



THE AQR TEAM FRICTION CHECK

Do you have a capable team,
but inconsistent performance?

Identify what's getting in the way
with our quick and easy
self-reflection tool.

Then take the insights and practical
tips back to your team.

Find the friction.
Focus on what matters,
Measure the difference.



THE CONTEXT

WHY THIS EXISTS

Capable people. Yet Performance feels harder than it should be?

Most teams are not short of ability. They contain experienced, committed and capable people who want to do a good job.

Yet performance can still feel harder than it should. Decisions take too long. Priorities compete. Difficult conversations get avoided. Work gets stuck between people. Meetings create activity without enough movement. A small number of people carry too much.

Does that sound familiar?

And you are not alone. In a study of 95 cross-functional teams across 25 leading corporations, Behnam Tabrizi reported that nearly 75% were dysfunctional, failing at least three of five performance criteria.

Source: Behnam Tabrizi, "75% of Cross-Functional Teams Are Dysfunctional", Harvard Business Review (2015).

They have team friction.

Typically, these are still capable people. They are just not always on the same page. Teams are made up of people who can interpret the same situation differently, feel differently about pressure or uncertainty, and respond in different ways. Those differences are not inherently a problem. Friction appears when the team lacks the shared understanding, ways of working or relational strength to use those differences well.

The capability is often already there. The challenge is releasing it.

It's important to remember some friction is healthy. Challenge, disagreement and different perspectives can improve thinking.

The problem is performance friction: the things that unnecessarily consume time, energy and attention or prevent the team's capability translating into results.

The AQR Seven Frictions™ are our practical way of making sense of the conditions that can help or hinder team performance. They draw on established team research and over thirty years of consultancy experience.

IMPORTANT

This short check is a reflection tool, not a psychometric test or formal diagnosis.

THE AQR SEVEN FRICTIONS

Where does performance friction show up?

Seven practical lenses for noticing what may be making team performance harder than it needs to be.

CLARITY	Are we genuinely on the same page? Purpose, priorities, responsibilities, expectations and success
DECISION	Can we make the decisions that enable action? Authority, evidence, expertise, pace and closure
ACCOUNTABILITY	Do we own what we have promised - individually and together? Ownership, commitments, standards, challenge and follow-through
RELATIONSHIP	Are our relationships strong enough for the conversations performance requires? Trust, psychological safety, challenge, conflict and listening
COLLABORATION	Are we combining our capability - or simply working alongside one another? Information, expertise, handovers, interdependence and support
LEADERSHIP	Does leadership enable performance - or create dependency? Direction, empowerment, support, challenge and role modelling
EXECUTION	Do good intentions reliably become action and results? Delivery, momentum, learning, adaptation and sustainability

REMEMBER	Friction rarely exists neatly in one box. One friction can create or amplify another.
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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

HOW TO USE THIS ASSESSMENT

Think about your team, what happens?

Not your organisation generally. Not how you would like the team to work. Think about your real day-to-day experience.

THE QUESTION

For each statement, ask: How consistently does this happen in our team?
1 Rarely / 2 Occasionally / 3 Sometimes / 4 Usually / 5 Consistently

HIGHER SCORE = MORE FRICTION

The statements describe friction behaviours. The higher the number, the more often that friction appears to be showing up. Answer instinctively. Do not spend too long looking for the "right" answer. Just circle your response.

AFTER ANSWERING

At the end of each section, add together your responses.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Do not add all seven friction scores together. Compare the shape of your profile instead.

This check is designed to show the shape of your friction profile - the one or two areas that stand out most strongly.

THE IMPORTANT BIT

A high score shows where friction may be visible. It does not tell you what is causing it.

THE TEAM FRICTION CHECK

CLARITY

Are we genuinely on the same page?

Score what actually happens

Circle one response for each statement:

#	Statement	Rarely 1	Occasionally 2	Sometimes 3	Usually 4	Consistently 5
1	People in this team have different interpretations of what we are here to achieve.	1	2	3	4	5
2	When priorities compete, it is unclear what should take precedence.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Ownership or role boundaries become unclear when work crosses people or functions.	1	2	3	4	5
4	We are not clear enough about how success for this team should be judged.	1	2	3	4	5

Add together your responses. Clarity friction score: _____ /20

AQR THOUGHT	Busy together is not the same as clear together.
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Your Reflections

THE TEAM FRICTION CHECK

DECISION

Can we make the decisions that enable action?

Score what actually happens

Circle one response for each statement:

#	Statement	Rarely 1	Occasionally 2	Sometimes 3	Usually 4	Consistently 5
5	Important decisions take longer than they need to.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Decision authority defaults to the most senior person rather than the person best placed to decide.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Important decisions are made without enough relevant evidence or expertise informing them.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Decisions are revisited, escalated or overridden after they have already been agreed.	1	2	3	4	5

Add together your responses. Decision friction score: ____/20

AQR THOUGHT	Good challenge can improve a decision. Endless reopening prevents action.
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Your reflections

ACCOUNTABILITY

Do we own what we have promised?

Score what actually happens

Circle one response for each statement:

#	Statement	Rarely 1	Occasionally 2	Sometimes 3	Usually 4	Consistently 5
9	Commitments slip without being raised early enough for the team to respond.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Agreed standards are applied differently depending on the person, role or seniority involved.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Team members avoid giving direct feedback when commitments or standards are not being met.	1	2	3	4	5
12	People take responsibility for their own area more readily than for the performance of the team as a whole.	1	2	3	4	5

Add together your responses. Accountability friction score: _____ /20

AQR THOUGHT

Accountability becomes powerful when it exists between team members, not just between a manager and an individual.

Your reflections

RELATIONSHIP

Can our relationships handle the conversations performance requires?

Score what actually happens

Circle one response for each statement:

#	Statement	Rarely 1	Occasionally 2	Sometimes 3	Usually 4	Consistently 5
13	People hold back concerns or mistakes because of how others may respond.	1	2	3	4	5
14	People avoid openly challenging views, particularly when seniority is involved.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Tension or conflict is allowed to linger rather than being properly resolved.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Different perspectives are not always given enough space or genuinely listened to.	1	2	3	4	5

Add together your responses. Relationship friction score: _____ /20

AQR THOUGHT	Teams cannot learn from what people do not feel able to say.
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Your reflections

COLLABORATION

Are we combining our capability?

Score what actually happens

Circle one response for each statement:

#	Statement	Rarely 1	Occasionally 2	Sometimes 3	Usually 4	Consistently 5
17	People prioritise their own function or area at the expense of the wider team outcome.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Useful information or learning remains in pockets rather than being shared across the team.	1	2	3	4	5
19	Handovers and dependencies between people create avoidable gaps, duplication or delays.	1	2	3	4	5
20	The team does not always make full use of the knowledge and expertise available across its members.	1	2	3	4	5

Add together your responses. Collaboration friction score: _____ /20

AQR THOUGHT	A capable team is not automatically a high-performing team.
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Your reflections

THE TEAM FRICTION CHECK

LEADERSHIP

Does leadership enable performance?

Score what actually happens

Circle one response for each statement:

#	Statement	Rarely 1	Occasionally 2	Sometimes 3	Usually 4	Consistently 5
21	Direction and focus become unclear when priorities or circumstances change.	1	2	3	4	5
22	The team relies too heavily on one person for answers, decisions or momentum.	1	2	3	4	5
23	People have problems solved for them when they could be supported to use their own judgement.	1	2	3	4	5
24	The behaviours expected from the team are not always modelled by those exercising leadership, particularly under pressure.	1	2	3	4	5

Add together your responses. Leadership friction score: _____ /20

AQR THOUGHT

Leadership should increase the team's ability to perform, not its reliance on one person.

Your reflections

THE TEAM FRICTION CHECK

EXECUTION

Do good intentions reliably become action and results?

Score what actually happens

Circle one response for each statement:

#	Statement	Rarely 1	Occasionally 2	Sometimes 3	Usually 4	Consistently 5
25	Important priorities or decisions do not consistently translate into action.	1	2	3	4	5
26	Important work is repeatedly displaced by whatever feels most urgent.	1	2	3	4	5
27	Work loses momentum or remains unfinished when difficulties arise.	1	2	3	4	5
28	We repeat problems or ineffective approaches because learning does not consistently translate into changed behaviour.	1	2	3	4	5

Add together your responses. Execution friction score: _____ /20

AQR THOUGHT	Activity is not the same as impact.
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Your reflections

EXECUTION AND THE FINAL PULSE

Complete your final friction score, then answer two whole-team pulse questions.

TWO FINAL QUESTIONS

These do not contribute to your seven friction scores.

#	Statement	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Usually	Consistently
29	Performance in this team often feels harder than it should.	1	2	3	4	5
30	We are not getting the full value from the capability already within this team.	1	2	3	4	5

WHAT TO NOTICE

If you score highly on either of these questions, what do you think is creating that experience? Use the space below to capture your first thoughts before you look at your profile.

YOUR FRICTION PROFILE

Now compare the seven scores. Do not total them.

Friction	Score
Clarity	____ /20
Decision	____ /20
Accountability	____ /20
Relationship	____ /20
Collaboration	____ /20
Leadership	____ /20
Execution	____ /20

Which one or two stand out most strongly? Your highest scores are signals - places to look more closely.

HOW TO READ YOUR SCORE

4–7 LOW FRICTION - This area appears to be supporting performance. Protect it.

8–11 WATCH THE FRICTION - Some inconsistency may be appearing. Pay attention.

12–15 SIGNIFICANT FRICTION - This may be costing the team time, energy, pace or performance. Explore it.

16–20 PRIORITY FRICTION - This friction appears frequently enough to deserve deliberate attention. Investigate it.

THE IMPORTANT BIT

A high score shows where friction may be visible. It does not tell you what is causing it. Your two highest scores are signals - places to look more closely.

YOUR TWO HIGHEST FRICTION SIGNALS

1. _____
2. _____

REFLECTION QUESTION

If you could reduce these two friction areas, what impact do you think that would have on your scores for questions 29 and 30?

PAUSE. NOTICE. REFLECT.

Before you continue, take a moment to notice what is emerging.

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

Which score stands out most and does that surprise you?

PAIR AND SHARE — OPTIONAL

If you're completing the check alongside someone else, compare your scores.

Where do you see things similarly? Where do you see them differently?

Don't try to decide who's right. The difference itself may be useful.

REFLECT

What has answering the questions made you think about that you might not otherwise have noticed?

Use the space below to capture anything you want to come back to.

FROM SCORE TO EXPLORATION

Your scores give you an idea of where friction may be showing up. They do not tell you precisely what is causing it. Your score is a signal. The prompts below are practical ways to start exploring what may sit underneath your highest scores.

CLARITY

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

People work hard but in different directions. Priorities compete. People make different trade-offs because they do not share the same understanding of what matters most.

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US

McKinsey found that only 46% of teams in its research agreed on both task and outcome interdependence; 54% disagreed on one or both. When people are effectively “playing a different sport”, coordination and success become harder.

Source: McKinsey & Company, “Go, teams: When teams get healthier, the whole organization benefits” (2024).

TRY THIS - THE 90-DAY TEST

Without discussing it first, ask every team member to write down the three most important priorities for the next 90 days. Compare the answers before debating them.

TAKE THIS QUESTION BACK

If two important priorities competed tomorrow, would we all know which should take precedence?

AQR THOUGHT

Busy together is not the same as clear together.

DECISION

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

Everything travels upwards. Expertise gets trumped by hierarchy. Decisions take too long - or are made without enough challenge. The team agrees something and then quietly reopens it.

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US

Poor decision-making can be expensive. McKinsey research involving more than 1,200 global business leaders found that 61% said at least half the time they spent making decisions was ineffective. For a typical Fortune 500 company, McKinsey estimated inefficient decision-making could account for around \$250 million in managers' time each year.

Their research also points to some familiar causes: unclear decision roles, too many people involved, overreliance on consensus and decisions not being made close enough to the work.

Source: McKinsey & Company, decision-making research (2017–2023).

TRY THIS - FOUR QUESTIONS BEFORE THE DECISION

Agree:

- Who owns the decision?
- Whose input do we need?
- What evidence would change our thinking?
- When is the decision closed?

TAKE THIS QUESTION BACK

Are decisions sitting with the person best placed to make them - or the person with the most senior job title?

AQR THOUGHT

Good challenge can improve a decision. Endless reopening prevents action.

ACCOUNTABILITY + RELATIONSHIP

Your score is a signal. The prompts below are practical ways to start exploring what may sit underneath your highest scores.

ACCOUNTABILITY

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

Everybody knows something is not happening - but nobody has the conversation. Standards depend on the person involved. Missed commitments become normal. Accountability becomes something the manager does to the team.

What Research Tells Us

Accountability has two sides. There is accountability for the work, the commitments, standards and results we are responsible for delivering. But there is also accountability to one another, how we respond when other people are relying on us to achieve a shared outcome.

Research distinguishes between these two forms of accountability, highlighting that effective collaboration involves not only delivering your own responsibilities, but recognising your mutual responsibility to others for the wider goal.

Source: Bardach & Lesser (1996)

TRY THIS - CLOSE THE LOOP

At the end of your next meeting, ask each person to consider:

What have I committed to?

By when?

Who is relying on me?

What support or resource do I need to follow through?

What is the consequence for the team if I do not do it?

Start the next meeting by reviewing those commitments before creating new ones.

FROM THE BOOKSHELF

"Never be too big to do the small things that need to be done" – James Kerr, *Legacy*

TAKE THIS QUESTION BACK

How can we strengthen accountability in a way that is supportive, not blaming?

AQR THOUGHT

Accountability becomes powerful when it exists between team members, not just between a manager and an individual.

RELATIONSHIP

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

Meetings appear polite, but the real conversation happens afterwards. People protect themselves. Mistakes are hidden. Challenge depends on hierarchy. Tension remains unresolved.

What Research Tells Us

Amy Edmondson's research found that teams learn more effectively when people feel safe enough to take interpersonal risks, such as asking for help, admitting a mistake, raising a concern or challenging an idea.

And this remains a real workplace issue. Recent UK research from MHFA England found that 45% of employees felt unable to raise mistakes or risks at work, while 35% did not feel safe asking for help.

For teams, that matters. When people hold back what they know, notice or think, the team has less information to work with, making it harder to challenge, learn and respond effectively.

Sources: Edmondson, *Administrative Science Quarterly* (1999); MHFA England (2026).

TRY THIS - ASK WHAT IS NOT BEING SAID

At the end of a team discussion, ask: "What is one thing we are not saying that would be useful to talk about?" Do not immediately defend, explain or solve. Listen.

TAKE THIS QUESTION BACK

Are our relationships strong enough to handle honest disagreement - and repair well when it becomes difficult?

AQR THOUGHT

Teams cannot learn from what people do not feel able to say.

PRACTICAL THINGS TO CONSIDER

COLLABORATION + LEADERSHIP

Your score is a signal. Use these prompts to explore what might be contributing to your highest friction areas.

COLLABORATION

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

There is plenty of capability around the table - but it is not being combined. Information stays in pockets. Functions optimise their own performance. Expertise outside someone's formal role goes unused.

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US

Having capable people in a team does not automatically mean their capability gets combined.

Research involving 699 people found that a team's collective intelligence was not strongly related to the average or highest individual intelligence of its members. Instead, it was associated with factors including social sensitivity and more equal participation in conversations.

In other words, who is in the team matters, but so does how well they work together and make use of what each person brings.

Source: Woolley et al., *Science* (2010).

TRY THIS - FIND THE UNUSED CAPABILITY

Choose one live team challenge and ask:

Who knows something about this that we are not currently using?

Then deliberately bring that knowledge, experience or perspective into the conversation.

TAKE THIS QUESTION BACK

Are we genuinely combining the capability in this team or simply working alongside one another?

AQR THOUGHT

A capable team is not automatically a high-performing team.

LEADERSHIP

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

Problems travel upwards. People wait for permission. One person carries the answers, decisions and momentum. What looks like strong leadership can quietly create team dependency.

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US

People perform better when leadership supports autonomy rather than simply controlling how work gets done.

Deci and Ryan's research on Self-Determination Theory identifies autonomy, experiencing a sense of choice and ownership over our actions as one of three basic psychological needs, alongside competence and relatedness.

Source: Deci & Ryan, *Psychological Inquiry* (2000).

For teams, this raises an important question: are leaders creating the clarity and support people need to use their own judgement, or unintentionally creating dependence on themselves for answers and decisions?

TRY THIS - DO NOT SOLVE IT FIRST

When someone brings a problem, resist immediately supplying the answer.

Ask: "What do you think we should do?"

Then: "What do you need from me?"

TAKE THIS QUESTION BACK

Does leadership in this team increase people's judgement and ownership - or increase their dependency on one person?

FROM THE BOOKSHELF

"Stay curious a little bit longer, rush to action a little bit slower." - Michael Bungay Stanier, *The Coaching Habit*

AQR THOUGHT

Leadership should increase the team's ability to perform, not its reliance on one person.

EXECUTION

Where intentions become action - or friction becomes visible.

EXECUTION

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

Lots starts. Less finishes. Meetings generate activity rather than movement. Firefighting crowds out important work. Lessons are identified, but behaviour does not change.

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US

Effective execution isn't just about setting goals. Teams also need to monitor progress, learn and adjust how they work.

A 2025 controlled study involving 478 people across 56 teams found that a structured approach to team regulation, including setting team goals, monitoring progress and evaluating how the team was working, improved how teams regulated and managed their work. Some of these improvements were still evident at follow-up.

Source: Althammer, Wöhrmann & Michel (2025), *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*.

For teams, this raises an important question: do we simply agree what needs to happen, or do we regularly check progress, learn from what's happening and adjust?

TRY THIS - TURN LEARNING INTO ACTION

Take one important priority and ask:

What do we need to STOP doing?

What do we need to START doing?

What do we need to CONTINUE doing?

Then agree who will do what, and by when.

TAKE THIS QUESTION BACK

What do we repeatedly know needs to change, but haven't yet changed?

AQR THOUGHT

Activity is not the same as impact.

LOOK ACROSS YOUR PROFILE

If Execution is your highest friction, treat it as a performance issue in its own right.

Then ask whether another friction may be feeding it. Clarity can affect priorities; Decision can affect pace; Accountability can affect follow-through; Relationship can affect challenge; Collaboration can affect dependencies; Leadership can affect ownership and momentum.

The point is not to explain Execution away. It is to avoid treating the visible symptom without exploring what may be sustaining it.

THE NEXT STEP

FROM SIGNAL TO DIAGNOSIS

You found the signal. Now find the cause.

The Team Friction Check can help you see where friction may be showing up. It cannot reliably tell you why.

Two teams can have the same friction score for very different reasons. That is why we diagnose before we prescribe.

THE AQR TEAM PERFORMANCE DIAGNOSTIC™

Rather than relying on a single self-assessment, we build a richer picture using the team's experience, interviews, observation and relevant performance evidence to understand:

What's really driving the friction?

How is it affecting performance?

What needs to change — and what doesn't?

We then follow our 4D methodology:

DIAGNOSE	Identify the friction and what is driving it.
DESIGN	Co-create practical, tailored solutions.
DELIVER	Build capability and put solutions into action.
DEVELOP	Reinforce, embed and sustain performance.

**WHAT'S SITTING BEHIND
YOUR SCORES?**

Start with a conversation about your team. friction@aqrconsulting.co.uk

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Find the friction. Focus on what matters. Measure the difference.