

Build Better Teams: a business case for your team

A short document a team leader can share with HR or a budget holder. Figures come from the published research listed at the end. Numbers in [brackets] are placeholders for your own assumptions.

1. The problem

Most important work depends on teams, and how a team works together is a large part of its results.

- **Collaboration takes up more and more of the working week.** Researchers writing in *Harvard Business Review* report that "the time spent by managers and employees in collaborative activities has ballooned by 50% or more." (*Practitioner article, not peer-reviewed.*) (Cross et al., 2016)
- **Talent alone is not enough.** Star analysts who moved firms on their own saw their performance fall, often for years, unless they moved to a firm with stronger capabilities. Those who moved with their teammates showed no significant decline. (Groysberg et al., 2008)
- **Unclear roles cost performance.** In a meta-analysis of 169 samples (35,265 employees), role ambiguity was among the two work stressors most strongly linked to lower job performance. (*Individual-level evidence.*) (Gilboa et al., 2008)
- **Conflict that turns personal is expensive.** Across studies of work teams, conflict about relationships was linked to lower team performance ($\rho = -.22$) and much lower member satisfaction ($\rho = -.54$). (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003)
- **Development done badly can backfire.** In a meta-analysis of 607 effect sizes, feedback improved performance on average, but in more than a third of cases it made performance worse. (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996) One-off, massed training also shows weaker effects on job behaviour than training spread across sessions. (Lacerenza et al., 2017)

2. The evidence

What the research says about the building blocks of the journey. "*d*" compares groups that received an intervention with groups that did not; "*p*" is a corrected correlation.

What was studied	What the research found	Source in plain language
Team debriefs: a team reviews its own recent work	Improved performance versus control groups ($d = 0.67$; the authors put the average gain at about 20–25%); in real work settings, $d = 0.56$	Meta-analysis of 46 independent samples, 2,136 people; medical, military, aviation and other settings (Tannenbaum & Cerasoli, 2013)

What was studied	What the research found	Source in plain language
Teamwork training	Medium-sized gains in team performance ($d = 0.58$). Interactive methods (workshops, practice, team reviews) changed teamwork behaviour most clearly; lectures alone showed no significant change in teamwork behaviour.	Meta-analysis of 51 controlled studies, 8,439 participants (McEwan et al., 2017)
Guided team reflection	Medium-sized effect on team performance outcomes ($g = 0.55$)	Meta-analysis of 24 randomised experiments, 4,339 participants (Lines et al., 2021)
Trust within the team	Linked to team performance ($\rho = .30$), even after accounting for past performance	Meta-analysis of 112 studies, 7,763 teams (de Jong et al., 2016)
Specific group goals	Specific, challenging group goals beat vague ones ($d = 0.80$)	Meta-analysis of group goal-setting studies (23 effect sizes for this comparison; the authors note few recent field studies) (Kleingeld et al., 2011)
How teams handle disagreement	Explained an additional 13% of the variance in team performance beyond how much conflict there was	Meta-analysis of 45 studies, 3,218 teams (DeChurch et al., 2013)
"If-then" action plans	Medium-to-large effect on reaching goals ($d = 0.65$)	Meta-analysis of 94 independent tests, mostly individuals (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006)
Monitoring progress	Improved goal attainment ($d = 0.40$), more so when progress was recorded or shared	Meta-analysis of 138 experiments, 19,951 people, mostly individual goals (Harkin et al., 2016)
Spacing over several sessions	Larger effects on on-the-job behaviour ($\delta = .92$ vs $.45$) and results ($\delta = .48$ vs $.18$) than single sessions	Meta-analysis of 335 leadership-training samples (Lacerenza et al., 2017)

What these findings do not show. They come from studies of similar interventions with other teams, often in health care, the military, aviation, laboratories or classrooms. They are averages, and some effects were smaller in the most rigorous studies. They are not studies of Build Better Teams, and they do not predict a result for your team. BBT's short team surveys are discussion tools; their measurement properties have not yet been independently validated. We intend to share what we learn from our founding teams' follow-up surveys.

3. How BBT's design maps to the evidence

BBT design choice	Evidence it draws on
The team works on its own data and real situations during the working week, not at an offsite	Debriefs work in real settings (Tannenbaum & Cerasoli, 2013); supportive work environment and transfer (Blume et al., 2010); on-site programmes showed stronger effects on results (Lacerenza et al., 2017)

BBT design choice	Evidence it draws on
Roughly one unit a week for about six weeks , not a single day	Spaced practice (Donovan & Radosevich, 1999; Lacerenza et al., 2017)
Each unit ends in a structured team meeting to discuss the team's survey results	Debriefs (Tannenbaum & Cerasoli, 2013); guided reflection (Lines et al., 2021); feedback plus team discussion (Gabelica et al., 2014)
A team agreement and named individual commitments , each with an owner and a review date	If-then plans (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006); group-focused goals (Kleingeld et al., 2011); commitment making (Lokhorst et al., 2013); concrete actions rather than announced aspirations (Gollwitzer et al., 2009)
Each meeting opens by reviewing last time's commitments ; a follow-up survey re-measures what the team chose	Progress monitoring (Harkin et al., 2016); goal setting and action after feedback (Smither et al., 2005)
Anonymous team results, private peer feedback , meetings about patterns rather than people	Psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999); anonymous raters feel more comfortable and rate less generously (Antonioni, 1994); feedback aimed at the person can backfire (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996)
Topics chosen for their link to performance: goals, safety and trust, working styles, roles and coordination, feedback, disagreement	See the unit-by-unit evidence on the research page

4. The time it takes

Figures are taken from BBT's facilitation guides. You choose the units and the pace.

Activity	Typical time per person
Short surveys (most take 3–10 minutes; the guides list about 3, 5, 6, 6 and 7 minutes for the main unit surveys)	under 1 hour in total
Seven team meetings (most 60–90 minutes; the Follow-up meeting about 50–70 minutes; Working Styles and Peer Feedback scale with team size, about 65–80 minutes for six people)	about 7–9 hours in total
Reading results and preparing (for example, reading Peer Feedback reports before the meeting)	short; varies
Total over about six weeks	roughly 8–10 hours per member , plus preparation time for the team lead
Optional private Big Five Leadership Profile (118 statements)	extra, self-paced

5. Estimating the value for your organisation: an illustration

This is an illustration, not a forecast or a promise. It shows how you could put a rough figure on the research findings, using your own assumptions. It uses a standard approach from HR "utility analysis". That literature warns that simple formulas tend to *overstate* returns (Sturman, 2000), so the example deliberately applies only a fraction of the research effect.

Fill in your own numbers:

	Placeholder	Example value (illustrative only)
A	Team size	[8] people
B	Average fully-loaded annual cost per person (salary + benefits + overheads)	[120,000] in your currency
C	Hours each person spends on the journey	[10] hours
D	Working hours per person per year	[1,700] hours
E	Research effect size you choose to start from	[0.58], the average effect of teamwork interventions on team performance in controlled studies (McEwan et al., 2017)
F	Fraction of that effect you think is realistic for your team	[0.20], i.e. one fifth. Deliberately conservative.
G	Value of one standard deviation of performance per person per year, as a share of B	[0.32]. Research on output variability found the spread of output to be about 19%, 32% and 48% of average output for low-, medium- and high-complexity jobs (Hunter et al., 1990). Using cost (B) as a stand-in for the value of output is itself a conservative assumption.
H	How long you assume the gain lasts	[1] year, with no carry-over assumed

Step 1: the team's time. $A \times C \times (B \div D) = 8 \times 10 \times (120,000 \div 1,700) \approx \mathbf{5,650}$. That is about 70.6 per hour, times 10 hours, times 8 people.

Step 2: an illustrative value of the improvement. $A \times B \times G \times E \times F \times H = 8 \times 120,000 \times 0.32 \times 0.58 \times 0.20 \times 1 \approx \mathbf{35,600}$.

Step 3: the break-even question. What fraction of the research effect would cover the team's time? Divide Step 1 by $(A \times B \times G \times E)$: $5,650 \div 178,000 \approx \mathbf{3\%}$. In this example, the team's time would be covered if the team achieved about 3% of the average effect reported in the research. Add the cost of the journey to Step 1 to see the full picture.

Important limits of this illustration

- The research effect (E) is an *average across other teams and settings*; your team may gain more, less or nothing measurable.
- Applying a team-level effect to each member's output (G) is a simplification.
- Effects can fade without follow-through; we assumed one year and no carry-over.

- Choose F honestly. If you are unsure, try 0.05, 0.10 and 0.20 and see whether the decision changes.
 - Non-financial outcomes the research also links to these practices, such as member satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003) and learning behaviour (Edmondson, 1999), are not counted here.
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6. Privacy and data handling, in brief

- **Team surveys** (Purpose & Mandate, Team Dynamics, Capabilities & Coordination, Handling Disagreement) are reported only as combined team results. A team report opens only when at least three people have answered. Handling Disagreement shows grouped percentages, never who answered what.
- **Peer Feedback** ratings are anonymous. Each person's report is private to them; the team lead does not get access to it.
- **Working Styles** manuals are shared by name with the team. This is the point of the unit, and members are told before they answer.
- **AI coaches.** Each member has a 1-on-1 coaching chat that the team lead cannot see. The team chat and meeting records are visible to the team.
- **Optional Big Five profile.** It is private to each person, requires explicit consent, and can be deleted by the person at any time.
- **A note on small teams.** Even with thresholds, in a small team context or someone's own words can make a comment recognisable. People are told this.
- **Recommended use.** The journey is designed for development. We recommend that organisations agree not to use journey results in performance appraisal.
- **Where data is held.** Build Better Teams runs on Microsoft Azure in West Europe (the Netherlands); the AI coaches use Azure OpenAI in Sweden. Our main systems, including the AI coaches, are hosted in the EU.
- **How long it is kept.** A team's data is deleted 24 months after the team's last activity, after a warning email. Anyone can delete their own account at any time.
- **Privacy notice:** <https://teams.leaderinsight.ai/privacy>

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