

Five steps to building a cohesive team



Team cohesion is the foundation of a high-performing, motivated workforce. This article explores its benefits and outlines five practical steps you can take to strengthen cohesion within your team.

What do we mean by the term 'cohesion'?

Cohesion, in the context of the workplace, refers to having close bonds, common goals and a sense of trust within your team, a key factor in being able to perform strongly.

You could say it's a bit like 'team glue' - it's what keeps people aligned, motivated, and working effectively together, even when things get tough.

Team cohesion is often described as a dynamic process that reflects how likely a group is to stick together and stay united toward common goals - a concept defined by Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer, leading researchers in team psychology.

What benefits can it bring to employees and organisations?

A multitude of studies have shown that cohesion is beneficial in a workplace setting and that the more cohesive a team is, the better the performance, also that high performing teams are more likely to be cohesive.

Benefits for people

- **Increased job satisfaction** – helps to foster a sense of belonging and purpose.
- **Helps reduce stress and anxiety** – supportive team dynamics can help people better manage workplace stress, and make challenging tasks feel more manageable.
- **Greater psychological safety** - when cohesion is high, people feel safe to express opinions, admit mistakes, and ask questions.

- **Collaboration and learning** – cohesive teams are more likely to share ideas, feedback and knowledge with each other.
- **Improved motivation and engagement** - when people feel connected to their team, they're more likely to stay motivated, engaged, and committed to their work.

Benefits for organisations

- **Higher productivity** – better communication and trust helps teams to work more efficiently.
- **Improved employee retention** - strong team bonds increase employee loyalty and job satisfaction, which can help to reduce turnover.
- **Better innovation** – people feel more comfortable sharing ideas and giving feedback, leading to greater creativity and more resilience to change.
- **Stronger organisational culture** – cohesion fosters a sense of shared purpose and values, which supports a positive company culture.
- **Reduced conflict and mismanagement** - team cohesion can help to minimise interpersonal conflicts.

How can I help my team to build cohesion?

As a team leader there are multiple ways, traits and actions which can be taken and adopted to increase cohesion within a team.

Here are five things you can try.

1. Set goals

You may have come across the term 'SMART goals' (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) - which is the standard framework for setting effective goals. But one element that is often left out is the importance of aligning organisational, team and individual goals.

Structuring and setting coherent and easy to follow targets so that each member of the team can easily follow how working towards and accomplishing their own aims fit into those of the wider team and company can really drive cohesion and performance.

As a leader you can encourage this through regular one-to-ones with those in your team, collective team goal setting in group meetings, and clear guidance on organisational goals - outlining how personal and team goals align with these.

2. Communicate, communicate, communicate

Teams who talk more are generally more cohesive. Encourage open and honest communication within the team by allowing team members to share their opinions, thoughts and feelings freely.

Share feedback often and be honest with your team, create an environment where everyone feels comfortable contributing without fear of judgment, and schedule regular meetings to review progress and allow questions.

3. Work together

Collaborative working helps build confidence and trust among team members while also providing valuable opportunities for learning and development.

In today's flexible work environment - with remote working and varied start times - fostering

collaboration can be challenging. However, by encouraging teamwork and scheduling around people's availability in line with project lead times, you can create environments that promote rapport, idea sharing, and a stronger belief in shared goals.

This approach is particularly effective for integrating new team members who may initially feel hesitant or unsure about contributing in group settings, helping them feel welcomed, supported, and valued.

4. Allow autonomy

Empowering members of the team to lead on projects, follow their own ideas and take on extra responsibility can benefit cohesion through increased trust.

When team members feel they have ownership over the activities, tasks and issues of the group, they are more likely to work together as a team to handle these situations and take responsibility for their role in them.

5. Make it enjoyable!

Take an interest in team members personal lives and interests. It is important that teams also feel relaxed and comfortable with one another and by organising team building events where work is not the focus, cohesion can be improved.

In team meetings ask about topics unrelated to work, ask individuals to share experiences and knowledge away from their professional lives, and encourage team socialising.

Further support

CIPD – Building a cohesive team.

CIPD – Hybrid working, and things to consider around communication.

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