

Creating and Sustaining Team Commitment

6. Every team must have a defining purpose if it is to act as a team and not as a collection of individuals. Its must have its own vision, mission and goals which reinforce those of the organization.

The vision should be inspirational, and a pointer to the future. Avoid bland mission statements such as 'best in customer service'. A good mission statements reflects the teams raison d'être and its ethos. Think of the classes of customer you serve, what benefits you deliver to them, your core work, processes, and core competencies. Develop goals that are stretching and exploit the teams' knowledge to the full. Make some of your goals knowledge-specific e.g. how the team's knowledge assets are enhanced, how it is packaged and delivered. Visions and missions are not dictated. They should evolve from within the heart of the team.

7. Every team should develop a strong set of cultural norms and values. Hence regular team meetings should take place. A set of working principles should be developed (print them on a laminated card!).

These are likely to include respect for the individual, honesty, a commitment to quality, confidentiality, clash of interests, environmental stance, speed of response etc. They are both inward and outward looking. The outward values are often expressed in the form "Our commitment to you..." Inward ones may be less specific in detail but emerge from discussion of individual values and core values that are shared e.g. "freely sharing knowledge with team colleagues", "valuing constructive criticism".

8. Each team should identify other teams carrying out related or dependent activities. It should draw a network diagram with:
 - itself (and its mission) at the centre
 - an inner ring of teams (nodes) where interdependencies are high (formal relationships)
 - an outer ring of collaborative teams (mostly information sharing)

These represent relationships that need to be developed, and where the sharing of knowledge can create win-win opportunities for all teams. Assign individual team members to work on specific relationships. Don't leave it to chance. Individual members of teams should be encouraged to maintain their personal networks, even beyond the identifiable needs of the current project or team.

9. Where possible major activity sequencing and interdependencies should be shown.

Draw up a supplier/user information and knowledge matrix (who provides what to whom). By better understanding of what knowledge each team has, and what each needs, mechanisms for improving its flow can be developed.

10. Devote quality face-to-face time for team building.

Although many routine activities can be done virtually through telephone and email, it is important, especially during the early stages to devote time for team development. Ideally there should be quarterly face-to-face meetings. In any case it is desirable for teams to communicate regularly by phone or videoconferencing. Some team leaders create a regular weekly or monthly time slot for such communications.