The Power of Teams: how to create and lead thriving school teams

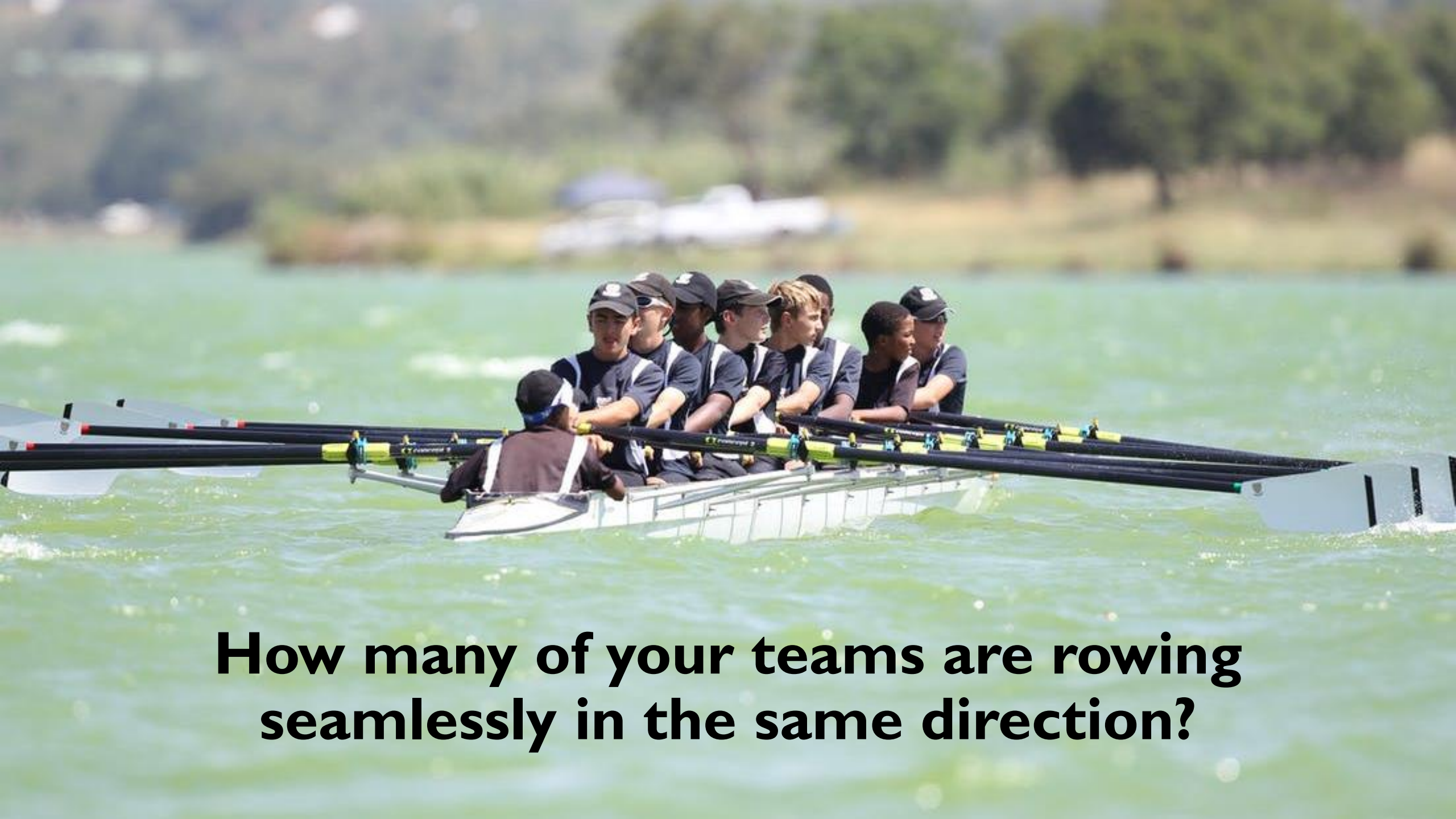
Sam Crome

About me

Teaching
Coaching
Leading
Researching
Writing
Teams!

Do we underestimate the power of teamwork?

Team work remains the ultimate competitive advantage (Lencioni)



How many of your teams are rowing seamlessly in the same direction?

Teams research

- Collaborative activities / team projects in organisations rising by circa 60%

- 90% employees believe teamwork is critical to their organisations' success; but only 25% consider their teams to be effective!

- **Team-related problems** are linked to huge breakdowns in effectiveness and performance in cross-sector research (rather than financial or logistical issues)

What are common traits that high-performing teams share? Come up with your list!

Codifying high-performing teams – what the evidence says….

1. Vision and purpose
2. Belonging and trust
3. Ambitious, clear team goals
4. Role clarity, mental models, and systems
5. Communication, candour, conflict
6. Review and evaluate
7. Team diversity and characteristics
8. Learning culture
9. Enabling organisational conditions

- Salas, et al 2018
- Tannenbaumn et al, 2013
- Bell et al 2018
- Lacerenza, et al 2018

A high-performing, thriving team

Team Development

Learning, Coaching, Debriefs, Leadership

Team Dynamics

Motivation, Conflict, Cohesion, Wellbeing

Team Operations

Knowledge, Roles & Mental Models, Communication, Meetings

Team Alignment

Purpose, Values & Behaviours, Goals

Team Belonging

Psychological Safety, Belonging, Trust

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Belonging matters

Higher team satisfaction and buy in

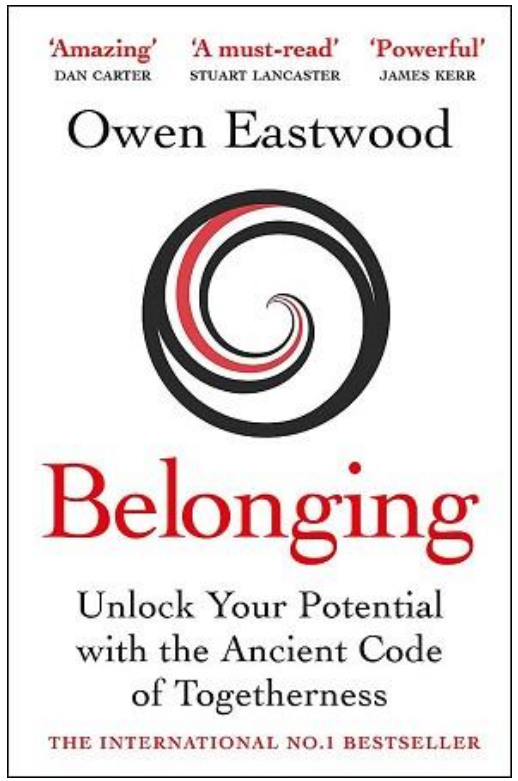
Higher retention

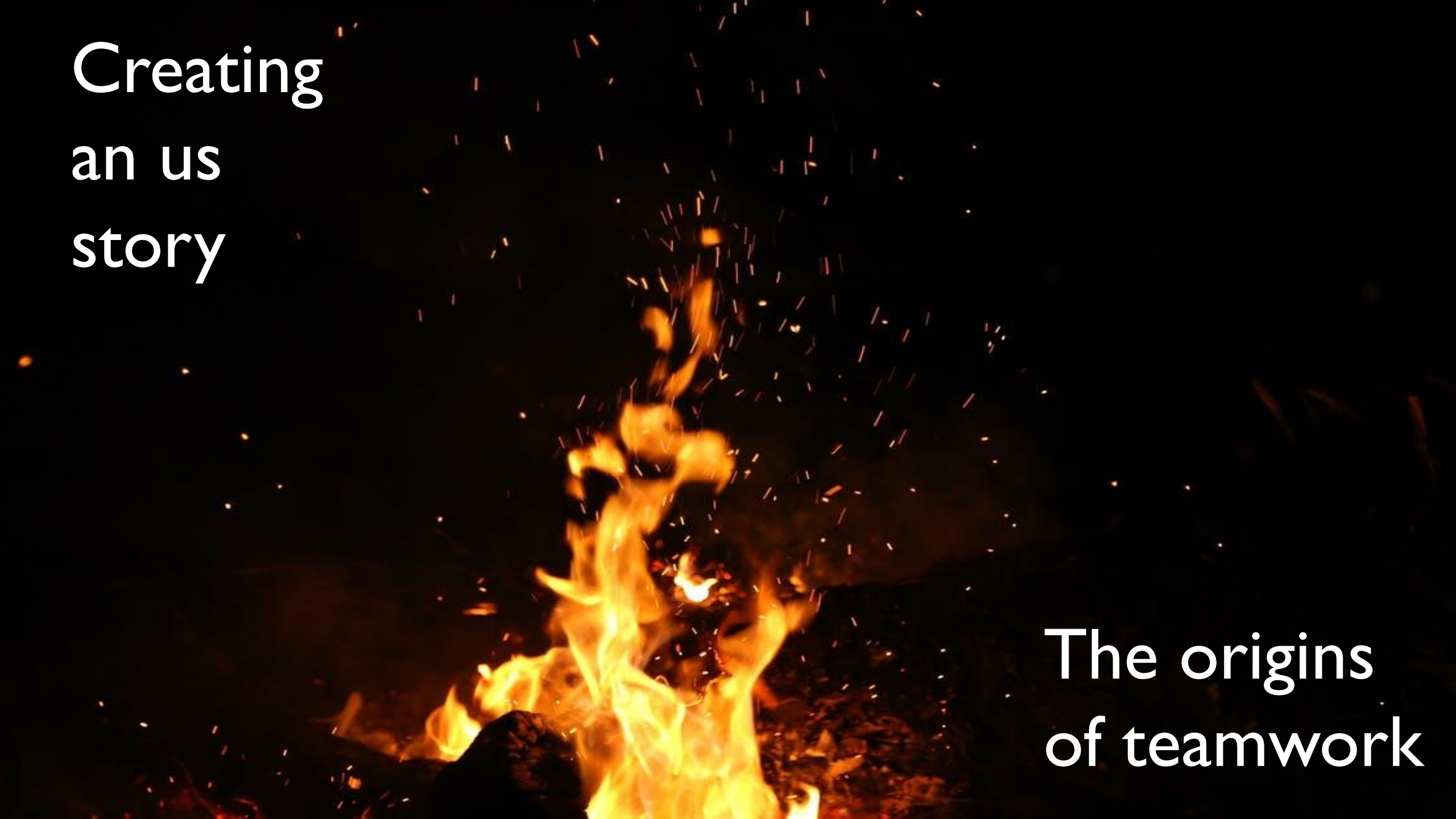
Increased team effectiveness and cohesion

Increased wellbeing

Carr et al, 2019

- We all want to belong
- Belonging before performance
- Not a fixed state




Creating
an us
story
The origins
of teamwork

You are part
of this group.
This group is special;
we have high
standards here.
I believe you can reach
those standards.

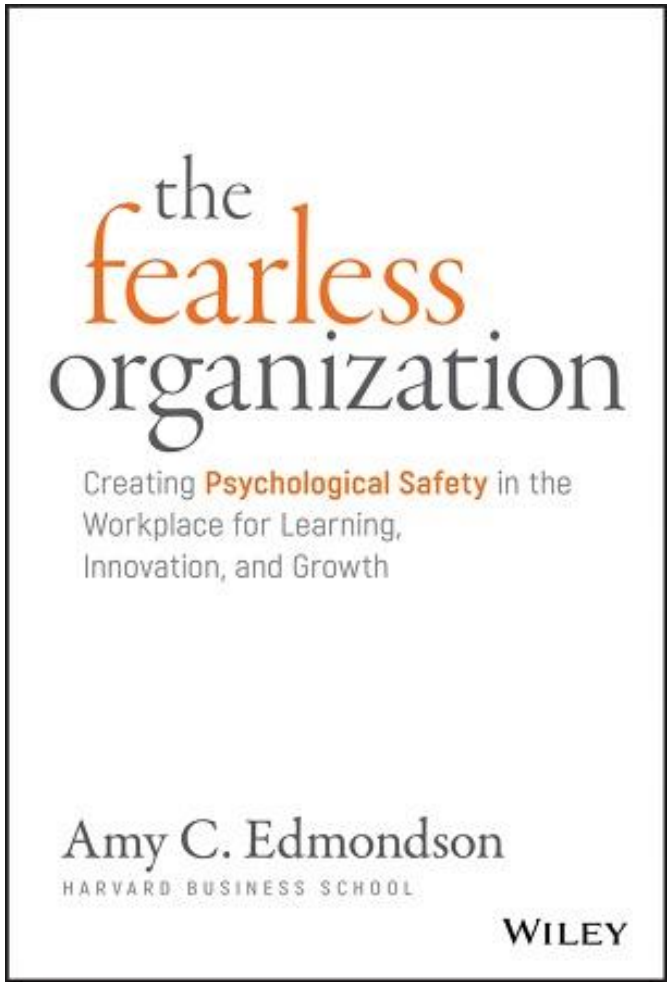
Psychological Safety

Groups perform better when they feel safe, trusted, supported, free to fail, and can engage openly. It is the shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.

They use this foundation to set ambitious goals and to challenge each other to reach their potential

Google

PIXAR
ANIMATION STUDIOS



Google findings from their top teams

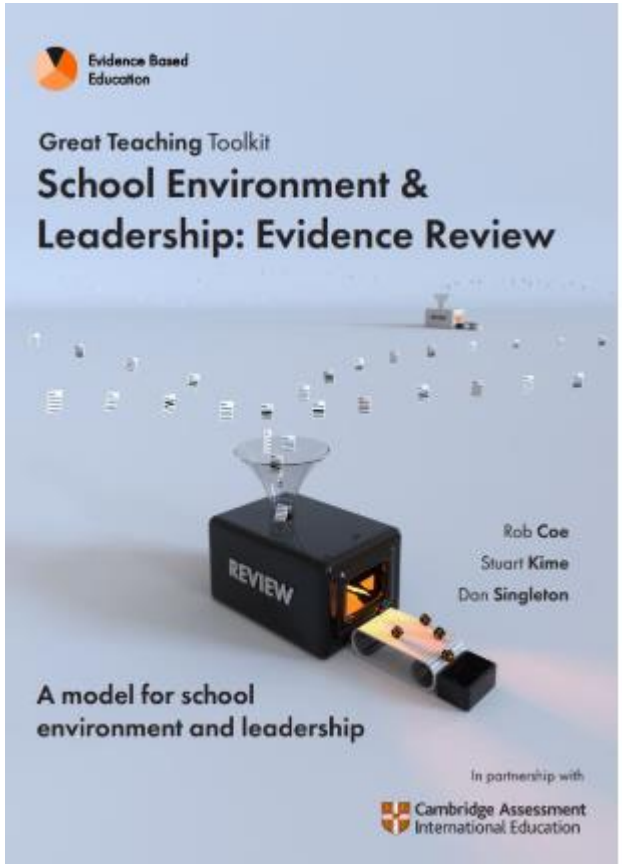
Top 3 elements are about team work

A Psych Safety Survey – how would your team do?

1. If I make a mistake on this team, it is never held against me.
2. When something goes wrong, we work as a team to find the systemic cause.
3. All members of this team feel able to bring up problems and tough issues.
4. Members of this team never reject others for being different and nobody is left out.
5. It is safe for me to take a risk on this team.
6. It is easy for me to ask other members of this team for help.
7. Nobody on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.

Measuring Psychological Safety – Psychological Safety (psychsafety.co.uk)

EBE School Environment and Leadership review 2022

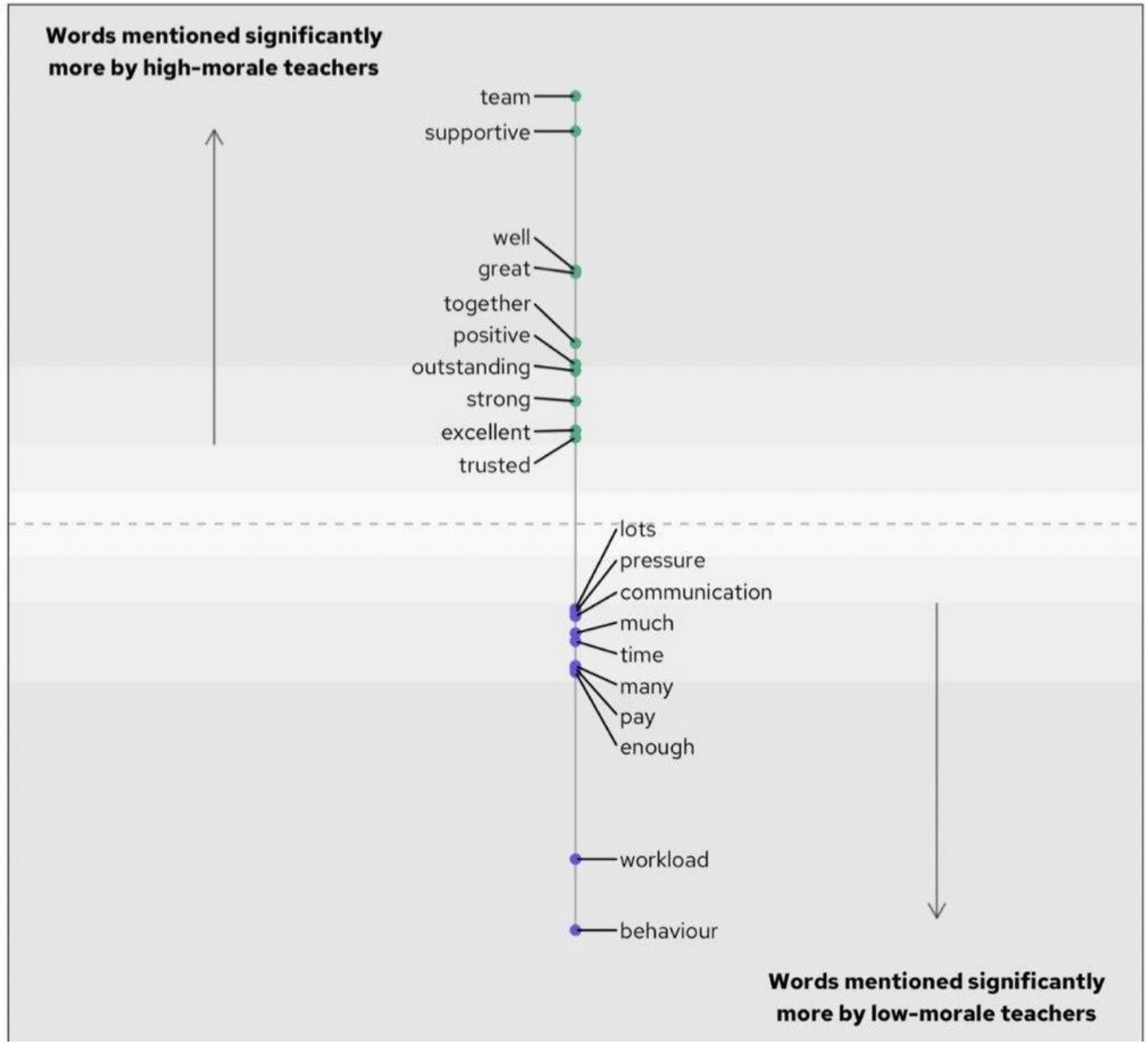


First 'management factor' = supportive working relationships:

- Trust towards leadership
- Willingness from staff to share or expose vulnerabilities
- Feelings of psych safety – it's okay to take a risk or make a mistake

(Coe et al 2022)

Keyness analysis of question "Tell us why morale is high or low in your school", crossed against teachers' responses to how morale is in their school



What 5 dysfunctions of teams (Lencioni) teaches us about belonging and psych safety

Belonging, trust, psychological safety

When these things are aligned…

Team members can focus on their role

Build Belonging to Activate Purpose

‘The best teams invest a tremendous amount of time and effort exploring, shaping, and agreeing on a purpose that belongs to them both collectively and individually. This purposing activity continues throughout the life of the team. By contrast, failed teams rarely develop a common purpose. For whatever reason – an insufficient focus on performance, lack of effort, poor leadership – they do not coalesce around a challenging aspiration.’

Katzenbach and Smith – The Discipline of Teams

Schools teams

- Unique challenges! What are yours?
- Teams within the team
- How many teams are we part of?

4 top tips for thriving school teams

1. Mental models and knowledge

2. Communication

3. Team meetings and debriefs

4. Team learning and development

Connection
Knowledge
Systems
Growth

1. Team Mental Models and Knowledge

Define the team's specific remits and knowledge

'A stronger focus on domain-specific expertise is required and the core responsibilities (or persistent problems) of leaders' roles are a good place to start' *(Barker and Rees, Ambition Institute, 2022)*

Teams function more cohesively when they understand roles, share expertise, and develop this knowledge together

1. Team Mental Models and Knowledge

Ask: ***What core, domain-specific expertise does your team require?***

- **Audit and Codify** this knowledge and link it to the team's roles, remits and processes, i.e. its mental models
- Create methods to **share the team's knowledge**
- **Develop team CPD** that centres around the embedding, and development of, this expertise

2. Team Communication

A regular survey feature!

- Main methods and times?
- Ask the team and agree
- Use SharePoint, One Note, or another shared system

Email and Teams etiquette

General principles:

- Chats are for one-on-one communication and for small groups which aren't related to a specific class or task.
- Channels are for 1) General whole department chat – whole department; 2) year group issues; 3) Shared Classes – just those teachers.
- Each shared class must have a channel (rather than chat) – even if only 2 teachers – because a) it's good to just see conversations related to that class; b) in channels you start a conversation which can be replied to whereas chat is just a free scrolling back and forth.
- All one-on-one communication through chats should be responded to, at least with a thumbs up.
- When responding to a post in a channel, ensure to use the 'reply' button on that specific post.
- Reminders/announcements that reference Trello cards are fine but if you reference a Trello card, add a link to that card. To add a link to the card, click the card in Trello, click share [at the bottom] and copy and paste the link.
- Don't use email unless forwarding or communicating outside department.

Teams:

- The General channel is to be truly general whole department stuff, announcements, deadlines and admin (including admin queries) whereas Curriculum and T and L should include MQ queries, how to teach something discussions, resources, FOF discussions and mark scheme discussions.
- Specific year group channels can include teachers who don't teach that year group (teacher's choice).

Adam Boxer – Science department communication

Year Team - The Week Ahead: 28th March Week B

Key dates & events

Reflecting on our practice

Key messages for the week

CPD corner

3. Meetings

Reflecting: think about the last team meeting you had or ran. What was it like to be in there?

- Are meetings mainly logistical / informative?

- How many people talk? Is there open discussion?

What goes wrong in meetings?

- Too much admin
- Lack of psych safety
- Dominant voices
- **No one wants to go to a poor meeting after a 5-period day!**

Ways to improve meetings

- Start with knowledge sharing / CPD (give ownership)
- Should be lively, full of discussion! Beware quiet meetings! Create mechanisms to support.
- Long-term projects for autonomy and enhanced expertise

Team Debriefs

Well-conducted debriefs can improve team effectiveness by 25% (Tannenbaum & Cerasoli, 2013), as they help teams and individuals to learn, communicate, and improve performance.

- Scheduled in advance
- Everyone has a (safe) voice
- No blame
- Learning, inevitable bumps

4. Team Learning and Development

- Coaching 'way of being' (van Nieuwerburgh)
- Reading together, learning together
- Projects and ongoing CPD, access to learning and development. A deliberate programme for development, responding to need.
- **Team considers one of its core remits as learning and growing as a group**

So, build belonging, then…

1. Understand team knowledge and expertise, codify and use to enhance smooth, effective team work

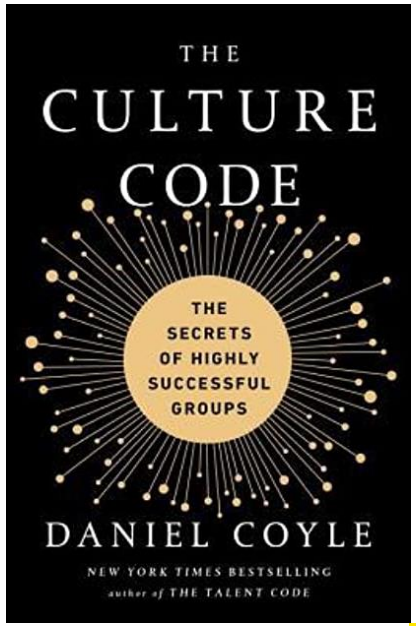
2. Use efficient, agreed upon communications

3. Hold purposeful meetings, and effective debriefs

4. Create and sustain a relentless learning culture, together

Reflecting on today

What can we do to maximise team effectiveness?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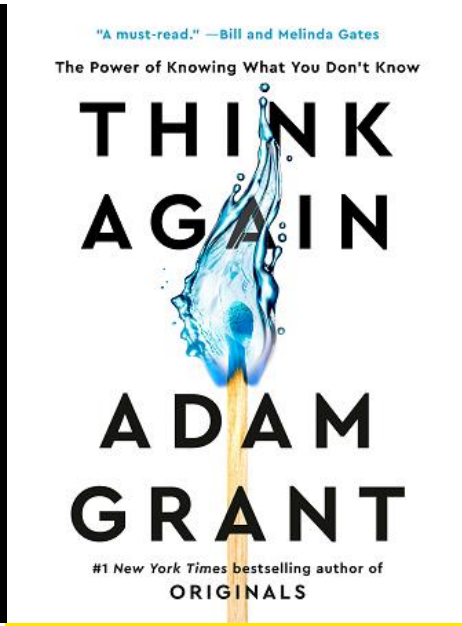
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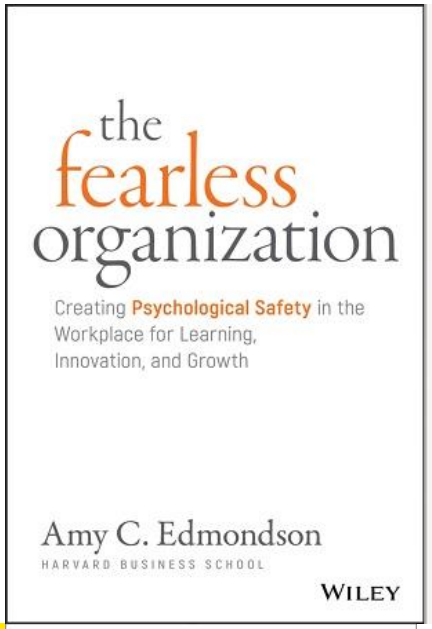
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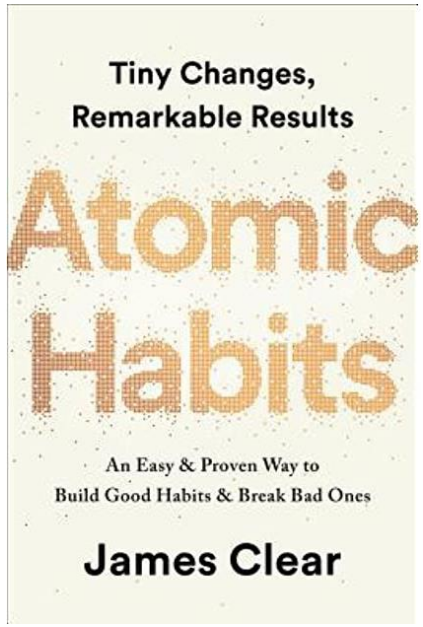
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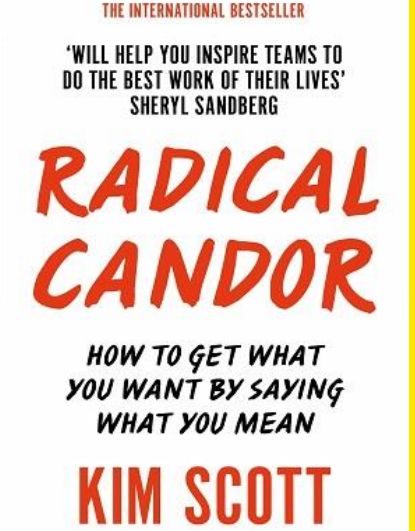
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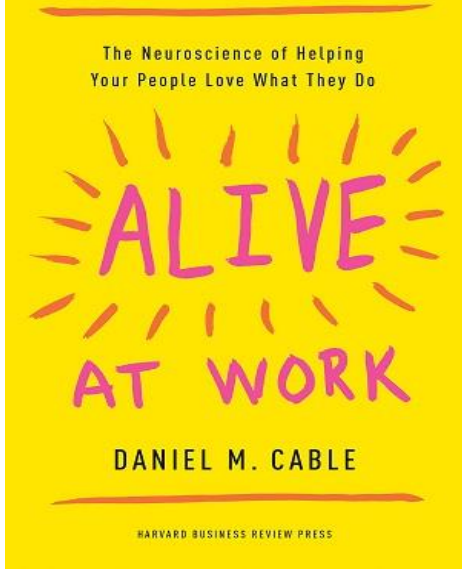
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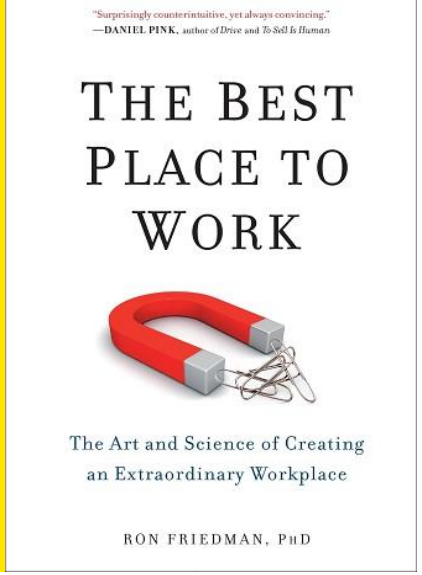
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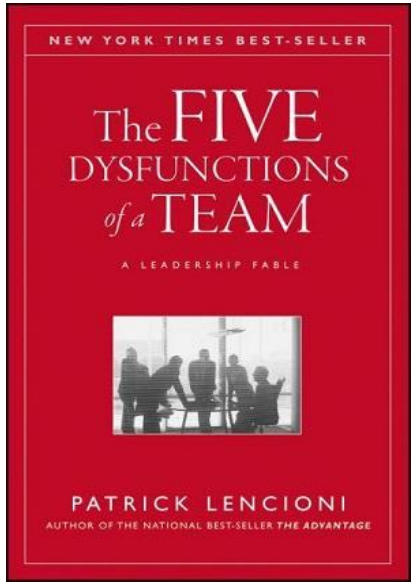
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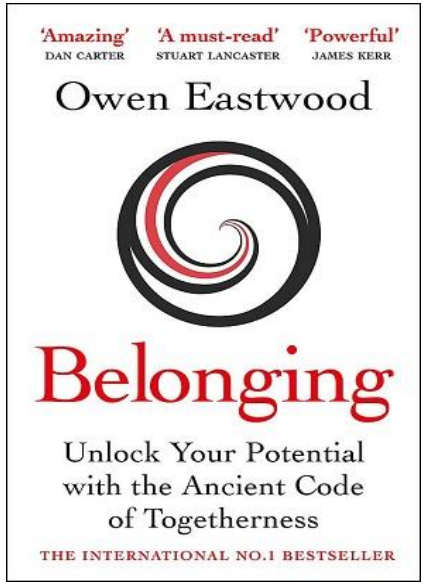
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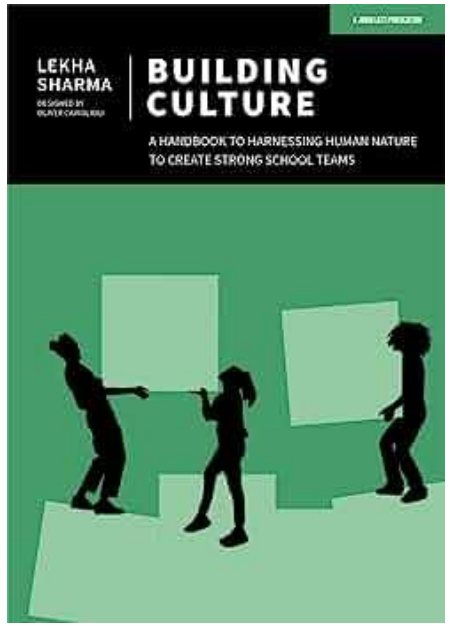
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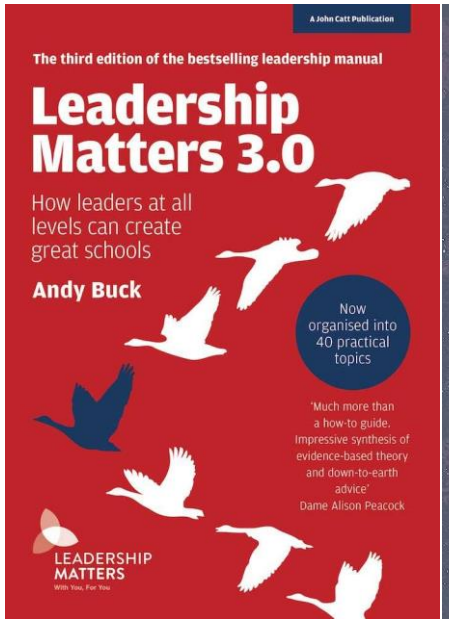
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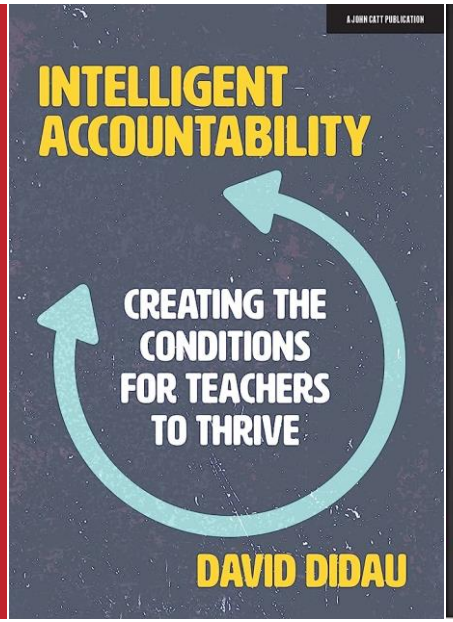
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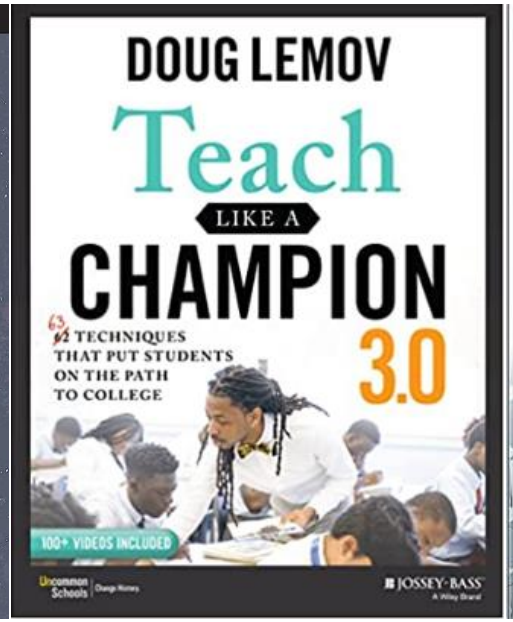
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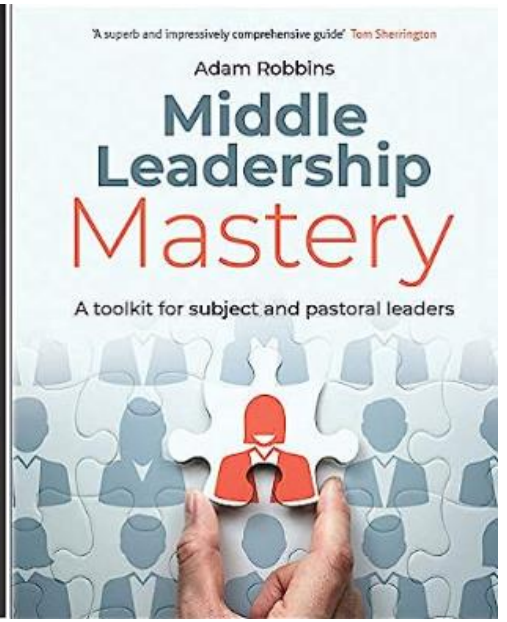
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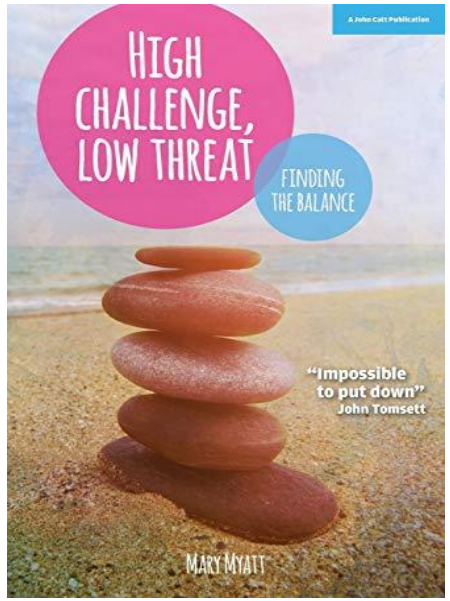
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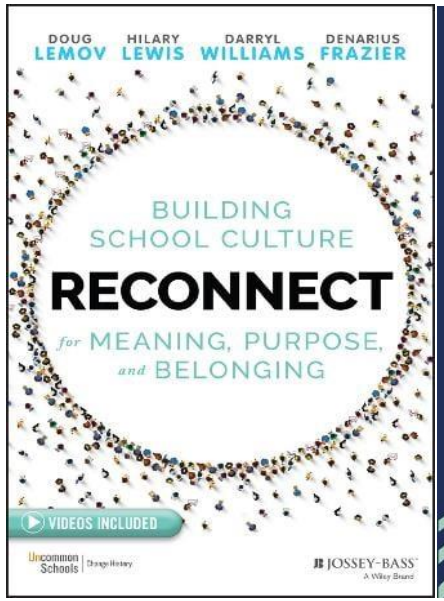
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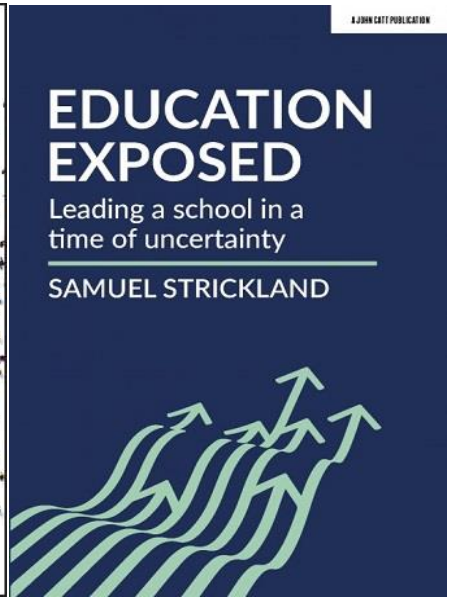
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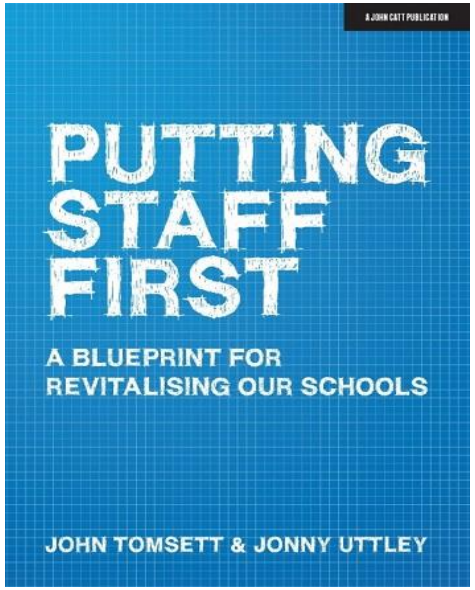
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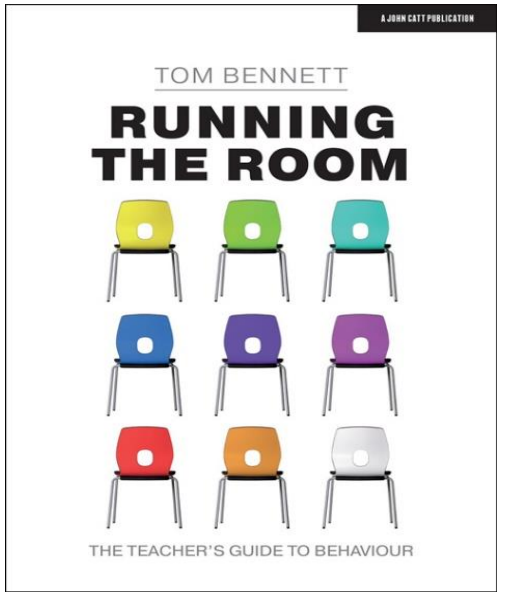
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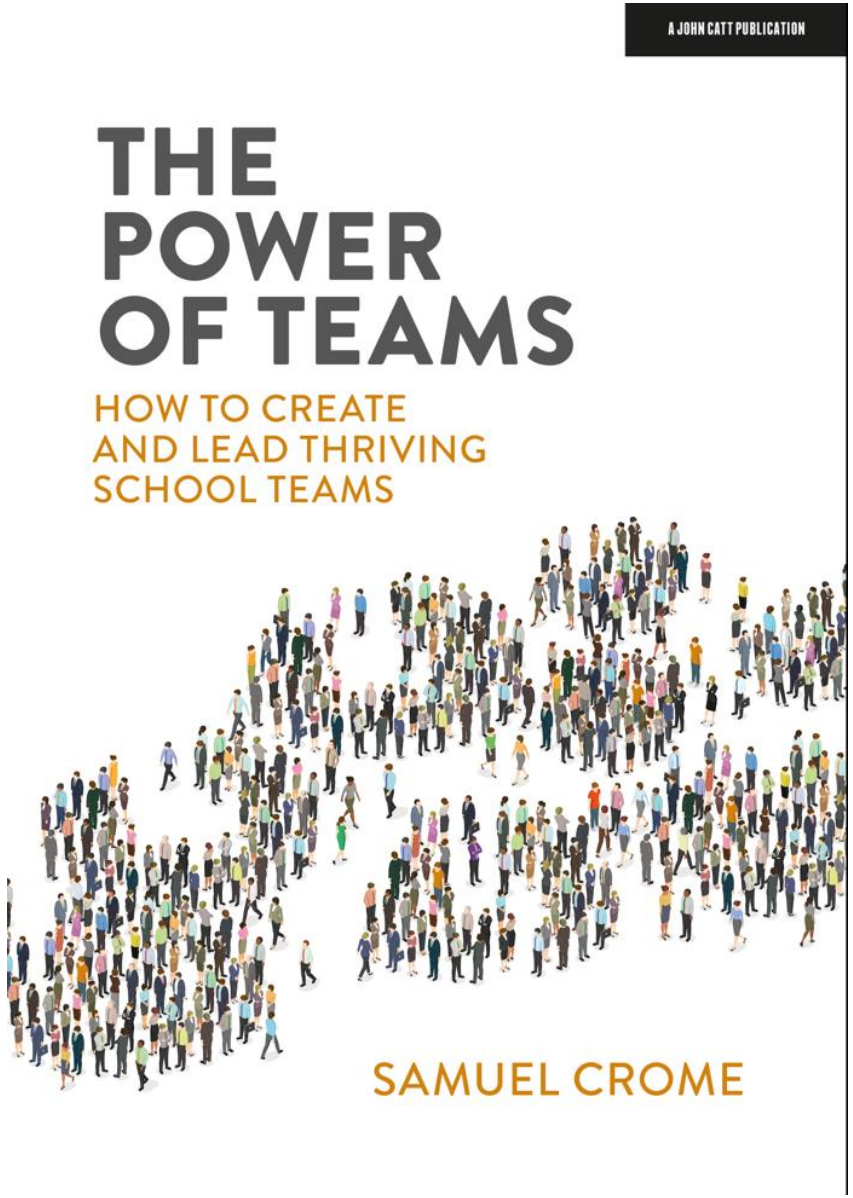

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