

Connect your teams with more than just technology



In today's virtual and rapidly changing business landscape, the importance of team connection is vital. And if your organization is scaling, you are facing the difficult challenge of keeping enterprise leaders, managers, admins, and teams aligned as the number of employees, processes, documentation, and ways of working grow and change with you.

Of course, technology and data play a critical role in facilitating collaboration, but we wanted to focus on how team connection - specifically ways of working, culture, and collaboration - can make a difference. To define what team connection truly means and learn how you can promote it in your organization, we sat down to learn from Atlassian's Modern Work Coach, Mark Cruth. Mark has over a decade of experience with teamwork practices and is on a mission to teach teams day-to-day improvements, new habits, and small skills that result in big changes.

Decoding the meaning of team connection

At the highest level, team connection comes down to autonomy and alignment. In Mark's view, teams need direction and context to know not only where they are going, but why

they are going there. This means goals need to be visible, and there needs to be psychological safety and trust in managers, admins, and teams. When this happens, teams are able to understand their organization's strategy and take tactical steps to deliver the products and customer experience they are striving for.



Connected organizations have a sense of where they are going and why, which enables teams to take the tactical steps necessary to get there.

MARK CRUTH

Atlassian's Modern Work Coach

The obstacles you'll face as you scale

As the saying goes 'what got you here, won't get you there', and Mark emphasized that what worked in smaller companies, such as relying on relationships and informal communication, becomes insufficient at scale. We discussed three common pitfalls to be aware of as you grow.



The emergence of 'small kingdoms'

Remember when you knew every person in not only your department, but across the organization? As you scale, this becomes increasingly difficult to maintain, and can hurt your organization in the long-term.

Small kingdoms emerge when teams only focus on what they know, and avoid trying to align and collaborate with other teams. As a company scales larger, the ability for any one team to accomplish something on their own shrinks - we need other teams to do our best work the bigger we get. In addition, if goals across the organization are aligned, then there's a good chance teams can work together to get things done efficiently.



A tight grip on past culture

Mark said it best when emphasizing that core values should always stay at the center of your organization, but it's expected that culture will evolve as your team evolves as well.

“ It's important to recognize that culture will and should change as an organization gets larger. Holding onto 'the way we used to work when we were smaller' actually leads to poor business outcomes and a less connected organization.

Instead of trying to maintain the culture of the past, embrace the change, and anchor yourself in values (that's really the important thing).



Too much emphasis on technology and not enough on change management

Obviously, we believe in the power of technology, but tools and technology should support collaboration and break down information silos, not add unnecessary blockers. Mark is a big advocate of using standard, yet flexible tools, and giving teams autonomy to best fit technology to their own workflows.

If your team decides to implement a new process, or a change to process, change management is essential for successful implementation and long-term adoption. It's important to balance common ways of working with common tools, and embrace change management by starting small, identifying champions, and involving them in proliferating ideas. Don't rely on just tools to change processes and collaboration, there's always a people side to change.

Small habits, big wins

If you're feeling the pains of scaling and disconnection, there is something to do about it regardless of your department or role. We asked Mark about his perspective on how you can promote better team connection across all levels of your organization.

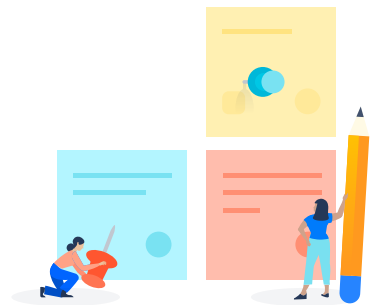
Leaders, you play an outsized role in facilitating (or hurting) team connection. Mark's advice? Make goals clear and visible. Instead of trying to orchestrate work across teams, focus on setting direction, facilitating collaboration, and advocating for the smooth flow of information.

Simple first step:

Encourage project leads to utilize the **goals, signals, and measures** play to define success, determine signals, and set measures before a project begins to keep each team member's focus aligned with the outcome in mind.

Admins, you are responsible for managing an organization's technology and play a significant role in promoting or hindering connectedness. In Mark's experience, the most successful admins focused beyond just tooling and instead became collaboration enablers.

"If admins solely focus on administering tools without considering the impact on the people side of team collaboration, it will hinder connectedness. I've seen admin teams that didn't provide guidance around how to use tools effectively, which ended up impeding work and visibility. For example, a team I coached allowed users to create an unlimited number of custom fields in Jira Cloud. After a while, having so many fields to fill led to slow and unusable tooling."



Simple first step:

Admins that facilitate team connection think outside of the impacts of their own team, and look at the big picture. Try this **dependency mapping** exercise to better understand potential blockers and prevent hiccups before they happen.

Lastly, individuals and **teams** can contribute to building better connections by being intentional about how you choose to work, both independently and together. Be an advocate for connection by stepping back and thinking about how team decisions are made and if they support visibility not only within your team, but across the organization. Default to keeping your documentation open and keep sharing knowledge as a standard practice.

“I typically recommend teams develop working agreements to call out how an individual and their team want to use the technology to stay connected - otherwise we create rework or experience mis-direction.”

Simple first step:

Everyone has different working styles, to take out the guess-work, create **team working agreements** to determine how you best work with others.



A look to the future

Using Atlassian as a case study, Mark shared how his experience has changed as our company has grown. Atlassian had 3,000 employees when he joined three years ago. Now we have 10,000 employees. When asked about how connection has evolved at Atlassian - what we've done right, and what we can do better - Mark shared a few reflections on visibility, communication, and technology.

“ At Atlassian, we are really good communicators - we share information, make it open, and welcome feedback - I think as organizations get bigger, this tends to get lost...so the fact that we emphasize keeping lines of communication open has been critical to enabling better team connection.

On where and what we are working towards, Mark shared that as we scale, we need to keep intentional practices top-of-mind to maintain alignment and connection.

“How our teams worked even 3 years ago may no longer work today...that’s because we’ve tripled in size and there’s a need to evolve everything we do, including practices like cross-team planning and dependency management, so we stay aligned with Atlassian’s goals.”

Whether your organization is growing from 10 to 100 or 10,000 to 50,000 - team connection is an evolving component and critical ingredient to success. By fostering strong team connection at every level and embracing technology and data, each one of us can pave the way for a promising future.