

Effective Conversations



Conversation tools and techniques A Workshop for CQ Middle Leaders

Presented by Chris Patty, Human Ingredient



About this workbook and toolbox

This workbook and toolbox for effective conversations builds on our practical work and experience in many organisations over the years; owes a lot to the input and conversations we have had with a vast array of people – clients, colleagues, friends and mentors; and draws on a wide range of conceptual frameworks, ideas, models and tools designed by various practitioners and researchers in the field.

In particular, it borrows from the work of our colleague **Bob Dick** (Interchange) and is based on some of the discussion tools popularised in **Peter Senge's** *Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*.

The Guide also contains extensive source materials, processes and tools derived or excerpted from previous publications produced by **Bill Cropper** (*TEAM Technologies Forum Pty. Ltd.*) and **Chris Patty** (*Ceejai Consulting Pty Ltd*) and **Bernadette Rutyna** (*Systems in Action, OD Options*) and the Australian Conflict Resolution Network, over which prior intellectual property rights are reserved.

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Section 1 – Getting started



Background to these workshops

Good relationships are built on good conversations. They provide the major forum where people learn together, solve problems, make decisions and formulate strategies and actions. When you think about what most of us do day in and day out, at work and at home, we spend a lot of time having (or avoiding having) conversations and discussions.

Yet despite the fact that we engage in them all the time, examining how conversations can be more productive seems to escape us. It's as though conversations are so fundamental to everyday life, most of us never stop to think how we might become more effective and skilful at them. We're on auto pilot a lot of the time when it comes to understanding what makes conversations work – they either do or don't. This limits what we can achieve from any ONE conversation.

Without learning and practicing conversational tools to help us interact better, most people interact poorly and conversations become difficult. Knowing when and how to use different conversational tools and techniques to improve the productivity of your meetings and other conversational interactions you have is a vital but neglected element for personal and organisational success.

Who is this program for?

These workshops will benefit anyone (*e.g. middle leaders, managers, principals, teachers, team leaders, committee members, community groups, facilitators, trainers*) who wants to increase their personal mastery of discussion tools and work on ways to foster more productive conversations in meetings and other interactions – either at work or in the broader community. So this workshop is for you if you want to:

- Make your meetings more productive and meaningful
- Make yourself heard and confront the reality of each conversation
- Get people thinking together and sharing ideas openly
- Replace dead-end debates with more skillful discussion and open dialogue
- Keep discussions on track and constructively channel conflict
- *Really* listen to opposing views and not just give listening lip service
- Handle '*game playing*' and other evasive conversational tactics
- Forge consensus and collaborate on common goals

Content Areas in Brief:

- Diagnose the discussions you have, what makes them effective or difficult and what you can do to get more out of them
- Observe and interpret more accurately what's going on in discussions and meetings
- Analyse your own conversational style and the impact on others
- Practice productive conversational tools, including precision and strategic questioning, perceptual positions, assumption testing, dialogue
- Deal with difficult moments and your own and others defensive patterns and emotions
- Balance advocacy and inquiry in conversations
- Move from debate and adversarial processes to collaborative conversation and dialogue
- Raise the level of frank, open interchange of views and perspectives between people
- Learn how to constructively use confrontation
- Learn how to structure a productive discussion and lead other people through it

Learning Processes

The program is delivered using a mix of action methods and experiential skills development sessions. These are supported by underlying relationship management theory whilst drawing from contemporary international best practice. The principles of adult learning and the recognition of individual learning styles guide the delivery of these programs. An appropriate mix of theory and practice is therefore geared to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skill to the particular group composition.

Delivery Modes.

This program is delivered in a two day format as outlined below.

Day one will focus on the following

- Observing, understanding and utilising the motivation of people in conversations – ourselves and others
- Techniques for building self awareness during conversations of ourselves and others to reduce habitual responding
- Approaches for setting up the climate to have a difficult conversation with another
- Tools for effectively managing the conversation process

Between workshop processes include:

- A webinar /s for ongoing support and information
- Identifying particular workplace situations and apply skills and new learning
- Journal writing about planning, conducting and reflecting on the conversations
- Additional readings

Day two will extend the skilling practice from day 1 and may include:

- Reflection and leanings from day 1 including workplace practice;
- Managing anger, and aggressive conversations, how to influence in conflict;
- Integrating effective conversation processes with policies and procedures;
- Developing a checklist for effective conversations and provide feedback for self and others;
- Effective conversations in teams
- Maintaining equilibrium with the diversity of conversations every day
- Developing peer support, backup and coaching systems to assist with difficult conversations.

Effective conversations program draft outline

Day 1

TIME	WORKSHOP OUTLINE
8:30am	Welcome, Arrivals and Coffee
8:45am	<p>Purpose and brief overview of the workshop, facilitators' introductions and workshop learning processes. Housekeeping</p> <p>Introductions and getting clear on our purpose – participants introduce themselves and discuss their own challenges in small groups.</p> <p>Expectations and contributions (people need to make a decision here about their level of commitment and openness and what they are willing to contribute to their own and other's learning) Work in small groups and then report back to the whole group.</p> <p>Group agreement developed</p>
10:15am	MORNING TEA
10:30am	<p>Group learning – building this group to learn together, content and process</p> <p>Discussion and reflection on previous experiences, learnings and application – where people applied their skills, blockages to application of learnings, and success stories; Techniques for developing self awareness in ourselves and others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding the motivation of people in difficult situations – ourselves and others ▪ Status and Power – Impacts on work relationships. What do you think are your sources of power? How stable/temporary are they? How does being one up or one down affect your relationships in effective conversations?
12:30pm	LUNCH
1:15pm	<p>Approaches for setting up the climate to have an effective conversation with another:</p> <p>Skills practice in -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LACE and rapport building – setting the climate to have the conversation ▪ Perceptual Positions
3:15pm	AFTERNOON TEA
3:30PM	<p>Checking our assumptions</p> <p>Next steps and actions back in the workplace:</p> <p>Conflict mapping process for a difficult conversation (pg 67). Read checklist on pg 75 and reflect on your own way of commencing a more effective conversation – first steps are important.</p>
4:00pm	Finish day 1

Building effective conversations

Understanding Motivation in Conversations

What actually makes an effective conversation? Sometimes we can walk away from a conversation with a sense that it went well, you achieved a good outcome and the others in the conversation had a similar experience. Some topics of conversation such as money or sex we all find difficult at times. Usually though difficulties are associated with our expectations, i.e. we anticipate trouble. We think that what we have to say will be met with hostility or resistance or that our words will harm others. We then think further that a conflict will arise between our needs and feelings and those of another person. It is the anticipation of conflict in our minds, usually not consciously, that sets a process into motion.

We generate concerns and anxieties about the outcomes in conversations whenever we consider that someone will criticise or that an issue is delicate or sensitive. In other words, we have already imagined a worst case scenario before engaging in the conversation.

Our relationship with the other person is important also. Regardless of our positional role, we estimate our chances of success based on how we see our relationship. Are they “one up” on us? Am I always one up on them? Is it worthwhile making the effort here because the outcome may not be favourable? The likelihood of confrontation creates anxiety and this restricts our thinking usually to one of two possible outcomes. Will I win or lose? The way in which we weigh up the odds of a favourable outcome is based on measures of *power*. Edgar Schein calls this “saving face”. All conversations have this as a base and we do what we can in most instances to maintain our own face and assist others to do the same. When we sense a confrontation or difficulty arising we get caught between saving our own “face” and that of the other person.

You may be totally unaware that this process is taking place. We know it’s going on though, because it shows in our behaviour and attitudes. Any situation where you imagine yourself confronting someone or you feel awkward about the conversation creates doubts or concerns which can undermine your resolve to speak up or censor your voice.

Do you recognize any of the following “voices in the head?”

- They might get angry
- They might take offence
- I’ll say the wrong thing and get into trouble
- I can’t say that to my boss / manager / director
- It’ll get nasty
- She won’t like me anymore
- There’s no point. They never listen to me anyway.
- It’ll end up in shouting match
- I won’t be able to keep up.

Or these:

- He can’t help it.
- Nobody’s perfect, we’ve all got faults.
- She’s having a tough time at the moment anyway.
- He’s only got one leg
- He’s inexperienced and doesn’t know what he’s doing.
- They’d be devastated.
- I just feel sorry for them really.
- Oh, he’s on his way out. What’s the point?
- She won’t be able to cope if she hears that.

Both lists reflect the situation as seen from our own perspective, without really checking where the other person stands. The first group indicates our anxieties about feeling “one down” in the relationship, or the other person being more powerful. The second group is the reverse. We adopt a mindset of being in the superior position, judging others as inadequate and really lacking the ability to change, so really why

bother? This means we defeat ourselves before we even start. We can only deal with issues and have effective discussions, if we recognise our own negative internal self talk that leads us to poor assumptions. We need to question these and develop new mindsets and strategies prior to going into the situation.

Reflect on your experience.

The areas / conversations where I want to build my effectiveness for me are:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪▪▪▪▪

What would “effective” look like in the areas mentioned above – for me, for the others in the conversation?

Area 1: Effectiveness looks like.....

Area 2: Effectiveness looks like.....

Area 3: Effectiveness looks like.....

Area 4: Effectiveness looks like

<p>What stops me from being as effective as I can in these conversations?</p>
--

<p>What things would you change?</p>

<p>Change:</p>

<p>Change:</p>

<p>Change:</p>

A Word on Power

The Usual Definition of Power

We live in a world of power transactions. Power is all around us and governs our relationships; yet it is invisible like the air we breathe. It affects how we see others and what we feel towards people and consequently our relationships.

A ladder with rungs

This way of thinking about power is hierarchical, like a ladder. We learn from this image that power happens in a linear fashion, either up or down. This structure is very clear in the workplace. Jobs have a title, which indicate your position in the organisation and who is either above or below you, or on the same rung on the ladder. The indicators of power extend to include remuneration, perks, vehicles, office space, number of support staff etc. The assumptions being that greater responsibility and accountability is exchanged for these “trappings” of power, although this isn’t always the case.

So where does this “perpendicular” power come from?

- *Legitimate*

This is power that is conferred through laws or social arrangement of the culture in which we live. Whether we’re a king, a parent, a manager, a teacher, this aspect of power arises from out many professional and social roles. It refers to the social status and responsibility that comes with the job or appointment.

- *Resources*

Power also comes from what we own or at least have access to, giving us power over those who don’t. Resources may be financial, key information, natural resources or specific equipment. So even if you’re a school child with the best or most tradable sandwiches, resources give you power over others.

- *Expertise*

If you have knowledge or skills that someone else needs but doesn’t have access to, you may have power over them. If you’re the only person who knows how to open the front door when it’s locked, you’ll have power over them. Anyone with expertise who is currently in demand will have a measure of this kind of power over those who don’t.

- *Charisma*

This is more difficult to define than wealth or legitimate authority, but still reflects the up – down nature of power on the ladder. Charisma may be due to charm, honest and clear articulation, moral integrity or holiness or a personal presence that make a significant impression on others. It may also be manufactured as in pop stars or sporting idols. This type of power exerts a strong influence whereby people try to imitate the behaviour or achievements of “charismatic” people. In some cases this extends to giving our money, vote and sometimes our lives to follow these people.

A view from the ladder

Because perpendicular power is all around us, it pays to bring it out into the open and to understand how much it affects us. This is of course risky, because we have also absorbed thinking that tells us that the only way to confront someone is to be higher up the ladder or superior in relation to the sources of power described above. For most of us, we also need to believe we’re right (i.e. on a higher rung) in order to confront someone. We anticipate the confrontation as a battle, and in order to win we need to come from the superior position.

Putting the “ladder” into perspective

There is nothing either “bad” or “good” about the ladders we use to ascribe power. They do give some measure or ruler to make comparisons and provide some useful information. Being higher or lower on the ladder doesn’t make you a better or worse person. The problem with using the “ladder” image of power is that it’s become the only guide to how we need to communicate with people who we perceive as either having power over us or us over them. We’ve narrowed down the options in our thinking to the up – down options of either winning or losing. Some aspects of perpendicular power which help develop alternate views are listed below.

- *It’s Temporary*

Perpendicular power doesn’t last forever. Kings and prime ministers eventually abdicate or move on. Political ups and downs mean that people fall into and out of, favour. Resources are finite and subject to market forces. Expertise is only relevant when that commodity is in demand. Even pop stars need adoring fans to be powerful

- *Depends on External Sources*

The ladder only exists because of outside agencies – the organisation, the rules of society, fashion trends, etc. Legitimate, resource and expert power are both attributed and removed in life independent of personal character.

- *Arbitrary*

Sometimes you don’t even choose to be higher on the ladder. It comes with the job, or you find it as a function of your responsibilities, sometimes it may be a real pain. Interestingly charisma is also attributed arbitrarily, quite independent of any internal moral integrity. Sometimes we find out after the fact that our saints are also sinners.

- *Balancing power*

Anne Dickson says “As long as we’re preoccupied with our own position on various ladders, fretting about unfavorable comparisons, pitting ourselves against others in a struggle to climb upwards, it’s impossible to develop a broader vision”.

She asks - How do I get others to take me more seriously?
Can I learn to settle for respect instead of needing to be liked?
What is the difference between authoritative and authoritarian?
How can I learn to put across my views more coherently?
(Women at Work, *Strategies for Survival and Success*. 2001)

Real self-confidence increases personal power. Being true to yourself is pivotal to getting the most out of your work and career. "It bears careful scrutiny. It shows how often one has to settle for respect rather than being liked: that assertiveness is not the same as 'aggression in velvet gloves'; that aggression (unlike anger) is a learnt, not a natural response; that to show anxiety, vulnerability, sympathy or consideration is human, even valuable." -- The Irish Times

So much emotional energy is spent on comparison and competition or in private self recrimination for not being as attractive / qualified / academic/ sorted / popular / or having less social status / less professional kudos/achieved less in life than everyone else”

What’s needed is to get some space and distance form the ladders we see ourselves on. Acknowledge them but make some room for something else. The ladders will always be there, but when we can see them for what they are – a temporary structure for how we try to make society more organized and

controllable – then we can focus on building different realities alongside. We can alter our relationships with these ladders without having to change them. How can we do this? By breaking the nexus between our thinking of power as linked to external sources and developing our internal resources to redefine what may be called personal power

Personal power

Personal power is related to self esteem, in that you regard yourself as you would a dear friend, rather than your worst enemy. This self esteem comes from truly accepting yourself, with all your frailties as well as your strengths, which distinguishes it from self esteem that is far more connected with status on the ladder. Sometimes we confuse self esteem with aggression (always getting what we want) with denial (hiding vulnerabilities and weaknesses), with self centredness (always putting yourself first) or self delusion (you can succeed at everything if you want to) and has no connection with authentic personal power.

Personal power is related to confidence, but not the kind of confidence that depends on showing a false or manufactured image to hide anxiety. Instead it describes a confidence based on acknowledging reality and trusting yourself to deal with that reality as best as you can.

When we perceive someone with personal power, we note that it emanates from them. We sense the person's inner joy and vitality. This comes across in the how they demonstrate courage and lack of arrogance and aggression. We get a sense of someone who knows their own limits and is clear about their boundaries; someone who is able to be sufficiently dispassionate about the need for others' approval to speak up and stand alone when necessary.

Feature of Personal Power

Balance: this extends to our behaviour and attitudes. It describes the ability to give equal value to our own and others needs. It helps us balance our wish to reach out and also to set clear limits and say NO. It helps us to negotiate from an equal position instead of automatically seeing a difficulty as a struggle for dominance.

Emotional Awareness: The ability to express clearly when you feel hurt or angry or fearful will become a critical part of learning to talk through difficult issues without aggression.

Integrity: Most of us have become so self conscious about how we appear to others that our integrity is weakened. Whenever we concentrate more on saying the right thing, making the right impression, second guessing someone else's response, controlling the outcome of an interaction than what we are actually experiencing inside, we lessen our integrity and our power as a consequence.

Creating rapport for effective conversations

Creating Rapport

What is needed to create a climate of RAPPOR?T?

Rapport is one of the most important elements in effective communication. Good communication stems from good rapport and appreciating the unique reality of each person. Rapport at its simplest is the ability to influence, and the openness to be influenced, on many different levels. Rapport builds relationships. The better the relationship the easier the task. By building rapport you can quickly build trust and understanding. Rapport may exist naturally in some situations and with some people. When it doesn't it requires skill to generate it. We are far more likely to agree to decisions with someone we have rapport with.

The ability to take on the same communication style as someone else is known as **matching**. There are four main things that can be matched – body language, voice quality, verbal language and beliefs and values. Among the things that can be matched (but not mimicked) include: *posture, movement and gestures, breathing, eye movements, voice tone and quality, language patterns and key words, beliefs and values*. We can observe and match these things to build rapport. This process is called *calibration*, it works from the premise that the mind and body are an integrated system. What occurs in one part of the whole will affect all the other parts. As well we can read how successful or otherwise our communication is by observing these things in the other person as they respond to us. Once we are able to read these cues we need the *flexibility* to keep changing what we do or say until we get the results we want. This is called *pacing*.

Pacing is another skill in rapport building. As you observe and match you are then able to adjust your whole body and pace the other person to a better and better levels of rapport and thus lead towards the outcomes/purpose of your communication. *Matching, pacing and leading* are tools to create rapport and influence the outcomes of the communication.

Matching and pacing values. Respecting and pacing values is a way of building a deep level of rapport. The more you develop your sensory acuity - your awareness to notice even the smallest of changes in the person with whom you are dealing, the more you will begin to be able to determine when their state changes related to core values held by that person, such as fairness, value for money, security, being on time etc.. Eventually you will be able to '*calibrate*' signs that indicate you are moving towards or away from values held and match them in you communication.

Congruence and integrity in using these skills is paramount. A mental check that your intention is congruent and valuing the other person and yourself is a good habit when determining the outcomes you want from the communication.

➔ **Think of a time when good, healthy rapport was created.** Try to visualise that place at that time again, seeing what you saw, and hearing what you heard. Think about how you were in the group...



? What kind of climate was created? What contributed to this? What did you observe about the person / group? What did they say? How did they act towards one another?

➤ **Write down your recollections and characteristics of rapport-building here...**

➔ **Now think about a time when rapport didn't happen very well.** Again, visualise that place at that time again, seeing what you saw, and hearing what you heard.



? What happened then to contribute to a poor rapport or atmosphere? From your experience, what signs would you look for that indicate a lack of rapport?

➤ **Write down your recollections and characteristics of rapport-building here...**

➔ **Now keeping these two situations in mind visualise a conversation you want to have.**

? What kind of atmosphere would you like to create with the person / team? What can you do to help build positive rapport?

? What feeling, fears, insecurities or rigidities do you think people might have to overcome? What about yourself?

➤ **Write down your visualisations of positive rapport-building here...**

Rapport Blockers and why they lead to Ineffective Communication

RAPPORT BLOCKERS	REASONS FOR THEIR INEFFECTIVENESS IN COMMUNICATION
Criticising	Criticism is often inappropriate and excessive, leading to defensive and/or aggressive responses. It is often justified as a way of getting another to improve or perform better. There are more effective alternatives.
Name Calling and Labeling	Labels tend to put barriers between people by creating a “box” into which we place others. The result is often to distance others from us.
Diagnosing	Diagnosing is a more sophisticated form of labeling often practised by professionals of various kinds and at times becomes generalized in the workplace. It can adversely effect communication as it is presented as one person has more power and authority than others.
Praise Evaluatively	Unrestrained praise is often insincere and hollow. Praise that is assessing others also can be problematic. It can be manipulative if the person using it has an ulterior motive. The result is often resentment.
Ordering	If order is used with coercion, it will create resistance and anger. Responses can range from sabotage to submission.
Threatening	Threatening has the same effects as ordering but often more pronounced.
Moralising	Bolton described this behaviour as people putting “a halo around their solutions for others” (1987, 21). Moralising creates many problems including resentment, increased anxiety and it often creates pretence in the communication.
Excessive or Inappropriate Questioning	Questions are unavoidable and valuable tools of communication but when used to excess create boredom and unnecessary distance between people. There are often better, more direct, ways of communicating.
Advising	Advice is sometimes valuable but when used inappropriately (which is often) it may damage the other’s confidence or fail to enhance his or her own problem-solving abilities. It often prevents a full exploration of the issues.
Diverting	Diverting is used often to avoid the unpleasant, unpalatable or the uncomfortable. It creates much tension.
Logical Argument	Logic is necessary but using logical argument when emotions are running high may be inappropriate because it creates distance.
Reassuring	Sometimes reassurance is a way of avoiding the issues whilst having the appearance of providing comfort. It can, in some cases, be very frustrating for the person being reassured.

(Adapted from Bolton, 1987 15-16)

Section 2 – Some frameworks underpinning effective conversations



Non Violent Communication – Marshall Rosenberg

Here are some tips for doing it productively.

Published on May 21, 2012 by [Miki Kashtan, Ph.D.](#) in [Acquired Spontaneity](#)
<http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/mating>

One of the most common critiques I hear of Nonviolent Communication is that it's simply not practical. "It would be great if this can work," the line often goes. "Too bad that in my (school, family, organization) we don't have the luxury of taking all this time to do all this endless dialogue that it takes to get anywhere. No one would have the patience, anyway."



I have my thoughts about why working things out for everyone's benefit takes as long as it often does and how to shift out of those challenges. I plan to write about it in a blog post soon. For now, I want to highlight three areas in which I see the use of NVC as directly contributing to movement. So practical, in fact, that I sometimes wonder how anyone can get anything done without this support.

Resolving inner conflict

My experience of working with people in diverse situations over the years has shown me that more often than not our inner conflicts are equally if not more distressing to us than our outer conflicts. Inner conflicts take many forms. It can be a decision that we can't make, a painful inner loop of self-criticism followed by impatience with ourselves for still criticizing ourselves, regret about something we did that we can't seem to come to peace about, or a host of other equally familiar ones. Even our outer conflicts are often intertwined with our inner life, since our reaction to others is fundamentally more the expression of our own meaning-making than a direct result of anything the other person does.



"Listen to Yourself" by Terry White

I have seen both myself and others reach fast and lasting relief, even from ongoing issues, by applying the core practice of NVC which makes everything else possible: being able to name and make full emotional contact with the needs that give rise to the various thoughts, images, inner demands,

judgments, or even fears that we carry internally. When I was agonizing for weeks with the decision about whether or not to continue to lead the BayNVC [Leadership](#) Program, I went back and forth without much progress until I listened fully to all the different voices inside myself. Once all the needs were on the table, I was able to make a decision easily and gently in less than an hour. What makes this possible, in my experience, is overcoming any reluctance to listen seriously to what any part in me would want, which allows synergy and internal coherence to emerge.

Moving from passion to action

I have recently been working with a person, let's name her Christine, who is profoundly passionate about a national policy she sees as the only solution to a critical problem she believes we are facing. She gives frequent talks about her work and more recently has begun meeting with some [government](#) employees. She was directed to me to solicit support in how to craft her message so it is less alienating.



Which request will work better?

One of the main pieces of feedback I gave her was that her talk lacks a clear focus on specific action. She provides ample evidence for why the issues she is working with are so crucial and paints a clear picture of what things would look like if her policy recommendation were adopted. She doesn't give people concrete steps for action. The uncomfortable truth is that if she is not talking to the person who has the power to make the particular change she wants, her audience's action cannot be the policy itself. They cannot enact it. That doesn't mean they cannot do anything that would increase the likelihood of this change happening. Once she recognized that the actions would be different depending on who her audience is, she was able to name what she really wanted people to do to support her approach. I am now confident that her talks will be more effective in the most practical sense of the word, and she is wholehearted about trying it out.

Once again, this suggestion rests on a basic NVC practice of identifying a clear and specific action we want people to take whenever we communicate to others what matters to us. So many of us tend to say what we feel passionate about solely as statements. It's no accident that I often speak of the request part of NVC as the power to create the life we want.



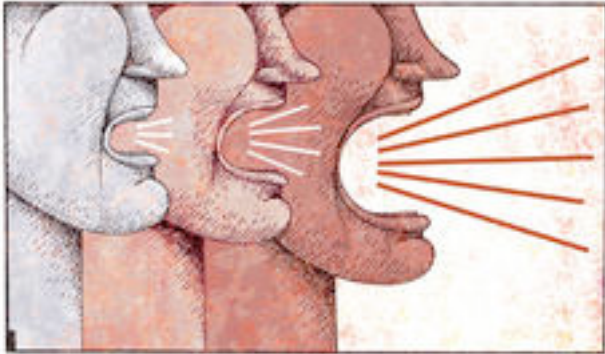
Running meetings

Anyone who's been in NVC communities for any length of time has no doubt experienced or heard about long, drawn-out group discussions that no one enjoys. I have been in such meetings, and still see them happening. That experience notwithstanding, I have also had the contrary experience, and am confident that applying certain key NVC principles consistently in a meeting yields cohesion, efficiency, and a high degree of [collaboration](#) in a group. This topic, in its fullness, is quite beyond the scope of a blog piece. In fact, I am dedicating four days this month to teaching peopleConfluent Facilitation, the name I gave to

the NVC-based [decision-making](#) process I have created. I am hoping for many people to join, as this is a rare and unique opportunity to learn this. For now, I want to highlight a few of the key NVC principles that allow collaboration to flow efficiently in a meeting. The “how” of these principles is what would go beyond a blog post:

Naming a shared purpose: Just as much as knowing our needs as individuals supports our ability to make life work, naming a shared purpose that brought us together for this meeting supports all of us in prioritizing our own individual wishes within that framework.

Distinguishing between strategies and needs: Just as much as internally or between us we often get stuck in conflicts around strategies and can resolve the conflict once needs have been named and owned, the same is true in a group. When we are able to identify the underlying needs, members of the group can more easily take responsibility for everyone’s needs so they can move toward a solution that works for everyone.



Distinguishing everyone’s needs from everyone’s voice: One of the core principles of NVC is that everyone’s needs matter. This level of inclusion is essential to reach truly collaborative solutions. This attention to everyone’s needs is also one of the stumbling blocks to people’s imagination about how to do it with efficiency. I have found one key to engagement and efficiency in a group context, which is that we can hear and attend to everyone’s needs without having to hear from every single person. We do so by capturing all the needs without repetition, so long as what’s important deep down to everyone is being said, usually posted somewhere where everyone can see. This, in and of itself, tends to save lengthy discussions in which so many repeat what’s already been said.

Distinguishing preference from willingness: As much [faith](#) as I have in our human capacity to work together and collaborate, I deeply doubt the likelihood, or even possibility, of aligning our preferences just so with others. My hunch is that the quest for perfect alignment of preferences stems from aversion to conflict and lack of awareness that connection with needs, our own and others’, generates willingness to shift and stretch towards others’ preferred strategy. This clarity can support a significant leap in the effectiveness of meetings. With sufficient attention to putting all the needs on the table and creating shared ownership, most of the time a group can coalesce around a strategy that all can live with, to various degrees of stretching and accommodating, even if it’s not some people’s preference.

In a world of scarcity, separation, and powerlessness, our willingness easily gets stunted, and we mistake compromise or resignation for pure willingness. Willingness is a true expansion of our human heart in the desire to make things work for others as well as ourselves. Willingness is the lubricant of [collaboration](#). It is more available to us to the extent we know that our own needs are considered. When what’s important to us is considered by others, when we know we matter, we shift easily from “Why should I?” and “What’s in it for me?” into “Why not?” There is no reason I see why we can’t reliably create this shift on a global scale and reawaken to the limitless possibilities of our human goodwill.

Transforming Business Culture

By Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.

Excerpted from [Speak Peace in a World of Conflict](#)

In many corporations it’s not easy to get people to talk at the level of needs and feelings, not to mention that they don’t recognize what theologian Walter Wink says is important to know — that every institution, every organization has its own spirituality. And when the spirituality of the organization is “production over all,” that’s the only thing that counts.

In such organizations, human feelings, human needs, humanness doesn't matter. Ultimately, the company pays for it in terms of both morale and even production, because when you get people believing that their feelings and needs are understood, production will go up.

Another thing we teach business people is how to do performance evaluations that don't criticize employees when they don't do what supervisors like. In this sense, we teach teachers the same thing. We also teach parents how to evaluate without criticism.

I was explaining this to managers in one company. I started by saying something that's part of our training — how to make clear observations, how to get people's attention by expressing what they're doing that you don't like.

I asked this group of managers I was with this question: "For example, what behaviors would you like to work on today that are problematic among the employees?"

One said, "Some of these people are just disrespectful of authority."

I said, "Just a minute. That's what I would call a diagnosis. I'm asking what they do. You want to evaluate somebody's performance. If you tell them they're disrespectful, you're likely to create a defensive response. What you see is what you get. I would suggest if you want to evaluate people in a way that improves performance, start with a clear observation."

He couldn't do it. Another manager said, "Well, I'm working with employees who are lazy."

I said, "Sorry, that's another diagnosis. It didn't answer my question about what they do."

And one of them finally said, "Darn it, Marshall. This is hard."

Krishnamurti says the ability to observe without evaluating is the highest form of human intelligence.

When I was showing them how to make observations, one of the managers jumped up; he literally ran out of the room. The next morning he came in and apologized for his abrupt departure. He said, "You know, yesterday, when you were showing us how to do performance evaluations and how to be sure that you make clear observations and not use any language that sounds like criticism...?"

"Yeah, I remember that."

"The reason I jumped up and ran out on your training yesterday was that while on my way to the training I had stopped at the office and dropped off my performance evaluations for my secretary to type. In the first 20 minutes yesterday you showed me why it's a nightmare of mine every year when it's time for performance evaluations. I can't sleep nights before that time. I know that a significant number of them are going to get hurt and angry. It's going to make matters worse. And you showed me right away that I was confusing observation and evaluation. So I ran back to get my evaluations from the secretary before she typed them up."

He continued: "I was up until 2:00 a.m. last night trying to figure out how to be clear about what the employees do that I don't like, without mixing in diagnosis or criticism."

And of course you don't have to be in a leadership position at a corporation or place of business to understand or use this work. You can be at any level in the business. By distinguishing between observations and evaluations, we can very far in building teams built on trust and mutual respect, which has a positive impact on all other aspects of the organization.

International peacemaker, **Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.**, is the founder of the Center for Nonviolent Communication, author of [Speak Peace in a World of Conflict](#) the international bestseller, [Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life](#), and several booklets.

Role theory and effective conversations

– Adam Blatner

Background.

A number of social psychologists pioneered role theory--Cooley, Linton, Parsons, Newcomb, Sarbin, Ackerman, Biddle and Moreno . The creation of a coherent integrated methodology on role theory belongs to Dr. Jacob L. Moreno, the developer of psychodrama.

The basic theory emphasises three points:

- (1) People play many roles, and the role concept offers an especially useful basis of a practical language for psychology.
- (2) The mind works on two levels: There is the pluralistic dimension; the way the mind may be (in part) understood as an aggregate of a multiplicity of roles (parts, sub-selves, ego states, sub-personalities, complexes, etc.). The other level, the "meta-role," modulates which roles are played when and how--this is the unifying function.
- (3). A useful approach to education or therapy involves cultivating the skills and identity of the meta-role, and making this role and its function explicitly conscious.

What are roles?

Roles - definition of role refers to "the functioning form the individual assumes in the specific moment he/she reacts to a specific situation in which other persons or objects are involved". This definition refers to Moreno's description of roles. Roles involve behaviours and cognitions (thoughts, feelings, emotions, beliefs etc) and are therefore observable. The meaning of what is observed is situation specific - i.e. roles are understood in terms of the context in which they emerge.

Roles develop in parallel with the individual's experience of their life. **Psychosomatic** roles develop first in relation to physiological states e.g. - the sleeper, the eater. **Psychological** roles emerge next and are personal inner experiences of the internal world of the individual. Initially in childhood they develop through fantasy and imaginings. The inner or psychological roles seek have an outer expression and these may be socially approved or disapproved. **Social** roles develop in response to the cultural context/s in which the individual develops. The immediate family and institutions largely teach them. The concept of self is an amalgam of the expressed and non expressed roles which cluster together and form the functioning identity of the individual.

Classification of roles

A number of methods of classifying roles have developed as an adjunct to analyzing role systems. These methods use observation and behavioral criteria to assess roles and include:

Symmetrical - similar or the same roles as observed in another person in the social system

Oppositional – opposite roles (as above), e.g. initiator and withdrawer

Complimentary – the roles observed go together in some way (eg doctor and patient)

Another classification system examines the developmental level of roles in a role system such as:

Progressive – the aspects of a person's functioning relating to their positive motivation

Fragmenting – the aspect of a person's functioning which relates to their reactive fears

Coping – the aspects of a person's functioning which helps them survive threats, e.g. habitual roles they use to avoid feeling awkward or

The Roles We Play

A role is something that could be portrayed, played in a dramatic enactment. Anything that could be shown on stage is a role. Some abstractions are not roles in themselves, but must be inferred, like

"relationship" or "spiritual." One can play at piety, but whether that's sincere or not cannot easily be determined.

The term "role" derives from the "rolled-up" scrolls that were the scripts held by actors in ancient plays. In time, the scripts became the actual parts played. (In the last century, in fact, illustrating language drift, the term has gone beyond the theatre and now refers to any general function category, such as "the role of hydrogen in the creation of sunlight," "the role of carbon dioxide in global warming," or "the role of the black market in Third World economies." But the term is especially useful as a way of describing people's lives and the relational predicaments they involve.

People play many roles. Most familiar are the social roles:

marital / romantic	parent	pet owner	offspring of elder parents
worker	teacher	student	club member
hobbyist	citizen	churchgoer	sports player
customer	friend	patient	extended family member

... and so forth.

In addition, there are character roles

joker	rule-keeper	sloppy	defiant
worrier	peacemaker	self-pitier	apathetic
clever	devious	hypocritical	sports player
uncertain	outgoing	impatient	generous

... and so forth.

And don't forget the fantasy roles: Hero in daydreams, vindicated in the courtroom of Heaven, secret rebellious alter ego, and so forth.

Roles are learned, culturally conditioned, often can be developed, amplified, released (with more or less difficulty). Many roles involve a number of component roles, and often these in turn involve further sub-components. It is often useful to analyze these roles. People get into trouble from not doing so, but assuming that people are competent (or incompetent) in general regarding a role, while in fact they may be very competent at some role components, fair at others, and incompetent in a few. (Trouble arises when the situation calls for competence in those sub-roles where it's not present! – i.e. under developed)

Of course, it's not just a matter of competence--though that issue is too often ignored. People's problems might involve an imbalance of roles--over-involvement in some, neglect of others. The neglect can be by the individual or by the person's family when he was growing up. Sometimes people don't even know certain roles exist!

Role Theory and Conflict

People develop roles in responses to demands of society. This explains conflict as a result of the mismatch that occurs when two or more people with different role perceptions and expectations meet.

An example is when police clash with peace demonstrators at a rally. The police have demands on them in their role to maintain law and order. The demonstrators have demands from their expectation of expressing their ideological principles. The end result need not be destructive. The policeman in this example may act in a tolerant manner towards the protestors - even "jolly them along". This may be because he receives role information from another social system to which he belongs (in this case his family) who support peace demonstrators, therefore he responds by acting tolerantly to the protestors.

Role conflict may arise in areas such as:- role perception conflicting with role expectation; psychosomatic role conflicting with social roles; one psychological role conflicting with another psychological role. Therefore role conflict may be interpersonal or intrapersonal (i.e. inter-role and intra-role).

All real and fantasised interactions and behaviour can be seen in terms of role theory. The personality of an individual can be defined in terms of active roles, underdeveloped roles, potential roles, inactive roles, over-developed roles etc, and can be evaluated in terms of role adequacy for self, significant others and society.

About Nonverbal Communication – Adam Blatner

Part 1: General Considerations
(Revised August 1, 2002)

Psychotherapists, leaders in management training, and people in personal growth programs all can benefit from learning about the nature and impact of nonverbal communications. This paper will review the major categories of this dimension of interpersonal behavior.

The major categories of nonverbal communications include the following (and will be discussed in greater detail further):

personal space	eye contact	position
posture	paralanguage	expression
gesture	touch	locomotion
pacing	adornment	context
	physiologic responses	

The Significance of Nonverbal Communications

Stated briefly, how something is expressed may carry more significance and weight than what is said, the words themselves. Accompanied by a smile or a frown, said with a loud, scolding voice or a gentle, easy one, the contents of our communications are framed by our holistic perceptions of their context. Those sending the messages may learn to understand themselves better as well as learning to exert some greater consciousness about their manner of speech. Those receiving the messages may learn to better understand their own intuitive responses—sometimes in contrast to what it seems "reasonable" to think.

Part of our culture involves an unspoken rule that people should ignore these nonverbal elements— as if the injunction were, "hear what I say, and don't notice the way I say it." These elements are often ignored in school or overridden by parents, so the task of incorporating conscious sensitivity to nonverbal communications is made more difficult.

Internal Cues

Nonverbal communication occurs not only between people, but also internally. People grimace, stand in certain postures, and in other ways behave so as to reinforce to themselves certain positions, attitudes, and implicit beliefs. Unconsciously, they suggest to themselves the role they choose to play, submissive or dominant, trusting or wary, controlled or spontaneous. Thus, people can use nonverbal behavior to notice internal as well as interpersonal dynamics, and individuals can be helped to become aware of their own bodily reactions to assist them in developing greater insight.

Learning by Doing

People and especially, people who work with or help other people—managers, teachers, etc.—would do well to read about nonverbal communications and apply their knowledge with themselves and others. We only learn to change our behaviour by doing, practicing and building our insights – learning experientially has bigger impact than just gaining new knowledge.

Categories of Nonverbal Communications

Personal Space: This category refers to the distance which people feel comfortable approaching others or having others approach them. People from certain countries, such as parts of Latin America or the Middle East often feel comfortable standing closer to each other, while persons of Northern European descent tend to prefer a relatively greater distance. Different distances are also intuitively assigned for situations involving intimate relations, ordinary personal relationships (e.g., friends), social relations (e.g., co-workers or salespeople), or in public places (e.g., in parks, restaurants, or on the street. (Keltner, 1970).

Eye Contact: This rich dimension speaks volumes. The Spanish woman in the Nineteenth Century combined eye language with the aid of a fan to say what was not permissible to express explicitly. Eye contact modifies the meaning of other nonverbal behaviors. For example, people on elevators or crowds can adjust their sense of personal space if they agree to limit eye contact. What happens if this convention isn't followed? (Schefflen, 1972.) This issue of eye contact is another important aspect of nonverbal communication.

Modern American business culture values a fair degree of eye contact in interpersonal relations, and looking away is sensed as avoidance or even deviousness. However, some cultures raise children to minimize eye contact, especially with authority figures, lest one be perceived as arrogant or "uppity." When cultures interact, this inhibition of gaze may be misinterpreted as "passive aggressive" or worse.

Position: The position one takes vis-a-vis the other(s), along with the previous two categories of distance between people and angle of eye contact all are subsumed under a more general category of "proxemics" in the writings on nonverbal communications (Schefflen, 1963).

Posture: A person's bodily stance communicates a rich variety of messages. Consider the following postures and the emotional effect they seem to suggest:

slouching	stiff	slumped
twisted (wary)	cringing	towering
crouching	angled torso	legs spread
pelvis tilt	shoulders forward	general tightness
kneeling	angle of head	jaw thrust

Paralanguage: "Non-lexical" vocal communications may be considered a type of nonverbal communication, in its broadest sense, as it can suggest many emotional nuances. This category includes a number of sub-categories:

- Inflection (rising, falling, flat...)
- Pacing (rapid, slow, measured, changing...)
- Intensity (loud, soft, breathy,...)
- Tone (nasal, operatic, growling, wheedling, whining...)
- Pitch (high, medium, low, changes...)
- Pauses (meaningful, disorganised, shy, hesitant...)]

Facial Expression: The face is more highly developed as an organ of expression in humans than any other animal. Some of these become quite habitual, almost fixed into the chronic muscular structure of the face. For instance, in some parts of the South in the United States, the regional pattern of holding the jaw tight creates a slight bulge in the temples due to an overgrowth or "hypertrophy" of those jaw muscles that arise in that area. This creates a characteristic appearance. The squint of people who live a lot in the sun is another example. More transient expressions often reveal feelings that a person is not intending to communicate or even aware of. Here are just a few to warm you up:

pensive	amused	sad	barely tolerant
warning	pouting	anxious	sexually attracted
startled	confused	sleepy	intoxicated

Gesture: There are many kinds of gestures:

clenching fist	shaking a finger	pointing
biting fingernails	tugging at hair	squirming
rubbing chin	smoothing hair	folding arms
raising eyebrows	pursing lips	narrowing eyes
scratching head	looking away	hands on hips
hands behind head	rubbing nose	rocking
sticking out tongue	tugging earlobe	waving

These, too, have many different meanings in different cultures, and what may be friendly in one country or region can be an insult in another (Morris et al, 1979, Maginnis, 1958).

Touch: How one person touches another communicates a great deal of information: Is a grip gentle or firm, and does one hold the other person on the back of the upper arm, on the shoulder, or in the middle of the back. Is the gesture a push or a tug? Is the touch closer to a pat, a rub, or a grabbing? People have different areas of personal intimacy, and this refers not only to the sexual dimension, but also the dimension of self control. Many adolescents are particularly sensitive to any touching that could be interpreted as patronizing or undue familiarity. Even the angle of one's holding another's hand might suggest a hurrying or coercive implicit attitude, or on the other hand, a respectful, gentle, permission-giving approach (Smith, Clance & Imes, 1998, Jones, 1994).

Locomotion: The style of physical movement in space also communicates a great deal, as well as affecting the feelings of the person doing the moving (Morris, 1977):

slither	crawl	totter	walk
stroll	shuffle	hurry	run
jog	spring	tiptoe	march
jump	hop	skip	climb
swing	acrobatics	swim	slink

Pacing: This is the way an action is done.

jerky	pressured	nervous	gradual
graceful	fatigued	tense	easy
shaky	deliberate	furtive	clumsy

A related variable is the time it takes to react to a stimulus, called "latency of response." Some people seem to react to questions, interact in conversations, or are slower or faster "on the uptake" than others.

Adornment: Our communications are also affected by a variety of other variables, such as clothes, makeup, and accessories. These offer signals relating to context (e.g. formal vs. informal), status, and individuality. The ways people carry cigarettes, pipes, canes, or relate to their belts, suspenders, or glasses also suggests different semiotic meanings. (Semiotics is the science of the emotional or psychological impact of signs, appearances—not words—that's "semantics"-- but of how things look.)

Context: While this category is not actually a mode of nonverbal communication, the setting up of a room or how one places oneself in that room is a powerfully suggestive action. Where one sits in the group is often useful in diagnosing that person's attitude toward the situation. Group leaders need to be especially alert to the way the group room is organised. Consider the following variables and imagine how they might affect the interaction:

- amount and source of light
- color of the lighting
- obvious props, a podium, blackboard

- the size of the room
- colors of the walls, floor, furniture
- seating arrangements
- number of people present
- environmental sounds, smells, and temperature
- the numbers and ratios of high-status and low status people
- the positioning of the various people in the space,
who sits next to whom, who sits apart, who sits close, etc.

Physiological Responses: This, too, is an exceptional category, because it cannot be practiced voluntarily. Still, it's useful for leaders and team members to become more aware of these subtle signs of emotion. It often helps to comment on these observations, as it implicitly gives permission to the person experiencing the emotion to more fully open to that feeling; or, sometimes, to more actively suppress it. Either way, the existence of that signal is made explicit in the group process. Some of the clues to physiological processes include:

shaking	flaring of nostrils	trembling chin
sweating	blanching	cold clammy skin
blushing	moisture in eyes	flushing
blinking	swallowing	breathing heavily

While a few of these behaviors can be mimicked, for the most part these reactions happen involuntarily. The only exercise is to watch for these reactions in oneself or others, at least mentally note their occurrence, and consider what the meaning of that emotional reaction might be.

Modifying Communication Patterns

It's important to realise that these are just habits, culturally and personally learned behaviors that can be un-learned and new ones learned in their stead. Role playing can be an adjunct to this kind of re-education, in a process of personal development for people who are essentially pretty healthy, as well as part of psychotherapy. Assertion training for the timid and anger management for the more explosive are two sets of re-training programs that could make great use of attention given to nonverbal styles of self-expression, internal cueing, and communications.

This role training may be a source of insight as well as merely behavioral re-conditioning. The enactments of nonverbal behaviors may be associated with scenes in which these behaviors occur and where there were first learned. Such enactments can help people connect their behaviors with underlying attitudes, such as expectations of others, fantasies that criticism will be catastrophically destructive, or a forlorn hope of magical rescue. And then re-playing these scenes with various alternative elements may help re-align those underlying attitudes.

Summary

People react to the unspoken, as much (if not more) to how something is said as to what are the explicit meaning of the words. Misunderstandings can often be clarified if the people involved have the ability to notice and comment on the nonverbal communications in an interaction. People will benefit from learning the range of nonverbal behaviors in order to clarify the often subtle dynamics of the situations they find themselves in. For example, in a marriage, sometimes the other person gets irritated by some mysterious event: Exploring what was the problem may lead to an awareness that the way something was said communicated an unintended meaning! By making the nonverbal communication more clear, misunderstandings can be resolved.

The field of nonverbal communications has grown rapidly over the last few decades, and it has applications in business, media, international relations, education, and indeed any field which significantly involves interpersonal and group dynamics. Certainly there is a need for more psychological mindedness in all these realms.

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Section 3 – Tools, processes and activities for practicing effective conversations



Tool: Observing yourself and others in conversations?

In most conversational interactions, very little attention is paid to process, even when it is *the* major cause of ineffective group action.

To improve our conversational skills and have more effective conversations, we need first and foremost to pay attention to what's happening in them.

This is called '*process observation*'.

Group process observation: looks at things like feelings, tone, conversational climate, influence, participation, leadership power struggles, conflict, competition, cooperation, etc.

Being sensitive to group process in conversations enables us to better diagnose conversational problems in a group and think of ways to deal with them more effectively. These processes are present in all conversational groups. Awareness of them enhances our worth to a group and enables us to be a more effective participant in group conversations and discussions. A couple of commonly known but useful distinctions to make for good process observation are:

➔ **The difference between Content & Process:**

- ❑ **Content** – is *what's* being discussed (i.e. task, topic). In metaphorical terms, think of the food we're eating or the meal on a plate. This is what most people focus on.
- ❑ **Process** - *how* the group is going about discussing the task. Again, in metaphorical terms, picture how the food is arranged, our approach to eating etc. This is often invisible (or at least unexpressed or unsurfaced) to many people.

➔ **The distinction between Data & Inference:**

- ❑ **Data** - the observable facts of conversational life that are evident to all people in a group if they choose to observe them. These include not only words but also non-verbal expressions.
- ❑ **Inference** - from what we observe or sense (our data) we then tend to draw conclusions or make inferences as to what this may mean (see *Tool: The Ladder of Inference*)

Because we don't directly perceive the group process (we really rather observe interactions and then make inferences about process), the validity and reliability of our judgments depends on how accurate and sensitive we are in our observations.

➔ **Here are some examples.** We've left a blank space down the bottom to add one of your own and share it with some others? **In each case, note down – quickly!!...**

- ? What would you infer if you observed this happening in a team you were in?
- ? What would you say or how would you act/react in response?



HERE IS THE OBSERVABLE DATA	WHAT INFERENCES DO YOU DRAW?
A group member has said little or nothing for the past half-hour. She is sitting slightly apart from the others looking at the floor.	
I am standing before the executive team, making a presentation. They all seem engaged and alert, except for Steve, at the end of the table, who seems bored and is making notes on his pad, eyes turned downwards – not looking at me.	
Everyone in this group is pretty engaged except for Monica – who’s been knitting the whole time and hasn’t said a word to anyone (except in the breaks).	

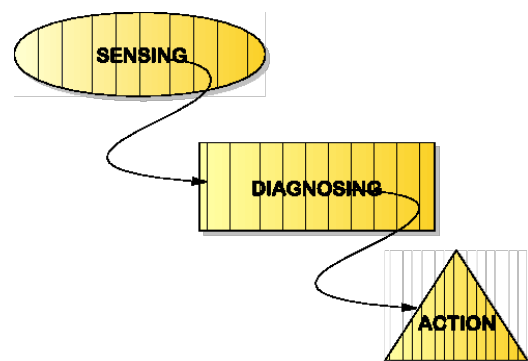
Three Skills for Observing Conversations

Here are 3 basic skills for observing what happens in conversations...

1. Sensitivity Skills:

Most conversational interactions generate a wealth of information – much more than any of us can consciously assimilate.

In order to make sense of what would otherwise be a *‘constant confusion’*, we *exclude, distort* or *give attention* to differing aspects of a common situation based on our personal preferences, prevailing paradigms, perspectives and mental models.



‘It’s strange, but wherever I take my eyes, they always see things from my point of view.’
Ashleigh Brilliant Pot Shots

We can’t help having our personal view of the world and all that’s in it. BUT, the more we are able to develop both the *accuracy* and *variety* of our perception, the more likely it is we’ll be able to take on valid and reliable data about *‘what’s going on in this conversational situation’*.

2. Diagnostic Skills:

Once we’ve tuned in to some data, the next step is *adding meaning*: we structure, interpret or categorise it in some way that *‘makes sense of what’s happening’*. Generally, we do this by comparing this current

experience with previous experiences or beliefs about what *'this sort of current experience'* usually means.

“The map is not the territory it represents, but if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness....” *Korzybski - Science and Sanity*

These are what we loosely call *'models'*. Maps about behaviour we apply from previous experience by which we try to comprehend then make *'judgements'* about this current experience. The quality of our judgements of course directly relate to quality of our models.

3. Action Skills:

The data we pay attention to, and what we believe that data means, becomes the basis for the action we then *choose* to take in this situation. The extent of our *flexibility* and *effectiveness* in responding or taking action is connected with our confidence in selecting the data we attend to and the understandings we've arrived at about the situation.

“You are free to do whatever you like. You need only face the consequences.” *Sheldon Kopp – An Eschatological Laundry List*

Once we've responded – *and doing nothing is still a response* – we've changed the situation. This in turn provides **feedback** or new data for us to include in our “awareness creating “ process, make sense of, respond to etc, etc...

➔ **Use the cycle of sensing, diagnosing and acting to describe a recent conversation you have been involved in. In the spaces below, make notes about...**

? What was the situation? Who was present? What did you sense?

➤ **Write down the conversational situation you have pictured in your mind...**

? What observations or judgements did you make? What actions did you take? What was the outcome? Make notes of each part of your experience

<p>▶ Sensing – what did you notice happening at a personal, interpersonal or group level during the conversation?</p>	
<p>▶ Diagnosing – What sense did you make out of the individual or group conversational behaviours you observed? What interpretations did you put on it? What inferences did you draw?</p>	

▶ Action – What did you and others do in this conversational situation to increase either the satisfaction or productivity of the discussion, the group meeting or the individuals in-group?	
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➔ **Now critically reflect on your own observations.** *Imagine if you like, that ‘someone else’ has written these observations you are looking over.*

? What are you aware of when you are observing what goes in conversations?

? What things do you especially notice? What do you *‘tune into’*?

For example, some people may be more sensitive to tone of voice or non-verbal cues. Others tune into who talks most/least, who seems to be in control or who is having the most influence. Others may relate more to who is getting on with the task or keeping the discussion *‘on-track’*.

? What are some personal “awareness” frames that you use? What mental processes do you go through? How aware are you of why you notice certain things.

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN GROUP CONVERSATIONS?	WHY DO YOU NOTICE THIS?

➔ **We’re all prone to what’s called ‘selective perception’** – *a bias to notice some things and not see or ignore other things. For example:*

? Do you distinguish between *‘What I actually observe?’* and *‘What I imagine or conclude it to mean?’*

? Do you have a personal investment in seeing a particular pattern of interaction or a particular person in a particular way? Are there biases or prejudices at play?

➤ **Write down your insights here....**

Tool: What to look for in conversations

This Tool is a checklist you can use to refine your process observation skills around what's going on in conversations. It provides:

- A framework for giving feedback to others on conversational group processes
- A language and patterns for groups to talk about their own conversational behaviour
- A way to diagnose what's going on in group conversations and identify strategies for moving through difficulties to adopt more productive conversational behaviours

➔ **Here is the checklist for observing what goes on in conversations.** There's room to note down your comments or use it when you observe conversations in future...

What To Look For In Group Conversations	Your Notes...
<p>Who Talks? The amount and direction of talk between people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who are the high talkers? Who are low? Who talks to whom ▪ Do highs become quiet? Lows become talkative? Do you see any reason for this in the group's interaction? ▪ How are silent people treated? How is silence interpreted? (Consent? Disagreement? Disinterest? Fear? Etc.) ▪ Who keeps the conversational ball rolling? How? Why? 	
<p>Who influences? Influence and talking are not the same. Some people may speak very little, yet capture the attention of the whole group. Others may talk a lot but not be listened to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who are high influencers? (When they talk others listen). ▪ Who are low in influence? (Others don't listen or follow) ▪ Is there any shifting in influence or rivalry in the group? 	
<p>Styles of Influence: can be positive or negative; can enlist cooperation or alienate; can determine how open or closed others will be toward being influenced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who imposes their will? Who is deferential to whom? ▪ Who evaluates or passes judgment? Who blocks? ▪ Who pushes to get organised? ▪ Who eagerly supports others' decisions? ▪ Who avoids conflict? Who deals with conflict? ▪ Who listens, interprets or gives positive feedback? ▪ Who stands apart, is uninvolved or withdrawn? ▪ Who tries to include/exclude others? ▪ Who is open without evaluating or judging others? 	
<p>Decision-Making: Some try to impose or force decisions on the group. Others want all to participate or share in decisions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who imposes their own decisions? Who consults? 	

What To Look For In Group Conversations	Your Notes...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who decides without reference to anyone else? ▪ Who supports whose decisions? ▪ How does the group make decisions? (eg. by majority rule? By a few forcing a decision? By consensus?) 	
<p>Task Functions: behaviors concerned with getting the job done that the group has before them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who is tasky? Who keeps the group focus on the task? ▪ Who keeps the group on target? Who prevents topic-jumping or going off on tangents? ▪ Who asks for/makes suggestions on ways to tackle tasks? ▪ Who suggests ways to go when the group gets stuck? ▪ Who summarises what's been covered or what to do next? 	
<p>Maintenance Functions: People who maintain good and harmonious working relationships and help create a climate that enables each member to contribute maximally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who is concerned with teamwork? ▪ Who helps others get into the discussion (gate openers)? ▪ Who cuts off others or interrupts them (gate closers)? ▪ How are ideas and contributions included? Rejected? Does anyone attempt to help others clarify their ideas? ▪ How well are ideas getting across? Are some people preoccupied with their own position and not listening? ▪ How are ideas rejected? How do people react when their ideas are not accepted? What affect does this have? 	
<p>Conversational Climate: The way a group works creates a certain atmosphere. People differ in the kind of conversational climate they prefer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who seems to prefer a friendly congenial atmosphere? ▪ Who attempts to suppress conflict or unpleasantness? ▪ Who seems to prefer conflict, debate or disagreement? ▪ Do any members provoke, antagonise or annoy others? ▪ Do people seem involved/interested or withdrawn/distant? ▪ Is the climate light/heavy, serious/playful, frustrating/satisfying, energetic/sluggish etc.? 	
<p>Inclusiveness: The degree of acceptance or inclusion in the group discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are there sub-groupings, cliques or factions? ▪ Any consistent patterns of opposition or disagreement? ▪ Do some people seem to be "outside" the group? Do some members seem to be "in"? How are those "outside" treated? 	
<p>Feelings: Feelings arise in all group discussions – but are seldom expressed openly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What signs of feelings do you see: anger, irritation, frustration, warmth, affection, excitement, boredom, defensiveness, competitiveness, etc.? 	

What To Look For In Group Conversations	Your Notes...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you notice particular tones of voice, facial expressions, gestures or mannerisms when these occur? ▪ Any attempts by group members to block/promote expression of feelings? How is this done? Who does it? 	
<p>Norms: Standards or ground rules in a group that control what behaviours <i>should or should not</i> take place. Norms may be clear and explicit, known or sensed by only a few (implicit), or operate completely below the level of awareness of anyone in the group. Some norms help. Some hinder.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are certain issues avoided in the group (e.g., sex, religion, talk about present feelings in group, discussing the leader's behaviour, etc.)? Are there undiscussables? ▪ Who seems to reinforce this avoidance? How do they do it? ▪ Are group members overly nice or polite to each other? Are only positive feelings expressed? ▪ Do members agree with each other too readily? What happens when members disagree? ▪ Do members feel free to probe each other's feelings? ▪ Do questions tend to be restricted to intellectual topics or events outside of the group? 	

Personal Reflection: What's your Conversational Style like?

➔ **Think about the things to look for in conversations (Tool 2) in terms of diagnosing and building up your own particular conversational style. Individually, note down...**

- ? What areas of your own conversational style do you think you need to develop?
- ? Which conversational functions are generally absent from your repertoire? Which functions are present but underdeveloped in your repertoire?
- ? Which functions are adequately covered in your repertoire? Which functions are overdeveloped in your repertoire?

➤ **Make your list here...**

Conversational Behaviour

On the one hand, people say they hold certain values and beliefs, which they claim to be able to see in their own behaviour (this is their espoused theory). On the other, there are values and beliefs, which are implied by their actual behaviour (this is their theory-in-use). The two are very often at odds, but people tend not to be aware of this.

Conversational coaching is really about our states of mind, beliefs and behaviours: what we consciously choose or are conditioned to believe; how we choose or are conditioned to act and how aware we are about all this thinking and doing.

There's a strong tendency in all of us to think or believe things that are *inconsistent* with our actions (or *vice versa*). To put it more simply, we're not always good at 'practising what we think we preach.'



- There's a gap between what we *think* we believe - and what we *act out* in our behaviour – and to varying extents, we're all blind to it.
- If we're not blind to it, and we do see it, we're more often than not reluctant to admit it to ourselves
- And if others point it out to us – we're likely to get defensive (see *Defensive Routines*).

What does all this have to do with conversational behaviour? Well... This tension between what we say we believe in and how we act applies at all levels, from whole nations down to our own interpersonal behaviour. But conversations are the forum where most of us see this kind of dynamic played out most publicly - time and time again.

Chris Argyris and Donald Schön have done a lot of pioneering work on the differences between *how we think we act/what we think we believe* and *actual behaviour*. Central to their work is the concept of '**theories of action**'. Here's a string of some of their main findings:

- Few of us are aware that the mental models (ie. our beliefs or worldviews) we use to take action are *not* the same as the beliefs (or '*theories*') we explicitly espouse.
- Even fewer of us are aware of the mental models we do use
- This is not merely the difference between what people say and do.
- There is a *theory consistent with what people say* and a *theory consistent with what they do*.
- The distinction is not between *theory and action* but between two different theories of action.
- These *theories of action* determine all deliberate human behaviour.
- There are two different types of '**theories of action**':

Espoused Theories – we *tell ourselves* that we know we do or think these things. These are the mental models, worldviews and values people believe their behaviour's based on.

Theories-in-Use – things we do, think, believe or act out as witnessed by our observable behaviour. These are the mental models, worldview and values evidenced by our behaviour.

- People are mostly unaware that their *theories-in-use* are frequently not the same as their *espoused theories*.
- On top of that, *most* people are often unaware of their theories-in-use.

Tool: Model 1 and Model 2 Discussions

Certain values and beliefs we display through our behaviour occur commonly enough to be clustered together. For example, people who believe in *winning and avoiding losing* also tend to often believe in *being narrowly rational* and *minimising emotionality*.

Argyris and Schön have identified two such major ‘belief clusters’, which they call **Model 1** and **Model 2**. Many characteristic strategies, behaviours and predispositions of both models can be readily applied to describe the kinds of conversations we all typically experience.

This Tool is another descriptive checklist you can use to characterise or define the kinds of discussions and conversations you see different groups having.

➔ **Here is a Table of Features connected with Model 1 & Model 2 Conversations....**

MODEL 1 CONVERSATIONS FEATURE:	MODEL 2 CONVERSATIONS FEATURE:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive stance (win, don't lose) <input type="checkbox"/> Control and self-protection <input type="checkbox"/> Strong advocacy - discourage inquiry <input type="checkbox"/> Little public testing of ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Invoke rationality over feelings <input type="checkbox"/> Suppress negative feelings <input type="checkbox"/> Invokes defensive routines <input type="checkbox"/> Treat own views as clearly correct (and others as wrong) <input type="checkbox"/> Many undiscussables <input type="checkbox"/> Judgemental, evaluative <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid confrontation/challenge <input type="checkbox"/> Face-saving - leave potentially embarrassing facts unstated <input type="checkbox"/> Little self-reflection <input type="checkbox"/> Game playing, distorting facts, unrevealed assumptions, hidden motives and feelings <input type="checkbox"/> Domination, manipulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperation & collaboration (win-win) <input type="checkbox"/> Sharing – joint control <input type="checkbox"/> Inquiry - assumptions are questioned non-defensively <input type="checkbox"/> Ideas tested publicly <input type="checkbox"/> Surface conflicting views <input type="checkbox"/> Open expression of feelings <input type="checkbox"/> Open, less defensiveness <input type="checkbox"/> Valid information - uses directly observable data <input type="checkbox"/> Fewer undiscussables <input type="checkbox"/> Inquiring, tolerate difference <input type="checkbox"/> Explore different perspectives <input type="checkbox"/> Expression of honest beliefs and feelings <input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on thinking/actions <input type="checkbox"/> Genuineness, assumptions made explicit, higher levels of truth and openness <input type="checkbox"/> Free and informed choice

Model 1 Conversational Behaviours are competitive, controlling, argumentative, ‘pseudo-rational’, judgmental, disingenuous and suppressive of real inquiry, challenge or emotionality.

- ▶ Most people conduct their conversations and discussions from a Model 1 standpoint. And many of these conversational behaviours amount to what we call in terms of modes of group discussion continuum – ‘polite discussion.’

Model 1 Conversational Behaviour has little potential for growth and learning. High levels of defensiveness protect people from really reflecting on their behaviour and intent. An ironic complication is that anyone trying to inform others of this kind of behaviour is also likely to use Model I behaviour to do so, and therefore trigger a defensive reaction (*Dick and Dalmau, 1990*).

"People programmed with Model 1 theories of action produce Model 1 group and organizational dynamics that include quasi-resolution of conflict, uncertainty, avoidance, mistrust, conformity, face saving, inter-group rivalry, invalid information for important problems and valid information for unimportant problems, misperceptions, miscommunication, and parochial interests." [Argyris, 1985, p. 88.]

Model 2 Conversational Behaviours are collaborative, sharing, genuine, open and robust – in the sense that they do not avoid conflict or dealing with feelings and attempt to *'raise the bar'* in terms of mentioning undiscussables, challenging assumptions non-defensively and dealing with factual data (as opposed to *'pretend rationalism'*).

And many of these conversational behaviours amount to what we call in terms of modes of the conversational continuum – *'skillful discussion.'*

The behaviours of Model 2 conversations by the way are not simply the opposite of Model 1.

- For example, the opposite of *being controlling* is *relinquishing control*. Model 2 behaviour is *sharing control*.
- Again, Model 1 behaviour is *'winning advocacy'*. The opposite would be *'giving in'* but Model 2 behaviour is more about balancing advocacy of one's own position with an invitation to others to challenge, question and add their own views.

Personal Reflection: Are you Model 1 or Model 2?

On the surface, most people in fact endorse/say they follow Model 2 values and behaviour (presumably because that's the way we'd like to see ourselves).

But in reality their *theory in action* is Model 1 values and behaviour.

If people saw this mismatch, they might do something about it.

- But this is difficult when the prevailing culture is Model 1, and others are unlikely to notice any discrepancy and less likely to bring it to your attention because there are strong Model 1 taboos against being open and telling people about our beliefs and feelings towards them.
- So assumptions about other people's motives are very seldom revealed.
- Besides, if someone does attempt to bring a discrepancy to someone else's attention, it's likely to be done in a Model 1 way, and thus trigger a defensive interaction (see *Conversational Dynamics* in Segment 3 of this Guide)

➔ Use the Model 1 – Model 2 Checklist to reflect on your own behaviour.

- ?** What Model 1 or 2 conversational behaviours do you have a tendency towards?
- ?** What behaviours in yourself are you aware of that leads you to conclude this?
- ?** Is there a conversational partner you can team up with in your group who is willing to give/get feedback about this with you?

➤ Write down your ideas here...

Conversational Roles People Play

(see 'Reframing Team Relationships' an article by David Kantor in Peter Senge's 5th Discipline Fieldbook pp. 407-416)



There's a rich body of theory around the roles people play in conversational groups and why/ where these emanate from. We may be aware of some of the roles we play. Others we may not be.

These roles tend to be *transportable* – more or less. That is, once we learn to act it, we'll tend to play out the role in varying ways no matter what the particular setting – work, home, family, community, etc.

- ❑ We are all able to play more than one role and switch between them when we need to.
- ❑ But we all have our *preferred roles* (roles we feel more comfortable or competent in and which historically have '*got us what we want*') as well as roles we may be less comfortable in or do not acknowledge – even to ourselves.
- ❑ As we all play out our roles – usually without making it explicit – the patterns of behaviour connected with them can lead to all sorts of '*inexplicable*' personality clashes and '*difficult moments*' (eg. accusations, jealousies, insecurities etc).
- ❑ The feelings arising from '*role-clash*' are usually kept hidden (especially in Model 1 type conversations where expressing feelings is '*taboo*') – until that is, some sort of crisis triggers a '*boil-over*' and they reveal themselves usually with destructive affect.

Many of these roles are universally recognisable to all of us. For example, in almost any conversational group:

you'll find people who habitually play the role of '*mover*' (who initiates or moves the group in a particular direction)

...while others play the role of '*opposer*' (being sceptical or challenging) or '*bystanders*', who sit back and observe what's going on.

Tool : Charting conversational roles

You can use this tool either individually or with your conversational group to:

- Identify the kind of conversational roles you habitually prefer to play
- Share and chart the conversational roles at play in across your group
- Think about or discuss the positive and negative attributes of playing these roles and clarify what expectations you and others have from different conversational roles

Individual Work...

➔ **Circle your Top 10 “Role-words”.** Do this rapidly, without self-analysis. Go with your gut feeling. Resist circling roles you feel you should play (but don't really).

Mover	Stabiliser	Shaper	Conformer
Proposer	Organiser	Involver	Controller
Conceptualiser	Conformer	Process Minder	Harmoniser
Affiliator	Innovator	Helper	Detailer
Follower	Co-ordinator	Compromiser	Sceptic
Challenger	Expert	Networker	Facilitator
Rescuer	Bystander	Observer	Truth-teller
Close Relationships	Joker	Supporter	Healer
Summariser	Dissenter	Fixer	Problem-poser
Theme spotter	Reflector	Analyser	Rationaliser
Teacher/Tutor	Recorder/Reviewer	Devil's advocator	Agitator
Enforcer	Dominator	Director	Gatekeeper
Peace-keeper	Information-seeker	Reality tester	Clarifier
Consensus Tester	Leader	Blocker/Aggressor	Information Giver

➔ **Reduce these to your Top 5.** Write them here:

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
----	----	----	----	----

➔ **Now choose your Top 2.** Write them here:

1.	2.
----	----

➔ **Now select your Top 1.** Write it here:

1.

➔ **Now ask yourself (and answer)...**

? What is this role about? Why do I prefer this role to others?

? What behaviours am I aware of when I play this role?

? What is the impact (positive / negative) of this role on others?

? How is this role helping me or holding me back?

➤ **Write your personal reflections on your preferred role here.....**

Group Work...



If you are willing to be open with others in your conversational group, you can now go on to:

- Share your findings about each other’s major role preferences and what they mean to each of you.
- Give and get feedback about how others perceive you acting in relation to what roles you think you play. (eg. Whether other people see you in this role or not.)

➔ **Here are the Steps...**

▶ **Each person first does the individual work above.** You’ll need to get your group’s agreement that this is a worthwhile activity to explore as a group. If there is agreement:

the individual work should be distributed before the meeting to give people time to think about it and write down their reflections

an agreed period of time needs to be set aside in the meeting to process the activity. We would suggest at least 1 hour.

▶ **Each person shares the top 2 roles they think they play.**

Before they do this, you can enhance the effectiveness of the activity by asking people to make notes about the following. Write them here.....

? What positive contribution does this role make to your conversations?	
▶ Write Role # 1 here	
▶ Write Role # 2 here	
? What negative effects does this role have on your conversations?	

▶ Write Role # 1 here	
▶ Write Role # 2 here	
? What kinds of role contributions do you look to others to make?	

- ▶ **Draw up a Chart like this to openly record roles** each person plays, contributions, liabilities and expectations...Here are a few protocols that might help in collecting and charting this information:
- Don't collect all the information from each person all at the same time
 - Collect roles (column 1 from each person in turn), then positives (columns 2) from each person, then column 3 and 4 in sequence.
 - Suggest that we collect this information rapidly without comment or discussion from anyone. Suggest that people listen carefully to what each other has to say.

CONVERSATIONAL ROLES IN THIS GROUP			
NAMES	CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS ROLE		EXPECTATIONS OF OTHERS
	POSITIVE...	NEGATIVE...	
Person # 1			
Role # 1			
Role # 2			
Person # 2	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEEDS...
Role # 1			
Role # 2			
Person # 3	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEEDS...
Role # 1			
Role # 2			

➔ This is a Sample Chart only... Add as many names as required by your group

- ▶ **Group Feedback:** After the chart is completed, invite people to give feedback to each other on:
 - How I perceive your role. What I see as positive in your contribution. What I would like to see more-less of from you*
 - Impact of your behaviour (eg. When you say/do this in the group, I feel as though...)*

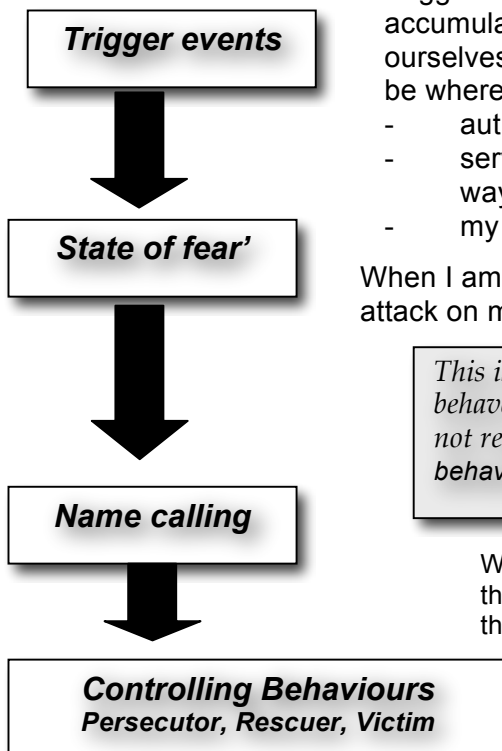
- ▶ **General Group Discussion:** These questions help a conversational group genuinely start to examine the impact of roles without getting into areas that are too sensitive:

? *How flexible are we with roles on this team? Are any important roles not here?*

? *Who can play other roles? What would happen, for example, if our prime 'mover' or 'initiator' played a 'bystander' role?*

? *What ineffective role sequences do we see played out over and over again in this team? How can we shut down or head-off certain unconstructive roles?*

Tool: Recognising your triggers



Triggers are often as a result of old patterns of reacting that we have accumulated from our years of experience, upbringing, ways of protecting ourselves. They create anxiety and a state of fear. A trigger event may be where your:

- authority is defied
- services are denied, I feel devalued or unacknowledged in some way
- my expectations are not met

When I am in fear, I am in shock - I treat the behaviour/event as an attack on myself. I go into the primitive fight or flight state or

This is the moment when I CHOOSE MY ACTIONS. I may choose to behave in persecutor, victim, or rescuer role OR my assertive self. If I do not recognise this moment then I will respond with these controlling behaviours:

When I am experiencing this, I wish to separate/disassociate with the other by making the other person into an object – name calling, then respond with controlling behaviours

We will continue to act using old patterns until our awareness of triggers and our management of these triggers enables us to step outside of our current way, observe what we are doing and reduce our defensiveness, being open to learn a new way of responding

Persecutor Behaviour:

Persecutors:

Choose aggressive behaviour (both overt and covert).

Persecutors make decisions to coerce or control the other party by:

- chasing (verbal) - to create an argument
- reverse chasing - deliberately pushing the other person's buttons to make him/her attack, so the controlling behaviour can be justified.

Rescuer Behaviour:

Choose to deny own needs and help others regardless of whether they want help.

Victim Behaviour:

Choose passive, submissive, 'poor me' type behaviours; expect others to "mind read" my needs. I may deliberately decide to reverse chase – pushing another's buttons.

To MANAGE 'FEAR and stop myself being controlling I need to:

- Know and understand and be able to identify my own signals - body (sensation), heart (feelings) and head (thoughts).
- Recognise and hold the fear by creating strategies like taking a breath, remove myself from a situation momentarily and take on positive and useful thoughts and feelings. Notice how the other person is feeling.
- Choosing an aware response (assertive self).

Ways I fail to account for my controlling behaviour:

- Denial – "I wasn't controlling", Minimise – "I only ..."
- Blame – "she/he did it...; it was really their responsibility"
- Collusion – "guess what I said to ..." "Did you hear about the issue with..?" "It's a shame they're not as professional as I thought, they're not able to be trusted"

Tool: Listening Skills – L.A.C.E. & F.I.D.O.

L.A.C.E.

Listen for understanding. First relax. Then attend to the other person, trying to understand what it is like for him/her.

- initial approaches show non threatening behaviour.
- environment is chosen and established to encourage trust
- observation not interpretation
- the intention to listen is evident
- Notice the person's non-verbals and mirror these e.g. head, facial movements, hands, arms gesturing etc.
- body language is matching the other persons without being too close.
- rapport – tune into the other person's breathing, tone, pace and manner and then mirror this.
- nod, show interest.

Acknowledge your understanding. Help the other person be aware that you are trying to understand what they are saying.

- minimal responses (vocal non-verbals)
- attending
- reflect back your understanding of what is being said
- use of silence and pauses

Check your understanding. Make sure that your understanding is correct. In practice this is often combined with acknowledgement.

- Paraphrasing
- Summarising
- reflection of feeling
- Check out assumptions and check for understanding

Enquire after more understanding. Ask the questions that will encourage him/her to provide specific information.

- Assertion
- skilful questioning

F.I.D.O.

It is useful to regard these as **priorities**. They are not usually the stages of the communication process.

Feelings..... prevent people from understanding the
Information..... which can be used to make
Decisions..... about actions to produce the future
Outcomes..... which are desired

Viewed as stages, they suggest a procedure that is often too simple minded and inflexible to cope with a complex reality.

Viewed as priorities, they give a simple set of strategies for resolving roadblocks in the communication process. If the likely outcomes are not what are desired, make the appropriate decisions. If decisions cannot be made, or agreed on, exchange and understand more information. If something interferes with the exchange or understanding of information, include information about the underlying feelings and beliefs.

Learning to Communicate
Dick B (1986) University of Queensland Bookshop

Tool: Perceptual Positions

"The state of your life is nothing more than a reflection of your state of mind." - Wayne W. Dyer

Introduction

Perceptual Positions comes from the field of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). NLP theory and practice has been used for many years to assist people to enhance their intrapersonal and interpersonal knowledge and skills. It is particularly useful in building people capability especially in the area of relationships. Building effective relationships in the workplace is key to successful performance now and in the future. Getting to know and understand others is the foundation for collaborative work relationships and is a skill that is needed to achieve and work well in a rapidly changing work environment.

The NLP field is the study of human excellence. In the early 1970's, Richard Bandler, John Grinder, Robert Ditts, Judith Delozier, Leslie Cameron-Bandler and others discovered ways to access and identify specific and reliable techniques that elicit internal mental processes, language patterns, and behavioural characteristics of successful people. This was the beginning of Neuro-Linguistic Programming. "Neuro" represents the internal workings of the brain, "Linguistic" refers to how language influences our experience, both internally and in communication with others, and "Programming" is how to install effective strategies into our own life.

Human excellence in communication can be achieved by examining what works, and how can it work better and by analysing the specific behaviours and internal thinking processes of people who consistently demonstrate excellence in a given area. Strategies can then be identified down to very fine details and be used by others to accomplish the same level of excellence. The same concept is accurate for professional goals, interpersonal relationships, and a person's self-esteem.

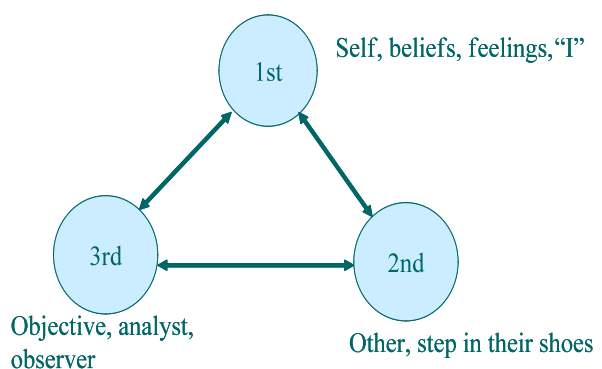
Understanding Perceptual Positions

We all have different maps of reality - ways in which we perceive the world. Our own perception of any experience depends on the position from where we perceive it. If we feel understood, we are more likely to give people our trust, and open up to them more easily providing information about ourselves. This would be from first position. On the other hand, when we take another person's perceptual position (second position), i.e. understanding them and tuning into their world, this further assists to build effective relationships.

Taking different perceptual positions enables us to step out of what we as individuals are currently experiencing and gather new information by seeing things from a different perspective. We can also clarify how our own words and behaviour may be affecting other people, and how they may be feeling about us and our actions. The idea is that, although we cannot truly experience events as others do, we can learn from our efforts to do so, perhaps gaining insights that might help us understand the other's positions, interests, etc.

In applying perceptual positions, we focus mainly on just three of the many potential ways of perceiving a situation: my view – first position, your view – second position, and the view of a detached observer – third position. We can control our attention energy rather than be functioning in automatic by choosing which position we would like to operate from.

First position: This perception is viewed through a filter which includes everything about ourselves – "I", who we are, our emotions, intellect, life experiences, values and spiritual beliefs i.e. you are in your own body, looking out through your own eyes, seeing things from your point of view, focussed on your own feelings, thoughts, opinions and what's important to you. When in first position, our perception of the world is driven by our thoughts and feelings at that time and we often cannot see beyond that. When you feel strongly about issues, events, people etc you are most likely in first position. If we choose to be in



first position rather than have it as a reaction and out of our control, we can disclose with friends and family. This position is very effective in creating authentic connections with others.

Second position: The ability to experience ourselves as someone else does is an essential part of any good relationship. Without some understanding of how others experience events differently than we do, the responses of others would be forever a problem for us. The basic idea of the importance of learning how to “walk in someone else’s shoes” is a very old one, and has been widely recognised in the field of psychology.

Acting from second position occurs when you: step into another’s shoes, take into consideration how a communication or event would look, feel and sound from another person's point of view, when you pay attention to their world view, imagine what it's like to be him or her, look at the world through his or her eyes, and notice their verbal and non-verbal behaviour. When we do this purposefully, we can often accurately guess or imagine what it is like to be that other person. We can then check our perceptions with them and build the relationship further. People will respond well if others are genuinely interested in them and truly make an effort to see and know their worldview.

Getting to understand and feel from another’s perspective is distinctly different from imagining what you would do in their shoes. In the second position, you develop the ability to experience empathy. This position gives much flexibility when involved in conflict with someone. From the second position, you can appreciate how they feel about your conversation and behaviour. It is important to build initial rapport before going into second position. When going into second position, notice how the rapport deepens and relationships are strengthened.

Third position: In the observer position, we are able to observe both others and ourselves and see the patterns of their relating. This means taking a concerned observer's view of events in which you are involved. It is like taking a helicopter view, or being the “fly on the wall”. In this position, we pay attention to what people are saying and doing, notice the dynamics, the ebb and flow of discussion, and pick up the patterns making inferences about what they might mean. This position can be very useful when in a meeting that lacks energy and engagement or working with a team to enable people to acknowledge systemic and people blockages and opportunities. Taking note and commenting on what has been happening from a third perceptual position, an objective stance, can provide a way for others to speak out. This has to be done in ways that challenge the current situation but does not intimidate the people.

Benefits

In any interaction with others, we use all three perceptual positions. This is usually automated, as over time we have developed patterns of communicating that are comfortable for us. Much like changing gears in a car, we move between first, second and third position unconsciously and with ease although sometimes not achieving what we would like.

Much of the research in this area identifies that we rely on one or two positions only. Learning to be conscious of our communication patterns and be able to shift and change gears to achieve specific outcomes, makes an enormous difference to our interactions.

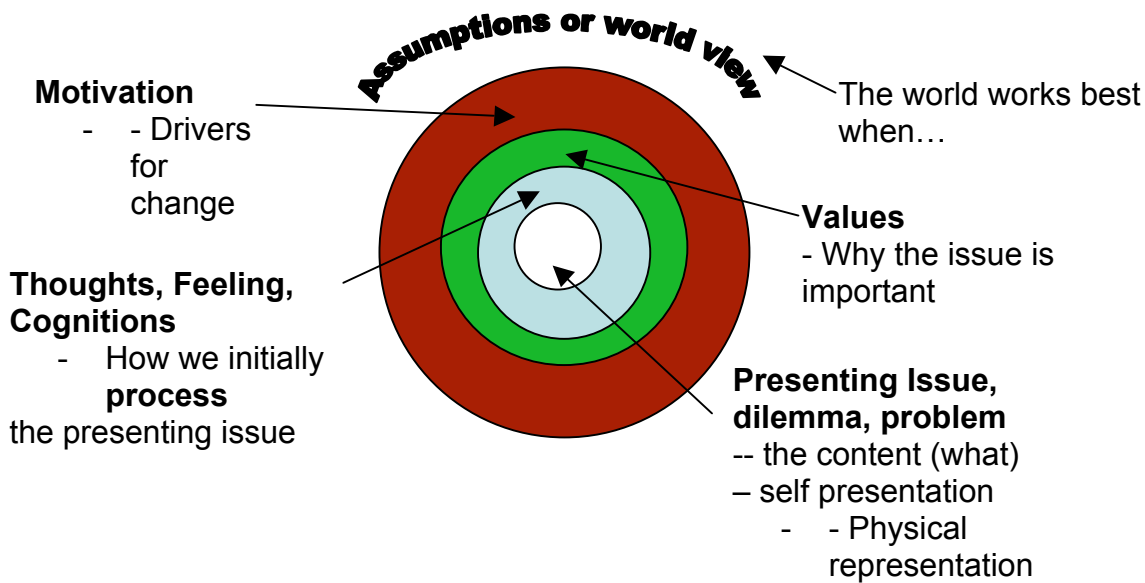
Developing capability in this interpersonal arena assists as follows:

- Enables you to think more flexibly and creatively;
- Improves your understanding of others;
- Provides an opportunity to stand back and consider issues objectively;
- Helps you appreciate the influence of your verbal and non-verbal behaviour on others, and the influence of their behaviour on you.
- Prevent others from taking advantage of you.
- Empathise with others without losing your “self”.
- Differentiate between someone else’s unique way of thinking and your own.
- Gain multiple perspectives on any situation.
- Improve the comprehension of your communication for more satisfying relationships.
- Speak your truth without disrespecting others.

In this mental technique, we can review (or preview) a situation from a number of different standpoints in order to enrich our appreciation of what is involved. We can then deliberately select the type of communication that achieves our purpose for the interaction.(see Figure 1 below)

Becoming skilled and purposefully choosing the perceptual position and the words to communicate with, develops with practice and becomes integrated, allowing us to reflect in the moment on the success of any interaction and shift gears again to move towards an effective outcome for ourselves and others. This is a challenging skill to master and requires practice and a willingness to be open to new learning.

Figure 1. Levels of Perception

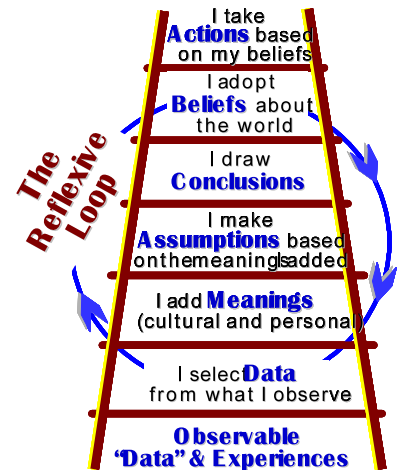


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Tool : The Ladder of Inference

We all infer things and draw conclusions. Once we have, it can rapidly become part of our belief system - and be very hard to change. We start to quickly believe that the same truth is obvious to everyone, our inferences are based on factual data and that the data we have selected is the only real data. By slowing down our thinking processes, the Ladder of Inference helps us see the connections we make. Because of its usefulness in distinguishing data and evidence from inference and interpretation, we imagine Teams will find the Ladder a very useful tool in a wide range of situations.



➔ You can use this Tool to:

- Reflect on your own thinking process and make it more visible to others
- Find out how other people think and see what links and assumptions they make – very handy in interviews
- Determine how valid our beliefs and assumptions are (or not).
- Track back to how we came to conclusions that lead to actions and test whether our conclusions and assumptions are backed up by observable data.

➔ Here are the STEPS:

There are **3 sets of steps** outlined here. The first presumes a *facilitator/coach* introducing the ladder to a team. The second presumes a *team* using the ladder amongst themselves – having already been introduced to it. The third focuses on a particular application for teams, or may be applied to any group situation.

Set (1) – For Demonstration by a Facilitator-Coach

1. Explain what an inference is. Use an example to demonstrate the rungs we climb on the Ladder of Inference. All but the first/last rungs of the ladder take place in my head. The only visible parts are *what I observe to begin with* and *how I decide to act at the end*. Here the steps on the rung to explain and discuss with examples:

1. I start by observing what I see (observable data)
 2. I can't see everything and I select some details of what I see (selective perception)
 3. I then add my own meaning to the data I have selected, based on my culture, values and belief system
 4. I then build on this and make further assumptions (generalising or stereotyping)
 5. I make a general conclusion that affects my feelings and behaviour (anger, defensiveness, hostility, insecurity etc)
 6. I now take actions or behave in certain ways based on my beliefs.
- 2. Ask people to work through their own example:** establish the issue people are looking at. This is the first rung on the ladder - "*What do I observe or see (observable data)?*". Individually, ask people to fill in the other rungs we climb on the Ladder of Inference. Help individuals explain assumptions to each other. Questions that assist include:

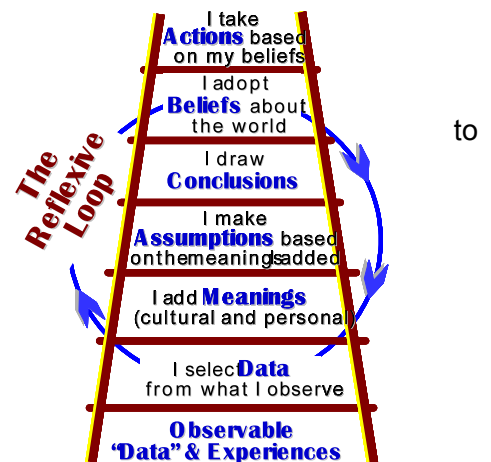
- ? What is the observable data behind that statement?
- ? Can you run me through your reasoning?
- ? Does everyone agree on what the data is?
- ? How did you/we get from that data to these abstract assumptions?
- ? When you said... what you inferred... did you mean... my version of what you said?

Set (2): For using in a team when looking at a situation (e.g. part of Critical Reflection)

Teams will find the Ladder a handy tool to use at any stage in the Learning Cycle. The questions below are ‘formulaic’ but we recommend you practise them to establish the habit of inquiry. After that, you can branch out to develop your own variations.

➔ **There is a worksheet over the page, to help you work through the steps**

1. **Clarify the issue, event or dilemma you’re looking at.** This is important because you want to compare your thinking around the same – not different – issues.
2. **Individually list all observable data.** This is the first rung. Record all you can, look up records, search for evidence/facts. Ask: *“What did I observe? What do I know as fact?”*
3. **Without discussion or debate, compile a group list of what we collectively know.** Use Nominal Group Technique share individual ‘knowing’ or ‘facts’.
4. **State your ‘top-rung’ position:** what beliefs you’ve adopted, actions you took or conclusions you came to. Write this individually then compare it with others.
5. **Individually, fill in the other rungs.** Start from the bottom, work through to the top. Then again, without debate or discussion, share these and make a group list.
6. **Take Each Other Up the Ladder:** Take turns in the team to take each other back to the bottom-rung (observable data). Listen to other’s mental models and inquire about assumptions. Practise using inquiry questions to uncover each other’s thinking (see Tool-11 for a list of Inquiry questions). Once protocol to adopt here: Inquiry only – no advocacy or criticising.



➔ **Here is the worksheet people can use...**

What's the Problem? Brief description...	
? What do we know as a FACT about this problem?	➔
? What meanings or interpretations are we putting on these facts?	➔
? What do we feel is true but cannot support with evidence?	➔
? What meanings have I attributed to 'the facts' I've selected	➔
? What assumptions, conclusions or inferences are we making?	➔
? What don't we know? What are our ponderables?	➔
? What are our old mental models? What new mental models/ concepts are possible?	➔
? What experiments can we try out to test our assumptions and conclusions?	➔

7. Challenge and question each other's assumptions. Again, practise using inquiry questions like these explore and understand each other's thinking as you proceeded up the rungs:

- ? What is the observable data behind this?
- ? Can you run me through your reasoning?
- ? How did you/we get from that data to these conclusions/assumptions?
- ? What evidence is there to support my/our assumptions?

8. List and discuss agreements/differences. There are bound to be both. Treat cases where you both agree on everything as ‘suspect’. Ask yourself:

- ? Are we all thinking inside the same mental models?
- ? How do we explain differences in conclusions/interpretations? Are they significant?

Set (3): A more particular application for Teams

Teams will work together better if people can practise some tools that help us deal on the level of explicit facts – rather than undeclared assumptions and inferences. We’re not saying that it’s possible to deal only in facts. We’re not saying it is desirable to do so. What we are saying is that it is useful to...

- be aware of how we deal in interpretations rather than facts
- distinguish between interpretations and the evidence for them

Viviane Robinson suggests that, when stating our point of view to others, we include three types of information. Each communicated in a different way. Their order may vary depending on the situation. But all must be included. They are as follows:

<p>Evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work as close to the base of the ladder of inference, the “event level”, as possible ▪ Provide the evidence as specifically and concretely as possible, in a form which allows it to be verified ▪ Avoid blame or criticism or demand 	
<p>Interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offer interpretations of what the evidence means ▪ Aware that it may be mistaken, offer it tentatively ▪ Clearly label it as interpretation 	
<p>Encouragement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offer genuine and vigorous encouragement to the other person to challenge the evidence or interpretations or both 	

Tool: Skillful Listening

Skillful Listening - Understand Others First – (Adapted from Team Tech Forums by Bill Cropper from workshops with Chris Patty)

"We typically seek first to be understood. Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They're either speaking or preparing to speak. They're filtering everything through their own paradigms, reading their autobiography into other people's lives.....we try to figure people out, to explain their motives, their behaviour, based on our own motives and behaviour" Stephen Covey 7 Habits of Highly Effective People pp. 239-245

People are often more intent on working out what to say next, rather than really listening to what the other person is saying. Think about things "I often say to you and you say to me" when trying to listen:

- "I know exactly how you feel"
- "I went through the very same thing myself"
- "That's nothing - let me tell you what happened to me"

Listening is a skill all leaders can improve upon. It requires concentration, tolerance and open-mindedness. Covey claims our own personal paradigms, mental models, values and experiences can get in the way of really hearing what others are trying to open up and tell us about. He says we most often "*listen autobiographically*".

There are two levels of real listening - *active* listening and *empathetic* listening. If you listen actively, you listen openly. You hear people out and try to absorb what they have to say before you speak.

Active listening at least gets me to listen attentively to the words being said. But in *Empathetic listening*, I am listening to really understand - not just the words being said but also the deeper feelings behind them. It means:

- listening with genuine intent to really understand
- getting inside the other person's mindset
- visualising *their* way of seeing a situation - not yours
- not assuming anything about what you hear from your frame of reference
- not projecting any motives or your experience into what you are hearing

➔ Review the *Empathetic Listening Scale* (next page).

? What level do you tend to operate at? In what ways are you satisfied with your listening level? In what ways are you not?



The Empathetic Listening Scale		
Level	What I say	What I really feel
Level 1: Ignoring	"I didn't know you wanted to talk to me"	<i>"I don't want you talk to me"</i>
Level 2: Pretending	"I can hear you"/"I'm not listening"	<i>"I don't want to hear what you have to say"</i>
Level 3: Listening for Blame	"I'm not what you say"	<i>"I anticipate attack, deny and defend myself"</i>
Level 4: Distorted Listening	You are wrong"	<i>"I listen to prove you wrong"</i>
Level 5: Interruptive Listening	"I am right"	<i>"I want you to hear me"</i>
Level 6: Active Listening	"I hear the words you say"	<i>"I want you to believe that I understand you"</i>
Level 7: Reflective Listening	"I listen to understand what you say"	<i>"I want to understand what you say"</i>
Level 8: Empathetic Listening	"I am open to listening to you to really understand"	<i>"A want to really understand what you say, feel and see"</i>

Adapted from Schutz *The Human Element* pp. 66-67

➡ Note down a recent (or ongoing) disagreement or confrontation you are experiencing with someone.

➡ Try to think through a future encounter where you use empathetic listening to try to change the energy. For example:

- ❓ Where is the person coming from?
- ❓ What beliefs, want or fears are driving their behaviour?
- ❓ What are the issues or concerns underlying their position
- ❓ How might you address these in a creative and mutually beneficial way.

Tool: Precision questions – listening for cue words

Adapted from Viv Read, Crosstech

Precision questions aim for specific results. In many exchanges of information we tend to be very general about what we say and take the other person’s understanding for granted. In such situations, there’s always a certain amount of information that is left unsaid. The listener could interpret this information in a completely different way. They then act on their own interpretation. And all of this can lead to confusion.

Precision Questions are useful because:

- ▶ They recover the deleted, distorted or generalised information that is demonstrated by hazy language and “fat” words or vague words – eg. increase, better, effective, delayed etc.
- ▶ They can be used to advantage at any point in a communication transaction.
- ▶ The type of Precision Question you use is determined by the kind of fat words you want clarified and the outcome you have in mind...

Here are some examples of Precision Questions...

Precision Questions for Verbs:	
Statement	Precision Questions
Annie: My manager persists in <u>leading</u> me through every item	I can appreciate that can be distressing but what I don’t quite understand is... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How specifically is she <u>leading</u> you? OR • What do you mean by “<u>leading</u>”?
Deleted Information: In this case it is the meaning given to the verb – <u>leading</u>	
Precision Questions for Nouns: (Including non-specific, eg He, she, it, people, they...)	
Barry: They don’t involve me in their plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who doesn’t involve you in their plans? • Which plans exactly are you referring to?
Deleted/Generalised Information: Who or what in particular the person is referring to.	
Precision Questions for Generalisations:	
Jennie: That case officer never works hard....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never? • Was there ever a time when she did work Hard?
Distorted Information: The person is likely to believe that it is “always” this way, and this is often not the case.	

Precision Questions for Comparators:	
Jerry: I want greater understanding of the situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater understanding than what? • How much greater do you mean?
Deleted Information:	The item that is being compared to something/one else. The present standard is being compared to a future standard without being made explicit.
Precision Questions for Block Busters:	
Angie: I have to take care of things here. <i>(This is an imperative statement that allows little room for discussion.)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would happen if you didn't take care of things here? <i>(The answer might open an opportunity to gather further information through precision questions, about the real necessity of the statement.)</i>
Distorted Information:	The implied effects, causes and outcomes that are often out of the person's awareness.

Do you notice that:

- ▶ The questions are “content free”. All the content is provided by the other person.
- ▶ The questions do not provide a direction for the answer. The direction is left where the other person thinks it is relevant.
- ▶ As you use the questions you will naturally become more aware of hearing the words that signal the deleted information.

? What precision questions would you use when listening to these comments....

Statement	Precision Questions
Kylie: I always thought the way we did things was a bit old-fashioned but never said much about it.. I was working with a lot of older-style tradesmen at the time.	
Brian: Our boss believes in sound management control procedures and specialisation. He's pretty firm on functional responsibility too.	
Roger: Our biggest challenge was we recruited by bringing people together from three different departments, all with very different work cultures and values.	
Janet: A key motivation for our agency has been a desire to deliver better outcomes for clients, customers	

Observer checklist - Listening skills

You are the observer, **watch** and **listen** carefully to a couple in conversation. Try to assess how the listener is performing against these criteria.

Attending Skills: <i>(environment, space, evidence of rapport, body positioning, breathing)</i>	
Use of Silence:	
Acknowledging and affirming: <i>(use of vocal non-verbals)</i>	
Further evidence of rapport: <i>(acknowledging feelings)</i>	
Checking for understanding (paraphrasing):	
Selective use of questioning: <i>(open and closed questions to increase understanding and build on <u>rather than</u> discuss what the other person is saying)</i>	

Tool: Giving positive feedback

What are the key considerations when giving positive feedback?

What are some of the common responses from others to positive feedback?

In what way do you normally respond to positive feedback?

What are some appropriate ways we know of?

How can you make your positive feedback really count?

Observer checklist – Feedback skills

CHECK SHEET FOR OBSERVER		Comments
1. Did the feedback giver attempt to put the other person at ease and build rapport?		
2. Did the feedback giver define the objectives of the discussion?		
3. Was the feedback specific enough?		
4. Were the impacts and consequences precise and objective?		
5. Did the feedback giver encourage the employee to talk by the use of quality LISTENING & QUESTIONING skills?		
6. Did the feedback giver attempt to learn about causes of the worker concerns/ difficulties? Were the responses paraphrased?		
7. Was there a mutual problem solving rather than a controlling approach?		
8. Were options explored? (more than two?)		
9. Was a mutual action plan agreed upon?		
10. Was the meeting closed positively?		
11. Will the relationship between the two parties be stronger as a result of this interaction?		

Tool: How to receive negative feedback

SOME GUIDELINES:

- **Offers the possibility of learning something new and valuable about your performance**
- **Should be based on past not future behaviour**

- Reframe your thinking about negative feedback from an attack on me to an opportunity to learn and grow personally and professionally
- Manage your emotions
- Listen carefully
- Try not to let your defences build
- Mentally note your questions/disagreements
- Paraphrase what you have just heard (check for understanding)
- Seek clarification
- Ask for examples – paraphrase again
- Carefully evaluate the accuracy and potential of what you have just heard
- Collect additional information from other people
- Observe your own behaviour more closely
- Observe other's reaction to your own behaviour more closely
- Don't over react to feedback where appropriate – modify and evaluate the outcomes

Tool: Strategic questioning



All questions differ in their power. It's not a matter of a question being labelled strategic or not, a question can be more or less dynamic, more or less strategic, more or less actioning, longer or shorter levered.

To adapt de Bono's terms there are "rock" questions, those that assume a tough truth, which focus on hard edged, permanent, unchanging reality, and then there are "water" questions which are those which flow, which work to find a way through, a reality that moves, a focus on "to" rather than "is". A water question takes the form of the container into which it is poured, but is not a form unto itself.

I like to think of these question families as increasing in fluidity, dynamic and strategic power as you go down from level to level. In any use of the strategic questioning process, we would start near the top of the family order and work our way down to the more powerful question families.

FIRST LEVEL

-- describing the issue or problem

While this level does not use strategic questions as such, describing the issue or problem is an important job. We need to gain the facts and points of view of all the main players in order to frame the strategic questions later.

1. FOCUS QUESTIONS

These questions identify the situation and the key facts necessary to an understanding of the issues at stake. When using questioning with an individual, this is the time when the facts of the situation are presented. Questions here focus on understanding the relevant parts of their story. When using Strategic questioning in a community polling process, questions focus on how they think about the particular issue at stake.

The key in framing the questions is to be open and non-partisan in the questions and in the tone of the questioner. It should be an equally valid question for a person no matter what their position is on the issue.

"What aspects of our community life concern you?"

"What do you think about the logging of old growth redwoods?"

"How has the violence in our community impacted you?"

"What are you most concerned about in your community?"

2. OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

These questions are concerned with what one sees and the information one has heard regarding the situation.

"What do you see?"

"What do you hear?"

"What have you heard and read about this situation?"

"Which sources do you trust and why?"

"What effects of this situation have you noticed in people, in the earth?"

"What do you know for sure and what are you not certain about?"

3. ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

These questions focus on the meaning given to events. Here the questioner is trying to ascertain how a person thinks about the situation, what motivation is ascribed to key participants in the story and the relation of individuals and events. "Why" questions are appropriate here. You are still gathering information and there is usually little motion in your questions - but you might be surprised. Sometimes these questions trigger strong feelings, or unanticipated motion.

"What do you think about?"

"What are the reasons for?"

"What is the relationship ofto?"

4. FEELING QUESTIONS

These questions are concerned with body sensations, emotions and health. It is important not to skip over these questions. Feelings often interfere with thinking, trust and imagination. Listening to and honouring the personal consequences of an event or issue is important in freeing the person to think about the area.

You do not have to "fix" the feelings ... you can't. Simply listen respectfully and when you sense the person is ready, move on. They may return to this level from time to time naturally. Some people may wish to spend very little time in the feeling level, while others may get lost in feeling and need some encouragement to move into a more dynamic discussion.

"What sensations do you have in your body when you think or talk about this situation?"

"How do you feel about the situation?"

"How has the situation affected your own physical or emotional health?"

SECOND LEVEL

-- Strategic Questions. Digging Deeper.

Now we start asking questions that increase the motion. The mind takes off, creating new information, synthesising, moving from what is known into the realm of what could be. Here you find more long-lever questions.

5. VISIONING QUESTIONS

These questions are concerned with identifying one's ideals, dreams, values. Articulating dreams and visions makes them a bit more real and their power is undeniable. We begin to build a bridge from the anchor of the present into midair. We stop pushing things as they are and focus on how things can develop.

"How would you like it to be?"

"What is the meaning of this situation in your own life?"

6. CHANGE QUESTIONS

These questions are concerned with how to get from the present situation towards a more ideal situation. As future alternatives take form, they are examined. Often the vision is partial but people are able to identify pieces that need to change. Later these specifics can be worked into a cohesive whole. Some people prefer a visioning process before asking specific change questions.

"How could the situation be changed for it to be as you would like it?"

"What will it take to bring the current situation towards the ideal?"

"What exactly needs to change here?"

"How might those changes come about? Name as many ways as possible"

"Who can make a difference?"

"What are changes you have seen or read about?"

"How did those changes come about?" (here you are trying to find the individual's change view which will greatly impact the strategies for change available to the person.)

7. CONSIDER ALL THE ALTERNATIVES

These questions examine the alternatives that come from the vision and ways things need to change. There are many ways to get to any goal. If a person is only examining two alternatives maybe more feeling work needs to be done.

Be sure not to give more time, enthusiasm, or focus to any one alternative even if you think it is the best. Also search out alternatives that seem on first glance to be odd or unusual. These ideas may have the seeds of other more viable alternatives, or suggest other ideas later on.

You may focus on creating alternative visions or alternative ways of achieving the changes mentioned above. Some people will get overwhelmed with questions that ask for "all the ways" but will continue to create if you simply request more ideas one at a time. Stay open to new ideas popping up throughout the process.

"What are all the ways you can think of that would accomplish these changes?"

"How could you reach that goal? What are other ways?"

"Be sure to tell me if other ideas come up ..."

8. CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

Explore the consequences of each alternative. Conscientiously examine each alternative for personal, environmental, social or political consequences, giving the same amount of time and energy to each alternative. Returning to feeling questions may be beneficial here.

"How would your first alternative affect the others in your group?"

"What would be the effect of using the runoff for your garden?"

"How would you feel doing (name each alternative)?"

"What would be the political effect if you did?"

9. CONSIDER THE OBSTACLES

Each alternative has things in the way of being achieved. Identify the obstacle, and how to deal with it if the alternative were selected. Focusing on obstacles is an important first step in removing them.

Obstacles may be addictions, values or needs. It is more useful to focus on what keeps a person, group, or institution from changing rather than pressuring them to change. Choices are clearest when the change and the obstacles to change are visible to both the questioner and questionee.

"What would need to change in order for alternative "a" to be done?"

"What keeps you from doing?"

"What prevents you from getting involved?"

10. PERSONAL INVENTORY and SUPPORT QUESTIONS

These questions are concerned with identifying one's interests, potential contribution and the support necessary to act. An important aspect of encouraging change is identifying the support needed to make the change. It may be financial, verbal, or emotional support that is needed.

"How can I support you?"

"What would it take for you to participate in the change?"

"What do you like to do that might be useful in bringing about these changes?"

"Tell me what is special about you."

"What aspects of the situation interest you the most?"

"What support would you need to work for this change?"

At this point in the questioning a decision may begin to emerge. Check to see if the person you are questioning perceives the decision arriving. If the decision is not apparent, do not force it. Often several days of pondering and several nights of dreaming are needed before clarity comes.

"Do you feel a clear decision coming forth?"

11. PERSONAL ACTION QUESTIONS

These questions are those which get down to the specifics of what to do, and how and when to do it. The actual plan begins to emerge. A questioning relationship may use several time periods to advantage. Sleeping and dreaming help the inner sense "true" the vision and plan. Action questions can also focus on alternative plans and possible outcomes in both the long and short term. Feel free to play with the planning process -- remembering that the future is always changing.

"Who do you need to talk to?"

"How can you join a group that is working on this?"

"How can you get others together to work on this?"

Source: Strategic Questioning for Personal Social Change . Fran Peavey.Last Updated: February 2, 1999

Webmaster Dan Perez

www.crabgrass.org/strategicmore.html

Tool : Active listening and strategic questioning checklist
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Comments

Attends to the speaker	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creates Empathy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reflects back facts/main message content	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reflects back feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uses non verbal cues to convey warmth	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uses "pacing"	<input type="checkbox"/>
Suspends judgment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asks open ended questions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uses verbal prompts	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uses silence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reads body language	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asks strategic questions	<input type="checkbox"/>

Examples of Strategic Questions asked:

Tool: Mapping conflicts

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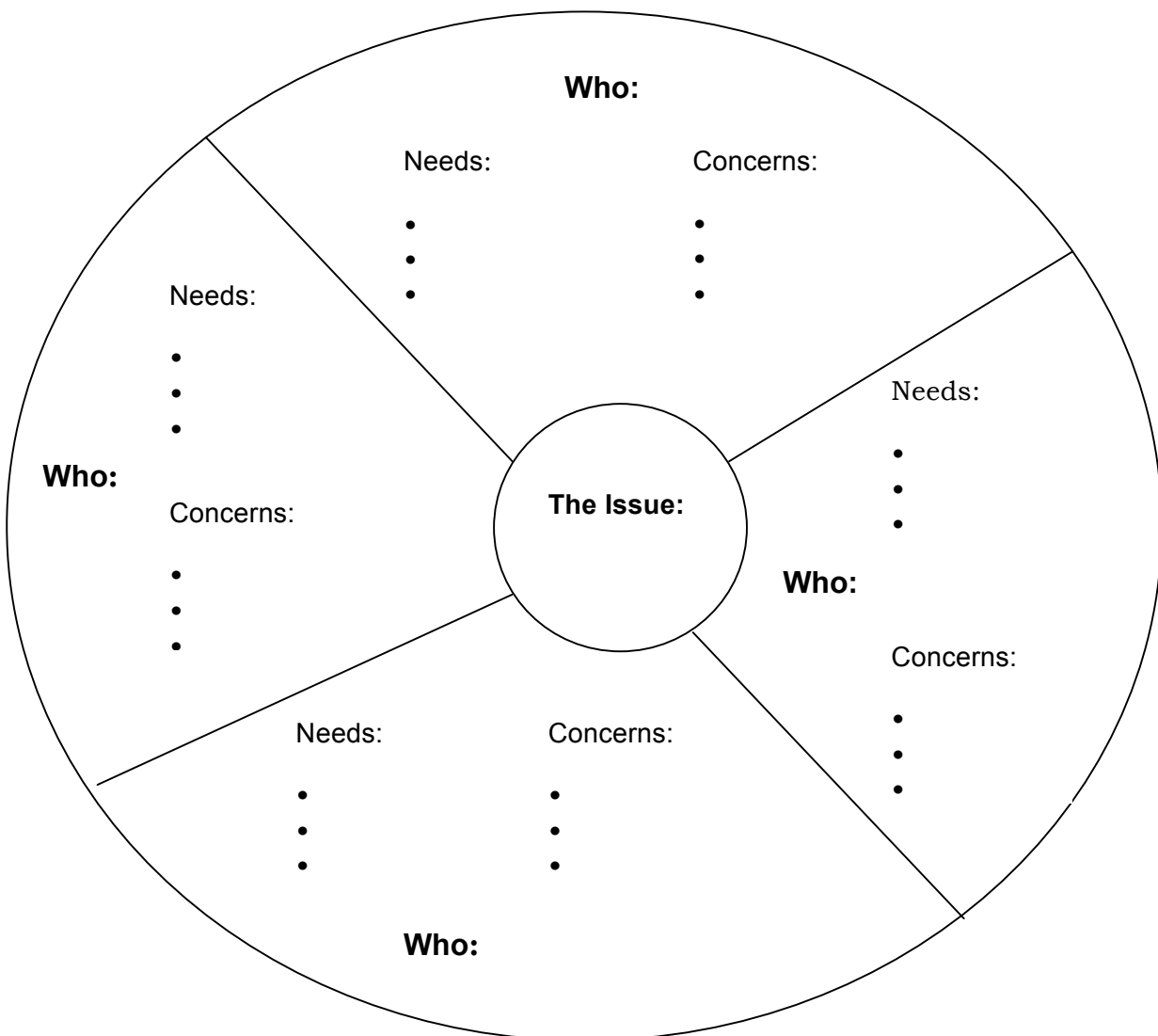
In the centre circle, define briefly the issue, the problem area, or difficulty in neutral terms that all would agree on and that doesn't invite a "yes/no" answer. e.g. "Filing" not "Should Sal do filing?"

In the sectors of the large circle, write the name of each important person/group (stakeholder).

Write down each stakeholder's needs. What motivates him/her/them?

Write down each stakeholder's concerns, fears or anxieties.

Be prepared to change the statement of the issue, as your understanding of it evolves through discussion or to draw up other maps of related issues that arise.



Tool: How to uncover needs during mapping

Introduce Needs Approach

Explain that we're looking for a solution that allows everyone to have as many of their needs met as possible.

Shift from Solutions to Needs

When asked what they need, many people reply with solutions that they think are needs, such as "I need a fence around the building site." The need is to protect public safety. There are a variety of solutions which meet that need. The fence is only one of these.

Ask "Why?"

As people explain why their solutions are important to them, they usually express their underlying (core) needs. "So, if you had that, what would that give you?"

Testing

Use active listening skills to check what you have heard or surmised about their needs.

Look for Indicators

If a need is intangible (e.g. respect), it may be helpful to ask what would indicate or point to the need being met. Ask what sorts of things the people concerned would want to have happen. These may be then built into the solutions.

Break into Component Parts

An abstract or complex need (e.g. acknowledgment) may be divided into simpler parts by asking what is involved and what it means to the person.

Identify Concerns and Fears

Ask specifically what would happen or what would go wrong if the need wasn't met.

Move Fixed Positions

If people are stuck with their own positions, help them to shift. Ask if there are any circumstances in which their solutions would not satisfy them or why other solutions don't work for them. Paint "what if..." scenario which could uncover their unrecognised needs to move from the current situation. Use strategic questions to help the shift.

Brainstorm the Needs

What are the elements that would be part of a successful agreement? Explore what needs would have to be met to produce an agreement that worked for everyone (including influential people who are not immediately obvious).

**"Needs include interests, values, hopes, desires, wants.
Encourage people to shift from their solutions to exploring their needs."**

Adapted from The Conflict Resolution Network PO Box 1016 Chatswood NSW 2057 Australia (02) 419-5500

How to read your Difficult Conversation Map

Adapted from The Conflict Resolution Network PO Box 1016 Chatswood NSW 2057 Australia (02) 419-5500

Look for:

Consider:

Common Ground

Which needs and concerns are held by everyone?

New Perspectives and Insights

What hadn't been seen before?

Hidden Needs, Concerns and Pay-offs

What deeper needs and concerns might exist? OR

What unstated intentions or pay-offs might exist?

Special Concerns

What are particularly difficult areas that need attention?

Leads

What have you noticed that is worth following through or finding more information about?

*Highlight the major needs of each participant. Now develop options which incorporate as **many of these needs** as possible.*

Tool: Responding to resistance

When faced with a statement that has potential to create conflict, ask open questions to reframe resistance. Explore the difficulties and then redirect discussion to focus on positive possibilities.

EXPLORE – Clarify details especially when there are generalisations.

- | | | |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| It's too much to ask. ... | ➤ | What particularly is too much? |
| They all do the same.... | ➤ | They <u>all</u> do? |
| I just want to do my job.... | ➤ | What do you see as doing your job? |

FIND OPTIONS

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| You can't do that around here. | ➤ | What would happen if we did? |
| He (she) would never ... | ➤ | How can we find ways for it to happen? |
| They always | ➤ | Are there any times they don't? |
| We've tried that already. | ➤ | What was the outcome? |
| | | Do you have an idea of how it could work? |
| This is the only way to do it. | ➤ | Yes, that's an option. |
| | | What else could we consider? |

REDIRECT – Move to the Positive

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| It will never work. | ➤ | What would it take to make it work? |
| I won't... | ➤ | What would make you willing? |
| It's a failure. | ➤ | How could it work? |
| It's disastrous. | ➤ | What would make it better? |
| He's (she's) useless. | ➤ | What is he (she) doing that is acceptable? |
| It's impossible. | ➤ | What would it take to make it possible? |
| I can't. | ➤ | You can't see any way to do it at the moment? |
| I don't want to. | ➤ | What would you like? |

GO BACK TO LEGITIMATE NEEDS AND CONCERNS

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| He's (she's) a hopeless case! | ➤ | It's hard to see how you could work with him (her)? |
| You fool (and other insults)! | ➤ | What do we need to do to sort this out? |
| How dare you do such a thing! | ➤ | What do you dislike about it? |
| It should be done my way. | ➤ | What makes that seem the best option? |
| He/she does it the wrong way | ➤ | He/she puts a different emphasis on to you? |
| He/she doesn't do their fair share. | ➤ | Where do you think his/her priorities may lie? |

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Checklist: How to respond to unfair tactics

The collaborative approach includes these components. Use them to steer a difficult conversation in a positive direction, and particularly whenever an unfair tactic has been used.

REFRAME

- Ask a question to reframe
- Request checking of understanding “ (“Please tell me what you heard me/them say.”)
- Request something she/he said to be restated more positively or as an “I” statement to ensure owning and grounding.
- Re-interpret an attack on the person as an attack on the issue.

RESPOND NOT REACT

- Centre. Manage your emotions
- Reframe an attack on you as an attack on the problem
- Let some accusations, attacks, threats or ultimatums pass.
- Make it possible for the other party to back down without feeling humiliated (e.g. identify changed circumstances).

RE-FOCUS ON THE ISSUE

- Maintain the relationship and try to resolve the issue.
- Summarise how far you’ve got. Review common ground and agreement.
- Focus on being partners solving the problem, not opponents.
- Divide the issue into parts.
- Address a less difficult aspect when stuck.
- Invite trading currencies (“If you will”..., then I will.....”).
- Try for agreement in principle.
- Explore best and worst alternatives for a negotiated agreement. (BATNA/WATNA)

IDENTIFY UNFAIR TACTICS

- Name the behaviour as a tactic
- Expose the feelings that the tactics have exposed.
- Use “I” Statements
- Address the motive for using the tactic.
- Seek out and discuss the principles underlying the other side’s perceptions.

CHANGE THE PHYSICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- Have a break. Change locations, seating arrangements etc
- Go into smaller groups. Meet privately.
- Call for meeting to end now and resume later, perhaps “to give opportunity for reflection”.

Tool: Managing unwillingness to resolve in others

Discuss the benefits of resolving the situation.

- Consider e.g. increased harmony, decreased stress, greater productivity and effectiveness, lower costs. What benefits would result with resolution?
- What are the “costs” of not resolving the conflict.

Explore blockers to further discussion.

- Consider whether he/she is backed into a corner. Is there something that can be done to help him/her save face?
- Identify areas of misinterpretation (e.g. objectives, motives, points of view, values, feelings, requirements, outcomes, needs, concerns). How can these be clarified?
- Consider the relationship with the other person. Could a relationship of greater trust be developed, independent of solving the problem?

Divide the conflict-resolving process into smaller steps.

- What is the issue? Is it clearly defined?
- What are both the other person’s needs and yours? Have you fully explored both?
- What are both the other person’s concerns and yours? Have you fully explored both?
- Have you identified areas of common ground?
- How have you clarified the outcome(s) towards which you’re both aiming?

Evaluate your part in the conflict

- “Am I using my power appropriately?”
- Have I tried to build empathy with this person? How? How else could I?
- Have I communicated my perspective, my needs and my concerns clearly and cleanly?

Consider “pay-offs” for not resolving.

- Am I getting more out of having the problem than solving it (e.g. having a high investment in being right, having the final say, taking the credit, some financial gain, getting attention and energy, confirming beliefs, keeping others at a distance, etc.).
- Is the other person getting more out of having the problem than solving it

Consider your own resolution to the problem, if the other person remains unwilling to resolve.

- Have I done all I can? What else can I do to resolve this situation for myself?

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Tool: Different ways to say “No”

1. ***Your natural No*** **This is your own idiosyncratic version**

2. ***Reflective Listening, Then No***, **Reflect back the content and feeling of the request and then say no**

3. ***The Reasoned No*** **Say no and give a succinct reason for it**

4. ***The Raincheck No*** **Saying no this time, but suggest that the other person asks again**









5. ***The Broken Record*** **For use with very aggressive or manipulative people (e.g. sales people). Simply use a one-sentence refusal and repeat it no matter what the other says.**

6. ***The Flat-Out No*** **Rarely used by assertive persons but simply saying “no” is appropriate at times**

7. ***The Celebrative No*** **This is a dramatic gesture to signify refusal (like Martin Luther pinning his theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church)**

(Adapted from Bolton, 1987, 196-9)

Tool: Protocols for handling disagreements

What to DO	What to SAY
<p>1. Inquire further - about what's led the person to that conclusion.</p>	<p> "How did you get to this point again?"  "Are you working on data that I (a) don't know about (b) didn't consider (c) overlooked?"  "Maybe I've missed something here. Can you go over this again?"</p>
<p>2. Do you truly understand the view?</p>	<p> "If I have you right, what you're saying is that. . ."  "I wonder whether I really get what you mean about..."</p>
<p>3. Explore, listen, and offer your own views in an open way.</p>	<p> "I wonder whether you've thought about."  "I think I can add to/work in with ... (that)"</p>
<p>4. Listen for larger meanings that may come out of honest, open sharing of alternative mental models.</p>	<p> "I wonder if we've got different mental models around this..."  "Do you think we're moving towards a really major rethink of ...X... here? "</p>
<p>5. Use The Ladder or left-hand column</p>	<p> "When you say (X) I think that it means..."  "As soon as you said that I immediately thought..."</p>
<p>6. Surface Concerns Honestly - not to score points and say what's behind them.</p>	<p> "I have trouble seeing (that) because of (this)..."  "Before I can buy into this, I have some concerns you need to help me with..."</p>
<p>7. Embrace the Block: Don't try arguing it away. Test current thinking. Focus on the "data" (take people back down to the bottom rung of the ladder of inference.)</p>	<p> "What do we know for a fact?"  "What do we sense is true, but have no data for yet?"  "What don't we know?"</p>
<p>8. Find Facts/Ideas to Move forward. Find new facts or concepts that help people shift the block or reframe it. Is there any way you might design an experiment to provide new information?</p>	<p> "What do we agree/disagree on?"  "Is there another way of looking at this?"  "Are there facts we've overlooked?"  "If we developed a new perspective to see this, I wonder what it might be?"</p>
<p>9. Merge Perspective or Mental Models Consider each person's mental model as a piece of a larger puzzle.</p>	<p> "Are we starting from two very different sets of assumptions here? Where do they come from?"  "Is there any way to merge these together?"</p>
<p>10. What Information, Event etc. do you need to change your mind?</p>	<p> "What would need to happen before you can consider this or another alternative?"</p>
<p>11. Ask for Help in redesigning, reframing, reviving, reviewing the situation.</p>	<p> "It feels to me like we're getting nowhere and I'm afraid we might walk away without any better understanding. Have you got any ideas that will help us clarify our thinking?"</p>
<p>12. Don't Take Disagreement for an Answer - Don't let the conversation stop with an "agreement to disagree."</p>	<p> "I don't understand the assumptions underlying our disagreement."  "Is there any way around our disagreements?"</p>
<p>13. Avoid advocating your "case" - when someone else speaks from a different view this just irritates things.</p>	<p> "I have my own views I'm willing to put aside for now. Let's concentrate on yours."</p>

Tool: Checklist for managing a potential conflict

When preparing for a conversation which may create conflict, it pays to practice what you want to say in advance. This preparation can then serve as a guide when in the middle of the conversation also. Now there are no rules that say simply because you use a process like this that the other person will play fair. What it does encourage though is that you will at least have considered the conversation in advance and in the first 60 seconds be able to be as clear as you can about what you think needs to happen as well as involving the other person. After this you can ask the other person to come out from behind themselves, put themselves into the conversation and make it real, and make it real from your part also. That's all you can do. As Susan Scott says – All conversations are with yourself – and sometimes they involve other people.

Here are the steps:

1. Name the issue
2. Select a specific example that illustrates the behaviour or situation you want to change
3. Describe your emotions about this issue
4. Clarify what's at stake
5. Identify your contribution to this problem
6. Indicate your wish to resolve the issue
7. Invite your partner to respond.

Some explanation as to why these steps;

1. Name the issue

The problem named is the problem solved. If you have multiple issues with someone, ask yourself what's at the core, what's the theme or commonality. Do your thinking to get at what is at the heart of the difficulty otherwise your opening statement will lack focus

2. Select a specific example

This needs to be succinct, so the other person doesn't get confused or misunderstands the specifics, so keep it short. It also means they don't lose sight of the immediacy of the issue for you. Pick an example that hits the issue right on the head

3. Describe your emotions about the issue

Why do this? Because this issue is personal and your emotions are the way by which you have made the issue personal for you. Disclosing your emotions about an issue lets the other person know that you are affected and even vulnerable and this often has an impact on the other person. Describe whatever emotions are true for you ... sadness, anger, concern, frustration. Remember, all feelings are valid.

4. Clarify what is at stake.

Why is the issue important for you and the other person you are confronting? What is at stake for the organisation, for clients, stakeholders and your relationship with this person? Remember this is not a threat to the other person, so it needs to be delivered as a clear statement about why the issue is important.

5. Identify your contribution to the problem.

Problems are seldom if ever one sided. Before confronting another person about “their” behaviour, you need to get clear about your role in how the issue came about or even how you have been involved in the development or maintenance of the issue as a difficulty. This is not a confessional statement, just recognize any role you’ve played in creating the issue and that you intend to do something about it. Often your own communication style may have lead to confusion or lack of clarity at the beginning of work projects or assignments.

6. Indicate your wish to resolve the issue with the other person

“Resolve” indicates your intent to work with the person, rather than “fix” which may indicate blame or resentment. Often good communication works because there is congruence between the words you use and your intentions, so you have to mean it when you say “resolve”. You’ll need to restate the issue also, because this means you have come full circle and reinforces clarity with the confronting issue.

7. Invite your partner to respond.

In this approach to managing a difficult conversation we are not trying to line the other person up in front of a firing squad. Rather we’re trying to outline clearly the reality from our perspective and assure the other person of our intent to resolve the presenting issue. The invitation comes from a position of mutual interest in the issue and collaboration in working through the issue rather than a position higher up the power ladder, or even appeasing from lower down the ladder looking up.

Source: Susan Scott, Fierce Conversations

Tool: Role clarification and negotiation

Use in performance conversations

Purpose:

The purpose is intended to assist individuals and teams reach agreements about their performance (individual and team) which form part of the performance management process. It can be used in a one – one setting , as between a manager and an individual supervisor , or in small group settings as for intact work teams. The process described below can be extended or shortened to suit. It can easily be developed as the front end to multi rater feedback performance systems

Overview of the Process

- In essence each individual records their accountabilities & major aspects of their role as they see it (currently and into the future) .
- The major aspects only are recorded on butchers paper.
- The individual then explains in some detail these aspects to the other members of the group /supervisor (in the case of one- one).
- The group asks questions for clarification. The purpose for the questions are to determine the fit between the individual’s perception of their accountabilities and the business unit objectives and overall Qld Skills Plan direction and rationale.
- Aspects for negotiation are marked on the butcher’s paper.
- The group (pair) reaches agreement on current and expected future roles and accountabilities.

The process in some detail

Step 1. – Individual Accountabilities & Role Analysis

- Each individual in the group (or the manager and an individual supervisor if one – one) begin by listing their accountabilities & main aspects of their role as they see it on a large sheet of butchers paper.
- Refer to existing documents if appropriate (eg business plan, unit operational plan, position description). Its best to get the individual’s perception of what they do, as this is their interpretation of those documents anyway.
- Use the following matrix for getting the information in a form to be discussed.

Accountability & Role Analysis Sheet

Accountability - Major Role aspect	Strategy for achieving	Targets- outcomes expected this year	Links with other roles

Step 2. - Individual Expectations

It is useful to complete this step before proceeding to step 3, although with practice both steps 2 and 3 can be combined, once some skill in facilitating this process has developed.

- Individuals list in response to their links with other roles, their response to the other person/people in their work group using the following table. Completing this table first may enable a more focussed discussion and negotiation on roles.

Instruction:

For each person in their work group, the individual is to list in the appropriate columns in the table below:

- what they’d like the other person to continue doing just as they are now
- what they’d like the other person to do differently – more of , less of, or different in some way
- their best guess as to what the other person would write about them.

Role Negotiation Sheet

A - Do Same	B - Do different	C - What they'd write about me

Step 3. – Group Discussion - Accountability & Role Analysis Agreement

- Beginning with the supervisor or manager.(role incumbent) The supervisor begins a discussion on his role using the role analysis sheet described in step 1.
- The main elements of his/her role are explained to the group, the fit with the organisation and the rationale.
- Other group members ask questions for clarification – additions or subtraction s may be made to the persons' list.
- The group agrees the “must have” elements of the role and the “discretionary” elements (the parts that are up to the role incumbent to perform as appropriate).
- This discussion will assist the individual and the group to clarify the accountabilities the individual must take on for him/her self for decisions, the choices open for alternative actions and any new competencies he/she may need to develop in the assigned role.

Step 4. – Joint Expectation Discussion

- a) The supervisor (role incumbent) then outlines his expectations of others in the group, particularly as they impact on his role performance. This is the information generated at step 2.
- Generally the first column items are managed easily in this step.
 - The items in column 2 can create a lively discussion between individuals in the group.
 - Other group members may help clarify the role relationship between individuals by sharing their own perceptions of the relationship.
 - The intention of this part of the discussion is to develop mutual expectations and obligations about accountabilities through a negotiated discussion.

A useful framework to assist this discussion is as follows:

- A (supervisor) non defensively describes one item from column 2, while B (the other, one of the group) first listens, trying to understand what it is like for A by:
 - asking questions for clarification only
 - restating A’s point of view in her own words.

Then....

B responds non defensively to A, while

A then listens, trying to understand what it’s like for B by:

- Asking questions for clarification only
- Restating B’s point of view in her own words.

A responds non defensively to B.....

Etc until some agreement can be reached

Then move on to the next item and so on through column 2. Usually several items on column 2 will also appear on person B’s column 2 list as well so part b) below can be completed as part of the process of exchange between individuals at this time. Usually Column 3 items need not be discussed except as a check to see how each person is perceived by the other.

- b) person B from the above discussion starts with one item from their column 2 for person A and proceeds through the process as described above. In essence this is person B’s view of person A’s obligations to them in performing their(A;s) role.

Step 5. Write up main points from preceding group discussion and agreements.

- The supervisor (role incumbent) has the responsibility for recording the major accountabilities / roles and the main points from the group discussion and make adjustments accordingly.
- This combination of the individual and the group expectations of the accountabilities through negotiation and discussion gives a comprehensive picture of the expected performance by the role incumbent in the role.
- In addition any suggestions or procedures /strategies that have been brought out which may help the role incumbent be more effective in performing the activities of the role are also recorded.
- All group members should have a copy of these notes for future discussions.

Step 6. Joint Analysis and Expectations continue

- The next person in the group (or other person if one- one) presents their butchers paper sheet of their accountabilities & role analysis (step 1 information) for discussion as per step 3.
- The process continues through steps 4 – 5. This process continues until all group members have presented and discussed/negotiated with the group their roles and responsibilities.
- The concluding step in this process is for the group/pair to set a time for review of the agreements made and strategies suggested for developing each individual's role and achieving their accountabilities.

Tool : Left-Hand column analysis

This is based on the work of Chris Argyris and adapted from exercises developed by Bob Dick.

Left-Hand Column Analysis is a powerful personal reflection tool for reconstructing what you and others said (*in the right-hand column*) and what your thoughts and feelings were about it (*in the left-hand column*) after conflict situations.

The term "left-hand column" amongst practitioners of dialogue and skilful discussion is now widely used to represent whatever one is thinking but not saying (ie. "What's in your left-hand column?")

How can I use this?

You can use *Left Hand Column Analysis* to:

- Analyse conversations and behaviour – yours and others. This is most useful following conflict situations
- Record your reconstruction of a conversation /event (or use the 2-column format in this tool to keep your own conversational journal and work through the steps below).
- Reflect on your reasoning and see opportunities for reframing conflict situations
- Share some of your unspoken "left-hand column" thoughts and assumptions with others

A Left Hand Column Analysis usually takes about an hour to write. It can easily be extended to a group exercise though individuals sharing their responses and testing the assumptions of each person's responses.

Alternatively you may choose to invite a trusted other to share the information you'll generate and ask their assistance as a "learning partner" to challenge your assumptions.

A Mini-Case: During the course of our meetings, each of us keeps a 'left-hand column' to become aware of their own "things thought but left unsaid" (undiscussables). At the end of the meeting, time is set aside to try to reflect on and share our LHC's. What have I left unsaid that before we leave, should be discussed or shared? The idea was to give people an opportunity to become aware of their own thoughts. Once those were brought to the conscious level, s/he could decide whether or not to share. It gave people an opportunity to deal with the discomfort as an individual before s/he went on to take the risk of sharing it at the end of the meeting (and then in real time).

➔ Here are the Steps...

Recollect a couple of conversations / events, then choose one that stands out as significant in your interactions with others. A recurring event will be most useful. Perhaps it's either one where you:

- ▶ didn't handle things as well as you would have liked or didn't get the outcomes you were after
- ▶ were less supportive or helpful than you could have been
- ▶ were interested in why the conversation went the way it did, or you were in some way less satisfied with what happened than you could have been.

➤ List the conversation you are going to analyse here.....

- ▶ **Bring the conversation to mind:** Recollect the details of what happened and note your thoughts and feelings as you start to remember the event.

➤ **List your thoughts about this conversation here.....**

? **Where was it? Who was involved? What time was it? What were the surroundings? How did the conversation begin?**

? **What would have been a good outcome for you in this conversation? Why?**

? **How did you go about achieving this outcome? What was it that lead you to think that these actions would achieve your outcomes?**

? **In hindsight, what do you now believe were the actual outcomes for you and others?**

? **Thinking back now what's your best guess about what was happening?**

➤ **Towards the end of this activity, look back over what you've just written to compare and review.**

▶ **Develop a more detailed description** of what happened in this conversation. Try to recall as best you can the exact words spoken.

It is essential that you make it like a script in a movie scene and follow the 2-column format.

In column 2 (Public Dialogue) describe what you and others actually said or did (as well as you can recall). This is the “visible” part of the interaction.

Write down only what you believe was actually said (not what you would have liked to have said)

Call yourself A - and each other person B, C etc. Leave Column 2 alone for now

Thoughts & Feelings (Private Monologue)	Actions & Words (Public Dialogue)

- ▶ **Now go back and fill in Column 1.** This is the private monologue you had with yourself while the public dialogue was going on. This is often invisible during the conversation.

Recall your thoughts and feelings about what you and the other/s did or said.
 Try to match this against the “action-script” in column 2.

- ▶ **Developing Understanding and Interpretation:** Develop a deeper understanding of the conversation from two perspectives – yours and the other person(s) in the interaction.

Underline or asterisk where you’ve made assumptions – about yourself or the other person. Also Circle where you’ve clearly expressed these to the other person.
 Now answer the following questions.

- ? What actions of B & C, etc really get up your nose? What must you think or do, **or not think or do** in response to B, C?

- ? What do you think are B & C’s motives? Why might they act this way towards you? How might B & C’s actions be ways of “looking after themselves”?
- ? Assume B & C’s behaviour is a result of what **you do** - How might their actions help them look after themselves in response to you?
- ? If you were B or C what do you think might be the motives for someone acting in the ways you do?
- ▶ **Personal Reflection:** Look back over your responses to the questions.

? What do you now make of B & C’s behaviour?

? What do you now think about yourself?

- ▶ **Challenging symptoms, patterns and causes:** Think back over your answers above. Try to get a better understanding of how your conversational behaviour develops.

Choose 2 or 3 assumptions you are now aware **you (person A)** made in response to the situation. These may be about yourself or the other person/s. Consider each assumption in turn....

- ? What was it about the situation or behaviour of the people involved that triggered that assumption. List these in column 2
- ? Does the trigger alone explain the assumption? If not what prior history about the *person or similar persons* might underlie the assumption? What information/assumption about others guided the interaction even before the situation? List these in column 3
- ? Are the trigger and history sufficient to explain the situation? If not what deeper beliefs or worldviews might also have lead to the assumptions being formed? Most of us have rules (usually not written) that we use to make sense of the world. In the conversation being analysed what were these? Write them in column 4

1 Assumption	2 Immediate Trigger	3 History	4 Deeper Belief

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- ▶ **Look at your responses:** to see what patterns you notice and what you make of this.
- ? What insights did you now have about your own or others conversational behaviours from analysing the situation?
- ? What things might be a) easy/possible to change and b) harder to change?
- ? What might happen to B or C if these things changes were made? What might not work?
- ? What parts of your own behaviour are a) relatively easy and b) more difficult to change?
- ? What could you do about these aspects of your own behaviour?
- ? How might you suggest to B or C some of the suggestions you made above without getting a defensive response. Step into their shoes first.

Tool: Discussing the undiscussables

The purpose of this activity is to help you identify some of the unstated rules, tacit understandings and thoughts and feelings, that are hard to discuss but which hinder useful openness in order to develop a more constructive and open style of operation. It is not the purpose of this process to achieve or encourage *complete honesty and openness*. Although this can be a useful end result under some circumstances, we do not believe it is always achievable. There is no absolute requirement that you actually reveal any undiscussable information. You may decide to do so, but that is not the primary aim of the activity.

➔ Learning Context – Individuals, Groups , Teams and Organisations

Human beings spend much of their time in small groups, tribes or teams of one type or another. This may be in one on one conversations or small group meetings or large group forums. Our productivity and happiness therefore depends, among other things, on the people we are with and the way we operate with these people. So it is useful if we can make informed judgments about the way we individually and collectively agree on how we work and communicate, if necessary to the way we work with others. We are more likely and able to do this if we *understand* how different people's style and ways of viewing the world, either supports or undermines effectiveness and satisfaction.

One barrier to this happening is that individuals obey a complex set of rules about how the world works best for them, which has come from their years of upbringing and their own styles. These are often unstated. In fact, others are not aware of them. So it's hard for us to know what rules would be better changed. As if this is not enough, some of those rules *forbid* mentioning certain types of information. These are undiscussables. Other rules, as Chris Argyris points out, forbid people from mentioning that there even *are* taboos. He calls this, '*the cover-up of the cover-up*'.

There will always be undiscussables between individuals, in teams and organisations. Often we hold thoughts or feelings or assumptions about another person which for whatever reason we prefer not to disclose. Perfect frankness and openness about everything is perhaps an impossible ideal and may be at times, of questionable benefit. Some taboos, however, prevent people from telling us what we need for understanding their actions. They may be acting towards us based on their untested assumptions. Misunderstandings are common and often unresolvable. The most damaging aspect of any rule or condition preventing open discussion is that it hinders the giving of accurate feedback. Having undiscussables or tacit rules places us in a difficult bind. Some issues are almost never discussed and therefore seldom negotiable. Yet unless these can be renegotiated, people get stuck in their present mode of operation and conflict remains unresolved.

➔ Some Conditions

Throughout the activity, three important conditions apply:

- ▶ *Lists are private.* The lists of discussables and undiscussables are private. Your lists are for your use only.
- ▶ *You decide what to discuss.* You decide what, and to what extent, you discuss any of the items on your lists. (The nature of an item is often discussable when the item itself is undiscussable, but you decide the extent to which you discuss even that.)
- ▶ *You decide what to move.* You decide which items, if any, you move from list to list.

This activity is most effectively conducted in small groups of between 3 - 5 people, unless the whole group is very small.

➔ Here is the Undiscussables process

Acknowledgements to Bob Dick: *The original process used in this workbook was originally designed by Tim Dalmau and subsequently modified by Bob Dick for use in activities drawing on the concepts of Argyris.*

1. Individually list undiscussables: work individually to develop a list of information that you find difficult to discuss openly in group settings. Think of a specific group (e.g. your area office management team, your natural work team etc).

- ▶ Work individually, without talking to compile a list of hard-to-discuss information. Make as long a list as you can in the time available. (If you find this hard, don't be concerned. There will be a later opportunity to add to the list)
- ▶ What information would you find it hard to discuss in the group? - What types of thoughts about the group or the people in it would you be reluctant to say aloud? (There is space on the next page to record your ideas.)
- ▶ You may find it useful to include information about the following
 - Attitudes towards yourself - your feelings and thoughts
 - Your assumptions about what's happening in the team or the motives of members
 - Your reactions towards characteristics of individuals (age, sex, ethnic origins, social class, education, and the like) and any behaviour which annoys you
 - The competence, style or mannerisms of the people or their activities/actions you like or don't like

2. Identify the undiscussables: choose items from the previous list and sort them to compile three lists of aspects of the group, which it might at some time be awful to discuss. Categorise them into:

- An **A** list of *discussables*. Things you could discuss in the (whole) group now, even if with some difficulty, if there were reason to do so.
- A **B** list of *potential discussables*. Things you don't think you'd be able to discuss now, but you can anticipate that they might become discussable in the future.
- A **C** list of *undiscussables*. Things you don't think are likely to become discussable in the whole group:

At the back of this Workbook (p.88 here) is the *Undiscussables Worksheet* for you to compile your three lists of topics:

3. Discuss nature of undiscussables: Look back over your A, B and C lists, noting the *type* of information, which appears there. During a brief discussion (whole-group if facilitated, otherwise small group) inform other group members of the type of information.

- ▶ You are not revealing the items, only their general nature.
- ▶ You may be able to add to your own A, B or C lists with items suggested by what other people say.

5.Consider moving items between lists: Working individually, examine your B list. Are there one or two items there which you could almost move to your A list? Mark them in some way. If you were to move one item, which one would it be?

- ▶ You are not required to *move* any items (though you may do so if you wish), only *mark* them. Your task is to identify those items which are more discussable and those, which are less discussable
- ▶ Similarly, are there one or two C items which could almost be shifted to the B list? If you were to move one item, which one would it be?

6. Individually identify conditions which aid movement: Thinking about moving items has probably drawn your attention to the differences between A, B and C items (particularly between A and B items). What are the differences?

- ▶ To help you answer this question, consider what it was that made items movable? How did they differ from the items which were least movable?
- ▶ Identify the conditions in a group which make items more discussable
- ▶ Working individually, focus on the A and B lists
- ▶ What is it about a group that helps to make an item discussable? - What are the conditions within a group?

7. Discuss conditions: Compare notes with other group members on the conditions which would make it easier for you to discuss the items on your lists, particularly the B items


- ▶ *Develop a group list of the conditions*
- ▶ On a sheet of butcher paper, list the conditions. A procedure for doing this is as follows...
 - Each person in turn contributes the most important item from her list that is not already listed
 - Continue going around the group until their individual fists are exhausted, or you run out of time
 - Individually choose the most important conditions
 - Working individually and without talking, from the "conditions" list choose the 3 most important conditions, *excluding* your own offerings from your chosen three. (Your facilitator may change this number of items)

Note: "Important" means those conditions which would make it easiest for you to discuss the items on your lists, especially the B list, especially those which could help to improve the way the group operates.

- ▶ Agree on the most important conditions. In the large or small group, use a vote to agree on group priorities for the conditions. A quick way of doing this is for each person to place a check mark against each of her three chosen conditions. Someone then tallies up the check marks.
- ▶ Briefly discuss your willingness to try to observe the conditions. Each person who wishes to, speaking as an individual, identifies the condition(s) that she is willing to try to observe. You are not required to participate unless you choose to.

8 Again consider moving items: Continue to work individually and without talking. In the light of the conditions agreed by the group, are there B items which you are now willing to move to your A list (and perhaps C items which can be moved to the B list)?

Note: you are not required to move any items unless you choose to do so. We urge you to resist any pressures from others.

 Please read this...

A small group as a self-improving system. Think of a small group as a system of rules, actions, and results...

Implicit rules → actions → results for individuals and group

Each group member obeys a set of rules which dictate what she may or may not say or do. Her actions in doing so have various effects, for better or worse, on herself and the other group members. However, the rules are mostly implicit. Many of the results are undiscussable. And their undiscussability is undiscussable in turn. The group and its members are thus locked into a system which is not as effective as it might be. For the rules to be renegotiated, two conditions are required...

- ▶ the rules are made explicit
- ▶ group members are able to give feedback on the results of anything said or done

The resulting feedback can then be used to critique the existing rules, and renegotiate them... No matter how effective (or ineffective) the group is, it is then able to improve its performance over time. It can also find ways of pursuing its collective goals in such a way that the individuals find it satisfying. It has become a self-improving system.

9. Final discussion: The small group briefly discusses...

- the nature of the items on the different lists
- the conditions which the group has agreed to try to observe, and the result this had on the categorisation of items.

Then hold a *large group discussion*: A brief final discussion of the activity and its results is held in the large group, preferably facilitated.

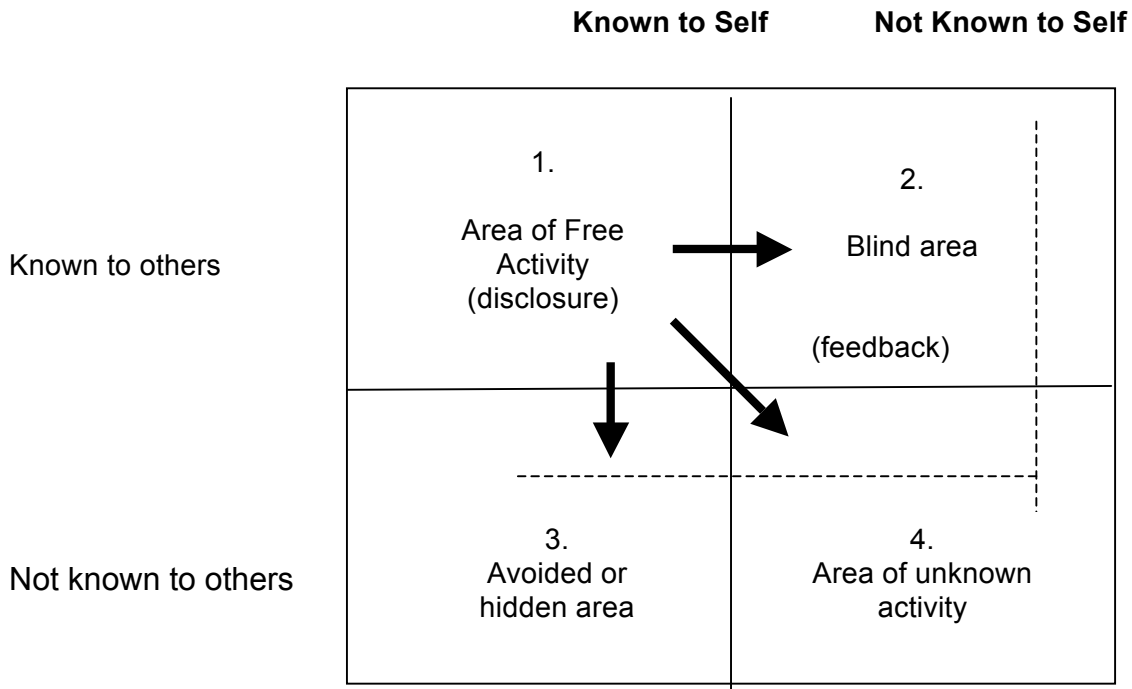
Undiscussables Worksheet

A. Discussable	B Potentially Discussable	C. Undiscussable

Tool: Developing Self-awareness and noticing others – the ongoing journey.

The Johari Window

Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham working together at a laboratory in California, developed a model that assists people to build self-awareness. Both Joe and Harry contributed part of their names and called it the Johari Window.



The Self

- Here we both know the information about me is available to you so we can learn, work, solve problems, and discuss what we know together. It is apparent that the first small square represents the only area of free operation and interaction. If we are interested in the possibility of growth and development, this can take place as boundaries are pushed wider in a climate of trust and acceptance.
- Here you see in me what I don't see in myself. If I do not hear this from you, then this information remains unavailable to me for all shared events. I may invite others to tell me of my blind spots - of faults I can try to do something about, or of my potential that I had not thought of developing. We need to be aware that in giving others feedback this says as much, if not more about the feedback giver than it says about the other person. At the time of giving feedback, we are disclosing what is important to us.
- Here I choose not to share things with you. This act of hiding takes energy and therefore it reduces the amount of energy available to us for being more creative and effective. Alternately I may feel free to share things about myself I had previously hidden from them through embarrassment, inhibition, or feeling of vulnerability. Choosing to be open can contribute to trust building and it models effective relationship building.
- This is uncharted water, all people are unaware. It may even happen occasionally that in such a context of free and frank sharing, new insights unknown either to myself or others can come, with consequent possibilities of growth and enrichment.