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Great managers still matter: the evolution of Google's Project Oxygen



Google has learned more about managers since the original Project Oxygen research study in 2008. As the company has grown, we found that Googlers rely on their managers to make clear decisions and facilitate collaboration across teams.

Back in 2008, an internal team of researchers launched **Project Oxygen** (</guides/managers-identify-what-makes-a-great-manager/steps/learn-about-googles-manager-research/>) – our effort to determine what makes a manager great at Google. From this research, we identified eight behaviors that are common among our highest performing managers and incorporated them into our manager development programs. By publicizing and training managers on these eight behaviors, we saw an

improvement in management at Google and team outcomes like turnover, satisfaction, and performance over time.

But as our company grew in size and complexity, demands on our managers and leaders increased as well. From the results of our **employee survey (/guides/analytics-run-an-employee-survey/steps/introduction/)** we learned that Googlers wanted to see more effective cross-organization collaboration and stronger decision making practices from leaders. We've also learned more about how we need managers to show up in some of our related work streams (e.g., teams, unbiasing, performance management). So we took a second look at our research, refreshed our behaviors according to internal research and Googlers' feedback, and put them to the test. We found that over time, the qualities of a great manager at Google had grown and evolved with along with the company.

The 10 Oxygen behaviors of Google's best managers (behaviors 3 and 6 have been updated and behaviors 9 and 10 are new):

1. Is a good coach
2. Empowers team and does not micromanage
3. **Creates an inclusive team environment, showing concern for success and well-being**
4. Is productive and results-oriented
5. Is a good communicator — listens and shares information
6. **Supports career development and discusses performance**
7. Has a clear vision/strategy for the team
8. Has key technical skills to help advise the team
9. **Collaborates across Google**
10. **Is a strong decision maker**

We created new survey questions to test these emerging themes of collaboration and decision making, and incorporated them into a random sample of **Manager Feedback Surveys (/guides/managers-give-feedback-to-managers/steps/try-googles-manager-feedback-survey/)** – a tool we use to assess and support managers. With our experiment, we wanted to see how well these potential new behaviors of collaboration and decision making tested alongside our existing eight behaviors. Did they strengthen or lessen our correlational relationships with manager effectiveness and team outcomes over time? *To read some of the items we tested for each behavior more closely,*

check out our ***refreshed Manager Feedback Survey (/guides/managers-give-feedback-to-managers/steps/try-googles-manager-feedback-survey/)***.

To our excitement, we found a strong statistical relationship. The two new behaviors were highly correlated with manager effectiveness and the updated list of ten Oxygen behaviors was even more predictive of team outcomes like turnover, satisfaction, and performance than our original list of eight. The higher the scores a manager received on the two new behaviors, the better those three outcomes were for their teams over the next year; their team members were more likely to stay at Google, gave higher subsequent satisfaction scores on our employee survey, and were better performers.

If you've taken an Intro to Stats class, you know that correlation does not prove causation. You could also argue reverse causation (i.e., happier, more productive employees rate their managers higher). So we accounted for this in two ways. First, we followed results over time to make sure strong management proceeded employee outcomes. Then, we verified that this pattern remained even when accounting for manager shifts (e.g. employees shifting to excellent managers saw improvements in turnover, satisfaction, and performance). We've found that quality management is not only critical, but dare we say, that it also *causes* better employee outcomes.

We've added the two new behaviors to the list, and we've started incorporating them into our manager development trainings. As informed by **research on psychological safety (/guides/understanding-team-effectiveness/steps/foster-psychological-safety/)**, **unbiasing efforts (/subjects/unbiasing/)**, and the **importance of establishing clear performance expectations (<http://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/186164/employees-don-know-expected-work.aspx>)**, we've also modified the wording of two original behaviors to *"Create an inclusive team environment, showing concern for success and well-being"* and *"Support career development and discuss performance."*

We now know that managers *still* matter. For Google, these ten behaviors are what we've found makes a manager great at Google – determine what makes a great manager in your organization.

To see our manager updates, check out these re:Work resources: ***Project Oxygen (/guides/managers-identify-what-makes-a-great-manager/steps/learn-about-googles-manager-research/)***, ***Manager Feedback Survey (/guides/managers-give-feedback-to-managers/steps/try-googles-manager-feedback-survey/)***.

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