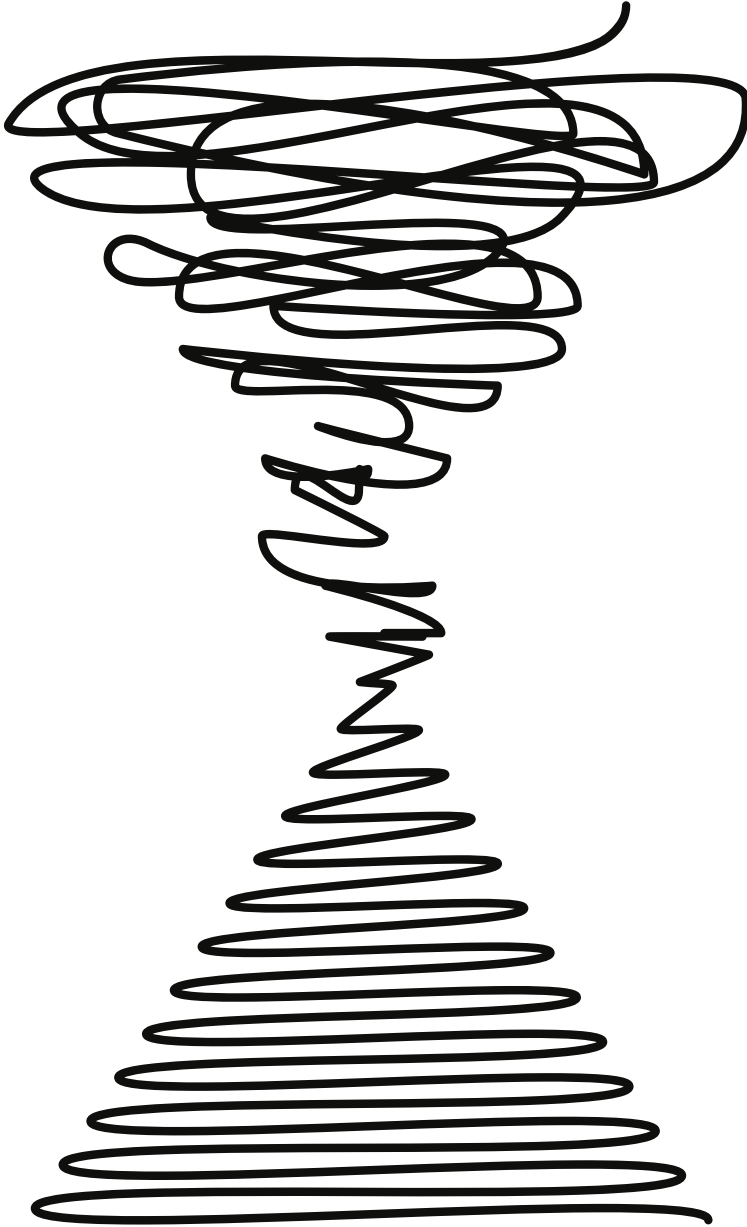# CONSCIOUS ACCOUNTABILITY

Deepen Connections, Elevate Results

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Conscious Accountability

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Practice Exercises

How Would You Handle Shalini's Situation?

To prepare for these complex conversations, Shalini circled back with her leadership coach. Together, they developed and worked through a set of questions that were focused on helping Shalini (and all of us!) communicate as openly, clearly, and respectfully as possible. As a thought exercise, you (the reader) can work through these questions too. If you were in Shalini's situation, what would you do?

- **Clarity of intentions:**
  - What does she want her team to understand about how and why she and the rest of the leadership team came to the decision about the layoffs?
  - What is the most important information she wants to get across about this news and its potential impact on her team?
  - How will she address the fact that she received different feedback from both of her teams and is working to address this while still encouraging the full cohesion of the group?
  - How could she most effectively communicate not just the decision, but also her feelings about it? What—on an emotional level—does she most want to convey to the recipients of this news?
- **Consider who is involved:**
  - How might her team members receive the news about the layoffs?
  - What considerations of cultural differences across her teams should Shalini make when delivering the news of the layoffs?
  - How will Shalini communicate her openness to addressing the unique needs of the staff members slated to be laid off?
  - How can Shalini both deliver the hard news about layoffs while also reassuring her team of her desire to be more open to their input and feedback going forward?

- **Communicate her message:**
  - How will Shalini alert her staff about this meeting?
  - How could Shalini frame her message so that it is concise, caring, easily understandable, and culturally sensitive?
  - How will Shalini handle her body language, tone of voice, and other elements of nonverbal communication to ensure that her feelings about the decision are in sync with the information she is sharing?
- **Check for understanding:**
  - How will Shalini create space for her team to ask any questions they may have?
  - What sorts of questions will Shalini ask them, to gauge whether they have fully understood her message about the layoffs and her desire to collaborate going forward?
  - What resources will team members have access to following the meeting, so they can retain what was said and continue learning about the terms of the layoffs?

Assess Engagement, Commitment, and Safety

Because high levels of engagement, commitment, and safety are so crucial to ensuring optimal teamwork, it is important to touch base frequently with team members about how safe, committed, and engaged they actually are feeling about the tasks at hand. The questions in the Quick ESC Check-In and Slightly Longer ESC Check-In exercises—inspired by more formal assessments, including those from Edmondson (2019) and Monday, Steers, and Porter (1979)—can serve as a guide to priming team members to necessary conversations about commitment, safety, and overall engagement. (You'll find them on the next page.) Feel free to adapt them as you learn more about your team and what they need to work together most effectively.

Here are some additional tips for increasing engagement:

- Introduce and normalize frequent conversations about safety and commitment. Explain these concepts and invite your team members to also share their perspectives on how safety and commitment could increase engagement and overall team performance.

- Set a strong tone of psychological safety by creating space for everyone to share their perspectives and potential concerns, and by making clear that all viewpoints will be welcomed and considered.

- If you sense that there are deeper-seated concerns with safety and commitment on your team, engage a coach to help the team navigate and discuss these issues constructively.

- Keep your approach to these topics flexible, light, and accepting. If team members seem hesitant to answer questions about commitment and safety directly, you could create an anonymous survey that you ask everyone to complete in advance of your meeting.

- After you have assessed commitment and safety and have a better understanding of where your team stands, you will want to move toward building upon their current levels of emotional buy-in and strengthening the climate of safety. The strategies for opening

up engagement (discussed earlier) can help guide you to do so. Awareness about typical challenges to commitment and safety will help you strategize about how to proceed.

Quick ESC (Engagement, Safety, Commitment) Check-In

Please rate your response to the following statements on a scale from 1 to 5.
(1 = not at all; 5 = completely)

	1	2	3	4	5
How committed are you to completing the task that we are working on?					
How psychologically safe do you feel on this team?					
What is your overall level of engagement with the task at hand?					

Slightly Longer ESC Check-In

Please rate your response to the following statements on a scale from 1 to 7.
(1 = completely disagree; 7 = completely agree)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Commitment							
I believe in the values and goals associated with this task.							
I am willing to exert considerable effort on behalf of this team.							
I have a strong desire to maintain membership in this team.							
Safety							
I feel comfortable speaking up.							
I feel comfortable experimenting.							
I feel comfortable collaborating.							
Engagement							
I feel completely engaged with the task at hand.							
I feel completely engaged working with my team members.							
If you are in need of a boost on either of the last two questions, please name one thing that could create a shift on our team to increase your levels of engagement.							

Plot the Scenarios

Nailing it within the framework of conscious accountability means to deliver on results and relationships. When you are in the midst of doing the work, it is a good time to assess whether you are maintaining good task performance and relationship quality. We developed the following matrix (inspired by the work of Amy Edmondson) to capture how conscious accountability can both result from and foster high-quality relationships and task performance.

Dual Outcomes of Conscious Accountability

		Task Performance	
		Low	High
Relationship Quality	High	The Harmonizer	The Conscious Performer
	Low	The Neutralist	The Hard Driver

In the scenarios below, the people described are attempting to nail it. With this in mind, review each situation and indicate where you would plot the behavior of the person in terms of task performance and relationship quality as indicated in the Dual Outcomes of Conscious Accountability matrix.

1. Gene arrives at the weekly team meeting having completed all of the items assigned to him. In fact, he got these done before the deadline and started pushing ahead on other work that's due next week. However, he had not been checking the Slack channel and let several emails from his colleagues slide, so he missed updates that drastically changed the nature of his assignment.

2. Pat designed t-shirts for the team and had them delivered to each member with a note of encouragement. She hand wrote each note. This took more time than she anticipated, and therefore she did not complete the financial projections the team needed to make important decisions about the road map of their new product.

3. Nada attends a whiteboard session with her team to plan out their priorities for the next quarter. She listens to others as they share ideas and answers questions when asked. When it is time to prioritize tasks, Nada remarks that she is flexible and is fine with whatever the team decides.

4. Sunil checks his team's shared project-management tool every morning. He sees that his teammate, Alex, has not completed an assignment that he has been waiting on. Sunil emails Alex to check in, asking how it is going and if he has what he needs to complete the task.

Answer Key:

1. Gene is a hard driver. His completion of all items falls into the high category of task performance. However, his decision to not check in with his colleagues on Slack and to not attend closely to his emails falls into the low category for relationship quality, which adversely affected the relevance of his final product.

2. Pat is a harmonizer. Her personal attention to each team member falls into the high category for relationship quality. However, failing to complete the financial projections falls into the low category for task performance.

3. Nada is a neutralist. She attends, listens, and answers at the session, but does not initiate, ask questions, express curiosity, or invite others to share their thoughts. This type of participation falls in the low relationship category. She also does not share any of her knowledge, experience, or expertise to help the team prioritize the tasks. This behavior falls in the low task performance category.

4. Sunil is a conscious performer. His daily tracking of work on the project management tool is a behavior that promotes high task performance, as well as his noticing of tasks that are not completed. Checking in with his teammate in a curious and supportive way is conduct that exemplifies high relationship quality.

Plot Yourself

Now think about a time when you had to work with a group of people. How did it go? How did you prefer to show up and behave? What was the typical way that you approached each task? How did you usually interact with others? After reflecting on this experience, where would you plot yourself in the table? How might you shift your mindset and behaviors to be more consciously accountable?

Dual Outcomes of Conscious Accountability

		Task Performance	
		Low	High
Relationship Quality	High	The Harmonizer	The Conscious Performer
	Low	The Neutralist	The Hard Driver

A Noticing Self-Assessment

Use this brief self-assessment to reflect on your practice of noticing. Reflection allows for deeper learning and greater clarity about what is going well and where there are areas for improvement. This can help guide you in your development of noticing, targeting areas you might want to experiment with or build and expand upon.

How Often . . .	Rarely/ Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Do I notice?				
Am I self-aware?				
Am I aware of others?				
Am I curious about other people's perspectives?				
Is my curiosity compassionate (not just intellectual)?				
Am I taking into account my mood and the environment when I notice?				
Do I acknowledge that I am reacting based on my assumptions and triggers?				
Do I check in with others and share my observations about myself and others?				
Do I request permission before sharing what I notice?				
Do I use open-ended questions?				

What are the kinds of things that I tend to notice?

How do I typically react to what I notice?

What might I like to enhance about my practice of noticing?

Create Your Own Notice Map

Using the figure below as an example, create your own map to help keep track of who and what you want to notice. Your map could focus on work or home, or other groups of people you interact with. Because you are noticing for the purpose of nailing it, we suggest you focus on the people with whom you are working toward a common goal.

Levels of Noticing
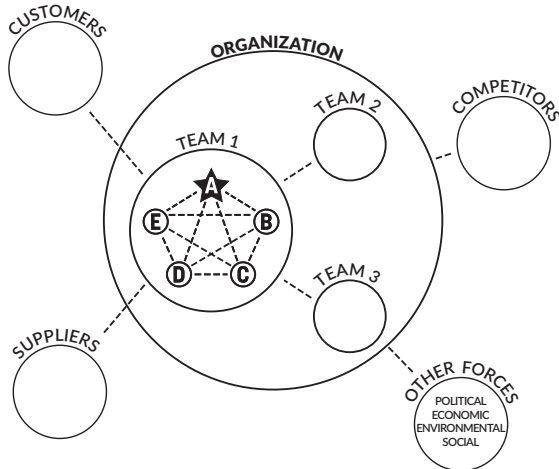
List the people involved, note the individual relationships between all the individuals, and consider the group as a whole as well as any other stakeholders or forces operating outside the group. Then, before you engage in your individual daily practice of noticing, you can glance at the map to remind you of all the things you could consider attending to.

Practice Giving Feedback

Think of a situation that would be challenging for you to give feedback. Some examples could be:

- You have a new work colleague—a peer—whom you do not know very well; perhaps you have only met on video conferences. Your direct reports have recently complained that this person is making demands on them that they do not have time for. Further, the demands are being delivered in an abrasive way.

- Your direct report is highly emotional and very defensive when receiving feedback. You need to bring up the fact that they have not made visible gains in areas identified for change last quarter.

- Your boss has a bad habit of interrupting other people. You and your teammates have commiserated in offline conversations about the negative effect of this on morale and performance. You all have decided you eventually need to let your boss know about his impact.

Choose a scenario and role play the situation with a partner. Tell them the type of person you want them to play. Practice giving feedback and record a video of the conversation.

If helpful, you can use the following script:

- **Intention.** The reason I wanted to have this conversation is . . . and my hope is that our talking about this will lead to . . .
- **Situation.** I was thinking about the time when . . . (*Describe the situation.*)
- **Behavior.** I noticed that . . . (*State the other person's behavior.*)
- **Impact.** The impact on me was . . . (*Describe your thoughts and feelings that followed from behavior.*)
- **Inquiry.** What was happening for you in that situation?
- **Request.** In the future I would prefer . . . (*State your request.*)

Ask the person who role played with you how they felt during the conversation; ask what you did that seemed effective or ineffective. Later, review the video and note which of this chapter's strategies you used. Notice your nonverbal behavior and body language. To what extent do they support or undermine your message? Make some notes on what worked well and what you want to continue to work on.

Practice Managing Emotions During Feedback

Imagine someone giving you feedback that would be difficult to hear and that you would find triggering in some way. It may help you to review the three different kinds of triggers and imagine what personal examples of each come to mind. Let's look at some possible scenarios to jump-start your thinking:

- Your client expresses strong disappointment in a project you delivered, which you thought went quite well.
- Your spouse says you are not doing enough to help with domestic tasks, yet you believe you do far more at home than your spouse does.
- You sit on a nonprofit board and have expressed concerns about a prospective new member's qualifications. Another board member questions whether you harbor a bias against young people.

Imagine having received this upsetting feedback and do the following:

- **Breathe.** Slower, deeper, diaphragmatic breathing can interrupt our sympathetic nervous response, and may be the fastest way to return our bodies and minds to a calmer state.
- **Check your narrative.** We are often very quick to interpret what's going on or make up a narrative that may not be true. *He's attacking me. She doesn't like me. They have a hidden agenda.* Slow down and distinguish the facts (what someone says or does) from the story (the meaning you assign to the facts).
- **Stay curious.** If we can encourage ourselves to stay curious about what the person is saying, it can help us suspend our defensive reaction and focus on learning more about their perspective. Ask yourself questions like: What does this person want? What is their concern really about? How are they viewing this? What are they feeling?

- **Connect to intention.** Remind yourself of your larger intention for this situation or relationship. Ask yourself: What is really important to me? How do I want to be present in this moment? A quick check-in on this can help you remain aware of your longer-term priorities, which can help you navigate your own reactions in the moment.

After doing these steps, notice your current state, and then practice what you would say in response to the other person. What would you want to clarify? What additional information would you seek?

CLAIMING IT

Conduct Your Own Claiming It Process

To help you practice conducting your own review process, we have developed the following exercise. Start by thinking about something you did recently that involved other people that you'd like to figure out how to get better at. In thinking about the situation and how you did, see if you can call forth the mindsets of acceptance and objectivity. Then reflect on the questions in the table below to generate some important learning for yourself. If you are working in a group or team, you can also present these questions to other team members to get their perspectives as well.

Claiming It Reflection Exercise

Steps for Claiming It	Task Performance	Relationships, Team and Interpersonal Process
What were the results (vs. expectations)?	• What was the actual outcome? • What did I want or expect to happen?	• What happened with the other people involved? • What did I think or hope would happen?
What caused the results?	• What were the top two factors that drove the outcomes and results?	• What were the top two factors that affected relationships?
How can I respond effectively to the results and their causes?	• What actions or changes are needed in response to the results? • Where do I think others may need to own up too?	• What do I need to own up to when I speak with others? • Who do I need to thank, appreciate, or recognize?
How could I apply the learning next time?	• What will I sustain? • What will I change?	• What will I sustain? • What will I change?

Run a 3-Day Experiment of Trying Again

Choose something you are working on and want to get better at. Here are some examples:

- Making healthier food choices
- Being kinder to and less critical of yourself
- Meditating and being more self-aware
- Being a better listener to your friends
- Communicating more clearly with your team members
- Limiting when you use your cell phone
- Being more present and patient with those close to you

The purpose of this experiment is to practice trying again within the framework of conscious accountability. You will be engaging the part of you that is "doing" and the part of you that is "observing."

The observer part is particularly important. As the preeminent educational scholar and philosopher John Dewey famously said, "We do not learn from experience . . . we learn from reflecting on experience." It is easy to get swept up in repeatedly doing, and in fact we often think of trying again as simply meaning doing it again. Here, we are emphasizing a more conscious, intentional approach to trying again with the deliberate act of observing and reflecting on the process.

In this framework, there are two main components to trying again:

- Taking new action that is informed by your previous experience
- Observing your experience around trying again.

Start by listing the behavior you are working on and writing down the daily goal you have for that behavior. Next, write down why getting better at this behavior is important to you. This is critical because it represents your commitment to the behavior change you are working to bring about or strengthen.

Day 1

Ask yourself these questions as you reflect on day 1 of doing:

- What did you do?
- On a scale of one (did not meet my goal) to 10 (fully met my goal), how would you rate how you did?
- What about that worked well and what could be improved?
- Note how you are feeling overall about your first effort.
- What modifications would you like to make tomorrow (if any)?

Day 2

This is your first opportunity to try again. Ask yourself these questions as you prepare for day 2:

- How are you feeling about trying again today? If you need a motivational boost, revisit your reasons for why this behavior is important to you.
- What actions did you take as part of trying again?
- On a scale of one (did not meet my goal) to 10 (fully met my goal), how would you rate how you did?
- What about that worked well and what could be improved?
- Note how you are feeling overall about your second effort.
- What modifications would you like to make tomorrow (if any)?

Day 3

Here is your second chance to practice trying again. Ask yourself these questions as you prepare for day 3:

- How are you feeling about trying again today? If you need a motivational boost, revisit your reasons for why this behavior is important to you.
- What actions did you take as part of trying again?
- On a scale of one (did not meet my goal) to 10 (fully met my goal), how would you rate how you did?

- What about that worked well and what could be improved?
- Note how you are feeling overall about your third effort.
- What modifications would you like to make in the future (if any)?

Reflection Questions

Ask yourself these questions to reflect on your three-day experiment and what you learned:

- What did you observe about how it felt to try again?
- What thoughts or actions helped keep you motivated to try again?
- If you experienced frustration or disappointment, how did you manage that?
- How, in the future, would you like to approach your practice of trying again?
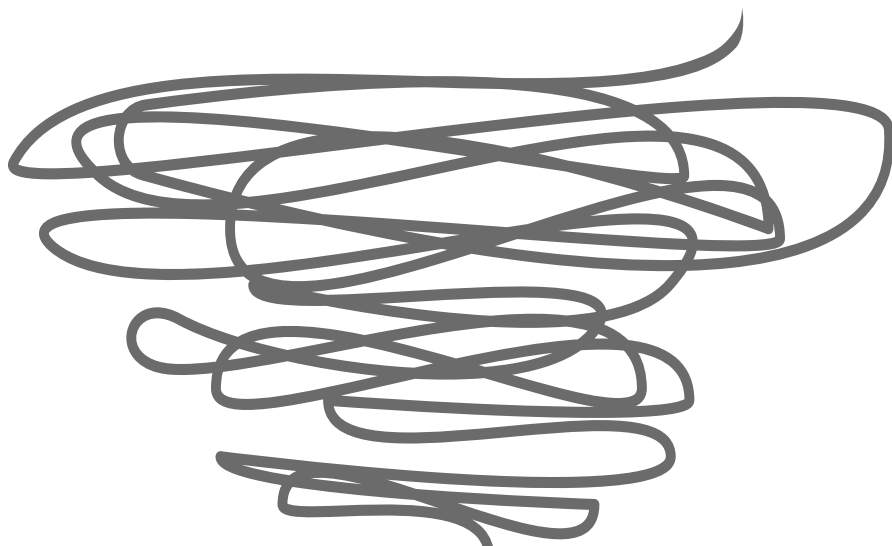
Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Summary of the CONNECT Model of Conscious Accountability

Practice	Mindsets	Strategies
Creating Clarity	**Humility and Patience**	• Clarify your intention. • Consider your audience. • Communicate the message. • Check for understanding.
Opening Up Engagement	**All In**	• Align values. • Honor individual needs. • Model vulnerable learning. • Be inclusive.
Nailing It	**Grit and Grace**	• Activate knowledge of self and others. • Organize for task completion. • Stay together.
Noticing	**Compassionate Curiosity**	• Prepare. • Be aware. • Share.
Exchanging Feedback	**Courage**	• Connect to your intentions. • Make it safer. • Prepare. • Listen actively and seek information. • Manage emotions and resistance. • Express gratitude. • Make a follow-up plan.
Claiming It	**Objectivity and Acceptance**	• Identify what the actual results were. (versus the expected results). • Determine the root cause of the results. • Respond to the results and what was learned from them. • Consider how to apply this learning next time.
Trying Again	**Growth**	• Refuel. • Recommit. • Rerun the experiment.

Table 1. Conscious Accountability Action Guide

Action Plan		Action Review	
Goal	**Options**	**What Happened?**	**Performance**
• What do I/we want to happen by using this practice? • Why is this important to me/us?	• Looking at the mindsets and key behaviors of [*insert practice*], how might I/we try to put this practice in place? • Who can help me/us?	• How did I/we try to [*insert practice*]?	• How well did I/we adhere to the mindsets and behaviors of [*insert practice*]? • What was the impact?
Expectations	**Commitments**	**Learning**	**Next Time**
• How do I/we think this will go? • What do I think will go well? What challenges am I anticipating? • What is my/our plan to address the challenges?	• What is one action I/we will commit to do? • What do I/we commit to not doing?	• What did I/we learn? • What may I/we have missed in my/our efforts? • What am I aware of now that I was not aware of before? [*Fill in the blanks: I used to think _____, now I think _____.*]	• How can I/we improve my/our efforts to [*insert practice*] going forward?

Use this space to answer each question in the action guide.

		Action Plan	Action Review
C	Creating Clarity		
O	Opening Up Engagement		
N	Nailing It		
N	Noticing		
E	Exchanging Feedback		
C	Claiming It		
T	Trying Again		

Table 2. Dimensions That Influence Organizational Culture

Dimension	Perspective 1	Perspective 2
Individual vs. Collective Should people's focus be on themselves or a larger group?	**Individual** People identify first as individuals.	**Collective** People identify first as members of a group.
Power Distance How do people with different levels of power or status interact ?	**Egalitarian** Status differences are downplayed.	**Hierarchical** Status differences are highlighted and maintained.
Change Orientation To what extent are people comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty?	**Change Embracing** There is high tolerance for uncertainty and risk, and greater ease with change.	**Change Fearing** There is anxiety about the future, resistance to change, and low risk tolerance.
Time Orientation How do people deal with time?	**Precise Reckoning of Time** Time is seen as scarce, with rigid schedules and emphasis on punctuality.	**Loose Reckoning of Time** Time is seen as plentiful, with loose schedules and punctuality de-emphasized.
Disagreement What is the best way to handle disagreements?	**Confrontational** Disagreements are taken on directly.	**Avoidance** Disagreements are avoided or handled indirectly.

Figure 2. The Kubler-Ross Organizational Change Curve
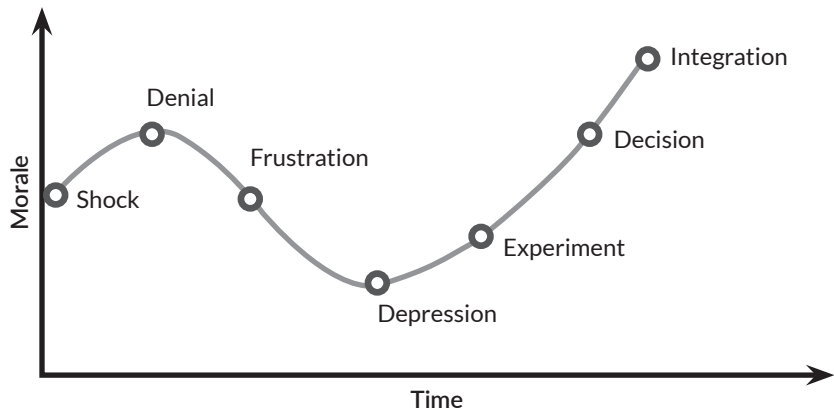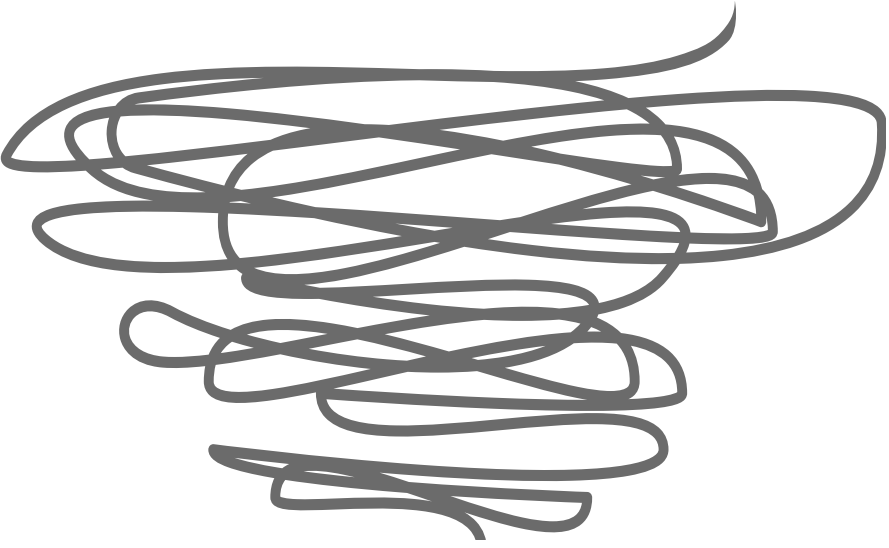
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