

Understand Team Members

This norm represents the degree to which a team attempts to understand the needs, perspectives, skills, and emotions of its members. The strength of this norm affects the team's ability to build a climate of safety and trust and an inclusive team identity.



Building a Norm of Understand Team Members

A norm of Understand Team Members involves creating patterns of behavior that enable team members to learn and come to understand one another's:

- attitudes and views
- skills and interests
- concerns and needs
- strengths and weaknesses

Understanding Team Members is a strong predictor of performance. It is about understanding teammates so that the team can perform its task efficiently and effectively. It is not about divulging deeply personal information or socializing outside work, although some teams do. It is about sharing information about team members such as their preferences for how they like to be treated, their work styles, personality characteristics, likes and dislikes and perhaps most importantly, the unique skills and knowledge they bring to the table.

Putting it into Practice

There are many opportunities to reinforce Understanding Team Members during discussions:

- When assigning roles and tasks, ask members about preferences. It is a good opportunity to find out strengths and weaknesses as well as member skills, interests, and tasks or pressures that compete for their time.

- When you encounter someone whose opinion differs from yours, use open-ended questions to facilitate your understanding of their position.
- Decide that understanding the other person is important. Listen carefully and ask questions until what the person is saying makes sense, at least from his or her point of view. Remember that listening well does not mean you agree; it simply means you are trying to understand.
- Suspend the tendency to make evaluations about another person before you hear and understand the other person's point of view.
- Take time away from team tasks to get to know one another.
- Encourage a "check in" at the beginning of each meeting - that is, ask how everyone is doing. Listen for hints that people send about how they are feeling, and ask them to elaborate. For example, if the person states that everything is "just O.K.," ask why.
- Assume that undesirable behavior takes place for a reason. Find out why. Ask questions and listen.
- Conclude each meeting you lead by asking if there are other comments that people would like to make.
- Encourage each member to give his or her full attention to the person who is speaking. Ask that all other tasks be put aside and the speaker be given undivided attention.
- It is always useful to spend time using personality surveys such as the Team Dimensions Profile or the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to uncover details about differences in personality or work styles amongst members.

Tool #1: Helping Others Get to Know You²

Purpose: To build Interpersonal Understanding and trust by giving team members an opportunity to share information about themselves in a low-risk way, and to help team members understand one another at a fundamental level so that they can avoid making incorrect attributions about behaviors and intentions.

Time required: Approx. 30 minutes depending on the size of the team.

Instructions: Each team member writes down information about them that falls within the designated categories. Team members then share their information with the team. Similarities and differences within the team are discussed.

| NAME: | FACTS ABOUT YOU Examples: Where they live, educational background, family background, hobbies, etc. | YOUR SALIENT VALUES Examples: What is important to this person in terms of family, friends, how they live their life, etc. | YOUR VISIONS, DREAMS, GOALS Examples: What is important to this person in terms of their aspirations, etc. |
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| YOU | | | |
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² Adapted from: Bharwaney, G. 2007. *Emotionally Intelligent Living: Strategies for Increasing Your EQ*. Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Crown House Publishing Ltd.