

# Module 3. The power of teams: cross-functional, multiskilled and heterogeneous collaboration

## Introduction: why teams matter more than ever

### Introduction

In high-performance sports, we understand instinctively that **teams win games—not just individuals**. Yet when it comes to the business side of sports, this principle has been slower to take hold. Digital transformation is often framed around **technology, strategy, and leadership**, but its execution depends fundamentally on one human structure: the team.

As organizations face complex, fast-changing challenges—from building fan data platforms to personalizing digital experiences—no single role or function can deliver outcomes in isolation. Success increasingly comes from **interdisciplinary, agile, and purpose-aligned teams**. These are not traditional departments with rigid roles. They are flexible groups composed of **diverse talents** working toward shared goals across marketing, tech, content, operations, and analytics (McKinsey and Company, 2021).

The shift toward team-based delivery reflects a broader transformation in how work gets done. Just as high-performing football clubs align their scouts, analysts, coaches, and players toward collective performance, digital-era sports organizations must now do the same behind the scenes. **Team effectiveness is becoming the human operating system of modern sport.**

Research from Google's *Project Aristotle* highlights that psychological safety, dependability, structure, and meaning—not just raw skill—are the ingredients of successful teams (Google, 2015). In sports business functions, these principles matter just as much. Whether it's launching a new fan app, running CRM-driven campaigns, or designing immersive content experiences, it is the team—not the title—that delivers results (Accenture, 2021).

This reading will explore how cross-functional, multiskilled, and heterogeneous teams are becoming the **true engines of digital transformation in sport**. We will examine how cross-functionality breaks down silos and accelerates innovation, and why teams built with t-shaped, diverse members tend to outperform traditional structures. We will



explore how leading organizations such as Manchester City, FC Barcelona, and Formula 1 are implementing agile squads to drive digital progress (Manchester City, 2022; FC Barcelona, 2022; Formula 1, 2021). We will also dive into the rituals, practices, and tooling that help sustain performance and cohesion under pressure—and outline how team effectiveness can be measured, developed, and embedded into the organization’s strategic core.

In short, while culture shapes the environment and skills empower individuals, it is teams that transform capability into outcomes. In the digital era, the team has become the central unit of value creation.

## Anatomy of a high-performing team

### Introduction

Teams are not equally effective by default. While assembling a group of skilled individuals is necessary, it is far from sufficient for success. In the context of digital transformation—where speed, complexity, and ambiguity are constant—high-performing teams must possess a specific anatomy. Their strength lies not only in talent, but also in trust, structure, communication, and a shared sense of purpose.

This truth is as applicable to the back office as it is to the field of play. In football, a team with world-class players can still underperform if cohesion is lacking. Similarly, in sports business, even the most capable data scientists, marketers, and product designers may struggle if they fail to function as a unified system.

### What Google learned from 180+ teams

Google’s landmark research initiative *Project Aristotle* investigated over 180 internal teams to determine what made some groups consistently more effective than others. Surprisingly, the most predictive factor wasn’t intelligence, tenure, or experience—it was **psychological safety**: the belief that a team is a safe space for interpersonal risk-taking (Google, 2015). In high-performing teams, members feel confident enough to speak up, admit mistakes, and share ideas without fear of embarrassment or retaliation.

The study also identified four other characteristics of successful teams.

- **Dependability:** team members reliably complete quality work on time.
- **Structure and clarity:** clear goals, roles, and execution plans exist.
- **Meaning:** the work is personally significant to each member.
- **Impact:** the team believes its work makes a difference.



Together, these five dimensions form a framework that organizations can use to **diagnose and develop team effectiveness**. They've since been adopted far beyond Google, including in digital teams across media, technology, and sports.

## Translating team psychology into sports business

For sports organizations navigating digital change, these lessons translate directly. Consider a digital content team responsible for building an interactive fan loyalty platform. If members don't feel safe admitting when a feature isn't working, or if roles are unclear between tech and design, the project will slow—or fail entirely. Conversely, when trust, dependability, and shared purpose are in place, the team becomes a **self-improving system**. Accenture (2021) emphasizes that such performance requires more than tools and talent—it requires deliberate **team design**, where behavioral norms, workflows, and collaborative rituals are established early. Just like on the pitch, where training sessions, pre-game meetings, and team talks create cohesion, business teams need **rituals** to build rhythm and alignment.

## Clarifying roles, strengthening interdependence

A hallmark of high-performing teams is that **roles are both clearly defined and interdependent**. This means individuals know their responsibilities, but they also understand how their work connects to others. In a cross-functional product team, a data analyst, UX designer, content lead, and CRM specialist might all be working on the same campaign—but none can succeed in isolation. The product only succeeds if each role is both **expertly executed** and **strategically coordinated**.

This dynamic reflects a broader shift in how sports organizations are structured behind the scenes. Rather than delegating down a hierarchy, modern teams practice **co-ownership of value**—where the focus is not on tasks completed, but on outcomes delivered collaboratively.

## Alignment through team rituals

High-performing teams don't just have the right roles—they have the right **rhythms**. In agile environments, teams hold structured ceremonies such as daily standups, sprint planning, and retrospectives to create cadence and accountability. These rituals enable fast decision-making, help surface blockers early, and reinforce a sense of momentum (Atlassian, 2023).

In elite sports clubs, similar practices have long existed. Pre-match tactical briefings, half-time adjustments, and post-match video analysis serve the same purpose: building alignment through shared reflection. Applying this to the business side of sport means using consistent team rhythms—not just status meetings—to drive continuous



improvement and transparency.

## Tools, tech, and the invisible glue

While team performance is mostly human, **technology still plays a critical supporting role**. Collaboration tools like Slack, Miro, Trello, Confluence, or Jira can enhance transparency, speed up feedback loops, and help distributed teams stay aligned. However, these tools only work if embedded in healthy team practices. Technology should **augment trust and clarity**, not replace them.

Leaders must ensure that tools aren't just rolled out, but **integrated into how teams operate**. For example, a shared backlog in Jira means nothing unless the team agrees on priorities and responsibilities. Effective teams make technology part of their cultural operating system—not just their workflow.

## Teams must be designed, not just formed

Finally, it is important to recognize that high-performing teams do not just happen. They are **designed, supported and coached**. This includes structured onboarding for new members, agreement on behavioral norms, and space for honest feedback. Over time, these foundations allow teams to develop cohesion, autonomy, and resilience—all essential traits in fast-moving digital environments.

Whether the goal is launching a new streaming product, enhancing ticketing systems, or driving fan engagement with AI tools, sports organizations must understand that the **team is the atomic unit of digital execution**. It's not just who's on the team—it's how the team works.

# Cross-functionality in action

## Introduction

Sports organizations—especially legacy clubs—have long been structured in functional silos. Ticketing, marketing, partnerships, technology, media, and fan engagement often operate as separate units with their own leadership, budgets, and goals. While this model may have served traditional operations, it is increasingly incompatible with the demands of **digital transformation**, where value is created at the intersections—not within functions.

In a fan-centric digital environment, initiatives like launching a personalized app, automating CRM campaigns, or producing immersive matchday content require **input from multiple disciplines**. Without close collaboration between marketing, tech, data, and content teams, delivery becomes slow, fragmented, and disconnected from the fan



experience. This is where cross-functionality becomes not just beneficial, but essential.

## What is a cross-functional team?

A **cross-functional team** brings together individuals from different departments or specialties to work toward a shared objective. These teams typically include people with diverse skills and perspectives—for example, a data analyst, UX designer, CRM specialist, software developer, and product lead working together on a mobile app upgrade.

The strength of such teams lies in their ability to **break down handoffs and integrate thinking**. Rather than waiting for designs to be passed to development, or for analytics to be retrofitted onto campaigns, cross-functional teams tackle challenges in real time—

together. This integrated approach significantly reduces delays, improves product relevance, and fosters a greater sense of ownership among team members. Most importantly, it aligns every role around **fan value**, not functional KPIs.

## Sports example: FC Barcelona's digital academy teams

FC Barcelona provides a strong case of cross-functionality in action. As part of its broader digital transformation, the club established **cross-disciplinary teams** within its academy operations to unify data, content, coaching, and performance analytics. Instead of isolating tech and football departments, Barça brought analysts, developers, coaches, and data engineers into shared planning cycles. This enabled quicker feedback loops, better integration of athlete data, and more effective communication between departments (FC Barcelona, 2022).

The same model was extended to its digital content division, where marketing and video production teams now collaborate closely with data and fan engagement leads to optimize content distribution across channels and regions.

## Breaking the cycle of functional control

Shifting to cross-functional delivery often requires organizations to challenge longstanding **power dynamics**. Department heads may resist losing control, or worry that their teams will be “loaned out” to projects they don't lead. To overcome this, forward-looking clubs use **matrix models**, where staff report both to functional leads and to product or squad owners.

This model enables the flexibility of agile teams while preserving deep domain expertise. For example, a CRM expert might belong to the marketing function but work day-to-day in a squad focused on loyalty and fan lifetime value. Success comes from clarity of goals and leadership alignment, not rigid structures.



## Driving alignment with shared objectives

One of the most powerful benefits of cross-functional teams is **strategic alignment**. Rather than optimizing for local success (e.g., hitting media views or email open rates), the team is focused on a common outcome—like increasing fan retention or revenue per user.

To support this, clubs such as Manchester United and Juventus have created **OKR (objectives and key results)** frameworks that unify performance indicators across departments (Juventus FC, 2023; Manchester United, 2021). This ensures that each role contributes to an overarching goal, reinforcing the team's shared accountability.

Cross-functional teams are not just a process innovation. They are a structural shift that enables sports organizations to work more like digital product companies—with speed, coherence, and continuous delivery of value.

## T-shaped talent and complementary skillsets

### Introduction

In the traditional workforce model, individuals were expected to specialize—to become deep experts in a specific domain. While specialization still has value, it is no longer sufficient in fast-paced, cross-functional environments where problems are **complex, interconnected, and often ambiguous**. Modern digital teams thrive not only on individual expertise, but on the ability of individuals to **collaborate across domains**. This is where the concept of the **T-shaped professional** becomes essential.

A T-shaped professional has **deep expertise in one area** (the vertical bar of the T) and **broad knowledge and collaboration skills across other disciplines** (the horizontal bar). For example, a CRM strategist may have deep expertise in fan segmentation and email automation, but also enough understanding of UX, data architecture, and content strategy to work effectively with colleagues from those areas.

This model allows teams to become more agile, less siloed, and more responsive to complex challenges. It promotes **mutual understanding, shared language, and faster decision-making**—all key drivers of team performance in sports organizations aiming to operate at digital speed (McKinsey and Company, 2021).

### Why t-shaped talent works in sports

The concept of t-shaped talent is especially valuable in the sports context, where digital teams often consist of professionals with **diverse backgrounds and evolving roles**. A content producer at a football club today might need to collaborate with a data analyst

on audience engagement metrics, a designer on visual assets, and a partnership manager on branded content. Without the ability to “speak the language” of these other roles, collaboration becomes clumsy or delayed.

Clubs like Arsenal and Bayern Munich have responded to this by creating **development paths and internal academies** that expose staff to multiple disciplines over time (Arsenal FC, 2022; Bayern Munich, 2023). These programs aim not only to deepen expertise, but to **broaden contextual understanding**—building teams made up of people who can work seamlessly together despite their different core skills.

## **Complementarity, not uniformity**

It’s important to clarify that t-shaped does not mean every team member must be a generalist. In fact, high-performing teams benefit from **complementary skillsets**—where each individual brings something unique, and those differences combine into a powerful whole. A product owner who can translate business needs into development requirements, a designer with a feel for fan psychology, and a developer who understands latency and performance trade-offs—these combinations are what make modern digital products in sport successful.

What matters is that team members have the **curiosity, communication skills, and humility** to bridge gaps in knowledge. Complementarity requires diversity of thought, as well as mutual respect and psychological safety, as discussed earlier (Google, 2015).

## **Structuring teams around complementarity**

To truly leverage T-shaped and complementary talent, organizations must structure teams with intention. This involves identifying not only **what capabilities are needed**, but how they will interact. Successful teams often map their strengths and gaps using visual tools like **skills heatmaps or capability matrices**, ensuring that key areas are covered without redundancy.

Teams may also rotate members between projects to build broader experience and foster **a more adaptable workforce**. Juventus, for example, has implemented rotational programs that allow marketers, analysts, and content leads to gain exposure across campaign types—making them more effective collaborators when working in agile squads (Juventus FC, 2023).

In this way, t-shaped talent and complementary skills become not just hiring principles, but

**design tools** for better, faster, and more human-centered collaboration.

# Collaboration at speed: agile squads and tribes

## Introduction

As digital transformation accelerates in the sports industry, organizations face a growing mismatch between traditional team structures and the demands of fast, flexible execution. Rigid hierarchies and departmental silos often slow down innovation, leading to fragmented fan experiences and sluggish product cycles. In contrast, the digital-native world thrives on small, empowered, and adaptive teams that work iteratively and respond quickly to user needs.

To bridge this gap, forward-thinking clubs are turning to **agile operating models**—not just as a methodology, but as an entirely new way of structuring collaboration. At the heart of this model are agile teams (often known as **squads**) that operate with high autonomy and clear accountability. These squads are organized into larger structures such as **tribes**, and supported by shared communities of practice called **chapters** and **guilds**. This architecture, originally popularized by Spotify, enables organizations to scale agility across complex environments without sacrificing alignment (Spotify, 2012; McKinsey and Company, 2020).

## Squads, tribes, chapters, and guilds: a blueprint for agile collaboration

The **Spotify model** is one of the most widely referenced blueprints for agile team design. In this model, a **squad** functions like a mini-startup—a cross-functional, autonomous team focused on a specific mission or product feature. Each squad includes a mix of capabilities tailored to its objective, such as product owners, developers, analysts, designers, and marketers. Squads are self-organizing, responsible for delivering end-to-end value without being micromanaged from above.

**Tribes** are clusters of squads working within a related domain—such as fan engagement, ticketing, or digital media. Tribes provide a shared strategic direction while allowing squads to maintain operational independence. Meanwhile, **chapters** group individuals with similar skills (e.g., all front-end developers) across different squads. Chapter leads support professional development, knowledge sharing, and consistency in standards. **Guilds** are more informal, cross-cutting communities of interest—like those focused on agile best practices, data ethics, or design systems—that promote learning across the organization.

This model promotes **decentralized decision-making**, continuous learning, and alignment around outcomes. It allows teams to move quickly while staying strategically coherent — a balance that's critical for digital transformation in sports.

## How sports organizations are applying agile models

While the Spotify model originated in the tech sector, its principles are being increasingly adopted by sports organizations aiming to modernize their operations and engage fans in more dynamic ways. At **Manchester City**, digital squads have been formed to own specific components of the fan journey—such as mobile app development, personalized ticketing, and loyalty features. These squads are cross-functional by design, combining technical, analytical, and creative roles to deliver rapid iterations and updates (Manchester City, 2022).

**Juventus FC** has embraced similar agile principles by launching innovation squads focused on digital fan engagement and new revenue streams. These squads bring together CRM experts, developers, and marketing leads to co-create experiences—from live matchday enhancements to data-driven campaigns—with short feedback loops and clear ownership (Juventus FC, 2023).

The **NBA**, with its vast international audience, has structured its digital innovation teams using a tribe-like model. Teams focusing on global fan development, content personalization, and platform innovation operate with high autonomy while being unified by shared KPIs and cultural principles. This has enabled the league to scale experimentation and personalization across regions (NBA, 2020).

These examples show that while the terminology may differ, the principles of **speed, autonomy, and cross-functionality** are being actively integrated into the organizational DNA of elite sports brands.

### Fan-centric squads: a new unit of value creation

One of the most powerful adaptations of the agile model in sports is the shift toward **fan-centric squads**. Instead of organizing around internal departments, clubs are structuring teams around stages of the **fan journey**—such as onboarding, engagement, loyalty, or reactivation.

Take, for example, a squad dedicated to **loyalty and membership**. This team might include a CRM strategist to design campaigns, a data analyst to identify churn risk, a designer to create user-friendly interfaces, and a developer to integrate features into the app. Together, this squad can rapidly test loyalty mechanics, analyze fan behavior, and ship improvements—all without handing off tasks across departments.

This contrasts sharply with the traditional model, where product changes require coordination between separate tech, marketing, and data departments, each with their own priorities and timelines. Agile teams replace this fragmentation with **shared ownership**, speed, and direct alignment to fan value.



Visual tools such as **fan journey maps overlaid with squad responsibilities** can help clubs identify gaps, overlaps, and opportunities to better structure around outcomes.

## Agile mindsets: culture behind the structure

Adopting agile structures is not enough on its own. To be effective, squads and tribes must operate within a culture that supports **empowerment, experimentation, and learning**. This includes:

- A willingness to test, fail, and adapt quickly.
- Clear, measurable outcomes that teams can own.
- Trust-based leadership that clears obstacles rather than issuing commands.
- Rituals like sprint planning, daily standups, and retrospectives that build rhythm and accountability.

For instance, **Atlassian's team health framework** emphasizes regular check-ins on team cohesion, clarity, workload, and morale—helping agile squads maintain performance while navigating complex projects (Atlassian, 2023).

When these cultural elements are in place, agile teams become more than just a project format. They form the **core engine of transformation**, accelerating delivery, deepening collaboration, and translating strategy into tangible fan experiences.

# Building team intelligence and cohesion

## Introduction

Team intelligence—the collective ability of a group to think, adapt, and perform—is one of the most undervalued drivers of digital transformation. While technical skills, role clarity, and agile frameworks provide the foundation, it is the **quality of team interaction** that often separates average teams from high-performing ones. Especially in sports organizations evolving into digital-first environments, this “human glue” is what turns cross-functional collaboration into sustained momentum.

Team intelligence is not a fixed trait. It can be cultivated. It grows when people trust each other, understand their shared purpose, reflect on how they work together, and learn from both success and failure. In today's complex digital projects, where teams must respond rapidly to change, cohesion and learning capacity are as critical as any software platform or analytics capability.



## Establishing rhythm through rituals

Just like training routines build muscle memory in sports, **rituals create the rhythm and flow of high-performing teams**. These are not empty routines or corporate ceremonies, but structured, recurring conversations that help teams align, reset, and improve continuously.

One of the most powerful rituals is the **daily standup**—a short, focused meeting where each team member shares progress, plans, and any obstacles. Done well, standups ensure visibility, reduce duplication, and surface issues before they escalate. When skipped or misused, information becomes siloed, and collaboration weakens.

Another core ritual is the **sprint retrospective**, which creates space to reflect on what worked, what didn't, and how to improve the next cycle. This builds a habit of learning and accountability—not for individual blame, but for team growth. Teams that regularly engage in retrospectives evolve faster because they internalize improvement as part of their identity.

Other practices, such as sprint planning or weekly reviews, help establish a cadence. Together, these rituals give teams a **heartbeat**, a rhythm of reflection and forward motion. In sports organizations, similar dynamics are familiar: from tactical video reviews to post-match huddles, the most successful teams don't just perform—they debrief, learn, and adapt.

## Tools that enable collaboration, not just communication

Collaboration is no longer about sitting in the same room or sending endless email threads. In digitally mature organizations, collaboration is built into the workflow, often supported by platforms that promote **transparency, co-creation, and real-time decision-making**.

Tools like Jira, Confluence, Slack, and Miro are used not just to track tasks, but to **create shared understanding**. For instance, using Jira, a team can maintain a visual board of tasks, responsibilities, and blockers—so that everyone sees the current state of play without needing a manager to coordinate every step. With Miro, distributed teams can sketch ideas together, brainstorm across departments, or design user journeys in real time.

What matters most is how these tools are integrated into the team's operating model. If they are seen as bureaucratic burdens, they fail. But when used to support agile rituals, share context, and clarify ownership, they **become the digital glue** that holds collaboration together.

## Measuring team health: learning from Atlassian



One of the more practical frameworks for assessing and improving team cohesion comes from Atlassian, which developed a **team health check** that encourages regular self-reflection on dynamics such as clarity, morale, speed of decision-making, and openness to feedback (Atlassian, 2023).

What's powerful about this framework is that it's **led by the team, not imposed from above**. It turns reflection into habit and builds psychological safety into the team culture. Instead of waiting for performance reviews or external audits, teams proactively assess how they're functioning and where they need to grow.

For example, if a team notices repeated friction around ownership of tasks or lack of alignment with broader goals, the health check prompts them to bring these issues into the open—not as blame, but as design challenges. These small adjustments, made consistently over time, create teams that are **resilient, adaptable, and deeply aligned**.

## **The leadership role: creating the environment for team intelligence**

Even in self-organizing teams, leadership plays a vital enabling role. Not by issuing orders, but by **shaping the conditions** under which teams can thrive.

Leaders support team intelligence by creating psychological safety—making it acceptable to ask for help, challenge assumptions, or admit uncertainty. They remove obstacles, protect time for learning, and provide air cover when teams take bold bets that might fail. Most importantly, they connect the team's daily work to broader purpose and impact.

In a sports context, this leadership role mirrors that of elite coaches. The best coaches don't just run drills—they create an environment where players trust each other, understand the system, and make each other better. In digital organizations, leaders must do the same: nurture culture, clarify mission, and champion the conditions for **collective performance**.

When all of this comes together—rituals, tools, reflection, leadership—teams evolve from being functional to transformational. They become not just executors of strategy, but **co-creators of innovation**, capable of adapting as fast as the fans and markets they serve.

# **Diversity and cognitive variety in team formation**

## **Introduction**

In discussions of team design, diversity is often misunderstood as a purely moral or



compliance issue. While fairness and representation are essential in any modern organization, the diversity that matters most for **team performance**—especially in digital transformation—is **cognitive diversity**. This refers to the variety of perspectives, problem-solving approaches, and experiential backgrounds that individuals bring to a team.

When sports organizations embrace teams composed of individuals with different disciplines, cultural perspectives, generational outlooks, and professional experiences, they create **rich environments for innovation**. Homogeneous teams might move faster in the short term, but diverse teams **see more options, challenge assumptions, and deliver more resilient solutions** in the long run.

In digital transformation work, where challenges are often ambiguous, multi-dimensional, and fast-moving, teams that bring different lenses to the table are far more likely to adapt and succeed.

## Why heterogeneity drives innovation

Research across industries confirms that **heterogeneous teams consistently outperform homogeneous ones** on problem-solving and innovation tasks—particularly when facing non-routine problems. This is because people from different disciplines (e.g., data science, marketing, UX, content, engineering) use different mental models to approach problems. The tension that arises from these differences, when managed well, leads to **deeper insight and better solutions**.

In sports, this is especially relevant as digital transformation requires teams that understand fans, technology, performance, and content—often all at once. A team composed entirely of former players, or exclusively of tech engineers, will likely miss important dimensions of the fan experience or overlook key operational challenges. Instead, the **most effective digital teams mix strategic thinkers with creative communicators, data translators with brand storytellers**, and technologists with experience designers.

This diversity of approach is what enables teams to move from incremental improvements to breakthrough innovations.

## Sports teams practicing inclusion and range

The value of cognitive diversity isn't just theoretical. Major sports organizations are actively **reengineering how they form teams**—moving away from narrow expertise silos to cross-functional, cross-background units.

For example, the **NBA** has invested in internal metrics and KPIs for team diversity, connecting inclusion practices with measurable innovation outcomes. Its digital teams span areas such as marketing analytics, user experience, international strategy, and



social justice—combining hard skills with cultural fluency to better serve a global fan base (NBA, 2020).

**LaLiga Tech** has similarly built cross-disciplinary teams that combine software developers, sports scientists, broadcasters, and customer success professionals—all working toward unified digital fan experience solutions across clubs (LaLiga Tech, 2022).

At **Formula E**, recruitment and team design actively emphasize non-traditional backgrounds, bringing in individuals with experience from esports, sustainability startups, and media production to design digital campaigns that resonate with next-generation audiences (Formula E, 2023). Their results—including some of the most innovative digital-first sponsorship activations in sport—reflect the creative power of diverse teams.

## Designing for variety: more than just recruitment

Cognitive diversity doesn't happen by accident. It must be **intentionally designed** into team formation processes. This includes:

- Recruiting for potential and mindset, not just pedigree and title.
- Creating inclusive spaces where all voices are heard—not just the loudest or most technical.
- Facilitating dialogue between disciplines with structured collaboration methods (e.g., design sprints, retrospectives, pairing).
- Encouraging a team culture where disagreement is safe, and constructive conflict is welcome.

When teams become echo chambers, they fail to see blind spots. But when teams embrace **intellectual friction and pluralism**, they generate the kind of insight that fuels transformation. As sports organizations take on more complex digital challenges—from building data platforms to engaging Gen Z fans—this kind of **cognitive range** becomes not just helpful, but essential.

## Real-world team success stories from sports

### Introduction

Team-based structures are increasingly the engine of innovation in sports organizations. From motorsport to global leagues and federations, digitally mature teams are being built



across departments to solve complex challenges collaboratively. Below are three examples that illustrate how high-performance, cross-functional, and agile teams are unlocking business value and cultural change in elite sport.

### **Formula E: real-time strategy and data collaboration**

In Formula E, Jaguar TCS Racing has implemented real-time digital twin technology and data-first teamwork to optimize race performance. These squads—composed of engineers, software developers, data scientists, and strategists—work collaboratively before and during races. Their objective: to make fast, data-driven decisions based on insights from more than 250 sensors embedded in the car.

By using AI and predictive analytics, teams simulate various race conditions, strategize pit stops, and adapt driving tactics on the fly. The tight integration of these roles allows the team to test and refine strategy within seconds during live competition. This high-stakes environment has become a proving ground for agile, data-literate collaboration (TCS, 2025).

### **NBA team: sentiment-driven content innovation**

An NBA franchise partnered with Talkwalker to launch a cross-functional content team composed of marketers, social media managers, data analysts, and creatives. The team's goal was to shift from volume-based posting to emotionally resonant storytelling. Using Talkwalker's sentiment analysis tools, they analyzed fan reactions, game-day discussions, and social trends to understand what themes resonated most during key moments of the season.

The results were tangible: posts aligned with fan sentiment saw 30 % higher engagement, especially during emotionally charged playoff games. This squad adapted in real-time, creating reactive content and interactive formats that felt more human and less corporate. Their success led to increased budget and visibility internally, validating the power of team-based agility in marketing (Talkwalker, 2025).

### **Olympic federation: agile pods for large-scale transformation**

One international Olympic federation collaborated with N3XT Sports to lead a digital transformation effort—not through siloed project teams, but by building agile “pods”. Each pod included members from marketing, IT, sponsorship, data, and events. These multidisciplinary squads co-created the digital roadmap, from strategy through implementation.

The pod structure ensured shared ownership and buy-in across the organization, overcoming resistance that often accompanies centralized digital programs. In less than a year, the federation launched a new tech stack, implemented data governance



protocols, and adopted an integrated content workflow. The agile pod model helped embed lasting change by prioritizing inclusion, iteration, and accountability (N3XT Sports, 2025).

## Measuring team effectiveness

### Introduction

Building high-performing teams isn't just a matter of assembling talent—it's about continuously assessing how teams function, improve, and deliver impact. Measurement is what transforms teamwork from intuition into an evidence-based discipline. In digitally mature sports organizations, team performance is tracked with the same rigor as athletic performance: through well-chosen metrics, clear feedback loops, and real-time insight.

### From output to outcomes: rethinking team metrics

Historically, team evaluation focused on simple outputs—number of tasks completed, deadlines met, or hours logged. But digital transformation requires deeper insight into how teams collaborate, innovate, and sustain performance. The shift is from tracking **what** gets done to **how** it gets done—team health, learning cycles, and value delivery (McKinsey and Company, 2020).

In agile teams, common performance indicators include the following.

- **Velocity:** how much work is completed in each sprint or cycle.
- **Cycle time:** how long it takes to move an idea from concept to delivery.
- **Sprint goals achieved:** a measure of alignment and planning accuracy.
- **Defects or rework:** quality indicators tied to team collaboration.

These metrics go beyond project management. They give leaders insight into whether teams are improving, stagnating, or struggling under pressure.

### Team pulse and engagement feedback

Beyond delivery metrics, measuring **team engagement** and **psychological safety** is critical. Google's Project Aristotle found that psychological safety—the ability to take risks without fear of ridicule—was the most important predictor of team effectiveness (Google, 2015).

High-performing digital teams report feeling trusted, supported, and heard.



Sports organizations now increasingly use **pulse surveys** to track team morale, clarity, and alignment. For example, Atlassian's *Team Health Monitor* encourages teams to assess themselves regularly across dimensions like ownership, decision-making, and balance. These surveys serve not just as diagnostics, but as catalysts for team reflection and improvement (Atlassian, 2023).

## **Retrospectives: continuous learning in action**

Retrospectives are a key ritual for team-based measurement. These structured sessions—typically held at the end of each sprint or project cycle—allow teams to reflect on what worked, what didn't, and what should change. Retrospectives shift the mindset from blame to learning, supporting a culture of accountability without fear (McKinsey and Company, 2021).

Some teams use simple frameworks like “start, stop, continue”. Others build feedback loops into their tools, such as shared dashboards or team review boards that track not only tasks, but collaboration patterns.

## **Linking team health to organizational velocity**

In elite sport, performance data is always linked back to results: wins, losses, and development curves. The same principle applies to digital teams. Research shows that teams with strong cohesion, trust, and autonomy deliver faster and more consistently over time (Atlassian, 2023).

When transformation efforts slow down, it's often not because of strategy failure—but because team conditions deteriorate. Measuring team health is a way to spot this early. Leading organizations now incorporate team effectiveness KPIs into their digital scorecards and leadership reviews.

# **Designing the organization around teams**

## **Introduction**

The power of teams doesn't stop at individual projects or departments—it can fundamentally reshape how sports organizations are structured. To maximize the impact of collaboration, agility, and innovation, many forward-thinking organizations are reimagining their entire operating model to be built around teams, not layered hierarchies.

## **From hierarchies to networks**

Traditional sports organizations have long operated with rigid hierarchies—departments



divided by function (e.g., marketing, operations, analytics), often creating silos that slow down innovation and responsiveness. But digital transformation requires flexibility. It demands that organizations become networks of empowered teams aligned by shared purpose rather than positional authority (McKinsey and Company, 2021).

The “team of teams” approach, popularized by General Stanley McChrystal, suggests that organizations must operate like adaptable ecosystems, not mechanistic hierarchies. In this model, leadership becomes a facilitator of flow—of communication, learning, and trust—rather than a controller of inputs and outputs (McChrystal, 2015).

## **Teams as the building blocks of strategy execution**

In a networked model, the team—not the individual or department—becomes the primary unit of execution. Strategic goals are broken down into missions assigned to multidisciplinary squads. These teams are cross-functional by design, capable of making end-to-end decisions on customer journeys, fan engagement campaigns, or data platform rollouts.

For example, instead of the marketing department “briefing” the data team, a unified team composed of marketers, data analysts, UX designers, and tech leads owns the whole initiative from start to finish. The benefits? Less back-and-forth, more shared accountability, and higher velocity (McKinsey and Company, 2020).

## **Role fluidity and the “talent cloud” model**

Designing organizations around teams also changes how roles and responsibilities work. Rather than being confined to job descriptions, people can contribute their expertise dynamically across teams—depending on the evolving needs of the business. This idea of a “talent cloud” lets organizations assemble just-in-time teams that respond to challenges quickly (Deloitte, 2021).

In elite sports organizations, this is beginning to show up in how digital squads operate: a designer may work on the ticketing UX one month and the streaming experience the next, based on sprint planning and team objectives. This creates learning loops and helps people develop broader skills across domains.

## **Embedding team support structures**

When teams become the center of how work gets done, they need support systems—like enablement coaches, agile facilitators, and internal “chapters” or “guilds” to help maintain quality and consistency. For example:

- **Chapters** are communities of practice (e.g., all data analysts) that ensure discipline-level growth.



- **Guilds** allow people across different teams to share knowledge around a shared interest (e.g., fan experience, accessibility, performance analytics).
- **Coaches** help teams improve rituals, retrospectives, and interpersonal dynamics—without being tied to delivery.

These support structures ensure that while teams operate autonomously, they still benefit from shared learning and aligned standards (Spotify, 2012; Atlassian, 2023).

## Visualization: networked teams vs. functional silos

A visual comparison can be helpful.

- **Siloed structure:** resembles a pyramid—work moves linearly, approvals are top-down, communication is fragmented.
- **Networked structure:** resembles a web—teams are nodes connected through purpose, data, and collaborative tools.

More and more sports organizations are shifting from the former to the latter to accelerate digital transformation without sacrificing alignment.

# Conclusion

## Teams as the human operating system

Throughout this reading, we have explored how digital transformation in sports is no longer just a matter of technology, strategy, or leadership—it is fundamentally a **team-based endeavor**.

The complexity, speed, and interdependence of modern digital initiatives require collaboration at a new level: one that transcends departments, disciplines, and traditional hierarchies.

We've seen how high-performing teams thrive on trust, psychological safety, and clear purpose. We've unpacked how **cross-functional collaboration**, **t-shaped talent**, **agile squad structures**, and **heterogeneous diversity** form the building blocks of digital excellence. And we've looked at real-world sports organizations—like Ajax, Juventus, and the NBA—where multidisciplinary squads are reshaping fan engagement, content delivery, and organizational agility.



In many ways, teams have become the **“human operating system”** of digital strategy. They connect the ambitions of leadership with the capabilities of individuals. They turn ideas into products, data into insights, and vision into execution. And when supported with the right tools, rituals, and structures, teams become not just delivery vehicles—but learning systems that adapt and evolve over time.

If the first reading of this course focused on **mindsets and culture**, and the second explored **skills and capability building**, this reading has made the case that **teams are where mindset and skill converge into action**. The effectiveness of a sports organization’s digital transformation now hinges less on isolated brilliance, and more on coordinated brilliance—distributed across teams who are empowered, connected, and mission-driven.

The journey doesn’t end here. In the next and final reading of this course, we’ll explore **how leadership plays a catalytic role in scaling team-based transformation**—through structure, talent models, and the design of the broader ecosystem that supports people and performance.

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