

**#6**

# **How to move to Effective Work Practices**

**russell  
fletcher  
.com**

## How to move to Effective Work Practices

A high-performance team can only produce consistently high output and quality when team members share a set of effective work practices. The best of these include email, decision making, intuition, process, and intranet, timeboxing, creativity, innovation, and workload management.

Effective work practices are the actions that glue a team together and are another contributor to high performance. They are the actions, large or small, that teams undertake regularly and consistently (habits or rituals) or occasionally. They can also be unspoken norms (intangible) that team members default to both consciously and unconsciously to regulate their behaviour. In many cases, a team's practices might be unremarkable, but as a whole and applied consistently by all team members, their influence on the way that the team performs is significant.

Successful teams develop work practices that allow them to effectively interact with their environment, including collaboration with other teams. The work practices are effective because they are active, compelling, forceful, practical, and potent. They might involve for example, regularly showcasing work to other teams, giving team members the opportunity to spend time with and learn from other teams or building stakeholder confidence with regular communication of risks, issues, and progress. This step calls for a 2-hour Workshop.

### Intangible work practices

These are observed as a team's 'collective consciousness' in action. Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) defined collective consciousness as “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society” the same applies to members of a high-performing team. Team members instinctively know what to say, what to do and how to do it – these are an example of intangible work practices.

When a team can crack this aspect of teamwork and successfully integrate various aspects of its functioning, it paves the way for a far better team performance than a team that struggles to find mutually acceptable methods to move the team work forward. For example, better work approaches can ensure better planning and scheduling of activities, quicker decisions, rapid response to customers, meeting deadlines and so on.

While successful teams have effective work practices, there are no objective rights or wrongs when it comes to what these practices are. A practice that is effective and enables success for one team might not be appropriate for another. For example, a regular sales conference call at 8 a.m. on Monday might help a team organize itself at the start of a busy week but could disenfranchise team members who have family

responsibilities such as school drop-off. Similarly, a daily stand-up meeting can be effective for a cycling team (or a project team) preparing to head off for the day but might cause problems for a leadership team dealing with significant business travel. Even for similar types of teams, a practice that is effective for one team may not suit the working styles or cultural preferences of individuals in another.

### **Tangible work practices**

Tangible work practices are work approaches, procedures, and processes that ensure the team accomplishes tasks efficiently and effectively. They give the team a common performance base. Using effective work practices are another determinant for realising superior performance providing work approach clarity. Here are seven, highly effective work practices:

#### **1. Email**

High-performance teams recognize that most email they receive is simply noise, often because of this realization they agree on a method for handling emails.

Procedure.

1. Open your Inbox.
2. Now decide within 10 seconds what needs to be done with each email by using the 'Delete, Delegate, Deal with or Decision required' approach. This is an excellent method for quickly getting through large amounts of email, especially if done in a scheduled, fixed block of time. (Timeboxing it for example is perfect).
3. Next decide 'Where to file it' (if not deleting it), for example create an email folder called 'Wait' for when you're waiting on someone. You can also create a folder called 'Weekly Meeting' and move emails there that can wait to be answered or addressed at that meeting.
4. For emails that contain important business information that you want to preserve create a folder called 'Business memory'. Periodically delegate a task to have the information appropriately dispersed and recorded.
5. Every day aim to leave the office with an inbox of five or less emails.
6. Stop replying to some emails, only answer the important ones. Once team members understand that you will not automatically respond to every email, they will either come and see you or ring you if it's that important.
7. Move on to the next email.

“One CEO on this topic told her staff not to send emails requiring her to make a decision about something - in order to make a decision she would probably need to ask clarifying questions leading to even more messages in her Inbox. She told her staff to ring her or make an appointment to see her instead.” The Age Newspaper.

## 2. Decision Making

Decision-making is one of the most important things a team must do. It plays a very important part in the planning process because when team members plan, they decide what goals they will pursue, what resources they will use, and who will perform each task. A good decision-maker chooses actions that give the best outcome for the team. Team members enter the decision-making process with an open mind and do not let their own biases sway them, they make decisions rationally, after researching alternatives and understanding the consequences. Decision making is the process of making choices by gathering information, assessing alternatives, and deciding on which way to go. Using a decision-making process helps a team make more deliberate, carefully thought-out decisions by organizing relevant information and defining alternatives. Here is the best Decision-Making procedure:

### 1. Identify the decision.

Ordinary teams can suffer indecision or, worse, ignorance of what the problem requiring their decisive attention is, causing a problem to fester, increasing its damage and influence on the team. High-performance teams define the issue and the decision that must be made as quickly as possible or immediately as soon as it is realised that a decision is required. They define the problem as specifically as possible, knowing that if they are too broad in its definition, then the decision is going to swing wide and likely miss its mark.

### 2. Gather relevant information.

Consider what the relevant information you need is to make a well-informed decision? That includes establishing where to gather the best information.

Look at the decision from as many angles as possible. Get input from your team and those who will be affected by the decision. Also, seek guidance from outside sources, whether that be online, or from other people who have experience and skill solving similar problems.

### 3. Identify alternatives.

As you collect information, identify the possible paths of action or alternatives. You can also use your imagination and additional information to construct new alternatives. List all possible options.

As you research, you'll likely have many avenues in which to address the problem, you want to have as many alternatives as possible. Think of this as a fact-gathering mission. List all the decisions that meet the criteria of the research you've done.

#### 4. Weigh the evidence.

Consider each option and think through what is required to carry it out. Next, evaluate whether the need identified would be met or resolved using each option. What does your intuition say? Think about what acting on that decision would look like for you and your team. Run each alternative through your head. See how they play out. Then list them in order of priority to get a sense of which one you favour.

#### 5. Choose among alternatives.

Once you have considered all the evidence, you can select the best alternative that seems to fit best with the desired goal. You can merge options together to form the best alternative. It's time for a decision.

#### 6. Act.

Now do the planning to implement the chosen alternative. The compass of your gut will be pointing towards one decision. Implement it. Whatever you do, don't implement your decision blindly. Watch what happens at the onset carefully, as you'll want to collect data and results to review later.

#### 7. Review your decision and its consequences.

Finally consider the results and outcomes of your decision and evaluate whether it has resolved the need you identified. If not, you might want to gather more detailed information or explore additional alternatives.

Look at the results of your decision. Did the decision go as you proposed it would? Evaluate whether you made the right choices throughout the previous decision-making steps. If your decision proved ineffectual, then maybe you didn't clearly define the problem.

High-performing teams have the freedom and flexibility to make decisions in real-time rather than waiting for management approval. While some decisions may need to be rolled back upon review,

team members who work in specific areas of the company on a daily basis are the best equipped to make processes more efficient and allowing them to do so will help the team pivot faster and perform better. - Laura Spawn, Virtual Vocations, Inc.

### 3. Intuition - trusting your gut

The old saying "trust your gut" refers to trusting your feelings, your intuition. The expression means to trust your inner voice; the "gut reaction" or "gut feeling" is more profound than your conscious mind. Gut feeling is intuition, which can be a valuable tool in some circumstances. It seems gut feelings do mean something, and they can often help you make good decisions if you know how they work. Trusting your gut takes practice to get good at it. When people talk about having great intuition or being good decision-makers, it's because they've worked at honing their gut feeling skills.

#### 1. What is your Gut?

Your brain is delicately linked to other body parts through your nervous system and through chemical signals such as hormones and neurotransmitters. Some neuroscientists assert that the mind is this intertwined system of brain and body. This, then, helps explain why intuitive feelings are frequently accompanied by physical reactions.

You may sometimes get an unusual feeling in the stomach, other times in the throat, and other times on the skin. The sensation can be like looking at a great piece of art for the first time or a feeling that seems deeper and wiser than the surface-level conscious mind. Intuitive decision-making or 'gut instinct' is your ability to instantly get an understanding of something without needing to consider other people's opinions about it or take time to think it over. It is your inner feeling about something.

Gut feelings arise within your body, and it's hard to explain to others the exact source or meaning of them. Intuitions are personal, and no one else can understand the full extent of your gut feeling. You have to deal with it alone. Trusting your gut or intuition is an act of trusting yourself.

#### 2. How does a gut feel work?

Gut feelings or intuitions come from patterns we've identified in our past experiences. Your subconscious mind continuously processes information that you are not consciously aware of, not only when you're asleep but also when you're awake. This helps explain the "aha" moments you experience when you see, feel, hear, or learn something that you already knew. The revelation of the obvious occurs when your conscious mind finally learns something that your subconscious mind had already known.

Gut feelings or intuitions occur when your brain makes a substantial match or mismatch between past experiences and current experiences. What we are noticing are patterns based on past experiences, we store these patterns and associated information as long-term memory, and then retrieve the information when we see these patterns again in our everyday experience. These patterns we can envisage as rows of data being populated in a never-ending spreadsheet. In the left-hand columns are the patterns, the bits of information that we notice across similar situations. And in the right-hand columns are other various bits of information - outcomes, expectancies, reasonable goals, and expected actions, things that we have learned to associate with those patterns. The next time we detect one of these patterns (or something similar), our brain finds it in the spreadsheet and delivers the corresponding outcome information to us.

Current research suggests that a brain is a predictive machine constantly comparing new experiences and against previously stored earlier experiences and, as a result, can predict what will happen next. If you have enough experience in a particular field, the mind's intuitions or information are more reliable. Gut feelings or intuitions, therefore, improve with experience, especially breadth and depth. Being experienced in your field allows you to rely on your gut feelings more. If you have years of experience under your belt or you've performed extensive research to deal with a problem, the solution will automatically materialize before you. You don't have to question how you came to a particular conclusion; you just know. You have enough facts, and you know what is right, so don't overthink it: trust your gut.

Bruce Henderson, the founder of the Boston Consulting Group, may have put it best when, in 1977, he called intuition "the subconscious integration of all the experiences, conditioning, and knowledge of a lifetime, including the cultural and emotional biases of that lifetime."

### 3. Experience improves your gut feelings

To use and trust your gut feelings, you need practice. Our gut feelings are only as good as the patterns we draw them from. So, you need to have had sufficient experience noticing and changing patterns in order to have built up a spreadsheet that is accurate and extensive. A poker player with years of experience and an amount of trial and error will have built up patterns as to what a winning hand looks like. When they peek at their cards and are struck by a feeling of joy, they would be wise to take that intuition seriously.

But while the quantity of practice is important for establishing patterns and therefore reliable intuitions, their quality is just as important. The best form of practice, the one that most reliably leads to accurate intuitions, is known as deliberate practice. Deliberate practice isn't just repetition, it involves constant refinement based on feedback. It means

noticing your gut feelings, thinking about them and the situation that has prompted them.

Truly inspired decisions, however, seem to require an even more sophisticated mechanism: cross-indexing, the ability to see similar patterns in unconnected fields is what elevates a person's intuitive skills from good to brilliant. Obviously, the power of cross-indexing increases with the amount of material that can be cross-indexed. In general management, people with varied and diverse backgrounds are going to probably be more valuable and will learn faster because they'll recognize more patterns.

A survey that was conducted in May 2002 by executive search firm Christian & Timbers reveals that fully 45% of corporate executives now rely more on instinct than on facts and figures in running their businesses.

This means we're likely to have reliable gut feelings in certain situations and unreliable ones in others. Think of your gut feelings as a compass and the world as a vast land dotted with areas of high magnetic resonance. The compass is invaluable in certain areas and, corrupted by the magnetic field, misleading in others. One of the most important tasks of professionals is to draw a map for ourselves, so we know when to trust the compass and when to put it away.

#### 4. Benefits of trusting your gut

When making business decisions.

- It's a way for you to make fast and effective decisions in unfamiliar, changing, and complex situations.
- You can align your decisions with your sense of purpose and core values.
- Intuitions help you retain energy otherwise spent trying to make decisions consciously.
- You make choices that utilize higher intelligence and deeper wisdom.
- You become more comfortable with trusting yourself intrinsically.
- Executives routinely rely on their intuitions to solve complex problems when logical methods won't do. In fact, the consensus is that the higher up on the corporate ladder you climb, the more you will need well-honed business instincts.

When you distrust someone.

- If you're looking for cues that someone is untruthful, you'll rarely find them in their conscious actions and their words. You can get cues from the vibes they're giving off and their body language – the latter of which can't be consciously picked up



but will be by those deeper animal parts of your brain that evolved to quickly judge character under duress.

- Although lying – or bending the truth – seems to come naturally to some people, it's actually pretty difficult for most of us. The body often betrays the words it speaks by giving off micro-expressions revealing the underlying truth. When we spot these subtle cues, we don't always immediately know we've spotted them, but our gut does.
- Logic and systematic thinking aren't enough to tell you that the person is telling the truth. If you have a gut feeling that a person is deceptive or lying, there is a good chance that you are right.

### When something feels right.

- Intuition isn't just useful for dealing with problems. It's highly useful for driving creativity and bringing a bit of magic to otherwise prosaic business procedures.
- You might interview a candidate who doesn't quite fit the bill for what you were looking for but just feels like a great fit for the team. Or you could be sizing up a purchase – new software or office space, for example – that might have a few flaws on paper but just feels right.
- More intangible things like brand design or marketing copy can be a mix of science and art; you'll often need to start work guided by data and then use creative imagination to come up with ideas that really sparkle. In cases like these, the gut can be the best guide to what works and what doesn't.
- Again, be ready to back yourself up with explanations if you're doing things that leave a paper trail or influence someone else.

Ralph S. Larsen, chair and CEO of Johnson & Johnson, explains the distinction: "Very often, people will do a brilliant job up through the middle management levels, where it's very heavily quantitative in terms of the decision-making. But then they reach senior management, where the problems get more complex and ambiguous, and we discover that their judgment or intuition is not what it should be. And when that happens, it's a problem; it's a big problem."

### 5. Why should you trust your gut?

In the age of analytical and rational thinking, intuition or gut feelings have fallen out of favour, but your emotional responses towards certain things are not something to be ignored.

It's difficult to imagine the owners or CEOs of prominent companies making important decisions purely based on their intuition. Big decisions usually must be made deliberately, carefully, and rationally. However, your emotions are not useless responses that must either be corrected by logic or ignored altogether. Your emotions are

evaluations of what you've been thinking or experiencing. They're a crucial part of your information processing system.

But when relying only on a rational mind and logical data in decision making, you can be unintentionally blinkering yourself. Sometimes, you are so data-driven that you can't see the forest for the trees and fail to exercise wisdom and insight where it's really needed. If you're confused over which option to choose and cannot decide, the only way you can move forward is often to just trust your gut.

More than 40% of CEOs say they make decisions based on their gut feeling (or intuition) despite having access to troves of data, analytical tools, and experts at hand.
---

Problem-solving is a creative skill that we often get wrong. The issue is that as children, we were taught how to solve problems, to systematically break something down into bits or chunks, analyse them, look for things, patterns, themes, find options, think of solutions, evaluate, and select one.

Yet, when you have worked in a developing country as I have where schooling is mostly absent or basic at best, people are not taught a way to solve problems, yet they do it every day and more effectively than we do. Over the years, I have dealt with many problems. I have noticed that despite living in a first world country, we have been taught to make problems worse by the act of trying to fix them the way we have been taught.

Our brains do it to us. When our brains hear the word 'problem,' they automatically switch into problem-solving mode. This mode begins by reminding us that problems are largely negative or are something to be avoided, problems are bad. Our brain goes on to tell us that problems can have professional and personal repercussions. This is the frame of mind in which our problem-solving process begins, a negative state that kicks in different cognitive processes to a positive one. Hardly a good state of mind to start with.

Classic problem solving creates confusion and a lot of background noise generated by the commencing negative state and too many options, potential solutions, and often overriding thoughts about how to protect ourselves from adverse effects. To help matters along, we then produce high levels of anxiety and stress hormones that weaken the whole process. Now we are in a bad state, yet we have what could be a major problem to solve and possibly – rapidly.

The solution to nearly every problem is the solution that subconsciously comes first to mind. Its correct 90% of the time, because there is a very high probability that you already know the answer, or you instinctively know it. Your brain is good at remembering trivia and things that you have read, but otherwise forgotten about.

## 4. Process and intranet

You cannot have a high-performance team without it being supported by excellent process and process management. Team members need to accept the need for all work to be process-driven as this is essential for high-performance attainment. Process brings consistency, increased quality, cost-effectiveness, reduced task and project timeframes and fewer errors. It also locks down the operational environment and reduces the number of operational resources required (by reducing the incidence of rework). It provides repeatable consistent outcomes, reduces the incidence of failures which reduces cost. Process is necessary because it describes how things are done and then provides the focus for making them better.

Good process also releases team members (who manage staff) from many operational activities, decisions and tasks allowing them to focus more on strategic matters. The other benefits of process are increased productivity, improved compliance, measurability, better employee satisfaction, risk mitigation and lower costs due to reduced rework.

In a high-performance environment all work is described and supported by process, how-to guidelines, and other documentation. The high-performance team members work together to discover new work approaches and methods for attaining the best possible performance standards and benchmarks and memorize and implement these in process. They understand that ineffective processes and procedures prevent the team from being efficient.

### 1. Usual process problems.

- Multiple templates in use.
- Broken or incomplete processes in use.
- Poor staff training.
- No Document Management System.
- Work standards and compliance requirements not being met.
- Increased risk.
- Low staff satisfaction levels.
- Inconsistent work quality.
- Decreased productivity.

### 2. Process rules.

1. Rule 1, If it is not baselined then it does not exist. All process, how-to guidelines and other documentation must be formally documented and baselined (finalised, ready for use).
2. Rule 2, The use of baselined process, how-to guidelines and other documentation is mandatory.

3. Rule 3, Only baselined documents are held on the Intranet.

### 3. Capability Maturity Model (CMM) Level 2.

The use of a common documentation template and approach based on Capability Maturity Model Level 2 is the high-performance standard. The model describes a five-level evolutionary path of increasingly organized and systematically more mature processes.

1. Initial level: - processes are disorganized, even chaotic. Success is likely to depend on individual efforts, and is not considered to be repeatable, because processes would not be sufficiently defined and documented to allow them to be replicated.
2. Repeatable level: - basic project management techniques are established, and successes could be repeated, because the requisite processes would have been made established, defined, and documented.
3. Defined level: - an organization has developed its own standard software process through greater attention to documentation, standardization, and integration.
4. Managed level: - an organization monitors and controls its own processes through data collection and analysis.
5. Optimizing level: - processes are constantly being improved through monitoring feedback from current processes and introducing innovative processes to better serve the organization's needs.

One of the most significant benefits of using CMM level 2 is that a standard template is used for all process, how-to guidelines, and other documentation. The template has a common look and feel, includes completion instructions for the user and complies with documentation management principles. Accordingly, all staff and especially new staff quickly learn how to use process and other documentation in the most optimum fashion. It brings a consistency of approach, improves project quality, reduces cost by reducing the need for rework, improves estimates, scheduling and business outcomes. Here is the best procedure:

1. Audit all processes, record on a spreadsheet.
  1. Processes in use.
  2. How-to guidelines or similar in use.
  3. Methodologies in use.
  4. Scripts in use.
  5. Technical processes in use.
  6. Project processes in use.
  7. Gating processes in use.
  8. Work management processes in use.

9. Reporting processes in use.
  10. All other IT related documentation.
2. Determine which process are.
    1. Duplicated.
    2. Redundant, old, or dead.
    3. Ad-hoc, not formalised.
    4. Incomplete.
    5. Drafts.
    6. Not baselined. (Not finalised, not ready for use.)
    7. Candidates for automation. (Manual process that could be automated).
  3. Next, determine actions to be taken against each process.
    1. Create a task list suitable for loading into a project schedule.
    2. Manage a project to bring all process up to date.

### **Intranet**

It is not possible to have a high-performance team without a fully functioning and managed intranet. The intranet is the repository of the teams work practices and acts as the team's work memory or 'single source of truth'. Most intranets fall into disrepair, they become full of outdated processes and other working documents and often have an unfriendly user interface. For example, for process to work well it must be quick and easy to find, be based on a common template, be up to date and be the only version available.

1. Usual problems
  - Multiple sources of documentation.
  - Multiple versions of documentation.
  - Lack of a full-time Intranet appointed owner.
  - Lack of a Document Management System.
  - Redundant process, how-to guidelines, and other documentation in use.
2. Audit all documentation stored on an intranet.
  1. Processes in use.
  2. Guidelines or similar in use.
  3. Methodologies in use.
  4. Scripts in use.
  5. Technical processes in use.
  6. Project processes in use.

7. Gating processes.
8. Work management processes.
9. Technical processes.
10. IT Policies.
11. IT Other.

### 3. Determine which documentation is:

1. Duplicated.
2. Redundant, old, or dead.
3. Ad-hoc, not formalised.
4. Incomplete.
5. Drafts.
6. Not baselined. (Not finalised, not ready for use.)
7. Candidates for automation. (Manual process that could be automated).

### 4. Determine actions to be taken against each document.

1. Create a task list suitable for loading into a project schedule.
2. Manage a project to bring all process up to date.

## 5. Timeboxing

Timeboxing is an effective time management technique to speed through work. Timeboxing focusses your attention on a task because mentally you know you only have a fixed amount of time to do it in, here are some examples:

### 1. Email.

1. Let's say you are doing your email.
2. Your goal is to do as many as you can.
3. You allocate 20 minutes to do it.
4. You look at the time and work out when 20 minutes will be up, and you may set an alarm.
5. You then get as many emails done as is possible in the time allowed.
6. When the time is up, you move on to a new task.
7. High-performance teams use Timeboxing - because it is great for doing annoying things or for when there is a stack of work to do and not a lot of time to do it in.

### 2. A Report.

1. Let's say you are writing a Business Case and are having trouble getting started.
2. Your goal is to make a start, do an outline.

3. You allocate just 30 minutes and do as much as you can in that time.
4. You produce an outline and maybe one or two paragraphs, but at least you have made a start.
5. Tomorrow, you will allocate an hour.

### 3. Projects.

Timeboxing is an excellent way of doing project planning. The schedule is divided into several separate time periods (timeboxes), with each part having its deliverables, deadline, and budget. Without timeboxing, projects usually work to a fixed scope, such that when some deliverables cannot be completed, either the deadline slips (to allow more time) or more people are involved (to do more at the same time). Usually, both happen, delivery is late, costs go up, and often quality suffers.

With timeboxing, the deadline is fixed, but the scope may be reduced. This focuses work on the most important deliverables. For this reason, timeboxing depends on the prioritisation of deliverables, to ensure that it is the project stakeholders who determine the important deliverables rather than software developers.

So, Timeboxing is simply fixing a set period of time to work on a task or group of tasks. Instead of working on a task until it's done, you commit to working on the task for a specific amount of time instead.

### 4. Meetings.

Timeboxing is also perfect for meetings such as project reviews or where you want to get through as much work as possible, in the time available. It also works for weekly team meetings.

“In time management, timeboxing allocates a fixed time, called a time box, to each planned activity. Several project management approaches use timeboxing. It is also used for individual use to address personal tasks in a smaller time frame. It often involves having deliverables and deadlines, which will improve the productivity of the user.” Source: Wiki.

### 5. How to do Timeboxing

Have a watch, clock, phone, computer, anything that has a clock or timer. Select a task or something that you are having trouble getting the motivation to start.

1. Consider your goals. Take a few minutes to think about what you want to complete.
2. Set a time. How much time you set is going to depend largely on what your goals are.

3. Set a short time. 15 to 30 minutes maybe, that you know won't be too painful or difficult to commit to.
4. Set a longer time. An hour or maybe even two hours if you're feeling motivated, don't go too overboard and burn yourself out.
5. Execute and remember that practice makes perfect.

"Work expands to fill the time allotted for its completion." Parkinson's Law.

## 6. Workload management

A major mistake ordinary teams make is lack of team level planning, high-performance teams on the other hand build a macro view of all the team's work (this also supports their mutual accountability for all work). High-performance teams do not rely on individual team member plans, that is left to activity and project owners.

Individual team member plans do not take resource sharing into account, meaning that resource allocations and utilisation are often over or underutilised leading to poor delivery performance. Team member level planning also promotes team member success over the whole of the team's success. Relying on team member level planning is also wholly inefficient when multiple teams are involved (as is often the case) as intra team communication, process integration and handoffs are usually informal or at best poorly defined.

In most teams, it is common practice for team members to plan out their activities, usually by way of a task list with prioritised tasks. Best practice is to review this list daily, adding, deleting, finishing, and commenting on the tasks. Some people because of the way they plan or because of projects use scheduling software like MS-Project which allows a Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) to be used (Phases, Activities and Tasks). This method of planning provides for detailed plans, tracking, resource allocation and utilisation and better execution, meaning more tasks are delivered on time. Team members that manage their own teams usually find this method best for controlling their teams work as it is an easy way to see and manage all the work.

The same approach needs to apply to the team's work. Every team needs a Team Master Plan of the entire teams' work activities and tasks, that is all work being undertaken by all team members expressed in one place. Every team needs to plan out its activities, to know what its priorities are and how its resources can best be used. Scheduling software is perfect for this as it is designed to handle different types of work by different owners.



A Team Master Plan is simply a high-level Project Schedule in the form of a Gantt Chart. It needs to show just enough information about the whole teams work activities to allow for the planning, prioritising, and monitoring of all work. The team should regularly (weekly) review the Team Master Plan, reviewing priorities, resource allocations, ownership, due dates, and deliverables. A best practice Team Master Plan has for example a WBS consisting of a top-level of Project Names, Business Units or Departments with the next level of detail being Activities which lists Deliverables and Scarce Resources against them. Tasks are not shown on the Team Master Plan, these are only shown on detailed plans (tasks, non-scarce resources) managed by each team member or their team. Here is the best procedure:

### 1. Use scheduling software.

Use a scheduling package like MS-Project or a spreadsheet to produce a master plan Gantt Chart. Have each team member audit all of their work that is currently underway and that is planned for the next month and enter it onto the master plan. Critical information to capture is Work Type (e.g.: Project names, Activity names), Priority (1,2 or 3), Owner, Due Date and Deliverable. Ensure that.

- All work activities are present.
- Priorities are agreed.
- Due Dates can be met.
- Enough scarce and regular resources are available to meet the due dates.
- Then update the plan weekly.
- Hold a weekly review session.

### 2. Gating, Work Management, Work Classification and Metrics.

All high-performance teams' control and manage work using a Workload Management system consisting of Gating, Work Management, Work Classification and Metrics processes. Each team needs to implement their own Workload Management system as follows.

#### Gating.

Gating is the process of registering and accepting work. An essential element of the Gating process is the mandatory rule that 'all work is registered before work can commence'. The benefits of this are it stops work coming in through back door networks, it stops the business bypassing priority setting rules, all work is made visible and is accounted for, work is not lost, all work is trackable, and all work is charged to correct cost centres. Gating supports good resource management and helps to identify resource savings; it also facilitates accurate management reporting.

Gating also improves staff morale by helping to bring order to areas that are often chaotic, have high rates of rework and are subject to backlogs.

### Work management.

Work Management is the process of efficiently assigning work to resources, completing, and tracking the work through to completion and advising a customer interface when work is complete. The Work Management objectives are to ensure there are no work request backlogs, that work turnaround times are being met (e.g., OLAs and SLAs) and that customer satisfaction levels are not compromised. Having enough scarce, regular and skilled resources available helps achieve work completion times. Resource shortfalls cause work queues to become backed up with old, dead, and outstanding work requests that then result in poor service delivery and lower customer satisfaction levels. Priority 1 and 2 work requests tend to get resolved, but priority 3's do not, they become buried in backlogs. Priority 3 work requests by their nature often contain issues to do with business functionality, more so than urgent issues. This in turn affects the businesses' ability to be efficient and provide their own high levels of customer service.

### Work classifications.

Work Classifications are used by a customer interface such as an IT Service Desk to classify and prioritise all work as it comes in and is registered. These classifications are then used by level 2 support or back office to manage incoming work according to its priority. Common work classifications across all support and back-office teams are the preferred standard, however, given that the resolution times for some support teams such as IT Infrastructure and IT Applications Development can vary significantly, different classifications may need to exist, otherwise one scheme should apply to everyone.

### Metrics

Metrics refers to 'Performance', that is reports that focus on Work Management efficiency. Predefined performance metrics use incoming work counts, to track support and back-office team efficiencies. Metrics include such things as Completion times (Actual), Turnaround times (Duration), Queue sizes (Backlogs) and Inter- team transfers (Hold-ups).

## 7. Creativity and innovation

### 1. Creativity.

High-performance teams work at being creative and innovative by practicing four common behaviours.

1. They are intensely curious. Curiosity means being able to ask any and every question. Especially the why, where, and what about any subject. This curiosity encourages people to investigate and look for new, out there, ideas.
2. They connect the dots. Steve Jobs once said creativity is all about connecting the dots. Creative people know how to bounce an idea around and how to bounce ideas off each other until arriving at something new.
3. They ask the big questions. Only by asking big questions can you get big answers. They think well outside the square; they are not constrained by what has been done before.
4. They indulge in daydreaming. They use their imagination, particularly to think about ideas that may seem at first too wild for contemplation. Daydreaming lets loose the power of the mind, to indulge in fantasy and to be innovative.

“Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn’t really do it, they just saw something.” Steve Jobs. Apple.

Creativity is just about generating enough ideas to solve a problem or create something new.

We all have different skills, knowledge, and personal characteristics (Diversity). By utilising all these various aspects as a team, more ideas can be generated. As more ideas are generated, more creative solutions are generated, leading to better results.

Pick a subject and then brainstorm or better timebox the brainstorming it to get as many solutions and approaches that can be thought of some will be quite whacky, but these are often the important ones as they prompt ideas in others and can also relate to other ideas.

“Always include someone with the biggest imagination so they can give their input, try to bring together imaginative types with inventive types. Someone always had an idea before the things around you that you use every day without thinking about them were created. The ideas that come out of most brainstorming sessions are usually superficial, trivial, and not very original. They are rarely useful. The process, however, seems to make uncreative people feel that they are making innovative contributions and that others are listening to them.” Source: A Harvey Block.

## 2. Innovation.

One of the reasons high-performance teams are so successful at creativity and innovation is that they allow and foster different points of view, promoting healthy discussion (Open Communication). They do this through the careful and mature use of conflict. It works like this.

Imagine a meeting with all team members present and two team members are having a vigorous debate (high-performance teams do not argue, they vigorously debate), for example, if someone makes a statement or claim, they are expected to back it up with evidence or withdraw it.

The other team members who are listening to the exchange, have an important role to play. They need to carefully listen for words and comments that the two people debating are using and are skipping over. It is these words and comments that hold the clues to innovative ideas. Managed conflict spurs innovation. They also need to listen out for whacky ideas or comments, things that are a bit out there, as they too spur innovative ideas and thoughts in others. Finally, they must ask the people debating to expand on an idea that they think might have merit. Innovation happens when you start at point A, expecting to only go to point D, but arrive at point Z.

### Summary

1. **Effective Work Practices.** - Effective work practices are the actions that glue a team together and are another contributor to high performance. They are the actions, large or small, that teams undertake either regularly and consistently (habits or rituals) or occasionally. They can also be unspoken norms that team members default to both consciously and unconsciously to regulate their behaviour. In many cases, a team's practices might be unremarkable, but as a whole and applied consistently by all team members, their influence on the way that the team performs is significant.
2. **Intangible work practices.** - They can be observed as a team's 'collective consciousness' in action, defined as "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society" the same applies to members of a high-performing team. Team members instinctively know what to say, what to do and how to do it – this is an example of intangible work practices. When a team can crack this aspect of teamwork and successfully integrate various aspects of its functioning, it paves the way for a far better team performance than a team where they struggle to find mutually acceptable methods to move the team work forward. For example, better work approaches can ensure better planning and scheduling of activities, quicker decisions, rapid response to customers, meeting deadlines and so on.

3. **Tangible work practices.** - Tangible work practices are certain work approaches, procedures, and processes to ensure that the team accomplishes tasks efficiently and effectively. They give the team a common performance base. Using effective work practices are another determinant for realising superior performance at work and they provide work approach clarity.
4. **Email.** - High-performance teams recognize that most email they receive is simply noise, often as a result of this realization they agree on a method for handling emails.
5. **Decision Making.** - Decision-making is one of the most important things a team must do. It plays a very important part in the planning process because when team members plan, they decide what goals they will pursue, what resources they will use, and who will perform each task. A good decision-maker chooses actions that give the best outcome for the team.
6. **Trusting your gut.** - The old saying "trust your gut" refers to trusting your feelings, your intuition. The expression means to trust your inner voice; the "gut reaction" or "gut feeling" is more profound than your conscious mind. Gut feeling is intuition, which can be a valuable tool in some circumstances. It seems gut feelings do mean something, and they can often help you make good decisions if you know how they work. Trusting your gut takes practice to get good at it. When people talk about having great intuition or being good decision-makers, it's because they've worked at honing their gut feeling skills.
7. **Process and intranet.** - You cannot have a high-performance team without it being supported by process and process management. Process brings consistency, increased quality, cost-effectiveness, reduced task and project timeframes and fewer errors. It also locks down the operational environment and reduces the number of operational resources required (by reducing the incidence of rework). It provides repeatable consistent outcomes, reduces the incidence of failures which reduces cost. Process is necessary because it describes how things are done and then provides the focus for making them better. It is not possible to have a high-performance team without a fully functioning and managed intranet. The intranet is the repository of the teams work practices and acts as the team's work memory or 'single source of truth'. Most intranets fall into disrepair, they become full of outdated processes and other working documents and often have an unfriendly user interface.
8. **Timeboxing.** - Timeboxing is an effective time management technique to speed through work. Timeboxing focusses your attention on a task because mentally you know you only have a fixed amount of time to do it in, here are some examples.
9. **Workload management.** - A major mistake ordinary teams make is lack of team level planning, high-performance teams on the other hand build a macro view of all the team's work (this also supports their mutual accountability for all work).

High-performance teams do not rely on individual team member plans, that is left to activity and project owners.

**10. Creativity and innovation.** -High-performance teams work at being creative and innovative by practicing four common behaviours. They are intensely curious, they connect the dots, they ask the big questions, and they indulge in daydreaming. One of the reasons high-performance teams are so successful at creativity and innovation is that they allow and foster different points of view, promoting healthy discussion (Open Communication). They do this through the careful and mature use of conflict.

<b>Effective Work Practices Workshop</b>	<b>2.0 hours</b>
Arrange a team workshop.	
Create a Handout. 1. Based on the notes in this step.	
Open the workshop. 2. Open the workshop with everyone reading the handout.	10 minutes
Discuss each work practice answering these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this a practice the team wants to mutually adopt?</li> <li>• Is this a practice that is up to each team member to adopt or not?</li> <li>• Does the team want to modify the practice for mutual use?</li> <li>• Are there other work practices the team should consider or drop?</li> </ul>	
Email. 3. Refer to the notes on email. 4. High-performance teams recognize that most email they receive is simply noise, often because of this realization they agree on a method for handling emails. 5. Use the Delete, Delegate, Deal with or Decision required' approach.	10 minutes
Decision making. 6. Refer to the notes on decision making. 7. Decision-making is one of the most important things a team must do. It plays a very important part in the planning process because when team members plan, they decide what goals they will pursue, what resources they will use,	10 minutes

## Management Guide

<p>and who will perform each task. A good decision-maker chooses actions that give the best outcome for the team.</p>	
<p><b>Intuition.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Refer to the notes on intuition (trusting your gut).</li> <li>9. The old saying "trust your gut" refers to trusting your feelings, your intuition. The expression means to trust your inner voice; the "gut reaction" or "gut feeling" is more profound than your conscious mind. Gut feeling is intuition, which can be a valuable tool in some circumstances.</li> </ol>	10 minutes
<p><b>Process and intranet.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Refer to the notes on process and intranet.</li> <li>11. You cannot have a high-performance team without it being supported by excellent process and process management. Team members need to accept the need for all work to be process-driven as this is essential for high-performance attainment. Process brings consistency, increased quality, cost-effectiveness, reduced task and project timeframes and fewer errors. It also locks down the operational environment and reduces the number of operational resources required (by reducing the incidence of rework.</li> </ol>	20 minutes
<p><b>Timeboxing.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. Refer to notes on timeboxing.</li> <li>13. Timeboxing is an effective time management technique to speed through work. Timeboxing focusses your attention on a task because mentally you know you only have a fixed amount of time to do it in, here are some examples.</li> </ol>	10 minutes
<p><b>Workload management.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. Refer to the notes on workload management.</li> <li>15. A major mistake ordinary teams make is lack of team level planning, high-performance teams on the other hand build a macro view of all the team's work (this also supports their mutual accountability for all work). High-performance teams do not rely on individual team member plans, that is left to activity and project owners.</li> </ol>	15 minutes
<p><b>Creativity and innovation.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. Refer to notes on creativity and innovation.</li> <li>17. High-performance teams work at being creative and innovative by practicing four common behaviours. They are intensely curious, they connect the dots, they ask the big questions, and they indulge in daydreaming. One of the reasons high-performance teams are so successful at creativity and innovation is that they allow and foster different points of view, promoting healthy discussion (Open Communication) and they manipulate conflicts into debates that can lead to new ideas and inspiration.</li> </ol>	10 minutes

## Management Guide

<p><b>Close the workshop.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>18. Ask for any questions or if anything needs to be clarified.</li><li>19. Arrange for a copy of the Work Practices outcomes be made accessible to everyone.</li></ul>	<p>10 minutes</p>
---	-------------------



**Copyright © 2022 Russell W Fitcher. All rights reserved. 17/2/22**