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Leading with Integrity



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Navigating Ethics and Conflict in Chapter Leadership

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At the conclusion of this session, attendees will be able to:

- Differentiate between interpersonal conflict, ethical issues, and genuine ethical dilemmas in chapter leadership.
- Recognise how expectations, perceptions, behaviours and competing values can create or escalate conflict
- Make and communicate ethical decisions that preserve trust, respect and integrity within the chapter.

- About Us
- Understanding Conflict
  - Case Study 1 – The Conflict
- Expectations and Conflict Escalation
- Understanding the Ethical Dilemma
  - Case Study 2 – The Ethical Dilemma
- Ethics in Leadership and Decision Making
- Key Takeaways



Ethics Advisory Team

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About Ethics Advisory Team



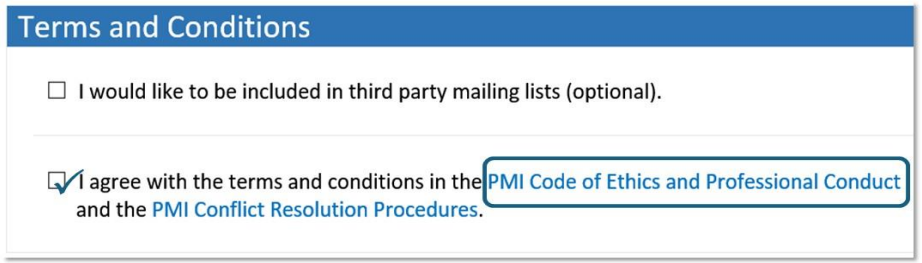
About The Ethics Advisory Team (EAT)

- Promote PMI Ethics
- Provide subject matter expertise and recommendations relating to PMI Ethics
- Deliver webinars, write blogs and articles to facilitate understanding and adherence to the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

PMI Code of Ethics – who it applies to.

We all should be familiar with it, because we have all agreed to be covered by it!

- All PMI members
- All PMI certification holders
- All PMI volunteers (including non-member volunteers)
- All applicants for a PMI Certification
- Literally, everyone in this room!



Conflict

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Definition



Pondy (1967): “Conflict is a process that begins when one partyperceives that another has negatively affected something it caresabout.”

Thomas (1992): “Conflict arises when the goals, values, or opinions of two or more people are incompatible.”

Rahim (2001): “Conflict is an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities.”

Conflict occurs when people perceive incompatibility between their goals, values, interests, expectations or actions.

Conflict is not inherently negative.

It can challenge assumptions, surface different perspectives and improve decisions. It becomes problematic when disagreement shifts from the issue to the relationship or behavior.

Conflict is a natural part of teamwork and, when managed well, can be constructive and lead to growth. However, when mismanaged, it quickly becomes destructive and erodes trust.

Case Study 1
Conflict

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Case Study 1 – Meet James the new Board Member



James

James: James has more than 25 years of experience leading large projects and has spent the past decade as a senior risk professional on major programs. He is recognised as an authority on risk in his workplace.

He joins the board of a relatively small PMI Chapter and is keen to contribute his experience and strengthen the Chapter's governance.

The Board: The Chapter is run entirely by volunteers with limited time and resources. The board acknowledges the importance of risk management but believes its existing informal approach is appropriate. Its priority is delivering events, professional development and value to members.



The Board

Case Study 1 – The Frustration

"They're dismissing my input; it's like my expertise doesn't matter here."



James

"Hmm, no one seems interested in discussing risk, it's always about events."

The Board



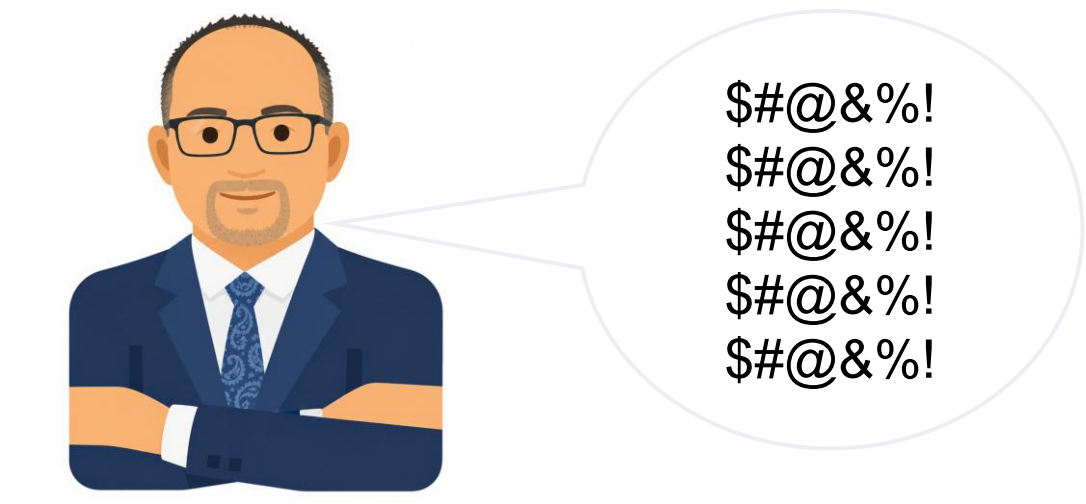
James does not understand how a volunteer chapter operates.

Additional governance would require more effort than the Chapter can reasonably sustain

Same situation. Two very different interpretations

Case Study 1 – The Reaction?

Frustrated that his repeated calls for stronger risk controls are being dismissed, James loses his composure during a meeting.



James

The outburst shocked everyone in the room. Several board members felt personally attacked and disrespected. Within days, two key members resigned just days before a major chapter event.

Case Study 1 – Group Discussion

- Could this have been avoided?
- At what point did the conflict move from constructive to destructive?
- What could James or the board have done differently to prevent escalation?



The Role of Expectations

An expectation is a belief or assumption about how others should behave, perform, or deliver outcomes in a given situation. It is shaped by values, personal purpose, and perceptions of fairness.



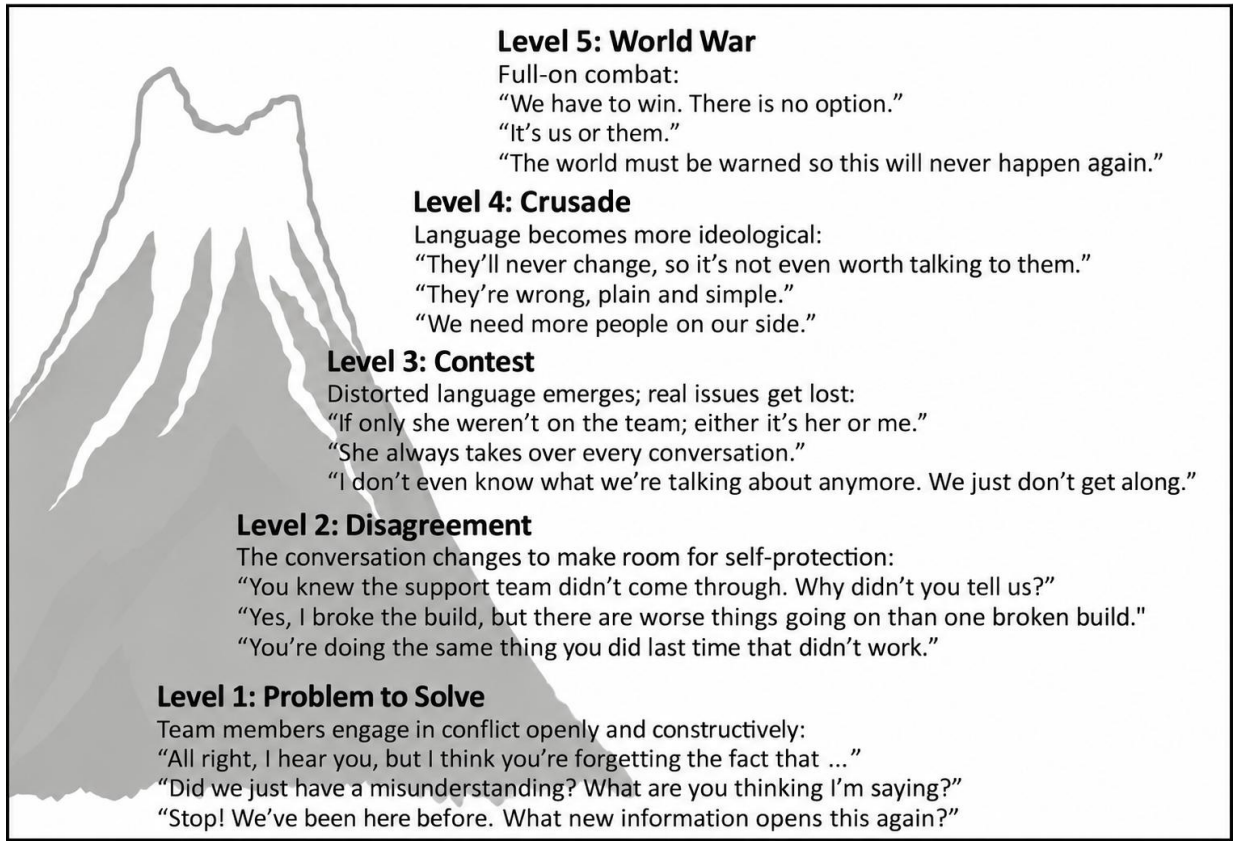
Examples of Expectations

- How many hours should each member dedicate to board activities?
- Are members expected to attend every board meeting?
- What level of participation is expected in chapter events or committees?
- How quickly should board members respond to emails or decisions requiring input?

Different expectations → Different interpretations → Frustration → Reaction → Escalation

Levels of Conflict





5 Levels of Conflict

Case Study 2
Ethical Dilemma

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Conflict or Ethical Dilemma?

Conflict	Ethical Dilemma
Competing goals, expectations, interests or perspectives	Competing ethical principles, duties or obligations
Primarily concerns differences between people or groups	Primarily concerns what ought to be done
May have a mutually acceptable resolution	May require choosing between imperfect alternatives
Does not necessarily involve unethical behaviour	Requires ethical judgement

They are different but they can intersect.

What is an Ethical Dilemma?

An ethical dilemma occurs when a decision requires us to choose between competing ethical principles, obligations or legitimate interests.



- There may be no option that fully satisfies every ethical obligation.
- Different courses of action may each be ethically defensible.
- The challenge is not simply knowing the rules, it requires judgement.

An ethical dilemma is not simply a choice between right and wrong. The difficult ones are often right versus right.

Case Study 2 – Dilemma



James is the new President of the PMI Gotham City.

The chapter has been allocated a grant of $2,000 for travelling to the PMI Africa Conference 2026.

The Vice President is a close friend of James and would like to use all the travelling grant for himself to attend the conference and build relationships with other Chapter leaders and bring knowledge back to the board.

The Vice President attended the conference the previous year whereas several other board members have never attended.

The Vice President privately tells James that he is relying on his support and reminds him of the work they have done together for the Chapter.

Case Study 2 – Dilemma



During the board meeting the other board members discuss the matter and suggest that the grant be split equally among the members willing to attend.

The Vice President does not support the proposal of having to split the grant and argues that as he is more senior than the other board members, he should be the only one to attend and the other board members should not attend.

Case Study 2 – Dilemma



If James awards the full grant to the Vice President, he may be able to argue that he is acting in the Chapter's strategic interests, but the decision could reasonably be perceived as favoritism.

If James divides the grant among the other Board members, he may provide fairer access and broader development opportunities, but the Chapter could lose an important opportunity for senior representation at the regional forum.

Case Study 2 – The Dilemma



Should James support the decision he believes may deliver the greatest benefit to the Chapter when that decision also benefits a close friend or should he prioritize equitable access and avoid any perception of favoritism?

Case Study 2 – Group Discussion

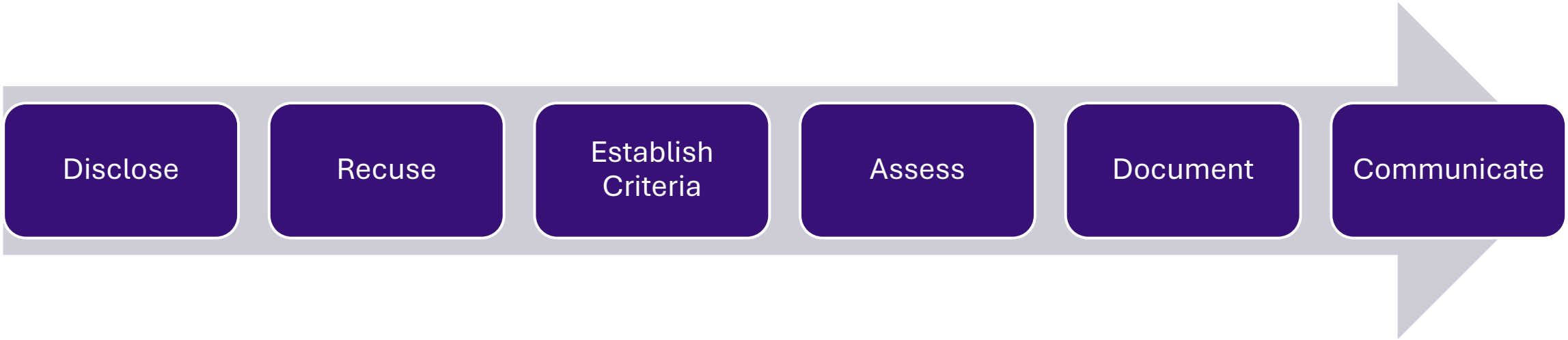
Discuss the following

- What competing ethical obligations do you see?
- What should James do?
- Could you defend that decision to the members of the Chapter?



Case Study 2 – The Solution

James should not personally decide who gets the money. Because the VP is his close friend, James has an actual or perceived conflict of interest.



Ethical leadership is not always about choosing the “right” outcome. It is about ensuring the process used to reach that outcome is fair, transparent and defensible.

Case Study 2 – PMI Ethics Alignment

Values	How is it challenged
Responsibility	All board members deserve fair consideration, especially those who haven't attended.
Respect	Allocating the grant based on friendship or seniority instead of equitable access is unfair.
Fairness	James must be transparent about the decision-making process and avoid favoritism.
Honesty	James must act in the chapter's best interest, not personal friendships.

Importance of Ethics in decision making

When we are in positions of power or influence, the decisions we make are rarely easy. We often have to balance friendships, personal interests, even family expectations. But as leaders and as professionals there is a higher standard expected of us. We are called to make the right decision.



And the right decision is not always the most comfortable or popular one; it is the one that serves the best interest of the organization, the people we represent, and the principles we stand for.

This is where ethics becomes our compass. It guides us when the path is unclear. It keeps us grounded when personal bias creeps in. And it ensures that our leadership is worthy of trust.

Importance of Ethics in decision making

“Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do”

Potter Stewart



Key Takeaways

- Conflict is not inherently negative; differences in expectations, priorities, and perspectives can strengthen decisions when managed constructively.
- Conflict and ethical dilemmas are different, but they can intersect: conflict concerns differences between people; ethical dilemmas require judgement between competing ethical obligations.
- Ethical leadership is as much about the process as the outcome: decisions should be fair, transparent, impartial and defensible.
- PMI's values provide the compass: Responsibility, Respect, Fairness and Honesty should guide both our decisions and how we respond when challenged.



Open Q&A

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Thank you!

Let's continue the conversation!



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