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MODULE 3

SMART VET
Erasmus+
K210-VET
Small scale

Interpersonal & Teamwork Skills

Strengthen learners' ability to collaborate, resolve conflicts, and work effectively in international and multicultural teams.

Erasmus+ KA210-VET | SMART-VET Project

Funded by the European Union

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.

Learning Outcomes

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

Elena, a VET learner from Italy, found her Finnish team polite but quiet — and assumed they weren't interested in collaborating. She later learned the team simply valued concise communication and individual responsibility. This module helps learners read team dynamics like this accurately.

BY THE END, LEARNERS WILL BE ABLE TO

1. Explain why trust is the foundation of effective teamwork, especially in diverse teams.
2. Apply empathy and active listening to build stronger working relationships.
3. Identify the sources of workplace conflict and respond constructively rather than avoiding it.
4. Use recognised conflict-management styles and negotiation techniques appropriately.
5. Reflect on personal patterns in trust-building, communication style and conflict response.

What Builds Trust in Diverse Teams

Employees in high-trust organisations report 74% less stress and 50% greater productivity (Zak, Harvard Business Review, 2017).

1 Demonstrate Reliability

Complete tasks on time, consistently, so colleagues can count on you.

2 Be Open & Transparent

Communicate honestly, including about mistakes or uncertainty.

3 Show Cultural Humility

Stay willing to learn from colleagues whose working style differs from yours.

4 Respect Communication Norms

Adapt to different feedback styles and ways of expressing disagreement.

Real-Life Example: Zofia's Experience

CASE STUDY

Zofia, a VET learner from Poland, joined a mobility placement in the Netherlands. In her first week, she noticed her team didn't include her in informal discussions or after-work gatherings, and assumed her colleagues didn't like her. During a feedback session, her supervisor explained the team was simply unsure whether Zofia preferred space or interaction, since she often avoided eye contact and stayed quiet during breaks — a cultural misinterpretation had created unintended distance.

Zofia began initiating casual chats during lunch and explained that formality was the professional norm back in Poland. The team responded warmly, and trust began to build. Over time, she became a fully integrated and respected team member.

Takeaway: Misinterpretations rooted in cultural norms or non-verbal behaviour can erode trust before it starts. Clear, respectful communication and openness can bridge these gaps and restore cohesion.

5 Elements of Empathic Listening

Teams with high empathy and listening capability perform better across every metric, including problem-solving and innovation (2021 meta-analysis, Journal of Applied Psychology).

1 Give Full Attention

Put away distractions and maintain nonverbal cues that signal attentiveness.

2 Be Non-Judgmental

Avoid interrupting or mentally preparing your response while the speaker talks.

3 Reflect What You Hear

Paraphrase or summarise to confirm you've understood correctly.

4 Clarify & Ask Questions

Invite the speaker to elaborate with open-ended questions.

5 Respond Appropriately

Validate the speaker's feelings through verbal and non-verbal feedback.

Where Team Conflict Comes From

85% of employees experienced some form of workplace conflict in the past year (CIPD, 2019).

1 Task Conflicts

Disagreements about how to approach a shared goal.

2 Process Conflicts

Friction over roles, responsibilities and methods used.

3 Relationship Conflicts

Personal incompatibilities, cultural misunderstandings or communication breakdowns.

Goleman's 5 Components of EQ

High-EQ individuals de-escalate tension, mediate disagreements and preserve team cohesion under stress.

1 Self-Awareness

Recognising your own emotions and their effects.

2 Self-Regulation

Controlling disruptive emotions and impulses.

3 Motivation

Channeling emotions to pursue goals.

4 Empathy

Understanding the emotions of others.

5 Social Skills

Managing relationships to move people in desired directions.

5 Conflict Management Styles

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) — no single style is always right; effective people adapt to the situation.

1 Avoiding

Low assertiveness, low cooperation — sidesteps the issue.

2 Accommodating

Low assertiveness, high cooperation — yields to others.

3 Competing

High assertiveness, low cooperation — pursues own concerns first.

4 Compromising

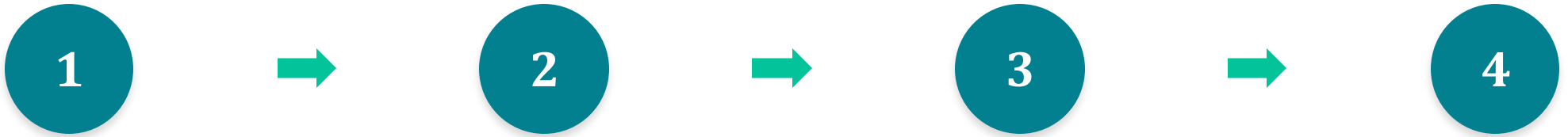
Moderate on both — finds a mutually acceptable middle ground.

5 Collaborating

High on both — works together for a genuine win-win.

The Interest-Based Relational Approach

Pioneered by Fisher & Ury: separate people from the problem, and focus on shared interests.



Define the Conflict

Identify the issue and every stakeholder's perspective.

Focus on Interests

Look past stated positions to the underlying interests.

Generate Options

Brainstorm multiple solutions without judgment.

Agree & Act

Use objective criteria to choose, then agree clear, actionable steps.

Practical Exercises for This Module

1 Workplace Conflict Simulation

Groups of 5–6 simulate a resolution meeting using IBR principles, with observers noting trust and empathy dynamics.

2 The Trust Ladder

Explore the 5 stages of building trust: Awareness → Interaction → Reliability → Shared Goals → Emotional Bond.

3 Multicultural Team-Building Challenge

Design an outreach campaign as a diverse team, then reflect on how cultural values shaped the work.

Key Takeaways

- Trust is the bedrock of effective teams — it grows from consistent, intentional behaviour, not overnight.
- Cultural misinterpretations of quietness, eye contact or formality can create unintended distance — clear, respectful communication rebuilds it.
- Conflict is a normal part of teamwork; addressed constructively, it strengthens collaboration rather than damaging it.
- High emotional intelligence — self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and social skill — helps de-escalate tension under pressure.
- No single conflict style is always right: effective team members adapt their approach, and negotiate around shared interests, not fixed positions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Great Teams Are Built, Not Born.

Next: Module 4 — Decision-Making & Problem-Solving, turning good judgement into confident action under pressure.