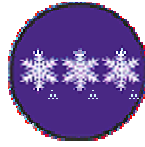




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World of Organizational Change

**GREAT CONVERSATIONS™: ENGAGING THE WHOLE SYSTEM IN SHAPING THE
FUTURE**

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What is a “Great Conversation?”

At Intersol, we view change as a process that begins and ends with people. It is a process in which the nature and degree of stakeholder involvement has a major impact on both the quality of, and the support for, change strategies and plans.

Great Conversations represents Intersol’s approach to creating a forum in which large numbers of people (the “whole system”) can engage in meaningful discussion about issues of mutual interest and concern. The use of the term “Great” is deliberate, expressing both the aim and the form of this particular change tool. First, Great means excellent, reflecting the intent to facilitate productive, satisfying interaction and outcomes. Second, Great means big, in that Intersol’s approach allows large numbers of people (50 - 500+) —in the same place and time— to join the conversation.



A focus on “Alignment”

Organizations exist to perform, to produce the results for which they were created. We believe that performance requires alignment, which we define as the degree to which...

- clients’ and customers’ needs, interests and expectations are clearly identified and understood;
- the organization has a clearly articulated Purpose (mission, vision, strategy, plans) which reflects customer expectations, and is understood and shared by organizational members;
- the organization’s Processes (methods, structures, information, tools) are consistent with, and capable of delivering on, the Purpose;
- People in the organization have the capacity, willingness and opportunity to fully and effectively apply the Processes to achieve the Purpose.

Great Conversations are designed to foster alignment. They can be used to focus discussion and decision making on issues of Purpose, and/or Process, and/or People.

Getting everyone on the same page

Whenever there is a need and desire to engage the hands, hearts, and minds of people toward shared goals. Great Conversations will help. They are designed to get as much of the organizational system as is possible “in the room” to participate in discussion and decision making about issues that matter — to the people who are the system. In short, Great Conversations contribute to getting everyone “on the same page.”

And that’s important because...?

We believe that when organizations undertake deliberate change, there are three factors that will ultimately determine the success of the change effort:

- The Quality of the Plan (How well does it respond to the need that gave rise to it?);
- The degree to which Stakeholders support and commit to the plan;
- The Time it takes to complete the change cycle, from inception to execution;

The complexity and pace of the environment, and of organizations, continues to increase.

The needs, interests and expectations of people within organizations, and of society at large, are also changing. In order to sustain performance in such turbulent times, organizations must develop ways to...

- gather and make use of the data and intelligence necessary for good analysis and decision making;
- foster agreement and commitment among a critical mass of stakeholders;
- Align —vertically and horizontally— the efforts and commitment of the entire organizational system.

Examples of Great Conversations

Some of the situations in which Great Conversations have proven useful include:

- A large regulatory organization in the transportation sector undergoing significant reorganization and refocusing invites all 250 employees to a three-day session to review, discuss and refine a new draft strategy, and to develop action plans for implementation.
- A bank brings all employees together for three days to explore the challenges and opportunities facing the organization, to shape the key thrusts and directions for the business, and to create and commit to specific actions.



- A major government department brings together 150 of its most senior managers to review and discuss the Departmental strategy, and to identify and analyze implementation issues.
- A Regional Council of Federal departments sponsors a 2 ½ day working session for 200 middle managers from all federal government departments for the purpose of developing strategies for promoting managers' contribution to public service renewal.

Principles for using Great Conversations

Great Conversations are a powerful tool for bringing large numbers of people together to influence change. However, the high levels of effort, planning and resources needed to make these event successful suggests that their use must be carefully considered.

The following principles guide Intersol's approach, design and implementation of the Great Conversations methodology:

Shared influence

Of particular importance is the willingness of senior leaders to truly "listen" to organizational stakeholders, and allow them influence in decision making. The real impact of the large-scale approach lies in its ability to build organizational capacity in "real time." Great Conversations are not about telling people that their ideas and opinions are valued; they provide a structure and process for gathering and applying the collective "wisdom" of people to shape a better organization.

Use of "design teams"

Constituted by a representative sample of the target audience, the design team, usually working with external consultants, ensures that the Great Conversation "event" is relevant and appropriate to the needs of the broader audience that will participate. The design team

participates in all aspects of the planning process: data gathering, purpose setting, detailed planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Involvement of senior leaders

In every large-scale event, organizational leaders have an important role to fulfill in establishing the context and credibility for the event and the process. We believe the leader's involvement must be complete and carefully planned to inspire the confidence and commitment of participants.

Designing participation “in”

Through the use of round tables, “max-mix” seating, facilitated activities, data synthesis and reporting, we ensure that participants are fully engaged with people from other parts of the organization throughout the large-scale event. We have found that the process of working with others in the act of creating something we both care about is the best way for people to find the “common ground” upon which shared understanding, plans and commitment emerge.

Keeping the broader “journey” in mind

Organizational change can be viewed as a journey from what has been, to what is, to what will be. Great Conversations are most useful at those milestones along the journey when engaging the hearts, minds and hands of stakeholders is important to the success of the broader change agenda. Each Great Conversation is envisioned, planned and implemented in a way that respects and reflects the organization's broader change journey, as well as the principles and values the organization wishes to foster.