

Resourceful Conversations

The Overview

Senior teams are busy. There's a lot going on. So leaders focus most of their attention on things – the business, performance, strategies, plans, change, technology and so on. That's where the challenges and opportunities lie, so that's good, right?

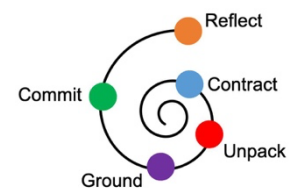
But when we talk to senior leaders about what gets in the way of progress most often, it's not the things themselves. It's people. When you have multiple changes underway, things get messy and pressure increases. Differences in perspective get amplified. People work hard, but with ambiguities and disagreements, the overall picture is fragmented at best.

When you need more aligned progress, it's not enough for people to be individually working hard at their part of the puzzle. Particularly in high stakes situations, people also need to pay attention to how everything fits together. That means the specific details of how things will work, but also how these changes impact how you all work together, how you make decisions and get things done in the new world. And if you change how you work together, that means everyone individually will need to let go of some old habits that have got you this far, and explore and co-create new solutions.

The problem is, letting go of old habits and exploring new possibilities takes time and attention. Pressing pause feels difficult when you're under pressure to perform. So while most of us want to breathe and find a new way forward, what happens is we end up cycling through familiar patterns.

We have an alternative.

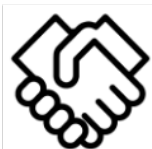
We have published a series of articles on the principles of [Resourceful Conversations](#) – how we individually and collectively curate more useful conversations on the things we are trying to make happen, so we get more creativity and progress, and less tension and conflict when working with other people.



The full articles are linked in the headings that follow, but we thought it would be useful to summarise them here for those moments when you need a quick reference. So, for those times when your business is facing a big challenge or opportunity, and people are busy, but things are tense, and not progressing as well as you would like, here are the five principles – the muscles you need to exercise.

Principle 1: Contracting

This is about making sure everyone has a shared understanding of *why* you are there and *how* you will all behave together. And note it's a shared understanding, not any one person's opinion pushed on others. You might think it's obvious, but so does everyone else. And your answers are different enough to be a problem.



Why questions include: What's the context for the conversation? Why now? What's the focus? What needs solving? What outcome do we need from the conversation? Who says? Who needs to be involved?

How questions include: Will this be confidential? Can we trust each other? Can we challenge each other? How radical can we be? Who says? How do we handle those process challenges alongside the content of the discussion?

Principle 2: Unpacking

We said earlier peoples' views will be different. Unpacking is about understanding in more detail how people see *what* is happening from their different perspectives, and *how* they feel about it, voicing our emotions so we can admit them and begin to move forwards.



What questions include: Where are we focusing? What facts do we have? How do we know – where's the evidence? What are the challenges and opportunities? What stories and assumptions do we hold? How real are they?

How questions include: How do we feel? What impact has that had? How long do we want to feel like this?

Principle 3: Grounding

If Unpacking opens things up, we need a way to connect to what matters, a foundation from which to navigate the uncertainty moving forward. Grounding is as much a feeling as an idea. We chose the symbol of a tree for this, differentiating between the visible things we pay attention to most (trunk, branches, leaves) and the below the ground roots that extend, gather water and nourishment and keep us stable.



Grounding questions include: What matters most here? What do we really care about? If we took a breath, relaxed our grip on old habits and fleeting distractions, what difference do we really want to make?

Principle 4: Committing

If grounding is about bringing ourselves to the present, Committing is about setting a direction of travel, creating hope and progress.



To make headway in any messy situation we need to get clear on the future we hope or wish for that would make all the effort worthwhile. Committing is about igniting that guiding star, and ensuring we maintain progress towards it, without being overwhelmed or distracted.

Committing also means recognising that trying to do everything never works, and we need to choose each step carefully, and notice where it takes us. We can then pick one thing we can do to move in a useful direction, and do it. And then the next. And then the next.

Questions include: Amongst all the turmoil, what do we really hope for? What version of the future would be worth the journey? What's one thing we can do now to make a tangible step in that direction? And what will that take from us?

Principle 5: Reflecting

We like to think that once we've been through some kind of discussion process and got



ourselves into action, we can just get on with it. When stakes are high there is often pressure and hence a bias to action – being, and being seen to be, busy doing important things. But over time actions have impact, things change, and if you don't check-in and reflect often enough, you risk peoples' efforts becoming fragmented from pulling in different directions.

We're not talking here about turning up to 'progress meetings' where people share decks and disguise the real issues. For us reflecting means deep discussion, curiosity about the reality of what has happened, the experiences of those involved, and what has been learned and using that to think collectively about how to move forward.

Reflection questions include: Where are we now? What has worked/is working (so far)? What progress have we made? What's missing? What needs to be better? How do we need to change our thinking? How are we feeling?

Conclusion

Hopefully you can see by now that these are not one-off steps. While there is a logical flow, they are actually five muscles that you need to monitor and pay attention to. And while we focus hard on questions, there are rarely 'right' answers. This is about people surfacing things that otherwise stay hidden and interfere with progress, so they can be more deliberate about choices - owning them when made, and adjusting them as things evolve.

That's how we use this ourselves, and with clients. The principles are always there, but we may choose to focus on different ones at different times, not just blindly follow the spiral. And we rarely use just these questions as written – they also get adapted.

Which might just be the unspoken principle underlying all the others. That to be at our most resourceful, we need to speak our truth, but hold our assumptions about it lightly and feel free to experiment and play. It's how we learn and grow, and get the most from people working together.

So, try some of this for yourself. Pick a safe space and explore.

Let us know how you get on.

Let us know what questions you have too.

Let us know when you would like to schedule a conversation about this

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