

Teamwork Agreement¹

“A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose . . . [and are] mutually accountable.”²

Teams are more effective when each member knows what’s expected of them and how members of the team will work together to become a high performing competent team. A powerful first step is to form a teamwork agreement — an explicit agreement that lays out the ground rules for team members’ behaviours.

Did You Know?

- Much like clinical competencies, teams also possess competencies.
- It’s believed that team competency is a state that can be achieved.
- Team competence is negotiated by the work the team does as they participate in shared authentic situations.
- Team competence is distributed across a network of people and competent teams as they see their work as collaborative and not largely attributed to one individual.
- Team competence is an evolving set of multiple, interconnected behaviours enacted in time and space.³

Creating a Teamwork Agreement

It’s important to take the time to establish a teamwork agreement as one step towards building team competency. Your teamwork agreement should be simple, no more than a page and should outline:

1. A broad statement of your team’s shared purpose;
2. A broad statement of what you want your team to achieve;
3. How your team will work together to foster teamwork and communication; and
4. How conflicts and challenges will be resolved.

Not sure how to do this? Don’t worry, we’ve outlined the steps to make it easy for you! Here are the supplies that you’ll need:

In-Person Team

- Flipchart paper
- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Markers or dots for dot voting

Virtual Team

- Virtual platform to host meeting
- Virtual whiteboard OR
- Pen and paper
- Slide presentation – include the steps to creating a teamwork agreement

Step 1: Develop Your Shared Purpose

Shared purpose is what happens when a group of individuals align their belief systems or values with a common challenge, vision or goal. It’s the purpose or the “why” of change. By building a shared purpose, it helps us tap

¹ Adapted from TBC on the Run. Vancouver: University of British Columbia. [accessed 13 January, 2022]. Available from: <https://health.ubc.ca/collaborative-health-education/tbc-run>

² Katzenbach J, Smith D. The wisdom of teams. Creating the high-performance organization. New York (NY): Harper Collins; 2003. 320 p.

³ Hodges B, Lingard L. The question of competence. Reconsidering medical education in the twenty-first century. New York (NY): Cornell University Press; 2012. 240 p.

into people’s need for meaningful work; to be part of something bigger than yourselves. It’s about finding common ground between our values, beliefs and aspirations and working towards a common goal.⁴

Ask your team to reflect on their own personal values and ambitions. During a team meeting, ask the following questions to help you inform your thinking around your purpose as a team. Sometimes it’s helpful to send these questions out in advance to allow team members time for reflection.

Questions for Consideration	Answer
What are the values and ambitions that we have in common that align us as a team?	
How are we engaging everyone on this team to achieve our shared purpose?	
How are we listening and incorporating the perspectives of everyone on this team?	
As a team, how are we placing equal value on everyone on our team?	

Next:

- Review the responses.
- Look for common themes and patterns, highlight or place a dot beside them.
- As a group, dot vote or come to a consensus on the themes or patterns within each question you would like to have represented in your shared purpose.
- Create a broad statement about what you want your team to achieve.

Dot voting is a simple group activity for recognizing preferences among limited options:

- Participants are each given a set number of dot stickers.
- They place dot stickers next to options presented that they like.
- Options with the most dots “win”.
- Dot voting can be done virtually using a virtual whiteboard with participants placing a mark (dot or x) beside an item on the screen.

Sample Shared Purpose

Shared Purpose:

Our shared purpose is to provide quality, person- and family-centred care every day with our values of teamwork, communication, compassion and honesty guiding us.

⁴ National Health Service. Leading large-scale change: A practical guide. [internet] NHS: Leeds; 2011. [cited 2, July 2020]. 123 p. Available from <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/leading-large-scale-change/>

Step 2: Create a Broad Statement of What You Want to Achieve as a Team

Discuss what you want to achieve with the teamwork agreement. Consider:

- The values and ambitions that you share as a team – reflect on your shared purpose.
- *What* are you committing to?
- *Why* are you committing to it?
- What would you like the outcome to be?

From this discussion, create a broad statement to illustrate the team’s commitment to the teamwork agreement.

Sample Team Commitment:

To advance the teamwork and communication of the [team name] team, we have created this teamwork agreement to define how we will work together.

Each member of the team is responsible and accountable to uphold our agreement as we work together to improve our teamwork and communication, as well as the outcomes of our patients or clients.

Step 3: Setting the Foundation for Working Together

Reflect and consider what expectations team members have of each other.

Consider what is working well and what isn’t. These might include:

- Well:
 - Good communication
 - Respectful
 - Responsive
- Not working well:
 - People not completing their tasks
 - Personality styles
 - Domineering team members
 - Team members that don’t contribute

Consider and discuss challenges unique to working with an interprofessional group. These might include:

- Different jargon or language
- Perceived hierarchies
- Different knowledge bases
- Understanding different team member roles
- Team members at different stages in their profession
- Stereotyping

Step 4: Working Together

Leverage the previous discussion and invite your team to decide how you will work together to foster teamwork and communication to achieve your shared purpose.

Outline the positive things the team wants to encourage. We've highlighted more steps to guide you:

In person team – You will need:

- Flipchart paper
- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Markers or dots for dot voting

Using post-it notes, have team members individually identify things they think will contribute to effective teamwork and communication.

These might include such things as:

- Respect
- Trust that others will contribute and complete their tasks
- Accountability
- Honesty and transparency
- Equal participation
- Good communication

From here, you may need to remove duplicates or theme similar ideas together.

Virtual team – You will need:

- Virtual platform to host meeting
- Virtual whiteboard OR
- Pen and paper
- Slide presentation – include the steps in this guide

On your virtual whiteboard or on paper, have your scribe capture things that team members individually identify that they think will contribute to effective teamwork and communication.

These might include such things as:

- Respect
- Trust that others will contribute and complete their tasks
- Accountability
- Honesty and transparency
- Equal participation
- Good communication

From here, you may need to remove duplicates or theme similar ideas together.

Once the duplicates have been removed and similar ideas have been themed, invite team members to dot vote on the top six items that they would like to see included in your teamwork agreement on how they want to work together.

As a group, review the top six items that received the most dots and discuss. Do these reflect what the team would like to see included? Anything missing? Come to a consensus on the list and this will form the foundation of how your team will work together.

Step 5: Resolving Conflicts and Challenges

Using post-it notes (individually), a virtual whiteboard or through a discussion using a pen and paper - have team members identify things they think will contribute to the effective resolution of conflict and challenges when they arise. These could include:

- Direct communication
- Addressing conflicts before they become destructive
- Creating the space for all team members to participate

Have everyone share their individual ideas. You may need to remove duplicates or theme similar ideas together.

Once the duplicates have been removed and similar ideas have been themed, invite team members to dot vote (in-person individually) on the top six items they would like to see included in your teamwork agreement on how they want to resolve conflict and challenges.

As a group, review the top six items that received the most votes from the voting process and discuss. Do these reflect what the team would like to see included? Anything missing? Come to a consensus on the list and this will form the foundation of how your team will resolve conflict and challenges.

Step 6: Tie the Pieces Together

Now it's time to pull it all together. Remember, your teamwork agreement should include:

1. A broad statement of your team's shared purpose;
2. A broad statement of what you want your team to achieve;
3. How your team will work together to foster teamwork and communication; and
4. How conflicts and challenges will be resolved.

Implementing Your Agreement:

- It's helpful to post your teamwork agreement somewhere visible.
- Refer to the agreement when you sense that the team is not functioning as it should.
- Challenge team members to adhere to the agreement early and often.
- Model the group guidelines in your own practice.
- Make a point to revisit the agreement occasionally. It needs to be a living document that changes as your team changes. Decide as a team how often this will be.

Tips for facilitating team meetings virtually:

- Set an agenda ahead of time with a clear purpose for the meeting.
- Assign roles for members of your team such as: scribe, chat box monitor, timekeeper, technology support.
- Prepare a visual focal point – a slide with an agenda, photo and graphics.
- Give everyone the chance to contribute or play an active role in the meeting.
- Test your technology in advance and be sure that your team members can access the technology required for the meeting.
- Prepare for a slow start.
- Engage with people right away so all voices are "in the room."
- Have a lower-tech back-up plan.
- Wrap up with clear agreements and action items.
- Follow up after the meeting with notes, minutes or a summary.

Sample Teamwork Agreement #1

Team Name: _____

Date: _____

Our shared purpose is to provide quality work each day while we uphold our values of respect, authenticity, teamwork and professionalism.

The [team name] team has created this teamwork agreement to outline how we will work together on enhancing teamwork and communication on our team.

All team members will be accountable to maintain our agreement. We will work together on our commitment to positive teamwork and communication while providing high quality work for the people we serve.

The values we commit to be accountable to include:

- Respect;
- Transparent communication;
- Authenticity;
- Empathy; and
- Trust.

When there are disagreements, our team will take the following steps to resolve conflict:

- Take a moment to self-reflect on the issue and address it within 24 hours; and
- Attempt to resolve issues at the staffing level at which they occur.

Sample Teamwork Agreement #2

Team Name: _____

Date: _____

Our shared purpose is to provide quality, person- and family-centred care each day with our values of teamwork, communication, compassion and honesty guiding us.

To advance the teamwork and communication of the [team name] team, we have created this teamwork agreement to define how we will work together.

Each member of the team is responsible and accountable to uphold our teamwork agreement as we work together to improve our teamwork and communication as well as the outcome of our patients or clients.

The teamwork agreement we commit to:

- Be respectful of our team members.
- Have direct communication, rather than sidebar conversations.
- Commit to complete tasks for which we are responsible.
- Practice kindness and compassion towards each other.
- Trust in each other.
- Not being afraid to say, “I don’t know” and ask for help.
- Avoid interrupting others when they’re speaking.
- Holding each other accountable when someone is not acting in accordance with this agreement.

Where differences arise, our team is committed to resolving conflict by:

- Addressing differences in a timely, open and honest manner.
- Speaking to the people directly involved in the conflict first, before approaching a third-party mediator, such as a manager or director.
- Avoiding using blaming language. Use “I” language instead of “you” when talking about the issue.