Unlocking Engagement

How AIIR Enterprise Team Effectiveness™ helped HRBPs unlock engagement and unleash performance at a global company

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Pioneering team effectiveness expert J. Richard Hackman said, "When you have a team, the possibility exists that it will generate magic, producing something extraordinary, a collective creation of previously unimagined quality or beauty. But don't count on it."

Nothing felt magical about the team Cameron Bernardi managed for a global professional services company. The hybrid team, consisting of 16 employees in two cities, was formed by a mid-pandemic restructure that combined two teams — Cameron's home team in New York and another in Missouri.

Managing a geographically dispersed, hybrid team is difficult for even the most seasoned leaders. For Cameron, who was new to her role as team leader, it seemed insurmountable. Her team struggled to reconcile differences in both their working styles and team cultures. Cameron found it challenging to keep team members engaged and hit performance targets. Meeting after meeting, Cameron was met with turned-off cameras and a disheartening lack of participation. She struggled to understand what was driving disengagement on her team, or what she could do about it.

A story of company-wide disengagement and depletion

Unfortunately, Cameron's team was not the only team navigating such challenges. Across the company, employees struggled to adapt to hybrid working, which raised concerns about the risk of increased turnover and decreased business outcomes. Team leaders were frustrated and depleted, and struggled to stay engaged themselves.

The overlooked power of teams

The challenges our client was dealing with are not unique. In a recent Gallup survey, only 20% of US employees reported feeling engaged. That's a problem — engaged employees are 21% more productive, and

show greater customer satisfaction, less absenteeism, and 22% higher profitability than their disengaged peers. They are also 87% less likely to quit. On the other hand, **disengaged employees cost companies as much as $605 billion in lost revenue each year.**

Given the stakes, it makes sense that companies spend an enormous amount of time and resources attempting to increase engagement and decrease turnover. But, studies show that, at best, those investments produce modest results. Why? Because, while most companies focus their investments at the organization or individual, most overlook the hidden key to employee engagement: teams.

Studies show that individuals on high-performing teams are happier, more productive, and more engaged than their peers on dysfunctional teams.

A reactive, unsustainable approach

Cameron's company tracked engagement via quarterly engagement surveys. The company used survey results to identify teams with lower-than-average engagement. Once these teams were identified, an HR Business Partner (HRBP) scheduled informal check-ins with the appropriate team leaders to mitigate. However, over time, the company found that, rather than increasing engagement and decreasing turnover, this model was creating its own problems.

First, low engagement is an outcome, not a cause, of dysfunctional teams. The company's HRBPs spent all of their time reacting to crises rather than preventing them.

Second, insights are only as valuable as they are actionable. This approach was good at identifying problematic teams, but didn't give HRBPs the insights, tools, or support to fix them.

Third, the program itself was unsustainable. 70% of HR leaders already felt that 2021 was the most challenging year of their careers. This labor-intensive process created an extra burden on the company's already overloaded HRBPs.

A scaleable, sustainable solution

Cameron's company approached AIIR® to develop a new approach to improving team performance and increasing engagement across the company. AIIR worked with the company to deploy a six-month program built around its AIIR Enterprise Team Effevtiveness™ (ETE) solution across a group of eight mission-critical teams of varying levels of engagement, function, and seniority across every level of the organization.

Developed based on a decade of research and experience working with thousands of leaders and teams, ETE is a simple, scalable solution that combines the insights of the AIIR® Team Effectiveness Survey (TES) — AIIR's powerful, proprietary team assessment — with a toolkit of cutting-edge team development exercises to bolster teams' effectiveness.

By the end of the program, every team had outperformed expectations, and the results were so positive that the company expanded the program to include 32 teams in 2023.

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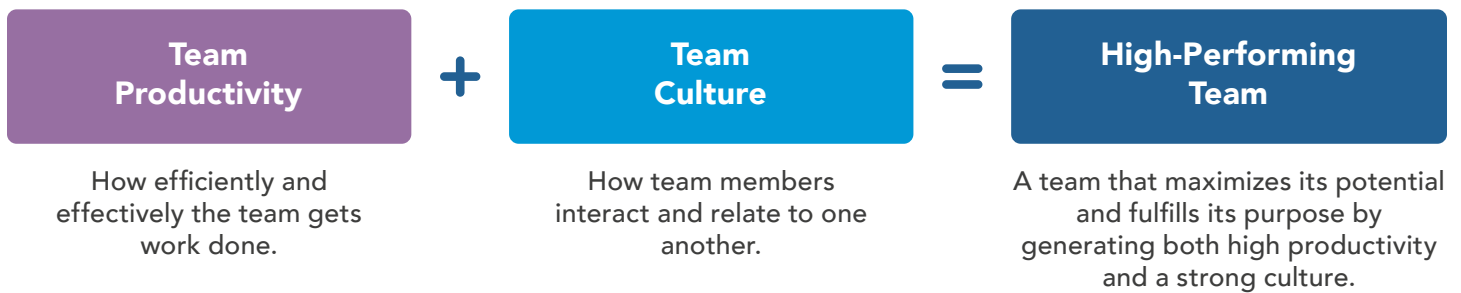# Built on accessible, actionable insights

First, AIIR trained a group of the company's HRBPs to administer and interpret the results of the TES.

Teams need two things to achieve high performance: high productivity and strong culture. Team Productivity is how efficiently a team gets work done. Culture is how it feels to be on the team.

The TES is a 36-question survey that measures Team Productivity and Team Culture along six dimensions. The report charts team members' responses along the team effectiveness grid, providing a clear picture of the team's specific strengths and potential weaknesses in an accessible, actionable way on its journey to high performance.

Team assessment data can be aggregated at the department, function, band, or enterprise level, empowering HR and talent leaders to understand the health of teams across the organization and focus resources where they'll matter the most.

Team Productivity	**+**	**Team Culture**	**=**	**High-Performing Team**
How efficiently and effectively the team gets work done.		How team members interact and relate to one another.		A team that maximizes its potential and fulfills its purpose by generating both high productivity and a strong culture.

Alignment
How efficiently and effectively the team gets work done.

Execution
Efficient and effective coordination, communication, and collaboration.

Learning & Adapting
The capacity to overcome obstacles and adjust to new realities

Trust & Safety
An environment of openness, honesty, and an 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

Empowering HRBPs with tools and training

AIIR Enterprise Team Effectiveness combines the insights of the TES with a toolkit of prescriptive team development exercises to augment teams' strengths and address their weaknesses. After certifying them to administer and interpret the TES, we provided HRBPs and team leaders at Cameron's company with multi-modal training that empowered them to turn insights into a meaningful intervention.

The accessibility of the AIIR® Team Effectiveness model and exceptional quality of training made it possible to elevate individuals with little or no coaching experience to become team effectiveness experts.

For example, assessment data showed a clear need for teams across the organization to clarify their purpose

and establish shared operating norms to address issues related to poor prioritization and mutual accountability. Such are common problems teams encounter when they restructure or move to a hybrid model.

With simple training resources and conversation guides, AIIR empowered the company's HRBPs to facilitate meaningful conversations around teams' assessment results and leverage exercises on Clarifying Team Purpose and Setting Team Operating Principles from the ETE toolkit. **This approach helped the teams in the short term and embedded a common language and skillset the teams could continue to own with limited accountability coaching from HRBPs.**

Overview of ETE Program Journey for HRBPs and Teams

HRBP Team Effectiveness Certification & Ongoing Support
(Time Commitment: 5 hrs over 6 months)

Self-guided and live orientation to the AIIR Team Effectiveness Model, TES, and ETE Toolkit

Participating HRBPs join the Community of Practice for group learning and the preperation of team sessions

On-demand access to AIIR TE expert coach for 1:1 consultations

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Team Member Experience
(Time Commitment: 6.5 hrs over 5 months)

Team completes the first Engagement Survey and TES

(20 minutes)

HRBP and CoE debrief the TES results

(90 minutes)

HRBP conducts team exercise on Operating Principles

(90 minutes)

HRBP conducts team exercise on Productive Conflict

(90 minutes)

Team completes second Engagement Survey and TES

(20 minutes)

HRBP and CoE debrief the TES results and set Team Actions

(90 minutes)

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A 180° turnaround for Cameron's team

In less than six months, Cameron's team was unrecognizable. Cameron's HRBP told us she felt supported and empowered from the outset of the program. With the TES, identifying the underlying causes of the challenges on Cameron's team was both straightforward and precise. With the provided training and development exercises, she created a development plan for Cameron's team that produced truly remarkable results.

The team began by establishing communication norms and operating principles to enhance a shared team identity and reduce the unproductive conflicts that had previously hampered engagement and performance.

Most notably, the team learned to break down silos and address issues openly, ultimately leading to a 24% lift in the Trust & Safety subscale. And because they no longer shied away from difficult conversations, the team could identify and solve the root causes of much of their dysfunction, producing a 29% increase in their Dialogue subscale.

Overall, their dedicated effort led to a marked transformation: a 24% increase in Team Productivity and a 25% increase in Team Culture, propelling the initially borderline-Frozen team into high performance.

Cameron's HRBP described the team's journey as "a full 180° turn from the first session to the last." Gone were the days of turned-off cameras and checked-out employees. Rather, the members of Cameron's team are now engaged and energized. Most importantly, AIIR's easy-to-understand model of team effectiveness has given the team the tools it needs to sustain the gains it made over the course of the intervention.

TEAM PRODUCTIVITY: 63 | 24% ↑ Percentage Change | TEAM PRODUCTIVITY: 87

TEAM CULTURE: 60 | 25% ↑ Percentage Change | TEAM CULTURE: 85

Team Productivity
How efficiently and effectively the team gets work done.

		Previous Score	Recent Score	Percentage Change
Alignment A shared understanding of purpose, priorities, and plans		65	91	26% ↑
Execution Efficient and effective coordination, communication, and collaboration		66	88	22% ↑
Learning & Adapting The capacity to overcome obstacles and adjust to new realities		64	87	23% ↑

Team Culture
How team members interact and relate to one another.

|		Previous Score	Recent Score	Percentage Change
Trust & Safety An environment of openness, honesty, and an absence of fear		63	87	24% ↑
Cohesion A shared sense of belonging and commitment to the team		64	87	23% ↑
Dialogue The capacity to work through conflict with compassion and understanding		59	88	29% ↑
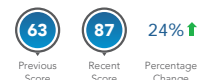
Success that cascaded throughout the organization

While the results Cameron's team achieved were incredible, they were not isolated. Of the eight teams that participated in the program, six experienced significant gains in effectiveness as measured by the TES.

More importantly, these gains translated to a significant increase in performance and engagement compared to the previous check-in model, as measured by the company's quarterly survey. Participating sales teams in the pilot estimated an average increase of $30,000-$50,000 in revenue per team due to higher engagement.

Overall, the company estimates that increased engagement saved them between $20,000-$30,000 per team in reduced turnover costs.

Not Significant

25%

75%

Significant Engagement Increase
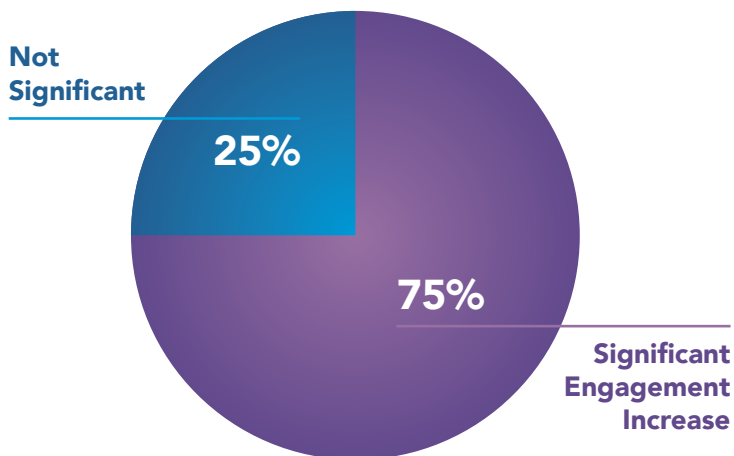
100% of participating team leaders agreed that the pilot was a valuable experience

One team leader described the pilot as creating, "a space where folks can be truthful and honest," and providing the "opportunity to step back as the leader and listen to the team tell us how they want to be led."

By the end of the program, all of the participating HRBPs were already identifying other teams who could benefit from AIIR Enterprise Team Effectiveness. The company plans to expand to an additional 32 teams of varying functions and levels.

What would increased engagement across 75% of teams look like for you?

The strain of the pandemic and subsequent shifts in how we work have taken a tremendous toll on engagement, and turnover is at record highs across industries and geographies.

Empowering HRBPs and team leaders with the tools, understanding, and support to build more effective teams can be a powerful solution for increasing engagement across the enterprise. By investing in their teams, our client company was able to drastically improve team performance and avoid turnover and its associated costs on 75% of the teams that participated.

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