Defining Team Boundaries

When to Use Defining Team Boundaries

The tool will often be helpful during a team start-up or "chartering" session. It can also be useful in refocusing a team on its objectives. This tool is particularly useful for teams that closely interface with other teams, often blurring their team boundaries and accountabilities.

It provides a safety net for the group because in making the boundaries visible, it eliminates unknowns that may create insecurity and a perception of danger for the group.

How to Use Defining Team Boundaries

1. Typically, the team leader begins this exercise by restating the team's purpose – why it exists, what it is designed to do.

   For this process, you will need a flip chart, markers, and sticky notes. On the flip chart, draw the following diagram of a smaller shape inside of a larger shape (see example below). The area inside of the smaller shape is for tasks or work that belongs to the team and the larger shape is for tasks or work that you don't think belongs to you and falls "outside the work of the team."

2. Give each team member a pad of sticky notes, and invite members to write down the specific tasks or work that belongs within the boundaries of their team (each task on a separate sticky). Have them also identify work they think does not belong in their team (but sometimes creeps into their team's agendas) and to capture that on sticky notes.

3. Have team members put their stickies within the "belongs in our team" space, or "outside our team" space. Through a facilitated discussion, move the stickies as necessary until the team is in agreement about the work that is theirs and the work that falls outside their boundaries.