

Cracking the code

Dr Tarek Jomaa and Vanessa Pozzali explore how one team uncovered the invisible dynamics holding them back from being a high-performing team



In today's workplaces, teams are chasing high performance through connection, trust and collaboration – but what if the real blockers aren't skills or motivation, but hidden dynamics and cultural blind spots?

Our client was a global organisation with a people-first reputation. One team of 12 described themselves as “like a family” – supportive, open, deeply connected. Despite the warmth, however, progress had stalled. Accountability was unclear. Feedback was rare. Projects dragged. The leader asked: “We get on really well, so why aren't we moving forward?”

The data that changed the conversation

Our 4C Model assessment revealed 83% of the team aligned with a ‘connect’ culture – high trust, empathy and care. It seemed positive. But deeper analysis told a different story.

Traits such as feedback and conflict resolution showed wide variation. Some avoided difficult conversations entirely. Others felt uncomfortable raising concerns. The radar plots were revealing: a culture built on harmony was unintentionally avoiding friction – and growth.

In the team dynamics data, things became clearer. While ‘collaboration’ scored highly, ‘clarity’ and ‘consistency’ lagged. Our bar charts showed uneven perceptions across core areas such as communication and accountability. The red dots in our visuals highlight these misalignments – small signals of bigger systemic drift.

Moving from insight to action

We ran a half-day team workshop to explore the findings. Seeing the data visualised – radar plots, heatmaps and score spreads – gave the team language for what they'd been sensing but couldn't

quite name. It wasn't about blame. It was about naming the invisible.

Through coaching and peer supervision, the leader began to introduce structure, setting clearer expectations and building feedback into everyday routines. Crucially, this was done without breaking trust. We helped the team reframe structure not as control, but as clarity in service of care.

Results – and a shift in mindset

Six months later, the team's scores told a new story:

- Clarity improved by 22%
- Consistency rose by 17%
- Response variation dropped across traits – showing stronger alignment.

Team members reported more focused meetings, clearer roles and open feedback as a norm, not a risk. The leader, once carrying the emotional weight of ‘keeping the peace’, now led with conviction – supported by a team that could challenge, align and grow together.

What this taught us

High performance isn't just about skills: it's about seeing the hidden dynamics. Sometimes what holds a team back isn't a lack of care, but too much comfort. Culture isn't what's written in values documents – it's what we repeat, avoid and assume.

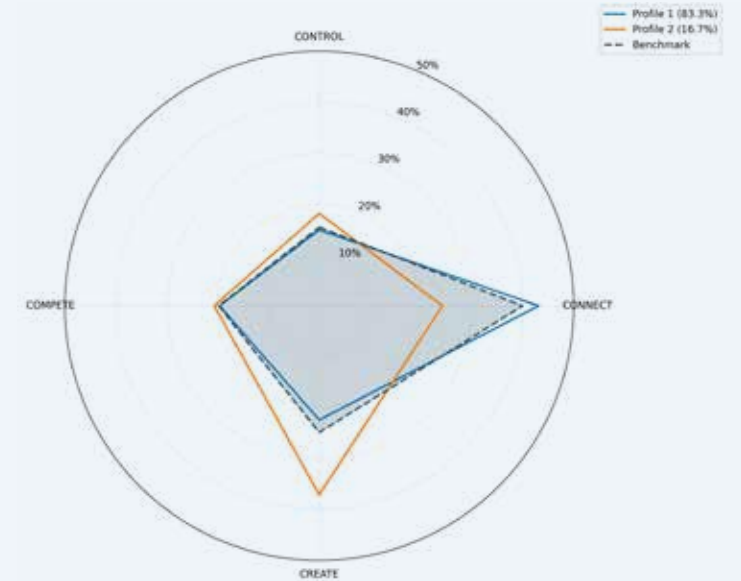
With the right insights and the courage to act, even great teams can become exceptional.

Dr Tarek Jomaa and Dr Vanessa Pozzali are co-founders of Synthosys, which specialises in bringing clarity, cohesion and high performance into the heart of teams. They are hosting sessions at Leadership Live on 24 June. See iol.rsvp.gather.com/

Culture at a glance

- Connect: empathy, trust, belonging
- Create: innovation, curiosity, growth
- Control: stability, process, structure
- Compete: results, pace, performance

Most team members (83.3%) identified strongly with a ‘connect’ culture focused on trust, care and emotional closeness. A smaller group (16.7%) leaned toward ‘create’ – innovation and change. On the surface, this looks aligned. But high agreement doesn't always mean high performance – sometimes it signals comfort over challenge.



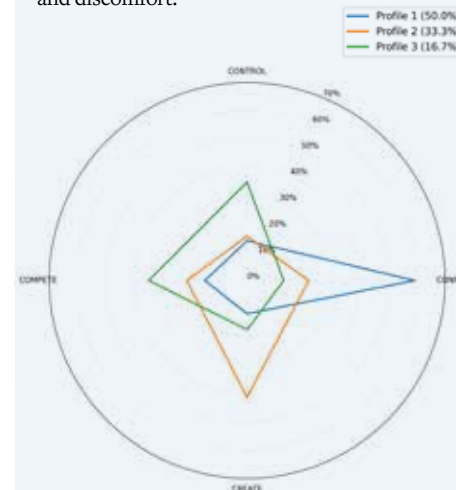
“High agreement doesn't always mean high performance”

Conflict: unclear and uneven

This radar plot shows how the team perceives conflict resolution, and the differences are stark.

Half of the team saw it as part of a connect culture – safe, open, supportive.

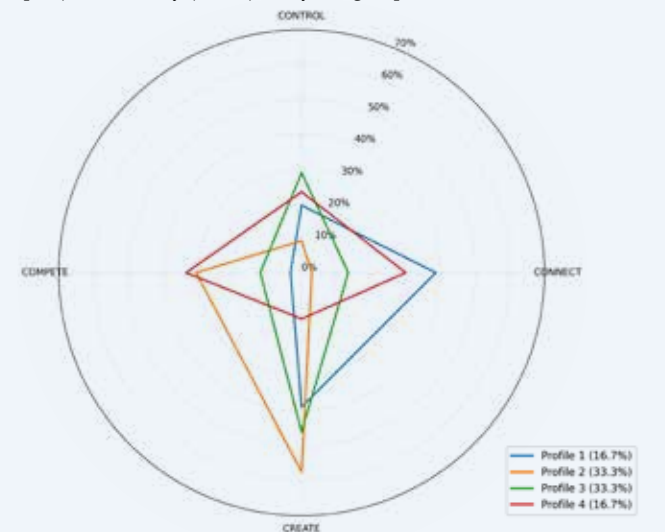
But others placed it in control, compete or create – reflecting mixed experiences and discomfort.



Feedback isn't flowing

This radar plot shows how differently feedback is experienced across the team.

Despite a strong ‘connect’ culture overall, here we see no clear agreement – some associate feedback with structure (control), others with challenge (compete) or creativity (create). Only one group links it to connection.



The team cared deeply but avoided discomfort. Feedback was valued in theory, but held back in practice.

What drives a high-performing team?

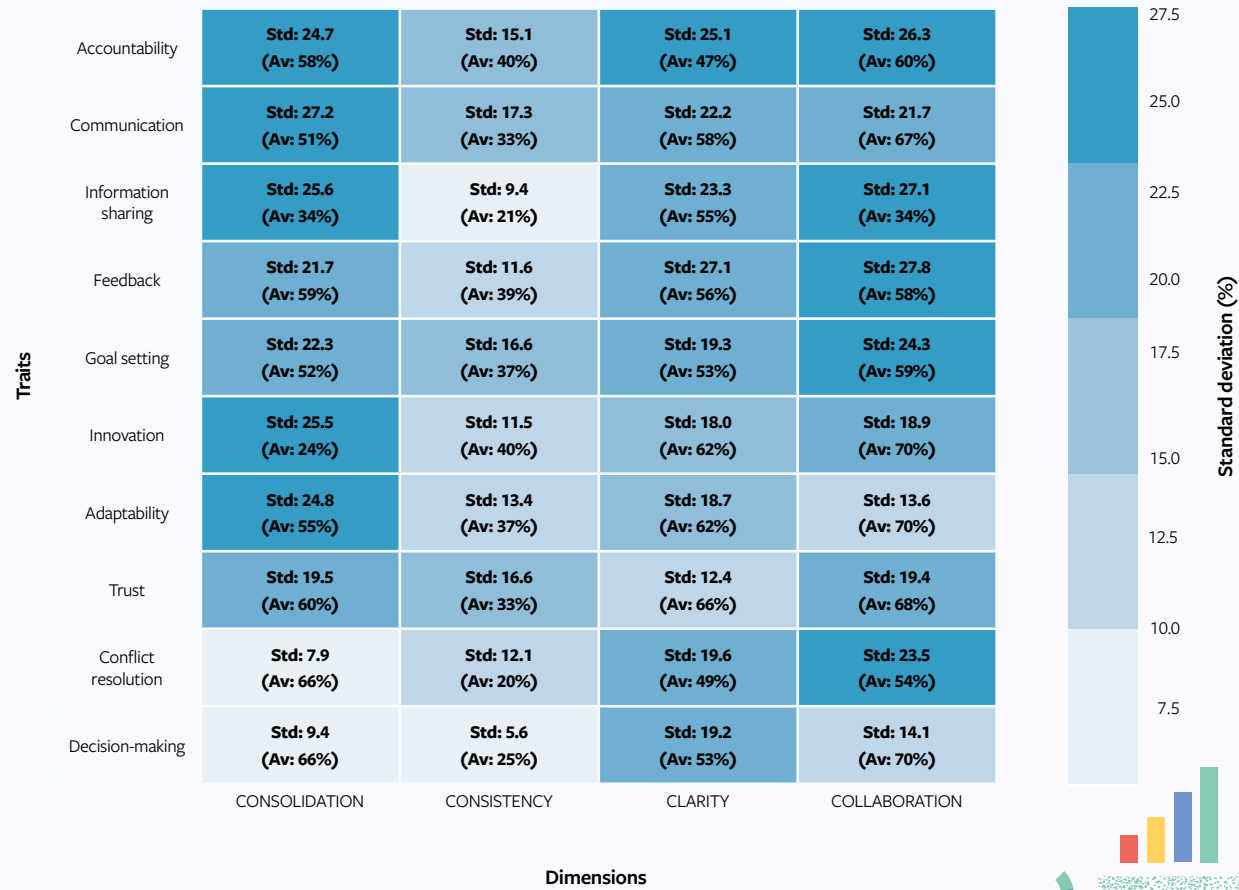
This heatmap shows how team members perceive their everyday dynamics across 10 essential traits.

Each cell reflects two things:

- **Average score (%)**: how present a behaviour is
- **Standard deviation (Std)**: how much perceptions vary across the team

Our model measures four key dimensions for high performance:

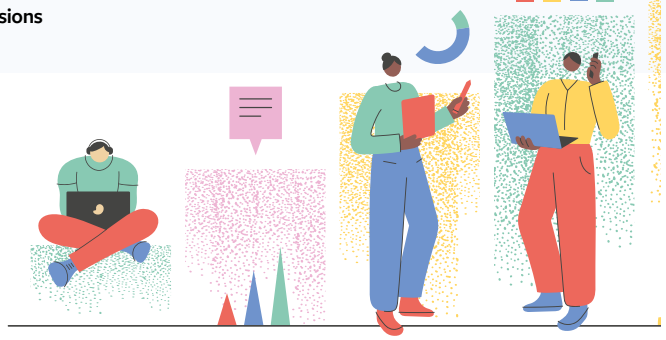
- **Collaboration** – how well we work together
 - **Clarity** – how clear roles, decisions and expectations are
 - **Consistency** – how reliably we follow through
 - **Consolidation** – how well we stay aligned and learn as a unit
- A benchmark team scores 70% or higher on all four.



The **biggest misalignments** are on:

- Accountability, communication and information sharing. These traits show high variation in perception – key red flags for friction and confusion.

Surprisingly, the **most consistent alignment** appears across the consistency dimension. Despite lower averages, team members broadly agree on what's lacking – an important starting point for change.



Accountability: alignment vs assumption

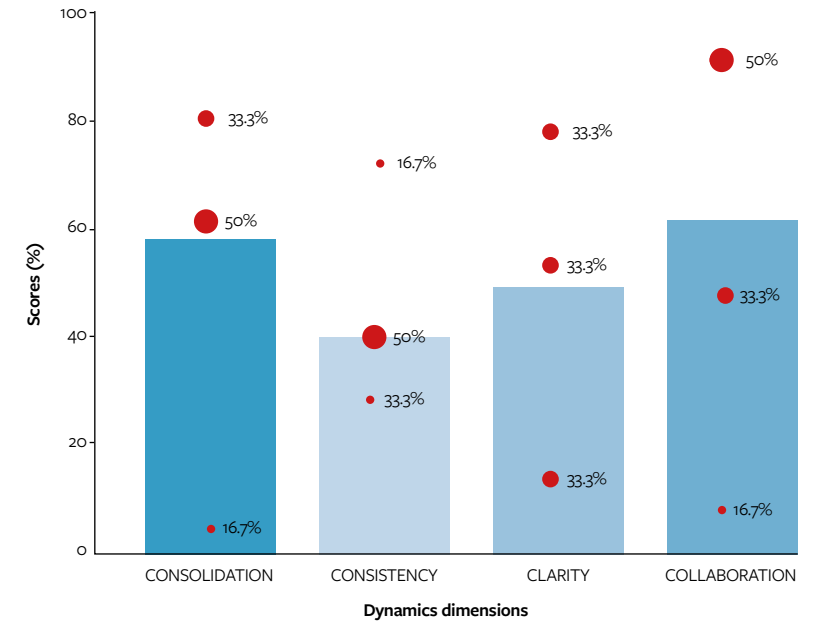
Each red dot represents the % of team members selecting a specific score.

The closer the dots, the more aligned the team is in how they experience that dynamic.

- Consistency stands out with the most tightly grouped responses, but at a lower average.

This reflects a shared agreement that the team lacks consistent practices, a probable blocker to sustained high performance.

- In contrast, collaboration scores highest, but with more disagreement, suggesting strong interactions but less clarity on how they're experienced.



Communication: everyone's talking, not everyone's hearing the same thing

Despite a high average in collaboration, the spread of responses shows clear misalignment – not everyone experiences communication the same way.

The most striking signals appear in consistency and clarity, where low scores combine with widely scattered perceptions. This suggests communication is happening, but not reliably, clearly or consistently.

“Without shared understanding, even frequent communication creates confusion, not cohesion”

