

Teamwork Skills in University

TEAMWORK SKILLS IN UNIVERSITY

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PREFACE

This resource was created for BUSI 1215 students at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. A major source used to create this resource (with permission) is:

[**Entrepreneurial Action Spring 2022**](#) created by KPU ENTR 4110 students Jamie Verschoor, Rebekah Lin, Vanshika Kesar and Prabhdeep Randay.

Additional text and content was used under the Creative Commons and OER, and come from these sources:

[**Fundamentals of Business: Canadian Edition**](#)

[**eCampusOntario – Create a Team Charter**](#)

[**Team Meeting Planner | PATHS Teamwork Series**](#)

[**eCampusOntario – Communication for Business Professionals**](#)

[**OpenStax – Organizational Behavior**](#)

We express our gratitude for the authors of these works.

Kwantlen Polytechnic University is located on the unceded and ancestral territories of the Kwantlen, Musqueam, Katzie, Semiahmoo, Tsawwassen, Qayqayt and Kwikwetlem peoples.

PART I

OVERVIEW OF TEAMWORK

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

1. Define different types of teams and describe key characteristics.
2. Explain why organizations use teams.
3. Identify factors that contribute to team cohesion or division.
4. Describe the importance of learning to participate in team-based activities.
5. Identify the skills needed by team members and the roles that members of a team might play.
6. Explain the skills and behaviours that foster effective team leadership.



Show What You Know



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=26#h5p-1>

1.

THE TEAM AND THE ORGANIZATION

What Is a Team? How Does Teamwork Work?

A team (or a work team) is a group of people with complementary skills who work together to achieve a specific goal. ^[1]

Teams Versus Groups

Every team is organized around a shared objective ... there is something to accomplish.

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.” – Andrew Carnegie

A group is different. A group of department-store managers, for example, might meet monthly to discuss their progress in cutting plant costs. However, each manager is focused on the goals of his or her department because each is held accountable for meeting those goals.

Some Key Characteristics of Teams

To put teams in perspective, let's identify five key characteristics.

Teams: ^[2]

1. Share accountability for achieving specific common goals
2. Function interdependently
3. Require stability
4. Hold authority and decision-making power
5. Operate in a social context

Why Organizations Build Teams

Why do major organizations now rely so much on teams to improve operations? Executives at Xerox have reported that team-based operations are 30 percent more productive than conventional operations. General Mills says that factories organized around team activities are 40 percent more productive than traditionally organized factories. FedEx says that teams reduced service errors (lost packages, incorrect bills) by 13 percent in the first year.^[3]

Today it seems obvious that teams can address a variety of challenges in the world of corporate activity. Before we go any further, however, we should remind ourselves that the data we’ve just cited aren’t necessarily definitive. For one thing, they may not be objective—companies are more likely to report successes than failures. As a matter of fact, teams don’t always work. According to one study, team-based projects fail 50 to 70 percent of the time.^[4]

The Effect of Teams on Performance

Research shows that companies build and support teams because of their effect on overall workplace performance, both organizational and individual. If we examine the impact of team-based operations according to a wide range of relevant criteria, we find that overall organizational performance generally improves. The following figure lists several areas in which we can analyze workplace performance and indicates the percentage of companies that have reported improvements in each area.

Area of Performance	Firms Reporting Improvement
Product and service quality	70%
Customer service	67%
Worker satisfaction	66%
Quality of work life	63%
Productivity	61%
Competitiveness	50%
Profitability	45%
Absenteeism turnover	23%

Adapted from Lawler, E. E., Mohaman, S. A., & Ledford, G. E. (1992). *Creating high performance*

organizations: Practices and results of employee involvement and total quality in Fortune 1000 Companies. San Francisco: Wiley.

2.

WHY TEAMWORK WORKS

Now that we know a little bit about how teams work, we need to ask ourselves why they work. Not surprisingly, this is a fairly complex issue. In this section, we'll explore why teams are often effective and when they are ineffective.

Factors in Effective Teamwork

First, let's begin by identifying several factors that contribute to effective teamwork. Teams are most effective when the following factors are met:

- Members communicate effectively.
- Members depend on each other. When team members rely on each other to get the job done, team productivity and efficiency tend to be high.
- Members trust one another.
- Members work better together than individually. When team members perform better as a group than alone, collective performance exceeds individual performance.
- Members become boosters. When each member is encouraged by other team members to do his or her best, collective results improve.
- Team members enjoy being on the team.
- Leadership rotates.

Some of these factors may seem intuitive. Because such issues are rarely clear-cut, we need to examine the issue of group effectiveness from another perspective—one that considers the effects of factors that aren't quite so straightforward.

Group Cohesiveness

The idea of group cohesiveness refers to the attractiveness of a team to its members. If a group is high in cohesiveness, membership is quite satisfying to its members. If it's low in cohesiveness, members are unhappy with it and may try to leave it. [\[5\]](#)

What Makes a Team Cohesive?

Numerous factors may contribute to team cohesiveness, but in this section, we'll focus on five of the most important:

1. **Size.** The bigger the team, the less satisfied members tend to be. When teams get too large, members find it harder to interact closely with other members; a few members tend to dominate team activities, and conflict becomes more likely.
2. **Similarity.** People usually get along better with people like themselves, and teams are generally more cohesive when members perceive fellow members as people who share their own attitudes and experience.
3. **Success.** When teams are successful, members are satisfied, and other people are more likely to be attracted to their teams.
4. **Exclusiveness.** The harder it is to get into a group, the happier the people who are already in it. Team status also increases members' satisfaction.
5. **Competition.** Membership is valued more highly when there is motivation to achieve common goals and outperform other teams.

Maintaining team focus on broad organizational goals is crucial. If members get too wrapped up in immediate team goals, the whole team may lose sight of the larger organizational goals toward which it's supposed to be working. Let's look at some factors that can erode team performance.

Groupthink

It's easy for leaders to direct members toward team goals when members are all on the same page—when there's a basic willingness to conform to the team's rules. When there's too much conformity, however, the group can become ineffective: it may resist fresh ideas and, what's worse, may end up adopting its own dysfunctional tendencies as its way of doing things. Such tendencies may also encourage a phenomenon known as groupthink —the tendency to conform to group pressure in making decisions, while failing to think critically or to consider outside influences.

Groupthink is often cited as a factor in the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger in January 1986: engineers from a supplier of components for the rocket booster warned that the launch might be risky because of the weather but were persuaded to set aside their warning by NASA officials who wanted the launch to proceed as scheduled.^[6]

Motivation and Frustration

Remember that teams are composed of people, and whatever the roles they happen to be playing at a given

time, people are subject to psychological ups and downs. As members of workplace teams, they need motivation, and when motivation is low, so are effectiveness and productivity. The difficulty of maintaining a high level of motivation is the chief cause of frustration among members of teams. As such, it's also a chief cause of ineffective teamwork, and that's one reason why more employers now look for the ability to develop and sustain motivation when they're hiring new managers. ^[7]

Other Factors that Erode Performance

Let's take a quick look at three other obstacles to success in introducing teams into an organization: ^[8]

- Unwillingness to cooperate. Failure to cooperate can occur when members don't or won't commit to a common goal or set of activities. What if, for example, half the members of a product-development team want to create a brand-new product and half want to improve an existing product? The entire team may get stuck on this point of contention for weeks or even months. Lack of cooperation between teams can also be problematic to an organization.
- Lack of managerial support. Every team requires organizational resources to achieve its goals, and if management isn't willing to commit the needed resources— say, funding or key personnel—a team will probably fall short of those goals.
- Failure of managers to delegate authority. Team leaders are often chosen from the ranks of successful supervisors—first-line managers give instructions on a day-to-day basis and expect to have them carried out. This approach to workplace activities may not work very well in leading a team—a position in which success depends on building a consensus and letting people make their own decisions.

3.

THE TEAM AND ITS MEMBERS

“Life Is All about Group Work”

“I’ll work extra hard and do it myself, but please don’t make me have to work in a group.”

Like it or not, you’ve probably already notice that you’ll have team-based assignments in college. More than two-thirds of all students report having participated in the work of an organized team, and if you’re in business school, you will almost certainly find yourself engaged in team-based activities.^[9]

Why do we put so much emphasis on something that, reportedly, makes many students feel anxious and academically drained? Here’s one college student’s practical-minded answer to this question:

“In the real world, you have to work with people. You don’t always know the people you work with, and you don’t always get along with them. Your boss won’t particularly care, and if you can’t get the job done, your job may end up on the line. Life is all about group work, whether we like it or not. And school, in many ways, prepares us for life, including working with others.”^[10]

She’s right. In placing so much emphasis on teamwork skills and experience, business colleges are doing the responsible thing—preparing students for the business world. A survey of Fortune 1000 companies reveals that 79 percent use self-managing teams and 91 percent use other forms of employee work groups. Another survey found that the skill that most employers value in new employees is the ability to work in teams.^[11] Consider the advice of former Chrysler Chairman Lee Iacocca: “A major reason that capable people fail to advance is that they don’t work well with their colleagues.”^[12] The importance of the ability to work in teams was confirmed in a survey of leadership practices of more than sixty of the world’s top organizations.^[13]

When top executives in these organizations were asked what causes the careers of high-potential leadership candidates to derail, 60 percent of the organizations cited “inability to work in teams.” Interestingly, only 9 percent attributed the failure of these executives to advance to “lack of technical ability.”

To put it in plain terms, the question is not whether you’ll find yourself working as part of a team. You will. The question is whether you’ll know how to participate successfully in team-based activities.

Will You Make a Good Team Member?

What if your instructor decides to divide the class into teams and assigns each team to develop a new product plus a business plan to get it on the market? What teamwork skills could you bring to the table, and what teamwork skills do you need to improve? Do you possess qualities that might make you a good team leader?

What Skills Does the Team Need?

Sometimes we hear about a sports team made up of mostly average players who win a championship because of coaching genius, flawless teamwork, and superhuman determination.^[14] But not terribly often. In fact, we usually hear about such teams simply because they're newsworthy—exceptions to the rule. Typically a team performs well because its members possess some level of talent. Members' talents must also be managed in a collective effort to achieve a common goal.

In the final analysis, a team can succeed only if its members provide the skills that need managing. In particular, every team requires some mixture of four sets of skills:

- **Communication Skills.** Because how you communicate can positively and negatively affect relationships within the team and outside the team with managers, customers, vendors, etc.
- **Technical skills.** Because teams must perform certain tasks, they need people with the skills to perform them. For example, if your project calls for a lot of math work, it's good to have someone with the necessary quantitative skills.
- **Decision-making and problem-solving skills.** Because every task is subject to problems, and because handling every problem means deciding on the best solution, it's good to have members who are skilled in identifying problems, evaluating alternative solutions, and deciding on the best options.
- **Interpersonal skills.** Because teams need direction and motivation and depend on communication, every group benefits from members who know how to listen, provide feedback, and resolve conflict. Some members must also be good at communicating the team's goals and needs to outsiders.

The key is ultimately to have the right mix of these skills. Remember, too, that no team needs to possess all these skills—never mind the right balance of them—from day one. In many cases, a team gains certain skills only when members volunteer for certain tasks and perfect their skills in the process of performing them. For the same reason, effective teamwork develops over time as team members learn how to handle various team-based tasks. In a sense, teamwork is always work in progress.

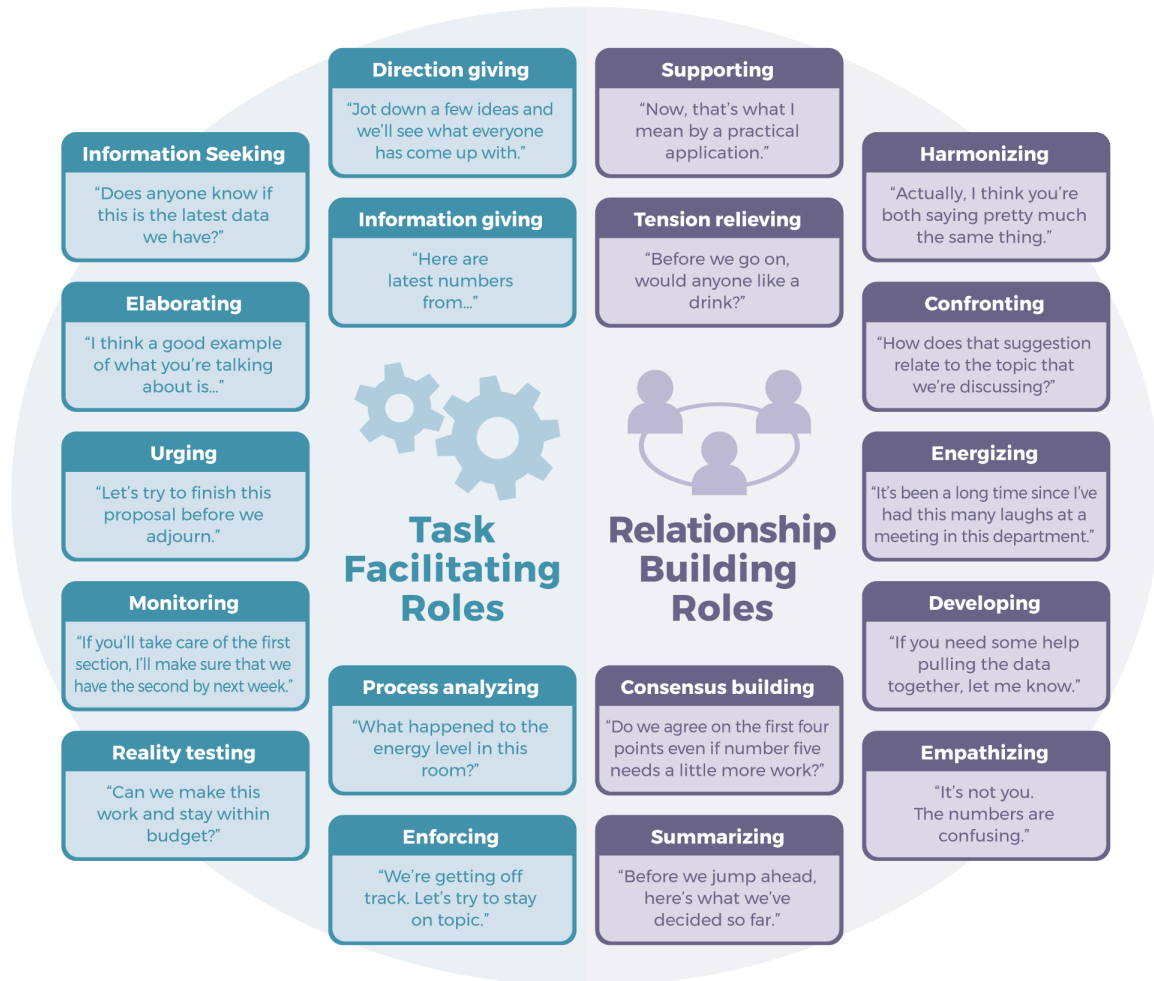
What Roles Do Team Members Play?

As a student and later in the workplace, you'll be a member of a team more often than a leader. Team members can have as much impact on a team's success as its leaders. A key is the quality of the contributions they make in performing non-leadership roles.^[15]

What, exactly, are those roles? At this point, you've probably concluded that every team faces two basic challenges:

1. Accomplishing its assigned task
2. Maintaining or improving group cohesiveness

Whether you affect the team's work positively or negatively depends on the extent to which you help it or hinder it in meeting these two challenges.^[16] We can thus divide teamwork roles into two categories, depending on which of these two challenges each role addresses. These two categories (task-facilitating roles and relationship-building roles) are summarized here:



Task-Facilitating Roles

Task-facilitating roles address challenge number one—accomplishing the team goals. As you can see from Table P.6, such roles include not only providing information when someone else needs it but also asking for it when you need it. In addition, it includes monitoring (checking on progress) and enforcing (making sure that team decisions are carried out). Task facilitators are especially valuable when assignments aren't clear or when progress is too slow.

Relationship-Building Roles

When you challenge unmotivated behavior or help other team members understand their roles, you're performing a relationship-building role and addressing challenge number two—maintaining or improving group cohesiveness. This type of role includes activities that improve team “chemistry,” from empathizing to confronting.

Bear in mind three points about this model: (1) Teams are most effective when there's a good balance between task facilitation and relationship-building; (2) it's hard for any given member to perform both types of roles, as some people are better at focusing on tasks and others on relationships; and (3) overplaying any facet of any role can easily become counterproductive. For example, elaborating on something may not be the best strategy when the team needs to make a quick decision; and consensus building may cause the team to overlook an important difference of opinion.

Blocking Roles

Finally, show what you know in terms of blocking behaviours and the tactics used when someone is using the behaviour. So-called blocking roles consist of behavior that inhibits either team performance or that of individual members. Every member of the team should know how to recognize blocking behavior. If teams don't confront dysfunctional members, they can destroy morale, hamper consensus building, create conflict, and hinder progress.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=30#h5p-2>

This is the end of the teamwork module! [Click here to start the Project Launch module.](#)

PART II

PROJECT LAUNCH

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

1. How to draw up a team charter and understand how this can help teams succeed.
2. Learn why trust is important, how to quantify trust, and learn multiple methods to improve trust in a group.
3. Explain what psychological safety is and how to build this.

INTRODUCTION

This module is centered around trust in teams. After learning how to develop a team charter, we will further explore what trust means and how it is used in various contexts.

Trust can be defined as:

“[The] assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something” (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definition 1a).

Additionally, it can be used to:

- *“Interpret what people say*
- *Describe behaviors*
- *Decide if we feel comfortable sharing information*
- *Indicate whether we feel other people have our interests at heart”*

(Trust Advisor, n.d., para 1)

No matter how it is defined, **lack of trust can be a common issue within various types of teams.**

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4.

CLASS TEAM PROJECTS

In your academic career you'll participate in a number of team projects. To get insider advice on how to succeed on team projects in college, let's look at some suggestions offered by students who have gone through this experience.^[17]

- Draw up a team charter. At the beginning of the project, draw up a team charter that includes: the goals of the group; ways to ensure that each team member's ideas are considered; timing and frequency of meeting. A more informal way to arrive at a team charter is to simply set some ground rules to which everyone agrees. Your instructor may also require you to sign an existing team contract or charter similar to the one below.
- Contribute your ideas. Share your ideas with your group. The worst that could happen is that they won't be used (which is what would happen if you kept quiet).
- Never miss a meeting or deadline. Pick a weekly meeting time and write it into your schedule as if it were a class. Never skip it.
- Be considerate of each other. Be patient, listen to everyone, involve everyone in decision making, avoid infighting, build trust.
- Create a process for resolving conflict. Do so before conflict arises. Set up rules to help the group decide how conflict will be handled.
- Use the strengths of each team member. All students bring different strengths. Utilize the unique value of each person.
- Don't do all the work yourself. Work with your team to get the work done. The project output is often less important than the experience.

What Does It Take to Lead a Team?

To borrow from Shakespeare, "Some people are born leaders, some achieve leadership, and some have leadership thrust upon them." At some point in a successful career, you will likely be asked to lead a team. What will you have to do to succeed as a leader?

Like so many of the questions that we ask in this book, this question doesn't have any simple answers. We can provide one broad answer: a leader must help members develop the attitudes and behavior that contribute to team success: interdependence, collective responsibility, shared commitment, and so forth.

Team leaders must be able to influence their team members. Notice that we say influence: except in unusual

circumstances, giving commands and controlling everything directly doesn't work very well.^[18] As one team of researchers puts it, team leaders are more effective when they work with members rather than on them.^[19] Hand-in-hand with the ability to influence is the ability to gain and keep the trust of team members. People aren't likely to be influenced by a leader whom they perceive as dishonest or selfishly motivated.

Assuming you were asked to lead a team, there are certain leadership skills and behaviours that would help you influence your team members and build trust. Let's look briefly at some of them:

- Demonstrate integrity. Do what you say you'll do and act in accordance with your stated values. Be honest in communicating and follow through on promises.
- Be clear and consistent. Let members know that you're certain about what you want and remember that being clear and consistent reinforces your credibility.
- Generate positive energy. Be optimistic and compliment team members. Recognize their progress and success.
- Acknowledge common points of view. Even if you're about to propose some kind of change, recognize the value of the views that members already hold in common.
- Manage agreement and disagreement. When members agree with you, confirm your shared point of view. When they disagree, acknowledge both sides of the issue and support your own with strong, clearly-presented evidence.
- Encourage and coach. Buoy up members when they run into new and uncertain situations and when success depends on their performing at a high level.
- Share information. Give members the information they need and let them know that you're knowledgeable about team tasks and individual talents. Check with team members regularly to find out what they're doing and how the job is progressing.

For this course, we will be using teams to learn in and outside of our formal class time. A team contract is important to ensure all members have input on how the team will work together. This contract can also be referenced if a team member is not working to the expectations.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=32#h5p-3>

Key Takeaways

Important terms and concepts

1. A team (or a work team) is a group of people with complementary skills and diverse areas of expertise who work together to achieve a specific goal.
2. Work teams have five key characteristics:
 - They are accountable for achieving specific common goals.
 - They function interdependently.
 - They are stable.
 - They have authority.
 - They operate in a social context.
3. Work teams may be of several types:
4. In the traditional manager-led team, the leader defines the team's goals and activities and is responsible for its achieving its assigned goals.
 - The leader of a self-managing team may determine overall goals, but employees control the activities needed to meet them.
 - A cross-functional team is designed to take advantage of the special expertise of members drawn from different functional areas of the company.
 - On virtual teams, geographically dispersed members interact electronically in the process of pursuing a common goal.
5. Group cohesiveness refers to the attractiveness of a team to its members. If a group is high in cohesiveness, membership is quite satisfying to its members; if it's low in cohesiveness, members are unhappy with it and may even try to leave it.
6. As the business world depends more and more on teamwork, it's increasingly important for incoming members of the workforce to develop skills and experience in team-based activities.
7. Every team requires some mixture of three skill sets:
 - Technical skills: skills needed to perform specific tasks
 - Decision-making and problem-solving skills: skills needed to identify problems,

evaluate alternative solutions, and decide on the best options

- Interpersonal skills: skills in listening, providing feedback, and resolving conflict.

5.

CREATE A TEAM CHARTER

Use the interactive activity below to create a team charter.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=33#h5p-6>

6.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST

Some students may feel that it's not necessary or 'worth it' to get to know and develop trust within their teams during group projects, especially when a project may only be in progress for a short period of time only. However, when completing our survey created by the student group who authored [Entrepreneurial Action Spring 2022](#), 83.3% of respondents agreed (50% Agree, 33.3% Strongly Agree) with the statement a “lack of trust or comfort among team members has been a difficulty in group projects based on my experience” (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Student Survey – Lack of Trust or Comfort

Lack of trust or comfort among team members has been a difficulty in group projects based on my experience.
18 responses

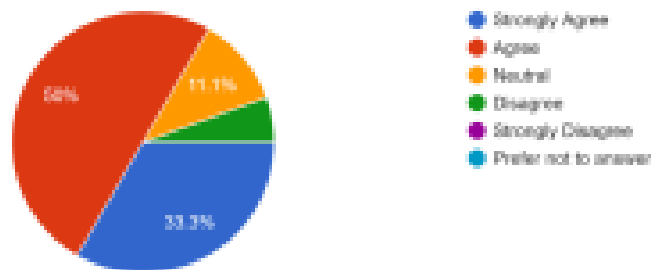


CHART SUMMARY: 50% of students Agree, 33.3% Strongly Agree, 11.1% are Neutral, 5.8% Disagree with the statement.

Consider the impacts of lack of team trust, even for a short assignment. Without trust, group members can end up “protecting themselves and their interests,” and there is a lack of collaboration and creative thinking (Mindtools, n.d., para 8). What could this actually look like? Perhaps you ask your team for assistance brainstorming for your section of a project, but other members are focused solely on completing their sections.

OPTIONAL – Scholarly Article: [“The relationship between trust and team performance.”](#)

**Note: Sign in through Kwantlen Polytechnic University or other institution is required to access this article.*
Some key elements of this article:

- “Where there is a lack of trust, there will be failings in communication, delegation, empowerment, and quality” (Erdem et al, 2003, para 1.)
 - 2 of the 4 organizations studied demonstrated a positive correlation between trust and team performance, as well as an inverse relationship between “critical errors” and trust (Erdem et al, 2003)
 - 2 of the 4 organizations did not support the finding above; more research of other factors is required (Erdem et al, 2003)
-

Building an understanding of trust within a group is beneficial to do before graduation, so you’re equipped for success in the workplace.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety, a concept that will be discussed later in this module, is improved with increased trust. Essentially, this means team members feel safe within the group to take “risks” such as challenging a groupmate’s idea (Brownlee, 2019). Challenging ideas leads to innovation, which means overall work quality goes up.

Questioning

Increased trust increases the amount of questioning between group members (Brownlee, 2019). When there is increased questioning occurring within a group, there is better decision-making, better end results, stronger communication (eg. individuals ask for clarity), and better innovation (Brownlee, 2019). One huge benefit to working within a team, is that your team members bring knowledge and skills you may be lacking. Questioning and providing constructive feedback are important tools that allow each member of the team to bring out the best in each other’s ideas.

Constructive Feedback

Similarly, more constructive feedback is exchanged when there is high trust, leading to better communication and better results. See [Module 2](#) for more information on constructive feedback. Consider your own comfort level with both providing and receiving constructive feedback. Have you ever had an idea on how a team member could improve their work, or had someone on your team make a suggestion that made

your work much better? Think about the difference in the end result of a group project within a team that openly provides feedback and a team who doesn't.

Goodwill

Communication, especially in a post-pandemic world that is much more virtual, can come with challenges. For example, it can be difficult to interpret the tone of written messages such as emails, as you have fewer non-verbal cues. Luckily, when there is trust within your team, you build “goodwill” in your communications (Brownlee, 2019). For example, in a team with low trust you may be quick to interpret a text as unfriendly, or even aggressive – whereas when there is goodwill between you and the sender, you may assume misunderstanding and seek further clarification (Brownlee, 2019).

Quicker Results

In a team that has high trust, less time is spent revisiting miscommunications or revisiting project work, so work is completed faster (Brownlee, 2019). Imagine that you missed an important part of the project criteria. Perhaps your teammate noticed, but chose not to say anything; then, you realize your mistake the night before the deadline. Now, extra time is required to rework the content that could have been resolved much earlier.

Knowledge-sharing

When trust exists within a team, members are more willing to share their knowledge, communicate and assist each other (Mindtools, n.d.). In a group project, your group members can be a huge asset to help you understand both the project itself, and other course content. A team that has high communication and knowledge sharing yields more learning within the group.

Try this activity to check your understanding:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=35#h5p-30>

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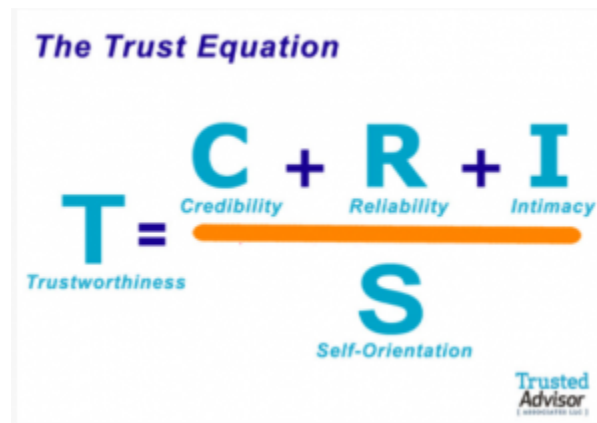
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7.

MEASURING TRUST

Can Trust be Measured?

Charles H. Green, a management consultant and the founder of *Trusted Advisor Associates* has created a model for quantifying trust, called the Trust Equation (Trust Advisor, n.d.b). The purpose of the model is to get you thinking about trust, trustworthiness and your own personal strengths and weaknesses (Trusted Advisor Associates, 2020a).



*Note: The following videos approach these concepts from the point of view of a **consultant** helping a **client**. For our purposes, imagine that you are the **consultant** within your group, and your team members are your **clients**. It is in your best interest that your clients (groupmates) have trust in you, this will allow you to have influence within the group, and overall increase group effectiveness.*

Watch this video of Charles H. Green introducing the Trust Equation, and answer the questions below.



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<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=37#h5p-10>

The following set of short videos explains each component of The Trust Equation in further detail, and provide tips to increase your own personal trustworthiness.

Credibility & Reliability



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Intimacy



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Self Orientation



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How to Increase Trust – Tips from The Trust Equation

This section summarizes some of the tips from the videos above (put in the context of group projects).

CREDIBILITY

1. Do Your Homework (Trusted Advisor Associates, 2020b)

If you want to establish yourself as a credible group member, ensure that you have done your homework. This means that you've not only completed the coursework that relates to your group project, but you've also done appropriate research and preparation for your meetings. Think about groupmates you've had in past group projects. It quickly becomes obvious during a brainstorm session who has read the applicable chapters in the textbook, and who has not. If you demonstrate that you are prepared and ready to contribute ideas and knowledge, you are well on your way to gaining trust and influence within your group.

2. Be Open, Honest, Transparent, and Accurate (Trusted Advisor Associates, 2020b)

This is generally pretty good life advice. Consider the impact of your team members finding out you've been dishonest. Try looking at it from their point of view. For example, how might you feel if your team member claimed that they had come up with an idea themselves, but you later find out it came from an external source that hadn't been cited. Would you trust future ideas or contributions from this person?

3. Ask Smart Questions (Trusted Advisor Associates, 2020b)

This is often a by-product of doing your homework and knowing your stuff. There is a noticeable difference

between the questions that are asked by someone who is familiar with course material and is trying to improve on a project, and someone who is not as prepared. Questions that are thoughtful, relevant to the project topic or meeting task, and supported with knowledge can drive the team towards better results. On the other hand, if meetings are spent answering questions that aren't as relevant, it isn't the most effective use of group time. *NOTE: This advice does not mean one should never ask questions (questions are very important!). What is important is that all members of a group put reasonable effort and preparation into their contributions.

RELIABILITY

4. Follow Through on Your Promises (Trusted Advisor Associates, 2020b)

This is critical! For example, did you promise to put your section of the project on to the team Google Doc when you got home from work one evening? Perhaps it seems that it wouldn't be a big deal to wait until the next morning to do this. But, consider how your group members may react when they notice that you have not followed through on your commitments. Students almost always have multiple commitments and have most likely carefully planned their time. Even if delays may not seem like a big deal to you, remember that each of your team mates have factored in your promises into their plans.

INTIMACY

5. Be Vulnerable (Trusted Advisor Associates, 2020c)

This is a common piece of advice that is found in many sources; being vulnerable is one of the most powerful ways you can encourage trust, because it indicates the others that it is okay to do the same. Think about a time when someone has shared something meaningful (eg. personal) with you; it likely made you feel comfortable to also share something. This principle can be useful at school as well. If you are having trouble with your section of a group project, or even other coursework, share this with your group; they may be able to help (or they may also be experiencing the same difficulties!).

SELF ORIENTATION

7. Be Curious (Trusted Advisor Associates, 2020d)

Ask your group members questions when they share, demonstrate that you care about their contributions. Use active-listening techniques as much as possible.

8. Lead with Calm (Trusted Advisor Associates, 2020d)

While in school, it's likely you have multiple assignments and activities on the go, and may have many things on your mind. To demonstrate to your group that they can trust you are present and ready to contribute, it can be important to "lead with calm." Take some time before meetings to ensure you are getting into the right mindset for a group meeting, so that you can be present and focused. Think about group members you may

have had in the past who come in like a whirlwind, sometimes it may feel that their focus is solely on themselves, and not on the group and the group's goals.

ACTIVITY – How Trustworthy Are You?

Try taking [this 5-minute free assessment](#) from the Trusted Advisor. Sign-up via email is required; after the assessment you will receive a free partial report that will identify which elements of The Trust Equation are your biggest strength & your biggest weakness.

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8.

BUILDING TRUST

The previous section of this module included many suggestions from Charles H. Green, on how to improve trustworthiness through each element of The Trust Equation. Here are some other ways to build and improve trust within a team:

Lead by example

Consider the impact that we each have on each other. In a group project, a team culture can quickly become established; this can be positive or negative. If you are the first person to share that you are struggling with course material, for example, it becomes easier for others to share.

(Mindtools, n.d.)

Look at your group as people

This may seem obvious, but consider the impacts of online, asynchronous courses, where you no longer see the faces of your team members. It can be easy to forget that a name on a screen is someone who may be just like you, with their own agenda, schedules and personalities. When completing an online course, ensure that you follow instructor's recommendations to have your camera and microphone on. If you aren't able to do this in class, try your best to do it in your group meetings; this makes connecting so much easier! Whether in person or online, try not to lose sight of the fact that everyone else in your group is also an individual who is experiencing highs and lows, just like you. See [Module 3](#) for more information on the role of empathy in understanding others.

(Mindtools, n.d.)

ACTIVITY – Getting to know your team

Try brainstorming some ways that you can get to know your team more. For example, some institutions have a course website where you can check out your classmates' profiles. If possible, take a moment to use your institution's course website and find out more about your classmates. Then, review your own profile and privacy settings, consider what you are comfortable sharing and what you might want your classmates to know about you.

Intentionally Build Relationships

It may be unreasonable to expect you to become best friends with your groupmates. However, there are still many reasons it may be important for you to get to know them. Studies show that performance increases when there is socialization occurring within a group (Zak, 2017). As students, you likely have a lot in common with your group members. To develop relationships, you could dedicate 5 minutes of meeting time towards “social time” where the team can discuss whatever they want.

(Zak, 2017)

Avoid placing blame

Sometimes, things go off the rails. In some cases, this could be the direct result of one person’s actions. However, dwelling on this fact is unproductive, and making that individual feel bad does not accomplish a lot. Try using an expression like “moving forward...,” or use passive voice to avoid placing blame. For example, if a team member missed a citation in your report, you could point it out by saying to the team “I noticed there are some missing citations in our report. **Moving forward**, let’s make sure that we double check our referencing practices”. Passive voice could go something like this: instead of saying “Jamie missed a citation in our conclusion paragraph,” you could say “a citation was missed in our conclusion paragraph”. This approach allows the group to begin resolving issues, instead of focusing on placing blame.

(Mindtools, n.d.)

Food For Thought

Jamie Verschoor, one student author of [Entrepreneurial Action Spring 2022](#), had this to say about group projects:

Although some students may feel that university is just a stop on the way to the “real world,” or isn’t as critical as work, it’s important to recognize that our actions as students (beyond our grades) can impact our professional future. *It may be helpful to imagine that your university experience is your career, your instructors are your supervisors, and your classmates are your coworkers.* If you are interacting and performing with each of these groups in a professional matter, you are making potentially helpful future connections. As you approach graduation, the student you worked with on a group project may become the recruiter at the company you’d really like to work at. Although networking doesn’t guarantee you are placed ahead of the pack, it can be important to be first in mind when people hear of openings or other opportunities. Your group members will remember what working with you was like, how you presented yourself, and your quality of contributions. The same goes for instructors. When students graduate and move into their careers, it’s not uncommon for them to reach out to old instructors and let them know about current opportunities. These instructors may then bring these opportunities to the attention of current students.

If all that fails, building your habits in group projects now will help you practice for when it really counts, in the workplace.

Discuss Trust Issues

Whether from a past work or past school situation, some of us may have some form of trust issues. Take a moment to consider your own experiences in school specifically. Have you ever felt that a teammate betrayed your trust during a group project? Perhaps they promised to complete a section of an assignment by a certain date, and then failed to follow through. More severely, perhaps you trusted them to demonstrate academic integrity, but then found out that they plagiarized a section of the project. The experiences that each of us have, especially the negative ones, stick with us. If you've had your trust betrayed in the past, this may influence how you approach a new group. Consider sharing your past experiences and trust concerns with your new group, and make a proactive plan on how you can prevent a similar experience in the future. If your instructor doesn't assign a group "charter" as part of your assignment, make one anyway to use within your group, and include this in it.

(Mindtools, n.d.)

Provide Recognition

Sometimes, it can feel like you only ever hear negative feedback on your work in school. But think about how it makes you feel when someone recognizes you for a job well done. Giving recognition to your team members for their work shows them that you see and value their time & effort, and that you see the value in their contributions. Feeling valued within the team is important for effective group work!

(Zak, 2017)

Allow Various Working Styles

If you have had negative experiences in group projects where work was disorganized, incomplete, lackluster, etc. you may have learned to now create rigid structures or try to control the project as much as possible. However, to build trust, it's important to ensure each group member has the freedom to complete their work in the way that works for them. This demonstrates that you trust them, and their working methods. Instead of focusing on *how* work is completed, try focusing on *when* it is completed and to *what* standard. Setting interim deadlines within a group is helpful for this.

(Zak, 2017)

Share Information Transparently

Another important way to build trust within your group is to stay in touch. This is very important online,

when you may not see your team in a physical classroom. Consider providing progress updates to your team, or sharing your concerns or issues. Also, ensure there are detailed meeting notes kept from team meetings for any missing members. You can also stay connected on topics outside of the group project. For example, if you notice a group member has missed a lecture in your shared course, you could let them know any important updates or course material that an instructor shared.

(Zak, 2017)

Embody Fairness

The perception of fairness is very important to building trust. Think about your personal actions and group norms. When allocating work, or providing feedback to one another, is everyone in the group treated equally?

(Zak, 2017)

ACTIVITY – Methods to Improve Trust

Try answering the question below to check your understanding.



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<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=38#h5p-31>

OPTIONAL Viewing – The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

This book, authored by Patrick Lencioni, describes five common pitfalls noticed in team dynamics. Although it has its critics, it still presents a model that invokes thought on team dynamics. Unsurprisingly, the book presents “absence of trust” as the first dysfunction of a team.

If you’re interested, check out this video summary of the Five Dysfunctions:



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9.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

What is it and why is it important?

Psychological safety is a concept that is closely related to the discussion of trust. It was first introduced by Amy Edmonson, and can be defined as the “shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking” (Google re:Work, n.d, para. 2).

OPTIONAL VIEWING

Watch this TedXTalk (11min) to learn more about Amy Edmonson’s discovery and research of psychological safety.



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This concept has also been explored in various other contexts and studies. In a study from Google, psychological safety was deemed an essential part of what makes an effective team (Rozovsky, 2015). Read this article for more information on Google’s findings.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY – THE 4 LEVELS

Psychological safety can be broken down into four levels; ideally, each level would be fulfilled within a team.

Watch this short video for an overview of the 4 levels:



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Each of the following paragraphs explain in further detail.

(1) Inclusion Safety

This is when all group members feel safe to be themselves and are accepted for who they are” Center for Creative Leadership, n.d., para. 19). It can be thought of as the “bare minimum” of psychological safety. In a group project, this means that team members have a sense of belonging and a feeling of acceptance. Without this, some individuals may not be able to then complete their work effectively, learn in the group or help innovate. In a group where one member was ridiculed for one of their attributes, this level would not be achieved.

(2) Learner Safety

This is when everyone feels safe to engage in the learning process, for example to ask questions and make mistakes (Center for Creative Leadership, n.d.) If, when a mistake is made during a group meeting, there is a negative reaction that causes the individual to feel uncomfortable (or otherwise negatively) there may not be learner safety. Since the purpose of group projects during post-secondary studies is to learn, an environment that allows for learning is critical.

(3) Contributor Safety

Once an individual is included in a group, and knows their stuff, they can now contribute meaningfully to the group (Center for Creative Leadership, n.d.). This element is important in group projects in order for the team to meet it’s full potential. One huge benefit of being in a team is the different skills, knowledge and strengths each individual brings. If even one member doesn’t feel comfortable contributing in their role, some of these skills are not being utilized.

(4) Challenger Safety

This means group members are comfortable speaking up and challenging the status quo within a group (Center for Creative Leadership, n.d.). Think about why this is important in a group that is comprised of

students with different skills, knowledge and strengths. A big benefit of this, is that your team members can help fill in the gaps in your work, challenge you to be better and overall achieve better work. This is important in the same way that constructive feedback is important. See the “[Ability to Provide Feedback](#)” chapter for more information on constructive feedback.

After reading this page, you may be wondering where the line is between creating psychological safety, and “being nice” or worrying about offending others. This short Forbes article, “[What Psychological Safety Is Not](#)” by Timothy R. Clark debunks some psychological safety myths and adds some more detail to the discussion of what psychological safety looks like.

Overall, an environment that is psychologically safe is better for learning and performance.

ACTIVITY



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10.

CREATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Now that you've briefly learned what psychological safety is, this section explains some suggestions on how you can create it within your groups (or anywhere). You may notice that there is some overlap between what is suggested below, and the information in previous sections on increasing trust in the group.

Establishing a psychologically safe environment typically becomes the responsibility of the leader, but in a group project where there may be no established leader, this responsibility falls on each and every member. See the [“Team Leadership”](#) module for more information on leadership.

Be Engaged

Be engaged with others in your group, and demonstrate your understanding of what they are saying (Barnett, n.d). This is especially important when taking an online course. Removing distractions, being fully present (physically *and* mentally) and using other active-listening techniques is important to show your group members that you value what they are saying.

Avoid Blaming

(Barnett, n.d)

Mistakes will happen during group projects, but there is a productive and less productive way to handle them. Try taking a forward-looking approach (“how can we improve this next time?”) to focus on getting better results, as opposed to dwelling and making the perpetrator feel badly. Look at this from the point of view of Learner Safety, making mistakes is part of the learning process.

Include everyone in decision-making

(Barnett, n.d)

This is an important action that can sometimes be overlooked in group projects. When making a decision within a team, make sure that every member has the opportunity to be part of the process. Decisions in a group project could be about interim deadlines, delegating work, emailing a professor, and many more. This is important to ensure that all group members feel valued within the group.

A common issue in group projects (mentioned by respondents in our student survey) is a lack of motivation based on interactions with the group. Consider if you would feel motivated to contribute and be engaged within a group project if decisions were made without your involvement or input. Sometimes (especially when working virtually), a decision may be time-sensitive and groups may have trouble getting a hold of one team member. Try to address this proactively, by setting communication expectations ahead of time in your group charter. For example, you may set the expectation that all group members will respond to a group chat every 12 hours (and if they do not, they may be excluded from decision-making)

Be open to feedback

(Barnett, n.d)

One great outcome of a psychologically safe environment is that group members feel comfortable to challenge each other. Remember that this feedback is important to get better team results, and is not a personal attack. Make sure to use constructive feedback best practices described in the [Ability to Provide Feedback](#) chapter.

Be Vulnerable

Admit when you don't know something (CCL, n.d). This indicates to the rest of the group that this is okay to do so. Once you've shared, it also means you can move forward by learning the missing information (with the help of the group) and continue doing great work.

Complete this short quiz to test your knowledge:



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<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=40#h5p-12>

OPTIONAL VIEWING

What is Psychological Safety, and How do you create Psychological Safety at Work?

This 8 minute video discusses psychological safety once more, and describes some ways to build it within the workplace.



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11.

TRUST AND COMMUNICATION

It is worth mentioning that trust and communication are very interconnected.

Communication helps improve trust

“When there is a lack of trust, there will be failings in communication [...]”(Erdem et al, 2003, para 1.)

According to The Trust Equation, asking questions and actively listening to others decreases self-orientation (Trusted Advisor Associates, 2020b). Further, open and honest communication helps build credibility; both of these increase overall trustworthiness (Trusted Advisor Associates, 2020a). Additionally, the sharing of information transparently and the communication of feedback increases trust (Zak, 2017). Finally, discussing and sharing personal trust issues improves trust within a group (Mindtools, n.d).

Trust helps improve communication

“Trust is Critical in Communications” (Folkman, 2020, para. 3).

Increased trust leads to increased questioning, and more questioning means better communication (eg. seeking clarification), so less time is spent resolving miscommunications (Brownlee, 2019). On top of this, increased trust means individuals have more “goodwill” during communications, so they are more likely to assume positive intention behind emails or other messages (Brownlee, 2019). Finally, when there is trust, there is more communication of knowledge (Mindtools, n.d).

Try this activity to test your knowledge:



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12.

BUILDING TRUST IN TEAMS - CONCLUSION

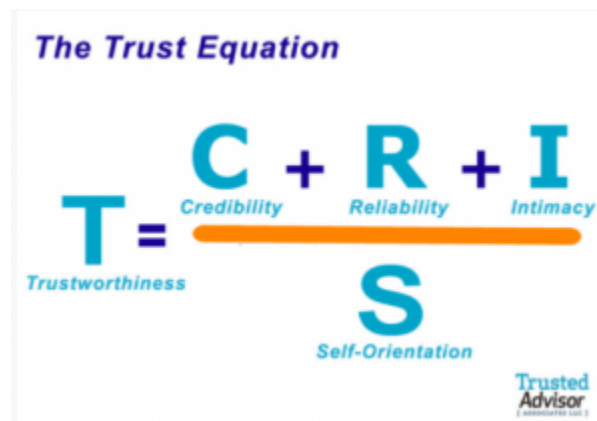
In this module, you learned about the following:

The importance of trust

- Can be a problem in group projects
- When it doesn't exist, people may protect themselves and their interests only
- *Builds psychological safety, increases questioning, stronger constructive feedback, increases goodwill, faster results, increased knowledge-sharing*

Measuring Trust

- Charles H. Green has created a model to quantify trust:



Some tips to improve trustworthiness through this model include

- Do your homework/ preparation
- Be honest, transparent, accurate
- Ask smart questions
- Follow through on promises
- Be vulnerable
- React to emotions

- Be curious
- Lead with calm

Building Trust

Other methods to improve trust include:

- Lead by example
- Look at your group members as people
- Intentionally build relationships
- Avoid placing blame
- Discuss trust issues
- Provide recognition
- Allow freedom in working styles
- Share information transparently
- Embody fairness

Psychological Safety

- Psychological Safety is “shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking”
- It has 4 levels:

1. **Inclusion Safety:** Team members have a sense of belonging
2. **Learner Safety:** Team members feel safe to engage in the learning process
3. **Contributor Safety:** Team members feel safe to contribute meaningfully
4. **Challenger Safety:** Team members feel comfortable challenging the status quo

Creating Psychological Safety

There are multiple methods to creating psychological safety

- Be Engaged
- Avoid blaming
- Inclusive decision-making
- Be open to feedback
- Be vulnerable

Trust and Communication

Trust & communication are interconnected

Closing Note:

It may sometimes be difficult to develop trust within your group project. However, there are multiple actions you can take to facilitate its growth. We hope that you are able to use the content of this module to help contribute to a team that is built on mutual trust and support.

PART III

TEAM LEADERSHIP

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

1. Define leadership and understand its social role.
2. Understand the key considerations in managing teams, including fostering support and performance.
3. Learn the different types of leadership styles.
4. Learn ways to develop leadership skills.

INTRODUCTION

This module provides a snapshot of leadership. When you hear the term leadership you might associate it with the management or executive in the corporate world.

But leadership refers to:

“a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal”
(Kruse, 2015, para 11)

The above definition has four main elements:

1. “Leadership stems from **social influence**, not authority or power”
2. Leadership **requires others**, and that implies they don’t need to be “direct reports.”
3. There are many styles and paths to effective Leadership, and it is **not based on personality, traits, or titles**.
4. “It includes a **goal**, **not influence** with no intended outcome”

(Kruse, 2015, para 11)

No matter how excellent or proficient team members in a group are, improper or misguided Leadership will result in sub-par results.

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CHALLENGES OF MANAGING TEAMS

What are some key considerations in managing teams?

For those of us who have had the pleasure of managing or leading a team, we know that it can feel like a dubious distinction. Leading a team is fulfilling—especially if the task or organizational mandate at hand is so critical to the organization that people are happy to be a part of the team that drives things forward. It can also be an exercise in frustration, as the charge is to lead a group composed of various individuals, which at various times will act both like a group and like a bunch of individuals. Managing teams is no small feat, and the most experienced managers truly understand that success ultimately depends on their ability to build a strong and well-functioning team. In J.J. Gabarro's *The Dynamics of Taking Charge* (HBS Press, 1987, pp. 85–87), he quotes a manager who had successfully worked to turn around a number of organizations:⁴

“People have to want to work together; they have to see how to do it. There has to be an environment for it and that takes time. It's my highest priority right now but I don't write it down anywhere because it's not like other priorities. If I told corporate that building a team was my prime goal they'd tell me, so what? They'd expect that as part of making things better.”

I love this quotation because it's so indicative of the state of most organizations today. The focus is on corporate goals and priorities—very task-driven and outcome-driven—but it is the people dynamics and how people work together in the company and in TEAMS that can make a real difference to the goals and outcome.

MANAGERIAL LEADERSHIP

Who Am I Managing?

Making the jump from individual contributor to manager is never easy, and it doesn't take long for a new manager to realize that what got him there is much different than what is needed to be successful in the future. Individual contributors that have been recently promoted would probably say that they have strong technical skills in their area, and that they were very good at doing what they were doing. In a more savvy organization that recognizes leadership competencies, individual contributors would probably say that they have strong technical skills AND that they showed some behaviors and potential to lead others. When new managers enter their new roles, they expect that they will be managing people—that is, the people on their teams. Few new

managers fully realize that the challenge ahead is not just in managing their people, but in managing all the other stakeholders and constituencies that want to and need to weigh in.

One of the key challenges that faces new managers is figuring out to balance all of the multiple demands from both the team and the stakeholders and constituencies external to the team. Linda A. Hill, the Wallace Brett Donham Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, states that “among all the challenges facing new managers, the need to reconcile different constituencies’ expectations and interests is probably the most difficult.” She asserts that the demands that the new manager’s direct reports, his peers, his boss, and the company’s customers place on the new manager will cause conflict at times. Having teams of their own, new managers may think that managing their direct reports is the most important role to play, even at the exclusion of managing other stakeholders. This is incorrect. A new manager needs to “manage his other consistencies just as carefully.” (“Helping New Managers Succeed,” Lauren Keller Johnson, *HBR* 2008).

Whenever I started a new role, I always created a quick stakeholder checklist for myself. This document is essentially a list of all the stakeholders (beyond the team I am managing) with whom I need to build a relationship in order to be successful. I listed the names of my boss, my boss’s boss, my peers, and any other key influencers or internal customers from the business. This is a quick checklist of the people that I need to immediately have a “meet and greet” with and then possibly even set up a regular meeting with at a certain cadence. I have learned over the years that each of these stakeholders will have some input and impact on my success, and the quicker and more effectively I engage them in the work my team is performing, the better the chance of my team’s success. Some of the questions I will ask myself when figuring out my stakeholder list include:

- Whose support will I need?
- Who needs my support? What do they need from me or my team?
- Who can keep me and my team from being successful?
- What is my ongoing influencing strategy?

Some new managers will feel that these strategies for building stakeholder support are too “political” and they don’t feel right. Trust me when I tell you that this is a necessary part of the new manager role, because now the role and the work call for greater interdependence and relation building in order to be successful. It is no longer just about individual technical skills, but more about building and managing relationships with people who will support you and your team to get your work done. So, if you are a new manager asking “Who am I managing?” ... the answer is EVERYONE.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree with the statement that “what got you there isn’t what will make you successful in the future”? Why or why not?
2. Who would be on your stakeholder checklist? Which stakeholders are you already engaging and building

relationships with?

In Linda A. Hill's *Harvard Business Review* article "Managing Your Team"⁵ (HBR 1995), she discusses that managing a team means managing paradox. Paradox exists in the fact that teams have both individual and collective identities and goals. Each individual has goals and ideas as to what he wants to accomplish—on the project, in one's career, and in life. The team itself, of course, has goals and success metrics that it needs to meet in order to be successful. Sometimes these can be in conflict with each other. Competition may arise among team members, and a win-loss attitude may take place over a collaborative and problem-solving team dynamic. The team manager may need to step in to help integrate all of the individual differences to enable them to productively pursue the team goal. Therein lies the primary paradox—balancing individual differences and goals AND the collective identity and goals. Other paradoxes include:

- Fostering support AND confrontation among team members
- Focusing on performance AND learning and development
- Balancing managerial authority AND team member discretion and autonomy
- Balancing the Triangle of Relationships—manager, team, and individual

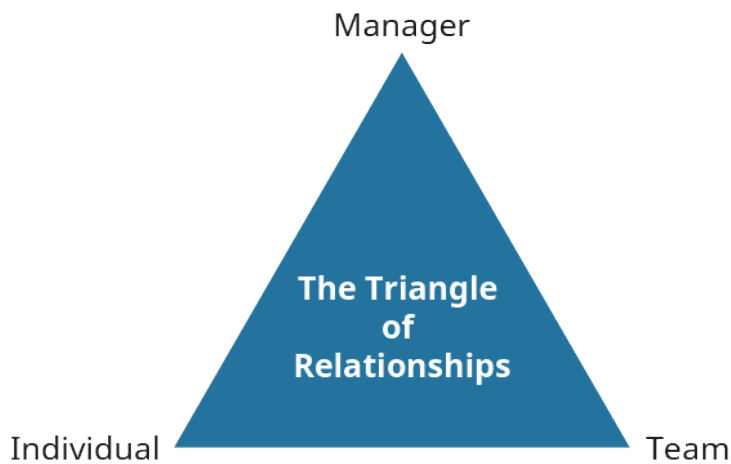


Exhibit 10.6 The Triangle of Relationships (Attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC-BY 4.0 license)

Managing a team also means managing its boundaries. Managing the team's boundaries—or space between the team and its external forces, stakeholders, and pressures—is a delicate balance of strategy, stakeholder management, and organizational behavior. The team manager must serve, in part, as a buffer to these external factors so that they don't derail or distract the team from its goals. However, the manager must also understand enough about the external environment and have enough emotional intelligence to understand which forces, players, or situations must be synthesized within the team for its own benefit. Think about any medium or large-scale change initiative that you have been a part of in your career. Ideally, there is generally a vision for change and a level of sponsorship at the senior levels of the organization that is supposed to pave the way for

that change to take root. The project team is officially “blessed” to kick off the team, create a charter, and identify the needed actions to drive the initiative to successful completion.

The dynamic that ensues after the kickoff is really what will determine the success of the team. There are numerous stakeholders in any organization, and many will be pro-change initiative, but others may be against the initiative—either due to lack of understanding or concerns about losing power, territory, etc. The external environment and business strategy may not be particularly well suited for a change initiative to take place, and so there may be the feeling of forces opposing the project team efforts. A strong team manager needs manage these “boundaries” with the organization to help the team navigate through and with the organizational complexities, goals, nuances, and egos that are a part of any organization. In Linda A. Hill’s *Harvard Business Review* article “Exercising Influence,” she states that “managers also need to manage relationships with those who are outside their team but inside their organizations.”⁶ To do so, they must understand the power dynamics of the larger organization and invest time and energy in building and maintaining relationship with those on who the team is dependent.” It is also, in her view, “the manager’s job, at a minimum, to educate other about organizational structures, systems, or politics that interfere with the team’s performance.” With all of the potential external influences on a team, managing a team’s boundaries can truly mean the difference between success and failure.

The final element of managing a team is to manage the team itself—both the people elements and the process elements, or task at hand. The process-focused elements include managing the work plan to reach the overall goal, as well as the incremental meetings and milestones that are a part of the team’s journey to reach the longer-term goal. Keeping the team focused on its objectives—beginning with setting agendas all the way to managing project tasks and celebrating milestones—assures that the team will stay on track. Projects and initiatives vary in size, scope, and complexity, and so the project management tools shouldn’t be prescribed in a general sense. The important takeaway here is to choose an approach and a tool that works for the culture of the team and the organization, and that helps the team understand where they are, where they need to go, and what resources are a part of that process.

In managing the team members and interpersonal dynamics, there is the important element of selecting the right team members, shaping the team’s norms and culture (how are decisions made, what are our rules, how do we manage conflict, etc.), and coaching the team. Defining the right skill sets, functions, perspectives, and expertise of the members will ensure a solid foundation. Helping the team to identify and formalize the ground rules for team engagement will help manage in the face of adversity or team conflict in the future. Finally, playing a role as a supportive coach will help both the individual team members and the group entity think through issues and make progress towards goals. A coach doesn’t solve the individual/team problem, but helps the team think through a solution and move forward. Teams may need guidance on how to work things out within the team, and the manager must provide feedback and hold team members accountable for their behavior and contribution. Continuous improvement is the name of the game. A team may not start out as high performing, but they can certainly achieve that goal if everyone is focused on incremental improvements to communication, collaboration, and performance.

CONCEPT CHECK

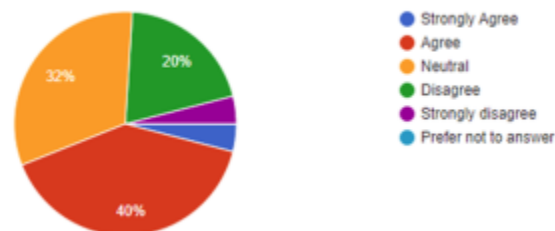
1. Discuss the paradox(es) of a team.
2. How can a leader manage team boundaries?

14.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP

Some students may feel that it's not 'worth it' to take the initiative to appoint a leader within their teams during group projects, especially when a project may only be in progress for a short period. However, when completing our survey (created by us and distributed to a sample of KPU Business students), 40% of respondents agreed with the statement "lack of strong leadership among team members has been a difficulty in group projects based on my experience" (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Student Survey – Lack of Leadership



Lack of leadership (no leader, confused group)
has been a difficulty in group projects based on
my experience.

Chart conclusion: 40% Agree, 20% Disagree, and 32% remain Neutral to the statement.

Aside from being able to lead, leadership skills can also be used in other areas such as personal life. They can help you manage your relationships and improve your performance at the recreational center and personal relationships (Chastney, 2021).

Moreover, "It's important for students to experience leadership opportunities during their schooling, learn the art of building relationships within teams, defining identities, and achieving tasks effectively. It also provides an opportunity to learn to identify and display effective communication and interpersonal skills" (Bishop Tyrrell Anglican College, 2021, para 1).

Importance of Leadership Skills at Work

Additionally, In the workplace, leadership skills will be the most valuable asset when the candidate is considered for the promotion.

- *According to a survey, more than 77% of the organizations report that leadership is lacking.*
- *83% of business says it's crucial to develop leaders at all levels.*

(Bradshaw, 2022)

For more stats on the importance of leadership [Click Here](#).

Therefore, accruing leadership skills in university will be a valuable asset to add to the resume.



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15.

TYPES OF LEADERSHIP

There are three main types of leadership, situational, transactional and transformational.

Situational Leadership

Situational leadership is a strategy that encourages leaders to think critically about their team members and their goals to develop a personalized approach to leading (The Ken Blanchard Companies, n.d.).

Characteristics of the Situational Leadership style:

- **“Insight:** The situational leader must be able to understand the needs of the followers, then adjust their management style to meet those needs
- **Flexibility:** Situational leaders must be able to move seamlessly from one type of leadership style to another
- **Trust:** The leader must be able to gain their followers’ trust and confidence
- **Problem-solving:** The situational leader must be able to solve problems, such as how to get a job done using the best leadership style available
- **Coach:** The situational leader must be able to evaluate the maturity and competence of the followers and then apply the right strategy to enhance the follower and their personal character”

(The Ken Blanchard Companies, n.d.) / (*What Is Situational Leadership? How Flexibility Leads to Success*, 2014, para 23)

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership focuses on results and adheres to the organization’s structure. It is responsible for maintaining a routine and ensuring that the group’s performance is consistent. This type of leader sets the expectations of their team members and uses performance reviews as a tool to evaluate their performance. Transactional leadership is focused on maintaining the status quo of an organization by rewarding its employees (*What Is Transactional Leadership? How Structure Leads to Results*, 2014).

Characteristics of transactional leaders:

- “Focused on short-term goals
- Favor structured policies and procedures
- Thrive on following rules and doing things correctly
- Revel in efficiency
- Tend to be inflexible
- Opposed to change”

(*What Is Transactional Leadership? How Structure Leads to Results*, 2014, para 25).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a type of leadership that inspires people to achieve remarkable results. It gives them the freedom to make their own decisions and develop their own talents. It also helps them improve their performance by motivating them to work harder and get results.

Characteristics of transformational leaders:

- “Very well-organized and expect their followers to be creative
- Team-oriented and expect that followers will work together to create the best possible results
- Respected, and in turn respects followers
- Acts as coach of the team. He or she provides training and motivation to reach the desired goals
- Responsible for their team, but also instill responsibility into team members
- Engenders respect through rapport and a personal influence”

(*What Is Transformational Leadership? Ideas Produce Results*, 2014, para 15)

Each of the three leadership styles possess characteristics that can be learned. What kind of leader do you want to be?



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HOW TO BUILD LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Begin this chapter by watch this 50 second video: [4 Essential Tips to Becoming A Better Leader](#).

Next, try this short activity:



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Some people have the necessary leadership skills to lead, while others learn along the way. So leadership skills can be learned and developed over the course of time.

We need to work on the following core competencies to acquire leadership skills. Excellent leaders use the following competencies to achieve goals efficiently and effectively.

Communication

Develop your Leadership Skills: Fast, Effective Ways to Become a Leader People Want to Follow

Chapter 4 - How to Turn the Core Leadership Functions into Skills
Kogan Page © 2019

Table 4.1: Effective communication

[→ Open table as spreadsheet](#)

Be prepared	Rehearse and practise. Make sure that you have some professional-looking visual aids: 'A picture is worth a thousand words.' Infographics can be very helpful when summarizing statistics and data.
Be clear	Double-check that what you are saying is not vague, ambiguous or muddled – leave talk like that to the politicians!
Be simple	Reduce complicated matter to its simplest form without oversimplifying. Avoid technical language or jargon that your audience will not understand.
Be vivid	Colour your message with enthusiasm, confidence and humour. Make it live – make it exciting and challenging and fun.
Be natural	You do not need to be a great orator. Just be yourself – your best self.

Image: (Adair, 2019)

Motivation

In order to motivate your team members, we need to understand the factors affecting team members' needs. The leader should identify the team members' needs and motivate them accordingly (e.g., by assigning duties based on strengths and interests). Leaders may use Maslow's hierarchy of needs to identify the stage and take decisions accordingly.



Maslow's hierarchy of needs (a scalable vector illustration on a white background).

For more information about Maslow's hierarchy theory read [The Needs Theory article](#)

Delegation

“Leaders who try to do too many tasks by themselves will often struggle to get anything done” (*Important Leadership Skills for Workplace Success*, 2021, “Delegating”). Instead, try to delegate tasks to other people. Doing so will allow you to focus on other important tasks. One of the most effective ways to do this is to identify the skills of each team member. Some skills that make a good delegator include (*Important Leadership Skills for Workplace Success*, 2021):

- *Accepting feedback from employees*
- *Allotting resources for employees*
- *Assessing employee strengths and weaknesses*
- *Defining expectations*
- *Evaluating employee performance*

- *Identifying measurable outcomes*
- *Matching the task to the right employee*
- *Prioritizing tasks*
- *Setting expectations*
- *Time management*
- *Trust in employees*

(*Important Leadership Skills for Workplace Success*, 2021, “Delegation”)

Positivity

Cultivating positivity is a skill that requires regular practice. “Positive leadership is modeling, facilitating, and purposefully influencing positive emotions that encourage team members and employees to excel in their work. Positive leaders cultivate an empowering environment through communication, accountability, emotional intelligence, motivation, and model-worthy work ethic” (Udoagwu, 2021, para 5).

Here are some tips to practice positivity every day:

- *Focus on good things*
- *Practice gratitude*
- *Open yourself to humor*
- *Surround yourself with positive people*
- *Practice positive self talk*
- *Start every day on a positive note*

(Santos-Longhurst, 2019)

Trustworthiness

Trustworthy leaders are approachable, accept responsibility for their actions, and mutually support everyone, not just the people they favour or who are like them. This leadership quality is an essential ingredient. Without it, a leader will not be viewed as ethical or having integrity (Kay, 2022).

For more information on how to build trust in teams please refer to the “[Building Trust](#)” chapter.

Constructive Feedback

Communication is a vital part of effective leadership. This is less about having frequent conversations and more about continuously engaging with your team members and delivering feedback (*4 Reasons Why*

Feedback Is Essential for Leadership, 2019). “Essentially, no task is complete, no objective is reached, and no successes can be experienced unless – and until – feedback has been given and received” (*4 Reasons Why Feedback Is Essential for Leadership*, 2019, para 5).

For more information see the “[Ability to Provide Feedback](#)” chapter.

For more information on how to develop leadership skills read: [Develop your Leadership Skills: Fast, Effective Ways to Become a Leader People Want to Follow.](#)

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PART IV

EFFECTIVE TEAM MEETINGS

17.

TEAM MEETING PLANNER

Use the team meeting planner below to create a meeting agenda and provide updates to your team.



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PART V

WORKING TOGETHER

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

1. Understand the importance of emotional intelligence (EI).
2. Gain skills for expressing your feelings productively.

Module Introduction

This module describes emotional intelligence, defined as “the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions” (Cherry, 2020, para. 1).

Begin this module by watching the five minute video below:

“Research shows that by accepting our emotions, we can help improve team communication and foster a healthy workplace environment” (Muller, 2019, para. 1)



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IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional Intelligence (EI) affects everyone on a personal level as it carries the ability to affect you and those around you.

Individual Level

From an individual level, having a higher level of emotional intelligence gives one the ability to recognize their own emotions (self-awareness) (Landry, 2019, para. 7). This paves the way for building skills to manage your feelings and having the ability to motivate oneself to get work done (self-management and social awareness). Only by having the ability to recognize your own emotions can you understand those of others. Those that maintain a high EI can sense the emotions of others and respond to them effectively (relationship management).

Group Settings

When working in a group setting it is crucial to make sound decisions. Your decisions ultimately determine the fate of a group. Increased emotional intelligence improves the ability to make sound decisions (Ottawa University, 2020, para. 3). This in turn guides the building and sustaining of collaborative relationships. As previously stated, self-awareness paves the way for understanding the emotions of others. Only by understanding the opposing party can collaborative relationships be sustained as you are doing your part in making sure the bond between you and a group member remains until the task on hand is accomplished.

Stress and change can go hand in hand and are quite prevalent when doing collaborative work (Ottawa University, 2020, para. 3). The vision a group may have for example may not always end up being what it was initially sought out to be. Having to change and refine processes in order to make a certain idea work is completely normal but can carry stress since most people do not respond well to change. By comprising a high level of EI, the barriers to dealing with stress and change are drastically decreased. You understand the obstacle much better which results in a more determined approach. Being more determined ultimately increases the likelihood of completing the task on hand and builds confidence toward reaching goals in the future.

Consequences

What happens if your or your group's EI level is low? Studies have shown that low levels of EI can lead to decreased employee morale, leading to high turnover (Landry, 2019, para. 17). In a university setting, this translates to the inability of completing work (e.g., missing deadlines, slacking, poor quality of work) and group members withdrawing. Low EI levels are often a root cause of dysfunctional teams because of the inability of members to understand one another.

[Click here to read for a more detailed breakdown of the components of emotional intelligence](#)



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EXPRESSING FEELINGS PRODUCTIVELY

In order to express feelings productively, you can do the following:

Adopt a Leadership Mindset

By embracing a leadership mindset, one can visualize how much of an impact their actions will have on others as you set an expectation of being considerate when expressing yourself (Muller, 2019, para. 4). You want to ensure that your feelings are conveyed in a manner in which your team dynamic is not negatively affected. A leader will make certain that their group is set up for success through their actions. By adopting a mindset like this in regards to expressing yourself are you able to maximize your ability in communicating emotions in the best manner possible.

Identify Problems as Challenges

Focussing on solving a challenge as opposed to a problem allows for less frustration and stress (Muller, 2019, para. 5). When processing something as a problem there is a negative connotation attached to it. For example, problems are commonly perceived as threats which are in turn linked to decreased motivation and performance (Muller, 2019, para. 5). If we look at the inability to express feelings as a challenge instead of a problem, there is more of a drive to overcome it. Focus can be directed towards expressing feelings and mapping out ways of accomplishing goals. Once we begin classifying anything as a problem, the result is decreased motivation, severely diminishing the chances of achieving the end goal.

Use I Statements

Describe any behaviours or circumstances that affect you or others by using “I.” Statements that begin with “I” sound less threatening than starting with “you” (Contributor, 2020, para. 4). I statements allow for more sympathy, empathy, and understanding. The threat of perceived personal attacks is also mitigated, decreasing the likelihood of misunderstandings.

Stay Calm and In Control

Emotionally charged discussions can interfere with the constructive resolution of problems (Contributor, 2020, para. 14). It’s crucial to speak in a calm tone and offer to continue a discussion at another time if the

other person becomes defensive. Sometimes time is needed to absorb information before reacting appropriately.

Communication

The underlying theme for many effective team strategies is communication. Communication plays a key role in expressing emotions effectively. A weakness in this area often leads to misunderstandings and conflict, leading to a reduced quality of work. The skills of EI, including Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, and Empathy, all begin with understanding yourself but end with your ability to convey this intellect to others. Honing interpersonal skills can not only build emotional intelligence but also the ability to express oneself effectively.

[Click here to find out ways to improve your own Emotional Intelligence](#)



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[Click here to do a quick EI assessment](#)

WORKING TOGETHER - CONCLUSION

After finishing this module, you should now understand the following:

Importance of EI

1. How establishing a high level of EI increases both self and social awareness. This paves the way for both managing your own feelings and motivation
2. Increased EI improves your ability to make sound decisions in group settings and decreases the barriers associated with stress and change
3. Low EI often causes dysfunctional groups (missing deadlines, slacking, and poor quality of work)

Expressing Feelings Productively

1. Adopting a leadership mindset allows one to visualize the bigger picture and what's at stake
2. Identifying problems as challenges increase motivation and eagerness to overcome
3. Using "I" statements and remaining calm mitigates the risks of misunderstandings
4. Communication skills play a crucial role in effective and clear expression of feelings

Congratulations, you have now completed this module!

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PART VI

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

1. Define and analyze a group problem
2. Establish criteria for, and work towards, a solution for a group problem
3. Recognize sources of conflict and techniques to mitigate conflict
4. Have tools to communicate effectively during a conflict
5. Provide respectful, encouraging and goal-directed constructive feedback in different environments

21.

GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING - PART 1



Source: pixabay.com

The problem-solving process involves thoughts, discussions, actions, and decisions that occur from the first consideration of a problematic situation to the goal. The problems that groups face are varied, but some common problems include budgeting funds, raising funds, planning events, addressing customer or citizen complaints, creating or adapting products or services to fit needs, supporting members, and raising awareness about issues or causes.

While there are many ways to approach a problem, the American educational philosopher John Dewey's reflective thinking sequence has stood the test of time. This seven-step process (Adler, 1996) has produced positive results and serves as a handy organizational structure. If you are member of a group that needs to solve a problem and don't know where to start, consider the seven simple steps illustrated in Figure 11.2 below:

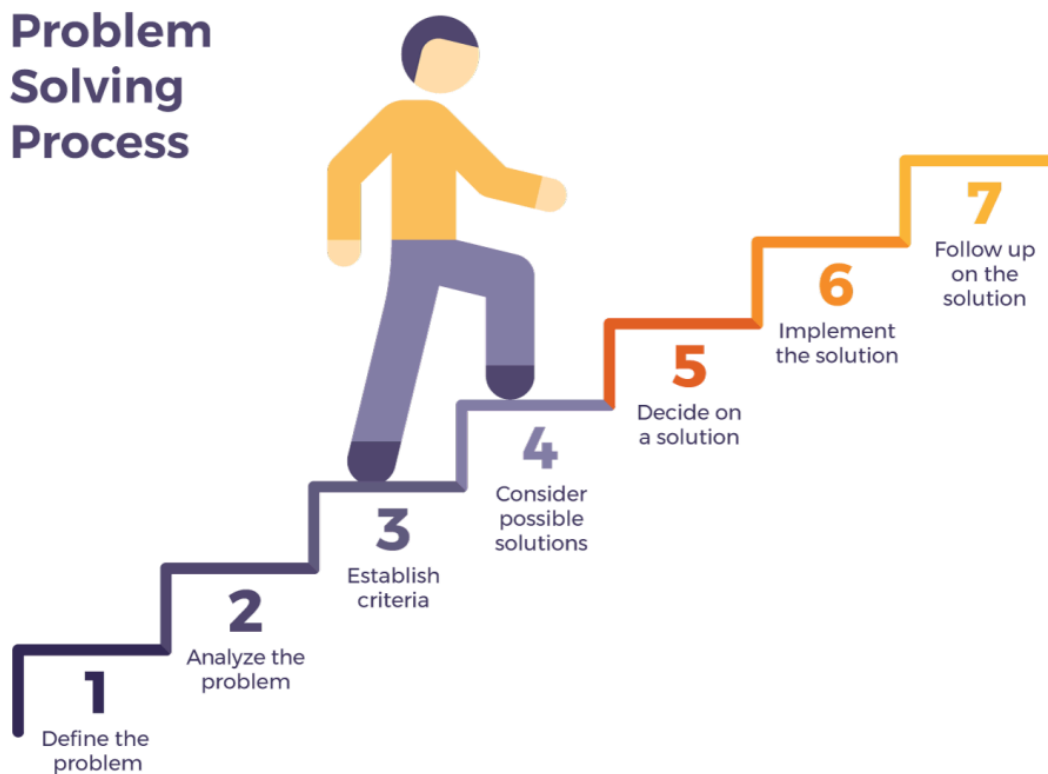


Figure 1. Problem-solving process.

Define the Problem

If you don't know what the problem is, how do you know you can solve it? Defining the problem allows the group to set boundaries of what the problem is and what it is not and to begin to formalize a description or definition of the scope, size, or extent of the challenge the group will address. A problem that is too broadly defined can overwhelm the group. If the problem is too narrowly defined, important information will be missed or ignored.

In the following example, there is a web-based company called *Favourites* that needs to increase its customer base and ultimately sales. A problem-solving group has been formed, and they start by formulating a working definition of the problem.

Example problems:

Too broad: "Sales are off, our numbers are down, and we need more customers."

More precise: "Sales have been slipping incrementally for six of the past nine months and are significantly lower than a seasonally adjusted comparison to last year. Overall, this loss represents a 4.5 percent reduction in

sales from the same time last year. However, when we break it down by product category, sales of our nonedible products have seen a modest but steady increase, while sales of edibles account for the drop off and we need to halt the decline.”

Analyze the Problem

The problem-solving group Kevin, Mariah, and Suri analyze the problem and begin to gather information to learn more. The problem is complex and requires more than one area of expertise. Why do nonedible products continue selling well? What is it about the edibles that is turning customers off?

Kevin is responsible for customer resource management. He is involved with the customer from the point of initial contact through purchase and delivery. Most of the interface is automated in the form of an online “basket model,” where photographs and product descriptions are accompanied by “buy it” buttons. He is available during normal working business hours for live chat and voice chat if needed, and customers are invited to request additional information. Most *Favourites* customers do not access this service, but Kevin is kept quite busy, as he also handles returns and complaints. Because Kevin believes that superior service retains customers while attracting new ones, he is always interested in better ways to serve the customer. Looking at edibles and nonedibles, he will study the cycle of customer service and see if there are any common points—from the main webpage, through the catalog, to the purchase process, and to returns—at which customers abandon the sale. He has existing customer feedback loops with end-of-sale surveys, but most customers decline to take the survey and there is currently no incentive to participate.

Mariah is responsible for products and purchasing. She wants to offer the best products at the lowest price, and to offer new products that are unusual, rare, or exotic. She regularly adds new products to the *Favourites* catalog and culls underperformers. Right now she has the data on every product and its sales history, but it is a challenge to represent it. She will analyze current sales data and produce a report that specifically identifies how each product—edible and nonedible—is performing. She wants to highlight “winners” and “losers” but also recognizes that today’s “losers” may be the hit of tomorrow. It is hard to predict constantly changing tastes and preferences, but that is part of her job. It’s not all science, and it’s not all art. She has to have an eye for what will catch on tomorrow while continuing to provide what is hot today.

Suri is responsible for data management at *Favourites*. She gathers, analyzes, and presents information gathered from the supply chain, sales, and marketing. She works with vendors to make sure products are available when needed, makes sales predictions based on past sales history, and assesses the effectiveness of marketing campaigns.

The problem-solving group members already have certain information on hand. They know that customer retention is one contributing factor. Attracting new customers is a constant goal, but they are aware of the well-known principle that it takes more effort to attract new customers than to keep existing ones. Thus, it is important to ensure a quality customer service experience for existing customers and encourage them to refer friends. The group needs to determine how to promote this favourable customer behaviour.

Another contributing factor seems to be that customers often abandon the shopping cart before completing a purchase, especially when purchasing edibles. The group members need to learn more about why this is happening.

GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING - PART 2

Establish Criteria

Establishing the criteria for a solution is the next step. At this point, information is coming in from diverse perspectives, and each group member has contributed information from their perspective, even though there may be several points of overlap.

Kevin: Customers who complete the postsale survey indicate that they want to know (1) what is the estimated time of delivery, (2) why a specific item was not in stock and when it will be available, and (3) why their order sometimes arrives with less than a complete order, with some items back-ordered, without prior notification.

He notes that a very small percentage of customers complete the postsale survey, and the results are far from scientific. He also notes that it appears the interface is not capable of cross-checking inventory to provide immediate information concerning back orders, so that the customer “buys it” only to learn several days later that it was not in stock. This seems to be especially problematic for edible products, because people may tend to order them for special occasions like birthdays and anniversaries. But we don’t really know this for sure because of the low participation in the postsale survey.

Mariah: There are four edible products that frequently sell out. So far, we haven’t been able to boost the appeal of other edibles so that people would order them as a second choice when these sales leaders aren’t available. We also have several rare, exotic products that are slow movers. They have potential, but currently are underperformers.

Suri: We know from a postal code analysis that most of our customers are from a few specific geographic areas associated with above-average incomes. We have very few credit cards declined, and the average sale is over \$100. Shipping costs represent on average 8 percent of the total sales cost. We do not have sufficient information to produce a customer profile. There is no specific point in the purchase process where basket abandonment tends to happen; it happens fairly uniformly at all steps.

Consider Possible Solutions to the Problem

The group has listened to each other and now starts to brainstorm ways to address the challenges they have addressed while focusing resources on those solutions that are more likely to produce results.

Kevin: Is it possible for our programmers to create a cross-index feature, linking the product desired with

a report of how many are in stock? I'd like the customer to know right away whether it is in stock, or how long they may have to wait. As another idea, is it possible to add incentives to the purchase cycle that won't negatively impact our overall profit? I'm thinking a small volume discount on multiple items, or perhaps free shipping over a specific dollar amount.

Mariah: I recommend we hold a focus group where customers can sample our edible products and tell us what they like best and why. When the best sellers are sold out, could we offer a discount on related products to provide an instant alternative? We might also cull the underperforming products with a liquidation sale to generate interest.

Suri: If we want to know more about our customers, we need to give them an incentive to complete the postsale survey. How about a 5 percent off coupon code for the next purchase to get them to return and to help us better identify our customer base? We may also want to build in a customer referral rewards program, but it all takes better data in to get results out. We should also explore the supply side of the business by getting a more reliable supply of the leading products and trying to get discounts that are more advantageous from our suppliers, especially in the edible category.

Decide on a Solution

Kevin, Mariah, and Suri may want to implement all the solution strategies, but they do not have the resources to do them all. They'll complete a cost-benefit analysis, which ranks each solution according to its probable impact.

Implement the Solution

Kevin is faced with the challenge of designing the computer interface without incurring unacceptable costs. He strongly believes that the interface will pay for itself within the first year—or, to put it more bluntly, that *Favourites'* declining sales will get worse if the website does not have this feature soon. He asks to meet with top management to get budget approval and secures their agreement, on one condition: he must negotiate a compensation schedule with the information technology consultants that includes delayed compensation in the form of bonuses after the feature has been up and running successfully for six months.

Mariah knows that searching for alternative products is a never-ending process, but it takes time and the company needs results. She decides to invest time evaluating products that competing companies currently offer, especially in the edible category, on the theory that customers who find their desired items sold out on the *Favourites* website may have been buying alternative products elsewhere instead of choosing an alternative from *Favourites'* product lines.

Suri decides to approach the vendors of the four frequently sold-out products and ask point blank, "What would it take to get you to produce these items more reliably in greater quantities?" By opening the channel of

communication with these vendors, she is able to motivate them to make modifications that will improve the reliability and quantity. She also approaches the vendors of the less popular products with a request for better discounts in return for their cooperation in developing and test-marketing new products.

Follow Up on the Solution

Kevin: After several beta tests, the cross-index feature was implemented and has been in place for thirty days. Now customers see either “in stock” or “available [mo/da/yr]” in the shopping basket. As expected, Kevin notes a decrease in the number of chat and phone inquiries to the effect of, “Will this item arrive before my wife’s birthday?” However, he notes an increase in inquiries asking, “Why isn’t this item in stock?” It is difficult to tell whether customer satisfaction is higher overall.

Mariah: In exploring the merchandise available from competing merchants, she got several ideas for modifying *Favourites*’ product line to offer more flavors and other variations on popular edibles. Working with vendors, she found that these modifications cost very little. Within the first thirty days of adding these items to the product line, sales are up. Mariah believes these additions also serve to enhance the *Favourites* brand identity, but she has no data to back this up.

Suri: So far, the vendors supplying the four top-selling edibles have fulfilled their promise of increasing quantity and reliability. However, three of the four items have still sold out, raising the question of whether *Favourites* needs to bring in one or more additional vendors to produce these items. Of the vendors with which *Favourites* asked to negotiate better discounts, some refused, and two of these were “stolen” by a competing merchant so that they no longer sell to *Favourites*. In addition, one of the vendors that agreed to give a better discount was unexpectedly forced to cease operations for several weeks because of a fire.

This scenario allows us to see that the problem may have several dimensions as well as solutions, that resources can be limited, and not every solution is successful. Even though the problem is not immediately resolved, the group problem-solving pattern and communication among the group members serves as a useful guide through the problem-solving process.

SOURCES OF CONFLICT AND HOW TO MANAGE CONFLICT

What are the benefits of conflict for a team?

There are many sources of conflict for a team, whether it is due to a communication breakdown, competing views or goals, power struggles, or conflicts between different personalities. The perception is that conflict is generally bad for a team and that it will inevitably bring the team down and cause them to spiral out of control and off track. Conflict does have some potential costs. If handled poorly, it can create distrust within a group, it can be disruptive to group progress and morale, and it could be detrimental to building lasting relationships. It is generally seen as a negative, even though constructive conflicts and constructive responses to conflicts can be an important developmental milestone for a team. Some potential benefits of conflict are that it encourages a greater diversity of ideas and perspectives and helps people to better understand opposing points of view. It can also enhance a team's problem-solving capability and can highlight critical points of discussion and contention that need to be given more thought.

Another key benefit or outcome of conflict is that a team that trusts each other—its members and members' intentions—will arise from conflict being a stronger and higher-performing team. Patrick Lencioni, in his bestselling book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2002, p. 188), writes:⁷

“The first dysfunction is an absence of trust among team members. Essentially, this stems from their unwillingness to be vulnerable within the group. Team members who are not genuinely open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation for trust. This failure to build trust is damaging because it sets the tone for the second dysfunction: fear of conflict. Teams that lack trust are incapable of engaging in unfiltered and passionate debate of ideas. Instead, they resort to veiled discussions and guarded comments.”

Lencioni also asserts that if a team doesn't work through its conflict and air its opinions through debate, team members will never really be able to buy in and commit to decisions. (This lack of commitment is Lencioni's third dysfunction.) Teams often have a fear of conflict so as not to hurt any team members' feelings. The downside of this avoidance is that conflicts still exist under the surface and may resurface in more insidious and back-channel ways that can derail a team. How can a team overcome its fear of conflict and move the team forward? Lencioni names a few strategies that teams can use to make conflict more common and productive. Mining is a technique that can be used in teams that tend to avoid conflict. This technique requires that

one team member “assume the role of a ‘miner of conflict’—someone who extracts buried disagreements within the team and sheds the light of day on them. They must have the courage and confidence to call out sensitive issues and force team members to work through them.” Real-time permission is another technique to “recognize when the people engaged in conflict are becoming uncomfortable with the level of discord, and then interrupt to remind them that what they are doing is necessary.” This technique can help the group to focus on the points of conflict by coaching the team not to sweep things under the rug.

The team leader plays a very important role in the team’s ability to address and navigate successfully through conflicts. Sometime a leader will have the attitude that conflict is a derail and will try to stymie it at any cost. This ultimately leads to a team culture in which conflict is avoided and the underlying feelings are allowed to accumulate below the surface of the discussion. The leader should, by contrast, model the appropriate behavior by constructively addressing conflict and bringing issues to the surface to be addressed and resolved by the team. This is key to building a successful and effective team.

There are a variety of individual responses to conflict that you may see as a team member. Some people take the constructive and thoughtful path when conflicts arise, while others may jump immediately to destructive behaviors. In *Managing Conflict Dynamics: A Practical Approach*, Capobianco, Davis, and Kraus (2005) recognized that there are both constructive and destructive responses to conflict, as well as active and passive responses that we need to recognize. In the event of team conflict, the goal is to have a constructive response in order to encourage dialogue, learning, and resolution.⁸ Responses such as perspective taking, creating solutions, expressing emotions, and reaching out are considered active and constructive responses to conflict. Reflective thinking, delay responding, and adapting are considered passive and constructive responses to conflict. See Exhibit 10.7 for a visual of the constructive responses, as well as the destructive responses, to conflict.

	Constructive	Destructive
Active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perspective taking • Creating solutions • Expressing emotions • Reaching out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winning • Displaying anger • Demeaning others • Retaliating
Passive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective thinking • Delay responding • Adapting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding • Yielding • Hiding emotions • Self-criticizing

Exhibit 10.7 Responses to Conflict (Attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC-BY 4.0 license)

In summary, conflict is never easy for an individual or a team to navigate through, but it can and should be done. Illuminating the team about areas of conflict and differing perspectives can have a very positive impact on the growth and future performance of the team, and it should be managed constructively.

CONCEPT CHECK

What are some techniques to make conflict more productive?

What are some destructive responses to conflict?

Source for this chapter: <https://openstax.org/books/organizational-behavior/pages/10-4-opportunities-and-challenges-to-team-building>

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION DURING CONFLICT

The word “conflict” produces a sense of anxiety for many people, but it is part of the human experience. Just because conflict is universal does not mean that we cannot improve how we handle disagreements, misunderstandings, and struggles to understand or make ourselves understood.



Photo by [Chris Sabor](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Conflict is the physical or psychological struggle associated with the perception of opposing or incompatible goals, desires, demands, wants, or needs (McLean, 2005). When incompatible goals, scarce resources, or interference are present, conflict is a typical result, but it doesn't mean the relationship is poor or failing. All relationships progress through times of conflict and collaboration. How we navigate and negotiate these challenges influences, reinforces, or destroys the relationship. Conflict is universal, but how and when it occurs is open to influence and interpretation. Rather than viewing conflict from a negative frame of reference, view it as an opportunity for clarification, growth, and even reinforcement of the relationship.

Conflict Management Strategies

As professional communicators, we can acknowledge and anticipate that conflict will be present in every context or environment where communication occurs. To that end, we can predict, anticipate, and formulate strategies to address conflict successfully. How you choose to approach conflict influences its resolution. Joseph DeVito (2003) offers several conflict management strategies that you might adapt and expand for your use.

Avoidance

You may choose to change the subject, leave the room, or not even enter the room in the first place, but the conflict will remain and resurface when you least expect it. Your reluctance to address the conflict directly is a normal response, and one which many cultures prize. In cultures where independence is highly valued, direct confrontation is more common. In cultures where the community is emphasized over the individual, indirect strategies may be more common. Avoidance allows for more time to resolve the problem, but can also increase costs associated with problem in the first place. Your organization or business will have policies and protocols to follow regarding conflict and redress, but it is always wise to consider the position of your conversational partner or opponent and to give them, as well as yourself, time to explore alternatives.

Defensiveness versus Supportiveness

Defensive communication is characterized by control, evaluation, and judgments, while supportive communication focuses on the points and not personalities. When we feel judged or criticized, our ability to listen can be diminished, and we may only hear the negative message. By choosing to focus on the message instead of the messenger, we keep the discussion supportive and professional.

Face-Detracting and Face-Saving

Communication is not competition. Communication is the sharing of understanding and meaning, but does everyone always share equally? People struggle for control, limit access to resources and information as part of territorial displays, and otherwise use the process of communication to engage in competition. People also use communication for collaboration. Both competition and collaboration can be observed in communication interactions, but there are two concepts central to both: face-detracting and face-saving strategies.

Face-detracting strategies involve messages or statements that take away from the respect, integrity, or credibility of a person. Face-saving strategies protect credibility and separate message from messenger. For example, you might say that “sales were down this quarter,” without specifically noting who was responsible. Sales were simply down. If, however, you ask, “How does the sales manager explain the decline in sales?” you have specifically connected an individual with the negative news. While we may want to specifically connect tasks and job responsibilities to individuals and departments, in terms of language each strategy has distinct results.

Face-detracting strategies often produce a defensive communication climate, inhibit listening, and allow for little room for collaboration. To save-face is to raise the issue while preserving a supportive climate, allowing room in the conversation for constructive discussions and problem solving. By using a face-saving strategy to shift the emphasis from the individual to the issue, we avoid power struggles and personalities, providing each other space to save-face (Donohue & Klot, 1992).

In collectivist cultures, where the community's well-being is promoted or valued above that of the individual, face-saving strategies are a common communicative strategies. In Japan, for example, to confront someone directly is perceived as humiliation, a great insult. In the United States, greater emphasis is placed on individual performance, and responsibility may be more directly assessed. If our goal is to solve a problem, and preserve the relationship, then consideration of a face-saving strategy should be one option a skilled business communicator considers when addressing negative news or information.

Empathy

Communication involves not only the words we write or speak, but how and when we write or say them. The way we communicate also carries meaning, and empathy for the individual involves attending to this aspect of interaction. Empathetic listening involves listening to both the literal and implied meanings within a message. By paying attention to feelings and emotions associated with content and information, we can build relationships and address conflict more constructively. In management, negotiating conflict is a common task and empathy is one strategy to consider when attempting to resolve issues.

Managing Your Emotions

There will be times in the work environment when emotions run high. Your awareness of them can help you clear your mind and choose to wait until the moment has passed to tackle the challenge.

Emotions can be contagious in the workplace, and fear of the unknown can influence people to act in irrational ways. The wise business communicator can recognize when emotions are on edge in themselves or others, and choose to wait to communicate, problem-solve, or negotiate until after the moment has passed.

Evaluations and Criticism in the Workplace

There may come a time, however, when evaluations involve criticism. Knowing how to approach this criticism can give you peace of mind to listen clearly, separating subjective, personal attacks from objective, constructive requests for improvement. Guffey offers us seven strategies for giving and receiving evaluations and criticism in the workplace that we have adapted here.

Listen without Interrupting

If you are on the receiving end of an evaluation, start by listening without interruption. Interruptions can be internal and external, and warrant further discussion. If your supervisor starts to discuss a point and you immediately start debating the point in your mind, you are paying attention to yourself and what you think they said or are going to say, and not that which is actually communicated. Let them speak while you listen, and

if you need to take notes to focus your thoughts, take clear notes of what is said, also noting points to revisit later.

Determine the Speaker's Intent

We have discussed previews as a normal part of conversation, and in this context they play an important role. People want to know what is coming and generally dislike surprises, particularly when the context of an evaluation is present. If you are on the receiving end, you may need to ask a clarifying question if it doesn't count as an interruption. You may also need to take notes and write down questions that come to mind to address when it is your turn to speak. As a manager, be clear and positive in your opening and lead with praise. You can find one point, even if it is only that the employee consistently shows up to work on time, to highlight before transitioning to a performance issue.

Indicate You Are Listening

In many Western cultures, eye contact is a signal that you are listening and paying attention to the person speaking. Take notes, nod your head, or lean forward to display interest and listening. Regardless of whether you are the employee receiving the criticism or the supervisor delivering it, displaying listening behaviour engenders a positive climate that helps mitigate the challenge of negative news or constructive criticism.

Paraphrase

Restate the main points to paraphrase what has been discussed. This verbal display allows for clarification and acknowledges receipt of the message.

If you are the employee, summarize the main points and consider steps you will take to correct the situation. If none come to mind or you are nervous and are having a hard time thinking clearly, state out loud the main point and ask if you can provide solution steps and strategies at a later date. You can request a follow-up meeting if appropriate, or indicate you will respond in writing via email to provide the additional information.

If You Agree

If an apology is well deserved, offer it. Communicate clearly what will change or indicate when you will respond with specific strategies to address the concern. As a manager you will want to formulate a plan that addresses the issue and outlines responsibilities as well as time frames for corrective action. As an employee you will want specific steps you can both agree on that will serve to solve the problem. Clear communication and acceptance of responsibility demonstrates maturity and respect.

If You Disagree

If you disagree, focus on the points or issue and not personalities. Do not bring up past issues and keep the conversation focused on the task at hand. You may want to suggest, now that you better understand their position, a follow-up meeting to give you time to reflect on the issues. You may want to consider involving a third party, investigating to learn more about the issue, or taking time to cool off.

Do not respond in anger or frustration; instead, always display professionalism. If the criticism is unwarranted, consider that the information they have may be flawed or biased, and consider ways to learn more about the case to share with them, searching for a mutually beneficial solution.

If other strategies to resolve the conflict fail, consider contacting your human resources department to learn more about due process procedures at your workplace. Display respect and never say anything that would reflect poorly on yourself or your organization. Words spoken in anger can have a lasting impact and are impossible to retrieve or take back.

Learn from Experience

Every communication interaction provides an opportunity for learning if you choose to see it. Sometimes the lessons are situational and may not apply in future contexts. Other times the lessons learned may well serve you across your professional career. Taking notes for yourself to clarify your thoughts, much like a journal, serve to document and help you see the situation more clearly.

Recognize that some aspects of communication are intentional, and may communicate meaning, even if it is hard to understand. Also, know that some aspects of communication are unintentional, and may not imply meaning or design. People make mistakes. They say things they should not have said. Emotions are revealed that are not always rational, and not always associated with the current context. A challenging morning at home can spill over into the work day and someone's bad mood may have nothing to do with you.

In summary, conflict is unavoidable and can be opportunity for clarification, growth, and even reinforcement of the relationship. Try to distinguish between what you can control and what you cannot, and always choose professionalism.

ABILITY TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Begin this chapter by watching this 5-min video that explains the secret to providing good feedback.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=128#oembed-1>

Constructive feedback aims to produce positive outcomes through useful comments (Valamis, 2021) . For the purpose of this module, we will focus on the following characteristics of constructive feedback: respectful, positive and encouraging, goal-directed, and collaborative.

Why is it important?

The ability to provide constructive feedback is important because it shows the ability to be critical and able to focus on both the positive (e.g., what is working, what does the team do well) and negative (e.g., what have we missed? where are areas for improvement?). From my own personal experience, it gives me the ability to think critically and be more specific in my own work. In a workplace, it reinforces positive behavior and corrects negative behavior. In school, it allows learners to be provided with an explanation of what is working well and where the learner could be stretched or challenged.

Below is a video (2 min) that explains the importance of providing feedback.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=128#oembed-2>

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RESPECTFUL FEEDBACK

This video (9 min) introduces the topic of giving respectful feedback.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=65#oembed-1>

One of the most important characteristics of constructive feedback is to be respectable. The feedback should respect boundaries, the use of non-judgmental language under a mutually respectful environment (Occupational therapy Practice Education Collaborative- Queensland, n.d.).

Examples of respectful feedback:

“A hardworking employee but he or she is frequently late for office

The Feedback:

“Hi (Employee Name), I was going through everyone’s performance report from the last few months, and I must say you have done a great job. Also, I feel that you could achieve more every day by coming early, and that way, you’ll also be able to maintain a sound work-life balance.” (Angshuman, para 11)

“Ruby makes up as one of the great team members in terms of performance but struggles with her communication skills

An encouraging feedback here would be:

“I have heard many compliments about your work and I would like to appreciate you for the same. However, I noticed that you tend to remain silent most of the time even during your team meetings. I must say that I’m concerned with this observation of mine and would like to know if you’re facing any difficulties out here.

My only advice here for you is to keep up your communication in whatever way you can. Even if you make mistakes, you should keep on trying, and also, we are all here to help you out.” (Angshuman, para 14)

Additional reading:

This [link](#) is for an article that explores if employees feels respected.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=65#h5p-28>

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POSITIVE AND ENCOURAGING

Positive and encouraging feedback should balance the strengths and areas of improvement in one's work (Occupational therapy Practice Education Collaborative- Queensland, n.d.). In other words, it needs to be practical and specific (Occupational therapy Practice Education Collaborative-Queensland, n.d.).

Examples:

“Travis keeps up with his great performance when working alone but he avoids being a team player

A Constructive performance review would be:

“I respect people who have the caliber to solve problems alone and move ahead. They learn from their experiences, and I guess you're one such person Travis.

However, I must also emphasize that everyone requires help at some point in time. It may be either you or someone else who might be needing an extra hand. And that is the perfect moment when you should exhibit your capabilities and help others out by sharing your knowledge. Also, at the same time, you can observe how others do their work and learn a few more things.

So, I would suggest you actively take part in team-based projects and help your team excel with your capabilities added to it” (Angshuman, para 13).

Additional reading:

The [link](#) takes you to an article that talks about why we need more positive feedback. The article has included several headings for this topic.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=66#h5p-27>

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28.

GOAL-DIRECTED

The third characteristic is goal directed. Goal directed feedback allows the students to gain assistance and understanding what is expected or required of them (Occupational therapy Practice Education Collaborative-Queensland, n.d.).

Examples:

An employee who frequently remains absent without any prior notice

Subtle constructive feedback to reduce employee absenteeism would be:

“Since the past few days, I have been noticing that you are seldom present in the workplace. May I know if you’re facing any problems that I can help you with?

I realize that every one of us has other responsibilities outside the workplace, but we should also treat our jobs equally. Also, you are missing out on a lot of information by being frequently out of work. I’m afraid that it might affect your overall performance, which I don’t want to happen. And so, I would like to extend you my help in every way possible to help you overcome this issue.”” (Angshuman, para 15)

Additional reading:

This 5 goal directed article gives an overview on goals directed in two topics: practice and feedback. It also includes a little section on strateies to consider.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=67#h5p-29>

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COLLABORATIVE AND FEEDBACK COMMUNICATION

The last characteristic that will be introduced is collaborative. A piece of collaborative feedback allows students to collaborate on “identifying strengths and weaknesses, in seeking solutions, reaching conclusions and formulating plans for future action” (Occupational therapy Practice Education Collaborative- Queensland, para 6).

GROW Model

One of the most popular model used to help coach collaborative feedback is the GROW model. The GROW model was cofounded by Sir John Whitmore and his colleagues in the late 1980s. The GROW model stands for Grow, Reality, Options, and Will (Performance Consultants, n.d.).

The following are the details for each of the acronym:

G: goals and aspirations

R: current situation, internal and external obstacles

O: possibilities, strengths and resources

W: actions and accountability” (Performance Consultants, para 5)

Examples:

“I’ve witnessed many team members coming to him for advice, and he always found a word of inspiration and desire to keep working as a team.” (Simblin, n.d.).

“Also a very good team leader who can organize the work within a team in a most efficient way and always being able to keep group members motivated.” (Simblin, n.d.).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it

online here:

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/teamworkinuniversity/?p=68#h5p-26>

Feedback and Communication

In the communication process, feedback binds the sender and encoder together. It ensures that the sender's message is encoded correctly by the receiver. The sender is the person sending the message while encoder means interpreting the message to its original meaning. In other words, through feedback the sender can recognize whether the receiver understands the question in its original intent. In an organization, this helps ensure that tasks are completed and what future work is required. Feedback can also be seen as a report for the CEO with the progress update (Dixit, 2018).

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30.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES - CONCLUSION

Congratulations! You reached the end of this module. We hope you learned something about providing feedback.

The following are the characteristics of constructive feedback:

- Respectable
- Positive and encouraging
- Collaborative
- Goal-oriented

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