

Questions that can Guide Consulting Conversations¹

PREPARING FOR THE CONVERSATION (Invitation Conversation)

As a leader or initiator, begin by asking yourself, “What is the new conversation that I want to occur?”

The invitation is the first step toward meetings, gatherings, and interactions that spark change.

Consider inviting people who are not used to being together. Questions to consider include:

- Who do we need to invite to best serve the purpose of the gathering?
- Who has unique information, expertise, or perspective about the topics we’re discussing?
- Who has the power to make decisions or access to other resources needed for the outcome?
- Who can speak about the consequences because they will be directly impacted by the outcome?

CONVERSATIONS

The most important thing about the following questions is that they name the agenda that creates space for an alternative future. The power is in the asking, not in the answers. *The following conversations do not have to be held in any particular order. However, the possibility conversation should be one of the earlier conversations and the conversation about gifts tends to be difficult and should be saved until later in the sequence.*

The Possibility Conversation

Possibility is the exploration of a future condition or state that is currently beyond reach. It is an act of imagination of what we can create together, and it takes the form of a declaration, best made publicly.

What can we create together that we cannot create alone?

Possibility Questions

- What is the crossroads you are faced with at this point in time?
- What declaration of possibility can you make that has the power to transform the community and inspire you?
- What do we want to create together that would make a difference?
- What can we create together that we cannot create alone?

The Ownership Conversation:

¹ Adapted from: Block, Peter (2008) *Community: The structure of belonging*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

In ownership, we ask participants to act as if they were creating what they want to exist. This includes acknowledging how they have contributed to creating the current reality and confronting stories that limit the possibility of an alternative future. This can be a slow conversation because it involves personal responsibility.

How much risk do you plan to take, and how engaged do you plan to be in this project?

Ownership Questions

Early questions (you can ask participants to answer on a 7-point scale from low to high):

- How valuable an experience (or project, or community) do you plan for this to be?
- How much risk are you willing to take?
- How participative do you plan to be?
- To what extent are you invested in the well-being of the whole?

Essential question:

- What have I done to contribute to the very thing I complain about or want to change?

The questions that can complete our story and remove its limiting quality:

- What is the story about this community or organization that you hear yourself most often telling? The one that you are wedded to and maybe even take your identity from?
- What are the payoffs you receive from holding on to this story?
- What is your attachment to this story costing you?

The Dissent Conversation

The dissent conversation creates an opening for commitment.

When dissent is expressed, just listen. Don't solve it, defend against it, or explain anything.

What are your doubts and reservations? What is the yes you no longer mean?

Dissent Questions

- What doubts and reservations do you have?
- What is the no or refusal that you keep postponing?
- What have you said yes to that you no longer really mean?
- What is a commitment or decision that you have changed your mind about?
- What resentment do you hold that no one knows about?
- What forgiveness are you withholding?

The Commitment Conversation

The commitment conversation is a promise with no expectation of return. It may be a promise about behaviors and actions with others or promises about results and outcomes. The commitments that count the most are ones made to peers within the group. It is important to explicitly provide support for participants to declare that there is no promise they are willing to make at this time. Refusal to promise should not cost anyone their seat at the table. A seat is only lost when someone does not honor their word.

What promises are you willing to make to your peers?

Commitment Questions

- What promises am I willing to make?
- What measures have meaning to me?
- What price am I willing to pay?
- What is the cost to others for me to keep my commitments, or to fail in my commitments?
- What is the promise I'm willing to make that constitutes a risk or major shift for me?
- What is the promise I am postponing?
- What is the promise or commitment I am unwilling to make?

The Gifts Conversation

We gain more leverage when we focus on the gifts we bring and seek ways to capitalize on them. Every time you gather, there needs to be space of a discussion of what gifts have been exchanged. The important task is to bring the gifts of those on the margin into the center. There may be no immediate and clear answer to these questions. That doesn't matter. The questions themselves work on us, and when they are asked, this work is activated.

What gifts have you received from each other?

Gifts of a Gathering

- What gift have you received from another in this room? Tell the person in specific terms.
- In what way did a particular person engage you in a way that had meaning?

Identifying Gifts of Individuals

- What is the gift you currently hold in exile?
- What is it about you that no one knows about?
- What are you grateful for that has gone unspoken?
- What is the positive feedback you receive that still surprises you?
- What is the gift you have that you do not fully acknowledge?