



The Importance of Team Agreements

Effective teams (from small teams to entire companies) establish, abide by and hold each other accountable to rules of engagement and expected behaviors. These may be referred to as Team Agreements. There is not a high performing team that works without Team Agreements. Why are Team Agreements a critical enabler for high-functioning teams? Because structured, clear agreements help thwart unnecessary conflict; teams working with clear agreements work together within a common sense of purpose and process; agreements eliminate assumptions about expectations, which increases trust and thus the team's performance.

Effective Team Agreements clearly define expectations for each other. These operating parameters define successful ways we work with each other.

- Team Agreements should be simple and real.
- They should be defined and supported by every member of the team.
- Agreements should contain specific soft skills and interpersonal behaviors.

Team Agreements that have proven successful include:

We have open communication and active participation

We respect others views, thoughts, and appreciate contribution

We resolve all conflicts positively; we address conflicts head on, respectfully

We define operating parameters within which to conduct meetings

Have all team members sign off and publically commit to the Team Agreements. Print and post them in clear view.

Team Agreements help members work together in a way that truly honors each other and when inevitable challenges emerge, helps all to return to a sense of aligned purpose.

Create and use your Team Agreements as a foundation for your high performance team. Review when new people join, and when you review, adjust to fit changing requirements and new input.

To create your own, we find it easiest for teams when they start from an existing list – then can edit and create from there. Use the prompts below as a starting point.

- We are all equal [*"All for one – One for all"*]; we treat each other with respect, as peers, in words, attitude, and intent.
- We address issues and speak with each other directly. We tell the truth as we see it, without blame. We discuss issues directly, never indirectly.
- If I tell you about someone else, I have already said it to that person.
- No retribution.
- Trust – first. Assume the best intentions before making judgments.
- We get issues on the table and call out the elephants. No withholding.
- We say; we do. We say what we mean and mean what we say. *"Count on me."*
- It's okay to be wrong, okay to be vulnerable, okay to ask for help.
- It's my responsibility to leave every conversation with absolute clarity. I'll take the initiative to clarify and understand if I am at first unclear.
- We help each other be successful in demonstrable ways.
- We always clarify the purpose of a meeting or conversation and roles including what "Mode" or role we are in- (e.g. leader, input provider, etc.)
- Our decision making process is clear. Once a decision is made we communicate it and stick to it. If there is a change of heart, all involved are communicated with.
- We establish and stick to a reliable cadence of communication including formal meetings, informal communications protocols and rules around response and methods of communication.

The responsibility of the leadership team is to codify, model, teach and enforce Team Agreements.

In the following pages we've pasted a great case study on the importance of team agreements was written by Kuntal Thakore. This can be found on his blog [here](#).



Importance of Team Agreements

By Kuntal Thakore

I had one more opportunity to volunteer at PMI Silicon Valley chapter this week. During breakout session, one of the project managers described problems he was having with his team members. He was describing how team members are having conflicts during meetings and their impact on the project. After further discussions with this project manager, I realized that proper team agreements were not defined by this team that could have avoided many of these conflicts.

Today, I'm going to talk about the importance of team agreement. To describe the problem, allow me set up the scene where project meeting is taking place.

During planning phase of project, project manager was having an important meeting with stakeholders. The discussion was surrounding the requirements provided by stakeholders. Some of these requirements were in conflicts with each other. Some of the requirements had to be eliminated in order to keep the project in the confines of defined scope.

Various stakeholders felt very strongly to keep their requirements. There were intense arguments made by multiple stakeholders. After about 20 minutes into the meeting, three key stakeholders abruptly got up and walked out of the meeting. Same thing went on for next several meetings. Needless to say, the requirement analysis phase of the project was finally completed but left behind a team that did not function well together, along with a trail of frustration, bad feelings, and jurisdictional divides.

This is a real-life scenario that occurred on one of the corporate wide IT projects that I participated in as stakeholder some years ago. What went wrong in the situation? What could have helped to avoid the situation? If there were proper team agreements defined and utilized, many of these problems could have been avoided.

The team agreement is an effective way to address such issues. When you create a set of team agreements on how you want to function when difficult issues arise, you are much better equipped to handle the challenges that occur. The team agreements help you work together in a way that truly honors each other and a return to a sense of defined purpose when you experience the inevitable challenges of working in team settings. Each member needs to learn to communicate with professionalism, confidence and compassion even in difficult situations.

The critical part of a successful team environment is making sure everyone has the same vision, before moving into action. The classic "forming, storming, morning, performing "

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stages that teams go through are best managed with set of agreements. The agreements serve the norming function as members of the team agree on how they will work with each other. The agreement reflects the resolution of their "storming".

The team agreements can be utilized on projects using SCRUM as well. You should continue to maintain team agreements and update them as the outcome of retrospectives. The refined team agreements can be used in subsequent sprints. This is an important step in the evolution of 'just a group of people' to a SCRUM team.

One of the most important tasks in early meetings is to sign off on a team agreement that clearly defines your expectations for each other, your operating parameters, and the ways in which you will define success at the end of the project. There are numerous ways to create team agreements. The main idea is to keep it simple and real; the team, not just by project manager, should define them. Ask the team 3-5 things they believe a team should do to support themselves moving toward the goal. They might come up with items such as "active participation" and "communication".

Encourage them to identify specific soft skills and interpersonal behaviors. Make sure to get signoff from the team on agreements document. Some teams agree to this by demonstrating a show of hands, others may physically retain the paper that includes the list of agreements and brainstorming notes. This step enforces public accountability with each other and project manager. Some teams have them even printed up and post them near their offices or conference room.

I have included a sample set of team agreements to use or to help you compose your own.

- Have Open communication and active participation
- Utilize Lessons learned from experience
- Treat all team members with respect and value other team member's opinion and time
- Be a Leader
- Respect others' views/thoughts and appreciate contribution
- Resolve all conflicts positively
- Hold yourself accountable
- Define the operating parameters within which to conduct meetings
- All formal meetings have an agenda and have one conversation at a time during the meeting

There are number of benefits of creating team agreements.

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The team agreements help team members work together in a way that truly honors each other and return to a sense of aligned purpose when team experiences the inevitable challenges of working on any project. It makes everyone in team aware of the expectations of the group.

It creates a foundation for building trusting relationships, which strengthens the team's infrastructure. It provides forum for open communication. It also allows team members to be accountable and allows project manager to offload this responsibility.

What's more? Having the team agreements can help your team eliminate assumptions about what's expected of everyone. This can increase trust and performance. A highly functioning team is a infrastructure for a successful project, and as a leader, you can help the team set the foundation for success! The ultimate role model for the agreement is the team leader. Talk about it, refer to it and most importantly, use it!