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## QuickTip – Norms for Meetings and Teams

Norms are rules of engagement that a group creates for itself. The members of the group agree to hold each other accountable to this behavioral baseline. (Norms are also known as groundrules, team protocols, and the team charter.) Norms can be short-lived – just for one meeting – or long-term, such as for the lifetime of a project team. Organizational psychologist Bruce Tuckman pointed out that norms are important for a team to function well.

Author and program manager James T. Brown says about the value of developing norms for a project team, “Having written agreement on team behavior also provides the team the opportunity and responsibility to self-regulate, meaning the team will fix most of their problems before the leader has to get involved ... A lot of the things the team charter addresses should not have to be addressed in a professional work environment, but unfortunately the charter will demonstrate its value tremendously when these circumstances arise – and they will.”

### When to Use

Help participants in your meeting or members of a long-term team develop norms whenever you want them to think intentionally about how they will work together constructively or set expectations on what behavior and ways of working are acceptable.

### Procedure

Set aside time at the beginning of a meeting or project for participants to discuss norms and agree on which ones they want to adopt. A good practice is for the facilitator to outline some norms that have worked well in the past, but leave the discussion open for the group to modify them or add their own. Ask questions that will get the participants to think deeply about how they want to work together.

For example, for a one-time meeting you can ask, “What norms will help this meeting run smoothly?” Here are some examples of areas the group may want to address.

1. Interruptions
2. Side conversations
3. Absences
4. Use of electronic devices
5. Going off agenda
6. Frequency of breaks
7. Appropriate level of detail during discussions

Groups that will be working together for a longer period should go beyond norms about meeting logistics – for example, setting expectations for roles, decision processes, and attendance. Here are some examples of areas that they may want to discuss.

Area	Example
1. Decision processes	How will we make decisions?
2. How will roles be assigned?	How much do we each want to be consulted/informed vs. how much division of labor do we want?
3. Meeting attendance	How will planned & unplanned absences be handled?
4. Technology usage	What collaboration tools will we use? When will we move from asynchronous to synchronous?
5. Trust / confidentiality	What will we keep in confidence? What can we share?
6. Conflict resolution	What types of conflicts will be escalated and to whom?
7. Work timing	What after-hours communication is expected?
8. Feedback processes	How will team members give one another feedback?
9. Focus	How will we distinguish facts from opinions and vital issues from less important ones?

If a long-term team will need to work together creatively to solve difficult problems, the following questions will help them think deeply about how to work together.



How are you assigning roles and responsibilities in a fair way, where everyone can learn, engage, and contribute?



How will you hold each other accountable for individual contributions to your team?



What will you do if something goes wrong, including providing feedback if a team member is not meeting expectations?



How will you meet, communicate status and issues, and share your work in progress?



How will you accommodate different conflict styles on your team?



What other team protocols will you establish?

## Considerations

1. The only way participants will own the norms is if they participate in creating them. If they don't own them, they will not hold each other accountable, nor will the facilitator be able to use the norms to course correct when the group gets off track.