


A successful team is one that learns from its past, from its environment and encourages learning continuously.

These tools can be used to harness the knowledge in the team, problem solve and plan for the future to ensure the team continues to perform.

### Knowledge Stocktake



To establish the concept of being a learning team

To understand the strengths and areas to develop in collective knowledge

The knowledge within the team can be difficult to appreciate—more experienced members may know more than they are credited for, while newer members may have skills needed in the future. This tool assesses the gaps, and also starts to set a mind-set that modern working means not knowing everything, but knowing where to look.

I. Set the time aside for the “Knowledge Stocktake” of the team.

II. Explain that there is value in gaining an understanding of the team’s collective knowledge.

III. Ask each of the team “what knowledge or experience do you think you can bring to the team?”

IV. Compile these as the strengths of the team.

V. Ask each of the team “What knowledge or experience do you think may be missing that is critical to the team and what we are trying to achieve?”

VI. Compile these as areas of development.

VII. Ask the team “What do you think we

will need to know for the future?”

VIII. Compile these skills and ask the team to rate themselves against these.


IX. Finally, ask “Who do you know or where can we go to address these gaps?”

X. These resources could be found internally such as IT or HR/OD, or they could be external such as internet resources, team training or studying for qualifications. The modern work place isn’t about knowing everything, but being committed to learning and self-development so you can develop continuously.

XI. Agree how this should be recorded in order to set the team learning goals and provide a reference for the future.

**Things to think about:** “Authentic Leadership” involves (amongst other things) admitting that the leader does not know all the answers—would you be comfortable doing this with your team?

### The Pre-Mortem



To use the thinking power of the wider team to anticipate problems that might lie ahead

Rather than discussing failure after it has happen, a pre-mortem allows the discovery and exploration of the concerns of team members in advance. As the group produces their concerns, they also moderate them and time is spent to collaborate around what could possibly be done to mitigate any risks that are identified or avoid them entirely.

I. There are many ways this can be approached but one example would be to “think gloomy”.

II. In this case, ask the team to imagine that they haven't been successful in achieving their end goal, their service delivery or a project. Say that something has gone wrong, but what happened?

III. Give each team member time to write their thoughts, worries and concerns on a post it.

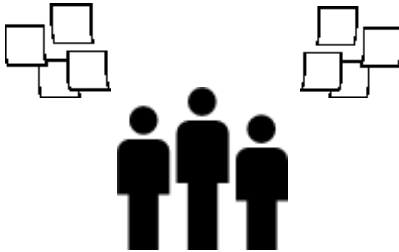
IV. These can then be posted around the room and the teams are invited to circulate and review these.

V. Each team member has two votes to identify the issues they feel are most

relevant or likely scenarios. After they have done this, give them one more vote to add to a post it.


VI. The top three topics are discussed in groups, and each feeds back with the actions that should be put in place to avoid these problems occurring.

VII. The actions are then noted and circulated to all team members. They can be a basis for future discussions, or the exercise could return at a later date to explore more of the issues.



**Things to think about:** This idea uses the notion of “the wisdom of crowds” - where collecting answers from a wide variety of people can produce better information than relying solely on experts.

### Lifting the barriers to creativity



To remove the blocks a team puts in place which inhibit creative thinking

When faced with a problem and a need to find a solution, we sometimes focus on the immediate barriers to change and do not think past these. This is a powerful form of self-inhibition, and the act of thinking creatively as unlocked by this tool is to look past that problem, and by doing so, also make the case for its removal.

I. Explain to the team that we have a habit of self-inhibiting or inhibiting each other by immediately identifying the barriers that will stop a good idea from being implemented.

II. Ask the team to pause and imagine they have the power to temporarily make that barrier disappear. This could be a process, a technological issue or a management issue.

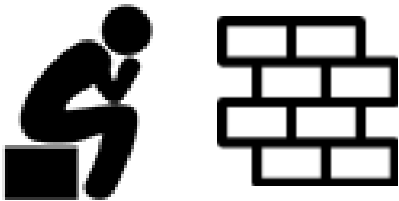
III. Now the barrier is no longer there, encourage the team to continue to work through the idea, detailing the

benefits of it and fill out all the actions needed to make it work. This could be identifying the resources needed, stakeholders to inform/influence and the skills and time needed to realise the idea.

IV. Explain that they have now established the compelling case for the idea ask the team if the case for it is now strong enough to tackle the barrier.


V. Focus on the barrier and consider how to solve it as a problem and work out a plan how to get around it.

VI. If the problem requires investment to overcome, then the benefits discovered here and the remedies to the problem can be incorporated into the business case.



**Things to think about:** There are a range of tools that can be used to facilitate problem-solving—Forcefield Analysis being one of these (see the **Problem Solving** manager toolkit)

### How are we performing?



To track a team’s perceptions of their ability to work as a cohesive unit, to learn or to problem solve.

This tool asks everyone to take part in feedback to monitor how they feel they are progressing against a number of measures that will form the Team’s Key Performance Indicators. The team can decide what these are, or they can be aligned to behaviours or the manager’s preferences: the value is being able to watch these for trends.

I. Agree the principle of regular feedback against the KPIs with the team. Examples of behavioural KPIs are below:

II. Decide on the method of data collection and the frequency—a simple online tool the University has access to is Bristol Online Survey.

III. Agree the cycle of monitoring, who

will administer the questionnaire and how the data will be reported back.

IV. When the first report is complete, discuss with the team and agree what action might be necessary.

V. Implement the agreed actions and repeat the cycle through the agreed dates. Form plans to address any declines and celebrate team strengths.

High Score	Behavioural Indicator	Low Score
The culture of the team encourages open admissions of weaknesses and mistakes	Trust	It is dangerous to admit making a mistake in this team
I feel that the team consistently treat each other respectfully	Respect	There are many occasions where team members act disrespectfully to each other
I believe the team are all committed to a single One Team ethos	“One Team” ethos	I see the team as a group who work independently of each other

**Things to think about:** At first people may be uncomfortable and give answers that don’t offer much insight so be prepared to stick with the process—it is the long term trends that are most valuable.

## Manager Toolkits

more available at <https://www.aston.ac.uk/staff-public/hr/organisational-development/leadership/managers-toolkits>