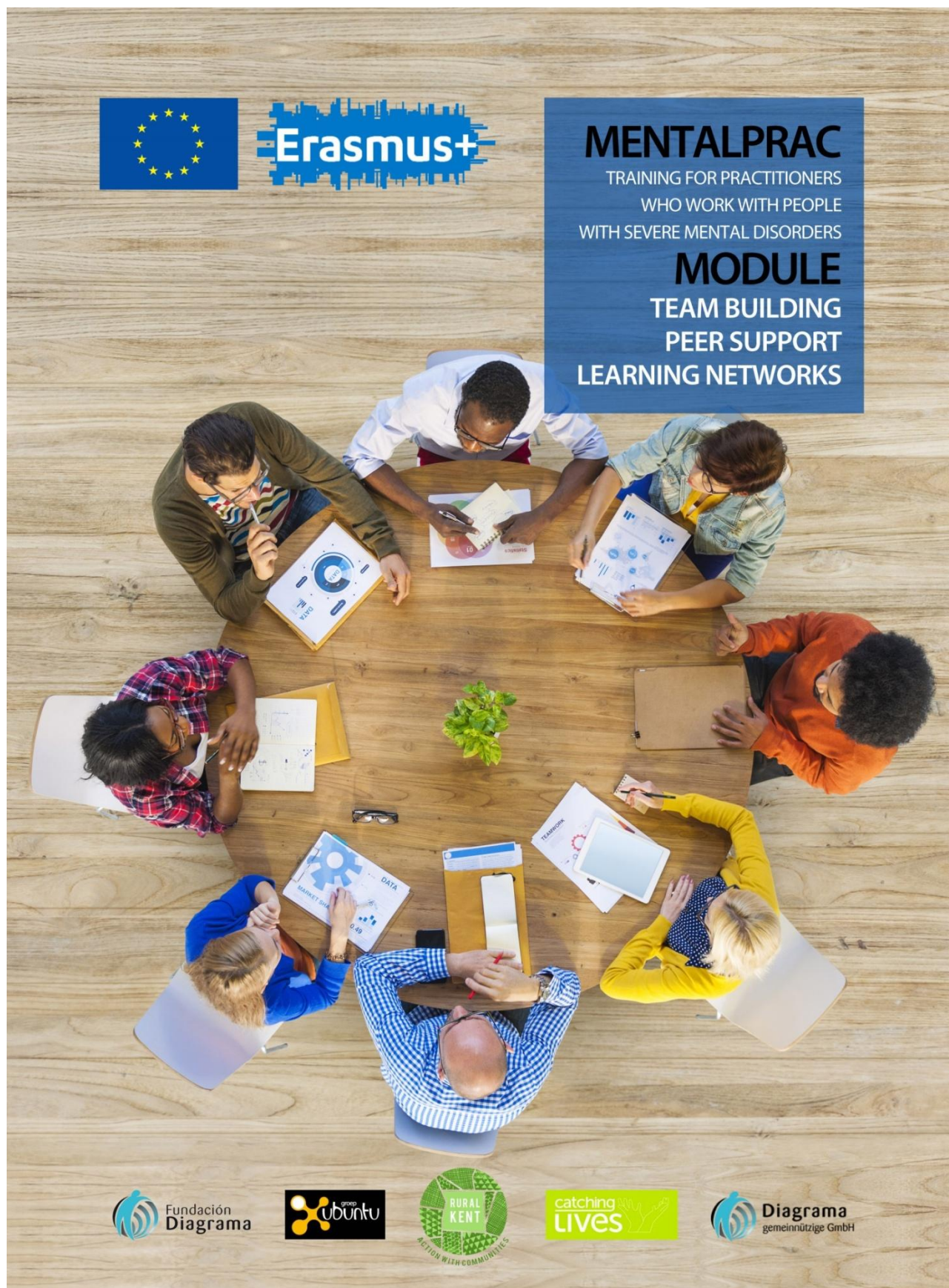




MENTALPRAC

TRAINING FOR PRACTITIONERS
WHO WORK WITH PEOPLE
WITH SEVERE MENTAL DISORDERS

MODULE
TEAM BUILDING
PEER SUPPORT
LEARNING NETWORKS



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1. INTRODUCTION

This module of the Erasmus+-project MENTALPrac, a training for practitioners who work with people with severe mental disorders, covers a number of methodologies, principles and tools that can be used in supporting people with severe mental disorders. In this module we will talk about the importance of teambuilding, peer support and learning networks.

With good teambuilding skills you can unite people, volunteers or employees around a common goal. For example: 'dealing with severe mental health issues or questions'. Teambuilding is an outgoing process that helps a work group evolve into a cohesive unit. Peer support is about offering and receiving help, based on shared understanding, respect and mutual empowerment between people in similar situations. Peer support includes a personal understanding of the frustrations experienced with the mental health system and serves to reframe recovery as making sense of what has happened and what is moving on, rather than identifying and eradicating symptoms and dysfunction. In a learning network you can unite people in order to exchange and share experiences about certain themes, for example the support of people with severe mental health issues. Learning in a network is closely connected to reality and the learning needs of caregivers, volunteers or for example peer workers.

This module covers theoretical en practical information and is equipped with theoretical contents, two videos and slideshows. This module has the intention to introduce practitioners to useful methodologies than can be used in supporting people with severe mental disorders.



2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Individual and collective learning
- Informal and formal learning
- Intentional learning
- Innovative learning
- Learn on the job
- Improve competencies
- Introducing methodologies: teambuilding, methodologies and learning networks
- Gain insights in teambuilding, peer support and learning networks
- Individual and collective knowledge sharing and development
- Sharing expertise
- Improve (working) skills



3. DIDACTIC TOOLS AND KEYWORDS

3.1 DIDACTIC TOOLS

- Theoretical content: teambuilding, peer support and learning networks
- Slideshow teambuilding (powerpoint)
- Slideshow peer support (powerpoint)
- Slideshow learning networks (powerpoint)
- Video peer support and teambuilding
- Activity: examples of teambuilding
- Evaluation sheet

3.2 KEYWORDS

3.2.1 Teambuilding

Teambuilding | Teambuilding skills | Steps to build an effective team | Lead a team effectively | Encourage trust and cooperation | Share information | Facilitate communication | Establish team goals and values | Ground rules for a team | Keys for successful teamwork | Team norms | Team norm essentials | The C's of teambuilding | Competence | Charter | Control | Collaboration | Communication | Creative innovation | Consequences | Coordination | Cultural change

3.2.2 Peer support

Peer support | Social and emotional support | Clinical and community resources | Ongoing support | Principles of peer support | Peer supporter | Role of a peer supporter | Health benefits | Models for using peer support | Key points to successful peer support | Science vs peer support | Professional-led groups with peer exchange | Peer-led face-to-face self management programs | Peer coaches | Community health workers | Support groups | Telephone based peer support | Web and e-mail-based peer support

3.2.3 Learning networks

Learning networks | Exchange knowledge and expertise | Acquaintance | Assessing questions | Agreements | Maintenance of a learning network | Facilitator | Result-oriented | Group decisions | Offering structure | Stimulating interaction | Intervention | External input | Involvement | Participation | A safe environment | Concluding a network | Communication | Less is more | Allow change | Motivation | Learning questions | Goals | Evaluation | Report | Variation in techniques

4. CONTENTS

4.1 TEAM BUILDING

4.1.1 WHAT IS TEAM BUILDING

With good team-building skills, you can unite employees around a common goal and generate greater productivity. Without them, you limit yourself and the staff to the effort each individual can make on its one.

Team building is an ongoing process that helps a work group evolve into a cohesive unit. The team members not only share expectations for accomplishing group tasks, but trust and support one another and respect one another's individual differences. As a team builder you can lead your team toward cohesiveness and productivity. A team takes on a life of its own and you have to regularly nurture and maintain it, just as you do for individual employees.

Team building can lead to:

- Good communication with participants as team members and individuals
- Increased department productivity and creativity
- Keeping team members motivated
- A climate of cooperation and collaborative problem-solving
- Higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment
- Higher levels of trust and support
- Diverse co-workers working well together
- Clear work objectives
- Better operating policies and procedures



4.1.2 STEPS TO BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE TEAM

- The first rule of team building is an obvious one: to lead a team effectively, you must first establish your leadership with each team member. Remember that the most effective team leaders build their relationships based on trust and loyalty, rather than based on fear or on fear for the power of their positions.
- Consider each employee's ideas as valuable. Remember that there is no such thing as a stupid idea.
- Be aware of employees' unspoken feelings. Set an example to team members by being open with employees and sensitive to their moods and feelings.
- Act as a harmonizing influence. Look for chances to mediate and resolve minor disputes; point continually towards the team's higher goals.
- Be clear when communicating. Be careful to clarify directives.
- Encourage trust and cooperation among employees on your team. Remember that the relationships team members establish among themselves are every bit as important as those you establish with them. As the team begins to take shape, pay close attention to the ways in which team members work together and take steps to improve communication, cooperation, trust, and respect in those relationships.
- Encourage team members to share information. Emphasize the importance of each team member's contribution and demonstrate how all of their jobs operate together to move the entire team closer to its goal.
- Delegate problem-solving tasks to the team. Let the team work on creative solutions together.
- Facilitate communication. Remember that communication is the single most important factor in successful teamwork. Facilitating communication does not mean holding meetings all the time. Instead it means setting an example by remaining open to suggestions and concerns, by asking questions and offering help, and by doing everything you can to avoid confusion in your own communication.
- Establish team values and goals; evaluate team performance. Be sure to talk with members about the progress they are making towards established goals so that employees get a sense both of their success and the challenges that lie ahead. Address teamwork in performance standards. Discuss with your team:
 - What do we really care about in performing our job?
 - What does the word success mean to this team?
 - What actions can we take to live up to our stated values?

- Make sure that you have a clear idea of what you need to accomplish; that you know what your standards for success are going to be; that you have established clear time frames; and that team members understand their responsibilities.
- Use consensus. Set objectives, solve problems, and plan for action. While it takes much longer to establish consensus, this method ultimately provides better decisions and greater productivity because it secures every employee's commitment to all phases of the work.
- Set ground rules for the team. These are the norms that you and the team establish to ensure efficiency and success. They can be simple directives (Team members have to be punctual for meetings) or general guidelines (Every team member has the right to offer ideas and suggestions), but you should make sure that the team creates these ground rules by consensus and commits to them, both as a group and as individuals.
- Establish a method for getting a consensus. You may want to conduct open debate about the pros and cons of proposals, or establish research committees to investigate issues and deliver reports.
- Encourage listening and brainstorming. As supervisor, your first priority in getting consensus is to stimulate debate. Remember that employees are often afraid to disagree with one another and that this fear can lead your team to make mediocre decisions. When you encourage debate you inspire creativity and that's how you'll spur your team on to achieve better results.
- Establish the parameters for consensus-building sessions. Be sensitive to the frustration that can mount when the team is not achieving consensus. At the outset of your meeting, establish time limits, and work with the team to achieve consensus within those parameters. Watch out for false consensus; if an agreement is struck too quickly, be careful to probe individual team members to discover their real feelings about the proposed solution.

4.1.3 SYMPTOMS THAT SIGNAL A NEED FOR TEAM BUILDING

- Decreased productivity
- Conflicts or hostility among staff members
- Confusion about assignments, missed signals, and unclear relationships
- Decisions misunderstood or not carried through properly
- Apathy and lack of involvement
- Lack of initiatives, imagination, innovation; routine actions are taken for solving complex problems
- Complaints of discrimination or favoritism
- Ineffective staff meetings, low participation, minimally effective decisions
- Negative reactions to the manager
- Complaints about quality of service

4.1.4 KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL TEAMWORK

Have you ever wondered how some work groups exhibit effective teamwork and others remain dysfunctional for the life of the team? Effective teamwork is both profoundly simple and difficult at the same time.

These ten tips describe the environment that must occur within the team for successful teamwork to take place. Successful teamwork is the cornerstone for creating functioning, contributing teams.

- The team understands the goals and is committed to attaining them. This clear direction and agreement on mission and purpose is essential for effective teamwork. This team clarity is reinforced when the organization has clear expectations for the team's work, goals, accountability, and outcomes.
- The team creates an environment in which people are comfortable taking reasonable risks in communicating, advocating positions, and taking action. Team members trust each other. Team members are not punished for disagreeing.
- Communication is open, honest, and respectful. People feel free to express their thoughts, opinions, and potential solutions to problems. People feel as if they are heard out and listened to by team members who are attempting to understand. Team members ask questions for clarity and spend their thought time listening deeply rather than forming rebuttals while their coworker is speaking.
- Team members have a strong sense of belonging to the group. They experience a deep commitment to the group's decisions and actions. This sense of belonging is enhanced and reinforced when the team spends the time to develop team norms or relationship guidelines together.
- Team members are viewed as unique people with irreplaceable experiences, points of view, knowledge, and opinions to contribute. After all, the purpose for forming a team is to take advantage of the differences. Otherwise, why would any organization approach projects, products, or goals with a team. In fact, the more that a team can bring out divergent points of view, that are thoughtfully presented and supported with facts as well as opinions, the better.
- Creativity, innovation, and different viewpoints are expected and encouraged. Comments such as, "we already tried that and it didn't work" and "what a dumb idea" are not allowed or supported.
- The team is able to constantly examine itself and continuously improve its processes, practices, and the interaction of team members. The team openly discusses team norms and what may be hindering its ability to move forward and progress in areas of effort, talent, and strategy.
- The team has agreed upon procedures for diagnosing, analyzing, and resolving team work problems and conflicts. The team does not support member personality conflicts and clashes nor do team members pick sides in a disagreement. Rather, members work towards mutual resolution.

- Participative leadership is practiced in leading meetings, assigning tasks, recording decisions and commitments, assessing progress, holding team members accountable, and providing direction for the team.
- Members of the team make high quality decisions together and have the support and commitment of the group to carry out the decisions made.



4.1.5 TEAM NORMS

The members of every team and work group develop particular ways of interacting with each other over time. Effective interpersonal communication among members and successful communication with managers and employees external to the team are critical components of team functioning.

How a team makes decisions, assigns work, and holds members accountable determines team success. With the potential power of the impact of these interactions on team success, why leave team member interaction to chance?

Form team relationship guidelines or team norms early to ensure team success. You can then shape the culture of the team in positive ways.

4.1.6 WHAT ARE TEAM NORMS OR RELATIONSHIP GUIDELINES

Team norms are a set of rules or guidelines that a team establishes to shape the interaction of team members with each other and with employees who are external to the team.

Team norms can be developed during an early team meeting. More norms can be added as the team sees the need for additional guidelines.

Once developed, team norms are used to guide team member behavior. Team norms are used to assess how well team members are interacting. Team norms enable team members to call each other out on any behavior that is dysfunctional or that is negatively impacting the success of the team.

4.1.7 TEAM NORM ESSENTIALS

Predictably, teams have trouble with particular components of interpersonal communication and interaction. You will want to develop norms in those areas for team success.

These are the steps to follow when you create your team norms. Additionally, here are sample team norms in several areas of the more important aspects of interpersonal and team interaction.

- Team members as coworkers: all team members are equal; every team member's opinion will be thoughtfully considered; each team member will keep all commitments upon due date agreed on; each team member agrees to constantly assess whether team members are honoring their commitment to the team norms.
- Team member communication: team members will speak respectfully to each other; will not talk down to each other; will positively recognize and thank each other for team contributions.
- Team member interaction in meetings: team members will listen without interrupting; hold no side or competing conversations; follow the rules for effective meetings; attend the meeting on time; always work from an agenda; minutes will be recorded at each meeting; end meetings on time.
- Team organization and function: leadership will rotate monthly; the team management sponsor will attend the meeting, at least, monthly.
- Team communication with other employees including managers: team members will make certain they have agreement on what and when to communicate; complaints about team members will be addressed first in the team.
- Team problem solving, conflict resolution, and decision making: team members will make decisions by consensus, but majority will rule if timely consensus is not reached; conflicts will be resolved directly with the persons in conflict.

- Team norms can encompass as many topics as the team deems necessary for successful functioning. Start with a few team norms and add more norms as needed.
- Make sure the team norms are written and posted where team members are reminded of their commitment. Take a look at Twelve Tips for Team Building to identify other areas for potential team norms.
- With effective team norms in place, your team will be able to focus on its business purpose. The team was undoubtedly founded to help the company continuously improve and achieve its strategic goals. Don't let ineffective relationships and interactions sabotage the team's work.



4.1.8 THE C'S OF TEAM BUILDING (MORE TIPS FOR TEAM BUILDING)

- **Competence:** Does the team feel that it has the appropriate people participating? (As an example, in a process improvement, is each step of the process represented on the team?) Does the team feel that its members have the knowledge, skill and capability to address the issues for which the team was formed? If not, does the team have access to the help it needs? Does the team feel it has the resources, strategies and support needed to accomplish its mission?
- **Charter:** Has the team taken its assigned area of responsibility and designed its own mission, vision and strategies to accomplish the mission. Has the team defined and communicated its goals; its anticipated outcomes and contributions; its timelines; and how it will measure both the outcomes of its work and the process the team followed to accomplish their task? Does the leadership team or other coordinating group support what the team has designed?
- **Control:** Does the team have enough freedom and empowerment to feel the ownership necessary to accomplish its charter? At the same time, do team members clearly understand their boundaries? How far may members go in pursuit of solutions? Are limitations (i.e. monetary and time resources) defined at the beginning of the project before the team experiences barriers and rework? Is the team's reporting relationship and accountability understood by all members of the organization? Has the organization defined the team's authority? To make recommendations? To implement its plan? Is there a defined review process so both the team and the organization are consistently aligned in direction and purpose? Do team members hold each other accountable for project timelines and results?
- **Collaboration:** Does the team understand team and group process? Do members understand the stages of group development? Are team members working together effectively interpersonally? Do all team members understand the roles and responsibilities of team members? team leaders? team recorders? Can the team approach problem solving, process improvement, goal setting and measurement jointly? Do team members cooperate to accomplish the team charter? Has the team established group norms or rules of conduct in areas such as conflict resolution, consensus decision making and meeting management? Is the team using an strategy to accomplish its action plan?
- **Communication:** Are team members clear about the priority of their tasks? Is there an established method for the teams to give feedback and receive honest performance feedback? Does the organization provide important business information regularly? Do the teams understand the complete context for their existence? Do team members communicate clearly and honestly with each other? Do team members bring diverse opinions to the table? Are necessary conflicts raised and addressed?
- **Creative Innovation:** Is the organization really interested in change? Does it value creative thinking, unique solutions, and new ideas? Does it reward people who take reasonable risks to make improvements? Or does it reward the people who fit in and maintain the status quo? Does it provide the training, education, access to books and films, and field trips necessary to stimulate new thinking?

- **Consequences:** Do team members feel responsible and accountable for team achievements? Are rewards and recognition supplied when teams are successful? Is reasonable risk respected and encouraged in the organization? Do team members fear reprisal? Do team members spend their time finger pointing rather than resolving problems? Is the organization designing reward systems that recognize both team and individual performance? Is the organization planning to share gains and increased profitability with team and individual contributors? Can contributors see their impact on increased organization success?
- **Coordination:** Are teams coordinated by a central leadership team that assists the groups to obtain what they need for success? Have priorities and resource allocation been planned across departments? Do teams understand the concept of the internal customer—the next process, anyone to whom they provide a product or a service? Are cross-functional and multi-department teams common and working together effectively? Is the organization developing a customer-focused process-focused orientation and moving away from traditional departmental thinking?
- **Cultural Change:** Does the organization recognize that the team-based, collaborative, empowering, enabling organizational culture of the future is different than the traditional, hierarchical organization it may currently be? Is the organization planning to or in the process of changing how it rewards, recognizes, appraises, hires, develops, plans with, motivates and manages the people it employs? Does the organization plan to use failures for learning and support reasonable risk? Does the organization recognize that the more it can change its climate to support teams, the more it will receive in pay back from the work of the teams?



4.2 PEER SUPPORT

4.2.1 WHAT IS PEER SUPPORT?

Peer support may be defined simply as 'offering and receiving help, based on shared understanding, respect and mutual empowerment between people in similar situations' (Mead et al., 2001). Thus, it occurs when people share common concerns and draw on their own experiences to offer emotional and practical support to help each other move forward. This is well articulated by peer support workers from Nottingham.

'...They know I'm not the expert, they know we're just us, both trying to beat the same demons, and we're trying to work things through together.... I said to her, 'I've got my own experience of mental illness, I've been on the ward myself and so on,' and with that she sort of jumped up and gave me this huge hug.'

Peer support encompasses a personal understanding of the frustrations experienced with the mental health system and serves to reframe recovery as making sense of what has happened and moving on, rather than identifying and eradicating symptoms and dysfunction (Bradstreet, 2006; Adams & Leitner, 2008). It is through this trusting relationship, which offers companionship, empathy and empowerment, that feelings of isolation and rejection can be replaced with hope, a sense of agency and belief in personal control.

'I wanted to be able to show people that however low you go down, there is a way up, and there is a way out... The thing I try to install is, no matter where you are, if you want to get somewhere else you can, there's always a route to get to where you want to be.'

The shared experiences of peers in mental health settings are most commonly their mutual experiences of distress and surviving trauma. However, it is not always enough simply to share experiences related to mental health. Support is often most helpful if both parties have other things in common such as cultural background, religion, age, gender and personal values (Faulkner & Kalathil, 2012). For people who have experienced marginalisation and exclusion (such as those from minority ethnic groups) it can be important for the support to come from someone who shares these experiences of oppression and/or of facing structural barriers so that they can 'speak the same language'.

Relationships with others who share your experience are unlikely to be helpful if they are overly prescriptive, burdensome, or felt to be unsafe (in terms of trust and confidentiality). The peers from user-led groups interviewed by Faulkner and Kalathil (2012) also found that relationships were more supportive if both people were willing both to provide and receive support and had gained some distance from their own situation so that they were able to help each other think through solutions, rather than simply give advice based on their own experiences. For these reasons, training, supervision and support are all essential for peer workers employed in services.



Link video 'What is peer support': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xclpcwMR8rU>

4.2.1.1 Peer support has four core functions:

Assistance in daily management

Peer supporters use their own experiences with diet, physical activity and medicine adherence in helping people figure out how to manage diabetes in their daily lives. They can also help in identifying key resources, such as where to buy healthy foods or pleasant and convenient locations for exercise.

Social and emotional support

Through empathetic listening and encouragement, peer supporters are an integral part of helping patients to cope with social or emotional barriers and to stay motivated to reach their goals.

Linkages to clinical care and community resources

Peer supporters can help bridge the gap between the patients and health professionals and encourage individuals to seek out clinical and community resources when it is appropriate.

Ongoing support, extended over time

Peer supporters successfully keep patients engaged by providing proactive, flexible, and continual long-term follow-up.

Whatever the form of peer support or the nature of the role, there are a **number of principles** that peer support workers should aim to maintain. These are summarized here below. They include: mutuality, reciprocity, a 'non'-directive approach, being recovery-focused, strengths-based, inclusive, progressive and safe. The principles can be used to guide training and supervision and to maintain the integrity of the peer role wherever they are located and whoever employs them (see below):

4.2.1.2 Principles of peer support

1. Mutual

The experience of peers who give and gain support is never identical. However, peer workers in mental health settings share some of the experiences of the people they work with. They have an understanding of common mental health challenges, the meaning of being defined as a 'mental patient' in our society and the confusion, loneliness, fear and hopelessness that can ensue.

2. Reciprocal

Traditional relationships between mental health professionals and the people they support are founded on the assumption of an expert (professional) and a non-expert (patient/client). Peer relationships involve no claims to such special expertise, but a sharing and exploration of different world views and the generation of solutions together.

3. Non-directive

Because of their claims to special knowledge, mental health professionals often prescribe the 'best' course of action for those whom they serve. Peer support is not about introducing another set of experts to offer prescriptions based on their experience, e.g. "You should try this because it worked for me". Instead, they help people to recognize their own resources and seek their own solutions. 'Peer support is about being an expert in not being an expert and that takes a lot of expertise.' (Recovery Innovations training materials. (For details see www.recoveryinnovations.org)

4. Recovery focused

Peer support engages in recovery focused relationships by:

- Inspiring hope: they are in a position to say 'I know you can do it' and to help generate personal belief, energy and commitment with the person they are supporting
- Supporting people to take back CONTROL of their personal challenges and define their own destiny
- Facilitating access to OPPORTUNITIES that the person values, enabling them to participate in roles, relationships and activities in the communities of their choice.

5. Strengths based

Peer support involves a relationship where the person providing support is not afraid of being with someone in their distress. But it is also about seeing within that distress the seeds of possibility and creating a fertile ground for those seeds to grow. It explores what a person has gained from their experience, seeks out their qualities and assets, identifies hidden achievements and celebrates what may seem like the smallest steps forward.

6. Inclusive

Being a 'peer' is not just about having experienced mental health challenges, it is also about understanding the meaning of such experiences within the communities of which the person is a part. This can be critical among those who feel marginalized and misunderstood by traditional services.

Someone who knows the language, values and nuances of those communities obviously has a better understanding of the resources and the possibilities. This equips them to be more effective in helping others become a valued member of their community.

7. Progressive

Peer support is not a static friendship, but progressive mutual support in a shared journey of discovery. The peer is not just a 'buddy', but a travelling companion, with both travelers learning new skills, developing new resources and reframing challenges as opportunities for finding new solutions.

8. Safe

Supportive peer relationships involve the negotiation of what emotional safety means to both parties. This can be achieved by discovering what makes each other feel unsafe, sharing rules of confidentiality, demonstrating compassion, authenticity and a non-judgmental attitude and acknowledging that neither has all the answers.



4.2.2 WHO IS A PEER SUPPORTER

Peer support refers to support from a person who has knowledge from their own experiences with a condition. Within the context of diabetes management, peer support is support that typically comes from a person with diabetes or a person affected by diabetes (e.g. immediate family member or caregiver).

4.2.3 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A PEER SUPPORTER

Peer support functions to complement, supplement and extend formal primary care services. The role of peer supporters is distinct and does not replace the role of professional health care providers in diabetes care. The role of a peer supporter is usually a voluntary role that is formally recognized, but generally not compensated. In certain instances, as informed by cultural or regional context, an honorarium or other acknowledgement of peer-supporter involvement may be appropriate (e.g. reimbursement for transportation).

4.2.4 WHY IS PEER SUPPORT IMPORTANT

Social support results in psychological and physical health benefits for both the receiver and provider. Peer support relies on non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationships, which provide a flexible supplement to formal health system services for people with diabetes. In addition, peer support fosters understanding and trust of health care staff among groups who otherwise may be alienated from or have poor access to health care.



4.2.5 MODELS FOR USING PEER SUPPORT

Professional-led group visits with peer exchange

In this model, patients who share the same condition are brought together with a health care provider or team of providers to address their self-management challenges.

Peer-led face-to-face self-management programs

In this approach, a person who shares the same condition as the participants leads an interactive format to enhance participants' sharing and mutual encouragement regarding self-management.

Peer coaches

Also known as peer mentors, peer coaches are individuals who have coped with the same condition and meet one-on-one with patients to listen, discuss concerns and provide support.

Community health workers

Also known as promoters, community health workers are community members who work to bridge the gap between their respective communities and health care providers. They do not necessarily have a chronic condition, but they often share language, culture and community with the patients. Oftentimes, the roles of Community Health Worker and Peer Coach are merged.

Support groups

Support groups are gatherings of people who share common experiences, situations, problems or conditions. In these gatherings, people are able to mutually offer emotional and practical support.

Telephone-based peer support

This type of peer support is provided through regular phone calls that are either the sole form of an intervention or used to complement other modes of intervention.

Web- and e-mail-based programs

These programs use the Internet to mobilize peer support, including Internet-based support groups and e-mail reminders. In addition to increasing reach and convenience, they may overcome problems some patients have with face-to-face contact.

4.2.6 WHAT ARE KEY POINTS TO SUCCESSFUL PEER SUPPORT

There's no single ingredient that is required or that guarantees success, but frequent components of successful peer support programs include:

- Maintain frequent contact (long-term and ongoing support).
- Be able to develop and maintain linkages with health systems and primary care providers.
- Be able to encourage regular care, healthy eating, physical activity and medicine adherence; share experiences and advice for those activities; and assist in completing those activities.
- Enable daily living with diabetes by engaging in healthy eating and physical activity together, giving

reminders for medicine adherence or health care appointments, and providing support in coping with day-to-day stressors.

- Assist in developing problem-solving, decision-making, and coping skills.
- Be sensitive to individual, social and cultural characteristics of the patient.
- Be considerate of individual rights, privacy, and the limits on the role of the peer supporter.
- Peer supporters are not primary care providers and should not give medical advice or diagnoses. Instead, if people have questions that require clinical expertise to answer, the peer supporter should encourage them to contact their regular source of care and, if necessary, help them do so.

4.2.7 WHAT DOES SCIENCE SAY ABOUT THE VALUE OF PEER SUPPORT

Much evidence supports that peer support is a critical and effective strategy for ongoing health care and sustained behavior change for people with chronic diseases and other conditions, and its benefits can be extended to community, organizational and societal levels.

Overall, studies have found that social support:

- Decreases morbidity and mortality rates
- Increases life expectancy
- Increases knowledge of a disease
- Improves self-efficacy
- Improves self-reported health status and self-care skills, including medication adherence
- Reduces use of emergency services
- Additionally, providers of social support report less depression, heightened self-esteem and self-efficacy, and improved quality of life.



4.3 LEARNING NETWORKS

4.3.1 THE WHAT AND WHY OF LEARNING NETWORKS

4.3.1.1 Introduction

Uniting people in order to exchange and share experiences is an often tested means of executing competency development. Learning in a network is closely connected to reality and the learning needs of the participants. A learning network helps developing the competences of caregivers: communicating, working as a team, solving problems together, taking initiative, working creatively and innovatively.

A learning network gathers people who want to learn and work around a certain theme, improve their work practice, deepen a problem and find solutions for it. Facilitating a learning network asks for a good preparation and adapted follow-up. In this training we want to offer you, as caregiver or facilitator, a practical guide with proven techniques. This guidance supports everyone who wants to start or facilitate a learning network, with concrete questions as ‘how do I start?’, ‘how do I communicate?’, ‘how do I conclude a learning network?’, ‘what contributes to the success of a learning network?’.

4.3.1.2 What are learning networks

In a learning network several individuals exchange knowledge and experiences purposefully from a mutual interest in a certain field of knowledge. This way, they develop new insights, solutions or working methods. Participants can step into a learning network based on their interests and develop questions. Learning networks are established with the goal of creating learning opportunities. Participants can have an equal function or one can choose a learning network in which the participants hold a different function. Although a larger diversity amongst the participants generally poses bigger challenges to this facilitator of the learning network, a diverse network contributes to the variety of experiences and feedback. We consider a learning network to be a ‘working place’ because the participants focus on urgent questions from the field or more future-oriented questions. In these learning networks, learning is linked to working. Dialogue is at the center.

4.3.1.3 Why a learning network?

A learning network can offer many advantages, both to an organization as to individual participants. For an organization these motives play a role:

- The network allows sharing knowledge and encourages cross-fertilization. Participating in a learning network can cause new dynamics. It provides access to expertise throughout the whole organization, provides a quicker spreading of practical experience and a more accurate conflict resolution.

- The network builds key competences. It offers an interesting learning experience to employees. By reflecting on the own performances and sharing knowledge and knowhow in learning networks, they learn how to deal with unforeseen problems, uncertainty and change. Other generic competences too, such as problem solving skills, communication, teamwork are cultivated in a learning network.

In turn, individual participants can benefit from a learning network: for example:

- Taking part in a learning network offers fresh ideas, new contacts and creates a breeding ground for new knowledge. Besides, it can sparkle motivation. For example the ones bringing up a practical problem in a peer session, are really interested in possible solutions and are genuinely motivated to change their behavior.
- In a 'safe' environment where people jointly can seek for solutions to common problems, they can show their vulnerability and open up to critique by peers. They can ask questions and present problems without being judged.
- A learning network offers the possibility for self-reflection. By discussing the own case and taking distance from it, people are more capable of critical reflection. They develop a helicopter perspective that can be enlightening. In the own organization generally few time is available for true reflection.



4.3.2 LEARNING NETWORKS FROM A TO Z

As facilitator of a learning network you do not only have the ultimate chance to get to know yourself, you also face a big challenge that will require a lot of motivation and energy. Evidently, the participants of the network play the lead: to set the agenda, the case they share, the knowledge and experiences they bring in and how they work together. The success of your learning network also depends on the extend to which you can enthuse others for your initiative, the way and manner in which members participate, how they behave in regards to well-defined opinions and to what extend they take responsibility for the results of the network. Reason enough to pay attention to the various phases of a learning network and resources at your disposal.

4.3.2.1 What precedes

As soon as the decision on the start of a learning network is taken, the goals are broadly laid down and the target group is defined, you – as the pulling force – have to make sure that you connect with the interests and professional development questions of the audience. Only if this last condition is realised, you can guarantee that participants stay motivated and are adapted to learn. On top of that, they must be prepared to share their knowledge or competency and endorse the main goal of the network.

Because you want to reach the line with a core group of participants, the communication preceding this first network meeting deserves all your attention. At the same time, this is your chance to act motivated: seize this chance. The announcement of your learning network preferably contains a clear explanation of the nature and goals of the network and practical information, next to a sensitizing description of the added value of participation in a learning network. Clearly explain the engagement you expect from the participants from the start, even in concrete terms such as number of meetings or expectations regarding internal communication and information flow.

4.3.2.2 Starting a learning network

Now your learning group has been formed, you can start the preparations for your first network meeting. Focus on what is expected of you as trailblazer of the network.

- You should explain as quickly as possible that members of the learning network decide the agenda and outcome themselves; a common goal leads to shared responsibilities and more motivation;
- The participants have to find out from the start that the learning network is both a working place and a learning place;
- Rules have to be designed for a fruitful group process;
- The facilitator has to understand the context in which the participants operate to be able to respond to cases and emotions;
- Change of working methods fosters learning;
- Frequent face-to-face communication is irreplaceable;

- The group of participants is not a monolith and a differentiated approach may be useful (use diversity to increase the learning effect);

It may be necessary to improvise in the beginning: learning in a network is a participatory process in which the facilitator has to adapt continuously to the input of the group. Your start meeting should leave room for three elements: **acquaintance, identifying questions and expectations that touch the group, and making arrangements regarding the process.**

Acquaintance

If you expect participants to cooperate actively and creatively in the process and thereby bringing up their own positive and negative experiences, they have to be able to share them among each other, in a safe environment where they can conduct themselves vulnerably. Therefore, spend enough time to introductions and well-being in the group. One technique that can streamline the acquaintance during a first encounter is speed dating.

Speed dating is a way for participants to familiarise themselves with many other members of the network in a short period of time. The facilitator organises the meeting place so changing duos can sit together for five minutes and share information. With a limited learning group of 10 to 15 people, everyone should be able to get to know the other attendees. To spare time or with larger groups, it is recommended not to work in pairs but in subgroups so people don't have to present themselves endlessly.



Assessing questions and expectations

As facilitator it is important to be aware of the questions and expectations of the participants from the beginning, so that you can manage and monitor those during the process. Ask substantive questions: What do participants want to learn exactly? What do they expect to be addressed in the meetings? What kind of experiences do they want to raise?



Making agreements about the further process

In the first meeting, the facilitator immediately pays attention to the process of the learning network. Thereby, don't forget following questions: If we want to obtain our learning goals, how do we wish to achieve those? What learning methods do we use?

Brainstorming is a working method that can help the facilitator during the various phases of the process to shape the learning network. It is a group technique that permits to generate the many possible solutions for a certain problem or creative ideas. The ultimate goal of a learning network is not the listing of ideas, but the discussion of the solutions and approaches suggested and the evaluation in the light of the available resources and set goals. As facilitator you have to anticipate so the conversation doesn't falter or creativity dries out. For moments like these, you better hold some reanimating questions in your pocket. It speaks for itself that this technique can also be used in following network meetings.

4.3.2.3 Maintenance of a learning network

With the first session behind the back, the facilitator of the learning network cannot rest yet. At best, the members got to know each other, had the chance to share their questions and expectations and explored the big themes for a first time with the group. Next conversations will have to put more stress on the exchange of experience, the learning from each other. The expansion of the present knowledge too has to be deepened by bringing in external information or insights. Both the facilitator and the participants have a role to play here. Both should consider different points of attention, if they want to maintain the learning network. How facilitator and participants shape this phase, is presented underneath. Although both actors are discussed separately, they interact continuously. Together they create a stimulating environment.

The facilitator

With the facilitation of the learning networks it is vital to guide participants towards the desired result. The main task of the facilitator is not the directing of the learning network, but the creation of conditions and the support whereby members are enabled to learn. In other words, the outcome of the learning network may not be lost out of sight. To achieve this result, the facilitator should keep the interaction going between the participants and stimulate their involvement and engagement. The skills and interventions the facilitator uses in this stage, is explained below.



a) Result-oriented

In the second stage of the learning network, the realisation of the group goals is at the centre. Members actively exchange knowledge and experiences to reach this goal. To make an evaluation of this information possible, the design, communication and compliance of some clear ground rules is necessary. We dedicate our full attention to the story of the person talking. We listen carefully to each story and don't interrupt. We refrain from early interventions or judgements. Only if the narrator is finished, we can raise questions or respond.

Not just the design of game rules, but also the suggested framework, designed during the introduction, makes it possible in the second phase to align work cases that are interesting and recognisable for all participants to the session.

A special role is played here by the facilitator who consequently acts as a process supervisor, not as a moderator or manager. In other words: the facilitator follows the process of discussion. He/she makes sure that every participant can speak, that participants stick to the topic and he/she offers structure where needed. At the same time, the facilitator makes sure the conversation doesn't stall (e.g. by repeating the main question) and guards over the compliance with the rules. The task of process supervisor asks for some specific skills, if one wants to reach the intended result. We'll discuss some of them.

Skill 1: Distinguish relevant and irrelevant contributions

Given the interactive and often vibrant character of meetings in a learning network, it can happen that participants deviate from the intended theme. A good learning network also means a pleasant group. A brief distraction can bring 'oxygen' into the discussion and looks at the problem from a different angle.

The facilitator (or participant) may get the feeling that the discussion leads to nowhere or that there is too much deviation from the subject. At that point, it is crucial that someone in the group points this out and redirects the group with a pertinent question. The trick as a facilitator

is to allow discussion on the one hand and not to lose the theme or problem out of sight on the other hand.

It is equally important to build on previously developed knowledge. This way, the agenda of the next meeting - based on the contributions of this day - can be shaped at the end of the meeting. Thereby a short resume is essential. The facilitator can summarise as follows: 'Today we talked about points 1, 2, 3, 4. In my opinion, 1 and 2 are finished, 3 was interesting but may be irrelevant to our learning issue. So I suggest we continue with 4 next time.'

By summarising it as a suggestion, the facilitator leaves room for input from the group in the agenda-setting of the next meeting. Their voice elevates the involvement of the members. On the other hand, this requires the skill of the facilitator to take decisions in group.

Skill 2: Taking group decisions

In the learning network, decisions preceded by several considerations are taken. The learning network often doesn't need a facilitator. With hard decisions, for example the defining of a new agenda, action points, etc., it may prove useful to simplify the decision making process. A decision making process typically consists of four phases:

First, the question requiring a decision needs to be explored. The facilitator can ask: "What is our problem?", "Where does this question come from?", "What makes this question so important?"

If the subject of the decision making process is clear, one can start to launch proposals. In the first phase of the learning network, we discussed some working methods making it possible to generate a large number of solutions for a specific problem, for example brainstorming. In a third phase, the proposals are being investigated more closely by all participants: "What are the strengths and weaknesses?", "What are opportunities and threats?" (e.g. SWOT analysis). At the end of this process, the goal is to reach a conclusion: "Is there a unanimous proposal?" Such a process takes time. The process is often spread over a number of meetings. Be clear on the phases that will be treated. The decisions resulting from such a process will be better understood and supported by all participants.

Skill 3: Offering structure

To create a clear image of what happens in a group, offering structure is important. That way, the members can gain confidence in the process and get the possibility to influence the process whenever they like to. The challenge is to offer as much support as possible and to invite the members to start working.

In order to provide structure, the facilitator must be aware of all sorts of working methods and instruments. However, not the instruments as such are important (e.g. programming meetings, preparing start documents, guiding the learning network), but the interventions preceding or during the meetings. Your competency to offer structure as facilitator is especially needed at times when the learning network overlooks its own knowledge and capacity, when they don't

respect agreements or stay with the topic.

1 - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

b) Stimulating interaction

Maintaining learning networks also means making sure the learning network doesn't fall silent. Knowledge exchange and development should be made possible. For the facilitator, this means that he must be able to use attractive working methods.

Intervention 1: Working with the exchange of experiences

The facilitator uses concrete and repeated questions from the field to stimulate network members to exchange experiences, to learn how, by whom, when and with what consequences practical questions are handled and debated. To smoothen the first session, a central topic can already be defined. In that case, ask participants to bring their experiences about the central theme to the first session. In the following sessions, participants should get the opportunity to define their own learning goals.

Intervention 2: Working with intervision

Intervision is a form of expertise improvement whereby employees can rely on colleagues (perhaps from different organisations) to think about personal and job related issues and obstacles from their own work situation. This thinking is done by raising questions using their own analytical and problem solving abilities and thus getting a view on the problem and how to handle it. Intervision or peer discussion often works with difficult situations and problems. It is worth taking successful experiences as a starting point for once: What leads to this success?

Intervention 3: Working with external input

The demand for learning needs of (participants in) the network can raise questions or themes with which the members have no experience yet. In that case, external expertise has to be brought into the network.

c) Stimulating involvement and engagement

Maintaining a network, finally, is only possible by stimulating involvement and engagement of the participants. This can be done for example by putting the responsibility for success explicitly and solely with the participants. If participants want to learn, they will have to participate actively. This can be done by asking questions, by thinking about other participants' problems, or by formulating (parts of) solutions.

The facilitator can also ask participants to share something from their organisation, for example their way of streamlining administrative procedures. This immediately fills the learning network with relevant input and augments the chance for practical, useful discussion. This is closely linked with what is written above about the exchange of experiences. In any case, participants will only feel involved if the learning network allows them to participate.



The participants of the learning network

Not just the motivating presence of a facilitator as driving force for the network is important for learning networks. A learning network demands employees who:

- Are eager to learn;
- Are open to learning possibilities that occur within a network;
- Search actively for learning opportunities;
- Can formulate their learning questions independently;
- Are prepared to explore unknown terrain;
- Can reflect critically on their own performance;
- Can use feedback from colleagues;
- Can approach the same problem from different angles;
- Can draw lessons from experiences;
- Can and dare to give direction to the learning network;
- (In many cases) can make use of digital communication.

The organisation: creating a safe environment

In order to function perfectly in a group, safety, feeling respected and valued and being given the space from the other participants to act effectively, are preconditions that must be met. The input from members will both increase and diversify. A better learning climate will prevail and this will lead to a greater input from acquaintances. The presence of a stimulating, safe environment seems inevitable to turn networks into successful learning networks.

In an internal learning network, the organisation can play a decisive role. It can improve the development and effectiveness of learning networks by formulating the strategic value from a bright vision on learning.

Besides, the organisation can create an environment where the exchange of knowledge and experiences and the acquisition of new knowledge is stimulated, for example by formulating challenging goals and evoking creative tension as management, or by giving employees the time and space for innovative thinking through learning networks. That is, so to speak, an environment:



- Where mistakes aren't punished or seen as loss of productivity;
- Where managers create opportunities in the workspace to realise new ideas, apply newly developed visions and competencies to improve and renew working processes, products and services.

Further, the organisation can offer help and resources (e.g. meeting rooms, communication technology, budget) when needed. An electronic platform can be used as auxiliary means in support of communication, for the exchange of knowledge and experiences, but virtual communication definitely can't replace personal contact.

In an external learning network too knowledge and experiences are shared in a safe environment.

This manual already pointed out some rules and agreements and the way in which the facilitator takes on the role of process supervisor. However, creating safety goes further. We think about equivalence between members and between members and the facilitator. As facilitator, you have to set an example and speak up when other members show (un)wanted behaviour. In this manual, some working methods were discussed that can be used adequately so members dare to contribute maximally to the learning network.



4.3.2.4 Concluding a learning network

A learning network is completed, like any formal learning moment, with a final evaluation. The interim evaluations already provided you, as facilitator, with information that could help steer the process. If the learning network promised to install a platform for the exchange of information and professional guidance, and at the same time announced theoretical models and external expertise, then the midterm evaluation in any case gauged the extent to which the participants saw these promises being realised. You learned what participants already learned and where they remained unsatisfied. This way you could better organise the next meetings based on this information. The final assessment should provide information on the positive points and working points first. Which learning methods were favoured and why; what suggestions do the participants have to improve future networks.

4.4.3 CONCLUSIONS

Some basic rules for the pioneer or facilitator of a successful learning network:

- Good communication in advance is half the work. Make clear from the start what a learning network is, the added value for participants, to whom it may concern, how much time is expected from the participants, how it works, how the coaching is planned, what participants can learn and what practical matters should be addressed or understood.
- Less is more. Limit the group to 10 or 15 participants.
- If you work with a large group in a learning network, adjust your working methods.
- Allow change. Be aware that your participants will not be present at each meeting, despite the clear communication. Try to keep a small core group that guarantees continuity.
- The success of your learning network is directly proportional to the motivation of your participants. Therefore you should take time for an introduction and for expectations in each phase. Also make sure that the participants already gain experience in the very first session: here we learn with and from each other. This is important for the motivation to continue participating.
- Let the participants formulate their own learning questions and goals.
- Evaluate each session, so adjustments can be made.
- Make a report for each participant (also send this to those who were absent).
- Sometimes external input is required. Adapt to this situation.
- Vary in techniques to facilitate the learning network, but constantly ensure that there is enough interaction.

5. ACTIVITY: TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES

EXAMPLES OF TEAM BUILDING THAT ACTUALLY BUILDS TEAMS

The most important step when planning a team-building activity comes at the very beginning: you must start by figuring out what challenges your team faces. Only then can you choose exercises that will be effective in helping them work through these issues.

Spend time thinking about your team's current strengths and weaknesses. Ask yourself these questions to identify the root of any problems:

- Are there conflicts between certain people that are creating divisions within the team?
- Do team members need to get to know one another?
- Do some members focus on their own success, and harm the group as a result,
- Does poor communication slow the group's progress?
- Do people need to learn how to work together, instead of individually?
- Are some members resistant to change, and does this affect the group's ability to move forward?
- Do members of the group need a boost to their morale?



Video team building activities and exercises: planning activities that actually work

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJUuMXtK6EU>

Here are some basic exercises you could try, if you're faced with issues of communication, stereotyping, or trust in your team.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

Back-to-Back Drawing

Divide your group into pairs, and have each pair sit on the floor back to back. Give one person in each pair a picture of a shape, and give the other person a pencil and a sheet of paper.

Ask the people holding the pictures to give verbal instructions to their partners on how to draw the shape – without actually telling the partners what the shape is. After they've finished, ask each pair to compare their original shape with the actual drawing, and consider the following questions:

- How well did the first person describe the shape?
- How well did the second person interpret the instructions?
- Were there problems with both the sending and receiving parts of the communication process?

Survival Scenario

This exercise forces your group to communicate and agree to ensure their 'survival.' Tell your group that their airplane has just crashed in the ocean. There's a desert island nearby, and there's room on the lifeboat for every person – plus 12 items they'll need to survive on the island. Instruct the team to choose which items they want to take. How do they decide? How do they rank or rate each item?

ELIMINATING STEREOTYPES AND LABELING

Stereotype Party

This is a fun exercise for a medium-sized or large group. Write on nametags many different 'personality types (see the list below), and pin or tape one tag to each person's back. Don't show people which tag is on their back – they'll be able to see everyone else's tag, but not their own.

Now, ask each person to figure out which personality type is on his or her back by asking stereotype-based questions of other people – “Am I a man?” “Am I an athlete?” “Am I an entertainer?” and so on.

Allow group members to answer only yes or no, and encourage participants to ask questions to as many different people as possible.

Here are some personality types you could consider:

Auto mechanic | Mental health caregiver | Olympic medalist | Professor | Fast-food restaurant worker
Postal worker | Movie star

BUILDING INTERDEPENDENCE AND TRUST

Mine field

This is a great exercise if you have a large room or outdoor field. Set up a 'mine field' using chairs, balls, cones, boxes, or any other object that could potentially be an obstacle and trip someone up. Leave enough space between the objects for someone to walk through. Next, divide your group into pairs. Pay attention to who you match with whom. This is a perfect opportunity to work on relationships, so you might want to put together people who have trust issues with each other.

Blindfold one person, the 'mine walker' – this person is not allowed to talk. Ask his or her partner to stay outside the mine field, and give verbal directions, helping the mine walker avoid the obstacles, and reach the other side of the area. Before you begin, allow partners a few minutes to plan how they'll communicate. Then, make sure there are consequences when people hit an obstacle. For example, perhaps they have to start again from the beginning.

WHAT NOT TO DO

If you were a marathon runner, would you train just a few times a year for your next race? Of course not. You would run almost every day. Why? Because only through regular, continuous training and exercise would you have a chance at winning. Team building works on the same principle. Most managers plan one or two events per year, and that's it. There's rarely any regular 'training' or follow-up, and this can hold back the group's long-term success. Effective team building needs to happen continuously if you want your group to be successful. It needs to be part of the corporate culture.

If you lead a group, aim to incorporate team-building activities into your weekly or monthly routine. This will help everyone address their different issues, and it will give them a chance to have fun, and learn to trust one another – more than just once or twice a year. Finally, make sure that your team-building exercises aren't competitive. Think about it – competition tends to make one person or team work against another. This probably isn't a good way to build team spirit and unity. More likely, it's a way to divide a group.

Many companies use sports for team-building activities. Yes, baseball and soccer can be fun, and some people will enjoy it. But these activities can do far more harm than good if they focus just on competing, and they can really de-motivate people who are not particularly good at these sports. Plan an event that makes people truly depend on others to succeed, and stay away from competition and 'winning.'

Key points: for team building to be effective, leaders must first identify the issues their group is facing. Then they can plan activities to address these challenges directly – and make sure that the team will actually gain some benefits from the event. Keep competition out of the exercises, and aim to make team building part of the daily corporate culture, instead of a once-a-year event.

6. EVALUATION TRAINING

MODULE

TEAM BUILDING | PEER SUPPORT | LEARNING NETWORKS

NAME

DATE TRAINING

ORGANIZATION

TRAINER



The questions are for illustration purposes only. Please check the box that best corresponds to your answer for each question below.

EFFICACY	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	AVERAGE <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	EXCELLENT <input type="checkbox"/>
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Is the aim achieved? Is the proposed requirement fulfilled?

Comments:

CONTENTS	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	AVERAGE <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	EXCELLENT <input type="checkbox"/>
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Did you like the content. Was everything relevant? Were the themes appropriate?

Comments:

TRAINER	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	AVERAGE <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	EXCELLENT <input type="checkbox"/>
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Was the training clear and informative? Was there possibility to interact?

Comments:

ACCOMODATION	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	AVERAGE <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	EXCELLENT <input type="checkbox"/>
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Did you get didactical tools? Sufficient? Adequate? Did you like the training room? Other tools?

Comments:

DURATION	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	AVERAGE <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	EXCELLENT <input type="checkbox"/>
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What did you think of the duration? Too long? Too short?

Comments:

CONCLUSION	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	AVERAGE <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	EXCELLENT <input type="checkbox"/>
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Would you recommend this training?

Comments:

7. RESOURCES

MODULE | TEAM BUILDING | PEER SUPPORT | LEARNING NETWORKS

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