

## Conversations Case Study

### We succeed or fail one conversation at a time

“Our careers, our companies, our relationships and our very lives succeed or fail, gradually then suddenly, one conversation at a time. The conversation is the relationship. The conversation yields the results. The most damaging conversations are the ones we are not having.”

Susan Scott, Author of  
“Fierce Conversations”

Whether your primary focus is currently on sales negotiations, strategy workshops, requirements consultations, or raising your employees game through performance discussions, the level of success you achieve will come down to the way that conversations in those situations are being conducted.

Extensive and well-documented research across different cultures, has shown that people display a number of predictable reactions and behaviours, regardless of gender, experience, job or position in the hierarchy, even when under fairly mild levels of stress. [Reference [Chris Argyris](#)]

All of which adds up to a heady mix of potential problems which can arise in everyday business conversations, particularly when stakes are raised, when emotions rise and when conflicts emerge.

*Chris Argyris describes 3 significant strategies people display when in conversation*

1. *We seek to maximise comfort and minimise negative emotions - both our own as well as the other person with whom we are interacting.*
2. *At the same time, we seek to maximise our chances of winning and avoid losing - in other words, we typically want to get our point across, and let others see where the problem lies or solution should come from.*
3. *And third, we seek to maintain control - we typically try to emit a sense of rationality and self-control (even when it may be lacking) and aim to maintain control of where the discussion or outcome is going so that we can 'steer' others to the outcome we want.*

## Supporting Transformation

"The reason why so few people are agreeable in conversation is that each is thinking more about what he intends to say than others are saying".

Francois de LA  
Rochefoucauld

Rapid Change Consultancy (RCC) provides a powerful method for addressing and alleviating the impacts of these conversation pitfalls, equipping people with skills to immediately improve their effectiveness. The IT Division of a leading global insurance company engaged RCC in April 2013 to work with their Senior Leadership Team. The dual objective was to provide the team with insight as to where the team's conversations were breaking down and failing to achieve the outcomes desired, and provide them with simple and practical tools for immediately increasing the effectiveness of their conversations.

Making extensive use of 'real-life' case studies, the session explored current techniques used by members of the team. During this period, the gap between what people believe they will say (their espoused theory), and what they actually say in the moment (their theory in practice), was highlighted and examined.

This period of self-awareness and 'unlearning' is a necessary step whenever breaking down a long-established practice, and before embarking on learning of a replacement skill.

*Some of the important principles underpinning the effective conversations skills are:*

- *Put issues on the table in an open and honest way. In other words, make sure the 'problem' is the issue and not the people talking about it.*
- *Be clear about what it is that concerns you about the situation and follow that up with rationale - i.e. give a reason why it is a concern. It is not enough to simply say "your behaviour stinks".....you need to say what it is that is of concern.*
- *Always invite the other person to tell you what they think about what you have just said and encourage a conversation that flows in a similar way. In other words do not make this a one-way conversation, where you are "maximising your chances of winning and maintaining control".*

## Supporting Transformation

“Best workshop ever! Mix of education and practice was just right. The model was simple to remember and just takes practice ”

Managing Director of IT  
Division of Global Insurance  
Company

A simple but highly effective set of skills was then introduced. Armed with the new skills, the team were then provided with extensive opportunities to put them into practice. Using the real-life cases that they had brought with them, and which they all wanted to handle more effectively next time round, they role-played future conversations with each other. With continued practice and coaching, the use of the new techniques became more natural, to the extent that everyone felt confident that the next time they held a similar conversation back in the workplace, it would be of higher quality and considerably more effective.

The Senior Leadership Team are now enthusiastic and excited about the potential their new skills and learning will have, not just within the confines of the team, but across the wider business. The introduction of a new way of conducting conversations, role-modelled from the top, will trigger changes. Like all new ways of working, it will meet resistance and be challenged, but the skills acquired will increase the likelihood that the conversations conducted around those challenges will be positive and constructive, resulting in effective dialogue and more productive outcomes.

### *Why Rapid Change Consultancy?*

- *Programme delivery by facilitators with 100s of hours experience working with senior execs and leaders in navigating the pitfalls that trip up our conversations.*
- *New skills and tools that are instantly appealing in their simplicity and application.*
- *Powerful learning ‘in the moment’ – shared and collaborative with peers and colleagues*
- *Skilled disorientation techniques to help ‘unlearn’ existing practices.*
- *Use of real-life cases to help make learning more immediate*
- *Not a simple teaching experience - self-awareness and personal transformation*

### Contact Us

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