(CE)^2: Communication and Empowerment for Cost Estimators

How to use soft skills to exponentially impact your team's analysis

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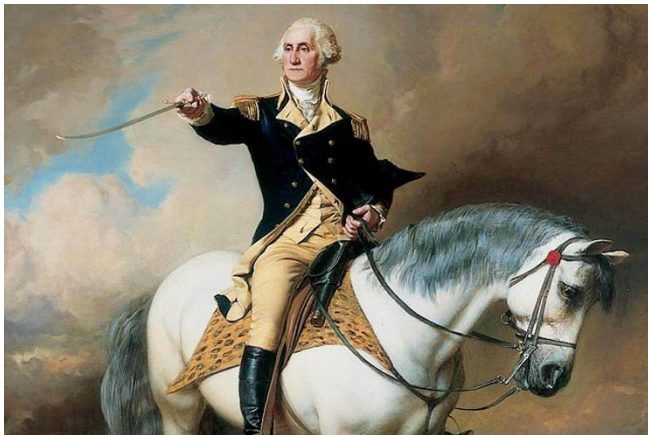
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Background

- Training for cost estimators is traditionally very technically focused

- There is significant "how-to" guidance to create a good cost estimate

- There is very little literature as to how to be a better cost team leader

- What research has already been done

- What defines a good leader

Who is a "good leader"

Cliff's Notes of 2021
"Does Cost Team Leadership Matter"

Project Oxygen – Do Managers Matter?

David A. Garvin 2013 case study in HBR highlights the behavior measurement of Google's management, why managers matter, and what the best managers do
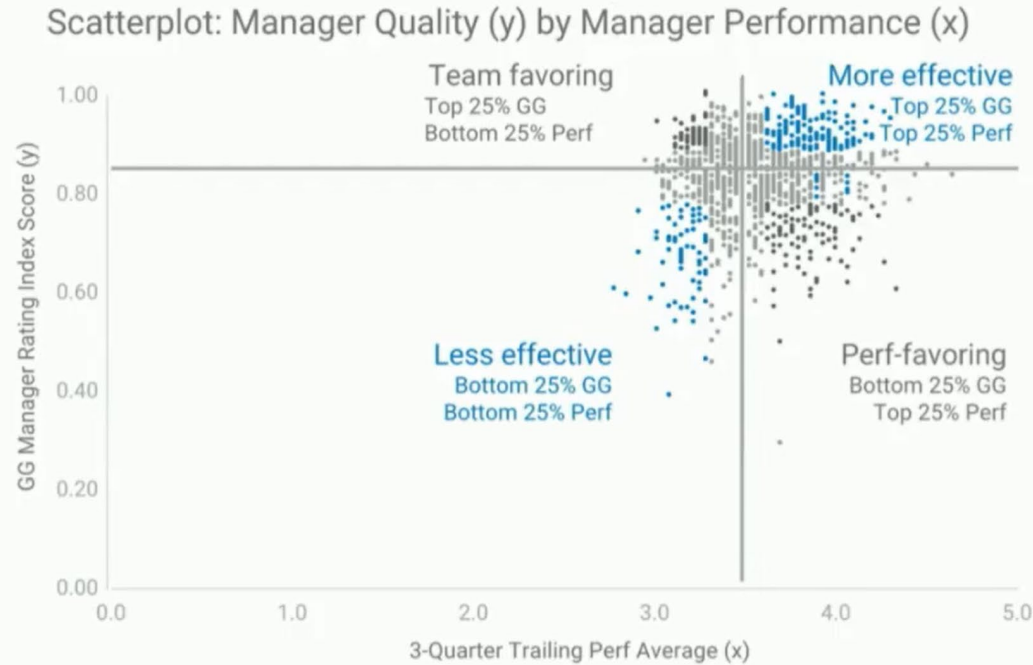
Project Oxygen – Do Managers Matter?

Academy on Air: Project Oxygen: Why Managers Matter. (2017, February 2). [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JattR1uoX7g&t=922s

Methodology

- Collect data via an anonymous survey shared with the cost estimating community
  - Note - the survey was intentionally designed to be brief to maximize participation

- Determine if the cost community agrees that team leadership matters

- Use the ten identified Google Manager Behaviors and establish their ranking regarding cost team leadership

- Determine if there were any differences in the perceived importance of these behaviors between leaders and non-leaders

Survey Participants

- 163 cost analysts with cost estimating experience ranging from one to 40+ years

- Approximately 80% of respondents had more than 5 years of cost estimating experience

- 46.6% considered "senior cost estimator/analysts" with over 15 years of cost estimating experience
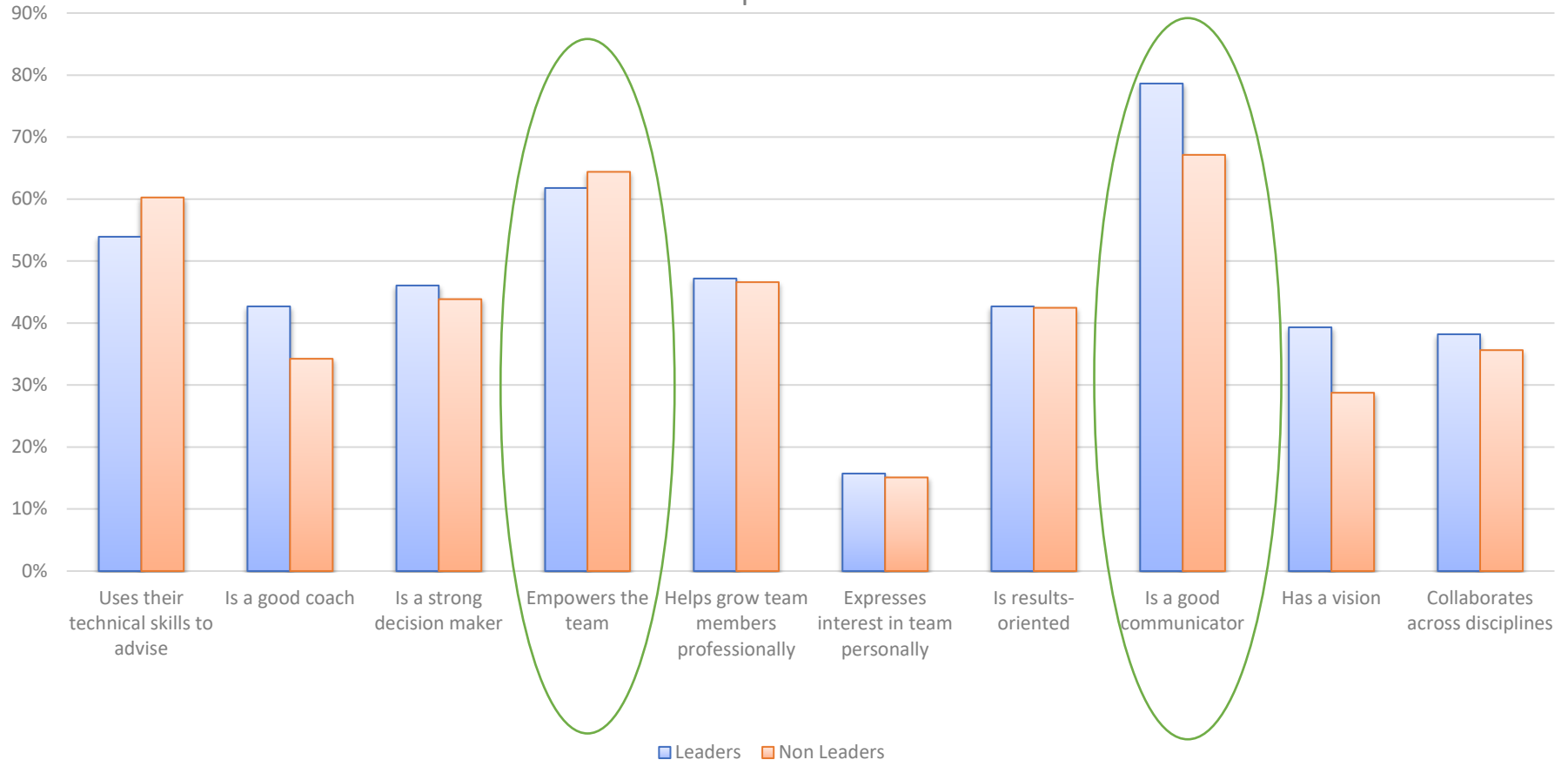
Years of Cost Estimating Experience
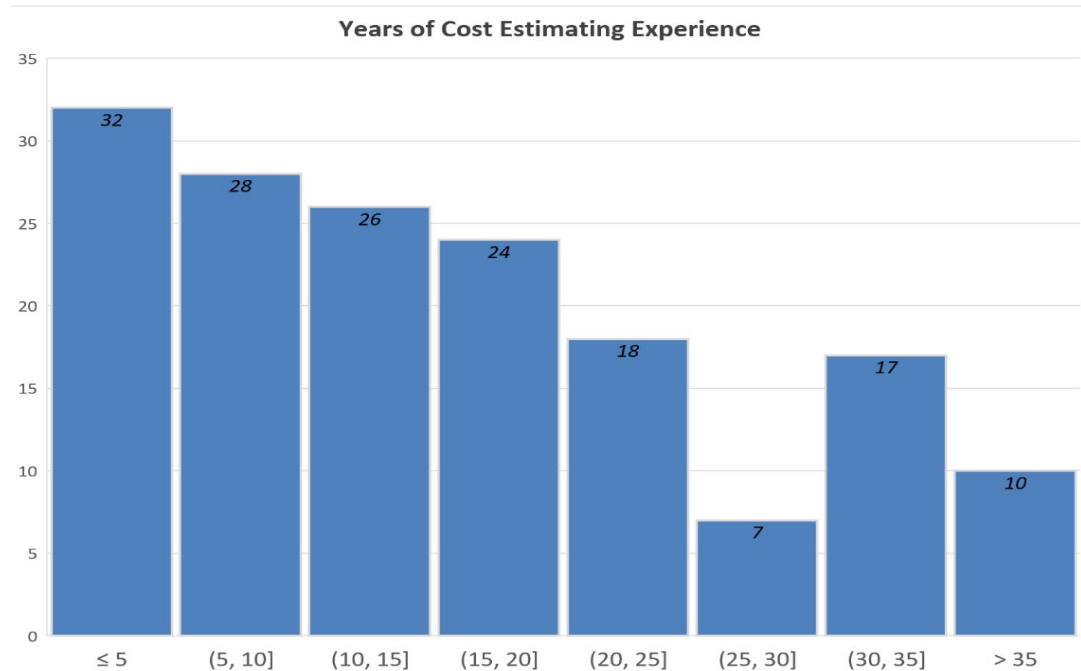
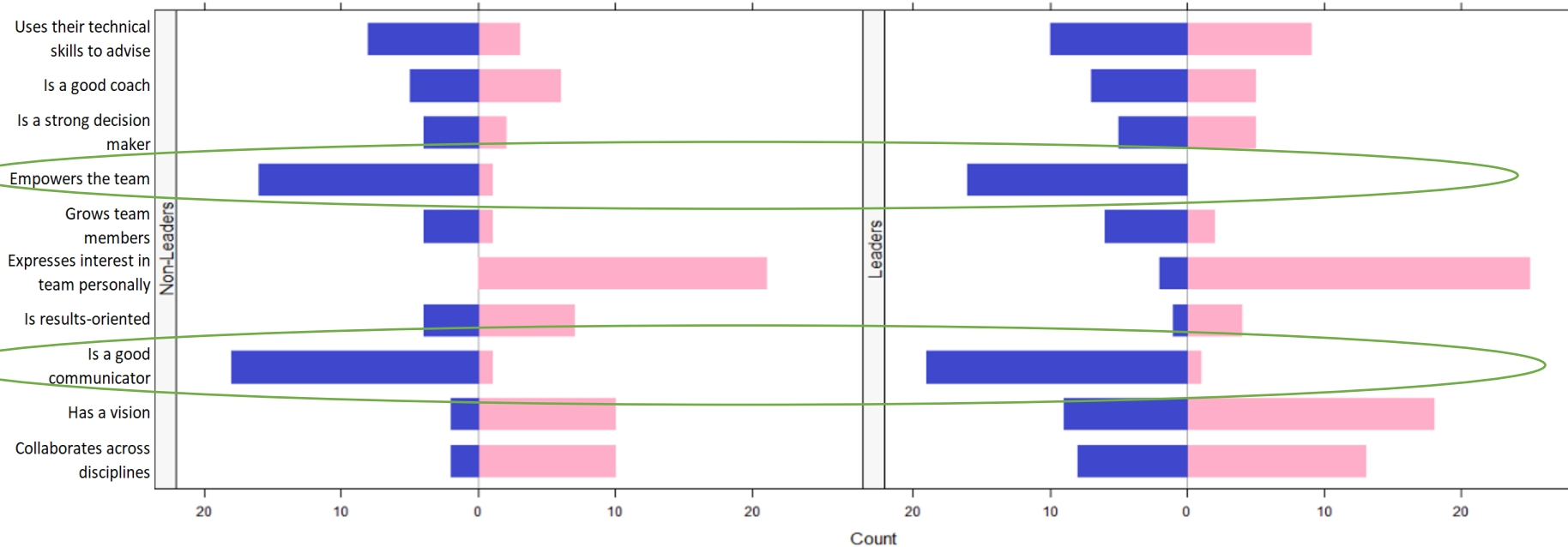|	Yes	No		Yes %	No%
Have you ever served as the leader of a cost team, as in, leading the effort for a cost product with one or more analysts reporting to you?	136	27		83.4%	16.6%
Within your current company/organization are you considered leadership or management?	89	74		54.6%	45.4%

ICEAA Important Soft Skills

Inclusion in the top 5 skills

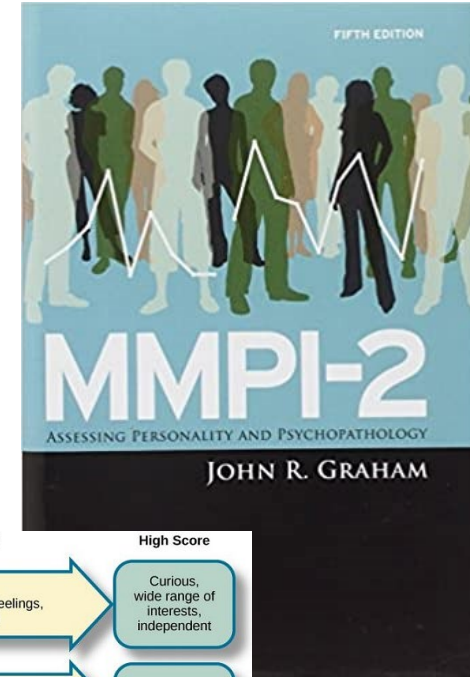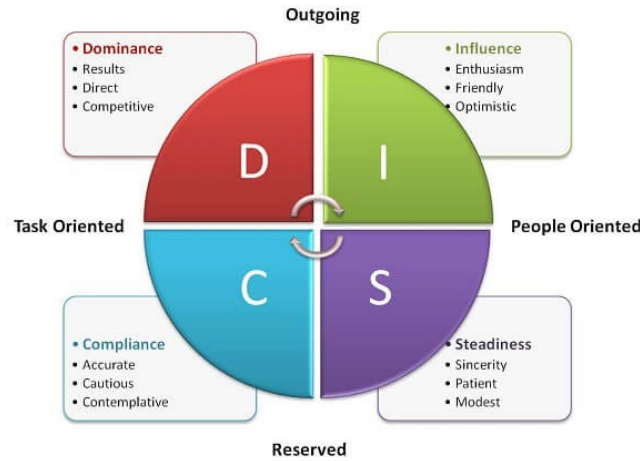# Least and Most Important Skills

Least and Most Important Skills

Back to our regularly scheduled program…

Personality assessments

EQ and Self-Awareness

Never True ← 1   2   3   4   5 → **Always True**

1. I adjust my behavior depending on who I am interacting with (e.g. calm/friendly or serious/deliberate depending on the situation)

2. I tend to postpone or avoid discussing touchy topics

3. I find myself feeling nervous about situations or events, and I don't even know why

4. If asked to list my top three strengths, I would have a hard time coming up with them

5. I have certain compulsive habits that I just can't seem to stop (e.g. overeating)

6. Once a pessimistic thought pops into my head, it's like a floodgate opens – my thoughts get more and more negative

7. I like learning new things

"Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself.

When you become a leader, success is all about growing others" – Jack Welch

EQ and Self-Awareness

The Four Self-Awareness Archetypes

This 2x2 maps internal self-awareness (how well you know yourself) against external self-awareness (how well you understand how others see you).

	Low external self-awareness	High external self-awareness
High internal self-awareness	**INTROSPECTORS** They're clear on who they are but don't challenge their own views or search for blind spots by getting feedback from others. This can harm their relationships and limit their success.	**AWARE** They know who they are, what they want to accomplish, and seek out and value others' opinions. This is where leaders begin to fully realize the true benefits of self-awareness.
Low internal self-awareness	**SEEKERS** They don't yet know who they are, what they stand for, or how their teams see them. As a result, they might feel stuck or frustrated with their performance and relationships.	**PLEASERS** They can be so focused on appearing a certain way to others that they could be overlooking what matters to them. Over time, they tend to make choices that aren't in service of their own success and fulfillment.

SOURCE DR. TASHA EURICH

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Communication

Cost team leaders should:

- look for opportunities to increase productivity

- maximize employee engagement

- effectively navigate the estimating process

All of these can happen by improving team communication

Communication skills employed by effective leaders were:

- Adaptability

- Approachability

- Trust

- Inspiration

> If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.
>
> JOHN QUINCY ADAMS
>
> GRACIOUSQUOTES.COM

Adaptability

- The best leaders use their EQ to understand that each person is different

- Tailor your communication style, both verbal and nonverbal, to your audience

- Adapting allows you to be persuasive and build stronger relationships with team members

- Modeling tact and respect when interacting with **every** team member sets the foundation for collaborative and efficient work

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Adaptability:
It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one that is most adaptable to change. (Charles Darwin)

Approachability

- Minimizing distractions

- Making eye contact

- Reflecting the other person's feelings with appropriate statements

- Using "minimal encouragers," that let the person know you are listening and urge them to continue talking

EMPLOYEES WHOSE MANAGERS ARE OPEN AND APPROACHABLE ARE MORE ENGAGED

A productive workplace is one in which employees feel safe enough to experiment, challenge, share information and support one another. The best managers get to know their employees and help them feel comfortable talking about any subject, whether it is work related or not. Among employees who strongly agree that they can approach their manager with any type of question, 54% are engaged. When employees strongly disagree, only 2% are engaged, while 65% are actively disengaged.

I feel I can approach my manager with any type of question.
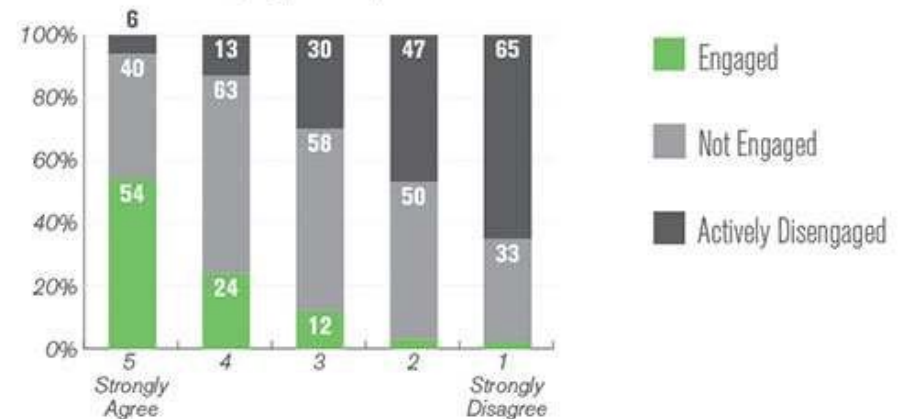
GALLUP

Trust

Trust has been shown to be the most important component of any successful team

1. You can be more fully yourself, and so can the other person.

2. Both of you are willing to be vulnerable.

3. You trust that self-disclosures will not be used against you.

4. You can be honest with each other.

5. You deal with conflict productively.

6. Both of you are committed to each other's growth and development.
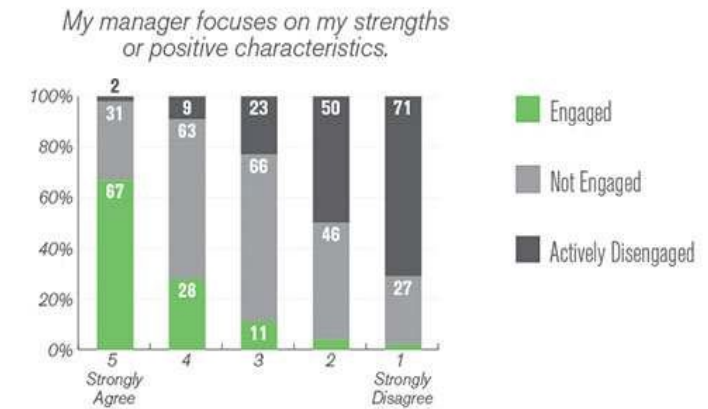
Performance vs Trust Matrix
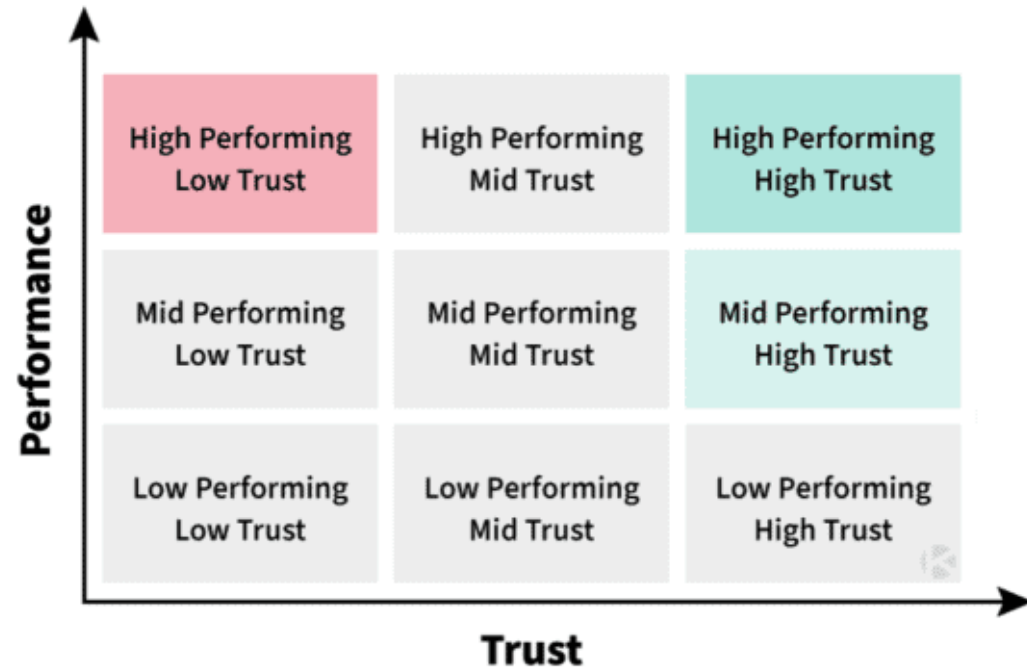
Inspiration

"Outstanding leaders go out of the way to boost the self-esteem of their personnel. If people believe in themselves, it's amazing what they can accomplish" – Sam Walton

A 2004 study showed that leaders should be in the habit of providing significantly more positive feedback than most would assume

- High performing teams had a positive to negative comment ratio of 5.625

- Medium performing teams had a ratio of 1.875

- Low performing teams had a positive to negative comment ratio of .3658.

EMPLOYEES WHOSE MANAGERS FOCUS ON THEIR STRENGTHS ARE MORE ENGAGED

In a strengths-based culture, employees learn their roles more quickly, produce more and significantly better work, stay with their company longer and are more engaged. More than two-thirds (67%) of employees who strongly agree that their manager focuses on their strengths or positive characteristics are engaged. When employees strongly disagree, only 2% are engaged, while 71% are actively disengaged.

My manager focuses on my strengths or positive characteristics.

	Engaged	Not Engaged	Actively Disengaged
5 Strongly Agree	67	31	2
4	28	63	9
3	11	66	23
2		46	50
1 Strongly Disagree		27	71

GALLUP

Losada, M., & Heaphy, E. (2004). The role of positivity and connectivity in the performance of Business Teams. American Behavioral Scientist, 47(6), 740–765
https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764203260208

Empowerment

The 7 Steps of Delegation

1 - What does success look like?

2 - Who is the right person?

3 - Communicate expectations

4 - Staff member plans project

5- Review the project plan

6- Establish milestones

7 - Provide access to resources

[7 Steps of Delegation (coachingforleaders.com)](coachingforleaders.com)

Summary

- "Soft skills" like being a good communicator and knowing how to empower your team are important to leadership efficacy

- Taking an inventory of your own strengths and limitations will help you identify areas for leadership growth

- Communication matters in a team and a cost team lead sets the tone

- Empower your team by effective delegation

"THE ONLY TIME I SET THE BAR LOW IS FOR LIMBO"

—MICHAEL SCOTT