Norm Rules of Thumb and Categories for Consideration

Whether they are called *norms*, *working agreements*, or *covenants to excellence*, a high-performing team is intentional about the development of norms. Being explicit about norms increases the level of effectiveness, produces a positive environment focused on the work, and helps socialize visitors or new members with the team. However, norms will only stick if the group practices them over and over again. Thus, the hallmark of high-performing teams is that they hold themselves accountable to the norms.

First, teams must adhere to the following rules of thumb.

- It is preferred that norm language, when created, is simple and positive. (It presumes positive intent.)

- The number of agreements is limited. Less is more.

- The best norms are established by the group that will use them.

- Norms are posted in the team's work area.

- Attention is given to the norms in each meeting.

- Team members measure their use of norms individually and collectively.

Next, teams selecting norms should consider having norms that address some of the following categories.

- **Respecting time:** What is our agreement about attendance and full presence? What do we agree to regarding meeting beginning and ending times?

- **Listening and speaking:** What patterns of listening and speaking will support team collaboration and the presence of group thinking over individual thinking?

- **Being prepared:** What is our standard for being prepared?

- **Keeping promises:** What is our expectation for moving the work forward and following up with the commitments we have made?

- **Setting a mindset:** What behaviors and attitudes will best support our work as a team?

- **Making decisions:** How will we make our decisions? Will we go by consensus? Majority?

- **Keeping confidentiality:** What is our agreement with regard to how we want to treat the confidential nature of our work?

- **Managing conflict:** Knowing that conflict is inevitable when change is required, how will we anticipate and plan for how we will deal with conflict or different points of view when they surface in our work?