
The Unwritten Rules of the Workplace



Learning Objectives:

- Develop awareness of the “unwritten rules” regarding the workplace.
- Make sense of workplace dynamics and where they might come from.
- Understand how to advocate for yourself when you aren’t sure about the rules.



Have you ever wondered?

- What are the "unspoken rules" for succeeding in your job or career?
- How do you discover these rules needed to play the game of work?
- When should you follow the rules, and when is it okay not to?

Reflect, Pair & Share:

Think of a situation where you were unsure about what was expected of you in one of your classes, a job, or any other professional setting?

If so, what did you do to figure out what to do?





What are the “Unwritten Workplace Rules”?

And where do they come from?

How would you describe unspoken rules at work?

- Invisible forces that shape workplace culture
- Secret codes that are important for success
- Hidden norms that may be the boss's preference
- Things you think you should know but no one has saidyet



Brainstorming Session:

What are some common and uncommon unwritten rules you might have heard or observed in your life?

Examples:

- Sports: Re-rack your weights after you use them.
- Life: If someone is showing you a picture on their phone, don't just start swiping left or right...
- Work: Do not gossip in the workplace.

Share with the group.

Examples of “Unwritten workplace Rules”

- Working longer than expected to be seen favorably by supervisors.
- Dress code: based on organization and company.
- The way one speaks, having to code switch to be seen as “articulate or intellectual”.
- Communicating & socializing informally with co-workers to build relationships.
- Being accountable for your own professional development.

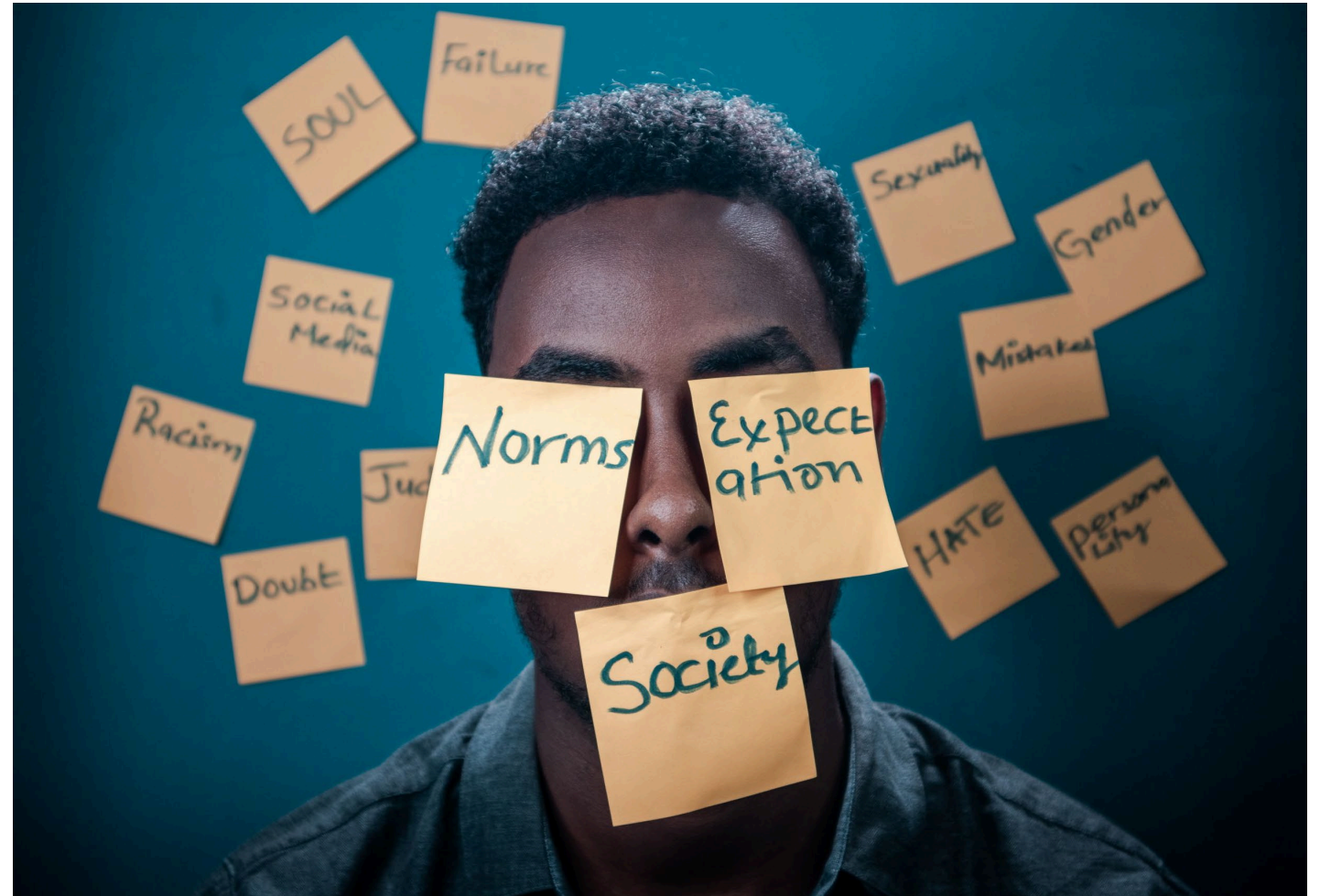


What influences the rules?

Cycle of Socialization & Social Cognitive Theory

Cycle of Socialization


The cycle of socialization is the process of how people learn and take on "norms", values, and behaviors in society, that influences our identities, behaviors and decisions.



Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) explains how we learn from watching others and how our behavior is influenced by what we see.





Take a few
minutes to
reflect on these
questions.

- When you first started college, what expectations were taught to you, what assumptions did you make, what reinforced those ideas?
- What did you do when you didn't fully understand how to do something you needed to do for a class?

Understand the Game of Work

- Who leads meetings?
- How are expectations from your supervisor implied?
- What do people wear?
- How do people socialize?
- Should you leave before the boss?
- What is highly valued at your organization
- Where is the power and influence in your team?
- How are ideas presented and or debated?
- Are advancements in your company based only on productivity, or is it relational?

By understanding the behaviors of other coworkers, it will help you figure out company culture.

Tips on how to recognize the rules...

- Watch and listen for how people act at work. If you're unsure, don't hesitate to ask questions.
- Get guidance when you're unsure about the rules, find someone you trust at work to help, like a buddy.
- Ask experienced coworkers or even folks from other companies or organizations for advice.
- Learn from your mistakes and address them.
- Recognize if behaviors are being contradicted by coworkers

Possible benefits of knowing the "Unwritten Rules"

- Knowing the unspoken work rules can help you connect with your team better.
- Following these rules can make it easier to communicate and work with your colleagues.
- Understanding these rules can avoid confusion and unintended problems.
- Knowing these rules can boost how others see you professionally.

Now you know the rules...

How do you decide how to act?

1. Consider where the rules might have come from socially and historically.
2. Determine your options for if & how how to engage or not.
3. What are the pros and cons of your options?
4. Question if you are advocating for yourself?

Time to play... Workplace Scenarios

1. Pick a scenario from the worksheet.
2. Reflect on what you might do in each scenario.
3. What is informing how you see the situation playing out?
4. Identify the potential socialization factors and expectations that are at play.
5. Acknowledge any feelings that come up with the scenario.
6. Develop an action or solution that you would implement.

Thank you



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