ANALYZING THE TEAM-BUILDING PRACTICES: INTEGRATING THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF FACILITATING CREATIVE THINKING BY LEADERS

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Barkova K. O. Analyzing the Team-Building Practices: Integrating Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Facilitating Creative Thinking by Leaders

The aim of this article is to integrate theoretical and practical approaches to team building as a tool that can enhance the creative thinking of teams through purposeful facilitation by leaders. The analysis, systematization, and synthesis of contemporary scientific publications reveal that team building creates the team's «capacity assets», yet their conversion into creative outcomes occurs only through mechanisms of psychological safety and communicative behavior, which leaders support through specific facilitation actions. The study demonstrates that the key «bottlenecks» are the fragmentation of practices, insufficient operationalization of leaders' «micro-actions», and the sensitivity of creative interaction to the hybrid context. The scientific novelty of the work lies in the proposal of the practical C-TEAM protocol, which combines team-building functions with a sequence of facilitation of creative thinking during everyday work discussions, as well as in the development of practically oriented recommendations for leadership facilitation actions that support the balance of divergence and convergence, reduce interpersonal risks, and enhance the quality of idea synthesis. The practical significance of the obtained results lies in the possibility of using the proposed logic and protocol by team leaders to improve the effectiveness of creative problem-solving in hybrid interaction settings. Prospects for further research in this area include the empirical testing of the efficiency of C-TEAM in various industries and types of teams, comparison of results for hybrid, fully offline, and online formats, as well as clarification of the conditions under which specific leadership facilitation actions have the greatest impact on psychological safety, communication behavior, and the quality of creative outcomes.

Keywords: team building, creative thinking, facilitation, leadership, psychological safety, hybrid teams, communication behavior, design thinking.

Fig.: 1. Tabl.: 2. Bibl.: 12.

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Баркова К. О. Аналіз практик командоутворення: інтеграція теоретичних і практичних аспектів фасилітації креативного мислення лідерами

Мета статті полягає в інтеграції теоретичних і практичних підходів до командоутворення (тимбілдингу) як інструменту, що може підсилювати креативне мислення команд за умови цілеспрямованої фасилітації з боку лідера. У процесі аналізу, систематизації та узагальнення сучасних наукових публікацій розкрито, що командоутворення формує «активи спроможності» команди, однак їх перетворення на творчі результати відбувається лише через механізми психологічної безпеки та комунікаційної поведінки, які лідер підтримує конкретними фасилітаційними діями. У результаті дослідження показано, що ключовими «вузькими місцями» є фрагментарність практик, недостатня операціоналізація лідерських «мікродій» та чутливість креативної взаємодії до гібридного контексту. Наукова новизна роботи полягає у запропонуванні прикладного протоколу C-TEAM, який поєднує командоутворювальні функції з послідовністю фасилітації креативного мислення під час повсякденних робочих обговорень, а також у формуванні практично орієнтованих рекомендацій щодо лідерських фасилітаційних дій, які підтримують баланс дивергенції та конвергенції, знижують міжособистісні ризики та підвищують якість синтезу ідей. Практичне значення отриманих результатів полягає у можливості використання запропонованої логіки та протоколу керівниками команд для підвищення результативності творчого розв'язання проблем в умовах гібридної взаємодії. Перспективами подальших досліджень у цьому напрямі є емпірична перевірка ефективності C-TEAM у різних галузях і типах команд, порівняння результатів для гібридних і повністю офлайн- і онлайн-форматів, а також уточнення умов, за яких окремі фасилітаційні дії лідера найбільше впливають на психологічну безпеку, комунікаційну поведінку та якість креативних результатів.

Ключові слова: командоутворення (тимбілдинг), креативне мислення, фасилітація, лідерство, психологічна безпека, гібридні команди, комунікаційна поведінка, дизайн-мислення.

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Team-building has long been used to improve cooperation and cohesion, yet its relationship with creative thinking is still frequently reduced to motivational "events" rather than sustained leadership practice. A recent evidence suggests that the strongest contributions of team-building occur when it is treated as a system of routines and shared meaning that supports coordination, learning, and interpersonal risk-taking [1]. At the same time, modern work settings are increasingly hybrid (combining co-located and remote collaboration), and creative output under compressed timelines is expected. This environment raises a key managerial question: how can leaders translate team-building practices into reliable creative thinking processes – without undermining speed and accountability.

Another design-thinking research highlights that structured collaborative methods can shape team interactions, skills, task execution, emotional climate, and overall performance [2]. However, the literature also indicates practical constraints: when deadlines tighten, teams may sacrifice exploration, increase conflict around selection, and reduce the quality of decisions unless facilitation actively protects the divergent–convergent rhythm [3]. Hybrid and virtual contexts add additional friction: reduced informal communication and weaker shared context can lower creative synergy unless leadership deliberately strengthens psychological safety and communication norms [4], [5].

Leadership studies of collective creativity emphasize that leaders influence creativity not only through vision, but through how they structure collaboration, distribute influence, and build enabling conditions for creative work [6]. Micro-level research further shows that leader behaviors during creativity episodes (e.g., how leaders respond to errors, how they allocate speaking turns, how they regulate conflict) shape group creative performance and coordination quality [7]. A parallel empirical stream demonstrates that psychological safety and communication behavior explain part of how teams convert collaboration into innovative performance [8].

Practical facilitation research also shows that psychological safety can be deliberately cultivated through repeated cycles of observation, interpretation, and intervention across a team's life cycle [9], and can be improved via structured short-term programs that strengthen communication and reduce interpersonal threats [10].

Therefore, the problem is not whether team-building matters, but how leaders operationalize it as a repeatable creative capacity, especially in hybrid settings where interaction quality is fragile and creativity competes with operational speed.

In the most recent international scholarship, team-building is increasingly framed not as a one-time "bonding" activity but as an evidence-based system of interventions that shape cohesion, coordination, and team emergent states across the project life-cycle. In a large-scale synthesis of team-building interventions, Sang Hyun Kwon and co-authors show that structured team-building practices are most consistently associated with stronger social integration and more stable coordination patterns when they are deliberately sequenced (diagnosis → intervention → reinforcement) rather than applied ad hoc [1]. In parallel, design-oriented approaches have become a prominent bridge between team-building and creative thinking: Cornelia Kerstin Schlott systematizes empirical work on design thinking and teamwork and argues that "impact" is best captured through multi-level indicators (individual skill development, team process quality, and innovation outputs) rather than single outcomes [2]. Extending this logic into time-pressured settings, Marco Balzano and Guido Bortoluzzi demonstrate that design thinking practices can shape team innovation differently under temporal constraints, implying that leaders must actively manage both "creative divergence" and "execution convergence" as the deadline window narrows [3].

Another stream of current research focuses on how digital and distributed contexts modify the classic drivers of team creativity. In their experimental work on creativity in virtual teams, Christian Grund, Christine Harbring, and Lisa Klinkenberg show that the structure of interaction in virtual collaboration can materially influence creative performance, suggesting that "virtuality" is not neutral and must be designed and led intentionally [4]. At the leadership level, Zijian Huang, Stavros Sindakis, Sakshi Aggarwal, and Ludivine Thomas synthesize evidence from research and development environments and emphasize leadership's role in orchestrating collective creativity through frameworks that connect motivation, group dynamics, and enabling conditions [6]. Complementing this, micro-dynamic perspectives examine what leaders do during creative work: Qingbai Zhao, Ying Li, Songqing Li, Zheng Liang, Shi Chen, Riman Ga, Quanlei Yu, and Zhijin Zhou examine dynamic leader behaviors during creativity-related tasks and link these behaviors to group performance, reinforcing the idea that leadership effects are enacted moment-by-moment rather than only through stable "styles" [7].

A particularly influential recent focus is psychological safety as a mechanism connecting leadership, team-building routines, and creative risk-taking. At the team-process level, Hao Jin

and Yan Peng connect team psychological safety to innovative performance and highlight the mediating importance of communication behaviors and reflexive team practices, implying that teams do not "inherit" creativity from talent alone – creativity is enabled (or suppressed) through how people speak up, challenge, and learn together [8].

From an institutional and facilitation lens, Megan S. Jones, Amanda E. Cravens, Jill Zarestky, Courtney Ngai, and Hannah B. They propose concrete facilitation practices to cultivate psychological safety in science and research teams, treating psychological safety as a cycle of observation, interpretation, and timely intervention – an approach that translates well into organizational team-building programs led by managers rather than external facilitators [9]. Importantly, evidence is also accumulating that psychological safety can be improved through short, structured interventions: Momoko Kobayashi reports a group-based psychological safety intervention evaluated via a cluster randomized controlled trial, showing measurable gains in psychological safety alongside reductions in bullying-related outcomes and improvements in consultation tendencies - results that support the feasibility of embedding brief training modules into routine organizational development [10].

Recent publications also sharpen how leadership enables creative thinking under digital transformation and hybrid work arrangements – contexts where team-building cannot rely on physical proximity. In a study of leadership competencies for psychological safety in hybrid teams, Ntando Ngubane and Gloria Mbokota emphasize leader capabilities that sustain a climate where team members can raise concerns and share ideas across partly virtual interaction patterns, directly tying leader competency models to team climate outcomes [5]. Building on this digital context, Mengxi Yang, Muhammad Talha, Shuainan Zhang, and Yifei Zhang explain how digital leadership fosters employee creativity through psychological and social pathways (notably innovation self-efficacy and knowledge sharing), reinforcing that modern leaders facilitate creative thinking by engineering learning loops and exchange processes rather than merely issuing inspirational goals [11]. Finally, inclusive leadership is increasingly examined as a context setter for creativity-supportive ecosystems: Mingdi Jiang, Jing Zhang, and Muhammad Zulqarnain Arshad show how inclusive leadership relates to creativity-supporting climates (in their case, in educational organizations), providing transferable logic for workplace teams where inclusion norms broaden idea diversity and reduce interpersonal risk – two prerequisites for creative cognition in groups [12].

Despite the rapid growth of empirical research on team-building, creativity-supporting methods, and leadership in hybrid settings, the literature still leaves important practical and theoretical gaps. Even when studies confirm positive effects on cohesion, psychological safety, or innovation-related outcomes, they often do not explain how these elements should be combined into a single leader-driven system that reliably produces creative thinking in everyday work. As result, organizations frequently implement team-building, creativity workshops, and leadership development as separate initiatives, and the benefits dissipate once teams return to time-pressured decision-making and routine collaboration. To these unresolved parts we can refer as:

1. The fragmentation between team-building and creative facilitation. Team-building studies often measure cohesion but do not specify the leader behaviors that convert cohesion into creative performance at the moment of ideation, conflict, and decision [1], [6].
2. The under-specified leader "micro-moves." Leadership research acknowledges facilitation, but many models remain abstract and do not provide a structured, teachable set of behaviors for guiding divergent–convergent thinking cycles in real teams [6; 7].
3. The hybrid context blind spots. Many creativity frameworks assume high-bandwidth interaction; hybrid teams require explicit routines and safety scaffolding because informal correction and sense-making are weaker [4; 5].
4. The lack of operational measurement tools. Organizations often track innovation outcomes (ideas submitted, patents, prototypes) but rarely measure leader facilitation quality and team creative conditions in a way that supports improvement [8; 9; 11].

The aim of this article is to integrate theoretical and practical aspects of team-building, creative thinking, and leadership by:

✦ synthesizing recent evidence on team-building, designing the thinking teamwork mechanisms, and psychological safety;

✦ developing an integrative model that explains how leaders convert team-building resources into creative outcomes;

✦ proposing an innovative, operational protocol (C-TEAM) that leaders can use to facilitate creative thinking systematically in hybrid teams.

This study applies a conceptual-analytical design with structured synthesis:

1. Evidence mapping: the recent peer-reviewed research (primarily 2022-2025) was selected

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across five streams: team-building, design thinking teamwork, virtual/hybrid team creativity, leadership and collective creativity, psychological safety and interventions [1–12].

2. Framework synthesis: the related mechanisms were extracted and grouped into team resources (cohesion/coordination), psychological safety/communication routines, and leader facilitation behaviors [1; 2; 6; 8; 9].

3. Model development: a causal logic model was built linking leader facilitation to team creative thinking processes and outputs, with hybrid context moderators [4; 5; 11].

4. Operationalization: one innovation was created:

✦ C-TEAM protocol (process tool) – newly developed.

5. Illustrative application: a non-empirical demonstration shows how leaders can use C-TEAM and LCFI in typical hybrid project settings; no primary field data are claimed.

The Team-building is often discussed as a driver of cohesion, engagement, and smoother coordination, but its contribution to creativity is frequently misunderstood as automatic. In practice, the relationship is conditional: team-building increases the capacity for creative work only when it produces "usable assets" that can be activated during real problem solving - shared language, trust, clarity of roles, and norms that make collaboration efficient and psychologically safe [1]. These assets matter because creative thinking in teams is not just an individual cognitive act; it is a social process that requires people to propose incomplete ideas, challenge assumptions, and integrate diverse viewpoints without fear of interpersonal penalty. The recent work on design thinking and collaborative innovation shows that structured creative routines can shape teamwork and outputs, but they can also fail under time pressure unless the facilitation of divergence and convergence is actively managed [2; 3]. Likewise, the evidence from research on leadership and collective creativity emphasizes that leaders are not only "motivators" but architects of interaction who influence whether teams sustain exploration, learning, and integration rather than defaulting to safe, conventional solutions [6; 7]. Therefore, the central logic behind Figure 1 is that team-building should be conceptualized as an upstream investment that creates enabling resources, while leadership and team interaction mechanisms determine whether those resources convert into downstream creative output – especially in hybrid/virtual contexts where distance and tool-mediated communication can amplify misunderstanding and reduce spontaneous sense-making [4; 5].

In the Figure 1, the left-hand block ("team-building assets") represents the foundational conditions that make creative collaboration possible rather than guaranteed. Trust and cohesion reduce relational uncertainty and increase willingness to engage in joint problem solving [1]. Shared language and role clarity reduce the cost of coordination and help teams exchange complex information faster – an advantage that becomes decisive when teams must collaborate across functions or time zones. Importantly, these assets also protect teams from a common creativity failure mode: members may have ideas but refrain from voicing them because the social environment signals that deviation from the norm is risky. Team-building
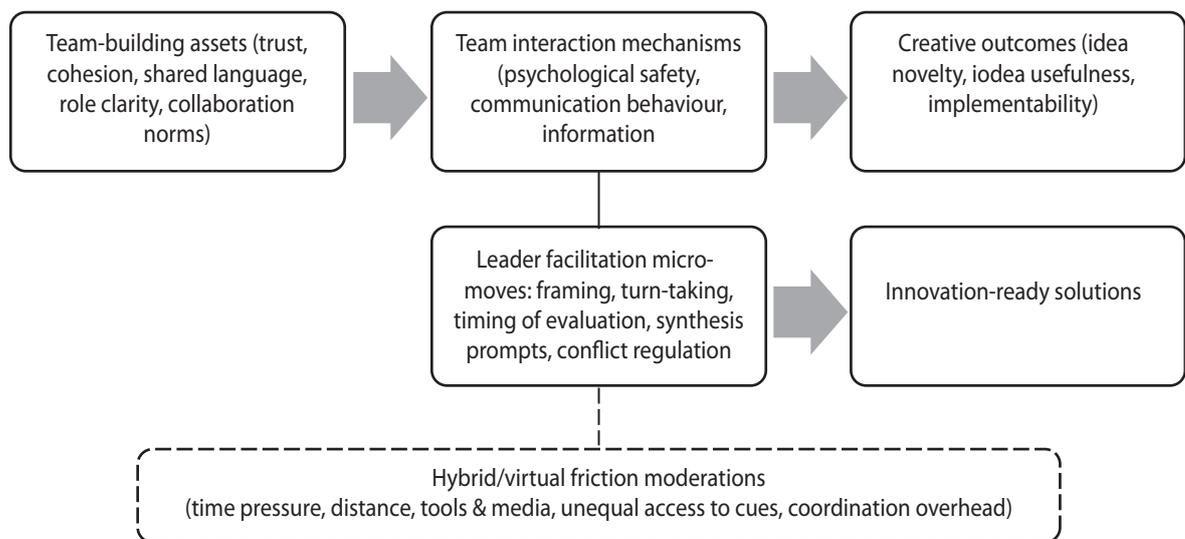
Fig. 1. The integrative model of team-building-to-creativity conversion

Source: developed by the author based on [1–5; 7–12].

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that strengthens norms for respectful debate and constructive disagreement can shift this perceived risk, expanding the "idea space" that a team is willing to explore [1; 8].

The middle block ("team interaction mechanisms") is the conversion engine of the model. Psychological safety and communication behavior are positioned as the direct pathway through which team-building assets become creative performance. Evidence suggests psychological safety and predicts innovative outcomes partly through communication behaviors: asking questions, admitting uncertainty, seeking input, and sharing tentative thoughts [8]. When psychological safety is weak, teams may appear harmonious yet produce low novelty because the members self-censor, avoid dissent, or converge too early. When psychological safety is strong but communication lacks structure, teams can generate many ideas but fail to integrate them into useful decisions. This is why the leader facilitation micro-moves are explicitly included as part of the mechanism layer: leadership behaviors guide the rhythm of creative thinking (diverge → synthesize → test), regulate participation, and protect idea generation from premature evaluation – an issue that becomes more pronounced under time pressure, when teams naturally accelerate convergence and prioritize closure over exploration [3; 7]. In other words, the model assumes that psychological safety is not merely a climate variable; it becomes functional only when it is translated into observable interaction patterns – the turn-taking, questioning, knowledge sharing, and sensemaking loops [8; 9].

The lower band in the scheme ("hybrid/virtual friction moderators") specifies why the same team-building assets can produce different creative outcomes depending on context. Research on virtual teams indicates that the medium and structure of collaboration can influence creative performance, implying that virtuality introduces coordination constraints that teams must actively manage [4]. The hybrid leadership research similarly highlights the need for leader competencies that sustain psychological safety and clear communication when informal cues are missing or unevenly distributed across remote and in-person members [5]. In hybrid settings, small breakdowns – misinterpreted tone, unclear ownership, uneven access to information – can quickly erode trust and silence dissent, shrinking the range of ideas discussed. This means the conversion from team-building assets to creative output is more fragile in the hybrid teams; leaders often need to "overcompensate" by making assumptions visible, documenting decisions, and ensuring equitable voice across channels [4; 5].

Finally, the right-hand block ("creative outcomes") captures the quality dimension that matters for organizations: creativity is valuable when it combines novelty and usefulness (and, in many cases, implementability). The model implies that novelty is most strongly supported by protected divergence and psychological safety, while usefulness is strengthened by disciplined synthesis, criteria-based convergence, and feedback/testing cycles – the elements associated with structured creative practices and leader facilitation [2; 3].

The key implication is that team-building should be evaluated not only by how teams "feel" afterward, but by whether it measurably improves the mechanism layer (psychological safety and communication behaviors) and, through them, improves creative output quality over repeated cycles [8; 9; 10]. In this interpretation, leaders become the decisive link: they transform team-building from a one-time morale boost into a repeatable creative capability, particularly when time pressure and hybrid work would otherwise push teams toward safer, more conventional solutions [3; 4; 5; 7].

Team creativity is rarely limited by the absence of ideas; it is more often limited by how interaction is managed in real time – who speaks, when evaluation begins, how disagreement is handled, and whether uncertain or incomplete thoughts are treated as acceptable contributions. The recent studies on leadership and creativity increasingly emphasize that leadership effects are enacted through micro-level behaviors during creative episodes rather than only through stable "styles" or broad cultural statements [6; 7]. In the hybrid and time-pressured contexts, these micro-behaviors become even more decisive because teams face higher coordination costs and greater risk of misinterpretation, which can suppress voice and accelerate premature convergence [3; 4; 5]. The Table 1 is introduced to translate these research insights into a practical, teachable set of leader actions ("micro-moves") that leaders can apply during team sessions to protect the divergent–convergent rhythm, maintain psychological safety, and increase the quality of knowledge sharing and synthesis. The table is grounded in evidence on design-thinking teamwork mechanisms [2], the effects of time constraints on team innovation [3], virtual/hybrid creativity dynamics [4], hybrid psychological safety competencies [5], leader behavior dynamics in creative tasks [7], and psychological safety pathways to innovative performance [8] alongside facilitation-oriented work on building safety through intervention cycles [9; 10] and leadership pathways that support creativity through knowledge sharing and inclusive climate [11; 12].

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Table 1

Evidence-linked leader facilitation micro-moves for creative team thinking

Facilitation aim	Leader micro-move (actionable behavior)	Why it matters for creativity
Protect divergence	"Two-minute wild list": requires non-evaluative idea listing before critique	Prevents early convergence that is amplified under time pressure [3]
Normalize interpersonal risk	"Make room for unfinished ideas": explicitly invites half-formed suggestions	Increases speaking up and reduces fear-based silence [8; 9]
Regulate conflict	"Separate idea from identity": critiques ideas using shared criteria, not personal labels	Maintains safety while allowing constructive debate [9; 10]
Build shared context (hybrid)	"Write it down live": ensures all assumptions and definitions are visible in a shared doc	Offsets information loss in virtual/hybrid teams [4; 5]
Strengthen knowledge sharing	"Rotate the explainer": each member teaches one concept briefly	Supports creativity via knowledge sharing pathways [11]
Build inclusive climate	"Equity of voice check": tracks turn-taking, invites low-voice members early	Inclusive leadership supports creative climate and outcomes [12]

Source: developed by the author based on [2–5; 7–12].

So, effective creative leadership can be operationalized as a repeatable behavioral toolkit: leaders who intentionally delay evaluation, invite unfinished ideas, regulate conflict through shared criteria, make assumptions visible (especially in hybrid work), and ensure equitable voice create interaction conditions in which novelty and usefulness can co-exist. These micro-moves strengthen the mechanism layer in the integrative model – psychological safety and communication behavior—which is repeatedly linked to innovative performance and creativity-related outcomes [8; 9; 11].

At the same time, the Table 1 implies a measurement and development pathway: because micro-moves are observable, organizations can assess them (e.g., through brief observation checklists or pulse feedback) and coach leaders toward consistent facilitation competence rather than relying on sporadic workshops. Finally, the table highlights that team-building becomes sustainable only when leaders embed these micro-moves into everyday collaboration routines; otherwise, cohesion gains may not translate into creative output under the very conditions where creativity is needed most – tight deadlines, distributed teams, and complex cross-functional problems [1; 3; 4; 5].

The C-TEAM protocol is proposed to address a practical gap that repeatedly appears in both research and organizational practice: teams often invest in team-building to improve cohesion, and they sometimes run creativity workshops to generate ideas, but the two are rarely integrated into a single leader-led routine that reliably produces creative thinking during everyday work. Evidence on design thinking and team-work suggests that structured creative routines can strengthen collaboration and outcomes, yet the same evidence warns that under time pressure teams tend to distort the process – skipping exploration, rushing convergence, or getting stuck in selection debates – unless facilitation actively protects the rhythm of divergent and convergent thinking [2; 3]. This challenge becomes sharper in hybrid and virtual contexts where interaction bandwidth is uneven, informal sense-making is weaker, and misunderstandings are more likely to escalate into silence or conflict; an experimental and applied research shows that virtuality and hybrid conditions can change creativity dynamics and therefore require intentional design and leadership competencies that preserve psychological safety and coordination [4; 5]. For this reason, C-TEAM is framed not as another "workshop format," but as a repeatable leadership tool that embeds team-building functions (trust, cohesion, norms of voice) directly into the creative problem-solving sequence, so that interpersonal risk is regulated at the moment it would otherwise block idea generation and integration [8; 9; 10]. In the Table 2, key features of this protocol are presented.

C-TEAM operationalizes the leader's role as a facilitator of creative thinking by making the most fragile transition in the team creativity explicit: moving from uncertainty and disagreement to constructive exploration and decision.

The protocol's distinctive contribution is the deliberate "tension" phase, which treats hidden assumptions, risks, and disagreements as necessary inputs rather than as disruptions; this aligns with the evidence that psychological safety is not a vague climate factor but a functional mechanism

Table 2

C-TEAM stage practices and outputs

Stage	Leader tasks	Team outputs	Hybrid safeguards
Clarify	Frame the question, define constraints, set decision rules	Shared problem statement, criteria list	Shared document visible to all [4], [5]
Tension	Invite dissent, list uncertainties, normalize disagreement	"Assumption register," risk list	Anonymous input channel if needed [9], [10]
Explore	Protect divergence, prevent premature evaluation	Idea pool + clustered themes	Time-boxed breakout rooms [4]
Align	Apply criteria, run fast tests, choose	Ranked options, decision rationale	Record a rationale to reduce later re-litigation [3]
Make	Prototype, assign owners, define learning metrics	Action plan + learning loop	Asynchronous check-ins [11]

Source: developed by the author based on [2–5; 8–11].

that works through communication behaviors such as speaking up, asking for help, and sharing incomplete ideas [8; 9]. By requiring teams to surface tension safely before deep exploration and convergence, C-TEAM reduces the likelihood of premature convergence under time pressure [3] and lowers the chance that hybrid friction (unequal access to cues, tool-mediated misunderstanding) silently suppresses voice or distorts decision-making [4; 5]. As a result, C-TEAM shifts team-building from an episodic activity to a practical infrastructure: a routine that produces concrete outputs (shared framing, visible assumptions, synthesized options, and testable next steps) and strengthens knowledge sharing and coordination behaviors that are repeatedly linked to creativity in modern digital work environments [11].

In practice, the biggest shift implied by this section is treating team-building as a production system for collaboration quality, not an occasional morale event. The evidence base suggests that team-building can reliably strengthen cohesion and coordination resources [1], but those resources only translate into creative output when they are activated repeatedly inside everyday work. That activation is largely a leadership job: leaders have to convert "we get along" into "we can explore, disagree, and integrate ideas fast," which is exactly the behavioral space where collective creativity is enabled or suppressed [6; 7].

A useful way to operationalize this integration is to embed team-building into the same cadence where the team makes decisions (weekly planning, sprint rituals, product reviews, operational huddles). Research on design thinking and teamwork indicates that structured collaboration routines can improve team processes and outcomes [2], yet under time pressure, teams often compress exploration and rush convergence unless facilitation protects the divergent–convergent

rhythm [3]. So, instead of scheduling team-building "on the side," leaders can use a light, repeatable routine (such as C-TEAM) inside normal meetings to create predictable moments for clarification, safe dissent, exploration, synthesis, and commitment. Over time, the routine becomes the team-building – because the team builds trust and norms through doing difficult thinking together, not only through social bonding.

Hybrid and virtual settings raise the stakes because the same team can behave very differently when cues are missing, turn-taking is distorted, and shared context is uneven. Experimental work on virtual teams shows creativity outcomes depend on interaction conditions and the way collaboration is structured, not simply on who is on the team [4]. The hybrid leadership research similarly emphasizes leader competencies that sustain psychological safety and consistent communication across distributed channels [5]. That means integration has a "design" component: leaders should make assumptions and criteria visible in shared artifacts (a live doc, decision log, or whiteboard), enforce inclusive turn-taking, and deliberately create spaces for asynchronous idea input so that remote participants can contribute without fighting the meeting dynamics. These are not administrative details; they are creative enablers because they reduce misinterpretation and coordination overhead that otherwise drain cognitive capacity and silence minority viewpoints [4; 5].

Another practical implication is rethinking conflict: teams often confuse "good team-building" with "low tension," but creative work requires surfacing uncertainty and disagreement early enough to shape exploration rather than sabotage selection. The research logic around psychological safety is especially relevant here: psychological safety predicts innovative performance partly through communication behavior – speaking up, asking for help, sharing

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incomplete thoughts – so safety becomes productive when it expands information flow and learning behavior rather than merely reducing discomfort [8]. The facilitation-focused work treats psychological safety as something leaders build through repeated cycles of noticing, interpreting, and intervening at key moments [9], and intervention evidence suggests it can be strengthened through structured programs that reduce intimidation dynamics and increase consultation behaviors [10]. In a daily-work translation, this means leaders should normalize "unfinished" contributions, explicitly separate critique of ideas from the critique of people, and treat dissent as a resource to be processed with shared criteria – especially before the team commits to a direction.

Integration also requires leaders to manage the classic failure modes of "team-building without creativity": strong cohesion can slide into groupthink, politeness, and premature convergence. Studies on leadership and creativity emphasize that leaders shape collective creativity by orchestrating social dynamics and enabling conditions, not only by providing vision [6]. The micro-dynamic research shows leader behavior during creative activity matters in the moment – how leaders respond to uncertainty, how they regulate evaluation timing, and how they manage participation – because these behaviors influence whether a group explores broadly and then integrates effectively [7]. Practically, leaders can institutionalize short "divergence protection" windows (where evaluation is paused), followed by structured synthesis and explicit decision criteria. This keeps cohesion from becoming conformity and helps teams preserve novelty while still producing useful, implementable outcomes [3; 7]

Finally, integrating team-building with creative performance routines becomes more scalable when it aligns with modern leadership contexts: digital tools and inclusive climates. The research on digital leadership links creativity to knowledge sharing and psychological pathways that support learning and experimentation [11], and inclusive leadership research highlights how inclusive behaviors support creativity-supportive climates that expand idea diversity and reduce interpersonal risk [12]. For teams, this translates into two practical choices: (1) leaders should deliberately engineer knowledge-sharing moments (quick teach-backs, visible expertise mapping, cross-role pairing), and (2) leaders should treat inclusion as an operational practice (equitable voice, clear documentation, predictable opportunities to challenge assumptions), not only as a value statement. When these are embedded into the team's regular workflow, team-building stops being episodic and becomes a continuous capability that repeatedly converts collaboration into creative, innovation-ready outputs [1; 2; 8; 11; 12].

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis presented in this article supports a central conclusion: team-building contributes to creative output only when it is treated not as an episodic "cohesion event," but as a deliberately designed capacity-building system that leaders activate through day-to-day facilitation. Team-building can generate usable collaboration assets – trust, shared language, role clarity, and norms for interaction – yet these assets do not automatically produce creativity [1]. Creativity in teams is a social process that depends on whether people can safely introduce incomplete ideas, challenge assumptions, and integrate diverse perspectives into decisions. For this reason, the integrative model developed in the article positions psychological safety and communication behavior as the key conversion channel through which the team-building assets become creative outcomes, while leadership functions as the operational mechanism that keeps the creative process intact under pressure [3; 8; 9]. In hybrid and virtual contexts, this conversion is even more fragile because distance, tool-mediated communication, and unequal access to cues increase coordination overhead and raise the risk of misinterpretation; as a result, teams may self-censor, converge prematurely, or fragment into parallel understandings unless leaders actively compensate with explicit facilitation and shared artifacts [4; 5].

A second conclusion is that leadership impact on creativity is best understood through the observable micro-behaviors, not only through broad leadership "styles." A contemporary research on leadership and collective creativity shows that leaders shape creative outcomes by orchestrating enabling conditions and structuring interaction rather than merely motivating individuals [6]. The micro-dynamic evidence reinforces this by demonstrating that leader behaviors during creative tasks – timing of evaluation, responsiveness to uncertainty, conflict regulation, and participation management – are associated with group performance [7]. This is why the article's taxonomy of leader micro-moves and the C-TEAM protocol are positioned as practical bridges between theory and implementation: they convert general ideas (psychological safety, design thinking, inclusion) into the concrete interaction rules that can be embedded into everyday meetings and decision cycles. Importantly, this operationalization addresses a major real-world failure mode highlighted across the literature:

teams may adopt design-thinking language or run creativity sessions, yet under time pressure they often compress exploration and rush convergence, which undermines novelty and decision quality unless facilitation protects the divergent–convergent rhythm [2; 3]. By explicitly institutionalizing a stage for surfacing assumptions and tensions before deep exploration and convergence, C-TEAM strengthens the likelihood that disagreement becomes a creative input rather than a disruptive force – an approach that aligns with evidence that psychological safety works through communication behaviors such as speaking up, consulting, and sharing tentative ideas [8; 10].

The third conclusion concerns sustainability: the creativity-supporting team-building is most effective when it becomes a routine embedded in work, not a separate program that competes with operational tempo. The literature on psychological safety in high-skill teams emphasizes that safety is not static; it is built through repeated cycles of observation and timely intervention at moments when uncertainty, error, or dissent emerges [9]. The intervention evidence also suggests that psychological safety can be strengthened through structured practices that reduce intimidation dynamics and increase consultation tendencies [10]. Taken together, this supports the article's practical implication that leaders should integrate team-building functions into the standard workflow: clarifying shared criteria, normalizing uncertainty, creating protected windows for divergence, and documenting assumptions and decisions to support alignment – especially in hybrid environments where shared context is less automatic [4; 5]. In the digitally mediated work, leadership that increases knowledge sharing and learning loops further supports creativity outcomes, reinforcing that creative team capacity is not only a psychological phenomenon but also an informational and coordination phenomenon [11]. Similarly, the inclusive leadership findings indicate that climates supporting inclusion can broaden idea diversity and reduce interpersonal risk, strengthening creativity-supportive ecosystems at team level [12].

Perspectives for further research follow from both the strengths and limitations of the present work. Since the article proposes an integrative model and an operational protocol, the next step is a rigorous empirical testing in organizational settings. Future studies could examine whether teams using embedded routines such as C-TEAM demonstrate the higher-quality creative outputs (novelty and usefulness) compared to teams using conventional team-building or unstructured brainstorming, particularly under time pressure where premature convergence is common [3]. Another promising direction is to test the proposed mediation logic directly by measuring whether improvements in team-building assets predict changes in psychological safety and communication behaviors, and whether these, in turn, predict innovative performance indicators – consistent with evidence that psychological safety affects innovation partly through communication [8]. A hybrid-specific research is especially valuable: both the experimental and field designs could compare different hybrid configurations (e.g., co-located synthesis with remote execution, or remote-first with periodic alignment sessions) to identify which combinations would best protect creative performance and reduce coordination loss [4; 5].

Finally, future research could investigate the leader development pathways by testing whether training leaders in micro-moves (evaluation timing, equitable voice, conflict regulation, assumption surfacing) produces durable changes in team interaction patterns and creativity outcomes, consistent with the micro-dynamic leadership literature [7] and the broader collective-creativity perspective [6]. ∎

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