

Viget Team Collaboration Guidelines

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What This Guide Is

This guide offers a starting point for building a healthy project team dynamic, with the ultimate goal of creating an environment that produces the best work from team members. A healthy team dynamic means

- Questions and diverse opinions are welcome
- Mistakes aren't held against you
- You're able to bring up tough issues and problems
- No one is rejected for being or thinking different

Research has shown that the key to creating a healthy team dynamic is **psychological safety**. At Viget, we define psychological safety as feeling comfortable speaking up, admitting mistakes, and being part of a culture of learning without fear. Those without psychological safety may filter themselves, avoid speaking up, and are limited in how they are able to contribute their perspective and background.

Below, we've created a set of best practices, which are intended to foster psychological safety in pursuit of a healthy team dynamic. These guidelines are not intended to discourage healthy conflict within teams. Good work requires us to productively challenge ourselves and each other, which can and should be uncomfortable.

Recognizing Healthy and Unhealthy Team Dynamics

On healthy teams...

- Junior folks don't hesitate to ask for guidance.
- Senior folks are comfortable admitting to mistakes.
- Critique is sought out, appreciated, and spread evenly across all roles and titles.
- The whole team might decide to try out a new routine to encourage collaboration, like Start/Stop/Continue.
- Challenges are met with patience and support.
- You might hear phrases like, "It seems to me that..." or "Can I make an observation?"
- People often ask, "How could this improve?" or "What am I missing?"
- When someone asks for feedback, others respond.

On unhealthy teams...

- Team members are afraid to admit they've never done a project like this one before.
- Junior folks don't feel like they can ask for help.
- Senior folks are unavailable for mentorship and delegate "helping" tasks to other team members.
- Team members don't share lessons learned.
- Challenges are met with negativity and exasperation.
- You might hear a phrase like, "That's just the way we've always done it."
- From the outside you might not realize that the team has a variety of opinions and interests.
- Nobody is willing to express a conflicting point of view.
- Often one person is dominating team meetings and discussions.
- Discussions and decisions feel 'behind closed doors,' without full team transparency or understanding.

Team Collaboration Best Practices

Cultivate self-awareness

As a member of a team, your actions and words impact others. Your behavior signals what you find appropriate and acceptable, and can have implications on whether peers feel safe sharing opinions, ideas, and feedback in a group setting. Cultivating self-awareness could mean:

- Monitoring your presence in conversations - Are you taking invitations to participate? Are you leaving space for others?
- Are your strong opinions shutting down conversation? Are you demonstrating that 'wrong opinions' will be mocked?
- Soliciting feedback on your work and sharing feedback on a peer's work

Embrace Vulnerability

The best idea is seldom the first one and great work is a product of refinement and iteration. Make space for people to share their unpolished work and imperfect selves with each other. To encourage team vulnerability,

- share in-progress ideas, work, and opinions;
- admit when you're wrong, or when you've made a mistake;
- name when you're unsure of an answer or solution;
- communicate when you've changed your mind as work progresses;
- share professional growth goals; and
- communicate your own limitations.

Assume Positive Intent

We're all humans, working to build a better digital world. Assume missteps made by team members aren't intentional. Assume feedback from team members comes from a constructive, well-intentioned place, intended to help you grow as a teammate.

We can contribute to a culture of positive intent by acting with good intentions ourselves. When you give feedback, aim to truly assist a teammate's growth or the team's success. Your words can be straightforward and direct, but still considerate and caring.

Mistakes, disagreements, and tension are unavoidable, but by giving each other the benefit of the doubt, we can focus on making shared progress.

Addressing an Unhealthy Team Dynamic

You may find yourself in a situation where you feel psychologically unsafe with peers. Below are some suggestions for addressing the situation. Please remember that complaints concerning harassment, bullying, and/or microaggressions deserve immediate discussion with your manager or People Director.

1. **Assess the situation.** Check in with yourself – Are you feeling healthy discomfort, or is the team dynamic unsafe or unhealthy? (Subtle behaviors greatly impact team dynamics. Trust your gut.) If you'd like, privately ask a peer to offer a perspective on the situation. Or if you feel comfortable doing so, discuss the situation with your manager.
2. **Address the situation with the peer making you feel unsafe.** Try to use the best practices detailed below, and ask for support from your manager, a member of the People Team, or another team member if you need to. (Note, if a colleague brings a potentially psychologically unsafe situation to you, it is not your responsibility to fix the situation. Your role is to listen, provide an opinion if asked, and encourage your peer to have a direct conversation with the person causing psychological harm or speak with their manager.)

Best practices for addressing a psychologically unsafe situation:

- Start with positive intent. It's possible that they are not aware of how their actions are impacting you.
- Use "I" language. Describe your feedback in relation to your own experience. Avoid accusatory language.
- Be specific. Describe specific events or actions and their impact on you. (Ex: "when you said/ did this, I felt_____")
- Focus on impact. Point out the impact the peer's action had on the team or you.
- Be present. Make sure you have the time and energy to be present after giving feedback too!

Some common pitfalls:

- The feedback "sandwich" – couching a criticism between two positive comments, obscuring the important critical feedback.

- Focusing on intent rather than on observed actions.
 - Demanding that the receiver change.
 - Feedback that is indirect or too general to be actionable. Example: “You’re too negative!”
 - Hit and run. After offering feedback, the giver is not available physically or mentally to discuss the receiver’s reaction.
3. **Confirm a plan of action.** After a conversation with your peer, agree on the next steps. Possible outcomes could be:
- Acknowledgment of the behavior.
 - Agreed-upon new behaviors.
 - New team practices. (For example, if someone dominates Google Meet calls, perhaps the team uses the ‘Hand Raising’ feature.)
 - Revisit the project structure. Structural factors have significant impacts on team dynamics.

If you don’t feel there’s an appropriate resolution, escalate the situation to management.

4. **Have a conversation with your peer’s manager.** After failed attempts to address the situation directly, consider addressing the problem with your peer’s manager. Describe your experience and ask for their help in determining the next steps in your plan of action to increase your psychological safety.

Additional Resources and Notes

- Psychological Safety Resources:
 - [Managing The Risk of Learning](#), HBS
 - [What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team](#), NYTimes
 - [How Does Psychological Safety Actually Work](#), Forbes
- [DEI Commitment](#)