

Participant-Facing Excerpt: Team Effectiveness

Based on the five team dynamics identified through Google Project Aristotle. Designed for senior leaders at Sandbox VR.

SESSION PURPOSE

Move the conversation from abstract leadership beliefs to observable team conditions. Leaders leave with one behavior they will change in the next 30 days.

Audience	Format	Duration	Facilitator role
~20 senior leaders	In-person workshop	90 minutes	Design, facilitate, challenge assumptions, convert insight into commitments
Executives, VPs, Directors, Functional Heads	Cross-functional	Leadership development	Internal L&D / OD facilitator

THE FIVE TEAM CONDITIONS

Condition	What it looks like in practice	Leader question
Psychological Safety	People can raise risk, admit mistakes, and challenge decisions without managing the leader's reaction.	What becomes harder to say when the stakes rise?
Dependability	Commitments are explicit, visible, and closed.	Can the team trust that commitments will be completed or renegotiated?
Structure & Clarity	Priorities, ownership, decision rights, and tradeoffs are understood.	Does everyone know what matters most and who decides?
Meaning	People understand why the work matters to them and the team.	Can people connect their work to something beyond task completion?
Impact	People can see how their work changes an outcome that matters.	Do people know what changed because of their work?

FACILITATOR INTENT

Do not teach the five conditions as a list to memorize. Use them as diagnostic lenses. The value of the session comes from forcing leaders to test whether their teams actually experience the conditions they believe they create.

OPENING PROMPT

“Think of the strongest team you have ever been part of. What did people do differently when pressure was high?”

Silent write: 90 seconds. Pair share: 3 minutes. Harvest no more than five behaviors into the room.

Scenario Discussion: The Launch Decision

Participant-facing case. Fictionalized for public use.

SCENARIO

A cross-functional launch is two weeks from go-live. In the leadership meeting, the VP sponsoring the work says the date will hold. A Director knows that a dependency is unlikely to be ready, but the VP has already challenged the team twice for “overcomplicating” the launch. The Director says nothing in the meeting and raises the concern privately afterward.

Discuss in groups of 3–4

- Which of the five team conditions is most at risk?
- What behavior from the VP is shaping the Director’s choice?
- What would a psychologically safe response look like without lowering accountability?
- What should happen in the meeting, not after it?

FACILITATOR NOTES

Moment	Facilitator move	What to listen for
0–2 min	Let groups diagnose before naming Psychological Safety.	Do they blame the Director for not speaking up, or examine the leader-created conditions?
2–5 min	Ask: “What evidence would tell you this is a safety problem versus a performance problem?”	Look for observable behavior: interruption, defensiveness, retaliation, dismissal, status pressure.
5–8 min	Push on false tradeoff: “Can the VP invite dissent and still hold the date?”	Leaders should separate candor from consensus. Safety means challenge is permitted; it does not mean every challenge wins.
8–10 min	Close with: “What would the VP say next if they wanted the truth before the launch?”	Listen for an explicit invitation, curiosity, and a decision process—not “my door is always open.”

FACILITATOR WATCH-OUT

Do not let the room reduce psychological safety to niceness. Redirect to candor under pressure. The test is whether people can surface risk while power, time, reputation, or money are at stake.

DEBRIEF LINE

“A team can be friendly and still be unsafe. The diagnostic question is not whether people like one another. It is whether the truth gets more expensive to say as the stakes go up.”

Reflection Exercise: Intent vs. Experience

Individual reflection followed by facilitated whole-room discussion.

PARTICIPANT REFLECTION

Prompt	Your notes
When was the last time someone publicly challenged one of your decisions?	
What kinds of bad news reach you immediately? What kinds arrive late?	
What do you do in the first 30 seconds after someone tells you that you are wrong?	
Where does your team disagree privately after appearing aligned publicly?	

DIFFICULT FACILITATION MOMENT

SENIOR LEADER

“People here can speak up. We’re already an open culture.”

FACILITATOR RESPONSE

“I think that is true at the level of intent. The harder question is whether people experience it that way when the stakes are high. Can someone disagree with you in a meeting, tell you your decision created a problem, or bring you bad news without first calculating how you are going to react?”

Then ask the room:

“When was the last time someone publicly challenged one of your decisions?”

FACILITATOR NOTES: HOW TO HOLD THE SILENCE

Do	Avoid	Why
Ask the question, then stop talking for 8–10 seconds.	Rescuing the room with an example immediately.	The silence is diagnostic. Senior leaders need time to search memory rather than answer performatively.
If nobody answers, say: “If the answer is hard to retrieve, that is data.”	Calling on a specific executive first.	Keeps pressure on the question without turning the exercise into public shaming.
Harvest examples of delayed dissent, back-channel concerns, or post-meeting objections.	Debating whether the culture is objectively “open.”	Moves the room from identity claims to observable evidence.
Ask what the leader did after the challenge.	Rewarding only stories where the leader changed the decision.	The desired behavior is safe dissent, not automatic agreement.

FACILITATION PRINCIPLE

Challenge the claim without challenging the person’s status. Treat “we are open” as a hypothesis to test against behavior, not a statement to defeat.

Commitment Exercise: One Behavior, 30 Days

Convert insight into a behavior that another person could observe.

CHOOSE ONE TEAM CONDITION

Condition	Example leader behavior
Psychological Safety	Ask for dissent before stating your own view; thank the challenge before responding to its content.
Dependability	Close every material commitment visibly or renegotiate it before the due date.
Structure & Clarity	End cross-functional meetings with owner, decision, deadline, and what was deprioritized.
Meaning	Connect a major priority to the customer, employee, or business outcome before discussing tasks.
Impact	Show teams the downstream result of completed work rather than only the next target.

30-DAY COMMITMENT CARD

Field	Completed sample
Condition	Psychological Safety
Behavior I will change	Before giving my recommendation in decision meetings, I will ask each function for the strongest reason not to proceed.
Where I will practice it	Weekly launch-readiness meeting
Evidence	Meeting notes show dissent captured before the decision; at least one contrary view documented in 3 of 4 meetings.
Accountability partner	Peer VP
30-day review question	Did people challenge earlier, or did concerns still move to private channels afterward?

FACILITATOR CLOSE

Ask each leader to read only the behavior—not the rationale—to a partner. The partner must answer one question: “Could I tell whether you did this without asking you?” If not, rewrite it.

FACILITATOR NOTE

Do not accept goals such as “communicate better,” “be more open,” or “build trust.” Require a behavior, a setting, and evidence. The session ends when the commitment is observable.

REINFORCEMENT

Timing	Reinforcement
Immediately after session	Leader records one 30-day commitment and names an accountability partner.
Day 14	Short peer check: what did you try, what reaction did you get, what will you adjust?
Day 30	Leader provides one concrete example of application.
Next development cycle	Themes inform 360 debriefs and individual 90-day plans.

PUBLIC-SAFE NOTE: This sample uses fictional scenarios and participant details. It is representative of the facilitation structure and leadership-development approach.