

Guidebook

for

**Designing and Sustaining Effective
Conversation**

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The Author gratefully acknowledges the ideas he has incorporated into his thinking from many colleagues over the 20 years of participating in ISI and IFSR conversations. In particular he would like to express his gratitude to Yoshi Horiuchi and Gordon Rowland for the learning experiences while working in the same conversation group. And, thanks again, to Gordon Rowland and the Linz Conversation team for their encouragement and review on an earlier Version of the Guide.

Learning Objectives

After studying this guide you should be able to:

- ❖ Understand the definition used for “conversation”
- ❖ Appreciate the meaning of an “effective conversation” as an ideal, which tries to exploit the potential creative synergy of the group participants
- ❖ Prepare yourself for participating in a conversation
- ❖ Understand how the metaphors of “lighting a fire”, and enthalpy change (drawn from thermo-chemistry) can offer considerable insights into how conversations can be started and sustained
- ❖ Recognise and use catalysts as conversation starters and sustainers
- ❖ Recognise the value and importance of metaphor in dialogue
- ❖ Recognise the “chemistry” and energy levels within a conversation group and be alert to the possibility of conversation breakdown
- ❖ Appreciate and adhere to the rights and responsibilities of a conversation member
- ❖ Select appropriate transcultural metaphors to help avert communication difficulties
- ❖ Avoid conversation blockers; instead choose a style of response which explores offered ideas
- ❖ Suggest steps that the group could consider to move forward when difficulties arise
- ❖ Apply the learning within the guide to have an enjoyable and worthwhile conversation experience

INTRODUCTION

Aim of Guidebook

The aim of this Guidebook is to help participants in conversations of the International Federation of Systems research (IFSR), both those invited to convene and lead, and those who are invited as members of a team, to have a productive and enriching learning experience. The Guidebook includes some theory underpinning its recommendations, which it then summarises as a practical checklist.

What is an IFSR conversation?

The main reason for conversations as initiated by the IFSR was dissatisfaction with the conventional style of conferences: an individual writes a paper, has 20 minutes to present it and then 10 minutes of questions. After that, the conference is virtually over for the individual. Clearly, this format is not the most effective way to progress in the exchange and development of ideas on pressing major issues.

Bela Banathy defined a conversation as being:

- a collectively guided disciplined inquiry,
- an exploration of issues of social/societal significance,
- engaged by scholarly¹ practitioners in self-organized teams,
- who select a theme for their conversation,
- which is initiated in the course of a preparation phase that leads to an intensive learning phase.

The team members provide a short (1-2 page) ‘input or think paper’ prior to coming to the event. This is for circulation only to colleagues and not for publication. During the conversation they follow a set of “rules” that guide their action (they can modify the rules according to their needs during the initial stage of the conversation). They document and share their findings, prepare a team report, and often additional reflection papers that present their own findings. The IFSR publishes the outcome of the conversation in the form of proceedings. Members take their experience with them and apply what they have learned in their own contexts.

There cannot be a pre-fixed agenda for a conversation. Triggering questions can open discussions but an agreed conversation path emerges as dialogue proceeds.

Participation in an IFSR conversation will present a new experience for most academics, in fact it requires nothing short of a change of mindset. Most interactions today reflect a mindset of competition. As Banathy and Rowland (2004) commented:

¹ Conversation methods as described here are no longer restricted to those involving “scholarly practitioners”. The techniques described are equally applicable to any context where the aim is to draw on the creative capacity of everyone involved. Hence it can be applied to a business context where there is genuine openness to contribution from all.

"We fight for the floor, insert ourselves in momentary silence, and attempt to convince each other of right (me) and wrong(you).This discourages listening and meaningful collaboration, the very things necessary for us to create (*a future*) together."

The following definition by Stewart (1999) fits exactly to the IFSR view of conversation:

“Conversation is the antithesis of debate in that it is not based on adversarial premises and does not polarise people. Participants realise that the winning of arguments is not the issue. It opens the discussion rather than channelling it into something that may be difficult to get out of. It enables "change of mind" to occur, without fanfare or fuss. It is the foundation of community building.”

What is effective conversation?

An effective conversation is one where the interaction between participants is such that throughout their potential for creative synergy is maximised. We have all experienced some conversations when this did not happen. The development of a conversation can be uncertain; it can flicker and then die. Another might develop with considerable excitement and then fade. There will be those where the excitement and exchange will be sustained until the planned end of the meeting, which in the case of IFSR conversations –may be for 4 or 5 days.

Pre-requisites for Effective Conversation

How can we design and then manage the process within a conversation so that we achieve the aim of sustaining creative synergy? This guidebook is focussed on these key questions. It has been produced particularly for those new to conversation techniques, but hopefully it will also have value for those invited to convene or lead a conversation. As we shall see while individuals have rights to participate in offering ideas, they equally have responsibilities towards others in engaging respectfully with what they too are offering.

Two domains influence the success or failure of conversations: one is linked to the enthusiasm and thus energy within the group for the topic, the other to personal freedoms, relations and psychological conditions e.g. mutual respect within the group which encourages the continuing participation of all members.

Structure

The domains of enthusiasm and thus energy for the topic, and maintaining relations within the group provide a convenient two part structure for this guide. Within this structure we shall find an important role for metaphor in the conversation journey. To reduce semantic difficulty it is important to provide definition of the terms used. The word metaphor is interpreted broadly, and is assumed to be inclusive of the wide range of images, analogies, concepts, models, theories, and inputs from the outside world that we receive and interpret individually or collectively through our five senses.

Some metaphors provide overarching insights and underpinning guidance for the overall design process and thus to successful conversations, - we call these “meta-metaphors

Other metaphors can have value in used at particular stages of a conversation e.g. when the group may be stuck or in difficulty.

Avoiding conversation breakdown is an important aim of the guidance presented here and we shall see that the form of language that members use in response to others during conversation is crucial. Responses, even when given to something, that you might not agree with – should be exploratory rather than conflict heightening. We will suggest ways and techniques for how this might be done.

ENERGY DOMAIN

Metaphors have been introduced as a powerful aid for systems designers. A simple yet powerful metaphor for conversation is that of lighting a fire. Rowland (1996) suggested that the activity of lighting a fire in a wood stove in terms of its preparation, ignition and feeding, could be explored as a metaphor for the development of a conversation. The key points arising from the Rowland metaphor are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Key Points of Rowland Metaphor

Preparation	Share input papers	⇒	Gather seasoned wood
	Offer ideas	⇒	Split wood or get kindling
	Offer shreds of ideas	⇒	Crumble newspapers
	Layer ideas - arrange loosely	⇒	Stack kindling over paper with space for oxygen
Ignition	Find trigger questions	⇒	Light a match
	Ask the question of ideas	⇒	Hold match near paper in several places
	Remain open	⇒	Ensure air available to fan flames
Feed	Introduce main issues	⇒	Add logs when kindling ablaze
	Develop conversation	⇒	When logs lit shut stove
	Seek patterns	⇒	Set damper for efficiency
	Allow conversation to take its course	⇒	Let fire burn; add wood periodically

A fire is a restricted type of chemical reaction, in that it is not reversible. The general case of chemical reactions, which may be reversible and may also involve what are termed catalysts, offer further insights into conversations and we will now examine these through the enthalpy metaphor.

Enthalpy Metaphor

Enthalpy change is a term used in thermodynamics to reflect the energy changes during chemical reactions. Dyer (1996, 1, 2) has demonstrated that enthalpy is a useful metaphor to provide insights as to how and why some conversations ignite and develop, and others do not. The comparison of the characteristics of chemical reactions and group interactions then leads to help with planning for a conversation and in sustaining the process.

The key feature of the metaphor is that the bonding changes within a chemical reaction can release energy (the technical phrase for this is negative enthalpy change) into the chemical

system and sustain further reaction. This can be related to the interactions within a conversation group that can give rise to inspiring creative synergy. The basic metaphor is widened to include the concept of *activation energy* that is required to initiate chemical reaction and group interactions, and the role of *catalysts* in reducing the necessary activation energy.

The inherent stability of chemical compounds arises from the fact that the atoms from which they are made are chemically bonded together. The bonding itself involves energy, so the first step in any reaction is therefore an input of energy to break the bond that already exists in

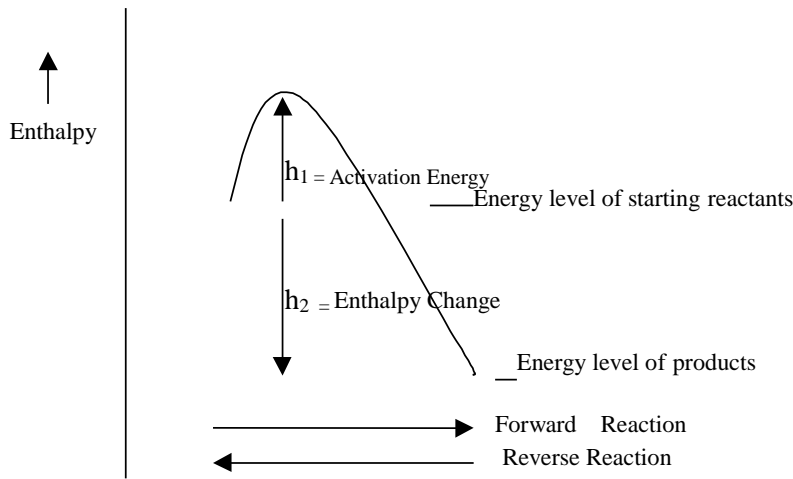


Figure 1: Enthalpy change.

the reacting substances (reactants). The second step is to make new bonds that will exist in the products. The amount of energy required to start a reaction is called the activation energy - it is simply the height of the "energy barrier" or "energy hill" to overcome the bonding of the first molecules to enable them to react (see Figure 1 above). Assuming the energy released from first interactions between molecules is greater than the activation energy (this is the case in the so-called exothermic reaction), then more molecules can react. A chemical chain reaction can occur if h_2 is greater than h_1 . As the reaction develops, energy release is sufficient not only to maintain combustion but also to release excess heat to the environment.

This provides a partial description of what happens within a situation involving human interaction. The participants will arrive with *external bonds* still partly intact. Hence the equivalent of *activation energy will be required to be input to the group to break these bonds*. Some form of spark must either be generated within the group or be brought in from the environment. The "wheelspin" which is a common experience in conversations can be seen as sparks which had inadequate energy to overcome the energy hill the group faced. But once the right spark has been found, and the group *reforms bonds and works collectively, then energy is released* - through negative enthalpy - to enable them to interact further and "perform". As the group increases its bonding something akin to the chemical chain reaction is taking place. But something more dramatic will happen in the case of human interaction in that as the starting energies of the participants varies from day to day, not only are the activation energies different but so will the enthalpy changes. Thus *any chain reaction which results appears to provide at least a partial explanation to what is usually described as the synergy of human activity systems* i.e. the non-repeatability of group interaction and the

capacity to produce unexpected results, which are sometimes very creative and positive, and sometimes the opposite.

Now to the notion of catalyst. A catalyst is a substance that alters the rate of a chemical reaction but may itself be unchanged at the end of a reaction. They work in various ways but their purpose is always the same - to reduce the activation energy. Using a catalyst will allow reaction to proceed with lower energy input. There is another advantage to catalysts, as conditions arise where several reactions, which can lead to different end products, are possible. Catalysts can sometimes be found that are specific to particular reactions taking place. So using the right catalyst, the reaction that produces the desired product can be enhanced at the expense of other possible reactions. We can use these ideas to help us in conversation design. A number of factors can operate individually and collectively as catalysts:

- a new external environment - may reduce bonding to perceived constraints. Group work away from the office can be useful to loosen bonds to constraints of social and professional culture.
- the external environment itself can also be a source of inspiration. The IFSR tries to choose venues e.g. Fuschl, Linz, Asilomar, Crete which potentially can have this catalytic effect.
- internal environment, e.g., warmth, comfort and the seating arrangements. With the latter aspect, care must also be taken to ensure cultural needs are taken into account. Chairs in a circle encourages interaction; consider placing a symbolic empty chair in the circle to represent those not present but who will be affected by any decisions made
- circulation or tabling of ideas from input papers
- opportunities to meet others informally in pairs, or small groups before the conversation,
- introductions and welcomes at the first plenary. Exploit early opportunity to foster bonding by adopting a flexible style of introductions. For example, rather than self-introductions, form pairs for discussion and then have A introduce B, B introduce A. Encourage participants, if appropriate, to avoid ring-fencing themselves by quoting post and function e.g. “I am from the Accounts Dept”. Suggest they convey a more open description of what they or colleague might be able to bring to the discussion e.g. “My interests are X, Y and Z”. Yoshi Horiuchi, conveys his openness by introducing himself as simply as a citizen of Planet Earth
- previously shared or recently emerging ideas from the systems field
- imposition of time pressures, or deadlines.

The notion of the *reverse* chemical reaction, which is associated with using energy to break bonds that have just been formed, alerts us to the dangers within groups when relationships break down. Energy is then expended to break bonds at the expense of that available for joint creativity. These conditions are most likely to happen if any member of a conversation group feels that they are not being given adequate opportunity to contribute, or when their freedoms of expression, action, or participation are being impaired. Thus the challenge in conversation planning, stewardship or participation is to ensure that behaviours and actions

are such that the energy of activation and interaction is maintained. This may be related to rights and responsibilities that are offered below (Table 2) as the first part of the guidelines for conversationalists.

Table 2. Domain of Energy in Conversation

	Rights to	Responsibilities to
Energy of Activation	Expect that: -others will be prepared and will offer catalysts for the discussion -others will seek out opportunities for bonding and energy release	Offer catalysts for the group to respond to Respond to the needs of the whole group as well as those of self, i.e., respond if possible to catalysts offered by others
Energy of Continuing Group Interaction	Expect that: -others are aware of temperature and energy level within group -others will look for opportunities for bonding thereby fostering energy release	Prepare to participate fully Prepare to offer alternative catalysts as conversation changes direction and new activation energies are needed to get to grips with new topics Remain alert to energy level and temperature of the group: -particularly when group is operating synergistically and positively -and, alternatively, to any danger signs that bonds are breaking down, particularly because individuals rights under the various dimensions of freedom (see Table 3) are being ignored

DOMAIN OF PERSONAL FREEDOMS AND RELATIONSHIPS

A second domain of rights and responsibilities (see Table 3) need to apply to all members of a conversation group if their interaction is to be sustained. This domain incorporates the seven freedom areas below: ^{2, 3}

- freedom of expression
- freedom of learning
- freedom of action
- freedom to act as a team
- freedom of belonging to a community of differences
- freedom of own networks
- freedom of participative democracy

² Adapted from (Pinchot 1993) and other previous work (Dyer, 1996)

³ These freedoms will also need to apply to members of a social unit participating in its on-going activity and design.

Table 3. Domain of Personal Freedoms in Conversation

	Rights	Responsibilities
Freedom of Expression	Freedom to communicate one's views without fear Equal opportunity to express one's views	Not to dominate conversation time Appreciate and bring out the many sides to every issue See the good in others' ideas and express it; try to build on those ideas Tell the truth
Freedom of learning	Freedom of inquiry Develop one's knowledge and competence	Be curious, persistent and aware Learn from past failures and successes Keep learning and growing Help others in group to learn and grow
Freedom of action	Offer choices of topic Equal opportunity of action Take individual decisions Limits to burdens: physical, emotional, or caused by the decisions of others	Commit to something worthwhile Achieve goals Recognise the possible consequences of individual decisions and face up to them if required
Freedom to act as member of a team	Freedom of team decisions	Recognise the possible consequences of team decisions and face up to them Care for team members Build the capabilities of every member
Freedom of belonging to a community of differences	Full membership of the group A group that cares for everyone's welfare An ethical group	Neither show nor tolerate bias or prejudice Balance self-interest against the common good Work toward worthwhile common vision and values Find value in diversity To agree that we disagree on some things or to some degree
Freedom of own networks	Freedom of association Choice of friends Freedom to make and honour commitments	Make commitments wisely Deliver on one's commitments Use others' time wisely
Freedom of participative democracy	Equal opportunity to participate	Listen to others and support their rights Stand for what one believes in Use incentives, not mandates, whenever possible Not manipulate or coerce Reward service to the whole

Combined together the rights and responsibilities for the domains of energy and individual freedoms in Tables 2 and 3 provide starting guidelines for the planning, development of process and facilitation of effective conversation.

The list is intended to apply to a cover the case of a relatively large conversation group (say up to 12), and to be comprehensive. Depending on the context and size of the group, particularly if it is small, some domains and rights and responsibilities may be more important than others.

One of Banathy's key propositions of social systems design (Banathy, 1996) is that it is unethical to design social systems for someone else. So, what is offered above as possible rights and responsibilities within these areas of freedom would need to be considered by any conversation group at the start of their meeting. They would decide the extent to which they would accept the list, delete from it or otherwise modify it.

OTHER KEY FACTORS

There are three other important areas for consideration which will maximise the chance of a group working cohesively and creatively throughout a conversation. These are:

- (1) the concept of conversation rules and the effect of culture upon them
- (2) the style of responses which will reduce the tendency for conversation breakdown when what seem to be strong disagreements emerge
- (3) the place of silence within conversation

Conversation Rules

We recommend that groups consider working to a set of rules for their conversation. A conversation based on these should help to reduce the chance of conversation breakdown. They link to the freedom areas listed above, but as a list they are easier to engage with.

Based on a Western assumption of equality, the set which is normally used is of the following form:

1. Display tolerance, patience and consideration to others.
2. Honour and respect each other.
3. Listen to others, attempt to understand the point of view being expressed, reflect and respond.
4. Do not dominate.
5. Do not offend.
6. Avoid losing control of one's feelings.
7. View all ideas as contributions to the group for consideration, accepting that not all ideas are used.
8. Allow free exchange of ideas; public ownership of ideas.
9. Allow equal opportunity to participate.
10. Stand for what one believes in.
11. Allow equal opportunity of action and decisions; but take responsibilities for actions and decisions.

However, it should be recognised that the complete list above would not necessarily apply in all cultures – particularly in the Far East. In Japan (Horiuchi, 2008), strict protocols regarding contributions to discussion apply. As stated earlier which set of rules should be followed, can be resolved at an early meeting. It can be generally assumed the first seven rules above would apply for the vast majority of conversation contexts and cultures.

Avoiding Conversation Breakdown – A New Lexicon

In view of our aim to maximise the creative synergy of a group, the thing we should try very hard to avoid is a fracturing, or breakdown of communication. Nevertheless the possibility of this is always present, though we hope much reduced if everyone does their best to follow the

rules above. There is something else that we can do to reduce the chance of breakdown even further. This centres on the style and way that we approach any strong differences of opinion that appear to be emerging. “Appear” is said advisably, as when an idea is offered to us, it is sometimes offered tentatively and with incomplete explanation. It follows that when we hear the idea with do so with imperfect understanding. There is usually no value therefore in blocking it abruptly. Responses should be exploratory rather than conflict enhancing. Banathy and Rowland (2004) capture this idea as follows:

“Conversation leads to a deep understanding of each others’ perspective. Rather than saying “no, you’re wrong” participants ask “what do you mean?” They listen and learn. The common ground that results is deeper, richer, and firmer. It allows whatever the group builds to stand more strongly
Conversation opens up creative capacity. Truly listening and reflecting allows participants to see connections more clearly. It opens them to possibilities rather than closing them off to views that they do not immediately share. It allows them to see AND rather than OR relationships.”

Some examples of responses to avoid, and what might be better to say, are given in table 4 below, and should help to avoid conversation breakdown

Table 4. A Lexicon to reduce conflict

Avoid saying	Say instead ⁴
That’s ridiculous!	Why do you say that?
Well, that will never work!	-and keep saying
Rubbish!	“Why do you say that” and/or some
You must be joking!	other non conflicting question such as:
...or any similar block	”Could you explain further?
	“That’s interesting. What evidence can you share with us?
	Or something of the form:
	Could we also consider...?
	But, is it not also possible that?
	Yes, but can we also agree that...?
	That’s interesting, how would that work..?
	Can/did anyone see this another way?
	etc

⁴ The questions in the right hand column are sometimes called Socratic questions : a pedagogical strategy intended “...to open up issues and problems, to uncover assumptions, to analyze concepts, to distinguish between what we know and what we don’t know, to follow logical implications of thought, or to control discussion.” Wikipedia

– until a way forward or a degree of
common ground may be found



“Am I to understand that my proposal is greeted with some skepticism?”

The Place of Silence in Conversation

What clues do we have if a conversation is running into difficulty? One possibility is non-contribution or silence of one or more members, especially if this is accompanied by disengagement body language e.g. turning sideways or away from the group, clock-watching, lack of eye contact with others, or set facial expression.

However, silence of individuals can also indicate that the conversation is proceeding normally, and that they are simply needing the time to reflect on what they have just heard. Reflective silence is what I call conversation-with-self (discussed in the next section). One’s perception mask is being challenged by new ideas being presented, so time and deeper reflection is important to consider what is being offered. Indeed, on occasions the time within the current conversation session is insufficient and we may need to “sleep on it”.

In either case – the group will stand best chance of success if everyone feels able to indicate why they have become silent. This can be done by a simple hand signal e.g. by forming a “T” with the palms, indicating they would welcome a “Time –out” or break. If the first case applies, this gives the individual the chance to request a change in the conversation direction before disengagement occurs. If the second case applies this gives the individual the time to explain that they are still reflecting on recent points and would personally prefer not to

experience overload with more information. Explanations of the silence gives the group the chance to decide on the best way forward.

EMERGENCE THROUGH CONVERSATION

A major outcome we seek from a conversation is that we all learn; both as individuals and as a group. If we learn, this implies that we probably change.

In systems terms we recognise the learning process as “emergence”. For the purposes of this guide the following working definitions are used:

emergence – the recognition by an observer of new form, shape, pattern, structure, organisation, model or concept

individual emergence – the recognition by an individual of a new order or level of their understanding or competence, or of adjustments to perception or values, which then leads to change in their future behaviour.

Metaphors, particularly images and story, provide the basis for individuals to understand and rationalise the external world around them. The word metaphor is interpreted **very** broadly, and is assumed to be inclusive of the wide range of images, analogies, concepts, models, theories, and inputs from the outside world that we receive and interpret through the five senses individually or collectively. Over time, as we grow up and learn from our experiences, this leads to a set of core values, beliefs and to a “perception mask”, which taken together we can regard as “self”. This mask can be an obstacle for change.

The Value of Metaphor

Conversation largely takes place through sharing and offering metaphor, which reflects the basis of understanding, beliefs and values that the participants hold. As Gregory (1993) has said in referring to Pask’s conversation theory:

“..it is nothing more – and nothing less - than the attempt to model the way in which we manipulate our metaphorical systems to construct shared meaning and thereby, come to agree with one another over what we understand”.

To sustain a conversation it is vital that metaphors that are shared are culturally and linguistically appropriate, and also possess structure, depth, and richness with an appropriate degree of familiarity and referencing for the intended purpose. In this way the metaphors serve as catalysts and triggers. As an example of inappropriate use, it may make no sense to refer to a “brick wall” to the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert. There can certainly be difficulty in using metaphor in a conversation between UK and US citizens. On one occasion a UK member of a conversation group was attempting to convey the need for extreme secrecy, by stating that they would need to behave like the Magic Circle. The metaphor was not understood. There is no Magic Circle in the USA, which in the UK is the professional body which controls and licences magicians to perform professionally, and binds them to not telling non-members how tricks are done.

Figure 2 below (Dyer, 2007), shows a conversation between participants A and B, each with their own perception mask. A dialogue is illustrated as the simplest version of a group exchange and thus collective emergence. The diagram shows that if care is taken to trigger and sustain communication through catalysts and appropriate metaphors that are accessible to both, then temporary bonding and positive creative synergy can result. If appropriate intercultural triggers and metaphors are provided over a period then a deeper reflection can occur. In this case, what we can call “synergy-with-self” can occur. This can then lead to a change of perception mask and individual emergence in either or both A and B, i.e. there can be collective emergence. “Synergy-with-self” deserves further explanation. We can all experience this when, occasionally, we wake at night with an idea suddenly in our head. This can then lead to an internal conversation which will continue until we discard it or stay awake as we try to assess it. The same internal process can happen with external stimuli, e.g. a book, learning material, a TV programme etc. The chance of the internal conversation is more likely to be triggered within a group as ideas come from many directions. Within a conversation group there is also a greater chance of an idea “bonding” with what we already know and understand, and a leap in thinking and perception can occur. In IFSR conversations we call this an “Aha” moment. We might say “The penny drops”, or “A eureka moment” if either of those metaphors is appropriate for you.

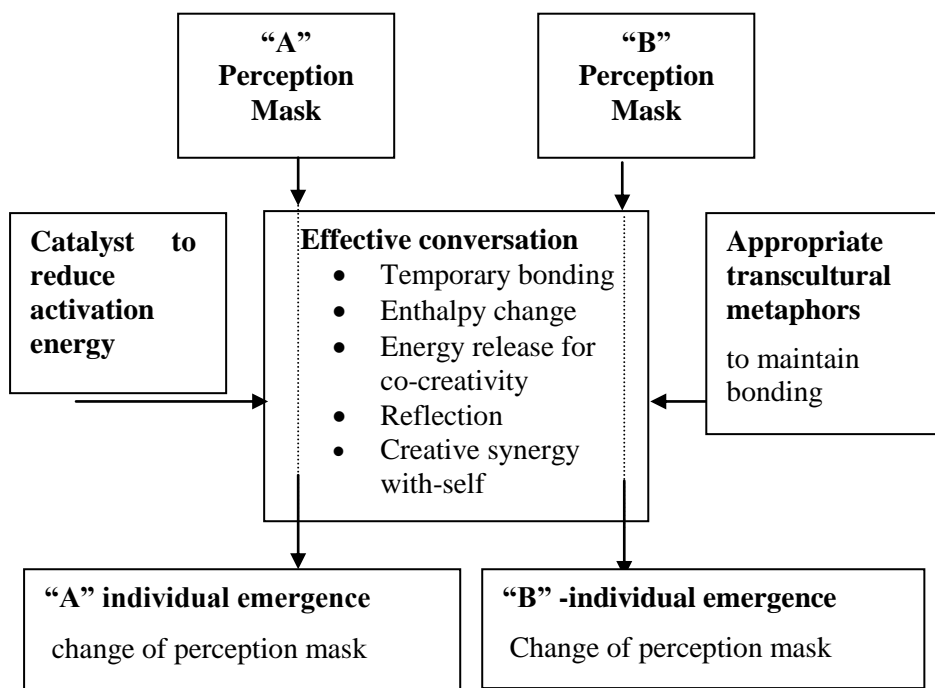


Figure 2: Conversation as process for individual emergence

What Metaphors and When to use them

Living in a free Western-orientated society, we are subjected, even bombarded, by constant metaphor from the natural and man-designed environments we have experienced and are still experiencing. The models and theories from our recent academic disciplines and interests provide a powerful layer of metaphor on top of those arising from the beliefs and experiences we absorbed from our earlier development. Table 5 below lists some major sources of metaphor that we might have experienced.

It is not possible to suggest metaphors that will be useful in any given context as each member of a given conversation team will have their own framework for understanding the world, and the group must discover for themselves which ones might serve as transcultural. Careful listening to others could give an indication of the types and categories of metaphors that individuals use or prefer, and which might then suggest what to offer in return as catalysts for further energy release.

One particularly useful way of exploiting metaphor is when a group has “hit a brick wall”, or is in danger of breaking down. If this is the case there is a need to take a rest, re-energise through switching activity. The Team Leader might invite story-telling, suggest one or more listen to some music (not a problem given the availability of smart phones), or some take a walk and image on the surrounding environment. The Team Leader may himself/ herself want to experience a similar complete break. After the break, share whether these experiences have provided metaphors for the problem the group has met, and whether new ideas have occurred, relating to the current direction of the conversation, or for a change in the journey, or for temporary change in the leadership role.

Table 5. Major Sources of Metaphor

Touch Taste Smell	
Sound	
Spoken language	Belief system, Theory Story, Parable, Fiction Selective facts Science fiction, Myth and legends, Fantasy
Music	Song Instrumental Ethnic Classical
Natural sounds	
Sight	
Symbolic language	written text mathematical models conceptual models diagrams
Art	2D 3D Drama, Dance, Poetry
Iconic models	Full scale models, Scale models Shape, Size and Colour
Collective senses	
Natural world	Physical, Ecological
Man designed and built world	Political, Social, Economic, Technology, Commercial, Communication, Legal
	Environments

SUMMARY

Every participant in a conversation group has considerable creative potential. Theoretically, it is possible that through dialogue there is potential for creative synergy. The path to maintaining creative synergy is not easy, as it needs a conversation environment conducive to continual interaction or bonding to exist. The guide reveals there are several factors which can lead to conversation breakdown. The first is simply one of misunderstanding what an IFSR conversation is. It is not an arena for the winning of arguments; it is an opportunity to explore difficult areas for decisions and designs for the future or change, so that conditions exist within the group for agreement to continue to seek ways forward. Thus this guide majors on providing some practical advice for initiating and sustaining conversation, based on an underpinning metaphor of enthalpy from thermo-chemistry. This has alerted us to the need to find catalysts for conversations, to respect rights and responsibilities of each participant, to avoid blocking by using appropriate exploratory style of responses to ideas being offered, and to communicate through transcultural metaphors. Much of these needs can be helped by a set of conversation rules which the group can apply and which is appropriate to their context.

Personal Learning and Follow Up

Hopefully as a participant at Linz you will have an enjoyable 4 or 5 days experience and you will learn and gain through practising through this style of conversation. Hopefully too, you will be able to agree with Charles Francois who said, referring to the previous venue for IFSR conversation, Fuschl “When you leave Fuschl, you are a different person”

Sometimes, the topic of the group discussion is one which is brought to a conclusion; the group can indicate that in its final report to which you can expect to make a contribution. However, on most occasions, the group will have tackled an issue which will be on-going, so that while a report is still required, the group may want to continue its conversation using e-methods. It may wish to carry its investigations forward to the next biennial conversation. You may wish to remain active in that process.

We also hope that the experience at Linz will inspire you to lead an IFSR style conversation in your own context.

Feedback

It would be very helpful to have user feedback on this guide. At the biennial Linz conversations a feedback form will be available, but comment arising from experience of this style of conversation at any other time would also be very welcome. Your feedback will be used as a basis for improving this version of the guide

Appendices

1. Quick Guide to an Effective IFSR Conversation

Acknowledgement and License

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APPENDIX 1 QUICK GUIDE TO AN EFFECTIVE IFSR CONVERSATION

Pre-conversation

- Select topic related to interests
- Prepare and submit input paper
- Join in suggestions by team leader to foster bonding

At the Conversation

- Check you are happy with rules and that they have been agreed
- Offer catalysts and triggers for exploration
- Respond if possible to triggers offered by others
- Offer alternative triggers
- Identify, if you can, the types of metaphor that others use and engage with those that appeal to you. Input papers from others may give clues
- Remain alert to the energy level and chemistry of the group, especially
 - when group is operating synergistically
 - when there are danger signs that the group might be breaking down
- Display tolerance, patience and consideration to others
- Do not block ideas but listen, attempt to understand point of view being expressed, reflect and respond
- Remember you are not out to win a debate, but to maximise interaction and creative synergy
- Do not dominate
- Do not offend
- Avoid losing control of one's feelings
- Accept that all ideas are offerings to the group, accepting that not all will be used
- Allow equal opportunities for participation
- Reflect whether those who might hold the key to a way forward have done so. If not invite them to comment
- If the conversation stalls, re-energise and switch activity: e.g.
 - invite story- telling
 - listen to music
 - take a stroll and image on the environment
- Post the break, share whether these experiences have provided metaphors for the problem the group has met, and whether new ideas have occurred

Post conversation

- Accept that you will make a contribution to the main Group report
- Deliver on that promise