

The "Unwritten Norms"

An Activity for Reflecting on Your Developing Group Process

Part 1: Reflective Writing:

Think about our staff meetings, and the way we are now working together. Do you see any patterns of behavior or procedures which are not a part of our written norms, but which have really become our assumed or expected ways of doing things?

For example, in some groups, it is an "unwritten norm" that the first ten minutes will be devoted to socializing before the real work of the meeting begins. Conversely, a group might develop a pattern of getting right to work, sticking to the agenda, and socializing at the end of the meeting. In other groups, it is an unwritten norm not to volunteer, to let the leader do most of the work. An unwritten norm might be to "look the other way" at conduct or behaviors, which group members find offensive or destructive.

- What are the patterns of behavior, procedures, or expected ways of doing things that seem to have emerged in our staff meetings?

Part II: Sharing Responses:

Each individual in the group should reveal what he/she thinks are the unwritten norms that have developed. Each norm that is reported should be written down on chart paper. Once the list is completed, the whole staff needs to decide what it wants to do with each norm that has been identified.

An unwritten norm can be:

- Kept and added to the "official" list of norms if there is consensus that it benefits the group.
- Modified and then added to the official norms.
- Dropped because the members do not believe the norm benefits the group.

Be sure to make necessary changes to the official list of norms, and be sure to review the new norms at subsequent meetings. It is also wise to have the group debrief its adherence to norms at least every other meeting.