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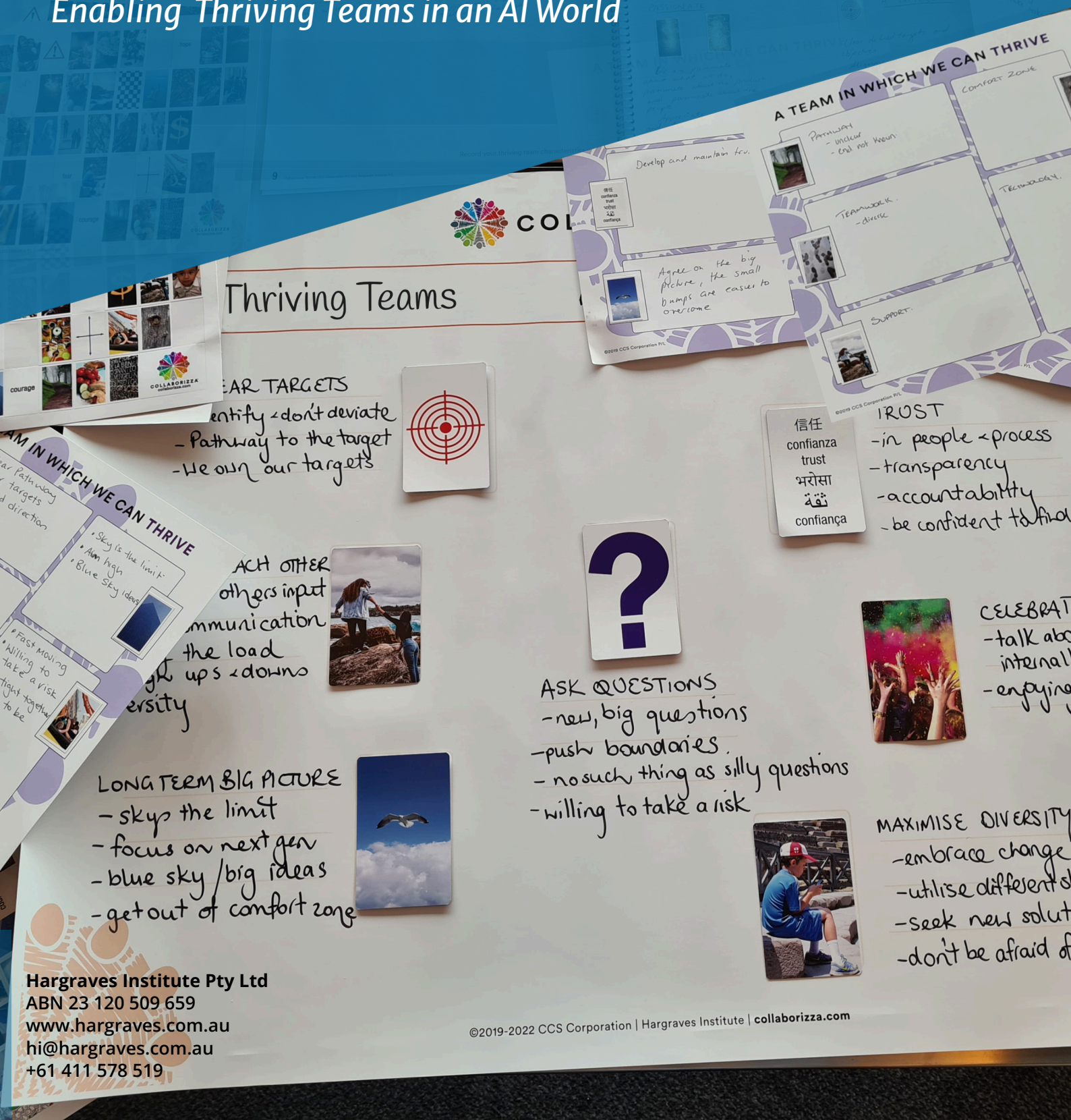
INSTITUTE

COLLABORATION 2.0

The research behind the Hargraves Collaboration Model

Enabling Thriving Teams in an AI World



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Preface

When we set out over a decade ago to research the key drivers of collaboration, we weren't starting from scratch. After all, Hargraves was built on a foundation of collaboration, and we'd already spent more than 10 years working alongside some of Australia's most innovative organisations, helping them share ideas and collective wisdom.

Rather, we sought a deeper understanding - the theory, data, and research to validate our practical experience. We wanted to confirm whether the evidence supported what we knew, and explore where it could take us.

The findings from this journey reinforced the importance of collaboration and led to the development of the Hargraves Collaboration Model. But little did we know how critical this framework would become in helping leaders, teams, and organisations thrive in an increasingly technology-based and AI-driven world.

I'd especially like to thank Tess Julian for her dedication to research and effort to consolidate years of work to bring this white paper to life.

Allan Ryan
Founder and Executive Director,
Hargraves Institute
Community, collaboration and innovation, since 2006

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or do you plan to be one someday?

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Introduction

While AI and automation are transforming the way work gets done, the role of human collaboration remains critical. Technology can process data and automate tasks but cannot yet match people's ability to generate creative solutions, solve complex problems, or explore ideas through deep discussion. In today's environment, teams that collaborate effectively - across functions, locations, and shifting priorities - are the ones that adapt faster, innovate better, and deliver stronger results.

This paper outlines why strengthening human collaboration is essential for success and how the Hargraves Collaboration Model offers a research-based framework with practical tools to achieve it.

> *"Artificial intelligence is not a substitute for human intelligence; it is a tool to amplify human creativity and ingenuity."*
>
> *- Fei-Fei Li, Co-Director, The Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence*

The Importance of Collaboration in the Modern Workplace

Collaboration, at its simplest, is working together toward a shared goal. While it sounds straightforward, the reality is more complex. Understanding what drives successful collaboration - and what undermines it - can be elusive. Critical success factors are often hidden, and potential pitfalls can easily go unnoticed. That's why we set out to investigate and develop clear, actionable guidelines to help people create and sustain healthy, high-performing collaboration.

Collaboration can take place within a single team, across departments, or even between organisations. It may be in-person or virtual, tied to a short-term project or embedded in everyday operations. Yet despite the abundance of digital tools and platforms, many employees still struggle to engage effectively, often feeling disconnected rather than empowered.

This is a serious challenge. Modern organisations must rapidly access skills and knowledge, adapt to change, and innovate to stay competitive - all of which rely on strong interpersonal connections and collaboration. With the rise of AI and automation, uniquely human strengths such as trust, communication, and creativity are more vital than ever. Without a robust collaborative culture, these objectives are far harder to achieve.

While organisations often invest heavily in tools and systems to enhance collaboration, technology alone is not enough. A collaborative mindset is critical. **At Hargraves, we champion a people-first approach, recognising that connection, confidence, and trust will become even more essential as the world continues to evolve.**

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Challenges for Teams

It's often assumed that, given the right tools and opportunities, people will naturally collaborate - after all, we humans are social beings. Yet experience and research show otherwise. Studies suggest that internal collaboration projects are more likely to fail than succeed.

Many organisations introduce new tools and processes but overlook the underlying human factors essential for collaboration: communication, leadership, shared purpose, and change readiness. As yet, these foundational elements cannot be replicated or replaced by technology.

In addition, skilled professionals sometimes hesitate to fully embrace collaborative teamwork. Concerns about status, conflicting individual and collective goals, and unfamiliarity with new tools can create real barriers. Even more so as teams become more distributed. New strategies are needed to foster cohesion, strengthen interpersonal bonds, and maintain high performance in teams.

In an AI-enabled workplace, these challenges only intensify. Technology can accelerate tasks but cannot build trust, define shared purpose, or create a sense of belonging. **As AI takes over more routine work, there's even greater demand for humans to excel in the areas where people, not machines, must lead.**

Internal collaboration projects fail at a rate of 35-75% depending on factors like culture, leadership and project complexity:

- **Cross-functional teams: ~60-75%** fail due to misalignment and siloed work (Gratton & Erickson, 2007).
- **Innovation projects:** 70% of internal innovation initiatives fail to scale (Tabrizi, 2019).
- **Agile teams:** While agile reduces failure rates, **35-50%** of teams still struggle due to unclear roles and priorities (Denning, 2018).

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A People-First Approach to Collaboration

Drawing on our research, real-world experience, and deep collaboration with clients and members, we created the Hargraves Collaboration Model - a proven framework that turns theory into action. Refined over years of practical use, it equips leaders with tools and strategies to foster genuine collaboration and build thriving, high-performing teams.

The Hargraves Collaboration Model

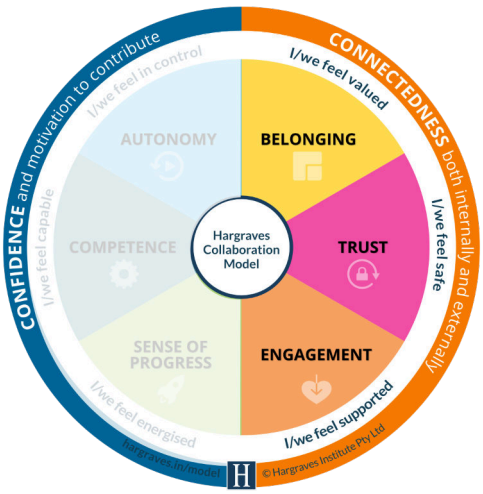
In our experience, successful collaboration is built on two key attributes: **Confidence** and **Connectedness**. That is, when an individual feels secure in their role and understands how to engage with others, collaboration thrives.

Further, we identified three building blocks for each of these attributes:

Confidence comes from:

1. **Autonomy:** The ability to have control over one's work. While traditional hierarchies limit autonomy, modern team structures offer opportunities for distributed decision-making, if properly leveraged.
2. **Competence:** The assurance that one can contribute meaningfully. Team members don't need to be experts but must feel capable and open to learning. A lack of competence breeds defensiveness and disengagement.
3. **A Sense of Progress:** The motivation from clear goals and constructive feedback. Without visible progress, morale and engagement suffer.

Connectedness comes from:



1. **Belonging:** The sense of being a valued part of a larger whole. Fostering shared purpose, mutual respect, and common interests in diverse teams helps build bonds beyond default tribal preferences.
2. **Trust:** The assurance that contributions are valued and that psychological safety exists. Trust enables open communication, risk-taking, and collaboration.
3. **Engagement:** Emotional commitment to the team's purpose and good relationships. A lack of engagement impedes progress and reduces team effectiveness.

These six building blocks form the foundation of the Hargraves Collaboration Model, addressing the human dimensions of collaboration that technology cannot yet replicate.

The Research Behind The Hargraves Model

Our model synthesises leading research and industry insights to identify essential elements for healthy collaboration. We focus on key drivers rather than traditional outcomes-based engagement metrics.

In developing the framework, we drew upon the following:

Self-Determination Theory[1] *(Deci & Ryan, SDT)* identifies three core psychological needs:

- **Autonomy:** Feeling in control of one's actions.
- **Competence:** Feeling effective and capable.
- **Relatedness:** Feeling connected and valued.

This theory shows that when these needs are met, individuals experience higher motivation, engagement, and performance.

These factors are amplified in environments of trust and psychological safety, qualities that AI tools cannot create but human leadership must intentionally build.

> *"Strong basic need satisfaction directly predicts trust in the corporation, perceived quality of manager feedback, the belief that there are opportunities to contribute your perspective, the recognition of advancement opportunities, feelings of security, satisfaction with pay and benefits, overall job satisfaction (Deci et al., 1989; Ryan et al., 2010), and a positive passion for work."*
>
> *(Spehar, Forest, & Stenseng, 2016; Vallerand, 2015)*

Darrel Mann[2] (a Hargraves expert who has influenced our thinking over many years), provided further insights into what drives **positive collaboration**. He identified the importance of pleasure seeking and pain avoidance as the two main human instincts we apply to working with others. This results in the three core behavioural drivers he defined: a desire for autonomy, a greater sense of belonging and the desire to feel competent. *Mann, Darrell and Ford, Ben; Everythink. A Gravesian Approach to Getting More Out of Yourself and Your Relationships with Others, 2020, IRF Publishing.*

The Progress Principle[3] *(Amabile & Kramer)* introduces the concept of the "inner work life" of employees - their emotions, perceptions, and motivations.

After studying the daily journal entries of over 12,000 employees across various organisations, Amabile and Kramer discovered that the most powerful motivator in the workplace is a sense of progress. Specifically, the feeling that you have a goal and are moving towards it. It doesn't have to be a grand, audacious goal, even incremental achievements in meaningful work ignite creativity, engagement, and resilience.

These inner experiences - the emotions, motivations, and perceptions that drive behaviour - are still uniquely human.

[1] http://selfdeterminationtheory.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2018_RigbyRyan_HR.pdf
[2] https://www.systematic-innovation.com/darrell-mann
[3] https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/profile.aspx?facId=6409

The Research Behind The Hargraves Model

Because collaboration is about interdependence, trust is also crucial. When you depend on others, you become vulnerable. Therefore, it is essential to feel psychologically safe in order to rely on those around you.

But trust is tricky. It's hard to earn and easy to lose. Building a trustworthy team environment means addressing culture, systems and practices on different levels.

The dimensions of trust at work have been researched and identified by *Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerrer*[4], as follows:

- **Calculus-Based Trust:** Trust based on reputation, qualifications, and proven competence.
- **Relational Trust:** Trust developed through repeated successful interactions.
- **Institutional Trust:** Trust fostered through structured mechanisms such as contracts and processes.

Newell & Swan further categorised trust into:

- **Companion Trust:** Based on goodwill and friendships.
- **Competence Trust**: Rooted in belief in a colleague's expertise.
- **Commitment Trust:** Established through formal agreements.

We introduced our own interpretation of these dimensions of trust:

[4] http://credit.ihmc.ens.fr/documents/trust%20management.pdf

The Research Behind The Hargraves Model

Costa et al. (2001) found that high-trust teams exhibit greater cooperation, problem-solving ability, and resilience in challenging situations.

Similarly, *Amy Edmondson's*[5] concept of **psychological safety** highlights the importance of creating environments where individuals feel safe to speak up, take risks, and learn without fear of criticism or punishment. These capabilities are indispensable for both innovation and the collaboration process.

Finally, research highlights that **strong interpersonal relationships** underpin effective collaboration. People who connect with team members, interact across teams and have healthy internal and external networks are engaged, which is a prerequisite for thriving teams.

- Research by *Salas et al. (2015)* on team effectiveness emphasises that clear, open communication underpins successful teams. Effective interpersonal relationships ensure information flows smoothly, reducing misunderstandings and improving decision-making processes.
- *Jehn (1995)* showed that while task conflict can be constructive, relationship conflict often undermines teamwork. Strong interpersonal bonds help minimise harmful conflicts while encouraging healthy debate.
- *Kozlowski & Ilgen (2006)* found that teams with strong interpersonal bonds are more adaptable and resilient, performing better in high-pressure environments.
- *Gallup (2017)* cite that employees who have a close friend at work are seven times more likely to be engaged in their jobs. Positive interpersonal relationships boost morale and reduce turnover rates.
- *Maslach & Leiter (2016)* linked positive social connections at work to lower burnout and enhanced overall wellbeing.
- In an MIT Sloan Management Review, *Cross, Cowen, Vertucci & Thomas (2019)* highlighted that engaged employees actively build networks beyond their immediate teams, which improves knowledge-sharing and reduces bottlenecks.

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[5] https://www.forbes.com/video/6330184732112/the-science-of-failing-well-according-to-author-amy-edmondson/

Conclusion

In today's AI-driven world, a people-first approach is more important than ever. While AI can process information and automate tasks with unprecedented speed and accuracy, it cannot build trust, show empathy, foster belonging, or create genuine human connection.

Real collaboration isn't just about tools or processes; it relies on developing healthy behaviours and embedding effective habits within teams. As AI continues to advance, our uniquely human, emotional intelligence is becoming a critical driver of business success.

Based on years of research and real-world experience, the Hargraves Collaboration Model provides a structured yet flexible framework to help teams build confidence, foster connections, and unlock their full potential.

Through our related tools and strategies, leaders and organisations prioritise autonomy, competence, progress, belonging, trust, and engagement, building high-performing teams that drive innovation, adaptability, and success. Ensuring that their people, not just their processes, thrive.

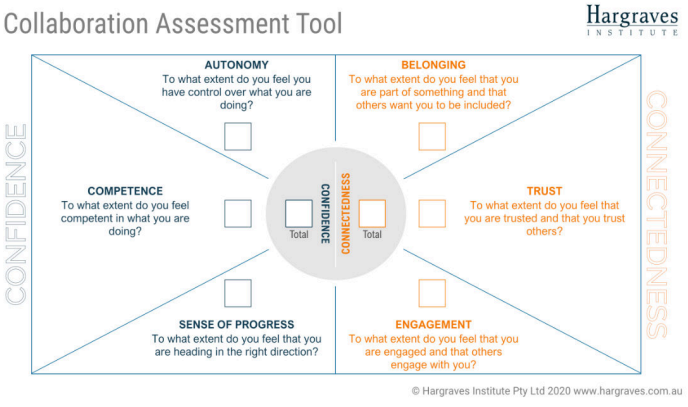
Where do you start?

We know that getting started can be the hardest part. That's why we don't just deliver solutions - we empower you to take that first step with confidence.

Collaboration Assessment Tool

Great teamwork starts with you. But how ready - and willing - are you to collaborate effectively? The Collaboration Assessment Tools asks six quick questions to uncover your collaboration strengths and highlight areas for growth.

Visit our website to download the Collaboration Assessment Tool[6] and get started.



[6] https://www.hargraves.com.au/home/working-collaboratively/#CAT

From Insight to Action

Collaboration QTools

Based on the six collaboration building blocks, QTools are visual canvases that help teams explore confidence and connectedness - individually and together - across a range of topics.

Each tool uses open-ended questions to spark reflection and discussion, creating a visual “heat map” of team dynamics. By using a trusted process to reveal strengths and surface gaps, QTools guide teams toward meaningful, practical improvements.

Our suite of QTools cover topics including:

- Customer Experience
- Digital Collaboration
- Structural Barriers to Diversity and Inclusion
- Individuals In Teams
- Strategic Execution
- Collaborative Leadership
- Inclusive Leadership

To help you put it into practice, start with the **Team Collaboration QTool** on the next page. For deeper insight, projects can include customised QTools tailored to your team's needs.

Thriving Teams Program

Most leaders are expected to drive strategy but often lack the tools to turn plans into results. Thriving Teams closes that gap.

Backed by 20 years of research, this practical, flexible program helps leaders unlock their team’s potential by working **on** the team not just **in** the team.

Instead of overhauling structures, it strengthens collaboration and alignment to tackle common blockers like misalignment, poor communication, and siloed operations.

Designed for leaders responsible for delivery, not just strategy, Thriving Teams equips you with the tools and habits to build trust, improve communication, and drive lasting impact. Because plans don’t deliver results - people do.

Explore the Thriving Teams Program

Team Collaboration QTool

Hargraves INSTITUTE

Use this Question Tool with your team to explore diverse perspectives, spark meaningful conversations, and agree on actions.

CONFIDENCE and motivation to contribute

CONNECTEDNESS internally and externally

AUTONOMY	COMPETENCE	SENSE OF PROGRESS	BELONGING	TRUST	ENGAGEMENT
The team has control of work processes	**The team has the mastery to succeed**	**Every team member understands the project purpose and milestones**	**The team feels proud of being part of something bigger**	**Team members trust each other and the organisation**	**Team members connect with others internally and externally**
ROLES How can we ensure team members understand their roles and the roles of others?	**SKILLS** How can we ensure we have the right technical and interpersonal skills to complete the project/work?	**GOALS** How can we ensure team members fully understand the goals and purpose of collaborative work?	**INCLUSION** How can we ensure that every voice is equally heard and opportunities are fairly distributed?	**HELPFULNESS** How can we prioritise giving and asking for support when needed?	**RESPONSIVENESS** How can we ensure team members respond appropriately to each other and other teams, online and in person?
FREEDOM How can we pursue our goal using our own processes and resources within the organisational strategy?	**SHARING** How can we encourage the sharing of knowledge and skills with each other and other teams?	**MOTIVATION** How can we maintain motivation and inspiration within the team?	**RESPECT** How can we ensure team behaviours are respectful, transparent and affable?	**PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY** How can we make team members feel safe when asking questions, challenging others and contributing ideas?	**COLLABORATION TOOLS** How can we ensure team members use collaboration tools positively and effectively?
INTERDEPENDENCIES How can we work well with other teams and sections of the organisation?	**LEARNING DISPOSITION** How can we learn from other team members, teams and organisations?	**FEEDBACK** How can we ensure team members get constructive feedback to boost individual performance?	**DIVERSITY** How can we make the most of different perspectives, lived experiences and ways of thinking?	**SYSTEMS** How can we be sure that the organisation's systems and processes support our team and team members?	**OPENNESS** How can we maintain healthy curiosity, particularly when working remotely?
RECOGNITION How can we celebrate individual and team contributions?	**JUDGEMENT** How can we ensure we make good and speedy decisions using sound processes?	**ACCOUNTABILITY** How can we ensure we meet milestones and are accountable for our work?	**DIVERGENCE** How can we respectfully manage disagreement and avoid "groupthink" and hostility?	**ETHICS** How can we ensure that both the team and the organisation uphold the highest ethical standards?	**EXTERNAL NETWORKS** How can we build positive external networks to get ideas and insights?

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1. **Define the team you are referring to.** Your work team, a project team, your leadership team, etc.
2. **Quietly read each question** and choose (tick) those you think are important. (Cross out any questions which aren't relevant.)
3. **Looking at the questions you've chosen,** circle those you think are most important right now. (If you do them well, these are your strengths.)
4. **As a team, discuss your choices.** Agree on 3 or 4 'most important' and think about actions you can take. Hint: to kick-start, look for quick wins.

About Hargraves Institute

Hargraves Institute is Australia's first innovation consultancy, built on community and collaboration.

What sets us apart? Two decades of research and experience, a People-First approach grounded in four pillars - individuals, processes, ideas, and collaboration - and a suite of uncommon tools that seamlessly complement your existing methods. Together, these foundations unlock potential, strengthen teams, and embed strategies for sustainable success.

We know that getting started is often the hardest part. That's why we don't just deliver solutions - we equip leaders and teams with the tools, skills, and frameworks to take the first step with confidence, tackle complex challenges, align priorities, and navigate what comes next.

Through expert facilitation, coaching, and practical resources, we engage everyone, strengthening culture to build diverse, high-performing teams. In doing so, we create the conditions for healthy collaboration that drives innovation, enhances performance, and enables teams to execute strategy with clarity and confidence.

Rooted in insight and rigour, our Approach includes:

- **Better Questions** – Equip leaders to ask the right questions, address issues safely, spark ideas, and drive action.
- **Collaboration Model** – Foster the habits and behaviours to build thriving teams.
- **Innovation Mindset & 123 Innovate (See Think Do)** – Help teams identify opportunities and think through ideas and challenges.
- **Storytelling and Recognition** – Make innovation visible and valued to strengthen team culture.
- **Conversation Framework** – Ensure every voice is heard to build more engaged, inclusive teams.
- **DECODE** – Provide a structured method for solving problems through creativity, collaboration, and innovation.
- **Serious Fun** – Increase engagement, productivity, and well-being through purposeful, energising activities.

Discover the Hargraves difference – uncommon tools, real impact.

Community, collaboration and innovation, since 2006.

Explore uncommon tools and a People-First Approach for your team. Reach out to start the conversation.

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