

RGM NEWSLETTER

RITA GUNTHER | MCGRATH

Team Effectiveness in a World Turned Virtual

Summer 2020



Dear Colleagues,

Productively managing groups of human beings who have to produce some kind of joint output was tough enough in the “before times.” Today, it’s exponentially harder, with issues compounded by the reality that many of us are working virtually, for the foreseeable future. We’re also dealing with far more in trying to get jobs done — family, illness, disruption of routines — than we’ve ever had to consider.

What we do know is that when teams can’t be together physically, the richness of the information they easily share drops dramatically. Which in turn means that you need to make a far more conscious effort to structure and manage your teams than in an in-person setting. As a team leader or team member, it’s therefore very useful to be able to get some data, quickly, on what’s going on with your teams so that any glitches can be addressed.

Start With Letting Go of Some Common Beliefs

I do find that there are a number of myths about effective teamwork that can get in the way of making sensible interventions. Hence, some beliefs we need to drop.

Myth #1: Effective teams are highly satisfied with their interpersonal relationships. Um, nope. I mean, it is hard to work with people you detest, but you can have high degrees of respect and professionalism even if the idea of socializing with Alex from Finance gives you a headache.

Myth #2: People on effective teams don't argue. Not true at all. People on some of the most effective teams I've ever seen can disagree quite heatedly. The difference is that they're arguing about a topic, not about each other. Indeed, Ed Catmull, the creative genius who co-founded Pixar Animation Studios, emphasizes the importance of people bumping their ideas off one another and giving each other candid, if painful, feedback.

Myth #3: On effective teams, people are "nice" to each other. Not so much. As Amy Edmondson and I discussed, it's a common misconception that in order to feel psychologically safe, you have to be a pushover. That's a very common misunderstanding.

So How Do You Know What's Going On With Your Team, If You're Not Together?

My dissertation was about how existing organizations create new capabilities. One of the surprising things that I learned was that if your project teams aren't working effectively together (a concept I called "deftness"), you can kiss your capability development efforts goodbye. Teams with issues simply couldn't figure out how to create replicable results over time (my measure of emerging competences).

Eventually, I developed a 20-question diagnostic that I could use to quickly help project leaders and team members figure out where their team stands. These are team-level measures, so what matters is everybody's response, not each individual response. Broadly, what I measure is evidence of the following five factors:

1. Roles: The right skills and capabilities.
2. Trust: Confidence and trust in one another
3. Information: Fluid and dynamic information flows
4. Commitment: Mutual commitment to the team's goals
5. Psychological Safety: Comfort in speaking up

The survey itself consists of 20 questions in which respondents are asked to position their team somewhere between two statements.



[Read more](#)



Five Minutes to Team Effectiveness

To help your team easily and quickly determine where it stands, I've introduced a Team Effectiveness diagnostic tool. This offering from my new company, Valize,

provides a 20-question online survey to identify potential issues and a customized report with team-specific recommendations for how to make improvements.

Learn more about this virtual diagnostic tool by visiting [Valize.com](https://valize.com).

[Learn more](#)

Reading List

A curated roundup of interesting articles and books to get you thinking:

- **How (and Why) to Budget Now for Strategic Foresight in 2021.** A tailored approach to "seeing around corners" from Amy Webb that's a must-read for anybody doing strategy these days. ([Medium](#))
 - **Backstage Leadership: The Invisible Work of Highly Effective Leaders.** Charles Galunic gives leaders tools for looking outside themselves to better understand and shape organizational contexts. ([Palgrave Macmillan](#))
 - **Eat, Sleep, Innovate: How to Make Creativity an Everyday Habit Inside Your Organization.** Using research in behavioral science and hacks from workplaces around the world, Scott Anthony and his coauthors provide a playbook for how individuals and teams can unleash their creativity and curiosity and turn innovation into a habit. ([Harvard Business Review Press](#))
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Upcoming Events

August 28: [Fireside Chat With Joanne Wilson](#) (Virtual)

Talk about having a flair for entrepreneurship! Joanne Wilson, of popular blog gothamgal fame, is an entrepreneur, angel investor, real estate mogul, and educator. Her sharp and incisive writing has made her a favorite go-to resource. She is a leading advocate for female entrepreneurs. We'll be talking about how entrepreneurs are navigating through the pandemic, and what she sees as early warnings of what comes next.

September 4: [Fireside Chat With Victoria Montgomery-Brown](#) (Virtual)

No one ever said that entrepreneurship was easy, but most of us don't know the reality! In her forthcoming book, *DIGITAL GODDESS: The Unfiltered Lessons of a Female*

Entrepreneur (HarperCollins Leadership; October 6, 2020), my guest Victoria Montgomery-Brown offers a raw, honest story of the many highs and lows of her life as the CEO of Big Think. We'll talk about the funny, the sad, and the surprising things about being a woman starting a business, with lots of insights to go around for everybody.

September 11: [Fireside Chat With Jim McKelvey](#) (Virtual)

Frustrated by the expense and inaccessibility of being able to accept credit cards, a St. Louis glassblowing artist and sometime computer scientist teamed up with Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey to found Square. The unlikely payments processor rethought everything about the credit card business, along the way fending off not only the establishment card companies but "born digital" competitors like Amazon. McKelvey chronicles his experiences of the early days of Square (and a lot of his other start-ups) in his recent book *The Innovation Stack*. Join us as we enter into a lively conversation about crazy ideas, unlikely successes, and the way to build a competitive advantage in a transient advantage world (hint: it's thinking beyond features and functions).

September 8: [The Business of Change](#) (Virtual)

TIME for Learning and Columbia Business School have partnered to offer a series of online, on demand classes specifically designed to empower you in this moment of uncertainty. Featuring content from my book *Seeing Around Corners*, I'll soon be launching a class as part of this series. Keep an eye out!

September 16 - October 8: [Women in Leadership](#) (Virtual)

Despite the compelling case for equality of gender representation at all levels of an organization, even with the best of intentions, unconscious bias can distort critical decisions influencing who moves ahead within an organization. During Women in Leadership: Expanding Influence and Leading Change, participants will learn time-tested techniques and practical ideas which women can apply immediately to their career and that can help combat these performance-limiting biases.

September 18: [Fireside Chat With Tom Peters](#) (Virtual)

Tom Peters virtually created the management guru business as we know it with his groundbreaking book *In Search of Excellence*. Since then, he has reinvented himself any number of times, written scores of brilliant business books, and kept his thinking fresh. His latest book is *The Excellence Dividend: Meeting the Tech Tide with Work that Wows and Jobs that Last* (2018). We'll be discussing what the excellent organizations of the future are like (spoiler alert: they create good jobs!), what he's working on now, and pretty much anything he wants to discuss. I shall make every attempt not to go all fan girl!

October 12-16: [Strategy in Uncertain Times](#) (Virtual)

Strategy in Uncertain Times is a five-day virtual program focused on the process of finding opportunities, launching new ventures, and leading necessary organizational changes to revitalize and transform an organization in times of uncertainty. If you have ever worried about how to drive new growth or make a change initiative successful, you will enjoy the insights developed in this live online program.

Interested in having Rita offer a virtual workshop, webinar, or keynote?

[Learn more](#)

In the Press

- It Was Business, It Was Personal: The Redstones' Father-Daughter Feud ([The New York Times](#))
 - Banks Set Aside Billions, Expecting Big Consumer Loan Defaults ([Marketplace](#))
 - Seeing Around Corners: How Business Should Respond to COVID-19 ([RTE](#))
 - Strategic Inflection Points that Change Everything ([A Faster Horse Podcast](#))
 - The Jobs America Needs to Support Workers and the Economy ([MPR News](#))
 - Build Back Better ... Inspiration From Global Leaders ([Fast Leader Magazine](#))
 - Stuck on Repeat: At Nokia, Is History Doomed to Repeat Itself? ([The New Economy](#))
 - Seeing Around Corners: Rita McGrath ([FranklinCovey On Leadership](#))
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Where there is uncertainty, there is also opportunity.



Here's to your next advantage! - Rita

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