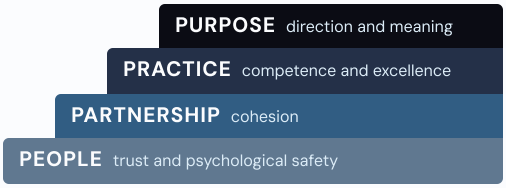
The 4P Framework

The five lenses explain. The 4P Framework says what to build, and in what order.



Built from the bottom up

Each level depends on the one beneath it. A team can't cohere if its members won't expose themselves to each other. It can't get good at hard work if people hide their mistakes, or commit to a direction it suspects is a trick.

Diagnosed from the top down

A missed objective looks like a Purpose problem. It is often a Practice problem underneath, and that is often a People problem: nobody told the leader early that the work was off track.

LEVEL 1 · THE FOUNDATION

People

Trust and psychological safety

Trust between two people, and safety in the group. People do not share information with a leader they do not trust. Predictability is the raw material of trust. It builds slowly and falls fast.

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SEEN FROM OUTSIDE

Does bad news travel up early? What happens to the person who carries it?

MEASURE

Who brings you bad news, and how fast. In a high-trust unit you hear early, from the person who owns the problem. In a low-trust unit you hear late, from your own boss.

BUILD IT

- Make the first move. Extend a specific, limited trust, with a date to review it.
- Make fewer early promises, and keep all of them.
- Find what people doubt: your competence, your honesty or your concern for them.[1] Each yields to something different.
- Repair a breach by its kind. Apologize when you were at fault; deny when you were not.[2] Then diagnose, reform and check.[3]

WARNING SIGNS

- People check with each other before telling you anything.
- Close supervision, less reporting, more suspicion: a loop.
- One public punishment for honest reporting changes what everyone reports.

LEVEL 2

Partnership

Cohesion

How far members stick together and commit to the group's work. It grows from repeated cooperation among people who already feel safe with each other. Winning builds teams at least as much as teams build wins.

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SEEN FROM OUTSIDE

Do units share information when sharing costs them something?

MEASURE

Behavior, not climate surveys. Good signs: unprompted help, open argument about the work, easy joking, people covering for each other.

BUILD IT

- Size teams on purpose: about 5, about 15, up to about 150. Five people have 10 pairs; fifteen have 105.
- Keep teams together long enough that people expect to work together again.
- Create regular rhythms and shared effort. Dose challenge so it is bounded and survivable.
- Know your bridges to other teams, and build a second and third for each.

WARNING SIGNS

- Information sharing stops.
- Conflict turns personal.
- Voluntary collaboration dries up.
- The team bonds against management.
- Free riders go unchallenged, and the conscientious notice.

LEVEL 3

Practice

Competence and excellence

It rests on trust and cohesion. People practice hard things in front of others only when mistakes are safe to make. Confidence has to be earned from verified evidence and stay tied to it.

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SEEN FROM OUTSIDE

What does the organization do over and over, intended or not?

MEASURE

Process as well as outcomes. The gap between a person's skill and their own rating of it. Error rates after people leave.

BUILD IT

- Raise difficulty in steps: normal conditions, then the unexpected, then under stress.
- Write a readiness list and check it on the day, out loud.
- Run after-action reviews: what was meant to happen, what happened, why, and what changes.
- Before someone leaves, ask what they do that nobody else knows how to do.

WARNING SIGNS

- Avoiding outside assessment.
- Talk shifts from analysis to explanation.
- Risky commitments called routine.
- Training cut. Challenger launched about 15 degrees colder than any launch before it.

LEVEL 4 · THE TOP

Purpose

Shared direction and meaning

A shared answer to why the work matters and what end state it serves, concrete enough to decide with. Meaning without clarity gives enthusiasm with no direction. Clarity without meaning gives compliance.

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SEEN FROM OUTSIDE

What does the organization refuse to trade away when two goals collide?

MEASURE

Decision speed, escalation rate and friction between teams. Rising speed with falling escalation shows purpose taking hold.

BUILD IT

- Two-manager test: give the statement to two managers facing a hard trade-off. If they reach different answers, rewrite it.
- Ask a first-line supervisor what the goal is this year, and what she would do if two goals collided.
- Hand over decisions in four steps: decision domains, boundaries, feedback, support.

WARNING SIGNS

- The scoreboard disagrees with the speech. At Wells Fargo, the cross-sell metric became the purpose.
- A metric far from what it measures. Alcoa's injury rate was close; up to 10% of the cross-sold accounts had been unused for a year.

Check a decision, in this order

1 People	Whose trust is at stake, in which direction, and what would count as proof to them?
2 Partnership	Which relationships have to hold for the decision to work, and has anyone tested them?
3 Practice	Is the competence real, and is it hiding a weakness at a lower level?
4 Purpose	Which direction does the decision serve, and can the trust, cohesion and skill below it carry it?

Purpose comes last here, though first in most speeches. In a crisis, deciding alone is acceptable for a while. The trap is to keep commanding after the crisis has passed.

Counter the effects of power

People who are paid to disagree with you.

Regular contact with the front line.

Data that does not pass through the people who report to you.

The framework fixes what must be true at each level. **It leaves the methods to the leader.** A quiet, analytical leader and a loud, warm one can both build People and Partnership.

The 4P Framework supports reflection and development. P×E is not a validated hiring, promotion, or performance-prediction tool.

From *The 5 Lenses of Leadership: How Biology, Behavior, and Complexity Shape the Way We Lead* by G. Damon Wells, 2026. amazon.com/dp/B0HL77YNY3

1. Frances Frei and Anne Morriss's trust triangle: logic, authenticity and empathy. The book applies it to Uber in 2017.
2. Peter Kim and colleagues, research on repairing competence and integrity breaches.
3. Nicole Gillespie and Graham Dietz's four-stage model of trust repair in organizations.

Which level is breaking on your team? Talk it through on a 30-minute call.

Book a call

calendly.com/summaryleadership/30min