Communicating effectively with colleagues

**Introduction**

effective\_teamwork\_01\_a.jpg

Effective communication produces efficient working relationships, supports delivery of effective customer service and allows you and your colleagues to resolve issues in a collaborative manner.

As part of increasing the effectiveness of your customer service delivery, you will also consider how best to communicate with customers to help you develop suggestions for improvements.

**Key terms**

* **Formal feedback** – input received through ‘formal’ means such as customer surveys and other specific research tools.
* **Informal feedback** – input received through ‘informal’ means such as casual conversations between staff and customers.
* **Organisational culture** – the way in which members of an organisation relate to each other, their work and the outside world in comparison to other organisations.
* **Team dynamics** – the relationships between members of a group that are part of a team within the organisation. Teams may contain a large number of people, or as few as two. Team dynamics are usually affected by roles and responsibilities.

**Teamwork**

effective\_teamwork\_01\_c.jpg

A team is a small group of people who possess complementary skills and who are working together to accomplish common goals.

Select the book below to learn more.

**Working as a team**

**1 Teamwork**

about\_teamwork\_01.jpg

Teamwork provides organisations with the ability to complete tasks and projects quicker and more efficiently than with individuals working alone. Co-operation on various tasks reduces workloads for all employees by enabling them to share responsibilities or ideas. Teamwork also reduces the work pressure on every worker, which allows him/her to be thorough in the completion of the assigned roles. In sharing ideas or responsibilities, every employee should have a role that suits their specialisation.

A team is at their most effective when:

* everyone understands the common goals that they are trying to achieve and appreciates that the team's aims are more important than the individual's
* everyone has a role in the team and each member understands their role and the skills of others
* everyone is relaxed in the company of the team members and offers support when it is needed
* there is trust, respect and open communication
* everyone shares responsibility for the work.

All teams must work to achieve the organisation's objectives, so every member of staff needs to:

* be aware of the organisation's objectives
* understand how the work of the team helps to achieve them
* understand how their own role helps to achieve them.

Every team will have its own targets and objectives that feed into the overall organisation.

**2 Teams or groups?**

team\_characteristics\_01.jpg

It is important to understand how **teams differ from groups** in the workplace:

* a group is a collection of individuals who coordinate their individual efforts
* a team is a group of people who have a common team purpose and challenging goals. Team members are mutually committed to the goals and to each other.

The difference between a group and a team can be illustrated by looking at the examples of a high street bank cashier and a surgeon. Both employees have a clear focus on what is required of them but there are several important differences about how they work.

The cashier that serves you when you are paying in money is one of a number of cashiers. The role of each cashier is to provide customers with a number of services. Each cashier, however, works independently. The cashiers in a bank could be described as a work **group**.

However, a surgeon works as part of a team in the operating theatre. The surgeon, the anaesthetist, the nurse, and the junior doctor all have distinct roles. These roles are complementary and inter-dependant. The surgical procedure could not be undertaken effectively without each member of the **team** co-operating fully.

Organisations use both groups and team depending on the work to be undertaken.

**3 Effective teamwork**

about\_teamwork\_02.jpg

Teamwork often improves relations by allowing people to bond and feel valued once tasks have been successfully completed. Where all members of a team have worked together successfully towards a common goal their respect for each other’s skills increases.

**Benefits of teamwork**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Shared workload | Shared and delegated according to individuals’ strengths and abilities |
| Best use of individuals’ strengths and abilities | Members can learn from each other and thus diversify and increase their skills |
| Support, greater productivity, efficiency | Co-operative, supportive team will be much more efficient and therefore contribute to greater productivity |
| Motivating | Team spirit increases morale, gives a sense of commitment, makes working more enjoyable and motivates individuals |
| Sense of participation | People feel that they are part of a team and the decision-making process, they accept change better |

**4 Benefits for individual team members**

effective\_teamwork\_01\_d.jpg

Individuals can benefit from, for example:

* **feeling proud to be associated with a successful and effective team** – eg a sense of belonging and job satisfaction
* **feeling supported when tackling tasks or learning new skills** – eg being able to develop their skills and stretch their talents with the help of others
* **feeling secure and confident** – eg from knowing that they are delivering high-quality goods and services
* **other team members’ knowledge, skills and experience** – eg making the whole team more successful
* **opportunities for creativity and career development** – eg from team members supporting each other and being innovative
* **increased motivation** – eg to stay on a good team and help it to succeed by doing their best
* **feeling valued** – eg knowing that their input is important and that their opinions matter.

**5 Benefits for teams**

effective\_teamwork\_01\_b.jpg

Teams can benefit from:

* **working towards shared objectives** – eg working together effectively towards agreed, shared goals
* **team members who are flexible and able to do several tasks** – eg multi-skilled team members who can be moved around between tasks or cover for each other’s holidays or periods of sickness
* **a balanced and supported environment** – eg from being a happy team where the members support each other and tackle objectives and problems together
* **bringing together expertise of team members for the benefit of the whole team** – eg having people with different strengths and attributes.

**6 Benefits for the organisation**

about\_teamwork\_01.jpg

The benefits of effective team working can be considerable for an organisation, for example:

* **successful achievement of organisational objectives** – eg to meet or exceed sales or production targets
* **access to a wide range of talents and strengths within the workforce** – eg pooling different talents that work together well to achieve major goals
* **good internal communications** – eg where team members and different teams communicate well with each other to improve operational productivity
* **increased efficiency and less duplication of work** – eg where teams understand each other’s tasks and needs, then work together to streamline their operations
* **a more flexible workforce** – eg where team members can cover for each other and perform a variety of tasks to maintain consistency and continuity
* **better relationships with customers** – eg from offering consistently high-quality customer service
* **better relationships with others connected to the organisation** – eg from having a reputation for being a reliable, consistent and smooth-running operation.

**7 Team dynamics**

**about\_teamwork\_03.jpg**

Team dynamics are the behavioural relationships between members of a group that are assigned connected tasks within a company. Dynamics are affected by roles and responsibilities and have a direct result on productivity.

It is important to build and maintain good working relationships, as this can impact on the work that is produced.  
  
Productive working relationships:

* help achieve targets and meet deadlines
* increase motivation
* increase efficiency, by sharing workloads
* encourage mutual support and advice
* generate better ideas from the team.

**Skills for building and maintaining good working relationships:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Co-operation | Co-operate and understand other people’s feelings |
| Courtesy | Be courteous, eg always say good morning and have respect for others |
| Openness | Admit it when you are wrong or have done something wrong. Don’t blame or criticise your colleagues when they do something wrong |
| Loyalty and friendship | Be loyal and friendly – don’t talk about people behind their back and don’t spread gossip |
| Feedback | Give praise where it is due, this should be timely, direct, personal and specific to the person |
| Trust | Understand why some decisions have been made even when you don’t agree with them |
| Consideration | Learn to listen and to think before you speak. Listen and understand the views of others even if you don’t necessarily agree with them – take others’ views into account in before making decisions or acting |

Poor working relationships are not effective for any organisation. The team will not feel productive or motivated if its members:

* work in or create a culture of blame or criticism
* are self-opinionated or dictatorial to others in the team
* argue openly with others
* don't work as hard as the others or leave others to do all the work; making them feel as if they are being taken for a 'mug'.

It is key that the team communicate well and feel like the job is worth completing.

Treat people how you would like to be treated, with respect, fairness and courtesy. Fulfilling agreements and providing support when it is needed will build on the relationships that have been formed.

**8 Team Role Theory – Belbin’s Theory**

time\_management\_01\_b.jpg

Belbin suggests that, by understanding your role within a particular team, you can develop your strengths and manage your weaknesses as a team member, and so improve how you contribute to the team. This should create more balance in a team. Read through the team roles below and consider which one you feel you are.

Belbin’s nine types of team roles and how they contribute to performance:

**Shaper** – they challenge, are dynamic and overcome obstacles. They can be prone to offend and can be easily provoked.

**Implementer** – disciplined, reliable, conservative, turns ideas into practical actions. They can be inflexible and slow to respond to change.

**Completer finisher** – delivers on time, conscientious, checks for errors and pays attention to detail. They can worry unduly and be reluctant to delegate.

**Co-ordinator ̶** mature, confident, clarifies goals delegates well. They can be seen as manipulative and offload tasks they don’t like.

**Team-worker** – co-operative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic listens and keeps the peace. They can be indecisive in a crisis.

**Resource investigator** – extrovert, enthusiastic, good communicator, explores opportunities and shares information. They can be over optimistic and lose interest quickly.

**Plant** – creative, imaginative, solves difficult problems. They can be prone to ignoring details and are too preoccupied to communicate well.

**Monitor evaluator** – strategic, sees all opinions and is accurate. They tend to lack drive or the ability to inspire.

**Specialis**t – single-minded, self-starter, dedicated and brings knowledge. They are prone to only working within narrow parameters and dwells on technicalities.

Belbin’s theory is a tool for leaders to help them recognise the diversity in their teams.

Select [here](https://www.123test.com/team-roles-test) to see Belbin’s team roles questionnaire which can be used with your team.

**9 Cross-team working**

cross\_team\_working\_01\_a.jpg

As an extension of teamwork, some organisations also have cross-team working. This is based on collaboration between different teams and is a useful way of working when there is a shared project or objective. The number of people involved in cross-team working will depend on the scale of the collaboration.

Some teams with **different functions work together all the time**. For example, in a car manufacturing company, functional teams that work together all the time could include separate teams who:

* build the bodywork of the cars
* install the engines
* install the electronics and trim
* do the paint finishing.

Each team’s work is very dependent on input from other teams, so they need to liaise on a regular basis about subjects that include, for example:

* the speed of production – so that the cars flow steadily from one team to the next without any delays, backlogs or excessive waiting times
* quality – so that all the teams work to a recognised standard
* problem-solving – so that they have agreed procedures on what to do when things go wrong to minimise the knock-on effect on other teams.

Sometimes, **different functional teams only come together for a specific project**. For example, a wedding planning company works with over a hundred different suppliers and brings together different teams for each event. The requirements are unique for each couple and they can choose from several suppliers for each function, including, for example:

* venue
* catering
* waiting and bar service
* floristry
* music and entertainment
* table and room decoration.

The wedding planner then has to bring together the different functional teams to work together just for the one wedding. Some of the supplier teams may know each other, and work together from time to time, but each wedding will be different.

In cross-team working, it can help to smooth the process by having **some individuals move from one team to the other.** This can be on a temporary or permanent basis. It can help to ease problems by having an expert on hand to answer queries and help solve problems. For example, in the car manufacturing company, a paintwork specialist could work with the bodywork team to help them to prepare the metal to a suitable standard to accept the paint well. This wold be particularly useful when:

* a new procedure or product is introduced – eg they need to work out new methods together when designing the quality standards for a new model
* there have been quality issues – eg to make sure that adjustments and improvements are effective.

Moving individuals from one team to another can also be of great benefit to their career development and working relationships. For example, in a large hotel or restaurant, kitchen team members and front of house team members rely on each other to deliver excellent products and service to the guests. To really appreciate what the other team does and needs, it can be useful and enlightening to work with them for a short while.

**10 Communication**

**about\_teamwork\_04.jpg**

Any team needs to communicate to be effective. The best way of doing this is to have regular team meetings. Meetings will allow and encourage the following:

* consultation – to seek out the ideas and opinions of all the team members
* monitoring – to monitor progress towards targets and deadlines
* decision making – to arrive at a decision as to action or a way forward that is acceptable to the whole team
* problem solving – to gather ideas for acceptable solutions to any problems that may arise
* acknowledge team achievements and celebrate success
* discuss strengths and identify areas for improvement.

**Benefits of having team meetings:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Information | A good way of ensuring everyone has up to date information on any new developments |
| Exchange of ideas | An opportunity to learn from the ideas and experience of colleagues |
| Time saving | Information can be communicated to everyone at the same time |
| Understanding | Listening to the views of others can promote better understanding of both the issues at hand and the differences in opinions and work methods of colleagues |
| Commitment | Bringing the team together regularly promotes the feeling of working towards a common goal and underlines the dependence of achieving the target on the actions of the individual members |
| Consensus | The team will work more positively if members feel that they have played an active part in any decisions made |
| Organisation targets | Information from team meetings can be communicated to higher management to provide feedback and progress towards overall achievement |

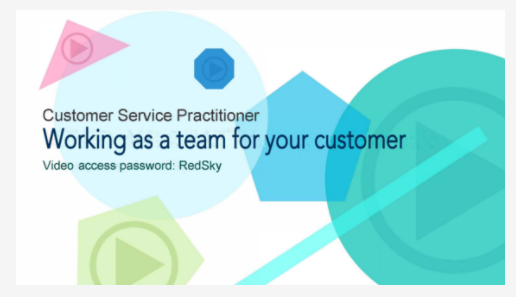
**Consider this ...**  
How you behave affects the relationship/performance of the team, so consider these points to build good working relationships and participate in effective teams.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Responsibilities | * Understand your job role and responsibilities. * Know your position in the organisational structure. * Understand the goals of the team and work with others to ensure achievement of the common goals. |
| Attitude | * Co-operative and willing. * Courteous and respectful. * Avoid blame culture – admit it when you are wrong and don’t blame or criticise your colleagues when they are wrong. * Loyal and friendly – discuss problems openly not behind backs. |
| Communication | * Listen actively and think before you speak. * Listen and understand the views of the others even if you don’t necessarily agree with them. * Give praise where it is due; support when required. * Be aware of your non-verbal communication signals. |

**Team and customer loyalty**

You are part of a team, so be loyal to your colleagues - support them and what they do. Be loyal to your customers too. You are not there to judge them and it will help you get the best for them.

Select the image to launch the e-learning below - to access the video you will need to enter the password **RedSky**.



**Improving the customer service offer**

measuring\_organisational\_effectiveness\_01.jpg

It is vital for all organisations to continuously improve their customer service and how effective they are in meeting customer needs to

* increase business
* retain customers
* maintain market share.

Select the book below to learn more.

**Improving customer service**

**1 Introduction**

communicating\_effectively\_colleagues\_book2\_01.jpg

Any organisation has many reasons for needing to make improvements to the standard of customer service it offers. Change needs to be considered and no organisation will make change just for the sake of doing so. Any change will consider the advantages and disadvantages and take into account customer feedback, sales, levels of complaints etc.

Changes in customer needs can include:

* **customers demand new ways of purchasing products or services**: e.g. with new technology customers want the ability to make purchases on a 24/7 basis
* **customers demand higher levels of service**: e.g. through social media customers are now more aware of what the standard of service is from competitors and have higher expectations of what the level of service is they should be offered by an organisation.

Through television, social media and the Internet, customers are more aware than ever of the level of customer service that is acceptable and what their rights are. This means any organisation will need to ensure that their customer service meets the expectations of their customers, and if not, to make improvements. Technology has changed all our lives, and all organisations now need to be aware of its influence.

**2 Trends**

organisational\_systems\_resources\_book4\_02.jpg

Customer service may need to change because of trends. Trends can include:

* new technology which can affect purchasing, ordering or appointment making - this can benefit customers who want to be able to do this at times that suit them, anywhere
* use of new approaches to greet customers or to finish a sale
* changes to reception areas e.g. making them more open, accessible and people-friendly
* changes in seating, eg in coffee shops where there are sofas etc.

Customer service is not just about how you deal with people face to face but how you work to meet customer expectations.

**3 Environment and economy**

organisational\_systems\_resources\_book4\_03.jpg

Additionally, customer service may need to change because of environmental issues. For example, people are keen to save the environment and make use of less paper so items like tickets, vouchers can now be accessed and accepted on mobile phones or laptops.

Economic issues can also affect customer service. For example, when there is a recession organisations need to be leaner but still offer a level of customer service that meets or exceeds that of the competition. In an economic boom people except a higher quality of service which they may be willing to pay for.

**4 Methods of change**

organisational\_systems\_resources\_book4\_04.jpg

The standard of customer service being delivered by staff will always be checked. Customer service can be improved by:

* staff training
* observation of staff
* improved procedures
* use of new methods.

Change can only be successful if it is introduced with care. Change requires the support of others who are involved. Support can be obtained by informing others through:

* team meetings
* memos
* emails
* training sessions
* management updates
* colleagues.

Successful introduction of change or improvement requires those involved to be:

* informed about the change and why
* trained in its introduction
* involved in its implementation
* involved in its evaluation.

Those involved need to be behind change as they will have to implement it. They need to be positive as customers will soon pick up if they are resentful or negative. If staff are not involved in change, it can be difficult to implement easily, and its success can be compromised. Staff or other service providers need to have change or improvement discussed with them and they need to be involved as it may be their practices that need to be changed.

**5 Sources of information and constraints**

organisational\_systems\_resources\_book3\_01.jpg

There are many sources of information that may help identify ways in which customer service can be improved:

* customer feedback
* sales
* complaints
* returns
* staff feedback.

There are a number of constraints on staff and their ability to suggest improvements to customer service:

* level of authority - they may not be seen as senior enough to comment
* level of experience - they may not be seen as experienced enough to comment
* cost - the suggested improvements may be too expensive
* lack of resources - there may not be sufficient resources in place to carry out the improvements.

In terms of actually implementing customer service improvements, organisational policies and procedures need to be followed. It is important that staff with the relevant level of authority implement any agreed customer service improvements. Always act within the limits of your own authority.

**6 Obtaining customer feedback**

gathering\_customer\_feedback\_03.jpg

Customer feedback is an important tool in evaluating and improving customer service. To enable you to effectively evaluate customer service you need to understand the measurement tools relevant for gathering, analysing and interpreting customer feedback. These include:

* online
* written - emails and letters of complaint
* verbal - face to face and by phone
* text
* social media - comments on twitter and facebook
* surveys - online and paper-based
* questionnaires - comments and suggestion boxes.

Feedback can be gathered formally or informally. Formal feedback gives useful information on an organisation’s performance:

* formal feedback is structured, written feedback, actively sought by the organisation
* formal feedback techniques include:
  + questionnaires
  + interviews/surveys
  + loyalty cards.

Informal feedback is often the source of information on individuals’ performance, and is obtained where a customer offers feedback without being asked, e.g. through:

* online reviews/forums
* social media sites
* comment cards
* spontaneous comments
* complaints.

Informal feedback should be reported and shared.

The purpose of encouraging customers to provide feedback is to:

* continuously improve
* be responsive to the changing needs of customers in order to maintain their loyalty
* identify if customer service standards are slipping
* prevent a situation becoming a problem that has to be solved
* identify potential problems, particularly with processes
* rectify repeated problems
* show the customer they are valued.

**The importance of feedback**

Organisations have many methods of monitoring customer service, but the most important is customer feedback. If the customers are not happy, the organisation will find itself in trouble.

**7 Loyalty cards**

organisational\_systems\_resources\_book3\_07.jpg

Loyalty cards are also used by organisations to collate information and feedback from customers. They:

* create a database on the organisation's customers
* record details of customer purchases
* identify customer purchasing trends
* allow the organisation to target promotional offers to specific customers
* encourage loyalty.

**8 Uses of feedback**

* actively seek customers’ opinion as to how service could be improved
* share feedback
* act on customer feedback.

Uses\_of\_feedback.png

**9 Individual performance review**

effective\_feedback\_12.jpg

As well as customer feedback you will also have regular performance reviews or appraisals with your line manager. Customer feedback may form part of your appraisal. During an appraisal you can expect your line manager to look back on your achievements and agree training to improve your overall performance moving forward.

You can also expect targets to be set and a future appraisal date will be agreed.

**10 Sales/performance targets**

measuring\_organisational\_effectiveness\_04.jpg

* Performance targets are a simple way to monitor the performance of an individual or team
* Targets are set based on an individual’s and /or team’s past performance. Your targets may also be set to meet the company’s targets set by management
* Your manager will always monitor team and individual targets and they may adjust them. If a target is changed you can expect to be given reasons for the change.

**11 SMART Targets**

Principles of target setting are outlined in the SMART method:

measuring\_organisational\_effectiveness\_05.jpg

**12 Competitor benchmarking**

measuring\_organisational\_effectiveness\_06.jpg

Companies will always keep a close eye on their competitors. They will try to gather as much information about each other as possible for example:

* a mystery shopper - may test the customer service
* pricing - ensuring the prices of similar products and services are similar
* sales/ special offers
* monitor advertising campaigns
* published records – all companies have to publish their accounts and profits.

**13 Methods of identifying service failures**

measuring\_organisational\_effectiveness\_08.jpg

**Complaints** must be recorded and followed up properly following your company policy.

**Customer feedback** can be in any form – formal or informal. Customer comments or suggestions do not have be complaints.

**Market research** is a useful indication of customer wants, needs and expectations and can be matched to the current service offer.

**Sales figures** can highlight failures because the actual sales are less than the forecast or required sales.

**Product returns** can be used to identify if the same products are being returned consistently and for the same reasons.

**Staff monitoring** within performance reviews and sales/performance targets.

**Mystery shoppers** - undercover quality assurance officers can check service from a customer’s point of view, giving valuable insight into how the organisation delivers its offer.

**Customer focus groups** are a way of gaining feedback into what customers think about an organisation and how they could improve. New ideas can be generated and highlighted.

**14 Other considerations**

gathering\_customer\_feedback\_06.jpg

**Policies and procedures**

When gathering any feedback, all organisations will have policies and procedures which must be adhered to. These policies and procedures are in place to explain:

* the roles and responsibilities
* the limits of authority
* how to handle of customer information.

These policies will also explain the service offer that the organisation will provide.

**Legal requirements**

When gathering any customer feedback organisations must consider the legal requirements of gathering, storing, and using information from their customers. This legal requirement is written in to the Data Protection Act.

**Ethical requirements**

Customer feedback must be gathered according to the organisation's policies and procedures. Included in this is the organisation's ethics - the way the business is going to ‘do the right thing’.

**Preparatory activities**

**Question 1**

Top of Form

Recognising the different roles within your team and how you all fit together is vital in understanding team dynamics and communicating effectively. Research [Belbin Team Roles](https://skills.cgkpivot.com/mod/book/view.php?id=13160&chapterid=7475) and look at the members of your team to see who, if anyone, is fulfilling each role. Remember to consider your own role. Download and complete [this worksheet](https://content.cgkpivot.com/documents/CSP/Belbin_Team_Roles.pdf" \t "_blank) and then upload your completed worksheet below. Once downloaded, select 'save as' and rename the worksheet so that your changes are saved.

Bottom of Form

**Question 2**

Teams and groups are actually two different things. Knowing whether you are working in a team or a group should affect how you communicate with your colleagues. Research and list **five** key differences between teams and groups.

**Question 3**

Do you think you work in a group or a team? Give reasons for your answer.

**Question 4**

How will this knowledge affect how or what you communicate with the rest of your colleagues?

**Question 5**

In your own words, explain why it is important to communicate effectively with your colleagues to ensure that you offer quality customer service.

**Question 6**

Obtaining customer feedback is a vital part of improving a customer service offer. Research a change that has taken place in your own organisation as a result of customer feedback. Your manager or mentor might be able to suggest some examples.

If there are no suitable examples in your own organisation, research how other companies have made changes as a result of either positive or negative customer feedback. For example, the introduction of 'New Coke' in 1985 by Coca-Cola, and its later scrapping. Explain how customer feedback influenced the decision to revert to the original name.

**Question 7**

Top of Form

Research and evaluate **two different methods** of collecting both **formal** and **informal** customer feedback that you could use within your organisation. Download and complete[this worksheet](https://content.cgkpivot.com/documents/CSP/Formal_and_informal_customer_feedback.pdf" \t "_blank)and then upload your completed worksheet below. Once downloaded, select 'save as' and rename the worksheet so that your changes are saved.

Bottom of Form

**Next steps**

Now you have completed this section select the **SUBMIT TASK FOR REVIEW** button below and your Assessor will review and give you feedback. If you have any questions, please contact your Assessor via the messages function.