

LEVEL 3: INSTITUTIONAL

ALIGN YOUR TEAM ASSEMBLE YOUR PARTY

Establish Team Norms

NAME	TEAM	DATE
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Your team is made up of people with different working styles. Some think out loud. Others need silence. Some move fast. Others gather data. These differences create value, but they also create friction when they go unnamed.

This tool guides your team through a structured conversation about working styles across the same four dimensions: Processing Style, Decision Speed, Execution Approach, and Context Preference. You'll map where people fall on each spectrum, discuss what those patterns mean for how you work together, and establish explicit team norms that honor both alignment and difference.

The goal isn't to eliminate diversity in how people work. It's to make preferences visible so your team can navigate them intentionally rather than letting them create unnecessary conflict.

BEFORE YOU START

Ideally, each team member has completed the Align Yourself tool before the team conversation. That individual reflection helps people articulate their preferences clearly and come prepared to discuss them.

If completing Align Yourself isn't feasible, you can still have this conversation. People will reflect on each dimension during the team discussion itself. It just takes longer.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

Who Should Participate

This conversation works best with 5-8 people who collaborate regularly. Larger groups can use this tool, but you may need to adjust timing or break into smaller discussion groups for some sections.

Logistics

- ◆ **Time:** Plan 90-120 minutes for your first team norming session (Recommended: add 15 minutes for every person above 8)
- ◆ **Space:** Choose a setting where everyone can participate comfortably, whether in-person or virtual.
- ◆ **Facilitation:** This tool is designed to be self-facilitated. One person can guide the group through the process, or you can rotate facilitation across dimensions.
- ◆ **Documentation:** Assign someone to capture agreements as you make them. You'll need these notes afterward. Be mindful that the same person isn't always expected to take notes during these sorts of activities.
- ◆ **Mindset:** Approach this with curiosity, not judgment. You're trying to understand each other, not change each other.

Ground Rules

Before starting, agree on these principles (add any others you need to have a safe and productive conversation):

- ◆ **Assume good intent.** Different working styles aren't personal attacks or signs of incompetence.
- ◆ **Speak for yourself.** Share your own preferences, not assumptions about others.
- ◆ **Honor outliers.** Majority patterns don't invalidate minority preferences. Outliers often bring perspective the team needs.
- ◆ **Commit to agreements.** Once you establish team norms, everyone follows them or raises concerns openly if something isn't working.

How this Conversation Works

For each dimension, you'll:

1. **Reflect individually.** Each person identifies where they fall on the spectrum (5 minutes).
2. **Map the team.** Share preferences and see the full range of styles represented (10 minutes).
3. **Discuss implications.** Talk about what this pattern means for how you work together (10 minutes).
4. **Establish norms.** Create explicit team agreements that honor different styles (10 minutes).

Take breaks between dimensions if needed. This is important work, and rushing through it defeats the purpose.

01

DIMENSION 1

PROCESSING STYLE

SOLO MODE vs PARTY CHAT

WHERE YOUR THINKING HAPPENS

Some people think by talking. Ideas form and clarify as they speak them out loud. Others think internally first, needing quiet space to process before they're ready to share.

Individual Reflection (5 minutes)

Each person silently considers:

- ◆ Where do I fall on the spectrum: **Internal Processor** ↔ **External Processor**
- ◆ What I need from others when working through something complex?
- ◆ One situation where their processing style created friction

Map the Team (10 minutes)

Go around the room. Each person shares

- ◆ Where they fall on the spectrum
- ◆ One concrete example of when their processing style helped them do good work
- ◆ What value does each style bring to your partnership?

Facilitator note: As people share, mark where each person falls on a visible spectrum (whiteboard, shared doc, sticky notes on a wall). This creates a visual map of your team's range.

Discuss Implications (10 minutes)

As a team we discuss:

- ◆ What patterns do we see? Are we clustered in one area or spread across the spectrum?
- ◆ How might our different processing styles create misunderstanding if we don't name them?
- ◆ What value does each style bring to our team's work?
- ◆ Are these processing preferences true needs for people, or strong preferences that can flex in certain situations? Understanding this helps us create norms that protect what's essential while allowing adaptation where possible.

01

DIMENSION 1

PROCESSING STYLE

SOLO MODE vs PARTY CHAT

WHERE YOUR THINKING HAPPENS

Create explicit agreements about how your team will honor different processing styles.

Establishing Team Norms (10 minutes)**Examples:**

- ◆ "We'll share meeting agendas 24 hours in advance so internal processors can prepare."
- ◆ "In meetings, we'll build in 2-3 minutes of silence after introducing a complex topic."
- ◆ "External processors will signal when they're thinking out loud versus making a proposal."
- ◆ "We'll use collaborative documents for brainstorming so both styles can contribute in ways that work for them."

YOUR TEAM'S AGREEMENTS

02

DIMENSION 2

DECISION SPEED


SCOUT AHEAD vs RUSH IN

HOW QUICKLY YOU COMMIT

Some people are comfortable making decisions with incomplete information. They trust they can adjust course as they learn. Others prefer to gather more data before committing, thinking through potential problems before moving forward.

Individual Reflection (5 minutes)

Each person silently considers:

- ◆ Where do I fall on the spectrum: **Cautious/Data-Seeking**  **Action-Oriented/Fast**
- ◆ What helps me feel confident enough to commit to a decision?
- ◆ What stresses me out more: moving too slowly or moving too quickly?

Map the Team (10 minutes)

Go around the room. Each person shares

- ◆ Where they fall on the spectrum
- ◆ A time when their decision-making speed served the team well
- ◆ A time when their speed (or caution) created tension

Facilitator note: Mark where each person falls on a visible spectrum.

Discuss Implications (10 minutes)

As a team we discuss:

- ◆ What patterns do we see in our decision-making speeds?
- ◆ How might our different thresholds for "enough information" create friction?
- ◆ What blind spots does each style help the team avoid?
- ◆ When decision speeds conflict significantly, are these true needs or preferences that can adapt based on the stakes of the decision? Can we distinguish between reversible decisions (where speed matters more) and irreversible ones (where thoroughness matters more)?

02

DIMENSION 2

DECISION SPEED

SCOUT AHEAD vs RUSH IN

HOW QUICKLY YOU COMMIT

Create explicit agreements about how your team will balance speed and thoroughness.

Establishing Team Norms (10 minutes)**Examples:**

- ◆ "For major decisions, we'll set a clear deadline for gathering input so everyone knows when we'll commit."
- ◆ "We'll distinguish between reversible decisions (move fast, adjust later) and irreversible ones (gather more data first)."
- ◆ "When someone asks for more time, they'll specify what information they need and when they'll be ready to decide."
- ◆ "We'll name a decision-maker for each choice so we don't get stuck in consensus paralysis."

YOUR TEAM'S AGREEMENTS

03

DIMENSION 3

EXECUTION APPROACH

EARLY ACCESS vs FULL LAUNCH

WHEN YOU POLISH YOUR WORK

Some people optimize for momentum. They value iteration, shipping quickly, and refining as they go. Others optimize for thoroughness. They want to get it right the first time, even if it takes longer.

Individual Reflection (5 minutes)

Each person silently considers:

- ◆ Where do I fall on the spectrum: **Refine then Execute** \longleftrightarrow **Execute then Refine**
- ◆ What does "ready to ship" mean to me?
- ◆ How do I feel when the team's pace is faster or slower than I'd naturally choose?

Map the Team (10 minutes)

Go around the room. Each person shares

- ◆ Where they fall on the spectrum
- ◆ A project where their execution approach created great results
- ◆ A situation where their approach clashed with the team's pace

Facilitator note: Mark where each person falls on a visible spectrum.

Discuss Implications (10 minutes)

As a team we discuss:

- ◆ What patterns do we see in how we approach quality and iteration?
- ◆ How might our different definitions of "ready" create friction?
- ◆ What does each approach protect the team from?
- ◆ Are these execution preferences true needs or flexible preferences? Some people genuinely need more refinement time to maintain standards; others can adapt their threshold based on the stakes of the work. Understanding this helps us create norms that honor what's essential without creating unnecessary bottlenecks.

03

DIMENSION 3

EXECUTION APPROACH

EARLY ACCESS vs FULL LAUNCH

WHEN YOU POLISH YOUR WORK

Create explicit agreements about how your team will honor different approaches to quality.

Establishing Team Norms (10 minutes)**Examples:**

- ◆ "For player/client-facing work, we'll agree on quality standards upfront. For internal prototypes, we'll default to shipping fast."
- ◆ "We'll explicitly label work as 'draft for feedback,' 'ready for review,' or 'ready for release' so everyone knows the expected level of polish."
- ◆ "When someone feels uncomfortable with the pace, they'll name what specific quality concern needs addressing rather than just saying 'it's not ready.'"
- ◆ "We'll build in time for both iteration and refinement in our project plans so neither style feels constantly compromised."

YOUR TEAM'S AGREEMENTS

04

DIMENSION 4

CONTEXT PREFERENCE

FULL LORE vs QUEST OBJECTIVE

HOW MUCH CONTEXT YOU NEED

Some people need the full picture before they can act. They want to understand background, history, and how pieces connect. Others want the headline first. Give them the bottom line, and they'll ask for details if they need them.

Individual Reflection (5 minutes)

Each person silently considers:

- ◆ Where do I fall on the spectrum: **Bottom Line First** ←→ **Context and Background First**
- ◆ What helps me understand something new most effectively?
- ◆ What happens when I get too much or too little context?

Map the Team (10 minutes)

Go around the room. Each person shares

- ◆ Where they fall on the spectrum
- ◆ A time when their context preference helped them understand something important
- ◆ A time when their preference created frustration in communication

Facilitator note: Mark where each person falls on a visible spectrum.

Discuss Implications (10 minutes)

As a team we discuss:

- ◆ What patterns do we see in how we share and receive information?
- ◆ How might our different context needs create misunderstanding?
- ◆ What does each style help the team see that we might otherwise miss?
- ◆ Do context needs vary by situation, or are they consistent regardless of the topic? Understanding when context is a true need versus a preference helps us create norms that adapt to different types of information.

04

DIMENSION 4

CONTEXT PREFERENCE

FULL LORE vs QUEST OBJECTIVE

HOW MUCH CONTEXT YOU NEED

Create explicit agreements about how your team will share information effectively.

Establishing Team Norms (10 minutes)**Examples:**

- ◆ "In emails and messages, we'll lead with a one-sentence summary, then provide background. That way people can stop reading if they have what they need."
- ◆ "When starting meetings, we'll name whether this is a 'quick update' or 'full context discussion' so people know what to expect."
- ◆ "Context-seekers will ask clarifying questions rather than assuming bottom-line communicators are withholding information."
- ◆ "We'll use structured formats for key communications (project updates, decision memos) so both styles get what they need."

YOUR TEAM'S AGREEMENTS



CLOSING

LAUNCH YOUR CAMPAIGN

MAKE IT ACTIONABLE

Document and Maintain Your Group Norms:

You've established working agreements across four dimensions. Now make them real

Capture Your Agreements:

Compile all four agreements into a single document that everyone can access:

- ◆ A shared team wiki page
- ◆ Your project management tool
- ◆ A pinned message in your team channel

Make sure it's visible and easy to reference, not buried in meeting notes.

Communicate Your Norms:

Share your team norms with people outside your immediate team who work with you regularly:

- ◆ Your manager or leadership
- ◆ Partner teams you collaborate with frequently
- ◆ New team members during onboarding

When others understand how your team operates, they can work with you more effectively.



CLOSING

LAUNCH YOUR CAMPAIGN

MAKE IT ACTIONABLE

Revisit Regularly

Team norms aren't permanent. They should evolve as your team does. Schedule check-ins:

After 4-6 weeks:

- ◆ Are our agreements actually working?
- ◆ What's improved since we established them?
- ◆ What needs adjustment?

When the team changes:

- ◆ New members bring new working styles. Revisit your norms to make sure they still serve everyone.
- ◆ When someone leaves, their absence might shift team patterns. Acknowledge that and adjust if needed.

When the work changes:

- ◆ High-pressure periods might require temporarily adjusting some norms. Name that explicitly rather than letting agreements quietly erode.
- ◆ New types of projects might surface friction in areas you haven't normed yet. Add new agreements as needed.

Honor the Agreements

The value of team norms comes from following them. When someone isn't honoring an agreement:

- ◆ Assume good intent. They might have forgotten or misunderstood.
- ◆ Raise it directly. "We agreed to share agendas 24 hours in advance. Can we make that happen?"
- ◆ If an agreement consistently isn't working, revisit it as a team. Maybe it needs adjustment, not just better compliance.

You've completed Align Your Team. Use these norms to reduce friction, honor difference, and work more effectively together.

WANT TO GO DEEPER WITH YOUR TEAM?

This is one of Mattering Lab's Free DLC tools. Book a discovery call at calendly.com/matteringlab.