

DISTRIBUTED HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS

How to create Distributed High Performance Teams that build Great Software?

WHITEPAPER



Introduction

We all know stories of offshoring and outsourcing experiences failing dramatically. Or maybe you are one of the lucky few who has solely positive experiences. Listening to these stories of misunderstandings, poor quality and deadlines not being met, might give the feeling that leading a distributed team is setting yourself up for a waste of time, money, and energy.

However, the demand for qualified software engineers grows due to an increasing dependency on software and a lack of availability of them in the Netherlands and many other Western countries.

So, the question should not be if we should do offshoring, but how to do it right? After all, working globally with distributed teams, is almost unavoidable.



So let us rewrite the story into a positive adventure. A story on finding passion in connecting with people globally and setting up a team culture that engages and challenges people on-site and remote. “I want a story on building great software”, I hear you think. “I don’t need all that fluffy stuff on culture and values.” You do want your teams to build working software that is better than that of your competitors, right? So you need distributed working teams that exist for success and high performance.

We have learned that great teams build great software. In this paper we share how to enable teams to become great and as a result: build great software, even when working remotely. Most importantly, in this paper we show how the process of building a thriving team is actually fun. It generates positive energy within yourself and throughout your organization.

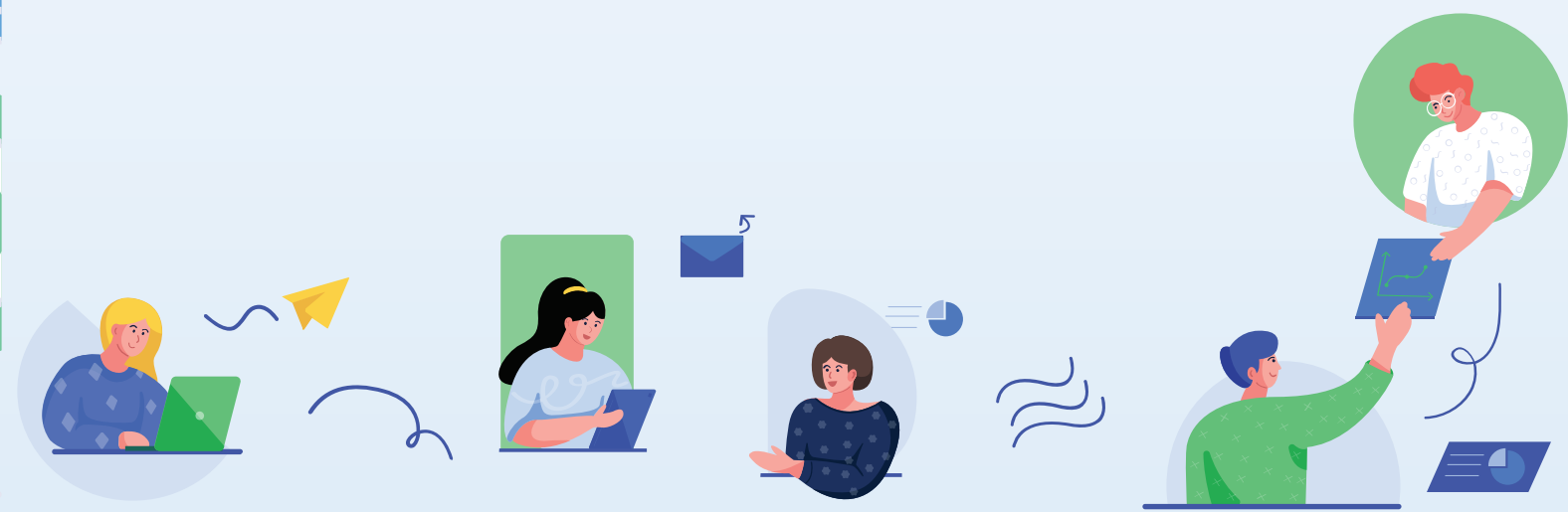
If you are interested to learn how to do offshoring well, via highly productive offshore teams, please read on. You will discover how to turn your outsourced offshoring into a positive adventure in which high performing distributed teams play the main part.

This whitepaper is intended for:

- ▶ CxOs seeking to build or enhance their software development teams
- ▶ Team leaders and project managers looking to improve their team’s performance
- ▶ Software developers and engineers interested in understanding the principles of high-performance teams

“Simply putting a group of your highest performers together doesn’t automatically create a high-performing team. Provided you create the right conditions and leadership, it is possible to significantly elevate the performance of largely average performers as well.”

– **Debra Logan**, VP at Gartner



Why does Offshoring often Disappoint?

Imagine you want to get a tailor-made suit. You walk into a tailor shop and after measuring you, the tailor promises the suit will be done in a week and will cost you €400. A week later, you return to the tailor for a fitting, pay €400 and leave the shop with a suit and a smile. What if you would have gone to a different shop afterwards. This tailor wants to make the suit in a week for a price of €100. You agree and think: "Great! I saved myself 75% there!" After a week you come back and the tailor says he needs more time and the price is €200 instead. I count on you being mad. What if you would come back after another week and the suit is still not finished and the costs have gone up to €300. You are angry now, right? When you do the fitting the next time, you notice the stitches are crooked and the pants are too short. Do you have steam coming out of your ears yet?

This also happens with offshoring software projects. Organizations start because they think offshoring saves money and time and then are disappointed if the project outright fails or saves a lot less time and money than was expected.

Outsourced offshoring is not a failure by nature. In many cases it is started for the wrong reasons or in the wrong way or should not have started at all. Reasons not to start or to even stop could be:

- ▶ It is totally unclear what problem needs solving and/or what solution needs to be developed
- ▶ Magical cost reductions are expected within world record times
- ▶ The technical infrastructure is not in place
- ▶ Proper governance is missing
- ▶ Quality issues on the side of the supplier

Looking critically at these reasons, you can actually say that they are all good enough for any type of work to become a failure. Magic does not happen; crystal balls that correctly predict the future do not exist. Why expect an outsourced offshoring team to succeed in settings where you, yourself or your local teams would fail too?

And then we did not even mention time zone-challenges, miscommunications and cultural differences, that are inescapably part of working globally. I can imagine you are feeling a little discouraged now. Especially since working distributed is not a choice, but a necessity in the software-driven global economy.

So the question remains: How do you make your distributed team work effectively? Before we answer this question, first we will look at the link between High Performing teams and Great Products.



Why do High Performing Teams build Great Products?

A haka is a traditional ancestral war cry, dance or challenge performed by a group, with vigorous movements and stamping of the feet with rhythmically shouted accompaniment. The rugby team of New Zealand, the All Blacks, performs a haka called “the power of Ba” before each match. “Ba” is the state teams are in when they become focused, energized, and high performing. There are several videos of this ritual that can be found online and they show you what feels like to be part of a team that has reached “Ba”. The place where the team, the work and the product or result become one.

Team equals product. It’s as simple as that. High Performing teams build great software. Just like great sports teams win championships. If there is a problem in the team, there will be a problem in the software. If there is a problem in the software, there will be a problem in the team that has built this software. For instance, if a product is lacking new features or innovation, the team lacks room for creativity and innovation to flow.

Results always come from human beings and their interactions. That's why with a positive attitude and a practical hands-on approach, you can lead your teams on an adventure towards their "Ba" in which they:

- ▶ Are high on trust and energy
- ▶ Have a clear goal and way of work
- ▶ Are empowered by having ownership
- ▶ Have space to experiment and innovate
- ▶ Are aware of the impact their work has on the organization
- ▶ Feel proud and fly high
- ▶ Contribute out of passion
- ▶ Reach a state of flow

The result of all this will be a High Performing Team that builds valuable, high-quality software.

Challenges for IT Leaders

Before we look at how to build Distributed High Performance Teams, it is important to get a good understanding of the challenges IT leaders face. The six most common are listed below.

Cultural Differences

Culture is the "way we do things in the team" and needs to be consciously crafted. Building a team culture enables members to connect on a human level and grow mutual respect and understanding. Leaders are faced with the challenge of overcoming cultural differences and finding common ground to successfully manage their distributed team. They should have a plan in place that fosters multicultural understanding and learnings for the team.

From Reactive to Proactive Skills Development

Developing, training, and improving skills and capabilities is becoming more and more of a priority for IT leaders. Organizations that want to apply Agile, DevOps, and AI to their digital transformations need to make drastic improvements to the way they train, develop, and improve the skills that play an essential role in this. The challenge here is to become less reactive and more proactive.

Communication and Collaboration

Members of High performing team must always maintain constant communication and are more likely to lose sight of their goals when communication breaks down. The nature of geographically distributed teams, with employees working at different times and locations, makes it hard for Leaders to trust members of their team and build authentic relationships. Leaders need to look for proper tools, solid infrastructure and adhere to an approach that works for everyone.

Increasing Demand for New Skills

Furthermore, with IT talent scarce, leaders need to invest more in upskilling and cross-skilling current teams to meet the increasing demand for new skills. Developers in particular need to add skills like Devops, AI, Data etc. With silos constantly being broken down, there is also a need for T-shaped professionals with the soft skills to enable innovation.

A New Generation of IT Talent is Here

The number of IT professionals who remember the days before Agile, DevOps & AI is starting to dwindle. Organizations need to start their transformation towards high performing teams soon. Otherwise they might miss out on attracting the new generation of IT talent.

Tool Fatigue

The number of tools and frameworks is growing exponentially. The challenge for high performance teams here is making smart choices, then successfully integrating them into their current practices.

Characteristics of High-Performing Teams

Understanding the key characteristics of high-performing teams is not only essential for organizations aiming to cultivate a culture of excellence but also for individuals aspiring to be part of such teams. A team's journey toward becoming a high performing one is as follows.

Strategically aligned

The team members have a solid grasp of their common goal and are motivated by a united vision, which leads to solid dedication and enthusiasm. They communicate with each other candidly, respectfully, and openly. Every member is aware of their specific responsibilities and duties.

Safe working environment

At workplace, uphold the principles of equality and respect for every individual, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds. We firmly believe that trust forms the foundation of a harmonious work environment, and it is built through mutual respect, dependability, and accountability. This creates a sense of security among team members, fostering a culture where everyone feels valued. Such an inclusive atmosphere encourages team members to take risks, freely express their ideas, and provide support to one another, ultimately driving innovation and collaboration.

Effective Ways of Working

The group exhibits a highly agile mindset, enabling them to navigate changes and unforeseen circumstances adeptly. Additionally, the team members possess exceptional conflict-resolution skills, ensuring that differences are resolved promptly and effectively. Moreover, every team member is fully committed to the decisions, leaving no room for doubt or hesitation.

Growth-oriented

Team members value continuous learning and strive to improve themselves. They are open to feedback, practice self-reflection, and actively pursue opportunities for growth and development. The team believes in taking risks and experimenting to succeed in the marketplace. Team members also prioritize innovation across all the departments.

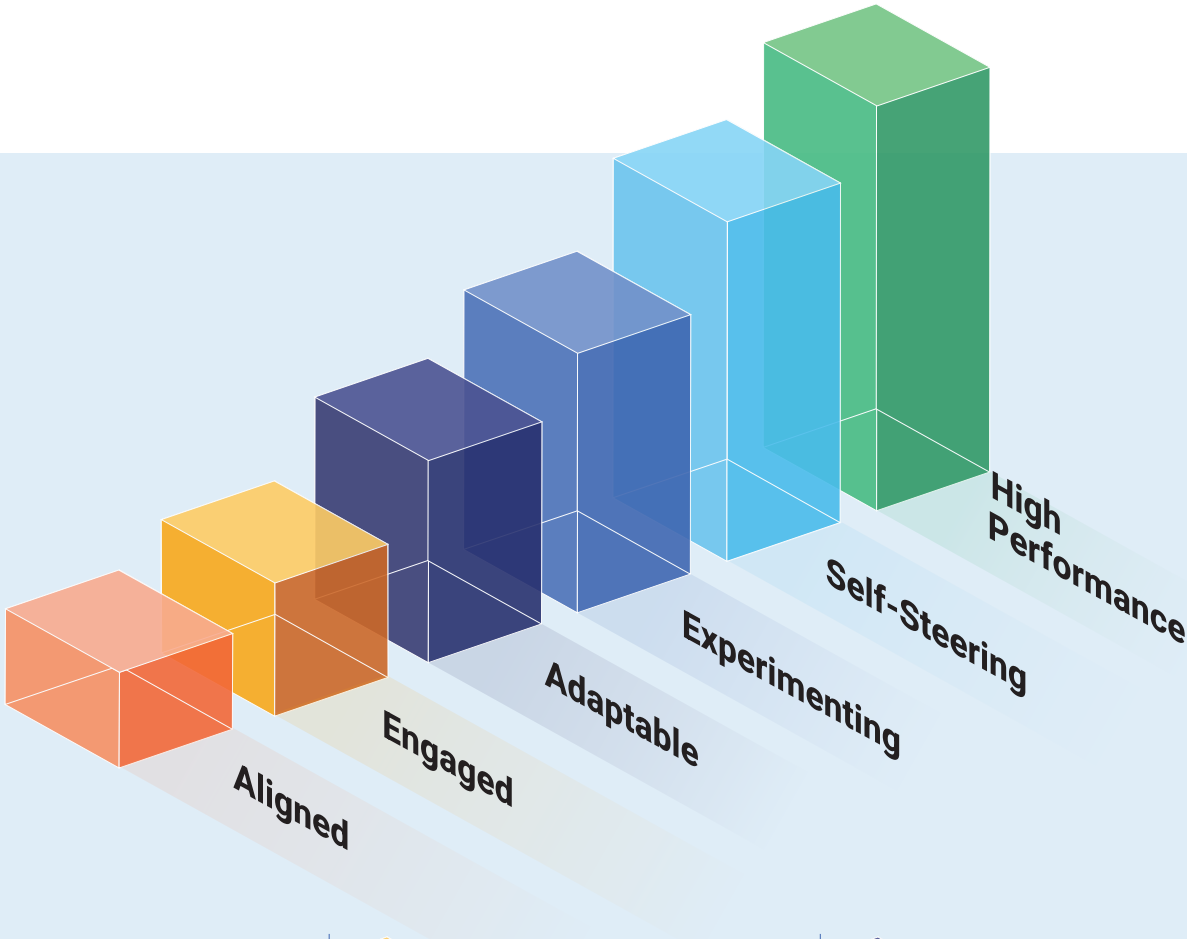
Ownership







Team members are responsible for their results and hold each other accountable. They take pride in producing high-quality deliverables and frequently engage with stakeholders. The leadership provides coaching and support to assist the team in achieving their goals. The team can make the most critical decisions independently.

Culture

A sustainable culture is established in a team that upholds its core values. Members who contribute to the team's success are acknowledged and appreciated.

Using these characteristics, we can utilize the following model to determine where the team stands in its progression towards becoming a high-performance team.



 Orientation - WHY?	 Trust Building - WHO?	 Processes - HOW?
 Winning by challenging the Status quo - HOW TO WIN?	 Self directed - END-TO-END OWNERSHIP	 Creating WOW experiences for everyone

Factors influencing High-Performing Teams

Following are the main factors that impact the performance of teams. High-performing teams continuously work on these to ensure that desired outcomes are achieved.

Communication

Communicating effectively is crucial for promoting collaboration and sharing knowledge. It enables the creation of transparent and open channels to exchange information. To achieve this, practicing active listening and providing constructive feedback is essential.

Diversity & Inclusivity

Having a team with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives leads to a wealth of ideas and approaches to problem-solving. This positively impacts team performance by fostering innovation, improving decision-making, enhancing customer focus, and creating a positive and productive work environment. In summary, diversity and inclusivity are crucial for a successful team.

Experimentation & Risk-taking

Teams can test new ideas, approaches, and strategies quickly and efficiently by promoting a culture of experimentation. This iterative process allows teams to gather real-time feedback, learn from failures, and make informed adjustments to their methods. Rapid experimentation can foster a proactive and learning-oriented atmosphere within the team, promoting continuous improvement.

Celebration & Recognition

Fostering a culture of celebration and recognition can significantly impact team performance. It promotes a positive and supportive work environment, encourages motivation and engagement, fosters collaboration and learning, and drives overall team success.

Trust

Collaboration and cooperation among team members are enhanced by trust. Trust creates a feeling of dependability where team members can rely on each other to meet deadlines and fulfil commitments. Additionally, trust encourages accountability, as team members take responsibility for their actions and obligations, recognizing that their colleagues trust them to produce results.

Training & Development

When you invest in training and development, it can significantly improve team performance. This includes enhancing individual skills, promoting a culture of learning, increasing motivation and engagement, and providing teams with the tools they need to succeed in a constantly changing business environment.

Leadership

Effective leadership plays a pivotal role in enhancing team performance by unifying individuals towards a common objective, fostering collaboration and innovation, nurturing a favorable work atmosphere, and empowering team members to unleash their full capabilities.

Strategies for building High-Performing Teams

The strategies used at Devon to attain a development stage and the tools that can be used are mentioned in the table below.

Team Development Stage	How do we do it at DevOn	Tools
 Aligned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Kick On ▶ Team Onboarding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Create a Team Canvas (https://theteamcanvas.com) for Vision, Goals, Roles ▶ Create Communication Charter ▶ Alignment on Release Plan
 Engaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Team Building ▶ Ikigai ▶ Off-sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Team bonding activities such as Journey Lines ▶ Team lunches ▶ Personal History activity
 Adaptable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Induction Program on Agility ▶ Team Agreements ▶ WoW report ▶ Lean Backlog Workshop ▶ Coaching support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Agile Frameworks ▶ Community of Practice
 Experimenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Kaizen ▶ Budget for Learning & Development ▶ Funding for the best business idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dragons Dens activity
 Self-Steering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Leadership training at all levels ▶ The leader steps in only when the team asks for help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Team Effectiveness activity
 High Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Culture of Appreciating through Awards ▶ Core Values messaging frequently 	

The Evolution to 'Data and AI' Way of Work

The Way of Work evolution from Agile to DevOps to (Data and AI) reflects the continuous quest for greater efficiency, innovation, and value delivery in software development.

“By 2027, 70% of professional developers will use AI-powered coding tools, up from less than 10% today.”

– Source: Gartner

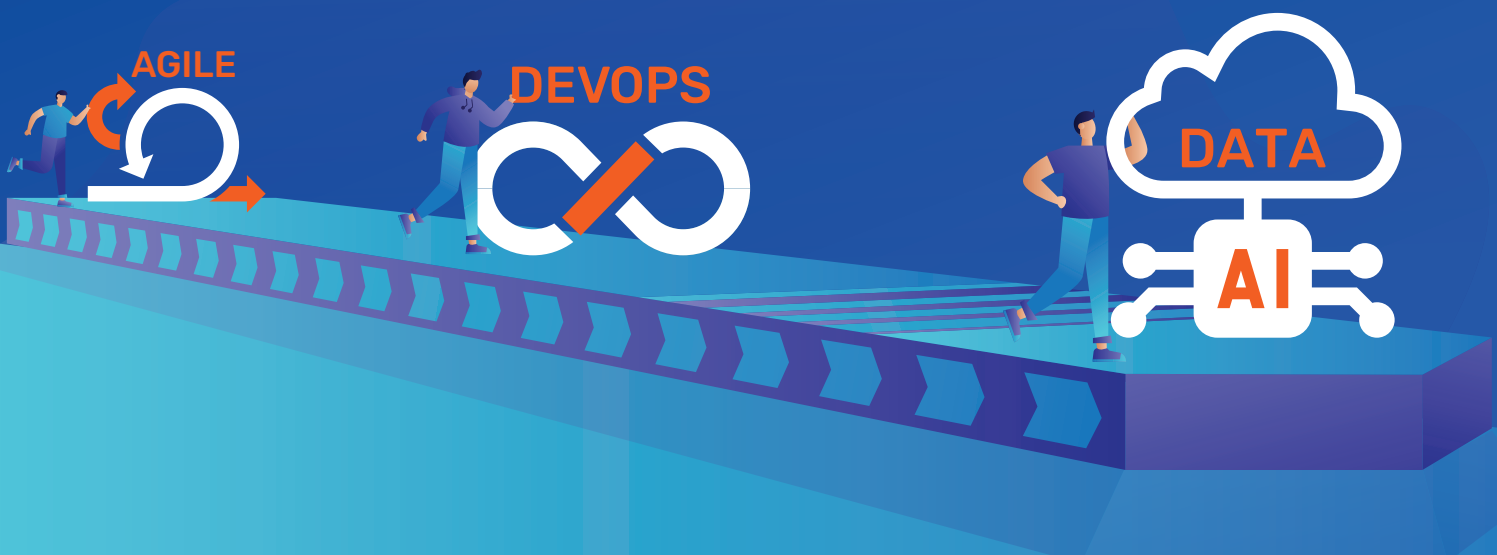
Incorporating Data and AI into the way of working of a high-performance software team requires a strategic and systematic approach. Here are steps and best practices to integrate Data and AI effectively into the team's workflow:

1 Assess Team Skills and Knowledge

Start by evaluating the current skills and knowledge within your software team related to data and AI. Identify areas where team members may need training or upskilling.

2 Define Clear Objectives

Determine the specific goals and objectives for integrating data and AI into the team's workflow. These objectives should align with the overall software development goals and project requirements



3 Identify Use Cases

Explore potential use cases where data and AI can enhance the team's performance. This could include areas like automated testing, code quality analysis, project management, or even predicting potential roadblocks in development.

4 Acquire the Right Tools and Resources

Invest in the necessary tools, technologies, and resources required for data and AI integration. This might include AI platforms, data analytics tools, machine learning frameworks, and cloud computing resources.

5 Training and Skill Development

Provide training and resources to team members to build their data and AI skills. This can include online courses, workshops, certifications, or bringing in external experts for training sessions.

6 Establish Data Governance

Set up data governance practices to ensure that data is collected, stored, and managed effectively and securely. Define data ownership, data quality standards, and data access policies.

7 Data Collection and Preprocessing

Implement mechanisms for data collection and preprocessing. Ensure that the data required for AI applications is clean, structured, and relevant to the use cases.

8 Create Prototypes and Proof of Concepts (PoCs)

Encourage team members to experiment with AI by developing prototypes and PoCs. These small-scale projects can demonstrate the potential value of AI and help identify challenges early on.

9 Integrate AI into the Development Pipeline

Incorporate AI-driven processes into the development pipeline. For example, use automated code quality checks, AI-based bug prediction, or automated testing powered by machine learning algorithms.

10 Automate Repetitive Tasks

Identify repetitive and time-consuming tasks within the software development process that can be automated using AI. This could include automated documentation generation, code review, or deployment processes.

11 Monitor and Measure

Implement monitoring and measurement tools to track the impact of AI on the team's performance. Collect data on key performance indicators (KPIs) related to software quality, productivity, and efficiency.

12 Feedback and Iteration

Create a feedback loop where team members can provide input on the effectiveness of AI-powered tools and processes. Iterate and refine AI implementations based on this feedback.

13 Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Encourage collaboration among team members to share knowledge and best practices related to data and AI. Create a culture of learning and experimentation.

14 Data Security and Privacy

Ensure that data privacy and security are maintained throughout AI implementations. Implement encryption, access controls, and compliance with relevant data protection regulations.

15 Scalability and Future-Proofing

Consider the scalability of AI solutions and their adaptability to future technologies. Plan for ongoing maintenance and updates to AI models and systems.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What role does company culture play in building a high-performance software team?

Company culture influences team dynamics, collaboration, and employee motivation. A positive and inclusive culture can attract and retain top talent, leading to a high-performance environment.

How do I manage and lead a high-performance software team effectively?

Effective leadership involves setting clear expectations, providing mentorship and coaching, offering regular feedback, and resolving conflicts constructively. Leadership styles should adapt to the team's needs.

What strategies can I use to motivate my software team?

Motivation strategies include recognizing achievements, offering career development opportunities, providing autonomy, fostering a collaborative environment, and aligning team goals with individual aspirations.

How can I adapt my software team to changing technologies and industry trends?

Encourage continuous learning, provide access to relevant training, and foster a culture of adaptability and innovation within the team. Stay informed about industry developments and emerging technologies

What are the key challenges in maintaining high team performance over time?

Challenges include managing team dynamics as the team grows, preventing burnout, staying current with technology, and adapting to evolving project requirements and industry trends.

How can I ensure diversity and inclusion within my software team?

Promote diversity and inclusion by implementing unbiased hiring practices, providing diversity training, creating an inclusive culture, and offering equal opportunities for career advancement.

What should I do if my software team encounters challenges or setbacks?

Address challenges by fostering open communication, involving the team in problem-solving, seeking expert advice when needed, and learning from failures to improve processes.

How can I promote a culture of innovation within my software team?

Promote innovation by encouraging idea generation, providing a safe environment for experimentation, and recognizing and rewarding innovative contributions.



Conclusion

In the ever-evolving landscape of software development, the pursuit of high-performance software teams remains paramount.

A high-performance software team is not merely a collection of skilled individuals; it is a dynamic entity that continuously adapts, learns, and innovates. It is a group of professionals who, driven by shared values and a common purpose, consistently deliver exceptional results, drive organizational success, and elevate the standards of excellence within the industry.

The journey toward building and maintaining high-performance software teams is both challenging and rewarding. It demands dedication, resilience, and a commitment to continuous improvement. By embracing the principles outlined in this whitepaper, organizations can chart a course toward team excellence, ensuring that their software development efforts are not just successful but transformative.

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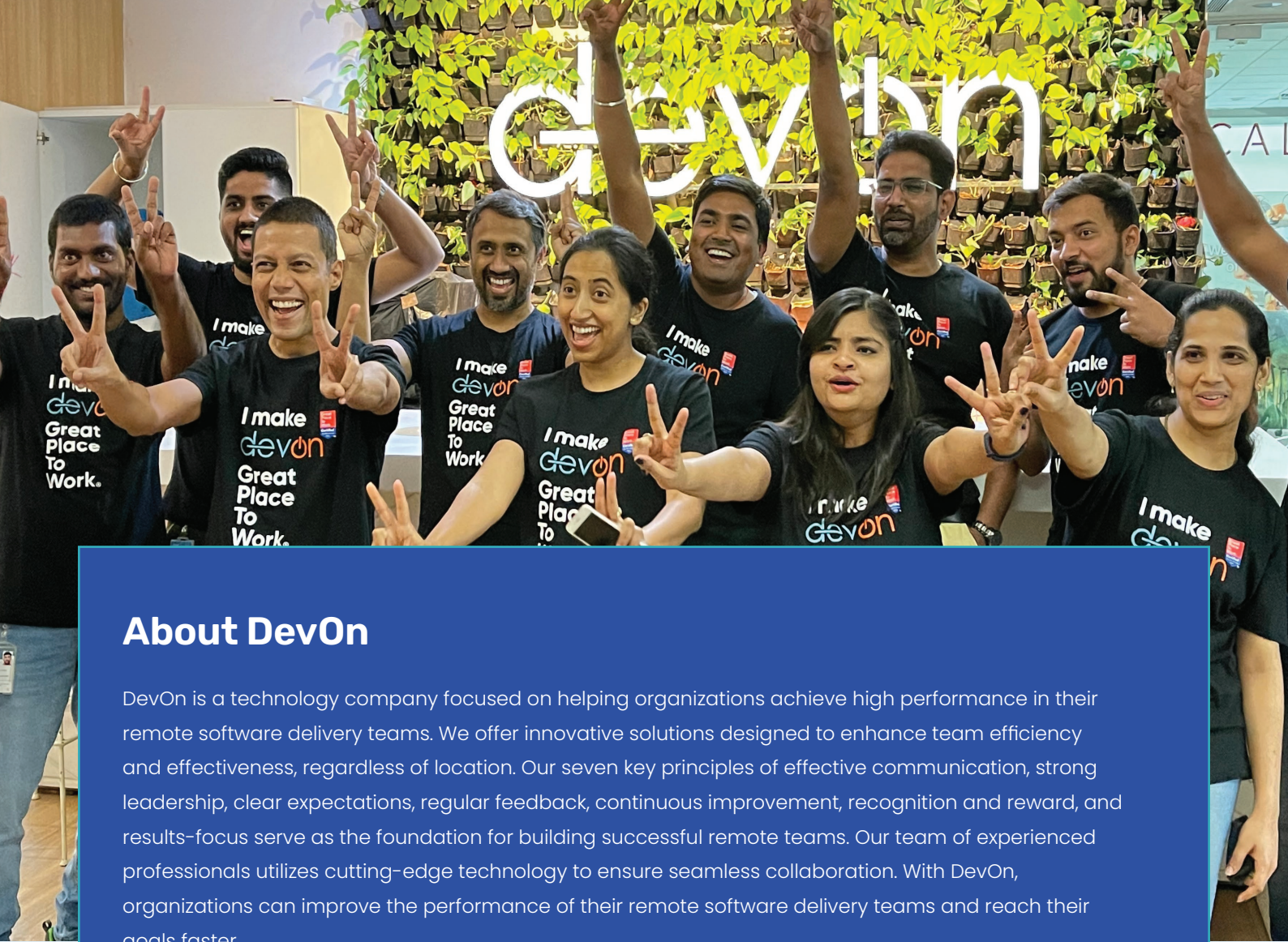
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About DevOn

DevOn is a technology company focused on helping organizations achieve high performance in their remote software delivery teams. We offer innovative solutions designed to enhance team efficiency and effectiveness, regardless of location. Our seven key principles of effective communication, strong leadership, clear expectations, regular feedback, continuous improvement, recognition and reward, and results-focus serve as the foundation for building successful remote teams. Our team of experienced professionals utilizes cutting-edge technology to ensure seamless collaboration. With DevOn, organizations can improve the performance of their remote software delivery teams and reach their goals faster.

Awards & Recognition



3 Times Great Place to Work Certified

Certification based on **Trust Index 94%** – a comprehensive employee survey and culture audit



Top 10 inspiring Workplaces 2023

Ranked No.4



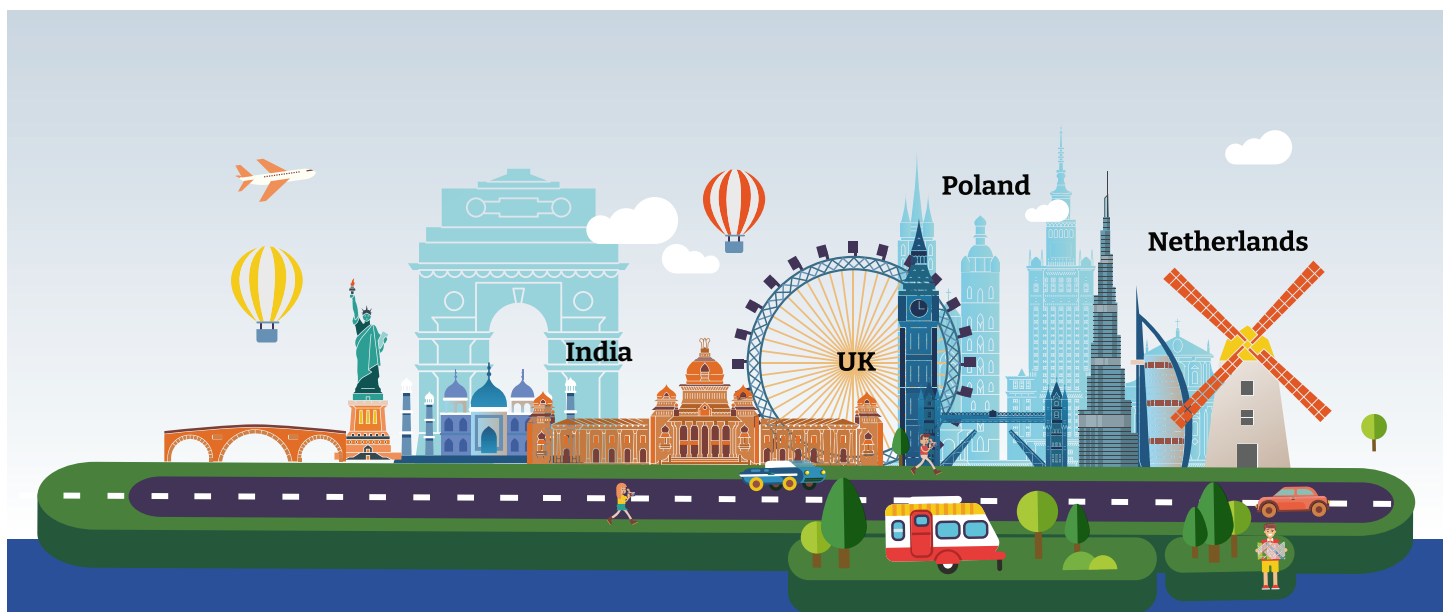
Top 50 mid size workplaces in India



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National Best Employer Brands Award 2022



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Speak with one of our experts

Our insights can help you take advantage of change. If you're looking for fresh ideas to address your challenges, please feel free to reach out to us for a quick brainstorm.

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