

Care Services Improvement Partnership **CSIP**

National Institute for
Mental Health in England



The
British
Psychological
Society

New Ways of Working for Applied Psychologists

Working Psychologically in Teams *Summary and key messages*



Introduction

This document provides a summary and key messages drawn from a full report produced as a result of the New Ways of Working for Applied Psychology project undertaken under the auspices of the Care Services Improvement Partnership and the British Psychological Society.

The document aims to provide an update on our understanding of how teams work and how their effectiveness can be maximised. It aims to have some relevance to any team member wanting to work using psychological principles. The report was compiled from the work of a wide range of contributors to whom we are enormously grateful.

The full report including examples of positive practice is available from the following websites:

www.bps.org.uk

www.newwaysworking.org.uk

www.mhchoices.csip.org.uk

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Summary

- Psychologists have important roles to play in achieving improved outcomes from teamworking. These include helping to achieve optimal team design and operation, effective individual service planning, peer consultation processes, reflective practice, the effective involvement of users and carers, teaching, training, research, evaluation and development.
- Recent policy and practice developments concerning team working mean that psychologists are required to adopt new ways of working. These are determined by local contexts and include some new and specific challenges. It often requires that psychologists become further integrated into teams.
- The issue of psychologists' integration in teams is a hot one for psychologists and is often determined by local capacity for psychology input. Stakeholders showed an overwhelming preference for the integration of psychologists within teams but only if psychologists retained their unique identity and contribution (e.g. offering an authoritative and constructive counter-balance to the "medical model").
- Psychologists have a wider role in providing consultancy to organisations on organisational and systems improvement (e.g. leadership and teamwork development) but their competence and confidence to assume these roles cannot be assumed.
- Definition of teams need to be clear and widely understood and differentiated from other descriptions of group working such as networks and communities of interest.

- There is good evidence for positive outcomes from teamworking but benefits will not be achieved without premeditated design of teams based upon research on what promotes effective teamworking.
- Effective teamworking is associated with
 - clear and achievable objectives;
 - differentiated, diverse and clear roles;
 - a need for members to work together to achieve shared objectives;
 - the necessary authority, autonomy and resources to achieve these objectives;
 - a capacity for effective dialogue. This means effective processes for decision making, being able to engage in constructive conflict and if complex decision making is involved the team needs to be small enough (no larger than 8 or 9 people).
 - expectations of excellence;
 - opportunities to review what the team is trying to achieve, how it is going about it and what needs to change; and
 - clear and effective leadership.
- Dedicated effort is required to improve team working within local whole systems. Tried-and-tested service improvement approaches are available to support this and should be more widely applied.
- Teams exist within complex systems and an understanding of how change and development occurs within such systems is important when aiming to improve outcomes.

- At team level leadership is about creating the conditions that enable the team to do its job; building and maintaining the team as a performing unit; and coaching and supporting the team to success. Leadership capacity is dispersed within complex systems and leadership roles should be determined by context and the demands of the task at hand, not position. It is the quality of the relationship between leader and follower that has most influence on performance-relevant attitudes and behaviour.
- Teams are working with greater reliance on virtual methods of working. Research in this area suggests that the need to consciously design and support teams to be effective is amplified in these contexts with an even greater need to build trust and shared understanding of ways of working among team members.

Key messages

Psychologists should be actively involved in the design, operation and evaluation of teams making use of appropriate research evidence (e.g. with respect to team size, composition, and process). This work should be informed by an understanding of the teams' role in the wider context of the local system of care, an understanding of how change within complex systems occurs and awareness of forthcoming developments in new roles and work practices (e.g. increased virtual teamworking).

Psychologists should seek to integrate their work within teams in a way that continues to promote their unique contribution to the care and treatment of service users.

Psychologists should seek to develop their role in contributing to the improved effectiveness of services through process consultancy at systems level, peer consultation and supervision, leadership, and the promotion of effective roles for users and carers. The achievement of effective person-centred planning should be a key marker for the success of this contribution.

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