THE TEN NORMS
OF DATA TEAM WORK

Behaviors That Develop Open Dialogue

1. Pausing: Pausing before responding or asking a question allows time for you to frame your own thoughts and responses to enhance dialogue, discussion, and decision making within the group.

2. Paraphrasing: Paraphrasing signals listening and helps one understand and support others' thoughts by clarifying, organizing, and extending their thinking. Use a paraphrase starter that is comfortable for you ("So...," "As you were saying...," or "You're thinking..."). Follow the starter with a paraphrase that helps members of the group understand, find meaning, and seek agreement.

3. Probing: Ask questions that clarify vague language, explore details, and generate clear examples. Use 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...?"

4. Putting ideas out to be examined: 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...." In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.

5. 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 he is saying but also how it is said and how others are responding. Pay attention to learning styles when planning for, facilitating, and participating in group meetings. Responding to others in their own language forms is one manifestation of this norm. You might say, "I know that you like to examine statistical data on things, so...," or "You care so much about how students react when we change our expectations...," or something similar to begin.

6. Presuming positive intentions: Assuming that others' intentions are positive promotes meaningful dialogue and eliminates unintentional put-downs. Using positive intentions in your speech is one manifestation of this norm. For example, you might say, "I know that we all want our students to do well in this next unit" or something similar.

7. 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 enhances the group's development in becoming a community of learners.

Behaviors That Develop a Community of Learners

8. Perpetuating continuous learning: Learning is meaning-making, constantly testing, refining, and getting feedback on the improvements in one's own efforts as well as in the collective efforts of the team. Joining your thinking and feeling into a shared pool of meaning carries the group into new, deeper levels of understanding that no one individual could have foreseen. This is the ultimate goal of working together collaboratively.

9. Practicing assessment literacy: This means examining student performance results and making critical sense of the information. The team must act on this collective understanding by setting goals, identifying and implementing strategies, describing desired results, and monitoring improvement efforts in order to make the kinds of changes needed to increase student achievement in targeted areas. The five steps followed in most Data Team meetings help each member practice their assessment literacy skills.

10. Paying attention to the connections between teachers' development and students' development: Teacher development and student development are intertwined. In other words, the value of teacher development must ultimately be judged by whether these changes make teachers better for their students in ways that teachers themselves can see.

Source: Four Hats Seminars in El Dorado Hills, California. Adapted by Raymond Smith and Angela Peery as part of The Leadership and Learning Center's work in Elkhart Community Schools, Indiana. Also adapted from Garmston and Wellman (2002).

We're a Team, Now What?
The Initial Challenges Teams Face

*Collaboration is a means to an end, not the end itself. In
many schools, staff members are willing to collaborate on
a variety of topics as long as the focus of the conversation
stops at their classroom door.*

—DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many, 2006

Once Data Teams are formed, there is often a period during which teachers adjust
to working with each other in this new manner. Because Data Team meetings are
unlike the grade-level, team, and department meetings of the past, teachers may
need time to adjust. As with other workplace groups, Data Teams take different
amounts of time to adjust, based on many variables.

This chapter discusses common struggles that Data Teams sometimes face as
they are beginning their work. Additionally, the various roles that members fulfill
and the potential problems that occur in those roles are discussed. The examples are
not intended to be all-inclusive but are offered in order to illustrate situations that
may indeed occur in your own Data Teams journey so that you may reflect on the
scenarios presented and be proactive in your approach.

The Stages of Team Development

Bruce Tuckman, a psychologist, first proposed his model of group development in
the 1960s. His model includes stages called forming, storming, norming, and per-
forming. He postulates that all these stages are necessary and must occur in order for
any team to deliver results. So while moving through these stages is necessary, the
progress is often frustrating for both team members and administrators alike. How-
ever, understanding the stages can be beneficial for anyone involved with the work
of Data Teams, just as understanding Piagetian psychology or Bloom's Taxonomy of
Educational Objectives is helpful when teaching students. Many Data Teams with
whom I have consulted over the past five years have found that viewing the devel-

opment of their own teams through the lenses of Tuckman's work provides insight and affirmation.

Briefly, the forming stage of team development involves individuals trying to get along and avoid conflict. This stage often manifests itself as newly formed Data Teams busy themselves with organizational and logistical tasks, such as deciding where and when to meet and figuring out how to keep records like meeting minutes and data displays. Team members also spend time getting better acquainted with each other on a personal level. This stage is characterized by little work of significance; it is basically a "getting to know you" time.

Data Team leaders, instructional coaches, and administrators often grow impatient during this forming phase because they want each team to focus immediately on the student learning needs. However, a team cannot effectively address student learning needs until they have experienced the forming phase. The frustration team members and others may feel lies in the amount of time that it takes for some teams to successfully navigate this initial stage. Some teams pass though it in one or two meetings, while others take months. Like an algebra problem, the mix of friendships, personalities, and experience on each team creates a different formula for the length of the forming stage.

The next stage is called storming. In this stage, team members turn their attention to the problems that must be solved—for Data Teams, that means the student learning challenges that must be addressed. Tuckman's theory posits that some groups move through this stage very quickly, while others never leave it.

Some Data Teams remain in the storming phase, unfortunately, for an entire school year. Data Team leaders, instructional coaches, and administrators from both the building and system levels often try to intervene if this stage appears to last too long. Sometimes these efforts work with the existing team members, but in other cases the configuration of the team has to be changed. A change in team membership is an extreme solution but is one that is sometimes cautiously exercised by administrators.

Storming includes team members presenting their own views, which sometimes lead to controversy or conflict because they may differ drastically from the views of teammates. On some Data Teams, teachers may express ideas about student learning capabilities that are offensive to other members, such as, "Those particular kids will never be able to learn this. They just don't have what it takes. Why don't we just move on?" Another common problem during the storming stage is when one or two members share their instructional strategy ideas and don't entertain the suggestions of others; for example, "Here's the way to teach that. I've taught it that way for years and it's the only way the kids get it. I don't see why we're wasting time trying to come

up with other methods." These kinds of statements prolong the storming stage because they don't encourage dialogue.

Those in supervisory, coaching, or team leadership positions can help teams move through the storming phase by guiding the dialogue. They can model effective ways to present ideas and can take statements such as the ones given previously and paraphrase them so that they become less definitive and more inviting. Many Data Team leaders grow frustrated during the storming phase, as they feel ill-equipped to handle the strong emotions that may be displayed by their colleagues. Data Team leaders who do grow frustrated need additional support from administrators or outside experts. Some Data Teams actually study information about group development prior to beginning the meeting cycle so that they are prepared for what's ahead.

The next stage in team development is norming. In this sometimes long-awaited stage, the team manages to have a shared goal and a consensual plan for reaching it. Team members have learned that sometimes they have to forego their own ideas, or at the very least find ways to combine their ideas with the ideas of others. In this stage, agreement is reached fairly easily, whereas in earlier stages, it was not.

In the norming stage, members have all taken responsibility and are keeping their commitments. They are all working toward the common good. From this point forward, a Data Team can be highly effective.

The last stage teams reach is the stage called performing. High-performing teams function interdependently and are able to do what's required with ease. Team members are motivated to do the work of the group, and direct supervision or guidance from outside members (like administrators) is not necessary. These are the teams that meet even when they don't have to. They enjoy and learn from their collaboration and feel that their teaching would not be as effective without it. The performing stage is the desired state for all Data Teams, because it is in this state that students can benefit the most.

The Differences between Elementary and Secondary School Data Teams

Many elementary teachers are accustomed to meeting in grade-level teams for various purposes: to discuss discipline issues; to plan class activities, including participation in art, music, and physical education; to share resources; to plan lessons and interventions; to monitor student achievement data; and so on. The difficult part for elementary teachers is to table discussions about issues that are not part of the five steps for other meetings, not Data Team meetings.

Because elementary teachers have often met as grade levels to do much of the

The Critical Role of the Data Team Leader

Data Teams are collaborative in the best sense of the word: team members ideally "co-labor" in order to make instructional decisions that positively impact the learning of every student. However, particularly in the early stages of Data Teams work, the team leader plays a crucial role as the purpose and norms are established.

Data Team leaders may volunteer, apply, or be appointed by the administration. Those selected should have a strong understanding of standards and assessment, know how to analyze various forms of student achievement data, be familiar with research-based instructional strategies, and be able to facilitate meetings well. They should be respected as teacher-leaders in the building and should not be afraid to challenge commonly held beliefs if necessary. Data Team leaders must believe that all students can learn if provided adequate time and ideal conditions; they must also believe that teachers can continue to grow professionally throughout their careers.

The main responsibilities of a Data Team leader are to set the agenda for each meeting, ensure that all members know the agenda as well as where and when to meet, and, obviously, run the meeting as it occurs. The Center recommends that Data Team leaders meet with the principal or building leadership team once a month to debrief and make recommendations, so this is an additional responsibility. Data Team leaders must also ensure that minutes or notes are taken in each meeting and that these are distributed to all stakeholders; generally, the role of recorder is delegated to one person on the team, or this role rotates among members, as does the role of timekeeper.

Administrators should seek to remove any unnecessary duties from teachers selected to be Data Team leaders. On many campuses, Data Team leaders are also provided with small stipends or other perks in order to thank them for the important job they do. Perks may include low-cost options such as sending each Data Team leader to a conference, or no-cost options such as trading time on campus for time off campus (during prep periods or in-service days, for example).

The biggest challenge that Data Team leaders face is in their interactions with colleagues. It is imperative that all educators in the building understand that Data Team leaders are not pseudoadministrators. They are not serving in an evaluative or supervisory role but in a facilitative one. Thus, the Data Team leaders must be able to cultivate strong relationships with both their peers and their supervisors. So, while asking probing questions of their peers during meetings, they must remain neutral and nonjudgmental. And while sharing information with supervisors, they must strive to report facts and allow the supervisors to make the inferences and determine future actions.

Sometimes, well-intentioned administrators seek information from Data Team

leaders that places the leaders in the difficult position of evaluating a teammate's performance. If this happens, the team leader must be as diplomatic as possible but resist falling into the trap. Minutes from meetings, data displays, and objective information shared in the monthly meetings of team leaders and administration should provide the administrators with plenty of material from which to generalize about any given teacher's performance. Principals should gather additional information from classroom observations, both formal and informal, and from conversations with members of the teams.

When Data Team leaders aren't skillfully navigating their relationships with their administrators, they may find themselves redefining their relationships with their teammates. At times, other members on the team may feel nervous about sharing the results from their classes for fear that their results aren't as good as the results of the rest of the team members. They may also be reluctant to share their teaching practices, for fear that the practices will be considered "not good enough" by their peers—or, contrarily, for fear that their teammates will think they are being braggarts. The Data Team leader must be alert to all the intriguing subtleties of human behavior that can prevent a team from reaching high performance.

Every building has those teachers on the faculty who would make excellent Data Team leaders. The challenge is to support them so that they don't "burn out" early in the process as teams move through the forming and storming stages.

Data Team leaders must also remember not to put too much pressure on themselves. They are not responsible for the work that their teammates are supposed to do—nor are they responsible for their teammates' behavior in meetings. They are responsible only for trying to facilitate the meetings and communicate between meetings as best they can to keep the team moving forward in the best interest of students.

Other Members of the Team

Every Data Team member must make the commitment to serve as an engaged participant. For some, this commitment is hard to make and even harder to live up to fully as meetings begin to occur.

Some teachers feel that they are being personally scrutinized as they open up their practice by sharing assessment ideas and assessment results with others. They also may be hesitant to discuss instructional strategies that they have used previously or suggest ideas about changes in instructional strategies. If Data Teams are implemented in a building where a collaborative culture has not been created or sustained, teachers may be very reluctant, especially initially, to participate in true dialogue about teaching and learning.

What does it mean to be a good Data Team member?

First, everyone must demonstrate active listening. As I used to explain to my high school students, this means listening with one's eyes, ears, and heart—not listening in order to respond, but listening in order to understand the person's perspective and the person's position or suggestion.

Second, all members should follow a norm that I learned years ago in a program called The Courage to Teach: presume welcome and extend welcome. This means to assume that all team members have good intentions. Even if a statement is controversial or is one with which others may disagree, if team members examine this statement by remembering that the person is most likely offering it with honorable intentions, then the resulting conversation is more likely to be productive.

Third, team members must reflect on their own practice openly, and in doing so share their successes, struggles, and ideas. Keeping potentially valuable information to oneself is not in the best interest of the team. It is often difficult to examine one's teaching objectively, and even more difficult to share one's insights with others, but this kind of openness is necessary in order for teams to function at high levels.

Last, members should adhere to the logistical rules of the meetings, which include being on time and having all needed materials ready. These materials include student work that was scored prior to the meeting.

Another role that is essential in the Data Team meeting process is the recorder. Every meeting held, whether it is a meeting during which the five steps are followed or whether it is a monitoring meeting during which the crucial sixth step occurs, must be documented through minutes or notes.

Often one member of a Data Team will fulfill the role of data technician or data coordinator. Usually this is a person who is adept at entering data and creating printouts that show the rest of the team how students are doing. Some data technicians use an Excel spreadsheet and create graphs for the team to examine at the beginning of each meeting. Others use whatever school performance-tracking software is available.

Some teams create a focus monitor role. The person serving in this role keeps the conversation focused on the meeting steps and other directly relevant issues.

A timekeeper may be used, too, and sometimes this is a dual role with the focus monitor. The timekeeper helps the facilitator put time limits to the agenda so that the team stays on topic and doesn't arrive at the end of the meeting not having gone through all the meeting steps.

A data wall curator or data display manager is another role that might be created. This person is sometimes the same person as the data technician, but that is not required. The data wall curator is responsible for displaying the team's data in what-

ever manner they have been directed to or as agreed upon by the team so that both teachers and students frequently see it. The displays serve as communication tools and as visible reminders of the important work of learning that all are engaged in.

Data Teams as Part of a Collaborative School Culture

Richard DuFour (2010) has said that collaborative teams are the fundamental building blocks of any learning organization and that they are "the best structure for achieving challenging goals" (p. 15). Data Teams are a vehicle that marries collaboration with classroom-based action research, and are thus an excellent model for all schools to use to meet their student achievement goals. When all Data Teams in a building have moved to the performing stage of Tuckman's model, results are truly astounding. These are the schools like those described in the next chapter where shared inquiry is an integral part of a continuous improvement process.

An inquiry orientation is important in order for Data Teams to thrive. Teams must move beyond the forming and storming stages and embrace a shared inquiry orientation. Administrators are key in establishing and nurturing this culture, but everyone in the building plays a very important role.

Initially, some teachers are hesitant to embrace the Data Teams process because they feel some type of penalty may result if the team fails to meet its goals. Also, teachers are sometimes reluctant to try new instructional practices for fear that the practices won't work well and that student learning will suffer. It is imperative that every adult involved with Data Teams implementation help create a culture where risk-taking in the name of improving student achievement is not only okay, it is celebrated.

Conclusion

Like many organizational teams, Data Teams may not operate at peak performance when initiated. However, with significant time allotted for Data Teams to meet and collaborate, and with support from administrators, these teams can become high performing and impact student achievement tremendously. Keeping an inquiry mindset and an action-research orientation is important for all educators involved in the Data Teams process. Data Team members should not be discouraged if they encounter problematic situations along the way to peak performance, as these situations are part of the natural learning journey of the team.