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TEAM  
EFFECTIVENESS

# Toolkit Exercises



# Introduction

Central to the AIIR Enterprise Team Effectiveness solution is a toolkit of exercises that the certified practitioner can apply in working with teams. These exercises were developed by AIIR's world-class team of psychologists and instructional designers to turn the insights of the AIIR Team Effectiveness Survey into action. Each of the 12 exercises maps to a specific subscale measured by the AIIR Team Effectiveness Survey, empowering the certified practitioner to design experiences that address the specific strengths and opportunities uncovered in the team's report.

This catalog provides an overview of each exercise in the toolkit.



# Exercises for Alignment

Alignment is defined as a shared understanding of purpose, priorities, and plans. It is how team members cultivate what is known as a shared mental model. This includes:

- > Why the team exists
- > What the team will accomplish
- > How they will accomplish their goals

Strong alignment connects otherwise individual contributors into a collaborative system working toward a collective goal.

## Clarifying Team Purpose

**Explore the team's business context and develop a compelling statement of purpose.**

Why does the team exist? This seems like a simple question, but the answer is difficult to untangle for most teams. In this exercise, the coach begins by exploring how the team fits into the broader context of the organization, then moves through a series of semi-structured discussions to address essential questions about the shared mandate, shared obligations, and desired impact. This is then shaped by the team into a unifying and compelling Team Purpose Statement.

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand how this team fits into the broader business context.
2. Develop a compelling statement of the team's essential purpose.
3. Identify the key activities this team must focus on when working together.

## Establishing Shared Business Priorities

**Clarify the few things this team must focus on now to realize its purpose.**

Teams are most effective when they rally their collective energy to drive a small handful of key initiatives. And yet, most teams spread their energy too thin, chasing after pet projects and reactively putting out fires. In this exercise, the coach challenges the team to define and commit to the few critical priorities that this team—and only this team—can accomplish by working together. This clarity provides a guiding framework for the team's work together as they move forward.

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand the importance of focusing on priorities that require collective ownership and input.
2. Develop a list of the team's most critical priorities.

# Exercises for Execution

Execution is defined as efficient and effective coordination, communication, and collaboration.

Execution is how the team implements its plans. While teams rely heavily on individual action to get things done, team Execution refers to the coordination of those actions such that team members move in lockstep with one another.

Teams that execute well maintain great communication through this phase to keep each other up to date on progress and changes. They also come together as needed to collaborate on tasks, provide input, and share knowledge.

## Enhancing Team Meetings

**Examine and optimize how the team spends its meeting time.**

Team meetings are generally seen as necessary and rarely felt as valuable. Without careful design, they can easily devolve into wandering debates that aren't resolved and report-outs that ignore most other team members. In this module, we explore the key components of all effective meetings, examine the team's current meetings, and decide on some improvements to how the team holds its meetings moving forward.

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand the critical qualities of great team meetings.
2. Recognize what is already working as well as what can be improved in our team's meetings.
3. Develop an action plan to enhance the effectiveness of team meetings so they are more focused, engaging, and productive.

## Applying Appreciative Inquiry

**Resolve a critical business issue harnessing the collective input of the team.**

When teams struggle with contentious issues, they often focus on solving the most critical problems. But, paradoxically, a focus on the positive aspects of the issue can help spur creative thinking and new solutions that really work. In this module, we apply a proven 5-step process called Appreciative Inquiry to address a challenging issue on the team.

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand the Appreciative Inquiry process and how it is applied to business challenges.
2. Develop questioning and storytelling skills focused on identifying strengths.
3. Develop a practical solution to a real business challenge.

# Exercises for Learning and Adapting

Learning and Adapting is defined as the capacity to overcome obstacles and adjust to new realities.

Things rarely go as planned. Successful teams are able to nimbly shift their approach in the face of new developments or unexpected challenges.

They also build and maintain knowledge through team learning that gets incorporated into future endeavors, generating consistent improvement in how the team operates.

## Creating a Culture of Learning

**Understand the value of team learning and explore ways to make it habitual.**

Team learning is critical to the long term success and growth of teams, allowing them to increase efficiency and cultivate new and better ways of doing things over time. It is also one of the easiest things to ignore when faced with the burning problems of the day. In this module, we discuss the importance of team learning and identify mechanisms for regularly discussing and distilling key insights for the team's growth.

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand the importance of team learning.
2. Develop intentional mechanisms to enhance team learning, making the team more adaptable when faced with challenges and setbacks.

## Developing Strategic Acumen

**Sharpen the team's focus on strategic activities, both internal and external.**

When plans inevitably go awry or unexpected difficulties emerge, the best teams are ready to rise to the challenge. Adaptable teams have strong strategic acumen because they harness the multiple perspectives, lines of sight, and capabilities of all team members. In this module, we'll explore what it means to be strategic at the team level and identify some key points of focus for the team to develop its strategic acumen.

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand why strategic acumen is important.
2. Build processes for improving internal ways of working.
3. Build practical mechanisms for anticipating emerging trends in the external business environment.

# Exercises for Trust and Safety

Trust & Safety is defined as an environment of openness, honesty, and an absence of fear.

When there is trust, team members are not afraid of being wrong. They take small risks, like speaking up when they disagree.

Trust is always earned, never assumed – it takes work to build and maintain this environment.

## Setting Team Operating Principles

**Clarify and commit to the principles that guide team behavior.**

All teams have underlying principles that determine what behaviors are accepted, encouraged, and required on the team. The problem for many teams is that these are vague and unspoken, which leaves team members to their own devices when trying to determine the right way to interact on the team. In this exercise, we work to define a list of the most important team operating principles so everyone is working from the same knowledge, building a strong foundation for team trust.

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand the importance of Team Operating Principles regarding team performance and team trust.
2. Develop a short and comprehensive list of clear, concise, and consequential Team Operating Principles that establishes team norms and expectations.

## Deepening Team Trust

**Explore the conditions for team trust and make individual commitments to building trust.**

Trust is the foundation for deep and meaningful team interactions, and it can never be taken for granted. In fact, it's much easier to destroy than to build, and it rarely grows naturally on teams. In this module, we will explore a number of individual behaviors that support trust, ask each team member to identify an area for improvement, and make individual commitments to better upholding those trust-building behaviors.

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand the importance of trust on the team.
2. Reflect on our own personal trust behaviors.
3. Commit to behaviors that support increased team trust.

# Exercises for Cohesion

Cohesion is defined as a shared sense of belonging and commitment to the team.

Cohesive teams are motivated and inspired by the team's purpose and the work of the team. They feel connected to not only the team's work, but to each other as human beings.

When a cohesive team faces difficult or challenging circumstances, they remain stable and bind even closer together, rather than succumbing to these pressures and splitting apart.

## Practicing Recognition

**Understand the value of peer-to-peer recognition and make this a team habit.**

Research shows that peer-to-peer recognition, as opposed to recognition that only comes from managers, can improve business performance in addition to strengthening the bonds between team members. In this module, we explore the importance of recognizing each other and identify mechanisms for building recognition into our regular team interactions.

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand the value and importance of peer-to-peer recognition.
2. Identify mechanisms for incorporating recognition into the team's interactions.

## Sharing Personal Stories

**Deepen personal connection through sharing the stories that shaped our lives.**

When there is always so much work to accomplish, teams rarely set aside the time to get to know each other as individuals. But in doing so, we can discover truly meaningful connections that bring us closer together, making teamwork easier and reducing the potential for personal conflict. The premise of this module is simple and impactful: team members are prompted to think of and share a story that shaped who they are today.

### Learning Objectives

1. Foster understanding and empathy among team members.
2. Enhance cohesion by getting to know one another better.

# Exercises for Dialogue

Dialogue is defined as the capacity to work through conflict with compassion and understanding. When teams are able to debate sensitive issues without getting personal or defensive, they increase their chances of making rational decisions while strengthening positive communication patterns. Strong dialogue on a team makes the best use of cognitive diversity, ensuring that team decisions result from the reconciliation of competing perspectives and priorities.

## Valuing Productive Conflict

**Recognize the value of conflict and commit to engaging more productively.**

Many people tend to regard conflict as something to be avoided, downplayed, or ignored. What they fail to realize is that conflict has incredible transformative power and can be among a team's most potent assets for high performance. In this module, we discuss the value of conflict and the methods for handling it constructively, then make individual commitments to improving our productive conflict skills.

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand the inherent value of productive conflict in the context of team and business performance.
2. Identify an area for improving your productive conflict skills, based on a self-assessment.

## Leveraging Diverse Roles

**Appreciate the role diversity on this team and how it creates natural points of tension.**

Most teams include members with a range of individual roles and responsibilities, with different expectations and stakeholder accountabilities placed on different individuals. This generates great potential for innovation and collaboration, but also comes with the risk that these natural role tensions will be interpreted as personal conflicts. In this module, we explore the value of role diversity, map the natural tensions on the team, and commit to approaching conflicts with an understanding and respect for our diverse team roles.

### Learning Objectives

1. Understand and appreciate the importance of role diversity and natural tension.
2. Develop a clear understanding of the different roles on the team and how they may be in conflict with one another.
3. Individually commit to improving productive dialogue on the team.