



January 2007: The Teamworking Edition

I'm different, she's difficult, they're impossible!

Managing a team of diverse characters can be a challenge. With some you will have an easy chemistry, you'll tolerate others, and you'll find some very difficult - often because of a "difference": physically, culturally or socially. Difference is not the same as being difficult and you should look at your own behaviour and consider yourself first when thinking about handling a problematic relationship. Are you the difficult one?

"look at your own behaviour first"

If the object of your difficulty is a difference, the source of your difficulty may be an inability to find a shared basis for communication. This is why knowing about different types of difficult behaviour can help. You can't change people (and you shouldn't see it as your mission) but you can identify the barriers to communicating with them effectively and alter your behaviour accordingly.

A "one-size fits all" management style doesn't work and it is your job to find how to connect with each individual so you can help them to maximise their contribution to the team and avoid conflict situations.

Here are some difficult behaviour types and some ideas of how to cope with them.

Moaners

Some people seem to come out of the womb moaning and will go to their grave whimpering *"It's not fair...why me?"* Their negative attitude can have a powerfully demotivating effect on the team. Even normally enthusiastic members can quickly become deflated. You can't stop a moaner moaning, but you can control them by making them do what they like least: finding a solution to the problem. Try *"That's a very interesting perspective on this issue. I would really like you to hear your solutions to this problem"* and they'll soon learn to curb they're moaning.

Killjoys

Like moaners, killjoys see the negative side to every issue. They pick holes in every initiative - sometimes just for the sake of it. So how do you handle a killjoy? You can "head them off at the pass" by voicing what might go wrong on the project yourself - before they get a chance to - then turn the conversation around. Or you

could exploit their pessimism as a counter to over-optimism and identify real risks at the start of a project. Use killjoys to test your idea and build contingency plans.

Nice people

There's nothing difficult about nice team members, is there? Well, yes. Nice people find it difficult to say "no" and consequently take on too much. Their work can obviously suffer. Nice people want to love and be loved, and therefore they avoid conflict at all costs, burying their head in the sand rather than confronting an unpleasant issue. So how do you handle them? Once you've shown them the love they crave (perhaps enquiring about their family or praising a piece of work) you need to help them to focus on the real issues and encourage assertive communication so they can avoid being down-trodden.

Quiet people

These people may seem to be ideal team members; quietly getting on with their work without any fuss or bother. But how do you know what's really going on in their head? Are they silently resentful and brooding revenge - or are they harbouring some wonderfully constructive ideas to improve your business? Get them talking somewhere they feel comfortable. Ask open questions to stop them from hiding behind "yes" or "no" answers and praise them liberally for every offering: *"I'm really glad you've shared that with me."*

Learn more about, ***Team Leadership*** on 24 April, and ***Managing People Problems*** on 17 April.

Related Courses:

Managing Underperformance on 21 February
Communication Essentials on 8 March
Motivational Techniques on 23 March

Quotable Teams

*"People don't leave companies
- they leave leaders"*
Richard Leider, the Inventure Group

*"What's wrong with second fiddle?
You need as much technique as you do for first"*
Franz Werfel

Team Breakdown

Here are five common reasons why team working fails, and what to do about them.

- Too much focus on work leading to overload and a "galley-slave" mentality - it's everyone for themselves.
Make time for the team to relax and socialise together.
- Not enough work, leading to boredom. Social interactions are corroded by gossip and backbiting.
Provide the team with something real to focus on: work!
- The team leader fails to engage with each team member as an individual; they feel unvalued and treated as a herd.
Make time to speak to your team members and get to know them.
- The leader focuses on telling, not listening and all communications go via the leader, stifling team processes and slowing things down, leading to poor efficiency, frustration and perceived lack of trust.
Make time to listen and encourage team members to talk to each other.
- No clear purpose or plan leaves unfulfilled needs for meaning and clarity.
Set out a clear goal and a workable plan, with explicit roles for everyone.

The Leitch Review of Skills

The Government's review of the UK's long term skills needs was published in December. Titled "*Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills*", it shows that the UK must urgently raise achievements at all levels of skills and recommends that we commit to becoming a world leader in skills by 2020.

To do this, we need to double attainment at most levels of skill, with responsibility for achieving this ambitious goal to be shared between Government, employers and individuals. Its key recommendations are:

1. Route public funding of vocational skills through Train to Gain and Learner Accounts
2. Create a new commission for employment and skills
3. Reform of sector skills councils
4. Encourage employers to take a training "pledge" and increase employer investment in higher level qualifications
5. Compulsory education or workplace training up to age 18

Leitch's 2020 Targets

Of 30 OECD countries, the UK is 17th on low skills and 20th on intermediate skills.

Lord Leitch finds that low skills levels stifle productivity and growth and, if not addressed, will result in increasing inequality and the marginalisation of some groups within the labour market. The report projects that, even if current targets are met, by 2020 the UK's skills base will be inferior to that of many other developed nations. A radical step-change is necessary. Leitch sets new targets:

1. 95% of working age adults have basic literacy and numeracy skills - from 85% and 79% respectively in 2005
2. over 90% of adults are skilled to GCSE level or vocational equivalents - from 69% in 2005
3. the number of Apprentices in the UK is boosted to 500,000 each year
4. more than 40% of adults reach graduate level and above - from 29% in 2005

Learn more:

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch

www.traintogain.gov.uk

Latest Management Thinking

The Wisdom of Crowds

How do teams make great decisions? For some of the most insightful writing you will read this year, read James Surowiecki's "*The Wisdom of Crowds*".

In this astonishing book, he sets out to discover the when a team can make a better decision than individuals. To do so, it needs three things:

Independence

Each team member must think independently, which means the team must make it possible for divergent views to emerge, be heard and be fully considered.

Diversity

If we are all the same, we think the same. Different perspectives are valuable. Adding a team member is great if they are different – pointless if they come at the issue from the same perspective as the rest.

Decentralisation

The team can only make a good decision if it's information is sound. The best evidence is collected from a wide variety of different sources and then effectively aggregated.

Spend time thinking about team decision-making on *Problem Solving and Decision Making* on 26 April.