

MODULE 3: TEAMWORK

STUDENT'S MANUAL

Objectives:

- Understand **what we mean by teamwork and what it means to network**.
- Understand **what makes a top performing team**.
- Know how to **identify the mission, vision and values** of a team, and what the importance of these are.
- Understand **the significance of trust, mutual respect and individual commitment** in interpersonal relationships when working with others.
- Learn to define functions, how to **organise time and to co-ordinate workflow**.
- Understand **conflict management techniques**.

Content:

- Introduction
- Groups v teams v networks
- Characteristics of high performing teams
- Mission, vision and values
- Interpersonal relationships
- Organising and co-ordinating workflow
- Conflict management

- **INTRODUCTION**

Teamwork means **being able to work effectively with others to achieve a set of pre-determined objectives**, ensuring both the productivity and the positivity of the group. It implies **making an effective individual contribution for the collective benefit of the team**. It demands commitment and ensures that daily duties are carried out responsibly. It requires interpersonal relationships to be nurtured with an attitude of collaboration, respect for others and with a co-responsibility for all to achieve success.

Most projects today involve teamwork, either with other members of your own organisation or with external professionals. This is reflected in increased performance (or productivity), and greater professional satisfaction (or positivity). Furthermore, **the ability to work in virtual teams, by its very nature, demands various digital skills**.

Nowadays, all **organisations** use **teamwork** as a **way of working**. For this reason, working side by side with others, to achieve a common goal, has **become an essential competence** to ensure survival in today's **world of work**.

Throughout this module, we will work on the characteristics of groups, teams and networks, to understand what the differences are and to ask ourselves if we actually work or have worked in one of these ways in the past. We will also see the characteristics of high performing teams, define mission, vision and values. We will also learn how to manage and co-ordinate workflow, and finally look at how to manage workplace conflicts.

Before continuing, let's take a moment to look at two key dimensions in teamwork which both the team leader and the team members should be constantly managing, and are based on the TEAM DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT. These are:

- **PRODUCTIVITY: This refers to how the team performs its tasks and makes the necessary decisions to reach its**

objectives. They include: objectives and strategies, resources, proactivity, responsibility, alignment, leadership and decision making.

- **POSITIVITY:** This refers to the quality and manner in which relationships within the team are managed. They include: communication, respect, constructive interaction, diversity, optimism, rapport and trust.

Combining these two dimensions, we can find four different types of teamwork scenarios:

- Low productivity and low positivity: the result will be an atmosphere where criticism, guilt, cynicism, and fear of failing dominate; not a happy place to work. This scenario is usually a short term phase and associated with one individual, rather than with the whole team.
- High productivity and low positivity: focused on efficiency, with clear objectives and based on getting the end result. However this scenario usually suffers retention problems and team members constantly feel on the defensive.
- Low productivity and high positivity: the team is based on friendship and fun, but there is a lack of effective focus. In this scenario, there is an insufficient sense of urgency, too much toleration of "incompetence" and is not sufficiently result orientated.
- High productivity and high positivity: a successful and fun team, with great rapport. With its inspiring vision, it sets challenging goals, is proactive towards change, practises open communication, and its team members are constantly challenged.

We must therefore work to ensure that our team is balanced and both of the above-mentioned dimensions are high to get the best possible results.

• GROUPS v TEAMS v NETWORKS

We have a tendency on many occasions to re-name a group as a team or a network, even though they are not really the same. There are a number of similarities and differences between them.

A **group** is a number of people who have something in common but do **not** necessarily **share** a goal or an **objective**. This definition includes both formal and informal groups. In a group the roles and responsibilities of its members are not defined, individuals have their own objectives, there is no relationship of dependence or interdependence, no-one has ownership of the end results and therefore any success is individual. (For example, being part of a class group at school.)

On the other hand, a **team** is **internally organised**, has **specific objectives**, and each of its **members** has a **specific role**. There is a common goal (known and shared). There is a relationship of interdependence. The benefit is mutual (so co-operation exists) and success is collective.

Networking goes one step further in the paradigm. It implies working as a community that is independent and has the capacity to manage itself. These networks are gradually being implemented in companies, co-existing with other structures and hierarchies, with the aim of making them more scalable and sustainable, so they can play an important role in the future of work. In networks:

- The **rules of operation are agreed between members**.
- **It does not require the supervision and monitoring of project completion by a specific leader** (although this does not mean that there is no leadership, but rather that it is shared).
- **Sharing responsibilities and good co-ordination is widely practised** by those involved.
- **Each person freely agrees to the project, and decides which parts he/she participates in.** Contributions are, therefore, heterogeneous.
- **It is expressed in nodes** for which a common goal is not necessary. According to José Miguel Bolivar, each node shares some interest with another node.
- Networks are **dynamic structures without the strict division of roles** (in the most traditional sense).

- The "time" dimension takes on a new meaning based on the fact that you do not have to be physically present.
- This system **requires its members to be very experienced** in their given professions (they must be responsible and independent) and the **organisation must promote networking**.

"A network is the only configuration in which it is possible for everyone to shine equally"(Eugenio Molini)

Obviously, everything has its pros and cons, but if we look at the advantages it is quite obvious the **importance and relevance of knowing whether it is better to work as a team or in a network depends on the type of project**. Making the correct decision will, without a doubt, give better results in the digital workplace.

*"If you want to go fast, walk alone;
but if you want to go far, walk with someone else"
(Proverbio africano)*

2.1. How to work in a group, in a team or network remotely

- Always keep the **project objectives** in mind so you can **organise yourself and the other team members** in line with the project demands.
- Take **ownership** of the team or network's **goals** as if they were your own.
- Be **co-operative**.
- Reflect on **your degree of responsibility and autonomy**, and how this affects other members of your organisation. When teleworking, this is especially important in the pursuit of goals, because usually there isn't anyone to report back to since the teleworker does not work onsite and may even have different bosses.
- Make sure you **continue to develop your leadership skills, your productivity skills and your personal organisation** (as we saw in module 1).
- **Stop working on your own or in a group when the task requires you to work in a team or to network**, even though this may be difficult at first. When we work remotely we tend to isolate ourselves, but we cannot forget that we are part of a system or a community.
- Always maintain **clear and effective communication** with your co-workers. Once again, we see the importance of why you need to continually develop your communication skills (ref. module 2).
- **Ensure you "pull your weight" as your co-workers will expect it of you**. How much is expected of you depends on your role, the tasks and the responsibilities you committed to.
- **Try to constantly improve and be available to take on new tasks** when necessary.
- You should be able to count on the **participation of all team members and appreciate their contributions**. Giving thanks and recognising a job well done helps motivation.

• CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGH PERFORMING TEAM

To attain a high performing team, it is necessary to follow a series of guidelines from teamworking methodology. In fact, there are **8 relevant areas in teamworking methodology that make teams "excellent"**. They include:

	Should be clearly defined and agreed by all, to ensure the commitment of all team members.
	Clearly define roles and responsibilities, ensuring their understanding. You should consider team members' talents, diversity and how team members can compensate for one other.
	Establish rules and procedures to ensure team collaboration.
	This is fundamental for all types of teamwork. It is developed through solid working relationships which are also based on mutual respect and commitment.
	Should be applied to all team members and be based on listening and transparency.
	Resolve conflicts by analysing the facts and giving everyone involved the chance to give their version, trusting that, in doing so, it will be a win-win situation for all involved.
	Stop from time to time to compare areas you could improve and what you have done well.

Celebrate successes. And if something has not been achieved, at least celebrate the fact that you did it together. This is what fuels the team!

Taking some time to work on these areas can result in a high performing team that yields maximum results ... and satisfaction!

3.1. How to improve a high performing team's competencies in a teleworking environment?

- Always keep the **project objectives** in mind. Always ask if you have any questions or doubts about them and make sure you communicate the objectives to your team.
- You need to be clear about both your roles and responsibilities, and the roles and responsibilities of others. Also, **let others know what your strengths and talents are** so you can maximise your contribution and, over time, gain greater satisfaction with what you do.
- **Respect and trust** others so they will respect and trust you. Both attitudes are essential for working together.
- Make an effort to **actively and empathically listen** to others. Use **assertive language** in your communication. Adding constructive **feedback** should guarantee optimal communication in the team (ref. module 2).
- Focus on **constructive conflict management** (we will look at this in more detail later in this module).
- **Learn from your mistakes and celebrate your successes.** This also applies to the other members of your team, network or organisation.

- **MISSION, VISION & VALUES**

The **mission, vision** and **values** of a team is what gives it coherence and authenticity; and as such, its identity. But what does each of these concepts actually mean?

- **MISSION:** essentially reflects the role of the team in the organisation; the reason why it exists, which sometimes gives rise to its main activity, to the solutions it provides.
- **VISION:** essentially the vision is how the team will look in the future. The vision has a motivating dimension to it and it must have the company's objectives aligned to it.
- **VALUES:** are the standards of conduct, the ethical principles that regulate and guide behaviour. In addition to the agreed values, corporate values will spread to the organisation's teams. Values are key, for example, to determine priorities in any given moment, and the basis for making decisions.

4.1. How to define mission, vision and values for your team?

- Always keep the **project objectives** in mind as well as the different objectives of each of your team members, so that everyone's expectations can be satisfied.
- **If your company is part of a larger organisation, you will also need to take their mission, vision and values into account** and ensure the team's are aligned to these.
- To get the best out of your team, always work on the **rules of engagement** before starting any project. It is best if it is written down and specifies the operating rules; what will be accepted and what will not be accepted in the team regarding behaviour, requests and the expectations of its members. This will help to agree on the way of working, it will correct any ambiguity and will also create cohesion and a positive working environment. Finally, it will reduce possible conflict and encourage individual commitment as well as promote co-responsibility.

- **Be coherent as** to the defined and agreed upon mission, vision and values, and **be an example in your behaviour** when working with and for others.

4.2. Mission, vision and values in teleworking

Working on the mission, vision and values in a team or network community is fundamental. In teleworking, we must also take the following into account:

- When working remotely, it is easy to forget that we are part of a larger system, **so keeping these elements in mind will be key to maintaining our commitment to the project.**
- In the same way, they are also essential to **strengthen the sense of belonging.**
- **Encourage cohesion** among team members, even if they do not share a work space together (which is what usually and logically unites us).

• INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

At the beginning of this module we learned about the importance of the productivity and positivity dimensions for a group to become a high performing team. **Depending on the level of the interpersonal relationships within the team, the positivity of the team could be high or low.** When this is high, it generates the necessary trust for the working relationships to be effective. This will also determine the team's level of personal satisfaction, which will ultimately maximise the work climate, motivation and commitment of all involved.

The positivity of a team is made up of different "strengths", all of them valid and to be developed in the same way, irrespective of the role you have in the team. These strengths include:

- **TRUST:** Already mentioned as one of the key areas of high performing teams. Trust is the basis of every team, because without trust we could not manage conflict, the commitment of the members will be affected, the responsibilities will be blurred, and this, of course, will influence the final results. Trust above everything else!
- **COMMUNICATION:** Another key area already mentioned and worked on in the previous module. Communication is the most important competence to ensure the team works together as a team. It is the vehicle through which we interrelate and co-ordinate.
- **RESPECT:** If we want to be respected, we must first respect ourselves. Respect involves accepting others to be different, and not just "tolerating" them. Respect leads to integration.
- **DIVERSITY:** Without a doubt the more diverse a team is, the more potential there is for conflict. However, diverse teams are often much more enriching and productive, because it is more likely that team members can compensate and complete each other's talents, which can generate very favourable synergies.
- **OPTIMISM:** Working in a positive and cheerful environment encourages creativity and eases problem solving, making the work much more enjoyable. Try to remain positive and upbeat at all times in the hope that your attitude is contagious and motivates others to be the same.
- **PARTNERSHIP:** We can all need others at any given moment, and knowing that we can count on others is a key element for us to feel secure, to generate self-confidence within the team.
- **CONSTRUCTIVE INTERACTION:** The attitude of each member about working together is very important. All team members need to understand that they are all interdependent. Each member contributes what he/she can to build a stronger team. Furthermore, helping others heightens personal satisfaction and improves team spirit.

5.1. Interpersonal relationships in teleworking

We already know the challenge of working as a team or as part of a network when we telework. In the case of establishing

and developing interpersonal relationships to improve co-operation, this is even more complex, since this is easier when we share the same physical space at the same time. In this regard, it will be important to:

- **Look for 'ad hoc' moments that allow you to build the necessary confidence with the rest of your colleagues and avoid the tendency to isolate yourself from the team.** If possible, look for ways to see the person face to face (e.g. Skype) and if at any time there is an opportunity to get to know your team personally, take advantage of it!
- **Maintain communication with your team that will allow you to be connected at all times.** This will make you feel more like part of the team, and will help when co-ordinating tasks.
- Maintain an **attitude of respect and an appreciation for diversity**. In this increasingly global world we live in it is almost certain that you will have to work with people from very different countries and cultures, so developing intercultural competencies is essential. However, diversity also refers to people different from us in terms of gender, age, religion ...
- **Be conscience of your attitude and your emotions**, always trying to be optimistic and available to help others. To do this, you will need to maintain communication with them on a regular basis and make it easy for them to get to know you and for you to get to know them. This will help overcome the barriers that the technology and the distance put between you.

• ORGANISING AND CO-ORDINATING WORKFLOW

A team, besides being positive, must be productive! And this **implies so much that each one of its members must have both productivity skills and personal organization skills** (module 1). **It also implies that there is an appropriate organization of its members and an efficient co-ordination of the workflow.**

The productivity of a team is made up of different "strengths", all of them valid and to be developed in the same way, irrespective of the role you have in the team. These strengths include:

- **PROACTIVITY:** As we saw in module 1, being proactive is crucial to achieving goals. Each team member must be proactive, taking every opportunity to influence what he/she can.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** If there is motivation and commitment, there will be responsibility. Likewise, each team member must be clear about his/her objectives in the team and what each of their roles and responsibilities are. If we do not assume our individual responsibility, the results can be very compromised, and the relationship with the other members of the team may worsen.
- **OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES:** A team essentially shares objectives, and these have to be clearly defined (using the SMART method that we saw in module 1), and be known by all. We should also define a strategy to achieve each objective, which will be the basis for the action plan we define thereafter.
- **ALIGNMENT:** The team and its objectives must be aligned, with the mission, vision and values that define them. Without alignment, there is no guide, and the team can easily lose direction. This is fundamental to achieving the overall goal.
- **RESOURCES:** Above all we need resources. If the resources necessary to achieve the proposed objectives do not exist, it will be difficult or almost impossible to achieve anything. In this way, a team must ensure that it has what it needs to deliver the expected results. In fact, if we do not have the resources necessary to reach an objective, it is perhaps not realistic (R in the SMART model).
- **DECISION-MAKING:** Some teams fail because they have not defined the decision-making processes; who is responsible for what, or who decides at any given time.
- **LEADERSHIP:** It is not always necessary for a team to have a single leader, but there must be leadership. This can be a shared leadership, e.g. each member (or some of them) taking the responsibility to lead a specific aspect of the project.

6.1. Effective meetings

One of the tools that teams have to coordinate and make decisions is the **meeting**, which, when managed properly, can increase productivity and help attain success. However, unproductive meetings result in significant costs for teams and companies, with regard to time, money and motivation.

“Meetingitis” is the consequence of the inefficiency of team meetings. This occurs when a common solution or proposal cannot be reached by the time the meeting is over, i.e. the meeting has not been productive.

To ensure that work meetings are successful, it is necessary **to achieve an appropriate degree of participation, effectiveness, productivity, integration, collaboration and creativity among the members of the team, so that the appropriate decisions can be made and the problems being dealt with, solved.**

Meetings techniques can be broken down into **three areas**, each with its own specific tasks:

- **BEFORE:** Define the objectives of the meeting, convene in a timely manner, invite the necessary people only, schedule the items to be discussed (agenda), and prepare the necessary materials and resources (room reservation, etc). NB: the attending members will also have to prepare the meeting, depending on their role.
- **DURING:** Presentation of topics per the agenda of the meeting and the objectives. Discussion for decision-making and agreement (here it will be important to have the figure of a facilitator, to manage and guide the meeting, ensuring speaking times are respected etc.) Minutes of the meeting should be recorded to reflect the agreements made and the next steps to be taken (including deadlines and those responsible for completing each next step). Finally there should be an evaluation of the meeting, specifying areas for improvement before the next meeting.
- **AFTER:** Follow-up of the meeting. Update the minutes with what was agreed by each individual with their corresponding defined deadlines.

6.2. Organising and co-ordinating workflow for teleworkers

If for traditional on-site teams organizing and coordinating the workflow is key, when we telework it is even more so. This is because we are usually working offsite and maybe even working out of office hours. It will therefore be important to:

- **Clearly define and share with all members** what the **objectives** to be achieved are, the **strategies** that will be carried out, the **resources** you have, and the **roles and responsibilities** of each member.
- **Establish standards and define processes** for effective decision-making and leadership. It is important that these processes and norms are clear for all members at all times, and that everyone respects them (individually and collectively). This is especially important if team members are not working in the same place, or working on par with the rest of the team.
- **All team members should try to be as proactive as possible and take responsibility for what they are assigned** to guarantee success even though they may work independently, away from the team, in their day to day.
- **Schedule well prepared meetings with the rest of the team.** It will be important for teleworkers not only to agree on the format of the meeting, but also the scheduled time (taking into account possible time differences with other work colleagues). In the agenda of the meeting, establish the time that the meeting is expected to last, and try to be realistic with regard to how many topics you can cover, to avoid any issues being untreated.
- **During virtual meetings**, maintain the **role of a facilitator** to ensure that the agenda is met, and **designate someone to take notes and do the minutes**. It is even better, if the technology allows, **that the meeting be recorded**, for later consultation, either by members who have not been able to attend, or to review specific issues.
- **Post meeting, each member must take a personal note of the actions** that have been entrusted to him/her respecting each completion deadline.

- **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

A conflict occurs when **two or more people disagree** about a fact or situation where they **perceive their interests to be incompatible and express themselves aggressively**, possibly **taking actions** that may even **harm the other party**. The fundamental difference with what we call a "problem" is the ego that comes into play from each of the intervening parties in the conflict.

Currently, we consider conflict to be an inevitable feature of social relations, reducing the negative idea that has always been associated with it. In fact, it is still a situation that is very much feared and avoided by people, especially in the workplace, because of its emotional burden, and what that implies.

The problem is that any conflict can take a constructive or destructive course and, therefore, the issue is not so much to eliminate or to prevent the conflict, but **to know how to manage each conflictive situation and to confront it with sufficient resources** so that all those involved learn something from them.

In this way, a "conflict" is not the same as a "problem" (although every conflict is in itself a problem or issue to be managed and solved). While a problem is an objective fact, something to be resolved (which may or may not have a solution), a conflict is usually subjective (there may or may not be a real problem, because what actually occurs is a difference of opinion between 2 or more people, and sometimes this is only a difference of perception). We often confuse problem and conflict, and even try to approach them in the same way. Understanding the differences between them will help find the best possible solution.

And although each conflict is different, we can categorize all conflicts into a series of phases that will help us manage them better:

- **Latency period:** This is the moment when the conflict is still only "brewing", but as the saying goes: "there is no smoke, without fire." Sometimes, it can be perceived beforehand by the people around you who are not directly involved.
- **Manifestation and outburst:** This is the moment in which the conflict takes place, when it explodes, for whatever the reason. This is where emotions come into play, the two "egos" emerge, each with their own perception, their own experiences, etc.
- **Resolution:** This is the phase when we bring our assertiveness and our emotional intelligence into play. It is when the solution to the conflict is sought and solved in a way that satisfies all parties involved and ultimately puts an end to the conflict.
- **Post-conflict:** It is important to make sure that the conflict is truly "over" and that there is no ill-feeling remaining between the people involved, to ensure this doesn't escalate into another latency period of a later conflict.

You need to recognize what phase the conflict that you are managing is going through, to be able to decide which is the best strategy to apply to initiate resolution.

Conflict can be looked at from 3 different **angles**:

- **PROBLEM - RELATIONSHIP:** We have to distinguish between the problem (if there actually is one) behind the conflict, and the relationship between the people involved. In fact, the same problem does not have to generate a conflict for everyone. Sometimes, however great the problem may be, there are people who, because of their relationship with the other party, will not usually initiate conflict.
- **REASON - EMOTION:** We have to distinguish between the emotional part of the conflict, and the reason for the conflict. The management of our emotions and those of the other party will be key in solving the conflict.
- **WIN – CO-OPERATE:** Finally, our own attitude towards the resolution of the conflict will be decisive for its resolution. In general, a co-operative, win-win attitude will be more favorable, both in the short term, and in the medium and long term (especially if we want to maintain a healthy relationship with our "opponent").

Thus, when the conflict ends, the following different types of **RESULTS** may arise:

- **Negative results:** These are the easiest to perceive, and are the reason we usually fear conflicts so much. They generate mistrust, they destroy personal relationships, and they can imply a lot of costs for the organization (and

can include social and even economic costs).

- **Positive results:** All conflicts are learning experiences if we know how to reflect upon them and take note for the future. Furthermore, conflict within teams fosters diversity of perspectives, it increases creativity (in the search for alternatives and solutions) and, as we usually show ourselves in our most vulnerable state, when we overcome the conflict, we can even strengthen the relationship and improve trust with the people with whom we have been in conflict.

7.1. How to best manage conflict

Which steps should we follow as a general rule to be able to manage conflict adequately? Here are **three steps** that you can apply in your day-to-day. Take good note of them, and do not skip any!

- **CREATE CONTEXT:** Create a context that facilitates the resolution of the conflict, a quiet area/space (without interruptions) and a time (without stress or rushed) suitable for constructive communication. Be willing to put your communication skills into practice (especially active listening, empathy and assertiveness). Gather all the possible information you need to attempt to resolve the conflict. Ensure that your emotional state and that of the other party is appropriate to manage the conflict. The conversation should be open only to the other party and yourself (in some cases, if it is difficult to reach an agreement, from previous experiences or if the subject matter is particularly difficult, it may be necessary to present the case to a mediator to resolve).
- **ADD VALUE:** This phase will be where we really identify what the problem is, where both parties explicitly express their objectives and interests. It is important here to clarify each person's perception of the problem, and to listen empathically to the other party, trying to understand how he/she thinks and how he/she feels (beyond what he is verbally manifesting). Likewise, always use assertive language, keep calm, be respectful and patient.
- **SEEKING RESOLUTION:** It is time to evaluate all possible alternatives, to agree on how the process itself (the steps and actions to be taken) will resolve the conflict. Then you need to implement what was agreed, to review progress, and to learn for future reference what worked and what needs to be improved for next time. Finally, ensure the conflict has been properly resolved and closed once the solution has been reached so that nothing is left open and nothing is pending that could give rise to a new conflict.

7.2. How to manage conflict management in the digital workplace

- Think of **conflict as a source of learning** because, on many occasions, it is necessary to experience it to obtain new points of view and solutions.
- Conflict is an **inevitable situation when working as a team**, and solving conflict is fundamental to guarantee the commitment of all its members. Living in "artificial harmony" leads to nothing.
- Being afraid of conflict does not solve it. Do not avoid it but rather ... **embrace it!** You will improve your communication skills and your emotional intelligence, and show a side of you which demonstrates responsibility, objectivity and maturity.
- In each conflict you deal with, **evaluate what you gain and what you lose**. Discuss the importance of the relationship with the other person and decide what strategy to adopt in each case. Sometimes it is necessary to lose today, to win tomorrow.
- Whenever a situation or person matters to you, try to manage the conflict by thinking about the **benefit for both parties**.
- To avoid unnecessary conflict, **try to use feedback** (give it and request it) **on a regular basis with your peers**, before any possible mountains get bigger!
- **Follow the steps** above to manage conflict in the workplace (create context, add value and search for resolution). In the case of the teleworker, it is especially important to find the right place and time to have the conversation with your "opponent", because communication is not usually as easy as it is for those in non-remote situations.
- Make sure that the barriers of distance and technology do not restrict your communication and, therefore, the possibilities of resolving the conflict. If it is a major conflict, **try to encourage dialogue with the other person in a personal and harmonious way to avoid misunderstandings or misinterpretations**, and avoid written or unidirectional messages.