Silverback Studios
Innovation Review — Stakeholder Survey Findings

Summary of Results

- Prepared by: Jess Saltz and team
- Respondents: 693 lead programmers, systems designers, technical artists, and rendering engineers, drawn from both high-output and low-output teams, and from teams under both long-tenured and recently joined managers
- Response rate: 75.7% (693 of 915)

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1. Item-Level Findings

Four composite scores were calculated for each respondent, each on a 1–5 scale (5 = high): psychological safety (7 items, adapted from Edmondson, 1999), and transactional, transformational, and empowering leadership (adapted from the MLQ, Bass, 1995). Respondents were grouped into low (1–2.4), moderate (2.5–3.4), and high (3.5–5) bands on each score.

Psychological safety

- Mean score: 3.37 (SD = 0.91)
- 48.5% of respondents report high psychological safety; 31.7% moderate; 19.8% low.

Transactional leadership

- Mean score: 2.98 (SD = 1.00)
- 33.0% of respondents rate their manager high on transactional leadership; 29.9% moderate; 37.1% low.

Transformational leadership

- Mean score: 3.47 (SD = 1.09)
- 53.5% of respondents rate their manager high on transformational leadership; 22.9% moderate; 23.5% low.

Empowering leadership

- Mean score: 3.29 (SD = 1.08)
- 48.5% of respondents rate their manager high on empowering leadership; 24.7% moderate; 26.8% low.

Roughly half of respondents report high psychological safety and high transformational/ empowering leadership — but the remaining half is split evenly between moderate and low, suggesting real variation across teams rather than a uniform picture across the studio.

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Manager tenure

- Mean: 54.6 months; Median: 62.1 months (range: 3.6–92.6 months)
- 20.5% of respondents report to a manager with under 24 months' tenure; 21.6% to a manager with 24–48 months; 57.9% to a manager with 48 months or more.

Changes/patents logged

- Mean: 11.0 (SD = 7.9)
- Considerable spread across teams

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2. Correlations Between Variables

The table below shows the zero-order correlations (Pearson's r) between the four composite scores, manager tenure, and the logged changes/patents count.

	Psych. Safety	Transactional	Transformational	Empowering	Mgr. Tenure	Changes/Pat
Psych. Safety	1.00	-0.60	0.66	0.63	0.53	0.73
Transactional	-0.60	1.00	-0.69	-0.64	-0.51	-0.73
Transformational	0.66	-0.69	1.00	0.79	0.66	0.85
Empowering	0.63	-0.64	0.79	1.00	0.62	0.82
Mgr. Tenure	0.53	-0.51	0.66	0.62	1.00	0.60
Team Changes	0.73	-0.73	0.85	0.82	0.60	1.00

The strongest correlations are between changes/patents logged and transformational leadership (r = .85), empowering leadership (r = .82) and psychological safety (r = .73). Manager tenure correlates moderately (r = .60) and transactional leadership is negatively correlated (r = -.73).

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3. Regression Analysis

To test whether manager tenure genuinely predicts team output, or whether it is only a proxy for leadership style, two regression models were compared. Both predict team changes/patents logged (standardized); the difference is which predictors are included.

Model 1: Tenure only

Predictors: manager tenure and respondent's own tenure.

- Manager tenure: $\beta = .60$ ($p < .001$)
- Respondent's own tenure: $\beta = -.06$ ($p = .04$)
- Model fit: $R^2 = .36$

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Model 2: Tenure + leadership style + psychological safety

Predictors: the same two tenure variables, plus psychological safety, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and empowering leadership, all entered together. This tests whether tenure still matters once style and safety are controlled for — that is, once every predictor's effect is estimated while holding the others constant.

- Manager tenure: $\beta = .07$ ($p < .001$)
- Respondent's own tenure: $\beta = -.02$ ($p = .18$) — not significant
- Psychological safety: $\beta = .13$ ($p < .001$)
- Transactional leadership: $\beta = -.13$ ($p < .001$)
- Transformational leadership: $\beta = .41$ ($p < .001$) — strongest predictor
- Empowering leadership: $\beta = .34$ ($p < .001$) — second strongest predictor
- Model fit: $R^2 = .86$ (an increase of .49 over Model 1 — leadership style and psychological safety explain a great deal that tenure alone does not)

Manager tenure's moderate effect in Model 1 ($\beta = .60$) collapses to a small effect in Model 2 ($\beta = .07$) once leadership style and psychological safety are added. This indicates tenure is not the real driver — it is standing in for leadership style. Although it is more common among longer-tenured managers, it is not exclusive to them: a handful of short-tenured managers run high-output, high-trust teams, and a handful of long-tenured managers run low-output, low-trust ones. Thus, transformational and empowering leadership, together with psychological safety, are the actual predictors of team innovative output.

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4. Does Psychological Safety Mediate the Effect of Leadership Style?

The regression analysis shows that both leadership style and psychological safety independently predict output. The question is whether they are fully independent, or whether leadership style works by building psychological safety, which then drives team output. This was tested with a formal mediation analysis, using bootstrapped confidence intervals for the indirect effect (5,000 resamples).

- Path A (empowering leadership → psychological safety): $\beta = .63$ ($p < .001$) — thus, empowering managers build more psychological safety in their teams.
- Path B (psychological safety → output, controlling for leadership): $\beta = .35$ ($p < .001$) — thus, psychological safety predicts output independently of leadership style.
- Total effect (empowering leadership → output, no mediator): $\beta = .82$
- Direct effect (empowering leadership → output, controlling for psychological safety): $\beta = .60$
- Indirect effect, through psychological safety: $\beta = .22$, bootstrapped 95% CI [0.19, 0.26] — statistically significant, as the interval excludes zero.
- Proportion mediated: approximately 27%.

These results indicate partial mediation: roughly a quarter of empowering leadership's effect on team output runs through psychological safety, but the majority of the effect is direct.

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