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CultureSmith Inc. Presents:

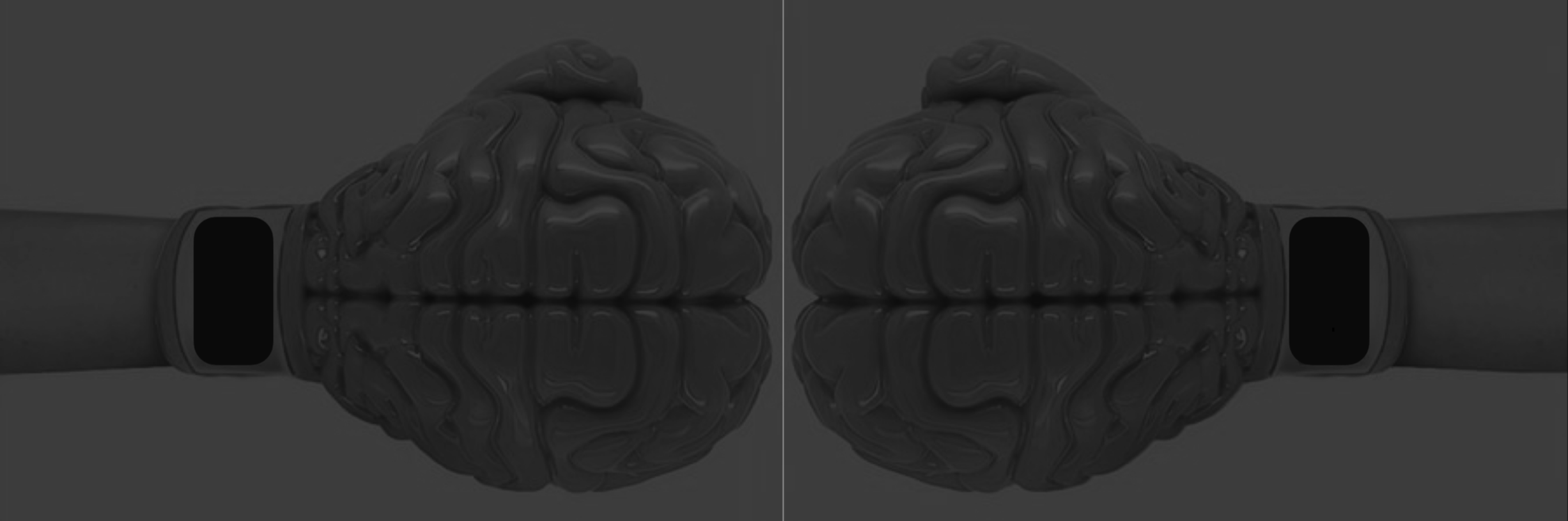


The Little Red Book On:

Conflict



An Executive Summary on How To Have Enough Conflict
to Drive Team Performance Without Eroding Team
Cohesion.



Are You Ready To Rumble?

CONFLICT IS
INEVITABLE,
BUT
COMBAT IS
OPTIONAL.
—MAX LUCADO

Conflict is like cholesterol. There is *bad cholesterol* and *good cholesterol*. If you have too much bad cholesterol you have a problem. If you don't have enough good cholesterol, you have a different problem. Yet when we hear the word 'cholesterol' it sounds like something we need to eliminate.

If you have too much bad conflict, you will have an issue of **team cohesion**. If you don't have enough good conflict, you will have an issue of **team performance**. Yet when we hear the word 'conflict' it also sounds like something we need to arbitrarily eliminate.

The paradoxical nature of workplace conflict is highlighted in two studies, the first from Harvard Business Review that claims people spend 2.8 hours per week in conflict, at a total cost of \$359 billion in paid hours which equates to 385 million working days per year.¹

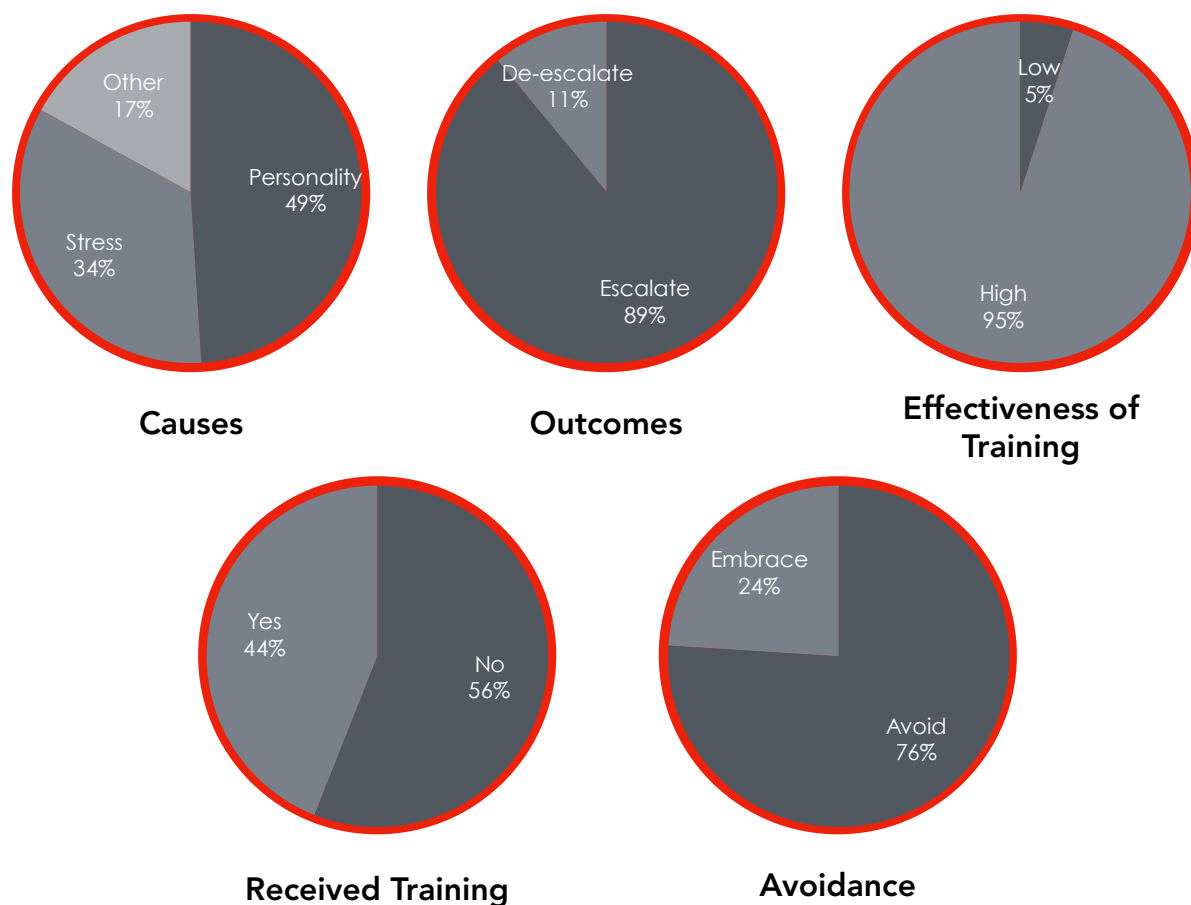
Despite the cost of conflict, the cost of avoiding it is just as high. The second study claims 95% of employees struggle to address concerns with their colleagues and waste \$1,500 and the equivalent of an 8 hour work day for **each** conversation they avoid.²

As experts in emotional intelligence and behavioural communication, the #1 problem we are tasked with by our clients is creating a healthy balance of conflict inside work teams.

This executive summary provides an overview of the process we follow to help teams embrace and grow from conflict.

Master it and you will be well on your way to separating your organization from your peers, as they are struggling with this as much as anyone. Effective conflict is essential, and so is knowing how to have it.

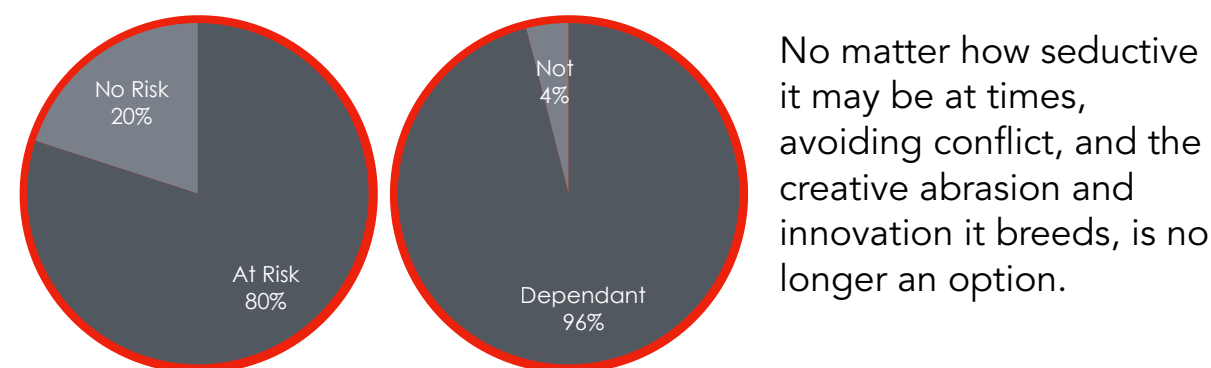
Understanding why effective conflict is essential becomes clear when you recognize that conflict within the workplace is inevitable. *The CPP Global Human Capital Report*³ states that 85% of employees at all levels routinely experience conflict in the workplace. The report went on to highlight some of the causes, outcomes and remedies as well.



Workplace stress and differences in personality are responsible for a combined 83% of all workplace conflict. 89% of people claim that once started, conflict caused by these triggers escalates beyond the initial incident. 95% of employees who have received conflict specific training say it has dramatically helped them deal with conflict more effectively. Unfortunately only 44% of employees receive this type of training. Combined, these factors result in 76% of people claiming that their primary response to conflict is to avoid it.

This rampant avoidance even has a name, **Comfortable Clone Syndrome**.⁴ Teams who struggle with conflict, actively avoid the clash of ideas. Over time, they hire and reward people based on similarities to the existing team instead of much needed differences. As a result, ideas pass through the same cognitive filters and only non-threatening ones survive. This is one of the reasons why 95% of all in-company innovations fail each year.⁵ A failure rate this high is problematic on its own but it is outright concerning when the current global reality is factored in.

80% of leaders believe their current business model is at risk of being disrupted in the near future⁶. An additional 96% believe that the success of their firm is directly tied to their ability to innovate⁷.



No matter how seductive it may be at times, avoiding conflict, and the creative abrasion and innovation it breeds, is no longer an option.

Self-Reflection Questions:

How often do you witness conflict in your workplace?

How often do you experience conflict yourself?

When was the last time you avoided conflict and why?

When was the last time you embraced conflict and what made that possible?

What is the cost of both conflict and avoidance to your specific organization?

"Conflict is the energy created by the gap between what we want and what we're experiencing."⁸ This gap shows up everywhere, from the anxiety of wanting a promotion yet not feeling ready for it to the annoyance you have when you need to slow down and explain something to someone who is just not getting it. It lives in the pull of procrastination when you have too many deadlines and in the frustration of being forced to stand in line when you want your morning coffee.

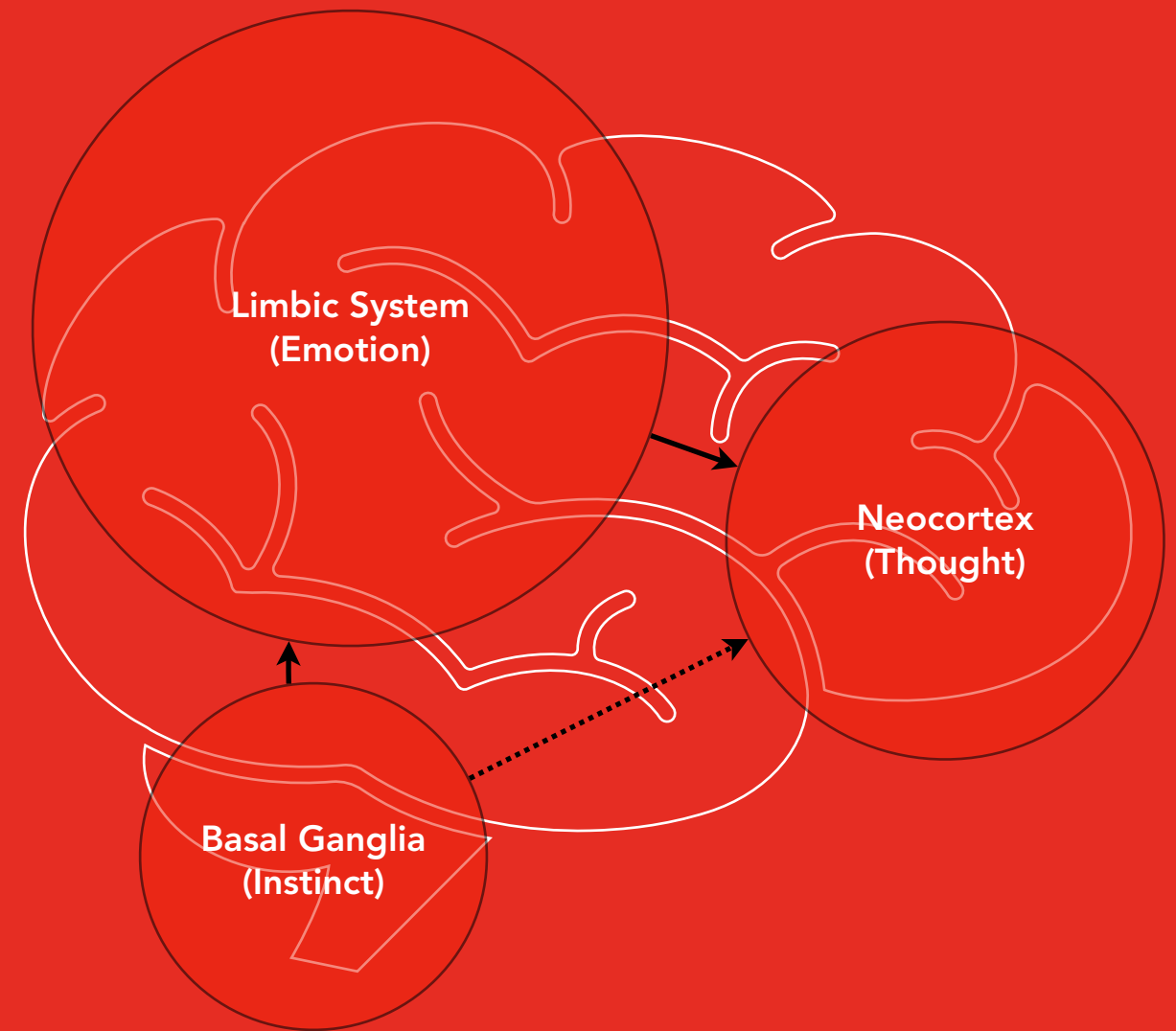
The point is, the gap between what you want and what you're experiencing is **emotional** which means by its' very nature, so too is conflict. Effectively navigating this gap requires turning an emotional response into a rational one.



Neuroscience provides some insight into how to do this. In the 1960's the model of the 'Triune Brain' was first introduced.⁹ This model segments the brain into three sections, the Basal Ganglia (responsible for instinct), the Limbic System (responsible for emotion) and the Neocortex (responsible for rational thought). To the right is a diagram that charts how any form of stimulus travels through these three sections.

Something you experience is picked up by one of your senses. That information travels up your spinal cord and into the brain stem which is the Basal Ganglia. From there it moves through the Limbic System and if not acted upon there, it moves into the Neocortex. When it comes to conflict this highlights a very important truth...

We ALL **feel** before we **think**.



A major reason why conflict happens so often and escalates so easily is the fact you're biologically hardwired to become emotional before you become rational.

Your brain is tasked with assessing threats and acting quickly to keep you safe. Spending too much time thinking runs counter to this design which is why thought occurs last in the chain. You are first kept free of physical danger by instinct (fight or flight) and then interpersonal danger by becoming emotional (eg. defensiveness). If data introduced to your brain is deemed non-threatening, and passes through both of these systems, you are then able to think and reflect on it. Creating a shortcut, a direct path to the rational part of your brain, is therefore a huge asset when it comes to dealing with conflict.

“
If you avoid conflict
to keep the peace,
you start a war inside yourself.

CHERYL RICHARDSON

How to MANUFACTURE Effective Conflict

That direct path requires a deliberate process, one with three steps.

Each step represents work that must be done at each of the **Organizational, Individual** and **Leadership** levels within your team to prevent conflict from causing harm.

To the right are brief descriptions of each step, with more detailed explanations to follow on the next few pages.

Court Conflict

Courting Conflict begins at the **Organizational** level.

In order to prevent conflict from being avoided the expectation must be set that it is both expected and embraced. This is only made possible with an organization-wide understanding of the **types of conflict**, which type causes harm by its presence, and which type causes even more harm by its absence.

Empathy

Empathy is required at the **Individual** level.

Empathy is defined as, *"understanding a person from his or her frame of reference rather than one's own".*¹⁰ Effective conflict comes from understanding the degree to which others may be **perceiving** conflict as negative, even when it is intended to be constructive, and altering your approach accordingly.

Persuasion

Persuasion happens at the **Leadership** level.

Here 'leadership' is being used in the clinical sense which simply means one person motivating one or more others to achieve a goal.¹¹ Titles and reporting lines are arbitrary. Anytime **anyone** is motivating **anyone else** to alter their behaviour it is considered an act of leadership. All acts of leadership must come from a place of persuasion over coercion to keep conflict healthy.

Within organizational psychology, conflict is simply defined as, “any disagreement between two or more people.”¹² However it’s what people disagree about that’s important. This requires understanding the two types of conflict, Task and Relationship.

Task Conflict is defined as, “any disagreement about the **goal** or **content** of the work.”¹³

Relationship Conflict is defined as, “any disagreement about **beliefs** or **ideologies**.”¹³

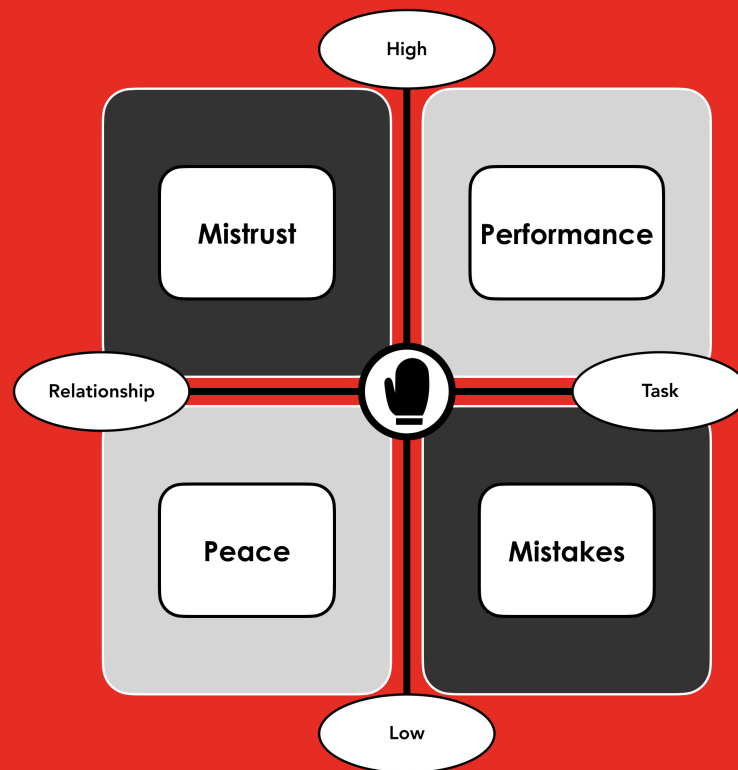
The most successful teams are those that simultaneously create **high** levels of **Task Conflict**, leading to **Performance**, and **low** levels of **Relationship Conflict**, maintaining **Peace**.

Too little Task Conflict leads to **Mistakes** and too much Relationship Conflict leads to **Mistrust**.

As you can see, conflict is not something avoided in high-functioning teams, it’s something understood.

Creating that understanding is possible when the organization has clearly defined and articulated its’ ideologies. These include things like the company’s mission, purpose and values.

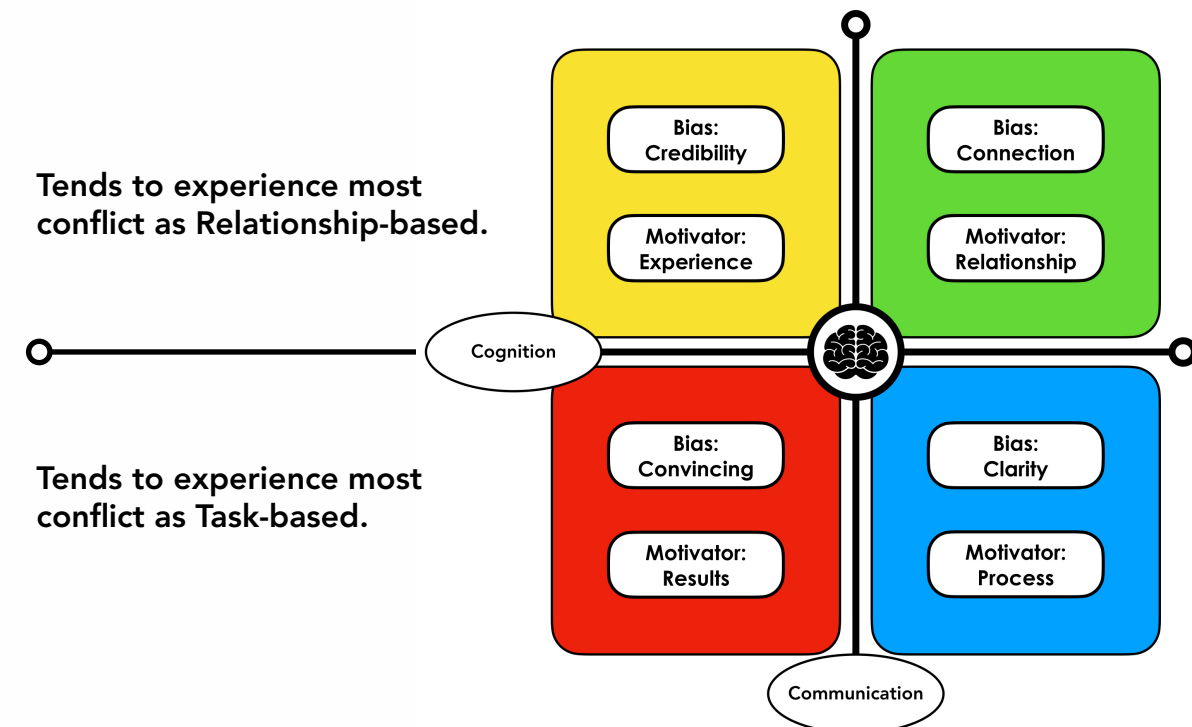
If these are clearly defined and shared by all, they become the **goal** within the definition of Task Conflict. All disagreements can now become about the **content of the work** that leads to that goal. Fail to clarify this and you are inviting different ideologies to the table, inviting Relationship Conflict along with them.



Understanding is not only needed at the Organizational level, it’s also needed at the Individual level and that’s where Empathy comes in.

Most people wish to be supportive in work groups. The problem is, they tend to provide support in the manner in which they prefer to receive it based on their own behavioural characteristics.

As you may or may not know, our system divides these characteristics into a Colours grid based on the problem-solving (Cognition) and interpersonal (Communication) preferences of the individual.



Roughly 66% of the general population are emotional processors, they tend to **feel** their way through problems using gut and intuition. The remaining 34% are cognitive processors, they tend to **think** their way through problems using facts and data.

This leads to ‘Yellows’ and ‘Greens’ to experience most conflict as Relationship based and instinctively avoid it, and leads ‘Reds’ and ‘Blues’ to see it as Task based and actively promote it. You must understand your type and the type of those you are having conflict with, in order to increase your understanding of how they may be perceiving conflict, regardless of how you are intending it.

Which then takes you to the 'mechanics' of how to actually challenge someone and have conflict in a safe way. This means learning how to use **persuasion** when it may be easier or more appealing to use **coercion**.

Persuasion: "relying on logic and explanation to appeal to another's best interest."¹⁴

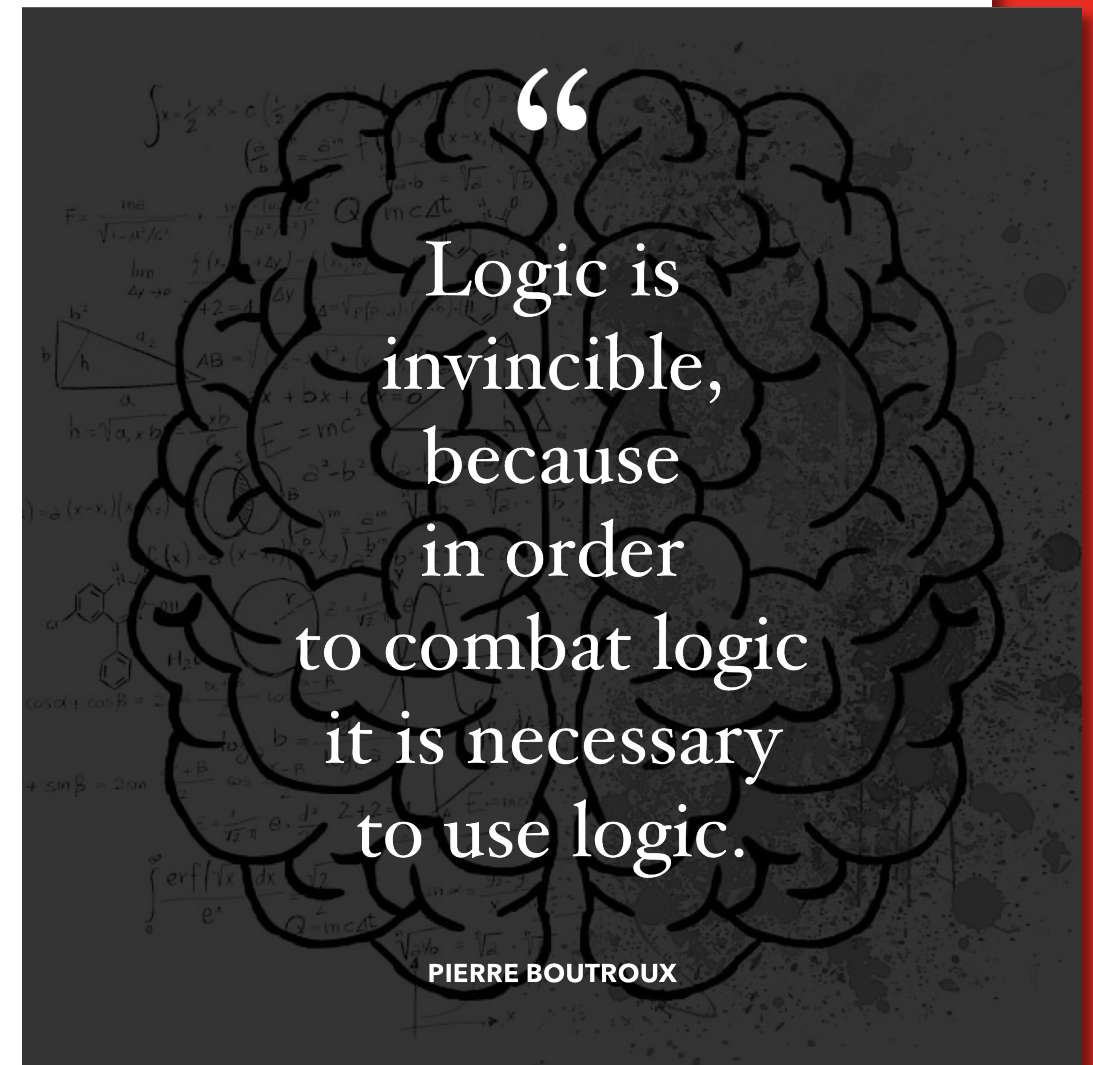
Coercion: "the process of attempting to influence another person through the use of threats, punishment, force, direct pressure, and other negative forms of power."¹⁵

In our 'Little Red Book' on Trust & Accountability, we detail the importance of decision-making. It is a central concept that ties together trust, accountability, empowerment and autonomy.

The job of a leader is not to tell people what to think, it is to focus their attention on what they should be thinking about. Not only does this provide people with the autonomy to act as they see fit, it is the primary process that allows you to trust them as you witness their decision-making over time.

Coercion takes away a person's ability to decide. Remember back to the Triune Brain. When you use threats or punishment to motivate someone odds are their instinct or emotion will drive their actions before their thoughts have an opportunity to.

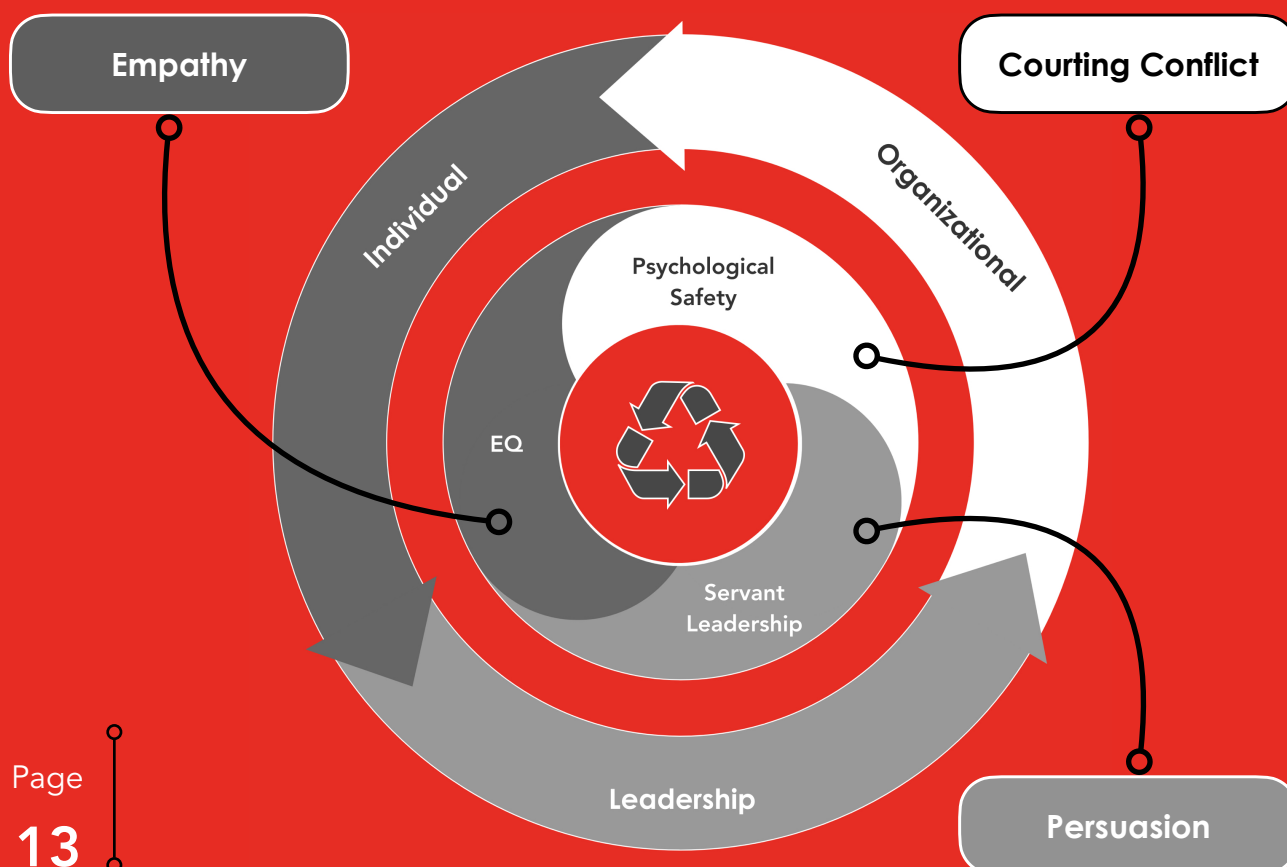
Healthy, Task-based Conflict requires debate about the goal or content of the work and debate requires the use of logic and explanation. Consciously focusing on persuasion as the primary communication tool when having conflict with someone activates the rational part of the brain because you are using logic and explanation. Furthermore, because you are focusing on the other person's best interests, you are reducing the risk that the instinctive or emotional parts of their brain control their actions. They may not like the feedback you are giving them, but at a minimum they are not feeling threatened by it.



The Little Red Book on Trust & Accountability was also where we first introduced the concept of the **flywheel**. A flywheel is a mechanical device that **stores energy** as it spins. Most organizations are built in ways that **extract** energy from their people. The flywheel model creates environments where **people go to work to become renewed**.

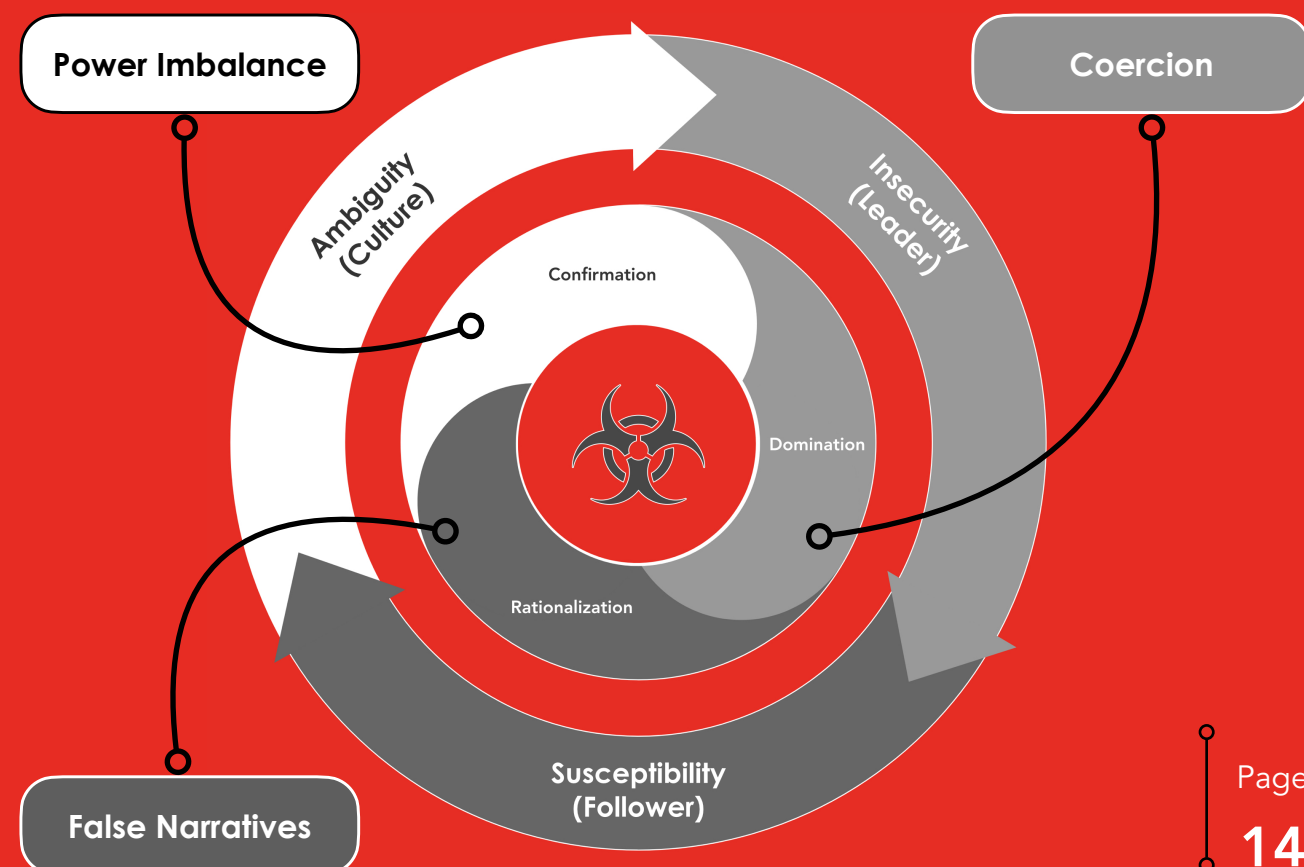
The outer ring represents the three levels we've already discussed. Your **Organization** has needs. Those needs are met by **Individuals**. Meeting the needs of the organization creates needs for the individuals. These needs are met by **Leadership**. The more harmoniously these levels interact, the more energy is stored to be used by people later. People now can't wait to go to work, as it has become a source of energy and fulfillment for them.

The inner ring is what enables this. High levels of **Psychological Safety** creates an environment where people feel safe to offer ideas and challenge others without the fear of retribution. Growing each individual's **EQ** allows for better self-regulation and increases the odds of empathy being present. **Servant Leadership** ensures that the needs of the followers are put at the forefront of the leader's actions at all times. **Courting Conflict, Empathy** and **Persuasion** are all native elements of these three theories of organizational psychology.



However, the problems with conflict are best explained using an inversion of the flywheel, something we call the **vortex**. In non-linear physics, a vortex is an energy center that spins clockwise and sucks energy in.¹⁶ As we said, most organizations extract energy from their people, and conflict happens to be at the centre of that phenomenon.

Domination is the opposite of Servant Leadership. Here someone uses **Coercion** to force their will upon others instead of appealing to their best interest. The less developed the others' EQ is, the more likely they are to give-in to the coercion, creating feelings of shame within them. These feelings are so unwelcome that the coerced begins to **Rationalize** their compliance with thoughts like "*maybe they're right*", or "*they know more than I do*". The second these **False Narratives** take hold, **Confirmation** bias emerges and the person starts to selectively disregard data that challenges their low self-belief and selectively over-emphasize data that reinforces it. This creates a **Power Imbalance** that makes Courting Conflict impossible. Left unchecked, this creates a toxic cycle represented by the outer ring where leaders allow **Insecure** people to focus their coercion on those most **Susceptible** to it. When the values the culture is built upon are too **Ambiguous** to be able to label this behaviour as wrong, the loop closes and energy is sucked out of the team. In a vortex, people dread coming to work.



Odds are you're feeling a bit overwhelmed right now and that's to be expected. Workplace Conflict is a deep and thorny issue with a lot of moving parts.

With luck however this Executive Summary has given you at least one piece of insight you can build from to get started.

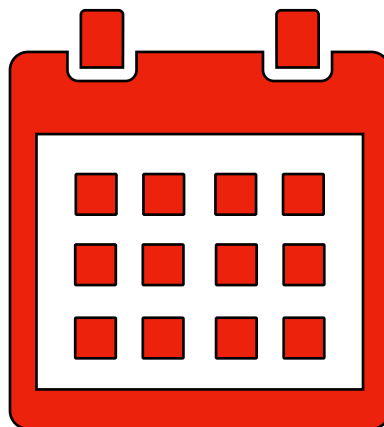
This is however just that, a summary. As much as we have tried to simplify the concepts within it, influencing people will itself, never be a simple thing.

This is why we encourage you to book your free consult. Not only will we help you identify your Behavioural Colour, we will also teach you how to assess the Behavioural Colours of your teammates so that you can begin to understand how they perceive Conflict.

We will also walk you step by step through both the **flywheel** and the **vortex** and how they apply to your specific organization at this specific time. This will not only allow you to better determine how much urgency you should bring to this, it will give you the clarity and confidence that you can in fact address it.

To book your free, no-obligation session, click the calendar icon below.

Until then, we have included some common signs of ineffective conflict in work teams to the right, and a recap of why you'll want to address them on the next page.



Signs You Have Issues With Conflict

'Hollow' or 'False' Apologies:

Most apologies are offered by the offender to simply make the offended go away. Both parties lack the tools to bring authentic issues to the surface and discuss them in a healthy way. An apology becomes a fast way for the offender to end the conflict and for the offended to feel as though they have gotten something for their pain.

Noticeable Silence in Team Meetings:

If you've hired a bunch of really smart people and those people have nothing to say in meetings, they didn't suddenly lose their intelligence, they are most likely ill-equipped to challenge others openly. Again, safety is not the absence of conflict, it's the ability to have it.

Rapid Agreements With No Questions:

A more pronounced version of the above is when people readily agree with something new when they have yet to ask any questions. The easiest and most common way to avoid conflict is to agree. Not only does the initial conflict not happen, it sends the message that you are an agreeable person that no one should want to have conflict with in the future.

'Devil's Advocacy':

"I'm just playing Devil's Advocate" really means, "I don't know how to have authentic conflict". When people pass their opinions off on a concept such as Devil's Advocacy, they are refusing to fully own their thoughts and opinions. This is usually due to an unconscious fear of relationship based conflict. Those that know how to have conflict don't need to justify their comments and critiques in this manner.

"You Always Do This":

No one 'always' does anything. When people voice their displeasure with others and embellish it in this way, it is often in an unconscious attempt to get the other party to acquiesce, thus ending a conflict quickly. Guiding this person to get specific about their concerns is what's needed here. This form of open challenge however, extends the conflict, which is why it is rarely done.

We are committed to *turning organizations into places people care about*, and we'd love to make your organization one of them. Below is a recap of why you should consider the changes outlined in this Executive Summary, and why we are uniquely suited to be your guide as you make them.

Why Change?

As shown early in this summary, workplace conflict is inevitable and avoiding it brings an entirely different set of problems. The only way to extract the benefit that conflict can create is to learn how to have it.

Why Now?

Even before the pandemic of 2020, work was going more and more remote. While technologies like text, e-mail and Slack offer increased connectivity, they don't always offer increased communication. The channels you are using increase the odds of misunderstandings which means your people need to increase their ability to prevent those misunderstandings from killing team cohesion.

Why This Process?

Understanding the difference between Task-based and Relationship-based Conflict enables you to prevent both the costs directly associated with conflict and the costs directly associated with avoiding it.

Why CultureSmith?

Our simplified Behavioural Colours system has proven to be dramatically easier to understand and scale across organizations than many other behavioural tools. This will allow people to understand how others *perceive* conflict, altering their approach to it. Additionally, our Values-Alignment process ensures everyone is operating from the same ideologies, preventing Relationship-based Conflict from entering your team.

Why Invest?

Again, the average person spends 2.8 hours per week addressing conflict. Multiply your current headcount by 2.8 and then by the number of weeks you have left this year, and then ask yourself if improving that is a worthwhile investment.

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⁵Christensen, C. (2011) *"Milkshake Marketing"*. Harvard Business Review.

⁶McKinsey & Company (2018) Global Innovation Survey.

⁷Accenture (2015) *"Clear Vision, Cloudy Execution"* 2015 Accenture U.S. Innovation Survey

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⁹Komninos, A. (2021) *"The Concept of the Triune Brain"*. Interaction Design Foundation.

¹⁰"empathy." American Psychological Association. Dictionary.APA.org. 2021.

¹¹Northouse, P. G. (2019). *Leadership: theory and practice*. Eighth Edition. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

¹²Hennesy, W. (2020) *"Conflict Defined"*. Penn State University.

¹³Jehn, K. A. (1995). A multimethod examination of the benefits and detriments of intragroup conflict. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40, 256-282.

¹⁴Greenleaf, R. K. (1970). *The servant as leader*. Cambridge, Mass: Center for Applied Studies.

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¹⁶Kuman, M. (2020) *"Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science About the Basis of our Health and Happiness"*. Journal of Complementary Medicine and Alternative Healthcare.