Transforming Unproductive Conversations

A practice prepared by Hilary Bradbury-Huang, Ph.D. to support first person research/practice: the foundation of good action research

Drawing on the Collaborative, developmental action inquiry work of Bill Torbert
Introduction

• This exercise helps develop “first person action research/practice skills”
  – Used regularly, it helps develop self insight
• Choose your own unproductive conversation
• Analyze it using 5 tools introduced
• End the exercise with reflection on your ‘conversational footprint’
• Select 1-3 tools to re-do the conversation
• Note: there is no one perfect conversational footprint. The goal here is to better recognize your own and select tools that will increase your effectiveness.
“First person”? 

- *first-person action research/practice* skills and methods address the ability of the researcher to foster:

- an inquiring approach to her or his own life,
- to act choicefully
- and with awareness,
- so as to produce desired effects in the outside world.
Groundrule for transforming conversations

You assume 100% responsibility for your conversational dynamics (no blaming the other person!)
Generating your data

• Think about ANY significant conversation in which you got stuck (personal, professional)
• Stay BRIEF and simple, writing it word for word (as best you can)
• Draw a line down the center of your page
• Right column: what you (plural) said
• Left column: what you (singular) felt/thought, did not say
I’m relieved that we just have a draft to get us going here.

The first thing out of your mouth is what needs to be changed after I do all the work.

Such trivia so early in the process – oh he’s just another idiot!

HB: So I’m really pleased to have a draft for us to work with.

OP: But a lot needs to be changed.

HB: I expect that of course.

OP: You also have a bunch of misspellings.

HB: I think it’s too early to wordsmith … etc.
Overview 5 conversational analyses/tools

1. Balance of advocacy and inquiry
2. Ladder of Inference
3. 2 crucial parts of speech
   1. Framing
   2. Illustration
4. 4 roles mover, follower, opposer, active bystander
5. Overall balance between your right and left hand columns
1. Balance Advocacy & Inquiry

• When I **advocate** I state my opinion (A)
• When I **inquire** I seek to better understand (IQ)
• Remember not all questions are inquiries (you know?!).
• Put “IQ” beside each of your Inquiries and “A” beside each advocacy.
• Note your ratio as part of your footprint.
3 of my colleagues and I are on a conference call to discuss a major project proposal we must submit within a month. I was last to work on the draft which I sent out over email before the call. I have the least in common with “OP,” a respected “senior.”

- *I’m relieved that we just have a draft to get us going here*
- *The first thing out of your mouth is what needs to be changed after I do all the work.*
- *Such trivia so early in the process – o he’s just another idiot!*
- HB: So I’m really pleased to have a draft for us to work with
- *(A)*
- OP: But a lot needs to be changed
- HB: I expect that of course *(A)*
- OP: You also have a bunch of misspellings
- HB: I think it’s too early to wordsmith … *(A).*
2. Ladder of Inference

- My interpretation (IN)
- Observables (O)
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- The first thing out of your mouth is what needs to be changed after I do all the work.
- Such trivia so early in the process – o he’s just another idiot!
- HB: So I’m really pleased to have a draft for us to work with
- (IN) (O)
- OP: But a lot needs to be changed
- HB: I expect that of course IN
- OP: You also have a bunch of misspellings
- HB: I think it’s too early to wordsmith … IN.
3. Parts of speech

• Framing (F)
  – Explicitly stating what the purpose is for the present occasion, what the dilemma is at the start ...

• Illustrating (IL)
  – Telling a bit of a concrete story, or providing more “rich picture” detail
Example of speech parts

- We called the meeting today to discuss the New Year curriculum (--Frame--).

- Jake Tarn, our biggest sponsor, called me to urge us to get underway (-illustration--).
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- I’m relieved that we just have a draft to get us going here
- The first thing out of your mouth is what needs to be changed after I do all the work.
- Such trivia so early in the process – o he’s just another idiot!

- HB: So I’m really pleased to have a draft for us to work with
- NO FRAME
- OP: But a lot needs to be changed
- HB: I expect that of course NO ILLUSTRATION
- OP: You also have a bunch of misspellings
- HB: I think it’s too early to wordsmith … etc.
4. Conversational roles

- Mover - Mov
- Follower - Fol
- Active Bystander - AB
- Opposer – Op

- Note which role predominates for you?
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- The first thing out of your mouth is what needs to be changed after I do all the work.
- Such trivia so early in the process – o he’s just another idiot!

- HB: So I’m really pleased to have a draft for us to work with
- (Mo)
- OP: But a lot needs to be changed
- HB: I expect that of course (F)
- OP: You also have a bunch of misspellings
- HB: I think it’s too early to wordsmith …(OP) etc.
5. Balance between the columns

- Note: How much writing is in each column comparatively less, more, equal?
- How often do you make your left hand column explicit? (remember a listener cannot read your mind!). Use grades A=very explicit, F=told lies

Consider:
- How often do you wish you had the chance to say things again?
- How would you convert your left hand column into socially appropriate right hand column language?
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- The first thing out of your mouth is what needs to be changed after I do all the work.
- Such trivia so early in the process – o he’s just another idiot!
- HB: So I’m really pleased to have a draft for us to work with
- (B)
- OP: But a lot needs to be changed
- HB: I expect that of course B-
- OP: You also have a bunch of misspellings
- HB: I think it’s too early to wordsmith …D etc.
Conversational Footprint as leverage points for more productive next conversations: Increasing my choices in communicating

1. I see I advocate more than inquire. Can I ask more questions?
2. I see I don’t share too much data. Can I do that?
3. I see that a **better frame** would make the conversation with OP more productive. Can I practice framing?
4. I see I have ease with different roles, can I also include the active bystander?
5. I see I am good at sharing my LH column, can I do so more quickly.