

Misunderstandings at work: Four traps and the way out

Adaptive module

~20 min

The more tasks AI takes over, the more the truly human part of work depends on the quality of interactions, yet 86% of workplace conflicts stem from poor communication, and 30% of a manager's time goes to handling avoidable misunderstandings. This module works through the four traps identified by Marshall Rosenberg, each with its way out and exact phrasing, then links this skill to psychological safety.

— LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 01 Spot the four traps that sabotage communication: judgment, beliefs, binary thinking, and language that denies responsibility.
- 02 Move beyond judgment and beliefs: go back to the facts, name your need, and check what you hold to be true.
- 03 Shift from "either-or" to "both-and," and from "I have to" to "I choose".
- 04 Identify what AI cannot replace: defusing tension, listening with empathy, and negotiating a compromise.

— WHO IT'S FOR

Anyone who wants to be understood the first time and turn a disagreement into a useful conversation.

- **Prerequisite:** none

— HOW THE MODULE WORKS

Self-paced, with practice tailored to each learner.

- 1 **Self-assessment:** on 9 dimensions, to gauge current habits and guide the practice.
- 2 **Expert video:** 10 minutes, with 3 pauses for reflection.
- 3 **Practice scenarios:** the first 2 chosen from the self-assessment, then 16 optional ones. Every answer gets feedback: what it leads to, and one way to improve.
- 4 **Dated commitment:** one action to try, written by the learner or picked from the suggestions.
- 5 **Memo to download:** key takeaways, questions, commitment, personal notes and checklists.

— A SAMPLE PRACTICE SCENARIO

Pavel, the new manager of Awa, a legal officer, replies to Awa in two words, never stops by to see her, and gave the latest sensitive case to Félix. Awa concludes that Pavel doesn't like her work. On Thursday, Awa has her first one-to-one with Pavel. What does Awa do?

— ASSESSMENT AND COMPLETION

Pass mark: 80%

The score takes into account your answers to the practice scenarios, your commitment and, where relevant, any additional learning activities. Passing requires a commitment and a score of at least 80%.

METHODS & MODELS

- Nonviolent Communication – Marshall Rosenberg
- Psychological safety – Amy Edmondson (Harvard)
- Theory X and Theory Y – Douglas McGregor (1960)
- Binary thinking vs complementary thinking ("yes, and" vs "yes, but") – Afthonios method

SOURCES & REFERENCES

- Grammarly & Harris Poll – the cost of poor communication, estimated at \$1.2 trillion a year for US businesses
- Marlow et al., Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes (2018) – communication quality and team performance
- Amy Edmondson (Harvard) – psychological safety, the top predictor of team effectiveness
- Gallup – average span of control up from 8.2 team members per manager in 2013 to 12.1 in 2025