An Analysis of Keeping Google “Googley”

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There are few companies in the world that are successful to the point where it becomes difficult to have a conversation about business success without mentioning them. There are even fewer companies that have this success while operating with a culture of playfulness, creativity, passion, and innovation. Google is one of these few.

In the case study *Keeping Google “Googley,”* interesting aspects of Google’s business are revealed, giving insight to how the company continues to maintain its position as a worldwide leader of business and technology. A number of questions come to mind when reading the text. The following are my answers to these fascinating questions.

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“**Google was committed to developing the perfect search engine that would understand exactly what the user means and give back exactly what the user wants** in the form of a fast, accurate, easy-to-use service that could be accessed from anywhere.”

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1. Kim Scott asked herself, “What else can we do to ensure that Google remains the same kind of entrepreneurial place that excited me in 2004?” What would you suggest?

I believe there are two undertakings that are pivotal in order to keep Google’s entrepreneurial culture intact: culturally control communication and allow time for innovation.

Effective communication is one of the most important parts of any relationship, and within an organization there are many relationships. According to the article, from Google’s very beginning “the culture was designed to encourage collegiality and to break down barriers to rapid idea development.” In my understanding, Google’s founders were looking to encourage strong relationships to form with an emphasis on open communication. Strong, positive relationships allow a person to maintain an optimistic attitude. An optimistic attitude, I feel, is the most important employee asset for a company like Google. Basically, one attribute leads to another. Communication breeds strong relationships, which breeds “can do” attitudes. A combination of these three attributes leads to focus on innovation and rapid idea development while having fun.

As Google continues to grow, it must foster the excitement level that Kim Scott felt. That excitement is directly linked to rapid idea development. Without excitement, producing ideas can be a struggle. Feeling excitement daily at work requires a special culture. For instance, organizations with an abundance of mid-level managers may lack this culture, which thrives on optimal communication. Conversely, organizations with a flat hierarchy encourage more input from everyone, despite seniority. These kinds of organizations require great communication between everyone and add to the entrepreneurial atmosphere by encouraging new endeavors without always having to seek the approval of a manager. By eliminating micromanaging, employees feel more open to expressing their original ideas, whether it’s how to perform a task better, improve a process, or create a product. Employees at Google must be aware of the culture they work in and direct it. Maintaining focus on smart, effective communication will be one key duty for Google to remain an exciting, entrepreneurial place.
The other key to success is allowing time for innovation. As the text states, “Creativity and innovation were considered core values at Google, and Google executives sought ‘continuous innovation’ at every level of the company.” The most important piece of information from this statement is that Google needs continuous innovation from every level of the company. How does every employee have time for continuous innovation? In my experience, it is nearly impossible to make time for innovation while on the job, but is very possible if a person is given time for innovation. Google engineers are encouraged to use 20% of their time to focus on whatever they want. They are encouraged to think, innovate, and present ideas without fears of failure or repercussion, fears that may be evident in organizations without a focus on innovation. Anybody can come up with a great idea. Of course, having the resources of Google and being allowed time to tinker, develop prototypes, and present findings helps a great idea come to fruition. Thus, I believe continuing to allow employees to pursue passions of innovation is an important strategy for the company if it hopes to remain an exciting, entrepreneurial place in the future.

2. Look at Exhibit 2. Pick out one of the “Google’s Ten Things” and write about what it means to you.

In the list of Google’s Ten Things, “You can be serious without a suit” appears as number nine. This means, very literally for me, that wearing a suit or dressing in business attire is not necessary to be taken seriously at Google. I believe with this statement, Google shows that people should be judged on the quality of their work and their ideas, not on their appearance. Google encourages its employees to be comfortable and relaxed, but still energetic and astute. Comfortableness is a part of Google’s culture, so having a formal dress code would not fit; seriousness still does, but only as it is intertwined with innovative thinking and a casual atmosphere.

In my experience, dress codes reflect business attitudes. I’ve worked for a bank; a ladder manufacturer; a medium-sized advertising agency; a small design firm; and an international health supplement company. With every position, I’ve worked in marketing communications. In every instance, the dress code has affected the culture of the place. Positioned on opposite ends of the spectrum, the bank and the small design firm have very different cultures. The bank required men to wear suits and ties. The design firm has no dress code; employees are encouraged to dress however they feel comfortable. This might be a way to control the culture of an organization, but in my estimation, it also effectively kills creativity by making some people uncomfortable. As a graphic designer, I sat at my desk most days, never meeting with people outside the organization. Wearing a suit seemed unnecessary, and it usually put me in a bad mood, especially on a hot day. This may not seem important, but as a designer, my focus should have been on my work, not on my attire. Quite possibly, my productivity suffered, even if only minimally.

My current position at the small design firm seems very comfortable. The managers encourage people to be themselves and act responsibly. There’s never talk of how someone dresses; there’s only talk of how people perform. I believe my company shares this one of the “Ten Things” with Google, and it works!
3. Laszlo Bock, Vice President of People Development, said, “We hire people who are learners – we want people who can infer meaning from what goes on around them.” What do you think of Google’s hiring criteria like intelligence, flexibility, and initiative? Is there anything missing?

I believe that Google’s hiring criteria is tremendous, and it really shows in the performance and growth of the company. A certain level of intelligence is necessary to have success. Some people are able to make up for a lack of intelligence with hard work and determination. However, because of Google’s business, I think intelligence is a key attribute.

In regard to flexibility, I believe it is also a key attribute because of the rapid pace at which Google moves and the rapid pace of technological innovation in general nowadays. A person working for Google must be open to change. He or she must work flexibly with coworkers and within ever-evolving situations.

The criteria of demonstrating initiative might be the most important. I believe this is the one attribute that can set a person apart amongst a group of top performers. If taking initiative is always a top priority, things get done quicker, easier, and better.

A couple items that might be missing from Google’s hiring criteria are that every employee should be tech-savvy and have the ability to learn quickly. Because of the industry within which Google operates, every person working there must absolutely understand technology and be able to evolve with it.

Because of the culture at Google, people are expected to operate with a certain level of independence, so hiring persons who are quick learners is very important. Supervisors at Google do not have time to continually teach an employee who is having difficulty catching on. Of course, there should be an initial period of time of adjustment, but each new employee needs to be dedicated to getting “up to speed.” A learner has this dedication; a quick learner has this dedication and excels at Google.
4. Creativity and innovation are thought of as part of the Google culture and are considered core values. Why are these factors so important to Google’s success?

Google is an overachieving company. Creativity and innovation are exceptionally important to Google’s success because these attributes allow employees to have freedom of expression, thus aiding Google to stay on the cutting edge of technology, information, and business. I consider these two attributes to be “wildcard” attributes; they aren’t easily measured and they are completely directed by the way a person thinks. Because of this, they seem difficult to release in daily business tasks for most people. In my estimation, the difficulty is created by rigid business practices and lack of time dedicated toward nurturing creativity and innovative thinking. Google works against these activities! It is the model for casual business atmosphere, creativity, and innovation. These factors are enormously important for a company like Google that has made its mark by “thinking outside the box.”

5. Luis Arbulu said “We have executive meetings where we ask ourselves, ‘If it all came to a screeching halt, what would we do differently?’” What would you suggest to Mr. Arbulu?

I’d suggest to Mr. Arbulu that if Google’s growth came to a screeching halt, Google still needs to keep itself “Googley.” It cannot abandon its core elements. People are attracted to Google’s culture and the way it does business; the best and brightest people seek employment with Google sometimes solely because of its reputation. After a screeching halt, Google could change various ways the business operates without changing the culture. A tighter control of finances and a prioritization of projects could keep Google in the right place to succeed during a slow growth period or an economic downturn. Keeping employees and customers first is the most important thing to be cognizant of in a company like Google. Putting them first is what sets Google apart; it’s what makes Google “Googley.”

Conclusion

Google seems to be doing things right. Its founders’ decisions in the beginning have paid off. By focusing on the internal culture, management has created a great place to work. Growth has been incredible, and employee morale is tops for companies worldwide because of the excitement Google creates within its walls. With creativity and innovation treated as the most important values within the company and by hiring people with intelligence, flexibility, and initiative, Google should be positioned well for the future.