



Interested in Having a Real Dialogue With Your Colleagues?

Use this tool to help get more meaningful conversations started

What has been your experience when people come together to explore a new idea or to discuss a sticky issue?

Typically what happens is each member in the group talks about his or her own personal experience, with little coherence to the shared conversation going on around them. Often there is little dialogue where people engage freely with each other. This is particularly true when there is real or potential conflict or when people are just confused and don't know what to do next.

Does this experience sound familiar to you?

People in organizations of all sizes recognize the value of dialogue to share learning and perspectives. Yet, most don't have a clear and productive way of beginning such a dialogue. That is particularly true when people are dealing with difficult issues or with their own frustration and confusion.

Why is this?

Discussions about difficult topics often have the potential to become personal or challenge an individual's competence and performance. This makes it harder for everyone involved to engage in an open, free-flowing conversation. When this happens, the following often occurs:

- Personal feelings like blame and shame, hopes and fears, and safety and risk often get in the way, or participants just cannot see their way through the current challenge.
- Conversation quickly gets out of control and escalates to a shouting match over who did what to whom.
- Dialogue veers off into an exploration of what "they" did to prevent "our" success—"they" referring to whoever is not in the room.
- The discussion shifts to a non-emotional theoretical discussion, remaining at the proverbial 10,000-foot level with no real insights that inform future action.

How can you engage in these conversations to generate new ideas and insights that have the potential to achieve the overall objectives of your organization?

Our "Pattern Spotters" tool offers a simple and direct way to prompt a group to talk about difficult ideas in ways that bring shared meaning to the dialogue.

The following five questions will allow you to get different perspectives among your group on a single event. Use these prompts to facilitate conversations of all types. Once the topic is introduced, any necessary explanation is given.

1. Generalization: *In general I noticed...*

This question allows for a view of the whole event at once to provide broad reactions. For instance: In general I noticed the team is productive and gets things done.

2. Exception: *In general...but...*

This question allows individuals to state what they missed or what they say that didn't fit the general patterns. For example: In general I noticed meetings start on time, but Jake was often late.

3. Contradictions: *On one hand...and on the other hand...*

This question allows the expression of paradoxes that occur to the observer. For example: On one hand Jake makes it to most meetings; on the other hand he is always late.

4. Surprises: *I was surprised that...*

This question allows participants to say what happened that they didn't expect, giving voice to more potent emotions like fear and joy. For example: I was surprised Jake was on time for Tuesday's meeting.

5. Puzzles: *I wonder...*

This question allows individuals to uncover the patterns shaping their interactions. For example: I wonder what was different about last Tuesday that allowed Jake to show up on time.

Dialogue generated by these questions will help expand your group's shared understanding of each other. Some of the ways this will benefit your group include:

- Analyzing a current situation to identify productive ways to benefit the entire team.
- Seeing and understanding real sources of conflict that when harnessed correctly can generate new levels of innovation.
- Exploring the potential impact of a new idea or product.
- How to embrace and encourage failure as part of the process towards achieving your next big breakthrough.

**Do you know the absolute truth about a current situation at your organization?
[Download the Four Truths Tool now.](#)**

Do you have a copy of our book on Adaptive Action yet? What are you waiting for? [Order it today!](#)

**Interested in having an HSD session with your organization?
[Contact us now to find out how!](#)**