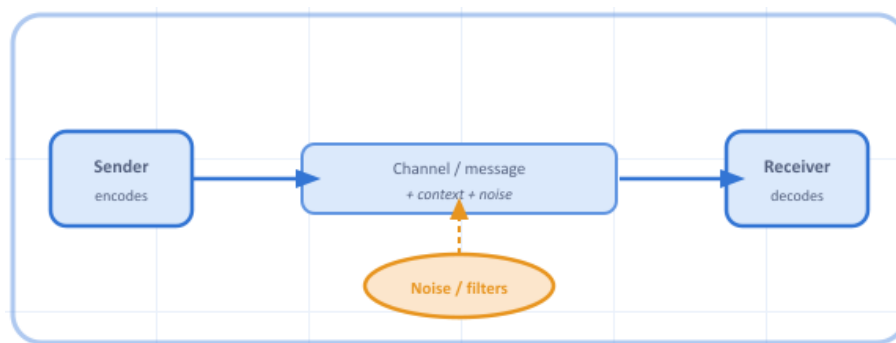


Guide

Communication and conflict management in work teams

In-depth development of the State of the art topics



Updated June 2026

About this document

This document is an in-depth development of the topics in the reference map (State of the art) for communicating effectively in the workplace and managing conflict when it arises within a team or between teams, which is available at: [Skill Arena](#).

Use it as reference material to keep your practice aligned with, and checked against, current professional knowledge.

It is complemented by the training and assessment platform in Skill Arena. In the [Communication and conflict management in work teams](#) area you can take training tests to check and improve your level of knowledge and, if you wish, you can also obtain a diploma that provides curricular accreditation of professional competence and currency in this area.



State of knowledge

Knowledge about interpersonal communication and conflict management is, for the most part, a mature and settled body: the classic reference frameworks —Watzlawick, Rosenberg, Fisher-Ury, Thomas-Kilmann, Edmondson— retain their validity without structural revisions. The only zone of active, fast-moving evolution is the introduction of artificial intelligence into team communication, which has been producing academic and practitioner literature since 2024-2025. Throughout the document, the labels (ESTABLISHED, CONSOLIDATING, EMERGING) help identify the maturity of each concept:

ESTABLISHED settled consensus; knowledge taken as required.

CONSOLIDATING gaining adoption fast; not yet universal but already relevant.

EMERGING recent frontier; high relevance and high volatility.

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BLOCK 1 · FUNDAMENTALS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

1. Communication models and process · ESTABLISHED

How communication works and which variables are involved. The Shannon-Weaver and Watzlawick models as practical tools for diagnosing failures.

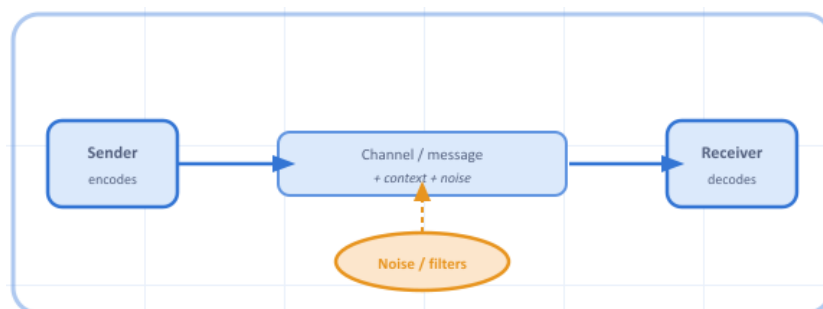
Introduction

Communication is the process by which a sender transfers a message to a receiver through a channel. This apparently simple definition contains enormous complexity: at every step of the process distortions can occur that make the message received different from the one sent. Understanding this process is the obligatory starting point for any work on communication in teams.

1.1 The Shannon-Weaver model

Developed in 1949 to describe the transmission of electrical signals, the model introduced the concept of noise as everything that distorts the transmission between sender and receiver. Its value in human contexts is diagnostic: when a communication fails, the first step is to identify in which element of the process the distortion has occurred.

The five elements: Sender (encodes) · Channel (medium) · Message (content) · Noise (distortion) · Receiver (decodes). Feedback closes the cycle.



The communication process: sender, channel, receiver, noise and feedback.

1.2 Watzlawick's axioms

Paul Watzlawick formulated five axioms of human communication. The first is the most cited: it is impossible not to communicate. All behaviour in the presence of another is communication, even silence. The second distinguishes the content level ("what is said") from the relationship level ("how it is said and what that how says about the relationship").

The fifth axiom —all communication is either symmetrical or complementary— is especially relevant in teams: communication between equals tends towards symmetry; communication between hierarchically different roles tends towards complementarity. When this difference is not managed explicitly, it can generate role or authority conflicts.

1.3 Practical application in teams

For a Scrum Master or Agile Coach, these models are diagnostic tools. When a communication fails, they make it possible to ask the right questions: Is the problem in the channel? In the encoding? In the relational noise? In the decoding?

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Identify in which element of the communication process a failure has occurred and formulate a diagnosis based on the model.
- Distinguish between the content level and the relationship level in a team communication, and act on the right level.
- Recognise when noise is contextual (pressure, stress) and when it is relational (mistrust, prior grievances).
- Explain to a team why it is impossible not to communicate and the practical consequences of that axiom.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Confusing intent with impact. The sender assumes the receiver has received exactly what they meant to say. The receiver always decodes from their own context and relationship.

Ignoring relational noise. Prior tensions and conflicts are the main source of noise in teams, yet the models are applied only to the content of the message.

Treating silence as an absence of communication. Watzlawick's first axiom is explicit: silence always communicates. Not giving feedback, not replying, not showing up are messages in themselves.

Further reading

- [Watzlawick et al. — Pragmatics of Human Communication \(Norton, 1967\)](#)
- [Shannon & Weaver — A Mathematical Theory of Communication \(1949\)](#)

BLOCK 1 · FUNDAMENTALS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

2. Verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal communication · ESTABLISHED

How the three communicative registers interact and coherence or incoherence between them as a source of mistrust.

Introduction

Human communication operates simultaneously in three registers: the verbal (what is said), the paraverbal (how it is said: tone, pace, volume, pauses) and the non-verbal (posture, facial expression, eye contact, proxemics). When these three registers are incoherent with one another, the receiver tends to give more weight to the non-verbal and paraverbal than to the literal content.

2.1 The three registers

Albert Mehrabian's work on the communication of attitudes showed that in situations of emotional ambiguity the receiver gives more credibility to tone and body language than to words. Although the popularised figure (55-38-7) is taken out of the context of the original studies, the underlying principle is sound: when there is incoherence between channels, the non-verbal wins.

Coherence between channels. When the verbal content, the tone and the body language convey the same message, communication is perceived as authentic. Incoherence between channels triggers mistrust in the receiver, frequently in an unconscious way.

2.2 Application in distributed teams

In distributed or hybrid teams, the reduction of the non-verbal channel (video call vs. in person) and its almost total elimination (text, chat) drastically changes the economy of communication. The receiver has less information to disambiguate the message and resorts more to interpretation, which increases the risk of misunderstandings.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Identify incoherences between the three registers in a team conversation and name them in a way that does not come across as accusatory.
- Consciously adapt one's own register so that the three channels convey the same message in emotionally charged situations.
- Explain to the team why difficult conversations require being in person or on video rather than text.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Reducing difficult communication to text. Chat or email messages eliminate the paraverbal and the non-verbal, which are the channels that matter most when there is emotional charge.

Overvaluing the impact of verbal content. A formally correct speech that conveys tension through tone and posture produces the opposite of the intended effect.

Further reading

- [Watzlawick et al. — Pragmatics of Human Communication \(Norton, 1967\)](#)
- [Mehrabian — Silent Messages \(Wadsworth, 1971\)](#)

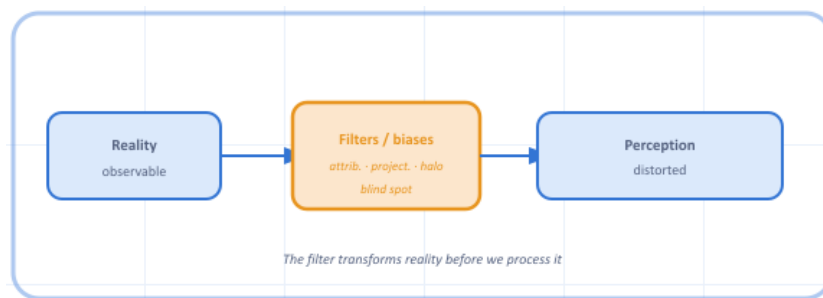
BLOCK 1 · FUNDAMENTALS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

3. Perception, filters and biases · ESTABLISHED

How perceptual filters and cognitive biases distort what is communicated and what is received, and their link with conflict escalation.

Introduction

No one communicates or receives messages from a neutral state. Between observable reality and the interpretation we make of it there is always a set of filters: prior experiences, values, expectations and cognitive biases. Most interpersonal conflicts originate or are amplified in the perception phase, not in the objective reality of the facts.



Cognitive filters transform observable reality before we come to process it.

3.1 Biases relevant in teams

Attribution bias is the most frequent in conflicts: we tend to attribute our own mistakes to circumstances and the mistakes of others to their character or intentions. Projection consists of attributing our own feelings or intentions to the other person. The halo effect lets a positive or negative characteristic condition the overall assessment of a person.

Attribution, projection, halo effect. The three mechanisms distort listening and feed escalation: the objectively neutral action is interpreted negatively, generates a defensive response, which confirms the other person's negative filters, which escalates... Managing filters is the first de-escalation tool.

3.2 The two-stories technique

Stone, Patton and Heen propose exploring the "two stories": how I experience the situation and how the other person experiences it. This exploration does not require anyone to be wrong: both stories can be partially true simultaneously. Naming one's own bias ("I am interpreting that... is that right?") opens space for correction.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Identify, in a conflict situation, which interpretations are being presented as facts, and separate them.
- Name one's own bias in a difficult conversation to open space for correction.

- Use the two-stories technique to explore both parties' interpretations before looking for solutions.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Treating interpretations as facts. In tense situations, people unknowingly mix what they saw with what they interpreted. Separating these planes is the basic operation of any difficult conversation.

Denying one's own bias. Believing that one is objective while others are biased is the blind-spot bias, one of the hardest to address.

Further reading

- [Kahneman — Thinking, Fast and Slow \(Farrar, 2011\)](#)
- [Stone, Patton & Heen — Difficult Conversations \(Viking, 1999\)](#)

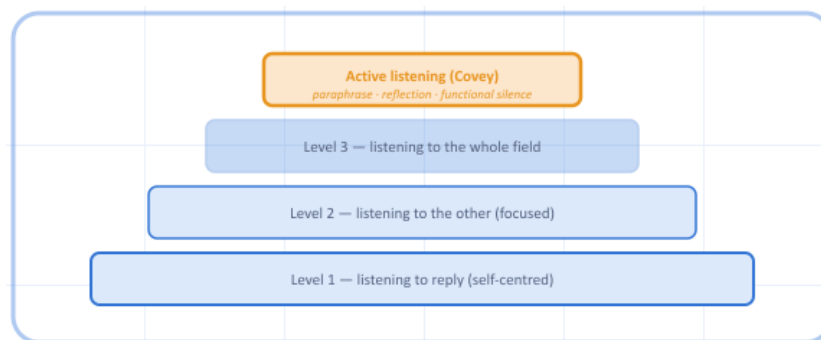
BLOCK 1 · FUNDAMENTALS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

4. Active listening · ESTABLISHED

What distinguishes listening from hearing, and the techniques that turn listening into a tool for communication and conflict management.

Introduction

Listening is the most under-trained communicative competency in work settings. Most people, while their counterpart is speaking, are mentally forming their reply instead of processing what they are hearing. This reactive listening is the norm in work conversations, especially when there is pressure, hierarchy or disagreement.



The levels of listening: from self-centred reactive listening to active listening of the whole field.

4.1 Active listening techniques

Active listening (Covey, Habit 5: "seek first to understand, then to be understood") is not a passive state but an active skill that requires deliberate practice. Its main techniques are: paraphrasing (giving back in one's own words what has been understood), emotional reflection (naming the emotional state one perceives), clarifying questions (opening, not closing) and functional silence (tolerating pauses without filling them).

Functional silence. In high-speed work environments, silence is perceived as discomfort and there is a tendency to fill it. However, the pause after a question or an emotional disclosure is the space in which the counterpart processes and decides how much to share. Interrupting that silence closes the conversation.

4.2 Barriers to listening in teams

The most frequent barriers are: multitasking (checking the phone or email while someone is speaking), hierarchy (listening less to those perceived as having lower authority), haste (the meeting has an agenda and one has to move on) and emotional filtering (stopping listening when something triggers a defensive reaction).

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Paraphrase accurately what their counterpart has said before replying, including the emotional component when present.
- Hold functional silence in difficult conversations without filling it out of discomfort.
- Identify in real time when they have stopped listening and shifted to preparing their reply, and redirect attention.
- Distinguish between active listening and interrogation: the difference lies in the purpose (to understand vs. to extract information).

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Solving before understanding. The most frequent antipattern in coaches and managers: jumping to solutions before the person has finished formulating their problem.

Confusing active listening with interrogation. Active listening opens; interrogation closes. The difference lies in the type of questions and the implicit purpose.

Simulated multitasking. Maintaining eye contact while internally handling another task. The counterpart perceives it and becomes less open.

Further reading

- [Covey — The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People \(Simon & Schuster, 1989\)](#)
- [Scrum Manager BoK — Communication](#)

BLOCK 1 · FUNDAMENTALS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

5. Communication styles · ESTABLISHED

Recurring communicative profiles and how to adapt one's own communication to the counterpart's style without giving up the message.

Introduction

People develop relatively stable communicative patterns. The most widespread taxonomy distinguishes four styles: passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive and assertive. Identifying one's own style and the counterpart's is the precondition for adapting communication effectively.

5.1 The four styles

The passive style avoids conflict and gives in even when the cost is high. The aggressive one puts its own position first without considering the impact on the other. The passive-aggressive one expresses disagreement indirectly: through silence, superficial compliance or subtle sabotage. The assertive one —the most functional in teams— expresses one's own needs in a direct, clear and respectful way.

The passive-aggressive style is the most damaging in teams. It is the hardest to address because it is the most invisible: the person appears to agree but does not. Its manifestations: agreeing in the meeting and not delivering, systematically arriving late to the sessions of the person one rejects, or sharing disagreements only outside the formal channels.

5.2 Adaptation without surrender

Adapting one's communicative style to the counterpart's does not mean adopting their style, but adjusting the way the message is conveyed so that it lands with less resistance. With a passive counterpart, it helps to give more time and ask more open questions. With an aggressive counterpart, it helps to keep one's own emotional state steady and not enter the escalation dynamic.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Identify one's own habitual communicative style and the situations that activate or dysregulate it.
- Recognise the counterpart's style and adapt the form (not the substance) of the message to reduce resistance.
- Name the passive-aggressive style when detecting it in the team, without accusing, using concrete behavioural observations.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Confusing assertiveness with aggressiveness. Assertiveness is direct and respectful at the same time. The aggressive style is direct but not respectful.

Adapting the style by giving up the content. If, in order not to confront a passive-aggressive counterpart, the topic is avoided, the style has not been adapted: one has capitulated.

Further reading

- [Alberti & Emmons — Your Perfect Right \(Impact, 2017\)](#)
- [Scrum Manager BoK — Communication](#)

BLOCK 2 · EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE TEAM

6. Psychological safety as a condition for communication · CONSOLIDATING

Why psychological safety is the structural prerequisite for honest communication, feedback and conflict management to be possible in a team.

Introduction

Psychological safety, defined by Amy Edmondson as the shared belief that the team is a safe space for taking interpersonal risks, is the base condition without which the other communication competencies cannot unfold. A team may know all the feedback and active-listening techniques, but if its members fear ridicule or punishment for expressing their ideas, those techniques will go unused.



Edmondson's quadrant: the high-performance zone combines high standards and high psychological safety.

6.1 What it is and what it is not

Psychological safety is not the absence of conflict, nor condescension, nor low standards. A team can have very high psychological safety and very high demand for results at the same time. That is precisely the combination Edmondson associates with high performance.

Signs of low psychological safety. No one asks questions in retrospectives. Criticism circulates outside the formal channels. Problems are escalated upward instead of being dealt with in the team. Apparent consensus hides unexpressed dissent. Bad news arrives late or does not arrive at all.

6.2 Practices that build psychological safety

The most effective practices include: modelling vulnerability (sharing one's own doubts), responding constructively when someone points out a problem, explicitly recognising the contribution of ideas that question the consensus, and protecting those who dissent from the negative reactions of other team members.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Diagnose a team's level of psychological safety through behavioural observation and name the concrete signals.

- Design specific interventions to increase psychological safety adapted to the team's context.
- Distinguish psychological safety from a lack of standards and from permissiveness, and explain the difference to the team.
- Model vulnerability authentically, without falling into performative self-presentation.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Measuring psychological safety only with surveys. Surveys capture perceptions at a given moment, but observable behaviours in meetings are the most reliable indicator.

Confusing tolerance with safety. Allowing non-constructive criticism in the name of psychological safety degrades the level of the conversation and can damage cohesion.

Further reading

- [Edmondson — The Fearless Organization \(Wiley, 2018\)](#)
- [NeuroLeadership Institute — The Neuroscience of Psychological Safety \(2025\)](#)

BLOCK 2 · EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE TEAM

7. Communication in team meetings · ESTABLISHED

Meeting structures that foster equitable participation and clarity, and frequent dysfunctional patterns.

Introduction

Meetings are the main space for collective communication in a team and, often, the main generator of friction. A poorly designed or poorly facilitated meeting is not a time problem: it is a communication problem that leaves residues of frustration, misalignment and mistrust.

7.1 Structures that foster equitable participation

Team agreements on how meetings are run are the first design mechanism: who convenes them, how time is managed, how decisions are made and how agreements are recorded. The explicit assignment of roles (facilitator, timekeeper, note-taker) distributes the load and reduces monopolisation patterns.

Check-in and check-out. A brief round of check-in at the start and check-out at the end increases presence and reduces the conflicts that emerge from unprocessed side conversations. They are especially valuable in teams with high emotional charge or after episodes of tension.

7.2 Dysfunctional patterns

The most frequent: monopolisation by one or two people; silence that conceals disagreement; decisions taken outside the meeting and presented as done deals; side conversations that generate two simultaneous agendas.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Design a meeting structure adapted to the objective, with defined roles and timings.
- Intervene constructively when a dysfunctional pattern emerges, without interrupting the flow or generating more tension.
- Record and communicate agreements in a traceable, action-oriented way.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Meetings with no agenda or a vague agenda. An agenda of "sprint updates" is not an agenda: it is an excuse for each person to report for as long as they see fit.

Recording agreements without an owner or a date. An agreement with no owner and no deadline is noise. The minimum record includes: what has been decided, who is responsible and when it is carried out or reviewed.

Further reading

· [Schwaber & Sutherland — Scrum Guide \(Scrum.org, 2020\)](#)

- [Kaner et al. — Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making \(Jossey-Bass, 2014\)](#)

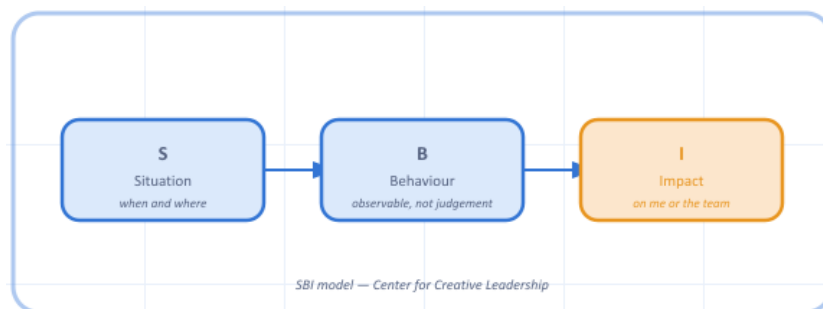
BLOCK 2 · EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE TEAM

8. Feedback: giving and receiving · CONSOLIDATING

Principles and models of effective feedback, and the difference between a culture of continuous feedback and one-off feedback.

Introduction

Feedback is the most powerful learning mechanism available in a team. Without effective feedback, problematic behaviours perpetuate themselves, talents do not develop and mistakes repeat. However, it is also one of the most avoided conversations, especially when there is hierarchy or when the relationship already carries tension.



The SBI model: the most effective structure for giving feedback on observable behaviours.

8.1 The SBI model

The SBI model (Situation-Behavior-Impact) from the Center for Creative Leadership separates the observable behaviour from judgement about character or intentions, and connects that behaviour with the concrete impact it had. This makes feedback more digestible and less likely to trigger defensive reactions.

Feedback on behaviours, not on people. The difference between "you are inconsiderate" and "when you interrupt while someone is speaking, the impact is that that person stops participating" is the difference between a personal attack and useful feedback. The first generates defensiveness; the second opens a conversation.

8.2 Feedforward and continuous feedback

Feedforward (Marshall Goldsmith) is future-oriented: instead of analysing what went wrong, it proposes concrete behaviours to improve next time. It is especially useful when the situation is no longer reversible or when the relationship carries a lot of emotional charge. Agile teams have a structural advantage for continuous feedback: the retrospective is a formalised mechanism.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Formulate effective feedback using the SBI model, clearly distinguishing the three elements.

- Receive feedback without an immediate defensive reaction, using techniques of pausing, clarifying and processing.
- Distinguish when feedback is the right channel and when the conflict requires a different type of conversation (see chapter 25).
- Design team agreements for a culture of continuous feedback that is safe and non-bureaucratic.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

The feedback sandwich. Sandwiching negative feedback between two positives is a technique that protects the giver. The receiver quickly learns to ignore the positives and to wait for the negative that will follow.

Giving feedback in public about personal behaviours. Feedback on behaviours perceived as personal criticism must always be given in private.

Further reading

- [Scott — Radical Candor \(St. Martin's, 2017\)](#)
- [Stone & Heen — Thanks for the Feedback \(Viking, 2014\)](#)

BLOCK 2 · EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE TEAM

9. Assertiveness and boundaries within the team · ESTABLISHED

How to express needs, opinions and disagreements in a direct and respectful way, and set boundaries without generating unnecessary conflict.

Introduction

Assertiveness is the ability to express one's own thoughts, feelings and needs in a direct, honest and respectful way, without attacking the other person or giving in to pressure without justification. It is the most functional communicative style in team settings because it combines the clarity of the aggressive style with the respect of the passive style.

9.1 Assertive techniques

The most useful techniques in teams: the broken record (calmly repeating one's own position without escalating in the face of pressure), fogging (acknowledging that there may be some truth in the other person's criticism without giving up one's own position), and negative assertiveness (acknowledging one's own mistake without excessive self-blame or defensiveness).

Setting boundaries without generating conflict. A boundary is not a threat or a request: it is a statement of what one is willing to do and what one is not. Boundaries set assertively —clearly, without hostility— generate less conflict than ignored boundaries that end up exploding.

9.2 NVC as a complementary framework

Nonviolent Communication (Rosenberg) adds a dimension to classic assertiveness: connecting one's own needs with those of the other before formulating the request. See its application to conflict in chapter 24.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Formulate a request or a boundary assertively in a pressured situation, without escalating to the aggressive style or giving in to the passive one.
- Use fogging or the broken record in the face of group or hierarchical pressure to hold one's own position without creating confrontation.
- Acknowledge one's own mistake assertively and redirect towards learning.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Confusing assertiveness with rudeness. Assertiveness is always respectful. If direct expression harms the other person, it is not assertiveness: it is aggressiveness by another name.

Not setting boundaries until they explode. Tolerating situations that exceed one's own limits until the accumulation produces a reaction disproportionate to the last trigger.

Further reading

- [Alberti & Emmons — Your Perfect Right \(Impact, 2017\)](#)
- [Scrum Master Toolbox — NVC in agile teams](#)

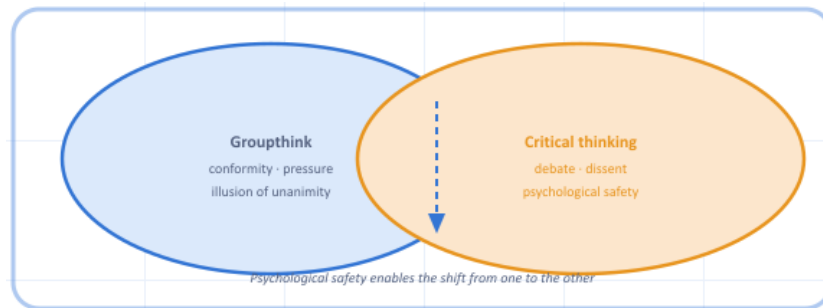
BLOCK 2 · EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE TEAM

10. Group dynamics that affect communication · ESTABLISHED

Collective phenomena that distort or block communication in the team, and how to intervene.

Introduction

Groups develop phenomena that are not the sum of individual dynamics. Some distort communication systematically, causing the team to make worse decisions than its members would individually, or to suppress critical information. Identifying them is a condition for intervening.



Groupthink closes communication; psychological safety opens it towards critical thinking.

10.1 Groupthink

Groupthink (Janis, 1972) is the tendency of cohesive groups to suppress dissent in order to maintain harmony. Its symptoms include: illusion of unanimity, pressure on dissenters, self-censorship and collective rationalisation that ignores risk signals.

The devil's advocate role. A classic intervention to prevent groupthink is to explicitly assign the role of someone with the mandate to seek the arguments against the majority position, without this implying personal opposition. In some contexts it is useful to rotate this role.

10.2 Pluralistic ignorance and polarisation

Pluralistic ignorance is the phenomenon whereby members privately hold an opinion different from the one they perceive as the majority, but do not express it because they believe they are alone. The result is that the group acts on a consensus that does not actually exist. Group polarisation is the opposite phenomenon: discussions tend to push initial positions to extremes.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Recognise the signs of groupthink in real time and intervene to open up the space for dissent.
- Detect pluralistic ignorance through anonymous polls or individual rounds before the group discussion.
- Manage a decision process while minimising the risk of polarisation.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Interpreting silence as agreement. In groups with groupthink, silence is frequently unexpressed dissent.

Confusing cohesion with alignment. A highly cohesive team can be completely misaligned on the most important decisions.

Further reading

- [Lencioni — The Five Dysfunctions of a Team \(Jossey-Bass, 2002\)](#)
- [Janis — Victims of Groupthink \(Houghton Mifflin, 1972\)](#)

BLOCK 2 · EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE TEAM

11. Upward, downward and lateral communication · ESTABLISHED

The specifics of communicating upward, sideways and downward, and how to manage expectations in each direction.

Introduction

One's position in the organisational structure radically conditions how one communicates and how one is perceived when communicating. Communicating upward (with management or stakeholders), sideways (with other teams or areas) and downward (from the leader to the team) require different approaches, tones and content.

11.1 Upward communication

Upward communication tends to be the weak point of the more technical Scrum Masters and Agile Coaches. Its principles: connect the information with the counterpart's business goals, be direct about problems (late bad news has an exponential cost), quantify when possible, and propose rather than merely report.

How to communicate bad news upward. The most effective pattern: (1) name the problem clearly and without euphemisms, (2) contextualise the impact in business terms, (3) present options and their assessment, (4) propose the team's recommendation. Arriving with the problem and no proposal generates anxiety in the person receiving the news.

11.2 Lateral and downward communication

Lateral communication —between teams— is the most vulnerable to dependency and interest conflicts. Its most frequent trap: assuming the other team shares the same context and goals. Downward communication has the greatest impact on the level of psychological safety: the signals the leader emits about how mistakes are handled are the main input for the team to gauge whether it is safe to communicate honestly.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Adapt the message and the format to each communicative direction, using the counterpart's level of abstraction and success criteria.
- Communicate bad news upward in a direct, timely and options-oriented way.
- Manage a critical dependency with another team through structured lateral communication.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Filtering bad news on the way up. The team knows there is a problem, but no one escalates it until the impact is large. The cost of the delay is always greater than the cost of the original problem.

Treating other teams as service providers. Quality lateral communication treats other teams as collaborators with their own goals, not as resources. A demanding tone generates resistance and deteriorates the relationship.

Further reading

- [Larman & Vodde — Large-Scale Scrum \(Addison-Wesley, 2016\)](#)
- [Scrum Manager BoK — Communication](#)

BLOCK 3 · COMMUNICATION IN COMPLEX CONTEXTS

12. Communication in distributed and hybrid teams · CONSOLIDATING

How communicative dynamics change when the team does not share physical space, and practices for maintaining cohesion at a distance.

Introduction

Distributed and hybrid work has ceased to be the exception and become the norm in most knowledge teams. This transition has fundamentally changed the economy of communication: non-verbal channels are reduced or disappear, spontaneity is lost, and the informal communication that happened naturally in the office now requires explicit design.

12.1 Communicative losses in distributed work

The main losses are: the reduction of the non-verbal channel (on a video call you see the face but not the posture), videoconference fatigue (the cognitive load of interpreting impoverished signals for hours is greater than in person), information desynchronisation (the hybrid team tends to create two parallel information flows) and the loss of informal conversation.

The double-conversation problem. In hybrid teams, in-person members have access to side conversations and non-verbal context that remote members do not receive. This creates information asymmetries that, in the long run, generate friction and mistrust if not managed explicitly.

12.2 Practices for cohesion at a distance

The most effective: explicit agreements on which channels are used for which communication; proactive documentation of decisions; periodic in-person meetings for the moments of greatest emotional or decisional load; and start-of-session check-ins that restore presence.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Diagnose the main points of communicative loss in a specific distributed or hybrid team.
- Design team agreements on channels, documentation and communication rhythms adapted to the distributed context.
- Manage the information asymmetry between in-person and remote members in hybrid sessions.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Digitising the office instead of redesigning communication. Reproducing in-person meetings in a virtual format without adapting the structure produces the worst possible experience for remote participants.

False presence. Being on a video call with the camera off or answering emails at the same time erodes the team's cohesion.

Further reading

- [Deel — Managing remote teams \(2026\)](#)
- [Agile Alliance — Distributed Agile](#)

BLOCK 3 · COMMUNICATION IN COMPLEX CONTEXTS

13. Synchronous and asynchronous communication · CONSOLIDATING

Differences, advantages and risks of each modality, and team norms for managing channels and response times.

Introduction

The synchronous/asynchronous dichotomy is one of the most important design decisions in the communication of a distributed team. Each modality has well-defined advantages and risks, and the wrong choice generates real costs.

13.1 When to use each modality

Synchronous communication is more suitable for conversations of high complexity or high emotional charge: conflicts, critical decisions, brainstorming, difficult feedback. Asynchronous communication is more suitable for information, updates, requests and the documentation of decisions.

The hidden cost of hypersynchronicity. Teams that prioritise immediate response across all channels generate a state of permanent alert that fragments deep time and increases stress. Well-managed asynchrony is a productivity asset, not a luxury.

13.2 Team norms for managing channels

Channel agreements are the basic design instrument: what is communicated through which channel, with what response-time expectation. A typical scheme: chat for informal and fast communication (response: hours, not minutes); email for formal and traceable communication (response: 24h); a documentation space for decisions; video call for what requires simultaneous presence.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Choose the right channel and modality for each type of communication, justifying the choice.
- Facilitate the process of channel agreements in the team, including expected response times.
- Identify when an asynchronous text has generated a misunderstanding that requires switching to synchronous.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Using chat for complex conversations. Chat has high frequency but low bandwidth: text without tone or context is the least suitable channel for conversations with emotional charge or high complexity.

Not documenting decisions taken synchronously. Decisions taken on a video call or in person are invisible to those who were not there and are lost if not documented immediately.

Further reading

· [Newport — A World Without Email \(Portfolio, 2021\)](#)

· [Remote.com — Guide to Async Work](#)

BLOCK 3 · COMMUNICATION IN COMPLEX CONTEXTS

14. Cultural diversity in communication · ESTABLISHED

How cultural frameworks affect communication styles, the handling of disagreement and expectations about hierarchy and confrontation.

Introduction

Culture profoundly conditions how people communicate: what can be said directly and what must be hinted at, how disagreement is expressed without losing face, what level of hierarchy is respected in communication, and how much silence is comfortable.

14.1 The Hofstede and Meyer frameworks

Geert Hofstede identified key cultural dimensions: power distance (how much hierarchy is respected in interactions), individualism vs. collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance. In The Culture Map, Erin Meyer contributes the direct/indirect communication scale: what one culture reads as direct honesty, another may read as aggression.

The misunderstanding of silent meetings. In high-context, high-power-distance cultures, silence in response to a leader's question does not mean an absence of opinion: it means respect for hierarchy. The facilitator who interprets that silence as agreement or disinterest makes a cultural-reading error with real consequences.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Identify, in a team conflict or misunderstanding, whether there is a cultural-difference component and formulate a working hypothesis about it.
- Adapt the facilitation style to the team's cultural composition, without assuming that the dominant culture's norms are universal.
- Use the Hofstede and Meyer frameworks as hypothesis tools, not as deterministic labels on individuals.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Reducing to national stereotypes. Cultural frameworks describe statistical tendencies of groups, not the behaviour of individuals. Applying them to specific people without direct observation is discrimination, not cultural management.

Treating one's own culture as the standard. The direct style and explicit confrontation are not "more efficient" than indirect styles: they are simply the standard of some cultures.

Further reading

- [Meyer — The Culture Map \(PublicAffairs, 2014\)](#)
- [Hofstede Insights — Country Comparison Tool](#)

BLOCK 3 · COMMUNICATION IN COMPLEX CONTEXTS

15. Cross-generational communication · CONSOLIDATING

Differences in communication preferences among generations in the same team, with a critical perspective on generational models.

Introduction

The coexistence of up to four generations in the same team is a real and recent phenomenon. However, the literature on generations at work is of very uneven rigour, and the risk of stereotyping frequently outweighs the explanatory usefulness of the models.

15.1 Documented differences

The most documented differences are not in fundamental values but in communication preferences and expectations about feedback and authority. Gen Z tends to prefer direct communication, frequent feedback and clear boundaries between work and personal life. Millennials value collaboration and participation in decisions. Earlier generations tend to have greater tolerance for top-down communication.

A necessary critical perspective. Generational models are descriptive constructs with significant internal variance: there are Millennials more similar to Boomers than to other Millennials. The apparent cohesion of each generation may owe more to life stage than to the generation itself. Using them as rigid typologies for individuals is a methodological error with relational consequences.

15.2 Frequent tensions and how to address them

The most frequent tensions: an expectation of immediate feedback vs. a culture of one-off feedback; a preference for digital vs. verbal communication; differing tolerance for role ambiguity. The most effective approach is to make individual preferences explicit and create team agreements that accommodate the diversity.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Identify differences in communication preferences in the team without automatically labelling them as generational differences.
- Facilitate a team conversation about communication and feedback preferences that produces explicit agreements.
- Recognise when a conflict is being attributed to generational differences when its real cause is structural or relational.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Labelling disagreement as a generational clash. Not every tension between members of different ages is a generational conflict. Attributing it to the generation evades the real conversation about the specific behaviour.

Treating generational models as science. Segmentation by decade of birth has a weak empirical basis for predicting individual behaviour.

Further reading

- [LinkedIn — Workplace Learning Report 2025](#)
- [MIT Sloan — Generational Differences in the Workplace](#)

BLOCK 3 · COMMUNICATION IN COMPLEX CONTEXTS

16. AI in team communication · EMERGING

The current presence of AI in workplace communication, its implications for the authenticity of the message, and mistrust towards AI-mediated messages as a new source of friction.

Introduction

AI has entered workplace communication flows quickly and unevenly. In 2025-2026, most knowledge professionals already have access to tools that automatically summarise meetings, assist in drafting emails and documents, translate in real time or generate feedback drafts.



Layers of risk in adopting AI in communication: from the useful tool to organisational friction.

16.1 Current uses and their value

The most widespread uses in 2025-2026: automatic transcription and summarisation of meetings (Otter.ai, Microsoft Copilot, Google Meet), writing assistants, instant translation and sentiment analysis. The value is documented: they reduce friction in mechanical tasks and can improve the quality of communication when used well.

What AI cannot do. AI can generate text, but it cannot replace the presence, the emotional authenticity or the ethical responsibility of the human communicator. Conflict conversations, difficult feedback and genuine recognition are communications that lose their effect when they are mediated by or delegated to AI.

16.2 New sources of friction

Recent research identifies three main sources of friction: mistrust towards messages whose human author is uncertain, adoption asymmetries (some members use AI extensively and others do not, generating perceived differences in productivity and authenticity), and the loss of nuance in AI-mediated communications.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Identify which types of communication benefit from AI assistance and which lose value when mediated by it.

- Formulate team agreements on the use of AI in communication, addressing authenticity, attribution and ownership of the message.
- Manage a team conversation about the friction generated by uneven AI adoption.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Delegating emotional communication to AI. Using AI to generate messages of feedback, recognition or apology eliminates the authenticity component that gives those communications their value.

Ignoring the friction of adoption asymmetries. The perception gap between those who use AI extensively and those who do not can become a source of conflict if it is not managed explicitly.

Further reading

- [Frontiers in Psychology — Trust in human-AI team communication \(2025\)](#)
- [SHRM — AI for Leadership Communication and Conflict Resolution \(2025\)](#)
- [Emerald — Artificial Intelligence and Team Dynamics \(2025\)](#)

BLOCK 4 · CONFLICT: NATURE AND DYNAMICS

17. What conflict is and what it is for · ESTABLISHED

Definition and typology of conflict. Conflict as a signal and an opportunity. Why avoiding conflict has a real cost.

Introduction

Conflict is inherent to any social system where different people have different goals, values, perceptions or access to resources. In work teams, conflict is inevitable and, managed properly, is a source of learning, innovation and improvement. The problem is not conflict: it is how it is managed.

17.1 Jehn's typology

Karen Jehn (1995) distinguished three types: task conflict (disagreement about the work: what to do, what to include, what to prioritise), process conflict (disagreement about how to do it: who is responsible for what, how decisions are made), and relationship conflict (interpersonal disagreement centred on the other person, not on the work).

Task conflict can be healthy; relationship conflict almost never is. The research of Jehn and De Dreu (2003) shows that moderate levels of task conflict in complex tasks can improve the quality of decisions. Relationship conflict, by contrast, has a consistently negative impact. The key is to separate the two types: treat the first as a decision process and prevent it from turning into the second.

17.2 The cost of avoided conflict

Avoiding conflict does not eliminate it: it postpones it with interest. Avoided conflict accumulates as latent tension that ends up emerging more destructively around a trigger that seems disproportionate to the history. Moreover, it deprives the team of the misalignment signals that could be addressed while they are still minor.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Classify a conflict observed in the team into one of Jehn's types and adjust the type of intervention accordingly.
- Distinguish a task conflict from a relationship conflict in real time and act to prevent the first from turning into the second.
- Argue why addressing conflict is preferable to avoiding it, with concrete examples of the cost of postponed conflict.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Treating every conflict as a relationship problem. A disagreement about backlog priority is a task conflict, not a relationship one. Treating it as the latter introduces unnecessary emotionality.

Confusing tension with conflict. Tension is the prior state. Intervening in tension before it turns into conflict is more efficient and less costly.

Further reading

- [Jehn — A multimethod examination of intragroup conflict \(ASQ, 1995\)](#)
- [De Dreu & Weingart — Task versus relationship conflict \(JAP, 2003\)](#)

BLOCK 4 · CONFLICT: NATURE AND DYNAMICS

18. Sources and triggers of conflict · CONSOLIDATING

Frequent causes of conflict in the workplace and the incorporation of technological change as an emerging category.

Introduction

Understanding where a conflict comes from is the condition for addressing it at its source and not only in its symptoms. Most conflicts in teams have combined causes: there is rarely a single trigger, and the visible event is usually the result of an accumulation of structural and relational tensions.

18.1 Structural causes

Structural causes derive from how the work is organised. The most frequent: ambiguity of roles and responsibilities, competition for scarce resources, unmanaged dependencies between teams, misaligned goals across functions, and incentive systems that reward individual victory over collective victory.

Role ambiguity as the main source. In agile teams, role ambiguity is the most frequent structural source of conflict: who has authority over the product vs. who over the process vs. who over the architecture. Role clarity does not eliminate conflict, but it turns it into task conflict rather than relationship conflict.

18.2 Relational and technological causes

Relational causes derive from interpersonal dynamics: differences in values, incompatible communication styles, a history of perceived grievances. AI adoption and automation are generating a new category: friction from role transformation, insecurity about the relevance of one's own role, and ethical conflicts about which decisions should be made with AI assistance.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Analyse a team conflict to identify the structural and relational causes, distinguishing them from the apparent triggers.
- Propose differentiated interventions: organisational changes for structural causes, facilitated conversations for relational ones.
- Recognise the symptoms of conflict arising from technological change and design an approach that combines change management and conflict management.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Treating the symptom without the cause. Resolving the visible argument between two people without addressing the role ambiguity that causes it guarantees a relapse.

Attributing structural causes to individuals. When a conflict has a structural origin, attributing it to the character of the people involved is unfair and ineffective.

Further reading

- [MEXC — Why AI Is Increasing Workplace Tension \(2025\)](#)
- [Scrum Manager BoK — Conflict management](#)

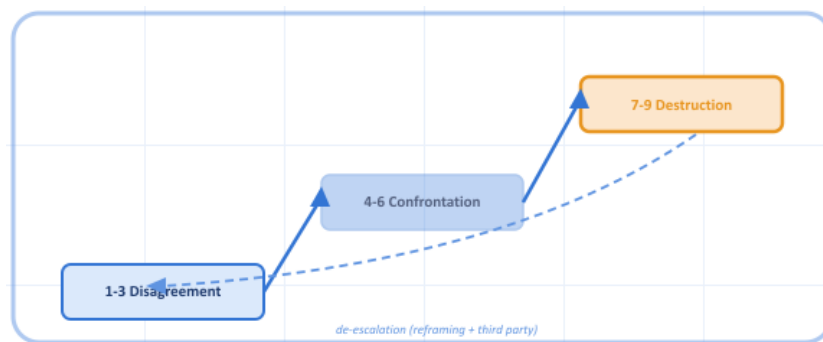
BLOCK 4 · CONFLICT: NATURE AND DYNAMICS

19. Conflict escalation and de-escalation · ESTABLISHED

How a conflict intensifies following Glasl's model (9 stages), early escalation signals and de-escalation mechanisms.

Introduction

Conflict does not erupt all at once: it escalates. Friedrich Glasl's model (1982) describes nine stages that run from the initial disagreement to mutual destruction. Knowing this model allows the facilitator to identify at which point in the process the conflict is and what type of intervention is appropriate.



Glasl's model: three escalation zones and the de-escalation path through early intervention.

19.1 The nine stages

Glasl groups the stages into three zones. In the first (1-3: win/win still possible), the conflict is still a manageable disagreement. In the second (4-6: win/lose), the aim is no longer to solve the problem but to win over the other: attacks on image, coalitions and threat strategies begin. In the third (7-9: lose/lose), the parties are willing to harm each other even if it means harming themselves as well.

The most important transition signal. The move from zone 1 to zone 2 occurs when the parties stop talking about the problem and start talking about the other person. This is the critical moment: if the facilitator can reframe the conversation back to the problem before this step consolidates, de-escalation is still possible with communication tools.

19.2 De-escalation mechanisms

The mechanisms vary by stage: in the early stages (1-3), active listening and reformulating the problem are usually sufficient. In the middle stages (4-6), the intervention of a neutral third party is required. In the advanced stages (7-9), internal intervention is no longer sufficient and professional mediation or a management decision is required.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Locate a team conflict within Glasl's model and select the type of intervention appropriate to the stage.

- Identify the early escalation signals before the conflict moves into zone 2.
- Use reframing to bring the conversation back to the problem when it has started to become personal.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Intervening late. The most frequent mistake: waiting until the conflict is visible and impossible to ignore. In stages 1-3, intervention is simple and cheap. In stages 7-9, it is no longer within the reach of the role.

Using zone 1 tools in zone 2. Active listening and informal mediation work well in the early stages. Applying them in an advanced conflict can be counterproductive.

Further reading

- [Glasl — Conflict Management \(Free Spirit, 1999\)](#)
- [Pollack Peacebuilding — Conflict Escalation Model](#)

BLOCK 4 · CONFLICT: NATURE AND DYNAMICS

20. Conflict in teams with specific dynamics · CONSOLIDATING

How conflict manifests and is managed in agile, distributed and cross-generational teams.

Introduction

General conflict models describe the mechanisms common to all contexts. But conflict manifests differently depending on the team's characteristics: an agile team has role tensions that do not exist in a traditional project; a distributed team has visibility and absence dynamics that amplify certain types of conflict.

20.1 Conflict in agile teams

The most frequent conflict contexts in Scrum: role conflict between the Product Owner and the team (who has authority over the product), process conflict when the ceremonies are perceived as a burden, priority conflict from sprint to sprint, and interdependency conflict between teams in scaled contexts.

Authority conflict in agile contexts. Agile frameworks distribute authority explicitly and in a differentiated way. When these boundaries are not clear or are not respected, authority friction is generated that is often unnecessarily personalised.

20.2 Conflict in distributed teams

In distributed teams, conflict has two distinctive features: it tends to fester because distance eliminates the informal resolution mechanisms, and it tends to be amplified by visibility asymmetries (in-person members have more access to information and to decision-makers).

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Identify the most frequent conflict patterns in one's own team's specific context and design preventive conditions.
- Manage an authority conflict in an agile team, clarifying the boundaries of each role without taking sides.
- Intervene in a conflict that has festered at a distance, creating resolution conditions that compensate for the absence of informal mechanisms.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Ignoring role conflict until it erupts. In Scrum teams, role tensions are predictable and recurring. The Scrum Master who does not address them preventively will encounter them in the retrospective, already amplified.

Trying to resolve distributed conflicts over chat. A conflict that has festered at a distance requires synchronous communication —preferably in person or a video call— to be resolved.

Further reading

- [ICAgile — Agile Coaching Competency Framework \(ICP-ACC\)](#)
- [myculture.ai — Workplace Conflict Resolution Strategies \(2025\)](#)

BLOCK 5 · CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: STYLES AND STRATEGIES

21. Conflict-management styles · ESTABLISHED

The five Thomas-Kilmann (TKI) styles: when each one is appropriate and the difference between habitual style and conscious choice.

Introduction

When we face a conflict, most of us tend to resort to the same style over and over again, regardless of whether that style is the most appropriate. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI, 1974) is the most widespread framework for identifying these styles and learning to consciously choose the most appropriate one.

21.1 The five styles

The TKI defines five styles according to assertiveness and cooperativeness. Competing (high assertiveness, low cooperativeness) seeks to win over the other: functional in situations of urgency or non-negotiable principle. Accommodating (low assertiveness, high cooperativeness) gives in to the other: functional when the matter is not important to oneself. Avoiding (low on both) sidesteps the conflict: functional when it is trivial or the moment is not right. Compromising (medium on both) seeks a middle point: functional when both parties have equal power and there is no time for collaboration. Collaborating (high on both) seeks a solution that fully satisfies both parties: the most time-costly and the most valuable in complex conflicts.

No style is always right. The most frequent mistake in applying the TKI is to rank the styles: "collaboration is always better". The TKI is explicit on this point: each style is functionally appropriate in certain circumstances. The competency lies in choosing consciously rather than reacting automatically.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Identify their own habitual conflict-management style and the situations that activate it automatically.
- Read the counterpart's style in a conflict situation and adapt the approach accordingly.
- Consciously choose the most appropriate style for each specific situation, justifying the choice.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Always using the same style. The manager who always avoids conflict accumulates tensions; the one who always competes damages relationships; the one who always accommodates loses credibility.

Confusing compromise with collaboration. Compromise reaches a middle point without exploring whether there is a solution that fully satisfies both parties.

Further reading

- [Thomas & Kilmann — Conflict Mode Instrument \(CPP, 1974\)](#)
- [MindTools — Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model](#)

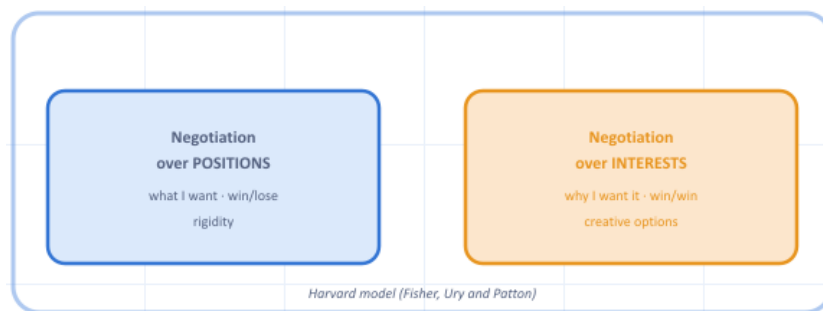
BLOCK 5 · CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: STYLES AND STRATEGIES

22. Collaborative interest-based resolution · ESTABLISHED

The Harvard approach (Fisher, Ury and Patton): how to separate people from problems and work on interests rather than positions.

Introduction

The Harvard negotiation model proposes an alternative to the positional game that characterises most workplace conflicts. In the positional game, each party declares what it wants and negotiates by conceding as little as possible. In the Harvard model, the parties work on the interests underlying those positions, which opens up space for solutions that were not available at the level of positions.



Positions vs. interests: the Harvard model opens up the solution space by moving down to the level of needs.

22.1 The four principles

The model is based on: separating the people from the problem (attacking the problem hard and treating the person with respect), focusing on interests not positions, generating options for mutual gain, and using objective criteria when a choice between options must be made.

The key question: why? The transition from position to interest is triggered by a simple question: why do you want that? The answer reveals the underlying need. When both parties can express their interests rather than their positions, the solution space multiplies.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Conduct a conflict-resolution conversation using the four principles of the Harvard model, including the transition from position to interest.
- Facilitate the generation of mutual-gain options when the parties are trapped in a positional game.
- Apply external objective criteria when the parties cannot agree on the optimal solution.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Proposing the solution before exploring the interests. The facilitator who proposes their own solution before both parties have expressed their underlying interests becomes a third party in the conflict.

Confusing position with interest. The position is the explicit demand; the interest is the need that justifies it. Working on the position is positional bargaining; working on the interest is the Harvard model.

Further reading

- [Fisher, Ury & Patton — Getting to Yes \(Penguin, 2011 ed.\)](#)
- [Program on Negotiation — Harvard Law School](#)

BLOCK 5 · CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: STYLES AND STRATEGIES

23. Difficult conversations · ESTABLISHED

How to prepare for and conduct conversations about tense or emotionally charged matters, using the Difficult Conversations and Crucial Conversations frameworks.

Introduction

A difficult conversation is one in which something important is at stake, emotions are intense and there is a perceived risk of negative consequences if it is addressed. They are the conversations most avoided and most needed.

23.1 The three simultaneous conversations

The Difficult Conversations framework proposes that in any difficult conversation there are actually three simultaneous conversations: the conversation about "what happened" (the facts, the interpretations and the intentions), the conversation about feelings (what each party feels), and the conversation about identity (what does this say about me as a person?). Most difficult conversations fail because the parties are having one of these conversations while believing they are having another.

The single-story error. A failed difficult conversation usually begins with each party bringing their own story of what happened and presenting it as the objective reality. The framework proposes exploring the "two stories": how I experience the situation and how the other person experiences it. Both can be partially true simultaneously.

23.2 How to manage emotion in the moment

The Crucial Conversations framework provides tools for when the conversation becomes emotionally charged. Its two warning signs: when someone moves to silence (avoidance, sarcasm, withdrawal) or to verbal violence (attacking, controlling, labelling). In the face of these signs, the first step is to restore safety: letting the counterpart know that the conversation has a mutual purpose.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Prepare a difficult conversation by identifying the three simultaneous conversations and anticipating how to manage each one.
- Open a difficult conversation in a way that invites participation rather than triggering defensiveness.
- Detect when a conversation has entered silence or violence mode and use techniques to restore safety.
- Explore the "other's story" with genuine curiosity, without positioning oneself as "the one who is right".

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Starting with the conclusion. Opening a difficult conversation with "what you did was wrong" immediately triggers defensiveness. Better to start with the description of the situation and one's own impact.

Avoiding the emotions. Ignoring emotions does not eliminate them: it turns them into unmanaged noise that interferes with the conversation.

Further reading

- [Stone, Patton & Heen — Difficult Conversations \(Viking, 1999\)](#)
- [Patterson et al. — Crucial Conversations \(McGraw-Hill, 2021 ed.\)](#)

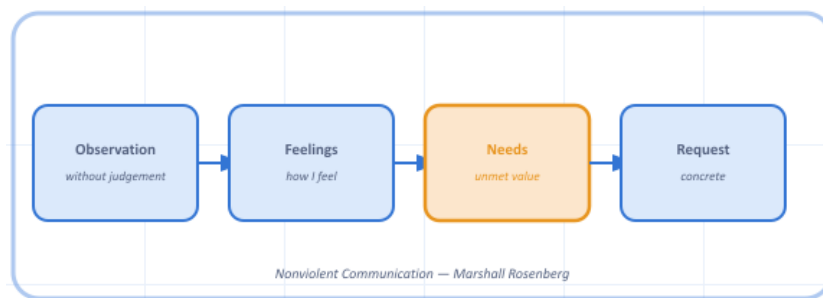
BLOCK 5 · CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: STYLES AND STRATEGIES

24. NVC applied to conflict · ESTABLISHED

Rosenberg's model (observation, feelings, needs, request) as a tool for transforming communication in situations of tension.

Introduction

Nonviolent Communication (NVC), developed by Marshall Rosenberg from the 1960s onward, proposes a way of communicating that reduces the likelihood of generating or escalating conflicts. Its central premise: most interpersonal conflicts are the result of forms of communication that block compassion and generate defensive responses.



The four steps of NVC: from observation without judgement to the concrete request.

24.1 The four steps

The NVC process has four components: observation (describing what has been observed without evaluation or judgement: "when I see/hear..."), feelings (how I feel as a result: "I feel..."), needs (what unmet need generates that feeling: "because I need..."), and request (a concrete and feasible request, not a demand: "could you...?").

The difference between observation and evaluation. "You always arrive late to meetings" is an evaluation. "In the last three meetings, you arrived after the agreed time" is an observation. Evaluations trigger defensiveness; observations open dialogue.

24.2 Practical application and limits

NVC has important limits: it is not a tool for situations of urgency or immediate risk, it does not replace direct confrontation when this is necessary (abusive behaviour requires a clear boundary, not a dialogue of needs), and it can be perceived as condescending if applied rigidly without authenticity.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Formulate a communication in the four steps of NVC, distinguishing observation from evaluation and request from demand.
- Listen empathically using NVC to identify the needs behind the counterpart's demands or complaints.

- Recognise when NVC is the right tool and when the situation requires a more direct confrontation.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Using NVC as a technique rather than an attitude. NVC applied mechanically produces the opposite effect: the counterpart perceives the structure as manipulation and closes down.

Avoiding the necessary boundary with NVC. Using NVC to avoid setting a necessary boundary — disguising avoidance as compassion— is a frequent antipattern in coaches and facilitators.

Further reading

- [Rosenberg — Nonviolent Communication \(PuddleDancer, 2003\)](#)
- [Management 3.0 — NVC in the Workplace](#)

BLOCK 5 · CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: STYLES AND STRATEGIES

25. Feedback in a conflict context · CONSOLIDATING

How to give feedback when there is prior tension, and the difference between corrective feedback and a conflict conversation.

Introduction

Giving feedback in a context of prior conflict is one of the most delicate situations in the practice of the Scrum Master and the manager. Feedback about behaviours that are already emotionally charged tends to be received as an attack, even if the giver has followed all the principles of well-structured feedback.

25.1 When feedback is the right channel

Feedback is the right channel for conversations about behaviours that are not yet charged with relationship conflict. When a relationship conflict is already in place, the conversation that is needed is not a feedback one: it is a conflict conversation, with a different structure.

The critical difference. In corrective feedback, the giver communicates an impact and expects the receiver to adjust their behaviour. In a conflict conversation, both parties have something to say and something to change. Treating a conflict conversation as if it were unilateral feedback is one of the most frequent and costly mistakes.

25.2 Giving feedback when there is prior tension

When feedback has to be given in a context of tension, the conditions for success are: choosing the moment with intention (not in the heat of the moment, not in public), explicitly naming the context of tension before entering the feedback, carefully separating the behaviour from the relationship, and leaving space for the other person's response.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Assess whether a situation requires feedback or a conflict conversation, and choose the right type of conversation.
- Prepare and conduct feedback about a behaviour in a context of prior tension, creating conditions for it to be received without defensiveness.
- Recognise when a conversation that starts as feedback turns into a conflict conversation and make the transition explicitly.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Giving feedback at the moment of greatest tension. Feedback given in the heat of the moment is received as an attack, regardless of the structure used.

Using feedback to avoid the conflict conversation. Giving incomplete feedback as a substitute for the conflict conversation that is really needed leaves the underlying conflict unresolved.

Further reading

- [Stone & Heen — Thanks for the Feedback \(Viking, 2014\)](#)
- [CCL — Feedback That Works](#)

BLOCK 6 · INTERVENING IN CONFLICTS: INTERNAL FACILITATION

26. Intervention and restoration roles · ESTABLISHED

Differences between facilitating, mediating informally and arbitrating. The full arc of the intervention: from opening to restoring trust and follow-up.

Introduction

When the conflict is not resolved directly between the parties, someone from the team or the organisation has to intervene. The first decision is the role to be taken on: facilitating, mediating informally or arbitrating. Confusing these roles — especially facilitating with arbitrating — is one of the most frequent and costly mistakes among novice Scrum Masters and coaches.

26.1 The three roles

The facilitator creates the conditions for the parties to resolve the conflict themselves: they hold the space, manage the process and help explore interests and generate options. They do not propose solutions or take sides. It is the most appropriate role for the Scrum Master in most team conflicts.

The informal mediator can propose options and suggest paths to agreement, although the final decision still rests with the parties. It requires greater trust in the mediator on both sides. The arbitrator makes the decision. It is the role of management or HR when the conflict has escalated beyond what internal facilitation can manage.

The limits of internal intervention. The Scrum Master or coach who tries to facilitate a conflict in which they have a personal interest cannot be neutral. Neutrality is the condition of facilitation: without it, the role is not valid. In those cases, one must refer to someone with no interest in the outcome.

26.2 The full arc of the intervention

Effective intervention has a full arc: preparation (contacting each party separately before the joint session), facilitated session, agreement (consolidating it so that both parties understand it in the same way), follow-up and restoration of operational trust. The difference between agreement and reconciliation is important: agreement is a commitment about future behaviours; reconciliation implies a repair of the relationship that is not always possible or necessary.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Choose the right intervention role according to the characteristics of the conflict.
- Identify when the conflict exceeds the limits of internal intervention and manage the referral to HR, professional mediation or management.
- Design and conduct the full arc of an intervention: preparation, session, agreement, follow-up and restoration of trust.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Mixing the roles. Starting as a facilitator and ending up arbitrating out of impatience. The undeclared change of role destroys both parties' trust in the process.

Considering the conflict resolved at the moment of agreement. The formal agreement is only the starting point. Without follow-up, conflicts have a high relapse rate.

Further reading

- [ICAgile — ICP-ACC: Agile Coaching Competencies](#)
- [Agile Alliance — Facilitation](#)

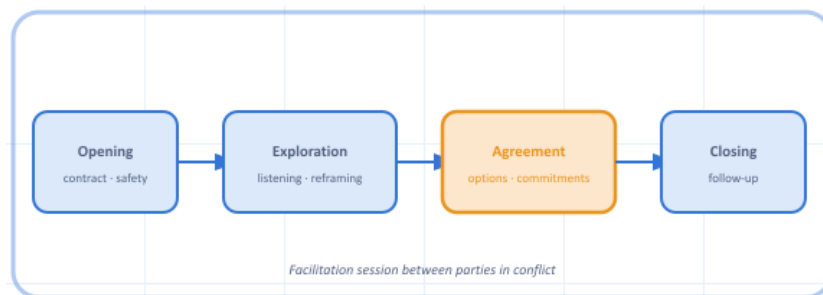
BLOCK 6 · INTERVENING IN CONFLICTS: INTERNAL FACILITATION

27. Facilitating conversations between parties · ESTABLISHED

How to conduct a conversation between people in conflict: session structure, creating conditions of safety and reframing techniques.

Introduction

Facilitating a conversation between people in conflict is one of the most demanding competencies of the Scrum Master and the Agile Coach. It requires presence, active neutrality, the ability to manage one's own emotions and specific techniques for intervening in the process.



The structure of a facilitation session: opening, exploration, agreement and closing.

27.1 Preparation

The joint session is rarely the facilitator's first contact with the conflict. Before bringing the parties together, it is advisable to speak separately with each one: explore their perception of what happened, assess their willingness for the joint session, agree the purpose and establish the minimum conditions of safety.

27.2 The session structure

The most effective structure has four phases: opening (creating the conditions of safety, agreeing the rules, framing the purpose), exploration (each party expresses their perception without being interrupted; the facilitator paraphrases and reformulates), generation of options (jointly exploring what changes would be acceptable to each one) and closing (formulating the agreement so that both parties understand it in the same way and agreeing the follow-up).

Active neutrality. The facilitator's neutrality is not passivity. The facilitator intervenes actively in the process: they reformulate contributions that become emotionally charged, pause the session when one party is in escalation mode, and protect the turn of whoever is being interrupted. They do not take sides on the substance, but they do intervene on the form.

27.3 Key technique: reframing

Reframing takes an emotionally charged statement and reformulates it in terms of interest or need. For example: "they are always late" (attack) is reformulated as "it seems that punctuality in meetings is important to you" (interest). This shift does not deny the speaker's experience; it translates it into language that the other person can hear without triggering their defensiveness.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Prepare and conduct a conflict-facilitation session between two or more people, following the four-phase structure.
- Use reframing to translate attacks and positions into interests and needs in real time.
- Manage one's own emotional state during a high-charge session in order to maintain active neutrality.
- Pause the session and propose a time-out when the level of escalation exceeds what facilitation can manage.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Bringing the parties together without prior preparation. A joint session without prior individual-exploration work can turn into a new escalation in the facilitator's presence.

Losing neutrality by taking sides. The facilitator who validates one party's perception of the other loses the trust of both and makes the session unmanageable.

Further reading

- [Kaner et al. — Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making \(Jossey-Bass, 2014\)](#)
- [Pollack Peacebuilding — Conflict Mediation Best Practices](#)

BLOCK 6 · INTERVENING IN CONFLICTS: INTERNAL FACILITATION

28. Managing conflict in meetings · CONSOLIDATING

How to handle conflict when it emerges in a meeting, and how to resume collective work afterwards.

Introduction

Meetings are the space where latent conflict surfaces most frequently. A retrospective with accumulated tension, a refinement where the Product Owner and the team clash, or a sprint review with harsh stakeholder feedback can quickly turn into a moment of escalation if the facilitator does not have the tools to manage it in real time.

28.1 Early detection

The signs of emerging conflict in a meeting include: an increase in the tone and speed of speech, interruptions, physical withdrawal, sarcastic remarks, the sudden silence of those who usually participate, and side sub-dialogues. The facilitator who detects these signs has an early-intervention window that closes quickly.

Constructive interruption. Interrupting an escalation does not require confronting the person who is escalating: it requires redirecting the process. Useful techniques: proposing a pause ("Let's take a two-minute break"), making the process visible ("I notice the conversation is becoming charged; I'd like to propose that..."), or reformulating the topic towards the problem rather than the person.

28.2 Separating the conflict from the agenda

The facilitator has to make a quick decision: is the conflict handled at this moment, or is it parked and a specific conversation scheduled? The general rule: if the conflict is about the content of the meeting (task conflict), it can be handled in the meeting with enough time. If it is a relationship conflict, it can rarely be handled well in public and with limited time.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Detect the early signs of conflict in a meeting and intervene before the escalation consolidates.
- Use constructive-interruption techniques that redirect the process without directly confronting any participant.
- Make the decision to handle the conflict in the meeting or to park and schedule it, justifying the choice explicitly.
- Conduct the transition back to collective work after a moment of tension.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Ignoring the conflict and carrying on with the agenda. Pretending that the conflict does not exist generates an underground parallel conversation that erodes the quality of everything that follows.

Trying to resolve a relationship conflict in public. The attempt to resolve in public a conflict that requires privacy usually produces more escalation, not less.

Further reading

- [Derby & Larsen — Agile Retrospectives \(Pragmatic Bookshelf, 2006\)](#)
- [Retromat — Retrospective techniques](#)

BLOCK 7 · CONFLICT IN THE ORGANISATION

29. Conflict between teams and dependencies · CONSOLIDATING

Causes and patterns of conflict between teams, and how to facilitate alignment from a communication standpoint.

Introduction

Conflicts between teams have a different nature from interpersonal conflicts: their causes are usually structural (unmanaged dependencies, misaligned goals, shared resources) and their manifestations usually take the form of "us vs. them" dynamics.

29.1 Causes of inter-team conflict

The most frequent: unmanaged technical dependencies, competition for shared resources, misaligned goals between teams working on the same product, and unequal-visibility dynamics (one team perceives that it receives less recognition or fewer resources than another).

The us vs. them dynamic. When teams start to refer to other teams as "them" in a negative tone, the silo dynamic is already in place. The symptoms: not sharing information proactively, escalating common problems upward instead of resolving them laterally, and treating the other team as a service provider one can make demands on.

29.2 Facilitating alignment

The most effective mechanisms: clarity of interfaces (what each team delivers to whom, with what criteria and on what timeline), cross-cutting synchronisation forums, and the facilitation of bilateral conversations when specific conflicts emerge.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Diagnose an inter-team conflict by identifying the structural causes and proposing interventions at the right level.
- Facilitate an alignment meeting between two teams with conflicting dependencies, using the interest-based model of chapter 22.
- Propose structural or process changes that reduce inter-team friction in the long term.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Personalising structural conflict. A conflict between teams whose cause is an unmanaged dependency is not resolved with conversations between the people involved: it requires a structural change.

Escalating every inter-team conflict upward. Systematically escalating to management generates dependency and slows resolution.

Further reading

- [Larman & Vodde — Large-Scale Scrum \(Addison-Wesley, 2016\)](#)
- [Scaled Agile — SAFe PI Planning](#)

BLOCK 7 · CONFLICT IN THE ORGANISATION

30. Organisational change and conflict · CONSOLIDATING

How change processes generate conflict, and change communication as a prevention tool.

Introduction

Organisational change —reorganisations, agile transformations, AI adoption, leadership changes— is one of the most powerful sources of conflict in organisations. Not because change is bad, but because the uncertainty it generates activates protective mechanisms that, if not managed, lead to resistance, mistrust and conflict.

30.1 Why change generates conflict

Change threatens three fundamental needs in the workplace: clarity about one's own role (who I am and what is expected of me), belonging (whether I am still part of the team), and perceived competence (whether I will know how to do what will be asked). When these needs are not met, resistance to change is not irrational: it is an adaptive response.

Legitimate resistance vs. dysfunctional conflict. Not all resistance to change is dysfunctional conflict. The person who points out the real risks of a transformation is providing valuable information. The one who actively sabotages is in a conflict that requires management. Distinguishing the two is the basic competency of the Agile Coach in transformation processes.

30.2 Change communication as prevention

The basic principles: communicate before rumours circulate, be explicit about what is not yet known, create channels for questions and fears to be expressed, and explicitly acknowledge the losses that the change entails.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Diagnose whether the resistance observed in a change process is legitimate (a signal of real risk) or dysfunctional (an identity or power conflict).
- Design a change-communication strategy that covers the needs of clarity, belonging and perceived competence.
- Facilitate a team conversation about the fears and losses that an organisational-change process generates.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Treating resistance as irrationality. Resistance to change always has a reason. Not listening to it is one of the most frequent failures in agile transformations.

Communicating the change only once. Change communication is not an event: it is a process. People need to hear the same message multiple times to internalise it.

Further reading

- [Kotter — Leading Change \(Harvard Business Review Press, 2012 ed.\)](#)
- [Prosci — ADKAR Change Management Model](#)

BLOCK 7 · CONFLICT IN THE ORGANISATION

31. Dysfunctional culture and chronic conflict · CONSOLIDATING

When conflict is not an episode but a pattern, and what the Scrum Master or the coach can do from their role.

Introduction

There are teams and organisations where conflict is not an exceptional episode but the norm: the same type of conflict emerges over and over again, regardless of who the people involved are. When this happens, the conflict is not interpersonal: it is cultural.

31.1 Symptoms of chronic conflict

The most frequent symptoms: the same patterns of tension emerge with different protagonists, problems are talked about outside meetings but never in them, there is systematic scapegoating, communication silos are impermeable, and the team has developed a collective narrative of victimhood or exceptionalism.

Lencioni and the five dysfunctions. Patrick Lencioni's model describes a causal pyramid: absence of trust → fear of conflict → lack of commitment → avoidance of accountability → inattention to results. The team that most appears to avoid conflict is frequently the most dysfunctional: chronic conflict is the expression of the absence of trust.

31.2 Informal power and chronic conflict

Formal hierarchy and informal power perpetuate chronic conflict. In organisations with high power distance, conflicts are suppressed downward but accumulate. In organisations with highly concentrated informal power, some people can block changes that threaten their position, generating structural conflicts that cannot be resolved without higher-level intervention.

31.3 What the Scrum Master or the coach can do

The role has clear limits: it can diagnose, create conditions for more honest conversations, point out the patterns it observes, and escalate when the culture requires a higher-level intervention. What it cannot do is change the culture alone from that role: cultural change requires authority and resources that are beyond its reach.

What you should be able to do

Having mastered this chapter, a professional is able to:

- Distinguish a one-off conflict from a pattern of chronic conflict, using the symptoms described.
- Diagnose the most probable cultural causes of chronic conflict using Lencioni's model.
- Define the scope of intervention from one's own role and formulate an escalation proposal when the intervention requires higher-level authority.

Common mistakes and antipatterns

Applying interpersonal solutions to cultural problems. Facilitating conversations between the people who show the most conflict does not resolve the cultural problem that generates it.

Assuming the role can change everything. A Scrum Master or coach who bears alone the responsibility of changing a dysfunctional culture without management's backing is doomed to burnout.

Further reading

- [Lencioni — The Five Dysfunctions of a Team \(Jossey-Bass, 2002\)](#)
- [Qandle — How AI Is Transforming Conflict Management \(2025\)](#)

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