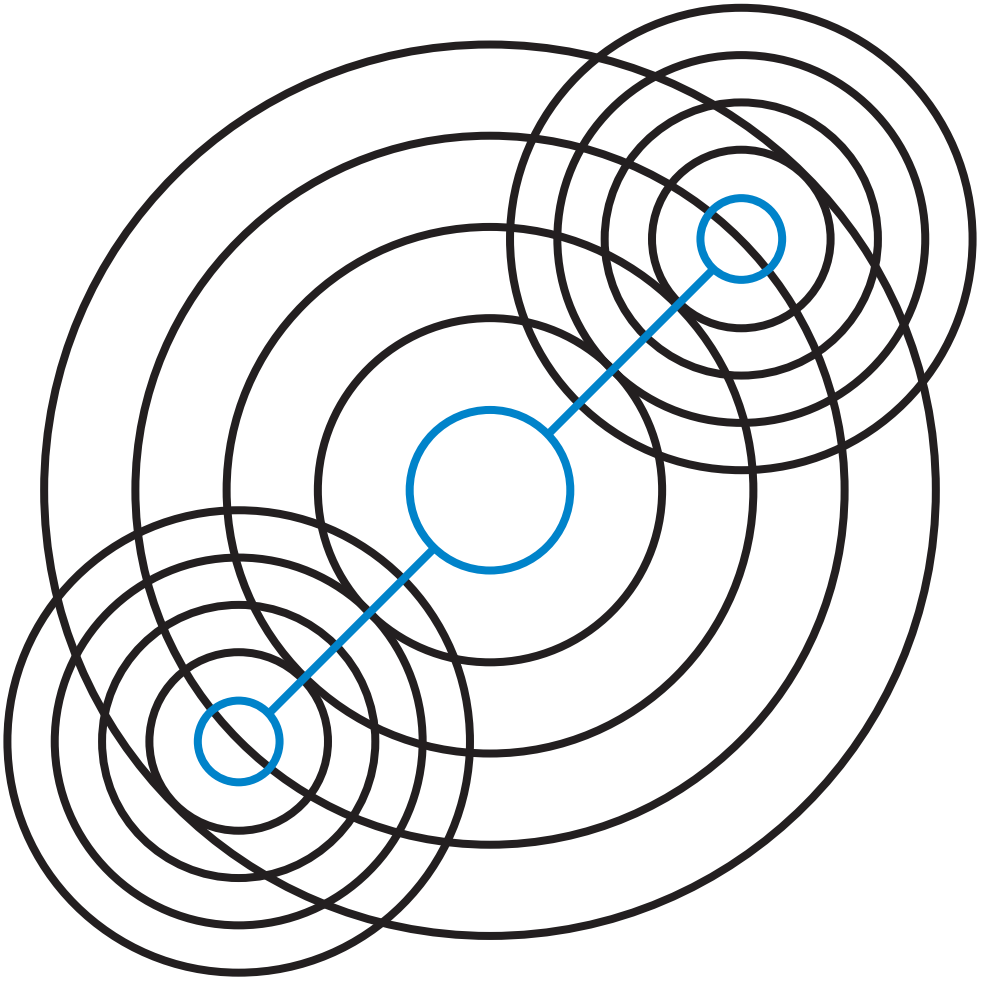
STAKEHOLDERING



DIPLOMATIC SKILLS FOR SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS

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LANNOO CAMPUS

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For Marinette,
who means so much more to me
than the entire universe and beyond

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IN A NUTSHELL

There were two reasons for writing this book: budget responsibility and job satisfaction.

Anyone who wants to achieve something of significance within a complex organisation is dependent to a significant degree on the goodwill of other people to make constructive collaboration possible. Or at least to ensure that they do not actively work against you. Whether or not things actually turn out the way you planned is another matter, because others also have their own agenda and their own objectives. Not all agendas are compatible. This can sometimes give rise to a lack of clarity, friction, delays and double work. Which, in turn, can cost a sackful of money.

As a professional or a manager, you know your job through and through. You devise solutions that can make a difference both for your organisation and for your customers. The fact that you can develop these solutions and make them work gives you moments of intense satisfaction.

It is frustrating when others cast doubt on (or even ignore) the quality and the usefulness of your contribution. And it is equally frustrating when your knowledge, your ability and your desire to improve things are unable to find proper expression or fail to receive the recognition they deserve.

If you want to implement a project efficiently and effectively, so that both you and your organisation can reap the full benefits of your work, you will need to find a way to deal with other third parties, your stakeholders, in a targeted and reasoned manner. You will need to find methods that will turn these others into allies, so that they will also be able to benefit from what you are trying to achieve.

Developing diplomatic skills is the best way to do this. Diplomacy demands tact and respect. It means having a real interest in the things that are important for your stakeholders, so that you can find the ideal approach that will allow you to bring everyone's different interests into line. It is an active process of searching together, of influencing and being influenced. It is a process driven by rational analysis and by a method of implementation that is as systematic as the managing of your project. All these things, taken together, are what we call stakeholdering.

Stakeholdering is a methodology that unites fire with water. Stakeholdering offers you a rational approach to non-rational processes, which, even though they are directed more by instinct than by reason, nonetheless follow their own dynamic, so that they can be predicted and managed.

Two of these non-rational elements are central to this dynamic: the urge to defend and extend your own territory and the phenomenon of power.

These are also two elements that are difficult to control, but which can make a huge difference to the successful realisation of your projects.

In chapters 1 and 2 you will gain insights into the nature of territories: how they originate, how they are defended and extended (including the pitfalls this often entails) and how you can best deal with them.

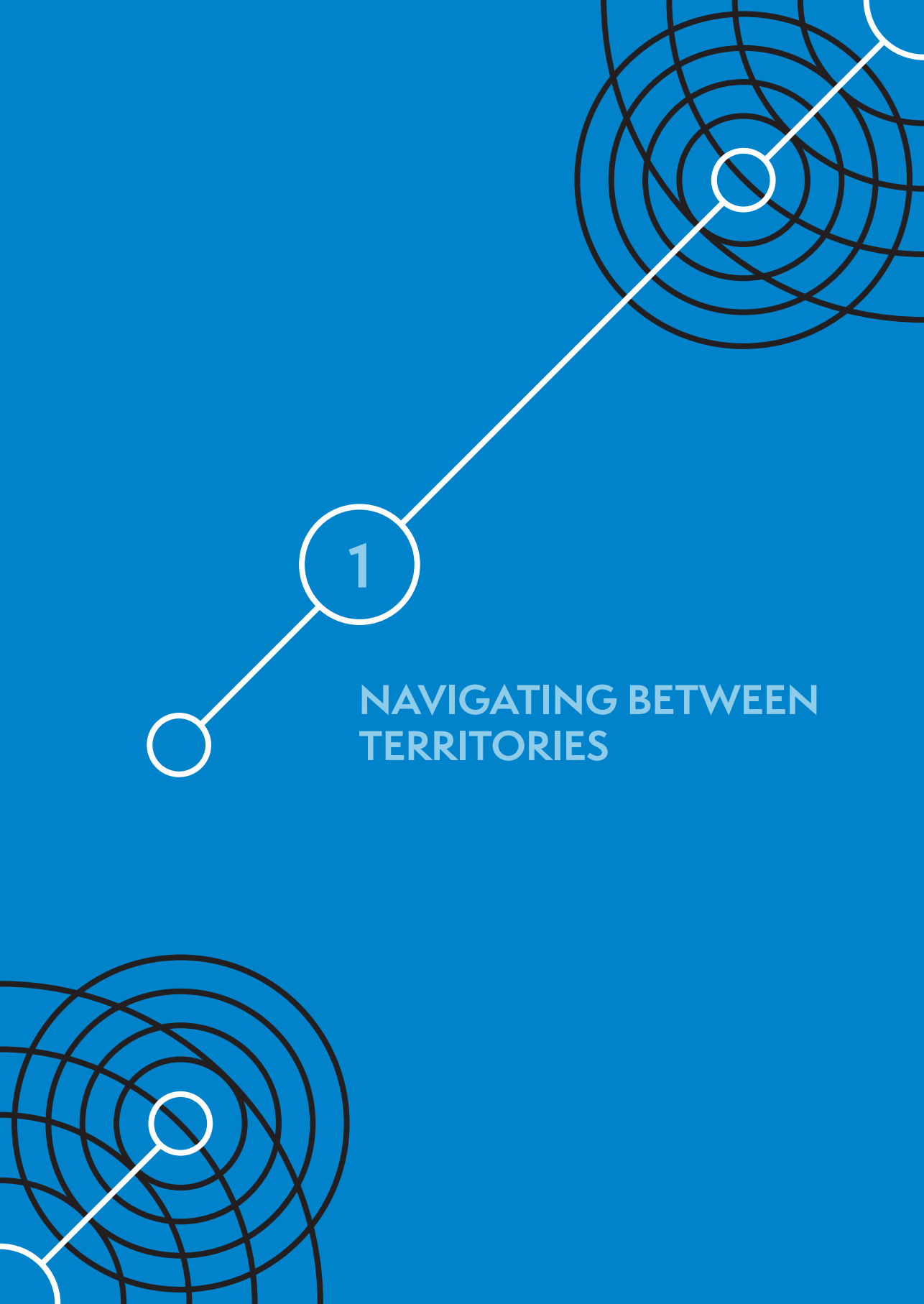
In order to be able to operate in an environment populated by stakeholders and their agendas, the first thing you need to do is to map out the landscape. Who is able to influence the project? What is the attitude of each stakeholder towards the project at the present time? Who are the key players and who do you need to make closer alliances with? This process will be examined in detail in chapter 3.

The next task is to forge partnerships with the key players you have identified. Chapters 4 and 5 will show you exactly how to do this.

If you are hoping to complete a project of some size, somewhere along the way you will inevitably come into contact with power figures. They can often have a decisive impact on your success or failure. Dealing with power is never simple, because it is a subject that affects us all emotionally, irrespective of whether you exercise power or are simply subject to it. It is a dynamic that is rooted deep within our human instinct. Chapter 6 will explore that nature of power and how you can best approach it.

Chapter 7 outlines a number of detailed interventions to illustrate how you can avoid difficulties with stakeholders or, alternatively, how you can get your project back on track if, for whatever reason, it at some point gets derailed.

I wish you good reading, good luck and plenty of inspiration!



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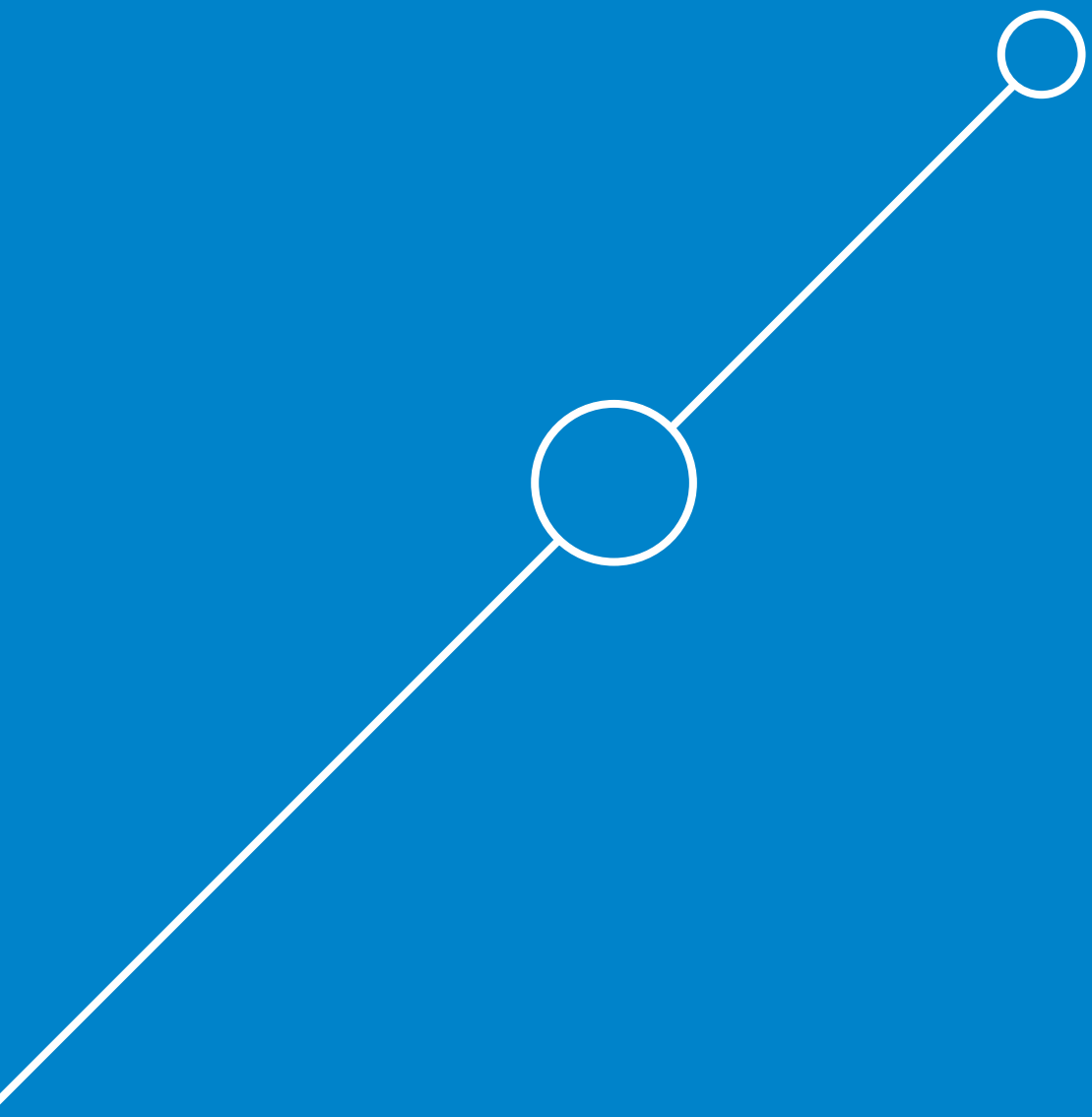
NAVIGATING BETWEEN TERRITORIES



1 DIPLOMATIC SKILLS ARE A NECESSITY

The main reason for setting up the European Union was to avoid repeating the horrors of the two world wars. Countries were tied to each other economically and, later, also monetarily. This benefited the prosperity and security of each country, whilst at the same time creating a dependence on each other that made serving their combined collective interests a necessity.

There are few objectives more important than these. Even so, we know that in practice things do not always run as smoothly as might reasonably be expected. The EU is an economic union, but not a political one. As a top European official once put it: 'Europe remains a collection of individual states.' Each of them has its own objectives, its own government, it own elections and its own opposition parties, who are all too ready to complain about Europe's 'interference' when it suits them.

There is a constant need to strike a balance between national autonomy and European collectivism. And it often happens that the former takes precedence over the latter. Some countries want to be in the euro area; others do not. Some are willing to accept African refugees; others are not. Some are happy to follow the provisions of jointly agreed European legislation; others prefer to play fast and loose with democratic principles and values. Some countries even leave the union altogether. But through it all, the European ship needs to be kept stable, afloat and moving forwards – because there is a lot at stake.

Europe will not be able to achieve this important objective by trying to force sovereign states to do things (or not do things) through diktats from Brussels. This would be wholly counterproductive. Nor is it possible to simply agree to everyone's separate wishes and see how things turn out, since this would risk bringing the entire European construction crashing to the ground. Instead, it is necessary to constantly steer a middle course between all the different interests, both collective and particular, so that it continues to be possible to find new balances that make the ultimate objective – a Europe that is economically strong and at peace – more rather than less secure.

How can you do this? Above all, through diplomacy.

Fortunately, getting things done within organisations is slightly less complex. But the basic dynamic remains the same: you need to achieve an objective that serves not only the company's interests but also your own interests and those of your team. And because you never work in a vacuum, your success will always depend on the cooperation of other teams, departments and interest groups. If you are leading a project that seeks to introduce change, you know that this will have consequences for how people are used to doing things, something that is seldom comfortable for those involved. You also know that you will often be accused of 'interfering' in things that are 'none of your business', so that you will need to find ways of getting these critics on your side, if you want to avoid the project becoming bogged down in endless delays. Last but not least, you also know that it is going to cost a lot of energy to deal with all this resistance.

About diplomacy

As a rule, diplomacy and company politics are not among the favourite pastimes of experts, professionals and managers. Quite the reverse: most of them hate these things with a vengeance and look on them with contempt: 'A waste of time, pursued only by people who are concerned with the superficial rather than the essential. It has nothing to do with the real work. Worse still, it even gets in the way of the real work, slowing it down and sometimes even making it impossible. If you really want to know: politics is a field that every right-minded professional should avoid. He has better things to do with his time.'

Jeffrey Pfeffer, a professor at the renowned Stanford University, was probably the first academic to take politics within organisations seriously and carry out systematic research into its nature.[1] What he soon discovered was that most people have very mixed feelings when it comes to political or diplomatic skills.

When he asked employees whether internal politics help organisations to function more efficiently or not, only 42 percent said that it had a positive effect. So does this mean that senior management should attempt to ban politics from their companies? 50 percent think that it should mean precisely that. Would people then be happier if politics played no role in their place of work? 60 percent agreed that they would. And now comes the really big leap in the figures: does politics of this kind exist in most organisations?

A resounding 93 percent are convinced that it does. An almost equally resounding 90 percent believe that you need to possess these political skills to get ahead in the organisation.

These figures reflect what we have already said about mixed feelings: people would prefer not to have politics in their company but it is there whether they like it or not, and you need to be good at it if you want to make a successful career. In other words, politics is a necessary evil. With the emphasis on 'necessary'.

Given these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that in competency manuals you always find a section on 'political skills' as a domain that you need to develop and manage. If you then look a little further, you will usually find the following description of the various sub-domains:[2]

- Being able to manoeuvre calmly and effectively in complex political situations.
- Being sensitive for the way in which people and organisations function.
- Anticipating potential landmines and being able to amend your route and plans to deal with them.
- Regarding internal politics as a necessary part of organisations and adjusting to it accordingly.

This book wants to serve as a pilot, to show you how to navigate your way through the treacherous waters you will need to cross if you wish to reconcile the collective interest with your own best interests. It will explain how you can avoid problems and pitfalls, making use of favourable currents and opportunities to arrive at your final objective safe and sound. This will often mean that your course does not follow a straight line from A to B, but will have to wind its way through the obstacles you will inevitably encounter along the way. It demands skill to be able to do this and it brings great satisfaction when you are able to do it successfully.

As the central thread running through this exploratory voyage of discovery, we will make use of the concept of 'territories': understanding what they are, why they exist, how they manifest themselves and, above all, how you can best deal with them. Only then will you be able to lay the solid foundations you need for the success of your project. As you will see, looking at matters from a territorial perspective helps to explain a lot of the things that happen in organisations. Yet strangely enough, very little is ever written or said about

this key aspect of organisational systems. This is probably because territorial behaviour, in general, has negative connotations: the implication is that organisations would be better off without it. But this is most definitely not the case, as we shall see in the following pages! Territorial behaviour is built into our DNA. Denying its existence is like denying that the earth moves around the sun. Worse still, this misplaced reticence would also deny you access to a remarkably powerful dynamic that you can use to achieve your goals.

2 THE TERRITORIAL IMPULSE IS UNIVERSAL

There is no getting around it. It is simply the way things have been since the end of the 19th century: football teams that play at home have a huge advantage. Everywhere in the world. At all times. Okay, there may be some variations from country to country, but if you compare the total number of games won at home against the total number of games lost, the general picture is indisputable: there is a clear home advantage, ranging from just over 80 percent in countries like Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina to between 60 and 65 percent in major footballing nations like Portugal, Spain, France, England, The Netherlands and Belgium, to 'just' 55 percent in Northern Ireland and the Baltic states.

This phenomenon is not quite so easy to explain as it might seem. In theory, the location of the game should make no difference at all: the ball is the same shape, the pitch is the same size and the number of players is the same, no matter where you play. Even so, the difference – and it is a big difference – remains. So what is the answer? Every local journalist and barroom pundit no doubt has his (or her) own explanation, but it may be wiser (if perhaps less fun) to rely on the insights of a good statistician.

Richard Pollard[3] is just such a statistician. He has made the most complete investigation to date of football results, while several of his other colleagues have done something similar, some of them with regard to other team sports, both inside Europe and beyond. This is what they have concluded.

If you ask the football supporters, the answer is crystal-clear: they – and no-one else – make the difference. How numerous they are, how close together they stand, how hard they scream and shout, and, above all, how much they sing. Sounds reasonable? Maybe. But how can you explain that home advantage still persists, even when there are only a handful of supporters? Or when clubs are forced to play behind closed doors as a punishment (usually for some form of misbehaviour by those same supporters!). And how is this mysterious supporters' benefit supposed to work? Are supporters an advantage for the home team or a disadvantage for the away one? Do they make their own players stronger? Or do they influence referees' decisions (a subject we will return to later)? They won't like to hear it, but a detailed analysis of the role of supporters in helping to create home advantage is wholly inconclusive. There is nothing to confirm that they make the difference they would like to think.

Might the distance the away team has to travel be the deciding factor? Does spending x hours in a coach, train or plane mean that they arrive at the game more tired than the players of the home side? Again, it sounds plausible. But again, the statistics – both for international and domestic pre-match travel – do nothing to support this contention. Travel does not make the difference.

So what about the sheer familiarity of your own home ground? After all, the home team trains there every day and plays there every second week. The players know the exact dimensions of the pitch, the distance to the terraces, the places where their most die-hard supporters stand. Their club flags and emblems are all around them and sometimes they even play with a specially made club ball. Could this be the elusive decisive factor? Might it explain, for example, why home advantage strongly declined in both Italy and England following the break in competition caused by the Second World War? Sadly, no: for the third time in a row, it is difficult to show empirically that familiarity with the surroundings – feasible though it seems – is the key to home team success. And the same applies to special tactical guidelines give by the home team managers.

Two factors that do make a difference...

There is, however, clear empirical evidence to show that referees play a demonstrable role in the creation of home advantage. To give you some idea: in a single season in the English Premier League referees gave 698 yellow cards

to visiting players against just 512 for players from the home team. Similarly, home sides were awarded 42 penalties against a paltry 26 for the visitors.[4] When other referees were shown video material of the same phases of play, but without sight or sound of the crowd, this tendency to favour the home team disappeared almost completely.[5] 'Do you see what we mean?' say the supporters with pride. 'That's all our doing!' 'Do you see what we mean?' say FIFA with equal triumphalism. 'That is why we desperately need the VAR!'

For the theme of this book, it is the second factor favouring home advantage that is potentially more interesting. What is this X-factor? It is all a matter of testosterone. Seriously, this is not a joke. The level of testosterone in players is significantly higher before a home match than it is for a training session or for an away fixture. And the level is highest of all when the home game is against a team regarded as one of the home team's biggest rivals.[6] The most likely explanation for this is that the territorial impulse – the urge to defend your own territory – is as old as mankind itself. What we have, we hold – at all costs. You want to take it from us? 'Come and have a go, if you think you're hard enough!'

This kind of territoriality is perhaps best known among animals. There are many species that delineate a specific area sufficiently large to guarantee both adequate food for the group and the best possible conditions in which to procreate. In addition, territories also have a regulatory social function: if they are clearly defined and marked, it creates clarity for all animals of the same species. Animals not belonging to the group will usually keep their distance, in order to avoid conflict. Conflict demands the use of extra energy that can be better used to find a more effective way to obtain the resources needed for survival.[7]

The biological roots of this territorial behaviour are also to be found in our human genes. After all, we are just another mammal used to living in groups. The ways in which we define and defend our territories is perhaps a little more sophisticated than leaving trails of urine and fighting tooth and nail with rivals who want to steal our women. At least, it sometimes seems more sophisticated. But in essence, what is at stake is much the same.

Imagine the scene. A residential estate in a pleasant rural area. At the heart of the estate Violet Avenue leads on to Primrose Lane. Sounds picturesque? It is – apart from one small problem. Both roads are shortcuts between two motorways. As a result, thousands of cars pass each day, especially during

the morning and evening rush hours. To make matters worse, there are now roadworks. The junction of both roads is closed off with red and white warning tape and there are signs everywhere to divert the approaching traffic. The top layer of tarmac has already been scraped off for replacement, so that even if the road was open you would currently need a tank to get through without damaging your vehicle. But for some people that doesn't matter. Several times a day, a driver jumps furiously out of his car, tears down the tape and pushes the signs to one side, before furiously announcing to any bystanders who may be watching: 'This is my route and I will drive on it if I want to!'

This driver has established the basic components of a territory: the feelings of ownership ('This is my route') and autonomy ('I will drive on it if I want to'). You will note that these feelings are only experienced within his own perception of things. In reality, the road does not belong to him but to the local council and he cannot drive on it because further on there are still more signs – not to mention big potholes in the surface – that make it impossible. Even so, his own experience of the situation is sufficient to give rise to primeval territorial behaviour in all its glory!

This kind of territoriality is universal. On a large scale, it applies to the borders between countries, who will fight to hold on to every square metre of their ground. This is getting close to the concept of territory amongst animals. But we clever humans have developed plenty of other variations. There is the field of action: my job and my function description ('Hey, Fred, what are you doing? That's my task!'). There is the field of relationships: my partner and my children ('Nobody has the right to interfere with the way I raise my kids!'). There is even the field of ideas ('That was my idea first and no-one is going to steal it!').

… also in professional organisations

It is impossible to go to work every day and do things that have no involvement with others. There is always interaction. Where does your work come from? What happens to it once you have finished it? Who can you turn to for help, if you need it? Not knowing these things would be like a torture that is sometimes used in prisons. You dig a hole (preferably a large one) and then fill it up again with the earth you have just dug out of it. Then you repeat the process. Ad infinitum. And you do it completely alone.

No, this is not really possible – at least, I hope not for your sake!

We work by definition in networks, which means that we are constantly involved with others and with their territories. This is certainly the case in project organisations, where project teams are often drawn from the members of different departments, so that the managers of those departments also have a finger in the collective pie. Every project therefore has implications for many other people within the organisation, which means that they are also 'interested parties'.

It is regrettable that the territorial aspect of working together has so far been so inadequately researched, since it is an aspect that can help to explain many other collaborative phenomena. We all know that territories play a role, but we tend to regard them like we regard politics: as something irrational, based purely on emotions and ultimately leading nowhere constructive. This is a shame, because it is essentially the same as saying that territories don't belong, that we would be better off without them. According to this logic, they are no more than a tiresome marginal matter.

If we qualify territories in this manner, there is a danger of two things happening: we risk reducing the amount of energy we currently devote to deciphering and understanding other people's territories and we are even more likely than is currently the case (we have all done it) to negatively label territorial behaviour as defensive. People's reaction will quickly become: 'Territories? Don't have anything to do with them!' That would be a pity, since territories open up numerous possibilities that allow us to become many times more effective, if only we can learn how to properly read their underlying dynamics.

3 THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF TERRITORIES

To start with, a definition: a territory is an area of your life that matters, in which you experience independence and feel free to take the initiative. In short, we regard a territory as our property. There are two major fields where this applies: the private domain and the public arena.

The private domain

We all have our own private territory. It is, almost quite literally, the area that we have delineated to safeguard our personal privacy and security. This area probably includes your home and perhaps some other specific place where you can shut yourself off from the outside world. It might be a man cave, or the room where your computer is, or the place where the children go to do their own thing.

This is something you can see in children from an early age. Sometimes it might be a special blanket they love to crawl under. Or under the table. Or behind the sofa. From the age of six or seven years, our little darlings actually start to mark out these territories. This becomes even more evident once they learn how to write: suddenly, there is a notice on their bedroom door, instructing: 'KEEP OUT – OR ELSE!' (it is hard to expect too much subtlety at this age). They claim a place where they can keep 'their' things and be as messy as they like. Moreover, it is a place where other members of the family, except perhaps the household pets, can only enter with their explicit permission and where mum and dad should definitely keep their ideas about neatness and tidiness to themselves. Even if you risk breaking your ankle every time you need to enter their room (possibly to rescue your hopelessly lost cat, which you haven't seen for the past week), it is not recommended to suggest that they might like to 'tidy things up a bit'. And you are effectively committing parental suicide if (God forbid!) you decide to start clearing things up yourself.

Everyone needs a *private hideaway*. This is essential, and it remains so your whole life long. The strength of this need can be measured by the intensity of

emotions people display when their hideaway is entered uninvited by others or taken away from them, so that it no longer provides the security they crave.

Hopefully, this has never happened to you but perhaps you have heard the story from others: having your private territory invaded is one of the most traumatising aspects of burglary. It is bad enough to be robbed of your prized possessions, but the idea that strangers have been in your home is somehow even worse. Your private sanctuary has been defiled.

At the other side of the legal spectrum, depriving prisoners of their own private space can be used as a punishment technique in prisons. In a jail, privacy is non-existent. There is nowhere you can go to be alone. This can have a remarkably destabilising effect on the people who experience it. There is, quite literally, no place where they can hide.

In addition to a private hideaway, we also all have an absolute need for *personal space*. This is something everyone can relate to. We feel uncomfortable when people get too close. We want our bubble of physical integrity to be respected and we have a highly sensitive compass that tells us when things risk getting out of hand.[8]

Imagine a waiting room with a long row of chairs against the wall. If someone comes in and sits on a chair at one end of the row, you can guess without too much difficulty where the next person is most likely to sit. It will certainly not be the chair directly next to the first person, nor will it be the chair at the opposite end of the row. It will most probably be a chair somewhere in the middle: far enough to be safe, but close enough not to seem unfriendly. What's more, this also leaves enough space for the third person who enters to sit between the second person and the other end of the row. This pattern will continue until there comes a point when the next person to enter has no option but to sit immediately next to someone else. You can see this same phenomenon every day in waiting rooms, trains, buses and even in public lavatories, not just for the gents, but also for women (who can see from the 'vacant-engaged' signs on the doors which toilets are occupied and which are not).

We like to keep our distance, but not to the extent that this distance makes us feel excluded. It is almost like the measured steps of a dance, a dance which is built into our genes. Everyone at the right interval. Close enough, but no further. And if circumstances dictate that it is physically impossible