

A Concise Overview of Collaborative Conversations

Collaborative Conversations rest on five premises:



If we accept these premises, the following question arises:

What is the minimum number of conversations required to define the desired outcomes of a project and then plot a pathway for achieving those outcomes with minimal breakdowns (interruptions in flow), while optimizing each person's contribution, and fostering team learning?

The answer Collaborative Conversations offers is four. These conversations are plotted around a circle because they form an

interdependent and integral whole – each is reflected in the others, and all are mutually reinforcing.

Collaborative Conversations begin by establishing an agreed upon sense of shared understanding regarding the purpose that brings us together: what is the work we wish to accomplish? The shared understanding conversation goes beyond simply defining the boundaries of the project. It also explores the human side of the work by using an appreciative inquiry process to learn about who is working along side us, and how each person's gifts, talents, skills, knowledge, hopes and dreams can contribute to our collective success.

The next conversation explores what is possible given who we are, the resources available to us, and the constraints we are operating under. Once we've generated ideas about what is possible and chosen the one most likely to succeed, we take up the coordinating actions conversation. Here we follow a very specific structure to ensure that when a commitment to action is made, everyone knows exactly what is expected of them, as well as what we need to do should it become apparent that we will be unable to deliver on a promise or commitment.

Finally, we finish with a conversation for reflecting and learning – a step all too often overlooked in today's busy world. This is critical to both organizational and personal learning. If we want to build our competence, we need to take time to explore what we did that worked well and can be replicated, as well as what did not work, but that taught us valuable lessons. The only shame in failure, is the failure to learn from it.

