

ABOUT & WHAT TO EXPECT

A **facilitated conversation** may become necessary when 2 or more employees struggle to communicate successfully and respectfully about and resolve problem patterns at work.

A key to understanding problem patterns is recognizing that everyone involved in the pattern is contributing to it in some way (even if they don't mean to). A facilitated conversation is a structured and methodical way to inquire into the various experiences people are having and, as a result, change problem patterns. While the goal of each conversation may differ slightly, the desired outcome of a facilitated conversation includes:

- Each employee hears and understands the experience of the other employee, even when it's different from their own
- Both employees understand how their different experiences create emotional reactions and misunderstandings without needing to agree on one single experience
- Employees distinguish between personal preferences and workplace expectations
- Employees agree on a way forward that that is in alignment with workplace expectations.

A facilitated conversation occurs at the workplace level between the impacted employees and a leader from their department as an early intervention to facilitate resolution between the participants without escalation. It is not an investigation, mediation, or legal process.

ROLE OF THE LEADER

The leader's role is to ensure the conversation follows a clear and respectful process where both employees have opportunities to share and to listen. The leader is not there to decide or to determine who is right or wrong. The leader's goal is to support the relationship between the employees and to highlight and minimize the impact of the conflict on workplace operations and the team.

The leader should provide enough structure to the conversation so that: each employee is provided the opportunity to speak and listen, there is attention paid to time and power balance, and that each person is participating according to the meeting agreements. This may involve prompting, inviting, and occasionally pausing or interrupting as necessary to ensure the conversation moves forward in a respectful way. The leader creates space for the employees to do most of the talking.

MEETING AGREEMENTS

At the outset of the meeting the Leader will review some simple commitments (below) to help the conversation to be productive and safe-enough to engage. The leader will ensure employees do not overtalk or interrupt each other, interjecting if necessary to ensure the meeting agreements are adhered to.

Workplace Guide to Facilitated Conversations

The following statements are general principles for a respectful conversation. All parties should review them and may add or amend them before verbally agreeing to abide by them during the conversation.

- **Respect:** I will refrain from interruptions (including email/phone use), overtalking, shouting, name calling, or bullying or discriminating behaviour. *The leader may interrupt/overtalk to ensure the meeting proceeds as intended.*
- **Confidentiality:** I will agree on the terms of what and with whom any details about our conversation will be shared beyond the meeting. I will refrain from gossiping and disclosing other people's stories. *Some follow up actions may not be disclosed to all parties to ensure employee privacy. Leaders will share what they can and be clear about what they cannot.*
- **Accountability:** I will own what I can of this situation. I acknowledge that we each have a role to play in contributing to problem patterns and will take responsibility for the parts of this situation and next steps which I can control. I will be direct and honest about my own experience. *Leaders will not assign accountability but will encourage employees to identify their own contributions to the situation.*
- **Curiosity:** I will remain open and work hard to consider other perspectives by listening and articulating what I have heard without trying to change it. I realize my version of events may be incomplete and will consider where I may have intentionally or unintentionally misunderstood or offended. *Leaders will gently question and prod to help employees remain non-defensive and curious.*

If emotions run hot, the leader may need to pause the meeting or reschedule. If an issue requiring performance feedback arises the leader will acknowledge a separate one-on-one meeting is needed and guide the conversation forward. Performance feedback should always occur in a one-on-one setting.

HOW TO PREPARE

It will be helpful for all employees to use the [experience cube worksheet](#) to reflect on the situation and bring any notes to the meeting. Leaders can review the [Leader's Guide to Coaching with the Cube](#).

It is normal to feel anxious or uncomfortable about participating in this type of process. Use what you know about yourself and your favourite techniques for wellness to take care of yourself leading up to, during, and following the conversation (e.g., food, hydration, sleep, breathing, exercise, grounding techniques etc.). Emotions are powerful and can catch us off guard, so when you manage yourself try to do so without judgement and be proud that you are willing to engage. You don't have to be perfect, just be present.

SAMPLE CONVERSATION FLOW

INTRODUCTION

- Review of process
- Review of and commitment to meeting agreements
- Leader thanks participants, sets context and identifies goals for the session

SHARING PERSPECTIVES

- Guided turn taking on hoped for outcomes of the meeting
- Guided turn taking to share experiences of the topics using the experience cube format
- Guided turn taking on clarifying understanding about impact

FINDING AGREEMENTS

- Discussing options for acceptable ways forward
- Making commitments around future behaviour
- Determining next steps

SUMMARY

- Review of confidentiality conditions: “Who is not in this room who may need to know about what we decide(d) in this room? What can be shared with them without violating each others’ trust or making unnecessary disclosures?”
- Review and documentation of agreed actions, commitments and next steps
- Set a time to follow up

EXPERIENCE CUBE SENTENCE STARTERS

From *Clear Leadership* by Gervase Bushe

During your conversation, use these sentence starters to inspire contributions that are neutral in tone and that you can own as your own interpretation without needing the other person to agree with you. Acknowledge your story/interpretation as creating the emotional impact without blaming the other person. Dig deep for a want that you can both agree on before moving to next steps, actions and specific requests.

<p style="text-align: center;">OBSERVATIONS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>State the facts as neutrally as you can</i></p> <p>The words I heard you say were...</p> <p>I heard your voice get louder when...</p> <p>When I saw you (describe only behavior)...</p> <p>When I hear the expression....</p> <p>When I see you move your eyes up/hold your head back/cross your arms...</p> <p>The time it took was xx minutes...</p> <p>The clock read...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THOUGHTS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Own how you are interpreting the facts</i></p> <p>The story I'm telling myself about this is...</p> <p>The way I interpret that is....</p> <p>For me those words remind me of ...</p> <p>The story I make up is...</p> <p>When I saw/heard that I thought...</p> <p>When see/hear that my mind goes to...</p> <p>In my belief system that could mean...</p> <p>What I'm wondering is...</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">WANTS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>What outcome could you both agree on?</i></p> <p>I would like us to be able to...</p> <p>What I want for our working relationship is...</p> <p>I want our clients/team/employees to see...</p> <p>It's important to me to resolve this because...</p> <p>I would like us to be able to....</p> <p>I want to build off our shared value of...</p> <p>I want us to realize our potential to....</p> <p>I want to see our work together as....</p> <p>I want to feel confident that...</p> <p>I want a workplace where...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FEELINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>How does your interpretation make you feel? (sad/mad/scared/happy/hurt/frustrated)</i></p> <p>When I think that I feel...</p> <p>My body feels...tight chest or gut, shaky hands</p> <p>I'm frustrated that...</p> <p>It feels like...</p> <p>I care deeply about...</p> <p>I'm worried that...</p> <p>What's confusing for me is ...</p> <p>I'm hopeful that ...</p> <p>I'm sad that we can't...</p> <p>I'm excited about the possibility of...</p>