

NORMS to Enhance Teamwork

The following acronym-based process may help facilitate the development of guidelines to encourage collaborative and productive teamwork. The key steps in the process are presented under the acronym NORMS:

| NORMS to Enhance Teamwork | |
|---------------------------|---|
| N | Norms facilitate teamwork |
| O | Openly establish team norms |
| R | Review team performance regularly |
| M | Manage issues promptly |
| S | Share responsibility for implementation |

Let us consider each of these points:

Norms facilitate teamwork

Teams that take the time to establish a set of teamwork guidelines have been shown to perform more effectively and efficiently. Establishing norms related to how people are expected to interact on the team, complete assigned tasks, and monitor their performance are especially valuable.

As the team develops, group norms related to decision-making, problem-solving, and dealing with conflict can further enhance team performance.

When groups establish a unique set of norms related to the behaviors they expect from their members, it is much easier to maintain a collaborative and productive environment, as group-sanctioned norms provide support to team leaders, as well as, team members, when dealing with those who break or overstep the guidelines.

Openly establish team norms

The best way to develop a set of team norms is to openly address the following types of questions.

- What personal and interpersonal behaviors will allow our team to be collaborative, creative, and productive?
- What types of behaviors will we as a team not accept?
- How will we, as a team, ensure that our team norms are followed?

Teams work in very different situations and under widely varying conditions. Each team will have a unique set of skills available to it, depending on the people who are on the team. Hence, the composition of the team will determine to a large extent how it will initially function. An example of a set of teamwork guidelines that I have used is presented under the acronym – [LEARNING](#). It can be accessed by holding the control key and clicking on the highlighted title.

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Review team performance

Effective teams review their performance on a regular basis. Very often, the best way to do this is informally. Team leaders can simply ask: how are we doing as a team? By doing so, members can safely share concerns or problems that need to be addressed.

In some situations, it might be more appropriate to begin the discussion of team performance after team members have completed a team performance questionnaire on how they are working as a team. Depending where a team is on the BASIC, SMART, GREAT team continuum, team leaders can select one of the following questionnaires to begin the team performance review process:

[Teamwork Questionnaire](#)

[BASIC Team Development Questionnaire](#)

[SMART Team Development Questionnaire](#)

[GREAT Team Development Questionnaire](#)

Manage issues promptly

In many team situations, a common practice is for team leaders to ignore members who are contributing to the team in a less than positive manner. In doing so, the work of the team and the team environment can be negatively impacted. Hence, a more optimal approach is to deal with issues that arise in a prompt and positive manner. Based on my experience, I suggest dealing initially with task related issues, that is, with questions or problems related to how the team is completing the tasks it has established to reach its shared goals.

Once the task-related issues are addressed; then team performance can also be enhanced by dealing with team-related issues, that is, problems or issues related to interpersonal conflict, lack of member commitment, or inappropriate personal actions by team members. If in the initial stages of team development, a team norm is established that states that such issues will be openly and promptly addressed, when such issues do arise, it is easier to deal with them in a pleasant and productive manner.

Share responsibility for implementing norms

One of the major benefits of establishing a set of sensible team norms is that team members, as a whole, become responsible for ensuring that people adhere to them. One of the unpleasant tasks that team leaders are often left to deal with is managing unhealthy competition among team members, the lack of follow-through in the completion of tasks, or inappropriate action during team meetings by some team members

Establishing team norms and encouraging the team as a whole to enforce them can lighten the load of team leaders and enhance team effectiveness. Quite simply, team leaders, as well as team members, can benefit from implementing the above NORMS process.