

CATCHBALL NEGOTIATION CASE

Make a capacity trade-off explicit

Original fictional planning exercise. All hours are invented, use the same planning period and do not establish a staffing standard or approved commitment.

Proposal and receiving response

A sponsor proposes consolidating two internal reports this week. The receiving team identifies nine hours of work and six hours it can protect after existing commitments. It accepts the intended outcome of a usable combined report, but cannot promise the original sequence without a trade-off. The difference is three hours, not evidence of unwillingness.

Negotiation step	Illustrative response
Clarify the outcome	"We understand the goal as one usable report with agreed definitions, not simply putting two files together."
Show the constraint	"The proposed work requires nine hours in this period. Six are protected. Our estimate still needs the content owner to confirm the reconciliation work."
Offer an adjustment	"We could prepare the common sections first and defer the optional appendix, or move another approved commitment if the sponsor authorizes it."
Identify the decision	"The sponsor must choose the trade-off. The content owner must confirm what makes the combined report usable."
Record the revised agreement	"We will prepare the agreed first section within six hours. The appendix remains deferred. The receiving owner will review the stated definitions before the next stage."

Debrief

Ask what was fixed, what remained open and which estimate still needed checking. If the sponsor has not actually approved the adjustment, label the response conditional. At review, examine usable output and effort displaced to another team. The arithmetic does not prove either the estimate or the result.

Original proposal, receiving constraint and supporting evidence

Actual authorized trade-off and remaining condition

Read alongside: Catchball questions and revised agreements.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL CONFLICT CASE

Check the definitions before judging cooperation

Original fictional coordination exercise. Serious conduct, protected concerns and formal personnel matters stay in the organization's approved processes.

The argument

One team says it finished 20 requests while the receiving team says it accepted 14. The first counts work sent for review. The second counts work accepted after review. Both figures may describe their stated definitions. Telling either group to be more collaborative will not reconcile what each figure measures.

Question	Illustrative finding	What follows
Same work and period?	Both refer to the same 20 requests in one period.	Confirm the underlying permitted references; do not assume matching totals prove matching records.
Same completion boundary?	20 were submitted; 14 had acceptance recorded.	Label submission and acceptance separately. Six remain without recorded acceptance; their cause is not established.
Who can resolve the definition?	The responsible process owner must confirm the reporting boundary.	The facilitator records the difference but does not silently replace either approved metric.
What is the shared work need?	The next team needs to know which requests can proceed and what remains open.	Agree a usable status and response route within current authority.

Practice and review

Have each leader restate the other's definition accurately before proposing the joint record. Then test an ordinary completed item and one open item. If the six include missing evidence, disputed requirements or unavailable reviewers, keep those causes separate. Fewer complaints after the meeting would not establish that the operating issue was resolved.

Which fact, definition or authorized priority remains disputed?

Who supplies the missing evidence or makes the next decision?

Read alongside: Evidence, priorities and authority in peer disagreement.

CHARTER-IN-USE CASE

Use a working agreement during disagreement

Original fictional leadership-team exercise. A charter records working arrangements within existing authority; it does not create governance powers or waive approvals.

The situation

A leadership team must review a proposed shared initiative. Its charter says members supply required input before the sponsor decides, use one current decision record and raise material missing information. One member wants to call the decision complete after a meeting. Another says a required input was never available. The issue is how the existing agreement applies, not who can argue most persuasively.

Charter field	Applied to this decision
Purpose and scope	Help the authorized sponsor make an informed choice about the stated initiative. The team does not approve unrelated spending or policy changes.
Decision and escalation	Identify the sponsor's actual authority and which input is required. An absent reply is not approval.
Peer commitments	Member responsible for the input explains what is missing, when it can be supplied and what decision would be premature without it.
Disagreement route	Leaders distinguish a missing requirement from a new preference. Required information goes to the sponsor as an explicit open condition.
Maintenance and communication	Record the sponsor's actual decision, conditions and current version. Tell affected roles what remains open rather than leaving the answer only in meeting notes.

Facilitator debrief

Ask participants to explain the next action independently. Different answers reveal an unresolved agreement. The exercise ends with a clear owner and next decision, even when the initiative remains undecided. A signature or a quiet room is not evidence that members can use the charter.

Agreement used, evidence considered and question still open

Authorized owner, next response point and receiving roles

Read alongside: Charter fields and work-based testing.