What Nurse Leaders Can Learn From Google

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This issue includes many innovative nursing ideas. Most innovations, when carefully examined, are not new creative ideas but rather iterations of something that has already been done. Allen Gannet,[1] a creativity thought leader, describes in his book how creative ideas are often the products of individuals who have consumed large amounts of information about their areas of interest. They have developed what Gannett calls cultural awareness or a real-time ability to assess what is familiar, what is good, and what is a cliché. They can identify where ideas are on a creative curve and have outstanding pattern recognition and the ability to see exemplars.

One such exemplar that leaders in health care should pay attention to is the commitment that the Google executive team has made to develop their frontline managers and teams. For many years, leaders at Google dismissed the importance of the manager role. The philosophy was to hire the best performers and let teams self-manage. Google leaders were convinced that they were evolving a new management model that others could emulate. They launched research to prove their point that organizations with a professional workforce don't need frontline managers. Researchers outside of Google examined the quality of Google's current managers, looking at manager performance ratings and employee survey feedback about managers. The data indicated that managers did matter. Google teams with great managers were both happier and more productive.[2]

Google then began a quest called Project Oxygen to build the best managers for the Google workforce. They identified the essential qualities of great managers and designed development programs to develop those qualities in new leaders. One best practice is to delay manager training until the leader has been in their role for 45 to 90 days. Although, intuitively, it makes sense to prepare someone for a job *before* they start doing it, Google has found managers are most receptive to learning *after* they've had some time in the new role and gathered some experience upon which to reflect. One of the biggest challenges that managers have is getting good feedback. It is a problem that Google has tackled with their innovative manager feedback survey. The tools, facilitation guide, and slides are on their guide to manager development website.[3]

Google researchers applied a similar method to discover the secrets of effective teams at Google. The initiative was named Project Aristotle—a tribute to Aristotle's quote, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." The goal of this research was to examine the attributes of the most effective teams at Google. The hiring process at Google was built on the premise that if you hire great people and put them on teams together, then you will have outstanding teams. But these were not the outcomes that were found. There did not seem to be any clear patterns about what made for effective teams. Researchers who studied teams at Google found that it was less about who is on the team and more about how the team worked together.[4] The factor that most impacted team effectiveness is psychological safety, confirming what Amy Edmondson[5] learned in her work with health care teams. Google then began to develop tools to help teams to create psychological safety and address other team needs. These tools are available on their guide to team effectiveness site.[6]

Unlike many companies that do development work, Google has made its practices and leadership resources available to other organizations at no cost. It is rare when you find such comprehensive work that is available for free if not used for commercial purposes. Google had some of the best researchers and learning development experts consult on the resources they make publicly available. Why reinvent the wheel in developing your own programs around leader development and team effectiveness? Use the evidence-based materials available from Google. It is an innovation that is worth replicating.

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