



Communication Tools for Leading Through Turbulence

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Re-capping time blocks

8:30-11am CST = morning Zoom

- Mid-session break from 9:45-10am

11am-2pm = intercession activities

2-4:30pm = afternoon Zoom

- Mid-session break from 3:15-3:30pm

Today's goals

- ▶ Intended take-aways:
 - » Know the promise and perils of real communication
 - » Learn to react less and respond more
 - » Learn new conversation tools
 - » Practice using the tools
 - » Able to put learning to use right away

- ▶ Take-aways you're looking for?

Why “...*Leading Through Turbulence*”?

- ▶ Because (potentially) turbulent moments are **the very times effective leadership communication is needed the most**
- ▶ Turbulent moments have higher stakes, more interpersonal tension, and greater potential for unproductive conflict
 - » Unproductive conflict = disagreements have become “personal” rather than in the service of the organization’s goals
- ▶ A leader’s actions in higher-stakes, conflict-laden moments **affect his/her reputation** more than actions in lower key moments
- ▶ Turbulence in the form of fair-minded disagreement is both healthy and necessary. **But, in most organizations, there is also plenty of unproductive/unnecessary turbulence**
 - » Unproductive turbulence needs to be converted into productive action serving the organization’s goals

Agenda

- ▶ What real & effective communication is
- ▶ What gets in the way
- ▶ *Triangle, Burt, Fran, and Eli* cases will be used for illustration and practice
- ▶ Productive communication model
- ▶ 4 Conversation Tools
- ▶ Practice using the tools
- ▶ Wrap-up

Tone and destination

- ▶ Desired tone:
 - » You own this learning
 - » Share disagreement
 - » My desired results
- ▶ Our path:
 - » Open to re-routing
 - » Many paths to same end-goals

Introduction

*The single biggest problem in communication
is the illusion that it has taken place.*

– George Bernard Shaw

Real communication happens in *conversation*.

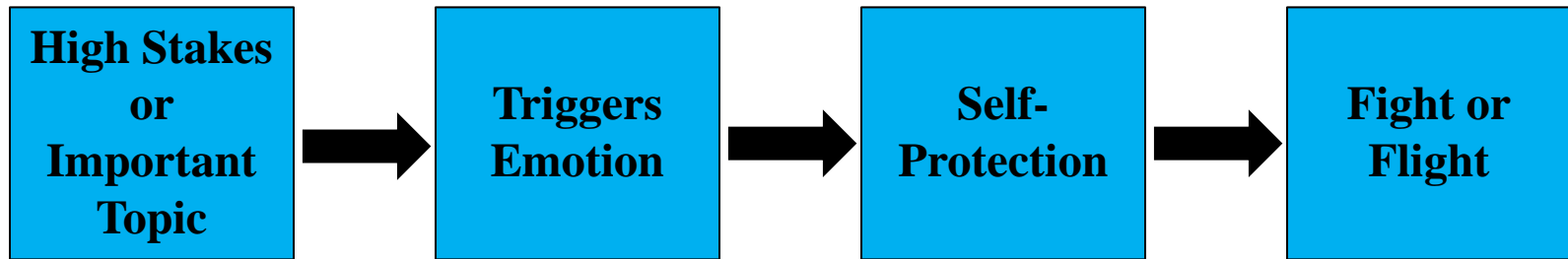
Conversation is a back-and-forth *exchange*;
it's a two-way street, not one-way.

How well we lead hinges greatly on
how well we communicate.

“Leadership is a conversation”

- ▶ Major theme in current articles and books
- ▶ Argument is that leadership “happens” through interacting with others, and **conversation** – whether spoken or written, in-person or remote – is the primary way we interact
- ▶ **Conversation quality drives leadership results**
- ▶ However, productive conversation becomes more difficult the more it is needed
 - » Why is this the case?

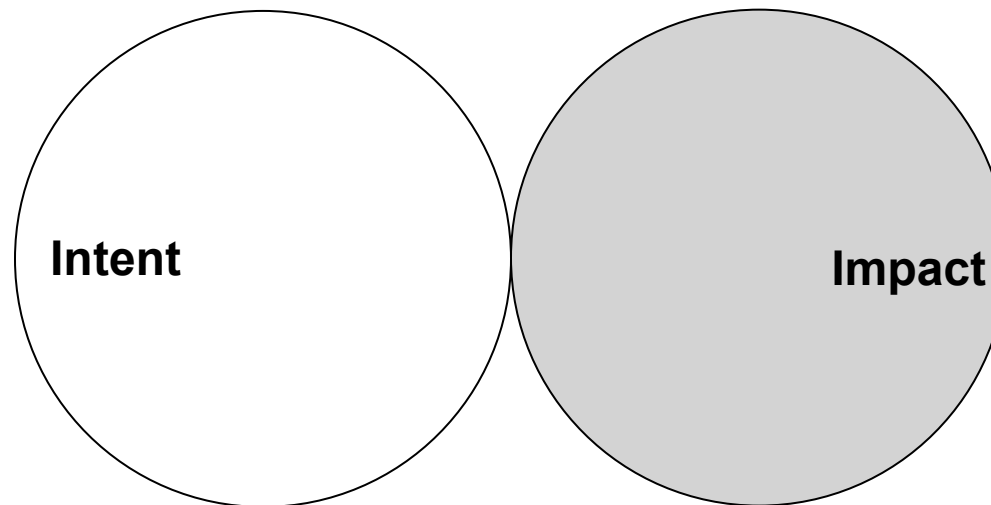
How we're wired

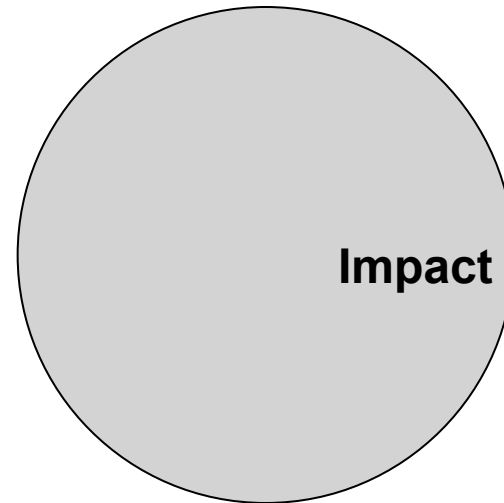
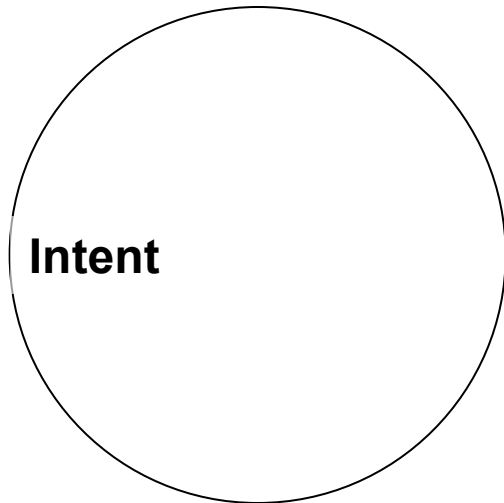


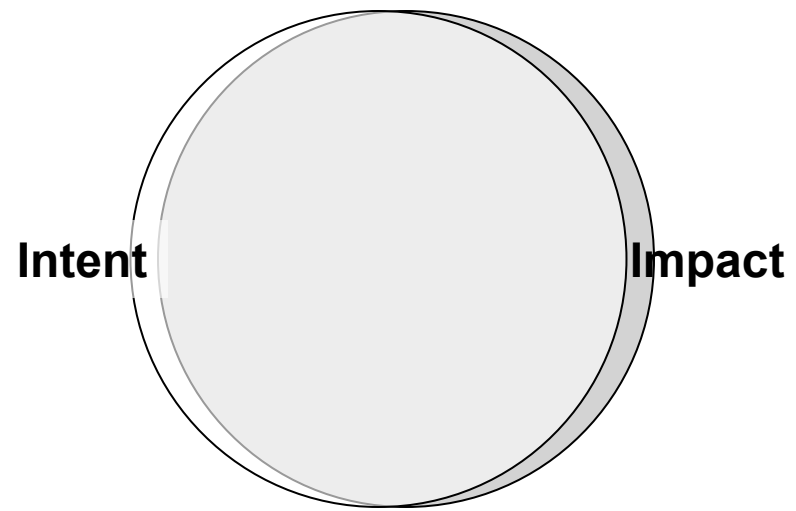
BEWARE: Flipping from fight to flight, and vice versa, are common!

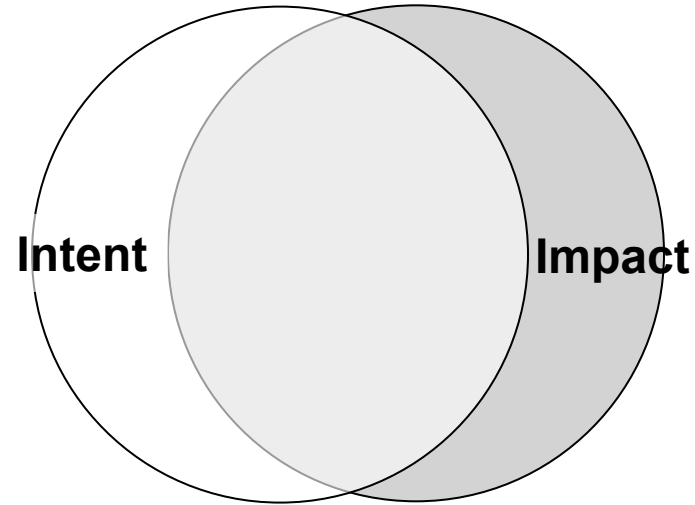
Intent vs. impact

- ▶ **Intent:** What I set out to do, and the effect I want to have on others
- ▶ **Impact:** The effect I have on others, and how they perceive me









The more personally invested we are, and the more fight/flight is activated, the more this gap widens

Triangle case

Pre-work Assignment

- a. Answer the following case questions by typing or jotting down your thoughts. **(Please type or jot down your answers simply for your own reference later; you will not turn in your answers or show them to anyone else.)**
 1. What's your assessment of how Lee has handled this so far?
 2. What instructions or advice would you give Lee on what he should do next?
- b. Watch this *60 Minutes Overtime* interview with Ray Dalio, founder and chief officer of Bridgewater Associates: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7wLJwA_ItY (this video is 5 minutes long)
- c. Type or jot down your thoughts on the following: How do think the Triangle Case situation would be handled at Bridgewater? Would the Triangle situation even come up at Bridgewater? Does having seen the Dalio interview change your thinking in any way(s) about how the Triangle Case situation should be handled? NOTE: It's perfectly okay if your answer to the latter question is "no." **(Again, please type or jot down your answers simply for your own reference later; you will not turn in your answers or show them to anyone else.)**
- d. Watch *Triangle video 1*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWBEbpcyOfA> and *Triangle video 2*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViqRKjfqOj0> (each video is about 12 minutes long)
- e. Be ready to discuss a-d above in our first live Zoom meeting.

- **Did your thinking change at all as you worked through the Triangle case pre-work? Do you disagree with points made in any of the videos? Moving forward, will you lead or coach the leaders reporting to you any differently in triangle-type situations?**

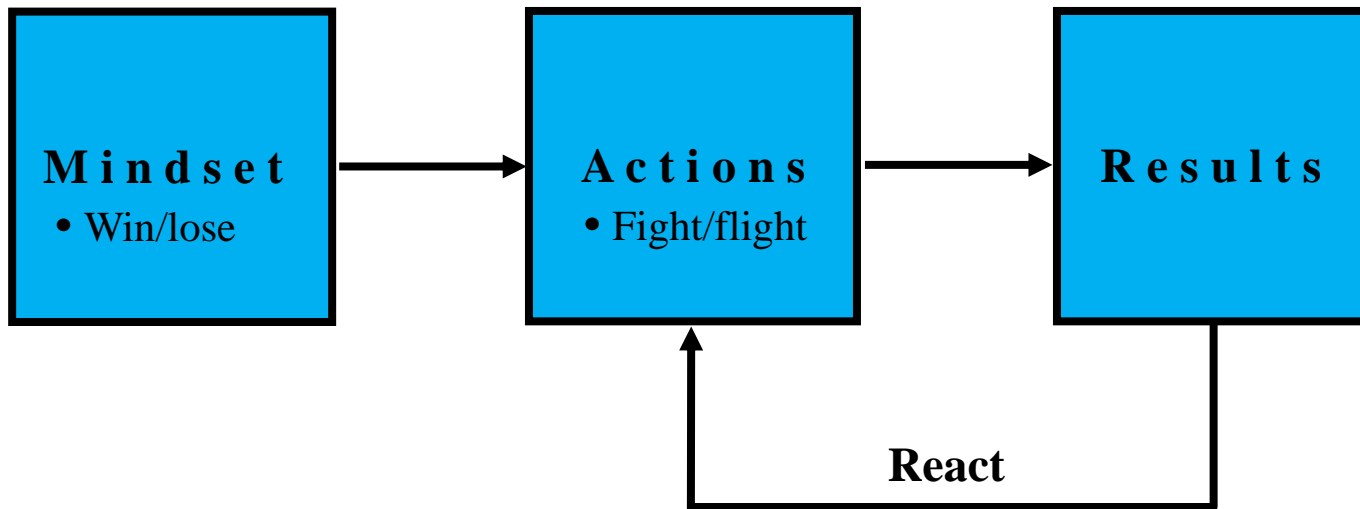
“original seed”

- ▶ Triangle feedback usually begins with good intentions, but has large downstream costs
- ▶ Poorly managed triangle situations are arguably the “original seed” of unproductive friction
 - » Erodes trust & breeds us/them “tribalism”
- ▶ Recommended “ground rules” or “rules of engagement” for groups and teams
 - » ***“Talk to, not about, others”***
 - » ***“Talk sooner rather than later”***
 - » ***“Give others the benefit of the doubt”***

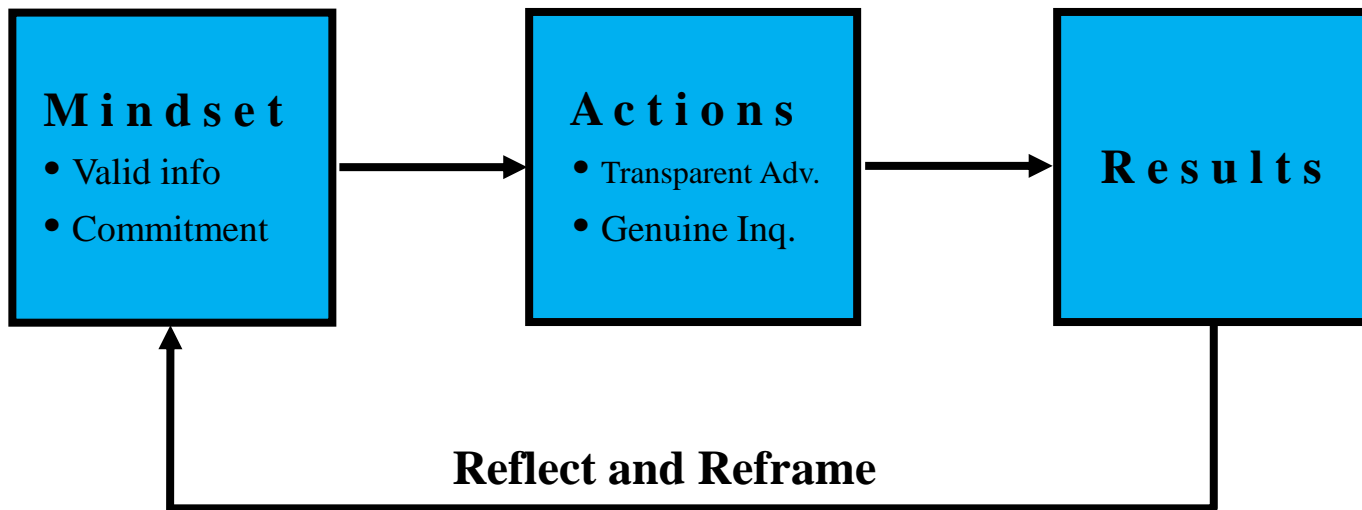
More recommended actions

- ▶ Leaders – *“Have you tried talking directly with Ted...?”*
“What would need to happen for you to be okay with approaching Ted directly?”
 - » In team meetings, set new norms/expectations that make it easier for peers to share candid observations directly with each other
 - » Take small/gradual steps; trying to change old triangle habits too strongly or too quickly can easily backfire
- ▶ Upward to leader – *“The next time one of my peers comes to you with feedback about me, would you be willing to ask him/her to come and talk with me directly?”*

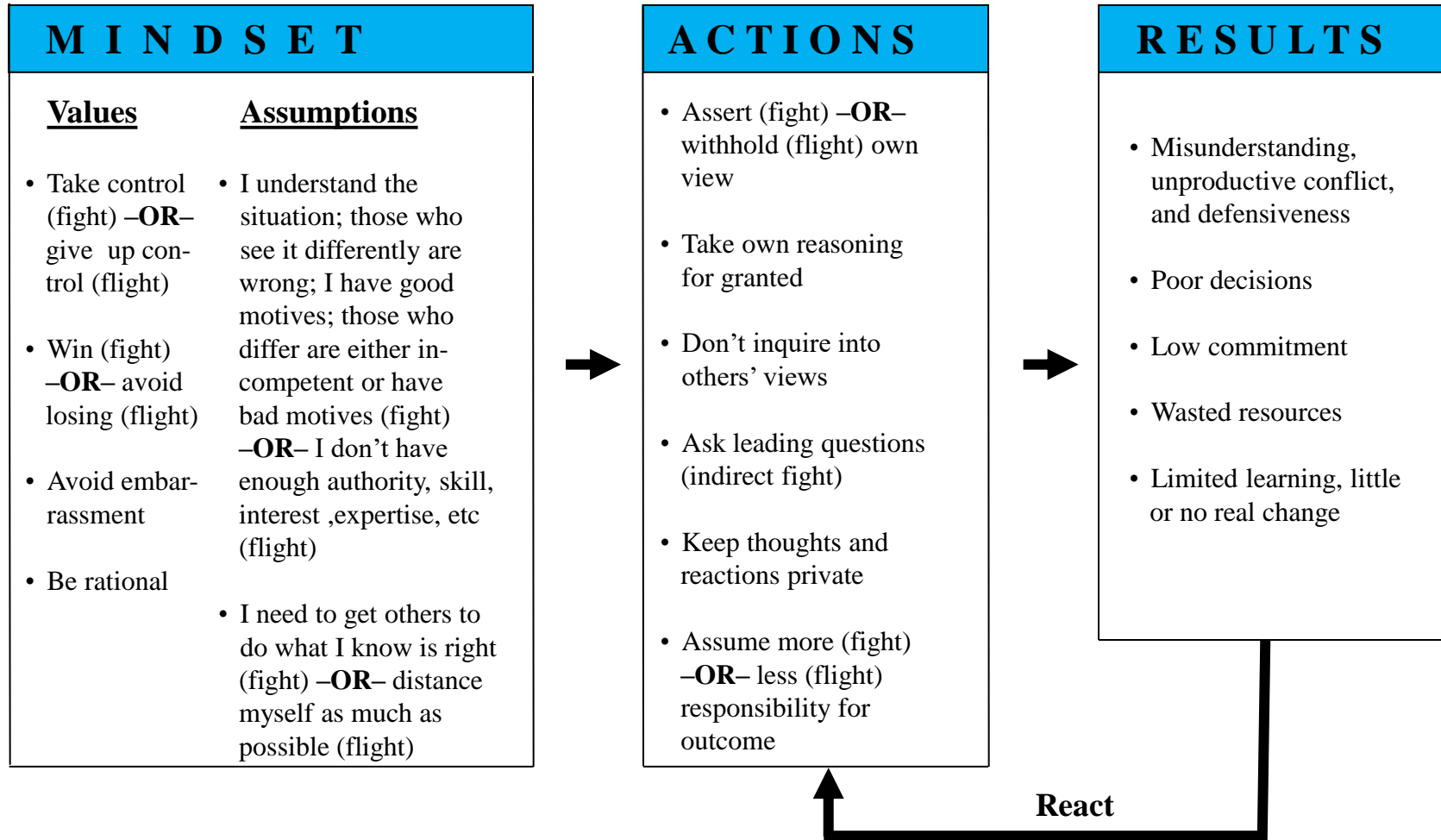
The default



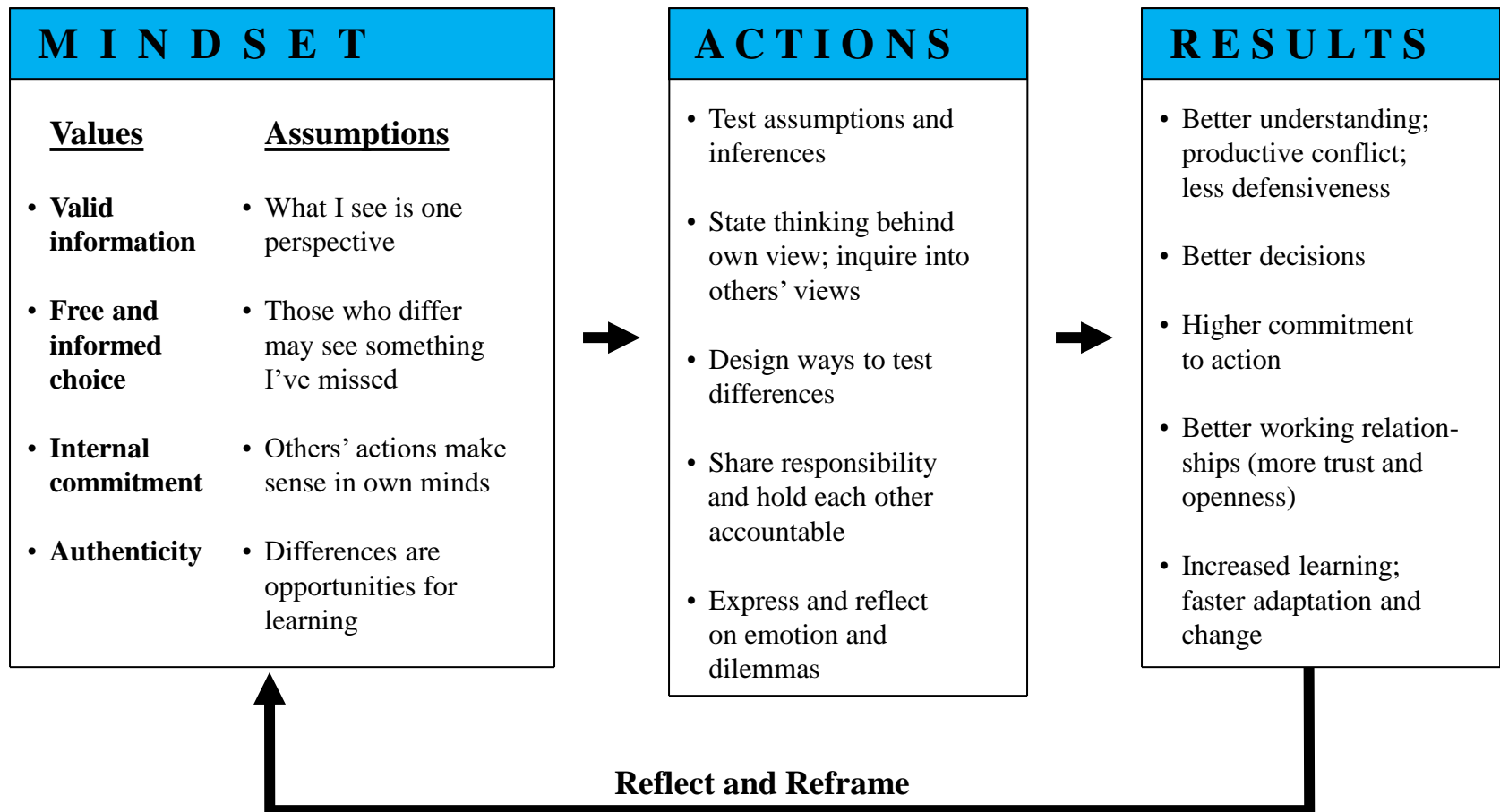
Productive model



The default (in more detail)



Productive model (in more detail)



4 conversation tools

Conversation tools

- 1. Reframing**
- 2. Left-Hand Column**
- 3. Ladder of Inference**
- 4. Advocacy and Inquiry**

Burt case

Pre-work Assignment – Think about case questions 1 through 5.ii below and be ready to discuss them in our first Zoom session

Case questions to be mulled over individually:

1. Is Burt’s way of interacting, as described thus far, similar to or different from how you interact with peers at work?
2. Have you ever worked with someone similar to Burt? If so, what was it like working with that person (or those persons)?
3. Given what you know about Burt so far, to what extent would you regard him as a “difficult” person? To what extent is he likely to emerge as an “ongoing problem” in the team (if he hasn’t already become such a problem)?

Burt (continued)

Case questions to be discussed in breakout groups:

4. Share your thoughts on questions 1-3. You don't have to agree with each other, but you should share and exchange views.
5. Assume you've set up a meeting with Burt to talk about how the two of you will go about working together on the 6-month project. Assume also that your main reasons for talking with him are to: (a) reduce the likelihood of flare-ups between you and Burt, and (b) increase the likelihood that the project outcome will "exceed expectations." You and Burt sit down to talk, and end up spending the first portion of your meeting simply getting to know each other a little better. Then Burt nudges you by saying:
 - i. **"So, you wanted to talk about the project our DL put us on?", and you reply, "Yes,..." Now Burt is waiting for you to speak.** What would you say to open the getting-down-to-business portion of your meeting? Map out what you would say first, your best guess as to what Burt would say back, and what you would say next.
 - ii. In this getting-down-to-business discussion, **would you bring up what happened right after his first presentation** when you came up and suggested he drop some of the technical detail and talk more about successes in the field? If yes, at what point would you bring it up? If you wouldn't bring it up, why not?

1. Reframing

► “Default” Frames

» Self

- I’m right, well-informed, and well-intentioned (and I’m the one in charge)...

» Others

- They’re wrong, poorly informed, and may have bad motives...

» Task

- Get them to see/do it my way...

► Productive Frames

» Self

- I have a vital point of view AND I may be missing something...

» Others

- They may know something useful or relevant I’m not aware of...

» Task

- Let’s make the best informed decision we can...

Reframing

- When others say/do things we find annoying, upsetting, inappropriate, etc., we tend to “**close the book**” on them
 - That is, the other becomes “clueless,” “wrong,” “bad,” etc.
- The idea of re-framing is to **keep from closing the book**, or to **re-open the book** when we realize we have closed it
- **Ask yourself:**
 - Have I closed the book on this person?
 - Have I mentally lowered the other person relative to me? (Note that sometimes we do the reverse and mentally lower ourselves relative to the other, especially when dealing with superiors, experts, or people with high authority”)

Notes on reframing

- ▶ Simple idea, difficult to do...
- ▶ Requires an “opposable mind”...
- ▶ Is the foundational tool
 - Without it, the other tools will be disingenuous and will come off as gimmicky or manipulative
 - The idea is not to pretend, but rather to dial down our own rightness while opening up to “what might be possible” about the other person or situation
- ▶ Any objections to this tool? Does it seem unrealistic?

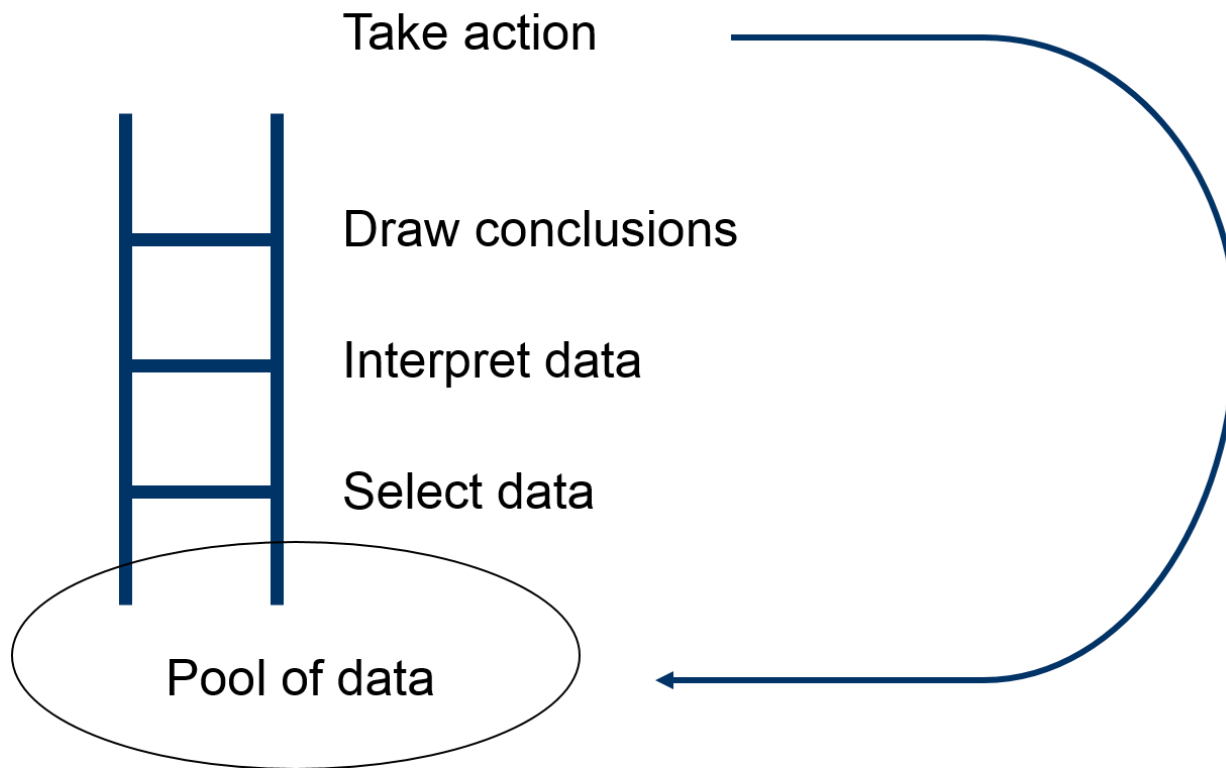
2. Left-Hand Column

- ▶ Origin of the term “Left-Hand Column”
- ▶ The dilemma:
 - » Hold it in
 - » Direct verbal combat
 - » Indirect combat (“ease in”)
- ▶ Crucial point: Keeping our LHC private prevents learning because we are unable to share and test our inferences and assumptions

Working with your LHC

- ▶ Pause, reflect, and notice what's there
 - This gives you the option of re-framing
 - Allows you to sift out valid concerns
 - Reduces detrimental emotions
 - Beneath most toxic thoughts lie valid concerns
- ▶ Use starter phrases such as
 - “Here’s what I’m struggling with...on the one hand...and on the other hand...”
 - “This is how it looks to me...”

3. Ladder of Inference



From 11am-2pm

- » Individually watch the 4 ***Ladder of Inference*** videos **(30 minutes total)**
 - [Ladder video 1](#) (just click on the link)
 - [Ladder video 2](#)
 - [Ladder video 3](#)
 - [Ladder video 4](#)

- » Individually read the ***Fran/upward communication*** case <http://pmcleadership.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/3.-Fran-upward-1.pdf> and reflect on the ***Fran, part A*** and ***Fran, part B*** case questions. **(10-15 minutes)**

About the Ladder...

- ▶ Metaphor for how we think
- ▶ This “default” way of thinking helps us navigate the world efficiently, but causes problems
 - » Emotions trigger self-protection, which involves “defensively categorizing” others or the situation
- ▶ Defensive categorization is adaptive in the face of real and immediate danger
 - » In workplace conversations, however, defensive categorizing is usually counterproductive

Ladder thinking process

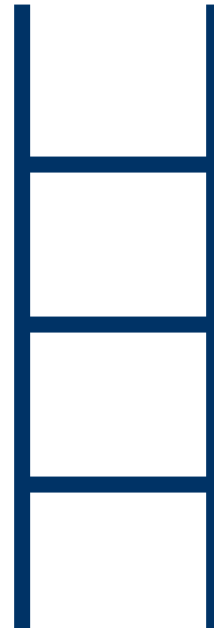
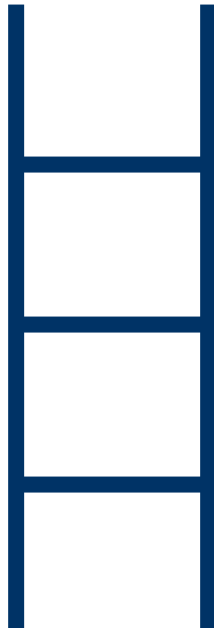
- ▶ Occurs very quickly and automatically, mostly outside of conscious awareness
 - Hence, our conclusions feel so “obvious” to us that we see no need to explain how we got from data to conclusion
- ▶ But people can and do reach different conclusions, often from the very same data
 - When we disagree, we often hurl conclusions at each other from the tops of our respective ladders
 - This makes it hard to resolve differences and to learn from one another

Dueling Ladders

Barb's ladder

Don's ladder

Barb: *"We work fine as a team. We're short on top talent!"*



Don: *"We have plenty of talent. Our problem is lack of teamwork!"*



Division leader: *"We need to do everything we can to reward and retain our top people... Of course, we must work as a team..."*

Another major “seed”

- ▶ Immediately jumping from what we’ve seen or heard (1st rung of the Ladder) to interpretations and/or conclusions (2nd or 3rd rung) is another major “seed” of unproductive communication
- ▶ Consider all the “flaming” and “shaming” that occurs on social media
 - » People jump very quickly from person A’s statement to their own interpretations, with little or no regard for whether their interpretations are in line with person A’s intended meaning

Key insight

The likelihood of differences in interpretation increases as we move from lower to higher rungs of the ladder

Using the Ladder

- ▶ First, suspend categorization
- ▶ **Then, “stay low on the ladder”**
 - » When *inquiring*, summarize the other’s conclusion and ask how s/he got there
 - Walk the other down his or her ladder
 - » When *advocating*, start low on the ladder and work your way up
 - In comparison to starting high on the ladder, starting low reduces defensiveness

Burt (video “challenge”)

▶ [Burt & Ronnie](#) (just click on the hyperlink)

- » **Hint:** Note that Burt’s “You shot me down!” statement is his interpretation of, or conclusion about, what happened – i.e., he’s communicating from the 2nd or 3rd rung of his ladder.

Fran case

- ▶ Discuss the questions on pages 2 and 3 of the case document

4. Advocacy and Inquiry

- ▶ **Advocacy** refers to expressing your views
 - Keyword is *transparency*; be direct; avoid easing in
 - Give examples and explain how you interpret them
 - Explain how you got from point A to point B
- ▶ **Inquiry** refers to asking about others' views
 - Keywords are *curiosity* and *learning*
 - Ask for examples that illustrate what they mean
 - Ask how they got from point A to point B
 - Invite others to challenge your thinking

Some example phrases

▶ Advocacy:

- “I’d like to talk about [X] because...”
- “This is how I see it...”
- “I say (or ask) that because...”
- “Here’s what led me to that conclusion...”

▶ Inquiry:

- “How do you see it?”
- “Do you have a different view?”
- “What I’m hearing is... Did I get that right?”
- “Help me understand your thinking...”

Listening is a crucial aspect of inquiry

- ▶ Check your understanding by paraphrasing, briefly, what you're hearing
 - *Acknowledging* the other's message is crucial; this is not the same as *agreeing* with them
 - *"I hear you saying _____. Did I get that right? Okay, good. I understand. Here's where I disagree..."*
 - Make sure the other doesn't attribute your disagreement to you not understanding them
- ▶ Get acknowledgment from the other side that they're satisfied you understand

Besides listening, how best to inquire?

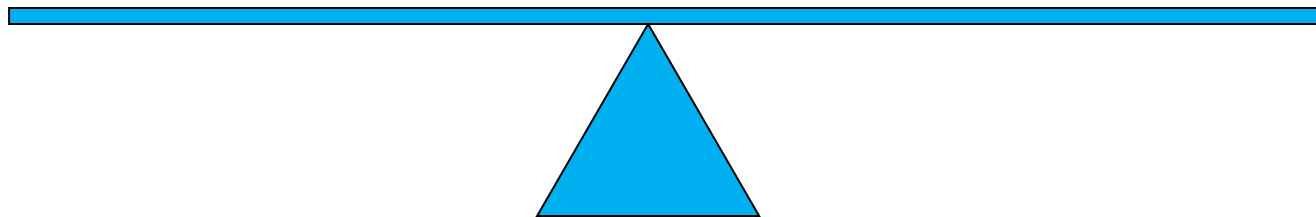
- ▶ Inquire to learn or to confirm understanding, not to influence
 - It all starts with mindset and (if necessary) re-framing
- ▶ Make sure questions are genuine, not leading
 - Questions designed to prove your point or trap the other side are advocacies masquerading as inquiry
 - Such leading questions tend to trigger resentment, mistrust, and/or stronger resistance from the other side
- ▶ To get a reluctant counterpart talking...
 - Venture an educated guess as to what they're thinking and ask if there's any truth to what you've guessed

Balance is the key

“The only limit to how strongly you can express your opinion is your willingness to be equally vigorous in encouraging others to challenge it” –Patterson et al (2002)

Advocacy

Inquiry



Eli case

- ▶ See case document attached in the Zoom chat
- ▶ Read case and be ready to discuss how you would go about getting through to Eli

With good advocacy and inquiry...

- ▶ There are no hidden strategies – e.g., the “compliment sandwich”
 - » You can be completely transparent about your approach without hurting its effectiveness
- ▶ There will be moments of feeling *vulnerable*
- ▶ You’re trying to reverse your own wiring
 - » Think of [George Costanza](#)...
 - » “What am I missing?”

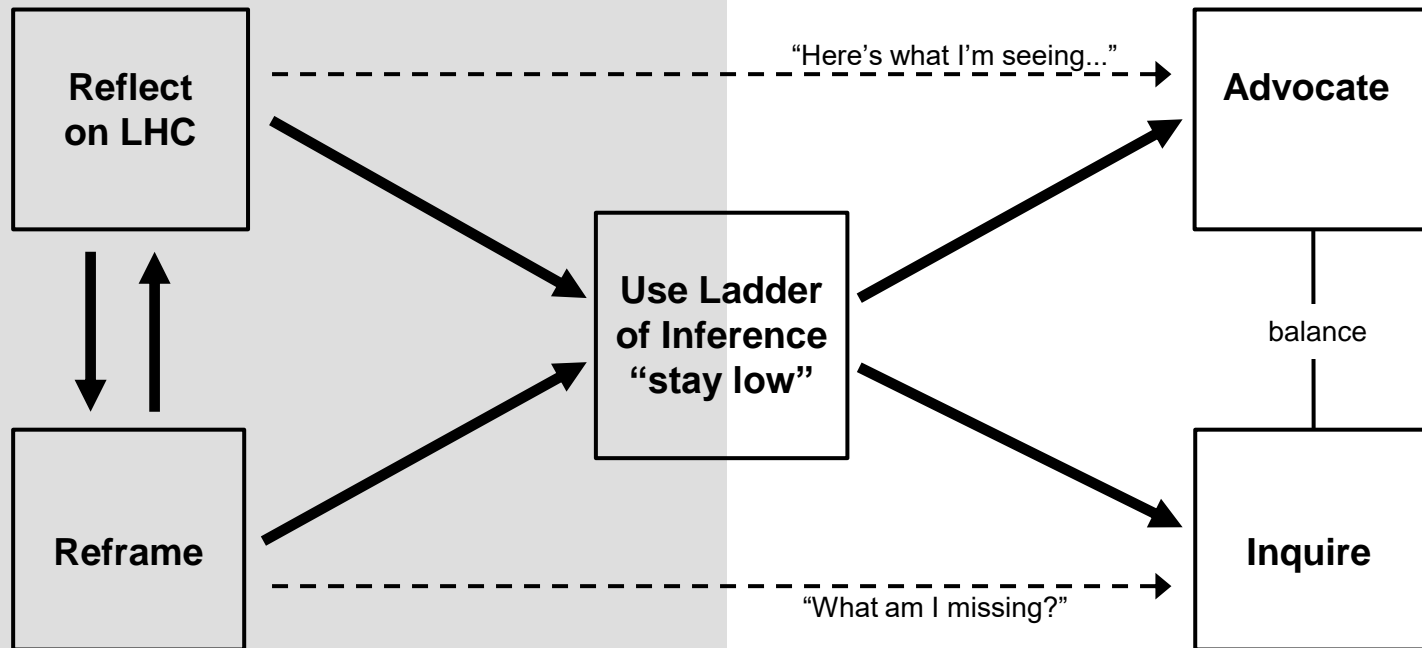
The Costanza Move

- ▶ Our default wiring is to **advocate/defend**
- ▶ The Costanza Move involves deliberately “doing the opposite” when we notice we’re about to act in the default manner
 - » That is, we substitute **advocate/defend** with **inquire/learn**
 - » “**price/cost**” = **feeling vulnerable** (but this vulnerability is actually a sign of strength)
- ▶ **Useful hip-pocket phrases:**
 - » “*Am I missing something?*” (inquire/learn)
 - » “*Where did that come from?*” (inquire/learn)
 - » “*Here’s what I’m seeing...*” (advocate/non-defend)

The tools in relation to each other

T H I N K I N G

A C T I N G



Applying the tools some more (if have time)

- ▶ **Individually, think of a difficult conversation you had or need to have at work...**
 - » Find a new partner and vow confidentiality
- ▶ **As client:**
 - » Describe the situation to your partner:
 - What are/were your desired results?
 - Apply one or two of the conversation tools to your case
 - How will/would you go about getting good results?

Applying the tools some more (cont.)

- ▶ **As consultant, offer any observations or advice you think may be helpful**
 - » If your partner consents and you think it would be valuable, feel free to nominate your partner's case for full group discussion

It really does take practice

- ▶ There is a gap between “invention” (in our imagination) and the “production” of actual behavior, especially when stakes are high and/or we’re emotionally invested
- ▶ Practice is the only means of closing this gap, and this applies not just to our actions, but even more importantly to our way of thinking
- ▶ The best practice includes immediate, “low on the ladder” feedback from others
- ▶ “Practice” in real time, let people know you’re doing so, and invite feedback

Resources

- ▶ Arbinger Institute, *Leadership and Self-deception: Getting Out of the Box (3rd Ed.)*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2018.
- ▶ Argyris, C., *Organizational Traps: Leadership, Culture, and Organizational Design*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- ▶ Argyris, C., “Good Communication that Blocks Learning.” *Harvard Business Review*, July-August, 1994.
- ▶ Goulston, M. *Just Listen: Discover the Secret of Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone*. AMACOM, 2015.
- ▶ Roberto, M. A. *Why Great Leaders Don't Take Yes for an Answer (2nd Ed.)*. Prentice-Hall, 2015.
- ▶ Scott, K., *Radical Candor: Be a Kick-ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017.
- ▶ Stone, D., Patton, B., & Heen, S. *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. London: Penguin Books, 2010.

Thank you!

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