

Realign and Find Agreement During Contests

Who Cares?

Robust leaders who want to succeed

- Predictable outcomes allow for better choices and empower groups to form partnerships and rally around mutual purpose
- Fostering the effectiveness of collaborative efforts prevent defective norms within groups.
 - Defective cultures generate waste and adversaries
 - ***Cooperative cultures generate success and partners***
- Contests should be civil and cordial to increase the number of partners in an organization

Definitions

Partner - either of a pair of people engaged together in the same activity.

Adversary - one's opponent in a contest, conflict, or dispute.

Bounds – establish territorial limit.

Boundary – in personal relationships, allows organizations to establish intimacy in consenting and respectful ways

Contest (v) – engage in competition to attain (a position)

Scenarios

- Project Completion
- Technical Documentation
- Criticism

Project Completion

Scenario 1

✓ Cooperative

- Forward client positive feedback to the development team and reward success with more opportunity within the organization
- Celebrate successes including small wins because the project goals were met with success
- Provide additional rewards and share profit equitably with the entire team that made the success possible

⊗ Defective

- Express gratitude for contribution combined with termination of role since the project will end too
- Explain that the team will be disbanded by labeling success as failure in order to provide an unquestionable cover story
- Fail to inform team of project compensation and very large profit margin on sub-contracting work

Scenario: The development of the project is on schedule for completion. Despite the numerous challenges of the project, the engineering team has ***successfully completed all objectives***. The team has finalization tasks within the remaining period of two months, and the project is ending. The client expresses positive feedback.

Technical Documentation

Scenario 2

✓ Cooperative

- Encourage feedback and show gratitude to make the documentation process less repetitive and painful
- Clarify misunderstandings with postmortems and retrospectives while accepting failures as learning
- Set documentation expectations as a clearly defined role to communicate transparently and to respect consent

✗ Defective

- Conclude all discussion and set the tone of the documentation phase with the phrase "it's just business" or "suck it up"
- Make passive-aggressive remarks when a team member expresses confusion
- After the engineering phase completes, send mixed signals to the team asking them to switch to only writing documentation

Scenario: The engineering team recently completed the development efforts of a project. Unfortunately, ***only this team*** has the specialized knowledge to document their efforts on their project. To make things worse, the organization can not hire a technical writer to collaborate with them on short notice. The documentation must be sent to the client with the completed project.

Criticism

Scenario 3

✓ Cooperative

- Discuss technical challenges with trust and express disagreement calmly while maintaining mutual respect
- Mentor and learn sincerely about impediments and set SMART goals to avoid pressure and ambiguous guidelines
- Handle individual conflict respectfully outside of group settings to improve group cohesion while increasing trust

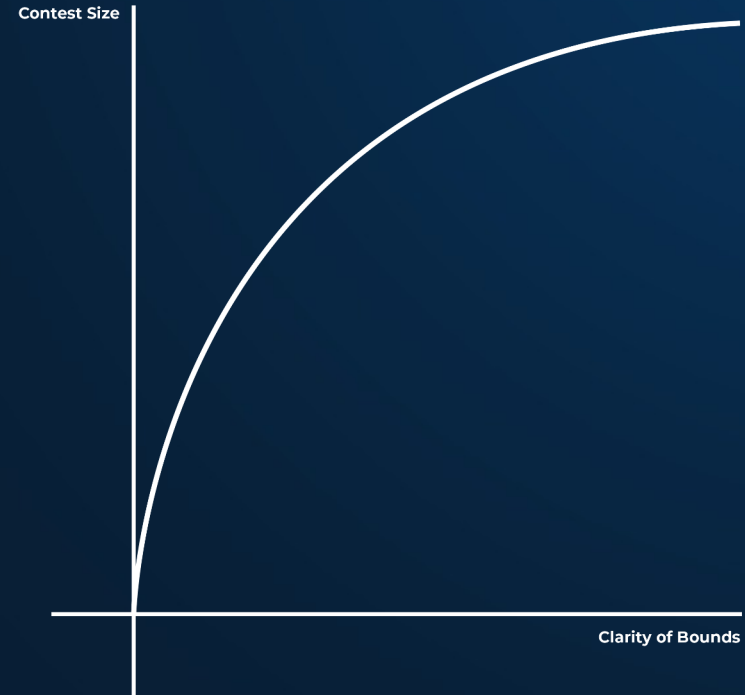
✗ Defective

- Allow criticism of “work-ethic” while labeling failure as unrecoverable and criticize the character of team members
- Mentor with inducement behaviors as ways to overcome misaligned professional goals and to complete tasks
- Provide feedback with snide remarks, shouting, or threats while suggesting replacement of team members

Scenario: As the project progressed, the team needed to share feedback with each other. Developers wrote code reviews, supervisors evaluated team members, and general discussions occurred in regular daily activities. As the team held their periodic retrospective, they began to engage with one another. Their style of communication represents their cooperative and defective norms.

Defective Contest Patterns

- Large contests tend to occur when boundaries are:
 - Ambiguous – innuendo may provide advantages for adversaries due to uncertainty
 - Precise – clarity demystifies plans for adversaries with high levels of distrust
- Small contests tend to occur when boundaries are:
 - Unclear – non-communication avoids contents between adversaries and tension tends to increase
- Poor **alignment** tends to drive escalation

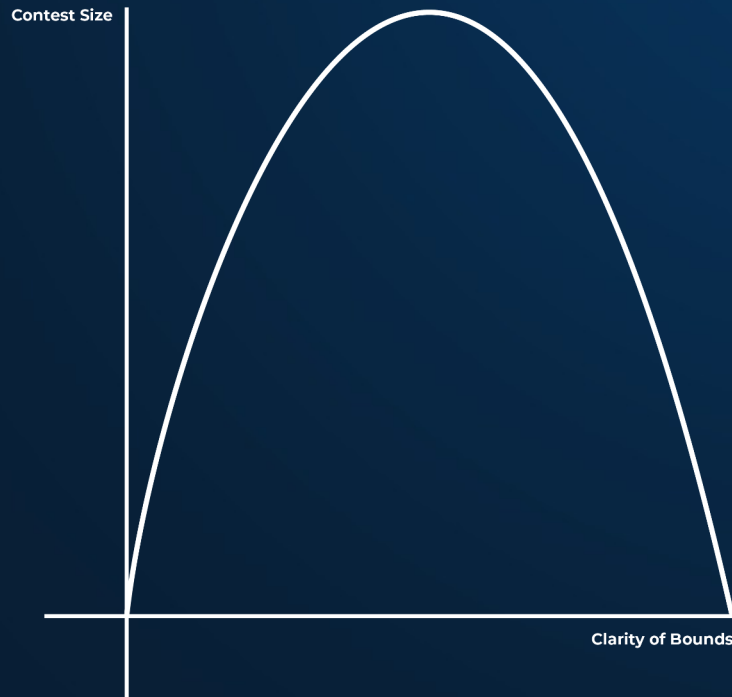


Defective Norms

- Sending mixed signals
- Allow side channels and unofficial email
- Sharing in demanding ways
- Define job functions poorly
- Rationalize with “it’s just business”
- Mentor poorly
- Ignore odd social interactions
- Be passive-aggressive
- Speak snide remarks
- Communicate with shouting
- Handle conflict unprofessionally
- Normalize criticism of “work-ethic”
- Pressure workforce
- Threaten team members
- Suggest replacement of team members
- Define goals poorly with lack of focus
- Constrain creative roles
- Terminate with gratitude of roles after project success
- Keep stubborn patterns
- Misalign professionally
- Label success as failure
- Label failure as unrecoverable
- Demean work quality
- Ignore technical suggestions
- Overrule technical decisions without explanation
- Provide executive support
- Humiliate and embarrass in group settings
- Induce to achieve tasks
- Communicate only in transactional styles
- Hide large profit margin of contracts

Cooperative Contest Patterns

- Large contests tend to occur when boundaries are:
 - Ambiguous – innuendo may provide comfort for partners due to uncertainty
- Small contests tend to occur when boundaries are:
 - Precise – clarity is a viable option because partners tend to trust each other more
 - Unclear – non-communication is a better option for partners with anxiety, but bounds are not understood either
- Poor **communication** tends to drive escalation



Cooperative Norms

- Ask for clarification on mixed signals
- Maintain transparent and open communication
- Share in fair ways
- Agree to clearly defined roles
- Provide advanced notice about financial constraints
- Mentor and learn sincerely
- Clarify misunderstandings early and often
- Establish safe and trusting spaces
- Frame the problem with the circumstance
- Express disagreement calmly
- Normalize healthy conflict resolution strategies
- Improve productivity with feedback
- Set SMART goals to avoid pressure
- Create mutual understanding of objectives
- Augment teams with missing resources
- Empower groups while building fulfilling roles
- Reward success with more opportunity
- Allow for different communication styles
- Align professional goals
- Celebrate successes including small wins
- Fix failures and circumstances instead of people
- Review and improve work efforts
- Recognize suggestions
- Show gratitude
- Legitimize executive decisions with complete transparency
- Support work efforts with executive resources
- Handle individual conflict respectfully outside of group settings
- Respect consent
- Enable collaborative work efforts
- Share profit equitably

Prisoner's Dilemma

A Classic Game Theory Example

		B	
A		B Cooperates	B Defects
A	Cooperates	B Cooperates A Cooperates	B Defects A Cooperates
	Defects	B Cooperates A Defects	B Defects A Defects

- A theoretical contest with two completely rational agents to a dilemma
 - cooperate with their partner for mutual benefit
 - defect from their partner for individual reward
- Abstract scenarios
 - Alignment drives A / B to cooperate
 - Misalignment drives A / B to defect
- In general across most scenarios, cooperation tends to lead to the most robust strategy
 - **Enlightened Self-interest** →
“Serving others often serves oneself”
 - Stag Hunt →
“Hunters share a stag instead of rabbits”
 - Overcoming the “Tragedy of the Commons”

Cooperation in the Wild

- Logistics chains rely on trust in production and security of the supply chain
- Networking socially, professionally, etc. to build cooperative norms and rapport before stressful events to make teams work
- Internet protocols relies on trust and communication networks make use of certificate chains
- Trust allows partners to communicate highlights through innuendo, whereas communication strains on forced teams of adversaries
- International alliances allowing for novel operations and capabilities between alliance members

Actionable Steps

Develop cooperative norms

- Encourage Partners, Not Adversaries
 - Creatives partners set boundaries
 - to communicate clearly in collaborative environments
 - to determine alignment in defective environments
 - Fearful adversaries hide boundaries
 - to win contests in collaborative environments
 - to hide misalignment in defective environments
- Overcome the Prisoner's Dilemma through setting boundaries
 - Identify partners through **transparent bounds**
 - **Minimize contests** through alignment on bounds
- Contests end with mutual agreement to increase partnership