- *Coordinating projects with cross-functional dependencies*: Sometimes multiple projects are dependent upon each other, and you are the one that oversees all projects. People in one project group might make decisions that affect another project group without knowing it. Or they might come up with an idea that would be beneficial for another project group without knowing it. With the right mechanisms to track progress you can spot risks and opportunities, and connect the right people at the right moments.
- *Providing a sense of encouragement*: If people progress well within their projects, it's nice for them to show you what they did. In particular when people have a high sense of autonomy and an ability to come up with creative solutions, they will be proud to show you the solutions they came up with. They may want to brainstorm with you about what more is possible as a result of these solutions. With the right mechanisms for tracking progress, people can always connect to you in order to showcase critical new ideas, solutions and milestones they achieved.
- *Evaluating people's performance and providing in the moment feedback*: Great managers don't wait with evaluating people's performance and giving feedback until the performance evaluation. They do it all the time. By evaluating performance and providing feedback all the time, you give people a chance to learn and grow, and you set them up for maximum success. And if they did not do well, despite you keeping a close eye and providing in the moment feedback, then it's clear why a performance rating is lower and you avoid surprises. More about that in the next chapter about performance evaluations.
- *Writing next quarter's OKRs*: Tracking of progress on OKRs and milestones of the *previous* quarter, is the input you need for writing OKRs for the *next* quarter. With the right mechanisms in place, you will know which projects went slower than expected, and which ones faster. You might spot milestones that were achieved, or solutions found that open new doors for projects in the next quarter. All of that input will go into OKR-writing for the next quarter. If it's near the end of the year, it will also be an input for next year's annual plan.

The good news is: if you apply the principles from the previous chapter about meaningful meetings, you've already done eighty percent of the work when it comes to tracking progress. Your one-on-one meetings were platforms where you could check in with individuals on the progress on their OKRs, challenges they faced, ideas they had, etcetera. You will have had many opportunities of giving them honest and actionable feedback. You've been able to encourage them and compliment them, or nudge them into a different direction.

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Through your presence at project meetings you've been able to see how people in the project group collaborate, how they make decisions and make progress. You've been able to support them at moments where they got stuck, or needed a decision, or resource, or something else. You've been able to keep the work of different project groups aligned. There have been moments where project groups could share their progress with you, and with the entire team in the project's deep dives at the team's meeting. All of these things combined mean that you've ticked almost all of the boxes for tracking progress.

The only thing still missing is formal scoring of OKRs. I recommend doing this twice per quarter. First as a mid-quarter check-in. This makes you and team members conscious of critical projects that could be at risk, so that you can collectively prioritize and focus efforts in the second half of the quarter in order to hit the most critical milestones. The second time you score OKRs is about two weeks before the end of the quarter. That's also the kick-off for the next quarter's OKR-writing process. There are four steps in the process of scoring OKRs:

1. Team members score their individual OKRs.
2. They discuss scores with their manager, correct them if needed and the manager signs off.
3. The team lead aggregates all scores by scoring team OKRs.
4. Actions and implications are discussed.
   a. For mid-quarter scoring, decisions are made to prioritize and focus efforts. It could be that expectation management needs to be done with stakeholders when a certain output cannot be delivered.
   b. For end-quarter scoring, decisions are made to set OKRs for next quarter.

The OKR-scores and achievements are also an important input for performance evaluations. I will cover that in more detail in the next chapter about performance management. Let's first have a look at how OKR-scores work.

OKR-scoring

The scoring of OKRs is done by applying a number between 0 and 1. You'd think that a score of 1 indicates the OKR was achieved—but that's not how most Silicon Valley companies do it. A score of 0.6 or 0.7 is typically considered "on target." A score of 1 indicates you have strongly over-achieved on an OKR. Anything below 0.6 means the OKR has not been completely achieved. A score of 0 means there was no progress at all. Key results are scored first. Objective scores are the average of the scores of the key results under the objective. You can choose to weigh some key results heavier than others if you believe they are

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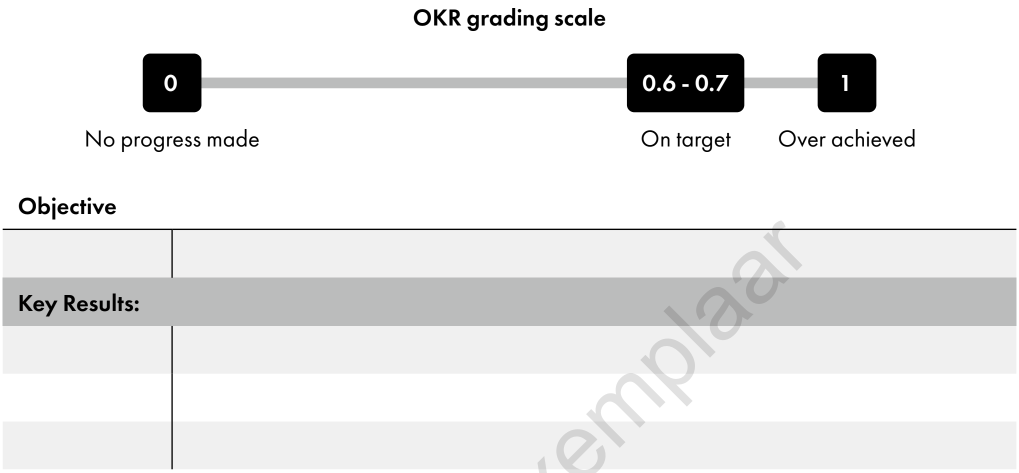
more important. The example OKRs Scorecard in figure 17 is from Google's re: Work website. This site also explains Google's philosophy on OKR-scoring.

Figure 17 *OKRs Scorecard from rework.withgoogle.com.*



The scoring definitions relate to the way goals are set. Google often sets goals that are just beyond the threshold of what seems possible, sometimes referred to as *stretch goals*. Creating stretch goals is tricky, as it could be seen as setting a team up for failure. However, such goals can tend to attract the best people, and create the most exciting work environments. Moreover, when aiming high, even failed goals tend to result in substantial advancements.

The key is clearly communicating the nature of stretch goals and what are the thresholds for success. Google likes to set OKRs so that success means achieving seventy percent of the objectives, while fully reaching them is considered an extraordinary exception. When a sequence of seventy percent achievements on stretch goals adds up across many quarters, the combined achievement will be much more remarkable than what people would have achieved if you had set goals you already knew were feasible in advance. This way of thinking, setting and scoring goals keeps people on their toes: Larry Page calls that "uncomfortably excited."

This only works if you as a manager ensure that people understand this philosophy. And you must combine it with a clear sense of prioritization using P0,

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P1 and P2 labels the way I described when covering the fourth Brilliant Basic about OKR-writing. If you don't apply the principle of priority labels well, setting stretch goals almost inevitably leads to workload issues and stress. It's also critical that you create high levels of psychological safety in your team. It's hard for people to accept stretch goals when they don't feel safe. Psychological safety is covered in part II of the book about high-performing teams.

So it's expected that, on average, team members end up scoring their OKRs 0.7. In this model, if a team member scores all of their OKRs 1, that would be a signal that the manager and that team member haven't set sufficiently challenging goals. What is a good score also depends on the priority label of the OKR. A 0.3 score on a P2 OKR is never a problem. A 0.3 score on a P0 OKR is a big problem, because P0 OKRs are the must-deliver OKRs. It's particularly a problem if a P0 OKR scores too low, if there haven't been any escalations about this that could have prevented the low score from happening. Both the manager and the team member should have intervened at a moment when course correcting was still possible if they saw that this P0 OKR was at risk. The only scenario where scoring low on a P0 OKR is acceptable is if all people have escalated to the right channels, and had still ended up hitting barriers that couldn't be overcome. In that scenario they must instantly manage the expectations of all stakeholders. If they did all of that, the low score on the P0 OKR is not a surprise and not a problem.

A range of high scores of your OKRs doesn't automatically mean you get a favorable performance evaluation. It's the impact of the OKRs that makes the difference. Not the score

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One implication of the above is that OKR-scores are not synonymous to your performance evaluation. A range of high scores of your OKRs doesn't automatically mean you get a favorable performance evaluation. It's the impact of the OKRs that makes the difference. Not the score. An 0.6-score on a stretch OKR can mean a team member delivered more impact than another team member which had a score 1 for an OKR that was easily achievable. When team members don't understand that their performance score is *not* a sum of their OKR-scores, some might start playing around with OKR-scores to look better, and the quality of your information for decisions about next quarter's OKRs will go down.

You can choose to deviate from this way of scoring if you think it doesn't fit the way of working or the culture in your organization. You might choose to make 1 the score that indicates "on target." Whatever scoring method you choose, make sure all people understand it and apply it consistently. Otherwise you cannot consistently interpret the results. You can even choose to use a completely different method than OKRs for setting goals and priorities. That's all OK, as long as you have at least some mechanism that helps people understand what is expected from them, how to prioritize their work, and how progress will be tracked and evaluated.

Critical points

- Ongoing tracking of progress, including scoring of OKRs, is critical to avoid people getting stuck, to identify when they go off brief, to spot cross-functional risks or opportunities, to provide in the moment feedback, and to course correct in time.
- It's important that all people use the same definitions when scoring OKRs, and that they understand their performance evaluation is defined by their impact, not by the OKR-scores.

Basic 5 Fair and predictable performance evaluations

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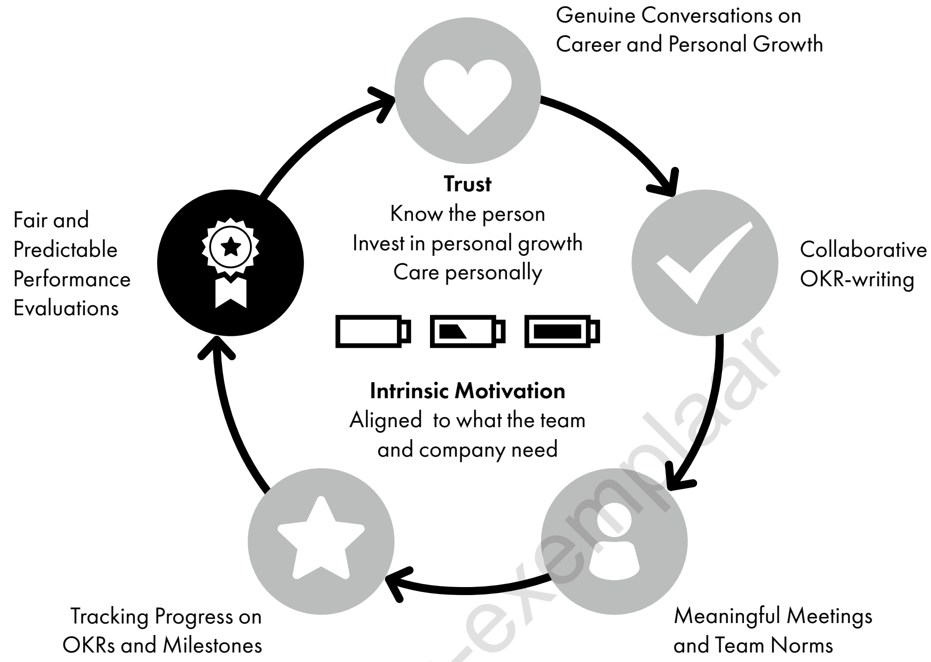
The fifth and last Brilliant Basic is "Fair & Predictable Performance Evaluations." When you applied all previous Brilliant Basics structurally and with genuine intent, delivering on this last Brilliant Basic is much easier. In the most favorable scenario, the performance evaluation is a predictable summary: of accomplishments that were agreed and delivered, and of feedback that had already been given, resulting in a rating and reward that were in line with expectations of your team members.

Unfortunately, this isn't always reality. In less favorable scenarios, people may experience moments where their manager has unrealistic expectations of them, or gives them unexpected, unclear, inactionable or unfair feedback and evaluations. When elements of performance evaluations are perceived as unfair or unpredictable, it damages all Brilliant Basics you've established. It's your job as a manager to manage people's perception. If you don't get it right, trust and intrinsic motivation will erode as a result. A performance evaluation is the mo-

Figure 18 *The fifth Brilliant Basic is "Fair & Predictable Performance Evaluations".*



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ment when people can see whether "your money is where your mouth is." It's relatively easy to give people encouraging words about their impact and performance. But it's extremely hard to do this in a way that manages expectations within the boundaries of the performance evaluation and the reward-system in your organization.

> *In the most favorable scenario, the performance evaluation is a predictable summary: of accomplishments that were agreed and delivered, and of feedback that had already been given, resulting in a rating and reward that were in line with expectations of your team members*

When things go wrong during people's performance evaluations, most of the time lack of investment in the *other* four Brilliant Basics is actually the root cause. For example, it's hard to have aligned expectations about output, if you haven't invested enough quality time in the process of writing OKRs and tracking progress. And without the right cadence and quality of meetings, it's easy for expectations to gradually grow out of sync without noticing, or you might notice it too late for team members to still demonstrate a turnaround. Without the right frequency and depth of career conversations, it's hard to develop the depth of understanding of team members that is needed to align projects and OKRs to their intrinsic motivations. People will run projects with less energy as a result, which will have consequences in performance evaluation that might have been avoided. If you don't spend enough quality time with people at one-on-one meetings, or if levels of trust in the relationship aren't high enough, it can be hard to give people the in-the-moment feedback they need in order to avoid surprises in performance evaluations. Finally, the largest part of people's feeling of being valued and rewarded comes from being seen and appreciated by their manager and leadership. With the right level of personal care, people in lower paid jobs can feel highly rewarded, while lack of personal care can make highly paid people feel undervalued.

With the right level of personal care, people in lower paid jobs can feel highly rewarded, while lack of personal care can make highly paid people feel undervalued

'Fair and predictable' doesn't mean scores and rewards always need to be high. It doesn't mean you always need to give people what they want. In fact, in my Google Digital Academy team I went through six years with almost no churn: only one person left the team. The rest meanwhile grew their skills and experience. That created a luxury problem. There wasn't a lot of scope for promotions in my team, and the distribution of ratings I needed to hold people to didn't change along with people's professional development. I gradually needed to increase the bar in performance evaluations: getting the same level of ratings gradually got harder for people. And because scores are linked to pay, achieving high financial reward also got harder. Despite all that, my manager scores remained positive.

There was still some sentiment of unfairness here and there, when people felt it was easier to get rewarded and promoted in other teams. But people trusted that I applied performance-evaluation principles in a fair and predictable way

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within the boundaries of our team. I also honestly shared with people that future growth-opportunities within the team were limited. That meant people could consciously choose whether or not to stay with the team, knowing what the consequences would be. People don't score you favorable as a manager because you always give them what they want. They score you favorable when they believe you understand who they are and what value they bring, and when they believe you do the right things to manage them as well as the team effectively.

People don't score you favorable as a manager because you always give them what they want

How much influence do you have on the performance system?

Depending on what organization you are part of, as a manager you may or may not have a lot of influence on the performance system. Your organization's performance system might be tight and prescriptive, or maybe there isn't a performance system at all. Whatever your situation, as a manager you always have at least some influence over what a performance system feels like for your team.
Even in the tightest systems, there's always some room for personal interpretation as to how you apply processes and rules, and there's room for interpretation when explaining the rules of the system to your team. For example, if your organization is prescriptive when it comes to the distribution of the scores you allocate, you are still the one that decides where on the spectrum of that distribution you put each of your team members. You are the one that explains to individual team members what the boundaries are within which you evaluated them, where on the spectrum you have placed them and why. The quality of your explanations, combined with your trusted relationship and personal care define people's experience of the performance system, more than the system itself does.

If you work in an organization that has no performance system at all, you might have an opportunity to create one based on your own preferences. That may sound daunting, until you realize how small a performance system can be. I will illustrate that with an example. In one of my teams we had six event-manager roles that were occupied by temporary workers. The maximum tenure of these workers was two years. After the first year we'd need to make a decision whether or not to prolong the contract for a year. Some of the event managers used that moment to ask for a raise, others didn't. Some event managers even asked for a raise earlier than the end of the first year.

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The quality of your explanations, combined with your trusted relationship and personal care define people's experience of the performance system, more than the system itself does

Based upon the principle of equity of reward, I didn't like the fact that an absence of rules could result in the most vocal people getting higher pay, even if those weren't always the best people. I pulled my managers together and agreed on a simple set of rules that would help us define, based upon objective criteria, who gets a raise and who doesn't. It looked something like this:

- At the one year-mark we'd evaluate for every individual whether they should get a raise or not.
- When we were happy with their service, and they started contributing to the design and improvement of our event-management processes, rather than just executing them, we'd give them a raise.
- The percentage raise was the same for all individuals that qualified.

And that's it: very simple, but it is actually a mini-performance system. With these three rules we took the bias out of the system. If a person was vocal, yet wasn't delivering quality work, that person wouldn't get a raise. If a person asked for nothing, yet delivered high-quality work and contributed to evolving our event-management processes, they would get a raise without asking for it. So a performance system can be very small, and you can create one yourself if your organization doesn't have formal processes in place.

No matter what situation you are in as a manager, whether your organization has a bit too much structure in performance evaluations or none at all: you always have influence upon how your team experiences the performance-evaluation system. You can choose to go big or small, but whatever you do, make sure you do it consistently so you avoid undesirable biases.

Why is a performance system important?

If you work for an organization that has an established performance-evaluation system, you'll need to apply it whether you want it or not, at least to some extent. It's still relevant to reflect on why performance-evaluation systems exist in the first place. People in large organizations typically don't like the performance-evaluation system, because it's easy to see all the things that are annoying about it. It's harder to see what the organization would be like in the complete absence of such a system.

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In my opinion there are three main reasons why having a performance-evaluation system is preferred to not having one:

1. *Recognizing, rewarding and retaining the people who bring most value to the team and the organization*. You can talk forever about how you define exactly what “most value” means. But the reality is that the difference between your highest and your lowest performer is likely to be large in almost any team. Even at a group size of about ten people, your highest performer can easily have three times more impact than your lowest performer. It doesn’t require precise calculation to see that. When you can roughly divide your team into low, medium and high performers, you’ve already done a pretty good job of evaluating performance. If people do a great job, a good performance system helps rewarding them for their impact.
2. *Dealing with your lowest performers*. Some people don’t meet the bar of what is an acceptable performance. There can be a variety of reasons why such a situation occurs. Sometimes they’re not in the right role, sometimes there’s lack of will, sometimes they lose faith, sometimes they are actively damaging people—and many other reasons can exist. In most cases, the same person can perform fine in a different role, team or organization. I have a dedicated section on dealing with low performers later in this chapter. The one thing I want to say now is this: if you allow people who don’t meet the bar to get away with it for too long, it drags the team down. Peers can’t rely on these people, which causes frustrations and often people spiral down if you don’t act. It can be demoralizing for a team to see a person slacking over and over again, while not being dealt with. It often feels harsh to give people bad performance ratings, but if you do it at the right moments in the right way, it has high value for the health of your team.
3. *Creating equity of reward and opportunity*. In my simple example of creating a set of criteria to decide about pay-increases for temporary workers you could already see how the absence of such criteria leads to a bias in favor of the loudest people. This problem lies at the heart of many challenges that relate to diversity, equity and inclusion. For instance, there’s a lot of research showing that women find it harder to negotiate as to salary than men, which is one of several reasons for the significant pay gaps that exist. There’s also a lot of research that demonstrates leaders, in the absence of a consistent set of criteria, often make decisions in favor of people who are like themselves, or that happen to be closest to them. This is why it’s so important to unbias rules and processes for hiring or assigning performance ratings, reward and promotions. It’s almost inevitable that you create situations of unfair distribution of reward and opportunity if those rules and processes don’t exist.

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As a manager you can consciously minimize the negative aspects of the performance system, while maximizing the value it brings

Yes, I know that there are a lot of downsides to having a performance-evaluation system. For a start, in many organizations it comes with a lot of admin. And if the system is on the harsh side of the spectrum, it can create tension and competition in the organization. But as a manager you can consciously minimize the negative aspects of the performance system, while maximizing the value it brings. If you do that successfully, I am of the opinion that having a performance-evaluation system is always preferred to not having one. The guidance in this chapter hopefully supports you in your efforts to minimize damage while maximizing value.

Evaluating the "what" and the "how"

So how do you maximize the value of the performance system you use? First of all by applying it on the basis of consistent criteria. There are two types of criteria to consider:

- *What* people do: this is the impact they achieved by delivering on the OKRs that you have defined and scored together.
- *How* they do it: what you assess here is typically articulated in a set of statements that phrase which behaviors you want to amplify in your team or organization. Some of these statements could be like skills or competences that people need to be successful in their job. For instance how people approach stakeholders, how they communicate, how they solve problems etcetera. But there can also be references to the culture you want to set. For instance, you could have statements that say something about how a person deals with conflict or change, and how they treat their colleagues and customers. You can also articulate which behaviors from people help the organization create value for the world and society. The media is full of examples where organizations ended up doing damaging things as a result of people achieving their goals without considering negative side effects. Well-articulated "how statements" help making sure that people do the right things for people, planet and profit.

Let's have a look at a specific example of a "how statement" about project management. As an example I will formulate the statement on three different job grades or levels.

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- *Job level or grade 1*. Provides support to projects within clear guidelines from a senior supervisor. Performs routine project tasks and activities.
- *Job level or grade 2*. Autonomously performs project activities, being responsible for specific deliverables agreed with the supervisor. May lead less complex projects within bigger projects.
- *Job level or grade 3*. Manages defined projects with moderate risk and business impact. Guides less experienced colleagues on the execution of project tasks and activities.

Well-articulated "how statements" help making sure that people do the right things for people, planet and profit

Whether jobs actually start at the example levels I described, depends very much on the seniority of your organization. And project management may not be a relevant attribute for jobs in your team. I mainly picked it as an example, because it translates to many job types. I'm using the example to illustrate that "how statements" like these help you define expectations on each level or grade in your organization. This is important so managers apply consistent criteria in performance evaluations, and it is important to create clarity of expectations for your team members. Without a solid set of "how statements" it's pretty much impossible to run a fair and predictable performance-evaluation system.

As job grades go up, the "how statements" will articulate a variety of ways in which jobs, responsibilities and skills become more complex. For example:

- *Proactiveness and ownership increases with seniority*. On one level employees assist based on instructions from a more senior colleague. On the next level they run a light project autonomously, and after that they might assist more junior team members. From there, more senior people might set the future roadmap, and create roles and responsibilities for project team members, etcetera.
- *The level of complexity and ambiguity goes up as employees grow more senior.* First they might run fixed and defined processes, next they help improve processes, and eventually they might define processes and projects from scratch. In even more senior roles, people might set the strategy for entering completely uncharted territory for the organization.
- *The seniority and complexity of stakeholder management typically goes up*. In junior roles, the main stakeholder for a person is often their supervisor. On

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the next level, they might need to coordinate with several team members that work on the same project. Another level higher, they might be the face of the project towards stakeholders in the execution phase of a project. On an even higher level, people might have to align with senior leadership for setting strategy and making decisions. More senior roles typically require you to interact with more senior stakeholders, which requires a different level of thinking and acting.

Addressing both the “what” and the “how”, with clear expectations by job grade or level, is critical if you want to run fair and predictable performance evaluations, and create a healthy performance culture. A balance between the “what” and the “how” avoids situations where a person achieves goals at the cost of other things that are equally or more important. For instance, a sales representative that achieved a target at the cost of customer satisfaction, could still get a lower bonus. Or a team member that achieved a deadline by pushing peers or more junior team members into overwork and unnecessary stress, could still end up getting a bad performance rating. Or the other way around: someone that worked on a project with high complexity, could be saved from a low performance score if they did everything within their power to overcome difficult obstacles. You can reward people for the value they contribute to the culture of your team and organization, and thereby get your team to perform highly in a way that is sustainable. When you define a performance-evaluation system, or when you assess how to apply it, you can choose how much weight you want to put on the “what” versus the “how.” I’d recommend applying roughly equal weight to both.

Addressing both the “what” and the “how”, with clear expectations by job grade or level, is critical if you want to run fair and predictable performance evaluations, and create a healthy performance culture

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Whatever rules, processes, criteria or statements you define, it’s always important to leave a level of discretion to cater for nuances of different situations, people and roles. For example, once “how statements” have been written for a variety of roles, dimensions and job grades or levels, there’s a tendency to start applying them as fixed rules. But the people who define these statements on behalf of the organization find themselves tasked with the impossible job of coming up with a consistent set of statements that somehow covers all types of jobs and levels in the entire organization. There's no way that this is possible, so they end up making choices. They pick the set of statements that does the job in about seventy percent of all situations. Trying to cater for the last thirty percent would result in a monstrous set of statements that's impossible to use for managers. So as a manager and leader, when you apply the statements available to you, you must be aware that there will always be people in your team who do not fit the mold. If you fail to recognize that, these people will always end up being evaluated unfairly. When you work together with managers to agree how to apply the rules of the evaluation system, it's therefore always important to actively look for the outliers, and to agree how to best evaluate these people. Sometimes it's just a matter of writing tailored statements or criteria yourself. Those don't have to be perfect. Having something is always better than nothing.

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Critical ingredients for an unbiased performance system

So having a performance-evaluation system is preferred to not having it. And whatever you do, no matter how big or small-the system is, you need to make conscious choices to maximize the value of the system and minimize the damage. In this chapter, let's have a look at some critical ingredients of a performance-evaluation system that you could consider. I already mentioned two of them:

- Quality OKR-writing and -scoring to address the "what" in evaluations.
- A consistent set of statements by job grade or level to define expectations on the "how."

Below is a summary table of ingredients in a performance-evaluation system. It isn't complete, but these are the most common elements you will find in most organizations. It will vary by organization to what extent systems and rules have been defined, and how consistently people apply them.

Because I already covered OKRs and "how-statements" I will only dive into the other elements. For each, I will cover ways they can create value, and risks that could cause damage if you don't pay attention. As you read, it's worth reflecting upon your own organization. To what extent does your organization or team have these elements, and how are they being applied? Do the systems work well in practice? Or do they need refinement? Are there any gaps? Can you fill some of those gaps yourself, by how you apply principles or by defining some of your own criteria and processes? Can you work together with peer managers, leadership or HR to make improvements? The exercise below helps you reflect.

Figure 19 *Exercise to brainstorm about healthy ingredients for a performance-management system.*

	Stop or avoid	Start	Amplify
OKR system for evaluating the "what" ☐ OKR-writing ☐ OKR-scoring			
'How attributes' by job grade and level ☐ To align with managers on consistent criteria ☐ To set clear expectations with team members			
360-degree feedback ☐ From peers and stakeholders ☐ From managers ☐ From leadership ☐ From customers and partners			
Assessment ☐ Self-assessment ☐ Manager assessment			
Rating scale ☐ Rating definitions ☐ Distribution guidance ☐ Discretion			
Agreement and guidance to run fair and unbiased performance evaluations ☐ Leadership guidance ☐ Manager forums ☐ Calibration sessions ☐ HR guidance ☐ Training (e.g. about the system, or unbiasing) ☐ Objective data checks			
Performance based reward ☐ Monetary (e.g. base salary, bonus or equity) ☐ Non monetary (e.g. coaching, senior acknowledgement or high-profile projects)			
Performance based progression ☐ Promotion ☐ Access to job roles with expanded scope ☐ Access to talent resources or programs			

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Exercise: Defining your ideal Performance-Management system

The table in figure 19 helps you reflect: Which behaviors, systems or processes do you consider damaging and should be *stopped or avoided*? Which things are not used in your team or organization, but would add value when you'd *start* doing them? And which things are already happening that could be *amplified* more because of the value they create? You can complete this table on your own, reflecting on your own team. You can also do it with a leadership team or a group of peer managers, reflecting together on what is right for your organization.

360-degree feedback

The term *360-degree feedback* is widely used across organizations. A lot has been written and said about it. I will not try to repeat all that. The goal of this chapter is mostly to summarize the role it plays in performance evaluations, and to help you avoid some pitfalls. Most large organizations have some kind of system that allows people to give each other feedback during performance-evaluation cycles. Even if your organization doesn't have any of those systems, you can still gather feedback from various sides to inform performance evaluations—and it is wise to do so.

There are three audiences for whom it is important to gather feedback:

1. Peers that work on the same project or in the same team as your team member: these people can comment on the quality of work, collaborativeness and dependability of a person. They can tell you what it's like to work with this colleague of theirs.
2. Peers or stakeholders outside of your team that your team member serves or needs to collaborate with. These people can comment on deliverables, quality of communication and alignment, reliability and also collaborativeness.
3. Senior sponsors with an interest in the work of your team member, and that have sufficient visibility upon the work. That last bit is important. It may sound nice to ask senior leadership for feedback, but they rarely have the type of visibility of the work of individuals to get a sufficiently educated opinion.

It's wise to agree in advance with your team members which people they will ask for a feedback. Otherwise they might ask their "friendly" colleagues to provide feedback, and avoid people who could provide harsh feedback, or they might pick a mix of people who don't create a solid 360-degree view. If your organization doesn't have a system that allows your team members to ask people for written feedback, as a manager you'll need to speak to people personally. That can be time-consuming, but it's time well spent. People generally appreciate it

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if you check in with them to hear whether they are happy with the "service levels" your team member provides, and they are typically open to providing constructive feedback that helps your team member to grow. You'll build a much richer view of the "what" and the "how" of the work of your team members. I think it's good practice to be transparent with your team members that you are having these conversations with and who you are speaking to. It's also valuable to share feedback you've heard, even before a formal performance-evaluation cycle starts. You as a manager should be the last person to write feedback, because you need to incorporate the perspectives of all people consulted in your feedback. You do this in your manager assessment.

Assessments

The ultimate output of a performance-evaluation cycle is normally an assessment from the manager. But before that assessment can be written, several inputs need to happen first. The 360-degree feedback mentioned in the previous section is one of the sources of input. Most organizations also ask individual team members to submit information about projects they worked upon and achievements they believe they had. They are then asked to reflect on their achievements and the feedback they have received.

When you make written self-assessments a part of your process, it is wise to provide people with a maximum word count. Otherwise some people would start writing books. It's also valuable to give people a fixed format. For example you could say people can submit up to five accomplishments. I typically ask people to describe projects in the following structure:

- *Objective*: what is the objective you worked on?
- *Actions*: what are the actions you took?
- *Result*: how did those actions help achieve the objective?

If you have a solid system for OKR-writing, it should be relatively easy for people to write about their achievements in this format. If they end up writing something that doesn't look like it's aligned with their OKRs, that's a signal that something might be wrong. They may have gone off track.

People can also reflect on the set of "how attributes" that are applicable to their role and level or grade. They can mention one thing they believe they do well, and one thing they want to improve. Whatever structure you provide, make sure you limit the word count for each section. It increases the fairness of the

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process, because all team members then work within the same boundaries. It also encourages people to invest in the quality of notes over the quantity.
You don't need a formal system to handle self-assessments the way described here. You can easily run a process like this by providing people with a text document that is a template for their self-assessments, and you can write manager assessments for them in a similar template.

Your manager assessment should include your interpretation of the impact people had through delivery upon the "what", and your assessment of their performance on "how attributes." In both areas you can use information from feedback given by peers and stakeholders, and from the self-assessments that your team members wrote. You can also include information about feedback you already gave to people earlier, and observations about how they acted (or didn't act) upon that feedback. Try to use specific examples as often as you can. When your organization requires you to assign a rating, your assessment should clearly summarize how your observations resulted in deciding this was the right rating. Whenever you can, include actionable recommendations that can lead to increased performance over time. Finally, hold yourself to a word count the same way you would do for your team members. This forces you to focus on quality and clarity.

Whether your organization has a formal system to capture feedback and assessments or not, either way it's useful to have something in writing: from team members about themselves and from you about them. It helps you and your team members to reflect before and after performance-evaluation conversations, and it's a useful archive to build over time, for instance to avoid recency bias when deciding about people's promotions. Such an archive is also critical when you might leave and a new manager comes in, or when people move to different teams within the organization.

Rating scale

Most large organizations have some kind of scale they use to assign performance ratings to people. Some organizations do this yearly, some twice a year and some quarterly. I prefer a yearly model, because the other ones create too much admin that distracts from core work. Too frequent performance evaluations can also create situations where the performance-evaluation system "takes over" the organization and its culture. People start doing things because they worry about their performance ratings, instead of doing the right things

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to drive their projects with impact. The downside of an annual model is the risk that managers delay giving feedback until the performance evaluation comes. If your organization works based on an annual model, you must give extra attention to making sure that people get feedback the whole year round. The Brilliant Basics of meaningful meetings and tracking of progress on OKRs and milestones will help you with that.

> *A rating scale that is too granular creates an illusion of precision that leads to a lower quality of performance-evaluation conversations*

Some organizations have a rating scale with four types of ratings, some with five, some might assign a number between one and ten, and there are probably many systems I am not aware of. Whatever the scale, in my personal experience it's important that a scale isn't too granular. A rating scale that is too granular creates an illusion of precision that leads to a lower quality of performance-evaluation conversations. The big question when assigning ratings is always: how do you define who is most impactful? That question rarely has a precise answer, but the answer also doesn't *need* to be precise. The difference between the amount of work and quality of work between your highest and your lowest performer is typically large. It is those big differences that you want to reward. A rating scale doesn't have to be precise to do so. A rating scale with five ratings is already hard to apply consistently, and probably the maximum level of granularity you should go for. The minimum amount of buckets in your rating scale is three. A scale with three buckets allows you to separate three types of people in your team:

- *The highest performers*: people who clearly demonstrated outsized impact;
- *The ones doing a solid job*: this is generally the majority of your team;
- *The lowest performers*: people whose work is clearly below standards.

If you work in an organization that doesn't have any performance-evaluation system and no rating-scale, I'd recommend categorizing your team in these three buckets based on the consistent criteria invented by yourself. Once you've done that, you can think about how you want to create extra reward for your highest performers, and how you want to deal with your lowest performers. A process like that already does most of the job that you want a performance-evaluation system to do. The lighter you make it, the less admin it triggers and the

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less it distracts you and your people from focusing on the work that delivers the most impact.

Tuning the "aggressiveness" of your rating scale

The title of this section is deliberately somewhat provocative. Of course, a performance system or rating scale is never really aggressive, and it doesn't have that purpose. But choices made about the application of the rating scale do define the amount of pressure you create in your organization. Similar to the idea of stretch OKRs, a certain amount of pressure can be a good thing, but you create damage when you overdo it.

There are several decisions about the application of a rating scale that affect the amount of pressure you create in an organization. First is the recommended distribution of ratings. Let's assume as an example that your organization has a rating scale that consists of five ratings. That could look something like the example in the table in figure 20.

Figure 20 *Examples of ratings distributions.*

	Lowest performance	Below average performance	Solid performance	Above average performance	Highest performance
Light pressure	3%	7%	80%	7%	3%
High pressure	10%	20%	40%	20%	10%

In the light pressure example, I've assumed eighty percent of the people in the organization will get a rating that is in the middle of the scale. That means the assumption is that most people do a solid job. There's only a small number of people who stand out positively or negatively. That means two things: first the amount of people whom you can reward for outstanding performance is relatively low, and second the amount of people who will be "punished" for low performance is also low. A system like this is relatively predictable for people, because they'll know they'll be in the middle most of the time. Predictability is a good thing, but it could also mean that your ability to reward high performance is so low that talented people start leaving your team.

In the high-pressure example, a total of sixty percent of all people are expected to be above or below the average. So more people can be rewarded for high performance, but also more people will be "punished" for low performance. This

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model is less predictable. There's more reward, but it's also likely to trigger more tension in your organization. There are also options to make the distribution asymmetric. For example you could dial down the proportion of people in the low-performer buckets, and put those in the middle bucket. That would allow you to reward many people for high performance, without necessarily "punishing" an equal amount of people for low performance.

There is no right or wrong, but you have to be conscious about the consequences of the choices you make. There are several choices you can make when thinking about a distribution of ratings:

- *Do you provide guidance on distribution at all?* You could leave it up to the discretion of the manager to decide what rating distribution makes most sense within their team. After all, they are the closest to the work of their people. The downside of this line of thinking is that different managers apply different standards across the organization. And if performance ratings are directly linked to financial reward, typically there isn't an infinite amount of money that can be spent, so you can't allow managers to score their teams as high as they want. I have a possible solution for that problem that I will share later.
- *When you provide guidance: is it a hard rule, or is it a soft recommendation?* If you make distribution a hard rule that every team must live by, you create a situation where colleagues within teams end up competing with each other. If all team members perform better, the ratings' distribution still stays the same, unless people can get promoted. A promotion brings people back to a lower score, because you are then evaluated based on higher standards at the next level. At small team sizes, adhering to a hard rule can be tricky because small sample sizes come with large fluctuations. One person too many in a particular rating bucket could shift the balance of ratings by twenty-percent points if you have a team of five people only. That brings us to the next consideration.
- *At what team size do you make the desired distribution a hard rule?* It's tempting to say, let's leave it flexible for smaller teams and only apply hard guidance once you get to a team size of about 50 or 100 people. At these team sizes, the sample becomes large enough to produce stable numbers. The problem with that, is that such a rule creates competition between teams. Managers of teams, on average, have a tendency to overestimate the performance of their teams, while underestimating performance of other teams. And most managers don't enjoy giving low performance ratings to their team members. They have personal loyalties to their people, and less so to the people in neighboring teams. Theoretically the leader of all teams could be the referee

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who makes sure all teams get evaluated by the same rules. However at a size of about 50 to 100 people, the leader of the team no longer has visibility upon the work of all people, so can't play an objective role. If you don't ask small teams to adhere to a fixed distribution, but you *do* apply it *across all of them collectively*, it's therefore inevitable that each team leader tries to push for one or two extra high ratings, and one or two extra promotions. If one person does that, it's not a big problem. But if one person gets away with it once, more managers will be doing it soon. From there onwards, you enter a gliding scale where the performance-evaluation process becomes a tactical game or negotiation between managers. Some managers enjoy that process, some don't. It doesn't matter: the essence is that a performance-evaluation system that is based on tactics and negotiation can never be fair and predictable. So it inevitably harms the effectiveness and culture of your team. The solution I will propose later on in this chapter solves this problem. Let's first look at some more decisions about ratings distribution that need to be made.

- *To what extent do you force people in the lower rating scores?* Some organizations enforce that a certain minimum percentage of all people *must* get a low rating. The underlying premise here is that in any sample, there will always be some low performers. If senior leaders don't see people getting low ratings, the assumption is that managers don't apply high enough standards. This could be true. Some managers dislike giving low ratings so much that they prefer to keep working with a person that is actually dragging the team down, or is just not contributing a lot of value. If you tolerate that, the performance and culture of the organization suffer. It also isn't fair to peers of those people who *are* making an effort, and *are* performing. But if you solve that problem by making it mandatory to assign low ratings, you create several problems. First, if a manager is disciplined in managing out low performers, while investing heavily in people who *can* perform, you end up punishing that team. Even though there are no low performers left, certain people will still get low ratings. When you can get a bad rating despite doing good work, that creates frustrations and psychological unsafety. Most teams I worked in therefore didn't enforce the lowest rating buckets, and I think they made the right call. It's a thin line to walk, and I cannot tell you how much pressure on this is healthy in your organization. I certainly recommend staying away from a mandatory percentage of low scores. But I also recommend not to shy away from low scores if people aren't performing. I think it's best to trust managers to make the right decision and to train them on the importance of managing out consistent low performers. When you allow for that flexibility, some managers will shy away from assigning low

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ratings for the wrong reasons. But the damage that does is lower than the damage of enforcing mandatory low scores in your organization.

My ideal organization

So, there are quite some choices around ratings-distribution that affect the amount of pressure you create in your organization, and whether that's good or harmful pressure. A hard rule for ratings distribution is certainly not a good idea for small teams, but when applied to large teams it nevertheless creates competition between teams. Forcing people in low rating buckets does more damage than good. Yet at the same time there isn't an unlimited amount of budget to reward people, and you want to have consistent standards across the organization, so you can't let managers do whatever they want.

Here's my ideal solution that solves most of these issues: this is what I would do if I had my own large company, and could design a performance and reward system from scratch. The first principle I would want to live by is that the manager should be trusted to make the right decisions. That's the person who's closest to the people and their work, and knows best what's right. This works up to a team size of about thirty people or so. In larger team sizes the leader of the team is mostly no longer close enough to the work of all people. A team of about thirty people will mostly have a few managers. The team leader is likely to be a manager of managers. The group of all managers at that team size, is still small enough to care about all people across the team, and they are still likely to understand as to all team members what they are doing. A small group of managers in a unit of this size, should be allowed to decide what ratings distribution is most suitable for their team, so I wouldn't provide any guidance or rule about that distribution, and I also wouldn't force them to assign low ratings. What I would do though, is give them a fixed reward budget to work with (adjusted to the size and average levels or grades in the team). That way they still operate within the same boundaries that all other teams in the organization work within.

The combination of a fixed budget, and a fully flexible ratings distribution allows a small group of managers to make the decisions that have the most positive impact as to the performance and culture of the team. For example, if there are no clear positive or negative outliers in the team, they could choose to distribute the budget evenly across team members by giving all people a similar rating. Interestingly, even if they would give all people the highest possible rating, the budget's distribution would still be equal. So there's no benefit in cheating the system. Another reason to go for a somewhat equal distribution could be that

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there's high interdependence in the team: in some teams, levels of interdependence are so high that it's hard to point to any individual contributor that made the greatest difference. In such a scenario, the thing you want to reward is how people pulled together in order to deliver impact as a team. Again, a fixed budget without rules for ratings distribution allows a small group of managers to make these decisions. If one person clearly stands out positively or negatively, that one person can be given a higher or lower reward, and the rest gets distributed evenly. The amount of extra reward you get cannot be linked to a particular score in a fixed way in this system. If you'd create a fixed reward multiplier connected to each score, the managers would no longer be able to be fully flexible with their ratings-distribution. For example, if five people are clearly outperforming the rest, assigning all of them a high rating would deplete the budget quickly. If managers can decide themselves what the multiplier would be, they could assign the highest rating to five people without depleting the budget. The total reward per person for high achievement becomes lower, but at least you can still reward all high achievers equally. So the managers should be able to decide themselves how ratings translate to rewards, as long as they stick to the team budget.

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Now there is still a scenario in which an entire team does not perform well, or performs very well. If all teams of equal size and seniority were always given the same budget, there would be no way to adjust pay according to the performance of the team as a whole. So the person leading a group of these "autonomous decision units" should be able to change the amount of budget each unit receives. If all teams write and score OKRs well, leadership can properly see which teams are contributing the most impact and adjust rewards accordingly. In my ideal organization, I would also ensure that all managers receive feedback from their teams every six months. That would reveal the extent to which team performance (or non-performance) is related to the quality of the manager(s).

In summary, these would be the rules in my ideal organization:

- Fixed budget at a team size that is small enough for the leader and all managers to have visibility upon the work of all people, and to care about all people equally. This budget is adjusted to the average size and seniority of the team.
- This budget can be increased or reduced if the team as a whole performs well or doesn't.
- No rules for ratings distribution.
- No forced low ratings.
- No fixed relation between rating and reward.

This level of autonomy gives a group of managers the trust and tools to use the performance and reward system in the way that is best for the team.

Performance evaluation is not about being perfect, it's about being thoughtful

It's unlikely that you will have every single ingredient of this ideal scenario. I certainly never had it in my jobs. But the exercise of walking through these scenarios makes you conscious about all the consequences of decisions as to the performance system. Some of these decisions aren't yours to make, but for many you can define how you apply them or even how you design them. A performance-evaluation system should never be over-engineered. If you want to create a system that is as fair as possible, the first thing to understand is that it can never be perfect. When you understand the inevitable imperfections of these systems, you can mitigate the damage they do, and maximize the value. When you *ignore* the inevitable imperfections of a system, it's a certainty that the rules of the system create situations of unfairness. Performance evaluation is not about being perfect, it's about being thoughtful. If you can say within each job level, which of your people perform at low, medium and high levels, you've done a perfect job that allows you to differentiate reward and opportunity based on performance.

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Agreements and guidance to run fair and unbiased performance evaluations

The biggest problem that undermines the integrity of a performance-evaluation system is bias. Bias comes in many forms. It could be that certain styles of working or certain types of people are overvalued, while others are undervalued. It could be that the system unconsciously rewards the loudest people, rewards straight white men more, or the ones that senior leadership has most visibility on. In an international organization, there might be a bias that causes preferred treatment for people in headquarter offices, versus people working in smaller offices. Reducing bias and unfairness is best done through best practice- sharing between managers, training, data checks and some supervision of senior leadership and HR.

Let's start with training: when companies think about training for managers to make the performance-evaluation system more fair and effective, they often think too narrowly. Managers might for instance be asked to do unbiasing training, or follow a training about giving high-quality feedback. But most unbiasing of performance evaluations happens before the performance-evaluation cycle starts. OKR-writing is for instance the moment when people are set up for success by assigning the right stretch-opportunities that help them to grow, and to build on their strengths. If a manager assigns the highest-profile projects to the people whom they trust, because these people happen to spend most time with the manager, that's a bias in the performance system. On top of that, you only know which projects and OKRs are good stretch goals for each person when you have regular and genuine conversations about career and personal growth with people. Unbiased access to the manager and equal airtime in meetings, can only be created through a thoughtful cadence of meetings, with thoughtful meeting norms. The way a manager uses one-on-one meetings and builds trust-relations defines whether people have equal access to high-quality feedback all the year round. One of the reasons why women and minoritized groups get less opportunities, is because some managers shy away from giving them an honest feedback, often out of fear of saying something wrong. These are all things that happen outside of performance evaluations, but they strongly define whether there's equal opportunity and reward or not. So when you want managers to contribute to fair application of the performance system, you need to train them as to all Brilliant Basics, not just on performance management. Unbiasing training is also important, yet people forget the principles over time, and therefore often still don't act on it in the moments that matter. So it's a good practice to remind managers of most common biases, and how to counter them, every time a performance-evaluation cycle opens. In appendix 3 you can find a practical unbiasing checklist from Google's re:work-website that can be used as a reminder to unbias performance evaluations. I'll cover the topic of unbiasing deeper in part II of the book.

Most unbiasing of performance evaluations happens before the performance-evaluation cycle starts

It's also valuable if the senior leader of the organization joins sessions where managers discuss best ways to apply the performance-evaluation system. The senior leader can share observations from previous performance cycles, things that went well, but also things that went less well. A leader can for instance show data about potential biases in the system. In my organization I always compared ratings distributions by gender in order to check for bias. I also checked if peo-

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ple who worked in large markets, near leadership, were getting higher scores than people working in smaller countries. I'd check whether people on senior job levels or grades were getting higher ratings. The higher the grade, the closer the proximity to leadership. Most of these data checks are checks you can do by hand, in an excel-sheet or even on a piece of paper. In part II I go deeper into data checks that help tracking progression on initiatives pushing for more diversity and inclusion in the organization.

I am not in favor of senior leadership interfering with decisions about ratings or promotions for individual people who are several layers lower than those in the organization. If a leader runs a large organization, they can't be close enough to the work of all people. So when they become involved in those decisions, they inevitably introduce proximity bias. But a senior leader can make powerful contributions by doing data checks and zooming in on edge cases, in order to see whether consistent criteria were applied. Once the checks have been done, and the right critical questions were asked, managers should be trusted to make the right decisions.

Performance-based rewards

When you have identified which people are your highest performers, it's nice if you can reward them for their impact and efforts. Laszlo Bock is the former Vice President of People Operations of Google, who wrote the book *Work Rules* where he shares his philosophy for the design of the Google organization. When he still worked at Google, he was the driving force behind the idea of Google's re:Work website, where Google "open sourced" a lot of their organizational and cultural ways of working. An interesting and provocative quote from his book is "pay unfairly (it's more fair!)." With that quote, he makes a similar point that I made earlier in the book. The difference in impact between your highest and lowest performers is typically very high. In his philosophy you should match that with differentiation in reward. I agree almost entirely with that statement. I believe that effort and impact should be rewarded, and lack thereof should be dealt with.

I've however also seen that for many people high pay leads to adjusted expectations for reward. People typically don't look at their salary as an absolute number. They look at it relative to what they think their peers earn. If you work in an organization where everyone gets paid very well, people can still be unhappy with their salaries. The perception that others might get more reward out of the performance and reward system than you do, can even undermine the work

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pleasure for people who would have been perfectly happy if the performance and reward system hadn't existed. Every time a big email goes out celebrating all the people who got promoted, ninety percent of the organization is watching it realizing that they did not get promoted. If people trust that your performance evaluations and promotion decisions are fair, they won't be bothered to see colleagues around them being promoted. They might even be happy for these colleagues. But if there's any doubt about the fairness of people's ratings and promotion decisions, every celebration of a colleague's promotion is a slap in the face.

Every time a big email goes out celebrating all the people who got promoted, ninety percent of the organization is watching it realizing that they did not get promoted

So yes, I do believe high performance should translate into higher reward and I believe low performance should have consequences, but I am conscious that financial reward is only a small part of the puzzle and too much emphasis on it can have adverse effects. It's the sum of all Brilliant Basics that counts. As a manager, if you make an effort to understand your employees by having genuine conversations about career and personal growth, and you give them projects that match their intrinsic motivations, you treat them with respect, create trusting relationships, give feedback and opportunities to grow, create a team culture where people can feel a sense of belonging, and performance reviews are fair and predictable. Then you will have already delivered about ninety percent of what it takes for people to feel valued and motivated. Getting financial reward based on great performance can then be the "icing on the cake" that keeps people happy. But without all the steps before it, it's hard for people to feel valued, no matter how high their financial reward.

There are many non-monetary forms of reward. Many of those are more powerful than money. In my experience, anything that empowers people and helps them grow is a valuable source of non-monetary reward. Examples are access to coaching, mentorship, rotations, education and talent programs. The ability to run side projects, to work on bigger projects, to train peers, to coach or manage junior team members, or to see your ideas get funded are also powerful ways to reward people for high performance, in a way that salary and high bonus-

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es cannot buy you. I also use flexibility and autonomy as reward mechanisms. If people prove they are intrinsically motivated and can make the right decisions that create a positive impact, I give them more flexibility and autonomy. The more you do that, the better talented and motivated people perform, and the longer they stay with you. This includes the flexibility for people to choose when, how much or where they work. If you have the opportunity to reward high performance with financial reward, you should definitely do so. But don't forget the Brilliant Basics, and make sure you think hard about all the non-monetary ways you can create value for people to reward their performance.

Running fair and predictable performance conversations

A performance-evaluation cycle typically ends with one-on-one conversations between managers and their direct reports. I have recommended earlier in this book to keep performance conversations and career conversations separate, so I'm assuming in this chapter that the performance conversation is a separate conversation.

The performance conversation typically covers at least the following topics:

- A summary of the "what": the impact the team member had by delivering on OKRs.
- A summary of the "how": an evaluation of skills, behaviors and attitudes the team member applied while delivering on the OKRs. Ideally this analysis of the "how" is based on "how statements" that have been formulated by job grade or level.
- An explanation of how the "what" and the "how" together have resulted in the rating you have given to your team member. If your organization doesn't have formal ratings, as a manager you'll still provide some kind of value judgment that indicates to your team members whether you consider them to perform at the high end of the spectrum or the low end of the spectrum.
- All of the above should be explained by referencing specific examples of things you've observed or learned through feedback from others. And it should come with actionable feedback: what are examples of things your team member can do to keep growing and performing better over time?
- Finally, there should be an explanation about how the performance evaluation affects reward and opportunities. This last part is in many organizations a conversation at a later moment. This could be an explanation about the way the evaluation translates into financial reward, it could be a promotion, and it could be that you have various growth opportunities you offer as reward

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for great performance. On the negative end of the performance spectrum it could be that you need to give people a warning, or put them on some kind of improvement plan.

These topics are not a one-way street. In fact, I often start my performance-evaluation conversations by asking people what their own reflections are, and what their expectation is in terms of rating. If I did a good job throughout the year, people will mention most of the things I am about to say and they arrive at the right rating. To avoid surprises, I often ask myself the following question during the year: “If I had to rate my team member today, and had to communicate that rating, what would the rating be and how would I explain it?” In fact, I even rate all of my team members every few months or so, simply as a self-reflection. If you think about people individually, you might believe they deserve a certain score. If you think about all cases collectively, you might discover that your total set of ratings is too far removed from the rating guidance of your organization. It makes you aware of the trade-offs you need to make, and you still have the time to make them in the fairest possible way. Sometimes I discover there’s information that is lacking. There’s still enough time at this point to gather the information by asking for it, or to observe it directly.

Doing this exercise regularly forces you to think about what feedback is important for your team members. Imagining giving people a rating, while knowing you haven’t landed all important feedback, gives you an uncomfortable feeling. If you feel this, that’s a sign there is feedback you should deliver right now. You could even say literally: “If I had to rate you right now, this is the rating I would give and here is why.” People will appreciate the honesty, if this is a conversation you have with them well ahead of the performance evaluation.

I’ve seen many managers having this “managing-expectations conversation” only one, two or three months before the performance evaluation. This is often when they realize a rating is going to be a negative surprise to people, so they still hope to fix this. If you do it that late, it will feel like a tick-the-box action to people. They might even feel deceived, because at that moment they can’t change the situation anymore. If you do this, it has to be done at least four or five months before the performance evaluation happens, and there needs to be a real opportunity to still act upon the feedback and influence the rating. If you ask yourself regularly how you would rate people right now, and act on it, you will not have to deliver any surprising feedback or ratings during performance evaluations.

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When you give people your assessment and feedback about their performance on the "what" and the "how", that is also a two-way street. You can share your observations and reflections and then ask them whether this matches theirs: Do you recognize this? Do you agree with my interpretation? If not, what is your interpretation of the situation? If you can run the entire conversation in a dialogue that way, a performance-evaluation conversation can actually be a pleasant experience for people. If you successfully made the conversation fair and predictable, and you made it to a proper dialogue, people will be likely to react with positive surprise. Performance-evaluation conversations aren't often pleasant for people.

The reward conversation at Google was always easy, because reward was mostly automated once ratings were established. When your organization isn't very structured as it comes to rewards, you may end up in negotiation conversations. People may ask for more salary, bonuses etcetera. To me this is one of those areas where you need to do the job *before* you enter the conversation. Establish clear criteria for yourself as to who gets a raise, how much and based on what criteria. Manage people's expectations throughout the year based on those criteria. Then apply them consistently in performance evaluations. If people try to use the performance-evaluation conversation as a negotiation moment, you can use that as an opportunity to reiterate the principles by which you decide upon reward, how that is based on the performance evaluation, and why you believe the performance evaluation was fair. If you allow yourself to enter negotiation any other way, your reward system becomes biased towards the loudest people, whereas it should be rewarding people who get the highest *impact*.

What if a team member doesn't agree with your evaluation?

Every now and then, there are outliers where expectations are far out of tune. If you execute well on Brilliant Basics, you will have few of those. But if you're not getting to a point where you and your team member agree upon the outcome of the performance evaluation, don't dwell on it for too long. Summarize the conversation, and the reasoning that made you decide this was the right rating. Don't promise anything that you can't deliver on. That will make the situation even worse. If you have been thorough in your assessment, there shouldn't be any situations where the rating you assigned is fundamentally wrong. You can suggest sleeping a night over it, and plan an extra hour to talk things through later on. That helps your team member to recover from the shock, and allows you to reflect whether you really believe your decision was fair. If not, you can think about ways that you can rectify this. If you do believe your decision was

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fair, you can think about what's the best way to still land it. The message might be a lot easier to land after your team member recovered from the initial negative surprise. If the person still fundamentally disagrees at the next conversation, you can refer your team member to the official channels where a complaint can be filed. Most large organizations have processes for this. I personally never had to use them. If you are thoughtful about your approach, the odds of that happening are small. And even if it does happen, it's mostly a moment where you can agree to disagree. Your decision still stands. It's up to your team member then to reflect on whether they can live with that or not. If you worry about your team member leaving, because of a rating you gave, to me that is a signal that there might be something wrong with that rating. If you are however convinced the rating you gave is fair, and you know you delivered well on all Brilliant Basics, it's easier to accept that a team member might leave. It might be the best decision for them and for the team.

Actionable feedback & coaching

When is the right moment for giving feedback? Many managers, including myself, sometimes delay giving feedback to people because it doesn't feel like the right moment. But the risk is that no moment ever feels right to land feedback, especially when you know it's difficult feedback. I hope by now it's clear that you should definitely not wait giving feedback until the official performance evaluation. In fact, the performance evaluation conversation is the worst moment to give feedback: the fact that it is a formal evaluation moment makes it a somewhat unsafe moment, which triggers a mindset where receiving and digesting difficult feedback is harder for people. When you work in an organization with a highly formalized performance-evaluation process, you can even feel that when the performance cycle is nearing. If you give people difficult feedback in the last few months before a performance-evaluation cycle starts, they worry more about how it might backfire in their performance rating, than thinking about how to change their attitude and behavior. You have much more opportunity of landing difficult feedback in a way that changes people's behavior positively, when you do it well ahead of the performance-evaluation cycle.

The performance evaluation conversation is the worst moment to give feedback: the fact that it is a formal evaluation moment makes it a somewhat unsafe moment

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So earlier is better, but how do you find the right moment? Have you ever had this happen to you: someone comes to you while you are in the midst of something and says "Do you have some time? Is this a good moment to give you some feedback?" Can you remember such a moment? What was the first reaction you felt? Chances are that somewhere inside you felt a somewhat defensive reaction. You probably started to wonder what you might have done wrong. It depends on the tone of the person saying it, and on the level of trust in your relationship. Imagine this happening while there's a difference in seniority between the two people. If this is a team member saying this to a manager, it's likely to be less threatening. But if it's a manager saying this to a team member that is one or two levels down in the organization, chances are that this remark triggers at least a wee bit of worry in people.

When you do trainings to learn about giving feedback, they often teach you to check in with people: "Is this a good moment to give you some feedback?" But the word *feedback* triggers negative emotions with people, and it therefore reduces your opportunity to land difficult feedback with them. And you don't even *need* the word *feedback* to check in with people and to give them feedback. In fact, I have almost never used the word *feedback* in my relationships with team members, yet I still scored a 100 percent in my manager feedback- survey on the statement "My manager gives me actionable feedback on a regular basis." I did so by asking people about their reflections of a certain moment or action, by sharing my thoughts with them, honestly and in a direct manner, positive and negative, and always with personal care. I rarely called it feedback though. People experienced value out of the questions I asked, and the thoughts I shared with them. They knew I was making an effort to help them to grow, so it felt like valuable feedback.

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The word *coaching* has similar challenges as *feedback*. Has someone ever said to you "let me give you some coaching"? How does that feel? Again, it depends a bit on the relationship with that person, but in most situations this will feel at least somewhat patronizing. It diminishes a person's sense of self, and makes them less open to coaching. When used wrongly, the word *coaching* implicitly says "you need some coaching, because there's something wrong with you and I am the one that knows what's right." Similar to giving feedback, coaching a person is easier when you don't call it *coaching*. This is particularly true when you are a manager. It's different if a person has actively asked you to be their coach. But as a manager, people may or may not want you to be their coach. They may or may not trust you, or find you sufficiently credible. So it's better to avoid the word, and instead just focus on asking the right thoughtful questions in order to help people reflect on their projects, situations and themselves. These are actually coaching questions, but you don't have to explicitly say that.

In many organizations and for many managers, giving more feedback and coaching people seem to have become goals in themselves. This is because feedback and coaching are critical contributors to high performance, so many organizations send all of their managers to trainings, and encourage them to give more feedback and coach more. These managers then often overdo it, at the wrong moments, with the wrong intention behind it, and it makes things worse rather than better. Feedback is not about "giving feedback" and coaching is not about "being a coach." In both cases it is about asking people the right questions at the right moment, that help people reflect on situations, problems, opportunities and behavior (or absence of behavior). And it's about sharing valuable thoughts with them, so they can find a better way forward for themselves.

Feedback typically is not about the person. If you make it about the person, that's often what makes people defensive. So focusing on people's behavior is always better. But most of the time, conversations about people's projects and OKRs are the opportunities for landing feedback and coaching people. You start talking about strategies, choices to be made, people to approach, creative ideas, possible solutions, etcetera. By going through topics like these, inevitably you also touch upon the behavior of your team member. Sometimes even without you or them noticing it. When you provide valuable feedback on a broad set of topics, these topics become your "entry doors" that create opportunities to give feedback on people's behaviors, and you'll be able to do it without having to say "let me give you some feedback."

Feedback can be positive as well as negative. I've often heard leaders say "giving positive feedback is easy, giving negative feedback is hard." That's not true: both are equally hard. Sure, it's easy to say "well done, thank you!" but that is not positive feedback. It doesn't specify what it was exactly that made what a person did well, and how they can use that knowledge to do even more things well or even better. Feedback is only relevant if it is specific, personal and actionable. You have to deliver it in a way that resonates with the receiver, so the person is encouraged to reflect, and so it affects attitudes and behaviors. That's equally hard, whether it's positive or negative feedback.

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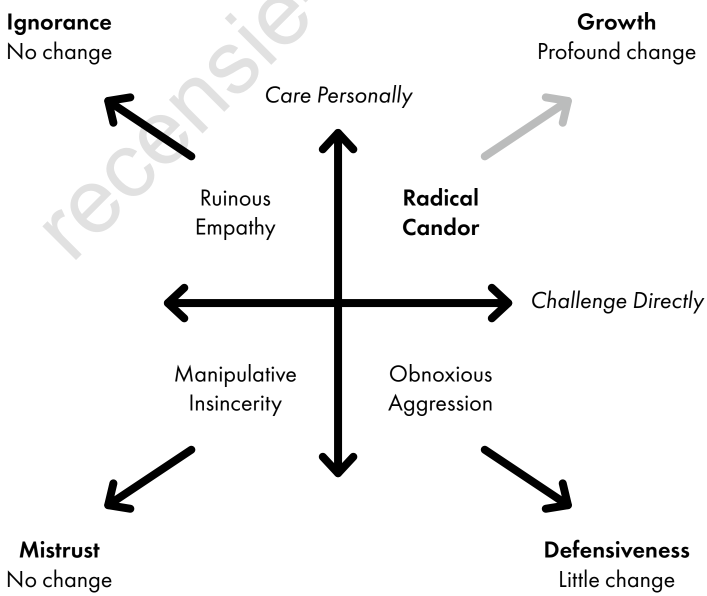
You have to deliver it in a way that resonates with the receiver, so the person is encouraged to reflect, and so it affects attitudes and behaviors. That's equally hard, whether it's positive or negative feedback

A book about feedback that I found valuable as a manager is the book *Radical Candor* by Kim Scott. The essence of the model is described in figure 21. Feedback needs to be direct and clear, but it also needs to be delivered with personal care. When you combine these dimensions, people change and grow. If one of the two is missing, you end up in the quadrants of obnoxious aggression, which leads to defensiveness or ruinous empathy, which then leads to ignorance. Both aren't useful and are often even damaging to the effectiveness of the team, and in some cases to the relationship with team members. If both are missing you are in the quadrant of manipulative insincerity, which leads to mistrust.

Figure 21 *The Radical Candor feedback framework by Kim Scott.*



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When you search for "Radical Candor" and "Kim Scott" on YouTube, you'll find some nice speeches by her that are worth watching. And the book is certainly worth a read as well.

Summing things up: consider erasing the words *feedback* and *coaching* from your dictionary. Instead, just spend time with people to understand who they are, what they do, how and why they do it. Have ongoing dialogues with them about their work, their ideas, their strategies, their actions, their fears, their working-relationships and more. Listen well and share honest thoughts and reflections with people. Ask how they look at those thoughts and reflections. Ask questions that help them to reflect and find ways forward for themselves. When you do it like this, feedback and coaching are closely related to each other. You might start coaching to solve a problem, yet at the same time you're likely to also give people feedback about their role in relation to that problem. You might start coaching a person to help find a strategy for maximizing impact of a project, and implicitly give feedback about behaviors or attitudes that could make or break the success of the project. Allow feedback and coaching to work implicitly, and you'll be more effective. Always do it with genuine intent: intent to understand the person and help them find a better way forward.

Managing low performers starts with giving them a genuine opportunity and support to become solid or high performers

Managing low performers

Everything I have written until now has been focused on helping people be the best they can be for themselves, the team and the organization. But the Brilliant Basics also help you to manage low performers, because managing low performers starts with giving them a genuine opportunity and support to become solid or high performers.

Below are three principles that help you manage low performers in a respectful manner:

- 100-percent commitment to consistent performance standards
- 100-percent commitment to human respect
- invest first, judge later

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Most of the time, when people don't perform well in a job, they can be turned around with the right levels of personal care, direction and support. It could be that they're just on the wrong project, or didn't get the right guidance, or there's something wrong in their support environment. They might have lost faith in themselves, or lost faith in the team or in leadership. Maybe they struggle with prioritization, or with strategic decisions. Maybe they moved from manager to manager, and clarity or motivation got lost on the way. It could also be that events in people's private lives affect their performance. When someone doesn't deliver what you expected, the first step is always to zoom in and understand. In organizations that look upon themselves as a high-performing organization, people can sometimes conclude too fast "this is a low performer." If managers arrive at such a conclusion without understanding and investing first, people who could have performed fine, spiral down fast.

The deep career conversations that are the first Brilliant Basic, are a powerful tool to figure out what could be wrong. The fact that you take several hours of personal time out of your schedule signals positive intent, and creates a circle of safety. The conversation framework helps you find out what drives a person, what gives them energy and what drains it, what they think they're good at and what not. This conversation will give you ideas for projects you can give this person, in order to test what they can do and what they enjoy. If you can come out of a conversation with some agreed actions or projects, and positive hope from you and your team member, you have started a potential journey of recovery.

From here it can go two ways: first, you see it starts to work, and you keep tweaking projects and guidance until you see your team member build up confidence. When that happens you can gradually fade out the extra guidance you are giving this person. Second, the person doesn't perform as well as you hoped. This means you have to keep giving this person extra attention, first to figure out if different input and guidance can make things better. If this doesn't work, agreements about deliverables need to be underlined more thoroughly. This means you're making it explicit and clear that the team member isn't delivering on expectations. That clarity opens the door to having honest conversations: Why is it not working? Why is the support not helping? Why are agreed deliverables not being delivered? What gets in the way? When you gradually narrow the space for people to get away with not delivering what was agreed, it will become clearer whether there is a lack of will or a skills-gap that is just too hard to overcome.

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If a person has a will to perform, yet a skills gap that is too hard to overcome, I do not look at that person as a low performer. It's just a person who is in the wrong job. It's still better if this person finds a different job then, and you can even help with that. But there's no need to make things nasty. Besides the fact that there is no need to treat the person badly, it also isn't good for the team. When you treat a person that has positive will, as a low performer because they lack a skill, and then you manage them out in a way that is painful for them, the other members will see that too. Some of them might be friends of this person. They might see that the person isn't performing, but they also know this person is trying hard and doing their best. Seeing such a person being treated badly by the leader is demoralizing. This harms team norms for respectful interaction with each other, and can lead to a turnover amongst your higher performers.

If a person has a will to perform, yet a skills gap that is too hard to overcome, I do not look at that person as a low performer. It's just a person who is in the wrong job

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A problem with *will* is harder. If you as a manager have invested lots of personal time and care in a person, yet that person still refuses to play ball, I do consider such a person a low performer. Your real low performers are the people who cannot be managed without power, that only do what you ask from them when they know you are watching. Similar to the previous scenario, I think such a person needs to find a different job. The main difference is that I would not be willing to *help* them find it, and I wouldn't write a positive recommendation. I wouldn't feel good luring a peer manager in another organization into hiring a person that I know has a lack of will to do great work. This person might even be damaging to colleagues, due to political behavior. You don't want to be the one who handed that problem to another manager and team. The problem with a lack of will, is that people go to great lengths to hide it. When not managed tightly they can successfully get away with such behavior for quite some time, sometimes for years, which encourages them to keep a poker face. They will pretend to listen to feedback, and do the minimum to make you feel they acted upon it. But they will not fundamentally change their ways of working. The only way to get them out is to make it sufficiently painful for them so they consider leaving, or to gather a large amount of documentation that proves their low performance so clearly that they can be forced to leave.

The formal way to do this is called a *PIP* in many organizations (Personal Improvement Plan). Your organization might have a different name for it, and there might be various flavors with different levels of severity. The PIP that I know is one where "improvement plan" actually isn't the right name. If you have been thorough in your investments in a person, by the time that person needs to be put on a PIP, they will have ignored all your guidance and feedback for several quarters in a row. You already know that they are not going to turn around. So the PIP is mostly a way to formally document your expectations of a person in a language they can't wiggle themselves out of. It also states clearly what the consequences are if they don't deliver on the expectations. And then you go through several months of micromanaging this person, essentially to prove they aren't delivering on the PIP. That's a painful experience, both for the team member and for the manager. It's also time-consuming and costly to the organization, because it easily takes four to six months to get to the point where you can end someone's contract. And even then, they might still have a right to get some kind of financial compensation, and lawyers might need to be involved.

There's a phrase in my native language, Dutch, that says "gentle healers make stinking wounds". It applies very much to this problem. As a manager, you should try to avoid getting to the stage of a PIP. A PIP is a stinking wound. That doesn't mean you should allow low performers to get away with not delivering. You should still achieve a situation where they leave the team, but ideally you do it in a way that is faster and less painful.

Your real low performers are the people who cannot be managed without power, that only do what you ask from them when they know you are watching

Below are ten "layers of defense" that prevent you from ending up in at PIP-stage with your team members:

1. Hire the right people.
2. Give people time and support to *ramp up* effectively in their job.
3. Find people's intrinsic motivation through meaningful career conversations, care, and giving them projects that stimulate their strengths and passions.
4. Create a productive supportive environment for people.
5. Create clarity of direction and expectations through vision, plan and OKRs.

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6 Ongoing tracking of progress and honest actionable feedback the whole year round.
7 Fair and predictable performance evaluations—and don't shy away from low ratings if people really have not delivered.
8 Support people with too large skill gaps by finding another job where they can shine.
9 Have tough and honest conversations with people who lack will, and try to agree upon an exit with them.
10 PIP.

You can avoid being a "gentle healer" leaving a "stinking wound"—but it's even better to avoid needing a doctor at all

Hiring is a topic I will cover in part II of this book about high-performing teams. Defense layers two till seven are all Brilliant Basics I discussed previously. When you execute well on the first seven layers of defense, you rarely end up in a situation where an exit is the only option. In layers eight and nine, you need to get to a situation where the team member realizes that the current situation in your team isn't going to work for them, and chooses to leave voluntarily. The problem is that some people only arrive at that conclusion when their current situation is sufficiently painful for them. A settlement can help to reduce some of the pain of leaving, yet when people don't experience their current situation as a problem, they're less likely to accept a settlement. If you as a manager refuse to tighten the screws on people, because you find it hard to be tough on people, no settlement will ever feel attractive enough to leave voluntarily. PIP then becomes the only way out. Or not doing a PIP, but that will mean that you and your team get stuck with a person who drags the team down, and this might even cause damage to people.

Layers eight and nine are where you can avoid being a "gentle healer" leaving a "stinking wound"—but it's even better to avoid needing a doctor at all. Layers one to seven prevent the need for a doctor. When you've arrived at the stages eight and nine and realize that a PIP will do even more damage, it's easier to accept that you've got to do what you've got to do as a manager: you need to make the current situation sufficiently uncomfortable. I've gone through this process only a handful of times. It felt painful, because it goes against my nature and some of my values, but I knew this was the least painful route for all involved,

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so I could do it with a good conscience. For a person with a fundamental skill problem it means making them painfully aware that they're not up to the job, while at the same time showing them a way forward, where they could perform much better and be happier. For people with a will problem this means narrowing all their options to wriggle themselves out of accountability: this requires you to set extremely clear expectations, verbally communicated and repeated in writing. You need to give them tough feedback and warnings, verbally communicated and repeated in writing. Meanwhile you need to keep your HR-business partner informed, and take their advice. When you reach the stage where you think you've tried everything, and the situation has become sufficiently painful for your team member, you can try to open the conversation about an exit settlement. When your team member realizes the alternative is a PIP, which is going to be an even worse and longer version of what they already went through, they might accept a settlement. Typically this releases people from duty instantly, which is a relief for all involved. Depending on the settlement and the country they are in, they will still get paid for a few months, which gives them time to find something new for themselves.

The one thing that is always in your power, is to be thoughtful about how a person's exit affects your team members

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In all exit scenarios, you must stay respectful to the person. It's the right thing to do and it sets norms for your team. When you can, give people a worthy exit. It doesn't mean you have to pretend they did a great job. In fact it's better if you don't pretend. Your team members will know what you're saying isn't true, so it harms your credibility. It also doesn't mean everyone that leaves needs to get a big expensive dinner. Some genuine words typically do the job, and maybe some nice cards written by team members to say goodbye. In your speech, you can focus on what's good about a person, maybe acknowledge it wasn't an easy journey, and then part with respect. Closures like this make it easier for everyone to move on with positive energy.

The only exception here is when the person you managed to get out was a damaging person. In that scenario, don't give them a good farewell. In severe cases this can be damaging. I've heard of a scenario where a senior leader was known for sexual harassment issues. The person was fired, yet still received a company-wide email saying "Thank you for your great services!" Many people got hurt by that message. It would have been better not to write anything. In most situations when someone did something serious that crossed the code of conduct of the organization, there are limitations in what you are allowed to communicate. That's tough for a team leader who needs to communicate about such a person's exit. You can choose not to communicate about it at all. That at least avoids the situation I just described. In some cases it's valuable when you speak one-on-one with a few people you know who interacted closely with the damaging person. You can let them know you can't share details, but that people's stories have been heard, and that you hope the problem is solved now. In tricky situations, speak to your compliance team to understand what you can and cannot share. You have to assume that everything you share with one individual, will eventually make its way through-out the grapevines. So if you are genuinely not allowed to share certain information, also don't do it in confidentiality with one person or a small group of people. The one thing that is always in your power, is to be thoughtful about how a person's exit affects your team members.

Closing remarks

Fair and predictable performance evaluations conclude part I of this book about the Brilliant Basics that are the foundations for high-performing teams. Many of the topics that relate to the performance-evaluation system are often seen as the responsibility of HR. But the way people experience the performance-evaluation system is primarily through their manager. The manager applies the rules, communicates about them. and can influence them. So you have to own it. You don't need to be the expert, but you need to reflect upon it, experiment with different ways to apply rules, share experiences with peer managers, and challenge the system when needed. The same is true for all other Brilliant Basics. The quality of your execution on those Brilliant Basics shapes most of how your team members experience the organization. That's a large responsibility, but also a great opportunity.

The Brilliant Basics are an investment in high-quality input, to get the highest-quality output

I have often heard from managers that they don't have the time to do all the things I advocate. For instance, many told me they couldn't afford to spend several hours or even a day on a career conversation. I acknowledge that the job of a manager is fragmented and full of conflicting demands, so you're always time-poor. But managing is an investment game. Output is a consequence of input. When you try to get a team to perform by demanding output, yet you don't invest enough in giving them high-quality input, you'll never get there.

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Problems will keep circling back, solid or high performers leave, while low performers *refuse* to leave. When you fail to invest early, things will keep popping up that demand your time at a moment that you no longer control. The amount of time you lose then will be larger than what your investments would have cost. And I haven't even mentioned loss of opportunity: a high-performing team that works based on intrinsic motivation often delivers you more than you ask for. They come up with solutions you didn't think of. And a high-performing team attracts more great people. This is also why part I of the book is much longer than all the other parts: everything you do is easier and faster once the Brilliant Basics are in place. The Brilliant Basics are an investment in high-quality input, to get the highest-quality output. Helping a team perform at the highest level is very much like nurturing a young tree.

A young tree doesn't grow faster if you pull it really hard.
In fact it's more likely to die. Nurture it and it will grow into
something bigger and stronger than yourself. Teams are the same:
top-down pressure and lack of care suck the energy out of teams.
Personal care, trust, safety, clarity, encouragement and meaning
bring them to the highest level of performance.

Critical points

- The first four Brilliant Basics do most of the work to make fair and predictable performance evaluations possible.
- Having a performance system is better than not having it: it helps you reward your highest performers and deal with your lowest performers.
- A performance system can never be perfect, but something is better than nothing, as long as you don't over-engineer it.
- When you don't have clear criteria for assessing people on the "what" and the "how" and for assigning reward, you inevitably create bias in your system.
- 360-degree feedback, data checks, and oversight by leadership and HR can help prevent bias.
- Managers should never give feedback during performance evaluation conversations, that wasn't shared before at a moment when the team member could still act upon it.
- Don't force a fixed ratio of low ratings on your teams, but don't shy away from low ratings either.
- It's your job as a manager to minimize the damage of the performance system, and maximize the value.

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PART II

GREAT TEAM LEADERS, HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

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We're now getting at the part of the book about high-performing teams, but when you apply the principles of part I you've already achieved most of it. When executed with consistency, genuine intent, and personal and situational awareness, the Brilliant Basics become a flywheel for trusted relationships and intrinsic motivation. These basics cover about two-thirds of the habits that make a team effective. Without these, it's impossible to create high-performing teams. The rest can be achieved by putting *focus* on psychological safety, innovation, meaning, diversity and inclusion. The remainder of this book is about that last 33 percent, and about scaling team effectiveness in order to create an effective organization.

Google's People Analytics Team published a famous piece of research about high-performing teams under the codename *Project Aristotle*—a tribute to Aristotle's quote, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." The goal was to answer the question: "What makes a team effective at Google?"

The People Analytics Team evaluated more than 180 Google teams, ran over 200 interviews, and ran more than 35 statistical models in order to find a relation with various output KPIs. They found that the number one factor that drives team effectiveness is *Psychological Safety*. Safe teams beat their targets by seventeen percent on average, while unsafe teams miss their targets by nineteen percent. The analytics team found four other attributes of high-performing teams. Below is the total list:

1. *Psychological safety*: team members feel safe to take risks, and be vulnerable in front of one another.
2. *Dependability*: team members get things done on time, and meet Google's high bar for excellence.
3. *Structure and clarity*: team members have clear roles, plans and goals.
4. *Meaning*: work is personally important to team members.
5. *Impact*: team members believe their work matters and creates change.

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Dependability, structure and clarity, and impact are all covered by the five Brilliant Basics in part I of the book: there's nothing extra you need to do in order to establish these last four attributes of high-performing teams.

When it comes to "meaning," it is tempting to attribute this to having a lofty mission about the value your organization brings to the world. Google actually has a fantastic mission: "To organize the world's information, and make it universally accessible and useful." I know many Google employees who derive meaning from that mission. The founders of Google wrote it down at the start-up-phase, but it's equally relevant today. However, if you look at it from the perspective of the daily work of your team members, the organization's mission is not the primary source that drives a sense of meaning.

There are many things that contribute to a positive sense of meaning for your team members. The Brilliant Basics play an important role there. Meaningful career conversations help uncover what is meaningful to each individual, and you can match the projects people work on with that. If there isn't enough connection between what people want and what the team needs, you can have honest conversations early on, so people don't end up "drowning" for too long in feelings about the lack of meaning. Meaning is also driven by the feeling of having impact, and of working effectively together within a team culture that feels good. Reversely, it's demoralizing to work in a team where you see the same mistakes repeating themselves, where the same challenges are discussed over and over again without being solved, or to see people consistently not respecting each other's boundaries. It's demoralizing if dynamics like these result in a too high workload, without a solution looking as if it's near. The Brilliant Basics prevent all of these things from happening, laying the foundation for a positive sense of meaning as to your team members. You can add to that by creating an inspiring mission or vision for your team and organization, so I will cover that in part III when we get to the topics *vision* and *leadership*.

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In this part of the book I will focus on psychological safety. Psychological safety is inseparably linked to topics related to diversity, equity and inclusion, because psychological safety can't exist if it isn't there for everyone. When team members see other people in the organization get treated badly or in unfair ways, it reduces their own sense of safety as well. If it happens to someone else, it can happen to them too.

Before I go deeper into psychological safety, it's worth also covering dimensions for which Google's People analytics team found they didn't correlate significantly to team effectiveness at Google:

- Colocation of teammates (sitting together in the same office)
- Consensus-driven decision-making
- Extroversion of team members
- Individual performance of team members
- Workload-size

- Seniority
- Team size
- Tenure

This list is a good reason to reflect upon common assumptions:
- Do we really need to make coming into the office mandatory?
- Can we make decisions in smaller groups?
- Do we acknowledge the effectiveness of more introverted people well enough?
- Does our performance-evaluation system reward team performance over individual performance?
- Do I trust that people who manage their workload effectively can be equally or more impactful than people who do lots of overtime?
- Am I willing to pick a talented junior person over an experienced team member when allocating high-profile work?
- Do I really need more people to solve the workload-issues we have? Or is it a problem of prioritization and team effectiveness?
- Do I hire enough external people who can bring in fresh perspectives?

Psychological safety is inseparably linked to topics related to diversity, equity and inclusion, because psychological safety can't exist if it isn't there for everyone

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Psychological safety

Now let's dig deeper into the dimension that is the strongest driver of team effectiveness at Google: psychological safety. The bit "at Google" is important here, because the same research might produce different outcomes in your organization. The research team doesn't provide a clear rationale as to why they believe psychological safety is the number- one dimension at Google, and how that would translate to other types of organizations. My theory is that it relates to the use of stretch OKRs.

I already mentioned that Google aims for stretch OKRs, because they found people deliver more impact when focusing on big bets, as opposed to deliverables that are obviously feasible. I also mentioned this inevitably leads to an unnecessary high workload and stress, when you don't make thoughtful use of priority labels. Psychological safety is the final dimension you need, in order to work effectively with stretch OKRs. Focusing on stretch OKRs and big bets means there's more ambiguity and risk, which results in lower safety. When you want people to take more risks, you need to provide them with safety. When people aren't sure whether they can achieve stretch OKRs, and they worry what might happen if they only achieve seventy percent, they won't accept stretch OKRs. Or they might accept them, but feelings of stress while executing might undermine their effectiveness, and their ability to come up with creative solutions for problems. So it's not surprising that psychological safety came up as the number one dimension for team effectiveness at Google.

When you want people to take more risks, you need to provide them with safety

Now you might say that many traditional stable organizations aren't like Google, and therefore they don't need people to focus on big bets, and hence don't need stretch OKRs. I think it's worth reflecting on that in the context of all changes happening in the world. Almost every organization nowadays is under pressure to go through some kind of transition: digital transformation, the shift to sustainability, shifting cost structures, increased ethical standards and changes in legislation are just a few. The required organizational transformation typically isn't the first one, and it won't be the last. Very few organiza-

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tions can still afford to "cruise along." In that context, every organization needs at least some of their people to focus on big bets that help anticipate required change, so org-transformation can happen early and fast enough. I will explain in more detail in part III why every organizational transformation inevitably triggers more work and more risk for employees. For now, I think it's enough to conclude that psychological safety is likely to be the number one driver of team effectiveness for all organizations that are going through some kind of change. This is what links the three parts of the book:

- Brilliant Basics do two-thirds of the work to establish the five dimensions of high-performing teams: they are the foundation.
- Psychological safety, diversity, equity and belonging are the remaining drivers for team effectiveness.
- High-performing teams, and managers that can create and nurture those teams, are key drivers of organizational change, because they are able to take risks and deliver on big bets.

This relation is summarized in figure 22.

Psychological safety is likely to be the number one driver of team effectiveness for all organizations that are going through some kind of change

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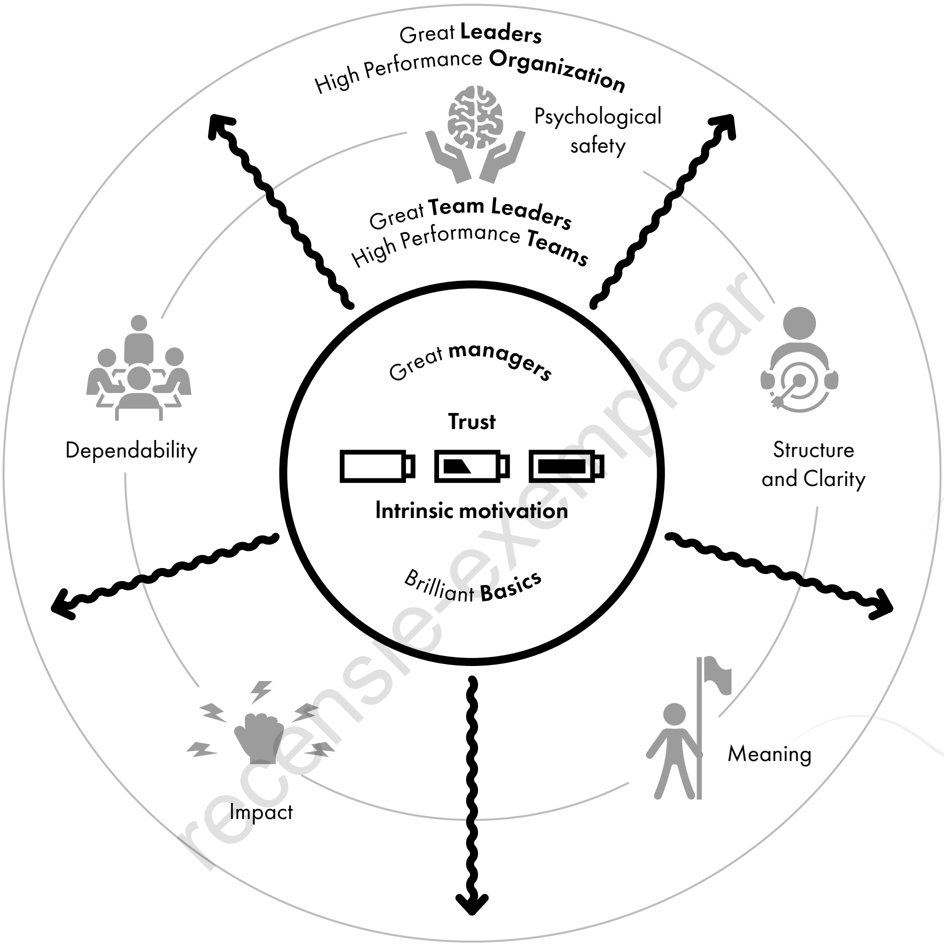
Psychological safety does many good things for your team:

- People are more comfortable delivering stretch goals and taking risks.
- They can carry a higher workload, without feeling overwhelmed.
- Less fear means people have clearer minds for creative thinking and problem- solving.
- People are more likely to raise problems or challenges early.
- They share more information with each other.
- People are more likely to ask for help and get help.
- They resolve problems together, rather than pointing the finger at one another.
- People can challenge each other and come up with difficult feedback, without undermining relationships.
- Your team members are not afraid to challenge you more, so that you make better decisions and grow as a person and professional.
- The team is more inclusive to all types of people.

Figure 22 *The Brilliant Basics are the foundations for establishing the five attributes of high-performing teams.*



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So psychological safety is critical for achieving the highest levels of team performance. That sounds nice, but it's easier said than done. In the next sections I will therefore cover how you can make psychological safety a reality.

Combining psychological safety with high performance standards

Stretch goals and big bets inevitably come with ambiguity and mistakes. How do you hold people accountable for achieving stretch goals, and how do you deal with mistakes without undermining psychological safety? How do you deal with situations of conflict between team members without undermining safety? How do you remove low performers from the team, without their peers fearing they might be next? How do you create safety for all types of people with completely different backgrounds, personalities, work preferences and communication styles?

Let's start with dealing with mistakes. It starts with investing early: the earlier you invest in building trusted relationships with your team members, the better. Ideally you already have some funds in your "trust account" by the time the first difficult situation emerges. Using deep career conversations to get to know your people at the early stages of your relationship with them, helps you to create a first "safety buffer". You will have a better understanding of your team members, which helps interpreting the situations and assessing what input works most effectively for each team member. But it also helps them to know *you* better, which means they're more likely to understand where you are coming from, when you have to land difficult feedback with them.

Next, it's important to use the word *blame* as little as possible. Whenever something goes wrong, what matters is what the best way forward is, and how to learn from what happened. Not whose fault it was. There is a nuance to this, because some mistakes do need to have consequences in the performance evaluation of a person. For example, not delivering on a P0 OKR, without any escalation or communication is something that can have consequences for performance evaluations. And if you wait with feedback about this until the performance evaluation, it's going to be a surprise at that moment. So you have to act upon it somehow. *How* you act on it makes a big difference to the psychological safety of the team.

When you first learn about something big that went wrong, you may well feel frustrating thoughts. "How is this possible? I clearly communicated the importance of this OKR! Why did you not communicate about this before?" When

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you allow those thoughts to become words in the heat of the moment, it's likely you will express them in a way that does damage. You'll pick the wrong words, you'll have a tone that indicates frustration, and it will all happen when a team member is most likely already banging their head against the wall due to their own frustration. So, the feelings of guilt and worry appear at that moment. It's even worse when this happens in front of other team members. So it's important to learn to "bite off your tongue" at such a moment. Your first reaction should be something like: "OK, tell me more about what went wrong. What are all the consequences? What have you done already to mitigate the damage? What more do you believe should happen? Do you need support with that?" For that moment, it's enough to leave it at that.

It could be that you end up discovering in such a conversation that your communication about priorities wasn't as clear as you thought it was, or maybe the team member tried to escalate to you earlier but you didn't listen. When you manage to create a safe environment, your team member is more likely to fully disclose all relevant information about what caused the problem. This will help you find more effective solutions together. And lowered stress helps your team member concentrate with a clear head on solving the situation. As a result the problem will be solved better and faster. The final benefit is that both you and your team member will have cooled down by the time you have a more thorough debriefing-conversation that includes potential negative feedback for your team member.

When you avoid unloading frustration in the heat of the moment and support solving the problem, your team member is more likely to be open to your feedback

Once the problem is solved, with the full overview of all information and with a cool head you can still deliver negative feedback when that is needed. If you had a role to play in information falling between the cracks, you can apologize for that, but you can also let your team member know how you would have expected them to deal with this situation. When you avoid unloading frustration in the heat of the moment and support solving the problem, your team member is more likely to be open to your feedback. Sometimes a situation like this can even increase trust between you and team members, because you've worked through a difficult situation together in a respectful and effective way.

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Do this consistently and your team will develop respect for you. They will learn to hold themselves and others to high performance standards while remaining respectful. When things go wrong between people, you won't see them escalate. Instead you'll see them work to resolve the situation together effectively and respectfully, and they will give one another feedback. Less problems will land on your desk as a result. Whenever you see team members working through a mistake or problem together in a respectful manner, don't forget to compliment them for demonstrating great team dynamics.

Dealing with conflicts

Let's have a look at another type of situation that can undermine psychological safety. Imagine three of your team members having a conflict. One or more of them escalates the issue to you during your one-on-one meetings. What do you do? My first line of defense is always to keep them responsible for solving the problem amongst themselves. I might ask "Have you delivered this feedback to this person directly already?" If not, I will ask to do so first. When they already delivered the feedback, I would be curious what the response was, and what other things the person has already tried to resolve the situation.

Now imagine this: Despite nudging all three individuals to give one another honest feedback and to resolve things amongst one another, the problem keeps circling back to you. On top of that, the problem undermines effective project collaboration, and the conflict is starting to affect team culture. If you would follow my recommendation from the previous section, to focus as little as possible upon who the guilty person is, you'd hold all three people equally accountable. That might result in each of them getting a lower rating in their performance evaluation. Now imagine that one of those three is a highly manipulative person, who has been sabotaging collaboration to a point that it became impossible for the other two team members to resolve the situation. If you would hold all three people equally responsible for the problem, you may have punished willing team members for a problem created by the manipulative person. Even worse: it would send a signal that people can get away with bad behavior, and that you as a leader don't have people's backs when someone deliberately makes their work hard. Your entire team will be affected, because people are likely to talk about such situations together, and because the manipulative person will most probably keep doing whatever that person did.

There are situations where you just cannot afford to stay impartial: you have to cast judgment and "pick sides." In situations like these you have no other choice

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than to zoom in and spend as much time as needed to uncover what is going on. And you have to consider that at least one of the people involved isn't telling you the full truth about the situation, so you need to dig hard. When people are skilled at manipulation, it can be very hard to discover who did what. But I do find that people like that, often leave a trail of damage that extends beyond that one situation which reaches your desk. Other team members or stakeholders will have experienced challenges with this person too. The main problem is that people may not dare to tell you. This is particularly true if the damaging person is more senior than the people who were affected. The more psychological safety you establish in your team, the faster you will figure out what's going on. With high psychological safety, people from various sides will proactively come to you if a person is a problem. Often they won't know about each other's stories, because a manipulative person typically makes sure that every "victim" thinks they are the only one. You will be able to stitch up the stories though, and form an image of what really happened.

So when you spend enough time and establish enough psychological safety, you're likely to untangle all bits of conflicting information, and so you get to understand who was the problem. If it was primarily one person, you will know who to hold accountable. You need to discuss this directly with that person. In severe cases you may need to involve HR. It would also be good to have a conversation with the other team members, to reassure them that you understand what caused the problem and are acting upon it. You may not be able to share all details about the situation, but the assurance that you dug deep enough to understand their challenge, will be highly valuable to them. And it will re-establish safety.

When you dig deep and discover it is genuinely a problem in which all three people were equally responsible, it would be good to let each person know what your assessment is, how you arrived at that assessment, and what the consequences will be. Do this as soon as possible after you have formed your opinion.

Moments of truth for psychological safety

People making mistakes and situations of conflict are examples of "moments of truth" for psychological safety: your actions in those moments define whether people experience psychological safety, or not. When your actions in those moments send the wrong signals, there are few words left that can repair that damage: you can't create psychological safety by just saying it exists.

Another example of moments of truth are exits: every time a team member leaves, you have an opportunity to reinforce psychological safety. It doesn't

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matter whether people leave of their own choice, due to a reorg, or whether they for instance needed to leave your team due to low performance. You can always spend some aware time allowing people to leave with respect and with some kind words. I mentioned earlier that it's probably not a good idea to give a damaging person a send-off like that. Instead of giving these people an exit ritual, you can spend time giving your team a context about why the person is leaving, without sharing confidential information. When you don't communicate anything, people will start guessing. They might even think they are next. Exit-rituals are a good way to ensure safety around exits. In my team we always send around a slide-deck where people can write a goodbye card for the person that is leaving. We give it to the person on the last day, so they can read people's messages. The slides people create are often full of pictures and memories. Habits like these create moments of closure. These moments communicate over and over again that every person matters, even if they are leaving.

> *People making mistakes and situations of conflict are examples of "moments of truth" for psychological safety: your actions in those moments define whether people experience psychological safety, or not*

Reorgs are also critical moments of truth. Both before and after the reorg, it's almost certain that people will experience psychological unsafety. In the period before it's the anticipation of the unknown that is most difficult for people. In the period after, jobs may be lost and people may have moved managers or projects. Some people might be lucky: they may have kept their jobs, or maybe their job even became bigger. Yet they still will have seen other people lose their jobs. I've come out of several reorgs with a bigger team and a bigger job, yet I still needed to recover from the fact that the colleagues around me lost their jobs. The context and support you provide before and after a reorg, defines how fast a team can move on, and be safe and effective again. It can easily take six months or so, for a team to be fully up- and running-again.

"Moments of truth" can also be triggered by big societal events. For example, the moments when *MeToo* and *Black Lives Matter* came up, were moments when my team felt a need to share experiences in a safe space. I organized virtual gatherings at these moments, where people could exchange thoughts if they wanted to, and where I shared my personal thoughts too.

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Spotting moments of truth is a matter of situational awareness. The more you are in tune with your team, the more likely you will be to spot moments of truth, that are an opportunity to demonstrate through behavior that psychological safety exists in the team. When you miss out on these moments, at best it's a missed opportunity, at worst it damages safety. And that damage is hard to undo. Psychological safety also helps making it easier for you as a manager to spot moments that matter—because your team members will start helping you. Whenever there's something on people's minds, people will come to you, and make you aware that it might be a good idea for you to add value or to mitigate damage.

Psychological safety is often in the details. Small behaviors, even facial expressions while you say something, can make a world of difference whether a situation feels safe to people or not. Small acts of kindness, like a hand-written Christmas card or a chat message to say thank you, can have profound impact when applied consistently. And sometimes, the moments when you *don't act* or *don't* say something are the moments of truth: for example if you don't intervene when team members treat each other disrespectfully, or if team members leave and you forget to spend time and attention on it. Google published a valuable checklist for psychological safety, which I included in appendix 4 of this book. It might help you to spot tangible things you can do to create and nurture psychological safety.

Critical points

- Psychological safety is the number one trait of high-performing teams at Google.
- Safe teams beat their targets by seventeen percent on average, while unsafe teams miss targets by nineteen percent.
- Whether or not people experience Psychological Safety is defined by your actions in moments of truth. Examples are moments of mistakes or conflict.

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DEI: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

When I first started educating myself on the topic of diversity, equity and inclusion, I struggled with the terminologies people use. I had a hunch what people meant by diversity and inclusion. But equity was a concept that needed more explanation for me, to understand the full breadth of the concept. Equity, in the context of professional organizations, is about fair treatment, equal access to opportunities, progression and reward. And someone's identity cannot predict the end result.

'Belonging' is another term that has an important place in this list. People often speak about an "inclusive culture": cultures can be less inclusive or more inclusive. I look at Belonging as the highest level of Inclusiveness you can achieve.

The analogy below has brought further to life for me what different terms mean:

- *Diversity* is about all differences and variations within a group, or: "being invited to the party."
- *Inclusion* is about valuing the perspectives and contributions of all people, incorporating the needs and viewpoints of the full diversity of the organization, or: "being asked to dance."
- *Belonging* is about feeling *seen* for your unique contributions, *connected* to your co-workers, *supported* in your daily work and career development, and *proud* of your organization's values, or: "dancing like nobody's watching."

The dance-analogy helps you to understand how teams and organizations can "feel for" different kinds of people.

When I became a manager for the first time, one question I asked myself is: "Should I have a strategy for diversity and inclusion?" At the time I only had six people in my team. This led to follow up questions: Should I do something special for the two women in the team? Or for the only black person? But shouldn't I then also do something special for the only Finnish person in my team? Somehow it felt against my principles to do this. The size of my team was small enough for me to be in direct contact with all the individuals of my team. And who says these two women have certain challenges, for the only reason that they're women. Who says the men in my team *don't* have challenges that are common among women?

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Creating a diverse and inclusive team is about knowing how to manage individuals, as unbiased as you can

I decided to *not* have a strategy for diversity and inclusion. Instead I focused on my full day career conversations, making large investments in getting to know my team members. I knew I would have an opportunity, to see whether or not the way I ran my team was inclusive. Besides the manager feedback-survey, Google also has an annual employee satisfaction-survey called *Googlegeist*. That survey contains lots of questions about diversity and inclusion within the team. I decided I'd focus my efforts on knowing the individuals first, and to use Googlegeist to evaluate whether more was needed. About nine months later, the Googlegeist results came out: I had the highest scores on almost all statements that related to diversity and inclusion. I concluded: creating a diverse and inclusive team is about knowing how to manage individuals, as unbiased as you can.

Being raised by lesbians

The way I was raised heavily influences my views of diversity, equity and inclusion. My parents divorced when I was five years old. My mother discovered she was bi-sexual. About a year later she met the girlfriend she lived with for the rest of her life. So, I was raised by two women from the age of six. My older sister and I referred to my mother's girlfriend as our "spare mother." But she's very much like a real mother. Nowadays she's the grandmother of my children. People often asked me whether it was strange to be raised by two women. At that young age though, the situation you live in is "normal" for you, so it never felt strange. As I grew up I never really noticed how being raised by two women had shaped my views about the world, people and myself.

I remember people often asked me: "Which of the two is the man in the relationship?" I'd always answer them with my reflections, and never thought much about that question. It's only about seven years ago, when I was nearing forty years of age, and started leading initiatives on diversity and inclusion, that I realized how offensive this question really is. And a stupid question too: there is no man in the relationship. People use labels of all kinds to organize the world so it makes sense to them. Gender labels are part of that. We cling to these labels so much that we even apply them in situations where they don't make sense. And we do it all the time: it's completely normal in most working environments to say that a woman is demonstrating "male leadership behaviors" when she's

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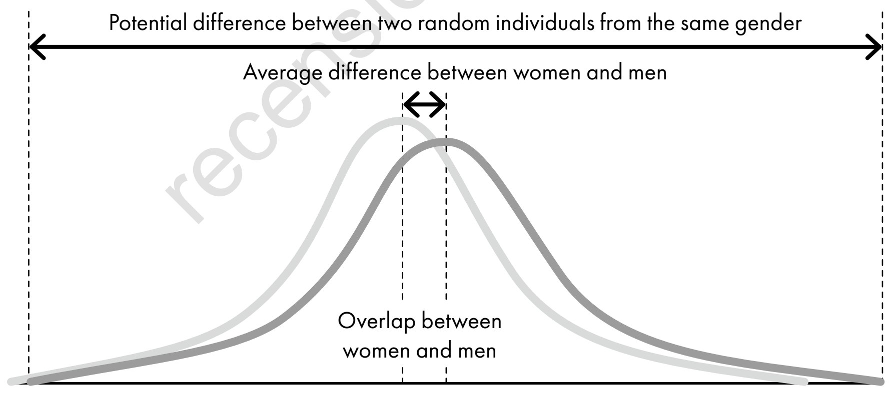
tough and dominant, and to say a man is demonstrating "female leadership behaviors" when he's empathic and caring. When you think of it, it's actually pretty offensive: it implies it's not manly to be empathic and caring, and that it's not female to be strong and dominant.

Our biases are hidden in the language we use, even in the context of advocating for equality. For instance, when we encourage women to use their "female qualities" to be better leaders, we reinforce the biases that also lead to women being judged for being "too manly." Our organizations would be more inclusive, if we could eliminate all biased language. One simple question helps with that: Would I have used the same language if I were speaking to …? …if I were speaking to a man? …if I were speaking to a white person? …if I were speaking to a straight person? …etcetera. If the answer is "no," the language is likely to be biased.

I realized through these reflections how profoundly my view upon people and the way we apply labels to describe them is influenced by being raised by two women. When I think of groups of people, for example men and women, the mental framework in figure 23 comes to mind for me.

Figure 23 *Bell curves comparing two samples of people.*



These are two bell curves. One represents a sample of women, the other of men. This could for instance be a comparison about particular cognitive abilities. Many statistical phenomena can be described through a bell curve. The "belly" of the curve is the average within a sample. The further you go away from that average, the less likely that this data point is to occur. When there's more va-

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riety in a sample, the bell curve becomes flatter and wider. Researchers have a tendency to focus on averages within a sample, yet it's often the variation where the real insight is.

When you apply that thinking to the comparison between men and women, these two bells could represent the data points about their ability to listen, to negotiate, to lead, to solve problems or any other skill. The average difference between men and women is quantified by the distance between the two vertical dotted lines in the middle. The difference is likely to be small in most cases. You can perform effectively in many different ways in most jobs. The more ways there are to be effective, the less likely it is that women and men on average would perform at different levels. And even *if* there is a difference, it could go in both directions.

The more ways there are to be effective, the less likely it is that women and men on average would perform at different levels

The difference between women and men will certainly be much smaller than the amount of variation of data points that exists *within the female sample* and *within the male sample*. The maximum of that difference is depicted by the two vertical dotted lines on the outer edges of the figure. The difference between *two random men within the male sample* is likely to be larger than the *average difference between* women and men. Similarly, the difference between *two random women within the female sample* is likely to be larger than the *average difference* between women and men. The area where the bell curves overlap is where men and women are similar. That's the largest area. And I haven't even gone into the question whether gender is binary at all, so this is a simplified version of reality. When you plot it out in a graph, this insight is a no-brainer. But in everyday life, we talk about differences between men and women as if they are the most normal thing in the world, and we often make them bigger than they really are, and ignore the variations between individuals far too easily. In doing so, we perpetuate unconscious biases.

You can apply this reasoning to the comparison of any type of group. Black people versus white people. Germans versus Americans. Introverts versus extraverts. When you compare the groups as to traits or skills that are needed to be

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effective at a certain job, the difference between *two random individuals from the same group* is likely to be larger than the *average difference between the different groups*. The only exception to that rule is when the skill you measure on is highly correlated to how you classified the groups. When you compare Germans and Americans on their ability to deliver a workshop in the German language, I'm pretty sure you'll find a large difference in skill.

When you make assumptions about an individual based on the group that person is part of, and based on what you think you know about that group (for example about the personal traits or skills of that group), you are more likely to be wrong than right

So when you make assumptions about an individual based on the group that person is part of, and based on what you think you know about that group (for example about the personal traits or skills of that group), you are more likely to be wrong than right. If you base your decisions upon such assumptions, these decisions are also more likely to be wrong than right.

When you interact with individuals, whether it's in job interviews, performance evaluations, salary negotiations or any other kind of meeting, you need to work hard to unbias yourself so you see the full person, and not what you think you know about that person based on the group you think they are part of.

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Micro- and macro-actions

So what about diversity and inclusion initiatives that focus specifically on women or minoritized groups. Those are examples where you do "label" people based on the groups they belong to. Is that still OK then? Can't you just solve these problems by unbiasing yourself, and focusing on the individuals? This is where the difference between "micro-actions" and "macro-actions" comes in. I define micro-actions as moments of action when you can look a person in the eye: essentially any type of meeting where you are in direct contact with a person. I could manage diversity and inclusion in my team by focusing on deeply knowing the individuals, because my team was small enough to do so. If my team would have been twice the size or larger, that wouldn't have been enough:

I would have had to add a set of macro-actions. Macro-actions are the moments when you set a strategy or make decisions about a group without having the option to directly engage with all individuals in that group.

It's easiest to explain the difference through the example of a hiring process. Imagine you're trying to unbias the hiring process of your organization to push for a better female representation at all levels. This requires conscious steps at various stages of the hiring process.

- *Macro-actions* happen, for instance when you set a target to have a fifty-fifty gender balance in your pool of candidates before you enter the interview stage. This shouldn't be controversial, because you're not giving any kind of preferential treatment. You're just creating equal access to the opportunity.
- *Micro-actions* happen at the interview stage, because this is where you can look people in the eye. By doing your due diligence at the macro-stage you've created a situation of equal access to the opportunity. From there onwards, the only thing you need to do is to focus on hiring the best candidate. If you would do anything else, you'd be giving preferential treatment because of having the goal of hiring more women. That leads to sentiment that the only reason a person was hired is because there was some kind of a target for gender balance. There shouldn't be a need for preferential treatment at this stage, because there isn't any reason to believe women would qualify less for the job. The only thing that is required from interviewers during the interview stage, is to be as unbiased as they can be. Educating yourself about unconscious bias, and taking actions to mitigate against biases, are what I consider micro-actions.

Macro-level is where you can set targets for representation and other diversity and inclusion related to KPIs. Micro-level is where you should ignore any targets or KPIs that exist

When you work like this, it shouldn't matter whether the best candidate at the end of the interview stage is a woman or a man, or what skin color the person has. When you consistently generate diversity in your pool of candidates at the macro stages of the process, and you consistently unbias the micro-stage of the process, over time you should be hiring with similar representation as the population available for any given role. When you track the data over time, and you

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see hiring is still skewed towards certain audiences, you can be certain there's still a bias in the system somewhere.

Macro-level is where you can set targets for representation and other diversity and inclusion related to KPIs. Micro-level is where you should ignore any targets or KPIs that exist. Instead you should focus on removing unconscious bias first, and then on hiring, rewarding or promoting whoever is the best candidate. When you handle macro- and micro-level this way—with focus, structure and discipline—you can progress any topic in relation to diversity and inclusion without giving anyone preferential treatment.

Don't try to boil the ocean

When organizations put effort upon representation in hiring, often they focus upon gender and ethnicity and sometimes on sexual orientation. I still remember my first internal reaction when I learned about these initiatives: Why are we focusing on gender and ethnicity? Why not on all dimensions of diversity? Why not on introverts versus extroverts? It seemed against my principles to focus on only two dimensions of diversity. But then I started leading a variety of projects in this area, and I realized how hard it was to make progress when you look at a larger scale. And not everything is allowed. For instance, in Europe you wouldn't be allowed to build a pipeline for the interview-stage based on ethnicity. It's also not allowed to build a pipeline based on sexual orientation: you'd have to ask people to state in their resumé what their sexual orientation is. That would be outrageous. And it really isn't about any of these dimensions. It is genuinely about diversity of thought and backgrounds in all thinkable ways. But you have to start somewhere. If you try to change the hiring-practices in a large organization by focusing on all dimensions of diversity at the same time, you'd most likely be less impactful, and it would be hard to track progress. Aiming for gender balance gives you focus, and makes progress more likely and measurable.

I discovered two other things:

1 The fact that you narrow your focus to a relatively small amount of dimensions of diversity, doesn't mean you aren't delivering impact on the other dimensions. When you succeed in making your organization more accessible and inclusive for a few types of underprivileged groups, you end up making your organization more inclusive in general. For instance, many of the practices that help you take gender bias or ethnicity bias out of processes, also reduce other biases in the process.

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2 The fact that you focus your macro-efforts on a relatively small amount of dimensions of diversity doesn't stop you from focusing your micro-efforts on *all* dimensions of diversity. Micro- and macro-decisions and activities happen in parallel, and they support one another.

Don't put too much on your plate. Pick a feasible set of priorities, execute them with discipline, track progress with data and hold people accountable

So don't be afraid to focus when you work to improve diversity and inclusion upon a large scale in your organization. Don't put too much on your plate. Pick a feasible set of priorities, execute them with discipline, track progress with data and hold people accountable. Meanwhile keep unbiasing yourself in all your micro-interactions with people.

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Making diversity and inclusion actionable

When people talk about diversity and inclusion, the topic often sounds big, idealistic and unachievable. But when you break it down to actionable dimensions, the amount of things an organization needs to do is actually manageable. There are various ways you can categorize it. Below is how I prefer to structure what organizations need to do:

- unbiasing hiring
- unbiasing performance evaluations, reward and progression
- creating a culture of belonging

Let's zoom in on each of those.

Unbiasing hiring

Hiring is probably the topic where it's easiest to make fast progress, when it comes to pushing for a more diverse representation. You can solve unbiasing of hiring in a few quarters when you really want to. And measuring progress is straightforward. I know there are certain job profiles for which making progress is harder: for example, there are many tech-related jobs where the supply of qualified people isn't diverse in all dimensions. However, the fact that making progress is hard for certain types of jobs should never be an excuse to park the topic in general. It makes it even *more* important to solve the problem fast for all the other jobs. You do this by taking focused actions in each step of the hiring process. The typical steps most organizations have are:

1 writing and posting job descriptions
2 sourcing (finding qualified candidates)
3 evaluating candidate pipeline
4 interviewing & deciding
5 offer stage

Macro-actions for unbiasing hiring

Your organization might use slightly different categorizations or names for these recruitment stages, but it's likely they align roughly. The first three steps in the list of hiring stages require a strategy for macro-actions. At this stage you're not assessing every individual person in a great deal of detail. You're mostly scanning and funneling to end up with a small pool of qualified candidates, that can be included at the interview stage where they will be evaluated more thoroughly. As mentioned, you could set a target to end up with a fifty-fifty gender-balance, and a diversity of backgrounds in the pool of candidates that goes to the interview stage.

The fact that making progress is hard for certain types of jobs should never be an excuse to park the topic in general

This starts with writing the job description in an unbiased way. There's lots of research that proves the way you write job-descriptions affects the diversity of the group applying to them. An obvious example: when you specify in your job-descriptions that only people who went to certain specific universities qualify, and those are universities that only privileged people can afford, you're likely to get a non-diverse sample of applications for your role. There's also proof that too long lists of qualifications make women less likely to apply, compared to men. Women are more likely to doubt whether they qualify, when you overdo it with your list of qualifications. Other examples that lead to bias in applications are the use of biased language or too much jargon. When you search on the internet, you will find lots of articles with great recommendations about unbiasing job descriptions.

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Next is sourcing: what sources of candidates will you explore to find qualified candidates? In most large organizations, this is something a staffing professional does for you. But you can make sourcing from diverse talent pools easier for them. First, don't limit them too much. When you want only candidates from specific competing companies, you're likely to tap into a pool of people that isn't diverse if those companies have limited diversity in their organizations. Second, you can give them sufficient time. When you force a staffing team to come up with a pipeline for the interview stage in one week, they're unlikely to come with a pipeline that has sufficient qualified people as well as sufficient diversity of backgrounds. Finally, many organizations have referral-arrangements to encourage existing employees to bring in people from their personal network. Referral mechanisms also have a risk of bias. If the current representation in your organization is poor, a referral system is likely to retain status quo, because you're hiring people similar to what you already have.

If the current representation in your organization is poor, a referral system is likely to retain status quo, because you're hiring people similar to what you already have

When you evaluate the pipeline of candidates that comes through, keep an eye on gender balance, and whether you believe there's in general sufficient variation in backgrounds in the pool of qualified candidates. When this is not the case yet, give your staffing partner more time to keep sourcing, and consider whether you've been too restrictive with your criteria.

When you take all steps above, a staffing member should be able to find you a pool of high-potential candidates that has a fifty-fifty gender-balance, and that is diverse in several other dimensions as well. The amount of extra time to get to a diverse pool of candidates is lower for most roles than managers often think. When I was leading efforts to improve hiring practices, we were able to completely solve issues with gender representation in hiring with only an about seven days longer time to hire. It was just a matter of putting focus on it in a structured way.

Micro-actions for unbiasing hiring

Once you enter the interview stage, you are in the realm of micro-decisions. From this phase onwards, you should completely ignore the fact that you have

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an objective of creating gender balance in your team or organization (or other KPIs you have goals on). The focus should now be on unbiasing the interview process, and on finding the best candidate for the job.

Unbiasing starts with a diverse interview panel: preferably you ask one or two colleagues to interview the same candidates. Those should be colleagues that look at people differently than you do yourself. All interviewers, including you yourself, should have gone through an unbiasing training. If your organization doesn't offer this, it's easy to find a good training for free online. LinkedIn Learning has good courses for this. It's a good habit to remind yourself of most common biases, and ways to mitigate against them before starting an interview process. Appendix 5 provides an overview of the ten most common biases that affect hiring. It was created by Equalture, a company that supports organizations with unbiased hiring. When you search on the internet for their article "10 Unconscious hiring biases & how to avoid them" you can read how you can counter these biases.

Next, you need to use what is called "structured interviewing practices." Some hiring managers run job interviews by asking people about things in their resume. That way each conversation follows a different structure, and it's hard to form objective criteria for comparison between candidates. When I prepare for interviews I define three or four skills needed for the job. I translate these skills to questions with scenarios or challenges that people would encounter in the job. For instance, I might have one question about dealing with difficult stakeholders, one question about solving problems, and one question about dealing with ambiguity. If the role includes managing people, I will also have a question about a particular aspect of team leadership. When you have multiple interviewers, it's wise to agree who interviews on what. At Google there are fixed processes for this. One interviewer will typically focus on role-related knowledge, one on leadership, one on general cognitive-ability and another on *Googleyness*. When you're curious what Googleyness means: a lot has been written about it online. Unbiased interviewing requires a consistent set of questions that is based on consistent criteria to assess candidates, and that is applied the same way across all candidates. This gives you the most objective set of information to compare candidates.

Finally, it's decision time: use all information available to you, including the information from the other interviewers, to make a decision that is as objective as possible. Ask yourself: which candidate is most qualified for the job? When two candidates are closely matched in terms of qualifications, ask yourself one

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more question: which of these candidates would add the most unique value to the team, compared to the people I already have? When still in doubt there's a final question that helps: which of these candidates is likely to surprise you most? You will have found your new team member when you know the answer to these three questions.

Unbiasing performance evaluations, reward and progression

The Brilliant Basics, when executed diligently, solve for unbiased performance evaluations, reward and progression:

- Deep career conversations get managers to invest in knowing their team members, and reduce the risk that biases affect their perception of individuals.
- OKR-writing ensures people have equal access to high-profile work.
- Meaningful meetings and team norms ensure people get equal access to guidance and quality feedback, and that they have equal opportunity to be seen and heard.
- Diligent tracking of progress on OKRs and milestones, prevents situations where people go out of sync with team goals, or where quality-feedback is delayed.
- Fair and predictable performance-evaluations result in an assessment of people's impact, that is as objective as possible.
- When all these steps have been taken, the only thing left is to use the available information in order to make objective decisions about reward and progression based on the impact that people have.

Building a culture of belonging, and measuring progress

The only thing left to do, when you succeed at making hiring, performance evaluations, reward and progression unbiased, is to create a culture where all people can develop a sense of belonging.

You may notice that one element is missing in my list of focus areas for building diverse and inclusive organizations: retention isn't part of the list. This is because retention automatically gets solved when all other dimensions are solved. When you build an organization with diverse representations of people, you give them equal opportunity in performance evaluations, reward and progression, and you create a culture of belonging where you should no longer see higher churn than average amongst women and minoritized groups. Retention is still a good output-metric to check though: when you see there's more churn

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in certain groups of employees in your organization, you know there are still things you aren't doing right, when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

When I thought about the topic of belonging, my mind went back to a moment my mother shared with me, at the age of sixteen, how the process of discovering that she was bi-sexual had worked for her. She told me she had looked in her heart and realized: "Why limit yourself to half the world, when you can find the space in your heart to open up to the entire world?" You can apply that principle to organizations too. You will only have the opportunity to open up to all available talents if you create more space for all types of people, regardless of their gender, skin color, or sexual orientation, if it does not matter whether they are introverted or extroverted, assertive or caring, young or old, physically challenged or not, etcetera. We can only create that space when we are willing to let go of the structures of our traditional thinking.

Belonging is the ultimate end result you achieve when you get all other things right. This framing is useful when you think about measuring the progress of your efforts. Measuring progress is critical if you want to hold people accountable. Coqual is an organization focused on creation of diverse and inclusive workplaces. They collaborated with Google to measure the concept of belonging at work. I've included their measurement framework in appendix 6. These are your ultimate KPIs that help you see whether your efforts were successful or not. It's worth checking whether employee-satisfaction surveys in your organization cover similar metrics or not. If not, consider including some of these metrics in your own manager- feedback survey. When you combine this data with data about representation and reward at all levels of the organization, you have a good basis to assess how the organization is doing on diversity, equity and inclusion.

When measuring KPIs like these on an organizational level, the main problem is many of these metrics move only slowly over time. That can be used as an excuse not to make progress. So you also need short-term KPIs to track progress, and hold people accountable. In hiring you can track gender balance at the interview stage during hiring and after acceptance of the job offers. That helps you see whether managers started with a diverse pool of candidates or not, and whether there's bias in hiring decisions. It works best if you can split this data by job-level or grade. It's often at the higher seniority levels that things get skewed, resulting in non-diverse leadership teams. During performance evaluations you

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can check similarly whether ratings and promotions are applied without bias at all levels. When you run a large organization, you can zoom in on various managers or leaders. It's relatively easy to see who makes an effort and who doesn't. When one particular leader doesn't play along, you'll see "skewed data" in the entire organization under that leader. In some countries you might be able to split data by more diversity dimensions than just gender. That might for instance make it possible to look at differences between ethnicities. In most organizations you can clearly see in the data that various groups of people have a worse experience than other groups of people. You can only split data in more diversity-dimensions if the data set is large enough, so that it doesn't create privacy issues. On top of that, employees may need to give explicit permission to use certain data points. Also, what is allowed by law varies by country. There's an increasing number of companies that offer services to help organizations track progress on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. When you take this topic seriously, it's worth looking into this.

When managers or leaders aren't contributing to the creation of a diverse and inclusive workforce, they should be held accountable in their performance evaluations. Only then will you make tangible progress on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

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Triple-A: Activism, Allyship, Action

Awareness of topics related to equity and inclusion, in society and at work, often starts with activism by a relatively small group of people. Those people are often the ones that are affected by the problem. At some point, some of them are sufficiently fed up with the problem that they start speaking up. At first, they typically aren't heard. Speaking up might even backfire. There are still countries in the world, where speaking out for equality can result in being punished. At work too, you can be at risk if you speak out about inequality. There are still many organizations where being one of the first to speak out, can reduce your chances of being rewarded and progressing your career. You may even lose your job because of it.

> *How do you protest within the law when your voices aren't being heard, decade after decade, while people are still being killed?*

It can take a long time before people start hearing a minority of activists, and even longer before they start *listening*. And even then, it doesn't mean actions are taken. In the examples of slavery and racism, people have raised their voices for decades. You'd think problems at work don't take that long, yet we still haven't solved topics like racism, gender-equality and *MeToo*-issues at work, even though these have been going on for decades and people have been raising their voice about them. When George Floyd was murdered by a police officer in 2020, protests became violent. Buildings were damaged and shops were raided. People complained: "This is not protesting, this is just criminal behavior!" And of course, I understand this is not how protests should go, and that innocent entrepreneurs faced significant damage and cost. But how do you protest within the law when your voices aren't being heard, decade after decade, while people are still being killed?

This is why allyship is important. Without allies, minoritized groups can stay in this phase not being heard while still being punished—forever. At some point, more privileged people need to stand up and tell their peers to listen and to act. That too comes with a risk. I know that by experience. I've gone through two periods of about two years each, where I found myself escalating stories of people

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who were being damaged—to my manager, to senior leadership and to HR. In each of those cases I wasn't being heard initially, and I had to keep banging the drums for about a year before I got signals the message was starting to land. And it took about two years until I knew what the consequences would be. If the person I was escalating stories about had had strong connections with the right people, this could have cost me my opportunities for advancement. I knew that, but I decided I didn't want to work for this company if this was the outcome. So I didn't care about losing my job. I was also in the luxury position to have saved enough money, so I could do without work for several years. That's a luxury many people don't have, and it's part of my privileged position. In the end, the problems got dealt with in a way that did justice. I didn't know that during the journey though, and it took about two years in each case before action was taken, so I had gone through periods of extreme stress.

Still, I had a privileged position in this situation. Relative to the people who came to me with stories, my position was more senior. My chance of being heard was probably greater, and the risk of negative consequences was probably lower. Societies and large organizations can only fundamentally change when a critical mass of people contributes to that change. Minorities cannot solve the problems alone. If there is one minority that can have a big impact, it's the minority of senior leaders, but these are typically people from privileged backgrounds. Only when privileged people in all layers of society and organizations speak up, actions will happen. And even then, it often goes slower than you would like, but every small step is a big win as to these topics.

When the MeToo-movement came up, there was a wave of protests across Google offices to support the movement. The great thing: senior leaders actively made space for these protests. Many of them canceled meetings so people could join protests, and some even joined themselves. Many of these leaders were white straight men. I saw this as an encouraging moment. The fact that leadership creates space for activism, isn't a given in large organizations. I know there also were moments in the press where Google colleagues felt there was no space to protest, so it doesn't always go right. But this was certainly a positive example in the offices where my team members worked.

When you want to create a diverse and inclusive organization, which is a prerequisite of building a high-performing organization, you need to be a triple-A organization:

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- *Activism*: You need to create a safe space for people to raise their voice and be heard.
- *Allyship*: You need to mobilize allies and hold people accountable for their contributions—this starts with senior leadership.
- *Action*: You need to have a clear strategy for making diversity, equity and inclusion actionable, and for tracking progress.

When you want to create a diverse and inclusive organization, which is a prerequisite of building a high-performing organization, you need to be a triple-A organization

If one of these three is missing, it can take decades before you succeed at your efforts. Meanwhile people will keep being damaged and your organization won't be performing at the highest level, because it isn't utilizing the full pool of talent available to the organization.

You could argue I am not an expert on topics of racism, gender-equality and other minority- issues, and that is actually true. There are many people who are more expert on this topic than I am. Much better books have been written on these topics. In fact, there is some risk I wrote things that aren't entirely correct. But that risk is part of being an ally. Most allies are not experts. And you don't have to be. Just make an effort to educate yourself as well as you can, and then do what you can to make a positive difference. As a manager, you have the biggest influence of all people as to how your team members experience the organization. And if you don't step up as an ally, who will?

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Critical points

- Psychological safety only exists when it exists for all types of people.
- Diversity is "being invited to the party." Inclusion is "being asked to dance." Belonging is "dancing like nobody is watching."
- Managing DEI requires a clear strategy on macro- and micro-level, and both levels should be executed in parallel.
- Targets are set and measured on macro-level, and at this level you focus on a limited amount of diversity dimensions.
- On micro-level you ignore that you have DEI targets: instead you focus on unbiasing in favor of all dimensions of diversity.

- When the principles above are applied consistently, you can solve problems in DEI without giving preferential treatment to specific groups or people.
- For an organization to become fully diverse and inclusive, you must apply a triple-A mindset: create space for Activism, mobilize Allies and hold them accountable, make DEI Actionable and track progress.

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PART III

GREAT LEADERS, HIGH-PERFORMING ORGANIZATIONS

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Almost all large organizations nowadays are going through some kind of transformation: digital transformation, cultural transformation, transformation to become more sustainable, to become more responsible as an organization, or to become more efficient and effective. An increasing number of organizations now actively strive for a balance between people, planet and profit.

Anyone who has worked in or with large organizations as a driver of organizational change, knows organizational transformation is tough work: It's hard to know where to start and where to go, It always goes slower than you want to, often to the point where you wonder whether any change is happening at all. I worked with Google's largest advertisers across Europe, the Middle East and Africa, supporting them with digital transformation and organizational transformation for ten years, and discovered many universal patterns and barriers. One of those patterns was the fact that many people who work in large organizations think their organization is the only one that has certain problems, and that they are slower than the organizations around them. This increases their frustration with challenges that are actually just common and inevitable things which any organization faces when going through a change. Almost all large organizations struggle with silos, data integration, making space for innovation, scaling innovations, general slowness and rigidity of the organization, lack of vision and direction, legacy-technology and processes, measurement of ROI (return on investment), having the wrong targets and KPIs, organizing data into actionable insights, internal politics and competition between teams, lack of people with the right expertise, cultural challenges… I could go on like this for a while. Do you recognize these challenges? I hope it's a relief to know you are not alone.

When Sundar Pichai, CEO of Alphabet, was asked in an interview about the threat of competition, he replied: "I've always believed that if you focus too much on the competition, you tend to get it wrong. Large companies in particular fail because they stumble internally." This analogy explains well why it can feel so frustrating to push your organization through change: you stumble over the internal organization, over and over again.

Interestingly, leaders always say it is hard to bring along employees, and employees always tell me their leadership isn't sufficiently supportive at great changes. I've learned by experience that the most effective and fastest way to change a large organization is through middle-management. This is the layer that can make the vision of leadership actionable, that can make sure people get the right direction and support, and that the right culture is established. When you apply all the principles of the parts I and II of this book, you've become the most powerful driver of change that any large organization can have, particularly when you pull together with the managers around you.

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People know what needs to be done... and still they don't do it

Another insight I built up by working with many organizations on transformation challenges, is that most people know what needs to be done, what changes need to happen in the organization. That isn't true for everyone: some just follow the boss without thinking critically themselves, they might do whatever the organization always did, or they might focus on their own job and not on the bigger picture. But most people I meet are not like that: they do care about the bigger picture, they do see the things the organization systematically does wrong, and the things the organization is not doing, but should do. Many of them even made efforts to push the organization to change, but even the best of them need to acknowledge they have to pick their battles. Some people may give up trying to change the organization, even when they know what needs to be changed. When people know what needs to be done, yet bump into boundaries over and over again, people lose a sense of meaning in their jobs. There are two underlying causes for the barriers that many people in large organizations encounter, which I have observed in almost all the organizations I have worked with:

1. Universal limitations of data.
2. People tend to do what makes their bosses happy, and that's not always a good thing.

In the next sections I will cover what those universal limitations of data are, and how that can create situations where it's not the best idea to do what makes your bosses happy. I will also discuss what leadership can do to prevent such a situation.

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Universal limitations of data: a game of prison break

I spent a large part of my career working in the industry of research, data and insights. Data also plays an important role in digital transformation. I've heard many leaders wish for a "magical red button" that aggregates all their data, analyzes it and predicts based on ROI (return on investment)—calculations what the best decisions for their organization are. I've also seen many suppliers of research, data, technology and consulting, promise that red button:

- "Our ROI-model takes all data sources into account, and predicts exactly what marketing mix is best for you."
- "Our technology platform integrates all types of data you can think of, and produces dashboards a toddler can read, so all decisions are based on ROI."
- "Our Artificial Intelligence-solution predicts the outcome of decisions by looking at all types of data you have, and learning from it, so your people don't have to do that work."

These products, tech-platforms and services are often of high complexity. It can be extremely hard to get your suppliers to explain to you what the limitations of the system or service are—or even to acknowledge that there are limitations in the first place. The result after implementation is typically not as rosy as the picture that was painted. That's partly because implementation is often more complex than it first seems. But it's also because there are three universal limitations of data that no system that relies on data ever can get round:

1. *Short-term impact is easier to measure than long-term impact*. This dilemma often emerges in marketing organizations as a tension between performance marketing, which is typically focused on short-term ROI, and brand-building which focuses on the longer term. Performance marketeers always complain that the ROI of brand-building-efforts is too hard to prove, but anyone who works in a marketing organization long enough knows it's hard to be sustainably successful when you don't have a strong brand.
   This limitation of data also makes it harder for organizations to invest in long-term bets like sustainability, transformation or innovation. These topics often require investment now, while pay-off is uncertain and takes a long time. When organizations optimize all their decisions based on data, their teams tend to prioritize short-term tactical actions over investments in the

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long-term journey, even when their leaders encourage them to invest in the future by painting beautiful future scenarios.

2 *Measuring within a channel is easier than measuring across channels.* Marketing ROI is easiest to prove when a consumer clicks on online-advertising, and then buys a product online and on the same device. As soon as the user buys on another device, measurement gets less accurate. You can solve for some of that when users are signed in on multiple devices, but it gets even less accurate when the purchase happens in a brick-and-mortar store. Again, you can make corrections in your data to solve it, but the calculations inevitably become less accurate. Wrong decisions get taken when you ignore the fact that these inaccuracies exist. This problem is also behind the issue of silos that many organizations face. It's easy to optimize the efficiency of conversations from a medical specialist in a hospital. When you isolate your view on one type of specialist-area, you might think the hospital is becoming more efficient. Yet when you talk to patients you might hear they end up getting sent from specialist to specialist, causing bad patient experiences. When you scrutinize the data about all types of specialists, you will see that systematically forwarding patients to one another also creates a higher collective workload. Building a model to optimize efficiency of conversations across all types of specialists is hard. The same problems occur when consumers are sent from one team to another, when trying to solve a problem with your organization. Each team optimizes for their own KPI, and individually it looks like they are efficient. Yet the damage to the customer relation, and the waste of effort across teams are harder to measure.

3 *Data cannot accurately predict impact as to things you've never tried.* Data tends to be based on things you have already done. Predictions about the future are extrapolated from what you already know. Even predictive data models are based on data from the past. Too much focus on data can therefore paralyze fundamental innovation within your organization. You will get stuck in incrementally improving methods that have been tried and tested in the past, and hence will gain a few percent each year, but are unlikely to make any *radical* improvements. If you want to build an organization that is "future-ready", you must be open to experimentation, even if the data cannot prove that the experiment will work. If the data could predict with certainty whether an experiment will work or not, it wouldn't be experimentation.

The three universal limitations of data make their way into our technology platforms and dashboards that organizational leaders use to make decisions, and into the processes by which we optimize the output of teams. This leads to suboptimal behavior of teams, including siloed behavior. When a leader tells

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me with pride “we make all decisions based on data,” I know employees in that organization probably struggle with:

- breaking through silos
- investing in long-term bets
- pushing fundamentally new innovations

The only way to make effective data-based decisions is to start with understanding the boundaries within which the data can provide accurate answers. The tighter we optimize behavior of teams without acknowledging limitations to our data, the less teams will prioritize behaviors that help our organizations to be future-ready.

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The result of this problem is that many leaders, without intending it, ask one thing from their teams yet incentivize something else:

- They might incentivize sales-teams to be customer-centric, while rewarding them to sell specific products because that makes it easier to measure sales success. This often results in sales teams pushing products, instead of listening to client-needs.
- They might encourage teams to break through silos, and collaborate more across teams, yet at the same time put pressure on those teams by optimizing their activities with KPIs that reward siloed behavior. When people have a lack of time and need to choose whether to invest in cross-team collaboration or achieving their KPIs, they often pick the latter.
- They might encourage their teams to serve consumers holistically at all stages of the consumer journey, while online- and offline-sales are handled and optimized by different teams with different KPIs. These teams often end up competing with each other, even though they serve the same consumers whose journeys seamlessly mix online and offline channels.
- They might ask for more innovation, while also demanding that you prove the ROI will be good, before you get permission to invest in new innovations. ROI-predictions for things an organization has never done are rarely accurate, so people in large organizations often end up innovating “below the radar” without permission, or they drop the idea altogether.

Leaders who want to create agile organizations that can change as fast as their environment need to lead, based on:

- data
- mind
- heart

Data needs to be used within the boundaries of its accuracy. The *mind* stands for strategy: in the areas where data is less accurate, you need to create logical strategic frameworks that set direction, and that quantify achievement of milestones. These strategic frameworks should be supported by "proxy KPIs." Proxy KPIs are estimators of ROI, that solve the lack of accurate data. For example, it is difficult to measure the ROI of customer satisfaction directly. Therefore, many companies have established KPIs for customer satisfaction, such as five-star-ratings and Net Promoter Scores (NPS). They measure these KPIs and make business-decisions based on them, but without directly measuring their financial impact. People often find it hard to accept proxies as hard KPIs, because they fear the inaccuracies. But making decisions based on fake precision of data is much worse than making decisions based on thoughtful proxy KPIs. Finally, the *heart* stands for the moments when you have to do something because the creative idea is beautiful, or when it's the right thing to do. Sometimes you just need to extend trust to people, when they come to you with ideas. If you do that at the right moments, people typically surprise you. They often overdeliver in a way you would never have seen if you had tried to optimize their work based on data.

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People often find it hard to accept proxies as hard KPIs, because they fear the inaccuracies. But making decisions based on fake precision of data is much worse than making decisions based on thoughtful proxy KPIs

Organizational transformation: breaking out of the prison

Pushing for organizational change requires people in your organization to take on more work and more risk. New ways of working rarely work well with existing processes and structures in an organization, so people end up shopping around for support and permissions, and they end up knocking on people's doors in order to unblock the barriers. And it's always uncertain what the reward for all that extra work is: you don't know in advance whether new ideas will work, and due to the universal limitations of data they rarely fit within the existing frameworks for measuring success and assigning reward.

The limitations of structures, processes, legacy technology, and KPIs make our organizations into prisons for those trying to forward change. Driving change in large organizations is like trying to escape from prison. You need to break through walls, find loopholes, and secret supporters. You hope that your manager and leaders help you with that, but some leaders are more like prison guards. Good managers and leaders are in a continuous connection with people in all layers and parts of the organization, and they are conscious of the barriers that structures, processes, systems and KPIs create. Bad managers and leaders are primarily driven by the dashboards and KPIs available to them, which means they are trapped within the same prison, and can't create an environment from which they may safely break out of.

The least you can do as a manager and leader is to scrap as many barriers for change as you can. That makes it safer and easier for people to push change. But simply "making it safer" is a really low bar to set. It means that people will not be punished for doing the extra work to further the organization. In many organizations this is the maximum you can expect when driving change. For intrinsically motivated people that's often enough encouragement to keep on going, because it provides a sense of meaning to help making your organization future-ready. That's more rewarding for those people than grinding and optimizing existing processes that you know are outdated. But it would be nicer and more fair, and better for the organization, when driving change comes with an extra reward.

This is where the principles of *Managing Without Power* are critical. When you apply these in the context of transformation, you create the levels of safety for people to take more risks, focus on longer-term bets, and come up with more innovative ideas. You set direction and measure progress, so you know which people contributed to the most difficult change projects, and thereby need to be rewarded. You create space for team members to cross the boundaries of teams, by agreeing joint OKRs with peer managers. When a critical mass of your managers knows how to manage without power, everything their teams do has a ripple effect, because it is based on intrinsic motivation. Even if you wanted to, you wouldn't be able to stop these people from challenging the boundaries of the organization. And that's exactly what you need to create: an organization that is able to transform over and over again.

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So, when you are a leader from a large organization, and you want to reduce the risk and effort it takes for people to drive change—while increasing reward for these efforts—you need to create as many great managers as you can, who know how to apply the Managing Without Power principles. This can be be done in several ways:

- Train your managers, and give them a common language and toolkit that helps them to create a culture where change is inevitable.
- Reward and promote your best managers by measuring manager-feedback and including that feedback in the performance evaluations of managers.
- Create communities amongst your managers: encourage the best to train the rest.

Critical points

- Everything that relies on data is bound by three universal limitations of data:
  - Short-term impact is easier to measure than long-term impact.
  - Impact within a channel is easier to measure than impact across channels.
  - Data cannot accurately predict impact for things you never tried.
- Imperfections of data dashboards, of the KPI's and processes we use to optimize behavior of teams, make our organizations into prisons: it's hard to invest in long-term goals, to break through silos, and to innovate.
- Leaders can create more space for their employees by leading with data, mind and heart, and by creating a critical mass of managers who know how to manage without power. This can be achieved through training, manager-communities, and reward and promotion for the best managers.

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Five enablers of organizational transformation

We've looked at what managers and leaders can do *generically* to make it easier for people to drive change in their organization. But it's worth going one level more specific. When my Google Digital Academy team built our portfolio of programs about organizational transformation for the first time, we spoke to many customers, to experts within Google and in the industry, and identified five themes of organizational transformation that are relevant in most organizations.

- Vision and leadership
- Customer centricity
- Tech, data, and automation
- Culture of innovation
- People operations

When a critical mass of managers in your organization succeeds in creating high-performing teams, they've charged the batteries of trust and intrinsic motivation within their teams, and in doing so their teams became a source of energy that can push the boundaries of the organization. As a leader you can channel that energy by setting a focused strategy for change in each of these five transformation themes. Let's dive deeper into each of them.

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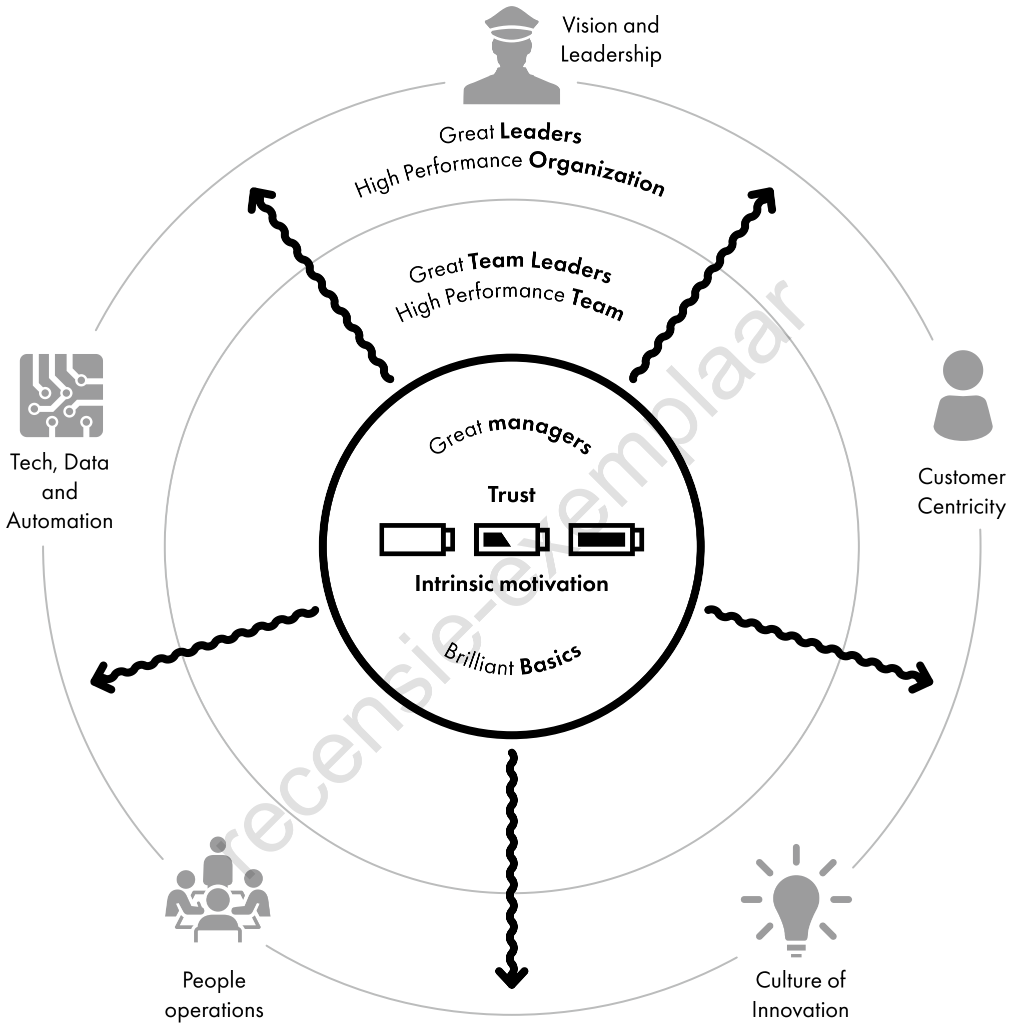
Vision and leadership

In my first four years with the Google Digital Academy team, I never had a vision for my team. Or better said I had a vision in my head, but it wasn't written down on paper. Nevertheless, I scored 100 percent on statements that related to having a vision and strategy. That score was almost entirely based on executing consistently on the Brilliant Basics, while being highly conscious why our team existed, and what unique role we played versus other teams at Google. There were about twenty other teams at Google that did education in one way or another. Most of them focused on education as to Google's products. We were one of the few helping customers solve digital-transformation challenges. We did so with the purpose of enabling Google's sales teams to become more consultative in how they sell, so we invested in problem-solving and action-planning workshops, where sales reps could spend quality time with customer teams. Everything I communicated to the team, annual plans I made, OKRs I set, came from that sense of purpose, and people felt there was a vision, even though there wasn't one on paper.

Figure 24 *Great managers build high-performing teams that are a source of energy in order to drive change: you can channel that energy through the five enablers of organizational transformation in the outer circle of the model.*



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I've been in many manager-trainings about writing a vision and mission for your team. People often end up debating the difference between vision and mission. I've seen many managers and leaders struggle to get words on paper that sounded sufficiently inspiring. The definitions and wordsmithing don't matter as much as people often think. Yes, when you write a vision or mission for an organization or brand, it pays off to hire a fancy agency to help you find a "light bulb-insight" and inspirational wording. But most managers and team leaders are not in a position where they get to define a vision or mission for an entire organization or brand. When it comes to teams, most team members don't necessarily want visions and missions. They want to have a sense of direction, prioritization and meaning for the group they are part of, and for their individual roles. Visions and missions can play a role establishing those things, but often they're just words on a slide. A vision or mission only has meaning to people when it helps them understand why the team exists, why their role exists, and how it defines where we go, what we do and what we don't do.

When it comes to teams, most team members don't necessarily want visions and missions. They want to have a sense of direction, prioritization and meaning for the group they are part of, and for their individual roles

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I find Simon Sinek's golden circle a powerful instrument to summarize all of these things for a team. It works at all team sizes. It was originally designed to help brands define their value-proposition by starting with the "why." Sinek argues that companies often talk too much about *what* they do and *how* they do it—and they lose the customer's attention as a result. Precisely by starting with *why* you do something, you bring people into your story, and your real reason for existence. "Why" is therefore the center of the model in figure 25: your organization's purpose, cause and beliefs are the starting point of your story. In the "how" you explain which strengths, values or guiding principles differentiate you from the competition. Finally, in the "what" you explain what products or services you provide. When you're not familiar with the framework, search for "Simon Sinek golden circle" on YouTube, and you'll find many movies of him explaining it.

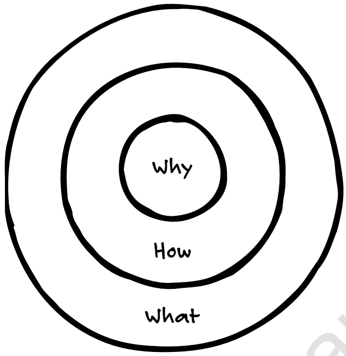
As a team, you may not sell services or products, but you do have a reason for existence, and you have internal or external customers for whom your team performs activities. Therefore, the model works very nicely for teams. Below is how I applied the framework to my Google Digital Academy team. I made edits to the original wording to remove things I shouldn't share.

Figure 25 *The "why, how, what" framework from Simon Sinek's book Start with Why is very suitable for writing a team vision.*

Why
Your purpose , cause or belief.

How
The strengths, values or guiding principles that differentiate you from the competition.

What
Products sold, or services offered.



Why

We believe Google has a unique opportunity to support customers with digital transformation, because Google...

- builds the technology that shapes the future
- has access to unique insights
- has unique ways to run a large organization, while retaining a remarkable startup- spirit

How

Google Digital Academy brings Google account-teams and customers together in order to offer inspiration, solve business-challenges and develop deep partnerships... creating time together that transforms.

What

We support consultative selling by creating and running scalable or semi-scalable action-planning workshops, that solve digital-transformation challenges for large customers.

The wording is not as smooth as Google's mission "To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful," but it doesn't have to be. The last thing I want is managers and leaders getting stuck finding the right wording. If you haven't written a vision or mission for your team, give it a try this way: sit down for two hours or so with a clear head, and put your thoughts on paper.

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Exercise: Making your vision meaningful and actionable with your team

It's nice if you can get input from your team also for your vision. I find that works best after I wrote a first draft myself. I'd typically do this on a team offsite in a session of about two hours, where we polish the "why, how, what" together, and then spend time exploring how it defines what we do and where we go. Below is how you could run a sequence of exercises about this with your own team.

Step 1: Likes and dislikes for the "why, how, what"

Print your draft "why, how, what"-statement on a large piece of paper, and hang it on a wall. Below it, hang two sheets of paper: one with the text "What I like," and the other saying "What I don't like." Or to make it more playful, you could have one with a smiling emoticon, and the other with an angry or sad emoticon, or a happy or grumpy cat. You can play around with that. Give all people post-its. Give them five minutes to read the statement, and five minutes to write down one thing they like about the statement, and one thing they don't like about it. Get people to stick their post-its under the sheets of paper. Observe when the group is ready reflecting and writing. If it's faster or a bit slower than the amount of time I mentioned here, that's fine—but don't drag it too long. Now have a look at the post-its, read them out to the group, and ask people for clarification where needed. This is an opportunity to have a discussion about various parts of the statement. Don't try to rewrite the statement on the spot with the group. You only have to make sure all voices are heard. Then you take the action-item to capture everything that was written and discussed, and use that to rewrite the statement and share it for a final check with the team after the offsite. The end result won't be "perfect," but it will be good enough to create direction and meaning. The discussions you had are equally important to what you end up writing on the paper. This exercise should take you about thirty to forty minutes.

Step 2: Defining where you play or don't play

A vision is only meaningful if it helps the team understand what we do and what we don't do as a team. This exercise is an easy way to clarify this to your team, while allowing them to reflect on what it means for their personal roles. In your preparation for this exercise, print three sheets of paper saying the following things:

- Where we play
- Gray zone
- Where we don't play

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The areas where your team plays have activities that are clearly core-work for your team, and typically things other teams should *not* be doing. Areas where your team does not play have activities that you believe other teams should be doing, or that aren't important enough for the organization to focus on. Very often a team gets loads of requests from internal and external stakeholders about activities they shouldn't engage in. Agreeing where you don't play helps team members say no at the right moments. There's always a gray zone, activities where you might make an exception when it helps opening a door or building a relationship, or it might be that it's not a priority now, but is likely to become a priority in the near future. For activities in the gray zone it's good to discuss under what circumstances you say "yes" and when you say "no."

Next, you need to create a few more sheets of paper: each of them should contain a domain of work that members in your team focus on. When you are a manager of managers, these domains could be the ones each team under you works on. For instance, in my Google Digital Academy team, one part of the team focused on Executive Workshops, one part on marketing workshops, and one part on the processes and ecosystem required to scale our workshops. You could also pick domains based on the strategic pillars in your annual plan, or the objectives you use in OKR-writing. Whatever structure you choose, people should already be familiar with it. On the offsite, use the sheets of paper to create a grid like the one in figure 26 on a large window or wall.

Ask people to have the "why, how, what"-statement in mind, and reflect upon things they do in their roles, and the requests they get. Explain the meaning of "where we play", "where we don't play," and the gray zone with some examples. Write the examples on post-its while you explain them and stick them where they belong. Give your team members ten minutes to write post-its for their own roles, and stick them in the right place in the grid. Finally, ask one representative for each of the domains to talk the group through the activities on the post-its. This allows that person to express an opinion: Why should the team play there or not? Or why is something a gray zone? This exercise doesn't just help people to understand when to say yes and when to say no. It also makes them aware of the boundaries of other people in the team: when should they respect someone else's "no"? So, it's a great exercise to make direction, prioritization and team norms actionable. This exercise should take you about thirty to forty minutes. Don't allow it to drag on much longer. You're not trying to set perfect prioritization. You're just training people to apply the principles. You can make priorities more distinctive in the OKR-writing later.

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Figure 26 *Exercise to determine where you team can play, and where it can not.*

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Step 3: Defining where you go

The last step is about looking ahead. Assuming you run an offsite about every six months or so, it's sufficient if you look ahead at the next six months. In your preparation, create a similar grid like the one in step 2. On the vertical axis you use the same activity-sites as the previous exercise. For the horizontal axis you now print six sheets of paper with the next six months of the year on them. Make a grid like the one in figure 27.

Ask people to take the "why, how, what"-statement in mind, and the agreements you made about where the team plays or not. Ask them to think ahead about the deliverables they want to achieve in the months ahead. Give them time to write deliverables on post-its, and stick them on the right part of the grid. When you see all people are done, ask each team member to walk the rest of the team through their highlights in five minutes. Whether you can afford to cover each individual in this exercise depends on the amount of people in the group. Even when you can afford the time, it's not wise to cover more than six

Figure 27 *Exercise to look ahead with your team for the next six months.*

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to eight individuals. Otherwise this step starts dragging for too long, lowering energy-levels that you need in order to run a good offsite. If the group is larger than six to eight people, you have two options. One is to run this exercise in subgroups, for instance: one group per knowledge domain. People will then be solely presenting within their subgroups. The other is to ask one representative for each knowledge domain in order to talk the group through the highlights. The benefit of the first option is that sub-groups can cover the road ahead in more detail. The benefit of the second option is that the entire team becomes aware of each other's priorities for the coming months. You can assess what's most valuable for your team.

There is also a nice version of this exercise that looks *back* in time: the wall of celebrations. It's worth considering as an opening exercise on the offsite. The only thing you need to do is create a grid like the one in this exercise with the six months prior to the offsite. Instead of knowledge domains on the vertical axis, you might have one sheet saying "work" and the other "personal". People can then write post-its to celebrate achievements or things that happened at work and in their life. It's a nice way to get to know one another, and to boost energy at the start of an offsite.

The simple set of exercises above ensures that a team vision is more than a few words on a slide. It helps you define the vision with input from your team. It makes actionable on a team level and individual level how the vision defines what people do or don't do, and where they are going. It helps people understand each other's work and boundaries, and empowers them to make decisions. That's all you need. You don't need to be an experienced facilitator to run these exercises effectively. You can repeat parts of these exercises over time, perhaps with small variations, in order to keep the team on track. It's important that you reinforce the vision and the things discussed when you write OKRs. And every moment when the team is under pressure to prioritize there is an opportunity to refer to the mission and things discussed, in order to emphasize how these define the prioritization-decision at that moment.

Critical points

- Teams want to have a sense of direction, prioritization, and meaning. A vision or mission can help, but most of it is achieved through the Brilliant Basics.
- A vision or mission is only relevant if people see how it defines where the team plays and doesn't play, how prioritization decisions are made, and how their role is affected. Without those things, visions and missions are just words on a slide.
- Simon Sinek's Golden Circle is an intuitive tool that helps drafting a team vision without overdesigning it.
- You can use offsites to align the vision with team members, and to agree how it defines what topics and activities people should and should not focus on.

Customer centricity

I rarely meet leaders or professionals who don't want their organization to be customer- centric. Still, few large organizations are genuinely customer-centric, so customer centricity is a topic of attention in many organizations. I know that not all teams interact with customers directly, but even when you are a team that is 100 percent internal, you still have internal customers. Customer centricity is often seen as a cultural problem, yet it's more often a problem of structures, processes and incentives.

There could also be a cultural problem, however you can't solve that without first solving all problems in structure, processes and incentives. And when you solve the other problems first, things that seemed to be cultural problems are

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likely to be resolved too. The key-problems below are examples of common issues with structures, processes and incentives that make customer centricity hard to achieve in large organizations:

1 The fact that an organization is large, makes it inevitable that you split tasks between teams.
2 In large organizations, leadership is no longer close enough to the work of all people, so output of teams is optimized based on KPIs. These KPIs are inevitably imperfect due to the universal limitations of data.
3 Reward-systems encourage people to deliver as to their KPIs, yet typically fail to acknowledge the imperfections of the KPI-system.
4 Optimization-efforts reduce the stretch that teams have to invest extra in customer- centric behaviors that aren't covered by the KPIs they are evaluated on. People give up "doing the right thing."

Customer centricity is often seen as a cultural problem, yet it's more often a problem of structures, processes and incentives

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The result of the above challenges is that people demonstrate siloed behaviors, or other behavior that isn't customer-centric, often even against their own wishes of being more customer-centric.

Now let's look at things managers and leaders can do to take away friction on the points mentioned. The first problem is unavoidable. You can't solve customer centricity in a large organization by putting all people in one big customer-centric team. The lack of structure would result in even less customer-centric behavior.

The remaining three challenges can be counter-balanced though:

- Joint-technology platforms between teams can make it easier to integrate data and to steer on KPIs that are less siloed. When data about the customer gets integrated, you get a single *view* on the customer. When that data then gets used to steer the work from teams, you create a single *voice* towards the customer.
- Leadership can create KPIs that quantify customer satisfaction, and make reward of teams at least partly dependent on the success on these KPIs. Many organizations measure customer satisfaction at least to some extent.

But in most organizations I know, customer satisfaction is not taken into account when evaluating performance and reward for employees. And even when it is taken into account, it's often treated as a secondary input. There's no point encouraging people to be more customer- centric when there is no incentive to do so, and while organizational structures make it hard to do so.

- Managers across teams can agree to joint OKRs and projects that reduce the presence of silos: when senior leaders sponsor these projects, they become career opportunities for the people contributing to them.
- Managers and leaders can prioritize more rigorously using OKRs and priority-labels, so that people aren't loaded with work to the point that they can't afford to invest in "doing the right thing." They could aim to always leave twenty-percent "customer centricity time" for people to invest in behaviors that aren't incentivized by their KPI-structure, but that are helpful to customers.

When structural barriers to customer centricity are removed and customer-centric behaviors are rewarded more, the only thing left is for leaders to consistently role-model customer-centric behavior themselves. Ideally, leaders in all layers of the organization make time at least every six months to speak directly with customers, whether internal or not.

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Critical points

- Customer centricity is often treated like a cultural problem, but it is more often a problem of structures, processes and incentives.
- Optimization on inevitably flawed KPI's leads to situations where people demonstrate siloed behaviors, or other behavior that isn't customer-centric, against their own wishes.
- Joint technology-platforms, customer-centric KPIs, joint-OKRs between teams, and twenty-percent "customer centricity time" can make it easier for employees to be customer-centric.

Tech, data, and automation

Almost every form of organizational transformation requires some kind of change as to the use of technology, data and automation. These three also depend on one another. Technology is often needed to integrate data, and to disclose it to organizations. Automation is often informed by data. When data isn't integrated, automation results in a faulty output. When technology-platforms aren't integrated, automation can merely be applied to narrow tasks that only benefit small parts of the organization.

There is one big problem: the people having the most profound knowledge of the latest developments in tech, data and automation are often the younger people in the organization. Those people are still at an early point in their career, and are therefore in relatively junior positions in the organizations. They are often the ones making choices about the use of technology in an organization, yet they primarily do so looking through the lens of the work in their own teams. Different teams then pick different technology-platforms, data can't be integrated, and automation doesn't work at the benefit of the organization as a whole.

Tech geeks often have a 'language problem': they speak figuratively in a binary code of zeros and ones

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Thus you need to find a way to elevate tech-decisions to higher levels of seniority in the organization, so that choices can be made from a holistic strategic view-point. But this also means that you need to create stronger connections between senior decision-makers and junior tech-geeks, so that their knowledge is taken into account. That brings me to the second challenge. Tech geeks often have a 'language problem': they speak figuratively in a binary code of zeros and ones. Even with the best of efforts, it can be very hard to understand what people are explaining when they are experts in a complex domain. As a leader you often find yourself bombarded with acronyms and abbreviations, while the only thing you want to know is: "How does this affect the decision I need to make?"

A digital maturity framework is an example of a solution to such a problem. An example of such a framework is the Digital Maturity Benchmark, which the Google Digital Academy team launched together with Google's marketing team and the Boston Consulting Group. This example is meant to be used by marketing organizations. The framework defines for six dimensions at what level of digital maturity an organization is. There are four levels of maturity that you can see above the columns in figure 28. If you work in marketing, you'll recognize the terminology used in the first column. *Audience* refers to the use of signals to target people as to advertising (or to applying other types of personalization). Mature organizations have integrated their data so that they get a holistic view of their customer. *Assets* refers to the communication-vehicles:

Figure 28 *Digital maturity framework by Google and Boston Consulting Group.*

	Nascent	Emerging	Connected	Multi-moment
Audience	Limited use of first party data, single broad targeting, upper or lower funnel	Use of first party data, segments defined based on personas, mid-funnel targeting expanding to other end of the funnel	Use of first and third party data, segments based on business, lower, mid and upper funnel targeting	Complete view of customer, segments based on Lifetime Value, full funnel targeting
Assets	Basic use of features on search, limited creatives, no focus on mobile	Multiple creatives optimized with automation, improvements on basic mobile-web performance	Extensions used, video ad sequencing, dynamic creatives in remarketing, optimized mobile web performance	Customized messages, audience-based strategy for creatives, optimal and always improving mobile web experience
Access	Most of us spend on one single inventory/ channel, buying through direct reservation, limited quality settings	Several channels, use of generic keywords, part of video/display bought programmatically	Leveraging most channels and formats, automating generic search with DSA, leveraging DSP and ad server pre-bid quality controls	All digital media is programmatic, comprehensive and unified audience strategy, sophisticated and systematic usage of brand controls solutions
Attribution	Intra-channel measurement, no online-offline tracking, limited test & learn	Occasional brand lift surveys, track micro-conversions, some use of A/B testing	Systematic check of viewability/audibility on video, non-last click attribution integrated with bidding, deduplicated cross-channel measurement	Complete online/ offline measurement, use of data-driven cross-channel attribution, always on use of A/B, incrementality on key campaigns
Automation	Manual bidding, no use of feeds	Automated bidding rules, simple and low-quality feed	Full-auto smart bidding on all channels on search and display, media buying and bidding depending on operational feeds	Full-auto smart bidding on all channels to omnichannel lifetime value, dynamic buying and bidding depending on feeds and margins
Organization	Client teams working in silos	Key functions working together, though IT remains separate, Defined test & learn process	Regular cross-functional teaming, including IT, Multiple, sequential test and learn pilots	Agile teaming and experimentation part of business as usual

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video-ads, banners, search-ads, or for instance a website. Digitally mature organizations use signals to personalize messages in an automated way. *Access* refers to how media-space is purchased. The online-media space is highly fragmented, so purchasing systems need to defragment the buying process. *Attribution* refers to the way you assess the impact of ads. Mature organizations have ways of assessing impact that go across online- and offline-channels. *Automation* is about removing manual steps from the processes of targeting ads, buying ad-space, customizing messages, etcetera. *Organization* refers to the ability to break through silos, and work in more agile ways. When you don't work in marketing, the information in the individual cells may not mean a lot to you. And that's OK. I mainly mean to illustrate by a specific example what a maturity framework may look like.

This maturity-framework is supported by a public and free survey that enables organizations to assess the digital marketing maturity of their own organization. You can find this survey at digitalmaturitybenchmark.withgoogle.com. The survey gets regular updates as technology advances. Each cell in figure 28 comes with a set of detailed actions to get to the next level of maturity as to that dimension. When you take the survey, you get the set of recommended actions that bring you to the next level. This particular survey is only suitable for marketing organizations. Depending on the nature of your organization, you might need a different flavor of a maturity framework. Almost all consulting companies have a variety of maturity frameworks for different purposes, and some organizations create their own.

There's lots of value you get from having a good maturity framework, particularly when it allows you to assess your own organization by means of a survey:

- It translates "tech language" into a strategic roadmap for the organization.
- It avoids fragmentation of technology platforms by elevating tech-decisions to a leadership level.
- It helps leadership to set an aligned cross-functional ambition.
- It helps identifying the steps to achieve that ambition.
- It gives teams a common language to contribute to the ambition.
- It helps to quantify the results of your investments to make the organization ready for the future.
- It helps to track progress, so that you can reward people for contributing to that progress.

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If you're not yet working with an organizational maturity framework, it's worth considering this when you find yourself struggling with one or more of the issues mentioned.

Critical points

- Technology choices should be elevated to higher levels in the organization, which means that leaders should link up more with junior specialists in their organization.
- A maturity framework can bridge the gap between a specialist language, and a strategic point of view, and can help set the direction and track the progress of transformation.

Culture of innovation

The innovation challenge has similarities to the challenge of customer centricity. Almost all leaders I meet want their people to be more innovative, but almost all professionals say it's too hard to innovate in their organizations, and that leaders don't support innovation enough. It's one of those areas where wishes and reality don't often align. Another similarity with customer centricity is that innovation is frequently seen as a cultural issue, even though other barriers in the organization are a bigger problem that should be tackled first. So, I'd like to start with those barriers.

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It starts with the people you hire. I mentioned earlier that Google doesn't hire people for a specific job, instead they hire them for a journey with Google. That makes what you're looking for in the hiring-process fundamentally different. When you hire for a specific job, you will look for people with the exact experience and knowledge to effectively execute that job. When hiring for a journey you look for people who can learn new things, deal with ambiguity, create new stuff, and reinvent themselves when necessary. Next time you write a job-description, consider removing some of the ingredients that demand highly specific knowledge and skills, and replace them by ingredients that are signals that someone can grow along with the organization over time.

Next are the organization's structure and the workplace. This workplace includes the physical and the virtual space people work in. Innovation often comes from connections between people and related worlds. It often requires cross-functional teams to come up with great ideas. How easy is it in your offices for people to bump into each other over lunch, coffee or tea? How easy is it for any random person in your organization to reach out to another colleague, regardless of what team and office they are in? Do you have forums set up where managers get together to exchange ideas about priorities and opportunities? Do teams have joint OKRs or projects that are sponsored by senior leaders, and that are considered a career opportunity? How easy is it for people to find information from all parts of the organization, and to collaborate on documents together?

And finally there's reward. Or even the opposite of reward: risk of punishment. Is it attractive for people to invest in big bets? Or is it safer for them to focus on the OKRs they are confident they can achieve? Are people encouraged to spend time on P2 OKRs? Or are P2 OKRs symbolic additions to the list that keep being deprioritized quarter after quarter? Is learning from failure rewarded? Or is failure more likely to be ignored or punished? Do you use "how-statements" in performance evaluations, that help reward people for working through ambiguity, for proactively identifying opportunities and for solving problems with a high complexity? Do the KPIs you use to measure team effectiveness and efficiency allow space to invest in long-term bets?

When you ask for innovation without making it easy and attractive to innovate, you deflate and frustrate people

There's no point in thinking about the culture of innovation without solving the above topics first. When you ask for innovation without making it easy and attractive to innovate, you deflate and frustrate people. Deflation and frustration are the worst mindsets for people when it comes to innovation, because they are reductive mindsets. A culture of innovation requires playfulness, safety, openness, time, and a willingness to grow and collaborate: the same things you establish when you work on the Brilliant Basics and the enablers for the high-performing teams that were described in part I and part II of this book. The best way to establish a culture of innovation is therefore to create a critical mass of managers who know how to manage without power. Once you have that, you no longer need to ask for innovation, because intrinsically motivated teams push the boundaries of the organization—whether you want it or not. The only thing left for leadership is to channel the energy of those teams, by removing blockers on the five enablers of the transformation described in part III, and to reward employees and managers who drive change and innovation.

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The culture of innovation is not something you actively create, though you can easily break it. Culture of innovation is something that emerges and grows under the right conditions

From here on, it's mostly a matter of creating space for ideas to emerge, and to be invested in. It's a matter of going out of the way. The culture of innovation is not something you actively *create*, though you can easily *break* it. Culture of innovation is something that *emerges and grows* under the right conditions. It does so when:

- You hire people who can grow along with a changing organization.
- You remove barriers to the physical and virtual connection and collaboration between people.
- You allow information and ideas to be easily shareable and findable.
- You approach prioritization of people's tasks in a way that leaves time for them to invest in big bets early on.
- You reduce risk, and increase reward for working at complex or ambiguous opportunities and ideas.
- Managers know how to manage without power.
- Leaders know how to lead with data, mind and heart.

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Critical points

- Similar to customer centricity, innovation is often seen as a cultural problem, even though it's more often a problem of organizational barriers.
- Innovative organizations don't hire people for a single role. They hire for a journey into the organization.
- They make it easy for people to connect with one another face-to-face and virtually, to exchange information and to collaborate.
- Reward systems should be designed, so that they make it safe and rewarding to invest in stretch objectives and long-term bets, to work through ambiguity and to learn from failure.
- Culture of innovation cannot be created, but you can easily break it. And you need to create the right conditions for it to emerge.

People operations

The people analytics team that published the studies about great managers and effective teams, plays an important role in Google's strategy for people operations. The reason: things that work in one organization might not work in another. The advice I wrote in previous sections and chapters may or may not work in your organization or team, because your situation might be different. So, it's wise to experiment with different approaches to learn from them. Data can help assess whether something is working. The manager feedback-survey is a good example of measuring whether the changes you make in the way you manage and organize your team are having the desired impact. A digital or organizational-maturity survey can help to assess progress on a transformation roadmap. Data-drivenexperiments are another way of using data to learn what works for you.

Google runs data-driven people-experiments all the time. These experiments are sometimes big, and sometimes small. Solutions are sometimes complex, and sometimes surprisingly simple. Laszlo Bock wrote about this approach extensively in his book *Work Rules!*. I'd like to illustrate the approach with some examples. Let's start with one that seemed complex, but that had a surprisingly simple solution.

In Google's engineering organization, employees can nominate themselves for promotion. Google discovered at one point that women nominate themselves less for promotions than men do, yet when they did nominate themselves they were actually more qualified for promotion. Apparently women were unjustifiably more hesitant to nominate themselves. This resulted in an unfair difference in promo-ratios between men and women. It seemed a complicated puzzle to figure out why this problem existed. A Google leader decided to share the data openly in an email, with some background about why women seem to be more reluctant to put themselves forward. It solved the problem instantly. Women then nominated themselves at equal rates to men. Yet over time that equality faded again. They discovered that this email needed to be sent with a certain frequency, in order to keep the ratios of self-nomination equal over time. It's a great example of running data-driven experiments. First, Google used data to analyze the situation. They noticed in the data that something was wrong. They tested a solution and measured whether it made a difference. They iterated it until they saw in the data that they consistently got it right.

Now, let's look at a more complicated example. In the early days, Google was notorious for their extreme hiring-process: people had loads of interviews, with lots of weird brain-teaser- questions. How many ping-pong balls fit in an airplane? How would you estimate how much paint there is on all Dutch highways combined? That last one is actually a question someone asked me at my interview process. Media even wrote articles about how to beat Google's inter-

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view-process, and how to answer these brain-teaser questions. The amount of hours that employees were putting into the hiring process were a huge investment. Yet there was no certainty that these practices led to a better prediction as to whether or not candidates were qualified for the role. The people analytics team decided to dig into this problem.

Luckily, Google is very structured as to how they record interviews, and how people's performance ratings are stored. That meant there were two great data sets available:

- One with information about the number of interviews and questions asked;
- One with performance ratings in the period after hiring.

By correlating the number of interviews and the questions asked with performance ratings after hiring, the team could see how many interviews and what type of questions would lead to the best prediction of performance ratings after hiring. The prediction did not get better when there were more than four interviews, and the brainteaser-questions also didn't improve the prediction. Since then, Google has adjusted their hiring process. People have less interviews, and job-interviewers get guidance about what questions are most effective. So, no more ping-pong balls or highway paint.

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When you understand the principles of data-driven experiments, it's a powerful way to find your own unique effective manner of running your organization. It helps you to test which bits of advice work for you, and which don't. Often you will find that advice can work only when you make some tweaks to make it to your own. So, next time you need to make a people's decision for your organization, ask yourself the following questions:

- What's the exact question I am trying to answer?
- What metrics would help me see whether I found the right answer or not?
- What hypotheses do we have about this question?
- What existing data sets do we have that might shed light on these hypotheses?
- What experiment can we run to create additional data in order to test the hypotheses?
- How can we iterate upon the experiment until we get it right?

Critical points

- Data-driven experiments are a powerful way to learn what people-strategies work best for your team or organization.
- Sometimes you can use existing data sources to find an answer. Occasionally you need to generate data through a process of testing and learning.

Epilogue

Now it's up to you...

Why so many people complain about their managers

People often complain about their managers, yet I don't believe this is because managers don't try, or don't have good intentions. Sure, some bosses are not nice people, but most managers and leaders I meet genuinely want to do right by their people. It's just a tough job, for many reasons. First, your job is highly fragmented. You're expected to set a strategy, but are often also involved in projects, and are buried in the administration that comes with being a manager. Meanwhile your people come to you with ideas, problems, conflicts and desires—and you want to be accessible to them. Secondly, you're torn between conflicting demands. You need to serve your team, but also to satisfy senior leadership and stakeholders. You need to aim for long-term bets, but are also expected to put out short-term fires. Team members on average will always have slightly too optimistic expectations when it comes to career and reward, so you can never satisfy all people. You'll even need to every now and then enforce decisions you don't agree with. And finally, there's rarely good and practical guidance and training to help you figure out overal what approach to management works best for you, while facing these conflicting demands.

This book is my attempt to provide managers with a holistic toolkit and practical guidance upon how to bring most value to their teams and organizations. I run courses and trainings where I bring managers and leaders together in order to explore how to apply the principles of *Managing Without Power* so that peer managers can exchange ideas, and learn from one another. I find it particularly rewarding to work with large groups of managers that are active in the same organization. It allows you to create a community that can positively change the culture and effectiveness of an organization within a relatively short time.

Yet even with the best of guidance, it's impossible to get it right all the time. Even with my track-record of high manager scores, I can easily think of a few people who probably don't look at me as one of their great managers. There are too many conflicting demands, too many questions you can't know the answer to, too many decisions that can't be entirely right, and there are always limitations when it comes to time and resources. I've advocated for acts of kind-

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ness towards your team members in this book, but kindness is equally important for yourself.

Managers and leaders are often ambitious people. Otherwise they wouldn't have earned the positions they hold. That ambition often comes with an attitude of toughness towards oneself. Yet the skill to survive in jobs that comes with a continuous pressure of risk, complexity and a high workload very much depends on your ability to recharge at the right moments. Only a relaxed brain, supported by a healthy body, consistently comes up with creative ideas and sharp strategic thinking. It's the same in sports. When people see champions compete at the highest level, they mainly think about how hard these people train. But the ability to compete at the highest levels in sports is the sum of your ability to train hard and smart, eat and drink healthily, and to take rest in order to allow your body to recover. In team sports, the team dynamics is also a critical contributor, and even individual athletes cannot be champions without a great support-system around them. So take care of yourself, recharge regularly, and build your own support-system, for instance by regularly connecting with the peer managers you trust.

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It's time for a new narrative

There's something fundamentally wrong about the way we think about performing at the highest level in our professional lives. There's a set of limiting beliefs that blocks us from seeing how humaneness and performing at the highest level can go together, and are even inseparable. There's a story we get told over and over again in our lives, that somehow resonates deeply within us, but that is damaging when you put it at the heart of your belief- system: that story is called the Heroes Quest.

The Heroes Quest-story's framework can be found in the majority of movies, TV-shows and books. Once you see the framework explained, you instantly recognize all the examples where you've encountered it. The story often comes in four stages, although there are variations on it:

- The calling
- The commitment
- The quest
- The homecoming

The story obviously starts with a hero. Only at that moment, we don't always know yet that this is a hero. It might even be an anti-hero. Somewhere at the opening of the story there will be *the calling*: a push or a pull. Some kind of pain pushes the hero's out of their existing life, or this happens at some kind of opportunity. Whatever the push or pull is, it may not instantly lead to action. It tends to take a few nudges to get over the barrier in order to leave the current life. Then there's this one moment when the penny drops: something happens that triggers *the commitment* to leave the current situation and move into the unknown. Now it's time for *the quest*: a journey of adventures and challenges, where friends are met and enemies faced, with wins and losses on all sides. The quest ends with a *homecoming*: this could literally be a journey home after a battle, but it could also be a moment of emotional acceptance, or a death that puts an end to a journey of suffering. Whatever it is, it is a form of closure. Stories that don't provide a sense of closure, can often leave you frustrated at the end.

Pick a random movie you recently saw, and you'll almost certainly recognize *the Heroes Quest*-framework in it. James Bond leads a hidden life on a remote island, having retired from his work as 007 after the woman he loved got murdered by his enemies. Suddenly someone from the secret-service approaches him at his hidden address, for a job that only 007 can do (the calling). Of course he refuses. There's too much pain. He will never go back to that life. Then he meets a girl, they connect deeply, but she sees the pain Bond carries with him, and convinces him to let go of it. He visits the grave of his ex-girlfriend one more time. A bomb explodes while he stands by her grave. He realizes the new girlfriend must have betrayed him, and that this must have something to do with the job the secret service wanted him to do. This is the final trigger to step back into the job as 007 (the commitment). Next is the quest with lots of action, tracing the enemy, set-backs, explosions, injuries, and confrontations with the pain of the past. In that journey he discovers the new girlfriend hadn't betrayed him. It was a setup. They find their love for each other again (the homecoming). In this case there's a surprising twist at the end: Bond gets infected with a special DNA-based poison. If he ever touches his girlfriend or her daughter, which turned out to be *his* daughter, they will die. He knows he can never be with them, yet he can't live without them. He explodes together with the base where the enemy was mass-producing the DNA-based poison. That was the last movie of Daniel Craig as James Bond: *No Time To Die*.

The Heroes Quest-story romanticizes pain and suffering. It says you come out stronger when you plough through it. In movies, most injuries completely heal again. James Bond gets shot, tortured and beaten countless times—through-out all the movies in the series. He falls off buildings and cliffs. At the end of each

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movie, he's typically significantly wounded. The next movie mostly depicts him recovering from physical and mental wounds, but he always heals (except however in this last movie with Daniel Craig). Even when people have lasting injuries in movies, they become part of the person's character in a way that is romanticized.

The same is true when we cover sports on TV. We see all the people who became champions, but we don't see the ones that dropped out because of serious injuries, and that could never practice their sports again. Every now and then, one of the champions gets seriously injured. It's only when they recover that we consistently keep seeing them in the media, reinforcing the idea that you can achieve anything if you work hard enough. It reinforces the idea that you can compete at the highest levels, as long as you are willing to suffer and work through pain. Yet for every champion we see on TV there are at least 99 that dropped out because of permanent injury. These are not people who were less talented, or that worked less hard for it. They were just unfortunate. And they don't fit our *Heroes Quest-story*, so we ignore them.

This belief that competing at the highest levels can only be achieved through pain, and that those who can't stand the pain didn't try hard enough, or weren't talented enough, also defines how many large organizations are run. It's swimming or drowning. If you don't swim, you're probably a low performer and need to be managed out. Burnout probably means you weren't up to the job. People often fear speaking about the pressure they feel, because it might be perceived as weakness. As a result, many people think they are the only ones that feel this pressure. Every now and then, cases make the news of famous bosses, trainers or celebrities that bullied and abused people. These are cases that are excessive enough to be newsworthy. We are then disgusted, and go back to normal. But in that "normal," we damage many more people in many more small ways. That "normal" is also the fertile ground allowing the extreme cases we see on the news to emerge over and over again. I covered examples of micro-pressures earlier in the book, or small acts of political behavior. It's behaviors like these that can cause a death by a thousand cuts, and a culture where excessively damaging situations arise from time to time. Even if this doesn't happen, I still find it strange that it is considered normal by many people, that you need to "put on your thick skin" in the morning before you go to work.

This approach might work in organizations where a relatively small group of talented and thick-skinned people can lead the organization to success, and

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when enough people want to work for this organization so that there's always a stream of new talent when people drop out. But in most large organizations you can't succeed with only a handful of people, and most organizations don't have an abundant stream of new talent available to replace people who were collateral damage. You need 95 percent of your people to be the best they can be for any large organization to be sustainably successful. And the five percent of low performers that can't be turned around, needs to be managed out in a way that doesn't undermine the psychological safety of the other 95 percent.

We can only build inclusive, safe and thereby high-performing organizations, when we get rid of the current version of *the Heroes Quest*-story. The way the current version is used in our organizations can be summarized as: "When you work hard and endure pain, you can play at the highest level." Besides the fact that it isn't a very healthy story, it also doesn't acknowledge the element of luck and privilege that some people have, and some don't. I was born in a country where great education was available to me. I was born without any disabilities. There were no wars during my lifetime, and there was always enough food and great healthcare. Due to the economic welfare in our country, there were also enough jobs available to build experience and grow. I've probably enjoyed loads of privileges in that journey without ever noticing it, just because of being a white straight male. I could say the success of my career is all because I worked so hard. I did work very hard, but take any of these privileges out of the equation, and I might not have achieved what I achieved.

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It would be nice when a new version of this Heroes Quest is one that acknowledges not all people start with equal opportunity, one that brings all types of people along on the journey, so they can collectively bring our organizations to the highest and most beautiful standards of achievement. It should be a version that acknowledges high performance is a sum of hard work, healthy habits, time to recover, and creating a strong team culture. Here's what I think the Hero's Quest-story can be:

- *The Calling*: appreciate the talents and privileges given to you.
- *The Commitment*: work hard, learn and grow, and take care of yourself and those less-privileged than you.
- *The Quest*: do impactful and valuable work together, and support one another in overcoming obstacles and losses.
- *The Homecoming*: leaving the team, the organization and world in a better shape than you found it, and bringing beautiful memories with you.

Imagine how different our working-environment would be, and how much more effective if all organizations would be run, based upon the beliefs of this *Heroes Quest-story*. This story-arch would fuel a belief-system that enables us to create genuinely high-performing organizations, because we genuinely harness the potential of all available talent, and do impactful work in a way that is sustainable.

Critical points

- The Heroes Quest story-framework resonates deeply within humans, but the version most people know romanticizes pain, and gets us to believe organizations can only perform at the highest level, when we accept it's a game of the survival of the fittest.
- It's time to start believing in a more inclusive and sustainable version of this story-arch, and thereby become truly high-performing organizations.

Staying true to your values

When you are successful at building a team in line with the principles of this book, it's likely that you become a "safe haven" for the people working under you. It's not easy for any professional to find a team or organization where you can do great work, with great people, in a great team culture, and under a great manager. Great people are therefore likely to stick with you, and they will tell their peers to join your team when an opportunity arises. The big question is then: "Are you as lucky as your team members are? Is *your* leadership creating the same great working-environment for you?" If "yes," you're in a great place. It probably means you are working in an organization, with enough critical mass of great managers and leaders, to have a great working-environment in many pockets of the organization. It could also be that you are lucky to work under a particular great manager or leader, who shields you from pressures in the organization. In that case, if that person leaves, the situation can change fast. Either way, you're still within the most favorable scenario.

The more likely scenario is one where you are the person shielding your team from pressures in the organization, and you are the one supporting people to break through the barriers with a view to the organizational change described in previous sections. You're likely to be in a position where you are trying to change things about the organization in order to create a better environment around your team, to make the organization more effective and inclusive. Those changes rarely go as fast as you want. Where do you find the energy to be the

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driving force for positive change in both the organization and for your team, when no one is creating it for you?

To me, the answer to that question is in the meaning of work. What makes work meaningful is different for each person, so the answer to that question is by definition personal. I experience meaning if:

- I see the potential to create something beautiful and impactful: this could be the output we produce as a team, for example a portfolio of high-quality workshops, but it also includes the potential to build an effective team and organization with a great culture.
- I believe the organization has enough good people to make it worthwhile contributing to improvement of the organization's culture and effectiveness.
- I learn and grow.
- I like most people I work with.
- I feel valued by my manager and leadership.

It's worth listing for yourself what your main drivers of meaning are in your work—if you haven't done so yet. Reality is that most of the time, most of these drivers won't be exactly what you want them to be. Yet when you are experienced enough, you know that no organization is ever perfect. If you run away from something because it isn't perfect, you're likely to find something else that also isn't perfect. This still doesn't mean though, that you should accept all things you don't like about your job. When you're faced with things that make you less happy, you always have three options:

1. *Change it*. This can mean convincing others to see or do things differently. Or to finding a way to work around the problem, so that it is no longer there.
2. *Accept it*. Accept that the problem cannot be solved, and try not to be bothered by it.
3. *Leave*. Walk away from the situation, which could mean looking for another job inside or outside the organization.

Failure to choose from these three, inevitably leads to unhappiness. As a manager and leader, you will be regarded as someone who lacks purpose and vision. This makes you less strong as a team leader. So, when I'm faced with something I don't like, the first questions I ask myself are: Can I change this? And if yes, is it a battle worth fighting? Sometimes I know I could change something if I tried hard enough, but I also know how much effort it would take. That effort will go at the cost of something else, for instance at the cost of investing in building a

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beautiful output with my team, or at the cost of spending time with my family. Even if you *can* change something, it doesn't always mean you *should*.

When the benefit of driving change outweighs the cost, then keep driving change. It will create a better environment for you and your team, and if you ever leave the organization, you will leave it in a better shape than you found it. If you can't change the problem, or the costs are too high, consider whether it's feasible to accept the situation as it is. When you find yourself thinking about the problem over and over again, during working hours or outside, that's a sign you probably shouldn't accept. The difficult part of the question is always *how long* you should allow yourself to walk around worrying about things at work. I've worked through many difficult periods where I thought it was time to leave; and then with the right amount of effort and patience a door opened in the end. It's because of that experience that I built strategies to retain energy, while investing in future scenarios that could solve the problem in my work situation.

The first step is to always go back to your personal anchors.
The anchors are things that give you meaning in work and life, and are your personal values. I opened this book describing a period where I felt I was no longer working for Google. I created a set of sneakers in Google colors in the adidas sneaker configurator. Wearing these sneakers was a way for me to remind myself what I believed Google could be, and what my personal values were. This allowed me to keep focusing on doing things I felt were most meaningful for Google, and for Google's clients. Because this meant I had to ignore some of the guidance from my leadership, I knew I was taking a risk.

The second step is therefore to reconcile yourself with the worst-case scenario and prepare for it.
The worst-case scenario is typically the one where you leave the team or the organization. I prepared for that step by starting to apply for jobs externally, but I also did so by saving enough money, so I could be without work for at least a year. You may wonder whether it's still possible to be committed to an organization when you stand with one foot outside of it. I believe you are much more effective challenging an organization when you know you can afford to leave. The hardest changes in an organization come with the highest resistance and risk. When you can afford to leave, you can face that pressure, and challenge the organization sharper, while keeping stress levels low for yourself. This makes you more convincing, and your energy lasts longer, so you can push with more patience.

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The third step is to invest in actions that increase the likelihood that one or more desired future scenarios emerge.

A desired future scenario could be that you can stay in your current job longer because you still enjoy it, but it could also be that a new opportunity inside or outside the organization emerges. When I discovered after my first three years at Google that I no longer wanted to be a researcher, I invested in creating my own digital-transformation workshops and running these with big clients. This led to first getting a newly designed role as Head of Digital Transformation, and later to the opportunity to join and lead Google Digital Academy. It took a bit more than a year for that first role to emerge, and another two years for the second one. If those opportunities had not emerged fast enough, I probably would have found an external role, because I was also investing in that scenario.

The fourth and final step is to jump at the opportunity when it arises.

Even when you push for certain scenarios to happen, it's unlikely that the scenario emerges exactly the way you imagined it. So when an opportunity emerges, you'll need to assess how much of the boxes it ticks of your desired scenarios. You'll need to make a risk assessment each time an opportunity emerges, and then a leap of faith at the right moment.

> *I look at the relationship with team members as a moment in time where two journeys run parallel temporarily, until each continues their own journey again, like two travelers enjoying time together before moving on*

When you work in line with the principles mentioned, always choosing between change, accept or leave, always preparing for desirable future scenarios, and always willing to accept the consequences of less favorable scenarios, you'll develop into a leader with purpose and vision. I was constantly transparent to my team about the scenarios I considered inside and outside of the team and organization; the same way I encouraged *them* to explore *their* scenarios in career conversations. Managers don't often share it with their teams when they consider leaving, but it changes the relationship when you do. I look at the relationship with team members as a moment in time where two journeys run parallel temporarily, until each continues their own journey again, like two travelers enjoying time together before moving on.

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As a manager and leader, when you make consistent and genuine choices based on your deepest beliefs, and open yourself up to deep trusting relationships with all types of people on your team, people will start to follow you for who you are and what you stand for. This helps you build organizations with a beautiful and effective culture. This is because, even people several layers away from you, will follow you *and* because your personal example will help you to create a community of brilliant managers. Once you've reached this level of connection with your team members, you don't easily lose it. It will last well beyond the time these people work in your team. Team members will take "bits of you" into their future jobs, will apply principles they saw you apply, and create great working- environments the way they've seen you do it. At this level, you create a ripple-effect that doesn't just leave your organization in a better place than you found it. It also leaves the world as a better place than you found it. The principles of Managing Without Power create managers and leaders that can build organizations that create value for people, planet and profit. Inclusivity is always the "default setting," because you can't perform at the highest level if you don't know how to mobilize all talent available to you.

The principles of Managing Without Power create managers and leaders that can build organizations that create value for people, planet and profit

Thank you for the time invested in reading my book. I hope you find the principles as meaningful and effective as I do. I hope they will help you build effective and human teams and organizations, and I hope they will enable a rewarding journey for yourself too. If you'd like to ask a question, share a thought, or feel I could add value to your organization, you can always connect with me through LinkedIn.

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I want to leave you with a mantra I wrote for myself that helps me to stick to my values, and to do the right things when plowing through difficult periods at work:

- Pick a battle worth fighting.
- Pick a challenge worth solving.
- Pick a skill worth learning.
- Pick people worth going on a journey with.
- Treat all with respect…
  … including the ones you don't like or don't understand
  … and including yourself.
- Set boundaries when needed.
- Accept losses and learn from them.
- Celebrate success with gratitude.
- And start all over again.

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Appendix

1 Google's Manager Feedback Survey

Section 1 Please respond to the following questions. Feel free to skip any questions you are not comfortable answering, or that are not applicable to you.

1 I would recommend my manager to others.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○	

2 My manager assigns stretch opportunities to help me develop in my career.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○	

3 My manager communicates clear goals for our team.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○	

4 My manager gives me actionable feedback on a regular basis.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○	

5 My manager provides the autonomy I need to do my job (i.e., does not "micromanage" by getting involved in details that should be handled at other levels).

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○	

6 My manager consistently shows consideration for me as a person.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○	

7 My manager keeps the team focused on priorities, even when it's difficult (e.g. declining or deprioritizing other projects).

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○	

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8 My manager regularly shares relevant information from their manager and senior leadership.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	O	O	O	O	O	

9 My manager has had a meaningful discussion with me about my career development in the past six months.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	O	O	O	O	O	

10 My manager has the technical expertise (e.g. technical judgment in Tech, selling in Sales, accounting in Finance) required to effectively manage me.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	O	O	O	O	O	

11 The actions of my manager show they value the perspective I bring to the team, even if it is different from their own.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	O	O	O	O	O	

12 My manager makes tough decisions effectively (e.g. decisions involving multiple teams, competing priorities).

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	O	O	O	O	O	

13 My manager effectively collaborates across boundaries (e.g. team, organizational).

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
	O	O	O	O	O	

Section 2 (Optional). While this is a confidential survey, keep in mind your comments are shared verbatim with your manager.

1 What would you recommend your manager keep doing?
2 What would you have your manager change?

Source: rework.withgoogle.com

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2 Checklist for setting direction and expectations

A good system to set direction and expectations should…

- ☐ Have **three to five objectives that last six to twelve months**, aligned to the annual plan, and that set a somewhat ambitious direction for the year ahead.
- ☐ Have about **three key results** for each objective that are **measurable quarterly milestones**, that set an ambitious pace to achieve the objective.
- ☐ Be "**vertically aligned**," so individuals can derive their individual priorities from team and company priorities, and know what they should spend their time on.
- ☐ Be "**horizontally aligned**," so individuals know which stakeholders have dependencies on their deliverables.
- ☐ Be "**output-based**," and quantify how success is defined, so people can be held accountable.
- ☐ Include **mechanisms to make deliverables that are hard to quantify more measurable** (e.g. defined project stages for a creative development process).
- ☐ Have clear **priority labels**, so people can manage workload, know when to escalate, and know when to say no.
- ☐ Enable **healthy distribution of workload**, **equal access** to high-profile work, and **opportunities for personal growth** (aligned to career plans).
- ☐ Set **clear expectations** that create transparency in order to make performance evaluations and **decisions about reward and progression that is fair and predictable**.
- ☐ Help people see a direct **link between their individual work and the vision** of the team and organization.

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3 Unbiasing performance-reviews checklist

When making important decisions about employees, like when to promote someone, it's critical to recognize and address how potential biases can influence the decision-making process.

Unbiasing Checklist for Promotion Decisions

Promotion Nominations	**Biases Targeted**
Define what success looks like at a particular level, and don't allow extraneous data points (e.g. time in role) to affect the decision.	Stereotype-based Biases
Consider the whole bench of talent, and narrow it down from there.	Availability Bias
Consider concrete, behavioral examples throughout the current level or role to narrow the pool.	Recency, Horns & Halos, Availability Bias
Before Promotion Decision Discussions	**Biases Targeted**
Write down your own evaluation of employees before promotion committee.	Anchoring Bias
Restate success-criteria (e.g. what's expected of a person for that particular role and level).	Stereotype-based Biases
During Promotion Decision Discussions	**Biases Targeted**
Consider concrete, behavioral examples for current-level or role.	Recency, Horns & Halos, Availability Bias
Consider situational factors (in the workplace) that affected performance (e.g. lacked resources).	Fundamental Attribution Error
Consider if a promotion-decision would change if your employee was in different social group.	Stereotype-based Biases
Play devil's advocate when there are no significantly different perspectives raised.	Anchoring Bias, Agreement Bias
Listen to the devil's advocate for employees you are involved in.	Leniency Error, Self-serving Bias, Similar-to-me Bias
Consider the benefits of complementary and supplementary skill sets (i.e., the benefits of being different).	Self-serving Bias

Source: rework.withgoogle.com

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Unbiasing Checklists for Performance-Review Conversations

Action	Biases Targeted
Communicate the performance expectations for your employee in that role and level.	Stereotype-based Biases
Make sure cited feedback and examples come from the entire assessment period.	Recency Bias
Discuss important work that may not have been visible.	Availability Bias
Differentiate between situational factors (in the workplace) and personal factors that affected performance.	Fundamental Attribution Error
Use multiple concrete, behavioral examples from reviewers to support *both* strengths *and* development areas.	Leniency Error, Self-serving Bias, Similar-to-me Bias, Horns & Halos
Imagine your direct report in a different social group and ask yourself whether your feedback would be the same.	Stereotype-based Biases

Source: rework.withgoogle.com

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4 Psychological safety checklist

How to foster Psychological Safety on your teams

Demonstrate engagement

- Be present and focus on the conversation (e.g. close your laptop during meetings).
- Ask questions with the intention of learning from your teammates.
- Offer input, be interactive, and show you're listening.
- Respond verbally to show engagement ("That makes sense. Tell us more.")
- Be aware of your body language; make sure to lean towards or face the person speaking.
- Make eye-contact to show connection and active listening.

Show understanding

- Recap what's been said to confirm mutual understanding/alignment (e.g. "What I heard you say is..."); then acknowledge areas of agreement, disagreement, and be open to questions within the group.
- Validate comments verbally ("I understand." "I see what you're saying.").
- Avoid placing blame ("Why did you do this?") and focus on solutions ("How can we work towards making sure this goes more smoothly next time?", "What can we do together to make a game-plan for next time?")
- Think about your facial expressions – are they unintentionally negative (a scowl or grimace)?
- Nod your head to demonstrate understanding during conversations/meetings.

Be inclusive in interpersonal settings

- Share information about your personal work-style and preferences, encourage teammates to do the same.
- Be available and approachable to teammates (e.g. make time for ad hoc one-on-one conversations, feedback-sessions, career coaching).
- Clearly communicate the purpose of ad hoc-meetings scheduled outside normal one-on-one team meetings.
- Express gratitude for contributions from the team.
- Step in if team members talk negatively about another team member.
- Have open body posture (e.g. face all team members, don't turn your back on part of the group).
- Build rapport (e.g. talk with your teammates about their lives outside of work).

Be inclusive in decision-making

- Solicit input, opinions, and feedback from your teammates.
- Don't interrupt or allow interruptions (e.g. step in when someone is interrupted, and ensure his/her idea is heard).
- Explain the reasoning behind your decisions (live or via email, walk team through how you arrived at a decision).
- Acknowledge input from others (e.g. highlight when team members were contributors to a success or decision).

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Show confidence and conviction without appearing inflexible

- Manage team discussions (e.g. don't allow side-conversations at team meetings, make sure conflict isn't personal).
- Use a voice that is clear and audible in a team setting.
- Support and represent the team (e.g. share team's work with senior leadership, give credit to teammates).
- Invite the team to challenge your perspective and push back.
- Model vulnerability; share your personal perspective on work and failures with your teammates.
- Encourage teammates to take risks, and demonstrate risk-taking in your own work.

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Source: rework.withgoogle.com

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5 Ten common biases that affect hiring

10 Unconscious Hiring Biases

1 Affinity/similarity bias When we favor a candidate because we share a characteristic with them.	**6 Social bias** Besides stereotyping based on age or gender, also race, cultural background, sexuality and religion also often form the basis for discrimination on the labor market.
2 In-Group bias The tendency that people have to favor their own group above that of others.	**7 Illusory correlation bias** When we perceive a relationship where no such relationship actually exists.
3 Halo effect Your first impression of a person's qualities is based on other unrelated factor.	**8 Anchoring bias** When we fixate on one piece of information. As a result, giving it more weight than it de serves.
4 Horns effect When after knowing or perceiving one bad thing about a person, this person seems less positive overall.	**9 Attribution bias** When we evaluate or try to find reasons for others' behaviours.
5 Confirmation bias When we form this initia! judgement of a candidate and then we focus on information that will support that.	**10 Beauty bias** A type of bias that encourages you to prefer a candidate that is, based on norms created by society , considered attractive.

Bron: www.equalture.com

recensie-exemplaar

6 Measuring belonging

To score a ten on our ten-point belonging scale, you strongly agree with each component of these four elements. In other words, in your day-to-day work, you feel fully seen, connected, supported, and proud.

Seen	• My organization values my unique attributes (e.g. culture, heritage, skills, perspective). • My organization adequately rewards my accomplishments. • My manager recognizes my skills and accomplishments. • My colleagues recognize my skills and accomplishments. • My colleagues take my opinions seriously. • I am treated with as much respect as other employees.
Connected	• I can be myself at my organization. • Other employees at work seem to like me the way I am. • My managers/supervisors seem interested in me. • People at this organization are friendly to me. • I feel comfortable attending social events at work. • I have very little in common with most other employees at my organization.*
Supported	• My organization extends satisfactory help and support at times when I have any personal issues. • My manager extends satisfactory help and support at times when I have any personal issues. • My colleagues extend satisfactory help and support at times when I have any personal issues. • My organization cares about me as much as it cares about other employees. • My colleagues include me at work. • There's at least one leader in this organization I feel comfortable talking to if I have a problem.
Pride	• I am proud to work at my organization. • I feel like a real part of my organization. • I am able to work in this organization without sacrificing my principles. • My organization's values are similar to my own. • I refer to "we/us" rather than "they/them" when I talk about my organization to others. • I generally experience more positive emotions than negative emotions at work.
	* Responses to this scale item were reverse-scored.

Source: www.coqual.org

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