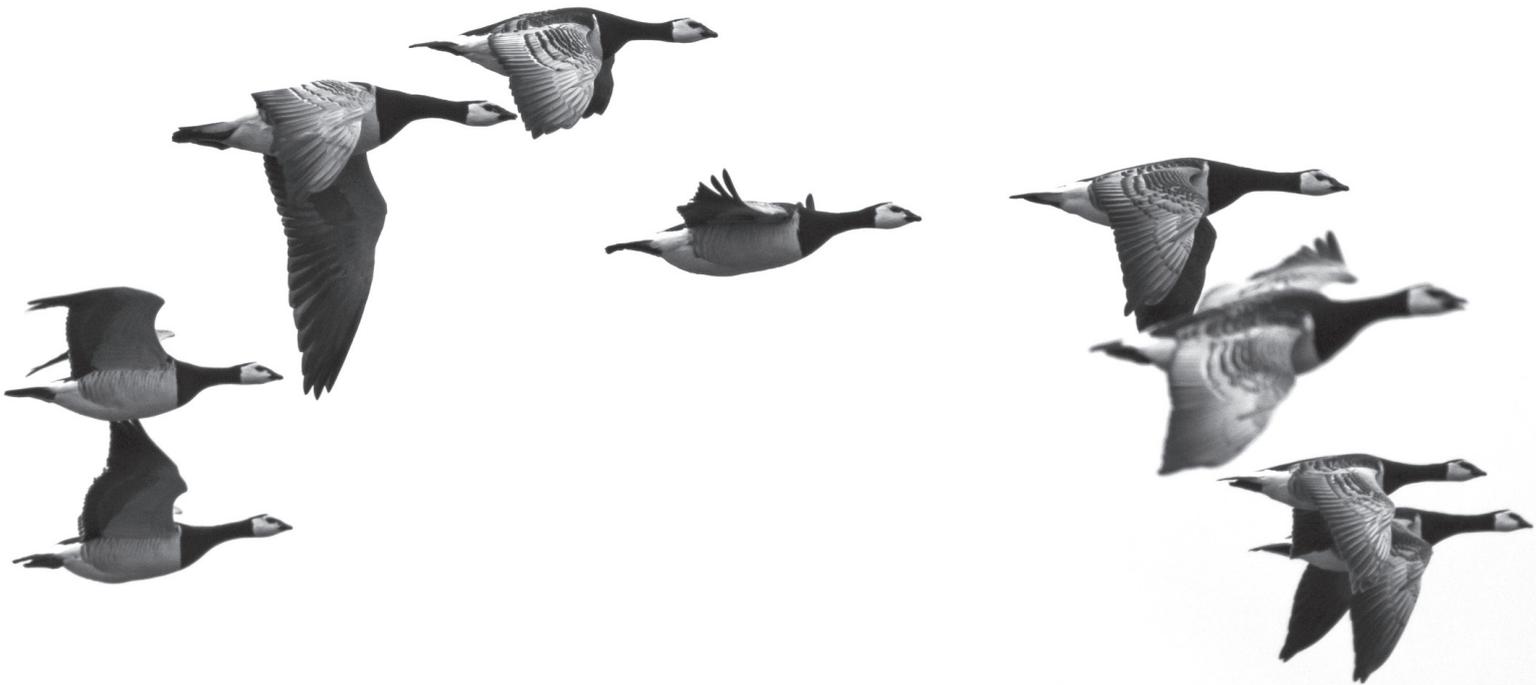


U P D R A F T

ADDRESSING TEAM TENSIONS



TEAM DISCIPLINES



WE ARE WIRED TO RELATE EMOTIONALLY TO EACH OTHER

Conflict and tension in a team, whether it is between two individuals or more widespread, can be toxic to both the team’s effectiveness and team members’ experience of being part of the team.

Tension and conflict are inevitable even in the best of relationships, so the objective of this discipline is to manage that tension, not eliminate it altogether. This discipline will introduce the team to practices that will help its members deal with tensions that arise promptly, honestly and effectively.

Our tendency to blame or attribute bad intentions to others, even sub-consciously, can get in the way of addressing these tensions effectively. It can therefore be useful to acknowledge some emotional triggers that we are all hardwired with to varying degrees, and how we can address these.

HARDWIRED EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS		
Triggers	Addressing these pro-actively	Addressing these reactively
<p>We have evolved to have a strong emotional response to things such as feeling that we are being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treated unfairly • Treated as having a lower status or value • Excluded • Disrespected <p>The emotional response to any of these triggers can be disproportionately strong when considered objectively (even by the person who has the reaction).</p>	<p>We can significantly reduce causing emotional triggers by paying attention to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How we frame things • The language we choose • How we include people in a discussion or decision 	<p>It is important to notice the impact we have had on someone and the emotions this may have caused. It is also important to accept that this reaction is a natural consequence of our words or actions – even if their reaction seems disproportionate.</p> <p>Where you have triggered a strong emotional response it is important to make an effort to rebuild trust and connection.</p>

The practices set out in this Team Discipline will assist your team to develop a culture in which team conflicts are surfaced, and not allowed to fester.



PRACTICE 1: ACKNOWLEDGE THE TENSION OR ISSUE

Ways to raise uncomfortable issues

It can feel easier to ignore tension than raise it and risk creating more discomfort. Of course, we know that this is not the right answer. So, how can we break the ice and get working on the problem?

The following phrases can give a team member an entrée and the courage to address a tension or issue:

“Can we take a temperature check to see how we are all feeling?”

“How about we lift up to take a helicopter view for a moment?”

“How about you and I take this offline and have a ‘SOSO’ convo.”

“Can you two please have a ‘SOSO’ session?”

PRACTICE 2: TAKE A HELICOPTER VIEW

For addressing a tension or strong emotion that has either arisen in the moment or has been simmering in the team

Choosing to shift our perspective from being ‘in’ the moment to looking down ‘on’ it from above can have a remarkable impact on what we observe.

This approach requires everyone on the team to be prepared to express honestly what they have noticed and felt without criticism or blame. The aim is to understand how a particular behaviour or situation has impacted everyone on the team and to consider how to manage that in a way that protects and builds on the team’s effectiveness.

Step 1: Call for the team to ‘take a helicopter view’

This starts with any team member saying:

“Can I ask that we take a helicopter view on this for a moment?”

There may need to be a quick discussion to remind people how this works – which can be a valuable moment to divert attention from the issue and let emotions settle a little. It may pay to write a few sentence starters from Step 2 on the white board.



Step 2: Share observations

Each team member is asked to share an objective view of what they noticed was happening in the discussion, starting with one or more of these phrases:

“What I noticed was”

“What I have been noticing is”

“What I heard was”

“What I have been seeing is”

“What I did was”

“I know that I have”

“What I felt was”

“This has made me feel”

To get the ball rolling, it may make sense for the person who called for the helicopter view to begin the by sharing their own observation, being careful to keep it objective. These observations may lead to a more in-depth discussion, potentially reflecting on the history of the issue.

BEWARE of...

- Blame: e.g. *“You are totally insensitive about”*
- Accusations: e.g. *“You have been talking outside of the team about”*
- Generalisations: *“You always”*

Notice each of these examples start with *“You. . . .”* If people stay focused on explaining what they saw, heard felt, understood, from their own perspective it can help avoid this.

Step 3: Decide what to do about it.

Some examples of what the team may decide include:

- *Taking some time to reflect*
The leader or a key person involved may suggest they’d like to take some time to think about this. This can be wise, but the matter shouldn’t be dropped. The team should agree when to come back and check in about how to address the issue.
- *Taking it offline*
Two individuals may recognise that they need to have a SOSO conversation about this (See Practice 4 below). Alternatively, the leader may propose that he or she works it through with those directly involved. Again, they should confirm to the team that they have done this at a later point.
- *Acknowledge and apologise*
One or more people may accept responsibility for some aspect of the issue and apologise. When this occurs, the team, or its leader should acknowledge the openness and vulnerability being displayed by the team member as a productive team behaviour.
- *Commit to future behaviour*
One or more team members may commit to doing something differently in future and may ask the team to hold them to account for demonstrating the change.



PRACTICE 3: REVIEW OUR COMMITMENTS

To reflect on how we are keeping to our commitments generally or to create an opportunity to raise a particular issue

Teams often create a set of agreed team behaviours, team expectations, or ground rules that are then ignored and breached without challenge.

This typically causes frustration and undermining of team spirit as some members continue to adhere to the team agreement while others operate to their own rule. Tension builds and team behaviours and commitment degrade accordingly.

Step 1: Dust off your team's agreed behaviours, ground rules or expectations

Assuming the team has together agreed a set of expectations or ground rules it would live by this is a chance to get those out. If not, it could be time to create them.

If people feel that there are behaviours that need to be discussed that are not on the existing list, they can propose adding one for discussion.

Step 2: Rate the team's compliance to each ground rule as green, amber or red.

Example - Ground rule or agreed behaviour	Team	Me
Speak your mind during meetings not after	Red	Green
Respect each other's time by:		
• coming to meetings on time	Green	Green
• avoid distractions and interruptions during meetings	Amber	Amber
• plan and lead agenda items we are responsible for effectively	Red	Green
Make ourselves available to help each other and provide a sounding board.	Red	Red
Provide social time around and outside of meetings. Stay focused on making efficient progress during meetings.	Green	Green
Show respect for each other by:		
• listening and not cutting across each other when speaking	Red	Amber
• taking time to explain things in a way that allows everyone to understand	Amber	Red
• being loyal and positive when we talk about each other to others or among ourselves	Green	Green
Keep our commitments to deliver - or call for help to address issues early.	Amber	Green
No surprises*	Red	Red

*This last one has been added in by one team member as a discussion starter.



Step 3: Each team member shares their ratings

Each team member in turn should share and explain their self and team rating on each item. Sometimes discussing these in pairs first can be useful.

All team members should be reminded to listen intently and be curious to understand their team mates' perspective. Ideally team members should be quick to acknowledge their personal contribution to any issues.

Step 4: Agree what should be done

It may be enough to simply get consensus about what is happening, compared to what was agreed or expected. Reaffirm that the agreement still holds and that members are committed to self-regulate.

However, there may be an opportunity to put some specific changes in place to address a behaviour that has arisen. For example if individuals are coming to meetings unprepared despite agreeing to come prepared, the solution may lie in sharing meeting materials earlier.

PRACTICE 4 - HOLD A SOSO CONVERSATION

For tackling a tension between two team members that is impacting the team

If one relationship in the team is not working well, it will more than likely impact the whole team. Team members need to take responsibility for ensuring they engage constructively with each of their teammates.

Sometimes this means two team members need to have a conversation to:

*“Sort Our Sh*t Out”*

or as we call it, a **“SOSO”** conversation

Step 1: Call it out: “I think it may be time for a SOSO conversation”

This may come from a team member experiencing tension with another, or someone else in the team who is observing the tension between other team members.

Step 2: Hold the SOSO Conversation

A ‘SOSO’ should be scheduled promptly (and this might mean that the team suggest the pair head out of the meeting to have this conversation straight away).



SOSO Conversation Guide

- 1 Each person share why it is important to resolve the issue (in a way that affirms the importance of the relationship to themselves, the team and the work).
- 2 Person A explains their perception of the issue and the impact they believe it is having while person B listens and asks questions to fully understand (*If one person is more 'aggrieved' they should usually go first.*) Person B should then accurately recount person A's view of the situation – resisting the temptation to add any clarifications from their own perspective.
- 3 Person B explains their perception of the issue and the impact they believe it is having while person A listens and asks questions to fully understand. Person A should now should accurately recount person B's view.
- 4 Each person should then suggest what they could do to resolve the issue (or improve it).
- 5 Each person outlines anything else they would want from the other in order to resolve the issue (or improve it).
- 6 Finally, both parties agree what they are prepared to commit to for the next two weeks, at which point they should meet again to review progress.

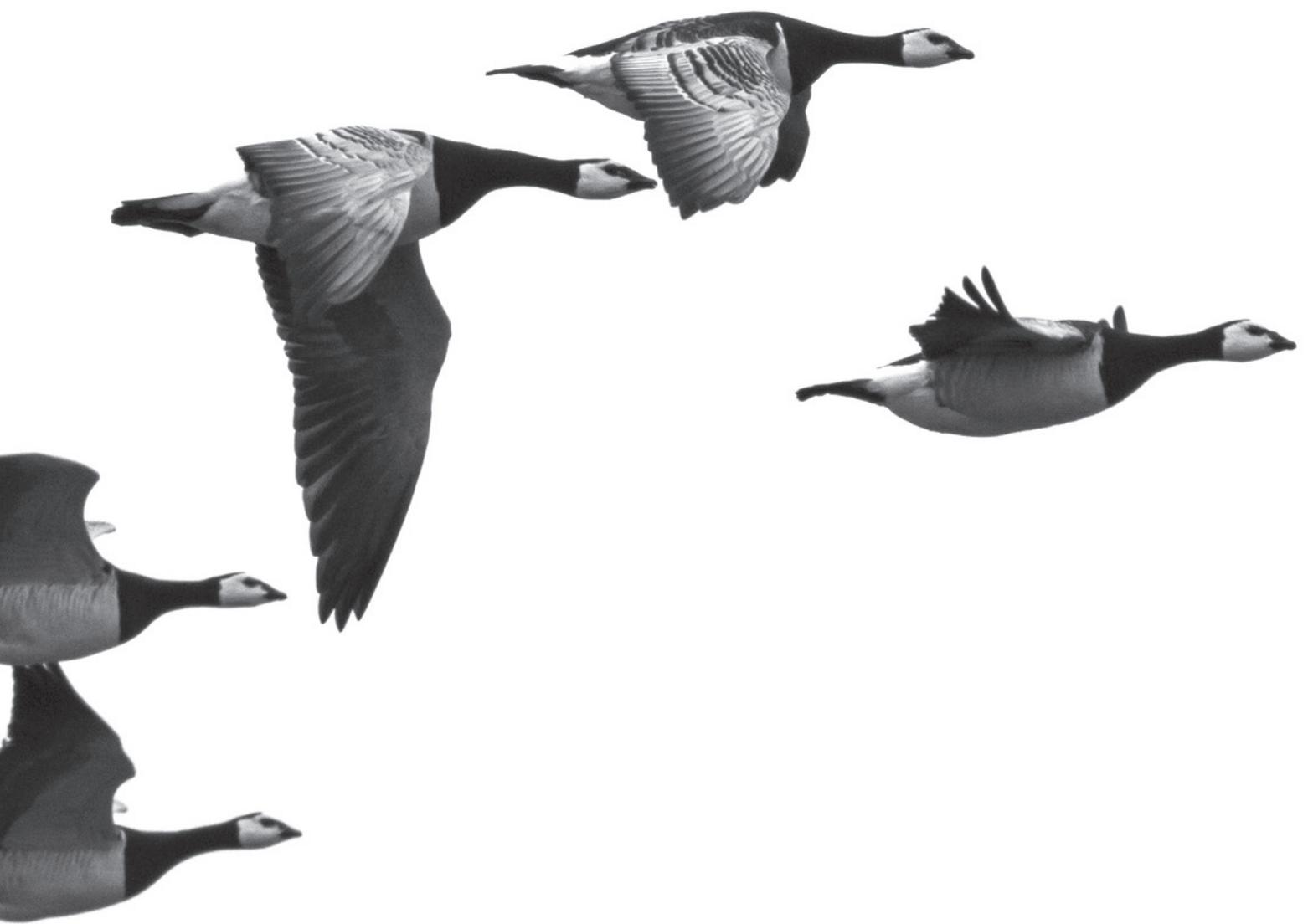
If emotions are running deep and the protagonists are concerned that real conflict is simmering beneath the tension, it may be sensible to have the leader or another team member with facilitation skills to help make the conversation constructive.

Step 3: Follow up the SOSO conversation to check progress

Scheduling this second conversation should be done during the first one and it must be kept as a firm commitment. If useful this might include the facilitator or leader.

Step 4: Report back to the team

Both team members should confirm to the team when they have had a SOSO conversation and that they have made progress. What is discussed in the conversation should be kept confidential to those two team members unless agreed otherwise.



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