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Team work and leadership: Best practice report

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Supplementary Skills for Built Environment Researchers

Guide to teamwork and leadership skills

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Supplementary Skills for Built Environment Researchers

Guide to teamwork and leadership

Introduction

This guide to teamwork and leadership skills for Built Environment researchers is prepared to provide some tips on how to enhance your skills and competencies during your course of study. This is an outcome of a Centre for Education in Built Environment (CEBE) funded project, called SuSi-BER (Supplementary Skills for Built Environment Researchers) conducted within the Research Institute for the Built & Human Environment, the University of Salford.

There have been repeated calls for enhancing research and supplementary skills of the built environment researchers. Few would disagree that deepening specialised knowledge-base and wider skills of researchers in a variety of disciplines are prerequisite for developing successful leadership in higher education, the public sector and industry. We believe that, there is ample room for improvement in developing supplementary skills for quality research and researchers in the built environment. Further, as the modern society is changing in an unprecedented pace, you as an individual might realise the need to develop skills and competencies on a continual basis.

In this context, the project has been focusing on creating a foundation for creating, developing, and exploiting knowledge of supplementary skills for various activities of the built environment researchers. The project has identified and classified generic and transferable skills under the following six broad themes.

- paper / report writing skills;
- communication and presentation skills;

- personal development, professional competence, judgement and confidence;
- planning, organising, and time management;
- critical thinking and problem solving; and,
- team work and leadership.

There would be a guideline for each theme and an overall guideline for developing supplementary skills. The guides are written for everyone who is engaged in the Built Environment research, particularly postgraduate researchers reading for academic qualifications, e.g. MSc or PhD.

There is a wealth of information on each topic already available elsewhere, be it written or embedded in practice at various institutions. Due to space limitations, this guide does not provide comprehensive and exhaustive advice on each topic. Instead, this guide will provide some examples and practical tips that can help you to understand what developing each skill entails. It is hoped that this generic guide will stimulate you to think or rethink your chosen course of study as not just acquiring a qualification or passive learning experience of gaining some specialist knowledge on a research topic, but also as a process of developing you as a competent professional who can solve problems and contribute to the body of knowledge during the course of your study as well as for your future career.

This guide is thus intended to provide a foundation for which you can start with and as a common frame of reference to facilitate knowledge sharing among fellow students. For those of you who are interested in exploring further on particular topics, a reading list is provided at the end of each guide. Also remember that these supplementary skills need practice and you will learn through experience as well as reading some good materials. Like learning craft skills, we suggest that, as a starter, you emulate how other model people do and adapt their style and behaviour to suit your particular needs and style.

Developing teamwork and leadership skills

Undertaking postgraduate research is often wrongly regarded as a personal enterprise that has nothing to do with teamwork and leadership. Teamwork and leadership skills are as important as other skills and competencies such as *inter alia* writing and communicating skills. This is because your study involves managing various stakeholders such as funding bodies, family and relatives, friends, colleagues in the university, peers in the same or similar research field, research participants, supervisor(s), and many more! Your ability to lead and work as a team will be a great asset not only to successfully complete your study but also to your future employer (even much more so if you intend to be a freelance, self-employed, or entrepreneur).

Given the importance of teamwork and leadership during and beyond the course of your study, developing relevant skills should start immediately. You don't have to be an expert of team working and leadership, but you can train yourself to become a successful teamworker and leader. This requires not just understanding how you can improve your own performance but also being sympathetic to the needs and wants of others. In other words, improving leadership and teamwork skills require exposure to first-hand experience of leading and working in a team as well as being a good listener to others.

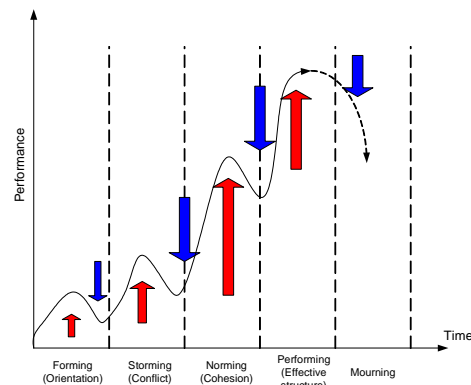
Establishing and building upon teamwork skills

Teamwork is an interesting topic whose discussion can last hours and hours, and page after page. Instead of discussing all technicalities of teamwork in various settings, we offer a team building process model to illustrate why this issue is important and what are the issues that you might have to effectively deal with.

Some researchers suggest that teambuilding process goes through several stages to mature the relationships among members. These stage models often argue that the more mature the team, the better its performance. Although the stage models provide some insight on how teams form and develop, not all teams develop as linearly as often suggested. Besides, group

dynamics, team member attributes and interactions among them, and various other factors can effectively reduce the team's performance at any stage.

Instead of the rigid stage model, based on Sommerville and Dalziel's (1998) teambuilding model, the following figure presents a fluid and more realistic model showing that teams work together towards a (or several) common objective. The process can be viewed as going through several fluid phases of development, where enabling forces can facilitate the process; whilst restraining forces can impede the process. The indicated phases are: forming, storming, norming, performing, and mourning (if the team dissolves at the end just like project teams in construction).



Forming is the starting phase of team, where needs of achieving certain objectives or goals are identified and appropriate team members are selected or allocated. The next storming phase is where conflict might arise due to uncertainty, disagreement, hostility, tension, different personal values, conflicting ambitions, different personal dispositions, or resistance to cooperate. Once the personal differences are resolved or the consequent problems are mitigated, the team builds up cohesion through consensus, accepting its leader, understanding interdependence, accepting team standards and rules, and accommodating the situation as the benefits of cooperation might be bigger than its related loss. However, these behaviours are necessary but not sufficient to produce the target performance successfully. Team members often need to go beyond this so that they reach the performing phase. The team performance is enhanced through openness, trust, flexibility, assuming wider roles and accountabilities, mutual respect and

assistance, and taking one's own initiatives. Finally, when the time comes to dissolution of the team, members might 'mourn' and display openness, sadness, longing, and revisiting.

What makes a team more successful than others continuously attracts high research interest but we do not intend to delve much into that in this guide. However, there is a general consensus that the quality of interactions among members and their teamwork as well as (if not more important than) the quality of specific individuals affects team performance outcomes, day-to-day management, and continual growth of the team. In other words, teamwork has an important bearing on motivation and ultimately team performance.

The implication of this is that, regardless of which team you are working with (be it you and your supervisor, your colleagues sharing the same office with you, your research or project team comprising diverse stakeholders, friends, or simply your flatmates), you need to pay attention to the team dynamics and do not take good teamwork for granted. Further, don't assume that other members of your team necessarily share the common vision and have the same propensity as you to choose options for solving problems. Effective goal setting, selecting appropriate members, consensus building, negotiation, leadership, and managing needs and expectations of stakeholders are important means to lubricate the teambuilding process.

Establishing and building upon leadership skills

Leadership skills are complementary to teamwork skills. They are not mutually exclusive and the challenge to postgraduate researchers will be to switch between teamworker and leader modes depending on the situation. During the course of study or your research project, you might predominately work as a team member and this mode may suffice to produce desired results. At other times, however, you are expected to show your leadership and shape the team and provide directions. Both are equally important and challenging.

Leadership is another topic that management students have extensively been studying. Yet, there is no universal agreement on what makes a good leader. In this guide, we take a contingent approach of leadership. That is, leadership effectiveness is depending on the context. Burns (1978), offers a contextual view of management vs leadership [see below table, source: Burnes (2000: Table 16.2)].

	Transactional management	Transformational leadership
Creating the agenda	Planning and budgeting: developing a detailed plan of how to achieve the results	Establishing direction: developing a vision that describes a future state along with a strategy for getting there
People	Organising and staffing: which individual best fits each job and what part of the plan fits each individual	Aligning people: a major communication challenge in getting people to understand and believe the vision
Execution	Controlling and problem solving: monitoring results, identifying deviations from the plan and solving the problems	Motivating and inspiring: satisfying basic human needs for achievement, belonging, recognition, self-esteem, a sense of control
Outcomes	Produces a degree of predictability and order	Produces changes – often to a dramatic degree

The table distinguishes transactional management and transformational leadership. This approach argues that the effectiveness of management-leadership styles is dependent upon two basic contexts, convergent and divergent. Burns contend that appropriate management-leadership styles should match the prevailing context. A *convergent* state refers to when the team or organisation is operating under stable conditions. Most notably, this means where the group has set and agreed goals and when the environment

(both internal and external) is predictable. In this state, transactional management is likely to be more effective. In contrast, a *divergent* state means that the group confronts a significant change(s) in the environment and thus the efficacy and appropriateness of its established goals and means are under serious doubt. Transformational leadership is argued as the most appropriate leadership style in this situation.

The contingent view of leadership is very intuitive, as we see some brilliant leaders in one time in the history become miserably powerless leader in another. However, this contingency view of leadership has not gone without challenge. For example, Kanter (1989) argues that increasingly successful leaders will have to possess both transactional and transformational management-leadership styles. Indeed, conducting research involves uncertainty and the modern society is changing rapidly. The challenge of postgraduate researchers during the course of study and future career will be to sense when to switch from transactional management to transformational leadership, and vice versa.

Summary

This guide has discussed teamwork and leadership skills. We proposed that you have to possess appropriate teamwork and leadership skills in order to succeed in your course study and future career. Both skills are complementary. In order to achieve desired results, we have argued, you need to sense when you need to switch your role as a teamworker or manager/leader. We have also argued that sticking to one management/leadership style may not be always effective and thus you need to take a flexible approach depending on the situation.

Some of you might have already accumulated some knowledge on teamwork and leadership. Or, you believe that you are a born teamworker/leader. We don't intend to resolve the continuing question whether these skills are nature or nurture; however, we believe that conscious efforts to develop related skills will help you to improve your ability to work in a team setting and to lead others.

Further Reading List

General books and guidelines on teamwork and leadership abound. You may speak to other researchers and supervisors to recommend some good books appropriate to your level. The following further reading list provides some articles and books on teamwork and leadership which you can refer to:

Burnes, B. (2000) *Managing Change: A Strategic Approach to Organisational Dynamics*. Financial Times/Prentice Hall, London.

Burns, J.M. (1978) *Leadership*. Harper & Row, New York.

Kanter, R.M. (1989) *When Giants Learn to Dance: Mastering the Challenges of Strategy, Management, and Careers in the 1990s*. Unwin, London.

Kotter, J.P. (1990a) *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management*. Free Press, New York.

Kotter, J.P. (1990b) *What leaders really do*, Harvard Business Review, May-June.

Manktelow, J. (2004) *MindTools: Essential skills for an excellent career*, Mind Tools, West Sussex.

Paulus, B. (1983) *Basic Group Processes*, Springer-Verlag, New York.

Sommerville, J. and Dalziel, S. (1998) Project teambuilding – the applicability of Belbin's team-role self-perception inventory, *International Journal of Project Management*, 16(3), pp. 165-171.

Tosi, H.L., Rizzo, J.R. and Carroll, S.J. (1990) *Managing Organisational Behaviour*, Harper and Row, New York.

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Appendix: Self-assessment for Teamwork and Leadership Skills

Complete this Skills Audit now and compare progress each year during your PhD. Through this exercise, you would have opportunities to assess your awareness of both strengths and weaknesses. This will form the basis of your supplementary skills profile. Having completed this assessment of your supplementary skills, you may want to set targets for yourself and develop strategy to improve any aspect of the particular supplementary skills. You may want to identify sources of good practice or model which you would like to emulate or learn through experience. Some of the aspects might be discussed during workshop or training sessions in your school, research institute or university, so check with the pertinent websites or student handbook. You may also discuss with your supervisor(s), who can provide you with some help on whether there are opportunities for you to practice your skills.

Rate your ability according to the scale provided as below. As you go through each category, it is useful to think about how you can develop your skills on a short-term as well as long-term basis.

Rating	
4	Very well I feel confident in my ability to use this skill.
3	Satisfactory I am able to use this skill well, but my ability could be further improved.
2	Needs attention My ability to use this skill needs to improve.
1	Needs considerable attention I struggle with this skill and need to put in considerable efforts to develop this skill.

<i>Rate your ability against each statement below:</i>	Rating	Target	Improvement Strategy
I am able work as part of a research team			
I can work with colleagues in a shared office and behave in a considerate manner			
I can assist colleagues in an area or technique that others may want to learn			
I am able to work with my supervisor(s) to further my progress in research			
I am able to network with peers within and across universities and industry			
I can network with peers nationally and internationally			
I can assist undergraduates as a mentor, graduate teaching assistant, guest lecturer, or demonstrator			
I can lead group seminars or workshops in my area of research			
I know requirements of professional bodies where I (want to) belong and comply with them			
I can construct and contribute to problem solving solutions for successful teamwork			
I can communicate effectively at the interpersonal and organisational level, and in doing so resolve or mitigate conflict			
I am apt at setting direction and motivate others to achieve common goals			
I can analyse different needs and wants of stakeholders of my research and act upon resultant knowledge			
<i>Consider your responses above and rate your overall ability for teamwork and leadership</i>	Rating	Target	Improvement Strategy
Overall teamwork and leadership skills			

Any problems?

Things I need to improve

Action plan for the next review (set your own review frequency such as quarterly or yearly)