

Establishing Group Norms - Adapted from Joan Richardson

Goals/Rationale

Effective groups, either newly formed or already established, usually have a set of "norms" that outline behavioral expectations for participation-how members should act to ensure a climate that is safe and conducive to learning for all. These include such things as active listening, taking turns, commitment to doing the task, confidentiality, respecting all opinions, taking responsibility for one's own learning, beginning and ending on time, giving everyone the opportunity to share their experiences at each meeting, and being on time.

What to Do

1. (5 minutes) Review the rationale for developing groups norms and give five index cards or Post-It Notes to each person in the group.
2. (5-10 minutes) Ask each person to reflect on behaviors they consider ideal for productive group interaction and work. Each conducive behavior or action should be written on a separate card for Post-It Note. These are some possible questions to help jump-start thinking.
 - a. How does a group of individuals become a team?
 - b. What keeps team members working well together?
 - c. How does a team function effectively?
 - d. What implicit norms may already be in place that will need to be brought to the surface?
3. (5-15 minutes) Every opportunity should be taken to ensure anonymity. This can be accomplished by gathering and shuffling cards or having everyone randomly place their Post-It Notes on a piece of chart paper. Discuss the ideas and group similar ones together.
4. (5 minutes) Summarize the norms that have been suggested onto a sheet of chart paper.
5. (5 minutes) Give five self-adhesive colored dots to each person. Members vote for ideas by placing a colored dot next to the idea. Dots can be allocated in any manner-for example, a separate dot for each idea or all five dots for one idea.
6. (5minutes) Tally the dots. Make sure that the final list of group norms will be agreed upon by everyone involved.

Process Issues to consider:

Include all members of the group; be sure the leader supports the change; involve members in identifying the norms(s) to be changed; allow members to communicate feelings and frustrations; identify reasons for concern over existing norms

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