

Chapter 7

Make the Most of Your One-on-One Meetings

Strategies for Foundational Leadership and Engagement

Based on research by
Steven G. Rogelberg

HBR's 10 Must Reads
on New Managers

The Leadership Gap: A Case Study in Disconnection

The Case of 'Bill' (Composite Manager)

- **Self-Perception:** Viewed himself as a 'good manager,' competent, and task-oriented.
- **Team Reality:** High turnover, role conflict, and a lack of meaningful support.
- **The Diagnosis:** Held fewer 1:1 meetings than peers. Meetings focused solely on 'fires' and tactical help for himself.

The Risk: Employees feel functionally and emotionally disconnected.

The Data Context



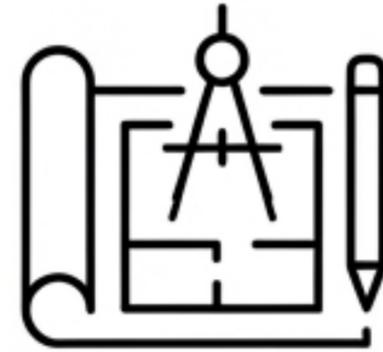
Nearly 50% of direct reports rate their 1:1 experiences as suboptimal.

Session Learning Objectives



ANALYZE

- Understand the link between 1:1 frequency and engagement.
- Evaluate current meeting practices against evidence-based research.



DESIGN

- Construct a customized cadence based on team size, tenure, and location.
- Create collaborative agendas balancing tactical needs with growth.



FACILITATE

- Apply the 50–90% employee talk-time rule.
- Implement feedback loops to iteratively improve meeting quality.

Core Concept: The Value Proposition of the 1:1

“Not an ‘add-on’ or status update. It is the foundational arena where leadership happens.”

Efficiency

Improves day-to-day output and coordination.

Psychological Safety

Builds trust and reduces fear of retribution.

Engagement

Increases motivation and improves employee experience.

Managerial Success

Directly tied to the performance of direct reports.

Primary Goal:
A focused space for the direct report's needs, concerns, and hopes.

Phase 1: Strategic Setup and Communication

Avoid the perception of micromanagement through explicit framing.



Avoid “Stealth” Implementation

Announce the initiative explicitly at a team meeting. Prevent feelings of being singled out.



Clarify Intent

NOT: Micromanagement or a sign of dissatisfaction.
IS: A space to know each other, discuss challenges, and plan careers.



Define Employee Responsibilities

- Drive the agenda with key priorities.
- Communicate candidly.
- Think deeply about problems and solutions.

Framework: Determining the Right Cadence



Model A: Weekly (Gold Standard)

- Frequency: Once a week
- Duration: ~30 mins
- Outcome: Highest engagement correlation.



Model B: Bi-Weekly

- Frequency: Every other week
- Duration: 45–60 mins
- Outcome: Allows for deeper dives.



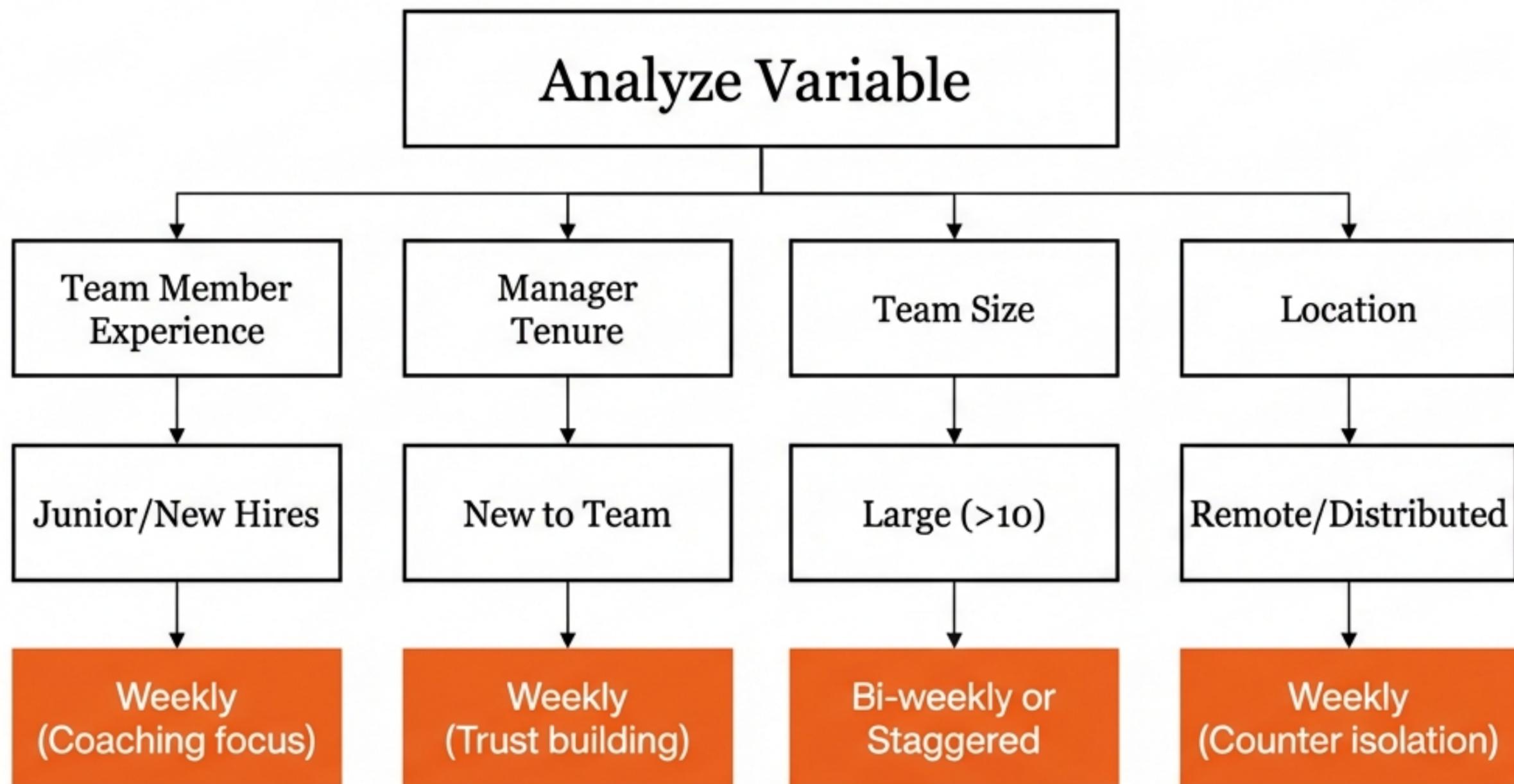
Model C: Hybrid

- Mixed cadence based on individual needs.
- Flexible resource allocation.



The 'Avoid' Category: Monthly meetings are rated least desirable and yield lower engagement gains.

Decision Matrix: Modifying Cadence Variables



Note: Use Peer Mentoring to supplement

Employee Preference

Give employees a voice, but avoid monthly cadences even if requested to prevent loss of momentum.

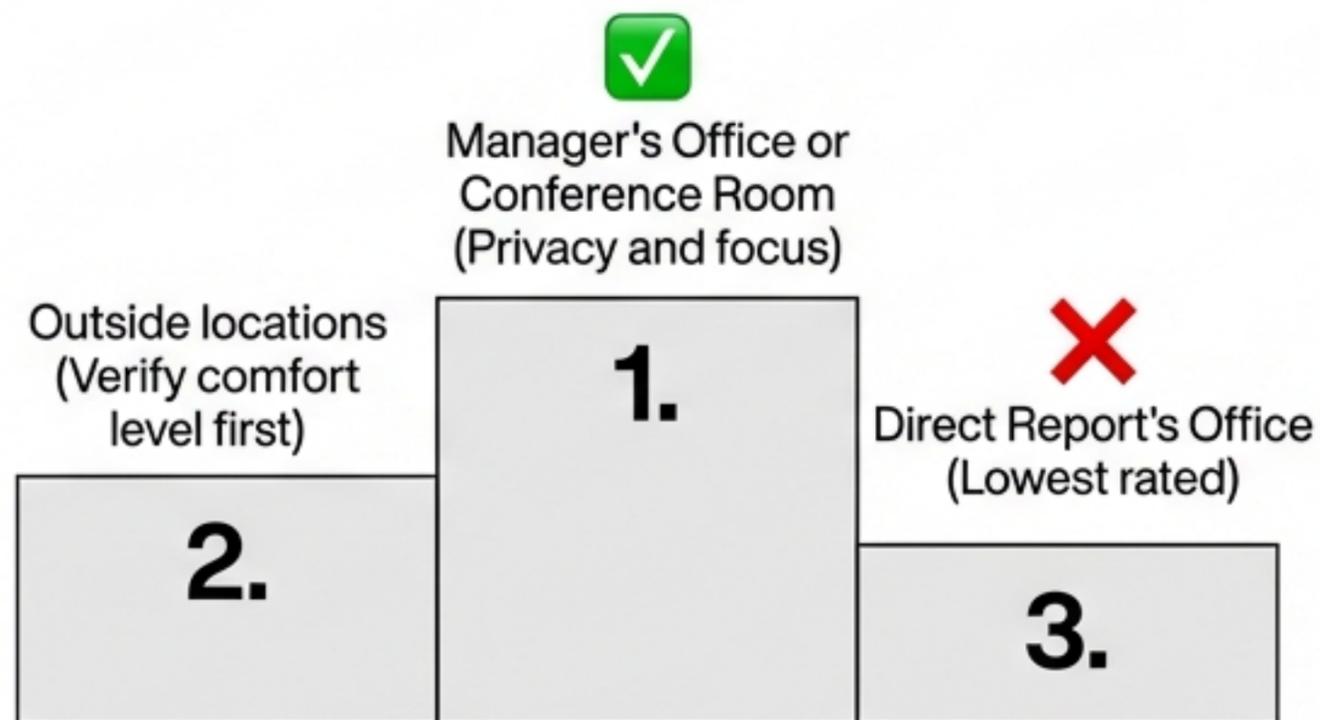
Logistics: Location and Continuity



The Cardinal Rule of Scheduling

Avoid canceling; it signals low priority.
Protocol: Reschedule immediately within the same week.

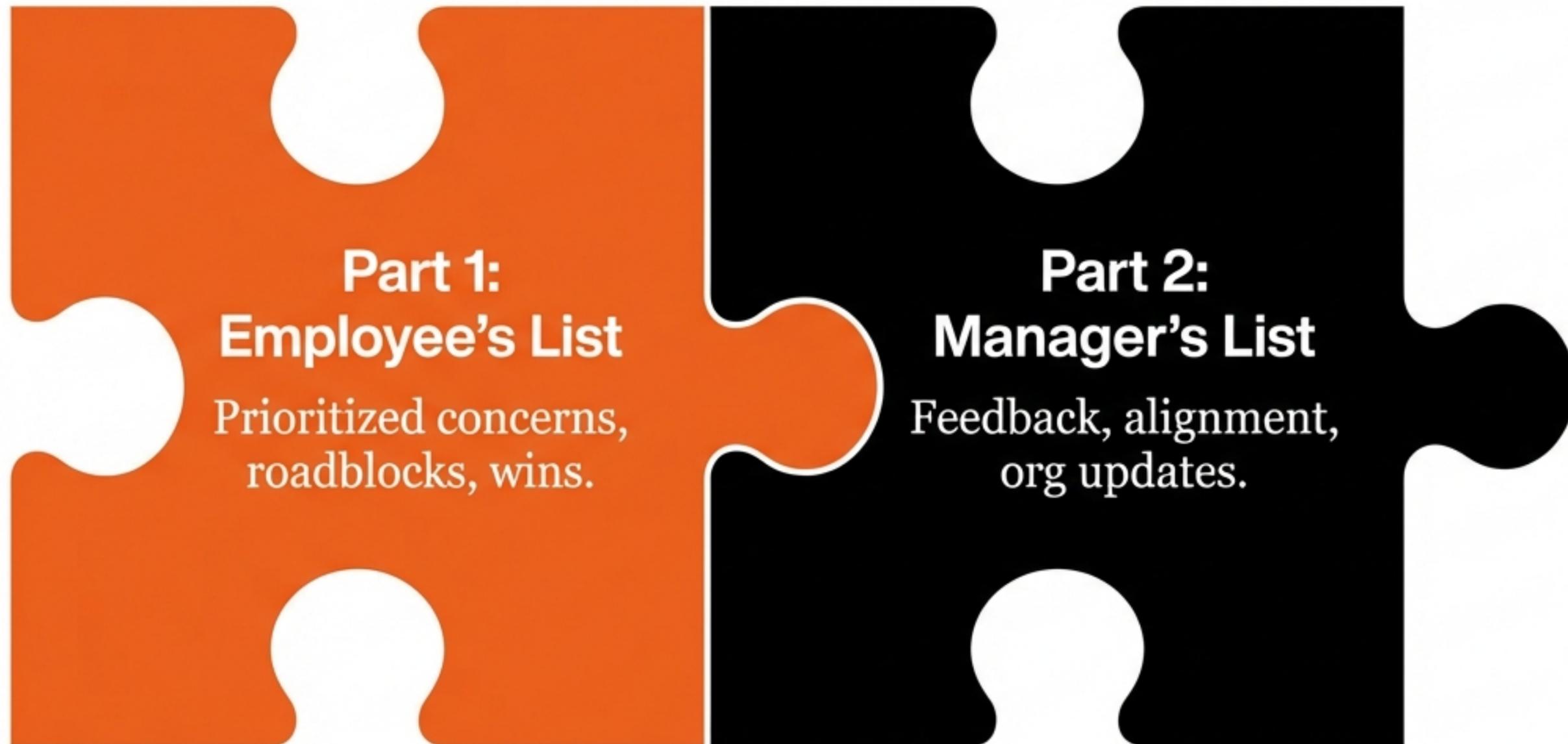
Location Hierarchy (Based on Ratings)



Virtual Considerations: Must be free of distractions (email/phone off).

Agenda Design: The Co-Creation Model

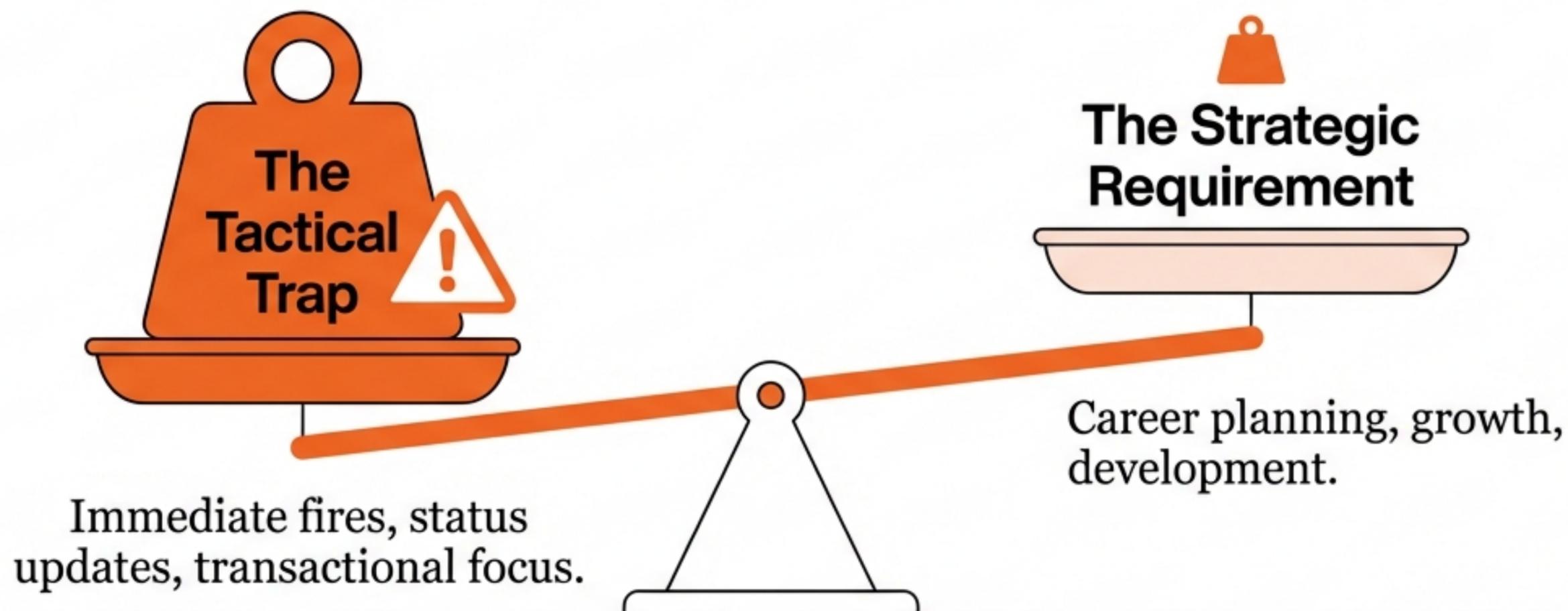
Agenda presence is a strong predictor of meeting effectiveness.



Preparation Protocol

- Review notes from previous 1:1s for continuity.
- Document takeaways to prevent “amnesia” between meetings.

Agenda Scope: Moving Beyond the Tactical



Integration Methods

1. **The Micro-Dose:** Dedicate 5–10 minutes per meeting to development.
2. **The Rotation:** Dedicate one full meeting every 3–4 cycles exclusively to career/growth.

Framework: High-Value Questions for 1:1s

Work Style & Support

- Tell me about the best manager you've ever had.
- Is anything slowing you down or blocking you right now?

Well-being & Culture

- What is your favorite/least favorite part of the job?
- What aspects of our team culture should we change?

Career & Growth

- What would you like to be doing in five years?
- What work is most in line with your long-term goals?

Feedback Loop

- Would you like more or less direction from me?
- What can I do to better support you?

Phase 2: Facilitation and Presence

Setting the Tone

- Emotional Contagion: Start with optimism and energy.
- Digital Hygiene: Phones silent, email off.

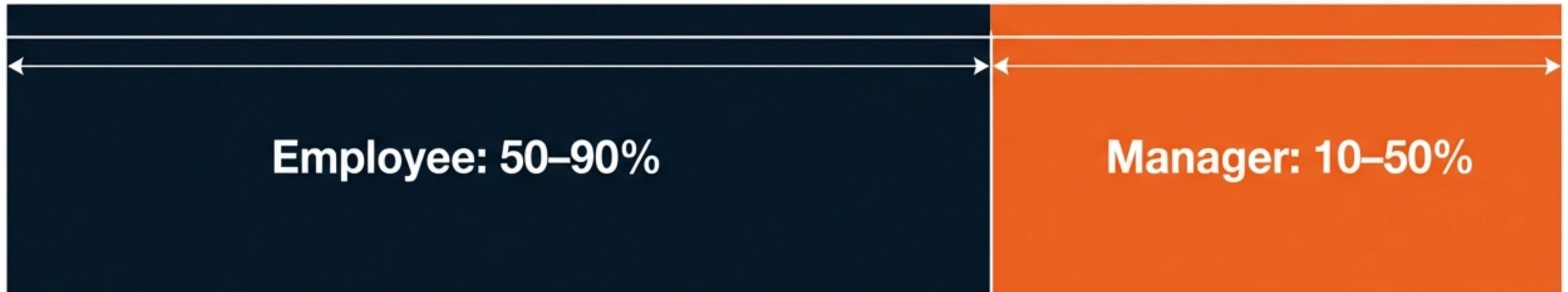
Rapport Building

- Begin with non-work topics or wins.
- Establish psychological safety before diving into problems.

Mindset Shift

- View the meeting as the employee's evolving story.
- Not a checklist to complete.

The Participation Ratio

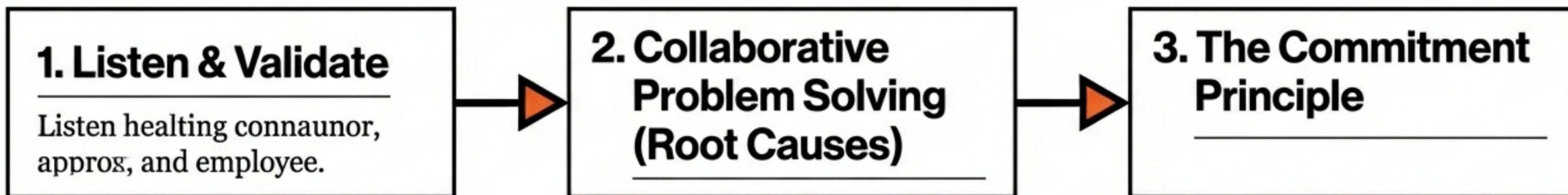


- **Manager Role:** Active listening, not broadcasting.
- **Technique:** Ask clarifying questions to understand fully.
- **Warning:** If you are talking more, you are likely micromanaging.

Manager Contribution: When to Speak

Focus on constructive contribution over instruction.

The Manager's Loop



The Commitment Principle

If the employee's solution is viable, go with it. Commitment increases when the path forward originates from the direct report.

Flexibility: Allow organic movement. Defer unaddressed items rather than rushing.

Phase 3: Closing and Continuity



Continuous Improvement and Feedback

The Ultimate Metric

Did the employee find the meeting both
TACTICALLY VALUABLE and
PERSONALLY FULFILLING?

Feedback Mechanisms

Direct Ask

- “What’s going well with our 1:1s?”
- “What isn’t?”

Anonymous Survey

- “Do you have ideas for improving our meetings?”

Outcome: Shift from compliance to commitment.

Scenario Application: The Remote Expansion

Context

- Team Size: 12 People
- Manager Constraint: Overwhelmed calendar. Cannot spend 12 hours/week on 1:1s.
- Goal: Critical Retention.

The Team Composition

4 Senior Veterans (Local)



Local

4 New Hires (Remote)



Remote

4 Mid-Level Employees (Hybrid)



Hybrid

Task: Design a cadence schedule using Rogelberg's decision matrix.

Scenario Discussion: Strategic Cadence

Groups	Proposed Cadence	Reason
New Hires / Remote	Proposed: Weekly	Reason: High touch needed for culture, training, and isolation.
Mid-Level / Hybrid	Proposed: Bi-Weekly	Reason: Balance of support and autonomy.
Senior Veterans / Local	Proposed: Bi-Weekly or Monthly + Peer Mentoring	Reason: Leverage experience to alleviate manager load.

Common Misunderstandings: Myth vs. Reality

MYTH:

“I see them all day, we don’t need a meeting.”

REALITY:

Spontaneous contact is transactional; 1:1s are strategic and developmental.

MYTH:

“No updates means we can cancel.”

REALITY:

Canceling signals low priority. Use the time for relationship building.

MYTH:

“The manager leads the meeting.”

REALITY:

The employee creates the agenda; the manager facilitates.

Knowledge Check: Tactics and Execution

QUESTION:	QUESTION:	QUESTION:
<p>You are doing 70% of the talking to clarify complex tasks. Corrective action?</p>	<p>A seasoned team member prefers monthly meetings. What is the risk?</p>	<p>How to prevent the meeting from becoming just a status update?</p>
ANSWER:	ANSWER:	ANSWER:
<p>Pivot to asking clarifying questions. Aim for 50–90% employee talk time.</p>	<p>Loss of momentum; inability to address issues while fresh.</p>	<p>Co-create the agenda and explicitly rotate in long-term development topics.</p>

Summary: The Strategic Imperative

- **Frequency:** Weekly is the gold standard; adapt based on tenure and location.
- **Ownership:** The meeting belongs to the employee (Agenda + Talk Time).
- **Consistency:** Never cancel; reschedule within the week.
- **Scope:** Integrate career growth with tactical needs.

“The most important metric for success is whether your employee found the meeting both valuable tactically and fulfilling personally.”