

# Work with a Team

**W**HEN YOUR TEACHER announces that there will be a future group project assignment, does your heart leap with delight or trepidation? Group projects can be very complicated, but experience does make the teamwork easier. In the work world, working with a team is a regular occurrence, so you may want to sharpen your skills.



## Objectives:



1. Identify key knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) for working on a team.
2. Explain conditions that help support team performance.
3. Identify elements for enhancing team performance.

## Key Terms:



brainstorming  
collaborative problem  
solving  
conflict resolution  
equifinality

goal setting and  
performance  
management  
human capital  
KSAs  
motivation

planning and task  
coordination  
positive illusion bias  
recognition  
reward

## Teamwork

Think of a time when you were working with someone and had a disagreement about how to do some of the work. What impact did the disagreement have on what you were working on at the time? How did you resolve the disagreement? Your knowledge, skills, and abilities to work on a team and to manage conflict resolution will greatly affect both the outcome of your project and your professional reputation.

## KEY KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES (KSAs) FOR WORKING ON A TEAM

**KSAs** are knowledge, skills, and abilities a person possesses. Five important KSAs have been identified as helpful for successfully participating on work teams: conflict resolution, collaborative problem solving, communication, goal setting and performance management, and planning and task coordination.

### Conflict Resolution

**Conflict resolution** is the capacity to manage desirable and undesirable team conflict. Two common team conflict resolution processes are brainstorming and equifinality.

**Brainstorming** occurs when the team opens the floor for any and all ideas to be expressed by team members. The purpose of brainstorming is to develop a range of ideas to use when the work begins. Desirable conflict occurs when the team must eclectically discern the better ideas and decide which ones will be used and which ones will not. The team must have the capabilities to effectively resolve any conflicting opinions about ideas to use or to reject.

**Equifinality** is the reality that there are a variety of ways for a team to reach the same desired outcome. This opens the possibility of having conflicts about (sometimes insignificant) matters in the decision-making process.

Conflicts over insignificant matters are examples of undesirable conflicts (e.g., when selecting a font or the wording for a flyer). Equifinality says there are a variety of ways for creating the flyer. Team members must have the KSAs to avoid or resolve undesirable conflict.

### Collaborative Problem Solving

**Collaborative problem solving** is the capacity for team members to participate in productive dialogue that produces the achievement of the team's goals. It requires individuals to be able to listen and learn collectively. People must be able to change personal biases based on what they learn from each other or from third-party entities.



**FIGURE 1.** Brainstorming occurs when the team opens the floor for any and all ideas to be expressed by team members.

## Communication

Communication is the capacity to understand others and to articulate one's own message accurately. To communicate effectively with a team, the following skills are desirable:

- ◆ Active listening
- ◆ Understanding (reading) nonverbal communication
- ◆ Assertive communication
- ◆ Writing ability

## Goal Setting and Performance Management

**Goal setting and performance management** is the capacity to set tangible, measurable, and realistic goals and to use measurement, motivation, and reward systems to enhance the likelihood of meeting goals.



### FURTHER EXPLORATION...

#### ONLINE CONNECTION: Creating Goals and a Performance Management System

The purpose of this activity is to increase your goal-writing abilities and to create a system of team recognition and rewards. You will need to draft a volunteer, as this is pair work. You and your partner will be assuming the role of parents.

Review the goal-writing resource at <http://www.topachievement.com/smart.html>. Read the following scenario. Brainstorm and discuss each question. Record your responses to each question on paper or on the computer (if possible). Write three or more goals that would include methods for recognizing and rewarding the achievement of the goals.

Scenario: You are playing the role of parents with two teenagers who live at home. You have decided to create a family team in which everyone is responsible for helping run the household. Your job as parents is to create household goals to help better run the household and to create recognition and rewards for the household team.

Questions:

1. What tasks need to be completed to run the household?
2. How often does each task need to be completed?
3. Which members of the team would complete each task?
4. How would the methods for doing the work be dictated? (E.g., By the parents? Would team workers be able to decide how to complete the work?)
5. How will the achievement of each goal be recognized and rewarded?
6. How will goal achievement be measured? (How will the team members know when the goal has been achieved?)

You may want to consider sharing your goals and performance management system with your parents.

## Planning and Task Coordination

**Planning and task coordination** is the capacity to lay out an action plan and to ensure that team members complete work in an organized, sequenced manner that results in meeting the team's goals.

## CONDITIONS THAT HELP SUPPORT TEAM PERFORMANCE

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Conditions that help support a team's work and performance are numerous. Among the critical supports are adequate human capital for the task at hand; sufficient recognition, reward, and motivation systems; and adequate coordination of work activities and communication. Team members are active participants in implementing these supportive conditions.

### Human Capital

**Human capital** is the knowledge, talent, and experience of team members. When a team has adequate knowledge, talent, and experience, performance is attainable. Individual team members must ensure that they offer their "capital" (talents) to the rest of the team while recognizing that the talents of others must also be called forth. It should be mutually understood by all team members that all team members should give their best and allow room for others to do the same.

### Recognition

**Recognition** is the honoring of the contributions of team members. Recognition implies that team members tell others how they value and appreciate their individual contributions. A **reward** is some kind of compensation to individual team members or the team as a whole when productivity is achieved. **Motivation** is a desire for the team or a team member to be productive. Team members can create motivation by recognizing and rewarding productivity.

### Coordination

Coordination of work activities and communication include the use of information and communication technologies as support in the process of team members completing their work together.

- ◆ Virtual teams complete a portion of their work without face-to-face meetings.
- ◆ Coordination of work activities and communication are particularly important while working in virtual teams.
- ◆ Virtual team members must be willing to learn and use work-design software and communication tools for coordinating and communicating, such as:
  - Online project management software
  - Blogs
  - Email

## ELEMENTS FOR ENHANCING TEAM PERFORMANCE

There are additional elements for ensuring a successful work team experience. Some examples of elements for enhancing team performance are using single-digit teams, using team contracts, increasing identifiability, and promoting involvement while avoiding positive illusion bias.

### *Using Single-Digit Teams*

It is best to use single-digit teams. A team should contain enough people with sufficient human capital to achieve the team's goals. When possible, a team should be composed of fewer than 10 people. Some studies indicate that three to five is an ideal number for a team. Having 10 or more people on a team makes it more difficult to:

- ◆ Plan meeting dates
- ◆ Collaborate
- ◆ Converge and come to a consensus on ideas

### *Using Team Contracts*

It is important to use a team contract to develop and clarify a team's purpose. Members contribute to the development of the contract, sign the contract, and revisit the contract frequently. A team contract contributes to keeping the team's purpose clear and helps team members stay focused on their roles in fulfilling the contract.

### *Increasing Identifiability*

It is essential to increase identifiability. The assigned roles and tasks (and their achievement) need to be publicly posted. When a team increases the identifiability of productive and nonproductive members, it becomes more likely that team members will contribute and be productive.

### *Promoting Involvement While Avoiding Positive Illusion Bias*

It is useful to promote involvement and to avoid positive illusion bias so team members become enthusiastic about their roles and tasks. This is achieved by conceiving the roles and tasks at a level that is appropriately interesting and challenging (not boring or unattainable).



**FIGURE 2.** A team that increases the identifiability of productive and nonproductive members is more likely to have members that contribute and are industrious.

Team members get involved when they feel that there is an interesting challenge for which their talents are suited.

The **positive illusion bias** is an unwarranted belief that one's personal talents are superior to those of others. When team members are engaged in interesting and challenging tasks, positive illusion bias will be diffused, thereby preventing team dysfunction.

### **Other Elements for Enhancing Team Performance**

Other elements for enhancing team performance include strengthening team cohesion, training team members together, and minimizing links in communication.

### **Summary:**



Your knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to work on a team and to manage conflict resolution will greatly affect both the outcome of your project and your professional reputation. Five important KSAs have been identified as helpful for successfully participating on work teams: conflict resolution, collaborative problem solving, communication, goal setting and performance management, and planning and task coordination.

Conditions that help support a team's work and performance are numerous. Among the critical supports are adequate human capital for the task at hand; sufficient recognition, reward, and motivation systems; and adequate coordination of work activities and communication. Team members are active participants in implementing these supportive conditions.

Some examples of the elements for enhancing team performance are using single-digit teams, using team contracts, increasing identifiability, promoting involvement while avoiding the positive illusion bias, strengthening team cohesion, training team members together, and minimizing links in communication.

### **Checking Your Knowledge:**



1. List the five KSAs presented in this unit.
2. Explain what it means to increase team identifiability.
3. Define the term "positive illusion bias" and its application to working on a team.
4. Define the term "human capital" and its application to working on a team.
5. Define the two common team conflict resolution processes discussed in this unit.



## Expanding Your Knowledge:

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Good managers know how to work with teams. Find two different managers and interview them about their experiences. Make sure to ask about positive experiences as well as experiences that were more challenging. What have these managers learned about working with teams that would be valuable for others to know?

## Web Links:

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### Creating S.M.A.R.T. Goals

<http://www.topachievement.com/smart.html>

### How to Plan and Organize Teamwork

<http://www.helium.com/knowledge/65533-tips-for-planning-and-organizing-the-work-of-a-team>

### Teamwork—A Practical Guide for Students

<http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~mitcheje/Teamwork/index.shtml>