



Managing Team Conflict

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**“Best Team
Experience,**

**Worst Team
Experience”**

Chat in:
BEST
WORST

YOUR EXAMPLES:

(1) Conflict that helps work

**(2) Conflict that hinders
work**

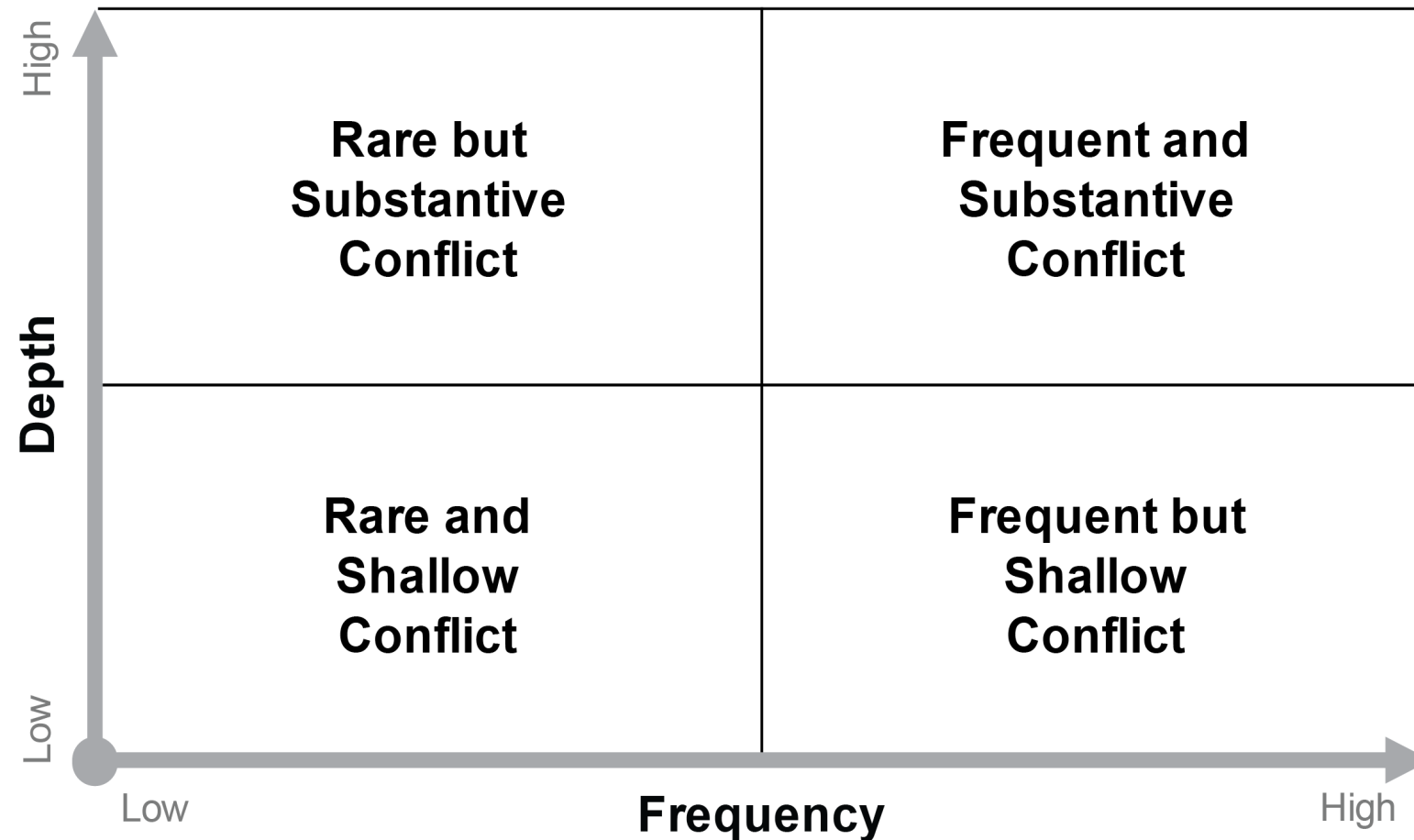
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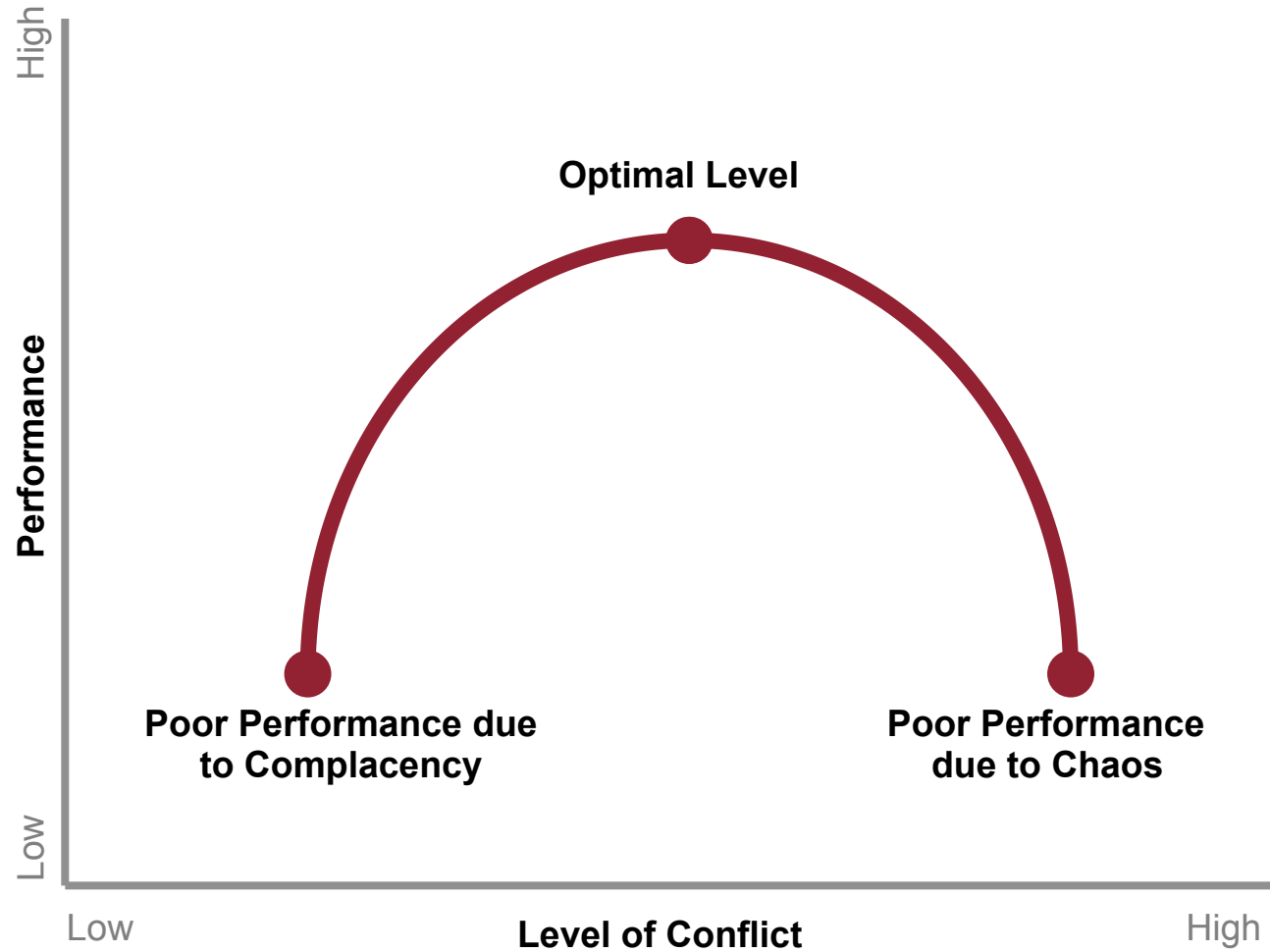
Sources of Team Conflict

- ▶ Structural: size, diversity, cohesion, purpose, norms, roles, leadership
- ▶ Developmental/Work-related: task & process
- ▶ Relational/affective-interpersonal

Mapping Your Approach to Conflict



Conflict and Performance



Assessing the Impact of Conflict

Functional: improves group performance

- ▶ Improves decision quality
- ▶ Stimulates creativity and innovation
- ▶ Encourages interest and curiosity
- ▶ Problems are aired
- ▶ Supports change and self-evaluation

Dysfunctional: hinders group performance

- ▶ Reduces communication and engagement
- ▶ Can lead to the disbanding of the group

Assessing the Focus of the Conflict

- ▶ **Task** – work content and goals
- ▶ **Process** – how the work is done
- ▶ **Relationship** – interpersonal

Desired Conflict Levels

| | | Level of Conflict | | |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|
| | | Low | Moderate | High |
| Source of Conflict | Task | Functional | | Dysfunctional |
| | Relationship | Dysfunctional | | |
| | Process | Functional | Dysfunctional | |

Quick Quiz

1. True or false: Assessing conflict means looking both at the source of the conflict and how it is affecting team performance?

True.

Functional conflict improves the team performance; dysfunctional conflict hinders performance.

What 'Buy-In' Really Means and How to Get It

Getting the Work Done:

Three Useful Definitions

- ▶ **Clarity:** removal of assumptions and ambiguity from a situation
- ▶ **Buy In:** honest emotional support
- ▶ **Commitment:** intelligent individuals buying into a decision precisely because they don't naturally agree

Let's Practice: Clarity

removal of assumptions and ambiguity from a situation

Sam had been up until 2am the night before reviewing all of the code. In the project review meeting, the next morning, he said:

“We got everything done. It is time to start defining the requirements of the next module.”

Clarity=Shared Understanding

“We are all on the same page”

- ▶ Ask Sam to explain his reasons for wanting to move ahead to requirements
- ▶ Ask others on the team if they see it differently
- ▶ Compare the project status back to agreed-upon processes, goals, deadline

Let's Practice: Buy-In

honest emotional support

After some discussion it appeared the team had two options: turn the code over to the production team and start on the requirements – meaning they would meet their deadline – or engage in one more round of testing, meaning they would follow their QA process but miss the deadline. Sam felt strongly they should move on.

Buy-In: “My voice was heard and my ideas were considered”

- ▶ Ask Sam to imagine what risks might be of this decision.
- ▶ Ask others to briefly describe the pros and cons, in their opinion, of moving to the next phase.
- ▶ Support anyone who is not getting heard to have a voice
- ▶ Get agreement on a decision-making process and a set amount of time for discussion
- ▶ Reiterate that there is no perfect solution, but the goal is to move ahead as one

Let's Practice: Commitment

intelligent individuals buying into a decision
precisely because they don't naturally agree

At the end of the agreed upon discussion time, the team leader stood up and said,

“This was a great discussion. I’m impressed by the thoughtful contributions, and more than that, the passion we all share to get this project done to the best of our abilities. We need to make a difficult decision, but I’m confident in this group’s ability to make the right one.”

Commitment: “We are a team”

- ▶ Restate the importance of individual contributions to the group, and that there are reasonable opposing views.
- ▶ Set context: we need to move forward, we have heard everyone’s views, individually we may have made different decisions but in this case we need one decision for the team.
- ▶ Reward the team’s ability to come together and make a single decision, including tying it back to performance and to organizational goals.

Quick Quiz

2. What is the definition of “buy in”:
- (a) agreement or consensus
 - (b) win-win
 - (c) honest emotional support

Honest emotional support.

**And “commitment” is intelligent individuals
“buying into” a decision precisely because
they don’t naturally agree**

Quick Quiz

3. How long should a buy-in discussion take?
- (a) As long as it takes for all views to be heard
 - (b) As long as it takes for everyone to speak the same amount of time
 - (c) As long as it takes to debate the important points

All views to be heard.

The point isn't to spend a set amount of time, although managing the time is important. Also, debate is only helpful if it removes ambiguity – too much debate can polarize a team.

Conflict & Team Structure

size, identity, cohesion

Team Size

Work Group (3-25)

- ▶ shares information and make decisions to help one another perform in own areas of responsibility

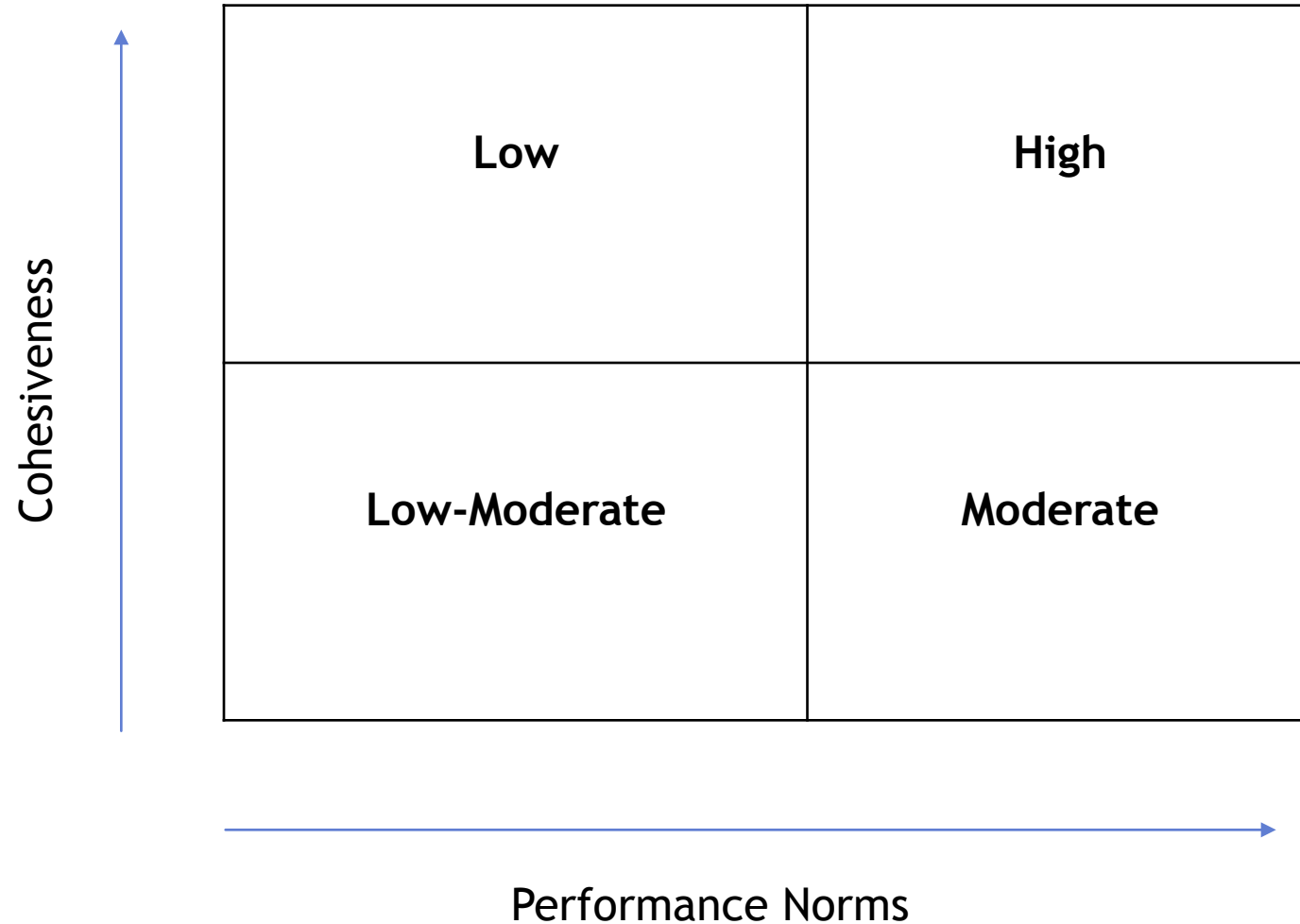
Work Team (3-8)

- ▶ Synergy through coordinated efforts and level of performance greater than sum of individual inputs

Definition: Team Cohesion

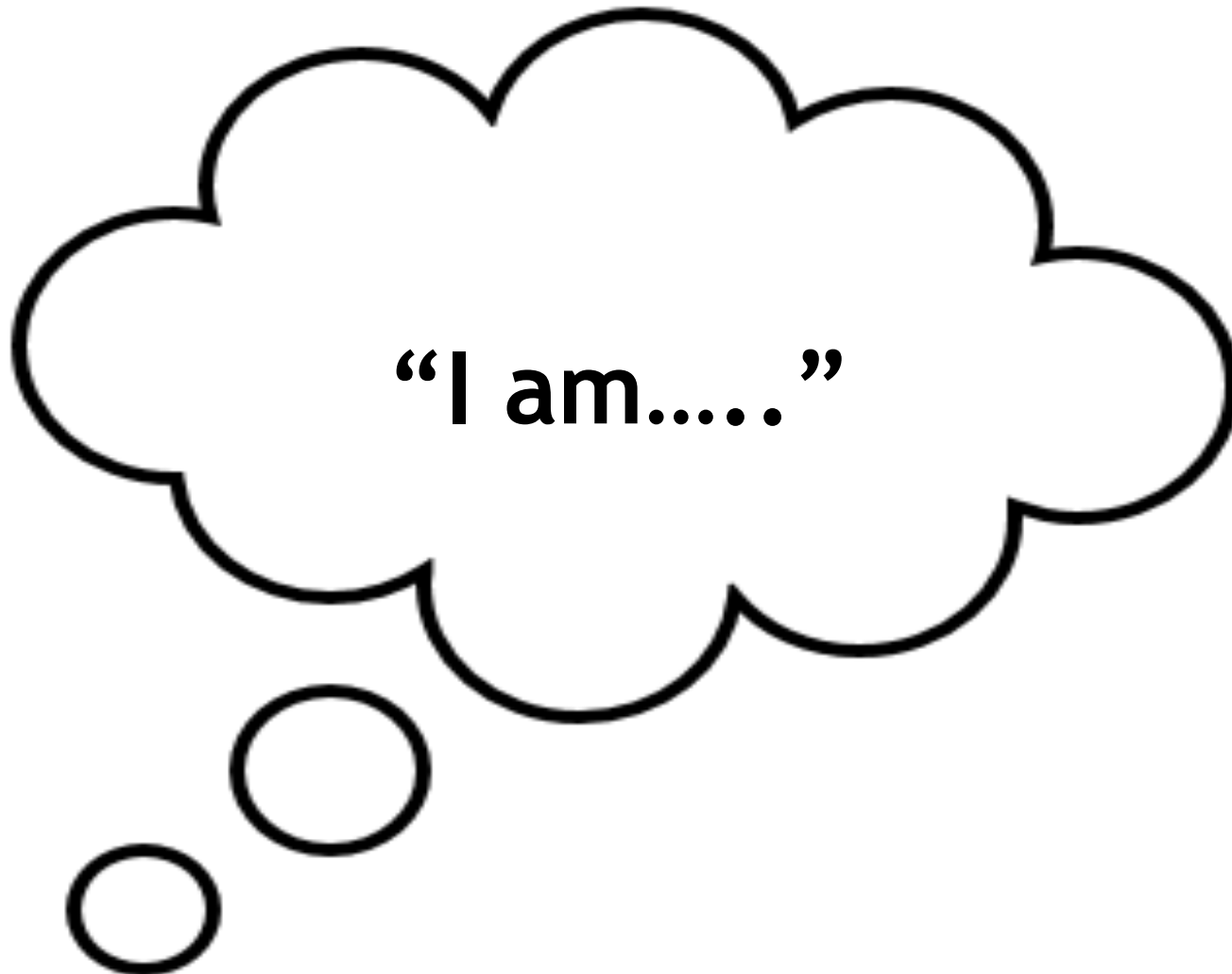
- ▶ **Cohesiveness** is the extent to which **team** members stick together and remain united in the pursuit of a common goal.
- ▶ A **team** is said to be in a state of **cohesion** when its members possess bonds linking them to one another and to the **team** as a whole.

Team Cohesiveness → Productivity



Ways to Encourage Cohesiveness

- ▶ Making the group smaller
- ▶ Encouraging agreement with group goals
- ▶ Increasing time spent together
- ▶ Increasing status of group
- ▶ Stimulating competition with other groups
- ▶ Giving rewards to groups rather than individuals
- ▶ Physically isolating the group



Write down:
At least 15 things

Chat in:
A few examples

The importance of identity on teams

Identity stems from three sources:

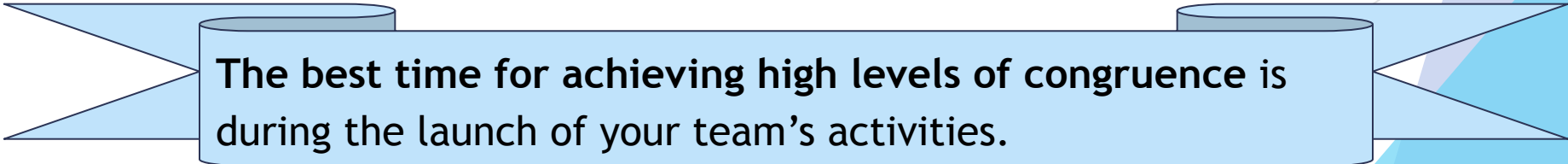
1. Social: the groups to which you belong
2. Relationships with individuals
3. Personal characteristics

People try and simultaneously:

- ▶ convey their own identities to their interaction partners, and
- ▶ appraise their partners accurately.

Teams are made up of individuals with many types of differences

- ▶ Many differences are **visible** (though less so on virtual teams) such as gender, race, language, national origin, social background
- ▶ Others are **less visible** such as education or culture
- ▶ **Personality-based differences** affect the manner in which individuals absorb and selectively use information available to them



The best time for achieving high levels of congruence is during the launch of your team's activities.

Quick Quiz

4. What is the difference between a group and team:
- (a) teams are smaller
 - (b) groups are focused on information sharing and decision making
 - (c) teams produce shared work products
 - (d) all of the above

All of the above.

Teams have synergy through coordinated efforts and a level of performance greater than sum of individual inputs

Quick Quiz

5. Which of the following is NOT a way to increase team cohesiveness:
- (a) making the team smaller
 - (b) encouraging agreement with goals
 - (c) giving rewards to individuals
 - (d) increasing time spent together

Giving rewards to individuals.

Teams should be rewarded as a team, and celebrate their successes together

Let's Explore: Scenario One

You have been assigned to lead a team of 15 people from different divisions. Your goal is to make recommendations on a new product. You are worried about the size of the team, the fact most people on the team haven't worked together before. You also know they will come from differing perspectives and agendas as these differ across divisions. What might you plan to do to manage early conflict on this team?

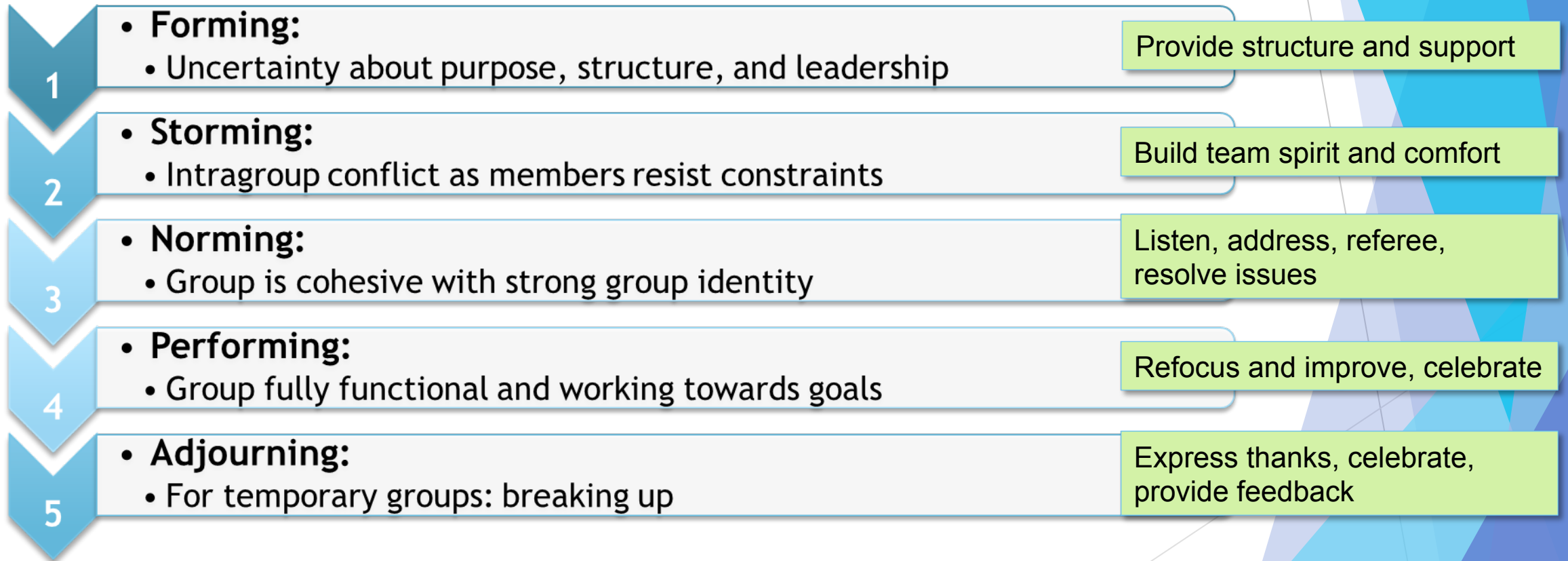
Things to Consider: Scenario One

- ▶ Creating subgroups of 3-5 people with specific tasks that flow up to the overall team goal
- ▶ Having people share their individual goals before working on a team goal
- ▶ “I am” or other exercises that help them get to know one another
- ▶ Getting buy-in on the team purpose, and motivating around the shared work/outcomes
- ▶ Regular meeting schedule, sharing contact information, defining roles, access to shared documents (agendas, notes, etc.).
- ▶ Include team learning as part of the overall team goal

Conflict & Team Development

Learning to Work Together

5 Stage Model of Team Development



Types of Team Trust

Competence

- Respecting and having confidence in another's knowledge, skills and judgement

Contractual

- Demonstrating confidence in the character of others and a willingness to presume they will meet expectations, fulfill promises and agreements and demonstrate consistent behavior

Communication

- Willingness to share information, tell the truth, give/receive constructive feedback, and maintain confidentiality

norm

NOUN

1. a standard pattern of behavior that is considered normal in a society
synonyms: custom · average · rule · model · type · standard · pattern
2. the customary situation or circumstances
3. a required level of achievement



Group or Team Norms

- ▶ How and what we will share
- ▶ How we will treat each other
- ▶ Confidentiality
- ▶ Follow-through
- ▶ Dealing with conflict

Examples of Norms

Other examples?
Please chat in

- ▶ Treat each other with dignity and respect
- ▶ Practice transparency and avoid hidden agendas
- ▶ Be genuine about ideas, challenges, and feelings
- ▶ Sensitive issues discussed will be kept in confidence
- ▶ Share the complete information that you have up front
- ▶ Step forward, step back
- ▶ Practice being open-minded
- ▶ Don't be defensive
- ▶ Support each other - don't throw each other under the bus.
- ▶ Avoid territoriality; think instead of the overall good for the company, our employees, and our customers
- ▶ The discussion of issues, ideas and direction will not become a personal attack or return to haunt you in the future

Dominant Individuals

- ▶ Characterized by one or more of these personality traits: Self Confidence, Directness, Decisiveness, Assertiveness, Impatience
- ▶ On the plus side: strong leaders, willing to take on complex tasks, work well independently, can come up with bold and creative ideas
- ▶ On the minus side: may intimidate other team members, even be bullies; can negatively impact climate; can negatively impact decision-making

What to do:

- ▶ Identity exercise
- ▶ Team norms
- ▶ Use techniques that capture all views (e.g., multi-voting, written brainstorming)
- ▶ Take them aside
- ▶ Give them challenging tasks

Quick Quiz

6. True or false: Teams can get to the norming or forming stage, and then go back to storming.

True.

Changes in the task (scope, timeline) and in the team composition are common reasons that a performing team would go back to storming.

Quick Quiz

7. Which of the following would NOT be a good norm to adopt:
- (a) step forward, step back
 - (b) treat everyone with respect
 - (c) be genuine
 - (d) if you disagree, keep it to yourself
- (d) – a better norm is: disagree in the spirit of finding better answers.**

It is very important for teams to explore disagreements even if they can't, ultimately, be resolved.

Let's explore: Scenario Two

It is the third team meeting, and you are the team leader. The team seems to be stuck having the same conversation over and over again – they are storming. How can you help the team? What kinds of questions do you need to ask? What do you need to look for?

Things to Consider: Scenario Two

- ▶ A team lead's role in the first two stages is to provide structure and support, and to build team spirit and comfort.
- ▶ This is very different than “telling” the team what the goals, roles, and processes are. Rather, you need to be able to facilitate conversations around these.
- ▶ You do, however, want to set some clear boundaries: how some of these early stage discussions will happen, over what time period, etc.
- ▶ As a group, writing down and discussing (remember “buy in”?) the team purpose, roles, and norms can be helpful. As team lead you also set the stage that these can continue to evolve as the team develops.
- ▶ From a conflict perspective, it is important to say that disagreement is OK, and will help the teams performance, and the goal is to come together and “buy in” or align to a share purpose because that will make the team more effective.
- ▶ Sometimes explicitly talking about team stages and storming can be helpful.

Relationship Conflict

Interpersonal challenges, “hot topics” and “cooling strategies”

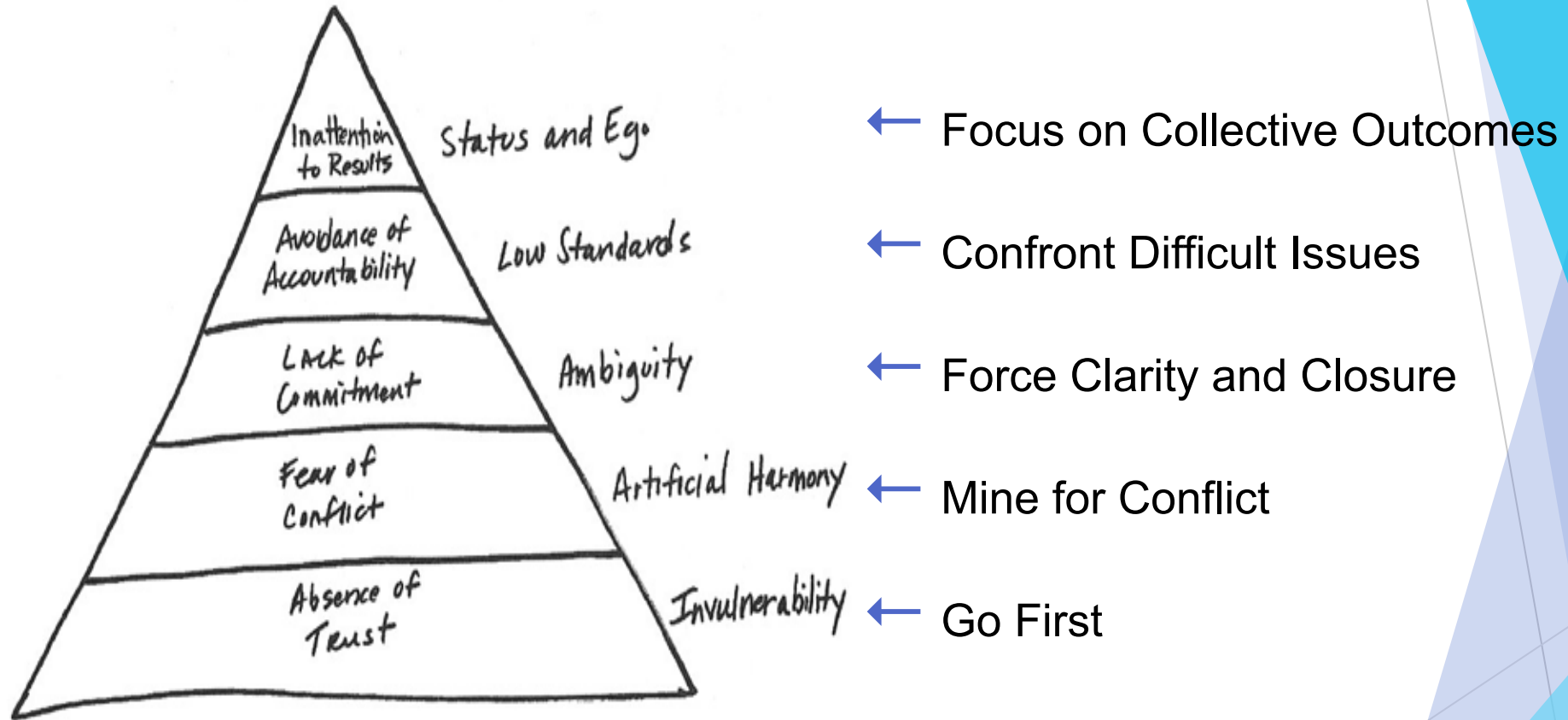
Difficult Conversations

What did you learn?

Think back on a difficult conversation you had, or think about one that you might have in the future:

- ▶ On one side of the paper, write what you think is going on
- ▶ On the other side of the paper, write with the other person might think is happening.

THE ROLE OF THE LEADER



Relationship Conflict: Suppress? Or Discuss?

- ▶ Relationship conflict can be triggered by “**hot topics**”, where there are competing values, uncertainty, and high stakes.
- ▶ Relationship conflict can also be triggered by **task conflict**, where there are negative attributions made about other’s motives, character, or abilities.

In these cases, relationship conflict needs to be discussed directly, **but only if it can be done in ways that allow for cooling the conflict down, rather than heating it up.**

Cool & Hot Topics

| | Cool Topics | Hot Topics |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Data | Accessible, relatively objective, conducive to testing of different interpretations | Controversial and/or in accessible, interpretation highly subjective, different interpretations, hard to test |
| Level of Certainty | High | Moderate to low |
| Stakes | Low to moderate | High |
| Goals | Largely shared | Differ based on deeply held beliefs, values, or interests |
| Discussion | Reasonable, fact-based, collegial | Often emotional, lack of agreement about which facts matter and what they mean, veiled personal attacks likely |

Practices you can Adopt

Manage Self

- Reflect
- Reframe

Manage Conversations

- Dig into divisive topics
- Examine competing views

Manage Relationships

- Build grounded trust
- Target key relationships

Practice 1: Managing self

| Actions | Behaviors |
|----------------|--|
| Reflect | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observe your emotional reactions - how do you feel? What is your body language saying?• Are you making assumptions about other's behaviors or intentions?• Do these assumptions say something about you? |

Practice 1: Managing self

| Actions | Behaviors |
|----------------|---|
| Reframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invent (to try out) alternative “stories” - what else might be going on?• Consider what you might miss that others might see.• Extend to others the same rights you claim for yourself to others. |

Practice 2: Managing Conversations

| Actions | Behaviors |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Dig into Divisive Topics | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treat people's concerns and interests as legitimate topics of conversation.• Make your reactions public: state your concerns, interests, beliefs and data that shape your views and ask others to do the same.• Acknowledge any puzzles that you experience, inviting others to help address them |

Practice 2: Managing Conversations

| Actions | Behaviors |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Examine Competing Views | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore competing beliefs, relying on data everyone (not just you) considers valid.• Ask others what they are feeling and thinking and what leads them to feel/think that way.• Examine how different team members' interests relate to the interests of the team. |

Practice 3: Managing Relationships

| Actions | Behaviors |
|--------------------|--|
| Build Trust | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognize each person's assets and liabilities.• Maintain the right to make mistakes and extend that same right to others.• Assume responsibility for learning from mistakes and help others on the team to do the same. |

Quick Quiz

8. True or False: Relationship conflict is avoidable.

False: sometimes relationship conflict is unavoidable.

This can happen when data is hard to interpret or controversial, certainty is low, stakes are high, and values, beliefs and competing interests come into play.

Quick Quiz

9. True or False: “Cooling” techniques include stopping a meeting early to reconvene at a later date.

True: this can be a way to help people manage themselves & gain perspective.

If you do this, though, set a time and date reconvene before ending, and in the next meeting go back to goals and norms before continuing the conversation.

Course Summary

- ▶ Conflict is one of the paradoxes of teamwork. It is both necessary and it must be managed.
- ▶ Understanding the varied sources of conflict helps to us depersonalize it, address it, work through it, and use it to improve performance.
- ▶ Addressing conflict is an “integrated task” – it is done through both sharing and listening

Coaching on your examples