Brief Summary
Conversational Intelligence
How great leaders build trust and get extraordinary results
Judith Glaser

- Conversations are dynamic, interactive, and inclusive. They evolve and impact the way we connect, engage, interact, and influence others, enabling us to shape reality, mind-sets, events, and outcomes in a collaborative way.
- Conversations have the power to move us from "power over" others to "power with" others, giving us the exquisite ability to get on the same page with our fellow humans and experience the same reality by bridging the reality gaps between "how you see things and how I see things".
- Conversations are the golden threads that enable us to move toward and trust others but these threads can also unravel, causing us to run from others in fear of loss and pain.
- The premise of Conversational Intelligence is "to get to the next level of greatness depends on the quality of our culture, which depends on the quality of relationships which depends on the quality of our conversations. Everything happens through conversations."
- Conversational Intelligence gives us the power to influence our neurochemistry even in the moment. Conversations have the power to change the brain; they stimulate the production of hormones and neurotransmitters, stimulate body systems and nerve pathways, and change our body's chemistry, not just for a moment, but perhaps for a lifetime.
- Conversational intelligence gives us the power to express our inner thoughts and feelings to one another in ways that can strengthen relationships and success. Conversational intelligence gives us the power to influence the way we interpret reality.

What is conversational intelligence?

- Conversational intelligence is essential to an organization's ability to create shared meaning about what needs to be accomplished and why, so that employees get excited and are clear about the future they are helping to create together.
- Conversational intelligence will enable you to discern the types of conversations that are suited for different situations.
- At Level 1 of Conversational intelligence - we transact business and share information with one another.
- At Level 2, we engage in "positioned conversations" - those in which we have a strong voice and point of view, and work to influence others to understand or accept our view.
- At Level 3, we are communicating with others to transform and shape reality together - these are "Co-Creating conversations". These are the highest form of conversations that let you have extraordinary, transformational conversations with others.
- Conversational intelligence allows us to connect, engage, navigate with others, and it is the single most important intelligence that gets better when "we" do it, meaning our individual capacity. Conversational Intelligence expands when we practice it with others and when we are all focus on it altogether.
• Conversational intelligence provides a framework and practices for the way individuals, teams and organizations listen, engage, architect and influence the moment and shape the future in all situations.

The Neuroscience of WE

• STAR Skills - Skills That Achieve Results. These skills are simple, powerful and get at the heart of building trusting relationships
  o Build Rapport – focusses on getting on the same wavelength as the person with whom we are talking
  o Listening without judgement – involves paying full attention to the other person as he speaks while consciously setting aside the tendency to judge the other person
  o Asking discovery questions - Opens our minds to the power of curiosity as well as to the possibility of changing our views as we listen and learn
  o Reinforcing success – focusses on us seeing and validating what “success looks like” for both people which eliminates uncertainty and moves people into action through greater connectivity and coherence.
  o Dramatizing the message – a reminder that we need to be alert to whether our messages are clear and understood by others – we could also use a story or a picture to make things clearer. These dramatizations move us toward greater understanding with others, elevating trust and strengthening the relationship.
• STAR skills serve as guideposts for our engagement process, but they are also designed to create a positive shift in brain chemistry. Supportive engagement makes us feel safe, as the oxytocin we release during such conversations enhances our feelings of bonding, and dopamine and serotonin contribute to the feelings of wellbeing. These neurotransmitters tamp down the defensive role of the amygdala, freeing the PFC to allow new ideas, insights and the wisdom to emerge.

Creating the Conversational space for mindfulness

• Navigating the 3 levels of conversations
  o Level 1 - Transactional - how to exchange data and information
  o Level 2 - Positional - how to work with power and influence
  o Level 3 - Transformational - how to co-create the future for mutual success.
• Need to keep in mind 3 things
  o Be mindful of your conversations and the emotional content you bring - either pain or pleasure... Are you sending friend or foe message?
  o Conversations have the ability to trigger emotional reactions - they carry meaning and the meaning is embedded in the listener more than the speaker.
  o Remember the words we use in our conversations are rarely neutral.

What can we learn from our worst Conversations?

• "I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant" - Pentagon spokesman Robert McCloskey
• Coaching requires that you know yourself first, from that platform you can help others know themselves.
• Conversations are the golden threads albeit fragile ones that keep us connected to others.
• When what we say, what we hear, and what we mean are not in agreement, we retreat into our heads and make up stories that help us reconcile the discrepancies.
• When we are out to win at all costs, we operate out of the part of primitive brain called the “Amygdala”. This part is hardwired with the well-developed instincts of fight, flight, freeze or appease that have evolved over millions of years. When we feel threatened, the amygdala activates the immediate impulses that ensure we survive. Our brains lock down and we are no longer open to influence.
• On the other side of the brain spectrum is the Prefrontal cortex. This is the newest brain and it enables to build societies, have good judgement, be strategic, handle difficult conversations, and build and sustain trust.

“We” Centric leadership

• Built on a level of trust that binds us together. It is our ability to treat one another with empathy and understanding and to work together to create a business enterprise that is bigger than sum of its parts.
• Consider the metaphor of a door that guards the pathway to our inner self. When we feel trust, we readily open the door, leading to an exchange of thoughts, feelings and dreams with someone else. When we distrust someone, thinking that she is somehow a threat, we quickly slam the door shut in order to defend ourselves from being hurt or rejected.
• The moment we enter into a conversation, our brains map our "interaction patterns", and we read a great deal of information from the dynamics of interaction. we know if the person is a "given, taker or matcher"

“I” Centric leadership

• He is the centre of the universe and sees the world only from his perspective. Conversations of “I” centred leaders are all one way (telling people what to do) and he rarely listened to or noticed signs of life in others - the Tell Sell Yell syndrome.

When we lose our trust we lose or voice

• Distrust is signalled through the Amygdala and trust is signalled through the Prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex is where we compare our expectations of what will happen (or what does happen) against reality.
• While trust takes place in the Prefrontal areas of the brain where we are assessing the credibility, intentions and predictability of a person's behaviour in the future, distrust takes place in the lower brain where we are assessing another person's threat level.
• It appears that there is a neural circuit called the insula (located below the prefrontal cortex) that acts as information highway between our mirror neurons and limbic system, thereby giving the ability to broadcast messages throughout the brainstem.
• Research indicates that when we are comfortable with someone, our heartbeat becomes more coherent, sending signals to the brain to relax, open up and share with that person.
When gaps arise between what we expect and what we get, we become uncertain of our relationship and our fear networks begin to take control of our brains. As a result we find ourselves lacking the neurochemical and hormonal support for placing trust in others.

When the amygdala goes into overdrive, it activates the limbic area of the brain, which stores all our old memories. Once triggered, this part of the brain begins to remember other similar hurts and threats and lumps them together into a movie.

Trust is difficult to sustain when we build a rich inner world of drama that we do not share with those around us.

If we learn to identify the signs of developing distrust before the amygdala is triggered, we can activate the higher level brain functions in the executive brain, where empathy, judgement or our more social strategic social skills reside.

When we learn to down-regulate, or reduce the effects of fear, we can up-regulate or increase the impact of the executive brain.

We can learn to side-line the signals from amygdala by:

- noticing how we react to threats - observing whether we go into "fight, flight freeze or appease"
- labelling our reaction as normal
- noticing if we always choose the same reaction to threat and noting how much the threat impacts us
- choosing an alternative way to react at the moment of contact (breathe in, breathe out; go into "discovery conversations"; share how you are feeling in the moment; stay calm and do nothing)
- Becoming more aware of our responses and realizing we can override our emotions and shift into other responses. we perceive what may happen before it happens and we interrupt that pattern
- Transforming fear into trust which is the heart of conversational intelligence.

On survey of more than 4000 leaders in the industry, WE institute identified that the two least developed skills in the work place are - the ability to have uncomfortable conversations and the ability to ask "what if" questions - both of which are necessary to build and sustain trust.

Moving from Distrust to Trust

- "Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength, mastering yourself is true power" - Laozi
- Trust has deep psychological and neurochemical roots. Trust and distrust happen as our inner and outer realities collide - my own inner and our reality and my reality with yours.
- When we are in a fear state, our conversations are shaped by the neurochemistry of fear. We can only think of protecting ourselves - and the best antidotes to the brain's fear state are trust, empathy and support.
The Conversational dashboard

**Conversational Dashboard**

Making the Invisible Visible!

- **Level 1 - Transactional**
  - Conversations often can be categorized as "Tell and Ask" interaction dynamics. People are exchanging information, updates and facts that help us align our realities or confirm that we are on the same page. There is not much trust.

- **Level 2 Positional**
  - These conversations are characterized by "Advocate and inquire" interaction dynamics. In a Level 2 conversation, I am not advocating for what I want (not just telling you) and I am inquiring about your beliefs so I can influence you to my point of view. Here Trust is conditional.

- **Level 3 : Transformational**
  - Transformational conversations are marked by "Share and Discover" interaction dynamics. Here I open up my inner thoughts, ideas and feelings giving a cue to the others that they can trust you to experiment and innovate with them. We will be able to co-create with one another to achieve greater shared success far beyond what we ever imagined.

- The Conversational dashboard is a visual representation of what happens in the brain during conversations.

- On the left are the "Protect" behaviours and on the right are "Partner" behaviours. The left represents the primitive brain where extreme fair and distrust reside, and the right represents the prefrontal cortex where more advanced human capacities such as trust, strategic thinking and regulating emotions reside.

- When we are confronted with a threatening situation - called an 'amygdala hijack' our brain floods with cortisol, a neurotransmitter that tells the brain to close down the executive functions, making them inaccessible even if the intention is there.
• Conversational intelligence facilitates connectivity with others and enables us to activate our higher executive and human functions.
• When we use conversational intelligence, the hormone oxytocin is released among other neurotransmitters. Oxytocin is associated with bonding behaviours and new research in neuroscience suggests that oxytocin may play a dominant in the brain and the heart as a regular of our need for social contact.
• Oxytocin is also often called the "cuddle hormone" since it can create feelings of wellbeing as comforting as a mother's hug.
• People learn best by doing, not by being told what to do. The "my way or highway" model of leadership fails to engage people in learning and in many ways negates their experiences. When we rely on our previous knowledge and experiences to help us work out issues in the present, we often fall into the trap of doing more of the same thing, but getting worse results.

**Distrust and Trust**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Distrust</th>
<th>Trust</th>
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<tr>
<td>When we are picking up any of the signs of distrust, our neurochemistry skills. More likely than not, distrust produces</td>
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<td>Higher levels of cortisol and the presence of catecholamine which closes down our prefrontal cortex where new ideas, creative thinking, empathy and good judgement reside</td>
<td>Higher levels of dopamine - the happy hormone, which gives us a positive outlook (cup half full) and assigns good feelings to our interactions, we have more positive memories to look back on and more positive views of the future.</td>
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<td>Changes in the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, a part of the brain that is sensitive to conflict, this centre responds by sending signals to the amygdala to take over and protect</td>
<td>Higher levels of oxytocin a bonding hormone which makes us feel closer to others and want to be with them and open with them</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher levels of testosterone which makes us more aggressive and induces us to fight to protect our territory.</td>
<td>higher levels of dopamine which makes us feel good and feel more talkative and excited</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher levels of norepinephrine - which causes us to want to think more negative thoughts and want to fight</td>
<td>higher levels of serotonin which also makes us feel good.</td>
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**TRUST model**

• The TRUST model is made up of 5 steps a leader can take to restore trust. Each step provides a way to signal our brain to move into higher levels of trust.
  o **Transparency** - being able to talk about our frustrations and worries openly, without fear of retribution, is the first step toward building and sustaining trust. Transparency is also about sharing our intentions so people don’t read into them.
  o **Relationships** - Once you have established trust, the next step is to focus on building relationships and work out strategies for rebuilding those relationships marked by distrust. We activate our ability for higher levels of bonding, collaborating and
experience high moments with others, which mean that the levels of oxytocin are increasing as we interact and this influx of neurochemicals reinforces trust.

- **Understanding** - On needs to learn to see the world through other people eyes not just one's own. We need to understand how to stand in another's shoe and understand their perspectives. Understanding each other's "context" and "perspective" is invaluable to building trust.

- **Shared Success** - this is about creating a shared vision of success with others. When we have a common view of success, we start to intuitively trust that others will make decisions similar to ours and we trust they will work out conflicts fairly.

- **Testing Assumptions and Truth Telling** - Truth telling starts with being able to see the truth about our own behaviour. It is about letting go of old assumptions and build new contexts and frameworks that included people as part of one's inner circle than treat them as outsiders.

- In summary, these five steps trigger the trust networks located in the prefrontal cortex and help us access Conversational intelligence.

**Challenges of navigating the conversational highway**

- "To get to the next level of greatness depends on the quality of culture, which depends on teh quality of relationships, which depends on the quality of conversations. Everything happens through conversations" - Judith Glaser

- Conversational rituals differentiate humans from other species and enable us to develop and handle complexity, ambiguity and change. When we create conversational rituals that enable us to honour and respect other's views of the world - especially when these views are very different from our own - we create a space for better conversations and for new ideas to emerge.

- Conversational rituals can be 'I-centric' like persuading someone until he/she gives in or intimidating someone before a negotiation so he gives up more than he'd planned.

- Conversational rituals can also be WE Centric like shaking hands before a difficult conversation and making up after an argument.

**Five conversational blind spots**

- **Blind Spot #1** - The first blind spot involves an assumption that others see what we see, feel what we feel, and think what we think. Winning a point makes us feel good - it makes others feel bad, but we often don't realize that.

- **Blind Spot #2** - Blind Spot # 2 is the failure to realize that fear, trust, and distrust changes how we see and interpret reality and therefore how we talk about it. When in a state of fear, we release cortisol and catecholamine, which closes down the prefrontal cortex.

- **Blind spot #3** - An inability to stand in each other's shoes when we are fearful or upset characterizes Blind Spot # 3. When we listen deeply, turn off our judgement mechanisms and allow ourselves to connect with others, we are activating the mirror neuron systems, however when we are fearful that power to connect becomes disconnected and our sensitivity to other’s perspective's recedes.

- **Blind spot #4** is the assumption that we remember what others say, when we actually remember what we think about what others say. We drop out of conversations every 12-18
seconds to process what people are saying - i.e. our internal listening and dialogue trumps the other person's speech.

- **Blind Spot # 5** - The assumption that meaning resides in the speaker, when in fact it resides in the listener characterizes Blind spot # 5. Meaning resides in the listener until the speaker takes the time to validate and link back to make sure both have the same picture and shared meaning.

**Bridging our reality gaps**

- Our blind spots spring from reality gaps. Your reality and my reality are not the same.
- **Powerful questions** - Level 3 questions / Discovery questions. These type of questions open up our minds to explore new avenues of thought with each other's thoughts. They help us enter each other's worlds, navigate each other's thought sand feelings and open and harvest new insights and wisdom not yet explored by either person.

**Examples:**

- Level 1 - Are you OK with taking the second writing sample to add to our marketing materials?
- Level 2 - I am fascinated by the second sample. It's got all the qualities of great writing. How are you thinking about it? Can you join me in this decision?
- Level 3 - which of the writing samples will achieve the best outcomes for our sales promotion and marketing? How would you describe success in this situation? Are there any feared implications that we should consider and talk more about before we decide?

**Harvesting Conversational intelligence using the wisdom of 5 brains**

- "I have learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel" - Maya Angelou.
- Trust is a phenomenon that is enhanced by oxytocin, which gets people to be socially interactive - to engage in conversations.
- Then you have the Amygdala and the PFC to decide if the interaction is going to be rewarding or punishing.
- They work as a team to help us know if we can trust being open or not trust and close down in the conversation. If the interaction is punishing or harshly threatening, we will feel more aggressive and distrustful. If we are unsure of the person's intentions, we will be wary and move into protect behaviours.
- The Amygdala is the region of the brain where fear and distrust reside, and the prefrontal cortex is where trust and growth reside. When the PFC is not overwhelmed by fear hormones, it is able to exert a top down control over the amygdala and limbic brain to quell fight, flight, freeze reactions.
- Some scientists assert that our lower brain responds at .07 seconds, while our higher brain, where language resides at .1 second. Our brains have evolved to give us greater ability to put words to what we feel and think, but to our nonverbal processors carry greater weight in the meaning of what we experience and make assessments at a much more rapid rate.
Our Five Brains

- The Reptilian brain informs us about threats (physical and psychological) to our safety (amygdala)
- The Limbic brain helps us identify our friends and our foes and lets us know how to fit in, it is concerned with needs, emotions and relationships
- The Neocortex sorts through data from our sense, memories and experiences and help us make some sense of reality - promotes understanding
- The Heart Brain - reads the biochemistry of our bodies and enables us to translate the energetic and hormonal messages that arise as we interact.
- The Pre Frontal Cortex - engages with the outer world and the future helping us grasp inner and outer truths. By translating current information, impulses and bio chemistry it makes us make judgement calls, have empathy and anticipate the future.
- Communication through interaction is less about words spoken that it is about the interaction dynamics that take place at the non-verbal level, it is at this level that trust is established or not.
- 3 elements that play a role when we convey feelings and attitudes to each other.
  - These are words, tone of voice, nonverbal behaviour (such as facial expression and eye contact)
  - In terms of importance people allocate 7 percent on words, 38% on tone of voice and 55% on non-verbal communication.
- For effective communication, these three aspects have to support one another.
- When we connect with others, our minds toggles through a series of five hardwired questions
  - Protect - how do I protect myself and do I need to
  - Connect - who loves me, who hates me and can I trust this person
  - Belong - where do I belong and fit in
  - Be Strong - What do I need to learn to be successful
  - Partner - How do I create value with others

Bringing Conversations to Life

- Too often leaders become stuck in one type of engagement, trying the same tactics again and again, hoping for different outcomes – this Level 1 Conversations are the “Tell Sell Yell syndrome”
- The Tell Sell Yell syndrome is about Telling, Advice giving, Fixated on a single strategy and lack interactive dynamics leading to loss of engagement
- Level 2 Positional dynamics is about advocating and inquiring with the intention of influencing others to our point of view. Getting stuck in Level 2, results in becoming addicted to being right and failing to realize the negative impact this has on the others.
- Moving to Level 3 conversations allows us to release the power of true exchange with other human beings. We become mindful of our conversational intention and notice the impact our conversations have on others.
• Conversation breakdowns occur when we hold different meanings than others or when we try to persuade others our meanings are the right ones. Breakthroughs occur when we take the time to share and discover, when we co-create and partner in creating a shared reality.

Priming for Level 3 conversations

• The best communications learn to align their intentions, what they plan to accomplish with their impact, the quality of the experience from the perspective of the receiver.
• “Vital Instincts” are hardwired into our sensory system letting us pick up cues about others trustworthiness.
  o Fairness – Does this interaction and relationship feel fair? Are we establishing a WE relationship?
  o Ownership – Do we have a sense of ownership and rules of engagement regarding ownership?
  o Reciprocity – Do I care for you and you for me? What are the positive actions we take on each other’s behalf?
  o Cooperation – In what ways do we join forces and work to support each other in achieving our needs?
  o Expression – Do we give each other room to speak up and share what’s on our minds? Do we give each other space to speak our thoughts?
  o Status – Do we honour where we stand in the social hierarchy, and do we respect each other for where we stand?
• Level 3 is a mind-set of partnering and co-creating; when you are living as an open, trusting, engaging, honest, candid and caring person. You are open to being compassionate and to listening non-judgementally and you are able to share with others your vulnerabilities and uncertainties.
• Priming is the implicit effect that takes place when exposure to a stimulus influences the subsequent response. E.g. when you see the word ‘tab’ - most often one associates it with the word “table”. In a business setting, priming lets us think about what we want to create - to design the conversational space – and allows the interaction dynamics to be flooded with positivity.

Conversational Agility

• In a meeting or interactions with colleagues, to take the level of conversations from Level 1 to Level 3, one of the ways to open up the conversation is to ask a discovery question like “What would it take for you to feel more engaged, or want to co-create?”
• Other ways of opening up a conversation, is to draw upon transformative conversational skills such as reframing, refocusing and redirecting.
  o Reframing – taking a difficult situation and turning it into an opportunity for finding trust and common ground with someone. You give the person you are talking with an opportunity to mentally take a break and think in a new way. Reframing can change the context and give a new meaning to a new situation
  o Refocusing – allows you to elevate people out of the place where they are stuck and point them toward another part of a larger topic where they can see connections
they had not seen before. It is about defocusing on specific things and focus on others.

- Redirecting – helps a person move from a place of being stuck and emotionally bound to a place where she can see new opportunities. It is saying “I care enough about you to help you things in a new light”.

- As one learns these skills, it helps create a mind shift from their lower brain to a higher brain and refocus the conversations to elevate the communication abilities of everyone involved – in other words it is the “Leadershift”. This involves a shift
  - From fear to transparency – refocussing on transparency to overcome threats.
  - From power to relationship building – refocus on relating to others, reaching out to connect is vital to establishing trust.
  - From uncertainty to understanding – refocus on understanding to minimize uncertainty
  - From a need to be right to mapping shared success - refocus on shared success which minimizes threats to self-interest.
  - From groupthink to group cohesion and partnering – refocus on truth telling to close reality gaps.

- The power of Level 3 interaction dynamics comes from their ability to catalyse the higher intelligence and requires the heart brain and the executive brain to work in harmony.

- To help elevate your culture to Level 3 interaction dynamics, start engaging in 7 vital conversations:
  - Co-creating conversations – that stimulate mirror neurons which enable you to see the world through others’ eyes.
  - Humanizing conversations – that stimulate higher levels of empathy and candour
  - Aspiring conversations – that stimulate higher levels of foresight
  - Navigating conversations – that stimulate higher levels of collaboration
  - Generating conversations – that stimulate learning from mistakes
  - Expressing conversations – that stimulate higher levels of judgement and voice
  - Synchronizing conversations – that enable you to close the gaps between reality and aspirations

- The 5 ways to eliminate fear within a team using the TRUST model are
  - Be present – make yourself open to others y being turned into your relationship environment.
  - Tell people where they stand – so that they can let go of their fears and questions such as “Am I good enough” or “Do I belong” and can refocus on contributing
  - Provide context in every communication – providing context moves people from uncertainty to understanding
  - Catalyse co-creating in conversations – create higher levels of engagement and co-creation so that people build a picture of shared success
  - Use honesty at all times – tell the truth tactfully and within the appropriate context.