

Table 8-5

### Typical Constructive (and Destructive) Norms for a Working Group

- Handle (Ignore) business for co-workers who are away from their desks.
- Be willing (Refuse) to admit your mistakes.
- Occasional time off from work for personal reasons is (isn't) okay, as long as the absence won't harm the company.
- Do (Don't) be willing to work overtime without complaining when big, important deadlines approach.
- Say so (Keep quiet) if you disagree. Don't (Do) hint or go behind others' backs.
- Avoid (Hold) side conversations during meetings.
- Don't (Do) interrupt or ignore others' ideas.
- Arrive on time (Be late) for meetings.
- Celebrate (Don't celebrate) successes.
- Honor (Shirk) your commitments.

Source: After Joel A. C. Baum, "Avoiding Common Team Problems," HomePage for Game Theory and Competitive Strategy MGT 2056–Fall 2003, retrieved August 26, 2003, from [www.rotman.utoronto.ca/~baum/mgt2003/avoid.html](http://www.rotman.utoronto.ca/~baum/mgt2003/avoid.html).

(such as the U.S. or Canada) would be more likely to address conflicts directly, whereas those from high-context backgrounds (East Asia or the Middle East, for example) would be inclined to use indirect approaches. Likewise, members from a background where high power distance is the norm would be less likely to challenge a group's leader than those from a background where low power distance is the norm.

Once norms are established, members who violate them create a crisis for the rest of the team, who respond in a series of escalating steps.<sup>63</sup> Consider, for example, a worker who violates the norm of not following up on her obligations between group meetings. Her teammates might react with increasing pressure:

- *Delaying action.* Members talk among themselves but do not approach the deviant, hoping that she will change without pressure.
- *Hinting about the violation.* Members tease the violator about being a "flake" or about being lazy, hoping that the message behind the humor will cause her to do her share of work.
- *Discussing the problem openly.* Members confront the nonconformist, explaining their concerns about her behavior.
- *Ridiculing and deriding the violator.* Persuasion shifts to demands for a change in behavior; the group's pressure tactics may well trigger a defensive response in the nonconforming member.
- *Rejecting or isolating the deviant.* If all other measures fail, the team member who doesn't conform to group norms is asked to leave the group. If she cannot be expelled, other members can effectively excommunicate her by not inviting her to meetings and by disregarding any attempts at communicating she might make.

There are two ways in which an understanding of norms can help you to function more effectively in a group.