**Measuring the Quality of Conversations**

The first question, I am guessing is 'Why would I want to measure the quality of conversations?!'

Firstly, let us examine some research carried out by wctd limited, examining the engagement and satisfaction of 248 people across 19 organisations. The first four statements of the research were:

1. Overall I am satisfied with my organisation at present
2. I would recommend my employer as a great place to work
3. I rarely think about looking for a new job with another company
4. I am proud to work for my employer

Each respondent chose from the following selections and the companies that were surveyed scored a **weighted average response of 3.65 across the four statements**, so above middle ground and as a baseline figure a fairly good satisfaction level, certainly compared to other studies of this type that we have carried out.

| strongly disagree 1 | disagree 2 | neutral 3 | agree 4 | strongly agree 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

The really interesting part of the research was revealed when filtering the respondents and cross-tabulating the results with some of the later statements, thereby identifying which factors most influence the satisfaction of staff. This is what we found, with scores in green being above the baseline figure and those in red, below:

1. Line Manager

Unsurprisingly, the influence of the Line Manager was key and was demonstrated in the results as follows;

I. People who rated their Line Manager as providing 'little support' or 'no support' scored an average of 2.70.

II. Line Managers that were perceived as being 'good' or 'excellent' at having conversations about the performance of individuals scored 3.89

III. Line Managers who were perceived as being 'good' or 'excellent' at communicating face-to-face scored 3.89.

IV. Respondents who said that their Line Manager was 'always interested in how I am doing' scored an average of 4.37. This was the biggest improvement in the baseline score across all responses.

2. Environment

I. For a high performance environment to exist a Leader must provide 3 elements*:
   - Vision
   - Challenge
   - Support

II. To be truly effective, teams need to have complementary skills, a common performance goal and be sized 6-11**.

In our survey, as shown above in 1. Line Manager, responders that experienced little or no support scored an average of 2.70 and those who experienced no challenge scored 3.25.

| | |
|---|---|
| *High Performance Environment Model, Professor Graham Jones, 2009 | ** The Wisdom of Teams, Katzenbach and Smith, 1992 |

The research results supported the team size statement from Katzenbach and Smith, in that people who managed teams of 6-11 scored an average of 3.87.

3. Communication

One of the major performance factors in teams is conflict. However, not all conflict is bad for a team, with 'Fear of Conflict' cited as one of the *'5 dysfunctions of a team, (Patrick Lencioni, 2002)'* and it is the way in which conflict resolution is handled by an organisation and in particular Line Managers that can influence how resilient a team is.

The survey showed that people who believed their organisation was either 'good' or 'excellent' at resolving conflict scored 3.81 and 'good' or 'excellent' at having difficult conversations scored 4.24.
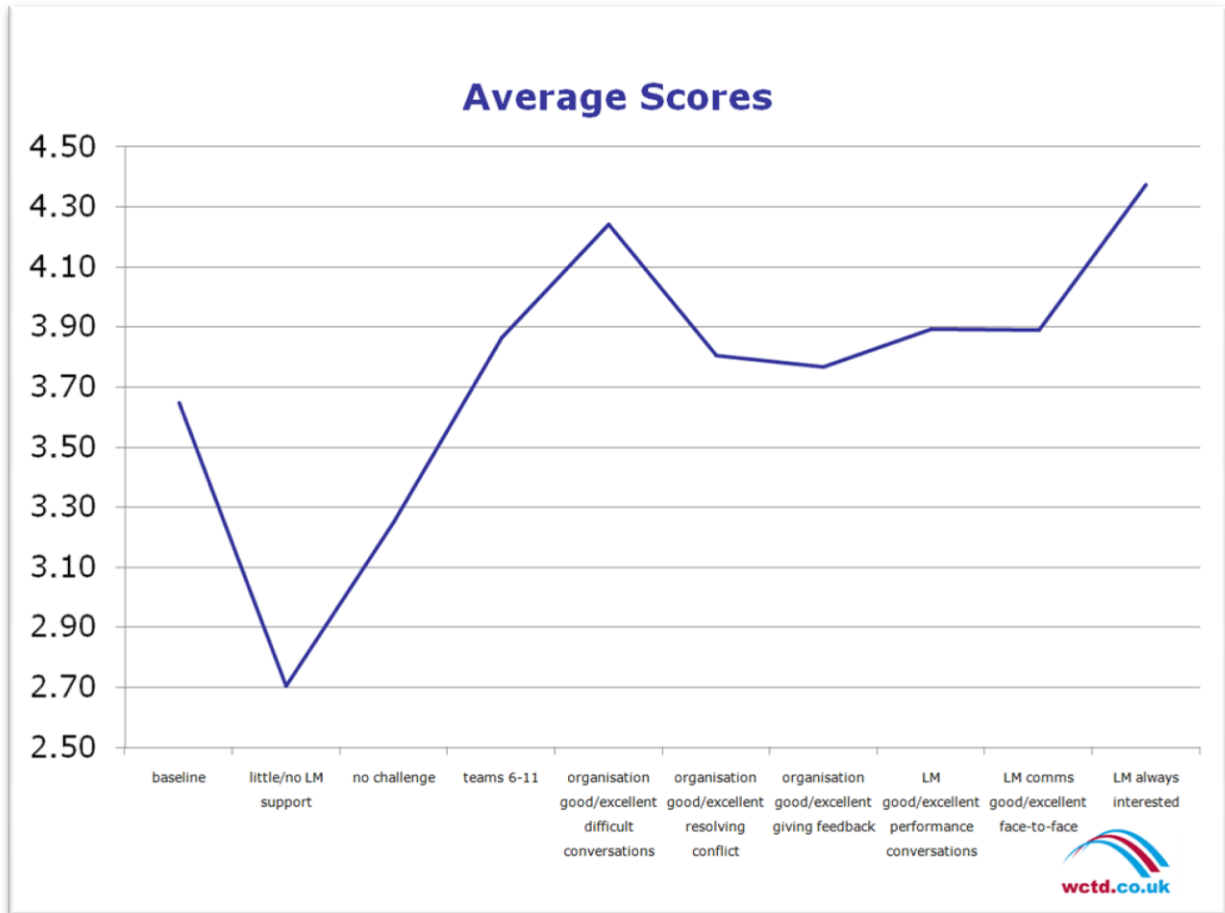


Also as you will see below, organisations that rate 'good' or 'excellent' at difficult conversations, resolving conflict and giving feedback score highest in overall satisfaction.

|  | Difficult conversations | | Resolving conflict | | Giving feedback | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Good | Excellent | Good | Excellent | Good | Excellent |
| Highest scoring organisation | 67% | 22% | 67% | 33% | 56% | 33% |
| Lowest scoring organisation | 14% | 0% | 29% | 0% | 43% | 0% |

All of which supports a view that the critical part of being a high performing team is about the way we communicate and the (sometimes arbitrary) feelings attached to the way people are treated.

The common denominator? **Quality conversations**. Whether you are building a relationship by chatting about the weekend, managing somebody's expectations about promotion, dealing with conflict between staff or setting performance goals that will stretch team members, these are all conversations that take place with a wider outcome in mind; performance improvement.

So, why should you be concerned with measuring the quality of your conversations?  To improve the performance of your team and company... and of course, your own performance.

This research shows that teams of people and companies of all sizes can improve their performance through conversations by making some simple changes:

Get interested and ask questions
Take the time to listen to your people and hear what they are saying and nothing shows you are interested like a question.

Agree the environment
One of the key factors in self-determination is autonomy - help your people to set goals and therefore the amount of challenge they would prefer, rather than just prescribing goals.  While you are at it, also agree what sort of support they require and how often.

Transactional outcomes
Each conversation is a transaction. Identify what you would like to achieve with each transaction and tell the other parties before you get started.

Feel the fear of conflict
...and do it anyway! Follow the suggestions above and conflict does not have to end relationships.

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