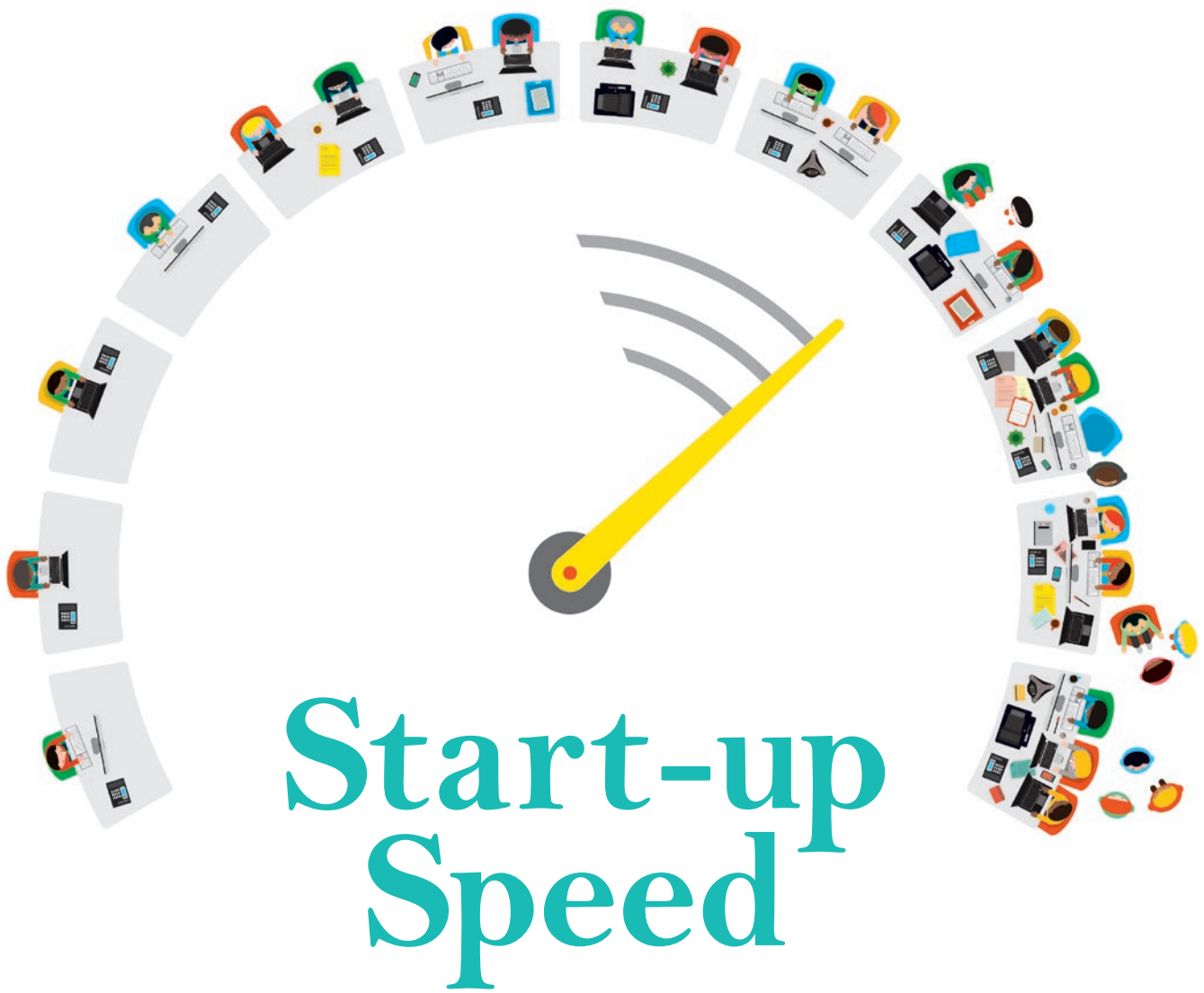# "*...we're all seeking the best ways to move faster and be smarter."/29*

KRISTEN GIL

Start-up Speed

Big business is traditionally slow business. But if you want to up your velocity, why not go back to the future? That's what Google did when it set out to rediscover its start-up roots – and find the holy grail of business speed. Kristen Gil, VP of Business Operations, explains how.

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It's

been a few years since Google was a small company – but at the beginning of 2011, we saw that in order to support the growth of our business, Google would need to become even bigger, so we set out to have the biggest hiring year in company history. At the same time, we saw that in order to achieve our ambitious goals, we needed to take steps to ship products and make decisions faster. In short, we needed to grow and speed up at the same time, but to do these things concurrently, we needed to make a few changes to how Google operates.

It's still a work in progress, but we've already identified some crucial lessons as we work to make our large enterprise as nimble and responsive as that holy grail of business speed: The start-up.

MEANINGFUL MEETINGS

One of our first observations was that many meetings weren't working as well as they should. A well-run meeting is a great thing; it empowers people to make decisions, solve problems, and share information. But badly-run meetings are a demoralizing waste of time. We didn't want our employees to waste either time or energy, so we gathered input and made some recommendations to help make meetings more effective.

For starters, we noted that every decision-oriented meeting should have a clear decision-maker, and if it didn't, the meeting shouldn't happen. Those meetings should ideally consist of no more than 10 people, and everyone who attends should provide input. If someone has no input to give, then perhaps they shouldn't be there. That's okay – attending meetings isn't a badge of honor – but the people who *are* attending need to get there on time. Most importantly, decisions should never wait for a meeting. If it's critical that a meeting take place before a decision is made, then that meeting needs to happen right away.

ONE PERSON TO STOP THE BUCK

Google has historically been organized functionally, with an engineering team, a product team, a sales team, and so on. But as the number of both employees and projects grew, we realized we needed to streamline the decision-making process. To do this, we adopted a 'buck stops here' approach that has been very effective. For example, under Vic Gundotra's management, Google+ shipped over 100 new features in the 90 days after launch, while accelerating to over 40 million users. That's a velocity we're proud of.

BULLPENS AREN'T JUST FOR PITCHERS

Besides fast decisions, another key hallmark of start-ups is their fast-paced, densely populated offices. We've always promoted this approach at Google, organizing around small teams and working in close proximity to one another. Even Eric Schmidt shared his office with an engineer when he first joined the company.

But as Google grew, the executives spread out to the far reaches of our campuses so they could work side-by-side with their teams. To make sure our key decision-makers could work and make decisions in an environment more reminiscent of a start-up, we created a 'bullpen' in one of the buildings on our main campus, which was specially designed as a place for members of our executive team to work and talk in an informal setting. These execs now set aside a number of hours per week to be there. It's amazing how fast things can get done – even in a large company – when you put so many key people together and don't give them an agenda.

USE OKRS TO UNIFY

Creating quarterly OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) has been part of Google's culture since board member John Doerr introduced the concept in 1999. More recently, however, we've elevated their importance and are using the quarterly OKR all-hands meeting (which is led by Larry Page and other company leaders) as a rallying point for all employees. Team by team, the leaders lay out their objectives and how they'll measure success. Afterwards, they're posted for anyone within the company to see.

To make sure our products work seamlessly together across Google, we're focusing more on broader OKRs – big company goals that can only be achieved if everyone works ➡

Quantify: Speed

Countries like South Korea, Lithuania, and Latvia regularly top the rankings in world broadband speed. The US does not make it into the top 10.[6]

together. For example, a recent OKR objective for our search team was to improve the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful, which restates and reiterates the company's mission statement. The key results underneath that objective included metrics and projects for the quarter, many of which span a number of teams, ensuring a well-coordinated push toward a shared goal. Having these shared goals also has the benefit of helping prevent the formation of silos – always a concern as companies grow.

MAKE TOUGH CALLS

It's one thing to talk about focus, quite another to practice it. In the second half of 2011 we shut down several products, including Buzz, Code Search, and Desktop, and merged others into existing products as features. Making these decisions allows us to devote more resources to high-impact products that improve the lives of billions of people. Or as Larry Page said, to "put more wood behind fewer arrows."

The challenges Google faces aren't unique; in a permanently accelerating environment, we're all seeking the best ways to move faster and be smarter. For some final inspiration, consider this nugget from Larry's closing speech at Zeitgeist: "There are no companies that make good slow decisions." That pretty much sums it up ⏺