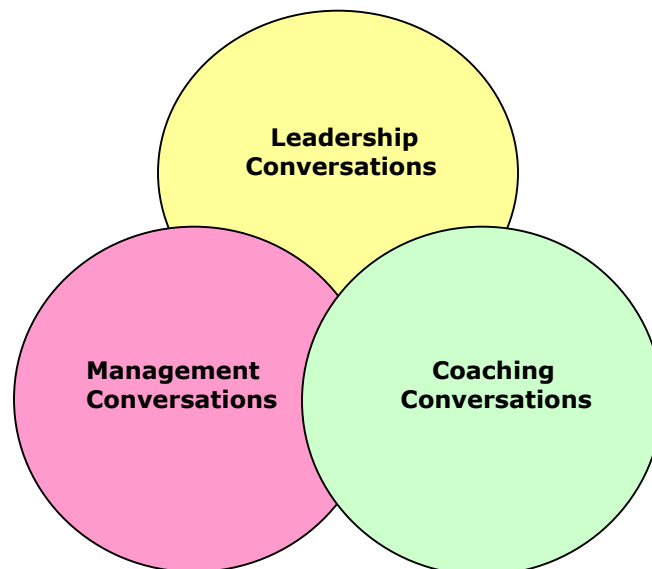


The role of the manager-leader-coach in the new organisation

The traditional concept of managers who are somehow in control of all procedures and systems under their authority – including people work with them – is rapidly changing. It is increasingly difficult for managers to predict markets, meet customer expectations, be aware of competitive threat, to forecast accurately, to communicate with an ever more widely dispersed workforce, and to lead the organisation, whilst at the same time unlocking the huge potential of their people.

The present balance looks something like the diagram below, where the three circles represent Leadership, Management, and Coaching, and the respective size of the conversation:



Leadership conversations are about creating a compelling picture of the future, enrolling people into that vision, and re-creating that day by day through their clarity and purpose. What they do and say is congruent always and only with the vision, within the values and rules of the organisation. By their behaviour, language and passion- by being so identified with the vision it becomes who they are – a leader shifts the context of all their actions, and of those who choose to follow him or her, to a different domain of possibility for the future. Great leaders have a facility with language and metaphor that engages listeners at a deep emotional, even spiritual level. This is known as creative visualisation.

Coaching conversations have the specific intent of improving performance. They focus on action, where that action is the choice of the individual - they own it and accept responsibility for the outcome. These conversations are characterised by:

- Mutual respect
- Trust
- Clarity of purpose
- Absence of judgement, recrimination or blame
- Learning and creativity
- Fun and energy
- Choice and responsibility

Coaching conversations are the enablers of the organisation's 'infinite' and hard-to-measure systems – creativity, innovative thinking, goodwill, learning and outstanding performance, which is the prerogative of every human being.

Management conversations concentrate on processes, procedures and rules. These conversations define the organisational structure, ensure compliance to quality and safety regulations, create and review budgets, set targets and monitor performance. These conversations are easy to measure and by so doing, give managers the illusion of being in control. These conversations are the enablers of the organisation's 'finite' systems, such as performance management, financial/budgeting systems, HR/policy procedures etc.

Historically, the management circle has been far larger than the other two representing conversations for leadership and coaching. Taking the analogy of a game of tennis, the rules of tennis define how the game is measured, and the white lines on the court and the net give us feedback as to how we are doing. There is also a clear objective. The difference is that the umpire (the manager in this metaphor) does not tell us *how* to play when we're on court – that's up to the player, with help from their coach. When management conversations swamp the organisation - tell us not only the rules but even how to play, there is rigidity, lack of creativity, too many rules, and not enough action. The fear of losing control stifles the free flow of information and any hope of becoming a learning organisation goes out of the window.

Organisations demonstrate a true culture shift when the relative proportions of these three conversations alter. As management conversations *decrease* and those for *leadership* and *coaching* increase, there are less easy measures, less controls, less rules, and even occasionally less managers. This emergent organisation is more agile, decisions are made faster and the culture one of interdependence rather than independence. At the same time, the role of the leader and coach necessarily increases. The primary focus for the leader is to constantly repaint the vision and enrol others into that. The

focus for the coach is to help other people achieve their objectives and fulfil on their huge potential as human beings.

It is **not** the case that the management aspect of the role of 'manager' just disappears. There will necessarily be rules, procedures, structures which managers have the accountability absolutely appropriately to uphold on behalf of the organisation. The key point is to *distinguish* between the conversations that uphold the rules, and the conversations that encourage free-flowing creative 'play' – coaching for peak performance. This distinction is rarely made in the management role, yet is essential to organisational change in the 21st century.

Critical organisational conversations

As the culture of an organisation shifts from controlling to enabling, and the number of conversations relating to restraining, or managing, the business decrease, there is a corresponding increase in leadership and coaching conversations. This is a shift from talking **about** action towards talking **for** action. Of course, both types of conversation are appropriate at certain times; it's just that conversations **about** action usually take up most of the time. By the time we have added grapevine conversations, rumours, bad-mouthing other people and conversations for self-preservation ('It's someone else's fault'), there's not much time left for getting down to real action. These are some typical critical conversation in each of the three key areas:



So what do managers do now?

The new manager has three roles – as controller and monitor of procedures and processes, as an exemplary role model congruent with the vision, and as facilitator to help individuals rediscover their potential and power at work. For managers this involves a great deal of letting go – of control, of authority, of knowing the answers, of being right. Instead they need to deeply consider who they really are, and what they are up for at work. Do they really buy in to the organisation's values? Are they always straight and truthful when there's a breakdown? Are they prepared to take risks and accept the consequences to achieve goals? Do they truly believe that everyone in the organisation has great gifts to offer, and would willingly contribute if only given the appropriate opportunity? Can they trust where they have not done so before, or speak out when previously too afraid to do so?

One reason why organisational transformation can stall is because it is so hard for us to do these things completely and with integrity. It requires us to forego so much of what we hold to be right and safe and what we know. We withhold from changing, except superficially. We will pretend to be outside our comfort zone, and make all the right noises, whilst quietly doing our own thing to avoid risk, sometimes even to the extent of undermining change initiatives. When that happens, how effective are we being as coaches to our people? What leadership example are we setting? The breakthrough will only occur when coaching becomes not only a way of managing, but a way of life in organisations.

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