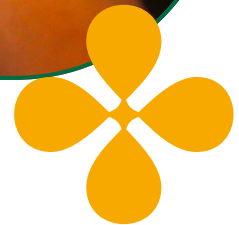


# ANATOMY OF A THRIVING TEAM





# ABOUT WISDOM WORKS

## *Creating a World Where Everyone Can Thrive*

Wisdom Works was founded in 1999 with a clear mission to make thriving the standard of effective, sustainable leadership. The social-impact firm works with companies worldwide empowering brands, work cultures, and leaders to embrace and advance a world where everyone can thrive.

To accelerate organizational impact, the firm draws on its core brand Be Well Lead Well®, a science-based platform of assessments, education, culture change resources, and strategic advisory services, backed by a growing community of change leaders around the globe.

Demonstrating the belief that every company, large and small, can be an engine of wellbeing, Wisdom Works donates 1% of its gross revenues to inspiring causes that promote positive social change.

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# Building Thriving Teams by Design

As our business worlds become more disruptive, we need teams of all types—project-based, functional, cross-functional, self-managed, virtual, and more—to thrive. A team that thrives is well-resourced mentally, emotionally, and physically to meet its demands and evolve.

Most leaders view their team as the unit for doing work, yet forget that the team is also an avenue for doing work sustainably. As a result, too many teams today are enduring rather than thriving. They're working harder, faster, and longer, failing to realize these aren't useful strategies for the long haul. When the way work is done elevates and amplifies individual and team thriving, it can have a positive ripple effect with a team's customers, partners, and the rest of the organization, as well as with the loved ones and communities of team members.

***Simply put: In your organization today, it's an imperative to build thriving teams intentionally.***

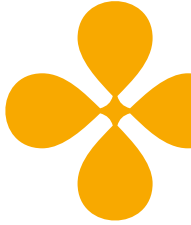
Teams are more apt to flourish when five essential categories are given attention:

- Best Team Makeup
- Clear Team Structures
- Essential Team Skills
- Committed Self-Leadership
- Positive Team Climate

Think of these categories as interdependent, working together to build a dynamic system of structures and a culture in which team thriving is more likely to occur. As you review each category, consider a team you lead or one you are part of now. Ask yourself:

***Where is our team today?***

***What shifts might enable our team to thrive?***



# BEST TEAM MAKEUP

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In thriving teams, the best team makeup is about the team's size, the diversity of abilities and backgrounds that constitute it, the mutual accountability and leadership held by team members, and the balance of what the team is to achieve and how they achieve it.

## OPTIMAL SIZE

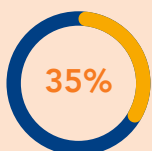
The most effective team size depends on the type of team, the work it needs to accomplish, and its approach to leadership. Some experts say 3 people or less is best, while others, such as in the agile movement, endorse 3-9 members. Interesting research in the journal *Nature* highlights that smaller teams tend to ignite disruptive work, while larger teams are needed to develop, expand, and realize those breakthrough ideas.

***To what extent is your team sized well for its unique situation?***

## DIVERSITY

Whether in living systems or business, diversity matters. In teams, valuing diversity is linked to greater innovation, decreased groupthink, and better decision-making and performance. Diversity can be defined as: *Internal* (i.e., characteristics a person is born with, such as neurodivergence or physical abilities), *External* (i.e., attributes and experiences, for instance, education level or partner status, that a person uses to define their identity), *Organizational* (i.e., job function, work experience, or seniority), and *Worldview* (the broad range of beliefs, political affiliations, culture, and life experiences that influence a person's conception of the world.) Thriving teams seek and respect the diversity of team members; doing so is a source of connection, creativity, and wisdom for the team.

***To what extent do people on your team appreciate the expertise, backgrounds, and strengths of one another, plus have opportunities to share their unique talents and gifts?***



McKinsey and Company found that teams made up of members from diverse backgrounds are more creative and perform better by up to 35% compared to more homogenous teams.

# BEST TEAM MAKEUP

## MUTUAL LEADERSHIP

While not everyone may be in a management role, everyone on a team can be a leader. Mutual leadership is about people holding shared accountability for the team's successes and disappointments, along with how those arise. It also means inviting people to step up and lead initiatives where they have a particular passion or talent and, where appropriate, rotating duties among people so that everyone better understands the role each member plays towards the team's results.


Mutual leadership isn't demonstrated through behaviors alone; it's about attitudes and words. Consider: "How will we fix this problem?" has a different vibe than "How will you fix it?" On thriving teams, the emphasis is WE. Individual contributions are valued, yet people on the team know that excellent results come through teamwork—and that depends on everyone.

***To what extent do people on your team demonstrate mutual accountability and leadership?***

## BALANCING WHAT & HOW

Some teams are so single-minded about what they set out to accomplish that they do so at the personal expense of team members (think: burnout, exclusion.) Other teams become so stuck in navel gazing that they don't seem to get much work done. In thriving teams, people are on the lookout to achieve excellent results aligned with their purpose and vision, plus work in ways that contribute to the wellbeing, growth, and effectiveness of the team and the people in it. This balance isn't always an easy one; it comes through the team's ability to honestly examine itself. In teams that prioritize high achievement, this usually means learning not to compromise the how for the what.

***To what extent does your team pay attention to both the what and the how of their work together?***



***We human beings are living, evolving potentials. Give us the right soil, rain, sunshine, and weeding, and we know how to flower. Similarly, given an opportunity to tap into, develop and harness our own brilliance and capacity, we can contribute greatly to the health and wellbeing of our organizations.***

— Micki McMillan, Master Certified Coach



# CLEAR TEAM STRUCTURES

Clear team structures supporting thriving teams are a shared purpose, an inspiring team vision and goals, values and operating principles for working together, and a well-managed workload.

## SHARED PURPOSE

Much has been said over the past decade about the power of a deeply-held shared WHY to provide a sense of identity and coherence in a team, give the team's work meaning and significance, build strong team bonds, empower the team to make sense of their work (and the world) through a generative story about their role in it, and help the team stay motivated, even in the toughest of times. A shared purpose guides the team to accomplish something together that individuals cannot do alone. Plus, when we take a big step back from the daily activities of our lives, we realize: It's a privilege to work with other human beings on something worthwhile.

***To what extent does a shared purpose animate your team?***

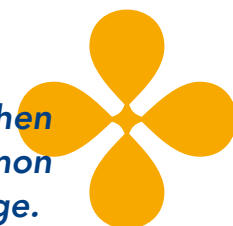
## INSPIRING VISION & CLEAR GOALS

Equally important to a shared purpose is an inspiring vision and clear goals that galvanize the team to act. The vision and goals help the team establish a constructive relationship with *challenge*, the tension that arises when what the team aspires to achieve differs from its current realities. Perhaps your team's challenge is to bring a product innovation into existence, reach new customers, extend the organization's impact through key partnerships, or resolve a vital need for our globe. Having a vision and clear goals not only enables your team to measure its progress; it is **one of the most important factors** for building team cohesion in the rapidly changing landscape of teaming.

***To what extent do a vision and clear goals inspire and guide your team?***

***Each individual has unique gifts, and talents and skills. When we bring them to the table and share them for a common purpose, it can give companies a real competitive advantage.***

— John J. Murphy, author of *Pulling Together: 10 Rules for High-Performance Teamwork*



# CLEAR TEAM STRUCTURES

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## VALUES & OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Given the constant disruptions most teams deal with, it's never been more important for team members to agree on values and operating principles for their work together. As an example, Relationship Before Business, a founding value at Wisdom Works, energizes this principle: *We will connect as whole people before working together because doing so makes work more effective, rewarding, and life-enhancing.* We put this principle into practice in our team routines, for instance, by starting bi-weekly meetings with a personal check-in or a mindful breath, as well as in our customer relations. A team's values and operating principles help team members know how to act when they are together and apart, plus they provide an ethical backbone people can lean into during stressful times.

***To what extent does your team use values and operating principles to guide its interactions?***

## WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT

No matter what industry or geography, teams today experience similar stressors, such as high volumes of work, short deadlines, a relentless pace, too little or too much collaboration, and unclear roles. To manage their workloads, thriving teams identify the work stressors impacting their ability to work well. They eliminate (when possible) the things that create needless pressure and prioritize the work that aligns with the teams' purpose, vision, goals, and capacities. They match the people with the right tasks, or better yet, invite people to craft their own jobs—with the aim that work demands are spread appropriately. They make sure people understand their individual roles and responsibilities, as well as how those interweave with the jobs of other team members. Plus, thriving teams assist people in identifying the positive factors that help buffer stress at work, such as training, healthy relationships, coaching support, and job autonomy.

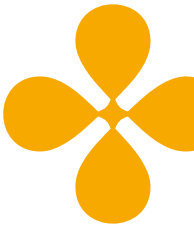
***To what extent does your team manage its workload well?***



# ESSENTIAL TEAM SKILLS

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Thriving teams develop essential team skills, such as communicating effectively, using constructive feedback, making sure ideas of team members are highly productive, and building positive relationships.



## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The basis of effective communication is the ability to advocate, inquire, and listen well. This isn't just about stating opinions and asking questions, both of which can be done with the intention to undermine rather than uplift, or listening for only what you want to hear. This is about high-quality advocacy (sharing ideas and reasoning openly, without a hidden agenda), [high-quality inquiry](#) (asking questions for understanding and discovery), and [high-quality listening](#) (a deeper sensitivity to what's said and unsaid). Advocacy, inquiry, and listening empower a host of prosocial skills in thriving teams, such as making commitments, productive dialogues, collaborating, peer coaching, problem-solving, giving and receiving feedback, and learning from mistakes. When tech drives communications more than human connection, as it often does today, most teams can improve on all three of these bedrock skills.

***To what extent do people on your team advocate, inquire, and listen effectively?***

## CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Constructive feedback is integral to the everyday work of thriving teams, rather than being relegated to scheduled feedback sessions alone. Through constructive feedback, thriving teams build a strong emotional reservoir that allows them to think outside the box, engage in conflicts productively, and make shared decisions. Using constructive feedback, thriving teams capitalize on decades of work by social scientist [Dr. Barbara Frederickson](#) and others who discovered: People who experience a higher ratio of positive than negative emotions daily are better able to bring their intellectual, psychological, physical, and social resources to their demands in life and work. This kind of feedback is applied in a range of situations, from celebrating small and large wins and appreciating teamwork to course-correcting when problems arise; what makes the feedback constructive is its underlying intention to broaden and build the capabilities and resourcefulness of people.

***To what extent does your team use constructive feedback?***

# ESSENTIAL TEAM SKILLS

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## PRODUCTIVE IDEAS

Lily Meola's song [Daydream](#) beautifully captures how we diminish ourselves when we disconnect with our ability to imagine, plus how we come alive when we reconnect with this instinctive human power. Yet, teams driven by efficiency alone easily ignore or dismiss creative ideas to address their difficulties and reach their goals. People become disengaged at work when they receive the message: Your ideas don't matter. Heads of nations have long known the power of giving ideas space to be nurtured and flourish. Thriving teams know this, too. They structure sessions for shared reflection and ideation into the team calendar, use collaborative tech to foster group brainstorming, and convene brain trusts where team members push each other's concepts to new heights. Important research shows [creativity has no age limit](#). By making ideas productive, thriving teams tap into the sense of wonder and imagination within people no matter what generation, opening new avenues for innovation, performance, and wellbeing.

***To what extent does your team make ideas productive?***

## POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Teams do not exist in isolation, and in organizations today, people are often part of more than one team at a time. Thriving teams share their work processes and outputs in a way that builds enriching relationships with stakeholders. Through this approach, they achieve, sustain, and extend positive impact. The deeper intention of the team? To amplify effectiveness and thriving in all their interactions. The truth is: We know when someone has our best interests at heart—and when they don't. Studies show that when people engage with each other with genuine presence and connection, a [micro moment of positivity resonance](#) occurs in the relationship. Influencing positive relationships is also good for wellbeing. The [latest Wisdom Works research](#) reveals that people who report a high ability to empower, maximize, and grow others through collaboration and care also report higher mental and emotional wellbeing personally. Thriving teams take the opportunity and responsibility to amplify the best in others. Being part of a team is never about the team alone; the team exists to make it easier for others to succeed and thrive, too.

***To what extent does your build positive relationships within the organization and beyond?***

# COMMITTED SELF-LEADERSHIP

Self-leadership is vital in thriving teams. It shows up in at least these four areas: Stress resilience, energy and wellbeing, a personal vision and purpose to self-author and guide life and work, and individual responsibility

## STRESS RESILIENCE

People bring their life energy, perspectives, and talents to all sorts of circumstances throughout the day, from handling a customer crisis to getting their kids off to school to onboarding new team members. Yet, too often, people operate from a state of chronic dysregulation, expressed by brain fog, lack of quality sleep, and depletion, or even worse, a host of mental, physical, and social health problems. In thriving teams, stress is acknowledged as a natural and valuable part of life that everyone deals with, instead of something to eliminate. In the right doses, adversity and challenge can help people build productive coping skills and stress resilience. So, team members strive to understand their own stress thresholds, make shifts in their state of being when they are over- or under-stressed, and effectively manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors so that they show up well for their relationships and tasks. With these skills for self-regulation, they are better able to maintain emotional balance, make thoughtful decisions, and recover from stressful situations.

*To what extent do people on your team practice attitudes and skills for stress resilience?*



**BetterUp research shows that when organizations see increased resilience in their managers and teams, it boosts their bottom line. On average, they experience 3.2 times greater year-over-year revenue growth and a 60% increase in five-year revenue growth. Adversely, when teams perceived their leader had low resilience, overall team performance fell by -23%.**



# COMMITTED SELF-LEADERSHIP

## ENERGY & WELLBEING

Conflicts, COVID-19, the unknowns of AI, the climate crisis, and other global instabilities have fueled individual and collective **uncertainty and fear** across the world. Our **negativity bias**, part of the human instinct for self-preservation, channels us to give more weight to things that go wrong than to things that go right. This erodes our abilities to be creative, concentrate, and learn. It diminishes our perceptions of ourselves and others. It harms our mental and physical health. Thriving teams know: Operating out of fear does not create the best and most sustainable results. In these teams, people counteract the negativity bias by investing in their innate capacity to thrive as a daily practice. They intentionally use sunlight, breath, movement, rest, work-chunking, brain breaks, meditation, work-life boundaries, gratitude, and a variety of other methods to cooperate with (rather than ignore) their **biological rhythms** and make self-regulation their most likely default response to stressors. When people experience a deeper sense of wellbeing within themselves, they're more internally well-resourced to engage with perspectives that differ from their own without defensiveness or fear, bring **both-and** (versus **either-or**) **thinking to the paradoxes** and disruptions the team faces.

***To what extent do people on your team take care of their energy and wellbeing?***

## INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

In today's increasingly hybrid work environments, individuals are given a great deal of autonomy over how, where, and when they get work done. This requires more self-management, self-discipline, and self-directed development than ever before. Team members must learn to appreciate their own aspirations, strengths, limitations, stressors, workload capacity, and growth edges. They must determine how they can best contribute to the team, ask for support when they need it, and push back or renegotiate requests that may be outside their scope or ability. Thriving teams know that when people accept responsibility for themselves, it leads to increases in their sense of control and self-esteem at work, as well as their confidence, motivation, resilience, and adaptability.

***To what extent do people on your team take personal responsibility?***



# COMMITTED SELF-LEADERSHIP

## PERSONAL VISION & PURPOSE

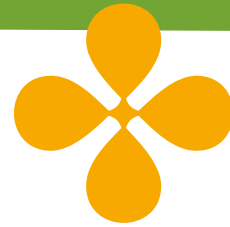
Human beings are naturally designed to bring ideas that matter to them into existence. Thriving teams tap into this innate drive by inviting team members to get clear about an inspiring personal vision and purpose, plus use their own vision and purpose as a compass for making decisions in their lives and work, instead of blindly following the team or organization. In effect, thriving teams support people on their journey of self-authoring, an important stage in human development where a person steps into who they want to become. Why? Because when someone chooses to contribute their life energies and talents to a team because the team's aspirations are so deeply connected to their own, it unleashes massive human potential.

*To what extent do people on your team have a personal vision and purpose to guide decisions in their lives and work?*

**Wisdom Works research shows that employees who use a personal vision and purpose, rather than immediate demands, to direct their lives and work everyday report higher levels of positive impact and wellbeing.**



# POSITIVE TEAM CLIMATE



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Thriving teams foster a positive team climate through physical and psychological safety, trust, respect, and inclusion, collective resilience, and team learning

## PHYSICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

As Harvard Business School professor of leadership Amy Edmondson once said, “No one wakes up in the morning to look ignorant, incompetent, intrusive, or negative.” Feeling psychologically and physically safe is one of our most profound human motivations. Through a biologically hard-wired neuro-radar, commonly known as neuroception, every person is unconsciously and continuously asking “Is it safe enough here for me?” Unsafe team climates rob the very human potentials, such as the creativity, trust, collaboration, and shared learning, people and teams require to succeed and thrive. A team cannot control how safe people feel when they show up for work; that’s a personal responsibility and journey of development. The team can, however, be purposeful about cultivating a climate that honors people as whole human beings, rather than only human resources, and where it’s safe for people to sincerely connect, bring up concerns, hold difficult conversations, and be authentic.

***To what extent does the climate of your team promote physical and psychological safety for everyone?***

## TEAM LEARNING

Given the disruptive nature of organizations, teams must learn how to learn so that they can succeed. Team learning is about people jointly participating in experimentation, discovery, knowledge-sharing, and sense-making to uplevel both how the team works and the team’s results. Among other things, a lack of team learning is linked to **longer times to bring a new product to market**, **power inequities in a team**, and **cognitive overload** (read: mental exhaustion) by team members. Thriving teams proactively structure opportunities for learning together, for example, through open reviews at the end of a project, reflective sessions to redesign unsustainable work approaches, and virtual think tanks that invite people to think beyond their current assumptions about a thorny problem. In thriving teams, collaborative learning is an expectation and a norm.

***To what extent does your team learn together?***



# POSITIVE TEAM CLIMATE

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## TRUST, RESPECT & INCLUSION

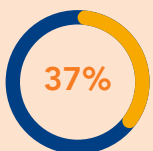
Like the Indigenous peoples of North America planted, ate, and celebrated the physical and spiritual reciprocity of the [Three Sisters](#) (beans, squash, and maize), at Wisdom Works we consider trust, respect, and inclusion the three sisters of a healthy team climate. *Trust* is a blend of sincerity (do we walk our talk?), competence (are we capable of walking our talk?), and reliability (do we walk our talk consistently?). *Respect* is about acknowledging the inherent worth and dignity of all people and demonstrating positive regard, knowing that each person is shaped by unique joys and struggles. *Inclusion* means recognizing how power, privilege, and belonging operate in the team, striving to resolve inequities that exist, and using difference as a source of new perspectives and wisdom. Thriving teams don't tolerate untrustworthy, disrespectful, or exclusionary attitudes and behaviors. They use open communications, flexible work scheduling, constructive feedback, job autonomy, opportunities for connection, and a host of other methods to put trust, respect, and inclusion into action.

***To what extent does your team embrace trust, respect, and inclusion?***

## COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE

Collective resilience is about a team having the capacity and skills to meet its demands without undermining the team. This becomes particularly crucial in times of high stress. Why? Because despite a team's best efforts to show up well, the group may default to unproductive strategies and behaviors when under duress (a common stress reaction). Thriving teams demonstrate a high degree of [social perceptiveness](#), where team members pick up on subtle cues about how people and the team as a whole are doing to help the team recalibrate itself toward greater effectiveness and wellbeing. They also identify and address the systemic factors that are causing undue stress. Psychologist Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett once said, "The best thing for the human nervous system is another human—and the worst thing for a human nervous system is another human." We wholeheartedly agree. Most teams fail to appreciate the biological need of humans to coregulate in life-enhancing relationships at work. On thriving teams, people recognize that their states of being affect not only their personal motivations, performance, and resilience, but also the motivations, performance, and resilience of others.

***To what extent does your team demonstrate resilience?***



Gusto reports that 37% of workers said being able to work with a great team was the top reason for staying at a company.

# The Anatomy of a Thriving Team is Aspirational—and It's an Imperative

Building a thriving team isn't something to pencil into the calendar as a group lunch-and-learn. It is a commitment to a way of being and operating. Plus, it is one of the central challenges and opportunities for leadership today.

If you're the manager of a team or the person appointed to build it, think of the five categories as a map supporting your leadership and team journey. Your current team may have already activated some of the categories and, without realizing it, neglected others.

The more your team pays attention to what enables them to thrive, the more the team will experience itself as well-resourced to handle and grow with the changes and disruptions they face.

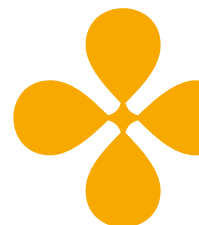
*How will you harness the powerful human energy of your team?*

*How will you create the conditions for people to thrive as they achieve positive results together?*



**"Your role is to unlock the potential of people to maximize their own performance individually and collectively."**

—Sir John Whitmore



"At Wisdom Works, we believe developing teams that thrive releases the human drive for excellence, creativity, and wisdom needed to meet the challenges in our organizations and world today. Plus, few experiences are more enriching for human beings than achieving meaningful results, discovering new avenues for growth and wellbeing, and contributing to the welfare and prosperity of others. This, and more, happens when when we work in a thriving team."

—Renee Moorefield, CEO, Wisdom Works Group



**CONTACT US** to access assessments, services, and resources that empower your team to thrive.

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