

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/what-google-learned-from-its-quest-to-build-the-perfect-team.html?mwrsm=Email&_r=0

My noteworthy takeaways quoted directly from article:

- “We’re living through a golden age of understanding personal productivity,”
- “All of a sudden, we can pick apart the small choices that all of us make, decisions most of us don’t even notice, and figure out why some people are so much more effective than everyone else.”
- The time spent by managers and employees in collaborative activities has ballooned by 50 percent or more over the last two decades and that, at many companies, more than three-quarters of an employee’s day is spent communicating with colleagues.
- Studies also show that people working in teams tend to achieve better results and report higher job satisfaction. In a 2015 study, executives said that profitability increases when workers are persuaded to collaborate more.
- We had lots of data, but there was nothing showing that a mix of specific personality types or skills or backgrounds made any difference. The ‘who’ part of the equation didn’t seem to matter.’
- As they struggled to figure out what made a team successful, Rozovsky and her colleagues kept coming across research by psychologists and sociologists that focused on what are known as “group norms.” Norms are the traditions, behavioral standards and unwritten rules that govern how we function when we gather
- After looking at over a hundred groups for more than a year, Project Aristotle researchers concluded that understanding and influencing group norms were the keys to improving Google’s teams.
- As the researchers studied the groups, however, they noticed two behaviors that all the good teams generally shared. First, on the good teams, members spoke in roughly the same proportion, a phenomenon the researchers referred to as “equality in distribution of conversational turn-taking.” On some teams, everyone spoke during each task; on others, leadership shifted among teammates from assignment to assignment. But in each case, by the end of the day, everyone had spoken roughly the same amount. “As long as everyone got a chance to talk, the team did well,” Woolley said. “But if only one person or a small group spoke all the time, the collective intelligence declined.”
- Second, the good teams all had high “average social sensitivity” — a fancy way of saying they were skilled at intuiting how others felt based on their tone of voice, their expressions and other nonverbal cues.
- People (on the successful Team B) may speak over one another, go on tangents and socialize instead of remaining focused on the agenda. The team may seem inefficient to a casual observer. But all the team members speak as much as they need to. They are sensitive to one another’s moods and share personal stories and emotions. While Team B might not contain as many individual stars, the sum will be greater than its parts.
- Shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.” Psychological safety is “a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up... It describes a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves.”

- Research on psychological safety pointed to particular norms that are vital to success. There were other behaviors that seemed important as well — like making sure teams had clear goals and creating a culture of dependability.
- Google’s intense data collection and number crunching have led it to the same conclusions that good managers have always known. In the best teams, members listen to one another and show sensitivity to feelings and needs
- Project Aristotle is a reminder that when companies try to optimize everything, it’s sometimes easy to forget that success is often built on experiences — like emotional interactions and complicated conversations and discussions of who we want to be and how our teammates make us feel — that can’t really be optimized.