Creating Great Teams

Second Edition

How Self-Selection Lets People Excel

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Preface

Since publication of the first edition of this book in 2015, self-selection has transitioned from a radical idea to a proven practice. We have seen that our core premise—that individuals thrive when they can choose their teams rather than being shuffled by management—has resonated with organizations all over the world.

Building on a decade of new experiences, this updated edition builds on the original groundbreaking concepts with fresh insights, wide-ranging case studies, and detailed strategies for navigating the complexities of work and forming teams. From small startups to global enterprises, the principles of self-selection have proven to be both adaptable and effective. We have enhanced the first edition with lessons learned from real world applications of self-selection. We address the movement to remote and hybrid ways of working, the nuances of ensuring a clear and safe process, and the pitfalls of misinterpreting self-selection.

Through a blend of practical advice and real-world examples, this book will equip you with everything you need to implement self-selecting teams in your organization. From the initial groundwork and planning phases to carrying out self-selection events and the crucial steps that follow, you'll learn how to create an environment where people choose their teams, choose their work, creating a strong sense of ownership, autonomy, and satisfaction.

This book is not about *how* you should structure your teams, although we will talk about how the idea sits across concepts like dynamic reteaming and team topologies. Instead, it addresses the best possible *way* of designing those teams and getting the right people into those teams—through self-selection.

Who Should Read This Book?

Self-selection isn't just for technology teams. If you work in an industry that benefits from people working in small, cross-functional teams, then self-selection could be for you.

If you are a CEO, CTO, delivery manager, VP of engineering, head of marketing, or any other kind of leader looking to structure your department into small teams, this is the fastest and safest way to do so. You will learn how to prepare for and organize a self-selection event, how to convince your colleagues that it's a good idea in the first place, and how to communicate with your participants to make sure everyone is on board and ready.

For those in human resources, people management, or coaching roles, this is your playbook for creating a culture rich in autonomy, ownership, and belonging. You'll discover how self-selection can positively impact your culture and how to nurture an environment that champions autonomy.

If you're on the ground as a developer, quality assurance specialist, UX designer, product manager, product owner, or business analyst, you'll get an insider's view of what it's like to be part of a self-selection process. Plus, you'll find tips on convincing your colleagues or boss to embrace this approach.

And for the facilitators among us, get ready for a comprehensive guide on planning, executing, and solidifying self-selection in a way that's both effective and psychologically safe.

Whether you have tried self-selection in your organization or you want to learn about it for the first time, this book will provide you with a clear method and a deep understanding of the thinking and reasoning that sits behind the approach, along with examples and case studies of this being done in a remote or hybrid environment.

How This Book Is Organized

As we navigate through the chapters, we introduce you to the mechanics of self-selection, from laying the groundwork to conducting the event and beyond. Each section builds on the last, weaving together theory, practice, and real-world insights to guide you in implementing self-selection within your organization.

Part I—Understanding the Core Concept

In Part I, you'll discover the critical impact of team design on effectiveness, emphasizing the shift toward dynamic teams in today's workplace. We delve

into how self-selection is pivotal in fostering flexible team structures, supporting seamless team transitions, and scaling effectively.

You'll see why managerial selection falls short and how self-selection's proven track record offers a compelling alternative. Through an engaging case study, you'll get an insider's view on the emergence of self-selection, its solutions to common team-formation issues, and the tangible experience it provides to all participants. This section lays the foundation for appreciating self-selection's role in modern team design and team dynamics.

Part II—Mastering the Self-Selection Method

Part II guides you through preparing and executing a successful self-selection event. You'll be equipped with practical ideas, essential tools, expert advice, and comprehensive checklists to ensure thorough preparation. Our goal is to bolster your confidence in navigating this process smoothly, avoiding common pitfalls and oversights whilst setting you up for success.

You'll master the art of organizing a self-selection event, from establishing clear rules and constraints to devising a strategic facilitation plan and assembling all necessary materials. This part arms you with a proven toolkit for in person, remote or hybrid events, empowering you to confidently plan and conduct a self-selection, tailor-made for your organization.

Part III—Learning from a Decade of Self-Selection

In Part III, you'll learn how to adapt self-selection to your context. We'll guide you through the changes and tweaks you can make whether your teams are uniquely set-up or following a heavily structured framework like SAFe.

Through real-world case studies, we'll explore the different approaches that have been used with self-selection across diverse organizational contexts—whether expanding, downsizing, large or small, agile or otherwise. These insights will show you the universal applicability and benefits of self-selection, including how to maintain momentum and foster a sustainable self-selection culture.

Online Resources

This book has a companion web page[1] on the publisher's website at pragprog.com. There you'll find a forum for discussion as well as a place to report any errors you may encounter. You'll also find a whole host of additional

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1.   https://www.pragprog.com/titles/mmteams2/creating-great-teams

tools, templates, and case studies at our Nomad8 website[2] in the self-selection section.

Embrace Self-Selection

This book describes a process that works—whether you're building teams from scratch, aiming to enhance the way you are currently organized, or gearing up for a major reshuffle. How can you be sure that your teams are the best possible mix of talent and preferences? There's only one reliable method: ask your people who they want to work with, and what they want to work on. Let them decide.

By embracing self-selection, you're not just rearranging people; you're unlocking the full potential of your organization. Whether you're kickstarting a new culture or revitalizing a stagnant environment, self-selection is your ticket to a more energized and productive workplace.

So, dive in! Immerse yourself in the world of self-selection, learn from some of the best organizations in the world, and embrace the idea of moving the choice of team to the right level.

2. https://nomad8.com/what-we-do/self-selection