

Interface Events

What is an Interface Event?

An Interface Event involves two or more teams that need to improve or develop the way they work together. Sometimes this is necessary when 'finger pointing' between teams has reached an unacceptable level, on other occasions when a need for improvement has been recognised. The exact content will depend upon the situation. An Interface Event will identify issues, blockages and actions required for improvement.

Interface Events can be run for teams from within the same organisation or teams from different organisations that need to work closely together. In the latter scenario, this might be the Executive Team from both organisations.

The process

We start off by meeting with the leaders of the teams involved and sometimes speak to other key players. Next we put together a proposal to meet the needs identified. On the day itself we run the event, provide the structure and facilitate any tricky situations. Finally, we provide a review letter with observations and recommendations and then meet with the leaders to review the event, evaluate progress made event and discuss next steps.

Occasionally, in very tricky or complex situations, we might recommend diagnostic 1-1s with key individuals prior to the event to canvass wider opinion and gather some data.

Typical contents

The exact content of an Interface Event will be designed around the situation and teams involved. The following are some typical contents, all of which are tried-and-tested:

Getting to know each other better

There are several options for this and we will select the most appropriate. The purpose is for the individuals in the teams concerned to find out a bit about each other as people rather than just a job title in one of the teams.

Leaders Speak

This is an opportunity for the leaders of the teams concerned to say what they see as the important issues for the teams and is followed by a structured question and answer session. We provide a checklist of topics to cover so the leaders don't have to start from scratch.

Briefings on specific topics

There are almost always things, such as major projects, that one of the teams is working on that the other needs to know about. In this situation we recommend a Briefing followed by an opportunity to contribute ideas and ask questions.

'This is what we think of you'/scoping session

This is the 'cards on the table' session where each team says what it really thinks of the other, both good and bad. Good facilitation is absolutely essential as this has the potential to degenerate into a mud-slinging exercise. On the other hand, if a real opportunity is not given for people to express their true opinions, the event is wasted.

During this exercise, the teams will also scope the issues they need to work on and resolve.

Roles and responsibilities clarification

This is an interactive exercise to clarify who does what in each team.

Real Work as required

If there is some Real Work the teams need to get on with, we will put together a structure to help do this. This often involves examining in some detail the processes that exist between the teams concerned. Not only does Real Work get things done - it has also been proven time-after-time that the most effective way to get people working well together is to give them tasks to carry out together.

There may be obvious topics to work on at an initial event but, as the teams learn to work better together, the real gains are made when it becomes normal practice to work jointly on topics of shared importance both at subsequent events and between events.

Meetings structure review

A review of what meetings there are that involve the teams concerned, the purpose, attendees and logistics of each.

Duration

Our preferred format for these events is either lunchtime-to-lunchtime, a late afternoon start and then a full day or a full day followed by some socialising afterwards. A little social time during or immediately after the event will consolidate emerging relationships and allow participants to reflect together.

What success looks like

It is easy to facilitate a feel-good event that ultimately makes no difference - we don't want to do that. An initial event typically produces a marked improvement in relationships. Better relationships don't last, nor do they automatically lead to an improvement in working practices or processes. Moving away from being nice to each other needs to be backed up by changes in day-to-day interactions, especially meetings, processes and decision-making. Therefore the outputs of the event need to lead to this.

For the most important relationships, Interface Events should not be viewed as a one-off activity. When to hold a follow-up event depends on many factors and this is something to be explored as part of the review process. Too frequent and too infrequent events both lead to diminishing returns so the objective is to find the middle ground and maintain momentum.

