

Brian Milner

**Conflict Competent Teams: Navigating Teams Through Turbulent Times**





# Before We Start...

Think back to a specific incident when you experienced a messy conflict while working on a team.

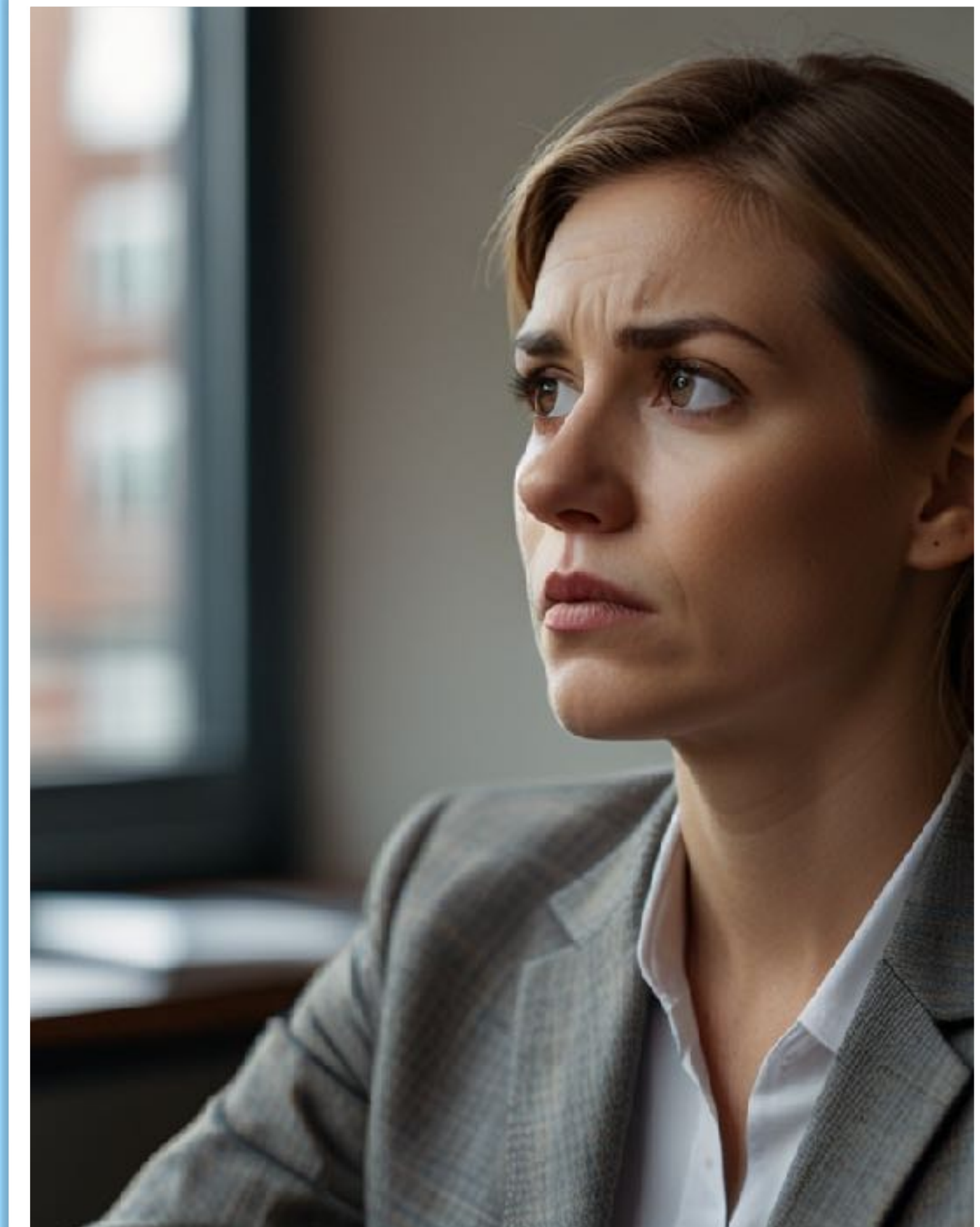
When thinking about that incident, can you identify the point in the conflict that it became destructive? What were the signs?

You'll use this later in our session.



# The Cost of Conflict

- In the US alone - \$359 Billion annually (Higher than the GDP of 132 nations) \*
- 25% called in sick to avoid conflict \*
- Managers spend 40% of their time resolving conflicts among employees \*\*



\* CPP Global Human Capital Report on Workplace Conflict

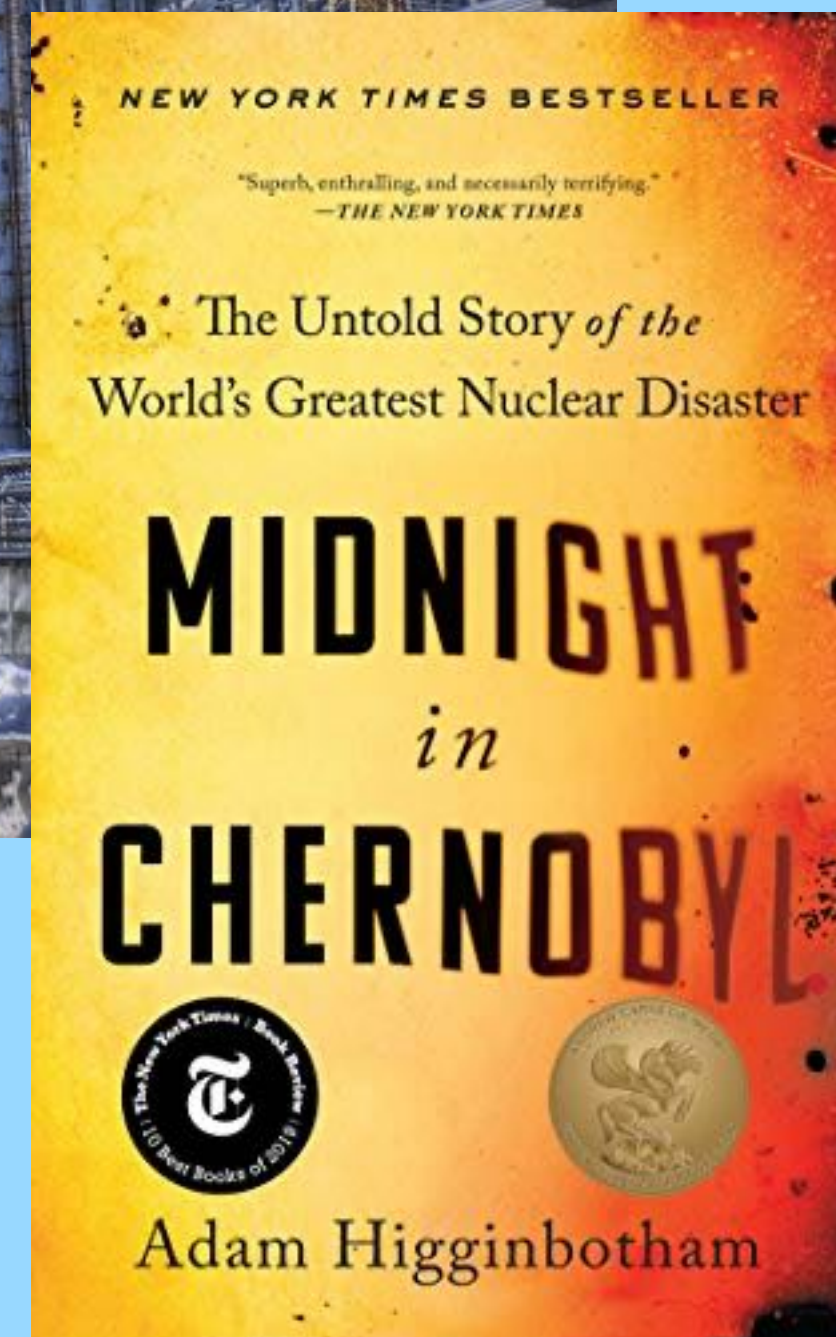
\*\* HBR Article - 4 Triggers Cause the Majority of Team Conflicts (2022)







Anatoly Dyatlov, the deputy chief engineer at Chernobyl, "expected his underlings to carry out his commands with robotic acquiescence, regardless of their better judgment."



"The operators had been trained to follow orders without question, and to trust the expertise of the engineers who had designed the reactor." - Adam Higginbotham





"Conflict isn't the problem. It's avoiding conflict that's the problem. Conflict can spark great ideas, challenge assumptions, and help teams grow."

- Ken Schwaber

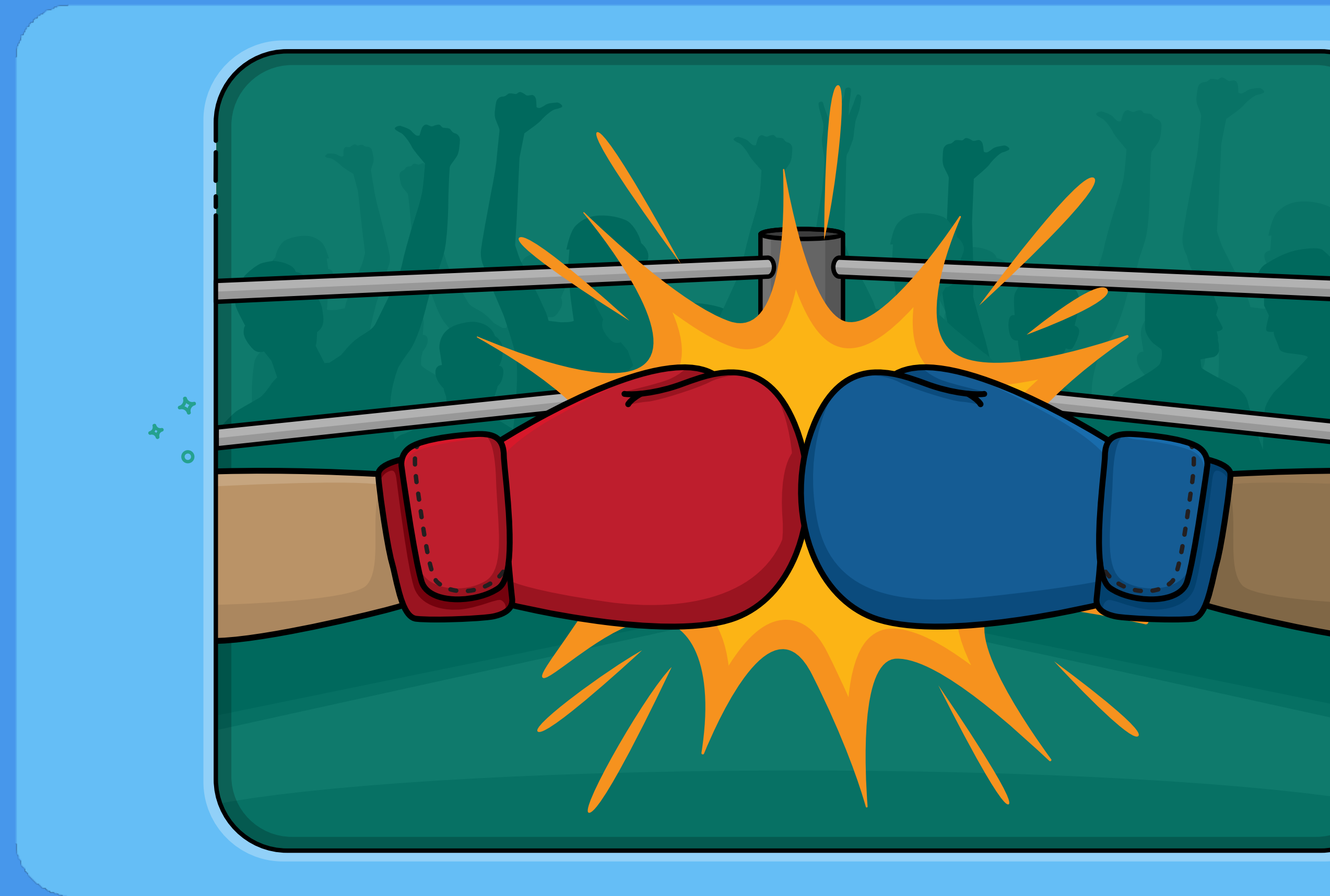


# Conflict Competent Teams

Navigating Teams Through  
Turbulent Times

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By Brian Milner





# Brian Milner

**SVP Agile Training & Coaching**

**Mountain Goat Software**

- Host of The Agile Mentors Podcast
- Certified Scrum Trainer
- Software Development over 25 years
- Working with Agile teams for over 15 years
- Spoke at GSG Nola 2024, Agile 2023
- DALLAS LOCAL!
- Co-hosted DFW Scrum Meetup



# Why You Should Care





**Individuals & Interactions**  
**Over**  
**Processes & Tools**





# Our Purpose

Our purpose is not to understand how every team or organization works best.

Our purpose is to understand how OUR team or organization works best.





# At a crossroads

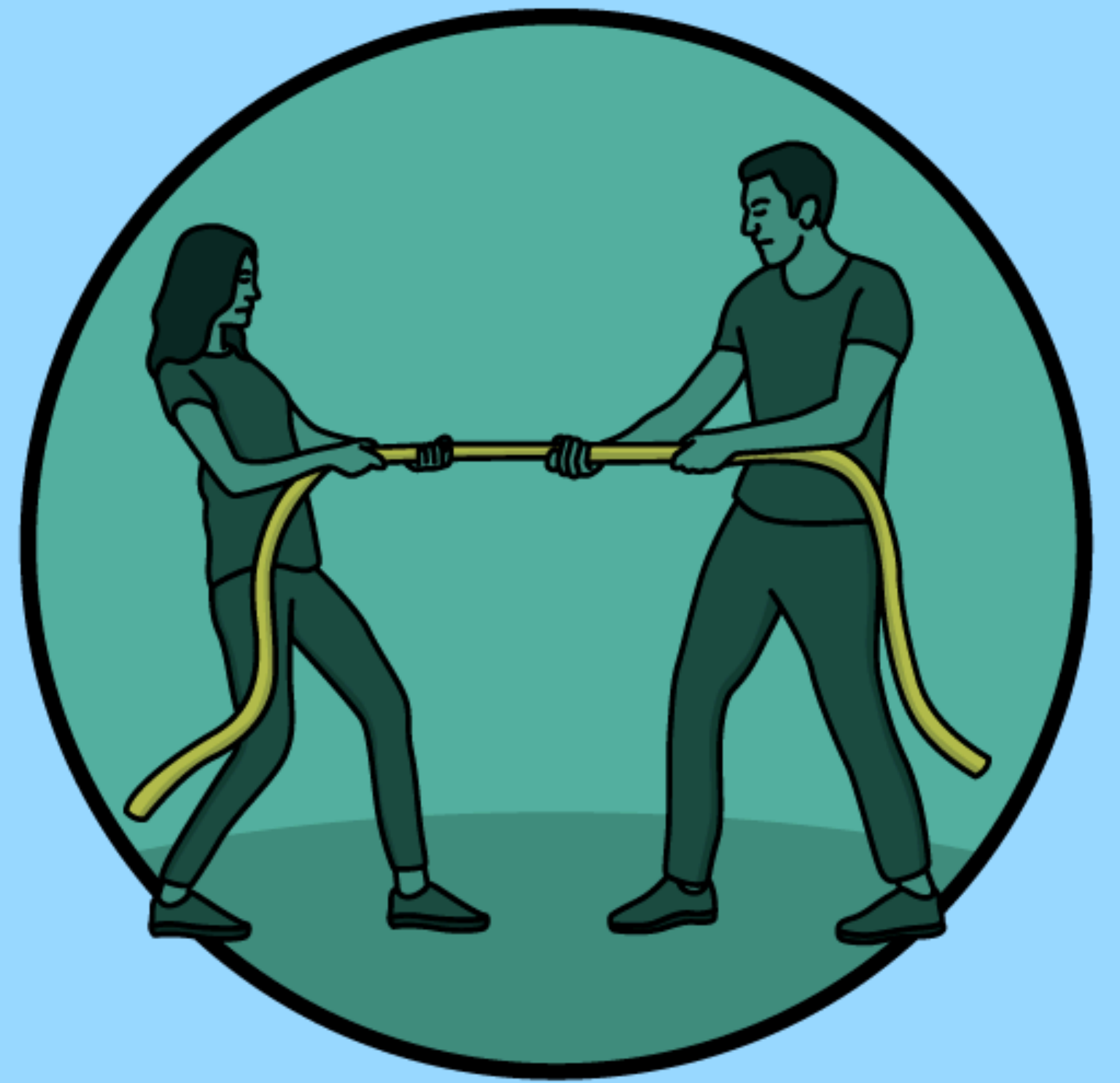
Scrum Masters are being devalued.

If we are to remain relevant to businesses, we MUST go beyond time boxes and merely scheduling meetings. We MUST provide deeper value in the form of soft skills such as team building, conflict resolution, and personality blending.





# Understanding Conflict





# Defining Conflict

Any workplace disagreement that disrupts the flow of work



# Four Main Sources of Conflict

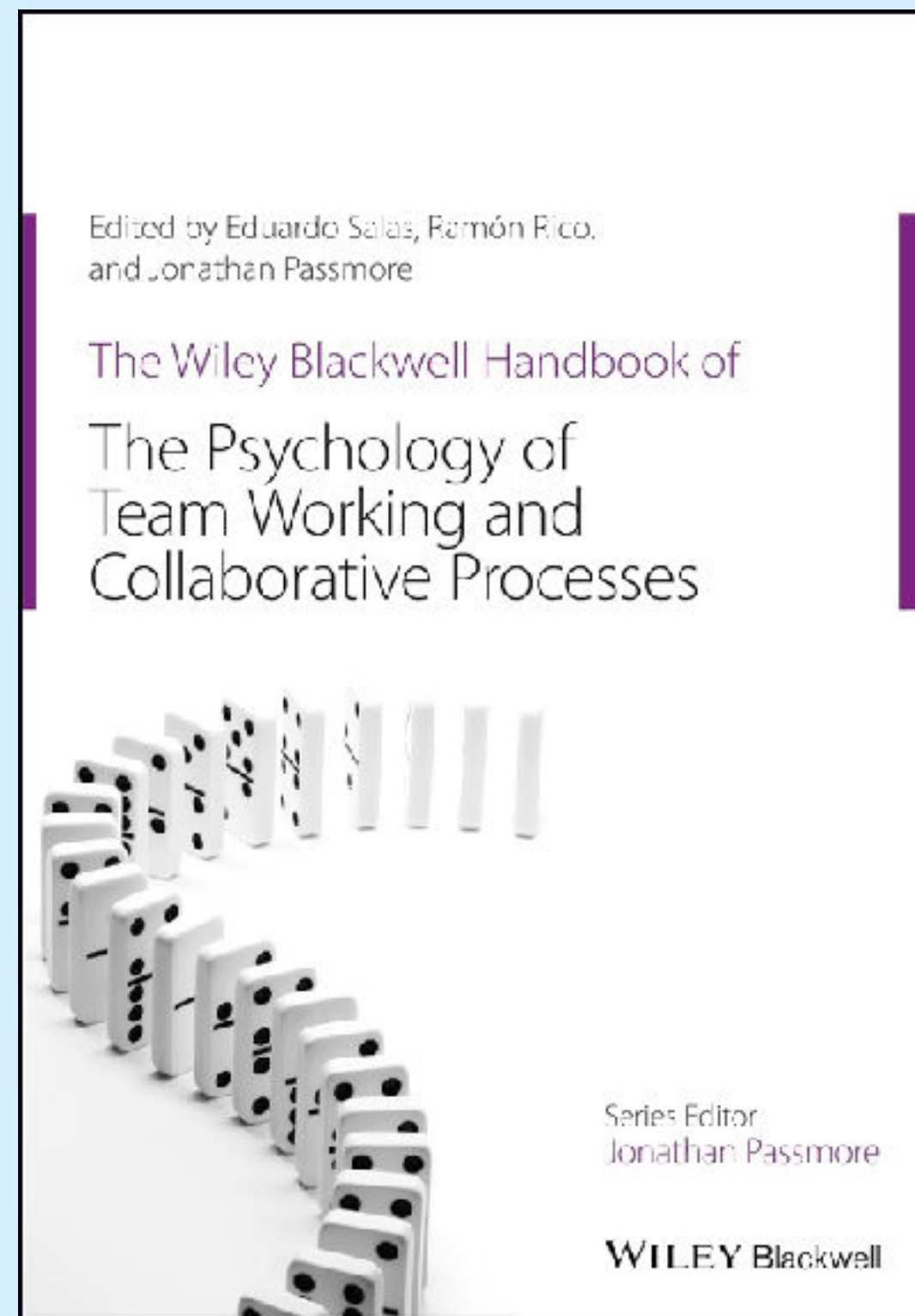


- Communication Differences (39%)
- Unclear Expectations (22%)
- Unreasonable Time Constraints (16%)
- Unclear Performance Standards (14%)





# Four Types of Team Conflict



- **Task Conflict (the WHAT)**
- **Process Conflict (the HOW)**
- **Status Conflict (the ROLE)**
- **Relationship Conflict (Personal)**

14: Conflict in Teams by Lindred L. Greer & Jennifer E. Daniels



# Task Conflict (WHAT)

Differences in ideas, attitude, and behavior related to team tasks. These include disagreements about:

- Organizational Policy
- Procedures
- Strategies
- How to interpret data





# Process Conflict (How)

Disagreements among group members about the logistics of task accomplishment, such as the delegation of tasks and responsibilities. These include disagreements about:

- Who does something
- How long something should take
- Most efficient way to do something



# Status Conflict (Role)



Disagreements among team members about their relative standing, influence, and perceived importance within the team's social hierarchy. These include disagreements about:

- Competition for visible role
- Asserting authority verbally
- Disputes over decision making authority





# Relationship Conflict



Disagreements among group members about interpersonal issues, such as personality differences or differences in norms and values . These include disagreements about:

- Personal Issues
- Feelings
- Values
- Attitude



"Conflict is a natural part of teamwork. It's how we handle that conflict that determines whether it is destructive or constructive."

- Esther Derby





# Constructive vs Destructive

## Constructive

- Focuses on issues and ideas
- Encourages respectfulness
- Problem focused
- Strengthens relationships

## Destructive

- Focuses on the person
- Often disrespectful
- Focus is on winning
- Damages relationships

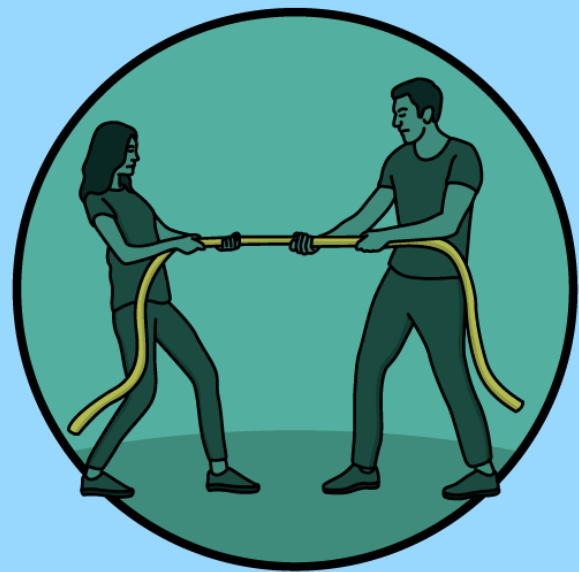


# Responding to Conflict

## Thomas-Kilman Model (TKI)



Avoid



Compete



Accommodate



Cooperate



Conciliation





# Exercise



# Your Conflict Example



Think about your conflict example from the opening slide:

1. What was the Conflict Type?
2. What were signs it turned destructive?
3. What was your response to the conflict? What was your team's response?





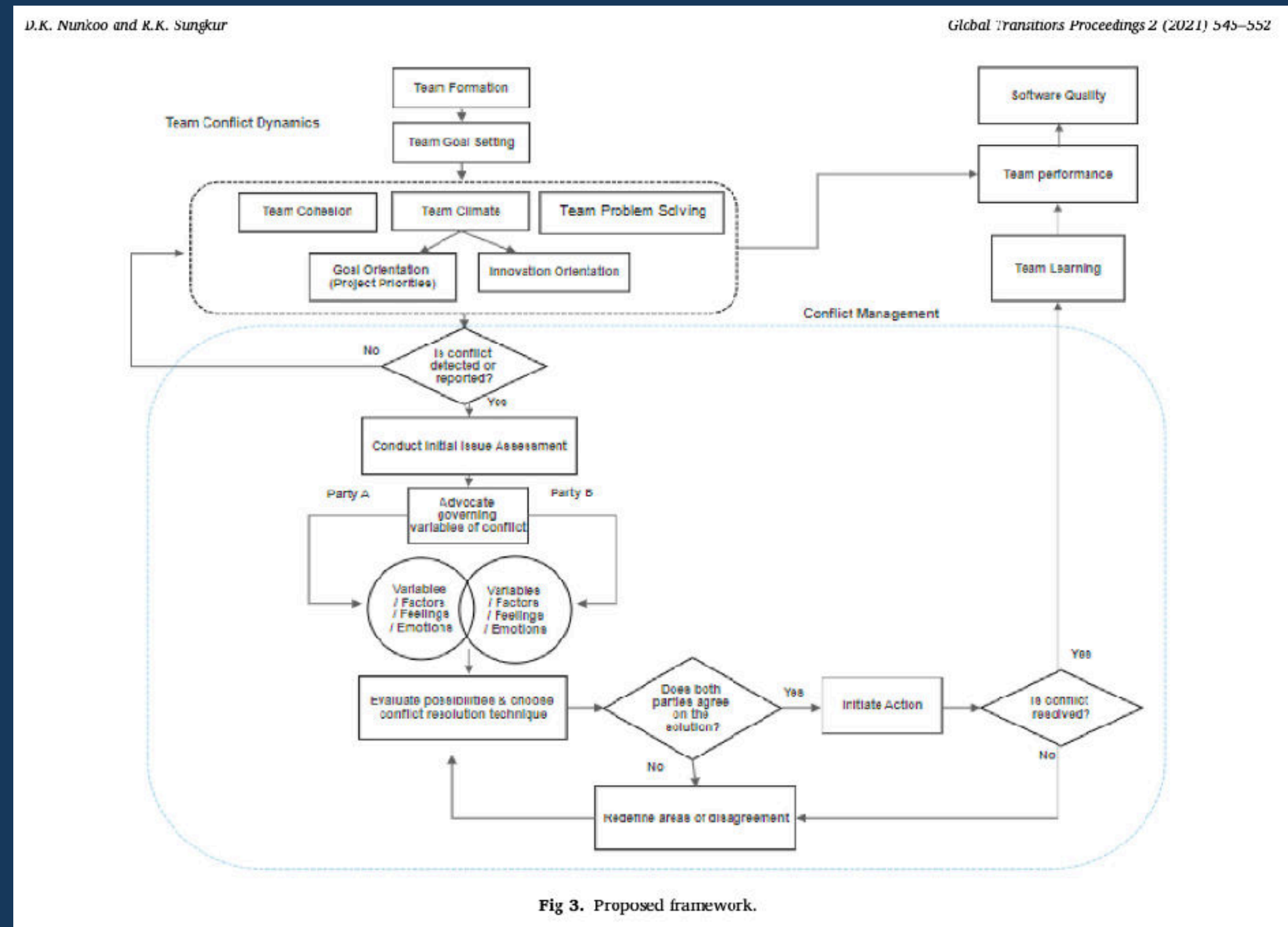
# The Framework

"If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there."

- Lewis Carroll



# The Research



Nunkoo, Deepak & Sungkur, Roopesh.(2021). Team Conflict Dynamics & Conflict Management: Derivation of A Model for Software Organisations to Enhance Team Performance and Software Quality. Global Transitions Proceedings. 2. 10.1016/j.gltp.2021.08.007.





# Team Conflict Dynamics & Conflict Management

Stage 1: Team Formation

Stage 2: Conflict Detection and Confirmation

Stage 3: Issue analysis and advocate governing variables of conflict

Stage 4: Evaluation of Possibilities

Stage 5: Agreement on Solution

Stage 6: Implementation of chosen solution

Stage 7: Conflict feedback and team learning

Stage 8: Team performance and software quality



# Applying the process to Agile teams

Stage 1: Conflict detection & confirmation

Stage 2: Inspect (Issue Analysis)

Stage 3: Evaluate Options

Stage 4: Build Consensus

Stage 5: Retrospect on Results





# Stage 1: Conflict Detection & Confirmation



1. Establish the protocol in advance
2. When a conflict cannot be resolved, confirm with participants that conflict management is required
3. If participants are at an impasse, move to stage 2.



# Stage 2: Inspect (Issue Analysis)



1. Arrange predefined meeting with neutral mediator
2. Ask conflict participants to explain why this is important to them
3. Determine conflict type
4. Determine conflict source
5. Create list of issues that need further action





# Stage 3: Evaluate Options



1. Catalog what options have already been presented
2. Discuss Thomas-Kilman's 5 responses and decide as a group which is most appropriate in this situation
3. Ask neutral parties to identify additional options



# Stage 4: Build Consensus



1. With selected conflict response method and options identified, neutral parties weigh pros/cons and propose a solution to be tried first.
2. Unless a significant downside can be shown (not preference), the group solution is put into action.





# Stage 5: Retrospect on Results



1. After solution has been implemented, entire team examines how the solution performed in a retrospective environment.
2. Team must discuss both how the solution worked as well as how their protocol for conflict worked and propose any needed adjustments.





# Exercise



# Create a Conflict Plan



In your table groups, pretend you are a work team. Using the stages we've outlined, develop a specific protocol you could use if a conflict were to arise that could not be easily resolved.



# Compare Your Takeaways



Find a partner at another table. Discuss the plan your table created with each other. What, in your opinion, is the most important concept from the talk or your discussions you plan to implement on your team(s)?







**Q&A**





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