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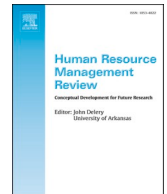
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Toward a theory of team resource mobilization: A systematic review and model of sustained agile team effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

The notion of resources is central to many theories in HRM and applied psychology. Prominent resource-based theories in HRM tend to focus on issues related to accessing resources at the firm-level (e.g., resource-based view of the firm) or the employee-level (e.g., job demands - resources theory). However, at the team-level, the critical issue is often a matter of resource mobilization rather than resource access. Previous research has discovered that a team's ability to use resources effectively is indicative of collective intelligence. Instead of explaining this ability with a latent collective intelligence factor, we argue that teams can develop this ability by using agile work practices (AWPs). Through a systematic review of the agile team literature, we describe how agile teams mobilize resources embedded in the internal and external environment to achieve sustained team effectiveness. Generalizing beyond the agile team context, we propose a model that introduces team-internal and team-external resource mobilization as unique predictors of sustained team effectiveness. We further propose that resource mobilization is strengthened by challenge demands (e.g., work complexity) and weakened by hindrance demands (e.g., role conflict). We hope our model of sustained team effectiveness inspires future research into how teams can perform effectively across multiple episodes, without this going at the cost of members' health and well-being.

1. Introduction

Teams are the building blocks of most knowledge-intensive organizations (O'Leary et al., 2012). Work organized in teams promises employees access to various resources, ranging from tangible support (Mueller, 2012) to knowledge (Majchrzak et al., 2012) and relational energy (Baker, 2019). However, teams often fail to use, coordinate, or leverage resources effectively. In consequence, teams with more resources do not necessarily perform better than teams with objectively fewer resources (Mayo & Woolley, 2021). This has been observed for resources such as manpower (Steiner, 1966), expertise (Woolley et al., 2008), and various measures of team diversity (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007). Thus, many of the difficulties that teams experience are less about resource access and more about resource mobilization, which we define as *using and sourcing resources in the internal and external team environment*.

Most HRM theories focus on the question of resource access rather than the question of resource mobilization. They also rarely put

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teams at the center of their reasoning. This holds for micro-level theories such as job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and macro-level theories such as the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm (Barney, 1991; Barney et al., 2011; Wernerfelt, 1984). For example, JD-R theory proposes that job resources instigate a motivational process and buffer the health-impairing effects of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2018, 2024). The RBV states that firms can achieve competitive advantage by holding resources that are valuable, rare, non-imitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991, 2021). This suggests that both JD-R and RBV treat resources as inherently useful, assuming their mere presence is sufficient for achieving desired outcomes. However, this perspective underestimates the issue of resource mobilization, which appears to be the critical bottleneck at the team level (Mayo & Woolley, 2021). This issue has rarely been addressed by mainstream HRM theory and research.

It could be valuable to look beyond the typical HRM discourse on teams to find new answers to the question of resource mobilization. The discourse on teams in the world of practitioners has revolved around the term “agile” in recent years (Girod et al., 2023). From the Latin word *agilis*, the term agile refers to quick, nimble, and easily moveable. Agile teams are “en vogue” among consultants, and agile practices are even used in initiatives to improve government organizations (e.g., Mergel, 2023). Agile working requires being able to swiftly allocate *internal* resources to where they are most needed (Cunha et al., 2020; Doz, 2020; Junker et al., 2022; McMackin & Heffernan, 2021). However, agile teams must sometimes also leverage resources embedded in the *external* environment, including customers (Hoda et al., 2011), suppliers (Bouguerra et al., 2024), and other external partners (De Diego Ruiz et al., 2024; Rabal-Conesa et al., 2022). Agile teams represent “extreme cases” where resource mobilization processes are visible, varied, and relevant for sustaining team performance and member well-being. Following the logic of multiple case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989), these features make empirical studies on agile teams suitable for theory development on questions related to resource mobilization.

To start with this, we examined more than 180 articles to explain how an agile approach to working in teams can facilitate resource mobilization (RQ1), and when this form of resource mobilization is more (vs. less) effective (RQ2). We address these questions by delineating the mechanisms and boundary conditions of agile work practices (AWPs). These practices are currently the most commonly used pathway to realizing “agile ways of working” in organizations (Koch et al., 2023; Peeters et al., 2022; Rietze & Zacher, 2023). Recently, Junker et al. (2023) defined AWPs as planning routines that facilitate iterative approaches to taskwork and teamwork. These iterative approaches are cultivated through various work practices, such as planning tasks in weekly goal cycles (“sprints”), developing products/services together with their end-users (“co-created solutions”), keeping each other in the loop about daily goal progress (“stand-up meetings”), and reflecting on opportunities for continuous improvement (“retrospective meetings”). With the present review, we aim to develop a framework that articulates what kinds of resources can be mobilized through the agile approach.

We start by reviewing the origins of AWPs and describing how HRM scholars can conceptualize these practices using commonly evoked resource-based views (i.e., JD-R and RBV). Subsequently, we systematically review studies on agile teams and inductively code the mechanisms and boundary conditions described in these studies. Our final review sample includes 16 quantitative team-level studies and 24 rigorously conducted qualitative studies, including ethnographies and multiple case studies. We use the insights of our review to develop a model of sustained team effectiveness (see Fig. 1). Here, we define *sustained team effectiveness* with two criteria. First, to be sustainably effective, teams must be able to meet their goals across multiple performance episodes (“the performance criterion”). We emphasize that performance should be met across multiple episodes because agile teams typically complete their tasks in repeated “sprint” cycles (Benlian, 2022; Rietze & Zacher, 2023). Second, we argue that this should not go at the expense of team members’ psychological and physical health (“the well-being criterion”). Thus, we adopt a multi-episodic and multidimensional view of team effectiveness (Kozłowski & Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu et al., 2019).

Our review and the proposed model of sustained team effectiveness offer new insights for multiple scholarly communities in HRM. First, we contribute to micro HRM theory (e.g., JD-R; Bakker & Demerouti, 2024) by describing practices that enable teams to use, coordinate, and leverage resources. This could also be of interest to the broader applied psychology literature. For example, Hobfoll et al. (2018) call for research on what they refer to as the *crossover of resources*. They also call for investigating how organizations can “cultivate frequent exchanges among colleagues to promote the crossover of engagement” (p. 109). Agile teams represent a relevant

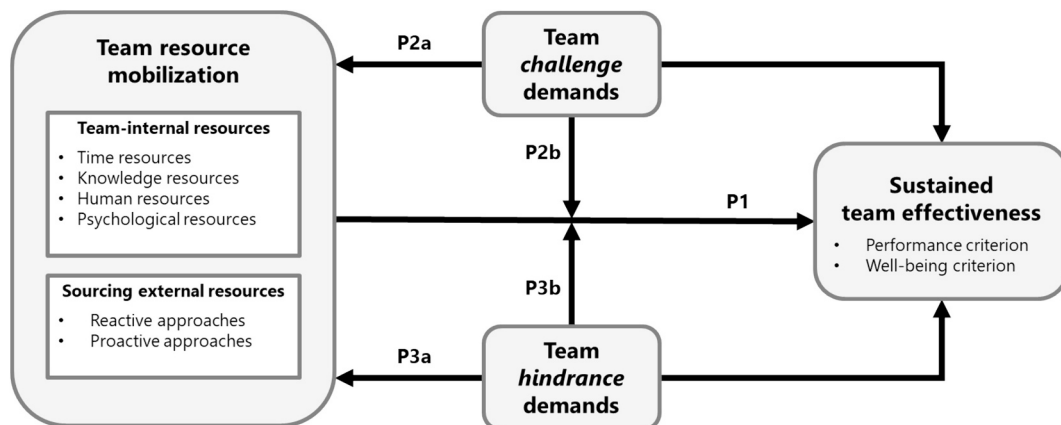


Fig. 1. Model of sustained team effectiveness.

population for addressing such questions because dynamic forms of exchanging and using resources are highly visible in these teams (e.g., Kremser & Blagoev, 2021; Majchrzak et al., 2012; Twemlow et al., 2023). Thus, our review offers HRM researchers a language to describe how resources can be mobilized in collaborative work settings. This language may also apply beyond the population that we focus on in the present review (i.e., agile teams). Moreover, we present actionable recommendations for HR managers and team leaders to improve the mobilization of team resources in practice.

Second, we contribute to the literature on small groups and work teams by describing how teams can achieve sustained effectiveness through resource mobilization. Mayo and Woolley (2021) observe that team scholars traditionally examine the *levels* of certain resources or the *processes* through which those resources might be applied, but investigate this in a detached way. Typically the effects of resource levels and team processes are estimated in isolation. According to Mayo and Woolley (2021), this approach masks between-group variation in resource use and limits our understanding of team effectiveness. Using an approach borrowed from strategic management, Mayo and Woolley (2021) explain this between-group variation in resource use with a latent collective intelligence factor. Here we explain the ability to mobilize resources by drawing from the agile team literature, which has introduced various practices teams can implement to use resources more effectively. Moreover, agile teams commonly need to mobilize resources embedded in the external environment such as customers (Hoda et al., 2011) or suppliers (Rabal-Conesa et al., 2022). This aspect has not been accounted for in Mayo and Woolley (2021) study on team resource use and most empirical studies on collective intelligence (Graf-Drasch et al., 2022; Janssens et al., 2022).

Third, we contribute to research on strategic HRM, which has recognized the need for advancing meso-level theory (Gallagher, Mathieu, & Reilly, 2023; Luciano et al., 2018). For example, our review may feed into theorizing on human capital (HC) deployment, which refers to how units (e.g., teams, projects, departments) allocate unit members to relevant tasks (Gallagher, Mathieu, & Reilly, 2023). Agile teams represent an interesting population for this stream of research because HC deployment decisions in such teams are presumably made in a self-organized manner (cf. Twemlow et al., 2023), while most of the HC deployment literature focuses on the role of leaders as decision-makers (see Gallagher, Wolfson, et al., 2023). Moreover, agile teams are often nested in multi-team systems (e.g., project portfolios; Bechtel et al., 2022), which increases the complexity of HC deployment decisions (Gallagher, Mathieu, & Reilly, 2023; Luciano et al., 2018). Our review offers some tentative answers on how agile teams deal with this complexity. More broadly, insights of this review may help to bridge the divide between the organizational psychology (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Hobfoll et al., 2018) and strategic management perspectives on HRM (Nyberg et al., 2014; Ray et al., 2023).

2. Origins and contemporary perspectives on agile teams

2.1. Origins and manifestations of agile work practices

Software development was not the first domain that has seen an application of agile practices (Roper et al., 2022). Similar continuous development practices have been advocated by total quality management (TQM) and lean management in the manufacturing industry (Balzer et al., 2019; David & Strang, 2006). More recently, organizations have been utilizing agile management frameworks, particularly Scrum (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2017), for implementing AWP in teams. Here we disentangle AWP from popular management frameworks for three reasons. First, it has been observed that AWP can be used implicitly without adherence to the guidelines of specific frameworks (Cunha et al., 2020). Second, multiple frameworks overlap in their recommended practices. For example, Scrum-based retrospective meetings resemble quality improvement circles advocated by TQM (David & Strang, 2006). Finally, we regard AWP as a continuous phenomenon because teams may implement only some but not all of the practices recommended by agile management frameworks (So, 2010). To understand how AWP impact team effectiveness we first need to clarify what this concept entails in terms of taskwork and teamwork (Crawford & LePine, 2013; Fisher, 2014; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Marks et al., 2001).

Agile *taskwork* is characterized by an iterative approach to goal accomplishment and short planning cycles, also known as sprints (Goh & Pentland, 2019; Lieberum et al., 2022). Developing products iteratively in sprints allows teams to respond more flexibly to changing requirements. Consider, for example, a team that aims to develop a new marketing campaign. Instead of planning each detail of the campaign upfront, agile teams may try to quickly develop a prototype campaign and test it in low-cost experiments (e.g., online user tests or focus groups). During each sprint cycle, the team may attempt to develop additional elements of the campaign and adapt existing elements to changing requirements. This iterative approach follows the logic of “effectuation” (Sarasvathy, 2001) because it assumes that the best products are developed through repeated experimentation rather than long-term strategic plans. Thus, instead of trying to predict an uncertain future, agile taskwork focuses on the controllable aspects of the present and re-prioritizing objectives to changing requirements (Kremser & Blagoev, 2021). This dynamic approach to taskwork is facilitated by a variety of social agile practices (Hummel et al., 2015) or agile teamwork (Junker et al., 2023).

Agile *teamwork* usually happens in the context of two formal team meetings, namely: (a) brief stand-up meetings, and (b) more extensive retrospective meetings. Stand-up meetings are usually held at the start of a working day and represent a type of goal-monitoring activity (Ghosh & Wu, 2021). Team members provide updates on their goal progress and can seek help from colleagues during stand-up meetings (Stray et al., 2016). Retrospective meetings are a type of after-action-review (cf. Keiser & Arthur, 2022), conducted at the end of a sprint cycle. During the retrospective meeting, team members reflect on their activities and identify areas for improvement. Agile teamwork complements and facilitates agile taskwork. For instance, during stand-up meetings, team members re-prioritize daily goals (Stray et al., 2016). During retrospective meetings, team members reflect on how to approach requirement changes more effectively (Twemlow et al., 2023). Moreover, it has been found that teams can lay a more robust foundation for agile *taskwork* by devoting more attention to developing a shared understanding of members’ roles and responsibilities through agile

teamwork (see Junker et al., 2023). This substantiates the usefulness of the taskwork-teamwork distinction for research on agile teams (Crawford & LePine, 2013; Fisher, 2014).

2.2. Resource-based view on agile work practices

The present review aims to (1) synthesize what is known about the underlying mechanisms of AWP and their moderators, and (2) integrate these insights with the resource-based views that are well-known within HRM research communities. Micro-level HRM scholars typically define resources as “those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 274). In contrast, macro-level HRM scholars view resources as “assets, capabilities, organizational processes, information, knowledge, etc.” (Barney, 1991, p. 101) that give firms an advantage over competitors because they are “valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable” (Barney, 2021, p. 1671). Now we may ask, would either of these views allow for categorizing AWP as job resources or firm resources, respectively? Empirically, we know that AWP have been widely adopted by firms across various industries and that these practices have both positive and negative effects on employee functioning (see meta-analysis of Koch et al., 2023). In other words, AWP are no longer rare or inimitable in the competitive landscape of many organizations (RBV), and they also do not seem to hold universal benefits for employees’ work-related functioning (JD-R).

Instead of viewing AWP as a resource in itself, it may be more accurate to view these practices as a “vehicle” that facilitates the mobilization of resources in teams. In other words, we suggest that AWP can help to use, coordinate, and leverage embedded resources. Most of these practices are geared toward mobilizing team-internal resources. For example, having a daily stand-up meeting routine may help to mobilize knowledge resources that are readily available in the team (Ghosh & Wu, 2021). Other agile practices, such as working closely with end-users of products (Liu et al., 2019), may help to mobilize resources that are not inherently present in the team. These practices may also direct attention to resources in the team-external environment (e.g., customers or partner organizations; Rabal-Conesa et al., 2022). Moreover, in certain conditions, we may view AWP as firm resources, namely: when these practices are part of an integrated HR system that is aligned with firm strategies in ways that are socially complex and hard to imitate (McMackin & Heffernan, 2021). Our review provides insights into how organizations can optimize the implementation of AWP, to sustain employee well-being and achieve competitive advantage. At the same time, we aim to complement the micro (e.g., JD-R) and macro (e.g., RBV) perspectives on resources by working toward a meso-level theory. This meso-level theory focuses on the issue of resource mobilization, which appears to be more critical at this level than the issue of resource access (cf. Mayo & Woolley, 2021).

3. Review methodology and descriptive insights

3.1. Prior reviews on agile teams and agile work practices

Most studies on AWP have appeared in information systems journals, focusing on specific software development practices (for a review of reviews, see Hoda et al., 2017). A review of research conducted in this field indicated that most studies use qualitative designs (52%), with single-case designs being the most popular methodology (37%; Vallon et al., 2018). Yet, there has also been a growth in the number of quantitative studies on AWP, which has been summarized in the meta-analysis of Koch et al. (2023). Koch et al. (2023) emphasize that their meta-analytic findings should be considered “preliminary” because the overall quality of the reviewed studies was rather low. A large number of studies (24%) used single-item measures of agile practices (e.g., Serrador & Pinto, 2015), while others constructed indices consisting of a range of team composition, work design, and team process measures (e.g., Malik et al., 2021). This makes it difficult to compare predictors across studies, a common problem in meta-analyses. Finally, most studies reported effect sizes based on correlations between individual employee perceptions of AWP and team outcomes. This can lead to inaccurate inferences known as the *atomistic fallacy* (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000).

Conclusive statements about the mechanisms and boundary conditions of AWP cannot be based on studies that use individual employee perceptions as the main data source. Such data sources cannot establish intersubjectivity (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010), which is needed for valid inferences about most team phenomena (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). For this reason, we focus on empirical studies that have used suitable methods for establishing intersubjectivity. In the quantitative realm, this could be survey studies that establish agreement among multiple team informants (e.g., using rwg_j indices; Van Mierlo et al., 2009) or studies that take relationships as the unit of analysis (e.g., social network analyses). In qualitative research, intersubjectivity can be assessed through data triangulation procedures. This is typically done in multiple case studies or ethnographic research (Eisenhardt, 1989). Next, we describe how we arrived at a comprehensive set of agile team studies that met these methodological criteria.

3.2. Review methodology

The present review aims to synthesize empirical studies that have (1) investigated agile team effectiveness in terms of well-being or performance outcomes, (2) delineated mechanisms and boundary conditions of AWP, and (3) used suitable data sources to establish intersubjectivity (e.g., quantitative team-level research, multiple case studies, ethnographies). Throughout the review process, we tried to adhere closely best-practice guidelines for conducting systematic reviews and theory-building research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Kunisch et al., 2023; Rousseau, 2024; Turzo et al., 2022; Wolfswinkel et al., 2013). In the first phase, we used the meta-analysis of Koch et al. (2023) and evaluated all studies included in their analyses. To our surprise, only two out of 53 effect sizes in Koch et al. (2023) were based on team-level data. We read the studies that collected team-level data in detail and screened their reference lists to identify

additional manuscripts that met our inclusion criteria. Subsequent forward and backward searches using Google Scholar resulted in 14 additional studies.

In the second phase, we expanded our search using Clarivate's Social Science Citation Index. We identified 179 articles using the terms "agile teams" or "agile work practices" or "agile practice" or "agile method" (All Fields) with our last update on June 14, 2024. Based on title and abstract screening, 57 articles were included for full-text screening. After screening the full texts, we excluded 17 studies that did not meet our three criteria. We excluded studies if they did not meet our methodological standards or did not present original empirical data (e.g., reviews or conceptual papers). In terms of content, we only included studies for coding if investigated team effectiveness and articulated mechanisms or boundary conditions through which AWP's lead to intended HR outcomes. This led to the exclusion of studies on agile leadership (e.g., Renault & Tarakci, 2023), studies describing how agile frameworks can be scaled to the organizational level (e.g., Dingsøyr et al., 2018), or studies developing new agile methods (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2020; Bianchi et al., 2022). The final set of papers ($k = 40$) was examined in detail and coded for methodological (Table 1) and theoretical insights (Table 2).

3.3. Descriptive Insights of the review

Methodologies and samples. As shown in Table 1, most studies (60%) used qualitative methods such as multiple case studies ($k = 20$) and ethnographic approaches ($k = 4$). The average qualitative study sampled six teams and conducted 40 interviews. Ethnographic

Table 1
Methodological insights.

Authors	Methodology	Data based on	Study context
Annosi et al. (2020)	Multiple case study	44 interviews/4 organizations	Telecommunications firm, multinational
Annosi et al. (2024)	Multiple case study	44 interviews/4 organizations	Telecommunications firm, multinational
Barke and Prechelt (2019)	Multiple case study	16 interviews/5 teams	Software developers, Germany
Bechtel et al. (2022)	HLM	378 projects/100 portfolios	Multi-project portfolios in Europe
Burga et al. (2022)	Multiple case study	60 interviews/9 teams	Software developers in six organizations
Dönmez and Grote (2018)	Multiple case study	42 employees/11 teams	Software development companies, Switzerland
Drury-Grogan & O'Dwyer (2013)	Multiple case study	34 interviews/4 agile teams	Software developers, in Sweden, India, and Ireland
Eckstein et al. (2015)	Moderated regression Social network analysis	143 firm informants 19 employees/1 agile and 1 non-agile team	Manufacturing firms, Germany Software developers, US
Espinosa-Curiel et al. (2018)	HLM	112 participants/38 teams	Software development Hackathon, US
Ghosh and Wu (2021)	Multiple case study	44 interviews/3 organizations	Software, public service, and manufacturing, Germany
Grass et al. (2020)	Correlation	200 employees/34 teams	Software developers, Brazil and Sweden
Hemon-Hildgen et al. (2020)	Multiple case study	59 interviews/2 teams	Software developers, European firm
Hennel and Rosenkranz (2021)	Multiple case study	13 interviews/3 teams	Various project teams, Germany
Hoda and Murugesan (2016)	Multiple case study	21 interviews/6 teams	Software developers, India
Hoda et al. (2011)	Multiple case study Social network analysis	30 employees/16 teams 15 employees/2 globally distributed teams	Software developers, NZ and India Globally distributed software development teams
Inayat and Salim (2015)	Ethnography	3 inter-organizational networks	Industry-academic research networks
Jarvenpaa and Välikangas (2022)	HLM	664 employees/110 teams	Large transport organization, Germany
Junker et al. (2021)	HLM	476 employees/114 teams	Large transport organization, Germany
Junker et al. (2022)	HLM	1664 observations/269 teams	Large transport organization, Germany
Kaufmann et al. (2020)	SEM	384 project managers/135 portfolios	Multi-project portfolios in Europe
Khanagha et al. (2022)	Moderated regression	248 employees/97 teams	Telecommunications firm, multinational
Kremser and Blagoev (2021)	Ethnography	incl. 52 interviews/1 consulting project	Top management consulting firm, Germany
Majchrzak et al. (2012)	Multiple case study	multiple interviews/3 teams	Various industries, US
Maruping et al. (2009)	Moderated regression	862 employees/110 teams	Software developers in consulting firm, US
Mattarelli et al. (2022)	Ethnography	incl. 62 interviews/3 countries	Globally distributed product development team
Melo et al. (2013)	Multiple case study	19 interviews/3 organizations	Software developers, Brazil
Mergel (2023)	Multiple case study	Focus groups/1 public organization	Public organization, Germany
Moe et al. (2021)	Multiple case study	32 interviews/2 case organizations	Telecommunications firm, multinational
Peeters et al. (2022)	SEM	623 employees/97 teams	Various project teams of a multinational bank
Przybytek et al. (2022)	Multiple case study	6 focus groups	Software developers, Poland
Rabal-Conesa et al. (2022)	Moderated PLS-SEM	184 firm informants	Industrial companies, Spain
Ramesh et al. (2010)	Multiple case study	50 interviews/16 organizations	Various industries, US
Stray et al. (2016)	Multiple case study	60 interviews/3 teams	Various project teams, Norway and UK
Tessem (2014)	Multiple case study	25 interviews/3 agile and 5 non-agile teams	Software developers, Canada and Norway
Tuomivaara et al. (2017)	ANOVA	36 employees/1 agile and 1 non-agile team	Software developers, Finland
Twemlow et al. (2023)	Ethnography	69 performance episodes/3 teams	Insurance company, Netherlands
Venkatesh et al. (2020)	HLM	1894 employees/217 teams	Software developers, India
Wiesche (2021)	Multiple case study	19 employees/4 teams	Software developers in automotive, insurance, banking, EU

Table 2
Theoretical insights.

Study	Mechanisms (RQ1) Agile work practices lead to intended outcomes via...	Moderators (RQ2) Strengthened or weakened by...
Annosi et al. (2020)	Team learning	(-) Lack of inter-team collaboration, short-term orientation, inward focus
Annosi et al. (2024)	Team learning	(-) Inward focus, lack of diagnostic control, too much concertive control
Barke and Prechelt (2019)	Self-organizing teamwork	(-) Role ambiguity and role conflict
Bechtel et al. (2022)	Teamwork quality	(-) Nesting in a non-agile portfolio can undermine teamwork in agile projects
Burga et al. (2022)	Psychological accountability	(-) Lack of organizational alignment and team role ambiguity
Dönmez and Grote (2018)	Proactive strategies to deal with uncertainty	(-) Appraisal of uncertainty as a threat rather than an opportunity
Drury-Grogan & O'Dwyer (2013)	Collaborative decision-making	(-) Hindered by a lack of information and slowed down by meeting frequency
Eckstein et al. (2015)	Accelerating work processes and increasing product variety	(+) Strengthened by product complexity
Espinosa-Curiel et al. (2018)	Collaboration and decentralized communication	(-) Competitive communication
Ghosh and Wu (2021)	Knowledge integration	(+) Time: effects of AWP on knowledge integration become larger over time
Grass et al. (2020)	Psychological empowerment	(-) Inadequate customer collaboration, managerial resistance, team resistance
Gren et al. (2020)	Teamwork quality	(+/-) Unclear whether effects differ based on team maturity
Hemon-Hildgen et al. (2020)	Collaboration and resource orchestration	(-) Membership changes, lack of manpower
Hennel and Rosenkranz (2021)	Psychological safety	(-) Lack of psychological safety
Hoda and Murugesan (2016)	Self-organizing teamwork	(-) Lack of senior management support, effective estimations, delayed requests
Hoda et al. (2011)	Customer management strategies	(-) Inadequate customer collaboration as a hindrance
Inayat and Salim (2015)	Decentralized communication and stakeholder involvement	(-) Centralized communication is negatively related to performance
Jarvenpaa and Välikangas (2022)	Temporal coordination of multiple teams	(-) Lack of organizational alignment and awareness of other teams' actions
Junker et al. (2021)	Emergent planning and resource mobilization	(+) Strengthened by work complexity and low team role conflict
Junker et al. (2022)	Proactivity (intrapreneurship, job crafting)	(+) Team proactivity norms strengthen the benefits of intrapreneurship
Junker et al. (2023)	Emergent planning, team autonomy, feedback	(+/-) Irrespective of team type and phase of agile transformation
Kaufmann et al. (2020)	Emerging strategy recognition	(+) Entrepreneurial orientation and voice behavior of project managers
Khanagha et al. (2022)	Peer pressure	(-) Diagnostic control can mitigate the negative effect of peer pressure on innovation
Kremser and Blagoev (2021)	Planning and prioritizing	(-) Temporal conflicts due to multiple project team memberships
Majchrzak et al. (2012)	Knowledge integration	(+) Involvement of external stakeholders ("moving the scaffold aside")
Maruping et al. (2009)	Quality improvement initiatives	(+) More effective when requirements changes are high and rewards are team-based
Mattarelli et al. (2022)	Ad-hoc problem-solving and quick response	(-) Misaligned product representations, short-term orientation, time pressure
Melo et al. (2013)	Work allocation and intra-team collaboration	(-) Team turnover (membership changes) and lack of inter-team alignment
Mergel (2023)	Accelerating work processes and procedures	(-) Resistance of middle managers, restricted external communication, legal constraints
Moe et al. (2021)	Psychological empowerment	(-) Lack of organizational alignment, but this is mitigated by clan control
Peeters et al. (2022)	Psychological safety	(+/-) Irrespective of the functional domain of the teams
Przybyłek et al. (2022)	Team learning	(-) Lack of variety in routines, dysfunctional group processes
Rabal-Conesa et al. (2022)	Information and knowledge sharing	(+) Effect is strengthened when external knowledge use is high (vs. low)
Ramesh et al. (2010)	Planning and prioritizing	(-) Inadequate customer collaboration, lack of consensus
Stray et al. (2016)	Information and knowledge sharing	(-) Knowledge redundancy, interruptions, concertive control
Tessem (2014)	Psychological empowerment	(-) Lack of formal power can undermine empowering agile practices
Tuomivaara et al. (2017)	Sustainable work pace	(+) Time: benefits of AWP become larger toward a deadline
Twemlow et al. (2023)	Proactivity (innovation, taking charge, problem prevention)	(+) Supportive peer, leader, and customer reactions strengthen benefits of proactivity
Venkatesh et al. (2020)	Favorable role perceptions	(+) Organizational skills (communication, teamwork, project management)
Wiesche (2021)	Transparency and time-boxed work	(-) Inadequate customer collaboration

Note. We coded the moderator as (+) when it strengthened the mechanism, as (-) when it weakened the mechanism, and (+/-) when the mechanism was present in different subgroups.

observations ranged from 41 working days (Kremser & Blagoev, 2021) to 4 years (Jarvenpaa & Välikangas, 2022). Most quantitative studies made use of multiple regression analyses or variants of structural equation modeling ($k = 8$), followed by hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) or multilevel analyses ($k = 6$), and social network analyses ($k = 2$). The average quantitative study sampled 103 units (i.e., teams, project portfolios, or firms) and collected data from 494 informants (i.e., employees, project managers, or team leaders). Approximately half of the studies (48%) explicitly described their sample as consisting of software development professionals, which may be unsurprising given the origins of the agile team concept. Most studies sampled participants in Europe ($k = 22$), followed by multinational samples ($k = 9$), participants from the US and Canada ($k = 6$), Asia ($k = 4$), or Brazil ($k = 2$).

Outcomes. Most studies emphasized performance outcomes (63%), including overall assessments of team performance (e.g., Junker et al., 2022), team innovation (e.g., Khanagha et al., 2022), or project success (e.g., Bechtel et al., 2022). A few studies included specific indicators such as software errors (Maruping et al., 2009) or product failures (Mattarelli et al., 2022). We coded qualitative studies as focusing on “performance outcomes” if they described the emergence of performance-relevant team emergent states (e.g., knowledge integration; e.g., Majchrzak et al., 2012) or team processes that presumably explained team performance (e.g., proactivity; Twemlow et al., 2023). Studies emphasizing health outcomes primarily considered positive forms of well-being such as job satisfaction (e.g., Hemon-Hildgen et al., 2020), empowerment (e.g., Moe et al., 2021), or team engagement (e.g., Peeters et al., 2022). A few studies examined negative health outcomes (e.g., exhaustion; Venkatesh et al., 2020). Only one study used objective health indicators (i.e., heart rate variability; Tuomivaara et al., 2017).

Agile team concepts. One of the key challenges in synthesizing the literature was the variety of concepts used to define agile teams or to describe how they operate. This was particularly challenging for qualitative studies because they often included detailed descriptions of practices and communicative processes in agile teams. Several studies purposefully sampled agile teams to build theory on phenomena related to agile working, such as prioritizing (Kremser & Blagoev, 2021), temporal coordination (Jarvenpaa & Välikangas, 2022), knowledge integration (Majchrzak et al., 2012), or proactivity (Twemlow et al., 2023). The main challenge with coding the qualitative studies was that some of them were explicit about how AWP contributed to observations, whereas others treated these practices as secondary contextual features. We coded the qualitative studies as capturing the “agile team context” whenever it was unclear which specific practices were investigated ($k = 24$).

While delineating the boundaries of agile team concepts was less ambiguous in quantitative studies, AWPs were measured in various ways. For example, some studies used overall assessments of agility ($k = 5$), with items such as “*What percentage of the portfolio budget is spent on projects using agile or hybrid PM?*” (Kaufmann et al., 2020, p. 437). Other studies measured specific software development practices (e.g., pair programming, continuous integration, unit testing, etc.; Maruping et al., 2009), and one study used an experimental approach to manipulating specific AWPs (i.e., stand-up meetings; Ghosh and Wu (2021)). Only a few studies captured AWPs with a multi-dimensional measure ($k = 11$). The most rigorous measure validation study gathered data from 269 teams to evaluate their instrument’s factorial, convergent, and discriminant validity (Junker et al., 2023). However, the Agile Work Practices Instrument (AWPI) was only recently published and has yet to establish its foothold in global implementation (e.g., Uraon et al., 2023).

4. Theoretical insights on mechanisms

As shown in Table 2, we inductively coded a variety of different mechanisms that could potentially explain why the use of AWPs in teams leads to intended outcomes. The variety of mechanisms is unsurprising given the breadth of the agile team concept and how it has been investigated (predominantly qualitatively). In the following sections, we try to make sense of these mechanisms using a resource-based lens. In the initial review, we distinguished between team-internal and team-external mechanisms. Through further engagement with the literature, we discovered that researchers have capitalized on the richness of agile team contexts to understand the mobilization of various team-internal resources. The resulting themes discuss how agile teams use time as a resource, how they mobilize knowledge, coordinate “manpower” or other human resources, and how they leverage psychological resources (Section 4.1) Subsequently, we describe how agile teams engage with resources embedded in the external environment and explain why this is necessary for sustained team effectiveness (Section 4.2).

4.1. Mobilizing team-internal resources

Time resources. An interesting insight of the review is that several studies used the agile team context to describe how these teams effectively use the key resource of time (on why time can be seen as a resource, see Blagoev et al., 2024). This is perhaps most prominent in the ethnography of Kremser and Blagoev (2021) who describe how members of an agile team dynamically prioritize their activities using various strategies (i.e., role-based, sequence-based, timing-based). By using these strategies and institutionalizing them in daily meetings, the agile teams observed by Kremser and Blagoev (2021) avoided temporal conflicts and addressed multiple competing deadlines effectively. On a vastly different timeframe of 4 years, Jarvenpaa and Välikangas (2022) observed how coordinating activities in sprint cycles facilitated collaboration in an industry-academic research network. Temporal mechanisms are also introduced in several quantitative studies. For example, Junker et al. (2023) show that AWPs stimulate emergent team planning behavior. Ghosh and Wu (2021) demonstrate experimentally that AWPs can help teams develop more useful solutions in extremely time-bounded Hackathon events (48 h). Finally, Tuomivaara et al. (2017) found that objectively measured physiological stress toward the end of a project deadline was lower in an agile team vs. a non-agile team. This led them to conclude that “agile methods enable a better workload balance and working at a sustainable pace” (p. 864). Collectively, these studies suggest that AWPs can help teams to pace their activities and use time more effectively. This is consistent with some of the language used in popular books, which describe agile methods as “the art of doing twice the work in half the time” (Sutherland, 2014). However, more research is needed to conclude

which practices are necessary and how frequently they should be enacted. For example, [Stray et al. \(2016\)](#) note that team members may regard certain agile practices, such as daily stand-up meetings as a “waste of time” (p. 113). It could also be that the agile approach to tasks creates more awareness about time, which may lead to more efficient team processes (cf. [Gersick, 1988](#)). However, this heightened awareness and perception of time as a resource may simultaneously lead to more critical remarks about seemingly unproductive practices. Future research may address to what extent the effects of AWP are explained by how these practices influence team member’s temporal schemata ([Lbianca et al., 2005](#)) or subjective perceptions of time ([Shipp & Jansen, 2021](#)).

Knowledge resources. Several studies used agile team contexts to develop theory on how teams mobilize knowledge resources. For example, the interviews and observations of [Majchrzak et al. \(2012\)](#) describe various agile practices that cross-functional teams use to transcend knowledge boundaries. Using quantitative approaches, [Rabal-Conesa et al. \(2022\)](#) find that AWP facilitate the mobilization of firm-internal knowledge for eco-innovation. Yet, they also note that the effect of firm-internal knowledge on the success of green products is more pronounced when external knowledge is mobilized, for example via professional associations or partnering organizations. [Annosi et al. \(2020\)](#), [Annosi et al., 2024](#) make similar observations in their research on learning in agile organizations. They show that AWP create learning routines that enable teams to share internal knowledge more effectively. At the same time, this internal knowledge mobilization process can become the “Achilles heel” of agile teams. Several authors note that agile teams tend to become too inward-focused due to their social practices, which limits their capacity for innovation ([Annosi et al., 2020](#); [Annosi et al., 2024](#); [Burga et al., 2022](#); [Ghosh & Wu, 2021](#); [Khanagha et al., 2022](#); [Moe et al., 2021](#)). Other studies suggest that agile teams develop routines that allow them to anticipate important market developments and spot internal knowledge gaps. For example, [Kaufmann et al. \(2020\)](#) find that project agility is positively associated with emerging strategy recognition – the discovery of new strategic opportunities. Likewise, [Junker et al. \(2022\)](#) report cross-level relationships between team AWP and employee intrapreneurship. This suggests that these AWP may create awareness about team-external strategic developments ([Blanka, 2019](#); [Gawke et al., 2019](#)). A better differentiation of the various AWP may help to reconcile these conflicting findings. For example, developing products by closely collaborating with end-users (e.g., iterative development) may contribute to external knowledge mobilization ([Liu et al., 2019](#); [Rabal-Conesa et al., 2022](#)). In contrast, social agile practices (e.g., stand-up meetings) create a routine for internal knowledge mobilization ([Ghosh & Wu, 2021](#); [Stray et al., 2016](#)). Therefore, to clarify how AWP influence team knowledge mobilization we recommend that future research adopts the recently validated distinction between agile teamwork and agile taskwork ([Junker et al., 2023](#)).

Human resources (“manpower”). Another consistent insight across studies was that agile teams use a variety of strategies to leverage and coordinate available “manpower” or human resources more effectively. It is commonly stated that agile working entails self-organizing teamwork ([Hoda et al., 2017](#); [McMackin & Heffernan, 2021](#); [Vallon et al., 2018](#)). Yet, only a few studies detail how agile teams achieve self-organization. One practice that enables agile teams to capitalize on available human resources is their collaborative decision-making routine. For example, [Hoda and Murugesan \(2016\)](#) describe how agile teams involve all team members in estimating the effort and time needed to complete various tasks. In contrast, in non-agile teams, effort estimation is “typically performed by managers or technical leads and does not typically involve the whole team” (p. 251). In addition, agile teams commonly use various work allocation procedures ([Melo et al., 2013](#)) and ensure that tasks fit member capabilities ([Barke & Prechelt, 2019](#)). This often covaries with high degrees of team autonomy ([Junker et al., 2023](#)) and member empowerment ([Grass et al., 2020](#)). In consequence, proactivity becomes an essential driver of agile team effectiveness. For example, [Junker et al. \(2022\)](#) find that proactive strength use behavior (cf. [Kooij et al., 2017](#)) explains part of the relationship between AWP and team performance. Expanding on these quantitative findings, [Twemlow et al. \(2023\)](#) observe similar proactive behaviors. However, they also note that continued engagement in proactivity depends on how peers, managers, and customers react to members’ initiatives. In other words, even with the most elaborate decision-making, work allocation ([Melo et al., 2013](#)), or effort estimation procedures ([Hoda & Murugesan, 2016](#)), agile teams may not capitalize on their human resources due to dysfunctional communication. Social network studies ([Espinosa-Curiel et al., 2018](#); [Inayat & Salim, 2015](#)) provide additional insights into how agile teams can optimize communication patterns and capitalize on available human resources. What has not been addressed to this date is how agile teams cope with the loss of human resources (turnover). As shown in the seminal work of [Shaw et al. \(2005\)](#), social network analysis can provide valuable answer to questions related to the loss of human resources. Moreover, recently proposed event-based methods ([Laulié & Morgeson, 2021](#)) could prove useful for investigating the impact of membership changes on team effectiveness in a more nuanced way.

Psychological resources. Our insights on the mobilization of human resources are closely related to studies detailing how agile teams leverage members’ psychological resources. These studies indicate that high degrees of autonomy and empowerment created through AWP partly explain why members of agile teams enjoy their work, making them feel vigorous, dedicated, and absorbed in their tasks ([Benlian, 2022](#); [Junker et al., 2021](#); [Rietze & Zacher, 2022, 2023](#)). Several qualitative studies indicate that agile teams create an atmosphere of psychological safety, making team members feel safe to speak up, experiment, and take initiative ([Burga et al., 2022](#); [Grass et al., 2020](#); [Hennel & Rosenkranz, 2021](#); [Moe et al., 2021](#); [Tessem, 2014](#); [Twemlow et al., 2023](#)). Quantitatively, this has been demonstrated by [Peeters et al. \(2022\)](#) who find positive correlations between AWP and psychological safety. Similarly, [Junker et al. \(2022\)](#) suggest that AWP may contribute to the emergence of team proactivity norms. This implies that agile teams create conditions that motivate team members to “go the extra mile” and push each other to high performance ([Baer & Frese, 2003](#); [Hong et al., 2016](#); [Raub & Liao, 2012](#)). At this point, readers may ask whether AWP can also harm members’ psychological well-being. The meta-analysis of [Koch et al. \(2023\)](#) was inconclusive in that regard, leading them to speculate that the “heterogeneity of affective reactions to APM [Agile Project Management] between individuals may be larger than reactions to other organizational phenomena” (p. 18). Illuminating the role of individual differences, [Venkatesh et al. \(2020\)](#) find that while AWP generally help to reduce emotional exhaustion, these effects are more pronounced for individuals who have strong organizational skills (i.e., feel proficient in planning and communicating). Beyond individual differences, social interaction patterns can influence the mobilization of psychological resources. Several authors note that AWP can undermine the mobilization of psychological resources due to peer pressure ([Khanagha](#)

et al., 2022), coercive control (Twemlow et al., 2023), and competitive communication (Espinosa-Curiel et al., 2018). Thus, heterogeneity in affective reactions to AWP may not be only due to person-job fit issues (cf. Venkatesh et al., 2020). It is likely also a function of how teams enact these practices and what kinds of interaction patterns they produce (see Twemlow et al., 2023). Future research will need to adopt longitudinal and multilevel designs to investigate *when* and *in what contexts* AWP create empowerment vs. performance pressure.

4.2. Mobilizing team-external resources

While mobilizing team-internal resources may be necessary for sustained agile team effectiveness, our review also indicates that this is *not* sufficient in all contexts (see also Carboni et al., 2021). Several authors highlight that the “Achilles heel” of agile teams often resides at their boundaries: Inadequate customer collaboration (Hoda et al., 2011), misaligned mental models of customer requests (Mattarelli et al., 2022), lack of top management support (Grass et al., 2020), or multiple project priorities (Bechtel et al., 2022). These studies converge on indicating the need for more boundary-spanning action in agile teams. Boundary spanning refers to activities through which teams can source resources from external parties (e.g., customers, internal clients, and other teams; Leicht-Deobald et al., 2023). Some studies frame boundary-spanning as a *reactive approach* to resource mobilization by concluding that this is needed for overcoming obstacles to agile team effectiveness. For example, Hoda et al. (2011) describe several customer management strategies (e.g., inviting clients for product demonstrations) and frame them as reactions to inadequate customer involvement. While a lack of customer involvement can hamper progress, overinvolvement of customers can be equally disruptive for teams. For example, Wiesche (2021) observes that extensive customer involvement in agile teams can lead to interruptions, requiring more effective boundary management. Other authors frame boundary-spanning as a *proactive approach* to resource mobilization, cultivated by several agile practices. For example, Kaufmann et al. (2020) and Junker et al. (2022) suggest that AWP can nurture an entrepreneurial mindset, making team members anticipate and seek opportunities in collaboration with external parties. Moreover, Junker et al. (2022) find that employee intrapreneurship leads to larger performance gains in agile compared to non-agile team contexts. Irrespective of whether it is framed as a reactive or a proactive approach, these studies collectively suggest that mobilizing team-external resources can amplify the benefits of AWP and build the capabilities needed for sustained team effectiveness. More research is needed to validate the distinction between proactive and reactive boundary spanning, beyond the agile team literature.

5. Theoretical insights on boundary conditions

As shown in Table 2, various moderators and boundary conditions may limit sustained agile team effectiveness. These boundary conditions range from team-internal processes (e.g., competitive communication; Espinosa-Curiel et al., 2018), to the activities of customers (e.g., Hoda et al., 2011) and organizational features (e.g., project portfolio management; Bechtel et al., 2022). To synthesize these moderators, we made use of the challenge-hindrance stressor distinction (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; LePine, 2022). We describe a moderator as a *challenge demand* (Section 5.1) when studies framed it as a difficult but motivating feature in agile team contexts, which may amplify the benefits of AWP for team effectiveness. When stressors were framed as unnecessary obstacles to agile team effectiveness, we describe them as a *hindrance demand* (Section 5.2). The resulting categorization may not be unambiguous since individual appraisal processes can lead to a stressor being experienced as a challenge vs. hindrance (Webster et al., 2011). Nonetheless, we note that the challenge-hindrance stressor distinction has received considerable empirical support (LePine, 2022), and has been integrated into several micro-level HRM theories (e.g., JD-R; Bakker et al., 2023). Our review suggests that this distinction could also be useful for building theory on team resource mobilization (see also Pearsall et al., 2009; Razinskas et al., 2022).

5.1. Challenge demands

Challenge demands have motivating potential (LePine, 2022) and amplify the need for structured approaches to resource mobilization (cf. Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Consistent with this general principle, several studies in this review indicate that AWP are most beneficial for teams working in complex, uncertain, and volatile settings. This is because AWP create structures that enable teams to take control of uncertainty and react flexibly to changing requirements (Bianchi et al., 2020; Dönmez & Grote, 2018; Grote et al., 2018). These routines may enable agile teams to appraise certain stressors as a challenge even if they are usually appraised as a hindrance (Griffin & Grote, 2020). For example, Dönmez and Grote (2018) describe how agile teams thrive on *uncertainty* – a stressor often appraised as a hindrance (Webster et al., 2011). Daily agile meetings appear particularly suitable for addressing task uncertainty because these meetings create a social routine that allows team members to clarify priorities (see also Stray et al., 2016). Planning work in sprint cycles may be most important for teams facing goal uncertainty (Jarvenpaa & Välikangas, 2022) and volatile customer requests (Kremser & Blagoev, 2021). Working in sprints enables teams to deal more effectively with frequent changes (i.e., requirement uncertainty) because this allows them to review and re-prioritize goals continuously (Ghosh & Wu, 2021). The findings of Maruping et al. (2009) indicate that this may additionally depend on team reward allocation (i.e., HR practices). They found evidence for a three-way interaction of AWP, requirement changes, and reward allocation on project quality. It appears that AWP only help to mitigate the negative effects of requirement *volatility* on project quality when members receive rewards for collective rather than individual performance. Another challenge demand that can amplify the benefits of AWP for team effectiveness is *complexity*. According to Junker et al. (2021), approaching tasks using AWP contributes to team engagement primarily when work complexity is high (vs. low). The agile approach may enable teams to transform complex assignments into more well-structured tasks, facilitating team engagement (cf. Graf-Drasch et al., 2022; Metiu & Rothbard, 2013). Together these studies suggest that AWP are most beneficial when teams face

challenging demands, such as volatile, uncertain, and complex tasks. However, more research is needed to solidify these conclusions. Most studies have restricted their samples to agile teams without including non-agile teams for comparison. This restricted range makes it difficult to conclude in what organizational contexts AWP are most beneficial.

5.2. Hindrance demands

Hindrance demands are stressors that obstruct goal-striving processes and create unnecessary obstacles to goal achievement (M. A. LePine, 2022). Several studies in this review illustrate hindrance demands manifested in the form of communication barriers (Inayat & Salim, 2015), conflicting requests (Junker et al., 2021), or inadequate customer involvement (Hoda et al., 2011). These studies converge on framing these stressors as hindrances, weakening the benefit of AWP for team effectiveness. However, they differ in where they locate the origins of these stressors. Several studies refer to hindrance demands originating *due to peers* inside manifested in the form of destructive communication (e.g., Twemlow et al., 2023), competitive communication (e.g., Espinosa-Curiel et al., 2018), or excessive communication (e.g., Drury-Grogan & O'Dwyer, 2013). Other studies frame hindrance demands as originating *due to management*, including top managers (e.g., Grass et al., 2020), middle managers (e.g., Mergel, 2023), and managers of other teams (e.g., Burga et al., 2022). According to Bechtel et al. (2021), this is particularly prevalent when agile teams are part of non-agile project portfolios (akin to multi-team systems). Using multilevel analyses, Bechtel et al. (2022) show that agile teams nested in project portfolios characterized by high operational control experience lower teamwork quality. Likewise, Junker et al. (2021) find that when teams receive conflicting requests, the benefits of AWP for team engagement are weaker. Using interviews, Grass et al. (2020) discover that when agile teams must collaborate with non-agile teams, opposing expectations about the “way things ought to work” can arise. These opposing expectations make it difficult for agile teams to work in a fully empowered way. Hindrance demands can also originate outside the organization, due to customers or other external partners. For example, Hoda et al. (2011) found that agile teams experienced difficulties when clients were skeptical about agile practices or withheld information from the team. Conversely, too frequent involvement of customers can equally hinder team goal progress (Wiesche, 2021). In sum, these studies illustrate various origins of hindrance demands. What they have in common is showing that hindrance demands make it more difficult for teams to mobilize resources (e.g., due to lower teamwork quality; Bechtel et al., 2022). To this end, our review of the agile team literature may inspire work stress researchers to investigate whether the effects of hindrance demands differ depending whether they originate within or outside team boundaries (Razinskas & Hoegl, 2020). Within-team causes of work stress may be more pervasive, while causes of stress due to external parties are less controllable (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Yet, which of the two is more exhausting for a team? Addressing this question can offer valuable insights for theory and practice.

6. Model of sustained team effectiveness

Beyond synthesizing available evidence on the mechanisms and boundary conditions of AWP (see Table 2), we aim to develop a general model of sustained team effectiveness using our review insights (see Fig. 1). At the outset of the article, we defined sustained team effectiveness with two criteria, namely (1) that teams can meet their goals across multiple performance episodes, and (2) that members can sustain their well-being throughout these episodes. Hence, sustainable team effectiveness is not about meeting one-time performance targets or creating fleeting positive member experiences. It is about being able to meet these objectives continuously. Our model (Fig. 1) introduces team-internal and team-external resource mobilization as predictors of sustained team effectiveness (P1), with the effects being stronger in the presence of challenge demands (P2) and weaker in the presence of hindrance demands (P3).

To perform and ensure member well-being over time, agile teams must continuously mobilize their internal resources including time, knowledge, manpower, and psychological resources (see Section 4.1). Without mobilizing internal resources, agile teams will typically not be able to meet their goals or maintain member well-being over time. We argue that P1 generalizes beyond agile teams because this proposition is consistent with the broader literature on team effectiveness (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Marks et al., 2001; Mathieu et al., 2019). It has been shown that groups vary in their ability to mobilize resources, a phenomenon that has been observed in small groups (Steiner, 1966), work units (Mayo & Woolley, 2021), and large social movements (Jenkins, 1983). Moreover, researchers have suggested that the ability to mobilize resources is a prime indicator of “collective intelligence” (Mayo & Woolley, 2021; Riedl et al., 2021).

Instead of explaining the ability to mobilize resources with a latent collective intelligence factor, we argue that teams can develop this ability through overt activities such as AWP (Junker et al., 2022; Junker et al., 2023). For example, sprint cycles bring awareness to the role of *time* as a resource (Jarvenpaa & Välikangas, 2022). Stand-up meetings can help to coordinate *manpower* and *knowledge* resources (Stray et al., 2016). Retrospective meetings, among other things, can leverage members' *psychological* resources (Hennel & Rosenkranz, 2021). The examples we describe here focus on AWP, given the focus of our review. However, we note that the mobilization of team-internal resources can also happen through other means (other team interventions; e.g., Chen et al., 2018) with similar effects on team effectiveness. Therefore, we make the following proposition, generalizing beyond agile teams:

Proposition 1a. Sustained team effectiveness is uniquely predicted by the mobilization of team-internal resources.

Team-internal resource mobilization alone might not be sufficient for sustained team effectiveness in *all* settings (cf. Carboni et al., 2021). Our review of the agile team literature indicates that these teams must sometimes leverage resources embedded in the external environment to stay effective (see Section 4.2). For example, Hoda et al. (2011) illustrate how agile teams engage with customers through various channels and argue that this is necessary for sustaining agile team effectiveness. Other researchers describe how AWP cultivate proactive behaviors that enable the swift recognition of team-external resources (e.g., Junker et al., 2022; Kaufmann et al.,

2020). Irrespective of whether teams use reactive or proactive approaches, we expect that *team-external* resource mobilization will explain additional variance in sustained team effectiveness over and above *team-internal* resource mobilization. Moreover, the mobilization of team-external resources may compensate for a lack of team-internal resources or strengthen the effects of internal resources (e.g., Majchrzak et al., 2012; Rabal-Conesa et al., 2022). Such interactive effects of internal and external resources are consistent with the idea that these two forms of resource mobilization explain unique variance in sustained team effectiveness. Finally, our proposition aligns with the broader literature on team boundary management (Ancona et al., 2021), which has shown that activities aiming to mobilize team-external resources explain unique variance in team effectiveness above team-internal resources (see meta-analysis of Leicht-Deobald et al., 2023). Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 1b. Sustained team effectiveness is uniquely predicted by the mobilization of team-external resources.

Consistent with general micro-level HRM theorizing (e.g., JD-R theory; Bakker et al., 2023), we expect that work demands influence resource mobilization processes. Whereas challenge demands have the potential to motivate team problem-solving behavior (Pearsall et al., 2009) and strengthen team identification (Razinskas et al., 2022), hindrance demands have been shown to disrupt affective, behavioral, and cognitive resource mobilization processes in teams (Pearsall et al., 2009; Razinskas et al., 2022). One prominent challenge demand is goal difficulty, which has been found to impact team performance by motivating high-effort teamwork (Weingart, 1992). However, effort is not the only mechanism. For example, LePine (2005) found that goal difficulty increases the need for learning-oriented teamwork. Several studies in this review point to team learning as one of the key mechanisms through which AWP lead to intended outcomes (e.g., Annosi et al., 2020; Przybyłek et al., 2022). Our review also suggests that these practices are most beneficial when teams work on tasks characterized by frequent changes (Maruping et al., 2009) and high complexity (Junker et al., 2021). In combination, we can conclude that challenge demands influence sustained team effectiveness in two ways. Challenge demands motivate team members to mobilize resources, for example through learning and exertion of high effort (e.g., Pearsall et al., 2009; Weingart, 1992). At the same time, demands increase the level of resources needed for realizing sustained team effectiveness (cf. Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2024). Teams working on more challenging assignments need more time, knowledge, manpower, and psychological resources to sustain their performance and member well-being compared to teams working on less challenging assignments (LePine, 2005; LePine, 2022). In sum, we expect:

Proposition 3. Team challenge demands (a) motivate team resource mobilization, and (b) increase the level of resources needed for sustained team effectiveness.

While challenge demands have motivating potential, hindrance demands represent stressors that undermine goal-striving processes (LePine, 2022). This has also been observed at the team-level (Pearsall et al., 2009; Razinskas et al., 2022). Perhaps one of the most studied hindrance demands in teams is conflict. Numerous studies have reported the negative effects of various manifestations of conflict on team functioning (see meta-analyses of De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit et al., 2013). Conflict impairs the mobilization of team resources by reducing knowledge-exchanges (Humphrey et al., 2017), inducing power struggles (Van Bunderen et al., 2018), or diverting members' attention away from their tasks (Park et al., 2024). Many hindrance demands in agile team contexts may represent some form of team conflict (see Section 5.2). Some of these conflicts are due to inadequate customer collaboration (e.g., Hoda et al., 2011) or lack of managerial support (e.g., Mergel, 2023), which likely impacted the whole team. More recent team literature suggests that shared conflict experiences have a more profound negative impact on team functioning than conflicts between sub-groups or dyads within teams (e.g., Shah et al., 2021). Based on these considerations, we theorize that when hindrance demands such as conflict become "shared unit properties" (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Razinskas & Hoegl, 2020), they will undermine the mobilization of team resources more than when only a few members experience hindrances. At the same time, hindrance demands increase the level of resources that are necessary for sustaining performance and well-being (cf. Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2024). In combination, these two mechanisms explain why *shared* team-level hindrance demands make it very difficult to achieve sustained team effectiveness. In sum, we propose:

Proposition 4. Team hindrance demands (a) undermine team resource mobilization, and (b) increase the level of resources needed for sustained team effectiveness.

6.1. Implications for team leaders and HR managers

In this section, we derive practical implications from our model (Fig. 1) and the reviewed studies (Tables 1 and 2). Most of these implications are directed toward team leaders, coaches, or HR managers who can help (agile) teams to realize sustained effectiveness. Irrespective of who takes leadership action, we emphasize that the most beneficial solutions likely emerge in *co-creation* with all team members (cf. Hewett & Shantz, 2021). Thus, leaders are advised to involve members to ensure that interventions address specific team needs.

6.2. Recognizing teams demands

Our review suggests that the benefits of AWP are contingent on challenge demands and hindrance demands (see Fig. 1). Hence, an important leadership activity before and during the implementation of AWP is to inspect team demands. One agile practice that may allow leaders to gain insight into team demands is the retrospective meeting (Twemlow et al., 2023). During retrospective meetings, the team reviews its work and identifies areas for improvement. A more formal way to investigate team stressors is to administer self-

report surveys and monitor trajectories of work demands over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Irrespective of whether the inspection of team demands follows via surveys and/or group reflection exercises, leaders need to ensure that team members feel psychologically safe. Without psychological safety, it is unlikely that team members will express their concerns about workload, role conflict, or ambiguity. Leaders can instigate a psychologically safe environment by acknowledging their own personal struggles and by asking questions with an attitude of open curiosity (Edmondson, 1999). In a psychologically safe team, hindrance demands may be recognized more quickly (Hennel & Rosenkranz, 2021).

6.3. Regulating team demands

Leaders can regulate demands by influencing the *subjective appraisal* and the *objective source* of stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to our review, one demand that may be regulated through cognitive restructuring and reappraisal is uncertainty (Dönmez & Grote, 2018). Leaders may communicate that uncertainty is best appraised as a challenge rather than a hindrance. For instance, leaders may emphasize that uncertainty drives innovation and actively motivate team members to learn from uncertainty. In contrast, certain hindrance demands cannot be resolved through appraisal-based interventions and instead need to be addressed at their origin. Leaders may regulate such hindrance demands by enacting their role as boundary spanners (Leicht-Deobald et al., 2023). For example, leaders may take action to clarify ambiguous client requests (Hoda et al., 2011). Leaders also have an important role in resolving tensions that teams experience during agile transformations (Grass et al., 2020; Strode et al., 2022) and when agile teams are part of non-agile project portfolios (Bechtel et al., 2022). Leaders can help to set up team charters that specify not only the roles and responsibilities of a given team's members (e.g., Mathieu & Rapp, 2009), but also the relations with other teams or stakeholders. Team charter interventions could help to create a common frame of reference (Firth et al., 2015) and shared mental models (Standifer & Bluedorn, 2006), which may prevent role conflicts between agile and non-agile teams (cf. Bechtel et al., 2022).

6.4. Facilitating proactive behavior

Several interventions have been introduced in the HRM literature, which can help to stimulate proactivity at the employee-level (e.g., Knight et al., 2019; van Wingerden et al., 2017). Such interventions may also prove beneficial for agile teams. For instance, agile teams may use the job crafting intervention of Kooij et al. (2017) to enhance team members' skills in proactively making use of their unique strengths (Junker et al., 2022; Tims et al., 2013). Leaders can facilitate this behavior by helping teams to establish a favorable social context for proactivity. Leaders may question team members who try to undermine other members' proactive initiatives (Twemlow et al., 2023). At the same time, leaders must ensure that initiatives are aligned with strategic business objectives. For example, during retrospective meetings, leaders may reflect on how team member proactivity contributed to the strategic renewal of the organization (cf. Gawke et al., 2019). However, leaders need to be aware of their own biases and assumptions regarding proactivity. They need to overcome the "proactivity paradox" (Campbell, 2000), which is a situation where leaders only evaluate those initiatives favorably that benefit them personally. This paradox lowers the value of proactivity because it favors predictable outcomes, undermining team innovation.

6.5. Facilitating team boundary management

Our review indicates that hindrance demands such as role conflicts (Bechtel et al., 2022; Junker et al., 2021), lack of information (Hoda et al., 2011), and interruptions (Wiesche, 2021) often originate from team-external sources and that boundary-spanning behaviors are essential for sustained agile team effectiveness (Annosi et al., 2020; Hoda et al., 2011). While earlier studies highlighted the importance of leaders in empowering team members (e.g., Grass et al., 2020), our review suggests that leaders can also help through boundary management. On the one hand, leaders can strengthen team boundaries by clarifying expectations and shielding the team from unnecessary interruptions (Wiesche, 2021). On the other hand, leaders may help teams to innovate by strengthening connections with other teams (Annosi et al., 2020) and by taking on effortful boundary-spanning activities (e.g., with customers; Hoda et al., 2011). Indeed, a recent meta-analysis suggests boundary management activities carried out by leaders are more effective than those carried out by team members (Leicht-Deobald et al., 2023). It is plausible that this also applies to agile teams, making boundary management an essential activity for effective leadership in agile team contexts (Carboni et al., 2021).

6.6. Tailoring HR practices to agile contexts

The studies included in this review also provide implications for classic HR practices such as selection, training, and reward management. For example, they suggest that selection decisions in agile team contexts should be informed by assessments of candidates' proactive personality traits (Junker et al., 2022; Twemlow et al., 2023), their ability to prioritize between conflicting requests (Kremser & Blagoev, 2021), and their experience with boundary-spanning activities (Grass et al., 2020; Hoda et al., 2011). In addition, when agile teams must collaborate in larger project portfolios (Bechtel et al., 2022), it may be essential that candidates have good organizational skills. Indeed, Venkatesh et al. (2020) found that insufficient communication and project management skills can lead to experiences of role conflicts in agile teams. In addition to selection, these skills can be improved through training at the team-level (Salas et al., 2008) or the individual-level (Stewart et al., 2011). Regarding performance management, the studies in this review highlight the superiority of collective (vs. individual) rewards for improving agile team effectiveness (e.g., Maruping et al., 2009). Besides incentivizing within-team collaboration, organizations may also reward collaborations that span across team boundaries (e.g.,

intrapreneurship; Junker et al., 2022).

6.7. Work design in agile team contexts

Agile work practices constitute a form of work design because they influence the content and organization of work tasks, relationships, and responsibilities (cf. Parker, 2014), as described in several studies included in this review (e.g., Junker et al., 2022; Moe et al., 2021; Tessem, 2014). Therefore, we propose that in their implementation of AWP, managers should draw from evidence-based knowledge of what constitutes “good work design” (Parker & Jorritsma, 2021). For example, they can provide autonomy in how teams enact AWP (e.g., how frequently to conduct stand-up meetings; Stray et al., 2016), offer work that is stimulating (e.g., complex tasks; Junker et al., 2021), and create meaningful social interaction moments (e.g., during retrospective meetings; Hannel & Rosenkranz, 2021). Managers can contribute to sustained team effectiveness by setting up practices that facilitate the mobilization of resources (e.g., AWP). However, they can also take action to increase the level of resources in teams by offering teams sufficient *time* and *manpower* to complete goals, by sharing their *knowledge*, and by bringing awareness to the importance of *psychological* resources (see Fig. 1). Viewing AWP as a form of work design may help to build bridges between communities of agile practitioners and HRM professionals, who can offer their evidence-based knowledge of work design to improve agile team effectiveness.

7. Implications for future research and contributions to theory

7.1. Directions for future research

In Table 3 we outline directions for future research based on the empirical puzzles that we identified in the review. Solving these empirical puzzles will feed directly into advancing the model of sustained team effectiveness shown in Fig. 1. For each theme addressed by our model, we developed two guiding questions for future research. Some of these questions are more specific and application-focused (e.g., RQ2, RQ4, or RQ6), whereas other questions are broader and more theory-focused (e.g., RQ1, RQ3, or RQ5). Similarly, some questions are more descriptive and call for a variance partition approach (e.g., RQ13), whereas others call for detailed investigations of processes and mechanisms (e.g., RQ11). Moreover, we included questions that focus on actions of team members (e.g., RQ7), the team context (e.g., RQ8), and questions that concern team leaders (e.g., RQ12 or RQ14). A combination of different methods will be necessary to address these questions. An in-depth overview of suitable methods is beyond the scope of this review. Several recent articles provide an overview of how team-level study designs can be improved in terms of sampling (Maynard et al., 2021) or the use of novel measurement techniques (Mathieu et al., 2021; Matusik et al., 2019).

A promising analytic approach for innovating the resource-based paradigm at the team-level is social network analysis. In future research, scholars may strive to represent team resource mobilization more accurately using multilayer, multiplex, or multilevel networks (Park et al., 2020). These networks can be used to represent multiple types of connections between actors (e.g., task-based and informal connections), simultaneously and over time (e.g., Snijders et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2013). This approach could be used to model how multiple types of resources are exchanged between actors within a team during different events (e.g., during a daily stand-up meeting vs. written text exchanges). A network-based approach could also provide additional insights into how team stressors disrupt resource mobilization processes (P3 and P4 in Fig. 1). How do network structures change when a team receives conflicting requests from a client? Which “layer” of resources (e.g., internal knowledge, external knowledge, social support, etc.) needs to be prioritized at different stages of a project for optimal team functioning? These questions can be answered at a more fine-grained level in future studies that seek to gather social network data in teams (Crawford & LePine, 2013).

Table 3
Future research directions.

Theme	Future research directions
Time resources	1. How do AWP influence team members awareness and use of time as a resource? 2. What is the optimal duration of a sprint cycle for a given team or project?
Knowledge resources	3. How can teams find the right balance between integrating internal knowledge and seeking external knowledge? 4. At what stage of a project is seeking external knowledge needed the most?
Human resources	5. What communication patterns enable (vs. disrupt) self-organization in agile teams? 6. How can agile teams make use of insights from social network analysis to improve the deployment of human capital?
Psychological resources	7. How can teams enact AWP to promote psychological resources? 8. In what team contexts does the agile approach lead to psychological pressure vs. psychological safety?
Team-external resources	9. Who should engage in boundary spanning in agile teams (leader vs. team member) and at what stage of an agile project (beginning vs. end)? 10. When is proactive (vs. reactive) boundary spanning more (vs. less) beneficial, and what capabilities enable proactive boundary spanning?
Challenge demands	11. How do AWP help teams to mobilize cognitive resources needed for dealing with challenge demands such as work complexity? 12. What is the role of team leaders in the appraisal process of stressors (e.g., whether uncertainty is appraised as a challenge)?
Hindrance demands	13. To what extent do hindrance demands originate within the team vs. at external boundaries (e.g., customers, other teams, organization)? 14. What role do leaders play in helping teams to overcome hindrance demands (e.g., team role conflict)?

7.2. The future of resource-based theories in HRM

Many resource-based HRM theories such as JD-R theory (organizational psychology) and the RBV (strategic management) have originated from a relatively static perspective. Their original versions assume that outcomes are explained by the presence or level of certain resources (Barney, 1991; Demerouti et al., 2001). This static perspective leaves unanswered how resources are put into action or how they can be coordinated by multiple actors (e.g., team members). Previous attempts to incorporate dynamic concepts in resource-based HRM theories have been incomplete because they (implicitly) left out the team-level. For example, job crafting has been introduced as a dynamic element in JD-R theory (Tims et al., 2013; Tims & Bakker, 2010), yet mainly focuses on how employees alter job resources and job demands on their own terms. However, we know that colleagues cannot craft their jobs effectively in isolation from one another (e.g., Tims et al., 2015). Job crafting may, in reality, require relational coordination and team-based approaches (Bizzi, 2017; Leana et al., 2009), which have not been explicitly included in JD-R theory to this date (cf. Bakker & Demerouti, 2024). Similarly, dynamic capabilities have been introduced as a concept in the RBV to explain how managers can influence a firm's resource configuration (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Yet, how resource mobilization unfolds in self-organizing teams has remained elusive until this date. The present review illustrates how resources can be mobilized in practice through the actions of multiple actors, both within teams and at their boundaries. Instead of explaining the ability to mobilize resources with an abstract latent variable (i.e., collective intelligence; Mayo & Woolley, 2021), our review focused on actionable agile work practices (Junker et al., 2022).

With the insights of our review (Tables 1 and 2), our model (Fig. 1), and the proposed research agenda (Table 3) we aim to shape the future of resource-based HRM theorizing. Our review shows that it is possible to deliver both actional managerial insights and broadly generalizable theoretical statements on how resources can be mobilized. However, this requires being comfortable to engage with concepts that are discussed outside the ivory towers of academia. A remark that HRM scholars can expect when submitting work on “agile teams” or other practitioner-focused concepts to management journals is an alleged lack of theoretical contribution due to the atheoretical nature of the concept (“it is just a hype”). We hope the present review demonstrates that looking at what stands behind fleeting management practices (e.g., AWP) can enrich our understanding of timeless theoretical debates (e.g., how resources contribute to sustained advantage). For resource-based HRM theory to have a future, it needs to address the macro-micro divide (Mathieu & Chen, 2011). This is not only needed for more complete theorizing. The team or meso-level is also where many HRM policies must be implemented and where managers coordinate their day-to-day activities (Hewett & Shantz, 2021; Kou et al., 2022; Nishii & Paluch, 2018). In other words, for resource-based HRM theory to stay relevant, it needs to move closer to the reality of managers and employees in today's organizations. This reality is increasingly constructed at the team-level (O'Leary et al., 2012). This reality is also increasingly managed in an agile way (Koch et al., 2023). Our review may clarify what this new reality means for practice and theory.

8. Conclusion

At the team-level, many difficulties are less about resource access and more about resource mobilization in terms of using resources embedded in the team-internal or team-external environment (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Steiner, 1966). Through a systematic review of the agile team literature, we developed a framework that explains (1) how agile teams mobilize resources and (2) when this approach is more (vs. less) effective. Generalizing beyond the agile team context, we developed a model of sustained team effectiveness. Our model introduces team-internal and team-external resource mobilization as predictors of sustained team effectiveness, with the effects being stronger in the presence of challenge demands and weaker in the presence of hindrance demands. We hope our review and model will inspire future research on sustained team effectiveness, contributing to more sustainable ways of organizing work in team practice.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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