

Foreword

"Dialogue that reflects an open and personal communication style is a defining feature of modern leadership."

The dynamics of communication in the workplace have shifted.

A more complicated global community and lower levels of trust in big business mean people don't defer to authority in the way they used to. Instead, organisations need to pay attention to conversations that take place in the moment.

Yet the legacy of command and control still characterises many leaders and many workplaces. Managers tell and employees receive. Leaders in this brave new world need to think about how they talk to people. They need to consciously decide whether the style with which they engage people is fit for the modern world.

Managers' skills can no longer be simply about having all the right answers but instead need to be about asking the right questions and allowing the right conversations to happen at work. Dialogue that reflects an open and personal communication style is increasingly a defining feature of modern leadership.

But for conversations to change, mindsets and the behaviours of leaders need to change first.

Dik Veenman,

Founder of The Right Conversation







"Following simple, practical advice can improve the quality of your conversations."

Leaders may recognise the need to change their communication style, but many do not consider it crucial to the company's success.

If HR directors can lead changes in the way senior leadership teams communicate, then the rest of the organisation will follow suit. Conversations at all levels of the organisation will be more productive, performance will improve and the organisation will achieve the sustainable change needed for competitive advantage in the twenty-first century workplace.

Real improvement in the quality of conversations at work can be achieved by following a few simple steps. In this guide, we'll deliver some practical advice for HR directors who are committed to improving the quality of conversations happening throughout their organisations.



"The modern workplace is about transforming the business one conversation at a time."

Conversational leadership is characterised by leaders engaging in more interactive, informal and personal conversations. They don't determine and own the content of conversations. Instead they listen to the workforce as well as talk to them. This collaborative leadership style should be distributed throughout an organisation.

Three types of conversation typically take place in the workplace.



Transactional.

I tell you something. You can ask me questions, but my mind is made up about what I'm talking to you about and the point of me talking to you is to tell you things that I already know. This kind of conversation is classically what leaders do when they communicate top-down. This leadership style is outdated in the modern workplace.



Positional.

I have a view, you have a view, and the point of the conversation is to debate and see which view is the right one.

These discussions characterise the law and parliament – people come together to defend, argue and debate. This is a great platform for bringing your leaders and their teams together, facilitating the start of honest conversation and open dialogue.



Transformational.

I might say there is a problem but I don't have the solution, and I hope that between us we can figure out what a good way forward might be. That is classically a dialogue between people. This is the approach to organisational dialogue that today's leaders should adopt.





"HR professionals need to reflect strategically about how they want conversations to occur..."

Embedding conversational leadership across an organisation reflects a cultural change to how the entire workforce communicates. HR teams need to be willing to reflect strategically about how they want conversations to occur and the kind of organisational culture that will support this change.

Start by examining:



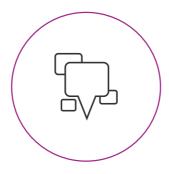
How comfortable people are expressing opinions and challenging each other.



How keen they are to understand the views of others.



How useful and productive conversations really are.



What role hierarchy plays in conversations.



How focused or flexible conversations are.



How present people are in conversations.





The Right Conversation



"Leaders need to be equipped with the right skills to achieve great conversations."

There are five Super-Skills™ that underpin all conversations taking place in organisations. Your leaders need to be equipped with these skills so they can transform your organisation and the conversations that take place within it.

The five Super-Skills™ are as follows:



Presence

This is about recognising the importance of being physically present (even if not geographically in the room). It also means recognising the importance of being mentally and emotionally engaged in the dialogue; creating a "human moment" away from digital or other distractions.



Hyper-awareness

This is about understanding you, understanding your emotional triggers, perhaps what distracts you, what is going to make you bored, angry, exasperated, more likely to talk over someone, and so on.



De-coding

This is "listening", but so much more. It is also about understanding signals such as body language and cultural differences, nonverbal signals, even the use of silence and understanding what is not being said.



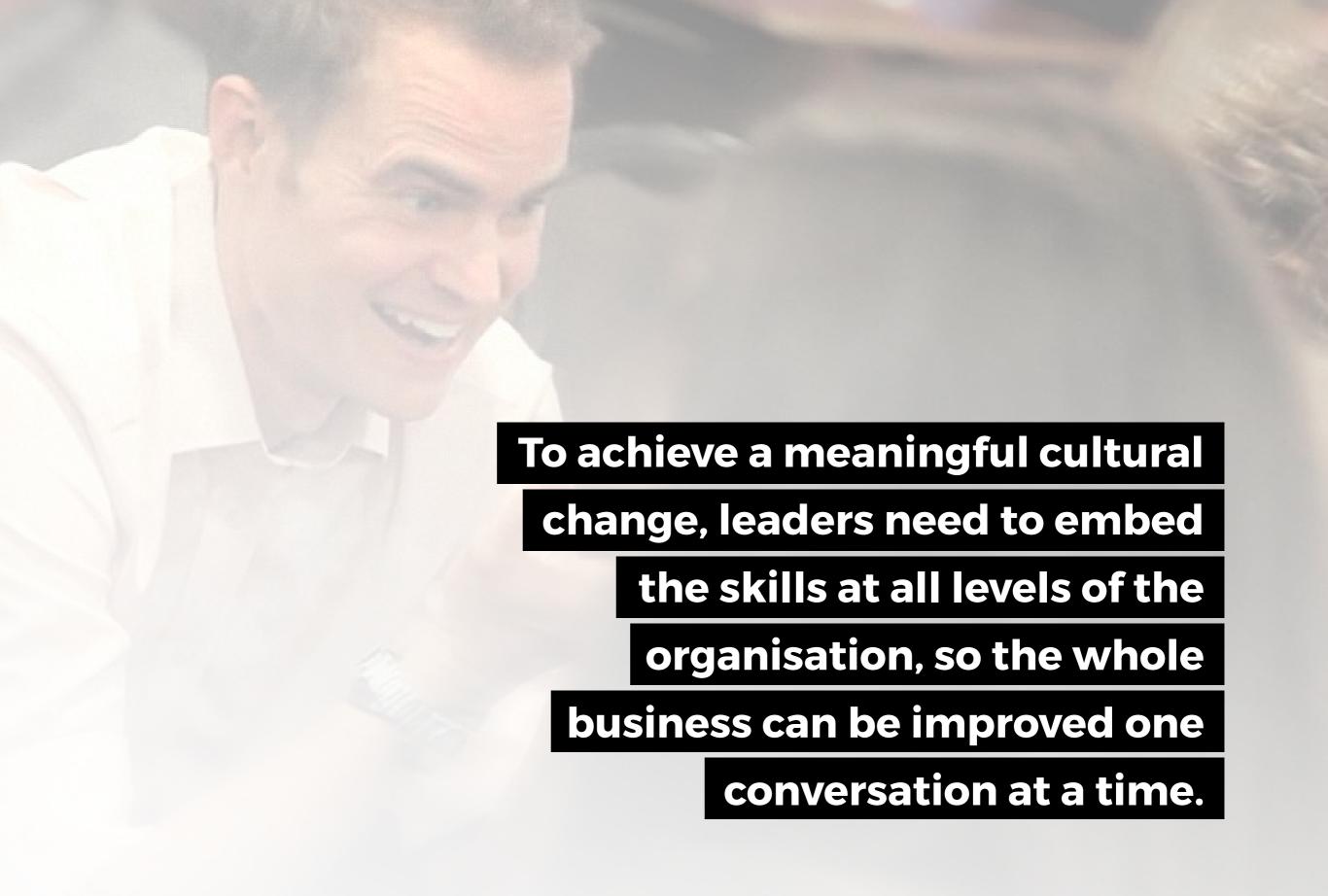
Voicing

This is the ability, and the confidence, to say what needs to be said, to understand the importance of not shying away from giving tough or challenging feedback in a constructive way. It is also about encouraging team members to be comfortable with expressing opinions and challenging each other.



Flow control

This is the practical skill of controlling and directing the conversation so that it has a proper structure – an opening, middle and end rather than meandering or wandering – and to ensure it properly concludes.





"Shaping conversational leadership isn't just about managers. It's about a mindset."

Once you've equipped your managers with the right skills, they need to develop a new level of awareness and pay attention to the quality of the conversations they have. However, shaping a conversational leadership mindset isn't just about managers.

It also means educating the workforce to express and advocate their point of view while feeling confident to challenge and test the robustness of arguments made by others. This gives way to honest, productive and meaningful conversations between leaders and their teams.

To really achieve this, conversation needs to be taken one step further and leaders need to take action. Leaders, at all levels, have to role model the key Super-Skills™ and encourage everyone in their teams to do the same. They also have to make themselves regularly available to meet with their teams, giving employees the opportunities to say what really needs to be said.





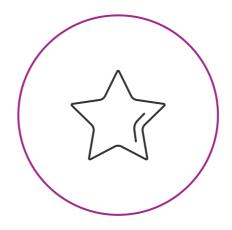
Remember, you don't have to do it alone. Work with an expert that understands the importance of conversations and can offer:



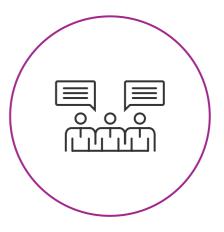




Workshops and training sessions.

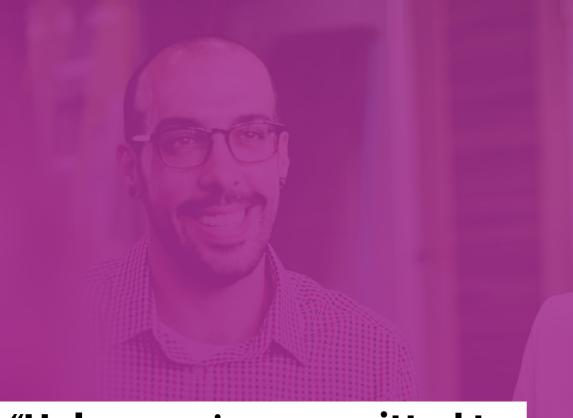


Opportunities to explore the Super-Skills™.



<u>Audits</u> that assess areas for improvement in your organisational dialogue.





"Unless you're committed to really improving the quality of organisational dialogue, your business won't see the benefits..."

"Great organisational dialogue isn't just about words. It's about driving results."

Sure, conversational audits can be re-run, feedback can be gathered from the workforce via focus groups or one-to-ones and questions about the quality of conversations can be included in employee surveys.

But unless you're doing something about the results, unless you're committed to really improving the quality of organisational dialogue, your business won't see the benefits of conversational leadership and the board won't see its value.



By improving your organisation's dialogue, HR professionals can expect to see an improvement in a number of areas, including:



Improved performance.



Higher rates of productivity.



Improved recruitment and retention.



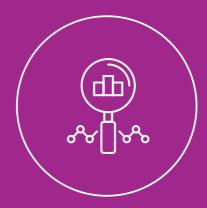
Reduced absenteeism.



Increased employee engagement.



Greater trust between teams and their leaders.



Aligned goals between the individual and the business.



Greater levels of innovation.

Conclusion

"Meaningful conversations lie at the heart of thriving organisations."

The conversations employees have with their line managers profoundly impact how they feel about working for your organisation.

So embedding the five Super-Skills™ into the daily conversations that all managers have will lead to better employee engagement and performance.

But there also needs to be a critical new discipline embedded into the organisation — which is to keep talking about how everyone is talking and not to see conversational leadership as a training programme that people simply attend and forget.

"KEEP TALKING ABOUT HOW EVERYONE IS TALKING."

When employees at all levels talk together openly, they feel their opinions are valued and that there is a genuine, two-way relationship with their leaders.

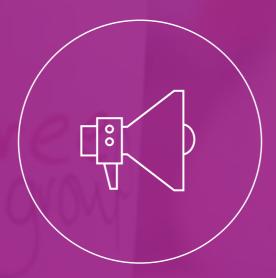




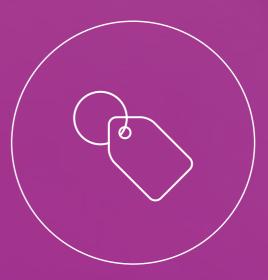
Takeaways:



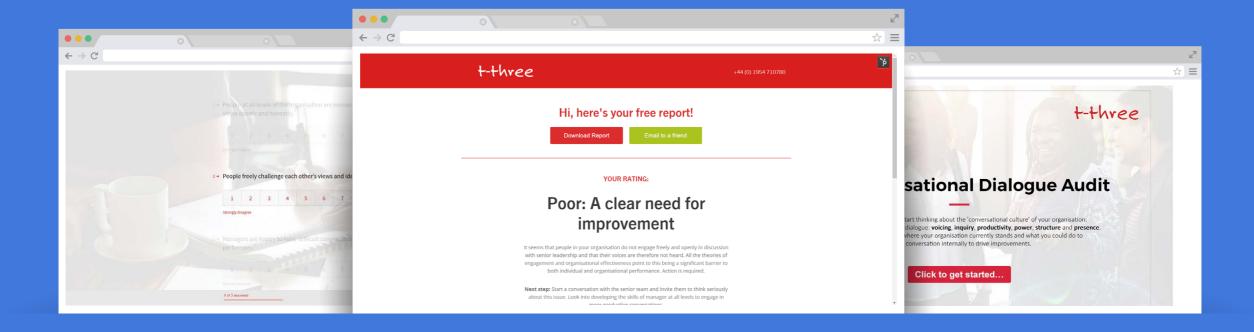
The HR department needs to equip leaders and managers with the right skills and knowledge to facilitate meaningful organisational dialogue. Embedding the five Super-Skills™ can transform the quality of all conversations.



Employees at all levels of the organisation need to be given the opportunity to speak openly and honestly, discussing their ideas constructively with peers and managers.



To change conversations for the better, and to make these changes sustainable, leaders need to internalise the value of meaningful dialogue and exemplify the skills involved.



Improve the conversations between your leaders and their teams to boost your organisation's performance.

Take the first step by completing our free organisational dialogue audit.

Complete the audit