High Performance Collaboration: The Radar Screen Exercise

Note: The following is an excerpt from the book, Lessons from Mars: How One Global Company Cracked the Code on High Performance Collaboration and Teamwork, (Changemakers Books; 978-1785353581; on sale October 26, 2018; $27.95) by Carlos Valdes-Dapena. It is reproduced here with permission.

Teams use the Radar Screen to identify which work requires collaboration and which doesn’t. The exercise also asks a team to differentiate between collaborative work that requires full team involvement and that which is better done by subsets of the team. A Radar Screen conversation can be conducted either face-to-face or virtually using desktop video. We’ll start with the in-the-room version and then offer a process for conducting the exercise virtually.

Time required: 2 – 3 hours. Timing will depend on team size, number of tasks and the complexity of the team’s working environment.

Materials:
- Large white paper or flip charts
- One medium sized pad of sticky notes for each team member.
- Sharpie® pens or markers—one per team member
- Artist’s tape for hanging flip charts
Note: A large whiteboard can also be used. Or you can create your Radar Screen electronically as described in the section on conducting the session remotely.
- Participants will need a list of their personal tasks/objectives to refer to.

Space:
- Large meeting room with plenty of wall space to hang flip charts

Set up
1. Provide each team member with a dark-colored, fine-point marker and a pad of sticky notes.
2. Create a large version of the Radar Screen (see diagram) on either a couple of pages of flip-chart paper or another large piece of blank white paper. Hang it on a wall with plenty of room around it.
3. Explain how the Radar Screen works, how the levels of collaboration are represented by the three concentric rings.

4. Instruct team members to write each project or initiative that they own or lead on a single sticky note. One sticky note for each project or initiative that each person owns. Have them put their names or initials on all sticky notes along with the names/initials of any other team member with whom they may share the project/task.

5. Have all team members post all their sticky notes on a smooth, blank wall or large piece of paper—near, but not on your Radar Screen.

6. Have team members go to the wall and silently review all the sticky notes. When complete, have them all sit down.

**The center of the Radar Screen**

7. Explain that you will start at the center of the Radar Screen, limiting, as much as possible, the number of tasks placed there to three. This helps to focus the discussion.

8. Ask one team member to stand up and pick from among all the sticky notes the three that they feel require ongoing, full team collaboration. Have them place these three at the center of the Radar Screen. Have the team member explain their thinking briefly as they do this. Don’t allow much debate at this point; that will come later in the process.

9. Ask a second team member to do the same. This person can either a) pick three new sticky notes and replace the first three (moving the first three to another position on the Radar Screen), or b) keep one or two of the first person’s choices and replace only one or two, or c) simply leave the first three as they were. Ensure there is discussion about why this person is making the choices they are making.

10. Continue with this process until the entire team has had a chance to place their choice of sticky notes at the center, or until the entire team is comfortable with what has been placed there.
11. If there are still sticky notes left on the wall after the center of the Radar Screen has been completed, facilitate moving these remaining sticky notes to appropriate rings on the Radar Screen. Don’t aim for perfection. Close is good enough.

12. There should now be three or at most four sticky notes at the center of the Radar Screen. Once about half the team has posted its choices, you can allow the center to expand beyond three if there is consensus that more than three is appropriate.

The rest of the Radar Screen

13. Review the sticky notes in the second ring and validate who should be collaborating with whom on these projects/initiatives. Modify the initials on the sticky notes as required.

14. Validate the outer ring as truly individually-owned-and-managed projects or initiatives.

15. Invite one final review of the entire completed Radar Screen. Challenge the team to consider if any of the projects should be removed entirely from the Radar Screen based on the amount of work that the team has committed to. These would be placed in a “not now/not us” category for later discussion.

16. Discuss with the team how they want to capture this output. Ensure ownership for the capture is assigned and a timeframe established for publishing the finished version to the team. Plan to review your work on the Radar Screen in three to six months.

Conducting the Radar Screen Exercise with Remote Team Members

When some or all team members are working remotely, use Skype™ or a similar desktop video application to conduct the process. Some pre-meeting work will be required.

Time required: 2–3 hours. Timing will depend on team size, amount of work, and the complexity of the team’s working environment.

Before the session

1. Well in advance of your Crystallize Intent workshop, describe the Crystallize Intent process to your team. You want them to understand what the process is and why it’s important.

2. Each team member will provide, via email before the session, a list of the projects and initiatives that they’re responsible for. Each item they submit will include the names or initials of all Associates who will be working on it. Their lists should not include general job responsibilities but only discrete projects or initiatives.

3. Prepare your draft Radar Screen ahead of time in PowerPoint® or a similar presentation software package. Populate it with the projects and initiatives that the team submitted.
   • Place each of the items submitted by the team into an individual text box; one
project or initiative per text box.

• Place each of the text boxes into the appropriate ring of the Radar Screen based on the number of people collaborating on each. Screen for duplicates as needed. Plan on sharing this draft Radar Screen during your virtual team discussion.

**During the session**

4. Begin by reminding the team how the process will work.
5. Share your draft Radar Screen via screen sharing if possible, so that it can be seen by all and modified in real time.
6. Start the discussion by having the team review the projects and initiatives at the center of the draft Radar Screen. Remind them that you only want projects in the center if they require the ongoing collaboration of the entire team. The goal is to end up with no more than three, maybe four, projects in the center by the end of your discussion. Those projects and initiatives that are moved out of the center of the Radar Screen will be placed in either of the other two rings based on the discussion.
   • If by the end of this discussion there are more than three projects at the center of your draft Radar Screen, ask for suggestions on which ones should be moved to other rings of the Radar Screen.
   • Challenge the team to think critically about what requires full team collaboration as opposed to work that could be done just as effectively and more efficiently by either small groups or individuals.
7. Once you have gotten the Center of the Radar Screen to the smallest appropriate number of collaborative projects / initiatives, conduct a similar discussion about the second ring of the Radar Screen.
   • Remind the team that if a piece of work can be handled more efficiently and effectively by an individual, then it will be better placed in the outer ring.
8. Review the outer ring with the team to ensure that the projects there are indeed individual tasks.
9. After working through each of the three rings of the Radar Screen, ask one last time if there are any final concerns about placement of projects. Address any concerns through discussion.
10. Once the final version is agreed, take a moment to recognize yourselves for a job well done. Save a copy of the Radar Screen and plan on reviewing it again in three to six months.

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