



MAKING TEAMS WORK

Developing highly
engaged teams that
exceed expectations

September 2024

Stagnating employee engagement is costing the global economy trillions of dollars.

Levels of employee engagement continue to stagnate around the world, costing the global economy an estimated US\$8.9 trillion or 9% of global GDP according to the latest Gallup State of the Global Workforce 2024 report.

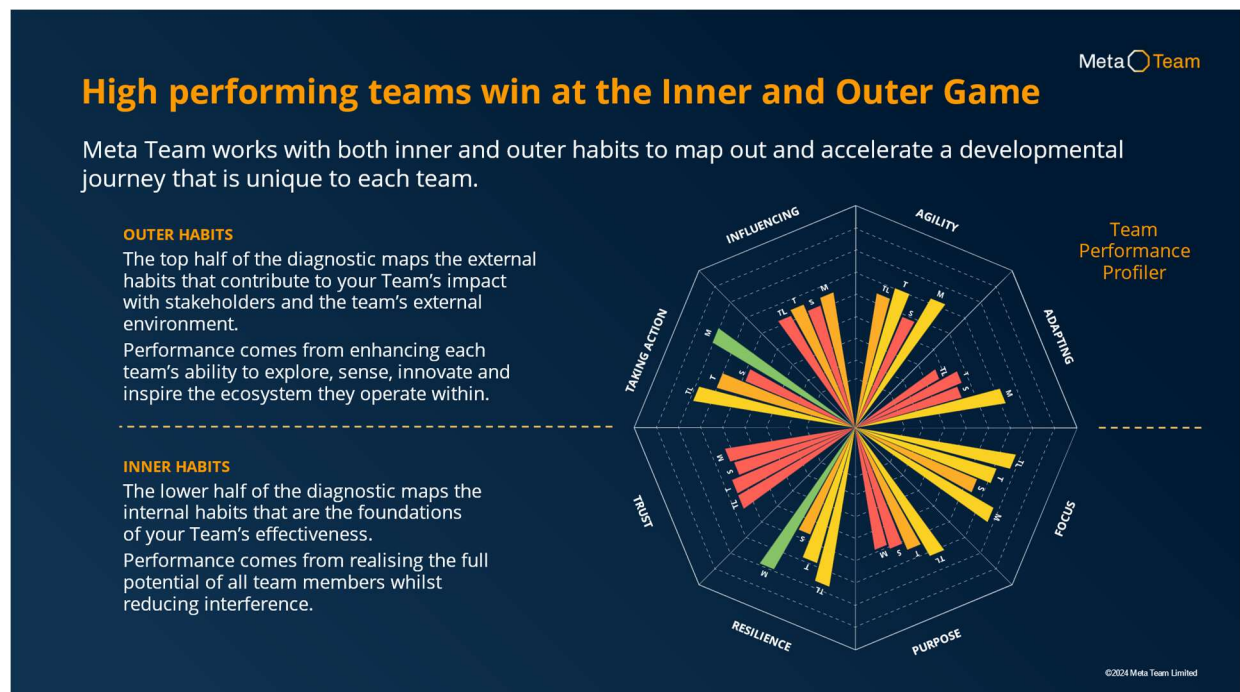
Gallup defines employee engagement as the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace. Employee engagement surveys help you measure and manage employees' perspectives on the crucial elements of your workplace environment. Engagement underpins the unspoken contract between the employee and employer and is a key driver in unlocking discretionary effort – illusive but so valuable to any organisation.

If this is negatively impacting teams within your region, how are you enabling them to play their part in turning this tide and unlocking their full potential?

In Europe a notable employee engagement gap exists. According to the same Gallup report, only 13% of employees in this region are engaged at work, while 72% are not engaged and 16% are actively disengaged. Moreover, Europe has the lowest regional percentage of engaged employees and second lowest regional percentage of employees experiencing daily sadness. Team leaders and organisational leaders in the region need new ways of growing sustainable employee engagement.

We've found that the most engaged teams are always playing two games—a well-honed outer game arising from a highly evolved inner game. Both are essential in building a winning organisational and team culture.

The best teams win at both the Inner Game and Outer Game



The inner game provides the foundations of each team's effectiveness through four key habits:

- building **trust** through authenticity, compassion and credibility
- strengthening **resilience** with commitment, confidence and relentlessness
- defining a shared **purpose** with alignment, accountability and clear direction
- driving for impact through **focus** and prioritisation

Growth in the inner game is achieved from realising the full potential of all team members whilst reducing interference. We've discovered the fastest route to inner game growth is through reducing that interference - the mental, emotional and psychological barriers that get in the way of optimal performance. These obstacles include over-reaching, self-doubt, ego, fear, negative self-talk, or any internal conflicts that lead to mistrust and prevent the team from accessing their full potential.

The outer game is grounded in four quite different team habits:

- **adapting** at speed through curiosity, reflection and experimentation
- creating value for tomorrow with **agility**, creativity and innovation
- deepening **influence** with key stakeholders through inspiration and trust
- continuously refining the team's decisiveness, consistency and speed of **taking action**

Improvement in the inner game drives improvement in the outer game and not vice-versa. Economic performance comes when the team's inner game manifests in a stronger outer game driving its ability to explore, sense, innovate and inspire the wider system in which they operate.

The chart below, based on 40 teams we've worked with over the last 12 months, demonstrates just how strong the relationship is between the inner game and the outer game. Teams with the best inner game always have the best outer games.

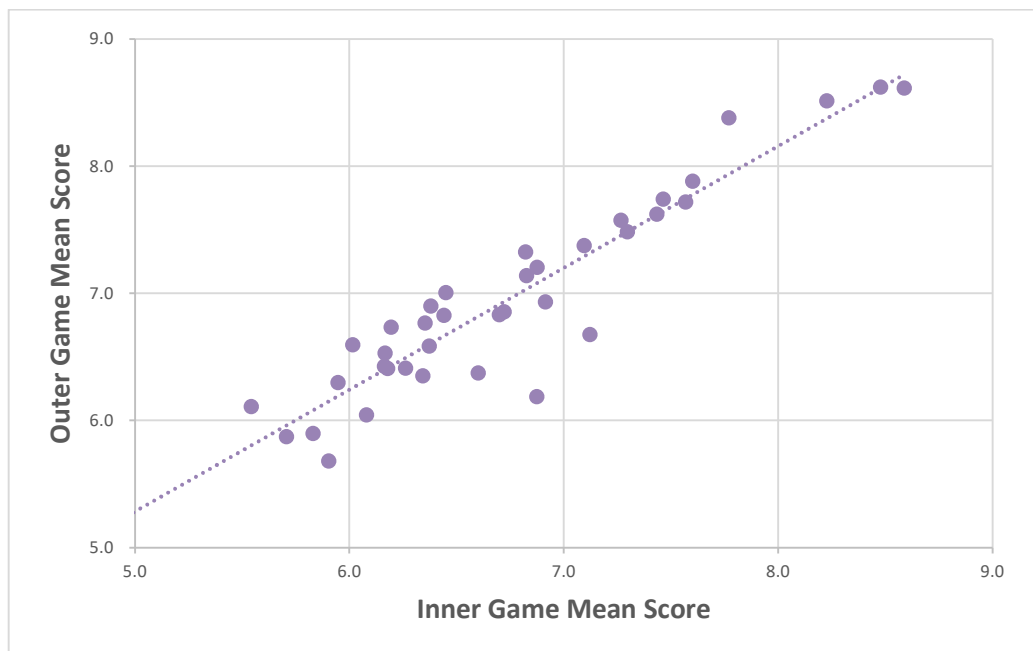


Figure 1: Inner and Outer Game mean scores, for top 40 teams who completed Meta Team's Team Performance Profiler in the last 12 months. The Team Performance Profiler is an inclusive team diagnostic that generates original insight taking into account the views of the team, team leader, team leader's boss, and team stakeholders. It contains 32 items rated on a 1 to 10 scale evaluating the relative strengths of each team's inner and outer behaviours.

We are yet to come across an outlier where a strong inner game doesn't result in a strong outer game. Our experience has shown us that until we take a more balanced approach—one that evolves a deliberate focus on both the inner and outer game simultaneously—teams continue to get stuck in familiar patterns of behaviour and employee engagement will at best continue to stagnate.

One of our long-standing London-based clients, a management board member in a global financial services business, was surprised at the speed of change in their leadership team when we introduced a balanced focus on both the inner and outer game *"the increase in cohesion, trust and collaboration has been astonishing. We are now motoring as a leadership team thanks to Meta Team"*.

Mastering the inner and outer game, as in any field, requires a willingness to search for hidden strengths, blind spots, challenge fixed beliefs and biases, surface fears, and replace used-up habits that no longer serve the needs of the team.

The benefits of mastering both the inner and outer games are worthwhile – based on our field work over the last 10 + years we typically observe +20% increase productivity, +10% uplift in employee satisfaction, and +15%+ enhanced team cohesion.

Switching the Inner Game out of auto-pilot

Teams can easily deceive themselves when they assume they make free and deliberate choices. In fact, a range of studies have found that at least 43% of our behaviours — and in some cases far more — occur not by conscious intention, but come from our subconscious mind automatically, habitually, and reactively. These automatically triggered responses tend to manifest in how teams work together, with one foot on the accelerator, whilst the other is on the brake which holds the team back.

In the past, most teams have had limited success with typical team building solutions focused on pushing themselves to work faster / harder; most are already flat out. They haven't identified where and how automatic subconscious behaviours are causing interference or understood how to remove them to unlock cohesion and collaboration.

Successful teams have realised their full potential by focusing on the internal dynamics and psychological factors that influence team members' behaviours, interactions, and overall performance. Collective, immersive, and experiential short 90-minute working sessions on a regular basis create sustainable change in team behaviour, commercial performance and overall engagement – helping teams to achieve the elusive goal of turning training costs into training investment.

One of our recent Saudi-based clients focused on identifying the key blockers to mutual accountability within their organisation. The subsequent workouts to overcome these obstacles inspired the leaders by lifting ambition, creating transparency and deepening connection.

Winning The Outer Game

The outer game involves leveraging all of the team's knowledge, experience, technical, managerial, and leadership competence to achieve sustained results. Teams who are masterful at the outer game create far greater value through a deeper influence of their external environment, but we've found only 1 in 8 teams find the time to identify where and how they can adapt ways of thinking and acting given the pressures of day-to-day demands.

Reflection without action is ultimately as unproductive as action without reflection. Our work with one of our Germany-based telecommunications client focused on the team's ability to reflect and adjust at speed. Within five months, the team's reflective behaviours improved by 17%, in turn driving a 15% increase in their speed of execution.

Our outer game work is based on the latest research in decision science, systems theory, and design thinking. We have found after many years of success and failure that the best learning happens in the flow of work. We have settled on 90-minute customised workouts built into the business-as-usual workflow of the team that enable them to immediately enhance their impact across key influencers and stakeholders.

Where to start?

Transforming team performance and achieving improved employee engagement can be challenging. There is a time and place for team-building exercises, sharing individual profiles, and scheduling away days to set team goals. However, there is a lack of evidence that these types of solutions on their own deliver a sustainable transfer of learning back into the workplace, so they are at risk of remaining a cost and not an investment.

Meta Team believes teams need data-driven insights and evidence on how they are delivering for their stakeholders and customers, alongside an understanding of what is needed to increase alignment and build trust. Meta Team uses digital diagnostic surveys to help teams to better understand the strength of their inner developmental game and the delivery impact experienced by key stakeholders. Using these data-driven insights to prioritise their most valuable inner and outer behaviours, teams open up a fast-track to engagement, collaboration, trust, and performance. This fast-track must balance strengthening both their inner and outer games, focusing on only one aspect incurs huge opportunity costs.

When a team is missing its deadlines and taking action is slow, a lack of trust is typically the root cause. Using the insights from Meta Team's online diagnostic survey, one of our Private Equity clients achieved breakthroughs in trust (inner game) through our workshops and exercises focused on team dynamics. Their focus led to sudden shift in the team's ability to execute at speed, deliver on their commitments, and grow influence with key stakeholders (outer game). The team's growth triggered the business to invest further in increasing both the team's size and in extending its scope of work.

So, in conclusion, team development becomes an investment and not a cost when the focus is on improving the inner and outer game of teams. By honing both games, teams achieve mastery and peak performance, driving double digit improvements in productivity, engagement and cohesion.

About Us

Meta Team delivers cost-effective, commercially relevant, and fast-acting team development solutions. We provide an inclusive team diagnostic survey that gathers insights from all team members, the team leader, the team leader's manager, and key stakeholders, identifying high-impact behaviours to accelerate performance. We call this the 'Team Performance Profiler'.

The approach is data-driven, and our algorithm sequences a fully customised journey of 90-min transformational workouts containing proven content all grounded in a well-researched model of high-performing teams. Developed by Rob Shaw in collaboration with Harvard University and McKinsey & Co., Meta Team's methodology has been refined over 15 years, working with over 1,200 teams.