The importance of teamwork

“Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life.”
- Confucius

Teamwork can be defined as an activity or a set of inter-related activities done by more than one person to meet a common goal.

T – Together  E – Everyone  A – Achieves  M – More

It is inevitable in life that you will need to learn how to work as an effective team member. In fact, your success at working as part of a team will form an integral part of your overall career success.

In the annual Graduate Careers Australia, Graduate Outlook Survey, teamwork is consistently ranked in the top 10 skills that employers want.

What does it mean to be an effective team member?

It means you can:

- work respectfully with people from diverse backgrounds
- define the roles and responsibilities of each member in the team
- clearly express your ideas, listen and be heard
- be open, honest and receptive to others' opinions, even if they differ from your own
- identify the strengths of all members of a team, including your own
- be kind, patient and considerate
- be relied upon to complete work independently
- be assertive if problems arise, and liaise considerately with others to resolve them
- collaborate, coach, give and receive feedback with other team members
- celebrate and encourage the achievements of your team.

Team roles

Belbin Associates, who specialise in team role development, have categorised nine different roles people will usually assume in a team.

One role will come more naturally to you than another, but usually we are a combination of roles.

Visit www.belbin.com to profile yourself or your team.

**Action Oriented Roles**

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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shaper</td>
<td>Challenges the team to improve. Has the drive to ensure the team keeps focused and maintains momentum, but can be seen as aggressive and offend others in their attempts to get things done.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementer</td>
<td>Puts ideas into action. Can be relied upon to turn the ideas into a practical plan and carry it out efficiently. Might be inflexible and slow to relinquish their plans in favour of any changes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completer/Finisher</td>
<td>Ensures thorough, timely completion. Best used at the end of a task, to “polish” and complete final edit of the work, but can be anxious and sometimes accused of extreme perfectionism.</td>
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**People Oriented Roles**

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Acts as a chairperson. Focuses on the team’s objectives, draws out team members and can delegate work appropriately but may be seen to offload their personal share of the work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Worker</td>
<td>Encourages cooperation. Diplomatic and cooperative, helps the team to gel, but might become indecisive when unpopular decisions need to be made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Investigator</td>
<td>Explores outside opportunities and develops contacts. Naturally outgoing. May be overly optimistic and can lose interest after initial enthusiasm passes.</td>
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Thought Oriented Roles

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plant</td>
<td>Presents new ideas and approaches. Highly creative and good at solving problems, but may be unorthodox and forgetful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor/Evaluator</td>
<td>Analyses the options. Provides a logical eye, can make impartial judgments and weigh up options in an objective way but can be overly critical, slow moving and uninspiring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Provides specialised skills. Provides knowledge and skills in a key area, but has a tendency to focus narrowly on their own subject of choice.</td>
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Tips for managing conflict in teams*

It is inevitable that some conflict will be experienced when a team works together. The following tips will help you manage it.

1. Expect conflict in teams.
2. Be proactive and have strategies in place to manage conflict. Please see www.mindtools.com
3. Embrace diversity and use it to your advantage — a rich mix of skills, experiences and knowledge can lead to highly innovative outcomes.
4. Write a team agreement.
5. Reach a consensus on team expectations from the outset and document the agreed policies and procedures.
6. Share leadership roles across the team.
7. Keep communication channels open and establish routines for meetings.
8. Reflect regularly on possible sources of conflict and be solutions-oriented.
9. Focus on the goals of the team and be prepared to compromise.

*Adapted from the Career Development Program of Queensland University of Technology http://qut.edu.au/, available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Australia Licence.

Checklist – teamwork

☐ I have worked through the Teamwork module on the SCU Career Development Program.
☐ I understand how important working as an effective team member is to my career.
☐ I can provide examples of when and how I have worked effectively in a team (at uni and/or in the workplace).
☐ I have identified the individual role or roles I usually play in a team and how these roles can be perceived by other team members, and visited www.belbin.com
☐ I can appreciate the roles my other team members naturally play in the team and how we can effectively use our individual strengths to the team’s advantage.
☐ I remain mindful of how I communicate with others in a team, while being assertive and expressing my thoughts and ideas.
☐ I work at being cooperative, respectful, patient and considerate of others’ ideas even if they differ from my own.
☐ I can be relied upon to complete my share of the work on time.
☐ I understand that conflict is common in teams and know what steps we can take as a team to help resolve it.
☐ I have visited www.mindtools.com for further information.

Where to find more help

- SCU Career Development Program on MySCU – learn.scu.edu.au
- Visit careerhub.scu.edu.au for job vacancies, events and resources
- Email for a careers consultation: careers@scu.edu.au
- For further resources and fact sheets go to scu.edu.au/careers