



Team effectiveness: the evidence.

What it is, why it matters more than ever,
and how to develop it.

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Introduction

At Gyre, our mission is to build business performance and improve the workplace for everyone by helping teams perform at their best. As psychologists with extensive business consulting experience we constantly track developments in research on team effectiveness. This enables us to reflect the best thinking in both Gyre's digital product and all our client engagements. In discussion with business leaders and HR professionals we are struck by how much interest there is in building team effectiveness. At the same time there is relatively little knowledge of the great body of academic, scientific and practical research that provides the foundation for evidence-based development of individual teams and whole organisations.

Two things are clear to us:

1

The workplace needs better teams.

2

There is a wealth of research backed evidence that can help teams improve effectiveness.





1. The workplace needs better teams. We would argue that improving team effectiveness is the quickest and most durable response to a whole range of current issues. Driving for improved business performance, delivering digital transformation, accelerating innovation through agile working, meeting diversity and inclusion needs or addressing mental health and wellbeing can all be facilitated by improved team effectiveness.

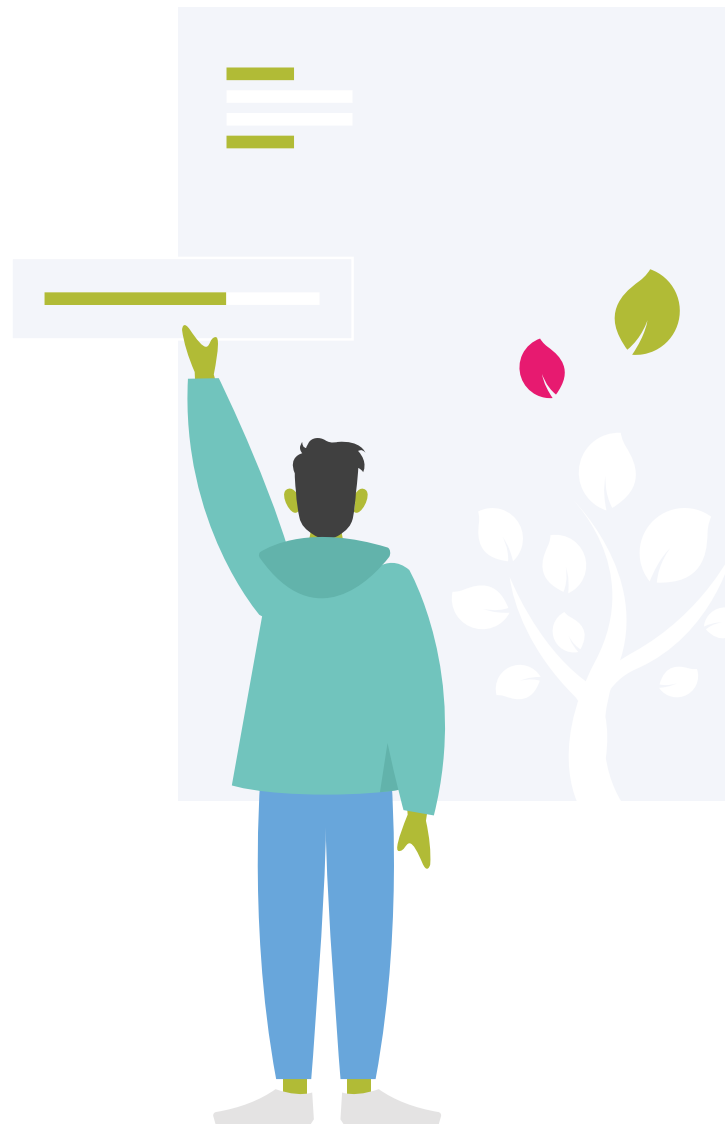
2. There is a wealth of research backed evidence that can help teams improve effectiveness, delivering better outcomes for organisations and team members. However, this evidence is not readily available to business practitioners. It is much easier for a business leader to find out – at least in theory - how to improve the effectiveness of a professional sports team than it is for them to find a roadmap to improve team effectiveness in their own organisation.





Structure of this paper

1. We first of all review why effectiveness at the basic organisational building block of the teams is so central to agendas around digital transformation, innovation and agility, diversity and inclusion and wellbeing.
2. We introduce Gyre's Team Effectiveness Model as a way of providing a framework to lay out our underlying thinking about the relationships between teams, team effectiveness, and organisational performance.
3. We then use the Gyre model to provide a practical framework that enables us to systematically pull out learnings from thousands of studies conducted over more than 3 decades. Sources are all referenced and there are further details in the appendix about our use of meta-analytic studies.
4. Finally, we review the critical role of leaders in making all of this happen.



We hope this white paper sharpens the focus on team effectiveness in the workplace and raises the evidence bar for solution providers working in coaching and organisational development.



Section 1

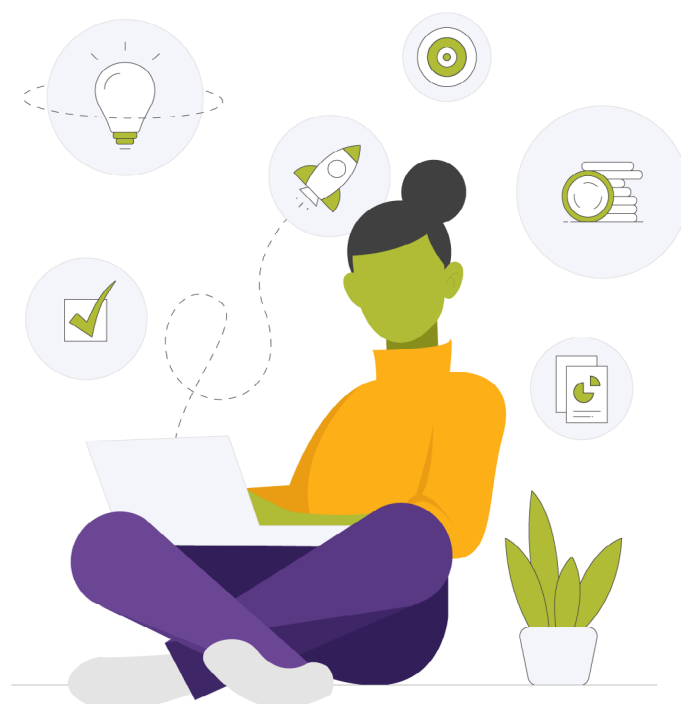
The time for teams is now

We are facing unprecedented times of complexity and uncertainty. Increased regulation, digitalisation, virtual working, mental health concerns, and the proliferation of diversity agendas to attend to, all evolving with such rapid pace, that it is unsurprising that even the most grounded of leaders and team members can feel overwhelmed.

Digitalisation

To choose just one survey, in 2020, two thirds ¹ of business leaders felt that their businesses could no longer remain competitive if they did not pick up the pace of their digitalisation. The speed of digital transformation has accelerated further as companies have grappled with and emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic.

This pace of growth is rapidly reshaping jobs and redefining how individuals contribute. It is also requiring teams to blend virtually and reconfigure rapidly, shifting organisational structures from traditional hierarchies represented by a static organisation chart, to ones that are agile shape-shifters; a “team of teams”. Any intervention to support the leaders, teams and individuals facing such rapidly shifting sands needs to align seamlessly with this data-enabled, digital agenda.



¹ Creating Digital Value at Scale - A Gartner Trend Insight



Agile

No white paper on Team Effectiveness could ignore the huge rise of the Agile Manifesto. It is designed to deliver fast paced creation of value through distributing leadership across a team, empowering decision-making and leveraging the talent of each individual. “By taking people out of their functional silos and putting them in self-managed and customer-focused multidisciplinary teams, the agile approach is not only accelerating profitable growth but also helping to create a new generation of skilled general managers” according to the recent HBR article ‘Embracing Agile’.

The contribution made by the agile principles is heartening and there is strong evidence supporting the claims that it can drive significantly invigorated productivity levels. As a consequence, it is estimated that 83% of large Corporates in Western Europe are adopting agile working methods, 42% of them in non-IT teams ².

However it is not a panacea. Research by Scrum Alliance (a member-driven nonprofit certifying body in the agile space) found that more than 70% of agile practitioners report tension between their teams and the rest of the organisation. Much like the revolutionaries facing off against the Old Guard, this tension is likely only to grow. It is a tension that will not be resolved through the simplistic application of yet more agile processes and terminology. Rather, what is needed are frameworks that will guide teams to become learning environments, able to cultivate the resilience and influence necessary to carve out their paths and contributions within the complex organisational dynamics at play.



2 From the article ‘Embracing Agile’, Harvard Business Review



Diversity and inclusion

Employees are also increasingly expected to navigate, with insight and sophistication, a range of diversity agendas beyond the more commonly discussed ones of race, gender, sexuality and age to include deeper level ones such as cognitive and socio-cultural diversity. We are exposed to ever expanding role and team diversity, with team members from across geographical regions, functions, time-zones and languages. The rising trend that sees 65 - 95% of knowledge workers operating in a multi-team environment ³, with estimates of 4 or more teams for up to a fifth of workers, adds further to the overall levels of complexity.



Mental health and wellbeing

Grappling with the complexity of rapid market change, disruptive digitalisation and the need for increased sensitivity to diversity and identity, whilst also working virtually and dealing with the long-term effects of the pandemic, puts pressure on employees at every level. Mental ill health is fast becoming the single greatest cause of long-term absence. Whilst HR may offer programmes to support wellbeing and encourage development, the burden of responsibility for managing all of this sits firmly on the shoulders of team leaders. It is they who are charged with the responsibility of delivering value at ever greater speeds with team members who are trying to make sense of such overwhelmingly complex times or, failing that, to merely stay afloat.

3 Multiple team membership a Theoretical Model of its Effects on Productivity and Learning for Individuals and Teams - O'Leary, Mortensen, & Woolley, 2011



Finding a response

Nostalgia for simpler times makes it tempting for organisations to reach for silver bullets and simplistic formulas, to focus on just one part of the picture. Yet simplistic solutions are doomed to fail because they do not reflect the essential complexity of work-place teams.

Teams, as systems, are complex but not chaotic. The distinction is important. Teams do have discernable patterns which can be measured and responded to effectively. A helpful metaphor for such systems are the oceans, also complex adaptive systems. Their behaviours, health and states are subject to multiple simultaneous environmental factors beyond the current capacity of humans to fully understand. Yet through study, we are beginning to appreciate the power of oceans to regulate our climate, heal pollution and stabilise our world.

The belief that motivates this paper is that by diving more deeply into the research on team effectiveness we can identify similar underlying forces that can be used by all teams to create an upward spiral of energy, inclusion and performance.

Dr Richard Hackman's definition of effective teams:





Section 2

The Gyre Team Effectiveness Model

The value of a good model is that it simplifies and guides. Team leaders and teams need some form of simplified approach to guide their actions. They need to be able to answer questions like:

- Should a team start with setting audacious, aspirational goals or should it start with a few quick wins to create a sense of shared belief? Or should it start with a focus on understanding each other and getting to know each others' talents?
- Should it introduce a bit of competitive gamification, for example by setting up a 'top-performer' leaderboard?
- Should it wait until it can do an offsite team-build or should it not bother doing anything because team relationships have a natural flow and cannot be forced?
- Should it focus its energies on creating a sense of psychological safety where everyone feels able to speak up, or should it focus its energies on clarifying key results and initiatives?
- Should it behave differently because it is working virtually?
- Should the team leader set direction or should the team collectively do it together?

The problem is that if teams are complex adaptive systems then simplistic heuristics cannot reliably guide action. For example, Tuckman's model (the familiar 'Forming - Storming - Norming - Performing') is still doing the rounds nearly 60 years after it was first formulated, and more than 30 years after research has shown that it effectively applies to some teams in some organisations in some situations, but is a very poor guide to most teams in most organisations and most situations.



The Gyre Model of team effectiveness

At the core, our model illustrates that to reliably convert any set of business **inputs** into specific desired **outcomes**, a sustained focus on building **team effectiveness**, done in a targeted and systematic manner, is required.



Inputs



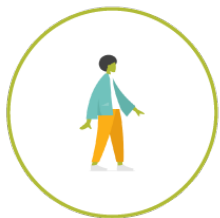
Outputs



Organisational variables



Team variables



Individual variables



**Gyre's
Development Pathways**



Organisational outcomes



Team outcomes



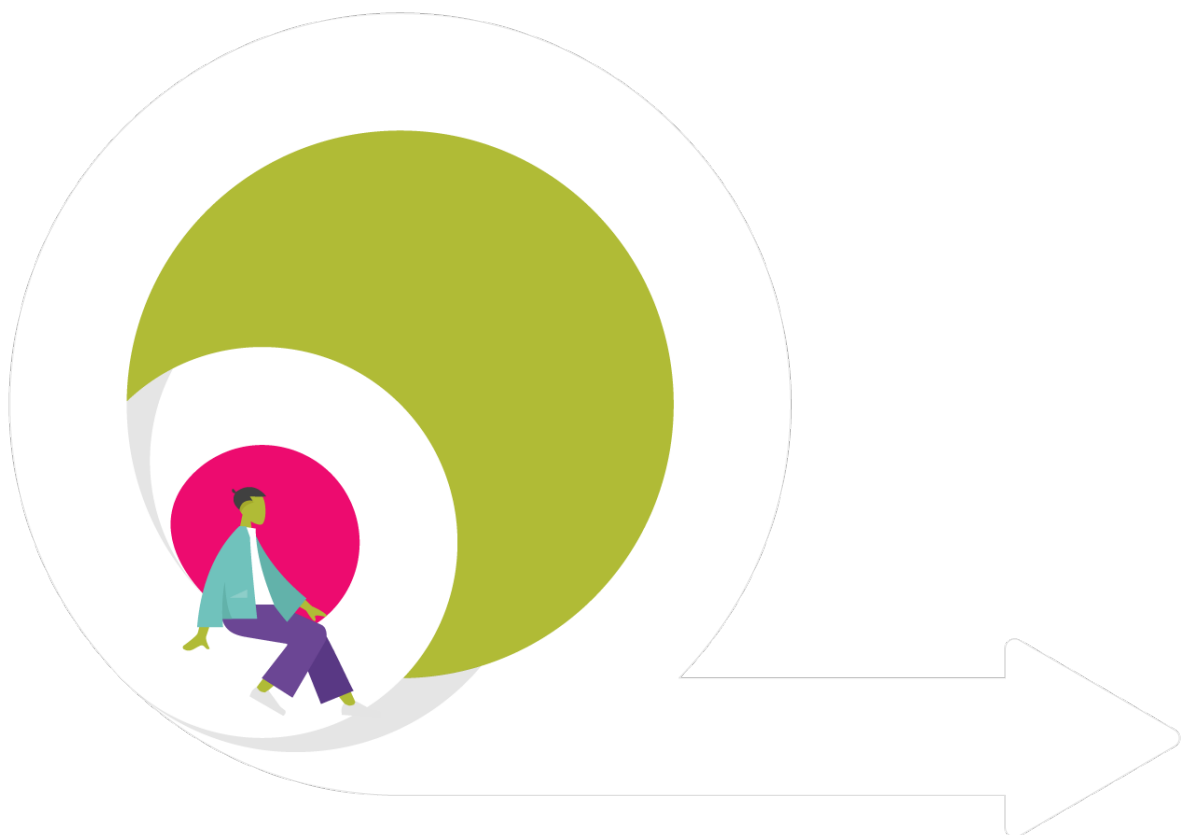
Individual outcomes



Inputs: context matters but does not determine outcomes

An organisation's unique combination of their **Organisation-level** variables sets the overall tone for team conduct, and the specific blend of **Team-level** variables and **Leadership and individual** attributes in the team provides the raw materials of team talent. The combination of these Inputs provides context and has an impact on the likelihood that a specific team can adopt and hone specific behaviours that shape **Team effectiveness**. Behaviours are enabled or disabled by the context within which they take place. Context matters, but is not the focus of this paper.

Our particular interest lies in the central part of the model, in the pathways to team effectiveness, and for the simple reason that it offers direct and immediate routes for intervention, and hence for delivering outcomes. There is little, for example, that an organisation can do in the short-term to change culture or to implement wide-scale job redesign, whereas each team within a business can, if properly guided, make tangible improvements in effectiveness within a matter of weeks and months. Put differently, there is much that can be done to improve individual and team effectiveness, regardless of the surrounding organisational context.





Team effectiveness as the fulcrum for delivering outcomes

Team effectiveness drives outcomes on three levels: **Organisational** outcomes, **Team** outcomes and **Individual** outcomes.

The Gyre model centres around **9 Outcomes**, with each outcome representing a dimension of team effectiveness. In turn, the Gyre platform is structured to guide teams through pathways that reliably deliver uplift against these 9 outcomes.

We will see that the research evidence shows that highly effective teams perform strongly on many if not **all 9** of these outcomes. In turn, the framework serves as a diagnostic and developmental framework for teams. Coaching and resources such as those in the Gyre platform can focus development on the areas a specific team will most benefit from. We can shift focus beyond “what is important?” to the question of “when and why is this specific dimension important?” and “how does this focus lead to a specific outcome?” and then “how best to develop these behaviours?”.

The next section of this paper uses this framework to structure and dive more deeply into the research findings:

- What is the research evidence for the importance of the dimension?
- What evidence connects each of these dimensions to desired outcomes?





Section 3

9 Outcomes



Entrepreneurial

We seize opportunities



Innovative

We achieve breakthroughs



Inspirational

We believe in what we are doing



Resilient

We rise above setbacks



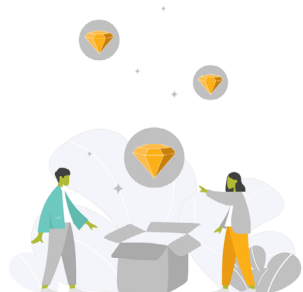
Growth

Together, we grow



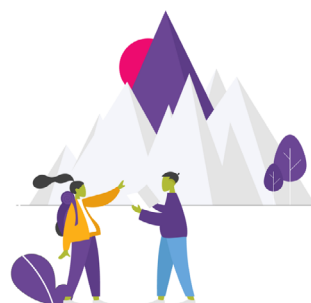
Collaborative

We connect productively



Productive

We consistently deliver value



Strategic

We focus on the right goals



Inclusive

We get the best from each other



Outcome 1: Growth

Together we grow

The 9 Outcomes group around the central question about commitment to improvement. In all of the complexity of teams, team dynamics and organisational culture, this essential first question can get lost. It speaks to the truth that teams need to learn how to be effective, and the more focus a team brings to making this learning happen efficiently, the faster it will reach performance and the more effectively it will sustain it.

The Offsite and the Water-cooler fantasy

The Offsite

The go-to solution for enhancing team effectiveness is the classic 'Offsite' event. Typically no expense has been spared on these events; a swanky location, an expensive external facilitator, travel and accommodation and so on. There are some obvious benefits, including refreshed motivation for the team, but the effect tends to be short-lived. Teams who wait for their offsite meetings to do the necessary work of team growth, risk their long-term growth and potential.

The Water Cooler Fantasy

What about providing the proverbial water cooler (or team social) to encourage team members to spontaneously gather, deepening their bonds and sharing information? If only it were that easy! The idea that providing opportunities for people to merely gather together informally is the magic ingredient needed to produce team effectiveness is tempting, but simplistic. In fact the research evidence is that simply spending time together, chatting around the water-cooler or in after-hours drinks makes little difference to team effectiveness ⁴.

4 A meta-analysis of team communication and performance. Shannon L., Marlow, Christina N., Lacerenza Jensine Paoletti, C. Shawn Burke, Eduardo Salas. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. Volume 144, January 2018,



So what does work?

What is the missing piece of the puzzle? According to the research, it turns out that those teams who schedule regular and deliberate reflective time consistently improve upon their team performance ⁵.

Why is this so? Partly it is because teams are complex systems, they have different moving parts, team members all have different needs and aspirations. To coordinate and harness the best parts of a team, and to manage the other parts takes sustained effort! The growth observed in these team's performance and effectiveness is brought about by their consistent,

disciplined and focused team practices. When teams habitually get together to reflect on their previous actions, learn lessons and plan future actions based on their learning, their levels of team cohesion increase and they start to act in more synchronous ways. If they were dancers, their 'dance' would become better choreographed, if you like. This enhanced team cohesion in turn drives up team performance.

However there is a caveat to this; the team must really commit to openly addressing and learning from their recent mistakes and then apply that learning to improve their approach. It seems then that a particular type of team 'debrief' or 'retrospective', if done regularly, is something that can offer a powerful 'secret sauce' for teams.



⁵ Do Team and Individual Debriefs Enhance Performance? A Meta-Analysis - Scott I. Tannenbaum, Christopher P. Cerasoli, 2013.



Team cohesion always matters! But especially when...

Research has shown that team cohesion is even more critical for overall team performance when⁶:

- team members need to rely on one another in conditions of uncertainty and complexity
- a team has rapidly changing membership (e.g. growing quickly)
- rapidly changing task demands
- team members don't spend much time face-to-face
- the team is high in diversity (in terms of expertise, experience and perspective)

Like meditation, where the busier you are, the more hours of meditation you likely need - here, the greater the sense of uncertainty and chaos, the higher the pace of change, the more team cohesion you need to foster and the more actively you need to adopt the disciplines that create team cohesion.

Of course, one alternative approach (and one unconsciously adopted by many organisations) is to keep teams stable, make their work predictable, hire for similarity rather than diversity and make sure everyone is co-located in the same office. This approach takes a burden off management's shoulders, but as we shall see, comes at a high price, even if this price is initially hidden: lack of agility, poor quality decision making, lack of creativity and innovation and lowered individual engagement and learning.



6 Cohesion and Performance: A Meta-Analytic Review of Disparities Between Project Teams, Production Teams, and Service Teams - François Chiochio, Hélène Essiembre, 2009



Recommendations for Practice:





Outcome 2: Strategic

We focus on the right goals

The most basic definition of a team involves a group of people working towards a shared goal and the research evidence emphatically underlines the foundational importance of clarity of direction. When teams possess a shared understanding of and buy into their goals and priorities they have deeper motivation and in turn exert greater productive effort. This in turn boosts task performance⁷.

The twist is that it is not as simple as the team leader setting objectives and communicating them. Instead, the goal is to create what psychologists call ‘shared cognitions’: a deeper level of understanding and a sense of personal connection with the goal: to ensure that goals are personally meaningful. Teams that take the time and effort to create shared mental models about the team direction from the outset experience less conflict later, higher motivation levels, and enhanced team performance. Those teams who do not take the time to develop such shared understandings are much less effective in achieving their objectives^{8,9}.

- 7 Perceived shared understanding in teams: The motivational effect of being ‘on the same page’. Caroline Aubé, Vincent Rousseau, Sébastien Tremblay. *British Journal of Psychology* 2014
- 8 Team mental models, relationship conflict and effectiveness over time. 2013 Marques Santos, C. and Margarida Passos, A. (2013), *Team Performance Management*, Vol. 19
- 9 The cognitive underpinnings of effective teamwork: A meta-analysis. DeChurch, L. A., & Mesmer-Magnus, J. R. (2010). *Journal of Applied Psychology*



As we will see over and over again, these effects are particularly strong for teams that are highly diverse, who need to work in an interdependent way, and are geographically dispersed (particularly if they work across time zones)¹⁰. We will also see this theme of “going more slowly in order to ultimately move much faster” as a recurrent one. In today’s hyper-executional world of work teams need to slow down enough to ensure that they truly do have shared goals, a shared plan and shared commitment.

Shared Team cognitions:

Team cognition describes the mental states that enable team members to anticipate situations and to coordinate with one another accordingly.



¹⁰ Conditioning team cognition: A meta-analysis. Ashley A. Niler et al (2020) Organizational Psychology Review



Recommendations for Practice:

The more the whole team is involved in direction-setting, the greater the shared understanding of not just what the goals for the team are, but why these goals matter

Have team members conduct collaborative strategic planning, presenting their results to the rest of the team for discussion and agreement

Review goals frequently to clarify and re-clarify shared understanding; developing 'shared cognitions' as a team is an essential tool for high performance

Make a habit of linking current tasks to team and organisational vision

Support all team members to develop their strategic thinking and leadership skills



Outcome 3: Agile

We consistently deliver value

People-focused leadership is rightly praised by leadership gurus and authors, and is undoubtedly an important element of effective leadership. However, there is much empirical research in favour of good old-fashioned task-focused leadership when it comes to raising the overall effectiveness of teams ¹¹.

The Believable pathway

In the previous section we highlighted the importance of teams developing shared mental models in relation to their goals; the research is equally clear about the need for these shared cognitions to extend to the pathways that need taking to achieving these goals ¹². If teams cannot see a **believable pathway** to a goal, the risk is that the goal actually serves as a demotivator because it is seen as unachievable ¹³.

For team members to feel confident that the pathway is a believable one, they must not only buy into the route and destination set out ahead but will need to feel that they can cooperate and rely on one-another to get the job done, which requires high levels of trust to exist between team members. Research demonstrates that teams with high intra-team trust consistently demonstrate better team performance. ¹⁴

11 Task and person-focused leadership behaviors and team performance: A meta-analysis Meltem Ceri-Booms et al (2016) Human Resource Management Review

12 The cognitive underpinnings of effective teamwork: A meta-analysis. DeChurch, L. A., & Mesmer-Magnus, J. R. (2010). Journal of Applied Psychology

13 Rethinking Positive Thinking by Gabriele Oettingen - Penguin (2015)

14 Trust and team performance: A meta-analysis of main effects, moderators, and covariates. De Jong et al (2016) Journal of Applied Psychology



A virtuous circle

There is a virtuous circle on offer here. Having a strong shared understanding of both goals and pathways generates a much stronger collective belief about how achievable the goals are. And where the team has this kind of shared belief it is more likely to set its own expectations high about its collective ability to successfully complete tasks. In doing so, the team creates what psychologists call 'collective efficacy': an intangible but key belief in the team's ability to achieve. These beliefs create powerful expectations within a team, and expectations of success drive engagement and performance.

Cognitive-Based Trust: The trust we form from what we imagine about someone's ability and someone's character. The more we regard them as having expertise and integrity, the more we will believe that they are trustworthy. This is the trust we first seek with team members - can they do the tasks assigned to them?

Interpersonal-trust, or the overall sense of trust between two people, is then developed by layering our cognitive based trust with emotional trust (the degree of emotional connection we feel towards a person).

Collective efficacy: the team's shared belief that they can perform specific assignments or reach specific goals successfully.

Team potency: a team's overall belief that the team is strong and generally capable.





Recommendations for Practice:

Take the time as a team to create a believable pathway linking current reality to aspirational goals: if teams cannot see a believable way of achieving their goals their motivation will suffer

Create opportunities for early success as a team to help create the team's 'collective efficacy'

Deal directly and openly with scepticism and doubt: the sceptic is often voicing something important on behalf of the whole team, and left unaddressed, their scepticism can derail the team

Explicitly work on creating expectations of success

Use some of your team time to focus exclusively on the tasks ahead and encourage team members to help each other to find practical and achievable solutions

Generate a clear shared understanding of who is doing what and agree explicit ways to coordinate tasks across the team; resist 'hub and spoke' working in which the team leader is the main means of coordination

Support all team members to develop their practical, task-focused leadership skills



Outcome 4: Inclusive

We get the best from each other

Trust matters

Team trust is a key requirement for team effectiveness, but it is also a challenge to achieve¹⁵, as it needs to exist across a variety of dimensions. Trust within a team matters¹⁶, trust between teams matters and the trust that employees have in their boss is also important¹⁷. Trust is even more critical in virtual or geographically dispersed teams where the ameliorating effects of face to face contact is diminished¹⁸. In summary, trust is a business imperative - it is not just a nice to have and bad things happen when trust erodes or is low.



- 15 Trust in teams: A taxonomy of perceived trustworthiness factors and risk-taking behaviors in face-to-face and virtual teams. Christina Breuer et al (2020) Human Relations
- 16 Trust and team performance: A meta-analysis of main effects, moderators, and covariates. De Jong, B. A., Dirks, K. T., & Gillespie, N. (2016). Journal of Applied Psychology
- 17 Trust in leadership: Meta-analytic findings and implications for research and practice. Dirks, K. T., & Ferrin, D. L. (2002). Journal of Applied Psychology
- 18 Does trust matter more in virtual teams? A meta-analysis of trust and team effectiveness. Breuer, C. et al (2016). Journal of Applied Psychology



The significance of psychological safety

If we explore why trust is so important, one of the clear effects is that it promotes a sense of ‘psychological safety’, which has emerged as one of the key deep-lying factors shaping team performance. This is a perception that an individual develops when they feel that they are in an environment that allows them to interact with others in an authentic and open manner, and express their own vulnerability, should they choose to.

Amy Edmonson, professor at Harvard University and the leading expert of psychological safety differentiates between trust, which is giving the other person the benefit of the doubt, and psychological safety which is believing that others will give you the benefit of the doubt.

Indeed, the impact of psychological safety appears to be so strong that even after controlling for personality, trust in leadership, work design, peer support and job engagement, it still predicts performance¹⁹.



The researcher Roger Mayer proposed that a person will make three judgements about the perceived trustworthiness of another person:

- Can they do it? (ability)
- Will they do it for me? (benevolence)
- Will they do it in an acceptable way? (integrity)

The meta-analytic research backs up Mayer’s theory in general, but there exist individual differences in how willing a person is to trust according to:

Dispositional Trust: the extent to which a person is willing to trust others; their propensity towards doing so. Some hold out more scepticism than others.



¹⁹ Psychological safety: A meta-analytic review and extension (2016). Frazier, M.L. et al. Personnel Review



Trust in the leader

Leadership is key in getting the best out of each other. Employees who trust their leader perform better and are more committed to their organisation. Yet the kind of leadership shown by the team leader also matters. Leaders who push to bring diversity into their team and create a sense of inclusion and valuing differences are rewarded by teams that take leadership. And as we'll see, shared leadership in teams becomes key to creating agile, adaptable teams and provides a compelling case for everyone to consider how they lead and to gain insight into their leadership style ²⁰.

The Toxic team member

Have you invested huge efforts trying to optimise your team processes, but find that they are repeatedly undermined? Are there negative individuals who seem to exert a disproportionate effect on the team ambience and motivation levels? This phenomenon is called emotional contagion: and it means that negative emotions get passed from person to person, much like a virus, through activating different centres in the brain. So people with consistently low levels of agreeableness in their personality can adversely affect the entire team.

Perhaps there are even more fundamental toxic traits within your team members. Ernest O'Boyle conducted a meta-analysis to explore the effects of the 'Dark Triad' (a set of 3 damaging personality traits) on work behaviours. He found that Machiavellianism and Narcissism were consistently associated with counterproductive team behaviours. The good news is that these traits are eminently identifiable and measurable. The reason they can linger in an organisation however is often more to do with an unease within management to confront and address the poor behaviour .



20 A Meta-analysis of shared leadership: antecedents, consequences, and moderators (2018) Qiong Wu et al. Journal of Organizational Studies



Recommendations for Practice:

To help teams boost their levels of team trust, get them to be aware of the 3 factors influencing trust:

- The ability levels of each person
- Whether people habitually act in the interests of others (not just of themselves) and
- Whether team members are considered fair and positively intentioned?

Hire for integrity and try to avoid hiring cynics: one toxic team member will quickly undermine trust levels for the whole team.

Actively foster a culture of curiosity and learning about what went wrong and how to improve. Vigorously challenge behaviour that seeks to place blame or instil fear



Outcome 5: Resilient

We rise above setbacks

It is inevitable that teams will face setbacks. Indeed, many report that they only really came together as a team when their collective backs were up against a wall and they faced seemingly impossible obstacles. In Gyre's own data-set, Outcome 5 receives the highest ratings out of all of the 9 Outcomes. Team members so often feel that this depicts the behaviour that is most characteristic of their own teams. It speaks to an apparent truth that challenge and adversity seem necessary ingredients for performance.

So what are the issues in play here? First, how team members handle the prospect or reality of conflict. Second, and related, the way a team deals with uncertainty and pressure.

Handling disagreements and conflict

Conflict is a 'dangerous necessity' for teams. On the one hand, it is clear that conflict is corrosive where it is between people or is about how the team works (for example, if people feel there are differing levels of commitment or contribution within the team)²¹. Teams need to find effective ways of minimising or quickly resolving interpersonal and process conflict. However, conflict about the task at hand does not necessarily downgrade performance - teams can disagree about task issues and this can lead to improved outcomes if certain other conditions are in place, such as high levels of psychological safety, or team members with high openness and emotional stability²².

21 Task versus relationship conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction: A meta-analysis. De Dreu, C. K. W., & Weingart, L. R. (2003). *Journal of Applied Psychology*

22 The paradox of intragroup conflict: A meta-analysis. de Wit, F. R. C., et al. (2012). *Journal of Applied Psychology*



We know that pressure increases the likelihood of interactions having an emotional edge to them, of people asserting views rather than exploring opinions, and this emotional edge is where task conflict can slide into interpersonal conflict. Strong ownership and passion are much-valued attributes, but can also signify that an individual is over-identifying with a particular position, that an attack on their view becomes an attack on their person.

Handling uncertainty

Turning to how teams handle uncertainty, we have already seen the importance of shared team cognitions and beliefs to goal-setting and pathway finding. They share an equally central role to the team's adaptability in the face of change, obstacles and setbacks²³. When situations are particularly tense or uncertain, it is imperative that a team maintains a clear, shared understanding of how to move forward:



- What are the next few steps that each of us as team members can take to help the collective goal?
- Who is doing what?
- How can we best overcome the immediate hurdles that we face as a team?

These are all questions that a team can usefully ask of itself collectively to 'get on the same page', achieve a shared understanding and then make tangible progress.

²³ Team adaptation in context: An integrated conceptual model and meta-analytic review. Jessica Siegel Christian et al. (2017) *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*



The impact of stress

The challenge within this is that one of the more well-established findings in the research literature is that stress leads to a restriction or narrowing of ‘attentional focus’: as we come under pressure, our awareness narrows. Put differently, pressure leads to a loss of perspective, and narrowing of team perspective has been found to be another significant predictor of poor team performance ²⁴.

But pressure and stress do not have to lead to dysfunction. Indeed, the established psychological finding is that moderate amounts of stress leads to increased personal resilience provided that people feel they have the resources to handle the stress. So also with teams: stress and pressure handled effectively create team resilience.

Team resilience

The hard graft of achieving team resilience when it matters is forged through the daily and weekly disciplines of honing the team processes which enable effective coordination and cooperation. It’s also helped by the mutual support of team members to believe in their own and each others’ capacity to stay the course and deliver on their commitments during tough times. Teams are more likely to be effective in reaching their goals when they:

Collective intelligence:
the ability of collectives of individuals to solve problems effectively.

- focus on building mutual understanding about what each team member is doing to overcome the hurdles and contribute to an outcome
- understand in practical and emotional terms how to support one another

If circumstances then change, they are also better equipped to regroup and adapt successfully. The words of Benjamin Franklin “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail” ring true here.

24 Does stress lead to a loss of team perspective? Driskell, J. E., Salas, E., & Johnston, J. (1999). *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*



Recommendations for Practice:

Apply the discipline of retrospective team meetings to pick through what went well and what went less well, and what can be learned from any of the team processes that contributed to those outcomes

Reinforce team members strengths, abilities and talents after team successes, helping them to make the link between their own capabilities and effort, and the achievements reached

Identify team members who seem to thrive under pressure and draw on their skills and mental approach to 'rally the troops' when team setbacks are experienced

During tough weeks, take a few moments to regroup as a team, reminding yourselves of the key purpose propelling everyone and why this is worth persevering for

The way teams handle conflict is more important than the actual topic of the conflict. Spend time consciously building the 'muscle-memory' of skilled, high quality interactions during easier times so they are better equipped to deal with obstacles and conflict when it does arise



Outcome 6: Collaborative

We connect productively

Do teams create silos?

One of the concerns voiced by business leaders is that when teams build strong identities they become more inward-looking, focused more on their own performance and people than on connecting across the organisation. They know that organisational adaptability depends on the web of connections across the organisation, on being able to see the wider organisation as an adaptive system. Hence the concern for leaders that inward-looking teams block organisational adaptability.

Yet one of the core characteristics of highly effective teams is actually that they are outward-looking, their confidence in their own abilities and efficacy meaning that they are freed-up to look outwards, to influence and be influenced. It is where team development has stalled, where there are no strong, shared cognitions, where task-conflict spills into interpersonal conflict, that teams become inward-looking.





Transformational leadership

We have already reviewed the importance of effective task-leadership for raising individual task-performance, and of people-leadership for ensuring that people get the best from each others' talents. Both are key to performance. But it is when leaders focus on contextual variables, bringing broader organisational perspective (termed Transformational leadership), that the evidence points to significantly uplifted team-level performance over and above uplifted individual performance²⁵.

True collaboration

As teams work at widening their perspective and building deeper insight into what others need, they become better able to tailor their communication to different stakeholders and create a richer map of who to turn to for help or information and who they need to influence to get resources or sign-off. This principle applies not just within teams but beyond them, into wider stakeholder networks. When teams can build up a shared understanding of who their key stakeholders are, they increase the likelihood that each team member will act in consistent ways, and that stakeholders will learn what to expect of the team, who to go to and how to get things done with that team.

These skills of perspective-taking, influencing and negotiating are characteristic of Transformational leaders. Where Transformational leadership strengths are present and distributed across a range of team members, the research suggests that teams benefit from higher levels of motivation and contribution, stronger conflict-resolution, increased team trust and stability and boosted levels of team innovation and overall performance. There are also strong, positive relationships with improved mental health across the team²⁶.

25 Transformational leadership and performance across criteria and levels: A meta-analytic review of 25 years of research. Wang, G. et al. (2011) Group & Organization Management

26 Leadership, followers' mental health and job performance in organizations: A comprehensive meta-analysis. Diego Montano et al. (2016) Journal of Organizational Behaviour



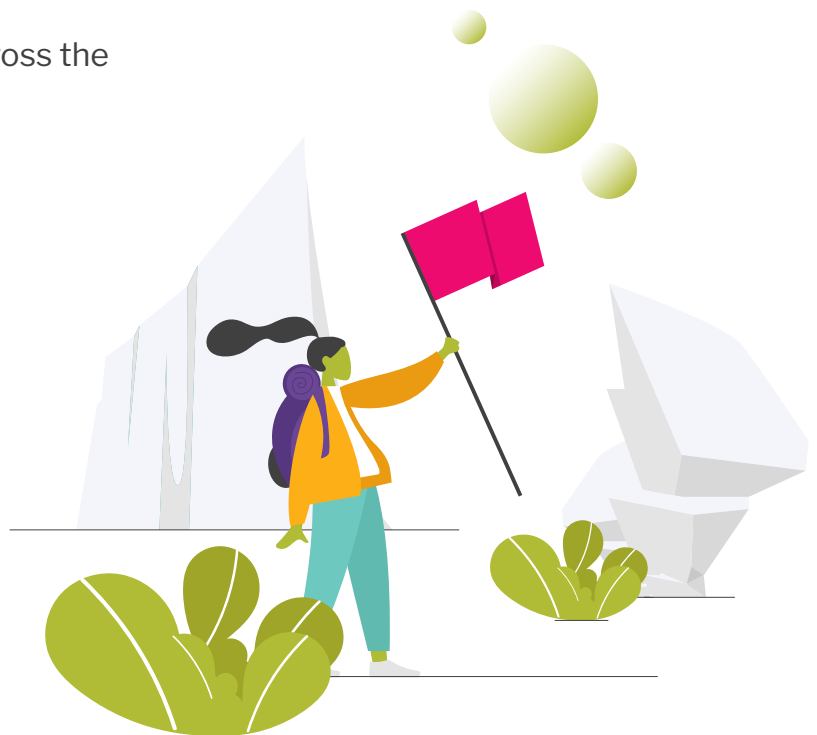
Maintaining perspective under stress

There is a further, less obvious gain. We have seen that under conditions of high stress, people are less able to keep the perspectives of others in mind, further increasing the possibility of misunderstandings and conflicts. Where Transformational leadership behaviours have been deliberately practised and rehearsed, there is a lower likelihood of these adverse effects arising, thus safeguarding the team's mental wellbeing and performance. Instead, communications, negotiations and the handling of conflicts can proceed with continued robustness and quality during these stressful times.

So, the skills underpinning high performance on Outcome 5 ("We rise above setbacks") provides one approach to managing obstacles and set-backs; the skills underpinning Outcome 6 offers the team the tantalising prospect of obstacles having a truly transformational impact on the team and on its wider influence within the organisation.

Whilst the research suggests that the rewards are high, honing these Transformational leader attributes takes practice, preparation and reflection - they are not easily acquired. But when team members support one another in doing so, transformations can emerge:

- Team members apply their learnings across the wider organisation
- They lean into difficult cross-functional conversations and negotiations
- They stay the course and learn to influence on a bigger stage to secure the organisational outcomes needed of them.





Recommendations for Practice:

Use team time to explore motives and perspectives of stakeholders and how they may differ from your own

Encourage all team members to practice and hone their influencing skills, to find their own personal balance between advocacy (pushing forward their own views) and inquiry (tuning into the other person's world and views)

Cultivate higher tolerance towards having difficult conversations, set within the bounds of a psychologically safe environment

Equip the team with a wider repertoire of conflict resolution tools and approaches, enabling them to find the transformational potential in conflict

Support team members to develop their own Transformational leadership skills



Outcome 7: Entrepreneurial

We seize opportunities

Whose responsibility?

Who is actually responsible for the entrepreneurial edge of an organisation? Our work, backed by the research literature, points to a world where an appetite for acting to capture opportunities all too often is not translated into reality.

Senior leaders often expect those at the coalface to spot and seize opportunities, yet many employees often do not feel sufficiently empowered to voice their ideas, let alone initiate pathways towards enabling them. With seeming inevitability, it leads to an unhelpful circle of senior leaders judging that their employees lack passion and ownership and hence behaving in more controlling and directive ways. How to square this apparent circle?

Distributed leadership

The research on how to improve levels of entrepreneurship consistently points to the need to cultivate greater distributed leadership within teams.²⁷ Providing opportunities for each team member to develop confidence in their own distinctive leadership contribution is key, regardless of whether people are ready or interested in a formal line management or leadership role. It is not about prepping folks for positional power, this is about enhancing the capacity for entrepreneurial leadership from the ground roots and suffusing it throughout the whole organisation. Who in your organisation should be given immunity to demonstrate their entrepreneurial flair?

27 Shared Leadership and Innovation: The Role of Vertical Leadership and Employee Integrity. Hoch, J.E. (2013) Journal of Business Psychology



The research further demonstrates that when expectations are set that every member of the organisation is empowered to make their own leadership contribution based on their unique set of strengths, levels of ownership and confidence will improve, thereby increasing the chances that opportunities will be seized by whoever spots them.

Bravery and risk-taking

There's a catch. Capturing opportunities requires bravery and a willingness to take risks. However, many organisations are strongly risk-averse and whilst their rhetoric might celebrate embracing risk, the way they treat failure will often inadvertently undermine their intentions. More subtly, the very systems that organisations build to create consistency (such HR systems, performance management processes, pay and reward policies) have been shown to be instrumental in stifling creativity and initiative-taking²⁸.

For risk-taking and bravery to emerge in team members, an environment of trust and a sense that the organisation is supportive is crucial. Whilst en-masse cultural change programmes are expensive and lengthy, supporting teams to foster their own entrepreneurial subcultures is more achievable with the right tools and processes in place.



²⁸ Teamwork and Organizational Innovation: The Moderating Role of the HRM Context. Doris Fay et al. (2014) Creativity and Innovation Management



Recommendations for Practice:

Measure how psychologically safe team members feel their working environment is

Use team time to discuss new opportunities and how to respond to them; encourage team members to share opportunities rather than to hoard them

Conduct retrospectives and debriefs to explore any overlooked opportunities

Develop levels of bravery and risk taking strengths in team members

Support team members to develop their Entrepreneurial leadership skills

Send team members on fact-finding missions to internal or external strategic presentations and forums. Ask them to help the rest of the team-members think about how the team's activities can align to any new and significant development or refresh in vision or strategy.



Outcome 8: Inspirational

We believe in what we are doing

The Charismatic leader

The reputation of the Charismatic leader has risen and fallen from grace repeatedly within the business literature. Clearly, there can be shadow sides to charisma - psychopaths can often appear highly charismatic - but the narcissists and sociopaths who have made it to the top of businesses should not be taken as the measure of the value of charismatic leadership.

What positively-intentioned charismatic individuals repeatedly do is to help generate inspired, upbeat optimistic visions for the future. They help the team to gain a shared understanding about the purpose of the team, and from this awareness of purpose to deepen their engagement with its priorities and goals and hence to be more willing to tap into their reserves of discretionary effort. Overall, the research shows that Charismatic leadership is particularly effective at increasing group performance rather than simply increasing individual performance of each team member; helping the team be more than the sum of its parts²⁹.



29 A Meta-Analysis to Review Organizational Outcomes Related to Charismatic Leadership. Timothy DeGroot et al. (2009) Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences



The importance of purpose beyond goals

The positives are not just about performance gains. Where team members feel engaged and motivated by purpose, they have a stronger sense of emotional attachment to the team as well as a greater commitment to remain within the organisation. Not only do these characteristics within the team help other team members, the research suggests that it is good for customers too, raising levels of customer satisfaction and service provision ratings.³⁰

Team potency

Developing a shared understanding of purpose is important and provides the essential foundation for the next level of breakthrough, one also strongly associated with Charismatic leadership. Where teams generate a strong sense of ‘team potency’ and a shared view that the team is well equipped and capable of achieving their specific goals, this shared belief results in the team actually being more likely to succeed. With such confidence, the team members show a tendency to reach beyond their comfort zone and take the steps necessary to seize the bolder and more ambitious opportunities. Team members who are able to convey a sense of group potency and collective efficacy (“we can do this!”) help the whole team to feel more positive and capable. Positivity begets positivity³¹.

30 Leadership, Commitment, and Culture: A Meta-Analysis. Jackson, T.A. et al. (2012) Journal of Organizational and Leadership Studies

31 A meta-analysis of team-efficacy, potency, and performance: Interdependence and level of analysis as moderators of observed relationships. Gully, S. M. et al. (2002). Journal of Applied Psychology



Recommendations for Practice:

Be discerning between those who usefully critically evaluate approaches and those who are habitual nay-sayers and positivity drainers. Cherish the former and change the latter

Be rigorous about incentivising the 'how' as well as the 'what' with team members and leaders. Be cautious of and challenge those who justify with a narrative of the end justifying the means

Praise those who are solid contributors to team ambience and positivity as enthusiastically as those who deliver on tasks - they may be the ones who are also delighting your customers

Help to connect those who demonstrate charismatic leadership strengths to others both internally and external to the business: chances are they will inspire others

Cultivate a strong sense of ownership and accountability in team members through seeking emotional connections (heart) and well as intellectual connections (mind) with the team's mission

Understand the overall sense of team potency and explore inhibitors of this



Outcome 9: Innovative

We achieve breakthroughs



The 'Innovative' outcome in the Gyre model is distinct from the 'Entrepreneurial' outcome because they lead to different outcomes. Many people make the mistake of conflating the two concepts; Gyre does not because the actions required for a team to be more innovative will not necessarily give rise to a greater level of entrepreneurship from the team and vice versa. For a team to be entrepreneurial it has to be brave in seizing opportunities that arise. For a team to be truly innovative however, it has to harness from its team members some of their deeper analytical and creative talents.



Diversity drives creativity

Organisations often appreciate the fresh, ‘outside in’ thinking of new members joining from outside, but they equally often miss the opportunity that lies within their existing people for breakthrough thinking and action. Concerns about inclusion and diversity have rightly risen high on senior leaders’ agendas as they seek initiatives to right many decades of social injustices. But the research evidence is also clear on the importance of diversity and of valuing this diversity at team and organisational levels: quite simply, it fuels innovation and creativity.

Inclusion harnesses creativity

To cultivate a strong culture of innovation within teams, it is important that the team environment feels inclusive and is regarded as a psychologically safe space within which to explore alternative ideas. Furthermore, the research base highlights that where the power differential is high between leader and team members, the leader is much more likely to commit damaging cognitive biases, asserting their own ideas and views as the majority view without having sufficiently explored others’ views ³².

Bravery turns creativity into innovation

Creativity and innovation are related but different and draw on different patterns of team and individual strengths:

- creativity requires generativity, so it is important that teams develop processes that help people to flow with ideas, insights and possibilities
- innovation requires judgement, bravery and perseverance, being skilled in nurturing a new idea through the early stages, but also having the judgement to know when to continue and when to cull

This is yet another reason in favour of nurturing shared, distributed leadership within a team: it will benefit from the full breadth of views held by team members and their alternative ways of thinking. Creating opportunities for team members to offer their views and opinions openly and to ensure that everyone feels safe to do so is a significant factor in helping to foster innovation levels. Trust matters here and there is clear evidence that teams with high trust levels are more willing to take risks if only because the ‘bravery bar’ is set lower in teams with high psychological safety ³³.

32 One for All: Social power increases self-anchoring of traits, attitudes, and emotions. Overbeck, J.R. & Droutman, V. (2013) Psychological Science

33 Trust, trustworthiness, and trust propensity: A meta-analytic test of their unique relationships with risk taking and job performance. Colquitt, J. A. et al. (2007). Journal of Applied Psychology



Get organisational processes out of the way

It is also important that the organisational structure and processes as a whole supports rather than detracts from innovation. Exploring how administrative systems, hierarchical organisational design, individual role design and incentivisation, and wider HR processes might serve to stifle rather than promote or reward innovation is helpful for uncovering deep-lying blockages to innovation³⁴.

Creativity and simplicity

Creativity and innovation is rarely derived from over-engineering ideas. As Charlie Mingus put it “Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that’s creativity.” Helping team members to move through the process of simplifying their ideas will help to liberate the most innovative elements of their contribution. For example, the use of team debriefs that encourage the team to come together, share unique information and review opportunities have been shown to increase levels of innovation³⁵.

A common error made by many team leaders is that retrospective-style meetings or project reviews are regarded more as a nice-to-haves, where time permits. However, by not reflecting on how recent projects and work-flows have gone, a team materially undermines their chances of applying better thinking and innovation to their future approaches according to the research. Instead they risk repeating the same mistakes. As we have seen repeatedly in this review of the research base, the old adage of slowing down to speed up is backed up by the research!

Team reflexivity:
the extent to which teams collectively reflect upon and adapt their working methods and functioning. Team reflexivity has been shown to be an important predictor of team outcomes, notably innovation.

34 Teamwork and Organizational Innovation: The Moderating Role of the HRM Context. Doris Fay et al. (2014) Creativity and Innovation Management

35 Team Reflexivity and Innovation: The Moderating Role of Team Context. Schippers, M.C. et al. (2012) Journal of Management



Recommendations for Practice:

Develop the team's ability to spot problems and see them as the spur to innovation

Actively build the psychological safety within the team such that people can be open about the emotional journey involved in creation

As a team leader, develop your judgement to know when deadlines and expectations of deliverables are helpful to innovation and when they will damage it

Create first and evaluate second: teams that second-guess themselves when they are in the process of creating rarely allow the time for truly creative insights to brew

Review your organisational processes and systems to find where any innovation-killers may reside



Section 4

The role of leaders and leadership

The culture of the organisation matters

The wider organisational context in which a team operates makes a real difference. Research has shown repeatedly that if employees perceive their work environment to be supportive, positive things happen³⁶:

1. Employees are more likely to trust their coworkers, their leaders and their employer (and trust **really** matters in teams)
2. They are more likely to identify with the organisation - to feel a connection between their personal values and their organisation's.
3. As a consequence, they are more likely to go beyond their direct responsibilities to help the team and company be successful.



In other words, if the work culture is supportive, people are more willing to take leadership and show ownership. It's the senior leaders who have the key role in crafting an overall culture within the organisation that is supportive of team working and leadership.

36 Perceived organizational support (POS) across 54 nations: A cross-cultural meta-analysis. Rockstuhl, T et al. (2020) Journal of International Business Studies



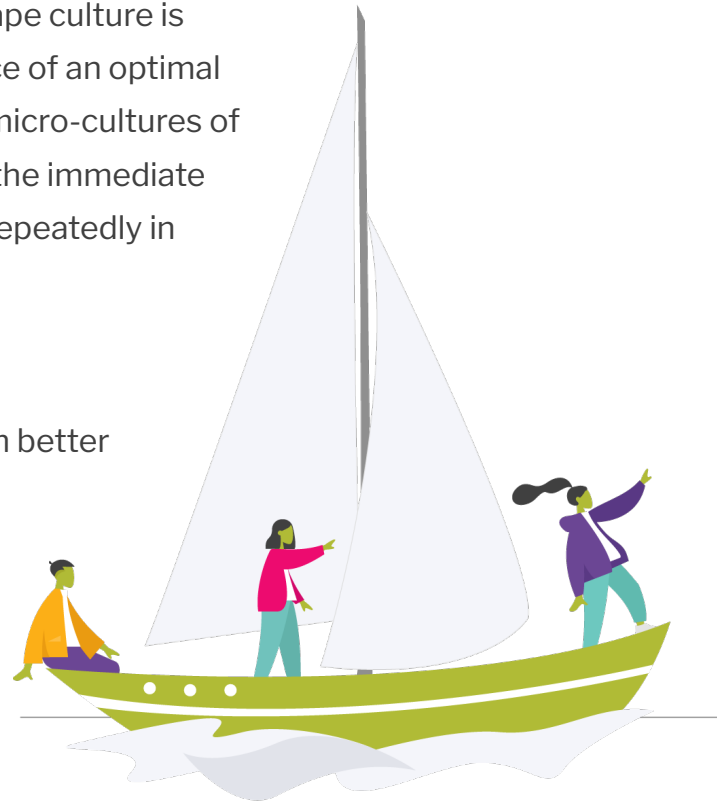
But the team leader matters more

Senior leaders shouldering their responsibility to shape culture is important, but teams can flourish even in the absence of an optimal culture. Individual teams, when well-led, can create micro-cultures of engagement and high performance. The key role of the immediate team leader in getting this to happen is highlighted repeatedly in the research.

1. The team has to trust the leader

Quite simply, if people trust their leader they perform better and are more committed to their organisation .

This is particularly the case for leaders who have Charismatic and Transformational leadership styles, which have been shown repeatedly to promote levels of positive emotional attachment and commitment to the organisation.³⁷



2. Doing nothing is worst

Leaders who don't like to act until they are feeling fully competent and skilful, need to be helped to challenge this perfectionist trait because it won't help the team. Similarly, leaders who believe that simply attending to one-on-one relationships with the team is good enough need to be encouraged to think again. Because the evidence is clear: laissez-faire leadership that fails to attend to the team as a team, is actually negatively related to commitment. That's right: doing nothing **actively undermines** commitment ³⁸

So even where the broader organisational context is less conducive to team working, individual teams, when well led, can create micro-cultures of engagement and high performance.

37 Trust in leadership: Meta-analytic findings and implications for research and practice. Dirks, K. T., & Ferrin, D. L. (2002). Journal of Applied Psychology

38 Leadership, Commitment, and Culture: A Meta-Analysis. Jackson, T.A. et al (2012) Journal of Organizational and Leadership Studies



What the leader does and how they do it

So far, we've identified that team leaders need to take the lead, and also that the kind of leadership shown by the team leader matters. Let's dive a little deeper into **what** the leader needs to do, but also **how** the team leader needs to lead.

Attend to the foundations first

The team leader has the key role in getting a team moving. Without leadership early on, a team risks wasting energy and losing people's goodwill. Gyre's own research data shows that teams that rate themselves highly on the statement: 'As a team we are fulfilling our potential' tend also to bring a sharp focus on the first 4 outcomes presented in this paper:

1. Growth: are we disciplined about improving our effectiveness?
2. Strategic: are we clear where we're going and is our direction meaningful?
3. Agile: do we know how to achieve our goals?
4. Inclusive: do we get the best from each other?



How to lead?

The team leader needs to lead. But if they are not careful in how they lead they will create problems. Imagine the team as a wheel with a hub and spokes: in this model, the team leader is the hub and the spokes are the team members. All interactions, decisions and information flows are routed through the leader, with very little across the team. The team leader will feel pressured, even stressed, but the team will move slowly, limited by the leader's capacity.

We can contrast the hub-and-spoke image with that of the mast and sails of a sailing boat. Without a mast the sails are just piles of cloth on the deck. But once the sails are hoist, it is the sails that drive the boat, with different parts of the sail pulling on each other to catch the wind. In this image, it's the leader that hoists the sails and trims them to catch the wind, but it's the sails (or the team members) that power the boat through the waves.

The research tells us that it is the mast-and-sails model that works better. The faster the team moves to a shared sense of ownership and leadership the more effective it will become. Shared leadership is central to teams getting the best out of each other, building effectiveness and delivering outcomes. More than that, shared leadership in teams is a key factor in creating teams that support mental health and wellbeing, that are agile and adaptable teams and both demand and support team member development.

Which, of course, raises the question: how to foster shared leadership? Leaders who push to bring diversity into their team and create a sense of inclusion and valuing differences are rewarded by teams that take leadership.

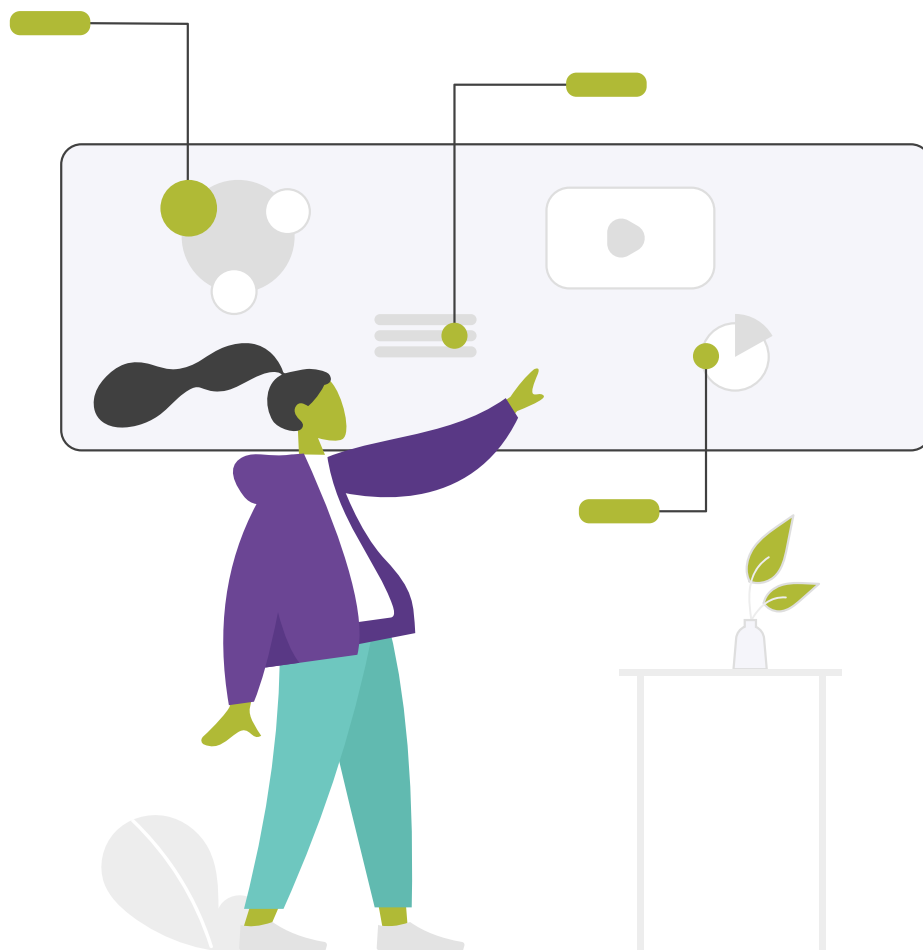




The implications

There are three immediate implications.

1. First, team leaders need to be actively supported to understand their own leadership style and impact and assumptions about how to create high performance teams.
2. Second, it provides a compelling case for everyone in the team to be guided to gain insight into their leadership style and impact³⁹, irrespective of whether they aspire to a formal leader position.
3. Team leaders and their teams need access to high-quality playbooks that they can turn to for guidance through their journey of creating high performance teams; without these, the complexity of teams risks overwhelming even the best-intentioned leader.



39 A Meta-analysis of shared leadership: antecedents, consequences, and moderators (2018) Qiong Wu et al. Journal of Organizational Studies



Conclusions and recommendations



Future research directions

All of the rich insight presented in this paper, along with our own research, has enabled Gyre to derive a set of robust, yet relatively simple principles that underpin effective team performance. In turn, we have used these principles to create a set of coherent pathways and playbooks to guide team leaders and their teams. But we argue that there is a glaring gap in the equation, and that is the dearth of rigorous research linking team behaviours to the tangible business outcomes and metrics that really matter to organisations, the ones they measure themselves on and report against.

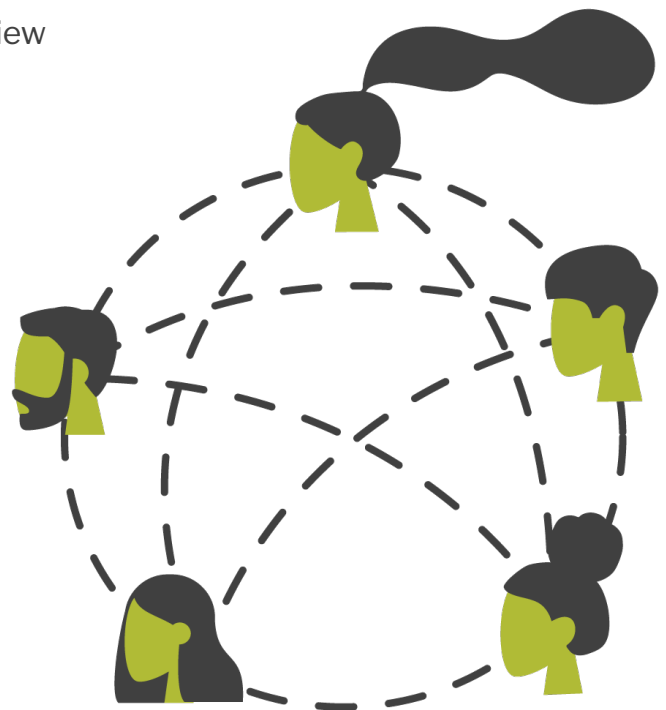


Gyre's mission is to make the world of work a better place by helping organisations to effectively harness the power of teams, which in turn enable both the organisation and the individuals within it to achieve their goals. Our methodology has baked into its core the continuous measurement and tracking of not just key organisational and team inputs, and not just essential team behaviours, but also tangible business outcomes arising from those inputs and behaviours. We are committed to ensuring that our enduring contribution to the field of team effectiveness will be to incrementally narrow the gap in our collective understanding around how the complexity inherent in team functioning translates into the metrics that matter for organisations and the individuals who work within them.

Data-driven insights must guide action

Our work with our customers generates rapid, data-driven insights that link their existing ways of working to their measurable effectiveness as individuals, teams, and collectively as a team of teams. It is the specificity of the insights we provide them at each of these three levels, which enables targeted interventions and curated playbooks to be selected. These interventions address not only the sub-optimised **parts** of their team dynamics, they also maintain perspective on the **whole** organisation as a system. It is this marriage of working simultaneously with both the constituent parts and the system as a whole which is key. The targeted, data-led insights, the application of simple actionable steps to build new habits and the iterative, cyclic discipline of measure, act, review and adapt are the key differentiators of the Gyre approach to developing team effectiveness.

Yet our argument goes wider: that it is for practitioners and solution-providers in the world of team development and team effectiveness to systematically establish and validate the links between team processes and desired outcomes. We at Gyre are committed to playing our part in this.



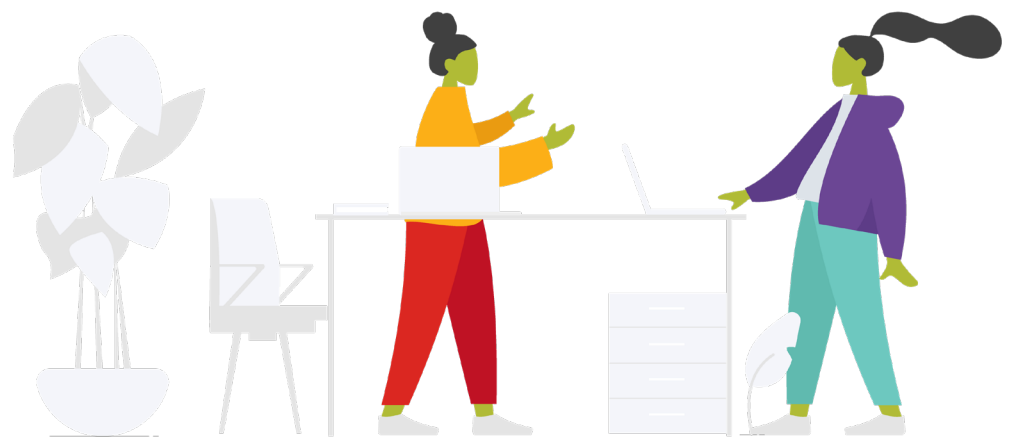


An example: Building innovation

To bring this to life through an example. One of our customers presented us with the challenge of needing their teams to be more innovative. Our digital tools swiftly and unobtrusively measure a range of their organisational and team inputs, additional team outputs (besides innovation), existing team behaviours, and individual and team leader strengths. The analysis of that data allowed Gyre to identify which parts of their system were likely to be contributing most to this perceived deficit in innovation.

We identified that in the teams where innovation was lowest there were lower levels of originality and risk-taking strengths in team members, coupled with a culture where high levels of executional delivery style (as opposed to charismatic or transformational) were observed amongst team leaders. Additionally, the data also suggested that these teams were not outward looking enough in their sense-making activities and were not sufficiently attuned to the wider organisation and market. And finally, people were frustrated with how their performance management processes placed a high value on their executional results, yet placed little if any value on innovation.

Gaining all of these insights about the state of their own system allowed our customer to commit to an interconnected set of individual, team and organisation level interventions. The Gyre platform contains easy to follow playbooks for individual and team development, built on the rigorously researched methods and psychologically informed techniques outlined in this paper. The data insights and the playbooks were our contribution, but it was the actions of our customer in weaving together a web of development that systematically changed their ability to innovate.





Team effectiveness demystified

It takes effort to change but with enough focused work and support, change is entirely possible. Gyre understands the effort required and is on hand with practical pathways and nudges, that reliably build team effectiveness. Team development is no longer a complete mystery and no longer requires expensive external consultants; it simply becomes a part of the habitual way a team operates. In this way teams can generate a spiralling uplift across individual and team behaviours that lifts them to achieve the outcomes they and their organisation want.

“

As the African Proverb suggests **“If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together”**. Gyre works alongside its customers to bring teams together to empower them to walk much further and faster than they ever could if they were left to figure this all out alone.



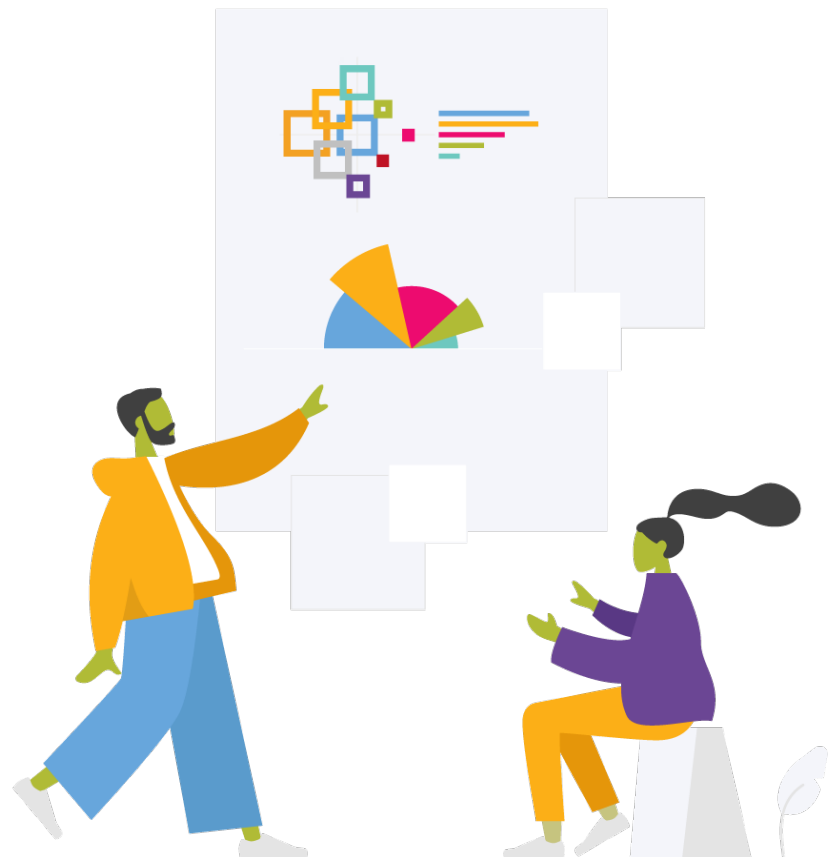


Appendix

The challenges of researching teams

Teams are complex and that complexity makes them hard to study⁴⁰.

The core concept of a group of people working together to achieve common goals and holding themselves accountable is pretty straightforward. The complexities crowd in as soon as you consider variables like the size of the team, how long it's been together, the role of the team in the wider organisation, whether team members are members of multiple teams, and so on. All of this has made the scientific study of teamwork challenging; it's been slow progress with many apparently contradictory results.



40 A Meta-analysis Of Teamwork Processes: Tests Of A Multidimensional Model And Relationships With Team Effectiveness Criteria - LePINE (2008) - Personnel Psychology



The consequence has been that different practitioners can have apparently equally valid reasons for taking diametrically opposed approaches to helping teams develop. As an example, there is continuing dispute as to whether team spirit is a consequence of an unwavering focus on performance or whether it is team spirit itself that leads to performance. The current hit TV series *Ted Lasso* makes the case for the latter argument, and countless ‘against the odds’ documentaries make the former case.

This inevitably leads to business leaders questioning whether facilitated team development works at all, and certainly whether it is worth the investment, even for senior teams, let alone thinking about how to scale team development across an organisation. The consequence is that the majority of employees have no access to, nor experience of high-performance work-based teams and team-working. The irony is that in their non-work lives, many will have the converse experience of playing in a sports team, music, dance or theatre group that is a direct experience of how a disparate group of people can successfully come together to perform at levels that often exceed expectations.





Seeing the scientific signal in the research noise

Our way of working through the complexity in the scientific literature has been to focus on meta-analytic studies. It is through the systematic pooling of comparable studies that we are best able to gain an overview of the many factors influencing team effectiveness. This regular broad scanning of the literature helps us to identify the most robust assertions arising from existing research.

For this paper, 35 meta-analyses were selected on areas specifically relevant to Team Effectiveness, along with a smaller selection of individual studies (where no meta-analyses could be found on the topic). These meta-analyses accumulate the results of thousands of studies, which in turn represent research across the past 3 decades into many tens of thousands of teams, across geographies and industries.



But this very richness highlights a core problem. What emerges from the literature is a complex web of inter-relations with innumerable feedback loops between different elements. Research, in the main, has examined unidirectional relationships between combinations of these elements. For example, some researchers have tracked the impact of organisational design (Input) on innovation levels (Team Behaviours)⁴¹, others have looked at individual leadership behaviours (Input) in teams and behaviorally-based team learning (Team Behaviours)⁴². However, a moment's reflection highlights that there are more or less unlimited combinations of relationship possibilities between these various elements of Inputs, Team Behaviours and Outcomes . Distilling this complexity is a key aim of this paper.

Much less common in the research is a focus on actual business outcomes and metrics such as shareholder value, revenue generation or employee retention. In some ways, this lack is unsurprising: given the potential complexity of interrelationships amongst the variables it is difficult to create convincing pictures of causality: which variables are most clearly leading to which business outcomes. In practical terms too, predictive validation studies can be less satisfying, the delay required to observe the resultant business outcomes requires patience and investment; hence the greater prevalence of concurrent studies where one existing factor e.g. communication patterns can be seen to relate to the presence or absence of another existing factor e.g. motivation levels.

In conclusion, Gyre are committed to playing our part in researching and validating the links between team processes and desired organisational outcomes. As such, we welcome the opportunity to consider and incorporate any additional insights and new research findings we receive from our readership community, such that we may enrich our ever-expanding understanding of this endlessly fascinating field.



41 Teamwork and Organizational Innovation: The Moderating Role of the HRM Context. Fay et al. (2014) Creativity and Innovation Management

42 What type of leadership behaviors are functional in teams? A meta-analysis, Salas et al, (2006) The Leadership Quarterly

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