BSBLDR402
Lead effective workplace relationships

Release 1

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Release 1

Learner guide

Aspire Version 1.1

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Contents

Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *BSBLDR402 Lead effective workplace relationships*, Release 1. 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	• Collects, analyses and evaluates textual information from a range of resources to inform improvement strategies
Oral communication	• Selects or adjusts communication style to maintain effectiveness of interaction and build and maintain engagement consistent with organisational requirements
Navigate the world of work	• Recognises and follows legislative and organisational requirements relevant to own role
Interact with others	• Selects and uses appropriate conventions and protocols when communicating with diverse stakeholders • Adapts personal communication style to build trust and positive working relationships and to show respect for the opinions, values and particular needs of others • Plays a lead role in situations requiring effective collaboration, demonstrating conflict resolution skills and ability to engage and motivate others
Get the work done	• Plans and implements activities and processes to manage and review work performance • Systematically gathers and analyses all relevant information to formulate and evaluate possible solutions to difficulties

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 Collect, analyse and communicate information and ideas	1A	Collect, analyse and share information to improve work performance	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1B	Communicate ideas and information within a diverse workforce	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1C	Implement consultation processes within your team	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1D	Seek out internal and external contributions to concept development	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	1E	Implement processes to ensure that issues raised are resolved promptly	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
Topic 2 Develop trust and confidence as a leader	2A	Treat all internal and external contacts with integrity, respect and empathy	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2B	Use the organisation's social, ethical and business standards to develop and maintain effective relationships	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2C	Gain and maintain the trust and confidence of colleagues, customers and suppliers	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2D	Adjust interpersonal styles and methods to meet organisation's social and cultural environment	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	2E	Lead and encourage other members of the work team to follow organisational examples	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident

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Topic	Key outcome		Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 3 Develop and maintain networks and relationships	3A	Use networks to identify and build relationships	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	3B	Use networks and other work relationships to provide identifiable benefits for the team and organisation	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
Topic 4 Manage difficulties into positive outcomes	4A	Identify and analyse difficulties and take action to rectify the situation	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	4B	Guide and support colleagues to resolve work difficulties	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	4C	Regularly review and improve workplace outcomes in consultation with relevant personnel	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	4D	Manage poor work performance within the organisation's processes	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	4E	Manage conflict constructively within the organisation's processes	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident

Topic 1
Collect, analyse and communicate information and ideas

In establishing effective workplace relationships, you need to communicate relevant information so it is understood and acted on. This requires information-gathering and analytical skills, as well as the ability to communicate effectively and confidently while taking into account the special needs of your audience.

In this topic you will learn how to:

1A   Collect, analyse and share information to improve work performance

1B   Communicate ideas and information within a diverse workforce

1C   Implement consultation processes within your team

1D   Seek out internal and external contributions to concept development

1E   Implement processes to ensure that issues raised are resolved promptly

1A Collect, analyse and share information to improve work performance

Good workplace relationships hinge on teamwork because teamwork is an essential element in the workplace. A team can only work at optimal level if it is fully informed of what is required and given access to information that will help all team members complete their tasks accurately, efficiently and effectively.

The specific information you need to maximise your team's work performance will vary according to the industry and organisation you work in. By understanding and incorporating relevant organisational information into their day-to-day tasks, team members can consistently work to designated standards and within their organisation's requirements.

Relevant organisational information includes:

- policies and procedures
- planning documents
- marketing and customer-related data
- archival, filed and historical background data
- individual and team performance data.

Legislation that affects business operation

There is a range of legislation at both national and state or territory level that influences the ways businesses operate. Laws define the way that employers must carry out their activities – many of these laws are directly beneficial to a business, its employees, clients and customers.

Working in a safe, healthy environment benefits both management and employees, as absenteeism is lower and quality of working and home life for everyone is improved. Along with human health, it is also important to consider the impact of the business on the environment. Equal employment legislation and anti-discrimination laws ensure that everyone gets a fair chance to be employed and to work free of harassment and intimidation. Industrial relations laws safeguard working conditions such as pay levels and workplace entitlements.
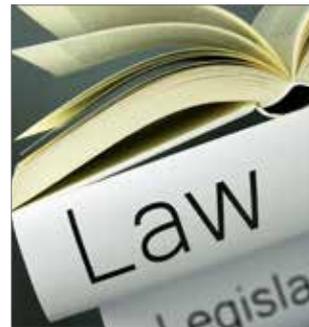
Work health and safety (WHS)

WHS legislation is designed to protect the health, safety and welfare of all people at work. You need to be aware of and know how to access current WHS legislation and other WHS documentation relevant to your specific workplace, occupation and industry. This documentation includes regulations, codes of practice, and your organisation's health and safety policies and procedures.

Keeping up to date with this information is essential. National WHS reforms resulted in the development of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth) and model regulations and codes of practice. These reforms were designed to improve national work health and safety by simplifying the system and making laws more consistent across Australia.

The following provides the name of the work health and safety legislation and the regulator responsible for its implementation in each state and territory, as at the time of publication.

Commonwealth	*Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth) WHS regulator: Comcare www.comcare.gov.au
Australian Capital Territory	*Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (ACT) WHS regulator: WorkSafe ACT www.worksafe.act.gov.au
New South Wales	*Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (NSW) WHS regulator: SafeWork NSW www.safework.nsw.gov.au
Northern Territory	*Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (NT) WHS regulator: NT WorkSafe www.worksafe.nt.gov.au
Queensland	*Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Qld) WHS regulator: Workplace Health and Safety Queensland www.worksafe.qld.gov.au
South Australia	*Work Health and Safety Act 2012* (SA) WHS regulator: SafeWork SA www.safework.sa.gov.au
Tasmania	*Work Health and Safety Act 2012* (Tas.) WHS regulator: WorkSafe Tasmania www.worksafe.tas.gov.au
Victoria	*Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (Vic.) WHS regulator: WorkSafe Victoria www.worksafe.vic.gov.au
Western Australia	*Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* (WA) WHS regulator: WorkSafe WA www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe

Environmental legislation

Care of the environment has become an increasingly important aspect of an organisation's responsibilities. The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) provides the legal framework to protect and manage Australia's built and natural environments, although the control of the environment is left to each state and territory through individual environmental protection Acts.

You need to be aware of your state or territory's environmental Acts and regulations, and the role and powers of the regulator. There are laws relating to the management and transportation of hazardous waste; noise; pollution; waste products; and water. For example, state and territory conservation and land management regulations impose a penalty for discharging or depositing waste on crown land managed for conservation.

Equal employment opportunity

In Australia, national, state and territory laws cover equal employment opportunity. Everyone is entitled to have equal opportunity when it comes to access to jobs, benefits and associated services within the workplace. Equal employment opportunity is aimed at ensuring that the job recruitment and selection process is fair, and that access to information, workplace outcomes with respect to supervision, and management are not biased.

Equal employment opportunity legislation is designed to ensure that:

- fair practices are in place in every workplace
- the best person is recruited and/or promoted when there is a position vacant and skilled staff are retained
- workplace management decisions are fair to all employees
- training and development needs address customer and employee requirements
- the workplace is free of harassment and discrimination
- social and cultural differences between staff are recognised and respected.

Industrial relations legislation

Industrial relations law covers employment matters such as pay rates and other entitlements. Issues that have WHS implications, such as any risk to employee health and safety from working additional hours, shiftwork or working in hot or cold conditions, may be dealt with under industrial relations legislation, in particular through the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth).

The Fair Work Act includes several provisions directly relevant to work health and safety, as detailed below.

Union right of entry	Health and safety legislation in some states and territories authorises union officials with permits to enter workplaces. The Fair Work Act also provides powers to union officials to enter a workplace for health and safety purposes. In doing so, those officials must demonstrate compliance with a number of conditions.

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Industrial action	Fair Work Australia, the regulator of Australian industrial relations, has the power to terminate industrial action if the action threatens or endangers life, personal safety or the health and welfare of the population.
Working conditions	The National Employment Standards, which provide basic standards of employment for all Australian workers, address some conditions of employment that can have implications for health and safety, including hours of work, maternity leave and alternative duties for pregnant women.
Dismissal	Under the unfair dismissal and discrimination provisions of the Fair Work Act, safety is considered as a factor when determining a dismissal's validity. The 'general protections' provisions under the Fair Work Act make it an offence to take adverse action such as dismissal, discrimination or refusal to employ a person against someone for exercising a right or responsibility under health and safety law.
Discrimination	The Fair Work Act can intervene if a worker has been discriminated against because of their characteristics, such as their religion, gender or a physical or mental disability; however, it does not address bullying and harassment.

Anti-discrimination legislation

Organisations within Australia must comply with a variety of Commonwealth Government Acts and national standards. National anti-discrimination legislation has a number of aspects as is shown below.

Age discrimination

Age Discrimination Act 2004

This Act protects people from being discriminated against because of their age and states that, regardless of age, everyone has the same right to equality before the law.

The Act also allows appropriate benefits to be given to people of a certain age, particularly younger and older people, according to their circumstances. Objectives of the Act also include removing barriers to older people participating in society and changing negative stereotypes about older people.

Exemptions include stipulations regarding youth wages, health care and voluntary work.

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Disability

Disability Discrimination Act 1992

This Act gives a broad definition of disability and prohibits direct or indirect discrimination based on disability. It also prohibits discrimination against people associated with people who have disabilities; these may be friends, relatives, carers and co-workers. The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate in the areas of:

- employment
- education
- access to public premises
- purchase of house and land
- provision of goods, services and facilities
- administration of Commonwealth Government laws and programs.

Exemptions to the Act include when a potential employer would be placed under unjustifiable hardship in order to employ a person with a disability, although the employer is expected to make reasonable adjustments. An example of an unjustifiable hardship might be the cost of renovations to allow for wheelchair access to a second-floor studio owned by a small business.

Racial discrimination

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

This Act prohibits racial discrimination and offensive behaviour based on racial hatred. It covers discrimination based on race, colour, descent, and national or ethnic origin. It also protects those who may be discriminated against based on their association with people of a particular ethnicity. The Act applies to everyone in Australia and all organisations.

The Racial Hatred Act 1995 (Cth) amended the Racial Discrimination Act and provides an avenue for people to complain about racist behaviour that offends, insults, humiliates or intimidates others in public. Exceptions to the law include when the behaviour is a matter of public interest (such as a newspaper report on racially based violence) or is part of an academic discussion that is not malicious or spiteful. These exceptions often involve rights to free speech.

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Sex discrimination

Sex Discrimination Act 1984

This Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against someone based on their sex, marital status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy. It sets out laws against sexual harassment as well as dismissal from work based on family duties, including pregnancy.

According to the Act, it is unlawful to refuse to provide goods or services, education or employment based on a person's sex. The Act also covers discrimination within awards and enterprise bargaining, insurance and superannuation, Commonwealth laws and programs, and accommodation.

Sexual harassment is included in the Act because it is a form of discrimination to treat a person unfairly because of their sex.

An exception to the Act includes when goods or services can only be applied to one sex; for example, female-specific or male-specific health care. Another exception covers employing a person to look after a child in the child's home. Sexual discrimination in the training and ordination of priests, ministers of religion or members of a religious order is also not covered under the Act.

Human rights

Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986

The Australian Human Rights Commission was established in 1986 to deal with breaches of anti-discrimination laws and to promote human rights education.

This Act only covers actions or policies of the Commonwealth.

The Act promotes human rights for all people and covers most forms of discrimination not already covered in the other Acts, including discrimination on the basis of:

- criminal record
- marital status
- medical record
- political opinion
- religion
- sexual preference
- social origin
- trade union activity.

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Privacy
Privacy Act 1988 If your organisation collects information about customers or clients, its operations come under the auspices of this Act. The Act deems personal information about individuals to be sensitive, such as information about: • criminal record • health • membership of a professional or trade association • membership of a trade union • political affiliation or opinion • racial or ethnic origin • religious affiliation or belief • sexual orientation or practices. This information about a person could be used by others to discriminate against them or to identify them. Your organisation should inform you of your responsibilities regarding your customers' privacy. It should also inform you of its responsibilities with regard to your privacy. It is always advisable to consider any information provided to you about any individual confidential. People generally have a right to see and correct, if necessary, files of personal information kept about them by organisations. Individuals are usually only denied access to files about them if their own or another person's safety is at risk, or if there are other legalities involved.

State and territory anti-discrimination legislation

Anti-discrimination legislation varies between states and territories.

The agencies that deal with anti-discrimination legislation in Australian states and territories are provided below.

State/territory	Agency
Australian Capital Territory	Human Rights Commission
New South Wales	Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales
Northern Territory	Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission
Queensland	Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland
South Australia	Equal Opportunity Commission
Tasmania	Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner
Victoria	Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
Western Australia	Equal Opportunity Commission

Organisational policies and procedures

Organisational policies and procedures cover a wide range of subjects, such as employment conditions, work health and safety, technical processes, communication procedures, performance reviews and security arrangements.

Team members must be aware of the organisation's policies and procedures so they can consistently work within the organisation's requirements and help both the team and the organisation operate smoothly, as illustrated below.

Following procedure

A team member may need to write a letter or a report; prepare a brief business case; help you prepare a contract; apply for sick leave; make travel arrangements; or request training. Because these tasks must be carried out within the organisation's policies and standards, team members should fully understand the required procedure and the reason for a consistent approach. Teams function more effectively when they are not wasting time redoing work or constantly asking how to do something.

Induction

Frontline managers need to induct new employees into the organisation by clearly explaining organisation policies and procedures, clarifying issues new employees are unsure of and explaining why this information is important. You may give new staff members a folder of relevant material, such as the policies and procedures manual, organisational forms and information, or make sure they are aware of where they should access the information – on the organisation's intranet, in the library or filing system, in their manager's office or on a noticeboard.

New policies

There will be times when you need to bring the team together to explain a new policy or process that has just been introduced. You need to refresh people's memories if you notice team members are following procedures incorrectly, such as filing documents in the wrong electronic file.

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Policies and procedures: availability

Most organisations have their policies and procedures available in both hard-copy and electronic formats. There may be hard copies in the paper-based filing system, the library and each manager's office, and an electronic copy may be available on the organisation's intranet or electronic filing system.

Encourage team members to approach you or another team member if they are unsure of a particular policy, process or procedure. By understanding and incorporating relevant organisational information into their day-to-day tasks, team members can consistently produce work that reflects the organisation's standards.

Example: a team is reminded of the work health and safety (WHS) policy

As a newly appointed frontline manager, Nick notices that a number of his team members have recently started to complain of tired eyes and sore backs. The team is halfway through a complex project with tight deadlines and Nick realises that unless he does something, their productivity could suffer.

Nick gets the team members together to discuss the situation. He reminds them of the organisation's WHS policy, which includes guidelines for taking regular breaks. He assures them that taking breaks will enhance their productivity levels. He also assures them that management expects them to take such breaks.

The team members agree to do the short physical exercises that are displayed on charts posted around the office. They appreciate that Nick is looking out for them.

'It's easy to forget these things when you're so busy,' commented one of the team members.

Plan documents

Understanding the organisation's goals and its social and ethical standards is essential for teams to function collaboratively. Familiarity with planning and operational documents ensures staff contribute to organisational goals. Generally, familiarisation is done during induction sessions. Periodically, organisations need to re-examine planning documents. Encourage your team to contribute to planning sessions and ensure everyone is aware of how their team's goals and strategies fit with the organisation's vision, goals, objectives and standards.

Make sure team members know where these documents are stored: in a hard-copy filing system, on the organisation's intranet or on the computer network. Planning documents, such as business plans, are often kept in an organisation's library. Some organisations display their risk management or strategic plans around the workplace to remind staff that their work should correspond with organisational goals.

Information is generally found in an organisation's:

- vision or mission statement
- code of best practice
- business or strategic plans
- risk management strategies
- operational budgets
- team plans
- annual reports
- other operational documents, including reports on continuous improvement and quality assurance processes.

Marketing and customer-related data

Most organisations have a range of marketing and customer-related information, including product and pricing catalogues, customer service charters, refund and exchange policies, sales statistics and targets, stock reports, market surveys, customer feedback data, advertising campaigns, and promotional material such as brochures, product datasheets and special offers.

This information helps marketing, sales and customer service staff perform their duties in accordance with company policy and marketing strategies, improve their performance and achieve sales goals. All staff should be aware of these documents, regardless of their roles. Marketing and customer-related data helps all employees understand the organisation's products or services, respond to inquiries and align work with broader organisational goals.

Team members may need assistance in sourcing, analysing and interpreting sales and other quantitative data. In large organisations this information may be kept within a specific department or section; in smaller organisations it may be held in a central paper-based or electronic file. Team members need to know who to contact if they need expert advice or assistance with interpretation.

Example: importance of having a broad understanding of the organisation

Roula, an accounting officer, is responsible for credit control. She telephones a client to follow up a payment and at the end of the discussion the customer asks her about a new product the organisation has just released. Although advising customers about products is not Roula's direct role, she knows enough about the organisation's product range to let the customer know its price and availability. She then transfers the customer to the appropriate customer service officer to complete the sale.

Customer satisfaction

Keeping customers satisfied remains a key initiative for most organisations. This is reflected in the development of customer service charters, which describe the desired behaviours that employees should follow when dealing with both internal and external customers. An understanding of an organisation's charter is essential if there is to be a consistent approach across the organisation. Staff are often involved in developing charters and it may be your role to ensure staff know where to access the charter and how to interpret it.

As part of your organisation's continuous improvement program, you may need to highlight a specific aspect that you feel needs improvement and share this with your team. For example, you may have received customer complaints about the increased time it takes to respond to customer requests. You may need to examine the customer service charter and discuss it with your team. Remember, you are focusing on improved work performance, so the charter is a tool you can use for continuous improvement.

Archival, filed and historical background data

Team members may need to access filed information from the past, such as the previous year's budget, the background to current market developments, details of past projects, business cases or surveys, or information on suppliers. When employees know the reason for a particular policy or course of action, they are clearer about the purpose of the work. If they have access to the results of previous activities, there is less duplication of work.

Examples of previous documents can provide a model for a current task. For example, if a team member needs to prepare a business case, they could use a past example as a template to ensure they are meeting the organisation's requirements. If a staff member has an idea about a new promotional initiative, they may find after referring to marketing records that this approach has already been tried unsuccessfully. This avoids duplicating work and may initiate new ideas.

Staff must be familiar with what and where archival information is stored, such as in a paper-based filing system or an off-site storage facility. They must also be familiar with any procedures they need to follow to access archival material.

Individual and team performance data

A major source of information that can help improve work performance is the documentation that accompanies quality assurance processes, skills audits, and team and individual performance reviews.

Sharing operational outcomes with your staff and making sure they know how to access performance data on a regular basis help them monitor their own progress and see how their activities affect the bigger picture. Sharing this information encourages staff to identify and make suggestions about how to improve both individual and team performances. Celebrating the completion of a project, acknowledging good performance and passing on third-party reports are all methods of sharing performance data with your team. Poor performance or feedback may provide you with an opportunity to discuss issues with the team or the individual on ways to improve work performance.

Collect and analyse information

The ability to research and critically evaluate information is an important part of a manager's responsibilities and should form part of an ongoing continuous improvement process.

Here is a process for collecting and analysing information.

Researching and critically evaluating information
• Understand your information objectives.
• Apply appropriate research methods.
• Identify information sources.
• Analyse the validity of the information.
• Assemble the information appropriately.
• Review the material for information gaps.

Understand your information objectives

Before seeking out information, clarify the nature of the information you are looking for and decide what you will do with it. Write down your objectives to ensure you are focused on the required results. Be specific about your aims and ultimate goals.

Clear objectives help you decide what kind of information you need to gather and where to look for it. Start with readily available information by collating any existing material and assessing it for relevance. Material that is unreliable, inaccurate or out of date should be discarded (unless it might be of historical interest). You can then identify information gaps and work towards finding out what it is you need to know.

These concepts are illustrated below.

Be specific about aims and goals	Identify information gaps
The supervisor of a customer service centre has received complaints about call waiting times. In order to improve staff performance, the supervisor needs to find out about systems for monitoring response times. The aim of the supervisor's research is to assess the available options in call-monitoring technology; the ultimate goal is to improve service to customers. Similarly, when the government announces changes to industrial relations policy, you may need to do further research to determine what the changes are and the implications for your organisation.	Your goal may be to ascertain the impact of new WHS regulations. In reviewing material already collected, you might find that much of it relates to draft codes rather than the final endorsed documents. You need to fill your information gap by obtaining copies of the official regulations, together with guidelines issued by reliable authorities.

Apply appropriate research methods

Researchers often use a combination of methods to collect information. Methods used depend on the objectives, the desired outcomes and the time lines involved. Information gathering can be carried out by you, by a team or by someone acting on your behalf.

The amount of time spent on collecting information should be consistent with your objectives as well as the broader objectives of the organisation. If your specific objective was to obtain more reliable computer printers, you could spend months scanning catalogues, seeking advice, reading product reviews, visiting other workplaces and collecting reviews. However, this amount of research would be out of proportion to the task involved and inconsistent with wider organisational objectives with regard to minimising time wastage. The time could be more productively spent on other activities.

Methods of acquiring information include:

- reading reports, articles and other news items
- analysing catalogues, price lists and statistics
- interviewing, asking questions and sharing ideas
- observing and listening
- reviewing and sampling new products or services.

Identify internal information sources

Not all organisational information is documented on files. Key people within the organisation have information based on their own knowledge and experience, and can point you towards other relevant information. Knowing who to approach for information helps you to understand work roles and responsibilities and to form relationships with others in the organisation. Be clear about the advice you need and what the person can and cannot provide; define your information objectives.

There are a number of ways of obtaining information within your organisation. Some of the main sources are shown below.

Ways of obtaining information

1

Paper-based files

Paper-based files containing correspondence, statistical data and historical material

2

Electronic files

Electronic files, such as emails, financial systems and customer databases

3

Online material

Online material, such as your organisation's intranet, which may contain planning and organisational documents, policies and procedures, marketing data, news items, minutes of meetings, personnel records and short reports

4

Internal reference libraries

Internal reference libraries or collections of reference manuals, journals, magazines and catalogues

5

Key people

Key people within the organisation who have information based on their own knowledge and experience

Identify external information sources

Some ideas for identifying external information sources are outlined below.

Types of information

Managers need to keep themselves informed of external issues and developments that affect decision-making and work performance.

Information you may need to source externally includes:

- industry-related data and market intelligence
- legislative and regulatory changes that impact on organisational policy and procedures
- work health and safety requirements
- developments in equipment and technology
- news items, feature articles and general information relevant to the organisation's operations.

Sources of information

Sources of external information include:

- government departments and agencies
- industry or professional associations, unions and employer bodies
- public libraries
- literature available from customers, suppliers, competitors and other organisations
- directories
- your contact network
- the internet.

Use the internet to source external information

Downloading up-to-date material directly from the internet is often the most efficient way of carrying out research. However, internet research can sometimes eat up hours of time with minimal results. Stick to your research aims and move on when a website doesn't meet your research needs. Bookmark useful websites or add them to your 'favourites' folder so you can refer back to them quickly if the need arises.

You can use the internet in a variety of ways, including:

- seeking information about businesses, government agencies, guidelines, regulations, people and trends within particular fields

- accessing reference material, such as geographical data, financial information, flight timetables and product details
- purchasing online
- downloading computer programs
- accessing communication channels such as newsgroups, bulletin boards, email discussion lists, e-newsletters and social media.

Example: how to keep abreast of new legislation and developments

The accounting manager

The accounting manager at a fashion house conducts some research and discovers that:

- outworkers can now claim additional allowances
- more comprehensive employment records need to be kept
- industrial relations inspectors have new powers to enter work premises and check employment records
- new health and safety legislation has just been passed.

The accounting manager knows immediately that the organisation's workplace policies and procedures manual needs updating. To start this process, he prepares a report to senior management on proposed changes to the manual.
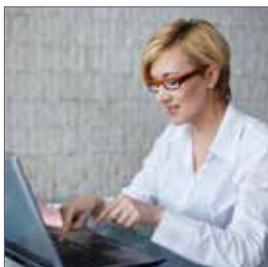
The marketing manager

A marketing manager learns of a new competitor in the organisation's market. She identifies:

- the products and services the competitor offers
- their prices and promotional offers.

She then writes a report on how the new competitor will affect the organisation's market share.

Analyse the validity of the information

There are a number of elements you should consider to determine whether information is valid, as shown below.

Source

Check where the information came from, who created it and whether the source is reliable and widely accepted in the industry.

Always check and verify information sources, particularly when dealing with material on the internet. Before using or reproducing any material, you must check whether there are any copyright restrictions and follow any legal procedures for reproducing material.

Currency

Be wary of relying on information that may be out of date. Check that the information you use matches the time period of any work being undertaken or examined.

Relevance

Check that the information relates directly to your research goals.

Presentation

Look at how the information is presented. If it has a lot of errors or is poorly organised, you need to be careful about relying on its content.

Authenticity

Make judgments about whether the information is accurate and authentic. Has it been prepared by someone with a biased viewpoint on the subject? Is it promotional material? Can the claims be substantiated? You may want to check with others who are more experienced in the subject as to whether the material you have obtained is credible.

Acceptability

Some organisations have policies regarding what information is acceptable or unacceptable. Always follow your organisation's policies and procedures when collecting and using information for work purposes.

Assemble the information appropriately

After obtaining the required information, you may need to convert it into a form more suitable to your needs. You can categorise and file the material, cull it down to a few key documents, highlight relevant sections, make separate notes, draw up some charts or prepare a report. The method you choose depends on the nature of the research and your information objectives; that is, what you or your audience needs to know from the information.

Some examples of how to assemble information are given below.

Example 1	Example 2
If you are gathering information regarding the skills of your organisation's workforce, you might look at the resumes of your employees. However, presenting a report that simply consists of these documents bound together will not satisfy your information objective. You need to extract the relevant information – the skills of your employees – and assemble this information in a way that you (and others) can use.	If your primary objective is to find out how many employees have training in particular areas, you could assemble the information in a table, with one column for the type of training they have and another for how many employees have that type of training. Depending on how specific your objective is, you may also include columns for the departments the employees work in, their length of service and whether they work full-time or part-time.

Review the material for information gaps

You need to review your material for information gaps. You may need to seek information from a different source to obtain a more balanced viewpoint. You may need to gather further facts or ask for clarification from someone whose opinion you trust. The way you assemble information can highlight information gaps. For example, if you are collecting information Australia-wide, you could separate your results into state and territory categories. This might highlight an information gap.

Practise thinking critically about any information you receive and how it can be assembled in the most useful way. Your aim should be to effectively evaluate the material, extract the key facts, make sound decisions and keep organised records that enable you to verify your decision and refer back if the need arises.

Confidentiality, timing and distribution

Be aware of confidentiality or privacy issues for both staff and external customers when reviewing or handling information. Some information needs to be viewed as commercially or politically sensitive. The ability to treat certain matters with discretion is one of the traits of a successful manager. You may be entrusted with confidential or highly sensitive information.

There is more information about confidentiality and distribution of information below.

Privacy standards

Refer to your workplace policies and procedures if you are unsure about how to handle particular information, or ask your supervisor. You must comply with all Commonwealth, state or territory privacy legislation that governs the use of personal and client information.

To read more about privacy standards, visit the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner at: www.oaic.gov.au.

Releasing information

You need to make judgments about when to release certain information, taking into account its possible impact on employee morale and productivity, and the potential for leaks to the external marketplace. Timing may also have implications for how you decide to distribute the information.

Open communication

Some managers decide not to share information and ideas with their colleagues; or information may be released on a need-to-know basis. Once considered a shrewd approach, keeping information secret is not consistent with current management thinking, which supports open communication, transparency, accountability and staff development.

Disseminating information

The way you disseminate information depends on the type of information. For example, a change of government policy that does not affect staff members individually may simply require a memo, notice or announcement at a staff meeting. Alternatively, you may need to organise an information or training session to inform team members of a new health and safety requirement.

Example: a manager neglects to pass on vital information

A factory manager has received notification that a disused power station adjacent to his workplace contains asbestos. He decides not to inform his staff, thinking that it is unlikely they will go near the area and the news might cause them undue alarm.

Some weeks later, a distress call comes from a passer-by who says that a young man has fallen over inside the power station and is badly injured. Two factory employees go to the scene to help before emergency service personnel arrive. Only later do they learn of the asbestos risk in the building.

The two employees' long-term health is jeopardised and the manager faces legal action over his failure to adequately protect his staff. The trust between employees and management has also been put at risk.

Practice task 1

1. Describe two strategies you could implement to ensure that workplace team members are familiar with the organisation's planning and operational documents.

2. Explain how familiarity with the following documents contributes to improving the work of your team:
    *   Vision or mission statement
    *   Business or strategic plans
    *   Operational budgets
    *   Team plans
    *   Continuous improvement and quality assurance processes

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3. Suggest two strategies you could implement for sharing team performance data with team members to improve their work performance.

4. Describe how you could find out about WHS policies for rest breaks from screen-based work.

5. Briefly describe some types of information that may be unreliable.

6. Explain some ways that you could verify suspect information.

1B | Communicate ideas and information within a diverse workforce

Sharing information and ideas drives productivity and healthy working relationships. Communication is a vital and constant element of organisational life. While effective communication should occur throughout the entire organisation, management sets the standard for the open exchange of information and ideas. Cooperation, respect, conflict resolution, innovation and teamwork are all results of effective communication and are all pivotal to high work performance.

Open and smooth flow of information throughout the organisation and team helps:

- inform team members of the purpose and function of particular tasks, so they are aware of what they are required to do and the desired outcome
- create an environment where employees can ask questions and voice concerns
- encourage employees to offer their own ideas and solutions
- fulfil obligations for work health and safety, equal opportunities, anti-discrimination, industrial relations and environmental issues
- uphold the organisation's social, ethical and business standards
- enhance employee goodwill and motivation
- avoid damaging speculation and gossip by ensuring accurate and timely information is made available.

Methods for conveying information

Frontline managers are the link in the communication chain between senior management, team members and other areas of the organisation. Effective communication means conveying information appropriately using a variety of communication methods.

The methods used to convey information after it has been gathered and interpreted depend on the nature and purpose of the information and who it is for. The first rule of communication is to identify the audience and its needs. Your audience could be your staff members, your supervisor or senior management, colleagues within the organisation, people in other divisions of the organisation, existing clients or suppliers, potential customers, the general public or specific target groups such as a focus group or priority customers. The most appropriate communication method and content can vary significantly between these groups.

The purpose, audience and method

Be clear about your purpose in communicating information and consider the way in which your audience will receive the message. Are you merely giving them information or do you want them to respond in a certain way? Are you trying to change someone's attitude or work practices? Have you considered the other person's point of view or interests? What are their expectations and special needs? How can you ensure the message is understood and accepted?

There is a range of communication methods that are dependent on the intended audience and purpose, as shown below.

Production figures

Audience: senior management, board of directors

Purpose: to meet reporting requirements

Method: written report including spreadsheets and comments; verbal report at meeting

Company history, products and services, policies, personnel

Audience: new staff

Purpose: to induct new staff members

Method: face-to-face contact; folio of information; group presentation

Details of new work requirements

Audience: team members

Purpose: to inform and train

Method: memo; emails; group meeting

Warning about workplace safety

Audience: staff members and visitors to premises

Purpose: to encourage safe workplace practices

Method: notices; emails; discussion at team meeting

Promotion of product features and prices

Audience: new and existing customers

Purpose: to generate sales

Method: brochures; new web page; marketing letters

Performance review

Audience: team members

Purpose: performance management

Method: written notes; face-to-face discussion; negotiation

Customer service charters from other companies

Audience: team members and colleagues

Purpose: to compare customer service and make improvements

Method: circulation of material; invitation for comment; group meeting

Customer feedback

Audience: team members and management

Purpose: to plan for quality improvements

Method: preparation of summary report; brainstorming session

Budget constraints

Audience: team members

Purpose: to introduce cost-cutting measures

Method: consultation; memo; emails

Techniques for conveying communication

Multiple communication methods may be necessary to get your message across and to allow for discussion and feedback. Many important messages are missed by assuming everyone reads their email; sometimes a meeting is more appropriate.

Communication involves more than speaking and writing. It should include opportunities for two-way interaction, listening, exchanging ideas, consultation and negotiation, as well as nonverbal communication. In some cases, you may simply want to convey a decision that has been made. In other cases, it is helpful to invite input from team members or others in examining the implications of decisions or involving them in the process to ensure they are committed to the outcomes.

Your choice of communication technique will largely depend on the characteristics of your purpose, audience and audience's needs.

There are advantages and disadvantages with some communication techniques, as shown here.

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Verbal – individual

Examples: face-to-face contact; telephone conversation

Advantages:

- Clear message
- Direct and instant
- Provides opportunity for interaction

Disadvantages:

- Inconsistency of message across similar exchanges
- Message may be misunderstood if communication skills are poor
- Time-consuming

Verbal – group

Examples: meeting; discussion group

Advantages:

- Sends consistent message
- Provides opportunity for questioning and sharing
- Provides chance for agreed approach

Disadvantages:

- Time-consuming
- Can be hard to organise
- Different personality types can dominate or withdraw

Written – electronic

Examples: emails; intranet posting

Advantages:

- Quick and efficient
- Sends consistent message
- Visually effective

Disadvantages:

- Cannot be sure message is read
- Message may be misinterpreted

Written – open

Examples: display notice; instruction sheet; system documentation; report; minutes; newsletter

Advantages:

- Sends consistent message
- Provides a record
- Reaches a wide audience

Disadvantages:

- No opportunity for response
- Impersonal
- Cannot be sure message is read
- Production time and costs involved

Written – targeted

Examples: memo; letter

Advantages:

- Can be carefully worded
- Direct
- Allows for confidentiality
- Clear record

Disadvantages:

- Formal and impersonal
- Doesn't encourage discussion

Presentation

Examples: exhibition; public address

Advantages:

- Visual as well as verbal
- Captures interest

Disadvantages:

- One-way communication only
- Not always correctly interpreted
- No clear record
- Uncertain whether message is accepted by all parties

Effective written communication

When communicating in writing, you need to ensure your message will be correctly interpreted. After spending time collecting and analysing information, there is little point in preparing a report or notice that no one can understand.

Creating an effective written message requires thought and planning. It is a skill that can be learnt and improves with experience.

Here are some tips for writing effectively.

Purpose

Decide what you want to say and why. Have a clear purpose in mind. Get to the point quickly and stick to your main message without getting sidetracked.

Audience

Be aware of who you are writing to. The contents and tone of your document must be appropriate to your audience. What does the reader need to know? How do you want them to react? What is their level of understanding?

Organisation of ideas

Organise your material. Jot down your ideas and arrange them in a logical order. Begin with an introduction, outline the problem at hand and end by indicating what you expect to happen next. Include section headings if necessary to guide the reader through the document. Check the content is accurate and covers what needs to be conveyed. Include explanations where appropriate.

Clarity and conciseness

Write clearly and concisely. Use simple sentences, short paragraphs or bullet points. Choose words the reader is familiar with. Avoid clichés and jargon. Make sure your spelling, grammar and punctuation are correct – even in emails. This can make a big difference to comprehension and shows respect for the reader. Write a first draft, put it aside and edit it later.

Attractiveness

Present your material attractively. Use headings and images where appropriate. Take care with layout and formatting.

Distribution
Ensure all intended recipients actually receive and read the information. Be aware of distribution methods and individual access to computer terminals, noticeboards and procedure manuals. Follow up your written communication with requests for feedback.

Effective verbal communication

Sometimes you need to pass on information face to face, by telephone or in a presentation to a group. As with writing, the golden rule for effective verbal communication is planning. Be clear about what you are trying to convey and why, so your message is expressed clearly and you don't waste valuable time getting to the point.

A helpful strategy is to prepare some key points beforehand – particularly when addressing more than one person. Preparation is the key to confident public speaking. Sort out the information you want to present, divide it into logical sections and make it as clear and specific as you can. Be sure of your material and give examples where appropriate. Strive for confidence in your delivery.

Below are some hints you can implement to ensure effective verbal communication.

Hints for effective verbal communication
When speaking, relate your message to your audience members, their needs and their point of view.
Customise your message to the listener's normal communication style, listening skills and familiarity with the subject at hand.
If you over-explain or talk down to your team members, they may resent your approach and feel demeaned.
If you speak aggressively or in language people can't understand, they may retreat, ignore you or feel confused.
Your tone of voice is important. It needs to engage those around you and maintain their interest.
Effective speakers learn to recognise their listeners' reactions and adjust their delivery accordingly. Always give your audience a chance to ask questions.

Issue instructions

When training staff or issuing instructions, ensure your message is clearly conveyed and fully understood. Prepare instructional material using plain English, and use short words, sentences and paragraphs with consistent terminology. Make sure all necessary information is provided. Use diagrams or photographs where appropriate.

Many people need more than verbal messages to understand instructions. You can use pictures, symbols and diagrams as well as demonstration and role play to cater to the needs of all your audience members.

You must be certain that employees understand important work instructions. However, they may be reluctant or unable to indicate when they are unsure, particularly if there are language barriers. Seek feedback by questioning and practical demonstrations or testing. Make sure they understand the basics first, before moving on to something more complex.

A misunderstood message or instruction can result in lost productivity and may put someone's safety at risk or adversely affect workplace relationships.

Example: how insufficient instructions can create problems

At a railway maintenance centre, a written instruction is given to tradespeople that outlines the process for replacing a high-pressure fuel pump on a diesel engine. The instruction assumes the tradespeople are familiar with the details of the bolt torque, which are set out on a separate instruction sheet.

When the fuel pumps are fitted, the bolts are not tightened correctly. As a result they break, which in turn causes an engine fire. The tradespeople concerned were not aware of the separate instructions and did not fully understand all the requirements.

The fire results in many thousands of dollars of damage, which could have been avoided if communication processes had been more complete. The replacement procedure has since been amended to include all of the bolt torque data in each step of the process. Regular meetings now provide the opportunity for questions and feedback from staff.

Recognise workplace diversity in your communication

Effective communication means that a message is both delivered clearly and interpreted correctly by the receiver. Trust is important for effective work relationships because people perform better when they feel confident about each other and the work being done. To promote trust, you need to demonstrate integrity, respect, empathy and cultural sensitivity in all of your communications. For a communication strategy to be effective, it needs to take into account the individual differences of those receiving the communication.

Such differences can present considerable challenges for a frontline manager. To successfully establish and nurture positive workplace relationships, you need to recognise diversity and the special needs of those around you, and respond to these by communicating appropriately and sensitively on a day-to-day basis.

Differences for communication receivers include:

- age
- belief and value systems, including religion and politics
- culture, including ethnicity and language
- social factors such as personality, lifestyle and sexual orientation
- work experience, educational background and literacy standard
- gender
- physical and mental abilities.

Respect individuality

Recognising diversity means respecting human individuality. There is much to be gained by accepting individual differences. You can learn and benefit from each other's skills, experiences, ideas and attitudes, and find new ways of working, solving problems, dealing with others and negotiating. These are valuable skills in any workplace. Diversity in the workplace helps increase the competitiveness and market relevance of your organisation within an increasingly diverse community and global economy.

If your workplace encourages and promotes diversity in its workforce, it will more accurately reflect society at large. This helps attract and retain a multi-skilled workforce and creates a cooperative and harmonious working environment.

What are the factors you need to take into account in order to be more open and flexible in your approach and ensure that your messages are understood? The following sections discuss the various aspects you should consider.

Language differences in Australian workplaces

The 2011 Australian census showed that 18 per cent of Australians speak a language other than English at home. In certain areas or workforce sectors, the percentage is much higher. There are over 200 languages spoken in Australia, with 17 languages predominant. An Australian Bureau of Statistics survey found that almost half of Australians aged 15–74 have poor literacy skills and can be expected to experience difficulty using many of the printed materials they encounter in everyday life.

You need to be aware of the English language comprehension levels of the audience you are communicating with and to adjust your method of delivery accordingly. Remember that a person may be able to speak English clearly but not be able to read complex documents or terminology. Some people need time to examine the language used or to have someone translate it for them.

Below are some tips for accommodating language differences.

Accommodating language differences
• Check that the information you want to convey has been fully understood.   • Make sure the recipient has the opportunity to ask questions, express concerns or consult an interpreter if necessary.   • If you are preparing a message for several recipients, write a draft and have a typical audience member read it to check that your meaning is clear.   • Written messages are sometimes inadequate or inappropriate. You may need to telephone rather than email a message to someone who doesn't read English well.   • When speaking with someone for whom English is a second language, speak clearly and slowly and don't shout. Remember that strong accents don't necessarily mean poor English skills.   • Be careful using slang or idioms. Many everyday expressions don't have a literal meaning and can be confusing to a person unfamiliar with colloquial English.   • Avoid abbreviations, even common ones like ASAP, and terms like 'uni' and 'this arvo' unless you are sure the people you are talking to understand.

Cultural issues and social diversity

What some people think of as 'normal' communication may be quite different and even offensive to other cultural groups. Here are some examples.

Cultural nuances	Discomfort
How body language is interpreted depends on cultural nuances; for example, shaking your head may mean 'no' to you, but in Turkey it means 'I don't understand'. In some cultures it is not accepted practice to look someone in the eye when conversing, and people often have different ideas about personal space and how close someone should stand to them during a discussion.	Be alert to the way a person interacts with you and to any signs of discomfort. Take note of any major differences within your workplace or circle of contacts. Understand any cultural sensitivities attached to the subject you are communicating. Consider the person's feelings and if you accidentally cause offence, be prepared to apologise.

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Social groups

Your workplace may include people from a range of social groups, as determined by their socioeconomic background, gender, sexuality, beliefs or way of life. Avoid creating 'us' and 'them' divisions in your organisation by catering for differences in all your communication. Work to eliminate hostile environments and avenues for any form of harassment.

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Show respect

Respect each person as an individual and try not to make assumptions when you communicate with them. Prejudice and stereotyping are almost always unhelpful, whether these relate to gender, age, race, physical appearance or any other form of diversity.

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Disability and special needs

The term 'disability' refers to conditions that interfere with the usual way of doing things. This can include physical, psychiatric and intellectual disabilities or impairment, whether permanent or temporary.

When communicating in the workplace, you must ensure that you present information to people with disabilities in an appropriate format. This may include providing supportive communication devices, such as telephone typewriters (TTYs) for those with hearing impairments; making assistive technology available where necessary; or placing noticeboards in a position where they can be read by a person in a wheelchair.

In the case of intellectual disability, you may need to cater for a person's ability to comprehend and process information that is presented to them or even to understand the consequences of their own actions.

Below are some tips for communicating with a person with a disability.

Tips for communicating with a person with a disability
Get to know your team members and those you deal with regularly, and ask them about their requirements and preferences.
Don't make the person's disability the focus of discussion unless they raise the issue or it is relevant.
Never assume that a person with a physical disability is intellectually deficient.
Speak to the person you are addressing, not their interpreter, carer or other person.

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Be wary of patronising a person by extending sympathy or assuming their disability is a major problem.

Check the confidentiality status of the disability, taking into account the person's privacy rights and any safety concerns. Always check first with the person concerned.

Non-discriminatory language

Using non-discriminatory and inclusive language in workplace communication means that what you say includes everyone regardless of their gender, status, race or ability. For example, 'parental leave' describes entitlements to both maternity and paternity leave.

Exclusive language leaves people out. This discriminatory language is often subtle; for example, assuming a manager of a business is male rather than female by always addressing letters to 'Sir' when the receiver's gender is unknown.

Here are some tips for avoiding discriminatory language.

Tips for avoiding discriminatory language

Revise wording to avoid gender reference; for example, 'Staff members should sign time sheets' rather than 'The staff member should sign his time sheet'.

Try not to use broad categories. Terms such as 'the blind' and 'Asians' exclude the possibility of differences within these groups.

Do not place undue emphasis on differences; for example, avoid phrasing like 'male nurse' or 'We recruited four engineers, including one Hungarian'.

Avoid expressions that treat people unevenly, such as 'men and girls' – use 'men and women'.

Never use language that denigrates or stereotypes people. Discriminatory pranks or comments are not acceptable, even in jest.

Awareness of discriminatory issues

As a frontline manager, you have a vital role in raising awareness of discriminatory issues among your staff members. Consider organising education programs on cross-cultural awareness, discrimination, bullying and grievance processes. You may also consider other means of increasing the literacy and basic education levels of your employees.

In Australia, it is an offence to harass or discriminate against another person based on their perceived differences. Victims of discrimination have legal recourse. Remember that it makes good business sense to be tolerant, flexible and considerate in the way you manage all your workplace relationships. The Human Rights Commission provides information about employers' and employees' rights and responsibilities under human rights and anti-discrimination law in Australia.

You can find more information about people's rights on the Australian Human Rights Commission website at: www.humanrights.gov.au.

Practice task 2

1. Prepare some simple instructions for a task you need a team member to undertake, such as making accommodation arrangements, operating a new photocopier or filling out a leave form.

2. Explain how you could present these instructions, allowing for the different needs of diverse audience members.

1C Implement consultation processes within your team

Communication should not always follow a top-down model. With the changing nature of information in business today, leaders should receive information as well as convey it. They need to be good listeners. They need to encourage those around them to contribute to organisational issues. They also need to provide the means for appropriate communication between employees, operational units and externally, so that an environment of knowledge and cooperation is cultivated within and around the work teams.

For example, the finance department needs to advise the production department about budgets and scheduling; the production department should keep the sales team informed of production time lines and product features; and the sales team must communicate with the service centre to ensure customer feedback is taken into account.

A communications framework

A communications framework should be established to provide for a two-way flow of information and ideas. While circulating a memo may appear to be the most straightforward way of communicating with staff, it does not necessarily provide for consultation. Healthy workplace relationships and increased productivity can only be achieved when employees and employers consult with each other, compare notes, encourage each party's input into workplace practices and problem areas, and resolve issues cooperatively.

A communications framework ensures achievement of the conditions listed below.

- Consultation processes are implemented to give employees an opportunity to contribute to work-related issues.
- Feedback regarding consultation process outcomes is relayed to the work team and relevant personnel.
- Contributions from beyond the work team, internally and externally, are sought and valued in developing and refining new ideas and approaches.
- Processes are implemented to ensure all issues raised are resolved promptly or referred to relevant personnel.

Effective consultation

Consultation is a process whereby employees communicate freely in a two-way interaction with their employers. Good consultation provides a forum for employees not only to state their views and opinions, but to have the confidence that their views are taken seriously. Managers who consult effectively set aside their managerial perspective while carrying out the consultation process, thereby encouraging everyone to contribute on the same level. However, they are still responsible for making final decisions after the consultation process has completed.

Below are some of the benefits of effective consultation.

Benefits of effective consultation
• Managers can make use of a wider range of knowledge and ideas to factor into their decision-making.
• Employees have more ownership of (and commitment to) decisions, in the knowledge that their input and contributions are valued.
• Overall organisational performance is likely to be enhanced.
• Job satisfaction and employee motivation are likely to be increased.
• Employees develop/increase trust in their management.

Consultation processes

No two workplaces are exactly the same. Processes for communication and consultation should always be relevant to the size and nature of your particular organisation.

Processes for communication and consultation:
- Schedule regular staff meetings to provide for reporting and updating.
- Hold team meetings on safety, technical or operational issues.
- Put into place incident or hazard reporting procedures.
- Consult with external parties such as industry, contractors and suppliers.
- Interact personally with team members.
- Conduct staff forums on topics such as organisation and WHS issues.
- Post workplace or intranet notices.
- Issue administration manuals, operational guidelines and safety datasheets.
- Communicate by telephone or teleconference.
- Send emails or memos to individuals or groups.

Encourage employee contributions

Implementing consultative communication processes takes advantage of what is often an underused resource in an organisation: its people. Consultation encourages individuals to contribute and to accept responsibility. Management can then place increased confidence in staff, benefit from employee input and identify potential problems that can be dealt with promptly.

Employees need to be actively encouraged to put forward new ideas, provide comment and show initiative. Managers need to actively encourage their staff to raise concerns about work-related issues.

Work-related issues include:

- workloads; for example, team members may feel they have too much work to do and are unable to meet deadlines

- office environment; for example, team members may be uncomfortable with the air conditioning or noise

- disputes; for example, between team members or with other people in the organisation

- training requirements; for example, team members may need help to understand a new operating process

- work health and safety issues; for example, an employee may be having difficulty lifting heavy objects or need an ergonomic keypad

- work hours; for example, requests regarding rosters, leave or flexible working arrangements

- employment conditions; for example, concerns about salary or responsibility.

Ensure your actions match your words

Sometimes there is a perception that managers say they are open to ideas but in reality take little notice of anyone else's suggestions. Your challenge is to ensure your actions match your words.

Below are some ideas for matching your actions to your words.

Encourage initiative	**Encourage assistance**
Encourage employees to take initiative in contributing to workplace issues. To do this, foster an atmosphere that is comfortable and non-threatening in which employees share ideas, tips, work strategies and information.	Encourage staff to help each other when a team member appears to be struggling with a certain work technique and to give each other advice when they notice a colleague could use a more effective process.

Share professional development	**Follow through**
Ask employees to share their professional development, conference information or research findings with the team and let employees know their contributions are appreciated.	Always follow through on ideas from your team and let them know the outcome of any contribution they have made. Make sure your team knows you take their contributions seriously and encourage them to use their initiative. This can be as simple as saying, 'I'm really glad you brought that up' or asking, 'What do others think about this?'

Staff meetings

Meetings provide an ideal forum for two-way communication of information and ideas. But meetings can also be frustrating, unproductive and a waste of time. Meetings need to be well run if they are to fulfil the goals of effective two-way communication.

Below are some tips for productive staff meetings.

Determine time and purpose

Determine a time and purpose for the meeting. Ask yourself 'Why are we meeting?' and 'What do I want to achieve?' If the goal is non-specific, such as sharing general information, reporting on progress or generating ideas, you should set clear guidelines.

Limit the meeting time

Limit the meeting time and don't let discussion stray too far from the set topics. The meeting chairperson should guide the agenda and only give as much time to each item as is appropriate.

Prepare an agenda

Even for informal meetings, a simple agenda is essential to set out an order of reporting or discussion, and to keep everyone focused on why they are there. If there are papers to be discussed, circulate them in advance. Allow for general business and informal contributions, but don't let the meeting be too open-ended.

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Limit the subject matter
If there is a topic that calls for more time or focus, such as a team building or brainstorming activity, organise a separate session devoted to that.

Expect everyone to attend
Make sure there is an expectation that everyone attends. Absences mean the information exchange needs to be repeated at a later date, which is frustrating for everyone, or people miss out, which undermines the purpose of the meeting.

Keep people involved
Consider rotating the roles of chair and minute-taker. Ensure attendees know they are expected to come prepared and on time. Make the meeting interactive. Ask open-ended questions to generate discussion. Invite contributions to the agenda and make sure each person is able to participate. Ensure everyone's opinion is respected and no one dominates. When each individual has a chance to have their say, there is greater commitment to work decisions.

Use visual aids or activities
Use visual aids or group exercises if necessary for emphasis and variety. Don't overdo it – a whiteboard may be all you need.

Document and circulate records
Issues raised and decisions reached should be recorded and circulated. Minutes should focus on action plans so everyone knows what is to happen next.

Give feedback

Effective two-way communication is important for giving feedback to the relevant parties on the outcomes of matters raised. Feedback demonstrates a commitment to keeping the team informed and overcomes the common complaint: 'We never heard any more about it'. People who don't give or seek feedback run the risk of working in an information vacuum and isolating their colleagues. This includes team members and managers alike.

Here are some characteristics of effective feedback.

Timeliness and clarity

Feedback must be both timely and clear. If too much time elapses between raising an issue and making a decision, people may feel the issues are not being addressed, and become sceptical and less committed to the consultation process.

Appropriate methods

Choose an appropriate communication method. A written message helps you set out all the facts and acts as a permanent record. In many cases, you need to follow up with face-to-face discussion.

Feedback to all relevant people

Feedback needs to be given to all the people involved, as well as to other relevant personnel. For example, in the case of a WHS complaint or suggestion, the person involved should be told the outcome. The WHS officer also needs to be informed and the outcome should be documented and filed.

Thanking people

When delivering feedback, always thank the person for their idea or complaint. Explain how you have reached your decision, such as through discussion with others within the organisation, research, consultation with external key people/experts, third-party reports about the person's work, or a budget review to see if the idea is financially feasible.

Fairness and openness

In the case of a dispute between team members, give feedback with all parties present so the process is fair and open.

Tips for giving feedback

Below are some tips for giving feedback.

> Give your staff feedback about what happens at management meetings and the status of other projects the team is involved in.

> Ask team members for feedback on your own performance as a manager from time to time; for example: 'Do you think the instructions I gave you for the project were adequate?'; 'What other information could I give you to help you get started?'

> Make sure team members are given feedback by way of recognition on a regular basis and also as part of formal performance review processes.

> Measure achievements against key performance indicators; this is a form of regular feedback that shows how progress is tracking against targets.

> Encourage team members to give each other feedback in sessions that are structured so individuals assess the team's performance, share ideas, raise issues of common concern and seek solutions acceptable to all parties.

Formal strategies to gather feedback

Organisations use a number of formal strategies to gather feedback. A popular one is the method referred to as 360° feedback, in which team members give both positive and negative feedback to each other based on a rating scale. This can be an extremely confronting method, especially if the feedback is given anonymously and causes dissension among team members. It can also reveal weaknesses in areas not previously considered.

This method can also be beneficial; especially if a team member receives positive feedback for an area they did not consider one of their strengths.

When using this technique or any other feedback strategy, ensure all criticism given is constructive and focused on work rather than personal issues.

Practice task 3

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

Case study

Dan is a corporate services manager in a government agency. He oversees the human resources, IT, accounting and customer service departments. Three staff members report directly to him. He holds regular divisional meetings where he invites his team to provide updates on work in progress and to raise issues of interest or concern. In this way, the various departments are kept informed of each other's activities. The department heads then report to their own staff on what has been raised at each meeting. Dan also uses these meetings to report on the outcomes of the board and management meetings he attends, and to encourage his team members to share their ideas about improving business practices.

List three consultation strategies outlined in the case study.

1D Seek out internal and external contributions to concept development

Your team cannot work in isolation. It is essential to seek out and value contributions from both internal and external sources in developing and refining new ideas and approaches. For example, a production department may be unsure about the direction to take with revisions to a product line. By speaking with a sales consultant who has just completed a field trip, the production team can assess the feedback from customers who are actually using the product. The department is then able to tailor its product design directly to market requirements.

Benefits of contributions outside your team

Gain input into issues from the point of view of the operations and experience of others and provide fresh ideas and insights or expert advice.

Avoid duplication across departments.

Reduce costs and improve the smooth running of the organisation.

Identify customer feedback, so you can enhance the products and services offered by the organisation and keep ahead of competitors.

Gain new suggestions from contractors, consultants and advisers.

Ensure your team's work fits in with other teams or departments, so everyone is working cooperatively towards the organisation's overall objectives.

Encourage others to contribute

When encouraging others to contribute, you need to be clear about the purpose of the consultation, provide evidence of work practices matching communication policy, and demonstrate a commitment to following up and giving feedback.

Here are a number of ways you can encourage others to contribute to your team's work.

Open communication

Keep communication open with other work teams, departments and sites across the organisation through regular meetings and a commitment to mutual cooperation.

External parties

Consult with external parties such as union representatives, health and safety officers, legal advisers and auditors to seek expert advice and input.

Views of others

Take into account the views of others such as clients, suppliers and contractors through surveys, questionnaires or meetings.

Suggestion box

Introduce an organisation-wide suggestion box and encourage all employees to contribute to this.

Key stakeholders

Keep in touch with the local community and key stakeholders through newsletters; interactive web pages; a comments register that allows people to raise concerns; relevant documents for discussion; meetings or focus groups; public events such as expositions or community days; and working in partnership with community groups through sponsorships and other cooperative projects.

Example: a company invites customers to give feedback on its products

The advertising catalogue for clothing chain Rivers Australia states: 'You write, we read'.

'Every piece of feedback we get is emailed to all of the directors of the company as well as the executives and people that are affected by the feedback. For example, all feedback regarding product quality issues is read by our factory manager and all product ideas are read by our range builders and product managers.

'The catalogue explains how customer feedback is treated and gives examples of how feedback has led to improvements in the product range. A selection of comments – both positive and negative – is regularly included in the sales catalogue.'

(Reproduced with permission of Rivers Australia: www.rivers.com.au)

Practice task 4

Describe three ways to encourage external contributions of information that can benefit an organisation.

1E Implement processes to ensure that issues raised are resolved promptly

A functioning, consultative working environment underpins the effective resolution of workplace issues. Within this environment, frontline managers must ensure the organisation's consultation strategies help to raise, address and resolve issues promptly.

Different processes suit different types of issues. Make sure the processes are easy to follow and everyone is aware of them.

Dedicated planning sessions

An effective way to resolve issues and encourage employees to share ideas and strategies is to organise a planning activity involving the whole team or organisation. This may entail scheduling a day when all team members gather at a venue separate from their everyday workplace to focus on group issues.

The idea of these sessions is to bring diverse parties with different perspectives together to create dynamic tension and develop creativity. Plan the activity or meeting well and let members know how it will be conducted.

Planning sessions should have:

- a defined goal
- an agenda or program outline
- a logical structure
- a set of ground rules or a behaviour contract governing how the dialogue will be conducted
- a facilitator who can control the flow
- a designated scribe to take notes and summarise the outcomes
- a goal of encouraging participants to express diverse viewpoints, take part enthusiastically and keep an open mind
- an atmosphere of equality – everyone must be treated as equals regardless of their status in the organisation.

Ideas for planning sessions

You can include brainstorming activities in your planning sessions. The golden rule with brainstorming is that no idea is bad. The structure of the session should allow ideas to flow freely and promote creativity. Each person should feel free to say what they think and put forward ideas. Nothing should be dismissed without sincere consideration.

You can involve key personnel in a team planning session or external experts in an organisational session, such as a work health and safety adviser, industrial relations representative or human resources officer.

Make sure the session results in some tangible outcomes, so everyone feels it was time well spent and their ideas were valued. Circulate a written account of what resulted from the activity and indicate what is to happen next – ideas to be further developed; initiatives to be introduced; issues to be resolved or referred to relevant personnel; and further sessions to be held.

When inviting others to a planning session:

- Ensure that everyone is aware of exactly why they are attending.
- Ensure that everyone is aware of the type of contribution they are expected to make.
- Prepare your colleagues by detailing why you have invited these experts and what specialist expertise they can contribute.

Informal meetings

Many matters can be quickly resolved by gathering the relevant people together for informal discussions, whether this involves your whole team, other personnel, operational groups across the organisation or one or two people who have raised a particular issue.

Prepare an agenda, even for a short ad hoc session, and circulate it in advance to all concerned. Invite people to submit other topics or suggest ways of addressing the issue under discussion.

Resolve problems

If the topic is a sensitive one, reassure those involved that they will be listened to and treated fairly. Cultivate a non-judgmental atmosphere that encourages participation and the sharing of views. The objective should be to establish the key facts and work towards a resolution.

Here is a process for problem-solving.

Define the current situation

To begin the problem-solving process, you need to define the current situation. Discuss it in detail, answering the following questions.

- What is the problem?
- When and where does it occur?
- What is each person's viewpoint?
- What has been done to try to resolve the problem?

Summarise the problem

Summarise the problem with a statement such as: 'There's not a lot of time to check the catalogue before it goes to print, but accuracy is essential because customers rely on the information. The marketing team feels the editing process is too slow. But the editors stress their job is a painstaking one and accuracy is part of quality assurance'. Or: 'Theresa feels she wastes a lot of time transferring parcels between departments one at a time and prefers to carry several at once. But Vince feels there are safety issues Theresa is ignoring'.

Reach a solution

Try to reach a solution that takes into account the difficulties each party is experiencing and the overall objectives of the organisation. Some problems cannot be solved, but the parties concerned will be placated if they have at least been given a fair hearing and an attempt has been made to reach an agreement.

In some situations, it is necessary to refer the issue to other relevant personnel in the organisation, such as human resources staff.

Try to find a resolution that allows the parties to move forward, even if there is no perfect solution that fully satisfies everyone.

Conduct surveys

Surveying stakeholders can help identify issues and ensure they are promptly addressed. Surveys need to be carefully worded to make sure they fully cover the areas you want to explore. Use a combination of closed questions; for example, 'Do you feel that you received sufficient training to undertake this work? Yes/No', and open-ended questions/statements such as 'Please suggest ways that you believe we can improve this service'.

You can also provide scope for graded feedback; for instance, by asking respondents to circle excellent, good, fair, poor or unsatisfactory rankings.

Give participants the option of supplying their name or commenting anonymously. If names are provided, you can contact the person afterwards and let them know how their concerns are being addressed or ask for further explanation of the issues they raised. Let people know their responses are treated confidentially; that is, individual comments will not be shared with others in the organisation.

Surveys include:

- evaluation or feedback forms inviting relevant people to provide their opinions and detailed comments on a particular service, product or process
- questionnaires designed to collect information about customer requirements, satisfaction levels, issues that need examination, etc.
- focus groups comprising a number of typical stakeholders to explore specific topics in-depth and generate suggestions and feedback
- suggestion boxes and similar invitations to customers to offer feedback and raise issues of concern.

Example: listen to customers' concerns

Jarryd is responsible for organising the fitness programs at a local swimming centre. Clients often make comments to him and other staff members about things that could be improved around the centre.

He decides to introduce a suggestion box and wants to make sure clients know he is taking this strategy seriously. He prepares feedback forms, attaches a pen on a string to a bench where clients can write their comments and provides a locked box.

Jarryd empties the box regularly, takes note of the suggestions and displays on a noticeboard both the suggestions and whether or not the suggestions will be acted on, according to the decisions made by the centre management. If ideas are not followed up, he gives reasons for this.

This all helps centre clients know their comments are being taken seriously and Jarryd is making an effort to address them.

Involve staff in corporate decision-making

Some organisations involve staff members in consultative groups, cross-departmental work groups or management meetings as staff representatives. This strategy invites input on issues, takes account of employee views, provides an avenue for transparent decision-making and allows for issues to be raised and resolved promptly between staff and management at all levels.

Practice task 5

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

Case study

Netta feels that members of her team have started to lose sight of their overall goals and objectives by becoming too immersed in their daily tasks. She decides to hold a two-hour workshop to briefly revisit the current team planning process and to brainstorm ways for everyone to become engaged and refocused. She plans to invite a guest speaker, then run a brainstorming session to involve all of the team for the remaining time.

She invites a planning expert from elsewhere in the organisation to do a presentation as part of the program, but forgets to let him know the specific focus of the workshop and that she has allocated 20 minutes for his talk.

On the day, the presenter speaks for an hour and focuses on what he does each day as a business planner, thinking that this is what he has been asked to do. The brainstorming session is consequently cut short.

Most of Netta's team members leave the workshop feeling frustrated, as they have not had the opportunity to have their views heard and cannot understand why the guest speaker was invited, as his contribution was not suited to the purpose of the workshop. They are also annoyed because the majority of the brainstorming that did occur was not recorded due to the shortfall in time.

Explain what went wrong with Netta's planning and suggest how she could have done things better to ensure a more satisfactory outcome.

Summary

1. Information needs to be communicated in a way that is easily understood and acted on.

2. A communications framework should be established to provide for a two-way flow of information and ideas.

3. Most organisations have a range of marketing and customer-related information. This information helps marketing, sales and customer service staff carry out their duties in accordance with company policy and marketing strategies, and improve their performance in servicing customers and achieving sales goals. All staff should be aware of these documents, even those who are not in a marketing or customer-focused role.

4. Organisational policies and procedures cover a wide range of subjects, such as employment conditions, work health and safety, technical processes, communication procedures, performance reviews and security arrangements.

5. It is important to understand an organisation's goals and its social and ethical standards for teams to function collaboratively.

6. Your workplace may contain people from a range of social groups, as determined by their socioeconomic background, gender, sexuality, beliefs or way of life.

7. A major source of information that can help improve work performance is the documentation that accompanies quality assurance processes, skills audits, and team and individual performance reviews.

8. An effective way to resolve issues and encourage employees to share ideas and strategies is to organise a planning activity involving the whole team or organisation.

9. Seek out and value contributions from internal and external sources in developing and refining new ideas and approaches.

Learning checkpoint 1
Collect, analyse and communicate information and ideas

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in collecting, analysing and communicating information and ideas.

1. You are a frontline manager. Explain how you communicate a new process or policy to your team. Select one of the following topics and identify a relevant aspect for your team.

    - Industry-related data and market intelligence; for example, current trends in the industry

    - Legislative and regulatory changes affecting organisational policy and procedures; for example, work health and safety requirements, current industry practice, workplace safety regulations

    - Developments in equipment and technology; for example, making better use of electronic tools for project management, explaining the benefits and operational features of a scanner

    - News items, feature articles and general information relevant to your organisation's operations; for example, what competitor organisations are doing, new directions for your organisation
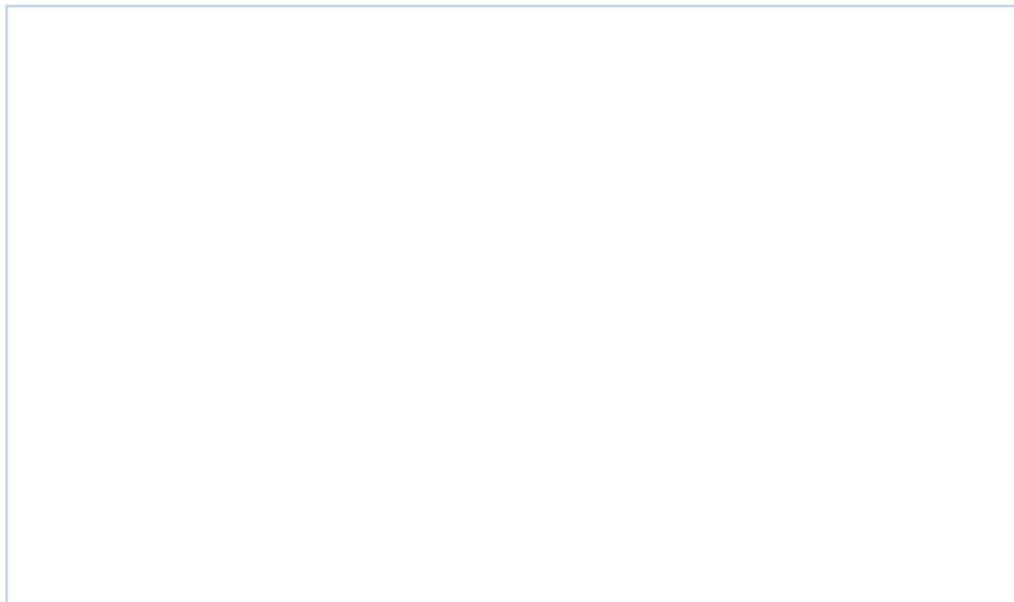
2. Research the topic you selected in question 1. Seek ideas and contributions from colleagues, experts, print-based resources and/or internet resources. Prepare a presentation of the topic for your team, and include all handouts and any other relevant material as evidence. If you plan to use an electronic presentation, include your slides, audience notes, research notes and sources of information.

3. Prepare a feedback survey for team members to complete after your presentation. The survey should ask for feedback on the presentation and for ideas about implementing the information conveyed in the presentation into the workplace.

    All information presented in both the presentation and the feedback survey should:

    *   incorporate simple, clear and concise English language
    *   be comprehensively researched and analysed appropriately
    *   be clear, appropriate and sensitive to the communication needs of team members
    *   be non-threatening and non-judgmental
    *   encourage team participation.

Topic 2
Develop trust and confidence as a leader

Trust is earned as a result of conscious decisions made regarding how people act, treat others, approach human relationships and perform their work. Studies have shown that one of the key qualities leading to superior organisational performance is the development of a culture characterised by trust-based working relationships. Frontline managers need to encourage their team members to follow examples set and adjust their interpersonal styles and methods to generate employee confidence.

In this topic you will learn how to:

2A   Treat all internal and external contacts with integrity, respect and empathy

2B   Use the organisation's social, ethical and business standards to develop and maintain effective relationships

2C   Gain and maintain the trust and confidence of colleagues, customers and suppliers

2D   Adjust interpersonal styles and methods to meet organisation's social and cultural environment

2E   Lead and encourage other members of the work team to follow organisational examples

2A Treat all internal and external contacts with integrity, respect and empathy

As a frontline manager, treating people with integrity, respect and empathy is your first step in developing trust and confidence within your work team. People who are treated considerately tend to respond with loyalty and enthusiasm, have high levels of job satisfaction and self-esteem, and display strong commitment to achieving mutual work objectives. On the other hand, if people are treated insensitively they may become resentful, unmotivated, negative, cynical and self-protective.

Of all the qualities an effective leader must possess, integrity is probably the most important. This attribute underpins all the decisions you make about how you treat others and carry out your responsibilities as a manager.

Example: a manager who lacks integrity

Gloria has introduced a policy of market testing the positions of the people who report to her. Periodically she publicly advertises the position; interviews candidates, including the person already in the role; and makes a decision based on the available field as to whether the current employee should be reappointed to the position.

Gloria believes there is much to be gained in pursuing this policy: keeping her employees 'on their toes' so they aim to perform well rather than becoming complacent; being open to new skills that are available in the marketplace; and potentially finding another person who could perform the work better than the current employee.

However, this policy makes Gloria's staff feel threatened, unmotivated and distrustful of management. Turnover is very high because people are continually on the lookout for other positions that offer more security and a positive working environment.

Staff who are treated in the way described in this example might work competently, but they are unlikely to do more than is required of them and may not be loyal, enthusiastic and committed to the organisation's objectives. This also does not reflect well on the organisation in the eyes of those who apply for the vacancy in good faith or who hear of the practice.

Only by consistently acting with integrity can you establish a reputation for doing so and inspire those around you to follow your example. It is not acceptable to treat certain groups or individuals well, such as your peers, while ignoring the impact of your actions on your subordinates or those outside your team or organisation.

Demonstrate integrity

The characteristics outlined below demonstrate integrity.

Strong values

Aim to have high professional and personal principles. Always tell the truth. This may not be easy, but honesty is fundamental to acting with integrity.

Be direct. It soon becomes obvious when someone is saying one thing while pursuing another agenda. Have the courage to be open and transparent in all you do, and make sure your actions speak as loudly as your words. Also, be consistent. Your credibility is undermined if you only choose to act with integrity in certain situations or relationships.

Follow through

Always pursue an endeavour to its conclusion. People will come to rely on you as someone who doesn't take shortcuts; is prepared to do their work well; and will make an extra effort to ensure a task is completed the way it should be or better.

Respect promises. Make it a rule to always keep your word and do what you say you'll do, and remind others you expect this of them too. Be cautious in the commitments you make and of overstating what you can accomplish. If you suspect you won't be able to deliver, don't sweep this under the carpet. Admit it and discuss the alternatives.

Value feedback

Find out how others perceive your character by observing their reactions and seeking feedback from someone you trust. This self-critical perspective is important in refining your behaviour and attitudes.

Be humble. Humility makes you approachable. Be prepared to laugh at yourself and don't flaunt your authority. Admit your failings and take steps to avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

Also, believe in yourself. Trusting your own capabilities enables you to lead with confidence, gain respect and treat others with compassion.

... continued

Encourage integrity in others

When recruiting, seek out those who appear to have strong values as well as the skills for the role. Value honesty in your team, rather than looking for 'yes people'. Acknowledge the qualities shown by your team members and consider incorporating integrity components in performance reviews.

Encourage ethical practices. Make your own actions an example of ethical business behaviour and create a safe haven for employees to report serious breaches of your organisation's standards without fear of retribution.

Be prepared to share

Good leaders are often characterised by the belief that there is plenty for everyone. This applies to the sharing of information and knowledge, as well as to showing generosity in more material ways.

Example: a manager shows high levels of integrity

Sanjiv develops a reputation for integrity primarily through how he treats others. He introduces a consultative environment where the input of his team members is valued and two-way communication is fostered. During meetings with his team, he keeps notes of what is discussed and always delivers on what he promises. In return, he expects team members to keep to their work commitments and to display high ethical standards. When discussing sensitive issues, he doesn't shirk from the truth but takes into account people's feelings. When dealing with senior management, he displays strong loyalty to his team and respect for the work they do.

His team members appreciate the considerate way Sanjiv treats them. They support his decisions because they know he makes these in their best interests. They repay Sanjiv with increased productivity, dedication to the work of the team and honesty within the workplace, all of which helps prevent problems.

Sanjiv places a high regard on valuing external contacts and treating them the same way as those within his organisation. Those who know him are not surprised that he is able to gain high levels of performance and loyalty from his team, and that he becomes a high achiever in his career.

Treat others with respect

You should aim to treat all people with respect, including your team members, others at all levels within your organisation and external contacts. People have varied backgrounds, beliefs, abilities, personalities and pursuits. These characteristics can affect the way you relate to them and react in particular situations. Consistently showing respect means treating all people well, even if it is inconvenient or if you are not happy with how they are behaving.

Showing respect includes:

- protecting the dignity and self-esteem of each individual
- acknowledging people's rights
- being considerate of others' beliefs, customs and feelings
- showing appreciation
- being courteous
- treating people fairly
- acknowledging people's needs.

Challenges you can face in respecting others

One of the biggest challenges you can have in respecting others is when you encounter people whose beliefs and lifestyles are very different to your own, including people who don't treat you with respect. Challenge your way of thinking if you find yourself reacting negatively to those who do not share your own ways of living and thinking about things. The ability to remain flexible and show tolerance when dealing with other people is a very powerful skill. By accepting differences in people, you can grow both professionally and personally.

Build trust based on respect and empathy

There are a number of ways that you can demonstrate respect for others and ensure you treat all contacts, internal and external to your organisation, with integrity and empathy. These actions help build trust and confidence within your team.

Some principles to follow in building trust are outlined below.

Build self-worth	Build a sense of self-worth in others. Make sure everyone counts and everyone knows they count. Be open to the best of what everyone has to offer. Express appreciation. Be generous in acknowledging people's strengths and endeavours and in giving praise for a job well done. Avoid making negative comments. Part of respecting the dignity of others and having regard for their feelings is making a rule not to complain about colleagues to others. While this happens in most workplaces, as a manager it is up to you to set appropriate standards regarding gossip and discourtesy. You should also ensure that any negative comments or concerns you have about a team member are kept between you and the individual, unless there is a good reason for discussing those concerns with others. Make sure employees know to approach you if they have concerns about a colleague's work practices.
Show courtesy	Show courtesy to others. Treating people politely demonstrates respect and can also diffuse a tense situation. This can be challenging if a customer or employee is being difficult or demanding. Listen to everything they have to say and reassure them that you are trying to help. Avoid reacting emotionally. Politely state your opinion or solution to the situation. You should be able to appease the person by responding patiently and calmly. Be a good listener. Taking the time to be receptive to others shows that you respect their individuality and value what they have to say. One of the greatest barriers to effective communication is failure to really listen. Be wary of interrupting, not waiting to hear the whole story or becoming distracted when others are speaking. Asking questions, minimising distractions and practising patience all help you stay focused.
Avoid prejudice	Be aware of prejudice and harassment. Prejudice and harassment have no place in a trust-based working environment. As a manager, you have a responsibility to ensure that you and those around you treat people with respect. Be alert to any signs of discrimination, alienation or bullying. Practise tolerance. Showing respect to those who are similar to you is not particularly difficult. It is more challenging when faced with someone who is different or who seems to be acting unreasonably. A practical approach is to use these times to practise the art of tolerance.

Seek input	Encourage input from others. Don't pre-judge or dismiss someone's concerns or ideas. Adopt the habit of expressing understanding of the other party's point of view and be prepared to explain the logic behind your own views. Accept that others have their own opinions, even if you disagree. Whether you prove to be right or wrong or you both agree to disagree, each party will feel better for having been heard.
Show empathy	Empathy is the ability to show compassion and sensitivity towards another's feelings, views and circumstances. It is an active process through which you try to understand another person's situation. This doesn't mean you must agree with the person or show exaggerated sympathy or interest – rather, empathy is a way of understanding and relating to what others are thinking and experiencing. Treating people with empathy also refers to developing rapport and positive working relationships.
Be flexible	Be flexible and responsive. Show flexibility in your outlook and in what you expect of others. Different situations demand different responses from you. Try not to be fixed in your ways and viewpoint, and you will often find a solution that suits all parties and in which work objectives are not compromised. Be responsive. Keep in mind the professional needs of your staff. Do they need experience in different areas of work? Do they need extra training? Should duties be rotated? Is a staff member underused? For example, a personal assistant may have shown strong skills in desktop publishing. Perhaps he would like to become involved in the production of the corporate magazine.
Offer support	If a team member appears to be struggling in some way, find out how you can help. Do they need advice or assistance? Do they have too much work or are they concerned about deadlines? Are they unwell or struggling with personal pressures? Is there a problem between two or more team members? Make a casual inquiry and be attentive to their response, both verbal and nonverbal. Help team members with their work when necessary. A good manager knows when to offer help and when to let a person do their work without interference. In the case of a sudden crisis or looming deadline, 'all hands on deck' is often a good idea; your gesture will usually be gratefully received and the favour will be returned. Be aware, though, that helping too much often indicates reluctance to delegate appropriately. Make sure you understand the difference between helping and interfering.

Participate	Try not to let your role as manager prevent you from mixing socially with your team and getting involved in initiatives such as tearoom rosters and the social club. Especially in small business environments, everyone needs to join in. Playing an equal part in social activities shows employees that you regard them as equals. Forming relationships with your team members on a personal level helps generate a positive and trusting work environment.
	Encouraging empathy between team members promotes constructive teamwork, as employees become more considerate of others' needs. However, remember that your team still needs a leader. Be careful not to undermine your leadership role by interacting too personally with employees. Good leaders establish a comfortable balance.

Be understanding	If a person is going through a difficult time, your ability to be understanding and make special allowances can affect how the person deals with their situation. For example, if a team member is going through a marriage breakdown, they may need to take occasional time off. This might mean that other team members have to pitch in or work production might suffer for a short time.
	Valuing staff means appreciating that some personal issues are more important than work issues; important personal issues left unaddressed may affect an employee's performance. Allowing employees time to deal with personal problems shows that you value them and creates trust – your team will recoup any small amounts of lost productivity by profiting from the sustained, long-term commitment of loyal staff.

Example: empathy in practice

External customers tend to look well on organisations that show empathy towards their staff. Lack of empathy is a common complaint directed at a range of industries today, and both external customers and potential employees are increasingly likely to select organisations based on ethical grounds.

Here are two examples where empathy and sensitivity has been exercised in the workplace.

Showing understanding for a contractor's situation

Tamar is a communications manager for an educational organisation. She is responsible for the production of the quarterly course guide, which she prepares with the help of Ray, an external designer. Ray has produced the last 12 course guides and has completely revamped the publication style to make it much more user-friendly.

Tamar becomes aware that Ray is suffering from a serious illness that requires weekly medical treatment. He is unable to do all the work required for the course guide production but, as a small business manager, he is anxious not to lose the contract. Tamar speaks to her colleagues and asks them to take on additional tasks such as proofreading until Ray recovers and is able to resume his normal function.

Tamar's willingness to modify her expectations of Ray while he deals with a personal crisis shows him that he is valued and appreciated by the organisation. In future, the organisation's loyalty will be repaid with increased commitment from Ray, who will be more likely to make an increased effort to accommodate the organisation's needs.

Showing sensitivity towards others during difficult times

Brian has received a directive from senior management to retrench three of his staff members. He realises that, no matter how this is done, the staff members concerned will be severely affected. However, he goes out of his way to ease the impact. He puts a lot of thought into the way he notifies each staff member, gives them sufficient time to finish up their work and leave their offices, organises a farewell event with other staff members and undertakes to be a referee for each on an ongoing basis. After their departure, he keeps in touch with them from time to time and encourages other staff to do the same.

Brian's approach ensures the exiting employees hold no grudge against him or the organisation. They are less likely to speak negatively about the organisation to potential customers or release confidential organisational information to competitors. Also, Brian can bring ex-employees into his circle of contacts and perhaps employ them for projects at a later date.

Attain work–life balance

Many people struggle to balance work and personal responsibilities, and look to their workplace to provide some relief, support and practical solutions for managing their commitments. Organisations that work with their employees to find and implement solutions to this problem often find that business benefits from providing a workplace that fosters work–life balance.

Studies have shown that employees who achieve an acceptable level of work–life balance are more productive, cooperative and willing to 'go the extra mile' for their employers. Staff also have fewer work health and safety issues. There is reduced stress, greater wellbeing and alertness, a reduction in accidents and disability claims, and fewer interruptions to workflow.

Organisations also gain the potential for increased service coverage if employees work varying hours. This results in an increased capacity to meet work targets and better results in today's busy marketplace. Finally, family-friendly policies enhance the reputation of the organisation in the eyes of business contacts and customers.

Family-friendly policies

The question of work–life balance is usually associated with the need to allow people access to work while accommodating family duties. This applies to mothers and fathers as well as those caring for ageing parents or other family members. Organisations adopt family-friendly policies to cater to these needs and retain valuable staff members.

Family-friendly policies depend on the size and nature of the organisation, but there are real benefits in integrating work–life balance measures into any business strategy. These include the ability of the organisation to attract and retain high-quality staff in a competitive workforce; high staff turnover results in extra cost and loss of productivity. Absenteeism also decreases when staff are more able to balance work and family life.

Family-friendly initiatives include those shown below.

Flexible work arrangements

Examples include:
- flexitime and make-up time
- time off in lieu
- part-time work and job-sharing
- working from home
- overtime
- shift work and rostering arranged in consultation with relevant staff, taking into account any special needs of the individual.

Family support

Examples include:
- regulation of workloads and avoidance of afterhours work, including meetings
- child or aged care services, including childcare centres and back-up care resources
- social events involving family members.

Employee assistance

Examples include employee assistance programs, such as making personal or financial counselling available.

Health and wellness initiatives

Examples include:
- health club facilities
- stress management workshops
- exercise programs and dietary information.

Flexible leave options

Examples include:
- regulatory leave such as parental leave
- flexibility in annual leave arrangements
- encouragement to take leave when due
- availability of special, sick or unpaid leave for compassionate, educational, carer or emergency requirements.

Practice task 6

1. Imagine that you are the manager of a customer service centre for a large government department. You receive an email from a member of the public complaining about the telephone manner of one of your team members. The email is strongly worded and complains about public servants who don't respect their clients and waste taxpayers' money. Describe how you could deal appropriately with your team member. How could you accommodate both parties' feelings and needs?

2. Describe three ways that you could enhance the quality of work–life balance in a workplace without compromising business objectives. Give examples of the strategies you would use.
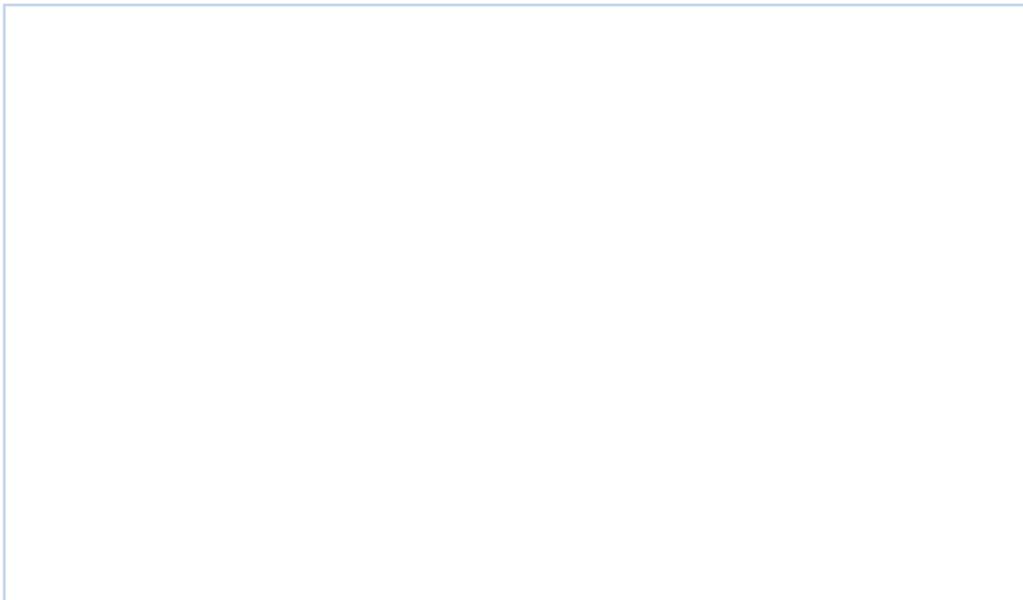
2B Use the organisation's social, ethical and business standards to develop and maintain effective relationships

Many organisations put considerable thought into organisational values, the way they should operate and how they want their employees to interact with internal and external contacts. From this process, one or more documents may be created that stipulate the organisation's philosophies and the standards that management and staff are expected to adhere to. By making these documents freely available, employees and customers know what to expect from the organisation and what the organisation expects from them.

Organisations may also have standards implied in the general way they go about their business, such as honesty and respect. They must also comply with the standards in legislation and regulations affecting their operation. Written, implied and legislative standards generally fall into the categories of social, ethical or business standards.

Social standards within workplace relationships

Social standards apply within the workplace and in the organisation's relationships with staff and members of its community. As a frontline manager, you need to ensure your team members are aware of the organisation's internal standards and that they adhered to these at all times.

Social standards include those outlined below.

Statement of workplace values

This sets out the values the organisation wishes to uphold in areas such as:

- equity and diversity
- industrial relations
- flexible work practices and family-friendly policies
- work health and safety
- fair treatment
- management–staff consultation and cooperation.

continued ...

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Code of conduct

This covers employee behaviour and workplace processes such as:

- work hours and rosters
- acceptable behaviour
- social inclusiveness and respect for individuals
- work environment (formal/informal, etc.)
- dress code
- workplace maintenance, security, signing on, etc.
- honesty and cooperation between staff
- confidentiality and intellectual property.

Employment policies

Documented policies may cover areas such as:

- recruitment and promotion
- equal opportunity
- rewards and recognition for high-performing staff
- profit sharing and other staff benefits
- education, training and development
- performance review and grievance processes
- leave arrangements
- use of vehicles and staff travel arrangements.

Ethical standards

Organisations and their employees rely on outsiders for business and support. They are required by the wider community and by governing bodies to operate responsibly, demonstrate acceptable values and show respect to those affected by the work they do.

Many organisations willingly develop a set of business ethics that governs the way they operate for purposes of best practice, philanthropy and a desire to be good corporate citizens.

These ethical standards set out guiding principles and dictate the way an organisation and its employees act in areas such as the following.

Areas covered by guiding principles for employee actions
• Sustainability, health and other issues related to the effect of the organisation's operations on the environment and the local community
• The impact of trading practices on other organisations and the broader community
• Investment and financial management
• Dealings with suppliers, contractors, consumers and other stakeholders
• Professional conduct in fields such as consulting, health, education, law, accounting, financial advice, information technology, police and defence
• Research, covering data integrity, use of privileged information, plagiarism and animal welfare issues involved in product testing
• Publishing and the media

Be fully conversant with ethical standards

You must be fully conversant with the standards you and your staff are expected to comply with. They may be documented by your organisation in ethical guidelines or a code of conduct, or they may apply within your broader profession or industry and your organisation might be unaware of them. For example, an internal auditor may need to remind the organisation of auditing standards that affect both the way a person is required to operate and the manner in which the company's accounts should be kept.

You and your organisation must comply with the legislative and regulatory framework covering anti-discrimination, work health and safety, financial reporting, tax, privacy, environment protection and other matters that relate to your particular organisation.

Business standards

Some organisations have statements or charters setting out their core values and the way they do business. These serve to remind staff, and also customers and the outside world in general, what the organisation stands for and how it conducts its operations.

Business standards may include a vision statement, a mission statement, a customer service charter and a brand. Each of these is explained here.

Vision

A vision statement encapsulates the reason for the organisation's existence and its vision for the future.

Mission

A mission statement summarises the organisation's overall objectives.

Charter

A customer service charter is like a code of practice. It sets out how the organisation proposes to meet its customer service commitments and delivery standards, and to fulfil its legal and self-regulation obligations towards customers.

Brand

A brand or corporate image is a tool for signifying to the outside world the identity the organisation aspires to and the essence of its products or services. This affects all areas of the organisation's operations, not just marketing and sales. Staff must be aware of the image the organisation is trying to portray and the ways they are required to carry out their duties in line with the organisation's corporate image.

Example: two mission statements

Snowy Hydro Limited mission statement

To deliver superior financial returns by being the preferred supplier of risk management products; developing our people, utilising and developing our water resources, physical assets and dual fuel capabilities, and exceeding customer and stakeholder expectations while demonstrating best practice in safety and health, asset and environmental management.

(Reproduced with permission: www.snowyhydro.com.au)

University of Western Australia mission statement

To advance, transmit and sustain knowledge and understanding through the conduct of teaching, research and scholarship at the highest international standards, for the benefit of the Western Australian, Australian and international communities.

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Example: extract from a customer service charter

Goals:

• Provide professional, courteous service

Activities:

• Listen to and clarify a customer's needs

• Treat each customer with respect and integrity

• Provide up-to-date information in plain English

• Respond promptly and appropriately to inquiries

• Process orders within 24 hours

• Seek customer feedback

Practice task 7

Complete this table by providing a description for each business standard.

Business standard	Description
Customer service charter	
Mission statement	
Brand or corporate image	
Vision statement	

2C Gain and maintain the trust and confidence of colleagues, customers and suppliers

A leader can be the role model who influences their team the most. There are certain behaviours you can aim to model in the way you perform your work in order to encourage high performance by your team members and to gain their confidence. This operating model flows on to those outside the organisation. There is a direct correlation between how employees view the organisation and how outsiders view it.

If leaders lose the confidence of their employees, the messages that frontline staff in particular deliver to customers and other external contacts can be affected. Competent performance inspires others to follow your lead.

Aim for high standards

Excellent performance is always influential. It exemplifies thoroughness, commitment, enthusiasm and diligence. If you have a job description, it should contain specific performance standards you are expected to meet. The job descriptions of managers usually stipulate that they manage themselves as well as others.

Below are some key requirements for achieving and maintaining high standards.

Know your organisation's expectations

Make sure you know your organisation's expectations as expressed in its business standards, both implied and stated. These may emphasise expected levels of proficiency, presentation standards, customer service, timeliness, teamwork, initiative in working independently, staff development, and quantity or quality of production. Aim to model these behaviours.

Be aware of your own performance levels

Be aware of your own performance levels and behaviour, and the value of ongoing professional development and self-improvement. This may involve training in computer or technical skills, time management, workplace knowledge, leadership, communication or interpersonal skills. Learn to identify your own strengths and weaknesses, and look for ways to improve your processes. Don't be afraid to ask someone to help you with a task you are grappling with; locate a mentor or undertake a training program outside the workplace.

Keep your word and see a task through

At all times, keep your word and see a task through until it is completed to the required outcome. This is essential in dealings with customers and other stakeholders, as well as with your own staff. Don't make promises or undertake tasks that you are unable to act on. If you do make a promise that you find you are unable to keep, let those affected know and explain why.

Work to build the talent of others

Recognise the talents of your team members and encourage their professional and personal development. The organisation can only benefit from fostering the ongoing growth of its staff. The individual will have greater job satisfaction if they feel adequately skilled for their roles and have greater career opportunity.

Develop the skills of your team

There are many ways that you can actively encourage team members to develop professionally and personally. Some of these are described below.

Ways to develop team skills

1

Give others confidence to contribute

Providing avenues for consultation and communication has many benefits. Managers need to maintain consultative strategies that give staff the confidence to make contributions and achieve their full potential. Managers should approach leadership by taking a positive win–win attitude, in which managers and team members all win by establishing processes that satisfy everyone's needs. A win–lose situation occurs when managers establish processes or behave in ways that are only beneficial to themselves while the rest of the team suffers.

Team members should be encouraged to show initiative, develop their skills, communicate openly, listen to others' points of view and remain committed to the consultative process.

2

Support your team

Give recognition and credit when they are due. Acknowledge the contributions of all team members. This is important if a team member has done something particularly well or has helped the team achieve its goals beyond what was required. Managers who take credit for other people's work or ideas have a devastating impact on morale and discourage workers from contributing. Good leaders put the needs of their team and organisation before their own.

Build each team member's self-esteem. Let them know you believe they can do the job. Ensure that people receive positive feedback and a simple thank you for a job well done.

Show loyalty to your team members. Just as you expect loyalty from your staff, it is essential to stand by them. This means showing support in times of difficulty and being prepared to defend them in the face of criticism from others. The same principles apply to your dealings with contractors and other key contacts.

3

Delegate wherever possible

Doing all the work yourself is not only inefficient, it discourages initiative and sends the message to your team members that you don't trust their abilities. You should know how to delegate. People develop best when they are given the chance to do things their own way and to learn from their mistakes. They like to feel in control of their own work and be responsible for their own progress.

Giving a team member a task and then constantly checking up on them, taking over or redoing what they have done leaves people thinking they are wasting their time. This micro-management often results from narrow and inflexible ideas about the way things should be done. It disregards the experience, skills and ideas of others. It also impedes the learning process. A good manager knows when close supervision is necessary and when to let go of the reins.

4

Motivate your staff

One of the best ways of motivating staff is to make the work interesting and worthwhile. Help ensure variety and challenge by rotating tasks, allocating whole projects that people can take responsibility for from inception to conclusion, and making sure they know the relevance and value of their contribution to team objectives.

Be alert to overexpectation. It is helpful to provide a challenge, but if a person is struggling they will lose confidence. Don't set people up for failure by setting unachievable goals. Particularly with new staff members, make sure they are feeling in control of what is being asked of them. Offer support, training and guidance, and rotate tasks until the person has the confidence to take on new responsibilities.

5

Encourage open communication

Invite personal interaction. Face-to-face discussions give employees the confidence to provide updates, ask questions, make suggestions and voice concerns they might not otherwise express. Simply stopping by a worker's desk to see how a project is progressing rather than requesting an update via email can open the way for a productive exchange. But this should be done in a way that doesn't look like you are checking up on them. Make yourself accessible to your staff.

By maintaining open communication with your team members, you remain aware of the level of morale within the workplace and can use your leadership and interpersonal skills to take corrective action if necessary. Pursuing an open-door policy whenever possible (without letting it encroach on good time management) allows others to feel comfortable in turning to you for guidance and raising suggestions. Make sure others know that you appreciate them coming to you with their concerns.

Communicate on important as well as commonplace issues. To maintain the faith of your team, consultation needs to cover all issues, not only the peripheral items.

Build trust and confidence

Successful business relationships entail being able to gain the trust and confidence of everyone you deal with – your team members, colleagues, management, customers, suppliers and other business contacts. When trust breaks down, individuals act with their own interests in mind rather than those of the team. Lack of confidence in each other can lead to those outside also losing confidence in the organisation.

Acting with integrity, respect and empathy goes a long way towards gaining the trust of those you deal with.

You can build trust by:

- sharing information
- acting with discretion and keeping private information confidential
- being sensitive towards cultural and social differences
- supporting others and being reliable
- working cooperatively with others
- being friendly and approachable
- being open and honest
- seeking and acknowledging input of others in developing new ideas
- working for the organisation's interests, not solely your own
- behaving in a consistent way
- being genuinely interested in and receptive to others.

Behaviours that work against building trust

Trust can be rapidly destroyed. Trust-building and trust-destroying behaviours might seem obvious and easy to follow or avoid. However, by being aware of how even small actions can negatively affect business relationships, you can channel your energies in positive ways more consistently.

Below are some behaviours that work against building trust.

Some behaviours that work against building trust
• Taking credit for what someone else has done
• Being unreliable or unpredictable
• Keeping information to yourself or acting secretively
• Being inconsistent
• Speaking negatively or disrespectfully about others
• Encouraging gossip or acting on hearsay
• Being self-centred or selfish
• Betraying the trust and confidence of others
• Being intolerant and making moral judgments

Example: a team leader loses the trust of a team member

The performance of one of Craig's team members, Jiang, has decreased. Without speaking with Jiang about the problem, Craig speaks negatively about him to the CEO. Later in the day, the CEO calls Jiang into his office and chastises him about what has been reported to him. Jiang feels angry that Craig has not discussed the problem with him first and is humiliated by having been taken to task by the CEO. He has been experiencing personal problems that have affected his usually high-level performance. As a result of what he sees as a betrayal of trust, he becomes self-protective and less cooperative with Craig after the incident.

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Practice task 8

1. Give five examples of ways that you have built trust within a workplace team or social group.

2. List five ways that you, as a leader, could lose the trust of your team.

2D Adjust interpersonal styles and methods to meet organisation's social and cultural environment

Every organisation has its own particular social and cultural environment. These are the often unwritten norms regarding the organisation's style of operation and the ways management and staff make decisions, approach their work functions, interact with each other and behave within the workplace.

As a manager, you have a responsibility to guide others in adapting their interpersonal styles and methods to match the preferred social and cultural environment.

Workplace culture is made up of norms that evolve and vary but usually involve a mixture of elements, as outlined below.

Tradition	Innovation
• Formality	• Informality
• Autocracy	• Consensus
• Conservatism	• Creativity
• Individual achievement	• Teamwork
• Uniformity	• Diversity
• Quality of work	• Quantity of production
• Routine	• Inventiveness
• Best practice	• Risk taking
• Accountability and process	• Autonomy
• Respect for authority	• Social interaction and fun
• Hierarchy (vertical structure)	• Collaboration (horizontal structure)

Organisational culture

Organisational culture has a major impact on workplace productivity and relationships. In many cases, the prevailing culture is dictated by the nature of the organisation's activities and the people it deals with. Ultimately, you and those within your team must respect and work effectively within the environment your organisation has chosen to adopt.

Nevertheless, frontline managers play a major part in creating conditions for effective working relationships within their own team that can then develop in other areas of the organisation and influence the thinking of senior management.

While workplace cultures differ depending on the size and nature of organisations, there are a number of characteristics that define a healthy social and cultural working environment.

Characteristics of an optimum organisational climate include:

- constructive communication
- knowledge sharing
- consultation and cooperation
- individual integrity
- mutual respect, empathy and trust
- continuous improvement and professional development
- fulfilling and enjoyable working environment
- fairness and equity
- positive attitudes
- best practice
- team spirit
- encouragement of new ideas
- measuring and rewarding individual and group achievements
- clarity of purpose and expectations.

Emphasise cultural factors when recruiting

Build into your job descriptions, advertisements and interviewing processes the traits you expect of your team members. Let job applicants know about the organisation's social and cultural climate, and aim for a meshing of personal and organisational values and approaches in those you employ. However, be wary of taking a narrow view and only looking to employ prototypes of yourself. This is a common trap that overlooks the many potential benefits to the team of diversity in skills, backgrounds and personalities.

When you have new staff, don't always expect people to learn by observation or through their own errors. Make sure they are clear about what is expected of them by way of work priorities, reporting lines, group interaction, team rules, problem-solving, and the values and traits they are expected to uphold. You can do this through a carefully planned induction program, by giving new team members a folio of relevant material, and by supporting them in adapting to the team's culture and understanding appropriate standards of behaviour.

Monitor your team's style

Be alert to the prevailing team climate and find ways of ensuring that interpersonal styles and methods of operation meet the organisation's expectations. Seek feedback by conducting a survey of employees regarding the existing culture within an organisation, levels of morale, trust between management and staff, and how people interact with each other. Be prepared to take everyone's views into account. Then find ways to take corrective action.

Be aware of individuals who are experiencing difficulties in adapting due to attitudinal problems, cultural differences or special needs. Anyone in the organisation can offer support, including a human resources officer or a colleague, and help with adapting can involve one-on-one or team sessions.

A good coach or counsellor provides a safe environment where a person can receive guidance and learn from their mistakes without feeling threatened.

Understand interpersonal styles

Being aware of different personality types and behaviours can help you communicate effectively, break down relationship barriers, understand group dynamics and coach team members in adapting their interpersonal styles and methods.

Several theoretical models define and categorise different temperaments and learning styles. One of these is the Myers-Briggs type indicator, which draws on the ideas of Carl Jung in identifying 16 personality types. The model categorises people according to how they relate to the world, take in information, make decisions and manage their lives using classification tags such as 'extrovert' and 'thinker'.

Characteristics of certain personality types relate to the ways they operate, as shown here.

Relate to the world

Ways of operating:

- Extroverts try things out and focus on the outer world of people and things.
- Introverts think things through and focus on the inner world of ideas and images.

Take in information

Ways of operating:

- Sensors focus on facts, procedures and detail.
- Intuitors focus on meanings, concepts and possibilities.

Make decisions

Ways of operating:

- Thinkers make decisions based on objective principles and impersonal facts.
- Feelers make decisions based on personal and humanistic considerations.

Manage life

Ways of operating:

- Judgers prefer to spend time in a structured, planned mode.
- Perceivers prefer to spend time in a flexible, adaptive mode.

Different ways of thinking and learning

Personality types are defined as psychological preferences; that is, by the ways we prefer to use our mental functions. The Keirsey temperament sorter is a model for personality pattern assessment, while Kolb's learning styles inventory and Gregorc's mind styles model focus on how individuals process information.

These models can be helpful in terms of self-assessment and building your understanding of different ways of thinking and learning. It should be stressed that none of the personality types are good or bad and that people display many combinations of types.

If you decide to use such models, do so sensitively and with discretion. Make sure all staff are aware of the limitations of these models. For example, labelling a person as an introvert could be damaging to their self-esteem. In addition, these labels are often not used in the ways we usually think of the words. For example, an extrovert is not necessarily an outgoing person; rather, this refers to the way they process their thoughts and react.

Example: new employee adapts to organisational culture

Sam's previous job involved a considerable amount of time speaking with other staff members and groups throughout the working day. The culture of the workplace encouraged this level of social interaction. In her new job, however, there is no longer a requirement for her to engage with others to the same extent.

The culture of her new workplace is one where social interaction is discouraged, as it was found to be disruptive to the workflows of many staff members. Sam initially finds it very difficult to adjust to the new situation, as she is naturally a social and outgoing person and misses frequent interaction with other staff.

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Capitalise on the strengths of all personality types

Organisations have cultures and expectations, which provide a framework for the ways their employees behave and operate. But people also come with a variety of personalities which, when combined haphazardly into work teams, may or may not work well together.

The essential message of personality typecasting is that one person's way of thinking and acting is not the only way and not necessarily the best way. The strengths of all personality types should be recognised and accepted by everyone, so that people can work together effectively. Failure to accept that others think differently and work in a variety of dissimilar ways is a recipe for team malfunction and disorganisation.

Organisational cultures that openly encourage the skills and talents of all personality types are likely to generate high levels of staff motivation and good workplace performance.

Example: successful combination of two personalities

Dani and Peta work in the horticultural section of a local council. Their shared role is to organise the field staff who maintain the sporting facilities in the region. Dani is a very quiet, analytical person who likes putting together information in spreadsheets and processing forms, and is always very well organised. Peta, on the other hand, has a social, outgoing personality and prefers to be out of the office, engaging with the field staff and ensuring they have what they need to do their work each day.

Dani and Peta have recognised that their personalities are very different, so they have worked out which parts of their combined role they enjoy most and then divided up their tasks to suit. They are not only a very successful team, but are also friends away from the workplace, because they get on so well.

Practice task 9

Look through this list of characteristics of an optimum organisational climate. Which items do you think are the most important? Explain the reason for your selection.

Characteristics of an optimum organisational climate	
• Constructive communication	• Fairness and equity
• Knowledge sharing	• Positive attitudes
• Consultation and cooperation	• Best practice
• Individual integrity	• Team spirit
• Mutual respect, empathy and trust	• Encouragement of new ideas
• Continuous improvement and professional development	• Measuring and rewarding individual and group achievements
• Fulfilling and enjoyable working environment	• Clarity of purpose and expectations

2E Lead and encourage other members of the work team to follow organisational examples

A frontline manager needs to direct team members to act in accordance with the organisation's policies and procedures. Policies set out specific guidelines or rules that tell staff how to work according to the organisation's objectives. Procedures put the organisation's policies into practice by setting out the way work is done, step by step. They are used to control work processes, allocate responsibilities for each task and ensure that requirements are met.

Procedures include:

- standard operating procedures
- safety data sheets (SDSs)
- organisational activities undertaken to meet performance outcomes
- sets of accepted actions approved by the organisation.

Lead by example

Team members look to you as their manager for guidance about working within the organisation's policies, procedures and standards. Model the correct behaviour and others will follow your lead. For instance, if you work in an office, you can model WHS procedures by sitting correctly and taking regular exercise breaks.

You should be aware of industry standards and procedural requirements relating to work carried out by your team members. Although your team may not do the same work on a daily basis, you need to have an adequate knowledge of work processes so you can monitor compliance with WHS standards, customer service charters, industry regulations, etc.

In many cases, simply reminding people of expectations and modelling the expected behaviour are enough to encourage them to do things the expected way.

Coaching

If you identify a skill gap or an inability or reluctance to follow procedures, take on the role of coach yourself or arrange for someone else to show the person how the task should be done.

Coaching has always been valued in sport as a way of helping people reach their full potential and overcome difficulties. Although knowledgeable about their sport, sports coaches are not necessarily elite sportspeople. Their skill lies in providing direction, encouraging skill development and getting the best out of a person. They do this by understanding people and situations, and by introducing some processes that help the individual and the team work through problems, learn and progress. Coaching depends on trust and respect.

In the workplace, coaching relationships work well when directed at a short-term, identified need such as inducting a new staff member; adjusting an employee's interpersonal style or operation methods; giving advice on policies and procedures; or developing a specific skill.

The workplace coach seeks to improve the performance of the team or individual by:

- listening and responding to the individual
- offering advice and suggestions
- giving constructive feedback
- guiding the person through the way things should be done
- providing encouragement and support.

Advantages of coaching

The main advantage of workplace coaching is learning by doing. Let your team or individuals know you expect them to participate in the coaching activity and that you expect the coaching to be successful. Give and invite feedback during the process. Both the coach and the learner need to know whether they are meeting expectations, and should be able to make comments on the process at any stage. If a coaching relationship is not working, initiate a change. If skill development is too slow, take a different approach.

Two features of effective coaching are shown below.

Coaching creates challenges

Coaching challenges the learner to take an active part in the process and to ask questions as necessary. The learner is then able to:

- clarify the current situation
- identify their own skill gaps
- link business and individual needs by focusing on current workplace challenges and the skills and attributes required to meet these challenges
- establish a time frame for acquiring the necessary skills or knowledge
- identify and resolve other issues that are raised through the coaching process.

Coaching creates an environment conducive to learning

An effective coach creates an environment conducive to learning and has a positive effect on morale and productivity. A good coach is motivated to take on the role and must believe that another person can benefit from their assistance. As a manager, you may not need or be able to coach every team member, but you do need to provide the support mechanisms for others to do any necessary coaching.

Mentoring

The Macquarie dictionary defines a mentor as 'a wise and trusted counsellor'. A workplace mentor is someone who is considered to have sufficient experience or expertise to assist others less experienced. The role of a mentor is to lead and act as a role model. The mentor provides informed advice, and encourages and supports the individual over the longer term. The mentor needs to respond to the employee's needs and treat them with respect and patience.

Mentoring is particularly useful for inducting new members into an existing team and is equally important for increasing skill levels and modelling behaviour required from team members. The mentor may also offer emotional support to someone who is having difficulty fitting into the team, by listening and providing encouragement and support.

There are benefits also for the mentor. Some simply gain satisfaction from helping others reach their potential, but mentoring also sharpens problem-solving, communication and training skills, and fosters a sense of achievement within the mentor's own career.

The mentor need not be the team leader, but the team leader can foster a system of mentoring within the team, pairing less skilled and experienced people with more skilled and experienced colleagues.

Aspects of the mentoring relationship

The mentoring relationship should foster openness, trust and mutual respect between the two people involved. A mentor can help an individual to reflect, adapt and explore new approaches. They should give constructive feedback, offer practical advice and help the learner develop their unique skills and attributes.

Key aspects of effective mentoring relationships are shown below.

Characteristics of a good mentor

A good mentor is someone who:
- has life and work experience that relates to the learner's concerns
- is a good listener
- has strong interpersonal skills – particularly understanding and sensitivity
- can provide constructive, candid feedback as well as encouragement and advice
- respects confidentiality and engenders trust.

Willingness to participate

Both the mentor and the learner must be willing to participate in the process. Mentoring is not effective if the two people involved simply do not get along. The mentor and learner should agree to a set of ground rules that include confidentiality and how and when to meet expectations and objectives. As a manager, you should know when the formal relationship is no longer necessary or is ineffective.

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Support for learning

A successful workplace mentoring relationship helps the learner to:

- clarify the goals and requirements of the organisation and the workplace
- develop competencies
- improve communication
- increase motivation and productivity
- enhance self-confidence and self-esteem
- share experiences.

Example: a manager initiates a mentoring relationship

Kamila has been promoted to the role of personal assistant but is having difficulty meeting expectations. The role is a senior one that calls for strong organisational skills and the ability to communicate with board members and important business contacts. Kamila does not seem to be focusing on the detail of her work or dealing with contacts with the expected level of professionalism. The manager asks Shane, a senior staff member who has had years of experience assisting top-level executives, to act as a mentor to Kamila.

Through the mentoring relationship, Kamila is able to develop a more organised approach to her responsibilities, paying attention to deadlines and the quality of her work. Shane is also able to guide Kamila in adapting to the cultural fit required of the role, learning how to interact with the wide variety of people she deals with.

Practice task 10

1. Describe three ways of setting a good example for your team members.

2. Describe three ways that you believe team members can set good examples.

Summary

1. People who are treated considerately tend to respond with loyalty and enthusiasm, have high levels of job satisfaction and self-esteem, and display strong commitment to achieving mutual work objectives.

2. Organisations develop statements or charters setting out their core values and the ways they do business. Business standards may include a vision statement, a mission statement, a customer service charter and a brand.

3. Organisations have other standards they must follow. They must comply with the relevant standards expressed in legislation and regulations affecting their operation. Written, implied and legislative standards generally fall into the categories of social, ethical or business standards.

4. A frontline manager needs to direct team members to act in accordance with the organisation's policies and procedures.

5. Organisational culture has a major impact on workplace productivity and relationships.

6. Mentoring can help an individual to reflect, adapt and explore new approaches.

Learning checkpoint 2
Develop trust and confidence as a leader

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in developing trust and confidence as leader.

Develop a strategy to help develop trust and confidence with your manager, your team, others in the organisation and your external customers.

Provide a plan of your strategy that demonstrates how you would:

- show integrity, respect and empathy to colleagues
- show integrity, respect and empathy to external customers
- use the organisation's social, ethical and business standards to develop and maintain effective relationships
- gain and maintain the trust and confidence of colleagues, customers and suppliers
- adjust your interpersonal styles and methods to meet the organisation's social and cultural environment
- encourage team members to follow examples set by the organisation, by you and by other staff.

Make sure you include:

- how you could improve your skills
- a list of people who may be able to help you implement this strategy; for example, experts, mentors
- a list of relevant books, magazine articles or websites you could use to help you understand and improve trust and confidence.
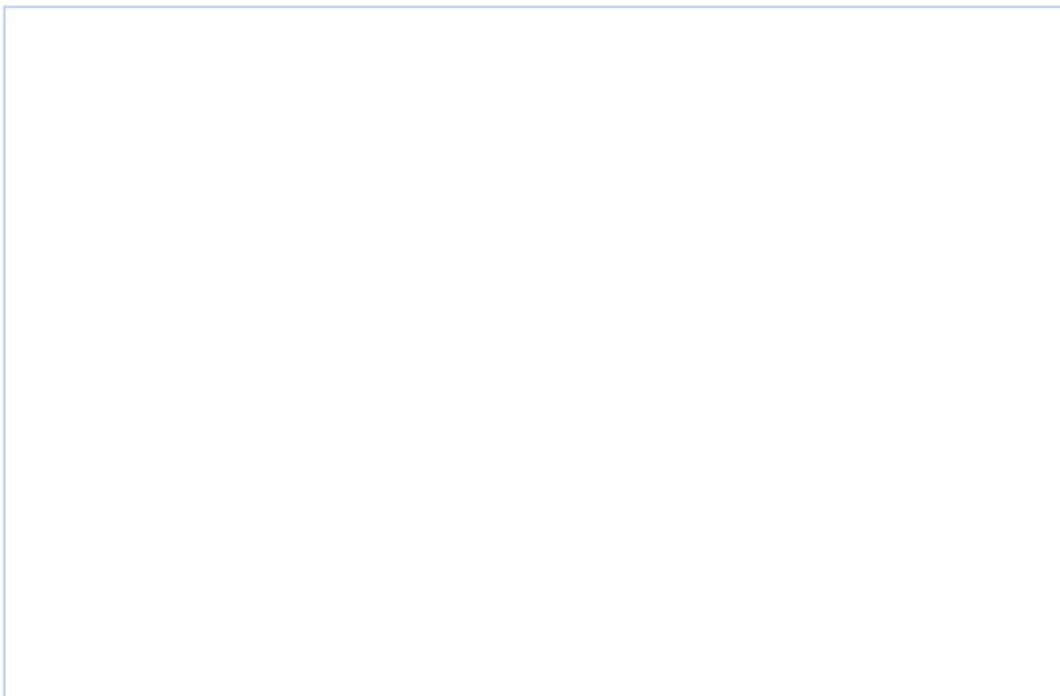
Topic 3
Develop and maintain networks and relationships

A network is a system of interconnected people and organisations. The key to establishing beneficial networks lies not so much in being well connected, but in understanding the way professional relationships work and knowing how to build and use a network. The ability to build and maintain productive relationships is vital in the business world. The contacts you form not only benefit your organisation, but also have the potential to enhance your personal career prospects.

In this topic you will learn how to:

3A   Use networks to identify and build relationships

3B   Use networks and other work relationships to provide identifiable benefits for the team and organisation

3A | Use networks to identify and build relationships

Networking involves developing and maintaining connections for mutual benefit. It is the process of making and using a number of contacts – whether for business, professional development, personal or social purposes. It is founded on the human instinct to connect with people, share what you know and find strength in numbers. Whenever you ask others for advice or suggestions, such as the name of a good accountant or whether a movie is worth seeing, or when you make friends through other people, you are networking.

When you network, you are building a relationship with another person to enable you both to benefit by exchanging ideas and information, promoting each other's interests and gaining further contacts. Networking should not be confined to only those moments when you want something from someone, but continually developed to share information and widen your knowledge base.

Types of networks

Your networks can be:

- internal or external to your workplace
- informal or formal
- structured or unstructured
- with individuals or groups of people.

The process of building networks

The process of building networks is a little like a series of spider webs, with ever-increasing circles of interconnected threads. Each thread is an existing contact and through that thread you can connect with other threads and other webs.

Each person has a unique circle of people they are connected with in some way. By communicating with a person within that circle, you can use them as a source of information, support, ideas and further referrals. The person you are networking with has their own circle of contacts that you can connect with through the mutual contact.

As a starting point, network within your own workplace and ask people questions about their experience and expertise. Then expand your sphere of influence.

Here are some people who may be involved in the process of building your network.

People in your workplace

Clubs and associations

Former colleagues and teachers

Family, friends and neighbours

Service providers; for example, doctors, tradespeople

People in your community

Clients and business contacts

Practice task 11

Match the following examples of networks to the type of network in the table that describes them best.

Examples:

- A workplace advisory board
- People who follow a football team
- An association of tennis clubs
- Small groups who work together in a large car racing team
- Parents of children who play in a children's soccer team
- A work team

Type of network	Example
Internal to a workplace	
External to a workplace	
Informal	
Structured	
Individuals	
Groups of people	

3B Use networks and other work relationships to provide identifiable benefits for the team and organisation

Used effectively, networking has a significant impact on almost every aspect of business operations.

Here are some benefits of networking.

Benefits of networking
Networks provide sources of information about developments in the industry, marketplace, wider community and general business world, both nationally and globally.
Networks offer opportunities to do business with a broader circle of customers, in new regions and in different ways.
Networks tap into ideas about new services, products and ways of doing things.
Networks grant access to industry expertise, new contacts and information not easily obtained.
Networks provide support and assistance on issues you or the organisation are grappling with.
Networks present opportunities for beneficial partnerships and supply arrangements with other organisations or groups.

Example: how to take advantage of networking benefits

Derek	Derek meets up with some former colleagues, to keep in touch. They talk about the work they are currently involved in and Derek finds out about a tender for work in South-East Asia before it is advertised in the media.
Julia	Julia manages a small business. Through a mutual contact, she is introduced to a member of an exclusive business networking group and is invited to attend a breakfast function. She exchanges business cards with several people and is able to follow up and arrange some meetings to discuss future business opportunities.
Dimitriou	Dimitriou, an engineer, attends an industry conference. He learns about a new financial management software program that is very cost-efficient and can save many hours of work. He tells his employer about it, obtains more details and they investigate further. They eventually purchase the program and are very happy with the results.
Aisha	Aisha's company needs to fill a vacancy in its busy call centre before the holiday season. Aisha has recently been approached by a friend who is seeking employment in customer service. She encourages her friend to contact the call centre manager. Without having to advertise, Aisha's company gains a skilled employee and her friend gains a job.
Heather	Heather's organisation is involved in a contractual dispute with a supplier. The company has not encountered this problem before, but Heather's former employer wnet through a similar process. She contacts him and he provides useful advice, eventually referring Heather's employer to an appropriate legal adviser.
Food processor group	A group of food processors who meet through an industry association decide to form a cooperative group for purchasing fresh produce direct from farmers. They use their networks to purchase collectively, saving valuable time and money.

Benefits of networks

Small-business expert Frank Sonnenberg summarised the many benefits to be gained from having a good network into three main groups: referrals, leads and relationships.

Referrals arise when your contacts know you, your business and/or your product well and voluntarily promote this information to others. This is often referred to as becoming better known by 'word of mouth'.

Leads can provide links to other opportunities. For example, a property developer may know good architects and alert them to future developments where architectural services will be in demand.

Relationships develop when there is a need that is satisfied on an ongoing basis by a network contact. For example, a small business may develop a relationship with a client who is then able to draw on the expertise of the business when needed. The client may in turn refer the business to others and the business may obtain more clients as a result. The business develops experience in relationship management and can then apply this to developing further relationships.

(Reference: 'Networking' – http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/small/Mail-Op/Networking.html)

Below are some personal benefits of networks.

Personal benefits of networks
• Introduce you to a wide range of people with different skills, knowledge and links to further contacts
• Extend your circle of business and personal acquaintances
• Provide you with sources of information and a forum for sharing ideas
• Give you access to advice on a wide range of subjects
• Reveal new career opportunities
• Support you in professional and personal challenges

Identify and build relationships

Many people feel they have little capacity for networking because they don't know many people, don't know the right people or find approaching professional people difficult.

In fact, you probably know more people than you realise and the people you do know may be more valuable than you think. Once you get talking to people, you may be surprised when you find out more about what they do and who they are connected with.

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Anyone within or connected to an industry can give you valuable pointers and advice. They can also introduce you to people who might be decision-makers within their industry.

Develop a list of contacts

To develop a list of contacts for networking, begin by compiling a list of the people you know. All these people have their own range of contacts, similar to yours but including a lot of people you don't already know. These other people have their individual lists of contacts and so on. Whenever you ask one of your contacts to help you, your request may reach more people than you imagine. Once you make contact with one of these people, you gain access to their list and can make yourself valuable by providing access to yours.

Your list of contacts may include:

- people within your workplace
- clients, suppliers, contractors and other business contacts
- previous work contacts, colleagues and supervisors
- people you know within the local community
- family, friends and acquaintances
- members of any club or special interest group you belong to
- current or former students, tutors, trainers and teachers
- service providers such as your accountant, lawyer, doctor and tradespeople.

Example: benefits of networking

Carolyn has been appointed to a position that involves contact with the media, but she has no direct media experience. She speaks with a friend who works as a nurse. Her friend puts Carolyn in touch with her brother, a public relations officer. The brother tells Carolyn how to get a copy of a media directory that lists contact names for journalists within all metropolitan and suburban newspapers. He also invites Carolyn to call him if she needs advice or direct referrals at any stage.

Make the most of your networks

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You should appreciate the boundaries of networking and always observe basic business protocol. Networking should never be seen as an opportunity for the 'hard sell'.

If you do not appear to be genuinely interested in the person and are focused only on how they can be of use to you, such as a quick sale or access to who they know, your networking will not be effective.

Rather, it should stem from a desire to give and receive support. Developing rapport and establishing goodwill are essential first steps when you are introduced to someone new. You should try to get to know your contacts on a personal basis. Be prepared to spend time interacting with others and always offer help when you can.

Simple ways of building and extending your contact circle

There are many simple ways of building and extending your contact circle. Every time you meet someone, you are provided with a networking opportunity, so make the most of it. Chat to people at sports games, in your exercise class, at your library or at stores you frequent, and get to know more about them and their acquaintances.

Here are some ways to build your contact circle.

Friends and activities

- Ask your friends if they can refer you to any relevant people.
- Develop a broad range of activities in your personal and professional life.

Colleagues

- Get to know your colleagues more closely.
- Reach out to more people within your workplace by attending company functions and taking part in working groups, committees and training sessions.

Collect details

- Develop lists, databases or other records of contact names and details for easy reference.
- Ask your supervisor or colleagues if they can share their contact lists with you for a particular purpose.
- Collect business cards and write key information on the back of the card, such as where you met the person and who they are connected with.

Talk to people and remember their details

- Adopt the habit of talking to people you come into contact with, anywhere, any time, and take a genuine interest in their work and activities.
- Make a concerted effort to remember people's names and details such as where they work and what their interests are.

Networking strategies

Formal networking strategies you can use:

- Join a professional or trade association.
- Find out about special interest groups.
- Attend conferences, trade fairs, seminars or business functions.
- Target individuals.
- Take advantage of online networking opportunities.
- Develop partnerships with other stakeholders.

Join a professional or trade association

Professional and trade groups are formed to promote the particular profession and to represent the interests of members. Individuals pay a membership fee and in return receive benefits, including journals, access to industry information, opportunities to attend seminars or training and contact names. Professional associations provide an ideal forum for networking, so it pays to become a member if there is an association in your field. You may also be able to attend events as a guest.

Examples of professional associations:

- Society of Automotive Engineers
- Australian Human Resources Institute
- Australian Library and Information Association
- Australian Institute of Office Professionals
- Association of Australian Rural Nurses
- Master Builders Association

Find out about special interest groups

A range of networking and lobby groups have been formed to support those in similar social and professional situations. These groups provide opportunities for networking with like-minded people in a supportive environment. They often hold regular functions and offer assistance by way of mentoring, advice and information. You can find out about these groups by talking to people or doing some research in trade journals or on the internet.

Examples include the following:

- Women in Insurance (WII), a not-for-profit organisation formed to provide a forum for professionals with an interest in the insurance industry
- Newcomers Network (for migrants and other visitors to Australia)
- Melbourne Business Network (MBN), a Melbourne-based networking group for small businesses

Attend conferences, trade fairs, seminars or business functions

Conferences and trade fairs provide an opportunity for people working in related fields to gather and share information about their current work and latest developments. They range from half-day forums to large-scale, week-long events. Presentations and trade displays provide avenues for keeping informed about developments in your field, while workshops and social activities provide opportunities for networking with people at all levels in other organisations.

Business functions and seminars are smaller events, lasting from an hour to a full day. One or more speakers present their ideas or research findings and usually invite the audience to ask questions. They may also include debates or small-group sessions and are often held over breakfast, dinner or drinks. Other functions centre on award presentations or product launches. These events are often held directly for networking purposes, so people are expected to make contacts and discuss their work. Approach them with an open mind and flexible expectations and you may be pleasantly surprised by who you meet and what you find out.

Target individuals

If you come across the name of someone who has the potential to become a good customer or help you with a particular project, you may like to approach them 'cold'. This means contacting them without prior introduction or warning. You should think carefully about the reason you are approaching them, how they can help you and how you can help them. Plan what you are going to say and prepare some questions. Think about the most appropriate way of approaching them, such as at a function, by email or telephoning to arrange a short meeting at a convenient time.

Take advantage of online networking opportunities

Online networks include newsgroups, email discussion lists and online forums. Online networking can provide you with a lot of new contacts, but you need to be aware of the authenticity of these contacts, as well as the etiquette that dictates how you should communicate within the group. Check the FAQs (frequently asked questions) to determine what is appropriate within the site. Be very careful also about confidentiality. Never reveal private information or speak about your organisation's confidential operations online.

The Our Community website offers practical resources and links between community networks and the general public, business and government.

You can find out more by visiting Our Community at: www.ourcommunity. com.au.

Develop partnerships with other stakeholders

Some organisations seek to establish organised and productive relationships or alliances with other organisations and groups in order to achieve common goals.

The purpose of these relationships may be to:

- strengthen links with community sectors or cultural groups
- provide more accessible services for mutual customers
- deal with particular clients in different ways
- establish cooperative buying or supply arrangements
- share facilities, expertise or knowledge
- obtain access to overseas markets
- work in a business partnership for mutual benefit
- provide for people with special needs
- support the local community
- provide assistance to others for philanthropic or social-development reasons.

Use networks and relationships

To some people, the idea of networking has negative connotations based on a fear of people being used. It helps to see networking as a natural process that we all do in our everyday lives – society is simply a vast series of networks. Networking is a two-way relationship: you are making yourself available to others, just as they are supporting you.

Unfortunately, though, there are times when people abuse the process, usually by regarding networking as a self-centred rather than group-centred process.

Positive and negative networking actions

Here is a comparison of characteristics of positive and negative networking actions.

Positive networkers	Negative networkers
• Keep in touch on a regular basis	• Contact people only when they need something
• Build productive relationships over a period of time	• Focus on their own products, services or needs on first contact
• Return favours whenever possible	• Fail to reciprocate when others need help
• Receive help graciously	• Are discourteous or unappreciative of others' help
• Act on advice and provide feedback	• Fail to follow up on suggestions or referrals
• Ask for something the contact can provide, such as advice or assistance	• Ask for something the contact cannot provide, such as confidential information
• Acknowledge a person's expertise by approaching them as an authority	• Make people feel uncomfortable by approaching them aggressively
• Respect people's time	• Expect too much help
• Are clear about needs and requests	• Make vague, indirect or ambiguous requests
• Realise that every contact has something to offer	• Aim only for the power brokers
• Ask for permission before using a name	• Abuse people's trust
• Respect the privacy and personal space of others	• Make inappropriate and unwelcome approaches and demands

Keep in regular contact

Maintain regular contact with your existing networks. Keep in touch in structured ways, such as scheduling when to contact certain people or arranging a lunch meeting every three months.

Develop a reputation for offering support to your contacts when needed. Send information or business ideas that might be useful to them. By becoming known as a resource for others, you encourage people to remember you and to turn to you for ideas and contact names. This shows your commitment to two-way networking and increases your own chances of being offered help and opportunities.

Join social groups

Be clear about your networking goals so the groups you choose help you find what you are looking for. Most social groups are based more on learning, making friends or volunteering than on strictly making business connections.

Visit as many groups as possible that spark your interest. Many groups allow you to attend as a visitor before joining. Note the tone and attitude of the group. Are the people supportive of one another? Does the leadership appear competent?

Take an active part in any groups you are a member of. Go to events, get to know people and consider holding volunteer positions – this is a great way to stay visible and to give back to groups that have helped you.

Conferences, seminars and other functions

When you attend a conference or other gathering, view it as a networking opportunity. Think about who is likely to be there and any connections you may have with them. If you can get a copy of the attendance list beforehand, you can seek out specific people.

Suggestions on how to make the most of conferences, seminars and other functions are outlined here.

Mingle

Make an effort to mingle with different people, not just those you already know. If you are not confident at first, approach someone who is standing alone. As your confidence develops, you will be able to approach groups of people.

Be sincere and listen actively

Read people's name badges and ask open-ended questions. This means questions that ask who, what, where, when and how; for example, 'What does your work involve?', as opposed to those that can be answered with a simple yes or no. This technique opens up your discussion and shows people you are interested in them. Allow people time to respond fully and don't get distracted by other people in the room.

Seize the opportunity to learn

Recognise the value of information that is available at conferences and expos. Seize the opportunity to learn about new developments and the work other organisations or internal departments are doing.

Prepare a report after the conference

After attending a conference on behalf of your organisation, prepare a brief report and list the names of people who might be useful to your organisation; or make your own notes about who you met, their contact details, information you gained and ideas that occurred to you.

Follow up

Phone or email the people you met, say you enjoyed meeting them and ask if you could get together and share ideas; or choose the names of conference delegates who may benefit from what you do and vice versa, make contact with them and mention where you found their name.

Actively represent your organisation

Have a clear understanding of your organisation's work, and your own, and how others may be able to help you. You should be able to easily explain what you do and the purpose of your organisation. You can practise this by role-playing with colleagues or writing down what you want to say. Have a brief script ready, such as 'I'm Kim from XYZ Company; we install computer equipment in offices; I head up a unit that's responsible for the equipment maintenance …'.

Monitor the value of your networks on a regular basis. You may decide to discontinue your involvement in some groups or partnerships that are not providing identifiable benefits to you and your organisation, and focus your energies in another direction.

Follow through on referrals you are given

Act quickly and efficiently on any referrals you are given. Remember, when people give you names of others to contact, your actions are a reflection on them. Make sure you don't act in a way that reflects negatively on the person referring you.

When following up, choose an appropriate strategy depending on the needs of the people you are contacting, the resources available to you and your expectations from the process. For example, if you want to contact a large number of people at once, a group email is appropriate unless people prefer to receive individual attention.

Some strategies may yield immediate results, while others may take longer to produce real benefits for you and your organisation. It may take months or years for your relationship to turn into a valuable two-way partnership. Don't expect immediate results and work on maintaining your networks for their possible future benefits.

Follow through with individuals

For individuals, you need to decide whether to communicate by telephone, email or letter, or in person through an informal chat or a more formal meeting. A face-to-face meeting is often more productive because there are fewer distractions and you can plan more carefully what you want to discuss. It is important to pick a time and place that suit the person you are approaching and to respect their time by being well prepared for the discussion. However, your contact may be very busy or at a distance. If you are unsure of how to approach them, send a polite email inquiring about their preferences.

Share information about networking

Sharing information about new networks is an important part of the networking process and should be included in workplace discussion and planning. Work colleagues can provide feedback and ideas about how your contacts can offer support. The information you have collected can be combined with material that others have gathered to create a resource useful for a range of purposes to benefit the team and the organisation.

Information about new networks can be shared in a variety of ways to suit different needs and situations, such as informally at a team meeting, in a short written report, as part of an oral presentation or by entering details in a database that others can access. Be sure not to restrict the number of people you share your information with – your colleagues may have different ideas about how the information can be used.

Encourage team members to network for organisational purposes

As a manager, you have a responsibility to encourage your team members to network for organisational purposes and to support their own career progress and skills development.

You can encourage your team to network by:

- sharing with the team details of what you have gained from networking

- communicating the benefits of networking to your team members

- encouraging team members to keep in regular contact with other people and departments within the organisation

- circulating details of networking opportunities, such as conferences to attend and associations to join

- introducing team members to people who could be useful contacts for their work or their career development

- giving the team scope to attend conferences and events and asking members to give a verbal report when they return

- involving team members in any relevant meetings you have with your contacts

- coordinating a short session on how to network.

Example: the importance of networking to ensure the business thrives

Monty Sacher is director of Sacher Associates, a consultancy that provides performance management services and strategic training and development. While the company is small, it counts very large organisations among its clients. Monty believes this is due to networking and the amount of time and energy he puts into it:

'In fact, I know I get 70 per cent of our business from networking.

'Networking is not about selling. A mistake people make is to only talk about themselves and what they can do for the other person – that's selling. To me, networking is about making interesting social contacts and widening your sphere of knowledge and information. This increases your chances of making contacts that, in turn, can provide you with business opportunities. When you meet people, ask them questions and find out as much as you can about their interests, what they do and what needs they have.

'People let themselves down because they don't see networking as important and don't invest any time or effort in it.'

Monty says that successful networkers:

- see networking as a vital part of their business practice
- branch out by constantly expanding their geographical and psychological area
- are passionate about connecting with other people
- initiate contacts and ask lots of questions
- find a need that the other person can satisfy.

Practice task 12

1. Describe how an organisation can benefit from establishing and maintaining a network.

2. There is a professional association for almost every industry in Australia. List two groups that represent people in your profession or industry, or an industry you would like to work in. Describe how you could find out about relevant associations.

3. Visit the website of a professional organisation you are interested in and briefly summarise the professional development it can offer you.

4. Find out about two forums or conferences you could attend over the next few months where you would be able to extend your network and undertake professional development. In each case, explain briefly why you believe the forum or conference will meet your needs. Ask your work colleagues, search on the internet, contact a professional association or look in trade journals or industry magazines.

Summary

1. The key to establishing beneficial networks lies not so much in being well connected, but in understanding the way professional relationships work and knowing how to build and use a network.

2. When you network, you are building a relationship with another person to enable you both to benefit by exchanging ideas and information, promoting each other's interests and gaining further contacts.

3. Networks present opportunities for beneficial partnerships and supply arrangements with other organisations or groups.

4. Maintain regular contact with your existing networks. Keep in touch in structured ways, such as scheduling when to contact certain people or arranging a lunch meeting every three months.

5. Sharing information about new networks is an important part of the networking process and should be included in workplace discussion and planning.

Learning checkpoint 3
Develop and maintain networks and relationships

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in developing and maintaining networks and relationships.

1. Make a list of all your contacts. Categorise them according to their job role or how you know them; for example, professional association, friend, financial adviser.
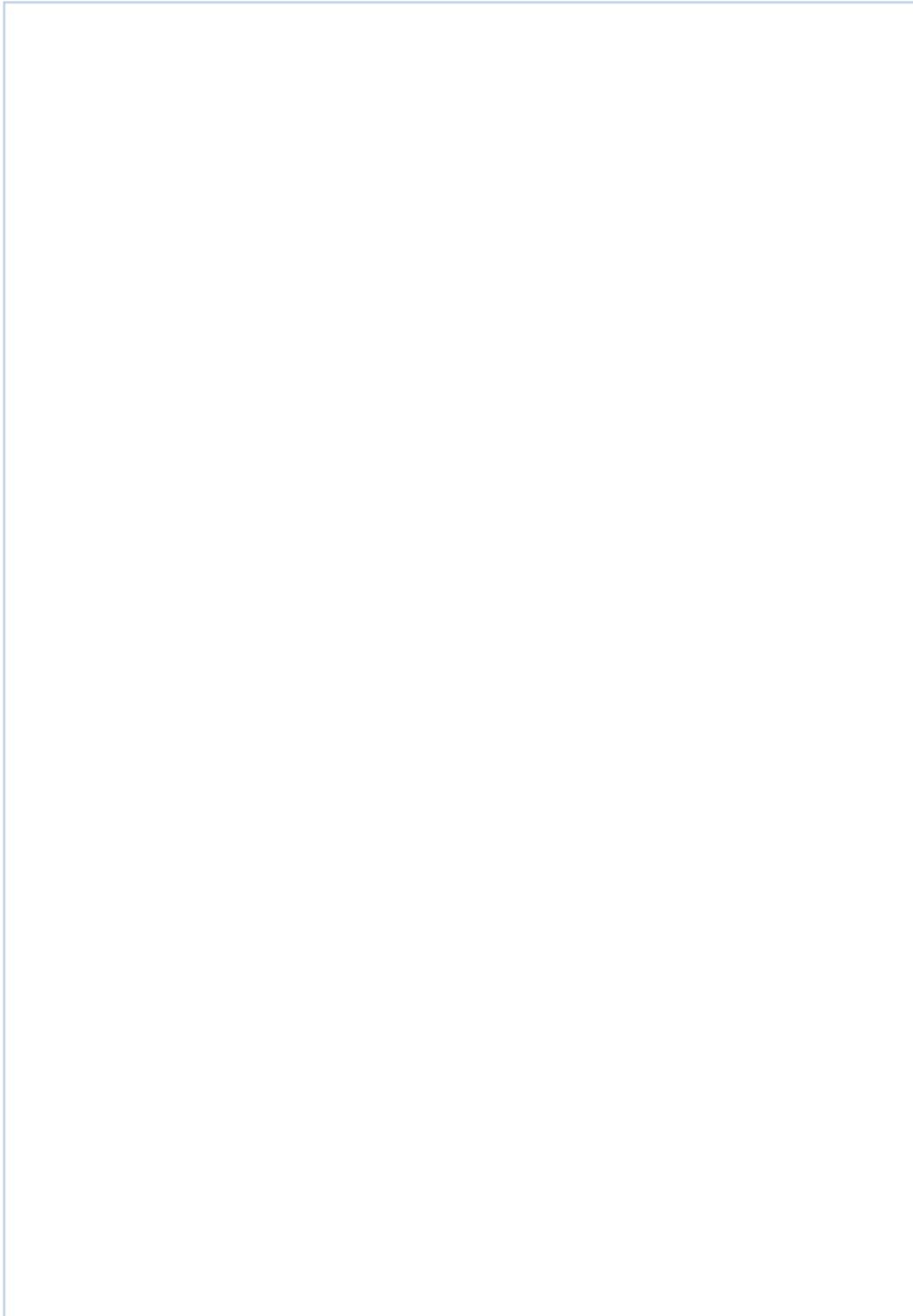
2. Use the table below to explain how your contacts can benefit you and your organisation. If you are not currently working, assume you are employed as a team leader in an industry in which you wish to work.

Contact details	Category	Benefits this contact could bring to you and/ or your organisation	Benefits you could bring to this contact	Strategies to maintain contact

3. Describe the types of contacts you should be developing and maintaining for your organisation or for the industry in which you wish to work.

4. Conduct some research into potential contacts and make a list of them. Prepare a brief strategy for making contact with these people and/or organisations, including a time line, where they are located, your approach and the follow-up you intend to do.
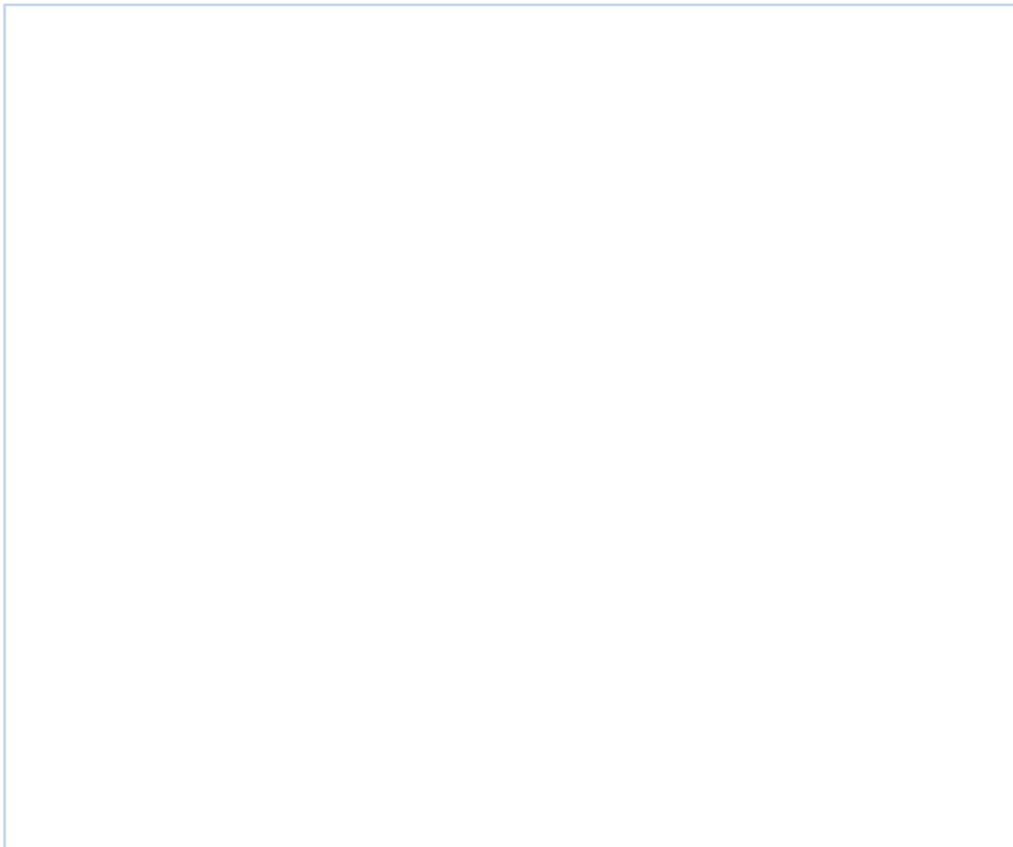
Topic 4
Manage difficulties into positive outcomes

When a difficulty arises within a business environment, it should be resolved with the aim of achieving positive outcomes for all parties and in a manner that minimises disruption to productivity.

The effectiveness of frontline managers depends on their ability to resolve conflict and work difficulties through identifying and analysing problems, and taking appropriate remedial action. Effective leadership also involves recognising the symptoms of problems, so major issues can be averted. This involves training team members in addressing the difficulties they encounter, managing individual and team performance, and regularly monitoring workplace outcomes. The ability to effectively address workplace difficulties is a challenging and valuable skill to acquire.

In this topic you will learn how to:

4A   Identify and analyse difficulties and take action to rectify the situation

4B   Guide and support colleagues to resolve work difficulties

4C   Regularly review and improve workplace outcomes in consultation with relevant personnel

4D   Manage poor work performance within the organisation's processes

4E   Manage conflict constructively within the organisation's processes

4A Identify and analyse difficulties and take action to rectify the situation

Problem-solving and decision-making – ask anyone in the workplace if these activities are part of their day and they will almost certainly answer yes. But while people know these skills are critical to their daily work, many people do not know how to resolve work difficulties effectively and so avoid dealing with them.

When faced with a problem, it is common for people to:

- do nothing, hoping the problem will resolve itself
- apply a quick-fix solution that doesn't address the problem
- blame themselves and develop a cycle of worry and inaction
- blame others and expect others to accept responsibility.

Reasons people tend to see problems as insurmountable difficulties

There are several reasons that people tend to see problems as insurmountable difficulties, as shown below.

Reasons that problems are seen as insurmountable
Many people are conflict-averse; that is, they are uncomfortable with addressing problems with other people directly due to a fear of confrontation or hostility.
Others would like to be able to solve the problem, but simply don't know how to approach it.
Some are unhappy that the problem has arisen and try to distance themselves; they may think it will reflect negatively on them or that their involvement will cause more problems.
A person may be inclined to see problems as bigger than they are and the resultant anxiety can lead to inaction and hostility.

View problems and conflict as opportunities to improve

Difficult situations should not be seen as entirely negative. There are two important things to remember about problems and conflict – they happen all the time and they present opportunities to improve the system and workplace relationships. Difficulty actually provides you with information you can use to resolve deeper issues more effectively. When handled in an appropriate manner, issues can lead to positive outcomes: a stronger understanding between colleagues; more efficient and effective work practices; greater awareness of the issues at hand, and the skills and flexibility to address bigger problems in the future.

Effective problem-solving skills

An important objective should be for you, your team and your organisation to become more conflict-resilient through the awareness and application of effective problem-solving skills.

A five-step process for managing work difficulties is outlined below.

> **Process for managing work difficulties**
>
> ---
>
> **1. Recognise the symptoms of the problem**
> Be alert to early warning signs of potential problems; establish a culture for regularly highlighting and addressing issues.
>
> ---
>
> **2. Identify the problem**
> Gather the facts; determine who is involved and who should handle the issue; talk to the relevant people; establish the causes.
>
> ---
>
> **3. Analyse the problem**
> Evaluate the extent of the issue; determine potential implications; consider the interests of those affected by the issue and its outcome; ascertain the processes that must be adhered to and relevant legislative requirements.

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4. Define the options for resolution

Define and evaluate options in consultation with those at the centre of the problem and any specialist personnel; determine the best course of action.

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5. Take action

Develop a plan of action; implement the solutions within the organisation's processes; follow up to ensure implementation; monitor outcomes.

Recognise the symptoms of problems

Symptoms alert you to possible problems and are evident in changes that occur around the workplace. The most effective way of dealing with a work difficulty is to prevent it from occurring. Prevention is always better than cure. As a manager, you should be alert to the early warning signs of potential workplace problems, both individual and organisational.

Early warning signs of problems include:

- decreasing profits
- lack of communication
- decreased productivity
- increased staff absences
- employees separating themselves from each other
- employees arguing
- employees who are unhappy, late, uncommunicative or unmotivated
- obvious hostility between employees
- increased complaints from employees, customers or suppliers
- flagrant or increased breaches of organisational policy.

The value of a culture of trust and two-way communication

It is easier to be alert to imminent problems and prevent them from growing if the organisation has an established culture of trust and two-way communication. Difficulties can be averted when team members provide input into planning and decision-making; when feedback from internal and external sources is sought and valued; and when all parties are encouraged to communicate openly and positively. At the least, difficulties can be highlighted and resolved long before they turn into major problems.

Be alert to problems with external stakeholders

Be alert to early indications of problems with regard to the organisation's relationship with external stakeholders.

Warning signs of problems with external stakeholders include:

- market developments, such as increased competition, price-cutting or development of new products or services that could threaten business viability
- price resistance of customers
- negative feedback from clients and other stakeholders
- increasingly unreliable suppliers
- deterioration of work provided by consultants
- economic or sociological changes that could affect demand for the organisation's products or services.

Identify the problem

A workplace problem or difficulty may be something that you have personally experienced or observed, or it could also be something that a team member or a person outside the team has raised with you.

Examples of workplace problems:

- Work not completed on time
- Authority disregarded; instructions and regulations not followed
- Breaches of legislation, including WHS and anti-discrimination guidelines
- Clash of personalities
- Difficulties meeting team or organisational objectives
- Difficult customers
- Uncooperative suppliers or contractors
- Excessive workloads
- Low staff morale
- Lack of punctuality; absenteeism
- Poor performance or inadequate work standards
- Breakdown of communication or cooperation between staff members
- Breaches of trust or privacy
- Unclear expectations or insufficient information
- Equipment failures or inadequacies
- Budget restrictions
- Lack of necessary work skills

Identify the extent of the problem

There are many simple problems, such as a malfunctioning printer, and much more complex problems, such as a culture of bullying or harassment, that can arise in a workplace. Your goal should be to accurately identify the extent of the problem using the guidelines below.

Guidelines for accurately identifying the extent of the problem:

- Gather the facts.
- Do not act purely on hearsay.
- Speak with relevant people.
- Establish the causes.
- Avoid making assumptions.
- Analyse the problem before taking action.

Gather the facts

What is the problem? The answer to this question lies in gathering details about the issue, both objective and subjective details. It can be easy to jump to conclusions and base your response on incorrect information, so you should make the effort to gather as much information about the problem as possible.

Aim to establish the facts by referring to any available data or written records, as well as employee comments. Base your knowledge on information that has been relayed to you and on your own observations. Always focus on the facts rather than relying on guesses, opinions and second-hand reports.

Depending on the extent of the problem, you may need to make notes about the known facts based on verifiable information before speaking to the people involved. The questions below will help you ascertain the background and circumstances surrounding the problem.

Questions to help gather the facts
• How long ago did the problem arise?
• When and where does it occur?
• Who is involved?
• Who else is affected by the problem? In what ways?
• Is the problem temporary or long term?
• What are the symptoms of the problem?
• What evidence do you have of the effect it is having?
• What are the likely consequences if the problem is not addressed?

Do not act purely on hearsay

You need to consider whether or not it is appropriate for you to step in and act, especially when the problem concerns a particular person. It may seem straightforward for you to take immediate action, but that is not always the best approach. While a third party may be correct in bringing a matter to your attention, if you take action based only on that report, you run several risks.

For example, by implication you are encouraging staff to inform on each other. This often leads to a climate of distrust and negativity. There is also a strong chance that you won't have all the facts at your disposal and may make allegations that are unfounded or antagonistic.

Those at the centre of the complaint are likely to feel that there has been a breach of confidence, in that people are not communicating openly and genuinely.

If a member of your team speaks to you about another staff member and you act immediately on the accusation, you are neglecting your leadership responsibility of guiding the first party to resolve the problems they encounter. Has the person attempted to raise the issue openly and directly with the other person? If so, is there another approach they could take to resolve the matter?

Example: an employer acts on hearsay

During the course of a discussion with Diana, the CEO, a team leader, Jason, makes a comment about one of his team members, Ashunta, that suggests Ashunta has disregarded an instruction.

Diana takes it on herself to speak with Ashunta about the allegation. Ashunta is shocked because the breach of the instruction was an isolated action to accommodate the needs of a disabled customer. She believes her fellow team members were aware of the circumstances at the time and supported her actions.

Diana does not give Ashunta the chance to explain her actions, but instead states strongly that Jason is not happy with her and warns her to follow all instructions in future.

Jason is, in fact, very happy with Ashunta's overall performance and has since been informed of the reason for Ashunta's flexible approach on this occasion. He did not intend his casual comment to be taken up by Diana in this way.

As a result of the reprimand she has received from Diana, Ashunta no longer trusts Jason and she suffers a loss of confidence that causes her performance to drop significantly.

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Speak with relevant people

Once you have decided that it is you who should handle the issue, speak as soon as possible to each of the individuals at the centre of the problem. Do this in a non-accusatory way, avoiding any inclination to jump to hasty conclusions. Your aim at this stage is to seek the views of those with first-hand knowledge of the problem and to be clear about what actually occurred, taking into account each person's perspective.

Employ active listening techniques to encourage each party to speak openly, without premature judgment. This includes listening to everything that is said with the intention to understand, and asking open-ended questions such as: 'What do you think happened that caused the equipment to malfunction?' Use your communication skills to manage uncommunicative employees. Don't interrupt unless you want to ask a question to clarify a point.

Hints for effectively seeking views of others are provided below.

Hints for effectively seeking views of others
Use your interpersonal skills to ensure your manner helps the person trust you and is inclined to explain the situation honestly.
Make sure you do not betray an employee's trust in any way through the problem-solving process.
Give the person time to express their point of view.
Remember, different people may have very different ideas about what the issues are.
Avoid reacting emotionally if the person becomes upset or angry.
People are more inclined to speak openly and positively about problems when there is already a culture characterised by trust-based working relationships.

Establish the causes

By asking relevant questions and listening carefully to what people have to say, you should be able to determine most of the causes of the problem. Be prepared to take some time to diagnose the symptoms behind the problem.

Causes of problems can be complex and varied. To understand the issues and get to the root cause, it is useful to break the problem down in order to avoid confusing the symptoms with the actual problem.

For example, whatever the surface reasons, the fact that a person misses deadlines is a symptom of a deeper problem. It is possible that: the deadlines are not realistic for the task; organisational processes are too cumbersome; performance standards are too high to enable the task to be completed on time; or unforeseen circumstances have arisen, such as a workplace emergency.

Possible reasons for someone not completing work by the required deadline are listed below.

- Other work competing for their time
- Insufficient training or lack of required skills
- Technical difficulties or inadequate equipment
- Processes that cause delays or someone else not completing work on time
- Lack of access to information that would make their work easier
- Personal problems

Avoid making assumptions

Common traps are: making assumptions based on an insufficient grasp of the facts; an unwillingness to understand the parties involved and their particular perspectives; or a tendency to form generalisations. Many people make generalisations to explain away the problem; for example, 'mature-age people aren't into technology' to explain the problem of an older employee's lack of computer skills. Addressing the individual person or specific issue is more appropriate. For example, 'Margot seems to be lacking in computer skills'. Asking appropriate questions leads to finding out why this is so and what can be done about it.

We are all prone at times to look for easy answers. Always take the time to think through an issue thoroughly and search for conclusions that are less obvious.

Example: a team leader makes an incorrect assumption

An employee reports that some items have gone missing from her workstation recently – some tools and a few personal effects. The team leader assumes that the site cleaners are responsible, as the items have been taken overnight and the contractors have employed some casual workers over that period of time.

The manager of the cleaning firm is approached and informed that he needs to take responsibility for the actions of his workers. Notice is given that if the thefts continue, the cleaning contract will be terminated. Unfortunately the thefts increase and the contractor is replaced.

However, the thefts continue and it is then revealed that a member of staff has not been properly activating the security system when he leaves at night. This means that the site has been vulnerable to members of the public. When the staff member is instructed to follow the correct procedures for locking up, the problem of the thefts is overcome. By this time, the relationship with the cleaning contractor is irreparable.

Analyse the problem before taking action

Sometimes the biggest challenge to overcoming a problem is the urge to act immediately. A knee-jerk reaction or automatic response often ignores other potential responses and can create more problems in the longer term by overlooking the possible consequences of the action taken. It is therefore best to think before you act.

Problems arising within a workplace can range from small everyday difficulties, such as an air conditioner that keeps breaking down, to more serious situations, such as a competing business opening up nearby and offering cut-price merchandise. Some problems seem straightforward but, on investigation, a whole range of causes and implications may surface.

Determine the extent of the issue and potential implications

Until you have fully analysed the issue and its implications, you should avoid making any promises to an individual or a group of individuals in regard to a particular outcome. You need to define and evaluate your options and commence a course of action before you can be sure of what will eventuate and how it will affect the parties involved.

Steps to follow are outlined below.

Who is affected?	**Who is likely to be affected?**
	Consider the needs of those involved, including your own. The best solution is one that satisfies the interests of all parties wherever possible. You may have spoken to the parties directly involved in the issue, but you need to consider whether other people are or will be affected by the issue and its resolution.
	For example, if you grant a pay rise to a number of employees, there will be implications in terms of parity with other groups of employees.

Problem extent	**What is the extent of the problem?**
	How significant is the issue? Are there any wider ramifications in terms of its potential effect on work productivity and the ability of the organisation to meet its objectives? How many people does it affect and in what departments? What organisational areas are affected; for example, staff turnover, profits or public reputation?
	Determining the extent of the problem involves looking at the bigger picture and the long term, rather than just the issue as it exists at the present time, to determine whether any likely solutions may pose a greater problem.
	For example, in response to a series of computer problems, a production company may decide its systems need a complete overhaul. However, with a busy Christmas period approaching, consideration needs to be given to whether this would jeopardise the handling of orders to such an extent that it could be counterproductive.

Problem context	**What is the context of the problem?**
	The context of the problem involves the circumstances that surround the situation. It points to specific organisational operations that are affected by or impact on the problem. The context may relate to:
	• employment contracts or enterprise agreements
	• organisational policy or standard operating procedures
	• organisational standards, such as a customer service charter, code of workplace conduct or ethical guidelines
	• work health and safety requirements
	• legislation or regulations governing anti-discrimination, equal opportunity, industrial relations, financial management, environment protection, trade practices, product liability and privacy
	• effective functioning of the team.

Example: an employer not following workplace procedures

An employee not lifting heavy packages correctly is a problem in the context of WHS procedure. Major staffing changes present a more complex problem. You would need to examine employment contracts to ascertain the conditions for dismissal and retrenchment. You would also need to refer to employment legislation, equal opportunity provisions for staff on maternity leave, company policy and operational guidelines. You would need to consider further implications as well, such as the loss of skills and knowledge, the cost and risk of training and inducting new staff, and effects on ongoing staff morale.

The problem of potential staff changes has a number of contexts: existing contracts, employment legislation and effective teamwork. The context may also involve following organisational procedures regarding reporting problems and following industrial regulations.

In the case of safety concerns or performance issues, there may be specific processes in place covering the period from the time when the problem is reported through to its ultimate resolution. You must be fully aware of these and follow them carefully. For example, you may need to refer to written guidelines to determine whether a breach of a code of conduct has been committed – the breach may then be a problem within the context of the code.

Resolve work difficulties in a timely manner

Timeliness is important in addressing work difficulties in order to contain the issue and to ensure minimal disruption to work processes. However, effective problem-solving does take some time and careful consideration before you begin to take action. Having identified and fully analysed the issue, you can begin to find possible solutions based on the needs of those involved and the outcome that you want to achieve.

Define and evaluate your options

An important point to remember in problem-solving is that in almost every case, there is more than one way to achieve your goal.

Whether large or small, most difficulties need to be addressed promptly. They must be managed to ensure they don't disturb work processes and put operational objectives in jeopardy.

You should always follow organisational policy and procedure, and consult with your own manager when changing working conditions.

Many common reactions to difficulties are far from ideal, such as becoming angry or abusive, being critical, suppressing feelings, withdrawing or ignoring the situation, aiming for a victory at someone else's expense, or placating another party at your or another's expense.

Some appropriate responses are outlined below.

Stay calm, take your time, listen

Remain calm; take the time to fully investigate the situation; listen carefully to the person or people at the centre of the problem; and explain clearly what you expect from employees.

Aim for win–win

Always aim for a win–win situation, in which a solution is reached that satisfies all parties and helps them feel that they have worked together or collaborated for their mutual benefit. This may not always be possible, but it should be the objective.

Consider allowing those involved to work the problem out

Sometimes it may be appropriate to let people work through a problem by themselves and so learn from the process. However, if the problem is affecting the work of the team or falls within a legal context, you should take prompt action.

Problem-solving options

There are several ways to define and evaluate the options for solving work difficulties.

Identify appropriate options yourself and discuss them with those involved. This is often the most effective approach because it gives people choices and encourages them to consider the merit and implications of each approach.

Some possible problem-solving options are listed below.

Possible problem-solving options
• WHS, IT, communication or technical skills training
• Revising communication procedures
• Mediating between parties
• Purchasing better equipment
• Hiring staff
• Taking disciplinary action
• Implementing team bonding/social functions
• Reminding staff of organisational expectations
• Rotating tasks between team members
• Redistributing work
• Changing working conditions, such as introducing tea breaks, altering the layout of work spaces or allowing more flexibility in working hours

Methods of defining and evaluating your options

Some methods you can use to define and evaluate strategies to solve problems are outlined below.

Trial and error

Once you have identified some options for solving the difficulty, try one option and then, if necessary, another, in an attempt to solve the problem. Trial and error can be an effective way of approaching some problems, such as administrative processes or minor technical problems, but it can be risky and time-consuming. Those involved need to carefully consider the potential implications of each approach at the outset.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming promotes creativity. Collaborative problem-solving encourages lateral thinking and helps people accept compromises and work with the solutions devised. Remember to welcome all ideas without judgment. Evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of each solution should only be carried out after all the ideas are on the table. Make the session action-based, rather than focusing on the symptoms of the problem.

Consulting experts

Consult with experts such as a human resources officer, industrial relations adviser or safety consultant to discuss possible courses of action. Depending on the issue and any predetermined processes, you may need to ask the people at the centre of the problem whether they are comfortable with involving others. Remember to respect the person's confidentiality and trust.

Choose a strategy to suit the situation

While reviewing the options for solving a problem, keep an open mind and choose a strategy that is appropriate for the specific situation. There are a number of factors to consider. Weight these according to their relative importance.

Factors to consider when choosing a strategy are whether:

- the proposed solution is possible to implement
- the solution will be enough to effectively solve the problem

- the solution is fair to those involved
- the time involved in implementing the solution is appropriate
- the resources required are cost-effective in terms of both people and finances
- any flow-on effects of the solution are controllable and not detrimental
- the solution has enough support from the various stakeholders.

Be flexible when considering solutions

Some issues can be resolved by examining the possibilities and remaining flexible.

You can make fairly simple changes by implementing some of the strategies outlined below.

Change the information flow

- Do people need more or better information?
- Should there be greater opportunities for feedback?
- Should there be more regular reporting?

Change the structures and procedures

- Should the work group be smaller or larger?
- Should reporting lines be changed?
- Are more staff needed?
- Can tasks be done a different way?

Change the equipment and services

- Is new equipment needed?
- Can technology be used to make processes easier?

Take action to solve the problem

Strategies sometimes fail because solutions to problems are not properly implemented. Your hard work in identifying and evaluating the issue must be followed through with action. As soon as a course of action has been determined, you must ensure the resolution strategies are applied.

You can ensure resolution strategies are applied by:

- developing an action plan and circulating copies to all parties
- clearly documenting the actual tasks that need to be done
- indicating who will do each task
- setting time frames for the completion of each task
- indicating how progress will be reviewed.

Develop an action plan

Documenting an action plan helps you and others think through all the details of the plan and its implications. Make sure all relevant parties understand the proposed solution and are clear about what their responsibilities are in implementing it. Never assume everyone already knows how to undertake their tasks; perhaps training, counselling or further information will be needed. Each party should be aware of their responsibilities and should agree on how the situation will be monitored.

The plan may need to be altered if new issues arise or certain tasks prove to be ineffective or impossible. However, the fundamental intent of the solution should always remain a focus.

Example: develop an action plan to implement a solution

A customer service team identifies a problem with responding to incoming correspondence, queries and complaints. Customers have been complaining about the time the team takes to reply to their requests. On investigation, the manager discovers that correspondence is being lost due to an inadequate mail registration procedure. Customer service levels are declining and this will eventually affect the whole organisation as profits decrease. The manager knows he has to address this problem promptly and discusses the situation with his team. They agree to develop a new procedure and train staff accordingly.

The following table is a record of the team's action plan.

Task	Person	Completion date
Prepare a new mail registration procedure in consultation with team.	Susan and Walter	30 January
Develop an online system for recording mail and monitoring its handling.	Sanjeev	15 March
Test system for functionality.	Susan and Walter	10 April
Draft instruction manual.	Sylvia and Walter	30 April
Approve instruction manual.	Andrew	6 May
Conduct staff training.	Mina	30 May

Address workplace issues at a team level

Workplace issues should be addressed as far as practicable at the team level, discussing them in an open and honest way and without recourse to external parties if possible. However, if your solution doesn't work, you may need to repeat the process of examining the issue and considering other possible solutions. This may need to be undertaken at a more senior level or in consultation with specialists.

When taking action, you must always work within the requirements of organisational policies and procedures and any relevant legislation or regulations. Refer to legislation, codes and standards, including award or enterprise agreements, legislation from all levels of government and regulatory bodies that affect business operations.

To ensure you are following the correct procedures, seek further advice by consulting managers or supervisors, union representatives, WHS consultants, legal advisers and other people with specialist responsibilities within or outside the organisation, such as an employee relations officer.

Practice task 13

1. Prepare a list of signals that may indicate a problem is brewing within your workplace.

2. Choose two of the signals from question 1 and identify the actions you could take to further explore the situation and avert the development of a major problem.

3. Describe some difficulties that can occur between those working together in a workplace.

4. List the sources you could refer to in order to clarify the facts of a problematic situation.

4B Guide and support colleagues to resolve work difficulties

It is not a manager's responsibility to solve every problem that arises within the workplace. In fact, it is sometimes inappropriate for the manager to step in when an issue could be dealt with by the individual or people involved. An organisation operates more effectively if all parties are encouraged to resolve issues openly, directly and with the aim of a positive outcome for the employees and the organisation.

As a frontline manager, it is your responsibility to take the lead in training your staff members and other colleagues in effective problem-solving techniques. You can do this by guiding and supporting those who are experiencing difficulties; establishing an environment conducive to positive communication and cooperation; and encouraging assertive rather than aggressive approaches to communication and dispute resolution.

Train colleagues in effective problem-solving

Team members should be informed of the expectations that you and the organisation have with regard to effective problem-solving and dispute resolution.

You can inform team members of expectations through the following methods.

Staff induction	When employees join the organisation, they should be made aware of what is expected of them in terms of group interaction, team rules and effective problem-solving. You should also reinforce the values and standards that you expect to be upheld, such as openness, respect, honesty, tolerance, flexibility and work ethic.
	You or a training/human resources officer can do this through a carefully planned induction program that emphasises appropriate standards of behaviour and by giving new staff members a folio of relevant material. In particular, new staff must be given information on the organisation's policies and requirements for dispute resolution, as well as information on both organisational and legislative compliance.

Ongoing education	Actively encourage staff members to solve workplace difficulties themselves. You can do this by:
	• promoting positive interaction between team members; assuring your team that you will support them
	• suggesting a direct approach when an issue is raised with you
	• coaching the team or individuals in processes for resolving work difficulties; reinforcing the importance of following the correct processes
	• emphasising the positive outcomes that stem from addressing issues positively
	• making sure information is provided to all staff regarding the organisation's problem-solving and dispute resolution policies, relevant legislative or regulatory requirements, employee rights and management expectations
	• ensuring team members know where they can access information when they need it.

Leading by example	As a manager, it is up to you to lead by example in the way that you approach and resolve difficulties and conflict that arise within the workplace. Your team members look to you for guidance in the policies and requirements of your organisation and regulatory bodies, so you need to be fully aware of this framework and to model the way the processes should be applied.
	You should promote effective problem-solving by ensuring your workplace culture is based on open communication and consultation.

Initiating training	You can arrange for a workshop to be conducted in-house for your team on how to convert workplace difficulties into positive outcomes; or you can give team members an opportunity to attend training sessions elsewhere. Keep a list of courses and appropriate providers. Be aware of the organisation's budget for training and select a program that benefits both the trainee and the organisation.

Reading material	Often a solution to a difficulty can be found in resource material such as magazines, newspaper articles and books, or through the internet. For example, if a person is having trouble fitting in with their work group, an article on group dynamics and interpersonal skills could complement advice given by you or a mentor. Be familiar with material that may be useful and make it available to those who can benefit from it.
Safe working practices	WHS legislation places a duty of care on employers, employees and contractors (and others, including the designers, manufacturers and suppliers of items used in the workplace) to ensure that everything reasonably practicable is done to protect the health and safety of those in the workplace. This means that all parties have specific rights and responsibilities towards ensuring a safe working environment. As a frontline manager, you have a key role in ensuring that WHS policies and programs are implemented in your area of control. Take active steps to train your team members in working procedures and skills that ensure health and safety.

Support your team to resolve difficulties

You have a responsibility to support team members in any problems they encounter. Providing encouragement, advice and help demonstrates your commitment to positive interaction and your willingness to show loyalty and support to those who report to you and to other colleagues.

Make it clear to your team members that you are prepared to support them when they are experiencing any sort of difficulties. Let them know that asking for help is better than ignoring a problem or handling it badly. Encourage them to approach you when they are unsure of a particular policy or process they are required to follow. Make sure they have information about problem-solving methods and organisational or legislative requirements.

If a team member tells you about a difficulty
First suggest that they try to resolve the problem themselves by discussing the issue in a positive and open manner.
If necessary, give them guidelines on alternative approaches that could lead to a positive outcome.
Make sure they know to approach you again if their efforts are unsuccessful.
In this case, you need to investigate the problem and define the options for action to resolve it, using a problem-solving process.

Use meetings to discuss issues and provide support

Meetings are an ideal way to discuss issues and provide support to team members. Regular meetings reduce the chance of difficulties arising and becoming larger issues. At each meeting, encourage attendees to participate by raising ideas and being prepared to discuss problem areas.

Initiate a meeting whenever it is clear there are problems that need to be resolved. Gathering everyone together to air difficulties and find possible solutions within the team is often the quickest approach to assessing resolution options and also a way of ensuring each party is committed to the action that is decided on.

Example: how an open discussion can lead to resolution

Sally notices that two of her team members, Liang and Joshua, are not working well together. This is causing a problem for the whole team and Sally is inclined to blame Liang, the newer staff member, for not adapting to the needs of the existing team. However, after observing the situation more closely, she discovers there is a cultural clash between Liang and Joshua.

Sally calls them together and provides feedback on the way they are interacting, and then invites them to say how they feel about the situation. Both Liang and Joshua express concern that they are not trusted by the other party. In discussing the issues openly, they come to understand each other better and feel relieved that the matter has been brought into the open. Sally is able to reinforce the organisation's expectations regarding mutual respect and cooperation, and to make some concrete suggestions about more positive ways of dealing with each other.

Feedback, training and support mechanisms

Feedback, training and support mechanisms provide ways to support your team to resolve problems, as outlined below.

Feedback

Giving people constructive feedback about the way they approach their work can avert difficulties. Feedback should be aimed at improving employees' work practices and interactions with other staff members. Feedback is given so a person knows why they made an error or encountered a problem. It should be given promptly after work is completed or a problem is identified, at an individual or team meeting or as part of a performance appraisal process.

Training

Providing immediate support, such as arranging a brief training session, can help resolve difficulties as they occur. Afterwards, the situation can be discussed at a team meeting and steps taken to ensure it does not recur.

Support mechanisms

Make sure your team members are provided with information about their rights as well as their obligations. Inform them about services available to them, such as mediation, counselling, union representation, legal assistance, support and advice from human resources and industrial relations officers, and review or appeal mechanisms.

Appoint a coach or mentor

Arranging for someone to coach a team member who is having difficulties in a particular aspect of their work responsibilities can be effective, time-efficient and positive for both parties. A coach can explain how to do something, give the person opportunities for practice and suggest different ways of approaching the task. Sometimes the person may only require a single coaching session. Other times, you may need to arrange for the person to receive ongoing coaching or to attend a session away from the workplace.

Another strategy is to ask the person to 'shadow' a more experienced employee. This means observing how the employee tackles a task. This approach can be used for difficulties relating to customer service or time management.

Appointing a mentor is another way of providing support. Mentors are often used for new managers, and for those experiencing problems with communication or interpersonal skills, or in areas that present particular challenges. A mentor provides advice or supervision based on their own experience and expertise. You can ask an experienced employee or colleague whether they would like to become a mentor. Ask them to explain to the inexperienced person the approach they take with a particular work difficulty or in dealing with a wide range of people.

Show loyalty to your team

When providing support to your team in resolving work difficulties, show loyalty to them at all times. Just as you expect loyalty from your team members, it is essential to support them in times of difficulty. Defend them in the face of criticism from others and provide ongoing guidance, training and constructive feedback.

Practice task 14

Read the case study, then answer the question that follows.

Case study

Costa meets regularly with two of his staff members, Hemi and Leanne, who comprise a small department that reports to him. In one meeting, they report that the organisation's events officer, Sheri, is refusing to assist them in organising a number of community education programs. Sheri believes she should have sole responsibility for arranging all company events.

Costa discusses the issue with Hemi and Leanne, and supports their view that these programs should be organised by their department because of their connections with local community groups. He encourages them to point out to Sheri the reasons that the programs are being managed through their department, and suggests they invite Sheri to organise an upcoming program launch.

Hemi and Leanne initiate a meeting with Sheri and point out their rationale for coordinating the community education programs themselves. Sheri is able to see their point of view and is happy to take on the arrangements for the program launch.

If you were in Costa's position, what would you do if Sheri refused to cooperate with Hemi and Leanne and see their point of view?

4C Regularly review and improve workplace outcomes in consultation with relevant personnel

To ensure an action plan for resolving a work difficulty is properly executed, you need to supervise and monitor the situation on an ongoing basis. Alternatively, a particular person can be designated with overall responsibility for coordinating implementation of the action plan.

Monitoring should ensure all tasks and changes agreed to are completed within specified time lines and with allocated resources. A clear understanding of how progress is to be monitored ensures those involved are alert to unexpected delays or difficulties associated with certain actions or tasks. You can then put appropriate measures in place to deal with any problems.

As the solution is being actioned, talk to the people involved with the implementation and those who are affected by it. This helps ascertain how people feel about what is taking place and whether they are experiencing any problems. If you communicate directly with the people who are affected, you can gain cooperation and identify difficulties before they become unmanageable. If timely feedback is given, it is easier to take corrective action to prevent future problems.

Review team performance

To achieve both team and organisational objectives, you should set measures to track progress against on a regular basis. If people are to perform well, they need to know exactly what is expected of them. Clear roles and responsibilities give people focus and clarify their aims. This enables them to monitor their own performance, take responsibility for results and initiate improvements.

Identifying key result areas is one way of setting standards of performance for the team and for individuals. For example, key result areas for a personal assistant could include:

- preparing correspondence and reports
- coordinating meetings
- handling inquiries from the media and the general public.

Key performance indicators

Within each key result area, smaller tasks need to be completed according to set performance standards and within agreed time lines. Key performance indicators (KPIs) can then be allocated to each key result area to provide a measure of how well employees are performing their tasks.

Using KPIs, the employee knows exactly what is expected of them and the employee's supervisor can monitor their performance against these criteria. For more specific tasks, measurable time frames and outcomes can be established and tracked.

KPIs for a personal assistant could include the following requirements.

Key result areas	Key performance indicators
Prepare correspondence and reports	Correspondence and reports are prepared accurately and thoroughly.
Coordinate meetings	Meetings are scheduled in consultation with other relevant personnel. Agendas and papers are circulated in a timely manner. Accurate minutes are recorded and circulated within three days of each meeting.
Handle inquiries from the media and the general public	Inquiries are handled professionally and politely to ensure that the organisation's objectives are met and relationships with key stakeholders are maintained.

Measures of team performance

The KPI process can also be used for team performance. Involve staff in the process of establishing key result areas, KPIs and specific work targets so they understand what needs to be done and why it needs to be done. When people feel they own the plan, they are more likely to take responsibility for its success and for their own contribution.

Other measures against which ongoing progress can be tracked are shown below. Ensure that outcomes against each of these measures are monitored on an ongoing basis and improvements are initiated in consultation with the relevant personnel. Use your communication skills to implement consultation mechanisms.

Other measures against which ongoing progress can be tracked include:
- regular financial reports outlining performance against divisional and organisational budgets
- sales statistics setting out results against marketing strategies
- documentation of customer inquiries and sales conversion rates
- personnel records, including staff attendance and turnover
- feedback from staff and other key stakeholders
- data on equipment maintenance and reliability
- quality control processes

- product evaluation completed by end users
- general customer feedback on products and services.

Review and evaluation of outcomes

If records are simply documented and filed away, they are of little use in monitoring performance outcomes. You should have an active commitment to closely reviewing the material gathered and using this information to further your knowledge, identifying areas for improvement in consultation with relevant personnel.

Methods of keeping and reporting outcomes are outlined below.

Written communication

Workplace outcomes should be summarised and relayed through reports, emails, memos or newsletters. Follow this up by providing opportunities for face-to-face discussion with either the whole team or one or more individuals. Team members should be encouraged to provide feedback and contributions to issues related to their work.

Manager/staff briefings and staff forums

Find ways of conveying and discussing workplace outcomes with stakeholders. Meetings provide a vehicle for reporting on outcomes; sharing views on team progress; inviting feedback; providing input on areas for improvement; and discussing ongoing work issues, problems and objectives. Staff forums can be convened for major topics, such as outcomes against organisational objectives, employment conditions or WHS requirements and issues.

Incident reports

Clearly outlined procedures must be in place to ensure incidents are reported and documented as and when they occur. This applies to technical failures and any instances of discrimination, harassment or other grievances, as well as health and safety incidents and workplace hazards. In matters such as employment and WHS, it is often a legal requirement to keep precise records and to retain these for a specific period of time. Incident reporting is also a way of ensuring that problems are addressed at the earliest possible opportunity.

Example: review and evaluate outcomes

Jennifer commences work as a coordinator of short courses at an adult education centre. One of the tutors comments to her that he never receives any feedback as to whether students are happy with his courses. On investigation, Jennifer discovers that students are given evaluation forms to complete at the end of each course but are asked to mail them to the office. This means that few forms are actually returned and when they do arrive, they are read by the administrative staff only.

Jennifer arranges for the forms to be completed by students and returned to their tutors at the conclusion of the courses. This gives the tutors an opportunity to take note of feedback and make changes to the course content to accommodate student needs. As well, the administrative staff are asked to retain the forms so they can be reviewed when the next course offerings are being planned.

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Monitor work health and safety (WHS)

Managers and supervisors have responsibilities for ensuring a safe and effective working environment in compliance with legislative requirements. In many cases, frontline managers are held ultimately accountable for taking all practical measures to protect the health and safety of those in the workplace. Consequently, it is imperative that you are aware of all regulations and standards that affect your area of work and that you review practices and measure outcomes on a regular basis.

The primary function of WHS should be prevention. This means both management and staff must be aware of the need to recognise, evaluate and eliminate workplace health hazards at the source, whether they are physical (e.g. accident hazards, ergonomic problems, glare, vibration), chemical or psychological (e.g. stress, fatigue).

Depending on legal requirements and the nature of your workplace and industry, monitoring may include:
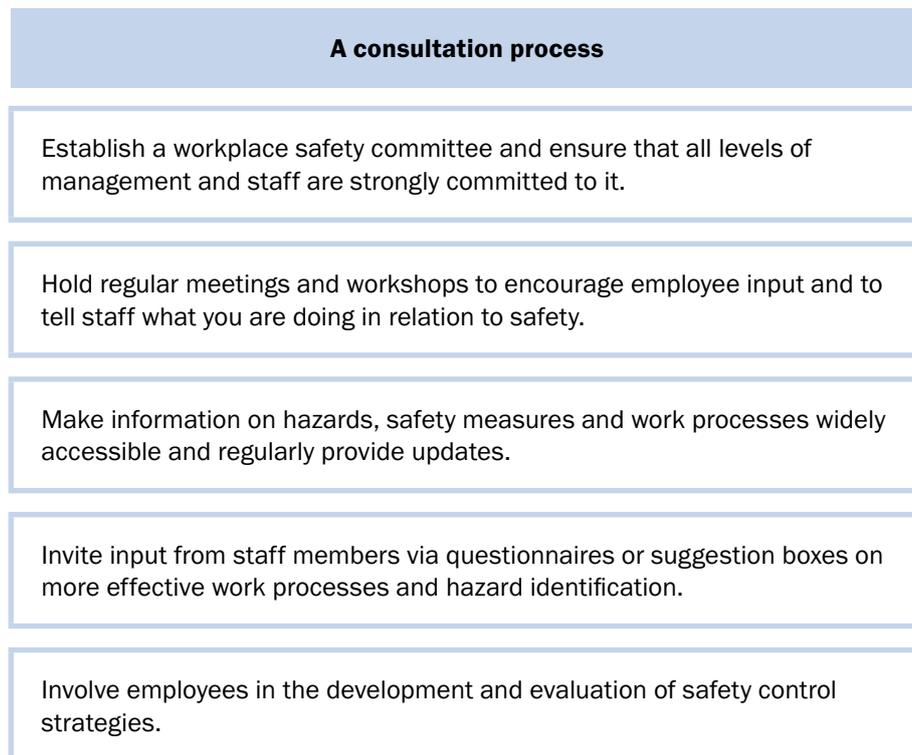
- safety audits by WHS consultants or other third-party specialists
- development of a team approach to ensure a coordinated effort to identify, control and eliminate hazards, in conjunction with specialist personnel
- everyday observation by managers, supervisors and safety committee members to ensure adherence to specified procedures and instructions
- completion of records against organisational and legal requirements
- regular inspection and reporting by all parties on all aspects of the work environment, including hazards and working processes
- demonstration and questioning, to ensure full understanding of work instructions and required processes
- thorough investigation of all accidents, near misses and hazards

- a commitment to following through on suggestions and complaints raised by employees
- maintenance of injury and illness records, and the generation of reports and statistics for analysis by all parties.

Consult employees to improve hazard assessment processes

Employees are often more aware of hazards and the possible ways of controlling them than management. Consulting employees can improve the assessment process, as well as encourage cooperation with control measures that are in place.

A process for consultation is shown below.

A consultation process

Establish a workplace safety committee and ensure that all levels of management and staff are strongly committed to it.

Hold regular meetings and workshops to encourage employee input and to tell staff what you are doing in relation to safety.

Make information on hazards, safety measures and work processes widely accessible and regularly provide updates.

Invite input from staff members via questionnaires or suggestion boxes on more effective work processes and hazard identification.

Involve employees in the development and evaluation of safety control strategies.

Practice task 15

1. Prepare a hazard identification checklist for your team. (You can find examples of these checklists on the internet – type 'hazard identification checklist' into the search box.) Include questions relating to computer use in a small general office environment, as well as more generic ones relating to:

   • physical and mental stress factors

   • ergonomics

   • equipment

   • air conditioning, lighting and noise.
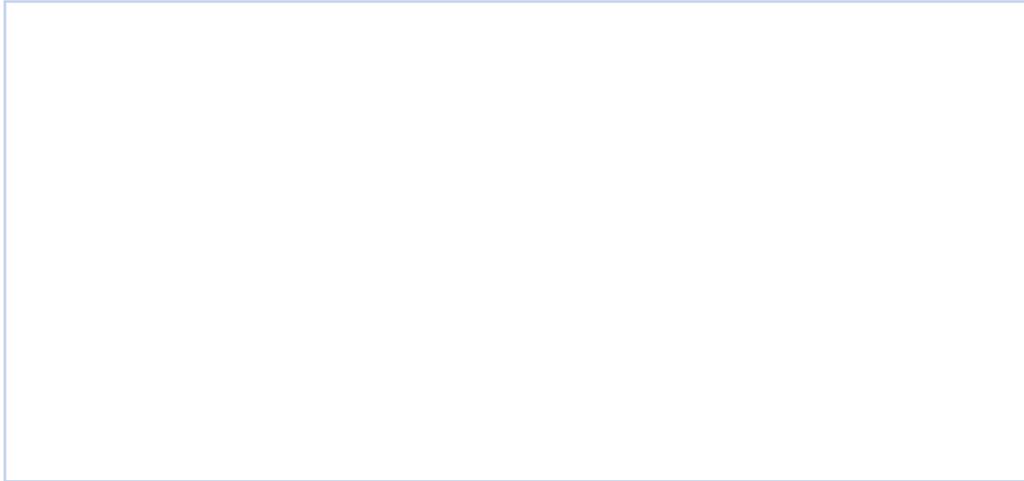
2. Describe how you could monitor the hazards you have identified.

4D Manage poor work performance within the organisation's processes

Effective team leaders know how to help people perform at their best. They see leadership as an enabling function, providing the necessary climate and support for people to do the best work they can. This includes implementing strategies to manage poor performance.

Individual work performance problems

From time to time, an employee may not perform to the organisation's required standard. This may be a one-off situation that can be dealt with by discussing the situation with the person and seeking ways to minimise the disruption to the team's work. For example, an individual may be experiencing difficulty with an unfamiliar computer system. The symptom may be that a deadline wasn't met and the situation can be resolved by providing training and asking another staff member to help out until the person attains the required skill level.

In the case of an ongoing performance problem, the situation requires a different approach. First, you need to understand your organisation's procedures for dealing with underperformance. Organisations should record in their policies and procedures manuals and employment contracts the steps that must be taken before a notice of termination can be given. Long before the situation reaches this point, every opportunity should be taken to counsel the person and to provide ways for them to improve their performance.

Follow correct procedures for managing workplace performance

Bear in mind that it costs much less to develop a current staff member's performance than it does to recruit and train a new person. If you follow the prescribed processes diligently, you should benefit, either by improved performance on the part of the staff member or by the assurance that you have done all you can to correct the situation.

The procedures for investigating and rectifying poor performance are similar to problem-solving steps. If you notice a person performing poorly on a number of occasions, you should follow a five-step process, as shown here.

1 — Observe the person at work. Note the ways their performance falls short of expectations. Refer to verifiable information, such as specific examples of below-standard work, attendance records, productivity levels and incident or complaint registers.

2 — Document the details of the situation. You may need to rely on these notes rather than your memory when you talk to the individual and, if necessary, take further action.

3 — Talk to the person in an open and respectful way.

4 — Investigate the source of the problem by identifying possible causes. There could be a number of mitigating factors, such as technical difficulties or delays caused by another party.

5 — Monitor the situation carefully before taking further action, in accordance with your organisation's processes.

Use effective interpersonal skills to manage performance

Your interpersonal skills are very important when dealing with someone who is not working to the standard of the team. The person may realise they are letting others down, so you must be sensitive in your approach. Never single anyone out in front of others or make them the centre of unwelcome attention. Speak to them privately so they have every opportunity to discuss their performance or behaviour.

If the problem continues and the employee fails to attain the required level of performance, you should manage the situation in accordance with the organisation's processes for dealing with unsatisfactory performance. These may include formal discussion between the supervisor and the individual; a series of warnings after which the organisation can institute dismissal processes; maintenance of precise records; notification of the employee's rights including any avenues for appeal or review; giving the required period of notice; arranging for an appropriate payout; and independent assessment.

Conduct successful performance interviews

Some tips for conducting successful performance interviews are shown below.

Focus on improvement
Describe what the person does best, as well as what they need to do better. Give specific examples. Emphasise avenues for improvement, not blame or failure. Explain any implications in terms of cost, timeliness and the importance of the function to the team and the organisation. Be clear and specific about your expectations and the performance standards required.

Outline performance gaps
Outline any performance gaps or inappropriate behaviour as you perceive them. Base your comments on your own observations and demonstrable facts, rather than rumour, guesses or generalisations. Avoid quoting others.

Avoid judgmental comments
Avoid any judgmental comments about the person's personality traits or circumstances. Focus on the work, rather than the person.

Speak naturally

Speak naturally, in the way you would usually speak to your employees. Following a script or changing your tone will make the employee uncomfortable and less likely to listen to what you have to say.

Ask for employee's point of view

Ask the employee to give their point of view and to identify possible causes and solutions. Listen actively and with empathy.

Ask how you can assist

Ask the employee how you can assist them. Offer appropriate assistance and support, such as coaching, training, explanatory material, supervisory assistance or a change in responsibilities. Look for solutions together and agree on an action plan, so the employee feels supported and is committed to the action decided on.

End positively

End the meeting positively and agree on follow-up dates when appropriate feedback can be given and further discussions held if necessary.

Keep records

Keep a clear written record of discussions and developments. In some cases, you may need to ask the employee to verify and sign the meeting record.

Understand group dynamics

If you have responsibility for managing the performance of a team or an organisation, you need to be aware of the ways the individuals within it interact. This is often referred to as group dynamics. It is helpful to learn some strategies for dealing with different types of behaviour, so everyone is encouraged to contribute and cooperate in a positive manner.

Organisations and teams are made up of people with different interpersonal styles and methods of operating within the workplace. Be alert to the fact that your style is not the only way – and not necessarily the most appropriate way – of thinking and acting in any given

situation. Using other people's attributes is part of valuing team diversity. You can use your knowledge of other people's skills to gain greater performance from your team. Awareness of different perspectives also helps you to troubleshoot areas of poor communication and cooperation and to manage the team's performance as a whole.

Promote cohesion

Managing the performance of the team and promoting cohesion involve adjusting your own interpersonal style, as well as encouraging others to behave appropriately.

Details of some common negative behaviours displayed in the workplace, together with their positive counterparts, are shown below.

Negative behaviours

- Giving too much advice or instruction
- Belittling or undermining team members
- Taking over work
- Attempting to persuade (without listening)
- Censoring ideas and giving precedence to only one opinion
- Talking too much or dominating discussion
- Remaining silent and impassive
- Displaying negativity or lack of interest
- Continually arguing against others

Positive behaviours

- Promoting teamwork and shared problem-solving
- Accepting and welcoming diverse opinions
- Relaxing and allowing for creativity and experimentation with new approaches
- Employing and encouraging active listening
- Conveying empathy and welcoming objective assessment of each idea
- Letting others speak and gently interrupting dominators to call on other individuals to present their views
- Contributing whenever possible and encouraging contributions by asking questions, boosting confidence and giving credit
- Taking on more challenging and active tasks, such as gathering information, taking notes or making presentations
- Encouraging positive attitudes, remaining calm, allowing everyone to contribute to discussion and assessing opinions objectively

Example: a committee takes action to counter the chairperson's domineering behaviour

Helen has a strong personality. She often takes the role of chairing the meetings of groups that she belongs to. One committee notices Helen regularly coerces others into agreeing with her. She does this by dismissing others' opinions, reiterating her point of view and using her position as chairperson to ensure her approach is adopted.

At one meeting, a number of committee members request that the discussion be kept open for a further time to ensure all views are fully considered. They make it clear they are not prepared to allow a resolution to be passed that is not based on adequate consideration and majority views. They decide to rotate the role of chairperson through the members in future and limit each person's speaking time at each meeting. They also make sure every person on the committee is given a chance to speak, with others to remain silent and listen.

Individuals within the team

The team leader needs to be mindful of any instances of self-interest and hidden agendas – both their own and their team members' – that could jeopardise the team's effectiveness. For example, one team member's primary agenda may be to build a high profile with a view to promotion. This person's commitment might be tempered by how useful the team's activities are in helping to their own profile. Other individuals might find themselves pushed aside while the person seeks more recognition. Self-serving behaviour such as this is not conducive to harmony and functionality, and should be addressed. Recognising and praising the efforts of all team members, rotating tasks and having activities carried out in pairs can help resolve this type of situation.

If an individual does not respond to these techniques, meet with them in private. Outline the problems you believe they are causing and how you and others feel about it. Explain how you think the team can operate effectively and ask them how they think they can contribute differently.

Provide feedback

An important step in the process of managing work performance is to give feedback to the relevant parties when required. One of the most challenging areas for a manager is being able to deliver constructive negative feedback in relation to individual or team performance.

For many people, delivering a message that is likely to be negatively received is so uncomfortable that they tend to avoid it altogether. This is not appropriate management behaviour. If you have trouble giving negative feedback, prepare yourself with a written list of the problems you have identified and all the ways they affect you, the team and the organisation.

Some ways to deliver effective feedback are shown below.

Deliver feedback in person

When delivering feedback, which should always be done in person wherever possible, refer to a list to remind yourself how important your feedback is. It is your responsibility as a manager to address problems that interfere with the team's work and sometimes you have to make tough decisions. If your negative criticism is also constructive, in that you try to help improve performance, you will be repaid with team loyalty and increased productivity.

Present the facts assertively

Be prepared to present the facts assertively as well as responding to your employees' concerns. A commitment to consultation includes explaining to employees how decisions that affect them have been made and how their views have been taken into account. Always be prepared to provide reasons for any decisions that affect individuals and the team as a whole.

Arrange mediation if necessary

In the case of a dispute between two team members, arrange for a mediation session and discuss the situation with others on staff to see how they might resolve the situation. Give feedback with all parties present so it is fair and impartial.

Practice task 16

1. How would you approach a situation where you have a team member who is consistently not performing to the organisational standards, procedures and protocols, despite you having approached them a number of times about their behaviour.

2. Think of a team that you are part of or a meeting you have attended. Identify and describe, using examples, two or more behaviours that have caused difficulties. For each item, list positive strategies that could be used to counteract the negative behaviour.
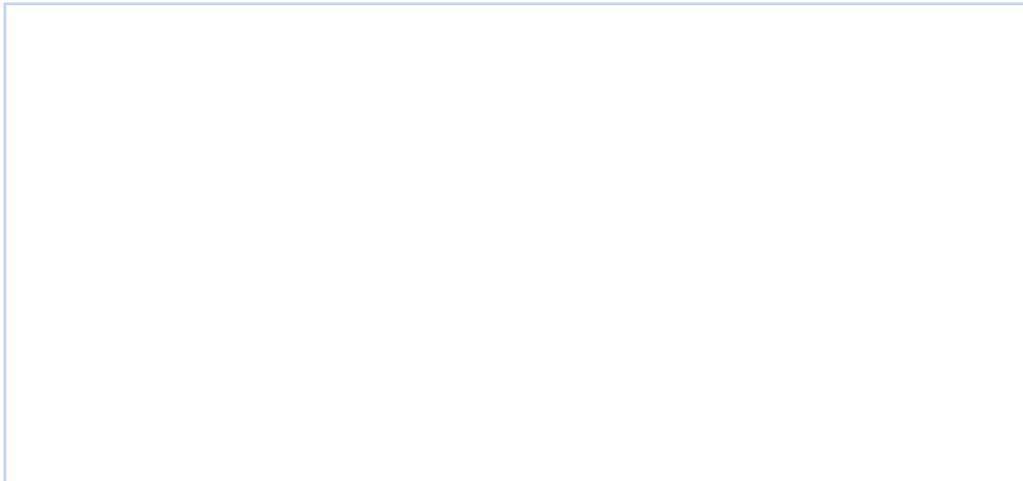
4E Manage conflict constructively within the organisation's processes

Performance problems often result from strained relationships between individuals, rather than deficits in employees' skills or motivation. Interdependent workplace relationships are a fertile soil from which conflict can sprout. Whether the problem is disputes between team members or departments or misunderstandings with customers, conflict is a normal part of working life. In fact, you should be concerned if there is never conflict or disagreement – it could mean that your team is apathetic or uncommitted.

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. However, suppress any tendency to use your authority to make a unilateral decision too quickly or to interfere in a situation that should be resolved between the individuals concerned. Follow problem-solving steps to investigate the issue, determine whether or not you should take action and define your options for rectifying the situation. Your organisation is likely to have set procedures for handling conflict.

Conflict resolution procedures may 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 handling 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 does not 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 prepared to adapt and work as part of a team.

The secret to good conflict management is to handle the situation in a constructive way so it is resolved as positively and quickly as possible and does not become unmanageable. Sometimes a minor problem can escalate into a major crisis if it is not tackled promptly.

Ways to handle constructively are shown below.

Think positively	Recognise others' feelings
Avoid thinking in terms of difficult people or demanding customers. It is more productive to focus on the behaviour or situation than to categorise or blame the person. 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 how others are feeling. Emotions should never be ignored. Give each party the opportunity to explain any hurt, annoyance or frustration they are 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 may be time to take a break from the discussion. Anger and distress don't help you to solve problems effectively. Try counting to 10 to give you 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 this immediately. Put the draft aside until you are feeling calm, then reconsider your words and decide whether you need to send this 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 concerned will be relieved that the matter has been brought out into the open.

Deal with conflict

If you are in conflict with another party, let the other party know they are being heard. Often this is all that is needed to defuse the situation. Showing open-mindedness demonstrates that you are treating 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 simply asking 'why?' Asking vague questions does not help identify the source of the problem and 'why' questions often make people defensive.

Be aware of the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour. You could arrange for you and your team to have some training in conflict management that focuses on the benefits of assertive, rather than aggressive or passive, approaches to workplace problems and conflict. Assertiveness is a valuable skill to acquire. Through training and awareness, everyone can learn to use assertive techniques in their workplace and in their everyday lives.

Example: how one manager resolves conflict situations

Jed is a category strategy manager at a food manufacturing company. He says conflicts often arise within organisations when employees are frustrated with their employment. This frustration arises particularly when employees feel they are being overlooked for promotion, are unhappy about the type of work they do or are experiencing difficulties with other staff members. Their negative behaviour is a signal that something is wrong. For example, their work may not be progressing, the quality of their work may deteriorate or they may become withdrawn, sulky, emotional or arrogant.

'The strategy I use when I have to deal with conflict of any type can be broken down into four steps. The important thing is to understand the other person's viewpoint and perspective. So I sit down with them and ask questions.

'I start by asking them what's wrong and let them vent their emotions, which can be distressing to listen to but is important for them to do before they can move on. Then I ask questions to find out the reason for their behaviour. Getting to the source is vital before anything else can be done. People often talk in generalisations such as: "Everyone ignores me", "I'm never asked to give a presentation" or "People don't respect me". So then I ask them to give me specific examples. In this way I'm guiding them to focus on the issue and not their emotions. For example, why do you think people have that opinion of you?

'I then encourage them to find solutions. For example, what can you do to improve the situation? I encourage them to think of responses such as: "I could contribute more at meetings"; "I could take on a project so I would be more visible to management" or "I could be more accepting of other people".

'I then ask them to accept or not accept the solution. They generally accept if they are the ones who have suggested the solution.'

Dispute resolution processes

Management needs to take the initiative in developing collaborative processes for dispute resolution and encouraging all parties to use them – as opposed to the arduous route of relying on litigation or industrial action in every case. Consultation ensures workplace issues are dealt with as quickly and amicably as possible to the satisfaction of all parties.

Many organisations have a formal framework in place to help parties deal with issues that cannot be easily resolved. The ideal process for dispute resolution varies enormously depending on the size and nature of the organisation, but the following common principles apply.

Consensus

Dispute resolution procedures should be developed in collaboration with all interested parties. This is the best way of ensuring that management and staff alike trust the processes and are prepared to abide by them. The processes should reflect fair and thorough decision-making and sound people-management practices in accordance with the organisation's ethical standards.

Transparency

New employees should be introduced to dispute resolution through induction programs and literature made available on joining the organisation. The procedures should be part of the organisation's standard operating procedures, with details readily accessible to staff via the organisation's intranet, employment manuals, human resources officers and/or workplace representatives.

Functionality

There is little point in having a process that is so unwieldy no one is prepared to follow it. The procedures should be logical, easy to follow and as simple as possible.

Timeliness

This is vital in ensuring that problems are kept in check. A commitment to regular consultation with staff and openness to ideas being shared help to address issues as they arise – or to avoid them altogether. When a problem does emerge, follow the agreed set of actions as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Informality

Issues are best resolved at the lowest organisational level and as close to the workplace as possible, so they don't take on more meaning than necessary. Beyond that, there should be a tiered structure to be followed if the issue cannot be resolved informally.

Referral
Dispute resolution processes should allow for issues to be referred to other departments or personnel within the organisation if required.

Right of review
Internal procedures are not meant to replace the right of recourse to formal dispute resolution processes. Employees (and management) are entitled to retain access to mediation, industrial action, legal advice, arbitration or other forms of external intervention when deemed necessary.

Practice task 17

Dispute resolution has seven important aspects:

1. Consensus about the process
2. Transparency of the process
3. Functionality and practicality
4. Timeliness
5. Level of formality
6. Potential for referral
7. Right of review

Match these aspects with their correct explanations in these tables.

Aspect	Explanation number
Consensus about the process	
Transparency of the process	
Functionality and practicality	
Timeliness	
Level of formality	
Potential for referral	
Right of review	

... continued

|	
1	Issues are best resolved at the lowest organisational level and as close to the workplace as possible, so they don't take on more meaning than necessary. Beyond that, there should be a tiered structure to be followed if the issue cannot be resolved informally.
2	Internal procedures are not meant to replace the right of recourse to formal dispute resolution processes. Employees (and management) are entitled to retain access to mediation, industrial action, legal advice, arbitration or other forms of external intervention when deemed necessary.
3	There is little point in having a process that is so unwieldy no one is prepared to follow it. The procedures should be logical, easy to follow and as simple as possible.
4	Dispute resolution procedures should be developed in collaboration with all interested parties. This is the best way of ensuring that management and staff alike trust the processes and are prepared to abide by them. The processes should reflect fair and thorough decision-making and sound people-management practices in accordance with the organisation's ethical standards.
5	Dispute resolution processes should allow for issues to be referred to other departments or personnel within the organisation if required.
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7	New employees should be introduced to dispute resolution through induction programs and literature made available on joining the organisation. The procedures should be part of the organisation's standard operating procedures, with details readily accessible to staff via the organisation's intranet, employment manuals, human resources officers and/or workplace representatives.

Summary

1. The most effective way of dealing with a work difficulty is to prevent it from occurring.

2. When team members provide input into planning and decision-making, when feedback from internal and external sources is sought and valued, and when all parties are encouraged to communicate openly and positively, difficulties can often be averted.

3. A workplace problem or difficulty may be something that you have personally experienced or observed, or it could be something that a team member or a person outside the team has raised with you.

4. Think before you act.

5. Determining the extent of the problem involves looking at the bigger picture and the long-term consequences, rather than just at the issue as it exists, to determine whether any likely solutions could pose an even greater problem.

6. Always aim for a win–win situation, in which a solution is reached that satisfies all parties and helps them feel that they have worked together or collaborated for their mutual benefit.

7. To ensure an action plan for resolving a work difficulty is properly executed, you need to supervise and monitor the situation on an ongoing basis.

8. Effective team leaders see leadership as an enabling function, providing the necessary climate and support for people to do the best work they can. This includes implementing strategies to manage poor performance.

9. Conflict should be dealt with sensitively and quickly, following a dispute resolution process.

Learning checkpoint 4
Manage difficulties into positive outcomes

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in managing difficulties into positive outcomes.

1. Choose and write down a situation you have managed that involved conflict or a dispute resulting from misunderstanding, poor communication, work-related difficulties and/or interpersonal differences. This can be from your workplace or a personal situation. Provide a brief outline, including background information leading to the situation. Describe:

   • how you recognised the situation

   • who was affected by the situation and in what ways

   • what effects the situation was causing

   • whether the problem was short or long term.
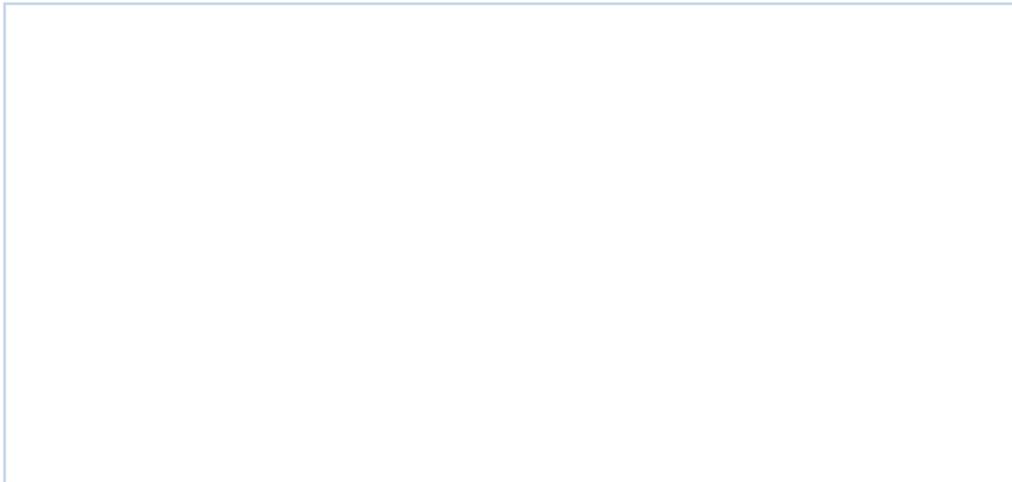
2. Explain how you gathered evidence about the situation, what evidence you gathered and how you analysed the evidence to find the cause of the problem and possible solutions.
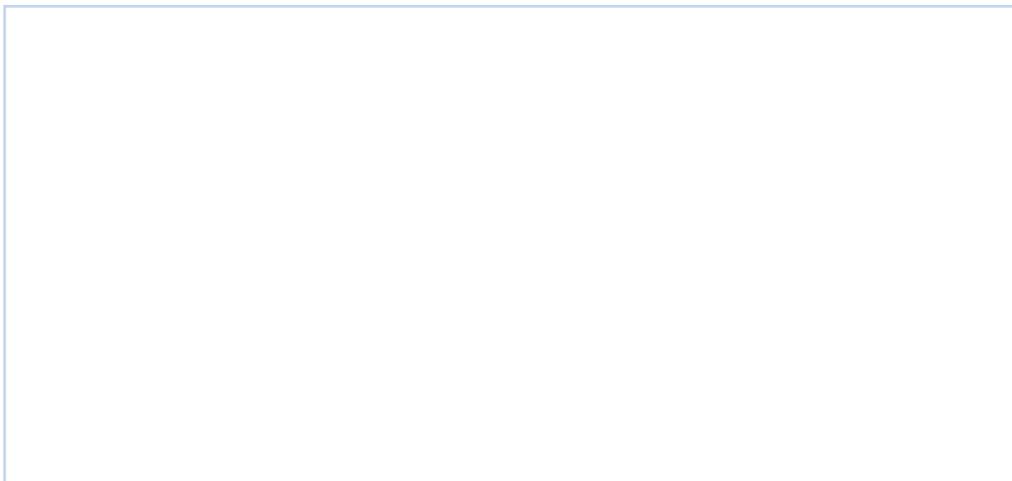
3. Explain how you resolved the problem. Include the action plan you developed, if appropriate.
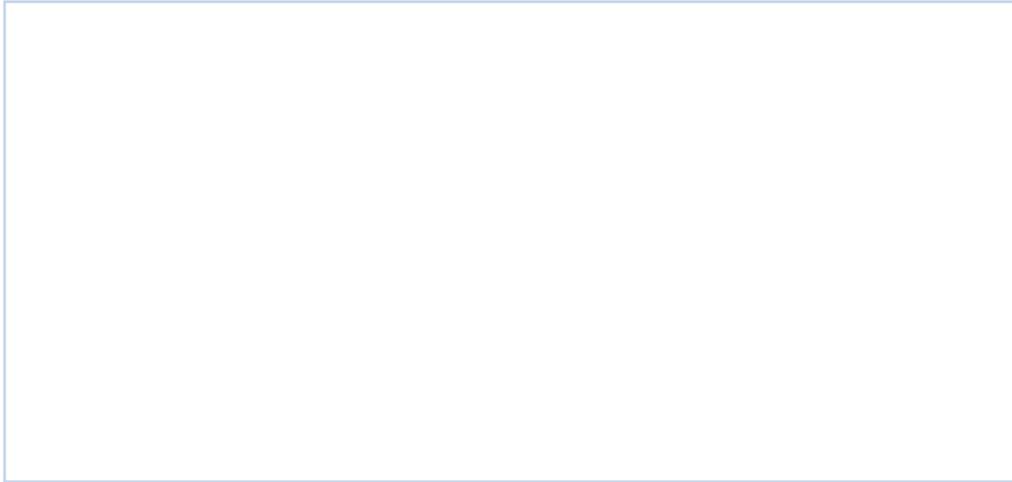
4. Describe the strategies you used to support your team members, colleagues, associates or family in resolving the problem.
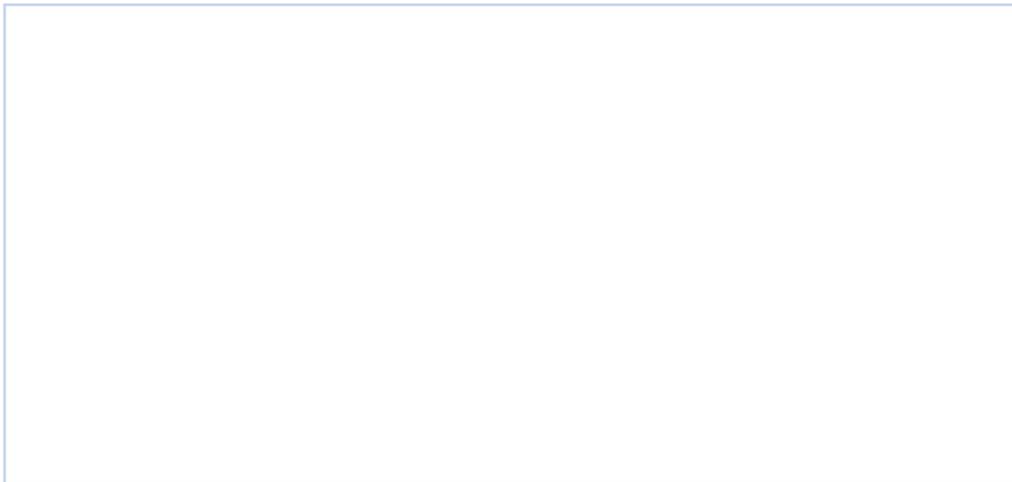
5. Explain the methods you put in place to ensure the problem would not happen again, including the policies and procedures you need to follow when managing conflict.
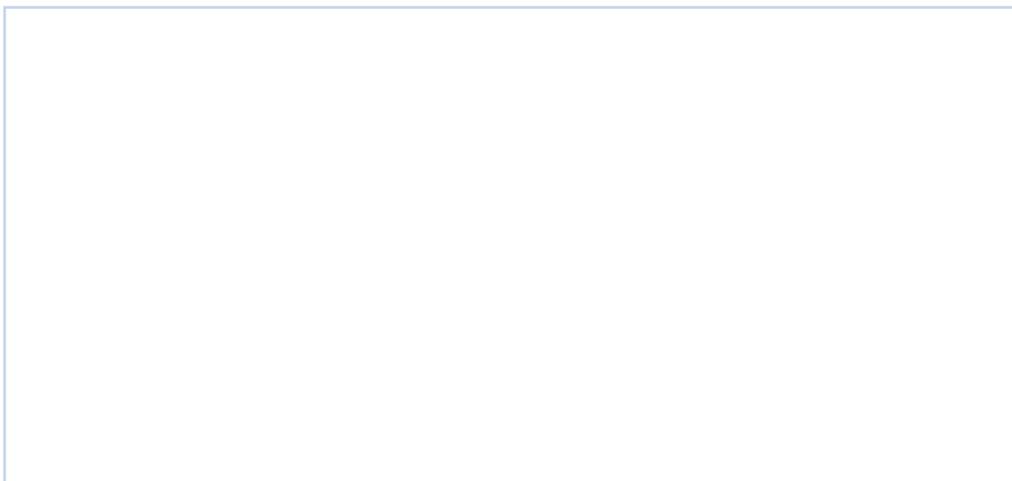
6. Describe a range of strategies you follow or could follow (if you are not currently in a leadership role) for managing poor performance within a team.