

Team Discussion Guide

This Discussion Guide is meant to serve as a framework and springboard for conversations around team habits. More specifically, the guide will focus on practical, tangible ways to improve how your team works together to create better team habits.

Team Habits was written for anyone and everyone who works on a team, no matter their job title. You participate in your team's habits every day, therefore you also have the power to change them.

Since team habits are formed by the ways you as a team work together, it makes sense to work through the process of improving your team habits *as a team*. Use the questions provided on the following pages to guide your team discussions.

The book's structure gives you many ways to explore and use it, but here are four logical pathways:

1. Have the team read the whole book front to back and schedule time to discuss the chapters in order. We suggest limiting the discussion to no more than two chapters at a time.
2. Have the team read Part 1 (Chapters 1 & 2), take the Team Habits Quiz at betterteamhabits.com, then come together to determine the category or categories your team might most need to work on. From there schedule time to discuss the specific chapters related to those particular team habit categories before jumping to Part 3 (Chapters 11 & 12) to discuss and create a plan for your team habit change.
3. If your team has a clear idea of which team habit category most requires work — you can jump right in to read and discuss that chapter. Then move on to Part 3 (Chapters 11 & 12) to create a plan for your team habit change.
4. After going through your first team habit change you can come back and repeat the process outlined in option 2 above.

And remember, team habit change is a continual process. At some point, it may be time to move to a new habit, but your team's potential, and the space we have to continuously improve are limitless.

CHAPTER 1

We Need Better Team Habits Now More Than Ever

Our workways are determined by a mix of our team habits, organizational policies, technology, regulatory compliance, and org structure. Each of these creates a system, and, as in any system, changes or effects in one area can change or create effects in others. These workways support our work if they're healthy, or get in the way if they're broken — and not addressing our broken workways is a choice.

We all have played a part in creating and maintaining the ways we work together. If something is not working it's up to us to change the workways we work within. Let's talk about how we work together and where we might start looking for our own "broken printers."

1. What are the broken printers on our team? What are the small (but fixable) things that get in the way of how we work together?
2. Can you name a time where you were frustrated by a broken printer where a teammate(s) jumped in and helped you address or work through the situation? What was the issue and how did you work together to manage it? Is it a challenge you expect will come up again?
3. Is there anything we do differently on our team (compared to other teams in the organization) that works well for us? Why do you think this works for us?
4. Are there any ways in which we work together that have worked in the past (past year, past quarter, or past month) that are no longer working? Why do you think that is?
5. Have there been any changes (in the last year, or quarter) that have required us to change the way we work together as a team? Have the changes made things more or less complex?
6. How does the work we do on this team impact the larger goals and priorities of the organization?
7. What's an example of an existing habit we have as a team that's working well for us? What's an example of how we get in our own way?
8. What have we done as a team to address our broken printers in the past? What keeps us from fixing them?
9. In what ways have our workways changed pre/post pandemic? How have these changes strengthened us? How have they challenged us?

No matter your role in the company, you have the power to change your team's habits.

CHAPTER 2

We Live And Breathe Team Habits

In this chapter we learn about the eight categories of team habits. The author reminds us that our habits in each of these areas are habits for a reason. If we want change we'll need to practice our new habits again and again and amplify positive feedback loops along the way. But the key is to start small — because moving mountains is hard, but moving stones is easier.

Let's talk about our existing habits, what's working, what's not working, and what habit category we might want to focus on as a team.

1. What are some small wins from the last three months we want to celebrate?
2. What's our speed of change? How quickly is our team able to identify and implement change initiatives? Is this any different from the organization's speed of change?
3. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate how we create belonging and meaning amongst members of this team? Why?
4. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate how this team makes decisions? Why?
5. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate how our team sets goals and priorities? Why?
6. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate how our team creates, distributes, and adjusts our plans? Why?
7. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate how our team communicates? Why?
8. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate how our team moves objectives, projects, and tasks forward? Why?
9. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate how our team prepares for, conducts, and follows-up after meetings? Why?
10. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate how our team enables the effectiveness of each individual member? Why?

Team habits are how a team or organization breathes. The breathing is happening whether you notice it or not.

CHAPTER 3

Belonging

Belonging is what creates that shared context — that glue — in a team. It's what allows us to give each other grace, to be patient with each other, and to offer support and solutions when they're needed. It also makes it easier for each of us to show up no matter what else is going on in our lives, knowing we can be our whole selves and give our best effort without fear.

Let's explore how we do (and don't) embody the definition of a team provided in this chapter: a group (collection of individuals) that's highly aligned, meaning the members feel a sense of belonging and a shared sense of purpose.

1. How do you think a stronger sense of belonging would impact our team's performance?
2. Can you think of any recent (or not so recent) examples of Crisco Watermelons this team has had? What happened? Where did things get slippery? And how was it eventually resolved?
3. As a team would you say we're in the process of forming, storming, norming, or performing (Tuckman Model of Team Development)? Why do you think so and how long have we been in this stage?
4. When was the last time someone on the team spoke up about a project they thought the team might not be ready or able to take on? What was the team reaction?
5. When was the last time someone on the team spoke up about something they weren't clear on or pointed out an error or red flag? What was the team reaction?
6. How do our team or organizational values show up in our day-to-day team habits?
7. How do you share your personality with the team? How have you seen your teammates share their personalities? (Think video call backgrounds, how they decorate their desks or offices, catch phrases, use of emojis, etc.)
8. How often do we share our wins and appreciation for one another? Let's do it now: What's an accomplishment that you want to celebrate? What did you see another teammate do recently that you want to shout out?
9. What's an example of a way we make it possible for everyone on the team to contribute in a way they feel comfortable?
10. What's a bump that you and a teammate resolved recently and how did that improve your relationship?

Groups flail while teams sail. And belonging is the key ingredient.

CHAPTER 4

Decision-Making

We're all making decisions all day long, every day. As a team we each have a role to play in any number of decisions. It's not a matter of *if* we can make decisions but rather knowing *which* are our individual decisions to make. By improving our team habits around decision-making we can enable true team partnership, collaboration, and sanity for every member of this team.

Let's talk about how we make decisions both as a team and individually.

1. What are some examples of things that would be L1, L2, and L3 decisions for you?
2. Can you name an example of something recently you were waiting on approval only to find out the decision was yours to make all along?
3. How does our team clarify who is responsible for decisions around different tasks or projects?
4. How does this team communicate how and why decisions are made? How might we improve?
5. Does our team have a habit of handing off “monkeys” (i.e. problems or decisions that need to be made)? Can you think of an example of a monkey you either received or handed off recently?
6. How well do we currently communicate the intent behind a decision, recommendation or plan? What are some things we might try to improve?
7. Where do we capture the decisions that have been made so they can be referred to in the future? If we're not doing this, how and where would be a good place to store them?
8. What's a simple way we might build in time for more complex decisions so teammates can assess, discuss, and provide feedback before a final decision is made? What's the amount of time the team needs to keep things moving along without rushing a decision?
9. Can you think of an example where the decision-making process was stalled out because we made it high stakes, non-reversible, and/or non-recoverable?
10. When our team gets stuck on a decision, how do we come together to work through it? What are some ways we can make that process easier?

When teams take the time to build good habits around decision-making, they see the benefits reverberate through everything else they do.

CHAPTER 5

Goal-Setting and Prioritization

Good goal-setting and prioritization team habits help us understand not just what needs to be done right now, but also how our work supports the overall goals of the team and how those goals are ultimately informed by company strategy. This chapter of *Team Habits* covers the psychology of choosing which goals to advance, as well as team habits that can help us prioritize those goals.

Let's talk about how we set goals and prioritize our work as a team.

1. Looking at the scale on the following page, how would you grade our level of readiness?
2. Team readiness levels are based on our team's competency (Do we know how to do it?), capacity (Do we have the bandwidth to do it?), and our team habits (Do we apply the know-how and bandwidth together?). Of those three areas, where do you feel we shine? Which needs work? Why?
3. What would you say is the most important priority we are working on right now? How do you know it's our highest priority?
4. Of the goals and priorities you're working on, name one pull goal (something you are drawn to) and one push goal (something you wish you could avoid). What would make that push goal something more meaningful and fulfilling for you?
5. Every project costs four things: time, energy, attention, and money (TEAM). Can you name an example of a recent project that you feel was fully "funded" with all four of those things? OR In which of these items does our team most often run at a deficit: time (on schedules), energy and attention (team focus), or money (budget for resources)?
6. What would it look like to give someone on our team the "green hat"? How specifically will we as a team clear the path for that person to support their work?
7. Who are our force multipliers? Who are the teammates that enable and amplify the work but often from behind the scenes?
8. As a team do we tend to choose goals that are sure things or do we take big swings? When was the last time we selected and worked towards a goal we weren't quite sure we'd be able to accomplish? How did we approach the challenges that came up?
9. How do our team goals and projects fit within the company's long-term vision?
10. When was the last time we took on a project before reviewing current commitments? How did that impact the time, energy, attention, and money needed to move that project to done?

Most teams know how ready they are, even if they don't have space or language to express it.

How Ready Is Our Team?

Readiness is exactly what it sounds like: the capability of a team or individual to accomplish their goals, complete their projects, and perform to standard. Think of readiness in terms of five different levels:

R1 Unprepared and likely to fail at meeting expectations

- Low/no competencies, capacity, and workways to support execution
 - Unable to address and navigate known challenges and low/no capability to respond to unforeseen challenges and opportunities
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R2 Poorly prepared

- Some competency, capacity, and workways, with little practice in running the type of projects and operations required to accomplish objectives
 - May be able to address and navigate known challenges, but low capability to be able to respond to unforeseen challenges and opportunities
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R3 Prepared

- Adequate competency, capacity, and workways, with adequate practice in running the type of projects and operations required to accomplish objectives
- Able to address and navigate known challenges and moderate capability to be able to respond to unforeseen challenges and opportunities

R3 is the lowest readiness rating where teams should expect success or where something could be called a core competency.

R4 Well-prepared

- Ample competency, capacity, and workways, with frequent or proven practice in running the type of projects and operations required to accomplish objectives
 - Able to address and navigate known challenges and completely able to respond to unforeseen challenges and opportunities
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R5 Extremely well-prepared

- All elements of R4, but able to convert challenges to opportunities and fully able to leverage opportunities

CHAPTER 6

Planning

Great plans are invisible — we're all on the same page, no one is confused, and everything just works. A great plan is something the team runs *with*, not runs *into*. To get to a great plan, we all need to take part in not just creating it but running it, maintaining and adapting it when things change, and communicating along the way.

Let's talk about the who, the when, and the how of our team's planning process.

1. Who on our team makes plans? Is it typically the same person(s) making the plans or do we each contribute?
2. How are plans shared? Where do they live? Who owns communicating the plan to everyone who needs to know it?
3. Can you name an example of a time when a decision was made based off of a ghost plan? What happened and what was the impact?
4. When planning a project how do we factor in the timelines of our other team projects or those related to broader organizational priorities?
5. What would be one element that needs to be added to our team's timeline/ planning habits that would make a significant difference to our ability to stay aligned on projects? What needs to be subtracted?
6. What's our team's commit:complete ratio? For every project we take on, how many do we see through to completion?
7. How much time does our team spend on the planning of a project versus executing the plan? Do we need more or less time for one and/or the other? (Remember the One-Thirds-Two-Thirds Rule.)
8. How much of our team's collective time is taken up by urgent or recurring work? Are there any routines we could eliminate, defer, or outsource to another team or function?
9. Who is the "Voice of No" on our team? What could be changed on our team to give more people the opportunity to speak up when they spot a potential challenge?
10. How can we create more flexible plans that allow us to adapt and adjust as we go without bringing everything to a standstill?

Planning is everyone's job.

CHAPTER 7

Communication

Communication patterns are like the volume, fade, balance, and equalizer on your car stereo and just like that car stereo you may need to adjust more than one dial in order to get the best sound. It's a balancing act and we need to consider how we communicate (our tone, cadence, volume, and focus), what we communicate, when we communicate, and where we communicate. And then there's communicating about how we communicate...

Let's talk about how, what, when, and where our team communicates.

1. As a team do we communicate too frequently or too infrequently? Provide too much or too little detail? Get too focused or too broad? Are we too afraid or too courageous?
2. For typical projects, what is the right cadence of communication for our team? What types of projects require more or less? Can you name an example of a project that required more or less than our standard levels? What made it so?
3. Can you think of any recent examples where information was shared before it should have been? What was the impact on team momentum?
4. Does our team (or organization) use language that is clear, direct, and kind so nothing is left open to interpretation?
5. Where and how do we communicate the essential information around a project?
6. What is a good example of a piece of communication that has been proactive, preemptive, and brief?
7. What are some shortcodes, abbreviations, or slang our team already uses to communicate more quickly? Are there any areas where shortcodes would be useful?
8. How can we incorporate task and project timing shortcodes into our regular communications to ensure that everyone on the team quickly understands expectations and priorities?
9. Where do we communicate? Take a moment to list out all the places information is shared or discussion happens. Are there any opportunities to streamline communication channels?
10. What is the team preference for where we communicate what type of information?

Most teams fall into a few broad patterns when it comes to how they communicate. Too much in one direction, and you create a bunch of unnecessary noise. Too little, and it's a recipe for confusion.

CHAPTER 8

Collaboration

We all want to do a great job. We're trained and competent, and we want to show up and have great relationships with one another. Collaboration defaults are important because they reduce the number of small decisions and negotiations that happen throughout our workdays. Defining intentional team collaboration habits means looking at our team as a whole rather than focusing on the individuals.

Let's discuss how we come together as a team and how we might be more effective in our efforts.

1. What is the "shape" (structure) of our team? Our organization? Where might collaboration be improved by shifting roles and responsibilities?
2. Who are the default doers, reviewers, and coordinators on our team? Do we have enough of the right people in the right places?
3. What's getting in the way of us running more efficiently as a team? (More specifically: Where are we seeing a lot of motion but not really getting anywhere? Where are we losing time waiting for answers, directions, decisions, feedback, etc? Where are we over processing, overthinking, or over doing work that's not actually increasing the quality of it? Where do we consistently run into defects or errors?)
4. Who is the "Wolf" for different critical functions on our team? Are there any gaps where we need a Wolf but we don't have a clear person to call?
5. Is there room in the work we do together for teammates who currently aren't the Wolf of anything to begin developing specialties? How can we support them in becoming a Wolf so that they have a greater sense of belonging and we have fewer gaps in our team?
6. Where does our work happen by default? Why there? Is this working for us?
7. What are our team defaults for proactively sharing what we're working on and checking in when we need to know the status of a project?
8. What are our team conventions for writing task titles and descriptions? How can we provide enough information for our teammates to get straight to work instead of wasting time hunting down more details?
9. How do we communicate who the project owner is? What does that look like on our team?
10. When was the last time someone on our team spotted a problem and stood up an ad hoc team to solve it? How was that team formed? What went well? What can we learn from that experience?

The goal is to eliminate any confusion about who's in charge of which parts of the workflow so that all roles and responsibilities are extremely clear.

CHAPTER 9

Meetings

One of the reasons meetings are such a go-to for people when they're thinking of team habits to change is that they are the context in which all other team habits come into play. It's where we experience belonging and trust in real time. It's where we see decision-making, goal-setting, and planning in action. And it's where communication and collaboration habits pop up as we start talking about how we'll work together to get it all done.

Let's discuss how our meetings are (or aren't) working for us and how we can make these times together more effective and fun.

1. On a scale of 1-100, what "Meeting Promoter Score" would you give to our meetings? In other words, how likely are you to recommend our meetings?
2. Share an example of a good meeting this team has had recently. What made it a good meeting? Did it run smoothly? Did it foster connection in the team? Were decisions made? Did it help you move work forward?
3. Thinking about our standing weekly and monthly meetings, how much time per team member would you estimate is being spent on meetings each week?
4. How often do meetings get scheduled that negatively impact the amount of focused time you are able to spend on your most important tasks? Is there a different time of day or cadence level that would make it easier for you to engage and also allow time for your deep work?
5. Looking back on the last six weeks, how many meetings on your schedule were actually crutch meetings? What faulty habit created the need for that meeting?
6. What can we do to make our meetings less stressful, more effective, and more of a force multiplier for the rest of our team?
7. Thinking about the six types of meetings (decision-making, planning, brainstorming, bonding, review, and update meetings), which would you say we have the most often? Which do we need more or less of?
8. How do we make room for bonding time in our meetings? Do we need more or less of this?
9. When invited to a meeting is it made clear what the purpose of the meeting is, who will be facilitating the meeting, and what each attendee's role is? If yes, is there anything that can be done more effectively? If not, what can we do to make our meetings run more smoothly?
10. How do we capture and assign next steps coming out of our meetings? Where does this information live?

Meetings can be either a powerful force multiplier or a powerful force diminisher.

CHAPTER 10

Core Team Habits

If the team is the atomic element of the organization then individually we are the protons, neutrons, and electrons that make up the team. This chapter spoke to the importance and impact of the work we do as individuals and how that translates to how we work together as a team.

Let's discuss how we work best as individuals and how we can support each other in that work.

1. How do we share our work with one another? Are there any improvements or shifts we can make to better communicate about progress on our individual tasks and projects — or on making clear where we might be stuck and need support?
2. What are the tasks and projects that seem to be the most dependent on one person? How can we educate more team members in that area so others can support the task or project when need be?
3. When was the last time you shared a prototype, draft, or early work in progress? How did the response or feedback from the team help you move work forward?
4. How many focus blocks would you say you really have during a typical week? What — if it could be shifted or removed — would free up space for one extra focus block in your week?
5. How well do we honor our own focus blocks? How well do we honor each other's focus blocks? What can we do to create better boundaries around our collective focus blocks?
6. What is your chronotype, and when do you do your best work? Are you a morning lark, afternoon emu, or night owl? How does your current schedule match up to your chronotype?
7. What is the chronotype makeup of our team? How could we shift focus blocks or work to free up people of different chronotypes to do their best work? How might we pair up with different chronotypes to better pass work between teammates?
8. Can you think of an example of an systemic issue that continues to present itself because it's only ever addressed at the local or surface level (Level 1 fix)? What can we do to capture these and make necessary system fixes (Level 2 fixes)?
9. What is your Achilles heel? What's a hidden superpower? How can we support each other's Achilles heels and celebrate and better leverage the superpowers on this team?
10. How do we support one another when we fall behind? Can you share an example of a time where a teammate came to your aid? What did that look like?

As individuals working together, we need to practice a few core skills in order to collaborate, communicate, and show up to do our best work for our team.

CHAPTER 11

Team Habits Are Political – So Play the Game

For real and lasting change to happen we'll need to come together as a team and work together against the inertia of our existing habits, and likely some organizational ones as well. Without alignment, this new team habit doesn't stand a chance.

Let's talk about not just what needs to change, but what needs to be put in place for us to enact that change.

1. What are some of the existing team or organizational dynamics that will need to be factored into initiating a change?
2. What category of team habit change is at the top of our list? Why?
3. Who is best suited to be the champion for this team habit change? Why?
4. Do we need an external change champion? Do we need someone outside of our team to help us explain to others in the organization why we're doing things differently and smooth things over if our new way of working causes conflict with other teams?
5. Who on our team would make an especially good habit change manager for this team habit change? Why?
6. How can we help the change champion and change manager find space for the necessary focus blocks needed for this change project?
7. What excites you about this team habit change? What do you see are the benefits to you, the team, and the organization as a whole?
8. What concerns do you have about the proposed team habit change? Is there anything you stand to lose? What do you think might happen as a result of the change?
9. Can you think of a time when we tried to make a change in the past? What went well? What challenges did we run into?

Team habit change is about alignment, not power.

CHAPTER 12

Create Your Team Habits Roadmap

This final chapter walked through the process of converting our *idea* for change into a solid *plan* to make it a reality. It's about preparing for the long-haul of team change: from picking our first small team habit to work on, to breaking it down into sprints, keeping track of progress, and working through the setbacks and positive surprises that come with change.

Let's align on our team habit change and discuss the steps that will set us up for success.

1. What are three to five *tiny* team habits in our chosen category that we could change?
2. Of the tiny team habits we've discussed, are there any that would be foundational for other habit changes? Any one that seems like it in particular would create the biggest difference for our team?
3. What are the "positive" effects that might result from each of these habits? What are the "negative" downstream consequences that might arise, and how would we deal with them?
4. Of all the possible habit changes we've discussed, which one gets your vote and why?
5. What time frame do we want to give ourselves for this team habit change? How many coherent sprints would we need to complete it? (The book suggests four 1-week sprints for a month-sized project and six 2-week sprints for a quarter-sized project.)
6. What shifts would we need to see to know that we're making progress? How will we measure and track those shifts?
7. How will we track and communicate progress for this team habit change project? By which mediums will we communicate and how often?
8. How can our past experiences with shifts and change (positive and negative) help inform how we approach this team habit change?
9. What was the last *positive* surprise that popped up when something changed on our team? How did we approach it? How was it communicated? Looking back, how would we approach it now in a way that really honors the gift that it is?
10. Changes to one team habit will impact others. How will we manage around these impacts while staying on course? What can we set up now to set us up for success with potential future team habit changes?

With every change, you'll also be training your team in the metahabit of team habit change, creating that positive feedback loop.

Glossary: Helpful Definitions By Chapter

Part 1: Intro and Overview of Team Habits

Chapter 1: We Need Better Team Habits Now More Than Ever

Broken Printer: small and fixable breaks in the way team members work with each other

VUCA Environment: An environment that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.

Workways: how we work with each other, determined by a mix of our team habits, organizational policies, technology, regulatory compliance, and org structure.

Chapter 2: We Live And Breathe Team Habits

IKEA Effect: The cognitive bias where people tend to place a high value on outcomes, products, and experiences they have partially created.

Part 2: Categories of Team Habits

Chapter 3: Belonging

Crisco Watermelons: The missed handoffs and dropped balls that occur when teams collaborate on projects.

Chapter 4: Decision-Making

DRIP: Shortcode for “decision, recommendation, intention, or plan,” used to indicate the user’s intention for next steps.

The Three Levels of Decisions: L1 = make the decision; L2 = make the decision and inform management; L3 = defer decision to management

Chapter 5: Goal-Setting and Prioritization

Dunkirk Spirit: The pattern in which, despite terrible planning and decision-making, a team rallies and accomplishes a daunting goal through valiant efforts, long hours, and sheer tenacity.

Green Hat: The person with the green hat currently owns the main effort for pushing a project forward and should be given priority to focus on that work until they've finished it.

Chapter 6: Planning

Ghost Plan: A plan that was made by a few members of the team but not communicated to the rest of the team.

One-Third–Two-Thirds Rule: Only one-third of the time allocated to execute a plan should be spent creating the plan, and two-thirds should be left to complete the project.

Strategic-Routine-Urgent Logjam: When accomplishing urgent and routine work regularly becomes the biggest priority, and strategic work falls by the wayside.

Chapter 7: Communication

Shortcodes: The acronyms and unique phrases your team uses to communicate rich information in only a few letters or words.

Chapter 8: Collaboration

Doer-Reviewer-Coordinator Triad: Three roles make up the atomic elements of the team:

Doers: the people rolling up their sleeves to make the work happen.

Reviewers: the people who keep an eye on the quality of the output so the doers can stay focused on production.

Coordinators: coordinates not only the doer and reviewer but also with elements outside the team.

TIMWOOD: A framework to help identify the common sources of waste in your team or organization: transportation, inventory, motion, wait time, overproduction, overprocessing, and defects.

Wolf: The person (whether an internal or external expert) who you call to handle a particular problem whenever it arises.

Chapter 9: Meetings

Crutch Meeting: Meetings that act as stand-ins for poor team habits. Crutch meetings often address things that should have been taken care of outside the meeting.

Meeting Math: A calculation of the true cost of meetings in terms of actual hours and salary spent.

Chapter 10: Core Team Habits

Focus Block: Those ninety-minute to two-hour blocks of time in which we can do deep work and stay focused enough on a project to move it forward or complete it.

Chronotype: Your personal natural rhythm (morning larks, afternoon emus, and night owls).

Part 3: How to Build a Plan to Change Your Team Habits

Chapter 11: Team Habits are Political—So Play the Game

Change Champion: Acts as the political face of the change project. The champion's job is to create and enhance partnerships with allies and speak their language when things get out of whack.

Change Manager: Manages the change project, focusing on the operational work to make things happen.