

Why

To avoid a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities. Often too much effort is put into the descriptions of roles and functions and still there are overlapping elements and vagueness. We feel that defining roles and responsibilities should be more of a living, continuous process. This stops frustration from festering and is a way of proactively streamlining and improving collaboration.

What

A meeting in which a team discusses each other's roles and responsibilities and finds solutions for missing links, overlap, discrepancies etc. Also, people can propose to change their own roles. After time, these meetings could develop into role markets where people "buy and sell" new tasks.

How

Step 1:

Someone (the case presenter) presents a proposal to change a role or task or states a problem concerning roles and/or collaboration.

Step 2:

Anyone can ask clarifying questions. No discussions or reactions are permitted, only questions.

Step 3:

People may give reactions but must not discuss these as yet.

Step 4:

The case presenter may react by giving an amended proposal and/or further clarification.

Step 5:

Objections: are there any objections in the sense that the new proposal will harm us or send us backwards?

Step 6:

Integration: the facilitator leads an open discussion to solve the objections one by one.

Alternative:

- Put blank flipcharts in the different corners of the room (the number of charts should correspond to the number of roles in the team).
- On each flipchart write the name of the role and the people who fill this role (the "role owners").
- Divide people into small groups. Each group works on one flipchart (the group must not include the role owners!) and answer the following questions: 1) describe the most important tasks completed by this colleague/in this role; 2) what is needed to fulfill this role effectively?; 3) what is the most challenging aspect of this role?
- The role owners then read the answers written on their flipcharts.
- The role owners discuss with the group what is correct on the chart or what is missing, different, difficult etc. about that specific role. The group moves around the room to each flipchart.
- Conclusions: what can we do to improve cooperation?

When

When roles appear unclear and there is a lot of discussion about "dropping the ball" at different times.

Also, one could advocate that regular governance meetings should be carried out anyway to prevent roles from becoming unclear, frustration from festering or the ball from being dropped.

Skills and necessary training

A good knowledge of the techniques, basic training and skills involved in facilitation (see Reinventing Organizations by Frederic Laloux).

Critical success factors

Following the steps and avoiding discussion where this is not effective.

Possible workshop exercise

Practice the above method in a simulated discussion about some typical role issues.