

## **Developing a Team Culture**

### **Aim:**

As a new manager leading a team with a number of new team members, I wanted to look at how I can develop a team culture that will provide a better working environment for the team and help the team to deliver service excellence.

### **Objectives:**

1. To get to know members of the team better and identify the strengths each individual brings to the team.
2. Identify our current team culture and values and identify strengths and weaknesses.
3. Look at the team culture we want to develop going forward to provide a better working environment and help us to deliver service excellence to our stakeholders.

### **The Academic Partnerships Team Background**

The University's Academic Partnerships team are responsible for the University's existing portfolio of academic partnerships and supporting the development of new academic partnerships in the UK and overseas. Over the last two years the team's remit has expanded to include student mobility and as a result the number of staff in the team has increased. In addition, a number of established members of staff have left and some staff members, including myself, have taken on additional responsibilities to cover these posts. Please see Appendix 1 for the current organisational diagram of the team.

I am currently covering the Partnerships Academic Administration Manager post which has involved me taking on a line management role for the first time. As a new manager in a fairly new team I wanted to take the opportunity to look at the current team culture we had and identify opportunities for developing a team culture that would provide a supportive environment and help us to deliver excellent customer service to our stakeholders.

### **Methodology**

I arranged a morning away from the office (Executive Business Centre) and used a number of exercises from the online Leadership and Management Toolkit <https://member.goodpractice.net/bournemouth-university-mkh/Welcome.gp>. The draft agenda for the day was as follows, although I explained to the team that the agenda was flexible as I wanted to ensure that the team got what they wanted out of the morning.

Agenda:

9.00am – Exercise 1 - Getting to know the team better

9.30am – Exercise 2 – The Shield - understanding the motivations of individual team members

10.30am – Exercise 3 - What are Our Team Values? – to identify the positive and negative aspects of the current team culture.

11.30am – Exercise 4 – What is Our Team Contract? - team to formulate a set of basic principles and standards for working together in order to create a supportive and productive team environment.

### **Exercise 1 - Getting to know the team better**

The aim of this icebreaker exercise was to help the team to get to know each other better and find out some interesting facts about each other. The exercise involved the team members completing a short questionnaire prior to the session, see Appendix 2 for the questions. I wrote everybody's answers on a flip chart and the other members of the team had to guess who provided which answer.

Outcome:

Everybody enjoyed the exercise and it was an excellent icebreaker activity which generated quite a bit of discussion. We did indeed find out some interesting facts about each other. An informal action taken from this exercise was to read, watch, listen to everybody's favourite books, films and songs.

### **Exercise 2 – The Shield**

The aim of this exercise was to find out more about the individual but to start focusing on what motivated the individual at work and areas they felt they required more support with.

The exercise involved the members of the team designing their personal shield. The shield was divided into the following 4 sections:

- What I love about my job
- The strengths I bring to the team
- The support I need from my colleagues
- My superpower would be...

In addition each member had to state their motto which summed up their approach to life. Each member of the team had to explain their shield to the rest of the team, see appendix 3 for the shields produced by each team member.

Outcome:

The main things that people loved about their job was supporting and helping people and learning new things and this was consistent throughout the team. The newer members of the team said they required guidance and patience from colleagues as they adapted to their new role and team. More established members of the team would value feedback and honesty. The motto's were generally very positive and motivating which was encouraging and the shields suggested that each member of the team had similar motivations and were keen to do a good job.

### **Exercise 3 - What are Our Team Values?**

The aim of this exercise was to look at the current culture of the team and to start identifying our strengths and weaknesses as a team. Each team member had to complete the grid in Table 1, writing a cross in the box nearest the side of each of the pairings that they felt best matched the team's values. The more accurately the adjective described the team, the closer the cross should be to the word. The crosses were then joined up to form a profile. We then compared all of the team's profiles and identified areas of weaknesses and strengths.

Outcome:

Most of the profiles were very similar which showed that overall the team were broadly in agreement with the positive aspects and areas of improvement in the current culture of the team. Table 1 shows the team results from the exercise, the numbers indicate the number of team members that placed the cross in that box.

Table 1:

Negative				1	3	1	1	Positive
Cold				1	2	3		Warm
Suspicious				1	2	2	1	Trusting
Aggressive					4	2		Supportive
Cliquy			1	1	4			Open
Blaming				2	1	2	1	Helping
Dominating				2	3		1	Empowered
Oppressive			1	1	2	1	1	Liberated
Bureaucratic		3		3				Dynamic
Confusing			2	3	1			Structured
Chaotic		1	1	1	3			Organised
Change Adverse			1	2	1	2		Change-Responsive
Unethical					1	3	1	Ethical

Overpowering					2	4		Friendly
Miserable				2	2	2		Enjoyable
Duty		1	1	1	2	1		Fun
Stifling					4		2	Learning
Pedestrian				3	2		1	Inspiring

Outcome:

From the results we identified the positive and negative factors of the team culture as follows:

Positive	Middle	Negative
Warm	Chaotic/Organised	Bureaucratic
Trusting	Change Adverse/Change Responsive	Confusing
Supportive	Duty/Fun	
Open		
Helping		
Empowered		
Liberated		
Ethical		
Friendly		
Enjoyable		
Learning		
Inspiring		

Overall, the general feeling was that the team already has a positive, supportive culture and provides a good working environment for team. However, it was noted that many of the results were largely around the mid-point so the team should still ensure that these positive values are worked upon and fostered.

The more negative values identified included the bureaucracy involved in much of the team's work and also that some of the processes could be confusing especially to new members of staff. There were a few areas where team members had a greater variation in their profiles but this generated lots of really useful discussion. In some cases the differences were because people had interpreted the meaning of the pairings of words differently and in other cases it was really dependent on the task being completed which explained the reason for many of the results being around the mid point of the scale. As the team has a large remit with team members working on different areas of work it was felt that each team member needed a better understanding of other team member's roles in order to be more supportive and provide better service. Overall, the discussion showed that the team has a very similar value set and ultimately wanted to provide an excellent service to its various stakeholders. The team agreed that the next step would be to identify some actions that could help address some of the weaker areas of our current team culture.

#### **Exercise 4 – What is Our Team Contract?**

Originally I had planned to finish the morning with an exercise which would enable the team to create a mutually agreed team contract or set of ground rules for working together in order to create a supportive and productive team environment. However, exercise 3 generated lots of useful discussion and the team agreed that it would be more useful to work on a specific action plan to address some of the issues we identified as a result. In addition, it had become obvious that the team had a very similar value set and a generally positive, supportive culture already so I agreed that this would be a better use of our time.

#### **Action Plan**

The team identified a number of actions to address the weaker areas within our team culture including ways that the team could understand each other's roles better, please see Appendix 4 for the current team Action Plan. Progress with the actions is reviewed regularly at team meetings and additional actions added as they are identified. Three months on we are still benefitting from this session as we identify further opportunities and actions.

## **Lessons Learned**

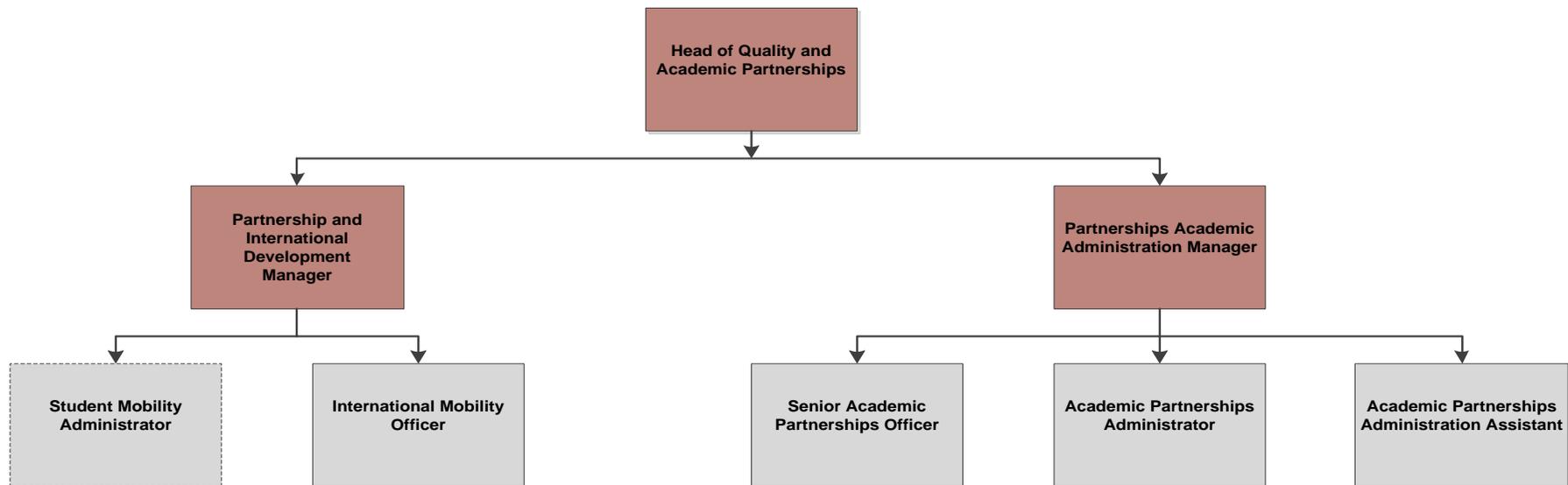
**Team Engagement:** The team appreciated the opportunity to take some time out from their very busy jobs and look at the way we interacted with each other and how we could address some of the issues that prevented the team from being as cohesive as it should be. The team's engagement was excellent and all members of the team actively participated in the exercises. The feedback I received from the rest of team was very positive, they enjoyed the exercises and they asked if we could have a further team development session in a few months. This is something I intend to do in addition to regularly reviewing the action plan.

**Team Culture:** It was reassuring to see that as a team we have a similar value set and want to provide an excellent service to our stakeholders. We did identify some areas for improvement that the action plan is helping to address. It is clear that the team's heavy workload does have an impact on the team and is a cause of frustration as team members feel that sometimes they are not as supportive as they feel they should be. However, it was useful to acknowledge this and to start identifying small steps that could be taken to address some of the more bureaucratic processes and ensure that the team has a better understanding of everybody's roles.

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**Academic Partnerships**  
**4<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

**Appendix 1 – Academic Partnerships Organisational Chart**

**Academic Partnerships  
March 2014**



**Appendix 2 - Exercise 1: Getting to know the team better questionnaire**

1. As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
2. Who was your first role model?
3. What are your hobbies and interests?
4. What is your pet hate?
5. What's the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you?
6. Favourite film, book or song.
7. Tell us something about yourself that would surprise us?
8. What annoys you most about yourself?
9. What do you enjoy most about going home after a day at the office?
10. What's the most embarrassing situation you've found yourself in?

## Appendix 3 - Exercise 2: The Shield Exercise Outcomes

### 'Just do it'

<p>What I love about my job!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Working with a range of interesting people</li><li>Working with international partners</li><li>Supporting staff &amp; students to have international experience</li></ul>	<p>The strengths I bring to the team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Calm</li><li>Practical</li><li>Positive</li><li>'Can do' attitude</li><li>Knowledge of research, practice, languages &amp; working practices abroad</li></ul>
<p>The support I need from my colleagues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Help refining &amp; designing processes</li><li>Reminder of key deadlines</li></ul>	<p>My superpower would be...</p> <p>Flying</p>

### 'If you aren't part of the solution you are part of the problem'

<p>What I love about my job</p> <p>Helping people and sharing experiences</p>	<p>The Strengths I bring to the team</p> <p>Smiles, experience &amp; ideas </p>
<p>The support I need from my colleagues</p> <p>Listen, support &amp; help!</p>	<p>My superpower would be... </p> <p>Instant cakes</p>

### 'Learning, growing & making things happen'

<p>What I love about my job</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Learning</li><li>- New processes &amp; methodologies</li></ul>	<p>The Strengths I bring to the team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Anticipation</li><li>- Organisation</li><li>- Pragmatism</li><li>- Holistic approach</li><li>- Empathy</li></ul>
<p>The support I need from my colleagues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Instruction</li><li>- Patience</li></ul>	<p>My superpower would be...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Magic</li><li>- Making things disappear</li></ul>

## 'From possibility to actuality (1 step at a time)'

<p>What I love about my job Encouraging young people to develop a global mindset</p> 	<p>The strengths I bring to the team</p> <p>Passion Enthusiasm Organisation Attention to detail Languages</p> 
<p>The support I need from my colleagues</p> <p>Feedback Availability Honesty</p>	<p>My superpower would be...</p> <p>Creator of time Teleportation</p> 

## 'Sometimes you've got to JUMP OF THE CLIFF'

<p>What I love about my job Variety &amp; potential</p>	<p>The strengths I bring to the team</p> <p>Energy Giving things a try Creativity</p>
<p>My superpower would be.... To have two separately working heads and four hands</p>	<p>The support I need from colleagues</p> <p>Time Patience</p>

#### Appendix 4 – Academic Partnerships Continuous Action Plan

DATE ADDED	ACTION	BY	COMPLETED
17.6.14	Identify opportunities for work shadowing within the team	All	Ongoing – a number of opportunities have been identified where team members attend meetings/events organised by other team members.
17.6.14	Review format of Academic Partnerships Team Meeting - 1 meeting a month - review format/less formal - Use team e-mails/blog for conferences and committee meeting updates rather than the team meeting.	KF/AM	Complete
17.6.14	Team members to look at 'bureaucracy' in own roles and send to Lillian to collate by Friday 18 <sup>th</sup> July 2014.	All	Complete 3.9.14 – as a result some further actions have been identified and added to the action plan.
17.6.14	Understanding team roles. Work in pairs to find out more information on one area of a team member's role and feedback at the next AP meeting on 9 <sup>th</sup> July 2014.	All	Complete 9.7.14 – the team agreed that this was a really useful exercise to learn more about other roles within the team.
3.9.14	The responsibility for creating and maintaining student records for incoming exchange students to be given to the Student Processes Team and Schools. MV to attend the October Academic Administration Team (AAT) meeting to brief Academic Administration Managers on the process.	MV	
3.9.14	Review the process for payments to exchange students and students participating in the Global Horizons Fund.	MV	

3.9.14	Review the honorary contracts process including meeting with IT to improve the IT interface.	ES	
3.9.14	Once the new Partner approval has been finalised, ensure there is a robust system in place for the allocation of due diligence to team members.	KF/AM	