

## 2. Training in Teams



### 2.1 Multicultural Team Work

#### 2.1.1. Why work in a multicultural team?

Many training events are prepared, run and evaluated by a single trainer working alone. Provided that this trainer has the experience and competencies required for that particular course, such an arrangement has some clear advantages. The trainer can take the necessary decisions and compose a coherent course structure and methodology according her own approach and working rhythm. Working in a team, on the other hand, takes time and energy. People have different opinions and ways of working, the process of working together can be tiresome and frustrating, the result can be chaotic and the quality of performance inconsistent.

That said, when organising a training course for an international or multicultural group of participants, there are some very good reasons for handing over the responsibility to a multicultural team of trainers.

Working in a team with people of different backgrounds and with a variety of experiences, approaches, views, values and opinions may well involve more disagreements and arguments, and require increased flexibility, tolerance and openness to other modes of perception and behaviour. It requires making efforts to understand the other members' points of view and making compromises. Intercultural teamwork can therefore be highly ineffective, as team dynamics disrupt concentrating on the tasks at hand. If thought through and managed well however, the resources and competencies of the different team members can complement each other to produce a rich and creative process and results that complement the complexity of the task and target group. This is intercultural teamwork as an exciting, stimulating and also highly effective process. Intercultural teamwork can be a deep mutual learning experience for all team members, as well as a source of mutual support in carrying the workload, responsibilities and stress of the training.

Maybe most importantly, diversity within the team suggests that a number of essential issues likely to come up during the training course may be signalled and discussed already in the team. Personal preferences and experiences, cultural differences, different social realities and educational systems across and beyond Europe influence our approaches to learning and training. In common with participants, trainers have different ways and styles of learning, training and working together, set different priorities and prefer different methods. Discussing and finding a balance between them lessens, at least to some extent, the cultural specificity of the training and increases the likelihood of coming up with an approach, or a combination of approaches, that the participants can refer to and will find useful.

#### ***Suggestions for reflection***

##### **Diversity – what does it mean?**

A variety of aspects can be considered when composing a 'diverse team' for a seminar or training course: country or region of origin, ethnic or cultural background, organisational background, age, sex, etc.

1. Which factors do you consider important when selecting members for a training team?
2. Are there institutional requirements of your organisation or service that you need to consider? What are they?

#### 2.1.2. What makes a team a team?

Much of what happens during training courses happens in groups, be it the group of participants, working or evaluation groups, informal groups, or the group of trainers. "Group behaviour has ranged from total chaos to dramatic success, but it is increasingly evident that groups



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enjoy their greatest success when they become more productive units called teams” (Maddux, R.B. 1990, p.10). Groups and teams are not interchangeable terms, nor is ‘team’ a feel-good label for what is clearly a group.

A group becomes a team when

- its members feel a sense of ownership for their work and a commitment to commonly established objectives
- there is a shared understanding that personal and team goals are best reached with mutual support
- there is participative decision making
- members can contribute their personal resources, qualities and competencies to the success of the work
- there is a climate of trust and encouragement to express ideas, opinions, disagreements, feelings and questions, where members make efforts to understand each other’s point of view
- members are encouraged to develop their skills and apply them during the work
- Conflict is considered a normal aspect of interaction and is viewed as an opportunity for new ideas, creativity and improvement.

*(ibid, pp 10-12)*

While these principles are quite inspiring, we still need to consider how to make a team really work. The next section outlines some aspects to consider and some ideas for methods to use with your team.

## 2.2. Team building and team life

### 2.2.1 Forming the Team

The eventual members of the team depend on a variety of organisational and practical criteria. Are people with a particular function in the organisation to be included? What are the financial means available? Besides those aspects, the course theme and the target group of participants should be important aspects in determining which trainers have the appropriate knowledge, experience, background and approach for the training course. Moreover, the team should represent a balance of geographic and cultural backgrounds and approaches that reflects the composition of the target group of participants. While individual trainer competencies are essential, it is crucial to look at complementarity when thinking about composition. A team works best when competencies and resources complement each other, and are used constructively in relation to the course objectives.

The working languages of the different team members deserve careful reflection. Team communication is clearly essential, and expressive capacity in the working language(s) can severely influence possibilities to contribute and effect power structures within the team. Selecting trainers with a good knowledge of one common working language might therefore be a wise decision. This does not mean that it is not beneficial to have other working languages of participants represented in the team. On the contrary, using different working languages during the training course (maybe only in smaller working groups) creates more equal chances for participation and diffuses the power structures that language may create among the participants. It can also help to visualise the cultural determination of many of the concepts used in youth work.



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Once it has been decided who will be the team, the common work can begin. Until the beginning of the training course, the program needs to be developed and the team should be able to find out, how it can work together to run and reach the objectives of the training.

Many essential aspects can best be taken care of in a preparation meeting. The possibility of holding one or more preparation meetings before a training course depends on factors such as financial possibilities or the availability of the team members. Some elements can certainly be discussed and prepared by email, fax or telephone before the beginning of the training course. Nothing however replaces a meeting where all team members meet to share and discuss their ideas and agree upon the basic values, objectives and program of the training. Especially if all or some team members have not worked together before, a team meeting to prepare the training course is also the first experience in working together and getting to know each other as colleagues.

Besides clarifying the course frame, preparing the program and distributing the tasks, some time should be reserved to build the team and to evaluate the meeting. Before ending the meeting, establishing a clear division of tasks with deadlines for their completion is essential. Who should do what by when? What can be done by email, what not? It is useful to decide on a co-ordinator for the process of team communication after the meeting to ensure that the process is actually followed up until the next meeting.

### ***Why not make a team contract for the trainers on your team?***

For instance

- We will strive to communicate with each other honestly.
- We are committed to all team meetings
- We will strive to be together during the training course as much as possible.
- We will have daily assessments of each other's performance
- We will not interrupt each other's sessions.
- We will try to contribute constructively during each other's sessions by mentioning at the end of the session any additional learning points that the session co-ordinator might have missed.

*(From Guijt et al. 1992)*

*Which elements do you consider important to make your team work?*

## ***2.2.2 Creating a climate of trust, support and personal expression***

*Team building* is instrumental in creating an atmosphere that allows team members to get to know each other and to find their place in the team. It is the basis for creating an open climate of trust and respect which is needed to encourage personal expression and contribution, mutual support and a constructive use of team diversity during the training. Team building should include sharing the trainers'

- expectations of the training course and teamwork
- motivation for being part of this team, and
- prior experiences in youth work and training and other experiences of relevance for the particular course.

Further elements of team building can be getting a first idea of everyone's ways of working and some of their strong and weaker points. Finally and importantly, it should provide an opportunity to enjoy each other's company and the prospect of working together. Yes, it should say, working together can be fun! Team building can be done by talking about these points during



the meeting or informally over dinner. Specific exercises can help the team to start working together. They can also be good icebreakers and help the trainers relax into the team. You will find two sample exercises below.

### ***Leading and following: leading each other blindfolded through the training site.***

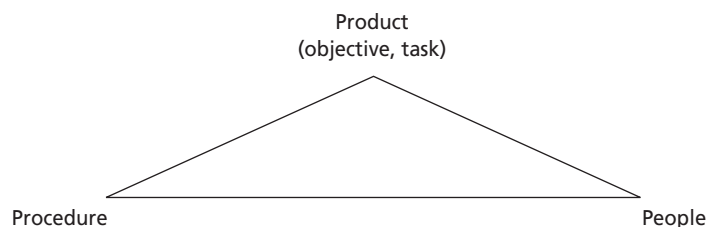
- Aim: Establish trust in each other. Experience following and leading.
- Task: All team members stand in a line facing the back of the person in front of them. With the exception of the first person in the line everybody is blindfolded, and they put their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. The first person in line then leads the team through the training site (or the site of the meeting). Change roles after some minutes, so that everyone gets to be the leader. Use your creativity for variations of this exercise: the leader can ask the others to do different things, such as climb over "barriers", talk, sing or draw etc.
- Time: 20 minutes in a team of 4 persons plus some minutes for discussion following the exercise.
- Materials: blindfolds for all team members except one.

### ***What is our ideal trainer or participant?***

- Aim: Imagine your ideal trainer or participant for this training course. Find out which elements are shared within the team, and which ones are different. Use creativity and imagination in working together and co-ordinating different ideas.
- Task: All team members sit or stand around one big sheet of paper (e.g. a flipchart paper). Each team member has one marker (in a different colour). On the sheet of paper, draw your trainer or a participant. Anyone can start, the others add elements as they like. This drawing stage should be silent.
- Time: 10 minutes approx. for one drawing and some time for discussion.
- Materials: a big sheet of paper and enough markers for all team members.

## **Product, process, people: the triangle of the 3 Ps**

### **TE-3**



The triangle of the 3 Ps – product, process and people – represents the different poles that any team needs to consider in its work. Many teams tend to focus on the product, on the result to be achieved, as this seems to be the most effective way to work, given that time is always limited. As this text has continuously argued, making sure that the different factors are in equilibrium always enhances a training. Attention to the individual members in the team is important. How do they feel about the work and the team? How does this impact on the team process? Allied to this, to organise its work a team needs some structure, some rules and a division of responsibilities



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and tasks. Too much of this, however, can be detrimental to creativity and spontaneity. Between the product, the procedure and the people, it is the balance that counts. The model of the 3 Ps can be used in different ways. A more extensive description of it can be found in the *Project Management T-Kit* (pp. 77-78). The *Organisational Management T-Kit* introduces it as a way of looking at leadership (p. 46). This T-Kit takes it up again in a different way in Part 5, when looking at group dynamics as 'theme-centred interaction' (4.3.1 & 5.1.3).

*Some suggestions for successful team communication*

- Listen to each other and sincerely try to understand what the other person is saying
- Ask questions
- Clarify concepts and understandings (training? facilitating?)
- Deal with emotions
- Offer support
- Give also positive feedback
- Give constructive criticism

### **2.2.3 Leadership, ownership and participative decision-making**

In many cases a team has a designated leader, possibly the person who has called for the team meeting and who is co-ordinating the training event for organising institution or organisation. The co-ordinator usually needs to make sure that the team gets off to a good start and deal with some of the administrative issues.

Clarity about the administrative framework and the conditions, responsibilities and tasks of the team members will lay the basis for the team to begin functioning. What decisions can the team take? What has been decided in advance? What is the situation concerning payment, contracts, institutional expectations? Do all team members have the same responsibilities?

Throughout the work process, there are certain team-leading tasks to be fulfilled. They include, for instance, chairing meetings (ensuring that decisions are taken, that the agenda is followed, etc.), dealing with administrative tasks (such as contracts, invitations to participants, communication with participants), writing reports of team meetings and co-ordinating team communication between meetings. Some of these tasks can be shared amongst the team. This can help create and maintain team ownership of the course and the team itself. It is important to bear in mind that a democratically structured team where members have equal responsibilities also develop certain power structures. Essentially, dealing with leadership in teamwork is a question of how these dynamics and structures are handled. Team members are perceived differently by each other and by the participants, they have different qualities, competencies and personalities. The challenge is to nurture support rather than competition within the team as a result of these differences.

Some questions worth asking yourself are:

- Does your team have a clear leader, possibly to the expense of the other members in the team?
- How are decisions taken?
- Can everyone in the team contribute to her full potential? If not, why is that the case?
- What happens, for instance, if someone is too dominant and if someone else is very quiet?
- Who decides what priorities are set when?
- When does the result become more important than the process?
- How are tasks distributed?
- Who gets the attractive tasks (such as running a nice exercise or giving an important plenary input), and who does the necessary yet invisible, less attractive work?
- What can the team do to create equal chances for participation?

Creating participative and interactive teamwork and decision-making does not mean that every member of the team contributes in the same way. But it does mean that that everyone can contribute to his or her full potential.



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### 2.2.4 Roles in a team: contributing personal resources, qualities and competencies.

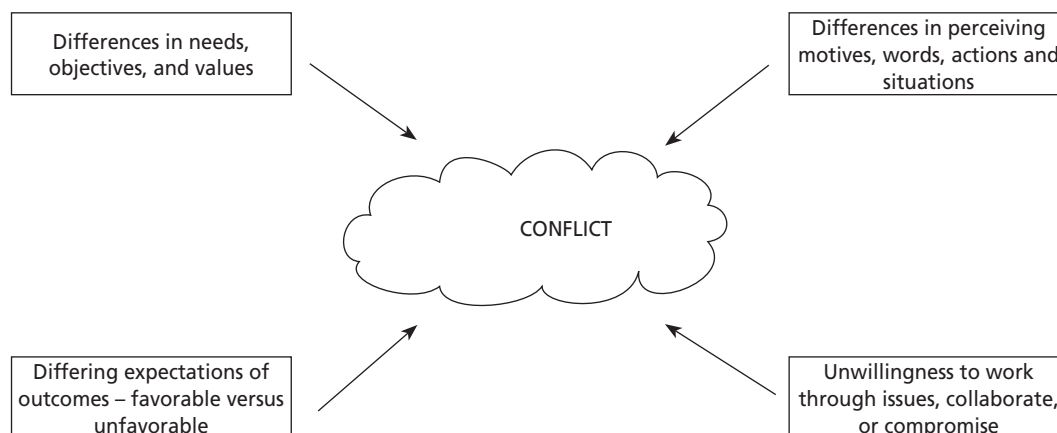
We all know these situations: some people talk a lot, others less. Ideas presented by some people are usually taken up by the team, while other ideas are ignored. Some people have a talent for coming up with creative ideas, while others tend to get stuck on practical details. Some push the team forward and challenge its work, while others ask painstaking questions. Some members have a strong sense of objectives, while others are good at promoting team spirit. There are many roles that people can take on in a team. All of these roles are important and can be complementary for productive teamwork. Depending on the team composition and the particular situation, people might change their roles. Different people bring out different qualities in us and a specific situation can demand specific behaviour and action.

For effective and fulfilling teamwork, it is important that all members can contribute according to their abilities and take on roles that they feel comfortable with and that are recognised and valued by the others. This is easier said than done. Behaviour that is different from our own easily annoys us. Understanding theoretically that people have different needs and ways of contributing is far from being able to accept this situation and to use it constructively. This is especially true for multicultural teams, where personal and cultural factors intermingle in determining team behaviour. Last but not least, good teamwork also depends on how we value the work with our team colleagues as a chance for personal learning and on how the team fosters this development. Reflective team analysis and careful feedback are essential elements in this process (see 3.3.2).

### 2.2.5. Viewing conflict as an opportunity for improvement and creativity

Sometimes we assume that our team works best when it works harmoniously, without major disagreements. Working in harmony is of course very nice, as long as we are sure that it is harmony for everybody. While not suggesting that everything is not always what it seems, sometimes apparent team harmony is the avoidance of disagreements and frustrations that exist but are not expressed. We would argue that constructive teamwork includes working with conflicts among team members and accepting them as a normal element of team communication.

Conflicts in teams mostly evolve for four different reasons:



Many European and U.S. theories suggest that conflicts are best dealt with if they are addressed openly, consciously and directly. In some other cultural contexts, however, openly and directly stating disagreements and related feelings might not be acceptable and conflicts are dealt with in more indirect ways. 5.2 takes a closer look at dealing with conflicts in groups or teams.



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### 2.2.6. Tolerance of tensions and ambiguity

Tensions and ambiguities are an inherent part of intercultural teamwork. To be able to accept them while still operating often proves to be a challenging and difficult aspect of work with team colleagues.

Fundamental tensions and ambiguities include:

- Tension between individual interests and the collective interest, between 'being myself' and 'serving the whole'. Both sides are essential, and suggest another key element of the balancing act that is team work.
- Tension between the need and challenge of change, flexibility and innovation and adherence to established structures, principles and points of orientation.
- Tension between the wish to set and reach ideal aims and the knowledge that they will never be fully reached.

(Pohl and Witt, 2000)

- Tolerance of ambiguity. Intercultural teamwork requires of its members a continual recognition that there are various *right* modes of perception and behaviour. Different approaches to the same idea are normal, different perceptions and interpretations of the same situation must also be recognised as such.

Facing these tensions and ambiguity can throw us off balance and make us doubt our own views and convictions, make us feel insecure, confused or frustrated. This is also normal, and the process of establishing common values, objectives and basic agreements can provide valuable stability for the team.

## 2.3 From preparation to practice: teamwork during the training course

### 2.3.1 Predicting issues

The experience of how the team actually works together in practice only arrives with the start of the training course. In the heat of the training, the pressure to perform in front of the participants can be stronger than good intentions regarding the functioning of the team. It is worthwhile to pre-empt some issues that are likely to arise, and to form team strategies in relation to them.

- *Team meetings and team feedback*: Set aside time for regular team meetings, even if there is a program to prepare and run and pressure to spend social time with the participants. In most meetings, the evaluation and planning of the program will determine the agenda. Nevertheless, make sure to take some time to check how every member feels about the course, the team and their own role in it. You might want to reserve some time in advance for team feedback, for instance; 'On Wednesday evening we will have a longer team meeting and take one hour to share how we feel about us as a team'.
- *Experts*: Fragile team dynamics can be upset by the presence of invited experts or lecturers that work with the team for a short while. Discuss how you want to deal with this issue in your team. What role does the expert have? To what extent does she need to be integrated into the team?
- *Time management*: Team members might have different, let's say, relationships with time, especially but not exclusively in intercultural teams.
  - When a team meeting is set for 18.00h, does it actually start at this time? If not, why? Is it okay for wait for each other (or always for the same person) or not?
  - During the program, how strictly do you plan and handle the schedule? What if a working group has not finished its discussion? Do you as a trainer stop it?



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Basic agreements on how to deal with time might contribute to a smooth running of the course and give the team members more security in dealing with specific situations.

- *Team and participants:* Team members may have different expectations and attitudes towards their relationship with the participants.
  - How important is it to spend time with the participants during their social time? How much time should be spent with participants?
  - How do we deal with participants' feedback about the course? How important are their interests and opinions in relation to the priorities set by the team?
  - How much responsibility for the program and the course do we want to hand over to the participants?
  - What do we consider a 'professional relationship' between participants and trainers?
  - To what extent do we need to agree on these questions?

Whatever the decisions taken within your team, and whatever the disagreements, a team will receive more respect and be considered more professional by participants when it acts as a team in front of them. This means discussing issues and voicing disagreement and frustrations within the team, rather than in front of the group. Clarify within the team ways of providing support in front of the group, regardless of behind the scene issues. For instance, what do you do if the chair of the day forgets to mention a point previously agreed upon? Should someone else interfere? How?

### **2.3.2 Evaluation and feedback**

Evaluation is a means to improving our work in the future and is therefore a central part of teamwork. The team should evaluate the programme, the participants, how it is reaching the objectives, and also its own work. 4.6 deals with evaluation in general. When evaluating teamwork, it is necessary to consider such elements as team performance and dynamics, leadership, decision making, roles, communication and conflict management.

Here are four ideas of how to evaluate your teamwork:

- *Evaluation rounds:* Many teams decide to have daily or otherwise regular rounds of evaluation during a training course. Sitting together, in a confidential and relaxed setting, might be the most comfortable way to evaluate your work, share concerns and find ways of dealing with critical points. To reinvigorate the dynamics of the team, you might wish to change the space you normally work in for a meeting of this kind.
- *Our teamwork: where do you stand?*
  - Step 1: Each member writes one sentence expressing their opinion about the team on a sheet of paper (for instance "the team does not handle its differences constructively"). Everyone can write several sentences on several sheets of paper.
  - Step 2: One person puts their paper in the middle of the space and reads out the sentence written on it. The team members then place themselves around it and explain and share their opinions. The less they agree with the statement, the farther away they stand from the paper. One by one, all sentences are read out and team members take a stand on them.



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Used in this context, this method should be handled flexibly, allowing time for discussion and sharing of thoughts where necessary and taking the time to address sensitive issues.

- *The triangle of the 3 Ps*. The model outlined in 3.2.2 can form a useful basis for evaluating the priorities your team sets in its work. Where does your team place the focus? Are you forging a balance between these interconnected elements?
- *Questionnaire about team co-operation* (Appendix 1). If the team is working together for a substantial period of time this might be a useful way to begin an analysis. Ask everyone to individually complete the questionnaire. Then share, compare and discuss the results in your team. What works well? Which points would you like to improve? You might want to invite an external trainer to facilitate the discussion following the completion of the questionnaire.

### **Personal feedback: why, when and how?**

How do I see you as a trainer and as a team member? Feedback in a team about each other's qualities and performance is a sensitive issue and should be handled with a lot of care. Even if the focus of feedback is (and should be!) on the role of the trainer and not on the person within the trainer as such, training involves personalities, and means placing part of ourselves into an often dynamic and intense process. And, as with all life-roles, criticism can hurt, create insecurities and strike at hidden issues, even when offered in a constructive spirit.

Negative feedback can be hard to take. Positive feedback is important and very nice to hear, but alone does not help us much to improve our work. Criticism also needs to address our weak points, but in a constructive way that helps the person receiving the feedback to improve. If there is enough trust in the team, feedback can be a learning experience and an occasion for self-reflection and self-improvement, helping to create more confidence and better working conditions within the team. The focus of team feedback can be the functioning of the team and the roles that team members are taking on. It can also be the competencies and working styles that the individual team members have shown during the course to date. How feedback is used depends on how far a team wants to go in evaluating its performance.

#### *Some guidelines for giving feedback:*

- Consider the needs of the person receiving the feedback.
- Describe behaviour only – do not attempt to interpret.
- Focus on behaviour that can be changed.
- Be specific. Give examples.
- Wait for feedback to be asked for.
- Do not judge.
- If possible, give feedback immediately after the behaviour (if asked for it).
- Allow the freedom to change or not to change.
- Express feelings directly (e.g. 'It makes me insecure when you...').
- Also give positive feedback.

*(P. G. Hanson, 1975)*



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Two ideas of how to give feedback:

*Exercise about team work and roles in the team: The vehicle method*

Step 1. In pairs or individually, imagine this team as a vehicle. It can be anything you wish, a car, tractor, steamboat or plane. The vehicle should express what you feel is the essence of the team. Make a drawing of this vehicle.

Step 2. Try to place the different team members in the vehicle. Which parts of the vehicle do you see them corresponding to? Who is the sail, motor, compass, seat, brake, global positioning system, and so forth. Why?

Step 3. Explain your drawings to each other.

Step 4. Debrief – What did we get out of this?

Time: At least 1 hour for a team of 4 persons.

*Exercise about giving personal feedback: The hot chair*

- Find a comfortable space for your team. Sit in a circle, place one chair in the middle. One by one, team members sit on this 'hot chair'.
- From there, tell your team colleagues what you would like to get feedback about: your performance as a trainer, your role in the team, and so on. The other team members will then answer you, bearing in mind the guidelines you have agreed on.
- Set a time limit for each person's visit to the hot chair.
- While sitting on the hot chair, you cannot react to individual comments, but you have some time for reactions and questions once the feedback round is over and before the next team member takes the chair.
- Time needed: at least 20 minutes per team member.
- Attention: this can be a very sensitive exercise. Remember to agree some basic rules for giving feedback beforehand!

### 2.3.3 Where do we go from here?

Every team works differently, and every new team has to create and nurture its own process. Importantly, we can feed our past experiences into further developing our teamwork competencies. Difficult and problematic working processes can constitute a learning resource. Sometimes, when working in the same team for a second, or longer time, we might have the opportunity to build on the past team process to improve communication and performance. If you want to read more about aspects of intercultural teamwork, you can also consult the relevant chapters in the *Project Management T-Kit* and *Organisational Management T-Kit*. **Appendix 1** is a reflection sheet for team co-operation.



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### **Some principles for successful team work**

- Commitment! A team can only work effectively if every member wants it to work.
- Take the time needed to discuss basic approaches and ideas, to evaluate your teamwork and give to feedback to each other.
- Make a contract; everyone is in charge!
- Act on the basis of commonly established basic values and objectives.
- Accept yourself and the others.
- Self-responsibility: I am responsible for my own actions and behaviour.
- Trust in and support each other's abilities and performance.
- Respect everyone's limits.
- Be ready to take the risk to do something new, challenge yourself.
- Accept mistakes as a chance for learning.
- Process-oriented thinking: the objectives are important, but the process is important as well. The team is able to improve itself by examining its procedures and practices.
- Establish some procedures to analyse situations and solve problems.
- Be ready to accept emotions as part of the work process.
- Keep a balance between efficiency and social quality.
- Have pride in the accomplishments of the team.
- Teamwork is also fun! If it isn't, something is wrong.

*(Adapted from: Pohl, M & Witt, J. 2000)*

### **Recommendations of the Curriculum and Quality Development Group of the Partnership of the Council of Europe and the European Commission on "Quality standards for European youth worker training" with regard to team work:**

- International composition of the team of trainers
- Balanced composition of the team of trainers with respect to nationality, origin, gender and other significant factors.
- The team composition should be reflective of the composition of the participants' group.
- Common working language for the team of trainers
- The composition of the team of trainers should reflect the knowledge and competence necessary to implement the course.
- Preparatory meeting of team of trainers well before the training course.
- Acceptable and fair economic conditions for participants and team of trainers.
- Clear agreements between all actors (team organiser, team of trainers, participants, sending organisations).