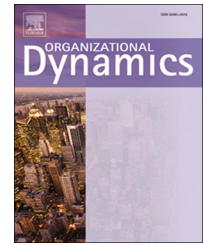Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

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Team ground rules: Their nature and functions☆

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Abstract
Teams are complex relational systems. Effective team functioning depends on members willingness to coordinate and work together. Ground rules play a fundamental but frequently ignored role in this process. We define ground rules as the mutual agreements informally established by members to regulate team functioning. These agreements may subsequently be rendered formal or explicit. The nature and functions of ground rules (including as social-normative tools for handling paradoxes) are discussed, as well as the forms/types they assume. Rules for setting ground rules, as well as the role team leaders may play in facilitating the emergence of effective ground rules are also considered.
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A professional player of a collective sport shared with us the following experience concerning how his winning team's captain addressed a concern arising from the arrival of a new player whose quality was beyond doubt. The problem, he said, was that the new player was a great scorer but equally prone to showing off. This created mixed feelings: on the one hand the team benefitted with the goals scored by the new player. On the other hand, his attitude was creating unnecessary feelings of ambivalence. The captain thought he should do something to prevent damage. Consequently, he suggested a new rule whereby the player who scored more goals would buy dinner for the entire team after each match. The proposal was gladly accepted by all. As a result, the new player continued to score and to show off but now nobody complained as the top scorer was frequently buying roast

M.P. e Cunha, A. Rego and A.V. Simpson

chicken for all. The rule accommodated a contradiction: it protected both the individual and the team.

This example illustrates the power of team ground rules, defined as the mutual agreements informally established by the members to regulate team functioning. These agreements may (or may not) subsequently be rendered formal or explicit. Referred to in the literature as team norms, ground rules can be found, as we have discovered in our research and interventions, not only in sports teams but also in teams in organizational environments, in the arts, or in teams of MBA students. These rules are necessary as every team maintains an informal life that connects members and the team without leader intermediation. Ground rules function as regulators of this informal life. Although ground rules pervade team functioning, they have not received much research attention as tools for handling team paradoxes, which is unfortunate because they may play a major role in group functioning. Ground rules are not necessarily rules, in the sense of mandatory lines of action, but rather emerging general behavioral guidelines that help the team productively handle its contradictions. For this reason, ground rules and their intentions are not necessarily discussed in an explicit way. Instead they are frequently oblique and implicit unstated assumptions. Effective teams tackle team contradictions in a sometimes-indirect way, not assuming the tension or making it salient, to use the vocabulary of paradox theory.

We discuss the role of ground rules in the construction of effective teams. The ingredients of successful teams have continuously attracted significant attention. It is not difficult to understand this interest given the fact that organizations rely on teams to get the work done. As the world of work changes in the direction of networked organizational designs, this interest has been renewed with consideration given to both teams and teaming. For these reasons understanding the nature of ground rules will grow in importance in team-based structures, such as holacracies, a flat organizational design based on purpose-driven forms of self-management. These structures may demand a deliberate engagement with ground rules to articulate intra- and inter-team dynamics. In this article we discuss the role of ground rules in helping teams handle team challenges and tackle the paradoxes of team life. We thus explore how the paradoxical nature of teams makes ground rules necessary. We further consider the nature and functions of ground rules, as well as the rules for the creation of rules, along with the role team leaders may play in facilitating the emergence of effective ground rules. The paper thus aims to help managers understand the potential gains associated with the adoption of effective team ground rules.

Teams, their paradoxes and the need for ground rules

From a lay outsider perspective, teams are more of less alike: with a limited number of members, generally designated responsibilities and shared goals. The crucial role played by *interdependency* and *complementarity* as definitional team features is often underestimated. A team is defined "as (a) two or more individuals, who (b) socially interact (face-to-face or, increasingly, virtually); (c) possess one or more common goals; (d) are brought together to perform organizationally relevant tasks; (e) exhibit interdependencies with respect to workflow, goals, and outcomes; (f) have different roles and responsibilities; and (g) are together embedded in an encompassing organizational system, with boundaries and linkages to the broader system context and task environment". This wider set of characteristics is more aligned with our lived insider experience, that apparently similar teams can have quite dissimilar dynamics. We explore three factors that likely contribute to such variability.

First, teams are sensitive complex human microsystems that critically depend on the relational patterns they stabilize. Accordingly, a group of competent individuals does not necessarily constitute a competent team. Teams, as a collective of interdependent agents, depends on the quality of the relationships: it is in this sense that it is sometimes said that the relationships *are* the team. The team thus can be viewed as a relational network of interdependent agents. These relationships are difficult to observe from the outside.

Second, teams are developed or nurtured, but not assembled. A team is not created by assembling X-number of members: it must be developed by its members. This process depends on a number of factors that cannot be taken for granted as automatic. For example, even a highly valued team ingredient, such as diversity, can be problematic if the team is unable to productively engage with difference and instead contributes to a psychologically *unsafe* work environment.

Finally, teams are paradoxical systems. Paradox refers to persistent tensions between mutually defining opposites. In the case of teams, opposites may include loyalty and voice, cohesion and dissent, similarity and difference, competition and cooperation, the "I" and the "we". Teams need to balance these tensions productively to avoid being caught in centrifugal or centripetal dynamics. In healthy teams, there is both an "I" in "team", and a "team" in each "I". Centrifugal forces risk turning a team into a mere assemblage of individuals, as happened in the case of the firefighters studied by Karl Weick. The team's loss of structure reduced it to a chaotic unit with no leadership, synchrony, and unity. Mutual support and collective sensemaking got lost and the team disbanded, with tragic consequences. In case of the opposite force, centripetal becomes overdominant, the team advantage may get lost in some form of unanimity (true or false) interpreted as the expression of being a good team player. This is the groupthink syndrome that has been associated with organizational disasters such as the Challenger launch decision, the Columbia disaster, the failure of Bay of Pigs invasion, or the Boeing 737 Max, and Carlos Ghosn scandals. In all those cases, pressures for conformity depleted the collectives of the vitality coming from disagreement, leading teams to, metaphorically, implode.

The paradoxical nature of teams means that they need to be managed in a way that accepts their inherent contradictions, instead of trying to suppress them. Accepting, managing, or navigating tensions, however, is easier said than done. Because of the influence of centripetal (leader or organizational influence) or centrifugal forces (internal rivalry and competition, conflictual objectives), teams may find it difficult to dynamically balance the tensions of

Table 1 What distinguishes ground rules from rules.

	Rules	Ground rules
Source	Hierarchical: the organization, the leader	The team itself, emergent
Goal	Control	Coordination, mutual adjustment
Number	Few or many	Typically, few
Limits	Coercion	Can be (officially/formally) ignored; informally, their capacity to regulate team members behaviors depends on their social-normative strength

teamworking. Direct leader intervention may increase rigidity, but the lack of action may originate a dispersion of efforts.

In face of such conundrum, how can teams and their leaders balance centripetal and centrifugal forces? We suggest that one mechanism for navigating team paradoxes lies in the use of ground rules that might function as simple structural and social-normative devices supporting the team in self-organizing without imposing obtrusive structures. In this sense, ground rules may function as scaffolds that assist teams in handling the paradoxical tensions confronting them. As scaffolds, they are not viewed as core, permanent, or formally prominent. They are not more than auxiliary structures, often informal, invisible, and temporary, introduced to support team functioning.

The nature of ground rules

What are the characteristics of ground rules and what roles do they play? These are the two questions that we address in this section. Ground rules have been studied before, but their important roles have not always been explicitly considered, particularly in dealing with the paradoxical nature of team dynamics. Rules have been historically considered as part of the development and functioning of teams. Effective teams need norms. Yet when teams change (e.g., in composition or the organizational context in which they operate) rules may need to be revisited. Norms may also have to be revised because, despite their possible stability, they are not immune to changing expectations introduced by new members – or a new leader. In some instances, the new member or a new leader's arrival may have to be reconsidered, as the new entrants may not to know or refuse to abide by the rules.

Karl Weick's study of the Mann Gulch wildfire also considered the role of rules. When the team's rules collapsed, the team itself dismembered, sense collapsed, and the disaster unfolded. In this view, rules are important for protecting collective action with the absence of valid operating rules precluding coordinated action. Rules thus help maintain team integrity, establishing a platform of co-ordinated action. A team with no ground rules is a collection of individuals at the edge of disaggregation.

What are the characteristics of team ground rules?

Ground rules, as defined here, are not formal rules nor disciplinary rules created by the leader, but rather guidelines that emanate from the team itself to assist the collective in articulating its challenges. They emerge informally, are not necessarily written, and are negotiated at the team level. Accordingly, the "ten commandments" introduced by FC Barcelona's new head coach Xavi Hernandez are not ground rules as defined here, because they were introduced unilaterally by the leader. These were compulsory and not open to negotiation, as were José Mourinho's 10 commandments. Ground rules are different: they are guardrails rather than orders, emergent rather than imposed, and are initially informal even though they might be rendered explicit at some point. Ground rules, despite their name, are not actual rules in the sense that they do not have the power of genuine official-formal rules. We summarize some of these distinctions in Table 1 and expand on them below. Examples of ground rules are presented in Table 2.

General behavioral guardrails

Ground rules are behavioral guidelines that aim to project a shared behavioral orientation and facilitate a shared mental model. A mental model provides the team with a collective knowledge structure that facilitates the convergence of modes of acting and thinking within the collective. They have no technical or hard intentions but aim instead to assist team members in the emotional and relational-interdependent labor that defines the team. Because teams are vulnerable to the effects of "bad apples", ground rules may help prevent these effects. As guidelines, they work as guardrails set in place to contain behavior within collectively agreed boundaries that may be revisited if and when

Table 2 Examples of ground rules.

Examples of ground rules collected from our own work as well as from other authors:
- "Respond to emails on the same day"
- "Limit virtual meetings to one hour"
- "No meetings after 5 pm"
- "Avoid email volleyball – just pick up the phone"
- "No teamwork on Sundays" (a rule we found in several MBA teams)
- "The Las Vegas rule: what happens in this team stays in this team" (a top management negotiated rule)
- "You can let yourself down, but it's not OK to let the group down"
- "On virtual meetings, all participants have the video feature active"
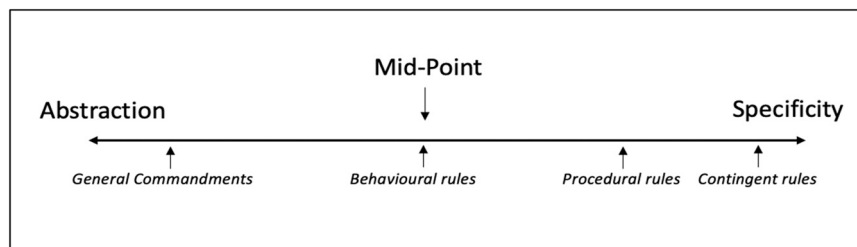- "When one of us talks, everyone else listen without interrupting"

M.P. e Cunha, A. Rego and A.V. Simpson

Fig. 1.. Continuum and ratio of abstraction and specificity in four ground rule types.

necessary. They exist to assist the team and enhance its strengths, not to constrain it.

Emergent

Ground rules are emergent from within the team, a product of the team's dynamic. They are not formally imposed by the organization or the leader, but rather a product of the team dynamics itself: the team's functioning creates norms as part of its life cycle. Rules are thus an emergent property of the team. The fact that teams create these norms does not mean team members will necessarily develop the desired behaviors. The team can instead create norms that favor individualism or rivalry. Leaders may therefore have an important role in facilitating or nurturing the emergence of positive, enabler rules. As in the opening vignette, ground rules may be created in response to specific circumstances to create better teams. The dinner rule was designed in response to a specific circumstance; it emerged as a solution to a new problem. When the problem is overcome, the rule may disappear as it first appeared – although it may also become a permanent guideline if team members consider it worth retaining. Given paradox dynamism, rules may also change as groups mature. Rules may have to be created, recreated (when circumstances change), abandoned (when the logic they support is assimilated), or become salient, explicit, even formal.

Informal but implicit or explicit

Ground rules are not actual rules in the sense of statements of obligatory obeisance. They are more norms, behavioral guidelines that are voluntary – although their capacity to regulate team members behaviors depends on their social-normative strength. One could even say that ground rules are, paradoxically, voluntarily self-enforced. Ground rules are often implicit even though they sometimes may be explicitly formulated and even written. In our work, we have collaborated with senior management teams that have sought to distill several guidelines to support their good functioning. In some instances, these initially informal rules were later formalized as organizationally mandated rules. Because they are mostly informal, ground rules do not replace formal rules. Thus, ground rules and organizationally mandated rules can coexist. Ground rules help the team handle its contradictions in a productive way that simultaneously facilitates freedom and control.

Types of ground rules

We now distinguish several types of ground rules: general commandments, procedural rules, contingent rules, and behavioral rules. These four types of ground rules exist on a continuum of tension, with abstraction as one pole and specificity as the polar opposite (see Fig. 1). The positioning of the four types of ground rules on this continuum relates to their ratio of abstraction and specificity. The rule types can be used to complement one another as they come with strengths and limitations that make them more or less relevant to various contexts. At the mid-point on this continuum, behavioral rules paradoxically integrate both abstraction and specificity.

General commandments

These are rules that are abstract in nature, are likely to have a formal expression, and are typically expected to be followed across the entire organization. They are the type of ground rules that are presented in company workbooks and take the form of commandments, i.e., general exhortations on what should or should not be done, such as "everyone is to be treated with respect", "feedback should be constructive", and "be time efficient". As abstract directives, they are normally general in character and can be applied to many different groups in different organizations, in a multiplicity of situations. The limitation with abstract general commandments is that they are open to wide interpretation and therefore can cause problems within a team. From the above examples, the types of behaviors seen to be *respectful* may vary from one team to another. For some teams, not raising concerns about individual members might be viewed as respectful behavior, while for others this might be seen as disrespectful. The same applies to notions of what constitutes *constructive* feedback and what exactly it means to be *efficient* with time.

Procedural rules

Ground rules introduced to provide general guidance for accomplishing a certain activity or task are referred to as procedural ground rules. Procedural rules facilitate conducting organizational practices, such as running meetings or delivering lectures in the most efficient and effective manner. Examples of procedural ground rules for conducting meetings are "begin and end meetings/lectures on time", or "all mobile phones must be switched off or on vibrate only mode" (for more examples see Table 3).

Table 3 Some examples of procedural ground rules for conducting meetings.

Some examples of procedural ground rules:
- "Start and end meetings/classes on-time"
- "Apologies should be sent to the chair/lecturer in advance"
- "Laptops should only be used for meeting/class specific functions such as presentations or note-taking"
- "Participants should only leave early if they have okayed it with the lecturer/chair in advance"
- "Questions/disagreements should be voiced during the meeting/lecture, not afterwards"
- "The agenda for meetings must be shared with all participants with at least 48 h in advance".

Contingent (idiosyncratic) rules

Contingent rules are those introduced to handle some issue that is team specific. The phrase "ground rules" was in fact initially introduced to describe rules agreed upon by teams for playing a game of baseball within a specific grounds or venue. These were venue specific rules adopted to play the game fairly across various venue that were not entirely similar. The opening vignette is illustrative: the rule was created to smooth the induction of a specific team member. Accordingly, this rule makes sense for this team but not for other teams. Contingent ground rules may therefore be integral to the team's identity: they are shaped by the team's characteristics and recursively shape these characteristics. They may make sense for a team with a particular culture and may be counterproductive for teams with a different culture. Both contingent and procedural ground rules are helpful for accomplishing specific tasks; their limitation, the opposite of that of abstract general commandments, is that they are too specific to be generalized beyond a particular context.

Behavioral rules

Ground rules that guide specific desired actions are referred to as behavioral ground rules. Examples of behavioral ground rules are: "critique ideas, not people", "express views, ask frank questions", "share all important information", or "test all assumptions". The beauty of behavioral ground rules is that they paradoxically accomplish both generalization and specificity: they are general or abstract enough to be widely generalizable across teams and organizations, and particular enough to guide specific desirable outcomes. Behavioral rules may also be idiosyncratic of each team. For example, while the rule that "when one of us talks, everyone else listen without interrupting" may be interpreted in some teams as a guarantee of mutual respect, for others it may be seen as being restrictive of a rich flow of communication and bidirectional feedback.

Functions of ground rules

Whatever the type, ground rules play several important team functions: clarifying expectations, promoting participation, imposing a measure of self-discipline, co-ordinating behaviors, assisting self-correction, and neutralizing negative behaviors and providing scaffolding for managing paradoxes. An additional function, one that is less explored, is that they assist teams in managing their paradoxes.

Clarifying expectations

Ground rules clarify expectations by helping members to make sense of their challenges, including by providing a context for more or less structured discussions. We have facilitated discussions in which teams created rules such as the Las Vegas rule, a case in which a senior management team decided to vent its disagreements only among its members, without involving their respective followers. This rule was created to allow disagreement and cohesion, dissensus and consensus. The Las Vegas rule allowed team members to act in a way that became predictable to each other. This predictability gave members clarity on what they could expect from their colleagues. Containing disagreements within the team allowed the safe expression of dissent in the right place, protecting the team and the organization, helping to create an environment of freedom and accountability.

Promoting participation

Ground rules are a vehicle for team member participation. They are not imposed by team leaders. A defining characteristic is that they are a collective creation. For this reason, they may be more apparent in leaderless teams or in leaderless interactions. In the case of sports, it is known that head coaches often impose rules. But in the case of peer-to-peer interactions such as those between team captains and their peers, ground rules typically emerge from the ground up rather than from the top-down – a subtlety that distinguishes them from team norms that are explicitly leader-led and hence imposed top-down. A team captain and team members may even set ground rules aimed at helping the team deal with (including circumvent) rules *enforced* by the coach.

Imposing a measure of self-discipline

Research has noted that teams construct a shared social reality, resulting from reoccurring interactions and discussions. We extend this argument by considering that such interactions are not strictly conversational but also based on negotiated semi-structural devices such as ground rules. Team norms, because they are emergent and negotiated, tend to impose a measure of self-discipline. When people accept rules of their own making, they are accountable to abide by them. Instead of imposing a form of hierarchical discipline, ground rules stimulate people to nurture discipline as an internally driven process. Ground rules stimulate discipline not as an external order but as an internal choice. Ground rules are self-imposed because they were first chosen. In this sense, ground rules are mechanisms for self-management that emanate from the team itself. Such self-discipline can, over time, define the team's identity

M.P. e Cunha, A. Rego and A.V. Simpson

with a typical way of doing things that characterizes the team as a unique unit.

Coordinating behaviors

One characteristic of teams refers to the fact that team members co-regulate each other's behaviors via what has been called "ambient and discretionary stimuli" to produce a measure of uniformity among members' behaviors. One of these ambient stimuli consists of the ground rules. As an "ambient stimulus", ground rules are not formally salient but rather embedded in the team's way of working. They coordinate behaviors because their meaning is inscribed in the repeated interactions, not because they are explicitly distilled or assumed. For example, the fact that OutSystems, a software company, established the "Ask Why Rule", does not make the rule performative unless it is practiced.

Supporting self-correction

Even accomplished teams require a way to self-correct. Ground rules can assist teams in self-correction (e.g., "we should meet together, each semester, to discuss and reflect on how we are doing our work"). One possible intervention consists in the use of debriefs, or after-action reviews. Debriefs are a simple yet powerful action tool that can be used to stimulate team level reflexivity and learning after an event. They allow the team to systematize discussion and reflection with the objective of promoting experiential learning. These collectively shared discussions/reflections, when carried out with developmental non-punitive versus administrative or punitive purposes, may help ground rules to emerge, implicitly or explicitly, as a response to events.

Neutralizing negative behaviors

As discussed in the team literature, negative behaviors (e.g., making personal attacks to peers, during discussions; hiding important information from peers) may project negative effects over team functioning. One of the goals of ground rules is addressing and mitigating these behaviors. By engaging with intra-team conflicts, implicitly or explicitly, ground rules help teams constructively and participatively address the tensions and contradictions that pervade them. For example, in the case of the opening vignette, the dinner rule was introduced to combine the tension between individual's desire to stand out and the team's need for putting the collective first. The rule served to productively balance this tension without forcing the formal structure to intervene and thereby avoid structural measures that could be interpreted as obtrusive. In a sport team, the team and its captain may set a ground rule that allow the team to neutralize negative behaviors quickly, before the coach notices those behaviors.

Managing paradoxes

Ground rules are also coordination devices that teams/organizations adopt to deal with the paradoxes of group life.

They perform several functions promoting ways of thinking that favor a paradox mindset. We elaborate on this important but somewhat ignored dimension of ground rules in the next section.

Rules as paradox scaffolds

Ground rules function as paradox scaffolds in the sense that they help teams articulate contradictions, supporting the development of a paradox mindset. Operating as a "both-and" mechanism to address oppositions, ground rules are themselves paradoxical (e.g., while not formally enforced, they contribute to effective team functioning when team members informally observe them). A paradox mindset has been presented as a cognitive process, happening in people's cognitions. Recent research suggests, however, that developing a paradox mindset is a collective effort. It is developed when people integrate different worldviews to collectively make sense of contradictions, not as dysfunctions to be eliminated but as exercises in managing the oppositions inherent to teams and organizations.

The role of conversations and relationships in the development of a paradoxical mindset have been explored but the role of ground rules in scaffolding these interactions has not received attention. For the reasons explained earlier, ground rules may play a major role in allowing people to integrate opposites as paradox management. As in the case of the introductory vignette, ground rules may support teams in considering *both* individual *and* collective motives. These rules thus support teams in determining how to handle the contradictions of group life not in abstract but in practical terms. Ground rules thus can be presented as scaffolds in the sense that they exist as auxiliary structures that help teams integrate contradictions. As indicated in Table 4, ground rules are helpful because they promote paradoxical effects.

Ground rules offer paradoxical solutions to handle contradictions that pervade life in teams. Ground rules aim to preserve a team's egalitarian ethos simultaneously introducing a measure of self-discipline. As reflected in Table 4, what makes ground rules particularly powerful is their role in addressing team paradoxes, synthesizing contradictory attributes that make oppositions objects of both-and approaches.

Table 4	How ground rules help handle paradoxes.
Ground rules...	But they...
Are norms	Are voluntary
Introduce predictability	Promote autonomy
Emphasize the collective	Tolerate diversity
Are central to action	Are unobtrusive
Promote self-discipline	Have collective reach
Serve as a control mechanism	Preserve freedom
Are not formally enforced	Are informally observed

Rules for rules

Ground rules are not a formal, bureaucratic device. We have worked with teams that aimed to articulate and explicitly clarify their rules. This clarification, though, does not turn ground rules into real, in the sense of mandatory, rules. Their effectiveness depends on three characteristics; they should be limited in number, organic, and natural. We discuss these attributes next.

Few is more

Ground rules should be few so that they do not become perceived as controlling and intrusive. The fact that they are limited gives them relevance and a "must respect" nature. This is a characteristic they share with simple rules: a handful of rules can be remembered and respected, whereas the proliferation of rules can become obtrusive and restricting. When they are only informal, members will likely not even know how many rules exist, or think to resist them. It is therefore important that rules do not proliferate.

The proliferation of rules can be experienced as the expansion of burdensome imposed obligations that reduce freedom and harm the sense of autonomy that teams are expected to preserve. One of us recently consulted to a client organization with an "organizational culture handbook", created through a top-down approach, that comprised 91 dense A5 pages with numerous rules, often conveyed through "stories" and respective "moral of the story" explanations. A possible risk is that, in seeking to preserve flexibility, a team breaks a rule – which creates distrust and cynicism. Paradoxically, ground rules are more likely to be obeyed when they are few rather than many.

Emergent

Ground rules appear to be naturally emergent. By "natural" we refer to the fact that they do not appear to imposed but rather arise as acceptable and even necessary collective choices for the greater good of the group's effective functioning. Ground rules emerge from the team's experience. They are accepted because they help the collective in its coordinating efforts, assisting it in handling contradictions that might otherwise be harmful. Once discussed (e.g., in debriefs), these rules become part of a team: as emergent constructions, emanating from the team's life.

Dynamic

The emergent nature of ground rules also makes them subject to adaptation or abandonment once *new* emergent conditions make them redundant. Ground rules are therefore dynamic. They are not as stable as overarching values, as they are introduced and adjusted to help the team deal with practical problems. For this reason, as changes are introduced and the team reconsiders its functioning (e.g., in debriefs), new rules may be necessary. Sometimes, it is the team itself that recognizes the need for new rules. At other times, change is suggested by new members joining the team. A new member in a small team questioning existing rules may spark the revising of rules by the team as a whole.

How leaders may help ground rules emerge

How can ground rules be created in a way that benefits the team, its members individually and the organization as a whole? Ideally, the creation of ground rules should emerge from the team who conjointly agree to be guided by them. Members are more likely to adhere to rules they themselves have set. Nonetheless, we suggest that team leaders play an important role in helping the team to set and maintain ground rules. Leaders may help the team to decide if rules should be implicit or made explicit to facilitate discussion and negotiation of the rules and their application. When leaders try to impose – instead of facilitating their teams in setting ground rules – a boomerang effect may emerge: team members don't identify with the rules, they develop a kind of "cynical obedience" towards them, and set implicit informal rules aimed at resisting or countervailing the imposed formal order.

Nudging and influencing: the implicit approach

Ground rules are often implicit. They tend to be introduced indirectly or subtly as in the case of our opening vignette. Leaders can use implicit rules for nudging the team towards desired behaviors. In this case, they remain in the "ambient", as tacit rules, or are introduced to predispose people to act in a given way, without dispossessing members of their agency and deliberative power. Leaders may act as a *primus inter pares* that, because of personal authority, can make proposals on behalf of the group, as a member of the group. Leaders are therefore not passive spectators of the emergence of rules. Passivity may even favor the emergence of dysfunctional rules associated with personal agendas rather than collective interest, with a similar effect to that mentioned above, when leaders impose rules. In short, both imposition and passivity are counterproductive, the virtue being in the middle.

Clarifying: the explicit approach

Leaders may document or render existing ground rules explicit for these to be embraced. In this case leaders clarify the rule and render it explicit, for example, at the beginning of meetings, workshops, or classes, requesting input from all participants. This effort of clarification does not necessarily imply a written statement, it may just involve the verbal communication of a rule, in meetings or personal interactions. For example, reiterating that "this is how we do things in this team" clarifies and makes the rule apparent. Clarification gives a rule performative power: through clarification, leaders do things with words, establishing what is appropriate and what is not. This can be formalized at the organizational level in handbooks as general organizational ground rules, which will coexist with local, team specific rules. The formalization of ground rules per se is not positive or negative. Formalization of ground rules means the rules are made explicit. This can be

beneficial if it promotes dialog and facilitates team member acceptance of the rules.

Personal example

Team leaders increase their team's capacity to absorb a rule by embodying its respective application. When leaders proclaim rules that they do not respect, it conveys a clear message about the rule's value. In the case of the organization with the dense and lengthy "organizational culture handbook" mentioned above, several rules emphasized a leadership duty of developing and enabling followers through kind, friendly and respectful relations. However, at the beginning of meetings, all participants, including middle- and low-level managers, would get up when a top manager entered the room. Leading by example matters because example is a way of communicating rules through deeds rather than words.

Agent of balancing

Finally, leaders can promote the use of ground rules by acting as balancing agents, using rules to assist the team in handling its paradoxes. Because teams are rich in contradiction and opposition, leaders need to help the group in their discovery of rules that allow the collective to deal with its inner contradictions. Rules are important for assisting teams in accommodating tensions. It is the role of leaders to support the team in finding rules that assist such tension integration. Returning to the opening case, the rule was effective because it integrated the needs of the individual and the collective. Instead of forcing individuality to dissolve in the collective, the rule harmoniously integrated the two, allowing individual differences to be affirmed within the team. Leaders may play an important role in the formulation of rules with such paradoxical content. By so doing, they will be promoting a team collective paradoxical mindset that will create competences in managing the paradoxes of group life.

The future of ground rules

It is likely that emerging organizational forms will see ground rules play a more significant role in team functioning than has been the case till now. We next explain why this might happen by considering the case of agile organizations, virtual teams and team resilience.

Agile organizations

Ground rules may be more important in agile organizations than in traditional hierarchies because agility implies a measure of autonomy (aimed at facilitating initiative, proactivity, creativity, and improvisation) that requires non-traditional forms of coordination. Ground rules offer one such form of coordination, promoting mechanisms that are not strictly hierarchical. Because agility requires structures

that are not obtrusive, hence forward, teams and organizations may need to engage more with ground rules as team level coordination mechanisms.

Virtual teams

The growing prevalence of virtual, geographically dispersed teams will also increase the importance of ground rules. Virtual teams may benefit from the presence of principles that create common ground with professionals who do not interact face-to-face. The importance of ground rules gained a clear expression during the COVID-19 pandemic when work suddenly went online and an etiquette for online meetings was quickly introduced. Rules such as "Keep your camera on", "Mute yourself when not talking", "Raise your hand before you speak", or "Nobody is allowed to dominate discussions in meetings" are examples of ground rules applied to online meetings. The specific case of rules for the virtual context constitutes a promising setting for clarifying the role of ground rules.

Team resilience

Future work may also explore the role of ground rules in the construction of team resilience. As internally initiated mechanisms, ground rules may support the sorts of positive relationships associated with resilience. Resilience is important to teams in general but may be even more central to the functioning of dispersed, virtual teams, which will critically depend upon the presence of these relational "scaffolds". Ground rules may operate as facilitators of social capital in teams, an important team resilience resource.

Conclusion

Ground rules are essential for the functioning of effective teams. Ground rules can manifest as different types ranging from abstract general commandments applied to entire organizations to more specific contingent rules that are team or context specific. In the middle are behavioral rules that paradoxically balance the two poles. Ground rules help members deal with the challenges of team life by functioning to clarifying expectations, promoting participation, imposing a measure of self-discipline, coordinating behaviors, assisting self-correction, and neutralizing negative behaviors. Whatever their different types or functions, some aspects that ground rules hold in common is that they are not imposed through a top-down approach, rather they emerge from interactions to solve team problems; they are more effective when they are few rather than many; at their best they are dynamic in that they are adjusted or abandoned in a changing environment; and they contribute to team resilience. To the last two points, we see ground rules playing a larger future role in the new business environment as it adapts to become more agile and responsive market disruptions and opportunities.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

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