

Lesson 2: Team-Building and Communication Skills

Introduction

In Lesson 1 of Module D, students examined the characteristics of effective teams and the development stages that teams go through from *Forming* to *Adjourning*, as identified by Bruce W. Tuckman. In order for a team to accomplish its goal(s), it is important for the team members to understand that they may play a number of different roles within a given team. Furthermore, individuals within a team need to appreciate the roles assumed by or assigned to the other team members. To gain this understanding and appreciation of team roles, a team needs the opportunity (at the appropriate time in its development) to build a sense of being a team. These team-building activities involve cooperation, teamwork, and communication.

This lesson focuses on the elements of teamwork and the skills required to work and to communicate effectively within teams. Being able to function effectively as a team member is a necessary skill for success in the workplace, in sports, in family units, and so on.



Specific Learning Outcome

12.PS.2 Explore and identify the various roles and skills of team members in building effective teams.



Key Understandings

- Team members play varying roles that contribute to or detract from team effectiveness.
- Communication is a vital element of effective teams.



Essential Questions

1. What roles do people play within teams that lead to success?
 2. How do communication skills contribute to team effectiveness?
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Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

All Hands On: An Activating Activity

This activating activity is intended to help teams develop effective communication and problem-solving skills.

Directions/Description

- Form teams of about eight students.
- Supply each team with one bandana, one marble, and one plastic cup that has some kind of “lip” on the bottom.
- The team members surround the bandana and hold onto it along the edges with both hands, creating a tabletop effect.
- The team then places the cup upside down in the middle of the bandana and places/balances the marble on top of the cup.
- The task of the team is to transport the bandana-cup-marble apparatus from point A to point B, as described by the teacher.

Possible Variations

- Smaller teams may be easier to work with.
- As the teams move from point A to point B, they encounter “obstacles” to navigate around, over, and so on.

Possible Debriefing Questions

1. What did you enjoy about this team activity?
2. What was your team’s greatest challenge?
3. How does the bandana symbolize how a team works together?



Background Information

Team Roles

In Lesson 1 of Module D, students examined which characteristics were evident in successful teams and which characteristics were lacking or not evident in unsuccessful teams. A team is made up of all sorts of people. How these people interact and relate to one another is a key factor in determining how successful the team will be at achieving its goals. Some people are primarily concerned about getting the work done, others are helpful and supportive to team members, and still others can cause dissension or conflict within the team.

High-performing teams don't just happen. They develop because the team members pay attention to the tasks and to team interactions. High-performing teams get the job done and enjoy the process along the way. The team members are energized and hard-working, and manage themselves in their respective roles. The team's end product is characterized by excellence in quality and quantity.

Functional Roles of Team Members

Kenneth D. Benne and Paul Sheats, two theorists on group behaviour, wrote an influential article titled "Functional Roles of Group Members" in 1948. In this article, the authors defined various roles based on behaviours that can be played by one or more people within a group or team. Benne and Sheats defined three categories of roles: task roles, personal/social roles, and dysfunctional or individualistic roles.

In this lesson, the following three categories are used as the framework for understanding and strengthening a given team:

- **Task roles/actions** move a team toward accomplishing their objectives. These actions include setting goals, identifying tasks, gathering facts, providing information, clarifying and summarizing ideas, and building consensus. The possible roles within this category are those that may be needed to advance a team from the *Forming* to the *Performing* stage of team development.
- **Interactive roles/actions** are directed at the operation of a team or how the team is working together. These actions include encouraging participation, expressing feelings, reconciling disagreements, keeping communication open, setting and applying standards for group performance, and building on each other's ideas. It is through these actions that teams function positively and effectively.
- **Self-oriented roles/actions** put the needs of the individual ahead of the needs of the team. They include dominating the discussion, interrupting, wasting time, not listening, withdrawing from the conversation, and holding side conversations. A team that has individuals demonstrating these behaviours is in jeopardy of not realizing its goals/objectives. Well-established teams will be able to manage these behaviours. Newly formed teams may require leader intervention.

Knowing the behaviours that can move a team forward or hinder its progress can be helpful to all team members.

REFERENCE



For additional information, refer to the following article:

Benne, Kenneth D., and Paul Sheats. "Functional Roles of Group Members." *Journal of Social Issues* 4.2 (Spring 1948): 41–49.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Predicting Team Roles

Have students participate in a learning activity to predict various team roles.

Directions/Description

- On three separate pieces of flipchart paper, write one of the following three categories:
 - Task Roles
 - Interactive Roles
 - Self-oriented Roles
 - Divide the class into three groups.
 - Using the Carousel Brainstorming strategy (see Appendix E), assign each group to one of the three pieces of flipchart paper.
 - Give each group a certain amount of time to identify possible roles within the identified category.
 - After the initial time has expired, allow each group to move to the next category and add other roles that they think fit within the category description.
 - Once groups have completed all three categories, review the results as a class. Check whether there is agreement and/or whether any clarification is needed.
 - Following the review, have students share their own team experiences related to the identified roles. For example, do they recognize these terms by name in the “teams” they are currently part of?
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Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Building a Structure as a Team

This learning activity provides students with an opportunity to work on team building, develop communication skills, and gain an understanding of the roles within a team and how they present themselves.

Materials Required

Each team requires

- a “handful” of uncooked spaghetti
- 30 jujubes (jelly-like candies)

The teacher requires

- a measuring tape

Directions/Description

- Divide the class into groups of five to seven students. Each team will need one person to act as the *process observer*.
- Ask each team to design and build the tallest free-standing structure possible in the time allotted, using the materials supplied.
- Before the team begins construction, allow each team five to ten minutes to discuss their design and plan. The teams could give their structure a name.
- After the planning time has elapsed, teams may begin construction.
- The process observer in each team watches and records (using RM 1-PS) how the team interacts and communicates during the building process, what team roles emerge, and who takes on these roles. (Students may need to refer to the roles identified in the Predicting Team Roles learning activity.)
- Periodically, announce how much time has elapsed and how much time is remaining.
- Once the allotted time has elapsed, have teams step away from their structures.
- Measure each structure to determine which is the tallest.

NOTE TO TEACHER

Remind process observers not to use students' names when recording or reporting observations.



Refer to the roles identified in Predicting Team Roles (previous learning activity) and to RM 1-PS: Process Observation Report Form.

Possible Debriefing Questions

Questions such as the following could be put on an overhead or on a chalkboard for each team to answer, with the process observer recording team responses on flipchart paper for discussion.

1. What did you learn through this building activity about the functioning of a team?
2. Did team members have specific roles? If so, how were these roles determined?
3. In general terms, how was communication used (e.g., positive, negative, neutral)? Give examples of words, phrases, or expressions used and/or heard.
4. Given the team experience, what were your team's strengths and possible areas for improvement? How could you contribute better to your team's effectiveness?

After the teams have answered the debriefing questions, have the process observers share their observations of their respective teams with the class. Discuss the responses as a class.



Background Information

Individual Communication Skills

Now that students have examined and experienced the characteristics of effective teams, it is important to determine the individual communication skills required to establish team relationships that support these characteristics. The individual communication skills include the following:

- **Listening:** Listening actively involves looking directly at the person who is speaking (taking into consideration cultural appropriateness), focusing intently on what is being said, and nodding to indicate attentiveness, understanding, or approval. Effective communication is a vital part of any team, so strong listening skills are highly valued.
- **Contributing ideas and solutions:** Sharing suggestions, ideas, solutions, and proposals with team members is another important communication skill. The ability and willingness to share increase when levels of trust are high. Reporting on individual and team progress is another way to contribute to team success.
- **Respecting and valuing:** All forms of communication are enhanced within a team when the members respect and value each other, regardless of their strengths and/or weaknesses. Team communication is strengthened when members encourage and support the ideas and efforts of others.
- **Questioning and clarifying:** If there is uncertainty about something being said, it is important to ask for more information to clear up any confusion before moving on. Asking probing questions and paraphrasing points that have been made (restating them in different words) are also effective ways to ensure deeper understanding and clear and accurate communication.
- **Persuading and defending:** The power of positive communication is evident when members exchange, defend, and rethink ideas. Presenting points of view and the reasons for them improves the decision-making process. At times, compromising may be necessary to avoid blocking team progress.
- **Helping and caring:** Seeking and giving assistance strengthens team cohesiveness. Asking for help should be viewed as a valuable skill necessary for the advancement of a team goal. Successful teams have members that freely seek help and willingly offer help to others. Helping and caring contribute to building positive, cooperative, and collaborative relationships.

NOTE TO TEACHER

When addressing communication skills, consider the students in your classroom and be sensitive to their cultural backgrounds and life experiences.

Please be aware that communication patterns and behaviours can vary significantly between people of different cultures and backgrounds, and as a result of personal or family preferences. Therefore, some students may be unaware of or uncomfortable with what others may consider “standard” practices of active listening, such as direct eye contact, proximity, and physical contact. Depending on the individuals and their cultural background, faith, and experiences with diversity, certain behaviours related to active listening, and to communication in general, may be encouraged or discouraged.

- **Participating and committing:** Each team member demonstrates dedication to the goals of the team by participating in and committing to completing assigned tasks to a high standard. These skills are often forms of non-verbal communication indicating to others the willingness to be an active participant in finding the solution to a problem.

These communication skills may seem relatively straightforward; however, once a conversation begins among team members, not all participants hear or understand the information in the same way.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Communication Exercise

Have students form teams to participate in the following two communication exercises.

What Is My Birthdate?

This team activity allows participants to use different forms of non-verbal communication.

Directions/Description

- Ask students in the class to form a line according to their birthdays (month, day), from January 1 at one end of the line to December 31 at the other end.
- Advise students that no verbal or written communication may be used during the performance of this task.
- Ask the class to signal when they are done, and then check for accuracy.

NOTE TO TEACHER

Another activity that promotes non-verbal communication is charades. If charades are used, students could write down their ideas and submit them to the teacher to be reviewed for appropriateness. The suggested debriefing questions would still be applicable.

Possible Debriefing Questions

1. What strategies were used to complete this task?
2. Were particular forms of non-verbal communication more effective than others? Explain.

Chain Talk*

This team activity allows participants to experience how communication can become distorted.

Materials Required

- paper
- pencils
- distinctive photographs (one for each team)

Directions/Description

- Form teams of eight to ten students. Ask for a volunteer from each team to initiate the activity.
- Take the volunteers to the side and give each volunteer a sheet of paper, a pencil, and a photograph. Ask the volunteers to write ten attributes of their respective photographs. The other team members are not to view the photograph or hear the instructions. After a few minutes, take the photographs and the written attributes from the volunteers, and ask them to rejoin their teams.
- Tell each team that the volunteer is going to convey information about a photograph by whispering this information to the team member on the volunteer's right. Team members can be sitting in rows or in a circle. The person listening may ask questions, but only one minute is allowed to convey the information.
- The person who has received the information whispers it to the individual on his or her right, taking care not to be overheard.
- The information is repeated in this fashion until all team members have participated.
- The last person receiving the information reports to the team, sharing the photograph description that was relayed.
- Read the initial description made by the volunteer and then present the photograph to the team.

Possible Debriefing Questions

1. Did the final description differ substantially from the initial one? If so, why? Can areas of breakdown in communication be pinpointed?
2. How can perceptions and communication become more accurate?

* Source: Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE Canada). *Leading the Way—Youth Leadership Guide: Bringing Out the Best in Children and Youth*. Ottawa, ON: PHE Canada, 2009. Available at <www.excelway.ca>. Adapted with permission.