

Questions for leaders

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Answer these yourself rather than sending them round the team. The ones you draw a blank on are the interesting ones.

There is no score and no benchmark. The point is not to grade your management. It is to find out how much of what you believe about your team is actually knowledge, and how much is an impression formed under conditions you set.

Eight questions

1. Who on your team did their best work this year, and what was different about the conditions they were working in?

2. What do you actually know about how each person works, beyond what they are good at?

3. Which of your standing meetings would nobody schedule if it did not already exist?

4. When someone underperforms, how long do you spend on the conditions before you conclude something about the person?

5. Who has been on demanding work continuously, with no gap, for longer than you would have guessed?

6. What do you decide about people based on how they show up in a room you chose, at a time you set?

7. Which conditions on your team are genuinely fixed, and which ones has nobody questioned in years?

8. If someone needed a condition changed to do their best work, is there a way for them to ask that does not cost them anything?

A caution worth stating

Conditions can quietly track with protected characteristics. Needing to leave by five tracks with caregiving. Preferring written communication can track with disability or with speaking English as a second language.

So change the shape of the work, not the list of people you offer it to. If someone needs to leave by five, move the meeting. Do not quietly stop putting them forward for the engagement that makes careers.

What the research does and does not support

Matching conditions to a person is well evidenced for how people feel about their work. Across 172 studies, fit correlates with job satisfaction at .56 and with commitment at .51.

It is not evidenced for what people produce. The same analysis puts fit against actual job performance at .07. Where one person supplied both ratings it reaches .22. Where they did not, it is -.02.

Anyone selling you the second thing is citing the first.

One more number worth carrying. Fit against intending to quit is -.35. Fit against people actually leaving is -.14. Intent is not behaviour, and the gap between them is where a lot of confident retention claims live.

Sources and their limits are at unusually.me/resources

Free to use, copy and circulate.

A version built around how your firm actually staffs and reviews work is more useful than this one. Email leahgerber@outlook.com with the shape of your team and what you are trying to work out. Free. Nothing goes into a performance file and no individual gets scored.

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