Establishing Team Norms/Ground Rules

Why have them?

Every team needs to establish norms/ground rules or agreed principles that are important to the team and <u>provide a guide for behaviour</u>. Team norms/ground rules will vary from team to team because the people are different. The rules themselves aren't so important as long as the team members agree on them.

Establishing norms/ground rules will enable your team to:

- explore the values of the team
- make sure everyone knows and agrees with what's expected
- develop norms that support both the needs of the team members and the organisation
- help a new team member know what's expected
- help the team evaluate its performance

Using a consensus approach

The process of reaching consensus on norms/ground rules is very important. In other words, how we do it is as critical as the results. Each person needs to be listened to. If some members are quiet, they need to be drawn out. If other people are exerting too much influence, they need to listen more and talk less.

The final results of consensus may not be that everyone agrees 100%, but rather they have been heard and can live with the agreed norms/rules and will support them. If anyone cannot, or will not, support the final results, the discussion isn't finished and the team must talk more. Norms/ground rules are meaningless unless all team members "own" them and live by them.

How do teams decide on ground rules?

Teams need to review their roles and purpose, thinking about how the members of the team want to work together.

You might do this as a discussion with prompts:

What are the rules/norms that you know have worked in other teams?

Are there rules/norms you'd particularly want to suggest to this team?

Alternatively, the following exercise may be useful to get people thinking about ground rules.

Reaching consensus on ground rules

- Whichever method you use:
- Give people time to think and talk
- Then collect all contributions and
- Discuss the entire list, eliminating or changing any items.

Reaching consensus on the ones the team wants to adopt as its ground rules is the last step. Groups sometimes find the "70% comfort level" useful. That is, the group works with those not completely comfortable to sort out reservations or concerns. When they reach a 70% comfort level the group agrees to adopt the idea or course of action. This means that 100% of the team members are at least 70% comfortable with the outcome.

Read each statement once. Check whether you agree (A) or disagree (D). Write: "A" if you agree; "D" if you disagree.

___   1   A primary concern of all team members should be to establish an atmosphere where all members are free to express their opinions.

___   2   In a team with a strong leader, an individual is able to achieve greater personal security than in a team with a more passive leader.

___   3   There are often occasions when an individual who is part of a working team should do what he/she thinks is right regardless of what the group has decided.

___   4   Members should be required to attend team meetings.

___   5   Generally, there comes a time when democratic group methods must be abandoned in order to solve practical problems.

___   6   In the long run, it is more important to use involvement/participative methods than to achieve specific results by other means.

___   7   Sometimes it is necessary to change people in the direction you yourself think is right, even when they object.

___   8   It is sometimes necessary to ignore the feelings of others in order to reach a group decision.

___   9   When leaders are doing their best, one should not openly criticise or find fault with their conduct.

___   10   Meetings would be more productive if the leader would get quickly to the point and say what he/she wants the group to do.

___   11   By the time the average person has reached maturity, it is almost impossible for him/her to increase his/her skill in group participation.

___   12   Interest falls off when everybody in the group has to be considered before making decisions.

___   13   Teamwork increases when the leader chooses friends as team members.

___   14   A team is no stronger than its weakest member.

___   15   In the long run, it is more productive to replace an ineffective team member than to try and retrain him/her.

___   16   Once a team gets established in a set way of working, it is almost impossible to change.

___   17   When a team gets a new leader, the whole pattern of the team changes.

___   18   One resistant member can keep a team from improving its performance.

___   19   The most important condition in a successful team building program is the motivation level of the team members to want to see the program succeed.

___   20   To become a really effective team, members should like each other.

___   21   A team decision is always better than an individual decision.

Group discussion

When everyone has finished, share what you have written and discuss the individual answers. See where there is consistency and where there is disagreement and why.

We will develop an agreed list of ground rules from the discussion.

Reaching consensus on ground rules

Next, as a team we will discuss the entire list, eliminating or changing any items. We will reach consensus on the ones the team wants to adopt as its ground rules.