Team Spirit

Intention for collaboration (Designing the Team Alliance, DTA)

Team Spirit, also known as Designing the Team Alliance (DTA), is an exercise for making collaboration agreements within a team, for example at the start of a project meeting.

PURPOSE	Making collaboration agreements within the team: in what atmosphere do you want to work together, and how do you deal with tensions? What matters is that all participants express their intention.
WHEN	At the start of a project meeting, such as a Project Startup, often together with the introductions (for example with scaling questions). Also at the check-in of an evaluation, to make agreements about the atmosphere.
WITH WHOM	The team, or the participants in the meeting.
WHAT YOU NEED	An attractive flip chart sheet and a thick marker that writes well.

HOW TO GO ABOUT IT

1. **Prepare the flip chart sheet.** Make an attractive flip chart sheet, for example with a drawing of a small group or of hands at the top, to illustrate what it is about. Make sure you have a thick marker that writes well. Write clearly and legibly!
2. **Explain the purpose.** Explain what it is about, and say that you would like to hear from everyone and that there are no wrong answers.
3. **How do you want to be with each other?** Ask the team: how do you want to be with each other? That sounds a bit odd, but it is a powerful question. Repeat the question a few times, possibly in different words:
   - How do you want to be with each other today?
   - In what atmosphere do you want to work together today? What kind of atmosphere helps?
   - What is important to you for getting on well with each other as a team?
4. **Probe and write it down.** Probe the answers a little by asking for an explanation: what would we see happening then? You are looking for concrete behaviour. Write all the answers on a flip chart. Emphasise that this is a deal they make with each other, for this meeting and possibly for the project as a whole. The agreements can always be adjusted.
5. **How do you want to be when there are tensions?** Explain that conflict is normal in every team. After all: no friction, no shine. So it is normal and even good that there are differences, and they will no doubt arise at some point, during the meeting and afterwards too. The only question is how you deal with them. The trick is to think about this in advance, so that working together stays pleasant:
   - How do you want to be when there are tensions?
   - How do you want to behave then? What does that look like?
6. **Make it a living document.** Hang the sheet with the agreements in a visible place in the room. Come back to it a few times during the day. In any case, check once along the way how the team feels the Team Spirit is going, and whether the agreements need to be added to.

TIPS

- Ask each team member which of the wishes described he or she wants to feel extra responsible for during the meeting. What do you want to take responsibility for? What will you yourself pay extra attention to today? How will we know when that is working?
- **Note:** participants do not have to agree 100% with each other on what is on the sheet. What matters is that all participants express their intention.
- In any case, agree that everything that is discussed stays in the room and that there are no stupid questions.
- As a facilitator, you can hold on to the list during the meeting, especially when things get a bit difficult.

NOTES

More about this way of working: Designing the Team Alliance (DTA).