16 Collaboration

Learning objectives

This unit is about the importance of teamwork. It begins by asking students to say how much of their own job involves teamwork and what qualities are needed to be a productive team-player. They read and discuss an article about creating team spirit in meetings, and then listen to a project team talking about a problem they are having. Finally, they work in teams to roleplay a project meeting in which they brainstorm solutions to business problems.

Digital resources: Unit 16

Online Workbook; Extension worksheets; Glossary; Student's Book answer key; Student's Book listening script; Fast-track map

This first section explores what makes a good team-player.

Warm-up

Focus attention on the title and ask students what they understand by the word *collaboration*. Ask them to suggest business situations where collaboration is important and those where they think it is better for individuals to work on their own.

1 Give students time to think about their jobs and decide what percentage involves teamwork. Ask them to put a mark on the scale and compare with other students. Encourage them to say what aspects of their work involve teamwork and how they feel about it.

2 Focus attention on the cartoon and explain or elicit that the point is that true collaboration means listening to everyone's ideas, and if one person – usually the most senior person – is making all the decisions and ignoring everyone else's ideas, this is not a collaborative situation at all. Make sure students understand the useful idiom *to keep something to yourself*. Here it refers to not putting your ideas forward in a meeting.

3 Read the instructions with the class and emphasize that all the candidates are equally professionally qualified to take part in the project, so what you are looking for now is personal skills that will make a good team-player. Ask students to work individually or with a partner to brainstorm the personal qualities that an ideal team-player would have. Then have a class feedback session.

4 Ask students to work individually to complete the sentences, then discuss as a class whether these cover the same ideas they came up with in 3. Ask them to say whether they know anyone with the qualities listed.

ANSWERS
a reliable b constructive c committed d supportive
e flexible f engaged g co-operative

5 Give students plenty of time to read the article and answer the questions. When checking answers, encourage a class discussion of the last three questions.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS
a T.E.A.M. = together everyone achieves more; P.P.R. = positives, possibilities, reservations
b Teams obviously don't always function better than individuals.
   Pros: you can draw on a wider pool of talent; you can be more innovative; you can delegate more; you can work faster and accomplish more within a timeframe – as the Japanese say, 'none of us is as smart as all of us'!
   Cons: there can be personality clashes; some team members may not do their share of the work; some may not buy into the project as much as others; if the team is multicultural and/or virtual, there can be communication problems; some members may not have as much support from their line managers as others.
c In a good team, synergy is created when people combine their efforts to be more effective than they are as individuals – 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts'
d People used to working on their own may find it hard to adjust to teamwork. This is especially true if they have a lot of personal ambition and a drive to compete rather than collaborate. Put two or more such people together and you have a battle of egos! And one way for them to do battle is to try to win arguments with each other and score points with the boss. Claiming group ideas as your own and saying 'I told you so' when things go wrong are common ways of scoring points.
e Cultures which are described as collectivist (Geert Hofstede) or communitarian (Fons Trompenaars) tend to be more accustomed to working in groups and putting group needs first. This needn't just be a question of national culture, however. Many Asian cultures are quite strongly collectivist, but their corporate culture may also be rather hierarchical, with the boss very much in charge. On the other hand, corporate cultures where the hierarchy is flatter may be better suited to self-managed teams (SMTs).
f P.P.R. is a good example of a communication technique that encourages collaboration even when there are disagreements and that values contributions from all team members.

6 ♪ **2.42** Go through the instructions and the options with the class before you play the recording, so that students have some idea of what they are going to hear and what information they need to listen out for.

ANSWER
c

> ♪ **2.42**
> **A:** Okay, look, the problem is this: we simply can't move forward on this project because we never get any answers from the client! I mean, whenever we ask KNP for their input on anything, they just sit on it for weeks without getting back to us. So we fall further and further behind schedule. Frankly, Rolf, it's driving me mad!

B: Hmm. Okay, well, thanks, Richard. It sounds like we have a pretty serious communication problem here. Does anyone have any suggestions? Yes, Elaine?

C: Erm, it's just a thought, Richard, but maybe you're trying to involve KNP too much.

A: How do you mean?

C: Well, I mean, you're agreeing objectives with them at the planning meetings, right?

A: Yes, of course.

C: And then you're asking them for further input between meetings as well?

A: Erm, well, it's a complicated project, Elaine. And new issues keep coming up.

C: I understand that. But here's an idea. Instead of waiting for them to get back to you on every issue, why not simply go ahead with what you think is best based on what you agreed with them at the meeting and then just ask them to confirm that decision?

A: Well, it's an idea. But I still think we need to keep them closely involved in the decision-making process at every stage.

B: Richard, I think we've already established that trying to keep the client involved is not working too well. Elaine, I really like your idea of just asking for the final go-ahead on each decision. What I especially like about it is that instead of having to come up with fresh ideas of their own, KNP just has to say yes or no. That's going to make things a whole lot easier! And it would certainly solve the problem of getting them to respond more quickly too.

A: What makes you think that?

B: Well, they'll know that there's a time constraint on their reply because we're already going ahead with whatever it is. If they still like what we're doing, no problem. But if they don't, well, they'd better get back to us *right away* or we'll be heading in the wrong direction.

A: Hmm, I'm not so sure.

B: Well, I like this idea of just asking for the green light at each stage. And if we did that, we could also give them more progress reports: as agreed at our last meeting, we've done this and this; and now we're going to do this – is that still okay with you? From what you say, Richard, it sounds like KNP are not as engaged in this project as we are. Maybe we need to keep them in the picture more. Perhaps another thing we could do is give the decisions we want them to approve a priority rating, so they pay attention to the really important ones. And, Elaine, if we combined your idea with Kevin's idea of setting up a client extranet, there'd be a single website they could always go to to find out what's been done, what's next and what they need to okay. And they could do that with the click of a button.

C: Good idea.

B: Now, the only thing is: I'm not sure if we could ask for approval on every decision we take. As Richard says, some of these decisions do require client involvement before we take action. If we go ahead and they're not happy, it could waste a lot of time … and resources. And I'm also a bit worried about KNP feeling we're taking control away from them. Elaine, how do you think we could manage that?

7 🔘 **2.42** Go through the things students need to identify before you play the recording again. Make sure they can identify Elaine (the woman) and Rolf (the second man who speaks). Check answers with the class.

ANSWERS

a Go ahead with what's best, based on what's been agreed at the planning meetings with KNP, and just ask them to confirm those decisions.

b He likes the fact that KNP simply has to say yes or no to each decision because this will make replying easier for them. He likes the fact that knowing that the project team is going ahead as agreed will make them respond faster if they've changed their minds.

c KNP could be given more progress reports to involve them more in the project. Decisions KNP needs to approve could be given a priority-rating to make sure they notice the important ones. Elaine's idea could be combined with Kevin's idea of setting up a client extranet where KNP can check on progress at any time and approve actions simply by clicking on a button.

d Some decisions require such an investment of time and resources that they may need more client involvement before action is taken. KNP may sometimes feel that control is being taken away from them.

8 Allow plenty of time for this activity. Go through the instructions and the problems with the class, then ask students to work in teams. Make sure they choose someone to be the facilitator and that they swap roles for each problem. They may need time outside of class to think of solutions to the problems which they can put forward in the meeting and to prepare what they are going to say. When they hold their meetings, go around giving help and encouragement.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

a Perhaps you could electronically tag the shopping carts so that they set off an alarm or lock the wheels when removed from the supermarket car park; provide a free service for those (such as the elderly or disabled) who are unable to carry their groceries home; hire contractors to hunt down abandoned shopping carts; produce a series of posters ridiculing cart-thieves; petition the government to increase fines for the offence of stealing shopping carts.

b Perhaps you could make it possible for customers to upload their photo to your website and superimpose the jewellery onto their picture; produce high-definition videos of all your products, so that customers get a more three-dimensional feel for what they are buying; set up customer feedback blogs for each product, so people can share views on products they've bought; pre-pay for return of goods and not invoice customers until their product orders have arrived and been tried on.

c Perhaps you could increase staff salaries in quarterly increments to reward loyalty; rotate staff so that they deal with different kinds of enquiry to prevent the boredom of routine; provide regular (and fun) training events; offer fringe benefits to long-term employees (health or social club membership, subsidized mobile phone accounts, a loyalty-points-based gift programme); give more experienced staff responsibility for training more junior members; give staff with the best customer feedback each year the opportunity to receive a management education and become a manager.

D

Tricky conversations

Learning objectives

This scenario is based on handling difficult conversations in the workplace. Students read some emails Heather Sherwood has sent, each of which outlines a problem she has with one of her colleagues and which she wants to meet them face to face to discuss – leading to some tricky conversations. Students say how they think Heather should deal with each person and then watch the video to see what happens. They evaluate Heather's success, read an article giving advice on dealing with difficult conversations and then watch Heather's follow-up conversations with her colleagues. Finally, students practise having their own tricky conversations with a partner and evaluate their performance.

Digital resources: Management Scenario D

📹 In company in action D1–D2 and worksheet; Extension worksheets; Glossary; Student's Book answer key; Student's Book recording script; Fast-track map

Warm-up

Ask the students to brainstorm reasons why a conversation at work might be 'tricky' or difficult. What kinds of things do people find it difficult to talk about?

1 Focus attention on the photo and ask students to say what they think is happening and how the people are feeling. Give students time to read the emails and decide what they think the answers to the questions might be.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

a It seems as if Heather agreed with Alan that they would both make the case for an increased budget in their meeting with Gabrielle.

b Alan obviously didn't support Heather when she raised the issue with Gabrielle.

c The email looks like a thank-you note, but, in fact, it appears that Anton may be trying to take all the credit for an idea which was, at least partly, Heather's.

d We can't really be sure. But the fact that he says he had to revise the figures a bit suggests that maybe he claimed all the work was his.

e It's a week overdue and she says it would have helped her make a case for a bigger budget in her meeting with Gabrielle.

f It seems as if Tony has done a lot of work on the report and may see it as his project. So bringing someone else in to help him finish and perhaps take some of the credit won't make him happy.

2 Have a class discussion, brainstorming ways of dealing with each person. Point out that Alan is a peer, Anton a superior and Tony a subordinate.

3 📹 **D1** Play the video and ask them to match the conversations to the descriptions.

ANSWERS

Conversation 1 c   Conversation 2 a   Conversation 3 b

📹 **D1**

Alan: Hi, Heather! You wanted a chat?

Heather: No, I don't want a chat, Alan. I want to know what on earth you think you were doing in the meeting this morning?

Alan: Excuse me?

Heather: What do you mean, excuse me? You know exactly what I'm talking about!

Alan: Oh, you mean the budget thing?

Heather: Yes, the budget thing, Alan! You agreed to back me up when I talked to Gabrielle about the increase. You do agree we need the budget increase, don't you, Alan?

Alan: Yes, of course.

Heather: So, what happened? You completely ruined everything! If you'd supported me the way we'd agreed, we could have got it. But you just sat there! Never said a word. You made me look foolish, Alan. And what's worse, now we won't get that increase and it's all your fault!

Anton: Come in.

Heather: Right, what's this about the client website idea?

Anton: Well, I told you in my email. Gabrielle loves it. We're going ahead with it.

Heather: Are we, now? But without me?

Anton: Er, I'm not sure what you mean, Heather.

Heather: Oh, I think you are, Anton. Whose idea was this in the first place?

Anton: Well, it was ours, but …

Heather: It was my idea, Anton. I came to you with it. You told me to go away and produce some figures. I did that. And now you've taken it to Gabrielle as if it was all your idea. Do you know how much effort I've put into this? On top of all the other work I have to do. It's taken me hours and hours …

Anton: And that's why I said I'd handle it from here on, Heather. You're busy …

Heather: Oh, don't give me that! This is my initiative, Anton, not yours. And you're trying to take all the credit because you want to impress Gabrielle after our disastrous performance last quarter!

Anton: Now, just a minute! I am not trying to take all the credit. I made it very clear to Gabrielle what your contribution has been …

Heather: Really? Well, she certainly didn't mention that at our budget meeting this morning, which I notice you skipped.

Anton: Ah, yes, well. How did it go?

Heather: Don't try to change the subject, Anton. This website idea is my baby and I want full involvement!

Heather: Okay. So, Tony, how's that report coming along? You know it was supposed to be finished by last week?

Tony: Yes, I know, I'm sorry about that. Frankly, it was just a lot more work than anyone expected …

Heather: Look, Tony, I just want to know, is it going to be finished this week, or not?

Tony: Well, I'm going as fast as I can, I just need a bit more time. I haven't been able to access all the files …

Heather: I see. So you haven't even gone through those yet. Right, then, I'll have to borrow Kelly from Nigel for a few days to help you get this thing finished by Friday. Gabrielle wants to see a copy and we're never going to get that budget increase authorized if I don't have that report. Do you know Kelly?

Tony: Yes, but I don't need any help. I've got this covered, okay? I just need a few more days …

Heather: I'm afraid we don't have a few more days. I'll call Nigel and see if he can spare Kelly as soon as possible. Okay, thanks, Tony …

4 Give students plenty of time to read the article and decide which of the advice contained in it might have helped Heather in each situation. Discuss as a class.

5 Ask students to discuss the questions with a partner, and then to report back on what she should do in each situation and how she could have been more diplomatic.

6 📹 **D2** Ask students to watch the three conversations and see how far Heather's behaviour matches what they suggested in 5.

🔘 📹 **D2**

Alan: Listen, Heather, about this morning. I'm really sorry I didn't back you up in the meeting as we agreed. It's just that I could see there was no point. Gabrielle was very clear about our financial situation. There's just no room in the budget for an increase for anybody right now. You know that.

Heather: Yes, I know, Alan. Look, I'm sorry too, I shouldn't have exploded like that. But we did agree to support each other. I just wish you'd warned me you weren't going to say anything about it.

Alan: Well, it was a bit difficult to do that in the meeting, wasn't it? To be honest, once you saw how things were, I was surprised you raised the matter at all. Everybody's budget's going to be frozen next year, by the look of it.

Heather: Yes, but we are a special case, Alan. We do have the company's two main clients to look after and we need that increase.

Alan: I agree. Do you think it would help if we arranged a private meeting with Gabrielle and Anton to discuss things further? Maybe without involving the other units?

Heather: It's worth a try, I suppose.

Alan: Okay, I'll speak to Anton about it first thing in the morning.

Anton: Ah, Heather, I'm glad I bumped into you. Listen, I've had a chat with Gabrielle and she's happy to let you lead the client website initiative, since it was mostly your idea – provided, that is, you don't mind doing some overtime to get it done?

Heather: Oh, I see.

Anton: I said I'd ask if you were okay with that because I know how busy you are.

Heather: No, no, that's fine. I don't mind working overtime to get it completed.

Anton: Great. And, look, I'm sorry if it looked like I was trying to take all the credit for this. Well, maybe I was just a bit. It hasn't been an easy year.

Heather: Yes, I know, Anton. It's been tough for all of us. And thanks for speaking to Gabrielle. I'm sorry; I shouldn't have accused you like that. It's probably because I'd just come out of that disastrous meeting with her about the budgets for next year.

Anton: Ah, yes. Alan spoke to me about that just this morning. He says you and he would like to arrange a meeting with me and Gabrielle to see if we can sort something out.

Heather: Do you think she'll agree? That would be fantastic.

Anton: I don't see why not, we'll talk to her about it in the morning …

Heather: Hi, Tony. Got a minute?

Tony: Yeah, sure, Heather. What is it?

Heather: I had another look at it last night and you're right, we didn't allocate enough time to it.

Tony: Oh, right.

Heather: But, I do have to get a copy on Gabrielle's desk by Friday because Alan and I have another meeting with her on Monday. So I'm afraid I can't see any alternative to bringing in Kelly to help you.

Tony: Oh, right.

Heather: But, look, it's you who's done all the hard work, so I don't see any reason for Kelly to do anything but the routine stuff to help you out – like checking those files, for instance.

Tony: Yeah, sure.

Heather: And there's no way Gabrielle's going to read the whole thing over the weekend, so just get me an executive summary by Friday, will you? I'll give that to Gabrielle and then you and Kelly can get the rest done next week. But don't worry; I'll make sure you get all the credit. I know what it's like not to be appreciated.

Tony: Thanks, I'll get right on to it …

7 Ask students to work with a partner and decide who will be Speaker A and Speaker B. Ask them to turn to their respective pages and follow the instructions there. They each have one difficult conversation they have to initiate. Point out that they will need to fill out a feedback form in 8, so they should pay close attention to what happens in their conversation. As they perform their conversations, go around offering help and encouragement.

8 Ask students to complete the feedback form on page 128.

1:1 Try to find time for both conversations so that your student has a chance to be both the initiator of the 'tricky conversation' and the person on the receiving end.