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The Evidence for Team Development

TEAM ASSESSMENT · TEAM DYNAMICS · WORKING SESSIONS · FACILITATED REVIEWS

Team development is not a soft investment. Across controlled studies, targeted teamwork interventions reliably improve how teams work and what they deliver. The strongest results come from work aimed at the team's actual bottleneck — not generic team-building.

TEAMWORK INTERVENTIONS

About 2 in 3

Across 51 controlled studies, 72 interventions, and 8,439 participants, teamwork interventions produced medium-to-large gains in both teamwork and performance. After unusually large studies were removed, a trained team had about a 66% chance of outperforming an untrained one.

STRUCTURED DEBRIEFS

20–25% lift

Across 46 research samples, properly conducted debriefs improved performance by roughly 20 to 25 percent — among the highest-return, lowest-cost team practices measured. The gain comes from structure: what happened, why, and what changes next.

STRUCTURE BEFORE PERSONALITIES

Conditions first

The best-validated team diagnostic — built on data from 2,474 members of 321 teams — assesses the conditions a team works in: real membership, compelling direction, sound structure, supportive context. Much of what reads as a personality problem is a design problem.

THE HONEST CAVEAT

Process, *then* results

Not every trial converts better teamwork into immediate business outcomes — in some rigorous studies, distal results lagged even as team process improved. Measure both: the mechanism you changed and the outcome it should eventually move.

"2 in 3" translates a standardized effect ($d = 0.58$ for team performance after outlier removal) into the probability that a randomly chosen trained team outperforms an untrained one, assuming comparable groups.

WHERE TEAM WORK PAYS OFF

- **Team friction:** unclear roles, stalled decisions, low trust, missed handoffs
- **New teams:** formed by growth, reorganization, or merger
- **Cross-functional seams:** where work stalls between functions, not inside them
- **Expert cultures:** where challenge reads as attack and candor stays scarce
- **Execution rhythm:** commitments, reviews, and after-action routines

HOW I RUN THE WORK

- 1 **Diagnose conditions first.** Goals, roles, processes, and decision rights — before personalities.
- 2 **Target the real bottleneck.** Add a focused measure only where the evidence points: candor, coordination, or maturity.
- 3 **Work it in the room.** Findings become decisions with owners and dates, not a report.
- 4 **Build the review habit.** Short, structured debriefs are the engine that keeps the change.

THE CREDIBLE CASE FOR TEAM WORK

No single framework fixes every team, and a one-day event alone rarely changes much. What the evidence supports is a sequence: diagnose the team's conditions, target the actual bottleneck, and install short review routines that keep the change alive. That is how this practice runs team engagements.

Research base: McEwan et al. (2017), *PLOS ONE*, DOI 10.1371/journal.pone.0169604; Tannenbaum & Cerasoli (2013), *Human Factors*, DOI 10.1177/0018720812448394; Wageman, Hackman & Lehman (2005), *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, DOI 10.1177/0021886305281984; Edmondson (1999), *Administrative Science Quarterly*, DOI 10.2307/2666999.



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Team diagnostic, working session, or facilitated review