




## **CRACKING THE CODE ON TEAM PERFORMANCE**

Why psychological safety  
is the key to high performing,  
resilient teams



**“IF A COMPANY WANTS TO OUTSTRIP ITS COMPETITORS, IT NEEDS TO INFLUENCE NOT ONLY HOW PEOPLE WORK BUT ALSO HOW THEY WORK TOGETHER.”** The New York Times Magazine on Project Aristotle

How do you determine what makes a team perform at their highest level? With new technologies and collaboration models shaping how we work, this question is more vital than ever. Contrary to conventional wisdom, team performance is not primarily driven by: skills, experience, background, performance record or personality of individual team members or even of team leaders.

In fact, leading companies such as Google and Microsoft (backed by the latest research out of Harvard Business School) focus on psychological safety as the most important factor in predicting team performance.

**Psychological safety describes a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves.**

Psychological safety was first studied at MIT in the 1960s and found to be essential for making employees feel secure enough to adjust in the face of organizational challenges. But there has been a resurgence of interest in the last 20 years along with the increasing importance of innovation, creativity, and teamwork in the workplace. In that time, researchers have found psychological safety to be consistently related to team performance and team behaviors associated with innovation including:

- + Creative idea generation
- + Learning from failures
- + Voicing concerns
- + Experimentation
- + Learning behaviors
- + Problem solving
- + Successful task conflict outcomes
- + Work engagement
- + Task performance
- + Information sharing
- + Job commitment

In simple terms, psychological safety sets the stage for innovation. In fact, psychological safety may make the difference between innovation processes that work and those that fail.

# IN PURSUIT OF THE PERFECT TEAM: PROJECT ARISTOTLE

In 2012, Google tasked a team of their best organizational psychologists, statisticians, engineers, and sociologists with uncovering what makes a high-performance team. The massive two-year study, Project Aristotle, gathered data from 180 teams and thousands of Google employees. The Results: None of the hundreds of team composition variables analyzed for the study (e.g., personality traits, skills, demographics) stood out as significant.

In fact, they found that teams with very similar compositions could have drastically different performance records. The five factors (see below) that consistently emerged as statistically significant predictors of team performance were not related to team composition but to how the teams worked together. Of these five team performance factors, team psychological safety stood out as the most impactful.

Team factors that predict team performance

TEAM FACTORS	DEFINITION
<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY</b>	Team members feel safe to take interpersonal risks without fear of consequences
<b>DEPENDABILITY</b>	Team members reliably complete quality work on time
<b>STRUCTURE AND CLARITY</b>	Goals are specific, challenging, and attainable
<b>MEANING</b>	Work has personal meaning for team members
<b>IMPACT</b>	Team members experience their work as making a difference, contributing to the organization's goals

Bottom line: It matters less who is on the team than how the team works together.

*“Innovation comes from the embrace of divergent and novel points of view, which are precisely the ideas that die first in a psychologically unsafe environment”*

Microsoft - The Art of Teamwork

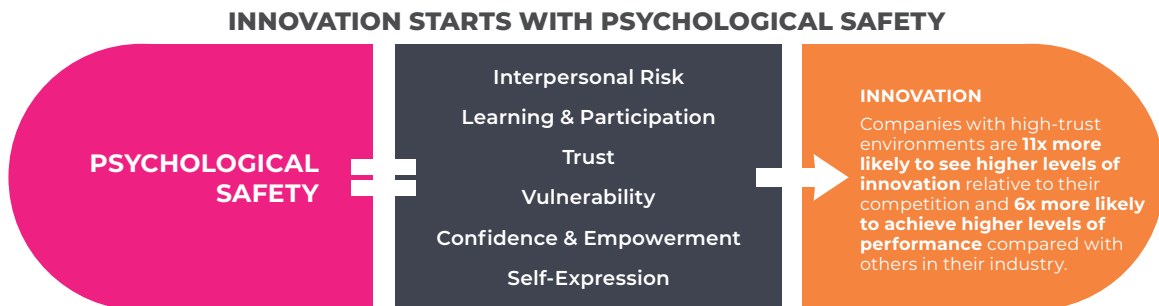
## SO, WHAT DOES A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE TEAM LOOK LIKE?

Psychologically safe work environments support divergent thinking and risk taking, creativity, exploratory dialogue, and failure based learning – all of these are associated with performance in fields that rely heavily on collaboration and innovation. Teams high in psychological safety can tolerate cognitive friction, discomfort, and debate.

Psychological safety creates an atmosphere that supports:

- + Idea sharing
- + Reflecting on performance
- + Information sharing
- + Suggesting a new approach
- + Asking questions
- + Speaking up
- + Admitting mistakes
- + Asking for help
- + Taking initiative
- + Disagreeing
- + Self-expression
- + Creativity

In other words, behaviors that lead to market breakthroughs!



## HOW DO I CREATE A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE, HIGH-PERFORMING TEAM?

The first step is to assess your team on the factors that define psychological safety. It is essential to quantify these factors in order to pinpoint opportunities to take targeted action. The *TeamCheck* and *InsightScan* are unique SaaS products within a proprietary assessment platform designed by fable+ that will help you identify what is keeping your teams from performing at their absolute highest levels.

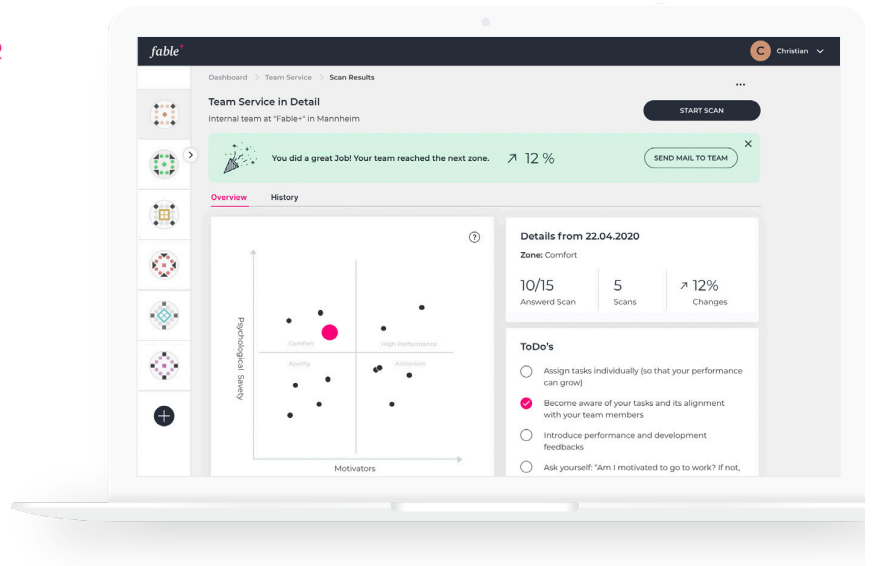
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