

Preventing Free-riding

Free-riders are people who use the efforts of a group without making sufficient contributions themselves. Free-riding describes the act of trying to get the maximum result with the minimum of effort. Occasionally, everyone is a free-rider in a group. The reasons for this can vary. In general, however, free-riding – certainly when it involves always the same persons – jeopardises the functioning of the whole group. Therefore, it should be taken very seriously. The reasons for free-riding behaviour change along the stages of the team development process (©G10), which makes it hard to deal with free-riding only at the moment it occurs.

Free-riders can only be dealt with if you have made it part of the group contract and/or have discussed *beforehand* what everyone in the group is expected to do. Only then, can the free-rider problem (1) be identified in time (which is very difficult even for the person who is the free-rider), and (2) addressed. **Basic rule:** A person who has been unable to carry out his/her responsibilities should *indicate this immediately* to the group. This person should come up with a proposal for compensating the deficiencies in his/her group contribution. It is not the responsibility of the group to do this, it is the responsibility of the (dysfunctional) individual member to come up with compensation. If the person does not do this, he/she can be considered to be a real free-rider: someone who *intentionally* tries to profit from the efforts of others. Talk about this problem openly with the person involved. Do this as soon as the problem arises. Real free-riders should be excluded from a group, but only when you have given the person a fair chance to offer compensatory action.