

Meyer's Management Models

75. Conversation Elevator

How can I engage in an effective conversation?

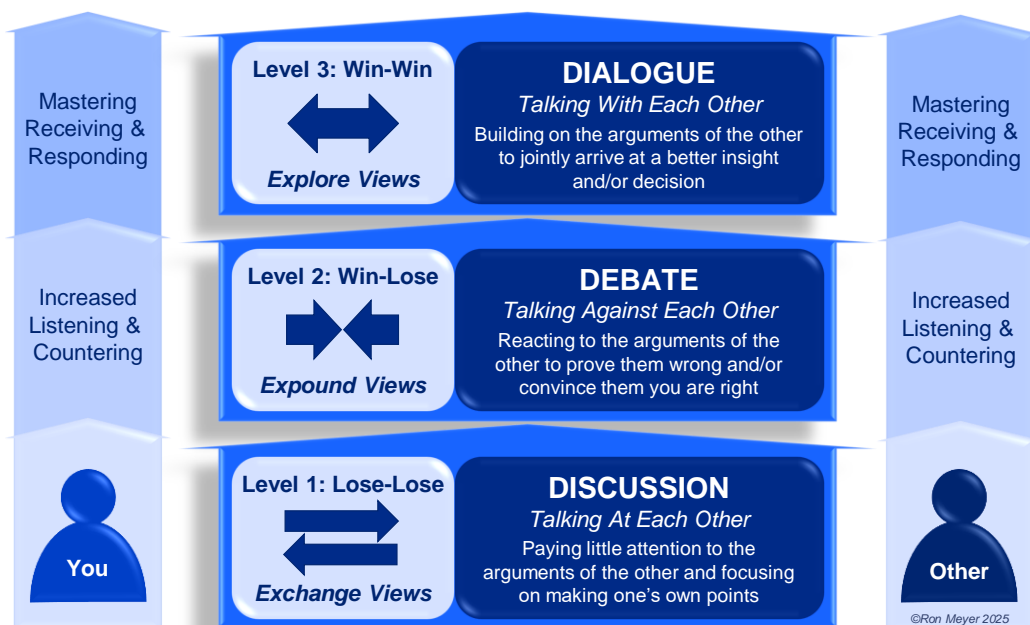
Key Definitions

While some people can work on their own, managers need to spend most of their time in *conversation* with others – engaging in two-way communication with the intention of achieving some result, such as gaining a better understanding, making a decision, or moving into action.

Conversations involve the simple act of verbally interacting with each other, sometimes on a one-to-one basis, while at other moments in larger group settings. But while interacting is commonplace and easy, interacting *effectively* is rarer and more difficult. It requires both sides to talk to each other in a particular way, in other words, to use a specific *conversation type*.

Conceptual Model

The *Conversation Elevator* model distinguishes three conversation types, that from bottom to top progressively lift the interaction to a higher level of effectiveness. The model suggests that if people are not intentional about how they engage in conversation, they will get stuck at the ground floor; in *discussion*, exchanging views, talking *at* each other, with little impact on either's opinion. To move one level up, to a *debate* type conversation, they need to start listening and talking *against* the other, with the intention of expounding their views and convincing the other. To elevate the conversation to the level of *dialogue*, at which people talk *with* each other, exploring each other's views, requires the mental shift of wanting to truly understand the other's perspective, in order to build on it. This is usually the most effective conversation type.



Key Elements

The three types of conversations are the following:

1. **Discussion: Exchanging Views.** A discussion is a type of conversation in which each speaker is more interested in being heard than in hearing – each broadcasts their own

views, with limited attention being paid to arguments put forward by others. In the worst case, it is hardly two-way communication, but various people engaged in one-way communication simultaneously. Typically, people in a discussion will be caught up in their own thought processes, which they need to make consistent and justify, with little cognitive bandwidth to make sense of someone else's views. Therefore, they will keep on repeating their own truth and only respond to people's points if they neatly fit in their own worldview.

2. **Debate: Expounding Views.** A debate is a type of conversation in which at least one side is intent on "winning" – proving they are right and the other is wrong. While in a discussion both sides are too busy with their own thought processes to hear what the other means, in a debate people do actually listen to each other, but to find weaknesses in the other's arguments, so they can open a new avenue of attack. The listening is not open-minded and constructive, but partisan and offensive, giving the verbal boxer more opportunities to land a counter punch. Still, a debate is more effective than a discussion in highlighting the relative strengths and weaknesses of various points of views. So, debates can be useful.
3. **Dialogue: Exploring Views.** A dialogue is a type of conversation in which both sides build on each other's ideas to reach more insight – they use their different perspectives and joint brainpower to reach conclusions they won't have been able to achieve separately. This requires all participants to receive the others' arguments without immediate judgement and with the intention of trying to understand their point of view. Only once this new information is digested, can a tailored response be formulated that tries to bring the argument further. If the goal of both sides is to explore issues together and/or reach more considered decisions, then this type of conversation tends to be the most effective.

Key Insights

- **Conversation is a key management tool.** Talking might be managers' most widely used tool for getting things done. This talking is sometimes one-directional, as when managers give a presentation, tell people what to do, or give a compliment. But more often, it is two-way communication, in which people talk about issues and argue about potential ways forward. This verbal interaction between two or more people is called conversation.
- **Conversation comes in three types.** There are three types of conversations. A *discussion* is where parties exchange views, without much reaction to the others' opinions. This adds little value and is therefore classified as lose-lose. In a *debate* each party expounds their views, trying to prove they're right and the others wrong, making it a win-lose affair. In a *dialogue* all parties explore each other's views, with the intention of gaining deeper insight, making it a win-win type of conversation.
- **Each conversation type has a different view of the other.** Someone in discussion-mode sees the other as *audience* that needs to be *told*. Someone in debate-mode sees the other as *opponent* that needs to be *convinced*. Someone in dialogue-mode sees the other as *sparring partner* who can help to *figure things out*.
- **Conversations can be elevated to a higher level.** When people don't think about their conversation intentions and the role of their counterparts, they quickly get stranded in discussion. They can elevate a conversation to reach a specific goal, such as getting their way (debate) or gaining more understanding (dialogue) but need to do this consciously.
- **Effective conversation requires better listening.** Moving to a higher conversation level starts with trying to understand the other, reacting to their points, and then subsequently asking them to listen and respond to you, instead of allowing them to repeat their initial position. This process is also described in the *Disciplined Dialogue* model (#29).

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Insightful Tools to Kickstart Your Thinking

Publication Schedule

<i>July 2019</i>	<i>Mind the Gap Model</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2019</i>	<i>Digital Platform Map</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>September 2019</i>	<i>Interaction Pressure Gauge</i>	<i>Interpersonal Interaction</i>
<i>October 2019</i>	<i>Revenue Model Framework</i>	<i>Revenue Model Typology</i>
<i>November 2019</i>	<i>House of Engagement</i>	<i>Organizational Engagement</i>
<i>December 2019</i>	<i>Confidence Quotient</i>	<i>Trust Building</i>
<i>January 2020</i>	<i>Competition Tornado</i>	<i>Competitive Strategy</i>
<i>February 2020</i>	<i>11C Synergy Model</i>	<i>Corporate Synergy Management</i>
<i>March 2020</i>	<i>Leadership Fairness Model</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>April 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Agility Model</i>	<i>Strategy Process Approach</i>
<i>May 2020</i>	<i>Control Panel</i>	<i>Corporate Control Dimensions</i>
<i>June 2020</i>	<i>Rising Star Framework</i>	<i>Talent Management</i>
<i>July 2020</i>	<i>Strategy Development Cycle</i>	<i>Strategy Process Steps</i>
<i>August 2020</i>	<i>7I Corporate Center Model</i>	<i>Corporate Organization</i>
<i>September 2020</i>	<i>Storytelling Scripts</i>	<i>Leadership Communication</i>
<i>October 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Bets Framework</i>	<i>Strategic Decision-Making</i>
<i>November 2020</i>	<i>Rebound Model of Resilience</i>	<i>Organizational Resilience</i>
<i>December 2020</i>	<i>4C Leadership Capabilities</i>	<i>Leadership Competences</i>
<i>January 2021</i>	<i>Digital Product Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>February 2021</i>	<i>Digital Distribution Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>March 2021</i>	<i>Empowerment Cycle</i>	<i>Employee Empowerment</i>
<i>April 2021</i>	<i>Innovation Box</i>	<i>Innovation Approaches</i>
<i>May 2021</i>	<i>Knowledge Sharing Bridges</i>	<i>Best Practice Sharing</i>
<i>June 2021</i>	<i>Followership Cycle</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>July 2021</i>	<i>Everest Model of Change</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2021</i>	<i>Fruits & Nuts Matrix</i>	<i>Priority-Setting</i>
<i>September 2021</i>	<i>Powerhouse Framework</i>	<i>People & Organization Strategy</i>
<i>October 2021</i>	<i>Strategy Hourglass</i>	<i>Strategy-Making Steps</i>
<i>November 2021</i>	<i>Disciplined Dialogue Model</i>	<i>Interpersonal Communication</i>
<i>December 2021</i>	<i>Team Building Cycle</i>	<i>Team Building Process</i>
<i>January 2022</i>	<i>Market System Map</i>	<i>External Analysis Framework</i>
<i>February 2022</i>	<i>Strategic Alignment Model</i>	<i>Business Level Strategy</i>
<i>March 2022</i>	<i>Creativity X-Factor</i>	<i>Creativity Enhancement</i>
<i>April 2022</i>	<i>Organizational System Map</i>	<i>Organizational Analysis</i>
<i>May 2022</i>	<i>Corporate Value Creation Model</i>	<i>Corporate Level Strategy</i>
<i>June 2022</i>	<i>Change Manager's Toolbox</i>	<i>Change Methodologies</i>

<i>July 2022</i>	<i>Sustainable You Model</i>	<i>Personal Sustainability</i>
<i>August 2022</i>	<i>Value Proposition Dial</i>	<i>Business Level Strategy</i>
<i>September 2022</i>	<i>The Tree of Power</i>	<i>Organizational Power</i>
<i>October 2022</i>	<i>Psychological Safety Compass</i>	<i>Team Dynamics</i>
<i>November 2022</i>	<i>Strategic Action Modes</i>	<i>Strategy Process</i>
<i>December 2022</i>	<i>Corporate Management Styles</i>	<i>HQ Management</i>
<i>January 2023</i>	<i>Thinking Directions Framework</i>	<i>Reasoning Skills</i>
<i>February 2023</i>	<i>5I Innovation Pipeline</i>	<i>Innovation Process</i>
<i>March 2023</i>	<i>Resistance to Change Typology</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>April 2023</i>	<i>Ambition Radar Screen</i>	<i>Motivation Analysis</i>
<i>May 2023</i>	<i>Corporate Strategy Framework</i>	<i>Corporate Strategy</i>
<i>June 2023</i>	<i>Cultural Fabric Model</i>	<i>Organizational Culture</i>
<i>July 2023</i>	<i>New Pyramid Principle</i>	<i>Presentation Approaches</i>
<i>August 2023</i>	<i>Activity System Dial</i>	<i>Value Creation Analysis</i>
<i>September 2023</i>	<i>Customer-Centricity Circle</i>	<i>Organizational Design</i>
<i>October 2023</i>	<i>Status Snakes & Ladders</i>	<i>Leadership Branding</i>
<i>November 2023</i>	<i>Stakeholder Stance Map</i>	<i>Stakeholder Management</i>
<i>December 2023</i>	<i>Best Practice Sharing Modes</i>	<i>Sharing Methods</i>
<i>January 2024</i>	<i>Duty of Care Feedback Model</i>	<i>Feedback Method</i>
<i>February 2024</i>	<i>BOLD Vision Framework</i>	<i>Organizational Vision</i>
<i>March 2024</i>	<i>MOVING Mission Framework</i>	<i>Organizational Mission</i>
<i>April 2024</i>	<i>Leadership Circle Map</i>	<i>Leadership Skills</i>
<i>May 2024</i>	<i>Digitalization Staircase</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>June 2024</i>	<i>Time Management Funnel</i>	<i>Personal Time Management</i>
<i>July 2024</i>	<i>Wicked Problem Scorecard</i>	<i>Organizational Decision-Making</i>
<i>August 2024</i>	<i>Hunting & Farming Typology</i>	<i>Sales Management</i>
<i>September 2024</i>	<i>Guiding STAR Matrix</i>	<i>Objective Setting Approach</i>
<i>October 2024</i>	<i>Corporate Synergy Typology</i>	<i>Corporate Level Strategy</i>
<i>November 2024</i>	<i>Self-Centered Thinking Traps</i>	<i>Thinking Styles</i>
<i>December 2024</i>	<i>Sustainability Maturity Ladder</i>	<i>Sustainability Management</i>
<i>January 2025</i>	<i>Top Line Growth Pie</i>	<i>Growth Strategy</i>
<i>February 2025</i>	<i>Innovation Sins & Virtues</i>	<i>Innovation Management</i>
<i>March 2025</i>	<i>Interaction Drivers</i>	<i>Communication Determinants</i>
<i>April 2025</i>	<i>Frictionless Flow Framework</i>	<i>Customer Journey</i>
<i>May 2025</i>	<i>Five Phases of Change</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>June 2025</i>	<i>Courageous Core Model</i>	<i>Leadership Behaviors</i>
<i>July 2025</i>	<i>Integration Zippers</i>	<i>Corporate Strategy</i>
<i>August 2025</i>	<i>Innovation Arena</i>	<i>Innovation Management</i>
<i>September 2025</i>	<i>Conversation Elevator</i>	<i>Communication Approaches</i>
<i>October 2025</i>	<i>5T SMART Plan</i>	<i>Strategic Planning</i>

November 2025	Organizational Diamond	Organizational Design
December 2025	New Learning Curve	Personal Learning
January 2026	Partnership Distance Model	Interorganizational Relations
February 2026	Dynamic Organization Paradigm	Human-centered Organization
March 2026	Embedded Identity Model	Personal Awareness
April 2026	Synergy Value Matrix	Corporate Level Strategy
May 2026	Low Performance Team Slide	Team Building
June 2026	Leadership Journey	Leadership Development
July 2026	Strategic Assignment Matrix	Corporate Strategy
August 2026	Triple Diamond Model	Organizational Decision-Making
September 2026	Personal Quick Guide	Personal Effectiveness