Learning Unit 5
Functioning and interacting in a team

After completing this Learning Unit, you will be able to function in a team and interact successfully in oral communication, by successfully completing the following:

- Take up responsibilities in the team and apply group work conventions in learning situations.

- Ensure that team work results in meaningful product or outcomes.

- Ensure that active participation takes place in group learning situations.

- Make contributions to group work that are appropriate to the task and nature of the group, and promote effective communication and teamwork.

- Participate in interviews, formal meetings, discussions, debates or negotiations to successfully establish a relationship appropriate to the context, and provide a non-threatening opportunity for participants to share information.

- Practise conflict management and negotiating techniques in a defined context.

Functioning and interacting in a team

In order for a team to be effective we should consider the interaction between people from diverse cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds.

Interaction and co-operation can be shown by team members':

- willingness to learn from each other
- recognising that everyone brings strengths to the group
- willingness to share ideas, power and expertise
- willingness to stay focused and staying on task

5.1 Function in a team

The main focus of this unit is on how to function in a team.

Much of this unit has been covered before when you were doing group-work in a range of contexts, so we will merely refer to the appropriate skills where relevant.

5.1.1 Take up responsibilities in the team and apply group work conventions

Effective group work requires all members of the group participate fully. Not everyone has the same personality, however, and some people in a group are more dominant and others are more modest.

Turn-taking and rotation of roles

To make sure that everyone does participate, group work should follow certain conventions. You will recall that in the Class Activities we made use of these conventions, when we gave each person in the group a role to perform, and we also said that each member should support the others in their roles, and that the roles would rotate in another project.

Conducting

This role includes the organisation of information sessions; training workshops; brainstorming and/or mind mapping activities. The activities included in this role may vary.

Chairing

Chairing the team's learning activities means that you will have to guide them. Make sure that they stay on track with the assignments, discussions and other activities. This role also means that you would take the role of Chairperson at all the meetings that are held.

Recording

If you are given the role of recording, you are responsible for recording the milestones or achievements of the team and/or the individuals within the team. You would also record attendance at the various meetings or functions that your team attends. Your function would also include the recording of all assignments completed and submitted, together with the uncompleted tasks and/or assignments.

Reporting

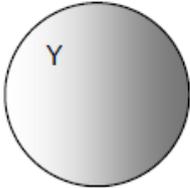One member of your team will be required to report back to Management on the progress, the activities and problems that the team may have faced.

5.1.2 Ensure that team work results in meaningful products or outcomes

Consensus is a form of decision making which tries to reach the most inclusive position possible. It is often contrasted with the system of voting in which people take a yes-or-no

position. Reaching consensus means reaching a broad agreement in which everyone makes a slight compromise, but where there is enough common ground for everyone to be "satisfied enough" to go forward.

Consider the following situation: X needs to make a decision with Y[1]

DECISION A X   Y
DECISION B X   (overlapping circles)   Y
DECISION C Y (single circle)
In Decision A, we see that X and Y have come into contact in their negotiation, but they have ended up with nothing in common. In Decision B, there is a small overlap where they share some common ground, but most of X and Y are not in agreement with each other. In Decision C, there is still some part of each that is not in full agreement, but we can see that they have reached a point where they share a lot of common ground. Which of these is a consensus decision?

Consensus has been emphasised throughout this module as it is a strategy for group work which allows us all to stay included in the group, agree to disagree on smaller issues, but to still co-operate on the basis of a broad agreement.

An example of consensus was when, in planning our project, we reached agreement on our planned timeframe for completing the project.

5.2 Interact/participate successfully with oral communication in group learning situations

Communication can be defined as "the exchange of thoughts, messages or information" (Encarta encyclopaedia, 2000).

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[1] Sourced by Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance from AgriSeta learning material

Let us explore that definition a bit further. When we communicate, we give or exchange information by, for example, speaking (oral) or writing. To communicate may mean that we show or transmit a thought or feeling by writing, speech, or a gesture (non-verbal communication), so that this thought or feeling is clearly understood. It may also refer to people understanding each other.

Promote effective communication and teamwork

We have worked in pairs and groups throughout this unit. As pointed out before, this encourages our creative thinking and our ability to learn. Sometimes participating in a group means that active listening takes place.

5.2.1 Make contributions to group work that are appropriate to the task and nature of the
group

From the definitions given in the above example, we can see that **interaction** is a key concept in communication. When you communicate orally, you always do so with an **audience** - a person (or number of people) who hears what you are attempting (trying) to communicate. Notice that we have used the word attempting - not all communication is successful or effective. When people fail to communicate successfully or effectively, this leads to misunderstandings and misinterpretation.

Our aim should always be to communicate as clearly as we can. To do this we need to understand a number of different elements about communication.

Firstly, we need to understand that the person/people we are attempting to communicate with (our audience) is very important. Generally, even if we are quite shy, we have a number of friends or family members with whom we communicate in a relaxed and easy manner. These are small informal groups.

5.2.2 Participate in interviews

Now, let us look at groups that are found in the work or study place. Basically, groups have one or more of the following features:

- Groups consist of a number of people who define themselves as belonging to the particular group.
- Groups generally meet regularly or for a specific length of time.

The group consists of individuals who interact with one another (both verbally and non-verbally).

- Different members take on different roles in relation to one another.
- A group generally has a well-defined aim and a specific task to perform.
- There is generally a group leader.

A group has a **specific purpose** - the purpose might be to decide on a method for completing an assignment, to discuss a new hydration scheme in a particular area, or any other well-defined aim.

A group has an **agenda** - a reason for meeting and a list of items that need to be discussed in order to fulfil its purpose.

A group will have a **procedure** to follow and a set schedule – for example the group may decide to have a preliminary meeting to discuss possible dates for reseeding and then to have follow-up meetings to finalise the procedure to be followed when doing the reseeding.

When a group is **meeting**, it is important that developments in the group are monitored – someone needs to record what is happening in the process.

A group must maintain **focus** - people often get side-tracked in a group and wander off the topic that should be discussed. Generally the group leader needs to ensure that the group is reminded of why they are meeting and that the focus is maintained.

A group needs to **draw conclusions.** It is pointless if people are just having a general discussion if no conclusion is being drawn. For example, the group may conclude that certain time periods are unsuitable for reseeding and that they will first have to do some research on the topic, then meet to finalise a date.

In order for effective communication to take place in a group setting, constant **feedback** must be given to members of the group so that they know how they are performing and how the group is progressing.

All members of a group need to feel a **sense of ownership** in the group's final decisions for them to feel that they have done an effective job. If this does not happen, members of the group will feel bored and left out and they may not want to communicate.

1. **How do we ensure that the contribution you make to the group is appropriate to the specific task at hand?**

   In order to do this, you must keep in mind what the specific task is. When you are sure your contributions is related to the specific task, then go ahead and make your point clearly and concisely.

2. **How do we ensure that the contribution you make is appropriate to the nature of the group?**

   When you are going to make a contribution think of who your audience is. Is what you wish to say appropriate in terms of the nature of the group? If you feel that it is, then make your point clearly and concisely.

3. **Most importantly, how do we ensure that you promote effective communication, which in turn will promote effective teamwork**?

   Remember that your audience is critical. Always bear in mind that for communication to be effective, your audience needs to understand exactly what it is you are trying to say.

   Communication is effective when the message you wish to convey is the message your audience receives.

   If you are not sure whether your communication has been clearly understood, try asking a question. The answer will usually indicate whether your communication has been effective. Effective teamwork happens when members of the team communicate their ideas and feelings clearly and listen to one another in an attentive and respectful manner.

Interviews and interview techniques

We have looked at group situations in some detail. We will now look at effective communication in an **interview** situation.

An interview can be described as a specific type of interpersonal communication.

The word "inter" means "between". There are generally two people present at an interview - the interviewer, who is conducting the interview; and the interviewee, who is being interviewed. This person can also be called the "respondent". An interview is a process in which the

interviewer obtains ideas, information and feelings from the interviewee for a very specific purpose.

Interviews take place in a wide variety of contexts. In the workplace, for example, you may conduct an interview with a prospective farm worker in order to assess his/her suitability for a position you wish to fill.

Certain key elements need to be in place to ensure that an interview is an effective form of oral communication.

An interview is an oral communication in which it is important that:

- a relationship that is appropriate to the context is successfully established

- a non-threatening opportunity for participants to share information is provided

What do we mean by this?

If it is important that the people you are interviewing know that what you are discussing will not be used against them, or spread around. For that you need to gain their trust. You could do this by informing the interviewees that what they tell you will remain confidential.

If it is important that the person you are interviewing gives clear and concise answers. You should then provide or create a context in which you maintain a clear focus on the issue at hand. You could do this by requesting the interviewee to be as precise as possible when answering the questions and to include only relevant information.

If you wish to communicate effectively with the interviewee in an interview situation it is very important that you create a non-threatening environment. Your tone of voice and manner should be friendly and encouraging and you should do your very best to put the interviewee at ease. When interviewees do not feel threatened or that they are not under attack they will be more willing to share information. Communication will then be more effective.

Now let us look at some key elements of an effective interview. For an effective interview you need to take the following steps:

- Draw up a plan of what information you wish to receive and how you are going to do this.

- Do some background research into the person you are interviewing; at the very least you need to know key facts like his/her name; age status; job position; etc.

- Sequence or order your questions in a logical manner. In order to do this you must be very clear about what information you wish to obtain (elicit) from the interviewee.

- Be prepared to be flexible - if an interviewee gives an unexpected answer or answers a question in such a way that your sequence is disrupted you must be flexible enough to accept the answer and still ensure that you maintain your focus. This means you must listen attentively and actively to all the responses.

- Organise the responses you have obtained in a clear and logical manner.

- Draw conclusions in a precise way. At the end of the interview you must know exactly what information or data you have elicited and what you can conclude on the basis of this data.

5.2.3 Participate in formal meetings

Thus far we have looked at two forms of oral communication, namely that which occurs in groups and that which occurs in the interview situation. We are now going to look at a third occasion during which oral communication plays a vital role, namely in meetings.

In almost all work environments one has to participate in meetings. The purpose of different meetings may vary, or you could be asked to attend regular set meetings on a weekly or monthly basis. As in all forms of oral communication, it is important that your participation in these meetings is effective. It is vital that everyone clearly understands the purpose and context of the meeting.

In order to participate in a formal meeting in an appropriate manner you must be familiar with some key concepts related to meeting procedures and organisation. Some of these are listed below.

Notice of the meeting: This is an oral or written communication that indicates the intention to hold a meeting; it will usually also stipulate the date, time and venue of the meeting.

Agenda: This is a prepared list of items that are to be discussed at a meeting; an agenda will usually contain apologies from members who are unable to attend; confirmation of minutes (the written record) from the previous meeting; matters arising from the minutes; a list of items to be discussed at the present meeting; any other business; conclusion.

Committee: This is a group of people who reports to a higher authority.

Committee members can be voted for or appointed.

> The Chairperson appointed Ms Mohammed, Mr. Parker, Ms. September and Mr. Plaatjies to form a committee to compare the efficiency of different planting methods for grapes.

Minutes: This is the official written record of who was present at the meeting and what was said by people at the meeting; it will also record decisions made for action to be taken.

> "After much discussion during which Ms Le Grange expressed her dissatisfaction with the present arrangements for staff transport, the meeting decided to purchase a dedicated mini-van that would operate after hours, transporting workers to their homes"

Point of order: This is a way of calling the attention of the Chairperson to the fact that you think an irregularity in procedure has taken place. The Chairperson is required to decide whether this is indeed so or not.

Chairperson: This is the person who runs (or presides over) the meeting. When addressing a point to the chairperson you are required to be formal and use the words "Madam Chair" or "Mr Chairman". The chairperson is in the leadership role during the meeting. He or she has to control the proceedings; he or she has to call for apologies; confirm the minutes of the previous meeting; make sure the agenda is followed; rule on points of order; exercise the casting vote in the case of a voting tie; sum up the decisions of the meeting; confirm the date of the next meeting and declare the meeting closed.

Suggestion for learners:
Think of a recent work meeting you have attended. How could the Chairperson have improved his/her chairing? Write up a few guidelines for "good chairing practice"'.

Motion: This is a proposal that is put to the meeting regarding an action or in order to show a certain attitude. Motions are proposed as positive statements.

> Example:

Mr. Habib proposed the following motion: all plant order forms to be signed by the treasurer. The motion was seconded by Mr. Bezuidenhout. The meeting indicated by a show of hands that it was in favour and the motion was adopted.

These are some of the main components of a formal meeting. It is important that you understand all of these in order to participate effectively and appropriately in a formal meeting. Remember, this is another example of oral communication and you have to clearly understand the context for effective participation to take place. In this way you will ensure that you make a valuable contribution towards realising the objectives of the meeting.

5.2.4 Participate in discussions and debates

We are now going to move on to look at other forms of oral communication, namely **discussion**, **debate** and **negotiations**. Again in order to communicate effectively in these two arenas you will need to be aware of the context and the audience.

What do we mean when we say we are going to discuss or debate an issue?

To **discuss** means to consider a question in open and usually informal debate. To **debate** means to talk or argue about an issue; to talk about something at length and in detail, especially as part of a formal exchange of opinion. Debates can be an organised or public meeting with the aim of discussion: or an argument. The word comes from the Old French "debat", which is originally from Latin "battere" meaning to fight. Debates can be formal or informal.

Formal debates follow certain set procedures:

- The topic for debate is always stated in the positive, e.g. "Genetic modification of plants is unhealthy".

- There are then two opposing speakers (or teams of speakers), one that supports the motion and one that opposes it.

- Both speakers are given an opportunity to put forward their ideas and then questions from the floor (the audience) are allowed. After that each speaker (or one member of the team) is allowed to sum up.

- Then the debate is adjudicated (judged) by an impartial source.

- The adjudicator must decide which side presented the strongest arguments.

- Finally the proposed motion is either accepted or rejected.

It should be apparent to you that in order to convince someone of your side of the debate, effective communication is critical. Arguments must be presented in a clear and unambiguous manner; research into the topic for debate must be done and effective listening skills must be used when listening to questions from the floor.

5.2.5 Participate in negotiations

Another form of oral communication that often occurs in the workplace is **negotiation.**

To negotiate is to discuss terms of an agreement; to attempt to come to an agreement on something through discussion and compromise. Negotiation takes place between two parties, who are attempting to decide what each party can offer the other in exchange for something else that they would like to have.

Once again, context and audience are critical factors in this type of oral communication.

Negotiating techniques

There are certain key elements, which can determine whether or not negotiations are successful. For negotiations to be successful, the negotiator needs to do the following:

- Get as much background information about the issue and the other parties involved in the negotiating process as possible.

- Do an analysis of the needs of the other party in order to make sure you understand their point of view.

- Ask as many relevant questions as possible, to ensure you understand the facts relating to the issue and a clear grasp of the attitudes of the opposing party.

- Make positive statements about what you are prepared to do in order to encourage the other party to lower their demands.

- Listen as attentively and actively as possible to make sure you understand exactly what the other party is asking for;

- Pick up cues from non-verbal communication - remember that body language says a lot about how someone is feeling; observe closely to see whether the opposing party is being aggressive or tentative or firm in their approach.

- Stress common interests before highlighting differences.

- Be as flexible as possible.

- Make sure that minor differences have been sorted out before moving on to the bigger issues.

- Keep a cool head and be as rational and logical as you can; do not allow emotion to cloud the issue.

- Do not threaten the other party - always try to reach a compromise.

- Make sure that neither side loses face or feels hurt or humiliated by the negotiating process.

Once again we can see that effective communication will lead to a more positive outcome for all the parties who are represented in a negotiating process.

Conflict management

In occupational learning programmes, communication skills may be needed in order to deal with conflict. Conflict can take different forms. It can be a minor disagreement over a minor issue and quickly blows over. At the other extreme it can be a long-term, ongoing opposition between two people. The conflict is not necessarily noisy; it may not be expressed in words but in hostile deeds. Sometimes there is a build-up of anger to the point of violence. One thing that is always there is a fixed attitude; a situation of deadlock. Conflict management is the skill of shifting such an attitude from a deadlocked opposition to one where the people in conflict are dealing with their hostility.

People usually experience anger in a negative light and people who happen to be nearby are often keen to stop the conflict by trying to get the participants to stop being angry. Unfortunately this may make it worse. Another way of understanding conflict is to see the anger as the result of some other feeling, such as fear or frustration, and to manage the situation so that the person can express the feelings behind their anger. If both people can express such feelings,

and can hear and understand the feelings of the other person, the situation will change. There may still be grounds for conflict, but what changes is how people deal with it.

Class Activity 5: Functioning and interacting in a team

Please follow the instructions from the facilitator to complete the formative activity in your Learner Workbook.