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Key steps to getting the best out of multidisciplinary teams

In the fourth of a five-part series on managing change, *Becky Hall* discusses working in multidisciplinary teams

DIFFERENT CHANGES require staff to work in new ways. The multidisciplinary approach is popular, as it draws together a range of professional disciplines and experiences into one team to focus on a particular issue.

From the point of view of the user, this is widely accepted as beneficial – but how is it for staff as part of these teams? How do you work through the sometimes thorny issues of different professional styles, cultures and approaches – to say nothing of the complexities of the management structure?

In our work with multidisciplinary teams, the same challenges arise again and again, so we have created a step-by-step approach to multidisciplinary working to help address some of the recurring issues. What you need to do is answer the following questions.

What is the make-up of the team?

What are the individual strengths and weaknesses of team members from across the range of professional disciplines, and how are these reflected in the team?

What is the team created to achieve?

Is there clarity about what the outcomes are? What are the milestones that will measure achievement and how will the team record its outcomes? We all like to know that we are making a difference – and succeeding. Charting progress, alongside celebrating successes, will help the team to maintain morale, momentum and a sense of purpose.

What are the different areas of expertise within the team?

Does everyone know the detail of what everyone else does? What are the individual roles and responsibilities, and how do these work together to the benefit of the team? This is so important to the multidisciplinary approach. In order to be able to draw on the advantages of working with different colleagues, all team members need to understand what they can offer.

What does the team believe in?

Shared values are crucial for all groups working together, and in multidisciplinary teams they can provide the "glue" to bring together the diverse approaches and backgrounds of staff.

How does the team work together?

Who leads or co-ordinates the team tasks, and who ensures that the team,

individually and as a whole, does what it said it would? What are the team methods of accountability to each other, and what are the lines of accountability outside the team? This needs to be clear to all team members to ensure joint responsibility to each other and to the team purpose.

Communication between team members is hugely important.

What are the meeting structures and feedback systems? How does the team share information around individual caseloads, hand over cases or carry out internal referrals? How does the team share with each other its progress and successes?

Much of the infrastructure for multidisciplinary teams is usually dictated externally. However, we always advise multidisciplinary teams to plan regular away days to give time for joint planning, reflection and assessment, so that staff can enjoy the personal professional satisfaction that working in a multidisciplinary setting can give, as well as offering an excellent joined-up service to users.

Becky Hall is a director of Fluent Consulting. For more information on the Fluent FitKit: A step-by-step guide for effective multidisciplinary teams contact her on 020 7524 7522 or email becky@fluentconsulting.co.uk or visit www.fluentconsulting.co.uk