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**Further Education College Clerk
Development and Training Programme Resource Pack**

Module 4
Working Relationships

For suggestions on how to get the most out of these self-study materials, see the booklet on 'Using the Materials'.

Contents

Introduction

Welcome to Module 4, which explores a range of models, theories and practical techniques for managing relationships with other people in organisations. The clerk has a key role to play in ensuring the governing body conducts its business efficiently, operates within its powers and follows procedures. Good working relationships are key to this.

Effective group interaction, team-working and harmonious relationships are essential to the productivity of any organisation. In order for groups and teams to function well within organisations, everyone needs to feel valued and to respect the feelings and emotions of the other group and team members. Each person needs to look at his or her own behaviour and the effect it has upon others, as well as understanding the behaviour of others and the effect that has upon him or herself.

Achieving a balance is not always easy. There are several ideas and techniques that can help people to analyse their own and other people's approaches to building effective professional relationships, and to decide on practical steps to improve effectiveness in working with other people, building on previous experience and expertise. The principal, clerk and chair each play a crucial role in providing professional support and guidance.

Aims

By the end of this module you should be able to:

- explain key processes and skills for working with groups and teams;
- analyse skills for self-management and apply these to your own and others' interactions;
- apply assertiveness skills to help manage difficult situations;
- identify common barriers to communication and discuss strategies to help;
- consider the diversity of perspectives and interests represented on the governing body, and strategies to help a sense of common purpose.

Contents

Mark the sections you want to study and tick them off as you complete them.

To do	Done		
		Section 1	Effective working relationships
		Section 2	Communication
		Section 3	Power, influence and politics
		Section 4	Working with groups and teams
		Section 5	Managing self

Working on the self-study activities

These materials have been designed to be used flexibly (e.g. dip in and out for reference; complete in one sitting; work through alone or with others).

Where you need to make notes in response to activity questions, we suggest you do this in a notebook or on separate sheets of loose-leaf paper, and store the information you compile along with the module for future reference. References listed in the Further Reading section may also be helpful.

Section 1. Effective working relationships

As clerk it will be your role to work with the governors and senior leaders to create the environment where constructive relationships are maintained. Managing relationships and behaviours with professional detachment requires a degree of self-awareness, skill and sensitivity in dealing with other people. This kind of working environment throws up a whole range of pressures on the day-to-day relationships that governors and the senior leadership team need to maintain.

A key aspect of managing relationships is being honest, open and direct. This is the core of assertive behaviour, which we look at more closely in this section.

Different types of behaviour

Clear, honest, open communication and assertiveness can help to reduce stress in interactions with other people. To understand what assertiveness is we must, first of all, be clear about what it is not. The checklist below gives examples of three different styles of behaviour that are not assertive: aggressive, indirect and submissive. Most of us tend to vary our style of communication depending on the circumstances and who we are talking to. Sometimes, however, an individual consistently uses a style which gets in the way of genuine dialogue.
Behaviour checklist
Aggressive behaviour is directed at satisfying the individual's needs without taking into account the needs and feelings of others. Examples include:

- making other people's decisions for them;
- making decisions without taking account of the views of people affected by them;
- 'putting down' other people who don't agree with your point of view;
- interrupting a lot;
- blaming someone else when things go wrong; or
- arguing for the sake of it.

Indirect behaviour is directed at satisfying the needs and feelings of others while concealing or denying your own. Indirect or manipulative behaviour is one form of hiding your own needs and feelings. Examples include:

- making other people's decisions for them while trying to make them feel they have made their own;
- appearing to consult but making your own decision in the end;
- using flattery to get what you want;
- making other people feel guilty;
- dropping hints rather than saying directly what you mean;
- side tracking the other person away from something you don't want to deal with; or
- criticising someone or sabotaging their efforts behind their back.

Submissive or passive behaviour is a form of non-assertive behaviour in which the individual denies their own needs. Examples include:

- allowing others to make decisions for you;
- keeping quiet about what you really want so the other person doesn't realise how important it is to you;
- being persuaded into something against your will;

- complaining behind the scenes about not getting what you want, without saying it directly to the person concerned; or
- avoiding confrontation by trying to smooth things over that really need to be dealt with.

Assertiveness is a key skill that can help you to better manage yourself, people and situations. It can help you to influence others in order to gain acceptance, agreement or behaviour change. Assertiveness is not about aggression, dominating or dismissing others in order to get what you want. Nor is it passive, failing to express yourself adequately, being self-doubting or timid. It is the ability to express your opinions positively and with confidence. Assertive people are in control of themselves and are honest with themselves and others.

Activity

Reviewing different styles of behaviour

- Use the bullet points above to analyse your own style of behaviour. As a clerk in a governing body meeting, you may also find it useful to analyse the styles of the governors and the senior leadership team, especially those individuals with whom you sometimes have difficulty communicating.
- How do you tend to react to each of these styles of behaviour in other people? How do colleagues react?

Viewpoint

Doing this activity may give you fresh insight into your own or someone else's behaviour. An individual who tends towards one particular style may do this deliberately to block honest communication, or may be completely unaware of their behaviour and its effect on other people.

We each tend to respond differently to unhelpful styles of behaviour in other people. One person may respond to aggressive behaviour, for example, by becoming more submissive to avoid conflict, while another person may react by getting more confrontational themselves. This can set up a vicious circle in meetings. Individuals in a group/team may establish a pattern of behaving and responding to each other's behaviour that gets in the way of productive discussion.

Assertive behaviour enables an exchange to take place with another person based on openness, directness and mutual respect. It involves negotiation on how the different needs and feelings of both people might be met. There are specific strategies that can help us to feel more assertive:

- respect the other person's rights to express opinions, make mistakes, make decisions, change their minds;
- expect the same respect for your own rights;
- be specific, say what you would like to happen
- keep to the point
- keep it short
- persist if this is appropriate
- let the other person know how you feel in a neutral way
- use 'I' to talk about needs and feelings: 'I feel frustrated because...'
- give confident explanations rather than being apologetic or self deprecating;
- repeat an important point calmly rather than getting frustrated or sarcastic
- listen to and acknowledge the other person
- show you are listening by nodding, making eye contact, taking notes
- ask questions rather than responding with statements
- summarise what the other person has said, when appropriate

We will now look at how you can use an understanding of behaviour styles to develop your own skills in this area.

Activity

Analysing your own behaviour styles

Think of a situation, preferably in your role as a clerk, in which you have used different styles of behaviour. Make a few notes about each incident and the circumstances and personalities that caused you to behave in the way that you did.

For the examples of aggressive and non-assertive behaviour, think about what stopped you from being more assertive. What do you think you might have done differently, in the light of the suggestions above? You might find it useful to draw up a sheet along the lines of the example below to work through this activity.

Style of behaviour	Example	What stopped you from being assertive?	What could you have done differently?
Passive	I just let the governors defer the item on self-assessment AGAIN when I knew it was important and I should have insisted.	Governors can be very irritated by this topic; concern that I will make the situation worse and fear about the impact their responses will have on me.	Maybe acknowledge their anxiety and my own. Consider the situation from their perspective to open up a new choice of responses.

Viewpoint

This kind of analysis may help you see more clearly what was happening in a difficult situation or relationship that you or a colleague had to face. A mismatch in styles of behaviour is not always the problem, and often not the only problem. However, being aware of your own style and other people's means that you are better able to analyse what is going wrong in communication between individuals, and to make choices about how to respond.

Our behaviour towards each other is affected by factors such as personality, position in the organisation, power, perception, mood and history. We cannot expect to behave in the same way all the time because the chemistry involved in interacting with other people is unique to each event and incident. However, developing an awareness of ourselves, and how we respond to others is a key dimension of our professional development. By developing assertive behaviour, we are more likely to have our own needs met and to be meeting the other person's needs at the same time. This in turn increases our self-confidence and improves our working relationships with others.

Robert Bolton and Dorothy Grover Bolton in their book 'People Styles at Work' (2009) identify four behavioural styles which may also be helpful to consider: analyticals, amiables, expressives and drivers.

Analyticals are people who are less assertive and less responsive. Emotionally restrained, they rarely compliment others or get excited. They are organised and systematic. They crave data - the more

the better. They are slow decision-makers because they want to make sure they have carefully weighed all the facts.

Amiables are, like analyticals, less assertive, but more responsive. Friendly and generous with their time, they are excellent team players. They aren't flamboyant creators, but rather diligent, quiet workers who do what's asked of them.

Expressives are, like amiables, more responsive. But they are also more assertive. They're friendly and empathetic like amiables but aren't as low-key about it. Flamboyant, energetic, and impulsive, they are the most outgoing of the people styles.

Drivers are, like expressives, more assertive. But they are less responsive. Decisive and task-oriented, they focus intently on the job at hand. In conversations, they get right to the point. They are purposeful and energetic, just as expressives. But expressives are concerned about people as human beings. For drivers, there's no time for such concerns.

NOTE: There is no right or wrong style. Each style can be a good place to be. It is also important to note that one's dominant style is a tendency. Each of us may exhibit aspects of each style, and few of us exhibit all the tendencies of our dominant style. The style we adopt is also situated: who we are at work, for example, is not necessarily who we are at home.

Section 2. Communications

Communication is key to a successful and effective board. Much communication is still formal, through board packs. This section looks at key aspects of communication; how individuals interpret the same experience differently; factors that get in the way of clear communication i.e. barriers to communication; and the value of giving and getting governing body and senior leadership team feedback, so as to develop a shared understanding and common purpose.

Communication strategies

We often hear of difficulties in colleges defined as 'communication problems'. It seems to be a catch-all for all the ills, mistakes and misunderstandings that characterise college life. The essence of survival in any organisation is to be able to communicate effectively. For a clerk with a specific role to play it is essential.

Communication strategies, systems and practices do play a central role in high performance, influencing the energy levels for change and improvement. Effective communication requires effective strategy - a coherent plan of action. The activities and further reading in this section should enable you to identify common barriers to communication and discuss strategies to help.

Improving communication means giving attention to the words you use, how you use them and your ability to listen. An important aspect of a clerk's interactions with other people is presenting your case and your views to others.

How we interpret the world

The process through which communication is structured is often fraught. How many times have you witnessed an event, say a film or TV programme, or a conversation at a social or business event, and then heard someone else's account of it conflict with your own? We tend to expect everyone to see things the way we do, so it is a bit of a shock when they have a totally different view. If people disagree in their understanding and interpretation of shared experiences, how much more difficult is it to get across ideas and opinions about something that is outside the other person's experience altogether?

Factors that get in the way of effective communication

No matter how good the communication system in an organisation is, unfortunately barriers can and do often occur, and may include the following:

Language: the communication message might not use vocabulary that is understood by the receiver; for example, too much use of technical or financial jargon.

Noise: various things stop a message from getting through or being heard, e.g. poor connection, background noise, distractions, too many people speaking. Noise appears in many forms – it can also be distractions due to pictures on the wall or objects in the room. In written forms of communication it can be the inclusion of irrelevant material, or an unsystematic approach to the topic.

Overload: too much information can cause problems; for example, overload can slow down decision-making.

Emotion: the relationship between the sender and receiver of communication might adversely affect the message, which could be ignored or misinterpreted.

Gaps: too many intermediaries, e.g. too many layers in hierarchy through which the message has to be passed, might prevent or distort the message.

Inconsistency: if people receive conflicting or inconsistent messages, they may ignore or block them.

It is essential to put in place strategies to deal with the barriers you identify. By overcoming barriers to communication, you can ensure that the statement you are making, individually or collectively, is not just heard, but understood by the person or people you are speaking to or communicating with.

The different types of barriers to effective communication can all reinforce each other, leading to vicious cycles. By anticipating potential barriers and attempting to avoid them wherever possible, the impact of communication can become greatly increased.

Giving and getting feedback

Because of the difficulties already considered, seeking feedback from the receiver of communication is crucial to make sure the sender has succeeded in conveying what they wanted to convey. This checking helps to ensure mutual understanding.

"Does that make sense?"
"What do you think about that?"
"Tell me what you think I said. I'm not sure if I was being very clear."

It is useful to get in the habit of giving feedback as well as asking for it, by paraphrasing or reflecting back what the sender has said or asking for clarification if the meaning is not clear.

"Let me just check. You want to..."
"What do you mean when you say...?"
"Can I just clarify...?"

Another important form of feedback is non-verbal communication. Non-verbal signals often convey our feelings. We sometimes say one thing while feeling quite the opposite. Facial expressions, posture, vocal intonation and inflection often 'leak' what we are really feeling.

Activity

Giving and getting feedback

Work through the questions below to identify areas where more feedback would help you in your work.

- How often do you ask for feedback from your colleagues on the governing body?
  Often   Sometimes   Rarely   Never
- How often do you consciously give feedback to your colleagues?
  Often   Sometimes   Rarely   Never
- Identify one person whom you would particularly like to ask for feedback, and note down when and how you will do it.
- Note down one person to whom you think it would be useful to give feedback, and work out when and how you will do it.

Viewpoint

This activity may have reassured you that you do give and get satisfactory feedback from most colleagues, but it might have made you aware of certain working relationships that could significantly benefit from better feedback. If you think this may be difficult, start by giving and asking for feedback on small issues or in 'safe' situations. See what the results are, and build from there.

Appreciative feedback is also worth considering, where we might look for opportunities to celebrate and highlight, for example, achievement, persistence, ingenuity, creativity, character, service, high standards, and positive behaviours overall. It respects unique contributions and outstanding endeavours. 'Systematic appreciative feedback' focuses on envisioning people at their very best.

"Appreciative governance offers a set of principles that help intentionally design structures and processes to capitalise on individual and collective strengths, as well as maximize the capacity of the whole".
Introducing Appreciative Governance. International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry, November 2011.

Consider different types of giving and receiving feedback. How does each approach help or hinder effective communications?

Defensive routines

Defensiveness is one of the major barriers to effective communication because when we are being defensive we are often too preoccupied to hear what the sender is trying to convey to us.

Management theorist Chris Argyris argues that all exchanges in organisations are designed to avoid threat and embarrassment. We want to act in ways in which we are in control and so we build up what he calls 'defensive routines' which ensure the preservation of our control. Sometimes seeking feedback in the way suggested can activate one of those routines, such as denial. Even so, seeking feedback does shift the balance in the interaction.

Carl Rogers suggests that most responses to attempts at communication fall into one of five categories:

- **evaluative** in which the listener, in effect, tells the sender what to do;
- **interpretive** where the listener implies what the sender should think;
- **supportive** in which the listener seeks to reassure the sender;
- **probing** where the listener wants the sender to elaborate further; or
- **understanding** where the sender seeks to confirm that the listener has heard accurately.

Activity

Analysing how your governing body communicates
During the next meeting of your governing body, observe the effectiveness of the communication:

- how much giving or seeking feedback is there?
- to what extent do people talk across each other?
- which of the five categories do most responses fall into?
- who tends to make evaluative or interpretive responses?
- is there congruence between the content of what people are saying and the non-verbal signals they are giving?
- when there is mutual understanding, what do you notice about the quality of the exchanges?
- what concrete examples of appreciative governance are you observing?

Viewpoint

Standing back to observe our own and other people's interactions can be very illuminating. Sometimes this awareness can help us to work out why communication with someone else is difficult, or why it seems to be going wrong, and find ways of putting it right. If you have found it useful to work through this section and observe the interactions of your governing body, you may consider further training or development in this area, either individually or as a group. Communicating is an essential skill for governors and the best way to develop good communication is by practising with other people.

Carl Rogers suggests:

"We can achieve real communication and avoid an evaluative tendency when we listen with understanding. This means seeing the expressed idea and attitude from the other person's point of view, sensing how it feels to the person, achieving his or her frame of reference about the subject being discussed."

['Barriers and Gateways to Communication', Carl R. Rogers and F. J. Roethlisberger, Harvard Business Review](#)

Dialogue - points for reflection

Most of us have a rosy view of ourselves as communicators. Rambling, not listening, talking over people, these are things other people do. But what about you? What are you like to talk to? Have you ever asked anyone? What would they say? And what would you do if the response was negative? Consider the following in the context of your role as a governor.

Definitions of dialogue

From [David Bohm](#), 'On Dialogue', 1996, Routledge:

"The object of a dialogue is not to analyse things, or to win an argument, or to exchange opinions. Rather, it is to suspend your opinions and to look at the opinions – to listen to everybody's opinions, to suspend them, and to see what all that means..."

From William Isaacs, [Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together](#), 1999:
"Dialogue is a conversation in which people think together in relationship. Thinking together implies that you no longer take your own position as final. You relax your grip on certainty and listen to possibilities that result simply from being in relationship with others – possibilities that might not otherwise have occurred."

From Patricia Romney, [The Art of Dialogue](#):
"Dialogue is focused conversation, engaged in intentionally with the goal of increasing understanding, addressing problems, and questioning thoughts and actions. It engages the heart as well as the mind. It is different from ordinary, everyday conversation in that dialogue has a focus and a purpose...Dialogue, unlike debate or even discussion, is as interested in the relationship(s) between the participants as it is in the topic or theme being explored. Ultimately, real dialogue presupposes an openness to modify deeply held convictions."

From Peter Senge, 'The Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership, 2007, chapter 1 page 9:
"The discipline of team learning starts with 'dialogue', the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine 'thinking together'. To the Greeks 'dia-logos' meant a free-flowing of meaning through a group, allowing the group to discover insights not attainable individually...[It] also involves learning how to recognise the patterns of interaction in teams that undermine learning."

Recognising and honouring the conversational rights of others and yourself

"We have certain conversational rights... to take one example — we have the right to withdraw from a conversation if we think the other person is behaving too aggressively."

"Understanding your rights, and those of other people, and choosing when to apply them, is an important aspect of being an effective conversation manager."
[The Art and Science of Dialogics](#)

Preparing for important conversations

"If a conversation is particularly important or complex, it's often useful to consciously prepare for it. First of all, know why you're having the conversation, what your purpose is. Second, get your story, message, point of view or case clear in your own mind. Third, think of the impact your conversation might have on both yourself and your conversational partner and determine how you might need to prepare yourself for the conversation and what you might need to do to help the other person hear what you have to say."
[The Art and Science of Dialogics](#)

Finally, it is worth stressing that many exchanges between people are in reality not aiming to progress towards mutual understanding. Instead they often represent struggles for power and control of one person over another. Reading the politics of the governing body and its meetings is a crucial dimension of being an effective clerk. It is one we shall turn to in Section 3.

Section 3. Power, influence and politics

According to various theories on management and organisations, we are 'sense-makers'. That is to say, we are engaged in reading and ascribing motives to the behaviour of others. Being able to process this information and predict the actions and reactions of others can make us more effective in managing the complexities that confront us in organisations.

People actively pursue their personal goals, and governors and senior leaders in colleges are no exception to this. Individuals perceive and interpret their environment, and subsequently adapt and make choices in line with what they believe is realistic in that context or environment. In these ways people formulate strategies that are designed to fulfil their goals.

However, the way in which we interpret our environment is shaped by our own experience and values; each individual has his or her own 'world view' through which they interpret their perceptions of the environment.

To support each other, governors and senior leaders generally find it helpful to have some awareness of the different interests and world views of their colleagues. Getting progress and understanding on a particular issue will happen more quickly if you are able to start where other people are, and move them towards a shared sense of purpose.

How clear is your understanding of how to embody the values that are consistent with your college, the sector as a whole and your own personal values and beliefs, enabling you to contribute towards building a positive and encouraging atmosphere and sense of common purpose?

The 'transformational changes' facing the sector - highlighted for example in the LSIS report 'The Further Education and Skills Sector in 2020: A Social Productivity Approach' (May 2011) and the Hay Group research, 'Building the new leader - leadership challenges of the future revealed' (2011) - place even more emphasis on the importance of understanding organisational dynamics and having clear strategies for the development of a common sense of purpose.

Activity

Translating between different views of the world
Read the following thumbnail descriptions of four governors, and then answer the questions below.

Nelson Smith works for a local voluntary organisation that works with young black people. He knows a lot of people in the local African-Caribbean community and works with a range of other voluntary organisations. He wants to make sure the college is meeting the needs of young black people. He is used to informal meetings where ideas are discussed and decisions worked out by consensus, and finds the governing body very bureaucratic. He is not perturbed by confrontation or conflict, and thinks it is useful to air differences and grievances.

Pauline Michaels is a retired GP who believes passionately in education. She has spent her professional life diagnosing and treating patients; this involves gathering and analysing information within a short consultation, making rapid decisions and getting things done promptly. She is always willing to undertake practical tasks but she is not a strategic thinker. She finds governing body meetings tedious and says very little. She believes the chair and principal should generally be left to get on with things.

Richard Bryce is a partner in a local firm of solicitors. One of his children attends the college. His professional life involves carefully timed meetings with clients and issuing precise instructions and/or delegating tasks to other colleagues. He is a clear thinker and good speaker, quickly cutting to the core of an issue or problem. He feels the governing body should be more businesslike, and dislikes long rambling meetings where other people say a lot that is not relevant to the issue.

Michaela Jessop is a staff governor. She is a strategic thinker, and quick to analyse the political implications of the issues and decisions that the governing body deals with. She is a good advocate for the staff viewpoint, sometimes outspoken on questions of principle, and has a healthy suspicion of management.

Choose three or four individuals on your own governing body whose viewpoints you sometimes find hard to understand.

- Can you pinpoint things in the selected individuals' background or experience that would help to explain their world view, and their likely response to particular issues? You may find it useful to write thumbnail descriptions like the ones above (making sure to keep them confidential and anonymised).
- Consider how you might translate a particular issue or problem into terms that would make it easier for each of the individuals selected to make sense of it.

Activity

Reviewing your strategies to work with governors and the senior leadership team
Think about a time when you had difficulty persuading members of the governing body or senior leadership team to consider an issue or take a particular course of action, e.g. seeking a decision on when and how the writing of the self-assessment report should take place.

- Use the first column of tick boxes in the checklist below to analyse what strategies you used (mark with a ✓) and what alternative strategies you might have used (note with a ?).
- Use the second column of tick boxes to identify the strategies that you use most frequently. Score 1 to 3 where 1 = I use this a lot and 3 = I use this very little.

Strategies used	Frequency of use	
		Threaten: If you don't do this, then... We must do this or...
		Direct: You must/have got to/should ...
		Moralise: I think the best thing to do is...
		Advise: If I were you I should...
		Cajole: You must do this, so that...
		Sell: You have always said that this has been an area of difficulty for you. I believe that this initiative will overcome those problems.
		Motivate: If we get this done, it will be great because we are then able to...
		Summarise accurately: The key points to bear in mind for this decision are...
		Use logic: The correct thing to do is... The rules say...
		Question to collect information: What do you want to try and achieve?
		Suggest options: The options are either... or...
		Involve: What do you think about...?
		Include: I think you are absolutely right. We need to take that into account.
		Support: Clearly if you see it that way then we must respect your judgement and consider the implications.
		Seek common ground: Are there some things here that we can agree on right away?
		Encourage: That was a good point you made a few minutes ago, can you say more?

Viewpoint

- There is obviously no blueprint here. Your own reading of the situation is important. You need to consider how crucial it is to achieve ownership of the decision and what time is available to make that decision. Obviously getting real consensus on a decision from a group of people will take longer than simply getting formal agreement. However if governors are just instructed to agree to something, their actual commitment to the decision may be severely limited. There is a tension in any decision making between getting through the business efficiently and allowing enough time for information, discussion and persuasion in order to achieve a high degree of commitment. This tension will influence your approach and the strategies you use.

- Broadly, strategies 1 to 7 in the checklist above represent more or less subtle 'controlling' strategies, i.e. directing other people to do what you want. Strategies 8 to 11 are 'rational' strategies, i.e. applying reason or using information to assist decisions. Strategies 12 to 16 are participative, encouraging other people to contribute and feel involved in decisions. Each of the strategies listed is useful at the appropriate time and place. However, if you tend to use one type of strategy more than any other, and if you find you use participative strategies less frequently than others or only very rarely, you may want to think about expanding your negotiating style by trying out some of the strategies that you only occasionally use now.

Being an effective clerk can often require a significant amount of tact, diplomacy and patience. These are key characteristics of the role. However, they should be based on an overriding sense of purpose, direction and focus. Being able to read the intentions, preferences and orientations of others can have a profound impact on your effectiveness. The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) identifies an organisation's shared sense of purpose as *"its identity and 'the golden thread' to which its strategy should be aligned"*.

What deeds, actions and behaviours do you observe that demonstrate a common sense of purpose for governors in your organisation? What opportunities do you have to foster debate and ambition to support the sector and your college in envisioning and determining its own future?

Section 4. Working with groups and teams

Colleges are made up of groups and teams that need to work together. As clerk, although independent, you are part of several groups: the governing body, the senior leadership team and the college as a whole. A key aspect of sense-making (see Section 3) is reading group and team dynamics. Despite the fact that we are all group and/or team participants in one form or another, it is rare for us to stop and think why people behave in a particular way. It is only when a problem arises that we are alerted to the fact that something might be wrong.

Content and process

Governing bodies are a group or team of people who meet to make decisions. In order to do that they consider information and ideas that are set before them. We can refer to the information, ideas and problems they consider as content issues. However, what many of us miss when considering the performance of a group or team are the process issues; in other words how the group or team is addressing the content issues. Process is the oiling of the content wheels. Process ensures that content does not become stalled or seized on the way. We ignore process at our peril. Process is about:

- how communication is handled;
- who is talking to whom; and
- the methods by which the governing body reaches a decision, e.g. consensus-seeking, polling or unanimity.

Activity

Making use of process behaviours
Some behaviours can help process and others can help content. Examples are given in the table below. At the next meeting of the governing body, assess how many process behaviours you see.

Behaviour that contributes to content	Behaviour that contributes to process
Summarising	Humour
Clarifying	Compromise
Giving information	Encouragement
Asking for information	Asking questions
	Asking for feedback

Viewpoint

If process behaviours are few and far between it is likely that the governing body may not be performing very effectively as a group or team. If governors are aware of their preferred behaviours and there is a good balance between process and content people, this can be a strength. An imbalance or lack of awareness of these different behaviours amongst key players can end up pulling meetings in opposite directions. A focus on group/team process skills is one area of training that can make a real difference to the governing body as a whole, and you might want to consider this with governors, the chair and the principal.

Disturbances

Other factors that can impede the progress of a group or team include:

- emotional issues – e.g. personal conflict between members;
- identity – e.g. a younger, possibly less experienced, member feels apprehensive or intimidated by other members;
- power – e.g. a governor whose autocratic behaviour discourages debate;
- alienation – e.g. a new member has not had a satisfactory induction and is not sure whether others accept her as legitimate contributor;
- environmental – e.g. meeting room conditions, temperature, refreshments, size of room.

Group norms

All groups and teams establish norms of behaviour, i.e. codes of acceptable conduct through which the group and team works. The key issue here is whether the norms help the group or team to be effective, or work against it.

There are a number of stages any group or team must go through in order to establish effective working relationships; Bruce W. Tuckman refers to these stages as 'forming' 'storming', 'norming' and 'performing'.

During this process, individuals test out each other's commitment, goals, priorities, etc. Only after that can norms be established and the group move towards performing effectively in a cohesive way. Regular changes in group or team membership tend to inhibit this process.

Activity

Observing group and team interactions

Read the more detailed information about the work of Bruce W. Tuckman (see Further Reading). Can you identify the group/team norms of your governing body? Is the current group of governors at the forming, storming, norming or performing stage? Are you able to spot emotional behaviours that are restricting its performance? Are you able to glean any information outside meetings to confirm or refute your analysis?

Groupthink

One of the dangers that can ensnare groups is 'groupthink.' This is where a group or team of people avoid conflict by seeking to find a way of agreeing above all else. This consensus-seeking becomes an end in itself. No-one wants to disrupt the cosy atmosphere by expressing a view that might destabilise it. There is an illusion of unanimity because views are not contested or disputed, despite the fact that, deep down, individuals may have reservations about them.

This danger has afflicted certain further education governing bodies in the past, leading to some high profile cases where weaknesses, including a tendency to groupthink, have been publicly exposed.

Defining creativity in leadership and governance

"One of the essential ingredients of high performing individuals, teams and organisations is creativity (Basadur, 2004). To be creative means releasing talent and imagination, the ability to take risks and, in some cases, necessitates standing outside the usual frames of reference (Harris, 2009). Creative people push the boundaries: they seek new ways of seeing, interpreting, understanding and questioning (Hoyle and Wallace 2005). They thrive in circumstances which others might see as chaotic and disorderly (Montuori and Purser, 1999)."
'Creative Governance in Further Education: the art of the possible?', Denis Gleeson, Ian Abbott and Ron Hill, University of Warwick, LSIS, 2009 (page 8).

Consider these perspectives in the light of your own role as a clerk.

Checklist: Skills for working in groups and teams

(indicate where you sit on a scale of 1 to 5)

Observational skills
1 = Need to improve and 5 = Good at this

Noting tension in the group	1	2	3	4	5
Noting who talks to whom	1	2	3	4	5
Noting interest level in the group	1	2	3	4	5
Sensing the feelings of individuals	1	2	3	4	5
Noting who is being 'left out'	1	2	3	4	5
Noting reaction to my comments	1	2	3	4	5

Communication skills

Being brief and concise	1	2	3	4	5
Being forceful	1	2	3	4	5
Drawing others out	1	2	3	4	5
Listening alertly	1	2	3	4	5
Thinking before I talk	1	2	3	4	5
Keeping my remarks to the topic	1	2	3	4	5
Problem-solving skills	1	2	3	4	5
Stating problems or goals	1	2	3	4	5
Asking for ideas, opinions	1	2	3	4	5
Giving ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluating ideas critically	1	2	3	4	5
Summarising discussion	1	2	3	4	5
Clarifying issues	1	2	3	4	5

Morale-building skills

Showing interest	1	2	3	4	5
Working to keep people from being ignored	1	2	3	4	5
Harmonising and helping people reach agreement	1	2	3	4	5

Reducing tension	1	2	3	4	5
Upholding rights of individuals in face of group pressure	1	2	3	4	5
Expressing praise or appreciation	1	2	3	4	5

General

Understanding why I do what I do	1	2	3	4	5
Encouraging comments on my own behaviour	1	2	3	4	5
Accepting help willingly	1	2	3	4	5
Making up my mind firmly	1	2	3	4	5
Criticising myself	1	2	3	4	5
Waiting patiently	1	2	3	4	5
Going off by myself to read/think	1	2	3	4	5

Viewpoint

This is a practical audit tool which members of the governing body and senior leadership team might also like to use, either privately or as a group. It could provide the basis for useful discussion and insight, and help to identify further training or development needs for particular individuals or the governing body as a whole.

Section 5. Managing self

As clerk, you are acting with senior colleagues inside and outside the college to contribute towards the effective working of the governing body. The relationships between members of the governing body and the senior staff are often complex and can be much enhanced by the emotional intelligence of both staff and governors.

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise your emotions, understand what they are telling you, and realise how your emotions may be affecting people around you. Emotional intelligence also involves your perception of others, when you understand how they feel. This allows you to manage relationships more effectively.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman looked at data from large high-performing companies and found that although technical skills and cognitive ability have some importance at senior levels, emotional intelligence characterised the most competent and successful managers. It is suggested that there are four capabilities within emotional intelligence:

- **self-awareness**: the ability to read and understand your emotions and their impact on others; self-confidence and realistic evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses;
- **self-management**: self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, initiative and a drive to meet an internally set standard of excellence;
- **social awareness**: empathy – the skill of sensing other people's emotions/perspective; organisational awareness; recognising other people's needs;
- **social skill**: the ability to inspire, influence and develop others; communication skills; conflict management, building bonds and promoting co-operation.

It is not within the scope of these materials to offer personal diagnosis of your competence in each of these areas. However you can begin to consider situations where you might practise and enhance your skills through active reflection and learning from events at governing body meetings, interactions between members and the principal, interactions between the principal and chair, and so on. Get in the habit of noting and analysing critical incidents (situations where something didn't work well and which present useful opportunities to learn from mistakes) and also where something did go well which provides an equally important opportunity to apply your learning.

Johari Window

The Johari Window is a tool to aid thinking about oneself in relation to others. The model uses a familiar quadrant approach to categorise four types of 'room' which describe what is 'known' and 'seen' about ourselves and others, by ourselves and others.

Analysing a critical incident

Think back over your interactions with a particular governor, group of governors or senior leader in the last month or two and choose a critical incident to reflect on. Using the questions below as a guide, describe the incident in terms of emotional intelligence – your own or that of other participants.

- What emotions drove your actions?
- What could you have done differently?
- What worked well?
- How do your peers interpret what went on?
- What would they have done differently?

Viewpoint

We cannot comment specifically on the incident you chose to analyse, but it is worth stressing that this kind of active reflection almost always repays the time spent on it. It can give valuable new insight into how others see us and how we might handle the situation and the interactions that took place more effectively in future.

Consider keeping a notebook where you regularly analyse critical incidents. If you have a learning group or peer network, you could periodically spend some time describing an incident and jointly reflecting on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skill. Managing yourself, and hence others, is a key component of your self-development.

Analysts are increasingly interested in the idea of 'learning organisations' – that is, organisations which actively use mistakes as vehicles for learning about and improving organisational effectiveness (as opposed to laying blame for things that go wrong or seeking to hide them). See, for example, Peter Senge's description of learning organisations as:

"...organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together."

Remember that continuous improvement applies to individuals in just the same way as it can be applied to organisations. We have a responsibility to ourselves to ensure that it happens. Emotional intelligence offers a way to examine dimensions of our behaviour that have not had a great deal of attention in the past yet are crucial for progression.

Further reflection

Peter Drucker in his article for Harvard Business Review, Managing Oneself, first published in 1999 and reprinted in 2005, asks four questions to cultivate a deep understanding of yourself:

- What are your most valuable strengths?
- Equally important, how do you learn and work with others?

- What are your most deeply held values?
- In what type of work environment can you make the greatest contribution?

The implication, he suggests is clear:

"only when you operate from a combination of your strengths and self-knowledge can you achieve true, and lasting excellence".

Consider:

- How can the answers to these questions help to inform your role as an effective clerk?
- What actions can you choose to take to build on your current strengths as a clerk and strengthen even further your collaborative work with others?
- What are the implications for the way in which governance is structured i.e. how many opportunities do you have to work informally with governors and the executive (e.g. at away-days) as opposed to formal meetings of the board?

Module review

This module has looked at working relationships and the skills and strategies that are useful for managing interactions with governors and senior leaders. If you have worked through the whole module you should now be confident that you can:

- apply the appropriate skills to help manage difficult situations;
- identify common barriers to communication and discuss strategies to help;
- consider the diversity of perspectives and interests represented on the governing body and strategies to help a sense of common purpose;
- explain key processes and skills for working with groups and teams; and
- consider skills for self-management and apply these to your own interactions

Summary of key learning points

 "Only when you operate from a combination of your strengths and self-knowledge can you achieve true – and – lasting excellence".
Peter Drucker Harvard Business Review, Managing Oneself, first published in 1999, reprinted in 2005.

Where next?

You have now completed work on Module 4: Working Relationships. Take a look at the further reading for each section. Note down what further information, support or guidance you would like.

Putting it into action

We hope that working through this module has raised useful questions, increased your awareness of issues and given you ideas for practical action that you would like to follow up. The 'Action Planner' in 'Using the Materials' contains a section where you can note down any questions or action points that you want to follow up within your own college.

Further reading

Section 1

Dealing with Difficult People Versus Them Dealing with You! Dr Bill Crawford, psychologist, on a new approach to dealing with difficult people - [video clip](#).

Ladder of Inference

The Ladder of Inference is one of the most effective tools in understanding and explaining why we so often get into conflict and fail to get resolution. The Ladder of Inference was originally articulated by Chris Argyris and popularised in Peter Senge's book 'The Fifth Discipline: The art and practice of the learning organisation' ISBN: 0-7126-9885-X

Perceptual positions ... in more depth

TED talks: [William Ury: The walk from "no" to "yes"](#) - William Ury, author of 'Getting to Yes', offers a way to create agreement in even the most difficult situations.

Article by Catherine Sandler in Strategic HR Review, January 2012: [The Emotional Profiles Triangle: Working with Leaders Under Pressure](#)

'People Styles at Work…And Beyond: Making Bad Relationships Good and Good Relationships Better' by Robert Bolton and Dorothy Grover Bolton (2009)

'Assertiveness at Work: A Practical Guide to Handling Awkward Situations', Ken and Kate Black (2005)

Section 2

[Harvard Business Review on Effective Communication](#), Harvard University Press, 1999

[Why communication skills are so important](#). Useful summary of the communication process and removing barriers to communication.

[How good are your communication skills?](#) Self-assessment of your own communication skills.

[The Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership](#), 2nd Edition, 2007, Jossey-Bass Publishers, Michael Fullan (Introduction) ISBN: 978-0-7879-8400-7. Helpful critical insights from respected authors, education researchers, and practitioners including Peter Senge - See chapter 1.

'Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together: A Pioneering Approach to Communicating in Business and in Life', Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, first edition 1 May 1999

'Dialogic Leadership', William N. Isaacs Pegasus Communications in 'The Systems Thinker' Volume 10 Number 1. Pegasus Communications, 1 February 1999 reference: The Concept of Dialogue page 2

'On dialogue', David Bohm, Editor Lee Nichol, Edition 2 revised, reprint, Routledge Classics, 2004 ISBN: 0415336414, 9780415336413

'[Introducing Appreciative Governance](#)', International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry, November 2011, Volume 13 Number 4. Guest Editors: Sallie Lee, Bernard J. Mohr and Cheri Torres. ISBN: 978-1-907549-07-6

The most recent publications produced by the [Sixth Form Colleges Association](#) can be found via this link.

Section 3

[Make your values mean something](#), Lencioni, Patrick M., July 2002. Harvard Business Review, Vol 80, Issue 7, pp. 113—17 — article explaining the different types of corporate values and how to make them 'stick'.

CIPD members resource: Shared purpose and sustainable organisation performance, October 2009.

'Power: Why Some People Have It – and Others Don't', Jeffrey Pfeffer, 2010.

[The Further Education and Skills Sector in 2020: A Social Productivity Approach](#), May 2011 LSIS-commissioned report from the RSA's 2020 Public Service Hub, providing an independent perspective for the further education and skills sector on possible futures. The report is designed to foster debate and ambition to support the sector in envisioning and determining its own future.

'[Building the new leader - Leadership challenges of the future revealed](#)'. Hay Group Leadership 2030 research shows that the leaders of the future will need a host of new skills and competencies if they are to succeed. Consider, for example, the six 'megatrends' identified to promote further dialogue with others, in order to inform future thinking.

'[Further Education in 2020 - making the system work](#)' A Think Piece, 157 Group, August 2013

Section 4

Smith, M. K. (2005) [Bruce W. Tuckman - forming, storming, norming and performing in groups](#), the encyclopaedia of informal education

'[Effective Team Building](#)' (revised edition), John Adair, 2009 (look under 'All books published').

'When Teams Work Best: 6,000 Team Members and Leaders Tell What it Takes to Succeed', Frank M J LaFasto, Dr Carl Larson, Sage Publications, 2001

'[The Five Dysfunctions of a Team](#)', Patrick Lencioni (2002) explores the fundamental causes of organisational politics and team failure

'Leading others to think innovatively together: creative leadership', Basadur, M (2004) – Leadership Quarterly 15(1) 103-21

'Creative Leadership: Developing Future Leaders', Harris, A (2009) – Management in Education Vol 23 (1) 9 – 11

[Managing Groups and Teams/Groupthink](#), 2010, from Wikibooks

'The Secrets of Great Teams', Harvard Business Review, April 2012. 'The New Science of Building Great Teams by Alex Pentland

'[Teamwork on the Fly](#)', Amy C Edmondson

'Coming Through When it Matters. How great teams do their best work under pressure', Heidi K Gardner

Section 5

Harvard Business Review's 10 Must Reads on Managing Yourself: Peter F. Drucker, William Oncken Jr., Donald L. Wass, Stephen R. Covey, Diane L. Coutu, Tony Schwartz, Catherine McCarthy, Edward M. Hallowell, Stewart D. Friedman, Sumantra Ghoshal, Heike Bruch. Robert E. Quinn, Robert S. Kaplan, Daniel Goldman, Richard Boyatzis, Annie McKee. Harvard Business Press Books, January 2011

'Primal leadership: learning to lead with emotional intelligence', Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, Annie McKee, Harvard Business School Press, 2004

'The emotionally intelligent workplace: how to select for, measure and improve emotional intelligence in individuals, groups, and organisations', Cary Cherniss, Daniel Goleman, John Wiley and Sons, 2001

'Linking emotional intelligence and performance at work: current research evidence with individuals and groups', Fabio Sala, Vanessa Urch Druskat, Gerald Mount, Routledge, 2006

'Leading with Emotional Intelligence: Hands-On Strategies for Building Confident and Collaborative Star Performers', Reldan S. Nadler, McGraw-Hill Professional, 2010

'Coaching to develop self-awareness: helping people to get to know themselves'

European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)

International Coach Federation (ICF)

'The Coaching Manual: The Definitive Guide to the Process and Skills of Personal Coaching', Julie Starr (2002/2008)

'Techniques for Coaching and Mentoring', David Megginson and David Clutterbuck (2005)

'Further Techniques for Coaching and Mentoring', David Megginson and David Clutterbuck (2009)

'Everyone Needs a Mentor', David Clutterbuck (2014)
http://www.davidclutterbuckpartnership.com/books/

Peter Drucker Harvard Business Review, 'Managing Onself', first published in 1999, reprinted in 2005

'Emotional Intelligence 2.0' Dr Travis Bradberry, Jean Greaves Foreword Patrick M. Lencioni (June 16, 2009)

Acknowledgements