CHAPTER 3

Team Communication and Difficult Conversations

● **ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY**

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

PRINCIPLES FOR & TYPES OF BUSINESS MESSAGES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

LO3.1 Explain the principles of team communication in high-performing teams.

LO3.2 Describe and demonstrate approaches to planning, running, and following up on meetings.

LO3.3 Explain the principles of effective virtual team communication.

LO3.4 Describe strategies for effective group writing.

LO3.5 Explain basic principles for handling difficult conversations.

Organizations of all types have increasingly recognized that teams deliver more innovation and better business results. You can expect that in your career you will spend a significant amount of your time in teams. In fact, about 54 percent of professionals spend about one-third of their work time in a team setting. Another 34 percent say they spend about half of their work time in a team setting. Yet, just 3 percent of these professionals say they've been trained to work in teams.[1]

Your ability to contribute to and lead teams will provide you with many career opportunities. In fact, excellent team players are often fast-tracked for better positions. Aside from the many career benefits of teams, working in teams can be energizing. It allows you to bond with your colleagues, learn from others, share your ideas, and celebrate together when your team hits big milestones. Working in teams isn't always easy. It requires that you give up some of your independence. It can be discouraging when team members don't work together well. However, with an understanding of principles for effective teamwork, discipline, and hard work, you're well positioned to succeed in teams. As you read this chapter, think about how you can improve your team communication skills and facilitate productive teamwork.

CHAPTER CASE | COLLABORATING IN TEAMS AT AICASUS TOURS

WHO'S INVOLVED

The Marketing Team Prepares for a Meeting
The marketing team is about to hold its biweekly meeting. Team members intend to evaluate their team's performance over the past quarter, discuss plans for upcoming market research, and identify new product and service ideas for cultural history tours.

SITUATION 1

Nancy and Kip Hold Grudges from a Prior Disagreement

SITUATION 2

Nancy and Kip have ignored one another as much as possible in recent months. Problems started when Kip authorized discounts to clients on several group tours. The clients complained they didn't get to see all the sites listed in promotional materials.

Nancy was furious when she found out that Kip had given the refunds without first checking with her. She called him into her office and scolded him for not speaking to her first. Kip abruptly said, "So much for our famous customer ser-

(Nancy Jeffreys character): Photodisc/Getty Images; (Kip Yamada character): John A Rizzo/Pixtal/SuperStock

vice," and left her office. Since then, Nancy has complained to co-workers that Kip didn't understand the business side of running tours. Kip complained that Nancy didn't relate to clients' expectations and that the company was losing repeat business because of it.

TASK

1 How will the marketing team work together effectively to implement a cohesive marketing approach? (See the Team Communication section.)

2 How will Nancy and Kip discuss their differences and work productively together again? (See the chapter section on Difficult Conversations.)

Principles of Effective Team Communication

LO3.1 Explain the principles of team communication in high-performing teams.

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Visit http://connect. mheducation.com for an exercise on this topic.

priming statements

Comments or remarks that trigger a mindset that affects subsequent behaviour. For example, solutions-oriented priming statements trigger a focus on performance.

Teams can take many forms. Some teams are formally and permanently organized and titled (such as the *marketing team*). Other teams are temporarily formed for completing a project or an activity (i.e., project team, committee). You will work on dozens of teams over your career.

In a recent survey, business professionals cited ineffective communication (66 percent) as the biggest barrier to team effectiveness. Other major barriers included lack of effective chartering and goal setting (56 percent), lack of clarity and understanding of roles (47 percent), low morale (44 percent), low productivity (42 percent), and lack of trust (36 percent). Similarly, when ranking the most frustrating aspects of being part of a team, business professionals cite the following: ineffective use of meeting time (54 percent), ineffective communication among team members (50 percent), lack of accountability (47 percent), individuals who don't complete assignments (44 percent), and lack of preparation in meetings (41 percent).[2] All of these factors in turn relate to communication competencies.

Your teams will perform far better if they follow the basic principles of team communication. Work in teams is among the most researched aspects of work performance, and hundreds of studies have supported each of the following principles:

Teams should focus first and foremost on performance. The most basic ingredient of excellent teams is a focus on high performance. Make sure that your team has a sense of urgency and direction to achieve excellence.[3] One signal that teams are sufficiently focused on performance is how often teams talk directly about work priorities. Out of every 100 comments team members in high-performing groups make, 60 to 70 directly relate to work—goals, coordination, roles, task clarification, and other project-related issues. Of the 100 comments, team members make about 15 to 20 supportive statements, intended to show goodwill and encouragement. And, they make 10 to 15 statements that are primarily social.[4] By contrast, team members in lower-performing groups make far fewer work-related and supportive statements. They typically replace these statements with social statements that may help team members bond socially but not around work issues.

One way teams can stay focused on performance is to use solutions-oriented priming statements.[5] **Priming statements** trigger a mindset that affects subsequent behaviour. Solutions-oriented priming statements trigger a focus on performance. For example, "Let's get together to work on this project" does not focus on problem solving and solutions. By contrast, "Let's figure out our options to create new customized tour options" is a solutions-oriented priming statement. Effective teams often use these solutions-oriented priming statements to maintain focus on high performance.
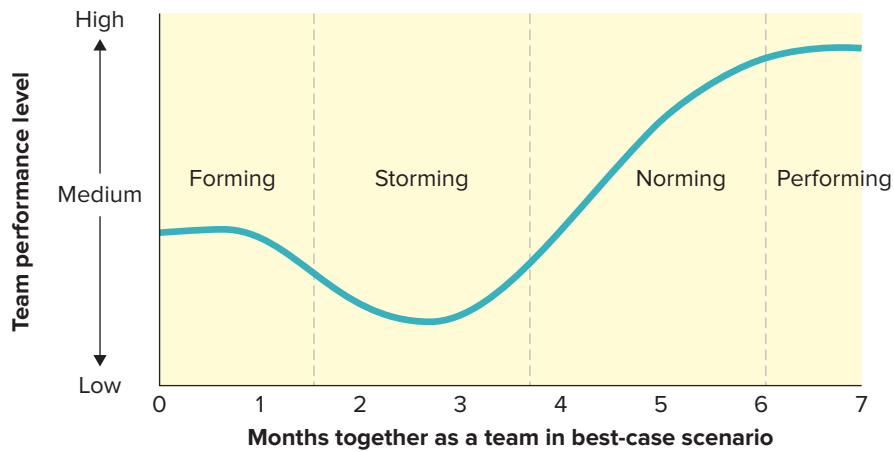
FIGURE 3.1

Stages of Development in High-Performance Teams

Teams go through four natural stages to reach high performance.[6] Nearly all high-performing teams go through four stages before they maximize their performance. In best-case scenarios, work teams take roughly six to seven months to reach this level (see Figure 3.1).[7] Typically, leaders become less directive and more consultative as the team progresses through the stages:

1. *Forming* (months 1 and 2). In the **forming** stage, team members focus on gaining acceptance and avoiding conflict. In some ways, this stage is a honeymoon period in which team members get to know one another.
2. *Storming* (months 2 and 3). In the **storming** stage, team members open up with their competing ideas about how the team should approach work. This stage is typically the least productive, since team members are attempting to make sense of uncertain roles, goals, and accountabilities.
3. *Norming* (months 4 and 5). In the **norming** stage, the team arrives at a work plan, including the roles, goals, and accountabilities.
4. *Performing* (months 6 and 7). In the **performing** stage, teams operate efficiently toward accomplishing their goals. They have evolved to a level where they can transform disagreement and conflict into consensus for future action.

Effective teams build a work culture around values, norms, and goals. Organizations and teams constantly attempt to foster unity and high performance. **Team culture** refers to a set of shared perceptions and commitment to collective values, norms, roles, responsibilities, and goals.[8] Typically, teams rapidly develop such shared perceptions and commitment during the norming stage. Only at the performing stage do these shared perceptions and commitments lead to high productivity.

High-performing teams avoid simply going with the flow. Rather, they frequently, explicitly, and openly discuss the set of values, norms, and goals they share. This process is critical, since team members often attach different meanings to the same goals. Open discussion helps team members avoid misinterpreting each other's motivations and actions.

One way that high-performing teams ensure they develop and live up to shared values, norms, and goals is to create a team charter. The team charter provides direction to the team in how it functions to meet shared objectives. Common elements of team charters include purpose or mission statements, values, goals, team member roles (including leadership), tasks, ground rules, communication protocol, meeting protocol, decision-making rules, conflict resolution, and feedback mechanisms. For short-term teams and groups, such as those that operate for school projects, you should make sure your charter also includes contact information for each team member as well as deadlines for task completion.[9]

In Figure 3.2, you can see an abbreviated team charter created by the Aicasus Tours marketing team. It contains many features common to team charters. As you

forming

The first of the four natural stages teams go through to reach high performance. In this stage, team members focus on gaining acceptance and avoiding conflict.

storming

The second of the four natural stages teams go through to reach high performance. In this stage, team members open up with their competing ideas about how the team should approach work.

norming

The third of the four natural stages teams go through to reach high performance. In this stage, the team arrives at a work plan, including the roles, goals, and accountabilities.

performing

The final of the four natural stages teams go through to reach high performance. In this stage, teams operate efficiently toward accomplishing their goals.

team culture

Refers to a set of shared perceptions and commitment to collective values, norms, roles, responsibilities, and goals.

FIGURE 3.2

Team Charter for the
Aicasus Tours
Marketing Team

Aicasus Tours Marketing Team Charter

Mission Statement: We provide marketing for Aicasus Tours that matches its mission of delivering once-in-a-lifetime tours, creating authentic and sustainable connections between tourists and host communities, and ensuring strong financial results.

Values: Excellence in all work, creativity, honesty, sharing, collaboration, professional growth.

Goals: (a) To be recognized as a leader in developing cutting-edge, interactive tours; (b) to increase revenue annually by 12 percent; and (c) to maintain 95 percent satisfaction among our clients.

Team Member Roles/Responsibilities

Team Member	Position	Responsibilities
Andrea Garcia	Director of marketing	Oversee all marketing initiatives.
Nancy Jeffreys	Director of market research	Lead all market research.
Barbara Brookshire	Director of marketing operations	Lead all marketing campaigns.
Kip Yamada	Group tours associate	Oversee custom group tours.
Jeff Anderton	Market research associate	Conduct market research and analytics.
Kailey Chang	Marketing assistant	Create concepts and graphics for campaigns.

Communication Protocol

- We will post project updates, recommendations, and relevant experiences to Slack. Team members should post roughly twice per week.
- We will respond to direct messages to one another (team messaging, emails, phone calls) within four hours.
- We recognize the value of each team member's ideas. We will discuss differences of opinions with one another directly and respectfully.

Meetings

- We will hold meetings on the first and third Wednesday of each month at 8:30 a.m.
- We will rotate facilitators for each meeting. The facilitator will ensure agenda items are covered with the input of all team members.
- The facilitator should create the agenda. By the Monday preceding each meeting, the facilitator should make a call for agenda items. The facilitator should distribute the final agenda on Slack by Tuesday at noon on the day before each meeting.
- We will rotate note-takers for each meeting.
- The note-taker should post minutes to Slack by the end of the day on Tuesday. The note-taker will create calendar entries for all action items.

Decision Making: We aim for consensus. If we do not achieve consensus, decisions will be based on a majority vote of the director of marketing, the director of market research, and the director of marketing operations.

Feedback

- After each major marketing initiative, we will evaluate each team member's performance.
- In June and December, we will evaluate team performance and communication.
- We are dedicated to professional growth. We will constantly help one another reach our professional goals.

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develop team charters, you should view this as an important agreement with your team members. From time to time, your team should evaluate the team charter itself and modify it to better meet the needs of your team.

Effective teams meet often. Most groups underperform because they do not spend enough time meeting. Frequent meetings are necessary to establish shared perceptions of roles, goals, and accountabilities. (See the next section on managing meetings.) Also, meetings force team members to meet deadlines. Teams that do not meet often may never reach the performing stage. Or they regress from the performing stage to an even less productive stage. Similarly, effective teams prioritize first

meetings and actions. They recognize that the initial series of meetings often set the tone and build a foundation for high performance for an entire project.

Effective teams focus on psychological safety and ensure all voices are heard. Over a two-year period, Google conducted an extensive study of teams to learn the key dynamics in successful teams. They conducted over 200 interviews and observed over 180 teams. They found that the most important predictor of team success was **psychological safety**, which is defined as "team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of one another." Two particular team norms contribute most to psychological safety. First, all team members spend roughly the same amount of time speaking during their conversations. Second, team members are empathetic and understand one another's feelings.[10]

Effective teams recognize and actively seek to avoid groupthink. Teams often fall victim to groupthink. **Groupthink** is when groups verbally or nonverbally agree to ideas without gathering enough information and exhaustively evaluating their options (as illustrated in Figure 3.3). Groupthink often leads to poor decision making. As we discuss groupthink, we'll work through an example of the Aicasus marketing team. It is seeking innovative services for its international tours. The team has decided to invest in virtual reality (VR) headsets and software to add to the experience of clients in group tours. They're convinced these VR headsets will make tours more adventurous and educational.

Effective teams seek to avoid the following symptoms of groupthink:[11]

Collective rationalization is when group members convince themselves a solution is the best one even when faced with conflicting information. They tend to explain away or dismiss the conflicting information. For example, the Aicasus marketing teams gets survey results from past clients that they wouldn't use VR headsets while on a tour. Various team members take turns saying the survey results are meaningless because "our clients don't know anything about something they haven't tried."

Moral high ground is when group members assume they're morally correct and as a result dismiss competing ideas or alternate solutions. For example, the marketing team believes tours should simulate history and help clients get a factual rendition. By using the VR headsets, they can provide programming that avoids the inconsistencies of tour guides. The team members make this argument in various forms of the following: "It's the right thing to do so our clients have an accurate understanding and appreciation of history."

Self-censorship (self-censorship) is when group members don't voice their opinions for the sake of harmony. Jeff, in particular, doesn't like conflict. He also doesn't like to challenge authority. When he hears Andrea and Nancy argue for the VR headsets, he decides not to share several reasons why he is skeptical that clients will want to use them during tours.

Illusion of unanimity is when no one speaks out against the majority view and, as a result, everyone assumes there is agreement. For example, when the marketing team dismisses the results of the client survey, Kip considers saying, "I think we should pay attention to these results. Even though our clients haven't tried this technology, they understand very well what they want on a tour." But, he never says anything. The rest of the team assumes everyone, including Kip, agrees with their stated perspective.

psychological safety

When team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of one another.

groupthink

When groups verbally or nonverbally agree to ideas without gathering enough information and exhaustively evaluating their options. This way of thinking often leads to poor decision making.

collective rationalization

When group members convince themselves a solution is the best one even when faced with conflicting information. Group members tend to explain away or dismiss the conflicting information.

moral high ground

When group members assume they are morally correct and, as a result, dismiss competing ideas or alternate solutions.

self-censorship

When group members don't voice their opinions for the sake of harmony.

illusion of unanimity

When no one speaks out against the majority view and, as a result, everyone assumes there is agreement.
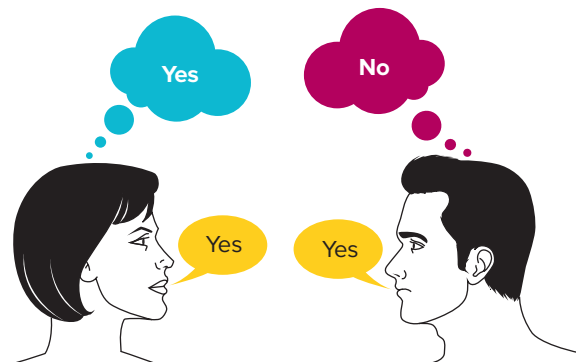
FIGURE 3.3

Teams often suffer from groupthink because of self-censorship and the illusion of unanimity.

peer pressure

When the majority of group members pressure or even penalize a member with dissenting views.

illusion of invulnerability

When team members are overly optimistic in their ideas and don't consider the risks or drawbacks of their ideas.

complacency

When a group has experienced quite a few successes and begins to assume it will automatically make good decisions.

mindguards

Team members who purposely filter information so there is no dissent or threat to the team leader.

stereotyping

When group members see outsiders as morally inferior or less competent.

cascades

When the initial ideas in a discussion excessively influence the ultimate decisions.

inherent diversity

Involves innate traits such as age, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

acquired diversity

Traits acquired through experience, such as customer service experience, retail experience, or engineering experience.

2-D diversity

Having both—inherent and acquired—types of diversity.

Peer pressure is when the majority of group members pressure or even penalize a member with dissenting views. For example, when the marketing team talks about why VR headsets are the "right way to learn history," Kailey disagrees. She says, "Actually, I think we should worry about trying to give our clients a standard version of history. They learn much more by hearing local tour guides give nuanced views of history." Several team members immediately say variations of the following statement: "Kailey, we don't have time for this. We've already agreed that a more standardized presentation is better for our clients."

Illusion of invulnerability is when team members are overly optimistic in their ideas and don't consider the risks or drawbacks of their ideas. **Complacency** is when a group has experienced quite a few successes and begins to assume it will automatically make good decisions. For example, the marketing team has introduced a series of successful innovations over the past three years. As a result, they're extremely confident the VR headsets will improve the attractiveness of their tours.

Mindguards are team members who purposely filter information so there is no dissent or threat to the team leader. For example, Barbara has read some research that most companies underestimate the expenses of developing content for VR headsets. She doesn't think the research is credible, so she chooses not to share this information with the team. She is concerned some team members will use the research to argue against an investment in VR technologies.

Stereotyping is when group members see outsiders as morally inferior or less competent. Let's say the finance team has sent an analysis to the marketing team. The finance team suggests an investment in VR headsets is a major financial risk. The marketing team members speak to one another making arguments such as the following: "The finance team never gets it right with new products and services. Basically, they just like to play it safe."

Many of these groupthink patterns can be amplified through cascades.[12] **Cascades** are when the initial ideas in a discussion excessively influence the ultimate decisions. Research shows that the first point of view in a discussion is most likely to gain momentum, especially if a counterview is not offered.[13]

Effective teams embrace diversity. High-performing teams embrace conflict. They see differences of opinion as natural and as a path to creativity and innovation. So, they encourage one another to share their ideas, even when those ideas differ from their own.

One way teams can welcome new ideas is to embrace diversity. Increasingly, research shows that diversity brings better business returns. Diversity comes in two forms: inherent and acquired. **Inherent diversity** involves traits such as age, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. **Acquired diversity** involves traits you acquire through experience, such as customer service experience, retail experience, or engineering experience. Having both types of diversity is called **2-D diversity**. Companies with 2-D diversity are about 45 percent more likely to report a growth in market share during the past year and about 70 percent more likely to have captured a new market. The following behaviours help drive acquired diversity: (1) making sure everyone is heard, (2) making it safe to let team members express novel ideas, (3) giving team members decision-making authority, (4) sharing credit, (5) giving useful feedback, and (6) putting feedback into action. In short, these behaviours drive an innovative, "speak-up culture."[14]

Usually, you won't understand your team's diversity unless you take time to evaluate your backgrounds and experiences. Diverse teams often hold strengths that may appear contradictory, such team members who are experienced and less experienced in certain areas. Ask questions to one another about your strengths and weaknesses, your passions, your achievements, and your past school and work experiences.[15]

One particularly effective approach of developing excellent team communication is for all team members to take assessments of personality and communication styles. After taking the assessments, team members typically share their results with one another. The major value of these types of assessments is to create explicit conversations about styles and preferences.

In the last chapter, you learned about the motivational value system (MVS). You learned how individuals with blue MVSs tend to focus most on nurturing, those with red MVSs focus most on directing, those with green MVSs focus most on autonomizing, and those with hub MVSs focus equally on these motivational values. In this model, the colours are also connected with approaches to conflict. Blue is associated with an *accommodating* approach in which meeting the needs of others is the first concern. These individuals tend to avoid conflict if possible. Red is associated with *asserting* one's viewpoints and interests. These individuals tend to embrace conflict and enjoy trying to win an argument. Green is associated with taking a step back and cautiously *analyzing* the situation. These individuals tend to want to discuss differences of opinion after having time to carefully think through their positions. Each approach to conflict is valid. However, team members with different approaches to conflict can easily misinterpret the motives and intentions of one another.[16]

Team members who take this assessment can plot their personalities and approaches to conflict on a triangle. The dot depicts the MVS in routine situations, whereas the arrow depicts approaches to conflict. By taking the assessment, the marketing team can rapidly see how their values and preferred communication styles in routine and conflict situations compare to one another (see Figure 3.4). A variety of personality assessments are available to help you and your team members share your preferences of communicating in routine interactions and in conflict situations.

Effective teams solve problems and generate creative solutions by going through cycles of divergence and convergence. Ensuring that teams are innovative requires discipline because team cultures can easily develop groupthink. In the past decade, businesses have increasingly encouraged teamwork and developed open-space environments where team members stay together for longer periods. However, for teams to function well, most team members need periods of time to work independently and without interruption. The most innovative teams balance time in teams with time for independent work to capture a diversity of strong ideas.[17] Teams that go through cycles of divergence and
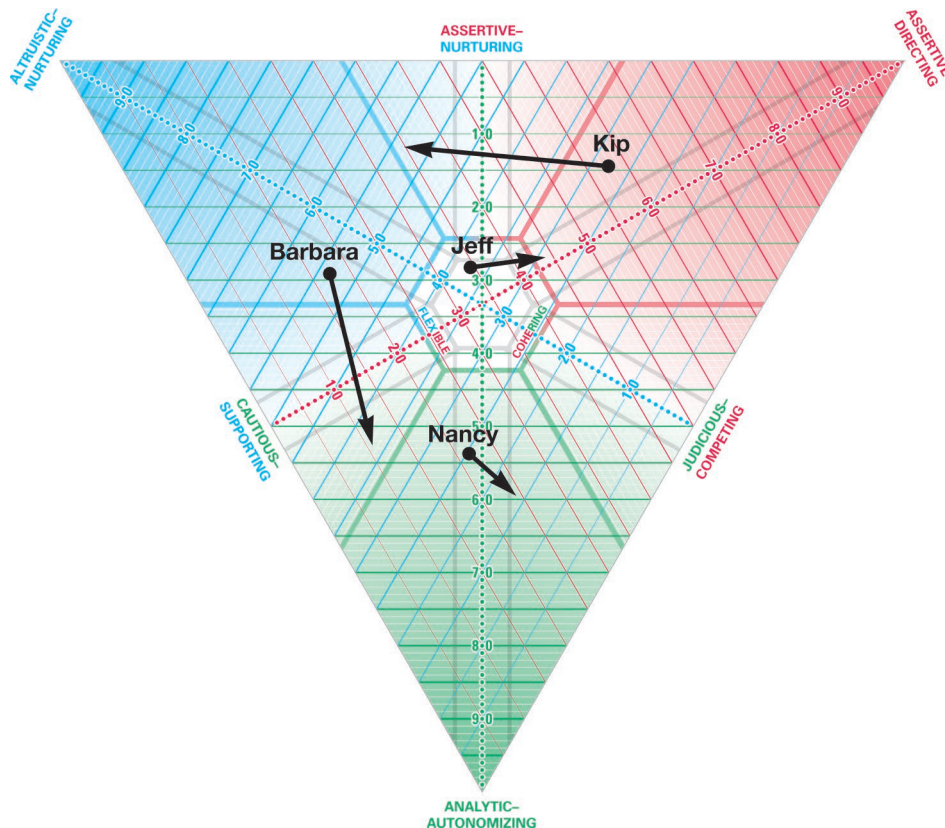

FIGURE 3.4

The Strengths Deployment Inventory Triangle Displaying Motivational Value Systems

convergence generate the best solutions. Typically, when team members work independently, they diverge. When they work together, they tend to converge.[18]

divergence

Involves considering as many solutions as possible.

convergence

Involves evaluating the proposed ideas and solutions and narrowing them to a small set of feasible solutions to address a problem.

Divergence involves considering as many solutions as possible. During the divergence stage, working independently can increase the number of ideas and solutions generated. One effective practice is to give each person on the team the basic problem and the criteria by which the solution will be evaluated. After team members generate ideas independently, they meet to discuss each person's ideas. Debate about the ideas is healthy at this stage. When there is high psychological safety, team members do not feel threatened as the team talks about the strengths and weaknesses of their ideas.[19]

Convergence involves evaluating the proposed ideas and solutions, and narrowing them to a small set of feasible solutions to address the problem. This part of problem-solving is highly collaborative and generally involves refining the best ideas with contributions from all team members.[20]

Effective teams provide a lot of positive feedback and evaluate their performance often. High-performing teams consistently provide feedback, most of which should be positive. A study of leadership of 60 leadership teams found that the primary differentiator between low-performing and high-performing teams was the ratio of positive-to-negative comments. The ratio in successful teams was 5.6 positive comments for every negative comment. Comparatively, there were roughly 1.9 positive comments for each negative comment in medium-performing teams. In low-performing teams, there were three negative comments for every positive comment! Examples of positive comments are phrases such as "I agree that . . ." or "that's a great idea." Negative comments are comments such as "I don't agree . . ." or "That's not a good idea."[21]

While most feedback is positive in high-performing teams, they also frequently evaluate their performance and ensure they give one another direct and candid suggestions for improvement. They may evaluate performance for projects or initiatives or for certain periods of time. Many teams take time at each meeting to briefly evaluate their performance. Several keys to effective evaluation include the following: (1) the process should be primarily positive and goal-driven and rarely punitive, (2) the process should involve clear expectations, and (3) all team members should participate.[22]

You will notice that in the Aicasus marketing team's charter (see Figure 3.2), there are several ways of providing feedback to one another. One way they do this is by completing a team assessment several times per year. In Figure 3.5, you can see an

FIGURE 3.5

Sample Team Assessment for the Aicasus Marketing Team

Marketing Team Assessment

Assess your team on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

Our team . . .	1 (Never)	2 (Rarely)	3 (Sometimes)	4 (Usually)	5 (Always)
Focuses on high performance.	1	2	3	4	5
Sets high goals and standards.					
Follows the team charter.					
Gives each team member a chance to participate.					
Engages in open and candid conversation.					
Holds high-value meetings.					
Handles differences of opinion constructively.					
Develops creative solutions together.					
Helps team members grow professionally.					
Has developed trust among members.					

abbreviated example of this team assessment. Common areas of emphasis on team assessments are a focus on results, communication climate (including conflict resolution), accountability, commitment, and trust.

Effective teams feel a common sense of purpose and bond socially. This sense of purpose feeds the team's morale, dedication, and ability to negotiate roles and accountabilities. Thus, high-performing teams frequently discuss their purposes. They also commit to bonding socially and showing concern for one another. Little things, even listening to upbeat music together and eating out, have been shown to build social bonding and sense of a common purpose.[23]

Developing Quick Trust and Working in Short-Term Teams

Many teams are created to accomplish projects in short periods of time, often in just a few weeks up to a few months. Short-term teams face unique challenges. They are often comprised of people who don't know each other well. They must quickly coordinate their efforts to meet pressing deadlines. They need to reach a high level of performance rapidly. Developing trust is particularly challenging given the short duration of these teams. As a result, developing quick trust is critical.

Get to know each other. Most short-term teams are so focused on accomplishing the tasks at hand that they don't take enough time to get to know one another. This is a mistake. Investing 30 minutes to an hour getting to know one another in a social but professional manner helps build the trust the team needs to effectively coordinate its efforts.

One of the fastest ways to increase trust, particularly among teammates who don't know one another, is through self-disclosure. **Self-disclosure** is sharing information about yourself, such as your goals, aspirations, views and values, and experiences. Teammates often bond emotionally and learn about one another's strengths by opening up or self-disclosing to each other. Yet, too much self-disclosure and the wrong types of self-disclosure in professional settings can often backfire.[24] See Exercise 3.7 in the end-of-chapter exercises for ideas about getting to know each other quickly.

self-disclosure

Sharing information about yourself, such as your goals, aspirations, views and values, and experiences.

Hold an effective launch meeting. Short-term teams rely on a well-organized, thorough launch meeting. One of the primary barriers to success for short-term teams is not exploring all options. Because the team is under pressure to meet quick deadlines, team members often feel rushed to decide on a direction, create a plan, and start making progress. By spending an extra hour or two in the launch meeting to explore all options carefully, short-term teams generally choose a better direction from the start of a project and ultimately save time by better coordinating their efforts on a strong choice of direction.

Commit to working together and separately. Team members on high-performing teams do a lot of work together and independently. Short-term teams often quickly delegate independent work and then attempt to tie the individual pieces together near the end of the project. By setting up a regular meeting schedule, short-term teams can ensure they spend enough time together to produce excellent work.

Set up a deliverable schedule and evaluate performance regularly. Short-term teams often produce poor or mediocre work because the first time they produce shared work is close to final deadlines. Forward-looking, short-term teams set up internal deadlines for deliverables across a project so they can evaluate and improve their joint work.

Managing Meetings

Meetings are one of the primary forums for teams to share and listen to one another's ideas. Because of the increasing importance of teams in the workplace, employees increasingly participate in project and interdepartmental teams. Meetings are an opportunity for teams to coordinate their efforts and increase productivity. Done well, they can be invigorating and produce new insights.[25]

At their best, problem-solving meetings when run efficiently can provide incredible return on investment if they help to develop solutions that save the company money.[26]

Yet, meetings have many trade-offs. The biggest drawback is that they take a great deal of time. Many managers spend up to 50 percent of their time in meetings.[27] Furthermore, when meetings are run poorly, they can create animosity, lower morale, and decrease productivity.[28]

Managers who run effective meetings help their teams work more productively and have better career opportunities.[29] As you prepare to lead and participate in meetings, consider all phases of successful meetings: preparing for them, running them, and following up afterward.

LO3.2 Describe and demonstrate approaches to planning, running, and following up on meetings.

Mc Graw Hill connect

Visit http://connect. mheducation.com for an exercise on this topic.

Planning for Meetings

As with other communication responsibilities, running effective meetings starts with planning. For routine meetings, you should spend 30 to 60 minutes preparing.[30] For especially important and nonroutine meetings, you may need to spend at least several hours or days planning.

Essential Questions   Planning for meetings requires strategy, scheduling, and coordination. At a minimum, you should answer the following questions in your preparations:[31]

- What is the purpose of the meeting? What outcomes do I expect?
- Who should attend?
- When should the meeting be scheduled?
- What roles and responsibilities should people at the meeting have?
- What will be the agenda?
- What materials should I distribute prior to the meeting?
- When and how should I invite others?
- What logistical issues do I need to take care of (reserving rooms, getting equipment, printing materials)?

As you answer these questions, keep in mind your purpose and ensure that your plans focus on productive outcomes. Also, think about how scheduling will impact productivity. Generally, you should avoid meetings, especially brainstorming meetings, during the least productive times of the day (usually the afternoon). Typically, most employees are at their best performance in the morning (see Figure 3.6).[32] As far as timing during the week, Tuesdays are overwhelmingly considered the most productive days By contrast, Fridays are the least productive days.

In addition, think about the materials you should send ahead of time. Often, you will make requests of various meeting participants before the meeting to help them prepare. Plan to send materials sufficiently far in advance to give people enough time to do required preparation.

FIGURE 3.6

Least Productive Parts of the Workday
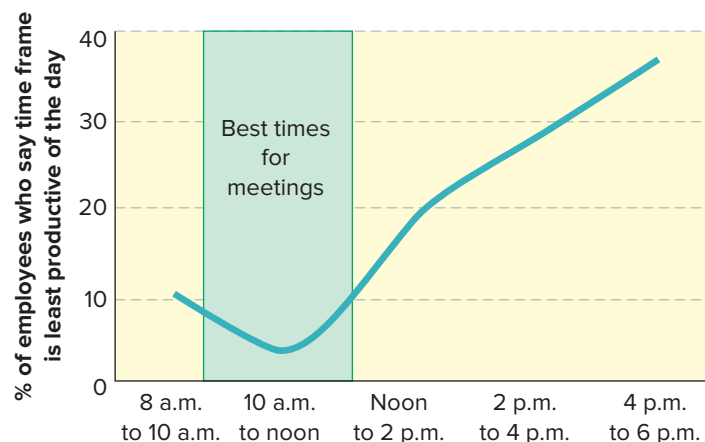
As you plan, consider the type of meeting you want. Meetings can be broadly categorized as coordination meetings or problem-solving meetings. **Coordination meetings** primarily focus on discussing roles, goals, and accountabilities. **Problem-solving meetings** typically involve brainstorming about how to address and solve a particular work problem. In actuality, nearly all meetings involve both coordination and problem solving. However, coordination meetings typically include many agenda items with a reasonable expectation of accomplishing each item in the allocated time. Problem-solving meetings, by contrast, involve more fluid issues that are less easily classified as discrete agenda items and that are less easily given time allotments. For especially difficult issues (i.e., periods of transition such as with mergers), some teams commit to meeting at the same time each day and without a preset agenda until they clearly define the issues at hand.[33]

coordination meetings

They primarily focus on discussing roles, goals, and accountabilities.

problem-solving meetings

These typically involve brainstorming about how to address and solve a particular work problem.

Creating and Distributing the Agenda

Agendas provide structure for meetings. For most meetings, preparing and distributing an agenda ahead of time allows each meeting participant to form expectations and prepare.[34]

Most agendas should include items to be covered, time frames, goals and/or expected outcomes, roles, and materials needed. You can foster more effective meetings by getting others involved in the agenda-creation process. For example, at least several days in advance, ask meeting participants for agenda items they want included. Typically, you should send out the final agenda at least one day in advance. Sending out the agenda ahead of time and inviting team members to provide agenda items increases buy-in from meeting participants. You can also consider assigning roles. For example, you might assign someone as a facilitator, a note-taker (minutes), a timer, and so on.[35]

As you develop the agenda, pay attention to the ordering of items so that it flows much like you would expect other written communications to flow from point to point. Also, consider placing those agenda items of most importance near the beginning. This way, if items take longer than expected and you are forced to shelve some items, you have addressed the highest-priority items.[36] See Figure 3.7 for an agenda for the Aicasus Tours marketing team.

Agenda Components

- Agenda items
- Time frames (optional)
- Goals/expected outcomes
- Roles
- Materials needed

Running Effective Meetings

If you've planned and prepared well for the meeting, you are in a great position to carry out your meeting objectives. Ideally, you've provided clear expectations for meeting participants—what they should have done before the meeting and what they can expect in terms of content and length of the meeting. Once the meeting arrives, you have several options for achieving productive outcomes.

Create Tradition, Culture, and Variety

Most meetings at Starbucks Coffee start with a customer story.[37] Many manufacturing companies start meetings with safety stories. You can create traditions that take only moments or minutes but that reinforce the core values of your organization. These types of traditions create a common sense of purpose (one of the key ingredients of effective teamwork) and are a light way to open people up at the start of meetings.[38]

Set Expectations and Follow the Agenda

Take a few moments to explain the purpose of the meeting and what you hope to accomplish. You may also want to set some ground rules, such as your expectations for others to participate, how much time to take with comments, or how to deal with differences of opinion. Part of the ground rules may involve assigning the roles of facilitator, timer, and note-taker. They may also include protocol for use of mobile phones and other potentially disruptive electronic equipment. You may also point out whether certain issues are considered confidential and shouldn't be discussed outside the meeting.[39]

FIGURE 3.7

Sample Meeting
Agenda

Marketing Team
Meeting Agenda

Date: November 9   **Start Time:** 8:30 a.m.   **End Time:** 10:00 a.m.

Purposes
1. Discuss the latest research and infromation about VR headsets.
2. Evaluate client satisfaction on our homestay tours.
3. Explore new options for cultural history tours.

To Do Before Meeting (stored in #MarketResearch channel in Slack)
1. Read the finance team's ROI estimates (labeled "VR-Headset-Projections.xlsx")
2. Study our client survey with attiudes toward VR (labeled "VR-Client-Survey.pdf")
3. Prepare three new tour or service ideas with a focus on cultural history tours

Desired Outcome: Create action items to complete within the next month (by December 15). At our December 15 meeting retreat, we will develop our annual marketing plan, which will include priorities for new tours and services.

Agenda Item 1: *VR Headsets* **(25 minutes)**
- Summary of financial projections from finance team (Jeff)   5 min.
- Summary of client survey about VR (Barbara)   5 min.
- Group discussion of findings and options   10 min.
- Develop action items   5 min.

Agenda Item 2: *Client Satisfaction on Homestay Tours* **(20 minutes)**
- Summary of findings from client satisfaction survery (Jeff)   5 min.
- Group discussion of findings and options   10 min.
- Develop action items   5 min.

Agenda Item 3: *New Options for Cultural History Tours* **(40 minutes)**
- Each person presents three ideas for new tours or services   30 min.
- Group reactions to the new ideas   10 min.

Summarize Action Items   5 min.

Participants: Andrea Garcia, Nancy Jeffreys, Barbara Brookshire, **Kip Yamada (note-taker)**, Jeff Anderton, Kailey Chang

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For most meetings, keep the discussion focused on agenda items and stick to allotted times. Some meeting participants may become uninterested or annoyed if they perceive the meeting as unstructured or off schedule.[40]

Encourage Participation and Expression of Ideas

facilitator

The designated person who acts from a neutral position to get each person to participate in the conversation and ensure that each agenda item is properly discussed.

Each meeting should have a facilitator. The **facilitator** acts from a neutral position to get each person to participate in the conversation and ensure that each agenda item is properly discussed. Facilitators should acknowledge, check for understanding, paraphrase and summarize, not judge, ask for elaboration, and get everyone involved. Sometimes, this may require using explicit phrases such as "I'd like each person to take two minutes to. . . ." For routine meetings, the facilitator is often the organizer.[41]

The issue of neutrality for facilitating is critical. If others view the facilitator as predisposed toward certain positions or perspectives, they are less likely to express their real thoughts. This is especially the case when the facilitator is a person of higher authority.

Making your meetings "safe" for each team member requires conscious effort. After all, in surveys of nearly 2.5 million employees, just 15 percent of respondents agreed that *work teams function in a safe, "win-win" work environment,* and just 17 percent agreed that *work teams have mutual understanding and creative dialogue.*[42] As a meeting leader, encourage debate but defuse any comments that are perceived as noncollegial. The art of encouraging discussion but avoiding arguments takes time. In meetings, it requires

that you initially foster disassociation but end with association. Research has shown that teams that have more dissent during meetings reach higher-quality decisions. By opening discussion to all available information and options, teams tend to adopt the best options more often and become more committed to the decisions.[43]

In problem-solving meetings, the leader must establish a pattern for discussion and debate. Generally, the first focus is getting agreement on the definition of the problem. Then, the focus switches to the history of the problem and its current impacts. Third, participants consider the causes and future consequences if the problem is not solved. Finally, the group is ready to brainstorm options for addressing the problem.[44]

Build Consensus and a Plan of Action The primary purpose of meetings is to create a plan of action. When all the ideas have been stated, the team must evaluate the alternatives and create an action plan. For important decisions, the group should attempt to build consensus around a decision-making approach that prioritizes factors such as timelines, financial resources, and so on. You may find it difficult to build consensus on the bigger issues. Start by building consensus on smaller ones.[45]

Closing the Meeting One priority should be to end the meeting on time. Before ending the meeting, summarize what you have accomplished. In just a few minutes, you can recap action items that the team has agreed on. Make sure the roles and assignments are clear for each of these action items, to establish accountabilities for follow-up.[46]

After a meeting ends (even for those you do not lead), you should mentally evaluate your performance. Consider these questions:[47]

- How much information, analysis, and interpretation did I provide?
- Did I communicate my ideas even if they conflicted with someone else's?
- Did I participate in the implementation of the timeline? Did I meet deadlines?
- Did I facilitate the decision-making process? Or did I just go with the flow?

Dealing with Difficult People Inevitably, you will work on teams with disruptive members. They may consistently display a negative attitude, refuse to participate, interrupt others, make irrelevant comments, make condescending remarks about other participants or their ideas, or dominate with excessively lengthy comments. One of the best ways to prevent such behaviours is to provide strong leadership with a clear agenda, goals, and roles. If the problem persists, pull that team member aside. Talk

Hoxton/Alamy Stock Photo

about the disruptive behaviours, and explain how the behaviour impacts group performance. Consider making specific and polite but firm requests such as the following: "At the next meeting, please give people more time to explain themselves."[48]

Following Up after Meetings

Follow up by distributing the minutes of the meeting as soon as possible (as a memo, in an email, in a meetings folder on the corporate intranet, or as part of a team blog or wiki). Minutes of the meeting should include the date and time, team members present, decisions, key discussion points, open issues, and action items and related deadlines. You can also include names of people who were invited but were absent and the assigned roles (i.e., note-taker). The minutes serve as a record of what your team accomplished. Figure 3.8 provides an example of meeting minutes based upon the chapter case.

If you are the team leader, make sure your team members follow through on action items. Follow up as soon as possible on those issues you were not able to resolve during the meeting. If each participant knows you will follow up, they will perceive the meeting as important. If you do not follow up, team members are more likely to view the meeting as a waste of time.

Meeting Follow-Up/Minutes Components

- Date and time
- Team members present
- Meeting roles
- Key decisions
- Key discussion points (optional)
- Open issues (optional)
- Action items and deadlines

FIGURE 3.8

Sample Meeting Minutes

Marketing Team
November 9 Meeting Minutes

Date: November 9   **Start Time:** 8:30 a.m.   **End Time:** 10:00 a.m.

Agenda Item 1: *VR Headsets*
Discussion: Jeff and Barbara presented research projections and survey findings about VR technologies to supplement group tours. The group agreed that we don't understand market demand for VR services enough to make any concrete investment plans.

Action Items	Responsibility	Completion Time
• Plan a set of nonintrusive field tests with VR headsets	Barbara, Jeff	December 15
• Work with VR vendors and software developers to plan small-scale field tests	Barbara	December 15

Agenda Item 2: *Client Satisfaction on Homestay Tours*
Discussion: Jeff presented client satisfaction surveys from homestay tours. The group concluded we need to improve our homestay services for the Japan, Indonesia, and Peru tours.

Action Items	Responsibility	Completion Time
• Develop plans to identify more suitable homestay families	Kip	December 15
• Develop plans for improving communication with homestay families.	Nancy, Barbara, Kip	December 15

Agenda Item 3: *New Options for Cultural History Tours*
Discussion: Team members shared their ideas for cultural history tours. We selected five tours for further exploration: (a) DNA-related family history; (b) musical performances at famous cathedrals; (c) Niagara Region Eco-Tour; (d) history of Chinese food; and (e) Egyptian archeology.

Action Items	Responsibility	Completion Time
• Develop ideas for DNA-related family history and muscial performances at famous cathedrals tours	Kip, Barbara	December 15
• Develop ideas for Niagara Region Cycle & Segway Eco-Tour.	Andrea, Kailey	December 15
• Develop ideas for history of Chinese food and Egyptian archeology tours	Nancy, Kailey	December 15

Participants: Andrea Garcia, Nancy Jeffreys, Barbara Brookshire, **Kip Yamada (note-taker)**, Jeff Anderton, Kailey Chang

Also, as a team leader, you will likely hold online meetings from time to time. Online meetings have become increasingly popular with improved technology and more dispersed teams. Principles of face-to-face meetings apply well to online meetings. However, online meetings present other challenges and benefits, the topic we discuss in the Technology Tips box.

Technology Tips

ONLINE MEETINGS

Business professionals increasingly use online meetings for many purposes: to bring together work teams that have members in different locations, allow marketers and account representatives to show their products and services to customers and clients, provide training to employees, give manufacturers and suppliers a forum to work out quality issues from a distance, and deliver many other opportunities.

Steve Cole/Getty Images

Online meetings allow you to conduct a meeting in a true, multimedia format. Typically, they are appropriate when people are far away, when the group is large (25 or more), when you feel too emotional or nervous for a face-to-face meeting, when you've already established trust with meeting participants, or when the agenda is fairly routine. Consider face-to-face meetings if possible when trust is not yet established or when discussing sensitive topics such as bad news or big changes.

Learn about the many functions of meeting software and its limitations. There are many software platforms for online meetings, including commercial options such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, WebEx, Google Hangouts, Lifesize, and GoToMeeting, as well as platforms developed in-house. These software platforms include many functions, such as video calling, picture and drawing windows, screen sharing, virtual breakout rooms, instant polls, email, chats, slide shows, electronic whiteboards, discussion boards, shared folders, and a variety of online resources. Learn about each of these tools, experiment with them, and make sure you use them to accomplish the key objectives of your meetings.

Although online meetings provide an increasingly rich communication environment, they rarely attain the connection that face-to-face meetings do. You often encounter a lack of visual cues and thus are less able to develop trust and rapport. Also, participants can easily detach from the meeting and focus on other things going on in their own offices. So, you confront more difficulty directing or monitoring the behaviour of meeting participants. Another limitation is that many meeting participants may not know how to use the meeting software well. Similarly, you may encounter technology failures. Most of these limitations can be overcome by using the many features of meeting software. Your job is to know how to use these features naturally so that you can employ them while orchestrating an effective meeting.

Prepare. Typically, you should follow roughly the same process for online meetings as face-to-face meetings: preparing an agenda, encouraging everyone to express their ideas, creating action items, and so on (see the discussion of effective meetings in the team communication section). However, since you are using meeting software with participants in many locations, you need extra time to plan how you will coordinate and keep people engaged. Consider assigning roles such as producer and moderator. Also, you should rehearse for important meetings and make sure technical details are functioning correctly before the meeting.

Discuss ways of documenting and distributing the discussion. Typically, face-to-face meetings are fairly straightforward to document: One person records the action items and/or minutes. This written document can be distributed to everyone on the team in a single format and serves as a reminder of important goals and action items and eventually a standard for follow-up. By contrast, online meetings generally involve many types of media. Plan how you will document the meeting and make it available to meeting participants later. A variety of software applications are available to document decisions, to-do items, and deadlines.

Your challenge: Hold a virtual meeting with a student team. Take notes immediately following the meeting about how effective the meeting. How could you have improved the meeting? How could you have prepared better? How could you have facilitated better decision making? How could follow up?*

*Team Writer. (2020, July 25). Top Meeting Software to Know. Tech Funnel. Retrieved July 26, 2020 from https://www.techfunnel.com/information-technology/11-best-virtual-meeting-platforms-for-business/.

Working in Virtual Teams

LO3.3 Explain the principles of effective virtual team communication.

Organizations increasingly rely on virtual teams to complete projects, initiatives, and a variety of other tasks. These virtual teams generally consist of team members located at various offices (including home offices) and rely almost entirely on virtual technologies to work with one another. One recent survey showed that about 80 percent of professionals in multinational companies report working on a team that is located in different locations. In fact, 64 percent of these professionals work with team members located in other countries.

Of those in virtual teams, roughly 46 percent have never met their teammates in person, and another 30 percent meet in person about once per year.[49] In practice, nearly all teams, including teams located in the same office, rely on virtual technologies for a substantial amount of their communication. One article suggests operating virtual teams can not only reduce overhead for a company, but now seem to be driven by employee demand due to their inherent flexibility and may make a company more attractive when hiring and retaining talent. Findings from a study out of the Richard Ivey School of Business surveyed undergrad business students about what would make an employer more attractive.[50] The most frequent answers included flexible work hours and ability to work from home. Virtual teams allow for both.

Virtual teams are often created because they cost less, are more convenient, and help assemble experts who are not located in the same office. Many times, virtual teams can be more productive and effective than co-located, in-person teams (we'll call these *traditional teams*). However, virtual teams present a variety of unique challenges. Compared to professionals in traditional teams, virtual team members are more likely to experience the following challenges: feeling isolated, not feeling connected to team members, not being able to read nonverbal cues, managing conflict, making decisions, and expressing opinions (introverts generally feel more comfortable expressing opinions in virtual teams; extroverts generally feel more comfortable expressing opinions in traditional teams). Virtual teamwork is further complicated by

Milles Studio/Shutterstock

issues such as time zone differences, language differences, and communication technologies.[51] In addition to the principles for working effectively in traditional teams, consider the following tips when working in virtual teams.[52]

Focus on Building Trust at Each Stage of Your Virtual Team

Compared to traditional teams, virtual teams typically find it more challenging to maintain trust over the duration of their work together. One way of ensuring trust within the team is living up to the characteristics most sought after in virtual teammates. Professionals in virtual teams rank the following characteristics as most important among virtual teammates: willingly sharing information, being proactively engaged, and collaborating.[53] Typically, you can take actions across the entire life cycle of a virtual team that bolster your credibility and help establish trust within your virtual team with a focus on competence, caring, and character (compared to traditional teams, research has shown that virtual teams far less often go through the storming stage).[54] In Table 3.1, you can see various strategies for displaying competence, caring, and character at each stage of virtual teamwork to build and maintain trust within the team.[55]

Meet in Person If Possible

The most effective, long-term virtual teams meet in person at the beginning of projects to help the team members build rapport. These kickoffs for virtual teams help team members do the tricky work of forming and norming. Not only are these stages of teamwork more natural for most professionals to accomplish in person, these meetings generally force team members to take enough time together to clearly articulate goals and objectives, values, responsibilities, communication protocol, and other elements of a team charter.

TABLE 3.1

Maintaining Trust over the Life of a Virtual Team Project

Stage of Project	Elements of Trust	Key Actions to Foster Trust
Forming	Competence	• Asking and responding to questions about one another's professional accomplishments, strengths, and weaknesses
	Caring	• Showing interest in teammates • Expressing a desire to work with teammates
	Character	• Making commitments to high team performance • Discussing shared values for a team charter
Norming	Competence	• Demonstrating strong performance in early deliverables • Preparing well for initial meetings
	Caring	• Sharing information, offering to help teammates, and staying accessible to teammates • Responding promptly to the requests of teammates
	Character	• Living up to commitments in the team charter
Performing	Competence	• Completing all tasks with excellence
	Caring	• Encouraging and supporting teammates to complete tasks near final deadlines when the pressure is highest
	Character	• Ensuring all team outcomes are fair to team members and stakeholders

Get to Know One Another

For all teams, this is important. For virtual teams, this is even more important. Especially in the early stages, forming and norming, virtual team members should schedule plenty of time to bond with one another. This social cement pays off later on with stronger and more aligned teamwork. Throughout the duration of projects, virtual teams should find ways to communicate spontaneously and even socialize in virtual environments. Colleagues who work in the same location often rely on informal, *watercooler* conversations to get to know each other better and discuss emerging opportunities in a relaxed environment. Effective virtual teams find ways to establish *virtual watercoolers*, where teammates regularly and spontaneously interact. Many tools exist to help virtual teams do this (we discuss some of these tools in Chapter 8 about social media for business communication).

Use Collaborative Technologies

Over the past 25 years, virtual teams have relied primarily on phone calls, teleconferences, and email to communicate with one another. Some, but not most, virtual teams have also used videoconferences. In the past five years, however, there are far more social collaboration tools that allow virtual team members to communicate and collaborate more efficiently (we discuss some of these tools in Chapter 8 about social media for business communication). However, the many collaboration technologies available create a challenge for many professionals. In fact, 43 percent of virtual team members feel "confused and overwhelmed" by the many choices.[56] Virtual team members should schedule time to agree about which communication technologies to use and ensure team members who are less confident with these tools get training.

Choose an Active Team Leader

The primary obstacle to virtual team performance is the lack of regular communication. Team leaders should ensure frequent contact and communication to keep the team moving toward its goals. One strategy many virtual teams use is to periodically rotate team leaders. This helps energize the team and keeps team leaders from burning out. This strategy also helps develop leadership skills of team members.

Run Effective Virtual Meetings

Professionals in virtual teams report that the primary challenge of virtual team meetings is not enough time to build relationships (90 percent). They also cite the following major challenges: the need to make decisions too quickly (80 percent); differing leadership styles (77 percent), unclear decision-making rules (76 percent), and lack of participation (75 percent).[57] Consider the following tips to make your virtual meetings more productive:[58]

- *Start the meeting with social chat.* One long-time expert and observer of virtual teams, Keith Ferrazzi, recommends the "Take 5" strategy—for the first five minutes of the meeting, each person takes a turn to share how he or she is doing.
- *Start with a contentious question.* Opening meetings with energetic and lively conversation causes virtual team members to embrace the meeting.
- *Ask "what do you think about" questions.* Virtual teams—perhaps more than traditional teams—are able to profit from diversity. Make sure your team is capturing the perspectives of all team members.
- *Make sure each team member is involved.* Some team members are more comfortable and outspoken using virtual technologies. Make sure all team members get opportunities to share their views. You might even consider protocols for taking turns in your discussions.

- *Articulate views precisely.* Most virtual teams focus on efficiency in meetings. This forces you to prepare carefully ahead of time and state your views precisely when you have the chance.

- *Take minutes in real time.* In real-time virtual meetings, you can take minutes—particularly those related to decisions—in real time so that meeting participants can comment on and correct information during the meeting. This practice often leads to more accurate recollections of the meeting, more buy-in from team members, and a higher likelihood that action items get accomplished.

- *Focus on your teammates and avoid multitasking.* Up to 90 percent of virtual team members admit they multitask during virtual team meetings.[59] Many new collaboration tools allow teammates to participate in several conversations at a time during an online meeting. Also, most virtual teams report heavily using IM and texting during virtual team meetings. In many cases, this allows side conversations that help the meeting operate more efficiently. However, there are several risks. First, this may distract focus from participating in the larger meeting. Second, it can lead to cliquish subgroups.[60] Make sure you focus sufficiently on your teammates.

- *Use video when possible.* Using video has many benefits. First and foremost, it allows virtual team members to better interpret one another's verbal and nonverbal cues. Also, this real-time conversation generally leads to faster decision making. Finally, an important but often unintended consequence of videoconferences is that virtual team members are less likely to multitask. Most virtual team members think video communication makes the most sense but rarely actually do it. But, others note important trends are emerging, such as software that makes virtual interaction feel natural, touch screens for easy document sharing, and a growing comfort to use social media for workplace exchange.[61]

The COVID-19 crisis forced many organizations to support employees through virtual teams. This was critical in the health-care sector where collaborative medicine through professional teams were enhanced through online technology.
Ariel Skelley/Blend Images

Group Writing

LO3.4 Describe strategies for effective group writing.

You will undoubtedly have many opportunities to co-create or co-author business reports and other documents during your career. The emphasis on teams in today's workplace is one reason group writing is becoming more prevalent. Many new technologies make this process easier and more efficient than at any time in the past. Yet, creating a strong, precise, and coherent document with many writers is challenging. As you write with teams or other groups, consider applying the following tips.

Start Right Away

One of the major obstacles to nearly all good writing is not starting soon enough. Developing ideas well near a deadline is rarely successful. This is even more problematic when many members of a team have competing views about the direction of a writing project close to a deadline.

Work Together at the Planning Stage

In Chapter 5 about developing business messages, we will discuss the three stages of writing: planning, drafting, and reviewing. For all strong writing, planning is the most important stage—it's the stage where you carefully think about audiences and their needs, develop compelling ideas that are well-reasoned, and think about how to frame your message for the most impact. Planning is even more important for group writing. As the group plans together, it should develop clear and specific purposes and goals, clarify and define the basic problems and issues together, prioritize finding certain pieces of information, identify subject-matter experts, and delegate roles for researching and writing. Generally, you should spend a significant amount of time together (*at least* one to two hours for student team writing projects) before delegating independent work. When team members work independently during the planning stage, they often waste time and energy working with different purposes, goals, and expectations.

Make Sure Your Roles and Contributions Are Fair

Early in the process, your group should clearly discuss the roles and expectations you have for one another—make sure part of this conversation involves splitting up contributions and time commitments equally. You might consider placing this in a team charter.

Stay Flexible and Open

As a group, it's important to remain open to change during the course of a writing project. As you start gathering information and drafting initial findings and conclusions, you may recognize that earlier decisions about purpose, direction, major points, and roles aren't strong or practical. Instead of staying silent and forging ahead with the writing project, groups should constantly reevaluate whether they need to modify their original plans.

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Meet in Real Time Consistently and Ensure the Writing Reflects the Views of the Group

You can accomplish a lot of coordinated writing working separately. However, you'll inevitably need to make some hard decisions as the writing project evolves. These tough decisions are often difficult to manage without holding real-time conversations about the direction and content of your project.

Discuss How You Will Edit the Document Together

Make sure all team members discuss and agree about the technologies you'll use as you draft your document. Some people prefer sharing offline word processing files (in programs such as Microsoft Word) with one another. Some people prefer cloud-based documents (such as those on Google Drive) that can be edited in real time by all members of the group. Pay attention to version control (so that some members aren't simultaneously editing different versions of the same document). Discuss how your team will use comments and track changes within the document. Also, be clear about rules for overwriting one another's work. Most programs allow backtracking to find former versions of the document. However, overwriting the work of others, without talking to them first, can lead to frustration.

Finally, make sure your group is clear about the purposes of each round of revisions. Generally, you should first revise with a focus on the strength of your ideas and how well these ideas match the needs of your audience. Then, you should focus on how smoothly the various sections of your paper flow together. Next, you should consider issues such as formatting, ease of reading, and language mechanics.

Consider a Single Group Member to Polish the Final Version and Ensure a Consistent Voice

Many groups use this strategy effectively. Make sure you choose the right person for this role. Also, avoid viewing this as a single person's work. Consider having the whole group together for this process so that as your designated writer polishes the document, each group member is present to offer input and confirmation.

Managing Difficult Conversations

Business professionals routinely—often on a daily basis—encounter difficult conversations, especially when working in teams and collaborating with others. Difficult conversations are approached with apprehension, nervousness, anxiety, and even fear. Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen of the Harvard Negotiation Project have spent three decades training business professionals to confront difficult conversations. They define difficult conversations as follows:

> Any time we feel vulnerable or our self-esteem is implicated, when the issues at stake are important and the outcome is uncertain, when we care deeply about what is being discussed or about the people with whom we are discussing it, there is potential for us to experience the conversation as difficult.[62]

Many business schools in Canada offer executive training in how to properly manage these types of difficult conversations.

Difficult conversations often centre on disagreements, conflict, and bad news. Common types of difficult conversations for entry-level business professionals include receiving a bad performance review, having ideas rejected, critiquing a colleague, giving feedback to a boss, correcting someone, approaching rule breakers about their behaviour, talking to a slacker on a group project, and dealing with office politics.[63]

Many people prefer to avoid difficult conversations because they want to avoid hurting the feelings of others, want to avoid conflict, or for other reasons. Many business professionals believe that honesty during moments of conflict may backfire and hurt their careers. However, this is not necessarily the case. Those business managers and executives who approach difficult conversations in a timely, honest, and caring manner typically accomplish much more professionally. After working with corporate clients for nearly three decades, one research team concluded that the most influential people are those who can effectively handle difficult conversations:[64]

> As it turns out, you don't have to choose between being honest and being effective. You don't have to choose between candor and your career. People who routinely hold crucial conversations and hold them well are able to express controversial and even risky opinions in a way that gets heard. Their bosses, peers, and direct reports listen without becoming defensive or angry.[65]

In this section, we briefly present basic, tried-and-true principles for handling difficult conversations in the workplace. You will notice that these principles rely on active listening with a learner mind-set. You can see several examples of how to put these principles into practice (see Table 3.2 and Figure 3.9). These examples relate to Kip and Nancy from the opening case. Kip and Nancy hold strong grievances toward one other because of a past disagreement about issuing refunds to business travellers. They avoid one another when possible. Their poor working relationship hinders productivity and makes work less pleasant for them and their team.

LO3.5 Explain basic principles for handling difficult conversations.

TABLE 3.2

Ineffective and Effective Approaches to Difficult Conversations

Approaches	Ineffective Examples	Effective Examples
Initiating the conversation Photodisc/Getty Images John A Rizzo/ Pixtal/SuperStock	**Nancy:** I want to go over your mishandling of the refunds several months ago. I have some ideas for how we can avoid this kind of problem in the future. This approach starts with blame. Worse yet, it frames the conversation as Nancy's story.	**Nancy:** Kip, let's talk about how the refunds were handled for several group tours a few months ago. First off, I want to apologize for speaking so harshly without hearing your side first. Since then, I feel like we haven't worked as well together. I think we can figure out a better way to make sure we're on the same page, and I also think we can figure out ways to avoid misleading our clients. When you authorized the discounts, I never heard all the details. Do you mind telling me about some of the clients who were upset and what you did to address their concerns? This approach is effective for several reasons. Nancy apologizes for her harsh words. She declares her intent: to work together better and come up with solutions. Nancy expresses her intent of discussing solutions that take into account both hers and Kip's perspectives (shared story). She invites Kip to tell his story.
Disagreeing diplomatically	**Nancy:** Look, you clearly overstepped your authority. You know there's language in the promotional materials that itineraries change, and you know we're not responsible when changes happen. You're clearly not acting in the company's interests when you give refunds when we're not at fault. Nancy does not recognize Kip's explanation or feelings as having any merit, which places Kip on the defensive and could lead him to resentment. Nancy projects a tone of blame by consistently using you-statements.	**Nancy:** Thanks for telling me how you felt. I agree that at the time I should not have snapped at you. I do want to explain why I thought you should have consulted with me prior to making the refunds. We have clear language in our promotional materials that the itineraries may change slightly. In my view, this doesn't require us to give discounts. We also have policies that require you to consult me before making any major refunds. Now, I understand your perspective. I also know that you were acting with the best interests of our clients and our company in mind. Nancy validates Kip's perspective by understanding how he *felt*. She explains why she thinks he overstepped his authority with a variety of I-statements.
Avoiding exaggeration and either/or approaches	**Kip:** I can never approach you with client issues. You're always fixated on following the small print in the promotional materials to a tee, even when you know clients don't read that. You never try to understand the client's perspective. Your approach is not working, and it's losing us money. Kip repeatedly exaggerates the frequency of Nancy's actions with words such as *never* and *always*. He takes an either/or approach by saying Nancy's approach doesn't work.	**Kip:** I'm hesitant to bring up client issues with you. I think sometimes you take a tough approach to clients, even when they have legitimate complaints. I can think of several cases when top clients started booking different tours after you denied their requests for partial refunds. In each case, I agreed with their reasoning and understood why they were upset. In the end, I think we end up losing revenue when we deny partial refunds to our clients who don't receive the tour stops and tour experiences we promised. Kip states his real feelings of frustration and explains his point of view. By using phrases such as *sometimes* and *I think*, he avoids a right-versus-wrong comparison between his and Nancy's approaches.

Nancy: Kip, let's talk about how the refunds were handled for several group tours a few months ago. First off, I want to apologize for speaking so harshly without hearing your side first. Since then, I feel like we haven't worked as well together. I think we can figure out a better way to make sure we're on the same page, and I also think we can figure out ways to avoid misleading our clients.

When you authorized the discounts, I never heard all the details. Do you mind telling me about some of the clients who were upset and what you did to address their concerns?

Nancy initiates difficult conversation

Kip: Well, I guess I think you overreacted. You were upset that I didn't get your permission before issuing the refunds. But I thought I was acting within my authority. The clients were upset we didn't include several stops listed in the brochures we sent them.

Kip's story

So, I didn't see a need to get your permission. We had clients who did not receive what we promised in the promotional material. I thought giving the refunds was the right thing to do. And, I felt that you didn't even give me time to explain myself.

But, it's more than that. I'm hesitant to bring up client issues with you. I think sometimes you take a tough approach to clients, even when they have legitimate complaints. I can think of several cases when top clients started booking different tours after you denied their requests for partial refunds. In each case, I agreed with their reasoning and understood why they were upset. In the end, I think we end up losing revenue when we deny partial refunds to our clients who don't receive the tour stops and tour experiences we promised.

Nancy: Thanks for telling me how you felt. I agree that at the time I should not have snapped at you. I do want to explain why I thought you should have consulted with me prior to making the refunds. We have clear language in our promotional materials that the itineraries may change slightly. In my view, this doesn't require us to give discounts. We also have policies that require you to consult me before making any major refunds. Now, I understand your perspective. I also know that you were acting with the best interests of our clients and our company in mind.

Nancy's story

Kip: So, I think you're saying that you felt I shouldn't have made the refunds because I should clear it with you first and clients should understand itineraries may change slightly. Is that right?

Nancy: That's right. It sounds to me like there are several issues. First, we need to make sure we always hear one another out immediately instead of letting hard feelings fester. I think this issue would have been resolved right away if I had listened to you right away. Second, I think we should discuss the process for handling complaints. Finally, but I think most importantly, we should re-evaluate what we believe constitutes a reasonable complaint and under what circumstances we provide refunds. I think it's safe to say that we view this differently. Kip, do you have suggestions for how we should manage these types of situations in the future?

Nancy and Kip's shared story

Kip: Well, I think there are several basic cases where we should refund our guests. For example . . .

---------- *Nancy and Kip continue to talk about shared approaches and solutions.* ----------

Embrace Difficult Conversations and Assume the Best in Others

Most people back away from uncomfortable or unpleasant conversations. This is particularly the case when we feel we have a lot to gain but risk heavy losses if it doesn't go right. For these reasons, difficult conversations are often emotionally challenging.[66] Successful people in the workplace do not evade difficult conversations. Those who regularly tackle them with skill and tact improve work performance for themselves and others.

One way to embrace difficult conversations is to view conflict as an opportunity.[67] That is, the exchange of perspectives and competing ideas reflects open and honest communication. If there is no conflict, employees are likely not voicing their true perspectives. Generally, colleagues tend to respect one another more when they know they can safely disagree.

To make a difficult conversation safe, follow the advice of Bart Egnal, CEO of The Humphrey Group, a communications consultancy with offices in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, and Mexico City:

> If you're delivering tough news, be accountable. The executive should have said, "we haven't delivered and ultimately that means we need to make some difficult changes. Here is what I've decided to do in conjunction with our CEO so we can move forward and improve our performance." It may be tempting to bond through commiseration, but it makes you look bad and undermines your ability to lead long term. As with all communication, there's a good way and a, well, bad way to deliver bad news. The former is usually tougher to do initially, but almost always makes things easier in the long run.[68]

Adopt a Learning Stance and Commit to Hearing Everyone's Story

Earlier in the chapter, we distinguished between the judger and learner mind-sets. In emotionally charged, high-stakes conversations, approaching the conversation with a learner mind-set will often lead to productive outcomes. You can do this by avoiding the message-delivery stance.[69] Because difficult conversations typically involve unresolved problems, each person should participate in a joint process of understanding the problems and creating solutions. The message-delivery stance implies that you have nothing to learn from the other person involved in the conversation. In sensitive situations, others will resist your attempts to impose solutions.

The learning stance involves a commitment to understanding others' **stories**—their retrospective versions of interpersonal interactions or their explanations of business successes and failures. In difficult conversations, invite others to describe their views and feelings of disputed events. When people have the opportunity to share their stories, they are often less resistant to change and more accommodating of the views of others. Sharing stories with one another can lead to shared interpretations of events, empathy, and new ways of viewing workplace relationships and business possibilities.[70]

One major benefit of allowing all people involved in a difficult conversation to share their views is buy-in. Research has shown that when everyone involved shares their ideas, they tend to be more committed to the ultimate decision of the group, even when their ideas are not adopted. When they remain silent, they tend not to commit to the decision of the group.[71]

Stay Calm and Overcome Noise

Few business professionals prepare for difficult conversations. And because emotions run high during such conversations, they often do not go well. Participants face a lot of internal noise, and this muddies rational thinking: They are nervous about the outcome of the encounter for themselves and others, and they often feel incapable of constructively expressing all their thoughts and emotions.

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stories

Retrospective versions of interpersonal interactions or explanations of business successes and failures.

Principles of Difficult Conversations

- Embrace difficult conversations.
- Assume the best in others.
- Adopt a learning stance.
- Stay calm/ overcome noise.
- Find common ground.
- Disagree diplomatically.
- Avoid exaggeration and either/or approaches.

Components of Difficult Conversations

Steps
1. Start well/declare your intent.
2. Listen to their story.
3. Tell your story.
4. Create a shared story.

During these difficult encounters, high emotional intelligence is crucial. Self-awareness is the foundation. When you feel angry or defensive, you need to ask yourself, "What do I really want?" and "How is what I'm feeling affecting how I'm responding?" By consciously asking yourself these questions, you are redirecting activity to the rational part of your brain. This de-escalates physical threats and allows you to respond more rationally.

While you should pay a lot of attention to your own emotions, intentions, and goals, you must also focus on those with whom you are speaking. They are likely experiencing similar emotions. Apply your active listening skills to feel and show empathy. If someone gets angry, view this as an opportunity. Do not return the anger, but rather help the other person channel the anger appropriately and rationally. Consider asking your conversational partner to sit down or offer a drink. As you summarize his or her thoughts and feelings, you defuse strong emotions and make the conversation constructive and rational.[72]

Find Common Ground

Finding common ground seems like obvious advice, but it's not easy to do during emotionally charged moments when you feel attacked. Finding common ground will help you and others accomplish two things. Emotionally, it lessens the perceived distance between you, and it may even lead to bonding. Rationally, it helps you analyze the issues at hand in a way that will likely lead to mutually acceptable solutions. You can find common ground in a number of areas, including facts, conclusions, feelings, goals, and values.

Disagree Diplomatically

Difficult conversations involve different perspectives. To create a learning conversation rather than a defensive and judgmental one, find ways to disagree diplomatically. By disagreeing well, you lessen the resistance that others have to you and your views. Typically, you can disagree diplomatically by validating the views and feelings of others and using I-statements. **Validating** others means that you recognize their perspectives and feelings as credible or legitimate. It does not necessarily mean that you agree. **I-statements** begin with phrases such as *I think*, *I feel*, or *I believe.* During disagreements or difficult conversations, I-statements soften comments to sound more conciliatory and flexible and less blaming and accusatory (see examples in Table 3.2).

validating

Recognizing others' perspectives and feelings as credible or legitimate. It does not necessarily mean that you agree.

I-statements

These begin with phrases such as *I think, I feel,* or *I believe*.

Avoid Exaggeration and Either/Or Approaches

As you navigate difficult conversations, avoid making them overly simplistic. Usually, you are encountering complex business and relationship issues. Also, by simplifying your story, you often inadvertently cause others to become defensive because you are in effect disputing their story or challenging their identity.

Two ways of oversimplifying your approach to difficult conversations is by exaggerating and by applying either/or approaches. If you find yourself using superlatives such as *always*, *never*, *most*, or *worst*, you might be exaggerating. By choosing other words, you're more likely to present your story accurately and also validate others. Applying an either/or approach to most business communication is ineffective. For difficult conversations, it usually translates into a right-versus-wrong approach. Approaching a difficult conversation with an *I'm right, you're wrong* approach inevitably dooms the conversation. See examples of exaggeration and either/or approaches in Table 3.2.

Initiate the Conversation, Share Stories, and Focus on Solutions

Initiating a difficult conversation is stressful. You may have avoided bringing up the issue because you are nervous about how the conversation will affect your working

relationships with others, or you are worried about costs to your career. Starting well is crucial. The opening moments of a difficult conversation offer a great opportunity to frame or orient the conversation for problem solving. In the opening moments, consider declaring your intent—your sincere desire to understand and find a solution that works for each of you. One obstacle to holding difficult conversations is that one or more people involved tend to judge the motives of others unfairly. Declaring your intent can reduce the likelihood of unfairly judging motives. See Table 3.2 for examples of initiating a conversation.[73]

When you initiate a difficult conversation, a common learning stance is to listen to the story of others first, then share your story, and then create a shared story.[74] When you invite others to share their perspectives and versions of events first, they recognize your sincere interest in understanding and cooperating with them. By telling your story, you allow others to see another version of reality and empathize with you. Finally, together you create a shared story. A **shared story** involves combining yours and others' experiences, perspectives, and goals into a shared approach to work. The *their story–your story–shared story* process requires a substantial time commitment, but it is well worth it. Figure 3.9 presents a simplified example of this process.

shared story

Involves combining yours and others' experiences, perspectives, and goals into a shared approach to work.

IDEAS IN ACTION

EFFECTIVE TEAMS HAVE GRIT

Heather Reier of Cake Beauty

Heather Reier is the founder and creative director of the popular and colourful vegan personal-care product company Cake Beauty. The Canadian brand—which Reier started up 15 years ago in her Kitchener, Ontario kitchen with a bowl and mixers—was recently acquired by MAV Beauty Brands and has now been launched globally.

Cake Beauty, which boasts strong customer loyalty, is known for its natural and luxurious hair and body products that are also cruelty-free, vegan, and come in packaging that uses vibrant colours and fun product names like the 'Do Gooder Volumizing Dry Shampoo, and Cake Walk Rich & Reviving Foot Pretty Cream.

The Western University graduate (in political science!) has come a long way from her kitchen. Cake Beauty is headquartered in Vaughan, Ontario, where all products are conceptualized, tested, and designed (all products are manufactured in Canada and the U.S.). Reier has said that finding the right team has been crucial for the success of the brand over the years. She shared with *Canadian Living*:

> Look for people that have skills that complement yours. I think many people have the inclination to hire people who are just like them—think like them, act like them, have the same abilities as them. But what you really need are people who can do things that you don't do well; people who are smarter than you in certain areas.

Reier sees caring as a key part of a credible communicator and working together—"Teamwork blossoms when there's compassion and understanding between team members. Projects are expedited and creative solutions are built when you dip your toe into another person's function. This 'connectivity' model makes everyone feel deeply engaged in the business as one; shifting work from self-focused to a shared vision." When it comes to difficult conversations, Reier believes it is important to:

> Communicate with GRIT—generosity, respect, integrity, truth. (Laurie Sudbrink coined this.) Step into the other person's shoes to see where they are coming from. Approach conversations with curiosity rather than judgement. Listen to the intentions beneath the emotions and words, and always make sure your own intentions are clear before engaging in difficult conversations. It's important to shift towards making agreements rather than expectations, to empower your team to feel confident in the decisions they will make as they move forward.

Alvaro Goveia

She notes that Cake's most successful launches happened when "the minds of finance, operations, marketing and design all came together in a oneness approach. With oneness, the positive energy of the Company swells and the success results are rooted in care, passion and pride that carries a success dynamic ongoing."

The recent acquisition by MAV Beauty Brands means Cake Beauty is now part of a global operation model. Reier commented, "Building Cake from the little company started in a kitchen to the beloved brand it is today has been the ride of a lifetime—and the natural next step for Cake is international expansion...I'm so pleased to be working with [MAV Beauty Brands] and thrilled to start this journey as one team." With the growth comes new demands to ensure Cake Beauty maintains a focus upon effective team communication.
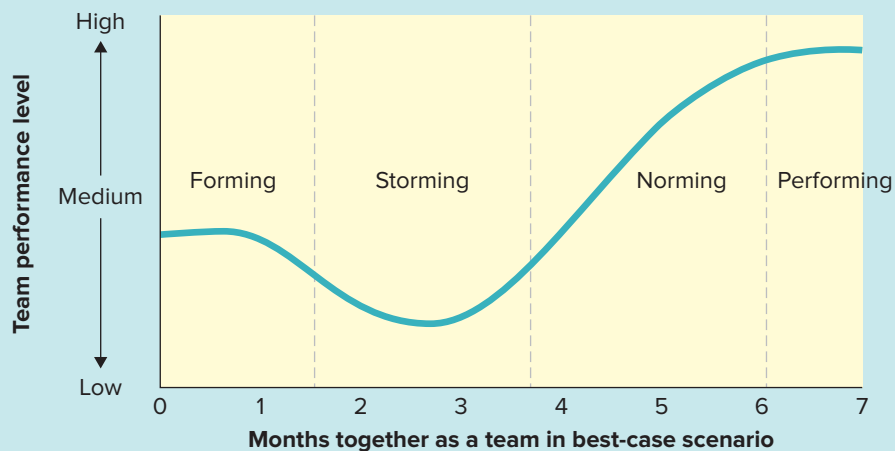
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Chapter Takeaway for *Team Communication and Difficult Conversations*

LO3.1 Explain the principles of team communication in high-performing teams.

Characteristics of High-Performing Teams

- Teams should focus first and foremost on performance.
- Teams go through natural stages to reach high performance.
- Effective teams build a work culture around values, norms, and goals.
- Effective teams meet often.
- Effective teams focus on psychological safety and ensure all voices are heard.
- Effective teams recognize and actively seek to avoid groupthink.
- Effective teams embrace diversity.
- Effective teams solve problems and generate creative solutions by going through cycles of divergence and convergence.
- Effective teams provide a lot of positive feedback and evaluate their performance often.
- Effective teams feel a common sense of purpose.

Team performance level (High / Medium / Low)

Forming | Storming | Norming | Performing

Months together as a team in best-case scenario (0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7)

LO3.2 Describe and demonstrate approaches to planning, running, and following up on meetings.

Items in an Agenda

- Agenda items
- Time frames (optional)
- Goals/expected outcomes
- Roles
- Materials needed

Items in Minutes

- Date and time
- Team members present
- Meeting roles
- Key decisions
- Key discussion points (optional)
- Open issues (optional)
- Action items and deadlines

See *examples of an agenda* in Figure 3.7 and *minutes* in Figure 3.8.

LO3.3 Explain the principles of effective virtual team communication.

Principles for Virtual Team Communication

- Focus on building trust at each stage of your virtual team.
- Meet in person if possible.
- Get to know one another.
- Use collaborative technologies.
- Choose an active team leader.
- Run effective virtual meetings.

LO3.4 Describe strategies for effective group writing.

Tips for Group Writing

- Start right away.
- Work together at the planning stage.
- Make sure your roles and contributions are fair.
- Stay flexible and open.
- Meet in real time consistently and ensure the writing reflects the views of the group.
- Discuss how you will edit the document together.
- Consider a single group member to polish the final version and ensure a consistent voice.

LO3.5 Explain basic principles for handling difficult conversations.

Principles for Difficult Conversations

- Embrace difficult conversations.
- Assume the best in others.
- Adopt a learning stance.
- Stay calm/overcome noise.
- Find common ground.
- Disagree diplomatically.
- Avoid exaggeration and either/or approaches.

Steps in Difficult Conversations

1. Start well.
2. Listen to their story.
3. Tell your story.
4. Create a shared story.

See *examples of less effective and more effective statements in difficult conversations* in Table 3.2. See an *example of a difficult conversation* in Figure 3.9.

Key Terms

Discussion Exercises

3.1   Chapter Review Questions (LO 3.1, LO 3.2, LO 3.3, LO 3.4, LO 3.5)

A. Research shows that under ideal conditions, most teams reach high performance in six to seven months. How can a student team that must complete a project in a few weeks to a few months go through the stages of team development more quickly and reach peak performance?

B. What is psychological safety? What do you think are the best ways to achieve it in teams?

C. Which three symptoms of groupthink do you think are most common in student teams? Explain your reasons for each symptom of groupthink.

D. In what ways can teams form a common sense of purpose? Provide examples from your experience.

E. Explain how creating and following an agenda is beneficial. Are there situations in which an agenda is not beneficial? Explain.

F. Explain the three strategies of virtual teams that you think are most important.

G. Explain the three strategies of effective group writing that you think are most important.

H. Explain what is meant by concluding a difficult conversation with a shared story.

3.2   Ideas in Action Questions (LO 3.1, LO 3.2)

A. Heather Reier says "teamwork blossoms when there's compassion and understanding between team members." What are three key ways to make this happen?

B. Reier believes GRIT is a key for team success. What do you think she means by this? What does this imply for teams?

C. How does Reier stay creative and innovative? What habits or routines can bring out your creativity?

3.3   Speaking Up in Meetings (LO 3.1, LO 3.2, LO 3.5)

Barbara J. Krumsiek of the Calvert Group recently talked about the style of meetings that take place in her organization:

I think it can be a little jarring actually for people who are used to perhaps a little more civility. I think we're civil, but we're direct. I don't like meetings if my direct reports leave the room and turn to somebody and say, "Can you believe someone said that?" And so I try to explain to them by example that if you find yourself doing that when you leave the room, or shaking your head, or kicking yourself for not having said something, or thinking that there were real problems with what somebody said, next time you have to say it in the room. You have to, or

you will not be the most impactful member of this team. When I first got to Calvert, there was a lot of that. And I had one of my direct reports send me an email, complaining about something somebody else said. I just got back to them and said, "I'm not going to read this because I don't see the person you're talking about CC'd on it. So if you CC them on it and send it back to me, I will deal with it." Well, I never had to get it back, because once the person really dealt with it, it was fine.[75]

Based on Krumsiek's comments, answer the following:

A. What types of expectations are there for meetings at the Calvert Group?

B. What does Krumsiek say about the nature of directness and civility at meetings? Does this imply the meetings are not civil?

C. How does Krumsiek deal with complaints about other team members?

D. What are three principles from Krumsiek's comments that you can apply to how you approach team communication?

3.4   Brainstorming at Meetings (LO 3.1, LO 3.2, LO 3.5)

Susan Docherty, former president and managing director of General Motors, described how she and her team communicate at meetings:

I love to brainstorm with my team around the table in my office. I like to use a big whiteboard for ideas, because when you make things visual, you encourage the team to get up there at the whiteboard and put their thoughts out there. It's one thing to say that you're inclusive, but it's a whole other thing to be inclusive. And when people come into my office, they feel welcome. My door is open. They can bring ideas. They begin to understand that, as a leader, I want to be collaborative. I don't have all the answers or all the best ideas, nor do I want to. The whiteboard also keeps great ideas in front of us, not buried in an email and not buried in a stack of papers on our desks. And it enables everybody to own what we've got to get done. People will grab a marker and put up there that we're going to do a deep dive to figure something out, and they put their name beside it. And there are lots of times where we put something on the board, and it requires a couple of people to get together to go work on it.[76]

Based on Docherty's comments and your own experiences, answer the following:

A. What strategies can you use for making meetings more visual? What are the benefits of making meetings visual?

B. What strategies can you use to make meetings more inclusive?

C. What does it mean for "everybody to own what we've got to get done"? What are a few approaches you can take to help make this happen for work teams?

3.5 *Being Friendly* versus *Being Friends* for Difficult Conversations (LO 3.5)

Kasper Rorsted, CEO of Henkel, a consumer and industrial products company based in Dusseldorf, Germany with a Canadian corporate office in Mississauga and several other offices and manufacturing facilities in southern Ontario, recently talked about the first time he had to be someone else's boss:

> [I first became someone else's boss] in 1989, right when I got promoted from being a sales rep in the Digital Equipment Corporation to being a sales manager at the age of 27. I had about 20 people at that point in time. All but two of them were older than I was. When you're 27, you're inexperienced, so you don't know what to fear. I didn't know what I probably should have known. The first time I realized it was serious was when, after about six months, I had to lay somebody off. And then suddenly you move

from the sunny side of the deal to the real deal. I remember I was sleeping very poorly for almost a week. He had a family.

> So one of the lessons I learned from that, which I've been very aware of since, is to be friendly, but not a friend. I had grown up in the company and I knew everybody, so I was more a friend. But then I had to start having honest conversations with people about how they performed, and that taught me a lesson. I've always been friendly but never been friends anymore. When we have parties, I'm the one who will leave early.[77]

Based on Rorsted's comments, answer the following questions:

A. What do you think Rorsted means by stating that he could "be friendly, but not a friend" once he became a boss and had to have difficult conversations with others?

B. Do you agree with his perspective about being friendly versus being friends? Do you think being friends makes having honest conversations in the workplace more difficult? Explain.

C. How can a person prepare for the difficult conversation that are necessary as one becomes a boss or supervisor?

Evaluation Exercises

3.6 Evaluating a Prior Team's Performance (LO 3.1, LO 3.2, LO 3.3, LO 3.5)

Think about a recent team or group project you were part of. Evaluate your team's performance in the following ways:

How well did your team set goals up front?

How well did your team establish norms, values, roles, and accountabilities?

To what degree did your team move through various stages of team development (forming, norming, storming, and performing)?

How effective were your meetings? Explain.

How well did all team members participate? Explain reasons for participation and nonparticipation.

How well did your team handle differences of opinion?

If you were to start the project over again, what three pieces of advice would you give to your team to drive higher performance?

3.7 Evaluating a Prior Group Writing Project (LO 3.1, LO 3.2, LO 3.3, LO 3.4, LO 3.5)

Think about a recent team or group project you were part of. Evaluate your team's performance in the following ways:

A. How well did your team set goals and purposes for your writing project up front?

B. How did your team establish roles for the project? Was the rationale for these roles appropriate?

C. Did your team ever change direction during the project? Did you not change direction but wanted to? Explain how flexible your team was over the course of the project.

D. How effective were your meetings? Explain.

E. How well did all team members participate? Explain reasons for participation and nonparticipation.

F. How well did your team handle differences of opinion?

G. If you were to start the project over again, what three pieces of advice would you give to your team to create a better final report?

3.8 Describe a Difficult Conversation from a Movie or TV Episode (LO 3.5)

Think about a recent movie or TV episode you watched. Select a scene that involves an interesting but difficult conversation. Ideally, select one that might occur in the workplace. Based on this scene, do the following:

A. Summarize the scene in one paragraph.

B. Analyze the difficult conversation. Explain how well the characters involved applied effective principles for communicating.

C. Describe how you can apply two strategies from the scene as you approach difficult conversations in the workplace.

3.9 Assess a Recent Difficult Conversation (LO 3.5)

Think about a recent difficult conversation you had. Ideally, select a conversation that occurred in the workplace or at school. Based on this conversation, do the following:

A. Summarize the conversation in one paragraph.

B. Evaluate your and others' performance in terms of assuming the best in one another, staying calm, finding common ground, disagreeing diplomatically, avoiding exaggeration and either/or approaches, and sharing all stories (including a shared story).

C. Describe three ways you would approach the conversation differently if you did it over again.

D. Assuming you had the conversation again, what are three questions you would ask to invite a learning stance?

Application Exercises

3.10 Getting to Know Each Other (LO 3.1)

In your newly formed, short-term team, share responses to questions about your personal, academic, and professional backgrounds and goals. Take turns responding to questions such as the following:

Personal background and interests:

Who is a person you admire and would most want to meet? Why would you want to meet this person? What would you ask this person?

What's your favourite movie? Why?

What are some of your hobbies?

What place do you want to travel to the most? Why?

What's the craziest thing you've ever done? What is your biggest pet peeve? What's your idea of fun?

Where were you born? What is unique about that city?

Academic background:

What's the favourite class you've taken? What did you enjoy about it?

What electives would you recommend? Why?

What's your major? Why did you choose it?

Professional background and goals:

What's the best job you've had? What did you enjoy about it?

What was the best team you've worked on? Why was this team so successful?

What was the worst team you've worked on? Why was this team unsuccessful?

What companies or organizations would you want to work at? Why? What's your ideal job? Why?

3.11 Create a Team Charter (LO 3.1)

For a team project you're currently working on, create a team charter. Consider using categories such as the following: purpose or mission statements, values, goals, team member roles (including leadership), tasks, ground rules, communication protocol, meeting protocol, decision-making rules, conflict resolution, and feedback mechanisms. Feel free to add your own categories as you and your team deem appropriate.

3.12 Create a Team Assessment (LO 3.1)

For a team project you're currently working on, create a team assessment. You can use ratings and/or open-ended questions. Consider including items such as the following: focus on results, communication climate (including conflict resolution), accountability, commitment, and trust. Feel free to add other categories as you and your team deem appropriate.

3.13 Creating an Agenda (LO 3.2)

Create an agenda for a recent meeting you had or a meeting that you will have soon (it could be a work or school agenda). Feel free to make up details if necessary. Prepare the agenda with agenda items, time frames, goals, roles, and materials needed.

Language Mechanics Check

3.14 Review the comma rules C8 through C10 in the Bonus Appendix. Then, rewrite each sentence to add or remove commas where needed.

A. You must apply for this credit card offer by July 1.

B. You must apply for this credit card offer by July 1 2020.

C. You must apply for this credit card offer by July 1 2020 in order to be eligible.

D. You can apply for the credit card anytime between July 1 and July 31.

E. Please come to my office on Tuesday July 5.

F. In 2020 22 of our engineers will visit our China branch.

G. The president, of our university, was a successful entrepreneur.

H. The president of our university, a successful entrepreneur, will lead, the delegation.

I. The president, owner of three companies, believes that entrepreneurship is the key, to success.

J. The president, went out to dinner, after giving the keynote address.

Endnotes

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