

FETRA



FELLOW TRAVELLERS

SOFT SKILLS FOR HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN SMES

SOFT SKILLS IN HUMAN RESOURCES

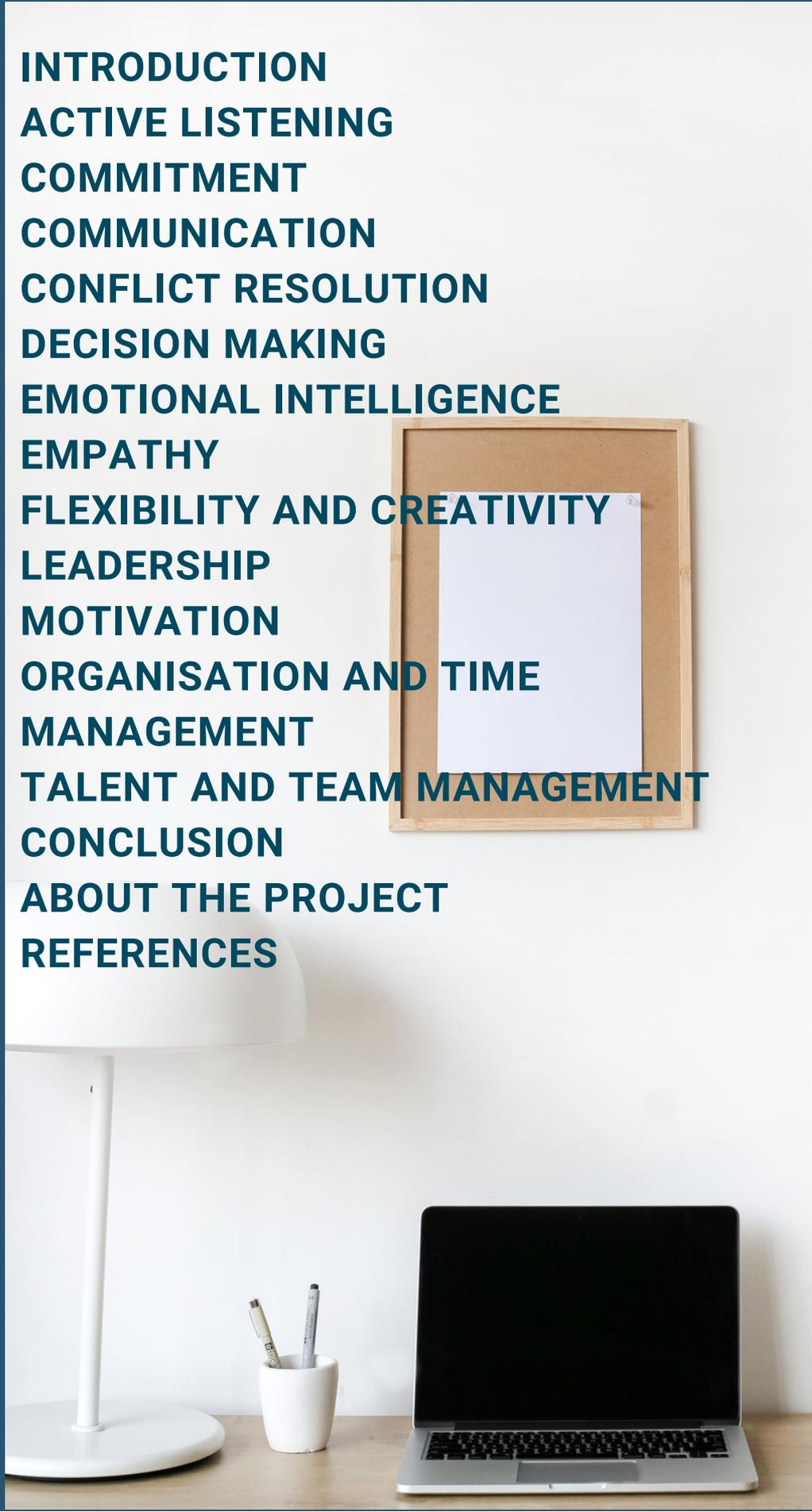
**GUIDE AND RESOURCE PACK ON
THE TOP 12 SOFT SKILLS NEEDED
FOR SME SUCCESS**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

04	INTRODUCTION
05	ACTIVE LISTENING
24	COMMITMENT
42	COMMUNICATION
58	CONFLICT RESOLUTION
78	DECISION MAKING
101	EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
120	EMPATHY
137	FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY
155	LEADERSHIP
173	MOTIVATION
190	ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT
210	TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT
229	CONCLUSION
230	ABOUT THE PROJECT
231	REFERENCES





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INTRODUCTION

SOFT SKILLS IN SME MANAGEMENT

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of Europe's economy. They represent 99% of all businesses in the EU. In the past five years, they have created around 85% of new jobs and provided two-thirds of the total private sector employment in the EU. The European Commission considers SMEs and entrepreneurship as key to ensuring economic growth, innovation, job creation, and social integration in the EU. This is especially important taking into account that according to Eurostat an average of more than 60% of SMEs fail in the first five years of live, and the right election of the staff has much to do.

Hiring the right candidate involves more than just assessing their technical skills and knowledge. Competencies play a crucial role in determining how successful a candidate will be in organisations which globally are struggling to plug their skills-gaps and are sourcing talent from unconventional channels. Competency-based hiring is the

solution to ensuring you have the right person for the job.

Through our research, we have identified the top 12 skills that are essential for managers, HR representatives, and all employees to have in order to have the greatest chance for success within the company.

HOW TO USE THIS E-BOOK

This e-book is intended for use by managers of SMEs. The structure of the booklet is separated into twelve separate skills, with each chapter beginning with a module detailing the definition of the skill, the objectives and outcomes of the module, the skill within the SME context and recruitment process, and how to develop the skill in managers and employees alike.

Each module is followed by two tools which SMEs can implement in order to hone that specific skill in their employees. Each tool is intended to provide a practical activity that managers can facilitate once they have identified the skills they wish to improve in themselves and their employees.

DISCLAIMER

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ACTIVE LISTENING

DEFINITION

Active Listening is the capacity of effectively listening to a message, moving beyond simply hearing it. It is entailed within the larger context of a message being conveyed, including the additional elements in presence, beyond the vocalisation of the message.

Active listening implies the attention paid to all the additional elements in place during the communication, in order to optimise it: when acting as an active listener, the receiver will effectively care for the sender's body language, their emotions, will show genuine interest in the message, will avoid judgements, will avoid distractions, will provide relevant and constructive feedback, will pose emphatic questions in order to clarify ongoing doubts or possible misunderstandings, and will generate moments asking for the sender's confirmation, in order to ensure that the correct message is effectively conveyed in its entirety.

Active listening turns into one important skill under the broader umbrella of emotional intelligence; being directly connected to empathy, this later relates to the

capacity of looking into the eyes of the other and not letting own experiences and life stories run judgments of the interlocutor during their speech. Active listening, in short, means listening with all senses focused on the person and on the message being conveyed as inserted within a broader and specific context for which the listener actively cares for.

Within the scope of the FETRA project, active listening is the capacity that a SME leader and/or a HR manager has, or consciously acquires, in order to be distinctively alert for a message being conveyed to them by any of the company's employees, in order to ensure that the message has been properly conveyed and the sender has been listened to and respected. At the same time, they will easily engage with promoting, within the company, an environment of 'active listeners.'

In order to succeed as an active listener, the receiver of a message must realise that such a communication principle can actually bring a series of benefits ranging from improvement in their relationships with friends, peers, colleagues, and clients within the scope of the company, to the reduction of conflicts caused by

ACTIVE LISTENING

communication failures, this latter facet being of paramount importance within a healthy work environment.

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES:

- To understand what active listening is
- To know the conceptual framework of active listening
- To relate the concept of active listening within the broader scope of related soft skills
- To recognise the importance of active listening within social and labour relations
- To be able to transfer knowledge about active listening to its practice, particularly within SME leadership and HR management.

OUTCOMES:

- To identify the specifics of active listening characteristics and intentionally set them up
- To apply active listening techniques to improve communication in general
- To apply active listening techniques to improve communication in the work environment
- To be able to perform active listening techniques during HR management, including recruiting processes
- To be able to identify active listening in job applicants during the recruitment processes

ACTIVE LISTENING

ACTIVE LISTENING IN THE SME CONTEXT

The importance of active listening in SMEs' context is related with sound communication and the resolution of conflicts. Conflict is to be expected and, since the organisational environment is composed of people with diverse opinions and personalities, conflict is expected to occur at the workplace. Once again, when compared to large companies, the conflict in SMEs can be rather strong and devastating, as it can climb to all members of the company, affecting everyone at the same time and, beyond people's wellbeing and health, putting performance and results at risk.

Thus, no matter how great the synergy between the teams of a company, inevitably, at certain moments, there will be some type of conflicting situation. This is where there is a need to adopt measures aiming to solve them.

However, active listening is a skill, not only able to act on conflict resolution, but mainly to act in order to prevent it and/or to smoothen its probable results. In this sense it can

be seen as a prophylactic measure on severe conflict emerging.

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

One of the great codes of conduct to be able to develop effective communication with other people is simply to know how to listen. This means that even if the receiver of a message does not agree with what the sender is conveying, they should not lose sight of the importance of listening and the aimed result of the communication, showing interest in the speech. This allows the receiver to listen while checking that they have effectively understood the broader message, thus being able to either agree or disagree in a respectful way.

Active listening turns into a skill that supports and leads to positive and non-toxic relationships, whether at a personal or at a professional level. Concerning this latter aspect, more relevant in the context of the FETRA project, active listening shows to working colleagues, peers, and employees that they are valued, that their contributions are considered, and that their ideas are accepted as valid, even if diverse or opposing to others. Within a company this is a very important impact, leading to a positive and sound working

ACTIVE LISTENING

environment, and even to a safer working environment, since it supports stress and distractions' reduction, leading to focus, attention, and improved working performance.

In summary, while active listening acts on reducing or preventing conflict, it helps to create good relationships, to develop empathy, and to raise awareness on the importance of listening to each other and helping each other in diverse working situations.

Kawamichi, H et al (2015) reported that 'the recognition of active listening activates the reward system, and that the emotional appraisal of experiences that had been subject to active listening would be improved'. Considering such an approach, an exercise for the working environment and SMEs can be provided, stating that:

- It is of foremost importance that SME managers possess this skill, since it will set up an overall positive feeling amongst employees who will activate their reward system, thus working in a better mood with a direct effect on the company's social environment and, ultimately, on its' working productivity;
- Aligned with the above-

- mentioned impact, the effect on an SME is expected to be turned into a more focused working team and workers with stronger feelings of reward by employers. Thus, particular working conflicts are prevented, namely those based in lack of participatory approaches and lack of proper rewarding systems: while a due reward system based on material gain is important, it is also important to establish a reward system based on personal and professional recognition, this later being conveyed, amongst other means, by means of active listening;
- Therefore, the clear positive effects of active listening and the performance advantages of this skill on the day-to-day running of an SME happen at the levels of: a good social environment, conflict prevention and conflict resolution, increase of empathy and of the feeling of being rewarded, and, ultimately, the positive effects of such results increase working commitment and productivity.

RISKS

Following the considerations posed under 3.1 above, some research

ACTIVE LISTENING

suggests a close link between job security (here considered as job maintenance alongside and supported by 'standard' well-being feeling of the employee) and active listening. Kris et al (2021) states that 'our findings suggest that in environments characterised by widespread change and impending job loss, an increase in active listening may have a ripple effect in increasing perceived control and decreasing AJI' (AJI: affective job insecurity). In this sense, not only does active listening become important for the overall environment within a SME but also it becomes relevant as a job retention factor (real and perceived).

Accordingly, associated risks of a lack of active listening mastering by SME managers can be declared as the risk of lowering the quality of the social environment within the company, as well as the risk of workers' dissatisfaction and discouragement, leading to lower quality work outcomes and, ultimately, to a greater fluctuation of the staff, which is strongly penalising for SMEs, forced constantly to train new staff (although new employees may be technically experienced people, they will always need to adjust to the organisational culture and practices, which may take a long

time or even not succeed at all).

In summary, risks incurred by SME managers lacking active listening skills are, amongst others:

- the increased demotivation of employees;
- the emergence and increase of conflict;
- the occurrence of a fluctuating workforce;
- a decrease in the quality of work results;
- a reduction in the company's productivity;
- a higher difficulty in relationships with the client, thus leading to a decrease in demand for the company from customers and potential customers (according to Min et al (2021), 'A service employee's active listening plays a crucial role in restoring a damaged customer relationship').

ACTIVE LISTENING

ACTIVE LISTENING IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Active listening in SMEs and as a skill mastered by managers is of paramount relevance. Previous research, as well as results of FETRA's research (namely that conducted in the scope of the definition of the self-evaluation tool in human resources soft skills), has shown that in SMEs, managers ('general' managers) are often also responsible for the recruiting process, and that even when outsourced, human resources recruitment still highly depends on the decisions of the manager (also in some cases the only human resource of the company up to the moment of recruiting newcomers). Therefore, the characteristics of the manager, their hard skills and soft skills, will be determinant for the further pathway of the company, including such a higher responsibility as hiring people.

Jonsdottir and Fridriksdottir (2020), in their studies of managers, state that 'findings reveal positive attitudes towards active listening as an important management tool. Besides organisational benefit, the

managers experienced increased sense of well-being at work. For them, active listening demonstrates respect and focused attention.'

Having this in mind, it is possible to identify a double layer of the active listening perspective under the recruitment process:

1. The manager (in their role as recruiter) will tend to look for candidates' soft skills, such as active listening, and will, of course, value it the most, when compared to candidates who lack it. In this case, the tendency will be to look for candidates with active listening skills, since the employer already recognises its importance;
1. From another perspective, active listening turns out to be a powerful 'tool' in the recruitment process itself, since, during the job interview, the recruiter will be actively listening to the interviewed, taking the most out of the experience and of the candidate, being able to better uncover their expectations, desires, fears, and fragilities that is their broad potential for the job, thereby facilitating the choice for the most suitable candidate(s).

ACTIVE LISTENING

WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

Active listening as a skill can be effectively trained, so the first aspect that the employer needs it to recognise is its importance and be open to incorporate it by training and by practice. In this point, we highlight some fundamental aspects of active listening, while hereunder, in point 5, we provide some topics about how such aspects can be further practiced.

The fundamentals of active listening are, among others:

- keeping attention on the speaker making them feel safe about the listener's attitude, thus ensuring a better understanding of the message being conveyed in its entirety;
- listening attentively; that is, keeping focus and avoiding diverse thoughts on the subject and on the message being conveyed;
- do not perform other activities, namely engaging in highly distracting activities (such as using a phone) while listening to someone, and avoiding yawning and visibly looking at the time,
- as these two acts severely affect good communication in a negative way;
- do not selectively listen only to parts of the speech considered attractive; for example, focusing only on pleasant elements of the speech, while refusing parts embedded with criticism or that do not meet the listener's previous expectations about the speech;
- try to face the speaker by showing empathy; that is, try to feel how they are or might be feeling about the subject;
- while listening, avoid judgmental perspectives based on own experience;
- in case of being busy with other commitments, always state it in advance, trying to postpone the conversation (it is better than appearing to be nervous or being rushed);
- do not try to finish the speaker's thoughts and vocalisations before they do.

ACTIVE LISTENING

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

Managers who succeed in being active listeners will realise that it can actually bring a series of benefits ranging from improvement in relationships with co-workers, peers, employees, and friends, but also with clients of the company, thus reducing conflicts caused by communication failures.

Active listening is not an innate skill, it is rather a skill that can be further trained and developed. Accordingly, it allows for conscious improvement by the user.

In a real context, an example can be given by surveying an employee by simply using a conversation, concerning their greater areas of comfort and of discomfort in the company. Following the survey, the manager might try to compile the results and later present them to the inquired staff alongside a set of measures applicable to realise comfort and alleviate discomfort. Confronting the employee with the manager position regarding those two dimensions will allow the manager to better understand up to where their active listening has been effective, considering the praise and the criticism of the employee.

The above example is based on one of the most relevant principles of active listening: the production of proper, adequate, positive, and constructive feedback. Thus, another example, possibly easier to implement, would be the introduction of feedback as a system within the company, targeting both official moments, such as meetings, but also routine and informal moments. In fact, many problems or important ideas and great suggestions emerge during a coffee-break moment or the side conversation during a routine task. If the team (managers and employees) is trained to consider and to provide positive feedback, the chances of considering relevant information instead of invertedly losing it are increased.

Finally, the best way to practice active listening is to listen more (and better) and judge less and less. When listening to someone, whether expressing an opinion or conveying other messages (technical information, etc.), there is a tendency to judge: the language, the knowledge, the subject, the intentions, etc. Once allowing such a tendency to guide our listening, we will lose focus, affecting the related capacity to 'see the overall

ACTIVE LISTENING

picture'; that is, to capture the full message being conveyed, laying underneath and beyond the words being verbalised.

HOW TO DETECT ACTIVE LISTENING IN EMPLOYEES

During the recruitment process it will be of foremost importance to convey the set of skills desired for the newcoming members of the team. Therefore, it should be set straight to candidates and applicants that the company values their active listening skills and wishes to make use of such capacity as much as possible. As has been said before, active listening is an active skill in conflict prevention and resolution. Accordingly, in order to tackle such skills in employees, HR managers should indicate active listening requirements in the vacancy announcement itself and follow it up during the job interview.

Once the candidates turn into effective employees, active listening skills can be traced and followed-up by using the above-mentioned feedback systems; for example: how good, accurate, applicable, and appropriate is the feedback given by a worker to chiefs, colleagues, and peers? Does such feedback lead to positive contribution and harmony

or destabilisation and conflict?

It is also important to remember that active listening can often become relevant in a 'venting context'. Within such a context, how supportive is the employee towards the other person? Do they try to uncover the reasons behind the venting in order to positively act on them? Or do they assume a contrary position by, for instance, blaming and judging?

The following point, 'How to develop this skill', will support you on understanding the type of reaction that an active listener develops, bringing important clues and tips to look for from a behavioural perspective in order to better target active listeners among your employees and co-workers.

ACTIVE LISTENING

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

In order to properly develop active listening skills, intentional users may resort to the following techniques and train them as much as possible in all given contexts of daily life like family, social, work, entertainment, and others.

Active listening techniques:

- **Lead your mind:** every time you are in a dialogue or similar communication environment and you notice that your thoughts are drifting away from the place or subject, you can make efforts to keep your focus placed on your interlocutor and on the contents of the message that they are conveying;
- **Avoid distractions:** in line with the previous step, this one relies on particular decisions: to avoid distractions and interruptions during a dialogue, such as mobile phones, checking e-mails, starting or following side conversations, etc. As much as you may not think so, all this has influence on the way you interact with people and with the surrounding environment. Therefore, it is important to understand how this interference happens and not let yourself be driven by it;
- **Show genuine interest:** taking a genuine interest in what your interlocutor is saying is of surmount importance, and so is showing it: try to make them comfortable, react to the message being told by using positive expressions, including positive non-verbal language (such as a re-affirmative smile or head-shaking) and eye contact. These actions will increase levels of comfort and support the communication of the desired message;
- **Pay attention to mute elements:** 'listening' to the mute elements means paying attention to what is not being verbalised. It means paying attention to what the other person is also conveying by means of body language, so that it becomes possible to understand what they want to say in depth. Active listening is also about interpreting the interlocutor's non-verbal language. In this sense, it is important that you work to effectively understand what the person is saying by examining different forms;
- **Do not judge:** when you are in a conversation at work, avoid the temptation to judge or to jump to conclusions about what is

ACTIVE LISTENING

- being said at that moment. Adopt a posture of understanding and of someone who is willing to help and find the ideal solutions to solve any kind of problem or conflict that is happening. Such behaviour will collect people's trust and will tend to further improve your ability to connect and to actively listen to your peers;
- **Ask in a proper way:** one way of knowing and demonstrating that you are really listening and paying attention to what is being said is by asking. So when you are in a dialogue, do not hesitate to ask questions in order clarify the message being conveyed and also to assure the other person that the message was really and truly assimilated in a correct way. This will also help you to get more information about the subject, which will benefit the overall communication process.
- **Activate empathy:** trying to understand other people's needs, motivations, expectations, values, etc., will support you in better understanding them, bringing clear benefits not only at the social, but also at the working level, as you may mutually contribute to each other's work and professional development;
- **Provide proper feedback:** already explained in this text, feedback should be based on a genuine assessment of the conversation's context. It should be clear, positive and constructive;
- **Create resuming moments:** try to summarize what you are understanding during a conversation and ask for confirmation. This allows for clarifying misunderstandings, whilst it tells the interlocutor that you are paying attention, increasing mutual understanding.

ACTIVE LISTENING

CONCLUSIONS

The notion that soft skills are innate and cannot be trained is no longer at stake. Just as hard skills, soft skills can be properly identified and assessed in a person and be further trained by using adequate training systems (courses, lectures, practice, and reading, amongst others).

Having this in mind, active listening may be used as an important skill to improve the working environment within SMEs, aiming at conflict prevention and resolution and pointing out lower levels of work-based stress and to an accordant increase in job retention and productivity levels. The importance of active listening and its benefits is therefore clear not at the command levels, of managers, as well as the general working teams' level, as a way to support better practices and fulfilled workers.

In order to follow an active listening pattern, some specific attitudes should be promoted, while some others should be avoided:

Attitudes to promote:

- Stay conscious of the communication moment; avoid distractions; get genuinely engaged with your interlocutor;

- observe non-vocalised aspects;
- pose clarifying questions;
- try to put yourself in the place of your interlocutor;
- assure them of your attention to the conversation.

Attitudes to avoid:

- Making judgements

In the scope of the FETRA project, active listening becomes relevant, as the observance of this skill by SMEs' leaders and HR responsibilities will be necessary for the success of the broader relationship of the company's staff, thus supporting a sound – and a productive – work environment, implied in employees' retention, an aspect that supports a positive and circular chain reaction: a good working environment causes major retention rates, which increases productivity, which increases employees' retention, which produces a good working environment.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

- The importance of active listening in a proficient communication
- Exercise listening, concentration, and memory

OBJECTIVES

- Understand the dynamics of active listening in conversations, and develop active listening skills
- Verify the importance of listening carefully to retain information
- Realise repetition as memory reinforcement

MATERIALS

- a room or space outdoors
- a sheet of paper
- a pen

TIME

15-20 minutes

TARGET GROUP

Potential employees

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

This is a group activity and requires (only) predisposition and good mood from the participants. It can be developed both indoors or outdoors; no formal context is needed. The coffee break room (if it exists in your company) is a good place to do so.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

This activity requires (a little) preparation: choosing a topic and writing down related words. For instance, under the topic of Sea, you can give the following set of words: sun, boat, sailor, beach, float, fisherman, summer, breeze, fish, yacht, ocean, names of seas (Mediterranean, Baltic, etc.) or oceans (Pacific, Atlantic, etc.), navigation jargon, etc.

Although the development of the activity does not require formality, it is necessary to form the group or take advantage of a situation where the people of the team are 'naturally' together (a coffee break, for example). The intentional formation of the group can be made from an invitation to a meeting in a room where people can comfortably sit down.

Before starting the activity, it is useful to tell the group that they are going to test their attentive listening and memory skills.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

After forming the group (or being with the group) and briefly explaining the purpose of the activity, read the word list to the group.

Purposefully repeat a few of the words multiple times, whilst omitting a certain obvious word in the group. Under the topic of Sea, you can give the chosen set of words: sun, sailor, beach, float, fisherman, summer, etc.

You can repeat the names of seas and/or oceans 2-3 times. You might notice that we have left out the obvious word – *boat*.

Once you are done reciting the words, take a gap of 5 minutes to discuss some unrelated topic. Then, ask the participants to indicate which word was on the list and which was not, as you read out that list of words.

You will notice that many would invariably mark 'boat' to be on the list. Also, most of the people are expected to remember the words that were repeated.

ABOUT THE TOOL

CONNECTION WITH (SKILL)

One of the great codes of conduct to be able to develop effective communication with other people is simply to know how to listen. Active listening helps to create good relationships, to develop empathy to raise awareness on the importance of listening to each other and helping each other in the most diverse working situations and to prevent/reduce conflict in all human organisations.

The importance of active listening in SMEs' context is related with sound communication. The effect on an SME is to have it be turned into a more focused working team with workers with stronger feelings of reward by employers. Therefore, the clear positive effects of active listening and the performance advantages of this skill on the day-to-day running of an SME happens at the level of good social environment, conflict prevention and conflict resolution, increase of empathy, and of the feeling of being rewarded; ultimately, the positive effects of such results increase working commitment and productivity.

Active listening is not an innate skill, it is rather a skill that can be further trained and developed. The activity presented is a proposal in this sense. If, on the one hand, individual competence is developed (stimulating the ability to listen, memorise, concentrate), on the other hand, team spirit and a healthy social environment are developed likewise.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

- An active listening exercise which involves multi-member groups
- A team building activity

OBJECTIVES

- Develop the ability to listen carefully and link your thoughts to the flow of ideas.
- Develop the ability to summarise effectively

MATERIALS

A room

TIME

varies according to group size

TARGET GROUP

Potential employees

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

This activity highlights two fundamental dimensions involved in active listening: paraphrasing and summarising. The first one consists in restating information just received with your own words; the second is about restating major ideas expressed, including feelings. So, it is important to listen carefully to rephrase and to summarise the information that has been given to you. This is an exercise, precisely, to develop these two dimensions of active listening.

Once based on a chain of thoughts, this activity also aims to enhance some creativity, since the participants, in addition to listening carefully to what was said, paraphrasing and summarising it, are challenged to add their ideas to the previous ones, successively.

This is a group activity and requires predisposition from the participants. It should be developed indoors, in a room suitable for the target group (size).

The activity does not require prior preparation. It consists of proposing to the group a topic. The conversation develops around this topic.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

This activity consists of proposing to the group a topic. The conversation develops around this topic. This activity does not require any preparation, although you can think of a specific topic in advance. The topic to be proposed could be a problem identified in the company, an innovation proposal for the company, the company culture, aspects related to the team, etc.

It is necessary to form the group and install it in a room.

Before starting the activity, it is useful to tell the group that they are going to test their attentive listening skills.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

After forming the group and briefly explaining the purpose of the activity, suggest to the group the topic on which the team should speak.

A first person is invited to speak for 1-2 minutes on the chosen topic.

A second person summarises what was said by the first one and then adds their own thoughts on the matter. A third person does the same, and so on.

This chain continues in the group, where each person must first summarise what has been said before them and then add their thoughts.

CONNECTION WITH ACTIVE LISTENING

The importance of active listening in SMEs' context is related with sound communication. The effect on an SME is expected to have it be turned into a more focused working team with workers with stronger feelings of reward by employers. Therefore, the clear positive effects of active listening and the performance advantages of this skill on the day-to-day running of an SME happens at the level of good social environment, conflict prevention and conflict resolution, increase of empathy, and of the feeling of being rewarded; ultimately, the positive effects of such results increase working commitment and productivity.

Listening attentively and actively is a skill to be developed to ensure effective communication in a group or company. The ability to listen, interpret and communicate what has been said is an exercise in rationality and in empathy (in understanding what the other said and not misrepresenting it). Once good communication is created, which involves an effective understanding of what the other says, it is an efficient way to solve/avoid problems and conflicts - a relevant dimension to the proper functioning of companies. This activity is a contribution in this regard.

COMMITMENT

DEFINITION

Commitment is the capacity to genuinely engage with a given domain, idea, subject, task or performance aiming to effectively result in the best possible outcome. A committed person is someone that makes any and every effort towards the best possible results. Commitment is supported by motivation, responsibility, dedication and perseverance; a committed person is someone that keeps assumed responsibilities, effectively keeps his/her dedication to a given cause, subject or task, and does not give up easily in the face of adversity.

In this sense, commitment is also linked with problem solving, a skill that is also required for building upon on desired results. While commitment can restrict freedom of action to some extent due to the high levels of focus required, outcomes achieved through commitment, even if showing ground for improvement, will always be much better than those achieved without commitment.

In terms of SMEs management, commitment is the capacity that a SME leader and/or Human Resources manager has, or

consciously acquires, in order to stay focused on their tasks and responsibilities. As a result, the manager has a clear set of priorities and responds to their responsibilities, creating a spill-over effect to the employees who look up to the manager and therefore increasing productivity.

In other words, commitment can be defined as the extent to which a worker accepts and internalises the goals and values of the organisation and how they look at the organisational function in terms of their contribution to such goals and values, beyond merely a personal perspective, which may as well enhance their contribution to the company.

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES:

- To understand what commitment is and its concept as a soft skill
- To connect the concept of commitment with the broader scope of related soft skills
- To recognise the importance of commitment within social and labour relations
- To be able to transfer the

COMMITMENT

- knowledge about commitment to practise in the SMEs leadership Human Resources management context

OUTCOMES:

- Increased knowledge about the characteristics of commitment and how to implement them
- Increased awareness about the importance of commitment in improving professional outcomes in HR and in general
- Increased ability to identify committed performers among peers and co-workers and to express valorisation concerning it, especially during the recruitment process
- Increased influence on employees and peers to spread the mindset of commitment

COMMITMENT IN THE SME CONTEXT

Commitment is a key soft skill to succeed in any given dimension of life and work. It is a conscious, although, internally deep decision to put in the maximum effort in a given tasks or objective. Therefore, its relevance in the context of SMEs is of major importance since it will allow managers to reach, or at least, facilitate, the goals which have been set for the company. It is important

to take into account that the risk of failure can have much more severe consequences in an SME compare to a large corporation; therefore, having a committed manager and, by extension, a committed team in a SME has a direct effect on the quality of services and products. Thus, this benefits the workers themselves, the team, the company, and the clients. On the other hand, a non-committal staff will be satisfied with average or below average results, which can be detrimental to an SME.

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

The relationship between commitment and work is mutually determined; while work benefits from committed performers, commitment is also increased thanks to satisfying work achievements. In line with this assumption, one major reason why an SME leader needs to be a committed person is because possession of this soft skill is the driving force behind aspiring for the company to succeed. On the other hand, a leader without commitment is not driven to find success.

Commitment as a soft skill has the capability of influencing others positively who view the committed person as a role model. Employees

COMMITMENT

who view their leaders as a committed person are this likely to gain confidence in the company itself and also perform their tasks in a committed manner.

The impacts and effects of being a committed leader in a company will include:

- lower employee rotation rates
- increased employee retention rates
- lower working absenteeism
- higher performance rates (increased results)
- higher punctuality rates
- higher satisfaction rates among employees

These impacts affect an SME very positively; the general working environment, maintenance of the same working team, and the company's overall performance can all feel the benefits of a committed manager.

Some studies also point out the possible negative effects of a lack of commitment as being the decrease or absence of the situations identified above (Randal, 1989). However, they also stress that an excessive level of commitment may as well bring negative aspects, which should be considered in order to balance the levels of commitment:

- decreased level of flexibility in the company as the workers get too attached to specific tasks
- decreased level of innovation as the worker may lose sight, or fail to try, new ways of performing
- increased levels of conflict between workers with varying levels of commitment

It is thus advised to keep the levels of commitment at what we would call a sound or moderate level, making sure to avoid both excessively low and excessively high levels of commitment.

RISKS

Contrary to the positive effects described in the previous section, the risk of dealing with non-committed leaders and teams will be a discouraging effect on other people, the achievement of lower working results and, as a consequence, a loss of productivity, of clients' satisfaction and, ultimately, of the companies' success. Such risks will prevent companies from growing and may lead to stagnation, downturn, and ultimately, failure.

In sum, the risks of SMEs managers lacking commitment skills include: the mimetic effect, leading employees to also act in a non-

COMMITMENT

- committed way
- decrease in the company's productivity
- increase in unsatisfied clients/customers
- demotivation of employees
- increase of a fluctuating workforce
- a reduction in the company's productivity
- Acceptance among employees of low quality and quantity of results

In the end, the risk of lacking commitment is making life and work a task-oriented affair without a broader sense of responsibility or ambition.

COMMITMENT IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

People who are committed to achieving their goals are generally happier, as they tend to feel they have more positive than negative aspects in their lives. The committed person has a more powerful self-image of confidence which will not only affect their personal life, but also the professional scope. People with more self-confidence generally have healthier relationships, a key point

to stand out as a leader.

During the recruitment process, leadership is fundamental as it transmits the image of confidence and clarifies to the others what is really expected from them – an outstanding performance during a job interview.

WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

In the applicable literature, Commitment has been identified in different scopes such as professional, normative, affective, and continuance.

“Professional commitment is a broader form of commitment that has been found to be significantly related to organizational commitment, sharing antecedents, and having similar outcomes. Professional commitment, the affective, normative, and continuance commitment toward one's profession or occupation, has the benefit of applying to individuals employed by organizations as well as those working for themselves or between jobs.”

(Kaufman et al, 2021).

COMMITMENT

Having this in mind, it is possible to understand how commitment can play a role in different spheres and functions within companies, particularly SMEs.

Some of the fundamentals of commitment are:

- **Enjoy what you are doing:** the more a person is passionate about a goal, the more they will strive to complete it. This means that you need to set yourself goals that are in line with your inherent desires. By setting a goal to try to please other people, for example, you are only fooling yourself. While you are dedicated to the task of succeeding at this goal, you will increase your sense of frustration and discontentment.
- **Pay careful attention to your personal and professional life:** self-awareness and sincerity of assessment are crucial to know what should be kept and what should be changed to be a more globally successful person. Start by thinking about which goals are in focus in your personal/family and professional sphere. Next, think about how relevant these goals are in the current context of your life. For example, if you
 - have been considering moving job but notice that you are not taking concrete steps to make this happen, you can start by asking yourself if this is really a relevant goal and why.
- **Use your conclusions to direct your commitment:** with a thorough assessment of yourself and your current goals, the time comes to direct the conclusions gained through this internal observation into establishing a true commitment. it is necessary to begin the process of building a more committed attitude by analysing the objectives pursued at the moment to identify (i) which ones really raise an deep passion and (ii) which ones are on your list only as a cloudy perspective.
- **Practice your commitment:** the drive to succeed at a task comes from the desire to succeed in general, which should be kept and fed. The idea is to motivate yourself so that you have the energy to keep on pursuing the fulfilment of your personal and professional desires. Every time you dedicate yourself to fulfilling a task in order to achieve your final goal,

COMMITMENT

- you will get the feeling that you are taking a step towards your dreams.
- **Stay focused:** being scatter-brained drives you away from completing your tasks satisfactorily, so map out your goals. If you find you are drifting away from what is really relevant to your success, come back and restart.
- **Set up an alternative plan:** no matter how much you dedicate yourself and have a desire to achieve a goal, it can happen that the expected outcome will not happen (commitment and performance/results, although related, are not the same thing, as described in the next point). The key in this case is to have an alternative plan, that is, an idea to get around the difficult situation that is in front of you. Having another plan does not mean that you do not believe in what you are doing, but that you have options, which is also great for controlling insecurity and anxiety, thus raising commitment.
- **Value your qualities:** your success is the direct result of the work done by your qualities,
- so give due value to all of them, from the smallest to the largest. It is not about hiding your flaws and failures, but to understand the best that you have to offer and focus on that.
- **Know how to start again:** just as indicated above, if at some point your plans do not come to fruition as expected, know how to pick yourself up and start again. A winning attitude helps to make yourself a winner!

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

In this context, it is worth noting that commitment is not always synonymous with performance and results. There are of course situations where no matter how hard a person tries, the end results are not satisfactory and do not reach the goals expected by themselves or the company. But surely, commitment without performance is a waste of time for the person and for the company, so it is important not to fall into a cycle of unproductivity. In short, commitment is the process, and performance is the result achieved which is enhanced by the first.

COMMITMENT

To understand if you “master” the skill, you need to have a clear idea about how, in your case, commitment and performance are related. If the assessment tells you that the best possible results are achieved within an environment which combines pleasure and duty while performing, you know that you “master” the skill. Otherwise, if you feel committed but results are great or, on the contrary, you achieve great results but you lack pleasure and motivation, then you know that you need to work this soft skill out a little more or simply review your assignments.

Managers who act in a committed way will not feel satisfied with low quality results, a stagnated job or company, or negative reviews by peers and working teams. Therefore, practical examples of commitment in the workplace are verified when a worker:

- Is never late to work or to perform a given task
- Demonstrates a participatory approach and attitude in the company’s life and daily routines (meetings, social gatherings)
- Does not refuse to take on new and demanding tasks (even if time is short or additional learning is required)
- Is not permanently complaining about tight deadlines (although those are negative factors and should be avoided as much as possible, they are also common, if occurring from time to time, in the current working conditions of an SME)
- Shows a good level of focus on tasks
- Prevents tasks from accumulating
- Learns how to say “no” to requests that they know they realistically cannot achieve

HOW TO DETECT COMMITMENT IN EMPLOYEES

The commitment of team members is of the utmost importance within an SME. Some studies relate the success of a project with the commitment levels of those dedicated to it, as we have previously described in this module along with the mutual feeding effect of the two variables. A study by Ameer et al. In 2021 concluded that employees’ personalities are linked with how committed they are to their profession. That faithfulness determines how well the employee executes a particular project, therefore making commitment a direct link with successfully completing tasks and projects.

COMMITMENT

There are different ways to detect commitment in employees, the first one being simply observing whether they display the same attitudes and outlooks described in the previous point when addressing the issue around employers/managers.

Another example to measure commitment in the workplace can be set up through a “fidelity” assessment. Like the questionnaires that companies pose to their clients in order to evaluate their fidelity, similar activities may be done for employees. The manager may ask their team members questions such as “rate from 1 to 10 your level of satisfaction with your job” or even, “rate from 1 to 10 how likely you are to advise a close friend or a family member to work in our company”, followed by an open question such as “please explain the reasons for your choice”. One risk of this type of activity is that employees will not be 100% honest on the questionnaire due to the lack of anonymity. But the answers may also be surprisingly honest, providing the manager some insight into the level of satisfaction and commitment of employees.

Some basic characteristics indicating that a worker or job applicant is a committed person are:

- Evidenced levels of the worker’s autonomy (the worker demonstrates that they are able to perform by themselves, not getting stuck when missing directives)
- Easily gains understanding of the rules and norms guiding the organisation, is a “quick study”
- High level of performance in comparison with baseline expectations
- Evidenced level of support for the organisation; expresses satisfaction or pride in reference to their work and would recommend their job to others

The following section will support the learner in understanding the behaviour that committed people demonstrate. This will allow you to better target the committed people among your employees.

COMMITMENT

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

Managers who are looking to improve their level of commitment and those of their employees should take into account the following needs:

- **understanding the purpose:** know what the personal purpose of the employees is in order to unite it with the company's purpose. With the objectives aligned, it is easier to demonstrate the importance of each one within the organisational structure, making them feel valued and engaged with the work.
- **recognising the value of each person:** each person has a specific ability. Recognising and praising them transforms the routine and motivates the employee. Knowing how to recognise the value that each person has guides them to improve more and more.
- **assigning the right people to the right job:** it is essential that the employee is working in the area in which they fit the best. No one is completely dedicated to a job that they don't like, which will only decrease their level of commitment.
- **Treating employees with a humanistic approach:** this is one of the most important steps for the motivation of your employees. It is necessary to keep in mind that each person has their own particularities and treat them in an appropriate way, ensuring strong and effective communication.
- **treating everyone equally:** a great step to be taken to improve commitment at work is to keep in mind that regardless of the position, all employees deserve to be treated equally. An employee should not feel inferior to others in any way, because everyone is essential to the smooth running of a company.
- **being aware of employee needs:** often, team members need tools to get the job done, and the absence of these can directly affect the quality of the results. Tools can be as broad as good working conditions, equipment, good lighting in a room, and breathable air, but also more specific aspects like training programmes or simply, human connection.
- **establishing feasible goals:** use common sense when

COMMITMENT

- **establishing goals** - both for the team as a whole and for each member. Be realistic and always seek individual growth when they are reached. Creating unrealistic goals leads to demotivation and the creation of beliefs that may limit your employees' productivity.
- **training your employees**: no matter how long the employee has worked for a company, it is necessary to keep them up to date with training and qualification so that they are aware of the tools available on the market and the best way to use them so that their goals are met to a satisfactory end. Invest also in personal development so that they are motivated both inside and outside of work. Remember, training is not the most difficult challenge, but keeping employees committed in your team can be challenging.
- **being available**: in case of doubts and conflicts within the team, the best way to solve it is to be aware of the reasons and help to resolve it calmly. During a moment of crisis or difficulty, the leader should be a guiding force.
- **providing constructive feedback**: analysing behaviour and giving constructive feedback to your employees is one way to align results and professionalism so it is clear whether the work is being well done or not. This also makes it possible to identify the points requiring improvement. The objective of feedback is to build upon behaviours that are seen as good and should be continued.
- **encouraging your employees**: show the importance that each one has within the company, remind them of the goals to be achieved, and demonstrate that each action affects other areas and what their value is in this process. Be open to new ideas and ways of doing the job so that they feel more freedom and motivation to achieve them.
- **offering a pleasant environment**: remember that your employees spend a good part of their day working. Therefore, to avoid lack of motivation and commitment at work, you must offer your employees a pleasant environment. Aligned with some of the previous steps, the

COMMITMENT

- the goal of this is to make your employees feel as comfortable as possible and enjoy coming to work.
- **engaging in external activities:** to keep up commitment at work, it is important to participate in external events such as training visits, celebrations (such as for the company's good performance), and others. Activities outside the company's day-to-day environment contribute to the productivity and motivation of the team.
- productivity
- customers and clients' satisfaction
- employees' motivation
- a stable workforce
- the employees' autonomy
- the employees' engagement with norms and rules;
- the performance levels
- the employees' self-identification with the organisation

To prevent high levels of job rotation, that is, numerous employees leaving the company and new ones joining, a sound level of commitment will generate stronger companies within a diverse range of positive factors. These include human resources engagement and covers domains such as the outputs (products and/or services), outcomes (results, such as clients' satisfaction) and impact (for example, a stronger market positioning).

The initial step for raising employee commitment is for the leaders/managers to demonstrate it, triggering a knock-on effect and passing it on to the other team members.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, commitment is a soft skill that is as important the managers as it is for the employees. It supports the overall performance of a company, aiming to progress, to achieve the best possible results and to keep a good working environment with a stable and content team.

One major aspect to consider when addressing commitment is the need to keep it to a sound level (not too low, not excessive) in order to reap personal and organisational benefits, such as the increase of:

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

You will learn about an activity called the 6.3.5 method. It focuses on:

- The importance of collaboration and engagement of all members to enhance creativity
- Team building
- Solutions to commitment issues

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this activity are:

- To develop, collectively, as many ideas as possible for the given problem
- To promote the commitment and engagement of all members of the group to discover new creative ways to solve a problem.

MATERIALS

- a room
- 6 sheets of paper (with the specific grid)
- pens

TIME

1 hour

TARGET GROUP

Potential employees

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

This technique, a structured group brainstorming, was developed by Bernd Rohrbach, who originally published it in a German sales magazine, *Absatzwirtschaft*, in 19681. Despite being a tool strongly associated with stimulating creativity and innovation, method 6.3.5. implies the involvement, commitment and joint responsibility of the team in finding new and/or problem-solving solutions. In fact, the commitment variable – responsibility and engagement - is essential for the method to be proficient and distinctive from the more traditional brainstorming techniques.

The 6.3.5 method involves all members of a specific group and commits each one to the activity. Each member is responsible for providing an answer, proposing solutions and ideas that converge with the other team members. Effectively, the basis of such a technique is the belief that the success of the process of generating ideas or solving problems is determined by the degree of contribution and commitment with the suggestions of each and with the company's culture and organisation.

Briefly, the 6.3.5. method is based on the composition of a group with 6 elements, supervised by a moderator. All participants must write 3 ideas/proposals, on a specific grid, within 5 minutes. Every five minutes, the paper is passed around by all the participants and the ideas can be reused and worked on top of the others.

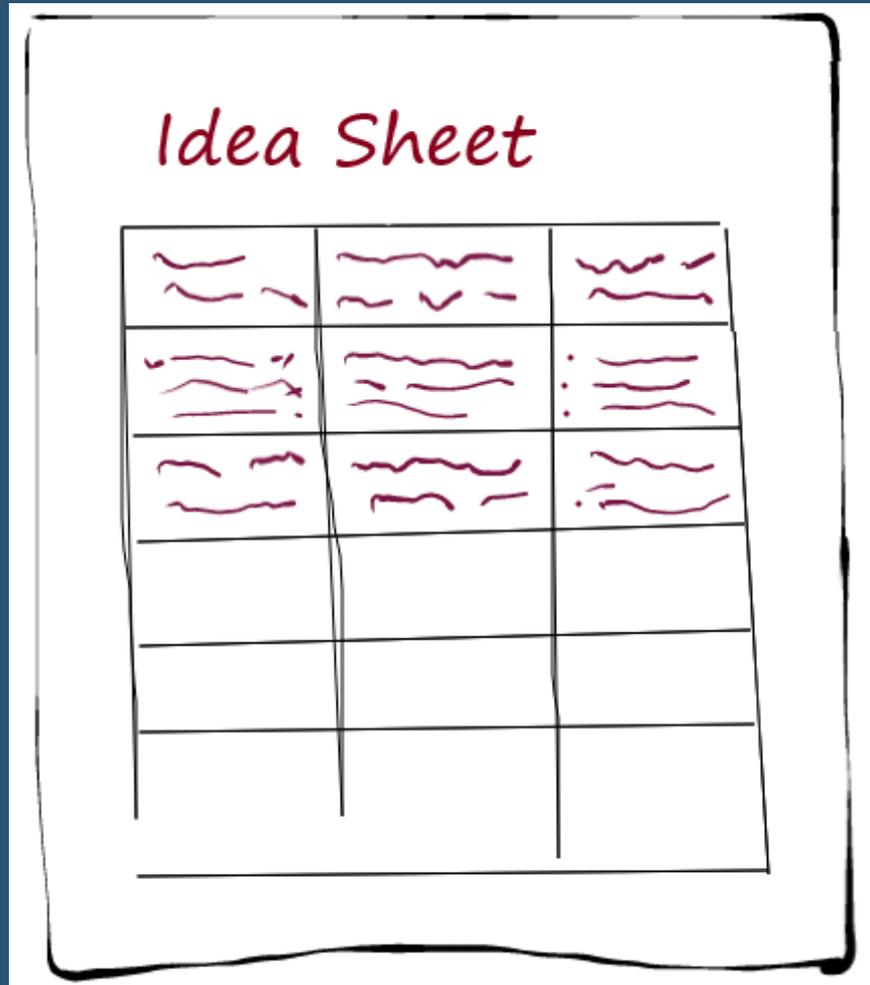
Thus, in addition to teamwork, it is possible to assess the capacity of each employee in the search for solutions and plans that meet the stipulated rules. The dynamic also shows how ideas can evolve and become even more creative with the collaboration and engagement of all members.

We propose using the 6.3.5. method for a purpose other than its usual use. Usually, the method is used for the development of new ideas and, above all, when innovative ways/solutions are needed to solve a problem. Our proposal reconciles the need for solutions/ideas with people's commitment to this need.

ABOUT THE TOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

This activity requires a bit of preparation, which consists of preparing a grid as shown in the example2. There must be a grid for each participant (six, therefore). Remember that each participant must put three ideas on the grid. Circulating the grid through the group allows you to add or expand/improve ideas already contained in the grid.



ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

1. Each participant receives a sheet of paper with an empty grid (3 columns with 6 lines each).
2. In the first line each participant writes 3 ideas to solve a problem.
3. After 5 minutes, the sheets are passed clockwise to the next person.
4. Everyone tries to build on the existing ideas and write down 3 new ideas.
5. Steps 4 and 5 are performed until the entire grid has been filled.
6. The group analyses, evaluates and discusses the results together, reflecting on the commitment and engagement in the task by each element of the group.

CONNECTION WITH COMMITMENT

Having a committed team in a SME has a direct effect on the quality of the performed work, services and products, thus benefiting the self, the team, the company and the clients. Commitment is a soft skill that is important both at the managers as well as at the employees' level. A sound level of commitment will generate stronger companies within a diverse range of factors, starting in their human resources engagement and covering domains such as the outputs (products and/or services), outcomes (results, such as clients' satisfaction) and impact (for example, a stronger market positioning).

In our view, keeping a team together and committed to solving the company's problems is fundamental to its success. Personal commitment to the team is as or more important than individual engagement with the company's goals. This activity allows us to work on three essential requirements for the success of a company: creative problem solving, consolidation of team spirit and personal and group commitment and engagement with the organisation's culture and objectives.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

This activity is called “The Power of Empathy.” You will learn about:

- The importance of creating a good company environment
- The importance of empathy in team building and commitment

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this activities are:

- To create healthier relationships by developing empathy
- To improve the construction of a more engaged teams
- To develop commitment to collectively solve human and relational problems

MATERIALS

- a room
- sheets of paper
- pens

TIME

30-40 minutes

TARGET GROUP

Potential employees

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

One of the strategies for developing people's commitment and engagement with the company is to ensure a good working environment, that is, to create and maintain healthy human relationships. Working on team spirit is a good step towards that goal. The exercises that aim to openly work with emotions and develop empathy are safe bets in this regard. This activity, which encourages the development of empathy, aims to strengthen the team's spirit to enhance the relationships and integration of its members in an open and transparent way.

The effectiveness of activities and exercises that aim to integrate the group depends, in part, on how much these activities and exercises encourage people's commitment and engagement.

This is a group activity and requires predisposition from the participants. It should be developed indoors, in a room suitable for the target group (size).

The activity is based on anonymity. Each participant is made aware of a problem that affects another (anonymous) element of the group. Faced with the problem, the participant tries to present a solution.

The activity does not require prior preparation. It consists of proposing to the group the activity as instructed below.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

It is necessary to form the group and carry it out in a room.

Before starting the activity, it is helpful to tell the group that they will have the opportunity to develop team spirit and improve trust and empathy with each other.

The facilitator should be aware that there is a certain risk in this activity: the eventual recognition of the person affected by the problem and/or the person(s) who may be responsible for it. If this eventually happens, a situation of embarrassment can be created. To avoid such a situation, the facilitator may suggest to the group to state the general scope of the problem and not the specific situation.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

1. Ask each member of the group to write on a piece of paper, without identifying themselves, any difficulty/problem they are facing at work.
2. Mix all the papers inside a box.
3. Ask each participant to randomly remove a piece of paper from the box.
4. Each participant reads what is written on the drawn paper and proposes a solution.
5. The facilitator may register some proposals to improve the relational environment of the team and the company or carry out organizational changes to avoid/eliminate the situations or problems pointed out.

CONNECTION WITH COMMITMENT

To properly develop commitment skills, there are a few steps managers can take. This activity contributes to some of these essential steps to enhance the commitment of workers through the development of team spirit and the stimulation of empathy. These steps are: a) knowing the needs of employees (sometimes related to good working conditions, equipment or simply connection); b) providing constructive feedback (this is important to build behaviours that are seen as good and should be continued) and c) providing a pleasant environment (physical and social, in terms of relationships).

COMMUNICATION

DEFINITION

Communication is the skill of being able to articulate a message to a person or a group, either directly or indirectly, and being able to convey the right meaning from sender to receiver. Communication happens through a range of media, transmitted verbally, visually, and physically.

HR communication plays a key role in getting your staff engaged in the company, boosting employee morale, and increasing productivity. Firstly, by being able to convey an accurate depiction of the job requirements to potential employees, you ensure that only those candidates most suitable to the role apply. By being able to communicate the company's working culture, your new hires will understand what to expect from both tasks and the social life within the company (Breugh, J., 2014). Secondly, through strong communication you will be able to create enthusiasm throughout your team by showing recognition and appreciation of the work done; when issues arise, as a manager communication should be the first method at hand to find a solution through acts of listening, understanding, and initiating

dialogue (Conrad, D. & Newberry, R., 2011). Finally, communication is central to outlining the mission of the company, and highlighting the common bond between employee, company, and society, giving a greater purpose to the task at hand and boosting overall productivity (Delaney, J.T. & Huselid, M.A., 1995).

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Objectives:

- To build and maintain healthy and effective relationships.
- To demonstrate appropriate and professional ethical behaviour.
- To create messages appropriate to audience, purpose, and context.
- To demonstrate the ability to accomplish communicative goals (self-efficacy).
- To demonstrate critical thinking by identifying, analysing, and evaluating the communicative behaviours of others and the self.

Outcomes:

- Improved productivity
- Effective brand messaging
- Positive workplace relationships
- Conflict prevention
- Greater levels of collaboration

COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION IN THE SME CONTEXT

Nowadays in our modern world, we consider communication essential, especially for small and medium businesses. Effective communication is absolutely crucial to ensuring a business's success. This includes both internal communication among team members and external communication with customers, clients, and other parties. Developing excellent communication skills will help leaders and their teams in almost every business activity.

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

Great communication skills lead to a healthy company, reliable growth, and, ultimately, success – while poor communication can often have the opposite effect.

Successful managers must be able to communicate their vision to the rest of the organisation through free-flowing conversation both up and down the corporate hierarchy, as well as between departments and colleagues (Markovic et al., 2009). Having developed skills in

this regard is important for managers in order to be able to communicate organisational goals to employees clearly, and thus inspire employees to trust in the leadership and perform at high levels. Moreover, managers must effectively communicate with employees to monitor progress and to correct ongoing processes. Consequently, communication is more all-encompassing than simply talking, writing, reading, and listening (Radovic Markovic M. and Omolaja M., 2009).

Communication allows managers to share goals with shareholders both inside and outside the organisation. It also permits managers to stimulate behavioural changes in employees and suppliers. Moreover, it enables managers to inspire loyalty from employees and customers, and also to convince employees to abandon counterproductive practices. Lastly, it enables managers to persuade leaders to provide financing and permits to calm angry customers and impress new ones.

Overall, communication skills are used in small and medium business to solve problems, create relationships, and inform decisions to be made. Good communication

COMMUNICATION

skills in the work place of small and medium businesses have a positive effect on the following areas:

- **Productivity:** When employees feel they are heard or have little problem making themselves understood at their work place, they tend to be more productive in their day-to-day tasks and activities.
- **Culture:** Clear communication between co-workers leads to positive feelings and an environment of trust and utter comprehension. When team members learn to communicate in professional and respectful ways, this contributes to a positive workplace atmosphere.
- **Leadership:** Being able to communicate efficiently is one of the primary skills any leader should have. Good communication skills convey the ability to lead in a more structured and efficient way.
- **Costs:** Effective communication means people work more productively, getting their tasks done on time without wasting excess effort, which has a tangible effect on the costs of the business.

RISKS

Poor communication skills can cost an SME business more than they know. Without effective and efficient communication, the following potential problems can accrue:

- **Incomplete answers**

Especially important for leaders at SMEs is having the impulse to provide a quick, definitive answer to questions. Without good communication skills, leaders often respond with a yes or 'no' without fully addressing the scope of the inquiry. This can lead to confusion and time wasted on follow-ups.

- **Failing to edit**

When leaders at SMEs don't choose their words carefully, miscommunication often follows. The person to whom they are talking may misread their tone, or a typo might result in their message being misconstrued.

- **Choosing the wrong format**

Just because a form of communication is convenient for the leaders at SME, that doesn't mean it is the best method in every situation. Trying to collaborate on a project through email, for example, leaves a lot lost in translation when compared to working face-to-face.

COMMUNICATION

- **Making assumptions**

When leaders make assumptions, there will inevitably be situations where such assumptions have overlooked important criteria.

- **Too much information**

Dumping too many superfluous details into a message makes it harder for recipients to sift through and find the information that is useful to them. This increases the chances they will tune out or miss something important.

- **Improvising**

When leaders are caught unprepared by a question they weren't expecting, they might blurt out an answer without fully comprehending what they are saying. This can spread misinformation and start a chain reaction of confusing misinterpretations.

- **Spreading gossip**

Rumours can spread quickly throughout an office environment. Not only does this distract employees from their jobs, but it also has the potential to undermine the working culture and to hurt feelings.

COMMUNICATION IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

The focus of this section will be on the double perspective of the SME manager, first as the leader of a small organisation in need of specific competencies and then as the person responsible for the recruitment process, where they have to identify positive communicative characteristics among potential candidates.

WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

Communication skills are essential to all spheres of the establishment, and problems will arise from poor communication. Managers must display the ability not only to communicate internally with employees, but also to facilitate the external flow of communication with new and existing guests (Bang, 2004; Brown, 2001). Within the service environment, managers must be able to speak fluently with guests (Johanson, Ghiselli, Shea & Roberts, 2010). This skill is essential regardless of the department or level of management,

COMMUNICATION

according to Bobanovic and Grzinic (2011). Saayman (2009) identified communication barriers, including failure to analyse the needs of the receiver, and poor listening and feedback from management, as service success indicators. These barriers can be overcome by managers if they are able to communicate using various communication channels to ensure that the right message is conveyed and received by all relevant parties (Ewing, 2007).

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

Good communication is a skill that does not always come naturally. It requires much concentration and practice.

Not all work communications are made equal. We've all had the experience of sitting through a boring, lengthy meeting with the thought, 'This should have been an email.' Different delivery methods are ideal for different types of communication, and depending on the type of information being conveyed can enhance or detract from how the message is received. An effective communicator will develop different skills and tools to match the type of communication needed.

HOW TO DETECT COMMUNICATION IN EMPLOYEES

A study by the research and consulting firm Millennial Branding showed that 98% of employers say effective communication skills are essential for their job candidates. By the time managers have gotten to the interview, they already will have a handle on some of the candidates' communication skills. For instance, managers probably will have corresponded by email, had their online social presence analysed, and possibly spoken by phone or other voice communication service. Managers need to be aware of how much attention to detail a candidate reveals in these different forms of communication.

Now that managers will be meeting face to face, it's time to ask more open-ended questions in order to gain a greater understanding of how this person will communicate with others on the job. Open-ended questions are a good way to evaluate communication skills. An example could be broad icebreaker question such as 'Tell me about yourself' or 'Tell me why you feel you are a good candidate for this job.'

COMMUNICATION

As the candidate responds, managers should look for important communication qualities such as eye contact and open body language, including unfolded arms and legs and a forward leading position. Next, managers can do more to assess communication skills by asking the candidate to 'Describe a time you had a problem with a supervisor and what you did to resolve it.'

Here, managers are looking to see that the candidate values good communication. If they did nothing to resolve the problem, for example, that can be an indication of poor communication skills. Remember that managers are not evaluating the candidate based upon that problem - in fact, it can even be an issue they had during a part-time job as a student - but are looking at ways the candidate has used soft skills to resolve the issue.

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

Effective communication is about the needs of the listener. While it may seem counter-intuitive, a 'listener-first' approach can help you structure the delivery of your message.

The following lines will explain eight tips for developing communication skills:

Think it through: There are many communications frameworks, but if you want to improve your communication skills, start by getting into the habit of thinking through these five questions for any communications upon which you embark:

- Why are you communicating?
- Who is the receiver, audience, or participant?
- What is your goal or objective? Common objectives of work communications include: to request (resources, participation, permission, etc.), to inform, to persuade, to connect, etc.
- What do you want the recipient to do as a result of the communication? Common work actions include: send an email to approve or authorise; complete a task in a system; provide comments or data for a shared work product; sign up for an event; download a tool or resource; confirm or correct; etc. *Note: Even if your goal is to inform, try to think of a relevant and unobtrusive way for the other party to engage.*

COMMUNICATION

- What format will best accomplish your goal?

If you struggle to answer these five questions, it's a clear sign that your communication effectiveness will benefit from putting in additional time thinking about how and why you communicate. Test your understanding with co-workers or your manager.

Give it time: Great communication benefits from having enough time to think it through. Plan what you want to say and review your communication to make sure it is actually doing the job you need it to. For written communications especially, this means that proofreading is important. Remember, great communication might seem effortless, but it rarely is.

Make it easy: In the workplace, communication almost always has a larger goal. People are busy – don't make them work too hard to understand what you are saying and what you need them to do. In both written and spoken communications, this often means leading with your main point or objective. State your objective and main point in the first paragraph or in the beginning of a presentation

so your audience knows where you're going, then fill in the details and complications.

Simplify: Focus on what is important. Trim away whatever does not serve. Eliminate jargon. While you don't want to condescend or 'dumb it down,' in everyday work communications, be mindful of not making the other party work too hard to understand. Give more attention to the one or two messages you want to convey. Plan for how you will get the message across and strip all other distractions away. Find a clear, simple phrasing to encapsulate your point. Repeat it at the beginning, middle, and end, and consider using a simple visual metaphor to make your point clear and memorable.

Experiment and diversify: Work on developing different tactics for different communication needs. Focus on experimenting with one aspect of your communication at a time; for example, spend a week paying extra attention to how you structure informal communication, then spend a week trying different structures for formal meetings or updates.

COMMUNICATION

Practice and reflect: Be deliberate about reflecting on what goes well and what doesn't in your day-to-day communications. Maybe an email to your manager didn't go well: read it again. Can you see how it might have been misinterpreted? What would you do differently next time? Similarly, if a conversation with a co-worker didn't yield the expected results, try to identify whether you clearly communicated what you needed.

Consider the full package: Consider recording yourself through a few interactions to gain insight into what your full package is communicating in your daily interactions with your team. Do you make eye contact? Is your facial expression relaxed and confident, or tense? As a leader, do you invite participation from others? Do you leave space for questions and clarification?

Seek feedback: Ask a few trusted co-workers and your manager to rate your communication skills. Start by asking them to rate (i.e., on a scale of 1-10) your written and spoken communication separately. Then ask these three questions:

- What one thing should I start doing to communicate better with you?
- What one thing should I stop doing in my communications with you?
- What one area or skill should I work on to improve how I communicate in this organisation?

COMMUNICATION

CONCLUSIONS

When employees are directly involved in work products and initiatives, it helps to foster a sense of ownership in the company's future. It also makes them want to work to improve things like the company's profitability, customer satisfaction, and brand.

Employees who feel personally connected to the company's mission tend to care more about other details, like whether the brand has a reputation as a great place to work, which in the long term can affect your ability to attract and retain the best talent.

What does good work communication look like? It's clear and succinct. The recipient understands what is important, why, and what actions they need to take. But the fundamental principle of all communication should be: respect the other party. What does that mean in workplace communication?

Communicating, whether with a colleague, a boss, or a customer, is not an opportunity to show how smart or superior you are – though it's easy to leave others with the impression that that's all you care about.

Every year, communication tops the list of skills in demand by employers, and with good reason. Communication is what makes our professional and personal relationships go smoothly. It's how we show care, catalyse change, and get things done. That's reason enough to improve – and keep improving – these important skills. Luckily, we can all learn to communicate better.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

Participants are going to learn about communication skills in the workplace: how to improve them, remaining conscious of the interlocutor's side, what the benefits are of effective communication, and what it brings to the company.

OBJECTIVES

Improving participants' communication skills will allow managers to have better relationships with their employees, resulting in fewer misunderstandings, fewer conflicts, and greater levels of motivation and productivity.

MATERIALS

A room with chairs enough and tables for each participant, a screen/monitor sufficiently big as to be viewable by all, a computer, pen and paper.

TIME

50 minutes

TARGET GROUP

SME managers

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

The tool consists of a face-to-face group activity. Participants will be split into groups of no more than ten to facilitate discussion.

The activity will be indoors, in a room with a screen, chairs, and tables. The activity can, however, easily be carried out outside as well, providing there is access to the same resources.

The practical tool will make SME managers reflect on the importance of communication in the workplace and on possible mistakes they might otherwise have made without realising, which could get in the way of a better relationship with employees. There will be a focus on learning to adapt communications to the target audience and the message that has to be delivered.

The activity consists of three stages (of 10, 30, and 10 minutes respectively). It is the facilitator's job to halt the activity.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

The aim of this tool is for participants to put their communication skills into practice by providing them the opportunities to solve real-life examples of various situations. They should be made to realise that handling communications differently depending on the nature of their employee can lead to employees feeling more positive, motivated, and understood, as long as this skill is correctly mastered. It always depends on the message that is going to be delivered, and so the communication will differ too. Of course, besides the employee, it is important to consider the nature of the message, which further affects in what ways such communications ought be dealt.

The facilitator should split participants into balanced groups of no more than ten and assign them to different tables/areas of the room before explaining the scenario and answering any questions. All groups should work on the same scenario - the division is merely to increase the opportunity for all students to make a contribution.

A risk for which it is worth accounting is that the participants might feel they are lacking some information about each person presented in the scenarios. In this case, the facilitator should insist on them working with the information they have, being as it is that in real life such information is not always obvious.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

The facilitator will introduce the scenarios; some people may find it helpful to have these detailed via slideshow. The case is as follows: The manager of a small SME within the IT industry is having a meeting with their team of five people. It is a morning meeting where the manager is to give feedback to their team about a task they have completed that is below the company's standards.

The team members participating in the meeting consist of: Paul (38), who is very focused on his job and has a very serious approach to it; Johanna (21), who is a motivated but insecure intern at the company; Marianne (42), who is very shy, but efficient, and always offering help; Rasmus (25), who is very extroverted, speaks his mind, has strong opinions, and is very sociable and friendly; Casper (32), who has a good sense of humour and prefers direct and unapologetic feedback.

First, participants should, as a group, address the delivery of the feedback. It can be helpful to have a look at Section 5 in the Communication Module if the participants are unsure of how to approach this exercise. This group discussion is expected to take 10 minutes.

Afterwards, participants will have to consider how their communication would differ were they speaking individually to each member. They should consider each member according to their personal characteristics. For this part, the participants should have 30 minutes for discussion. The employees' characteristics should remain displayed on the screen to aid participants during their discussion.

ABOUT THE TOOL

CONNECTION WITH COMMUNICATION

This tool aims to raise awareness in managers of the different communication methods required in the workplace. This example focuses on communication with employees, but can apply to communication with stakeholders or external partners. This tool allows participants to understand what the characteristics of becoming a good communicator are and why effective communication is important. It allows the participants to analyse themselves in retrospect and reach their own conclusions as to what they need to improve. The resulting improvement in communication will lead to employees feeling more motivated and cared-for. There should be fewer misunderstandings, leading to a smoother-running company, with the additional benefit of making the workplace more attractive to future candidates.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

Participants will learn about communication skills in the workplace and how to improve them. They will roleplay interviews, wherein there will follow an analysis of the communication carried out by the interviewers and their (acting) interviewees.

OBJECTIVES

Improving participants' communication skills will allow the managers to have better relationships with their employees, resulting in fewer misunderstandings, fewer conflicts, and greater motivation and productivity.

MATERIALS

A room with chairs enough for each participant and pens and paper.

TIME

40 minutes

TARGET GROUP

SME managers and HR recruiters

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

- This tool is a face-to-face group activity.
- Participants will be split into groups of four.
- The activity can be done either indoors or outdoors.
-

The intention of this activity is to make SME managers and recruiters reflect on the importance of communication within their current and future workplaces. They will learn to spot communication skills in their candidates and in themselves during the recruitment process. Troublesome communication gets in the way of having a better, more understanding relationship with employees, so the aim of this tool is to help managers cultivate their communicative abilities.

The activity consists of two main stages, lasting 20 minutes each. The first stage is that of the interview roleplay (lasting approximately 10 minutes), followed by feedback from observers (a further 10 minutes). This will then be repeated, with participants switching roles. It is the facilitator's job to explain the activities and judge when it best to stop/continue.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

The focus of this dynamic is for participants to put their communication skills into practice by roleplaying an interview scenario and getting feedback from observers. They should utilise content from the module, especially that content in sections 3.2 and 4.3. Both actors and observers should bear these sections in mind throughout.

The facilitator will split the participants into groups of four, separating people well acquainted to increase objectivity in their observations and feedback. Two participants will roleplay as interviewer and interviewee and two participants will observe (one observer per actor). Any remaining participants should be added to the groups as an observer of both actors.

The facilitator's role is to provide explanations and answer questions where applicable.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

The facilitator will assign two participants from each group to be actors (they will themselves choose who is interviewer and interviewee) and the two others to be observers (one per actor). If there is an uneven number of participants, some groups will have an extra observer.

The facilitator should explain that participants should focus on the contents of sections 3.2 and 4.3 from the module. They should use this content both to inform their communications while acting and their judgements while fulfilling the role of observer.

Whoever has the role of interviewee will act as if they are applying to their current job; the other person will act as their interviewer. This roleplay should last 10 minutes.

Afterwards, the facilitator will ask observers to give feedback on the roleplay based on the content learnt from the module. This part of the activity should take 10 minutes and it is done within each group.

Finally, group members will switch roles and start again. If a group has three observers, they need to decide who will observe a second time. If there is no agreement, the facilitator should make the decision. The roleplay again should last 10 minutes, followed by a ten-minute feedback session as previously.

CONNECTION WITH COMMUNICATION

The tool aims to raise managers' awareness of their communication abilities in recruitment and to spot such skills in candidates. This example focuses on communication during recruitment, but the factors learnt about good communication can be transferred to many other work situations. The tool allows participants to understand the characteristics of effective communication and its importance. It allows participants to analyse themselves in retrospect and come to their own conclusions as to what they should improve. This improvement in communication will lead employees to feel more motivated and cared for, and managers to choose candidates with the right communication skills.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

DEFINITION

Conflict resolution is a way for two or more parties to find a peaceful solution to a disagreement among them. The disagreement may be personal, financial, political, or emotional.

When a dispute arises, often the best course of action is negotiation to resolve the disagreement. The goals of negotiation are:

- To produce a solution that all parties can agree to
- To work as quickly as possible to find this solution
- To improve, not hurt, the relationship between the groups in conflict

Conflict resolution through negotiation can be good for all parties involved. This is one of the “non written” rules of conflict solving.

More specifically, and according to FETRA objectives, conflict resolution in a labour environment is the process by which two or more parties active in the working process (coworkers, clients, managers and employees, workers and customers, company and supplier...) reach a peaceful resolution to a dispute.

As we have seen, in the workplace, there can be a variety of types of conflict:

- Intrapersonal conflict: Occurs within the same person due to conflicting values between what is asked of him/her and what he/she believes to be right.
- Interpersonal Conflict: This involves several parties. It usually occurs between employees and superiors or between colleagues. It can also occur between employees and customers.
- Intra-group conflict: Conflict that occurs within the same group.
- Intergroup conflict: Occurs between different groups.
- Inter-organisational conflict: between two or more organisations.

In both cases, an early action by the management personnel helps to resolve a conflict in its primary stage

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES:

- Defining the importance of conflict resolution in an SME
- List the risks of poor conflict resolution in an SME

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- To approach the search for the right candidate in a selection process from a conflict prevention perspective
- Identify the qualities of a suitable candidate in this field
- List the necessary characteristics of an SME manager in order to select personnel from a conflict resolution perspective.

OUTCOMES:

- Managing the risks caused by the inability to manage conflict in SMEs
- Recognising the needs of managers to resolve conflicts
- Identify suitable candidates who do not generate conflicts
- Develop a training plan to prevent the emergence of conflicts
- Act before conflicts arise in the organisation.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE SME CONTEXT

Workers spend between 35 and 40 hours a week in the workplace, a period in which human interactions can provoke different reactions. These relationships are much closer in an SME, where the

physical and working proximity means that points of encounter or misunderstanding multiply throughout the day, becoming a breeding ground for potential conflicts.

Accumulated quarrels and lack of communication (or too much miscommunication, if you prefer) can end up negatively affecting the working environment.

The basic instinct for survival is one of the sources of confrontation within organisations; insecurity of its members will necessarily lead to conflict, although it is not only insecurity in a work environment that generates disputes - think, for example, of strikes for wage increases.

It is, therefore, almost a certainty that sooner or later, conflicts will arise between a company's own employees, or between them and their superiors, and the way in which these conflicts are dealt with and resolved will affect the company and its productivity, since if employees disperse their energies in open conflicts, they will obviously be less productive.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

The responsibility for resolving labour disputes usually falls mainly on the middle management of companies, and in SMEs this is one of the main aspects that managers must take care of, as they are not only the leaders of the organisation, but also the owners and the main people involved in the success of the company. That is why they need to master this skill.

It is in this context that work-related problems arise, triggered by multiple causes. And these causes derive from both individual and personal conditioning factors, as well as from business conditioning factors. The problem comes when, in organisations, managers are unable to realise that something is wrong, whether in the professional, economic or personal spheres (closely related in an SME). Or, even worse, they are aware of the problem but do not know what the cause is.

It is therefore essential that SMEs and their leaders are aware that resolving such conflicts in the work environment is almost an obligation. This is the only way to maintain productivity, foster a good working environment and attract quality talent.

Sun Tzu (544 BC-496 BC), author of 'The Art of War', wrote that it is better to win without fighting and that continually battling, even when winning, will discourage the troops and others will take advantage of this weakness to revolt. This can be extrapolated to the impact of conflict within the company, so that unresolved conflicts become entrenched, employees become discouraged, the company becomes less profitable and competitors can take advantage, either by poaching the best employees or simply by benefiting from the internal self-destruction that certain conflicts within organisations generate.

In any case, we must understand that disputes or disagreements at work have a number of common and intrinsic characteristics:

- They are inevitable: one cannot pretend that disagreements never exist. It is normal for disagreements or differences of opinion to arise in relationships between people, especially in the business environment, where decisions affecting a business have to be taken.
- They are potentially dangerous: these conflicts have the quality of being either beneficial or detrimental. If they are not dealt with in a timely manner or are not dealt with in the right way,

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- they could pose risks for the company or the employees involved in the conflict.
- They are necessary: although they are often seen as a problem, the truth is that they are also essential for the professional growth of each employee and of the company as an entity.

This opens an interesting starting point for the development of conflict management in an SME: they will exist and are elements of improvement for interpersonal relations between those involved, so their proper management should lead to improved performance and increased productivity.

RISKS

Proper conflict management is a basic aspect for the correct management of an SME, and this depends mainly on the manager, because he/she is in charge of laying the foundations of coexistence and also the company culture, even within a small organisation. Thus, inadequate management of the risks generated by conflicts in an SME can have these effects:

- It sours the working climate. It is a source of rancour, simplicity, rumours and, ultimately, hostility between the parties involved.
- It makes it difficult for people to get involved in the project, as continuous conflicts limit the freedom of the workers and the effectiveness of the group.
- It reduces productivity. The time and energy that the company or its workers spend on resolving conflicts prevents efforts from being focused on what is really important: obtaining results.
- It causes dissatisfaction, weariness, stress, anxiety and, in the most serious cases, depression. The consequence of this is an increase in absenteeism and staff turnover.

The leader must understand confrontational situations as opportunities for improvement. In reality, they are neither negative nor positive, but must be seen as a set of different perspectives that are colliding at a given moment and that can affect the harmony of the team.

A skilled conflict manager must be able to listen to all parties, resolve the conflict of interests and reach a consensus. It is important to bear in mind that there will always be a difference of opinion among team members. Therefore, you should focus on improving performance

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

and achieving the objectives set out in the project planning.

Therefore, among the risks that arise in an SME that does not manage conflicts properly, there are both personal and professional issues that end up affecting profit and loss.

Conflict has a number of negative factors and can break down many relationships. As a consequence, they take an emotional toll due to the tension generated. This sometimes reduces performance and can also distract the parties involved from their daily activities.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

It is traditionally assumed that the best conflict is the one that does not happen, i.e. the one that is avoided through preventive policies. Thus, the task of avoiding future conflict situations in the workplace starts with the choice of personnel, looking for the right people for a framework of solutions rather than problems.

Therefore, as a manager of an SME,

while you want to find a competent and experienced person during the recruitment process, you should also consider how this professional will contribute to the dynamics of the workplace should he or she receive an offer of employment. If this individual has all the skills to excel in the position, but has a personality type that will cause tension in the office, it is worth reconsidering your hiring choice.

Personality influences more than many hiring managers realise when it comes to making a decision about who should be offered the job. Your employees spend most of their lives at work, so if they have to come in and deal with someone who fights, lashes out or is unpleasant in any way, it will quickly turn that office into a hostile place to do business.

WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

When it comes to choosing who to hire, the manager needs to look at the big picture. If he/she is not sure that the person will enhance the dynamics of the existing team, he/she may need to move in another direction. So when considering who to hire, professional worth should not be everything, but make sure that the

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

personalities fit your culture or the kind of culture you want to imbue in your organisation.

Perhaps the first task is too obvious, but it is necessary as a starting point, being clear and honest in the description of the job offer and the profile required. This benefits both the applicant and the hiring manager alike. When you're explicitly clear about what the position entails during the hiring process, what is expected of the employee, and what the company is like, you save yourself from hiring someone who comes into the position blindly and ultimately ends up being a poor fit.

Taking this as a departure point, among the skills needed by a SME manager in the recruitment process are:

- To know the processes of emotions and affections that intervene in interpersonal relations in the workplace; this knowledge undoubtedly helps to prevent work-related stress, to improve the work climate, to resolve conflicts and to conduct negotiations in an appropriate manner.
- To know the procedures to be used to assess the psychological factors
 - of the individual that may determine their placement in the different company structures or in groups related to work (trade union organisations, public administration, etc.), as well as in negotiation and collective conflicts.
 - Being able to work in a team and in a committed way with the work group.
 - Know how to analyse the behaviour of individuals or groups in the work context and know how to look for alternative responses to the needs of individuals or groups.
 - Learning to establish priorities, goals and objectives of the intervention in the work environment.
 - To know how to maintain a balance between organisational objectives and the integral development of human resources.
 - Knowing the strategies for improving organisations from the perspective of human resource management.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

A) During the hiring process, consult with other trusted colleagues before making a choice. Ultimately, you

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

know who will work best on your team, but you will want to hear from other colleagues or employees about any concerns they have about this person's ability to cooperate with your staff members. This is why many organisations prefer group interviews.

B) Stop and consider who has been successful in this type of role in the past. While the past is not always an indicator of future success, reflecting on the kind of people who have excelled in this role in the past can help hiring managers continue to make good decisions about future hires.

C) If, for example, the brightest workers on the team tend to be those who love to collaborate and brainstorm with others, hiring a deeply introverted type may not be the most ideal choice. This person is unlikely to alienate the rest of the team and will put a damper on the collaborative energy flowing within the organisation.

D) Ask your current employees for their opinion on the type of person you should hire. Since each person contributes to the overall dynamic of the office, you may want to get feedback from senior members of the team on the type of person they

think would be the best fit when it comes time to expand the workforce. They may have a keen insight into the personality types, skills and other attributes that would enhance the organisation, as well as suggestions on the types of people to avoid.

In addition, demonstrating that staff members' opinions are valued is important for workplace morale. When it comes to the final stage of recruitment, consider having a select group of employees (probably the most senior) meet the potential new team member so that they can offer feedback on whether the person will be a good fit.

E) Streamline the communication process. Conflicts can arise at work when communication processes make a professional's job even more difficult. Unnecessary paperwork, meetings that take longer than necessary, or email chains that drag on when a phone call could solve the problem in a few minutes are sources of aggravation that can lead to conflict at work. Consider ways in which you can streamline office processes to benefit your employees.

Even before an individual joins your team, you can help preserve that

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

person's time and energy by streamlining and facilitating the selection process. A good pre-selection of the candidate by pre-screening their profiles on social media and other websites can be one option.

F) Once you have hired a new team member, it is important to continue to focus on keeping the peace in the office every day. Here are some ways a hiring manager can ensure that employees remain productive and that conflicts are not allowed to disrupt the business environment:

G) Manage favouritism. Even the most experienced hiring managers will inevitably end up with employees with whom they feel particularly connected. However, it is important not to let favouritism come into play at work, as it can be very damaging to employee morale. Before you know it, employees may start undermining each other to get the boss's attention, or they may suspect that the boss's favouritism influences who is assigned to which projects when a new job comes along. It is essential to keep personal preferences out of the workplace.

H) Tackle gossip. Some of this talk

is harmless. However, when office gossip goes on and on, it can be distracting and cause a division among the team that paralyses productivity. Try to deal with problematic office gossip before it detracts from team members' ability to do their jobs.

I) Handle problem employees as quickly as possible. Firing an employee is probably every hiring manager's least favourite task, but a disruptive element can incite conflict among staff. It is therefore essential to dismiss this individual as soon as it becomes apparent that he or she is no longer performing to the required level.

HOW TO DETECT CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN EMPLOYEES

The first step in identifying a candidate's ability to not generate and resolve conflict is to be very clear about the skills required for each position. To do this, in the selection process, it will be necessary to create a profile and a job description for each vacancy that not only includes the key skills to fulfil this role, but also the soft skills required.

The recruitment and interview process is the ideal time to identify

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

the skills required of a candidate. It is essential to create a relaxed atmosphere, in which pressure is controlled, so that the candidate is comfortable enough to show his or her true personality. Some experts recommend doing this during an informal situation such as a meal, but not all processes make this possible.

Don't lose sight of the unconscious bias, as conflict resolution, like all soft skills, involves interpersonal attitudes. To avoid them, it is recommended that interviews are conducted by more than one person from the recruitment department, that they are structured correctly, that the questions are standardised - if we ask the same questions to everyone, it will be easier to compare and evaluate the results without bias, etc.

In fact, by using open-ended questions about the candidate's experience and preferences, it is possible to detect certain skills that could be valuable to your company, such as their ability to work in a team, resolve conflicts or build relationships.

The key, however, is to ask specific situational and behavioural questions.

Some useful questions are:

- What are the advantages of working in a group, and the disadvantages?
- What do you ask of a boss?
- Tell me about a conflict situation you have faced in the past and what you learned from it. How would you act now?
- Imagine this situation: you have joined to do X task, but finally you have to change temporarily to attend to other issues required by the company, what do you do?
- When was the last time you asked for help and for what?
- What has been the greatest difficulty you have faced, and what has been your greatest achievement during your professional career?

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

To prevent and avoid these situations, SME managers can be trained in key skills such as: The recruitment and interview process is the ideal time to identify

EMPATHY AND ASSERTIVENESS: Training in skills such as empathy and assertiveness will help teams to

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

improve the way they communicate. In this way, it will be easier to reach an understanding, without new conflicts arising. In addition, they will be more productive and faster in their processes and tasks.

STRESS MANAGEMENT: Training our teams and department heads in stress management at work will help to prevent situations of anxiety or burn-out. If your employees know how to manage stress at work, it will improve their psychological well-being and, therefore, their productivity.

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION: Every organisation should have a clear and strong corporate identity that reflects its mission, vision and values. This identity must be communicated to all employees to strengthen their sense of belonging and commitment. This is what we call Employer Branding.

DEFINING ROLES: In multidisciplinary teams, however small they may be, it can happen that, on a day-to-day basis, the responsibilities of each member of the team are blurred. The existence of a correct job description helps to prevent problems in the assumption of responsibilities and favours cohesion and respect among colleagues.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE:

Emotional intelligence gives middle management the ability to understand the emotional state of each employee. Thus, they will be able to know if someone is having problems with a colleague or if there is any other conflict at work. They will also learn to communicate better with the team, conveying common objectives clearly and effectively.

ACTIVE LISTENING: As a leader, being an active listener allows you to be more aware of the message your employees are conveying. In addition, active listening makes it easier to detect problems that any team member may have. In turn, it increases the speed to find a solution that favours all parties.

CONCLUSIONS

1) Workers spend between 35 and 40 hours a week in the workplace, a period in which human interactions can provoke different reactions. These relationships are much closer in an SME, where the physical and working proximity means that points of encounter or misunderstanding multiply throughout the day, becoming a breeding ground for potential conflicts.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- They are inevitable.
- They are potentially dangerous.
- They are necessary.

This opens an interesting starting point for the development of conflict management in an SME: they will exist and are elements of improvement for interpersonal relations between those involved, so their proper management should lead to improved performance and increased productivity.

2) When it comes to choosing who to hire, the manager needs to look at the big picture. If he/she is not sure that the person will enhance the dynamics of the existing team, he/she may need to move in another direction. So when considering who to hire, professional worth should not be everything, but make sure that the personalities fit your culture or the kind of culture you want to imbue in your organisation.

3) Training SME managers in Conflict Resolution Techniques will enable them to face the selection process with the right tools to make the right choice.

Training for companies is a key tool that allows companies to detect, prevent and resolve labour conflicts. In addition, a properly developed and implemented training plan will help us to learn how to take advantage of these situations, in principle unfavourable, and even cancel them before it is too late. As a result, we will be able to improve and enhance key aspects of the organisation.

4) A tailor-made training plan adapted to the needs and reality of each company and employee will be useful, beneficial and profitable for the organisation. This plan will help to improve the working environment, the corporate image, the recognition and achievement of objectives and the feeling of belonging and commitment. In short, the best way to avoid and resolve conflicts is to have a company that is committed, healthy and in which employees feel happy. And, above all, training is the tool that can best help us to achieve this.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

To understand how interpersonal relationships are built, to put ourselves in the other person's situation, to understand their point of view and to get an overview of the relationship from different perspectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. To avoid and solve conflicts at work.
2. To know what the other person thinks, what he/she understands and why he/she expresses and behaves in a certain way.
3. This tool can also be used to devise alternative strategies that can unblock a conflict situation in the workplace.

MATERIALS

none

TIME

20 minutes for the explanation and implementation. More time could be freely added for reflection.

TARGET GROUP

Managers and employees

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

Perceptual positions is a Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) tool that aims to put the subject in three different positions before a conflict, so that he/she can draw different conclusions and apply alternative solutions to the same problem, generally based on an interpersonal conflict. The tool aims to show the participant different perspectives, through emotional association and dissociation, as well as spatial and emotional distance from the conflict. In this way, the balance between the rational and emotional brain is sought in order to generate the most functional decisions.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

This is an individual tool, although it can also be used by departments within the organisation, so that everyone understands and is aware of the conflicts or difficulties in communication that can be established with others.

The facilitator will need to guide the participant from three imaginary points on the floor, giving them the full experience of what it feels like from each of these positions. To do this, the facilitator will guide the participant by asking questions that cover the three main representational systems (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic).

We cannot work on one and not on the other, we must go through the whole process in order to reach a global vision of the system or process in which we are immersed.



ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

1. The first position is the "I", i.e. seeing the situation from your own point of view, taking into account your interests and motivations. What we see, hear and feel, we see, hear and feel through our own experience, we are part of the situation itself. We will guide the participant to describe how he/she lives and experiences a situation of conflict or tension (either with another colleague, a superior or in general) in the first person. We will ask questions such as:

- What are you seeing?
- How do you see it?
- How do you see yourself?
- How do you feel?
- What emotions are you developing?
- What is he saying to you?
- How is he talking to you?
- What do you notice in your body? How do you somatise it?
- How does it affect you?
- What do you perceive in others?
- What do you hear or what do you think others say about you?

We will get all the necessary information, and the participant will be aware of how their creation of the experience is affecting their emotional state and, therefore, their reactions and results.

To finish this first step, and to break the pattern for the second position, we will take the participant out of the position (not only physically, but also mentally) by getting them to sing, dance, move, tell a joke or whatever we need to get them to delocalise so we can move on with the exercise.

2. The second position is the "other", the person with whom you are negotiating or debating, considering how he or she interprets the situation and what his or her wishes are. To do this, we have to experience the situation or conflict as if we were the other person or persons. We position ourselves in their thoughts and beliefs, we adopt their senses, their feelings, their emotions. We configure ourselves as that other person, their posture, their expression, their attitude... We "associate" ourselves with that person but we "dissociate" ourselves from ourselves.

To do this, the facilitator will take the participant to that physical space where "the other" is and will ask the same

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

questions as in step 1, but now with the added value of doing it from another perspective, so we will find clues to the conflict from another point of view.

As we did at the end of step 1, we will try to break the physical and emotional connection with a little dance, a song or a joke that takes the participant out of their association with "the other".

3. The third position refers to an "independent observer", someone who may be observing the situation but is not directly involved in the outcome either physically or emotionally. This is a figure who is absolutely neutral and dissociated from the situation/conflict and who looks from the outside at the relationship that is being established between "I" and the "other".

The third position must act as a neutral and equidistant arbiter, overruling assumptions about any of the previous positions.

Questions should now be addressed in the third person:

1. What are you seeing?
2. How do you see THEM?
3. How do you see THEM?
4. What emotions are THEY developing?
5. What do you notice in THEIR bodies? How do THEY somatise it?
6. How does it affect THEM?
7. What is your tone of voice? What are your words like?
8. What do you think they are thinking about each other?
9. What do you think others think about this situation?
10. What consequences do you think this situation may have?

4. Once the passage through positions 1, 2 and 3 has been completed, the facilitator will accompany the participant back to position 1 so that he/she can regain the perspective as the protagonist and experience the situation in the first person, but now with all the information gathered after passing through the other positions.

1. Now the questions will be:
2. What have you learned?
3. What information have you gathered that you did not have before?
4. What do you think you were doing wrong?
5. What do you think you can change?
6. What can you do differently now?

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

5. There could even be a fourth perceptual position which would be "we". This considers what makes sense in the "system" in which people operate. What is in the best interest of the social, business, team system?

From the four perceptual positions - the self, the other person, the observer and the system - experiencing any situation through experimentation will help us to understand much better the usefulness of this technique in any field in which we want to apply it.

To conclude, we will brainstorm among participants and attendees to draw conclusions.

CONNECTION WITH (SKILL)

This tool is intimately linked to conflict resolution skills, because it aims to reach the most operative solution for all parties by understanding the different points of view.

In the end, the ultimate question is: "What do you want to happen?", because this dynamic is aimed at changing something that is not working in an interpersonal relationship, at developing different strategies by taking in information from different points of view.

All three positions are important. If we consider only our own position, we will err on the side of selfishness, as we will not take into account the interests of the other person. The ability to put ourselves in the other person's shoes gives us empathy, and helps us to reach a common agreement. However, taking into account only the other person's position is not favourable either, as we are putting aside our own interests. Considering only the third position implies being outside the situation, which leads to taking a distant and uninvolved stance.

A good strategy is to use all three positions and be aware of how each one feels. If you are faced with a situation to resolve, go through these positions one by one, taking note of your ideas, feelings, comments and interests.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

- The importance of the expectations we place on ourselves and others in explaining our outcomes
- The weight of our belief system on our actions
- Putting the outcome before being right

OBJECTIVES

- To avoid stressful situations
- To focus on the result
- To evaluate expectations as a personal and subjective opinion
- To be more pragmatic and functional

MATERIALS

none

TIME

20 minutes in the explanation and implementation More time can be demanded for reflection.

TARGET GROUP

Potential employees

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

The way human beings are, think and act leads them to generate expectations about everything they do. We tend, by default, to associate behaviours and ideas with individuals we do not even know, to compare or, for example, to justify our own ideas in denial of those of others. And sometimes, especially in human relationships, this is the origin of conflicts. Here is where this tool is useful, as an approach to different perspectives in order to solve the potential conflicts.

The application of the power of expectations and beliefs to the field of business was extensively developed in the 1960s and 1970s by Jacobsen and Rosenthal, who developed the theory of the Pygmalion Effect (how the expectations I generate in others affect my results) and the Galatea Effect (how the expectations I generate in myself affect them). The result of these two theories is what is known as the *self-fulfilling prophecy*.

The concept of self-fulfilling prophecy refers to the process by which individuals make their own expectations real on the basis that these expectations will actually materialise. That such expectations will indeed materialise, i.e. come true. In reality, prophecy does not have to operate on the basis of an expectation; it is sufficient that we are in the presence of a preconceived idea. We are in the presence of a pre-existing idea which, being uncertain as to its production, becomes real on the basis of the preconceived idea.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

This activity can be done individually, in pairs or in groups. The facilitator's mission is to guide participants through the four phases of the Pygmalion Effect by asking questions, leading the participants' reflection and generating a debate between the weight of expectations and the beliefs that generate them.

In the end, the aim should be to raise doubt between reason and results. The fact of seeing expectations fulfilled, even if the results are far from the desired ones, makes us question even the origin, validity and credibility of those beliefs that sustained certain decisions and that, therefore, caused X results.

Finally, as a conclusion to the activity, it would be interesting to raise a debate about the origin of these beliefs, which are nothing more than a mere subjective construction that gives us a sense of certainty in our relationship with the outside world.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

The only victory, when it comes to dealing with conflict at work, is mutual, resulting in de-escalation, new common ground and problem solving. Seeing the person (or team) on the other side of the conflict as the opponent will condemn both parties to remain adversaries, and undermines the following conflict resolution techniques that increase the likelihood of a mutually beneficial outcome.

From that starting point, we will guide participants through four scenarios by asking questions in each of the situations:

1. OUR BELIEFS:

- What do I believe about myself?
- What do I believe about my peers?
- What do I believe about my bosses?
- What do I believe about my clients?
- What do I believe about my company?
- What do I believe about this job?

2. (HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON) OUR ACTIONS:

- How do I behave?
- How do I react?
- What do I think?
- What do I do or don't do?
- What do I expect others to do?
- What problems can this create for me?
- How will it affect my decisions?
- What conflicts might it cause?

3. (HAVE AN IMPACT ON) OTHER'S BELIEFS:

- What do my bosses think of me?
- What do my colleagues think of me?
- What do my customers think of me?
- How can it affect me?
- What impact can it have on me and my work?
- What impact can it have on my results?

4. (GENERATE) OTHER'S ACTIONS TOWARDS ME:

- How do others react?
- How do they act?
- How do they talk to me?
- How would I expect them to talk to me?

AND THAT REINFORCES MY ORIGINAL BELIEF, CREATING THE SELF-FULFILLED PROPHECY

ABOUT THE TOOL

CONNECTION WITH (SKILL)

The influence of the expectations placed on a person has long been recognised in fields such as medicine and psychology, but there have always been greater doubts about the impact of the expectations of bosses and superiors on their subordinates. Therefore, in the field of organisations, many empirical studies have focused their interest on the analysis of expectations and their impact on the company and on the performance of workers not only from the perspective of the Pygmalion effect but, prior to this, many authors studied expectations due to the relevance of their management by the management of organisations. The underlying idea is that leaders who expect more from their workers obtain better results.

Thus, the management of expectations is formulated as a process of motivation that is based on expectations and has a direct effect on the performance of workers. performance of the employees.

In addition to the ratification of the effect of third-party expectations on the performance of subordinates, i.e. the Pygmalion effect, the importance of the mediation of leaders in the process is demonstrated. Leaders and superiors use the resources at their disposal according to the expectations they have of their subordinates, devoting more of them to those for whom they have higher expectations. In short, we can conclude that this experiment showed that superiors obtain from their subordinates what they expect from them.

DECISION MAKING

DEFINITION

In simple terms, decision making is about solving problems by choosing the alternative that appears to be the most appropriate among those available. And the decision will be more correct the more likely it is to achieve the desired effect and the more efficient it is.

Decision-making can be defined as the process of selecting a right and effective course of action from two or more alternatives for the purpose of achieving a desired result. Sometimes some factors that can be internal or external influence positively or negatively when making a decision, the important thing to reach the best possible result is to always keep in mind what the final objective is, so as not to lose the course.

If we consider it more specifically from a FETRA point of view, the entire managerial process is based on decisions. Decisions are needed both for tackling the problems as well as for taking maximum advantages of the opportunities available. Correct decisions reduce complexities, uncertainties and diversities of the organizational environments.

According to P. F. Drucker – “Whatever a manager does he does through making decisions.” All matters relating to planning, organizing, direction, co-ordination and control are settled by the managers through decisions which are executed into practice by the operators of the enterprise.

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES:

- Understand the importance of decision-making in the selection process of an SME.
- Identify in an SME manager the advantages and risks of his or her decision making skills
- Understand the need to hire good decision-makers
- Know how decision making is developed and detected
- To learn strategies for operational and sustainable decision making

OUTCOMES:

- Managing the risks caused by the inability to make decisions in SMEs
- Recognising the needs of managers to make decisions
- Identify suitable candidates who are decision makers

DECISION MAKING

- Create a decision making atmosphere in the organization
- Develop a training plan to prevent the lack of decision making

DECISION MAKING IN THE SME CONTEXT

Decision-making is considered to be the most important process within any organisation, as stated by Nobel Prize-winning economist Herbert Simon. Such is the importance of decision-making that it generates positive or negative impacts on the company itself and, sometimes, for the community at large.

Every day, people in decision-making positions make choices and take actions of varying degrees of relevance: from simply issuing a work order, to choosing a new branch location or taking on a new partner. If this happens in companies of all types, the impact is much greater in SMEs, small companies that must necessarily be dynamic, flexible and adaptable to change.

In an SME, responses are immediate, and there are not (and cannot be) as many protocols as in

a large organisation, where there are numerous departments and decisions are usually clearly assigned to area managers. In an SME, decision-making is constant, daily, both by the manager and by the staff.

In theory, decision-making should involve three basic steps, according to Simon:

- Identify all possible alternatives
- Analysing the results that would be obtained with each one.
- Choosing the most appropriate solution, according to its effectiveness and efficiency.

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

There are different types of decision-making in a company, something that often depends on its size, since the process is not the same for large companies, where there is delegation, as for family businesses and other types of SMEs, where the decision-makers are usually a small group of people, or even limited to the manager. Therefore, the leader of an SME must manage the following decisions:

Management decisions:

Management decisions are those made by the company's directors or

DECISION MAKING

managers. In SMEs this is the norm, while in large companies, decision-making is usually delegated, with the management being in charge of studying the results and planning medium- and long-term measures.

Strategic decisions: Strategic decisions are responsible for preparing the future of the company, i.e. decisions that are taken to achieve results in the medium and long term. These decisions are taken by the company's management in scenarios that may involve different degrees of risk. These are strategic directions, for example:

- Financial planning
- Remuneration policies
- Going international

Individual decisions: Individual decisions are those that any employee of the company makes on a day-to-day basis. Control over these decisions is important, because a mistake repeated over time can have economic consequences for the company or mean the loss of customers.

Operational decisions: Operational decisions are those that are taken to carry out the day-to-day management of the company, i.e. the objectives to be achieved are short-term or immediate. These

These decisions can be taken by individual employees or by the relevant departments.

These are examples of operational decisions:

- The adaptation of data protection regulations.
- The selection of suppliers.
- Control of receipts and payments.

Routine or programmed decisions:

Routine or programmed decisions are those that are carried out on a regular basis and are also guided by an established procedure. They are part of the operational decisions.

Risky decisions: Risky decisions are exceptional, as they are taken only in critical or crisis situations for the company. A bad decision in this type of scenario can have serious consequences for the company.

The decision-making process in the company has a series of advantages such as:

- Presenting a greater number of alternatives, thanks to the different experiences of the participants in the process.
- When a decision is made by several people, it is easier for it to be accepted without problems by the rest of the company.

DECISION MAKING

- If decision-making is left to a single person, using a group and a consensus decision demonstrates participative leadership and that all participants are listened to.
- Interdepartmental communication improves when representatives from each department are involved in decision-making. This also helps to ensure that the measures to be implemented are better accepted.

RISKS

As obvious as it may seem, the main risk for the manager of an SME is that at the same time as being the owner, he or she is just another worker, and this leads to a doubt about his or her own identity. Any SME manager, when he leaves the workshop and "puts on his/her tie", undergoes a mutation that often makes him uncomfortable, as he understands that this is not his job. In this mutation, they also have to change their mental structure and they have to start 'deciding'. And this is the key. The efficiency and effectiveness of our organisation will depend on the quality of the manager's decisions.

This is a starting point that may

seem very obvious, but the main risk for an SME manager is that he/she must understand that in addition to being a professional, he/she has become an entrepreneur. This implies that in addition to comprehensive skills and knowledge of the sector in which he or she works, the manager must develop entrepreneurial skills, including effective decision-making.

As we have seen in the previous section, the life of the organisation depends on the quality of the decisions taken, from the smallest to the most transcendental, which is why this is an essential skill for the entrepreneur.

From this initial lack of entrepreneurial skills, a manager may fall into the risk of playing one of these roles:

1. An ostrich, who hides his head when there is a problem, and hopes that it will solve itself.
2. A headless chicken, making 'decisions' by intuition, continuously and instantly, even contradictory ones.
3. A lion, because I decide from the authority of the boss.
4. And very rarely like an owl, deciding with sufficient information and time.

DECISION MAKING

- The negative effects that an erroneous (or non-existent) decision-making policy can have on the organisation are varied, and all of them jeopardise productivity and also the very survival of the company.
- Paralysis in the absence of decisions, which leads to delays and slowness in the rest of the operations.
- The lack of vision, of a clear objective that marks out the appropriate decisions in both the short and medium-long term.
- The loss of confidence on the part of the staff in the face of a manager who is incapable of making strategic decisions with a company vision.
- The lack of autonomy of the rest of the employees, as they are not delegated to make shared decision-making.

DECISION MAKING IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

A recent study on job creation in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) included an examination of SMEs' approach to hiring, which is quite different from that of larger firms.

Recruitment is usually informal, for instance, but while most SMEs do not follow any standardised procedures, hiring decisions are thought through strategically. SMEs tend to consider carefully whether the workload of the position will be sufficient in the long run and recruit only if the job is deemed sustainable. Processes do become standardised with repeated recruitment, as owners become more experienced in hiring. And while recruiting new staff is time consuming, owners prefer to put in the time and do it themselves as they see staff as the most important resource of the company.

Smaller employers apply different criteria in choosing recruits than larger companies. SMEs are less interested in formal qualifications and tend to evaluate an applicant's motivation, skills and capacity to learn. They also focus on candidates' transversal skills – skills that are relevant regardless of sector or occupation – and soft skills, such as teamwork, willingness to work hard, international experience, decision making, flexibility and adaptability. The ability of the candidate to fit into the existing workforce and culture and to share the company's ambitions is critical. For this reason,

DECISION MAKING

SMEs place a lot of emphasis on face-to-face interviews with candidates. These are conducted by the owner, often with other senior staff or staff who will work closely with the new recruit. This is why decision making is a key element in the recruitment process both from the point of view of the employer and the employee.

WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

It may seem obvious, but the first thing a recruiter has to bear in mind is that he or she has no certainty that the decision (in this case, the choice) will be the right one.

On that premise, decision-making has traditionally been classified as one of the main characteristics of managers in organisations. In fact, the value of the leader is not so much his or her talent, but rather his or her clarity and flexibility in making strategic decisions for the organisation, even changing course depending on market readings or socio-economic situations.

This trend has been aggravated in recent years by the uncertainty of an increasingly unstable market and, in recent months, by the Covid 19 pandemic (what in management is

called a "black swan", an exogenous factor that suddenly alters the scenario). These elements make cognitive and behavioural flexibility commensurate with increasingly rapid, flexible decision-making adapted to changing circumstances.

Such an environment can be described by the acronym "VUCA", which stands for "volatile", "uncertain", "complex" and "ambiguous". This concept reflects the turbulent and unpredictable forces of change that can affect organisations, and requires new skills, approaches and behaviours to manage against the four VUCA threats.

In previous socio-economic models, medium and short-term decisions were made on the basis of a security that has collapsed. In the uncertainty phase, the most flexible and adaptable managers will succeed as opposed to those who try to have everything ready before making a decision, who may be blocked or paralysed waiting for an ideal calm that will not return.

In this context, a manager must make operational, balanced and aligned decisions. In this context, a manager must make operational,

DECISION MAKING

balanced and aligned decisions. Thus, the **three pillars** of a good and effective decision-maker are:

VISION. Describes the plans of an organisation and how it wants to be. Within the concepts of mission, vision and purpose, vision helps to make medium and long-term decisions based on a future projection of where the organisation wants to be, creating flexibility but avoiding the impulses of short-term decisions. Where do we want to be in X years? will be a great guide for decision making, and a necessity for choosing the right employees.

VALUES. These are the judges that mark and guide the actions of the manager. Defining and respecting the values of an organisation is one of the best elements for decision making, and also for hiring people. They act as judges and advisors in any dilemma. Based on them, leaders set goals and make choices that are aligned with the company's unwavering foundation and culture.

EMOTIONAL STATE. It is essential to strike a balance between impulsive and rational response. People make an average of 35,000 decisions a day and we are only aware of a small fraction of them. Specifically, our brain makes 99.74% of decisions automatically, without us being aware of them.

The human brain works by mechanising certain processes that are repeated on a daily basis, so that the number of real decisions we have to make is reduced to around 100 per day. This translates into just over 4 decisions per hour.

Although we like to think of ourselves as rational animals, the truth is that most decisions are made from the more primitive (reptilian) or emotional (limbic) part of the brain, and few of them pass through the rational and logical filter, which drastically impacts our outcomes. Emotional intelligence tries to balance this imbalance.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

Taking all these facts into account, a decision maker knows he/she has the right stuff when:

- You feel at least a little scared. Fear is a common, and very normal feeling before making any decision. Just because you feel scared does not mean that you are making the wrong decision. So embrace the fear. Welcome it. Don't let it stay, but realize that this is normal.
- You are listening the "loud voices", surrounding and saying

DECISION MAKING

- what you “should” or “shouldn’t” do. Then, realize you are probably taking some very much needed steps in the right direction.
- You’re feeling uncomfortable. It just means you are breaking away from some very engrained mindsets and things that are a part of your current perception.
- You’re questioning yourself. Simply put, you’re going to think at least a few times that you’re making the wrong choice. Listen to that inner voice, but remember that the voice speaking to you is based on your current perception of your reality, not necessarily where you want to go.
- You feel your confidence grow. Taking the reins of your own life boosts your confidence, and reminds you that you are capable of so much good in your life and others.
- You make new friends and broaden your relationships. The confidence you will begin to build can only bring new people into your life, and it’s so important to welcome these new people into your world. Treasure the memories and lessons learned with those that are leaving, and welcome in the new.
- You find yourself making more and more decisions more quickly. Once the ball begins to roll, you’ll begin to feel your confidence in simply deciding and making choices growing.
- You realize that decision had to be made, and you can’t imagine what your life would have looked like if you would have made the other choice.

HOW TO DETECT DECISION MAKING IN EMPLOYEES

Everything an employee does throughout the day is based on decision-making and action. It is as simple as that. Employers often look at an employee’s ability to perform a task, but rarely delve into an employee’s ability to make effective decisions. That’s why, during the selection process, managers can come across very talented individuals who get stuck because of their poor decision-making skills.

Here are three questions a manager should ask to assess the decision-making skills of potential employees:

1. Are they capable of making decisions on their own?

The employee must have the ability

DECISION MAKING

to make decisions without having to constantly ask for the approval or opinion of others. It is smart if they are looking for other angles and perspectives on the situation; but if they lack the confidence and motivation to make decisions on their own, it is a problem. These are the individuals who will keep coming back to the manager even if they have been told the answer several times.

How do you determine if an employee can make decisions for themselves? Either during the hiring process or at the beginning of their employment, provide them with a range of decisions they need to make. Present a series of varied situations and ask them to make a decision for each one, and then give you their explanation of why they chose each path. This exercise will give you a good idea of their decision-making skills.

2. Can they make decisions in difficult situations?

Employees are most likely to make decisions when they are under pressure or feeling stressed. If your employees are able to cope with stress, they are more likely to make effective decisions. If they are not able to cope with stress or pressure, they are likely to make mistakes and

decisions that are not in the best interest of your company. Not because they want to, but because they simply do not know how to deal with stress and make effective decisions at the same time.

The best way to determine if someone is good at making decisions under stress is to put them in a stressful situation. As an employer, it is also your responsibility to ensure that your employees are prepared to deal with stress. This may require you to provide additional training and other benefits to help them cope.

3. Can they learn to make better decisions next time?

Decision-making is a skill and, like any other skill, it should improve over time. Employees should be able to improve their decision-making skills with time and experience. Some will develop their skills more quickly and some will not develop them at all.

So how do you determine their ability to do this from the start? During the hiring process or at the beginning of their employment, give them a variety of tests or situations that gradually become more difficult. If they improve in a short period of time, chances are that

DECISION MAKING

they can also improve on the job. If they do not improve, it may be a sign that it will take them longer to improve or they may not improve at all.

When the manager is looking for the right candidate, he or she should make sure to look at their ability to make effective decisions. A candidate who is good at decision making can save a lot of headaches and money in the long run.

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

1. Use values, vision and purpose.

When the leader is clear on a personal and team level about his or her purpose, vision, values and goals, these elements serve as a starting point for making good decisions. When deciding between different options, it is very useful to ask oneself questions such as: Does this option lead me to honour my values? How does this alternative contribute to the achievement of the goal? If we choose this option, are we moving towards the vision? If we choose this alternative, are we being consistent with our purpose?

2. Develop emotional intelligence.

Every decision has a rational and an

emotional component. If the leader makes the decision impulsively, based on emotions such as fear or frustration, he or she is likely to make a mistake. A leader who has developed his self-awareness is able to see the situation in perspective, manage his emotions and therefore make better decisions.

3. Be honest with yourself. If he or she is inclined towards a course of action, it is advisable to be aware of the motivations and priorities that are influencing his or her preferences. In this way, bearing the costs of decisions will be much easier.

4. Embrace uncertainty. If a leader waits until he or she has all the information looking for perfection, he or she runs the risk of taking too long to make the decision, not being timely and affecting the team. To move the process forward, it is important to be aware of deadlines; to learn to accept the uncomfortable emotions that arise from uncertainty; to be willing to accept responsibility for making mistakes; and to trust that the best possible decision was made with the resources available.

5. Saying no. If the decision goes

DECISION MAKING

against goals, priorities and values, saying no is the best option.

Learning to say no with kindness and courtesy is one of the skills leaders must develop in order to make good decisions.

6. Broaden perspective. To find alternatives and decide which is best, leaders must question their own and their team's beliefs, challenge the status quo, open their minds and make the decision from a perspective where they are playing to win, rather than not to lose.

7. Trust intuition. While it is important to analyse the variables and know the benefits and costs of each scenario, it is often our intuition that leads us to make the right decision.

8. Use a system. Leaders can learn different decision-making methods and according to the situation and context, make use of these tools where following a series of steps makes the process faster and simpler.

CONCLUSIONS

Decision-making is probably the great characteristic of a leader, especially in an SME, because it is something that the manager of a small business has to do on a daily basis, and in many cases the survival of the business depends on these decisions.

Therefore, the first thing an entrepreneur must do is to understand that in addition to being an excellent professional and master of his or her specific area, he or she must develop these skills that make the difference between a sustainable organisation and one that is doomed to failure. In other words, the manager of an SME must know when to "wear the tie" and be more of an entrepreneur than a professional.

Decision-making rests on three pillars: vision, values and an emotional stability that allows the manager to make the right decisions for the organisation. These include choosing the right people, employees who are not only professionally valuable but also aligned with the culture and values of the organisation.

DECISION MAKING

In this selection process, one of the keys to the company's sustainability lies in finding professionals who are also good decision-makers, because this will allow the leader to trust his or her team more and reach a state of shared decision-making, in which all staff are more autonomous and self-sufficient.

And the best thing is that decision-making is a skill that can be learned, improved and developed over time. Not only with practice and experience, but by working on a set of skills that stimulate confidence and the ability to make more operational and sustainable decisions.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

- Analyse areas for improvement and establish action plans.
- Understand how different areas are interconnected in positive or negative ways
- Make decisions with a holistic effect

OBJECTIVES

Make medium and long-term decisions taking into account the interconnectedness of the different fields concerned, but also considering not only the advantages, but also the disadvantages and drawbacks of the decision.

MATERIALS

none

TIME

30 minutes. More time can be freely added for debate and reflection

TARGET GROUP

Managers and potential employees

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

The 4-window self-analysis is based on the idea that a decision, no matter how small, can make life better or worse. It is about identifying where there are small problems that can lead to bigger ones.

The 4-window self-analysis is a technique designed to evaluate and improve any area of life in order to affect it in a more holistic way. Thus, it not only serves to promote change in a specific area, but also in general.

It has to be said that the 4-window self-analysis is based on the famous broken windows theory. Its main contribution is that it helps to pinpoint where the essential aspects to be changed are, so that the effort can be concentrated on specific points and not dispersed.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS



The broken windows theory is a thesis that has been applied since the 1980s to improve policing and combat crime. It was proposed by the social psychologist Philip Zimbardo, after a small experiment. He left a car abandoned, with its doors open and without number plates, in a dangerous area of the city. Unsurprisingly, within a few days it was completely stripped.

Then he left another car in a similar state, but in a posh part of town. A week passed and the vehicle was still intact. Zimbardo then smashed one of its windows with a hammer and caused several damages. Within a few days, the car was completely stripped.

ABOUT THE TOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS CONTINUED

The conclusion is that if one window is broken and not fixed, the other windows will soon be smashed by vandals. If someone scratches the wall of a house and it is not fixed, in a few days it will be full of other scratches. If someone throws rubbish in a place and it is not picked up, it will soon become a rubbish dump.

Simple examples illustrate this idea. A high number of open tabs on the computer, which may not seem relevant, helps attention to wander. If this happens, a person is also more likely to take longer to do a task. If so, they will be less productive and their work will be less valued. Thus, a "broken window" is the gateway to many ills. Therefore, it must be repaired. How?

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

As you might guess, the self-analysis of the 4 windows is about identifying those "windows" that are in need of repair, but have not been paid attention to. As with broken windows, they send a message: no one is taking care of this. At the same time, that message attracts further difficulties. Wrong or unhelpful behaviour or decisions often do not start with a marked beginning, but with small situations that amount to a broken window. In the same way, changes in life often begin with actions that may seem irrelevant, but are actually relevant because they are part of a chain of deterioration.

To do the self-analysis of the 4 windows, we first have to assign a field to each of the windows. Let's say, for example, that we are going to work on:

- job satisfaction
- productivity and profitability.
- personal relationships
- individual development.

In each of these, measure satisfaction and determine which is the "most broken window" and start there.

To establish where the problem lies, it is best to assign a rating, from 0 to 5, to each of the four windows. As can be assumed, the area with the lowest score is the one that needs to be addressed. To do this, it would be advisable to follow the steps below:

- Identify habits. The first thing to do is to identify the repetitive behaviours that lead to difficulties in the "window".

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

- Identify routines. Habits generate their own routines and it is important to pinpoint them.
- Reminders. Habits are automatic and deeply ingrained. So, it is necessary to create awareness around them in order to change them.
- Change. Next is to find a healthy habit to replace the unhealthy habit and compensate for the role it plays.
-

The more specific you can be in the self-analysis of the 4 windows, the better. The ideal is to identify the simplest and most deeply rooted habit in a certain area. If it can be eradicated, this will certainly lead to a chain of relevant changes.

This tool can be complemented by an adaptation of the Perceptual Positions tool, which we have already developed here in the conflict resolution module.

The aim is to analyse decisions not only in the short-medium-long term, but to open up a much broader perspective to clients who, in general, make little use of alternative thinking, i.e., thinking oriented towards generating options. It is about observing oneself from an inner position or perceiving oneself from the outside (position and perception).

ADVANTAGES OF DOING IT

DISADVANTAGES OF DOING SO

ADVANTAGES OF NOT DOING IT

DISADVANTAGES OF NOT DOING IT

When decisions are made, they are usually analysed from the perspective of the advantages and disadvantages of doing so, which is always subjective. The contribution of the "four windows" technique is to add two new positions. On the one hand, the advantages of not doing it and the disadvantages of not doing it. Frankly, it is not the same thing. In fact, we practically double the field of options and analysis that we usually consider.

In short, the "four windows" decision-making technique consists of analysing the positives and negatives of doing something and not doing it, taking a step back, weighing all possible options and deciding.

ABOUT THE TOOL

CONNECTION WITH DECISION MAKING

Generating greater value for customers entails implementing differentiation and promotion strategies that enhance the competitive advantages offered in the market: to achieve this objective, it is necessary to understand very well how to make the right decisions, as it is essential to establish efficient ways to face the day-to-day challenges of an SME and collaborate with its growth.

Decision-making in the business world is essential to develop tools that improve the productivity of a company, as it serves to define the direction of the organisation and determine the actions necessary to meet its objectives.

Considering the small size of SMEs, the number of decisions (many of them decisive) that need to be taken in a short space of time, and, above all, the small number of decision-makers, tools such as The Four Windows are essential to develop a rapid model for management, evaluation, and decision-making.

If SMEs have an advantage over large organisations, it is their flexibility, as decisions are not subject to boards of directors or the opinion of external investors. But to do so, they must be quick to make strategic decisions and their members must be equipped with the right tools and skills to do so.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

- Perceive graphically the interaction between our own perception and the way other people see us.
- Giving and receiving feedback.
- Improve communication, generate synergies, promote self-knowledge and detect opportunities for improvement in both personal and work environments.

OBJECTIVES

The Johari window is very useful for the study of human behaviour, analysing the traits or characteristics and highlighting those that the individual shows openly, those that he hides, those that he is prevented from knowing and are only seen by others and even those that are unknown both to him and to those around him.

MATERIALS

A piece of paper

TIME

30 minutes. More time can be freely added for reflection and debate.

TARGET GROUP

Managers and potential employees

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

The 'Johari' window model is a convenient method used to achieve this task of understanding and enhancing communication between the members in a group. American psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham developed this model in 1955. The idea was derived as the upshot of the group dynamics in University of California and was later improved by Joseph Luft. The name 'Johari' came from joining their first two names. This model is also denoted as feedback/disclosure model of self-awareness.

The Johari window model is used to enhance the individual's perception on others. This model is based on two ideas: trust can be acquired by revealing information about you to others and learning yourselves from their feedbacks. Each person is represented by the Johari model through four quadrants or window pane. Each four window panes signifies personal information, feelings, motivation and whether that information is known or unknown to oneself or others in four viewpoints.

But when we study the individual as an entity involved in a decision-making process, this is intimately linked to knowledge of certain facts, and depending on the level of knowledge or lack of knowledge, we speak of decision-making under certainty, when the states of nature and the certainty of their presence are known, under risk, when only the probability of occurrence of these states of nature is known, under uncertainty, when only the existence of these states of nature is known, but not the probability of their existence, and we speak of decision-making under ignorance, when the states of nature are not even known.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

The method of conveying and accepting feedback is interpreted in this model. A Johari is represented as a common window with four panes. Two of these panes represent self and the other two represent the part unknown to self but to others. The information transfers from one pane to the other as the result of mutual trust which can be achieved through socializing and the feedback got from other members of the group.

The starting point is a very simple structure, consisting of a rectangle, which encloses four rectangles, forming quadrants, which for convenience are drawn with equal dimensions two by two, but which in reality represent four totally different areas, the largest rectangle representing the window through

ABOUT THE TOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

which the individual looks out, and through which he/she knows him/herself.

	known to self	not known to self
known to others	open area	blind spot
not known to others	hidden area	unknown

What the Johari window tries to explain is how differences in personality areas should try to behave in order to improve interpersonal relationships through one's knowledge of others.

1. The first area, the upper left, represents the "open" region, i.e. those feelings or aspects of behaviour that the individual knows in himself and makes known without any restriction, which he shows without any doubt in his environment.
2. The second area, the upper right, is the hidden region, understood as a private region, where the individual knows the information, but does not wish to reveal it to others. The individual assumes that if he reveals his feelings, thoughts and reactions, he may be judged negatively by others.
3. The third area, the lower left, is the "blind" area, which contains information about the individual that the individual is unaware of, but which others know, and which, through the messages the individual sends, allows others to form a picture of the individual.
4. The last area is the unknown or unexplored region, the quadrant on the lower right, where there are the personality factors that the individual has not been able to become aware of, and which are also unknown to other people. It is important to note that here we have used open - hidden above and blind - unknown below, although some authors reverse blind and hidden.

A more realistic Johari window for a particular individual is presented in the next figure, where each internal window is represented by different dimensions.

ABOUT THE TOOL

	known to self	not known to self
known to others	open area	blind spot
not known to others	hidden area	unknown

From a behavioural science point of view (Fritzen, 1987), the Johari window tries to illustrate the relationships between the self and others in terms of consciousness, and can serve to gain a clearer idea of many of the behaviours of human beings, as well as providing solutions to interpersonal relationships.

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

For the last reason, it is on group decision-making that attention has been focused on the use of the Johari window as a methodology to improve decision-making. Particularly because it can help to identify the experiences that each individual can bring to the table.

The method used, rather than being inspired by the method used by scholars of human behaviour, is a modification of it, where the weights are as follows:

1. The members of the group who are going to take part in the decision-making process are selected.
2. A list is made of them, identifying them by a key, and they are taken to a room where the Johari Window section will be carried out.
3. The moderator, or person in charge of running the section, calls each member and tells them the name of the individual they are to observe.
4. After explaining (this can be someone from outside the group, the moderator, or the group member who has the information) to the group what the decision-making process will consist of, each member is given a sheet of paper to create four lists.
5. They are given a reasonable amount of time, five to ten minutes is enough, so that on the first list, they can indicate in the form of qualifiers the weaknesses and strengths that each one has in order to undertake the decision-making process for which they have been selected.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

6. It should be made clear to them that this list should include qualifiers for each of them, which they can read and comment on in front of the audience without any kind of restriction.

7. At the end of this time, they are given another reasonable amount of time to develop list two, in which they should list all the weaknesses and strengths of the person they have been assigned to observe.

At the end of time for list two, they move on to list three, where, again with a reasonable amount of time, each individual with a reasonable amount of time, each individual will list all the strengths and weaknesses that he/she has, but that he/she does not consider prudent to read and comment on in public, using a key that allows them to clearly distinguish the written qualification, but that cannot be read by any other person.

Once the previous list is finished, each member will read his/her list one, doing it very slowly, with the intention that the other members can add the qualifier read to one of their lists, the first one, if it is a characteristic of his own that the respective individual dares to comment on in public, the second one, if he considers that it is a qualifier of the person observed, the third one, if it is a qualifier that he considers his own, but that he would not comment on to everyone. But if he does not place it in any of the three previous lists, it would go to the fourth list.

The observer of the person reading should also pay attention, because he should eliminate from his list two, any qualifier read by him that he had in that list.

Once all the readings have been completed, each individual must identify all the synonyms in each of their lists individually, i.e. the synonyms in one list are not taken into account with the other lists.

In any case, for each group of synonyms, only one representative per list should be left.

The moderator should ask for all the lists, and note separately the number of qualifiers in each of the two lists, placing this number next to the name of each person observed.

The moderator returns each individual's list.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

Each individual must independently make up his or her respective Johari window by creating a table:

- at the top left, he/she places the number corresponding to the number of qualifiers in his/her list one.
- in the upper right hand corner, he places the number of aspects the individual had placed in his list three.
- at the bottom left, the number that the moderator will indicate to you, which is the number generated by your respective observer.
- finally at the bottom right the number of qualifiers that are in list four.

CONNECTION WITH DECISION MAKING

Applied to the business environment, the Johari window allows us to improve our capacity for internal analysis and external communication. It is designed to reflect and illustrate human interaction processes and dynamics.

This model is generally used in self-help groups and group dynamics exercises in companies and other organisations, and allows, among other things, to improve communication, promote self-awareness, generate synergies, improve performance and detect opportunities for improvement. It is a very useful X-ray to develop self-leadership.

The first step would be to describe for ourselves what we think our business is like. Then we can ask other people how they perceive it. Then we would compare the differences in a four-quadrant window.

In business management, an interesting aspect is that we can repeat this same exercise with different groups. That "we" can be the management of the company, the management of a department, or any set of people who are part of the organisation. And "the others" can be a panel of experts, people working in other departments, consumers, etc.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

DEFINITION

Emotional intelligence (EQ) refers to one's ability to understand and recognise their own emotions as well as having the skills to appropriately manage the emotions of others (Goleman, 2019). Furthermore, it also refers to having the ability to manage and use one's own emotions in order to create a positive outcome, as well as being able to communicate effectively about your emotions and empathise with other in order to create an emotionally safe environment for everyone. Emotional intelligence also means having an awareness of that our behaviour can be a result of our emotions and have either a negative or positive impact on the people around us.

The concept of emotional intelligence gained traction within workplace settings during the mid-1990s when businesses were undergoing various forms of decentralisation and the use of delegation was becoming ever more common (Wright, 2017). Today, it is regarded as one of the most crucial attributes and soft skills that leaders and managers alike should possess to ensure their operations run successfully (Ibid). 90% of many

top high performers in business hold this characteristic and as a result, they are more able to deal with difficult situations and alleviate any stakeholder conflict (HouseToGrow, 2021).

There are generally considered to be 4 main categories of EQ (Slater, 2016), which are the following:

- Self Awareness
- Self-management/regulation
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Management

Having said this, Goleman (1996), reminds us that empathy and motivation are also key drivers in acquiring EQ. Empathy allows staff to be considerate of others' emotions and demonstrate compassion accordingly while motivation allows a person to be resilient and has a strong correlation to EQ.

Emotional Intelligence is a crucial aspect for SMEs. For managers running a small business, it is important that they understand the emotional queues and those of staff. In dealing with a smaller team, the results of a leader's actions can spread easily onto the dynamics of their employees, for better or for worse. Therefore, implementing good EQ will allow for a more

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

integral and versatile workforce that has great communication with leaders and management (Segal, 2021)

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES:

- Define the importance of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in SMEs.
- Understand the needs for managers to adopt EQ.
- Identify the relevant components of effective EQ.
- Comprehend how EQ is developed and detected within an SME.
- Realise the need to hire people who are open to adopt EQ.

OUTCOMES:

- Manage consequences and possible crises as a result of poor EQ.
- Improve relationships between members of staff through EQ.
- Implement a framework in SMEs that actively embraces EQ amongst employees.
- Incentivise how EQ can positively affect employees' self-esteem and performance.
- Promote how EQ can allow lead to a high-quality product and/or service and overall business operations.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE SME CONTEXT

Developing our own emotional intelligence is an asset for ourselves and small and medium business. Our levels of emotional intelligence will determine whether our group fails or succeeds. Having good emotional intelligence will enable us to manage our groups in a way that works efficiently and effectively, while ensuring that we are working towards everyone's best interest. By developing our emotional intelligence, we are working towards becoming better leaders that produce desired outcomes.

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

Emotional Intelligence is a strong asset for conflict resolution, coaching, and motivating others. It is also important for creating a culture of collaboration and building a safe space for emotional expression within the workplace. Additionally, having good emotional intelligence is important for management as enables them to place people in appropriate roles for their skill sets as well as supporting their employees in stressful work situations.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

RISKS

A lack of Emotional Intelligence within management in an SME company can cause a breakdown in several areas. These areas include:

Communication

- A lack of Emotional Intelligence can cause a breakdown in communication. For effective communication we must be able to understand our own and others' emotions and intent behind the information they (or we) are sharing. Without the emotional intelligence to be able to manage and understand our own and others' emotions, we end up with a lack of understanding and an inability to interpret the meaning of people's words and actions.

Conflict resolution

- Emotional Intelligence is essential when it comes to conflict resolution. Without the ability to remain impartial or to be able to understand the views of others we cannot resolve issues. We must be able to understand what is driving others' views, opinions and emotions in order to resolve conflicts and none of this can be done without emotional

- emotional intelligence. In order to have an understanding of these things, we must be able to understand and manage our own and others' emotions appropriately.

Teamwork

- Being able to empathise with others and manage our own and others' emotions is essential for teamwork. Without Emotional Intelligence, there would be a breakdown in teamwork. In order to maintain a culture of teamwork, we must be able to manage take ownership of our own emotions, actions and mistakes.

Effective feedback

- Emotional Intelligence is important when giving and receiving effective feedback. When receiving feedback, it is important to be able to admit our mistakes and use them as an opportunity to grow and learn from them (remember, perfection does not exist). Additionally, when giving feedback, it is important to have an awareness of how you give feedback. Criticism can sometimes be hard to take so when giving feedback on people's work, it is important to remain aware of their emotions

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

and try to give the feedback in the most constructive way possible (and also remember to remind them of what they are doing well!).

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

For candidates applying for a new job, the recruitment process stage can be very daunting as it is something that cannot be overlooked or taken lightly - equally by candidates and employers.

It is vital as an employer to understand that the application process is something that is overwhelming for most candidates and may have trouble organising their feelings. An employer should have an Emotional Intelligence framework that can easily be diffused onto candidates. By adopting this trait, candidates and future employees alike, will feel more comfortable in the recruitment process and will be more confident to present their skills and talent they possess to fulfil said specific role (Ruby, 2021).

Furthermore, managerial staff

should be aware that emotional intelligence is a learnable skill that can adapt and change over time. Consequently, in terms of recruitment, employers should have a framework in place that does not necessarily detect if a candidate dominates the required level of EQ but rather examines their agility to latch onto such EQ framework and develop the skill internally.

WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

Emotional intelligence is essential in the management of SMEs. Managers must be able to display an ability to empathise with their workers and be able to manage their own and others' emotions appropriately in order for the organisation to run smoothly as well as being able to utilise this skill in the process of recruitment in order to decide whether applicants would be a good fit for their team.

Furthermore, the employer also needs to be able to hold themselves accountable when mistakes are made. If work isn't running smoothly and there seems to be a breakdown in communication amongst the team, then this may actually be due to management. Instead of blaming others,

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

employers must get the root of the problem while remaining impartial and engaging in self-reflection. If needed, they should also be able to take accountability for the role they played in the breakdown.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

Most people have a certain level of Emotional Intelligence (EQ), however compared to Intellectual Intelligence (IQ), it is dynamic rather than static, and can change on a regular basis. If there is a willingness among staff to learn and grow then, most likely, their level of EQ will favourably evolve to accommodate said willingness (Wright, 2017). As it is dynamic, it can be a bit difficult to detect it at first within you. However, there are some characteristics that imply a positive evolution of EQ. They are as follows:

- An ability to identify and communicate about your emotions as you experience them
- Having an awareness of your strengths and weaknesses and being able to manage them well
- Better control of your negative inner voice
- Being a good judge of character
- Reduction in feeling overwhelmed and for this not to be transmitted onto peers
- The ability to be assertive while simultaneously, maintaining professional
- Being able to grow from mistakes and let go of them
- Having an awareness that perfection simply doesn't exist and being proud of what you have accomplished without allowing failures to set you back
- Being able to put boundaries in place and taking time to care for yourself

HOW TO DETECT (SKILL) IN EMPLOYEES

Emotional intelligence is a skill that differs very much from other skills such as technical or social media skills. It isn't a skill we can simply observe in order to learn. Learning emotional intelligence takes a lot of personal reflection and growth.

Surveys have indicated that over 71% of employers value Emotional Intelligence over IQ. When going through the recruitment process, with the right training, it can be quite easy to detect people with a higher Emotional Intelligence. This can be done by observing their responses

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

and behaviour during the interview process, and these questions could include lessons that they have learned from mistakes they have made in the past or how to see how they respond to criticism (Crimcheck, 2021).

Moreover, according to Bradberry (2019), there are some other ways which can give an insight into whether an employee has fostered EQ. One sign is that employees use more robust and emotional vocabulary. If an employee has a high EQ, then they also have the ability to lexically convey those emotions, which for most people are overlooked or unlabelled. This also feeds back into the business as employers can more accurately grasp their concerns and needs.

Another sign is that employees are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. It has been proven that when beginning a professional career, younger employees are usually more pessimistic of their capabilities and may shy away from roles that require more responsibility. However, with time, they will gradually become more optimistic and will be more willing to adopt delegation roles.

Indeed, with increased optimism comes increased confidence. Confidence can be shown in many ways both internally and externally, though Bradberry (2019) refers to the act of being offended. While no one expects there to be any confrontations, ultimately there are going to be disagreements. An employee with a high level of EQ will deal with any complaints professionally and will not take them personally, meaning that the speed and quality of the products and services will not be as adversely affected. However, while employees should learn not to be offended by negative comments, it is integral that managerial staff have the acceptance that mistakes and crises will occur and that it is not always their employees who are accountable; they should not hold grudges or show favouritism amongst the workforce.

Even though all of the above are signs that employees' EQ is evolving for the best interest of them as individuals and for the businesses aims and objectives, these positive outcomes will be diluted amongst the outcomes of other successful strategies. Therefore, the intersectionality of these

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

complicates the exact measurement of EQ amongst employees. For this reason, a framework that focuses on EQ should be made aware to employees especially in valuations and appraisals.

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

As mentioned in the introduction, Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is a dynamic attribute and as well as being divided up into various sub-sections, it is something that can be evolved internally and externally (Goleman, 2019). Indeed, Ackerman (2021) explains that a high EQ leads to a higher job satisfaction. While creating a framework, especially for SMEs may be very overwhelming, it is important to focus on a few components that are vital for developing Emotional Intelligence both within a company and as an individual. Below are ten ways that help someone boost his or her Emotional Intelligence:

Be a good listener. As an SME, it is extremely important that a sense of amiability is developed in the business, which starts with good listening skills. This permits staff to understand each other's feelings

and strengthen their personal relations between employees. By doing this, employees feel more comfortable being in a working environment and will have increased job satisfaction.

Become aware and tune in to your own emotions. In order to control your emotions, you must first be aware of them. Some pointers for becoming self-aware include: practicing mindfulness and monitoring your emotions by acknowledging them, examining them, and then assessing your triggers and activation points. By being aware of your own emotions, you are better able to understand and become aware of the emotions of others.

Seek to understand the point of view of others. In the workplace or in a group setting, where ideas are flowing and being exchanged, it is particularly important to understand and empathise with others. As a manager, listen attentively, put yourself in your employees' place and try to imagine what they are thinking and feeling and how they may have arrived at their conclusions.

Understand relationship management. The ability to communicate positively with others

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

is essential to knowing how to manage relationships properly. Understanding how to interact with others in a constructive way will help you maintain productive relationships and increase your EQ aptitude as a leader.

Communicate effectively.

Communicating effectively requires both verbal and non-verbal skills. It is essential for business owners to communicate effectively so as to manage relationships and instruct their staff to move forward.

Effective communication is about understanding emotions, as well as the intentions behind the information exchanged. It is a mutual back and forth that includes conveying a message in the way it is intended and in turn, making sure it is received as intended.

Maintain accountability. Business owners who hold themselves just as accountable as their employees are often seen as more trusted.

Employees appreciate their jobs more when they know their employers are held equally accountable. Transparency in leadership is extremely valuable, meaning you should be able to admit when you're wrong. Leaders that are more open foster employees who are supportive to be even more willing to work with them

in order to achieve the same business goals.

Be proactive instead of reactive.

When you lead from a proactive standpoint, you can anticipate how others will react and thus respond accordingly. By doing so, you keep work-related stress at a minimum. For instance, if your business plans to relocate, merge or lay off employees, business owners can tap into their emotional skills and be proactive to help the staff through these tough situations.

Lead others with passion. Leaders can instruct through passion.

Passionate leaders are able to show their emotional vulnerability in order to connect with others; however, they can still maintain a leadership presence by showing others how to engage and collaborate as a team. This means being able to address employees from a place of warmth, instead of a detached dictatorship.

Connect empathy with compassion.

When you connect empathetically, you are letting your employees know you understand how they feel and this invokes compassion. As a result, employees will want to work harder. For instance, if an employee is upset after dealing with an irate customer, your ability to empathise compassionately can turn into

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

something constructive, such as finding ways to minimise similar situations from happening again.

Practise emotional management through feedback. As a small business owner, you are tasked with providing your employees with feedback on their daily work habits. When feedback is provided sensitively, based on EQ and by using constructive criticism, it builds trust among the staff. They begin to feel connected and believe you are not just thinking about the business, but about them as well. As a result, employees are more productive.

CONCLUSIONS

Emotional Intelligence is something that is ever growing. It is about taking every opportunity to learn, grow and develop while using these lessons to encourage the growth of others. Emotional intelligence is the ability to manage your emotions and those of your staff. As a small business owner, you should be aware of your own emotional queues and those of the staff.

Having good Emotional Intelligence is about being able to empathise with others and being able to .

manage our own and others' emotions. It is also about being able to effectively identify and communicate about our emotions.

A good level of emotional intelligence is widely appreciated amongst employees. In order to work effectively within a team, we must be able to empathise with other team members and have some understanding of their emotional wellbeing and what drives their behaviours. During the recruitment process, managers should look for someone that they feel will fit best into their team and be able to enhance the overall performance of the company.

Emotional Intelligence is something that everyone has. However, it varies from person to person. There are some signs of good Emotional Intelligence and if you possess them, you know that you have a high level of EQ. Likewise, there are some signs that give an employer an insight into whether an employee has a high level of Emotional Intelligence. These signs are the following:

- Employees use more robust and emotional vocabulary
- Employees are aware of their strengths and weaknesses
- Employees show increased

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

- optimism and confidence

When dealing with emotional intelligence as a business owner, you should be aware of how your actions affect your staff. This means recognising the essentials of emotional intelligence to keep everyone accountable through effective management, being more self-aware, proactive, empathetic and passionate. There are many ways through which small business owners can increase their emotional intelligence to enhance their overall leadership qualities.

As mentioned throughout this module, Emotional Intelligence can make or break teams. It is essential for managers and employees within teams to have an awareness of the people around them and have the ability to rationalise, understand and utilise their own and others' emotions around them in order for the team to run smoothly.

To put it in a nutshell, emotional intelligence is essential for small business owners because it opens up the lines of communication. This prevents misunderstandings, confusion and frustration from occurring between employees and their management teams. Effective communication also fosters positive workplace relationships as providing employees with the details about the vision of the company and how valuable their role is to see it through, gives them a sense of value.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

The intention of this tool is to provide a comprehensive overview of the skill of Emotional Intelligence and understand its importance in all interactions within SMEs both for the progression of the business as well as the individual.

OBJECTIVES

The tool is designed to express the importance of emotional intelligence in the workplace with an added focus on its relevance regarding leadership. Specifically, it will analyse and create synergies between the adoption of emotional intelligence and the potential enhancement it can bring to thematic topics of expertise and hard skills.

MATERIALS

Computer and Internet Access

TIME

4 hour virtual workshop + pre-course session

TARGET GROUP

Employers & employees of SMEs

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions both of yourself and others. In the workplace, especially within SMEs it is important for a workforce to foster this attitude as it can easily rub off and reciprocate throughout the entire business, thereby improving efficiency. Equally, if not practised, then it can easily detriment business' outputs.

Ergo, this tool, created by Learning Cog Ltd in Brighton, UK, comes in the form of a course. First, a pre-course activity will be provided that comprises of an online self-assessment regarding the topic so as to comprehend the learners' base level of emotional intelligence. After this, the workshop, which is conducted through the video chatting platform Zoom, will be 4 hours long with a one-hour break in the middle.

After the meeting, participants should be able to:

- Understand the key traits of Emotional Intelligence
- Identify their key Emotional Intelligence skills
- Develop your rapport with individuals
- Read non-verbal language more effectively
- Understand and respect the difference in others
- Be able to manage relationships more effectively
- Understand their triggers and how their emotions change in various situations
- Learn some of the history of Emotional Intelligence and the basic brain science
- Know their positive triggers, what motivates them

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

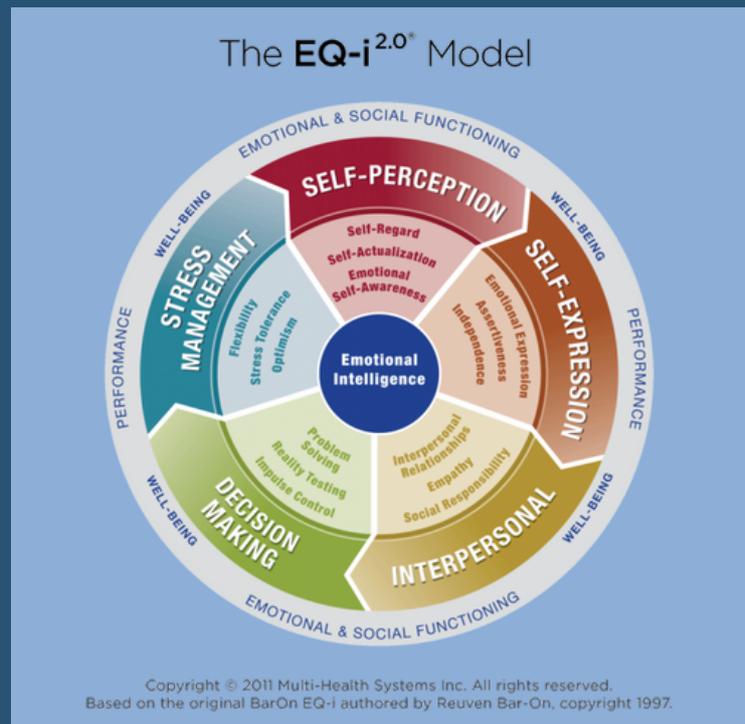
As mentioned previously, the motive of this workshop is to facilitate and foster emotional intelligence by leaders in their businesses. The course aims to develop the individual while also taking the workplace setting into account. It allows the leader to recognise the positive impacts of fostering emotional intelligence.

A key aspect that participants should understand is that emotional intelligence is adaptive and no two interactions with employees are the same. Thus, it is crucial that while there are structured elements that are needed to implement emotional intelligence, it is knowing how to tailor these skills to a plethora of eventualities that will see long-term benefits.

ABOUT THE TOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS CONTINUED

The course aligns itself with the EQi 2.0 model, being a psychometric assessment that measures emotional intelligence within an individual and their dissemination of said skill to other people in their workplace (see image below). The image reveals the various sections that will be covered and tested in the course and how to improve them.



It should be expressed that this course is designed for leaders of organisations who are facing communication and collaboration issues with staff. When using the training course, facilitators should make sure that all participants are able to access and have an account created on Zoom, as this is how the course will take place. Due to the nature of using virtual conferencing digital tools, it would be effective to only have about 10 people at a time, along with one or two facilitators.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

The phases of the tool are:

1. Before starting the course, participants will be given instructions to complete an online pre-course self-assessment of their emotional intelligence skills. This should take a maximum of one hour.
2. Afterwards, 4 hours will be dedicated to evaluating and improving emotional intelligence skills through a virtual workshop.
3. Once the workshop has concluded, participants will be asked to carry out a EQ-i 2.0 assessment to evaluate their skills learnt. They will receive a certificate for their actions.

Facilitators, which in our case could be the employers, are firstly advised to assess the Emotional Intelligence of their employees based on the "EQ-I" model presented above. First of all, they should spot the areas of emotional and social functioning and those of performance. The aim is always to increase the well-being of their employees through job satisfaction. For this reason, five sub-areas, which are core areas of emotional intelligence, are examined. These are:

- self-perception
- self-expression
- interpersonal
- decision making
- stress management

Each of these sub-areas has three main characteristics. Once the employer spots the area that needs improvement, then the focus can shift to the characteristics of that area in order to enhance it. For example, in decision making, what needs to be further examined by the employer to ensure that the employee possesses that skill in a good level is the employee's problem-solving ability, his or her perception of reality, and how well he or she manages impulse control. Likewise, for the ability of self-perception, the focus has to be laid on the characteristics of self-regard, self-actualisation and emotional self-awareness. Once the employer goes through all these sub-areas and their characteristics, he or she will be in a position to have a better picture of the level of emotional intelligence of his or her employees.

ABOUT THE TOOL

CONNECTION WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The tool is to provide a clear overview of the benefits of understanding and implementing emotional Intelligence amongst their staff. It is intended to outline various possibilities when demonstrating great emotional intelligence would be of great benefit. Furthermore, by referencing the above diagram, leaders of SMEs can comprehend the complex intersectionality that emotional intelligence is. More importantly the course is oriented so that leaders know that emotional intelligence is as much as individual development as well as their interactions with their work colleagues but both function in harmony.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

This set of 4 tools highlights your level of emotional intelligence both in and outside of a work setting. It focuses on various competencies within emotional intelligence.

OBJECTIVES

The idea behind the evaluation is to examine various elements of emotional intelligence to ensure you stand out from other colleagues in the workplace.

MATERIALS

Computer and Internet access

TIME

2 hours in total (Approximately 30 mins each evaluation).

TARGET GROUP

Employers of SMEs

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

This tool is an amalgamation of 4 sub-tools. More specifically, all four tools are self-evaluations to test the level of EQ (emotional intelligence) of employees and other relevant staff. Some are more comprehensive than others, but together, they all touch on the necessary aspects of the topic to display a comprehensive overview of the skills and practices already in motion, as well as those that may need to be further developed. All of these evaluations are to be carried out individually. The different tools come from the following organisations:

- Psychology Today (2022)
- Mind Tools
- Institute for human health and potential (2022)
- Talent Smart

Specifically, the version offered by Talent Smart also focuses on the appraisal of the workplace and how emotional intelligence enables its enhancement. Moreover, the aforementioned version also allows the evaluation to be completed through means of a booklet, which may be more beneficial to coaches and teachers who want to conduct this training within a classroom setting. However, the others can be done online, remotely and in one's own time. All of these tests are free, but a fee is needed to download the full version of the programme. However, it should be stressed that the Harvard Professional Development Sector deems the free version to be sufficient to decipher one's accurate level of EQ.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

As mentioned previously, the purpose of the tools is to accurately calculate an employee's level of emotional intelligence as well as an outline which factors of said soft skill are the strongest and those that need to be improved. This is extremely beneficial for coaches and employers within SMEs as it can allow them to implement various interventions of aspects of EQ that the business lacks as well as highlight the advantages of strengthening said areas of emotional intelligence.

ABOUT THE TOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS CONTINUED

Similarly, facilitators should note that these 4 evaluations are only tools to see the progression and current status of the EQ of their employees. It is the responsibility of the facilitator to analyse the results and implement any necessary strategies and/or interventions that belief will aid business efficiency. In other words, it acts as a guide to pivot the business in the right direction, along with its workforce.

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

A week before facilitators plan to give the assessment to their employees, they should have a teaching session with them explaining the basic overview of the importance of emotional intelligence. They should explain, what it is, examples of how to detect it, as well how to go about interjecting it into day-to-day business activities. This is to ensure that employees have some form of an idea of the term as they may not have been aware of the skill prior to the assessment. In order to facilitate this, coaches and employers can refer to Crow's (2020) article that demonstrates 17 examples that help increase a person's emotional intelligence. By showing this to employees, they should be in a stronger position to carry out the 4 evaluations but also not diffuse too much information that their answers are skewed.

The week after, employees should carry out all 4 evaluations with a 30-minute break between each one as to not feel too stressed or overwhelmed. For this reason, it would be most practical to conduct the "Psychology Test" as it is the longest at 45 minutes.

The week after, test results should be finalised and handed back to employees along with some constructive feedback as to how to improve various competencies within emotional intelligence.

The subsequent two weeks should be dedicated to addressing the skills related to emotional intelligence, which generally was the weakest among the employees. All of this will have been based upon the test results.

ABOUT THE TOOL

CONNECTION WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The idea of these tests is for facilitators to grasp an idea of the level of emotional intelligence that exists in their company. Employers should understand where they want the business to be heading including having a comprehensive understanding of emotional intelligence. Not only does this increase morale among staff and employees are less likely to resign, but can also gear various elements of emotional intelligence into business operations that lack these soft skills. Therefore, emotional intelligence can allow for a more consistent workflow within SMEs.

Furthermore, as many of the questions within the 4 evaluations are multiple-choice, they give employers an opportunity to discuss various behaviours and choices with their employees to understand their mistakes when applying emotional intelligence and collaboratively resolve said mistakes to ensure they will not happen again, but also do it in an amicable way where employees are willing to change their various behaviours and actions.

EMPATHY

DEFINITION

Empathy is a key competence of emotional intelligence that is manifested when communicating and relating to others. Empathy is the intention to understand feelings and emotions, trying to experience objectively and rationally what another individual is feeling.

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES:

- To understand how empathy can improve the productivity of a company's employees, improving staff relations and the working environment
- To predict the needs of employees and customers in order to meet them in a more effective and direct way
- To connect with the team by building relationships of trust, openness, communication and understanding
- To make employees feel valued, heard, acknowledged, recognised and cared for by the company, in order to strengthen their well-being and loyalty to the company
- To learn how to transmit the company's objectives and philosophy to employees by

- understanding the needs of the company

OUTCOMES:

- The ability to identify empathy, or the lack of it, within the selection process of new employees for the company
- To make the employee feel understood in the face of any problem that may arise, without fear of being judged or rejected, having total freedom to express themselves within their working environment
- Increased ability among employer and department heads to connect with workers and break down any status barriers that may exist
- A sense of value and understanding among workers, resulting in dedicated and loyal workers who will be more productive and motivated
- The creation of a favourable working environment by improving the interpersonal and productive relationships of the different members of the team

EMPATHY IN THE SME CONTEXT

Empathy, or rather, the lack of it, can interfere with working relationships, so knowing how to handle it is very important in the corporate

environment. Empathy allows the development of stronger ties in the company and will benefit your relationship with employees and collaborators as it significantly improves communication and interpersonal relationships. Empathy leads to a greater sense of comfort at work, as relationships become much more fluid, resulting in higher productivity and a better working environment. When you make an effort to understand your fellow human beings and put yourself in their shoes, reaching agreements becomes a much easier task.

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

Empathy is a key competence of emotional intelligence, a highly valued skill when communicating and relating with workers. It is very important to foster it among managers and middle managers of teams as it is associated with good leadership. Empathy is the ability to see the world from the other person's point of view, sharing their feelings, needs and concerns. Thanks to empathy and the promotion of a good working environment, the employer will achieve greater productivity from their employees, as feeling understood within their work environment will motivate them to feel like an active part of it and not a

number that does nothing more than work.

An empathetic manager can achieve benefits such as:

- **Providing support to workers and colleagues** by using the optimum time and attitudes to meet challenges and overcome problems encountered.
- **Showing the right attitude to resolve conflicts.** Knowing how to listen and take into account the point of view of all parts of the company will make achieving a common goal much easier.
- **Achieving greater objectivity** when carrying out daily activities, eliminating prejudices and assumptions.
- **Strengthening relationships** with and between employees by understanding their needs and providing exactly what they need at that moment.
- **Feeling valued by others without fear of being judged.** Feeling listened to and respected makes you more open to expressing emotions and finding solutions.
- **Conveying empathy to others thanks to "mirror neurons".** An empathetic manager will model this to others, creating a better and more enriching work environment.

Apart from improving the relationship between workers, empathy is beneficial for the development of important areas such as:

- **Customer care.** If the employee is cared for, he/she will take care of the customer. An empathetic worker will understand the emotions of the customer and will try to make the customer feel comfortable with the service provided.
- **Leadership.** It will be vital to work in an organised way to achieve the goals set. Empathy allows leaders to trust their teams more and vice versa, while the absence of empathy often turns into tyranny.
- **Negotiation,** not only with suppliers and customers, but also within the SME's own departments. A negotiation lacking empathy will not achieve satisfactory agreements for either party.

RISKS

Sometimes we tend to confuse empathy with sympathy, these two being totally different skills. Sympathy would be more focused on kindness and finding something positive in a problem that is communicated to us by a co-worker or an employee, seeking approval

and feeling the same emotion as the other person, but without the need to understand them. Empathy, on the other hand, does not seek the positive side of the situation, but rather to understand that person. We listen to understand and recognise emotions without judging.

"Others may feel misunderstood or disrespected. The response that you think is supportive of them may hurt their confidence and stop them feeling free to express themselves"

- Marcia Reynolds.

Both sympathy and empathy will help us to form a good working team, but empathy will help us to make a more lasting connection. Another point to be careful about is not to confuse empathy with excessive emotionality, which makes one dependent on the moods of others in order to act. It is necessary to create a safe space to identify and understand feelings without being reflected in them. In this way we will avoid anxiety and stress, both in the workers and in the managers themselves.

EMPATHY IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Professionals in the field of human resources use tools to obtain the most detailed information from candidates during job interviews. When preparing for an interview, the main objective is to analyse the interviewee's experience and training in order to know the interviewee's capabilities, but nowadays, the emotional part of the applicant will be sought, and for this, it is necessary to know the guidelines to detect the candidate's emotional intelligence and, within it, their empathy.

In SMEs, the problem is that the personnel who conduct the job interview are rarely experts in the field, so the task cannot be carried out with the necessary rigour, and our choice may be wrong.

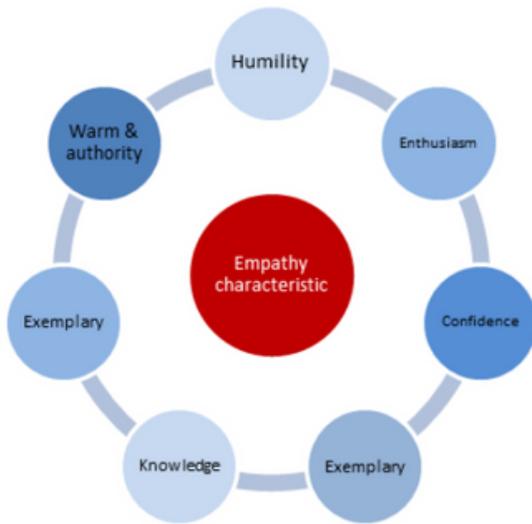
WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

Today, an authoritarian boss has little in common with an empathetic leader. The latter earns the trust and respect of employees without losing authority. He or she cares about the needs of his or her employees, both at work and on a personal level. As a result, the functioning of the

company improves, as well as the excellence of the product or service offered.

Empathy in the SME world is vital for success, especially on the part of the entrepreneur. You are surrounded by people you need to understand, whether they are partners, investors, employees or customers. The empathic connection gives the entrepreneur the necessary insights to be able to manage the business in the most optimal way, and for this the employees must know that their interests are a priority, showing the entrepreneur that he is not only looking for his own benefit, but for the benefit of all.

Empathy has become popular in recent years, generating "human" business, that is, focused on people, on the team. Empathetic entrepreneurs incorporate policies to improve human relations in their companies, always promoting a positive image. The entrepreneur must always have a greater purpose, apart from financial projections, which has to take into account the relations between workers, and with clients, suppliers or investors.



The main characteristics of an empathetic entrepreneur will be the following:

- **Humility.** Treats the whole team with respect and dignity.
- **Enthusiasm.** Always maintains a positive attitude.
- **Confidence.** Delegates tasks and consults as necessary.
- **Exemplary.** Sets an example for the team he/she leads.
- **Knowledge.** Must know the project inside out.
- **Dialogue.** A good leader recognises mistakes and learns from others, growing professionally and personally.
- **Warmth and authority.** After listening to the team members, he/she will be able to make the final decision.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

There are three types of empathy: cognitive empathy, emotional empathy and compassionate empathy. Each type is adapted to a particular situation. Some are more uplifting and others are simply limited to maintaining a good working environment.

Cognitive Empathy

Trying to understand another person's emotional state

Emotional Empathy

To feel the same emotions as those around them

Compassionate Empathy

Feeling an obligation to alleviate the pain of others by feeling it as one's own pain

In order to connect empathetically with employees, it is essential for the SME manager that when conversing with an employee, all attention is focused on the conversation, without distractions such as electronic devices or even

thoughts. Also, asking questions about the situation an employee is discussing will demonstrate the employee's interest in the situation and help them to extract the information they need to share.

Another key is to affirm what you think you have heard from the employee to confirm that the message has been conveyed in the right way. This can give the interlocutor a different perspective when using different language when recapping the information.

Having empathetic conversations is often difficult, as some people are not comfortable talking about other people's problems, offering only superficial solutions and offering comfort without emotional involvement. The employer should be aware that empathy does not necessarily require problem solving, but listening and being present in the face of a serious problem.

HOW TO DETECT EMPATHY IN EMPLOYEES

Empathetic people often possess other types of positive emotional intelligence skills as well. It can be difficult for an employer without HR experience to test the level of empathy that a candidate can show in a recruitment process within an

SME. The main problem they face is that the interviewee is always eager to please the employer and get the job, trying to make their answers socially acceptable, overestimating the positive attributes they possess. It can be very useful to test a candidate's level of empathy in a subtle way without sending signals to the other person that they are being assessed in order to avoid the obvious answers they think the interviewer might expect.

One of the points to consider is to pay attention to how the candidate treats other staff in the company who were not involved in the interview, such as security, reception, cleaning or other staff who interacted with the candidate, to see whether they were polite, smiling or chatty, or whether they were distant, cold or rude.

Another option is to ask the interviewee to answer some job-appropriate question about how they would handle an emotionally sensitive topic. An example might be how they would react to a colleague who is blocked by stress at a particular time such as lunchtime. Seeing them prioritise the team's well-being over time off for lunch, or talking about team rather than individualism, can be very positive signals.

Waiting for time to speak, or the ability to listen, is another positive point in capturing the interviewee's empathy. You can tell whether they are listening or simply waiting to speak in a learned discourse when you speak to them, or whether they interact with the questions you ask them.

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

The reason empathy often fails at work is because it is taken as a sprint, not a marathon. Just as some people handle stress less well than others, there are others who are more empathetic than the rest. Therefore, SMEs, starting from the most responsible positions, must foster empathy on a daily basis.

There are a number of steps that can be taken to establish empathy:

- **Spending time getting to know your colleagues**, starting new conversations or joining existing ones during break times.
- **Keeping up to date with colleagues' lives** helps you to get to know them better; knowing if they are getting married or becoming parents or going on holiday are good examples of getting to know the team.
- **Observe and listen.** Observe the
 - people around you, how they react to what is happening to them, how they act, how they relate to others.
 - **Reflect.** After the previous point, this point is very important in order to value the position in respect of the situations that colleagues have experienced.
 - **Help where you can.** Being helpful is a key point when it comes to improving empathy with the other workers in the company.
 - **Teamwork.** Improving the relationship between workers by having to work together for the optimal functioning of the group.

Subsequently, to strengthen this empathy, and thus build better relationships at work and in personal life, a number of guidelines can be used at the individual level:

- **Test yourself.** Trying to learn a new language or to play a musical instrument will bring humility as a key factor of empathy.
- **Travel.** Getting out of your environment will improve your appreciation of others by learning new customs.
- **Asking for feedback** can help to know how the rest of the team values each other.
- **Questioning our prejudices** will

also help to improve our empathy.

CONCLUSIONS

- Empathy is one of the main pillars for the cohesion of the group of workers in a company. Thanks to empathy, the worker's feeling of usefulness is improved, as well as their loyalty to the company, as they feel valued, thus improving the team's performance and productivity.
- It is the responsibility of the SME employer to empathise with workers and foster empathy within his or her team, starting with the positions of greatest responsibility. To this end, the promotion of dialogue and regular meetings, where different points of view on the projects to be developed are put together, should be a priority.
- It is necessary to know how to differentiate between sympathy and empathy, as well as to know how to distinguish between the three types of empathy and which one is best suited at any given moment to the situation to be faced, since excessive emotionality can reverse the positive effect of empathy.
- The main basis of empathy is listening, but above all, knowing how to listen. When you are in dialogue with a colleague or worker, you must be in the conversation 100%, without the presence of electronic mechanisms or factors that may distract the conversation. Likewise, showing interest in the story that is being told by asking questions about issues related to it contributes positively to the strengthening of empathy in work and personal relationships.
- It is not common for recruitment processes in SMEs to be carried out by qualified personnel specialised in human resources. Therefore, when conducting an interview, the manager must be attentive to the signals received from the interviewee and be able to identify and value this empathy with a series of guidelines that can be applied when recruiting personnel for the company.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

In this activity titled "Walk in Your Shoes," you will learn to put yourself in the shoes of a colleague at work, in a team or in a department, to know how they feel at work, what their worries and fears are, how you as a colleague contribute to these worries, and what you can do to address them.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this activity are:

- To teach employees to be more empathetic in the work environment
- To create a greater sense of comfort at work so that relationships become much more fluid, leading to greater productivity and a better working environment
- To show employees how to be more objective and eliminate biases
- To improve communication between workers so relationships become stronger
- To improve conflict resolution skills by making an effort to understand our fellow human beings and putting ourselves in their shoes

MATERIALS

pens, shoes (template), post-it notes

TIME

25-45 minutes

TARGET GROUP

Members of a team, department and employees

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

This tool, called “Walk in Your Shoes,” is a way for the members of a team or department to discover in an empathic way how each of them feels at work, and what their worries and fears are. It is an activity that helps us to put ourselves in the place of our co-worker and reflect on how we could act to prevent them from feeling negatively.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

This tool is a way to work on the problems that may arise in the work teams. It is a very useful tool to work on empathy, teamwork and team climate. It can be adapted to the digital environment by using digital tools and sharing the template or creating your own. It is recommended that the facilitator gives a brief overview of the activity before starting it.

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Step 1:
At the start of the workshop, Give each participant a copy of the template. Each sheet will be numbered as shown in the picture, so there will be as many sheets as there are participants.

1 HOW DO I FEEL AT WORK?

ANSWER

- WORRIES, FRUSTRATIONS
- OBSTACLES
- FEARS

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Step 2:

Once each person has their shoe (template), they should answer in the first box how they feel at work, indicating their fears, their worries, the obstacles they encounter at work, with their colleagues, etc.

Step 3:

Once everyone has answered how they feel about their work and their problems, the facilitator will collect each sheet of paper and hand them out so that everyone has one different from the number they got.

Step 4:

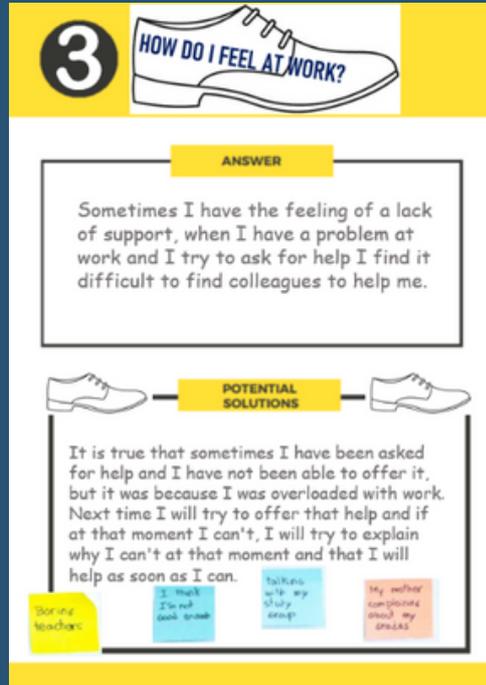
Now each one has to read the one they have been given and provide some possible solutions in the second box. The solutions should outline how they could contribute to overcoming the fears, barriers, and obstacles of the participant who answered in the first box.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

Step 5:

The last step would be for each participant to read their "shoe" (template) with the fears and solutions they would bring. All the shoes can be stuck on a blackboard or wall and others can paste post-its with other possible solutions.



CONNECTION WITH EMPATHY

This activity is related to empathy at work because by doing this activity, employees will put themselves in their colleagues' shoes and be able to understand how they feel at work.

In addition, they will learn that empathy can bring great benefits to their life at work as it can help them to deal with customers, partners and other employees, as well as work teams and relationships with other employees. If you foster this quality, you will notice that it can be applied to many activities in your day-to-day life. Practising empathy at work will aid you in:

- Achieving team goals
- Achieving the personal goals of each member of the team
- Generating a better working environment
- Fostering working relationships for the future
- Stimulating creativity
- Increasing productivity
- Offer better service to users or clients

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

You will learn about an activity known as ‘empathy mapping.’ Any self-respecting worker has some characteristics that could be considered common, and these are:

- Aspirations
- Needs
- Frustrations

Starting from these three premises is where the empathy map generates basic questions with which you can better understand your employees. It is a tool that will help you to get to know your workers, their environment, their aspirations and their frustrations

OBJECTIVES

This tool helps employers to:

- develop a deep and shared understanding of other people
- designing better working environments
- understand their worker’s problem(s), how they experience it and what motivations they have.

MATERIALS

- Empathy map template
- Questionnaires

TIME

Total estimated time 30- 45 minutes

TARGET GROUP

Professionals working in the same company

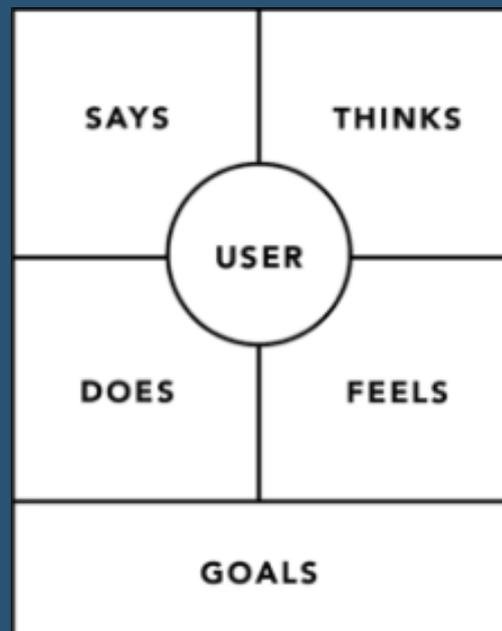
ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

Empathy mapping is used as a marketing strategy to convert people into customers who buy products or services from a particular brand.

Therefore, empathy mapping aims to understand as well as identify the potential customer of a brand, understanding both their explicit and implicit needs. Well, we are going to transfer the empathy map to the work environment. The empathy map or what is the same: know to sell more, know to understand your employees more and better. Both in marketing and in business, the relationship with people must be based on the principle of trust. To achieve this relationship of trust, empathy is essential in order to establish relationships that can last over time.

The empathy map aims to determine the specific needs of each worker in order to offer the greatest attention and reach a better understanding of the person. The empathy map is a tool created by the business consulting firm XPLANE that aims to achieve a greater degree of knowledge of the person by delving deeper into what surrounds them, what concerns them, what they yearn for and what they desire. Specifically, Alex Osterwalter is the one who proposes the creation of the empathy map in order to better understand people and thus be able to use this information to meet their needs and help them based on the information obtained from them.



ABOUT THE TOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

This tool is used to put oneself in the customer's shoes and understand "from the inside" what their needs and desires are, what their aspirations and expectations are, and what motivates their actions, but this is an adaptation to apply to the employee environment as a tool for the employer to get to know their employees better. It is a method that relies on observation and interviewing to eliminate as many assumptions as possible. The idea is to be able to obtain more reliable and accurate data by seeing the world through the eyes of another. This also gives a more human approach to the project, as it helps to understand the real context in which the worker is immersed.

Before filling in the empathy map, you will have carried out the interviews and the analysis of the interviews. can be done in an online version as shown in the picture.

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Go through the following steps to create a valid and useful empathy map:

1. Define scope and goals

a. What user will you map? Will you map an individual user? Always start with a 1:1 mapping (1 user/ per empathy map). This means that if you have multiple, there should be an empathy map for each. Select the worker(s) with whom you want to make an empathy map.

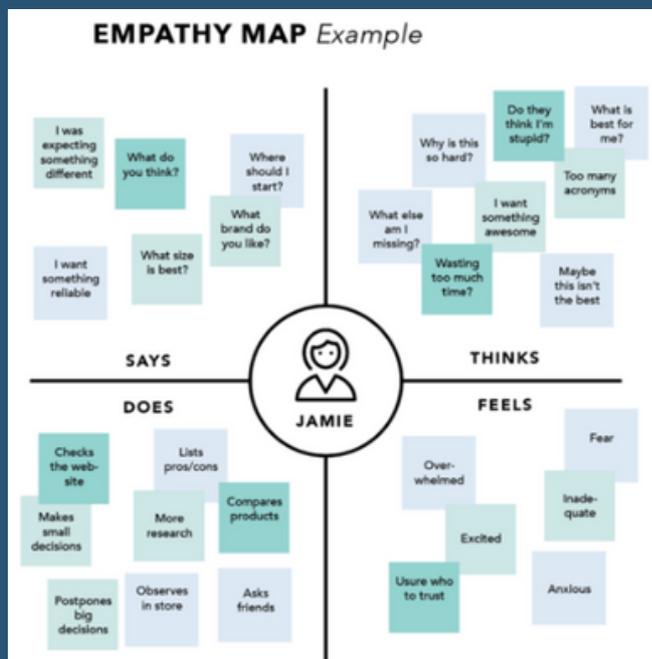
2. Gather the materials

Your purpose should dictate the medium you will use to create an empathy map. If you will be working with a whole team, have a large whiteboard, sticky notes and markers available. (The result

will look more or less like the illustration to the left.) If it is a solo empathy map, you can use the template individually.

3. Collect research

The third step is to collect the information that will help you answer the questions on the empathy map. Gather the research you will be using to fuel your empathy map. Empathy mapping is a qualitative method, so you will need qualitative inputs: user interviews, field studies, diary studies, listening sessions, or qualitative surveys.



ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

4. Individually generate sticky notes for each quadrant
You can use the empathy map template and answer the guiding questions posed there according to the information collected in the previous step. Once you have researched inputs, you can proceed to mapping as a team. In the beginning, everybody should read through the research individually. As each team member digests the data, they can fill out sticky notes that align to the four quadrants. Next, team members can add their notes to the map on the whiteboard.

5. Converge to cluster and synthesize
In this step, the team moves through the stickies on the board collaboratively and clusters similar notes that belong to the same quadrant. Name your clusters with themes that represent each group. The activity of clustering facilitates discussion and alignment – the goal being to arrive at a shared understanding. Once your empathy map is clustered, you can begin to vocalize and align as a team on your findings. What themes were repeated in all the quadrants? What themes only exist in one quadrant?

6. Polish and plan
If you feel that you need more detail or you have unique needs, adapt the map by including additional quadrants (like Goals in the example below), or by increasing specificity to existing quadrants. Depending on the purpose of your empathy map, polish and digitize the output accordingly.



ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

The basic elements of the empathy map involve asking the best questions to get to know your employees better. Consider the following:

1. What does the worker think and feel? It is necessary to be concerned about what each worker thinks and feels. To do this, it is essential to take the following aspects into account:
 - Knowing what moves the worker.
 - Knowing what their real concerns are.
 - Find out what really matters to them and what they are not able to verbalise.
 - Ask them what their interests, worries and aspirations are.

2. What does the worker say and do? It is fundamental for a good knowledge of any worker to know both what he/she says and what he/she does. To do this, we can start from the following premises:
 - Observe their behaviour at work.
 - Value their presence, their way of behaving.
 - Take into account the people with whom he talks and establishes relationships.
 - Appreciate what is really important to the worker because he/she is able to verbalise it.
 - Learn to distinguish between what he/she says and does and what he/she really thinks.

3. What does the worker see? This third question is based on everything that surrounds a worker. In this sense, it is important to insist on:
 - Find out what is the environment in which the worker moves.
 - To get to know the people who are an essential part of this environment.
 - Discovering the problems that this environment may cause for the worker.

4. What does the worker listen to? A worker is what he or she is in many cases not only because of the environment, but also because of what he or she hears in that environment. It is therefore a question of:
 - Discovering what the worker hears in his environment.
 - Finding out which colleagues are the ones who exert the greatest influence on the worker.

5. What frustrates the worker? The road to maturity is not without its frustrations. As an employer you have to keep this

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

in mind when getting to know an employee. That is why it is a question of:

- Knowing what the employee's main frustrations are.
- Find out what they are afraid of and how they can verbalise it.
- Knowing which are the elements or obstacles that produce fear and frustration at work.

6. What motivates the worker? Motivation is the engine from which a worker's inner strength is born. That is why it is so important:

- Knowing what goals, needs and desires the worker has.
- To find out how the worker will achieve these objectives.
- Knowing the means that the employee will use to achieve the objectives he/she has set for him/herself.

CONNECTION WITH EMPATHY

As you can see, the empathy map aims at personalising the staff and learning more about what makes them tick. Empathy is only useful as long as you have the essential information about the employee you want to help and get to know better. By means of the empathy map, segmentation, i.e. categorisation and labelling, is transformed into personalisation, deep knowledge that will translate into affective and effective help over time. This activity is linked to the skill as it is a tool to get to know and understand the worker, what problems he/she has and how he/she experiences them.

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

DEFINITION

Flexibility is the capacity to **adjust to short-term change** quickly and calmly, so that a person can deal with unexpected problems or tasks effectively, and if they come across a problem, come up with solutions that might fix it. Flexibility involves an open, team-centered attitude and retaining a strong sense of identity and purpose.

From the physical point of view, flexibility is the ability of a joint or series of joints to move through an unrestricted, pain-free range of motion which can be influenced by how mobile the soft tissues around the joints are. When we say soft tissues, we are talking about ligaments, muscles, joint capsules, skin, and tendons. Flexibility is essential for both body and mind.

SMEs are very often in the position to face new challenges. Because of that, flexibility is an important skill for all SME workers to have since they need to react efficiently to these challenges. By treating an SME as a living organism and combining physical and mental flexibility, workers can prevent complex “injuries”: both for themselves and for their business.

Creativity is the use of imagination or original ideas to create something alternative and new, and to view things from a different perspective or to think out of the box. Being creative at work generally means taking risks. There are two concepts in relation to creativity worth mentioning: creative thinking and creative problem-solving. A creative thinker comes up with ideas that are entirely unique.

Creative problem-solving refers to coming up with new ideas as to how to solve an issue that are not necessarily the typical ones. While a lot of problems in the workplace have one or two definite solutions, creative people are able to find refreshing and interesting solutions to issues by examining it in original ways. Creative problem-solving will therefore result in solutions that might be completely new and interesting.

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES:

- To define what physical and mental flexibility is
- To describe the needs of flexibility and creativity in SMEs
- To identify how to support flexibility and creativity

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

- To improve working environment in SMEs by creating a flexible workplace
- To support flexibility and creativity in the workplace

OUTCOMES:

- More flexible, creative, healthy, and happy staff members in SMEs
- Readiness for unexpected situations, changes, and new circumstances
- New flexible workplace and user-friendly arrangements for SMEs' staff
- Creative approach to work
- Better problem-solving and teamwork skills

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY IN THE SME CONTEXT

Flexibility in business is an asset to most employers, and workers who readily demonstrate their ability to intelligently respond to a changing environment are highly valued in SMEs. An employee who is flexible can change plans or overcome unanticipated obstacles. An employer can encourage this way of thinking by letting employees decide certain aspects of their job by themselves, for instance their

schedules and workplace, with characteristics of [flexible offices](#).

Workplace flexibility is important for SMEs, particularly in the pandemic situation. Companies have to adapt changes and new circumstances regarding how and when work gets done, allowing employees to work remotely or make other arrangements about working conditions and make them more user-friendly. There's growing demand particularly among younger workers for a less rigid work schedule.

A [flexible office space](#) is one of the answers to new challenges. It is a type of workspace designed to provide employees with a [variety of different places](#) and ways to work. When there is a flexible office space, the workers decide which place suits best the task they are performing, which is not possible if they are in an inflexible office sitting at one desk.

Another answer to facing new challenges is having a flexible working arrangement. This provides SMEs' workers with the freedom to work where, when, and how they want, which has an impact on job satisfaction and productivity. Being able to shape your workday around

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

personal obligations, like dropping the kids off at school or waiting for an important delivery, allows you to strike a healthier work-life balance and to direct your energy towards where it's needed the most.

Flexibility in SMEs is especially important in fast-moving and dynamic industries, where the ability to respond to unpredictable events and changing expectations is a valuable asset for employers and employees alike. Fostering an ability to deal with unexpected situations has benefits in all facets of SMEs workers' lives—both professional and personal. In other words, a more flexible office leads to a more agile business, one that **promotes collaboration** and creativity and is better able to navigate the unexpected situations.

Creativity in the flexible workplace includes efficiency and productiveness. Creativity builds better teamwork, improves the ability to attract and retain employees and increases problem-solving success. Employees and managers benefit from creativity because it can take them, and sometimes the company, in a whole new direction.

Creativity-promoting work environments are those that:

- Are intellectually challenging
- Offer sufficient resources
- Have greater degrees of freedom
- Encourage innovative thinking
- Are receptive to new ideas
- Provide support
- Trust their employees

SME managers can encourage creativity and flexibility by creating a supportive environment in which workers are unafraid to share new ideas. SMEs that promote creativity and flexibility are better equipped to navigate complicated problems when they arise.

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

There are many benefits of being creative and flexible at work. SME managers need these skills to organise daily work in the most efficient way, to motivate staff members to work for the best results, to be innovative, to follow modern trends and to implement best practices. It is important for SME managers to take the specific competences and needs of each worker into account to find and suggest the best way and style of working.

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

Work in SMEs is more manageable when working with creative and flexible team members who are adaptable to sudden changes. If SMEs members have flexible roles within their teams, it will allow them to respond to changes faster and with less stress. Each member can more easily meet objectives, which means that the whole company can evolve and grow by developing new skills additional to the ones in their job descriptions.

Creativity and flexibility are also important tools in decision-making and problem-solving. SME managers can find alternative and new ways to processes if they are thinking out of the box. Being creative and flexible in the workplace can extend to higher happiness in the private life as well. When people are less anxious at their working place, they are more likely to [achieve a healthy work-life balance](#). And also, being open to challenges and changes in the workplace prepares people to be open to new experiences and challenges outside of the job as well. Studies about the topic show that having a flexible time schedule increases productivity and levels of employee satisfaction, and that being able to work remotely reduces sick days. Some managers have

feared that a move away from the usual 9-to-5 would harm businesses. But, when shifted to an agile working strategy, it saw an increase in productivity and employee engagement. Introducing a flexible working policy can help with minimizing costs too. With fewer employees required to be in the office at any given time, SMEs can cut down on office space. In summary, a flexible workplace:

- Allows companies to adapt to unexpected circumstances.
- Benefits both the employer and the employees.
- Allows for a more balanced life, where employees show higher levels of job satisfaction.

Creativity doesn't have to be only about artistic expression. Developing new practices, making a workflow more efficient, or finding a better way to do things are all examples of creative thinking. And when it comes to creativity in the workplace, these can be the positive outcomes:

- Builds better teamwork
- Reduces workplace stress
- Allows for better problem-solving
- Makes employees more motivated and more likely to be attracted and retained at the company

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

RISKS

When talking about flexibility, we should definitely take into account that a flexible workplace requires trust between employers and employees, and the autonomy to choose where and when we do our best work. However, managers cannot allow a commitment to flexible working to become an opportunity for others to take advantage of them. It is important to make clear boundaries and assert rights and responsibilities.

From one side, SME managers have to be sure that all tasks will be completed on time and that the quality of the results will be high. Only responsible workers can make this happen and it is a risk to have only creative but not responsible people in a team. But, from the other side, SME managers have to understand that employees who are both creative and flexible have more to offer than those who can only do one or two tasks under the supervision of a manager. Having employees who are creative and flexible and are willing to step outside their job description means that there is a reduction in unnecessary extra work.

A sense of belonging is key when

trying to improve flexibility and creativity in the workplace. If all members of SMEs feel part of the company and all of them are working for the common best results, risks of less flexible and less creative workers can be reduced.

Specific training and mutual understanding and trust can help SMEs with identifying where and when managers and employees need to assist and help each other. This loyalty and engagement should be from both sides - employee and employer -, and only in this way will flexibility and creativity serve the completion of the tasks in the best way.

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Creative and flexible people are highly sought after by managers and businesses. They help to stabilise situations when a crisis strikes. They keep objectives achievable, and they support colleagues who are in need of advice or help.

Creativity and flexibility are skills

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

that can be learned. Managers can train and practice the skills required to help other people become more flexible and creative in the workplace, so that when someone encounters an obstacle at work, they have the tools to deal with it calmly and effectively.

Employers are hiring human beings, not robots. That means employee engagement should be a top priority when a manager recruits candidates and assess the overall happiness of the current employees. Companies that are not flexible might be missing out on attracting more candidates.

When it comes to attracting top talent, many employers turn their eyes towards creativity and flexibility in the workplace. As we have seen before, allowing employees to work remotely can boost employee morale and reduce stress levels. Besides, a great work-life balance builds trust and commitment within the workplace, which can in fact increase productivity.

WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

A creative and flexible SME management provides workers with

greater latitude about the way they accomplish goals. These managers assess the needs of employees and **provide feedback**, guidance, and recognition individually to optimize performance and results.

A creative and flexible management treats employees as individuals and make an effort to accommodate personal styles and needs. One employee may require more structure in their job duties and another may function better working independently. Managers will often need to adjust schedules and as they focus on reaching the company's priorities.

Creative and flexible management skills include:

- Analysing the style and preferences of individuals.
- Praising the work of a productive employee more frequently because they crave feedback.
- Providing release time for SMEs' staff who are parents to attend school events.
- Rewarding employees who make impactful suggestions.

Creative and flexible management offers flexible work arrangements that typically include **flexible schedules**. Employers with a flextime policy allow their workers

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

to start and finish work as necessary.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

Creative and flexible employees work with the idea to achieve goals by tailoring efforts to the mission. They demonstrate creativity and flexibility by actions such as learning new software that will rise productivity, offering to cover for colleagues when they can not go to work or staying extra hours helping them with a task, or paying extra attention to any feedback they get as to better their work performance.

Flexibility encompasses a broad spectrum of work arrangement, including the following:

- Flexible arrival and departure times
- Full-time work from home or location independence
- Choice and control in work shifts
- Part-time work from home
- Compressed shifts or work week
- Opportunity for career breaks
- Unlimited paid time off
- Caregiving leave

HOW TO DETECT CREATIVITY AND FLEXIBILITY IN EMPLOYEES

It is important that employees are part of a team that is willing to help one another out in a tight situation. Managers can ask a candidate during their first days in the company to demonstrate creativity and flexibility by giving some tasks where they can offer assistance to SME colleagues. For example, this could be done by taking on some of their tasks, covering a shift, or training them on something they are unfamiliar with. This fosters a sense of unity and mutual support within the team, which in turn will encourage colleagues to help the newcomer when an unexpected problem appears.

Creative and flexible employees demonstrate solutions rather than complaints during the meetings and over emails. They do not respond emotionally when circumstances suddenly change for the worse but take a moment to collect their thoughts and then present a few different ideas for overcoming the obstacle instead.

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

In order to become more creative and flexible a person can follow these seven steps:

1. Focus on your core values
2. Be open-minded
3. Develop new skillsets
4. Be optimistic
5. Stay calm
6. Plan ahead
7. Have a strong support network

The skills required to achieve creativity and flexibility differ depending on the type of work but there are some general tips to bear in mind.

It is important to have time to stay up to date with the latest trends in the industry. It's easy to fall into a routine and be closed to fresh ideas, especially when someone is a veteran in the field. It is important to pay attention to trends and follow the work of those who are just entering the industry. SMEs members have to stay curious about [new research and ways of working](#), especially if these ideas contrast with the way they are currently doing things.

It is important to practise optimism

when faced with a problem. It is natural for people to focus on the setback rather than the solution. Instead, it is important to see the potential benefits for SMEs in changing plans and aim to respond with positivity. Basically, to recognize the impact an unexpected event might have on a task but prioritize the search for an answer to the problem. It is important to consider this to keep the high spirits of the team.

If unpredictable things happen, creative and flexible people can find in the correct mindset to react to them. A sudden change can be stressful, but that stress is exacerbated by the sense that people lost control. By bracing for unanticipated outcomes, people can better retain control over the situation and better position to deal with the fallout.

Being flexible is all about physical and mental preparation and accepting that things will change. While it's impossible to expect the unexpected, people can still anticipate new developments before they happen and have a plan of action ready to meet the occasion. For example, some personal developments can be seen coming over the horizon, such as a new baby or a move to a new

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

house. The impact of these events can be thought about long before they happen.

Communicating and sharing expectations are also important. If the daily commute is causing anxiety, or maybe people are finding it difficult to deal with [the distractions of working from home](#), it is important to communicate and share the need for a better solution. For example, changing the workplace or schedule.

When people are given the freedom to be flexible and creative, they will likely find it easier to adapt to new ways of working, to find solutions to problems, and to make better decisions when unexpected issues come out.

CONCLUSIONS

It is important for SMEs managers to understand the benefits of creativity and flexibility for businesses and the working environment. A flexible workplace guarantees better results in the business and happier and healthier staff members. Encouraging and cultivating flexibility and creativity in the workplace is a win-win situation. It's something that helps everybody. Companies benefit from innovation

in terms of their bottom line. Managers become happier, more engaged, and get higher job satisfaction. Likewise, employees are better able to do their jobs, express themselves, and discover additional layers of passion in their work.

Creativity and flexibility in SMEs are important in fast-moving and dynamic industries where companies need to be able to respond to unpredictable situations. At the same time, increased creativity in the workplace leads to positive outcomes. That includes [increased job satisfaction and reduced absenteeism](#). In competitive industries, creativity is what keeps companies moving forward. While applying creative thinking, SMEs can make jobs more meaningful. Creative people turn failures into learning opportunities.

Flexibility and creativity can improve productivity and efficiency by solving current problems or business obstacles. They allow for greater interpersonal connection and lead to higher loyalty, productivity, and innovation. SMEs look for flexibility and creativity in their current staff or may even recruit new, more creative, and flexible employees.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

- You are going to learn about an activity titled “The Torrance Test of Creative Thinking.” The activity’ will help you:
- Search for alternative solutions
- Develop creative solutions to simple problems
- Generate alternative and non-standard strategies

OBJECTIVES

- To assess the level of creativity
- To assess the components of originality, fluency, flexibility and elaboration.
- To develop alternative strategies
- To maximise resources
- To practise lateral thinking and the ability to strategise out of the box.

MATERIALS

- Pen
- Pieces of paper

TIME

30-40 minutes. This is a downward time estimate. Clearly, each step can lead to discussion and reflection, so more time can be added.

TARGET GROUP

Potential employees

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

Based on the work of J.P. Guilford (Alternative Uses Test) and created by Ellis Paul Torrance, the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking is a test of creativity that originally consisted of simple tests of divergent thinking and other problem-solving skills, which were scored on four scales:

- **Fluency.** Ability to produce multiple and diverse ideas. The total number of interpretable, meaningful and relevant ideas generated in response to the stimulus is assessed.
- **Flexibility.** Ability to see and approach similar situations in different ways. The number of different categories of relevant responses is assessed.
- **Originality.** Ability to produce unusual responses. The statistical rarity of responses is assessed.
- **Elaboration.** Ability to produce complementary details to the main idea. The amount of detail in the answers is valued.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

Facilitators should implement at least two graphic and two verbal tasks. The idea is that each person completes the exercises in any way that comes to mind and seems different from how anyone else would do it.

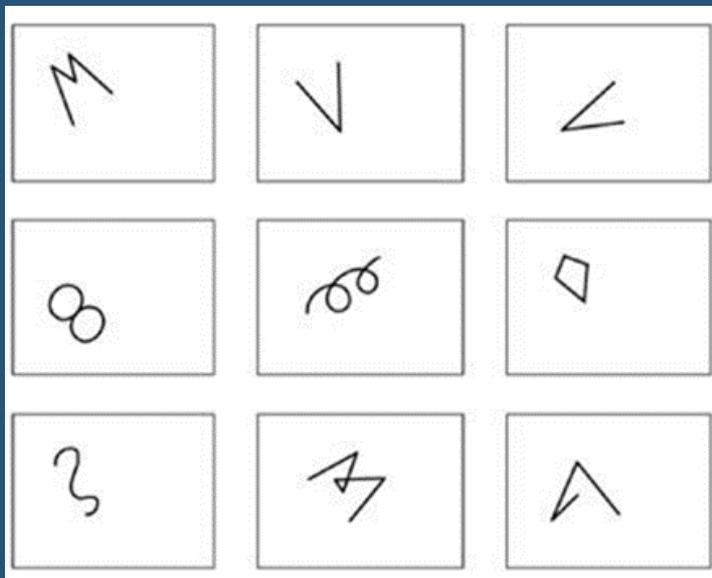
The time limit should be around five minutes per exercise. In this way, creativity is valued, because although it is not an unlimited time, there is time to think of alternative strategies. In other exercises or dynamics in which a very short time limit is set, creativity is not really being tested since time pressure is a clear enemy of creative thinking, but rather productivity is. Being productive is not the same as being creative.

There are no right or wrong answers. This exercise only serves to measure the lesser or greater creativity of individuals.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

1. Complete the drawings from these figures.



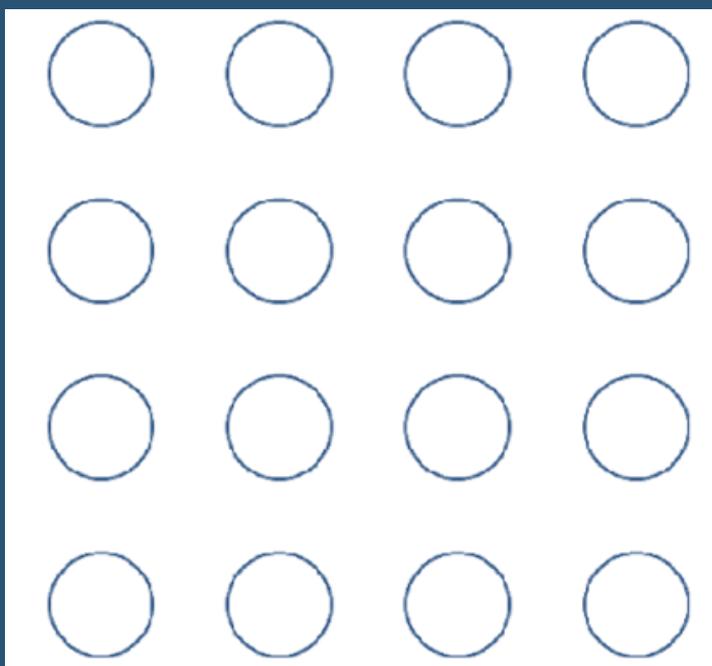
Starting Shapes	
Use	
Combine	
Complete	

2. Describe a new sport that does not yet exist. Describe it including what it would be like, why people would like it, what rules it would have, etc.

3. Follow the instructions and develop new designs from the starting figures.

4. Make a list of all the alternative uses for a 500cl plastic bottle. The more the better.

5. Draw a picture with each circle.



ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

6. Tell what your day would be like today if you had been born in a village in Africa. The more details, the better.

7. Evaluation

Each test will be graded on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the maximum.

These tests are not individual. In order to evaluate them, it is advisable to compare them with those of the group they belong to (especially to assess originality).

It is advisable that the evaluation is carried out by no less than three different people ("judges") in order to contrast the subjectivity of any one person.

In other words, each "judge" will evaluate each of the tests from 1 to 10, according to the four basic criteria defined (strength, flexibility, originality and elaboration). The resulting score will be the average of the evaluations given by each judge.

Per evaluator

Criteria	Exercise 1	Exercise 2	Exercise 3	Exercise 4	Exercise 5	Exercise 6	Total	Average
Fluency								
Flexibility								
Elaboration								
Originality								

Total

Criteria	Evaluator 1	Evaluator 2	Evaluator 3	Evaluator 4	Evaluator 5	Total	Average
Fluency							
Flexibility							
Elaboration							
Originality							

ABOUT THE TOOL

CONNECTION WITH FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

When we talk about creativity, we are also talking about flexibility in both form and substance. This is what is known as cognitive and/or behavioural flexibility, and in recent years it has become one of the most sought-after skills in the workplace, hence the connection between this tool and the topic.

The most recent reports of the World Economic Forum on the skills demanded by the market point in this direction, something that we wanted to emphasise with the application of a tool specifically designed to develop cognitive flexibility. Creativity is important in organisations, but it is also important in people's daily lives. Its benefits are manifold and not only from the point of view of productivity or profitability.

In recent times, creativity has been focused on the possibilities of selling more and better. However, its usefulness goes far beyond consumerism. It is clear that a company has to focus on selling its products and services in response to the changing needs of its consumers or customers. But creativity is also criticism of an established model, it is looking for a better way of doing things, it is thinking about improving the lives of others as well as one's own.

From the point of view of profitability, creativity is a tool to generate new ideas; a rising value in organisations. In an increasingly competitive and innovative environment, the creativity of individuals and teams is essential for companies to remain competitive; even more so in certain sectors. Encouraging creativity in the SME can achieve new heights of success; but it can also improve the working environment or help to overcome limits.

The key benefit of an SME that is the ability to foster the creativity of its employees is competitive improvement and long-term sustainability of the project. It also facilitates the generation of innovation, which is the implementation of that creativity in the market and thus meeting market needs. But it also has a positive impact on employee motivation. Participation makes employees grow personally and professionally, increases their loyalty to the company, improves relations between colleagues, etc. It can even be a way to make the working day more fun and less stressful.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

You will learn about an activity called S.C.A.M.P.E.R. which teaches:

- How to stimulate creativity
- The importance of exercising creativity to expand and improve new ideas

OBJECTIVES

- Stimulate creativity
- Improve and expand ideas

MATERIALS

- a room
- a board
- a pen

TIME

90 minutes

TARGET GROUP

Potential employees

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

S.C.A.M.P.E.R.1 is a tool to support the production of new ideas. This exercise for stimulating creativity is a good instrument for improving and expanding ideas. It helps to visualise different angles of an initial theme towards understanding it in a completely different and innovative way.

Each letter from the acronym refers to a specific process.

- **SUBSTITUTE:** to figure out alternative ideas/objects instead of the existing idea/object
[What can you exchange from this idea for something else?]
- **COMBINE:** to form innovative ideas by combining several and connected-disconnected ideas.
[What elements of this idea can be combined for efficiency?]
- **ADAPT:** to use/modify previous ideas to create new ones.
[How can this idea be adapted for a different market?]
- **MAGNIFY/MODIFY:** to make changes to the current object by magnifying, minifying, modifying it.
[What can be modified to improve functionality?]
- **PUT TO OTHER USES:** to use an object in a different and preferably unexpected concept/situation/location.
[What is another use for this idea?]
- **ELIMINATE:** to eliminate a part of the existing object on behalf of creating a better version of it or figuring out the consequences of elimination.
[What is unnecessary?]
- **REARRANGE/REVERSE:** to rearrange or reverse the status/situations/orders/standards to consider alternative ends, practices, ideas.
[What can be adjusted to make this project better?]

This activity can be done on your own, but works best in a group (maximum 15 people). It should be done indoors, in a room suitable for the target group size.

The activity does not require prior preparation. It consists of applying the questions inherent to S.C.A.M.P.E.R. steps/questions.

ABOUT THE TOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

The technique/procedure consists of applying the phases to which the letters of the acronym refer. We suggest some concrete questions to be posted to the group to help guide them, following Serrat (2016).

Substitute

Think of an alternative idea to **substitute** something that already exists (e.g., a product, a process, people, ...)

What else instead? Who else instead? What other processes, approaches, or (...) might we substitute? Which another place?

Combine

Consider **combining** two or more parts/components of the product or process to achieve something new (e.g., mix, combine with other services, integrate)

What mix, assortment or set might we blend? What ideas, purposes or (...) can we combine?

Adapt

Think about what parts of the product or process could be **adapted** or how you could change the nature of the product or process (e.g., adjust, change function, use part of another element)

Does the past offer a parallel? What else is like this? What other idea does this suggest? What could we adapt to be used as a solution? What could we copy and/or adapt?

Magnify/Modify

Consider changing part or all the product or process, or **modifying** it in an unusual way (e.g., increase or reduce in scale, change shape, modify attributes)

What other meaning, shape or form could we adopt? What could we add?

Put to other uses

Think about how you can put the product or process to **another use** or how you can reuse something from somewhere else.

What new ways are there to use this? Can this be used in other places? What other people can I reach? What other uses could this be put to if it is modified?

Eliminate

Think about what might happen if you **eliminated** parts of the product or process and consider what you could do in that situation (e.g., remove elements, simplify, reduce to core functionality)

What could we underestimate? What could we eliminate? What could we simplify?

Rearrange/Reverse

Think about what you could do if parts of the product or process worked in **reverse** or were sequenced differently (e.g., turn inside out or upside down)

What could be rearranged? What other pattern, layout, or sequence could it adopt? Can the components be interchangeable? Should we change the rhythm or schedule? Can roles be reversed?

ABOUT THE TOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS CONTINUED

The SCAMPER Technique is used to produce original ideas. The creative process thrives on preparation, concentration, incubation, illumination, and verification (production testing). In organisations, its successful application depends on the existence of a supportive environment. There are, of course, personal blocks to creativity, but these can often be removed. Supervisors who foster creativity must be willing to listen, to be comfortable with half-developed ideas and to capitalise on the projects (Serrat, 2017).

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

After forming the group and briefly explaining the purpose of the activity, tell the group what is needed to create or change.

Use the steps described in the previous section to see how you can improve the idea or project, particularly if you are looking for ways to develop it further.

CONNECTION WITH FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

This activity is not only a process of activating thought and exercising activity, but also an effective tool for creating and/or changing companies/organisations. Employees and managers benefit from creativity because it can take them, and sometimes the company, in a completely new direction.

SME managers can encourage creativity and flexibility by creating a supportive environment where employees are not afraid to share new ideas. SMEs that promote creativity are better equipped to navigate complicated problems when they arise. SME managers can find alternatives and new ways of processes if they are thinking outside the box. Creativity in SMEs is important in fast-paced and dynamic industries, where companies need to be able to respond to unpredictable situations. In competitive industries, creativity is what keeps businesses moving forward. While applying creative thinking, SMEs can make jobs more meaningful.

LEADERSHIP

DEFINITION

The general definition of leadership is the ability to inspire others and direct the way they act. It is a critical skill and way of thinking to know how to use the resources of the organisation and employees in the best possible way. It also includes the ability to motivate and communicate with others (Ward 2020).

HR leadership combines the traits of strong interpersonal skills with the ability to maintain the mission of the company (Boxall et al., 2008). As a business manager, you must be able to understand and connect with the person across from you, whether they be a current employee or a potential one. You must be able to spot talent outside of your own field of expertise and be confident to make the hire when the right candidate comes along who is both a good addition to your team and can help your business grow (Wiblen et al., 2012).

With your current staff, successful HR leadership involves being able to motivate your employees, developing a strategic perspective in which they feel valued and feel a sense of purpose, build relationships within the

organisation, and foster collaboration and teamwork that leads to results (Sandberg, J., 2000).

Finally, good HR leadership shows up in the ability to analyse issues and solve problems as they arise, keeping an open mind to the differences that will always exist between people in a workplace, and being a driver of change when the company's current ways of handling interpersonal relationships or strategies for human management need to be updated (Keegan et al., 2018).

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES:

- Explain why all managers need to understand the basics of HR management
- State the interpersonal skills needed to be a successful HR leader
- List the impacts for SMEs if HR Leadership is not practiced
- State the importance of HR management processes and leadership in the recruitment process
- Discuss how to develop HR Leadership skills in the organisation

LEADERSHIP

OUTCOMES:

- Effective management and planning of key human resource functions within organisations
- The ability to problem-solve human challenges
- Will contribute to employee performance management and organisational effectiveness
- To examine current trends, practices, and processes in HR management and innovate therein
- Be able to identify and appreciate the significance of ethical issues in HR

LEADERSHIP IN THE SME CONTEXT

The role of an HR leader in the SME context will differ and change over time, as these factors change depending on the workforce size, stage of growth, maturity, industry, and the nature of job roles, as well as the possible changes in the ambitions of the owner or founder (CIPD Report, 2015).

It is important that you as an HR leader shape your role to maximise the value you bring to the table, and this process needs to start out by collaborating with the owner/founder and the leadership

team on their expectations of HR. There are often unclear understandings of leadership development in the SME context, as there is typically a focus on the individual leader's skills (Garavan et al., 2016); however, it is suggested that it should focus on interpersonal development. We will in this section list the impacts and effects HR leadership has in an SME, as well as the risks of not having this skill.

As stated by Garavan et al., leadership development differentiates between formal and informal practices. Formal practices include classroom-based practices, involving formal mentoring, coaching, and multi-source feedback processes (Garavan et al., 2014). On the other hand, informal practice is the collective and contextual approach to leadership and the emphasis is on the collective capacity to develop in the day-to-day working process. Informal practices involve learning through conversation, learning from mistakes, coaching, and reflection processes within the team (Garavan et al., 2014).

LEADERSHIP

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

HR leadership as a link between HR management and strategy is critical to business success (Way and Johnson, 2005). In the growth of an SME, formality will be a necessary part of the organisational structure; formality is both time-consuming and costly for a smaller business where the management will already be covering multiple functions and skills.

An SME is dynamic, meaning that it is constantly changing and on the move. However, valuable leadership resources can set the firm apart from its competitors by developing these different role behaviours that not only provide the business with specialist information and knowledge, but can also match the ever-changing environment of an SME (Garavan et al., 2016). Furthermore, this changing environment often also includes organisational change and can have an impact on the employees. Research shows that changes to the sets of HR practices - also referred to as HR blueprints (M.S. Cardon, C.E. Stevens, 2004), are in general very destabilising to a young business. This can affect their employee turnover, financial

performance, and ultimately the survival of their business. It is therefore critical for SMEs to develop their HR leadership practices early on and make the initial decisions regarding organisational administration.

SMEs face different challenges and burdens based on their youth and small size. They struggle at first to find ways to gain legitimacy in the industry and the resources to track performance (M.S. Cardon, C.E. Stevens, 2004). These firms also face many unique HR challenges due to the tight working environment and lack of resources, which only confirms the need for good HR leadership practices to address these challenges and solve them. This skill will indeed have a positive impact on their effectiveness and survival in the market as well as their day-to-day running of performance and employee development. It is also crucial that management shows the value this skill can bring to the business by, for example, addressing common challenges and skill gaps, how the added focus can decrease employee turnover, the establishment of new career paths and internal development, and the distinction between HR leadership

LEADERSHIP

and line managers (CIPD Report, 2015).

RISKS

An SME that does not master the HR leadership skill needs to be aware of the risks involved with the lack of this and the negative impacts it can have on daily performance. However, as the focus is on smaller businesses, we often see a lack of the owner/manager's attention to HRM due to lack of resources. It also includes the failure to recognise the importance of leadership development (Garavan et al., 2016). The positive impacts and effects listed above should however be of great motivation and a wake-up call to managers to adopt more HR leadership practices.

As SMEs do not have the resources or the capacity to have big HR departments or professionals, risks regarding recruiting and retaining employees are seen. This can be due to lack of financial resources and therefore also lack of experience is likely to happen. It can be hard to attract the right employees if the business is not able to compensate them accordingly. This can create difficulties in recruiting, as well as a

lack of legitimacy – a very well-known issue and challenge for SMEs. Without an HR department we might also see reduced formal training and staff development, as well as more informal and haphazard employee management systems (M.S. Cardon, C.E. Stevens, 2004).

LEADERSHIP IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

One of the most discussed topics within HR is perhaps recruitment and staffing. Even for smaller companies who might not have an HR department, they still have recruitment and HR policies – they might just be informal and implicit (M.S. Cardon, C.E. Stevens, 2004). It can be argued that it is especially important for small companies to find the right staffing, as they are even more dependent on qualified workers and competencies and skills across many different areas of the business, as they often cover more than one function. Another factor for SMEs to grow in sales or production, and thereby be able to expand their business, is that they must grow in the number of people they employ (M.S. Cardon, C.E. Stevens, 2004).

LEADERSHIP

There are different recruitment strategies and processes that a HR department and company can pursue, however it usually starts with defining the 'ideal candidate' (Windolf, 1986). It refers to the candidate's profile and how it fits with the position for the company, and it can be defined in detail, which might already be the first step of discrimination and ignoring different types of potential candidates; however, the recruitment strategy can also be to have a loose definition of the profile. Next, the company will have to choose a particular recruitment channel to advertise the vacancy, which can be either through the internal labour market or networks, also referred to as closed channels, or it can be completely open to the public through job portals (Windolf, 1986). The third stage of the recruitment process is the application, testing, and interviewing of potential candidates.

For an HR leader it is important to choose the right strategy for the recruitment process. It must be a strategy that fits with the company's values, beliefs, and needs. It also must fit with the unpredictable and constantly shifting markets that the company

operates in – this is especially relevant for SMEs that are new and still in the process of finding their place in the market.

Managers/owners influence the HR leaders by communicating a vision and a way of working (Lopez-Cabrales et al., 2016). It is about creating value through aligning recruitment with the culture of the company.

WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

An HR manager needs several characteristics and competencies to master the leadership skill adequately. There are several leadership styles that a manager can approach, however, to be successful you must be an ethical leader: a moral person and a moral manager. Traits such as integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness are important competencies to have, as well as actively engaging and communicating ethics-related messages, establishing high ethical standards, rewarding employees, and having consequences for those who engage in unethical actions (Ogunfowora, 2013). Research conducted by Brown and colleagues also emphasizes this and uses this description of ethical leadership: 'demonstration of normatively

LEADERSHIP

appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making' (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). Having high ethical standards and morals as a manager will also have a positive effect on job seekers and establish legitimacy.

Another important aspect of practicing good leadership is for a manager to be aware of the dynamic capabilities and different leadership styles of HR systems (Lopez-Cabrales et al., 2016). In relation to what has previously been discussed, the environment of an SME is constantly changing. This also means that managers need to have skills and competencies that match such environments. The definition of having dynamic capabilities is a firm's ability to change their resource base to address the rapidly changing environments, and has been linked to sustained competitive advantage (Lopez-Cabrales et al., 2016). However, capabilities are difficult to observe; research does show that managerial behaviours and leadership styles influence the policies and practices that develop

capabilities. This relates to recruitment as the dynamic capabilities of both the company and leaders influence organisational processes, HR systems including recruitment, and communication throughout the organisation. The manager will then be even more skilled in recruiting the best candidates for the organisation based on common dynamic capabilities, that will also ensure a positive future for the organisation (Lopez-Cabrales et al., 2016).

In the SME context, leadership might be consisting of only one person, which makes it hard to have anyone to bounce ideas off or get support or advice from. A manager must be able to create a network and engage with employees to create the best recruitment practices and standards. It is a crucial part of being a successful manager, along with developing an understanding of the primary people-related problems common to such environments (CIPD Report, 2015). The manager may need to participate in different workshops or courses within the industry or with other SMEs, so that they can enhance their recruitment skills and develop their tools.

LEADERSHIP

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

The success of good leadership skills in relation to recruitment will show through in the level of skills and qualifications that employees possess, as this shows that the manager has been able to attract the right people to the company and established legitimacy. It will also show in a low turnover of employees, because this not only demonstrates that the fit was right for both parties, but it also demonstrates that the manager was able to describe and outline the needs, wants, and requirements for the organisation as well as for the potential employee and that this was a perfect match (M.S. Cardon, C.E. Stevens, 2004).

Another key to knowing whether you possess good leadership skills is in the level of motivation of employees, and the level of people-related issues. The primary vehicle for success is the psychological contract created with workers (McDermott et al., 2013). These contracts are what employees believe they owe their employer and what they are owed in return, and this success and fulfilment can be seen through employees' job performance and extra-role

contributions, which is directly related to the motivation of employees.

However, it is also important to point out that there is no best leadership style, as the best leaders might need to use more than one (McDermott et al., 2013). A good leader is able to adapt to the strategic goals and day-to-day scenarios important to employees.

HOW TO DETECT LEADERSHIP IN EMPLOYEES

When recruiting new employees that possess basic leadership skills, managers should look for many different traits and signs, although research suggests that they should in particular look for a personality trait known as honesty-humility, as this typically denotes a person who is sincere, honest, fair-minded, faithful/loyal, and modest (Ogunfowora, 2013). This trait is part of the HEXACO model, which is a well-established framework that proposes six different factors for individual variation in personality (Ogunfowora, 2013). This trait can be detected through perceived value congruence, such as when the manager tells the job seeker about ethics and leadership behaviours. More broadly, a manager should

LEADERSHIP

also look for traits such as good interpersonal skills, motivation and inspiration, their ability to relate to others, an encouraging attitude, and a true and honest team player, as all of these are important traits to have in providing good leadership.

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

Good leadership is a skill that should change and progress along with the business. This is also why there is no permanent solution to its development. However, there are different approaches to undertake in order to gain and maintain successful leadership in a business. Leadership refers to the patterns of actions that influence people and shape their behaviour. Research shows that managers need to use two essential leadership styles: transactional and transformational (McDermott et al., 2013). Transactional leadership is a set of behaviours that give structure to the work and requirements of employees. It seeks to clarify and support working methods and results.

Leaders behaving transactionally results in specific and measurable

goals, use of mechanisms such as direction and task structuring to clarify appropriate employee behaviour, coordination of the work individuals do, and the monitoring of their accomplishments and deliverables. Using an array of rewards, from praise to pay, transactional leadership works with the existing job requirements to create incentives tied to job goals. It supports satisfactory job performance and therefore works best when job requirements are clearly described and understood. In contrast to this, transformational leadership is achieved by inspiring people.

It appeals to deeper motives and links performance to values, identity, public service, or transcendent goals. The transformational leader elevates what employees aspire to in doing their job and places personal values at the centre of motivation for work. The performance-enhancing effects are within these four dimensions: charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and personal concern. These two leadership styles are not mutually exclusive; leaders may need to display elements from both (McDermott et al., 2013).

LEADERSHIP

As mentioned earlier, a good leader also needs elements of ethical practices. Ogunfowora (2013) describes five categories of values that an ethical leader needs: tradition (respect, commitment, and acceptance of traditional customs and ideas), conformity (restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses that violate social norms), and security (safety, harmony, and stability), stimulation (seeking excitement, novelty, and challenge in life), and self-direction (independence in thought and action). Other values mentioned are those of being understanding, tolerant, and protective of the work environment and achievement. Another necessity for leaders is having some portion of power in order to lead the group (Ogunfowora, 2013).

Other important soft skills and traits that are a part of good leadership is the ability to practice discipline, to be effective, as well as inspiring others to be disciplined. This means meeting deadlines, keeping appointments, etc. You also need to be open to more responsibility, as this is a good way to develop your leadership skills. A

true leader knows when to lead and when to yield control to another team member. Situational awareness is a super important skill to have as a leader. It involves seeing the bigger picture and anticipating problems before they occur; this will evidently help in being a motivational figure for others. Team members will, as mentioned earlier, need encouragement and guidance. As a leader you should never stop learning, to prime you for any new challenges that may come.

CONCLUSIONS

- Leadership is defined as the ability to keep the mission of the company in mind and motivate employees to work towards the common goal.
- In the SME context, leadership may change and differ over time, as does the company. It is very important for the manager to get a clear understanding of expectations from the owner/founder and thither shape their role.

LEADERSHIP

- Good leadership is critical to business success, especially in the SME context, as establishing legitimacy and attracting the right candidates to the company is key.
- For recruitment purposes, a manager has many different strategies and styles to choose from. However, the manager must also be aware of the key competencies and traits needed in personnel for the business to succeed, as well as in potential leaders and employees.
- Developing good leadership depends on the context, the situation, and the position of the business, as well as the team. There is no single way of practicing good leadership, but there are multiple strategies and styles to use, as well as certain soft skills and traits to be aware of and practice or improve.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

This tool is going to teach business managers about the importance of HR leadership in their companies, what the different leadership styles are, and if their personal leadership styles are the most adequate for their companies.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this tool is for business managers to reflect on whether the behaviour they are currently carrying out fits and is the most efficient leadership style for their company and employees. It will allow them to identify pros and cons of their current way of managing their human resources. Adopting an appropriate leadership style for their company could improve the motivation and performance of their employees.

MATERIALS

An area with chairs for each participant, four big tables to which all participants can be distributed, a computer, a screen/projector big enough for all participants to see, paper and pens for everyone. All participants should have access to a device with internet (for example a cellphone, tablet, or computer).

TIME

60 minutes approximately

TARGET GROUP

SME managers

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

The tool is designed to be developed face-to-face and indoors. The participants will be split into four groups. Each group will be designated a company and will be given time to research it online. Participants will reflect, first individually, and then with their group, on what leadership style the company uses, which characteristics it has and how the styles are important to that specific company to make it function. They will also discuss how that leadership style would work in their own companies.

The objective is for participants to reflect on the content from the module about leadership, and to reflect on what the best style for their own organisations is. Each part of the activity ends after an assigned amount of time by the facilitator (60 minutes total).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

The intention is that the participants will use the knowledge they have acquired from the module about leadership, with specifically a focus on part 5 of the module. The four companies selected for this tool have been purposely selected because they have very defined leadership styles, and it is easy to find information about them online.

The objectives behind this exercise are for managers to reflect on whether what works well for one company might or might not work for another one, and to think of the most convenient style and behaviour for their own organisations.

It can be helpful for the facilitators to have a slideshow to explain the task. They will also have to be attentive in case of questions and if participants are finished early with their tasks. In this case, the facilitator should stimulate the discussion among the group by asking questions about what the participants have reflected on.

The spirit of the activity is for participants to reflect and discuss the most effective leadership style and characteristics to apply to their own companies, and to understand the importance of this.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

This tool will have a duration of approximately 60 minutes to implement. Initially, a facilitator will split all participants into four groups with a balanced number of participants. Each group will sit at a different table.

The facilitator will randomly assign each group the name of one of these companies: Valve, Google, Tesla and Microsoft. The setting up is estimated to take 5 minutes.

The facilitator will show on a screen the slide with an explanation of what to do next and will read it out loud to the participants. The slide will remain visible during the development of the activity and the facilitator will be present and available for questions.

Each participant can research the given company on the internet by using an electronic device. They will first reflect individually on what leadership style the company seems to have (transactional or transformational. They will be referred to part 5 of the module); what characteristics identify the style and how do they help the company succeed. Lastly, they will think about how that leadership style would fit in their own company and with their employees. They will take notes.

The task will last 20 minutes. The facilitator will tell the participants about this before they start this part of the activity and will stop them after 20 minutes.

The last part of the activity will last 35 minutes. During the first 15 minutes, everyone will discuss their individual ideas about what leadership style they think the assigned company has and how it helps that company succeed with their group. The facilitator will stop them after 15 minutes.

Next, they will use the following 20 minutes to discuss how that leadership behaviour would impact their company and to compare it with their current style. The facilitator will also explain these instructions by showing a slide on the screen that will remain visible until the end of the task.

ABOUT THE TOOL

CONNECTION WITH (SKILL)

The tool will improve the leadership in the companies because the business managers will be able to deeply reflect on their current leadership styles in relation to what their employees need.

The tool is meant to help employers by modifying the behaviour of their leadership. The final intention of this tool is for leaders to be able to motivate and understand their employees better, allowing for a more efficient performance from them.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

This tool is going to teach business managers about the importance of choosing the right recruitment strategy to find candidates that fit the company values.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this tool is for business managers to reflect on the importance of having an HR team that has knowledge about the most adequate recruitment strategies for their company, since it will allow for better suited candidates who will perform the best.

MATERIALS

An area with chairs for each participant, 2 big tables where all participants can be distributed to, a computer, a screen/projector big enough for all participants to see, paper and pens for everyone. All participants should have access to a device with internet (for example a cellphone, tablet, or computer).

TIME

55 minutes approximately

TARGET GROUP

SME managers and HR leaders

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

The tool is thought to be developed face-to-face and indoors. All participants will be split into three groups.

Each group will be designated a recruitment case to work on and will have access to the internet if they want to do any research to help them solve their case.

Participants will first reflect individually and then with their group on what the best recruitment strategy is for their given case. The objective is for the participants to reflect on the content from the module about leadership in recruitment, and to understand the relevance of this process for their companies. The activity ends after an assigned amount of time by the facilitator (55 minutes total).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

The intention is for the participants to use the knowledge from the module about leadership and recruitment styles during the activity, specifically referring to part 4 of the module.

The objectives behind this exercise are for managers to reflect on the importance of recruitment and of having a knowledgeable HR team handling this part of the business, who would know how potential employees would fit with the company culture.

Facilitators will have to explain the task to the participants with the help of a slide on a screen. They will also have to be attentive in case of questions or if participants are finished too early with their tasks. In this case, the facilitator should stimulate the discussion among the group by asking questions about what the participants have reflected on.

The idea of the activity is for the participants to reflect and discuss the most effective recruitment strategy for their given case and to understand the importance of this for good HR leadership.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

This tool will have a total duration of approximately 55 minutes.

Initially, a facilitator will split all participants into 3 groups with a balanced number of participants. They will each sit at a different table and will be provided with paper and pens to take notes on. The facilitator will randomly assign each group one of these cases: [Text Wrapping Break]A SME company in the advertisement industry that needs a junior part-time graphic designer. [Text Wrapping Break]A SME company in the healthcare industry that needs a senior full time project manager.

A SME company in the finance industry that needs maternity cover for a mid-level position as a human resource manager. The facilitator will show a slide on the screen with an explanation of what to do next and will read it out loud to the participants. The slide will remain visible during the activity and the facilitator will be present and available for questions. The slide will explain the following instructions:

Each participant can use the internet from their electronic devices to do any research that could help them solve the case. They will first reflect individually on which recruitment strategy would be the best for their case and why. They will refer to part 4 of the module.

The task will last 20 minutes. The facilitator will notify the participants about this before they start this part of the activity and will stop them when it is due time.

The next part of the activity will last 25 minutes. Here, everyone will discuss their individual ideas from the previous task with their groups and give each other feedback, until they reach a common strategy. The facilitator will also explain these instructions by showing a slide on the screen that will remain visible until the end of the task.

Finally, each group will give a 2–3-minute presentation about what they have discussed in their groups to the two other groups. This last part is estimated to take about 10 minutes. With this, the activity is finalised.

ABOUT THE TOOL

CONNECTION WITH (SKILL)

The connection between the tool and the skill is that leaders will learn how to manage and plan HRM functions and tasks and hence contribute to employee performance.

Participants will understand the importance of recruitment as the way to get the right candidates for their companies, who should not only have the right skills for the job, but also fit the company's culture. By using this tool, participants learn to analyse the assigned company and their industry, and thereby also their needs and values.

At the same time, the tool is meant to help current and future employees. Having a suitable HR recruitment strategy ensures that candidates are chosen because they match the company's ways and values, thus creating a motivating environment with people with similar ways of thinking.

MOTIVATION

DEFINITION

Motivation is an internal state that activates, directs and maintains a person's behaviour towards certain goals or aims; it is the impulse that moves a person to perform certain actions and to persist in them in order to achieve them. Motivation is what gives energy and direction to behaviour; it is the cause of behaviour. It is a process that goes through several stages. Initially, it is expected that a person will feel good (or stop feeling bad) if a goal is achieved. In the second stage, the person becomes active and starts doing things to achieve that goal. As progress is made towards the goal, there will be an evaluation of whether or not the person is on the right track, i.e. performance feedback will be given. And finally, the result will be attained.

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES:

- To equip the employer with the necessary skills to improve the motivation of their employees or future employees
- To understand the link between worker motivation and productivity
- To identify the fundamental elements that make up employee motivation and its connection with SMEs
- To provide the keys to improve work motivation by increasing employee commitment to the company
- To identify the motivational activities that can be implemented in an SME

OUTCOMES:

- The employer will understand the importance of employee motivation in optimising productivity
- It creates a motivating and challenging work environment that allows the employee to develop teamwork in a more organised way in order to achieve the company's objectives
- Improved health and emotional well-being of employees by feeling that they are an indispensable part of the company
- Promoting positive behaviours through motivation, confidence, commitment or innovation
- The motivated worker will be more efficient and productive than a demotivated worker

MOTIVATION

MOTIVATION IN THE SME CONTEXT

Employee motivation includes all actions that the company takes to positively influence the performance of employees. The best possible result is to achieve a constant or increasing productivity of the employees as well as their involvement in the company's goals. As a rule, this means that employees feel comfortable in their workplace. Motivated employees who feel connected to the company show higher performance, are more innovative, and are better able to cope with stress. In the SME environment, this aspect is very important because, as a smaller group, getting employees to bond with management and each other will bring greater personal and work-related benefits.

There are two types of motivation:

- **Intrinsic work motivation.** This is the one that arises from the satisfaction obtained from a task while it is being performed. It is personal, self-stimulated and does not require a third source. It is directly related to our level of personal satisfaction.
- **Extrinsic work motivation.** It comes from the outside, from
 - from resources or from external recognition by third parties. It is associated with goals and incentives. This type of motivation is easier to implement in SMEs because communication and cooperation between workers is more fluid.

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

Motivation is a key skill to improve productivity within an SME and to optimise the resources available to the employer and the employees in a more positive way. To this end, the manager of a company must be aware of the main guidelines for improving the motivation of his or her employees.

Among the main options for motivating workers are the following:

- **Flexible working hours.** The worker's freedom to choose their own timetable is free to implement. Combining teleworking with face-to-face work, or even extending the start and finish times, can be a good opportunity to motivate the worker.
- **Create incentives.** Establishing a variable salary based on achievements is a good way to

MOTIVATION

- motivate the employee, as it is directly related to performance and job responsibility.
- **Offer possibilities for growth** within the company or involve the employee in projects. Financial remuneration is not the only objective for the employee, as an emotional salary is equally necessary.
- **Improve the workspace.** An open, tidy and comfortable space favours the exchange of information and teamwork, improving employee productivity.

RISKS

The implementation of mechanisms to improve employee motivation in SMEs can pose serious problems for the employer if the importance of motivation is not understood and reliably planned within the company.

The planning of workers' schedules and their flexibility can lead to a destructuring of the group and of communication between the different departments, so this point must be approached from the need for certain workers' schedules to coincide who are involved in an ongoing task. In SMEs it can be more difficult to implement as there

are fewer employees, so that a reduced timetable may present a greater problem.

The incentive programme must be understandable and achievable, as exorbitant targets will make the employee uninterested in achieving them, turning the intended positive effect into a negative demotivation effect. On the other hand, basing an incentive programme on sales can lead to an attempt to offer customers products they do not need, providing poor service.

As for teleworking, the absence of a working environment in some cases has a negative influence on employees, as they may feel less involved with the company. On the other hand, if it is not applied consistently and fairly, it can lead to individual or team disputes over achievements or comparing the working status of employees with each other. In a smaller environment such as SMEs, these disputes can be very negative for the overall functioning of the group. Conversely, trying to control work situations or results can lead to frustration and stress for the employer when problems arise, as it will be felt that efforts to improve conditions for employees are not bearing the expected fruits.

MOTIVATION

MOTIVATION IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Once we have analysed the advantages and disadvantages that motivation has within the work environment, we will address the best ways to implement it in the day-to-day work of an SME, as well as its vital importance when it comes to the development of the work activity by the workers and how the employer can improve this motivation by applying different improvements that have an impact on the benefit of the worker and, consequently, on their productivity within the company.

On the other hand, we will see what needs an employer has when selecting personnel in order to be able to detect and value the motivation of job candidates.

WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

Any entrepreneur knows this, but it is worth remembering. The success of an SME is almost entirely determined by the people who make up the team. An employer can motivate his employees by following a few simple guidelines when it comes to guiding them

towards their goals, thus creating a good working environment.

The main characteristics of a motivating employer are:

- **Friendliness:** A friendly employer fosters a good working environment, reducing the stress of their employees.
- **Ability to recognise achievements.** With this, the good mood and self-esteem of the worker is stimulated and the fulfilment of goals is encouraged.
- **Clear goals and objectives.** By clearly informing workers of what the objectives are, they will feel more integrated in the project and will have greater clarity in their functions.
- **Being in favour of flexible working hours.** It improves personal, work and family reconciliation. A more rested worker performs better because exhaustion is avoided.
- **Favours integration.** It makes the worker feel like an important part of the company.
- **Offering an adequate salary.** A salary that is appropriate to the functions carried out will make the worker feel recognised and valued in their work.
- **Places the worker in the right position.** If a worker can apply his or her knowledge to a job, there will be a sense of satisfaction in responding effectively.

MOTIVATION

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

The use of incentives can bring benefits to the company, the main one being increased productivity. These incentives create a better working environment. A satisfied and motivated employee is very likely to be reluctant to leave the company, as the feeling of recognition is achieved. Some companies offer benefits to their employees to improve their motivation. Some examples are:

- Offering extra days off to employees who reach certain targets. This incentive is very popular with employees.
- Holding social days with colleagues and their families when targets are met. This measure will improve the relationship between employees and their sense of team spirit.
- Have recreational options at work, such as employee canteens, break rooms or waiting rooms. This will help to provide a place to unwind and take a break during the working day.
- Offering gift cards to employees or establishing collaboration agreements with other companies to offer their employees discounts on
 - different services (health insurance, dentist, gym...) are actions that are also highly valued by employees, as it is considered an emotional salary.
 - Offering an internal promotion position to skilled workers before the job offer is made, will make workers feel motivated and well regarded in the company, being able to improve their working conditions and position.
 - The continuous professional development of workers through training programmes offered by the company or requested by the worker will improve the feeling of improvement within the company with a higher qualification to be able to achieve a promotion to a higher category position.
 - The right to disconnect outside the working day has been gaining strength in recent years, encouraging respect for timetables so as not to encroach on workers' personal or family life.

MOTIVATION

HOW TO DETECT MOTIVATION IN EMPLOYEES

The questions asked in the job interview will be paramount in assessing an employee's knowledge and aptitude for the job, but detecting their motivation for the job will also be key in deciding a candidate's suitability for the job. Different people have different motivations for applying for a job and these are individual.

Asking the candidate about their motivation for the job will let us know whether they do it for personal or professional fulfilment, whether they like to achieve goals, whether they like to feel part of the company or whether they can give a vision of what they can contribute to the team. There are workers who like change or challenges and having problems to solve, so their motivations at the time of an interview can be very diverse.

Non-verbal communication is just as important when it comes to perceiving a job candidate's motivation. Look for enthusiasm in the candidate's voice and commitment in their body language. For example, by analysing the space occupied at the table, as a confident

candidate will use as much space as possible to his or her advantage. A candidate who leans forward and looks confidently in the eye is a potentially motivated candidate. On the contrary, a candidate who shows slow responses, without emphasis or hardly any body language, will be telling of an unmotivated personality.

Sometimes it is also a mistake to underestimate the importance of money and benefits as one of the motivations for the job. This will not be the main motivation and the employee will try to avoid it in the conversation, but it should not be an impediment that the economic factor is another of the main motivations when applying for a job.

In conclusion, the key to success in a job interview will be to identify what motivates the candidate, and to see if these qualities, values and approaches fit the job to be developed. Asking how they would feel in a future situation that may arise in the new job would be a good way of finding out what they can bring to the team and what motivates them to be the perfect candidate.

MOTIVATION

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

For the employer of an SME, for the long-term future, there is nothing better than improving the quality of life and satisfaction of his employees. The actions carried out in the field of human resources should be aimed at improving the employee's opportunities for professional growth, without forgetting the improvement of collaboration within the team or communication. To achieve this objective, to improve the work and productivity of employees, the following initiatives can be implemented in the company:

Reminding employees of the company's vision and mission. By conveying clear information to employees, we will encourage motivation and involvement in the company's philosophy. This will ensure that everyone is fully aware of their role and place in the company by defining the positions and who the team leaders are, as they will be responsible for ensuring that everything runs smoothly in each department.

Reward success. Employees must feel valued within the company and

the best way to achieve this is to clearly know their objectives and know that, if they achieve them, they will be rewarded. Work development must be measured by evaluating what works and what doesn't in order to optimise the time and resources available.

Provide the necessary resources and tools. It is necessary to take care of details such as the work environment or the tools for the development of the activity so that the worker feels comfortable during their working day and feels cared for within the company; this way, productivity will not decline.

Control and encourage middle management. As a general rule, the problems that workers face have to do with their direct manager. For this reason, it will be essential to transmit the need to motivate their team to these middle managers.

Training. The continuous training of workers will be one of the keys to increasing the feeling of being able to grow within the company and improving the working environment.

Prioritise communication, meetings and human resources.

Communication will be the basis for improving worker motivation within

MOTIVATION

the company. A good manager must be close, have contact with the worker and talk face-to-face with the staff instead of limiting themselves to being locked up in an office. By scheduling regular meetings with employees, the employer will have a global vision of the strengths and weaknesses of his company, as well as of their staff.

Responding to requests. When an employer asks workers to make an extra effort or ask for a favour, the response is usually positive. Likewise, when a worker asks the company for a favour, the response should be active and short in time, trying to find a solution to the employee's professional and personal situations.

Encourage a fun environment. Making the workplace more fun will make the feeling of working more enjoyable, which can keep employees motivated and engaged. Workplace parties, setting up bring-your-dog-to-work days and weekly happy hours for employees are some common strategies. Asking workers to suggest how to make the workplace more fun will improve motivation.

CONCLUSIONS

- A motivated worker will feel like part of the team and of the company, becoming a key element in improving productivity, improving the optimisation of resources at their disposal and increasing the sense of well-being among the work team.
- It is up to the company manager to improve employee motivation by following simple guidelines to improve working and/or personal conditions.
- Care must be taken when implementing measures to improve the working conditions of employees, as poor implementation, or disorganised implementation, can have the opposite effect of demotivating and confusing employees.
- Incentives and financial rewards are often outweighed by employees' appreciation of the possibilities of promotion and advancement within the company, or of being taken into account when making work decisions, thus making them feel more fulfilled and valued.

MOTIVATION

- Improved employee well-being will always have a positive impact on the development of their activity. Freedom of working hours, the possibility of teleworking or the possibility of reconciling work and family life improve the employee's sense of well-being.
- In personnel selection processes, the employer must take into account both the verbal language of the interviewee and his or her motivation when applying for the job, as well as the non-verbal language and his or her emphasis when expressing him or herself. A motivated employee will show that motivation in a job interview.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

The GROW approach promotes confidence and self-motivation, leading to increased productivity and personal satisfaction. The GROW model is a strategy that allows you to learn how to identify the fundamental goals, analyse the current situation and draw up general action plans based on the information obtained. Before focusing on the more specific problems, it is necessary to know what the ultimate purpose of any project is and to have a holistic view of it, so that all decisions to be taken are properly aligned and the original purpose and motivation to achieve that goal is never lost.

OBJECTIVES

- Awaken motivation: while short-term goals incentivise improved productivity in the immediacy, it is the call to meet our long-term personal goals that really drives consistent action and provides a sense of self-fulfilment.
- It provides clarity: Due to the complexity of the situations we face, distractions often arise that divert our attention from the initial objective. If a global perspective is maintained, all actions will have a common purpose.
- If properly implemented, its effects will extend over time to the later stages of the project.

MATERIALS

Flipchart or Whiteboard, Pens

TIME

60 min.

TARGET GROUP

Leaders and managers

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

As a leader, one of your most important roles is to coach and motivate your people to do their best. By doing this, you'll help them make better decisions, solve problems that are holding them back, learn new skills, and otherwise progress in their careers. GROW is an acronym that stands for Goal, Reality, Obstacles/Options, and Will. A good way of thinking about the GROW Model is to think about how you'd plan a journey. First, you decide where you are going (the goal), and establish where you currently are (your current reality). You then explore various routes (the options) to your destination. In the final step, establishing the 'will', you ensure that you're committed to making the journey, and are prepared for the obstacles that you could meet on the way.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

The GROW model is a simple, yet highly effective, framework that can be used in any meeting or leadership setting. It can be adapted to fit into any setting where decisions need to be made, or where obstacles need to be overcome.

The facilitator should be aware of the following when implementing the steps:

Step 1. The more aligned workers are with their core values in moving towards those goals, the more committed they will be to participating in the actions that will make those goals a reality.

The second step of GROW allows for an invitation for self-assessment.

Step 3. Options allow people to explore possibilities and to choose which of those possibilities will work the best to move them forward. When the person develops these options, they are more motivated and emotionally connected to them.

Step 4. This portion of the framework helps to develop a commitment to goal achievement.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Step 1:

ESTABLISH THE GOAL Goal (aspiration).

First, you and your team member need to look at the behaviour that you want to change, and then structure this change as a goal that they want to achieve.

Ask the employee (group member, colleague, etc..) to describe what their goal/aspiration(s) is.

Valuable questions in this step:

- What would you like to focus on today?
- What's important to you at the moment?
- What new skills do you want to learn or develop?
- What challenges are you facing at the moment?
- What would make you feel that this time has been well spent?
- What are you currently working toward?
- How can you word your goal in positive language?

Step 2:

EXAMINE THE CURRENT REALITY

Next, ask your team member to describe their current reality. This is an important step. Too often, people try to solve a problem or reach a goal without fully considering their starting point, and often they're missing some information that they need in order to reach their goal effectively.

As your team member tells you about their current reality, the solution may start to emerge.

Useful coaching questions in this step include the following:

- What is happening now (what, who, when, and how often)? What is the effect or result of this?
- Have you already taken any steps toward your goal?
- Does this goal conflict with any other goals or objectives?

Step 3:

EXPLORE THE OBSTACLES/OPTIONS

Once you and your team member have explored the current reality, it's time to determine what is possible – meaning all of the possible options for reaching their objective.

Help your team member brainstorm as many good options as possible. Then, discuss these and help them decide on the best ones. Typical questions that you can use to explore options are as follows:

- What obstacles stand in your way?
- If you had 50% more confidence, what would you be doing that would be different?
- What could you possibly do?

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

- What else?
- What if this constraint were removed? Would that change anything?
- What are the pros and cons of each option?
- What would you do if you answered to no one?
- What is the most efficient use of your time at this moment?

Step 4:

ESTABLISH THE WILL

Look at the way forward (accountability and personal actions) (What, When, by Whom and the WILL to do it). Establishing their current reality and exploring options, your team member will now have a pretty good idea of how they can achieve their goal. Awesome – but, this may not be enough. The final step is to get the team member to make a commitment to specific actions to move forward towards their goal. This step helps them activate their willpower and gives them an empowering boost!

Effective questions include:

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how motivated are you to achieve your goal?
- What will it take to get that motivation closer to a 10?
- Whatever your first step is, can you think of anything that might stop you from doing it?
- How committed are you to achieving this goal?
- How do you want to be held accountable for this goal?
- How will you celebrate when you've achieved your goal?
- What are you going to do in the next 24 hours?
- What will you do when you've achieved your goal?
- Who do you need to include in your journey to that goal?
- What else do you need to consider before starting?

Decide on a date when you'll both review progress. This will provide some accountability, and allow them to change his approach if the original plan simply isn't working.

CONNECTION WITH (SKILL)

This tool is connected to motivation as the GROW approach fosters confidence and self-motivation, leading to increased productivity and personal satisfaction.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

"The Marshmallow Problem" activity teaches you how to work better together with your team by being more effective in reaching your goals. You will learn how to implement this modern tool for motivation, collaboration, and leading teams in times of change and complexity.

OBJECTIVES

This activity emphasises the importance of team motivation and group communication, leadership dynamics, collaboration, innovation and problem-solving strategies. It teaches an agile approach to risk management and the value of continuous experimentation to reduce waste.

MATERIALS

20 Sticks of spaghetti (per group)
1 meter of string (per group)
1 meter of tape (per group)
1 paper bag or envelope (per group)
1 marshmallow (per group)
Measuring Tape

TIME

60 minutes

TARGET GROUP

Team members

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

The Marshmallow Problem is a team-building and motivation activity in which teams must compete to build the tallest free-standing structure out of 20 sticks of spaghetti, one meter of tape, one meter of string, and one marshmallow. It emphasizes group communication, leadership dynamics, collaboration, innovation and problem-solving strategies. It teaches a lean approach to risk management and the value of continuous experimentation to reduce waste. It is meant to be a fun team building exercise.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

After its implementation, facilitators should wrap up with the insights of the challenge. You can show the Marshmallow Challenge TED Talk, or just refer to the talk and describe some of the key insights of the marshmallow challenge:

1. Kids do better than business students: On virtually every measure of innovation, kindergarteners create taller and more interesting structures.
2. The marshmallow is a metaphor for the hidden assumptions of a project. The assumption in the Marshmallow Challenge is that marshmallows are light and fluffy and easily supported by the spaghetti sticks. When you actually try to build the structure, the marshmallows don't seem so light. The lesson in the marshmallow challenge is that we need to identify the assumptions in our project—the real needs, the cost of the product, the duration of the service—and test them early and often. That's the mechanism that leads to effective innovation.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Step 1:

Create a marshmallow challenge kit for each team, with each kit containing 20 pieces of spaghetti, 1 meter of masking tape, 1 meter of string and 1 marshmallow. These ingredients should be placed into a paper lunch bag or envelope, which simplifies distribution and hides the contents, maximizing the element of surprise.

Organise the group into teams of 3-6 people. Each team should sit around a table. The whole group should work in the same space, fairly close together.

Step 2:

Give the instructions. Be clear and concise about the goals and rules of the challenge.

Build the tallest freestanding structure: The winning team is the one that has the tallest structure measured either from the tabletop surface or from floor to the top of the marshmallow. That means the structure cannot be suspended from a higher structure, like a chair, ceiling or chandelier.

The entire marshmallow must be on top: The entire marshmallow needs to be on the top of the structure. Cutting or eating part of the marshmallow disqualifies the team.

Use as much or as little of the kit as needed: Teams can use as many or as few of the 20 spaghetti sticks as needed, and as much or as little of the string or tape. The team cannot use the paper bag / envelope as part of their structure.

Break up the spaghetti, string or tape: Teams are free to break the spaghetti, or cut the tape and string to create new structures.

The challenge lasts 18 minutes: Teams cannot hold on to the structure when the time runs out. Those touching or supporting the structure at the end of the exercise will be disqualified.

Ensure everyone understands the rules: Repeat the rules if necessary and ask if anyone has any questions before starting.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

Step 3:

Start the countdown clock and music at the start of the challenge.

Remind the teams of the time: Count down the time. It can be effective to call out the time at 12 minutes, 9 minutes (halfway), 7 minutes, 5 minutes, 3 minutes, 2 minutes, 1 minute, 30 seconds and a ten-second countdown.

Call out how the teams are doing: Let the entire group know how the teams are progressing. Call out each time a team builds a standing structure. Build a friendly rivalry. Encourage participants to look around, and don't be afraid to raise the energy and the stakes.

Remind the teams that holders will be disqualified: Several teams will have the desire to hold on to their structure at the end to stabilize it because placing the marshmallow on top will cause the structure to buckle. The winning structure needs to be stable.

Step 4:

After the clock runs out, ask everyone in the room to sit down so everyone can see the structures.

Measure the structures: From the shortest standing structure to the tallest, measure and call out the heights. Identify the winning team.

Step 5:

Teams reflect on how they did: Have teams sit together and discuss their process. Introduce the questions below to help guide them in their reflection:

Suggested reflection questions:

- *How did we work as a group?*
- *What role did I take? How did I contribute? Is there anything I held off from doing? Why?*
- *Who took the leadership in the group? How did it manifest in different moments?*
- *What did I learn about myself and my behavior? About other people and their behavior? About the behavior of groups?*
- *What insights can I take from this experience that I could apply in other contexts?*

CONNECTION WITH (SKILL)

This tool is connected to motivation as motivating team members involves ensuring satisfaction in the workplace, as well as taking actions that positively influence work performance. Team objectives will be achieved more successfully if team members are motivated and committed.

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

DEFINITION

Organisational skills are those that allow an employee, or employer for that matter, to utilise resources efficiently and effectively (Indeed, 2021). Organisational skills are some of the most important and transferable job skills an employee can acquire.

To learn how improving organisational skills can affect work performance, specific steps to improve organisational skills include:

- setting goals and making lists
- planning
- scheduling
- prioritising
- resource allocation
- collaboration
- delegation, maintaining efficiency
- documenting
- record keeping

Amongst these skills lies the concept of time management, which can be defined as a process that involves planning and managing tasks around deadlines in order to work smarter and to produce work to a higher standard (Kushwaha, 2021). It is the strategy of planning out your available time and controlling the amount of time

you spend on specific tasks in order to work more efficiently. It allows enough time to finish tasks without spending too much time on any one task, as well as balancing the time you spend at home and work.

No matter how organised we are and how much we wish for more time, there are always only 24 hours 1,440 minutes, or 86,400 seconds in a day, so the improvement of organisational skills and time management is therefore of the utmost importance. The abilities people gain via self-analysis, planning, evaluation, and self-control determine how we use that time.

People who use effective organisational skills and time management skills are more likely to be more productive and have more energy for the tasks at hand. They are less stressed, have more spare time to pursue their passions, complete more tasks, have a more favourable relationship with people and have a greater self-esteem. Another important organisational skill is self-care. Nothing mentioned above is possible if you are not organised in your own life, both professionally and personally. You need to eat and sleep well, along with taking care of your general health. Organisation in each aspect

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

of your life is essential to ensure you have a healthy balance. Feeling under the weather, tired, stressed or anything else negative will have a profound impact on your abilities as a leader.

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES:

- To define the importance of organisational skills and time management in an SME
- To understand the range of advantages for managers to diffuse a culture of organisational skills and time management amongst their work team
- To identify the plan and components of improvement
- To create checklist to monitor and evaluate the process of improvement
- To realise the need to hire people who are organised and manage their time well

OUTCOMES:

- Knowledge of what organisational skills are needed for SME management
- Development of a training plan for goals setting and time management

- Improved ability to upgrade organisational and time management skills individually, in peers and in small teams
- Improved organisational skills and time management
- Improved efficiency of SME operations

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT IN THE SME CONTEXT

Organisational and time management skills are paramount in a work and business setting as it allows for smoother and more efficient operations of the company. To achieve this, business owners and leaders must cultivate a workplace that centralises the importance of organisational skills and time management (Business Trends, 2016).

Possessing these features is, most evidently, beneficial to an employee as a person by allowing them to collate and gather necessary resources and be punctual; all of these are necessities in any organisation and transcend into employee's personal lives (Kooser, 2019).

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

Indeed, strong organisational skills are equally important for a variety of reasons, and all have one common denominator because they turn a person into an efficient and effective employee. This is exactly why employers value strong organisational skills so much as it forms a strong basis for future skill progression, which is extremely beneficial for HR operations (MOO, 2021).

Workers can live a less stressful and more joyful life by prioritising and organising their tasks. Prioritising the most important or time-sensitive tasks and delaying less crucial chores to a less chaotic period is a key part of effective time management.

Managing time is important because it helps conserve energy and stay calm in a fast-paced environment. Time management helps to improve performance, produce better work, deliver work on time, reduce stress and boost confidence.

Organisational skills involve maintaining an orderly workspace, meeting deadlines and communicating well with your SME team and partners/clients outside your SME. The need to have

organisational abilities becomes even more important when you are a boss or human resources manager.

The ability to perform tasks in a timely manner, schedule, and stick to deadlines is the Holy Grail of strong organisational skills. If you can keep yourself and your team disciplined, SME will benefit from you in each and every way.

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

SMEs have the impact of well organised work and maximise the time for the growth of their business, so they can prioritise all their work tasks and achieve their goals faster. Well organised SMEs have visible effects inside companies when staff members feel well during the implementation of clear tasks and also outside when communicating with partners and clients in a professional way.

As mentioned previously, it is important that SMEs foster a culture of effective time management. This predominantly stems back to the management of the business. If management do not explicitly and implicitly highlight this need, they then cannot expect employees to follow such

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

guidelines (Kushwaha, 2021). Furthermore, the concept of time is not limitless and this is crucial to understand for SMEs. These businesses have a smaller workforce and if a time management strategy is not implemented, then it can seem as though the business is stalled and not progressing (Fewtrell, 2021).

Conversely, the adoption of a strong time management philosophy will allow you to concentrate on and prioritise the most important business operations and produce them to a better quality. Equally, if time is organised coherently, employees should see a decrease in stress levels as tasks, completed in the correct order, will seem more attainable and easier to control. This is in spite of them having the same amount of work to complete (Pettit, 2020). Consequently, workers will feel more alleviated and not overwhelmed with tasks, which allows them to focus better and reduce their amount of procrastination (Ward, 2021). All of this results in a motivated workforce who are likely to stay at the business for a longer period of time (Business Trends, 2016).

RISKS

The failure to adequately adopt organisational skills and time management skills can result in unmet obligations, sleep deprivation, and a lack of self-care, all of which can lead to stress. These adverse side effects will equally be transferred to the working environment as well as to the employees' personal lives (Ward, 2020). Poor time management and excessive screen time can lead to exhaustion, irritability, and poor health in general. Feeling overwhelmed is a major source of stress. Learning how to organise work and private life and how to manage time is a terrific way to significantly reduce stress.

Multitasking does not save time, according to psychological studies (Vaden 2015). In many cases, the opposite is true. When you go from one activity to another, you waste time and lose productivity. Multitasking on a regular basis might make it harder to concentrate and sustain attention. This is because the brain is unable to create an in-depth analysis of said task and resulting in the overlooking of finer details that could have been detected if not multitasking (Girdler,

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

2020). In fact, you may unwittingly limit your advancement potential if your organisational skills are poor or undeveloped.

It is important to keep your location free of distractions, including turning off notifications on your devices, and set up allocated time for specific chores to help you focus on just one activity at a time.

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Managerial staff should be aware that organisational skills and time management are essential. A candidate can have the right set of hard skills, but without strong organisational skills, their productivity plummets. That's why both hard skills and soft skills matter in order to be a top-notch employee.

It is apparent how a candidate is organised during a job interview, how they look, how they listen and how they answer questions, especially about emotions. Some candidates can be well-prepared for

the interview, some not, and this can be very telling about their value in your SME in the future. Even something simple like whether they showed up 10 minutes early, 5 minutes early, exactly on time, or even late to the interview will reveal how they manage their time.

It is important to tell the candidate how long the job interview will last, so time management skills will be visible when the candidate speaks. Is she/he clear and short or, opposite, use long sentences with many details. This gives a clear indication of how they analyse and comprehend time restraints without the candidate explicitly knowing (Doyle, 2021).

It is important to inform employees and potential employees how the SME organises its work (timetable, deadlines, responsibilities of staff members, etc.). When asking a candidate if they agree with the conditions, it is important to look at the candidate's reactions. A look of shock is not a good sign, for example, when discussing the daily timetable.

It is good to include some questions about the candidate's soft skills, including questions about organisation and time management.

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

Yes/no self-reflection questions such as “Do you consider yourself an organised person?” are great, but most people will respond what they think the interviewer wants to hear. Instead, ask more open-ended questions, like “What do you do to keep organised on a day-to-day basis?” and “How important is punctuality to you?” Their responses will reveal whether they are already an organised person or whether those skills could use some improvement.

WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

Employers need to be aware that not everyone has strong time management and organisation skills, but there are ways to make sure that naturally disorganised people are still on track. Managers should have systems in place that ensure that employees are meeting deadlines and generally managing their time well; some of these can include a shared to-do list (such as Asana), a shared calendar, and setting reminders for meetings and deadlines that a disorganised person is likely to forget. Having a to-do list and calendar that is transparent, meaning anyone in the company can view it, is a way to encourage employees to stay on top

of their deadlines because it will be visible to everyone if a deadline is missed by anyone.

One of the main benefits of organisational skills is a sense of control that allows for increased productivity. Accompanying this is the idea of planning. Employers should implement a calendar or planner (or both) so that you, along with your workforce, can comply with deadlines. Visually presenting tasks allows for easier analysis of said tasks and hopefully, makes them more accomplishable (GreatBizTools, 2022). If an employer finds there is a lack of consistency in meeting said time constraints, then a heavier intervention may be needed; but beware, this could easily slip into ‘micromanaging’ territory.

Employers also need to demonstrate good time management skills themselves; with many (if not all) soft skills, the ones in charge should be good role models for the rest of the employees to follow. If the boss is constantly late to meetings and not meeting deadlines, why should the employees be on time? Setting a bad example creates a knock-on effect that lets employees know that it’s ok to be late and

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

disorganised, which is never appreciated in the corporate world. On the other hand, employers who demonstrate the importance of organisation and time management sets the groundwork for the other employees to do the same.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

A clear example of good organisation and time management skills, although it may not be conclusive on its own, is the level of communication that a person displays (Indeed, 2021). If you have good organisational skills, you are more likely to openly communicate in saying you have accomplished tasks and what exactly you have done (Kooser, 2021). If you don't, then likely your organisational and time management skills are limited as you may feel too overwhelmed to meet deadlines. Additionally, employees who can plan their work effectively as well as create a clear distinction between work and personal life are said to have good organisational skills (Estrada, 2022).

Another sign of good organisation and time management is physical; do you keep your desk tidy? Do you leave dirty dishes in the sink after

lunch? Do you appear dishevelled, like you just got out of bed?

Behavioural observations like these are revealing. Someone who appears physically dishevelled, for example, may have a hard time getting up and getting dressed on time for work, a sign of poor time management. Likewise, a messy workspace reflects a messy thought process, so having an untidy desk is telling of someone whose thoughts are also disorganised.

Organisational skills establish a sense of trust and professionalism in the workplace. A well-organised manager has an image of reliability and control. This helps to win the trust of clients and associates more easily. A well organised manager creates a more relaxed working environment, as opposed to a cluttered or disorganised office where you are constantly searching for items or sidestepping around piles of papers.

Another sign of good organisation skills, both for managers and employees, is the ability to work under pressure. Someone who effectively divides their large tasks into smaller, achievable chunks is more likely to meet a deadline for a big project or task. Being prepared for the amount of time each sub-

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

task takes will make the larger task at hand more surmountable. Lastly, being organised at work often involves organising your thought process. Analytical thinking involves the ability to read and interpret information to come to reasonable conclusions, and being able to think about a problem logically and determine the source of the issue will help you overcome setbacks quickly and avoid delays.

HOW TO DETECT ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT IN EMPLOYEES

The first step in identifying an employee or potential employee's ability to work in an organised manner is to give a few tasks with clear deadlines. Some tasks should be easy and some should be more complex. Managerial staff can then analyse how the candidate divided time for these tasks and how efficient they were during the implementation. Even if they manage their time well to complete a task, if it is not done to a good quality, this could also mean they rushed through it and therefore did not actually show good time management skills.

Organisational skills are usually

more visible more than other soft skills (like emotional intelligence or conflict resolution skills). Candidate should show her/his skills in:

- Communication (speak and write in a clear manner to be sure that message is understood, follow up on incomplete tasks)
- Attention to detail
- Teamwork (organising work in a group of people and participation in group work)
- Delegation skills to achieve the best results (a strong set of interpersonal skills)
- Planning
- Prioritising (being able to give priority to tasks is far more important than checking off items on to-do lists)
- Working under pressure (time deficit and other pressures)
- Mental organisational skills (to think in a logical and orderly way, to research and analyse situations, prepare documentation, think strategically and evaluate)

An important element of organisation skills is the ability to take initiative. Organised employees are well-aware of the tasks they need to complete and can work on assignments without supervision or assistance. If you can earn a

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

reputation for being organised and self-sufficient in your workplace, you will likely be given even more opportunities to use your skills and develop professionally.

Poor time management results from disorganisation and can be visible from the first days. Many of these are simple and mundane but can be crucial to decipher whether a candidate lacks organisational skills and time management skills. Some of these include the following (Rampton 2019):

Arriving late - A very simple mistake but one that demonstrates a lot about a person. If an employee arrives late consistently, it can reveal how they choose to coordinate their priorities.

Obviously, they seem to prioritise their personal life more than their work life, meaning that over time they may not be as focused or engaged in business operations.

Procrastination - Employees who have poor time management skills usually procrastinate for long periods of time due to them not being able to coordinate their work effectively.

Being in a rush - This is a combination of the previous two. By

wasting time, employees suddenly find themselves time constricted to complete tasks and are therefore stressed when doing so.

Loss of work quality - If tasks are not organised in a way that is achievable by employees, then they are likely to “cut corners” in order to complete the tasks they have assigned to them. Ergo, many of the tasks may not be up to the desired quality that they could have been.

Easily distracted - Similar to procrastination, not being able to understand a task means that an employee is less engaged with their commitments and tries to find a distraction rather than a solution to their work problems.

As you can see, many of these symptoms are intertwined and are not mutually exclusive as, in many cases, one leads to another creating a vicious cycle (Ibid).

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

Good organisational skills" encompasses physical and mental organisation and time management abilities. Good organisational skills are essential for a successful business. These specific steps can

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

be taken with the aim to improve organisational skills (Indeed, 2022):

- Have a tidy work space. Believe it or not, the physical cleanliness of a workspace can dramatically improve an employee's task efficiency. By creating a tidy work space, and wanting to have one, it creates a sense of organisation that an individual can then transfer to when dealing with tasks.
- Keep records of the tasks you have completed and the ones you are still working on. These can be physical lists on a pad of paper or digital lists that you access with your phone or computer. Additionally, breaking down large tasks into smaller sub-tasks to add to your list can be an effective way to manage your time.
- Keep to a schedule. It is not only paramount to keep to a schedule, but if possible, create a schedule that is in line with what you realistically can do. If it is not personalised to your ability and availability, then you will always see yourself as underperforming, which can be very demotivating.
- Set a regular schedule. This can be a physical calendar or a digital time log that you keep on your phone. Creating a detailed
- schedule will help you to budget your time and ensure that you meet your deadlines.
- Communicate with your team. Scheduling face-to-face meetings, creating records of important conversations and writing efficient emails are all ways you can communicate. Communicating on a regular basis allows you to free your mind of tasks or perceived work. If you find that the workload is too much or the tasks do not align with your skill set, then communication with managerial staff is key as to not get overwhelmed with complicated tasks in the long term. The manager should then adjust tasks accordingly and with minimal adverse effects.
- Delegate tasks where appropriate. If a project includes a sub-task that you know one of your workers would be able to do much faster and easier than you, it is a good use of time to delegate the task to that person instead (but only if they have the time themselves).

Moreover, organised employees are able to balance their personal and work lives, but crucially, not to merge the two (Porteous, 2022). To do this, consider the following:

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

- Set realistic deadlines
- Take a lunch break
- Go home on time
- Take your holiday leave
- Leave your work at work
- Participate in work functions
- Establish open and professional communication
- Sign up for workplace training programs to develop and improve your skills
- If required, seek training to manage and develop skills

Digital organisation skills also are important in an SME. Digital organisation can encompass both your individual computer usage (for example, properly labelling and storing files and emails in different folders, arranging frequently used applications front and centre on your desktop or dock, and bookmarking links you visit often) and shared digital resources (for example, using digital project management tools to manage your team's tasks, and creating master documents with resources your team can refer to regularly). In other words, improving organisational and time management skills are the result of both individual and corporate practises. Both types need each other in order for the workforce to fully adopt this philosophy and work optimally (Pettit, 2020).

To improve digital organisation, it is crucial to decide what things will be saved where and how. Immediately recycling junk mail and unneeded papers, filing crucial papers promptly, and making quick decisions on issues that require approval can help to avoid a messy desktop. When applicable, communicate those new rules to everyone on your team who will have access to those resources. By communicating this, you make sure that they are aware and thus organised in their minds (Duzynski, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

To summarise, SME managers need a clear understanding of organisational skills and time management and possess those skills themselves. It is important for management to create an environment that encourages and rewards such attitudes. SME managers should know that these skills are able to be improved, and employees can acquire them during training or during their daily work. This makes it so that a person with limited soft skills but with good hard skills has the chance to develop or improve them. It is also paramount for these employees to understand how these soft skills

ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

work in harmony with their hard skills, and that not following them will have a negative side effect on themselves and the SME as a whole.

It is advisable for SME managers to either implement systems of organisation themselves or to hire external trainers to do it for them. Making sure that employees have to-do lists, calendars, and a way to organise files/emails is the bare minimum in order to stay on top of deadlines and responsibilities at work.

Lastly, it is important that managers are open to communication about their employees' workloads; not only will it make the employees feel that they are listened to and respected, but shifting work around between staff members when one of them is overwhelmed will increase efficiency as well.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

You will learn about two online tools which are designed to enhance organisation and time management skills. The two tools are Microsoft [OneNote](#) and [Trello](#). You will learn about their various features and how to implement them effectively in a team.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of using the aforementioned tools are:

- To enhance communication between all members of your team
- To understand the importance of delegating and taking on responsibilities to improve organisational and time management skills
- To increase transparency and see whether employees are working to deadlines and/or if they are overwhelmed with tasks
- To transfer these skills to other similar tools/ programmes.

MATERIALS

Computer and internet access

TIME

60 minutes

TARGET GROUP

All employees of SMEs

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

In any business, it is doubtful that its workforce will be able to enforce organisation and time management without utilising some form of software that facilitates this process (Scoro, 2022). Using software not only allows you to manage tasks and note down important task and ideas, but it gives management an indication of your workload and progress on said task. It is also a way to be honest and transparent with your colleagues (Ntask, 2020).

The first tool, Microsoft One Note, may already be familiar to you. Its purpose is to be able to take notes and construct them in a way that are adaptable and shareable with colleagues. While there are various ways for this programme to be implemented, Nimble (2022) suggests that it be used in a collaborative and functional way when attending online meetings. This is what will be detailed in this module.

The second programme is Trello. Trello is a comprehensive organisational tool and possibly the most commonly utilised tool out there (NTask, 2020). Apart from it being used as a simple collaborative calendar, it is used a task management system that assists with workflow and can easily be used to coordinate bigger operational tasks (such as projects).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

It is important to note that many variations of the 2 aforementioned tools exist and different businesses will use different programmes. However, these two were chosen as they are the most comprehensible while being lucrative with their potential. However, the skills learnt from these activities will allow staff to transfer these skills to using other similar programs. The idea is to be adaptable.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

For Microsoft OneNote, the tasks are as follows:

1. Decide on an upcoming time to test the tool, preferably during a meeting so that all employees can be present and participate. This can be done in an online meeting or in person.
2. Before the meeting, write down detailed notes in Microsoft OneNote and also invite other members of your team to participate in noting their ideas on the shared document. It should be highlighted that emails and text messages can be linked and copied into the transcript directly.
3. During the meeting, share your screen and continue with your presentation while highlighting various points you have noted on OneNote. By doing this, you will find it easier to communicate with others on the call and they will comprehend your ideas better.
4. Ask your team for feedback, preferably through a questionnaire, on the simplicity and comprehensiveness of OneNote in effectively demonstrating you and your colleagues' ideas.

For Trello, the steps are as follows:

1. Decide on an upcoming project or group activity for which you would like to use Trello.
2. Decide on the tasks and roles of each member and allocate them accordingly on Trello.
3. Pick a workspace board on the Trello website/ app.
4. Invite all members using the dedicated email link option so that all members can view their task.
5. As the project progresses, check in with members to see if they have completed tasks to the deadline and to what part of the project they correspond. If someone has too many tasks, then the workflow and workload should be adjusted accordingly.
6. Once the project has ended, ask participants to fill in a questionnaire about their opinion of how efficiently the workflow was managed using Trello. These comments should be taken on board and adjusted when using Trello or a similar task management tool in the future (Trello, 2022)

ABOUT THE TOOL

CONNECTION WITH (SKILL)

Both of these tools are fundamental to SMEs regarding organisational and time management skills. Firstly, Microsoft OneNote allows workers to collaborate effectively and share their ideas so as to foster the brainstorming process. This can be very beneficial as not only does it give them more content to use, but also increases motivation amongst employees as there is a certain drive to make these ideas come to life. Furthermore, in terms of management, it gives a clear idea on how much work employees have. It also allows managerial staff to see if they are on track both in terms of quantity and quality of the content. If not, then it is easier to plan interventions as to not have to deal with any crises last minute. Lastly, the feature of including emails and other data from other platforms makes everything interconnected and gives a clear picture of how business operations are functioning.

Trello is at the heart of organisational and time management skills. Before, big tasks may have seemed very overwhelming for employees as it was difficult to comprehend all of the activities that the big task entailed. Now, with Trello, each person can see a breakdown of the necessary activities they need to complete, the sub-activities that it comprised of, as well as its type and deadline. Having this visually laid out on one screen makes tackling large tasks more comprehensible and achievable for employees and employers. They are therefore more motivated as it is clear where they need to start and the order of the activities they need to complete. Lastly, for employers it also allows them to justify and equally distribute tasks and to not overwhelm one person over another. Being overwhelmed causes a lack of productivity in employees, whereas breaking large tasks down into small, achievable chunks, employees tend to find the tasks less daunting and more realistically achievable. Therefore, implementing a system like Trello is fundamental to ensuring your team's organisational and time management skills.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

You will learn how to use the Who/What/When matrix, a simple design tool to simplify the organisation and distribution of duties and tasks.

OBJECTIVES

The matrix brings three main advantages to the development of a project.

1. Communication

Each person knows his or her role clearly and at a glance with this project responsibility matrix.

2. Improved time and team management

Responsibilities are defined from the outset, which facilitates coordination between members and the taking of responsibility. In addition, each person will know what task he or she has to perform.

3. By dividing roles, excessive workload and responsibilities on one employee is prevented. This reduces employee stress and improves team performance.

MATERIALS

Flipchart or whiteboard, pens

TIME

5-60min

TARGET GROUP

Employees, teams, departments

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

By focusing the discussion on a Who/What/When matrix, you can connect people with clear actions on tasks and a commitment on when they will complete the task. Defining responsibilities and organising is not always easy. This Matrix helps each employee to know his or her duties and functions clearly. With it, it is possible to know who is in charge of a specific activity.

The matrix is also used to distribute responsibilities, which helps to speed up the development of a project and to finish it within the agreed time.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

It is important to clarify that it is most appropriate to apply the Matrix in complicated, multidisciplinary processes or where a considerable number of people are involved. Within this matrix, which details each task, participants will be clear about their responsibilities. This delimitation will allow a balance of workloads and thus a greater structure and cohesion in each of the stages of the project.

NEXT STEPS (v)

WHO 😊	WHAT ↓	WHEN
Bunko	=====	5/10
Morelli	=====	Friday
Chung	=====	1/07
Macannfo	=====	Mon. 9am
Brown	=====	NOW!!
Gray	=====	Friday

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Step 1.

On a flip chart or whiteboard, create a matrix that outlines WHO | WHAT | WHEN.

Step 2.

Although instincts may be to start with the “WHAT” (the tasks and items that need to be done), this approach starts with the “WHO” (the people who will be taking the actions). Put every participant’s name into the matrix in this column.

Step 3.

Ask each participant what concrete next steps they can commit to. Place this in the WHAT column. Each participant may have a number of next steps that he thinks are required or feels strongly about. For each item, ask that person “WHEN” he will have the item done.

Step 4.

Actions don’t take themselves, and people don’t commit as strongly to actions as they do to each other. By approaching next steps “people-first,” a few things change. First, it becomes clear that the people in the room are the ones who are accountable for next steps. Second, by making commitments in front of their peers, participants stake their credibility on taking action, and are more likely to follow through. And third, it becomes clear WHO is going to do WHAT by WHEN—and who has volunteered little or no commitment

Step 5

Strategy

In completing the Who|What|When matrix, you are likely to find that there is a lot to do. This is a good time to ask if there is any way for participants who have committed to little or nothing to step up their contribution. They may be able to assist others in completing their tasks—or their attendance may have been unnecessary.

Although participants are more likely to commit to actions they declare in front of the group, ultimately you are accountable for following up with them after the meeting. You may ask participants to email you their commitments, and you may send the group the full list as an update

ABOUT THE TOOL

CONNECTION WITH ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

This activity is related to time management as it is a tool to manage and improve the performance of a work team by assigning responsibilities and determining by who and when it should be done. It is one of the tools for optimising time in tasks that, due to their nature and complexity, require teamwork. It streamlines communication and speeds up decision-making processes.

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

DEFINITION

In simple terms, team management refers to the administration and coordination of a group of individuals to perform a certain task (Erorus 2018). It became a prominent concern during the late 1960s as head staff struggled to come to terms with more complex businesses and their respective hierarchical structures (Anderson, 1988). On a similar note, the concept of talent management is the process of acquiring the right talent and expertise on board to facilitate a business' various sectors (Ghosh, 2021). It is a strategy that looks for gaps in talent within a working environment and intends to fulfil these gaps.

These concepts are fundamental to any business and cannot be underestimated regarding performance. Effective team management will allow business colleagues both inside the business and external stakeholders to cooperate with each other harmoniously. Equally, talent management can have substantial benefits in formulating business strategies. A company's most important asset is its workforce and gathering the correct talent only adds to a business's versatility (Negi & Patel, 2021).

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES:

- Understand the importance and benefits of talent & team management amongst managerial staff and their employees
- Identify the consequences of bad talent & team management
- Adopt various methods of fostering talent & team management
- Comprehend how effective talent and team management is detected
- Discuss how it can be implemented into the respective business

OUTCOMES:

- Manage the consequences caused as a result of ineffective talent & team management
- Identify talent in employees and allocate tasks to them respectively
- Recognise the need to implement effective talent & team management in a business
- Develop a training programme to reduce the lack of, or poorly executed, talent & team management

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

- Create an amicable working atmosphere that embraces good talent and team management

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT IN THE SME CONTEXT

Universally, employees require good talent and team management to work effectively. Employees rely on cooperating well with their fellow staff in order to feel welcomed in a business. As Maslow highlighted with his Pyramid of Hierarchy, employees need interaction for them to grow as people and flourish (McLeod, 2020). Seeking out and hiring the correct talent will not only improve higher quality operations, but as each employee should have dedicated tasks based on their skill set, they will feel more comfortable in a given working environment.

Within an SME, there is a higher chance that teams are smaller, and therefore there is a higher chance of people interacting with each other. As a result, day-to-day interactions are vital to the functioning of an SME. Due to the nature of SMEs, any mishaps or disagreements between co-workers will not go unnoticed. Therefore, implementing

team management strategies to prevent this can be beneficial. Similarly, allocating relevant talent to where it is needed will give the SMEs a higher chance of growth in a competitive global market.

To put it in a nutshell, Talent and Team Management play a crucial role in recruitment and maintenance of the working force to increase the success of the company. This is done by making the company an appealing place to work, ensuring the recruitment of the right people for the role and working to keep those employees as well as helping them develop in their personal and professional lives.

IMPACT AND EFFECTS

Managers of SMEs require talent and team management because dealing with a smaller team will give them the capabilities to address and supervise their team once the business grows. Understanding its importance and executing it appropriately will facilitate its future implementation.

As mentioned previously, having effective team management allows for shared and aligned goals and objectives. If everyone in an SME has this in mind, then it is very easy

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

to transmit a stronger working dynamic throughout the entire organisation (Emergenetics, 2021). Furthermore, improved talent management leads to a more lucrative recruitment process because an employer can better determine the skill set of candidates and whether they are apt for the job in question (Holliday, 2021). Consequently, this leads to the minimisation of employee turnover as employees will feel more comfortable in their roles.

RISKS

A major risk that most team managers face within SMEs is that some individuals may shirk their duties and leave it for someone else to do. This, in turn, can lead to poor collaboration and diffuse negative feelings towards fellow colleagues (Lumen, 2021). Similarly, a team manager may have difficulty gaining trust from his/her team, especially in SMEs as many managers may have only recently commenced their managerial role. Therefore, gaining trust from peers is difficult but equally crucial for the SME's success. Indeed, a benefit of effective team management mentioned previously is that it allows all members to be aware of

the SME's goals and have everyone contribute to achieving them horizontally. However, if the goals and objectives are skewed or simply incorrect, then it can be difficult for the entire team to first identify them and then collaborate to rectify their faults (ibid, 2021).

Regarding talent management, a risk could be that a manager could overspend and dedicate an excessive amount of time on their recruitment process as a consequence of searching for candidates' profiles to be adjusted to specific company roles. Big expenditures such as this can be detrimental and cause significant cash-flow problems (Kokemuller, 2019). Moreover, within SMEs, the leadership pipeline is often insufficient to carry out active talent management. As an SME, the needs and requirements of the business are hard to pin-point and are sometimes overlooked. This is due to the dynamic nature of SMEs.

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

A well-discussed topic in HR is recruitment. Even in SMEs, where

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

the recruitment and staffing procedures may be more informal and less structured, they still follow a set of policies. For example, effective talent and team management starts with a clear idea of what the business lacks and can subsequently be explicitly announced in one's job description. However, while determining the correct workforce for the company is critical, it does not mean that they will naturally feel part of a team and collaborate effectively. Talent and team management goes beyond simply hiring correctly-skilled employees by also providing them with the resources and environment to succeed and progress while making them aware of it too (Indeed, 2021).

There are various aspects of the talent and team management process in relation to the recruitment process. The key aspects are as follows:

- Planning
- Attracting
- Selecting
- Developing
- Retaining
- Transitioning

These are elements that any employer should be considerate of when recruiting in order to go about

talent and team management in the most effective way (Indeed, 2021 & Valamis, 2021).

WHAT DOES THE EMPLOYER NEED?

Talent and team management can be quite daunting for many employers as it is a very overarching topic that is always in the background of SME operations. Even so, Stobierski (2020) reminds us of some skills that an employer must have.

The first is **clear and effective communication**: The goals and objectives must be clearly explicated to your team in order for a team to function.

The second is **emotional intelligence**: Employers need to be sympathetic and actively reassure their employees. By doing this, employees can build up confidence with their employer and allow them to implement their talent and teamwork skills harmoniously.

The third is **organisation**: As an employer, you will be overseeing various sections of the SME and thus it is important to dedicate your time equally with each section and distribute tasks fairly in order to

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

maintain good morale between the staff and employer. Furthermore, it is important to delegate tasks appropriately depending on the skill set of each employee for tasks to be completed efficiently.

The fourth is **delegation**: Finding the right balance between delegating leadership to others and taking on responsibility yourself is crucial for a team to work optimally. Equally, delegating responsibility to somebody whose knowledge of that task or sector is inadequate is not a good example of good talent management.

The fifth is **openness**: This complements the aforementioned aspect of emotional intelligence. Being open to colleagues will allow them to open up to you. As well as aiding them emotionally, this aptitude will allow an employer to better evaluate an employee's skills and make any talent adjustments if necessary.

The sixth is **problem-solving**: As an employer, one must be able to anticipate and handle crisis management. One must evaluate the situation and rectify it in an efficient manner that does not adversely affect their employee relations.

The seventh is **decision-making**:

This is at the core of effective talent and team management. An employer needs to make the correct choices for all members of the business to collaborate favourably to the business' needs and objectives.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE IT?

If an employer possesses a mind for talent and team management, they will undoubtedly already possess some of the aforementioned qualities; however, how this diffuses across the entire organisation may be more obscure to identify as it can often be diluted with other successful strategic elements of the business (Valamis 2021). Even so, there are some results that can substantially hint at a good talent and team management implementation. They are as follows (Tedgui, 2021):

- An increase in the number and quality of applicants for a specific role
- Improved and more professional resolutions revolving around crisis management
- Decreased dismissals and resignations

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

- Increase in self-actualisation amongst employees
- Less perceived hierarchy between employees and employer
- Improvement in the quality of products and services
- Healthier financial accounts

HOW TO DETECT (SKILL) IN EMPLOYEES

Once you as an employer fully embrace talent and team management, the next phase is to ensure that it rubs off on your employees. According to Tedgui (2021), talent and team management focuses on fostering a high-performance work environment where employees enjoy working. Therefore, the nature of detecting talent and team management in your employees is usually qualitative and trickles down to their overall levels of contentness (Campbell & Hirsh, 2013).

There are many ways to detect that skill based on the elements that an employer should have, as we have seen above in 4.1. If the aforementioned elements are fostered and relayed in a cohesive manner, this should provoke a reciprocal response from employees. These responses are

key pieces of evidence that talent & team management is being implemented correctly. Some of the most evident signs are as follows:

One way to detect this skill amongst employees is to observe their willingness regarding undertaking unfamiliar jobs. There are some employees that do not demonstrate initiative. Talent and team management helps to strengthen the quality of skills they already possess but also encourages them to adopt an entrepreneurial spirit in diversifying their skill set. Therefore, if effective talent & team management strategies are in place, employees should be more willing to branch out (Fuhl, 2020).

Another key sign is their interaction with their employer. As mentioned previously, in order to conduct effective talent & team management, an employer has to portray a level of openness and caring as to make them approachable by employees. If an employee feels comfortable coming to an employer with an issue, whether it is regarding work or personal matters, there is a high spirit of talent and team management in the workplace.

A strengthened and more relatable

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

more relatable relationship between employee and employer can further lead to increased **integrity**. With effective talent and team management in place, employers can expect employees to be more honest with them and develop a professional morale (MaRS, 2020). A crucial factor in gaining an insight to see if your talent & team management strategy has been successful is to ensure that forms of **appraisal**, both written and verbal, are adapted to clearly highlight talent & team management strategies. For example, their performance should depict indicators specifically related to their field to make it more personalised; talent management aims to seek out those most suited for said role. By doing this, employees will feel content with the specific goal(s) they have achieved while having clarity on the improvements they need to conduct (Fuhl, 2020).

HOW TO DEVELOP THIS SKILL

According to Chamorro-Premuzik and Kirschner, “the ability to see talent before others see it (internally and externally), unlock human potential and find not just the best employee for each role, but also the

best role for each employee, is crucial to running a top-notch team. In short, great managers are also great talent agents.” Here are 7 science-based recommendations to help someone develop the talent management skill:

Evaluate in advance. Only a few leaders can be proactive by evaluating in advance whether their new hire has skills that align with their long-term strategy. The majority of them do know what kind of talent they are looking for, but they should act in a way to keep them in the long-term. The point here for a leader is to know where he/she wants to go and to focus on targeted efforts so as to hire someone with skills, abilities and expertise needed to move forward. It’s false for an employer to think that every employee he/she has today, will also stay tomorrow.

Lay emphasis to the correct criteria. Despite on focusing too much on your employees’ past performance and on overrating the importance of their resume, it is better to concentrate on some specific soft skills, which are required nowadays. In other words, instead of examining your employees’ hard skills and technical experience, it is advised

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

to lay emphasis on emotional intelligence, drive and learnability. After all, these are foundational aspects of talent and determine new skills and knowledge acquisition. In the dawn of Artificial Intelligence and its rise in the coming years, soft skills such as the emotional intelligence will play an important role.

First search internally. By searching internally for new talents, not only you do save precious time and resources, but you also increase your chances of success. People who are already your employees, are better able to understand the culture of the company, to navigate its politics and to be loyal and committed to the company. Think twice when as an employer you would like to source better talent. Start from within, because your employees are people who have already been adapted to your company and its functionality and have low rates of voluntary and involuntary exits. Generally, internal candidates are not paid more than new ones hired externally. Last but not least, by promoting internal candidates, you as an employer boost other employees' engagement.

Envision the difference. Be open to accept employees that differ from you and other members of your team. Embrace people who challenge traditional norms. This is the only way to think about talent inclusively. When you envision the difference, you can hire diverse talents and as a result, your company has high chances of progressing. Change and progress are likely to happen with a diverse team of employees. Consequently, better financial results are about to come on your company's way.

Take evidence-based decisions. Undoubtedly, talent identification is an ongoing process of trial and error. However, there are ways to minimize making a mistake when you decide based on evidence. It is recommended, when you hire someone, to outline clear performance goals that can be easily evaluated by others and see whether your view of their performance aligns with what others think and see. Let your decision of nominating someone as a high-potential employee be determined by data. By doing so, you would be close to take a fair and sensible decision. Even if the future proves this decision of yours to be wrong, at least you would have

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

been based on solid data.

It's time to think collectively.

Collective thinking is essential for achieving common goals. It produces more intelligence and ability than individual thinking. Within a company, it creates a positive mindset that is a guarantee of coherence, survival and thus success. People with different backgrounds come together to turn their unique talents into a high performing synergy. Talent agents know that teams who embrace a "we" attitude and forget about the "I" attitude, are likely to be more productive and successful. So, next time you are hiring a potential talent, think about the following questions: "Will they work well together with the other employees? Are they likely to complement each other? Do their functional and psychological roles align with what the team needs?" On great teams, each individual is like an indispensable organ in charge of executing a specific function, making each part different from others and the system greater than the sum of its units.

Help your team blossom. Just like a plant needs care and water to blossom, a workplace culture

needs the proper care and attention in order to see its employees bloom into their full potential. Great talent agents, such as great managers recognize potential where others do not. Once you have spotted a future talent, your bet is to retain it. There are many ways that you can keep it. First and foremost, you need to help them continue growing. Show them that you care by giving them constructive feedback, by asking them about their workload demand, by knowing how their relationships with their peers are and by ensuring the level of their job security. This can be summed up in what was noted by professors Herminia Ibarra and Anne Scoular: "The role of the manager, in short, is becoming that of a coach".

Regarding the team management skill, here are 10 ways to improve this skill:

Be clear about your goals and write them down. Managers have to write down clear and attainable goals and find ways to measure progress. Different specific goals could be written for managers of different departments. Within a team, the team manager ought to set clear goals and all team members know what is expected of them.

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

Come up with objectives. Objectives are the steps that you must take in order to reach the goals. For example, a goal might be to increase customer satisfaction and the objectives to getting there might include faster shipping times, easier returns and improvements in customer service etc.

Hire competent people. A good manager should set out clear, reasonable, attainable and measurable goals for the department. You can then take the goals that have been set for your department and give them to each employee according to their skill level. Part of your job as a manager is to check on and measure progress of your employees. If you are finding someone who just can't seem to keep up, try setting them up with a mentor, or even break down their job responsibilities so they don't seem overwhelming.

Have regular meetings with your staff. Having regular productive meetings with your staff is key to identifying problems before they get out of control. Problems, issues and bottlenecks will inevitably arise in any organisation. Part of your job as a manager is to identify the issues and correct them before they

become problems. Almost all issues arise because of a lack of communication. A good manager will be the go-between for the team and the managers of the other teams. As long as cool heads prevail, you can almost always come up with a solution that satisfies everyone.

Use the "sandwich" method when dealing with problems that arise from good employees. Everyone makes mistakes, some are small and can be dealt with via a memo to the team or a quick word with the offending employee. However, an otherwise excellent employee can make a major mistake that can cause a serious disruption to your unit's responsibility. These types of problems need to be addressed by you, the manager. As long as this is a one-time occurrence and the employee has not had issues in the past, the sandwich approach is the best. Start by explaining that the employee is valuable to the organisation and that their work has generally been a positive influence in the company. Next, address the problem that occurred and what steps could be taken to avoid similar problems in the future. Close the conversation by reiterating the value the employee has to the

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

company and reinforce the steps that will be taken to avoid the problem again. The idea is to “sandwich” constructive criticism in between two slices of appreciative comments.

Always remember that examples work better than positive or negative reinforcement. Part of your job as a manager is to be an example to those you manage. Be open about your mistakes and the steps you are taking to avoid doing the same thing in the future. After all, you can’t expect your employees to admit mistakes if you’re not the example. There should be a process in place for when things like this happen. Acknowledge the problem, analyse the root cause of the problem, implement procedures to avoid reoccurrence of the mistake, evaluate the solution you’ve come up with, and if it works, move on.

Be smart about building your team. As a manager, you have to deal with a lot of different situations, people and personalities. You are going to be given new and sometimes more responsibilities, including things like budgeting, forecasts, presentations and payroll. So, think seriously about your own strengths and weaknesses in order to be able to hire

accordingly. You want people who will complement your strengths and help you with your weaknesses. There’s an old saying that you should “hire slow and fire quickly.” It’s a good thing to keep in mind, taking your time to find the right person for the job. Once you have trained them and given them all the tools for the job, then you can evaluate them. If for whatever reason they aren’t living up to expectations, then it might be best to terminate them quickly and search for a new person.

Maintain a positive attitude and promote it within your team. People are naturally attracted to others who have an upbeat positive attitude. Having a positive attitude will make your job as a manager so much easier just because people are much more likely to follow you. As for your team, encourage team building activities. We know that not everyone will like or even get along with everyone else, so use team building exercises as a way to make sure that your team stays goal-orientated.

Use positive reinforcement. When that project gets done on time or you made the tight deadline, don’t forget to show gratitude to your

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

team who were the ones that really made it possible. Positive reinforcement strengthens that manager-employee relationship. It can take many different forms and will vary by company; some may allow an extra day of paid time off (PTO), give gift cards, give public recognition or just a private acknowledgement from you. Whatever form it takes, it's important that their achievements are appreciated.

CONCLUSIONS

Talent and team management is:

- an ongoing process that focuses and aims to utilise an individual's strengths for the greater benefit of the team. To state it briefly, it is being able to identify and develop the skills of the individuals within a team in order to enable them to work towards a bigger goal.
- crucial for any business to operate favourably. All staff should be aware and collaborate on common goals. If this is not achieved then it can lead to a lack of consistency amongst the businesses operations and create internal conflict.
- important for SMEs as it works to ensure that employees are utilised based on their skills and

- strengths. This ensures that the roles are filled by the right people for the job in order to achieve the company's goals more effectively and efficiently.

Some skills that an employer must have for an effective talent and team management in an SME are: clear communication, emotional intelligence, organisation, delegation, openness, problem solving and decision making. Some ways through which you can detect team and talent management skills are by observing employees' willingness regarding undertaking unfamiliar jobs, observing employees' interactions with their employers, increasing integrity in a workplace and adapting written and verbal forms of appraisal.

There are many ways through which team and talent management skills can be developed. Being a great manager is, in large part, about being an expert in talent matters. The most important part of this process is to never stop thinking about your employees' potential and talent, especially if your aim as a manager is to build a high-performing team.

All in all, as a manager, by giving your employees the proper training up-front and practicing good

TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

communication techniques, you can minimise the time you spend fixing mistakes and focus on delivering on-time projects and attracting new business. This can mean a huge increase in productivity at minimal costs.

In conclusion, effective talent and team management is the key for an organisation's success and sustainable growth as it allows them to retain top talent while increasing productivity. It is important that talent and team management procedures should be integrated across all aspects of human resource management in SMEs.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

You will learn about how to use the SAP Success Factors platform in order to improve the employee experience by seeking out talent within current and future employees.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of using this system is to improve the employee's quality of life which, in turn, will generate greater efficiency for the business as a whole. SME employers and employees can use it to:

- Improve the recruiting process
- Increase diversity
- Improve employee management
- Increase retention
- Improve succession planning
- Improve the onboarding process
- Create opportunities for training, growth, and career advancement
- Improved overall employee experience

MATERIALS

Internet access and the ability to download

TIME

This is a tool that should be used throughout the course of the business' life. As a result, there is not a time limit per se.

TARGET GROUP

Employers and employees of SMEs

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

Organising and directing an SME is a lot more dangerous than one might imagine. Changes in the external environment can have a great impact on business outputs. More well-established businesses can usually adapt easier and are more resilient to changes. However, such changes can severely detriment SMEs if crisis management is not appropriated (Millar, 2013). Consequently, it is crucial for SMEs to utilize some type of talent management platform, such as the SAP Success Factors platform as to ensure the resilience of its workforce.

SAP Success Factors is a cloud-based talent management system that offers exceptional HR solutions for seeking and rewarding notions of talent in the workforce. It considers HR cloud payroll, time tracking, benefits administration (including integrated software regarding recruiting), onboarding and performance monitoring, and compensation. All of these aspects are designed to bring the most appropriate expertise, and consequently, talent, out of each individual employee so they can be accurately rewarded as a result. For managers, it also gives very clear classifications of talent amongst the workforce. This means they can adjust the workload and move employees around to where they should excel (according to the platform). It also helps in recruiting new employees by thoroughly analysing their skills and potential. Overall, this platform can improve employee enhancement and drive the productivity of the business (Santora, 2021). This results in excellent team management within the SME.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

For employers, it is important not to disclose all details and results indicated by this platform. Otherwise, it could impose unnecessary stress on employees who see that they may not be excelling as planned. It can also create a negative competitive atmosphere between employees who may try and gain bonuses and benefits outlined by the platform. Therefore, if sensitive information is disclosed, it should be held confidential between the employer and relevant employee.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

The steps for implementing this activity are as follows:

1. Pay for an SAP Successes Factors subscription (the free trial starts from \$2.18 per user with software packages starting from \$1000+ per package) and discuss with other managerial staff whether it should be tried out for a few months. Ensure that all managers are aware of what it does and the competencies it highlights.
2. Use the tool by [exploring which product](#) best cover your needs for about three months with new and future employees and record their level of experience and satisfaction.
3. Ask for feedback from employees regarding their experience and quality of life within the company and compare it to the last quarter's opinions.
4. If there is an increase, both through quantitative and qualitative indicators. Keep the employees on at the company as and continue to use the tool.

CONNECTION WITH TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

The SAP Success Factors platforms is fundamental for the advancement of talent and team management. Today, with many people going into higher education, it can be very difficult to determine the skills and abilities of an individual simply based on paper. Equally, one cannot fully anticipate their behaviour or work ethic when placed into various business settings (Reitsma, 2022). As a result, it is more important than ever for employers to decipher the talent within its staff. Using such a platform helps facilitate this process, which in part benefits employees as they are placed in a section of the business that is better tailored to their skills. Additionally, it frees up time for the employer to carry out more pressing business operations as well as interact on a more personal level with their employees so as to build rapport between both parties.

OVERVIEW

WHAT AM I GOING TO LEARN?

You will learn about the Eddy platform, which is designed to facilitate employers in seeking out talent (predominantly during the recruiting process). Eddy is a paid subscription platform.

OBJECTIVES

The Eddy platform has various benefits that it offers to employers, particularly those of SMEs, as it can save valuable time and monetary resources when hiring new employees. It was made with the following objectives in mind:

- To improve management
- To reduce employee turnover
- To enhance quality of life and experience of employees within the company
- To ensure more efficient business operations
- To reduce the risks of conflict and crisis amongst staff

MATERIALS

Internet access from managerial staff

TIME

To be trialled for three months and, if successful, to be used throughout the life of the business.

TARGET GROUP

Employers and directors of SMEs

ABOUT THE TOOL

DESCRIPTION

Nowadays, sifting through many different CVs of potential candidates for jobs can be difficult. As an SME, the process can have severe adverse effects if the correct people are not chosen as the lack of morale and inefficiency can easily spread to multiple business outputs. In an extremely competitive market, SMEs cannot afford many drawbacks as they run a much higher risk of liquidation as well as the knock-on effects (Reitsma, 2022).

Therefore, platforms such as Eddy exist to prevent these risks from being a reality. Eddy is an HR tool that is designed to manage the talent of your current and future employees. It provides a clear outline of scheduling interviews as well as rating various candidates based on their performance and the soft skills they claim to acquire. These details are laid out in a comprehensive list that allows employers to make more accurate decisions when hiring candidates (Eddy, 2022). Also, Eddy provides an easier way to deal with administration and onboarding processes to save time and increase productivity on an employee's first day at the company. Additionally, the platform allows for easy storage of employee profiles.

Therefore, in the case that staff need to be allocated, employers can make more informed decisions based on employees' profiles, which are highlighted all on one page. Besides this, it also manages the following talent categories:

- Time tracking
- Paid time off (PTO)
- Training tracking
- Payroll

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

This platform is designed for employers of SMEs. Therefore, employees should not be too focused on this platform unless it is brought to their attention by senior members of staff.

This should be done in confidence so that no other employees have access to the information within. Otherwise, this can create unhealthy competition amongst employees along with behaviours that are not consistent with the business' mission or vision statements.

ABOUT THE TOOL

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

The process of implementing the Eddy platform should be as follows:

1. Management should decide on a time to use the platform and all be in agreement to use it. This should preferably be at a time when the business is looking to increase its workforce and hire multiple employees.
2. The members of staff involved in the recruiting process should be made aware of the software and understand how to use it during the process; they should be able to document their results from the interview processes.
3. Managers should see the results posted on Eddy of each candidate and make informed decisions on which candidates to hire.
4. Once these decisions have been finalised, their profiles should be created and recorded on Eddy to monitor their progress.
5. After 3 months of using the tool, get feedback from the employees and have them share their outlook regarding their experience at the company. Managers should also give them monthly reports with constructive feedback.
6. If the comments are positive, then the Eddy platform should be used in the long term, too.

CONNECTION WITH TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT

The Eddy platform is useful in seeking out and undertaking talent and team management roles. It provides managerial staff with a complementary and comprehensive way of seeking out key talent amongst its current and potential workforce. Also, it also frees up time for managers to undertake more pressing matters for the business while still ensuring that they have made a more multilateral decisions when hiring candidates. As a result, employers of SMEs who use Eddy can maintain a high level of talent and team management skills.

CONCLUSION

SOFT SKILLS IN SME MANAGEMENT

Booklets are printed materials with four or more pages, containing details about a business, event, product, promotion, etc. They are also known as catalogs or pamphlets, and are usually created to communicate a message to a wide variety of audiences.

ABOUT THE PROJECT



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



FELLOW TRAVELLERS: SOFT SKILLS FOR HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN SMES

This e-book was created within the frame of the Erasmus+ project "Fellow Travellers: Soft Skills for Human Resources Management in SMEs," or FETRA for short. This project is aimed at recent entrepreneurs without training in human resources abilities. The soft skills for managing human resources will help entrepreneurs for the success of the company. One of the most important factors for competitiveness and success in entrepreneurs and SMEs are the importance to know how to manage your staff.

Thus, the FETRA project provides tools for recent entrepreneurs to be able to assess their level of soft skills and attain these skills in order to utilise them for the success of the company.

DISCOVER MORE

If you are interested in reading more about the project and discovering other useful products for SME managers, you can find more information on our website: <http://www.fetra-erasmus.site/en/fellow-traveller/>

You can also follow us on social media:



www.linkedin.com/company/fetra



<https://www.facebook.com/FETRAproject>

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