Tempo Whitepaper

Build a Better Team
— and Watch Your Business Grow
What’s in this paper?

1. Why You Need a More Diverse Team
2. The Key Ingredient Missing from Your Team
3. Top 4 Tips for Managing a Global Team

**teamwork**

/ˈtiːmərk/  
*noun*  
the combined action of a group of people, especially when effective and efficient.
“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

—Helen Keller
The Key Ingredient Missing from Your Team

Think back to some of the team meetings you’ve been in over the course of your career. In some meetings, members may have finished each other’s sentences, contributed valuable and unexpected ideas and divided the speaking time equally. Other team meetings may have been less effective. A single member may have unfairly dominated the conversation and there may have been an atmosphere of uncertainty and a tendency to hold back. As a leader, it’s up to you to work on building the right atmosphere to make sure every member contributes as fully as possible, no matter who is part of the group.

How can you do this? Surprisingly, it’s not a matter of choosing the most talented people to be on the team. According to a growing body of research, the way to lead a truly effective team is to foster psychological safety. Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmonson, who coined the term, defines psychological safety as a “shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking”. It is characterized by a “sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up.” A very well-studied aspect of team learning, psychological safety essentially means you can be yourself in a group without fear of negative consequences.

Some elements of psychological safety look counter-intuitive at first glance. For instance, Edmonson noticed that teams that perform very well appear to make more errors. Over time it became apparent that what really distinguishes the best performing teams is not the amount of mistakes they make, but how transparent they are with one another. In a negative team environment, employees avoid volunteering negative information for fear of being judged. By fostering psychological safety, all team members feel safe and appreciated.

The cost of having a team with poor psychological safety is high: "Every time we withhold, we rob ourselves and our colleagues of small moments of learning. And we don’t innovate. We don’t come up with new ideas,” Edmonson explains in a TEDx talk. So how can you build psychological safety at work? Here are a few steps you can take, inspired by Edmonson’s talk:
Start small

Model positive behaviour by productively challenging team members and contributing new ideas. Invite members to offer their expertise. Acknowledge when people take risks - whether they ask unexpected questions or contribute new ideas - and vocalize your appreciation for their effort, especially when they make a mistake. Doing so will inspire other team members to take similar risks.

Frame the work as a learning problem

“Make explicit that there is enormous uncertainty ahead and enormous interdependence,” Edmondson explains. “We’ve never been here before; we can’t know what will happen; we’ve got to have everybody’s brains and voices in the game.” In other words, make it clear that the future is unknown, the group is learning, and every team member’s input matters. This creates a rationale for team members to contribute.

Acknowledge your own fallibility

As a team leader, it's important to be aware of your limitations. Occasionally make statements that acknowledge your imperfections and follow up by encouraging others to contribute their thoughts. For instance, you may say something like “It’s possible I could miss something — it’s important that I hear from you.” By admitting to your own mistakes, you model the desired behaviour for your team members and make it safe for them to speak up.

Be curious and ask a lot of questions

When you ask a lot of questions, your team members are encouraged to generate meaningful answers and follow up with their own questions. Model curiosity that gets people talking and stimulates productive discussion. If a team member’s performance is faltering, use genuine curiosity to open a dialogue that will inspire change.
“[I]n diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”

—Maya Angelou
Why You Need a More Diverse Team

From stimulating innovation to increasing the bottom line, diversity in the workplace can bring with it many surprising benefits. An analysis of 2,400 global companies found that companies with at least one woman on the board yield higher return on equity than companies with all-male boards. Another analysis discovered that firms with higher racial or gender diversity have greater sales revenue and more customers. A study of 4,277 Spanish companies found that companies with more women are more likely to introduce new innovative products into the market. Even academia sees the benefits of diversity. In 2014, two Harvard researchers found that academic papers produced by ethnically diverse authors get more citations than those written by ethnically homogeneous authors.

So what is it that’s so special about a diverse group of people working together on a problem? Can diversity really make a company more innovative and intelligent? The answer appears to be yes. Each individual in a diverse team comes to the table with a different background and history. Research shows that members expect conflict and are better prepared for differences of opinion. They anticipate alternative viewpoints and assume that reaching consensus will take time and effort. Diverse teams tend to reexamine facts and thus are more likely to be objective.

In other words, the members of diverse groups seem to work harder, both socially and intellectually. There’s a lot of evidence that the hard work performed in diverse teams pays off with better results. In one 2009 study, for example, fraternity and sorority members were placed in a team of three and instructed to solve a murder mystery game. As they were reviewing the evidence, every group was joined by a fourth team member—either someone from the same house or from a different one. The results? Those groups with diverse membership performed much better, in spite of the fact that they were less confident in their judgments.

Still, there are some caveats. Diversity in the workplace can cause conflict if not properly implemented. “It’s critical to note that simply making a team more diverse is not necessarily enough to see the benefits,” David Rock, Heidi Grant and Jacqui Grey write in the Harvard Business Review. “Diverse teams must find ways to work together productively, and often the best ways of working may seem counterintuitive.”
Here are some tips for managing a diverse team:

Highlight that multiculturalism is valuable and appreciated

You may be tempted to downplay any differences. Don’t. A 2009 study examined support for multiculturalism versus colorblindness at a large U.S. health care firm. The more that workers agreed with the statement that “employees should recognize and celebrate racial and ethnic differences” and disagreed that “employees should downplay their racial and ethnic differences,” the more minorities reported being engaged at work.

Ensure knowledge is being shared

No matter how multi-faceted a team is, diversity will not enhance the overall creativity of a group unless its members freely share their knowledge. Encourage discussion by asking questions and making sure everyone is included in the conversation.

Foster psychological safety

Psychological safety is always important, but especially so in diverse groups where members may feel less familiar with one another. Create an environment where diverse team members can feel at ease and comfortable contributing.
Companies with at least one woman on the board yield higher return on equity.

Firms with higher racial or gender diversity have greater sales revenue and more customers.

Companies with more women are more likely to introduce new innovative products into the market.

Academic papers produced by ethnically diverse authors get more citations.
“Great things in business are never done by one person; they’re done by a team of people.”

—Steve Jobs
Top 4 Tips for Managing a Global Team

Here at Tempo, we’re very familiar with the challenge of managing a global team; we have close to 100 employees divided between Sweden, Iceland and Canada. There are many difficulties that arise in global teams: cultural divides, time changes, isolation, and more. That’s why it’s crucial to hone your leadership skills if you find yourself leading a team of international employees.

“Think of the job as a combination of being in several marriages at once and being a parent at the same time,” says Tsedal Neeley, an expert in global teamwork and professor at Harvard Business School, in an interview with the Harvard Business Review. “You’ve got to constantly work on your relationship with every member of the team. You’ve got to schedule date nights with each of them. And never, ever take your relationships for granted.”

So what should you know if you’re going to be managing a global team? Here are Tempo’s tips:
Create unstructured time with employees

A global team doesn’t get the opportunity to chat around the water cooler every day. There are no chance meetings or impromptu conversations in the elevator. Because team members don’t ever meet face-to-face, there is the very real possibility of isolation. Leaders can resolve this problem by creating space for employees to engage spontaneously with each other during online meetings. Neeley calls this practice “structuring unstructured time”. For instance, a manager might allocate seven or eight minutes at the beginning of a call to check in with employees and chat about what's happening in life and work.

This practice of structuring unstructured time gives people room to discuss their thoughts and feelings and promotes connection across the team. Managers should model the desired behaviour by sharing some of their own personal stories. Ultimately, having informal conversations improves working relationships and can decidedly boost work results.

“Without a sense of connection, it is very difficult for co-workers to get on the same page about their work, whether they’re determining how to accomplish a task or thinking about a process for doing a task,” Neeley explains.

Make sure everyone speaks in meetings

Employees from some cultures may interrupt each other frequently over the course of a conversation or speak without having prepared notes. Other employees may behave very differently.

“Often people from East Asia are not ready to speak until they’ve had an opportunity to prepare what they’re going to say and check with other people to see what they think,” says Erin Meyer, professor at INSEAD and author of The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries.
of Global Business. “In Thailand and Indonesia people learn that you wait for the person to clearly have stopped speaking, you wait a couple of seconds and then you speak.”

These kinds of differences can inhibit open conversation in cross-cultural meetings and unexpectedly quash diversity, but a few useful tricks exist to fix the situation. Leaders can manage global meetings by setting up an agenda so that everyone speaks in order, or create a process where every person is clearly called upon to speak in turn. A few days before the meeting, managers can also inform team members that they’ll be looking for the input of employees on a particular topic and afford them some time to prepare.

**Continue to reassure employees**

When you’re far away from your employees, the anxiety of the team tends to run high. People always look for reassurance that their work is respected, whatever the working arrangement; but in a global team, team members are especially vigilant for clues about how their leader feels about them. Members of your team will carefully watch what you say in meetings and note how quickly you respond to their emails. So, take special care to be supportive and responsive in your communications.

“Even when we’re co-located, the tone of a text or the formality of an email is left wide open to interpretation, to the point that even our closest friends get confused,” Neeley explains. “These misinterpretations create an anxiety that can become costly, affecting morale, engagement, productivity, and innovation.”
Use digital tools to your advantage

For teams that are dispersed around the world, using the right tools is a crucial part of staying connected. Use regular video conferencing calls to stay in touch and be sure to employ an advanced instant messaging tool like Slack so everyone is in sync. With collaborative tools like Jira, you can make sure everyone on the team can track progress and follow the comments of team members. Tools like Tempo Timesheets are also great to keep time tracking simple and integrated for everyone.

There’s a lot to keep in mind when managing a global team. The job comes with a significant amount of responsibility and power, and the skill of the leader in managing the team is crucial.

Says Neeley: “I can’t emphasize enough how important the leader is to the success of a global project.”
About Tempo

Tempo is a cloud-first software company that helps teams at 10,000+ companies—SMBs and large-scale enterprises—collaborate, plan and schedule resources, manage budgets, and track time directly from their daily workflow. Tempo started as a homegrown time tracking solution, which offered our software and business teams seamless integration with Jira. It changed the way we worked.

We quickly realized this technology could help every team and business gain visibility over their work efforts for better collaboration and decision-making. Today, Tempo is a team of almost 100 peers with offices in Reykjavík, Montréal, and Stockholm.

We are one of the largest, award-winning, top-selling developers in the Atlassian ecosystem. Tempo offers three efficiency and visibility-enhancing products that extend Jira to help IT, software development, consultancy, and business teams work smarter.

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**Tempo Planner:** Visual resource management and planning  
**Tempo Budgets:** Project and portfolio financial management
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