

Chapter 7

Teamwork



Learning outcomes

This chapter offers you opportunities to:

- ✓ understand team dynamics and what is involved in good teamwork
- ✓ consider how you could develop better team skills
- ✓ create great teams and be an effective team member
- ✓ manage conflict and confrontation constructively in team contexts
- ✓ identify the contribution you make to teams and groups
- ✓ present your teamworking skills effectively when applying for jobs.

Learning in groups reaps greater benefits than attending formal lectures or presentations. It gives students more scope to express themselves, to establish effective relationships with tutors and others in the group, and to develop a range of skills such as team working.

Skills and Enterprise Network, 2001

Why teamwork matters for you

'Finding and keeping a good team' is amongst chief executives' most highly rated ingredients of success (Taylor and Humphrey, 2002). Since that was written, teamworking has become an even greater feature of academic and working life. Many professions now require multi-teamworking, and expect not only excellent teamworking skills but also the ability to work flexibly and skilfully across teams with complementary roles and abilities.

Team players are usually well-appreciated by both employers and colleagues. On the other hand, our natural self-interest in our own needs, moods, beliefs, wants and feelings can make it easy for us to undermine the effectiveness of our team or group.

Use the challenge

Don't expect teamwork to be easy. Assume that any mix of individuals will bring challenges, diverse sets of assumptions and divided opinions. Be open to learning from the experience – even if it feels frustrating or difficult at times. Use the opportunity to understand more about team dynamics, and the roles and functions that each person fulfils for the team. Build your confidence in taking your space whilst respecting that of others, and in getting your points across whilst helping others to take on board the best ideas from the team as a whole.

Become better at coping with uncomfortable situations in groups, and in confronting people constructively when this is needed.



Teamwork as a student

Gain lots of practice

Learn to operate within many varied team contexts. Consider ☒ which of the following you could take part in to build team skills.

- ☐ Playing team sports
- ☐ Musical group, orchestra, choir
- ☐ Quiz teams
- ☐ Productions of a play, film or video
- ☐ Voluntary projects or fund-raising
- ☐ Cheerleading
- ☐ Leisure teams: bowling, darts, etc.
- ☐ Student societies and clubs
- ☐ Study groups and action sets
- ☐ Debating teams
- ☐ Group talks, seminars and presentations
- ☐ Support groups
- ☐ Study and research projects
- ☐ Online community forums
- ☐ Writing a joint wiki or blog
- ☐ Teams helping at social events such as student welcomes or meet-and-greets
- ☐ Work-based project teams

Consider:

- ★ Which would work best for the time you have available?
- ★ What kinds of skills would these develop?

Gain varied experience

Look for opportunities to take on the various roles of team 'secretary' or organiser, time-keeper, presenter, and chair/leader.

Have a go at fulfilling diverse functions for teams (not necessarily stating these to the group unless it is something it has chosen to discuss). Depending on the team, aim to be 'the ideas person', the cheerleader/motivator, the harmoniser, the supportive one, the one who eases communications, and/or the planner/organiser.

Gain a sense of which roles and functions seem to come more naturally to you – and which ones you need to work at so that you open up more options for yourself.

Learn from the process

Naturally, when we embark on a team task, our attention is on the end point: winning the competition, raising the largest amount for charity, beating a rival team, or getting the best grades for a project. To develop team skills well, stand back and reflect on the process. Become more aware of how every aspect of teamwork is useful.

- ★ Learn how the team interacts – and why; gain an understanding of team dynamics (pages 161–7).
- ★ Become better at recognising the point where things start to go wrong.
- ★ Notice how and why communications work – and when they start to break down.
- ★ Identify how and why the team won or lost, was successful or not, worked well or not.

For group assignments

Check carefully the purpose of these: why were they set? Often, this is to provide the opportunity to develop the attributes covered in this chapter. This might be reflected in the assignments' marking /grading criteria – although not always.

Whilst many students are wise to the benefits of gaining teamwork experience for their CV and job applications, it is easy to forget this angle when teamworking gets tough. For example, students often complain about team members that don't pull their weight. That can be frustrating when it occurs; at such times, it is useful to focus on learning from the process and capturing this for your CV.

Use feedback

Ask others what you could do to be a better team member. Jot down any comments made about your teamworking skills and reflect on what these are telling you. Be open to hearing comments that might at first seem unfair or inaccurate. Use them to help you understand how others perceive you – and to decide how to create a different impression.

Being part of a great team

What is a 'team'?

A team is more than a collection of individuals. Any group could operate as a team if it is focused on being effective for the mutual benefit of all. Smith and Katzenbach (2003) argue that efficient teams need commitment to a common purpose and accountability to each other. A really great team uses constructive processes that enable personal growth as well as effective collective working to deliver its goals.

Activity

Effective teams

A good team will show most of the following characteristics. Rather than just reading through them, consider two or more teams that you are in, or have been in, ideally one that seemed to work and one that didn't.

Reflect on whether, and how, they each exemplified these characteristics.

A great team

Works as one

- ★ it has a shared vision; it knows what it wants to achieve
- ★ is clear about targets and priorities – and agrees these together
- ★ shares information
- ★ can make decisions
- ★ is able to achieve more together than individuals each achieve alone.

Takes collective responsibility

- ★ makes decisions together
- ★ takes responsibility for what the team does as a whole, the good and the bad
- ★ shares disappointments
- ★ doesn't blame each other
- ★ looks for solutions to conflicts or failures
- ★ shares the praise and glory together.

Supports and motivates

- ★ supports each other through setbacks
- ★ watches out for each other's needs.

Works to strengths

- ★ has members with diverse qualities, who contribute in complementary ways
- ★ takes time to discover the experience, skills and interests of all and how to work to these
- ★ shares expertise, to mutual benefit.

Respects, includes, communicates

- ★ makes efforts to ensure that nobody feels left out or undervalued
- ★ gives room to individuals to be who they are
- ★ recognises diverse ways of being a good team player
- ★ enables all members to express their views
- ★ gives each member equal time to speak on an issue, inviting people who have not spoken yet to contribute their views
- ★ builds trust through its behaviours
- ★ values everyone's time.

Is a pleasure to be part of

- ★ provides more to members than just achieving the goal (e.g. a positive sense of being in a team; collegiality; mutual support)
- ★ members look forward to seeing each other
- ★ members feel respected and cared for
- ★ members enjoy working together.

Good team members

Individuals are good team members when they:

- ★ commit to the team – and put it ahead of personal glory on the task
- ★ are fair-minded and treat others' time, opinions and dignity with equal respect
- ★ contribute their fair share to work and discussions
- ★ encourage and enable others to do well
- ★ appreciate the value of the diverse skills, abilities and perspectives others can bring
- ★ do what they say they will do, and act in ways that enable others to trust them
- ★ can be relied upon to be good team spokespersons or 'ambassadors'.

Creating a great team



1 Bond

- ★ Get to know each other really well: gain a sense of who you are as people so that trust can develop naturally.
- ★ Do something fun together – see a different side to each other.
- ★ Show interest in what others in the team are going through – and what they enjoy.
- ★ Make mutual commitments or a contract, to help ensure you all benefit from the team.
- ★ Define your purpose and goals: forge a group identity.



2 Create the team ethos

- ★ What is it about the task, or teamworking, that matters most to each member? Consider how you can best honour what each person values.
- ★ What will characterise your working relationship as a team? If someone observed you working together, what words would you hope they used to describe your team ethos?
- ★ Aim to establish a sense of fun, enjoyment and mutual care so that everyone looks forward to teamwork sessions.



3 Set ground rules

Discuss how you will operate as a group – consistent with the ethos you have started to establish.

What kinds of behaviours or speech are acceptable – or not?

- ★ Make a list of the 'rules' that every member commits to honouring (e.g. punctuality; doing the tasks allocated by the team; mutual respect; etc.)
- ★ Decide how the group will ensure these rules are kept.



4 Decide processes

- ★ How will the team make decisions?
- ★ How will the team resolve problems and address things that go wrong in its working relationships?
- ★ How will it communicate with itself and others?



5 Set team goals

- ★ Clarify the purpose and aims of the team.
- ★ Identify what each member wants to achieve.
- ★ What goals and objectives are held in common? Clarify where goals differ.
- ★ Refer back to your agreed process for making decisions, in order to arrive at goals for the team as a whole.
- ★ Clarify anything that was discussed that you now agree not to pursue as a team.



6 Make a team analysis

Put some time aside at the start to work out how best to work as a group. Don't assume everyone likes working in teams, or has similar past experiences of them (positive or negative). As well as forming the ground rules, talk through such aspects as:

- ★ Who knows who? Be open about any existing friendships or previous experience of working together – and how that can be used as a strength rather than a source of division.
- ★ Experience of teams: what kinds of teams have members worked in before; is this new terrain or familiar to everyone?
- ★ Assumptions of teamwork: the opinions and expectations of how teams should or shouldn't operate – and why.
- ★ Strengths – the expertise, interests, energies, contacts, ideas, the team could draw upon.
- ★ Limits – what the team as a whole doesn't want to do or can't do.
- ★ Preferences – who wants to do what.



7 Clarify the tasks

- ★ Define the overall assignment; list tasks that contribute to its achievement.
- ★ Decide together on a strategy (or plan) for carrying out these tasks in an efficient and timely way. See Chapters 9 and 11.



8 Recharge

Take a few minutes at the start and end of each meeting, and/or after any major disagreements, to reinforce a sense of team and recharge good will.

- ★ Acknowledge any difficulty so it doesn't fester – don't pretend it doesn't exist.
- ★ Acknowledge the importance of getting through challenges and working as a team.
- ★ Thank everyone for what they contributed, and for raising concerns so these could be addressed.
- ★ Identify what went well during the process and the value of what has been learnt from working through the difficulty.



9 Allocate roles

Agree together:

- ★ Which roles are needed?
- ★ How will you decide who has each role?
- ★ Will roles be rotated to develop everyone's skills and CV?

Some useful roles for teams

- ★ Leader, to chair meetings, provide direction, and set the pace (see Chapter 8)
- ★ Secretary for making notes, taking minutes, and managing communications
- ★ Treasurer (if there are finances involved)
- ★ Co-ordinator/Planner, for schedules, organising, time-keeping, etc.

The role of 'followership'

If the team has a leader, the leader needs to be supported to be effective. This is sometimes referred to as 'followership'. It is a skill in itself, and involves:

- ★ being able to 'manage upwards' – to help the leader to see what is needed
- ★ being someone the leader can trust and rely on to do right by the team
- ★ knowing when to listen, speak, ask, check, advise or just get on with what was asked.

In the workplace, this includes being able to develop a good relationship with managers and team-leaders, to mutual advantage.



10 Fulfil team functions

According to Belbin (1996), individuals tend to behave, interact and contribute to teams in a particular way, thereby fulfilling diverse functions such those on page 164. In a much-repeated experiment, Belbin and the Cambridge Industrial Training Research Unit found that teams made up entirely of the best business brains were far less successful than those with mixed memberships. Check whether your team is a good mix and who is fulfilling these key functions.

The best team 'mix'?

Not all teams need someone who is strong in each function – and several members might excel at many. Belbin recommended having:

- ★ a co-ordinator: to lead or chair
- ★ a 'plant': an imaginative person with creative problem-solving skills relevant to the task
- ★ a monitor-evaluator: to spot and weigh up good and bad ideas
- ★ an implementer or completer-finisher: to ensure things get done
- ★ a spread of other types.

Further, teams can benefit from having other balanced 'mixes' – of extroverts and introverts, those who generate ideas and those skilled at evaluating ideas, people who enjoy change and those who appreciate continuity.

Reflection

Team function



Consider which of the team functions listed on page 164 you perform best.

Want to know more?



M.R. Belbin (2010) *Team Roles at Work*. 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group).

If you wish to take the Belbin self-perception inventory, ask at your Careers Service.

Team functions and Belbin team types

Belbin team types		
Function by team type	Positive characteristics	Potential shortcomings
Implementer	Steady, reliable, sensible, gets things done. Well-disciplined, organised.	May not welcome change and new ideas. Expects too much from others.
Co-ordinator	Focused, looks for consensus, tries to involve everyone. Delegates work; chairs meetings well.	Doesn't bring many ideas. Might be seen as manipulative. Passes their own work on to others.
Shaper	Outgoing, high-energy, no-nonsense, speaks their mind; ready to overcome obstacles; gets things moving.	Impatient, irritable, insensitive to others' feelings; might say the wrong thing at the wrong time.
Plant	Creative, imaginative, lateral thinker, generates ideas, enjoys looking for solutions, inventive. Good at holding the 'big picture'.	Inflated sense of their own 'genius'; ignores targets and details; lives in a dream-world; does not communicate ideas well to others.
Resource investigator	Curious, interested, outgoing. Likes exploration, information, meeting new people, challenge, trying out gadgets.	Short interest or attention span; invests and then moves on to something else; may pilfer other people's ideas.
Monitor-evaluator	Considers all angles; unemotional; takes on many perspectives; good at weighing up the evidence and making a judgement; good at decision-making.	Rigid in ideas and in their love of 'logic'; not open to creative or lateral thinking; over-critical. Not good at generating novel ideas.
Teamworker	Observant; listens and responds well; smooths over conflict; diplomatic; good social skills; sensitive to others; puts the team first.	Can be swayed by all views; easily influenced; prevaricates; finds it hard to come to a decision.
Completer-finisher	Good attention to detail; responsible; conscientious; reliable; delivers to target; fine-tunes the final effort.	Poor at delegating and trusting others; picks fault; over-perfectionist.
Specialist	Single-minded, dedicated, offers skills that are hard to find; gets on with the task; self-motivating.	Not interested in the big picture; doesn't mix with the team; narrow horizons.

Activity

Team functions using Belbin team 'types'

- 1 Which of above team functions do you find yourself occupying the most? Is that the role in which you feel most comfortable? Could you fulfil all the other functions effectively?
- 2 For teams you are in, are there people who are fulfilling these functions well?
- 3 If you had to choose just one or two other people to be in a pair or small team with you, which of these 'types' would best complement your own strengths?



Helping the team to work well

Helpful things to do

You can make a difference to the functioning of a team through a multitude of small actions.

- 1 Learn and use everyone's name.
- 2 Always act with courtesy and respect.
- 3 Look for chances to give honest praise.
- 4 Be willing to adapt to help things work.
- 5 Aim to make quality contributions rather than talking longest or loudest.
- 6 Reflect back to the group, in brief, what it has said, done or achieved so far.
- 7 Ask whether those who haven't yet spoken on the point would like to do so.
- 8 Leave spaces or silences so everyone can absorb what has been said, think, and work out what they want to say.
- 9 If the group is 'stuck' on relatively minor points, bring it back to the main issues.
- 10 Don't agree with the same people all the time, to the exclusion of others.
- 11 If ideas are blocked, suggest 'brainstorming' options together.
- 12 If there is conflict, suggest ways through.

When things go wrong

Even when teams are enthusiastic, hopeful and keen to achieve together, things can go wrong. The actions for creating a great team (pages 162–3) can help the team to build the right foundations for effective working and for resolving problems. However, high-performing teams still experience challenges at times. Often, this is because some members underestimate the impact of their individual behaviour on the rest of the team. The activity below can help to bring awareness to how you or others might be weakening a team.

Activity

Sabotaging a team

Drawing on your experience and observations, list ways that members could sabotage the team they are in – making it unpleasant, annoying and/or unproductive.

Then compare your list with the checklist of unhelpful behaviours below.

Unhelpful team behaviours

If your team isn't working well, use this as a checklist together, to help identify ☒ what is going wrong.

- ☐ not bothering to get to know some (or all) of the other team members
- ☐ dominating the group – or not contributing enough
- ☐ forming factions that split team energies
- ☐ not taking responsibility for tasks that need to be done, leaving one or two others to do these
- ☐ speaking badly about some team members
- ☐ trying to split the team into 'goodies' and 'baddies'
- ☐ being late or not turning up at all
- ☐ putting own interests before those of the team
- ☐ not listening to other people's ideas
- ☐ not using the strengths and qualities of each person to best effect
- ☐ messing about/time-wasting
- ☐ not caring what happens to others on the team
- ☐ not being able to take criticism.

My behaviour in teams

Use the evaluation on page 166 to guide your observation of your own behaviours in teams. If feasible, ask other team members for feedback, too. Aim to form a fair, accurate picture. Use these to identify how you could help your teams be even more effective.

How do I behave in teams/groups?

How do I behave in teams/groups?

Each set of statements below represents opposite ends of a spectrum. Decide how close you are to either end, indicating this along the dotted line accordingly: ...X..... Before deciding, observe yourself in action during teamwork. Provide an accurate response that others would recognise rather than assuming you are always 'somewhere in the middle'.

Am I more like this....?		Or more like this?
I tend to dominate group space /time	.....	Usually, I am invisible in groups
I multi-task whilst others are speaking	.....	I listen closely to what others say
I generally think my ideas are the best	.....	I always think others' ideas are better
I try to force through my opinions	.....	I don't argue my case strongly enough
I have to make all the decisions	.....	I leave others to make the decisions
I push myself forward as leader	.....	I avoid being the leader
I insist on speaking for the group	.....	I insist others speak for the group
I interrupt others quite a lot	.....	I usually don't find an opening to speak
I am bad at punctuality	.....	I am obsessed by punctuality
I waste team time	.....	I insist we stick to a strict agenda
I get caught up too much in details	.....	I tend to neglect important details
I leave others to do most of the work	.....	I usually do more than my share of work
I get into a lot of arguments	.....	I avoid conflict at all costs
I like to share every thought and idea	.....	I keep my thoughts and ideas to myself
I speak out about things I dislike	.....	I harbour silent resentments/dislikes
I don't always do what I agreed to do	.....	I do as agreed – no matter what!

Activity



Turn short-comings into strengths

- 1 Read through your responses above. What kind of team character comes across?
- 2 Identify which of your own behaviours are less than helpful to teams or groups you are in currently. Acknowledge the impact they are having.
- 3 Consider how your less helpful behaviours could be adapted so that they become useful for the team. For example, if you tend to push your ideas too strongly, the positive side is that you have ideas and share them. If you communicated them differently, it could be an asset to the team.
- 4 Choose at least one aspect of your team behaviour to improve. Set yourself a target for changing that. What will you do, by when? How will that benefit the team? What support or help would you need from the team in order to form a new behavioural habit?

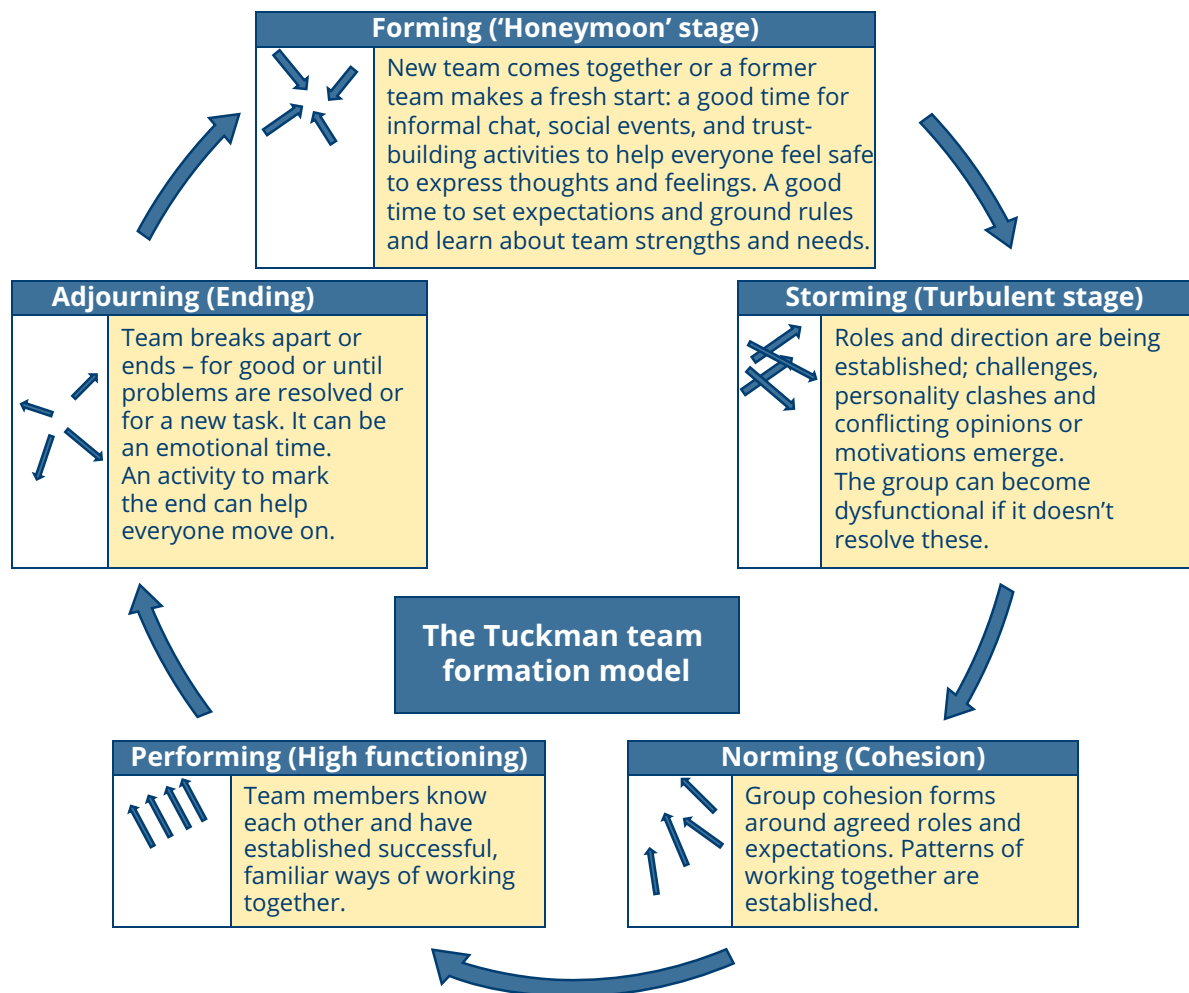
Understand team dynamics

Making sense of teams

Teams develop their own characters and ways of doing things. Understanding these helps us to make sense of why a team works well or badly, with conflict or harmony, effectively or not. The interactions of the ideas, values, experiences, emotions, behaviours, needs and motivations of each member of the team create its dynamics – affecting the energies of each individual and the team as a whole. What is *not* said or done contributes to the dynamics for better or worse, and can be as significant as what *is* said or done: see page 168.

The Tuckman team model

Tuckman (1965) noted that the longevity of a group affects its dynamics. New teams are generally different to those where members know each other well or are closing down. Teams tend to go through four stages of development: forming, storming, norming and performing (Egolf and Chester 2013). Tuckman later added a fifth stage – ‘adjourning’ – after which teams might re-form. Distinct challenges arise at each stage. McCahan et al. (2015) emphasise that teams tend to move back and forward between stages rather than progressing in sequence. Not all teams reach the high performing stage.



Want to know more?

S. McCahan et al. (2015) 'Introduction to teamwork', in *Designing Engineers: An Introductory Text*, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley), pp. 219–246.



Involve and include the whole team

Inclusive team dynamics

Team dynamics are improved when teams actively seek to include all members in all aspects of the life of the team. If everyone starts out wanting to be inclusive, that encourages individuals to join in and voice what they need to perform at their best.

All members bring a unique set of experiences which will impact on how comfortable they feel within the team or group. When a group is inclusive, everyone compromises on some individual interests in order to find the best possible arrangements for the team as a whole. Some aspects of our usual way of doing things are easy to adapt; some are harder to change but might be essential to enabling others to participate at all.

A great team does its best to make everyone feel comfortable. Below are ways of developing an inclusive culture in teams.

Friendliness

Team members do not have to like each other or be friends. However, everyone should be able to expect basic courtesies such as:

- ★ **Dignity** Being spoken to and treated with respect and politeness.
- ★ **Recognition** No one should feel invisible, ignored or left out.
- ★ **Collegiality** Included in social interactions alongside other members of the team, such as greetings, chats, decisions, humour, social activities, etc.

Look out for others

If everyone looks out for everyone else, inclusion is not difficult. A few simple steps go a long way.

Prevent exclusion Take steps yourself to check others are not being left out by decisions made by the team; don't leave it for others to sort.

Demonstrate interest Smile and say hello. Check they are ok. Ask about their day or holidays. Seek their opinions. Check they have said all they wanted on an issue, etc.

Find out what people like and need, so you are better placed to enable them to achieve these.

Be observant Take note of who hasn't contributed, and ask kindly if they would like to. Notice who needs support, help, a chat, a partner for a task.

Give a helping hand Ask how people are getting on with their team tasks. Check whether they need help. See if others can help or offer to help yourself. Don't let other team members fail when they just need a bit of help or advice.

Make everyone feel needed Share tasks fairly so that everyone's contribution matters. Speak about the importance of everyone's role in the group. If someone seems isolated, ask for their help with something you are doing.

Don't take things too personally If someone seems distant or unfriendly, they might be preoccupied with difficulties at work, with family, study, finances or health. They might have a disability or mental health issue that is draining or distracting them.

Watch for scapegoating

Groups often bond through unhelpful tactics such as setting up other groups as the 'enemy'. Sometimes, a team colludes in regarding one of its own members as problematic, then blames that person for most of what goes wrong. This is known as 'scapegoating'.

Scapegoating is not unusual. When it occurs, members reinforce each other's opinions that they are completely justified in vilifying or blaming that person. They amplify any action or aspect of behaviour that seems wrong, but don't notice similar behaviours in everyone else. Groups can find it hard to accept this is happening. Be vigilant in watching out for early signs of scapegoating, such as the team...

- ★ descending into gossip
- ★ commenting on who doesn't seem to fit in
- ★ focusing on one person's faults
- ★ losing a balanced view of an individual
- ★ over-stressing one person's role in what goes wrong
- ★ not giving due recognition to what that person does contribute – especially if they are quieter, more introverted, or stand out in some other way as different.



When things started to go wrong, Gertie the goat started to feel a sinking in her stomach

Inclusiveness on disability

Be aware that good organisation, scheduling and time management by the team can be especially important if any of the team (or clients) have disabilities. It can impact on aspects such as:

- ★ booking specialist help or transport
- ★ booking the right kind of specialist help for the tasks involved
- ★ conserving mental and physical energy.

Inclusive communications

Inclusive teams consider such matters as:

- ★ who might need to sit in particular positions in order to see or hear what is being said
- ★ the speed of communication, especially if any members are not using their mother tongue, or are relying on lip-reading
- ★ use of specialist terminology, especially if this is potentially confusing to new members
- ★ puns and use of humour – if members are from different cultures, language groups or on the autistic spectrum.

If you are part of a group that has, for example, gone silent or obviously changed the conversation when someone approached, perhaps because a private matter was being discussed, assume this will have been noticed and would feel uncomfortable or stressful. The person might reasonably assume that they have been the subject of gossip. Ease the situation. You don't need to share details, but you can acknowledge that a private discussion had been under way and apologise if that felt awkward for anyone else.

Social inclusiveness

Social activities can help teams to bond. Much of the disharmony in groups arises from not knowing each other, leading to doubts about good intentions and motives. Seeing each other in new contexts reduces the unknowns, which can take the heat out of disagreements, reduce misunderstandings and help the team resolve problems from a position of good will. Such bonding only works if everyone is included. Otherwise, it can be divisive.

Be aware of what restricts any members from participating. Depending on the members, this could be childcare costs, caring responsibilities, travelling home safely, lack of money, disabilities that make it difficult to be in noisy or high-stimulus environments, personal or cultural reasons for not being around alcohol or certain foods, etc. Set up team social events at times and places that mean everyone can join in.

Want to know more?



Stella Cottrell (2019) 'Developing cultural competence'. *The Study Skills Handbook*. Chapter 9.

British Council (2013) *Culture at Work. The Value of Intercultural Skills in the Workplace Report*.

Managing team conflict

Use conflict to advantage

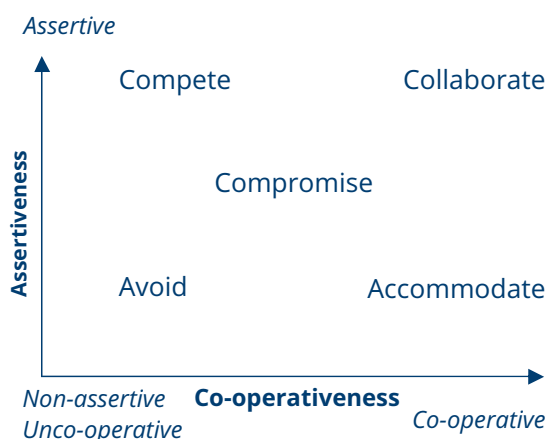
Even with the best intentions or amongst friends, when individuals work together conflict can arise – even outside of the initial ‘storming’ stage (page 167).

Whilst it can be stressful and waste time, conflict can bring positives too. It isn’t something to be feared or avoided at all costs. For example:

- ★ It can demonstrate that people care: it is often a sign of passionate commitment to the team’s goals.
- ★ It clarifies issues that might have been lurking harmfully below the surface.
- ★ It can force a team to find innovative resolutions and creative synergies.
- ★ It provides an opportunity to develop skills in negotiating consensus or other ways forward – invaluable skills for life and employment.
- ★ For individuals, it can highlight areas to work on in communications, emotional management and inter-personal skills.
- ★ Teams that emerge well from conflict can be more strongly bonded and effective.

The TK Conflict Mode model

The Thomas-Kilmann (TK) model (1977) identifies five modes of behaviour people bring to managing conflict, depending on how far they act to satisfy their own needs (assertiveness) or the team’s (co-operativeness).



If your team is struggling with internal conflicts, check the mode of behaviour each member brings to resolving the situation. Whilst collaboration (high

assertiveness, high co-operation) is the ideal, other behaviours can be useful, depending on the context. Recognise these potential impacts on team dynamics and performance.

Compete Are individuals competing enough to put forward ideas and take their space? Or are some asserting their own point so forcefully that other voices and ideas are drowned out?

Accommodate Is enough effort being made to take on board others’ ideas? Conversely, is everyone so keen to maintain ‘harmony’ that speech and the flow of ideas are constrained?

Compromise Is compromise being used constructively to find the best synthesis of ideas? Or would one person’s great idea be best for the team in this instance?

Avoid Is this an occasion when it is useful to ignore the issue and just get on with the task? Or will that lead to greater problems later?

Collaborate If everyone is both assertive and co-operative, the team as a whole benefits. All voices get heard. Everyone is willing to listen to these and find the best for the team as a whole.

Motivations As a team, aim to understand what prompts each person to adopt the mode they do – in general or at that time.

Observation



Conflict mode

Note which of these modes tends to predominate in teams, groups or seminars that you are in. Which mode do you tend to adopt most easily? How has that helped or hindered the team?

Want to know more?



Kwame Christian (2017) *Finding confidence in conflict*. TEDxDayton talk

K.W. Thomas and G.F. Thomas (2004) *Introduction to Conflict and Teams: Enhancing Team Performance using the TKI* (Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc.).

Confronting team members

Why confront?

Confronting in this context means facing up to what needs to be done or said, such as when members are letting down the team. The team needs to address any serious issues so that it does not fall apart or rely for success on everyone working harder because of those who are not contributing as they should. Skilful confrontation:

- ★ has a constructive purpose
- ★ is best undertaken when anger and other emotions have had a chance to die down
- ★ should keep to the facts of what is happening and the consequences rather than in sweeping statements of blame.

Before confronting

Clarify the issues It is possible that there are many strong emotions flying around which can confuse the issues. If so, calm the situation and then think through what exactly is going wrong and needs to change.

Clarify the goal Be clear what you/the team wants others to do differently.

Choose time and space Consider carefully where you can raise these issues in a private, respectful way, with sufficient time to work through whatever arises.

Script If necessary, prepare and rehearse a script to help you present the issues without getting angry or distressed.

During confrontation

Maintain the person's dignity Remember that this is likely to be hard for them to hear.

Maintain calm Stick to the point. Take a break to cool down if things get heated.

Clarify Explain the issue, what has happened, and what kind of solution you are seeking. The person might not realise the impact they had.

State facts neutrally *'So far, we have spent several hours discussing this and we haven't agreed a plan'* rather than *'You won't agree to any plan that anyone proposes'*.

Ask and listen Use open questions such as 'How do you feel about this?' The person might be unaware of their behaviour. Give them a chance to take things in and to explain if they wish.

Be open to the unexpected Confrontation can reveal unexpected sets of dynamics. The whole team can find that their own actions are perceived differently than they had assumed. This can be useful for working out team needs.

Create a 'way back' Conduct the confrontation in such a way that the person can see a way forward for themselves in the team with dignity.

Agree next steps Decide together what are acceptable ways forward. Changing some aspect of the task or schedule, sharing roles, or altering communications, locations or group processes might resolve the issue.

Repairing the team

Lencioni (2005) found five problems that create the most difficult dynamics in teams, undermining their effectiveness. Check whether these affect your team. Lencioni advises tackling them in sequence, starting with trust.

- 1 Lack of trust** Trust is essential for open communications, risk-taking, and support. If lost, it has to be earned back. Members need to express their commitment to the common purpose again. It can help to spend time together, understanding each other's past and future motivations.
- 2 Fear of conflict** If this is the issue, the team needs to recognise that conflict brings benefits and can be survived. Without it, ideas are stifled, feelings go unexpressed, resentments fester and trust can be impaired.
- 3 Lack of commitment** If members reveal this, such as through behaviours listed on page 165, the team should check why this is happening and take steps to bond and commit as a team again (page 162).
- 4 Avoidance of accountability** If individuals are not taking responsibility for their actions, the team needs to raise this.
- 5 Inattention to results** If the team is losing sight of its goals and failing to achieve essential milestones along the way, it should find out why. It could be for many reasons, from too little short-term pressure to lack of clarity about effective teamwork.

What I can contribute

The skills and qualities you contribute to a team will develop through experience. However, if you are not used to teamwork, you will feel more confident at the beginning if you can identify things you can contribute already. Use the following activity to recognise the wide range of contributions that team members can make. If you prefer, you can download it from the companion site. Then decide:

- 1 Which of these you can offer now to groups and teams you are in, because you have experience or abilities in these areas.
- 2 Which of these are personal strengths – where you could make the most useful contribution.
- 3 Areas you want or need to develop further (even if they are already relative strengths).

Activity

Contributing to a team



For each way of contributing to teams, decide ☒ whether boxes 1 and/or 2 and/or 3 apply to you.

Contribution	1 Can offer?	2 Strength?	3 Develop?
Team spirit and inclusiveness			
1 Enabling others to bond well			
2 Helping the group to stay motivated			
3 Creating/re-establishing harmony when needed			
4 Supporting others to get things done			
5 Noticing when others are being left out			
6 Drawing in anyone who is being left out			
7 Helping others to contribute the best they can			
8 Recognising others' strengths and contributions			
9 Praising others when they do well			
10 Celebrating group successes			
Communications			
11 Listening well to others' views, ideas, opinions			
12 Contributing usefully to discussions			
13 Knowing when to be quiet/silent			
14 Keeping others informed/up-to-date as needed			
15 Communicating on behalf of the group/team			
16 Bringing structure to group discussions			
17 Making minutes/notes of meetings			
18 Networking on behalf of the group			
19 Keeping group discussions focused			
20 Writing letters, messages, etc. for the group			
Organisational skills/Getting things done			
21 Planning out what needs to be done			
22 Working out the team's priorities			
23 Allocating tasks fairly			
24 Tracking that everything is being done as needed			
25 Suggesting improvements to group processes			

Contribution	1 Can offer?	2 Strength?	3 Develop?
26 Keeping the group focused on its purpose			
27 Finding ways of doing things more effectively			
28 Organising events			
29 Bringing a task through to completion			
Creativity, analysis and problem-solving			
30 Coming up with good ideas and solutions			
31 Analysing and weighing up options			
32 Making decisions, based on the facts			
Acting responsibly			
33 Completing tasks I have been allocated			
34 Taking the initiative when needed			
35 Respecting other team members' time			
36 Committing to the group as a team member			
37 Letting others get on with what they need to do			
38 Acting with integrity, whether as leader or follower			
39 Clarifying to the group where it needs to change			
Information, data and numbers			
40 Researching information for the group			
41 Managing data for the group			
42 Interpreting data, charts, graphs, etc.			
43 Sharing information and experience			
44 Creating graphics, illustrations, images, slides			
45 Managing finances/acting as treasurer			
46 Making charts, tables, graphs, data			
47 Doing the maths, number work, statistics			
48 Other ways I can contribute (e.g. specialist skills, languages, driving, technologies, etc.)			

Reflection



Team contribution

- ★ Are there any areas above that you enjoy more than others?
- ★ How could you build on your strengths?
- ★ Which aspects would be the most useful for you to work on, in order to function more effectively as a team member?

Observation



Myself in team action

- ★ Over several meetings of teams or groups, take more notice of how you behave as a team member – and how others respond to what you say and do. Use the list above and evaluation on page 74 to help you focus on specific behaviours.
- ★ Be honest about what you note: it will help you to become (or remain) a good team member.

Teamwork when applying for jobs

Employer requirements

Employers benefit when employees are able to work effectively as collaborative teams. When applying for jobs, take note of whether teamwork is a requirement. Look out for wording such as:

- ★ 'Will work across multiple teams...'
- ★ 'Works effectively alone and in teams'
- ★ 'Is a collaborative teamworker'.

'We' or 'I'?

Balance references to team successes and your own specific contributions. Employers want to know what you did for the team and as part of the team. Using only either 'we' or 'I' can be risky as it does not give a sense of both shared and individual contributions.

Maintain a record

It isn't always easy to remember the best examples to use in response to questions raised during the job application process. Keep a few brief notes of recent occasions when you:

- ★ led a team or group – what you did you well and the skills you demonstrated
- ★ were in a group or team that didn't work – and what you learnt from the experience that would help in future
- ★ acted as a good team-member. Consider what this shows about how well you can operate within a team.

On your CV

Include references to teams, groups and/or working with others in each section of your CV (at work, as a student, sports, hobbies, etc.). List brief examples of your experience of working in teams – ideally examples relevant to the job you are seeking.

- ★ What did the team(s) as a whole achieve?
- ★ What, in brief, was your role/contribution?
- ★ List 3–5 skills/strengths you bring to teamwork.

In your application

- ★ Provide a sentence that lists around three jobs or settings in which you developed team skills.
- ★ Provide a sentence that summarises a successful team project you contributed to and what, specifically, you contributed.
- ★ Give a sense of where your strongest team skills lie.
- ★ Where possible, state how you think you could contribute to teams in this job.

At interview

Avoid repeating information from your CV or application. Either use different examples or provide richer details. Prepare at least three examples. Be able to speak about these both in brief and in detail. The employer will observe how teamwork attributes are reflected generally, such as in how you speak about others or collaborate well or react when you don't get your own way.



Be ready to answer questions such as:

- ★ What have you learnt from your experience of working in a team recently?
- ★ How would team members describe you?
- ★ Tell us about a recent occasion when you demonstrated good teamworking skills.

In assessment centre tasks

What is involved?

Employers and recruiters often include a team task such as a discussion group or working on a problem or activity relevant to the job. They might use an 'ice-breaker' such as sharing background details with another candidate and reporting their points back to the group (so listen carefully!) Use any informal chat time to get to know other candidates so you are more relaxed around them. Treat them as future colleagues rather than as competitors.

What do employers look for?

Employers, typically, look for the following.

- 1 The usual features of good teamwork** and of being a constructive, active team member (page 161). Practise these so that they become habitual, automatic behaviours. This will help you to relax, focus and be yourself during assessment.
- 2 A range of skills in action** They will observe how well you demonstrate skills such as clear thinking, good listening, creativity, task-management, problem-solving, analysis and ability to take criticism during teamwork. They might look at specific behaviours such as whether you:
 - ★ can cope under reasonable pressure
 - ★ stay focused on the important issues
 - ★ encourage others to contribute.
- 3 Forward movement** They will observe whether your input and behaviour move the group towards a good solution, or obstruct it with negativity, wasted time, lack of contributions, indecision or weak decisions.
- 4 Company values** They will check whether your behaviour is consistent with company values. Be familiar with these well in advance.
- 5 How you get on with others** (as relevant to the job). Show genuine interest in other candidates and their views. Invite their views. Listen. Act as if relaxed (even if not). Smile.

Things to ask yourself

It can be useful to prepare a mental checklist of behaviours that you think assessors might observe – and how you might demonstrate these

without it looking forced or artificial. Draw on this during your time at the centre. For example:

- 1 Am I speaking too much – or not enough?
- 2 Am I repeating myself? (If so, stop.)
- 3 Am I encouraging others to speak?
- 4 Am I taking on board others' perspectives?
- 5 Are we using time well? What can I suggest that would help us use the time to best effect?
- 6 Have we drifted off subject or away from the brief? If so, is this a good moment to remind the group of the focus of the brief?
- 7 Would this discussion benefit from more structure? If so, what can I suggest?
- 8 Would the discussion benefit from more ideas? If so, suggest a brainstorming session, or that everyone write down a few ideas and put them up for everyone to consider together.
- 9 Am I sounding too negative? If so, how can I balance that with constructive comments?
- 10 Would it help if I fed back to the group where I think we have got to so far?

Observation



Through employers' eyes

Put yourself in the shoes of recruiters: watch TV programmes such as *The Apprentice* which are based around team tasks. Jot down:

- ★ Your observations of behaviours that were unhelpful – or embarrassing – to watch.
- ★ The comments made by team members, judges, studio panel members, etc.

Reflect on how you behave when you feel stressed, threatened or unsupported.

Want to know more?



<https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/assessment-centres/275425-group-exercises-what-to-expect>
www.brightnetwork.co.uk/graduate-career-advice/assessment-centre-advice/succeed-group-exercise

Review: Teamwork

Use the teamwork opportunities provided for students

- 1** Take part in many teams to gain varied skills and insights. Recognise that student teamwork assignments are usually set to provide experience relevant to employment – not just to get an assignment completed.

Focus on process as well as outcomes

- 2** Whilst it is important to keep an eye on the intended team goals, teamwork can offer much more. Good teamworking enables a positive experience of collaborative working and enables personal growth, too.

Understand what underpins great teamworking

- 3** Great teams don't just happen. The actions and behaviours of the team members are paramount. Even small actions, over time, shape the team as effective or dysfunctional.

Commit to being a good team member

- 4** Teams work effectively when members commit to putting team interests ahead of individual glory-seeking and when everyone can rely on each other as respectful, dependable, and trustworthy. Be aware of how your own behaviours affect team morale, efficiency and effectiveness.

Put time into creating a sense of team

- 5** Don't underestimate the importance of developing a sense of team. That usually means putting time into getting to know each other and bonding, either over time (if there is time) or away from the main task.

Understand formal and informal roles required for effectiveness

- 6** Identify and allocate roles needed to fulfil key functions for the team and to carry out each task. Be aware of softer functions such as coordination, planning and ideas generation. Decide who will fulfil these.

Recognise and manage team dynamics

- 7** Learn to interpret more accurately what is going on in your team at a given time, such as whether it is in the process of forming, storming, norming, performing or adjourning. Observe what triggers your team into each of these stages.

Strive for positive, inclusive team dynamics

- 8** Become more skilled at creating and maintaining teams that involve everyone fully, to the benefit of the team as a whole, and to help the personal growth and well-being of each team member.

Use conflict and confrontation in teams constructively

- 9** Don't fear conflict and confrontation – these can bring energy and diffuse problems. Use them sensitively, being aware of the conflict dynamics. Respect the dignity of all, so you can re-group as a stronger team.

Be confident in teamwork components of job applications

- 10** Be aware of what you can contribute to teams already, and build your skills and experience. Prepare good examples of your experience to draw upon, as well as lessons learnt. If invited to team assessments, remember to demonstrate that you can be active in helping a team to function effectively.