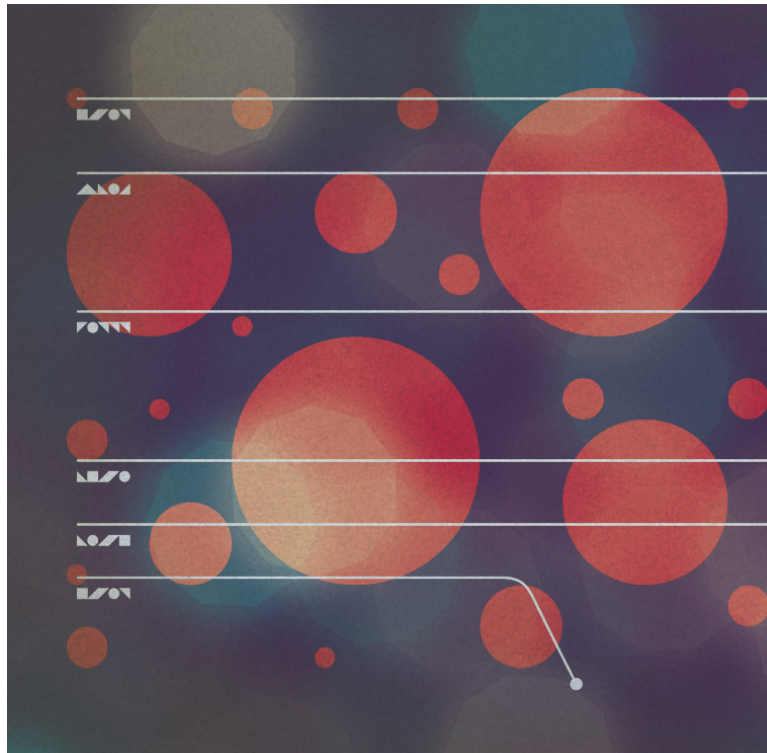




Nova Consulting Inc.

Relationship and Communication Answers
— *Working across Functions*



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Introduction

It's often challenging to maintain positive, constructive collaborations with peers, in part because many functions in organizations are designed to have roles that impose checks and balances on one another. For example, staff functions that serve to regulate risk or costs place some restrictions on what line functions, such as sales or manufacturing can promise or do to deliver to customers. Frequently peer relationships reflect these normal conflicts, which may not be well understood by all the parties involved, especially at lower levels across functions.

This document tells you how to work skillfully across functions to promote the overall well-being of the organization through the high performance and collaboration of every area. It tells you how to enlarge your strategic view of the business to create productive cross-functional alliances that will benefit everyone.

This document contains two sections to help you make the most of Nova's Training Programs for your specific situation:

Strategies and recommendations that provide a range of immediate answers for your situation. These are the building blocks of new behaviors to improve your performance.

A series of work sheets designed to help you engage actively with the strategies and recommendations to begin making the change you want and learning from your progress to refine your new behaviors.

END OF SECTION

Working Across Functions

BROADEN YOUR EXPERTISE

Study the disciplines outside your area of expertise that impinge most significantly on your area, the ones your function interacts with most often. Take your colleagues out to lunch to learn more about their day-to-day concerns. Subscribe to business publications for those functions to learn their language and new developments. It will not only give you an appreciation of their work but enable you to work more intelligently with them and contribute more to the business as a whole from a strategic perspective.

BUILD DREAM TEAM RELATIONSHIPS

You don't have to know it all, as long as you know the right people. Imagine a scenario in which you could create an ideal team of experts and support staff for a particular project if you could recruit from inside your company as well as outside. Make a list of those people, and strategize ways to build relationships and collaborative alliances with them. Start networking and making solid connections.

ELIMINATE ELITISM

Often cross-functional agreements between the heads of different areas don't trickle down to the rank and file who are carrying them out. Lots of friction exists when people at other levels don't understand that their jobs are collaborative rather than

protective of turf. Become a role model for democratic behavior. Invite and include support staff or people from other levels to meetings and planning discussions. Doing so will not only give you a chance to get additional perspectives, it will also provide learning opportunities to develop your team at the same time it demonstrates your respect for everyone's input. It will send the message that responsibility for collaboration is everyone's business. Treat everyone with equal courtesy and respect, and insist that your team members do too.

MAKE MEETINGS MULTI-DISCIPLINARY

When putting your core team and any adjunct teams together, make it a rule to include representatives of as many disciplines as will be involved or interested in the process and outcome. The more varied the inputs you get, the more you and your team will begin to think in broad, interdisciplinary terms that forestall problems and promote development.

PRACTICE CROSS-BOUNDARY COMMUNICATION

Communication can never be too inclusive. Make a list of the persons and business areas that will be affected by critical events and decisions. Be sure to include key people from these areas in

the meetings, decision processes, and communications, whether they are support staff or technical experts. If other team members are initiating communications, be sure they include all appropriate parties.

FOCUS ON BUSINESS RESULTS

The ultimate objective is never the interests of any single area of the business, not even of Sales. The ultimate objective is what's good for the business as a whole, both short-term but especially long-term results that will promote a sustainable way of doing business. Keep focused on what really matters so that the relative importance of any single issue or any single function's interests is kept in perspective. Always bring people back to the big picture.

IDENTIFY THE RIGHT PARTICIPANTS AND PROCESS FOR CROSS-FUNCTIONAL DECISION-MAKING

In calling cross-functional meetings, be clear on your goals and the decisions that need to be made. Determine who has the authority to make those decisions and what the process should be. While inclusion is usually a good thing, involving people who are tangential to the decision-making process or who have insufficient authority is inefficient and just confuses the process. If you and your peers can only recommend a particular path rather than approve it, make that clear and work out

the path of decision-making with your group before escalating it to the appropriate level. Act with dispatch rather than holding on too long to areas where resolution at your level is not feasible.

SHOW OPEN-MINDED RESPECT FOR DIFFERENT EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE

Let your cross-functional colleagues know that you respect their abilities and welcome their contributions, no matter how much you may differ on approach. Productive collaboration often means not getting your own way but bowing to another opinion that is equally valid or identifying a third way both sets of objectives can be met. Doing so shows solidarity and respect for your associates—besides often being the optimal thing to do. Unless unusual issues are at stake where you truly have better information, acquiesce to another point of view once you have advocated for your opinion. Do it gracefully and appreciatively.

FOCUS ON SOLVING THE PROBLEM, NOT GETTING YOUR OWN WAY

When peers seem to resist your point, avoid repeating your own view or trying to convince them to do what you want. Instead, ask questions that may help them refocus on solving the problem by recasting it in a new light. Plan

for the kinds of issues that come up often by making a list of questions you can ask in many situations. Helping you think through the problem from a broader perspective of the total business will place you in a more consultative role that facilitates the situation, rather than one that seems to force-fit a particular outcome or favor your area's interests.

PUBLISH YOUR AGENDA, AND ASK THEM TO PUBLISH THEIRS

Effective working across functions involves clarity about everyone's intentions. Hidden agendas involve the withholding of information for political ends. Talk about your plans and activities openly with your peers. Be sure everyone knows what your intentions are, and keep them updated. Invite your colleagues to ask you questions about your plans, and answer them fully and frankly. Do the same with them. The more all of you know about the others' needs and goals, the more intelligently you can make decisions.

DETERMINE WHAT YOUR AREA'S ROLE IS AND WHAT IS NOT

Often conflict between areas of a business is the result of conflicting roles or confusion about how roles mesh to move the business forward, including what appear to be "turf" or "jurisdiction" issues. Identify areas you're involved with and clarify whose purview they really are or should be. Does it make more sense to position

them as your area's issues, someone else's, or system-wide ones for the business? Create an action plan to separate these issues and to start working them separately to advance the greater good as well as the individual role your area should play.

BECOME A STRATEGIC PARTNER

Consider the role your area should play as a strategic partner in the business, especially if you head a staff function whose contribution is to facilitate, rather than hamper, line functions. Find out what reputation your area has, and how you can address shortcomings. Even if yours is a "watchdog function," such as a legal or accounting function created to place checks and balances on other areas, you want to be known as one that collaborates with other areas, making it easier for them to be in compliance rather than a naysayer. If your area has a reputation for being oppositional and hard to work with, take immediate steps to change that with action planning and new initiatives that involve everyone at every level in your part of the business.

WORK TO IDENTIFY THE LARGE ISSUES

If the same system-wide issues keep coming up in working across functions, such as an inefficient IT process or restrictive financial red tape, consider creating a coalition to take these under

advisement for recommendations for system-wide change. Even if your group itself doesn't have the collective authority to change things, taking the initiative to make a well crafted recommendation may benefit everyone and bring attention to things that would enhance the business bottom-line for everyone. Be sure to do it in a way that doesn't point blame at another function but seeks to improve things from a positive point of view.

INFLUENCE YOUR COLLEAGUES

Assess the different needs and capabilities of different audiences to see how to make yourself understood and how to maximize your chances for getting agreement. Ask yourself questions like these: What's in it for them? How will this information affect them? What is most important to them? What proofs or arguments are most likely to appeal to them? How should data, especially bad news, be conveyed to be most convincing concerning your goals? What medium and back-up materials will be most helpful?

DEVELOP AN APPROACH TO BALANCE CONFLICTING NEEDS

Functions that have to negotiate between two divergent interests have a tough role in general, such as a sales account management group that must negotiate between R&D or manufacturing and the customer. Be frank and honest about the needs of one party to the other, and don't

try to pretend that a bad situation is a good one. If you can, bring all parties to the table to solve a problem. If not, represent a point of view that honors the true needs of one group as well as includes informed input from the other. Develop shared goals through active dialogue to identify a path that will serve the greater good of the most parties or the business as a whole.

PRACTICE CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Disputes are a natural outcome of individuals working together, especially in functions that may have structural conflict built into their roles as checks and balances on the business. Expect differences, and accept the challenge of resolving them as a way to eliminate obstacles for the business. Practice standing up for your views when you disagree with a trusted colleague. Ask for feedback on how you presented your position, and how it felt when you disagreed with them. Work with that feedback to lessen problems with taking a stand appropriately and cultivating skillful means for getting your point across.

RESOLVE CONFLICT QUICKLY

Negotiate differences with peers quickly and directly. Don't avoid conflict. Seek mutually satisfying solutions or compromises, but be sure to hold your

ground on minimum acceptable standards for your area that are consistent with the overall business's strategic objectives. Never let cross-functional differences fester. It can affect the entire organization's ability to function.

AGREE ON THE PROBLEM AND COLLABORATE ON THE SOLUTION

When you disagree, emphasize that you're presenting your perception of the problem, not the "facts." Use specifics to describe events and feelings, but refrain from thinking your perception of the conditions is "the way it is." Present the problem in a way that will be readily understood, concentrating on important issues as they affect performance. Before proposing solutions, gather as much information as possible about the other parties' opinions. This will not only help you understand the issues from their vantage point (which may give you new insights), but also shows that you respect their opinions and hope for cooperation. Listen carefully and then paraphrase the other views to be sure you have understood. Summarize the various viewpoints and restate the problem all of you agree needs to be solved. Once everyone agrees, ensure that all participants are actively involved in developing solutions. Agree on what each person, especially you, will do to solve the problem or support the decision. Keep those commitments.

NEVER TELL WHEN YOU CAN ASK

When you disagree with a peer or think their approach won't work, always avoid rejecting it with declarative statements. Instead, use skillful questioning to get the other person to see what is less than optimal themselves without your having to be the "disapprover" or "naysayer." It keeps you out of an undesirable role and places the challenge with them in a way that maintains a collaborative sense of teamwork. Instead of saying, "That won't work," or "That isn't what the customer asked for," try, "I see how that might meet this objective, but how does it take care of this other concern?"

END OF SECTION

Creating a Plan For Improvement

INTRODUCTION

This section is designed to help you work actively with the information and recommendations provided by Nova, first reflectively, then by applying them on a day-to-day basis. Most people find that this practice enables them to identify more quickly critical transactions where they can apply their learning to improve their leadership abilities and performance rapidly.

When you make note of strengths you can develop as well as the interactions that leave you feeling dissatisfied, uncomfortable, or less than successful, you can create strategies to take advantages of opportunities coming your way and to anticipate potential challenges in ways that can resolve them successfully.

Creating a Plan For Improvement

IDENTIFYING AND APPLYING MY STRENGTHS

When I think about my performance in relation to the strategies and recommendations, my strengths and best assets I can apply to my situation include the following:

Based on the information and recommendations, I can best leverage my strengths in this situation by applying them in the following ways to improve my performance:

IDENTIFYING AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

These are the three most critical areas where I can improve my performance. List the situations that you find challenging in each area and the qualities or behaviors you would like to develop to improve your performance:

IMPROVEMENT AREA 1

IMPROVEMENT AREA 2

IMPROVEMENT AREA 3

END OF SECTION

Assessing Your Plan For Improvement

CHALLENGE 1, A SUCCESS STORY

This section is for you to track your efforts to change in the coming months. Each time you encounter a situation that involves one of your key challenge areas, capture it in writing. It's best to include not only "success stories," but incidents that illustrate that success isn't always easy. You will learn more and gain greater insight from times when you fall short of your goals in the situation you described, and comparing success with times that weren't so successful is an optimal learning experience.

State the background briefly, the people involved, and what was said or done. Indicate what you intended to accomplish in the situation in contrast to the way it actually turned out. Then write down how you can better manage similar situations—including how you might anticipate them—in the future so can begin to plan and monitor your progress.

CHALLENGE 2, A TIME WHEN THINGS DID NOT GO AS DESIRED

State the background briefly, the people involved, and what was said or done. Indicate what you intended to accomplish in the situation in contrast to the way it actually turned out. Then write down how you can better manage similar situations—including how you might anticipate them—in the future so can begin to plan and monitor your progress.

END OF SECTION

Conclusion

Congratulations! You've now got specific recommendations for new behaviors that can improve your performance, and a way to work those behaviors into your day-to-day activities and learn quickly from practicing those new behaviors. If you consistently act on the recommendations and strategies provided here, you can become an outstanding leader in your organization or wherever your career takes you.