What do we do if the PLC norms are not adhered to by our teammates? Here's an interesting article that deals with team norms and what to do after they're written.

By Ken Williams, PLC at Work™ Associate

Roadblock: Lack of Accountability Protocol

Some teams do a great job of developing norms. Members agree and commit to them, even posting them on chart paper to be prominently displayed at every meeting. Elementary school teams often add attractive artwork in the form of ladybugs and bumblebees, and they may even go as far as laminating the chart paper. They feel great about the process. They know they've made progress. But here's what they *don't* realize: no matter how well-developed norms are, no matter how committed the teammates are, no matter how prominently the norms are displayed, someone is going to violate them. I know it's hard to fathom, but someone who agreed to the posted norms, who put their magic marker thumbprint on the poster and signed around it in a show of real commitment, who high-fived at the end of the norms creation session is going to violate one—or more—of them. And when that happens, the team finds itself at a crossroad. Teammates will begin to awkwardly look at one another, trying to figure out the next step and appropriate response. The questions of how to respond and who is going to respond will dominate their thoughts. Why? They did not establish an accountability protocol. In my work with hundreds of PLC teams, I find this step to be the one most commonly missed by teams that have established norms.

They don't have a process for answering the following question: *What is our process for holding each other accountable in a respectful and dignified manner?* Unanswered, this question is a definite team-dynamic derailer. Without this process in place, teams will end up with a list of "nice to knows," rather than effective team norms.

Reason: "No One Will Violate the Norms"

"There's a difference between interest and commitment. When you're interested in doing something, you do it only when circumstance permits. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results."

Art Turock

"Do We Have PLC Team NORMS Or "Nice To Knows"?

Teams typically experience a wave of positive feelings soon after establishing team norms and mistakenly believe that the mere establishment of behavioral commitments is the end of the process. The feeling of accomplishing the task of developing team norms sometimes blinds teams to the fact that they have to know how to respond when violations occur. The truth is, they don't believe that violations will occur.

In my experience, I don't see teams skipping this step intentionally. In fact, most of the literature regarding team norms does not adequately address this step. The harsh reality is that the time and energy invested in developing team norms does not eliminate the need to have a protocol ready for when norms are violated. Without accountability protocols, one of three scenarios typically occurs:

1. The norm violation is not addressed, and as a result, unspoken tension and frustration grow within the collaborative team.
2. The norm violation is addressed, but inappropriately. With no established protocol, reaction to the confrontation becomes defensive.
3. Too early in the process, the team takes the issue to the principal for him or her to handle.

When teams establish a process for holding each other accountable when someone violates a norm, then unnecessary confrontations and unspoken tensions are avoided. It's a given that violations will occur, and collaborative teams that have a predefined process for dealing with them will be the ones that become highly effective. Teams that don't engage in this very important step will often end up with a list of "nice to knows" instead of effective team norms and commitments. Teams that do address the question, "What happens when?" create the kind of safety and predictability on their team that serves to accelerate the collaborative culture.

"Stay committed to your decisions, but stay flexible in your approach."

Tom Robbins, Novelist

Nine Norms of High-Performing Teams

1. Willingness to consider matters from another's perspective

2. Accurate understanding of spoken and unspoken feelings and concerns of team members

3. Willingness to confront a team member who violates norms

4. Communicating positive regard, caring, and respect

5. Willingness and ability to evaluate the team's own effectiveness

6. Seeking feedback about and evidence of team effectiveness from internal and external sources

7. Maintaining a positive outlook and attitude

8. Proactive problem solving

9. Awareness of how the group contributes to the purpose and goals of the larger organization

—Daniel Goleman

Guiding Questions for Team Norms

1. Are we clear on the commitments we have made to each other regarding how we will work together as a team?

2. Have we stated our commitments as explicit behaviors?

3. Have we discussed how to address the issue if we feel someone is not honoring our norms?

Criteria for Team Norms

1. The norms have clarified our expectations of one another.

2. All members of the team participated in creating the norms. All voices were heard.

3. The norms are stated as commitments to act in certain ways.

4. All members have committed to honoring the norms.

Developing Norms

Comments to the Facilitator: This activity will enable a group to develop a set of operating norms or ground rules. In existing groups, anonymity will help ensure that everyone is able to express their ideas freely. For this reason, it is essential to provide pens or pencils or to ask that everyone use the same type of writing implement.

Supplies: Index cards, pens or pencils, poster paper, display board, tape, tacks

Time: Two hours

Directions

1. Explain to the group that effective groups generally have a set of norms that govern individual behavior, facilitate the work of the group, and enable the group to accomplish its task.

2. Provide examples of norms.

3. Recommend to the group that it establish a set of norms:

   ■ To ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute in the meeting;

   ■ To increase productivity and effectiveness; and

   ■ To facilitate the achievement of its goals.

4. Give five index cards and the same kind of writing tool to each person in the group.

5. Ask each person to reflect on and record behaviors they consider ideal behaviors for a group. Ask them to write one idea on each of their cards. Time: 10 minutes.

6. Shuffle all the cards together. Every effort should be made to provide anonymity for individuals, especially if the group has worked together before.

7. Turn cards face up and read each card aloud. Allow time for the group members to discuss each idea. Tape or tack each card to a display board so that all group members can see it. As each card is read aloud, ask the group to determine if it is similar to another idea that already has been expressed. Cards with similar ideas should be grouped together.

8. When all of the cards have been sorted, ask the group to write the norm suggested by each group of cards. Have one group member record these new norms on a large sheet of paper.

9. Review the proposed norms with the group. Determine whether the group can support the norms before the group adopts them.

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When Establishing Norms, Consider:	Proposed Norm
Time ■ When do we meet? ■ Will we set a beginning and ending time? ■ Will we start and end on time?	
Listening ■ How will we encourage listening? ■ How will we discourage interrupting?	
Confidentiality ■ Will the meetings be open? ■ Will what we say in the meeting be held in confidence? ■ What can be said after the meeting?	
Decision Making ■ How will we make decisions? ■ Are we an advisory or a decision-making body? ■ Will we reach decisions by consensus? ■ How will we deal with conflicts?	
Participation ■ How will we encourage everyone's participation? ■ Will we have an attendance policy?	
Expectations ■ What do we expect from members? ■ Are there requirements for participation?	