

ESTABLISHING AND ENFORCING GROUP NORMS / RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Definition of Workplace Group Norms / Rules of Engagement:

“Group norms are a set of agreements about how members will work with each other and how the group will work overall. These agreed-upon behaviors allow the team to increase its collective performance through healthy debate and clarity of purpose and roles.”

Nawaz, S. (2018, January 18). *How to Create Executive Team Norms — and Make Them Stick*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-to-create-executive-team-norms-and-make-them-stick>

Tips for Establishing and Enforcing Group Norms:

1. Make the process inclusive and collaborative
 - a. Designate a specific meeting for the effort and give proper notice to all
 - b. Offer opportunities for everyone to make suggestions in a manner that is comfortable to them: at the meeting (open discussion or by confidentially submitting ideas) and/or in a confidential way in advance of the meeting
 - c. Determine the process for developing norms and the scope ahead of time
2. Create norms that are informed by, and not contradictory to, established university policies and procedures
3. Break the norms into measurable and enforceable behaviors (“we will all be respectful” is not as useful as “we will show respect by not interrupting one another”)
4. Stick to a handful of norms and/or prioritize to ensure that the most important issues to address will stay on people’s minds
5. Incorporate the norms into your planning for future projects and meetings (i.e.: if a norm is established that meetings will start and end on time, plan for that in meeting agendas and stick to it)
6. Create a system of mutual accountability that reduces rather than increases conflict
 - a. Norms should be *gently* enforced (for example, everyone is able to remind one another about norms but this act should not publicly humiliate or lead to lengthy debate)
 - b. Norms should be enforced in a timely manner and when relevant
 - c. Remember that norms aren’t intended to replace university policies and aren’t used as a system of discipline
 - d. It is normal that change takes time – encourage the group to demonstrate understanding and kindness as others adapt to change

Examples of Group Norms:

Meetings:

- We will begin and end meetings on time
- We will be present and engaged at meetings by actively listening and will exit to take care of any non-meeting business (such as looking at texts, phone calls, etc.)

- We value one another's contributions and will allow others to speak without interruption
- We will disagree in a respectful manner by not attacking people or being dismissive of their contributions
- We will discuss problems directly and avoid using side conversations to voice disagreement

In General:

- We will show respect for one another's time and efforts by providing adequate time to respond to requests and also by responding as promptly as is practical
- We will strive to take responsibility rather than placing blame
- When raising a concern or problem, we will also contribute possible solutions
- We will demonstrate value and respect for staff expertise by trusting their input rather than "shopping" for a different response

Resources:

- *How to Create Executive Team Norms — and Make Them Stick* by Sabina Nawaz. Harvard Business Review, January 18, 2018. <https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-to-create-executive-team-norms-and-make-them-stick>. Provides a brief overview of the process of developing and enforcing workplace norms.
- *Joining Together: Group Theory and Skills* (6th edition) by David Johnson and Frank Johnson. Needham, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1996. A comprehensive resource on group development theory with information on the importance of group norms.
- *Learning by Doing* (3rd edition) by Rebecca DuFour, Richard DuFour, Robert Eaker, Thomas W. Many, and Mike Mattos. Solution Tree, 2016. https://solutiontree.s3.amazonaws.com/solutiontree.com/media/pdfs/Reproducibles_LBD2nd/developingnorms.pdf. A guide to leadership and teamwork (available as an ebook) offering reproducible downloads including one that serves as a template for developing group norms.
- *Norms Put the 'Golden Rule' Into Practice for Groups* by Joan Richardson. National Staff Development Council, August/September 1999. [https://wvde.state.wv.us/ctn/Informational%20Documents/Developing%20Norms%20\(NSDC\).pdf](https://wvde.state.wv.us/ctn/Informational%20Documents/Developing%20Norms%20(NSDC).pdf). This resource describes different processes for developing norms, provides tips, and offers examples.
- *Write Down Your Teams Unwritten Rules* by Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy. Harvard Business Review, October 26, 2020. <https://hbr.org/2020/10/write-down-your-teams-unwritten-rules>. Provides an overview of how norms develop in groups.