

Team working agreements or chartering

It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare.

-Patrick Lencioni

Agile thrives with self-managing teams. A great first act of self management for a team is to establish their own working agreements, reflecting the kind of team and environment they value. This can help to establish collective accountability and is often taken more seriously than rules imposed by others. The aim is to create a clear understanding of what their purpose is, the boundaries of their roles and responsibilities and how they will navigate inevitable conflicts and challenges along the way.

Why have a Team charter?

- Increase the autonomy of the team
- Identify parameters within which the team agree to self-organise
- Clarify the purpose and goals of the team
- Provide a basis to resolve future differences
- Builds trust, crucial for agile empiricism
- Highlight common beliefs and objectives that define a team over just having a collection of individuals

How to create a Team charter

1. Organise a session to create the charter by the team for the team
2. Explain the purpose of the team charter and how it can set teams up for success
3. Start with a set of abstract values, such as the Scrum Values or your own corporate values
4. Add a high level goal, purpose, or mission statement for the team – for example “We exist in order to ...”
5. Develop a set of context-specific expectations based on the values and mission
6. Identify how decisions will be made and conflicts resolved (a list of values that the team identify can be useful to discuss how they expect to see those values enacted and what to do if those values are not respected)

How to use the team charter?

- The Charter is a lightweight living document, not something to create once and then forget. Keep it relevant and ever present. You may choose to remind the team of it at some Retrospectives (did we live up to our values?).
- Encourage the whole team to hold individuals to account when they do not respect the charter the whole team agreed to.
- Use it as part of induction to introduce new team members to the ways of working for that team.



Example team charter based on the Scrum Values

Mission: The app operations team exists in order that users learn to trust our app to provide a fast, reliable service.

We expect the following from each other:

Focus

- We'll use our chat status to indicate when we can be interrupted.
- Meetings should only be scheduled on Tuesday mornings or Thursday afternoons.

Openness

- The first thing we should do upon making an operational error is to let the team know.

Courage

- During an incident, any member of the team call the word “Review” if they think are concerned about an operational decision.

Commitment

- We agree to either be fully “present” during meetings, or to excuse ourselves entirely.
- We will add any work items that don't align to our core function to the team board, so that they can be managed alongside other priorities.

Respect

- We solemnly swear not to leave dirty cups in the sink, even if the dishwasher is on.

