Developing Working Agreements

Working agreements are guidelines developed by the group to aid in creating a positive, productive process. Working agreements detail three important aspects of group work:
1. Group behaviors and responsibilities
2. How consensus will be reached
3. Consequences for transgressions.

For example, an agreement on responsibility might be "We all agree to participate fully." Agreements are the group's power tool. Those who don't abide by the agreement, face expulsion from the group. Elements of the working agreement should be written out for easy reference throughout the group process.

Agreements:
1. Help team develop a sense of shared responsibility
2. Increase members' awareness of their own behavior
3. Empower the facilitator to lead the group according to the agreements.
4. Enhance the quality of the group process.

Agreements work well if:
1. They are well developed.
2. They are enforced consistently

Agreements should address:
- Communication
- Participation
- Decision making and problem solving
- Managing disagreements
- Responsibilities and expectations

Adapted from Dominick, P. G. et al. (2001). Tools and tactics of design. John Wiley & Sons, Inc

Some Examples of Working Agreement guidelines are:
- Attack a problem, not a person
- Listen to other's points of view without prejudice
- Do not take comments personally
- Show up on time, and if you cannot, contact the group
- Be prepared for meetings
- Be willing to take risks
- Be committed to ending on time if possible

Working Agreement ground rules (examples)

1. Ground Rules Regarding Logistics and Behaviors
   1. Date, Time, and Location of meetings
   2. Purpose of the meetings
   3. Order of business to conduct
   4. Starting and Ending times of meetings

6. Each person should be prepared and on time for the meetings
7. As a team we will value the diversity of team members
8. We will support the team concept and process
9. We will work to maintain positive team dynamics
10. Each person will participate in the meetings

2. Ground Rules Regarding Consensus and Decision Making
   1. We will make decisions by consensus (we will work out impasses by reverting to a majority rule after _____ amount of time and discussion)
   2. Each person will keep track of their own work and the team's compiled work. (Or, our team has a designated record keeper)
   3. Each person will listen and have an open mind.
   4. Major changes to the project must be brought to the rest of the group and discussed.

3. Ground Rules Regarding Conflict and Team Member Exit
   1. Each person will be dedicated to openly discussing issues and conflicts openly with the team.
   2. If a team member is engaging in behaviors or attitudes that disrupt the work or climate of the team, that person will be given a "warning" and an opportunity to change the disruptive behavior/attitude.
   3. This warning will be given up to (X) times.
   4. If after the first warning the team member does not end the disruptive behavior then the instructor (T.A., Consultant) will be notified.
   5. If the behavior continues after the (X) warning, then the team member will be asked to leave the team. This team member will no longer receive a team grade for the assignment.
   6. The team member who has been asked to leave will acknowledge that they must now meet with the instructor of the course to work out a potential arrangement.

Team Firing Guidelines (Sample)

Appropriate team functioning starts from the premise that all team members are dedicated to doing their best work, providing feedback and support and communicating when problems arise. Unfortunately, this does not always happen. Sometimes team members stop working, stop communicating and are not dedicated to giving their best effort to their team. These attitudes and behaviors have the potential to negatively influence a team. If this happens, team members who are dedicated should have options. Teams will be able to "fire" members who are not participating in the team process.

Firing a team member is an option when a member repeatedly fails to show up for meetings, does not participate in the team process, does not perform their share of the team's work, and/or continuously deters the team's progress due to negative behaviors.

The process for firing a team member will be outlined below:
1. Your team MUST FIRST attempt to have an open and honest discussion with the team member deemed negligent about the team problem! You will not be allowed to fire a member without proving that you have first tried to fix the problem internally. A CLEAR consultant is available to help you with this discussion.
 2. Your team must document the negligent member's behavior/actions and keep a written record of things such as absences, negative behaviors, lack of participation, etc. There should be sufficient reason to fire someone and should probably not occur for a first offense.
 3. If the majority of the team feels as though a member should be fired, you can take your written documentation to the instructor to discuss the removal of this person from your team. The instructor will ask you to prove to him or her that you have first tried to discuss this problem with your team member.
 4. The instructor will ultimately make the final decision as to whether or not your team member can be fired—and documentation from your team is required.

If you are fired from a team:
1. If you are fired from your team; then your team has already tried to discuss your behavior with you, and you either did not respond, or you did not change your behavior.
2. If you are fired, that means that the instructor has approved your team's decision.
3. Being fired from your team means that you may receive a zero for the team assignments.
4. You should see the instructor as soon as possible if this occurs; however, it is not a guarantee that an alternative assignment will be provided for you.