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TRUST-BASED
LEADERSHIP

**What if you could boost
your team's engagement?**

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Introduction

Is it not amazing how much we take care of our equipment (cars, electronic devices, machines, IT systems, production systems…) by constantly upgrading and repairing them ?

And yet, what do we do to keep our workforce and our people alive, rejuvenated, healthy, inspired and engaged? So little. Luckily, the human «machine» seems to be more flexible and adaptable than actual machines. But only to a certain extent…

As a coach and manager, I have forged the strong belief that management and leadership need to evolve.

- What kind of leadership do we need to reach new levels of performance, which is ecological and sustainable for all parties?
- What can we do to help others feel more motivated and engaged in what they do at work?
- What new type of communication do we need to develop?
- How can we contribute to our colleagues' full potential development and growth?
- How can we lead with both the head and the heart?

So much has been written on leadership, and what it takes to be a good leader.

And yet, I rarely felt entirely satisfied by the definition of leadership. What I am sharing is this ebook is an attempt at presenting leadership under a new light, which I call **trust-based leadership**.

This e-book is for all leaders and managers as well as individual contributors who seek to have a positive impact in their workplace by cultivating and developing values and behaviors that are ecological for themselves as well as for the people around them.

Any leadership role in particular is not something that should be taken lightly as it provides unique opportunities to lead, inspire and help others to grow.

Disclaimer: English is not my native language. Although I do work in English, read and speak English, I have no doubt you will occasionally find in this book a few awkward turns of phrase. I hope you will be forgiving when it does happen.

Chapter One

DATA CONFIRMS WHAT GREAT LEADERS KNEW ALREADY!

As I wrote in "[Ecological Leadership](#)" a while back now, business is largely dominated by 'left-side brain' perspectives. Business management practices such as performance management, strategic planning, financially driven strategies and plans, productivity driven initiatives are just few examples. They have been proved to «work» in recent decades and produce short-term results but they are often «cold» and dehumanizing.

This has produced some unfortunate collateral damages over the years, but it is now time to consider something radically different. I am not saying we should get rid of the practices above as we need them to a large extent (but not always !), we now need to **supplement it with more right-side-brain thinking so that we can find a sense of purpose, connection and growth in our workplace.**
That will drive higher level of performance, tangible and less tangible. Revenues AND engagement, customer satisfaction AND inclusion, productivity AND renewed creativity and innovation, …

As said in the short introduction, what do we do to keep our human capital alive, rejuvenated, healthy, inspired and engaged. Very little, I am afraid. Almost as if we could not see any direct link between a team's engagement and business results and productivity!

And here comes **a very interesting project Google led earlier this year with the goal to know the secret to building more productive and stellar teams**.

The project, known as [Project Aristotle](#), took several years, and included analysis of data about the people on more than 100 active teams at the company.

Google's data-driven approach ended up highlighting what leaders in the business world have known for a while; the best teams respect [one another's emotions](#) and are mindful that all members should [contribute to the conversation equally](#). It has less to do with who is in a team, and more with how a team's members interact with one another.

The answer is simple yet profound: it turns out that the secret of teamwork is

being nice to people.

Here are a few key components of Google's secret to teamwork:

<u>Team dynamics</u> are more important than team makeup: Many managers might think that a great team "just happens" if you get the right people with the right skills and personalities in the right jobs. But according to Google's research, the strength of a team has less to do with which people are on the team, and more to do with how the team interacts.

<u>Respect and collaboration</u>: The best teams tend to respect each other's feelings and create safe spaces for open conversation where everyone can feel comfortable contributing. Productive teams are good at making an effort to understand and relate to each other – and this starts with simple respect and open communication.

<u>Psychological safety</u>: Are people on your team comfortable with making themselves vulnerable, sharing what's really on their mind, confiding in each other, and pausing the conversation to ask for clarity? Or is your team more tight-lipped and tense? The best teams cultivate a feeling of "psychological safety," where no one is worried about feeling embarrassed or bullied, and where people feel safe asking questions and proposing the "craziest" ideas. When team members feel safe, accepted, and understood, they are able to feel more comfortable sharing ideas and taking risks.

At the heart of Google's findings, is the concept of "psychological safety" (https://rework.withgoogle.com/blog/five-keys-to-a-successful-google-team/), a model of teamwork in which members have a shared belief that it is safe to take risks and share a range of ideas without the fear of being humiliated.

Google now describes psychological safety as the most important factor to building a successful team.

"There were other behaviors that seemed important as well — like making sure teams had clear goals and creating a culture of dependability. But Google's data indicated that psychological safety, more than anything else, was critical to making a team work."

In short, just be nice and kind ! In the best teams, members listen to one another and show sensitivity to feelings and needs.

According to Google's research, great teamwork is not a matter of talent; it's a matter of creating a safe space for people to practice kindness, respect and empathy for their teammates. Productivity comes from mutual understanding – when people trust their teammates to be on their side, they'll be ready to do great things.

However, establishing psychological safety is, by its very nature, somewhat difficult to implement.

We will discuss in the third chapter how you indeed can help to create that kind of environment and behaviors.

Chapter Two

TRUST-BASED LEADERSHIP

I have been a manager in the IT industry for almost 20 years, and have worked in that capacity at different companies. Through external forums, trainings and workshops, I also had the chance to discuss and work with managers and leaders from other companies on those topics.

More often than not, when companies want to develop a manager or leader, and hope that this will boost their team's productivity and engagement, they will likely send them to some kind of training. This is usually the first response to one's development need.

The challenge is that when it comes to soft skills (such as developing your coaching or listening skills, empathy, facilitation skills, assertiveness…), I have never been really convinced of the lasting effects of those trainings.

Why? In short, because most of the time these trainings are primarily about fixing things or gaps, but are rarely designed to fundamentally help attendees to deeply change their behaviors, their profound way of being and operating in the world.

It really takes a sustained effort for someone to not just change a few aspects of his leadership and/or management style, but to deeply transform himself. How many are we to have that awareness, discipline and stamina when we are coming back from a 3-days training and going back to our habits?

Not only that! Depending on how management higher in the organisation sees the world, and because of their own filters, they are likely to identify and recommend the "wrong" gaps to be addressed.

Here is a very personal example!

At one point in my career, many years ago, a VP told me that, should I have wanted to further climb the corporate ladder, I needed to display more of the 3 "A": Ambition, Aggression and (I forgot the 3rd A, I think it was Assertiveness). Aggression, really?!

Contrast it with Google latest study and findings discussed in the previous chapter! Which talks about kindness and providing a "safe environment" for teams to be at their best!

Do we need a new approach to develop our managers, and hopefully as a result, our teams?

I believe so. And I think this can only happen when we will start to change our filters, how we look at the world and the people around us, how we operate in the world.

Only a leader, who, as a human being, will make the conscious effort to evolve from a fear-based to a trust-based perspective and leadership, will have a profound and lasting impact on his teams, and on the business.

As I look for myself, and try to "isolate" the one thing that really allowed me to perform at my best over the years, and I think, allowed people in my teams to do so too, I indeed can bring it down to Trust. Trust is the cement from which all success can be built upon.

Patrick Lencioni's perspective on trust which he shares in his book "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team" is really interesting.

He explains that trust is the essential foundation of highly effective teams (and organizations). As can be seen from the layered pyramid below, lack of trust in the end leads to inattention to results.

A high level summary of the "The five dysfunctions can be found in the book "Search Inside Yourself" by Chade-Mang Tan. In order of causality, they are:

1. Absence of trust: People do not trust the intentions of their teammates. They feel the need to protect themselves from each other and tread carefully around others on the team. This leads to the next dysfunction.

2. Fear of conflict: Without trust, people are unwilling to involve themselves in productive debates and conflicts, the type of good conflict that focuses entirely on resolving issues without involving character attacks or hidden personal agendas. Without such healthy conflicts, issues stay unresolved

or are unsatisfactorily resolved. People feel they have not been properly involved in decisions. This leads to the next dysfunction.

3. Lack of commitment: When people feel their input has not been properly considered and that they have not been properly involved in decisions, they have no buy-in. They do not commit to the final decisions. Ambiguity about priorities and directions festers, and uncertainties linger. This leads to the next dysfunction.

4. Avoidance of accountability: When people have no buy in about decisions, they avoid accepting accountability. Worse still, they do not hold their teammates accountable to high standards. Resentment festers, and mediocrity spreads. This leads to the final dysfunction.

5. Inattention to results: The ultimate dysfunction of a team. People care about something other than the collective goals of the team. Goals are not met, results are not achieved.

Looking at my own experience as a manager and, simply, a human being, I have tried to identify how shifting from a fear-based to a trust-based perspective gets translated in day-to-day situations at work.

Fear-Based	Trust-Based
Be visible	Do the right things
Tell people what to do and how to do it	Share the Why and Empower your teams
Protect you by securing everyone's buy-in	Work with the right stakeholders and move on with speed
Go through extensive and lengthy review processes	Work with the right stakeholders and move on with speed
Command & Control	Trust and leverage people's own inner leadership and insight
Keep information to your chest	Free the flow of information. Share and support as much as you can
Decision pushed to the top	Tap into the team's collective intelligence and define a more agile decision process
Hierarchies	Holocracy
Reaction driven	Creation

By putting a different kind of glasses (trust, instead of fear), one can start to embody a new kind of leadership.

Before we look in the next instalment at precisely the qualities we need to nurture as well as the benefits of trust-based leadership, I just could not resist to end the post with this beautiful quote from Einstein. Another way to look at limiting "filters" one needs to free himself from:

"*A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive.*"

Chapter Three

5 CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUST-BASED LEADERSHIP

"So, what does it look like to be driven, not by fear, but by a higher purpose, a sense of wholeness, our soul?

This is the question Frederic Laloux asks in his book "Reinventing Organizations" as he talks about fear-based leadership. And then describes how it would like not to be driven by fear:

"*What replaces fear? A capacity to trust the abundance of life. All wisdom traditions posit the profound truth that there are two fundamental ways to live life: from fear and scarcity or from trust and abundance. In Evolutionary-Teal, we cross the chasm and learn to decrease our need to control people and events. We come to believe that even if something unexpected happens or if we make mistakes, things will turn out all right, and when they don't, life will have given us an opportunity to learn and grow*"

"*If all you have known in your professional life are workplaces where politics and conflicts were the rule, it may be nearly impossible to consider that something else can exist. And that has to do with our worldview as discussed at the beginning. Do we see the world as a place of dangers where we are better off protecting ourselves from external (perceived) risks (.i.e separation) or a place where we can take bold steps towards authenticity, vulnerability, trust and wholeness ?*"

After we discussed the Google Aristotle project and its findings in the first chapter, and the contrast between fear-based and trust-based leadership, let's now have a look at what happens when you stop being driven by fear. What is then emerging instead?
I can see a few things unfolding when we are able to change our "glasses" through which we see others and the world in which we operate.

Heart-based leadership

The heart is center of one's personality, the center of character and emotional

life.

The heart is connected with our intuition and emotion. Our body is the vessel to make things happen, our strength to overcome obstacles. "Heart" drives feelings, emotions, intuitions, actions, and reactions.

Therefore, the heart "knows". He knows how best to deal with specific situations, with the complexity of our world.

Heart-based leadership takes the whole into account, not just the limited ego of the leader himself or the ego of others.

Author and teacher Parker Palmer described the 'heart' so powerfully as "that centre in the human self where everything comes together -where will and intellect and values and feeling and intuition and vision all converge. It meant the source of one's integrity. It takes courage to lead from the heart."

Balancing your head and heart is essential to great leadership. The quality of the relationships you build and maintain matter. Starting to see people as ... "human beings" and not as "some guys who report to me", "guys who need to play by the rule" or "who are here to deliver growth every month" is the basis from which unprecedented levels of engagement can be created.

How you serve your team also matters greatly and you can only do that with genuine empathy, authenticity and vulnerability. Does it sound too sentimental, or even weak for a leader to embrace those qualities? Most likely, yes, but the corporate world does not need more ways to subordinate people nor does it need more "stick and carrot" approaches to lead others.

Humility

Leading from Heart. Serving and developing your team. This is where humility is needed, and needs to be cultivated. That cannot be done with the ego in the driver seat.

We see leaders stealing credit for those that are underneath them and then never protecting them when something goes wrong. We see leaders not making decisions or implementing ideas from other people just because of their own egos.

Interestingly, Jim Collins in his book "Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't " discovered what makes companies go from good to great by sifting through a massive amount of data.

He started with the set of every company that has appeared on Fortune 500 from 1965 to 1995, and they identified companies that started out merely as "good" companies that then became "great" companies (defined as outperforming the general market by a factor of three or more) for an extended period of time (defined as fifteen years or more). They ended up with a set of eleven "good to great" companies and compared them to a set of "comparison companies" to

determine what made the merely good companies become great.
Those companies have what Jim Collins describes as **Level 5 Leaders: a unique mix of humility and professional will.**

Here are some key principles of level 5 leaders.

✓ "Level 5 leaders embody a paradoxical mix of personal humility and professional will."

✓ "Level 5 leaders set up their successors for even great success in the next generation, whereas egocentric leaders often set up their successors for failure."

✓ "Level 5 leaders are fanatically driven, infected with an incurable need to produce sustained results. They are resolved to do whatever it takes."

✓ "Level 5 leaders display a workman-like diligence – more plow

horse than show horse."

✓ "Level 5 leaders look out the window to attribute success to factors other than themselves. When things go poorly, however, they look in the mirror and blame themselves, taking full responsibility."

✓ "Level 5 leaders attribute much of their success to good luck, rather than personal greatness."

Some leaders will struggle to get there. They will never bring themselves to subjugate their own needs to the greater ambition of something larger and more lasting than themselves. Their work will always be first and foremost of what they get. And work will never be about what they build, create and contribute. The great irony is that the personal ambition that often drives people to become a Level 4 leader stands at odds with the humility required to rise to Level 5.

The mistake would be to assume they are weak because of their humbleness. Ambition, decisiveness and professional will can coexist with humility, as show in the "Good to Great" companies. Jim Collins wrote his book more than a decade ago, and it seems to me that it is even more urgent years later than it was back then to develop that balance.

You attract like-minded people, and become a "magnet".

Some might call it law of attraction or law of resonance.
Because trust/collaboration/respect/empathy/wholeness is how you see the world, how you look at situations in which you get engaged, you naturally see the good in others, you see and appreciate their potential. It is not about being naïve or helpless. It is just about being, without putting a mask, and see the human being in others too.

You in turn free other, let them express their own wholeness

Because others see that you are free, and not driven by your ego or your own personal agenda, that gives them the permission to become that too. This is to me a very important aspect. Have you ever had a leader in your own organization having an impact just by expressing himself authentically, empathically, with humility and yet with power ? How liberating and inspiring, isn't?

You accept and enjoy people difference.

Others feel seen and heard. You collaborate, you are equals. Yes, roles might be different, but you are not on a pedestal or put others on a pedestal either. You end up acknowledging and leveraging those differences, people's unique strength and abilities. Their unique brilliance.

Chapter Four

BEING YOU, AT WORK

From Google's project discussed in the first chapter, it may sound like you "just" need to tell people to take turns during a conversation and to listen to one another more. You can "just" instruct employees to be sensitive to how their colleagues feel and to notice when someone seems upset. But how often have you been part of authentic conversations at work, talking about your feelings while feeling you were in an emotionally stable environment ?

The behaviors that create psychological safety — conversational turn-taking and empathy — are part of the same unwritten rules we often turn to, as individuals, when we need to establish a bond. And those human bonds matter as much at work as anywhere else. In fact, they sometimes matter more.

According to the [research at Google](), what the Project Aristotle has taught people within Google is that no one wants to put on a ''work face'' when they get to the office. No one wants to leave part of their personality and inner life at home. But to be fully present at work, to feel ''psychologically safe,'' we must know that we can be free enough, sometimes, to share the things that scare us without fear of recriminations. We must be able to talk about what is messy or sad, to have hard conversations with colleagues who are driving us crazy. We can't be focused just on efficiency.

In addition, let's not hide from the truth, this is hard to change our glasses and our patterns, and ultimately our behaviors. Since we have been "moulded" for so many years to act defensively at work, to protect ourselves and our teams, it may not always be easy to embrace a trust-based perspective, as discussed in our second post.
So, what can we start to put in place both at an individual level and at a more collective and organizational level.

Mindfulness

At a personal level, mindfulness is certainly a great place to start. We have already looked at mindfulness on this blog. Based on the number of emails I

have received, I take that this was very well received, and even embraced by some readers of this blog. This is really great to see indeed.
We looked at:

- [How to develop and deepen one's awareness](#)
- [The benefits of having a mindfulness practice](#)
- [How to start a practice, even at your workplace](#)
- [How to deepen our understanding with another practice, called RAIN](#)

Mindfulness helps us to see how sometimes we can be driven by fear and ego. It all starts with this profound awareness first. If we do not develop that new awareness, we will continuously be driven by fear, even without knowing it. Looking at some example provided in the table in the second post, are you able to distinguish similar fear-based attitudes and reactions? Yes, it is not comfortable to admit it for ourselves, but unless we make that conscious effort, nothing will change in you and around you.
The good news is that you will allow others, as a mirror of the changes happening in you, to also move from a place of fear to a place of trust.

Organizations that allows trust-based leadership

What can we also do at an organizational level ? Well, we also have discussed it in great details in the ["Reinventing Organizations" series](#) and [ebook](#).
At its core, what Frederic Laloux suggests in his book, following examples from companies from across the globe (named "Teal organizations"), is that it is possible to create more inspiring trust-based organizations … while delivering exceptional business results.
The three primary breakthroughs found in this companies are the following:

1. Self-management:

Teal Organizations have found the key to operate effectively, even at a large scale, with a system based on peer relationships, without the need for either hierarchy or consensus.

2. Wholeness:

Organizations have always been places that encourage people to show up with a narrow "professional" self and to check other parts of the self at the door. They often require us to show a masculine resolve, to display determination and strength, and to hide doubts and vulnerability. Rationality rules as king, while

the emotional, intuitive, and spiritual parts of ourselves often feel unwelcome, out of place. Teal Organizations have developed a consistent set of practices that invite us to reclaim our inner wholeness and bring all of who we are to work.

3. Evolutionary purpose:

Teal Organizations are seen as having a life and a sense of direction of their own. Instead of trying to predict and control the future, members of the organization are invited to listen in and understand what the organization wants to become, what purpose it wants to serve

The good news: yes, we can change. There are ways. At the end of the day, it is really a matter of whether we want to change. And if so, whether we intent to become the change agent our very own organizations and teams need.

Conclusion

As you close the last chapter of this ebook, I have only one hope.

It is that you will feel even more compelled to do *something* to make your own workplace more engaged.

As Gandhi once said "Be the change that you wish to see in the world". If you wish to make your workplace a better place for the people you have the chance to touch and interact with, and be a change agent, start somewhere, anywhere. Small, big, it does not matter.

Managers and Leaders very often hold positions of influence in their companies. If you are a people manager, or a leader in your field, that gives you a fantastic opportunity to make your workplace more liberated.

Several studies have shown that the number one reason people are leaving their companies is because of frustration, resentment or conflict with their manager! Not the salary, the company, the benefits, or the job itself. No, their direct manager!

Imagine what it would be like if managers and leaders could have a positive impact on the quality and the authenticity of their relationships with their team members and colleagues?

Through more ecological relationships and connections, empowered organisations, purpose and bringing our whole at work.

Driven by kindness and empathy. While still meeting your sales and productivity numbers!

I hope this ebook encouraged you to be that change agent our workplaces need, and undoubtedly, will increasingly need in the next decade.

I am also very grateful for the time you spent reading "Trust-based leadership".

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Note: if you would like to add to, comment or share on what I have discussed in this ebook, please do so at : **www.ericmarin.fr/blog**

Eric.