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# Module 1: Work in a Team



On completion of this module you will be covering the following Specific Outcomes which will enable you to:

* Communicate with all relevant stakeholders to enhance teamwork
* Report on team progress to appropriate authority and team
* Display tendencies to work with others as a member of a Contact Centre team
* Handle and resolve areas of conflict
* Demonstrate a fundamental understanding of diversity
* Communicate within a diverse working environment
* Interact with others in a diverse working environment

**Teams have become a fundamental building block** in the strategy of successful businesses. Whether the focus is on service, quality, cost, value, speed, efficiency, performance, or other similar goals, teams are the central point of most businesses in the private, non-profit, and government sectors.

With teams at the core of corporate strategy, your success as a business can often depend on how well **you** and **other team members** operate together. How are your problem-solving skills? Is the team enthusiastic and motivated to do its best? Do you work well together?



**Working in diverse teams** can be **rewarding**, but also **difficult** and **sometimes frustrating.** If there **is poor communication** on your team, you may often feel **left in the dark, confused and even**

**misunderstood**.

Before we start this Module – **write down** what your personal thoughts and objectives are when it comes to working with people and working in a team.

**Personal Objectives**

**What is your idea of effective team work?**

**Why is it important?**

**What’s in it for me?**

# Section One: Communication Skills When Working in a Team

## 1.1 Communicating with Others to Enhance Teamwork

Working in teams can be rewarding, but also difficult and sometimes frustrating. If there is poor communication on your team, you may often feel left in the dark, confused and even misunderstood.

In this section we will learn the importance of good communication within a team. Good team communication:

* Provides an opportunity for team members to get to know one another and share ideas for developing the team to a higher level
* Understand the value of working as a team
* Understand the value of working and communicating as a team member
* Recognise the critical role communication skills play in building and maintaining a team
* Explore your team player style and identify how it can be used effectively with our own team
* Identify ways that team members can be involved and grow in a team setting.

Before we start, let us note our personal objectives:

**What does it mean to you to be part of a team – what do you expect as a team member?**

If we look at the word **team** in the dictionary it is explained in many ways, **crew, player, squad, group or even band** – which means a group of people working together – and for a group of people to work together the very first thing that has to be correct is communication – this is the most integral part of being a team member **- communicating:**

**The definition of communication is "sending, giving, or exchanging information and ideas," which is often expressed nonverbally and verbally.**

**Non-verbal communication** is the act of saying what's on your mind without speaking words. Examples of this include facial gestures (smiling, frowning), body language (arms crossed, giving someone the "finger", legs shaking resembling nervousness, sitting upright giving someone their full attention), and the impression you give to others with your appearance (dress, body image, body odor).

Also, the **tone** of your voice can be expressed non-verbally. For instance, if you are saying one thing, but your tone of voice is saying another, then that reflects how you are truly feeling without speaking a word about it (yelling and crying while saying your okay).

**Verbal communication** is the act of saying what's on your mind with words. This form of communication is often taken for granted such as saying regretful things and opening your mouth before thinking about what you are saying.

Words can hurt or they can heal. So, it's very important to become aware of what words you choose to use when communicating to others as well as to yourself.

Effective communication methods are both necessary for both team members and team leaders. Even though some people understand their style of communication their skills still need to be improved upon but they are uncertain how to do this.

**If you are a member of a team** or a team leader you need to be an effective communicator. If you have a problem with someone in your team, you need to be able to talk about it, do not let bad feelings brew – it will cause you to withdraw from the group and isolate yourself. It is a feel good feeling to get it out and it is also better for the team. Remember it is important the way you communicate with your team members – have respect and deal with matters in an adult manner.

Members of your team will lose respect for you if you are constantly blaming others for not meeting deadlines, absenteeism, any excuse that lets the team down. You are not fooling anyone but yourself, a team will soon get to know who is pulling their weight and who is not. If you continually point fingers at other members of a team it makes you look is a cowardly (weak). Team members will know when your workload is heavy and you were not able to meet a deadline. In this case if you said “I’m really sorry, but I’ll get it to you by the end of the day” will earn far more respect than trying to make it seem as if it is the groups fault that **you** missed **your** deadline.

**Support your team member’s ideas**. If a team members suggest something, consider it – even if it is the silliest idea that you have ever heard – consider all idea that are brought to the party and not just your own, this is what make a good team member – not a know-it-all.

Remember in **supporting your team** does not mean that you only rejoice in your success with the group, doing this may create tension within the team. Remember as a team you would all have worked to a common goal, and yes, maybe you were the main contributor and you will be recognized for this, but don’t brag about it – if someone does comment or give thanks to you for being the main contributor to the goal, be gracious and say thanks.

## 1.2 Clear and Concise Communcation

Remember the **basics of any communication**, it must be **clear and concise** – the basics of any communication is to say enough to be understood and not too much to waste anybody’s time – clear and concise.

To communicate clearly and effectively an effort from both the sender of the message and the receiver, it's a process that can be full of errors, with messages often misinterpreted by the recipient. When this isn't detected, it can cause tremendous confusion, wasted effort and missed opportunity.

In fact, communication is only successful when both the **sender and the receiver understand** the same information as a result of the communication.

By successfully getting your message across, you convey your thoughts and ideas effectively.

When not successful, the thoughts and ideas that you convey do not necessarily reflect your own, causing a communications breakdown and creating roadblocks that stand in the way of your goals – both personally and professionally.

Getting your message across is paramount to progressing. To do this, you must understand what your message is, what audience you are sending it to, and how it will be perceived. You must also weigh-in the circumstances surrounding your communications, such as situational and cultural context.

How do you do this:

* Think about what you are going to say, use the right language for the audience.
* Technical talk and abbreviations are there to use if you know your audience is going to understand it.
* Check what is being understood when you are talking, take note of the person or person’s you are talking to – what is their body language – are they nodding in agreement or frowning – are they asking questions
* Say what you mean – make sure you are getting your story across
* Be professional – no jargon or cursing, within a business environment you will also not be familiar
* Be professional, keep focused and be friendly
* Speak to the person’s face, and be friendly
* Speak clearly and at a suitable volume

## 1.3 Listening to Others

Although we have covered listening skills in other modules, we need to consider the important role it plays in team communication.

Two of the most powerful communication skills are our ability to **listen** and to **ask questions.** These are the tools everyone uses overcome miscommunication problems. Surprisingly, we don’t do either of them very well.

Good listening skills are crucial to team building. Team Leaders should be doing more listening than talking.

US President Franklin D. Roosevelt used to say that people never really listened to what he said. They only kept quiet out of courtesy. Every once in a while he would test his theory and say something like, “So good to see you. I murdered my grandmother this morning.”

But he got caught out on one occasion when a woman nodded gravely before replying,

“Mr. President, I’m sure she had it coming to her.”

Listening is not just a techniques. It is an attitude, a way in which you relate to the world. To be a good listener, you must make **listening** a part of the way you live.

Most of us take it for granted that we are good listeners, and that listening just comes naturally to us. In fact, listening is as complicated and strenuous as the other forms of communication—reading, writing, and speaking.

One reason listening is important is that we do so much of it each day. It is our most frequently used communication skill.

Effective listening can help you improve your relationship with other important people, such as your manager, your team members, your employees, your friends, and your family.

**Guidelines for Effective Listening[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Concentrate

Maintain eye contact

Use your time to anticipate, evaluate (not judge), summarize, and listen between the lines.

Non-Verbal Messages - Eye contact, an alert expression, head nodding, and a forward lean to the body expresses listening.

Cues or Invitations - these are the phrases like “Uh-huh,” “Okay,” “Yes,” and “Go on,” that signal our attention and invite an individual to continue talking. Clarification of what has been said - we can do this in one of several ways: by asking questions, summarizing what has been said, or paraphrasing the message in your own words.

**Constructive Listening** - to be an effective team member, it is important to be both a willing and a skilled listener. Here are some guidelines for constructive listening:

These are some general tips when listening, we can all be guilty of some of them – try and make yourself aware of the small things you do when listening to a person, and work on the technique to get it right.

When someone has something on his/her mind, allow that person to talk it out without responding with sharp answers or judgment contacts about the unreasonableness of the statements.

Restrain any natural impulse to be curious and avoid asking questions that show bias or are not relevant to the discussion.

If feelings or emotions become the centre of discussion, don’t dismiss them lightly or abruptly. Discouraging the expression of emotional issues can inhibit the team’s ability to work things out. They need to be allowed to vent their frustrations.

Violent and deep-seated negative expressions require understanding rather than judgment.

Although it may be difficult to be silent, you should speak as little as possible when listening.

Verbal cues that you are listening, such as an alert facial expression and a slight forward movement, all indicate interest.

Acceptance doesn’t require agreement. It isn’t necessary to say “I think you are absolutely right.” Possibly the only thing worse to say is, “I think you are absolutely wrong.”

Don’t give advice on personal matters. There is an old saying, “A wise man does not need advice; a damn fool will not take it.” Let the speaker decide what the best approach is. Your role is to listen and, when appropriate, suggest where the person may find additional help.

**Listen actively** to your team members/team leader - by this we mean, nodding, ask questions, acknowledge, ask if you are unsure, paraphrase the main points, clear up any confusion before you move on. Effective communication is a vital part of any team, so the value of good listening is a skill that should not be underestimated.

## 1.4 Giving Feedback

When working in a team it is important that you are given and also give feedback to your team or team leader.

Some team members might not be able to distinguish feedback from general criticism, and this is something you need to learn. If negative comments are given by someone, we can feel discouraged and often blame the giver without

considering his/her true intentions – which could be to assist the team and better the performance, but because we have little experience in dealing with negative feedback – whether giving or taking, we will more than likely be offended by it, simply because we do not expect it or want to hear it. We need to learn how to open our minds and make room for ‘constructive’ feedback.

People often do not know where to draw the line when distinguishing feedback from general criticism. If negative comments are given by someone, we may feel discouraged by these, and often blame the giver without any consideration for his true intentions. One who has little experience in dealing with negative feedback (whether giving or taking) will likely be offended by it, simply because that person is expecting to hear what he wants to hear. Learn how to open your mind and make some room for the word "Constructive" in Feedback.

**Process of Giving Feedback:**

There are many general rules when providing feedback. These rules apply to your every-day life and to those who surround you; your child, spouse, teachers, employers, colleagues, and so on. These procedures, as you know, must always be followed very carefully. **The first rule**

**is to be able to communicate clearly**. In order for anyone to learn from their mistakes, it is imperative that people can get their point across as clearly and concise as possible. Below are some guidelines on how to organize and provide casual feedback:

**Present the situation in question**: If your child did not complete his math homework, for instance, you need to let him know how important it is for him to finish all homework given. As obvious as it may sound to both the parent and the child, reinstating the facts increases the likelihood of both being on the same wavelength.

**Organize a plan to resolve the problem**: Now that all cards have been placed on the table, discuss your child's fear. What are his strengths? What are his weaknesses? Acknowledge these so that YOU can better assist with the help HE needs. Knowing that help is just around the corner, your child will feel more secured about seeking advice next time things are looking rough.

**Ask and tell! Advice is the way to show the ropes**! But be careful how you approach it.

To get a little more detailed, let's talk about a more serious situation (and possibly more common among adults) that is essential in the workplace. A fellow employee is not up to speed on the latest company project. As a result, he does his job, but it seems a little rough around the edges.

Whether it needs more attention to detail or is usually late, it nevertheless needs to be brought to the employer's attention. How would the boss best handle a situation like this?

**Again, Acknowledge the situation at hand**. Talk to your employee about the importance and meaning of the project in question.

It is very **important** to also **allow** the person on the other end (receiving the feedback) **to input his/her own opinion as well**. This will help clear the atmosphere about any

possible misunderstandings between the two.

Come to an understanding which will lead to a solid solution. If the employee needs to catch up with information, offer a private meeting! If not, have him/her sit with a fellow colleague to further analyze and discuss the goals on this project.

**Follow up! It is not enough to simply come to a conclusion and move on**. If this was the case, many doctors' patients would constantly feel ill. Once the necessary steps have been taken care of, go back to square one with the colleague to make sure that he or she is comfortable with the job. Best of all, this undoubtedly implies "If any more help is needed, I will always be there for you."

**Remember there is no 'I' in 'team'**. If something needs to be addressed, make sure everyone is on the same page, now matter how individual the situation may seem to be.



**Acknowledge people's feelings**. Providing positive feedback is generally easy because one never has to worry about saying the wrong things. When negativity comes into place, however, people are suddenly playing an entirely new game. **Do NOT, under ANY circumstance, make constructive comments**

**offensive**. These include, but are not limited to, yelling to an individual,

embarrassing him/her in any way, or underestimating someone's character. If something needs to be heard, pull the person to the side for a moment, look at

him/her in the eye, and talk about the problem/solution in a civilized manner. Does anyone think people will be encouraged to move on once their heads get chewed up? I highly doubt it.

Because we are only humans, we tend to overlook a lot of mistakes, especially the ones that we create on our own. Because of this, we NEED other people's perspectives. We NEED others to guide us in the right direction so that next time nothing else goes wrong. In order to grow before a person's very own eyes, we have to grow within ourselves, therefore one should be able to take advise as advise and not get into a rage and take it is criticism,

As you can see, when it comes to feedback, it is not simply about when to communicate, but how the communication is executed. **It is now what we say**

**but how we say it.**

## 1.5 Overcoming Communication Barriers

Barriers to communication plays a huge part in our daily lives, and although we are not sometimes aware of it, it is a underlying fact and if we take the time to think about certain instances, and we recognize these barriers it will give one the opportunity to improve communication within your daily and family life.

These barriers suggest opportunities for improving communication:

**Muddled Messages** – when we do not think about what we are going to say, we send out a muddled or not so clear message which becomes a barrier to good communication , for example:

“Please be here at about 7:00 tomorrow morning."

"Please be here at 7:00 tomorrow morning."

The one word difference makes the first message muddled and the second message is clear as to exactly what time the person should be there..

Muddled messages are a barrier to communication because the sender leaves the receiver unclear about the intent of the sender.

Muddled messages have many causes. The sender may be confused in his or her thinking. The message may be little more than a vague idea. The problem may be semantics, e.g., note this muddled newspaper ad: "Dog for sale. Will eat anything. Especially likes children. Contact 888-3599 for more information."

Feedback from the receiver is the best way for a sender to be sure that the message is clear rather than muddled. **Clarifying muddled messages is the responsibility**

**of the sender**. The sender hoping the receiver will figure out the message does little

to remove this barrier to communication.

**Stereotyping** - Stereotyping causes us to typify a person, a group, an event or a thing on oversimplified conceptions, beliefs, or opinions. For instance, basketball players can be stereotyped as tall, green equipment as better than red equipment, rugby linemen as dumb, BMW as better than Mercedes, and people raised on dairy farms as interested in animals. Stereotyping can substitute for thinking, analysis and open mindedness to a new situation.

Stereotyping is a barrier to communication when it causes people to act as if they already know the message that is coming from the sender or worse, as if no message is necessary because "everybody already knows." Both senders and listeners should continuously look for and address thinking, conclusions and actions based on stereotypes – **remember our most common mistake in stereotyping is that we**

**assume that the person is something he/she is not.**

**Wrong channel** - "Good morning." An oral channel for this message is highly appropriate. Writing "GOOD MORNING!" on a chalkboard in the workplace is less effective than a warm oral greeting. On the other hand, a detailed request to a team members to encourage them to reach and exceed their target for the day should be in writing, i.e., non-oral – this not only has a visual impact but also is encouraging.

Another way of being on the wrong channel is if you are in a meeting and your team leader has a long conversation with your team regarding a new product launch and starts to compare it to another product and nobody is taking notes, surely will result in confusion and misunderstanding. This is a simple way of indicating how the wrong channel can be a barrier to communication.

Variation of channels helps the receiver understand the nature and importance of a message. Using a training video on a new product launch for the company may help new employees grasp the importance of the new product.

A written disciplinary warning for tardiness emphasizes to the employee that the problem is serious. A birthday card to an employee's spouse is more sincere than a request to the employee to say "Happy Birthday" to the spouse.

Simple rules for selection of a channel can cause more problems than they solve. In choice of a channel, the sender needs to be sensitive to such things as the complexity of the message, the consequences of a misunderstanding; knowledge, skills and abilities of the receiver to understand maybe the urgency of the message or the understanding of a new product.

**Language** - Words are not reality. Words as the sender understands them are combined with the perceptions of those words by the receiver. In other words – it is the choose of word that you use and the way it is said that makes the receiver understand the message.

Language represents only part of the whole. We fill in the rest with perceptions. Trying to understand a foreign language easily demonstrates words not being reality. Being "foreign" is not limited to the language of another country. It can be the language of another colleague, for instance: The Gerken house may be where the Browns now live. The green goose may be a trailer painted red long after it was given the name green goose. A brassy day may say much about temperature and little about color.

Each new employee needs to be taught the language of the company. Until the company’s language is learned, it can be as much a barrier to communication as a foreign language. In this we mean that each company has a set of rules on how it communicates to its clients, and we need to know and understand this.

**Lack of feedback** - Feedback is the mirror of communication. Feedback mirrors what the sender has sent. Feedback is the receiver sending back to the sender the message as perceived. Without feedback, communication is one-way.

Feedback happens in a variety of ways. Asking a person to repeat what has been said, e.g., repeat instructions, is a very direct way of getting feedback. Feedback may be as subtle as a stare, a puzzled look, a nod, or failure to ask any questions after complicated instructions have been given. Both sender and receiver can play an active role in using feedback to make communication truly two-way.

Feedback should be helpful rather than hurtful. Prompt feedback is more effective that feedback saved up until the "right" moment. Feedback should deal in specifics rather than generalities.

**Poor listening skills** - Listening is difficult. A typical speaker says about 125 words per minute. The typical listener can receive 400-600 words per minute. Thus, about 75 percent of listening time is free time. The free time often sidetracks the listener. The solution is to be an active rather than passive listener.

One important listening skill is to be prepared to listen. **Tune out** thoughts about other people and other problems. **Search for meaning** in what the person is saying. **A mental outline** or summary **of key thoughts** can be very helpful. Avoid interrupting the speaker.

Withhold evaluation and judgment until the other person has finished with the message. A listener's premature frown, shaking of the head, or bored look can easily convince the other person there is no reason to elaborate or try again to communicate his or her excellent idea.

**Providing feedback** is the most important active listening skill.

Focus on what the other person is saying. Repeat key points.

Active listening is particularly important in dealing with an angry person. Encouraging the person to speak, i.e., to vent feelings, is essential to establishing communication with an angry person. Repeat what the person has said. Ask questions to encourage the person to say again what he or she seemed most anxious to say in the first place. An angry person will not start listening until they have "cooled" down. Telling an angry person to "cool" down often has the opposite effect. Getting angry with an angry person only assures that there are now two people not listening to what the other is saying.

**Interruptions** - A contact centre is a very busy environment, although each day is the same as the next, periods of calm and quiet rarely interrupt the usual hectic pace. In this environment, conversations, meetings, instructions and even casual talk about last night's game are likely to be interrupted. The interruptions may be due to something more pressing, rudeness, lack of privacy for discussion, a drop-in visitor, an emergency, or even the curiosity of someone else wanting to know what two other people are saying.

Regardless of the cause, interruptions are a barrier to communication. In the extreme, there is a reluctance of employees and family members even to attempt discussion with a manager because of the near certainty that the conversation will be interrupted. Less extreme but serious is the problem of incomplete instructions because someone came by with a pressing question.

**Physical distractions** - Physical distractions are the physical things that get in the way of communication. Examples of such things include a contact centre agent at the workstation next to you talking loudly to a customer and maybe getting a bit aggravated or when an agent walks past you and you are talking to a customer and she taps you on your shoulder to tell you something, and you lose concentration, and noise.

These physical distractions are common within a contact centre. Have you ever noted that if you are talking to your Supervisor or Team leader and his/her telephone rings in the office, the tendency is to answer it even if the contactor is interrupting a very important or even delicate conversation? **Noise is a physical distraction** simply because it is hard to concentrate on a conversation if hearing is difficult.

**Facilitating Communication**

In addition to removal of specific barriers to communication, the following general guidelines may also facilitate communication.

* Have a positive attitude about communication. Defensiveness interferes with communication.
* Work at improving communication skills. It takes knowledge and work. The communication model and discussion of barriers to communication provide the necessary knowledge. This increased awareness of the potential for improving communication is the first step to better communication.
* Include communication as a skill to be evaluated along with all the other skills in each person's job description. Help other people improve their communication skills by helping them understand their communication problems.
* Make communication goal oriented. Relational goals come first and pave the way for other goals. When the sender and receiver have a good relationship, they are much more likely to accomplish their communication goals.
* Approach communication as a creative process rather than simply part of the chore of working with people. Experiment with communication alternatives. What works with one person may not work well with another person. Vary channels, listening techniques, and feedback techniques.
* Accept the reality of miscommunication. The best communicators fail to have perfect communication. They accept miscommunication and work to minimize its negative impacts.

Communication is at the heart of many interpersonal problems faced by contact centre employees and employers.

Understanding the communication process and then working at improvement provide both employees and employer a recipe for becoming more effective communicators. Knowing the common barriers to communication is the first step to minimizing their impact.

Both employees and employers can reflect on how they are doing and make use of the ideas presented. When taking stock of how well you are doing as an agent, supervisor or manager, first ask yourself and others how well you are doing as a communicator.

Practice speaking, asking questions, try and use a new technique – read as much as you can, listen to how people communicate to improve your daily skills. You can practice these skills at home as well, look at the mirror and have a conversation, watch your facial expressions and body language, all these tips will assist in making you’re a better communicator. Good luck – good communication is a goal to strive for.

# Go to your assessment pack for this section and complete in full

# Section Two: Reporting Team Progress

## 2.1 How Often Must We Report Team Progress?

In the Contact Centre industry team progress is of vital importance. The Contact Centre is traditionally divided up into teams and these teams are chosen strategically to improve and assist the Company to reach targets.

Team Leaders are chosen for their ability to coach, encourage and develop a team. Whilst the emphasis is put on the team and the team leader the day-to-day progress is measured in the form of reports at various intervals.

In previous sections we have learnt about the CRM (Customer Relationship Management System) – this is the system that will give management reports on all aspects of the Contact Centre.

The frequency of the reports will depend on management. Management will review the running of the Contact Centre for a month before starting to strategise as to the type of report they require.

## 2.2 Report Contents

Progress reports are an integral part of a Contact Centre. Progress reports are developed at the start of a new campaign or product launch. The following reports are an indication of the type of report that will be constructed:

* Incoming Calls
* Outgoing Calls
* Dropped Calls
* Down Time
* Time keeping
* Promise to Pay – (in debt collection)
* Targets
* Team targets
* Individual team targets
* Individual team members targets

The list is endless – management is able to pull any report be it a specific time or a daily report, or view it as a real time report – meaning that they can see immediately what is happening in the Contact Centre at that exact moment.

From the above reports, progress is monitored and the facts are used to make future decisions within the Contact Centre.

Progress reports are required for clients, if your Contact Centre is in debt collection, reports on how many calls were made per day – how many clients have ‘promised to pay’ how many calls were made to clients but the number had been changed – all these reports could be sent to the client at the press of a button.

A Contact Centre is a ‘fact’ centre because of the nature of the business all facts obtained and recorded are constructed into reports.

## 2.3 Organisational Requirements

All progress reports need to be ‘fit for purpose’ meaning that it must have the end results of giving the information that is required by the reader.

Progress reports in a Contact Centre that deals with Market Research for instance must be able to give the client the results from a survey in a logical manner and a in a way that fits in with the customers’ requirements.

## 2.4 Presenting Report Findings

Reports are mostly presented in writing within the Contact Centre. The reason for this is that all reports become a history of what has happened from day to day and this is stored for future analysis.

If you are required to present a report verbally, you will need to formalise this in your brain before you present. Prepare your verbal report in writing to ensure that you have a logical sequence and that the facts are reported to clearly and accurately.

## 2.5 Report Time Frames

Progress reports are presented within the agreed time frames and format. Management will agree on the time frame as to the regularity of the reports and the format will be decided upon and the IT department will then ensure that the format is designed the correct format.

If reports are not captured electronically through the CRM system then format advised by your Management or Team Leader, this will confirm to the company’s requests and also customise all reports ensuring that they are easier to read and understand.

Customising reports makes them more user friendly.

# Go to your assessment pack for this section and complete in full

# Section Three: Effective Team Work

## 3.1 Effective Teamwork Tendencies

No matter what you do or where you live or where you work, the quality of your attitude determines the quality of your relationship with your team or team members. The good news is that attitudes are yours to select. And if you are free to choose any one you please, why not choose a Really Useful Attitude.

In face to face situations, your attitude precedes you. It is the central force in your life; it controls the quality and appearance of everything you do.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Really Useful Attitudes** | **Really Useless Attitudes** |
| Warm  Enthusiastic  Confident  Supportive  Relaxed  Obliging  Curious  Resourceful  Comfortable  Helpful  Engaging  Laid Back  Patient  Welcoming  Cheery  Interested | Angry Sarcastic  Impatient  Bored  Disrespectful  Conceited  Pessimistic  Anxious  Rude  Suspicious  Vengeful  Afraid  Self-conscious  Mocking  Embarrassed  Dutiful |

## 3.2 Self Reflection Activity

Complete the following questions

What role do you think you play in your team?

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How do you describe yourself?

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Can your team can count on you:

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What specific changes do I want to see within your team in three months?

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What are you going to do to ensure that these changes are made?

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This is how I will know I have to do it:

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In the above exercise it identifies how you describe yourself and how you work within your team:

People in every workplace talk about building the team, working as a team, and my team, but few understand how to create the experience of team work or how to develop an effective team. Belonging to a team, in the broadest sense, is a result of feeling part of something larger than yourself. It has a lot to do with your understanding of the mission or objectives of your organization.

In a team-oriented environment, you contribute to the overall success of the organization. You work with fellow members of the organization to produce these results. Even though you have a specific job function and you belong to a specific department, you are unified with other organization members to accomplish the overall objectives. The bigger picture drives your actions; your function exists to serve the bigger picture.

## 3.3 Team Member Behaviours

Team behaviours are governed by Company mission and value statements. Team behaviour can also be governed by their Supervisor or Team leader. Many view team-based, horizontal, organization structures as the best design for involving all employees in creating business success.

No matter what you call your team-based improvement effort: continuous improvement, total quality, self-directed work teams, you are striving to improve results for customers. If your team improvement efforts are not living up to your expectations, this self-diagnosing checklist may tell you why. Successful team building, that creates effective, focused work teams, requires attention to each of the following.

**Nine Cs for Team Building**

1. **Clear Expectations**: Has executive leadership clearly communicated its expectations for the team’s performance and expected outcomes? Do team members understand why the team was created? Is the organization demonstrating constancy of purpose in supporting the team with resources of people, time and money? Does the work of the team receive sufficient emphasis as a priority in terms of the time, discussion, attention and interest directed its way by executive leaders?
2. **Context**: Do team members understand why they are participating on the team? Do they understand how the strategy of using teams will help the organization attain its communicated business goals? Can team members define their team’s importance to the accomplishment of corporate goals? Does the team understand where its work fits in the total context of the organization’s goals, principles, vision and values.

1. **Commitment**: Do team members want to participate on the team? Do team members feel the team mission is important? Are members committed to accomplishing the team mission and expected outcomes? Do team members perceive their service as valuable to the organization and to their own careers? Do team members anticipate recognition for their contributions? Do team members expect their skills to grow and develop on the team? Are team members excited and challenged by the team opportunity?

1. **Competence**: Does the team feel that it has the appropriate people participating? (As an example, in a process improvement, is each step of the process represented on the team?) Does the team feel that its members have the knowledge, skill and capability to address the issues for which the team was formed? If not, does the team have access to the help it needs? Does the team feel it has the resources, strategies and support needed to accomplish its mission?

1. **Charter:** Has the team taken its assigned area of responsibility and designed its own mission, vision and strategies to accomplish the mission. Has the team defined and communicated its goals; its anticipated outcomes and contributions; its timelines; and how it will measure both the outcomes of its work and the process the team followed to accomplish their task? Does the leadership team or other coordinating group support what the team has designed?

1. **Control**: Does the team have enough freedom and empowerment to feel the ownership necessary to accomplish what it has to? At the same time, do team members clearly understand their boundaries? How far may members go in pursuit of solutions? Are limitations (i.e. monetary and time resources) defined at the beginning of the project before the team experiences barriers and rework?

Is the team’s reporting relationship and accountability understood by all members of the organization? Has the organization defined the team’s authority? To make recommendations? To implement its plan? Is there a defined review process so both the team and the organization are consistently aligned in direction and purpose? Do team members hold each other accountable for project timelines, commitments and results? Does the organization have a plan to increase opportunities for self-management among organization members?

1. **Consequences**: Do team members feel responsible and accountable for team achievements? Are rewards and recognition supplied when teams are successful? Is reasonable risk respected and encouraged in the organization? Do team members fear reprisal? Do team members spend their time finger pointing rather than resolving problems? Is the organization designing reward systems that recognize both team and individual performance? Is the organization planning to share gains and increased profitability with team and individual contributors? Can contributors see their impact on increased organization success?

1. **Coordination**: Are teams coordinated by a central leadership team that assists the groups to obtain what they need for success? Have priorities and resource allocation been planned across departments? Do teams understand the concept of the internal customer—the next process, anyone to whom they provide a product or a service? Are cross-functional and multi-department teams common and working together effectively? Is the organization developing a customerfocused process-focused orientation and moving away from traditional departmental thinking?

1. **Cultural Change**: Does the organization recognize that the team-based, collaborative, empowering, enabling organizational culture of the future is different than the traditional, hierarchical organization it may currently be? Is the organization planning to or in the process of changing how it rewards,

recognizes, appraises, hires, develops, plans with, motivates and manages the people it employs?

Spend time and attention on each of these tips to ensure your work teams contribute most effectively to your business success. Your team members will love you, your business will soar, and empowered people will "own" and be responsible for their work processes. Can your work life get any better than this?

## 3.4 Applying What You’ve Learnt

To produce a team or complex team results through simple member behaviours can be complex, but nature often is a good example of how we can achieve this through a number of simple rules which can operate at both team member and team leader level. This can results in a sophisticated team behaviour provided for all members to follow consistently, for example ‘birds flying in a group’, a bee hive and ants. All we have to do is adopt a set of ‘model behaviours’ at individual or team member level.

If you think in nature how do these teams work together, they:

* They don’t issue orders
* They expect members to all work together
* One goal – success
* If you deviate – appropriate action will take place
* Timely information – if you think of ants, in a colony of ants there could be up to 300 million ants, and the queen ant will not know what every ant is doing – so each group of ants will communicate to each group to ensure that the job at hand is completed timeously.
* Information not supplied by the leader – but by other members as above
* Elimination – the Queen ant will recognize a scouting weak link in her colony, and if this is found she calls in her ant army and uses the SWAT method to eradicate that ant. (Strength, Weakness, Attitude and Threat).

Self-management as above is a scary thought – because as humans we all have different traits and behaviours – it is almost a recipe for chaos, it might work for the bees and ant and other animals – we as humans are too scared to allow the selfmanagement technique to work – as we fear failure.

So, it would be more helpful if we had a set of rules for model behaviour as a team member or team leader.

**Generally the rules that follow would be ideal:**

1. **Steer your team** – make sure that they all understand what you end results is.
2. **Alignment** – make sure that everybody has the understanding and threat they are on board by understanding the end result.
3. **Ensure that there is structure** – each team member must understand the structure – this could be in product knowledge or the format to follows.

The above behaviours will ensure that all team members/team leaders understand exactly what the brief is. Once the basics are in place the behaviour will then follow accordingly and the team will perform. Without the ground rules, your team will not act cohesively, (together) and will not give the necessary results. This will allow the team to act in a Command-and-Control system without consciously realizing it.

In getting to know your team members you need to be:

* + **Outgoing –** find out about your team members, common interests
  + **Recruit –** when you have a new person join the team, introduce them to the team and to a team member that has the same interest
  + **Ask for help** from other team members if you a new team member or don’t understand
  + Note: Keep yourself aware of the daily tasks and targets of the overall group
  + **Investigate -** When you see something or hear something that is not correct try and assist your team member, rather than lettering the member continue in an incorrect manner – but remember to watch your attitude and body language.

Remember these model behaviours listed are only an indication and can be tailored to suit the team or the individual. The behaviour’s need to be carefully nurtured to become ‘real and personal’.

**If team members consistently and seriously develop these behaviours then the team will be able to produce complex**

**responses and outcomes without the penalty and problems of centralised command and control.**

## 3.5 Consulting with Team Members on Work Related Issues

In decision making it is of vital importance to both the Company and the teams to be consulted on matters related to the Contact Centre. Management understand that the agents in the industry are the voice of the company, thus the teams will be consulted in many instances and decision will then be made regarding certain issues within the Contact Centre.

It is important to consult members of a team because:

* Team members are the voice of the company
* Team members work closely with customers
* Team members understand other members within the team
* Team members understand the working of the product/campaign as they are working with the product daily
* Team members understand the limitations of the system
* Team members understand the limitations of a Team leader/Supervisor
* Team members in some instances can be totally honest and not bias

The list is endless – and that what makes it so important to consult team when decision making is about to take place.

Each company will do this in different ways, but in most instances, Management will request information from team leaders/supervisors and it will be their position to illicit (find out) the relevant information and give feedback to management.

## 3.6 Making Decisions as a Team

Team consensus is as important to an individual and a team, and it is important that team decisions are based on team consensus. But, team consensus is not always used as there are a number of different ways to formalize decision making within a team, the different methods could be:

1. Decision made by management without group discussion
2. Decision by expert
3. Decision by averaging individual responses
4. Decision by majority
5. Decision by minority
6. Decision by majority vote
7. Decision by consensus

All the above decision have the pro’s and con’s and depending on the situation on hand – management will use one of the above decision making tools to ensure that the right approach has been taken.

# Go to your assessment pack for this section and complete in full

# Section Four: Working in Diverse Work Environment

## 4.1 Diversity Defined

**Diversity** refers to the ways people differ from each other. On the surface, this definition may seems very simple. But think for a moment how many kinds of differences there are – and in how many different ways they can be combined! Together, these differences are significant in shaping us and making us individuals.

It’s a common misconception that diversity in South Africa is just Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) or Affirmative Action (AA) with a new name. EEO and AA serve **social** purposes. They were designed to eliminate barriers certain groups faced in hiring staff. Being different was equated with being inferior or disadvantaged in the past, so these programmes deny differences in order that everyone is given equal opportunity.

Diversity serves **economic** purpose. It focuses on retention of employees by including differences. The goal is to encourage new perspectives and approaches through diversity in the hope they’ll increase productivity and profitability in the organisation/business unit.

Race, gender and ethnic background aren’t the only kinds of differences among people, although they’re probably the first ones we think of when someone mentions “diversity in the workplace”.

There are all kinds of differences among people! Each individual also has different characteristics.

**The Many**

**Dimensions**

**of Diversity**



As fingerprints show us, each human being is unique, providing the world with a broad base of diversity. However, some differences are more important than others in the effects they have on an individuals’ opportunities in the working world. The major dimensions of diversity fall into two categories—primary and secondary. **Primary Dimensions** of Diversity:

Age

Ethnicity/colour/race

Gender

Physical ability

Sexual orientation

**Secondary Dimensions** of Diversity:

Geographic location (where you were born/currently live)

Income Parental status

Marital status

Political affiliations and beliefs

Religious beliefs

Work experience

Primary factors are unchangeable and extremely powerful in their effects (on people's perceptions of one another in the work place).

Secondary factors are significant in shaping us, but they are to some extent changeable in return, because we have some measure of control over them. Research has shown that the nine most important things noticed about people in most societies, in order of importance, are the following:

1. Skin colour
2. Gender
3. Age
4. Appearance/style of dress
5. Facial expression/accent/
6. Eye contact
7. Movement/mannerisms
8. Personal space
9. Touch

Upon encountering one another, we notice, make assessments, and make decisions about how to interact with one another based on these nine factors. The first three items on the list - skin colour, gender, and age - fall into the primary dimensions of diversity.

These items are virtually unchangeable and extremely powerful in 'determining' our life situation - from where we live and work, to whom we socialise with at work, to how much we earn. Plenty of research evidence exists that shows how these differences crop up in the various human resource practices used in business life: such as higher performance appraisal ratings on average go to men, and that black women can bank on a slower promotion and career path than say a coloured woman, in different geographic areas of this country.

The last six on the list are all culturally influenced. And this is where things become complex/complicated for organisations, and for the people in business life who are supposed to bring about a cultural transformation that will largely determine whether a company has the internal capability to embrace diversity as a strategic business asset (and cope with the legal/political demands for diversity and transformation).

The obvious or surface level of culture, such as whether we give a handshake or a hug, a direct stare or lowered eyes, is determined by the culture we were raised in, and the primary and secondary dimensions of diversity.

**Business culture** emerges over time from the interaction between a company's current management and leadership practices, and from the people management and control systems used by managers and leaders in the course of steering the business in a specific direction to achieve its mission through its chosen business strategy. This leads to the very powerful and invisible force called organisational culture.

Examples of organisational culture are:

 people soon get to know what the (cultural) rules

of the game are for getting ahead in their company,

or how far you can 'push' managers before getting a 'black' mark allocated to your invisible scorecard that determines whether you are selected onto important project teams and so on.

All companies have an invisible cultural code (totally

independent of diversity and transformation issues) called the 'right' and the 'wrong' way to do things around here.

Combine this force/dynamic with the primary and secondary dimensions of diversity and you have a very powerful force to reckon with when it comes to encouraging people to value diversity.

## 4.2 What are Stereotypes?

Stereotypes are as old as human culture itself. They reflect ideas that groups of people hold about others who are different from them.

A stereotype is a **standardized conception, or image, of a specific group of people or objects**. Stereotypes are "mental cookie cutters”. They force a simple pattern upon a complex mass and assign a limited number of characteristics to all members of a group. For example:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Age:** | All teenagers love rap music and have no respect for their elders. |
| **Sex:** | Men want just one thing from a woman. |
|  | Blonde women are dumb. |
| **Race:** | All Japanese look and think alike. |
|  | Afrikaans people are racist. |
| **Religion:** | All Catholics love the Pope more than their country. |
|  | Jewish people are stingy and only think about money. |

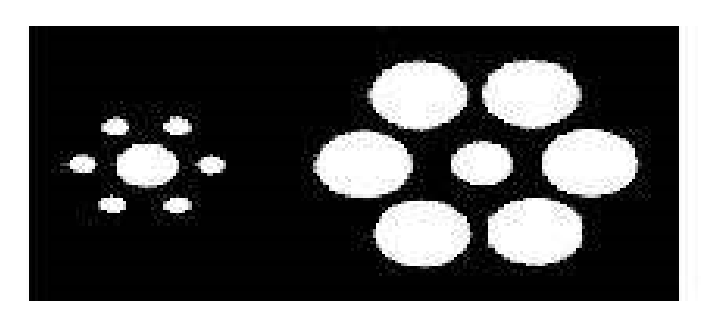
**Vocation:** All lawyers are greedy weasels and cannot be trusted.

All taxi drivers are reckless.

**Nationality:** All Germans are Nazi warmongers.

Italians are passionate lovers.

Stereotypes can be either positive ("black men are good at basketball") or negative ("women are bad drivers"). But most stereotypes tend to make us feel superior in some way to the person or group being stereotyped. Stereotypes ignore the uniqueness of individuals by painting all members of a group with the same brush. It is important that you are aware of your own stereotyping behaviour. Being an effective member of a diverse working team requires that you respect your fellow team members and value the diversity that each individual brings to the group.

Which centre circle is bigger? The one on the left or the one on the right?

This illusion shows that it is important not to let the surrounding circumstance cloud your perceptions about things. Just because everyone else in the group is one way, does not mean that the individual with whom you are dealing is the same. It is important to be sure that you are not caught up with stereotypes, which cloud your perceptions and thinking.

## 4.3 All Kinds of Differences

Race, gender, and ethnic background aren't the only kinds of differences among people, although they're probably the first ones we think of when someone mentions "diversity in the workplace."

There are all kinds of differences among people! From an employer's perspective:

We vary **culturally** in: We vary **functionally** in how we:

Gender Think

Age Learn

Ethnic background Work

Race Respond to authority

Sexual orientation Show respect

Education Reach agreements

Religion

Physical ability We vary **historically** in our:

Mental ability Family make-up

Military experience Work history

Lifestyle Perspectives

Immigrant status Political views

Language ability Group relationships

Diversity has many advantages in the workplace today. These include:

* Improves morale and productivity
* Improves the bottom line
* Enhances management skills

## 4.4 Cultural Groups

The scope of diversity work expanded dramatically from 1994 onwards with the implementation of the South Africa Constitution Act, and from 1998 onwards with the passing of the Employment Equity Act. Employers have been forced (by law) to accelerate the hiring of a more diverse workforce and to remove the barriers to employment progress for previously disadvantaged groups. However, changing the numbers has not been enough; figuring out how to effectively work together is the bigger challenge. It is from this that it is necessary to discuss and develop an understanding of cultures and customs that exist in our country.

Although South Africa is known as the rainbow nation with many, many cultures living side by side, there are 3 main cultural groups found in South Africa:

* African cultures
* European (Western) cultures
* Asian cultures

### Culture and Customs

South Africa's greatest treasure is the cultural diversity of its people. The contrasting influences of the African, European and Asian heritages create a mosaic of influences throughout the arts, crafts, dance, music, food and sports of South Africa. There are many indigenous people who have lived in South Africa for thousands of years. Three quarters of South Africa's 49 million people are Blacks whose ancestors, many of them farmers and herders, began arriving from Central Africa some 1,500 years ago.

### Black/African Culture

Most fall into two major ethnic groups: the Nguni, which consist of Zulu, Xhosa,

Ndebele and Swazi peoples, and the Sotho, which includes the Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho or Basotho and Venda peoples. Blacks often speak several languages, including that of their own ethnic group and English. Many Blacks reside in cities and townships living a more modern western lifestyle, while rural dwellers often wear unique costumes and maintain their ancestors’ traditions and customs. In addition, ceremonies play a very important part in the lives of Black South Africans.

The country's black majority still has a substantial number of rural inhabitants who lead largely impoverished and necessarily simple lives. However, blacks are increasingly urbanised and westernised, and usually speak English or Afrikaans in addition to their native tongue, which may be one of nine Bantu languages with official status since 1994. These include the Nguni languages, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sindebele, and Swazi, and the Sotho languages, which include Setswana, Sesotho, Sesotho, Leboa and Venda.

Cultural differences between speakers from the two language groups are comparable to those between speakers of German and Italian. Many urban blacks speak several indigenous languages, with isiZulu being a lingua franca in the Johannesburg area.

### European Culture

The European influence of South Africa is primarily rooted in the Afrikaners, who were descendants of Dutch settlers. They developed their own language 'Afrikaans' which is based on Dutch, but also has Malay, French, German and Black influences. About 6 million people, or roughly 15% of South Africa's population are of European descent. The British and Germans also played an important part in the country's development. The white minority lead lifestyles similar in many respects to whites found in Western Europe, North America and Australasia.

### Coloured Culture

The mixed-race Coloureds are, culturally speaking, much closer to whites, especially Afrikaans speakers, whose language and religious beliefs they share, than they are to black South Africans, despite suffering considerable discrimination under apartheid. A small minority of Coloureds, known as Cape Malays are Muslim.

The label "coloured" is a contentious one, but still largely used for the people of mixed race descended from slaves brought in from the East and central Africa, the indigenous Koisan who lived in the Cape at the time, indigenous African blacks and whites. The majority speak Afrikaans. Koisan is a term used to describe two separate groups, physically similar in that they were light-skinned and small in stature. The Koi, who were called Hottentots by the Europeans, were pastoralists and were effectively annihilated; the San, called Bushmen by the Europeans, were huntergatherers. A small, impoverished San population still lives in South Africa.

### Asian Culture

The Indian community can be divided into two main groups: Muslim and Hindu. However, both these groups are subdivided into different categories, each with their own customs, dialects and value systems.

The major part of the Asian population of the country is Indian in origin, many of them descended from indentured workers brought in the 19th century to work on the sugar plantations of the eastern coastal area then known as Natal. They are largely English-speaking, although many still retain the languages of their origins as well.

### Religion

In terms of religious affiliation, about three-fourths of South Africans are Christian, mainly Protestant. They belong to a variety of churches, including many that combine Christian and traditional African beliefs. Most of the non-Christian population follow these traditional beliefs. Minority religions are Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism.

## 4.4 Working within a Diverse Work Environment

The Contact Centre Industry is probably the most diverse working environments in our country. It is made up of many cultures and people. We have discussed the importance of working in teams but, as important if not more so, we also need to explore the ways in which we can work effectively within this diverse work environment.

Diversity experts Armida Russell, Amy Tolbert, and Frank Wilderman have identified four cornerstones of diversity development. They are:

### Knowledge

The best way to battle stereotypes is to inform yourself about the truth. Some activities you can do on a personal level include:

* Visit ethnic museums or memorials
* Take ethnic cooking classes or language classes
* Travel
* Watch movies or read books about stereotypes (To Kill a Mockingbird, Amistad, Schindler’s List, and Ghosts of Mississippi are some excellent resources)
* Involve yourself with people that your stereotype could apply to. Find out what they’re really like.

### Understanding

Once you have some knowledge about diverse groups, put that knowledge into action. If you understand why a person is acting in a particular way, it may be easier to empathise with them. This goes for when you are dealing with your internal and external customers.

### Acceptance

Acceptance does not mean adopting the behaviours or rituals of a culture as your own. It also does not mean condoning behaviours that clash with your value system.

Acceptance does mean respecting the values and behaviours of other cultures. Let’s say that we need to schedule team meetings and I feel that the best time to do this is before the day starts, at 8 am every morning. However, Pam has a conflict: she attends worship every morning before work. Perhaps I don’t go to church every morning, but I can respect the fact that Pam has this commitment. Rather than ask Pam to alter her religious commitment, I can respect it and schedule the meeting for another time.

In this day and age where people are celebrating their differences, it’s hard to know what will offend people and what’s acceptable. Some words are obviously unacceptable, particularly those that segregate based on race, religion, or gender.

Developing acceptance can open up a whole new range of possibilities for everyone involved. To start, if you listen with an open mind, you’ll probably learn something about your co-worker and/or customer or even about another culture. And, when different viewpoints are exchanged in a respectful manner, amazing ideas are bound to result. **This respectful, healthy exchange builds respect and communication skills, resulting in a stronger team**.

### Behaviour

Now that all the pieces are in place, you can begin to change your behaviour. Don’t let that discourage you from starting where you are to:

**Learn about diversity** by reading books, articles, attending cultural events and programmes. Discover some of the diversity issues faced by others.

**Talk to people**. What do your colleagues think about diversity and about how your organisation addresses it? What have they experienced, positively or negatively, in reference to their differences?

**Research what other companies are doing**. This will help you avoid reinventing the wheel and making costly mistakes.

**Involve human resources**. It’s easier to build support for a programme when a company is formally committed to diversity.

**Develop a diversity resource list**.

## 4.5 Diversifying your Organisation

Many organisations have so many assumptions about the way things should be that they have a tough time starting a diversity programme. After all, it requires identifying, examining, and confronting many of those established assumptions.



Here are the steps that lead to success — and the most common problems you may encounter at each stage:

### Step #1 - Establish Good Communication Lines

When an organisation changes how it does something, the new procedures are often accompanied by confusion and misinformation.

Head off this threat to smooth functioning early in your planning by developing a way to communicate at all levels of your organisation and across all lines.

Use the corporate communication tools you already have — newsletters, email, memos, and voice mail. But be open to creating a separate channel just for discussing diversity, if you see the regular ones aren't working.

Check off the communication tools your organisation already has in place that could be used effectively for diversity.

Newsletter Company newspaper Corporate television

Staff meeting Group voice mail Group email

Bulletin boards Corporate magazine Intranet

### Step #2 - Develop a Vision and Strategy

Sometimes, company executives have good intentions, but they look at diversity as an issue that can be "solved" with more training or a new corporate awareness campaign. They start a diversity programme, but there's neither a vision nor strategy behind it.

That's like building a house without a foundation; it has a good chance of crumbling! Bring diversity training into your training offerings, but as one tool of the diversity programme — not the whole programme.

### Step #3 - Go for Realistic Goals

Remember, diversity programmes are major cultural changes, and major changes take time. Task-driven, results-oriented, short-term thinking won't work here — you'll set yourself up for failure by creating unrealistic expectations.

Instead, design your strategy for reaching long-term goals. Include short-term objectives and actions as the building blocks.

For example, let's say your long-term goal is to have an equal number of men and women in management positions. The building blocks might be shorter-term goals such as increasing the number of women supervisors or offering management training to the top women in various departments.

### Step #4 - Emphasise the Positive Bottom Line

Companies want employees to be satisfied and fulfilled in their jobs, but they usually want it to happen without cost to the company.

You can meet this concern by focusing on the business advantages diversity provides.

### Step #5 - Create a Company-Wide Perspective

Establish a guiding committee for your diversity programme, and make sure employees from throughout the company are on it. This points the organisation in the right direction: taking responsibility as a whole organisation, developing the commitment and skills that will help the diversity process evolve.

By establishing a committee that represents the whole corporation, you'll reinforce a new idea — that diversity is a way of doing business, not just another programme that comes in this month and goes out the next.

### Step #6 - Get Senior Management's Commitment

Too often, executives and managers make an edict and then remove themselves from the process, standing back to monitor progress rather than leading by example. This doesn't help change efforts. Employees can interpret it as lack of commitment and respond by being guarded and suspicious.

Leadership must clearly support change — in writing and in action. They need to spell out their values and guiding principles and prove their commitment to them by practicing what they preach and by integrating a diversity perspective in all arenas.

### Step #7 - Include Everyone

Once diversity efforts are started, long-time employees or those within the former workplace majority may feel threatened and left out. They may think diversity is for everyone but them.

You can take the power out of this negative thinking by:

* Confronting their wrong beliefs
* Emphasising — and proving it with your actions — that everyone's insights are important
* Keeping communication with them open
* Valuing their experience and contributions
* Asking for and listening to their opinions on diversity
* Explaining that diversity is a learning process for everyone
* Framing diversity as a competitive advantage in the marketplace • Explaining that discrimination is illegal

# Go to your assessment pack for this section and complete in full

# Section Five: Resolving Team Conflict

Conflicts are often difficult enough as is. Be prepared to resolve conflicts. Practice makes perfect. We have discussed resolving customer conflict but conflict exists in our teams and is important to explore how we can overcome these team challenges.

## 5.1 Identifying Possible Areas of Conflict

Within the workplace there are common sources of conflict, as long as there are people/workforce is involved there will always be conflict and the workplace needs to manage this conflict.

**How do we define conflict?**

Workplace conflict is a specific type of conflict that occurs in workplaces. The conflicts that arise in workplaces may be shaped by the unique aspects of this environment, including the long hours many people spend at their workplace, the hierarchical structure of the organization, and the difficulties (e.g. financial consequences) that may be involved in switching to a different workplace. In this respect, workplaces share much in common with schools, especially pre-college educational institutions in which students are less autonomous. (Wikipedia)

**Common Sources of Conflict**

1. Unclear definition of responsibility — there will be numerous occasions for conflict to arise over decisions made or actions taken in disputed territory.

1. Limited resources — time, money, space, materials, supplies, and equipment are all valuable resources. Competition for any of these resources will inevitably lead to interpersonal and interdepartmental conflict.

1. Conflict of interest — individuals may fight for their personal goals and lose sight of organizational goals. Each individual needs to know how his or her personal goals and efforts fit within the organizational goals and efforts.

I have better things to do with my time than to baby-sit with a bunch of feuding children," complains one manager. "It seems that someone is always mad at someone else, feuding with someone else, or refusing to work with him or her. What is this all about anyway?"

It is all about conflict, a normal and natural part of our workplace and personal lives. Conflict can be helpful in making necessary changes within the home or work environment. However, unresolved conflict can result in feelings of dissatisfaction, unhappiness, hopelessness, depression, and other emotions. It can result in behaviours such as physical or emotional withdrawal, resignation from jobs, dissolution of personal relations, aggression, and even violence.

Communication is both the cause of and the remedy for conflict. Understanding how to effectively communicate, and how to satisfactorily resolve disputes, can lead to a happier, more productive life. Communication and conflict resolution skills must be learned. Most often, poor communication and conflict resolution styles must be corrected and replaced with approaches that are more conducive to creating peace in the workplace and at home.

The workplace setting is fertile breeding ground for conflicts because of the dynamics and interdependency of the employee-to-employee, customer-to-employee, and employee-to-outside vendor relationships. Recognizing and addressing the factors that give rise to the potential for conflict can have a positive impact on workplace and the productivity in the workplace.

It is all about conflict in the workplace. Is it avoidable? Is it preventable? Is it necessary? **The answer to all of these questions is "yes."**

## 5.2 Resolving Conflict – A Strategy

Most people fear conflict and see it as something to avoid. In fact, conflict is a normal and natural part of our lives, both professionally and personally. Conflict in the right setting, handled in the right way, can be beneficial. It is through conflict that an awareness of the need for some necessary changes can be made - at work and at home.

Conflict in the workplace can come as a result of serious disagreement over needs or goals, and can result in behaviours such as gossip in the workplace, avoidance, verbal abuse, even passive and aggressive communication and hostility. All of this can lead to a drop in productivity and management needs to focus on the problem rather than the solutions as this could lead to wasted resources.

Finding a workable solution to workplace conflict can involve the following steps:

1. Once you are aware of the problem, call a meeting with the team members concerned and define the situation as factual as possible. Keep it simple.

1. Confront both teams or team members to look at the possible positive sides the argument/conflict. Each party should treat the perceptions as reality – in other words they need to be constructive as to the dealings with each other.

1. Encourage both team/team members to look at possible positives sides to resolving the conflict.

1. Once you have reviewed the options and facts put forward one can gain greater commitment. Look at generating and creating motivation on the part of the team/team members.

1. Generate directions in order to achieve the listed goals. List your plan on action, objectives and supporting goals.

1. Discuss how you are going to reach this target.

1. Address the negatives again in order to address both parties and they have found common goal.

1. Encourage both team and team members.

1. Set up a supporting structure and make sure each team/team member understand how this structure is going to operate.

1. Evaluate and re-evaluate at regular intervals.

1. Decide on who is going to be held accountable – the team/team member or the team leader.

1. Summarise your discussion – recap and remind both parties what they want and what the company is expecting from them.

## 5.3 Taking Team Member Expectations into Account

The needs and expectations of all team members must be taken into consideration in order to resolve any conflict.

Prior to beginning the improvement process, the team/team members should identify relevant parties their interests and all this should be taken into consideration.

Stakeholders should be informed of:

* The general project and the team's purpose;
* Specific information of interest to them;
* How they will be involved and when they can expect to be consulted; • How communication will be structured; and • Any other information they may request.

Conflict in the workplace is a fact of life, we all see situations differently, people have different goals and needs and this is where conflict comes into play as we have already learnt.

If conflict is resolved effectively this can bring about both negative and positive results which is not a bad thing, this can lead to personal and professional growth. Resolved conflict can bring about a number of benefits:

* **Increased understanding** – leads to discussions to resolve the conflict and an awareness of people, surroundings and an insight on how each team/team members would like to achieve their goals
* **Increased group cohesion** – team/team members become stronger
* **Improved self-knowledge** – Conflict pushes individuals to examine their goals in closer detail, helping them to understand in facts, bringing focus and enhances the effectiveness of the team/team member.

However, conflict not handled effectively will bring about a damaging result within the company. They can turn into personal dislikes, teamwork will break down, talent is then wasted and team/team members start to withdraw and the spiral of negativity will have a dramatic effect on business.

Therefore conflict when arises has to be dealt with as soon as it is detected in order for a team/team member to operate efficiently.



## 4.4 Conflict Resolution Styles

In the 1970s Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann identified five main styles of dealing with conflict that vary in their degrees of cooperativeness and assertiveness. They argued that people typically have a preferred conflict resolution style. However they also noted that different styles were most useful in different situations. They developed the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) which helps you to identify which style you tend towards when conflict arises.

Thomas and Kilmann's styles are:

**Competitive:** People who tend towards a competitive style take a firm stand, and know what they want. They usually operate from a position of power, drawn from things like position, rank, expertise, or persuasive ability. This style can be useful when there is an emergency and a decision needs to be make fast; when the decision is unpopular; or when defending against someone who is trying to exploit the situation selfishly. However it can leave people feeling bruised, unsatisfied and resentful when used in less urgent situations.

**Collaborative:** People tending towards a collaborative style try to meet the needs of all people involved. These people can be highly assertive but unlike the competitor, they cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important. This style is useful when you need to bring together a variety of viewpoints to get the best solution; when there have been previous conflicts in the group; or when the situation is too important for a simple trade-off.

**Compromising:** People who prefer a compromising style try to find a solution that will at least partially satisfy everyone. Everyone is expected to give up something, and the compromiser him- or herself also expects to relinquish something. Compromise is useful when the cost of conflict is higher than the cost of losing ground, when equal strength opponents are at a standstill and when there is a deadline looming.

**Accommodating:** This style indicates a willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of the person's own needs. The accommodator often knows when to give in to others, but can be persuaded to surrender a position even when it is not warranted. This person is not assertive but is highly cooperative. Accommodation is appropriate when the issues matter more to the other party, when peace is more valuable than winning, or when you want to be in a position to collect on this "favour" you gave. However people may not return favours, and overall this approach is unlikely to give the best outcomes.

**Avoiding:** People tending towards this style seek to evade the conflict entirely. This style is typified by delegating controversial decisions, accepting default decisions, and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. It can be appropriate when victory is impossible, when the controversy is trivial, or when someone else is in a better position to solve the problem. However in many situations this is a weak and ineffective approach to take.

Once you understand the different styles, you can use them to think about the most appropriate approach (or mixture of approaches) for the situation you're in. You can also think about your own instinctive approach, and learn how you need to change this if necessary.

Ideally you can adopt an approach that meets the situation, resolves the problem, respects people's legitimate interests, and mends damaged working relationships.

# Go to your assessment pack for this section and complete in full

1. (Source: Active Listening by Carl R. Rogers and Richard E. Farson)

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)