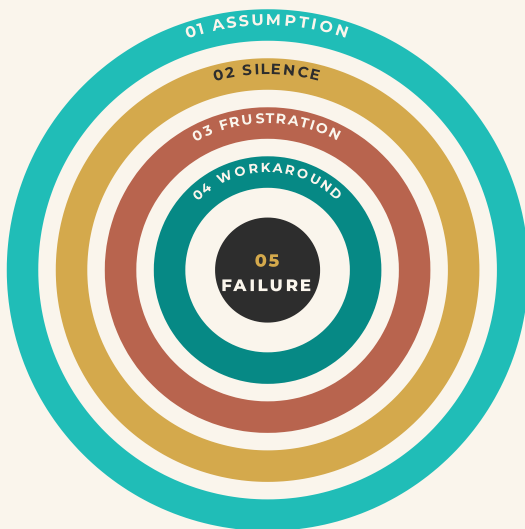


## A DIAGNOSTIC FIELD CARD

# The Silent Spiral™

How communication fails on a team — not in one moment, but in five stages that compound. Each stage feels small. Together, they end careers, contracts, and operations. Adapted from *Failure to Communicate*.



Each ring tightens. The floor goes quieter as the failure grows louder.

## THE FIVE STAGES

### 01 Assumption

Message sent — receipt and understanding unconfirmed. We transmit the conclusion without transmitting the reasoning, and assume the receiver has all the context.

△ Watch for: "I emailed them — they know"; "we aligned in the meeting"; same decision relitigated next week.

### 02 Silence

People are confused but won't say so. "No questions" gets misread as agreement. Everyone assumes someone else will break the silence first — so nobody does.

△ Watch for: zero pushback in meetings; unanswered emails; "I didn't want to bother anyone."

### 03 Frustration

The silence becomes expensive. A systemic failure starts getting misread as a personality problem. "She's difficult." "He doesn't listen." The spotlight goes on people instead of the system.

△ Watch for: same surprises repeating; "why does nobody ever tell me anything?"; trust in official channels eroding.

### 04 Workaround

When official channels fail, people build unofficial ones. Shadow infrastructure runs in parallel. The dysfunction becomes survivable enough that nobody fixes the root cause.

△ Watch for: "don't bother filing it — just text me"; trackers abandoned; approvals hand-walked around the process.

### 05 Failure

The visible event — the missed shipment, the audit finding, the client who didn't renew, the resignation letter that says "didn't feel heard." The problem was visible for months; it just wasn't safe to say so.

△ By the time the failure is visible, the spiral has been turning since Stage 01.

## THE COUNTERMEASURE · FIVE MOVES THAT PAIR TO FIVE STAGES

### Breaking the Spiral™

Test the Assumption · Break the Silence · Make It Safe · Close the Loop · Name It. Each stage has an exit. The spiral is predictable — and so is the way out.

**USE THIS CARD WHEN:** You suspect your team has gone quiet. Match what you observe to the stages above. Then act on the stage where the spiral is currently turning — using the move that pairs to it.