

Developing a culture
of strong relationships

Conversations are your key tool

Culture lives in
our conversations



"If you want to change a culture
– change the conversation"

– Edgar Schein

"We have a culture of candour"

– Ed Catmull, Pixar

(Candour: the quality of being open and honest, frankness)



Why conversations matter

- Conversations are the operating system of our relationships
- Conversation patterns and cultural norms
- Conversations are both a diagnostic tool and a change mechanism

Types of workplace conversations

- One-on-one
- Team conversations
- Cross-functional dialogues
- Informal vs formal
- Surface vs deep conversations

How the setting influences the conversations

- Desks and tables as barriers
- Psychological safety signals
- Time of day

Walking conversations

- More relaxed and less confrontational
- Creative thinking – (brain massage)
- Great for sensitive topics

From conversation to dialog

Key elements of dialogue

- Deep listening
- Suspending judgement
- Exploring assumptions
- Building a shared meaning – sense-making

Quality conversations

- Balancing advocacy and inquiry
- Practising humble inquiry
- Active listening

Inspiration for conversations

Structured conversations

- Check-in
- After Action Review w/Goals Grid
- Team temperatures, results, processes, relationships

Co-created conversations

- What do we need to talk about? (one topic per Post-it)
- All Post-its on the wall (whiteboard /flip-chart)
- Cluster in themes – name the theme with a heading
- Build an agenda from the themes
- (Use Dot-Voting if it is unclear what the priority of the group)

Practical implementation

Reality check

- Calendar audit
- Who do you have conversations with?
- What type of conversations do you have
- What is missing?
 - People?
 - Topics?

Tips for improving conversation quality

- Be intentional/present
- Ask questions
- Hold the space for silence
- Check your understanding
- Recognise the opportunity for an improved relationship

Conclusion: The power of conversations

- Conversations are not just a communication tool
- Quality conversations influence the whole system
- Be the change you would like to see