



The Team Alignment Tool

Leading with
Ambition

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Leading with Ambition

Competing ambitions among team members can create a significant obstacle to group success. While we do not have to convince individuals to drop their unique ambitions, we must ensure they are aligned with the ultimate aims of the group.

This tool can help you understand individual ambitions (yours and theirs) and create alignment within the team for the greater good.

- 1 Understand what your team members want, and why.**
- 2 Plotting individual ambitions.**
- 3 Aligning ambitions in the team.**

Instructions for team leaders:

Why Ambition?

As with many words, “ambition” evokes multiple meanings, some positive and some negative. At its best, ambition inspires us and others to set higher goals built on powerful, intrinsic motivations. If we can harness the collective power of individual ambition, it can benefit everyone.

Which Ambitions?

It is difficult to move ourselves or others to higher goals if we do not understand our ambitions and their intrinsic motivations. Often, these goals and impulses seem implicit, but we must understand, clarify, and articulate them individually before we can leverage them for the group.

Preparation

Alignment of individual ambitions happens through open and transparent dialogue. You should plan for at least one hour of uninterrupted time for this conversation. This tool contains some tables and figures to structure and manage the exchange. Print out copies of this tool for everyone, and consider the use of boards, screens, or other visual means to enable everyone to follow along as you work through the exercises together.

Process

Trust is of paramount importance in this exercise, so you may need to add some time at the beginning of this process to establish expectations and create a forum for free and open dialogue. There are many approaches you can use

to help with this. For example, by asking people to share the strengths they bring to the team and then the areas in which they are likely to need help from other team members. It is recommended that you go first to set the example of vulnerability. However, if there are pre-existing obstacles to building trust, you may consider inviting a facilitator to assist with trust-building before beginning the process of aligning your team’s ambitions.

With trust established and expectations clearly expressed, the alignment activity can begin.

The ambition alignment process consists of three steps:

1. Understand team member ambitions.
2. Plot ambitions along “Internal” and “Positivity” axes.
3. Brainstorm ways to align ambitions.

Team members complete the first two steps individually. Instructions for team members may be found in each of these two steps. The final step involves the entire team. Instructions for the team leader may be found in the third step.

Understand Ambitions

Instructions to team members:

You will soon have a meeting designed to increase alignment among team members. To prepare for this meeting, please fill out the table below. If you are unsure of how to interpret any of the questions, ask your team leader for input. This will ensure that team members answer the questions in relatively consistent ways even if you all give different answers. The reason for answering these questions before meeting as a team is because it will help you clarify your ambitions for yourself and for the team. Team members are unlikely to be aligned as a team if they are unclear about team members’ individual ambitions.

What do you most want to accomplish in your career?	What is the reason/are the reasons why you want to accomplish this?	Why are these reasons important to you?
What do you most want to accomplish on this team?	What is the reason/are the reasons why you want to accomplish this?	Why are these reasons important to you?

Plot Ambitions

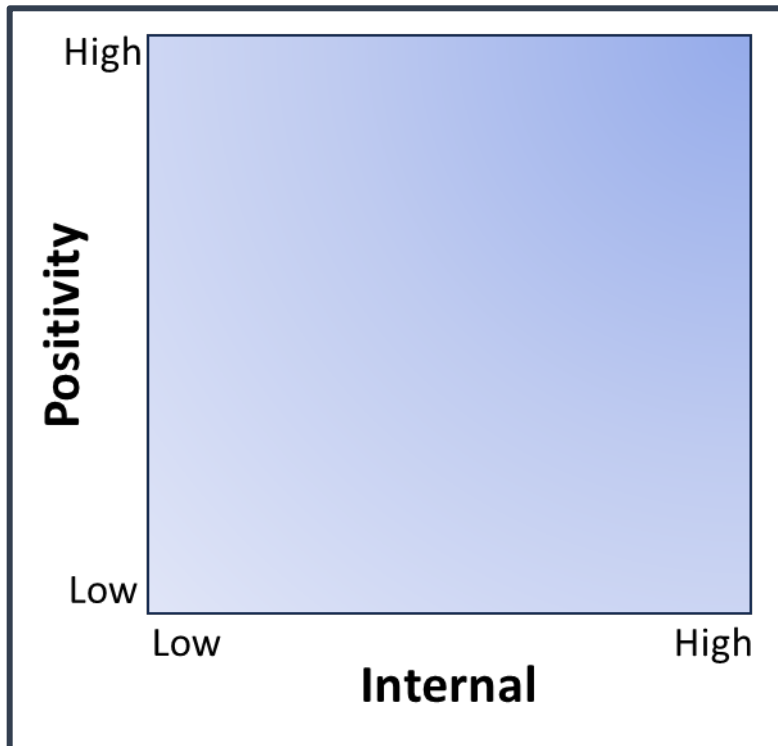
Instructions to team members:

Next, please plot the ambitions you wrote in the table above using the box below, based on how intrinsic and how positive each of the ambitions are. Plotting ambitions will help you prioritize them, both for yourself and for your team. Ambitions are intrinsic when the activity you are doing is enjoyable for its own sake, or when the goal of the activity is personally meaningful to you. Ambitions are more positive when they help ourselves or others in constructive and ethical ways, and they are less positive when they hurt others, avoid problems, damage relationships, or are unethical in some way.

For example, a desire to ...

... develop a new skill to become more effective is ...	High Internal / High Positive
... seek revenge for a professional slight is ...	High Internal / Low Positive
... elicit approval from a supportive social circle is ...	Low Internal / High Positive
... avoid disapproval from an abusive boss is ...	Low Internal / Low Positive

Please plot each of the ambitions from the table on the previous page in the box below. Use the labels on the side and the bottom to help you place each ambition in its appropriate place.



Align Ambitions

Instructions to team leaders:

Once people have clarified and plotted their ambitions, gather everyone into a meeting to share their ambitions and to discuss what these ambitions mean for the whole team. Remind them up front that the goal is not for them to sacrifice their ambitions, but rather to ask how everyone can achieve their most important ambitions while simultaneously creating or adjusting team ambitions to make sure that both individual and organizational goals are achieved. You may also want to set some norms for this discussion, such as

- Respecting everyone's ambitions even if you disagree with them.
- Assuming positive intent in others as they share their ambitions.
- Keeping the discussion confidential to the team.

Begin by writing the goals and that have been assigned to the team on a flip chart or white board, so that everyone can see them. Then, have team members take turns sharing their ambitions, one at a time, starting with the ones that are most important to them. As they do, ask the team the following questions:

1. What conflicts, if any, are there between this ambition and the team goals and responsibilities?
2. In what ways might this person either broaden this ambition to be more compatible with team goals and responsibilities, or adapt their approach for achieving this ambition to enable them to achieve personal ambitions and team goals despite the conflicts?
3. What conflicts, if any, are there between this ambition and the ambitions that others have shared so far?
4. In what ways might these people either broaden their ambitions to be more compatible with each other, or adapt their approach for achieving their ambitions to enable them to achieve their personal ambitions despite the conflicts?
5. How can we make goals, responsibilities, and ambitions more positive?
6. How can we make goals, responsibilities, and ambitions more intrinsic?
7. How might we use our goals, responsibilities, and ambitions to support each other?