BSBLDR502
Lead and manage effective workplace relationships
Release 1

Learner guide

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Aspire Version 1.1

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BSBLDR502 Lead and manage effective workplace relationships Release 1

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Contents

Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *BSBLDR502 Lead and manage 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
Writing	• Prepares plans and policies incorporating appropriate vocabulary, grammatical structure and conventions
Interact with others	• Adapts personal communication style to model behaviours, build trust and positive working relationships, and to support others • Plays a lead role in situations requiring effective collaboration, demonstrating high level support and facilitation skills and ability to engage and motivate others
Navigate the world of work	• Establishes or follows organisational policy regarding diversity and ethical conduct
Get the work done	• Takes responsibility for formulating, organising and implementing plans, processes and strategies that impact the workplace • Systematically gathers and analyses all relevant information and evaluates options to inform decisions about organisational strategies • Evaluates outcomes to identify opportunities for improvement

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 Manage ideas and information	1A	Implement strategies to communicate information about work responsibilities	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	1B	Implement consultation processes to allow employee input into their work role	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	1C	Facilitate feedback to employees	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	1D	Ensure that issues raised are resolved or referred on	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
Topic 2 Establish systems to develop trust and confidence	2A	Ensure adherence to organisational cultural diversity and ethical values	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2B	Act professionally to maintain the trust and confidence of others	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2C	Adjust interpersonal communication styles to meet organisational and individual needs	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
Topic 3 Manage the development and maintenance of networks and relationships	3A	Use networks to build workplace relationships	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	3B	Conduct planning to develop and maintain effective workplace relationships	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident

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Topic	Key outcome		Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 4 Manage difficulties to achieve positive outcomes	4A	Implement strategies for resolving difficulties in workplace relationships	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	4B	Manage conflict constructively	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	4C	Guide, counsel and support co-workers	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident
	4D	Implement an action plan to address identified difficulties	❑ Confident ❑ Basic understanding ❑ Not confident

Topic 1
Manage ideas and information

Frontline managers need to establish an environment that promotes an open, two-way flow of ideas and information. The sharing of information, ideas and suggestions encourages creativity and innovation. An effective manager informs team members about all organisational issues and encourages employees to contribute to resolving issues related to their work. Informed team members, whose contributions are sought and valued, consistently display high levels of loyalty and motivation, along with a willingness to adhere to the organisation's business standards and advanced work performance. Within such an environment, relationships based on trust can develop.

Frontline managers play a vital role in managing effective workplace relationships. Successful working relationships are formed when individuals work together in teams, collaboratively solving workplace issues and contributing to organisational priorities.

In this topic you will learn how to:

1A Implement strategies to communicate information about work responsibilities

1B Implement consultation processes to allow employee input into their work role

1C Facilitate feedback to employees

1D Ensure that issues raised are resolved or referred on

1A — Implement strategies to communicate information about work responsibilities

Frontline managers are responsible for communicating ideas and information to team members about a range of situations, including work responsibilities. Information that must be regularly communicated to the work group includes organisational requirements in terms of standards, values, policies and procedures; and new ideas and information relevant to team member responsibilities.

It is essential that frontline managers possess the skills and ability to:

- gather and organise suitable information from appropriate sources
- analyse and share the information and ideas with the work team
- communicate ideas and information with consideration for a particular audience
- support and motivate work colleagues.

The role of a frontline manager

Frontline managers need a combination of interpersonal, conceptual and practical or technical skills. The key to effectively performing this role is communication.

In your role as a frontline manager, you will be expected to lead a work group or team to achieve its work responsibilities. Your job description will usually include information related to your organisation's expectations of you in regard to your performance and behaviour. Regardless of the title, a frontline manager will have leadership, management and motivational responsibilities included in their job description.

As you perform these responsibilities, you need to consider that, as a leader, you are representing the organisation's values and standards. You are a role model and your behaviour is constantly being scrutinised by the team. Staff will look to you for guidance, support and training, and may adopt some of your habits.

An effective manager or team leader will:

- promote and help team members to achieve goals
- communicate openly and honestly to share information
- make decisions that are in the team's best interests
- encourage the team to take responsibility

- listen to and learn from other people
- know team members professionally and personally
- know what team members want to achieve and their career objectives
- motivate, mentor, coach and trust team members
- help establish and implement the team's values, standards and protocols.

Work responsibilities

Teams work together to achieve individual and common responsibilities, which, when achieved, contribute to the organisation's goals and objectives. All the activities of individuals, teams and the organisation division, department or unit to which they belong should reflect and contribute to the goals of the entire organisation.

Roles and responsibilities within teams vary dramatically depending on the team, the organisation and the environment or industry in which it is operating. In all situations, it is crucial that team members – regardless of their role within the team – are aware of their responsibilities.

Individual job descriptions usually indicate the responsibilities of a particular role; however, it may be necessary and useful to discuss individual and shared responsibilities within the team context. Often, one or two responsibilities outlined in a job description may be particularly important to the success of a team. Additional responsibilities created because of a team goal may need to be added to an individual's job description or work plan.

Individual and team roles

Roles generally depend on a person's skills and knowledge. A person's role within a team is often reflected in the title of their position or summed up in their job description. However, a team role can be quite different from a job function, depending on the situation and type of team.

Sometimes it is difficult to know what role a person has within a team. Their job description may give you an idea of what they do on a day-to-day basis, but their role within the team may be less evident. Some occupations have less of an emphasis on team skills and a role's importance within a team because the organisation is less team-focused.

Practical team roles will vary considerably depending on the working environment. Generally a team consists of a team leader and team members, with these roles applying in many different circumstances, as outlined here.

Building site	**Operating theatre**
Team leader	**Team leader**
Foreman	Chief surgeon
Team members and their different roles	**Team members and their different roles**
Bricklayers, electricians, labourers, carpenters, plumbers	Anaesthetists, theatre nurses, technicians, assistant surgeons

Warehouse	**Bank branch**
Team leader	**Team leader**
Supervisor	Branch manager
Team members and their different roles	**Team members and their different roles**
Forklift drivers, pickers, packers, order checkers	Tellers, supervisors, loan staff, back office staff

Types of ideas and information

The specific information you need to maximise your team's ability to achieve work responsibilities will vary according to the industry and organisation you work in.

Learn about different types of organisational information below.

Policies/procedures	**Policies and procedures**
	Organisational policies and procedures cover a wide range of subjects such as employment conditions, work health and safety (WHS), 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.
	Frontline managers need to induct new employees into the organisation by clearly explaining the organisation's policies and procedures, clarifying issues new employees are unsure of and explaining why this information is important. You may give a new staff member a folder of relevant material, such as the policies and procedures manual, organisational forms and information, or show the employee how to access the information via the organisation's intranet or library.

Planning/ operational	**Planning and operational documents** An understanding of the organisation's goals and its social and ethical standards are essential for teams to function collaboratively. This 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, or other operational documents including the outcomes of continuous improvement and quality assurance processes. A code of conduct describes the conduct expected of all employees and outlines the rules or responsibilities that an organisation will observe when dealing with all stakeholders. Ethics or values statements describe the broad behavioural expectations of employees, rather than specific rules that must be enforced. Organisational standards describe the way in which specific business operations must be conducted and direct what is deemed acceptable behaviour when performing specific work responsibilities. Specific organisational standards may be developed to cover customer service, human resource issues, quality assurance, dress and corporate presentation, or meeting legislative issues. Frontline managers need to make sure team members know where these documents are stored.
Marketing	**Marketing and customer-related documents** Most organisations have a range of marketing and customer-related information that includes 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 carry out their duties in accordance with company policy and marketing strategies, and improve their performance and achieve sales goals. All employees should be aware of these documents, even if they are not in a marketing or customer-focused role. Marketing and customer-related data helps all employees understand the organisation's products or services, respond to inquiries and work in line with broader organisational goals. 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.

Archival data	**Archival, filed and historical background data**
	Team members may need to access information the organisation has filed away 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 used in the past. Understanding the reasons for a particular policy or course of action causes less confusion about the purpose of work responsibilities and 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.
	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 should also be familiar with any pwrocedures they need to follow to access archival material.

Performance plans	**Performance appraisals**
	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 work colleagues and making sure they know how to access performance data on a regular basis helps them monitor their 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 individual on ways to improve work performance.

Collect and analyse ideas and information

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

Information objectives

Understand your information objectives

Before seeking out information, you should be clear about the nature of the information you are looking for and 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 existing material and assessing it for relevance. Material that is unreliable, inaccurate or out of date should be discarded (unless it is of historical interest).

You can then identify information gaps and work towards finding out what it is you need to know.

Research methods

Apply appropriate research methods

Methods used to collect information 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.

Common methods of acquiring information include reading reports and articles; analysing catalogues, price lists or statistics; interviewing, asking questions and sharing ideas; observing and listening; or reviewing and sampling new products or services.

The amount of time spent on collecting information should be consistent both with your own objectives and those of your organisation.

Information sources

Identify information sources

Information can be most easily collected from within your organisation.

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

Information validity

Analyse information validity

You should consider several elements to determine if the information is valid.

- Source – check where the information came from, who created it and if the source is reliable and widely accepted in the industry.
- Currency – be wary of relying on information that may be out of date.
- Relevance – check that the information relates directly to your research goals.
- Presentation – look at how the information is presented, whether it has errors or is poorly organised.
- Authenticity – make judgments about whether the information presented is accurate and authentic.
- Acceptability – follow your organisation's policies and procedures when collecting and using information for work purposes.

Assemble information

Assemble information appropriately

Once you have the information, you may need to convert it into a form more suited to your needs. 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 will depend on the nature of the research and your information objectives; that is, what you or your audience needs to know from the information.

Review your material for information gaps or additional information to obtain a more balanced viewpoint. You may need to gather further facts or ask for clarification.

Your aim should be to evaluate the material effectively, 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.

Internal and external sources of information

You should gather information from a variety of appropriate internal and external sources.

Not all internal information is documented on files so you may need to approach key people within your organisation for advice. 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.

External sources of information include government departments and agencies, industry or professional associations, public libraries, literature, directories, your contact network, or the internet.

Internal information

- Paper-based files containing correspondence, statistical data and historical material
- Electronic files such as emails, financial systems and customer databases
- Online materials, such as your organisation's intranet
- Internal reference libraries or collections of manuals, journals, magazines and catalogues

External information

- Industry-related data and market intelligence
- Legislative and regulatory changes that impact on organisational policy and procedures
- Work health and safety (WHS) requirements
- Developments in equipment and technology
- News items, feature articles and general information relevant to your organisation's operations

Confidential ideas and information

Frontline managers need to be aware of any confidentiality or privacy issues affecting staff and external customers when reviewing or handling information. Some ideas and information needs to be viewed as commercially or politically sensitive. The ability to treat certain matters with discretion is one of the traits of an effective manager.

Commonwealth, state and territory privacy legislation governs the use of personal or client information. To read more about privacy standards, visit: www.oaic.gov.au.

If you are unsure about how to handle particular information:

- refer to your organisation's policies and procedures
- seek advice from a more senior or experienced work colleague
- comply with all Commonwealth, state or territory privacy legislation
- make judgments about when to release certain information
- if appropriate, share information in a memo, notice or announcements at a staff meeting.

Legislative changes and developments

Frontline managers need to be aware of their role, responsibilities and personal limitations. Among your responsibilities is complying with Commonwealth, state or territory legislation and guidelines relating to your organisation.

Your organisation should have relevant legislation and other practices embedded into its policies and procedures. If you and your work colleagues follow these, then you are meeting your organisational obligations.

Downloading relevant material directly from the internet is often the most efficient way to conduct research, especially when it comes to keeping up to date with legislative changes and developments. Bookmark useful websites or add them to your favourites folder so you can easily refer to them if the need arises.

Important legislation
Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth)
Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)
Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth)
Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986 (Cth)
Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
Financial legislation relating to the banking, finance or insurance sectors
Environmental legislation relevant to your organisation
Industrial relations legislation and regulations
Laws specific to your state or territory
Workplace or industry-based codes of practice and ethical principles

You can read more about relevant legislation and regulations by visiting the following websites:

- www.comlaw.gov.au
- www.austlii.edu.au
- www.fwc.gov.au

Communication strategies

Organisational managers act as the conduit between team members, other leaders and senior management in the organisation.

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 and implements strategies for the open exchange of information and ideas.

Cooperation, respect, conflict resolution, innovation and teamwork are the results of effective communication and are all pivotal to high work performance.

An open and smooth flow of information within your organisation and team:

- informs team members of the purpose and function of a particular task
- creates an environment where employees can ask questions and voice concerns
- encourages employees to offer their own ideas and solutions
- fulfils your obligation to your colleagues in regard to work health and safety, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination, industrial relations and environmental issues
- upholds the organisation's social, ethical and business standards
- enhances employee goodwill and motivation
- frees the workplace from damaging speculation and gossip.

Identify your audience and purpose

Effective communication means conveying information appropriately using a variety of communication methods. How you convey information after it has been gathered and interpreted depends on its nature and purpose and who it is for. The communication method and content selected can vary significantly between different groups of people.

Be clear about your purpose in communicating the information, and consider the way in which the message will be received by your audience. When you communicate ideas and information that supports the achievement of work responsibilities to team members, consider any specific social, cultural or other needs that may require certain approaches, and adjust your chosen communication methods as appropriate.

Your audience could include:

- work colleagues
- your supervisor
- senior management
- colleagues within the organisation
- people in another division of your organisation
- existing clients or suppliers
- potential customers
- the general public
- specific target groups.

Communicate to your audience and purpose

The following table shows a range of communication methods appropriate to the intended audience and purpose.

Information	Audience	Purpose	Method
Production figures	Senior management, board of directors	To meet reporting requirements	Written report with spreadsheets and comments; a verbal report at a meeting
Information about company history, products and services, policies, personnel	New staff	To induct new staff members	Face-to-face contact, folio of information, group presentations
Details of new work requirements	Team members	To inform and train	Memo, email, group meeting
Warning about workplace safety	Staff members and visitors to the premises	To encourage safe workplace practices	Notices, emails, discussion at a team meeting
Promotion of product features and prices	New and existing customers	To generate sales	Brochures, new webpage, marketing letters
Performance review	Team members	Performance management	Written notes, face-to-face discussions, negotiation
Examples of customer service charters from other companies	Team members and colleagues	To compare customer service and make improvements	Circulation of material, invitation for comment, group meetings

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Information	Audience	Purpose	Method
Customer feedback	Team members and management	To plan for quality improvements	Preparation of summary report, brainstorming sessions
Budget constraints	Team members	To introduce cost-cutting measures	Consultation, memo, email

Choose a communication method

Your choice of communication method will largely depend on your purpose, as well as your audience and their needs. More than one communication method may be necessary to get your message across and allow for discussion and feedback.

Communication involves more than speaking and writing. It should include opportunities for two-way interaction, listening, exchanging ideas, consultation and negotiation, as well as non-verbal communication. It is helpful to invite input from work colleagues when examining the implications of decisions or to involve them in the process to ensure they are committed to the outcomes. There are advantages and disadvantages of using various communication methods.

Verbal – individual

Examples: face-to-face contact, telephone conversations.

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: meetings, discussion groups

Advantages: sends consistent message; provides opportunity for questioning and sharing; provides chance for agreed approach

Disadvantages: time-consuming; cumbersome; different personality types can dominate or withdraw

Written – electronic

Examples: emails, intranet postings

Advantages: quick and efficient; sends consistent message; is visually effective

Disadvantages: cannot be sure message is read; message may be misinterpreted

Written – open

Examples: display notices; instruction sheets; system documentation; reports, minutes or newsletters

Advantages: sends consistent messages; 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: memos, letters

Advantages: can be carefully worded; is direct; allows for confidentiality; is a clear record

Disadvantages: too formal and impersonal; does not encourage discussions

Presentation

Examples: exhibitions, 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 you use writing to communicate, 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 ideas and tips for writing well.

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 side-tracked.

Organise your material. Jot down your ideas and arrange them in a logical order. Write clearly and concisely. Use simple sentences, short paragraphs or bullet points.

Ensure all intended recipients actually receive and read the information. Follow up your written communication with requests for feedback.

Be aware of who you are writing to. The contents and tone of your document must be appropriate to your audience.

Avoid clichés and jargon. Ensure spelling, grammar and punctuation is correct, even in emails. Present your material attractively.

Effective verbal communication

Sometimes you will need to pass on information face to face, by telephone or as a presentation to a group of people. As with writing, the golden rule for effective verbal communication is planning. You need to 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.

To speak effectively:

- be clear about what you are trying to convey and why, so your message is expressed clearly
- do not waste valuable time getting to the point
- prepare some key points beforehand, particularly when addressing more than one person
- be sure of your material and give examples where appropriate
- relate your message to your audience members, their needs and their point of view

- customise your message to the listener's usual communication style and listening skills and adjust your delivery accordingly

- do not over-explain, speak aggressively or use a language your audience does not understand

- be confident and use a positive tone of voice

- provide your audience with an opportunity to ask questions.

Issue instructions

When training staff or issuing instructions, ensure your message is clearly conveyed and properly understood. You must be certain that your work colleagues can understand important work instructions. Seek feedback by questioning and practical demonstrations or testing. Make sure they understand the basics first, before moving on to something more complex. Misunderstood information about work responsibilities can result in lost productivity and may put someone's safety at risk or adversely affect workplace relationships.

When issuing instructions, use:

- plain English

- short sentences and paragraphs

- consistent terminology

- relevant information

- diagrams, pictures or photographs if appropriate

- demonstrations and role-plays to cater to specific needs.

Example: issue instructions

The tradespeople at a railway maintenance centre are given a written instruction outlining the process to replace a high-pressure fuel pump on a diesel engine. The instructors assume the tradespeople are familiar with details of the bolt torque set-out on a separate sheet.

When the pumps are fitted, the bolts are not tightened correctly. As a result, they break, which in turn causes an engine fire. The tradesperson concerned was not aware of the separate instructions and didn't fully understand all the requirements.

The engine fire results in damage worth many thousands of dollars. This damage could have been avoided had communication processes been better. The procedure has since been amended to include all of the torque data in each step of the process. Regular meetings provide the opportunity for questions and feedback from staff.

Practice task 1

Using five different examples from your organisation, or from an organisation you are familiar with, to answer the following questions.

1. What types of ideas and information do you communicate within your organisation to support others to achieve work responsibilities?

2. What is the purpose of the information and who is the audience?

3. What strategies, processes or methods do you use to communicate the ideas and information?

1B Implement consultation processes to allow employee input into their work role

Organisational consultation processes must be developed and implemented to ensure that work colleagues have the opportunity to contribute to issues related to their work role. 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 employers, operational units and external stakeholders so an environment of knowledge and cooperation is cultivated within and around the work team.

Establish a communications framework

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

For example, the finance department advises the production department about budgets and scheduling; the production department keeps the sales team informed of production time lines and product features; the sales team communicates with the service centre to ensure customer feedback is taken into account, and so on.

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. Aspects of a communications framework are outlined below.

A communications framework

Consultation processes are implemented to give employees an opportunity to contribute to issues related to their work.

Feedback regarding outcomes of the consultation process is relayed to the work team and relevant personnel.

Contributions from beyond the work team, both internally and externally, are sought and valued in developing and refining new ideas and approaches.

Processes are implemented to ensure the issues raised are resolved promptly or referred to relevant personnel.

Develop and implement consultation processes

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

The benefits of a consultative team culture are not just limited to the additional insights and ideas generated by a group of individuals working together. By allowing your team to contribute to organisational decision-making, team members will encounter greater job satisfaction and a heightened interest in and commitment to their job.

Consultation processes
• Scheduling regular staff meetings to provide for reporting and updating
• Holding team meetings on safety, technical or operational issues
• Putting into place incident or hazard reporting procedures
• Consulting with external parties such as industry, union, WHS or community representatives, contractors, suppliers, clients, legal advisers etc.
• Conducting staff forums on major topics such as organisational developments or WHS issues
• Posting workplace or intranet notices, sending emails or memos to individuals or groups
• Issuing administration manuals, operational guidelines, or safety data sheets
• Personally interacting with team members, communicating by telephone or teleconference

Encourage employee contributions

Implementing consultative communication processes takes advantage of what is often an under-used resource in an organisation: its people. Effective team leaders recognise that some team members may have meaningful contributions to share in the way of experience or skills that other team members, including the team leader, may not have.

Consultation encourages individuals to contribute and accept responsibility. Management can then place increased confidence in staff, benefit from employee input and notice potential problems that can be dealt with promptly.

Frontline managers need to actively encourage their staff to put forward new ideas, provide comment, show initiative and raise any concerns about work-related issues. You should foster an atmosphere that is comfortable and non-threatening, in which employees shares ideas, tips, work strategies and information. Discussion may relate to a variety of work-related issues.

Workloads and work hours

For example, team members may feel they have too much work to do and are unable to meet deadlines.

Employees may also have requests regarding rosters, leave or flexible working arrangements.

Office environment

For example, team members may be uncomfortable with the air conditioning or noise.

Disputes

For example, disputes may exist 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

For example, an employee may be having difficulty lifting heavy objects or may need an ergonomic keypad.

Employment conditions

For example, employees may have concerns about salary or work responsibilities.

Provide opportunities for planning, decision-making and action

Within a team, members are given the opportunity to raise issues and concerns, contribute knowledge and opinions, and assist in operational, decision-making and planning activities. Involving staff members in consultative groups allows for issues to be raised and resolved promptly between staff and management at all levels. Managers and team leaders need to work hard to foster a team culture where members are encouraged to participate and have input into the team, its outcomes and its processes.

Various consultative forums help people to develop relationships, share information, understand each other's work and discuss issues related to the achievement of team goals.

Forums providing opportunities for team input include:

- team meetings
- one-on-one meetings
- planning days
- performance appraisals
- conferences
- communications folders
- team diaries
- social get-togethers
- email, teleconferencing and intranet sites.

Team meetings

A popular two-way communication method to share information and facilitate teamwork is to hold a meeting. But, as most people know from experience, meetings can be frustrating, unproductive and waste time. Meetings must be well run if they are to fulfil the goals of effective two-way communication. Here are some tips for staff meetings.

Tips for staff meetings

1 **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.

2 **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.

3 **Limit the meeting time and focus discussion on the set topics**

The meeting chairperson should guide the agenda and only give as much time to each item as is appropriate.

4

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.

5

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.

6

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 that everyone's opinion is respected and that no-one dominates. When each individual has a chance to have their say, there will be greater commitment to work decisions.

7

Use visual aids or group exercises for emphasis and variety

Don't overdo it – a whiteboard may be all you need.

8

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.

Purpose of meetings

If you decide to hold a meeting, you need to respect that the people you invite are busy and that the meeting time needs to be spent productively. Ideally, at the end of a meeting, everyone should leave feeling they have gained from the experience.

Many managers make the mistake of scheduling regular team and one-on-one meetings because they believe the simple act of holding the meeting will induce team bonding and information sharing. Yet effective meetings have a definite and known purpose. Before you start scheduling meetings, it is a good idea to think about why the meeting needs to take place.

Motivate the team	**Promote team spirit or motivate the team** While meetings are a great way to promote teamwork, think about what you are going to do in the meeting and what steps or activities will directly contribute to a sense of teamwork. One idea is to get team members to work together on deciding the agenda. Perhaps ask small groups within the team to organise an activity or lesson on a topic they feel would be of interest or benefit to them. Encourage team members to have a sense of ownership in the running of meetings and of the issues discussed, as this promotes interest in the agenda and team operations. Think about asking guest speakers, or ask team members to report successes and share specific issues with their colleagues. Meetings are an appropriate venue to reward or recognise excellent work.
Set goals	**Set goals or devise plans** Planning meetings for setting goals is very important. Understand that this may take some time and that team members will want to debate these issues at length. Allocate plenty of time and consider taking meetings such as these out of the workplace, if possible. Record people's thoughts on a flip chart or whiteboard, ensure everyone gets a say and that all opinions and ideas are heard.
Solve problems	**Solve problems or brainstorm new ideas** Make sure everyone has the information they need to contribute effectively and that they know their ideas, knowledge and opinions are welcome. This might mean organising information packs, emails or copying documents and distributing them before the meeting. You should start the meeting by briefly identifying the reason for it and then moving on to problem-solving or generating ideas. If people want to discuss other issues, make sure they have the opportunity to do this outside the problem-solving meeting by talking directly with you or placing the issue on the agenda of a more suitable meeting.
Provide training	**Provide training** Think about what you want your staff to learn. Is the meeting room the best place for the training? Do you need equipment or materials in order to conduct the training? Are you the best person to do the training or should you sit in on the session as a trainee? Do all team members need to attend? Make sure staff know it is a training session, why their attendance is important, what is expected of them, who will be there (including the facilitator) and how long the session will last.

Strategic planning days

Many organisations arrange time for employees to come together to discuss key issues surrounding the organisation's operations and plan for future action. Such planning sessions may last a day, a week, or more. Generally, they are carefully structured events with a set agenda.

Strategic planning days provide an opportunity for departments and teams to have input into organisational planning as well as planning for their particular section. Some organisations display their strategic plans around the workplace to remind staff that their work should correspond with organisational goals.

A frontline manager's role is to encourage team members to make an active contribution, given crucial decisions can be made at these times that affect all staff.

Strategic planning topics may include:

- risk management
- work health and safety procedures
- environmental issues
- sales performance
- competitors
- future products and services.

Performance appraisals

Regular performance appraisals give employees the opportunity to provide input into the way the team operates and issues related to their work role. It also provides team members with a sense of ownership. Some people prefer to contribute when they are in a one-on-one situation rather than in an open forum.

Encourage team members to discuss how they think the team could improve its performance. Discussion may include suggestions for better planning strategies, or for how staff could contribute their ideas. A team member may believe that decisions are always made by one or two people or that ideas are not heard. Pooling ideas collected from performance reviews can be very constructive.

Team decision-making

The ability to make decisions that are balanced, perceptive and based on relevant information and advice does not come easily to everyone.

Most team leaders or managers are expected to make decisions on a range of issues. Team members need to know how decision-making works within the team and their role in the process.

Different teams will have different ways of making decisions. Some examples of the different ways are provided below. The process depends on the environment, the culture of the team, the culture of the wider organisation and the personalities and working styles within the team. It also depends on the manager's leadership style.

A team may use different decision-making methods in different circumstances. If this is the case, the team should understand why its advice may not be required in some situations.

Scenario 1

The team leader makes major decisions but relies heavily on information, opinions and advice given by team members. The team leader talks to the team about decisions that concern it and explains why they have chosen a certain path.

Scenario 2

The team leader facilitates and aids the decision-making process, yet the final decision is reached by consensus within the team.

Scenario 3

The team leader asks some team members to provide limited information before making a decision. Team members are informed of the decision later.

Scenario 4

The team leader makes a decision without consulting with team members or asking for information or opinions.

Example: establish a communications framework

Phil is a corporate services manager in an insurance company. He oversees the human resources, IT, accounting and customer service departments. He has three staff members reporting directly to him. He holds regular divisional meetings in which 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. In turn, the department heads report to their staff on what has been raised at each meeting. Phil also uses the meetings to report on the outcome of the board and management meetings he attends, and to encourage his team members to share their ideas about improving business practices.

Practice task 2

Reflect on a work team of which you have been a member.

1. Describe the way members were encouraged to be involved in planning and making decisions.

2. Describe at least two strategies that would encourage team members to participate more fully.

3. What are some other tools or activities, apart from meetings, that could provide team members with opportunities to participate in running the team, including decision-making, planning and operational tasks?

1C   Facilitate feedback to employees

One of the most important elements in the communication process is to give feedback to the relevant parties on the outcomes of matters raised. This demonstrates a commitment to keeping the team informed and overcomes the common complaint: 'We never heard any more about it'.

People who do not give or seek feedback run the risk of working in an information vacuum and isolating their work colleagues. This includes team members and managers alike.

Getting useful feedback from team members can be invaluable. As well as learning about what you could do to improve next time, you can benefit from the experience and insights others provide.

Feedback can be given verbally and in writing. It can be public and private, informal and formal. Managers who ensure that feedback is used to good effect in their team will reap the rewards of a more involved and informed team.

Informal and ongoing feedback

Feedback can be sought and provided in many situations, both formal and informal. When you give instructions or make requests, you should seek verbal feedback as to whether team members understand the information provided. Sometimes people say they understand when they do not.

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

Choose an appropriate communication method. A written message will help you set out all the facts, and acts as a permanent record. In many cases, you'll need to follow up with face-to-face discussion. In the case of a dispute between two team members, give feedback with all parties present, so it is fair and open. Here are some more tips.

Tips for providing informal feedback
• Ask team members for feedback on your own performance as a manager in general or in specific situations.
• Team members can give each other feedback and recognition when individuals have worked hard, made an effort or achieved something they have been working towards.
• The team can give itself feedback in sessions that are structured so individuals assess the team's performance, as opposed to focusing on individual achievements.
• Feedback can be sought several times over the course of a project or activity and can be used to check how well work is progressing.
• Key performance indicators are a form of impartial feedback that show a team how progress is tracking against targets.
• Give your team feedback on what happens at management meetings or other projects you are involved in as a representative of the team.
• When delivering feedback, always thank the person for their idea or complaint.

Formal feedback

Organisations use a number of formal strategies to gather feedback, such as the methods mentioned below.

360-degree feedback	**360-degree feedback**
	This highly-structured method of giving feedback involves all team members giving other individuals in the team a rating or qualitative feedback on their performance.
	Sometimes this sort of feedback is done anonymously, and the team members receive a report showing the scores they received on each point. 360-degree feedback can be very confronting and needs to be managed carefully. Nevertheless, it can be a useful too, especially when plans are put in place to correct poor results. Getting low scores from team members can be a real revelation, while it can also be very gratifying to see that your colleagues appreciate your efforts.

Performance reviews	**Feedback during performance reviews**
	Any kind of performance feedback needs to be given carefully, especially if it is negative. Feedback that constitutes part of a performance review can affect an individual's career and advancement prospects and, in many cases, their earnings (if performance reviews are linked to bonuses or salary).
	Positive and negative feedback needs to be given constructively. Try to give examples and to be balanced in what you say. Link the feedback to key result areas, performance indicators or team goals, and state the effect the positive or negative performance has on team outcomes. If feedback is negative, do not dwell on it, but move on to ways you can work together to remedy the situation.
Recognition	**Feedback as a recognition tool**
	For many people, acknowledgment of a job well done, especially in a public setting, is reward enough without the need for monetary or physical rewards.
	Taking the time to acknowledge the efforts of groups, individuals or the whole team in meetings where colleagues or more senior staff are present is an excellent way of showing people that their contribution is important and valued.
	Feedback involves explaining to the people or person involved just what their hard work means and how they have made a difference.

Example: give feedback on a job well done

Harry and his manager are having a conversation about how well they have been doing on the development of a new customer service questionnaire.

Later, the manager also meets privately with Harry and talks to him about the project. She asks for feedback on the work and about what he would do differently next time. She also mentions a couple of areas she thinks were particularly well done and reinforces the major contribution Harry has made to the team.

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Practice task 3

1. Outline a brief scenario relevant to your role, describing a team situation that requires feedback to be given.

2. List at least three strategies you would use to provide feedback to encourage, value and reward team members.

3. Explain why you have chosen these strategies.

1D Ensure that issues raised are resolved or referred on

Managers must develop and implement specific processes to ensure that any organisational issues raised are resolved promptly or referred to relevant personnel. A functional 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.

Identify problems

Problems take on many forms and have various levels of risk, severity and urgency. Typical problems may fall into a range of common categories. These are mentioned below.

When team members identify a problem, think proactively about solutions, or use their initiative to avoid potential issues, you should ensure they are recognised and possibly rewarded for their actions.

People-related

For example, team members do not get along, one or more team members are unusually shy or overbearing, team members are not capable of doing the work, team members are underused, or team members are bored with the work.

Task/process

For example, a process is not in place, a process does not work, or a task is exceedingly difficult or meaningless.

Time/resource

For example, not enough time to complete tasks, not enough people to do the work, or not enough resources to do the work (either properly, or at all).

Communications

For example, team members misunderstand directions or do not read or listen to information, processes are not understood or communicated, team members do not communicate with each other, or feedback is not provided or asked for.

Cultural

For example, team members do not respect and value diversity, or there is a lack of teamwork and cooperation.

Leadership

For example, the team has no direction, the team does not understand or accept goals, the decision-making process is unclear, or team members do not feel valued.

Solve problems

Encourage a proactive attitude within your team. Do not wait for problems to occur that present major operational issues for your organisation and result in your team not meeting goals. Demonstrate the benefits of avoidance strategies, early detection and swift action.

If you have problems you think your team members could help you with, ask them for assistance. You could include a regular five-minute session in team meetings when you ask whether any problems have occurred or are anticipated that might impede their progress.

Have an open communications policy. If team members want to raise issues with you in a private setting, as opposed to a public meeting, they should feel able to speak freely with you about problems involving other staff members or sensitive issues. It is wise to have a management process in place for each of the common categories of work-related issues.

It will be helpful if you:

- know who to ask for help, such as specialists internal or external to your organisation
- know the potential impact of likely scenarios occurring within each of these areas
- anticipate and plan for likely situations that could cause problems, such as team members resigning, going on leave or calling in sick.

Problem-solving solutions for managers

If you or your team's efforts to resolve an issue are unsuccessful, the team leader can explore several other avenues.

How to solve problems
If a problem is beyond your control and will affect your team's ability to achieve its goals, forward the problem on to your own manager as soon as possible.
If a disagreement between team members cannot be resolved, contact your HR department or external mediator for dispute resolution and counselling.
Talk to your colleagues or other managers – who may have experienced a similar problem – to see if they have useful advice.
Do some research or read books about problem-solving, seeking information on tested theories or frameworks you could apply to your workplace.
If your problem is deciding between options, list the pros and cons of each. This can help clarify thoughts and identify options to deliver the greatest benefit.

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 might entail scheduling a day in which all team members gather at a venue separate from their everyday work to focus on group issues.

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

Include brainstorming activities in planning sessions. 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.

Make sure the session results in some tangible outcomes so everyone feels it was time well spent and their ideas were valued.

Planning sessions should always 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 of ideas
- 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.

Involve key personnel or external experts

You may ask key personnel to attend a team planning session or invite external experts to an organisation session. There may be issues you feel cannot be resolved by yourself or your team. If you don't have the resources or expertise to resolve particular issues, you may need to refer them on to someone who does. This may be another manager, team or department within the organisation, or a specialist from outside the organisation. They may provide direction, advice and/or an impartial interpretation of the issue.

When inviting others to sessions, you need to make sure they are aware of exactly why they are attending and what sort of contribution you expert from them. Prepare your colleagues by detailing why you have invited the person and what specialist expertise they have. You may need to seek some of the following experts at different times.

- Work health and safety advisers
- Industrial relations representatives
- Human resources officers
- Financial experts and advisers
- Legal representatives

Informal meetings

Many matters can be quickly resolved by gathering the relevant people together for informal discussion, whether this involves your whole team, other relevant 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 to address the issue under discussion.

If the topic is a sensitive one, reassure those invited 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 toward a resolution.

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

Informal meeting process
• Identify the problem.
• Identify when and where it occurs.
• Consider each person's viewpoint.
• Explain what has been done to try to resolve the problem.
• Reach a solution that takes into account the overall objective of the organisation.

Conduct surveys

Surveying relevant 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 and open questions.

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

Give participants the option of supplying their name or comments anonymously. If names are provided, you may decide to contact the person afterwards and let them know how their concerns are being addressed or ask for further explanation of the issues they have raised. Let people know their responses will be 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 opinion 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 invited to meet and 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

Simon 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.
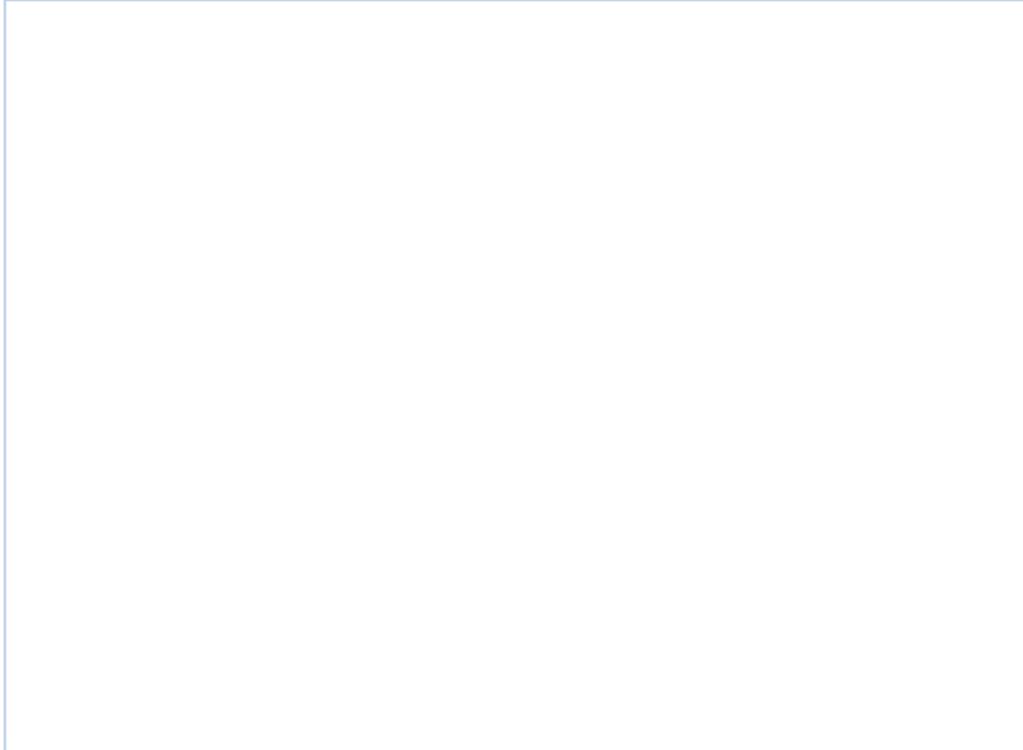

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He decides to introduce a suggestion box, and wants to make sure clients know he takes the strategy seriously. He prepares feedback forms, attaches a pen on a string to a bench where clients can write their comments and provides a locked box.

Simon 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 management of the centre.

If ideas are not followed up, he gives reasons why they aren't. This helps his clients know their comments are taken seriously and that Simon has made an effort to address them.

Practice task 4

1. Describe the processes you currently use to resolve issues raised in your organisation.

2. If you do not currently have any formal processes in place, develop a process that you could use within your organisation to resolve issues promptly, referring to relevant personnel as appropriate.

Practice task 4

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 if they are not in a marketing or customer-focused role.

4. The team needs to be given opportunities to provide input into planning, decision-making and operations. Meetings, planning days and performance appraisals can be used to provide these opportunities.

5. Team members need to be encouraged to take responsibility for their work and understand the responsibility they have to the team to help it achieve its goals.

6. Feedback needs to be provided to team members to encourage, value and reward their contributions to the team.

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
Manage ideas and information

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in managing ideas and information.

Part A

1. Describe what is meant by strategic planning and identify how it is useful in relation to communicating work responsibilities.
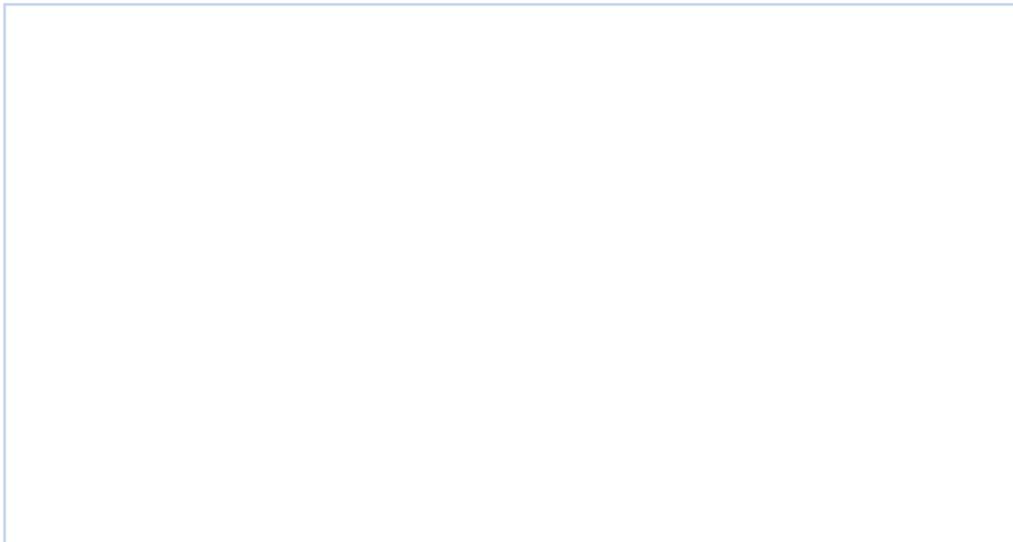
2. Explain how your organisation's systems, policies and procedures relating to communications and consultation can support the development of effective workplace relationships.
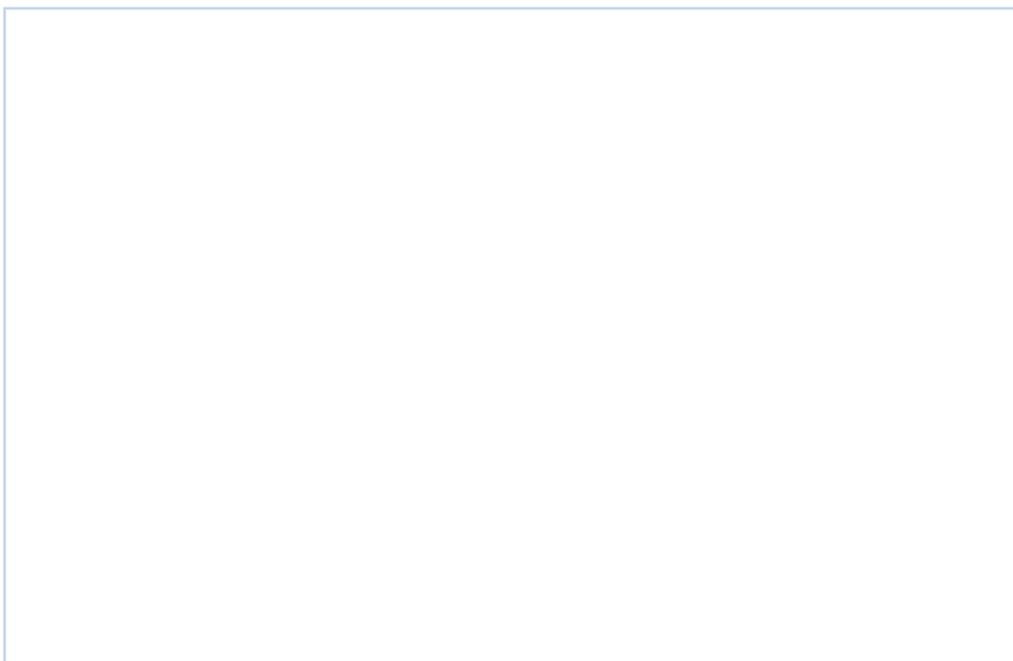
3. Identify and describe five legislative changes and developments relevant to your organisation that you must remain up-to-date with, and communicate to team members.

Part B

Read the case study, then complete the tasks that follow.

Case study
You are a frontline manager. Explain how you would 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 impacting on 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

1. Research the topic. Seek ideas and contributions from colleagues, experts, print-based resources and/or internet resources. Prepare a presentation of the topic for your team, including all handouts and any other relevant material as evidence. If you plan to use an electronic presentation, include your overheads, audience notes, research notes and sources of information.
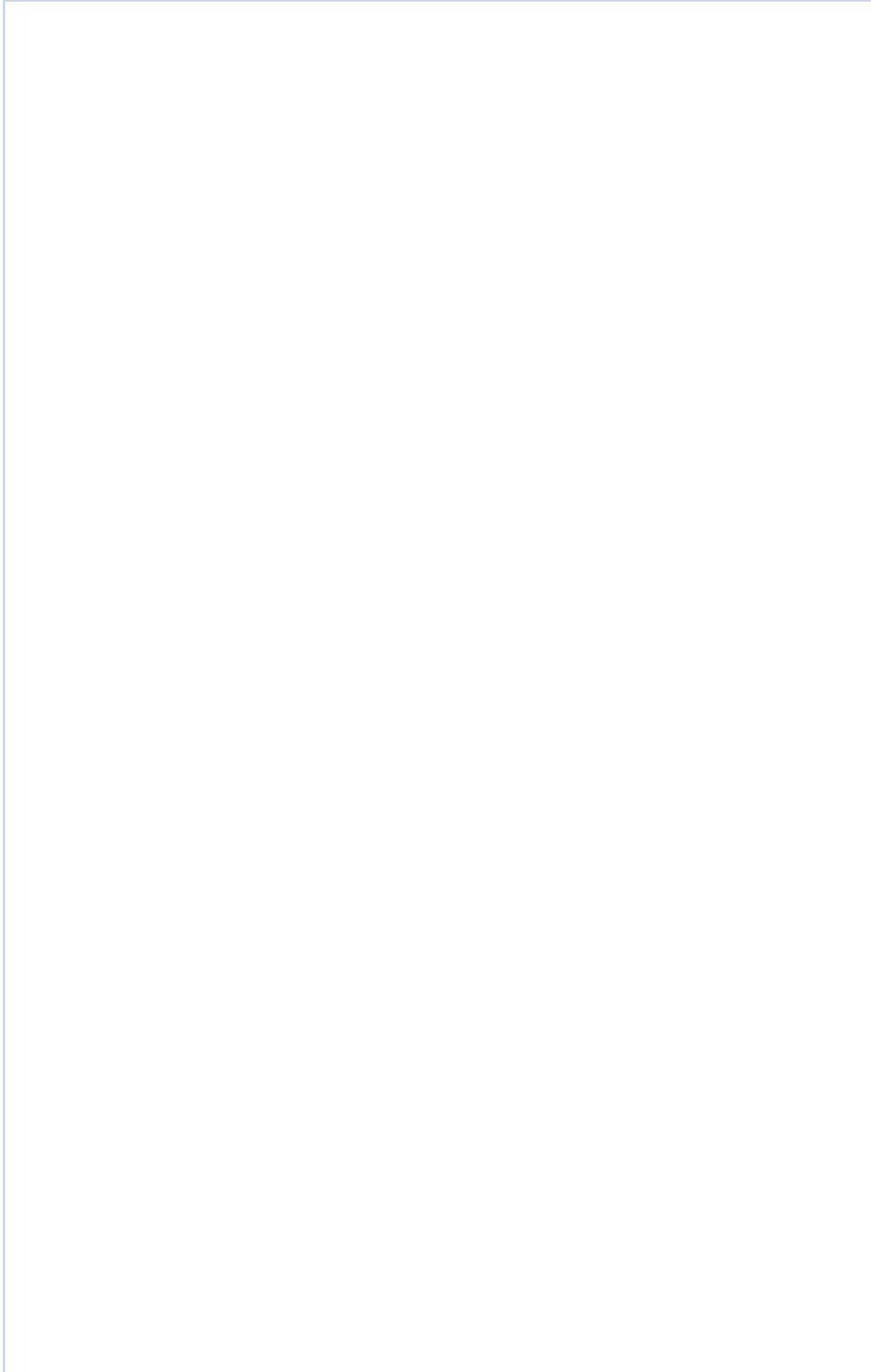
2. Prepare a feedback survey for team members to complete after your presentation. The survey should ask for feedback on the presentation and for ideas on how to implement the information conveyed in the presentation into the workplace.

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

   • incorporate plain English principles
   • be comprehensively researched and analysed appropriately
   • be clear, appropriate and sensitive to the needs of team members
   • be non-threatening and non-judgmental
   • encourage team participation.

Topic 2
Establish systems to develop trust and confidence

Most people like to think they are worthy of trust but trust does not come without effort. Trust must be earned as a result of conscious decisions about how to act, treat others, approach human relationships and perform your work.

Studies have shown that one of the key qualities leading to superior organisational performance is 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   Ensure adherence to organisational cultural diversity and ethical values

2B   Act professionally to maintain the trust and confidence of others

2C   Adjust interpersonal communication styles to meet organisational and individual needs

2A Ensure adherence to organisational cultural diversity and ethical values

Frontline managers must establish and implement policies to ensure their organisation's cultural diversity and ethical values are adhered to.

Many organisations put considerable thought into organisational values, the way they should operate, and how they would like their employees to interact with internal and external contacts. From this process, one or more documents may be created that outline the organisation's philosophies and the standards that management and staff are expected to adhere to.

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

Cultural and social diversity

Recognising diversity means respecting human individuality. 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. Diversity in the workplace also helps to increase the competitiveness and market relevance of your organisation in the context of an increasingly diverse community and global economy.

Your organisation may have people from a range of social groups, as determined by their socio-economic background, gender, sexuality, beliefs or way of life. Avoid creating divisions in your organisation by catering to differences in all your communication. Work to eliminate hostile environments or avenues for any form of harassment.
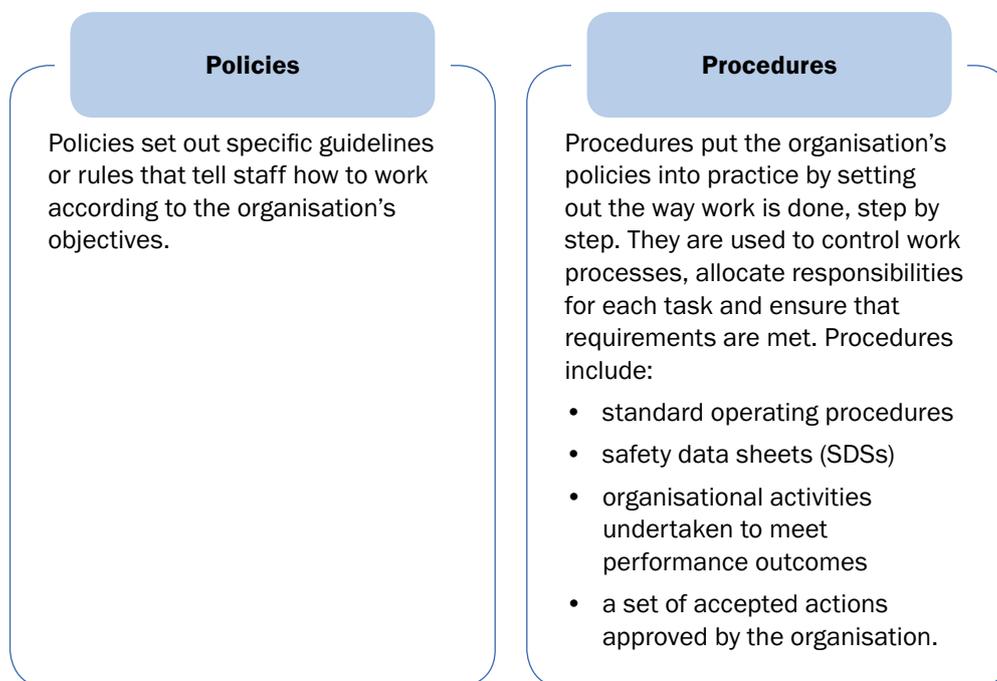
If your organisation encourages and promotes diversity in the workforce, it will more accurately reflect society at large and help it attract and retain a multi-skilled workforce. Every member will then enjoy the benefits of a cooperative and harmonious working environment.

Individual differences may 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 standards
- gender
- physical and mental abilities.

Organisational policies and procedures

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

Policies	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 • a set of accepted actions approved by the organisation.

Social standards

Social standards apply within the workplace and in the organisation's relationship 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 they are adhered to at all times. Some organisation standards are described here.

Workplace values	**Statement of workplace values**
	This is a document setting out the values the organisation wishes to uphold in areas such as:
	• equity and diversity
	• industrial relations
	• flexible work practices or family-friendly policies
	• work health and safety
	• fair treatment
	• management/staff consultation and cooperation.

Code of conduct	**Code of conduct**
	This document 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
	• honesty and cooperation between staff
	• confidentiality and intellectual property.

Employment policies	**Employment policies**
	Most organisations have documented policies covering 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 the people within them 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 certain areas.

You must be fully conversant with the standards you and your staff are expected to comply with. They may have been 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 may not be aware of them.
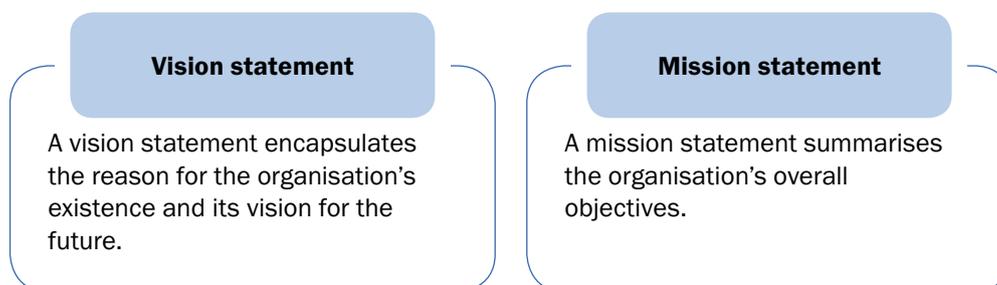
Ethical standards cover areas such as:

- sustainability, health and issues related to how the organisation's operations affect the environment and 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, IT, defence etc.
- research, covering data integrity, use of privileged information, plagiarism and animal welfare issues in product testing
- publishing and the media
- legislative and regulatory requirements.

Business standards

Some organisations develop 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, and are outlined below.

Vision statement	Mission statement
A vision statement encapsulates the reason for the organisation's existence and its vision for the future.	A mission statement summarises the organisation's overall objectives.

Customer service charter	Brand or corporate image
A customer service charter sets out a code of best practice for servicing and dealing with the organisation's clients.	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 and services. This impacts on all areas of the organisation's operations (not just on marketing and sales). Staff must be aware of the image the organisation is trying to portray and the ways in which they are required to carry out their duties in line with the organisation's corporate image.

Adhere to relevant legislative requirements

Teams must work within relevant legislation, codes, national standards and work health and safety (WHS) rules. Managers should note that many laws and standards are complex and amended regularly.

National legislation exists on many issues, while states and territories also have their own laws. Your organisation should provide you with details of legislation and guidelines that are relevant to your team, although it is a manager's responsibility to ensure the team follows correct procedures.

Work health and safety	Work health and safety legislation (WHS)
	Employers have a duty to provide a safe work environment for their employees. A breach of the relevant Act may result in prosecution and substantial fines. Where a breach results in death or injury of a worker, the employer may also have to pay compensation to the worker or their legal representative. This is legislated at both the federal and state level.
	Further information on federal, state and territory WHS requirements can be found by visiting the Safe Work Australia website at: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au.

Equal employment opportunity	**Equal employment opportunity (EEO) legislation**
	In Australia, federal, state and territory laws cover equal employment opportunity in the workplace. Organisations are required by these laws to create a workplace free from discrimination and harassment. As a manager, you should understand your rights and responsibilities under human rights and anti-discrimination law. By putting effective procedures in place you can improve productivity and increase efficiency.
	Employing people facing barriers to employment is often overlooked by employers and can be a useful way to diversify the skill set within an organisation. Funding and incentives are available for organisations supporting people with a disability, Indigenous Australians, the long-term unemployed and mature-aged people.

Anti-discrimination	**Anti-discrimination legislation**
	Managers and team leaders must prevent and eliminate discrimination in the workplace, whether based on grounds of race, colour, gender, sexual preference, age, physical or mental disability, marital status, family responsibilities, pregnancy, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin.

Sexual harassment	**Sexual harassment legislation**
	Sexual harassment is broadly defined as an unwelcome sexual advance or unwelcome request for sexual favours, or any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, principally in circumstances where the perpetrator would have anticipated that the victim or victims would be offended, humiliated or intimidated. This includes discriminating against people based on their sexual preference.
	Laws regarding sexual harassment fall under the relevant equal opportunity and discrimination legislation in your state or territory.
	The prohibition against sexual harassment applies to management and their employees. You should ensure that staff are aware of the provisions of the relevant Act and have a clear policy against sexual harassment. Employees should understand that engaging in sexual harassment may be grounds for dismissal, or if they are subject to sexual harassment, they have access to an effective complaints handling procedure.

Environmental	Environmental legislation
	All Australian organisations can play a part in environmental management, but whether environmental laws affect your particular organisation directly will depend on your business activities.
	Federal, state and local governments jointly administer the environmental protection laws in Australia through bilateral agreements. As a manager, you should understand which laws, licences and permits apply to you.

Work–life balance and family-friendly policies

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 a work–life balance.

The question of work–life balance is usually associated with the need to allow people access to work as well as accommodating family duties. This applies to mothers and fathers as well as those who need to care for ageing parents or other family members. Organisations have adopted family-friendly policies to cater to those 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, such as attracting and retaining high-quality staff.

Family-friendly initiatives

1 Flexible work arrangements – such as flexitime and make-up time, time off in lieu, part-time work, working from home, job-sharing, overtime, shift work or rostering arranged in consultation with relevant staff – taking into account any special needs of the individual

2 Regulation of workloads and the avoidance of after-hours work including meetings

3 Employee assistance programs such as making personal or financial counselling available

4 Child or aged care services, including childcare centres and back-up care resources

5 Health and wellness initiatives, ranging from health club facilities to stress management workshops, exercise programs or dietary information

6 Flexible leave options, including regulatory leave such as maternity/paternity, as well as flexibility with annual leave arrangements, encouraging staff to take leave when due and the availability of special, sick or unpaid leave for compassionate, educational, carer or emergency requirements

7 Social events involving family members

Example: vision statement

Organisations develop statements or charters setting out their core values and the way they do business. Here is an example of a vision statement.

Toastmasters International vision statement

Toastmasters International empowers people to achieve their full potential and realise their dreams. Through our member clubs, people throughout the world can improve their communication and leadership skills and find the courage to change.

(Reproduced with permission of Toastmasters International: www.toastmasters.org.)

Example: mission statement

Here is an example of a mission statement.

The 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 international and national communities and the state of Western Australia.

(Reproduced with permission of UWA: www.admin.uwa.edu.au.)

Example: customer service charter

Here is an example of a customer service charter:

Goals	Activities
Provide professional, courteous service	• 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 5

Explain how you could ensure internal standards are the following:

1. Communicated to new staff members when they join the organisation

2. Readily available to employees when they need to refer to them

3. Made available to contractors or others who work within the workplace from time to time

2B Act professionally to maintain the trust and confidence of others

An effective manager will gain and maintain the trust and confidence of colleagues and external contacts through professional conduct.

Successful business relationships are forged by gaining 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 only with their own interests in mind, not those of the team. Lack of confidence in each other quickly leads to those outside also losing confidence in the organisation.

A leader is the role model by which the team is most influenced. There are certain behaviours you can aim to model in the way you perform your work to encourage high performance by your team members and gain their confidence. This operative model flows on to those outside the organisation. There is a direct correlation between how employees view the organisation and how outsiders view it. Once a leader has lost the confidence of their employees, the messages that frontline staff deliver to customers and other external contacts can be affected.

Professional conduct and competent performance inspires others to take your lead.

Identify colleagues and external contacts

Gathering accurate data on your work colleagues and external contacts is vital for the smooth running of an organisation. There is a direct link between internal staff satisfaction and external customer satisfaction. If your work colleagues receive high-quality services in their own organisation, they will be more motivated to deliver high-quality services to their external contacts.

An organisational plan or chart shows the functions of each department, area or branch, and where each person works, their title and their responsibilities. These people depend on services somewhere else in your organisation in order to deliver their own services.

Work colleagues	External contacts
• Team members	• Customers and clients
• Other team leaders or managers	• Industry or union representatives
• Administrative staff	• WHS representatives
• Service or hospitality staff	• Community representatives
• Supervisors	• Suppliers
• Senior management	• Contractors
• Board of directors	• Legal advisers or accountants

Treat people with integrity and respect

As a frontline manager, treating people with integrity, respect and empathy is the 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 a strong commitment to achieving mutual work objectives. On the other hand, if people are treated insensitively, they may become resentful, demotivated, negative, cynical and self-protective.

Act with integrity	Of all the qualities an effective leader must possess, integrity is probably the most important. This attribute underpins the decisions you make about how you treat others and carry out your responsibilities as a manager.
	Only by acting with integrity consistently 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 of your team or organisation.

Have strong values	Aim to have high professional and personal principles. Always tell the truth. This may not always 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 loud as your words. Also, be consistent. Your credibility will be 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; that is, does their work well and makes 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 also. 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 it 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.
	Believe in yourself. Trusting your own capabilities enables you to lead with confidence, gain respect and treat others with compassion.
Encourage integrity	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 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 flexible and responsive	A good leader believes there is 'plenty for everyone'. This applies to the sharing of information and knowledge as well as to showing generosity in more material ways.
	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 under-used? For example, a personal assistant may have shown that he has strong skills in desktop publishing. Perhaps he'd like to become involved in the production of the corporate magazine.

Show respect	Showing respect means 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; and acknowledging people's needs.
	You should aim to treat all people with respect, including your team members, those at all levels within your organisation and external contacts. Remember, 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 their behaviour.
	Respect others whose beliefs and lifestyles are very different to your own, including people who do not treat you with respect. 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 self-worth	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	Treating people politely demonstrates respect and can also defuse a tense situation. This can be difficult to maintain if a customer or employee is being very difficult or demanding. Listen to everything they have to say and reassure them 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 a 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 will help you stay focused.

Be aware	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 to be 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.

Encourage input	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 issues. 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.

Take part	Try not to let your role as a manager prevent you from mixing socially with your team, and getting involved in initiatives such as tearoom rosters and the social club. Everyone should join in – especially in small business environments. 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 to generate a positive and trusting work environment.

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 show understanding of another person's situation as you have experienced it yourself. It 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.

Encouraging empathy between team members promotes constructive teamwork through better consideration of each other's 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.

Understand another's situation

If a person is going through a particularly difficult time, your ability to be understanding and make special allowances can make all the difference to 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 to look after their children, attend appointments with counsellors and deal with the emotional impact. It may mean that other team members will have to pitch in or that work production may suffer for a short time.

Value staff

Valuing staff means appreciating that some personal issues are more important than work issues which, if left unaddressed, may impact on 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.

Be compassionate

Above all, showing empathy means understanding the influence of your management and organisational practices on the feelings and wellbeing of internal and external contacts.

Avoid behaviours that destroy trust

Trust can be rapidly destroyed. The trust-destroying behaviours outlined below may seem obvious and easy to avoid. But even small actions can negatively affect business relationships, so you should take steps to channel your energies in consistent, positive ways.

Behaviours that work against building trust include:

- 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.

Aim for high professional standards

Excellent performance and professionalism 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.

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 and behaviour and the value of ongoing professional development and self-improvement. Learn to identify your own strengths and weaknesses and look for ways to improve your processes. Consider locating a mentor or undertaking a training program outside the workplace. Some professional development or self-improvement ideas follow.

- Computer or technical skills
- Time management
- Workplace knowledge
- Leadership
- Communication or interpersonal skills

Build the talent and confidence 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. Individuals will have greater job satisfaction if they feel adequately skilled for their roles and that their career opportunities are broadening.

There is no point asking others to work to high standards unless you are prepared to practise what you preach. This applies to your relationship with contractors and suppliers as well as with your work colleagues.

Managers need to maintain consultative strategies that give work colleagues the confidence to make contributions and achieve their full potential.

Team members should be encouraged to:

- show initiative
- develop their skills
- communicate openly
- listen to others' points of view
- remain committed to the consultative process.

Support your team

Managers should approach leadership and support their team by taking a positive win–win attitude, in which managers and team members win by establishing processes that satisfy everyone's needs. A win–loss situation occurs when managers establish processes or behave in ways that are only beneficial to themselves while the rest of the team suffers.

Be alert to expectations that are too high. It is helpful to provide a challenge but if a person is struggling, they will lose confidence. Do not set people up for failure by setting unachievable goals. It is particularly important to ensure new staff members 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.

Give recognition

Acknowledging the contributions all team members make is an important part of management and is crucial if a team member has done something particularly well or has helped the team achieve its goals beyond what was required. Do not take the credit for other people's work or ideas. Good leaders put the needs of their team and organisation before their own. A wise manager understands the importance of having a cooperative, hard-working team.

Show loyalty

It is essential to stand by your work colleagues in the same way as you expect loyalty from 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. This is crucial to gaining the confidence and trust of others.

Build self-esteem

If you expect people to achieve, usually they will. 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.

Delegate

Doing all the work yourself is not only inefficient, it discourages initiative and sends messages 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 learn from their mistakes. They like to feel in control of their own work and be responsible for their own progress.

Motivate others

An effective leader motivates and empowers others to strive enthusiastically and willingly toward the achievement of work goals. A motivated team will deliver a higher standard of work.

Different people are motivated by different stimuli but one of the best ways to motivate 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 make sure they know the relevance and value of their contribution to team objectives.

The Bass (1998) theory of transformational leadership suggests that leaders can achieve greater team performance through skilled communication, the formation of positive relationships, and the implementation of innovative workplace processes.

Transformational leaders:

- are respected and admired by their work colleagues
- inspire team members to be enthusiastic about achieving work goals
- solve problems creatively and innovatively
- mentor work colleagues and provide opportunities for professional development.

Alleviate organisational stress

Workplace stress occurs when an employee experiences ongoing challenges associated with performing their role. The level of stress suffered varies depending on the type of role, industry or organisation. The wellbeing of your work colleagues is threatened when they perceive organisational goals as exceeding their current resources.

Prolonged stress could lead to several mild to chronic physical and mental health problems, including mental fatigue, headaches, feeling unappreciated, a loss of interest in professional pursuits, depression or anxiety.

A frontline manager should alleviate organisational stress by reducing the pressure placed on work colleagues, and increasing the resources necessary to meet organisational demands.

Possible causes of organisational stress
Demands placed on work colleagues, such as workload, organisational culture, the physical environment or challenging work patterns
Level of support provided to work colleagues in the form of encouragement, coaching, mentoring or human resources

continued ...

… continued

> Absence of positive working relationships, leading to conflict or unacceptable workplace behaviour

> Organisational change that has not been managed or communicated effectively to work colleagues

> Ambiguous job roles or excessive work responsibilities and duties

> Too much or too little control over how the individual performs their role or undertakes specific tasks

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 may not otherwise express. Simply stopping by a work colleague's office to see how a project is progressing rather than requesting an update via email can open the way for productive exchange. It should be done in a way that does not look like you are just checking up on them! Making yourself accessible to your work team members is vital to building healthy workplace relationships.

By maintaining open communication with your team members, you can be aware of the level of morale within the organisation and use your leadership and interpersonal skills to take corrective action if necessary.

Pursue an open-door policy whenever possible. This allows others to feel comfortable in turning to you for guidance and to raise suggestions. Make sure they know you appreciate them coming to you with their concerns.

'I hope I'm not interrupting you, but I would like to discuss a way in which we can improve the new communications policy.'

'My door is always open for suggestions. I am glad you came to me with this.'

Example: professional conduct to maintain trust and confidence

Sanjiv has developed a reputation for integrity primarily through how he treats others. He has introduced a consultative environment in which 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 display high ethical standards. When discussing sensitive issues, he doesn't evade the truth yet he takes people's feelings into account. When dealing with senior management, he displays strong loyalty to his team and respects the work they've done.

His team members appreciate the considerate way he treats them. They support Sanjiv's decisions because they know he has made them in their best interests. They repay Sanjiv with increased productivity, dedication to the team's work and honesty within the workplace that helps prevent problems.

Sanjiv also has a high regard for external contacts and treats them in the same way as those within his organisation. Those who know him are not surprised that he gains high levels of performance and loyalty from his team, and that he has become a high achiever in his career.
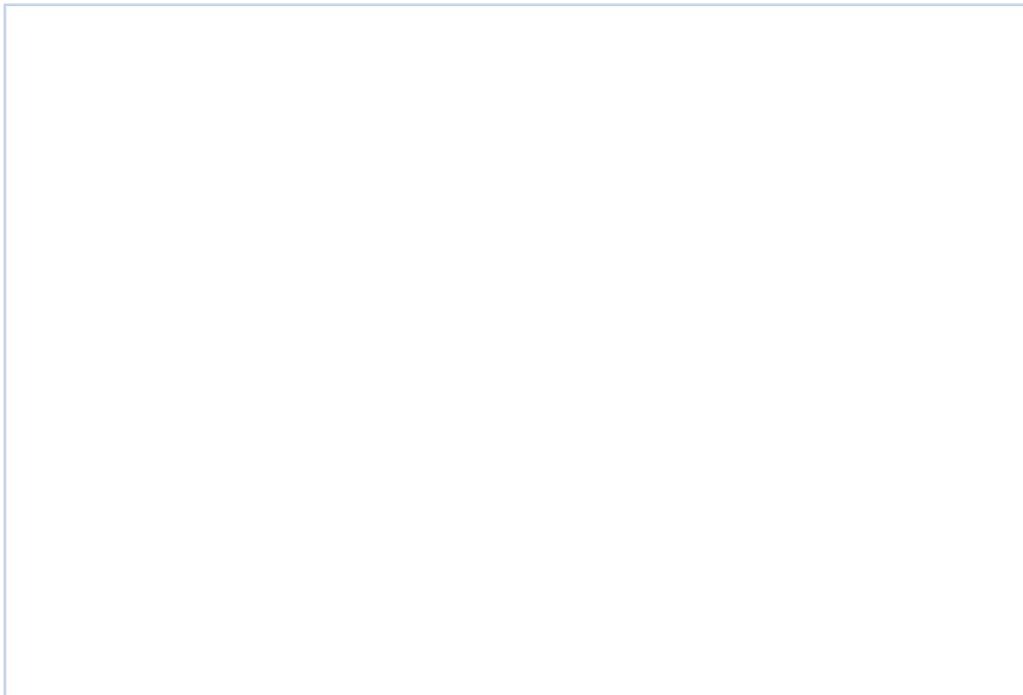
Practice task 6

1. Which of the trust-building behaviours do you think you demonstrate in your organisation?
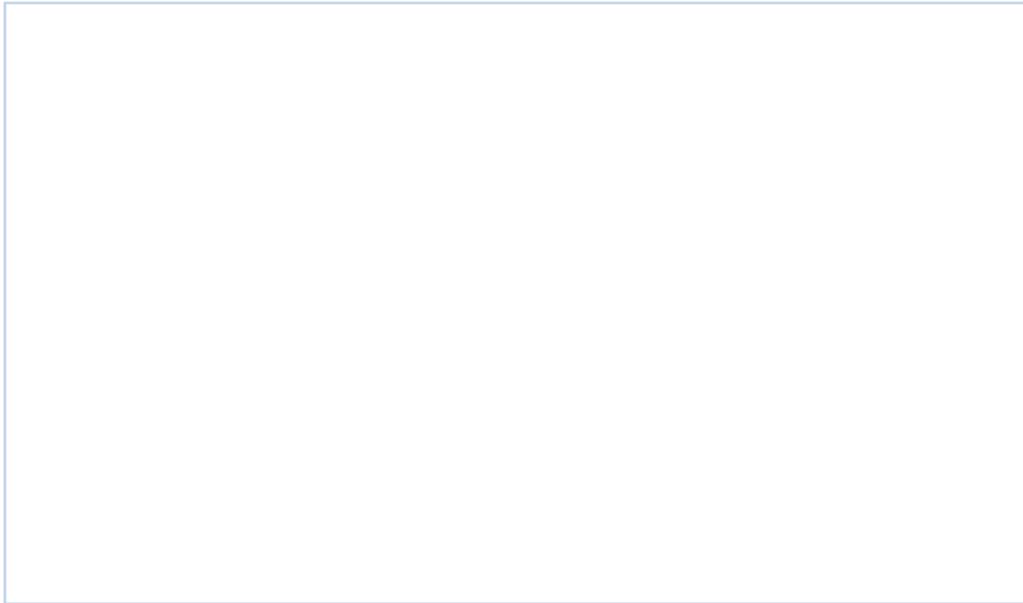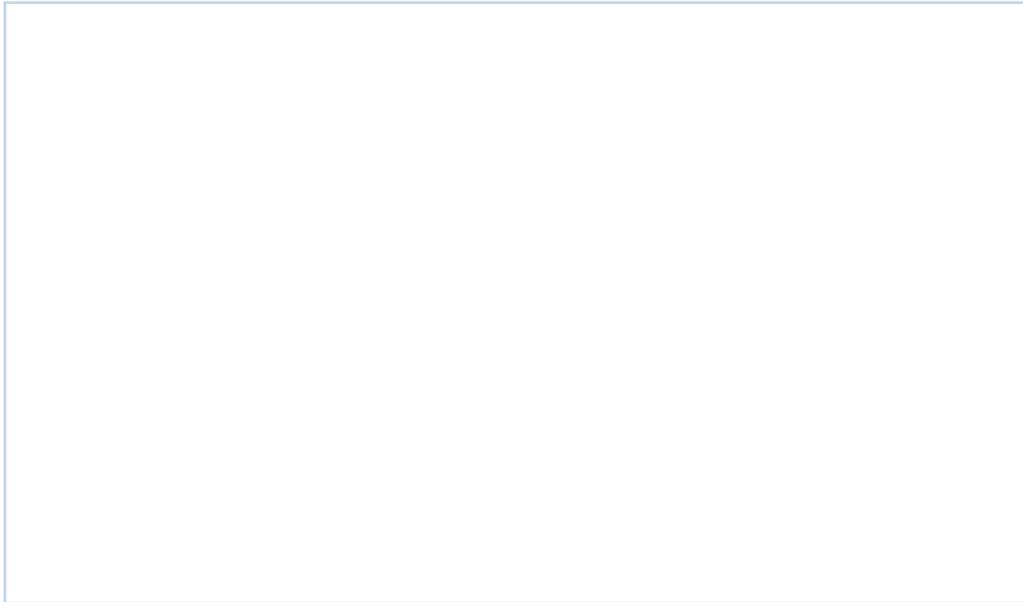
2. Describe the strategies you can use to attain the traits associated with trust-building that may be more difficult to achieve.
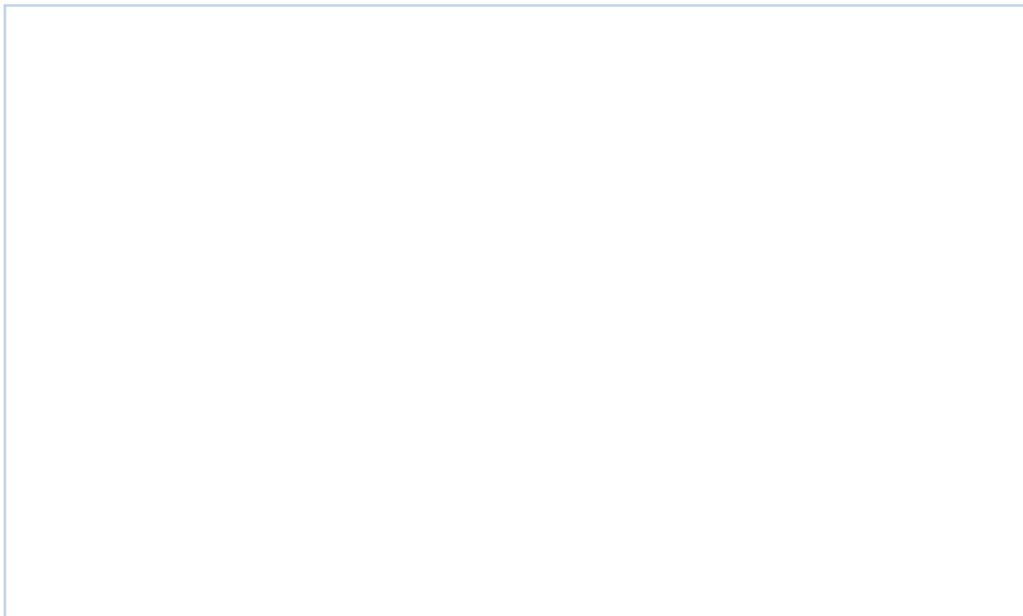
... continued

3. Select three behaviours and explain how they could help you gain the trust of suppliers or contractors you need to work with.

4. Describe an example of a time when you demonstrated the ability to gain someone's trust. What lessons did you learn from the experience?

2C — Adjust interpersonal communication styles to meet organisational and individual needs

Every organisation has its own particular cultural and ethical environment. This often gives rise to the 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.

Frontline managers play a major part in creating conditions for effective working relationships by adjusting their own interpersonal communication styles to meet the organisation's cultural and ethical environment, and by guiding and supporting their team members in their own personal adjustment process.

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 with whom it deals. Ultimately you and those within your team must respect and work effectively within the environment your organisation has chosen to adopt.

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)

Achieve an optimum environment

While one workplace culture will differ from the next depending on their size and nature, several characteristics commonly define a healthy social and cultural working environment.

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

Characteristics of an optimum organisational environment:

- Constructive communication
- Knowledge sharing
- Consultation and cooperation
- Individual integrity
- Mutual respect, empathy and trust
- New ideas are encouraged
- Measuring and rewarding individual and group achievements

- Clarity of purpose and expectations
- Fairness and equity
- Positive attitudes
- Fulfilling and enjoyable working environment
- Best practice
- Team spirit
- Continuous improvement and professional development

Communicate within a diverse workforce

For a communication strategy to be effective, the individual differences of those receiving the communication must be taken into account. If you are to successfully establish positive workplace relationships, you need to recognise diversity and the special needs of those around you, and respond to them by communicating appropriately and sensitively.

What some people consider 'normal' communication may be quite different and even offensive to other cultural groups. 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 how closely someone should stand to them during a discussion.

You should know if any cultural sensitivities are associated with the subject of your communication. Consider the person's feelings and if you accidently cause offence, be prepared to apologise. 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 they relate to gender, age, physical appearance or any other form of diversity.

Language differences

The 2011 Australian census showed that 20 per cent of Australians speak a language other than English at home. In certain areas or workforce sectors, the percentage is much higher. More than 200 languages are spoken in Australia, with 17 languages predominant.

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

Tips for accommodating language differences in the workplace

1 Always check the information you want to convey has been correctly understood.

2 Make sure the recipient has the opportunity to ask questions, express concerns or consult an interpreter if necessary.

3 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.

4 Written messages may sometimes be inadequate or inappropriate. You may need to telephone rather than email a message to someone who doesn't read English well.

5 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.

6 Be careful when using slang or idioms. Many expressions that are part of everyday speech don't have a literal meaning and can be very confusing to a person unfamiliar with colloquial English. For example, many instructors tell trainees they will 'get the hang of it'. Think about how someone unfamiliar with the phrase may interpret this.

| 7 | Avoid acronyms, even common ones like ASAP, and abbreviations like 'uni' and 'this arvo' unless you are sure the people you're talking to understand. |

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 and impairment, whether permanent or temporary.

When communicating in the workplace, you must ensure that people with disabilities have information presented to them in an appropriate format. This may include providing supportive communication devices such as telephone typewriters 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 a person with an intellectual disability, you may need to cater for their ability to comprehend and process the information presented to them or even to understand the consequences of their own actions.

Tips for communicating with a person with a disability
• Get to know your team members and those you deal with and ask them about their requirements and preferences.
• Do not make the person's ability 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.
• Be wary of patronising others by extending sympathy or assuming their disability is a major problem.
• Check the confidentiality status of the person's disability, taking into account privacy and any safety concerns.

Use non-discriminatory language

Exclusive language leaves people out. Using non-discriminatory or inclusive language in workplace communication means what you say includes everyone regardless of their gender, status, race or abilities.

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 work colleagues.

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

You can view the Commission's website at: www.humanrights.gov.au.

Tips for avoiding discriminatory language

Avoid using 'he/him' or 'she/her' by using 'they/their' or 'the worker', 'the manager'. You can often revise the wording so gender is not an issue.

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

Do not place undue emphasis on differences; for example, '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.

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, do not always expect them to learn by observation or through their own errors. Make sure new team members 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 by providing a carefully planned induction program, giving them a folio of relevant material and supporting them in adapting to the team's cultural and ethical environment and understanding appropriate standards of behaviour.

Monitor your team's style

Be alert to the prevailing team climate and find ways to ensure that interpersonal styles and methods of operation meet the organisation's expectations. Seek feedback by arranging for a survey of employees regarding the existing culture within the 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. You are then in a good position 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 mentor provides a safe environment where a person can receive guidance and learn from their mistakes without feeling threatened.

Leading

Provide support and guidance to your team, influencing and empowering team members to work enthusiastically to get the work done. Find creative ways to motivate and reward team members.

> **Coaching**
>
> Get the best out of your team by coaching work colleagues individually and as a group. Aim to understand the individual needs of your work colleagues and introduce processes that encourage progress and foster a cooperative organisational culture.

> **Mentoring**
>
> Help team members to gain a deeper understanding of complex organisational opportunities through reflection, adaptation and exploration of new approaches. Provide work colleagues with constructive feedback.

Interpersonal styles

Being aware of different personality types and behaviours can help you to 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 (1875–1961) and Isabel Briggs Myers (1897–1980) 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 life, using classification tags such as extravert and thinker.

To broaden your understanding of different interpersonal types and adapting individual styles and behaviours to meet organisational standards, you could attend a training program aimed at furthering awareness of different ways of thinking and doing things. Take a proactive role in arranging in-house programs for your team or finding out about available courses elsewhere.

Personality types

Personality types are defined as psychological preferences; that is, by the ways we prefer to use our mental functions. The Keirsey temperament sorter is another 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. None of the personality types are good or bad and people may display combinations of types. If you decide to use such models, do so sensitively and with discretion.

The essential message of personality typecasting is that one person's way of thinking and acting is not the only way, and not even necessarily the best way. The strengths of all personality types should be recognised so people can live and work together effectively.

The following table relates the characteristics of certain personality types to the way they operate.

Actions	Characteristics
Relate to the world	• Extraverts 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	• Sensors focus on facts, procedures and detail • Intuitors focus on meanings, concepts and possibilities
Make decisions	• Thinkers make decisions based on objective analysis of cause and effect • Feelers make decisions based on personal and humanistic considerations
Manage life	• Judgers prefer to spend time in a structured, planned mode • Perceivers prefer to spend time in a flexible, adaptive mode

Lead by example

Being a good leader means being many things, among them a motivator, a representative, a decision-maker, an information sharer, an organiser, a conduit to the outside world, a good communicator, and a good listener.

Good leadership is critical. One of the most effective methods of building effective workplace relationships is to participate in the team and to lead by example. Model the correct behaviour and others will follow your lead.

Consider that as a team leader, you have the eyes and ears of your team focused on you, especially when you are asking the team to do something, such as adjusting their own interpersonal styles. The popular catchphrase – 'walk the talk, don't just

talk the talk' – sprang from management circles several years ago and means 'lead by example'. Setting an example enhances the image of your organisation among your team members and the organisation's other internal customers and external clients.

Coach your team members

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 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 way of operating, giving advice on policies and procedures, or developing a specific skill.

Let your team members know you expect them to participate in the coaching activity and that you anticipate the coaching will be successful. Give and invite feedback during the process. If a coaching relationship is not working, initiate a change. If skill development is too slow, take a different approach.

Coaching improves team performance

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.

Coaching is learning by doing

The main advantage of workplace coaching is learning by doing. 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 those 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 a learning environment

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.

Mentor your team members

A workplace mentor is someone who is considered to have sufficient experience or expertise to be able to assist and counsel those who are less experienced.

A mentor can help an individual reflect, adapt and explore new approaches. They should give constructive feedback, offer practical advice and help the learner develop their unique skills and attributes. Mentoring is particularly useful for inducting new members into an existing team but it is equally important for increasing skill levels or modelling behaviour required from team members.

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

Role of the mentor

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. Mentors need to respond to the individual employee's needs and treat them with respect and patience.

The mentor may also offer emotional support to someone who is having difficulty fitting into the team by listening to their concerns and providing encouragement and support.

The mentoring relationship

The mentoring relationship should foster openness, trust and mutual respect between the two people involved. Both the mentor and the learner must be willing to participate in the process.

... continued

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.

Advantages for the learner

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.

Advantages for the mentor

The mentor also benefits. 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.

Example: initiate a mentoring relationship

A manager has a discussion with Shane about how he may be able to assist and mentor Lee-Anne in her new role as a personal assistant.

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Through the mentoring relationship, it is hoped that Lee-Anne will be able to develop a more organised approach to her responsibilities, and pay closer attention to deadlines and the quality of her work. Shane can also guide Lee-Anne in adapting to the cultural fit required of the role, whereby she learns how to interact with the wide variety of people she comes across on a daily basis.

Practice task 7

1. Describe the traits your organisation lists in its job descriptions to communicate its ethical and cultural environment to current or potential staff. If this information is not available, develop your own list of traits that you think identify the personal and organisational values and approaches in those you employ.
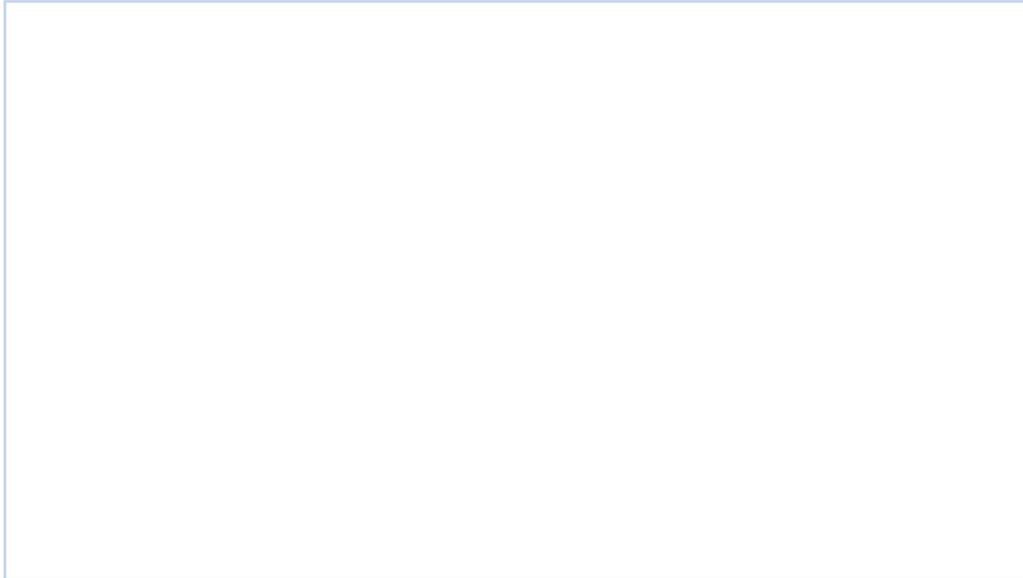
2. Describe the approaches you take, or could take, to teach current or new staff about the ethical and cultural expectations placed on them as employees of the organisation. Include a discussion about the following expectations:

    *   work priorities
    *   reporting lines
    *   group interaction
    *   team rules
    *   problem-solving
    *   ethical values.
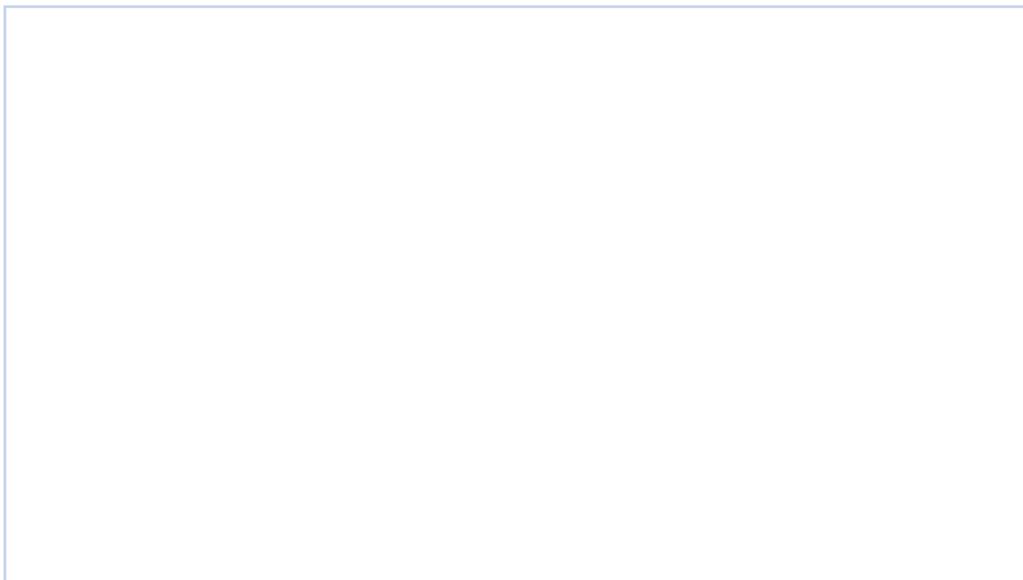
Summary

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

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

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

4. 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.

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

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

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

Learning checkpoint 2
## Establish systems to develop trust and confidence

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in establishing systems to develop trust and confidence.

Part A

1. Explain how your organisation's systems, policies and procedures relating to cultural and social sensitivity can support the development of effective workplace relationships.
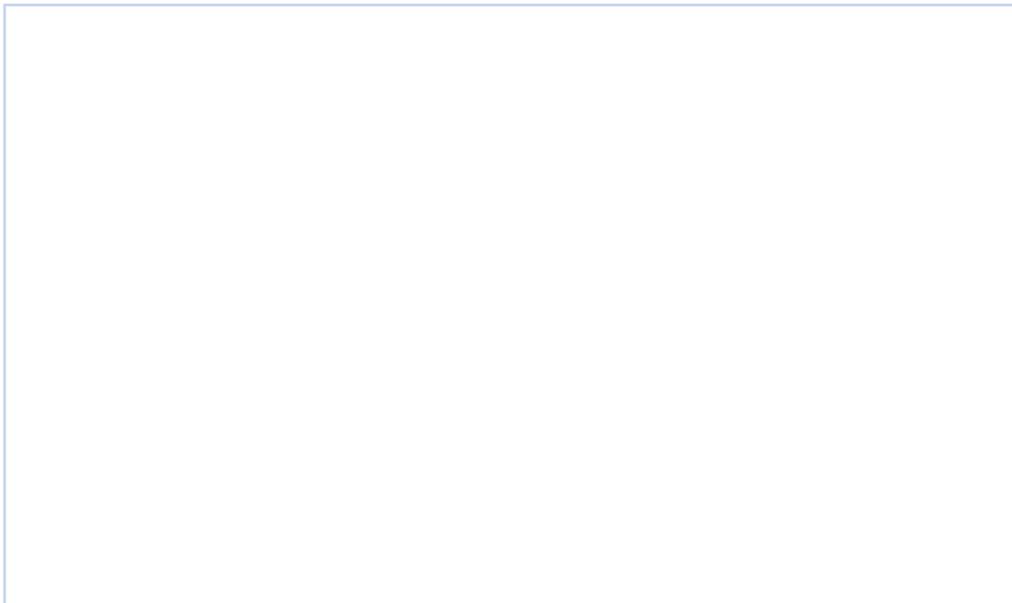
2. Outline relevant legislation (Acts) that affect your organisation's business operation, especially in regard to anti-discrimination, and explain how these are relevant to managing effective workplace relationships.
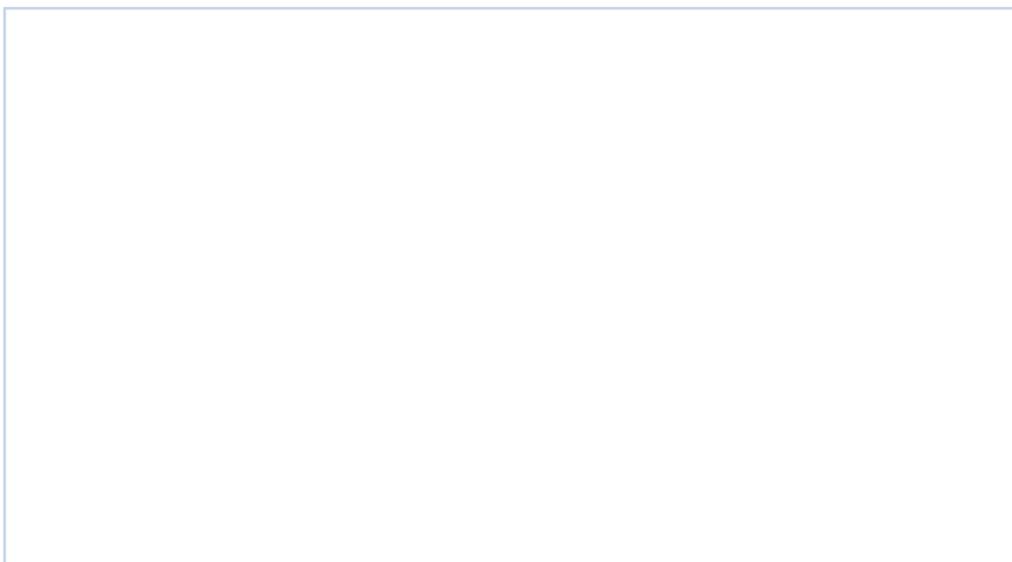
Part B

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

Plan your strategy to demonstrate 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 style 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 or a mentor
- a list of relevant books, magazine articles or websites you could use to help you understand and improve trust and confidence.
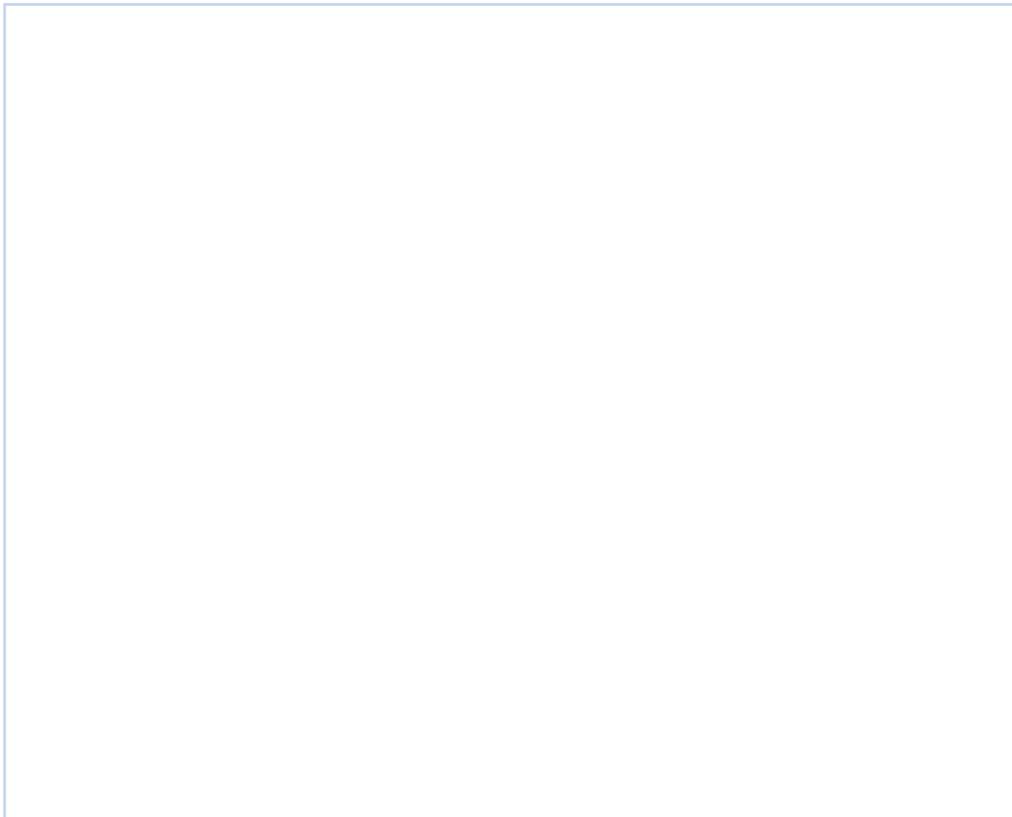
Topic 3
Manage the development and maintenance of networks and relationships

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 contacts you form will not only benefit your organisation, but also have the potential to enhance your personal career prospects. The ability to build and manage productive relationships is vital in the commercial world.

In this topic you will how to:

3A   Use networks to build workplace relationships

3B   Conduct planning to develop and maintain effective workplace relationships

3A Use networks to build workplace relationships

Effective frontline managers will use networks to build workplace relationships, providing identifiable outcomes for the team and the organisation.

Networking means developing and managing 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 film is worth going to see, or when you make friends through other people, you are networking.

The purpose of 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. Before looking at how to network, be aware of the value of networking and also its limitations.

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 network with has their own circle of contacts you can connect with through the mutual contact.

Use networks to benefit the organisation

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

Networks provide sources of information about developments in your industry, the 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.

Use networks to benefit the individual

Networking can also assist you personally and professionally as an individual.

Networking can assist you by:

- introducing you to a wide range of people with different skills, knowledge and links to further contacts
- extending your circle of business and personal acquaintances
- providing you with sources of information and a forum for sharing ideas
- giving you access to advice on a wide range of subjects
- revealing new career opportunities
- supporting you in professional and personal challenges.

Identify and build relationships

Many people feel they have little capacity for networking because they do not know many people, or 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. For example, you may discover that your neighbours have a printing business and can give you discounted rates when you are preparing some brochures. They could give you advice about the right person to contact and the best time of day to telephone them.

Anyone within or connected to an organisation or industry can give you a wealth of advice. They can introduce you to people who may be decision-makers within their organisation or industry.

Networking may give you valuable advice about:

- operational problems and solutions

- industry trends

- business methods

- work health and safety

- other regulatory requirements.

Develop a list of contacts

Begin the networking process by compiling a list of the people you already know.

All these people have their own range of contacts, similar to yours but including a lot of people you do not 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 or tradesperson.

Expand your contact circle

There are many simple ways to build and extend your contact circle.

Adopt the habit of talking to people you come into contact with, anywhere, anytime, and take a genuine interest in their work and activities. 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.

As a starting point, network within your own organisation and ask people questions about their experience and expertise. Then expand your sphere of influence. Practise asking a range of questions to discover where people have a need for what you can offer. Above all, decide to invest effort in networking. Here are some tips.

	Tips for expanding your contact circle

- Ask your friends if they can refer you to any relevant people.
- Get to know your colleagues more closely.
- Reach out to more people within your organisation by going along to company functions, taking part in working groups, committees and training sessions.
- 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.
- Develop a broad range of activities in your personal and professional life.
- Make a concerted effort to remember people's names and details such as where they work and what their interests are.
- Collect business cards and write key information on the back of them, such as where you met the person and who they are connected with.

Networking strategies

Your networks can be internal or external to your organisation, informal or formal, structured or unstructured, and individuals or groups of people.

Here are a range of formal networking strategies you can use.

Professional associations	**Join a professional or trade association**
	Professional and trade groups are formed to promote the particular profession and 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 associates provide an ideal forum for networking so it pays to become a member if there is an association in your field. Alternatively, you may be able to attend events as a guest.
	Examples of the vast range of professional associations include the:
	- Society of Automotive Engineers
	- Australian Human Resources Institute
	- Australian Library and Information Association
	- Australian Institute of Office Professionals
	- Association of Australia Rural Nurses
	- Institute of Chartered Accountants
	- Master Builders Association.

Special interest groups	**Find out about special interest groups**
	A range of networking and lobby groups have formed to support those in similar social and professional situations. These groups provide excellent 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. Be alert to the networking opportunities different groups provide. Examples include:
	• Women in Insurance
	• Newcomers Network (for migrants and other visitors to Australia)
	• Westend Business Association (a Melbourne-based networking group for small businesses)
	• ARPA Over 50s Association.

Conferences and functions	**Attend conferences, trade fairs, seminars or business functions**
	Thousands of events are held every year representing many industries and hundreds of professions. Conferences and trade fairs are 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 through to large-scale, week-long events. The presentations and trade displays provide an avenue 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. Other functions centre on awareness presentations or a product launch. 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	**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.

Online opportunities	**Take advantage of online networking opportunities**
	Online networks include newsgroups, email discussion lists, online forums and social media sites. 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. Also, be very careful 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 access the site at: www.ourcommunity.com.au.

Partnerships	**Develop partnerships with other stakeholders**
	Some organisations seek to establish organised and productive relationships or alliances with other organisations and groups 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.

Social networking

Social networking sites provide an open service on the internet where anyone with a valid email address can register. Users create personal profiles describing where they are from, where they work, where they have studied, and any other information they choose to share.

Social media sites provide good opportunities to share information, educational resources, ideas and opinions. 'Facebook', 'Twitter' and 'LinkedIn' are all popular social media sites used by people from all over the world to connect with each other. Most relevant to the commercial world is LinkedIn, which incorporates social activity but is mainly used for professional networking. Some advantages and disadvantages of social networking are addressed here.

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Users stay up to date with industry news • Users discover upcoming trends or new ideas • Users share experiences and advice • Free access to valuable resources • Provides major data about particular organisations • Allows users to find potential partners or recruit new employees • Saves users time, energy and resources • Users demonstrate their skills and knowledge • Users create and invite others to professional networking events and activities • Positions users as experts and improves the organisation's credibility	• Exposure to excessive advertising and SPAM • Requires personal time to set up and learn how to use • Users are required to constantly update their profiles and connections • Users are required to pay for premium use • Risk of associating with 'fake' profiles • The ability for users to know when you have viewed their profile • Users may exaggerate their skills and experience • Impersonal means of communicating • Resources and information accessed may not be credible

Example: use a network to benefit the organisation

Declan meets up with some former colleagues (to keep in touch). They talk about the work they are currently involved in and Declan finds out about a tender for work in South-East Asia before it is advertised in the media.

Patrea manages a small business. Through a mutual contact, she is introduced to a member of an exclusive business networking group who invites her 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.

Kostas, 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.

Barbara's company needs to fill a vacancy in its busy call centre before the holiday season. Barbara was recently approached by a friend seeking employment in customer service. She encouraged her friend to phone the call centre manager. Without having to advertise, Barbara's company gains a skilled employee and her friend gets a job.

Heather's organisation is involved in a contractual dispute with a supplier. They have not encountered this problem before but Heather's former employer has been through a similar process. She contacts him and he provides useful advice, eventually referring Heather's employer to an appropriate legal adviser.
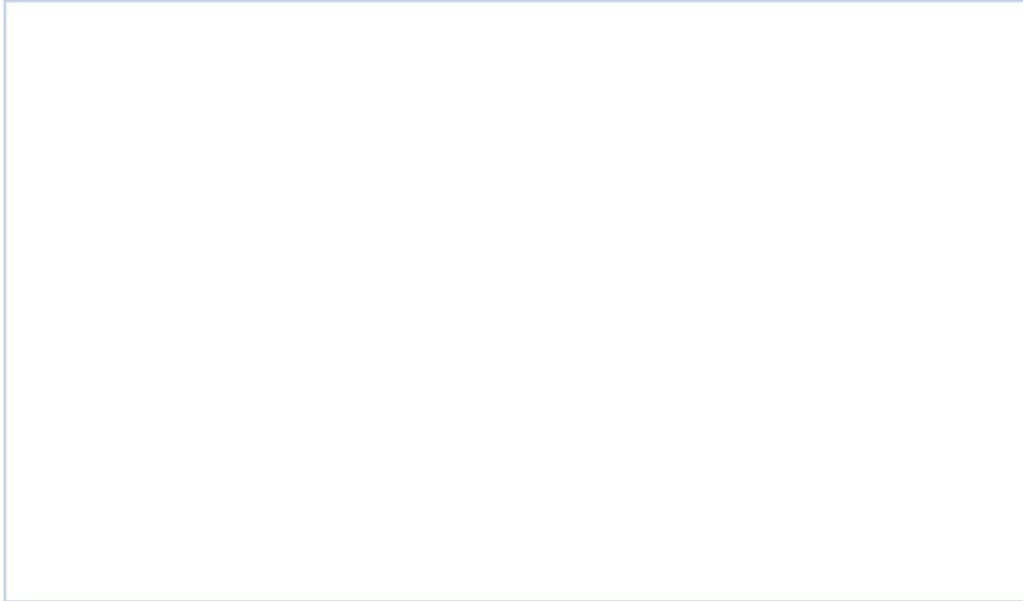
A group of food processors who met through an industry association decide to form a cooperative group for purchasing fresh produce direct from farmers. They use their networks to purchase collectively, saving valuable time and money.
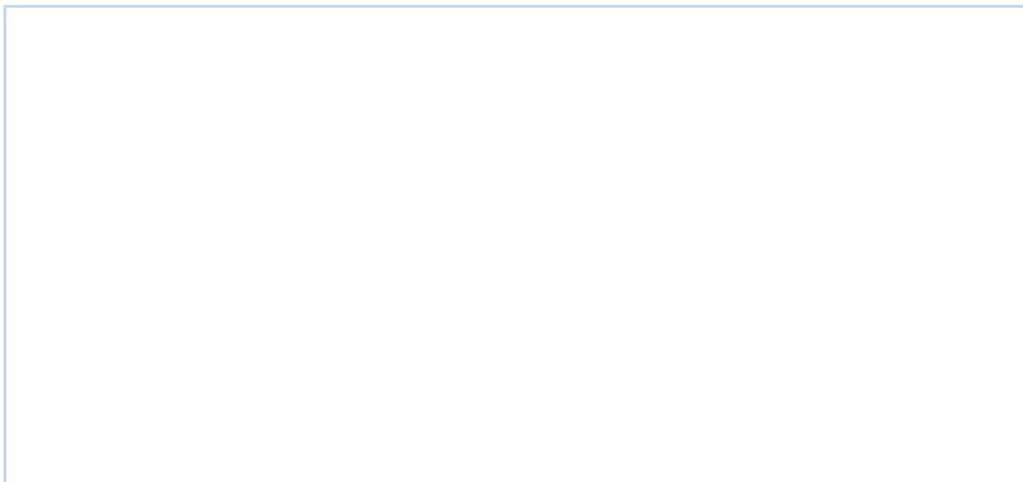
Practice task 8

1. Describe how your organisation uses networks to support organisational outcomes.

   OR

   Describe how you could benefit your team or organisation by establishing and managing a network.

2. Consider how you or your organisation could benefit from enhanced relationships with other industry, professional or community groups. Identify four organisations or groups that might present opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships.

3B Conduct planning to develop and maintain effective workplace relationships

To maintain effective workplace relationships, managers must conduct ongoing planning to ensure that effective internal and external workplace relationships are developed and maintained.

To some people, the idea of networking has negative connotations based on a fear of using people. 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 also 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.

Make the most of your networks

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'. 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. 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 via a quick sale or access to who they know, your networking will not be effective. Be prepared to spend time interacting with others and always offer help when you can.

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 may be useful to them. By becoming known as a resource for others, people will remember to turn to you for ideas and contact names. If you show your commitment to two-way networking, you will increase 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 to find what you are looking for. Most social groups are based more on learning, making friends or volunteering rather than on strictly making business connections.

Visit as many groups as possible that spark your interest. Many groups will allow you to attend as a visitor before joining. Note the tone and attitude of the group.

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 give back to groups that have helped you.

Network at professional events

When you attend a conference, seminar or function, view it as a networking opportunity. Think about who is likely to be there and any connections you may have with them. Make an effort to mingle with different people, not just those you already know.

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. This technique allows you to open up your discussion and shows people you are interested in them.

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.

After attending a conference on behalf of your organisation, prepare a brief report and list the names of people who may be useful to your organisation. Make sure you follow up and call the people you meet. Say you enjoyed meeting them and ask if you could get together to share ideas.

Actively represent your organisation

Have a clear understanding of your own and your organisation's work 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'd like to say. Have a brief script ready.

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.

'Hi, I'm Kim from Tree Saving Solutions. We install computer equipment in offices. I head up a unit that's responsible for the equipment maintenance.'

'Nice to meet you Kim.'

Follow through

Act quickly and efficiently on any referrals you are given. Remember, when people give you the names of others to contact, your actions are a reflection on them. Make sure you do not act in a way that will reflect negatively on the person referring you. Some suggestions are below.

Choose an appropriate strategy

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 will be appropriate as long as people do not prefer to receive individual attention.

Decide how to communicate

For individuals, you need to decide whether to communicate by telephone, email, 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 would like to discuss.

It is important to pick a time and place that suits 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 situated at a distance. If you are unsure of how to approach them, send a polite email inquiring about their preferences.

Consider time to achieve results

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. Do not expect immediate results and work on maintaining your networks for their possible future benefits.

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 for how your contacts can offer support. The information you have collected can be combined with the material others have gathered to create a resource that the team and the organisation may use for a range of purposes.

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.

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

You can do this 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 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: positive and negative networking actions

A small insurance company decides to improve its networking strategies by taking advantage of its location to promote its services. The company's office is in a high-rise building opposite a grand prix circuit. Each year at race time, staff invite their new and potential clients to an afternoon tea to watch the races in a relaxed atmosphere. They display their brochures, give a 10-minute talk about their products and services, invite employees to introduce themselves and give attendees a pre-prepared information pack to take with them at the end of the day. The event becomes a regular item on their marketing calendar and potential clients often sign up, staff make valuable contacts and everyone enjoys themselves.

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 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

Practice task 9

1. Describe how you capitalise on your networks. How might you improve on your current approach?

2. Describe how you would present yourself at a networking conference, seminar or function in a way that supports your individual and organisational outcomes?

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
Manage the development and maintenance
of networks and relationships

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in managing the development and maintenance of networks and relationships.

Part A

1. Explain how your organisation's systems, policies and procedures relating to networking can support the development of effective workplace relationships.

2. Explain why your organisation does, or does not, encourage the use of social media websites to network with other professionals and organisations. If your organisation has a professional social media networking policy in place, describe what it includes.

Part B

1. Use the following table to complete this task.

    a) 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.

    b) Explain how they can benefit you and your organisation.

    c) Explain how you could benefit this contact.

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

Part B

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

3. 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.
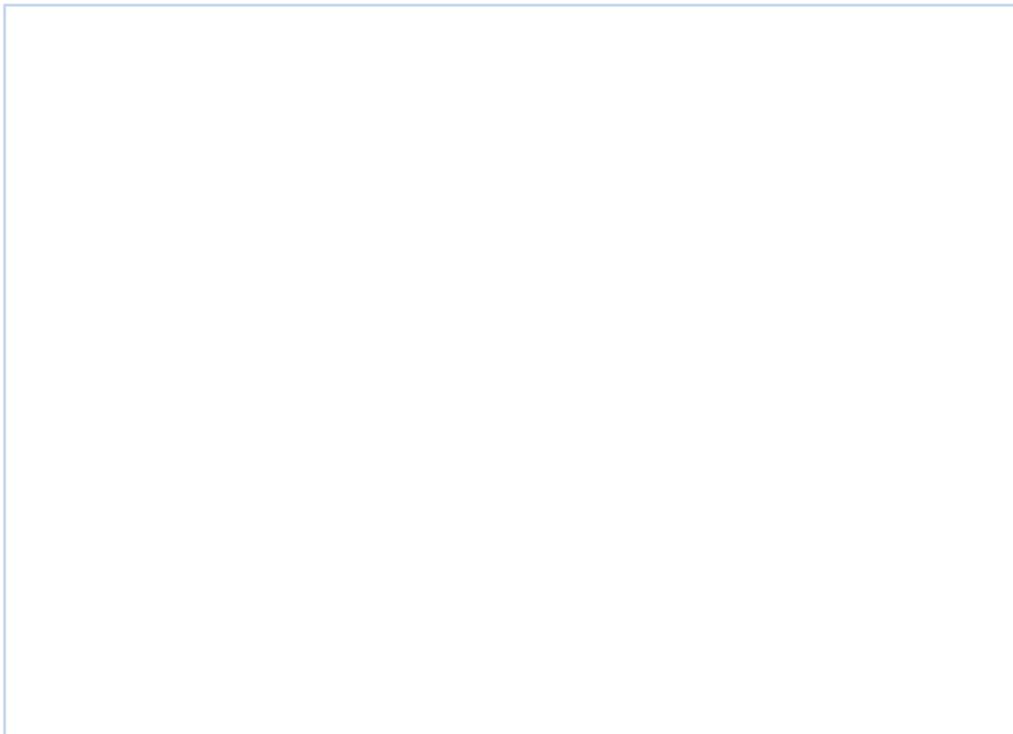
Topic 4
Manage difficulties to achieve positive outcomes

When a difficulty arises within a business environment it should be resolved by aiming to achieve positive outcomes for all parties, in a manner that minimises disruption to productivity.

The effectiveness of frontline managers can depend on their ability to resolve conflict and work difficulties through identifying and analysing the problem 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 to address the difficulties they encounter, managing individual and team performance and regularly monitoring workplace outcomes. Being able to effectively address workplace difficulties is a challenging and valuable skill to acquire.

In this topic you will how to:

4A   Implement strategies for resolving difficulties in workplace relationships

4B   Manage conflict constructively

4C   Guide, counsel and support co-workers

4D   Implement an action plan to address identified difficulties

4A Implement strategies for resolving difficulties in workplace relationships

Managers must develop and implement strategies to ensure that difficulties in workplace relationships are promptly identified and constructively resolved.

Problem-solving and decision-making – ask anyone in the workplace if these activities are part of their day and they would 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 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 does not address the problem
- blame themselves and develop a cycle of worry and inaction
- blame others and expect them to accept responsibility.

Workplace difficulties

Difficult situations should not be seen as entirely negative. There are two important things to remember about workplace problems: 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, tackling issues can lead to positive outcomes such as a stronger understanding between colleagues, more efficient and effective work practices, a greater awareness of the issues at hand, and the skills and flexibility to address bigger problems in the future.

Reasons why people may see problems as insurmountable difficulties

Many people are problem-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 do not know how to approach it.

> People may distance themselves from a problem because they are worried it will reflect negatively on them, or that their involvement may cause further problems.

> A person may be inclined to see problems as bigger than they are and the resultant anxiety can lead to inaction and hostility.

Manage work difficulties

An important objective should be for you, your team and organisation to become more resilient through the awareness and application of effective problem-solving skills. A five-step process for managing work difficulties is outlined in the following table.
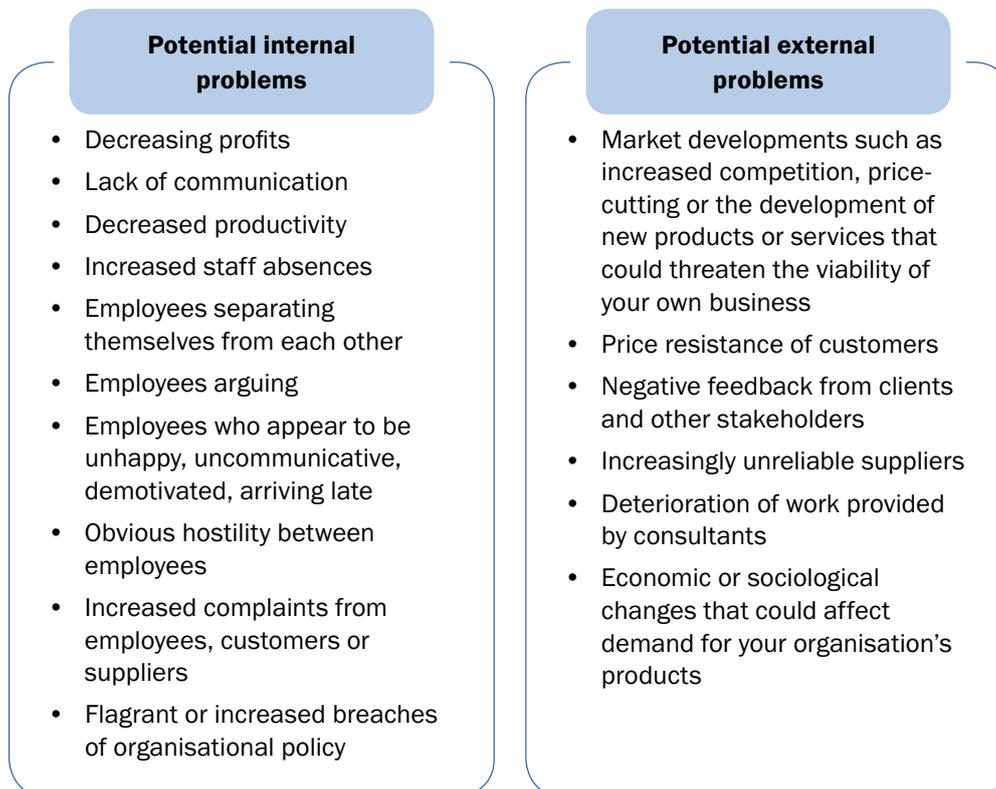
Managing work difficulties	
Step	**Action**
1. Recognise the symptoms of the problem.	• Be alert to early warning signs of potential problems. • Establish a culture for regularly highlighting and addressing issues.
2. Identify the problem.	• Gather the facts. • Determine who is involved and who should handle the issue. • Talk to the relevant people. • Establish the causes.
3. Analyse the problem.	• Evaluate the extent of the issue. • Determine the potential implications. • Consider the interests of those affected by the issue and its outcome. • Ascertain the processes that need to be adhered to and any relevant legislative requirements.
4. Define the options for resolution.	• Define and evaluate options for resolution in consultation with those at the centre of the problem and any specialist personnel. • Determine the best course of action.
5. Take action.	• Develop a plan of action. • Implement the solutions within the organisation's processes. • Follow up to ensure implementation. • Monitor outcomes

Step 1: Recognise the symptoms of the problem

Symptoms alert you to possible problems and are evidence of changes occurring around the workplace.

The most effective way to deal 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.

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. 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 be averted completely or, at least, highlighted and resolved long before they turn into major problems. Be alert to early indications of problems with regard to the organisation's relationship with external stakeholders.

Potential internal problems	Potential external problems
• Decreasing profits • Lack of communication • Decreased productivity • Increased staff absences • Employees separating themselves from each other • Employees arguing • Employees who appear to be unhappy, uncommunicative, demotivated, arriving late • Obvious hostility between employees • Increased complaints from employees, customers or suppliers • Flagrant or increased breaches of organisational policy	• Market developments such as increased competition, price-cutting or the development of new products or services that could threaten the viability of your own business • 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 your organisation's products

Step 2: Identify the problem

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

Many problems are mildly troublesome, such as a malfunctioning printer, while others can be more complex, such as bullying or harassment. Your goal should be to accurately identify the extent of the problem by gathering the facts, speaking with the relevant people and establishing the causes, while avoiding making assumptions and acting on hearsay.

Common workplace problems include:

- poor performance
- inadequate work standards
- work not completed on time
- authority disregarded
- instructions not adhered to
- regulations not followed
- lack of punctuality, absenteeism
- breakdown in communication
- lack of cooperation between staff
- clash of personalities
- low staff morale
- breach of trust or privacy

- difficulties meeting organisational objectives
- unclear expectations
- insufficient information
- difficult customers
- uncooperative suppliers or contractors
- excessive workloads
- equipment failures or inadequacies
- budget restrictions
- lack of necessary work skills
- breaches of legislation and guidelines.

Gather the facts

What is the problem? The answer to this question lies in gathering details about the issue, both objective and subjective. It can be easy to jump to conclusions and base your response on incorrect information, so you should make an 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 both on information that has been relayed to you and on your own observation. Always focus on the facts rather than rely 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.

A series of questions such as the following will help you to ascertain the background and circumstances surrounding the problem.

Questions
• 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 way?
• 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.

Reasons not to act purely on hearsay
By implication, you are encouraging staff to inform on each other. This often leads to a climate of distrust and negativity.
There is a strong chance that you won't have all the facts at your disposal, and will make allegations that are unfounded or antagonistic.
Those at the centre of the complaint are likely to feel there has been a breach of confidence, in that people are not communicating openly and genuinely.
If you act immediately on an accusation, you neglect your leadership responsibility to guide the first party to resolve the problems they encounter.

Speak with relevant people

Once you have decided that you should handle the issue yourself, speak as soon as possible to the individuals at the centre of the problem. This must be done in a non-accusatory way, avoiding any inclination to jump to hasty conclusions.

Your aim at this stage should be to seek the views of those with first-hand knowledge of the problem and to be clear about what actually has 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. Do not interrupt unless you want to ask a question to clarify a point.

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

Establish the causes

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

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

If someone is not completing work by the required deadline, it may be that:

- the person has other work competing for their time
- the person has not received sufficient training or lacks some of the skills required to complete the work in the time required
- the person has experienced technical difficulties, such as computer failure, or does not have adequate equipment for completing the task
- the person is hampered by processes that are causing delays or by someone else not completing their work on time
- the person does not have access to information that would make their work easier
- the person is experiencing personal problems
- the deadlines are not realistic for the task at hand
- organisational processes are too cumbersome
- performance standards are too high to enable the task to be completed on time
- unforeseen circumstances have arisen such as a workplace emergency.

Avoid making assumptions

You will fall into a common trap if you make assumptions based on an insufficient grasp of the facts, are unwilling to understand the parties involved and their particular perspectives, or make generalisations.

An example of a generalisation is to explain away the problem of an older employee's lack of computer skills by saying 'mature-age people are not into technology'. Addressing the individual person or specific issues is more appropriate. So instead you would say 'Margot seems to be lacking in computer skills', which would lead to a question of why this is so, and what could be done about it.

While you may feel that you are very open-minded, at times we are all prone to look for easy answers. Always take the time to think an issue through thoroughly and search for conclusions that are less obvious.

Step 3: Analyse the problem before taking action

Sometimes the biggest challenge to overcome is the urge to act immediately. This is a common mistake in problem-solving that puts the solution at the beginning rather than the end of the process. 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. The golden rule in ensuring a positive outcome is to think before you act.

Until you have fully determined the extent of the issue and its potential implications, do not make 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.

Affected parties

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'll 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.

Extent of problem

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 organisation's ability 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. You should do this to predict whether any likely solutions could pose an even greater problem.

Context of problem

What is the context of the problem?

The context of the problem involves the circumstances that surround the situation. It points to specific operations that are affected by or impact on the problem. The context may relate to:

• employment contracts or enterprise agreements

• organisational policy

• organisational standards such as a customer service charter, code of workplace conduct or ethical guidelines

• standard operating procedures

• 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

• the effective functioning of the team.

Industrial relations issues

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.

The Fair Work Commission is Australia's national workplace relations tribunal, responsible for maintaining a safety net of minimum wages and employment conditions, as well as a range of other workplace functions and regulations.

The Commission assists employers to resolve issues, disputes and dismissals; validate right of entry permits; approve or vary enterprise agreements; and help find an agreement or an award. It also assists employees to resolve disputes about issues in the workplace, dismissals, or general protection.

The Commission operates under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth). Further information on Australia's national workplace relations tribunal can be found at: www.fwc.gov.au (viewed 12 January 2015).

The Fair Work Commission assists Australian organisations by:

• providing a safety net of minimum conditions, including minimum wages, in awards

• facilitating good faith bargaining and the making of enterprise agreements

• granting remedies for unfair dismissal

• regulating the taking of industrial action

• resolving a range of collective and individual workplace disputes through conciliation, mediation and in some cases arbitration

• carrying out a range of functions relating to workplace determinations, equal remuneration, workplace protections, right of entry, and stand down.

Step 4: Define the options for resolution

Timeliness is important in addressing work difficulties to contain the issue and 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 you would like to achieve.

Always aim for a win–win situation in which a solution is reached that satisfies all parties and helps them feel they have worked together or collaborated for their mutual benefit.

Sometimes it may be appropriate to let a person or people work through a problem by themselves and 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.

You should always follow organisational policy and procedures and consult with your own manager when changing work conditions.

Possible problem-solving options include:

- 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 work conditions, e.g. breaks, layout.

Try some 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.

Try one option and then, if necessary, another in an attempt to solve the problem. Trial and error can be an effective way to approach 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.

Brainstorm

Brainstorming promotes creativity. Collaborative problem-solving encourages lateral thinking and helps people to accept compromises and work with the solutions devised. Remember to welcome all ideas without judgment.

Evaluating 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.

Consult 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 involved in the problem whether they are comfortable with involving others. Remember to respect the person's confidentiality and trust.

Choose a strategy

Keep an open mind and choose a strategy that is appropriate for the specific situation. Factors to consider are whether the:

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

These criteria can be given weight according to their relative importance.

Be flexible

Some issues can be resolved by examining the possibilities and remaining flexible. You can make fairly simple changes by changing the:

• information flow

• structures and procedures

• equipment and services.

Step 5: Take action

Many strategies fail because the solutions 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 solution strategies are applied.

Depending on the nature of the problem, you can:

• develop an action plan and circulate copies to all parties

• clearly document the actual tasks that need to be done

• indicate who will do each task

• set time frames for the completion of each task

• indicate how progress will be reviewed.

Example: identify the context of the problem

Joneen is considering some major staffing changes. She determines that she needs to examine employment contracts to ascertain the conditions for dismissal and retrenchment.

She also needs to refer to employment legislation, equal opportunity provisions in regard to staff on maternity leave, company policy, and any relevant operational guidelines. Joneen must also consider further implications such as the loss of skills and knowledge, the cost and risk of training and inducting new staff, and ongoing staff morale.

Practice task 10

Identify a workplace problem you are currently facing or have experienced in the past, then answer the questions that follow.

1. Prepare a list of symptoms that indicate a problem is developing within your particular organisation. Choose two of these symptoms and identify the action you could take to further explore the situation and avert the development of a major problem.

2. Describe the relationship difficulties you encountered, or could encounter, as part of the problem in your workplace.

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3. Describe how you would handle a team member making an allegation against another team member. Consider the alternative courses of action you would take as a leader. Describe the circumstances where you believe it would be appropriate for you to take action yourself.
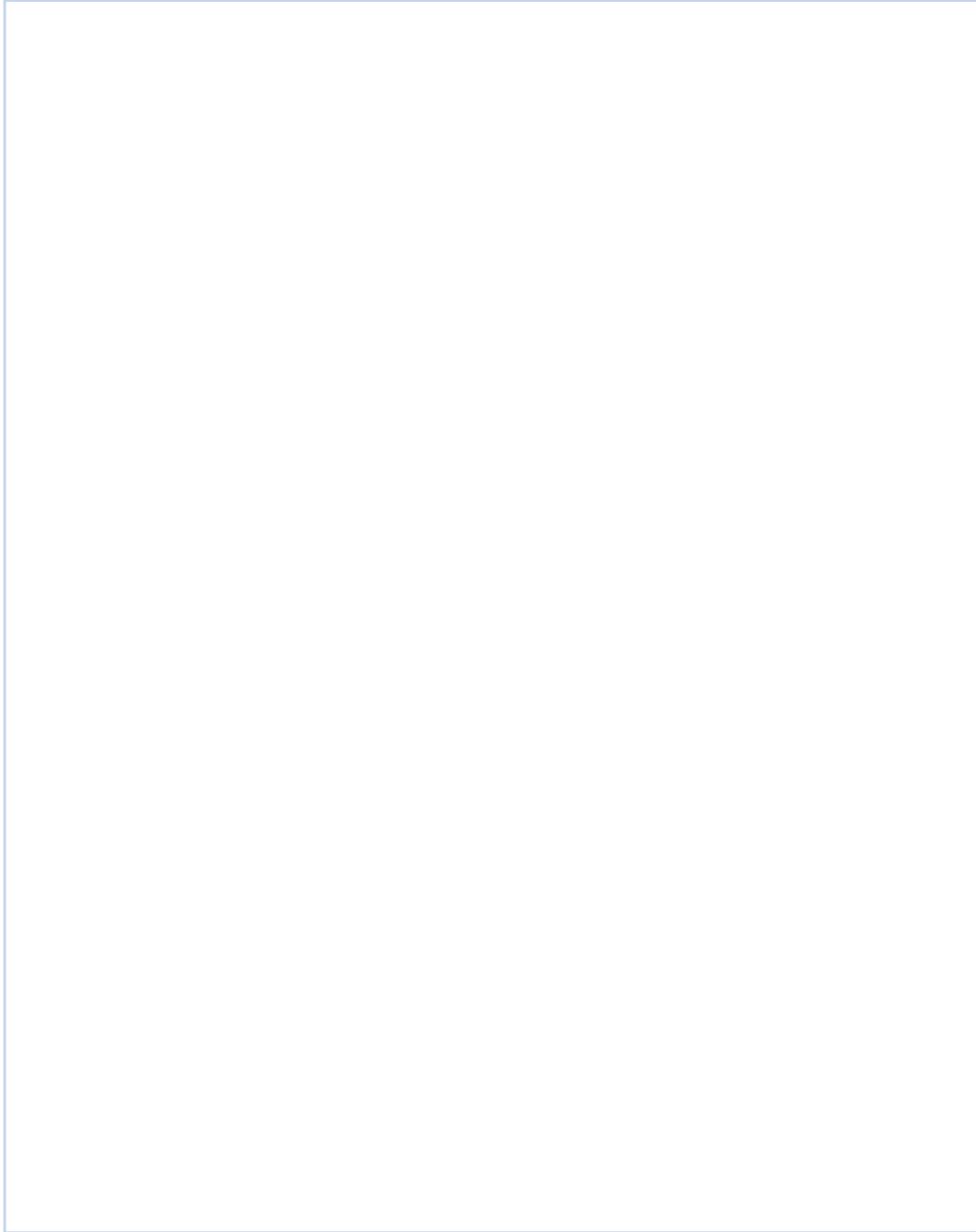
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4. Describe who the problem affects, analyse the extent of the problem and determine its context.
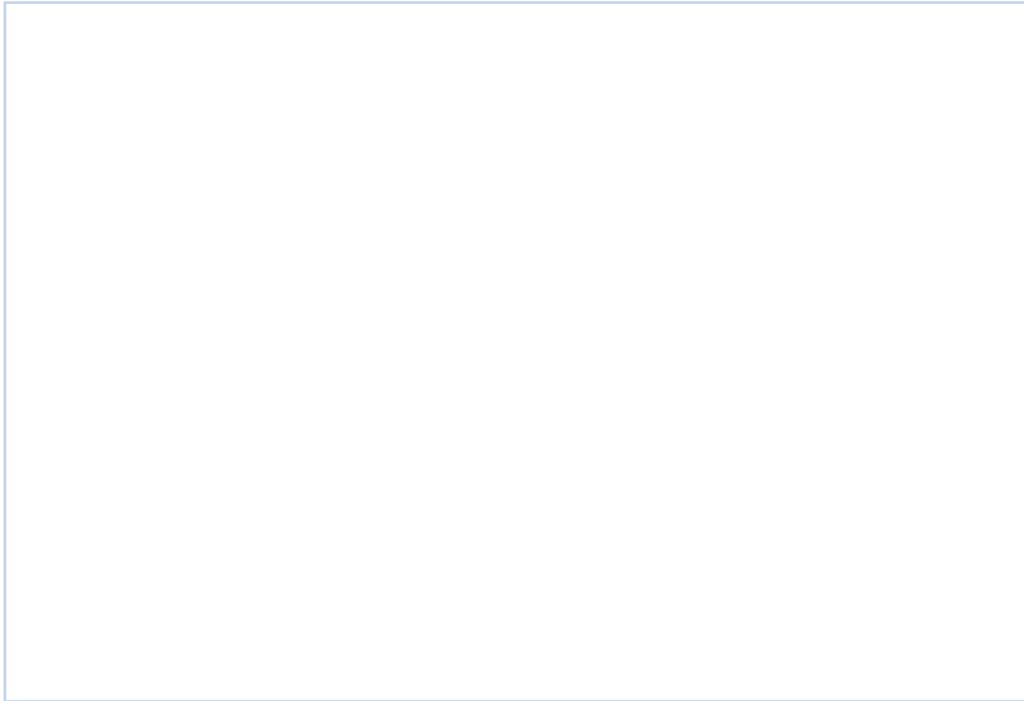
5. Prepare a list of three possible courses of action you could follow to resolve your workplace problem. For each course of action, identify the potential implications and likely effectiveness of each solution.
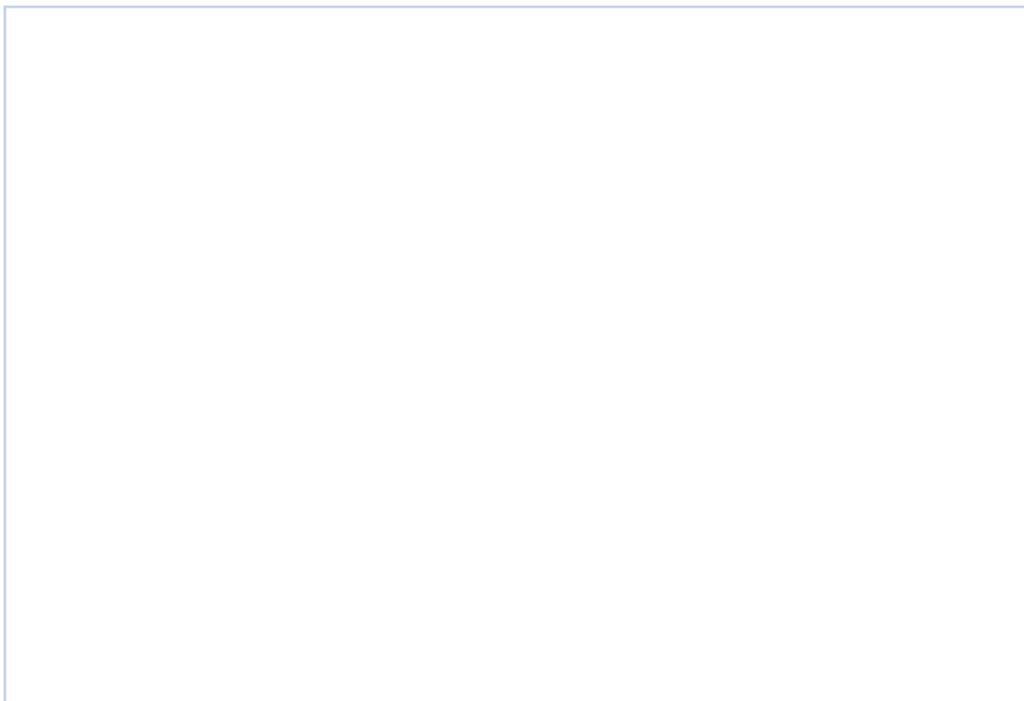
4B Manage conflict constructively

A manager should establish processes and systems to ensure that conflict is identified and managed constructively in accordance with the organisation's policies and procedures.

Most performance problems result from strained relationships between individuals, not from 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 an everyday 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, 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 policies and procedures

Conflict should be dealt with sensitively and quickly. However, you should 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. Follow the problem-solving steps outlined previously 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.

Procedures for handling conflict 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 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 and accept alternative ways of doing things, while being 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.

Think positively	**Empathise with others**
Avoid thinking in terms of difficult people or demanding customers. It is more productive to focus on the behaviour or situation than to categorise and blame the person as a whole. A suitable approach is to sum up the situation with a statement such as 'this customer is angry because she believes she was entitled to a refund even though we offered to exchange the goods'.	Recognise how others are feeling. Emotions should never be buried completely. Give each party the opportunity to explain any hurt, annoyance or frustration they may be experiencing. You do not 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 do not help you to solve problems effectively. Remember everything you've been told about 'counting to 10' to give you time to think about your reaction.

Consensus	**Use a deferral technique**
	If you are considering putting your feelings in writing, use a deferral technique: write down what you want to say but do not send it immediately; put a draft aside until you're feeling calm then reconsider your words and decide whether you need to send it at all.

Discuss misunderstandings	**Discuss misunderstandings** If there is an obvious problem, draw attention to it and talk about how it can be resolved. Often the parties will be relieved that the matter has been brought out into the open. Of course, it isn't appropriate to react every time you see the slightest sign of friction.
Acknowledge the other party	**Acknowledge the other party** If you are in conflict with another party, let the other party know they're being heard. Often this is all that is needed to defuse the situation. Showing open-mindedness demonstrates that you will treat their concerns fairly. Listen actively and ask critical questions to explore the situation. Rather than trying to solve the disagreement yourself, ask 'What do you think needs to be changed?' or 'How can we resolve this?'. While open questions are often effective, avoid asking why. Asking vague questions does not help identify the source of the problem and 'why' questions often make people defensive.
Be aware of behaviours	**Be aware of certain behaviours** 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 conflicts. 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: resolve conflict

Jed is a category strategy manager at a major food manufacturer. 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 experience 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"; "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 one who has suggested the solution.

Dispute resolution processes

Many organisations have a formal framework in place to help parties deal with issues that cannot be easily resolved. It is in everyone's interests for management to take the initiative in developing collaborative processes for dispute resolution and for all parties to be encouraged 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.

The ideal process for dispute resolution varies enormously depending on the size and nature of the organisation; however, certain principles apply.

Dispute resolution principles

1

Consensus

Dispute resolution procedures should be developed in collaboration with all interested parties. This is the best way to ensure 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.

... continued

2 **Transparency**

New employees should be introduced to dispute resolution through induction programs and literature made available upon 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 internet, employment manuals, human resources officers and/or workplace representatives.

3 **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.

4 **Timeliness**

Timeliness is vital in ensuring that problems are kept in check. A commitment to regular consultation with staff and openness to ideas being shared will help address issues as they arise (or avoid them altogether). When a problem does emerge, follow the agreed set of actions as quickly and efficiently as possible.

5 **Informality**

Issues are best resolved at the lowest organisational level or as close to the actual workplace as possible, so they do not take on more meaning than is necessary. Beyond that, there should be a tiered structure to be followed if the issue cannot be resolved informally.

6 **Referral**

Dispute resolution processes should allow for issues to be referred to other departments or personnel within the organisation if required.

7 **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 11

1. Describe a conflict or misunderstanding that has occurred recently, either within your workplace or privately. How was the situation managed?
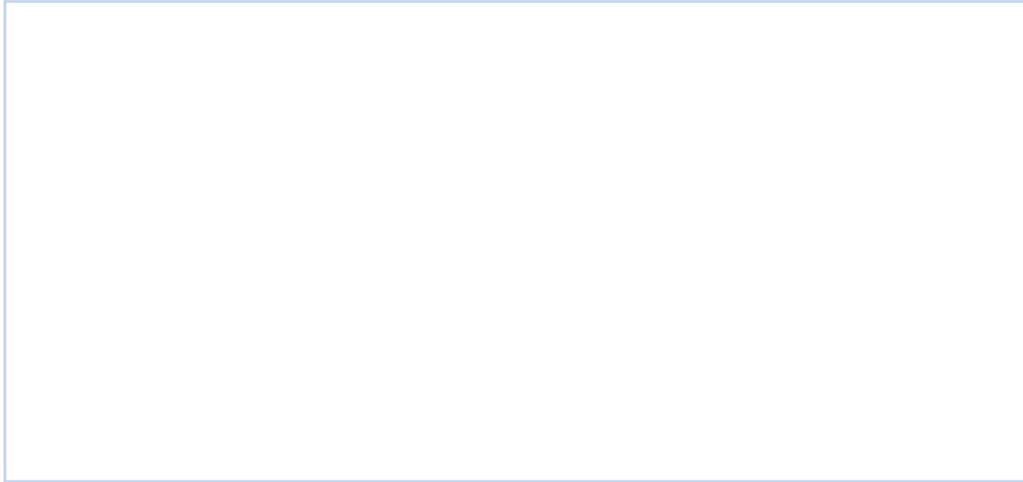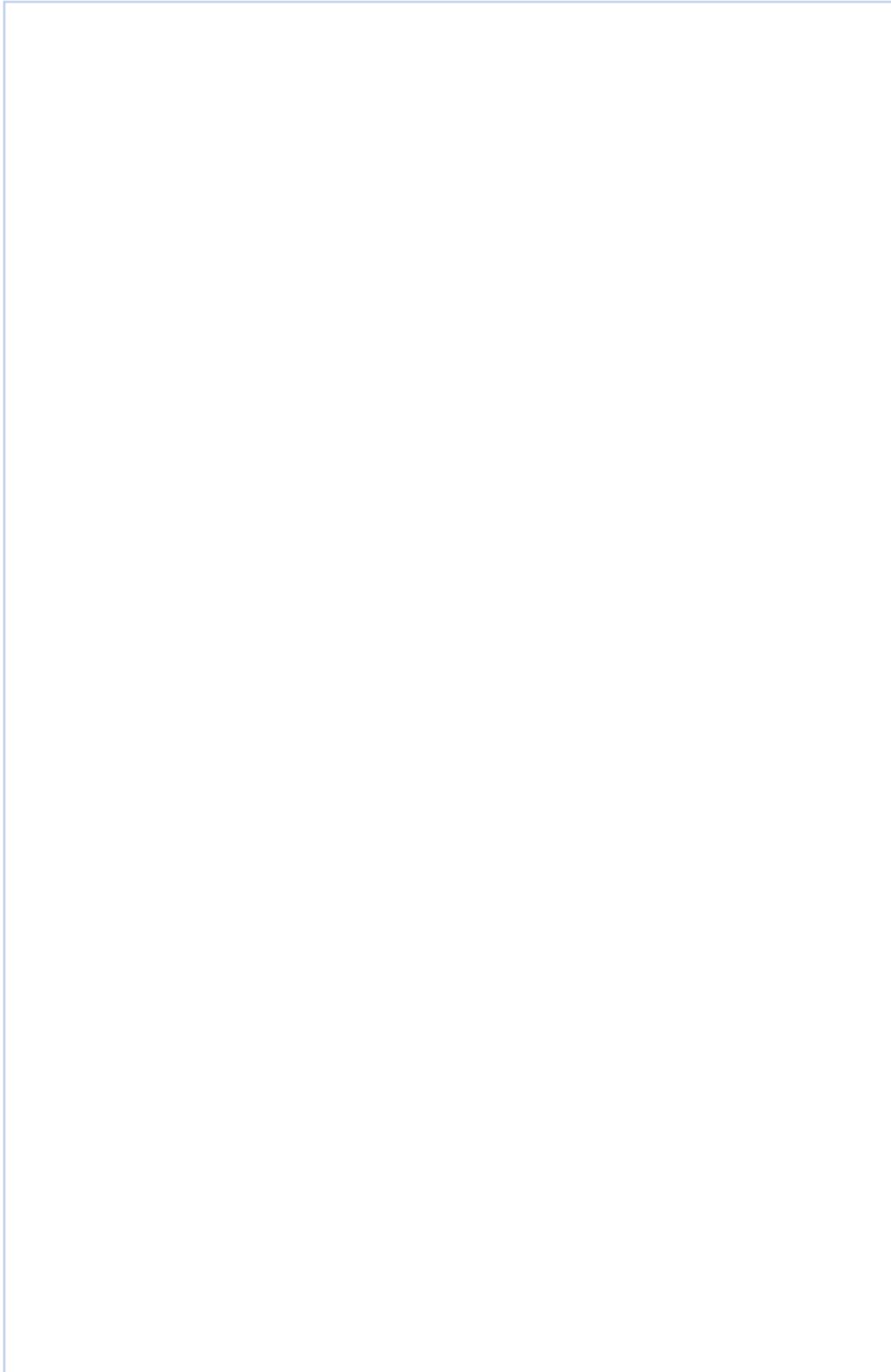
2. Identify three initiatives you could take, based on the strategies described previously, and on ideas of your own, that could help resolve areas of conflict more constructively in the future.
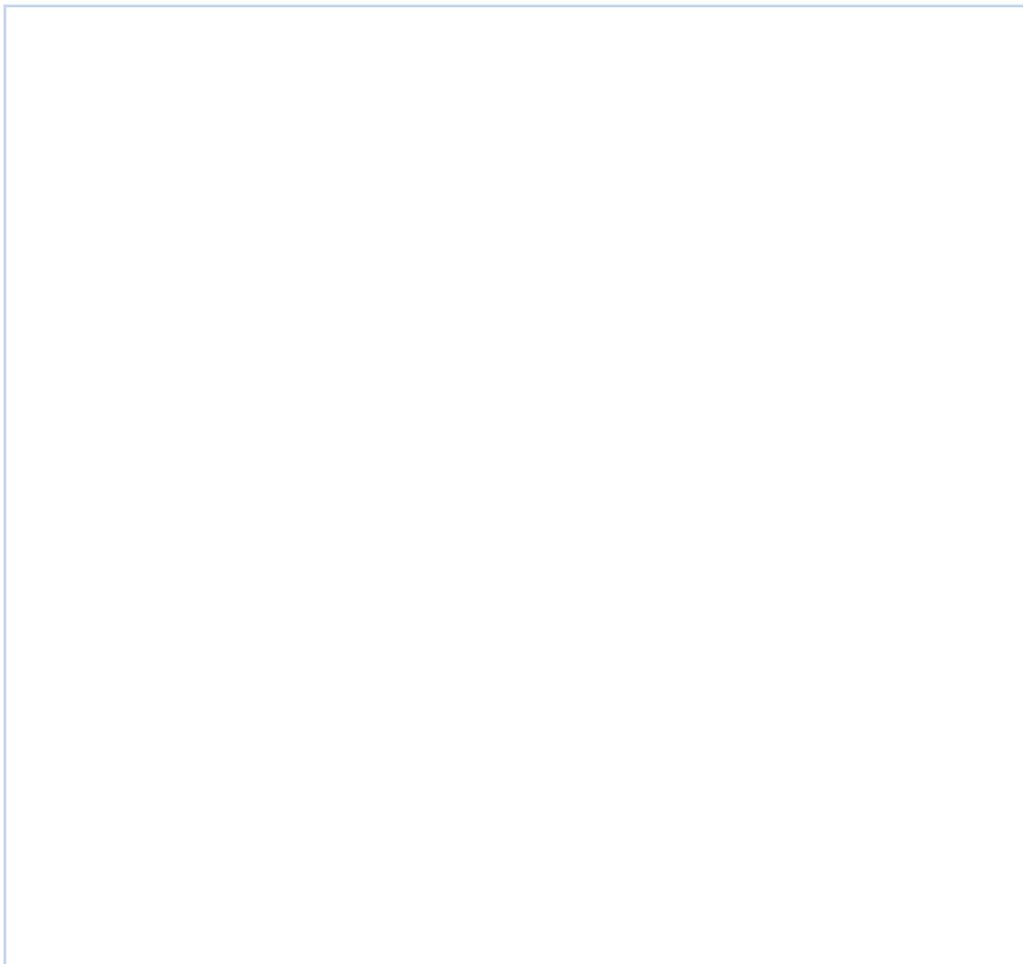
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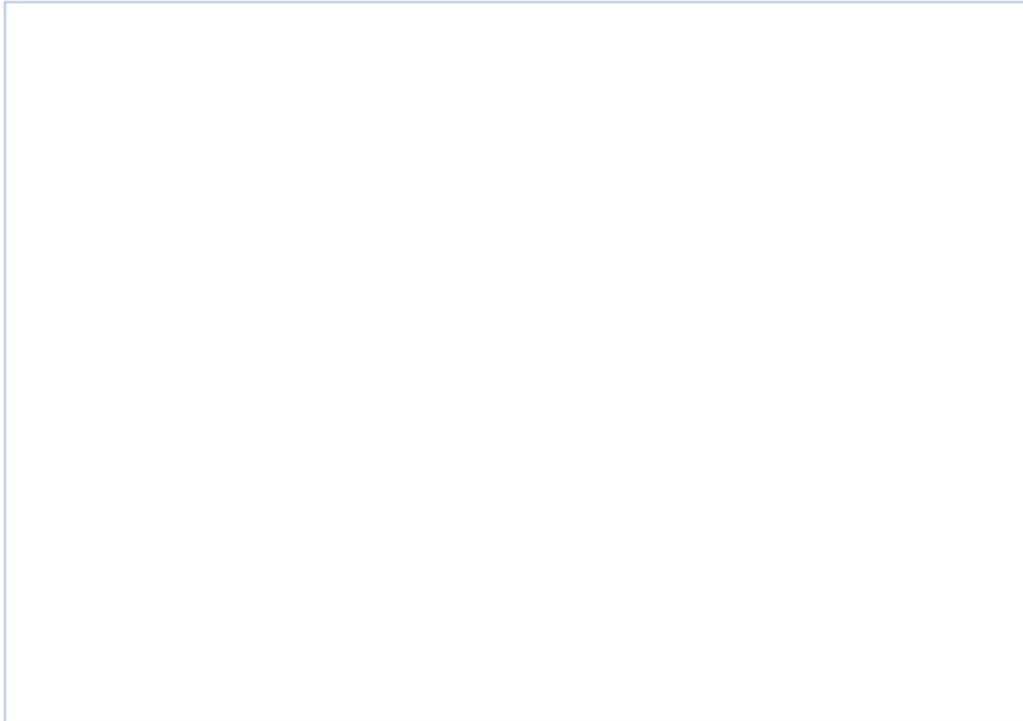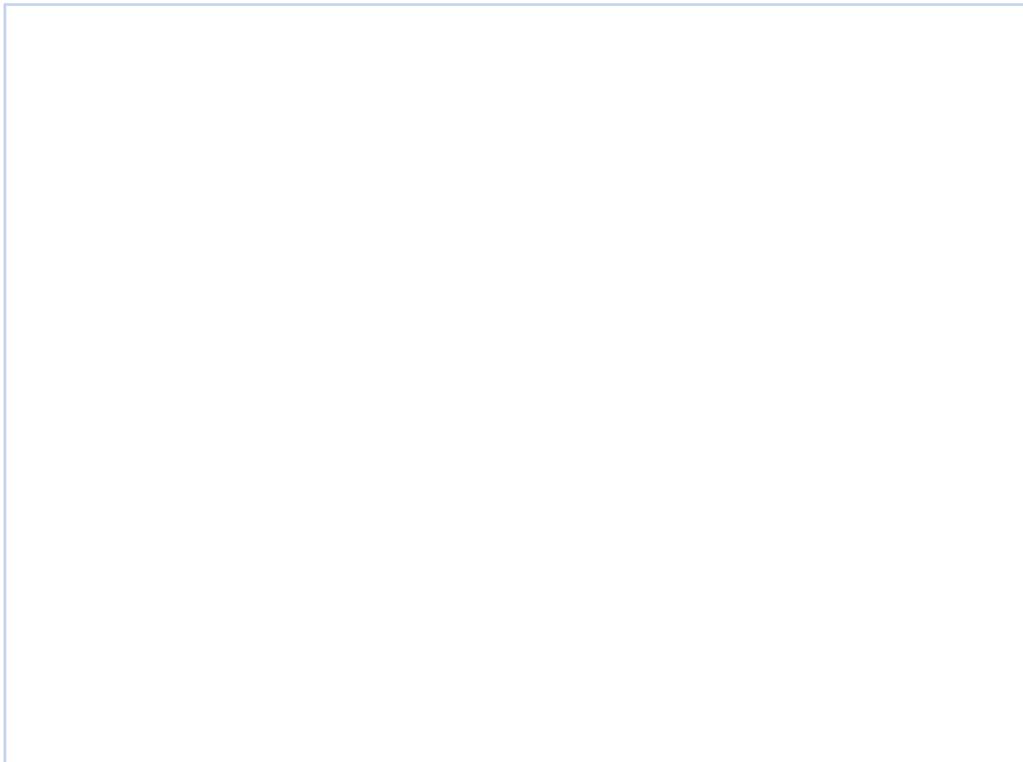3. Describe the dispute resolution process in place within your organisation.

... continued

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4. Describe how the resolutions are communicated to staff. Are they consistently followed?

5. Discuss what people at various levels of your organisation think about the usefulness of these procedures. How could the procedures be improved?

4C | Guide, counsel and support co-workers

Frontline managers should provide guidance, counselling and support to assist co-workers in resolving their 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 have been contained by the individual or people involved. The organisation will operate more effectively if all parties are encouraged to resolve issues openly and directly, while aiming for 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 to use effective problem-solving techniques. You can do this by guiding, counselling 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.

Responsibilities of a frontline manager

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

If a team member tells you about a difficulty they are experiencing, such as a dispute with a colleague, you should first suggest 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. However, 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 the problem-solving process.

Guide

Direct and influence your team members on how to resolve difficulties in the workplace by training them in effective problem-solving skills and techniques.

Counsel

Offer your team members advice on resolving their particular workplace difficulty in a formal consultation.

Support

Provide your team members with opportunities and mechanisms that motivate and direct them to solve problems and create a working environment that helps them work at their best.

Guide your team

You should provide your team with guidance and information about the expectations that you and your organisation have with regard to effective problem-solving and dispute resolution.

Staff inductions

Conduct staff inductions

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 a strong 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

Provide ongoing education

Actively encourage staff members to solve workplace difficulties themselves, by:

- promoting positive interaction between team members
- suggesting a direct approach when an issue is raised with you
- coaching the team or individual team members in processes for resolving work difficulties
- emphasising the beneficial outcomes that stem from addressing issues in a positive manner
- making sure that information is provided to all staff regarding the organisation's problem-solving and dispute-resolution policies, relevant legislative requirements, employee rights and management expectations
- ensuring team members know where they can access information when they need it
- reinforcing the importance of following the correct processes
- assuring the team that you will support them.

Leading by example

Lead by example

As a manager, you should lead by example in the way you approach and resolve difficulties and conflict within the workplace. Team members will look to you for guidance on the policies and requirements of your organisation and regulatory bodies, so you need to be entirely aware of this framework and 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.

Training programs

Initiate training programs

You may arrange for a workshop to be conducted in-house for your team to learn how to convert workplace difficulties into positive outcomes. Or you may choose to give team members an opportunity to attend training sessions elsewhere. Keep a list of relevant 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.

Supply resources

Supply reading material and other resources

Often, a solution to a difficulty can be found in resource material such as magazines, newspaper articles, books or on the internet. For example, if a person is having trouble fitting in with their team, 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 may benefit from it.

Safe work practices

Encourage safe work 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. You should take active steps to train your team members in work procedures and skills that ensure health and safety.

Counsel your team

Problems may arise when team members act individually and without regard for one another. The team leader will need to act quickly and carefully to remedy the situation through counselling, discussion and coaching.

If a team member is not pulling their weight, counsel them to determine whether the reason is a personal one or something that is best managed one on one with you. If the problem is due to poor organisational skills or a lack of knowledge, enlist the help of more able or experienced team members to mentor them, or contact your HR department or an external provider to organise some training.
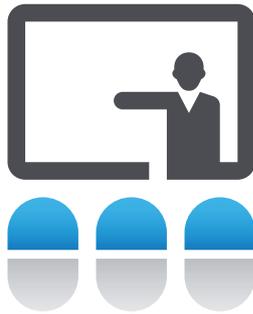
Coaching

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 to resolve difficulties or approach the task.

Shadowing

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

Mentoring

Appointing a mentor is another way of providing support. Mentors are often used for new managers, for those experiencing problems with communication or interpersonal skills, or in any area that presents particular challenges.

A mentor should provide 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.

Support your team

Make it clear to your team members that you are prepared to support them through any 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.

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. This means defending them in the face of criticism and providing ongoing guidance, training and constructive feedback.

Meetings are an ideal way to discuss issues and provide support to team members as a whole. 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.

Giving people constructive feedback about the way they approach their work can avert many difficulties. Feedback should be aimed at improving an employee's work practices and interaction 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, either at an individual or team meeting or as part of a performance appraisal process.

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.

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

Example: resolve problems in open discussions

Sally is in her office having a general conversation with two of her staff members about how they are not working well together.

In discussing the issues openly, they come to understand each other better and feel relieved the matter is brought into the open. Sally is able to reinforce the organisation's expectations regarding mutual respect and cooperation, and make some concrete suggestions about more- positive ways of dealing with each other.

Practice task 12

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, was refusing to help them organise 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 why 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 education programs themselves. Sheri is able to see their point of view and is happy to take on the arrangements for the program launch.

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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?
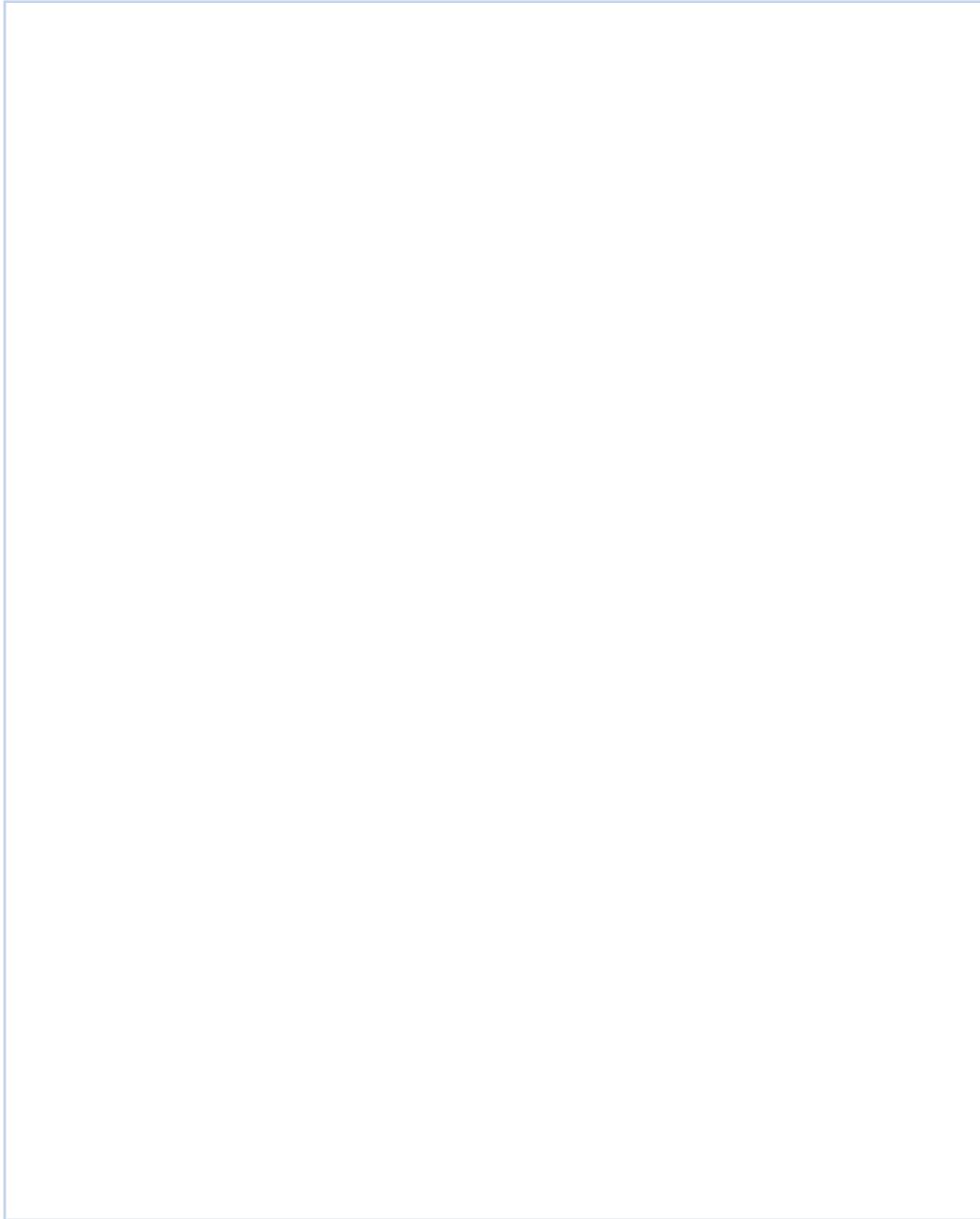
4D Implement an action plan to address identified difficulties

Frontline managers are responsible for developing and implementing an action plan to address any identified difficulties. As previously mentioned, as soon as an action plan has been determined, you must ensure the resolution strategies are applied.

Develop an action plan

Documenting an action plan helps you and others think through all the details of the action 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 inconsequential or impossible. However, the fundamental intent of the solution should always remain a focus.

Involve your team

Workplace issues should be addressed, as far as practicable, at the team level; discuss them in an open and honest way without recourse to external parties if possible. However, if your solution does not 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.

Follow organisational and legislative requirements

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

Seek further advice

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

Review and improve workplace outcomes

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, in fact, completed within specified time lines and with allocated resources. In many cases, those who have identified and analysed a problem can believe their task is over when a solution is established. A clear understanding of how progress will be monitored ensures those involved are alert to unexpected delays or difficulties associated with certain actions or tasks.

As the solution is being actioned, talk to people involved with the implementation and those who are affected by it. This helps to ascertain how they feel about what is taking place and whether they are experiencing any problems. If you communicate directly with people who are affected by the situation, 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 more severe problems occurring in the future.

Example: implement an action plan

A customer-service team identifies a problem with responding to incoming correspondence, queries and complaints. Customers had been complaining more and more about the time the team took to reply to their requests. On investigation, the manager discovers that correspondence was being lost due to an inadequate mail registration procedure. Customer-service levels were declining and this would eventually impact on the whole organisation as profits decreased. 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 register 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 the system for functionality.	Susan and Walter	10 April
Draft an instruction manual.	Sylvia and Walter	30 April
Approve the instruction manual.	Andrew	6 May
Conduct staff training.	Mina	30 May

Practice task 13

Identify a difficulty you have experienced, or are currently facing, in your organisation.

1. Develop an action plan (including five or more tasks) to address the identified difficulty using this table.

Task	Person	Completion date

... continued

Task	Person	Completion date

2. Describe how progress will be reviewed and how feedback will be obtained.

... continued

Summary

1. The most effective way of dealing with a work difficulty is to prevent it from occurring.

2. Difficulties can very often be averted completely 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.

3. A workplace problem or difficulty may be something you have personally experienced or observed, or it could be something that a team member or 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, rather than just the issue as it exists at the present time. You should do this to predict whether any likely solutions could pose an even greater problem.

6. Always aim for a win–win situation that satisfies all parties and helps them feel 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.

10. The team leader must lead by example by actively seeking to resolve problems with the team. If your efforts are unsuccessful, then problems beyond your control must be forwarded to relevant others.
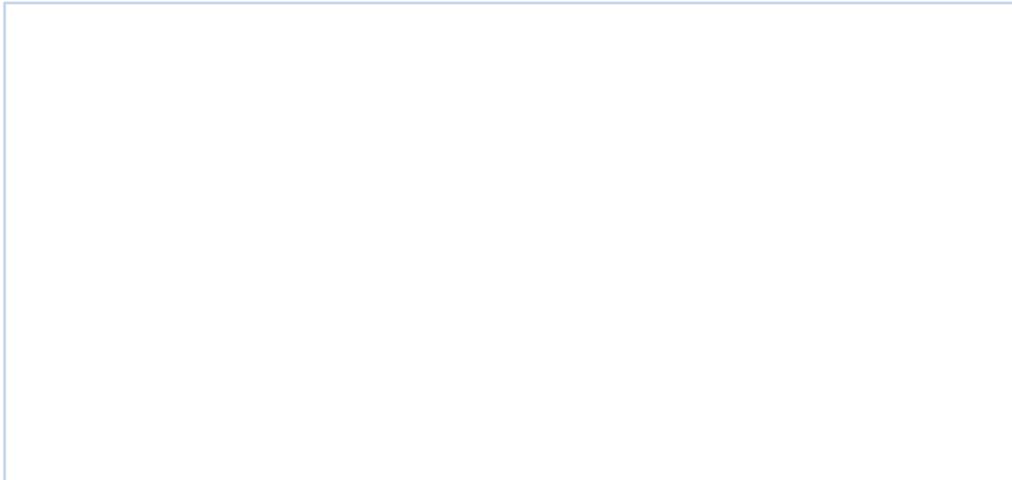
Learning checkpoint 4
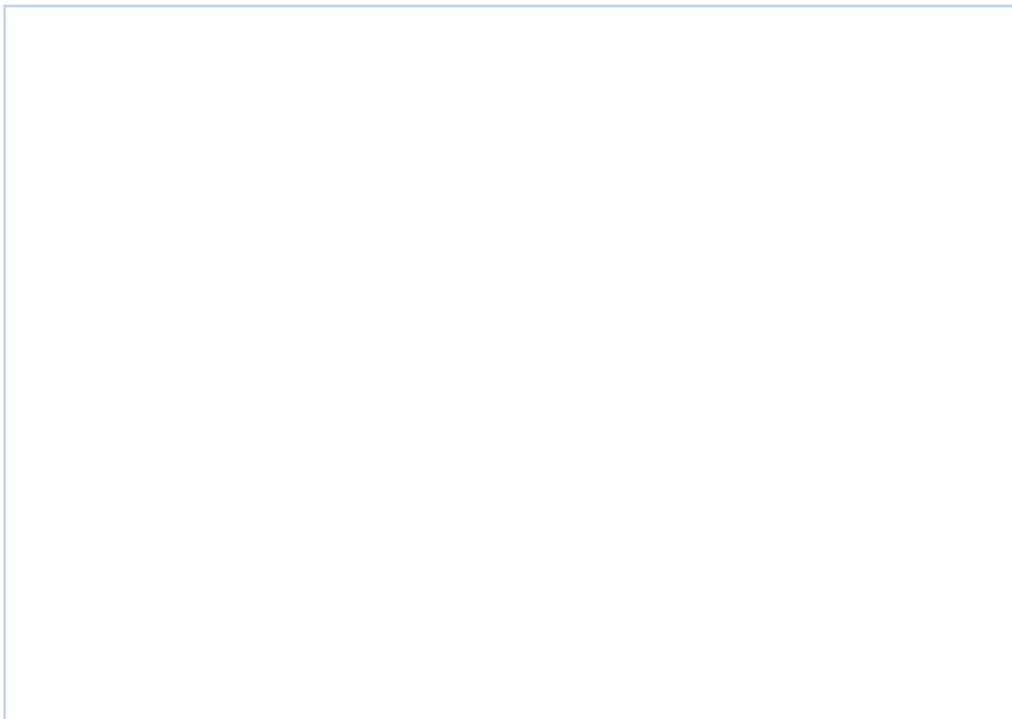## Manage difficulties to achieve positive outcomes

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in managing difficulties to achieve positive outcomes.

Part A

1. Explain how your organisation's systems, policies and procedures relating to conflict resolution can support the development of effective workplace relationships.

2. Outline the relevant legislation that affects your organisation's business operations relating to industrial relations.

Part B

1. Select a situation you managed that involved conflict or a dispute resulting from a misunderstanding, poor communication, work-related difficulties and/or interpersonal differences. This can be from your workplace or from a personal situation.
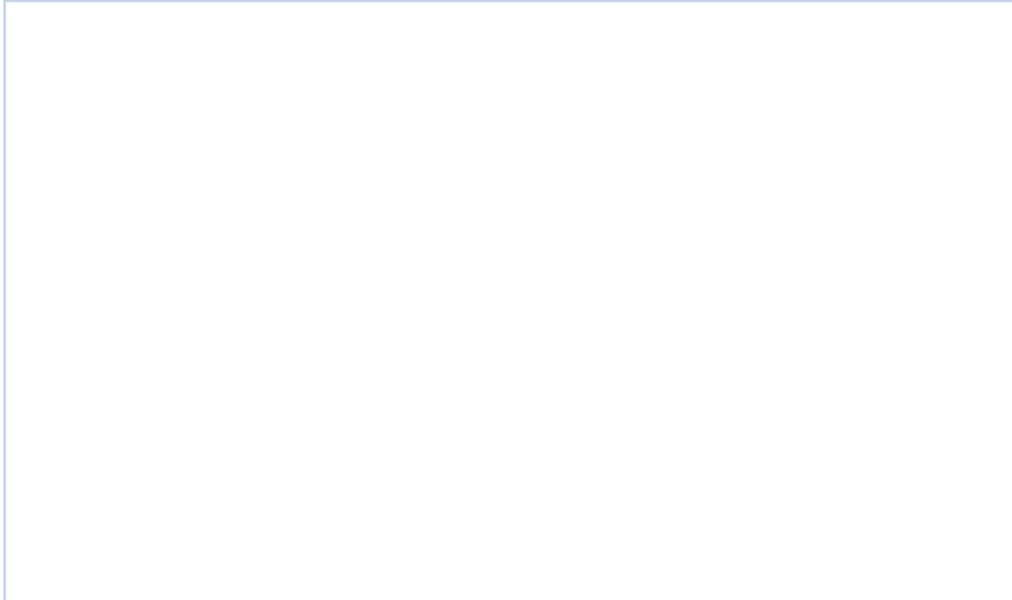
2. Provide a brief outline, including background information, leading to the situation. Describe:

   • how you recognised the situation

   • who was affected by the situation and in what way

   • what effect of the situation

   • whether the problem was short or long term.
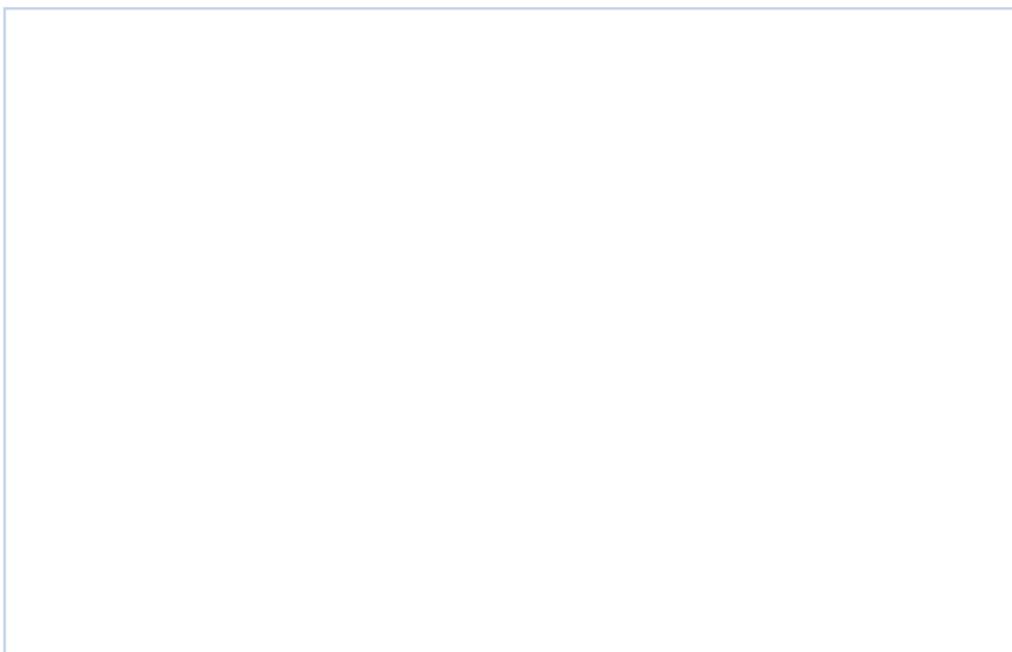
3. Explain how you gathered evidence, what evidence you gathered and how you analysed the evidence to find the cause of the problem and possible solutions.
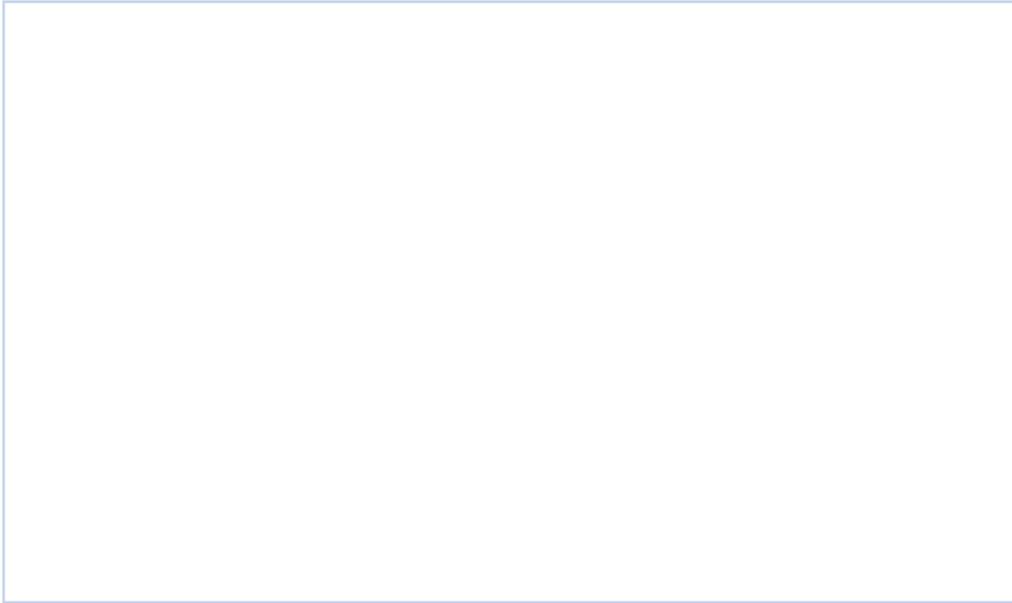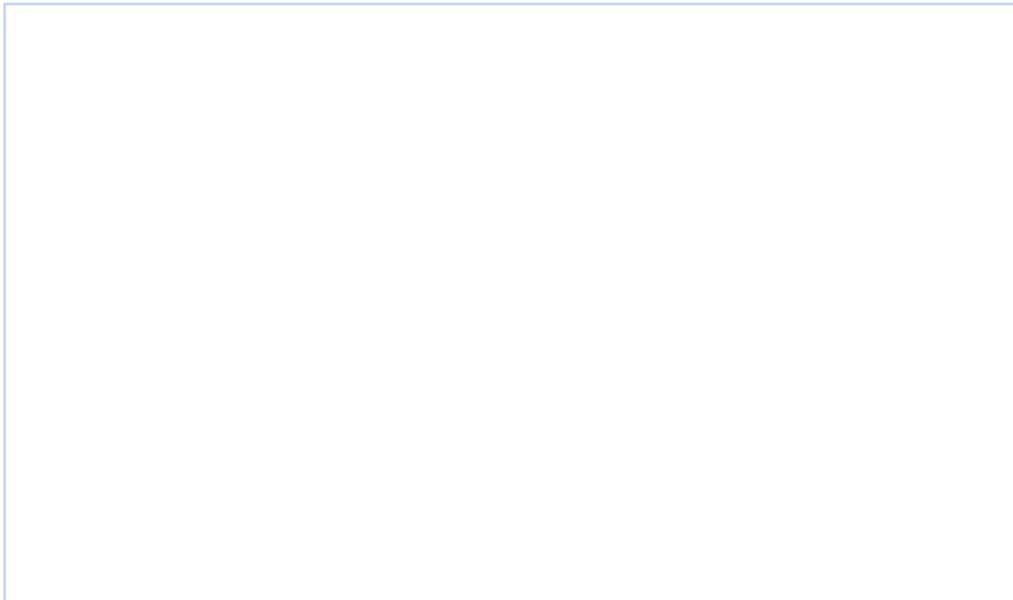
4. Explain how you resolved the problem. Include the action plan you developed, if appropriate.
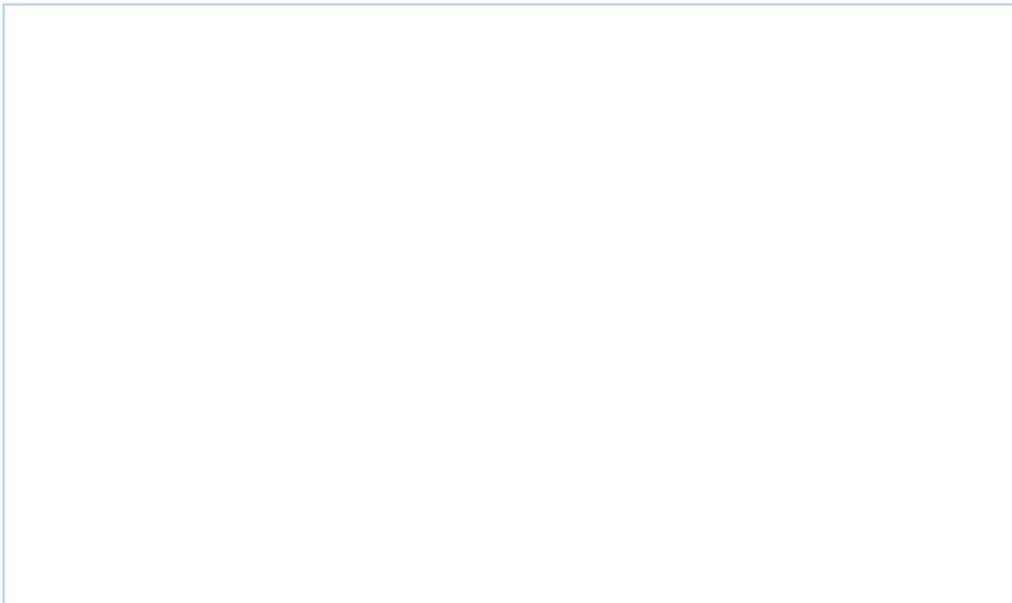
5. Describe the strategies you used to support your team members and colleagues in resolving the problem.

6. 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.

7. Describe a range of strategies you follow for managing poor performance within your team.
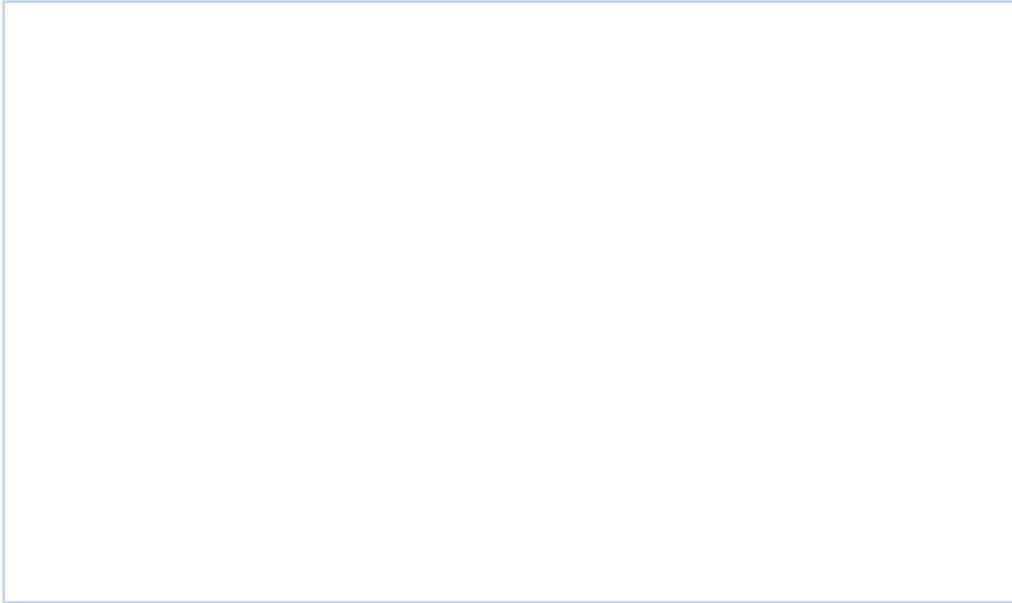
8. Explain how effective these strategies are and how they may be improved if necessary.