## Tutor notes for the Team Roles residential school activity

An ongoing issue is that cultural norms and the hierarchical nature of society in Myanmar is not helping TIDE to get mixed teams to work together effectively. At the same time, TIDE has been promoting the practices of the (OU) course team as being very important for the creation of open and distance education resources and courses. This was first done in the context of three webinars on OU Processes (Module production; module presentation; and programme development) that also covered the many layers of quality assurance and enhancement that operate at the OU. A further attempt at fostering effective team working are the notes in an Annex of the Phase 2 OER development activity for the 2019 cohort which is also included here).

I have based this team building activity on one I found online called All The News Team Building Activity. In turn the page I found this on says: *This activity is from Vasudha Deming’s “The Big Book of Leadership Games”, which is a fantastic team building resource with 50 fun games for groups. In this activity, the group is tasked with creating a mock-newspaper with headlines based on what they think the department/company will achieve in the near future*.

What follows is an adaptation of the online notes:

Group Size: 6 – 20 is ideal. Each small sub-team should have 3 – 6 participants.

Total Time: 90 minutes

15 minutes to brief and setup

45 minutes for the activity

30 minutes to review and debrief

Running the Activity

Explain the activity: Each sub-team must create a poster that describes the educational practice and educational technology knowledge and skills that they, as a team, could offer to other people in other departments in their university

Hand out stationery and pens to each group.

Once they are ready, they can begin the activity.

At the end of the activity, each sub-team is to pin up their poster so that everyone can read them.

Once everyone has read all the posters, get them to discuss what they think about them, whether they think there are other knowledge and skills they need to acquire, and how they can work together to achieve them.

During the review, ask the group about any knowledge or skills that they found especially interesting or unexpected. Discuss the implications of those knowledge and skills for what TIDE could or should be doing (note that this may relate to what they will have to do on the Thursday when they are planning the first Residential School for the 2020 cohort).

Other questions to ask:

How did your team decide on what to include on the poster?

Did everyone agree with the list? If not, did you have to compromise?

Did others in the team listen to what you said? Did everyone have their input?

What can you, as an individual, do to help bring make your team work more effectively?

Finally, there are some slides you can talk to that reinforce the main points about effective team working that were part of the OER development Phase 2 instructions and that also remind them of the different roles that people can play in course teams at the OU.

## Annex Managing team processes

What steps do managers need to take to ensure that their teams are working effectively on a day-to-day basis? We set out the most important ones in this section, which covers mainly throughputs and some advice on management. Consider what you might do to make a difference to the management of a group or team you are responsible for, or what you might do differently with a future team.

1 Team goals and objectives

A team needs clear goals that members believe are important and worthwhile. A team is more likely to be effective if it can participate in developing team objectives and work out how they are to be achieved, even if the team’s overall goal has been imposed from above. Discussions should lead to action planning, including specific milestones, timetables and monitoring activities to keep the team focused and to create an appropriate sense of urgency. Defining a measurable output gives the team a framework to work within.

2 Ground rules

The team needs to establish a mutually agreed working approach. The means of participation and expectations of the team experience should be agreed on. Discussions will inevitably consider the norms and values held by the team and what rules are needed to preserve these.

Team members will also need to discuss process issues, such as how the group evaluates and self-regulates itself (that is, how any performance issues will be addressed) and how conflicts are managed.

3 Allocating tasks

The allocation of tasks, responsibilities and priorities of individual team members is usually done, at least partly, through joint discussion and negotiations in the team. If the team has a manager, it will be the manager’s responsibility to see that this is done effectively. Usually the process will be supported and strengthened by regular supervision and appraisal. Key questions for the manager to ask are:

1. Has work been fairly distributed between team members?

2. Have roles and responsibilities of team members been decided?

3. Has each individual member taken personal responsibility for at least some aspect of the team task?

(Source: adapted from West, 2004)

4 Developing individual contributions

Based on their prior experience, team members will bring assumptions and ideas about how teams should operate, what is expected of them and what they can expect from the team-working experience. These assumptions, ideas and expectations may not be appropriate to the current situation. Conversations are essential to bring to the surface any possible tensions. Questions for the manager to address here include:

1. How well do the tasks allocated fit with the person’s preferred ‘role(s)’?

2. Who has the skills and experience to handle a particular task competently and efficiently?

3. Who will find the task useful for their development?

4. What further training, development or support might an individual need?

5. Developing trust

A reasonable degree of trust is an essential ingredient of any successful relationship. Without trust, communication will deteriorate because people will begin to hide their views or try to impose them.

Each member of a team must take some responsibility for the development of trust, although team leaders and managers have the greatest responsibility and the greatest influence. Trust is likely to develop when people listen to and respect each other’s views, irrespective of whether or not they agree with them. Then they are able to share their ideas and views without fear of recrimination.

A team manager can help to ensure the development of trust by involving team members in setting team and individual goals and by giving the team members the necessary autonomy to carry out their tasks without undue interference. Managers should take care, however, that delegating responsibility to team members does not result in abdicating responsibility – that is, ceasing to monitor the performance of team members. A team must also have ways of monitoring and giving feedback on the performance of its members. Any effective team will need to conduct regular reviews.

The higher the level of trust a group has, the easier it will be to deal with conflict when it (almost inevitably) occurs.

6. Arriving at consensus in a team

Conflict is perhaps most likely to arise in team work during decision-making. You can help to avoid unnecessary conflict by ensuring that individuals see and understand the logic of what you are proposing, by exploring and discussing the proposals and by making sure there is agreement before proposals are finalised. Some guidelines are:

1. Present a position logically, pointing out strengths and weaknesses and illustrating with examples.

2. Try to avoid using your extra power as team leader or manager.

3. Demonstrate the benefits as well as any disadvantages of the proposal.

4. Avoid changing your mind or agreeing with something because this is easier than promoting or defining what you regard as a good proposal.

5. Remember that consideration of a variety of ideas and opinions is likely to be constructive.

6. Make sure that everybody has access to all the information needed to reach considered opinions.

Sometimes during the life of a team, conflict can run so high that communication is impaired and intervention may be necessary. At such times, the team will need to examine its own progress. Here, the manager or leader will need to:

• ensure that behaviour between members is appropriate

• reinforce and support desirable behaviour

• be prepared to raise the issue of inappropriate behaviour

• create a sense of fairness by empowering or sharing power across team members

• make sure the team goals are shared.

(Source: adapted from Hill and Farkas, 2001)