



FUTUREquipped

Meta Skills

Collaboration (Social Skills)

UNIT

5

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Collaboration

Introduction

Thanks to our increasingly connected global society, collaboration has never been more possible.

Social media, video conferencing and cloud-based technologies are some of the many digital enablers that allow us to build relationships and work with others, across borders, cultures and disciplines. We can share knowledge and information at low cost and with relative ease, allowing colleagues in multiple locations to work effectively together as a team.

That's not to say that we are unable to collaborate without technology, far from it. Teamworking, relationship building and showing empathy to others are all collaborative behaviours that we as humans are instinctively capable of and can practice with or without technology.



Why Collaboration?

Collaboration is fundamental to achieving shared goals. Being able to work effectively with others can help bring about the mix of perspectives that increase creativity and innovation within a work group.

Now and in the future, people from different subject specialisms will need to work together to identify and develop solutions that solve joint problems or provide access to new opportunities. For example:

SMART housing for assisted living is a technology-enhanced solution that requires a significant amount of collaboration across disciplines. Specialists from the health and care, data science, sensor and construction sectors need to work together to understand user needs and enabling technologies, before designing and delivering solutions that address these needs.

The construction industry has been moving towards a goal of increased collaboration through the adoption of BIM (Building Information Modelling) for some time now. This technology enables architects, engineers, designers,

tradesmen, and importantly, end-users to work in partnership across their individual areas of expertise to deliver an optimal end product. An advantage of BIM is that it represents a form of international language that enables cross cultural, cross border collaboration.

Given the amount of data being generated in today's digital society, there is a growing need for information and communication technology employees to be able to collaborate across disciplines, industry sectors and socio-cultural boundaries. Being able to build relationships, determine user needs, appreciate multiple perspectives and make constructive contributions are all critical human inputs required to work effectively as a team.

Ways to develop your collaboration skills

Once again, development of this meta skill will require that you apply and develop other complementary skills. For example, collaboration is a socially led skill and therefore your ability to communicate, be it via written word, in person or via another medium is critical to getting your point of view across to colleagues or team members.

Similarly, being able to consider multiple sources of information and perspectives on a problem will help you to make a positive contribution in situations where a team decision needs to be made, or a joint problem solved.

To develop your collaboration skills, you may wish to try some of the following exercises:

1. A fun activity to get you working collaboratively with others is the **“build a tower”** exercise. Please watch this video for further information on what’s involved:

https://www.ted.com/talks/tom_wujec_build_a_tower?language=en

On completion of the activity, take the opportunity to reflect on the experience – what did you learn from it? What would you do the same or differently next time?

2. As suggested in the adaptability module in this library, **working with a mentor** can help you to develop your collaboration skills. Being able to bounce ideas off an objective 3rd party will help you to gain a second and objective perspective on your teamworking experiences, which in turn could help you make better sense of the challenges and opportunities you face.

3. Practice working across departments and locations.

Speak to your tutor, lecturer or line manager about the potential to collaborate on a piece of work or assignment with colleagues or peers who are based in a different location to your own. For students, this could mean collaborating with peers from another institution on a project or assignment. For employees, this could mean working with a colleague in another department to jointly solve a workplace problem. In either case, you could employ one of the many cloud based collaborative platforms that are freely available to help you connect and share information with your team members. An example of this kind of technology is the project management platform “Slack” – available at slack.com – but there are countless others available to use instead.

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