BSBWOR203
Work effectively with others

Release 2

Learner guide

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Aspire Version 1.1

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Contents

Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *BSBWOR203 Work effectively with others*, Release 2. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples and case studies	Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete practice tasks and learning checkpoints. Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice tasks	Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Video clips	Where QR codes appear, learners can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help
Summary	Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning checkpoints	There is a learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Reading	• Identifies and interprets information to determine task requirements
Writing	• Completes required documentation using organisational formats • Composes simple documents for others to read
Oral communication	• Presents information and seeks advice using language and features appropriate to audience • Participates in discussions using listening and questioning to elicit views of others and to clarify or confirm understanding
Numeracy	• Interprets information related to timeframes and resource quantities
Navigate the world of work	• Understands responsibilities of own role and follows explicit and implicit organisational protocols and procedures
Interact with others	• Selects and uses appropriate communication practices when seeking or sharing information • Establishes and builds rapport and relationships with others to foster a culture of respect and cooperation in communications
Get the work done	• Plans and organises work commitments to ensure deadlines and objectives are met • Uses formal analytical thinking techniques to recognise and respond to routine problems

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcome	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1 Develop effective workplace relationships	1A Identify own responsibilities and duties and undertake activities in a positive manner	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1B Consider time and resource constraints in fulfilling work requirements	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1C Encourage, acknowledge and act on constructive feedback	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
Topic 2 Contribute to work group activities	2A Provide support to team members to ensure goals are met	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2B Make a constructive contribution to goals and tasks	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2C Share information to ensure goals are met	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2D Identify and plan opportunities for improving the work group	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
Topic 3 Deal effectively with issues, problems and conflict	3A Respect differences in personal values and beliefs	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3B Identify differences in communication styles and respond appropriately	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3C Identify issues, problems and conflict in the workplace	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3D Seek assistance when difficulties arise	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident

Topic 1
Develop effective workplace relationships

No-one in the workplace ever works entirely alone. Even people who work in a small organisation need to discuss their work at some time with a supervisor or manager. Those who work in a large organisation are usually in a department or work group and they constantly interact with each other. Working effectively with other people is an important skill. People who work together in a team can often achieve more than people who work on their own.

Working effectively with others involves having a clear understanding of your role and responsibilities, understanding the responsibilities of those you are working with, and being supportive and cooperative. You need to think about how you use your time and resources wisely to ensure you are an effective member of the work group. Feedback and support enables you to further develop your skills.

In this topic you will learn how to:

1A   Identify own responsibilities and duties and undertake activities in a positive manner

1B   Consider time and resource constraints in fulfilling work requirements

1C   Encourage, acknowledge and act on constructive feedback

1A Identify own responsibilities and duties and undertake activities in a positive manner

Specific and general responsibilities that are part of your job role might change from time to time as the requirements of your work change, and as you grow and develop as a member of the team. Initially you may only complete basic tasks, but as you become more confident and capable it is likely you will take on more responsibility and be able to contribute more extensively to the workplace.

What is a work group?

A work group is a group of people who work together, full time or part time. In some workplaces, there are many different work groups, and people may move within and between them from time to time. In other workplaces there is only a single work group, with everyone taking on a wider range of tasks to ensure all the functions of the workplace can be completed.

A work group can comprise only two people (for example, you and your supervisor), or it can be made up of many more people. Work groups are often made up of people who have different types of skills. By working together, everybody's skills are used so more can be achieved.

Organisational structure and processes

There may be a number of different work groups at your workplace, each with different responsibilities. Special work groups can also be set up depending on the organisation's needs.

Here are some types of work groups.

Management team

Administrative support team

Sales team

Financial management team

Customer service team

Organisational chart

You may have a personnel or organisational chart, often available from the human resources department, which illustrates graphically the position titles and the names of the staff who hold those positions in your organisation. These charts are a useful tool when you are first learning the names of the people with whom you work. It is also a useful tool for knowing who to contact for a specific query or problem.

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Example: organisational chart showing the relationship of personnel

CEO – Patricia Blennings

Operations manager –
Sue Chan

Assistant operations manager –
Pasco Beels

Marketing director –
Roberta Raimondo

Marketing and PR team leader –
Jane Waters

Sales director –
Phillipa Van der Steed

Sales team leader –
Caroline Bobbs

HR director –
Sam Pauls

Payroll and HR administrator –
Jennifer Hawks

Office manager –
Petra Porter

PA to CEO –
Peter Jummings

Reporting lines

While you may work closely with a particular person, you may not report directly to them. Check with your supervisor if you are unclear about your own arrangements.

Depending on the size and complexity of your organisation, there may be other people listed on the chart such as:

- a coach or mentor (someone who helps you learn your role and gain new skills in the workplace)
- your supervisor or line manager (the person to whom you report directly)
- facilities or maintenance staff (who can respond to WHS problems or maintenance tasks)
- payroll staff
- human resources staff
- specific operational departments (such as sales, marketing or publishing)
- training and support departments
- employee support services.

Understand your job roles and responsibilities

When you start work in an organisation, it is likely you will have a job that requires you to work with other staff members. You may be part of a project where the team has a specific time frame to achieve a goal, with each team member responsible for completing specific tasks. Alternatively, you may find yourself working as part of a team where specific ongoing tasks need to be completed.

Most positions in an organisation have a written position description, also known as a job description. This is an important document; you should read it carefully and make sure you understand it.

What a position description may include
• General tasks to be performed
• Responsibilities of the position
• Who the position reports to
• Skills and competencies required for the position
• Qualifications required for the position
• Hours of work to complete the tasks
• Salary and entitlements of the position

Job descriptions

Job descriptions may change over time. The job itself may change or there may be a change to the structure of a workplace. You will be notified if your role or job description changes. If you have any questions about your job description, you should consult with your supervisor or manager. Some workplaces have a union representative who can help you understand your job description.

In your position, tasks to perform might include:

• maintaining accurate records of payroll transactions

• updating employee pay records

• managing employee inquiries related to pay and conditions

• referring complex queries to your supervisor for advice.

Additional duties

As the employee of an organisation, you have general duties and responsibilities in addition to the tasks associated with your specific job role. These are designed to ensure the effectiveness, safety and protection of yourself, your organisation and your fellow workers.

General duties and responsibilities might include:

• following organisational policies and procedures

• complying with the code of conduct

• complying with work health and safety (WHS) guidelines

• promoting good workplace relations.

Follow organisational policies and procedures

Many workplaces have a set of policies and procedures outlining what the organisation expects from its employees. Understanding the policies and procedures relating to your job is an important part of your work. Your supervisor will probably explain these to you when you first start work, and may give you a copy to keep.

Policy documents explain the organisation's position on various topics. They detail things such as what is and is not acceptable, and what the organisation aims to do. A procedure sets out the way to do something step by step.

Follow procedures for a safe environment

Workplace policies broadly outline how it is everyone's responsibility to ensure a safe workplace. To follow through on the policies, there are also procedures for completing work in a safe way, reporting safety issues or dealing with equipment that has broken down or is malfunctioning. You need to make sure that you know what these procedures are and what your responsibilities are.

Whether you work for a large or small organisation, your workplace will have procedures to follow when you find an equipment fault. A smaller organisation may not have specific maintenance or IT staff. It may be necessary to call in external repairers when equipment has broken down or malfunctioned.

Procedures for dealing with faulty equipment:

- Ensure safety.
- Report the fault.
- Arrange repair.

Follow sustainable work practices

Sustainable work practices help protect the natural environment. To minimise the impact of their operations, many workplaces have introduced processes to reduce, reuse or recycle materials; for example, buying products in bulk, seeking products with less packaging and recycling used office equipment, waste paper, bottles and cartons. A range of legislation has been passed to ensure workplaces meet environmental standards. These include the *Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000* (Cth), *Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005* (Cth) and the *National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007* (Cth).

While you do not need to know this legislation in detail, you must be aware of, and comply with, any procedures based on this legislation that have been introduced for staff to follow, such as using less paper, switching off lights when not needed, recycling waste and placing used printer cartridges in a box for collection.

Where to find policies and procedures

In some workplaces, policies and procedures are kept on a computer system so that employees can access the most up-to-date copy whenever they need to. You will probably need a login name and password to access this information. Your login and password will usually be given to you at an induction session or when you first begin work in your workplace. If you have been given a paper copy of the policies and procedures of your workplace, check that it is the most recent copy.

Policies and procedures may cover such things as:

- first aid
- purchasing of materials and resources
- dress code
- use of work vehicles
- reimbursement of costs (e.g. for a conference or training activity)
- use of the organisation's internet and email systems for private use
- confidentiality of documents and work materials
- professional development and training
- equal opportunity
- annual, personal, long-service, maternity and paternity leave arrangements
- quality assurance and continuous improvement strategies.

Comply with the code of conduct

A code of conduct outlines how the organisation expects staff to conduct themselves and behave within the workplace. A code of conduct is developed and agreed to by a team of people including department and team managers, employees and external customers, and includes information such as ethical behaviour, responsibilities, values and expectations of the organisation and its staff.

Comply with work health and safety guidelines

Australian federal, state and territory governments have laws relating to work health and safety (WHS). Most states and territories model their legislation on the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth); for example, the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (NSW).

WHS legislation requires employers (those conducting a business or undertaking) to provide a safe place of work and employees (workers) to comply with WHS requirements by working in a safe manner.

Workplace safety is everyone's responsibility. Employers and employees must make an active contribution to ensure that their workplace is safe. Hazards need to be identified and risks assessed to reduce injury in the workplace. For example, if you are working at a computer for an extended period each day, your workstation must be comfortable and designed to carry out your tasks efficiently. You will need to organise your work so that you are not doing a repetitive task for a long time. You also need to take time to stand up and stretch.

Workplace safety legislative requirements

WHS legislation requires employers to provide a safe workplace with adequate training and supervision, and to control workplace hazards and risks. You must work in line with legislative requirements, regulations, Australian and industry standards, and the relevant codes of practice.

Legislation describes WHS requirements such as:

- managing risks to health and safety
- promoting and maintaining the health, safety and welfare of people at work
- protecting people at work from injury and illness, including psychological injury
- protecting the health and safety of the public in workplaces
- consulting workers and encouraging participation in maintaining WHS
- providing rehabilitation and maximum recovery for injured workers.

WHS policy

Workplaces in Australia are required to have a WHS policy that describes the organisation's responsibility for the health and safety of its employees. The policy should include the organisation's goals and objectives regarding WHS and a general set of guidelines related to health and safety in the workplace.

The WHS policy will help you fulfil your duty of care as a worker for the organisation.

WHS procedures

WHS procedures are instructions developed to ensure all employees work safely and effectively. For example, in the context of working in an office and using a computer workstation, WHS procedures include the following information.

Information contained in WHS procedures includes:

- workstation ergonomics
- standard safety precautions and housekeeping
- safe handling of hazardous substances (e.g. cleaning products)
- emergency and fire drills
- hazard identification and risk control
- manual handling
- emergency contact numbers, including local doctors and hospitals
- location of first-aid equipment and first-aid officers.

WHS regulations

State and territory legislation is supported by regulations and codes of practice. WHS regulations support legislation by outlining specific WHS requirements that must be addressed.

For example, the model WHS Regulations, which provide a framework that most states and territories have adopted, have specific requirements for hazardous manual tasks that must be addressed. These requirements are summarised here.

Manage risk

A person conducting a business or undertaking must manage risks to health and safety relating to a musculoskeletal disorder associated with a hazardous manual task, in accordance with guidelines for managing risks to health and safety.

Control measures

In determining the control measures to implement, the person conducting the business or undertaking must regard all relevant matters that may contribute to a musculoskeletal disorder, including:

- postures, movements, forces and vibration relating to the hazardous manual task
- the duration and frequency of the hazardous manual task
- workplace environmental conditions that may affect the hazardous manual task or the worker performing it
- the design of the work area
- the layout of the workplace
- the systems of work used
- the nature, size, weight or number of persons, animals or things involved in carrying out the hazardous manual task.

Code of practice: hazardous manual tasks

WHS regulations make it a legal requirement for persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) and workers to address hazardous manual tasks in the workplace. A PCBU has a broad definition that includes both employers and supervisors.

The code of practice for hazardous manual tasks was developed to provide guidance on how to manage risks associated with those manual tasks that have the potential to cause musculoskeletal disorders (MSD).

A PCBU must consult with workers, so far as it is reasonably practical, to develop their own set of procedures in managing the risk of MSDs.

The hazardous manual tasks code of practice assists PCBUs and workers in:

- identifying hazardous manual tasks
- assessing the risk
- controlling the risks
- reviewing control measures.

Promote good workplace relations

You need to develop relationships with lots of different people in the workplace. They may be people in your workplace or they may be from outside the organisation. Regardless of who you are dealing with, you should ensure the interaction is positive and productive. Building good working relationships takes time; you need to build trust and show reliability and flexibility. You also need to practise skills such as participating in meetings, communicating clearly and cooperating as part of a work group.

You can help promote good workplace relations by:

- listening carefully to other people
- taking notes of important information so you can refer to them later
- thinking about how you can work towards the goals of your organisation
- being flexible and adaptable
- concentrating on your work tasks
- thinking about how you can contribute to a situation and share your ideas with others
- communicating clearly with other people.

Work effectively in groups

There are many ways to promote good working relations. Interacting with others requires you to be flexible and able to adapt your thinking and your behaviour to accommodate the values and behaviours of others. Working effectively with others in a group requires a different set of skills from working alone. Understanding some of the differences and opportunities of working in groups allows you to be a more effective and efficient team member.

Areas to consider
• Understanding group structure and responsibilities
• Working in different groups
• Demonstrating a positive manner at work
• Using a positive manner in group meetings
• Cooperating with others in a group

Understand group structure and responsibilities

Different members of your team – peers, work colleagues or team members – may have different roles and responsibilities depending on their particular skills and the needs of the group. You need to understand what each person's roles and responsibilities are and how you can best work with them. The more you understand how others work and what they require from you, the better you will be able to do your job.

The supervisor, manager or group leader's role is to make sure the group operates efficiently so it can achieve its goal. The group leader identifies which tasks need to be done, how and when they will be completed and who should be responsible for what. The group leader makes sure that the resources needed are available, and keeps everyone focused on the overall goal and time lines for each task.

Role of a group leader

The group leader is responsible for looking after the group dynamics, or the way the group works together. This involves such things as encouraging communication among team members, solving problems, supporting or mentoring individual team members, and dealing with conflict.

The group leader is the link between your group and other groups in the organisation. They are responsible for reporting on the group's activities and coordinating the activities of your group with other groups in the organisation. They might be the person you report to within the organisation. This would be written into your job description. Your responsibility is to support the group leader and help make their job easier. Your group leader is one of the people you can go to if you need any help with your work, or if you are concerned about anything.

Duties of a group leader

In some groups, all the members (except the leader) have a similar role; for example, in a customer service team all customer service officers would be responsible for answering the telephone and dealing with visitors.

In other groups, members' roles may all be different; for example, in a project team one person may be responsible for doing research, another for publicity and a third person for data entry.

Members of a group can:

- take responsibility for particular tasks
- organise their own work schedules
- carry out the tasks they are responsible for
- help the team leader make decisions
- help divide up the tasks
- give the team leader feedback
- help each other complete tasks.

Work in different groups

You might find that, even though most of your work is completed within one group, you are asked to work in other groups. For example, your main duties may be with a sales team, but you may be asked to relieve at reception, help prepare material for a conference the manager is going to, or keep a database up to date for another work group.

Example: work in a different group

Christine is an administrative assistant in Taylors Bay real estate office. Her duties include reception, filing, photocopying, and collecting and distributing the mail. Christine is part of the office team, which includes the office manager and a secretary.

The sales team at the office has distributed a survey to all the people who attended house auctions in Taylors Bay during August. The sales team has arranged for Christine to work with the team for two weeks to help process the information they have collected. Christine's duties are to enter the information into a computer database and print the information for the sales team. She is to notify the sales manager of anyone who attends more than five auctions.

While Christine still works with the office team, she will spend some of her time with the sales team over the next two weeks. During this time, the other office team members will take over some of her duties.

In both groups her role is to provide administrative support, but the objectives and tasks are different for each group.

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Work in more than one group

Although you may use similar skills in different groups, you need to focus on the specific objectives of the group you are working in.

Sometimes it may seem difficult to swap between groups. You may prefer to just do your own job without having to accommodate the needs of another group. Cooperating with other work teams within an organisation is an important part of making a positive contribution to the organisation as a whole. You may gain new skills; learning to apply your skills in a variety of ways and locations is an important part of growing and developing as a worker.

Balance your workload

If you work for more than one group, you need to carefully balance your workload. You need to ensure that one group does not give you so many tasks that you cannot complete your work for the other group. If you let yourself get overloaded with work and then don't let others know there is a problem, your work team might not be able to meet its objectives and goals. This could have an effect on the overall performance of the organisation.

Skills required for working in more than one group include:

- clear communication
- an ability to prioritise tasks
- time management.

Demonstrate a positive manner at work

Your attitude in the workplace is important. Once you understand what is required of you in your job, start thinking about how you relate to other people. If you are positive and cooperative, you will probably find you get along well with the rest of your work team. If you are negative all the time, you may start to have problems. Of course it is not possible to be cheerful all the time. But if you do your best to get along with others, they will probably be more understanding if you have the occasional bad day. By having a positive and helpful work attitude you will contribute to the overall atmosphere of your workplace and make everyone's time at work more enjoyable.

Checklist to help promote your own positive attitude at work:

- ❏ Check your face muscles – are they making you smile or frown?
- ❏ Check your feelings – what single word would you use to describe your feelings right now?
- ❏ Do a tension check – are your shoulders relaxed or tight? Do you feel wound up and agitated, or relaxed and calm?
- ❏ Remember break times – how long since you last had a break for a stretch, a walk or a coffee?
- ❏ Make time for chats – have you said a few cheerful words to a colleague recently?
- ❏ Check in with your supervisor – have you let them know how your work is progressing?
- ❏ Look out for new faces – find someone you don't already know in your workplace and introduce yourself.
- ❏ Create new habits – consciously adopt a cheerful, positive and helpful manner whenever you can.

Use a positive manner in group meetings

Meetings are an important way for team members to communicate and solve any difficulties. They also help develop positive relationships within a work team, as everyone has a chance to share ideas, talk about issues and plan for future goals and tasks. Groups may meet regularly for a variety of reasons, including those shown below.

Identifying the group's goals

Identifying tasks to achieve the goals

Discussing how an individual's tasks affect the work of the group

Developing work plans

Finding out how the group is achieving its goals

Allocating tasks to members of the group

Your responsibility in group meetings

You need to be prepared before you attend a meeting. You may like to jot down some ideas for discussion. Listen to everyone's viewpoint. Be prepared to contribute your ideas and suggestions. This is part of being an effective member of the work group. You may not agree with everything that is said, but put forward your own ideas clearly and briefly. It is important that everyone has a chance to express their views and be heard, and that united decisions are made about issues discussed during the meeting. By cooperating and working together, decisions become a product of the work group as a whole, rather than of an individual.

Cooperate with others in a group

For a work group to be effective, all members must be able to work together. Groups are more likely to reach their goals when the group has good group dynamics. Group dynamics is the way the members work and interact. Good group dynamics can make a big difference to the success of the work group.

The following information involves some of the key behaviours that people in a group must have if the group is to be successful in its goals.

Show commitment to the group's goals

All members of a work group must be committed to achieving the group's goals. If, for example, somebody in the team thought their own goal was more important than the goals the team had decided on, this would delay the team's achievement of its goals.

Communicate with others

Communication is a two-way process. You need to be able to express your ideas clearly and effectively, and listen to the views of others. Communicating involves listening actively, asking appropriate questions, and summarising and repeating what was said, so you and the speaker are both clear on what was discussed.

Being able to communicate effectively with group members and other colleagues is an essential responsibility at work. Groups that frequently discuss their progress, talk about difficulties and share ideas are generally more successful.

If you are not sure how to speak with someone for whom English is a second language, ask a more experienced team member. They may be able to help you with tips such as speaking more slowly, not shouting, being patient and understanding and using plain English. Avoid using jargon or words they are unlikely to know.

Be trustworthy and reliable

It is much easier to communicate and cooperate with somebody if you trust them and know you can rely on them. Having trust and reliability among group members means things like:

• being able to rely on another person to complete their tasks
• trusting that members respect each other's work
• trusting that decisions agreed on by the group will not be altered.

To help make sure that your group operates in an environment of trust, you must be trustworthy and reliable yourself.

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Be flexible

Part of working in a team involves helping out your colleagues. This means members need to be flexible to fit in with each other's needs. Do not be too rigid. An ability to be flexible is part of good cooperation in situations such as the following:

- You may be asked to help with something that you had not planned for such as photocopying or tackling urgent tasks.
- Your group's goals may change.
- An important task may come up during the time you had set aside for something else.
- A team member or supervisor may want something done differently from the way you would normally do it.
- A group member may be away sick and you may be asked to temporarily take over their duties.

Example: work in a group

Anand's work group's task for the day is to prepare a mail-out to the company's clients. Viv, the team leader, says the mail-out needs to go in the mail that night.

Anand's job is to process the mail and take it to the post office by 4.45 pm. Michelle, another team member, is asked to collect the stationery and brochures to include in the mail-out. Anand and Michelle are to pack everything into envelopes.

Brian looks after the database. His task is to do a mail merge and print out letters and mailing labels for each client. However, Brian says he is busy updating the database.

Even though the team has agreed that the mail-out is the most important goal for the day, Brian wants to keep working on the database before he prints out the letters and labels.

The rest of the team members are frustrated because they can't start working on the mail-out until Brian has printed the letters and labels. They are worried that they will not have time to prepare the mail-out by the end of the day.
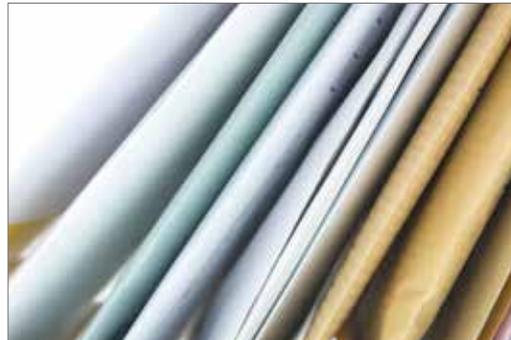
Practice task 1

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Tuk Lee works as a receptionist in a large public relations company. She is responsible for general customer service and managing the reception functions of the company. Her duties include greeting customers when they arrive, handling phone calls and inquiries, and performing general administrative tasks such as word processing and filing. Tuk Lee does not enjoy her job as she finds it boring. She often keeps customers waiting on hold for too long, and sometimes connects them to the wrong person. She keeps a magazine under the notepad on her desk and reads it when no-one is looking. Sometimes Tuk Lee leaves the front counter to go to the toilet without telling anyone. This means the phones ring out and clients are not met when they enter the office. She rarely smiles when people come to the counter, and she is often grumpy and difficult to get along with.

At break times, she sits outside on her own. She refuses to join the social club and doesn't spend any time with her colleagues. Tuk Lee's supervisor asks her to come in for a meeting about her work performance, and to talk about complaints he has received from other staff members.

1. How would you describe Tuk Lee's attitude?

2. What are Tuk Lee's main work duties and areas of responsibility?

3. What effect would Tuk Lee's attitude have on other workers in the company?

... continued

4. What might the impact of Tuk Lee's attitude be for the company as a whole?

5. What do you think Tuk Lee's supervisor might say during their meeting?

1B Consider time and resource constraints in fulfilling work requirements

Time and resource constraints are two challenges that confront you when you work in an organisation. As organisations strive to be more efficient and productive, there is a flow-on effect for workers. From management level down, there is a drive to complete tasks faster using fewer resources and to achieve work group goals with a limited number of workers.

Time constraints

Time management is an important aspect of your work. Good time management will assist you to complete your tasks within the required time frame.

If you are new to the job, your team leader may allow you more time to perform your duties and will expect you to gradually become faster as you learn. If you have a good attitude to your work and approach your tasks positively, you will become more efficient. As you gain a better understanding of how long your tasks will take, you will be able to assist others in group projects and tasks.

Time management tips

Understanding how you spend your time will enable you to manage it better. Below are some ways you can do this.

Daily diary

Keep a daily diary and record all the tasks you have been given.

Note when they have to be completed.

Prioritise

Prioritise your tasks so you do the most important ones first.

Learn how long it takes you to complete routine tasks such as delivering the mail, word processing a letter or adding a customer to a database. As you become more experienced, you will be better able to accurately estimate how long particular tasks will take you. It is likely that you will also become more efficient over time.

Meet deadlines

If you do not meet a deadline, identify what happened and why. It may not be your fault. For example, you may have been unable to complete a letter because your supervisor did not give you the information in time, or because another group leader asked you to do an urgent task. On the other hand, you may have been disorganised, or you spent longer than you thought you would on another task.

Types of time constraints

Time constraints have an obvious impact on your ability to do your job. They can occur in a variety of areas and for a variety of reasons.

Below are some time constraints to consider.

Unexpected absences by other workers

You may need to take on additional duties to cover their absence.

You may normally rely on this person to assist you with your tasks.

The team as a whole may feel more stressed and overworked because of the absence.

Meetings

Meetings can run overtime and reduce the time available for other tasks.

Meetings often involve actions that need to be taken and reported on at the next meeting.

Deadlines

Deadlines that are too short may not leave enough time for the task to be completed adequately.

Deadlines may link to other tasks or projects and have a flow-on effect from one task to another.

Task–time imbalance

If the time estimated for a task is inadequate, it is not possible for the task to be completed before a deadline unless extra work is completed, extra personnel assigned or extra time allowed.

Other duties

Most job roles involve 'other duties as required'.

These duties can sometimes take considerable time and take the person away from their normal tasks (such as having to organise catering for a meeting or plan a staff Christmas party).

Training

Training programs such as conferences, mentoring sessions, in-house training, or external professional development can take workers away from their normal duties and prevent tasks being completed on time.

Critical incident

A critical incident such as a workplace accident, an evacuation or a major health or illness event can take away from time for tasks and also take workers' attention away from their tasks, with an additional flow-on effect.

Example: the impact of time constraints

Trudi works as an account manager. She has booked herself into an advanced computer bookkeeping course next month for three days. She is worried about going on the course because she knows it will impact her ability to:

- close a major deal with a client
- finish a project that must be reported on by the end of the month
- complete her regular end-of-month reporting requirements
- attend a compulsory workplace training session about valuing diversity in the workplace, which is being held at the same time as her course
- prepare to give a presentation at a conference the following week.

Deal with time constraints

There are many useful strategies to help deal with time constraints. Consider your tasks carefully and plan your time accordingly. Your supervisor may be able to help you with your planning and ensure you have allowed enough time to do your work properly. If you think you may not have allowed quite enough time, add a little more to your estimate to ensure you can meet your deadlines.

Example: plan for time required for tasks

Max thinks he might need longer than his original estimate of 15 minutes to type up the minutes from the team meeting. He thinks about how long he took to type up the last meeting's minutes. He remembers being late to get the minutes out and the team members having to ask him several times about them. He changes his estimate to 45 minutes and adjusts the rest of his work plan for the day to compensate for the extra time needed.

Strategies for managing time constraints

Here are strategies you can put in place to help manage time constraints.

Think clearly

Think clearly at the start of the day and the start of the week about what you need to do, and how you are going to do it.

Set small tasks

Write a list of tasks that will only take a few minutes to complete, and allow 10 minutes at the start of each day to deal with them.

Set priorities

Organise your work tasks so you know which are the most critical to complete on time, and which can wait until later.

Clean and tidy your desk and computer

Clear away all the clutter on your desk and computer. Look through papers and files and get rid of those not needed for the day's tasks. Sort through the icons on your desktop and the older files and folders and see what can be moved to another drive, permanently deleted or archived.

Make and use lists

Make a list of tasks in order of importance and cross them out when they are completed.

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Ask for help
There are others in your workplace who can help with tasks, so share your responsibilities when you can and when you need to.

Take regular breaks
People often become less efficient and make more errors when they are tired. Take a break for a walk, a chat with a colleague, or a stretch and a rest. You will feel much better physically, and chances are you will be more mentally alert too.

Reschedule and report to your supervisor
If a time constraint is simply not going to work, reschedule some tasks so there is more time available, alter the task so it can be completed in a different way or by a different person, and discuss things with your supervisor.

Resource constraints

Resource limitations can affect your ability to work efficiently. The three types of resources in the workplace are described below.

Physical resources

The equipment, objects and physical space within a workplace, including computers, desks, meeting rooms, chairs and phone systems

Human resources

The people who work for an organisation, such as a payroll administrator, maintenance supervisor and cleaner

Skills and knowledge resources

The skills and knowledge built up over time in an organisation, such as the skills a worker has acquired by going on a training course, or the knowledge a worker has of the particular needs, likes and dislikes of an important client

Possible implications of the loss of a particular resource

Often resources are only noticed and appreciated when they are no longer there. It is easy to take people as well as objects for granted in a workplace. It is only once they are gone that we realise how important they were, and what the impact of their loss is. A good supply of quality resources makes a difference to an organisation and its workers. Resources should always be valued and every attempt made to preserve them.

The following information outlines the possible implications of the loss of a particular resource in the workplace.

Possible implications of the loss of a particular resource in the workplace

- Calls cannot be received.
- Customers become frustrated.
- Business cannot be conducted over the phone.
- Increased demand for other systems such as emails and mobiles.

Adjustable chairs replaced with non-adjustable chairs

- Workers are less comfortable.
- Increased risk of RSI, eye strain, muscle strain, general fatigue.
- Increased chance of workers making WHS claims for injury.
- Worker morale is decreased.
- Work productivity drops.

Kitchen assisstant quits over a pay dispute and is not replaced

- Pile-up of dirty dishes in the kitchen.
- Worker morale decreases as tea and coffee supplies are no longer easily available for a fast, refreshing break.
- New systems need to be introduced for washing cups, emptying the dishwasher, buying supplies and catering for special events.
- Workers become frustrated and sad at the loss of a well-liked and valued member of staff.

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Photocopier must now be shared between two work groups

- Additional use of the photocopier
- Increased chance of the copier breaking down
- Rise in the use of paper and toner
- Extra waiting time for copying
- Decreased productivity
- Conflict between the two groups

Deal with resource constraints

When a resource is not available, consider discussing with team members possible changes to procedure or alternative work practices to reduce the impact on productivity. Some workers may not necessarily be impacted or even be aware the resource is unavailable until their attention is drawn to it. In some cases, an organisation may increase the availability of necessary resources by making simple changes to processes or operations. In some situations, you may simply have to accept that the current resources are the best the organisation can reasonably afford or organise at the time.

Your employer is responsible for providing you with a safe working environment. If resources are causing you WHS problems (for example, if a computer is facing a window or a desk is not set up correctly) you should ask for assistance. Legally, you are not required to work with resources that are likely to cause you pain or injury.

Example: negotiate and manage constraints when they occur

Sandi works for a charity in a small office environment. There is no money available to buy badly needed replacement office furniture and equipment. The workers, including Sandi, have become used to making do, and do not usually ask for new items to be purchased.

Sandi notices a large company down the road is having some new computer desks delivered. The old ones are being stored in a shared lane behind the offices. She finds out the desks are being thrown out and asks if they could be used to replace the old desks at her office.

The company's manager is happy to support the charity in this way, and agrees to provide the desks and organises their delivery. He also suggests they could supply other equipment such as computers, printers and surplus stationery to the charity rather than sending it to landfill or simply not using it.

In this example, Sandi uses her skills as a communicator to organise for additional resources to be brought to her workplace. She has a good understanding of the limited capacity of her workplace to provide new resources and looks for alternative ways to meet its needs. In addition to saving the charity money, it also means items were recycled and reused rather than being discarded.

Forward planning

Forward planning can be helpful in dealing with resource constraints. This applies both to physical resources, and to the skills and knowledge resources built up over time. Look ahead at the tasks you have to complete. Decide which resources you will need to complete them, and check their availability ahead of time. Physical resources may need to be booked, arranged or planned in some way before use.

Planning ahead to ensure you have resources may involve:

- booking a meeting or conference room
- requesting catering supplies for an event
- booking a work vehicle
- organising to use a particular room or piece of equipment that you need for a special task
- arranging for a speaker to be available to give a talk or presentation
- discussing tasks with your supervisor before they leave for a holiday
- writing a flow chart to show how you perform a specific task within your job, so that others can use the chart if you are away sick.

Example: the importance of forward planning

Pedro has been given the task of organising a training session for his work team at the end of the week. However, Pedro has many other tasks to do this week as well. He forgets about the training session until the day before he is due to send out the agenda.

When he remembers about the training, Pedro checks the room bookings diary and discovers another department has the conference room already booked. He hastily re-plans and books a smaller meeting room. He rings the speaker he would like to get for the training, but she is not available. He decides to run the training himself, so he dashes off from work early to visit the library and borrow some books. He forgets his car-park access pass, so is not able to get his car out of the car park and has to go back later and get it. He walks to the library but it has closed early, so he cannot get the books he needs. He spends the night at home on the internet looking up information for the training session and eventually gets enough information together to organise a presentation.

In this example, Pedro's lack of forward planning meant he faced a series of unnecessary challenges. Pedro could have saved himself time and stress by being better organised. By carefully considering what he needed to do, and allowing enough time to plan his resources and the various tasks necessary to achieve his goal, he would have reduced or eliminated time and resource issues.

Practice task 2

Samantha has been given this memo from her manager:

Memo

We will be completing a major project over the next few months. Please organise some temporary staff to work for us in administration support on a short-term contract basis. We will need two administration assistants to work for a three-month contract, performing basic functions such as filing, keyboarding, data entry, reception, phone management and general data processing. Start date should be around 1 August.

Please do the following:

- Write advertisement, get it checked by human resources (HR) and placed into the usual newspaper and online.
- Create an interview schedule.
- Book the workers' induction program and put its date and the new workers' start dates in my diary.
- Contact available interviewers to join me interviewing applicants (include an HR member and a union representative).
- Get the appropriate pay scale from payroll.
- Get a job description from HR.

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1. Samantha realises her supervisor has just given her a list of tasks she needs to complete to ensure the positions are filled by the due date; however, the tasks are not in any specific order. Help Sam plan the order of tasks she needs to undertake. Prioritise the tasks by numbering them from 1 to 6 – number 1 being the highest priority. Then help Sam estimate how long it might take her to complete each task in this table.

Task	Order in which task should be completed	Estimated planning time required
Contact interviewers for interviewing applicants		
Write advertisement for positions		
Get pay scale from payroll		
Enter induction date and start dates in supervisor's diary		
Get job description from HR		
Book induction program dates and resources		
Create an interview schedule		

2. When Sam checks her supervisor's diary, she finds it is full for the week when she had wanted to organise the interviews. Fortunately she has not yet arranged the interview times with potential new workers or others on the interview panel. What should she do?

3. Sam has been working all morning without a break. She is getting a sore neck from typing job descriptions and using the phone to speak to potential interviewers. She is worried that the way she holds the phone on her shoulder so she can type on the computer and talk on the phone at the same time is causing her sore neck. What could she do to fix this problem?

1C Encourage, acknowledge and act on constructive feedback

Feedback is an important part of workplace communication. Feedback lets you know how well you have done a particular task, or whether there are things you should change about the way you do your job. In your workplace, there will be times when you need to give feedback and times when you will receive it.

There are two main types of feedback, which are described below.

Knowledge of results

This type of feedback only tells a person about the end result of their actions; for example, 'The new client has agreed to use our agency'.

Knowledge of performance

A more detailed form of feedback, this tells a person about the nature of their actual performance and relates specifically to their actions and behaviour; for example, 'Your presentation was informative, direct and clear. The client understood you easily'.

Effective feedback

Feedback should always relate to actions, behaviours and outcomes rather than people themselves. If you give someone feedback, think about their feelings and emotions, and avoid saying things that might make them feel inadequate or upset.

To be constructive and helpful, feedback should always be aimed at improving the performance of the work team rather than being negative and critical. If feedback is purely negative without giving any information about what needs to change or how, then it is not constructive. Feedback should help people understand what they have done well and what they need to change to do their work better next time.

If you need to give someone in your work team feedback about an area they need to improve, find something positive to say at the same time. This will make them feel better about the changes they need to make. They will be less likely to be upset by the feedback you give them.

Effective feedback tells a person:

- exactly what they did well

- how their actions and behaviour affected the outcome of a situation

- what the result of their action or behaviour was.

Receive constructive feedback

Feedback helps you to look critically, not negatively, at yourself. It is valuable for improving the way you do things. Feedback is especially useful when you are new to an organisation or learning new skills.

Constructive feedback is given to improve your performance. Make sure you act on it and develop strategies to incorporate improved work practices into your daily routine.

Your supervisor will usually try to make sure you receive positive feedback about your job and make suggestions for how you could improve. Positive feedback tells you which parts of your job you are doing well, and which skills you have mastered. We all like to hear positive feedback about how we do our jobs. It makes us feel motivated and satisfied that someone else has noticed what we are doing correctly.

If somebody gives you feedback on your work, it may:

- let you know how you could do something better next time

- clarify the organisation's preferred way of doing something

- show that you have not quite finished your task

- let you know that you are on the right track

- give you a confidence boost.

Example: provide constructive feedback

Hayley has typed a letter to a client and given it to her supervisor to check and sign. Her supervisor, Toni, gives Hayley some feedback after checking the letter.

'Thanks Hayley, I've made a few suggestions. I think you should say "Dear Mr Boromeo", rather than "Dear Harry" – it needs to be more formal. I've marked a couple of spelling errors. Also, you need to make some changes to the layout. You should have a blank line between the paragraphs and don't indent the first line of a new paragraph – keep it left-aligned. Remember one of our team objectives is to always use our workplace style guide so our letters and documents look professional and consistent.'

Hayley makes the suggested changes and gives the letter back to Toni.

Toni's feedback was useful to Hayley because it told her how the organisation liked to have letters set out. Toni could have simply made the changes herself and sent the letter. However, by telling Hayley, she has helped her to improve her skills.

Types and sources of feedback

Feedback is a process of sharing observations, concerns and suggestions between people or divisions of an organisation. The aim of feedback is to improve the organisation's performance as well as the performance of the workers.

Some organisations also seek and encourage feedback from customers and suppliers. They use this feedback to improve processes and to keep up to date with what their customers want and need.

The process for collecting feedback can be undertaken formally using forms and agreed processes, or informally – generally via a discussion between two people or a small group. Brief notes replace the many formal documents of a formal feedback session.

Types and sources of feedback in an organisation
Formal feedback in a performance appraisal
Informal feedback on performance
Customer and client feedback
Service delivery feedback
Personal feedback and reflection

Formal feedback in a performance appraisal

A performance appraisal is a method by which your job performance is evaluated in line with the expectations of your job description. A performance appraisal is part of career development. A performance appraisal of your work can be done formally or informally.

Formal performance appraisals are usually undertaken at least annually between yourself and your supervisor or manager. The process looks at your performance against the expectations of the organisation.

Aims of performance appraisals
• Providing formal feedback on performance
• Identifying employee training needs
• Documenting criteria used to allocate organisational rewards
• Establishing the basis for wage increases, promotions or disciplinary actions
• Facilitating communication between employee and administrator

Purpose of a performance appraisal

People worry about their performance appraisal but performance appraisals are usually a positive, helpful way to learn more about how to do your job.

You will probably find that you receive positive feedback at your first performance appraisal, and discuss a few areas where you might need to learn some more skills or try a bit harder. Often your supervisor will fill out your performance appraisal with you, so you can talk about the things that are written down and make sure you both agree with them.

You may be asked to choose someone else from your workplace to be a part of your performance appraisal also. This person might be someone you work closely with, or perhaps another team leader or manager.

Performance appraisals are a great chance to talk about how your job is going, and to plan for the future. There might be skills you want to learn or areas of the organisation that particularly interest you. Talk about these at your performance appraisal, so your team leader or manager can help you plan your future within the organisation.

> ## Example: formal feedback in a performance appraisal
>
> Beth receives the following written comments on her performance appraisal:
>
> 'Beth has worked hard at learning our new filing system. She is able to correctly store, note and locate documents within the system, and can maintain accurate and detailed records in excess of the skills required of her position.
>
> Beth attended a training course this year to update her skills in database management. She has put this knowledge to good use and has spent time showing other staff how to use the database more effectively. This contribution has been noted by management and is appreciated.
>
> Beth has shown a high level of skill in supporting other staff, and has indicated an interest in the training area at a later date. She would do well to consolidate her skills in administration first before moving to a new challenge.'

Informal feedback on performance

If at any stage you would like feedback on your performance, speak to your supervisor. If you need to clarify the feedback you are getting, ask questions until you ensure that you understand which parts of your tasks you have done well and how you can improve other aspects.

You can often learn a lot about your performance by having an informal chat with your team leader or another more experienced colleague. If you have found a task difficult to do, or you have just completed an unfamiliar task, ask for some feedback. Tell your team leader or colleague that you would like to be able to improve how you do your job. They will appreciate your efforts to learn more about your performance, and you will have gained some valuable information. Make a note of the comments so you can keep improving your work skills. Informal feedback sessions occur at no set time – unlike formal performance appraisals – and generally no notes are written on your file.

Advantages of informal feedback:

- It is a quick and easy way to share ideas.
- It provides a relaxed environment to discuss issues and opportunities.
- It allows for immediate feedback, which enables workers to improve their work skills sooner.
- It provides an environment for trust and rapport to prosper.

Customer and client feedback

Many workplaces collect feedback from customers and clients. They might use a feedback form or a questionnaire that is sent out on a regular basis. This could ask questions about the products or services provided by a business, or the way in which the staff dealt with the customer. This feedback is important for the organisation as a whole, as well as for the work team and for individual staff members.

Example: customer feedback form

Jimmings Accountancy

Thank you for using Jimmings Accountancy. Please take a moment to give us some feedback about our services, so we can continue to provide our customers with the high-quality accountancy they expect from Jimmings. Please tick the box to indicate your level of satisfaction.

❑ Very satisfied

❑ Satisfied

❑ Neutral

❑ Unsatisfied

❑ Very unsatisfied

Please add any other comments you would like to make:

....

....

....

Clients using this feedback form can give specific information about a number of different aspects of the firm's practices. This provides management with the opportunity to evaluate the feedback they receive over time from a number of clients and then initiate changes if needed. For example, if several customers ticked 'unsatisfied' for the speed of the service provided, management may decide to address this through discussions with workers or other strategies.

Learning about what customers and clients like and do not like about a business is an important part of making sure they stay happy and satisfied with the service they receive. Dissatisfied customers often take their business elsewhere.

Sometimes customer feedback can be informal and not written on a feedback form or questionnaire. This type of feedback is still valuable.

Service delivery feedback

Some organisations deal with many customers or clients and multiple pieces of information each day. They may take lots of different orders for sales items, process data or manage documents across a number of systems and worksites. Managing information is a complex task, requiring careful planning and effective systems. Often the management of these systems is computer based, as this allows multiple system users to enter information, check information or make changes as needed.

Computer-based systems allow reports to be written based on data for a particular period of time or a particular region. This can be useful for dealing with problems, addressing service delivery issues and improving quality and performance parameters across the organisation.

A computer-based system allows people to perform tasks such as:

- checking if an item is in stock
- providing an estimate of the time of delivery of an item
- updating information sent to clients via email or phone
- checking if an item is in transit from one location to another
- checking if an order has been completed and payment has been received

Personal feedback and reflection

While feedback from others is important, it is also a good idea to consider how you would rate your own performance. This gives you the chance to do your own mini performance appraisal so you can help yourself to do your job better. Give yourself some personal feedback at the end of each week, or when you have just finished a major task or project.

Personal feedback topics could include:

- Which tasks did you do well?
- Where could you have made improvements to your performance?
- Do you feel you have learned some new skills, or improved in some areas of your work?
- Write some notes in a diary or workbook so you can keep track of how you feel you are going with your job.
- Look back at your notes from time to time so you can see how much you have learned.

Acknowledge and act on constructive feedback

When you have received some constructive feedback, either formally or informally, about your performance at work, it is important to act on it. Think about what has been said, and why. Consider how you could alter your work attitude and performance in line with the feedback you have been given. If you need to, ask specific questions about how you could make some changes to your work.

Thank the person for their feedback and for taking an interest in your work. Remember that constructive feedback is not given just to criticise you or make you feel bad about your work. It is given so that you can learn to do your job better and continue to make a valuable contribution to your work team.

Seek further feedback

Give yourself a time frame for making some changes after you have been given feedback, and then talk to the person again.

See if they have noticed a difference in your work, and tell them what you have done since they gave you the feedback. Ask if they can make any further suggestions about how you can do your job more effectively.

Acknowledging and acting on feedback from others in your work group will help build positive, cooperative working relationships.

Practice task 3

Read these two statements and answer the questions that follow.

Statement 1

'You did a really slack job of that mail-out last week Christie. Your work is sloppy and I hate how you leave the rest of us to do all the work.'

Statement 2

'Thanks for helping when you could with the mail-out Christie. I know you are busy, but if you could double-check the envelopes are labelled correctly next time before you post them, it would make our team look a lot more professional. A professional image is one of our work team objectives.'

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1. What do you notice about the second statement compared with the first?

2. Which statement is more useful for Christie?

3. Which statement is more likely to make Christie feel upset and angry with the person giving the feedback?

Summary

1. Your job description lists many of your individual responsibilities in your workplace.

2. Learning about workplace policies and procedures is an important part of your responsibilities at work.

3. Using a positive manner at work will help your work group function effectively.

4. Developing strategies for dealing with time and resource constraints helps you complete your tasks efficiently.

5. Giving and receiving constructive feedback is a useful way of learning more about how to do your job well.

Learning checkpoint 1
Develop effective workplace relationships

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in developing effective workplace relationships.

Part A

1. Prepare a table similar to the following and describe how you could act to support your team and provide assistance in each of these workplace situations.

Situation	Support action
A member of your team has been asked to give a presentation at a conference next week and they are very nervous about speaking in public.	
Your team leader needs someone to take over collating and mailing out the newsletter because someone else in your team is sick.	
A colleague does not understand how to use a new software program.	
A member of your team has miscalculated the amount of time they will need to prepare an urgent customer mail-out.	

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The evacuation alarm is ringing and there is smoke coming out of a storeroom. People are starting to panic and trying to run down the stairs or into the lifts. There is a customer in a wheelchair in the waiting area near the front desk.	
A team member consistently wastes paper by using only one side and always printing out draft copies when there is no need to.	

2. Write, or tell your trainer, about a situation where someone in your workplace, class, sports team or club needed help with a task in order to achieve the goals of the whole group. Describe how the task was completed, how other members of the work team helped and how this contributed to the achievement of the goals of the team.

Part B

You are in charge of running a training session for frontline management staff. The organisation you are working for has identified that not all staff members are positive in their manner and approach to work. Create a poster or tip chart that you could share with these staff members to help them be more positive in their manner and approach.

Part C

1. One of the people in your training session asks you to give them feedback about how they answer a customer query on the phone. You listen to them take a call, and then give them feedback. What should you consider as you do this?

2. List three time constraints or resource constraints you may come across in a workplace and how you could deal with them effectively.

Part C

Part D

Read the case study, then complete the task that follows.

Case study

Juan is a new member of the sales team at Bradwell Office Supplies. He is always punctual, and he spends time talking to other members of the work team to find out how they do their jobs. He is trying hard to learn his job, but he is making a few mistakes. He keeps forgetting to record important customer information and this means sales leads cannot be followed up. He also has a habit of leaving confidential documents lying around where they can be read by anyone who is walking past. Yesterday he lost an important folder because he left it in a coffee shop where he was having lunch.

In a small group, demonstrate by role-play how to give Juan feedback. In your group, act out the roles of Juan, his supervisor and another work colleague having a meeting to give Juan some feedback about his performance at work.

OR

Prepare a written report explaining the aims of the feedback you would give Juan and summarise what you would include in feedback to him.

Topic 2
Contribute to work group activities

As a member of the work group, you have an important contribution to make. You need to work with other members of the team to make sure your team can achieve its goals. The way you work with other members of the team will change depending on the situation and the tasks you are working on. Part of your role will involve working with other members of the group to identify and plan opportunities and ways that you can work together to ensure tasks are completed in the most effective and efficient manner.

In this topic you will learn how to:

2A   Provide support to team members to ensure goals are met

2B   Make a constructive contribution to goals and tasks

2C   Share information to ensure goals are met

2D   Identify and plan opportunities for improving the work group

2A Provide support to team members to ensure goals are met

One of the requirements of working in a team is to provide support to your team members. The type of support varies depending on the situation. Offering encouragement is one way to support your team members. Providing assistance and giving constructive feedback are other ways.

By providing the right kind of support, you can assist other members of your team to achieve work group goals.

Your role might include providing administrative support to your group or others in your organisation. In any successful group, all members support each other. Receiving and providing support is an important aspect of group work.

Communicate clearly

Communication is one of the key skills needed to work effectively in a group. Clear communication is a skill that can be learned and developed. You should pay attention to the words you use and what you say and also how you say them.

Here are some aspects of clear communication.

Clear speech

The way you speak on the phone is important. Always speak clearly. Some people find it difficult to understand what is being said, particularly if they have a hearing problem or don't speak the language very well. Speaking clearly and a little more slowly than usual gives your listener time to hear and understand. Remember, they may be taking notes as they listen to you.

Tone of voice

The tone of your voice helps the listener to understand the real meaning of what you are saying. Tone is especially important on the telephone because people can't see your face. Always be pleasant. Never sound hurried, angry or bored. The caller should always get a positive impression of your organisation.

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Appropriate language

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Making a telephone call at work is different to calling a friend. Business calls are generally shorter. They also use more formal language than a conversation with a friend.

When making a call at work, be sure to:

- greet the person you have called
- introduce yourself
- tell the person the name of your organisation
- explain the reason for the call.

Tips for good communication

Effective communication involves a range of skills and will vary depending on the circumstances. Here are some general rules or tips for effective communication.

Tips for good communication:

- Listen carefully.
- Ask questions to clarify what the other person means.
- Speak clearly.
- Use language that the other person can understand.
- Do not assume that the other person knows what you are talking about.
- Clarify that the other person understands what you mean.

Strategies for supporting team members

Sometimes supporting your group is as simple as explaining how to do something, such as showing a member of the group where to find some information or how to use a piece of equipment. Sometimes it might be more challenging; for example, staying late to help finish a task in order to complete a project. When you do this, you should ensure that tasks are divided among team members so that no single team member carries the entire load.

Ways to support team members:

- Explain or clarify information or procedures.
- Solve problems.
- Provide encouragement.
- Give feedback.
- Undertake some extra work

Explain or clarify information or procedures

There are often times in a workplace when people do not understand exactly what it is they need to do. A piece of equipment may not be working the way they expect, or they may be having trouble understanding some important information. You can support your colleagues in this situation by either providing an explanation about how to do something, or confirming that they have understood the information or task correctly. Providing an explanation or some clarification for another member of your work team is important. It can allow them to get on with their tasks quickly.

Example: support a team member by explaining a procedure

Trina has not used a work vehicle before. She does not know how to book a vehicle, or which forms she should complete. You show her where to find the vehicle booking form and how to complete it. You also show her where to find the keys and where to collect the vehicle. You remind her that she must fill the vehicle with petrol before she returns it.

Solve problems

Problems come up from time to time in most workplaces. Problems can hold up the flow of work and mean that tasks are not completed on time and goals cannot be met. Often there are particular people in a workplace who are good at solving certain kinds of problems. If you learn who these people are, and perhaps concentrate on developing some special skills yourself, you will be able to use everyone's problem-solving skills to the best advantage. Talking over a problem with another person is often better than trying to solve it yourself. Work groups should try to solve problems together.

Example: support a team member by helping solve problems

Alicia is having trouble getting the new database software to work correctly. She knows that Roger, a colleague from her work group, has used the database many times before. Alicia asks him for some help. Roger sits with her and watches while she enters some data. He quickly identifies where she is going wrong and shows her how to make simple changes. This allows Alicia to use the database more quickly and efficiently.

Provide encouragement

Everyone works better when they receive encouragement from time to time. Encouragement tells others they are on the right track. It also helps people feel better about situations where things have not gone according to plan. Encouragement is a friendly, team-focused way of supporting your colleagues when you think they could use a bit of a boost.

Example: support a team member by offering encouragement

You notice that a colleague has been having some problems dealing with a difficult customer. You wait until your colleague has finished. Then you spend a few minutes talking with your colleague about the difficulties they have been having. You offer some encouragement and a few suggestions that may help them to deal more easily with difficult customers in the future.

Give feedback

Feedback is an important way of supporting your colleagues by making sure they understand when they have completed a task well and when they have not. Giving and receiving feedback is an important part of being in a work team. If you notice that someone is not sure whether they are doing the right thing or not, feedback can be useful.

It is important that any feedback you give is constructive and helpful. Feedback should not make someone feel that your comments are directed at them personally. Feedback should focus on the task rather than the person.

Positive feedback

Positive feedback encourages someone to continue doing a task in the same way, or it lets them know that what they are succeeding.

Negative feedback

Negative feedback tells someone that they should change what they are doing, or alter their approach in some way.

Example: support a team member by providing constructive feedback

You notice that Marcus has spoken up in a staff meeting for the first time. Normally he does not make comments or suggestions during a meeting. Today, he clearly outlined his ideas for making some changes to a new brochure. After the meeting, you take a moment to tell Marcus that his ideas were terrific, and that it was great that he had been able to explain them so well to the whole work group.

Undertake extra work

When things get busy in a workplace it is time for everyone to pitch in and help. This ensures important jobs are completed on time and deadlines are met.

Your supervisor may ask you to take on some extra work tasks to support your colleagues, or you may become aware of someone who needs extra help with a task at a time when you are available to share some of their workload. If you are positive and cheerful about taking on extra work duties, you will probably find that others are also happy to help and support you when you need it.

Being aware of possible busy times in your workplace means you will know when you might need to offer your help to support your colleagues.

Busy times may occur:

- at the end of the month when reports are due in on programs and activities
- at the end of the financial year
- when team members are absent.

Example: support a team member by undertaking extra work

Patricia needs to go home early because her daughter is sick. Before she leaves, you sit down with her and go through her tasks for the rest of the day. You check which tasks are urgent and which can wait until tomorrow. You agree to complete the urgent tasks for her and to handle any other issues related to her work that come up during the day. Patricia is able to go and collect her daughter without having to worry that her urgent work tasks will not be completed.

Ensure the goals of the work group are met

Keep the overall group goal in mind when you are working in a group. When you are busy trying to complete many different tasks, it is easy to lose sight of what you are aiming to achieve. You may believe that the task you are currently working on is the most important and must be completed first, but does this task really help the group achieve its overall goal? Sometimes it is difficult to decide which task is more urgent or more important; they are not always the same thing. Frequently reminding yourself of the overall goal helps you keep focused on completing tasks to achieve it.

Provide support and learn new skills

Helping another member of your team is a good chance to learn some new skills. Many organisations encourage workers to learn how to do each other's jobs, so that there are always a number of people who can take on different roles at different times.

Sometimes organisations develop documents explaining the daily and weekly tasks that are a part of a particular job. These are often called operating guidelines or instructions.

Operating guidelines or instructions:

- are very practical
- are very specific
- provide details about what needs to happen
- provide details about when something needs to happen
- are useful if someone is away sick
- are helpful if there is a change of personnel within a workplace
- allow anyone to read the document and understand the tasks that need to happen each day as part of that role.

Learn by using operating guidelines or instructions

Reading through the operating guidelines or instructions for a particular task or job role is a good way to learn what is required of a particular task. If you are asked to take on a role or to assist, you will have a good idea of what is required.

If there are no written operating instructions, watching and communicating with other team members can help you to learn more about a range of tasks within your work team.

Example: develop operating guidelines

Pedro works in the payroll department. His job is a vital one and has to be done according to strict time lines. Pedro and his supervisor, Janet, have worked together to create a detailed set of instructions to explain how to process time sheets. Although Pedro and Janet are easily able to do each other's jobs, they also wanted to ensure that time sheets could be processed if neither of them was available. The instructions mean that anyone in the organisation is able to complete their tasks for them.

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Know your boundaries when providing support

In any workplace, you need to understand your boundaries. This means knowing which tasks are part of your job and which tasks generally belong to someone else. While it is good to support another team member in order to meet the goals of your group, it is not up to you to do someone else's job for them. If you spend too much time working on tasks that someone else has asked you to do and fail to do your own duties as a result, you have not made a useful contribution to the goals of your work group.

If you have problems with someone always expecting you to do tasks that you know are a part of their job, talk to your supervisor in private about the problem and ask for their help. Here are some reasons why one member of a group may rely heavily on other members of the group to help them with their work.

Some reasons why one member of the group relies too heavily on other members:

- They are not motivated.
- They not interested.
- They do not understand their job responsibilities properly.

Understand skills and knowledge required

There are some jobs that you do not have the skills or knowledge to do. Some jobs require an understanding of particular equipment or procedures, or need special training. Examples of these jobs include operating a printing machine, or working in an office within a restricted area such as a laboratory or food processing plant.

You should not attempt to do something you do not have the skills or knowledge to do. Doing so may breach the requirements of your organisation, and put yourself and others at risk.

Questions to ask

- Does my supervisor know and approve of me doing this task?
- Do I have the knowledge and skills to do it correctly?
- Do I understand any occupational health and safety issues that may apply?
- Does it give me a chance to learn some new skills?
- Will it help my work team achieve its goals?
- Can I rearrange my own tasks to accommodate this task?
- If I do this task, will I upset the dynamics of our work team?

Practice task 4

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Van Lin has just begun working for a computer software company. He is working hard to make a good impression. He wants his supervisor to think he can do his job well, and that he is a good team member. He has read the company's policies and procedures manual, and has started to learn about the forms he needs to use for ordering new equipment and sending out invoices. He is finding his daily tasks are taking him a while to do, but he is trying to be as efficient as he can be and to use his time well.

One of his colleagues, Veronica, has worked for the company for several years. Veronica is responsible for packaging and dispatching customer orders on a daily basis, processing the invoices and entering the information onto a database. Veronica does not like packing the boxes in the warehouse because she finds it too cold. She sometimes asks Van Lin to do this task for her while she does the invoices.

Van Lin helps Veronica out a few times, but then he starts to get behind in his own work. One day he finds Veronica sitting in the office reading a magazine because she has finished her work already. He is cross because he knows that after doing her packing task, he still has to do his own jobs as well. He does not know whether his supervisor will be upset that he has not finished his own work, or angry that Veronica is taking advantage of him. He is not sure what to do.

1. What are Veronica's duties?

… continued

2. Which task does Van Lin do for Veronica?

3. Why do you think Van Lin does this task for Veronica?

4. Is Van Lin being a good team member by doing Veronica's work for her?

5. Is Veronica being a good team member?

6. What should Van Lin do to solve this problem?

2B Make a constructive contribution to goals and tasks

It is important that the contribution you make towards the tasks and goals of your work group is constructive. There may be occasional situations where you think you are providing support but, in fact, that may not be the case. Always take the time to think about whether your contribution is helpful. You should always think about your own job role and duties and make sure you do not neglect these, or act outside your own skill level and experience.

Most organisations have guidelines for their staff about what is required of them. Make sure you understand the requirements of your organisation, so you can keep these in mind as you are doing your job.

The requirements of the organisation may be described in:

- a vision, mission or values statement
- a code of conduct for staff
- workplace policies and procedures
- workplace forms
- your own job description
- daily and weekly operating procedures
- task plans or individual performance plans.

Make sure your contribution is constructive

It is easy to be carried away with enthusiasm to show you understand your job, but step back occasionally and look at how you fit into the bigger picture of your organisation. Ask yourself some questions to make sure you are contributing to the overall goals of your team and organisation in a constructive way.

Questions to ask:

- Is this what I have been asked to do?
- Do I fully understand the requirements of my task?
- Have I allocated sufficient time for the task?
- Am I following the correct workplace procedure for the task?
- Have I read and understood the workplace policies that apply to this task?
- Am I doing the task to the best of my abilities?

What if your contribution creates a problem?

Sometimes you might think you are making a constructive contribution, when in fact you are making things difficult for other members of your team. Before you decide to make a contribution in a particular situation at work, check that you are actually able to offer something useful. Sometimes people in a team may say and do things that they think others, especially the team leader, want to hear or see.

In situations where things may have gone wrong, first think about what you can do that is useful and helpful. If you have nothing to contribute, and can offer no practical support, you are probably best to continue with your own tasks until someone asks you to do something else.

Using a checklist can help you work out whether you have made a constructive contribution to the goals and tasks of your work group. Review the checklist at the end of each day, and think about whether the contribution you made was a constructive one.

Example: checklist for making a constructive contribution each day

Planned and organised my tasks for the day in line with work group goals	
Completed all tasks that were assigned to me, or carried them forward into a later list to be completed at a later date	
Used workplace policies and procedures wherever appropriate	
Thought about how what I was doing contributed to the goals of the team	
Actively listened to others in the team	
Made positive contributions to interactions with others in meetings and conversations	
Asked only relevant and thoughtful questions	
Made notes of any new information, feedback or comments	
Assisted others when I was able to	
Reviewed the tasks I completed today	
Planned the tasks I need to do tomorrow	

Practice task 5

Read the case study, then complete the required form.

Case study

One of the fluorescent lights in the Supply Department, Clerical Office, Room 5 above the workbench is not working. Danny Jones decides to change the globe himself. He stands on an office chair, then balances with one foot on the chair and one on the desk. He manages to get the cover off the light but cannot reach the globe. Danny's supervisor comes in just when Danny is struggling to reach for the globe. She tells Danny to get down from the desk and reminds him that the maintenance workers complete maintenance tasks. She shows him the WHS policy and the workplace form that should be used to request a maintenance task. She explains that she understands it is frustrating to have to wait for maintenance to be done, but that it is the best way to keep everyone in the workplace safe.

Complete this workplace form. It is a request for maintenance work to be undertaken.

Abbey Field Constructions Maintenance request form	
Today's date:	Employee name:
Location of request (room number, building, area):	
Description of maintenance request:	
How urgent is this request?	
❑ Very urgent	
❑ Somewhat urgent	
❑ Not urgent	
Form lodged with:	

2C — Share information to ensure goals are met

Sharing information is essential if a work group is to be effective. Information can be shared in different ways, such as through meetings, informal conversations, or in a brainstorming session. It can be shared verbally, or through written documents. Information can also be shared as a way of acknowledging satisfactory or unsatisfactory work performance, or as a way of providing encouragement to a colleague.

Sharing information allows team members to:

- clarify goals and tasks
- understand how each team member's tasks fit in with those of others
- sort out problems as they arise
- evaluate group progress and discuss strategies to improve skills.

Share information during meetings

Work group meetings are an ideal way for groups to get together and discuss their progress. Group meetings are an opportunity for you to ask questions about things you do not understand.

It is important to maintain open and clear communication with all members of your work group. Everyone needs to be involved in making decisions because this helps everyone understand what the group is aiming to achieve. Meetings may also be used to plan new directions, discuss difficulties or resolve issues. They can simply involve gathering the members around for a quick, informal discussion. At other times they can be formal, with the leader preparing an agenda and having minutes taken.

Here are some things to be aware of when sharing information at a meeting.

Be prepared

Before the meeting, write down a short list of questions you would like to ask.

Think about how you will share

Think about how you will share any important information or ideas you have. Make notes so you can explain these clearly and concisely.

continued ...

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Listen carefully

Listen carefully to what others contribute at the meeting.
Meetings are not about winning or losing points or arguments;
they are about working out what is best for the whole team.

Clarify completion methods

An important professional issue for organisations is ensuring tasks are always completed in the same way, and in line with requirements. A manual may be used to explain how to do certain tasks, or how to set out documents.

There may be templates to use for documents such as letters or reports that are written frequently; a system of checking documents before they are sent out; and operating instructions explaining, step by step, how to complete certain tasks.

You may need to check with your supervisor or a more-experienced colleague about how your organisation performs certain tasks. You may be asked to do a task you have not done before, or you may simply need a reminder about what is expected in your workplace.

Alternatively, you may have someone new in your work team and you need to offer them some help. Make a list of important information that people in your work team need to remember. Sharing information like this will make sure everyone works in a similar way.

Example: use procedures in the workplace

Marjorie is not sure about her workplace requirements for writing a letter. She checks in the online manual and finds a procedure headed 'letters'. She reads that procedure and learns that, in her workplace, she must remember the following when she writes a letter:

- Use letterhead paper.
- Use plain English writing style.
- Place the date in the top left-hand corner.
- Include the name, title and address of the recipient under the date.
- Use a subject line (headed Re:) to indicate to the reader what the letter is about.
- Include sender's name and position title at the bottom of the letter.
- Allow sufficient space to sign the letter.

Project reports

Project reports are one way to ensure that information about a particular project or task is shared with other members of the work group.

Project reports:

- provide a permanent record of tasks and achievements that have been made by a group member
- are often provided to a supervisor or manager
- may be written on a monthly basis or more frequently, such as weekly
- often include facts and figures as well as more descriptive information
- allow a supervisor to clearly see how a group member is progressing with a particular task, and when they may need additional support or assistance.

Performance appraisals

Performance appraisals are used in many organisations. They provide a formal way of evaluating skills and performance over a set period, such as over a year. Performance appraisals can clearly set out areas where an employee is performing well and where they need to gain further skills or receive additional support.

Consider performance appraisals as a positive, helpful and constructive tool to help you become better at your job. A positive performance appraisal is recognition of your achievements over the period since your previous appraisal. A performance appraisal that suggests areas for improvement should be seen as a positive challenge that specifically highlights the skills you need to develop in the following period.

Encourage colleagues

Everyone works better if they are given encouragement from time to time. It can be disheartening to work hard at a task and not receive feedback about your performance. Look for opportunities to tell others in your workplace that they have done a good job.

Be on the lookout for situations where a colleague may be feeling a bit down or disappointed about how their work is progressing. Provide praise for a job well done, and encouragement and support when you think it is needed. If you have information that could help a colleague with their task, pass it on to them.

Share information about workplace hazards, risks and controls

Workplace safety is vital, regardless of where you work or what your job is. Everyone has a role in making sure workplaces are safe. Most workplaces have procedures for identifying risks or hazards. Sometimes a form can be filled out so the problem can be fixed. Alternatively, there may be a person who can be approached directly to make repairs or carry out small maintenance tasks.

If you are not sure what to do about a hazard, tell your supervisor or a more-experienced colleague straight away. Let other people in the area know of the hazard so they can stay safe. Make sure you are aware of how your workplace shares information about risks and hazards, and the controls used to manage them.

Example: deal with workplace hazards

Roger notices that someone has spilt a drink in the staff lunchroom. There is a large area of the floor that has become slippery. Roger takes an orange witch's hat and a sign from the nearby storeroom. The sign reads 'Slippery floor'. It warns everyone of the hazard and ensures that no-one is hurt.

Share information during brainstorming

Brainstorming is a process used by groups to solve problems and discuss issues. Group members talk freely and provide as many ideas as they can. Brainstorming can be done on a single topic or on a group of topics.

Quickly jot down any ideas or words as they are said, without stopping to talk about them in detail. When the brainstorming phase is over, the group can look back at what has been written and talk about the ideas. Brainstorming can be successful if members avoid judging anyone's responses. Ideas that may seem unrealistic at first may prove to be valuable later on.

After the brainstorming session, evaluate the ideas, categorise them and sort them into a priority order.

Here are a number of important rules to follow in a brainstorming session.

Share information during informal conversations

Informal conversations are often an effective way of sharing information in a workplace without waiting for a formal meeting. Be proactive about seeking information or support from others informally. Find out whether your supervisor is contactable during the day to share information, or if there is a particular time when they are available for queries and discussions.

Some workplaces are set up in a way that encourages workers to share information regularly, and may even provide comfortable sitting areas for this purpose. Other workplaces might encourage people to leave their office doors open as a sign that they are available for informal conversation. In some organisations, the office is designed with very few internal walls so that people can move around and talk easily with each other.

Open-door policy

Many managers and supervisors have an open-door policy. This means that they make themselves generally available to provide support, feedback or information to their employees. If your supervisor has an open-door policy, it means that they are available if you need them.

Make sure you take advantage of this in an appropriate way, and without pestering your supervisor for information constantly. Used wisely, an open-door policy makes it easier to handle difficult or challenging situations. It is also important to show your supervisor you can work independently and without direction.

Practice task 6

Read the scenario, then complete the task that follows.

Scenario

You work as a supply clerk. Behind your office is a large warehouse with restricted access. The warehouse is a busy environment where boxes are being moved by forklifts.

Previously, staff have gone into the warehouse to obtain small items for use in departments. You and your colleagues know that because of WHS legislation this should be a controlled environment and, unless procedures are put in place, it is only a matter of time before there is an accident.

Your recommendation is that this should be a 'no go' area that cannot be accessed by general staff unless accompanied by a member of the supply team.

In preparation for a meeting with management regarding the safety issues, you and your colleagues decide to brainstorm some safety rules.

Jot your ideas from the brainstorm down. Remember to just write your ideas down as they come into your head.

2D Identify and plan opportunities for improving the work group

After working in a group, it is useful for members to discuss how well the team worked towards its goal. Evaluating or assessing performance helps everybody to think about what was done well or how things could be done better next time. If the group does not evaluate its performance, it is less likely to improve and will never find out how it performed.

Groups evaluate their performance in a number of ways. Regular team meetings are useful for reporting on progress and identifying how well the group is working within its time lines. Adjustments to tasks may be necessary. More informal monitoring and evaluation takes place on a daily basis as the team members discuss their work and whether everything is going according to plan.

Evaluate performance as a group

Sometimes groups go back over their work schedule to identify the things they did well. This involves going through the tasks they identified at the start to see which ones met the goal they were trying to achieve. They also look to see which tasks did not go so well. The group then thinks of ways to do these tasks better next time.

When a group evaluates its performance, it should look at:

- whether the group achieved its goals and, if not, why not
- how the group worked together
- which tasks were completed well
- which tasks were difficult to complete, and why
- whether the group had the right resources
- whether tasks were allocated to group members appropriately
- whether the team updated its work schedule to reflect any changes to the group's priorities.

Evaluate individual performance in a group

A group can evaluate its performance at any stage. The more a group looks back over its performance, the better it will be able to plan for the next stage.

When a group is evaluating its performance, each member should think about whether:

- they could have done their own tasks more efficiently if the tasks had been planned differently
- they had (or had learned) the skills to complete the tasks they were allocated
- the tasks the group identified at the start achieved the team's goals
- the overall performance of the group could improve, and how this could be achieved.

Plan strategies for improvement

Work groups need to pause every so often and look at how well they are working together to meet their goals and objectives. There is often room for the work team and the individuals within it to improve. Strategies used to help group members do their jobs better are good strategies for helping the work group as whole.

Strategies such as formal training or personal study are often conducted away from the workplace. Some strategies for improvement are provided below.

Strategies for improvement

1
Coaching, mentoring or supervising

Your group leader may arrange for a more-experienced colleague to coach or mentor you, or someone in your group may volunteer to take on this role. This means that they take a special interest in your work, suggest ways you can manage your time and perform tasks more efficiently, and provide tips and hints they have gained through experience. You may have regular formal meetings with your mentor, or you may have an arrangement where you know you can ask them for help or advice whenever you need it.

2
Formal or informal learning programs

Your supervisor may arrange for your group to undertake training in a specific area; for example, a new software application. This training may be part of a formal course conducted away from the workplace. Use a folio of documents or a simple checklist that records tasks you have performed and skills you have gained, together with information about the time and location.

When you have completed a training activity and learned some new skills, you might be asked to share the learning you have gained from the training with others in your workplace. This is a great chance to contribute to the group and to reinforce the information you have just learned from your course.

3
Performance appraisals

Performance appraisals or reviews provide your employer with the opportunity to discuss your strengths and to identify any skill gaps. They may arrange further training for you after identifying gaps in your skills. Your supervisor may facilitate meetings where the group as a whole can discuss issues and suggest ways for you to improve.

4 **Personal study**

You may have identified a career path or specific skills you require. Many employers grant leave with or without pay, or provide a training bonus, to enable people to complete learning programs. These are conducted in the learner's own time but may involve some office hours. Personal study is a great way to meet your individual career goals as well as to contribute to the goals of your workplace. If you have a clear idea of where you want to go with your career, you can work at developing the skills and knowledge you need to make sure you get there.

5 **Work experience**

Work experience is a valuable way of gaining new skills. By working within an organisation, you have the opportunity to watch and learn from others around you. You may take part in work experience as part of a training course, or perhaps as an exchange within your workplace with a worker from another area or department. When you have completed a period of work experience, make sure you take the time to think back and reflect on what you have learned. Write some notes about the new skills and experiences you have gained and note down any other useful information.

6 **Workplace skills assessment**

You and your group might conduct a skills assessment to identify areas in which you need further training. You can use your position description that outlines the skills required, or a copy of your industry's competency standards that describe the skills and knowledge needed for particular tasks.

Example: recognition of current competence

Max wants to demonstrate that he already has the skills needed for a computer course. He looks in his folio of previous work. He finds that he has examples of several pieces of completed work that demonstrate he has the skills that are to be covered during the course. He photocopies the information and presents it to the training organisation. He is awarded a certificate and a statement of results that shows his recognition of current competence in using the computer software that is covered in the course.

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Practice task 7

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

A retail organisation has one team doing market research. This is their schedule for September.

September work schedule			
Goal	Task	Deadline	Who
To find out what consumers want by doing market research	Design telephone survey	Friday 10 Sept	Rob
	Draw up list of customers to call	Friday 10 Sept	Rani
	Design database to record responses	Friday 10 Sept	Rani
	Make telephone calls	Monday 13 to Friday 17 Sept	Con, Helen, Rob, Jimmy
	Enter results into database	Monday 20 to Friday 24 Sept	Rani and Helen
	Analyse results	Thursday 30 Sept	Con and Rob
	Write report with recommendations for new products	Wednesday 6 Oct	Con and Rob

The group leader calls a meeting on Wednesday 15 September to see how the team is progressing. Rob has designed the survey and Rani reports that the database has been designed. However, Con and Helen say they are not having much success telephoning customers, and Rob and Jimmy agreed they had been having a similar problem. The people they wanted to speak to were not available, so they had left messages for people to call back.

Helen says she is concerned that she is not experienced in using a database, and Rob said he is worried about only having a week to write the report, as he is not very good at writing lengthy documents.

The group leader knows there are other people in the group who have database and report writing skills. However, she wants everyone in the group to have the chance to learn some new skills.

1. What might be the reasons for the problems with the phone calls?

... continued

2. What solutions could the group come up with to solve this problem?

3. Should any of the time frames be changed?

4. What could the group leader do to support Helen and Rob?

5. How could other team members help Helen and Rob?

Summary

1. Offering assistance and support to group members where possible – and in line with your skills, experience and work role – is an important way to help the group achieve its goals.

2. Sharing information, formally and informally, is essential for helping a group to achieve its goals.

3. It is important to make sure your contributions to the work group are constructive and useful.

4. It is important for groups and group members to evaluate their work to see where they have succeeded and where they can improve.

5. Groups may consider a range of strategies or opportunities for improvement, such as formal or informal learning programs, personal study and coaching, mentoring or supervising.

Learning checkpoint 2
Contribute to work group activities

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in contributing to work group activities.

Part A

Describe the kind of support you could provide in a workplace in each of the following situations.

1. Solving a problem related to a task that is more complicated than expected

2. A work colleague who is concerned that they do not have the skills to complete a task assigned to them

3. A work colleague who is unsure about whether they have done a good job on the report they have just written

4. A colleague who performs a similar role to your own will be absent on a training course for a week

Part B

1. Think of any group activity you have been involved with at work, at school, in a community group or with family. Describe what the activity involved.

2. Suggest ways in which the activity could have been better.

Part C

You work as the receptionist in a small workplace. Your main duties include answering the telephone, greeting customers at the front desk and providing administrative support to the manager. You also perform general housekeeping duties such as filing, putting stamps on letters, and managing the petty cash. You are going on a course for a week and a colleague has to take over your tasks.

1. Write a summary of the tasks you do in your daily routine.

2. What types of information would you need to give to your team members and/or the person taking over your job before you leave?

3. Which four of the following strategies would be most appropriate for assisting the team to prepare for your absence?

   - Sharing information during a meeting
   - Clarifying completion methods
   - Completing a project report
   - Having a performance appraisal
   - Encouraging your colleagues
   - Sharing information about workplace hazards, risks and controls
   - Sharing information during a brainstorming session
   - Sharing information during informal conversations

4. You are preparing a document about hazards, risks and safety procedures involved with your job so you can leave it with your replacement. What headings would you use in the document?

Part D

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Jin works as an administrative assistant for a food processing company. She has organised her daily work plan and knows she can complete her tasks in the time line she has been set. Jin works closely with Sandra, another administrative assistant, on many projects and tasks. Sandra always wants to arrange meetings to brainstorm new ideas and plan new ways of doing things in the office. Jin is worried that having more meetings will just waste time and stop her from getting her tasks finished. She knows she has to be flexible and try to work effectively with Sandra, but she does not know how to do this and also get her work finished.

1. What should Jin's goal be for this situation?

2. Who could she discuss this problem with?

3. Can you think of any solutions to this problem?

4. What could Jin say to Sandra?

5. When would be the best time and place to discuss the problem?

6. Complete the following sample professional development form to help make her request.

Professional development form

Employee name:..

Date:...

Name of course:...

Location: ....

Training provider:...

Contact details of provider:...

Duration of course: ....

Describe your reasons for wanting to attend this course:..

....

....

....

....

....

How will information from this course be shared with your colleagues?

....

....

....

Supervisor name:...

Signature: ....

Topic 3
Deal effectively with issues, problems and conflict

Everyone working in an organisation faces challenges they must deal with. Some of these challenges may be beyond their control. Some may be because of something they said or did. Some may be because of something that they failed to do or did not do correctly. Being able to minimise the impact of problems and conflict is important regardless of the cause. The ability to identify the causes of challenges and to understand how to manage them effectively is a skill that comes with time and experience.

It is important that you and your team members understand the impact of poor communication, unresolved conflict and personality clashes in the workplace. Dealing with such issues and problems helps the team to be productive and operate in a harmonious environment.

In this topic you will learn how to:

3A   Respect differences in personal values and beliefs

3B   Identify differences in communication styles and respond appropriately

3C   Identify issues, problems and conflict in the workplace

3D   Seek assistance when difficulties arise

3A   Respect differences in personal values and beliefs

People in an organisation have diverse skills, abilities and experiences. They come from diverse cultures and backgrounds, and the way they do things may be different.

Some people enjoy socialising, while others are quieter. Some will have excellent ideas and will want to share them, while others may find it difficult to share ideas. Some people are technically minded and enjoy analytical and problem-solving tasks, while others prefer doing manual tasks. Some people are more productive in a team environment, while others work just as effectively on their own.

The way people think and act in a given situation is hard to predict. In a crisis, some people have the ability to think more rationally and naturally take control, providing leadership to those who prefer to be led. In times of sadness or grief, others are better able to provide the empathy and support people need to deal with such situations.

What makes people think and behave differently?

A number of things govern the differences in the way people think and behave. These include upbringing, culture and previous experiences. The way people act and think is driven in part by their values and beliefs.

Values and beliefs determine the way we think, feel or behave in certain situations; for example, you might have a value that means you are strongly committed to the ideals of feminism. This value means you believe women should assert their rights, and not be limited in their choices because of their gender.

Values and beliefs have a great influence on workplace behaviour and actions, and on how people deal with each other.

Areas where people can differ in their values and beliefs include:

- religion
- race
- social and economic issues
- political views
- interests
- family dynamics
- personal relationships.

Example: differences in the way people think and behave

Patrick is very conservative in his dress and behaviour. He does not drink alcohol, does not smoke and rarely goes out on weekends except with his family. By contrast, his co-worker, Bill, is alternative and liberal. He likes to dress on weekends in clothes reflecting his Goth allegiances, and he has numerous piercings and tattoos. Bill takes his piercings out at work, and changes his appearance so he looks professional, but there are still significant differences between him and Patrick.

People's values and beliefs often come from a mixture of sources. They may be based in part on family and cultural background, as values and beliefs are often strongly tied to early influences. They may also stem from experience, as different events in our lives may change our thinking about right and wrong, acceptable behaviours and expectations of others.

Respect the values and beliefs of others

Everyone should respect other people's values and beliefs regardless of their own. This applies to people in the workplace, in social circles and in public. Understanding differences rather than judging them builds rapport and creates better working relationships. Appreciating that someone holds a different view builds respect and trust. This minimises difficulties in the workplace and helps create a more harmonious and productive work environment.

Some workplaces celebrate diversity to foster a more harmonious working environment. Recognising and celebrating a particular religious event creates an opportunity for everyone to learn about the views, values and beliefs of others. A worker who has special religious tasks that they must perform as part of their religion might like to explain their religion to others in the workplace. This is a useful way to encourage people to work together in teams.

Another way is to create educational activities where workers are taught a little about the features of various cultures, or are given the chance to talk about their differing values and beliefs and how they might relate to their work.

Example: celebrate diversity

There are workers from many different cultures at Sinching Enterprises. Recently the firm employed several workers from a Muslim background. Because they wear traditional dress, they have created a lot of discussion among the other workers. The management team decides to organise a cultural awareness dinner and they invite everyone to bring a traditional dish that has special meaning for them. They encourage each worker to talk about why their dish is important and what it means in their culture. By the end of the night, everyone is talking and sharing ideas about cultural similarities rather than differences.

Protect the values and beliefs of others

There are laws that protect people's safety and there are laws that protect their values and beliefs. It is unlawful to discriminate against someone because of religion, preferences, skills, abilities, race, sex, or what they value and hold important.

Commonwealth laws that relate to discrimination
• *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth)
• *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth)
• *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)

Work with diversity

Working in an environment where everyone is different can make work exciting because it provides a chance to learn and share experiences. However, there may be times when differences create issues that affect the productivity of the team.

If there is an issue affecting how group members get along with each other, it is a good idea to stop and think about what the issue is, and talk about how everyone feels. Express your thoughts clearly and take the time to listen to the thoughts and feelings of everyone affected. The focus should be on the resolution of the issue, so the team can continue to progress. Ask a supervisor or team leader to be part of a conversation if you need help to resolve things.

Customers will also have a range of backgrounds and values. A workplace that values the contributions of different people will be able to relate well to customers who have individual differences.

Practice task 8

1. What are three advantages of a diverse workplace?

2. What are some disadvantages of a diverse workplace?

3B Identify differences in communication styles and respond appropriately

Communication is much more than just the words we speak. Communication is also about the actions and gestures we make, body language, our tone of voice and facial expressions.

Different people and cultures have different ways of communicating their thoughts and ideas. Working in an organisation with people from other cultures means you may need to adapt your communication style to ensure that everyone understands clearly, and without offence, what it is you are trying to communicate.

Linguistic differences

Linguistics refers to the study of language, so a linguistic difference refers to the language differences between people.

Australia is a country with diverse cultures and language groups. Many of the people who have settled in Australia may have adopted English as their first language but still speak another language at home or with family and friends.

Many people speak more than one language. If they speak two languages, we say they are bilingual. If they speak more than two languages, we say they are multilingual. In some cases, the language they use may not be a spoken one; for example, members of the Australian deaf community use a language called Auslan.

Here are some differences you might notice between speakers from different linguistic groups.

Tone of voice

Some speakers use a very flat tone, and run many of their sounds together.
Others speak with a very bouncy, changeable tone with lots of high and low sounds.

Volume

Some speakers are much louder in volume than others.

Accent

Some accents are more difficult to understand than others. Often this is to do with experience, and once you have listened to an accent for a while you will be able to understand it more readily.

Gesture

Sometimes people use many hand gestures when they speak. This is particularly seen in some European cultures.

Emotion

Some groups of people are more likely to have highly emotive ways of speaking. They laugh and cry easily, and are very demonstrative when they communicate.

Personal space

Some people tend to stand very close to others when they speak to them, while others prefer a much bigger distance between them and the person they are speaking to.

Speed of speech

Some speakers are naturally much faster at speaking than others. If someone speaks much more quickly than you are used to, it may take a while to tune in to their speech patterns so you can understand them.

Colloquialisms

Many languages have phrases and words that are particular to that language, or to a small group of speakers within the larger language group. There may only be a small number of people who understand a particular phrase; for example, 'swimmers' is the word used in New South Wales and Queensland for a swimming costume whereas in Victoria the word is 'bathers'. Other examples include 'shonky', 'ripped off', 'barbie', and 'done and dusted.'

Jargon

Jargon consists of words used only by people who share a work or professional background, or another specialty area such as a sport or hobby. They are words related just to that area, and are understood only by people within that group; for example, 'cleat', 'tack', 'jibe', 'starboard' and 'port' are all terms easily understood by a person who sails, but not by anyone else.

Cultural differences

Culture relates to people who share a common background, although they may not necessarily speak the same language. They identify themselves as belonging to a particular group of people, and may or may not share some of the same characteristics and behaviours of others in that group. It is important not to assume that all people who are from the same cultural group will speak the same language or behave in the same way. That would be like assuming that all the people who live in your street are exactly the same, and can be expected to show the same sorts of behaviour.

People from different cultures may have differences in areas including:

- the roles and expectations of men and women
- the rights of adults and children
- how family members and groups relate to each other
- behaviours in the home and in public
- shows of emotion at home and in public
- how liberally or conservatively they behave and dress
- the ways that customs, traditions and special events are celebrated
- the importance of religion as part of the culture.

How to respond to differences

How you respond to a speaker from a cultural or linguistic background different from your own can tell them a lot about you and your values and skills as a communicator. If you are patient, calm and considerate, you are showing respect for the other speaker. If you appear frustrated, bored or inattentive, you are giving the unspoken message that you are not interested enough in what they are saying to bother trying to understand.

Useful techniques for responding appropriately to cultural and linguistic differences
• Know and learn about differences between people from different backgrounds and cultures. • Show respect for people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. • Avoid using colloquialisms and jargon. • Be patient with yourself and the other speaker. • Limit background noise and other distractions. • Listen closely to speakers, and use clarifying statements to check you have understood what they mean before allowing them to continue.

Use an interpreter or translation service

There are times when linguistic differences make it impossible for you to communicate with someone who speaks a different language from you. If this occurs, you may need to use an interpreter service. Your organisation may have an account with an interpreter service already, or you may be able to organise to use the service and have it paid for as a one-off payment.

A translation service provides written translations from one language to another; they may translate a service agreement, a customer complaint document or an important WHS brochure.

The contact number for the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) is 131 450.

The interpreter service can provide translation of the spoken words into another language.

Face-to-face interpreters

Face-to-face interpreters attend a meeting and interpret what is said.

Conference call

Interpreters listen to a conversation in a three-way telephone conference call and interpret for both parties.

Example: use an interpreter service

Peter works at the front desk of a large charitable organisation. He meets people from many different cultural backgrounds and he finds there is a high demand for brochures in other languages other than English. He speaks to his supervisor about the current brochures and suggests they have some translated into the languages most commonly asked for at the desk. His supervisor agrees and asks Peter to contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) to organise for the organisation's most popular brochures to be translated into the seven most frequently spoken languages in their region.

Communication differences associated with people with disabilities

Some people have disabilities that can affect their spoken language. They may not communicate using words at all; for example, a person who is deaf may use sign language to communicate. Some people's language may sound slurred, it may not contain all the regular speech sounds or it may be different from the usual pattern of speech. This may be the case for someone who has cerebral palsy. They may use an alternative form of communication; for example, they may use a communication board, a voice output device or a keyboard.

Some tips for communicating are provided here.

Tips for communicating with someone with a disability
• Limit background noise and other distractions.
• Face towards the person, but still show respect for their personal space.
• Use the communication method they prefer to use.
• Don't avoid the communication entirely just because it is hard or different.
• Maintain eye contact and normal conversational habits of your own as you would in any other conversation.
• Don't finish a sentence for the person; wait for them to finish speaking themselves before you interrupt or speak yourself.
• Use nods, smiles and nonverbal indicators to show you understand.
• Don't pretend you understand if you don't.
• Never make a joke of someone you can't understand, or assume they are speaking that way for a laugh or because they are drunk or affected by drugs.

Written material

Most workplaces have brochures, catalogues and other documents that are written in English. Although commonly used, they can be a source of problems for workers and customers who do not speak English as a first language. Written material should be reviewed from time to time to check how easily a non-English speaker understands it. In some cases, it may be appropriate to have the material translated. This is particularly important for workplace forms, procedures and policies, as many of these are essential to the safe and effective operation of the workplace. A worker who cannot read the WHS policy may be in danger of a workplace accident because they do not have access to the same information as their colleagues. The employer may be at risk of a claim of failing to provide a safe workplace, as important information was not available to a worker from a different linguistic background.

To help make written material more accessible:

- use simple terms and plain English
- avoid jargon and colloquialisms
- avoid long sentences
- explain important terms in a separate section
- use pictures, diagrams and graphics
- use captions near pictures
- ask someone who has limited English skills to check the material for readability before it is printed.

Example: difficulties for a non-English speaker in understanding information

Ramid has just started work at a manufacturing plant. He works in the office, but often has to visit the main plant to take messages, ask for information or attend meetings. He was given an induction pack when he started work, but he can only understand some of the information. He has trouble understanding the plant access diagram, and fails to understand that he must:

- always wear a safety vest in the plant
- stay within the yellow markings on the floor
- watch and listen for forklift bells and lights
- not walk in the forklift-designated areas.

Ramid thinks the yellow markings on the floor show where he is not allowed to walk. He walks to a meeting on his second day by crossing directly from the office door to the meeting room. He has earphones in his ears, so he does not hear the forklift reversing behind him. He walks straight into its path and is injured.

In this example, Ramid was at risk at least in part because he was not given information in his own language. No-one checked that he understood the documents in his induction pack. For him, the safety instructions that kept other workers safe actually put him more at risk. The failure of the employer to address Ramid's language needs meant the workplace was not a safe place for him to be.

Practice task 9

Make a list of the needs of the following people in the workplace:

1. Someone who has a hearing impairment

2. Someone who is wheelchair-bound

3. Someone who speaks English as a second language

3C Identify issues, problems and conflict in the workplace

In every workplace, there are occasions when people disagree with one another or when something does not go according to plan. Such differences and issues are more easily and quickly resolved when employees are focused on helping each other rather than being focused on their own agendas.

It is important to be able to identify the cause of such problems when they arise to ensure they can be resolved quickly and effectively.

Common causes of conflict

Conflict can arise when two or more people in a workplace have differing opinions. Conflict can be positive or negative, depending on how it is used. Positive conflict brings about discussion and the sharing of ideas, whereas negative conflict results in the opposite: disconnected and unhappy work groups, and individuals operating without focus or direction.

There are many causes of workplace conflict, including:

- poor communication
- unrealistic work and time expectations
- stress
- personality clashes
- favouritism.

Poor communication

Poor communication can quickly lead to an escalating conflict situation. The communication may be verbal or written, or a combination of the two.

Here are some signs of poor communication that could result in conflict.

Some signs of poor communication
• Failure to speak to people directly when there is a problem
• Communication that is confusing or ambiguous
• Changes in fact, where information changes depending on who is giving it
• Communication that is indirect, occasional or unhelpful
• Communication that focuses on personalities rather than tasks and outcomes

Example: issues arising from poor communication

Tuyet and Juanita are arguing in the tearoom. They have both had conversations recently with Jim, their manager. Juanita had understood her conversation with Jim to mean that only she was getting a pay rise at the end of the month. Tuyet believes the pay rise is being given to all staff, but at the end of the year, as is written in their enterprise agreement. Jim is now out of the office for the next three days, and cannot be contacted. Tuyet and Juanita are each left with a different understanding of an important conversation, and no way of resolving the issue.

v1218

Unrealistic time expectations

Different people have different work capacities, and differing interpretations of what is realistic in the workplace. For some, a normal working day is one that starts at 9.00 am, includes an hour off for lunch, and ends at 4.30 pm. For others, a normal day involves far longer hours, and very little in the way of breaks.

This difference in interpretation can lead to conflict, as workers may perceive that the expectations being placed upon them are not reasonable.

Differences in interpretation can lead to:

- work being passed on to others
- refusal to complete some tasks
- tasks being finished late, or left incomplete
- higher rates of absenteeism
- more requests for single days off or short periods of leave
- arguments over job roles and responsibilities
- lowered motivation and morale
- requests for increased salaries, overtime or time in lieu.

Unrealistic work expectations

Sometimes job tasks can cause problems. People may believe that their tasks are more important than someone else's, or that they should have priority for some reason. Supervisors and managers may make demands that are unreasonable.

Unreasonable demands may include:

- documents be prepared in time for a meeting or event, with little notice given

- filing and photocopying be done at the last minute before a fixed deadline

- reports be written without adequate time being allowed

- training be attended in personal time

- meeting tasks be completed before specific dates or events

- major project tasks be completed without changes to normal duties

- absent staff be covered while staff are still performing their own job role

Example: unrealistic time and work expectations

Jack is personal assistant to Gerry Marks, the company CEO. Gerry is a hardworking person who starts early each day and finishes well after 7 pm each night. Most weeks, he does around 60–70 hours of work. He expects his staff to work hard too. Jack is becoming tired of the demanding schedule and never getting home on time. He is missing his young family, as he often gets home after the children are in bed. Jack is experiencing conflict at home with his wife and children, and at work with his boss, who believes he is not performing.

Stress

Stress affects people in different ways. We all need some degree of stress to provide us with motivation to perform tasks. With too little stress, we would never get things done. Too much, and we fail to perform at our peak. We all need our stress levels to be just right so we can get the job done without harming our physical or mental health.

Too much stress can lead to problems with physical health such as ulcers, stomach complaints, nausea, headaches, sleep problems and muscle tension and strain. It can cause problems with mental health too, causing things such as anxiety, depression, anger, frustration and feelings of hopelessness.

v1252

Example: affects from stress

Jack, personal assistant to company CEO Gerry Marks, is starting to feel the effects of Gerry's long hours and demanding schedule. Gerry is being critical of Jack's work performance, and has told him he must focus and concentrate more on details and stop making mistakes. Jack is getting headaches each day, which become worse as the day goes on. He takes headache tablets each day, and often has a few glasses of beer at the end of the day. He wakes during the night with his stomach churning and has trouble getting back to sleep. He makes mistakes at work, such as mixing up dates and booking Gerry on the wrong flight to a conference.

Personality clashes

Sometimes there are people in workplaces who just cannot get along with each other. Sometimes these clashes are due to differences in age, gender, cultural background or social grouping. Sometimes it is just because they are incompatible. Below are some negative outcomes that can be the result of personality clashes.

- Constant disagreements
- Put-downs and negative comments
- A focus on negatives rather than positives
- A personality-based approach rather than one based on solutions
- Requests for transfers to other areas or departments
- Deliberate sabotage of activities and tasks
- Complaints made formally or informally about each other
- Unprofessional conduct

Example: incompatibility in the workplace

Mark and Phil do not get along. They disagree in meetings and always find fault with each other's work. They dislike being in each other's company and try to sit apart when they are in the same room. Their supervisor is trying to get them to work together harmoniously. She decides to set them a task where they work together with no input from any other team members. Unfortunately, her experiment fails, as Mark quickly comes to her to complain about Phil not doing his share of the task and Phil is unhappy about Mark's discriminatory behaviour during a meeting.

Favouritism

Favouritism exists when there is a perception, based in fact or otherwise, that one worker receives preferential treatment over another; for example, by getting a lesser workload or more recognition, or having to wait less time for a pay rise.

Significant disputes can arise if the favouritism involves:

- salary, time in lieu or overtime
- time demands made on workers
- changes to a job classification
- roles and responsibilities
- promotions
- awards or workplace recognition.

Conflict resolution techniques

Many situations that result in conflict emerge from strained relationships between individuals rather than deficits in people's skill or motivation. Interdependent workplace relationships can lead to conflict. Whether the problem is disputes between team members or departments or misunderstandings with customers, conflict is a normal part of working life.

Disharmony can eventually lead to positive change by forcing the resolution of a difficult situation. Often, though, problems fester because no-one knows how to define them or what to do about them. Inaction ultimately undermines the smooth functioning of the organisation and the quality of employees' work lives.

Follow procedures

Conflict should be dealt with sensitively and quickly by your supervisor. They should follow problem-solving steps to investigate the issue, determine whether or not to take action and define options for rectifying the situation.

Similarly to poor performance, an organisation is likely to have set procedures for handling conflict.

Procedures might include:

- arranging a time for the relevant parties to meet to discuss the situation
- explaining the need for commitment and cooperation between team members in order to achieve common goals
- providing opportunities for resolution such as brainstorming potential solutions
- explaining the organisation's processes if a resolution cannot be achieved.

Be objective and constructive

If you are involved in conflict, you must aim to understand everyone's point of view and be willing to compromise and negotiate if the conflict appears difficult to resolve. In some cases, not everyone will be happy with the outcome. Learning to be flexible and cooperative doesn't mean that you have to give in. It implies you are willing to listen with an open mind, accept alternative ways of doing things and are prepared to adapt and work as part of a team.

Some ways to handle conflict constructively are shown below.

Think positively

Avoid thinking in terms of difficult people or demanding customers. It is more productive to focus on the behaviour or situation than to categorise and blame the person as a whole. A suitable approach is to sum up the situation with a statement such as, 'This customer is angry because she believes she was entitled to a refund even though we offered to exchange the goods'.

Recognise others' feelings

Recognise how others are feeling. Emotions should never be buried completely. Give each party the opportunity to explain any hurt, annoyance or frustration they may be experiencing. You don't have to agree with the person but you do need to acknowledge their point of view.

Defuse difficult situations

When emotions run too high, it might be time to take a break from the discussion. Anger and distress don't help you to solve problems effectively. Take time to think about your reaction. If you are considering putting your feelings in writing, use a deferral technique: write down what you want to say but don't send it immediately; put a draft aside until you are feeling calm then reconsider your words and decide whether you need to send it at all.

Discuss misunderstandings. If there is an obvious problem, draw attention to it and talk about how it can be resolved. Often the parties will be relieved that the matter has been brought out into the open. Of course, it is not appropriate to react every time you see the slightest sign of friction.

Deal with conflict

If you are in conflict with another person, let them know they are being heard. Often this is all that is needed to defuse the situation. Showing open-mindedness demonstrates that you will treat their concerns fairly. Listen actively and ask critical questions to explore the situation. Rather than trying to solve the disagreement yourself, ask: 'What do you think needs to be changed?' or 'How can we resolve this?' While open-ended questions are often effective, avoid asking why. Asking vague questions does not help identify the source of the problem and 'why' questions often make people defensive.

Practice task 10

1. In this table, read each scenario and try to identify the cause of the conflict, from the five common causes of conflict (poor communication, unrealistic work and time expectations, stress, personality clashes, favouritism).

Scenario	Cause of conflict
Brenda and Margo argue most days. The topic varies but the core problem remains the same. They just cannot get along.	
Max has only been in the workplace for a few months, but he is already being invited out for private dinners with his manager, and rumour has it he is being considered for the new special- projects job. Others in the workplace feel Max does not deserve the job, as he is so new.	
Vinod is feeling sick. He has a headache. He comes to work early to try to get a project report finished. He jumps when the phone rings unexpectedly and argues with others for little reason. He is feeling frustrated and upset most of the time.	

... continued

Pablo's supervisor wants him to complete some special tasks for him, but still thinks he can do the filing, photocopying and ordering as well as the end-of-month payments. Pablo tries to prioritise but his supervisor wants everything done a day early this month, as the CEO is visiting their department soon.

2. Anita receives this memo from her supervisor. What is the potential for conflict here and how could the conflict have been minimised?

Memo

To: Anita Jeffries

From: Annabel Waters

Date: 14/08/16

Re: Change of meeting times and location for this afternoon's meeting

The location for this afternoon's meeting has changed to the Boardroom. Can you please organise new agendas to go out to all team members telling them about the change? Make sure they all know the meeting is now at 4 pm, not 4.30 pm, and they will need to come to the Boardroom on Level 3 for the meeting.

3D Seek assistance when difficulties arise

Developing effective workplace relationships includes learning how to work cooperatively with your manager, supervisor and colleagues either individually or within a group. If you are comfortable and confident enough to discuss ideas and suggestions with work colleagues, you should be able to approach them when a difficulty arises or you encounter a problem you cannot solve yourself. If you have difficulties at work, use a step-by-step problem-solving approach to try to fix the problem. Otherwise, you may need to change your plans or renegotiate your responsibilities.

If a problem arises, stop and think about what the problem is and how you can go about fixing it. A useful strategy to make sure things get fixed is to focus on the solution rather than the problem. There is always time later to talk about why things went wrong, but first you should try to get things back on track.

Difficulties that may need manager or supervisor input:

- Equipment breakdowns, such as computer crashes
- Not enough resources such as a shortage of computers or stationery
- Being given extra responsibilities due to a change in the group's goals
- Something being mislaid
- Being unable to contact somebody you need to talk to
- Lack of time to complete the task before the deadline
- A need to change your plans

A five-step approach to solve difficulties at work

Use this five-step approach to solve a problem at work where you need to ask someone for assistance.

Five-step approach in problem solving
1. Recognise that there is a problem.
2. Consider what needs to happen to fix the problem.
3. Ask someone to help you with a solution.
4. Carry out the solution as a team.
5. Talk about what went wrong and what could be done to make sure it does not happen again.

Example: not asking for assistance can let everyone down

Ted is busy photocopying and binding reports which need to be sent to customers by the end of the day. Mid-morning, the photocopier breaks down. Ted notifies the service company immediately. He then begins to prepare the binding material until the service person arrives. The service person is very busy and does not arrive for two hours.

Consequently, Ted is far behind in his task. He knows he should tell his supervisor that he needed help, but he wants his supervisor to think he can handle difficult situations. Therefore, he works as fast as he can. However, he is unable to finish the job on time and his supervisor is not pleased. The customers need the reports as soon as possible. Nobody is happy with this outcome.

The best way to solve difficulties is to discuss the issues at a meeting where everyone can contribute ideas and possible solutions. Sometimes, however, it may be more useful to discuss the situation alone with your supervisor, a colleague working on the same project or another appropriate staff member. Seeking help will ensure that you do not waste time trying to work things out yourself. Do not wait for your next meeting to bring up something that is an immediate problem.

v1219

Change your plans

Situations often arise in the workplace that prevent you completing your tasks the way you planned.

Reasons why plans may change:

- Your group changes its priorities to focus its activities on a new area
- You are asked to help with a specific project
- Someone in your group leaves or goes on holiday
- Equipment breaks down

Example: situations that affect your work schedule beyond your control

Alesa, an administrative assistant, plans to spend the morning typing some notes for Elise, her group leader. Frank, another group member, receives an urgent customer order. He asks Alesa to prepare the order and have it couriered to the customer by lunchtime. Alesa needs to change her plans to deal with the new task.
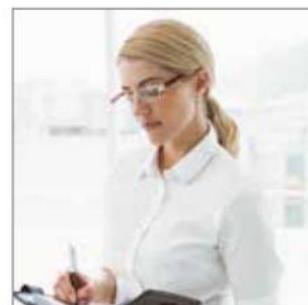
Renegotiate your responsibilities

When you cannot complete tasks your group is expecting you to do, you may need to renegotiate your responsibilities with your group leader or other group members.

In the previous example, Alesa's colleague asked her to do something that meant she could not complete another task for her group leader. This meant she needed to renegotiate her responsibilities with her group.

Alesa could have:

- asked Elise if she could type the notes after lunch
- asked if somebody else could help if the notes she was working on were also urgent.

Renegotiate when plans change

Sometimes, changes may mean that other people have to take over tasks for you. Other times, you and your group leader may just change the deadlines. In most cases, you should discuss any changes to your deadlines with your group leader.

If you work in more than one group, you need to negotiate your responsibilities with each group to make sure that you can complete all your tasks. You need to negotiate with all groups to see whether you could change any deadlines.

Example: renegotiate tasks when plans change

Marcia's work schedule on Monday includes the following tasks:

- Word process and send three urgent letters – 1.5 hours
- Process customer orders – 1.5 hours
- Enter data to make sure monthly sales figures are up to date – 2 hours
- Gather publicity material for supervisor to use in a presentation – 1 hour
- File processed order forms – 1.5 hours
- Other duties as required

At 9.15 am, Marcia's supervisor tells her that Kim will be away and that Marcia will have to take over some of Kim's tasks.

The extra duties she is given are:

- Provide reception from 9.30 to 11.30 am.
- Take meeting minutes from 2.30 to 3.30 pm.
- Record and balance petty cash for the day.

continued …

… continued

When Marcia sees all the work she has to do, she realises there is too much to do in one day. She knows some of her other tasks will have to wait until the following day if she is going to complete the extra duties.

Marcia discusses the situation with her supervisor. Together they decide that Marcia's most important tasks are sending the urgent letters and processing the customer orders.

By the time she completes those tasks, as well as Kim's duties, there will be no time left for her other tasks. Her supervisor agrees that it is all right to leave the other tasks until the following day.

When Marcia's situation changed, she could not complete some tasks that directly affected her group. Therefore, she needed to discuss with her supervisor whether she could do them the following day.
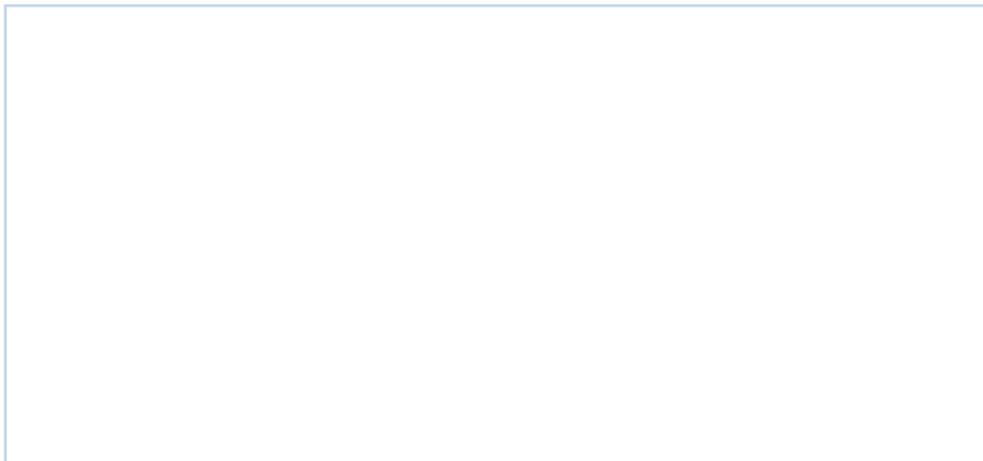
Practice task 11

Read the following workplace problems and write out how you would use the five-step process to solve the problems.
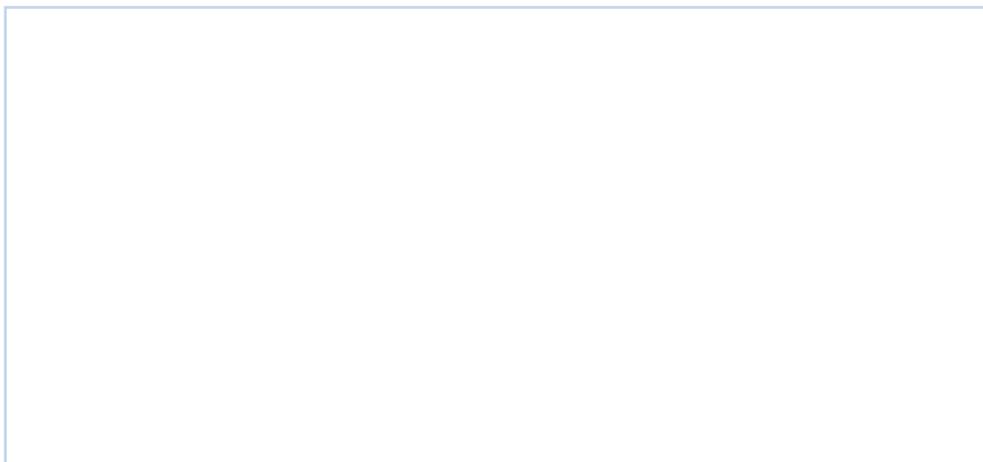
1. The photocopier toner light is flashing.
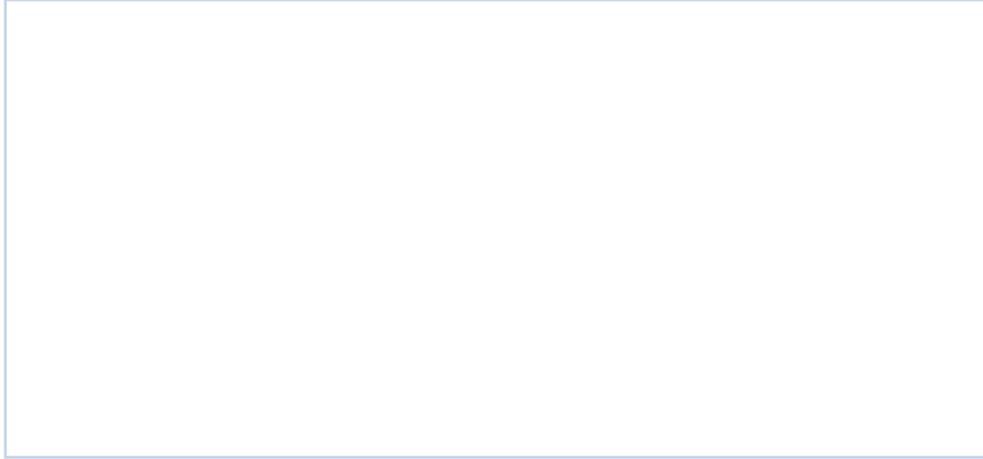
2. One of your team members is late to arrive most days and you think he is deliberately trying to get out of doing his share of the work.

3. Your company has received several customer feedback forms stating that the customers cannot get through on the new customer service number.

Summary

1. In a workplace, you should respect the different values and beliefs held by others.

2. It is important to understand how cultural and linguistic differences can affect communication in the workplace.

3. There are a range of causes of workplace problems that can result in conflict.

4. Assistance can be obtained from a range of sources to solve workplace problems and issues.

Learning checkpoint 3
Deal effectively with issues, problems and conflicts

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in dealing effectively with issues, problems and conflict.

Part A

Read the case study, then complete the task that follows.

Case study

Mohammed has very different values and beliefs from Chantelle. Mohammed is very religious and conservative and never drinks or smokes. Chantelle loves going out with the girls on weekends and going to parties. She drinks often and smokes socially. She has a much more liberal view of the world than Mohammed.

Describe how Mohammed and Chantelle could ensure they can work harmoniously together in a workplace.

Part B

Read the case study, then complete the task that follows.

Case study

Mark needs to prepare a document explaining the procedure for working on the front reception desk. He knows many of their customers speak a language other than English as their first language. He also knows some of the other workers in his workplace can be a little intolerant of people from cultural backgrounds that are different from their own. It is important the document is written in a way that highlights the need to cater for people with differing language and communication skills and styles.

Write a series of points you think Mark should include in the document.

Part B

Part C

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Ben has responsibilities in two different work groups. He spends some of his day answering phones and handling customer requests face to face. His supervisor in this work is Amanda Watkins, the office manager. He also spends time providing administrative support to the general manager of the company, Mr Franklin. Lately, Ben has needed to spend much more of his time with Mr Franklin, as there is an important trade show coming up that Mr Franklin is attending. Ben needs to make all his travel and trade show arrangements and it is taking up a lot of his time. Ben is becoming very tired as he is working a lot of hours.

1. What issues may occur for Ben if the situation continues unchanged?

2. How could Ben deal with this situation?