

Leadership and Management

Developing effective teamwork



“When team members cooperate well, respecting and supporting one another, it helps to achieve common goals.”

Leadership and management in the early years. Jones & Pound 2009

Recognising one another as individuals – both personal and professional qualities – is fundamental when developing effective teamwork. It enables you to pull on one another’s strengths and to effectively embed a strong system of peer support.

Task 1 – The team member

Leaders will need to be skilled in modelling what it is to be an effective team member and should be clear in their expectations of all members. As a starting point to developing effective teamwork, it might be helpful to discuss as a team, what the qualities of a strong ‘team player’ might look like.

Draw a stick person on a flip chart and ask each member of staff to add a quality/skill/trait to the paper that they think is important e.g., good communicator, open to suggestions/advice, supportive, understanding, motivated etc. Keep going until you are all happy with your ‘ideal team member’. Ask individuals to personally reflect on how they compare and what they might need to work on.

Task 2 – The team

The working dynamic of a group of individuals can be fragile if not managed effectively. Whilst it is helpful to establish who we are as individuals; leaders then need to evaluate how effectively they are knitted together to create a team that works efficiently and effectively.

Handy 1990 describes four stages of development when developing a team -

- **Forming** – The beginning stage, finding your team's identity. This can be when you are starting up, or when there are changes to the existing team. Individuals are brought together to contribute to the team's purpose but are not yet working cohesively. Opinions are being formed of one another, and how they themselves fit. Some will be more confident than others and dynamics not yet established. Leaders at this stage will be focused on assessing individuals both professionally and personally to establish next steps. As confidence and familiarity grows, conflict can be expected – and indication that you have progressed to the next stage.
- **Storming** – A challenging yet crucial stage. Individuals begin to move towards a general consensus and with this comes debate. Personal agendas, ideas and approaches are visible, and clashes of opinion can be expected. Team members can become critical of one another whilst dynamics are established, and systems developed. Leaders will need to support conflict resolution and ensure that the team priorities are reflected on and reevaluated if needed. Clear and open communication is essential to enable the team to progress to the next stage. Too much/too frequent change can lead to a sense of instability that can also prolong time in this stage – so leaders need a mindful and measured approach.

- **Norming** – The teams identify is now established. A sense of cohesion can be felt and practice normalising. Processes become more reliable, and expectations are clearer. Issues can be raised more comfortably, knowing that a solution will be the shared goal, supported by leaders. A welcome stage where a feeling of trust and confidence in one another has formed, with individuals now working co-operatively and starting to feel like team.
- **Performing** – A sense of being part of the team that is now fully formed. The ethos of the team is supportive and productive, enabling members to actively work to achieve the shared vision of the provision. Practitioners work together naturally, and the team is maturing over time. During this stage, leaders will continue to support, discuss, reflect, and review with the team to build on quality. Individuals will help and support one another, responding to one another's needs, personalities strengths and weaknesses.

Looking at these stages, can you assess which stage you currently sit in as a team?

What steps are now needed to enable you to progress to the next stage?

Do individuals recognise the role they play in supporting progression through these stages?

How can you empower individuals to take ownership of their responsibility when it comes to shaping an effective team?

[15 Team building ideas | team building, team building activities, activities \(pinterest.co.uk\)](https://www.pinterest.co.uk/teambuildingideas/)

Task 3 – Keeping momentum

To ensure that practice moves forward and that it is not hindered by ineffective teamwork, leaders need to be continuously reflective of the current team working culture.

Below is a list of principle features described by McCall & Lawlor, as contributing to a successful team.

Reading the list of principle features, spend some time reflecting how your existing team measures up.

- There is a shared vision and agreed priorities.
- Individuals have good interpersonal skills.
- Systems in place for exploring different views and opinions.
- There are open and clear lines of communication.
- There is access to 'practice' support as needed.
- Processes for managing conflict are in place.
- There is time to plan and evaluate.
- Recognition is ever present.
- The ability to problem-solve is strong.
- Team has a clear and agreed purpose.

Through this reflective exercise, have you noted any improvements that could be made to strengthen how effective teamwork currently is?

Ask your team for their perspective – does it differ from your own? Having team feedback can support you in identifying and managing expectations and any underlying challenges.