

What's in a Name?

OBJECTIVES

- To get to know the team members on a more personal level
- To build respect and understanding for others on the team
- To develop trust

Team Size

Up to 20

Materials

None

Time

10 to 30 minutes

Technology

Email, conference call



Procedure

Play this game early in your team's formation stage. Send an email to members of your team, letting them know that you will start your next team meeting with a game to help them get to know each other better. Tell them that each person will have the floor for a few minutes to tell the team the story of his or her name: such as what it means, where it came from, and perhaps the reason your parents had for giving you the name (this may require some prep time for team members). Ask them to close with, "I prefer to be called . . ."

Especially with a globally dispersed team, you can learn quite a bit about someone else with this low-risk, easy game. This can be a rich activity for a diverse team. In fact, the greater the diversity in the team, the more meaningful this activity is.

Thanks to Jim Cain, Ph.D., of Teamwork and Teamplay (teamworkandteamplay.com) for this activity.

Tips

By sending out the email beforehand, you will ensure that team members are ready with their story.

Variations

This activity can also be used to reveal the story behind other names such as participants' nicknames, pets' names, or children's names.

Discussion Questions

1. How important are names?
2. In what ways does the story behind our names define us?
3. Why is it important to remember and to use names?
4. How does this relate to trust within the team?
5. What are some ways to remember names and make sure we are pronouncing them correctly?

Communication Best Practices

OBJECTIVES

- To create team communication norms
- To demonstrate effective communication practices

Team Size

Any

Materials

Communication Best Practices Worksheet (provided here, and available for download)

Time

1 hour or more

Technology

Email, conference call, online collaborative tool, team web book or website



Procedure

For virtual teams, creating norms is essential. Norms can help teams create consistency, lessen conflict, and promote accountability, and can help team members feel more connected to each other and the team.

Once created, post your team norms in a team Web book or online resource that the team can access at any time. This activity focuses on communication norms, but you can follow this process to create other team norms, rituals, and operating agreements. Once the team decides on the norms they will adhere to, writing them in a positive manner is important. For example, have them come up with “what to do” rather than “what not to do.” Posting team norms in a prominent place like your team website or web book increases their value.

Follow these steps to generate your team's best practices regarding communication:

1. Email the worksheet to team members to be completed before your next team meeting. Have them complete the form on their own without discussing their answers with other teammates.
2. Ask the team members to list all the qualities and characteristics of good communication practices. Request that they provide examples for each item and be prepared to provide the reasons they included this item on their list. Allow 20 minutes for this step.
3. During the next team meeting, have team members share the items on their list. During this stage of the activity, other team members are to listen, ask questions for clarification, and provide positive feedback. Suggest they use the technique of listening "for" rather than "against" the speaker. Their job is not to judge the items on another team member's list, but to gain clarity and understanding.
4. The team comes together using the online collaborative tool to create their Team Communication Best Practices. If your team is larger than ten members, you may want to do this part as a two-step process, where small groups of five or six team members collaborate on their group list, after which they take it to the entire team. Drawing from all the ideas detailed on the individual lists, the team needs to collaborate to create team norms regarding the positive communication practices that team members will follow during their time together.
5. Post the completed list on your team website or include it in your team's web book. Refer to the list during future meetings or as part of the debriefing discussion in a communication game such as Speed PassPhrase (page 211).

Use this list as a living document, and revise the list as needed to reflect the team's changing needs and dynamics during the duration of your virtual team.

Tips

Use this activity in conjunction with Line Up (page 113). Line Up should be played in one meeting, and this activity should be run in the meeting that immediately follows. During your Line Up debriefing discussion, be sure to

talk about the benefits of developing team norms for communication. At the end of the discussion, let them know you will email a form to be completed before the next team meeting. This will set the stage to jump right into Step #3 of this activity.

In developing their lists, the team will put to use many of the components of effective communication, making this an activity within an activity!

Variations

Some virtual teams have the opportunity to meet in person at the beginning of their project. If this is the case for your team, include this activity as part of the initial face-to-face meeting. After facilitating some icebreakers and climate-setting games, move on to this activity. Once completed, use the Team Communication Best Practices to help create your team's goals, vision, and mission statement.

Discussion Questions

1. What was the hardest part of creating our team communication norms?
2. What are the benefits of shared norms?
3. How can we hold each other accountable for following the agreed-upon norms?
4. Can we do this in a positive manner?
5. What would that look/sound like?