

## Conversation - an overlooked technology

In the field of Knowledge Management (KM) as in all fields of Organisational Development (OD) we are always looking for the next new transformative tool.

Too often, we look to Information and communications technology (ICT) or social media but what if that elusive break-through was staring us in the face and had nothing to do at all with information technology?

What if it was something that has evolved as an integral part of us human beings over the last 200,000 years or so? What if our Stone Age ancestors, 10,000 years ago, were as familiar with it as we are today?

I am of course, talking about our language, our speech, and our conversations – the natural way that we communicate as human beings, tell stories and think together.

Conversation is the way that humans have always thought together. In conversation we discover shared meaning.

It is the primal human organizing tool.

Even in the corridors of power, very little real action happens in debate, but rather in the side rooms, the hallways, the lunches, the times away from the ritual spaces of authority and in the relaxed spaces of being human.

In all of our design of meetings, engagement, planning or whatever, if you aren't building conversation into the process, you will not benefit from the collective power and wisdom of humans thinking together.

These are not "soft" processes.

This is how wars get started and how wars end.

It's how money is made, lives started, freedom realized. It is the core human organizing competency.

— [Margaret J. Wheatley](#)

Conversation can even be considered a form of technology – not a silicon based one but carbon based – a human technology.

We take conversation for granted. We are never taught it. We absorb it naturally as we grow and mature. We are never given lessons in how to hold a conversation; how to talk or how to

listen or how to engage in dialogue.

Sometimes we are taught public speaking and how to give presentations and we are often taught how to deliver monologues and how to debate or “talk at each other” but we are rarely taught how to “talk with each other”. Don’t you find that a little surprising?

And conversation, especially face to face conversation is far more than a simple exchange of messages. It has evolved a long way since our early grunts and gestures.