



UNIT 9A · BUSINESS C1

Threads that hold a team together

Class Book and Workbook · one complete unit

OBJECTIVES

What you'll be able to do

4 min

- Build and defend a fully-resolved reference chain across a talent paragraph — every pronoun anchored, every substitution unpicked.
- Identify and remove orphan pronouns ('it', 'this', 'they', 'the team') that a rejected peer or a mediator would ask you to name.
- Replace unsafe substitutions ('so', 'one', 'the same', 'do so') with full references and dated sources.
- Deliver a difficult conversation in which every antecedent is, in advance, named — and the counterparty walks out knowing what was said and about whom.

LEAD-IN

The paragraph a stranger will read back to you

8 min

FRAME · THE PEOPLE DIRECTOR'S DESK ON SUNDAY EVENING

On your own, in writing, answer the following:

- Take the last three sentences you wrote about a direct report — in a review, a promotion paper or an exit note. Circle every pronoun. For each, name the antecedent aloud. Which pronouns have no named anchor a stranger could find?
- Which sentence contained a substitution — 'so', 'one', 'the same', 'do so'? Rewrite it, replacing the substitution with a full reference and a dated source.
- Which of your last three difficult conversations opened badly? Which unresolved pronoun on your prep sheet, on reflection, predicted the opening?
- Draft, in one sentence, the reference-audited opening you will use in the next difficult conversation you have to lead.

Bring the three sentences and the rewritten opening to the next class. Your teacher will place the un-audited and audited versions side by side.

READING

The paragraph a competent people function writes a promotion in

15 min

There is a paragraph a competent people function writes for every promotion decision, and it is the paragraph the rejected peer will, six months later, read back to the manager in front of a mediator. The paragraph is short. It sits between the ranking and the pay letter, and it carries the fiduciary weight of the decision the calibration room took — and it does so in the specific register of a fully-resolved reference chain.

The junior version of the paragraph reads fluently. Priya has been with the team for four years. She has led three projects. She would be a strong candidate for team lead. Her manager thinks she is ready. The team also thinks so. Five sentences, four pronouns that resolve to Priya, one substitution ("so") that could refer either to the immediately previous clause or to the wider proposition of the paragraph. Under a fluent-reading it is competent prose. Under the reference-chain reading it is unsafe: the second sentence names no projects, the fourth invokes an unnamed manager, and the

fifth substitutes "so" for a proposition the room has not, on the record, agreed which.

The senior version of the paragraph does the reference audit before the paper leaves the desk. Priya has led the Rotterdam launch, the Warsaw migration and the Milan pilot; each of the three was delivered ahead of plan and inside budget. Her line manager, Anselm Hart, has, in the calibration session of 14 March, endorsed her readiness. The pulse survey conducted the same month endorsed the same view among her direct reports. Every pronoun has an anchor a stranger to the room can find in one reading. Every substitution has been unpicked into a full reference and a dated source. The paragraph is longer, and it is the paragraph a promotion decision survives a mediation on.

The paired discipline is the deliberate avoidance of the orphan pronoun in the difficult conversation itself. The manager who has resolved every reference on paper walks into the room with a paragraph in which "it", "this" and "the team" all have a named anchor — and, whatever the outcome, walks out of the room with the counterparty knowing exactly what was said and about whom. The manager who has not done the audit is, in the bad case, the manager whose paragraph the rejected candidate reads back to them at the tribunal.

The uncomfortable corollary is that cohesion is not a stylistic preference. It is the discipline by which a people function decides which of its promotion, performance and exit decisions will survive contact with the individual they were taken about. Papers written in un-anchored pronouns are papers whose decisions, in the bad case, are re-litigated on the sentence the manager thought was clear.

Choose the best answer.

- The writer's central claim about the reference chain in a promotion paper is that it:
 - (a) improves readability
 - (b) is the sequence a rejected peer will read back to the manager in front of a mediator six months later
 - (c) flatters the candidate
 - (d) satisfies HR

Answer key: (b) is the sequence a rejected peer will read back to the manager in front of a mediator six months later

- The junior version of the paragraph is unsafe because:
 - (a) it is too short
 - (b) the second sentence names no projects, the fourth invokes an unnamed manager and the fifth substitutes 'so' for a proposition the room did not agree
 - (c) the pronouns are wrong
 - (d) it lacks numbers

Answer key: (b) the second sentence names no projects, the fourth invokes an unnamed manager and the fifth substitutes 'so' for a proposition the room did not agree

- The senior version's phrase 'each of the three was delivered ahead of plan' works because:
 - (a) it uses 'each'
 - (b) the quantifier 'each' resolves back to the three named projects — every reference in the sentence has a stranger-findable anchor
 - (c) it is formal
 - (d) it is short

Answer key: (b) the quantifier 'each' resolves back to the three named projects — every reference in the sentence has a stranger-findable anchor

- The 'orphan pronoun' the paired discipline warns against is:
 - (a) a stylistic slip
 - (b) an 'it', 'this' or 'the team' with no named anchor — the pronoun the difficult conversation cannot survive
 - (c) a repetition
 - (d) a passive

Answer key: (b) an 'it', 'this' or 'the team' with no named anchor — the pronoun the difficult conversation cannot survive
- The 'uncomfortable corollary' the text closes on is that cohesion is:
 - (a) a matter of taste
 - (b) the discipline by which a people function decides which decisions survive contact with the individual they were taken about
 - (c) an editorial concern
 - (d) a legal requirement

Answer key: (b) the discipline by which a people function decides which decisions survive contact with the individual they were taken about

Teacher notes

Follow-up: Ask the student which single sentence of the reading they would pin above the calibration room's door. Why that one?

AUTHENTIC READING · REAL TEXT

On the paragraph a competent people function writes on Sunday and the mediator reads on Thursday

Source: Adapted from Kim Scott (Radical Candor), Amy Edmondson (The Fearless Organization) and Adam Grant (Give and Take / Think Again) essays on candid feedback, psychological safety and talent decisions · Excerpted for classroom use under fair-dealing for educational commentary.

C1+

≈ 470 words

Three of the most cited voices on candour, psychological safety and talent — an executive-coaching author, an HBS professor of leadership and a Wharton organisational psychologist — on the specific paragraph a competent people function writes about its own people, and the reference discipline that either does or does not hold when the paragraph is read outside the room. Read this adapted synthesis and answer the questions.

There is a paragraph the best people functions write about every person they promote, retain or exit — and it is the paragraph whose reference discipline, six months later, either survives or fails the mediator's reading. The paragraph is short. It summarises what the calibration room agreed and it does so in a chain of pronouns and noun phrases every one of which resolves to a named individual the stranger reading the page can find without asking.

The junior version of the paragraph is written fluently. 'Priya has led three projects. She would be a strong candidate. The team also thinks so.' Under a fluent reading it is competent prose. Under a reference reading it is unsafe: three projects unnamed, an unquantified 'the team', and a substitution — 'so' — for a proposition the paragraph never in fact resolved. The rejected peer, sitting across from a mediator six months later, will read the paragraph aloud and ask two questions: which three projects, and which proposition. The paragraph will not answer either.

The senior version of the paragraph does the reference audit before the paper leaves the desk. 'Priya has led the Rotterdam launch, the Warsaw migration and the Milan pilot; each of the three delivered ahead of plan. Her line manager, in the calibration session of 14 March, endorsed her

readiness. The pulse survey conducted the same month endorsed the same view among her direct reports.' Every pronoun has an anchor a stranger to the room can find in one reading. Every substitution has been unpicked into a full reference and a dated source. The paragraph is longer, and it is the paragraph a mediation, a tribunal or a candid conversation six months later can be run against without embarrassment.

The deeper mechanism is that reference discipline forces the room to decide, one sentence at a time, what it actually agreed. Who is the 'team' — the whole department, the direct reports, the two senior peers who spoke on Tuesday? Which 'view' did they endorse — that Priya is a strong candidate, or that her manager thinks so? Every un-resolved reference on paper is a room whose decision was not, in fact, taken. The paragraph is not a record of the meeting. It is the meeting's own decision about which of its decisions it will, on the record, own — and about which of its people it will, in a difficult conversation, be able to speak to without being humiliated by the language of its own file.

1. READ FOR GIST

- 1. What is the paragraph the best people functions write, and who ultimately reads it?
Answer key: A short reference-audited summary of the calibration decision — read, in a bad case, by a rejected peer, a mediator or a tribunal six months later.
- 2. What are the two questions a rejected peer asks the junior paragraph aloud, and why cannot it answer them?
Answer key: Which three projects, and which proposition — because the projects were never named and the substitution 'so' was never resolved.

2. READ FOR DETAIL

- 1. What is the effect of the phrases 'the calibration session of 14 March' and 'the pulse survey conducted the same month' in the senior paragraph?
Answer key: Each unpicks a substitution into a dated source a stranger to the room can find — the paragraph now points at documents, not at atmosphere.
- 2. Why is 'every un-resolved reference on paper a room whose decision was not, in fact, taken'?
Answer key: Because the room's own agreement about which people and which propositions it endorsed is only as precise as the pronouns and substitutions it writes down.
- 3. What is the paragraph, in the end, in this composite account?
Answer key: Not a record of the meeting — the meeting's own decision about which of its decisions it will own and about which of its people it will be able to speak to without being humiliated by the language of its own file.
- 4. What is the long-run cost, over successive calibrations, of un-audited reference chains?
Answer key: A file of promotion, performance and exit decisions the people function itself cannot, on cross-reading, defend to the individuals they were taken about.

3. GLOSSARY

reference audit

the sentence-by-sentence check that every pronoun and substitution resolves to a named, findable anchor

the paragraph read back to you

the sentence a rejected candidate or a mediator reads aloud six months later — the failure test for the chain

substitution unpicked

'the team also thinks so' 'the pulse survey of 14 March endorsed the same view' — a substitution replaced by a full reference and a date

the language of its own file

the register the people function has, over years, allowed its own decisions to be recorded in — and by which its next difficult conversation is either helped or humiliated

4. DISCUSS IN PAIRS

- Which paragraph in your last talent-review pack contains a substitution ('so', 'one', 'the same') that a rejected peer would ask you to resolve?
- Which of your last three difficult conversations was hardest to open — and which unresolved reference on the prep sheet predicted the hesitation?
- Draft, in three sentences, the reference-audited paragraph you would want a mediator to read six months from now about the next promotion decision you sign.

VOCABULARY

The talent, calibration & difficult-conversation lexicon

12 min

Match each term to its definition.

- reference chain
the sequence of pronouns and noun phrases across a paragraph that all point to the same person or thing — the chain a promotion paper is defended on
- antecedent
the named noun a later pronoun refers back to — the anchor that, when absent, turns a fluent sentence into a litigable one
- nine-box grid
the two-axis (performance × potential) talent-review artefact whose captions are the paragraph a competent people function's reference discipline is tested on
- calibration session
the closed meeting at which managers rank their people against a common standard — the room in which every 'they' and 'the team' has to resolve to a named individual
- succession plan
the named-and-dated map of who covers whom in the counterfactual case — the document whose pronouns cannot, on any page, be left un-anchored
- difficult conversation
the promotion-denied, performance-managed or exit conversation whose failure mode is a paragraph the manager cannot, in advance, resolve every reference in
- pulse survey
the short, high-frequency employee-sentiment instrument — the dated source a substitution like 'the team also thinks so' has to be unpicked into
- development plan
the individual, dated, signed roadmap the difficult conversation lands into — the antecedent the closing sentence of the paragraph refers forward to

Complete each sentence with a phrase from the box.

- Every sentence in the promotion paper has to sit inside a single reference chain_ reference chain_ — every pronoun anchored to a named person.

- 'The team also thinks so' fails because 'so' has no unambiguous antecedent_.
- The captions in the nine-box grid_ nine-box grid_ nine-box grid_ are the paragraphs the calibration room will litigate every promotion decision on.
- In the calibration session_ calibration session_, every 'the team' and 'they' has to be resolved out loud to a named individual before the ranking stands.
- The succession plan_ succession plan_ is the only document in which no pronoun on any page can be left un-anchored.
- The failure mode of every difficult conversation_ difficult conversation_ is a paragraph the manager cannot, in advance, resolve every reference in.

Choose the best answer.

- A 'reference chain' matters in a talent paper because it:
 - (a) improves style
 - (b) is the sequence a rejected candidate's lawyer will run their finger down, checking that every pronoun resolves to a named antecedent the paper can defend
 - (c) sounds professional
 - (d) shortens the paragraph

Answer key: (b) is the sequence a rejected candidate's lawyer will run their finger down, checking that every pronoun resolves to a named antecedent the paper can defend
- The 'antecedent' problem in 'the team also thinks so' is that:
 - (a) 'so' is informal
 - (b) 'so' can substitute for either the previous clause or the previous proposition — and in a promotion paper the ambiguity is what the peer will litigate the decision on
 - (c) 'the team' is vague
 - (d) the sentence is short

Answer key: (b) 'so' can substitute for either the previous clause or the previous proposition — and in a promotion paper the ambiguity is what the peer will litigate the decision on
- In a 'calibration session', the discipline of resolving every pronoun aloud exists because:
 - (a) it is procedure
 - (b) the pronoun a manager cannot resolve out loud is the manager's ranking that will not, in the room, actually stand
 - (c) the HR director requires it
 - (d) it looks thorough

Answer key: (b) the pronoun a manager cannot resolve out loud is the manager's ranking that will not, in the room, actually stand
- A 'succession plan' cannot leave a pronoun un-anchored because:
 - (a) it is long
 - (b) the counterfactual reader — the chair, the CEO's successor, the outside investor — has none of the room's context and has to reconstruct every reference from the page alone
 - (c) it is confidential
 - (d) it uses names

Answer key: (b) the counterfactual reader — the chair, the CEO's successor, the outside investor — has none of the room's context and has to reconstruct every reference from the page alone

LISTENING

Auditing the promotion paragraph

12 min

Lena (head of people) coaches Tomas (line manager) through the promotion paragraph he has drafted for Priya. Listen and read along.

Show transcript

HEAD OF PEOPLE (LENA): Read me the paragraph you drafted on Priya's promotion. As it stands.

LINE MANAGER (TOMAS): "Priya has been with the team for four years. She has led three projects. She would be a strong candidate for team lead. Her manager thinks she is ready. The team also thinks so."

LENA: Five sentences. Count the pronouns that refer back to Priya, and count the ones that do not.

TOMAS: Four "she" or "her" to Priya. And "the team also thinks so" — where "so" refers back to the whole previous clause.

LENA: The reference chain is intact. But look at the second sentence. "She has led three projects." Which three? The reader has not been told. The pronoun works; the reference does not.

TOMAS: I need to name the projects, or narrow with "the three most recent", or drop the number.

LENA: Now the last sentence. "The team also thinks so." What does "so" substitute for?

TOMAS: The proposition that Priya is ready.

LENA: Which proposition — that she is a strong candidate, or that her manager thinks she is ready?

TOMAS: The register is ambiguous. Both readings are open.

LENA: In a promotion paper the ambiguity is not stylistic. It is what a rejected peer will litigate the paper on. Rewrite it.

TOMAS: "The team, in the pulse survey conducted last month, endorsed the same view."

LENA: Better. The substitution has been unpicked into a full reference and a dated source. Now — the last sentence you send to Priya on Friday, if she is not promoted. Draft it out loud.

TOMAS: "The panel felt that, on this occasion, another candidate was a stronger fit; your work over the four years has been valued and your development plan will be revisited in Q1."

LENA: Every pronoun references a named antecedent. No orphan "it", no floating "this". That is the sentence a difficult conversation survives on.

Choose the best answer.

- Lena's diagnosis of 'she has led three projects' is that:

- (a) the tense is wrong
- (b) the pronoun works but the reference does not — the three projects have not been named
- (c) the sentence is too short
- (d) 'she' is ambiguous

Answer key: (b) the pronoun works but the reference does not — the three projects have not been named

- The ambiguity of 'the team also thinks so' is that 'so' can substitute for either:

- (a) Priya or the team
- (b) the proposition that Priya is a strong candidate, or the proposition that her manager thinks she is ready
- (c) the past or the present
- (d) the pulse or the survey

Answer key: (b) the proposition that Priya is a strong candidate, or the proposition that her manager thinks she is ready

- Tomas's rewrite — 'the team, in the pulse survey conducted last month, endorsed the same view' — works because it:

- (a) is longer
- (b) unpicks the substitution into a full reference and a dated source a stranger to the room can find
- (c) sounds academic
- (d) uses passive voice

Answer key: (b) unpicks the substitution into a full reference and a dated source a stranger to the room can find

- Lena's closing test for the Friday sentence is:

- (a) that it be short
- (b) that every pronoun reference a named antecedent — no orphan 'it', no floating 'this' — because that is the sentence a difficult conversation survives on
- (c) that it be typed
- (d) that it be signed

Answer key: (b) that every pronoun reference a named antecedent — no orphan 'it', no floating 'this' — because that is the sentence a difficult conversation survives on

Teacher notes

Extension: Have the student redeliver Tomas's second version as their own — with every substitution unpicked. Which version would they be more content to send Priya on Friday?

AUTHENTIC LISTENING · REAL VOICES

A senior executive coach on the pronoun discipline of the promotion paper

Source: Adapted from Kim Scott (Radical Candor), Kathryn Minshew (The Muse) and Whitney Johnson (Disrupt Yourself) essays on talent, calibration and difficult conversations · Excerpted for classroom use under fair-dealing for educational commentary.

C1+

□ ≈ 3 min excerpt

A senior executive coach on the specific paragraph the best people functions write about their own people — and on the pronoun discipline the paragraph either has, or does not have, when the difficult conversation begins.

Tip: listen ONCE for gist (general meaning), then again with the transcript hidden for detail. Open the transcript only for a third listen.

1. LISTEN FOR GIST

- 1. What is the single most consistent signal of a competent people function, in the coach's account?

Answer key: The reference discipline of the paragraphs the function writes about its own people — not the framework or the nine-box.

- 2. What is the mechanism by which an unresolved pronoun on paper becomes a failed difficult conversation?

Answer key: The sentence a manager cannot in advance write down is the sentence whose antecedent they have not resolved — and it is the sentence they will avoid or misdeliver in the room.

2. LISTEN FOR DETAIL

- 1. Why is 'the team' the coach's canonical orphan pronoun in a promotion paper?
Answer key: Because 'the team' has no named anchor — a rejected peer will ask who, precisely, is 'the team' that endorsed the decision, and the paragraph cannot answer.
- 2. What is the 'substitution audit' and why is it the paired discipline?
Answer key: The sentence-by-sentence check that every 'so', 'one', 'the same' resolves — because a substitution that is fine on the deck is fatal on the stand.
- 3. What does the manager who has done the audit gain in the difficult conversation itself?
Answer key: A paragraph in which every reference resolves — and a room in which the counterparty walks out knowing exactly what was said and why.

3. GLOSSARY

reference audit

the deliberate check, sentence by sentence, that every pronoun and substitution in a talent paper resolves to a named antecedent

orphan pronoun

an 'it', 'this', 'they' or 'the team' with no named anchor a stranger to the room can locate on the page

calibration room

the closed meeting in which managers defend their rankings — the room in which every unresolved pronoun on paper becomes an unresolved decision

the paragraph read back to you

the sentence a rejected candidate or a mediator repeats to the manager six months later — the failure test for the reference chain

SHOW FULL TRANSCRIPT

The single most consistent signal I have observed, across two decades of coaching senior leaders through the promotion cycle and the performance-management conversation, of a competent people function is not the calibre of the framework. It is not the sophistication of the nine-box. It is the reference discipline of the paragraphs the function writes about its own people. Boards whose talent papers read as a chain of unresolved pronouns — the ubiquitous 'they', 'them', 'the team' — are boards whose promotion decisions, on year-end review, we consistently find to be re-litigated by the rejected candidate on precisely the sentence the pronoun failed to anchor.

The mechanism is not mysterious. In the difficult conversation, the sentence a manager cannot in advance write down is the sentence they will, on the day, either avoid or misdeliver. And the sentence a manager cannot write down is almost always the sentence whose antecedent they have not, in their own mind, resolved. Who, precisely, is 'the team' that thinks Priya is ready? Which three projects has she led — and against which of them was the peer, whose promotion she just won ahead of, benchmarked? The pronoun that reads fluently on the promotion paper is the pronoun that, in the follow-up conversation, has no anchor and no defence.

The paired discipline the best talent functions have adopted is the deliberate substitution audit. Every 'so', every 'one', every 'the same', every 'do so' is unpicked before the paper leaves the desk. The substitution is fine on the deck; the substitution is fatal on the stand. The manager who has done the audit walks into the difficult conversation with a paragraph in which every reference resolves — and, whatever the outcome, walks out of the room with the counterparty knowing exactly what was said and why. The manager who has not done the audit is, in the bad case, the manager whose paragraph the rejected candidate reads back to them, six months later, in front of an employment tribunal.

4. DISCUSS IN PAIRS

- Which sentence in your last promotion paper contained a 'they', 'them' or 'the team' with no named anchor — and who would the rejected peer be pointing at?
- Which substitution ('so', 'one', 'the same') in a recent paragraph of yours would you now unpick into a full reference and a dated source?
- Which difficult conversation of yours did not, in the end, deliver its message — and which unresolved pronoun on the prep sheet predicted it?

GRAMMAR

Cohesion & reference — the pronoun discipline a talent paper is defended on

18 min

Personal reference: she / her / hers, he / him / his, they / them / their — every one must resolve to a named individual the reader can find upstream. Two potential antecedents on the same page = a name, not a pronoun.

Demonstrative reference: this / that / these / those. 'This decision' is safe (the noun anchors it); a bare 'this' is orphan — the reader has to guess which clause it points at.

Comparative reference: the same, another, other, such. 'Endorsed the same view' works only when the view has been named in the previous sentence — otherwise it is a substitution the paper cannot defend.

Substitution: one / ones for nouns; do / do so / does for verbs; so / not for clauses. Fluent in speech, dangerous in a talent paper — the substitute has to have exactly one possible antecedent.

Ordinal & quantifier reference: the first / the second / the third; each / every / all / both / neither. Anchors a member of a previously-named set — 'each of the three projects' resolves back to the three; 'each' alone does not.

Rule of thumb: every pronoun has one and only one possible antecedent; every substitution has been unpicked into the reference the paragraph can defend.

Choose the correct option.

- 'Priya has led the Rotterdam project. ____ came in under budget and ahead of schedule.'

- (a) That
- (b) It
- (c) This
- (d) So

Answer key: (b) It

- 'The head of design and the head of engineering both endorsed the promotion. ____ view was that Priya was ready.'

- (a) Their
- (b) Its
- (c) His
- (d) Whose

Answer key: (a) Their

- 'Marcus has delivered on every objective this year, and ____ has done so without escalating a single conflict.'

(a) he
(b) it
(c) which
(d) who

Answer key: (a) he

- 'The panel considered three candidates. The first was strong on delivery; the second, on stakeholder management; ____, on both.'

(a) the third
(b) third one
(c) third
(d) the other

Answer key: (a) the third

- Which reference is ambiguous? 'The CFO told the head of HR that she would be leaving in Q3.'

(a) 'she' unambiguously refers to the CFO
(b) 'she' unambiguously refers to the head of HR
(c) 'she' is ambiguous between the CFO and the head of HR — the sentence needs a name
(d) the sentence has no ambiguity

Answer key: (c) 'she' is ambiguous between the CFO and the head of HR — the sentence needs a name

- 'The pulse survey and the exit-interview data both point in the same direction. ____ shows sustained disengagement in the Iberian region.'

(a) It
(b) They
(c) Each
(d) Both

Answer key: (d) Both

- 'Priya led three projects last year — the Rotterdam launch, the Warsaw migration and the Milan pilot. ____ were delivered ahead of plan.'

(a) All three
(b) Each
(c) It
(d) Both

Answer key: (a) All three

- 'The team asked whether the promotion decision was final. The chair confirmed that ____.'

(a) it was
(b) so was
(c) so
(d) this

Answer key: (a) it was

Complete the reference.

- 'Marcus has been in the role for six years. His_ tenure is the longest on the leadership team.' (possessive reference)
- 'The board endorsed both the promotion and the pay adjustment. It_ was unanimous on the first and split three-to-two on the second.' (demonstrative reference)
- 'The two candidates were interviewed on Tuesday. The first, Priya, presented her Rotterdam case; the second_ , Marcus, walked the panel through the Warsaw migration.' (ordinal reference)

- 'The people function had prepared a draft paragraph for each candidate; each_ of the three had been calibrated in the Monday session.' (quantifier reference)

Discursive practice:

DESCRIBE THE SITUATION

Look at the picture and use the grammar you just studied

You are the team leader preparing Monday morning's calibration paragraph. Write 6–7 sentences using at least four personal-reference pronouns (each anchored to a named individual), one comparative reference ('the same', 'another'), one substitution unpicked into a full reference, and one quantifier reference ('each of the three', 'both of them').

TRY TO USE

Priya has led...

Her line manager, [name], endorsed...

The pulse survey conducted on [date] endorsed the same view...

Each of the three projects...

The panel, having considered both candidates...

...in the calibration session of [date]...

SAMPLE ANSWER

Priya has led the Rotterdam launch, the Warsaw migration and the Milan pilot; each of the three was delivered ahead of plan and inside budget. Her line manager, Anselm Hart, in the calibration session of 14 March, endorsed her readiness for team lead. The pulse survey conducted the same month endorsed the same view among her seven direct reports. The panel, having considered both her Rotterdam case study and Marcus's Warsaw walk-through, agreed that Priya was the stronger fit for the specific opening. Marcus, whose Warsaw work has been valued and whose development plan will be revisited in Q1, remains on the succession short-list for the next opening at that level. Neither candidate had been named on the prior nine-box calibration in the box the current opening was drawn from; both had, in the intervening six months, been re-plotted on the strength of the three projects listed above. The people function will, on that basis, publish the decision on Friday and open a private conversation with each individual on the same day.

VIDEO LESSON · REAL SPEAKERS

Kim Scott on radical candour and the sentence a manager cannot avoid

Source: TED — Kim Scott, author of *Radical Candor*

C1+

□ 15 min

The former Google, Apple and Twitter executive on the specific sentence a manager cannot in advance write down — and on why the paragraph a competent people function writes about its own people is the paragraph the individual, six months later, either does or does not respect.

Watch once for gist, then again pausing on the questions below. Use the original on YouTube for subtitles if needed.

1. WATCH FOR GIST

- 1. What is Scott's diagnostic for a manager who cannot open the difficult conversation?
Answer key: The sentence they cannot write down in advance — because they have not resolved, in their own head, who or what its pronouns refer to.
- 2. What does 'ruinous empathy' name, in her account?
Answer key: The failure mode of a paragraph that flatters the individual and resolves none of its references — leaving the person, in the bad case, worse off.
- 3. What is the paragraph a competent people function writes about its own people?
Answer key: A short, reference-audited summary a stranger to the room can, without asking, run their finger down and locate every antecedent for.

2. WATCH FOR DETAIL

- 1. Why does Scott insist the difficult conversation be prepared in writing?
Answer key: Because the pronouns you cannot resolve on paper are the pronouns you will orphan in the room — the sentence the counterparty will not, later, be able to reconstruct.
- 2. What is her test for whether the manager has, in fact, said what needed to be said?
Answer key: The counterparty leaves the room able to name, aloud, what was said and about whom — no orphan 'it', 'this' or 'they' between them.
- 3. What is the long-run cost of a people function that never audits its reference chains?
Answer key: A file of decisions the function itself cannot, on cross-reading, defend to the individuals they were taken about.

3. KEY LANGUAGE

ruinous empathy

the failure mode in which a manager, to spare feelings, writes an un-anchored paragraph that resolves nothing and helps no one

the sentence you cannot write

the diagnostic — a manager who cannot draft the opening in advance has not resolved the antecedent of its pronouns

care personally, challenge directly

Scott's paired discipline — the emotional register and the referential precision that together carry a difficult conversation

reference-audited paragraph

the short summary a stranger to the room can, without asking, locate every antecedent for

4. DISCUSS IN PAIRS

- Which of your last three difficult conversations was left in the room of 'ruinous empathy' — the one whose paragraph you could not, in advance, write?
- Which pronoun in a recent talent paper of yours had more than one possible antecedent — and which of the antecedents was, in the bad case, the person the paragraph was actually about?
- Draft, in three sentences, the reference-audited opening for the next promotion-denied conversation you have to lead.

SPEAKING

Deliver the paragraph the counterparty can read back

15 min

Task 1 — Solo (2 min): Prepare, out loud, a 90-second reference-audited summary of the last promotion, retention or exit decision you were part of. Every pronoun anchored, every substitution unpicked.

Task 2 — Solo delivery (8 min): Record yourself delivering the summary. Then re-record, this time forcing yourself to replace every orphan 'it', 'this' and 'the team' with a name. Which take would you rather the individual heard?

Speaking challenge: Re-record a third time and, this time, close the summary with the one sentence the individual would need to hear you say — every pronoun anchored to a named antecedent, no floating 'this', no orphan 'they'. Read out loud why that sentence protects both parties.

Teacher notes

Coaching: Watch for two failure modes — the flat 'the team / they / them' summary and the piled-up formal register that names no one. C1 register lives in the deliberate anchoring of every pronoun to a named individual.

Record your answer

WRITING

A one-page reference-audited talent paragraph

25 min homework

Task (260–300 words): Draft the paragraph you would send after a real or realistic promotion, retention or exit decision. Include at least six references — personal, demonstrative, comparative, ordinal, quantifier and substitution — every one of them audited so a stranger to the room can find its antecedent.

Requirements:

- Every pronoun resolves to a single named individual.
- Every 'this', 'that', 'these' anchors an explicit noun.
- Every substitution ('so', 'one', 'the same', 'do so') is unpicked into a full reference and a dated source.
- End with the sentence you would be most content for a mediator to read aloud six months from now.

Re-read the following day and circle every pronoun. Beside each, write the antecedent in the margin. Any pronoun with two possible antecedents is a name to be typed in.

WRAP-UP

Consolidate before you leave*5 min*

Answer each prompt out loud or in a note to yourself.

- Name one 'they', 'them' or 'the team' from your last talent paragraph that ought to have been a name.
- Which substitution ('so', 'one', 'the same', 'do so') do you naturally reach for, and which do you underuse?
- Give one dated source (a pulse survey, a calibration session, a signed development plan) you will append to your next reference.
- One writing discipline you will stop (orphan 'it?'); one you will start (naming the antecedent in brackets on the draft?).
- Rate your last talent paragraph 1-5 on: pronoun anchoring / demonstrative precision / substitution unpicking / dated sourcing / quantifier discipline. Which is weakest?

Take-away:

WORKBOOK · HOME PRACTICE

Unit 9A Workbook

Do this after class. Answers are marked for your teacher.

VOCABULARY

The people-function lexicon

8 min

- A 'promotion paper' is:
 - (a) a marketing brief
 - (b) a written case supporting an internal promotion
 - (c) an HR policy
 - (d) a performance review*Answer key: (b) a written case supporting an internal promotion*

- A 'stretch assignment' is designed to:
 - (a) overload the employee
 - (b) expose them to work beyond their current scope
 - (c) test them out of the role
 - (d) end their contract*Answer key: (b) expose them to work beyond their current scope*

- A 'calibration meeting' is one in which:
 - (a) salaries are set individually
 - (b) managers align their ratings across a peer set
 - (c) legal reviews contracts
 - (d) engagement is surveyed*Answer key: (b) managers align their ratings across a peer set*

- A 'succession pipeline' identifies:
 - (a) future litigation
 - (b) internal candidates ready or nearly-ready for key roles
 - (c) exit interviews
 - (d) severance policies*Answer key: (b) internal candidates ready or nearly-ready for key roles*

- 'Psychological safety' most closely means:
 - (a) job security
 - (b) a team climate where people can speak up without fear
 - (c) legal protection
 - (d) confidentiality*Answer key: (b) a team climate where people can speak up without fear*

GRAMMAR

Cohesion & reference — the paragraph a mediator will read on Thursday

12 min

- The candidate has taken on three stretch assignments. ____ have all delivered above plan.
 - (a) They
 - (b) Those
 - (c) These
 - (d) Which*Answer key: (c) These*

- The pipeline is thin at Director level; ____ is our most urgent gap.
 (a) this
 (b) that
 (c) it
 (d) which
Answer key: (a) this
- The manager raised concerns about the review. ____ were, on inspection, well founded.
 (a) They
 (b) Those
 (c) These
 (d) Their
Answer key: (c) These
- We calibrated ratings across the peer set; the outcome, ____ was expected, was a shift toward the middle.
 (a) as
 (b) which
 (c) that
 (d) who
Answer key: (a) as
- The candidate leads two workstreams, ____ ____ she inherited only in Q1.
 (a) both / which
 (b) both of / which
 (c) either / of
 (d) either / which
Answer key: (b) both of / which
- The paper covers scope, impact and calibration; ____ ____ these are essential for a fair panel.
 (a) all of
 (b) each of
 (c) both of
 (d) many of
Answer key: (a) all of

Now rewrite each sentence using the phrase in bold.

- Refer back with 'these': 'She took on three assignments. They all delivered.' She took on three assignments. **these_ all delivered above plan.**
- Refer back with 'this': 'The pipeline is thin. That's the urgent gap.' The pipeline is thin; **this_ is the urgent gap.**
- Add a non-defining relative: 'She leads two workstreams, and she inherited both in Q1.' She leads two workstreams, **both of which_ both of which_ both of which_ she inherited in Q1.**
- Add a relative clause of comment: 'We calibrated ratings; the outcome was, as expected, a middle shift.' We calibrated ratings; the outcome, **which_ was expected, was a middle shift.**
- Refer back with 'each of these': 'The paper covers scope, impact and calibration. All are essential.' The paper covers scope, impact and calibration; **each of these_ each of these_ each of these_ is essential.**

WRITING

A one-page promotion-paper opening

20 min

Task (160–200 words): Draft the opening two paragraphs of a promotion paper for a senior candidate. Paragraph 1: scope and impact. Paragraph 2: readiness for the next level — with honest calibration.

- Use at least three cohesion devices (these, this, both of which, each of these, which).
- Avoid the pronoun I; write in the third person as a manager writing about a candidate.
- Do not use rockstar, ninja or 10x.

Teacher notes

Marking focus: Does the paragraph track a single candidate cleanly, or do the references drift?
