a self-deprecating sense of humor.

Self-awareness can also be identified during performance reviews. Self-aware people know—and are comfortable talking about—their limitations and strengths, and they often demonstrate a thirst for constructive criticism. By contrast, people



LEADERSHIP QUALITIES: CONT.

with low self-awareness interpret the message that they need to improve as a threat or a sign of failure.

Self-aware people can also be recognized by their self-confidence. They have a firm grasp of their capabilities and are less likely to set themselves up to fail by, for example, overstretching on assignments. They know, too, when to ask for help. And the risks they take on the job are calculated. They won't ask for a challenge that they know they can't handle alone. They'll play to their strengths.

Consider the actions of a midlevel employee who was invited to sit in on a strategy meeting with her company's top executives. Although she was the most junior person in the room, she did not sit there quietly, listening in awestruck or fearful silence. She knew she had a head for clear logic and the skill to present ideas persuasively, and she offered cogent suggestions about the company's strategy. At the same time, her self-awareness stopped her from wandering into territory where she knew she was weak.

Despite the value of having self-aware people in the workplace, my research indicates that senior executives don't often give self-awareness the credit it deserves when they look for potential leaders. Many executives mistake candor about feelings for "wimpiness" and fail to give due respect to employees who openly acknowledge their shortcomings. Such people are too readily dismissed as "not tough enough" to lead others.

In fact, the opposite is true. In the first place, people generally admire and respect candor. Furthermore, leaders are constantly required to make judgment calls that require a candid assessment of capabilities—their own and those of others. Do we have the management expertise to acquire a competitor? Can we launch a new product within six months? People who assess themselves honestly—that is, self-aware people—are well suited to do the same for the organizations they run.

Self-Regulation

Biological impulses drive our emotions. We cannot do away with them—but we can do

much to manage them. Self-regulation, which is like an ongoing inner conversation, is the component of emotional intelligence that frees us from being prisoners of our feelings. People engaged in such a conversation feel bad moods and emotional impulses just as everyone else does, but they find ways to control them and even to channel them in useful ways.

Imagine an executive who has just watched a team of his employees present a botched analysis to the company's board of directors. In the gloom that follows, the executive might find himself tempted to pound on the table in anger or kick over a chair. He could leap up and scream at the group. Or he might maintain a grim silence, glaring at everyone before stalking off.

But if he had a gift for self-regulation, he would choose a different approach. He would pick his words carefully, acknowledging the team's poor performance without rushing to any hasty judgment. He would then step back to consider the reasons for the failure. Are they personal—a lack of effort? Are there any mitigating factors? What was his role in the debacle? After considering these questions, he would call the team together, lay out the incident's consequences, and offer his feelings about it. He would then present his analysis of the problem and a well-considered solution.

Why does self-regulation matter so much for leaders? First of all, people who are in control of their feelings and impulses—that is, people who are reasonable—are able to create an environment of trust and fairness. In such an environment, politics and infighting are sharply reduced and productivity is high. Talented people flock to the organization and aren't tempted to leave. And self-regulation has a trickle-down effect. No one wants to be known as a hothead when the boss is known for her calm approach. Fewer bad moods at the top mean fewer throughout the organization.

Second, self-regulation is important for competitive reasons. Everyone knows that business today is rife with ambiguity and change. Companies merge and break apart regularly. Technology transforms work at a dizzying pace. People who have mastered their emotions are able to roll with the

changes. When a new program is announced, they don't panic; instead, they are able to suspend judgment, seek out information, and listen to the executives as they explain the new program. As the initiative moves forward, these people are able to move with it.

Sometimes they even lead the way. Consider the case of a manager at a large manufacturing company. Like her colleagues, she had used a certain software program for five years. The program drove how she collected and reported data and how she thought about the company's strategy. One day, senior executives announced that a new program was to be installed that would radically change how information was gathered and assessed within the organization. While many people in the company complained bitterly about how disruptive the change would be, the manager mulled over the reasons for the new program and was convinced of its potential to improve performance. She eagerly attended training sessions—some of her colleagues refused to do so—and was eventually promoted to run several divisions, in part because she used the new technology so effectively.

I want to push the importance of self-regulation to leadership even further and make the case that it enhances integrity, which is not only a personal virtue but also an organizational strength. Many of the bad things that happen in companies are a function of impulsive behavior. People rarely plan to exaggerate profits, pad expense accounts, dip into the till, or abuse power for selfish ends. Instead, an opportunity presents itself, and people with low impulse control just say yes.

By contrast, consider the behavior of the senior executive at a large food company. The executive was scrupulously honest in his negotiations with local distributors. He would routinely lay out his cost structure in detail, thereby giving the distributors a realistic understanding of the company's pricing. This approach meant the executive couldn't always drive a hard bargain. Now, on



LEADERSHIP QUALITIES: CONT.

occasion, he felt the urge to increase profits by withholding information about the company's costs. But he challenged that impulse—he saw that it made more sense in the long run to counteract it. His emotional self-regulation paid off in strong, lasting relationships with distributors that benefited the company more than any short-term financial gains would have.

The signs of emotional self-regulation, therefore, are easy to see: a propensity for reflection and thoughtfulness; comfort with ambiguity and change; and integrity—an ability to say no to impulsive urges.

Like self-awareness, self-regulation often does not get its due. People who can master their emotions are sometimes seen as cold fish—their considered responses are taken as a lack of passion. People with fiery temperaments are frequently thought of as “classic” leaders—their outbursts are considered hallmarks of charisma and power. But when such people make it to the top, their impulsiveness often works against them. In my research, extreme displays of negative emotion have never emerged as a driver of good leadership.

Motivation

If there is one trait that virtually all effective leaders have, it is motivation. They are driven to achieve beyond expectations—their own and everyone else's. The key word here is achieve. Plenty of people are motivated by external factors, such as a big salary or the status that comes from having an impressive title or being part of a prestigious company. By contrast, those with leadership potential are motivated by a deeply embedded desire to achieve for the sake of achievement.

If you are looking for leaders, how can you identify people who are motivated by the drive to achieve rather than by external rewards? The first sign is a passion for the work itself—such people seek out creative challenges, love to learn, and take great pride in a job well done. They also display an unflagging energy to do things better. People with such energy often seem restless with the status quo. They are persistent with their questions about why things are done one

way rather than another; they are eager to explore new approaches to their work.

A cosmetics company manager, for example, was frustrated that he had to wait two weeks to get sales results from people in the field. He finally tracked down an automated phone system that would beep each of his salespeople at 5 PM every day. An automated message then prompted them to punch in their numbers—how many calls and sales they had made that day. The system shortened the feedback time on sales results from weeks to hours.

That story illustrates two other common traits of people who are driven to achieve. They are forever raising the performance bar, and they like to keep score. Take the performance bar first. During performance reviews, people with high levels of motivation might ask to be “stretched” by their superiors. Of course, an employee who combines self-awareness with internal motivation will recognize her limits—but she won't settle for objectives that seem too easy to fulfill.

And it follows naturally that people who are driven to do better also want a way of tracking progress—their own, their team's, and their company's. Whereas people with low achievement motivation are often fuzzy about results, those with high achievement motivation often keep score by tracking such hard measures as profitability or market share. I know of a money manager who starts and ends his day on the internet, gauging the performance of his stock fund against four industry-set benchmarks.

Interestingly, people with high motivation remain optimistic even when the score is against them. In such cases, self-regulation combines with achievement motivation to overcome the frustration and depression that come after a setback or failure. Take the case of another portfolio manager at a large investment company. After several successful years, her fund tumbled for three consecutive quarters, leading three large institutional clients to shift their business elsewhere.

Some executives would have blamed the

nosedive on circumstances outside their control; others might have seen the setback as evidence of personal failure. This portfolio manager, however, saw an opportunity to prove she could lead a turnaround. Two years later, when she was promoted to a very senior level in the company, she described the experience as “the best thing that ever happened to me; I learned so much from it.”

Executives trying to recognize high levels of achievement motivation in their people can look for one last piece of evidence: commitment to the organization. When people love their jobs for the work itself, they often feel committed to the organizations that make that work possible. Committed employees are likely to stay with an organization even when they are pursued by headhunters waving money.

It's not difficult to understand how and why a motivation to achieve translates into strong leadership. If you set the performance bar high for yourself, you will do the same for the organization when you are in a position to do so. Likewise, a drive to surpass goals and an interest in keeping score can be contagious. Leaders with these traits can often build a team of managers around them with the same traits. And of course, optimism and organizational commitment are fundamental to leadership—just try to imagine running a company without them.

Empathy

Of all the dimensions of emotional intelligence, empathy is the most easily recognized. We have all felt the empathy of a sensitive teacher or friend; we have all been struck by its absence in an unfeeling coach or boss. But when it comes to business, we rarely hear people praised, let alone rewarded, for their empathy. The very word seems unbusinesslike, out of place amid the tough realities of the marketplace.

But empathy doesn't mean a kind of “I'm OK, you're OK” mushiness. For a leader, that is, it doesn't mean adopting other people's emotions as one's own and trying to please everybody. That would be a nightmare—it



LEADERSHIP QUALITIES: CONT.

would make action impossible. Rather, empathy means thoughtfully considering employees' feelings—along with other factors—in the process of making intelligent decisions.

For an example of empathy in action, consider what happened when two giant brokerage companies merged, creating redundant jobs in all their divisions. One division manager called his people together and gave a gloomy speech that emphasized the number of people who would soon be fired. The manager of another division gave his people a different kind of speech. He was up-front about his own worry and confusion, and he promised to keep people informed and to treat everyone fairly.

The difference between these two managers was empathy. The first manager was too worried about his own fate to consider the feelings of his anxiety-stricken colleagues. The second knew intuitively what his people were feeling, and he acknowledged their fears with his words. Is it any surprise that the first manager saw his division sink as many demoralized people, especially the most talented, departed? By contrast, the second manager continued to be a strong leader, his best people stayed, and his division remained as productive as ever.

Empathy is particularly important today as a component of leadership for at least three reasons: the increasing use of teams; the rapid pace of globalization; and the growing need to retain talent.

Consider the challenge of leading a team. As anyone who has ever been a part of one can attest, teams are cauldrons of bubbling emotions. They are often charged with reaching a consensus—which is hard enough with two people and much more difficult as the numbers increase. Even in groups with as few as four or five members, alliances form and clashing agendas get set. A team's leader must be able to sense and understand the viewpoints of everyone around the table.

That's exactly what a marketing manager at a large information technology company was able to do when she was appointed to lead a troubled team. The group was in turmoil,

overloaded by work and missing deadlines. Tensions were high among the members. Tinkering with procedures was not enough to bring the group together and make it an effective part of the company.

So the manager took several steps. In a series of one-on-one sessions, she took the time to listen to everyone in the group—what was frustrating them, how they rated their colleagues, whether they felt they had been ignored. And then she directed the team in a way that brought it together: She encouraged people to speak more openly about their frustrations, and she helped people raise constructive complaints during meetings. In short, her empathy allowed her to understand her team's emotional makeup. The result was not just heightened collaboration among members but also added business, as the team was called on for help by a wider range of internal clients. Globalization is another reason for the rising importance of empathy for business leaders. Cross-cultural dialogue can easily lead to miscues and misunderstandings. Empathy is an antidote. People who have it are attuned to subtleties in body language; they can hear the message beneath the words being spoken. Beyond that, they have a deep understanding of both the existence and the importance of cultural and ethnic differences.

Consider the case of an American consultant whose team had just pitched a project to a potential Japanese client. In its dealings with Americans, the team was accustomed to being bombarded with questions after such a proposal, but this time it was greeted with a long silence. Other members of the team, taking the silence as disapproval, were ready to pack and leave. The lead consultant gestured them to stop. Although he was not particularly familiar with Japanese culture, he read the client's face and posture and sensed not rejection but interest—even deep consideration. He was right: When the client finally spoke, it was to give the consulting firm the job.

Finally, empathy plays a key role in the retention of talent, particularly in today's information economy. Leaders have always needed empathy to develop and keep good people, but today the stakes are higher.

When good people leave, they take the company's knowledge with them.

That's where coaching and mentoring come in. It has repeatedly been shown that coaching and mentoring pay off not just in better performance but also in increased job satisfaction and decreased turnover. But what makes coaching and mentoring work best is the nature of the relationship. Outstanding coaches and mentors get inside the heads of the people they are helping. They sense how to give effective feedback. They know when to push for better performance and when to hold back. In the way they motivate their protégés, they demonstrate empathy in action.

In what is probably sounding like a refrain, let me repeat that empathy doesn't get much respect in business. People wonder how leaders can make hard decisions if they are "feeling" for all the people who will be affected. But leaders with empathy do more than sympathize with people around them: They use their knowledge to improve their companies in subtle but important ways.

Social Skill

The first three components of emotional intelligence are self-management skills. The last two, empathy and social skill, concern a person's ability to manage relationships with others. As a component of emotional intelligence, social skill is not as simple as it sounds. It's not just a matter of friendliness, although people with high levels of social skill are rarely mean-spirited. Social skill, rather, is friendliness with a purpose: moving people in the direction you desire, whether that's agreement on a new marketing strategy or enthusiasm about a new product.

Socially skilled people tend to have a wide circle of acquaintances, and they have a knack for finding common ground with people of all kinds—a knack for building rapport. That doesn't mean they socialize continually; it means they work according to the assumption that nothing important gets done alone. Such people have a network in place when the time for action comes.



LEADERSHIP QUALITIES: CONT.

Social skill is the culmination of the other dimensions of emotional intelligence. People tend to be very effective at managing relationships when they can understand and control their own emotions and can empathize with the feelings of others. Even motivation contributes to social skill.

Remember that people who are driven to achieve tend to be optimistic, even in the face of setbacks or failure. When people are upbeat, their “glow” is cast upon conversations and other social encounters. They are popular, and for good reason.

Because it is the outcome of the other dimensions of emotional intelligence, social skill is recognizable on the job in many ways that will by now sound familiar. Socially skilled people, for instance, are adept at managing teams—that’s their empathy at work. Likewise, they are expert persuaders—a manifestation of self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy combined. Given those skills, good persuaders know when to make an emotional plea, for instance, and when an appeal to reason will work better. And motivation, when publicly visible, makes such people excellent collaborators; their passion for the work spreads to others, and they are driven to find solutions.

But sometimes social skill shows itself in ways the other emotional intelligence components do not. For instance, socially skilled people may at times appear not to be working while at work. They seem to be idly schmoozing—chatting in the hallways with colleagues or joking around with people who are not even connected to their “real” jobs. Socially skilled people, however, don’t think it makes sense to arbitrarily limit the scope of their relationships. They build bonds widely because they know that in these fluid times, they may need help someday from people they are just getting to know today.

For example, consider the case of an executive in the strategy department of a global computer manufacturer. By 1993, he was convinced that the company’s future lay with the internet. Over the course of the next year, he found kindred spirits and used his social skill to stitch together a virtual community that cut across levels, divisions, and nations. He then used this de facto team

to put up a corporate website, among the first by a major company. And, on his own initiative, with no budget or formal status, he signed up the company to participate in an annual internet industry convention. Calling on his allies and persuading various divisions to donate funds, he recruited more than 50 people from a dozen different units to represent the company at the convention.

Management took notice: Within a year of the conference, the executive’s team formed the basis for the company’s first internet division, and he was formally put in charge of it. To get there, the executive had ignored conventional boundaries, forging and maintaining connections with people in every corner of the organization.

Is social skill considered a key leadership capability in most companies? The answer is yes, especially when compared with the other components of emotional intelligence. People seem to know intuitively that leaders need to manage relationships effectively; no leader is an island. After all, the leader’s task is to get work done through other people, and social skill makes that possible. A leader who cannot express her empathy may as well not have it at all. And a leader’s motivation will be useless if he cannot communicate his passion to the organization. Social skill allows leaders to put their emotional intelligence to work.

It would be foolish to assert that good old-fashioned IQ and technical ability are not important ingredients in strong leadership. But the recipe would not be complete without emotional intelligence. It was once thought that the components of emotional intelligence were “nice to have” in business leaders. But now we know that, for the sake of performance, these are ingredients that leaders “need to have.”

It is fortunate, then, that emotional intelligence can be learned. The process is not easy. It takes time and, most of all, commitment. But the benefits that come from having a well-developed emotional intelligence, both for the individual and for the organization, make it worth the effort.

This article is also included in the book HBR

at 100: The Most Influential and Innovative Articles from Harvard Business Review’s First Century (Harvard Business Review Press, 2022).

- DG

Daniel Goleman, best known for his writing on emotional intelligence, is codirector of the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations at Rutgers University. His latest book is Building Blocks of Emotional Intelligence, a 12-primer set on each of the emotional intelligence competencies, and he offers training on the competencies through an online learning platform, Emotional Intelligence Training Programs. His other books include Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence and Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body.

