

How Good is Your Team?

A Guide for Team Members

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About this workbook

The contribution that team working can make to the effective delivery of quality health care was emphasised in the NHS Plan¹ and more recently in *Shifting the Balance of Power within the NHS: Securing Delivery*² (July 2001). The emphasis is on 'trusts devolving greater responsibility to clinical teams and the growth of clinical networks across NHS organisations' p6.

This workbook has been developed to help teams working in the NHS meet the new challenges they face. It offers guidance and support to team members on how to work together more effectively.

Information is provided about team working and the general conditions required to promote effective team working.

An audit tool is provided that can be used to assess how well your team is working together.

Practical guidance is provided on how you can develop and improve team working.

What is a team?

'A team is a group of individuals who work together to produce products or deliver services for which they are mutually accountable. The team members share goals and are held mutually accountable for meeting them, they are interdependent in their accomplishment, and they affect the results through their interactions with one another. Because the team is held collectively accountable, the work of integrating with one another is included among the responsibilities of each member'³

Teams have the following characteristics:

- Team members have shared objectives in relation to their work.
- Team members interact with each other in order to achieve these shared objectives.
- Team members have more or less well defined roles, some of which are differentiated from each other.
- Teams have an organisational identity – they have a defined organisational function and are recognised as a team by others outside the team.
- The team task performance has consequences that affect others inside or outside the organisation.

Why work in teams?

A team based working system in an organisation is a powerful way to achieve a range of performance benefits. In the National Health Service it has long been argued that team working has an important contribution to make to the effective delivery of health care⁴ and there have been repeated initiatives aimed at promoting team working^{5,6}.

In the NHS Plan¹ the need to break down barriers between staff was emphasised so as to tackle the inefficiencies in working practices identified.

'Old-fashioned demarcations between staff mean some patients see a procession of health professionals ... Information is not shared and investigations are repeated ... unnecessary boundaries exist between the professions which hold back staff from achieving their true potential.' p27

'Throughout the NHS old hierarchical ways of working are giving way to more flexible team working between different clinical professions.' p82

Research Evidence on the Value of Team Working

There is a growing body of research evidence that team working can make a substantial contribution to improvements in quality of patient care, the efficient use of resources and staff satisfaction and well-being.

The findings from the Health Care Team Effectiveness Project⁷, a national study of team working in primary, secondary and community mental health care, and research on team working in breast cancer care⁸, show that:

- Health care teams that function effectively provide higher quality patient care and introduce more innovations in patient care.
- Members of teams that work well together have relatively low stress levels.
- In primary health care particularly, a diverse range of professional groups working together is associated with higher levels of innovation in patient care.
- Good quality meetings, communication and integration processes in health care teams contribute to the introduction of new and improved ways of delivering patient care.
- Clear leadership contributes to effective team processes, to high quality patient care and to innovation.

Team working in primary care has been found to improve health delivery and staff motivation⁹ improve the deployment of skills and expertise¹⁰ and improve patients' access to primary care services. Effective team working can reduce the general practitioners' workload so increasing the number of patients seen, and enabling doctors to see patients for longer¹¹. There is evidence that giving teams the autonomy to determine their own working practices and procedures results in cost savings. In hospital based teams, the introduction of 'shared care', a form of team nursing, lead to reductions in the costs per patient stay, and average length of stay. In addition, there was a substantial reduction in sick leave and a 97% reduction in contract labour costs¹².

Conditions for effective team working

There are a wide range of factors that influence whether a team is effective, in addition to the skills, knowledge and experience of the individual team members.

Key elements are:

- Individuals should feel that they are important to the success of the team. Team member roles should be developed in ways that make them indispensable and essential.
- Individual roles in the team should be meaningful and rewarding. We are more committed and creative if the tasks we perform are interesting and challenging.
- The team as a whole should also have interesting tasks to perform.
- Individual contributions should be identifiable and subject to evaluation. People have to feel not only that their work is indispensable, but also that other team members can see and acknowledge the contribution they make.
- Above all there should be clear, shared team goals with built-in performance feedback. Research evidence shows consistently that where people are set clear targets to achieve, their performance is generally improved. For the same reasons it is important for the team as a whole to have clear team goals with performance feedback.

Additional factors influencing team effectiveness are:

- An organisational context that supports team working.
- Effective team leadership.

Using the team working guide

This team working guide* provides tools that your team can use to assess how well it is working together and practical advice and guidance for team members which will help you to work together more effectively.

It is suggested that the team use the guide as follows:

- Each team member, including the team's manager/leaders, individually completes the team working questionnaire, and then combines these individual scores to calculate the team's score.
- The team identifies which aspects they consider as priority team development areas.
- Using the information in Section 2, the team chooses appropriate team development activities.



- The team develops an action plan that specifies how and when the development activities will be carried out.
- After carrying out the development activities, team members again complete the team working questionnaire to assess progress.

* This guide has been based on materials used in the following publications:

Markiewicz, L. and West, M.A. (1996) The Team Tool Kit. Grampian Enterprises and The Engineering Construction Industry Training Board.

Markiewicz, L. and West, M.A (2001) Developing Team Based Working. British Psychological Society.

West, M.A. (1994) Effective Team Work. British Psychological Society.

Section 1

Team Working Questionnaire

Listed below are a number of statements that could describe a team. Indicate how accurately you think each statement describes the team in which you currently work, or where you work most of the time.

	Very inaccurate description 1	Inaccurate description 2	Somewhat accurate 3	Accurate description 4	Very accurate description 5
1. In this team we are clear about what we are trying to achieve.					
2. We know we can rely on one another in this team.					
3. We have lively debates about how best to do the work.					
4. We meet together sufficiently frequently to ensure effective communication and co-operation.					
5. People in the team are quick to offer help to try out new ways of doing things.					
6. We all influence the final decisions made in the team.					
7. We are careful to keep each other informed about work issues.					
8. There is a feeling of trust and safety in this team.					
9. We are enthusiastic about innovation in this team.					
10. Team members are committed to achieving the team's objectives.					
11. We can safely discuss errors and mistakes in the team.					
12. We agree in the team about what are our team objectives.					
13. There is a climate of constructive criticism in this team.					
14. We support each other in ideas for new and improved ways of doing the team's work.					
15. We work supportively together to get the job done.					
16. Everyone in the team contributes to decision making.					

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Team Working Questionnaire - Scoring

Team members calculate their individual score for each area by writing the rating (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) for each question on the scoring sheet. Add these together to get the total score for each area, and then divide by the number of questions to calculate the average.

For example, to calculate the average score for the area 'Clarity of commitment to team objectives', you add together the ratings for questions 1, 10 and 12 and then divide by the number of questions, 3.

Individual team member scoring sheet

	Question		Question
Clarity and commitment to team objectives	1 ___	Focus on quality	3 ___
	10 ___		11 ___
	12 ___		13 ___
	Total ___		15 ___
	Average ___		Total ___
	(Totalyby 3)		Average ___ (Totalyby 4)
Decision making and communication	4 ___	Support for innovation	2 ___
	6 ___		5 ___
	7 ___		9 ___
	8 ___		14 ___
	16 ___		Total ___
	Total ___		Average ___ (Totalyby 6)
Average ___	(Totalyby 5)		

Calculate a total score for the team as a whole for each area. Add together the average scores for each area from every individual team member. Note the totals for the team in each area on the following table in the column 'total for team'.

Calculate the average score for the team on each area by dividing the total for team by the number of team members who completed the questionnaire. Note the average on the table in the column 'team average'.

Team total scoring sheet

	Total for team	Team average
Clarity and commitment to team objectives		
Decision making and communication		
Focus on quality		
Support for innovation		
Total scores		

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Team Working Questionnaire – Interpreting Scores

Clarity and commitment to team objectives

The clarity and commitment to objectives questions assess the extent to which teams are clear about their work-related objectives, the extent to which they perceive objectives to be worthwhile, and whether team members share these objectives.

Low scale score (below 2.1)	High scale score (above 3.4)
The team lacks a clear, shared, attainable vision/set of objectives that is valued by all team members.	The team has a clear, shared, attainable vision/set of objectives which is valued by all team members.

A score of 2.1 or lower suggests that your team might benefit from development activities that will improve clarity and commitment to team objectives.

Decision making and communication

The decision making and communication questions assess the extent to which members of the team feel they have influence over decisions made in the team, the degree to which team members interact with each other on a regular basis, and the adequacy of information sharing amongst members of the team.

Low scale score (below 3.0)	High scale score (above 4.4)
The team meets only infrequently and/or team members participate only partially in decision making. There is a lack of trust between team members. Individuals do not feel safe to make proposals to the team. Individuals may not be contributing fully toward team membership.	The team meets regularly and all members participate in decision making; individuals feel safe to make proposals to the team. Team members trust one another and participate fully to achieve the team's aims and objectives.

A score of 3.0 or below suggests that your team might benefit from development activities that will improve communication, information sharing and decision making in the team.

Focus on quality

Focus on quality is the extent to which team members engage in debate and review processes to achieve excellence in decisions and actions that they take to provide services. It is a measure of the degree to which team members feel that discussion and debate within the team is constructive, and that team members feel able to engage in the process of debate without being concerned that their contribution might be ridiculed or ignored.

Low scale score (below 1.9)	High scale score (above 3.8)
The team is not fully committed to achieving the highest performance possible. Team members may not critically appraise their work. Help in developing new ideas may not be readily available.	The team is fully committed to achieving the highest performance possible. Team members critically appraise their work. Help in developing new ideas is readily available.

A score of 1.9 or below suggests that your team might benefit from development activities that will improve the team's ability to constructively debate and review.

Support for Innovation

Support for Innovation is the degree to which there is verbal and practical support for the development of new ideas. Questions on this measure refer to sharing resources, giving time, and co-operating in implementing new and improved ways of doing things.

Measure	Low scale score (below 3.2)	High scale score (above 4.4)
Support for innovation	Little articulated or enacted support for innovation is given. Stability is favoured above change. The team commits few resources to innovation.	Sufficient articulated and enacted support for innovation is given. Innovation is favoured above stability. The team commits adequate resources to the development of innovation.

A score of 3.2 or below suggests that your team might benefit from development activities that will raise the team's awareness of the importance of innovation and improve the support team members provide to promote innovation.

Taking Action

Section 2 provides information that can be used to help the team address the development needs identified. It is important to develop an action plan that clearly states what the team will try and achieve, the steps that it will take, the time frame within which action will be taken, and who is responsible for taking action forward.

Where possible the team should get support from someone outside the team to help with implementing development activities. It can be useful to have the contribution of someone outside the team who has a more objective view, who can help the team if they get stuck by offering fresh ideas and suggestions, and can help if there are differences of opinion in the team.

Section 2 Team Development Techniques

A useful starting point is for team members to meet and discuss the results from the Team Working Questionnaire.

It is suggested that you consider the main strengths that emerged and, so the team has a clear idea of what works well that they can build on, consider what contributes to these aspects of team working.

Also consider the main areas of weakness and discuss why these have emerged.

- What can the team do to address these weaknesses?
- What outside help is there available to the team?
- If some of the team's weaknesses are a result of factors over which the team has very little control, how can these be addressed? Who might be able to help the team tackle these?

Clarity and commitment to team objectives

- Having clear, shared objectives is a crucial element of effective team working.
- To improve this aspect of team functioning the purposes, values and objectives of the team need to be clearly communicated and understood through regular reviews of goals.
- Objectives need to be stated in terms that clearly communicate what the team is trying to achieve.
- It must be possible to measure team performance against these objectives.



The following are examples of objectives that have been developed for primary health care teams:

- Promote, maintain and improve health of the local population.
- Enable personal and community responsibility for individual health.
- Use the team's resources efficiently and effectively.
- Enable team member personal and professional development.

It is also crucial for achieving effective team working that each member of the team is clear about the contribution she/he makes to achieving the team's objectives and that team members understand the contributions that other team members make. Box 1 outlines a role negotiation exercise that can be used to clarify roles in the team.

Box 1: Role Negotiation Exercise

Step 1

Each team member lists his or her objectives and principle activities on a piece of flipchart paper.

Step 2

Each piece of flipchart paper is hung on the wall around the room and team members examine each role, only asking questions that clarify objectives and roles.

Step 3

On a piece of paper each team member writes down for other members of the team (a) what they would like each person to do less, (b) do more, (c) maintain at the present level of activity.

Step 4

Working in pairs, team members discuss and negotiate each others' requests on (a), (b) and (c). This is a highly participative exercise and teams may need help, particularly if pairs find it difficult to reach agreement.

Through role negotiation the needs of individual roles are met, and the activities of team members become dovetailed more into meeting the objectives for the team as a whole. Team members also develop a better understanding of each others' contribution to the team.

Decision making and communication

Decision making and communication in the team can be improved by using the following techniques:

- **Communication Audit:** This involves analysing the patterns of communication within the team, identifying who provides who with information, and evaluating any shortfalls in information sharing between team members. A tool that can be used to review communication is provided in Box 2.
- **Review of Decision making Procedures:** The team should regularly review: how and where different types of decisions (operational, strategic, clinical) are made; to what extent team members are consulted/are able to have their views taken into account about decisions that affect their work; to what extent team members can contribute their relevant knowledge and experience to decision-making processes; and which decisions should be delayed until all alternatives have been considered. The team also need to determine which team members should take executive decisions on behalf of the team, and in which areas.
- **Team Meetings Review:** Without regular meetings, both formal and informal, important information is not exchanged. It is not possible to specify any ideal frequency of interaction; however, teams should meet minimally once every two weeks, in order to up-date one another on developments. It is also important to review the processes in team meetings. Effective meetings have: a clear purpose and agenda; one person taking responsibility for ensuring that agenda items are covered, and for managing time; and are managed so that all those who attend are able to make a contribution to the discussion, irrespective of status.

Box 2: Information sharing in the team

What information do you currently receive from each team member?

Name of team member	Content of information	Current medium eg email, face-to-face	Current frequency
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			

What information would you like to receive from each team member?

Name of team member	Content of information	Current medium eg email, face-to-face	Current frequency
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			

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Focus of quality

To achieve this it is suggested that your team focuses on the following areas:

- **Excellence:** A process of constructive controversy within teams promotes a concern for excellence in task outcomes. Constructive controversy is where a climate of co-operation and trust exists, and critical review is encouraged. Exploring opposing opinions carefully and discussing them in a co-operative context, improves the quality of decision-making and group effectiveness dramatically. Box 3 outlines steps for developing constructive controversy.
- **Interpersonal Process Review:** For team members to be able to contribute fully to the discussions about how the team carries out its work it is important that team members feel that there is a climate of interpersonal safety; that they can express their views free from the possibility of attack or ridicule. The aim of this review would be to promote that climate of safety, with team members encouraging others to offer their views and then supportively exploring those ideas.
- **Appraisal:** The team will be more effective if members regularly take time out (say every 6 months) to review the team's objectives, strategies, processes and performance, in a critical and open way. They should then adapt and change these aspects of the team's functioning as necessary in order to continually improve efficiency and effectiveness. Action groups should be formed to implement decisions and, thereby, ensure that reviews lead to real change and discernible outcomes.
- **Ideation:** Problem solving in teams is more effective when the approach taken is to generate a range of possible solutions, rather than just seeking 'one way out'. Techniques such as brainstorming are best used, and all ideas should be welcomed and encouraged.

- **Reflexivity:** This is the extent to which a team reflects upon objectives, and considers appropriate strategies and team processes for achieving these objectives. Reflexivity can be developed in the team by using events which occur as learning opportunities, such as: errors and failures, team conflicts, team successes, team member changes, organisational changes, changes in the services the team has to provide. Research evidence shows teams that are more reflexive are more effective.

Box 3: Developing Constructive Controversy

1. Elaborating positions

Firstly team members should carefully describe their positions, explaining how they have come to their decisions in relation to any particular issue within the team. They should also indicate to what extent they are confident or uncertain about the position they have adopted.

2. Searching for understanding

Those in the team with opposing viewpoints should seek more information about the others' positions and attempt to restate them as clearly as possible. There should be attempts to explore areas of common ground in opposing positions along with an emphasis on personal regard for individuals whose positions oppose their own. This will lead to greater creativity and more productive outcomes.

3. Integrating perspectives

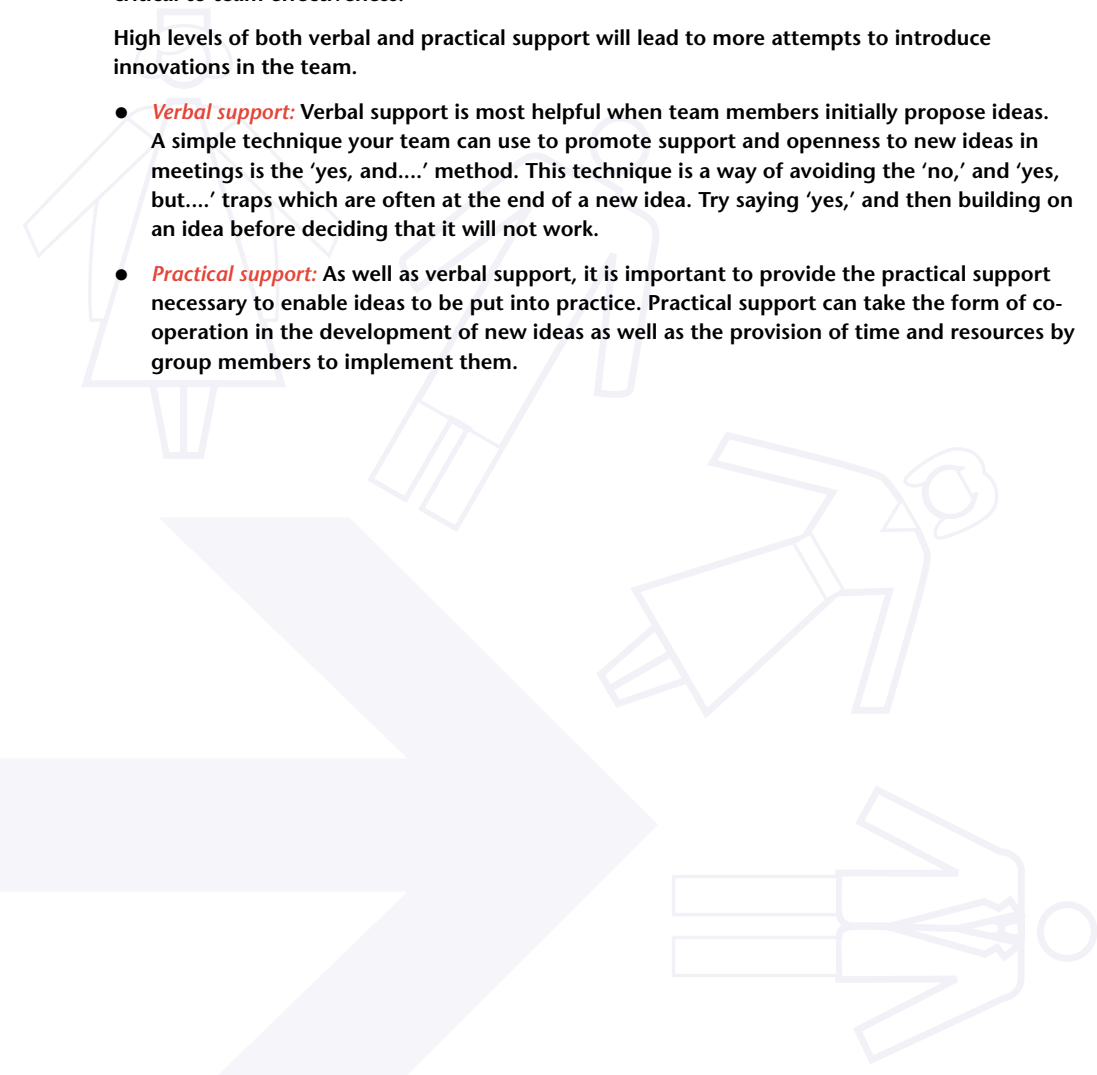
Team members should encourage integration by working to resolve controversy based on the principle of excellence in decision making. Attempts to influence team members towards a solution should be on the basis of shared, rational understanding rather than attempted dominance. Finally, team members should strive for consensus by combining team ideas where ever possible rather than using techniques to reduce controversy, such as majority voting.

Support for Innovation

There is constant change within the NHS – changes in policy, procedures, systems of organising and medical practices. Teams, therefore, are required to be innovative, adaptable and essentially creative in order to accommodate these changes. Support for innovation in the team is therefore critical to team effectiveness.

High levels of both verbal and practical support will lead to more attempts to introduce innovations in the team.

- **Verbal support:** Verbal support is most helpful when team members initially propose ideas. A simple technique your team can use to promote support and openness to new ideas in meetings is the 'yes, and....' method. This technique is a way of avoiding the 'no,' and 'yes, but....' traps which are often at the end of a new idea. Try saying 'yes,' and then building on an idea before deciding that it will not work.
- **Practical support:** As well as verbal support, it is important to provide the practical support necessary to enable ideas to be put into practice. Practical support can take the form of co-operation in the development of new ideas as well as the provision of time and resources by group members to implement them.



Section 3

Sources of Information

These two books provide additional sources of information and ideas that the team can use to help further develop and improve the way you work together.

Charles C. Manz & Henry P. Sims (1995) *Businesses without Bosses: How Self Managing Teams are Building High Performance*. John Wiley: New York.

Michael A. West (1994) *Effective Team Work*. British Psychological Society.

Another team working guide is available:

- Developing Team Working in Health Care: A Guide for Managers

Information on how to access this guide can be obtained from:

www.aston.ac.uk/achsorstop

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