How to write mandates

Why mandates?

We are based on autonomy and decentralisation. Mandates are the building blocks by which we decentralise and mitigate any concentration of power.

We divide all the different types of decision we have to make into mandates, and then we distribute these mandates to the people best able to carry them out. We trust them to do just that, and we hold them accountable if they don't.

So the mandate for a circle or role defines which decisions it can make.

Taking care of our mandates — recording them, communicating them, updating them — is *critical* to how we manage ourselves without managers.

What's in a mandate?

A mandate has three parts:

> - a **purpose** — the result we want to bring about (e.g. for XR UK the purpose might be 'Achievement of the three demands');
> - some clear **accountabilities** — the activities we will do to bring about the result;
> - some **domains**, if they’re needed — the resources (e.g. PA system) or spaces (e.g. website, social media presence) to which we need to regulate access.

What makes a good mandate?

- **Short** — rebels need to be able to scan mandates quickly to find the right team, so try to make this easy.
- **Clear** — use plain does-what-it-says-on-the-tin terms that rebels don't need training to understand.
- **Specific** — each circle or role has a purpose which is part of, or contributes to, the wider circle of which it is part. So focus on what your part of that wider purpose is, and avoid overlapping with areas that other circles might think are part of their mandate.

Notes:

- None of this means that your team cannot create richly described visions of the world you would like to bring into being, or the strategy by which you might do this. If that helps you achieve your mandate, do it. But it is separate from your mandate, and serves a different function.
- If circles *do* feel that their mandates are overlapping unhelpfully, then we count this as a tension and one or both circles may work on a proposal to resolve it. This is part of how the wider Self-Organising System works.

Tips for writing mandates

Purpose

Everything starts with the **purpose**. This is the outcome that your team exists to bring about.

Why purpose matters - a short anecdote from history

> “In 1962, President John F Kennedy visited NASA for the first time. During his tour of the facility, he met a janitor who was carrying a broom down the hallway. The President then casually asked the janitor what he did for NASA, and the janitor replied, "I’m helping put a man on the moon."
>
> The janitor knew something that most of us struggle with, the purpose of his work. He kept the building clean so that the scientists, engineers, and astronauts could focus on their mission of putting "man on the moon". They did not have to worry about spending their time on trashcans, bathrooms, or hallways. He did that for them. He saw where his contribution fit in the organization. He connected his purpose with theirs. [source]

How does your purpose connect with achieving XR's demands?

Try answering one or more of these questions:

- What would it look like if your team were wildly successful?
- If I fulfilled my purpose, there would be… [what?]
- We imagine a world where… [what? but keep it specific: remember this is what *you and your team* are creating, not the whole movement]

You should be able to use your answer as a purpose statement.

You can do whatever it takes to achieve your purpose.

What is the point of ‘purpose’?

1. Rebels across the movement can see how their team plays its part in achieving the XR demands.
2. Rebels can see how the organism works and how the pieces work together (like seeing how an organism has a respiratory system, a digestive system, a locomotive system, and how the smaller parts — the bronchioles, the kidneys, the feet and toes — play their parts).
3. Rebels can easily locate the part of the movement that serves a particular function (if you know something that would make the respiratory system work better, you need a way of finding the relevant part or organ).

The movement is complex, but by representing its hierarchy of purpose we make it as simple as possible to understand how it works, and empower rebels to take action to help it work better.

Some Do's and Don't's when writing Purpose statements

Do

1. Keep it as short as possible (there are a lot of teams; rebels haven’t got time to read an essay about each one).
2. Keep it simple and able to stand on its own.
3. Keep it practical. Ground the vision in an achievable outcome.
4. Check that the purpose can reasonably be understood as a subset of the purpose of the broader circle it sits within (the broader circle cannot distribute power to you that it doesn’t itself have)
5. Be clear about how the purpose contributes to the goals of broader circles, but...

Don't

1. ...Define the purpose in such a way that it requires other circles (or the whole movement) to do things in a particular way — that would not be self-organising.
2. Refer to other strategies, policies or mandates that rebels have to read in order fully to understand the purpose (possible exceptions to this are the demands, and the principles and values, which all rebels can be expected to know).
3. Include ‘representing’ a group or individual: the purpose is about how the work serves the wider goal of the organism, not about how one team projects its collective voice to it.
4. Include a list of several activities (these may fit better as Accountabilities) or goals — though you can have one end-point with several attributes.
5. Define a purpose that is wider than the circle itself can achieve — in other words a purpose that depends heavily on effort from the rest of the movement to accomplish fully. It’s great to be ambitious about what a team can achieve, but don’t be

completely unrealistic.

Accountabilities

Accountabilities are the things that a circle or role does day-to-day, the most common activities to achieve the purpose.

Try completing the sentence, "I was watching the team (or role) for a while and I saw them..."

- contacting..., communicating..., coordinating...
- creating..., producing..., designing..., making...
- identifying..., analysing..., evaluating...
- supporting..., assisting..., caring for...
- planning..., deciding...

Try to avoid words like 'ensuring' because they usually imply controlling someone else's work.

Think about all the work your circle/role needs to do to fulfil its purpose.

Again, try to keep each accountability to a single concise sentence, so that all rebels can grasp them quickly.

The holder of a mandate has the *authority to do whatever they need to get their accountabilities done*, unless it impacts someone else's domain.

(Still want more? Check out this blog post from HolacracyOne for some further guidance on writing accountabilities.)

Domains

Domains are things that a role has exclusive control over. These could be physical things (like a PA system or greenhouses) or more abstract things (like payment processes, or event lists).

Only add a domain to a mandate if there is a clear reason for it. It serves as a kind of "Hands off" or "No trespassing" sign. But if there's little risk of others interfering, it doesn't need mentioning. Most mandates don't have domains.

What harm would be caused by having no exclusivity? If a role wants the PA system for an event, but finds it has been taken to another event, the former role experiences harm. If lots of people can add, edit or delete events from a list, there could be harm (e.g. from mistaken deletions), but there may not be. Is it safe enough to try?

Scope - important

A circle cannot delegate a mandate that has a wider scope than its own mandate:

- it can't give a role or subcircle a purpose that is not a part of achieving its own purpose;
- it cannot make someone accountable for doing something that it is not itself accountable for;
- it can't add a domain to a mandate unless it already controls that domain.

Example mandate

Let's say our circle has been given a mandate to organise a fundraising party.

We decide we need a role for finding the venue, which we'll call Venue Finder. Now we need to give the role a mandate so that someone has the authority to find the venue.

> **Purpose**: The party is held in a location with space for dancing and awesome acoustics.
>
> **Accountabilities**:
>
> - Contacting and maintaining a list of potential venues
> - Evaluating the potential venues in terms of access, cost, and other criteria agreed with relevant roles
> - Booking a venue for the date of the party

Should the Venue Finder role have 'Food and drinks tables' as a **domain**? If they did, the Catering role would have to get permission from the Venue Finder if they wanted to move the tables or buy more tables. It is for the circle to decide, when creating the mandate, whether this is necessary or would prevent the Catering role from fulfilling its own purpose and accountabilities.
