



PROJECT MANAGEMENT
CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE

A.J. CLARK SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
Civil & Environmental Engineering Department

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
2026 PROJECT MANAGEMENT SYMPOSIUM

Train the Nervous System to Lead the System — Building Calm, Connected, and High- Performing Project Teams

Dr. William Brantley

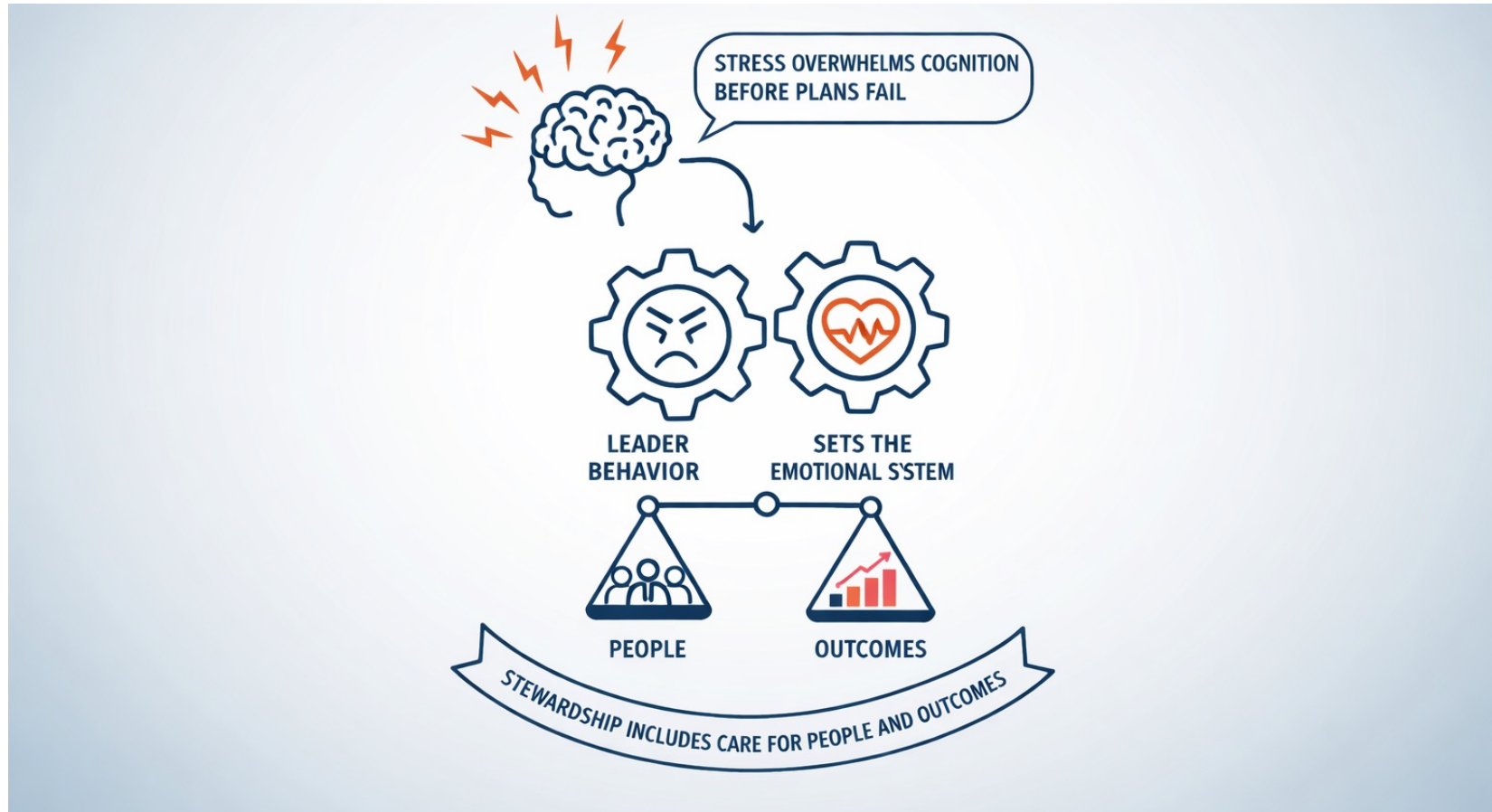
PMP, PMI-ACP, PMI-PBA

PMSYMPOSIUM.UMD.EDU

Why Projects Fail Under Pressure



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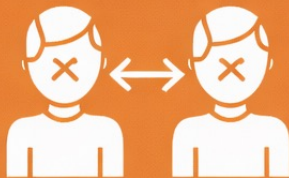
Safety Before Performance



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Psychological safety
enables thinking and speaking



Stress shuts down
collaboration



Leaders regulate
first, then lead



Fight, Flight, or Freeze in Projects



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FIGHT



control

blame

micromanagement

FLIGHT



avoidance

disengagement

FREEZE



silence

stalled decisions

The Nervous System in Projects



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**TEAMS MIRROR
LEADER REGULATION**



**CALM EXPANDS
PROBLEM-SOLVING**

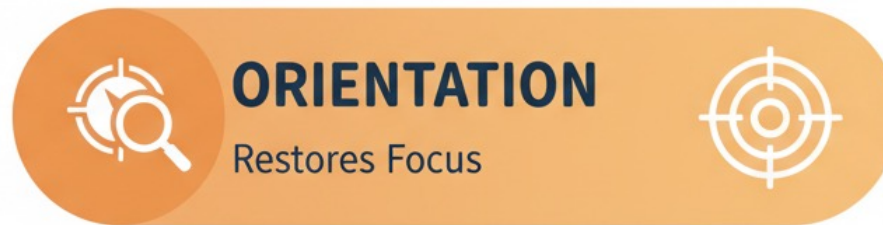
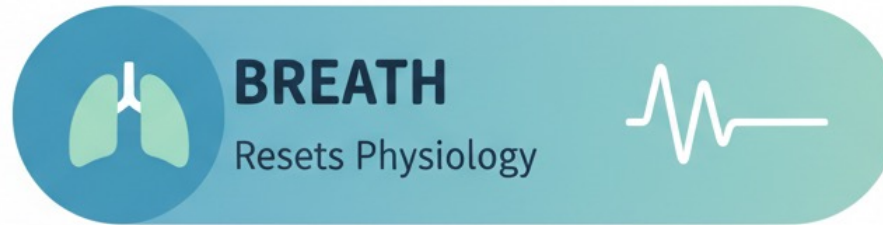


**STRESS NARROWS
TIME AND ATTENTION**

Rapid Regulation Tools



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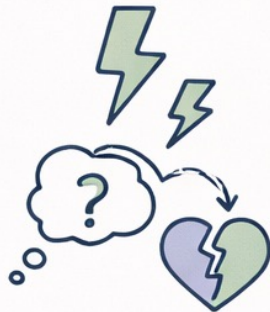


Handling Conflict with Clarity



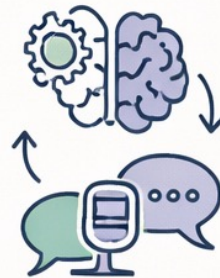
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Conflict signals unmet needs



Identify the root cause.
Listen actively.

Regulation enables dialogue



Manage emotions.
Pause and reflect.
Communicate
respectfully.

Safety builds stakeholder trust

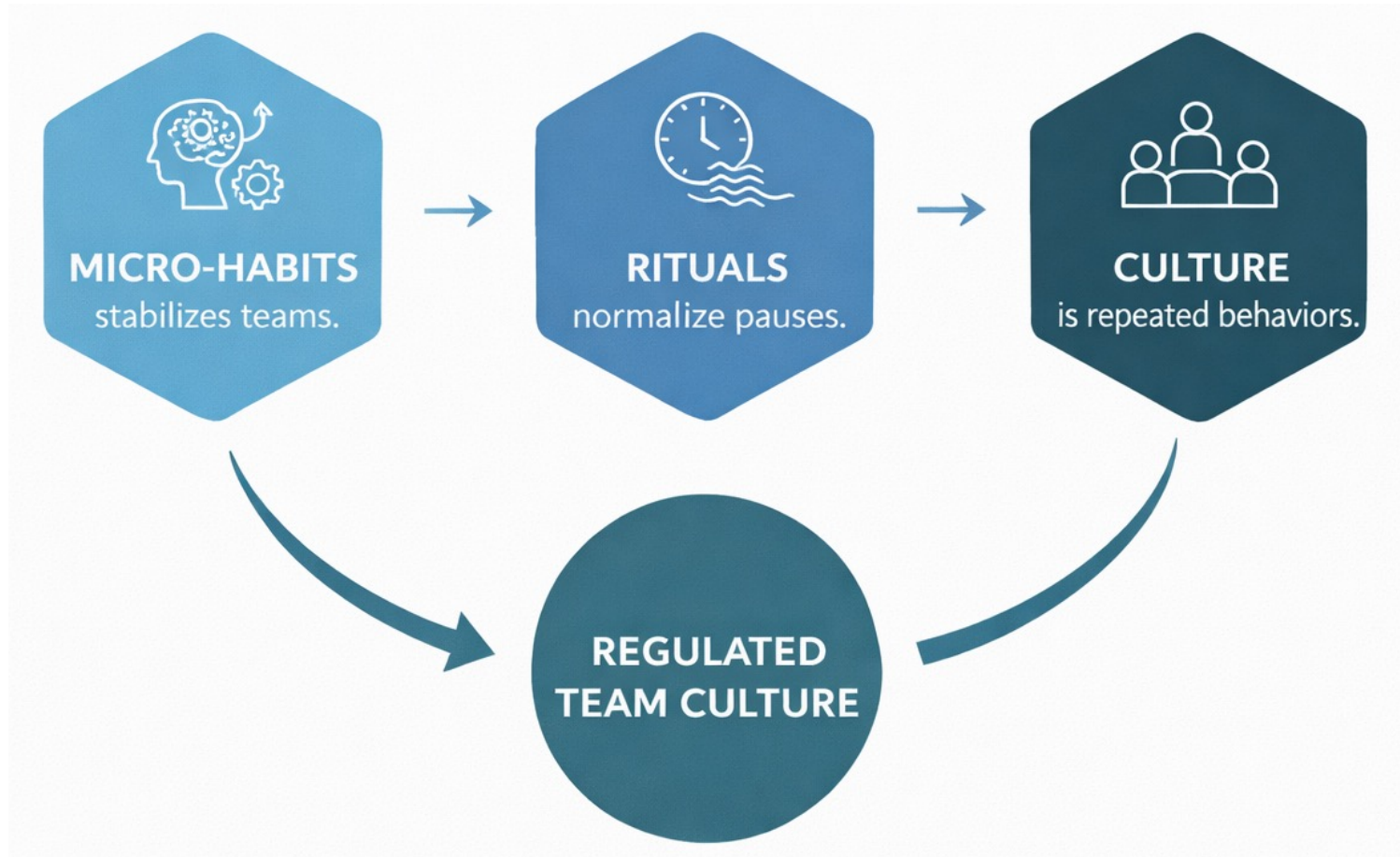


Create brave spaces.
Ensure psychological safety.
Foster open communication.

Designing A Regulated Team Culture



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Your Leadership Presence



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YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM SETS THE CEILING

Self-awareness &
emotional regulation are key



TEAMS BORROW REGULATION FROM LEADERS

Create calm &
inspire confidence



PRESENCE IS A DELIVERY SKILL

Practice,
communicate,
& connect



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Questions & Evaluation

Evaluate Session:



Contact Information:

Dr. Bill Brantley

Email (bill@billbrantley.com)

LinkedIn ([linkedin.com/in/billbrantley/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/billbrantley/))

Websites (billbrantley.com)

