

Establishing Team Norms for Effective Communication

Team norms are collective expectations that shape interactions among team members. These norms consist of guidelines and agreements created by the team to direct members in their collaboration. They aid in defining expectations on how the team will cooperate to reach their common objectives. Setting up precise communication norms promotes alignment, minimises confusion, and nurtures a culture of mutual respect and teamwork.

Benefits of Establishing Team Norms

- **Improves clarity:** Reduces misunderstandings and ensures everyone is on the same page.
- **Enhances collaboration:** Fosters a culture of teamwork and mutual respect.
- **Boosts productivity:** Streamlines communication, saving time and reducing friction.
- **Promotes accountability:** Sets clear expectations, making it easier to hold one another accountable.
- **Reduces and prevents conflict:** Provides guidelines for respectful and constructive communication, minimising potential conflicts.
- **Encourages inclusivity:** Ensures all voices are heard and valued in discussions.
- **Strengthens team culture:** Builds a sense of shared values and purpose among team members.

Tips for Establishing Team Norms

- Each team co-creates and establishes its own norms.
- Norms are stated as commitments to act in certain ways rather than as beliefs.
- Norms are reviewed at the beginning and end of each meeting until each team member internalises them.
- One norm should require the team to assess its effectiveness at least twice during each school year. This assessment should include a review of members' adherence to team norms and the need to add new norms.
- Less is more. A few key norms are better than a laundry list.
- Violation of norms should be addressed swiftly

Steps to Establishing Effective Team Norms



Define the Purpose of Communication Norms

As leaders, outline why communication norms are necessary. Consider goals like enhancing collaboration, reducing conflicts, and ensuring clarity in messaging.

Specify what you hope to achieve by adhering to these norms.

Ensure Collaboration for the Whole Team

Engage all team members in the process of creating norms. This ensures buy-in and that the norms reflect the team's collective values. Encourage an open discussion where everyone can share their thoughts on effective communication. Ensure that quieter voices are heard.

Consider What Norms To Create

Modes of Communication: Decide on the primary methods of communication (e.g., email, messaging apps, in-person meetings).

Response Times: Set expectations for response times based on the urgency of the message.

Meeting Etiquette: Define norms for meeting behaviour, including start and end times, agenda-setting, and active participation.

Conflict Resolution: Establish protocols for addressing and resolving conflicts respectfully.

Reflect as a Group

Ask team members to think of a past negative experience they have had serving on a team or committee and to identify a specific behaviour that prevented that group from being effective: *for example, whining and complaining, arriving late and leaving early, being disengaged during the meetings, and so on.*

Reframe

For each negative norm identified by members of your team, establish a positive commitment statement (a norm) your team should adopt that, if everyone adhered to it, would prevent the past negative experience from recurring.

Examples include:

- We will maintain a positive tone at our meetings.
- We will not complain about a problem unless we can offer a solution.
- We will begin and end our meetings on time and stay fully engaged throughout each meeting.
- We will contribute equally to the workload of this team
- We will listen respectfully and consider matters from another's perspective.

Steps to Establishing Effective Team Norms

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Compile the Norms into a Document that Can be Easily Referenced

Share norms with the team by distributing the document to all team members and review it together to ensure understanding and agreement. Attach to the top of your meeting agenda and review at the start of each meeting.

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Regularly Review and Update the Norms

Schedule check-ins and periodically revisit the norms to ensure they still meet the team's needs. Adjust as necessary. Be sure to encourage feedback in order to create an environment where team members feel comfortable providing feedback on the norms. Be open to suggestions, amendments and changes.

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Lead by Example

Team leaders should model the communication norms consistently and be flexible, where feasible. Understand that norms may need to evolve as the team grows or as new challenges arise.

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Celebrate Adherence and Successes!

Acknowledge and celebrate when team members follow the norms, reinforcing positive behaviours and ongoing progress!

Establishing and adhering to communication norms can significantly enhance the effectiveness and cohesion of your team. By setting clear expectations and regularly revisiting them, you can create a culture of open, respectful, and productive communication.

