Leading work teams
A self-paced learning resource for supervisors working with supported employees in Disability Business Services
Contact details

Branch          Disability Program Branch
Department      Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Postal address  GPO Box 9820 BRISBANE QLD 4001
Phone           1300 653 227 Toll Free
Website         www.fahcsia.gov.au

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Introduction
Leading supported employees

As a team leader or supervisor you assist supported employees to perform their work more effectively by offering leadership. This self-paced learning resource aims to guide you through the various aspects of workplace leadership and your role as a team leader. It is divided into four sections:

- teams and team planning
- developing team commitment and cooperation
- managing and developing team performance
- participating in and facilitating a work team.

The content of these sections relates to elements within the national unit of competency 

BSBFLM404A Lead work teams from the Certificate II in the Business Services Training Package. There are case studies and activities to help you decide what will work best for you and your team. You may find that the terms we have used throughout the Manual differ from those in your workplace. For example, you may use the term ‘client’ instead of ‘supported employee’, and ‘business service’ instead of ‘disability business service’.

An important aspect of successful leadership is good communication. You would be aware there are some ways of communicating with supported employees that are more effective than others. This Manual only briefly discusses communication in leadership, however, the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) has produced a series of booklets called Work Talk. The Work Talk series provides information about communicating with people with:

- an acquired brain injury
- intellectual disability
- psychiatric disability
- physical/sensory disability.

Copies of these booklets will be available in your disability business service in the yellow folder provided by FaHCSIA, or you could access copies by contacting the Department by going to www.fahcsia.gov.au. Take some time to read the booklets as they provide some good ideas about clear communication in the workplace.

Another useful resource to be found in the yellow folder is a training product, 

Being an Effective Manager. Although primarily aimed at managers, it contains further information about planning, leading and team building, which could be used by supervisors in business services.

Additional training material which covers teamwork, called When I’m at work: Teamwork, can be found in the green folder. This has been designed as a tool for supervisors/trainers to use to deliver information and enhance the teamwork skills of supported employees.
Section 1

Teams and team planning
1.1 What is the role of a team leader?

As a supervisor or team leader in a disability business service working with supported employees you have a role to:

- assist your team to establish its purpose, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities in line with the organisation’s goals, plans and objectives
- assist your team to monitor and adjust its performance within the organisation’s continuous improvement policies and processes
- encourage your team to use the competencies of each member for the team and individual benefit
- monitor the team competencies.

How each of these is achieved will depend on a number of factors related to you, your team and your organisation. Each team leader, team member and organisation has characteristics, aims and expectations that impact on how the role of team leader is carried out. Being aware of the basic principles and practices of team leadership can assist you in completing your work successfully.

1.2 What is the role of the team leader in a disability business service?

Generally, in disability business services, the team leader provides support to the employees to assist the organisation to meet:

- Strategic business objectives. Strategic objectives relate to the aims and targets the organisation has set for a period of time, for example, a financial year. These in turn impact on the production targets and activities for each part of the organisation. For example, the organisation has set its profit at $100,000 for this financial year. To help reach this, your team has a production target of 5,000 units per year. This means 100 units per week for each of the 50 operation weeks. Your role is to provide supported employees with the continuous leadership needed to reach that target.

- The 12 Disability Services Standards. There are quality assurance and continuous improvement guidelines to guide Disability Business Services’ performance. For example, Standard 10 requires that the employment opportunities of each person with a disability are optimised by effective training and support. Copies of the Continuous Improvement Handbook and the Quality Assurance Handbook will be available from your manager or the FaHCSIA website if you want to read them.
1.3 What skills and abilities do effective team leaders have?

Team leaders are all different but there are some skills and abilities that all effective team leaders have. They are:

▶ respect for team members
▶ good communication skills
▶ job related knowledge.

In addition, an understanding of the impact that some disabilities can have on a team member’s ability to complete tasks will assist you as a team leader.

**ACTIVITY:** First job

Remember your first time at work or in a new job. Think about the team leader or supervisor who helped you most.

What did you admire about their leadership skills and abilities?

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What did they do to ensure they communicated effectively with you?

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How did they indicate that they had good job related knowledge?

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Does this have any relevance for how you might lead in the workplace? If yes, how?

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1.4 What is a work team?

A team is a number of people working to achieve a common goal. In the workplace a team is a number of employees working together on a regular basis to achieve a shared organisational goal.

The membership of work teams is often decided by management choosing which employees have the skills and knowledge to complete the work required to achieve the goals of the team. Team members interact and communicate with each other and coordinate their actions to achieve the shared goal. Teams in the workplace are usually small, around six to ten people.

Teams can be formed for short periods of time to complete a specific project or activity, or they may be formed for extended periods of time. Membership of teams can change over time.

The following criteria can be used to identify a team:

- definable membership: a collection of three or more people identifiable by name or type
- group consciousness or identity: the members think of themselves as a group
- sense of shared purpose: the members share some common tasks, goals or interests
- interdependence: the members need the help of one another to accomplish a purpose
- interaction: the members communicate with one another, influence one another and react to one another
- sustainability: the team members periodically review the team’s effectiveness
- ability to act together, for one purpose.

Usually, the tasks and goals set by teams cannot be achieved by individuals working alone because of constraints on time and resources, and because few individuals possess all the relevant competencies and expertise.

**ACTIVITY: Team criteria**

Think about a team you have worked with and write down the criteria you used to identify it as a team.

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1.5 Why do workplaces establish teams?

Businesses will have a number of reasons for wanting work teams. These reasons may relate to improving performance, increasing market share or ensuring staff are well skilled. Generally, teams are established in a workplace because they offer:

- Advantage to the organisation. For example, because the nature of its work is best arranged for completion by work teams rather than by individuals.
- Continuity of work flow. For example, a team can continue to package products for distribution to a market when a team member is absent. If one employee has sole responsibility for completing that task it becomes more difficult for an organisation to meet its goals and objectives should the employee be away from the workplace.
- Opportunity to extend capacity. For example, the skills and abilities of team members can be blended to the advantage of the task the organisation plans to complete.

**ACTIVITY: Why have a team?**

What are some of the reasons for having workplace teams at the disability business service where you work?

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1.6 How can a team leader help team members understand the purpose of their work, their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities?

Team leaders are the link between management and its employees, the team members. A clear understanding of the goals, plans and objectives of your organisation is essential to ensure that you are able to help team members understand and act toward meeting work requirements. This understanding has to be combined with an ability to communicate well with team members.

In a disability business service this may mean ensuring that team members are aware of:

- the type of business they are employed in
- how the organisation expects employees to behave in the workplace
- what the organisation expects team members to achieve in the workplace
- how tasks will be completed
- how performance will be measured.

Team members with an understanding of these issues will have a greater likelihood of working effectively towards team goals.

1.7 How can team leaders develop team goals and plans?

Once an organisation has established its broad aims, it then develops detailed goals and objectives for how it will achieve those aims. Team leaders may be involved at some or all stages of the planning process, however, an integral part of their role is determining the targets, roles and responsibilities for their work team. These will have a direct link to the detailed goals and objectives of the organisation, and will guide the short term targets for the team.

Work goals should be:

- specific
- measurable
- attainable
- realistic
- time related.
**ACTIVITY: Work goals**

Think about the work goals you set. Write down a work goal that is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time related.

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**CASE STUDY: The daily plan at ET**

David, a team leader at EnviroTransport, needed to work out a daily plan for the team. EnviroTransport worked on the basis that, on average, a full detail and wash took 2.5 hours, based on a wash taking 0.75 hours and a detail taking 1.75 hours.

The five supported employees hand cleaned and detailed large trucks. Trucks were usually booked in to the organisation about a week in advance and the drivers selected the type of clean and detail they required. The booking system helped David to make sure that the organisation didn’t take more work than the supported employees could complete during a day. It also helped with ordering cleaning products and equipment. This helped David plan from day to day what needed to be done.

He set some time aside each afternoon to plan the next day. An example of one of his plans is below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tuesday 11 January</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Client name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpman Brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken Sutton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Transport</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Review David’s plan in terms of whether it has specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time related goals. Make a note of any suggestions you might make to David.

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1.8 Who should be involved in the team planning process?

All team members should be involved in the planning process.

In addition to team members, management will have a role in confirming that the work plan aligns with organisational goals. Prior to commencing a planning process it is best to check with management to determine the reporting and communication requirements that the planning process will need to follow.

**CASE STUDY: Tea and coffee**

T&C packages tea and coffee for distribution to specialty shops around the country. Each year the senior managers meet to decide the strategic plan for the business – where it is going and how it’s going to get there. The specialty tea and coffee industry is growing fast and it has attracted a lot of competitors in recent years. T&C is still competitive but it needs to regularly review its strategic plan to make sure it retains its competitive advantage.

The CEO, Rolf, has asked that each manager explain and discuss the plan with T&C’s team leaders. He wants to make sure that everyone in the business knows what T&C wants to achieve and how each person employed at the organisation can work to achieve the goals.

Evelyn, the production manager, calls a meeting to talk to the packaging team leaders Frank and Samantha. After she explains the strategic plan for the next year they talk about how the packaging teams can work to achieve the plan. They develop a plan for the packaging section and then one for each team (Frank’s coffee packing team and Samantha’s tea packing team). They also decide to review all job descriptions to ensure that they are in line with the direction the organisation and teams are taking.

Evelyn also requests that Samantha and Frank talk to the team members about how they can help meet the goals. Each team has three supported employees.

Based on your work experience, what information would you need before you talked with the team members? Take note of the **Hints** below when developing your response.

**Hints**

✓ An understanding of the organisation’s strategic plan and details of the team plans would be essential information for a discussion with team members.

✓ It would be important for supported employees to know if their job is going to change, and if so, what the changes might be and how these changes will impact on their daily, weekly and monthly work arrangements.

✓ Communication about work, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities must be clear and appropriate for each supported employee.
1.9 When should work plans be reviewed?

There is no set time when a work plan should be reviewed. It makes sense to review them at regular intervals that are relevant to the team's goals. It also makes sense to undertake reviews when specific milestones are met or scheduled to have been met.

The review dates or times should be decided when the work plan is being established.

1.10 What is the team leader’s role in monitoring and adjusting team performance?

Team leaders are expected to monitor and adjust team performance to assist the team in meeting its goals. How this is done will vary from organisation to organisation. Most organisations will require team leaders to ensure that teams complete work:

- on time
- within budget
- to specifications.

An everyday part of a team leader’s role is to assist the team to complete its work successfully. This is greatly assisted by clear communication of the team’s goals, objectives and targets in a manner that aligns with team members’ needs.

1.11 How does a team leader monitor team performance?

Team leaders should use a range of monitoring tools. The most commonly used ones include:

- budget
- completion time
- product quality indicators
- team membership turnover
- wastage
- absenteeism
- safety.
**Activity: Monitoring tools**

List the tools used at your workplace to monitor team performance. Take note of the *Hint* below when developing your response.

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*Hint*

✓ Remember to include the 12 Disability Services Standards as part of the list.

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1.12 How can a team leader assist a team to work within continuous improvement policies and processes?

Continuous improvement means that all aspects of a team’s work are reviewed to ensure it meets the standards, goals and expectations of the workplace. In addition, Disability Business Services are guided by the Disability Service Standards.

A team leader’s role is to ensure that supported employees are kept informed of work requirements. Team leaders also have a role in ensuring that supported employees are empowered to suggest and discuss potential improvements.
CASE STUDY: Pencil packing

Colour for You is an art supply business. Supported employees work in small teams packaging specialist art supplies such as crayons, watercolour pencils and brushes. Rufus, Roseanna, Matte and Bruna have the job of collecting twelve different coloured watercolour pencils and placing them in a tin pack. Recently there have been some complaints from customers about packs of watercolour pencils containing too many red pencils and no white ones.

Cyan, the team leader, has been asked by her manager to ‘ensure the team knows its role, responsibilities and accountabilities’.

What are some of the things you think she needs to do?

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What is some of the information each team member may need in order to know the team’s role, responsibilities and accountabilities?

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ACTIVITY: Ensuring improvement

Talk to a manager in the organisation you currently work with about how that organisation ensures that it meets its continuous improvement requirements. Write down those processes and concepts that are related to your work as a team leader.

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1.13 How can a team leader use the competencies of each member for team and individual benefit?

Competency is related to skills and abilities. Team leaders need to combine the competencies of the supported employees in the team to benefit both the individual and the team. This means that team leaders must be aware of each team member's skills or competencies and recognise the benefits of a diverse set of skills and abilities.

Awareness of a supported employee's skills and abilities can be gained by:

- asking the supported employee about the skills and abilities they have
- seeking information about skills and abilities of the supported employee from team leaders who have supervised them in other relevant work
- observing the supported employee at work.

The advantage of diverse work teams is created from the strengths that are brought to the team by individuals in combination with each other. Unfortunately, there are times in any workplace where this diversity results in difficulties between team members. Team leaders working with supported employees need to be aware of the diversity of the team members and its potential impact on the work of the team.

Work teams can have members of different ages, race or ethnicity, sex and sexual preference, physical and mental ability. It is part of the team leader’s role to help team members develop relationships that respect these differences.

Team leaders also need to recognise that each team member will have different work preferences. These preferences relate to how team members may prefer to complete their work.
CASE STUDY: Kerylyn’s work preferences

Kerylyn, a supported employee, had been working at Bonway’s Printing Service for 15 years. She had quite strong ideas about how she did her work. Her routine was the same every day. On arrival she said hello to all the team and then spent her time concentrating on the tasks for the morning. She didn’t like to be disturbed, not liking to chat or move from her work station.

Merv was a new team member. He loved talking and laughing with the other team members and it required quite a bit of time from the team leader, Greg, to help keep Merv focused on his work. Each morning Merv would stop and talk to everyone he passed. He took lots of breaks from his work and was very interested in talking to Kerylyn.

Greg realised the team needed to address a potential problem. Kerylyn was becoming agitated by Merv’s chatter.

If you were Greg, what would you do? Take note of the Hints below when developing your response.

Hints
✓ Discuss workplace expectations about team behaviour.
✓ Review workflows and the placement of team members.
1.14 What is the team leader’s role in monitoring team competencies?

Team leaders need to be aware of the skills, knowledge, abilities and competencies of team members before monitoring can proceed. Monitoring is essential to ensure a close alignment between team competencies and the team’s ability to meet team goals.

Each team member will have an individual set of competencies. When team leaders are equipped with this information, decisions about matching team members to tasks and developing appropriate training and development can begin.

**ACTIVITY: Team competencies**

List some team competencies that are important in your organisation. For example, consistent approach to work, uses equipment safely.

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Describe how team competencies are monitored in your organisation. For example, day-to-day observation, performance appraisal programs.

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Would you suggest any improvements to how team competencies are monitored? What are the suggestions?

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Who could you suggest any improvements to?

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1.15 What is a team leader’s role when monitoring indicates a gap between competency and team requirements?

When there are indications that the competencies needed by the team to reach its performance targets or goals are not available within the team, team leaders should consider providing training and development activities for the team or the team member/s.

For more information about training supported employees you can refer to the FaHCSIA product *Training & Assessing: A resource for team leaders training and assessing supported employees in Disability Employment Services*. There is an e-book version and a print based version of this resource. Copies of these resources are available from your organisation.
Summary

Effective team leaders need to be aware of the goals of their organisation. This information enables them to assist the team of supported employees to understand their role, responsibilities and accountabilities.

As a team leader you need to know:
- what the organisation needs your team to do
- the standards the work needs to meet
- the skills and abilities the work team needs to meet these requirements
- the skills and abilities the work team currently possesses.
Section 2
Developing team commitment and cooperation
2.1 What does commitment and cooperation mean?

Commitment means acceptance of the responsibilities and duties and cooperation means help and assistance. By developing team commitment and cooperation in a work team you are assisting the team to meet its goals and objectives. Work teams that are committed and cooperative are more likely to achieve the goals the business has set.

**ACTIVITY: Identifying employability skills**

Read the job description provided below. Note how team leaders at the Bakewell Food Company need the commitment and cooperation of the team they are working with to meet all the key responsibilities of the position.

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**Job description**

**COMPANY** Bakewell Food Company

**TITLE** Team Leader

**REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

As team leader you are responsible for the direct support and development of each member of your designated team of supported employees. This is to be achieved by direct supervision of all team members, communication with other team leaders and support staff as well as the monitoring of supported employees’ goal achievement as documented in their appraisal. You are also responsible for addressing day-to-day performance and behavioural issues of members of your team using agreed strategies. Should members of your work team be temporarily transferred to duties with other work teams, you will remain responsible for their support through continuous communication with other team leaders.

**KEY RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. Train and develop the skills of supported employees in order to achieve the potential productivity of the team and its individual members.
2. Coordinate and oversee the work of members of your work team in order to achieve expected production targets.
3. Participate in the development of supported employee appraisals and goals.
4. Facilitate and monitor the achievement of supported employee appraisal goals.
5. Address individual and group performance and behavioural issues.
6. Maintain production records and individual supported employee records as required.
7. Act in accordance with and maintain an awareness of all company policies, Occupational Health and Safety requirements and Quality Assurance system requirements at all times.
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
1. Achievement of production targets and quality specifications.
2. The effective and efficient provision of support to supported employees as evidenced by maintenance and improvement of employees’ skill and productivity levels and the attainment of their identified goals and objectives.
3. The level of employee goal achievement within your work team.
4. The incidence of performance and behavioural issues requiring in direct intervention.
5. Minimisation of accidents and incidents.
6. Participation in, and application of, personal development and training.

SUMMARY OF DUTIES
1. Supervise employees in your work team, including temporary transfers in the production area, maintaining a continuous workflow with minimal downtime caused by disruptions.
2. Conduct individual and group training and instruction to ensure that each employee’s productivity and range/level of skills are maximised in accordance with their appraisal goals.
3. Actively participate in the employee appraisal, goal setting and monitoring process.
4. Actively participate in the development and application of specific strategies aimed at addressing individual and group employee performance and behavioural issues.
5. Maintain direct communication with other team leaders in relation to team members temporarily re-assigned.
6. Maintain awareness of, and apply all, occupational health and safety and quality management system requirements within the production area. Complete all reporting requirements as necessary and attend and participate in Occupational Health and Safety and quality improvement meetings as requested.
7. Maintain awareness of, and apply all, company policies and procedures.
8. Train employees to follow safe work practices in order to maintain a safe work environment.
9. Report incidents/accidents as required.
10. Maintain all documentation as required.
11. Undertake or manage reporting and data collection duties as required.
12. Work alongside supported employees in order to set a hands-on example and model appropriate work behaviour.
13. Actively participate in staff development and training opportunities ensuring that skills are applied in the workplace.
14. Undertake other reasonable work-related duties that are within the realms of this position and your level of skill as directed.
2.2 How do team leaders develop team commitment and cooperation?

Team commitment and cooperation is developed through good communication and effective decision making, as well as fostering mutual concern and camaraderie between team members.

2.3 What are the signals that team commitment and cooperation has been gained?

There are a number of signals that indicate the work team is committed and cooperating. These include:

- maintaining or increasing quality
- reaching or exceeding production targets
- decreasing complaints from team members
- limited conflict between team members
- fewer workplace injuries.

**ACTIVITY: Gaining team commitment**

What are the signals that team members in your work team are committed and cooperative? Take note of the *Hint* below when developing your response.

Who can you speak to about gaining team commitment and cooperation in your workplace? Take note of the *Hint* below when developing your response.

**Hint**

An important part of gaining commitment and cooperation is getting information from people. These people could be supported employees, or other supervisors and managers. Information could also be sought from specialists available to your workplace such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists or occupational health and safety trainers.
2.4  How important is good communication for a team leader?

Good communication skills are essential for any team leader. An ability to communicate with supported employees according to their preferences is a first step in developing team commitment and cooperation. Without the skills and knowledge to talk and act in ways that acknowledge the needs of supported employees in the work team, obtaining commitment and cooperation in the work team is difficult.

Knowing how each member of your team prefers to gather information and how each member prefers to get advice and to be given instructions will help you to communicate the team goals appropriately to each team member.

**ACTIVITY: Work Talk**

Take some time now to read the Work Talk series. Your organisation will have copies of these available. In particular read any parts of the series that are relevant to you and supported employees in your team.

What additional information or skills do you need to help you communicate effectively with supported employees?

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Who can provide the information?

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How can you gain the skills?

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2.5 Are the communication requirements of team members easy to identify?

No, at times you may find it difficult to identify the communication requirements as well as the communication preferences of your team members.

2.6 What can influence a team member’s communication requirements?

A number of things can affect how a team member communicates with you and with other team members. A specific style of communication, as a consequence of the supported employee’s disability, may be a constant factor. There may be other situations which may arise, however, which have unexpected results. These could include such things as a change in the medication or the side effects of a medication, the team member may be ill, or there may have been changes in the work routines.

2.7 Are team leaders always the best people to identify communication preferences and requirements?

Team leaders are the people who spend the most time working with and observing team members in the workplace, therefore they are usually the best person to identify communication preferences and requirements. There will be situations where you are unable to determine a supported employee’s needs and will need to seek advice from other people.

2.8 How can team leaders help teams make effective decisions?

Team commitment and cooperation is also based on the team’s capacity to make effective decisions. Many teams need assistance to learn how to make effective decisions and it is part of a team leader’s role to provide this assistance.

Team leaders can help teams make effective decisions by encouraging a work environment that supports the team and its members to make considered choices, act on them and review the results of the action.
**ACTIVITY:**

Provide examples of where you were part of a team that:

| Provided an appropriate and fair value system |  |
| Operated with an appropriate and fair value system |  |
| Encouraged the team and team members to act confidently |  |
| Identified meaningful levels of responsibility for team members |  |
| Trusted team members to act responsibly and autonomously |  |
| Presented opportunities for team members to test and stretch their abilities |  |
| Recognised and rewarded excellent performance |  |
| Provided support and encouragement |  |

Provide examples of how can you contribute to ensuring that your current team:

| Operates with an appropriate and fair value system |  |
| Operates with an appropriate and fair value system |  |
| Is encouraged to act confidently |  |
| Has meaningful levels of responsibility identified for team members |  |
| Knows that you trust team members to act responsibly and autonomously |  |
| Is presented with opportunities for team members to test and stretch their abilities |  |
| Is recognised and rewarded for excellent performance |  |
| Is provided with support and encouragement |  |
2.9 When should supported employees be involved in decisions relating to the team?

There are degrees of team involvement in decision making. Your knowledge of the skills and abilities of the team members will guide your decision about the extent supported employees can contribute to making a decision. There are no rules for when and how team members should be involved. It is a matter for your judgement. The following diagram shows the degrees of involvement team members may have.

Involving team members in decision making, which can include problem solving, should be based on whether one or more of the following is met:

- The need for acceptance. The greater the need for the team to accept your decisions, the more you should involve them.
- The effect the decision will have on the team. The more the problem or decision affects the team, the more you should involve them.
- Their involvement in implementing the decision. If the team will be implementing or carrying out the decision, involve them.
- The ability and desire of the group to become involved. If the team wants to be involved, consider involving them, particularly if they have sufficient knowledge or expertise in the issue involved. Even if they do not, it could be useful for training and development purposes.
CASE STUDY: Morning tea chaos

Henry, a team leader, was annoyed. He had tried to involve the team in a decision about when to take a morning tea break and the discussion had ended in two of the supported employees yelling at each other. He spoke to Lisa, another team leader about the experience.

‘It was awful, I thought I was doing the right thing and asking everyone. We need to get everyone’s input into how we do our work otherwise it’s always the team leaders making all the decisions.’

Lisa’s reply gave Henry some ideas about how he would approach similar situations in the future. She said, ‘Henry, you’re right that supported employees should be involved with decisions about their work life. We need to hear and act on what our team wants, it makes us a better team but sometimes it’s the team leader’s job to make a decision. This morning you asked people to change their routine quite significantly but did you really want them to make a team decision? It sounds as though you had already done that. Jocelyn always takes her medication at 10.30am and Valerina calls her mother, the change you were suggesting wouldn’t have meant much difference in the team’s output for the morning but it meant a lot for some of the members. We need to choose the times we ask supported employees to be involved in decisions and we have to be prepared for their responses’.

Do you think Lisa’s advice should be useful to Henry? Why?

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Where did Henry’s communication skills let him down?

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2.10 How can a team leader develop shared concern and camaraderie in a team?

Shared concern and camaraderie means team members support each other to complete the team’s work. Your words and actions will do much to assist the development of this shared concern and camaraderie. Team members need to trust each other and you can act as a role model for this through your work with the team.

Team leaders build trust by:

- behaving consistently
- behaving with integrity
- sharing control by delegating
- including team members in decision making
- providing accurate, clear information
- explaining decisions
- respecting the team’s diversity
- demonstrating consideration and sensitivity.

**CASE STUDY: Working as a team**

Kim was a new team leader at Craft Packs, an organisation that made children’s craft packages. He liked to get things right and had been pleased with how easily he had managed to get into the flow of work at Craft Packs. His team had been meeting its targets, both quality and quantity, and Kim thought he had a pretty good team.

One day soon after Kim had started, his manager asked to have a chat with him. His manager explained that some of the supported employees in the team had spoken to her. They were concerned that they weren’t getting a ‘fair go’, ‘were being told what to do all the time’, and ‘didn’t know what was going on’. Kim was quite upset. He told the manager that he was trying to make sure the team got its work done properly. He felt that the supported employees couldn’t make the right decisions so he needed to lead the way, he hadn’t realised that he was upsetting the team members.

He asked his manager for some advice.

If you were Kim’s manager, what advice would you give him? Why?

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Summary

Team leader’s skills and abilities to communicate with team members and involve them in decision making that recognises their skills and abilities are critical to team success. Teams that are supportive of their members base their strength on communicating well and involving each other in decisions.
Section 3

Managing and developing team performance
3.1 What can team leaders do to manage and develop team performance?

Team leaders can manage and develop team performance by:

- ensuring the team contributes positively to the business plan
- encouraging the team to be innovative and use initiative
- enabling team members to share and enhance their knowledge and skills.

3.2 How can team leaders ensure that the team contributes positively to the business plan?

There are three essential criteria that must be met if team leaders working in Disability Business Services are to ensure that the team contributes positively to the business plan. Team leaders must have an understanding of the:

- links between the tasks each team member completes, the overall team performance and the organisation's business plan
- team's performance targets
- communication needs of the team members and use of appropriate processes to communicate the tasks to each team member.

The complexity of the information about the organisation's business plan (that is provided to team members) will be dependent on the ability of the team members to relate the information to their daily work. An important skill for team leaders is the ability to give and receive information from team members, for example, providing opportunities at staff meetings for team members to discuss the team's work.
**CASE STUDY: Roberto’s team development sessions**

As a team leader Roberto makes sure each team member knows the performance targets for the team and how individual performance assists in meeting these. He considers this to be part of his day-to-day work. Some of the team members have memory retention difficulties and others need reminding about new roles when they change tasks within the team. On a regular basis Roberto also brings the team together to talk about how it is going. He doesn’t call these discussions planning sessions, but that is what they are. Each team member has the opportunity to talk about the team’s work.

He has been relatively pleased with the results of the previous sessions. Team members have been keen to talk about the work they do and what they would like to do, but Roberto believes the process could be improved. Some of the sessions get off-track quite easily and not everyone is contributing as much as he thinks they would like. He realises that if the meeting is based around four questions, the team may gain greater benefit from the discussions and contribute more to the overall planning process for their team.

The questions he decides on are:

- **Who are we?**
- **Where are we now?**
- **Where do we want to be?**
- **How will we get there?**

Roberto recognises that some team members may need assistance to understand the intent of the questions so he begins to think about how he would explain the questions to the team.

Think about your current team or a past team to answer the following questions.

If ‘Who are we?’ relates to the team’s understanding and supporting the values and vision of the organisation, how is this best explained to the team?

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How is the answer to ‘Where are we now?’ best explained?

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If the question ‘Where do we want to be?’ relates to the long term goals for the organisation, how is this best explained to the team?

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What response is expected from ‘How will we get there?’ What action can result from recommendations from the team?

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Roberto also considered developing some guidelines for the team meetings to ensure everyone had an opportunity to contribute. He soon realised that the guidelines would be best developed between all the team members, however, he jotted down the guidelines he wanted to contribute:

- encourage each other to contribute
- listen carefully to each other.

What guidelines would you suggest to help ensure all team members have the opportunity to contribute to team planning discussions?

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3.3 How can team leaders encourage the team to be innovative and use initiative?

Team leaders can encourage team members to be innovative by ensuring that team members know that their ideas and suggestions are welcome. If team members know that their ideas will be thoughtfully considered and that they will be provided with useful feedback, team leaders are likely to receive ideas and suggestions that benefit team members, the team and the organisation.

Innovation and use of initiative can have an element of risk taking. This should not be confused with unsafe behaviour. Innovation relates to the opportunities team members are provided to offer new ideas about ways to complete tasks. The risk is whether the innovation will be successful or otherwise.

Similarly, the use of initiative requires organisations and team leaders to create an environment where team members can try alternative ways to complete work.
CASE STUDY: Juku Antique Restorations

Juku Antique Restorations operates as three sections, each specialising in restoring particular types of furniture. The team has worked together for a number of years. It is successful and the team members are skilled and knowledgeable about their work.

The chair restoration section has been arranged the same way for quite some time. As each chair (or set of chairs) arrived it is assessed for the work it requires and a timetable for work completed. The work is assigned to specialists within the team. For example, one team member specialises in sanding and another in small repairs. At a recent team meeting one of the team expressed a desire to learn new skills, this was followed by nods of agreement around the room. One team member suggested that the team all swap jobs. Again, there were nods of agreement around the room.

May, the team leader, was a bit surprised by the suggestion but agreed that it should be discussed in more detail at the next meeting. The following week saw much discussion between team members about who could do what tasks. At the meeting the team members expressed a desire to try a new way for a week. May recognised that this would be a risk, it was likely that work completion would slow and there was also a possibility that there would be poor matches between individual team members and the skills required for a particular task.

Despite her misgivings, May agreed to the one week trial.

If you were May, how would you respond to the request from the team?

What advantages would the trial have?

What disadvantages would the trial have?
Think about the organisation you are working with. How does it handle innovative ideas and suggestions from team members?

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Think about the organisation you are working with. How does it promote initiative from team members?

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Summary

The promotion of innovation and initiative is possible, and healthy, in every organisation on the understanding that, with the recognition of every opportunity or problem, there is a need to assess the impact of potential solutions. Recognising that the initial idea may not be the optimum solution and allowing time for the development of the idea is also useful.
Section 4

Participating in and facilitating a work team
4.1 How can team leaders assist team members to participate in and facilitate work teams?

There are three ways team leaders can assist team members to participate in and facilitate work teams. They are by ensuring:

- team members participate actively in team activities and communication processes
- team members and teams take individual and joint responsibility for their actions
- the team receives support to identify and resolve problems which impede its performance.

4.2 What is the team leader’s role in assisting team members to participate in and facilitate a work team?

Workplace participation means that team members can:

- influence the outcomes of issues that directly affect their work
- accept delegation of responsibility
- be involved in cooperative approaches to conflict
- have shared understanding of objectives
- feel empowered.

As a team leader you are in a position to influence the ability of team members to participate in decision making through:

- ensuring the potential of all team members is used
- giving and receiving feedback
- establishing and maintaining productive relationships with team members
- matching communication processes to the needs of supported employees.
CASE STUDY: My team, our team

Zac was feeling on top of the world. His team had completed its best week for the year. Production targets had been met, few team members had been away ill and the team had been happy and content for some time. There had been few of the arguments and disagreements that had plagued the team some weeks earlier.

Before a team leaders’ meeting later that week, Zac told Antonio, a close friend and fellow team leader, how he was feeling. Antonio thought for a while and then told Zac that he thought Zac had improved as a team leader.

‘Remember when you first got here’, he said, ‘you thought you knew it all. You had all that experience with the car company and had worked on production lines for years and you were going to waltz in and show us all how to lead a team. It was all my team this and my team that. The first few weeks were really hard for you; the team wasn’t responding the way you expected. Then you got your act together’.

‘What did I do?’ asked Zac. ‘I think I still act the same.’

‘No, you’ve changed, for the better’, replied Antonio. ‘The best things you did were getting to know the team members. You found out how to communicate with each person in the team. Remember, you used to stand too close to Nick and he couldn’t concentrate on what you were saying because you were so close and then he’d make mistakes. Eliza needed everything repeated a few times slowly and she would do the work perfectly. All those things made a difference; the team became a real team after those types of things happened.’

Zac thought for a time then said, ‘I know I learned pretty quickly that the team was good at giving me feedback. Some of them let me know how I needed to spend more time getting to know what they could and couldn’t do, and where they needed some help. I was really surprised to find out all the skills and knowledge the team had. I had really underestimated them when I started’.
ACTIVITY: Team dynamics

Provide some examples of how your organisation ensures that the potential of all team members is used.

Provide some examples of how to ensure you provide effective feedback to team members.

Provide some examples of how to ensure you are receptive to feedback from team members.

Provide some examples of where team leaders have established and maintained productive relationships with team members? How was this achieved?

Provide examples from your workplace where team leaders are effective at matching the communication processes with supported employees’ communication needs.

List the skills and abilities needed by team leaders to ensure their communication processes suit the needs of supported employees in the team they are leading.
4.3 What can a team leader do to help team members take individual and joint responsibility for actions?

Team leaders should always remember that they are part of the team, not separate from it. This means that there is a shared responsibility between the team leader and team members to take responsibility for actions occurring as part of the team’s activities in the workplace.

For team leaders working with supported employees there is a need to acknowledge the varying ability of each team member to recognise their responsibilities as part of the team. Assessing individual capacity for recognising responsibility will provide a starting point for team leaders to communicate individual and joint responsibilities.

**ACTIVITY: Influencing team members**

The following table shows some of the ways team leaders can influence team members’ work performance. Complete by adding suggestions for your workplace.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of influence</th>
<th>Actions required</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treat team members as individuals</td>
<td>Different people need different approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a sense of energy</td>
<td>Work quickly to solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a vision for the team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to team members and recognise their efforts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice visible management</td>
<td>Be available for team members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give responsibility and build self esteem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build confidence and empower the team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make work interesting and worthwhile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove barriers to good performance</td>
<td>Check for faulty tools or equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote cooperation and team support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keep promises and build trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage conflict and complaints</td>
<td>Deal with conflict as soon as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model the behaviour you want in others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 What can be done to ensure the team receives support to identify and resolve problems which impede its performance?

A team leader’s skills, knowledge and ability to communicate effectively with the supported employees in the team will be of paramount importance in assisting the team to identify and resolve problems.

The ability of a team leader to solve problems and to develop problem solving skills in team members is also important.

CASE STUDY: We can fix this

Annaleise was concerned about the number of arguments occurring between team members. Over the past weeks two new supported employees had joined the team and the previously calm and quiet atmosphere of the workplace had been transformed into a battle ground. No one was sure when the next argument would happen and some of the team members were showing signs of withdrawing from discussions they had previously taken pleasure in contributing to.

The next morning Annaleise decided to talk to the team about the problem. She thought that the best solution would come from the team. She approached the meeting carefully and began by asking the team members to set some rules for the meeting. The suggestions included listening carefully, letting everyone have a say and not getting angry with each other.

‘A good start’, thought Annaleise, ‘but where to next? One step at a time is best’.

She decided to outline her concerns about the team’s performance and ask the team members to share with the group what they thought the problem was.

The meeting took some time and Annaleise wasn’t convinced the problem had been solved, however, she did recognise that some steps had been taken toward improving workplace communication. She would have to monitor the situation and decide on the next steps following this.
**ACTIVITY:** Problem solving guideline

Set out below is a seven step problem solving guideline.

Review the guideline in terms of how your work teams operate and suggest any changes to make the guidelines effective for your teams.

1. Define the problem
2. Identify the type of problem
3. Identify constraining issues
4. Develop alternative solutions
5. Evaluate the alternative solutions
6. Decide on a solution and implement it
7. Monitor and evaluate the action

Successful team leaders need to invest time and effort into developing team members’ skills and abilities to participate in and facilitate teams. Communication skills are at the core of effective team leadership. These, combined with a clear understanding of organisational goals and knowledge of each supported employee’s competencies, will mean a team leader has the skills and abilities to carry out the role well.
Summary

Successful leadership of work teams requires team leaders to continually review the environment the team is working in to ensure all members have opportunity to participate in the team. In working to achieve participation team leaders will draw on their communication, organisation and planning skills to develop a team with members who are willing to contribute to decision making and to take responsibility for their actions.
Resources
References

http://openlearn.open.ac.uk [accessed 17 December 2007].

