Creating the right team climate
during the Covid-19 crisis

- **There has never been a more important time for effective team working**
- **Teams play an important role in providing social and emotional support**
- **They need time to reflect and work through things together**

With clients asking how they can maintain good team working and psychological safety during the pandemic, AOD asked **Professor Michael West** for his take on helping team members to support one another at work.

Support within teams

Teams play an important role in enabling people to cope with everyday work challenges and in providing the social and emotional support that contributes to the quality of each of our lives, both at work and more generally.

"The teams in which we work play the most important role in our work lives," says Professor Michael West, AOD Advisory Consultant. "They enable us to deliver high quality for the people we serve and they are crucial in ensuring our own health and wellbeing."

Teams tend not to discuss team climate but, according to Michael West, it is fundamental to effective functioning:

"Team climate refers to aspects of teamwork such as compassion, warmth, humour, management of conflict, mutual support, emphasis on status and professional distinctions, participation in decision making, information sharing, the value placed on diversity and difference, level of criticism of each other's work and support for new ideas."

Here are some pointers on how to create a favourable climate at work and make a positive impact upon the mental health and job satisfaction of individual team members:

Frequent interaction

- Take time to reflect and talk things through together as a team - the more difficult the environment, the more important it is to take time out to reflect
- Provide warm expressions of welcome when team members reconnect or new members join the team
- Give attention and support to all team members and not just those with whom you feel personally compatible
- Encourage those who work in multiple teams or short-lived project teams to identify their home team (usually, but not always, the most senior team) where they spend more time, get more support and discuss their learning needs

Positivity and growth

- Encourage a sense of belonging and community within the workplace through positive, enthusiastic optimism
- Support other team members with information and practical assistance, and help them to appraise problem situations
- Enrich roles by considering skill variety, autonomy, feedback loops and other job characteristics
- Provide opportunities for learning, growth and development
- Acknowledge shared values and goals

Mutual support and concern

- Take the time to show interest and concern about the lives of others in the team
- Pay attention to how team members are showing up – is their behaviour different for a reason?
- Consciously express gratitude - saying thank you has a ripple effect
- Look after yourself and set aside time to model self-care as a legitimate and important priority for others around you
- Be an active, open listener – listen with fascination
- Enable and support each other in finding a balance between home and work life - the lines between the two can be somewhat blurred at the moment, so it is more important than ever
- Develop a relaxed, enjoyable atmosphere
- Recognise your limitations in providing emotional support and recommend professional help where needed

Stability, continuity and freedom from chronic conflict

- Resolve conflicts early - stability of team membership makes a real difference here but, if that is not possible, focus on the following
- Develop wider understanding and tolerance within the team about differences in views and approaches
- Encourage team members to communicate respect for each other's competence and commitment
- Emphasise the team's shared goals and inter-dependency of outcomes - take opportunities for team members to develop a sense that 'we are all in this together'
- Separate the people from the problem - be tough on the problem, empathetic to the people

Support for teams during recovery

With so many of us redeploying away from our home teams, taking on entirely new roles or working at a different pace in recent weeks, AOD is developing options for those teams needing support and harnessing learning as they come back together:

- Focusing on reconnection, restoration, reflection and building team resilience
- Providing a framework for supportive discussions
- Sharing the learning across multiple teams

Interested in hearing more? Please get in touch with Sarah-Jane Dale, AOD Chief Operating Officer on 01252 727270 or helpdesk@affinaod.com

Research references

This paper is adapted from the book 'Effective Teamwork' by kind permission of Professor Michael West – see Chapter 10 – Team Support

Baumeister and Leary (1995) The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. Psychological Bulletin 117, 497-529