



5 Effective Conversations at Work

HR Coach Research Institute White Paper

5 EFFECTIVE CONVERSATIONS AT WORK



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These are challenging times to manage a business. It seems like every time you turn around, technology's taken another leap, barriers have come down, and people have found clever new ways to communicate.

Thanks to social media there's a 24/7, global conversation going on – and everyone's invited. To thrive in this networked world, businesses have no choice but to change who they talk to, and how they do it. Controlling the flow of information is simply no longer an option when your employees, competitors and customers can all talk to each other at the tap of a screen.

It's time to adapt and get involved in the change by taking the reins of the conversations you are having. And we're not just talking about marketing and external communications – this is a fundamental shift in the way you manage and talk to **everyone** in your community. Starting with meaningful and effective conversations with your own people.

In summary? Society and communication patterns are changing. Dramatically. To stay competitive, business systems and management practices need to change too.

So it's time, to be honest. Can you keep up? Are you ready to run your business as an ecosystem, where knowledge is shared, decisions are devolved, and the lines on the organisation chart are all a little bit blurred?

And if not, does it matter?

Before we answer that, let's take a look at this debate into context.

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Communication: the heart of better business

The HR Coach Research Institute put management under the spotlight by taking an in-depth look at what societal change is doing to business growth activities – and at what managers are doing to keep them thriving in such a volatile world.

As part of this process, we conducted a survey of more than 500 organisations, gathering feedback from more than 26,000 people (that’s a lot of data) and examining the differences between low-, medium- and high-performing organisations.

The key insight? The focus for business growth is not from innovation, it is through improvement.

That’s right. Businesses are putting most of their effort and resources into doing what they already do – but doing it better. What’s more, the research showed us that it’s ongoing, systematic changes within the workplace that are most effective at improving performance.

And the beating heart of good performance is good communication – after all, how can you hope to get things done (and done as well as is humanly possible) if you can’t have a good, honest conversation about what’s needed, who should be doing it, and how best to go about it?

But among the invaluable data, we collected were thoughts and evaluations from thousands of employees and employers about the conversations they have at work. And what that data told us was rather worrying:

- Overall, communication doesn’t happen well in all organisations.
- Communication style and quality vary greatly between low and high performing organisations. Employees in high performing organisations were:
 - > 12% happier with the formal communication process
 - > 13% happier with their team leadership
 - > 16% more likely to describe management as good quality communicators

So on the one hand, we’ve got businesses trying to be more competitive by being better at what they do – primarily by making ongoing improvements within the business – and on the other hand, the number of businesses struggling to communicate with their employees is alarming. We also have spin savvy employees, who know when a conversation is a set up or a talk fest.

Which is why we’ve created this white paper, as a resource to help you hold effective conversations that will tangibly improve business performance and the way connectivity within.

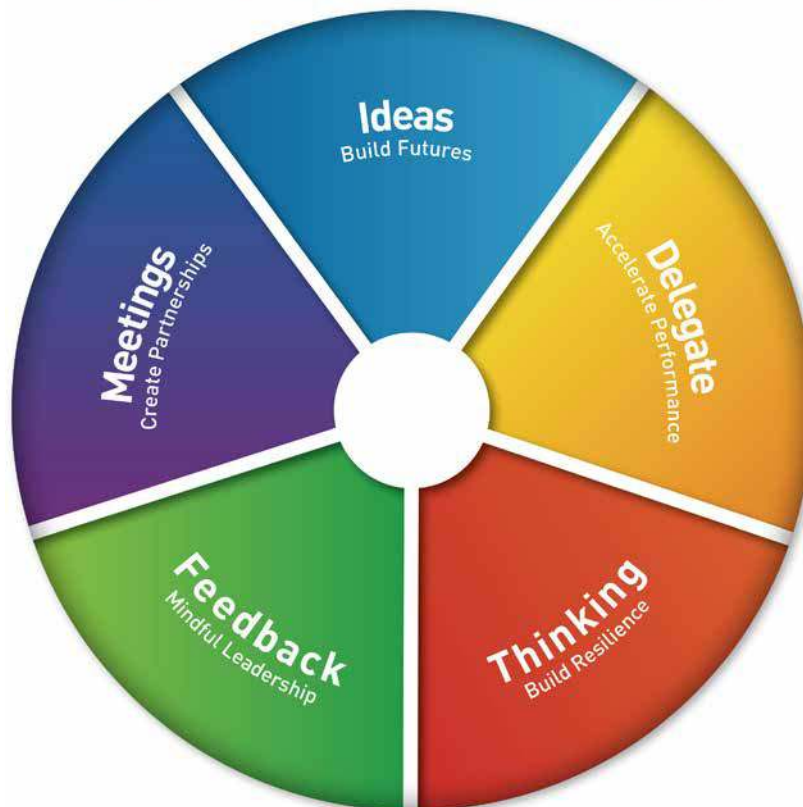
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Getting the basics right

We know that what you need is specific, practical advice to help you get the very best out of your precious people. We have so many different conversations at work. Which ones matter and make a difference? Through the feedback from managers and employees in our data, we've identified five (5) core types of conversations that if done well, drive improvement within businesses.

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In final sections of this paper, we'll dive into each conversation type, explain their purpose and give you practical tips for making them work. But before we get to that, there are some things that never change: fundamentals that underpin any successful conversation, no matter who you're talking to or what you want to get out of it.

The crucial thing to remember is that a conversation is a TWO WAY process. If you're going to get great results, everyone who's going to take part in the conversation needs:

- clear guidelines what the conversation will be about, and what the objective is
- be respectful. Three things are crucial – create an environment of trust, openness and commitment
- be mindful. Focus on building the relationship and encourage new thinking

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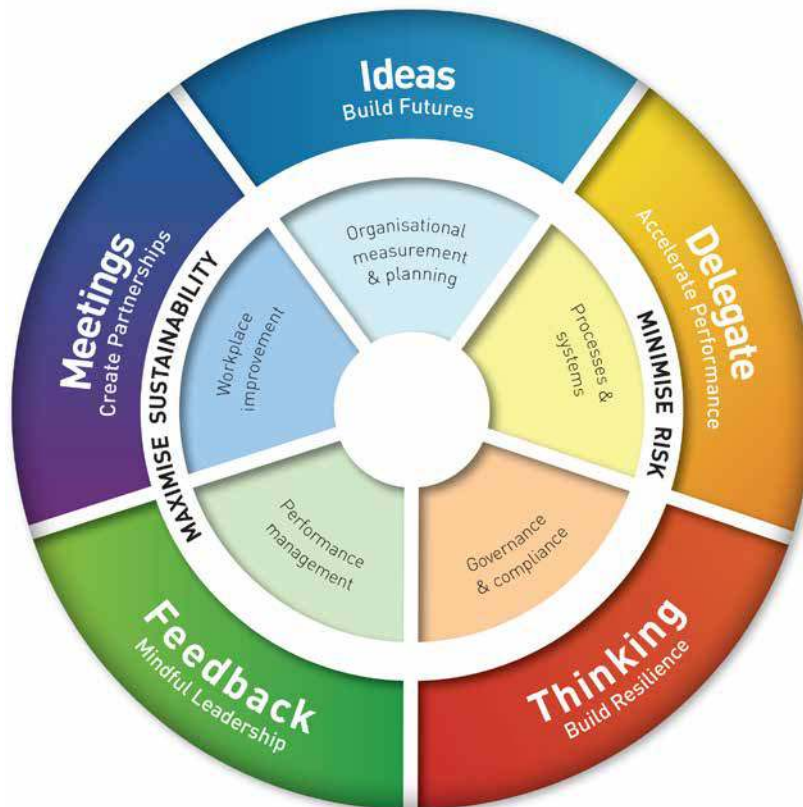
Having the *right* conversation

In 2010, the HR Coach Research Institute defined the people structure inside organisations into 5 distinct functions. Each workplace function stimulates a different and important conversation. What our latest research has shown us are the conversations that are most effective within the workplace.

Each workplace function stimulates a different and important conversation

To have an effective conversation and get great results from a discussion, you need to choose the right type of conversation and to prepare and approach it in the right way.

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Having the conversation right

So here they are: the five essential conversations explained, and tips you need to help you make it work for you.

Ideas Build Futures



Conversation Objective

This is a crucial conversation with the objective of planning ahead for the future of your business. It's all about strategy, planning and implementation.

Conversation Examples

Strategic thinking, defining culture and values, building capability and creating inertia, business planning, business analysis.

Success tips

1. Make sure everyone is well prepared
2. Stick to intelligent and factual information
3. Choose which way the conversation starts – you can create ideas based on where you are now, or define your ideal state (what you'd love to achieve) and work backwards

Delegate Accelerate Performance



Conversation Objective

This is a smart conversation that aims to support accelerated performance. It develops your people's skills, and achieve more as an organisation. It is linked to getting a job or project completed, business as usual, processes and systems.

Conversation Examples

Managing technology and systems, getting things done, managing knowledge and data and providing quality client outcomes.

Success tips

1. Have the right conversation, with the right person, at the right time
2. Be clear on the delegating process – understand and explain what you are delegating (a specific task or entire project) and exactly what you expect them to achieve and by when
3. Make sure they have the tools they need to complete the task (and they know how to use them)
4. Have a follow up process: checklists are an effective way to manage expectations

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Thinking Build Resilience

Conversation Objective

Managing risk is difficult in fast paced and changing environments and critical thinking is tested during high-risk situations. These conversations are crucial and having an ethical mindset that promotes resilience, fairness and respect in the workplace are important.

Conversation Examples

Exploring issues and risk, evaluating credibility and reputation, compliance and regulations, building resilience and future proofing and crisis management.

Success tips

1. Think first – then be critical (i.e. be rational and objective)
2. Evaluate the consequences of each option
3. Two heads are better than one: tap into the right people to do the thinking with you



Feedback Mindful Leadership

Conversation Objective

Providing feedback is an 'intelligent' conversation and supports mindful and competent leadership. These conversations are important to motivate people who are already doing great work, to set them back on track if they're not, and to help them develop their skills so they can do even better in the future.

Conversation Examples

Building capability and competence, demonstrating leadership, providing effective feedback for improvement, performance reviews, performance planning and performance coaching.

Success tips

1. There are four key types of feedback you can give to someone:
 - Showing your appreciation for their work
 - Assessing performance (letting them know how they are tracking against your expectations)
 - Coaching (giving advice or support to help them to complete a task or do something better)
 - Mentoring (giving them career support and identifying opportunities for personal development)
2. Before you begin, agree on the issue or topic you're going to discuss
3. Write down what you've discussed and agreed

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Meetings
Create Partnerships



Conversation Objective

Meetings provide an avenue for contribution at both an individual and collective level. The health of the workplace “tribe” and belonging is most demonstrated here. Out of all conversations, this is the least effective in all organisations.

Conversation Examples

Fosters engagement with pride, stimulates team dynamics, provides open communication channels at work, internal team meetings, sales meetings, board meetings, committees, project teams and workshops.

Success tips

1. Make sure everyone involved is fully prepared
2. Clearly define the roles of everyone in the conversation
3. Use your Meeting Code of Conduct to guide the way people communicate and interact in the meeting
4. Use an evaluation checklist to gather feedback from participants after the meeting

As this is a high impact conversation, needing the most attention, we have other essential considerations for successful meetings

- Gen Y is driving many of the changes in the way people communicate and use technology, and their rapidly filling the ranks of management.
- Virtual meetings are a great way to bring remote or shift workers into your group conversations
- It’s vital to support diversity and manage differences through transparency and negotiation

Key takeaway: the golden rules for successful business communication

We would like to leave you with this final key takeaway: when it comes to communicating with your people (or anyone, really), there are two 24-karat golden rules.

1. Have the right conversation with the right people at the right time.
2. Set everyone up for success in a consistently respectful and collaborative environment.

For more information or advice on any of the conversation types and success strategies for meetings, chat with our members.

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ABOUT HR COACH INTERNATIONAL

HR Coach International supports an international network of business professionals, working with clients to be more strategic and proactive in their people management. With member organisations internationally, it is backed by the HR Coach Research Institute to provide insight and currency in applied methodology.

To find a Network Partner or to find out more about the international network in Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea, UK, Canada, USA and Europe, visit www.hrcoachinternational.org

ABOUT THE HR COACH RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Since 2002, the HR Coach Research Institute has researched growth triggers and constraints on the business sector. Its primary focus is the connectivity between business strategy and employees. Key research outcomes have included:

- Succession Planning, planning stages model – 2014
- Career Monitor Model for Retention – 2013
- HRF101, Human Resource Framework for Business – 2010
- Business benchmark series for employer and employee engagement connectivity – 2008
- Strategic Action Model – 2004
- Innovation patent for measurement of organisational capability – 2003
- Identification of key behaviour matrix of managers and employees – 2002

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