

The Me-myself-and-I file: why teams are sharing personal user manuals

Level: Advanced (C1–C2)

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Business topics: Teamwork, communication, ways of working, CVs

Business language: Words and phrases related to communication, working preferences, teamwork

Activities: Key words, understanding the text, business language, writing a Manual of Me, discussion

Groups: Whole class, one-to-one, small groups

Overview: This article discusses the trend of sharing more personal information with colleagues with a Manual of Me as a starting point.

1. Warmer

- a. Ask students to discuss the questions in small groups. Monitor and write any useful vocabulary on the board. Elicit the main ideas that arise from the discussion from the whole class.

2. Key words

- a. Have students scan the article, find the key words individually, and compare their answers in pairs. Elicit answers from the whole class.

Key:

1. dredge, are dredging/dredge/dredged/were dredging
2. quirk, quirks
3. to boot
4. trigger, triggers
5. cohesion
6. barrier, barriers
7. diminish
8. particularity, particularities
9. tailor

10. whim, whims
11. mercurial
12. bloodless
13. advocate, advocates
14. prescriptive

3. Understanding the article

- a. Ask students to find the answers individually in the article. Have them compare their answers in pairs or small groups before eliciting answers from the whole class.

Key:

1. The writer thinks adding information about how we work, our strengths and weaknesses, and perhaps a few hobbies and quirks might be useful.
2. A growing number of companies are adopting them both to introduce newcomers to teams and to improve cohesion among existing staff.
3. A parent might say they may take longer to respond to emails after school hours. A new joiner could write that they like interim deadlines that allow feedback before a final submission. Others may say they focus better when listening to white noise.
4. Manuals help their fresh projects hit the ground running. They wanted to eliminate the barriers that make it difficult for people to work together effectively. One of the most obvious was how to communicate effectively.
5. Matt Knight initially used the templates to get to know new teams quickly.
6. Knight said the earliest mention he has found, in the mid-2000s, is by consultant Ben Dattner for a 'managerial user's manual'. He doesn't take credit for the idea.
7. Dattner said the guide greatly diminishes the possibility that misunderstandings will cause your new staff to view you as a 'toxic' boss.
8. David Burkus thinks their main function is facilitating conversation and helping teams learn about each other, be vulnerable and create trust.
9. At Deloitte, the piece of paper is just a prompt; discussion is the most important element.
10. Knight thinks it might be because when hiring, you're interested in what somebody adds and what they're like when they work.

4. Business language – phrases

- a. Ask students to practise their scanning skills to complete this activity. You could also set it up as a whole-class activity, so students compete against each other to complete the 'race'.

Key:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. <i>talk up</i> | |
| 2. <i>struggle with</i> | 7. <i>cater to</i> |
| 3. <i>armed with</i> | 8. <i>place an</i> |
| 4. <i>packed with</i> | <i>emphasis on</i> |
| 5. <i>catch on</i> | 9. <i>the basis of</i> |
| 6. <i>treat with</i> | 10. <i>set (something) up</i> |

- b. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to complete this activity. Remind them that, in some cases, there is more than one possible collocation. Ask students to add more nouns of their own.

Key:

1. *treat with*
2. *armed with / packed with*
3. *struggle with / place an emphasis on*
4. *catches on*
5. *place an emphasis on / cater to*
6. *talk up*
7. *cater to*
8. *the basis of*
9. *set up*

- c. Ask students to write their sentences individually and share them in pairs or small groups. Ask students to give each other feedback focusing on correctly using the collocations. Monitor and provide as much individual feedback as possible.

5. Discussion

- a. Put the students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all the questions, bring the whole class back together so that they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions.

6. Wider business theme – writing a Manual of me

- a. Ask students to work in small groups. Ask them to give arguments for their choices and try to reach a consensus. This fuels discussion and interaction, and they can still write about different questions in the next step.

- b. If students need more support before they start writing, ask them to discuss their answers in pairs to get them started. They can make notes while talking about their answers and use them to write their manuals. Encourage them to use action verbs.

If time permits, ask students to peer edit each other's manuals. Elicit criteria or things to focus feedback on from the class or provide suggestions (e.g. content and relevance, effect on reader, vocabulary, grammar, tone).

- c. Remind students that the manual should be the starting point for discussion. Have students work in small groups and ask each other questions about their texts.

Get students to reflect on the best questions that led to more surprising insights.

If there is time, regroup students and get them to repeat the discussion.