

4 Keys for Effective Teams

Working in schools can be stressful!

These articles are intended to help the great people who work in schools.

Key points

4 key components of effective teams are **PURPOSE, PROCESSES, TRUST and LEADERSHIP**

Teamwork is essential in schools. Each year more is expected of schools, with limited resources. School staff must respond to complex issues and difficult circumstances. It is essential that staff in schools work together to co-operate and share their skills and expertise to ensure that the best possible decisions are made and programs are provided. Good teamwork is essential yet many staff feel frustrated when relying on others and are tempted to do it themselves.

There are four key components that are essential for teams to work effectively -

PURPOSE – Effective teams have a clear purpose and maintain focus on that outcome. Team members need to be aware of what they are trying to achieve and have a clear purpose

PROCESSES – Clearly defined processes ensure that the team works efficiently and effectively. Timely meetings, agreed processes for how decisions are made and suitable processes for recording decisions are essential.

TRUST – Team members communicate well and trust each other to contribute to achieving the team's intended purpose.

LEADERSHIP – Effective teams are well led to maintain focus on the purpose of the group and the task at hand.

The four components are inter-related. The absence of one component impacts on the effectiveness of the team.

Where teams don't understand and commit to a clear and agreed PURPOSE, team members will lack commitment. If team members are not clear on the team's purpose, the work of the team will be seen by staff as a low priority. Attendance and engagement will therefore be poor if the team lacks purpose.

Effective teams have PROCESSES in place to ensure that team members are clear on their roles and responsibilities and actions are carried out. Processes ensure that the decisions and agreements decided by the group are put in place. Once team members have made a decision, it is essential that the next steps, who is responsible and by when are made clear.

Where processes are not clearly defined, teams are often inefficient. Meetings will lack focus. Team discussions will appear to be unproductive and go nowhere. Often topics continue to be revisited on numerous occasions, covering areas that have been discussed in previous meetings.

Where TRUST is lacking, team members don't communicate effectively. The 'elephants in the room' are not addressed and discussions tend to focus on superficial matters only. Often a symptom of poor team communication is that opinions on significant issues are discussed in the staff car park, rather than in the meetings. Establishing trust and having open, real conversations with the right people is essential to operating as a truly effective team.

The key role of LEADERS in effective teams is to ensure that team members maintain focus on the PURPOSE, apply the agreed PROCESSES and build TRUST through open communication. One of the key responsibilities of the leader is to ensure that the team stay focused on the task at hand. Whilst the team leader doesn't have to be a hierarchical appointment, the most effective teams have leaders that ensure they remain 'on-task'.

All four aspects are needed for teams to be effective.

Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.

Henry Ford

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