

Unlock the Extraordinary



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Even teams composed of exceptionally talented individuals often fail to meet their objectives, much less exceed them

Executive Summary

Teams provide an undeniable advantage over the individual. When teams function at a high level, they produce extraordinary results above and beyond the capabilities of their individual members.

And yet, most teams never reach this state of performance.

Even teams composed of exceptionally talented individuals often fail to meet their objectives, much less exceed them.

Why?

Talent development professionals have attempted to answer this question for decades. And, as organizations increasingly rely on teams to achieve key organizational goals, the question is more pertinent than ever.

Our study of available models, experience working with teams, and understanding of the current literature revealed that most models of team effectiveness are ill-suited for the complexity of the modern work environment.

Working from this revelation, we created AIIR Team Effectiveness, a simple and powerful model built for modern teams.

In this whitepaper, we lay the scientific foundation for our model of team effectiveness and demonstrate how AIIR Team Effectiveness addresses both the processes that dictate how teams work and the interpersonal dynamics that allow them to transcend their individual identities, unlock their performance, and generate extraordinary results.



Employees and managers reported at least a **50%** increase in the amount of time spent on team-related tasks over the past 20 years

> Collaboration is King

Teams are an essential part of modern work (Kaplan, Dollar, Melian, Van Durme, & Wong, 2016) and are increasingly being recognized as a powerful source of competitive advantage. From the executive teams that run organizations to matrixed project teams to the sales and service teams that interact directly with customers, “collaboration is taking over the workplace” (Cross, Rebel, & Grant, 2016, p. 74). A recent survey found employees and managers reported at least a 50% increase in the amount of time spent on team-related tasks over the past 20 years (Ibid, 2016). This trend shows no signs of stopping as more and more organizations transition from traditional hierarchies to networks of teams (Deloitte, 2018). With this dramatic increase in teamwork and collaboration, organizations must adjust their talent strategies to harness the potential of these teams.

> The Undeniable Advantage

The shift to teamwork in today's modern workplace makes sense — teams can provide organizations an incredible advantage (Society for Human Resource Management, 2018). Teams can take on more complex work than individuals because team members can combine their diverse, complementary capabilities to provide backup behaviors, monitor one another to reduce errors, and shift the workload as needed (Goodwin, Blacksmith, & Coats, 2018). Academic research has shown that high-performing teams almost always make better decisions than individuals (Blinder & Morgan, 2000) and industry research shows that high-performing teams achieved huge improvements in areas including customer experience, employee satisfaction, and operational performance, often in less than a year (Hanlan, 2004).

> When Teamwork Doesn't Work

Despite the clear benefits to teams and their organizations, effective teaming is neither simple nor easy. Team effectiveness is driven by team processes (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001) as well as the attitudes, values, cognition, and motivations of its team members, all of which require a concerted effort to maintain (Lacerenza, Marlow, Tannenbaum, & Salas, 2018). Due to the complexities inherent in teams, they are often susceptible to all manner of dysfunctions. Instead of gaining exponential output through collaboration, many teams operate as a collection of individuals. Although they work hard, their work is not coordinated or aimed toward a unified, clear set of objectives. Not only will such a team deliver lackluster results as they fail to capture the beneficial effects of teaming, but this lack of coordination can also cause team members to unknowingly work against each other, generating frustration and unhealthy competition for the advancement of individual priorities.

Teams that form without establishing psychological closeness and safety will lack the basic conditions for innovation, creativity, decision-making,



and even successful completion of essential tasks (Cleveland et al., 2011; Schaefer & Palanski, 2013). On the other hand, extremely close-knit teams are susceptible to groupthink and “emotional contagion” that can influence the happiness and creativity of individual members (Visser et al., 2013). It is therefore critical for teams to establish a healthy balance of behaviors that engender psychological safety while maintaining the distance and objectivity necessary to challenge one another and embrace healthy conflict.



AIIR Team Effectiveness

A Breakthrough Model

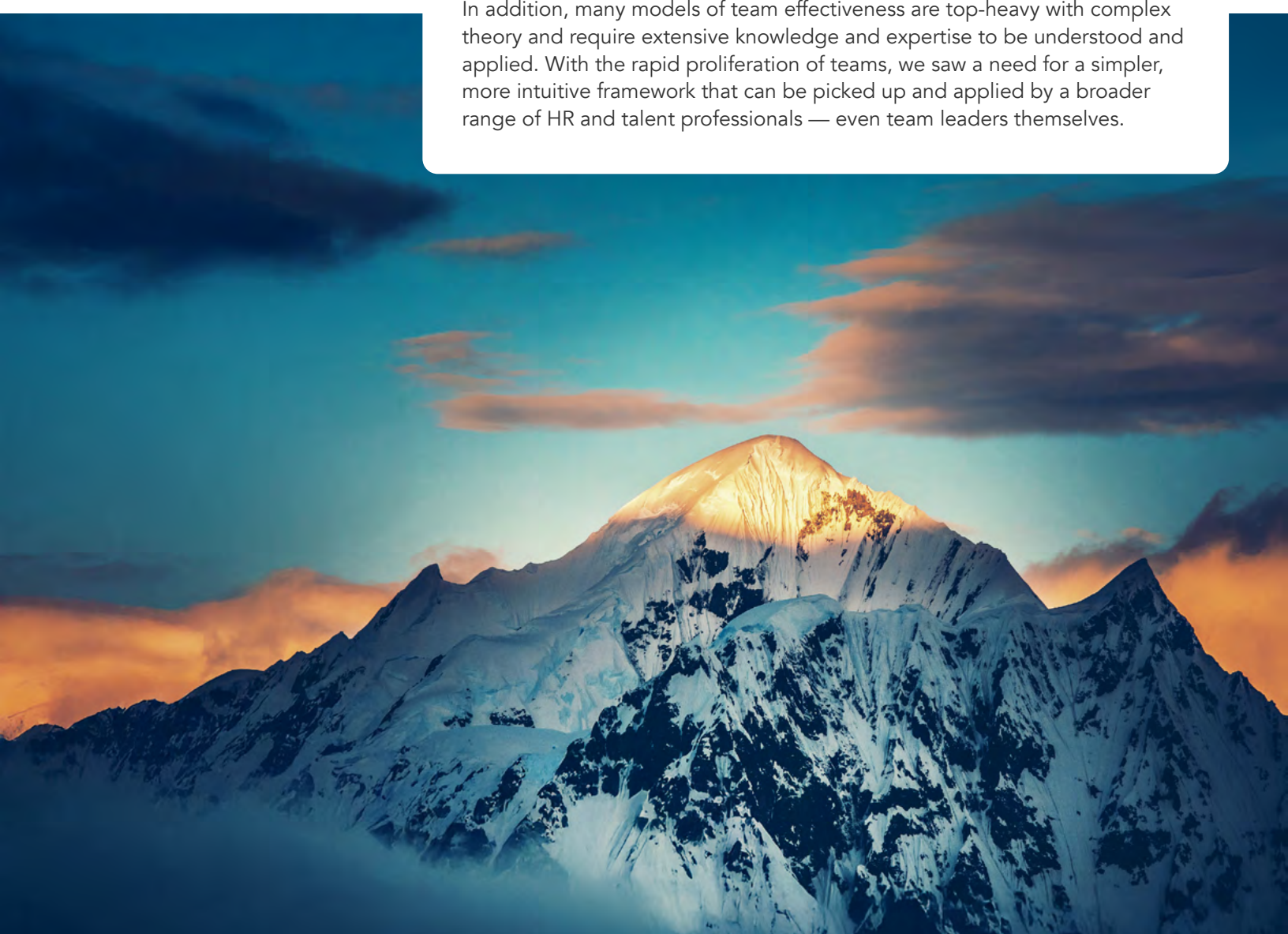
Recognizing the potential power of teams and the inherent difficulty of harnessing team dynamics, AIIR Consulting designed the AIIR Team Effectiveness model as a practical intervention for leadership and management teams in modern organizations.

> Updating an Outdated Model

Our extensive work with corporate team leaders and a thorough review of available models in the marketplace proved a new approach was badly needed to overcome the complexities today's teams face. The majority of available models for team effectiveness were designed for hierarchical and siloed organizations that defined teams in traditional terms. We noted that the emphasis on traditional teams — which tended to be a group of people who meet in person and stay intact for long periods of time — was less relevant in the context of matrixed, cross-disciplinary, or geographically dispersed teams that are much more common today.

In addition, many models of team effectiveness are top-heavy with complex theory and require extensive knowledge and expertise to be understood and applied. With the rapid proliferation of teams, we saw a need for a simpler, more intuitive framework that can be picked up and applied by a broader range of HR and talent professionals — even team leaders themselves.

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> Building a Process-Based Framework

To develop a new model of team effectiveness, we drew on the experience and perspectives of more than 50 executive coaches and high-performing team leaders around the globe. Further, we synthesized research in the team effectiveness literature to develop an intuitive and business-relevant model of team effectiveness that could be both actionable and scalable. Finally, over a period of 2 years, we gathered data from hundreds of individuals on corporate teams to test and refine our model.

Ultimately, we determined that a process-based framework provides the most direct and applicable insights into team effectiveness. Team processes are functions performed by team members to coordinate and combine individual activity to accomplish team goals. In other words, they are the means through which teams perform (Hackman & Morris, 1975). Although other perspectives of team effectiveness exist, such as examining individual (e.g., team demographic composition, personality characteristics) or organizational factors (e.g., team budget, resources, and institutional support), a process-based framework that assesses how a team functions as a cohesive whole puts the power for team transformation in the hands of those most capable to wield it — the team members themselves.

> Input-Processes-Output

Our model of team effectiveness is based on the Input-Process-Outcome (IPO) model (McGrath, 1964), which has served as the dominant framework for investigating team effectiveness for more than 50 years (Goodwin et al., 2018). The IPO model advanced our understanding of team processes by characterizing team communication, cooperation, and coordination behaviors as critical processes for team effectiveness (McGrath, 1964). These processes can be organized in a temporal framework in which team behaviors can be understood as recurring episodes of *inputs*, *processes*, and *outputs* that emerge over time as team members interact and the team develops (Marks et al., 2001; Kozlowski, Gully, Nason, & Smith, 1999).

Inputs can refer to individual, team, or organizational factors such as personality characteristics, team composition, or support from upper-level management.

Processes refer to activities team members engage in, combining their resources to resolve (or fail to resolve) task demands and mediate the conversion of *inputs* to outcomes. These processes are characterized in terms of how teamwork is performed (i.e., *action* processes), how work is organized (i.e., *transition* processes), and how team members interact together over the course of the team's lifespan (i.e., *interpersonal* processes).

Outputs comprises three facets: (a) performance judged by relevant others who are external to the team (e.g., key stakeholders); (b) meeting of team member needs; and (c) viability, or the willingness of members to remain in the team (Hackman, 1987).

Dual Domains of Team Effectiveness

Using the IPO model as our lens to study the process of team effectiveness, a clear insight emerged from our study of the data: a team's success can be predicted by how well teams attend to and balance their efforts to create a strong team culture while being mindful of the tasks before them. We conceptualized this balancing act into two domains — **Team Productivity** and **Team Culture**.

Team Productivity captures a team's *action* and *transition processes* and is defined as the manner in which a team efficiently and effectively gets work done. It is represented by three process factors:

- 1 Alignment
- 2 Execution
- 3 Learning and adapting

Team Culture captures a team's interpersonal processes and is defined as the manner in which team members interact and relate to one another. It is represented by three process factors:

- 1 Trust and safety
- 2 Cohesion
- 3 Dialogue

Team Productivity

The Team Productivity dimension assesses a team's ability to efficiently and effectively get work done.

Our survey of the literature identified three factors that represent a unique combination of both transition and action processes: (1) *alignment*, (2) *execution*, and (3) *learning and adapting*.

Alignment

Alignment captures effective team transition processes and is characterized by:

1. A clear understanding of the team's purpose
2. The ability to establish shared goals and prioritize tasks
3. Clear task ownership among team members (Stout, Cannon-Bowers, Salas, & Milanovich, 1999).

Team alignment is critical to a team's productivity. It connects otherwise individual contributors into a collaborative system working toward a collective goal. To motivate and unite team members, the team's purpose must be clear, compelling, and consequential (Wageman, Hackman, & Lehman, 2005). Alignment ensures that team members share an understanding of their roles and goals on a project. Together, these elements establish what is often referred to as a "shared mental model" (Salas, Reyes, & McDaniel, 2018) that gets team members on the same page, ensuring they are thinking and moving in the same direction (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001; Lacerenza et al., 2018; Klein, DiazGranados, Salas, Le, Burke, Lyons, & Goodwin, 2009).

Execution

Execution refers to a team's ability to accomplish team tasks through collaboration and coordination. This concept represents *action processes* that occur among team members through behaviors such as sharing updates and collaborating with other team members to complete goal-relevant tasks (Salas, Shuffler, Thayer, Bedwell, & Lazzara, 2015; Wilson, Salas, Priest, & Andrews, 2007).

Efficient execution is particularly important as a focus area for both geographically dispersed teams and executive teams due to the high risk of communication gaps or delays in decision-making. Teams with high levels of execution are quick to provide feedback and assistance to each other, share information as it becomes available, and stem difficulties before they become major problems (Wilson et al., 2007).

To motivate and unite team members, the team's purpose must be clear, compelling, and consequential



Learning and Adapting

Learning and adapting synthesizes both *transition* and *action processes* and refers to a team's ability to self-correct in the midst of unexpected setbacks or challenges. *Learning* refers to a team's ability to take stock of previous successes and failures and update their plans to reflect new insights while *adapting* assesses a team's ability to respond to changes in the business environment.

In a rapidly evolving and VUCA world, a team's ability in this domain is a critical success factor. In fact, this ability is considered "one of the few universally effective [team] strategies" (Driskell, Salas, & Driskell, 2018, p. 338) because it modifies the team's actions to be as efficient and functional as possible (Marks, et al., 2001). Teams with high levels of learning and adapting are able to self-correct and remain flexible and cohesive during setbacks (DeChurch & Mesmer-Magnus, 2010; Driskell et al., 2018).



Team Culture

The Team Culture domain assesses how team members interact and relate to one another.

Contrasting the cyclical nature of Team Productivity, the interpersonal processes described by Team Culture are always present, underlying all interactions that take place within the team. It describes how team members interact with each other in terms of: (1) *trust and safety*, (2) *cohesion*, and (3) *dialogue*.

Trust and Safety

Trust and safety refer to the level of comfort team members feel in taking personal risks to share their perspective without the fear of reprisal (Edmonson, 1999; Rozovsky, 2015). Modern human societies depend on interpersonal trust. Team trust is an essential component of mitigating and resolving conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003) and serves as the bedrock to building team safety, which enables team members to overcome uncertainty and display vulnerability with their teammates (Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klingler, Pezeshkan, & Vracheva, 2017).

As the levels of trust and safety increase, so too does team cooperation and collaboration (Wilson et al, 2007; Das & Teng, 2004). Cooperation with others activates the release of oxytocin, testosterone, and dopamine and the formation of different neural networks within the brain (Krueger & Meyer-Lindberg, 2018). These networks are strengthened through continued interaction and can significantly impact the quality of work one is able to perform in a group context. Teams with high levels of safety invite individuals to speak freely, engage in creative problem-solving, and resolve conflicts collaboratively (Burke, Stagl, Klein, Goodwin, Salas, & Halpin, 2006; Nembhard & Edmonson, 2011; De Jong, Dirks, & Gillespie, 2016). Conversely, on teams with low levels of safety, information sharing and collaboration are severely restricted and team discussion is often superficial and counterproductive (Edmonson, 1999).



Cohesion

Team cohesion refers to the quality of the relationships team members have with each other and the level of personal affiliation felt among team members. Cohesion integrates important concepts frequently discussed separately in team science research, such as group pride and team commitment, as well as interpersonal needs such as liking and belonging. Individuals who strongly identify with their team members are more likely to be motivated to work together to drive team results due to shared attitudes, beliefs, and feelings held by individuals (Salas et al., 2015). Strong cohesion has been linked to a variety of positive team outcomes, including lower rates of stress and higher employee satisfaction and retention (Griffith, 2002).

Dialogue

Lastly, dialogue assesses a team's overall communication process when disagreement, challenges, or conflict arise. This includes how well different points of views are considered by team members, the extent of debate that occurs during team discussion, and the moderation of team conflict.

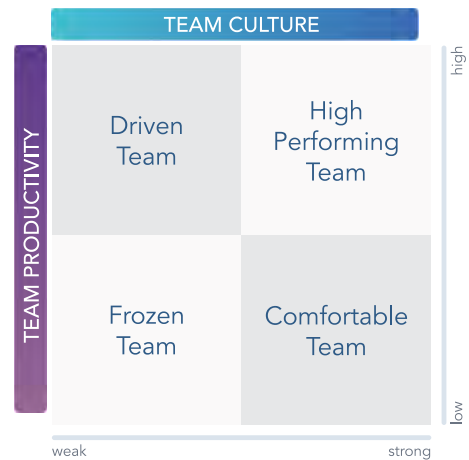
Effective team dialogue facilitates contributions from all team members and fosters collaborative problem-solving, effective information sharing, and decisive action (Hayes & Omodei, 2011; McIntyre & Salas, 1995). Consequently, teams with effective dialogue are better able to achieve their goals (Marks, et al., 2001). Conversely, teams with poor dialogue tend to be disengaged with their work and team members often get derailed when challenges arise (Jehn, 1997).



Four Types of Teams

In our research and experience working with corporate leaders, we have observed teams with varying levels of Team Productivity and Team Culture. Based on a team's unique combination of strengths and weaknesses in these domains, measured by the AIIR Team Effectiveness Survey, it is possible to plot a team's scores on a matrix that describes four distinct types of teams. We have defined these teams as:

- 1. **Driven** — high Team Productivity, low Team Culture
- 2. **Comfortable** — low Team Productivity, high Team Culture
- 3. **Frozen** — low Team Productivity, low Team Culture
- 4. **High-Performing** — high Team Productivity, high Team Culture



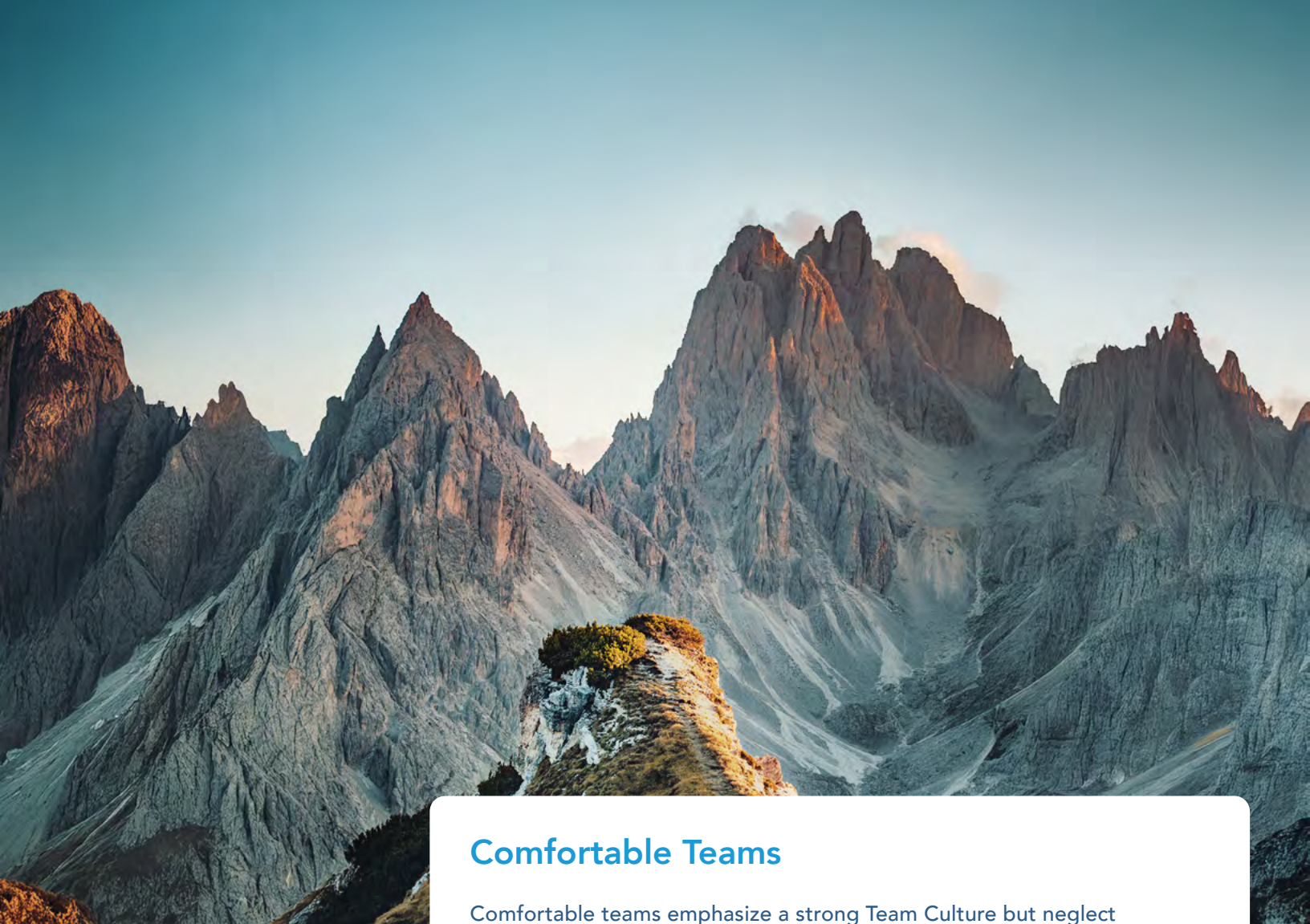
Each of the four teams attends to the two domains of team effectiveness in different ways and are described below.

Individuals on driven teams tend to operate more as independent contributors and focus primarily on protecting their own self-interest

Driven Teams

Driven teams are those whose work is highly productive, but limited by an underdeveloped Team Culture (Hackman, 1987). On the surface, driven teams appear to be built for success: team members are talented, hard-working, ambitious, results-oriented, and focused on the bottom line. Team meetings are structured, team leaders establish clear roles and priorities, and team members hold themselves accountable for their work. In other words, these teams are built to “drive” results. Unfortunately, with such a strong emphasis on Team Productivity, driven teams minimize or neglect the importance Team Culture has on a team's sustained effectiveness.

Individuals on driven teams tend to operate more as independent contributors and focus primarily on protecting their own self-interest. Team discussions are thorough and efficient, but lack contribution and collaboration from others. When problems arise, it is not uncommon for individuals to engage in turf wars, and interpersonal conflict is often left unresolved. By emphasizing team results over team members, individuals on driven teams are adversely affected: employee satisfaction drops, creativity and innovation stall, and key team members may resign (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Ultimately, “the integrity of the [team] as a performing unit is destroyed” as “the [team] ‘burns itself up’ in the process” (Hackman, 1987, p. 22).



Comfortable Teams

Comfortable teams emphasize a strong Team Culture but neglect important elements of Team Productivity. In these teams, individuals feel a strong sense of team pride and affiliation as well as strong interpersonal liking. Team members are supportive and respectful, behaving in ways that engender a welcoming and collaborative atmosphere. Although comfortable teams are skilled at prioritizing Team Culture elements, they tend to deemphasize the importance of Team Productivity. Consequently, comfortable teams typically lack a clear sense of purpose, which undermines their ability to establish goals and assign tasks, leaving the team aimless and ineffective (Marks, et al., 2001).

When comfortable teams do engage with each other to accomplish tasks, they are prone to “going through the motions.” Team meetings are held without specific agendas, goals are often conservative, and progress is likely to be sluggish. If a team member fails to complete a task or reach a project milestone, they are given the “benefit of the doubt” and are often not held accountable. When problems arise, team members are slow to respond, and team leaders tend to be reluctant to adjust their plans in the face of change or unexpected setbacks.

Most importantly, due to the highly congenial atmosphere and reluctance to engage in healthy debate, decision-making within comfortable teams is highly susceptible to groupthink, stifling creativity and innovation (Wise, 2014; Kong, Konczak, & Bottom, 2015).

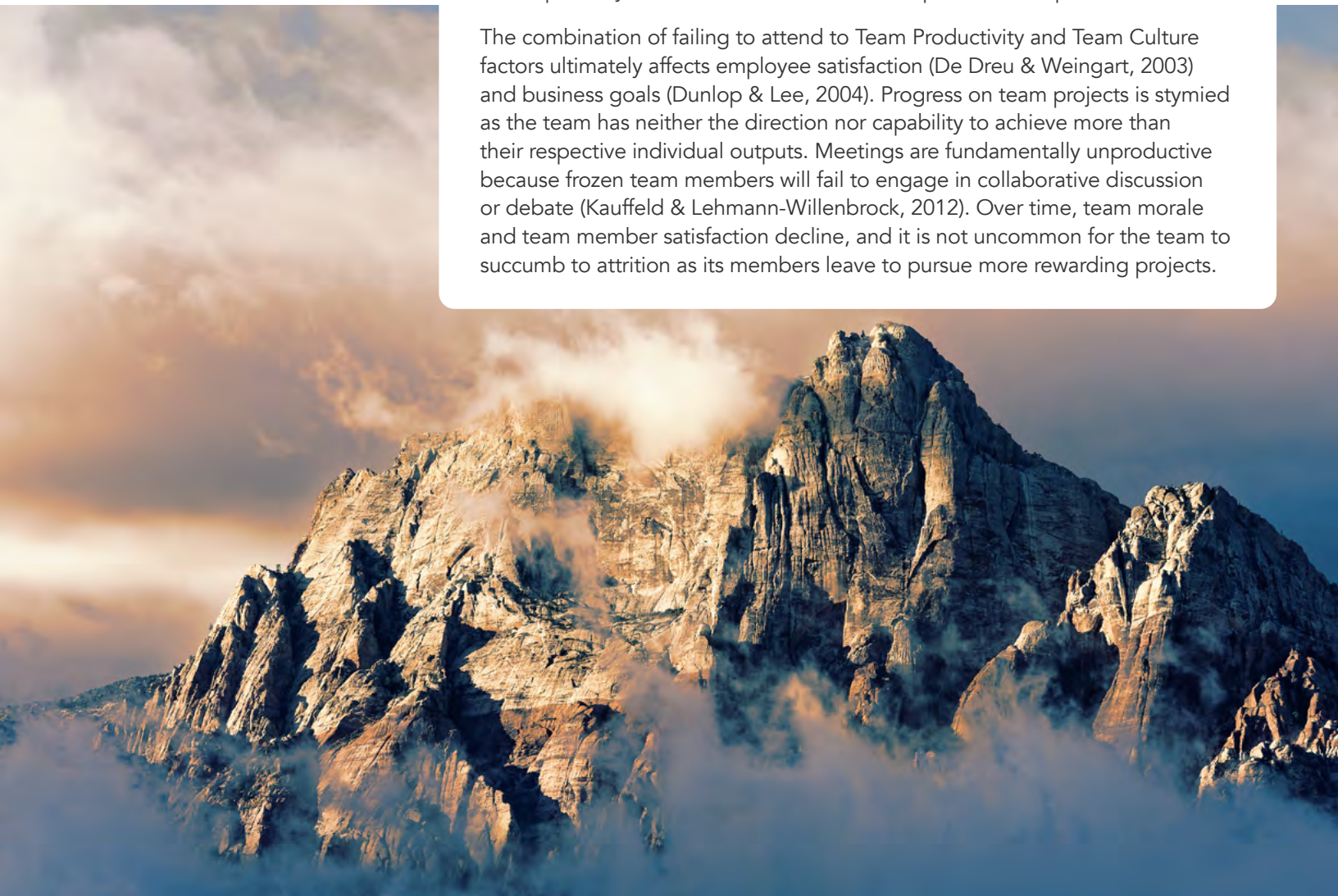


Frozen Teams

Frozen teams lack important elements of Team Productivity as well as an enabling Team Culture. While both comfortable and driven teams attend to at least one of the two fundamental team effectiveness domains, frozen teams struggle with both Team Productivity and Team Culture. Consequently, team meetings are often held without clear agendas, difficult decisions are routinely put off, individual efforts supplant meaningful collaboration, and strategic discussions give way to endless firefighting (Stohl & Schell, 1991). It is not uncommon for members on a frozen team to limit their interactions with others either personally or professionally.

By failing to attend to Team Culture, team members may be distant and disengaged with one another and may even exhibit dysfunctional organizational behavior that undermines their team or its individual members (Griffin & Lopez, 2005; Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006; Felps, Mitchell, & Byington, 2006). At the individual level, disengagement can actually be observed physiologically, with team members demonstrating lower levels of brain activity during collaboration (Kolm, Stevens, & Galloway, 2013). Conversely, greater social activity can lead to improved overall brain functioning. Research on monkeys has shown that more friendships lead to healthier, better-integrated neural pathways mediating social connection compared to monkeys whose social networks are less well-developed (Sallet et al., 2011). Because teamwork and collaboration both rely heavily on these neural pathways, social bonds have a direct impact on team performance.

The combination of failing to attend to Team Productivity and Team Culture factors ultimately affects employee satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003) and business goals (Dunlop & Lee, 2004). Progress on team projects is stymied as the team has neither the direction nor capability to achieve more than their respective individual outputs. Meetings are fundamentally unproductive because frozen team members will fail to engage in collaborative discussion or debate (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Over time, team morale and team member satisfaction decline, and it is not uncommon for the team to succumb to attrition as its members leave to pursue more rewarding projects.

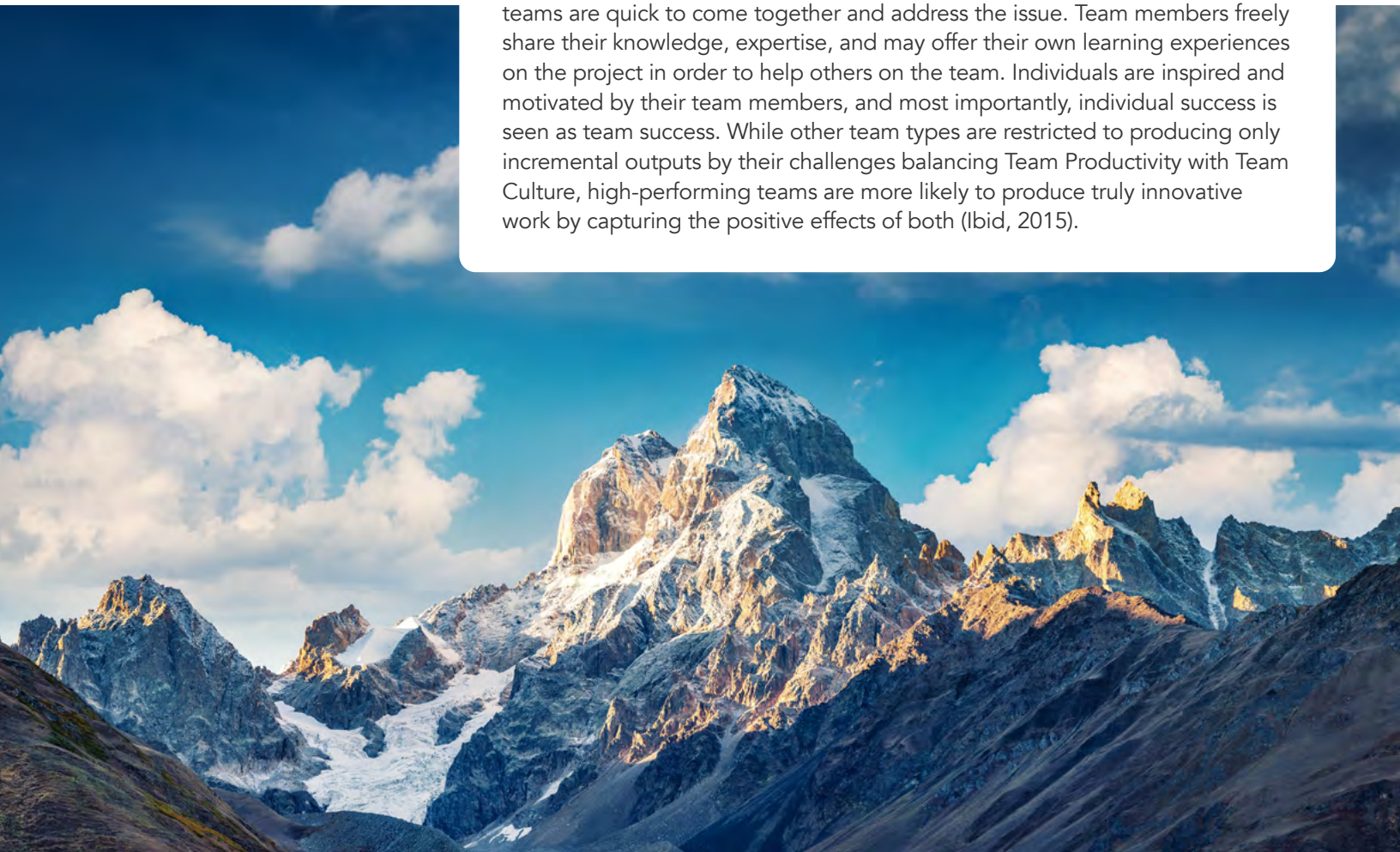


High-Performing Teams

High-performing teams successfully balance **Team Productivity and Team Culture** elements by placing the importance of team results on par with maintaining a strong team culture (Hanlan, 2004). Whereas comfortable and driven teams attend to only one of the two dimensions of team effectiveness and frozen teams are unable to attend to either domain, high-performing teams acknowledge that for the team to be successful, both are vital to their long-term success.

High-performing teams are motivated by the challenge placed before them (Katzenbach & Smith, 2005). They create a shared purpose around the task at hand, come together to establish team goals and priorities, and they delegate tasks to each other. (Katzenbach, 2000). The process of identifying the team's goal and priorities leverages participation from all team members. While differing perspectives are considered and debated, team members feel safe to push the discussion forward out of an underlying sense of trust and mutual respect. Individual team members offer their expertise and are willing to collaborate with team members experienced in other areas to reach a solution. With everyone contributing to the discussion, high-performing teams quickly align to the strategic direction of the project and understand how individual team members' experience and expertise can contribute to accomplishing team goals (Hanlan, 2004).

As a high-performing team's work progresses, members openly share the progress and status of their work while holding themselves and their team members accountable for their contributions (Katzenbach & Smith, 2015). When setbacks or unexpected changes are encountered, high-performing teams are quick to come together and address the issue. Team members freely share their knowledge, expertise, and may offer their own learning experiences on the project in order to help others on the team. Individuals are inspired and motivated by their team members, and most importantly, individual success is seen as team success. While other team types are restricted to producing only incremental outputs by their challenges balancing Team Productivity with Team Culture, high-performing teams are more likely to produce truly innovative work by capturing the positive effects of both (Ibid, 2015).



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The AIIR Team Effectiveness™ Survey and Report: Compelling Insights for the Modern Team

The AIIR Team Effectiveness Survey™ brings to life the benefits of the AIIR Team Effectiveness model in a tool that is easily administered and provides practical, actionable information to teams of all types and at all organizational levels.

Informed by a combination of literature review and primary research, we developed the AIIR Team Effectiveness Survey in successive iterations over a period of two years. The resulting instrument is an advanced, 36-item psychometric tool that measures the process factors of team effectiveness and surfaces a team's strengths and opportunities for development.

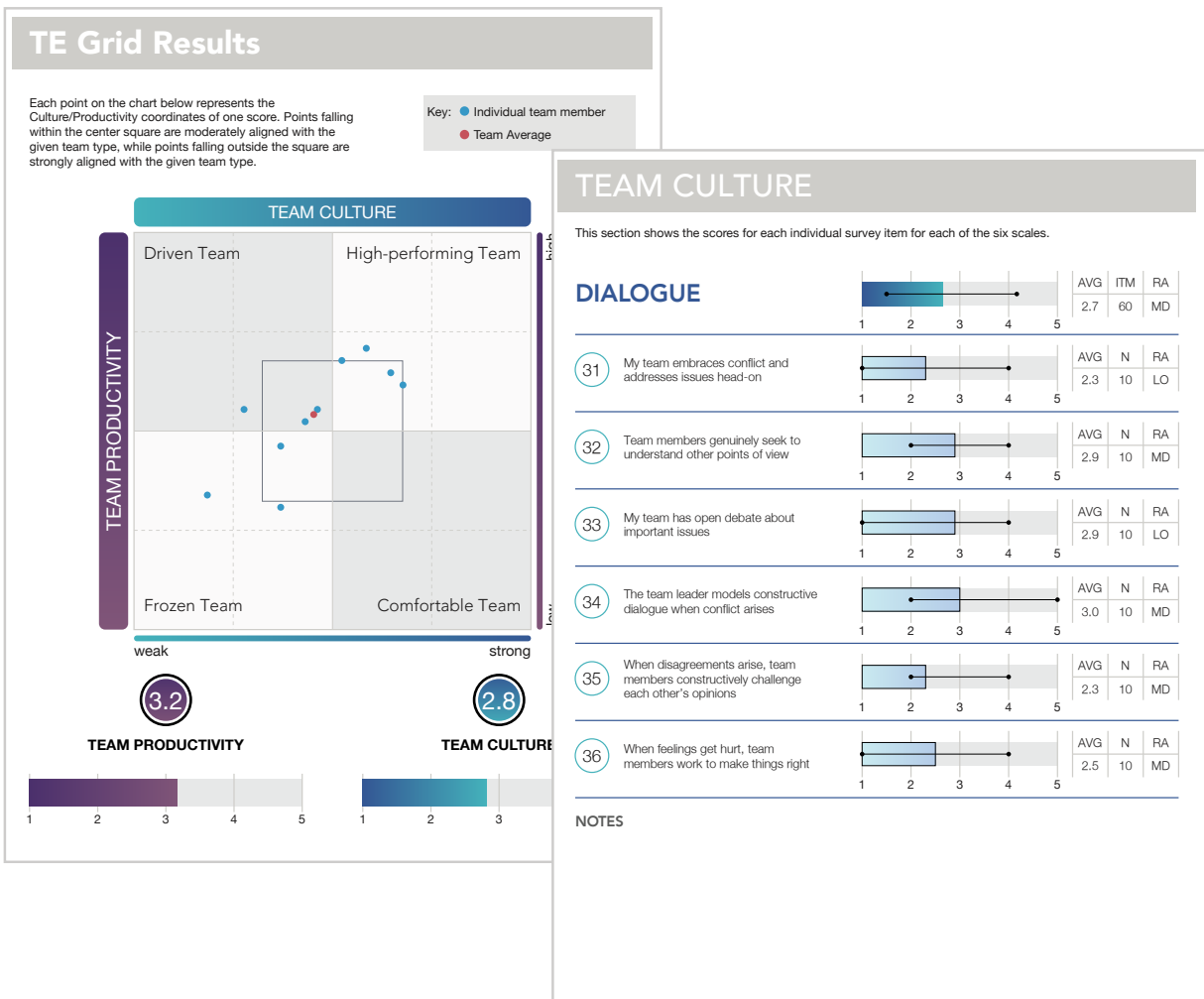
Team members who complete the AIIR Team Effectiveness Survey receive a teamwide report that displays the average scores of the six process factors of team effectiveness:

The report also presents composite Team Productivity

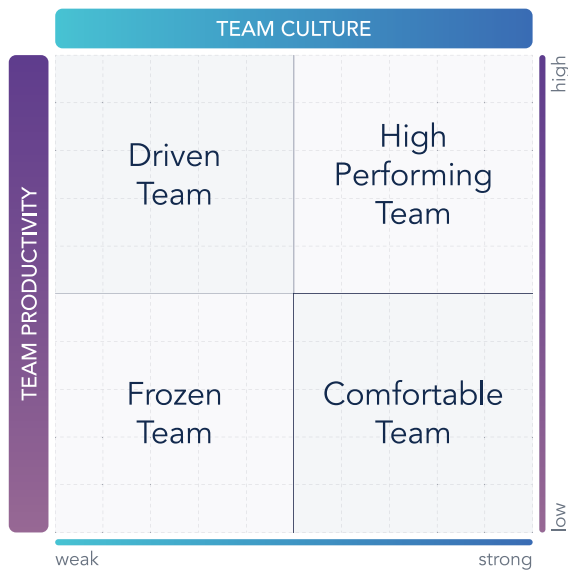
and Team Culture domain scores and highlights specific items where the team scored particularly low or high, as well as items where the team had the most and the least agreement. The survey also asks team members three open-ended questions, which provide valuable contextual information used to interpret their results and provide team members with a forum to share their personal insight and perspective.

Perhaps most importantly, the report graphically displays the composite Team Productivity and Team Culture scores for all team members onto the TE Grid in order to help team members better understand their team type. This allows for periodic administration to assess a team's progress over time, making it a powerful tool for measuring long-term team development.

To learn more about AIIR Team Effectiveness, visit www.aiirconsulting.com.



The AIIR Team Effectiveness Model at a Glance



High Performing Team

- > Aligned purpose and priorities
- > Efficient and well-coordinated execution
- > Learning agility and adaptiveness to change
- > An environment of trust and safety
- > Effective dialogue and respectful conversations
- > A shared sense of belonging and team cohesion

Driven Team

- > Emphasis on tasks and results
- > Efficient project execution
- > Well-defined roles and processes
- > Lack of trust undermines collaboration
- > Unproductive conflict management
- > Lack of interpersonal warmth, empathy and support

Comfortable Team

- > Emphasis on people and relationships
- > Friendly, trusting environment
- > Empathy and respectful communication
- > Unclear or misaligned priorities and goals
- > Inefficient project execution
- > Lack of adaptability when faced with obstacles

Frozen Team

- > Unclear goals and poor performance
- > Frequent breakdowns in project execution
- > Slow to innovate or respond to change
- > Poor engagement and commitment
- > Fear and distrust undermines communication
- > Collection of individuals vs. operating as a team

Team Productivity

How efficiently and effectively the team gets work done.

- Alignment**
A shared understanding of purpose, priorities, and plans.
- Execution**
Efficient and effective coordination, communication, and collaboration.
- Learning & Adapting**
The capacity to overcome obstacles and adjust to new realities.

Team Culture

How team members interact and relate to one another.

- Trust & Safety**
An environment marked by honesty, openness, and the absence of fear.
- Cohesion**
A shared sense of belonging and commitment to the team.
- Dialogue**
The capacity to work through conflict with compassion and understanding.

About AIIR Consulting

AIIR Consulting is a global business psychology consulting firm dedicated to building amazing leaders through executive coaching, leadership development, and team effectiveness.

Founder and CEO Dr. Jonathan Kirschner pioneered The AIIR® Method, a four-phased process for creating sustained behavioral change through **A**ssessment, **I**nsight, **I**mplementation, and **R**einforcement.

AIIR Consulting combines evidence-based techniques, proprietary tools, and innovative coaching technology, empowering leaders to drive incredible business results.

To learn more, visit us at: www.aiirconsulting.com.

