

Setting Norms for Collaborative Work

Norms are ways of working together that help groups be more thoughtful and productive. They fall into two categories: procedural and interpersonal. Once norms have been established, it is important that the entire group, not just the facilitator, takes responsibility for making sure that the norms are respected, and for redirecting the group when they are not. Norms can change and evolve as the group develops and matures.

Areas to Consider When Setting Norms

Logistics: meeting time, place, duration, and frequency

Timeliness: start time, finish time, lateness, and attendance

Courtesy: listening, interruptions, equal participation, dealing with disagreements, respect, empathy, and sharing the workload

Decision-making Process: How will we make decision? Reach agreements? How will we show agreement?

Workload Assignment: How will work be assigned? How will conflicts with existing workloads be settled?

Setting Priorities: How will we discharge responsibility for on-time completion and equal distribution?

Enforcement of Norms: How will we make sure the norms are followed?

Activity for Setting Norms

1. The facilitator passes out four to six post-it notes to each team member.
2. Each person writes a norm, a statement about how they want the group to work together, on the post-its.
3. The team shares its individual notes and divides them into the two categories – procedural norms and interpersonal norms.
4. Within each category, group the suggestions that are similar (For example, *take turns speaking* and *make sure everyone speaks* should be grouped together)
5. Give a name to the norm for each group. (From the example above, the norm could be “Make sure everyone is heard.”)
6. The group discusses the norms that have been suggested and checks to see whether or not they are in agreement. The group should reach consensus on the ones it accepts.

HINTS

- The team will work with greater commitment if they themselves generate their norms.
- Post the norms during each meeting
- Add new norms as the team develops and new situations arise.