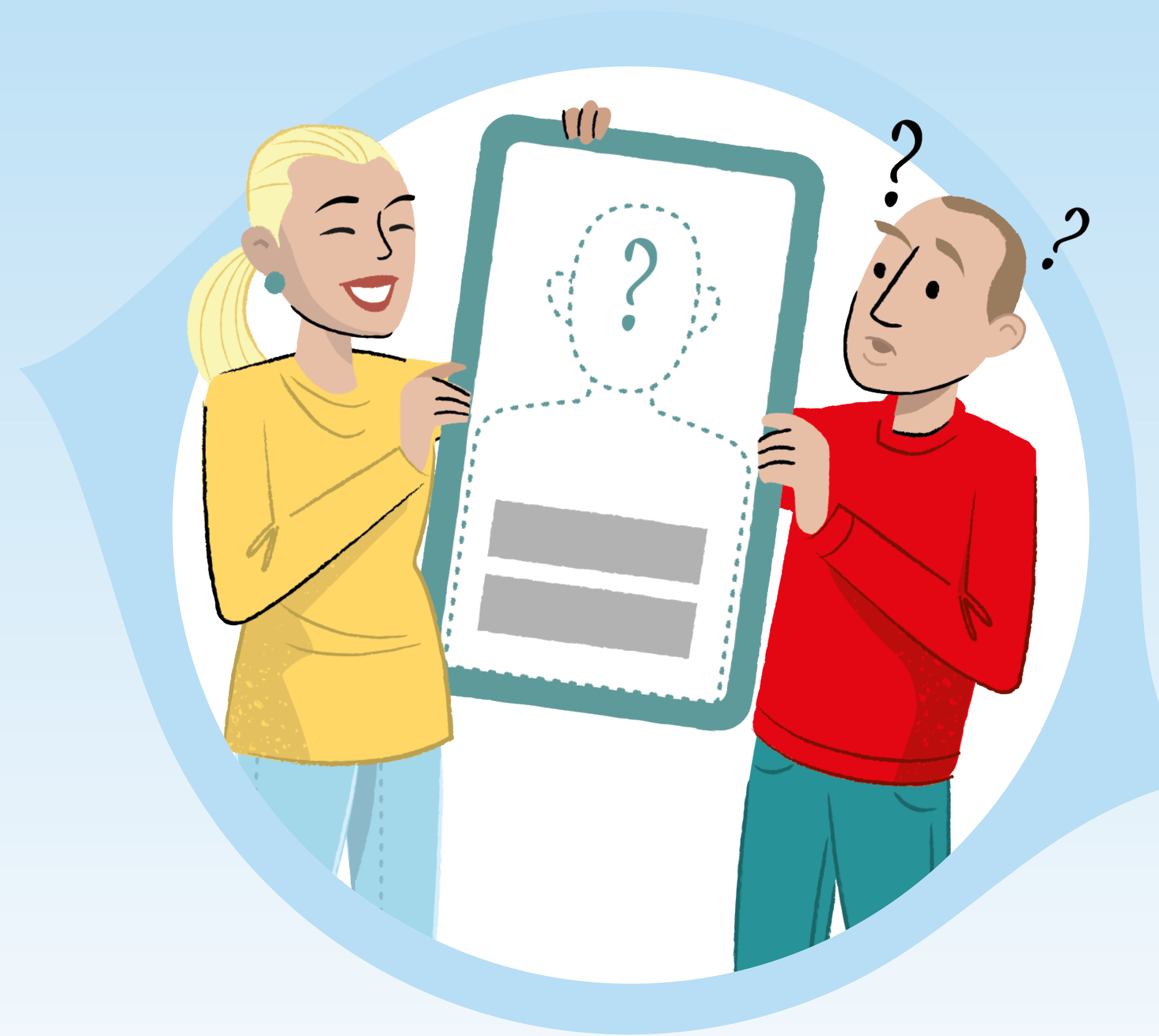




QUICK GUIDE:

How to build a **productive team**



Teamwork & collaboration in the workplace

Teamwork is important in every field of business. A good team enables you to be productive, both as a group and as an individual, and when teams interact they create a new, stronger entity.

There's nothing better than seeing a new and enthusiastic team achieve something that's never been done before by being agile, dealing with complexity, staying centred when things wrong, yet somehow pulling everything together anyway. Henry Ford's assembly line never would have happened without teamwork. McDonald's' fast food process developed because their first team collaborated to achieve a sum that was greater than its parts. And Google's success is driven by people coming together in teams - the molecular units where real, collaborative work happens.

Today's teams are different from those of the past. Frequently they are more dispersed, they are digital, they combine diverse skills and the nature of the challenges they face has changed. Despite these factors, their success still depends on a core set of fundamentals that make a team a good team.

So what are the skills required to create and support teams, how can you optimise their potential and where should you start?

“If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.”

– Henry Ford¹

Strong teams are **effective teams**

Most people have experience of working in teams, probably at a business level, but also in social and/or sporting contexts. It is very likely that some of these teams were sub-optimal, yet despite this achievements were made... targets were met...events were organised...games were won. Might these teams have been more effective had there been a different attitude and culture? Most likely the answer is 'yes'. In other words, it pays to change a team culture into something stronger and more effective.

The positive effect of improving teamwork can ripple out to affect in other areas of talent management, as the following research suggests:

- 86% of employees and executives believe workplace failures are due to poor communication and collaboration²
- 97% of employees believe poor team alignment impacts on the outputs from a project or task³
- 54% of employees say a strong sense of community motivates them to remain longer in a company⁴
- 33% of employees say poor communication causes morale to slump⁵
- 37% of employees say having a great team is a good reason not to change job⁶

Investing time to make your teams more effective can improve engagement levels, company culture, turnover & retention rates and productivity. Surely that is time well spent?

Characteristics of a strong team

Let's address the fundamental question of what makes a good team good. One thing is certain - building a successful team is about more than finding a group of people with the right mix of skills. It is about the art of fostering a strong sense of teamwork in people who may be working together remotely or temporarily, and enabling them to communicate, cooperate and innovate in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.

The following four guidelines can help you lay the groundwork for a highly productive, well-oiled group:

1. Each member should understand and accept their own strengths and weaknesses.
2. Collectively, team members should understand how theirs and others' skillsets blend together harmoniously.
3. The team manager or team leader should be able to coordinate roles according to each person's strengths and skills.
4. There should be a general willingness to communicate with members in their preferred communication style.

One of the key reasons that successful teams work is that they maintain a culture of respect in which members are treated as they want to be treated. This creates a comfort level and a feeling of safety within the unit.

Not all teams may have the level of awareness and empathy necessary to maintain such a culture but, if it can be nurtured, it will motivate team members to bring their best ideas and their best selves to work. It will also foster the inner resolve to work together when challenges arise and things go askew.

A team is stronger when everybody:

- delivers on their individual roles
- understands and appreciates the parts others play

1: Personal self-awareness

Self-awareness is like common sense – it's not very common. None the less, whether you are a manager, team leader or team member, it is important to develop an awareness and understanding of yourself. Indeed, some would say that self-awareness is the essence of good leadership⁷ and it is only by understanding your own behaviours and capabilities that you can know how to best direct and lead your team.

Want to gain some self-insight? Try answering the following questions as honestly as you can:

- What are your core skills? You can optimise your strengths by identifying the type of tasks on which you thrive.
- What are your shortcomings? Acknowledging these will help to clarify when you should ask for support.
- What character traits should you minimise or discard? By recognizing behaviours that may be problematic for others, you can present your best self to the team.

Spend some time thinking about these questions. Commit your answers to paper. Doing so will give you a deeper insight to your own behaviour & beliefs and a better sense of how you act in the workplace.

Now it is time to move to the next leadership level and examine how you can use assessments to foster greater self-awareness in your team.

Gaining insights from assessments

You may have found the self-awareness activity relatively easy to do, but asking others to think objectively about what they do and why they do it can be difficult. It is certainly not a subject for group discussion. Rather, team members should be invited to look at themselves in a more personal way. A very effective means of achieving this is to use a science-based personality assessment.

A personality assessment will reveal a fascinating insight to each member's inner qualities, such as their creativity, adaptability, drive, leadership, teamwork and organisation skills. It will also measure the characteristic traits that they exhibit in various situations and this can be helpful in predicting their response to change or challenges.

We would recommend that, as a minimum, you should use a psychometrically valid measure, published by a trusted developer. This means that the assessment will have been rigorously tested in order to ensure the reliability and validity of its results.

Ideally, the test should be structured as follows:

- Brevity: 10-15 minutes is the ideal time, otherwise team members may lose interest
- Positivity: self-analysis and self-learning can be challenging, so tests and reports should focus on positive attributes and learnings
- Clarity: reports should provide a clear pathway towards enhanced self-awareness and improvement

It is worth noting that assessments in general are an invaluable management tool, providing a better way to hire, develop and build your team. Assessments also send out the message to staff that your business cares about their personal development. Above all, by learning more about your people, you are better placed to assign them to the right roles and nurture a workforce that will achieve your corporate goals.

2: Creating team awareness

Having helped each team member to gain an appreciation of their skills, abilities and shortcomings, it's time to turn your attention to the team as a whole.

On high-performing teams, members feel accountable for each other's success and willingly provide generous support and candid feedback to help each team member be at their best. The objective is to create a similar condition within your team, where members look out for one another and where everyone can work at their highest capacity.

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3: Focus on strengths

Getting the maximum impact from everyone on your team and growing their potential over time is perhaps the most important thing a manager can do. As you observe your team's performance over time, you are going to identify members who are not performing well. Conventional wisdom would tell you to work on their weaker areas. Whereas, it actually makes much more sense to encourage team members to become even stronger in areas of where they are already strong.

Focusing on people's natural strengths will impact positively on your bottom line, thus:

- Enhanced productivity: when everyone does what they do best, the overall output of your team increases.
- Better staff retention: aligning someone's skills and personality to their work makes them identify positively with their role.⁸ This sense of belonging reduces turnover rates and all of the associated costs.
- More staff engagement: when people are successful and work with a purpose, they are more likely to enjoy their jobs and feel appreciated.⁹
- Stronger corporate culture: a happy, effective workforce creates a strong company culture. As this grows, conflict and gossip diminish.

In short – a happy team is a productive team.

Match strengths to tasks

In order to allocate the right person to the right role, you have to understand what each individual is good at.

This means acknowledging their learned skills and noting how their personality can also drive their innate strengths. By cataloguing these strengths, you can assign each person to their proper role.

Here is one approach you can take:

1. For each specific team member, use their personality assessment to identify their main strengths and developmental areas. Consider the types of work that would suit them and those they would detest.
2. Compile a list of tasks or jobs to be completed in the coming months.
3. Match people to work which they would excel at and enjoy. Where someone is assigned to a more challenging and inappropriate task, try to correct this on their next project.
4. This action is vitally important – tell everyone in person why they'll be great at their job. Then explain what you've done to the team as a whole. Make sure everyone is aware of each other's strengths so they know where to get help if they get stuck.

The purpose of these steps is to nurture a collaborative culture where members look out for one another and cover each other's weaknesses as a cohesive team.

4: Better communication

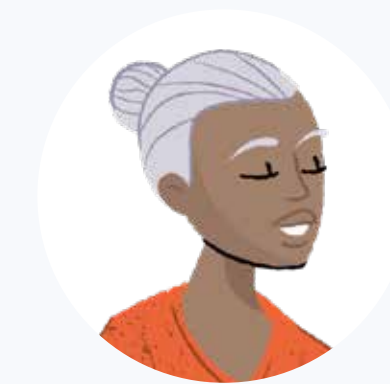
Communication is a keystone of business success. Confusion and errors thrive when no one knows what's going on. This leads to increased stress, demoralisation and, ultimately, higher staff turnover. So in what ways can we improve this vital and fundamental area of business?

Good communication embraces both understanding and empathy. Consider this scenario involving two different personality profiles:



Team member

- More interested in the big picture
- Always finds time to socialise
- Works at a prompt pace
- Actively embraces change



Team member

- Thrives on detail
- Regards socialising as futile
- Operates at a measured, considered pace
- Only comfortable within existing structures

Superficially, it might seem that these two people could never get anything done together on a team. Yet this is where understanding and empathy come to the fore. Of course, it's important that people with different profile types succeed in their particular roles - but everyone has to work together to achieve business goals by being self-aware and aware of others.

This might mean, for example, communicating with colleagues in ways that suit them - and them doing the same for you. When such an approach is taken, it is amazing how much more you can achieve.



The last word

Everyone is different, everyone has their own world view and everyone brings something unique to their workplace. This makes it difficult to meld people together into cohesive teams. Yet by understanding our differences and working to each other's strengths, it become possible for us to engage together meaningfully and productively.

Awareness, both at a personal level and also within and across the group, plays a critical role in this process. Personality assessments can provide the information needed to assign roles and improve communication. By sharing personality insights, team members can play to each other's strengths and weaknesses, showing empathy and providing support for colleagues whose outlooks and skills may differ from theirs.

Adopting an 'awareness-based' approach to team building, where you and your team members have strong professional relationships and work as an integrated group, will create a cohesive unit that is capable of rising to every challenge. The good news is that as 'awareness' becomes embedded in your business culture, new hires will get a kick-start and the resilience of your team will improve.

So, the next time you see a group whose members aren't working well together, look for their differences, transform them into assets and watch the whole team flourish.

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