

# The Power of Team Norms to Create a More Inclusive and Innovative Workplace

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Effective teamwork is the key to success in today's fast paced, ever evolving workplace. Collaboration, collegial communication, and shared goals are all hallmarks of a high performing team. A number of recent studies have reinforced the importance of team norms in shaping and sustaining effective teams.

One such study, published in the Journal of Business Research in 2023, found that teams with clear collaboration norms were more apt to deliver innovative ideas and solutions for their organization. The study also found that collaboration norms, focusing on "the rules of engagement," were particularly important for teams comprised of individuals with complimentary yet divergent views. Team norms should include behavioral expectations that ensure all voices are heard and valued, and that all team members feel comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions, regardless of their position, background, or experience.

## Team Norms Defined

Team norms are collaboratively derived rules and expectations that guide group behavior, interactions, and decision-making processes. These "rules of engagement" influence how team members collaborate communicate and handle conflict. Establishing clear positive team norms is crucial for creating a harmonious and productive working environment.

Here are a few examples of team norms to ensure all voices are heard and valued:

- Listen actively and respectfully to others.
- Avoid interrupting others.
- Be open to different ideas and perspectives.
- Value the contributions of all team members, regardless of their position, background, or experience.
- Avoid making assumptions or generalizations about others.
- Be mindful of your body language and tone of voice.

## Establishing Team Norms to Inspire Inclusion and Innovation

Implementing effective team norms requires a deliberate and inclusive process. Here are four key considerations when establishing the 'rules of engagement' for your team.

1. **Engage the Team:** Involve team members in the development of team norms to ensure buy-in, accountability, and commitment.
2. **Keep the Norms Top of Mind;** Periodically review and adjust team norms to adapt to changing team dynamics and goals.
3. **Leadership Support:** Leaders should model the desired behaviors and actively support the team in upholding the established norms.
4. **Expert Support:** Leaders should consider investing in the expertise of a skilled facilitator. Using a 3<sup>rd</sup> party facilitator will help the team to uncover unspoken roadblocks and opportunities for improved communication that are more readily revealed with the aid of an objective advocate.

## The Benefits of Establishing Team Norms

There are a number of benefits associated with establishing, and using, team norms as a guide to group interactions and decision-making.

- Increased employee engagement and satisfaction
- Improved communication and collaboration
- Reduced conflict and tension
- A more positive and productive work environment

Implementing effective team norms require a deliberate and inclusive process. With the assistance of a skilled facilitator, and a leader and their team are afforded the opportunity to discuss and reveal the most relevant list of norms meant to enable and inspire collegial discussion, engagement, and a high regard for individual contributions.



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