

## Google's Optimal Teaming Mapped to Safety, Belonging, Mattering

In Power Your Tribe chapter 5 we talk about creating optimal teams. Google did some comprehensive multi-year research on this topic. I'll refer to it below and map it to our work over the past 30 years with safety, belonging and mattering.

What Makes An Optimal Team?

Alignment, communication, collaboration, energy management, leverage, trust, what else?

We've found it all comes back to safety, belonging, mattering no matter what structure you want to wrap around optimal teaming. Let's look at what Google learned in their extensive research on the topic.

Over the course of two years (ending in Nov 2015) they conducted over 200 interviews where they assessed over 250 attributes of what they thought made an optimal team. The findings from the 180 teams they studied were surprising.

While they had hoped to find a "recipe" for an optimal team (take one Ivy League MBA, one extrovert, one expert engineer, etc.), they actually found that *who* was on the team mattered far less than *how* they interacted, structured their work, experienced their contributions. The answer was in behavior and emotional resilience. Their work echoed some of what Carnegie Mellon found back in 2010 with their collective intelligence work.

They learned that five key dynamics resulted in optimal teams:

1. **Psychological safety:** Can we take risks on this team without feeling insecure or embarrassed?
2. **Dependability:** Can we count on each other to do high quality work on time?
3. **Structure & clarity:** Are goals, roles, and execution plans on our team clear?
4. **Meaning of work:** Are we working on something that is personally important for each of us?

5. **Impact of work:** Do we fundamentally believe that the work we're doing matters?



Five Factors of an Optimal Team per Google

Google found that Psychological Safety was by far the most important dynamic. Without this people don't feel comfortable speaking up, asking questions, checking in. There's too much risk of being labeled as "out of it" or "clueless". All humans want to be "in" the group (to belong) and we'll take tremendous risks (like not speaking out even if we feel it's very important) if we feel we'll become an outcast as a result, or lose status in our tribe, or be ostracized somehow.

Googlers now use a tool they call gTeams. It's a 10-minute check in on the five dynamics. We'll do a modified check in below, one that our clients find works very well. To tie this topic up in a bow, over the past year over 3,000 Googlers across 300 teams have used gTeams and focused on the 5 factors above. They often will kick off team

meetings by each team member sharing a risk they took in the past week. The net-net is they've seen Psychological Safety ratings increase by 6% and Structure/Clarity increase by 10%. But the best part is the increased connection in the team due to increased communication.

### **Rate Your Team Per Google's Five Dynamics**

Consider the five factors from Google:

- Psychological Safety
- Dependability
- Structure & Clarity
- Meaning of Work
- Impact of Work

On a scale of 1-5 where 5 is excellent, rate your experience of each factor in your team. Now total up your score. Here's our rating format. If your total score is:

Up to 10: High Risk. There's a lot of work to do. Use the table below to map to safety, belonging, mattering, get a neuroscience-based coach, and get to work healing your culture.

11-18: Risky. Your team is not performing nearly as well as it could. Let's get everyone more connected and collaborative. Time for team training and coaching.

19-25: Solid. Congrats! You're on a high-performing team. Time to raise the bar!

Below is a shortcut to help you figure out where to focus, how to get better, and a way to talk about this concept with your teammates in a structured way.

Let's now map frameworks:

**Safety, Belonging, Mattering Mapped to Google's Optimal Teams**

<b>Google Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Safety, Belonging, Mattering</b>
<b>Psychological safety</b>	Can we take risks on this team without feeling insecure or embarrassed?	Safety, Belonging
<b>Dependability</b>	Can we count on each other to do high quality work on time?	Safety, Belonging, Mattering
<b>Structure &amp; clarity</b>	Are goals, roles, and execution plans on our team clear?	Safety, Belonging
<b>Meaning of work</b>	Are we working on something that is personally important for each of us?	Mattering
<b>Impact of work</b>	Do we fundamentally believe that the work we're doing matters?	Mattering

Easy, yes? Everything basically maps to safety, belonging, mattering. All other models simply help you implement programs to deliver these three core human needs. See how this model helps your team!