

4

Teamwork and Problem-Solving Skills

Key Terms

interpersonal skills
team
quality
quality assurance
quality control
functional team
cross-functional team
multifunctional team
self-directed team
norm
goal
Gantt chart
problem
problem solving
criteria
constraint
Pareto Principle
brainstorming
compromise
consensus
conflict

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- **describe** the importance of teamwork in the workplace.
- **recognize** how teams develop and work effectively.
- **explain** the problem-solving process.
- **demonstrate** how to manage conflict.

Reading Advantage

Draw a comic strip that shows two employees having a conversation about what you think will be covered in this chapter. After reading the chapter, draw another comic strip that incorporates what you learned.



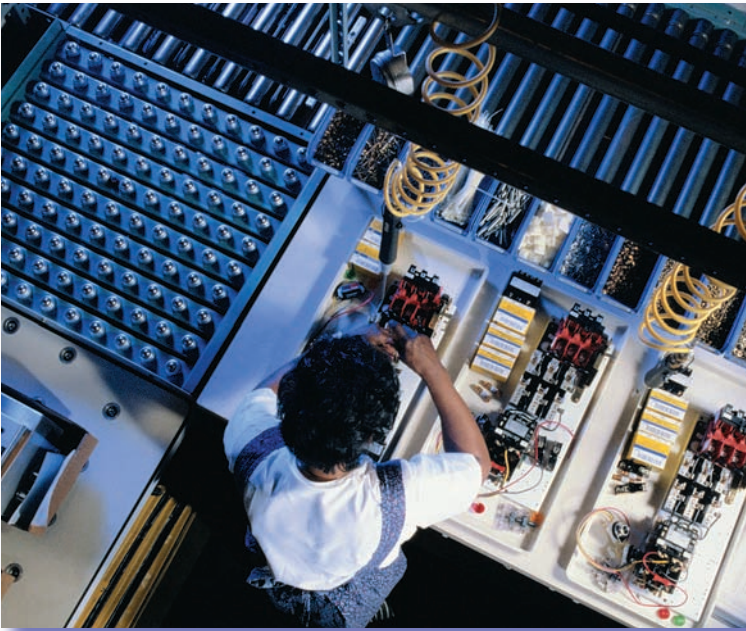
Key Concepts

- The American workplace has changed over time.
- Teams are often used in the workplace.
- Effective teams share leadership, rotate team roles, stay focused, and work for the common good.
- Knowing how to manage conflict is important in the workplace.

Working well with others is an important skill for future success at work. First and foremost, it requires good **interpersonal skills**. People with good interpersonal skills are friendly and sensitive to the needs of others. They communicate well and know how to listen. These skills are important in solving problems, working on teams, and dealing with customers. Using interpersonal skills well is an expectation in today's workplace.

Working with others can be fun and rewarding. It can also be frustrating and irritating. This chapter explains the importance of working as a team member in the workplace and ways to promote team harmony. A **team** is a small group of people working together for a common purpose.

Changing Nature of the Workplace



Not too long ago, many American workers were expected to leave their ability to think at the door when they entered the workplace. Managers made the decisions, and workers followed their orders. Workers spent long hours doing repetitive tasks that often required little or no formal training or creative thinking, 4-1. These jobs paid a good wage and provided good benefits. Workers could count on holding a lifelong job with one company that provided their families with a high standard of living.

This style of management worked well for decades. It helped make the United States the top manufacturing country in the world. After World War II, however, the business world began to change. The

4-1

Today, even repetitive jobs often require special skills, reasoning ability, or creativity.

U.S. economy boomed, and new products were in such great demand that production hardly kept pace. Competition as we know it today did not exist because products sold out easily. There was a willing buyer for everything made. Since products sold out quickly in the United States, product quality was not a major concern.

No single definition of **quality** exists in the workplace, but it generally means a commitment by everyone in an organization to exceed customer expectations. The terms **quality assurance** and **quality control** have the same meanings. These terms refer to a variety of strategies used by a company to ensure that its products and services are of the highest quality. Several of these strategies, such as the team approach, the Gantt chart, problem solving, consensus building, and Pareto analysis, are discussed later in this

chapter. They are all part of a “Total Quality” strategy involving meeting customer needs, employee involvement, and continuous improvement.

American industry failed to embrace many of these concepts and, as a result, the quality of many products built in the United States declined during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. This lack of attention to quality began to hurt American industry. More information on quality can be found at the Web site of the American Society for Quality (www.asq.org).

The first major challenge to U.S. industry was led by Japan. The quality of Japan’s products at the end of World War II was so low that most were considered unreliable. The entire Japanese economy suffered when sales slowed. As a result, the companies in Japan redesigned their workforce around a way of managing that focused on quality. This plan began in the United States but was abandoned when quantity, not quality, became the main goal.

Japan’s companies, however, decided to put quality first. They learned to compete with companies throughout the world. The automotive and electronics industries were prime examples. Cars, cameras, and television sets from Japan set the worldwide standards for quality for these products. They were rated higher than American products. The rebirth of industries in Japan and other countries led to worldwide competition. Communications and transportation improved.

The failure to compete on the world market negatively affected the morale of American workers. Many felt defeated and depressed when faced with the better quality and lower prices of overseas products. Many, too, lost their jobs when U.S. companies could not find buyers for their more expensive, lower quality products. As a result, a surplus of U.S. workers with outdated skills could not find work.

This lesson resulted in a number of changes in the workplace. The U.S. industry refocused on quality, making it the number one goal. See 4-2. This shift in focus increased the role of typical workers. They were no longer expected to leave their ability to think at the door. Workers were expected to help solve problems and make decisions on work methods, quality, and finances. Successful companies began using teams of workers to solve problems once handled by top managers. Most importantly, these changes created a need for a more highly educated American workforce.

This major adjustment in how work is performed continues to affect the workplace today. Employers want workers who are comfortable working with others and sharing ideas. They expect workers to stay knowledgeable about their work and continually make improvements. Employers want workers who can work with others, solve problems, and manage conflict. As a result, the quality of American products has been on the rise.

Thinking It Through

How does competition affect quality? Give examples from athletics or other areas that indicate how competition affects quality.



4-2

Companies have quality control departments to constantly check the quality of products coming off production lines.

Teams in the Workplace

More and more companies are now using teams to help solve problems and increase productivity in the workplace. Depending on its purpose, the typical number of members on a team ranges from 5 to 15 people.

Pros and Cons of the Team Approach

The team approach has a number of advantages for both the employer and the employee. As a rule, teams reach better and more creative decisions than individuals. One reason for this is the greater amount of information obtained by a group compared to the efforts of an individual. The saying “two heads are better than one” certainly applies to teams. One team member’s comments will often inspire ideas from others. This can lead to creative new ideas that would have never surfaced if several individuals had worked alone. See 4-3.

When research needs to be done, several people can gather information more quickly than one person can. Team members are more likely to make plans work when they are involved in the decision-making process. They can even make a poor plan work well if they agree with the idea. Effective teams make individuals feel better about themselves and the quality of their work. Members may feel they are accomplishing more than they could as individuals.

There are disadvantages to the team approach, too. Teams usually take more time to reach a decision than individuals do. Working with a group can be very frustrating, especially if the team is not effective. Personality clashes can develop which create an unpleasant working environment. Some people just are not good team members and make life difficult for others. It may take weeks or even years to develop an effective team. Some teams never fully develop, and production may suffer during this period.

4-3

Successful teamwork produces results that exceed what any single individual could do in the same amount of time.



As you can see, a team approach is not always best. It depends on the situation and individuals involved. In fact, some individuals can be more productive and creative than teams in a lot less time. Therefore, important considerations for employers are *when* and *how* to involve teams in the workplace.

Role of the Team in the Workplace

Teams in the workplace are formed for different purposes. Generally, three common types of teams exist: functional, cross-functional, and multifunctional.

Functional Teams

All members of a **functional team** have similar skills and expertise although they would not be able to perform one another's jobs. They usually work in the same department. Functional teams solve problems based on their understanding of the work to be done and each team member's unique contribution. For example, a functional team for plant maintenance might be composed of a variety of workers such as electricians, plumbers, and air-conditioning specialists. They would have a common knowledge of the department's role in keeping a plant running and could help solve maintenance related problems.

Cross-Functional Teams

A **cross-functional team** consists of workers from different areas within a company who are assigned to work on a specific project. See 4-4. Members are selected based on their expertise and ability to make a unique and meaningful contribution. For example, a team whose purpose is to create a new car design might consist of representatives of the company's design, manufacturing, marketing, and financial departments. The marketing representative could share information on special features that help the car sell better. The manufacturing representative would comment on the company's ability to build the new design. Working together, their goal would be to produce a well-designed car that is relatively easy to build and can be profitably sold at a reasonable price.



4-4

Cross-functional teams consist of people from different parts of the organization who can contribute different types of expertise.

Multifunctional Team

Members of a **multifunctional team** have been cross-trained so each person is able to perform the duties of all the other team members.

Reflect Further

What teams have you joined? Did you always enjoy working on the team? Were there times when you disliked being a member of the team?

Thinking It Through

When teams are productive in the workplace, do you think more or fewer top managers are needed?

An example might be a team of workers who assemble automobile air conditioners. Each member of the team would be able to perform all the jobs on the assembly line. When a worker is ill or takes a rest break, another team member can step in and do the job without further instruction.

Each of the previous teams could perform as a self-directed team. A **self-directed team** has been given full responsibility for carrying out its assignment. The members of the team must set work-related goals and objectives. They identify priorities, set budgets, develop work plans, and solve problems. Self-directed teams evaluate their own progress and often hire, train, and evaluate their team members. For example, if a worker becomes seriously ill, the team decides whether to hire a temporary replacement or to have the team members work overtime.

Stages of Team Development

You cannot group strangers together and expect them to perform well right away. Because teams are composed of people, they go through stages of development just as people do. It takes time for team members to learn to work together.

Team development evolves in stages. One way to identify these stages is the following set of terms: *forming*, *storming*, *norming*, and *performing*. These stages were developed by group dynamics expert Dr. Bruce Tuckman. Generally team members do not begin to work well together until the last two stages. However, not all teams make it to stage four. Some teams may not make it past stages one or two.

Stage 1. Forming

Teams go through the forming stage when they first come together. At this stage the team members may feel good about what the team can do. Individuals may be excited about being chosen for the team.

In many cases, members of the team do not know each other very well. They may feel uncomfortable, afraid to speak, and full of doubts. They may not understand why the team was formed or what is expected of them. During this stage, team members become acquainted. They also discuss the purpose of the team. There may be no leadership, or someone may step up and take charge.

Stage 2. Storming

Disagreements are likely to occur when team members get to know each other better. Team members may distrust or not understand one another. They may even question why the team was formed. See 4-5.

There may be disagreements over how the team operates, who is in charge, or when and where the team meets. Sometimes these conflicts are discussed openly during meetings. In other cases team members

Reflect Further

In your experience, what can help new members feel comfortable on a team? What can make them feel uncomfortable?



4-5

Members of new teams may have disagreements while they get to know and trust one another.

may talk behind others' backs. There may be personality clashes and arguments. As a result, team members may find it hard to work together and make decisions. However, this is also the stage when members begin to trust each other and share their feelings more openly.

Stage 3. Norming

At this stage, team members begin to work together and leaders emerge. Teams resolve the disagreements that began during stage 2. The members openly discuss issues, listen to one another, and become more involved. They feel good about themselves and the team. They accept the team's decisions and are willing to work hard to carry them out.

The title of this stage comes from the scientific term *norm*. A **norm** is a pattern that is typical in the development of a social group.

Stage 4. Performing

This is the highest level of team performance. The positive feelings that developed during stage 3 continue to grow. Members are committed to the team and the organization. They take responsibility for making improvements and examine the best way for the team to function. Different team members may take charge depending on the task at hand. The team works at maximum efficiency in this stage.

Characteristics of an Effective Team

A good, effective team is no accident. It is a sign of a team that has reached the highest level of development, the *performing* stage. The members of a team in the performing stage assume leadership and other team roles as needed. They stay focused and work for the common good.

Reflect Further

If you were the leader of a team whose members were split on which direction to follow, what would you do?



Shares Leadership

Leadership on effective teams is shared among the members. Often the person who knows the most about a given problem serves as team leader until the problem is resolved. When a new problem is faced, the most expert person on that issue becomes the next team leader, 4-6.

When leadership is shared, everyone feels responsible for the success or failure of the team. All members of the group are more willing to make decisions and take responsibility for them. Leadership does not mean telling others what to do. Instead, it involves helping the team move forward. A leader listens and encourages the team members. People who like to control others are not very effective team leaders.

4-6

An effective team is led by the member most expert in the subject. When the mission is accomplished and a new goal is identified, the most qualified team member then leads the group.

Reflect Further

Do you prefer to follow your plans or those of others? Why?

Rotates Team Roles

A good team keeps everyone involved. One way to accomplish this is to assign roles to members. Besides rotating the role of leader, other roles are assigned to different members, too. This is particularly true in team meetings. The roles that rotate among members are shown in 4-7.

These roles may vary depending on the needs of the team. Taking turns performing the roles increases interest in the team's activities. The team leader one week may be the recorder next week.

Stays Focused

An effective team consists of members always aware of their mission. There are several ways to keep the team's focus on its mission.

4-7

For a team to work effectively, all these roles must be filled.

Team Roles

- **Leader**—sets the team's agenda and helps the group make progress
- **Encourager**—inspires everyone to participate and makes certain that everyone's opinions are heard
- **Taskmaster**—keeps the group focused on achieving its goal(s)
- **Critic**—questions the assumptions expressed and decisions made
- **Recorder**—keeps detailed notes

- *Using humor effectively*—relaxes team members and helps them focus on the issues. There are times when groups become too frustrated or tense. A humorous comment helps to release the tension. However, make sure humor is never used to “put down” or embarrass another team member.
- *Taking a break*—can also relieve pressure, reduce tension, and get a team back on track. It can be a few minutes or a few days long, depending on the situation. Team members often return with fresh ideas and more positive attitudes even after a ten-minute break.
- *Listing goals*—helps team members continually move forward. A **goal** is what you want to attain. For example, a work team may work toward the goal of reducing department injuries in June by 50 percent. Concentrating on the steps everyone must take to achieve that goal keeps the team focused.

One tool for staying focused is a **Gantt chart**. This is a graph that shows the steps of a task divided across a timetable. See 4-8. Team members can tell at a glance what phase of the goal should be in progress.

Works for the Common Good

Members of effective teams agree on what they are trying to do. The team members are able to set and meet deadlines. They encourage each other and celebrate both team and individual accomplishments. Effective teams make sure everyone understands the plan and helps carry it out. The team checks on the way it operates to see if it can work better.

Advertising Plan									
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9
<i>Buy advertising space.</i>	■	■							
<i>Run magazine ads.</i>			■	■	■				
<i>Run newspaper ads.</i>				■	■	■	■		
<i>Run TV commercials.</i>						■	■	■	
<i>Run in-store promotions.</i>						■	■	■	■
<i>Measure sales; evaluate plan.</i>								■	■

4-8

A Gantt chart provides an easy way to see if team activities are proceeding as planned.

In the Real World

Pit Crews Are Team Players

Pit crews are critical to the success of professional racecar drivers. The crew may include a chief mechanic, general manager, driver assistant, “fuel” person, “tire” person, transportation personnel, and others. Pit crews must set up the pit hours before a race. They make sure gasoline, tires, and anything else they may possibly need is available in the pit.

Before the race, the pit crews wheel pit buggies and huge toolboxes into the pit area. The equipment and supplies include jacks, spare chassis, drink holder with extended handle for the driver, brush with extended handle to clean the car’s grill, and spare shocks. Three gas cans, each containing 11 gallons of fuel, are placed in the pit. There is also a broom in the pit for cleanup, and a gas catch-can to catch excess fuel during a fill-up. There are various lubricants, mufflers, lug nuts, sets of spare tires, and sometimes even a spare steering wheel. The list of items needed during a race is quite lengthy. If something is needed in a race and is not in the pit, a crew member must run to the garage to get it. That takes valuable racing time.

Around the pit buggy, five air wrenches are carefully placed. Hoses connecting them with nitrogen tanks are coiled and secured so nobody

trips over them. The nitrogen tanks provide the pressure needed to operate the wrenches.

Probably one of the most important tools used during pit stops is a two-way radio. Before the driver comes down pit road, he can tell his crew about any problems the car has. He can talk with his crew for instructions, such as when to pit and how many tires will be changed.

Only seven crew members are allowed over the pit wall at any time to work on the car, so special tricks are used to perform the work at lightning speed. Pit crews can change four tires and add 22 gallons of fuel to the car in less than 28 seconds. The actual fueling process on a stock car only takes ten or eleven seconds.

For the driver to win the race, the team has to function like clockwork. Each member has to know his or her job well and be highly skilled. The successful team not only helps the driver win a race but also assures a safe race without injuries.

Questions to Discuss

1. What characteristics of an effective team are evident in a pit crew at a professional car race?
2. To what stage of team development has a racecar pit crew evolved?
3. How does teamwork solve the problems associated with driving racecars in competition?

Problem Solving

A **problem** exists when there is a difference between reality (what you have) and expectation (what you want). **Problem solving** is the process of making an expectation a reality. The methods used to solve problems are the same for individuals and teams.

Employers are finding that many benefits occur when workers are given more responsibility for solving work problems. Workers take greater pride in their work and employee morale increases, 4-9.



4-9

Large construction projects present many problem-solving challenges. After solving them, workers often feel strongly attached to the finished projects.

Employees also tend to support an action plan they helped develop and complete successfully. Employers expect their workers to be able to solve problems.

Solving problems as a team will involve the same basic steps as solving them as an individual. The important difference is that everyone should be involved as much as possible to keep the team functioning effectively. Problem solving skills can be developed if you learn and follow several basic steps.

Steps in Problem Solving

Knowing the steps involved in solving problems will increase your success rate. See 4-10. Although the following steps are listed in a recommended order, it is not simply a matter of doing one step at a time. Very often information you obtain at one step may send you back to a previous step. As you gather data in step 2, for example, you may find that you did not fully do step 1. When this occurs, simply go back to the beginning and proceed once again through the steps.

Problem-Solving Steps

1. Identify and analyze the problem.
2. Collect and analyze data.
3. Consider possible solutions.
4. Choose the best plan.
5. Implement the plan.
6. Observe, evaluate, and adjust.

1. Identify and Analyze the Problem

Unsuccessful problem-solvers tend to jump right in and start trying to find solutions. Successful problem-solvers take time to identify and analyze the problem. It is very important to learn as much as you can about the problem before taking any action.

4-10

Learning the problem-solving process will increase your confidence in your ability to solve problems.

Do you understand what the problem is? Can you state it accurately? For example, you may not be getting along well with your employer. A major cause for this friction is your frequent tardiness to work. Usually your friends give you a ride to work and pick you up late. Simply stated, however, the problem is your late arrival to work caused by riding with your late friends. The friction with your boss is only a result of the problem.

The first step in solving a problem is to state it accurately. As you try to determine the basic problem, you will identify factors related to the problem. These factors will be useful when you consider possible solutions in step 3. The factors to consider are criteria and constraints.

- **Criteria** are standards you use to find the best solution. Without the criteria to help make an evaluation, it is difficult to know if the problem is really solved. For this example, you may need a solution that incorporates the following criteria: *arriving five minutes early to work* and *arriving dressed in your work uniform*. Evaluation criteria will have an important influence on which solution you choose.
- **Constraints** are factors that may restrict or hinder your ability to solve the problem. One hindrance to arriving on time at work may be *not having your own car*. Another constraint may be *having just 50 minutes between your last class and the time work starts*. At this point your identification and analysis of the problem would resemble the chart in 4-11.

2. Collect and Analyze Data

In this step, you collect and analyze data related to the problem and ask yourself certain questions. What do you need to know about the problem that you do not already know? What information is available to help you solve the problem? Do you have everything you will need? If not, can you obtain what you need or must you make adjustments?

4-11

A careful examination of a problem pinpoints all the important factors.

Identifying the “Late Arrival” Problem

Problem

- Late arrival at work caused by riding with friends who are usually late

Criteria

- Arriving five minutes early to work
- Arriving dressed in uniform

Constraints

- No car
- Just 50 minutes between the last class and the time work starts

As you go through this process, other questions may arise. These questions will vary depending on the type of problem being solved. For example, what type of public transportation is available? Can you get a ride to work from more reliable friends, relatives, or coworkers?

You can gather data at the same time you develop your questions. This information should help you better understand the problem and provide ideas for possible solutions to it. If it does not, you may need to go back and reconsider how you identified and analyzed the problem.

One of the problems in collecting data is organizing it in a form that team members can easily understand and apply. Pareto analysis is one strategy for accomplishing this. The **Pareto Principle** states that as a general rule, 20% of causes produce 80% of the effects, or 20% of the effort produces 80% of the results. If you can discover which areas to concentrate on, you will be much more productive in solving problems and accomplishing goals. For example, imagine that 100 students were surveyed to determine the type of fund-raiser in which they would be willing to participate. Forty-four percent would prefer a car wash, while 30 percent prefer a candy sale. The remaining 26 percent of responses are divided among four other activities. The students conclude that if they concentrate on just the car wash and candy sale, they will have the largest percent of student participation.

Once you are satisfied that you have accurately defined the problem and collected all important data, you can focus on possible solutions.

3. Consider Possible Solutions

This is the first step in actually solving the problem. Your first concern is the quantity of ideas you develop, not their quality. Try to think creatively. Even wild ideas may have some later value. Keep your ideas simple and brief at first. Do not worry about details. See 4-12.

Some possible solutions to the problem of tardiness may be to take a cab, ride the bus, or buy a car. Once you list various ideas, you can begin to narrow the list. Now is the time to think about the quality of your ideas. If you do not have enough money to buy a car or take a taxi, these are not practical solutions to your problem. Keep your evaluation criteria in mind, but do not be overly concerned about that at this point. Add more detail to the ideas that seem workable. You may even consider combining several ideas. This process should result in a few workable solutions.



4-12

Brainstorming can help groups generate many ideas in a short period of time.

4. Choose the Best Plan

When you have two or three good ideas, it is time to select the best one. Evaluate each in terms of the problem, the evaluation criteria, and the constraints that you identified in step 1. After considering all options, you may decide that the solution to your late-arrival problem is to take the city bus.

5. Implement the Plan

You should now be confident that you have a good workable answer to your problem. You know what bus to catch and where to catch it. It is time to carry out your plan.

In the Real World

Sharika's Job Gets Difficult

Sharika was recently promoted to evening manager at the Pizza Palace. She had been performing her new responsibilities for about two weeks and everything was going smoothly. She was really enjoying it and felt very competent as a manager.

Then one night, Clare, her top server, came to her with a problem. Clare was very upset. She explained that she was doing all the work while Roger, the other night server, did very little. He left tables for her to clean. He often pretended to be too busy to handle some of his assigned tables and left them for her to handle. He even took tips belonging to her. Clare said

Roger never did this before Sharika became manager. Roger seemed to be taking advantage of his new, inexperienced manager.

Sharika was shocked! She hadn't noticed anything wrong with Roger's work habits. In fact, she thought he was a pretty good employee. He was very friendly and outgoing, and Sharika enjoyed working with him.

Questions to Discuss

1. Do you think Clare should have talked with Roger first?
2. What reasons might Clare have had for bringing this problem to Sharika's attention?
3. What steps should Sharika take to try to resolve this problem?

Extend Your Knowledge

Success Brings Confidence

Do you feel apprehensive about problem solving in the workplace? As you become more successful at solving problems, your confidence will grow. The combination of knowing how to solve problems and having the confidence to try is very important. New problems will seem less intimidating when you are more confident of your abilities. You will soon find yourself looking forward to the challenges of problem solving.

6. Observe, Evaluate, and Adjust

This is one of the most important steps in the problem-solving process. Even the best plans may not go smoothly at first. Therefore, the plan must be carefully watched and evaluated. Perhaps adjustments are needed. It is also important to allow flexibility in your plan.

Again consider the evaluation criteria you developed when you identified the problem. The success or failure of your plan will depend to a great extent on how well your plan meets the evaluation criteria. If the plan fails this test, it may need to be abandoned. When that happens, return to step one to reexamine the problem.

To continue with our example, it is now time to check how well taking the bus solves the problem. Is it a dependable solution? Do you arrive at work five minutes early each day? Do you have enough time to dress into your work uniform before catching the bus? If this solution does not meet your evaluation criteria, discover why. Perhaps there is a better way to solve your problem.

Aids to Problem Solving

For a team to solve problems well, all members should be involved in each step of the process. Brainstorming, compromise, and consensus are tools that help teams through the problem-solving process.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a group technique used to develop many ideas in a relatively short time. It can be used during a number of different steps in the problem-solving process. However, it is a very good way to identify answers to a problem. The quality of the ideas is not a major

Thinking It Through

Is it easier to solve a big problem alone or with help? Which is faster?

4-13

This organized approach will help improve the results of a brainstorming session.

Brainstorming Strategy

- Have the team sit in a semicircle to encourage discussion.
- Present the topic to the group.
- Have one member of the group offer his or her idea.
- Have someone record the ideas on a board or flip chart located so all can see. Do not criticize or discuss the merits of the ideas.
- Continue around the circle as each person states one idea. (It is permissible to build on someone else's ideas.) A person with nothing to contribute may pass.
- Continue around the circle as many times as necessary to identify all ideas.
- Discuss and evaluate the ideas.

concern during brainstorming. The purpose is to identify as many ideas as possible. No idea is considered too ridiculous. See the chart in 4-13 for a common way to hold a brainstorming session.

Reflect Further

Did you ever have to compromise to solve a problem? How committed were you to the solution?

Compromise

One way to solve a problem is through compromise. **Compromise** is when each side gives up something of value to help solve a problem. All sides accept the idea, but no one may feel it is the best one. This is because they gave up something that was important to them to reach the compromise.

Voting is often used to reach a compromise. However, the people who vote for an issue may feel more positive about carrying it out than those who vote against it.

Consensus

Another way to solve a problem is through consensus. A **consensus** is when all members of a group fully accept and support the decision. It is much more difficult to reach than a compromise. When all members agree with a decision, they are more likely to be excited about carrying it out. Ideas must be thoroughly discussed and understood by all team members before a consensus can be reached. As a result, the process often leads to new and more creative ideas that neither side considered in the beginning. There is no need to vote since everyone fully supports a decision reached by consensus.

A major problem with achieving consensus is that it is very time consuming. Therefore, you may not want to try to reach a consensus for all decisions.

Managing Conflict

As you work with others, whether as individuals or in teams, disagreements are bound to occur. More serious disagreements are called conflict. **Conflict** is a hostile situation resulting from opposing views. It is important that you know how to handle conflict so it does not become a destructive force in the workplace. See 4-14.

In a traditional work setting, a permanent manager supervises a group of employees. That manager is responsible for managing conflict. In teamwork arrangements, however, the individuals have a responsibility to prevent destructive conflict among team members. The person temporarily assigned to lead the team has a special responsibility. The steps to managing conflict are shown in 4-15.



4-14

Stress, frustration, anger, and even illness can result from conflict in the workplace.

Know When to Intervene

Disagreements are not always bad. Constructive disagreements often lead to improvements in the workplace. One of the first decisions you must make when they arise is whether to become involved. It is sometimes best not to act. What seems terribly important at the moment may later seem unimportant or even trivial. Sometimes your action may even make a difficult situation worse.

Steps in Managing Conflict

- Know when to intervene.
- Address the conflict.
- Identify the source and the importance of the conflict.
- Identify possible solutions.
- Develop an acceptable solution.
- Implement and evaluate.

4-15

Knowing how to manage conflicts when they occur is part of being an effective team player.

Thinking It Through

Which of the problem-solving aids do representatives in Congress use?

Often avoiding or ignoring a serious disagreement only postpones the time when conflict will result and action will be required. As a rule, it is time to consider action when the team or individual's happiness and/or productivity are affected.

Address the Conflict

When you have decided to take action, there are some rules you should follow. The first consideration, and perhaps most important, is to take a positive approach. Accept disagreement as a natural part of the group process. Then try to follow the golden rule as you address the situation. Treat others as you would want to be treated. Try to understand the issue from the other person's point of view. Try to protect the person's self-esteem. Do not ever try to embarrass someone.

Whenever possible, try to avoid addressing the problem in front of others. Find a quiet place to resolve the conflict so you will not be distracted. Talk directly to the person or persons involved, 4-16. Demonstrate control by speaking in a calm, firm, constructive way. Use "I" messages as you discuss the problem. For example, you might say: "I really felt embarrassed when you shouted at me" rather than "You should know better than to shout at other people." "You" messages tend to put people on the defensive.



4-16

When you find two or more people causing conflict at work, it is best to discuss the problem openly with them at the same time.

Identify the Source and Importance of the Conflict

The next step in resolving conflict is to state the problem openly. Encourage each person to describe the problem as he or she sees it. Be sure there is a real problem, not simply a misunderstanding. Be specific in the discussion rather than general. Try to get people to focus directly

on the problem. Imagine someone is continually late for team meetings. Is that the problem, or is tardiness a sign of a larger problem? What is the real problem?

Keep an open mind as the problem is discussed. Focus on getting all the facts expressed. Avoid making snap judgments and jumping to conclusions.

Identify Possible Solutions

Be sure everyone involved understands that each individual is responsible for both the problem and the solution. Anyone who is not involved in the matter should not be included in the discussion. Ask for comments and possible solutions from all sides and discuss the pros and cons.

Develop an Acceptable Solution

Focus on behavior that can be changed, not something a person cannot control. At the end of the discussion, summarize what has been decided and what action will be taken. Make sure everyone understands his or her role in solving the problem.

Implement and Evaluate

Once an agreeable solution has been reached, it is time to try it. Be willing to become involved in carrying out the plan. Avoid thinking it is not your problem. Be sure to check periodically to make sure teamwork has improved to a satisfactory extent. If not, it may be time to bring the concerned parties back together and try again to resolve the conflict. You could address the conflict from the beginning or return to the point where the breakdown occurred.

Reflect Further

When was the last time you were involved in a conflict with another person? How was it resolved? How did you feel afterward? Could it have been handled differently? If so, how?

Summary

At the end of World War II, American products were so much in demand that quality was sacrificed for the sake of increasing production. Then the Japanese adopted some strategies that focused on quality and helped them make products preferred around the world. The success of the Japanese caused American companies to refocus on quality. These and other changes required workers who could solve problems and work in teams.

The team approach offers advantages to both the employer and the employee. Different teams are used for different purposes, but all teams that work effectively share common qualities. It takes considerable time to develop into an effective and smooth running team.

Knowing the basic steps in problem solving will increase your confidence in your ability to solve problems. Being able to accurately identify and analyze problems is the first and most important step in the problem-solving process.

When a team solves a problem, there is the added challenge of keeping the members involved in the process. A good team leader knows when to try to reach consensus and when to be satisfied with compromise. As you work with others on a team, it is important that you are able to understand and manage conflict effectively.

Facts in Review

1. When did American companies begin relying on teamwork?
2. What are three possible advantages of teamwork?
3. What are three possible disadvantages of teamwork?
4. What three common types of teams are used in the workplace?
5. Briefly describe the four stages of team development.
6. What are the four characteristics of an effective team?
7. Name three ways to keep the team focused.
8. Briefly list the problem-solving steps.
9. List and describe the three considerations important in identifying and analyzing a problem.
10. What is the Pareto Principle?
11. Why is it important to check how well a specific plan solves a specific problem?
12. True or false. When brainstorming, the most important consideration is the quality of the ideas generated.
13. True or false. In a decision involving compromise, everyone involved feels that the decision is the best one.
14. List the steps in managing conflict.
15. Why should “I” messages be used when attempting to resolve conflicts?

Developing Your Academic Skills

1. **Science.** To stress teamwork in the workplace, work in teams on an experiment. Divide tasks equally among team members. Write reports on how each member's contribution was instrumental in making the experiment a success, and relate this to the necessity of teamwork in the workplace.
2. **Science.** Discuss the steps in the scientific method. Compare and contrast the scientific method with the steps in problem solving.
3. **Social studies.** Research the labor movement following World War II and its long-term effects on the American workplace. Also study the growth of business in Japan after the war.

Information Technology Applications

1. Use the Internet to research a current topic involving conflict resolution, such as a strike or political situation. Use the information to debate the topic in class.
2. Use the Internet to research aspects of the changing workplace. The Web site for the Department of Labor, www.dol.gov, contains information about working in the 21st century.
3. Conduct an Internet search on one of the following problem-solving tools, which were not covered in this chapter: benchmarking, cause-effect diagram, control chart, force-field analysis, nominal group technique, or histogram. Write a brief paper describing the technique and how it is used.

Applying Your Knowledge and Skills

1. **Communications.** Invite someone who has been employed for 40 or more years to speak to your class on how the workplace has changed over that period.
2. **Leadership and Teamwork.** Ask someone to speak to your class who works in a team setting. Ask him or her to share experiences related to each of the four stages of team development.
3. **Problem Solving and Critical Thinking.** Set up a situation where two of your classmates are having a disagreement. Select another classmate to act as moderator and demonstrate the steps in resolving a conflict as discussed in the text. Conclude the activity by having your class discuss the pros and cons of the techniques used in the role-play.
4. **Employability and Career Development.** Organize and conduct a brainstorming session on a work-related problem. Try to involve people outside the school in your group.
5. **Leadership and Teamwork.** Form a team of four to six members. Identify a problem for the team to solve and role-play the four stages of team development: forming, storming, norming, and performing. End the role-play with a discussion of how members felt during each of the stages.

Developing Workplace Skills

Work with three or four classmates to examine the personal traits needed to contribute to effective teamwork. Begin by developing a checklist of traits needed in effective team members. Then, brainstorm ways for promoting the development of each trait. From your brainstorming ideas, create a student handout listing helpful tips for developing traits that contribute to good teamwork. Title it "Tips for Acquiring Teamwork Traits" and use a computer software program to enhance its appearance.