NCFE Level 2

Certificate in Principles of Team Leading

CUSTOMER SERVICE

MOTIVATION

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP ROLES

SUPPORT

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Workbook 2

How to use your learning materials

This course is delivered on a flexible learning basis. This means that most of your study will take place away from your Assessor/Tutor. It helps to carefully plan your studying so that you get the most out of your course. We have put together some handy tips for you below.

Study Guidance

- Try to plan an outline timetable of when and where you will study.
- Try to complete your work in a quiet environment where you are unlikely to be distracted.
- Set realistic goals and deadlines for the various elements of your course.
- Plan what you are going to study during each session, and try and achieve this each time.
- After each session, reflect on what you have achieved and plan what you hope to complete next time.
- Remember that not only do you have the support of your Assessor/Tutor, but it is likely that your family, friends and work colleagues will also be willing to help.

Assessor/Tutor Support

- Your Assessor/Tutor will be available to support and guide you through the programme. They are experts in your area of study and are experienced in helping many different types of learners.
- They can help you to improve the standard of work you submit and will give you useful feedback on areas in which you have excelled, as well as where you can improve.
- Remember to listen to, or read, their feedback carefully. Ask if you are unsure about any of the feedback you receive as your Assessor/Tutor is there to help.
- Make note of any tips they give. Refer to the learning materials as they contain the information you need to complete the end-of-unit assessments.
- Look out for areas in which you can improve, and set yourself an action plan to make sure you complete the required work.
- Take positive feedback on board; this demonstrates you are doing things right and have a good understanding of the subject area.
- Use the feedback to avoid repeating any mistakes you may have made.

Enjoy your studies!

NCFE Level 2 Certificate in Principles of Team Leading

Workbook 2

Workbook Contents

In this workbook, we will cover several work-related subjects that team leaders often deal with in the course of their duties. We will cover customer service, working relationships, health and safety, and handling information and mail.

Within the workbook, there are several Knowledge Activities, focusing on the various topics. These are informal activities that help to consolidate knowledge. In the last section, there are Extension Activities for learners who wish to develop their knowledge further.

Contents

This workbook contains six sections:

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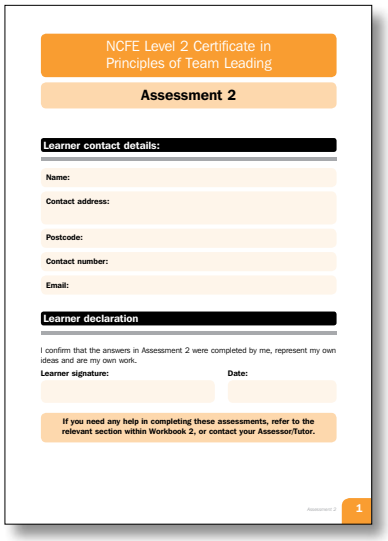
Each section has a corresponding assessment that must be completed in order to achieve this part of the programme.

The assessments for this workbook can be found in:

Assessment 2

When you have completed this workbook you should attempt the assessment. Your Assessor/Tutor will then give you detailed written feedback on your progress.


NCFE Level 2 Certificate in Principles of Team Leading

Assessment 2

Learner contact details:

Name:

Contact address:

Postcode:

Contact number:

Email:

Learner declaration

I confirm that the answers in Assessment 2 were completed by me, represent my own ideas and are my own work.

Learner signature: Date:

If you need any help in completing these assessments, refer to the relevant section within Workbook 2, or contact your Assessor/Tutor.

Introduction

This section deals with customer service. We will look at the purpose and scope of customer service, different types of customers, their value to an organisation and the importance of customer loyalty. We will examine the relationship between good customer service and customer loyalty, and how this can affect the organisation's reputation and image.

The purpose and scope of customer service

We all know when we have received bad customer service, for example:

- when sales assistants are too busy chatting to serve us
- when staff in a restaurant or store are rude and unfriendly
- when a call centre puts us on hold for half an hour
- when our complaints are handled badly

But what makes customer service good?

Customers have **expectations**. They want:

- **an efficient and polite service before, during and after a transaction (buying or using products or services)**
- **good-quality products and services**
- **any complaints and problems to be dealt with properly**
- **their opinion to matter**

Good customer service meets these expectations.

An organisation needs to offer good customer service at all times so that it can survive and thrive. If the customers are satisfied with the products or services, they return and recommend the organisation to others. Quite simply, this keeps the organisation alive and means that their employees' jobs are safer.

On the other hand, good customer service has the scope to make a positive impact on everyone concerned. For example, good customer service can:

- meet or exceed customers' expectations, inspire their loyalty and encourage repeat business and recommendations
- ensure that products and services are developed and provided to meet and exceed current and changing expectations
- help to make sure that the organisation is successful and sustainable, which can have a positive knock-on effect on suppliers and the local community
- help to give staff job security and scope for career development with a successful employer

When considering the scope of customer service, we need to remember that it is important before, during and after the transaction when the customer buys or uses a product or service.

The **purpose** of customer service is to:

- provide good-quality products and services that meet or exceed customers' expectations
- provide an efficient and polite service before, during and after a transaction
- treat customers with respect and consideration
- deal with any feedback, complaints and problems effectively

The **scope** of customer service is very broad as it can affect many people. There can be serious consequences if customer service is not good enough, for example:

- dissatisfied customers who go elsewhere for their products and services
- a loss of revenue and good reputation for the organisation
- loss of jobs, security and career development for employees
- a knock-on effect on suppliers if the organisation reduces its output or fails
- a knock-on effect on the local community if an employer moves away or makes its workers redundant

Team leaders are very important when delivering customer service as they can have a big influence on their team members and their attitudes to customers. If teams are more concerned with production, they need to focus on providing excellent products for others in the organisation to sell and pass on to the organisation's customers and service users. If teams are customer-facing, they need to be managed and motivated by their team leaders to ensure excellent customer service at all times.

Did you know?

According to the Global Consumer Pulse Survey report by Accenture, which covered all industries throughout the world:

66% of consumers globally switched service providers due to poor customer service in 2013.

Internal and external customers

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 1.

Traditionally, we think of a customer as someone who buys the products or services from a shop or business. However, organisations have business relationships with different people, agencies, contractors, companies and so on, and many of these will be customers too.

Customers can be:

Internal customers

These customers are within the organisation itself. One team within an organisation can be the customers of another team. For example:

- The shop-fitting department of a large supermarket chain call the store managers their customers.
- The printing team in a company may consider the marketing team as their customer because of preparing brochures, leaflets etc. for them.
- The human resources team employed by a charity to look after the welfare of volunteers may think of the volunteers as their customers, as their job is to provide backup and resources to the voluntary workers.

External customers

These are outside people or organisations that buy and/or use the products and services. These will include:

- **Clients** – customers who use the organisation's services over a period of time, where there is usually an ongoing business relationship – e.g. in a hospital, the cleaning contract company will call the NHS its customer; an accountant will have the same clients for many years.
- **Walk-in customers and passing trade** – customers who walk in from the street without pre-booking a service or product, usually wanting to buy or browse and get to know a business.
- **Internet-based customers** – there may never be a direct, personal relationship with these customers if all transactions are performed on a website, although email contact is now very common.
- **Telephone customers** – call centres deal with millions of people this way, dealing with services, orders, queries, payments, complaints and so on.
- **Contacts from referrals and recommendations** – people referred to the organisation by existing customers.

Money does not always need to change hands directly between customers and the organisation. There is still a customer service role even if products and services are not paid for. For example:

- For a free drop-in centre funded by a charity and local council, the customers will be the people who use the facilities. The level of activity will probably affect the money given to the centre, and customer service is still important.
- A library funded by the local council does not charge for many of its services, but the users of the library are still customers.

Differences between internal and external customers

There can be differences between the two types of customer, for example:

Their level of knowledge and understanding of the organisation's systems and procedures

Internal customers will usually have a reasonable working knowledge about how the organisation works. They may work for a different department or team and have different skills, but they will know about the organisation's structure and functions.

External customers may know nothing about the organisation, especially during their first transaction. Unless we have worked for or studied a similar organisation, we are unlikely to understand how its systems and procedures work.

Their expectations of the products and services

Internal customers will base their expectations on a working knowledge of the organisation. They are much more likely to have come across the products and services before and will have a good idea about what to expect.

External customers' expectations might be based on previous experience, but they are likely to be based on their impression of the brand. This impression could have been formed by finding out about the products and services from several sources – e.g. advertising, research or recommendation.

Styles of communication

Internal customers will often use jargon and abbreviated references, such as acronyms. Using inside knowledge and familiar phrases keeps things brief when communicating with people who also understand what is meant. Communication can often be informal between established colleagues, for example, although formal styles are needed in some circumstances.

External customers often require more formal communication styles and methods, avoiding jargon and over-familiar phrases and greetings, especially if the working relationship has not been established. Organisations will usually use a more formal approach with external customers, as a sign of respect and to minimise misunderstandings.

Cultural factors

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 2.

Customers' expectations can be heavily influenced by cultural experience, and organisations take this into account when delivering their service offer and managing expectations.

Cultural factors that need to be considered include, for example:

- **language** – e.g. English not being the first language; different traditions about tone of voice; cultural traditions about the formality of language communication styles
- **nationality** – e.g. established traditions that reflect national culture
- **age** – e.g. cultural traditions about how people of different ages treat each other
- **religion and beliefs** – e.g. affecting food and drink choices; different holy days; religious festivals; fasting periods
- **social attitudes and behaviours** – e.g. the formality and type of greeting
- **body language** – e.g. personal space; touching and gestures; showing feet
- **values** – e.g. ethics and perception of right and wrong; lifestyle; attitudes to environmental and animal welfare issues

As we know, customers all expect good-quality products and services, and excellent customer service. In addition to these expectations, we need to add cultural awareness as it is an important part of treating each customer as an individual.

The following table gives some examples about topics that may affect customers' expectations and how an organisation might address these:

Cultural factor	Possible effects on customers' expectations	When considering cultural values, organisations might
Language	■ unable to check if needs can be satisfied ■ not understanding the details about the service offer, leading to disappointment or surprise ■ finding communication with customer service staff difficult and embarrassing ■ fear about asking questions ■ offended by the words and tone of voice used	■ print product information in different languages ■ train staff to speak slowly and clearly and be prepared to repeat ■ encourage staff to use gestures and diagrams to communicate when necessary ■ have access to translation services ■ use a formal approach when greeting customers – if their culture expects this ■ reassure staff that customers from certain cultures do not use 'please' and 'thank you' as we do in the UK – although considered rude here, this is seen as normal in many countries
Nationality	■ want to find familiar products and services that reflect their nationality and traditions	■ do different versions of products for different nationalities – e.g. flags and souvenirs sold at international sporting events ■ offer national dishes and drinks – e.g. haggis for a Scottish New Year party ■ offer imported products and brands – e.g. Polish tiger bread or German bratwurst sausages
Age	■ expect to be treated in a certain way for their age ■ might have preconceptions about staff being much older or younger than them – and unable to deal with their queries	■ treat older customers more formally – if their culture expects this ■ use formal forms of address for adults ■ amend their service offer for children and young people ■ research a person's cultural expectations for different age groups

Religion and beliefs	■ want foods that are prepared in a special way ■ want products and services required by their specific religion ■ want products and services available at correct time for religious holidays, festivals, fasts etc. ■ expect respect and tolerance for their beliefs, or lack of beliefs	■ offer alcohol-free options ■ offer vegetarian, kosher, halal and pork-free options ■ set aside an area for prayer ■ target service offers at religious festivals and respect fasting periods ■ be aware of having to separate men and women at certain events ■ make sure that there are no offensive images or symbols on show – e.g. covering up a cross at a crematorium when there is a non-Christian funeral ■ making sure that staff cover up sufficiently to show respect
Social attitudes and behaviours	■ some expect to be served by a person of their own gender ■ expect products and services associated with certain social situations to be available ■ expect staff to respect or follow their own traditions and cultural behaviours	■ be aware that some cultures treat males and females differently – amending the service offer if appropriate ■ match the service offer to particular cultural practices – e.g. allowing alcohol sales at a rugby match in a stadium, but not a football match ■ avoid interruptions and shouting – considered to be very rude in some cultures ■ be aware of types of customer service that people from other cultures may be used to

Body language	• some expect staff to display body language that is acceptable in their own culture	• train staff about not standing too close to people, or touching them – if this will be considered offensive • encourage eye contact with some cultures, but discouraging it for others • check which gestures are acceptable or offensive • make sure that staff know how to greet people from different cultures – e.g. whether to shake hands, bow, remain silent or be very relaxed and chatty
Values	• some customers will not choose products and services that do not support their values • customers expect claims about the organisation's values to be genuine	• provide a range of ethically-sourced goods to give customers choice • be members of associations and schemes that identify with their values – e.g. the Soil Association, Fairtrade, Assured Food Standards (British Red Tractor logo) • offer vegetarian • offer approved options – e.g. Halal or Kosher meat • make sure that their service offers reflect different lifestyles • make sure that their image and behaviours support their values

Organisations will usually have policies, procedures and training in place to help their staff treat customers equally and fairly. They encourage respect and make it clear that discrimination is not tolerated. They may have 'diversity days' where people bring and try things from different cultures, so that they can learn about different customs, food, festivals etc.

In the customer service role, team members and leaders can do several things to embrace and respect cultural diversity. They can, for example:

- **observe, understand and respect different dress codes and symbols** – e.g. customers wearing a cross, a hijab or a turban
- **be respectful and aware of how different genders can be treated in other cultures** – e.g. some cultures can seem quite sexist to us in the UK, with the husband making all of the decisions during a transaction, for instance
- **be sensitive to the person's gender** – e.g. female patients may prefer or insist on seeing a female doctor
- **be very discreet and allow privacy** – e.g. in a changing room
- **learn about festivals and customs for other cultures** – so that they understand the main points and can hold an informed conversation with the customer
- **be polite, courteous and friendly at all times**
- **speak clearly and slowly, moderate strong regional accents and avoid local sayings** – especially if English is not the customer's first language
- **repeat very clearly if requested** – maybe using different words, gestures or a diagram to help the customer understand something
- **stay calm when they are not sure about how to handle the situation**

If an organisation deals with customers from the same cultures all of the time, staff with a customer service role will soon learn about the details of the cultures. This will enable them to relax and engage with customers on a wide variety of subjects.

If staff find that they do not understand the cultural differences and do not know how to act, they should just stay calm and remain polite and courteous. They should not make assumptions about the customer's needs and expectations. They should ask the customer, in a polite way, about what they can do to help.

The main thing is to treat every customer as an individual, with respect and patience, whatever their background or culture.

Knowledge Activity 1: Imagine that you work in an insurance call centre. You are having great difficulty understanding a customer who has called to complain.

What could be the causes of the communication difficulties?

How would you deal with the situation?

Challenging and dissatisfied customers

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 3, 4 and 5.

Sometimes staff in a customer service role have to deal with challenging customers. There can be communication difficulties that need to be overcome, and it is important for the staff member to respond professionally and appropriately. This is to:

- safeguard the personal safety of the staff member, their colleagues, the customer, and others who may be affected
- respect the customers' rights
- comply with legislation and regulations – e.g. the Equality Act 2010 or the Data Protection Act 1998
- maintain good customer service in all situations

Different types of challenging customers

Customers can present extra challenges at work for a variety of reasons. People might exhibit challenging behaviour or make extra demands as a result of:

- reasons outside the organisation's control – e.g. permanent or temporary factors in the customer's personal life
- reasons within the organisation's control – e.g. a reaction to problems with products or bad customer service
- a mixture of the two – e.g. someone with drug or alcohol issues overreacting to a problem with a product

Whatever the cause, challenging customers may be angry, unreasonable, confused, distressed, demanding, difficult to communicate with, or in need of extra assistance.

Customers may be challenging to deal with due to, for example:

- **additional needs or requirements** – e.g. impaired vision, hearing or mobility issues that need to be accommodated
- **poor communication skills** – e.g. learning difficulties that make communication difficult
- **language barriers** – e.g. making them upset because they find it hard to express themselves in English
- **cultural barriers** – e.g. making some customers seem rude because saying 'please' or 'thank you' is not part of their culture
- **personal problems** – e.g. issues with alcohol, drugs or a medical condition; childcare or family problems; difficult living conditions
- **an incident, emergency or trauma** – e.g. reacting badly if they (or a person close to them) have been involved in an accident, injury or serious illness
- **dissatisfaction and disappointment** – e.g. reacting emotionally when there is a problem with the product or service
- **impatience** – e.g. being short-tempered if they are not dealt with straightaway
- **indecision** – e.g. uncertainty about how to proceed, what they want or how to solve problems
- **being overly assertive, confident or intimidating** – e.g. coming across as a bully when talking to customer service staff

- **being too talkative** – e.g. making it hard for staff to deal with their query quickly; making things unnecessarily complicated; making it difficult to find out exactly what the problem is

It is important to collect information about the reasons behind a challenging customer's behaviour as this helps us to work out how to react and take appropriate action. Challenging behaviours can include, for example:

- **aggression** – e.g. threatening or bullying staff or others; being violent; standing very close to someone and intimidating them; using threatening gestures
- **frustration** – e.g. getting angry and making inappropriate comments; refusing to accept limitations and procedures; crying or losing control of their temper
- **irritation** – e.g. being impatient and bad-tempered; questioning the competence of staff or the organisation
- **confrontation** – e.g. arguing with staff
- **confusion** – e.g. not understanding what they need to do due to physical or mental impairment
- **making unreasonable demands** – e.g. expecting solutions that cannot be delivered; being unrealistic about deadlines or the limits of the service offer

Dissatisfied customers

When customers are dissatisfied with the service offer or customer service, they do not make repeat purchases or recommend the organisation to others. This can harm the organisation, especially if negative reviews mean that potential customers refuse to try the organisation's products or services for themselves.

Dissatisfied customers can be identified by, for example:

- their direct complaints – e.g. on emails, letters, telephone or face-to-face
- their indirect complaints – e.g. leaving poor reviews on social media or surveys
- body language – e.g. crossed arms, angry expressions or aggressive hand movements
- their tone of voice – e.g. using a raised voice or shouting

When dealing with dissatisfied customers, it is important to find out why they are unhappy. They are often dissatisfied with the organisation's failure to deliver excellent customer service – e.g. late delivery; damaged or incorrect goods; items being out of stock; a lack of appointments. Having identified the reason for dissatisfaction, staff members can start to investigate the cause of the problem, work to find solutions and follow their organisation's complaints procedures. The staff member will usually, for example:

- **listen carefully to (or read) the details of the complaint** – letting the customer speak and explain themselves fully, maybe making notes about the details
- **ask questions in a calm voice** – to establish the details, show personal caring and echo key points
- **apologise to the customer** – and show that they understand and sympathise with the customer
- **explain the background to the problem or issue** – or offer to investigate if the cause of the problem is not obvious

We will cover how to deal with angry customers later in this workbook. For now, it important to just mention that staff members must not put themselves or others in danger if a customer becomes violent or abusive. It is usually best to call for help and let specially trained managers or security staff handle the situation.

Knowledge Activity 2: Imagine that you work in a large shop and a customer comes in from the street in a distressed state. They are hardly able to speak, they have blood on their arm and they are extremely pale.

How do you handle the situation?

It turns out that they have been attacked outside the store and had their bag and purse stolen. What other action can you take?

During the conversation, they become even paler and they complain of feeling sick and dizzy. What should you do now, and why?

An organisation's service offer

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 6.

Organisations offer their customers a range of products and services. The extent and limits of the customer service that an organisation offers its customers is called its **service offer**.

The service offer will cover many things, for example:

- **the range of goods and services offered**
- **pricing** – e.g. stating the price including Value Added Tax (VAT), or maybe excluding VAT for trade customers
- **discounts** – e.g. buy one get one free; 10% off if customers buy today
- **delivery options** – e.g. free for standard delivery when customers spend above a minimum amount; charges for overnight or weekend delivery
- **installation options** – e.g. charges for installing household appliances like washing machines
- **warranties** – e.g. extended warranties on electrical goods that guarantee repairs or replacement if there are faults after the period covered by the manufacturer
- **returns policies** – e.g. rules about exchanges or refunds on returned items that are not faulty
- **other value-added features** – e.g. loyalty card points

The service offer can include items and deals that are in addition to the customer's normal statutory rights, which we cover later on.

An organisation's service offer might be covered in a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between two parties. For example, trade show organisers will have an SLA with the catering outlets that serve the public attending the show. This will cover agreed levels of prices, quality, service, waste disposal, safety and emergency arrangements and so on.

The customer service offer and customer loyalty

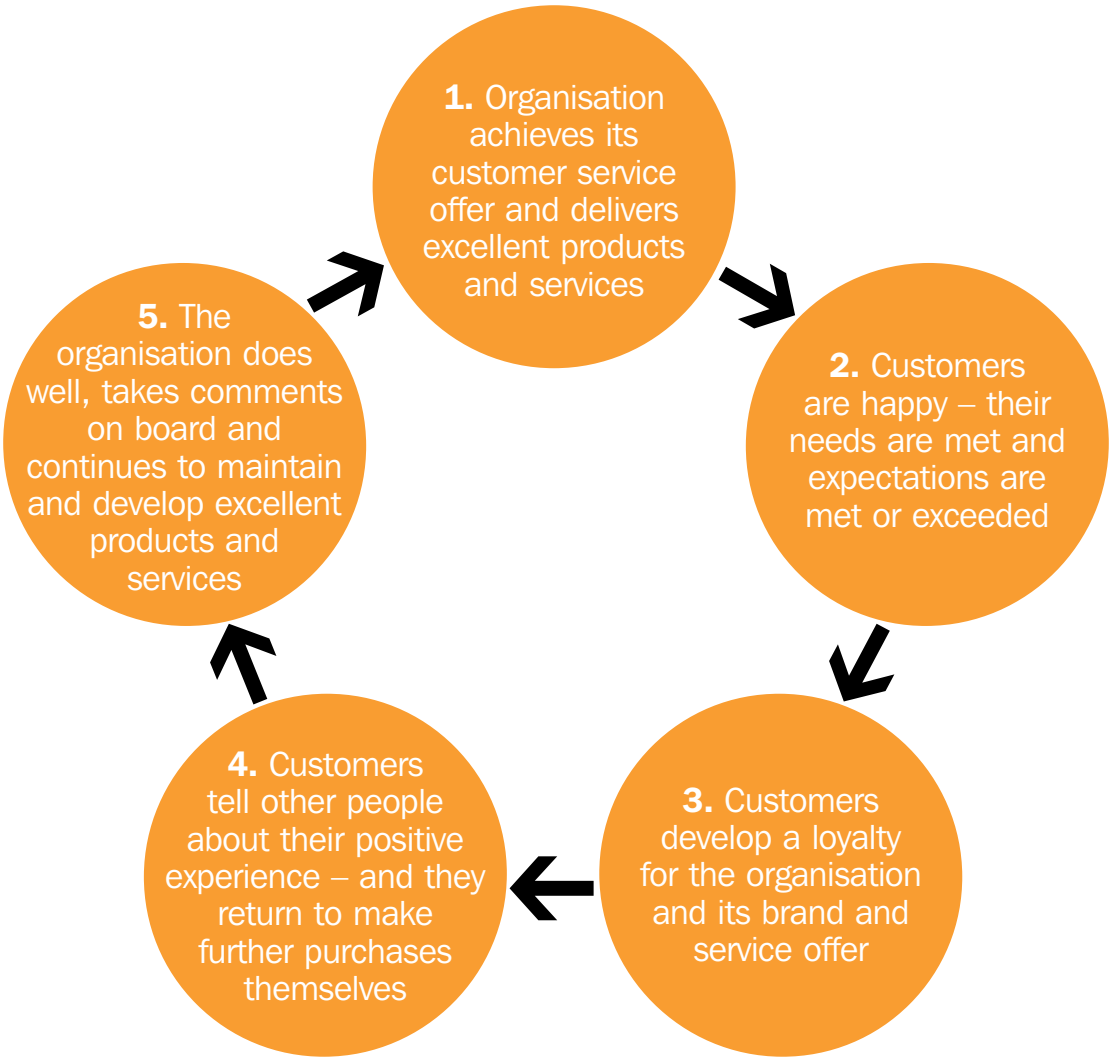
The achievement of the customer service offer can be a major contribution to the enhancement of customer loyalty. Meeting or exceeding expectations when delivering customer service is a vital part of developing a relationship with customers and earning their loyalty.

To achieve a service offer, an organisation needs to gain customer satisfaction by meeting and exceeding expectations through delivering excellent products, services and customer service. This can be identified in positive feedback and increased sales from customers' recommendations and loyalty.

When an organisation achieves its service offer, it develops a relationship with the customer that builds:

- confidence in the organisation
- trust in the service offer
- commitment to the organisation

This leads to satisfied customers who remain loyal to the organisation and refer it to others. In turn, this brings ongoing business to the organisation, which allows for future plans and job security, as shown in the diagram below:



Knowledge Activity 3: Think about businesses that you use and make a few notes about what they offer to make themselves seem different to their competitors. For example:

Supermarkets and local food stores

Mobile phone providers

Local restaurants and cafes

Did you know?

Customers rank speed of response, speed of resolution and staff friendliness as the three most important aspects of customer service.

(Research by Zendesk)

Customer satisfaction and organisational performance

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 7 and 8.

There are links between all aspects of customer service. One relationship is between customer satisfaction and organisational performance, a two-way and interdependent process.

Customer satisfaction is an abstract concept of when customers' needs and expectations are met or exceeded by, for example:

- **receiving good-quality goods and services**
- **delivery being on time**
- **staff 'going that extra mile' when delivering customer service**
- **having problems and queries dealt with effectively**
- **knowing that their opinions and feedback matter**

Organisational performance must be at a good level to be able to achieve this success on a sustained basis. All operational functions need to run smoothly, efficiently and effectively for the products and services to be consistently delivered at a high and sustainable standard.

Once an organisation has achieved good levels of customer satisfaction, there can be several benefits, including:

- **repeat business from the customer**
- **increased customer spend** – e.g. a customer who starts by buying one new product might be so impressed that they try three or four new products next time
- **customer loyalty** – e.g. always buying the same brand
- **recommendations** – e.g. from the customer telling friends and family about the new products
- **performance targets being met or exceeded** – e.g. sales, profits, new contracts or SLAs

Even if the organisation enjoys success and benefits as a result of good rates of customer satisfaction, it needs to continue to deliver excellence to maintain and improve its position to survive and thrive.

Potential consequences of customers' dissatisfaction

If an organisation fails to achieve its customer service offer, it will lead to customer dissatisfaction. It can fail by, for example:

- providing substandard goods or services
- failing to deliver on time and in good condition
- giving poor customer service
- not dealing with queries or complaints effectively
- mis-selling – deliberately or by accident
- charging excessively high prices

- not keeping up to date with trends and customer expectations
- not being ethical or environmentally aware

The consequences for an organisation that fails to earn customer satisfaction can be serious and difficult to address. For example, an organisation could:

- suffer from bad publicity and lose a good reputation
- lose current and potential customers to competitors – in the short or long term
- have orders cancelled or reduced
- suffer a drop in revenue and profits
- receive more complaints
- lose staff from redundancies or resignations
- have a demotivated workforce

Once the cycle is broken, by not making sure that customers are satisfied, it can be extremely difficult or impossible to mend. Customers really are the lifeblood of organisations in all sectors. Their needs and expectations need to be met and exceeded if organisations are to avoid failure, reductions or closure.

Knowledge Activity 4: Imagine that you go to your favourite restaurant where you normally have a great meal with great service. On this occasion, the meal is not up to standard and the usual kitchen staff do not seem to be on duty. You find out that the usual chef and manager are away, but they will be back next week. Make a few notes about:

How you feel about the problems

Whether you will give the restaurant another chance

How you would feel if the problems were repeated on your next visit

Reputation and image

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 9.

When we think about an organisation's reputation and image, we consider a wide variety of subjects that influence our impressions. The organisation's values, often mentioned in its brand promises, form the base of its reputation. Its reputation and image can be based on, for example:

- **the standard of products and services produced** – e.g. a car manufacturer that is known for producing only prestige cars
- **the standard of its customer service delivery** – e.g. companies known for their excellent customer care
- **being a market leader in its industry** – e.g. the larger supermarkets who compete for market share
- **its size** – e.g. being known for being the biggest in the town, country or the world
- **its business structure** – e.g. John Lewis being a partnership where all employees have a stake in the organisation
- **its ethics** – e.g. refusing to bring food into the UK by air
- **its reputation as an employer** – e.g. a school being known as a good place to work
- **legal compliance** – e.g. a building firm having a good safety record and high standards of health and safety on-site
- **publicity** – e.g. positive coverage about charity work done by employees; negative coverage about illegal or unethical practices

The image that an organisation usually wants to present is that they are competent, decent, trustworthy, solvent, reliable and competitively priced.

All of these elements influence the customers' perceptions of the brand, products and services offered by the organisation. If customers have a positive perception of the organisation, they are far more likely to have a positive impression of their goods and services. They will feel positive about associating themselves with the brand.

However, if customers have a negative perception of the organisation, they are very likely to have a negative view on the products and services. If they feel that they cannot trust the organisation, they will feel that they might not be able to trust the quality and reliability of the service offer, so they may refuse to buy a product, or only spend a small amount to 'see how it goes'.

This is especially true of larger and longer-term transactions. If people are going to make a considerable investment, they need to feel that they can trust the organisation and its service offer – e.g. when buying large electrical appliances, cars or homes. They want to know that their needs and expectations will be met and that any problems will be dealt with effectively.

Changes in demand for an organisation's products and services need to be managed. If they have a good reputation and image, the organisation needs to plan for sustained or improved development – e.g. in production, sales or employment levels.

If they develop a bad reputation, the organisation needs to act quickly to put things right. If they fail to take early action, the chances are that the organisation will become unsustainable and will have to reduce its output, make redundancies and cuts, and it may be forced to close or sell.

Knowledge Activity 5: Think about three of your favourite brands. Make a few notes about the reputation and image you have of each of the organisations that make them:

1.

2.

3.

Attracting customers and retaining loyalty

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 10.

We have seen how an organisation relies heavily on its customers being satisfied with its customer offer. It needs new customers and repeat business all of the time to be able to do well and plan ahead. There are many things that organisations can do to help to attract customers and retain their loyalty.

Attracting customers

Methods that organisations use to attract customers include, for example:

- **advertising campaigns** – e.g. television, radio, magazine and newspaper advertisements about a new or revised product or service
- **promotional offers** – e.g. offering discounts and special offers
- **promotional events** – e.g. having an open day; taking stands at trade shows; running corporate events; product launches for media and invited guests
- **sponsorship** – e.g. sponsoring local, national or international events or sporting competitions
- **offering unique selling points (USPs)** – e.g. offering brand-new technology
- **marketing and publicity campaigns** – e.g. mailshots, cold-calling, marketing emails or telephone calls; doing radio, press or television interviews
- **social media and Internet activity** – e.g. using Twitter, Facebook or YouTube
- **incentive schemes** – e.g. bonuses or gifts for customers who introduce new business; loyalty cards and vouchers
- **developing websites** – e.g. working to improve rankings on search engines and links with compatible websites
- **developing relationships with compatible organisations** – e.g. sporting event organisers working with different stadiums and venues that have similar customers
- **contacting previous customers** – e.g. to offer new products or entice them back from competitors

An organisation needs to have its service offer ready by the time it embarks on activities to attract customers, so that it is ready to cope with demand. It needs to do a coordinated approach so that all of the different activities complement each other and appeal to the right customer profile.

Retaining customer loyalty

Having attracted its customers and met or exceeded their expectations, organisations need to continue to make their service offer attractive to retain their loyalty. Methods that can be used include, for example:

- **consistently providing excellent products and services** – e.g. proving that their trust and confidence are justified
- **providing excellent customer service** – e.g. making customers feel valued and important
- **loyalty schemes** – e.g. loyalty cards, sales, discounts, offers, incentives or events for loyal customers
- **dealing with feedback, problems and complaints quickly and effectively** – e.g. to apologise, explain and make sure that amendments to the service offer are made when required
- **reacting to any adverse publicity or feedback quickly and in a professional manner** – e.g. to explain the situation, be clear about remedial actions and be involved in follow-up media coverage
- **remaining competitive** – e.g. to make sure that they can continue to compete with competitors' service offers
- **constantly reviewing trends and customers' expectations** – e.g. to make sure that the products and services are up to date with changes in fashion, technology and so on
- **developing new or improved products and services** – e.g. to give them new opportunities to approach previous, current and potential customers
- **staying on touch with customers** – e.g. to continue, maintain and develop the customer relationship

Did you know?

Attracting a new customer costs around 6-7 times more than retaining an existing customer.

(Bain and Company – an international management consultancy firm)

Knowledge Activity 6: Imagine that you manage a phone shop in town. You have new products coming to your store next month and you need to attract new customers and retain the loyalty of your current customers. Make a few notes about what you could do to achieve your objectives to develop the business.

Summary

In this section, we have looked at the different types of customers, and the value of customers and their loyalty. We have reviewed:

- the difference between internal and external customers
- cultural factors, and how they can affect customers' expectations
- dealing with challenging and dissatisfied customers
- how the achievement of the service offer enhances customer loyalty
- the relationship between customer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and organisational performance
- how an organisation's reputation and image can affect customers' perceptions of its service offer
- methods of attracting customers and retaining their loyalty

Section 2: Understand how to deliver customer service and resolve problems

Introduction

In this section, we are going to look at how to deliver customer service and resolve problems. We will consider how organisations work to satisfy their individual customers' needs and expectations with their products, services, customer service and brands. We will also look at how organisations resolve customer service problems and make use of feedback.

Customers' wants, needs, expectations and satisfaction

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 11.

Customers have expectations and generally want:

- **efficient and polite service** – before, during and after buying or using a product or service
- **good-quality products and services** – in line with the standards promised in catalogues, brochures, websites, customer charters, company policies etc.
- **complaints and problems to be dealt with properly** – politely and quickly, with an effective outcome
- **their opinion to matter** – when dealing with staff, when giving feedback or when discussing a problem

There can be subtle differences between customers' wants, needs and expectations. These are illustrated below with some comments about what a customer may want, need and expect when buying a new vacuum cleaner for their home:

	General description	Example of customer buying a new vacuum cleaner
Customer wants	What the customer sees as their idealistic view of which type of product or service will meet their needs	A perfect, low-cost cleaning machine that is lightweight and can clean their house with very little effort
Customer needs	What the customer requires the product or service to do – looking at the benefits and features that the customer needs	Individual features that are needed: • must be able to deal with dog and cat hair • must be lightweight • must have tools and a long hose • prefer a long electrical lead • prefer a quiet, low-wattage motor • must be under £250 • prefer to buy from retail outlet • prefer a three-year warranty or guarantee
Customer expectations	What the customer expects the product or service to do to meet their needs – these can be realistic or unrealistic	The chosen vacuum cleaner should: • do everything that was promised • be reliable • be easily available, preferably in stock to take away that day • come with good customer service and guarantees Staff should: • be polite, friendly and knowledgeable • be able to answer queries • make the transaction easy and straightforward • make the customer feel valued and respected The retail outlet should: • be easy to get to, with free parking outside • be clean, tidy, well lit and well ventilated • be well laid out with logical sections • have enough knowledgeable staff on duty • have plenty of stock and choice

Even in this simple example we can see differences between wants, needs and expectations. A customer's wants can be very general and idealistic, and their wants do not necessarily give enough information about their needs. Their needs are the focus of the negotiations and transaction. If the needs cannot be satisfied, the expectations cannot be met.

Using good questioning techniques can encourage customers to give useful answers that can help us to identify their needs and expectations, for example:

- open questions to get the customer to talk – e.g. "What are your top three priorities?"
- closed questions for a quick response – e.g. any question that can be answered "yes" or "no"
- probing questions for more details – e.g. "So, tell me more about..."

By looking at their needs in detail, it is possible to match the service offer and meet or exceed their expectations. Each customer will have a 'wish list' of features and benefits that they need from the product or service – some of these features will be 'must haves' and others will be 'prefer or would like to have' features that are optional.

Effective customer service skills can result in a match by, for example:

- asking relevant questions to assess needs accurately – especially if the customer is not sure about what they want or need initially
- using good listening and questioning skills to encourage useful answers
- clearly explaining the features and benefits of relevant products and services
- dealing with objections with respect and an open mind
- offering and suggesting alternatives and compromises
- remaining focused on the customer's needs

Customer satisfaction is a measurement of how well the products of services provided meet or exceed customers' expectations. It is an abstract concept and can be very subjective, with customers having their own individual views, standards and concerns.

Organisations use several ways to try to quantify their customers' reactions and levels of satisfaction and they can measure several things, such as, for example:

- the level of sales
- the amount of repeat business that is generated
- the level of complaints, negative feedback and product returns
- comments and scores in satisfaction surveys
- key performance indicators (KPIs) that assess the performance and key features of the product or service

Reviews on websites and forums are often used as an indication of customer satisfaction – e.g. comments and star ratings on websites that deal with restaurants, hotels and travel. Although the reviews are usually left by legitimate customers who leave impartial and independent comments and ratings, a significant number can be false. Fake reviews can influence potential customers who want extra information before they decide to buy or reject a product or service, so care needs to be taken when using these to measure customer satisfaction. Surveys can also be inaccurate, and they need to be thorough and well run to give an accurate picture.

If an organisation can identify customers' needs, then meet or exceed their expectations, the level of customer satisfaction should be high. This helps them to build relationships with customers and develop repeat business and recommendations.

Treating customers as individuals

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 12.

It is important to treat customers as individuals so that staff can do their best to meet or exceed each customer's particular needs and expectations. Some parts of the service offer will appeal to some people and not others, so team members need to be able to target their approach in line with the individual's requirements.

Another important reason is that organisations need to comply with anti-discrimination legislation, particularly the Equality Act 2010. This Act addresses unfair discrimination against people:

- in the workplace – during recruitment and employment – e.g. in care homes, offices, retail, voluntary workplaces
- in education – e.g. schools, colleges, training companies
- as consumers – e.g. in shops, on the Internet, in cafes and restaurants, when buying or renting property
- when using public services – e.g. healthcare, libraries, transport, councils, civil service
- in clubs with more than 25 members

The Equality Act 2010 means that all people are now protected from discrimination due to their:

- **age** – young (but over 18) and old are protected at work and in work training
- **disability or impairment** – organisations must make 'reasonable adjustments' to accommodate staff, customers and visitors with disabilities
- **gender** – equal pay, training and opportunity for males and females
- **gender reassignment** – people changing from male to female, or female to male
- **marriage or civil partnership** – preventing discrimination on the grounds of being married or in a civil partnership at work or in work training
- **pregnancy or maternity (including breastfeeding)** – only reasons of safety are not covered – e.g. equality may not be possible for pregnant women in some circumstances if the activity could harm them or the baby
- **race** – wherever they were born, their parents' and their own race, colour, ethnicity are protected
- **religion or beliefs** – any religion, lack of religion or personal belief is protected
- **sexual orientation** – heterosexual, gay, lesbian and bisexual people are covered

Under the Act, these are called **protected characteristics**. These characteristics are protected in most circumstances, and organisations need to have sound operational reasons for discrimination.

Organisations must make sure that discrimination is not tolerated – in the workplace, in shops, in healthcare etc. They have to train and monitor their workforce, and put in place policies and procedures for dealing with problems and complaints. They need to make sure that all employees, customers and others know where to find the information.

The Equality Act covers the main sources of potential discrimination, but customers will also have other characteristics, tastes, standards and life choices that make them individual. Although not specifically covered by law, customer service staff also need to be tolerant, respectful and accepting of other differences.

For example, customers may also have individual requirements relating to:

- **where they live** – e.g. influencing where they choose to use a service
- **their transport arrangements** – e.g. having no car and being unable to get to an appointment for a service
- **their general health** – e.g. causing difficulty with mobility when planning how to access products and services

- **their income** – e.g. influencing their choices of products, financial arrangements and payment terms
- **their childcare and other family commitments** – e.g. families wanting holidays during the school breaks only
- **who lives in their household** – e.g. wanting products that are suitable for a large family
- **whether they own or rent their home** – e.g. influencing permanent fixtures such as replacement windows
- **personal tastes, likes and dislikes** – e.g. preferring certain colours and styles of products
- **how they dress and present themselves** – e.g. expressing individual choices about clothes, jewellery, tattoos or piercings

The main objective is to treat everyone as an individual, with respect and patience, whatever their background or culture, and whatever their differences.

We can never assume facts about our customers until we get to know them, and it is vital to remain open-minded when finding out about their needs and expectations. Just because customers are dressed in scruffy clothes and turn up in a muddy car, it does not mean that they cannot want, need or afford the full range of services and products on offer. If we work in a building supplies company or a garden centre, we would expect people to turn up in work clothes if they are working on a project.

Similarly, we cannot assume that a well-dressed customer who wears expensive jewellery can afford everything on offer. Their circumstances might have changed since they bought the high-end items, and we must not make assumptions about their income and spending patterns.

By treating customers as individuals, customer service can be enhanced and more effective. Benefits can include, for example:

- more accurate identification of customers' needs and expectations
- increased customer satisfaction
- improved customer relationships and loyalty
- compliance with legislation
- a good reputation for the organisation

Knowledge Activity 7: Imagine that you are wearing scruffy clothes because you have been helping to clear out and clean a friend's house. You go to the local shop for some food and the shop staff look at you and judge you by your appearance. They are rude and disrespectful, making unpleasant jokes to each other about how you look. They take a long time to serve you and are not helpful when you need help to find something.

How do you feel about their reaction to you?

How do you feel about going to that shop again for something else?

If you were their manager, how would you advise those staff members to treat all customers, and why?

Features and benefits of products and services

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 13.

Organisations can be in different sectors:

- **the commercial sector** – e.g. manufacturers, businesses, supermarkets, hotels, landlords, financial services providers, or transport providers
- **the public sector providing public services** – e.g. the NHS, libraries, schools and colleges, local councils, armed forces, police, fire or ambulance service
- **the third sector** – e.g. voluntary and not-for-profit groups, such as charities

The products and services offered by each organisation will have a range of features and benefits, and these will vary according to the type of organisation.

Features are the distinguishing characteristics of a particular product or service. The features will deliver the benefits to the customer.

Benefits are the positive effects enjoyed by the customer if they buy or use the product or service. The benefits meet the customer's needs.

Features and benefits can include, for example:

Features of the product or service	Benefits to the customer
Charging consistently low prices – e.g. large supermarkets offering deals and value for money; budget airlines and train companies offering some tickets very cheaply	Lower costs Able to budget and plan expenditure
Offering a wide range of goods and services – e.g. an online art materials supplier offering a wide range of products from many different manufacturers; insurance companies offering access to products from the majority of insurance providers	More choice Greater chance of being able to satisfy needs and expectations
Fast service and response times – e.g. in fast-food outlets; promised by broadband suppliers; telephone call-back service from doctors in a GP surgery; ambulance, police and fire service emergency response	Saving time Convenience Actions can potentially saves lives and reduce suffering
Personal service and aftercare – e.g. from a hospital or healthcare professional	A feeling of well-being Feeling valued and safe Greater chance of being able to satisfy needs and expectations
Fast and reliable delivery of goods – e.g. courier companies and Royal Mail	Convenience Saving time Able to plan the rest of the day Able to rely on times that may have a critical effect on a business or personal task
Excellent data security – e.g. from banks; from online payment systems; for personal health records	Personal and financial security and safety Trust and good working relationship
Good guarantees and warranties – e.g. department stores with a good reputation for 'no quibble' guarantees, car manufacturers offering free or low-cost extended warranties	Peace of mind Confidence that help will be available if needed Less likely to lose money if something goes wrong

Commercial sector

Organisations in the commercial sector offer goods and services for which they are paid. The features and benefits of their products and services need to be cost-effective to maximise profit. Profit is important for their survival and development, so it is crucial for them to retain old customers and attract new customers. Their commitment to customers is based on sales and after-sales service, for example:

- **giving efficient and polite service** – before, during and after buying or using a product or service
- **supplying good-quality products and services** – in line with the standards promised in catalogues, brochures, websites, customer charters, company policies etc.
- **dealing with complaints and problems properly** – politely and quickly, with an effective outcome
- **treating their customers with respect and taking their opinions and needs seriously** – at all stages of the transaction, and when dealing with feedback, complaints or problems

Giving good customer service before, during and after transactions is based on, for example:

- **before** – by analysing what the customers want, developing products and services to suit the customers, training staff to deliver these
- **during** – well-informed staff delivering good-quality products and services in a way that suits the customers
- **after** – dealing with complaints, collecting and using feedback, developing the products and services to keep up with the changes in standards and expectations

Public sector

In the public sector, organisations offer services to the public on a not-for-profit basis. They are funded by taxes, national insurance contributions, VAT, council tax and fees that are charged for some services. This funding is decided on and controlled by central government, local councils and government agencies.

The features and benefits offered to customers are based on the quality and level of service that is provided. Although profits are not made, the organisations usually have budgets that they must manage and balance. They aim to satisfy customer expectations by planning the best use of the resources, and by training and supporting their customer service staff.

Features and benefits for customers can be based on many things, for example:

- **waiting times** – e.g. for healthcare, emergency services or for a response from a government department
- **value for money** – e.g. to provide the widest range of services they can for the customers' council tax contributions
- **excellence of service and delivery** – e.g. promising to deliver education or housing of the highest standard possible for the budget
- **fairness** – e.g. committing to give all customers equal opportunity of access to services

Third sector

Organisations in the third sector offer products and services. Sometimes they are sold, such as items in a charity shop, and sometimes they are given for free, such as counselling services. They have to balance their operation between raising funds and giving services and support to customers.

The features and benefits for customers can also be split. The customers who use the services, such as free counselling from a charity, will benefit from the organisation's commitment to funding and providing good-quality care and support services. The customers in the charity's shops, on the other hand, will benefit from the same commitment as the commercial sector, with the added bonus of knowing that they and the volunteers are involved in supporting a wider cause.

Knowledge Activity 8: Make a few notes about the features and benefits of one of your electronic devices – e.g. mobile phone, tablet or laptop.

Features:

Benefits:

Balancing promises to customers with organisational needs

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 14.

There will always be a balance between the customers' needs and expectations, and the products and services that an organisation offers. The balance is not static as there are so many variables. Every customer is different, and products and services can vary.

When organisations produce their service offer and make promises to customers, they need to make sure that their own needs are also met. An organisation has many functions and requirements, and it needs to achieve its own objectives to survive and thrive. Organisational needs include, for example:

- **having a robust and sustainable supply chain** – e.g. a supermarket making sure that its suppliers produce and deliver high-quality goods at the right time
- **matching the supply of goods and services with the demands of its customers** – e.g. a supermarket making sure that they order the right amount of Christmas goods, at the right time, to cope with customers' needs
- **managing human and physical resources** – e.g. a supermarket having the right number of staff on duty and convenient opening times
- **managing budgets** – e.g. making sure that products and services are financially viable and able to make a profit
- **developing products and services** – e.g. looking for new trends and technological improvements that can become part of the service offer
- **compliance with legislation** – e.g. satisfying health and safety rules as well as consumer-based legislation
- **following its own policies and procedures** – e.g. a supermarket following ethical policies about how it treats its suppliers
- **maintaining a good reputation for quality and reliability**

Organisations need to balance their needs with what they offer and promise to customers. For example, if a supermarket promises its customers very cheap milk, it has to consider whether it can:

- make a profit from the low price
- get hold of enough milk to satisfy customers' demands
- safely store and display all of the milk at the right temperature in the warehouses and stores
- abide by its own ethical policy about how to treat its suppliers
- maintain a good reputation if promises to customers and suppliers cannot be met

Organisations constantly review all aspects of their operations to balance their needs against their customer offer. They make changes and adjustments to ensure that their customer offer is realistic, attractive, achievable and sustainable.

There are times when staff working in the customer service role need to tell customers that their organisation cannot meet expectations. This can be due to delays or problems, or it can happen because the organisation simply does not offer that particular product or service.

However, the main rule is that staff should only promise what can be delivered. False promises lead to disappointment for the customer or serious consequences for the organisation. We need to escalate problems to our line manager in line with our organisation's procedures – e.g. when we are not sure about something or if a decision is outside the limits of our authority.

Knowledge Activity 9: Imagine you are working in a toy shop in December. Having checked with your manager, you have promised several customers that the shop will have a delivery of the new 'must-have' toy today, but the company has been unable to get hold of the stock after all. Head office cannot say when the toys will be delivered to your shop, if at all.

How do you feel having to explain the problem to several angry and disappointed customers?

How do you think the customers will feel about you, your manager and the toy shop company?

Did you know?

A 10% increase in customer retention levels results in a 30% increase in the value of the company.

(Bain and Company)

Escalating problems

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 15.

When delivering customer service and working to balance the customers' expectations with the organisation's needs, it is important to know when to ask for help and escalate a problem up to the next level in the line management structure, or to a specialist who can help with a particular problem.

The job titles can vary, but employment contracts, job descriptions and training materials should show the chain of command for the organisation. For example:

- team members will usually escalate problems to their team leader, or supervisor
- team leaders and supervisors might refer a problem to their shift manager or a specialist from another department – e.g. quality control team leader for help with product testing
- managers will escalate to more senior managers or subject specialists

Everyone needs to work within their limits of authority. This helps to make sure that people do not promise or do things that could cause problems for the customer, staff member, team, organisation or others. Even if the intentions are good, inappropriate promises or actions could be illegal, impossible to achieve, unfair, too expensive etc.

The organisation's procedures will show when staff need to escalate a problem. For example:

- when a decision is needed that is outside their limits of authority
- when a customer requests something that is outside the limits of their responsibility
- when dealing with complaints or problems that are outside the limits of authority
- when they do not have enough knowledge, experience or skill to be able to deal with something on their own

The procedures will also show to whom the staff members should escalate their problems. For example:

- team leader or supervisor
- a more experienced team member
- someone from a different team who understands the issue
- managers
- a staff helpline or help desk

To provide consistent standards of products, services and customer service, the organisation needs all of its staff members to work to the same goals. The operating procedures show the details about how to achieve these goals, and what to do when there is a problem.

Team leaders and managers need to know if there are problems so that they can take steps to put things right and improve the service offer for everyone. If staff members do not escalate their problems, queries, issues, concerns or suggestions, the management team will not have the information they need to:

- understand new problems experienced during customer service delivery
- offer consistent standards of products and services
- keep customer complaints to a minimum
- support their staff and identify training and career development needs
- comply with regulations and legislation
- improve and maintain standards for the organisation as a whole

Knowledge Activity 10: Imagine that a member of your team is dealing with a customer who is complaining about the service they have received in the restaurant where you work. They have followed your employer's procedures but the customer is not satisfied. Explain why it is important for the team member to escalate the problem to you.

Measuring effectiveness

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 16.

As we have seen, measuring customer satisfaction can be difficult, especially as many aspects of customer service can be abstract, personal and subjective. However, it is important to evaluate customer satisfaction to identify areas that need to be improved and developed.

It is also important to measure the effectiveness of the organisation's delivery of customer service. An organisation can measure effectiveness by analysing:

- **sales figures** – e.g. to see if the number and value of transactions have increased or decreased
- **levels of repeat business and retention of customers** – e.g. supermarket loyalty cards track purchase patterns; customer records for leisure centres or banks show how often services are used; Internet-based purchases can be tracked electronically to see spending patterns
- **website and social media activity** – e.g. hits on a website that are converted to sales; likes on Facebook or hits on YouTube to show interest in products
- **media comments** – e.g. comments about the organisation sent by customers; news reports and investigations about the organisation's customer service
- **analysing competitors' activities and sales** – e.g. to see where the customers have gone, or might go, and why
- **complaint levels** – e.g. tracking the volume and types of complaints, and how they were dealt with; monitoring changes since improvements introduced; analysing different levels following staff changes or introduction of new products or services
- **feedback during the appraisal process** – e.g. when discussing career development with team members formally or informally

Individuals can measure their own effectiveness using similar methods, for example:

- **listening to feedback from colleagues** – e.g. praise, advice or constructive criticism during a shift
- **gaining feedback from their line manager** – e.g. formally during an appraisal session or informally at the end of a shift
- **reviewing sales targets and analysing results** – e.g. measuring sales made over a month and identifying reasons for changes in success rates
- **reading customer complaints** – e.g. reading feedback cards from their customers or reviewing comments online
- **listening to customer feedback** – e.g. positive and negative comments given during customer service delivery

Knowledge Activity 11: Imagine that you are preparing to have an appraisal interview with your line manager about your effectiveness in customer service delivery. Make a few notes about:

Your strengths and successes

Areas where you could improve

Examples of how you identified your strengths and weaknesses – e.g. feedback from customers, team members and other colleagues

Relationship between customer service and a brand

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 17, 18, 19 and 20.

Branding is everywhere and we are used to seeing different brands on show. Our supermarkets, fast-food restaurants and high-street shops, for example, all have their own way of telling us who they are – often without using words.

The importance of a brand to an organisation

Organisations work extremely hard to promote and protect their brands. They go to great lengths to make sure that previous, current and potential customers can recognise their brands, and understand what they offer.

A brand can be identified by, for example:

- logos – e.g. the McDonalds' golden arches 'M', or different badges used by car manufacturers
- brand names on labels, packaging and signage
- colours on packaging and signage – e.g. orange for Sainsbury's, green for Asda and blue for Tesco
- sponsorship relationships – e.g. companies sponsoring the football leagues and tournaments
- trademarks or copyright

A brand is important to an organisation because the brand image reflects their image. It is a major part of an organisation's identity. Our impression of a brand goes a long way to establishing our expectations of the products and services offered.

For example, when we see a sign for Burger King, we know that we can go into any of their restaurants anywhere in the country and get the same product and service. The same is true for chains of hotels, restaurants, shops and other businesses – we know what to expect. Even if there are local differences, the core values of the service offer are the same.

This is vital for organisation because they know how to manage their customers' needs and expectations, based on the brand promise that they make and deliver. Having a brand enables an organisation to position itself in the market, promote and protect itself. It does this by, for example:

- **establishing legal protection of unique product features** – e.g. registering a brand name or logo so that competitors cannot use the same one
- **giving customers a specific perception of the organisation** – e.g. Rolls Royce establishing itself as a supplier of prestige cars
- **establishing its place in the marketplace** – e.g. designer clothes shops aiming at one part of the market, low-cost clothing shops aiming at another
- **displaying how it is different to competitors** – e.g. gaining a reputation for their brand being the most reliable on the market
- **encouraging customer loyalty** – e.g. from customers being pleased and proud to be identified as supporters of their brand

How a brand affects the service offer

How people perceive a brand can have a big influence on the service offer. If a brand is seen as a prestige, high-end, expensive brand, the organisation will have to make sure that its service offer supports this if it wishes to attract the same types of customer. Similarly, if a brand appeals to families, the organisation needs to make sure that the service offer is aimed at what families want.

Example A – a company that deals with designer watches

A company that makes and sells high-end watches that sell for thousands of pounds each will make sure that their brand is associated with successful businesses, high-end goods, and expensive pasttimes and interests. They will sponsor and support events such as polo matches, aviation displays, skiing competitions or international equestrian events as these are the types of events that their current and potential customers attend. They will make sure that their brand is seen by the 'right' people in the 'right' places.

The company will also run corporate events and offer bespoke, personal customer service to look after their customers and encourage them to think of themselves as part of an exclusive club.

The products will be of the highest quality so that the brand has and maintains a reputation for excellence.

The advertising and sales process will be discreet to maintain the prestige and excellent image of the brand.

The aftercare service, warranties, guarantees and maintenance will also be excellent, so that customers know that they are valued and will be looked after.

Example B – a company that runs a chain of family pubs/restaurants

A company that owns and runs a chain of hundreds of family pubs/restaurants will target their brand at families to attract previous, current and potential customers.

The selling point of their brand is that people will get the same great prices, quality and choice in every restaurant. This gives their customers reassurance and confidence that they know what to expect from the brand, even if they go to one of their restaurants in a different town.

The company will place their outlets in similar locations in each town – near to areas where young families live, but on the edge of a development so that they can offer plenty of free parking. The buildings will usually have standard facilities, furniture, layout, music, art and lighting, so that the atmosphere is similar in each restaurant.

The products on the menus will be the same in every restaurant throughout the country, using the same ingredients, preparation and presentation, so that the food choices are always the same.

The staff will be trained in the same way to deliver the same level of customer service in each outlet. They will have the same uniforms, name badges and minimum grooming standards.

Aftercare service, complaints processes and ways of collecting feedback will also be standardised throughout the chain.

As we can see from these two examples, the service offer needs to support the brand to maintain the image of the organisation. This can be positive or negative.

On the **positive** side, if previous, current and potential customers are happy to identify with the brand, they will be happy to accept the service offer, as this is seen as part of the brand. They will feel comfortable about what the brand gives them and, usually, their expectations will be met.

This can work to the organisation's advantage because it can attract more customers who are happy to either return to them or aspire to buy their products and services. The organisation knows that the brand and the brand image are attracting the customers that are needed for success and sustainable growth.

On the **negative** side, a brand can be a problem when trying to deliver the customer service offer. If people perceive an organisation as being too upmarket, exclusive or expensive, potential customers may avoid it if they think that they will not fit in or be able to afford the services and products.

Conversely, if an organisation's brand seems to be too downmarket, people might refuse to buy there because they do not want to be associated with an 'inferior' brand.

Both of these attitudes can cause problems for an organisation that needs to broaden its appeal and attract new customers. They do not want to alienate their core of loyal and established customers by changing the brand and brand image too drastically, but they do need to change the customer offer to attract newcomers.

For example, if the watch company needs to increase the number of customers, it cannot afford to alienate its core of customers who value the prestige and exclusive nature of the brand. They need to launch a similar brand that is similar to the original, but not as expensive or exclusive – an entry-level range for people who aspire to buy the exclusive range but cannot afford it at the moment.

There has been an interesting shift in the customers who use cheaper supermarkets, such as Lidl and Aldi. The supermarkets have amended their service offer to attract new customers, with clever marketing to show that their quality and choice of products are attractive to a wide range of people. Winning prizes from independent reviewers has broken down barriers by showing that the quality of the products and customer service is high and sustainable.

Customer service language to support a brand promise

The language that staff use when delivering customer service is part of establishing and maintaining a brand image. It supports a brand promise, which is the organisation's commitment to its service offer, and is sometimes called a mission statement.

To support the brand promise, customer service staff will need a range of phrases that they can use when communicating with customers – face-to-face, on the telephone or when writing to them. Customers might have seen advertisements or logos, but contact with staff will have a major effect on their impression of the brand and how they perceive the brand promise. It can help to cement a good impression, help customers to develop a good impression of the brand, or leave them disappointed and sceptical about the brand promise.

To create a positive impression, key words about the brand, products or services need to be part of the staff members' everyday language, to make sure that the key features and benefits of the brand promise are highlighted. A brand promise for a product might state that it is, for example:

- the most advanced product of its kind in Europe
- cheaper than all competitors' similar products
- reliable and safe

- of good and affordable quality
- long-lasting and durable
- made using the very latest technology
- faster than other products

An organisation will usually have a selection of key phrases for its staff to use in their customer service language to support the brand promise. By having established phrases, an organisation can make sure that the descriptions given out by their staff:

- are accurate and truthful
- are compliant – e.g. with consumer-related legislation
- give the right impression of the brand
- are kept up to date to tie in with current marketing and advertising campaigns

In addition to key phrases that describe the features and benefits of the brand, some organisations have set customer service phrases that they like their staff to use for certain situations. These could be, for example:

- "Have a nice day"
- "Is everything all right with your meal?"
- "No problem"
- "You're welcome"
- "My pleasure"

The customer service language needs to support the brand, so careful thought needs to be given to make sure that the tone and words are appropriate. For example, staff working for a funeral director should avoid "Have a nice day" when talking to grieving family members. Similarly, waiting staff working in a four-star restaurant will use more complicated language than those working in a family pub/restaurant, as they will need to discuss and explain their products and services in more detail.

Did you know?

The red and white Coca-Cola logo is recognised by 94% of the world's population.

(**Buzzfeed.com** – quoting from Steel Media in the USA)

Staff also need a range of customer service language phrases that they can use in potentially awkward situations, so that they can maintain a positive impression of the brand and the organisation. For example:

Phrases to avoid	Alternative phrases that could be used
I don't know	I just need to check that for you, let me call you back in a few minutes I'll find out for you…
Who is this?	May I have your name, please?
You didn't fill out the form properly	I would be happy to help you fill out the form
She is not taking any calls	She is not at her desk at the moment, may I take a message or put you through to her voicemail?
He's not in	He's away from his desk just now. May I take a message and get him to call you back?
I can't help you	Let me see what I can do for you…
You owe us money	Our records show that there is a balance of…
You need to…	We usually find it works best if… I suggest…
What do you want?	How can I help you? Are you ready to order or shall I come back in a few minutes?

Standard phrases, such as "Have a nice day", are not always welcomed in the UK as we sometimes consider the comments to be insincere and impersonal. However, it is important for staff in a customer service role to use phrases that are positive, helpful and professional. A positive attitude expressed in positive and helpful language helps to support and sell the brand image.

Using the right customer service language is important as it helps to:

- reassure and put customers at their ease – but it does not put them down
- confirm or exceed their expectations
- build a relationship with the customer
- support the identity of the brand
- confirm the link between the customer, the brand and the organisation
- focus staff members on the expected service standards and brand promise

Everyone who works for an organisation needs to use language that supports the brand promise so that they give out a consistent message about the brand to, for example, customers, suppliers, media contacts or others connected with the organisation.

Knowledge Activity 12: Have a look on the Internet and find some brand promises or mission statement from some brands that you know. For each one, make a few notes about:

The wording of the brand promise
Whether you think it fits your image of the brand

Delivering a brand promise

Staff working in a customer service role need to bring several elements together when ensuring that a brand promise is delivered. Team leaders need to work with their team members to make sure that they, for example:

- are clear about what the brand promise is
- understand what the brand means to the organisation
- follow the organisation's procedures about how to deliver the brand promise
- have thorough and up-to-date knowledge about the brand and all of the related products and services
- treat each customer as an individual
- use appropriate customer service language
- remember to take appropriate follow-up actions and keep promises
- escalate any problems or issues as soon as possible, so that the brand is not compromised

Complaints procedures to resolve customer service problems

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 21 and 22.

It is important for organisations to resolve customer service problems effectively so that they can meet or exceed their customers' needs and expectations, develop and maintain a good reputation, and survive in the marketplace. Although complaints can be difficult to handle, if the organisation is told about issues, it does have the opportunity to put things right, improve its service offer and avoid future complaints.

To provide consistently high-quality customer service, organisations set up and follow customer service and complaints procedures to show their staff how to deal with customers and different types of problems.

Customer service procedures

Organisations need to give their staff guidelines about how to communicate with customers in all aspects of customer service. Customer services procedures cover many tasks and functions, for example:

- quality, image and presentation of products and services
- quality, image and presentation of staff
- promotion of services
- contact and communication with customers
- the delivery of products to customers
- monitoring and improving products and services
- finance
- compliance with legislation and regulations

Communication with customers is extremely important before, during and after a transaction, and the standards and procedures will show how staff need to be able to, for example:

Before the transaction:

- understand different customers
- identify different needs and expectations
- check the customer environment – e.g. is the waiting area clean and tidy
- check that high-quality products and services are ready and available

During the transaction:

- welcome and greet the customer
- engage with the customer and take genuine interest
- give accurate, up-to-date and relevant information
- make sure that the customer's environment is prepared and comfortable
- use the best communication methods and techniques for the customer and the situation
- deal with queries, comments and complaints
- ensure that the customer's legal rights are respected and protected
- end the transaction with positive comments and body language

After the transaction:

- give aftercare service
- respect and protect legal rights
- provide ongoing maintenance
- ask for feedback from customers
- deal with complaints and feedback effectively

Effective customer complaints procedures

Part of excellent customer service delivery is having robust and effective complaints procedures. Some large organisations have a customer service department and the staff there will deal with complaints. Others have special complaints teams that focus purely on handling issues raised by customers. Smaller organisations and businesses will rely on their staff and managers to handle complaints themselves.

Whatever the size of the organisation, complaints need to be handled in a consistent way throughout. Features of complaints procedures could include standardised processes about, for example:

- who deals with complaints
- what each staff member is allowed to say and agree
- timescales for resolution
- how to deal with each situation and which solutions can be offered
- when to escalate the problem up the management line

- what happens if the organisation cannot agree on a satisfactory outcome with the customer – e.g. the customer's rights under consumer legislation
- customers' statutory rights

The complaints procedures will give details about how staff members should deal with each complaint, instructing them to, for example:

- **listen to or read the details of the complaint** – maybe making notes about the details
- **apologise to the customer** – and show that they understand and sympathise with the customer
- **explain the background to the problem or issue** – or offer to investigate if the cause of the problem is not obvious
- **outline solutions and keep the customer informed at all stages of the process** – even if it takes many weeks to resolve the problem
- **apologise again, reassure and thank the customer for their patience and custom**

They may be advised to use the **HEAT** method when applicable:

- **Hear** – listening to the customer's complaint properly
- **Empathise** – showing that they understand the customer's position, frustration etc.
- **Apologise** – saying sorry is incredibly important
- **Take ownership** – taking the problem seriously, seeing it through to a satisfactory end, keeping the customer informed, passing on feedback to the organisation

Complaints need to be dealt with quickly and effectively to defuse the anxiety and stop the complaint becoming more serious. It may be that staff need to diffuse the situation before they pass on the complaint to a manager, the customer service team or the complaints team. If they are the first point of contact with the complaining customer, their role is vital to keep everything calm and polite, even if they cannot solve the problem.

In all customer service situations, staff need to bear in mind any possible communication problems. The customer may be nervous and a little aggressive due to nerves about making the complaint. They may also have visual, speech, reading, writing or hearing problems, or not have English as their first language. Staff need to take these factors into account when responding to keep the anxiety levels as low as possible.

Knowledge Activity 13: You need to describe your own organisation's customer service and complaints procedures to answer the assessment question. To prepare for this, ask your employer (or an organisation that you know well) for a copy of their complaints procedure, or look up a company online and find theirs. Make a few notes to outline their procedures for handling complaints.

Customer service problems and their causes

Complaints can arise for a variety of reasons, including:

- **faulty goods or missing parts**
- **poor-quality products or services**
- **incorrect or incomplete delivery of items**
- **bad customer service** – e.g. from rude or unhelpful staff
- **the service or product does not matching the description** – not meeting the customer's expectations
- **delays and missed deadlines** – maybe leading to fines and interest charges
- **lack of information** – e.g. when transport is delayed
- **inefficient systems** – e.g. call centres passing customers from one advisor to another when they call for help; long queues that are badly managed
- **unfair treatment** – e.g. for receiving a parking ticket when the signs were unclear or absent
- **impact on the environment** – e.g. the location of wind turbines; noise from neighbours or traffic; dealing with waste inefficiently

- **negative consequences of someone's actions** – e.g. medical problems missed during an examination that lead to serious health issues; someone slipping on a wet floor in a hotel when the cleaner had forgotten to put out a warning sign

The problems and causes can be identified by tracking information from, for example:

- customer feedback and complaints
- feedback from staff who encounter the problems or deal with customers' comments
- returned and rejected goods
- internal audit and monitoring records
- external reports – e.g. from governing bodies
- legal action
- customer surveys, reviews and forum comments

Did you know?

Thousands of Amazon managers have attended two days of call-centre training – even the CEO – in order to help them understand the customer service process.

(**www.salesforce.com** – quoting Jeff Bezos, CEO of **Amazon.com**)

Dealing with angry or agitated customers

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 23 and 24.

We have already covered techniques that can be used when dealing with challenging behaviour. These techniques can also be used when dealing with angry or agitated customers. To summarise:

- welcome and greet the customer
- introduce yourself
- offer to move or change the environment
- speak clearly and ask open questions
- use active listening skills
- use open and relaxed body language
- show empathy and give the customer your full attention
- focus on the desired outcome
- explore and agree a solution
- agree and take follow-up action

When dealing with angry or agitated customers, the first thing to do is to make sure that the angry customer does not pose a threat to the personal safety of the staff member, their colleagues, customers or other people. If there is no immediate threat, staff should deal with the angry customer by following the general techniques.

It can be very important to offer to move to somewhere quiet as this can help to diffuse the situation because:

- the customer can discuss their details in private
- they can be removed from the source of their anxiety – e.g. a fight in a pub or street; a crowd of people who are reacting emotionally or erratically
- other customers may get upset or distracted by angry outbursts

When customers are angry, they usually 'run out of steam' quite quickly if people just listen to them using good active listening skills. Arguing with them just gives them an excuse to carry on 'ranting' and is like throwing petrol on a fire. Listening and apologising are the best ways to defuse anger.

Staff dealing with angry customers need to be very aware that anger can quickly lead to violence. If there is a possible threat to personal safety, during a heated argument between customers in a bar for instance, it is usually best to let specially trained security staff handle the situation. Experienced staff may be able to offer advice, but fights can flare up extremely quickly and it is not worth getting too close.

Other conflict resolution techniques

There are many theories about conflict resolution, and these techniques may also help when dealing with angry or agitated customers:

Conflict resolution technique	Details
Win-win or collaborating	The organisation and customer confront and solve a problem by working together
Forcing or competing	The organisation or customer firmly pursue their own concerns
Smoothing or accommodating	The organisation soothes the customer and accommodates their views
Compromising	The organisation and customer look for a mutually acceptable solution that satisfies all parties
Withdrawing or avoiding	The organisation and/or the customer ignore or step away from the conflict

When dealing with any customer complaint about the organisation's products or services, it is important to:

- **listen to or read the details of the complaint**
- **apologise to the customer**
- **explain the organisation's reasons for the problem or issue**
- **outline solutions and keep the customer informed at all stages of the process**
- **apologise again, reassure and thank the customer for their patience and custom**

This system is useful for all customers as it makes them feel valued and respected and shows that their concerns are being taken seriously. A sincere apology can diffuse anger very quickly, especially if the customer is emotional because they are nervous and tense about having to speak up for themselves.

Keeping people informed when there is a problem, delay or complaint reduces anxiety and gives them the opportunity to adapt to the changes in the plans. Sometimes customers can reduce the impact on themselves by making alternative arrangements. Sometimes they will just feel reassured that something will happen, that their opinion and input matter and that the organisation cares about them as an individual.

Limits of authority when resolving problems

As we have seen before, working within the limits of authority is important. This applies to resolving customers' problems as well, and staff members need to make sure that they are authorised to make promises.

The limits of authority, and how to escalate a problem that is outside those limits, will be set out in, for example:

- the employment contract
- the job description
- organisational policies, procedures or standards
- training materials

Working within the limits protects:

- the individual staff member – by making sure that they act legally and are fully supported in their decisions and promises if they have worked in line with the organisational procedures
- the customer – by making sure that their legal rights have been observed and respected
- the organisation – helping it to maintain a good reputation for being fair and consistent

If staff members fail to operate within the limits of their authority, they can find that they have maybe:

- acted illegally – e.g. by promising something that does not support the customer's consumer rights
- offered something that is impossible to deliver – e.g. due to cost or lack of available resources
- caused a health, safety or security problem – e.g. trying to mend an electrical appliance when they are not qualified to do so
- put themselves at risk – e.g. trying to hold down a violent customer instead of calling properly trained security staff to deal with them

Knowledge Activity 14: You need to explain the limits of your own authority for resolving customers' problems and making promises to answer the assessment question. To prepare for this, find documents that show the limits of your authority in this area and make a few notes about:

What you are allowed to promise

Examples of what you and your colleagues promise and provide when resolving problems

Customer feedback

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 25 and 26.

The value of feedback from customers

Organisations need to collect positive and negative feedback from their previous, current and potential customers so that they can review their products and services and make sure that they are satisfying customers' expectations. They need to review the feedback to evaluate the customer service and:

- **see what changes are needed** – to adapt to changes in trends, expectations, technology etc.
- **find out what is working** – so that they can develop and support the strong areas within the operation
- **find out what is not working** – so that they can rectify issues and catch major problems early, and make any necessary changes as soon as possible
- **find the most effective and successful ways of handling queries and complaints**
- **make sure that customers feel valued** – to build customer loyalty
- **make sure that they are complying with relevant legislation and regulations**

If the feedback is good and customers are generally satisfied, organisations need to, for example:

- give praise and credit to the staff
- reassure everyone that they are doing well
- maintain good standards and procedures
- monitor the service offer to make sure that high standards are maintained
- check external forces and trends to make sure that success is sustainable
- continue with research and development to make sure that future products, services and customer service are up to date and relevant

Methods for collecting customers' feedback

We all like to feel valued and that our opinions matter. Customers cannot be forced to provide feedback. However, there are many things that organisations can do to encourage people to give the useful feedback they need when reviewing their operations.

Staff who deal with customers have many opportunities to make them feel included and important, and the organisation might have standards and guidelines about how to do this by, for example:

- engaging in small talk whilst serving someone face-to-face, online or on the telephone
- using active listening skills when dealing with feedback from a customer
- reassuring them, if they are making a complaint, that their views are being taken seriously
- asking for feedback and reacting to it in a genuine way

The organisation can add to this with comments about how they value their customers in letters, advertising, brochures, websites etc.

Various methods can be used to collect the feedback from customers. These include, for example:

- **questionnaires and surveys** – in person, online or by telephone
- **comment or suggestion cards** – e.g. at reception or in hotel rooms
- **feedback forms** – e.g. after a training course
- **focus groups** – as part of a market research initiative
- **unsolicited letters and emails from customers**
- **online forums and social media** – where people leave honest comments about their experiences
- **via the media** – e.g. letters to a local newspaper about the organisation
- **informally gathered chance remarks to staff or other customers**

The information gathered from monitoring complaints can be used in the planning process to improve customer service throughout the whole organisation. Many organisations have teams of customer service staff who monitor social media and other communication methods to capture and react to feedback comments.

Organisations can benefit from handling feedback correctly. Customers nearly always have choice. By taking customers' views and ideas seriously, organisations can improve their products and customer service and encourage customer loyalty. This helps to ensure the long-term success of the organisation and its staff by keeping up with customers' expectations.

Further information about consumer rights, and other legal matters, can be found on the Citizens Advice website: **www.citizensadvice.org.uk**

The Financial Conduct Authority also has information and advice for consumers: **www.fca.org.uk**

For more information about confidentiality and data protection, a useful website is the Information Commissioner's Office website: **www.ico.org.uk**

Knowledge Activity 15: Imagine that you own a small café. You have received some positive feedback about the coffees that you provide, but some very poor feedback and complaints about the teas on offer.

How would you use the positive feedback about the coffees?

How would you use the negative feedback about the teas?

Summary

In this section, we have looked at delivering customer service and resolving problems, including:

- customers' needs, expectations and satisfaction
- the importance of treating customers as individuals
- features and benefits of products and services
- balancing promises with organisational needs
- escalating problems and measuring effectiveness
- the relationship between customer service and a brand
- customer service and complaints procedures
- how to deal with angry or agitated customers
- collecting customer feedback

Section 3: Understand how to develop working relationships with colleagues

Introduction

In this section, we are going to consider the principles of effective team working. We will look at:

- roles within a team
- the benefits of effective team working
- feedback in the workplace
- resolving team conflicts
- discussions in the workplace about progress, issues, problems and changes

Effective team working

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 27.

For a team to work effectively, they have to develop productive and positive working relationships that are based on:

- clear lines of communication – so that people know where to go to ask questions, or report and discuss issues
- openness – giving and receiving correct and appropriate information
- mutual trust and respect – where everyone listens to each other, and acknowledges feelings and opinions

Roles within a team

People play different roles within a team, and an effective team will have people with very different skills and attributes. People cannot all be the same, so it important to have a variety in an effective and balanced team.

As we saw in the first workbook, in the 1970s, Dr Meredith Belbin identified the types of role that members of a team take on when working together. During this research, Belbin discovered that a team's success was not dependent on factors such as the intelligence of its members, but more on their behaviour and how they related to each other in working towards a common goal, purpose and/or objective.

As we have already seen, Belbin identified nine team roles that people play:

1. Chair/coordinator
2. Shaper
3. Innovator/plant
4. Monitor evaluator
5. Implementer/company worker
6. Resource investigator
7. Team worker
8. Completer finisher
9. Specialist

Belbin discovered that a team without all of the nine roles would struggle to complete its task. For example, a team without an innovator/plant would find it difficult to come up with ideas, and if they didn't have a shaper they would lose direction and focus.

A balanced team has all of the nine roles within it and is, therefore, more likely to succeed. A team leader should be aware of the requirements for a balanced and effective team.

Benefits of effective team working

When people work together well as a team, there can be benefits for the individual team members, the team and the organisation. A group of people working together can achieve things that the individuals cannot achieve on their own. Team sports show this all of the time – we just need to think about how a football, rugby or netball team works together to meet their joint objectives and achieve goals. Single team members all have a valuable part to play and they could not win the match on their own.

Effective team working brings a variety of benefits:

- for individual team members
- for teams
- for the organisation

For individual team members

Individuals can benefit from, for example:

- **feeling proud to be associated with a successful and effective team** – e.g. a sense of belonging and job satisfaction
- **feeling supported when tackling tasks or learning new skills** – e.g. being able to develop their skills and stretch their talents with the help of others
- **feeling secure and confident** – e.g. from knowing that they are delivering high-quality goods and services
- **other team member's knowledge, skills and experience** – e.g. making the whole team more successful
- **opportunities for creativity and career development** – e.g. from team members supporting each other and being innovative
- **increased motivation** – e.g. to stay on a good team and help it to succeed by doing their best
- **feeling valued** – e.g. knowing that their input is important and that their opinions matter

For teams

Teams can benefit from, for example:

- **working towards shared objectives** – e.g. working together effectively towards agreed, shared goals
- **team members who are flexible and able to do several tasks** – e.g. multi-skilled team members who can be moved around between tasks or cover for each other's holidays, sickness etc.
- **a balanced and supported environment** – e.g. from being a happy team where the members support each other and tackle objectives and problems together
- **bringing together expertise of team members for the benefit of the whole team** – e.g. having people with different strengths and attributes

For the organisation

The benefits of effective team working can be considerable for an organisation, for example:

- **successful achievement of organisational objectives** – e.g. to meet or exceed sales or production targets
- **access to a wide range of talents and strengths within the workforce** – e.g. pooling different talents that work together well to achieve major goals

- **good internal communications** – e.g. where team members and different teams communicate well with each other to improve operational productivity
- **increased efficiency and less duplication of work** – e.g. where teams understand each other's tasks and needs, then work together to streamline their operations
- **a more flexible workforce** – e.g. where team members can cover for each other and perform a variety of tasks to maintain consistency and continuity
- **better relationships with customers** – e.g. from offering consistently high-quality customer service
- **better relationships with others connected to the organisation** – e.g. from having a reputation for being a reliable, consistent and smooth-running operation

Feedback in the workplace

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 28.

We all need feedback to find out how well we are doing, and this is an important part of effective team working. When feedback is good, it gives us positive reinforcement and gives us the confidence to carry on and develop our strengths further. The negative aspects of feedback are useful too because they show us where we need to make changes.

Feedback can be formal or informal. Formal feedback will usually be documented and more detailed, and be given in meetings or on forms. Informal feedback is often unplanned and can be a brief message or comment, verbal or written.

If we do not give and receive feedback, we have no way of knowing how we are doing from an objective point of view. Our efforts need to be measured against outside standards and opinions to reflect a realistic, three-dimensional picture of our performance in the workplace.

Giving constructive feedback

It is important to give feedback that is constructive. If someone just gives an emotional response and says that they do not like something, their feedback is not constructive because we cannot learn from it. Just knowing that someone is unhappy, disappointed or angry about something that we have said or done is not enough. We need to know the details about what went wrong and how we could have done better.

When giving constructive and useful feedback, it is important to consider the person receiving the feedback. If the feedback is positive, it is a good opportunity to give praise and encouragement. This empowers and motivates the individual or team to continue doing well and not lose focus. They feel valued and respected and will benefit from feeling appreciated and recognised.

If some of the feedback is negative, this needs to be delivered carefully and objectively. The best way can be to use a 'sandwich' technique, where negative news is put between two bits of positive news, for example:

- praise the individual or team for a good aspect of their performance
- mention and explain areas that need to be improved, and give guidance and support about how to improve
- finish on a high note about positive aspects, plans and hopes for future developments and improvements

When we are asked to give feedback about someone else, it can be a good idea to only say things that we would say to that person's face. This helps us to keep our comments objective, fair, valid and useful. When delivered tactfully, constructive criticism and genuine praise are both valuable and welcome.

To give useful and constructive feedback, we need to, for example:

- have a clear purpose for giving the feedback – e.g. being very clear on why we are giving feedback and what we need to achieve as a result
- respect the need for privacy and sensitivity – e.g. having a chat about problems in private rather than in a big team meeting
- be specific – e.g. about what went well, what needs improvement and what needs to be done in the future
- use good questioning techniques – e.g. open, closed and probing questions
- focus on the issue or behaviour rather than the person – e.g. concentrate on the facts rather than the emotional reaction to events
- check that the feedback has been understood – e.g. by asking questions or inviting comments
- have a balance between positive and negative feedback – e.g. using the 'sandwich' technique
- offer support – e.g. retraining or shadowing for an individual who needs to develop their skills following negative feedback

Knowledge Activity 16: Think of two occasions when you received feedback at work. How did you feel? How did you react? What happened next? Write a few lines about what happened when:

You received negative feedback

You received positive feedback

If this hasn't happened to you yet, just imagine how you would feel and react.

Resolving team conflicts

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 29.

Conflict is an emotive word and its meaning can vary. Dictionary definitions include:

- a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one
- a serious incompatibility between two or more opinions, principles or interests
- to be incompatible or at variance with something or someone

According to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) conflict falls into two broad categories:

- **conflict between individuals** – e.g. between colleagues or between team members and their team leader or manager
- **conflict between groups** – e.g. between teams or between large groups of employees and management

Examples of causes of conflict at work could include:

- dissatisfaction with the workload or work slippages – e.g. increased workloads or missed deadlines
- lack of appreciation and perceived unfairness – e.g. someone feeling that they have not received appropriate credit for their efforts
- misunderstandings and poor sharing of information – e.g. concerned discussions and arguments due to not knowing what is happening
- external problems that affect the team or individuals – e.g. a supply problem leading to the team's failure to finish on time and receive a bonus
- differences of opinion – e.g. between individuals, teams or organisations about working methods
- people having different objectives – e.g. some wanting to do overtime to finish the task on time whilst others wanting to leave and get home on time
- incompatible objectives and rivalry – e.g. between different teams
- bullying, harassment or personality clashes between individuals

Conflict management techniques

As we saw earlier when we looked at how to deal with upset customers, there are several techniques that can be used to minimise and resolve conflict at work. For example:

- **win-win or collaborating** – confronting and solving a problem by working with the other parties
- **forcing or competing** – when individuals only consider their own concerns and force their views on others
- **smoothing or accommodating** – when individuals smooth things over and accommodate other people's views, needs, demands and requests
- **compromising** – when people look for a mutually acceptable solution that satisfies everyone
- **withdrawing or avoiding** – when people ignore the problem and step away from the conflict

The following table explains when the different techniques may be useful, as well as the different strengths and weaknesses:

Way to manage or resolve conflict	Strengths	Weaknesses
Win-win or collaborating Confronting and solving a problem by working with the other parties. Useful when: • the long-term relationship is important • consensus and commitment of others is important • the environment is collaborative • addressing the interests of many different people • there is a high level of trust	• solves the actual problem • leads to win-win situation with mutually beneficial results • reinforces positive relationships, mutual trust and is a basis for future collaboration • responsibility is shared • less stressful • there is more respect for someone who is a good negotiator	• requires commitment from all parties and trust cannot be lost • may take more effort and time • a win-win solution might not exist, or it may not be easy to find
Forcing or competing The individual firmly pursues their own concerns. Useful when the person resolving the conflict: • finds that less forceful methods do not work, and this is the last resort • needs to resist aggression and pressure • needs a quick resolution	• quick resolution • can increase self-esteem • can gain respect for being able to deal with hostility and aggression	• can have a negative effect on relationships • can cause the opponent to react in the same way • cannot compromise and accept the good points made by the opponent • the approach requires a lot of energy and courage; can be exhausting to some

Smoothing or accommodating The individual soothes others and accommodates their views. Useful when the person resolving the conflict: • wants to put other people's concerns first • is in the wrong • needs temporary relief whilst finding long-term solutions • has no choice and continued competition would be damaging	• can protect more important interests while giving up on smaller issue • gives opportunity to reassess from a different angle	• can be abused as the opponent can try to take advantage • can affect confidence about dealing with aggressive situations • difficult to move to the win-win situation • supporters may consider the negotiator as weak
Compromising Looking for a mutually acceptable solution that satisfies all parties. Useful when: • goals are only moderately important • a temporary or fast settlement is needed for complex issues • it is used as a first step • collaboration or forcing do not work	• faster resolution of issues • can provide a temporary solution • reduces stress and tension	• parties might all be dissatisfied with the outcome • does not contribute to trust in the long term • might need close control and monitoring to see it through

Withdrawing or avoiding Ignoring or stepping away from the conflict. Useful when the person resolving the conflict: • believes the issue is trivial and not worth the time or effort • considers other priorities more important • needs more time to consider solutions • thinks the time and place are inappropriate • does not want to deal with hostility • cannot deal with hostility due to personal issues • passes the problem on to someone else for action	• can withdraw until the time and place are more appropriate • can take time to gather information, evidence etc. • can concentrate on more important priorities first	• can lead to losing or weakening the position • where multiple parties involved, can affect relationship with parties who expect action

Everyone needs to make sure that they work within the limits of their authority at work, including when resolving conflicts. If we find that we do not have the authority, experience, skills or knowledge to resolve an issue, we need to make sure that we refer the matter to our line manager or a senior member of staff.

The organisation's procedures should show when to escalate a problem, but, if we are in any doubt, we should ask for advice and assistance.

Knowledge Activity 17: Think about a time when you witnessed or experienced conflict – maybe at work, in school or in your private life. Make a few notes about:

What caused the conflict

How you felt at the time

How it was resolved

Whether it could have been dealt with differently

Discussions in the workplace

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 30 and 31.

Communication is vital for effective teamwork. All team members need to be able to let the right people know what is going on and keep them up to date. By discussing progress, issues, problems and changes, the relevant people will be able to react and make decisions that are right for the team as a whole.

Discussing work progress and issues

Information needs to flow in many directions and team members need to be able to inform their colleagues, team leaders and managers about their work progress and issues that arise at work when performing their tasks. For example, when discussing progress and issues, team members can:

- **discuss their progress and compare it to work schedules** – e.g. to see if they are behind or ahead of schedule with each task
- **check that they are working to agreed standards** – e.g. reporting issues that may affect quality or output
- **help to avoid misunderstandings** – e.g. making sure that everyone understands any problems they are facing
- **identify and discuss any problems** – e.g. discuss issues to see if others have experienced the same things
- **agree actions that are needed** – e.g. find solutions and corrective actions that work for everyone
- **develop their skills** – e.g. by practising negotiation and conflict resolution techniques
- **develop working relationships** – e.g. building trust and awareness that encourage team building, motivation and loyalty
- **provide information to help managers with planning** – e.g. team member who is ahead can be allocated to help a team member who is behind schedule due to illness

Discussions about work progress and issues can be part of a team's day-to-day activities. They might have team meetings or briefings so that everyone can report their own progress and issues in an open group, enabling everyone to discuss everything and find solutions. Meetings might take place at the beginning or end of each shift, for example, or when a product, service or procedure is being introduced or changed.

Team members also need the opportunity to be able to discuss work progress and issues in private, maybe with a supervisor or manager. This is particularly important if there are personal issues that might be affecting their work performance – e.g. illness or serious family problems. Organisations need to make sure that team members know how to ask for a private discussion – maybe asking for a one-to-one meeting with their line manager, or sending a confidential email to human resources (HR).

Team members also need the opportunity to discuss progress and issues as part of their career development. This can be during formal, quarterly appraisals, for example, or during informal, unplanned discussions. We all need the chance to give and receive feedback about work progress, with constructive comments and plans about how to develop our skills, knowledge and experience to enhance our career opportunities.

Warning colleagues about problems and changes

When discussing progress and issues arising at work, problems can come to light that might affect other people. These problems need to be communicated to the right people so that relevant colleagues at all levels can be warned.

For example, if a team member who works on a food production line finds that a machine is working slower than usual, this might indicate that there is a major fault within the machine. Colleagues need to be warned because, for example:

- parts of the machine might have ended up in the food, so the production line needs to be stopped and checked immediately
- colleagues using similar machines might have the same problem
- the machines might cause injury to team members

If it turns out that there is a serious problem with the machine, this would affect several other teams within the food production factory. For example:

- the maintenance team needs to be called
- the quality assurance team needs to be warned that there may be contamination in a batch of food
- the packaging team needs to know that there will be a delay in producing finished products for them to pack
- the delivery drivers need to know that there may be delayed or cancelled products that will not be available in time for delivery slots
- managers need to know about delays and problems so that they can make decisions and reschedule where possible

As we can see in this example, some problems can lead to changes that affect colleagues. They need to be aware of these so that they can adapt their tasks and procedures.

For example, the breakdown of the food production machine may lead to changes that colleagues need to know about, such as:

- rescheduled production rotas for the next shift – e.g. closing the affected production line and increasing output for the other lines to compensate
- changes in inspection procedures for all machinery
- changes in the way food items are inspected for contamination – e.g. extra X-ray machines to check for metal parts
- changes in the quality control checks – e.g. extra visits or tests
- changes in orders from the supermarkets that can no longer have the cancelled product

If team members warn their colleagues about problems or changes that may affect them, colleagues can work together as an effective team and, for example:

- **anticipate work problems and changes** – e.g. from having as much notice as possible
- **avoid problems or stop them before they become serious** – e.g. taking early action to prevent something happening
- **share accurate information** – e.g. about causes of problems or the correct actions to be taken
- **prepare for changes** – e.g. by giving them the time and information needed to plan and adapt to changes
- **keep the delivery of products and services on track** – e.g. by pulling together as a team and working to catch up and bring output up to a reasonable level
- **share and build trust between individuals and teams** – e.g. by being honest about the knock-on effect of a problem or change for other individuals or teams
- **make sure they understand the changes** – e.g. by ensuring that important messages have been received, understood and actioned
- **give and receive support** – e.g. by being ready to assist colleagues to adapt to changes

How to buddy a colleague

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 32a, 32b, 33 and 34.

It is often useful to have support in the workplace or place of study, especially if we are new to the organisation or the role. Having someone to help us find our way can help us settle in and become productive more quickly.

The term 'buddy'

Many organisations now use the term 'buddy' to describe the role and actions of someone who is allocated to look after and mentor a new or less experienced colleague. A buddy is any colleague who is teamed with another colleague to provide them with ongoing support, training, development, feedback, mentoring and constructive criticism.

For example:

- A **buddy** or **mentor** will be the experienced person who is given the task of looking after a new person.
- There can be a **buddy relationship** between the experienced colleague and the new recruit.
- The word can be used as a verb that describes the action of 'looking after' – e.g. the experienced colleague will **buddy** the new person for the next week; a colleague will **buddy** another experienced colleague who has come over from a different team.

The new person can be new to:

- the whole organisation – e.g. a new employee on their first day
- the team – e.g. coming over from another established team on a temporary or permanent basis
- the task – e.g. learning about a new task from a colleague who has just done the training course and is ready to train and help others

What is expected of a buddy?

A buddy's main role is to help a colleague to develop their knowledge and skills so that they can settle in quickly and become a productive member of the team. A buddy is not usually expected to fully manage or train the new person, but they are expected to be a supportive, informative, approachable and friendly colleague.

For example, a buddy might be expected to:

- reassure the new person and make them feel welcome
- show them around the building, campus or work area
- introduce them to their new work colleagues
- explain the organisational policies and procedures and maybe show them how to perform tasks
- show them where to find the physical resources they need – e.g. in a stationery cupboard, locked store cupboard or warehouse
- show them how to access support and information – e.g. from their line manager, training materials or company website
- make sure that they know that they can ask the buddy if they have queries
- arrange regular meetings to check their progress and answer any questions
- be patient – e.g. if the new person asks lots of questions, sometimes more than once

A buddy needs to treat all information as confidential, so that the new person feels comfortable about confiding in them and showing their vulnerability.

Knowledge Activity 18: Imagine that you are a new employee and it is your first day. Your buddy has shown you around and shown you what to do. You overhear them telling colleagues about you and laughing about how you do not have a clue about what to do and where to go.

How would you feel about your buddy discussing you like this?

Would you trust your buddy and feel able to confide in them?

How should your buddy deal with things that you say and do as you find your way around?

How to give positive feedback and constructive criticism

In the previous section, we looked at giving constructive feedback. The techniques covered can be used in a buddy relationship. When giving feedback and constructive criticism to a buddy, it is important to:

Start and end with positive comments

Using the 'sandwich' technique makes negative comments much easier to give and receive. As the experienced colleague, it is really hard to give negative feedback to someone, even if it is meant well. By ending on a positive note, it is easier to deliver the 'bad' news as we know that we are going to follow it with something positive and useful.

The recipient needs a positive comment at the end so that they do not feel completely negative – e.g. deflated, useless, depressed, hopeless or unacceptable.

For example, if a new employee in a supermarket makes a couple of mistakes on their first day on the checkout, their buddy might say:

	Examples of suitable comments
Positive	You did really well today. Well done, you coped very well. You seemed to enjoy that, well done. You learned all that really quickly, well done.
Negative **– try to avoid personal comments** **– give practical advice about how to improve**	There was just one thing that we need to think about… when you have a query it's important to tell the customer and not just ignore them. Next time it happens, just smile and explain briefly so that the customer does not feel abandoned. There were a couple of issues… it's important to say hello to each customer and look them in the eye. This helps them to feel welcome.
Positive	You were so good with the customers, though, you really engaged with them. You were very quick with the scanner and seemed to work it all out… well done. A really good first day, you should be very proud. You learn really quickly and you're a great addition to the team. Well done.

Focus on the issue not the person

As we can see from these examples, it is important to concentrate on the issue or behaviour and not make the comment personal when the feedback is a bit negative. The objective is to help the new person to improve their knowledge and skills, not to put them down and make them feel inadequate.

To achieve this objectivity, it helps to avoid saying "you" when giving constructive criticism. For example:

- "It's important to say hello to the customer. It helps to make them feel welcome, relaxed and positive about the organisation." This approach reinforces the standard that is required without making a personal comment about the new staff member. It encourages them to adopt the standard procedure.
- "You didn't do that right. You didn't say hello to the customer. You must greet them." This is harsh and very personal, and is likely to leave the new staff member feeling very negative and bullied.

Keep eye contact at all times when giving feedback

Good eye contact reinforces authority and gives someone confidence that we know what we are saying. It focuses attention on the person receiving the feedback and helps them to concentrate.

We can also see if they are listening. If they look us in the eye and engage with the comments, they are likely to absorb the feedback and information and follow the advice given. If they look away too much, look bored or do not engage at all, they are likely to ignore the feedback and disregard the advice on how to improve. This could cause problems as the new team member will find it hard to integrate and become a productive part of the team if they are unwilling to listen and learn.

Use humour when applicable

The role of the buddy is to be supportive, friendly and approachable, and the use of appropriate humour at the right time can help the new person to relax and become an integrated member of the team.

Humour can be a great tool for building relationships and loyalty within a team. People that know each other and get on well will share funny comments, friendly banter, comic stories and gentle teasing. For a new person joining a group, the first few encounters can be rather anxious times – the group is well-established, with lots of shared history and values, and they are expected to join in.

Humour needs to be appropriate for the newcomer, probably avoiding contentious issues, swearing and too much jargon that could offend them or make them feel left out. As working relationships develop, people will find their own level, common interests and sense of shared humour. The main thing is to make a new person feel welcome and to give them a chance to feel part of the team.

Be specific and include examples

Feedback and constructive criticism need to be targeted and specific. The objective is to help the new person to improve, so they need to be very clear about what is expected.

In the example of the new staff member working on the supermarket checkout, the feedback is very specific – e.g. about saying hello to customers and not ignoring them if there is a problem. The issues are specific and the advice needs to be specific as well. Within the negative feedback comments are suggestions about how to address each issue – e.g. "…it's important to say hello to each customer and look them in the eye. This helps them to feel welcome."

Choose a suitable time and place to give feedback

As we have seen, confidentiality is important, especially if some of the feedback is negative and constructive criticism is required. It is usually acceptable to give someone general praise in public, although some people find this very embarrassing and awkward. However, it is not usually acceptable to give negative comments in front of others, such as colleagues or customers, and this can be seen as harassment or bullying.

The organisation's procedures should cover how and when feedback and criticism can be given – e.g. in the office after a shift or in a quiet corner of the staff canteen during a break when comments cannot be overheard.

The timing of comments can vary. Sometimes a planned, full debrief that covers all aspects is required – e.g. at the end of a shift or at the end of the week. This may take some time and probably needs to be in a private office environment so that both people can freely discuss queries, problems and solutions.

Sometimes an unplanned comment is needed, especially if there is an urgent problem or safety concern. This may need to happen in the work area to prevent an accident or major problem occurring. If possible, a full, private discussion needs to take place soon after, to explain the consequences and offer training and support.

For example, if a new colleague makes a mistake on a production line, the experienced colleague will probably need to intervene straightaway to prevent an accident or problem that could affect the whole production line. Once things have been stopped or put right, the buddy needs to explain in detail and offer support to the new person, maybe in a private meeting after the shift.

Establishing a rapport with a buddy

As we have seen, the buddy's role is to help someone to find their way around an organisation, team or task. A buddy relationship is a friendly, supportive, one-to-one mechanism to help a new person to settle in and make progress in a new environment. As the two people work closely together for a while, it is important to build a rapport. The experienced colleague who acts as the mentor or buddy can, for example:

- **Be friendly and approachable** – e.g. be welcoming, patient and ready to answer a lot of questions, maintaining confidentiality throughout the process
- **Be trustworthy and supportive** – e.g. maintain confidentiality throughout the process; take the new person's opinions and concerns seriously
- **Organise structured plans to cover all aspects** – e.g. have a list of tasks to be covered in the first meeting; make sure that they are up to date themselves; have leaflets or other training materials to hand

- **Arrange structured sessions for feedback and questions** – e.g. to share information and build confidence in a private and organised way
- **Give constructive feedback and criticism** – using the 'sandwich' technique to tackle negative points
- **Make sure that communication is balanced and not one-sided** – e.g. encouraging the new person to speak by asking them open questions
- **Be available to answer questions about day-to-day issues** – e.g. face-to-face, on the telephone or via email
- **Work hard to present a positive and welcoming image of the organisation or team** – e.g. to help make the new person feel supported and confident about joining a worthwhile operation

It is important to take into account the new person's background and experience when deciding on the buddying techniques that will be best for them.

For example, if the new person has been working for the same company for years and has just switched over to a new team for a few weeks, they will know where to find the canteen and toilets, but they may not know where to find the physical resources they need for the new tasks. They may know many people within the company, but may need to be introduced to key people on the new team.

If the new person is new to the organisation but has previous job experience in the same industry, they may understand the procedures and how to perform their tasks, but they will not know where to find the canteen and toilets.

If the new person has come straight from college, the chances are that they will not know the organisation's procedures and working practices, so they will need to find out about their surroundings and what they are expected to do.

The buddy's approach needs to be flexible so that they can establish a rapport with the new person and support their individual needs and requests. By finding out about their previous experience, the buddy can tailor their support to the individual and help them to find their way and integrate smoothly and quickly.

Knowledge Activity 19: Imagine that you have been asked to buddy a new person who is joining your organisation or college course. Make a few notes about:

The practical things you would show them – e.g. toilets, stores or work areas

Who you would introduce them to

A basic outline of the work they are likely to cover on day one

Questions you would ask them to help build rapport

How you would tackle giving them negative (but constructive) feedback about a piece of work

Summary

In this section, we have covered the principles of effective team working and how to buddy a colleague. We have considered:

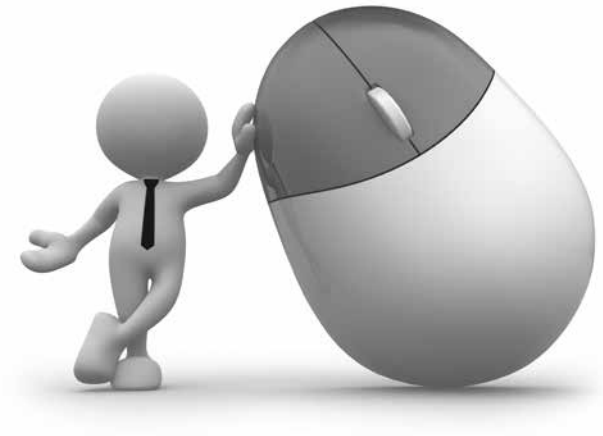
- the benefits of team working
- giving positive feedback and constructive criticism
- resolving team conflicts
- giving opportunities to discuss progress, issues, problems and changes
- what is expected of a buddy
- establishing rapport with a buddy

Further information about different aspects of customer service and the terms that are used can be found on the following websites:

A business website that has a wide range of information about management and customer service problems:
www.businessballs.com

The Institute of Customer Service:
www.instituteofcustomerservice.com

A good general website that has useful links to all legal and government-related aspects:
www.gov.uk



Health and safety procedures in the workplace

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 35, 36, 37 and 38.

This section deals with health and safety procedures in the workplace. We will look at the main responsibilities of employers and employees, health and safety legislation, and the types of information and support that are available.

Team leaders play a very important role in making sure that their team and others in the workplace are as healthy and safe as possible. It is vital to be aware of potential problems and to take the appropriate actions to safeguard everyone's welfare.

Hazards, risks, competence and risk assessment

Here are some brief descriptions of some of the terms that we might come across when looking at the subject of health and safety:

Hazard

A hazard is something that can be dangerous and might cause harm.

Anything can be a hazard if it is not used correctly or is not stored in a safe place – e.g. fire; a wire from a vacuum cleaner; a ladder; water on the floor; furniture or equipment that is not used as intended.

Other hazards include: an open window with no bars on the fifth floor; mouldy food; a moving forklift truck in a very noisy arena; fast traffic for a pedestrian crossing a street; strong cleaning chemicals; high levels of noise; uncontrolled crowds who crush people at the front; moving exhibits such as aircraft or boats; sun, heat, dehydration and fatigue.

Risk

Risk is the likelihood that something may cause harm, or the chance of something happening.

Some things can be **high risk** – e.g. standing on a chair that is on top of a table to change a ceiling light bulb. The chances of falling off are very high.

Similarly, some things are **low risk** – e.g. a chair and table being used as intended are unlikely to cause accidents if they are placed and used sensibly, and people can get around them.

Zero risk is a good goal, but we can never guarantee 100% freedom from harm. Someone may still bump into a table or fall off a chair, even when they are being used sensibly.

The idea is to **minimise** risk by thinking through the consequences and taking actions to reduce the chance of harm through accidents, injuries, electric shocks, fires, food poisoning etc.

Once we have worked out what the hazards and risks might be in the workplace, we need to do a **risk assessment**.

Competence

Competence is a combination of training, skills, experience and knowledge that an individuals has, plus their ability to perform a task safely.

There are requirements for training and competence in the workplace. Employers must make sure that people who perform a task for them are competent to do so, without putting themselves or other people at significant risk.

Employers need to examine the competence of their employees, contractors and others when they decide what level of information, training and supervision they need.

For example, a transport company needs to make sure that their drivers have:

- the correct licences and certificates for the vehicles they are authorised to drive – e.g. forklift or HGV licences
- previous experience – relevant to the job that they will be doing
- training – e.g. ongoing and refresher training; specific site training about hazards, speeds, parking and loading areas

Competent people have the ability to recognise risks in the operational activities, then apply the right measures to control and manage those risks.

Risk assessment

A risk assessment is a careful examination of what could cause harm. It is a record of every aspect of an organisation and its activities.

According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), there are five main steps to risk assessment. Many organisations use these as guidelines when designing and implementing their own risk assessments:

1) Identify the hazards
2) Decide who might be harmed, and how
3) Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions
4) Record findings and implement them
5) Review the assessment and update as necessary

Risk assessments help everyone to see and understand the potential hazards, and to take steps to reduce the chance of harm by having **control measures** in place.

Assessments can be visual checks – e.g. looking for trip hazards or looking for obvious damage to equipment or furnishings. They can also be detailed written documents that analyse potential hazards, the risks of harm, and possible solutions to problems.

Risk assessments will vary for each event and venue. They will look at all aspects of the operation, show the level of risk, and show what is being done to minimise the risk.

Knowledge Activity 20: Do a brief health and safety risk assessment for the kitchen and bathroom where you live. What are the potential hazards, and what could you suggest to minimise the risk of harm?

Area of the home	Potential hazards and problems	Suggestions to reduce the risk of harm
Kitchen		
Bathroom		

The work of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

The HSE's work covers a wide range of activities – e.g. shaping and reviewing regulations; producing research and statistics; enforcing the law. It produces useful newsletters and several free publications that are easy to read, and which contain a vast amount of relevant, factual and sensible information. The website address is: **www.hse.gov.uk**

Did you know?

According to data from the HSE website, in 2014/15:

- 611,000 injuries occurred at work – according to the Labour Force Survey
- 142 workers were killed at work
- 1.2 million working people suffered from a work-related illness
- 27.3 million working days were lost due to work-related illness or workplace injury

Part of the HSE's work is to dispel myths about health and safety. There are so many stories about organisations blaming H&S for some of their actions and rules that the HSE puts together 'myth busting' facts on their website. This is because the ridiculous stories discredit H&S and make it seem trivial.

They also have a Myth Busting Challenge Panel that looks at decisions and gives independent advice. They make it clear that H&S is about managing risks properly, and is not about being risk-averse and stopping people getting on with their lives.

Samples of H&S myths include:

- kettles being banned in offices as people would walk around with hot cups – the Panel said that there was no H&S issue and that it was being used as a poor excuse by the employer
- employers refusing to put plasters in first-aid boxes because of possible allergies – the HSE recommends that plasters should be stocked; people can always ask the injured person if they are allergic and use a hypoallergenic plaster if appropriate
- children not being allowed to play conkers without goggles
- hanging baskets being banned in case people bump their heads
- park benches being replaced because they are three inches too low
- office workers being banned from putting up Christmas decorations

As we will see later on, the legislation and regulations for health and safety at work are based on common sense and managing risks. The increase in H&S awareness and compliance has led to a decrease in fatalities and serious injuries at work, so it is vital that the subject is taken seriously.

We will briefly look at the legislation and regulations that provide the framework for H&S at work. In later sections, we will look at fire safety, manual handling, display screen equipment and hazardous substances in more detail. In this section, we are going to concentrate on the general H&S duties and requirements for employers and employees.

Did you know?

The HSE state that the high-risk industries include:

- construction – 156.0 major injuries per 100,000 employees
- agriculture – 239.5 per 100,000
- waste and recycling – 369.8 per 100,000

Health and safety legislation and regulations

We are going to have a look at the main legislation and regulations that apply to health and safety in the workplace. In addition to these regulations, there are many that relate to specific industries – e.g. food safety legislation that applies to any organisation that handles, stores or processes food; transport legislation that applies to organisations that offer transport services.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

This is the main piece of UK legislation for health and safety and applies to all industries. This Act of Parliament covers all employers, employees and customers on the premises. The HSE is the government body that is responsible for creating and enforcing the legislation.

An employer's responsibilities are based on **duty of care** of the people in their workplace. Employers have to do a **risk assessment** to analyse any potential health and safety hazards. They also have to appoint a **competent person**, usually one of the owners in a small business, or a member of staff trained in health and safety in a large organisation. If there are more than five employees, the employer must keep an official record of its risk assessments, and have a formal health and safety policy.

The employer's main responsibilities

There are many aspects that an employer has to consider, such as having a duty of care, performing risk assessments and appointing a competent person, and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) gives more detailed information. Broadly speaking, the employer must also:

- make sure that the workplace is free from risks to health, as far as is reasonable and practical – e.g. arranging for proper cleaning, providing sinks for hand-washing, organising waste areas to reduce the risk of fire or attracting vermin, taking precautions with flammable and explosive hazards
- assess any risks and take action to reduce these – e.g. by providing safety signs, moving the food waste bins away from the kitchen door
- share information about H&S matters with other employers who use the building
- provide H&S information, training and supervision for employees and others
- provide first-aid facilities, and other welfare facilities, and health supervision as needed – e.g. a first-aid box, a staff restroom, maybe a medical room
- provide any necessary safety clothing and PPE, free of charge – e.g. gloves, aprons, safety shoes, protective goggles
- set up emergency procedures, and make sure that employees and customers can understand them – e.g. fire evacuation procedures, fire-exit signs
- ensure that they provide training and supervision for manual handling – e.g. training staff how to lift heavy items to reduce the risk of injury
- ensure that all plant, machinery and equipment is correct for the job, properly maintained, safe to use, with safe working practices set up and followed
- make sure that the workplace meets health, safety and welfare requirements – e.g. ventilation, temperature, lighting, rest facilities, toilet and washing facilities
- report injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences to the appropriate authority under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR)

The employee's main responsibilities

Under the health and safety legislation, employees also have responsibilities and must:

- take reasonable care of their own and others' health and safety by following instructions, guidelines and company policies
- cooperate with their employer on H&S issues, and follow the H&S training given
- use work items correctly, in accordance with instructions, training and agreed safe practices
- never tamper with or misuse anything provided for health, safety or welfare

- wear the correct PPE when provided
- report any hazards or risks to the employer or health and safety representative

As a normal part of the working day, employees need to:

Observe – to look for visible signs of damage, excessive wear and tear, or tampering

Check – that protective measures are in place, such as safety guards, PPE, PAT testing of portable electrical equipment

Report – any problems, hazards or issues that may cause a risk of harm

It is important to report faults and hazards and to only deal with things that are within our authority. For example, putting up a yellow hazard sign then reporting a broken step would be a good option, but trying to unblock a rubbish compactor ourselves would not be, unless we were trained to do so. Blockages in equipment, or problems with machinery, must be dealt with by trained specialists only.

If any person feels that an item of machinery or equipment may put people at risk, they must:

- not use it
- identify it as broken
- ensure that no one else uses it

Other legislation and regulations

The following regulations and legislation apply to all industries. The employer's and employee's duties remain broadly the same as for the Health and Safety at Work Act.

Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 (as amended)

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is equipment that will protect the user against health and safety risks at work – e.g. gloves, aprons, safety goggles or glasses, safety harnesses.

Using PPE can be an everyday part of work activities. The correct PPE can protect the worker from harm and prevent cross-contamination. It comes in many forms and can be used for a wide variety of tasks, for example:

- **gloves** – e.g. disposable latex for cleaning duties, handling food or to avoid contact with body fluids
- **safety goggles or glasses** – e.g. for use when pouring chemicals or dusting at height

- **aprons and overalls** – e.g. disposable plastic aprons for use in healthcare organisations
- **safety shoes or boots** – e.g. especially useful when there is a risk of equipment falling on the feet
- **ear protection** – e.g. when working in noisy environments or using noisy equipment
- **high-visibility clothing** – e.g. hi-viz jackets or waistcoats to be used when cleaning where there are moving vehicles, such as aircraft, lorries or forklift trucks
- **masks** – e.g. lightweight masks to prevent the inhalation of dust or other matter; pressurised breathing apparatus for cleaning areas with asbestos
- **hard hats** – e.g. when working on a building site or in a building that is undergoing building work
- **hairnets and snoods (coverings for beards)** – e.g. when cleaning in a food factory or kitchen
- **safety harnesses** – e.g. when working on a platform

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002 (as amended)

These cover hazardous substances that may affect health in the workplace – e.g. chemicals, dust, fumes, detergent, wet working, lubricant, paint or glue – and the HSE produces direct advice sheets for many different industries.

The regulations focus on how employers and their staff can control risks by:

- finding out what the health hazards are
- deciding how to prevent harm to health
- providing control measures to reduce harm to health
- making sure they are used
- keeping all control measures in good working order
- providing information, instruction and training for employees and others
- providing monitoring and health surveillance in appropriate cases
- planning for emergencies

Health and Safety (Information for Employees) Regulations 1989 (as amended)

Employers must inform their employees about all aspects of H&S in the workplace. This includes a legal requirement to display an approved HSE H&S poster where staff can see it, or to provide each worker with an approved leaflet.


Health and Safety Law
What you need to know

All workers have a right to work in places where risks to their health and safety are properly controlled. Health and safety is about stopping you getting hurt at work or ill through work. Your employer is responsible for health and safety, but you must help.

What employers must do for you

What you must do

If there's a problem

0845 300 9923

0845 345 0055

www.hse.gov.uk

Employment rights

www.direct.gov.uk

HSE

Health and Safety Executive

The HSE has detailed information about weights and lifting techniques, for example:

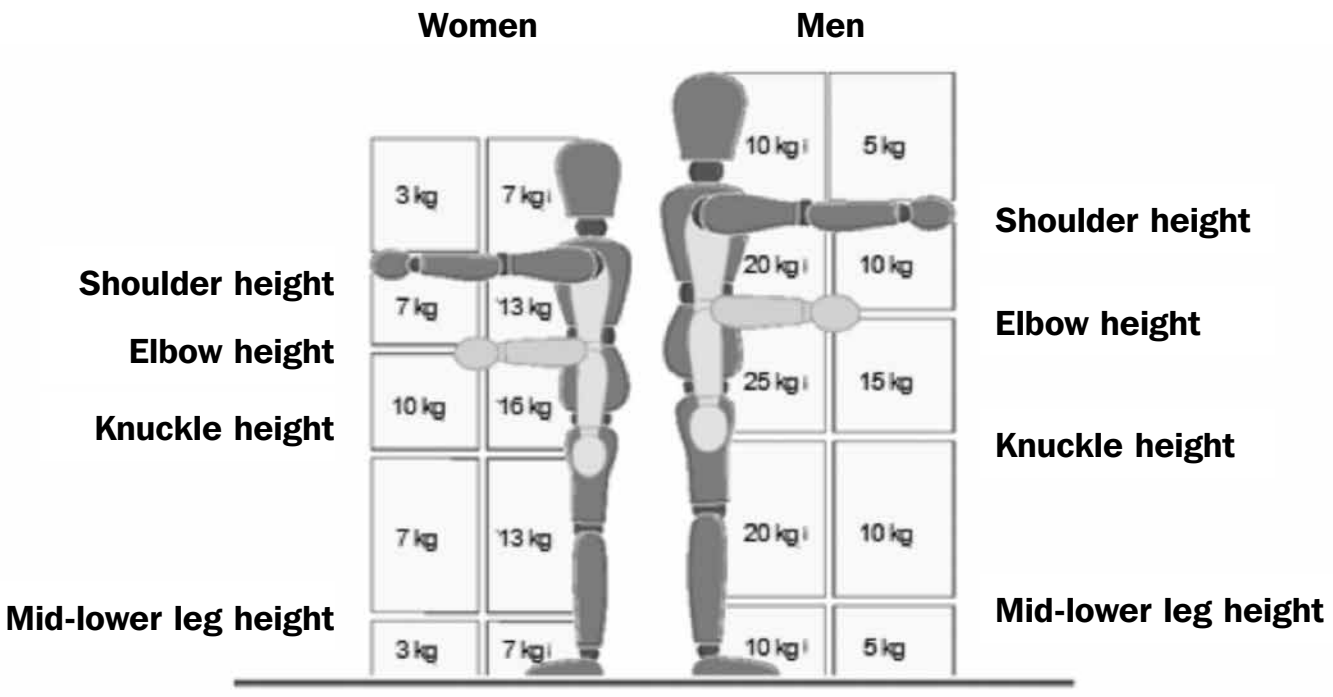
Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended)

These regulations exist to help to minimise injuries from lifting and handling. They ensure that the correct training and equipment are provided and used.

Training helps to:

- minimise the risk of injury for the care workers
- minimise the risk of damaging objects or heavy equipment
- comply with health and safety legislation
- comply with the organisation's health and safety policies, procedures and training
- apply agreed ways of working

Infrequent lifting and lowering:



These guidelines are for up to 30 lifting operations per hour.

Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

This covers fire risk assessment, fire safety training, equipment and procedures. Under the legislation, employers have to have fire safety and evacuation plans that must show that they have:

- a clear passageway to all escape routes
- clearly marked escape routes that are as short and direct as possible
- enough exits and routes for all people to escape
- emergency doors that open easily
- emergency lighting where needed
- training for all employees on how to use escape routes
- a safe meeting point for staff
- special arrangements for people with mobility needs – e.g. make sure there are specific people to help wheelchair users get downstairs if there is a fire

Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 2013 (as amended)

The RIDDOR regulations require employers, the self-employed and people in charge of premises to report certain incidents, such as food poisoning and major accidents.

Incidents have to be reported when there are:

- accidents resulting in the death of any person
- accidents resulting in specified injuries to workers
- non-fatal accidents requiring hospital treatment to non-workers
- dangerous occurrences – e.g. the collapse or overturning of lifting equipment used for people, materials or goods

Environmental Protection Act 1990

The law makes provisions for improved control of pollution from certain industrial and other processes. Areas covered by the Act include:

- emissions from certain processes and substances – e.g. smoke, fumes, gases, dust, steam, smell, effluvia (unpleasant discharge) or noise
- disposal of controlled household, industrial or commercial waste on land – e.g. unauthorised or harmful deposit, treatment or disposal of controlled waste
- contaminated land – e.g. how to deal with land after a chemical spill to avoid it getting into the water supply
- litter – e.g. defining a set of criminal offences
- radioactive substances – e.g. controlling access, transport and storage
- genetically modified organisms (GMOs) – e.g. providing a system for notification and risk assessment for the importing, purchasing, keeping, releasing or marketing of GMOs
- conservancy – e.g. creating the Nature Conservancy Councils for England and Scotland, and the Countryside Council for Wales

Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations 2013

The aim of these regulations is to reduce the amount of untreated WEEE disposed of in landfill sites, to ensure that it is dealt with properly, and to require electronic equipment producers to pay for its disposal.

If possible, WEEE needs to be recycled, reconditioned or reused. Some WEEE is hazardous and requires special treatment and disposal – e.g. fridges, televisions, computer monitors and fluorescent lighting, batteries and vehicles at the end of their lives.

Working at Height Regulations 2005 (as amended)

These regulations deal with situations where a person could be injured from falling – e.g. high up on a ladder, standing on a small stool, at ground level, or below ground.

Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992

These cover workstations, breaks, eyesight tests, spectacles etc.

Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981 (as amended)

These lay down the rules for the provision of first-aid equipment, facilities and people so that employees and customers can be given immediate help if they are injured or taken ill.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work (MHSW) Regulations 1999 (as amended)

These are in addition to those laid down in the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and cover the employer's responsibilities for identifying risks and hazards, and taking steps to reduce the risk of harm.

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992

These cover a wide range of day-to-day welfare issues for employees, including adequate ventilation, lighting and temperature

Smoke-free (Premises and Enforcement) Regulations 2006 (part of the Health Act 2006)

In England, places open to the public, or used as places of work, must be smoke-free (other parts of the UK have their own versions of the regulations). These include places where a worker enters to make a delivery or provide a service, and most work and public vehicles. 'No Smoking' signs must be shown in certain places, including smoke-free vehicles.

Knowledge Activity 21: Make a few notes about which legislation and regulations apply to your own organisation.

General H&S (that apply to all industries)

Industry-specific (that apply just to your industry)

The importance of following H&S procedures

Following health and safety procedures is extremely important to:

- minimise the risk of harm to staff, customers and others in the workplace
- comply with legislation and regulations and avoid legal action
- maintain good levels of productivity, sales, profitability and job security
- protect the organisation's good reputation as a safe employer

As we have seen, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the employer's main legal responsibilities are to assess each situation, provide and maintain the correct equipment and guidelines, and to provide training and supervision. The employee's general legal responsibilities are to use equipment correctly, follow instructions and training, and to report any problems. If employers or employees fail to comply with legislation and regulations, there can be many consequences.

Although legal action is very rare, it does happen. For example, in 2013, a company had to pay more than £200,000 following the death of an employee who was killed by a forklift truck. Employees used the same doorway as the forklift truck, something that the company had been warned about but had failed to manage and change. In 2007, a plant-hire company and their employee were both fined following the death

of a foreman who was crushed by an excavator bucket. The employee had failed to insert a safety pin to safely lock the bucket, and the company was guilty of providing equipment without adequate safety warning signs, information or instructions.

Failure to follow good H&S practices and to comply with laws and regulations can impact on organisations and staff in several ways:

	Possible consequences for employer include	**Possible consequences for employee include**
Avoidable suffering, illness, sickness and accidents	Loss of work days, possible fines, bad reputation as an employer	Suffering and time off work, possibly unpaid; possible long-term problems after a serious injury or illness; fatality
Absences and sick leave	Costs of paying sick pay, plus costs and inconvenience of recruitment, overtime and replacement staff to cover absences	Lost wages, with maybe only statutory sick pay to live on; missed opportunities in the workplace
The HSE using enforcement powers	Possibly leading to a variety of measures including cautions, fines or, in very rare and exceptional cases, imprisonment	Possibly leading to a variety of measures including cautions, fines or, in very rare and exceptional cases, imprisonment
Loss of a good reputation	Negative media coverage, public opinion, or attention from pressure groups; can lose business following the loss of a good name	Can lose the employer's trust; possible disciplinary measures can affect job appraisal and performance measures
Reduced productivity	From losing good staff, damage to machinery and equipment, or breaks in production	Reduced performance following injury or illness, temporary or permanent
Increased insurance costs	Premiums for Employability Liability Compulsory Insurance would probably increase following incidents, injuries and ill health	As a possible consequence of long-term health issues
Other costs not covered by insurance	Sick pay, lost time and productivity, repairs to plant and machinery, overtime, investigation time	Loss of future earnings if unable to perform at the same level
Time and costs of legal action	Reduction in productivity and profit if finance, time and other resources used for legal costs and defending legal action	Stress and possible costs if involved with legal action

Employees have a responsibility to be aware of the health and safety legislation relevant to their working practice. Everyone has a responsibility for the welfare of employees, customers and visitors, and they could be legally liable if someone is injured through their negligence or ignorance.

When controlling risk in the workplace, team leaders need to work with their team members, managers and others to follow H&S procedures that can include:

- **using risk assessments** – to identify potential hazards and find ways to minimise the risk of harm
- **observing legislation and regulations**
- **taking personal responsibility** – e.g. following instructions and training, taking care of personal hygiene and reporting hazards
- **following safe practices** – e.g. using PPE, equipment, materials and chemicals properly
- **following fire safety and first-aid training**
- **following working at height and lifting and handling training**
- **having control measures**

It is important to be involved with controlling H&S risks so that new hazards are not introduced if something is changed. For example, just introducing the use of latex gloves will not help to reduce cross-contamination unless the disposal of the soiled gloves is done properly.

Control measures are vital to bring the level of risk down, and to keep the level as low as possible. They are the logical and practical actions that everyone can do to address the problems shown in the risk assessment.

H&S information and support

There are many sources of information and support on the wide-ranging topics that involve health and safety in the workplace.

Types of information and support

Examples of the types of H&S information include:

H&S procedures and policies

An organisation's H&S procedures and policies will lay down the instructions and guidelines that need to be followed to make the workplace as safe and healthy as possible, and to comply with the legislation. H&S policies are compulsory for organisations with more than five employees.

These policies make sure that the organisation has thought through the possible risks in their particular business or industry. They will cover, in detail, how the organisation plans to minimise risks, and how it will make sure that their procedures are followed.

Emergency and evacuation procedures

These will cover what staff, customers and visitors need to do in the event of fire or evacuation. They will explain, for example:

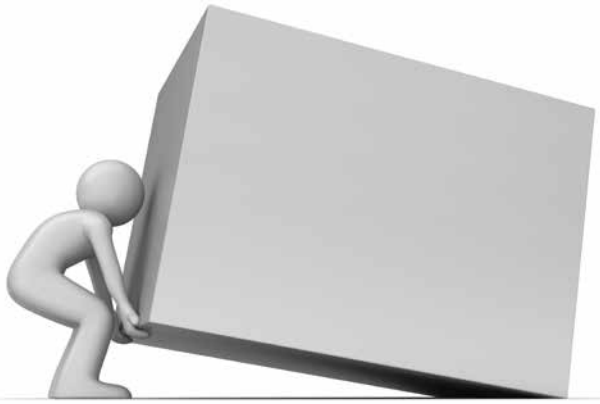
- emergency exits
- how the alarm will sound
- what to do and where to go if the alarm goes off
- assembly points outside the building
- how to evacuate people with disabilities or mobility problems
- how to summon help and who to report to
- fire and evacuation drills and training

How to use equipment and other supplies

Instructions are needed so that staff can use supplies, machinery and equipment safely and efficiently, for example:

- how to operate machinery – e.g. floor polishers, kitchen appliances
- how to dilute chemicals correctly

- what PPE is needed – e.g. gloves, masks, hard hat
- how to look out for potential problems – e.g. checking the condition of the wires on a machine
- what to do in an emergency with the equipment or supplies – e.g. after an accidental spillage of strong cleaning chemicals



Lifting and handling techniques

Instructions may include:

- how to lift items
- weight limits for certain body positions
- how and when to use lifting equipment

Hand-washing techniques

These will be particularly necessary where chemicals or food are handled, or contact is made with patients or customers.

First aid

Information about the first-aid facilities and qualified first-aiders will be easily available.

Specific instructions for the organisation or location

Each workplace will have its own specific information about H&S. This could include, for example:

- instructions and barriers to keep pedestrians and vehicles separate
- when hard hats need to be worn
- warnings about slippery floors, electricity or dangerous chemicals
- noise levels and advice about wearing ear protection
- when to use guards on a machine, and how to stop the machine in an emergency

How organisations and individuals communicate information

There are many ways in which organisations can communicate H&S at work and staff need to be aware of where they can find information, including:

Induction training sessions

When we start a new job or go to a new location, there will be induction training sessions which focus on H&S in each workplace. Subjects covered include: fire and evacuation drills; how to use equipment properly; the organisation's policies and procedures; who to go to for help and advice.

H&S and general training sessions

Training raises awareness of the issues that may affect safety and would cover the use of personal protective equipment and other measures that are designed to reduce the risks. Training sessions are often used for ongoing training, refresher training or if there have been changes in procedures, locations or equipment. Training notes and handouts will often be given out during a course or training session.

Meetings and discussions with colleagues, other team leaders, supervisors and managers

All of these people are invaluable sources of information about H&S in the workplace. They will often be the first to communicate information about H&S, and this can be in a variety of ways – e.g. training sessions; group or one-to-one meetings; informal and formal discussions; emails, notices and letters.

Operations manuals

Detailed operations manuals will also contain information about the H&S aspects of the operations. These might be paper files kept in an office or electronically on a website or Intranet system.

Notices, posters and signs

These can be used for any subject – e.g. H&S posters in the staff room; statutory fire exit signs throughout the building; notices about changes in operations or equipment; to show that something is out of order and is not to be used.

Signs can be very important and the broad categories they cover are:

Prohibition signs – do not do

e.g. No entry; No smoking

Blue – mandatory (things that must be done)

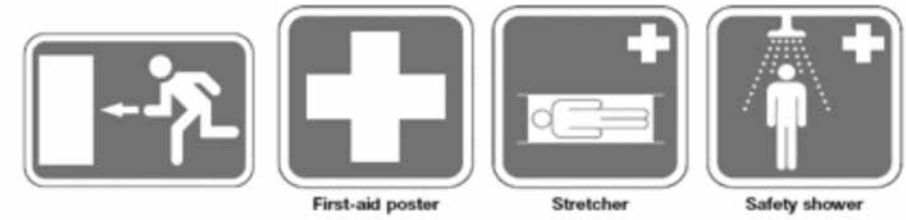
e.g. Wash your hands; Safety goggles must be worn

Yellow – warning, danger, caution

e.g. Danger high voltage; Caution slippery floor

Green – safe conditions, the safest way

e.g. Fire exits and escape routes; First Aid



Red – fire signs

e.g. Fire point; Fire extinguisher; Fire instructions

Emails, letters and memos

These can be used to give specific information to particular people, or general information to a wide number of people. Letters and personal emails can be useful when information is sensitive, personal or confidential.

Websites, newsletters and Intranet

These are useful when sending information to a large number of people where the information can be quite public. A vast amount of H&S information is now available on websites. The organisation may have its own site, where it can display its own H&S policies and procedures, and highlight problems and changes. Professional bodies and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) also have excellent websites with comprehensive current information and advice.

Electronic and paper newsletters are both useful ways of sharing information about H&S issues and changes that may affect an organisation – e.g. how to operate new machinery; warnings about accidents and near misses.

Manufacturer's leaflets and labels on packaging

The companies that supply equipment, materials, chemicals and so on will also provide H&S information. This can be communicated in several ways – e.g. instructions on packaging; instruction leaflets and operation manuals. Manufacturers may support their written instructions with special training sessions on particular products.

Meetings or training sessions with health and safety officers or representatives

Even a small business will have a nominated 'competent person', maybe the owner. Large organisations may have a health and safety department with specially trained staff and representatives. Many organisations use health and safety consultants. Whoever they are, these people are responsible for carrying out risk assessments, monitoring health and safety training, and keeping track of any incidents or 'near misses'.

These specialists will communicate with employees and others connected to the organisation. They may do this in a variety of ways – e.g. training sessions, emails, notices, meetings, letters or memos.

Entries in incident reports or accident books

All dangerous occurrences and accidents in the workplace need to be recorded. Staff need to know who to report to when something happens, and they may need to know where the accident book is kept. Some incidents, diseases and near misses need to be reported to outside authorities. The organisation's policies, procedures and training should show these in detail.

Knowledge Activity 22: Have a look around your workplace or place of study. Where can you find the following?

Fire exits

First-aid facilities and qualified first-aiders

Health and safety policies and procedures

Summary

In this section, we have looked at health and safety procedures in the workplace. We have examined:

- general information about health and safety
- terms used – such as hazard, risk, competence and risk assessment
- the role of the HSE
- a range of health and safety legislation and regulations
- the main responsibilities for employers and employees
- the importance of following health and safety procedures
- information and support on health and safety topics

Section 5: Understand how to handle information and mail

Introduction

In this section, we are going to look at how and why organisations handle information and mail. We will examine the storage and retrieval systems and procedures, legal and organisational requirements, and how to deal with problems when storing and retrieving information. We will also look at how to deal with ingoing and outgoing mail and packages, plus the security of data and how to deal with suspicious items.

Information storage and retrieval

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 39, 40a and 40b.

It is important to store information so that it is organised, safe, secure and straightforward to find and retrieve again when needed. Information can be stored in paper-based or electronic systems. All staff members need to follow the same procedures so that the system operates smoothly and everyone knows how to handle the organisation's information to, for example:

- collect information
- maintain records
- share data with authorised people only
- store information safely
- dispose of information and records securely

Systems and procedures

Organisations use manual paper-based systems and electronic systems to store and retrieve information.

Some organisations are totally dependent on electronic information systems and technology, and they will have a wide variety of software packages, computer hardware, storage media and communication devices. Other organisation will use a mixture of manual and electronic systems.

Section 5: Understand how to handle information and mail

Manual systems that are used to store and retrieve information include, for example:

- paper files, box files, ring binders and archive boxes
- index cards
- diaries, calendars and wallcharts
- address books
- notebooks, notes and printed reports

Examples of different types of IT used to store and retrieve information include:

- the Internet
- software programmes and packages
- operating hardware
- storage media
- communication devices
- off-site electronic data storage services

Organisations have procedures on how to store and retrieve information and these will usually be set out in the policies, operating procedures and training materials. Procedures will usually cover, for example:

- **confidentiality and security of information** – e.g. passwords and other security measures to allow access for authorised people only
- **training courses and job descriptions** – e.g. on the organisation's working practices for handling paper-based and electronic data
- **where different information is stored** – e.g. everyday accounts information in files and boxes; the previous year's accounts information in a secure storeroom on-site; archived accounts information from older years off-site in a secure warehouse
- **how to access information** – e.g. where to look on a company's cloud storage and how to open the files
- **how to put information away after use** – e.g. how to save documents electronically or where to file papers after a task
- **how to handle queries and problems** – e.g. when to escalate issues to line managers and others

Legal and organisational requirements

Organisations needs to retain information and keep it safe for many reasons. They may need to, for example:

- monitor operational progress, standards and productivity problems
- comply with legislation
- have historical data that can be used for analysis, research and planning
- have reliable evidence if required – e.g. if there is an accident in the workplace
- work on and store clients' papers and records – e.g. in an accountancy firm
- keep personal data about staff members – e.g. application forms, wages and training records
- use and store personal data about customers – e.g. sales information, names and addresses

Organisational requirements

All information needs to be stored securely and organisations have a requirement to, for example:

- keep documents in good condition – e.g. in boxes, files, filing cabinets or cupboards away from damp, fire and pests
- have reliable network, hard drive or cloud storage for electronic documents that can be accessed remotely
- have backup arrangements for electronic data
- have a system that identifies the location of stored information
- security measures to restrict access to unauthorised personnel

Legal requirements

In addition to having their own operational requirements, organisations have a responsibility to comply with various legislation and regulations.

One important piece of legislation that affects how information is managed is the **Data Protection Act 1998**. The Act ensures that personal and confidential information is not shared without the individual's knowledge or permission. The principles covered in the Act are useful guidelines for an organisation to follow when it handles information generally. Records should be:

- processed fairly and lawfully
- obtained, stored and used for specified and legal purposes

- adequate and relevant, but not excessive
- accurate and kept up to date
- disposed of correctly when no longer needed – and not kept any longer than necessary
- processed and used in accordance with the individual's rights
- obtained, stored and used securely – so that the information cannot be obtained by unauthorised people or organisations, in the UK or abroad

Other legislation that can require organisations to keep and store adequate records include many regulations connected with health and safety, such as:

- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 2013
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work (MHSW) Regulations 1992

Time limits

There can be legal time limits for keeping information that need to be observed. For example:

- company statutory – indefinitely
- tax records – six years
- wage and PAYE records – three years

Organisations will have other legal obligations to keep and store accurate records depending on their industry and activities. Team leaders need to be aware of other legal requirements that are specific to their own employer or industry.

Effective filing systems

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 41, 42 and 43a and 43b.

The equipment that is needed to create filing systems varies according to the needs of the organisation. Systems can be manual or electronic. However information is stored, it needs to be organised, labelled and in a logical place to be useful and retrievable. Documents can be stored, for example:

- in alphabetical order
- in numerical order
- in alphanumerical order
- in date order
- according to the time period – e.g. accounts for one year all being kept together in a box
- according to a project or task – e.g. all research materials for a project being kept together

If the information is not stored in an organised and logical fashion, valuable time and staff resources will be wasted looking for important items. In addition, the operational efficiency of the team, department or organisation will be compromised, especially if the information cannot be retrieved at all.

Manual systems

Systems used to store paper-based information can be tailor-made to accommodate the documents that need to be kept. When designing a manual filing system, it is important to consider:

- the size and number of the items that need to be store
- how often they need to be accessed
- who needs to access items
- how they are to be returned after use

Options include, for example:

Paper files, box files, ring binders and archive boxes

Paperwork can be stored in a variety of ways so that it is easy and straightforward to access information that has been stored. If information is current or recent, it needs to be easily accessible to those who need it – to retrieve, use or update. Files, binders and box files can be kept in the main work area in storage cabinets, cupboard or shelving units.

When the information is not needed very often, it can be stored further away from the work area – e.g. in a departmental storage room on-site.

When information is not needed at all, but has to be kept for legal or operational reasons, it can be archived. There are many secure storage facilities where old documents can be kept safe and secure for many years if required. Documents can be accessed if necessary, but this will be a difficult and costly exercise.

Index cards

Index cards are a simple device for having brief details about customers, contacts, staff members and so on literally at someone's fingertips. Cards are usually kept in alphabetical order so it is easy to sift through to find the contact details of the individual or organisation that are required.

Diaries, calendars and wallcharts

Many people use paper versions of diaries, calendars and wallcharts to track progress and commitments. They are easy to fill in, update and amend, and they are generally portable and adaptable

Address books

Paper-based address books can be useful, portable places in which to store contact details for people and organisations.

Notebooks, notes and printed reports

Notebooks, notes kept in files and paper copies of reports can be extremely useful as reference sources for other reports and documents. Original notes, often made at the time of a discussion or enquiry, can be useful if there are queries, disputes or problems, or if further action is required. Notes need to be detailed enough to be useful as evidence if required – e.g. showing the date, who was present, contact details and what was agreed or suggested.

Copies of reports can be useful source materials when planning and monitoring – e.g. to compare objectives, achievements and action plans.

Electronic systems

Electronic systems are widely used. They take less physical space and being able to store electronic copies in different places can improve security in the event of fire, computer failure or other emergency. Remote access by unauthorised people can be an issue, however, and organisations need to take regular action to keep up to date with data security improvements and safeguards.

As for manual systems, organisations will have their own procedures for identifying the location of information – e.g. using menus and folders. Retrieval of information will usually be via computers and mobile devices, with security being controlled through password-protection and encrypted access.

Options for electronic systems include, for example:

The Internet

The Internet has revolutionised the management of information, data and communication and there are more and more Internet-based businesses and services each year. Organisations use a variety of equipment and devices to access the Internet, including: modems, routers, servers, dedicated telephone lines such as ISDN lines.

Software programmes and packages

Some software is standard and can be purchased by anyone – e.g. Microsoft Office, PDF Convertor, QuickBooks or Sage. Some software is designed specifically for the organisation to deal with the specific demands of the operations. This can be purchased from software design companies or designed in-house by the IT department of a large organisation.

Bespoke software is particularly important when the data is very sensitive and security is paramount – e.g. as used by banks and the NHS.

Applications for mobile phones and tablets, known as apps, cover an infinite number of topics and tasks, some of which can be useful to organisations – e.g. a map app to help people find their way around when walking through a city on business; a translation app that can convert foreign words into English.

Operating hardware

The IT hardware used to operate software changes all of the time, as processing speeds and memory capability improve. Typical hardware used by organisations include:

- desktop computers – stand-alone or as part of a computer network, PC or Mac
- laptop computers – based in the main offices or used at home or when working away
- tablets, smartphones and other mobile telephones
- dongles – usually plugged into laptops to allow Internet access when away from the office
- scanners, printers and copiers
- monitors and screens – including TV screens for presentations, training and videoconferences
- cameras – for graphics and for CCTV
- portable devices – including smartphones, mobile phones, tablets and other devices that facilitate calls, emails, apps and general Internet coverage away from the office

It is a growing trend for people to access and send information using mobile devices, enabling them to work away from the office and still be able to store, identify and retrieve what they need.

Storage media

Most hardware devices have the capacity for data storage. Data can be stored within the computer's **internal hard drive** or on **mobile storage devices**, such as:

- USB memory sticks – e.g. flash drives
- CDs
- DVDs
- portable external hard drives – e.g. Zip drives, Jaz drives
- digital voice recorders – for dictation and other sound recordings

Saving data on storage devices helps to reduce the amount of space taken up on a computer's own memory system. The storage system needs to be well organised so that documents can be tracked, identified and retrieved when required.

Data can be stored centrally on an organisation's **computer network**, and this will come under the control of the IT department. Information can be kept on different drives, and employees will be given passwords and instructions for the drives they are allowed to use – e.g. the tens of thousands of photographs generated at major annual events can be on the 'J:/ drive', with company policies and procedures on the 'K:/ drive'.

Cloud or Internet-based storage

Remote electronic storage is becoming more common and is a useful way to store and access large amounts of data. The cloud is accessed via the Internet and data is saved on remote servers that can be accessed from anywhere in the world, using passwords. It can be very helpful to save large documents in the cloud, using a company such as Dropbox, especially when they need to be shared.

For example, if an aviation company in the UK is working with its sister company in Australia to develop new training schemes, staff can set up cloud storage for the training documents, then find and access them from both countries to make changes, share ideas and discuss editing before going to print.

Off-site electronic data storage services

There are companies that provide off-site electronic data services. Their systems comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act and they store data safely and securely for their customers.

These off-site data protection services can be useful as part of an organisation's disaster recovery policies and procedures as the data is physically stored away from the workplace.

Data can be transferred off-site:

- on moveable devices – e.g. microfiche, magnetic tapes or optical devices
- electronically using a remote backup service – known as e-vaulting

Knowledge Activity 23: Make a few notes about how you would:

Archive your qualifications and certificates

Retrieve information about how much money you earned or received last month

Delete and permanently dispose of old financial documents and statements that have banking and personal details on them

Search techniques to retrieve information

As we have seen, information can be stored, for example:

- in alphabetical order
- in numerical order
- in alphanumerical order
- in date order
- according to the time period
- according to a project or task

Different search techniques can be used to help to locate the information that is needed for a task. For example:

Manual systems

- index cards – e.g. one card for each client, filed alphabetically by surname, showing their basic contact details and preferences
- colours – e.g. sales in green folders, emergency procedures in red and banking in blue
- colour strips – e.g. on the back of the file; on tabs sticking out at the side of the pages to show different sections and subjects; on the edges of cards or pages
- tabs on suspension files in drawers – e.g. one for each client or topic
- labels – e.g. on the outside of long-term archive storage boxes

Electronic systems

- using keywords or dates on internal search facilities
- using search engines
- following menus on business software
- searching folders by name, date or topic – e.g. on hard drives or cloud-based storage
- using databases – e.g. to search for customers' details
- keyboard shortcuts – for information that is used frequently

Problems with storing or retrieving information

If we have problems when we try to store or retrieve information, we need to have some ideas about how to search in different places and resolve the problem.

Manual systems

If we **cannot find information**, we might find that, for example:

- papers have been put into the wrong files
- files are in the wrong order
- files have been taken out by a colleague

If something is in the **wrong place**, we need to:

- make sure that everyone knows exactly how to file things in the correct order – e.g. for surnames such as McDonald and Macdonald; if there are apostrophes such as in O'Leary; if capital letters are part of the name, such as ABC Limited; if numbers are used in the name, such as A1 Limited
- have systems to show when a file is being used elsewhere – e.g. leaving a dummy file in its place to show who has the actual file
- do a thorough search of drawers, offices and other places to find the missing file or documents

If **the storage facility is full**, or nearly full, we need to follow the organisation's procedures to, for example:

- create an extra file
- arrange for more drawers, shelves or other storage
- move old papers to archive storage to make way for current papers
- remove and correctly destroy papers that are out of date and no longer needed

Electronic systems

When we have **difficulty locating electronic data** in a computer file, we can change the ways that the documents are listed. For example, instead of looking alphabetically, we can look for 'recent documents', or we can set the index to show the most recently modified documents first.

If an electronic **document cannot be found** because it has been saved incorrectly, it might be easier to find if we know the date it was modified. An extra space in the file name, for example, can take a document out of alphanumerical order and make it awkward to locate.

Some documents might be **visible but confidential**, so they cannot be retrieved or edited by unauthorised people. If the security setting is incorrect, it needs to be changed by someone who has the authority to do so.

If part of a document is **deleted by accident**, it is often possible to open an earlier version of it that was saved before the deletion. If a whole document is deleted in error, most computer systems have a 'recycle bin' or 'trash' facility that holds documents until they are permanently deleted, so it is always worth searching elsewhere in the organisation's software, or asking the IT specialists for help.

To help avoid problems from systems failures or accidental deletion, it is extremely important to follow the organisation's procedures for **backing up data** – e.g. saving data to a different hard drive at regular intervals.

Problems can also occur if the system has been **infected with a virus or other malware**. Again, it is extremely important to follow the organisation's procedures for protecting systems and data – e.g. not allowing unauthorised devices to be plugged into an Intranet system; not opening document attachments from unknown sources, making sure that antivirus, firewall and other protection programmes are kept up to date.

If in doubt, we should always ask for assistance and advice from line managers and IT specialists.

When considering the legal and organisational requirement for the retention and security of information, there are advantages and disadvantages with different filing and retrieval systems. The following table has some examples:

Filing and retrieval system	Advantages include	Disadvantages include
Paper files, box files, ring binders	■ accessible to many people ■ easy to see where information is if labelled correctly ■ portable and inexpensive ■ can be locked away securely ■ can be kept for many years	■ vulnerable to fire, damp and pests ■ take up a lot of space ■ can be time-consuming and expensive to dispose of securely
Archive boxes	■ good long-term storage ■ can be sent to safe depository off-site ■ easy to see where information is if labelled and catalogued correctly	■ vulnerable to fire, damp and pests ■ take up a lot of space ■ can be time-consuming and expensive to dispose of securely
Index cards	■ very portable ■ quick and easy to use	■ not very secure unless locked away, as cards can be seen by many people ■ limited scope to hold much information
Diaries, address books	■ portable and easy to use ■ easy to access	■ not very secure unless locked away ■ limited scope to hold much information
Calendars and wallcharts	■ portable and easy to use ■ easy to access ■ can be seen by many people at once – e.g. in a staff room	■ cannot hold much detail ■ not secure ■ can be difficult to understand

Notebooks, notes and printed reports	■ portable and easy to use ■ easy to access ■ can be any size and deal with any subject ■ provide reliable written evidence ■ can be personal or issued to many ■ eports can be secure if circulated correctly	■ notes can become disorganised and lose their value as evidence ■ printed reports can be expensive to print and circulate ■ notebooks and notes need to be stored securely
Internet	■ inexpensive ■ generally protected by passwords and encryption ■ no limit to the amount of data that can be stored ■ menus make access easy	■ cataloguing and indexing of information needs to be very organised or data cannot be found ■ possibly vulnerable viruses, hackers and data theft
Software programmes and packages, hardware and storage media	■ can be tailor-made to the organisation's requirements ■ fast and easy to access once set up correctly ■ can handle large amounts of data	■ cataloguing and indexing of information needs to be very organised or data cannot be found ■ possibly vulnerable to viruses, hackers and data theft
Communication devices	■ portable and easy to use ■ easy to access data from anywhere in the world ■ information can be stored and retrieved remotely ■ sensitive information can be protected by passwords and encryption	■ possibly vulnerable to viruses, hackers, data theft and theft of the actual device ■ costs of updating devices and applications

Knowledge Activity 24: Make some notes about your organisation's procedures for:

Filing new paper documents

Storing personal details for customers, suppliers and staff – e.g. index cards or databases

Long-term storage of papers and files

Long-term storage of electronic documents

Dealing with mail

Organisations deal with mail and electronic mail all of the time. They need to have safe and efficient systems to handle mail of all types, and it is important to follow the procedures to help with the smooth running of the organisation.

Incoming and outgoing mail needs to be secure as it can contain sensitive and confidential information. Under the Data Protection Act 1998, organisations need to follow strict rules about handling data and information so that it is used, stored and disposed of in a safe and secure way. This includes handling paper-based and electronic mail and procedures help to stop the wrong people gaining access to private information.

A useful source of further information about mail services is the Royal Mail – **www.royalmail.com**

Junk mail

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 44.

Junk mail can be paper-based or electronic. Sometimes the advertisements that arrive as junk mail can be useful, but the majority of it is a nuisance and a waste of time and resources. Some junk mail can actually be malicious – e.g. designed to trick people into giving money; sent to infect IT systems and cause catastrophic failure.

Stopping junk mail altogether is nearly impossible, but there are some measures that we can take to reduce it and lessen the damage it can cause. For example:

Paper-based junk mail

- register with the Mail Preference Service – a Royal Mail service that removes a person or address from direct mail lists of companies who are registered with the Direct Marketing Association
- post it back to the sender
- stickers on the letterbox – e.g. 'no junk mail, please'

Electronic mail

- use 'spam' filters for emails
- set up a 'blocked sender' list to stop emails from persistent sources
- make sure that antivirus, firewall and other protection programmes are correctly installed and updated
- report 'phishing' attempts to genuine senders – e.g. banks or HM Revenue and Customs
- inform the service provider if they have facilities to block junk calls and messages – e.g. for 'spam' messages to mobile telephones

Problems with incoming or outgoing mail

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 45.

Various problems can arise when dealing with mail, for example:

- delays
- incomplete or failed deliveries
- suspicious mail

Delays

There can be delays when sending mail if items are not addressed correctly or if deadlines for collection or posting are missed. If a letter or package has to be somewhere for a specific time, delays can be avoided by, for example:

- making sure that names and addresses are clear and legible
- putting the correct postage on the item for the weight, dimensions, postal class and service required – e.g. to cover overnight guaranteed delivery costs of a large envelope
- having items ready on time – e.g. for Royal Mail to collect at a set time, or to catch the last post locally
- using a courier if required
- arranging for a staff member to deliver the item by hand

Incomplete, damaged or failed deliveries

Problems with incoming or outgoing items can be due to incomplete, damaged or failed deliveries. When sending important items, it is sensible to, for example:

- send mail via recorded or special delivery
- use a reliable and experienced courier service
- include a message about what to do if the item cannot be delivered normally – e.g. leave it with reception if the workshop is closed

If incoming items are incomplete or fail to arrive, we need to contact the sender as soon as possible to report the problem and arrange delivery of the missing items. We may also need to contact the carrier if the item has been damaged or not delivered as promised.

When emails cannot be delivered and are returned, we need to make sure that the email address is correct or contact the recipient for an updated address, maybe by telephone.

Suspicious mail

It is important to be vigilant about suspicious packages. Some organisations have scanners to look at all mail and other objects that come into the building, plus strict guidelines and procedures about how to deal with anything suspicious.

Any staff members who handle, open and sort incoming mail need to be trained about how to:

- look for clues – e.g. electrical wires or a leaking substance
- report the matter immediately – e.g. to the team leader, supervisor or manager
- follow any other relevant procedures

Franking machines

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 46.

Some organisations have franking machines for the outgoing mail. These machines:

- print prepaid postage onto envelopes and labels
- are operated by the organisation in-house
- offer lower prices than conventional postage
- can save time
- can show the organisation's brand and marketing
- help with budgeting and monitoring expenditure in different departments

The machines are particularly useful when there are large mailshots to send out that have the same weight of items in them – e.g. direct marketing letters and brochures that are being sent to hundreds or thousands of people. Some machines also fold and insert the letters into envelopes or pouches, and can be used to print the date of receipt on incoming mail.

Operating instructions for franking machines may vary, but the main principles are to:

- have a stack of envelopes ready
- weigh the standard envelope and contents
- enter the weight into the machine
- select the postage class
- select any special requirements – e.g. for airmail or recorded delivery
- place the letters face up in the feed tray
- press start

There are other Royal Mail options for dealing with bulk mail. For example:

- **Royal Mail Direct** – for buying stamps, prepaid envelopes and other items online, by mail or phone
- **Despatch Manager Online** – for all parcel services, including barcoded shipping labels, reports and orders from multiple locations
- **Printed Postage Impressions (PPIs)** – to preprint postage onto envelopes, labels or wrappers at discounted postage rates for UK and overseas mail

Barcodes are critical for the sorting and delivery of post, and any new systems are geared up to provide them as part of their printing process.

Preparing packages for distribution

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 47.

Packages need to be prepared correctly for distribution. Items need to be packed in ways that are sturdy enough to survive the automated and manual sorting and delivery processes they will go through. They also need to be as small and light as possible to keep costs to a minimum.

When preparing items for distribution, we need to, for example:

- select the correct container – e.g. box, pouch, ordinary envelope, padded envelope or reinforced envelope for items that must not be bent
- use padding inside if required – e.g. bubble wrap, shredded paper or polystyrene shapes
- seal the package with tape
- write the name and address clearly on the front of the package – or on a label
- write the return address on the package – or use a label or company stamp
- check the size and weight of the prepared item
- put on the correct stamps, PPI, barcode or franking mark for each item
- place items in the holding area ready for collection

Most carriers have restrictions on what they will carry – e.g. live animals or liquids – so it is important to check before packaging and sending unusual items.

Size and weight

The size and weight of the letter or package are very important when calculating the costs and deciding the best delivery option. Some couriers and postal services have a flat rate for items up to a certain weight and size, others charge according to the size and weight. Delivery times vary too, so it is necessary to have all of the information to hand when working out how to choose the right delivery method.

We need to measure the item and make a note of:

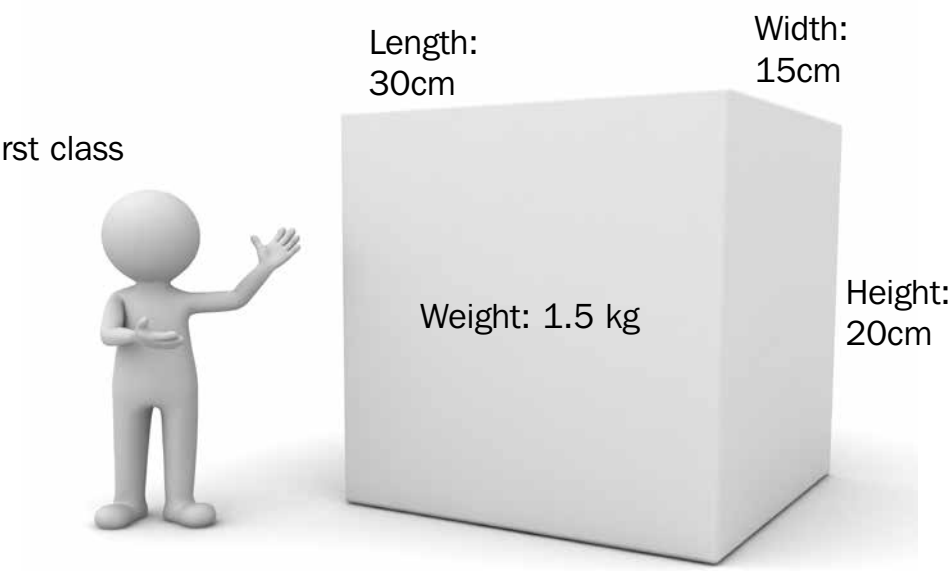
The **width**: 15 cm

The **length**: 30 cm

The **height**: 20 cm

The **weight**: 1.5 kg

Delivery instructions: first class



Knowledge Activity 25: Have a look on the websites for Royal Mail and a courier (such as DHL, Hermes or UPS) and find out about postal and delivery services. Make a few notes about how you could send the following items first class (1-2 days):

	Royal Mail	**Courier**
A large letter – A4 size, 10 mm thick, weight 200 g:	Details of service Delivery options Cost £	Details of service Delivery options Cost £
A parcel – 15 cm x 20 cm x 30 cm, weight 1.5 kg:	Details of service Delivery options Cost £	Details of service Delivery options Cost £

Organisational policies and procedures

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 48 and 49.

Organisations will have procedures about how to handle mail, security, the use of courier services and how to deal with suspicious and damaged items. It is important to know what is required so that the operation can run safely, smoothly and effectively.

Procedures could include, for example:

Handling mail

Procedures will show how to sort, deliver and store mail, and instructions could include, for example:

- scan mail electronically before it comes to the mail room
- if any package or letter is suspicious, inform the administration team leader or manager immediately – e.g. electrical wires or a leaking substance
- personally addressed mail must not be opened – e.g. if it is marked 'In confidence' or 'For the Attention of Alex Smith'
- all other letters must be opened using the letter-opening machine (this slices the envelopes), the contents removed, unfolded and stamped with the date of receipt
- any enclosures (such as notes or brochures) must be either stapled to the letter or put into a plastic wallet with the letter
- cheques and payment slips must be put into the box for the finance department, with the payment slip in front of the cheque
- place the letters in the mail file in the pigeonhole for each person or department
- if unsure about who should receive the letter, put the mail in the 'Miscellaneous' pigeon hole for the administration team leader to check
- once sorted, deliver the mail to each person using the trolleys and boxes provided and place each person's mail folder in their in-tray
- leave large packages and parcels on the mail room shelf, and put a 'Parcel Card' in the person's mail folder to let them know that a package is held there for them
- if any item is marked 'Urgent', inform the administration team leader immediately

Organisations can also have procedures for dealing with internal mail, giving instructions about, for example:

- interdepartmental mail collection points – e.g. pigeonholes or boxes where staff can collect mail relevant to those working within their department

- site transfer systems – collection and redistribution systems when mail is received into one location but needs to be taken to another – e.g. when offices are spread out over a town, industrial park or office block
- internal envelopes used for mail that is to be sent to staff within an organisation – these can be for just one person or can be passed around several people who sign a circulation list when they have read the contents

There can also be procedures for handling incoming emails – e.g. how to prioritise the important emails and discard junk messages.

Security of mail

Access to data needs to be strictly controlled so that unauthorised people and organisations cannot get hold of information that needs to be kept private. This is important to:

- maintain confidentiality and trust
- avoid breaches in security
- comply with legislation
- reduce the chances of data being used for criminal purposes

To keep the information safe, organisations use passwords, secure storage, staff confidentiality contracts, PIN numbers and so on.

The physical condition of mail is also important, and there will be procedures about how to keep it in secure storage, away from fire, water, pests and so on.

Using courier services

Some organisations use courier services all of the time, and others only use them in extreme circumstances. Staff members need to know their organisation's policies and procedures so that they can make the right decisions. Procedures are likely to state, for example:

- the circumstances when couriers can be used – e.g. to deliver legal documents within hours; for top-secret, international documents
- preferred couriers for each type of package or task – e.g. different couriers for light and heavy packages; couriers who can offer the fastest or cheapest service for the particular task; couriers who specialise in high-security items
- preferred contact methods – e.g. mobile numbers or email
- how to operate the accounts for regular couriers
- who to approach when advice or signatures are needed

Suspicious and damaged items

For suspicious packages, procedures could state, for example:

- complete training on how to identify suspicious packages – e.g. how to look for wires or substances
- if found, report to the team leader or manager immediately
- do not touch the item
- clear the area of all people – e.g. colleagues, contractors or other visitors

For incoming packages that are damaged but not suspicious:

- report to the team leader or manager – immediately if in any doubt
- contact the sender as soon as possible – to report the problem and arrange the replacement of any missing or damaged items
- contact the carrier about the damage – e.g. for compensation and to help them to identify and correct problems in their sorting and delivery processes

Summary

In this section, we have looked at how to handle information and mail in the workplace. We have examined:

- systems and procedures for storing and retrieving information
- legal and organisational requirements
- effective manual and electronic filing systems
- search techniques to retrieve information
- how to deal with problems when storing or retrieving information
- dealing with incoming, outgoing and junk mail
- franking machines and preparing packages for distribution
- organisational procedures for handling mail, security, courier services, suspicious and damaged mail

Section 6: Extension activities

Further your knowledge and understanding of the topics in this workbook by completing the following extension activities.

Understanding customers

Extension Activity 1: Look at a website for a large charity that has shops in the UK. Find out who their target customers are – those who use the shops and those who benefit from and use the charity's services – and make some notes about how the charity operates to meet its customers' expectations, and satisfy demand for its various services.

You could consider, for example:

- cultural factors – e.g. level of income, country of residence and cultural traditions
- how it identifies and deals with challenging customers
- how the charity organises its resources to be able to meet the demand for its services
- how it uses volunteers
- how it finds and maintains its income
- the importance of goodwill from the general public

Extension Activity 2: Research the story of Ratners, the high-street jewellers. Find out what happened and analyse how the company's loss of image and reputation caused its downfall.

Understand how to deliver customer service and resolve problems

Extension Activity 3: Find information online about the Equality Act 2010 – maybe of www.gov.uk or **www.acas.or.uk**. Make some notes about the different protected characteristics and why it is important to treat customers and colleagues as individuals.

Extension Activity 4: Think about a time when you witnessed or experienced an angry or agitated outburst of aggression or violence – maybe at work, in school or in your private life. Make a few notes about:

What caused the outburst

How you felt at the time

How the situation was resolved

Whether it could have been dealt with differently

Understand how to develop working relationships with colleagues

Extension Activity 5: Look at your organisation's induction process and how they use the buddy system (or their own equivalent).

Make some notes about:

- the good features of the induction process
- how it could be improved
- how you can help new people who join your team or organisation

Understand health and safety procedures in the workplace

Extension Activity 6: Have a look on the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website and find some information about your own industry – e.g. relevant legislation, regulations, leaflets or advice. Make some notes about your findings.

Extension Activity 7: On the HSE website, find out about the main causes of accidents at work and how many working days are lost each year. Make some notes about what can be done to minimise the risk of harm from the main causes.

Understand how to handle information and mail

Extension Activity 8: Find a stationery supplier online and research different systems for filing and locating paper documents. Make notes about systems that are based on:

Filing in alphabetical and numerical order

Using colour to identify different subjects

Short-term, accessible storage of papers

Long-term archive storage of files

Extension Activity 9: Research the services that the Royal Mail offers for prepaid postage services. Look at two of their recommended suppliers of franking machines and make some notes about the pros and cons of each service.

Well done!

You have now completed Workbook 2 and should attempt the assessments. If you require any help or guidance please contact your Assessor/Tutor.

Disclaimer

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