Teamwork and Leadership

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of a continent.
—John Donne, English poet, 1572–1631

In this text, you’ll explore answers to these questions:

▶ What is a team and why are teams important?  p. 3
▶ How do you and others interact in a team?  p. 5
▶ What is leadership?  p. 10
▶ How can a team operate effectively?  p. 13
▶ What strategies help teams achieve their goals?  p. 15
For each statement, circle the number that best describes how often it applies to you.

1 = never   2 = seldom   3 = sometimes   4 = often   5 = always

1. I tend toward working together rather than competing.  
2. I can accurately "read" people's emotions by their facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice.  
3. I am comfortable working with people whose personalities differ from mine.  
4. I am aware of my skills and talents and am comfortable offering them to others.  
5. I enjoy working in a group.  
6. I communicate my ideas clearly to others.  
7. I am able to motivate people toward a common goal.  
8. I meet deadlines and follow through on tasks.  
9. When I have a vision of what is possible, I convey it effectively to others.  
10. I act towards others as I want them to act towards me.

Each of the topics in these statements is covered in this text. Note those statements for which you circled a 3 or lower. Skim this text to see where those topics appear, and pay special attention to them as you read, learn, and apply new strategies.

Anna couldn’t wait to start her new job at ParaTech, Inc. As a programmer, she figured she’d have plenty of time to focus on writing code, researching new technologies on the Web, attending technical conferences, and keeping her Facebook page updated. However, she did not realize how much time she would have to spend collaborating with team members and attending meetings. Suddenly her focus and drive seemed to be a liability. When she interrupted people in the meetings to get them back on track, they didn’t appreciate it. When she tried to hide out in her cubicle and get some work done by herself, her manager said she wasn’t a team player.

If only her manager would let her focus on her part of the project and leave her alone. Why did she have to work with the rest of the team? In fact, Anna was pretty sure that she could do a better job working by herself than working with the team. After all, that’s what she did in her college coursework. She had done well because she knew how to hole up in her room, work hard, and study. She rarely made time for socializing and extracurricular activities because she found books and computer programs a lot easier to understand than people.

Yet here she was in her first professional job, realizing that working hard by herself wasn’t getting her anywhere. She wondered how she was ever going to get the hang of working with a team. And she knew that if she didn’t, she’d probably be out of a job.

Like Anna, no matter how hardworking, brilliant, or good at problem solving you are, you can’t do it all by yourself. In today’s world, projects are usually too big to be completed by one person, and problems are often too complex...
What is a team and why are teams important?

People form groups of all types and sizes. However, not every group is a team. Consider this definition:

A team is a group of people working together towards a common goal.1

In today’s world, almost everything is accomplished by teams. Large companies often use project teams that span the globe. Small companies use teams to ensure that their products and services reach their customers. Non-profit organizations put teams together to accomplish goals. Instructors teach and develop curriculum in teams, and work in teams with counselors, administrators, and other academic employees. Government workers from local to national levels work in teams. Aware of the importance of working with others, academic institutions have increased the teamwork component of many courses, and students work together both in person and online to create documents, put together presentations, and complete projects.

The prime advantage to working in teams is the ability to combine skills and talents. An academic or work team benefits from a wide array of skills that no single student or employee could possess alone, from analytical skills to marketing skills to technical skills and everything in between. Complex projects at school or in the workplace demand all of these skills, especially when things need to get done in a specific time frame.

Savvy employers look for employees who are good team players. However, working on a team is not always easy, as you can tell by the disadvantages that appear in Key 1.

Teamwork and collaboration

Collaboration is the lifeblood of any team. Even when project teams are not large or global, collaboration is essential. Collaboration is the act of working effectively with others to achieve a common goal. It needs to be built on trust, which can only be achieved through honesty, openness, consistency, and respect.

1. Honesty means that team members tell one another the truth, not just what each wants to hear. They feel comfortable disclosing problems so that other members can join in the problem-solving process and help overcome obstacles.
2. **Openness** means that team members are not afraid to say what is on their minds; they do not fear repercussions for communicating their thoughts. They share information because they are confident that people won’t make fun of their ideas.

3. **Consistency** means that each team member works, and interacts, in a consistent manner. This allows members of the team to know what to expect from one another. Progress toward a goal can suffer when team members are inconsistent with their work, meeting attendance, communication, or even mood.

4. **Respect** means that team members see one another as vital parts of the team. They speak and behave respectfully toward one another. They listen to everyone’s ideas without judgment, and offer constructive criticism.

To get an idea of what the four components of trust look like, consider two teams, as in Key 2. One operates on distrust and competition (Team A), and the other operates on trust and collaboration (Team B). Both teams consist of people who have never before worked together. And both teams have been tasked with coming up with a “give to get” idea that will attract more customers to buy a new cell phone product. Which team is most likely to get the job done, on time and with good quality results?

What all this means is that in a collaborative environment founded on trust, team members can stay focused, communicate more clearly, and help one another succeed, which consistently leads to better outcomes.

The idea of collaboration may take some time to get used to in a culture of competition fostered by sports, media, and business. But in the end, the benefits of collaboration almost always trump the results of a focus on competition. Alfie Cohen, a well-known author of books on human behavior and education, conducted over 400 studies to research the effects of competition on classrooms and organizations. The results? (1) Competition is not required for optimal results and (2) optimal results usually require an absence of competition. Cohen found that in the workplace when people started working together, rather than working against each other, productivity increased dramatically.
How do you and others interact in a team?

Now that you have a sense of what a team is and what teamwork involves, it's time to look at personality types that make up a team. Start with your own personality, because an important step in the process of understanding others is to understand yourself.

Take a look at the four most common workplace personalities. These personalities also apply to working in groups on academic projects and appear in different quadrants of Key 3. Your position in a quadrant depends on your level of comfort communicating with others and on how people-oriented you are.

Descriptions of the different personality types follow. As you read them, think about which personality sounds like you. Remember, no one is ever 100 percent one personality. Each person generally has one or two quadrants in which they are most...
comfortable, but may have elements of other quadrants and can operate in other modes when necessary.

- **Driver.** These individuals are action-oriented and more concerned with results than with people. In general, people who are drivers are good communicators and are adept at telling you what they want and when they want it. Conversely, they do not tend to be the best listeners. Here are some of their typical qualities.
  - Decisive
  - Direct
  - Assertive
  - Risk taker
  - Competitive
  - Independent
  - Demanding

- **Analytical.** These individuals are data-oriented and more concerned with facts than with people. In general, people who are analytical are skilled at organizing information and analyzing it in a logical manner. They are usually good with details and appreciate structure. Their communication skills are often not well-developed and they tend to have difficulty making decisions because they tend to need “more data.” Here are some of their typical qualities.
  - Precise
  - Orderly
  - Deliberate
  - Cautious
  - Logical
  - Systematic
  - Controlled
**Amiable.** These individuals are people-oriented. They are very concerned with how people get along. In general, people who are amiable are dependable, loyal, and easy-going. They do not enjoy dealing with hard facts and impersonal details, and prefer interacting with people. They are usually described as warm and sensitive, and know how to make decisions based on how they feel. Here are some of their typical qualities.

- Loyal
- Sympathetic
- Empathetic
- Supportive
- Patient
- Considerate
- Trusting

**Expressive.** These individuals are expression-oriented. They enjoy coming up with ideas and sharing them with others. They are typically very social and like helping others. They like to express themselves verbally and can be quite dramatic. Although they are good idea-generators, they are often poor at following through or making decisions. Here are some of their typical qualities.

- Verbal
- Motivating
- Enthusiastic
- Charming
- Influential
- Optimistic
- Animated

People with different work personalities bring different qualities to the team, all of which are needed. However, each personality type needs to adjust somewhat to effectively communicate with other personalities. For example, an expressive person might need to tone it down with an analytical person—present fewer ideas, speak more slowly, and go into more detail. Someone who’s a driver might have to be more personable with someone who’s amiable and consider feelings, not just results. Conversely, an analytical person might need to provide less detail with a results-oriented person who’s a driver and an amiable person might need to be more assertive and willing to interrupt a fast-talking expressive.

Once you identify your tendencies as well as those of others on your team, you will be more able to do two crucial things:

1. **Understand communication in the context of the person.** A driver and an expressive might both be telling you the same message, but it comes across in completely different ways. With a greater understanding of how each person operates, you will be more able to interpret the message accurately.

2. **Adjust your communication style and behavior as needed to get the results you want.** If you keep your focus on your goal, you will be less likely to cling to the idea that you should be able to communicate any way that you want. One approach will work with one person but not with another. Thinking about personalities will help you choose the right approach at the right time.

**Skills, talents, likes, and dislikes**

To operate most effectively on a team, you need to understand what you can contribute to a team. One way to do this is to identify your skills and talents.

**Talents.** A talent is something you are born with. For example, you may be a naturally gifted artist who can draw easily or a writer who can communicate easily with words. Although practice will allow you to grow in your areas of talent, whether you practice or not, you will always demonstrate a notable level of ability.
Skills. A skill is something that is learned and must be practiced to remain viable. For example, you may have learned to play the piano, but get rusty when you don’t practice. Or perhaps you learned a programming language in school, but haven’t used it in awhile, so you need to brush up on it.

Let your teammates know what you’re good at so they can keep your skills and talents in mind as decisions are made about who will take on which task. The more your teammates know about what you can contribute, the more likely they are to use your knowledge and experience, and benefit from your contributions. Likewise, if you are aware of the talents and skills of your teammates, you can use that information to make suggestions about how to divide up tasks. If you are assigned a task that is much more easily and effectively completed by another team member, for example, you can speak up and try to rearrange tasks in a more productive manner.

Keep in mind that you will not always be able to do something you are good at, or something you like to do, with a team. Ultimately the list and division of tasks will depend on the unique combination of what needs to be done, who is doing it, and when and how it needs to be done. In addition, the team leader will usually take the lead in assigning tasks, and needs to distribute them so team members are required to put in similar amounts of effort. However, having an understanding of skills and preferences will help teams and leaders make the most effective possible assignments.

Knowing what you like to do and don’t like to do is also a consideration when looking at how you might contribute to a team.

Likes. You know what you like, whether or not you are good at it. A team may give you an opportunity to try things you’re interested in and enjoy. Even if you are not highly skilled in what you are tasked to do, by pairing up with someone more skilled on the team you can gain valuable experience. Remember, if you like doing something, you’re more likely to stick with it, and teams benefit from members with perseverance.

Dislikes. It’s equally important to let your team know what you are not interested in. This is especially important if you don’t want to do something you are good at, because teammates may assume you like doing it and assign you that duty. To avoid this, let your teammates know when you do not enjoy a particular task. That way, they may call upon you in emergencies to perform that task, but they will not ask you to do it all the time.

The more you like what you’re doing, the more likely you are to keep doing it . . . and doing it well.

Emotional intelligence (EI)

Your emotional intelligence (EI) helps you to collaborate with others and become a better team player. Psychologists John Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David Caruso define emotional intelligence (EI) as the ability to understand “one’s own and other’s emotions and the ability to use this information as a guide to thinking and behavior.” According to this definition, it isn’t enough to just understand what you and others feel. An emotionally intelligent person uses that understanding to choose how to think and how to act.

People with high EI can typically do the following:
1. **Accurately perceive emotions in themselves and others.** People with high EI understand emotional language and signals. They are perceptive and can easily read others by observing their facial expressions, body language, and voices. They are also self-aware and can tell when their own emotions are interfering with their communication—and can then do something about it.

2. **Manage emotions to attain specific goals.** People with high EI know how to keep calm in a crisis and help others to do the same. They know how to convey important messages with the right emotion to get buy-in from others. This makes them especially good at inspiring and motivating others. They understand how certain words and actions can impact others, and manage their behavior accordingly.

In general, people with high EI are sought after team members because they have excellent interpersonal skills. In fact, according to the Institute for Health and Human Potential, high EI contributes to improved job performance and stronger leadership skills.

To help you understand EI and its value to teamwork, imagine that you are working with a team of people on a new product design. The project deadline is fast approaching and progress on the project has come to a standstill because of serious design problems. The team has been putting in 10-hour days for months, with people occasionally working weekends. Many members of the team believe that if the project fails, they will be fired. But no one knows for sure. All you know is that you are exhausted and worried.

Unbeknownst to you and the rest of the team, the manager has spoken with the client about the design issues, and the client has agreed to extend the project deadline. The manager has now called an emergency meeting with the team.

Key 4 describes two ways the manager might conduct the meeting, depending on whether he has high or low EI. You be the judge of which way is the most effective.

The low EI manager chooses the route of intimidation. He ignores (or is unaware) of his team’s fatigue and anxiety. He thinks that by yelling he can get more out of them when it is likely there is not much left to give. The high EI manager recognizes what his team has gone through, acknowledges their efforts, and gives them a chance to regroup. This team is far more likely to succeed. Even if the team with the low EI manager manages to get the job done, chances are the quality of the work will be compromised because of the unproductive atmosphere the manager created.

It is important to acknowledge here that skills are crucial. For example, even a person with extraordinary emotional intelligence could not perform surgery without medical training. However, because EI is so crucial to effective communication in
relationships, and team function depends on those relationships working well, it is a strong predictor of work and life success.

What is leadership?

When you think of a leader, your first thought may be of someone in a highly visible and powerful position—the president of the United States or the chancellor of Germany, the CEO of Microsoft or Ford Motor Company, the Dalai Lama or the Pope. However, there are many ways to lead, and not all leaders carry such a high profile.

Think of the community where you live. You may know of leaders such as people in local government positions, deans of educational institutions, and business owners. You probably can also think of people who you consider leaders even though they hold no official position—they just seem to motivate people, or set an example that others want to follow.

Definitions of leadership

There are two ways to define leadership:

1. The ability and process of motivating people to move toward a common goal
2. The ability and process of affecting thoughts and behaviors of others

The first definition refers to a more visible, typical kind of leadership. It is the job of the CEO of a company, for example, to motivate people employed by the company to create and sell the company’s products; likewise, it is the job of a quarterback to motivate his team to move the ball downfield. However, any person—whether a CEO, a quarterback, or anyone else—can also lead in the second way, by setting an example that inspires others to positive thought and productive action. This second type of leader may or may not have a typical leadership position, but an official position is not necessary to lead by example.

Think of leaders who have inspired you. Do you look up to humanitarian heroes such as Mother Theresa or Nelson Mandela? Perhaps you admire agents of social change such as Martin Luther King, Jr., or Gloria Steinem. Maybe you are motivated by