

The Clario Method™

*Why Intelligent People Misunderstand Each Other:
How to Create Shared Understanding*

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Chapter 10

The Clario Method™ in Action

A product team at a mid-sized software company held a forty-five-minute meeting to align on the launch plan for a new feature. The VP of Product led the discussion. Engineering, design, marketing, and customer success were all represented. The team reviewed the timeline, debated the rollout strategy, and discussed risks. People asked good questions. The conversation was substantive.

When the meeting ended, everyone moved on to their next commitment.

Over the following week, five things happened. Engineering began building toward a phased rollout to beta customers. Marketing drafted a press release for a full public launch. Design started working on onboarding materials for enterprise accounts — a segment that had not been discussed in the meeting. Customer success scheduled training for a feature set that included two capabilities engineering had descoped without telling anyone. And the VP of Product, who believed the team was aligned, began preparing a confident update for the executive team.

Two weeks later, the launch was delayed by a month. Not because anyone lacked competence. Not because the feature wasn't ready. Because five groups had been executing against five different understandings of the same conversation.

This chapter will show you how to see what went wrong — and how to prevent it. Not through better intentions or more meetings, but through a diagnostic process that examines communication the way a physician examines a patient: systematically, using observable evidence, and with a framework that produces specific, actionable findings.

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The Clario Diagnostic Process™

The five groups in that meeting were not careless. They were not inattentive. They were doing what human minds always do — constructing understanding from incomplete information, filling in gaps with assumptions, and walking away confident that their version of the conversation was the right one.

The question is not whether this will happen. It will. The question is whether you have a systematic way to see it — and to do something about it.

The Clario Method™ provides that system. And it works the same way every time.

Every Clario evaluation — whether it examines an email, a meeting, a presentation, a set of instructions, or a conversation — follows the same six-step diagnostic process. The communication changes. The process does not. This is what makes the methodology repeatable and the results comparable. A physician follows the same diagnostic process whether the patient is presenting with chest pain or a sprained ankle. The symptoms differ. The method of examination is the same.

The six steps are:

Step 1 — Observe. Begin with the communication exactly as it occurred. Not what the sender believes they said. Not what the receiver thinks they heard. The communication itself — the words that were written, the slides that were presented, the statements that were made in the room. The Clario Diagnostic Process™ starts with observable evidence, not assumptions or opinions. Before you evaluate anything, you gather what actually happened.

Step 2 — Evaluate. Determine what understanding was intended and what understanding was actually created. This is the step where the gap between the melody and the taps becomes visible. The sender had a purpose — something they needed the receiver to understand. The receiver constructed something. Were they the same? The goal is not to guess. It is to identify evidence — observable signs that the understanding the receiver built matches, or does not match, what the sender intended.

Step 3 — Score. Evaluate the communication using the Five Core Communication Signals — Purpose, Action, Decision, Tone, and Shared Understanding. Each signal receives a diagnostic rating on the Clario scale: 0 (Missing), 1 (Weak), 3 (Functional), or 5 (Excellent). The scale intentionally skips 2 and 4, forcing the evaluator to make a meaningful diagnostic distinction rather than defaulting to a comfortable middle. The five scores together produce a detailed picture of where the communication succeeded and where it fell short.

Step 4 — Diagnose. The scores reveal where Communication Gaps formed. A Weak Purpose score tells you the communication's reason for existing was unclear. A Missing Shared Understanding score tells you that no one verified whether understanding was actually shared. Diagnosis focuses on the communication — not the people. It replaces opinion with evidence. You do not conclude that someone "wasn't clear enough." You identify that the Action signal scored 1 because the email specified a deliverable but not an owner, a deadline, or a standard. That is a diagnosis. It is specific. It is observable. And it points directly to what needs to change.

Step 5 — Improve. Once the Communication Gaps have been identified, the communication can be revised — not by applying generic advice, but by strengthening the specific signals that scored lowest. If Purpose was Weak, state the purpose explicitly. If Action was Missing, assign the task, the owner, and the

deadline. If Decision was Weak, mark the boundary between discussion and decision. Improvement in the Clario Method™ is always targeted. You do not try to "communicate better" in some vague, unmeasurable sense. You close the specific gap the diagnosis identified.

Step 6 — Verify. The process is not complete when the improved communication has been sent. It is complete when there is evidence that the intended Shared Understanding was actually achieved. Verification is the step that separates the Clario Method™ from every other approach to communication improvement. Most communication advice stops at Step 5 — make the message clearer and hope for the best. The Clario Diagnostic Process™ goes further. It asks: did the revision work? Is there evidence — a confirmation, a readback, an aligned action — that the gap has actually been closed? Understanding must be confirmed, not assumed.

THE CLARIO DIAGNOSTIC PROCESS™

Observe → Evaluate → Score → Diagnose → Improve → Verify

These six steps form the repeatable diagnostic process used throughout every Clario Method evaluation. The communication changes. The process never does.

With the diagnostic process in hand, let's look at what each step examines — beginning with the five lenses through which every communication is evaluated. A Communication Effectiveness score of 100% does not mean communication was perfect. It means that, based on the observable evidence, each communication signal was expressed at the highest evaluable standard. Human communication remains probabilistic rather than certain.

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What the Clario Method™ Evaluates

The Clario Method™ does not evaluate the intelligence, intentions, or professionalism of the communicator. It evaluates the communication itself.

Specifically, it asks one question:

How effectively did the communication create the Shared Understanding required for its intended purpose?

This distinction matters. When we evaluate people, the response to failure is personal — someone should have been clearer, someone should have listened better. When we evaluate the communication, the response is diagnostic — here is where the gap formed, here is the evidence, and here is how to close it.

The methodology examines communication through five diagnostic lenses — the Five Core Communication Signals — and produces a structured assessment that identifies exactly where Shared Understanding was achieved and where Communication Gaps formed.

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The Five Diagnostic Lenses

Every communication is evaluated through five signals. Each captures a different dimension of whether Shared Understanding was created:

Purpose: Does the communication make clear why it exists and what it needs to achieve?

Action: Does the communication specify what needs to happen next — who, what, by when, and to what standard?

Decision: Does the communication identify what has been decided, by whom, and whether it is final?

Tone: Is the emotional and relational dimension of the communication likely to be received as intended?

Shared Understanding: Is there evidence — not assumption — that the receiver's understanding matches the sender's intent?

These are not abstract categories. They are the specific dimensions along which Communication Gaps form. A communication can be strong in four signals and fail in one — and that one failure can undermine everything else.

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The Scoring Model

Each signal is evaluated using a four-level diagnostic scale:

Score

Rating

Meaning

0

Missing

The signal is absent or cannot reasonably be identified.

1

Weak

The signal is present but unclear, ambiguous, incomplete, or likely to be interpreted differently by different receivers.

3

Functional

The signal is sufficiently clear for normal professional communication, although minor improvement is possible.

5

Excellent

The signal is explicit, immediately recognizable, unambiguous, and highly likely to create the intended Shared Understanding across audiences.

The scale uses 0, 1, 3, and 5 — with no 2 or 4. This is intentional. A scale with incremental options encourages evaluators to gravitate toward the middle, producing scores that feel safe but reveal nothing. The Clario scale forces a choice: is this signal Missing, Weak, Functional, or Excellent? There is no comfortable neutral ground. The evaluator must commit to a diagnostic judgment based on evidence, not impression.

This produces two benefits. First, it increases consistency between evaluators — two people evaluating the same communication are more likely to arrive at comparable scores because the categories are distinct rather than graduated. Second, it shifts the conversation from subjective preference to observable evidence. The question is not whether the evaluator liked the communication. The question is whether the signal created the Shared Understanding it needed to create.

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From Diagnosis to Communication Effectiveness

The Clario Method™ serves two purposes. First, it diagnoses communication — identifying where Communication Gaps formed and why. Second, it communicates diagnostic results — presenting findings in a way that professionals, executives, and organizations can immediately understand and act upon.

These two purposes require two different expressions of the same analysis.

The signal scores (0–1–3–5) provide diagnostic precision. They tell you where the gaps are. A Purpose score of 1 and an Action score of 5 mean something specific and different from a Purpose score of 5 and an Action score of 1. The signal-level analysis is always the primary diagnostic tool — it is where you find the source of the Communication Gap and the evidence for improvement.

The Communication Effectiveness percentage provides immediate understanding. It answers the question every leader, team, and organization naturally asks: how effective was this communication, overall? A Communication Effectiveness of 24% tells you something is critically wrong. A Communication Effectiveness of 88% tells you the communication is strong with minor opportunities. The percentage is intuitive, comparable, and immediately meaningful.

The percentage is calculated from the raw score: the sum of the five signal scores divided by the maximum possible score of 25, expressed as a percentage.

The percentage summarizes the communication. The signal scores explain it.

This distinction is important. Two communications can have the same overall percentage — say, 60% — while requiring completely different improvements. One might have strong Purpose, Action, and Decision but failing Tone and Shared Understanding. The other might have strong Tone but weak Purpose, Action, and Decision. The percentage is the same. The diagnosis is entirely different. Always read the individual signals.

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Interpreting Communication Effectiveness

Interpretation

90–100%

Excellent Communication Effectiveness. The communication is highly likely to create the intended Shared Understanding across audiences.

75–89%

Strong communication with minor opportunities for improvement.

60–74%

Functional communication with identifiable Communication Gaps that should be improved.

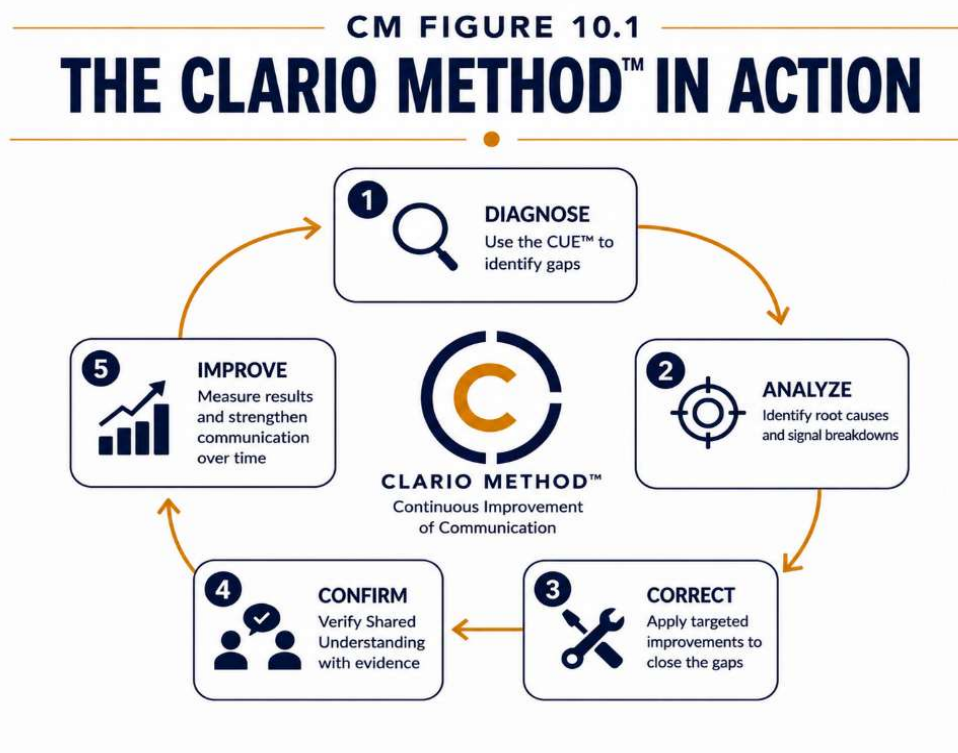
40–59%

High risk of misunderstanding. Significant Communication Gaps are present.

Below 40%

Critical communication failure. The intended Shared Understanding is unlikely to have been created.

The Communication Effectiveness percentage is a summary — useful for benchmarking, tracking improvement, and communicating results. But the signal-level analysis remains the primary diagnostic tool. It tells you not just how effective the communication was, but where the Communication Gaps formed and what to do about them.



The Clario Method™ Workflow. The Clario Method™ is a continuous improvement cycle. Communication is diagnosed, analyzed, corrected, confirmed through evidence, and continuously improved to increase Communication Effectiveness and create Shared Understanding.

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Example 1: Diagnosing an Email

Consider the following email from a project manager to her cross-functional team:

ORIGINAL EMAIL

Subject: Project Update

Hi team — Just a quick update on the Henderson project. We met with the client last week and they had some feedback on the direction. We're going to need to adjust the timeline and probably rethink the approach on the analytics module. Let's plan to discuss next week. Also, the client mentioned they want to see a demo by the end of the month. Let me know if you have any questions. Thanks, Laura

Signal Analysis:

Purpose — Score: 1 (Weak). The email is framed as a "quick update," but it contains a decision (adjusting the timeline), a request (discuss next week), and a deliverable (demo by end of month). Three communication types collapsed into one casual framing. The Purpose is present but unclear — different receivers will construct different understandings of what this email requires of them.

Action — Score: 1 (Weak). "Let's plan to discuss next week" does not specify who is scheduling the meeting, what should be prepared, or what the meeting needs to produce. "Rethink the approach" does not specify who is responsible, what the revised approach should address, or when a new direction is needed. The demo deadline is the only concrete action, but no owner is assigned.

Decision — Score: 1 (Weak). "We're going to need to adjust the timeline" implies a decision, but no specifics are provided. Adjust by how much? Based on what criteria? "Probably rethink the approach" is even weaker — "probably" signals that a decision may not have been made at all.

Tone — Score: 3 (Functional). Professional, approachable, and appropriate. However, the casual framing may undermine the urgency of the timeline change and the demo deadline. Tone is the one signal working reasonably well.

Shared Understanding — Score: 0 (Missing). "Let me know if you have any questions" is not a verification mechanism. It places the burden of identifying gaps on the receivers. No evidence of Shared Understanding is created or requested.

Raw Score: 6 / 25 → Communication Effectiveness: 24%

Communication Effectiveness: 24% — Critical communication failure.

The diagnosis is specific: Purpose, Action, and Decision are all Weak. Shared Understanding is Missing. Only Tone is Functional. This email will feel clear to Laura — she knows the full context — but will produce divergent understandings across her team.

Now let's see the same email after the Communication Gaps are closed:

REVISED EMAIL

Subject: Henderson Project — Timeline Change & Action Items

Hi team — I'm writing to share three outcomes from last week's client meeting on the Henderson project, each of which requires action.

1. Timeline change (decided): The launch date is moving from March 15 to April 7. This is based on client feedback and is confirmed. Please update your project plans accordingly.

2. Analytics module (needs discussion): The client wants us to reconsider the approach. James, can you prepare two alternative options by Wednesday? I'm scheduling a working session for Thursday at 2 PM to review them as a team.

3. Demo (deadline): The client has requested a working demo by March 28. Priya, you own this deliverable. Please confirm by end of day tomorrow that this is feasible, or flag any concerns.

Please reply to this email confirming you've read it and noting any questions or conflicts. I want to make sure we're all working from the same understanding before the week starts. Thanks, Laura

Updated Signal Scores:

Purpose — Score: 5. The opening sentence states the email's purpose explicitly: three outcomes requiring action. Every recipient knows why they are reading this.

Action — Score: 5. Each item specifies the task, the owner, and the deadline. James prepares alternatives by Wednesday. Priya confirms feasibility by tomorrow. Everyone updates project plans.

Decision — Score: 5. Item 1 is marked as decided. Item 2 is marked as needing discussion. The distinction is explicit — no one will mistake an open question for a closed decision.

Tone — Score: 5. Direct but respectful. Urgency is appropriate without creating anxiety. The closing request for confirmation is framed as collaborative.

Shared Understanding — Score: 5. The email requests explicit confirmation. This is a verification mechanism that produces evidence of Shared Understanding rather than assuming it.

Raw Score: 25 / 25 → Communication Effectiveness: 100%

Communication Effectiveness: 100% — Excellent.

A score of 25/25 represents the highest observable quality of the communication itself. It does not guarantee perfect understanding, agreement, memory, execution, or outcomes. Human communication always involves uncertainty because understanding ultimately occurs in the mind of the receiver.

The content of both emails is essentially the same. The information Laura possessed did not change. What changed was the structure of the communication — how the signals were organized, specified, and verified. The first email took four minutes to write. The second took seven. The three additional minutes moved Communication Effectiveness from 24% to 100%.

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Example 2: The Meeting That Felt Decisive

A leadership team spends an hour discussing whether to enter a new market. The debate is vigorous. Data is presented. Risks are weighed. The CEO listens carefully, then says: "I think we're aligned. This is a strong opportunity and I'd like us to pursue it."

Everyone nods. The meeting ends.

Two weeks later, the head of sales has begun hiring for the new market. The head of product has not allocated engineering resources, because she interpreted the CEO's statement as directional rather than final. The CFO has not budgeted for expansion because no one discussed the financial commitment.

Signal Analysis:

Purpose — Score: 3 (Functional). The meeting's topic was clear, though the intended outcome — decision or discussion — was not explicitly stated.

Action — Score: 1 (Weak). No specific next steps, owners, or timelines were assigned after the CEO's closing statement.

Decision — Score: 1 (Weak). The CEO expressed a preference but did not mark a decision. No one stated what was decided, who decided it, or what it committed the organization to. The boundary between discussion and decision was never crossed.

Tone — Score: 5 (Excellent). The CEO's tone was engaged, confident, and appropriate. The emotional dimension supported the content.

Shared Understanding — Score: 1 (Weak). No verification occurred. The CEO assumed alignment. Three leaders later described the outcome differently.

Raw Score: 11 / 25 → Communication Effectiveness: 44%

Communication Effectiveness: 44% — High risk of misunderstanding.

The meeting might have felt productive — strong Tone, clear topic, good discussion. But the signal-level analysis reveals that Decision and Action both scored Weak, and Shared Understanding was never verified. A Communication Effectiveness of 44% with Excellent Tone tells a specific diagnostic story: the meeting felt good but did not produce the alignment it needed. This is why signal scores matter more than the total. The overall percentage tells you there is a problem. The signal scores tell you where it is.

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Example 3: Correct Content, Wrong Tone

A senior engineer sends feedback to a junior colleague's code review:

"This implementation has multiple issues. The error handling is inadequate, the naming conventions are inconsistent, and the test coverage is insufficient. Please revise and resubmit."

Every statement is factually accurate. The content is correct. But the Tone signal fails.

Signal Analysis:

Purpose — Score: 3 (Functional). The purpose — providing feedback for revision — is implicit but reasonably clear from context.

Action — Score: 3 (Functional). "Revise and resubmit" specifies the task, though it does not identify which issues are highest priority or provide guidance on the revision.

Decision — Score: 3 (Functional). The review outcome is implicitly clear: the code is not ready to merge.

Tone — Score: 1 (Weak). The message reads as a catalogue of failures with no acknowledgment of effort, no indication of what was done well, and no investment in the junior engineer's development. "Multiple issues" in the opening frames the entire review negatively. "Please revise and resubmit" reads as dismissive.

Shared Understanding — Score: 1 (Weak). No verification. The junior engineer may focus on the Tone rather than the content, may over-revise out of anxiety, or may revise minimally out of frustration.

Raw Score: 11 / 25 → Communication Effectiveness: 44%

Communication Effectiveness: 44% — High risk of misunderstanding.

The content is right. The Shared Understanding it needed to create — a clear picture of what to fix, what to keep, and how to improve — is undermined by a Tone that causes the receiver to disengage before processing the substance.

Same content, calibrated Tone:

"Good start on this — I can see the logic behind your approach. A few things to address before we merge: the error handling needs to cover the edge cases we discussed last sprint, the naming conventions should follow our style guide (I've linked it below), and we'll need to bring test coverage above 80%. Happy to walk through any of this if it would help."

The factual content is identical. With Tone moved to Functional (3) and the offer to walk through issues creating a path to verify Shared Understanding (score 3), the revised communication scores 15/25 — Communication Effectiveness: 60%. Still room for improvement, but the Tone gap is closed and the content can now be received, absorbed, and acted upon.

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Diagnostic Thinking

The Clario Method™ does not ask: "Was this communication good?"

It asks: "What evidence exists that each communication signal successfully created the intended Shared Understanding?"

This is a critical distinction. "Good" is subjective. Evidence is observable. When an evaluator scores a signal, they should be able to point to specific elements of the communication that support the rating — or point to the absence of elements that would have been necessary.

A Purpose score of 3 (Functional) should be supportable by evidence: "The email states that it is providing a project update, which establishes the general purpose. However, it does not distinguish between informational items and items requiring action, which could cause some recipients to underengage."

A Decision score of 1 (Weak) should be supportable by evidence: "The CEO expressed a preference but did not mark a decision. No statement identified what was decided, who decided it, or whether it was final. Three participants later described the outcome differently."

Diagnosis should always be evidence-based rather than opinion-based. The methodology produces its greatest value when evaluators can explain not just what score they assigned, but why.

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Why 0–1–3–5

The scoring scale intentionally avoids incremental ratings. A scale of 1 through 5 invites evaluators to default to the middle — to assign a 3 when they are uncertain, producing scores that feel reasonable but reveal nothing diagnostically useful.

The Clario scale eliminates the comfortable middle ground. There is no 2 — a score is either Missing (0), Weak (1), or Functional (3). There is no 4 — a score is either Functional (3) or Excellent (5). Each category represents a meaningfully different condition, and the gaps between them are intentional.

The result is a scale that separates communications into distinct diagnostic categories rather than arranging them along a smooth gradient. This increases the reliability of the evaluation, encourages more productive discussions about evidence, and produces scores that are genuinely useful for identifying where Communication Gaps formed and what to do about them.

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The Clario Checklist

Before sending any important communication, ask yourself five questions — one for each signal:

- Is my Purpose obvious?

Will every recipient know why they are receiving this and what it requires of them?

- Is the required Action unmistakable?

Are tasks named, owners assigned, deadlines specified, and standards described?

- Is there a clear Decision?

Is it clear what has been decided, who decided it, whether it is final, and what is still open?

- Will my Tone likely be interpreted as intended?

If I remove the melody from my head, how will these words feel to someone reading them cold?

- Do I have evidence that Shared Understanding exists?

Am I assuming understanding, or have I created a way to verify it?

Five questions. Thirty seconds. The difference between communication that creates Shared Understanding and communication that creates the illusion of it.

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The Clario Method™ is not intended to make communication perfect. Perfect communication is impossible — this book has established that as a foundational principle.

What the methodology does is make misunderstanding visible.

Once misunderstanding becomes visible, it becomes diagnosable. Once it becomes diagnosable, it becomes improvable. Not through better intentions or generic advice, but through specific findings attached to specific signals, supported by specific evidence.

The five signals give you a framework for seeing what most people miss. The scoring model gives you a language for describing what you find. The Communication Effectiveness percentage gives you a way to communicate what you found. And the diagnostic process gives you a method for turning observation into improvement.

You do not need to evaluate every email, every meeting, or every conversation. But the next time a project stalls, a team misaligns, or a relationship strains — and someone says, "We have a communication problem" — you now have a way to answer the question that has never had a systematic answer: Where, exactly, is the gap?