

5 Reasons Interdepartmental Relationships Fail

written by Rory Lodge | August 29, 2014



Interdepartmental relationships or lack thereof are not always given the attention and priority they require. Too often relationships within departments and/or teams, between employees and between managers and employees grab the attention. However, a poor relationship between departments can cause many headaches. I have heard it said that had there been better relationships between departments at former Canadian tech giant Blackberry the word 'former' may not be part of the story when talking about Blackberry.

For a variety of reasons relationships between departments fail or fail to materialize. Understanding some of these reasons may help lay the groundwork for interdepartmental relationships that build a stronger organization.

Reasons Interdepartmental Relationships Fail

1) **Relationships require two-way communication:** Communication is time consuming. Within each department there are already many channels of communication all taking up time. Adding another channel without understanding how or why is a step many employees simply will not take.

Building communications channels as part of a regular routine, for example company wikis or social networks, can help open up two-way communications.

2) **Perceived or real competition for resources or glory:** When resources are scarce or perceived as scarce competition for resources can build walls. Departments may hold their resources and information about resources and how to obtain resources too tightly.

Communicate that working together and sharing resources can result in an appropriate distribution of resources, which helps everyone get the resources they need.

3) **Distance and/or lack of regular interaction:** It is possible that employees from different departments have rare opportunities to interact. The once a year

picnic does not cut it. Familiarity can create comfort and shared experiences can build relationships between individual employees.

Interaction need not involve all employees in a department at the same time. Secondments, joint committees, interdepartmental training all build paths between departments

4) **Lack of precedence or expectation:** If relationship building, sharing and communication are not built into the process or expressed as an expectation by leadership it is difficult to build bridges between departments.

Establish processes and set precedence by having departmental managers visibly work together. Task department heads/managers to create opportunities for individual employees to share experiences that build relationships.

5) **Managers that are in conflict/competition:** Sometimes there is a personal conflict between managers/department heads that trickles down throughout the departments. Sometimes these conflicts are historical and have never been resolved. Sometimes leadership encourages competition that causes poor interdepartmental relationships.

Identify if conflict exists and why, but do not spend too much time on the past, focus on the future. If leadership or managers have created the conflict or competition work first with them to build better relationships. Emphasize the value in working to a common goal.

Encourage A Culture Of Gratitude

Building and maintaining healthy relationships require many components; trust, open lines of communication, common needs, shared experiences and more. One important component of strong relationships is showing gratitude. Show gratitude for the efforts of those who build interdepartmental relationships. Additionally recognize and encourage others to demonstrate gratitude to others. Provide employees a visible way to show their gratitude to others by creating a thank you 'wall' (virtual and/or real) or ask for a note to be shared with management or HR that can be shared across the organization.

Departments that work well together facilitate better communication, problem solving and even innovation by increasing responsiveness and a sense of being part working to achieve a common goal.