The Seven Norms of Collaborative Work

Pausing: Pausing before responding or asking a question allows time for thinking and enhances dialogue, discussion and decision-making.

Paraphrasing: Using a paraphrase starter that is comfortable for you: "So…" or "As you are…" or "You're thinking…" and following the starter with a paraphrase assists members of the group to hear and understand each other as they formulate decisions.

Probing: Using gentle open-ended probes or inquiries such as, "Please say more…" or "I'm curious about…" or "I'd like to hear more about…" or "Then, are you saying…?" increases the clarity and precision of the group's thinking.

Putting ideas on the table: Ideas are the heart of a meaningful dialogue. Label the intention of your comments. For example, you might say, "Here is one idea…" or "One thought I have is …" or "Here is a possible approach…"

Paying attention to self and others: Meaningful dialogue is facilitated when each group member is conscious of self and of others and is aware of not only what she/he is saying, but also how it is said and how others are responding. This includes paying attention to learning style when planning for, facilitating and participating in group meetings. Responding to others in their own language forms is one manifestation of this norm.

Presuming positive intentions: Assuming that others' intentions are positive promotes and facilitates meaningful dialogue and eliminates unintentional put-downs. Using positive intentions in your speech is one manifestation of this norm.

Pursuing a balance between advocacy and inquiry: Pursuing and maintaining a balance between advocating a position and inquiring about one's own and others' positions assists the group to become a learning organization.

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