Conflict Resolution in Leadership

Types of Conflict and Strategies for Resolution →

Ready to begin?

produced by
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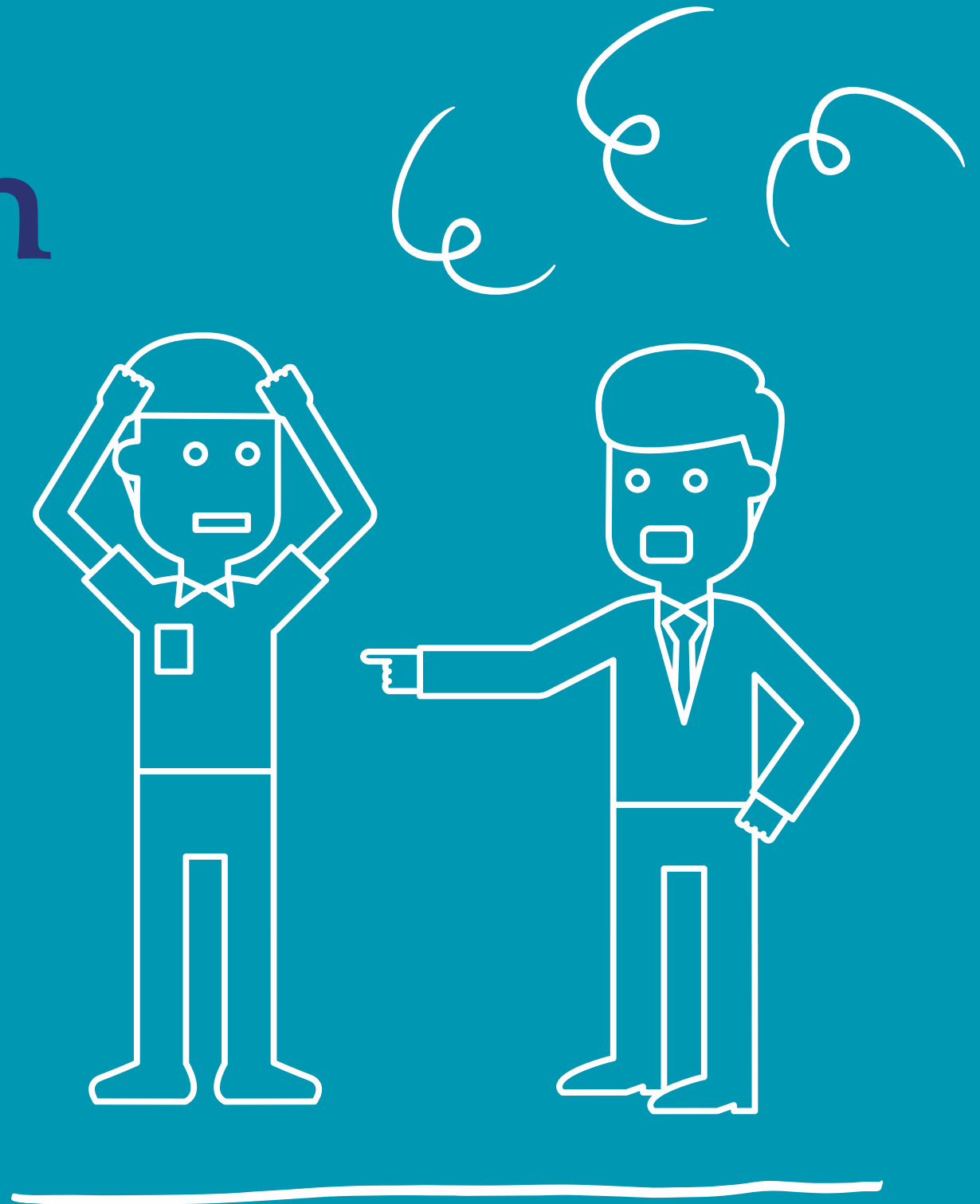
What is Conflict?

Conflict occurs when individuals or groups perceive a lack of alignment, miscommunication, or misunderstanding, typically rooted in diverse underlying causes. Recognizing and addressing these causes is essential for crafting effective resolution strategies. Common types of conflict include:

Task-Based Conflict

This occurs when team members disagree on goals, strategies, or processes for achieving objectives.

Example: Disagreements about the most efficient project timeline or approach to meet a deadline.
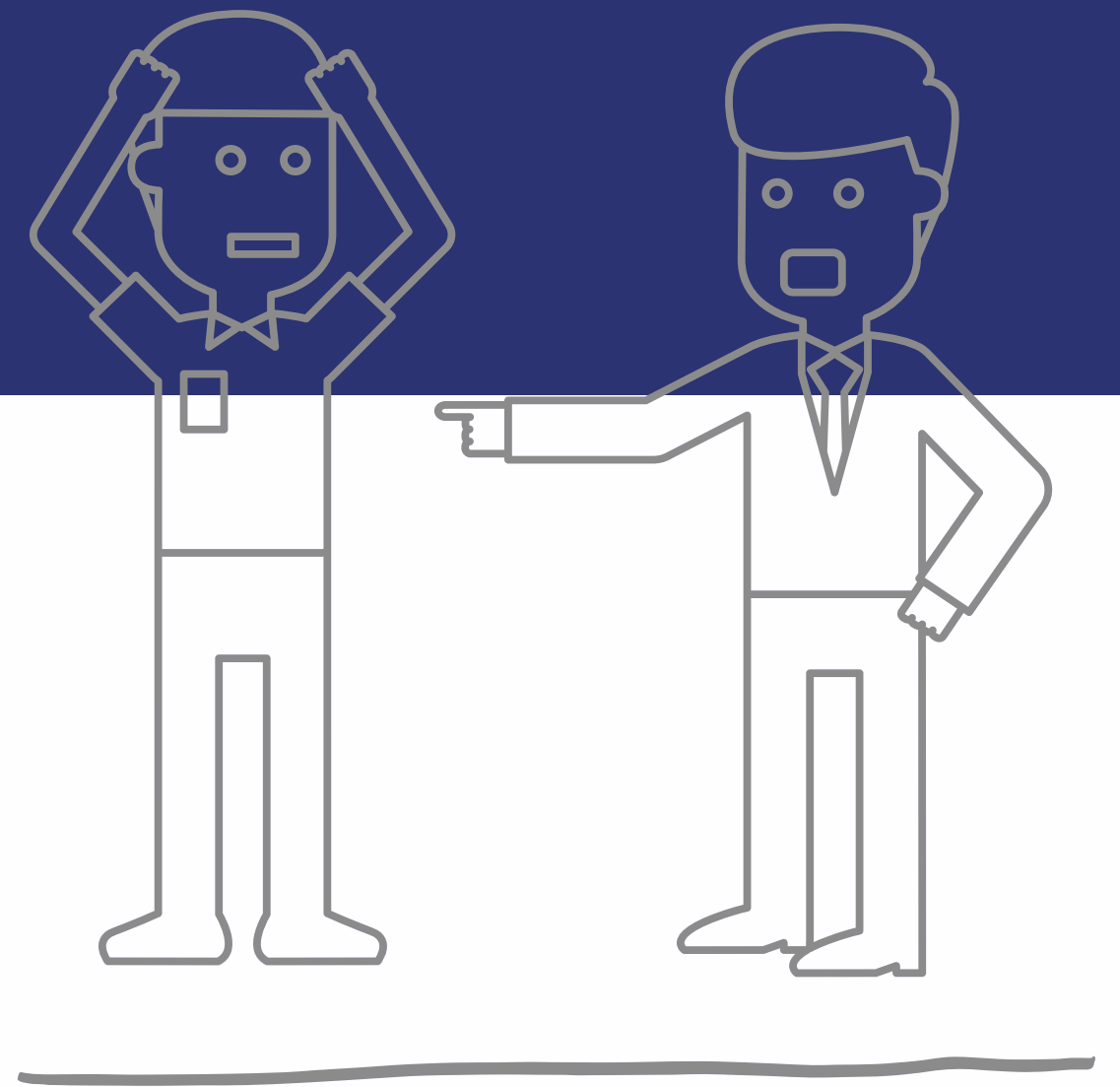
Interpersonal Conflict

Rooted in personality differences, communication styles, or personal values that impact team dynamics.

Example: Tension arising from perceived disrespectful communication or contrasting working styles.
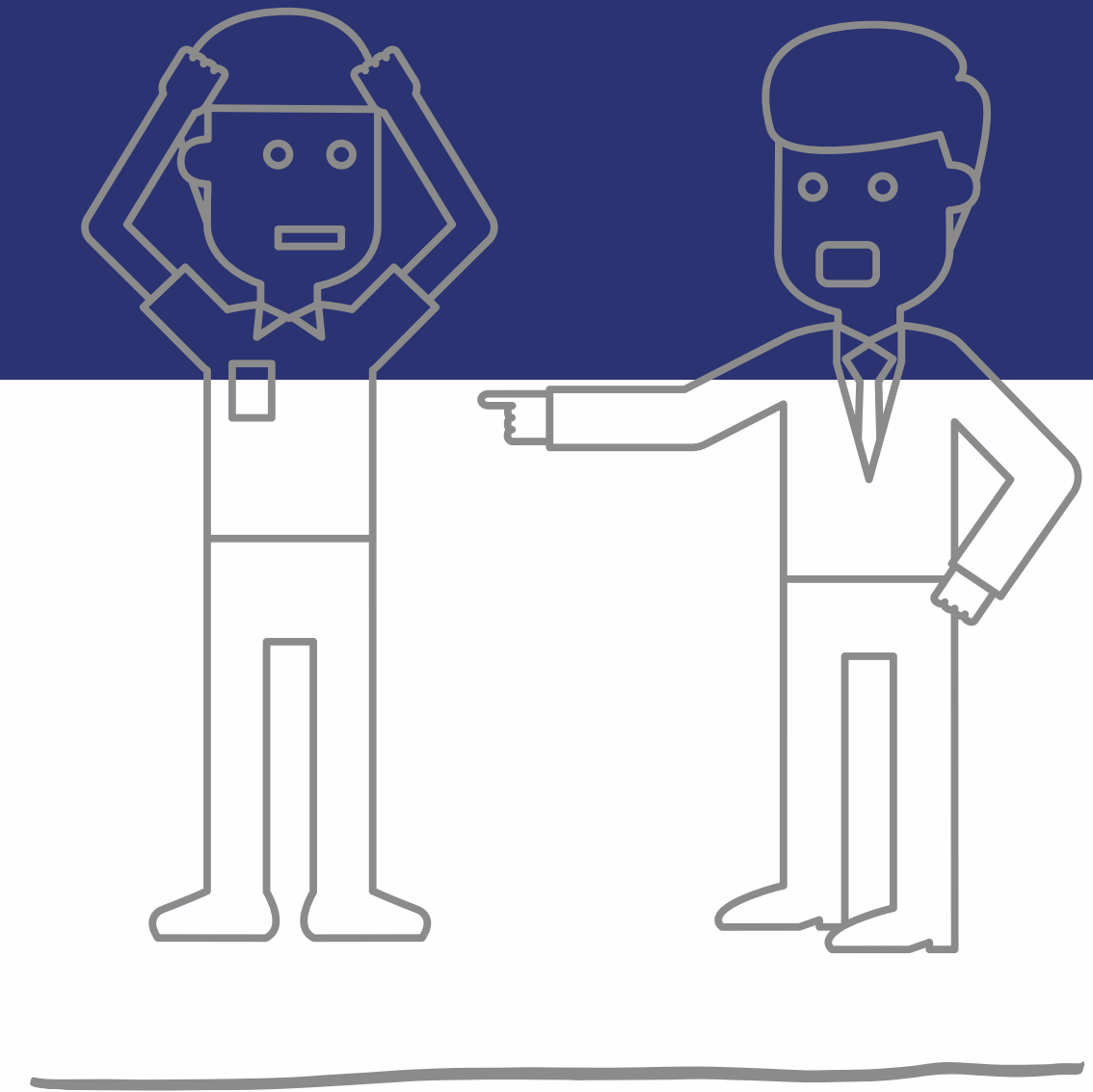
Role Conflict

Emerges from ambiguity, overlap, or incompatibility in job responsibilities, leading to confusion or competition.

Example: Unclear division of project responsibilities causing team members to compete for task ownership.

Value-Based Conflict

Stems from differences in personal beliefs, ethics, or core principles that challenge team cohesion.

Example: Divergent perspectives on organizational ethics or corporate social responsibility.

Resource Conflict

Arises from competition for limited organizational resources like time, budget, or personnel.

Example: Departments competing for budget allocation or limited staffing resources.
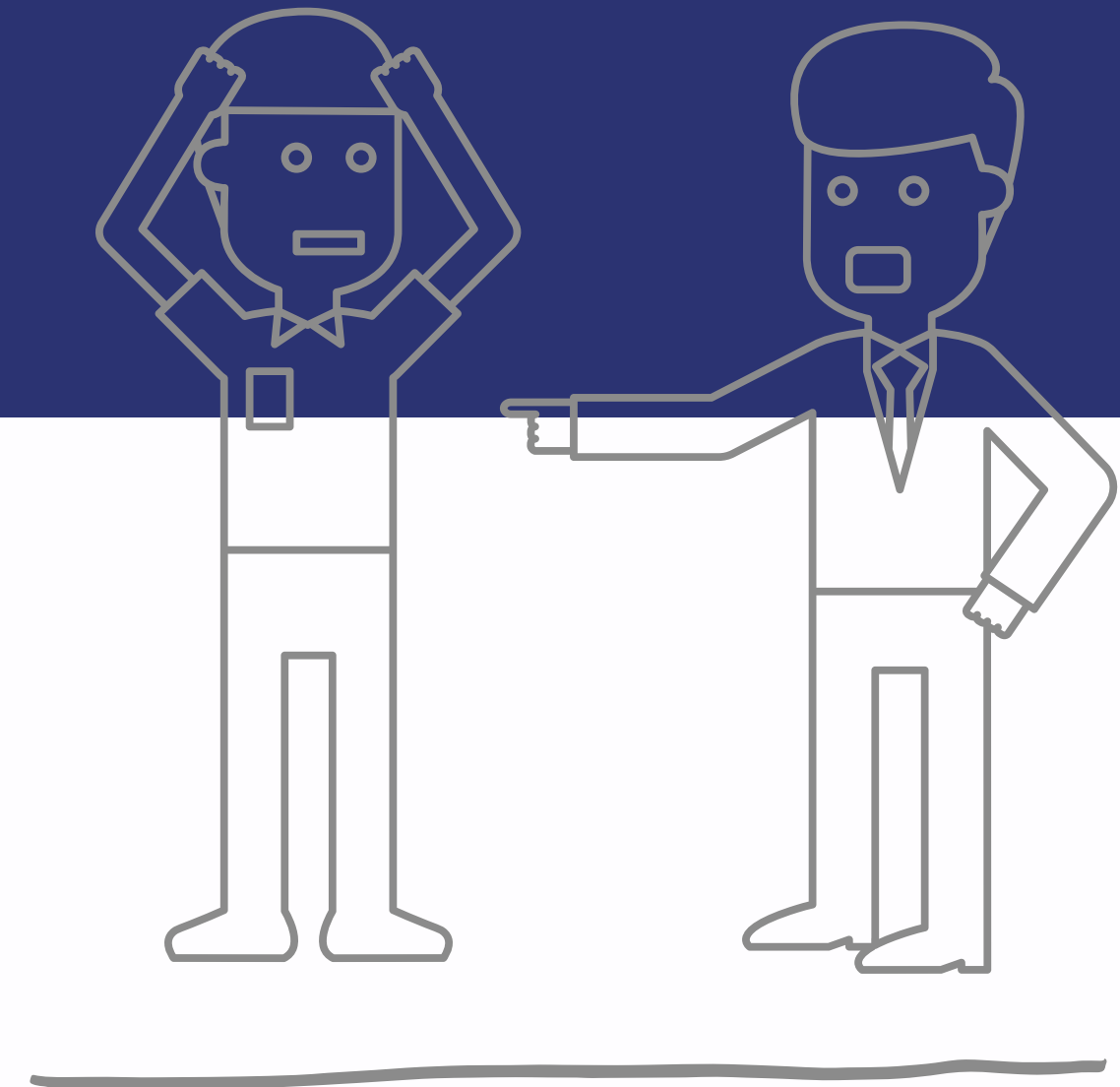
# Reflection Activity

Reflect on a recent conflict you faced.

Questions to consider:

- What triggered the disagreement?
- How did emotions shape the interaction?
- What could have been done differently to improve the outcome?
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Takeaway: Understanding the dynamics of conflict begins with self-awareness.

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model

It offers a strategic approach to managing interpersonal tensions by mapping conflict resolution strategies along two key dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness.

COLLABORATING

COMPETING

COMPROMISING

ACCOMMODATING

AVOIDING

Assertiveness

Cooperativeness
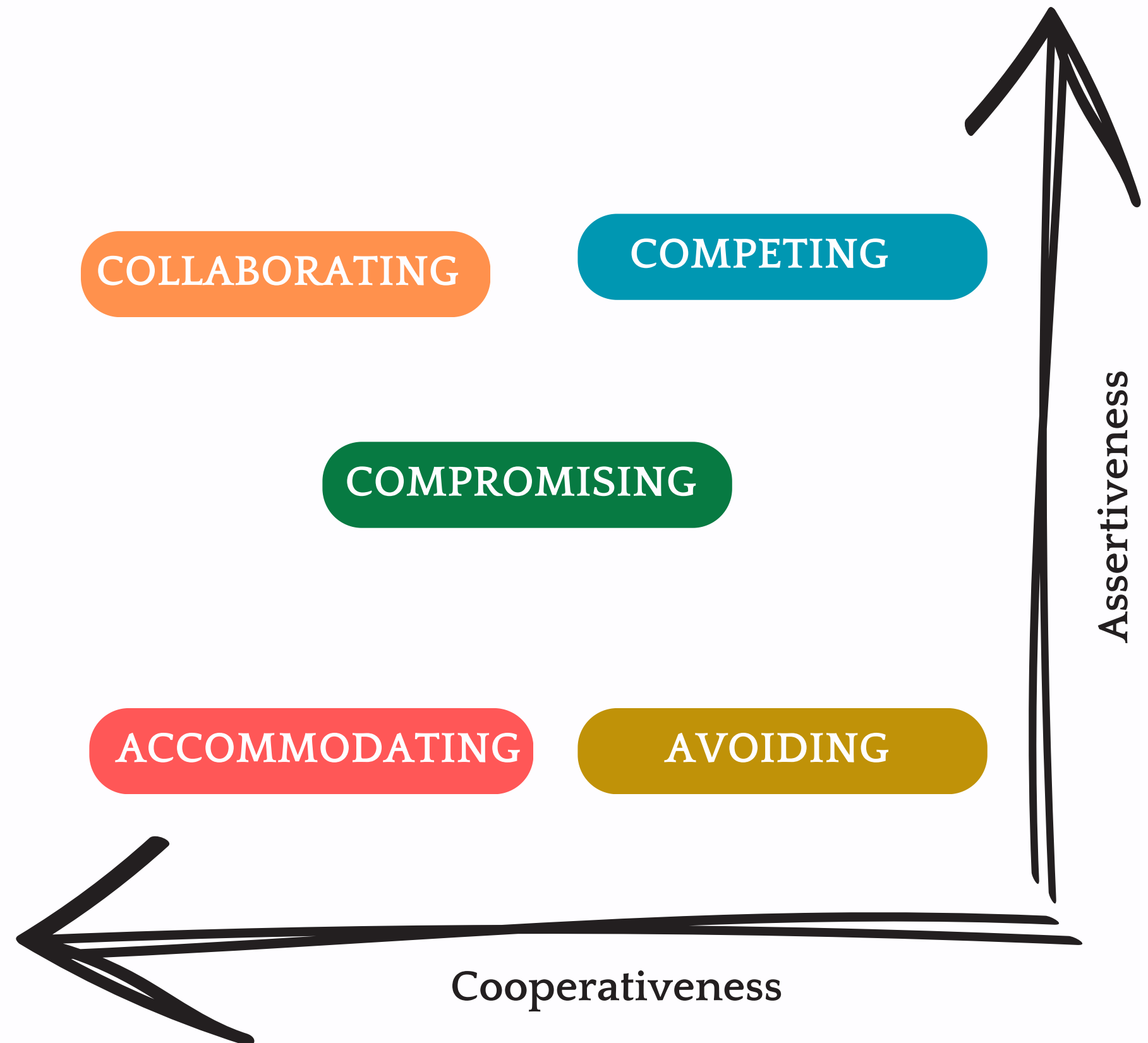
# Five Conflict Resolution Strategies

01 Avoiding Strategy

Characteristics:
- Low goal importance
- Low relationship importance
- Minimal engagement with the conflict

Workplace Applicability: Generally ineffective in professional settings

Example: Ignoring a minor disturbance with a stranger in a public space

Caution: Frequent avoidance in workplace interactions can weaken team dynamics and hinder problem-solving. Conflict should not be avoided out of fear but approached as a strategic decision when necessary.
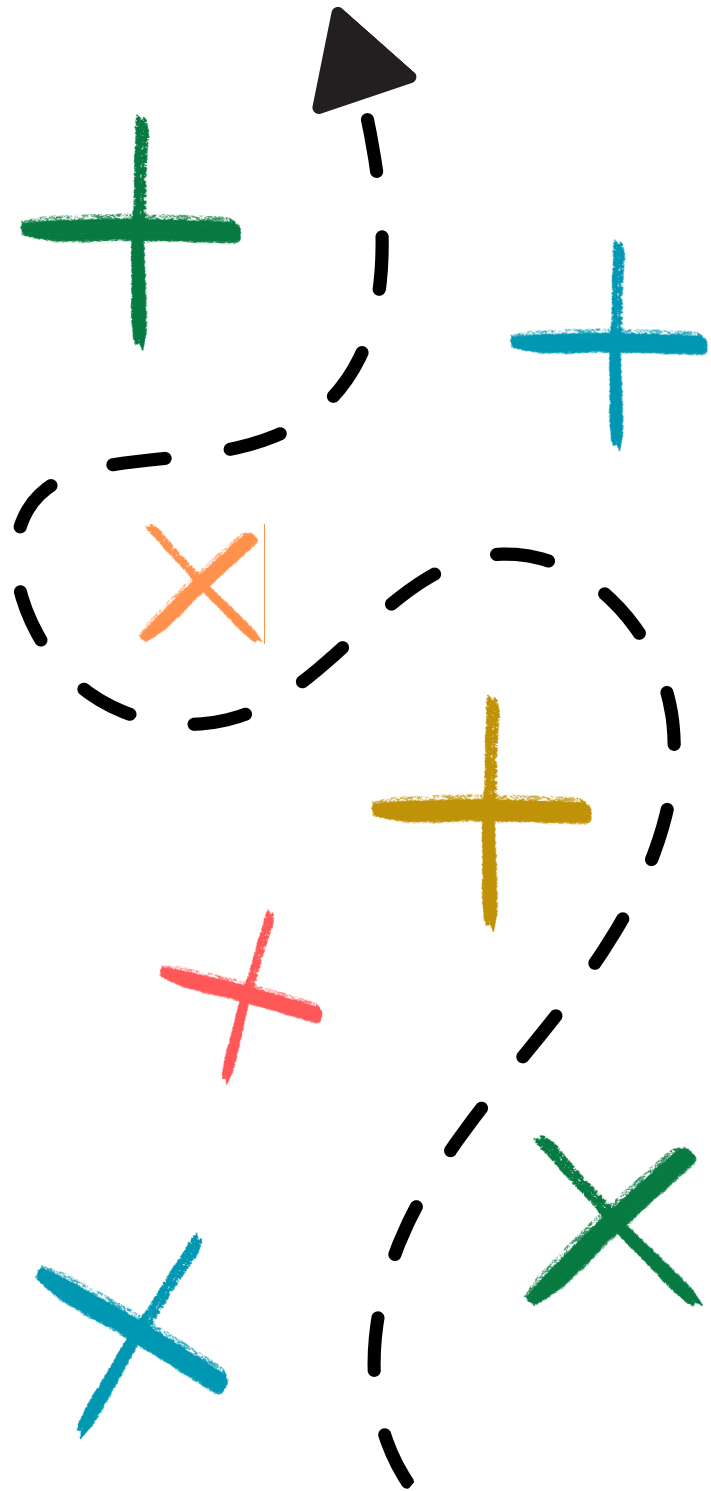
02 Competing Strategy

Characteristics:
- High personal goal importance
- Low relationship importance
- Assertive and directive approach

Workplace Applicability:
- Crisis management
- Protecting fundamental rights

Example: If someone is unconscious and others are debating what to do, stepping in and taking charge can ensure the person receives medical attention more quickly.

Caution: Frequent competition in workplace interactions can strain interpersonal relationships, weakening trust and hindering collaboration.

03 **Accommodating Strategy**

Characteristics:
- Low personal goal importance
- High relationship preservation
- Prioritizing harmony over individual objectives

Workplace Applicability:
- When the issue is low-stakes
- Maintaining team cohesion

Example: If you propose an idea for a future project during a meeting and a colleague expresses concerns about its potential negative impact, you could address the conflict by withdrawing your proposal.

Note: If accommodation is used excessively, it can stifle innovation and meaningful dialogue.

LOSE-LOSE
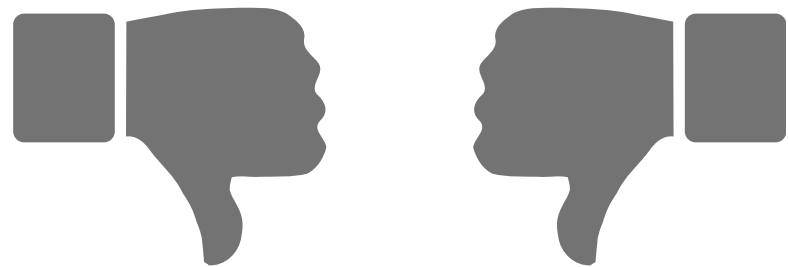
04 Compromising Strategy

Characteristics:
- Moderate goal importance
- Moderate relationship importance
- Mutual sacrifices for partial resolution

Key Features:
- Balanced approach
- Requires emotional intelligence
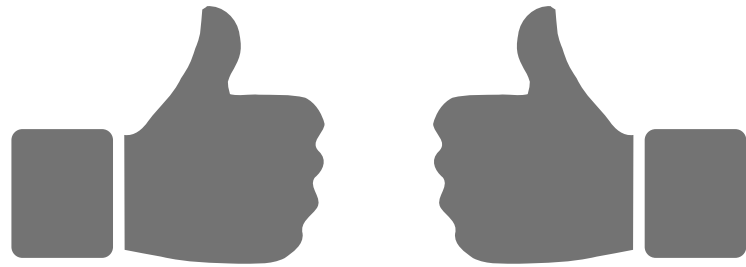- Focuses on mutual concessions

Example: Sharing project leadership responsibilities by alternating roles

Caution: A "lose-lose" strategy where neither party fully achieves their original objectives

WIN-WIN

05 **Collaborating Strategy**

Characteristics:
- High goal importance
- High relationship importance
- Creative problem-solving

Workplace Applicability: Ideal for most workplace conflicts.

Example: Collaboration is key when an employee's poor performance is affecting the business. Maintaining a positive relationship is important, but addressing the issue together can help identify the cause and improve both performance and business outcomes.

Note: If you can't generate a win-win idea, you can always fall back on compromise.

How to address a conflict collaboratively

01 **Establish a Safe Environment**

Create a neutral space where all parties feel comfortable expressing their perspectives.

02 **Active Listening**

The goal is to fully understand the other person's perspective with genuine curiosity, free of judgment, and without interrupting or making assumptions.

How:

- **Give your full attention.** Avoid using your cell phone or any screen.
- Show that you're listening through **body language**: maintaining eye contact, nodding, and using open gestures.
- **Ask open-ended questions** that encourage sharing. For example: "Can you tell me more about why you feel that way?" or "What would make this situation easier for you?"
- Use **paraphrasing** to confirm understanding: "What I hear you saying is…"
- **Listen to understand**, not to argue or respond immediately.
- Acknowledge and **validate the other person's emotions**. For instance, saying, "That must be frustrating for you."

03 Root Cause Analysis

Identify the root causes behind surface-level disagreements by asking probing questions to uncover deeper issues.

How:
- Differentiate between positions (what people want) and interests (why they want it).
- Explore systemic or contextual factors that may be influencing the conflict.
- Focus on the problem, not the person. Address the issue directly without making it personal. For example, say "The project timeline is causing stress" instead of "You're causing delays."
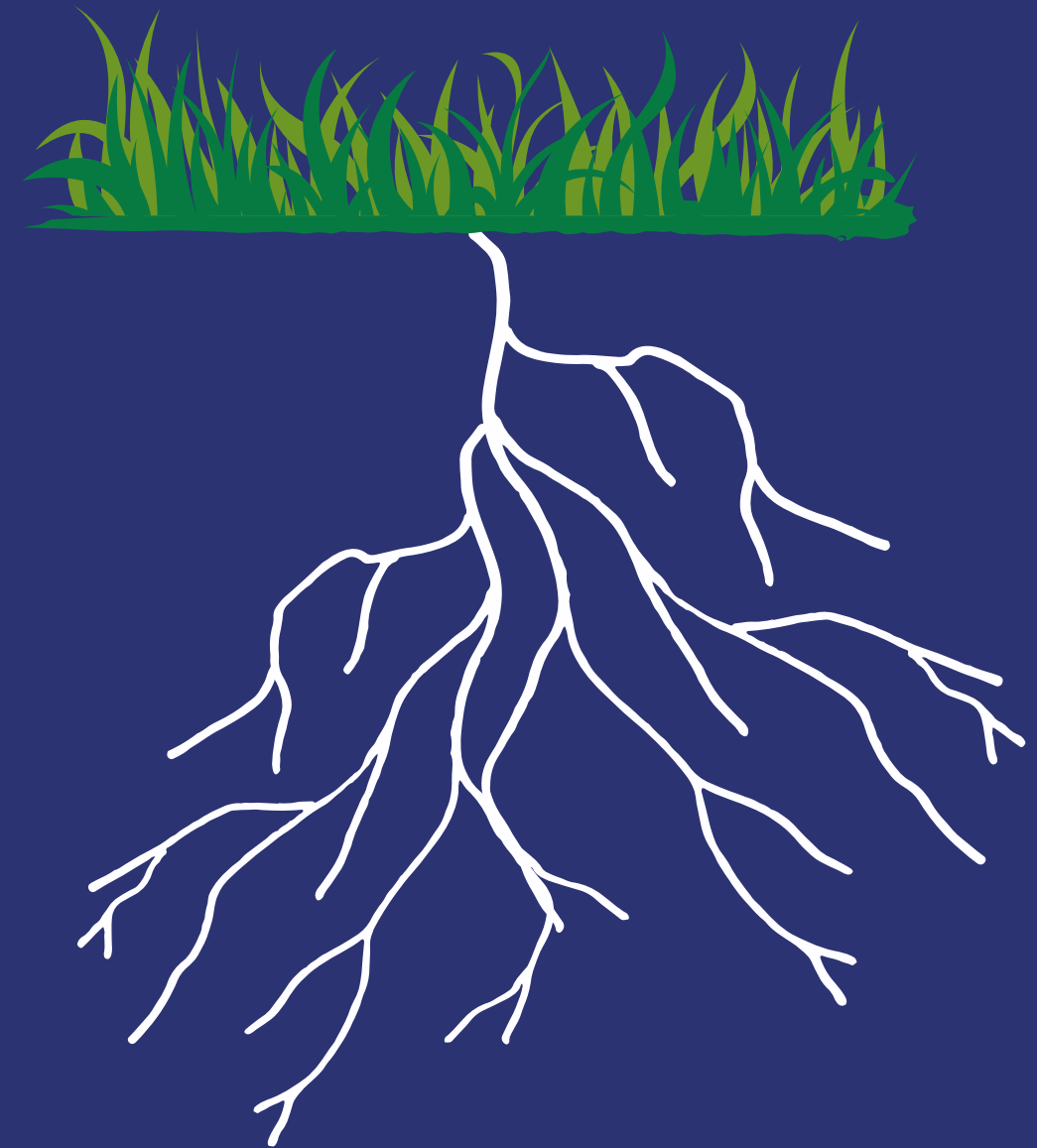
04 **Goal Alignment**

Establish shared interests or goals that unite conflicting parties.

How:
- Identify common goals and areas of agreement.
- Ensure proposed solutions align with organizational values.
- Highlight mutual benefits to encourage collaboration.
- Balance immediate solutions with long-term relationship building.

Example: "We all want this project to succeed. Let's work together to meet the deadline."
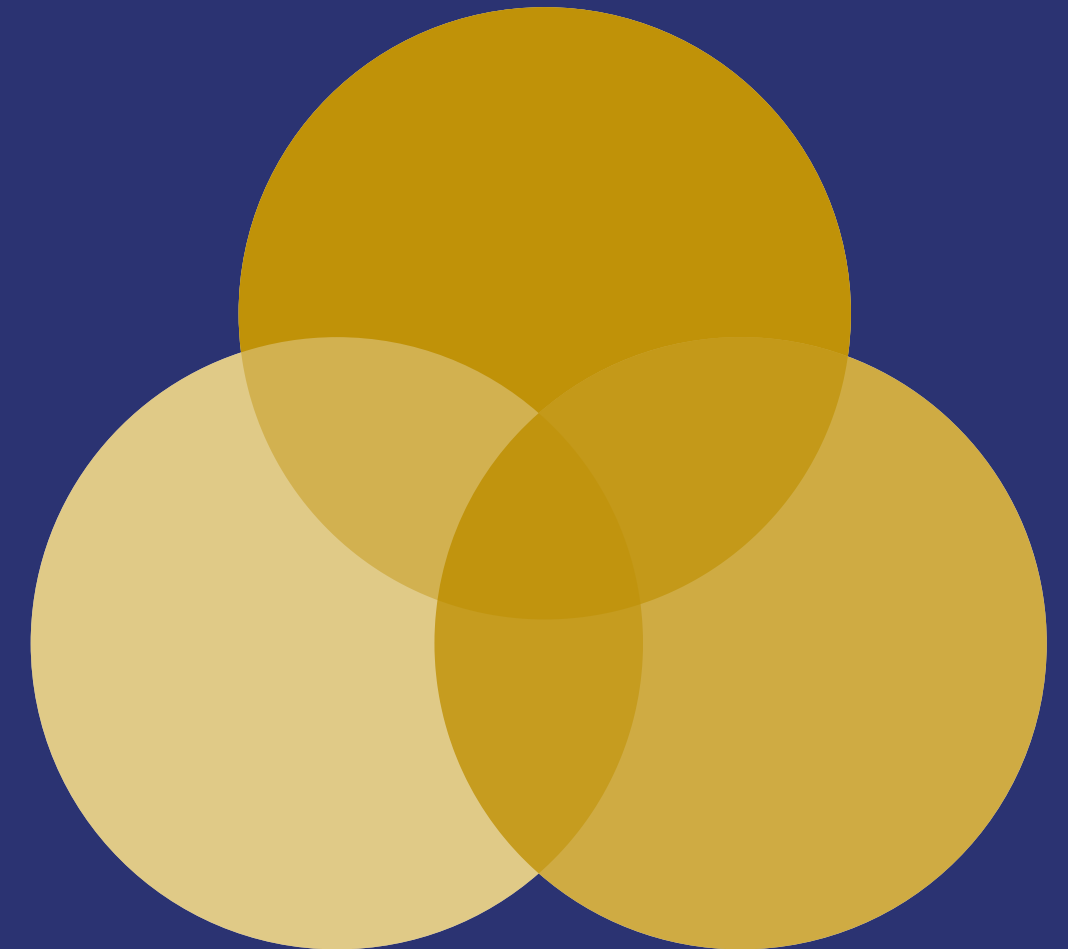
05 Resolution Planning

Develop and implement a mutually beneficial plan of action.

How:
- Brainstorm a variety of potential solutions.
- Evaluate each option for fairness and feasibility.
- Develop a clear, actionable plan with defined roles.
- Establish accountability and follow-up measures to ensure resolution success.

06 Follow Up

Check in regularly to ensure the conflict has been resolved and no residual issues remain.

Exercise

Context: Your software development team is preparing for a high-stakes project with a tight deadline for a major financial services client. The team is divided over the choice of project management methodology:

Team A: Advocates for the Agile Scrum methodology
- Believes in iterative development and the ability to rapidly adapt to changes.
- Argues that the client's evolving requirements require flexibility throughout the project.
- Cites previous successful projects that used Agile, demonstrating its effectiveness in dynamic environments.
- Concerned that alternative methodologies could lead to increased costs and timeline risks.

Team B: Supports the Waterfall methodology
- Emphasizes the importance of predictability through detailed upfront planning.
- Highlights the financial sector's need for precise and comprehensive documentation.
- Argues that the client would benefit from a structured, linear approach with clear milestones.
- Worried that Agile could lead to scope creep and a lack of control over the project's direction.

Additional Contextual Layers:
- The project budget is $750,000
- Deadline is 6 months from project initiation
- The client has a history of changing requirements mid-project
- The team has mixed experience levels (senior and junior developers)
- Recent organizational restructuring has created underlying team tensions

Role-Play Exercise:
- Explore differing perspectives: Role-play the conflict, ensuring each member practices articulating their methodology's advantages and addressing concerns.
- Collaboratively draft a resolution: Work together to propose a compromise or hybrid approach that leverages the strengths of both Agile and Waterfall to meet project requirements.
- Reflection: After the role-play, reflect on what worked well in the discussion and where further improvements can be made in bridging methodological differences.