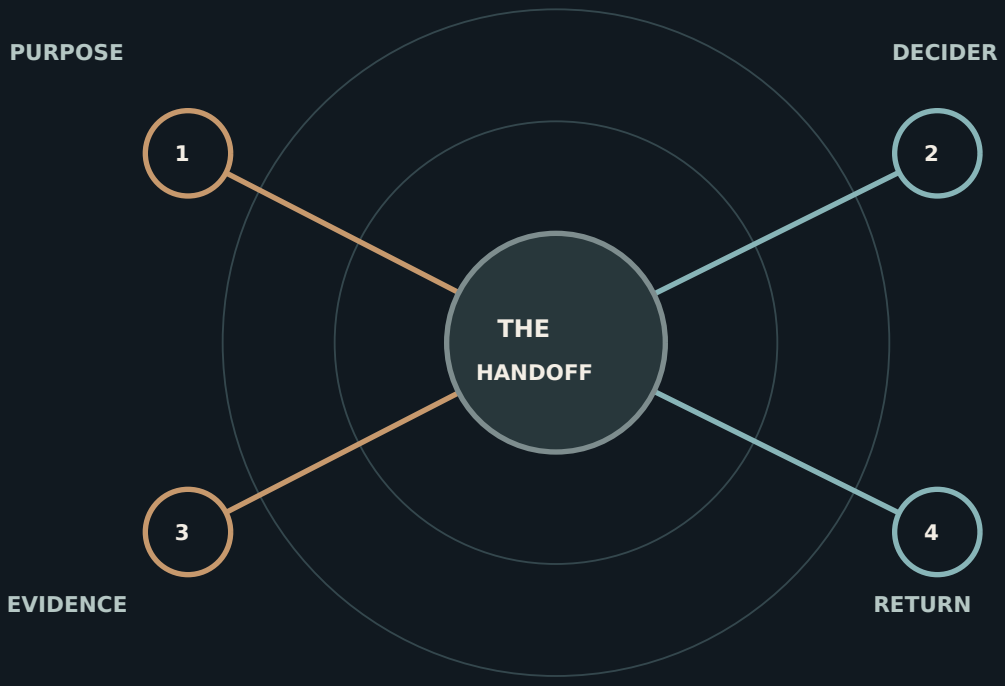
SEAMWORK

The invisible architecture of collaboration

What is left unsaid when work crosses from one person to another?



FIVE PAGES · FOUR QUESTIONS · NO PERFORMANCE SCORE

An original conceptual tool by Sahil Tayal. 2026.

01 / THE MODEL

Four seams, one handoff.

A seam is a place where the sender relies on understanding that may not yet be shared. These four prompts are designed to reveal potentially consequential assumptions, not to produce a score.

01

PURPOSE

What outcome must become true? Say what matters without prescribing every method.

02

DECIDER

Who does the work, and who may accept, revise, or halt it? These roles can differ.

03

EVIDENCE

What observable sign will count as complete? Match the check to the stakes.

04

RETURN PATH

How can a question, mismatch, or blocker travel back while there is still time?

TWO IMPORTANT DISTINCTIONS

An explicit seam is not a promise of agreement. A handoff can still fail because of missing capacity, changing conditions, competing incentives, or a poor decision.

A seam need not be written down. In a trusted pair, a brief conversation may be the more respectful and effective medium.

02 / USE IN PRACTICE

A seven-minute seam audit.

Use this with a real task that has crossed a person, team, or time boundary. It is a conversation starter, not a mandatory meeting format.

01 / NOTICE

Write the request exactly as it arrived. Underline a verb such as "handle," "review," or "finalise." Ask whether two people might picture different results.

02 / NAME

For each of the four seams, mark only what is consequential and still uncertain. Avoid writing an exhaustive process document.

03 / NEGOTIATE

Ask the receiver what they understood. Invite an objection or a better approach. Shared understanding cannot be established unilaterally.

04 / REVISIT

Agree on the smallest useful return path: a check-in, a proof, a timestamp, or permission to pause when a claim cannot be verified.

LANGUAGE TO BORROW

"*Before I start, can I check the outcome, who signs off, and when you would want me to raise an uncertainty?*"

03 / WORKED CASES

Small sentences. Large assumptions.

CASE A / A PUBLIC EVENT

AS SENT "Can you handle the sign?"

REPAIRED "Please draft the accessible entrance sign with the approved title. Send the proof to Dev by Thursday 15:00 for approval."

CHECK Would the person receiving this want a choice of format or more context?

CASE B / A DIGITAL RELEASE

AS SENT "Make sure the article is updated."

REPAIRED "Update the help page for the new feature only. Verify the public links. If the product wording differs from the approved brief, pause and ask before publishing."

CHECK Could this become over-specified for a routine correction?

EXERCISE / THE COUNTER-CASE

Take a low-stakes handoff between two people who already collaborate well. Remove every instruction that would be obvious to them. What remains necessary? You have not failed the framework by choosing brevity.

REFLECTION

Which seam is most often assumed in your work? Which one would you rather discuss in person? Which question might feel like unnecessary surveillance if used carelessly?

04 / EVIDENCE AND LIMITS

Clarity is not control.

SEAMWORK is an editorial and facilitation model, not a measured intervention. It does not diagnose communication styles, infer motives, or predict the performance of a team.

THE HONEST BOUNDARY

FACT: Grounding research treats shared understanding as an interactive accomplishment, shaped by purpose and medium.

INTERPRETATION: Some missed handoffs can be usefully examined through purpose, decider, evidence, and return path.

ARGUMENT: Consequential uncertainty should be discussable without replacing trust or judgment with bureaucracy.

SPECULATION: The best degree of explicitness changes with relationships, stakes, time, and organisational culture.

SOURCES / RELATED READING

Clark & Brennan (1991). Grounding in communication. DOI: 10.1037/10096-006

Edmondson (1999). Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams.

The second paper concerns the conditions for interpersonal risk taking and learning; it does not validate this tool.

USE, SHARE, ADAPT

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