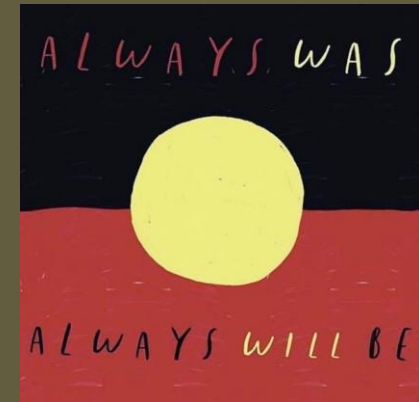


MASTERING FIVE CRITICAL NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS EVERY ENGINEER NEEDS

Leena Silberer 15th October 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, on whose land we meet today. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.



AGENDA

1. Introduction
2. The Foundation
3. Skills
 - ✓ Cross-Cultural Competence
 - ✓ Critical Thinking and Decision-Making Abilities
 - ✓ Time Management
 - ✓ Active Listening
 - ✓ Technical Storytelling: Communicating Complex Ideas
4. Observe more, react less

INTRODUCTION



HELLO

Music > Engineering > Motherhood > Management > ?

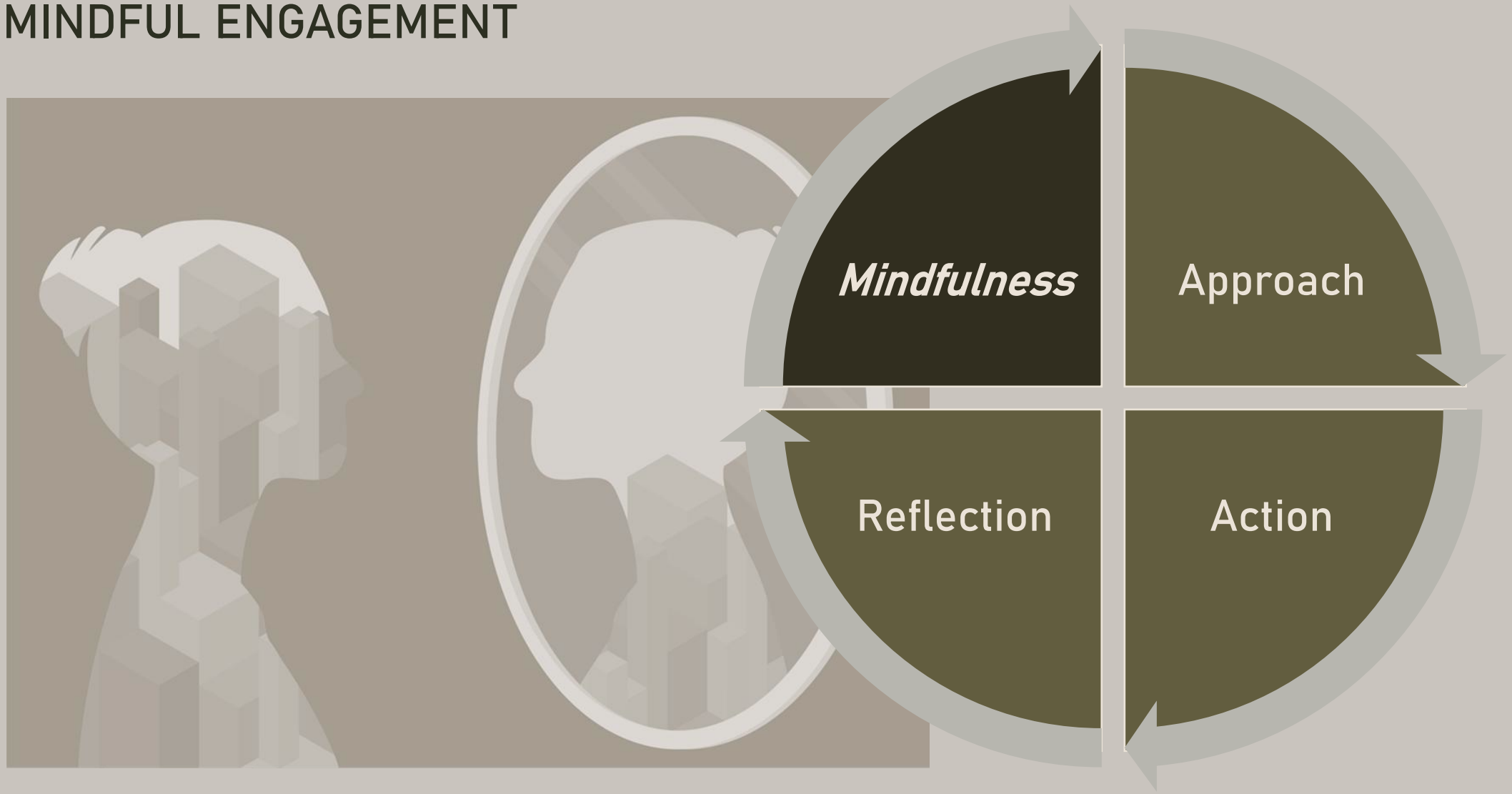
THE FOUNDATION

MINDFUL ENGAGEMENT



Source: Ashford and DeRue (2012)

MINDFUL ENGAGEMENT



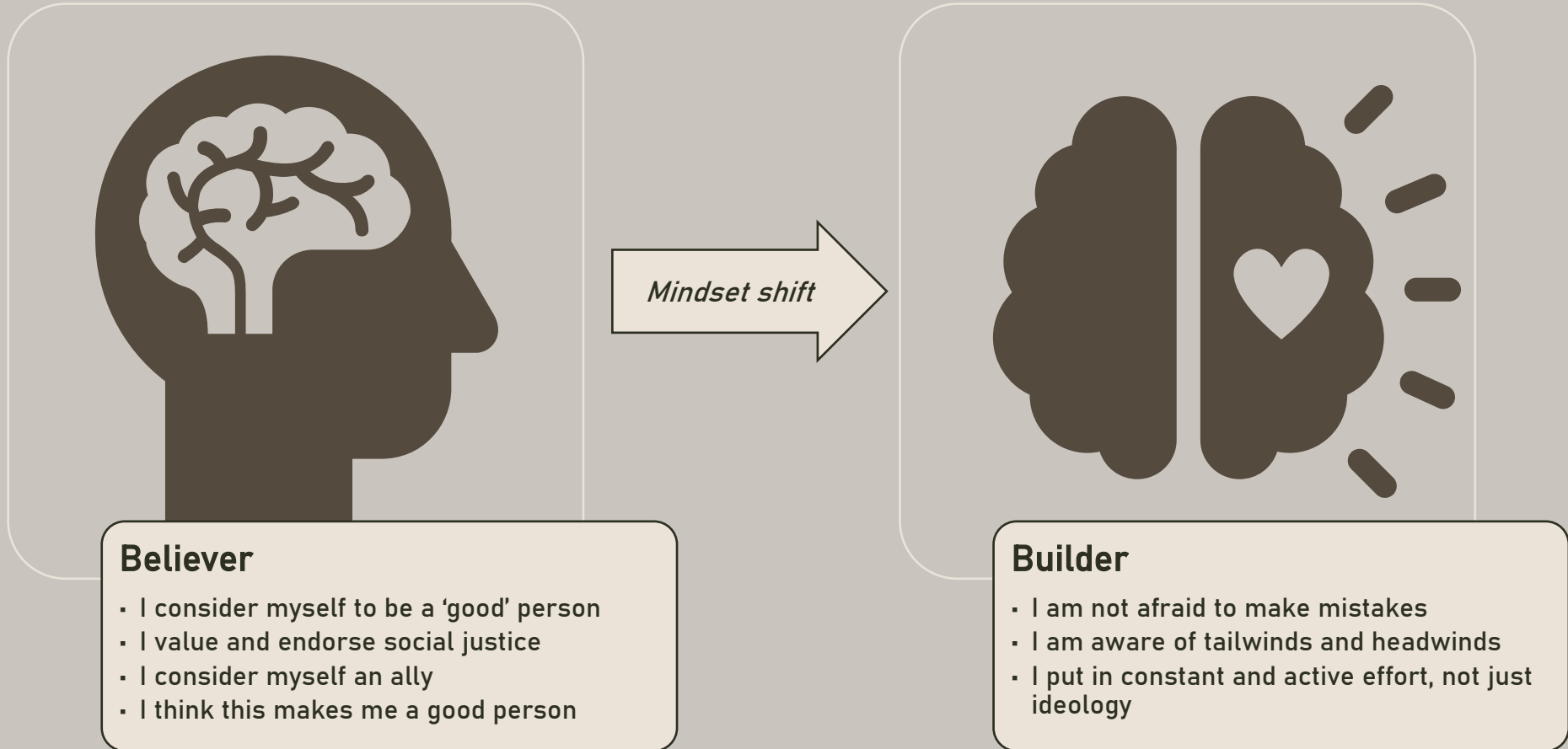
**DEVELOPING
CROSS-
CULTURAL
COMPETENCE**

WHAT IS CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCY?

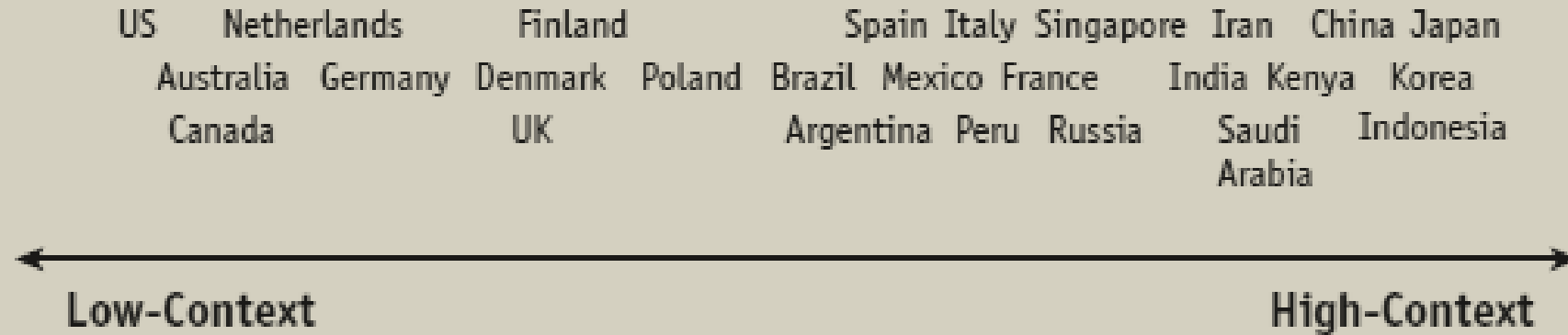
How can you unlock a productive relationship with someone with different skills, who looks different, who communicates differently to you?

Source: Ashford and DeRue (2012)

WHO IS THE PERSON YOU MEAN TO BE?



THE CULTURE MAP



Low-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.

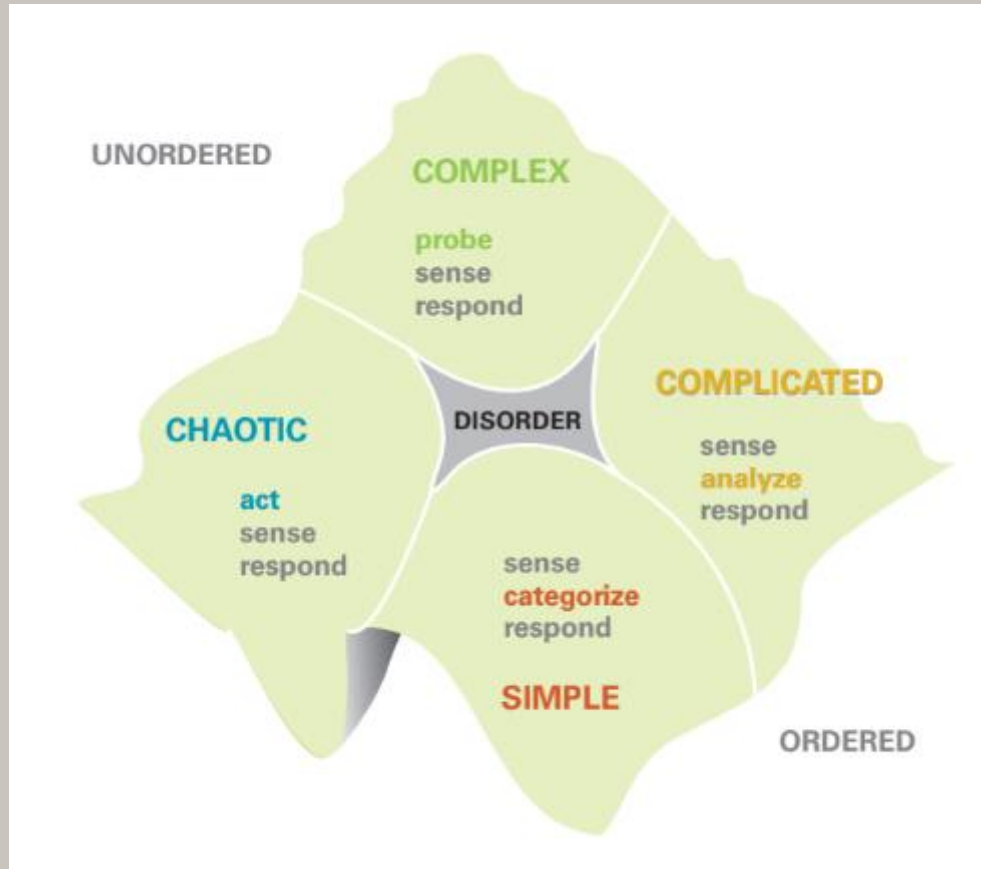
High-Context

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



CRITICAL THINKING AND DECISION- MAKING

A FRAMEWORK FOR DECISION-MAKING



What is the context?

- Using the CYNFIN framework, identify the domain and act accordingly

The five domains

- Simple – cause and effect is clear
- Complicated – known unknowns
- Complex – unknown unknowns
- Chaotic – cause and effect is unknown
- Disorder – unknown domain

HOW CAN YOU TAKE THE EMOTION OUT OF PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION-MAKING?

The bigger picture, where do you fit in?

- What is the problem we are trying to solve?
- What could your role be in the solution?
- What are my biases?

Your toolkit

- Bring your risks and opportunities to life
- Use schedule to connect, persuade and justify
- Use stakeholder analysis to drive your communication style

TIME MANAGEMENT

LIFE GETS IN THE WAY



ARE YOU WELL RESTED?

There are 7 types of rest.

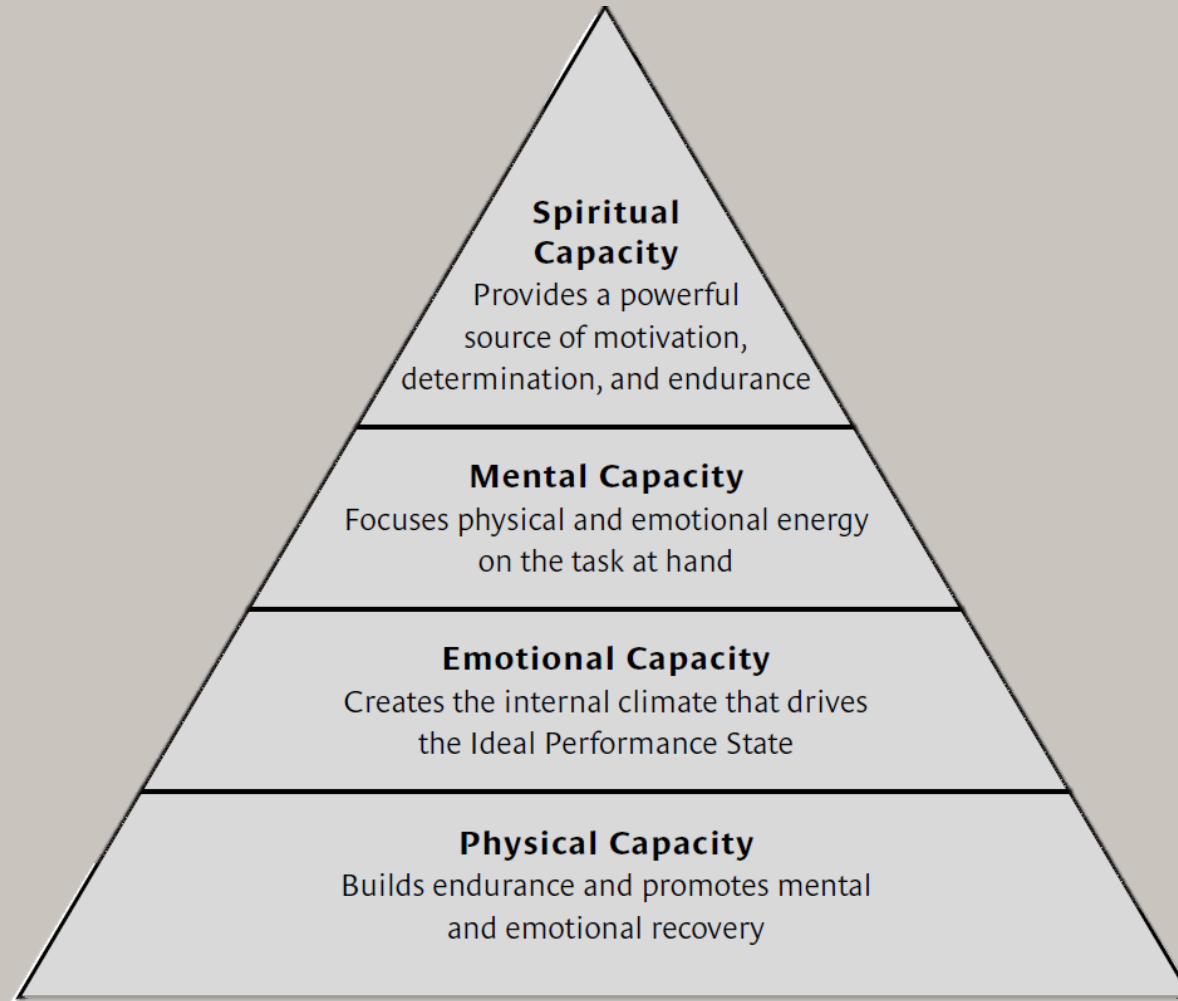
☒ *Are you getting all of them?*

These are the areas in our lives we need to regularly recharge, according to Sandra Dalton-Smith MD.

- ☐ *Physical rest* 🛏️
- ☐ *Mental rest* 🧠
- ☐ *Sensory rest* 🔌
- ☐ *Creative rest* 🎨
- ☐ *Emotional rest* 💡
- ☐ *Social rest* 📱
- ☐ *Spiritual rest* 🙏



THE CORPORATE ATHLETE



SHARPEN YOUR TOOLKIT

The Eisenhower Matrix

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	Do: Tasks with deadlines or consequences.	Schedule: Tasks with unclear deadlines that contribute to long-term success.
Not important	Delegate: Tasks that must get done but don't require your specific skill set.	Delete: Distractions and unnecessary tasks.



OR CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE,
SIMPLE IS BEST...

ACTIVE LISTENING

LISTENING STYLES

'WE DON'T THINK THAT
MUCH ABOUT WHAT'S IN
THE HEADS OF OTHER
PEOPLE. THAT TAKES
PRACTICE'

(FELPS, 2017)



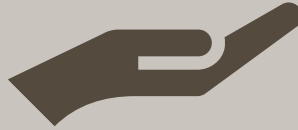
ACTIVE LISTENING



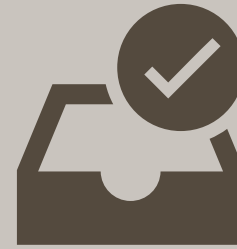
Pay attention



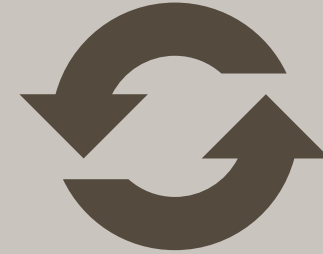
Be open, look for
non-verbal cues



Encourage



Check
understanding



Convey
understanding



TECHNICAL STORYTELLING: COMMUNICATING COMPLEX IDEAS

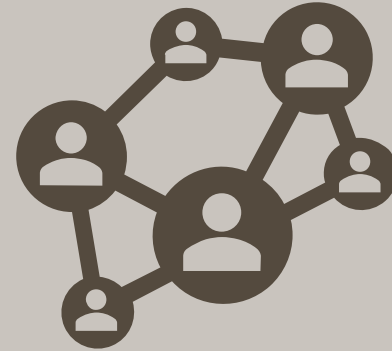
ELEMENTS OF STORYTELLING



Know your objective

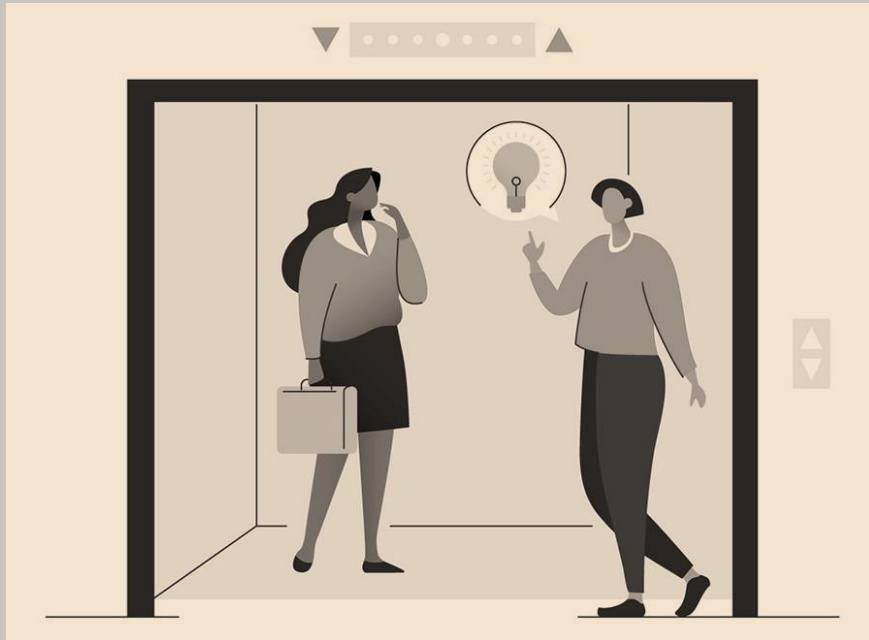


Connect genuinely



Level-set and preempt
challenges

KNOW YOUR OBJECTIVE



Elevator pitch

Be crystal clear with your vision, simplify accordingly

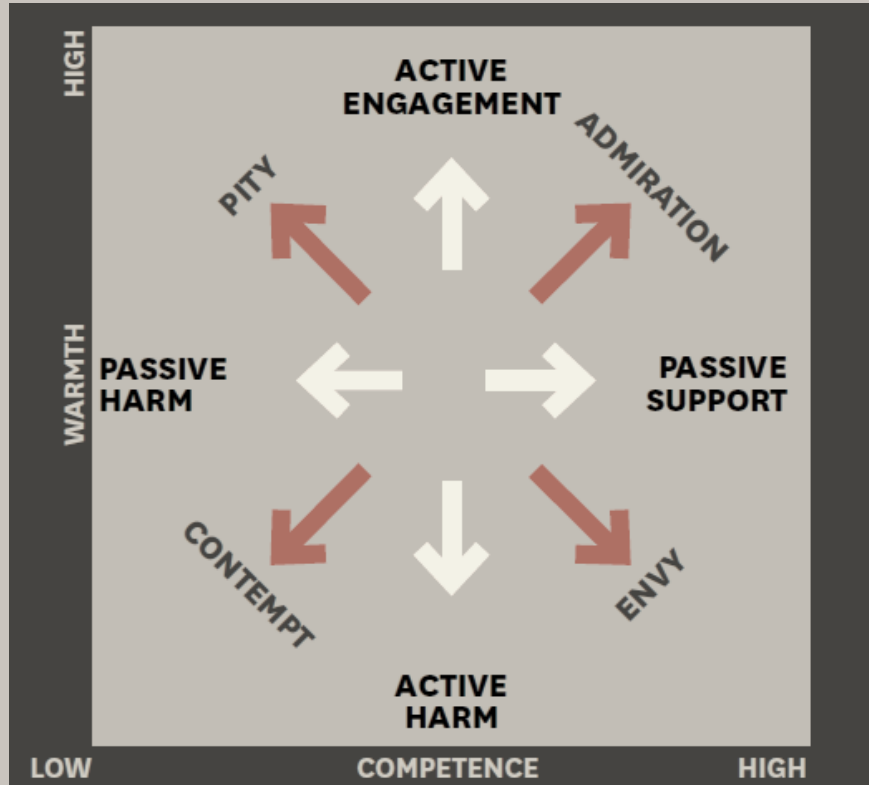
Shout it from the rooftops

Be clear and concise in your communication, the email invite, the agenda and in your set-up conversations

Avoid distractions

Assume the audience has limited time and capacity, focus on your key objective, maximum of 3

CONNECT GENUINELY



Competence v Warmth

Is it better to be loved or feared?

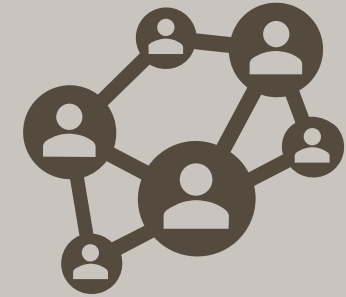
Where is your starting point?

Where do you sit on the spectrum?

Find the balance

Other's evaluations of us start with warmth

LEVEL-SET AND PREEMPT CHALLENGES



Who is your audience?

Tailor your presentation to the level e.g. executive level No surprises!

Brainstorm questions, challenges and answers

Be ready for a challenge

Pre-work

Set-up meetings and conversations for individual context and buy-in

CLOSING THOUGHTS



WALKING IN MANY WORLDS

Case study: Aboriginal v western leadership styles

	<i>Non-Aboriginal Leaders</i>	<i>Aboriginal Leaders</i>
<i>Direction</i>	Set of short-term goals Aligned vision	Long-term aspirations Shared vision
<i>Alignment</i>	Hierarchical roles and responsibilities	Responsibility given by the community
<i>Commitment</i>	Motivation for the short-term goals	Motivation comes from understanding who we are, where we come from and co-existing with the world around us

OBSERVE MORE, REACT LESS





THANK YOU