

# management **kits**

Your digital management consultant

## **Diversity**

Working tool for leaders

# Quick Guide

management **kits**

- Team composition, considering backgrounds, cultural heritage and personalities of team members, have a strong influence on team dynamics. Heterogeneity of teams can be a strong facilitator of team performance if it is understood and facilitated with sensitivity.
- Use this tool to guide your reflection on diversity in your team, as well as to support you in finding strategies to unlock the positive potential resting in the diverse perspectives of all members in your team.
- Review the communication model to get an overview on the challenges you might face.

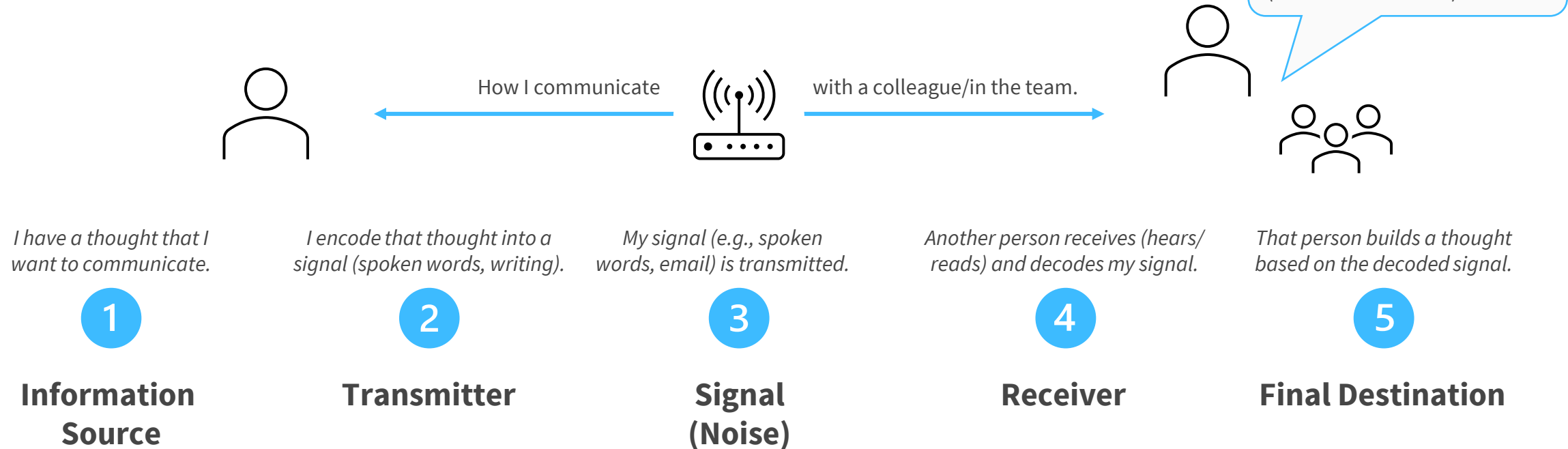
# Purpose of this work tool

- Team composition, considering backgrounds, cultural heritage and personalities of team members, have a strong influence on team dynamics. Heterogeneity of teams can be a strong facilitator of team performance if it is understood and facilitated with sensitivity. However, interactions in diverse teams can pose a challenge team effectiveness.
- Your goal as a team leader is twofold: to make sure that you interact/communicate effectively on a bilateral basis, and to foster effective communication throughout the team, as a group and amongst members.
- Creating awareness for diversity and how it can impact team dynamics, allows you to be more sensitive to the potential issues arising from diversity. Based on this you can remove roadblocks in your team and proactively facilitate diversity to turn this aspect into a key strength of your team.

# Framework 1/ Creating understanding (1)

management kits

- Communication is the main form of interaction in teams. It is a key challenge for any team. In **diverse teams' communication typically becomes more complex.**
- Let's look at the communication challenge contextualizing the Shannon and Weaver communication model. This breaks the process of communication down into five steps:



Source: The illustration is based on the Shannon and Weaver (1949) model of communication; a more complex, yet similar version is Berlo's (1960) SMCR model of communication

# Framework 1/ Creating understanding (2)

management **kits**

Your thoughts?

- Consider a situation when you were with a group of people that you had known very well and for many years (e.g., friends you grew up with).
  - Consider a situation when you came into a new group environment with people that you hadn't met before (e.g., colleagues in a different country).
  - Consider how you would have communicated in both environments. Try to find an experience, when communication was: (1) very effective; (2) very challenging; and (3) there were misunderstandings.
- 
- Most people would say that the first situation, communicating with people that you knew for years, will be more effective and less challenging.
  - Communication in a new and unknown context is typically more challenging. It requires more effort to encode the thoughts you want to communicate, or decode signals you receive, to make sure you are correctly understood and, for one example, do not come across unkindly.

# Framework 1/ Creating understanding (3)

- This communication model is easy to picture in a context where we would speak to one another. An important aspect to differentiate, is that we speak either directly to one person, or we speak to a group (e.g., in the setting of a team meeting).
- We can apply the same model to oral communication (speaking in a meeting), or written communication (sending emails to one person or a team). As communication is a key form of team interaction, we can also generalize it to “behaviors” in the social setting of a team, or in a 1:1 interaction.

## Your thoughts?

- Consider a situation in your work environment, where there were issues in communication/interactions – in team meetings, in email communication.
- Consider how the issue might have been caused through a problem in the communication process along the process introduced before: the sender might have encoded the message in a particular way? The recipient(s) might have decoded the message in a particular way? The message’s signal might not have been correctly transmitted (e.g., because of language, impatient listening, noise)?

# Framework 1/ Creating understanding (4)

## → Some examples of implicit challenges for team interactions – what can go wrong?

### Summarizing reasoning:

I have thought of something for weeks now and considered all pros and cons. How much of this do I need to communicate?

### Writing emails:

Do I take a moment to consider how the receiver might be affected through my words? Do I show true appreciation, communicate critical aspects?

### Impact of emotions:

The strong (or very low) emotions in your voice might impact how what you are saying is understood?

### Short on time:

The receiving person might read an email in a rush (pressured by time) and misunderstand

### Considering intentions?

Do I get enough reasoning/context around what is being said/stated to form my own opinion?

### How to make your point:

How do I best voice/formulate my opinion? Should I just say what I think, or give more context how I came to my opinion?

### (Second) language barrier:

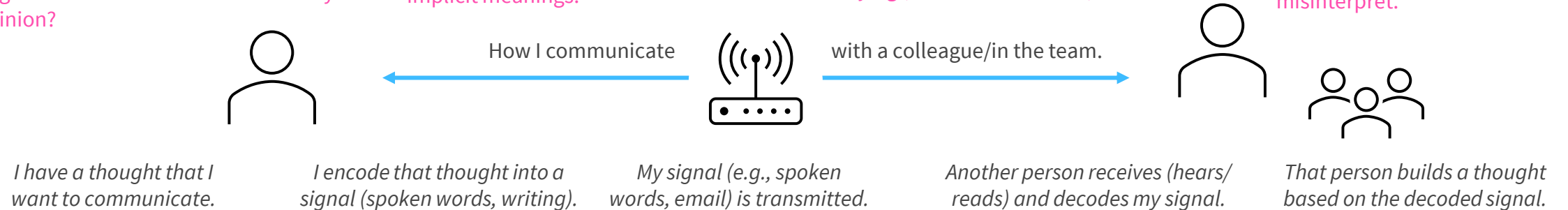
I have to say something delicate but as a second-language speaker, I sometimes miss implicit meanings.

### (Second) language barrier:

The receiver might not speak the language well enough to fully understand what you are saying (or the nuances of it).

### Does everybody understand?

In a team meeting, some might get a clear picture of what is said, while others might misinterpret.



Source: The illustration is based on the Shannon and Weaver (1949) model of communication; a more complex, yet similar version is Berlo's (1960) SMCR model of communication

# Framework 2/ Perspectives on team interactions

management **kits**

- We now generalize the process of communication to look at social interactions in a team and understand underlying aspects that can cause challenges, if you are in a highly diverse team context.
- The various dimensions introduced are based on Erin Meyers “Culture Map”. It seems important that understanding diversity should not be limited to cultural backgrounds but must comprehend the whole personalities of the people in your team, or work context. Generalization helps to illustrate dynamics – but people are all different and can change.

Your thoughts?

- Consider a (homogenous) “national” work environment, where all colleagues grew up in the same culture, and where trained following a similar education system. There will be a lot of “implicit” understandings based on the similar backgrounds.
- Compare this to an (heterogenous) “international” work environment, where colleagues come from all over the world, brought up in different education systems. You can also add diversity in terms of personalities to the equation if you’d like. There will be a lot of need to form “explicit” understanding and agree a common approach for action.

We are not making a case here that one or the other work environment is better, or more effective.

Our goal is to develop sensitivity to understand the environment around us and enable effective interactions therein.

Source: Erin Meyer (2014) The Culture Map - Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business, Public Affairs Books – you can also find further resources on [www.erinmeyer.com](http://www.erinmeyer.com)



# Framework 2/ Perspectives on team interactions (2)

→ The Culture Map illustrates key dimensions that can impact team interactions – both positively and negatively. Our goal is to become more aware of these dimensions, reflect how they might impact your specific team context, and what you can do about this.

→ **Key dimensions to consider are:**

<b>Communicating</b>	Low-context	←————→	High-context
<b>Evaluating</b>	Direct negative feedback	←————→	Indirect negative feedback
<b>Persuading</b>	Principles first	←————→	Application first
<b>Leading</b>	Egalitarian	←————→	Hierarchical
<b>Deciding</b>	Consensual	←————→	Top-down
<b>Trusting</b>	Task-based	←————→	Relationship-based
<b>Disagreeing</b>	Confrontational	←————→	Avoids confrontation
<b>Scheduling</b>	Linear time	←————→	Flexible time

Detailed explanations follow on the next pages.

# Framework 2/ Perspectives on team interactions (2)

## Communicating

management kits

**Low-context**



**High-context**

Good communication is precise, simple, and clear. Messages are expressed and understood at face value. Repetition is appreciated if it helps clarify the communication.

Good communication is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered. Messages are both spoken and read between the lines. Messages are often implied but not plainly expressed.

Your thoughts?

→ Where would you place yourself in this dimension? Do you remember colleagues, which were acting in the extremes of this dimension? Any issues, effective strategies that you observed when thinking of this dimension?

# Framework 2/ Perspectives on team interactions (3)

## Evaluating

management kits

### Direct negative feedback

Negative feedback to a colleague is provided frankly, bluntly, honestly. Negative messages stand alone, not softened by positive ones (totally inappropriate, completely unnecessary) when criticizing. Criticism may be given to an individual in front of a group.

### Indirect negative feedback

Negative feedback to a colleague is provided softly, subtly, diplomatically. Positive messages are used to wrap negative ones. Qualifying descriptors are often used (sort of appropriate, slightly unprofessional) when criticizing. Criticism is given only in private.

Consider the relation to the communicating dimension:  
How direct/indirect negative feedback can be communicated in explicit (low-context) or implicit (high-context) ways?

Your thoughts?

→ Where would you place yourself in this dimension? Do you remember colleagues, which were acting in the extremes of this dimension? Any issues, effective strategies that you observed when thinking of this dimension?

# Framework 2/ Perspectives on team interactions (4)

## Persuading

management kits

### Principles first



Individuals have been trained to first develop the theory or complex account concept before presenting a fact, statement, or opinion. The preference is to begin a message or report by building up a theoretical argument before moving into a conclusion. The conceptual principles underlying each situation are valued.

### Application first

Individuals are trained to begin with a fact, statement, or opinion and later add concepts to back up or explain the conclusions, as necessary. The preference is to begin with a message or report with an executive summary or bullet points. Discussions are approached in a practical, concrete manner. Theoretical or philosophical discussions are avoided in a business context.

Your thoughts?

→ Where would you place yourself in this dimension? Do you remember colleagues, which were acting in the extremes of this dimension? Any issues, effective strategies that you observed when thinking of this dimension?

# Framework 2/ Perspectives on team interactions (5)

## Leading

management kits

### Egalitarian

The ideal distance between a boss and a subordinate is low. The best boss is a facilitator among equals. Organizational structures are flat. Communication often skips hierarchical lines.



### Hierarchical

The ideal distance between the boss and a subordinate is high. The best boss is a strong director who leads from the front. Organizational structures are multilayered and fixed. Communication follows set hierarchical lines.

In hierarchical contexts, people are less likely to voice disagreement with their boss openly.

They will also seek a formal “ok” before taking action more often than in egalitarian cultures.

Communication is at the same hierarchy level only (position matters) and seldomly across.

Your thoughts?

→ Where would you place yourself in this dimension? Do you remember colleagues, which were acting in the extremes of this dimension? Any issues, effective strategies that you observed when thinking of this dimension?

# Framework 2/ Perspectives on team interactions (6)

## Deciding

management kits

**Consensual**



**Top-down**

Decisions are made in groups through unanimous agreement.

Decisions are made by individuals (usually the boss only).

Your thoughts?

→ Where would you place yourself in this dimension? Do you remember colleagues, which were acting in the extremes of this dimension? Any issues, effective strategies that you observed when thinking of this dimension?

# Framework 2/ Perspectives on team interactions (7)

## Trusting

management kits

### Task-based



### Relationship-based

Trust is built through business-related activities. Work relationships are built and dropped easily, based on the practicality of the situation. You do good work consistently, you are reliable, I enjoy working with you. I trust you.

Trust is built through sharing meals, evening drinks, and visits at the coffee machine. Work relationships build slowly over the long term. I've seen who you are at a deep level. I've shared personal time with you, I know other well who trust you, I trust you.

Your thoughts?

- Where would you place yourself in this dimension? Do you remember colleagues, which were acting in the extremes of this dimension? Any issues, effective strategies that you observed when thinking of this dimension?

# Framework 2/ Perspectives on team interactions (8)

## Disagreeing

management **kits**

### Confrontational

Disagreement and debate are positive for the team and organization. Open confrontation is appropriate and will not negatively impact the relationship



### Avoids confrontation

Disagreement and debate are negative for the team or organization. Open confrontation is inappropriate and will break group harmony or negatively impact the relationship.

Also consider how emotions can be different for both settings. While you might be in an equally confrontational (or avoiding confrontation settings) some cultures will express emotions openly, and others suppress their emotions through a more rational communication.

Your thoughts?

→ Where would you place yourself in this dimension? Do you remember colleagues, which were acting in the extremes of this dimension? Any issues, effective strategies that you observed when thinking of this dimension?



# Framework 2/ Perspectives on team interactions (9)

## Scheduling/Time

management kits

### Linear time



### Flexible time

Project steps are approached in a sequential fashion, by completing one task before the next. One thing at a time. No interruptions. The focus is on the deadline and sticking to the schedule. Emphasis is on promptness and good organization over flexibility.

Project steps are approached in a fluid manner, changing tasks as opportunities arise. Many things are dealt with at once and interruptions are accepted. The focus is on adaptability, and flexibility is valued over organization.

Your thoughts?

→ Where would you place yourself in this dimension? Do you remember colleagues, which were acting in the extremes of this dimension? Any issues, effective strategies that you observed when thinking of this dimension?

# Approach 1/5: Let's put this to work...

management **kits**

- Your goal as a team leader is twofold: to make sure that you interact/communicate effectively on a bilateral basis, and to foster effective communication throughout the team, as a group and amongst members.
- Creating awareness for diversity and how it can impact team dynamics, allows you to be more sensitive to the potential issues arising from diversity. Based on this you can remove roadblocks in your team and proactively facilitate diversity to turn this aspect into a key strength of your team.
- This tool includes three steps to “reflect and understand”, “consider impact”, and “actively address” diversity in your team.
- You can work through these steps in a sequence. If you are observing specific challenges in your team's interactions, you map those in “consider impact” and then move back to “reflect and understand” to explore possible reasons and then define steps to “actively address”.

# Approach 2/5: Reflect on and understand diversity

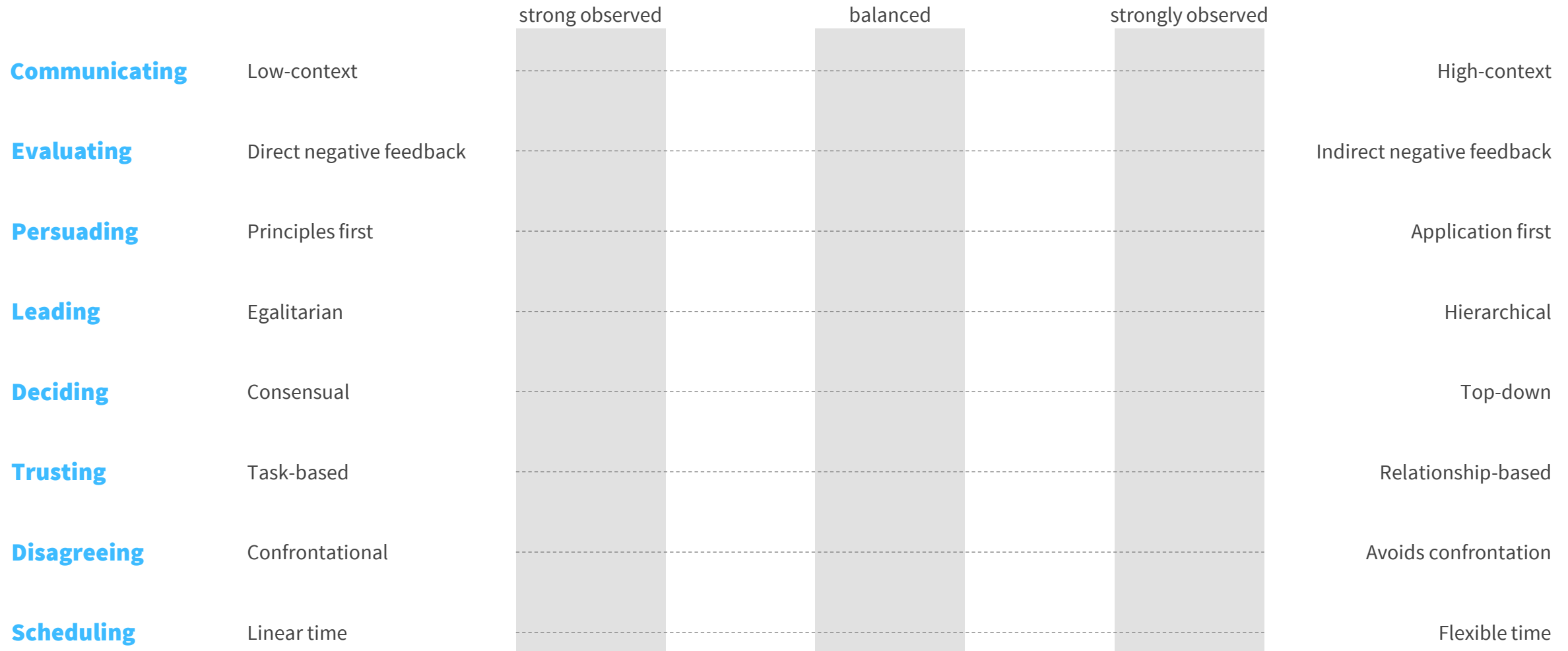
management kits

<b>Your tasks for reflect and understand</b>	<b>Thinking questions</b>	<b>Your notes</b>
<b>Diverse (cultural) backgrounds</b> What are the main commonalities/differences in your team stemming from culture/heritage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Do the members of your team have “shared” backgrounds in terms of cultures or heritage?</li><li>→ What other common factors, e.g., education can you see that might foster a natural alignment in thinking/action?</li><li>→ If not the whole team, do smaller groups share similar backgrounds in relation to the above? What and how extensive are such “overlaps”, respectively the differences?</li></ul>	<i>Example</i>
<b>Diverse personalities</b> What are the key commonalities/differences possibly stemming from the personalities of the people on your team?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Looking at the personalities in your team, what are shared dispositions/values?</li><li>→ How do team members exhibit similarities/differ in their behavior (how they communicate, argue, make decisions, go the extra mile, build trust, care about formalities)?</li></ul>	<i>Example</i>

# Approach 3/5: Map your team

Be aware to use this tool as a reflection tool to deconstruct und understand social interactions in a team. This is not to qualify people.

management **kits**



Source: Erin Meyer (2014) The Culture Map - Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business, Public Affairs Books – you can also find further resources on [www.erinmeyer.com](http://www.erinmeyer.com)

# Approach 4/5: Consider the impact on team dynamics

management kits

<b>Your tasks for considering the impact</b>	<b>Thinking questions</b>	<b>Your notes</b>
<b>Possible roadblocks</b> What are the challenges in team interactions stemming from diversity? How can things go wrong?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Consider situations, when your team is challenged due to misunderstandings, makes poor decisions, acts ineffectively, members are not engaged.</li><li>→ Can you identify triggers/patterns in the underlying interactions that link to the considerations before?</li><li>→ How do these relate to external circumstances, the topics on the agenda, or the members interacting?</li></ul>	<i>Example</i>
<b>Key enablers</b> How does its diversity help your team to achieve better results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Consider situations, when your team communicates very effectively, makes the best decisions, acts most effectively, all team members are highly engaged.</li><li>→ Can you identify triggers/patterns in the underlying interactions that link to the considerations before?</li><li>→ How do these relate to external circumstances, the topics on the agenda, or the members interacting?</li></ul>	<i>Example</i>

# Approach 5/5: Unlocking the potential of diversity

Your tasks for actively address	Strategies to consider	Your notes
<p><b>React when you hit a roadblock</b> What should you look for in team dynamics in order to react when necessary?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Does everybody have “understanding” (let me summarize; if I would paraphrase)?</li><li>→ Are arguments clear to everyone (can you elaborate on your thinking; can you explain how do you come to this conclusion)?</li><li>→ Do all members contribute to the discussion (Can I hear some other opinions; who would take a different perspective; let’s go around the table to hear everyone)?</li><li>→ Are Tensions at a professional level (do people get offended; rules in team setting, follow-up in 1:1)?</li></ul>	<p><i>Example</i></p>
<p><b>Facilitate proactively</b> What can you do proactively to better facilitate team interaction using the team’s diversity?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Built relationships in the team to foster trust and feeling of psychological safety. Develop explicit rules to establish a common way to interact/communicate.</li><li>→ Create transparency how you want decisions to be made, how much input you want from team members.</li><li>→ Encourage dissenting opinions, get to constructive feedback and critical views through focused questions (one positive, one aspect to improve).</li><li>→ Intentionally ask for specific perspectives. Ask people to take different views. Ask members to lead meetings.</li></ul>	<p><i>Example</i></p>

# Example Applications (1) - Situation

- Think of a small team of six members including yourself. For simplicity, there are two predominant “profiles” along the dimensions of Erin Meyer’s Culture Map:
  - Some members (including you) are very direct in their communication (low-context, direct criticism, confrontational). They are used to argue based on principles and act very egalitarian.
  - Other members are less direct in their communication (high-context, indirect criticism, less confrontational). They are used to argue based on application and think more hierarchical.
- Think how the team is collaborating throughout a series of strategy discussion. The business is not going very well. The question is what root causes can be identified and what change should be prioritized.
- Such a discussion is not easy to handle per se. It has to focus on what is going “wrong” and what is going “well” and “what has to change first”. Try to put yourself at the meeting table, in front of the computer when writing/reading email communication.

## Example Applications (2) – Dynamics, roadblocks and enablers

- There might be heated discussions, as every team member is arguing and making their case with passion. However, there might likely be challenges in the discussion:
  - The members communicating very direct will voice straightforward feedback (criticism) on what they think is going wrong and who is responsible. This can easily upset the other group and lead to tensions that are not constructive.
  - The members communicating with high context will voice their criticism in an indirect way, because of which the other members might not fully comprehend their full argument.
  - The members that think more hierarchical are likely to wait for your opinion, which they would struggle to then openly disagree with. Less confrontational members might fall more and more silent in a heated and direct discussion.
  - Members who argue “application first” risk to not get their argument across to members that start with principles. As they might not share their full reasoning, their argument might be interpreted as subjectively defending their position.
- An important aspect to consider is yourself – you will likely have easier communication/interaction with the team members sharing a similar profile. But as a leader you should balance the discussion and ask yourself, whether/how your own profile affects your communication, decision-making, and actions.



# Example Applications (3) – Considerations and how could you (re-)act?

- Frame the discussions:
  - Change is necessary and unavoidable. You need a shared plan how to act. For that you need to understand what is not working well and take a development focus.
  - Make the decision-making transparent: will you decide in the end? Will it be a team decision? Or will you make a recommendation to a higher board?
  - Set rules, define no-go areas: what statements/criticism would go too far? This might also be done in a 1:1 context.
- Ensure understanding:
  - Ask a lot of questions for the statements brought into the discussion to ensure everybody fully understands the messages that are being sent.
  - Ask to clarify, ask to explain and elaborate, summarize for understanding. Ask people to challenge or question what is being said.
- Make sure everyone contributes their perspective
  - Invite dissenting opinions, invite those who have fallen silent.
  - Ask people how they would argue from a different perspective as their own.
  - Hear contributions around the table have everyone contribute

# Key literature

management **kits**

- Erin Meyer (2014) The Culture Map - Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business, Public Affairs Books, New York.
- David Berlo (1960) The process of communication: an introduction to theory and practice, Holt, Reinhart and Winston, New York.
- Claude E. Shannon & Warren Weaver (1949) The Mathematical Theory of Communication, University of Illinois Press,