

Words matter. Distinctions make a difference.

tri·ad

/ˈtriˌad/ **noun**

ORDINARY MEANING

A group or set of three connected people, elements, or parts.

THE DISTINCTIONS DEFINITION

An intentional conversation between two people, supported by a third person who listens for understanding and helps create the conditions for openness, curiosity, straight talk, and productive dialogue - so people can say what needs to be said, understand one another more fully, and move forward.

COMMUNICATION • TRUST • LISTENING • STRAIGHT TALK • LEADERSHIP • ALIGNMENT

Why three?

Three creates a remarkably stable structure.

Photographers, surveyors, engineers, and others rely on tripods because three points establish balance without unnecessary complexity. In a triad, the third person is not there to add another side.

The supporting listener helps create the conditions for a more open, balanced, and productive conversation.

WHAT IT IS NOT

- an HR intervention
- performance management
- disciplinary or corrective action
- a referee deciding who is right
- someone else solving the issue

WHAT IT IS

- supported direct communication
- a supported way to listen and be heard
- an environment for candid, productive dialogue
- a way to surface assumptions and clarify meaning
- a way to create clarity, understanding, and forward movement

The supporting listener does not replace direct communication.

The supporting listener helps make direct communication more possible.

SUPPORTED DIRECTNESS

Straight talk is easier when people trust the conversation, not just each other.

One-on-one conversations can be valuable, especially when the relationship already has trust and openness. But history, hierarchy, personalities, assumptions, emotion, and the importance of the issue can affect what people are willing or able to say.

A triad does not suggest that two people are incapable of talking directly. It recognizes that sometimes the quality of the conversation matters enough to support it. A supporting listener helps create the conditions for candor, listening, curiosity, and understanding - while keeping ownership of the conversation with the two people involved.

ONE-ON-ONE**Directness.**

Two people communicate directly, relying on the quality of their relationship and their ability to listen, clarify, and work through differences.

TRIAD**Supported directness.**

The conversation remains between the two people. A supporting listener becomes a resource to the conversation - helping each person speak, listen, clarify, and understand.

The role of the supporting listener

- 1 Set the intention.**
What are we here to accomplish? What would make this worthwhile?
- 2 Listen for understanding.**
Notice what is being said, what is unclear, and where meaning is being lost.
- 3 Make room for both people.**
Help each person say what needs to be said and be heard.
- 4 Invite curiosity.**
Slow assumptions and help people ask before concluding.
- 5 Clarify rather than judge.**
Ask, check understanding, and surface what each person actually means.
- 6 Return ownership.**
Support the conversation while the two people own what happens next.

The goal is not necessarily agreement.

The goal is better communication, greater understanding, and a clearer path forward.

A good triad leaves people feeling that what needed to be said was said, what needed to be heard was heard, and nothing important was left unfinished.

Triads can support conversations between peers, across levels, and among senior leaders.

THE EXPERIENCE OF A GOOD TRIAD

HEARD. UNDERSTOOD. COMPLETE.

Not necessarily in agreement - but clear about what matters and better able to move forward.