
Conversational Leadership Training Course: Dialogue, Questions and Hosting Group Conversations

4 – 8 October 2027
Cape town





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Programme Summary

Conversational leadership is the subject of this one-week training course for directors and senior managers, ending in a strategic conversation plan for one live issue. Many organisations rely on briefings and debate, so people hold back information and commitment stays thin. The programme moves from principles of dialogue, through diagnosis of listening and conversation breakdowns, to design of questions and hosted group conversations, and then to application. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this conversational leadership programme for leaders from mixed organisations.

The Business Case

Strategy, change and performance are carried out through conversations, yet most leaders are never taught how to design them. Meetings that reward the loudest voice and one-way messages leave useful knowledge unspoken and misunderstandings uncorrected. Leaders who ask better questions, listen with discipline and host group conversations on purpose draw out more information, test assumptions earlier and turn talk into agreed actions that people own.

- Employee Engagement: Rises as people are invited to contribute to the issues that affect them.
- Decision Quality: Improves as hidden information and assumptions surface before choices are made.
- Follow-Through on Agreed Actions: Strengthens as conversations end with recorded, owned next steps.

Principles and Evidence Base

- The World Cafe method of Juanita Brown and David Isaacs: Its design principles for hosting collective conversations structure the hosted sessions designed in Session 3.
- William Isaacs's dialogue work on listening, respecting, suspending and voicing: It supplies the four practices applied in Sessions 1 and 2.
- The distinction between dialogue and debate: It frames when each form of conversation serves the leader, applied in Sessions 1 and 4.

Intended Participants

- Directors who need engagement and commitment from large or dispersed teams.
- Heads of function who convene stakeholders with competing priorities.
- Senior managers who lead change and need honest information from their people.
- Programme sponsors who run town halls, review sessions and strategy dialogues.



Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to distinguish dialogue from debate and select the right form for a leadership purpose.
2. Participants will be able to diagnose listening habits and conversation breakdowns in their own meetings.
3. Participants will be able to construct powerful questions that open thinking rather than close it.
4. Participants will be able to design a hosted group conversation using World Cafe principles.
5. Participants will be able to justify an approach to a difficult stakeholder conversation.
6. Participants will be able to prioritise the follow-up actions that turn conversations into results.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Conversational Leadership Principles and Dialogue versus Debate

How does dialogue differ from debate, and when does each serve a leader?

- Dialogue Versus Debate Distinction
- Isaacs Four Practices of Dialogue
- Conversation Purpose Statement
- Leadership Conversation Types Map
- Personal Conversation Style Profile

Day 2: Diagnosing Listening and Conversation Breakdowns

Where do conversations lose trust, information or momentum?

- Listening Level Observation Log
- Assumption Check Sheet
- Meeting Conversation Pattern Audit
- Defensive Routine Checklist
- Silence and Airtime Map

Day 3: Designing Powerful Questions and Hosted Conversations

How is a conversation designed so that people think and speak openly?

- Powerful Question Framing Sheet
- World Cafe Design Principles
- Table Round and Rotation Plan
- Invitation and Context Brief
- Harvest and Insight Capture Template



Day 4: Hosting Strategic Conversations in Groups and with Stakeholders

How does a leader host a group conversation that moves from talk to commitment?

- Host Role and Opening Script
- Stakeholder Conversation Sequence
- Difficult Conversation Opening Lines
- Hybrid Conversation Room Plan
- Follow-Up Action Register

Day 5: Applying Conversational Leadership to One Strategic Conversation

Is the conversation plan ready to be hosted with real stakeholders?

- Applying the Session 1 Purpose Statement to the Chosen Conversation
- Testing the Session 2 Breakdown Signals on Past Meetings
- Finalising the Session 3 Question Set and Table Plan
- Rehearsing the Session 4 Opening and Follow-Up
- Completing the Strategic Conversation Plan

Methodology

The programme uses a structured exercise method built on anonymised leadership scenarios, recorded meeting extracts and written case notes. Participants practise conversation techniques in pairs and small groups, host short group conversations for one another, and receive facilitator and peer feedback on every work product before it enters the strategic conversation plan.

- Suggested activity: Holding the same discussion first as a debate, then as a dialogue, and comparing what surfaced.
- Suggested activity: Rewriting a closed meeting question into three powerful questions and testing them in pairs.
- Suggested activity: Hosting a short rotating table conversation on a live organisational issue and harvesting the insights.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a strategic conversation plan for one live issue. It holds a purpose statement, an invitation brief, a powerful question set, a table and rotation plan, an opening script and a follow-up action register. The plan is used at work to host the conversation with stakeholders and to record what was agreed and who owns it.



Frequently Asked Questions

Is conversational leadership suitable for senior managers who have not hosted group conversations before?

Yes. Conversational leadership is taught from first principles and assumes responsibility for engaging teams or stakeholders, not prior facilitation experience.

Which models does conversational leadership rest on in this programme?

Conversational leadership here rests on the World Cafe method of Juanita Brown and David Isaacs and on William Isaacs's dialogue work on listening, respecting, suspending and voicing.

How is the strategic conversation plan from conversational leadership used at work?

You use the strategic conversation plan to host a real conversation with stakeholders and to record the actions agreed and their owners.

How does conversational leadership differ from a programme on presentation skills?

Conversational leadership centres on two-way dialogue and hosted group conversations, while presentation skills centre on delivering a message to an audience.