

COMMITMENT TO THE TEAM

A leader's role in assessing and managing the performance of team members

Introduction

A common question for leaders is what is the appropriate level of interaction with team members that have promised to do work for them? Too much control is unproductive and is referred to as “micro-managing;” too little oversight is also unproductive and leads to frustrated team members and dissatisfied leaders. What guidelines can be followed to ensure appropriate results are delivered while allowing the team members to do what they do best, including bringing their own thinking and innovation to the work?

A Helpful Perspective

Let's start by thinking about the work to be done as a **mutual** set of obligations between the leader and the team member, rather than a one way promise from the team member to the leader to get the work done. After all, the leader has (or should have) as much at stake in getting the work done as the team member!

With this perspective in mind, the **obligations of the team member to the leader** are to:

- Understand fully the results that the leader is asking for, and why they are asking
- Understand the “conditions of satisfaction” that the leader will use to determine their satisfaction with the results, e.g., metrics like timeframe, cost, quality
- Apply their best thinking, resources, and innovation to the creation of the desired results
- Keep the leader up to date with the progress on creating the results, including early-as-possible indications of issues or delays, and finally
- Deliver the results while meeting the leader's conditions of satisfaction

And there is a corresponding set of **obligations that the leader holds to the team member** to:

- Ensure the team member understands the desired results, and why the results are important
- Ensure the team member understands the leader's conditions of satisfaction, including timeframe, cost, and quality. If these are not understood as the leader intends then there is little hope for delivery of the desired results. Time and attention on this aspect is very often overlooked, to everyone's detriment
- Provide the team member with adequate resources, budget, time, political support, and advocacy to ensure the results are achieved
- Keep the team member up to date regarding any changes that the leader wants to make to the results or their conditions of satisfaction, and finally
- Accept the results and express their degree of satisfaction with them

For a dependable and resilient delivery of results, both the leader and team member must consider themselves **100% accountable** for achieving them. This co-accountability of the leader to achieve the results provides the license for the leader to have conversations with the team member regarding their understanding of the desired results, issues encountered, and progress towards the promised results. These conversations may reveal opportunities for the leader to offer additional support.

This co-accountability also provides the team member with license to initiate conversations with the leader regarding clarification of the desired results, the conditions of satisfaction, and progress and issues in delivering the results. These conversations may reveal opportunities for the team member to ask for additional support.

The Bigger Picture

The lists of obligations above are adequate and useful in managing specific deliverables by team members, but what about overall leadership of a team? In a collection of articles¹ Fernando Flores suggests a broader set of mutual obligations that are necessary for a team to exist. A set of commitments to:

1. Coordinate action for the sake of a shared, explicitly declared mission
2. Own the shared mission
3. Fulfill roles by each team member, with explicit accountabilities
4. Develop and carry on practices for anticipation [of future breakdowns and opportunities]
5. Commit to the team's unity of command and to the political declarations of the team
6. Evoke and produce trust
7. Hold a mood for success in the mission
8. Commit to the team's standards for assessment, and to
9. The future of the company, the team, and people's careers

In the same article, Flores also points out key aspects of team leadership:

- A leader's authority is granted by the institution the leader participates in **and** by the community being led
- To excel as a leader is to put together and to orchestrate a team that has strong competencies to be successful
- Fundamentally, the agreement of leader and team must be that the team members satisfy the leader in the performance of their duties

What Level of Interaction is Appropriate?

The question then is not "should leaders interact with team members, and to what degree?" but more appropriately "**what interactions are necessary in order for a leader to fulfill their obligations and duties?**" By reviewing the set of obligations above, a leader can confidently initiate conversations with team members. By being explicit about what obligation is being taken care of with each conversation, any suggestion of micro-managing can be avoided.

An implication of this approach is that a high performing leader and team will review and agree to the full set of obligations they hold to each other as part of forming and maintaining the team. The lists above can help get you started.

¹ *Conversations for Action and Collected Essays, written by Dr. Fernando Flores and edited by Maria Flores Letelier; 2012; Chapter 9: Building and Leading Teams*