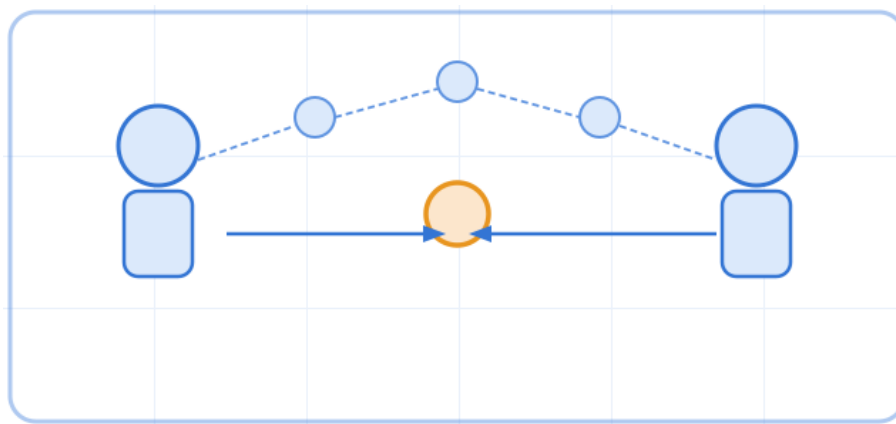


State of the art

Communication and conflict management in work teams

Reference map of current professional knowledge



Updated June 2026

About this document

This document is a curated map of the knowledge, practices and models in professional use as of its publication date for communicating effectively in the workplace and managing conflict when it arises within a team or between teams. For each entry, the map places it in context, indicates its degree of adoption in current professional practice and points to where to find reference information.

Use it as an observatory and reference point to check whether the professional knowledge you rely on is aligned with current practice and at the leading edge.

It is complemented by an in-depth companion guide that develops each concept and by the training and assessment platform in Skill Arena. In the [Communication and conflict management in work teams](#) area you can test your level of knowledge and, if you pass, 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, both as a tool and as a new source of friction, which has been producing academic and practitioner literature since 2024-2025. The map reflects that asymmetry: most of the pointers are ESTABLISHED or CONSOLIDATING; the AI pointer is the only one marked EMERGING. Throughout the document, the labels (ESTABLISHED, CONSOLIDATING, EMERGING) help identify the maturity of each concept:

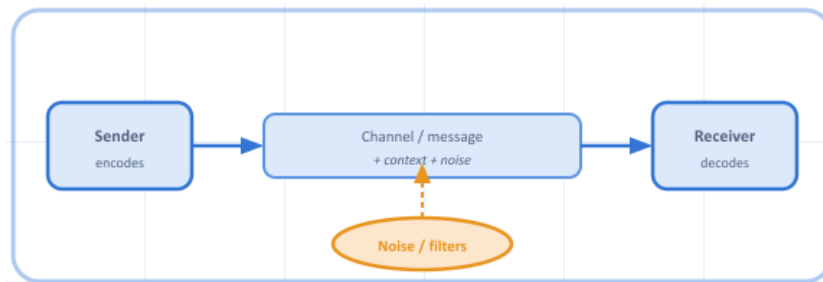
ESTABLISHED settled consensus; knowledge taken as required.

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

EMERGING recent frontier; high relevance and high volatility.

1. Fundamentals of interpersonal communication

The conceptual base on which all the other blocks rest. It establishes what communication is, how it works and why it fails, before moving on to team competencies or conflict management.



The communication process: sender, channel, receiver and the noise that distorts the message.

Communication models and process · ESTABLISHED

How communication works and which variables are involved: sender, receiver, message, channel, code, context and noise. The Shannon-Weaver and Watzlawick models as practical tools for diagnosing communication failures.

Why it is here now. The underlying conceptual framework has gone more than fifty years without structural revisions and remains the universal teaching reference for identifying where and why communication fails in a team.

Where to look. [Watzlawick — Pragmatics of Human Communication \(Norton, 1967\)](#) · [Shannon & Weaver — A Mathematical Theory of Communication \(1949\)](#)

Verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal communication · ESTABLISHED

How the content of the words, the tone, the pace and the non-verbal cues (posture, expression, proxemics, eye contact) interact. Coherence or incoherence across channels as a source of mistrust or misunderstanding.

Why it is here now. A mature body of research; its practical application in work settings has not undergone relevant conceptual changes and is a prerequisite for understanding the distributed contexts of Block 3.

Where to look. [Watzlawick — Axioms of communication](#) · [Mehrabian — Silent Messages \(Wadsworth, 1971\)](#)

Perception, filters and biases · ESTABLISHED

How perceptual filters, cognitive biases (attribution, projection, halo effect) and implicit assumptions distort what is communicated and what is received. Their direct link to the mechanisms of conflict escalation.

Why it is here now. Concepts drawn from applied cognitive psychology, fully integrated into the practice of team coaching and facilitation. Understanding them is a condition for working on conflict with sound judgement.

Where to look. [Kahneman — Thinking, Fast and Slow \(Farrar, 2011\)](#) · [Stone, Patton & Heen — Difficult Conversations \(Viking, 1999\)](#)

Active listening · ESTABLISHED

What distinguishes listening from hearing. Active listening techniques: paraphrasing, emotional reflection, clarifying questions, functional silence. Frequent barriers in work settings (multitasking, hierarchy, haste). Reference: Covey, Habit 5.

Why it is here now. One of the most consolidated concepts in team development, with decades of documented practice. It is the entry-level competency for any difficult conversation or mediation process.

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

Communication styles · ESTABLISHED

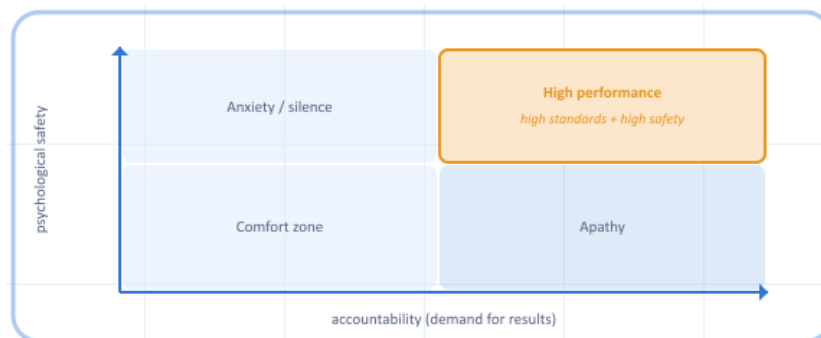
Recurring communicative profiles: passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive and assertive. How to identify them in oneself and in others, and how to adapt one's own communication to the other person's style without giving up the message.

Why it is here now. A consolidated taxonomy, the basis of assertiveness training. It connects directly with the conflict-management styles of Block 5 and is a prerequisite for the assertiveness entry in Block 2.

Where to look. [Alberti & Emmons — Your Perfect Right \(Impact, 2017\)](#) · [Scrum Manager BoK — Communication](#)

2. Effective communication within the team

How a team communicates well: the conditions that make it possible, the channels and norms that sustain it, the feedback that improves it and the collective dynamics that block it.



Psychological safety (Edmondson) as the structural base for honest communication and healthy conflict.

Psychological safety as a condition for communication · CONSOLIDATING

Why psychological safety —the shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson)— is the prerequisite for honest communication, feedback and conflict management to be possible. Signs of its presence and absence. Practices that build it.

Why it is here now. Edmondson's framework (1999) is solidly established as a research reference; its practical application in agile teams keeps expanding actively. Recent 2025 literature connects psychological safety with the challenges of introducing AI into teams, which keeps the field in active consolidation.

Where to look. [Edmondson — The Fearless Organization \(Wiley, 2018\)](#) · [NeuroLeadership Institute — Neuroscience of Psychological Safety \(2025\)](#)

Communication in team meetings · ESTABLISHED

Meeting structures that foster equitable participation and clarity: team agreements, meeting roles, decision-making and recording of agreements. Frequent dysfunctional patterns: monopolisation, silence, decisions taken outside the meeting.

Why it is here now. Practices consolidated in agile frameworks (Scrum, facilitation) with no significant recent conceptual developments. Mastering them is a basic competency of the Scrum Master and of any team-coordination role.

Where to look. [Schwaber & Sutherland — Scrum Guide \(Scrum.org, 2020\)](#) · [Agile Alliance — Meeting Facilitation](#)

Feedback: giving and receiving · CONSOLIDATING

Principles of effective feedback: specific, timely, behaviour-oriented. Reference models: SBI (Situation-Behavior-Impact), CEDAR, feedforward. How to receive feedback without becoming defensive. A culture of continuous feedback versus one-off feedback.

Why it is here now. The classic feedback models are established; the practice of continuous feedback —built into the team's day-to-day— is still being adopted in many organisations and generates active debate about its long-term effectiveness.

Where to look. [Scott — Radical Candor \(St. Martin's, 2017\)](#) · [CCL — SBI Feedback Model](#)

Assertiveness and boundaries within the team · ESTABLISHED

How to express needs, opinions and disagreements in a direct and respectful way. Assertive techniques: broken record, fogging, positive and negative assertiveness. Setting and communicating boundaries without generating unnecessary conflict. The Nonviolent Communication framework (Rosenberg) as a complementary tool; see its application to conflict in Block 5.

Why it is here now. A framework with decades of consolidated practice, an essential base for any conflict-management work. Distinguishing assertiveness from aggressiveness is an entry-level competency in agile teams.

Where to look. [Alberti & Emmons — Your Perfect Right \(2017\)](#) · [Scrum Master Toolbox — NVC in agile teams](#)

Group dynamics that affect communication · ESTABLISHED

Collective phenomena that distort or block communication: groupthink, polarisation, pluralistic ignorance, dysfunctional informal roles. How to detect them and intervene from a communication standpoint.

Why it is here now. Concepts drawn from classic social psychology, fully incorporated into the practice of team facilitation and coaching. Understanding these dynamics is a condition for managing the chronic conflict of Block 7.

Where to look. [Lencioni — The Five Dysfunctions of a Team \(Jossey-Bass, 2002\)](#) · [Janis — Groupthink \(Wikipedia / Houghton Mifflin, 1972\)](#)

Upward, downward and lateral communication · ESTABLISHED

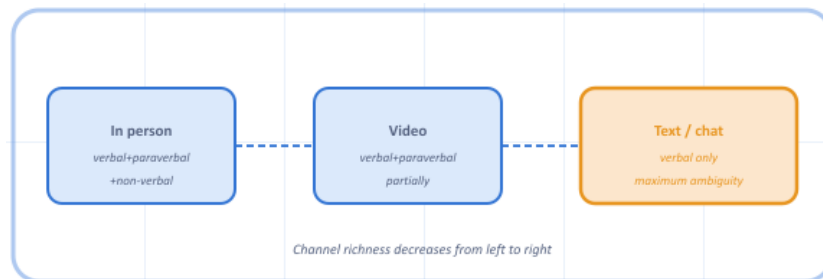
The specifics of communicating upward (management, stakeholders), sideways (other teams, areas) and downward (from the leader to the team). Managing expectations, accountability and the communication of bad news.

Why it is here now. Mastering this is especially relevant for Scrum Masters and Agile Coaches who manage interfaces with stakeholders and other areas. An area with a consolidated body of knowledge that shows no recent fundamental changes.

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

3. Communication in complex contexts

Variables of today's work environment that substantially change how people communicate: physical distance, cultural and cross-generational diversity, and the growing presence of AI in team communication channels.



Choosing the channel according to urgency and emotional complexity: the key to distributed communication.

Communication in distributed and hybrid teams · CONSOLIDATING

How communicative dynamics change when the team does not share physical space, or does so only partially: loss of non-verbal context, videoconference fatigue, information desynchronisation, the double in-person and digital conversation. Practices for maintaining communicative cohesion at a distance.

Why it is here now. Practice has evolved substantially since 2020. A solid body of knowledge already exists, but the organisational adoption of hybrid-work norms is still being actively adjusted in 2025-2026, with significant variation across sectors and cultures.

Where to look. [Deel — Managing remote teams: best tips \(2026\)](#) · [Agile Alliance — Distributed Agile](#)

Synchronous and asynchronous communication · CONSOLIDATING

Differences, advantages and risks of each modality. When to use real-time communication and when asynchrony is more efficient or more respectful. Team norms for managing channels, response times and the documentation of decisions. The risk of misunderstandings in text without paraverbal context.

Why it is here now. The debate between modalities and the norms of asynchrony are an area of practice in active consolidation, especially in distributed teams. Organisations keep adjusting their team agreements on the matter.

Where to look. [Newport — A World Without Email \(Portfolio, 2021\)](#) · [Remote.com — Guide to Async Work](#)

Cultural diversity in communication · ESTABLISHED

How cultural frameworks affect communication styles, the handling of disagreement and expectations about hierarchy and confrontation. References: Hofstede (cultural dimensions) and Meyer (The Culture Map). Application in multicultural teams.

Why it is here now. The Hofstede and Meyer frameworks are consolidated references in international professional practice. Their application in multicultural agile teams has not changed conceptually, although their critical use (avoiding national reductionism) is gaining weight.

Where to look. [Meyer — The Culture Map \(PublicAffairs, 2014\)](#) · [Hofstede Insights — Country Comparison Tool](#)

Cross-generational communication · **CONSOLIDATING**

Differences in communication preferences, expectations about feedback, authority and digital presence among generations in the same team. The most frequent tensions and how to address them from a communication standpoint. A necessary critical perspective: generational models (Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z) are indicative, not rigid typologies; the risk of stereotyping frequently outweighs their explanatory usefulness.

Why it is here now. The coexistence of up to four generations in the same team is a real and recent phenomenon. What is consolidating are the practices for managing that diversity, not the scientific validity of generational models, which is the object of growing methodological criticism.

Where to look. [LinkedIn — Workplace Learning Report 2025](#) · [MIT Sloan — Generational Differences in the Workplace](#)

AI in team communication · **EMERGING** · *new since 2024*

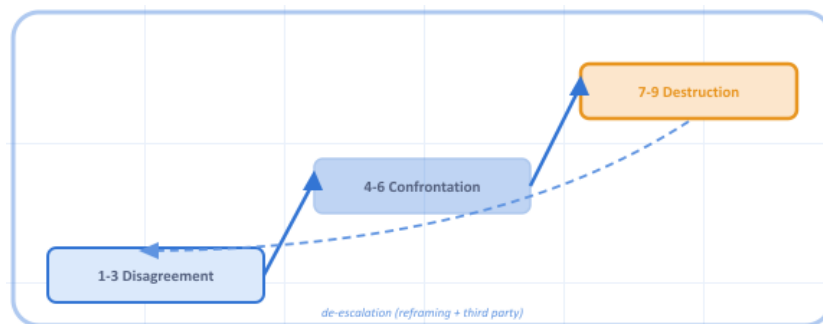
The current presence of AI in workplace communication: automatic meeting summaries, writing assistants, translators, feedback bots. Implications for the authenticity and the ownership of the message. The risk of over-delegation. Mistrust towards AI-generated or AI-mediated messages as a new source of friction in teams.

Why it is here now. Recent academic literature (CHI 2025, Frontiers Psychology 2025, Emerald Publishing 2025) confirms the reality of the phenomenon: trust calibration in human-AI teams, misunderstandings amplified by ambiguity in AI-mediated communication, and new organisational frictions from uneven adoption.

Where to look. [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 \(2025\)](#)

4. Conflict: nature and dynamics

A conceptual framework on what conflict is, how it originates and how it evolves. A necessary base for managing it with judgement and not merely with technique.



Glasl's escalation model (9 stages): from the initial disagreement to mutual destruction.

What conflict is and what it is for · ESTABLISHED

Definition and typology of conflict: task conflict (what to do), process conflict (how to do it) and relationship conflict (who the other person is), following Jehn (1995). Conflict as a signal and an opportunity versus conflict as a threat. Why avoiding conflict has a real cost.

Why it is here now. Jehn's typology is the most cited academic reference in team development on conflict. Distinguishing the types of conflict is the basic intellectual operation for any subsequent intervention.

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

Sources and triggers of conflict · CONSOLIDATING

Frequent causes of conflict in the workplace: role ambiguity, competition for resources, differences in values or goals, communication failures, perceived grievances, pressure and stress. Structural factors versus relational factors. Conflicts arising from AI adoption and technological change as an emerging type.

Why it is here now. The classic map of causes is established; the incorporation of conflicts arising from technological change (AI, digitalisation, roles in transformation) as a recognised category is being validated by 2024-2025 literature.

Where to look. [MEXC — Why AI Is Increasing Workplace Tension \(2025\)](#) · [Scrum Manager BoK — Conflict management](#)

Conflict escalation and de-escalation · ESTABLISHED

How a conflict intensifies: from disagreement to personal confrontation, from confrontation to coalition and deadlock. Glasl's escalation model (9 stages). Early escalation signals. De-escalation mechanisms: reframing, separating the problem from the people, third-party intervention.

Why it is here now. Glasl's model (1982) is the most cited reference in the training of facilitators and mediators on conflict dynamics. Identifying which stage a conflict is at determines which intervention is appropriate.

Where to look. [Glasl — Conflict Management \(Free Spirit, 1999\)](#) · [Pollack Peacebuilding — Conflict Escalation Model](#)

Conflict in teams with specific dynamics · CONSOLIDATING

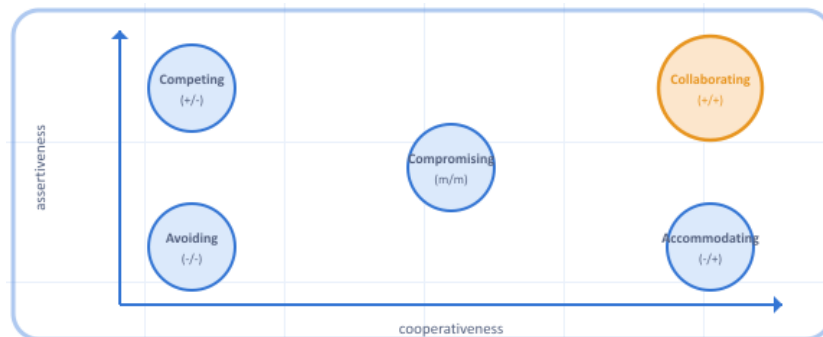
How conflict manifests and is managed in agile teams (Scrum roles, sprint-to-sprint tensions), distributed teams (conflicts that fester at a distance, visibility asymmetries) and cross-generational teams. Specifics compared with conflict in co-located and homogeneous teams.

Why it is here now. The intersection between conflict dynamics and agile or distributed contexts is an area of active practice. The Scrum Master community (ICAgile, Agile Alliance) regularly produces reference material on the matter.

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

5. Conflict management: styles and strategies

How each person chooses and acts when faced with a conflict, and when each approach is more or less appropriate. The core of the topic's practical dimension: the frameworks that guide action in situations of tension.



The five Thomas-Kilmann styles positioned by assertiveness and cooperativeness.

Conflict-management styles · ESTABLISHED

The five classic styles (Thomas-Kilmann TKI): competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating. When each style is functionally appropriate and when it becomes dysfunctional. Self-diagnosis of one's own style and reading the other person's. The difference between habitual style and conscious choice.

Why it is here now. The TKI is one of the most validated and widely used instruments in conflict training. Understanding it is the gateway to any conflict-management work in teams.

Where to look. [Thomas & Kilmann — Conflict Mode Instrument \(CPP, 1974\)](#) · [MindTools — Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model](#)

Collaborative interest-based resolution · ESTABLISHED

The Harvard approach (Fisher, Ury and Patton): separate the people from the problem, focus on interests rather than positions, generate options for mutual gain and use objective criteria. The difference between positional bargaining and principled negotiation.

Why it is here now. The Harvard model (Getting to Yes, 1981, updated) is the most cited reference in conflict resolution. Its integration into agile practice is direct: working on underlying interests defines how difficult retrospectives are approached.

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

Difficult conversations · ESTABLISHED

How to prepare for and conduct a conversation about a tense or emotionally charged matter. Reference frameworks: Difficult Conversations (Stone, Patton and Heen) and Crucial Conversations (Patterson et al.). Structure: separate facts from interpretations, explore the two stories, manage emotion in the moment, seek shared purpose.

Why it is here now. Both frameworks are references with decades of widespread use in the training of leaders and coaches. They have direct application to a Scrum Master's most common situations: giving difficult feedback, managing role tensions, addressing behaviours that harm the team.

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

NVC applied to conflict · ESTABLISHED

Marshall Rosenberg's model (Nonviolent Communication): observation without evaluation, identification of feelings, connection with needs, formulation of concrete requests. Practical use in team conflicts to transform communication in situations of tension. An important limit: NVC does not replace direct confrontation when it is necessary. See also the Assertiveness entry in Block 2.

Why it is here now. NVC has documented adoption in agile and coaching contexts (Scrum Master Toolbox, Management 3.0, ICAgile). The best-known example of its corporate adoption is Satya Nadella distributing Rosenberg's book to his leadership team on taking over Microsoft.

Where to look. [Rosenberg — Nonviolent Communication \(PuddleDancer, 2003\)](#) · [Management 3.0 — NVC in the Workplace](#)

Feedback in a conflict context · CONSOLIDATING

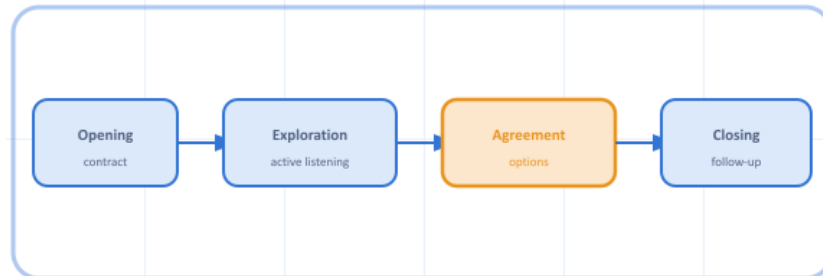
How to give feedback when there is prior tension: managing the moment, separating the behaviour from the relationship, acknowledging the impact without attributing intent. The difference between corrective feedback and a conflict conversation. When feedback is the right channel and when it is not.

Why it is here now. The distinction between feedback and a conflict conversation is a consolidating competency: the classic feedback frameworks do not address it explicitly, and it is emerging as a differentiated competency in the training of coaches, managers and Scrum Masters.

Where to look. [Stone & Heen — Thanks for the Feedback \(Viking, 2014\)](#) · [CCL — Feedback That Works](#)

6. Intervening in conflicts: internal facilitation

What to do when the conflict is not resolved directly between the parties and someone from the team or the organisation has to intervene. The territory of the Scrum Master, the Agile Coach and the manager acting as facilitator.



The facilitator in active neutrality: the role that holds the space between the parties without taking sides.

Intervention and restoration roles · ESTABLISHED

Differences between facilitating, mediating informally and arbitrating: what each role does, when each one is appropriate and who takes it on in a team. Limits of internal intervention: when the conflict requires referral to HR, professional mediation or management. The full arc of the intervention: from opening to consolidating the agreement, restoring operational trust and follow-up.

Why it is here now. The framework of roles in intervention is well defined in the mediation and facilitation literature. Confusing the roles —especially facilitating with arbitrating— is one of the most frequent and costly mistakes among novice Scrum Masters and coaches.

Where to look. [ICAgile — ICP-ACC: Agile Coaching Competencies](#) · [Agile Alliance — Facilitation](#)

Facilitating conversations between parties · ESTABLISHED

How to conduct a conversation between two or more people in conflict: session structure, creating conditions of safety, managing emotion in the moment, reframing and reformulation techniques. The facilitator's active neutrality: present and intervening without taking sides.

Why it is here now. Practices consolidated in professional facilitation, widely documented in agile and coaching communities. They are the core of the conflict-intervention competency of the Scrum Master and the Agile Coach.

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

Managing conflict in meetings · CONSOLIDATING

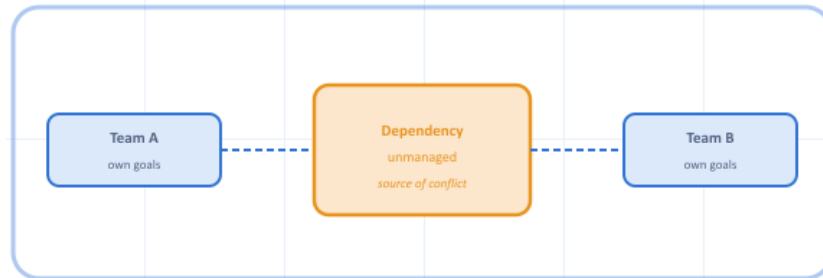
How to handle conflict when it emerges in a meeting: constructive-interruption techniques, managing the moment of tension, separating the debate from the personal conflict, using time-outs. How to resume collective work afterwards. The link with retrospective facilitation in agile teams.

Why it is here now. In-the-moment management of conflict in agile meetings is a competency in active consolidation: the retrospective is the ceremony where latent conflict surfaces most often and where this competency is most needed.

Where to look. [Derby & Larsen — Agile Retrospectives \(Pragmatic Bookshelf, 2006\)](#) · [Retromat — Retrospective techniques](#)

7. Conflict in the organisation

Conflicts that originate not in interpersonal dynamics but in how the work, the culture and the power structures are organised. A broader level of analysis, especially relevant for Agile Coaches and managers.



Structural conflict between teams: when unmanaged dependency turns into an organisational fracture.

Conflict between teams and dependencies · CONSOLIDATING

Causes and patterns of conflict between teams: competition for resources, unmanaged dependencies, misaligned goals, "us vs. them" dynamics. How to facilitate alignment between teams from a communication standpoint. The difference between inter-team conflict and interpersonal conflict that crosses boundaries.

Why it is here now. Managing dependencies and inter-team conflicts is an area of active practice in scaled organisations. Frameworks such as LeSS and SAFe explicitly address the coordination structures that reduce this type of conflict.

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

Organisational change and conflict · CONSOLIDATING

How change processes — reorganisations, agile transformations, AI adoption, leadership changes — generate conflict: perceived loss, resistance, insecurity about roles. Change communication as a prevention tool. The difference between legitimate resistance to change and dysfunctional conflict.

Why it is here now. The mass adoption of AI and the reconfiguration of roles in 2024-2026 have reactivated the literature on change management and organisational conflict. Agile transformations remain a frequent source of role and authority conflict.

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

Dysfunctional culture and chronic conflict · CONSOLIDATING

When conflict is not an episode but a pattern: symptoms of a dysfunctional team culture, avoided conflict that accumulates, scapegoating, communication silos. How hierarchy and informal power perpetuate chronic conflict. The difference between a one-off conflict and a cultural problem. What the Scrum Master or the coach can do from their role.

Why it is here now. The distinction between a one-off conflict and a cultural pattern is a consolidating competency. Lencioni's model (Five Dysfunctions) remains the most accessible reference in this territory for coaches and managers.

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

What to watch in the next revision

Signals of change the editorial team anticipates for the next edition of this map:

- Maturation of the academic literature on AI in team communication: the 2025 studies (CHI, Frontiers Psychology) are early indicators; meta-analyses are expected in 2026-2027 that could stabilise the practical recommendations.
- Hybrid and asynchronous work norms: the organisational debate remains open; it is possible that in the next revision pointers 3.1 and 3.2 will reach the ESTABLISHED state if a broader practical consensus consolidates.
- New AI tools for facilitation and mediation: the appearance of AI mediation assistants (already documented in 2025) may justify an additional pointer in Block 6 in the next edition.
- Evolution of research on cross-generational communication: if literature with greater methodological rigour on Gen Z in agile settings emerges, entry 3.4 could be updated in state and content.

A note on the references

The links included were available and verified as of the update date. Given the pace of change in this area, some may change; each revision of the map also updates its references.

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