

Effective Team Working



Name: _____

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Introduction

Information and skills you will acquire

Effective Team Working is one of a valuable and user-friendly new series of easy-to-read booklets created specially to help you develop at work. The materials have been created from actual experience in workplace training. Experts have pooled their knowledge and experience to involve you in learning new skills and building on those you already have. The booklet is divided into clear *sections*, containing specially devised *activities* and a *mini project*, to allow you to practise as you learn.

Effective Team Working will enable you to:

Understand what is meant by teamwork and identify when a team is not working properly.

Review your own team and your role as a team member.

Understand how people fit into a team and why some people do not.

Overcome some of the enemies of teamwork.

Approach changes in teamwork more positively.

Understand the importance of supporting team members.

Getting the most out of this booklet

You may want to work your way through the booklet from start to finish or focus on an area of interest.

Once you have completed the questionnaire on page 4 you will be able to see clearly which topics you need most help with, and which areas you can safely leave out.

The questionnaire will also allow you to create your own learning plan for which an example and space is provided on page 5.

You may want to ask your supervisor or another colleague for their views on the areas you could work on, or for help with the activities in the booklet.

As you may want to use the booklet for future reference, you may want to write the answers out in rough first and then write them in the booklet.

Section I

WORKING IN A TEAM

What is meant by teamwork?

There is often confusion about what we mean by teamwork. Quite often people think that because they work in the same room or for the same supervisor, they are in a team. This is not always the case. In this booklet we will be asking you to think about the team you work in, so that you will get a better understanding of how your team works and how you can work better within your team.

There are a number of examples of good teamwork that can be used. Let's look at a football team; the players do not try to keep the ball to themselves. They pay special attention to each other's unique skills and use these to benefit the team as a whole. Some people are better at penalties and some people are better at defence than attack. When you are watching a game you can see that they constantly shout and banter to each other so that players are in the right place to take the ball.

Teamwork involves a number of things:

- working to the same goals
- following what other people are doing within the team
- making the most of people's skills
- not working in isolation, but building on what other people are doing
- passing on information to other members of the team
- giving each other the necessary support to complete tasks effectively.

Activity I

What do you think teamwork is?

What are the three most important qualities that an effective team member can show?

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 22.

Do's and don'ts of teamwork

Do:

- make sure you know the goals of any team you are part of
- try to focus on the overall goals of the team and not your own personal task
- be flexible about the range of tasks you do
- try not to avoid communicating with people you don't like
- support your colleagues if something is urgent and they need help
- pass on useful information rather than keeping it to yourself
- ask your supervisor if you are unsure about what is the most urgent thing that needs doing
- try to make the most of team meetings
- suggest new ideas.

Don't:

- get involved in negative talk and cynicism
- be afraid to change your ways
- be unco-operative
- avoid working with other team members.

Activity 2

Why is this team working badly?

Nita, Pat, Kath and Ed work together in a school kitchen. They are supervised by Mavis. Pat and Ed don't get on and refuse to work with, or speak to, each other. Kath is moody and blames everyone else for her mistakes. Nita is always friendly and works hard to keep the peace. Nita also does the lion's share of the work, although Pat, a personal friend of Mavis, claims that she is doing all the work. Pat is the only person who has the recipes for the pie fillings and she will not pass them on to anyone else. This makes it difficult for the other team members to complete their tasks in time for the mid-day sitting.

The team's performance is very poor, with complaints from teachers and parents and a bad outbreak of food poisoning. The team is told that one of the main problems is lack of teamwork. They each do their own tasks and will not help each other when there is a rush to get things done in time.

The team is very worried. All the members realise that they will have to make more of an effort to work as a team. An adviser is called in to talk to them and find out their views on what can be done. List some of the things the adviser could suggest to Nita, Pat, Kath and Ed.

Activity 3

Take a look at your own team.

Ask two or three of your team colleagues the following questions to build up a picture of your own work team. Take a separate sheet of paper and make a note of their responses, or give them a sheet with the questions on it and ask them to write their answers down. Look at any similarities and differences you find in the answers.

Who are the members of the team?

What are the different roles that different people have within the team?

Is there a team leader?

What are the aims and goals of the team?

Overall, how do you think the team works together?

Key Learning Points

- Team work involves planning, working towards the same goals, understanding that we are all different, making the most of people's skills, working together, passing on information to other members of the team and giving each other support.
- We can tell when people are not working properly as a team when they are not interested in what is going on within the team as a whole, when they want to work alone, when they do not talk to other team members and when they do not want to help their team colleagues and there is no understanding of team work.
- Teamworking is the modern way for working in most organisations today.

Section 2

BEING AN EFFECTIVE TEAM MEMBER

One way in which you can become a more effective team member, is by understanding the different people in your team, and how the differences between people can help a team to work together successfully.

We all have stereotypes or images in our minds of what different people are like. For example, we have an idea of what rich people look like and how they behave. We also have ideas of how people on welfare benefits look and behave. The same thing happens for people in particular jobs.

For instance, if you have a youthful looking supervisor, you may wonder if he/she can do their job properly.

Fitting into a team

Every work team has its own characteristics and there can often be a lot of unspoken pressure to 'fit in' with a team.

It may happen that your team is very friendly, you tell jokes and you play bowls together at lunchtime. But there is one person though who doesn't join in with this. You think this affects the way the team works together. It could be that you are not accepting that this person has a right to be different.

Other ways in which people don't fit in can be if they 'rock the boat' or threaten other people's jobs. Take a look at the following case study.

Ahmed, Ashkan and Bill work together on a reception desk. They have worked together for years and do as little work as possible. A new receptionist is recruited called Karen. Karen is very keen, she wants to fill the racks with information leaflets and do everything possible to provide a good service. Karen is frozen out by the rest of the team and is even reported to the supervisor when she does a minor thing wrong. She leaves the job after two months.

There are lots of reasons why a person may not fit into a team. Other team members may feel that the person is too aggressive, too sensitive, too eager and so on. A person will often not be accepted into a team if he or she is considered to be different.

Activity 4

What happens when one person does not feel part of the team?

Can you think of what can happen to a team when one member is considered to be different and does not fit in? You may be able to draw on your own experience here.

FEEDBACK: There can be many effects when one team member is considered to be different and not fully accepted by the other members. Possibly the most serious effects are:

- team members not talking to each other
- not passing on information
- not helping each other to achieve the teams goals
- people leaving their jobs
- poor quality work
- poor motivation
- stress.

People are different

Teamwork is very much to do with accepting that people are different and do not come in ideal packages. There will nearly always be something that you do not like about someone. To work well within a team you need to forget about what it is that you do not like about that person and focus on the task that needs to be done.

Differences within the team can be very positive, because they help to get things done. For example, a team needs a talkative person to find out what is going on in the organisation, it needs a 'fussy' person to make sure everything is being done properly, it needs a person who is very motivated to ensure that things get done in time.

The enemies of teamwork

Teams do not work well if any members are negative about their work. Most of us have at some time been in a work situation where one or two colleagues have felt very upset about their jobs. Everything they say and do is negative. It is very difficult to move forward as a team with such people.

If you find yourself having to work with people like this it can be very draining and frustrating.

There are a number of things you can do if you find yourself in this sort of team:

- Do not allow yourself to join in with the negativity, which is all too easy to do.
- Try to be a positive role model and supporter of younger and more inexperienced people.
- Listen to these people for a short while, as they may have cause to be upset and then move on to the task that has to be done.
- Do what you can to keep your own spirits up; do not worry about work at home.
- Praise negative people for what they do well, a boost to their confidence may help them.
- Do not ignore or exclude negative people, it will only make it worse.

Activity 7

Beneficial teamwork

Tick the behaviours you think are beneficial to teamwork:

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> laughing | <input type="checkbox"/> energy | <input type="checkbox"/> concentration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gossiping | <input type="checkbox"/> criticising | <input type="checkbox"/> not talking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> confidence | <input type="checkbox"/> understanding | <input type="checkbox"/> organising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> being creative | <input type="checkbox"/> supporting | <input type="checkbox"/> trusting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> competing with each other | | <input type="checkbox"/> planning |

FEEDBACK:

- Laughing, trusting and understanding – these are all beneficial for creating a good team spirit.
- Energy, concentration and being creative – these are all good for teamwork, as they help to get the task done properly.
- Gossiping, criticising and not talking can all be very damaging to a team. People need to communicate with each other about their work. It is much better to focus on what can be done to improve things in the future than to criticise what has happened in the past.

- Competing with each other is not beneficial to team because people are thinking about their own goals rather than those of the team, although a bit a healthy competition can help to get a job done.
- Individual and team confidence is beneficial to the team. If people feel confident they are more likely to support colleagues and less likely to use insecure behaviours such as not passing on information and spreading gossip.
- Planning and organising is essential to good teamwork. If this does not happen, information may be missing, quality standards may fall and it may also affect how other people do their jobs.

Coping with change

When there are changes in an organisation due to new procedures or standards, new teams are often made. This means that along with anxieties about the new things that have to be done, the team members also have to work together in a different way.

Many people do not like change. They like their own familiar workspace. People get used to chatting to the same colleagues and putting their belongings in the same drawer or locker. When these things change they feel unsettled. It is natural for people to have these sorts of feelings.

Part of the process of getting used to working in the new team is to accept that things can't always be the way you want them. This will help you to move on and work more happily in the new team.

Activity 8

Fear of change

What behaviours have you seen in people when they are afraid of changes that are happening to their work?

FEEDBACK:

- Many people become fearful about changes and hanker after the way things used to be done. It therefore takes that much longer to get the new way of working established.
- Some people may be unco-operative, for example, by not passing on information and not helping others out within the team.
- Some people may not be friendly to their new team colleagues.
- Other people complain a lot about the changes.
- Some people find reasons why things can't be done e.g. the machine doesn't work properly.
- Some people become unhappy and don't put as much energy as they could into their work.
- Some people become anxious and stressed.

Changes in your team

When change happens you may begin to have ideas of your own about ways which would help your new team to work more effectively. This is much more positive than rejecting the new team because it is not the way you have always worked. If you are in this situation and have some good ideas about changes that would improve the new team, talk to your teammates or supervisor about them. Regular meetings help the team.

Key Learning Points

- Accept team members for what they are – different qualities and skills are essential for effective team working. Do not judge people superficially.
- If there are problems and conflicts within your team try to talk to people to find out what is going on.
- Do not let any negative people ruin your team. Put your team on the right track by acting and talking positively.
- Try to accept that changes are always going to happen at work and you have to make the most of your work situation.
- Put forward new ideas if you think they will help the team to work more effectively.
- Arrange regular team meetings.

Section 3

HELPING YOUR TEAM TO WORK TOGETHER

Communication is the key to teamwork

If a member of your team is having difficulty with working as part of the team there are a number of things that you can do to help.

You need to talk to the people with difficulties, even though they may seem to want to work alone. If you isolate them it will make them worse. Tell them what is going on in the team and make it seem worthwhile to communicate with other people.

If you find out that they need support with an urgent deadline, help them out. This way they can see the real benefits of teamwork and they may even help other people in future.

It is more difficult if you have two or three people in a team who work as a team within a team. In this situation you should make friends with them and try to get them interested in what is happening in the team as a whole. Again, isolating a team within a team will only make matters worse.

Here are a few hints which can help communication:

- if you can, talking face to face is always more friendly than on the phone
- chatting is a good way to have easy work relationships
- blaming people for work problems is unhelpful
- trying not to form a clique or have special pals
- including people in what is happening
- laughing together.

Activity 9

What can you do to help?

What would you do if:

1. Someone in the team starts criticising another teammate who is a friend of yours?
2. A teammate blames you for poor quality work which was nothing to do with you?
3. Two members of the team are clearly very depressed?

Enjoying your work

Work can be dull, upsetting, frustrating and many other nasty things. There are always highs and lows. Try not to always be in a low state of mind. Ways to make your work more enjoyable are:

- think positively about the work that you do – is it really that awful?
- try to see the good qualities in your teammates
- chat with people and get involved in conversations
- try to ignore the things that niggle you
- try to see the funny side of things
- don't personalise what is happening – a job is part of an organisation, not part of you.

Mini Project

Ask some members of your own, or another team, to complete this questionnaire. You should copy points 1 and 2 onto a separate sheet to give to your colleagues.

1. How would you rate the following aspects of teamwork within your team?

Please circle one number using the following scale:
1 = low, 3 = medium, 5 = high.

Communication	1	2	3	4	5
Support	1	2	3	4	5
Sharing and giving praise	1	2	3	4	5
Enjoying work	1	2	3	4	5

2. If you rated your team low to medium on any of the above aspects of teamwork, what changes could team members make to improve the team?

When the questionnaires are returned to you, compare the different answers you get from your colleagues. Use the questions below to make an analysis of the responses you received:

- Which aspects of teamworking did your colleagues give similar scores?
- Which of the above aspects of teamworking were given low scores?
- Which suggestions do you think would be the most effective?

If the responses are similar, you can be fairly sure that the ratings reflect what is actually happening within the team. You may like to discuss the outcome of this questionnaire with your supervisor.

Action Plan

What can you do to improve team working in your team?

Key Learning Points

- Help people who do not want to work within the team by: making friends with them, talking to them and involving them. Help them out if they need support. Help them to see the positive benefits of team work.
- Don't criticise your teammates if you think you are a better worker than they are. This will only cause conflict and tension. Instead, get yourself noticed as a good worker and supporter of other team members.
- Avoid criticising people, instead talk about things that have happened and what can be done to put them right.
- Praise your teammates, this will make them feel more valued as team members.
- Try to put yourself in a mind state so that work can be enjoyable rather than dreaded. Don't take what happens to you at work too personally – your job is not part of your personality.

FeedBack toActivities

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 1:

Effective team members will work well together by using each other's **skills** and letting other members of the team know what they are doing. Team members are also there to **give each other help**, so those individual team members complete their tasks successfully. Team members **communicate well** and **trust** each other.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 2:

These are some of the suggestions that an adviser might make to Nita, Pat, Ed and Kath:

- more flexibility about the range of tasks that they do
- showing each other how tasks are done
- talking to each other
- clearing up after each other if there are tight deadlines to reach
- planning together what needs to be done and the timings at the beginning of each day
- not blaming each other for mistakes but trying to overcome them
- trying to be more positive and cheerful about the work
- sharing the credit for work done
- making sure that the work is allocated fairly
- helping and supporting each other.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 6:

One thing you could do is to chat to Veronica on her own and find out what is happening from her point of view. You would need to be friendly with her for a while before you have any chance of getting her to open up. It could be that Veronica's isolation from the rest of the team is making her very upset and angry and causing her to react in an aggressive way to colleagues.

You will only find out what is causing Veronica's anger if you regularly talk to her. If Veronica really wants to be accepted within the team this will make her feel more positive about it. If you help her out if she has an urgent deadline to meet this will also make her feel less isolated.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 9:

1. It is best to begin by pointing out that the person in question is your friend. Make sure that the conversation is about events and refuse to listen to personal insults. You should suggest that the person concerned should be involved in the conversation. Do not make a judgement until you have the full story.
2. Talk to the teammate about what they thought happened. Chat through what you thought happened with both your teammate and the supervisor there and discuss actions, which can be taken to avoid this happening in the future.
3. Carry on talking to these teammates and involve them in what is happening. Try to get them to talk about what is wrong but don't pry. Ask them how they are and give them support if necessary. Give them time to get over it.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 10:

The rest of the team can do a number of things to help Sonia to become happier in her work. These are:

- making a special effort to talk to Sonia and involve her in what they are doing
- if possible, to give her some special responsibility to acknowledge that she has worked for the company for a long time
- to make sure that there is a fair system for deciding who has to work the extra hours
- at team meetings talking generally about how important it is to keep a positive outlook on the work
- move the conversation on to other things when Sonia starts to moan.

Have you ever worked in a team where you felt there were some basic problems to be overcome? We can't avoid working with other people. Everything we use in our day to day lives and most of the things we do are there because people have worked in teams to achieve them. You may think that you can work better if you are left alone, but this is not how real progress has been made over the Ages.

In this booklet you will cover skills and techniques which will improve your teamworking. You will also find information and activities on how to overcome the barriers to teamworking.

Workbase Training is a national specialist organisation for workforce learning and development. These booklets are based on work with over 20,000 employees within 120 organisations since 1980. Workbase is a not-for-profit charitable company, limited by guarantee, and is supported by the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress and other unions.

The Campaign for Learning is a national charity seeking to create an appetite for learning in everyone. Its four areas of work are Workplace Learning & Skills, Family Learning, Learning to Learn and influencing policy. It co-ordinates Learning at Work Day and a Family Learning Festival each year. The Campaign is supported by the government, a wide range of businesses, local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and individuals.

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