

Escalation Map — Facilitator Run Sheet

Folder: escalation-map · Category: conflict · 4–12 people · 25 min · offline + online · print props · tool pack

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25

MINUTES

4–12

PEOPLE

print props

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Escalation Map — Facilitator Guide

A team plots the arc of a conflict as a heat ladder — from calm, to tension, to blowup, to the point where it was no longer recoverable the same way. At each rung, they name what could have kept the situation one degree cooler, and mark the earliest rung where a small move would have been cheapest. No culprit is written on the map; the map is about the shape of getting hot, not who started it.

Objectives

By the end of the activity, participants will have:

1. Seen the shape of how the conflict got hot — not who started it.
2. Named, at each rung, a small move that would have kept it one degree cooler.
3. Circled the earliest rung where a cheap move was available, and each taken one move for their own next time.

When to use this activity

- A dispute between teams or individuals has left the room picking sides, and no one can see how it got this hot.
- You want a shared post-mortem of a conflict that doesn't turn into a blame contest.
- You have 4–12 people and 25 minutes; remote works if the ladder is on a shared board.

The four rungs

Rung	What it feels like	Typical move that was available
1 · Warm	Small irritations, unsaid	Say the small thing before it becomes a stand
2 · Heated	Positions harden; tone shifts	Ask a real question, or take a day before answering
3 · Boiling	Public, sharp, sides chosen	Change the room: move it offline, or bring the shared cost onto the table
4 · Point of no return	Actions have been taken	Repair work only; do not pretend a small move still applies

Setup

Space: a wall or shared board with the four-rung ladder drawn up it; the team gathered around one map.

Materials per person: sticky notes and a pen.

Materials for the room: the four rung cards (Warm / Heated / Boiling / Point of no return) and a “one degree cooler” move card from [escalation-map-prop-cards.pdf](#).

Grouping: 4–12 people who were inside, or adjacent to, the same conflict — one shared map, not two blame maps.

Roles: everyone plots events and writes moves; you draw the rungs and hold “no names, only the shape.”

How to run it

Time	Phase	What you do
0–3	Frame	Draw the four rungs as a ladder on the wall. Set the rule: no names, no “who started it” — only the shape.
3–9	Plot	As a team, place sticky notes on the rungs: what actually happened at each level of heat. Start early; if you can’t find anything at rung 1, look harder.
9–15	One degree cooler	On each rung, write what could have kept the whole thing one rung lower. Be specific and cheap, not heroic.
15–20	Earliest cheap win	Circle the earliest rung with a real move. That’s the intervention point the map is for.
20–25	Personal bridge	Each person writes one thing they will do at their own earliest rung next time — and shares it out loud in one line.

Why the shape, not the culprit

Once a map has a name on it, the room argues about that name. Once it only has rungs and moves, the room argues about which moves were available — a very different, and much more useful, conversation.

The card

Use the faces from [escalation-map-prop-cards.pdf](#): four rung cards (Warm / Heated / Boiling / Point of no return), a “one degree cooler” move card, and a blank to author your own. Keep the “no names, only shape” rule on the card in view — it’s the one that keeps the map from becoming a grievance list.

Failure modes

- **Someone writes names or “they”.** Pull back to the shape. “What happened at this rung, not who did it.”
- **The team only plots rungs 3–4.** That means they skipped the early, cheap part. Push for rung 1 honestly; the value lives there.
- **Moves come out heroic (“have a big honest talk”).** Force cheap: one question, one day’s delay, one offline move.

Variations

- **Remote:** the same ladder on a shared board; it transfers cleanly.
- **On a conflict that just cooled:** run it on a dispute that ended recently — the map will name the rung you’re actually sitting on now.
- **Two sides, one map:** if both sides can be in the room, plot one shared ladder rather than two competing blame maps.
- **Shortened (15 min):** plot rungs 1–3 only and circle the earliest cheap move; skip the individual bridge.

Facilitation notes

- The strongest moment is realising rung 2 had a 30-second, costless move nobody took because they were saving for the rungs below.
- Don't let the map become an excuse ledger — every rung's move should be doable by the person drawing it.

Put it on the wall

Print `escalation-map-activity-poster.pdf` (A3) to put the run of show, the four rungs and the “one degree cooler” prompt on one wall while you facilitate.

Props in this folder

- `escalation-map-prop-cards.pdf` — poker-spec print sheet (63.5 × 88.9 mm, bleed and cut guides): four rung cards, a “one degree cooler” move card, a blank card, branded backs
- `escalation-map-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief, bound as one A4 document with bookmarks (`-Letter.pdf` is US Letter)
- `escalation-map-activity-poster.pdf` — the whole post-mortem on one A3 wall sheet
- `escalation-map-guide.md` · `-debrief.md` · `-start-here.md` — the facilitator guide, the debrief, the one-page start here
- `escalation-map-license.md` — what you may do, how to rebrand, what shipped when
- `SKILL.md` · `escalation-map.zip` — the machine-readable manifest, and the whole folder in one download

Agent version

Every file in this folder has a stable public URL — an AI agent can fetch the cards, the debrief and this run sheet with three curl commands (see `SKILL.md`). The paper version needs nothing but a wall, four rung cards and a pad of sticky notes.

Escalation Map — Debrief

The map isn't for finding who caused it — it's for finding the rung where it was still cheap to fix.

Use with `escalation-map-guide.md` . The personal bridge at minute 20 is the compressed version; this sheet is the full one.

How to run this debrief

- Point at the map, not at people. Every question should land on a **rung and a move**, never on a name.
- Read the early rungs first. If the team jumps to rung 3–4, pull them back to rung 1 — that is where the cheap moves lived.
- Close on the personal bridge: each person names what they will do at their own earliest rung next time.

Read the ladder

1. **How early the rungs start.** If everything is at 3–4, the map is telling you the team can’t name their own rungs 1–2 — that’s a signal.
2. **The moves nobody took at rung 2.** Small, cheap, available. Why were they skipped? That “why” is the real conversation.
3. **The point of no return.** Circle it once. Everything above was repair; everything below was avoidable. That line is what next time is drawn against.

The four debrief questions

- Which rung were you personally at when the situation first got uncomfortable — and what did you do there?
- What small, available move at that rung did nobody actually try — and what stopped them?
- What is your early-warning tell that you’re on rung 2 and about to climb?
- What is one thing you’ll do at rung 1 or 2 next time — while it’s still cheap?

Failure modes of the debrief

Failure mode	Why it happens	The rescue
It turns into grievance rehearsal	Names creep back in	Redraw the map without the “who” column; only events and moves allowed.
Everything looks heroic	Only big moves are named	Force cheap moves: a question, a day, an offline hop.
Nobody owns the rung	“It” escalated	Each person names their own rung and one next-time move out loud.