SmarterEveryday.

Teams
That **Flow**

NOKIA

CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION.

Flow is the psychological description of those really satisfying occasions at work: you're productive, engaged, confident and operating at your full potential. When a team is in flow, it's innovative, harmonious and productive. Being part of it improves the performance of each member. Communication is purposeful and clear. Friction is seen as an opportunity, not a personal threat. Location and time zones pose no barriers. The balance is just right, and everything flows.

Our culture has a love affair with the archetype of the lone genius - but it's a myth. While we like to give a face to great innovations and inventions, more often than not the reality is that there's a team behind that face.

Michelangelo didn't paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling alone. While he created the design and did the bulk of the painting, his assistants contributed to less intricate areas, prepared the plaster, and even created a new kind of mould-resistant paint, without which the frescoes could not have been completed.

Thomas Edison didn't invent the lightbulb alone. Others had already patented the incandescent bulb years before him. Edison built on and enhanced other people's inventions - his real discovery was that a special species of bamboo had a higher resistance to electricity than carbonised paper, and could produce light more efficiently as a result.

Samuel Morse didn't invent the telegraph alone, either. It was a co-invention of Morse, Charles Wheatstone, Sir William Fothergill Cooke, Edward Davy, and Carl August von Steinhiel. Their independent research and discoveries combined together to create what became the telegraph.[1]

The truth is, most of us work better when we collaborate with others.

We've known this for almost a century, since social psychologist Floyd Allport's experiments revealed that people working at a table with others performed better than when they sat alone, even though they weren't collaborating or competing.[2]

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[1] **Derek Thompson,** 'Forget Edison: This is How History's Greatest Inventions Really Happened', *The Atlantic*, http://nokia.ly/19v03YY

[2] **Floyd Allport,** *The Influence of the Group Upon Association and Thought,* http://nokia.ly/1fV9qXd

Lone Genius

Technological advances have created huge new opportunities for collaboration. They have given us myriad ways to communicate with email, instant messaging and social networks - in fact, the multitude of options can sometimes be daunting. Technology has untethered us from our desks and made it possible to build teams that cross borders and timezones. It has given us open source culture, which has created a whole new way to collaborate. It can enhance our memory, and help us work smarter and faster. Software and gadgets are an integral part of our teams.

This book is a guide to building a team that flows. Continuing from our previous Smarter Everyday publications - *Design Your Day*,[3] and *Mobile Mastery*[4] - we're going to begin with the theory, explaining the concepts and elements you need to create flow, before moving onto the practicalities of harnessing the power of collaboration, working alongside technology, and leading a more productive working life within any team.

[3] **Nokia,** *Design Your Day*,
http://nokia.ly/DYDebook

[4] **Nokia,** *Mobile Mastery*,
http://nokia.ly/MMebook,

THE ELEMENTS OF TEAM FLOW

The psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, who was the first to outline the concept of flow, suggests that in a flow state:

- **You're challenged**
  The task you're attempting isn't too difficult, but it's not so simple that you get bored.

- **You give your whole attention**
  There are no distractions and you're giving the task the concentration it requires.

- **You have clear goals**
  You know what your goal is and keep track of your progress towards it.

- **You get immediate feedback**
  You know instantly whether or not you've hit your goal.

- **You feel totally immersed**
  You feel deeply, effortlessly involved in what you're doing and removed from any worries or frustrations.

- **You have control of your actions**
  You actively make choices about what you're doing.

- **You lose yourself**
  You lose any self-consciousness or the lack of self-confidence that might come with it.

- **You feel time pass differently**
  During the task, it feels as though time stands still, but afterwards, you're not sure where the time went.[5]

[5] **Mihály Csíkszentmihályi,**
  Flow: The Psychology of the Optimal Experience

In this description, there are a lot of 'yous', and in most popular business thinking, flow is almost exclusively discussed in relation to the individual.

However, while people focus on individual flow, Csíkszentmihályi recognised the role of teams and collaboration in flow. The problem with focusing on individual flow is that it puts the onus on you to change your behaviour, innovate and succeed alone, when the truth is that high performance is more likely to be the result of collaboration and being part of a team that flows.

Csíkszentmihályi writes that group flow is characterised by five things:

1. Clarity
Knowing what's expected of you.

2. Centering
Knowing that your teammates are interested in what you're doing.

3. Choice
Knowing that you have options.

4. Commitment
A sense of trust in your team that lets you feel unselfconscious.

5. Challenge
Increasingly complex challenges to tackle.[6]

We'll look in depth at how teams can achieve these 'five Cs' in the following chapters.

[6]   **Mihály Csíkszentmihályi,**
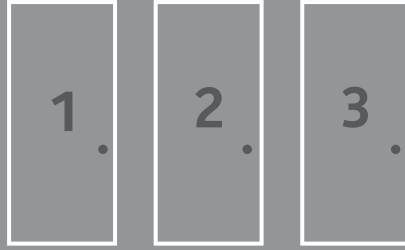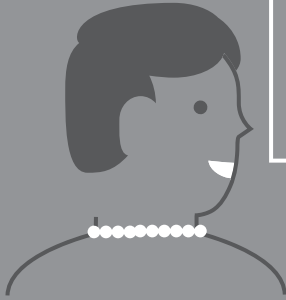*Flow: The Psychology of the Optimal Experience*

CLARITY

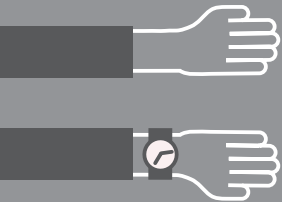Knowing what's expected of you.

CENTERING

Knowing that your teammates are interested in what you're doing.

CHOICE

Knowing that you have options.

COMMITMENT

A sense of trust in your team that
lets you feel unselfconscious.

CHALLENGE

Increasingly complex challenges to tackle.

STRUCTURE

The structure of any team is a significant element if you're trying to create the conditions needed for flow. Structure has a big impact on the first, third and fourth of Csíkszentmihályi's 'five Cs' - clarity, choice and commitment.

Traditionally, teams tended to be structured in one of two formats:

1. Project teams
Dedicated to a specific project or projects.

2. Operational teams
Undertaking ongoing activities, such as providing goods or services.

Then, they would tend to be organised in one of two ways:

1. Functional
Members have similar roles and report in to the team leader.

2. Matrix
Members have different roles and as well as reporting to the team leader, they report to different managers for different aspects of their work.

These kinds of teams also require people to take on additional roles to help them function, including:

- **Team leader**
  Takes responsibility for the team, chairs meetings, and plays the key role in decision making and allocating tasks and activities.

- **Record keeper**
  Takes and distributes notes in meetings.

- **Progress chaser**
  Responsible for ensuring that the team is keeping to schedule and that tasks are being completed.[7]

While these might be the most common ways of structuring a team, they're by no means the only way to do so. The structure of teams is evolving, as people look for better ways of working, and - perhaps inadvertently - better ways to make their teams flow.

The rise of technology has possibly played the largest role in this evolution - teams don't have to be in the same physical place anymore thanks to new methods of communication, and the functional roles within teams have changed as technology has made it increasingly easy to automate administrative tasks.

There's no one way of structuring a team that guarantees flow, but in the following pages we'll showcase some new, and in some cases radical, approaches to team structure to give you a few ideas about how structural changes could help. You might find one that seems perfect for you, or instead bring together elements of multiple ideas - whatever works best to help bring you and your team achieve flow together.

[7] **Open University,** *How Teams Work,*
   http://nokia.ly/1eJclyS

Self-managed teams.

What is a self-managed team?

In a self-managed team, team members take responsibility for deciding the work to be done, setting goals, monitoring and improving performance, making decisions and solving problems. However, the ultimate goal or purpose of the team is set externally.

A 'self-directed' team has an even greater degree of autonomy, and decides its own overall goal and purpose.

The benefits of self-managed teams

Self-managing and directing teams are a comparatively new development, and have been widely recognised as a significant innovation and improvement in terms of team performance.

Self-managed and self-directed teams have a series of potential benefits:

- **Cost savings**
  Companies have achieved significant cost savings, because self-managed teams are more empowered to deliver continuous improvements.
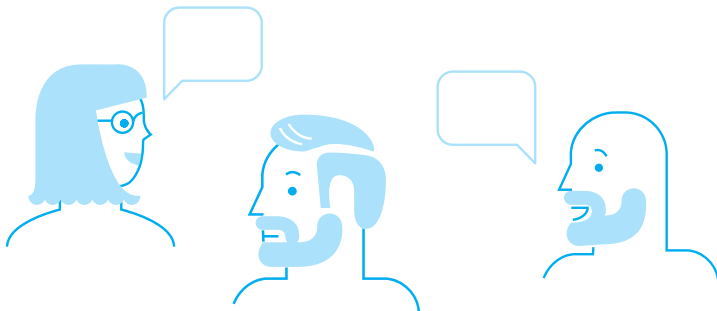
- **Better productivity**
  Self-managed teams tend to be able to do more with less, and do it faster too.

- **Happier teams**
  Self-managed teams report increased loyalty, less absenteeism and lower staff turnover.[8]

Self-managed teams also represent a good opportunity to create flow, by providing the kind of close-knit and transparent structure where the five Cs can flourish.

[8] **Robert T. Howell,** '
  'Fostering Self-Directed Team Members', *Journal of Technology Studies,* http://nokia.ly/19uZtKV

Toyota

Toyota - which uses the HERE platform for its in-car navigation and infotainment systems – is renowned for the Toyota Production System and its promotion of efficiency and productivity.

One element of the Toyota Production System is that teams have a lot of control when it comes to making improvements to processes and practices. Rather than management dictating from the top down, the managers go to the 'front line' on a regular basis. All team members have the ability to make suggestions for improvements, which are then reviewed by the rest of the team. If the team is behind an idea, it's then passed up the management chain. This system encourages a culture of continuous improvement, and also gives people a sense of empowerment and pride in their work.[9]

[9] **Brad Power,**
'How Toyota Pulls Improvement from the Front Line', *Harvard Business Review,* http://blogs.hbr.org/2011/06/how-toyota-pulls-improvement-f/

Holacracy

What is holacracy?

A more extreme take on self-managed and self-directed teams, a holacracy is a team which is entirely autonomous and self-reliant, with each individual member being solely responsible for their own role within the group.

In holacracy, there is a big focus on governance, and providing clarity on what needs to be done, who needs to do it, and what processes need to be followed.

A second key focus is processing tension, and turning frustration into meaningful change, rather than letting it compromise communication, productivity and, in turn, flow. The idea is that team members get frustrated when they feel something isn't being done the right way - rather than seeing this as a negative, holacracy sees this as an opportunity to learn and make improvements.

Benefits of holacracy

As it is still currently on the margins of mainstream business practices, the full effects of holacracy are still emerging. However, the potential benefits of switching to a holacratic team are:

- **Increased agility**
  Teams are able to make decisions faster, and adapt to change with less difficulty.

- **A culture of innovation**
  An open forum for left-field ideas infuses every aspect of work with the joy of discovery.

- **Universal transparency**
  Holacratic teams give staff a feeling of value by promoting transparency and creating avenues by which they can air their concerns and turn them into improvements.

Much like self-managed teams, a holacratic structure is also likely to encourage flow because it provides for each of the 'five Cs'.
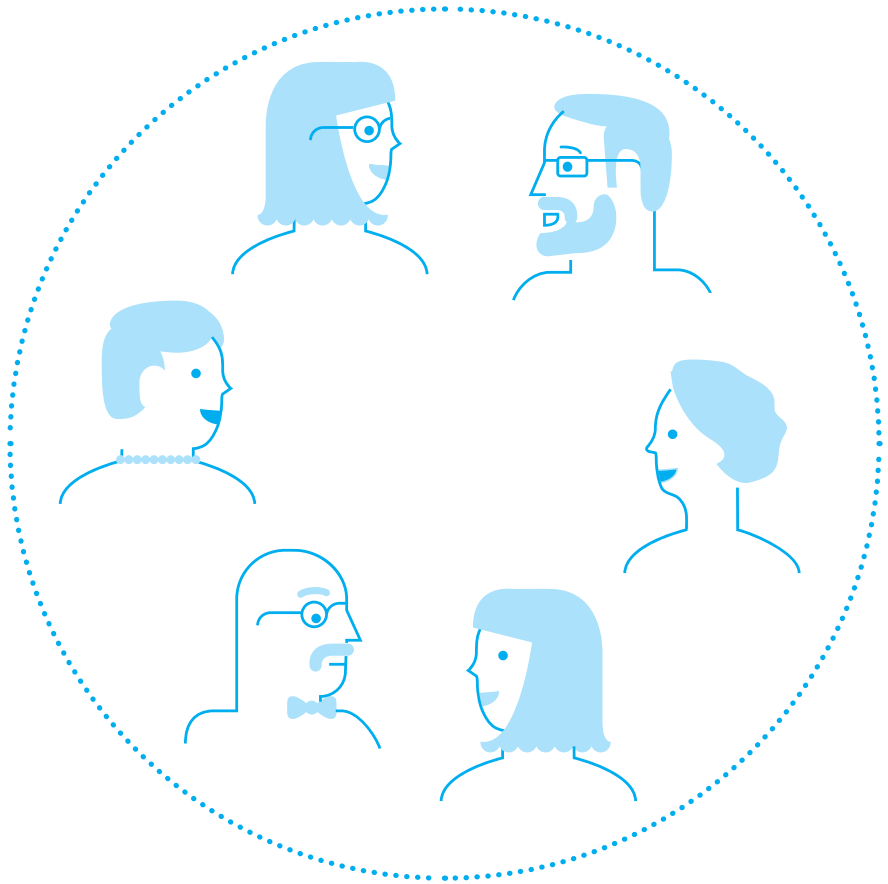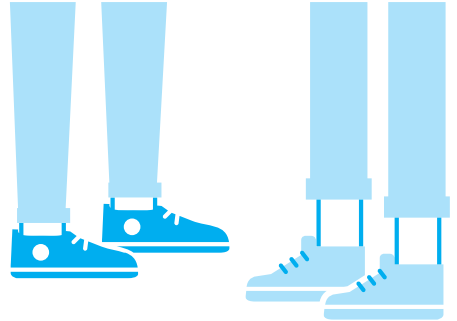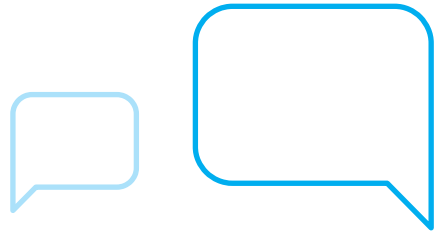
Agile

What is agile?

Agile started as an approach to teams and project management in software development, but it has since spread into teams in other industries and disciplines.

While over time the definition may have evolved, the 'Agile Manifesto' has twelve key principles. Of those twelve, the following four are the most relevant when it comes to creating a team structure that promotes flow:

- Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done.

- The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.

- Simplicity – the art of maximising the amount of work not done – is essential.

- At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behaviour accordingly.[10]

Generally speaking, in an agile team, the members meet for daily 'stand-ups' or 'scrums', where they discuss what they've done, what they're doing next and any issues blocking their progress.

There is a big focus on prioritisation, and also on delivering small incremental chunks of work, rather than completing a project in its entirety before releasing it.

Looking back on projects in 'retrospectives' is also an important factor, to take as many learnings and ideas for improvement as possible away from a finished piece of work.

[10] *The Agile Manifesto*, http://nokia.ly/1gEWQMR
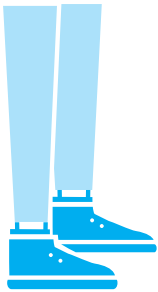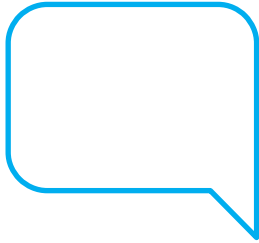
Benefits of agile
There are four main benefits to an
agile team structure:

1. Faster
Your team can start generating value
faster by getting things to market/the
customer/the user faster.

2. Lower risk
You waste less time and money on
projects and ideas that may not
work by releasing them and getting
feedback sooner.

3. You fail fast
You can spot and fix defects early on.

4. Transparency & visibility are built in
Daily communication is key to agile
and team members have total
visibility on who is doing what,
and on why work needs to be done.

Government Digital Service

The Government Digital Service (GDS) is a team within the United Kingdom Cabinet Office that is charged with transforming the UK government's digital services. It has delivered award-winning projects such as the Gov.uk website using an agile approach.

GDS created high-performing multi-disciplinary teams, consisting of designers, developers, user researchers, content designers, technical architects, delivery managers, product managers and experts in customer insight, web operations and product analytics. The team members worked together to build digital products and services.

Although these agile teams decide between themselves what they do and how they do it, they still have managers. The manager's role is to cover pastoral care, match people to work that fits their skills and interests, provide help with development, training and career guidance.[11]

[11] **Meri Williams,**
'People management in an agile setting', *Government Digital Service,* http://nokia.ly/1fVaGto

Virtual or asychronous teams

What is a virtual or asynchronous team?

Virtual or asychronous teams are ones where the members work in different locations and/or at different times.

This could mean that members work different shift patterns in the same office, or that they work in different countries in different timezones. The key factor is that they're not working in the same place at the same time.

The primary difference is that in a team where people are in the same location and working the same hours, communication is synchronous. When you ask a question you can expect an immediate answer, because there are lots of opportunities for face-to-face meetings and discussions, and to pass work immediately between team members.

In a virtual team, communication is asynchronous - it's rare for a team to get together in person (or even on the phone) for meetings and discussions, or to hand over work.

Instead, each individual team member works on their own, with collaboration and agreement taking place asynchronously through things like email, messaging, shared documents, and project management software. This allows people to work in their own way, at their own pace, at a time that suits them, wherever they are.

Team members will often have multiple tasks, so if they are blocked and need input from a team member who isn't available at the time, they will shift to the next task.
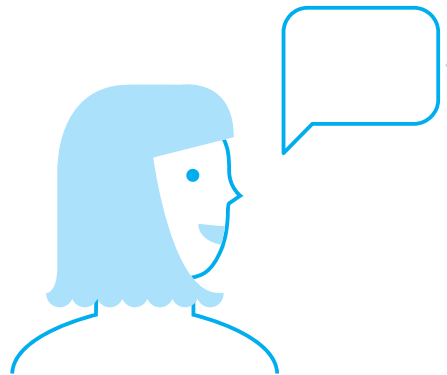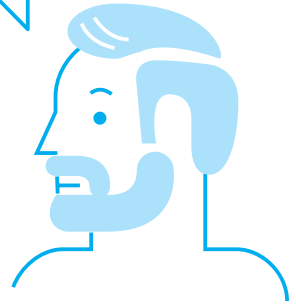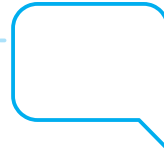
What are the benefits of virtual and asynchronous teams?

Some of the benefits of a virtual team and asynchronous work are:

- **Talent**
  You have the opportunity to hire the best staff, irrespective of where they are in the world.

- **Cost savings**
  You can potentially make savings on office space, travel costs, and can use these savings to offer better salaries to attract the best talent.

- **Productivity**
  Team members experience enhanced productivity without the extraneous cognitive and social demands of a traditional office ecosystem.

- **Happiness**
  Team members appreciate the flexibility offered by asynchronous work that lets them adopt their own schedule.

- **Flow**
  Allowing people to work in their own time without distraction also increases the chances of them achieving individual flow. In a virtual team, group flow takes on a different meaning, with team members all achieving flow alone, at different times, but still due in part to the way the team is structured.
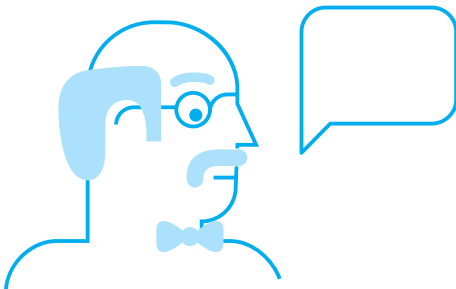
Nokia B2B Sales team

Niko Mykkänen is the Head of B2B Sales at Nokia, and leads a team that operates in various time zones from Australia to the United States. He says:

"We don't meet in person often, but we are in touch almost every day in one way or another. When our gentlemen in Australia leave the office at the end of the day, our colleagues in India and Middle East are in full speed. Europe, North America and Latin America follows. This brings incredible cultural richness and the possibility to learn new ways to do things. However, due to the breadth of time zones the traditional 9am – 5pm hours simply doesn't work for us. We are accustomed to grab our Lumia phones and have spontaneous intercontinental calls on a daily basis, and we also have great internal tools like Socialcast and Salesportal that help us to share ideas, send enquiries on hot topics, and simply take things forward, regardless the time and place. Lync, with video capabilities is also an invaluable tool we use every single day on both PC and Nokia Lumia smartphones, helping to drive opportunities at hand without using email which is sometimes too time-consuming in our fast-paced environment."

Communities of practice

Communities of practice are groups made of members with a common concern, passion or interest. They come together to share their interest and improve their skills through interaction. They can be online or offline, can operate inside the workplace or outside of it, and may manifest themselves as a learning network, club or meet-up.

They might not be a team in the traditional sense of the word, but we have included communities of practice because of the valuable role they can play in sharing, spreading and growing knowledge. They can be a particularly useful resource for people who work in a team or organisation where they have a unique skill or area of interest, which the people they work with on a day-to-day basis can't help them develop.

Encouraging the creation of communities of practice within an organisation, or encouraging staff members to find one outside work to join can help them to hone their skills and give them a network of experience and support to tap into.
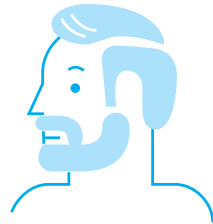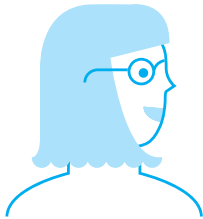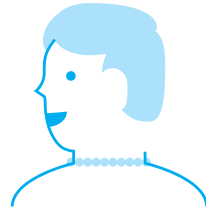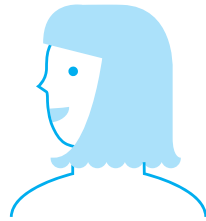
Nokia Developer

Nokia Developer is an online community of practice that aims to help people create and publish their own apps.

The website features a Wiki and blog providing a wealth of information and news for developers, and discussion boards where people can ask questions and give advice, helping to build knowledge and boost skills among the whole community.[12]

[12] **http://developer.nokia.com/**

WORKING WITH TECHNOLOGY

In the previous *Mobile Mastery* [13] ebook, we looked at length at how technology can affect flow and productivity. In particular, we examined how easily technology can distract us.
The internet can often feel like 'an ecosystem of distraction technologies'[14] - always-on internet, multiple devices, notification pop-ups and flashing lights everywhere can make it hard to reach and maintain flow. Yet when work gets tough, that kind of distraction can start to look very tempting.

It's easy to use technology to fool yourself that you're working hard and achieving lots - reading all your emails and checking on all those notifications can give you a little dopamine hit that makes you feel like you're getting something done, while you ignore the bigger, tougher, but ultimately more rewarding tasks that would require your full attention.

But despite this, technology has huge potential to support both team and personal flow.

Technology can be deployed to ensure you have those characteristics that Csíkszentmihályi says are central to flow: it can be used to create engaging and immersive online working environments, and software can make workflow, setting goals and getting feedback faster and easier.

Used in the right way, technology can be just as much a part of your team as people are. When people work in true harmony with technology, they can become 'centaurs', to use a term that emerged from the world of chess.

[13] **Nokia,** *Mobile Mastery*, http://nokia.ly/MMebook   [14] **Cory Doctorow**

Journalist and author Clive Thompson discusses centaurs in his book *Smarter Than You Think*. The Russian chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov was famously defeated at the game by IBM's purpose-built chess computer Deep Blue in 1997 (although Kasparov had won at their first meeting a few years earlier). Thompson writes that after the match Kasparov wondered:

"What would happen if, instead of competing against one another, humans and computers collaborated? What if they played on teams together—one computer and a human facing off against another human and a computer? That way, he theorized, each might benefit from the other's peculiar powers. The computer would bring the lightning-fast—if uncreative—ability to analyze zillions of moves, while the human would bring intuition and insight, the ability to read opponents and psych them out. Together, they would form what chess players later called a centaur: a hybrid beast endowed with the strengths of each."

Kasparov started playing with a computer and found that, when freed from the need to rely exclusively on his memory he was able to focus more on the creative elements of his game. Instead of remembering, he had to learn how to drive the computer, working out which strategy to enter for assessment, when to stop a line of inquiry, and when to accept or ignore its advice.[15]

The experiment reached a peak in 2005, at a 'freestyle' chess tournament which allowed teams of any number of humans or computers, in any combination. While some teams consisted of chess grandmasters with plenty of tournament wins under their belts, another consisted of two amateurs, Steven Cramton and Zackary Stephen and their computers. Cramton and Stephen were victorious, because they were experts at collaborating with computers. They knew how to achieve the balance of human and machine intelligence, and could work at a rapid pace.[16]

Just as in the chess world, when you include the right technology in your team and use it in the right way, it can help you to work smarter and faster.

[15, 16] **Clive Thompson**, *Smarter Than You Think: How Technology is Changing Our Minds For the Better*

Team tools

Of course, behind the scenes of any successful human/technology partnership is a little of the conscious technological control that we call "Mobile Mastery": ensuring that the tools at your disposal are ideally suited to their purpose and that you are utilising them in the smartest way possible.

When choosing what tools are right for you, it's important to understand what needs exist at the most basic level, as well as to be able to anticipate new developments that you might not otherwise be aware of.

Perhaps your internal systems are based on a legacy of doing things in a particular way, and serve their function adequately and without complaint. While your team may tick quietly along in this way, would you ever choose to be a part of something best described as merely 'adequate'?

A new tool to replace the old might just open a wealth of productivity possibilities to energise your team and give them the edge to help win out over the competition.

However, at the same time, it's important not to forever be tinkering with technology purely for the sake of it. The balance between the comfort of what's familiar and the allure of something new is a delicate one.

There could quite easily be new applications for older, forgotten tools that are ideally suited to a contemporary demand. More often than not, the simpler solution is best, and just because a new device is launched on the market with flashy bells and whistles, does not mean that it necessarily addresses your present needs efficiently.

It's important for teams to be open to new technology and to discuss how it could enhance (or detract from) team flow. One potential approach might be to implement a method like that used by Toyota, where anyone can suggest a technical addition to the team, which then gives it a trial, and takes a vote on whether to make it a permanent addition.
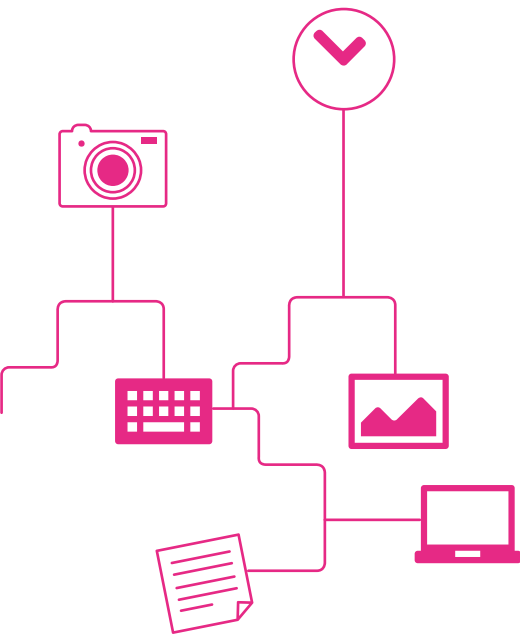
A balanced relationship between your team members and their tech tools ought to be:

- **Mindful**
  Aware of the effect different tools have on personal mood, performance, and stress levels.

- **Purposeful**
  Correctly selecting each tool for the demands of each specific purpose.

- **Playful**
  Maintaining curiosity, adaptability, and passion for professional evolution, as opposed to staying rigid and stubborn with your habits.

To make sure that you choose the right tools for your team you'll need to foster these three states of mind as your default status when you approach technology. By being mindful, purposeful, and playful, your team as a whole will be equipped with the perfect cognitive skills to surpass passive functions and 'work-arounds' with imperfect technical solutions, and flow together as a well-oiled, highly-capable unit.

Nokia.com
Online Experience

Tuomas Manninen is Head of Online Experience at Nokia, and develops content strategy and leads a team focusing on user experience development on Nokia.com worldwide. He says:

"It's very important to define the operative model we want to follow as a team at first, and then identify the tools that help us to do our job in the most effective manner. I don't see the point of first thinking what processes and tools there are available to us, and then trying to adapt and make use of those. We are in charge of content guidance for 73 Nokia.com country sites around the world with 45 languages, meaning we need rigorous processes that help us to stay on track and deliver on time. But it's our team who need to define the tools and processes that match our needs, not the other way around. The operational model needs to be clear with roles and responsibilities but also in our environment it needs to leave room and create a safe space for creatives to be creative. When it all starts from people, it's way easier to set expectations and goals together, so that each team player knows what to do."

COMMUNICATION

Whether we're talking about email, instant messaging, phone calls or good old-fashioned meetings, communication is perhaps the most important element in any team. You can have the most talented staff and the best technology, but if you don't have excellent communication then your team won't flow.

This isn't just a theory - there is strong evidence in support of this. MIT's Human Dynamics Laboratory conducted a study looking for the dynamics behind successful teams and found that communication was key.

As part of the study, team members were given electronic badges that collected data on their individual communication behaviour, like their tone of voice, body language, who they talked to and how much. The data consistently revealed that communication plays a critical role in building successful teams and that patterns of communication are the most important predictor of a team's success - just as significant as individual intelligence, personality, skill, and the substance of discussions combined.

The study took place in a call centre, and on the recommendation of the team who ran the study, the manager changed the employees' coffee break schedule so that everyone on a team took a break at the same time, allowing them the opportunity to socialise away from their workstations. While it clashed with traditional ideas about efficiency, this simple change led to productivity increases worth $15m a year, and an increase in employee satisfaction of over 10% in some teams.

The MIT study noted that high-performing teams:

- **Communicate frequently**
  In a typical project team, 12 communications per working hour was optimum, more or less than that and team performance could decline.

- **Talk and listen in equal measure, equally among members**
  Lower performing teams tended to have dominant members, teams within teams, and members who talked or listened, but didn't do both.

- **Engage in frequent informal communication**
  The best teams spent about half their time communicating outside of formal meetings, and increasing opportunities for informal communication tended to increase team performance.

- **Explore ideas and search for information outside of the group**
  The best teams periodically connected with many different outside sources and brought what they learnt back to the team.[17]

The need for strong communication goes back to the 'five Cs': without it, it's hard to have a sense of clarity about what's expected of you, the centring that comes from knowing that your team mates are interested in what you're doing, or the sense of commitment and trust in your team that lets you feel unselfconscious.

Technology might have updated the tools when it comes to communication, but it's still the same game. Good communication is direct, economical, well considered and purposeful at all times, with thought put into the way it's constructed and delivered.

In the next pages, we'll look at ideas and models that can help with team communication, and the role technology has to play.

[17] **Alex Pentland,**
'The New Science of Building Great Teams', *Harvard Business Review,*
http://nokia.ly/1gEXABP

Information exchange

When it comes to teams, it's useful to make a clear distinction between *communication* and *conversation*, as the two are really very different things.

An individual communication is a one-way, simple delivery of a piece of information from one person to another - a longer discussion might contain dozens or even hundreds of communications as they bounce back and forth between the participants. These 'information deliveries' are especially well suited for the digital realm, where input from the listener isn't essential. If the recipient requires clarification, or simply wants to confirm that the message has been understood, they have the option of issuing an additional communication - but it's not essential to the process. This makes it a fast and streamlined mode, most appropriate for emails or text messages.

A conversation on the other hand occurs in 'real time,' with all sides of the dialogue guiding the course of the discussion together towards a mutual goal. Conversations are best suited to face-to-face communication or social networks, as they are open and engaging.

The down side of this is that they can be far more time consuming, and quite often will fail to produce any viable results.

Thinking about whether you need to communicate or converse can help you pick the right method of communication. Other important aspects to consider are:

- **Timeliness**
  How time sensitive is the information?

- **Archiving**
  How important is it to be able to refer back to the communication at a later date?

- **Privacy/security**
  How sensitive is the information?

- **Assurance**
  Is there any danger of the recipient missing your communication entirely?

For example, in situations where face-to-face communication is possible, it is the most direct and immediate mode of conveying information. However, in doing this you risk breaking your colleagues' concentration and interrupting their flow. It may be beneficial to discuss 'interruption signals' among team members in advance, such as wearing headphones as a way to show that you don't want to be disturbed.

In those situations, when a timely response is still required, email may be the next logical choice. With the capacity to mark items as urgent, they can be highlighted as a visible priority once your colleague has completed their task, and seamlessly incorporated into the structure of their working flow. However, for many of us, email can seem like a millstone around our necks, threatening to swamp us in unproductive inbox management and take away our precious time from urgent projects. Yet when used sparingly and efficiently, email is still essential for sharing files and information with teams of people.

The key consideration should be Csíkszentmihályi's first of the five Cs, which is clarity. By placing clarity at the forefront of all information exchanges, you build an excellent foundation for teamwork.

Integrating a few useful tools into your digital environment can help to reduce non-essential emails and eliminate distractions.

With a little bit of ingenuity, 'If This Then That', (aka 'IFTTT') is a great tool for automating simple web tasks to make sure your flow doesn't get disrupted by inbound mail or other nagging digital obligations. You can set up a rule to automatically save any emails from specific people to a 'to do' folder in Evernote, for example. You can even scan for keywords and get IFTTT to respond on your behalf to prevent you from having to answer the same questions over and over again. All of which helps you make sure that you flow for longer - and achieve more in the process.

In certain situations, the best channel for inter-team communications will be private social networks. This is especially appropriate for asynchronous teams separated by wide geographical distances or overlapping time schedules. If you want to solicit ideas for a brief, or inform your colleagues about a non-urgent change of schedule, then a mobile-integrated tool like Yammer is the ideal medium. It is secure and archivable, and unobtrusive. You won't disrupt anybody's flow by posting to Yammer that your afternoon meeting has changed location, but you are placing that information in a place where it can be seen and discussed at everyone's own leisure.

For a more real-time, conversational experience, there is of course the more traditional format of the telephone call. In an age where most of us are always within reach of a mobile phone, it's never been easier to connect. For some, phone calls are too intrusive, as they are loud, potentially disrupt those around them, and demand too much attention. For those situations where an email is not sufficient, but a phone call

seems inappropriate, it is entirely acceptable to send a text message. This works best when you are seeking a simple binary answer to a question, such as "Have you arrived?"

Another alternative is to experiment with instant messaging. Conversations on instant messaging are mobile, 'real-world silent', and easily deferred when concentrating your attentions elsewhere. Tools like Microsoft Lync or Skype allow multiple team members to participate in live-digital chats from anywhere in the world, essentially combining file-sharing collaboration with virtual meetings.

One of the challenges posed by strong and broad use of mobile technology is that in some teams it can create a culture where people are expected to be available at any time of the day or night.

Having a mobile phone that provides access to your emails is both a blessing and a curse - it's a boon when you work away from the office a lot, but it makes it all too tempting to check what's going on

at work when you should be focusing on friends or family instead. And doing it once or twice can create the expectation that you'll always do it, and in turn can make the other members of your team feel like they need to do the same to be able to compete or keep up.

We all need time where we're completely away from work, so there shouldn't be any shame or stigma in switching off.
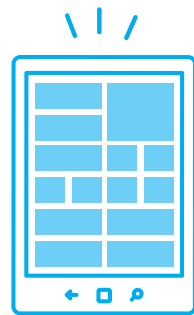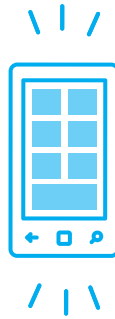
Listening, understanding and interpreting

As well as thinking about the platform or method with which your team communicates, thought also needs to go into how you listen, understand and interpret.

It can be all too easy to forget that communication isn't just about how you speak or write to others, but is also about the way in which you listen to them.

Active listening is an approach which aims to derive as much meaning and understanding as possible from conversations. In active listening you:

- Listen to the complete message the other person is giving you, not just the words they are saying.

- Put aside preconceptions and hostility.

- Evaluate and analyse what's being said to you.

- Watch for body language, facial expressions and listen for tone of voice.

- Stay quiet - nod or speak to show you're listening, but resist the temptation to respond until the other person has finished speaking.
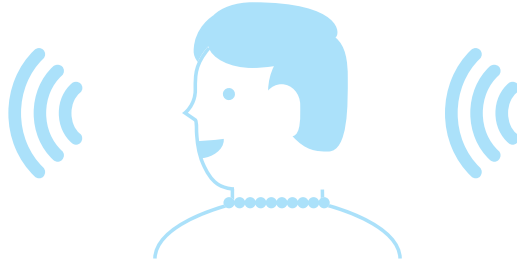
Making sure your team engages in active listening can help ensure that everyone feels that they are truly being heard, and can build a greater sense of trust and camaraderie.

SCARF is a brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others, created by Dr David Rock, an expert on applying neuroscience at work. It's a useful tool to have in mind when you're trying to understand and interpret the things your team are saying.

The model identifies five key qualities that activate either the 'threat' or 'reward' networks of the brain. Believe it or not, a perceived threat to your status at work or in your team activates similar brain networks to a threat to your life. In the same way, a perceived increase in fairness will activate the same reward network in your brain as getting a financial reward.

According to Rock, it has many implications for how teams are structured and run when it comes to rewards and salaries, communication, and decision making, because it can help you to consider the brain networks that have the greatest significance when collaborating with and influencing others. Having a better understanding of these drivers can help individuals and organisations to run more effectively, reduce conflicts and perform better as a result.[18]

[18] **Dr David Rock**,
'SCARF: a brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others',
NeuroLeadership Journal, http://nokia.ly/19v09zY

Consider SCARF at regular intervals and make any necessary adjustments to make sure your team stays healthy, synchronised, and motivated as they guide each other towards their goal. The acronym stands for:

• **Status**   A sense of your relative importance to others. When people fight for status, those around them will constantly feel threatened and uncomfortable.

• **Certainty**   Being able to predict the future. Uncertainty feels like pain, and can be cognitively exhausting. The more we can predict the future, the more rewarded we feel, and vice versa. Even a small degree of uncertainty or ambiguity in a simple activity creates a threat response.

• **Autonomy**   A sense of control over events. It's important to feel a sense of control, as a lack of autonomy can turn a small stress into a big problem.

• **Relatedness**   A sense of safety with others, of friend rather than foe. This means whether we see other people as part of the same group, working to the same goals. If we feel like the people around us are part of a different group, it can make us feel threatened.

• **Fairness**   A perception of fair exchanges between people. This is fundamentally important because a fair exchange is intrinsically rewarding, and an unfair exchange of anything is intrinsically threatening.[19]

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[19] **Adam Bryant,** 'A Boss's Challenge: have Everyone Join the "In" Group', *New York Times*, http://nokia.ly/1eJd82X
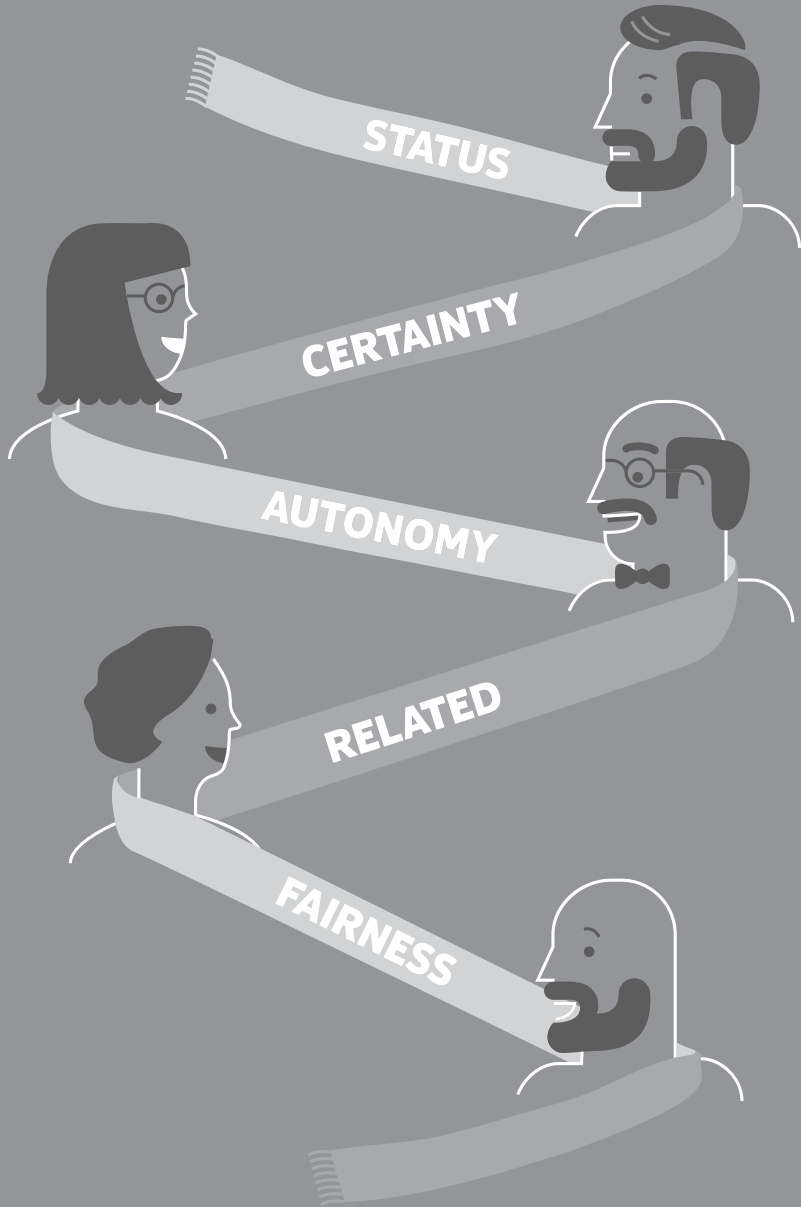
Putting heads together

Most professionals will cite too many meetings as a major bugbear that drags them away from their actual work, and yet so many of us still lose a lot of time every week to meetings - often with little or no visibly productive result. In general, teams that flow can rarely be found tethering themselves to restrictive meeting schedules.

In the age of mobile tech, it is now more common than ever before to travel or work outside of the central office. This is not just because our available tools keep us in regular contact, but also because of carefully fostered team cultures of independent thought, delegation, and public goal declaration. This makes sure that everybody can move in the same direction without needing to cling to one another to stay on track.

Technological alternatives to the traditional meeting don't just include phone calls and emails, but file sharing for draft revisions, proofreading, and collaboration software. This can all happen within the controlled bubble of each individual's preferred creative workspace, be it the hubbub of a busy office, the buzzing coffee shop, their own home, or even on public transport.

There can be many positive benefits to choosing not to have meetings. Economist John Kenneth Galbraith once said that "meetings are indispensable when you don't want to do anything," and particularly lengthy meetings can be such a drain on company time that it may be illuminating to track the financial cost of attendees hourly rates throughout the discussion. Glancing at the clock and seeing that your meeting has already cost the company almost $1000 is great way to make sure you stick to the point and focus on getting something out of a meeting.

Csíkszentmihályi's key points of centering and commitment are highly applicable to achieving team flow in these situations. By instilling your team with the autonomy to forgo regular meetings in favour of digital 'check-ins' or work sharing via mobile platforms, you are promoting a mindset of creative independence, personal confidence, and the agile principle of 'failing fast'.

The new emphasis is on a bias for action - rather than sitting idle and awaiting input, a true display of flow is to dive in, get started, and have something to show your colleagues by the end of the day. If it's the wrong direction, then they can help guide you with constructive comments, and the result is a prototype that can be built upon as opposed to a blank slate.

There will be occasions when holding a meeting really is the only solution. In these situations, it's important to take steps in advance to ensure that the meeting flows, for a briefer, more enjoyable, and ultimately more useful occupation of everyone's time.
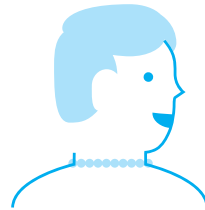
You might also be interested to try the exercise in the appendix of this book, which aims to help you make your meetings happier and more productive.
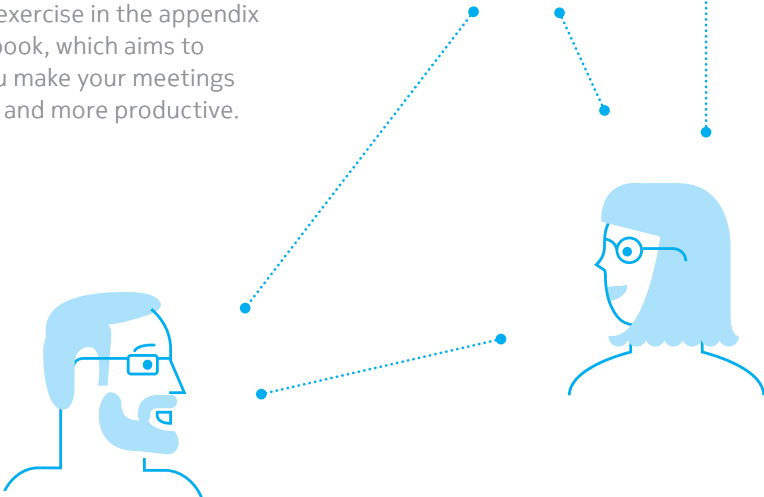
Group-think and the myth of brainstorming

In business, creativity is both a rare and a valuable commodity. You can't synthesise it, and the only way to reliably maximise your team's creative potential is to situate it in an environment that will allow inspiration to flourish naturally.

In his book *Imagine: How Creativity Works*, author Jonah Lehrer offers up a multitude of insightful methods for exactly this process. He writes:

"For years people believed that creativity was similar to other forms of cognition, whether divinely inspired or a natural 'gift'. But today as we learn more about the brain we're finding how the 'trick' works."[20]

His ideas for developing a creative internal ecosystem range from the wild to the surprisingly simple, but all are backed up by real-world business cases showcasing the evidence to back-up the theory.

One such example is the concept that attempting to force insight can actually prevent insight, as demanding aggressive concentration can shift attention away from the right hemisphere of your brain (the part

responsible for insight and unlikely connections), resulting in an increased likelihood of your ideas falling into the 'obvious' or 'uninspired' category.

The trick to avoiding the trap of forced insight, Lehrer writes, is to try and inhabit the mind of a young child. By embodying the uninhibited curious naivety we all experienced in our youth, we can reclaim the joy of discovery and increase the number of abstract connections our minds makes - avoiding the obvious all together.

Even subtle environmental factors can make a huge difference to team creativity. According to Lehrer, a room with blue walls is twice as conducive to insight as a room of any other colour. Conversely, a red room is thought to stimulate concentration, analysis, and logical problem solving.

[20] **Jonah Lehrer,** *Imagine: How Creativity Works,*

Lehrer also tackles universally accepted norms of brainstorming. First coming to the attention of the business community via the mind of legendary Madison Avenue advertising agency BBDO's Alex Osborn in 1948, brainstorms are an enormously popular technique for sourcing creative ideas from a team - but Lehrer suggests the method needs improvement.

The initial method for the brainstorm was virtually unknown upon the publishing of Osborn's book Your Creative Power in 1948. A chapter titled 'How to organize a squad to create ideas' states:

"When a group works together, the members should engage in a "brainstorm," which means "using the brain to storm a creative problem—and doing so in commando fashion, with each stormer attacking the same objective."[21]

Osborn boasted that the power of brainstorming had once inspired a group of ten marketing professionals to create eighty-seven new advertising ideas in ninety minutes - an impressive rate by anybody's standards.

Osborn insisted that one of the most important factors for a brainstorm to succeed is an agreed lack of negative criticism; also known as the commonly stated encouragement that 'there are no wrong answers'.

"Creativity is so delicate a flower that praise tends to make it bloom while discouragement often nips it in the bud," wrote Osborn. "Forget quality; aim now to get a quantity of answers. When you're through, your sheet of paper may be so full of ridiculous nonsense that you'll be disgusted. Never mind. You're loosening up your unfettered imagination—making your mind deliver."[22]

[21, 22] **Alex Osborn,** *Your Creative Power,*

However, according to Lehrer, Osborn's concept of the brainstorm as a fertile creative incubator is both outdated and misinformed.

One issue is that when brainstorming in a large group, generally a few dominant participants will control the flow of ideas, while everyone else just fades into the background for fear of speaking up.

The herd mentality that brainstorming groups arrive at will usually produce mundane ideas rather than anything truly exciting.

Instead, Lehrer recommends that individuals should prepare their creative ideas before attending the session, and then present complete ideas to the team to be critiqued. This process vastly increases the likelihood of a more unusual, left-field idea coming to the group's awareness.

It does seem as though the scientific evidence backs up Lehrer's theory, too. For example, in an experiment into the cases for and against brainstorming at the University of California, 250 students were split into fifty teams of five. Each team was presented with the task of generating ideas for improving traffic problems in neighbouring San Francisco.

In this experiment, one group of teams were asked to brainstorm for solutions, another group were told to suggest individual ideas before heavily debating each one to find the 'best' answer, and the final group were free to pursue any technique they wished.

The final evidence of the experiment showed that the most productive and creative group were those that criticised and debated each others submissions, with almost 20% more ideas than their competitors, and individual team members of the critical group still wanting to contribute an average of seven further ideas each even after the session had expired.
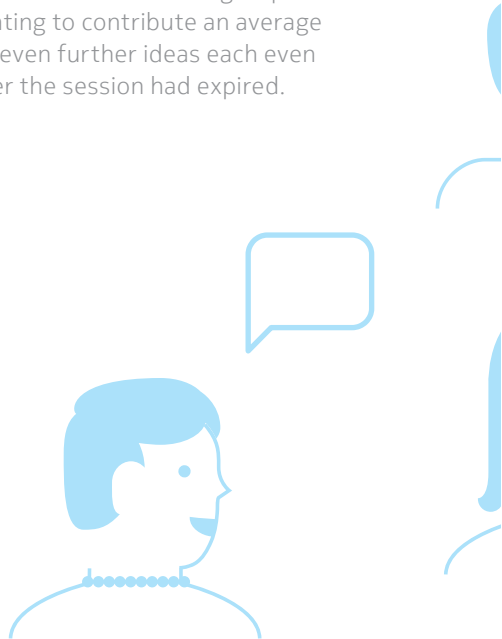
Charlan Nemeth, the professor responsible for the study explained:

"While the instruction 'Do not criticize' is often cited as the important instruction in brainstorming, this appears to be a counterproductive strategy. Our findings show that debate and criticism do not inhibit ideas but, rather, stimulate them relative to every other condition."[23]

For obvious reasons it can be difficult to quantify the creativity of a concept, but this experiment certainly seems to suggest that for pure idea generation alone, the 'safe zone' of a brainstorming session does not provide as much of a spark as a little 'positive conflict.'
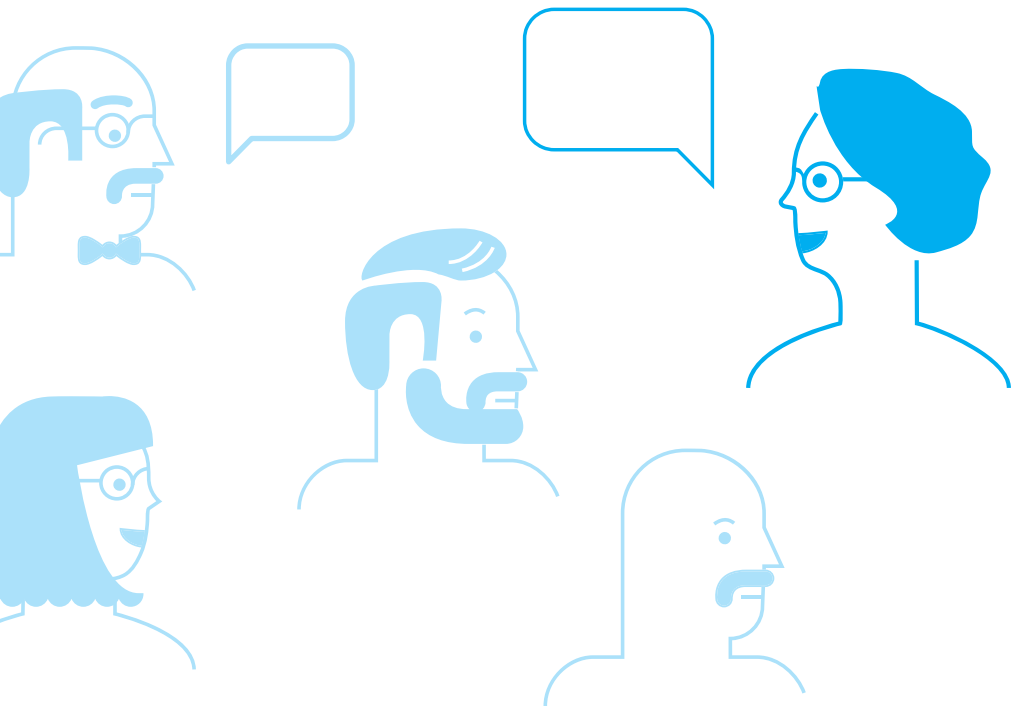
[23] **Matthew Feinberg, Charlan Nemeth,**
'The "Rules" of Brainstorming: An Impediment to Creativity?',
University of California, http://nokia.ly/1hKepcq

The art of positive conflict

Naturally, when you have creative people working closely alongside one another, you're going to get conflict in certain areas, perhaps due to personality clashes or interdepartmental differences. But contrary to popular opinion, an element of friction in the mix isn't always negative.

For one thing, conflict provides 'challenge', another one of the five characteristics of group flow. It also frequently results in the strongest idea becoming the most prevalent. If people are required to explain themselves rather than have their ideas go unquestioned, then flimsy concepts will quickly become exposed, while the most robust solution reveals itself.

In this way, another of group flow's key characteristics is represented: clarity. This is because conflict is a form of dialogue. Without conversations, goals, and passions, there can be no conflict, and those moments of friction bring strong feelings out of people.

Times of conflict cause teams to reassess their values and vocalise exactly why they feel the way they do, what exactly is making them upset, and what needs to be done about it, because conflict is only beneficial when it leads towards resolution.

That's how occasional arguments can produce a kind of clarity that in certain situations is more valuable than a perfectly quiet, incident-free office.

If you notice a shift within your team from a little healthy conflict to negative tension, the first step to dealing with the problem is to gather the relevant parties and directly acknowledge that the issue exists. By bringing it out into the open, you give both sides an opportunity to air their side of the matter and reveal their perspective.

Guide the conflicting personalities towards finding a common ground at the root of the problem. Perhaps Mary feels as though Justin is not addressing his responsibilities on a specific project, and this is leaving her to deal with the workload alone?

In this situation you may well discover that Justin is having trouble with the project because he is being overloaded elsewhere, and both parties are feeling as though they have too much work to do and not enough time. By defining the shared emotion, it makes it much easier for them to understand one another.

Finally, resolve the conflict by making a clear decision on what will be done going forward. Conflict has a habit of festering within the shadows of ambiguity. If everybody is 100% certain on how things will be changing, you remove the risk of further problems before they arise.
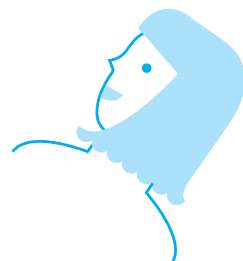
VALUES AND GOALS

The values and goals that you choose for your team define its ultimate purpose and also affect the way that people experience being part of that team. Your values will have an impact on the emotional connection that people have with the team, while goals will affect how they relate to the work they are asked to do.

While they are different things, the values and goals need to fulfil the same criteria. To really have a chance of meeting them, your team members need to:

• Understand them
The members need to know what the values and goals are, and really understand them. They should be familiar enough to stay at the forefront of their minds, and each person should also be able to explain them to others with confidence.

• Feel invested in them
The members need to feel that they are included in collaborative experiences, have a part to play in upholding the values and reaching the goals, and be confident that have something to gain from them.

• Think they're achievable
Your goals and values need to feel realistic and attainable, or they will fall by the wayside and become a source of frustration.

• Be able to measure them
There should be a framework by which you can measure how well you are living up to your values and how you are progressing towards your goals.

Keeping track of it all

The ways that projects are managed are just as vital to their success as the granular work that goes into their completion, and with larger teams, keeping on track and on budget can at times feel a little bit like herding cats. If team members are the cogs of the machine, and happiness is their engine oil, then project tracking is the speedometer.

Fortunately there are a huge number of project management tools available. One excellent tool is project tracking system Basecamp, along with its Windows Phone apps Camper and Ablaze. Together these are great for on-the-go management - they let you view projects, send messages, share documents, set milestones, check your progress towards deadlines and participate in live team chats.

As more processes continue to be automated, the ultimate burden of work on people is dramatically reduced.

As with anything else, the specific processes you choose to automate and those you prefer to perform 'by hand' or with technological augmentation really boils down to the needs of each individual team. The important thing is to be aware of those needs and select a system that caters to them in the most efficient manner.

The benefits of passing the minutiae of project management over to the powerful realm of communication technology is that it dramatically reduces the need for cognitively wasteful internal emails, distracting face-to-face conversations, and the potential for human error, as well as providing an insightful overview into the health of your projects at a glance. All of this frees up more of your team members brains for the things that tech can't do - chiefly, producing exceptional quality creative work.

HAPPINESS

There is a growing interest in happiness as a metric and measurement of success. The United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network now measures the happiness of nations in the World Happiness Report, but it is also an important metric for teams and businesses.

There's plenty of evidence to suggest that happier teams mean better performance, less sick leave and more innovation.
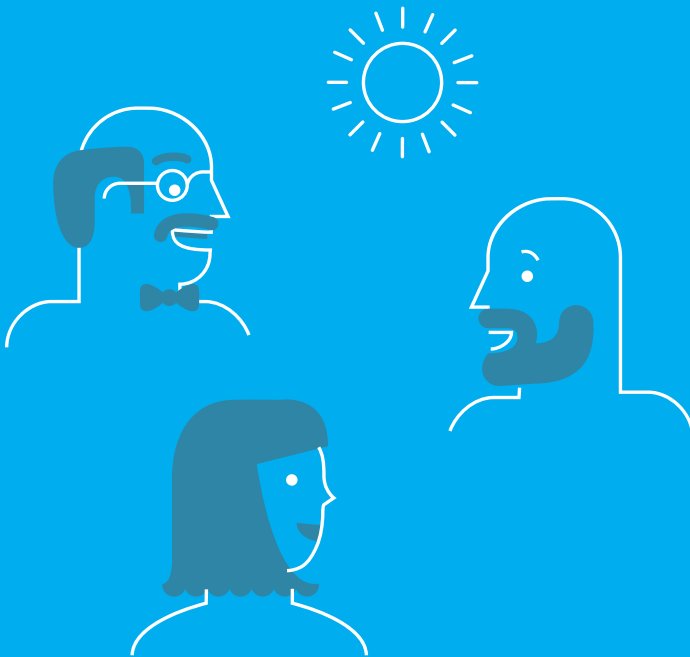
Just being part of a team can make people happier; a psychological study found that the communities exhibiting the best well-being were those that offered occasional experiences in which self-consciousness is greatly reduced and one feels merged with something greater than the self, because the self can be an obstacle to happiness. (This also harks back to the fourth of Csíkszentmihályi's 'five Cs - 'commitment' which is about having a sense of trust in your team that lets you feel unselfconscious.)

In addition, the psychologist Charles Walker conducted a study into flow among groups, and concluded that instances of flow which were social were more 'joyful' than solitary flow. His research identified three different kinds of flow:

1. **Solitary flow** - working alone.

2. **Co-active flow** - working on your own task in the company of others.

3. **Interactive flow** - collaborating on a task with others.

The more social and collaborative the activity, the more joyful the participants found it.

Flow is infectious - it spreads quickly within teams. Walker writes that in highly interdependent situations, people may serve as agents of flow for each other. Or in other words, in highly cohesive teams in which there is agreement on goals, procedures, roles and modes of communication, social flow is more likely to occur.[24]

Having good communication, clear goals and values and working with technology will all help to contribute to the overall happiness of your team too.

However, it's important to recognise that friction and tension within a team is not a disaster, in fact, it can be a rich seam of creativity. Friction is likely to occur in a diverse team of people who are passionate about their work, and have conviction in their opinions. The key (as seen in holacracy) is to tap into the ideas and passions that fuel friction and disagreement, rather than let them fester and turn into dissatisfaction.

[24]   **Charles Walker,**
'Experiencing Flow: Is doing it together better than doing it alone?', *Journal of Positive Psychology,*
http://nokia.ly/19v0gvl

Health and wellbeing

In an article for *Fast Company*, Amy Westervelt details what happened when the online marketplace Etsy commissioned data-driven psychology consultancy Imperative to monitor their employees' PERMA (an abbreviation of Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) statistics:

"At the end of the day data only gets you so far," says Kyla Fullenwider, co-founder of Imperative and the lead consultant on Etsy's happiness study. "Data can be very useful to help make the case to the board for why this stuff matters, but then it's digging in and working on creating a really healthy work culture, which just requires elbow grease, thoughtfulness and wisdom."[25]

This kind of data led to the manufacture of technological sensor badges to monitor key information such as verbal interaction between employees, foot-traffic patterns within the office, and stress-levels in the tone of voice of team members.

Some people might feel uncomfortable to know that their boss was monitoring their tone of voice and could conceivably be concerned that they were being manipulated towards better performance at the cost of their privacy. The choice comes down to the individual team, and the culture within it.

Business consultancy NixonMcInnes chose to push the idea of happiness data even further, with the introduction of a 'happiness index' for their staff, also known as the happiness barometer. In terms of technology, the execution of the happiness index couldn't be more basic. It requires nothing but two buckets, and a large amount of tennis balls.

The two buckets are labelled as 'happy' or 'unhappy', and at the end of the day when heading home, each employee simply places a tennis ball into the bucket that best represents their current mood.

In this way, NixonMcInnes is given a clear insight into anonymised happiness data from their staff, and can monitor it over time and act accordingly. One immediate finding was that Tuesdays trumped Mondays as being a regular recurrent low-point among the staff.

This data is collected into a spreadsheet, and weekly results are displayed to all with a printout on the office wall. Ongoing reports track this happiness against other factors such as hours worked, office temperature, and even the volume of the office radio.
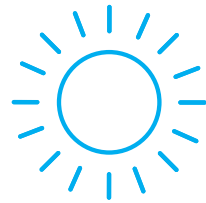
A clear indication of the general mood of the team provides an interesting opportunity to spot larger problems before they develop. It becomes a kind of emotional 'early warning system' for staff, that shows which projects need more attention, and what deeper problems those troublesome projects might be causing.

The five habits of flow

Positive team habits can be difficult to describe, but are much easier to demonstrate. Some of the positive team habits exhibited by high performing teams are:

1. **Independent research**
   An ingrained passion for knowledge and curiosity within the team.

2. **Declaration of goals**
   A clarity of direction, purpose, and expectations.

3. **Skills sharing**
   An actively helpful system for spreading knowledge, not hoarding it.

4. **Praising colleagues**
   A positive feedback loop for recognising contributions at every level. This could also be referred to simply as 'respect', but praise is a more overt expression of this idea It's easy to silently respect somebody. Praising them takes a little bit more effort, but offers much stronger results.

5. **Airing grievances**
   An open forum for voicing concerns and roadblocks before they become endemic.

Once the working day is over, the most important thing is to ensure a sustainable working culture, by growing together and adapting to change in an agile way - burn out, stress, and boredom need not be a part of the equation. With this kind of built-in flexibility, flowing teams are future-proofed for any seismic shifts that might be thrown their way, up-to and including the departure of a linchpin team member.

You should strive to comprise your workforce of a collection of 'T-shaped people'. With a broad experience-base supporting a central area of expertise, and a habitual pattern of skill-sharing and collaboration in place, team members experience a fluid journey throughout their careers.

This fluid journey allows for a mutually beneficial workplace wherein team members abilities are improved exponentially just by working alongside their colleagues…and after all, what could be more fluid than flow?

Conclusion

We hope these ideas help you and your colleagues become a team that flows.

Perhaps the most useful action you can take right now is to share these ideas with your colleagues, start a conversation about how your team works and how it can evolve. Open up the subject for discussion about what flow is and how it feels when you hit that state as a group.

Ask each other questions designed to push thought forward, move away from consensus or group-think, and divine the strongest truth.

What does 'optimal' look like for your team? How do you know when you are really at your best? What can be done to achieve that state more often, and what will have to change in order to make that happen?

Once you begin to regularly talk about and pick apart the inner workings of your group structure, you'll start to see the benefits. Direct these discussions towards the subject of different working methods, and keep the conversations going.

Just as each individual is unique, so too is every team a one-of-a-kind unit comprised of social dynamics,

values, needs, and methods that are native only to that specific ecosystem. Over time, you'll build an internal structure to be proud of, and flowing will become what your team does best.

There's a vested interest for any organisation in having teams that flow. As the evidence shows, flow means happier staff, greater innovation, and faster progress. However, on an individual level, there is an even bigger pay off, as flow makes us the best that we are able to be, producing our finest work.

A team comprised of remarkable individuals working together to achieve flow can be an incredible force, far stronger than the sum of its parts.

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Other books in the Smarter Everyday series:

Design Your Day
http:/nokia.ly/DYDebook
Mobile Mastery
http://nokia.ly/MMebook

Reading list

Floyd Allport,
*The Influence of the Group
Upon Association and Thought,*
http://nokia.ly/1fV9qXd

Adam Bryant,
'A Boss's Challenge: have Everyone
Join the "in" Group', *New York Times,*
http://nokia.ly/1fV9xSv

Mihály Csíkszentmihályi,
*Flow: The Psychology of the
Optimal Experience*

Robert T. Howell
'Fostering Self-Directed Team Members',
Journal of Technology Studies
http://nokia.ly/19uZtKV

Jonah Lehrer,
Imagine: How Creativity Works

Jonah Lehrer,
'Groupthink', *The New Yorker,*
http://nokia.ly/1fV9OoD

Alex Osborn,
Your Creative Power

Alex Pentland,
'The New Science of Building Great
Teams', *Harvard Business Review,*
http://nokia.ly/1fV9Z3d

Clive Thompson,
*Smarter Than You Think:
How Technology is Changing
Our Minds For the Better*

Derek Thompson,
'Forget Edison: This is How
History's Greatest Inventions
Really Happened', *The Atlantic,*
http://nokia.ly/19v03YY

Dr David Rock,
Your Brain At Work

Dr David Rock,
'SCARF: a brain-based model for
collaborating with and influencing
others', *NeuroLeadership Journal,*
http://nokia.ly/19v09zY

Keith Sawyer,
*Group Genius: The Creative
Power of Collaboration*

Charles Walker,
Experiencing Flow: Is doing it together better than doing it alone?
http://nokia.ly/19v0gvl

Amy Westervelt,
'Why your boss cares if you're happy', *Fast Company*
http://nokia.ly/1fVakTm

Meri Williams,
'People management in an agile setting', *Government Digital Service,*
http://nokia.ly/1fVaGto

Malinda Zellman,
Four Effective Styles of Communication in the Workplace,
http://nokia.ly/1gEWwxG

How Teams Work,
Open University,
http://nokia.ly/1eJclyS

How it Works,
http://nokia.ly/1eJcq5E

The Agile Manifesto
http://nokia.ly/1gEWQMR
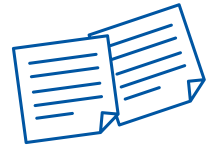
Tools

Basecamp and Camper
https://basecamp.com/

Campfire and Ablaze
https://campfirenow.com/

Evernote
http://evernote.com/

IFTTT
https://ifttt.com

Lighthouse
http://lighthouseapp.com/

Merlin
http://www.projectwizards.
net/en/merlin/

Microsoft Lync
http://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/
business/products/lync-2013/

NoKahuna
http://nokahuna.com/

Redmine and Redmine To Go
http://www.redmine.org/

SkyDrive
https://skydrive.live.com/

Skype
http://www.skype.com/

Trello and Trellizo
https://trello.com/

Zurmo
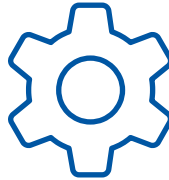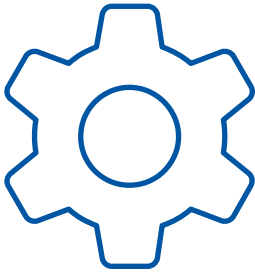http://zurmo.org/
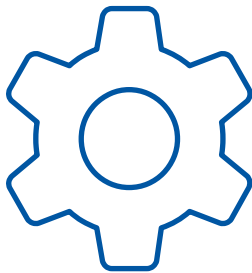
Exercise 1: better meetings

Done right, meetings are an invaluable business tool - but done wrong, they can be a drain on your time and energy. Use our checklist to help make your meetings smarter and more productive.

Before the meeting:

Purpose: make sure you know why you're meeting and what your objectives are.

Time, place and format: think about whether you need to meet in person, how long you need, and where and when you'll meet.

Agenda: create and distribute a written agenda for your meeting, listing the topics you'll cover and the desired outcome.

People: think about who needs to attend and why, and decide who will chair the meeting, take notes and track actions.

Prep: make sure that everyone knows what tasks they need to complete or what reading they need to do before the meeting.

During the meeting:

Time: stick to your start and end times. Agenda: stay on topic.

Notes: take notes and keep a record of who needs to do what by when.

Review: was the meeting effective, did you reach your objective?

After the meeting:

Notes: send them round as quickly as possible.

Actions: complete any actions you were set.

Report: report back with updates as required.

To help ensure that your meeting stays on track, ask that the group makes the following pledges beforehand:

- **"We'll know why we're meeting and what we want to get out of the meeting."**

- **"We'll provide (and read) background material beforehand."**

- **"We will stick to our agenda."**

- **"We'll give each other our full attention – no mobiles, tablets, or laptops."**

- **"We'll operate within our time limit."**

- **"We'll have clear actions to take after the meeting ends."**

Exercise 2: prioritisation

Team priorities can at times be unclear, particularly in fast-paced work places with multiple projects underway simultaneously.

Begin this week by gathering everyone together to share the following information with the rest of the team:

- **I will: two priority items that you will focus on this week.**

- **I won't: one item that you will not be completing this week.**

- **I need: what you need others to do in order to complete your priorities.**

- **I like: one moment from the previous week that you particularly enjoyed.**
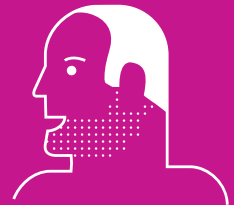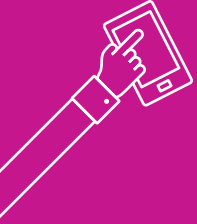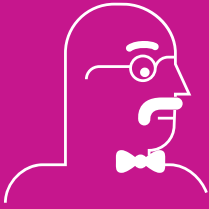
By limiting yourself to just two priorities, it forces you to think about what is the most pressing work for the week.

Follow this by dividing the days of the week into two action blocks and assigning one project to each.

These may be your priorities, other less pressing matters, or even simple 'email'. The important thing is to provide a rough outline of what you consider to be the most essential use of your time, and how much of the week that is likely to take up.

Even if the entirety of the team only gather once per week, declaring this information to the collective provides clarity and transparency to help furnish the team with autonomous flow.

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