



Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



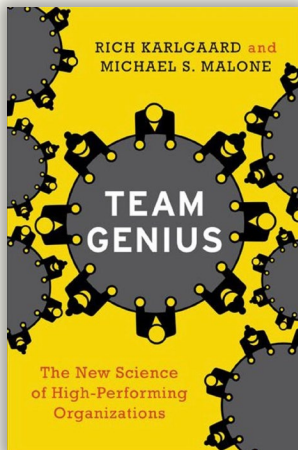
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Team Genius

The New Science of High-Performing Organizations

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In **Team Genius**, Rich Karlgaard and Michael Malone explore what it takes to create high-performing teams and what makes them so. Building on decades of research across disciplines, they delve into not only how great teams are formed and structured, but how they function. In simplest terms, they tend to agree with Alex Pentland, Director of MIT's Human Dynamics Lab, who argues that great teams **1) communicate frequently, 2) talk and listen in equal measure, 3) seek ideas and input from outside the group, and 4) employ malleable communication patterns (pp. 58-59).**

Key Quote

“The more diverse a team, the more volatile it is likely to be. And often the only thing keeping such a team from exploding is the quality of its leadership. Great leaders create team genius by bringing together, and holding together, the most diverse and heterogeneous team” (p. 76).

KEY POINTS AND CONCEPTS

British anthropologist Robin Dunbar observed that over the course of human history and across cultures the same group sizes appear repeatedly. **They are:**

- 3 to 5: The circle of our closest friends.
- 12 to 15: The group of friends and family whose death we would deeply mourn. These are people with whom we have a deep trust, meaning the relationship can endure a small amount of betrayal.
- 50: The traditional camp size of hunter-gatherers, and the largest size where a degree of mutual trust remains.

- 150: Dunbar's number. The number of relationships a person can keep organized in their mind. It does not necessarily mean you trust them, but it does mean you can know something about them (p. 26).
- 1,500: Not well defined, but appears to be the largest an organization can become before it subdivides.
- When building a team, it's best to align the number of individuals with one of Dunbar's numbers. Big teams aren't effective because even though they have more resources to draw upon, there are too many connections that need to be managed, wasting everyone's time (p. 31).


To help manage team size, Jeff Bezos has a rule that no meeting includes more people than the number two pizzas can feed (p. 188).

Studies show that the optimal balance of people on radical innovation teams requires that half the team should follow the below distribution:


- Creative (20 to 30 percent)
- Conformist (10 to 20 percent)
- Detail Oriented (Up to 10 percent) (p. 68).

When building your team:

- Focus on creating diversity of culture, life experiences, skills, and thought processes.
- Keep teams close together—they work better when in close proximity to one another.
- Limit team size to the smallest size needed for the task at hand.
- Keep the leadership team to the fewest number of managers and fewest management layers needed to keep things in order (p. 219).



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Large organizations should, to the best of their ability, abide by the same practices that sustained them when they were smaller (p. 207).

Defining and Fostering Diversity

When creating a diverse team focus on creating cognitive diversity—you want diversity in the way people think. The goal is to create “whole-brain” teams that include both “left” and “right” brain individuals (pp. 68-69).

There are three sources of cognitive diversity 1) training, 2) experience, and 3) genetics (p. 72).

“Sometimes the right person for the job is two people” (p. 69).

“The more diverse a team, the more volatile it is likely to be. And often the only thing keeping such a team from exploding is the quality of its leadership. Great leaders create team genius by bringing together, and holding together, the most diverse and heterogeneous team” (p. 76).

“The best strategy is, if possible, to keep team members together through more than one project. That will give them a chance to learn about each other and to bond—and in the process, help mitigate the social categorization problems associated with diverse teams” (p. 81).

“Experimental research on teams has shown that debate and the presence of competing views actually stimulate divergent and creative thought” (p. 84).

When joining a new team, the best strategy is to “conform early, diverge later” (p. 85).

“Don’t look at the obvious strengths of these individuals, but instead focus on their weaknesses. Compare these weaknesses to see if they can fit together in a way that neutralizes them” (p. 157).

Establishing Team Culture

“Mirror neurons allow us to navigate our social world and create an instant sense of shared experience. And they are particularly important to leadership, because followers don’t just act out the orders of the leaders, they actually tend to mirror the feelings and actions of those leaders” (p. 49).

Research shows that “neural representations of others’ errors are also influenced by being on a team.” When a teammate makes a mistake, we are more likely to forgive them than if they are an outsider (p. 52).

Reputation matters. In a newly formed team, it takes only one week for reputations to form amongst team members (p. 55).

Transactive memory lets team members both direct incoming information to the appropriate team member and retrieve information from the right team member (p. 64).

“Keep careful records and never screw up—in [small teams], everything is personal” (p. 192).

Dictate the style and culture of the team and do it early. Do this by setting metrics and creating rituals that reinforce the patterns of behavior that you want to see. Live the persona you want to see so completely that you (and eventually your team) become it (p. 223).

In the early days of Hewlett Packard, William Hewlett visited the office on a Saturday to find all the engineers standing around doing nothing. All of their equipment was locked in a storage room and the lab supervisor, who had the only key, hadn’t arrived yet. Hewlett proceeded to grab a pair of bolt cutters, and cut the padlock off the door. He then announced a new rule—anyone caught putting a lock on a storage room door would be fired on the spot (p. 226).

“Great teams invariably have great stories—and not just drunken anecdotes and tales of screw-ups, but also stories that help define the personality of the team, that underscore its pride and morale, and most of all, stories that help the team explain its own specialness to itself” (p. 227).

Lifecycle and Autopsy

Teams begin with the Formation Phase in which strangers (or near strangers) are thrust together under unusual circumstances and then are forced to quickly establish relationships.



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The Establishment Phase marks when the team begins to establish rules, metrics, milestones, and its communication apparatus.


The Operational Phase marks when the focus shifts from organization to the actual work.

When teams begin to develop their own legends and stories that help define the internal culture, they enter the Cultural Phase.


During the Maturation and Consolidation Phase the team combats outside forces such as pressure from senior leaders to finish the task or recruiters trying to steal the team's top talent.

The Completion Phase only happens if the team is able to complete the project. It includes the final packaging and presentation of the results of the team's work.

Teams enter the End Phase when all associated work is complete, and it usually plays out with either the team disbanding or reforming (perhaps in a slightly modified way) to tackle a new task. Regardless, it's important that the team take the time to celebrate its accomplishments (pp. 215-217).



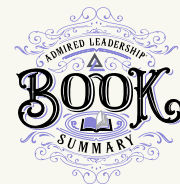
“Healthy, Successful Teams face challenges of success such as inflated egos and other teams trying to poach members for their own teams. The hope is that their success becomes contagious.”



At the end of the team's engagement, their legacy can fall into one of four categories:

- **Unhealthy, Unsuccessful Teams** not only fail to accomplish their task, but create a miserable experience that will impact team members down the line.
- **Unhealthy, Successful Teams succeed in spite of themselves** usually because they just get lucky, have so much talent that they can survive extreme dysfunction, or fake results to make themselves look better than they actually are.
- **Healthy, Unsuccessful Teams are tough to judge**, but can be best described as “good failures.” With these teams, everything usually works well, but the team fails due to forces outside their control. The key question to ask members of a healthy, unsuccessful team is “Not knowing what was to come, would you have done anything differently?”
- **Healthy, Successful Teams face challenges** of success such as inflated egos and other teams trying to poach members for their own teams. The hope is that their success becomes contagious (pp. 239-244).

Karlgaard, R. and Malone, M. (2015) **Team Genius: The New Science of High-Performing Organizations**: New York: Harper Business.



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