

Organizations are organic. Made up of living, breathing human beings, their cultures reflect the values and passions of their inhabitants. And because society and social norms continue to evolve and become more complex, so must organizational cultures or they risk becoming stagnant.

The human and the corporate body seeks stasis and stability. Updating cultural norms means change, which most often gets met with resistance in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

A very effective strategy for initiating cultural change is through conversations.

Hi-Fidelity Conversations are grounded in the purpose, vision and values of the organization. Nine elements of these conversations are described below. Consider this a starting point; some elements may not be as applicable for your organizational change as others.

Listen to the podcast, [Rise Leaders Radio, Episode #16: High Fidelity Conversations - Nine Elements to Launch Culture Change](#) as I walk through this guide.

1. Create a Vision that everyone can see themselves in.



- Be clear about the future being created through this change initiative.
- *Example: PCI stated their vision as, A high- trust culture, one where all races and genders feel they can come to work as their authentic selves.**

2. Ground the vision in the purpose and values of the organization.



- How will this change help the organization uphold its purpose?
- How is this change in alignment with the values?
- How can the values be used to operationalize the change?
- *Example: Racial equality was examined through the lens of PCI's corporate values, especially that of Servant Leadership.**

3. Include expertise and training.



- Consider whether the expertise on the topic or change can be provided in-house. If not, bring it in.
- Prepare those expected to lead the change and/or conversations.
- *Example: PCI hired an expert in leading conversations about race, and who aligned with their vision. They spent time before their first session coaching the leader-facilitators.**

4. Model the change through exemplary leadership – the highest-level leader for the organization champions the change and models it.

- Leaders have an exponential impact on successful change.
- Walking the talk is crucial.
- Listening, learning and being open to other points of view is critical.
- *Example: As President, Drew led the charge with the first gatherings, intent on learning about the life experience of Black male leaders at PCI. Lori, as CPO, also learned that to fully show up herself, she would have to let down her own guard and be willing to change her stories.**



5. Build a safe container for conversational exploration.

- Provide and follow an agenda.
- Create norms, or ‘rules of engagement’ for the gatherings.
- Invite everyone to the conversation and hear from them all.
- Focus on inquiry and listening as a primary communication mode.
- *Examples at PCI:**
 - *An opening practice included mindfulness to help attendees focus.*
 - *Sessions began with an introduction by Drew and an agenda for the session*
 - *Attendees were asked to reflect on the same questions.*
 - *Breakout sessions allowed for small group discussions.*
 - *Conversations were kept at the personal experience level, not ‘what-about-isms’.*



6. Get feedback and adjust.

- Build in time for after-meeting reviews and general feedback for conversation leaders.
- Incorporate a what worked (plus/+) and what didn’t (delta/Δ) review in each meeting.
- Finalize and communicate decisions, approaches and norms.
- *Example: PCI brought meeting facilitators together to discuss their breakout sessions and made improvements prior to the next session. They also created a survey measuring trust for benchmarking purposes.**



7. Create predictability and consistency



- Establish and publish a rhythm: Weekly, monthly, etc.
- The cadence may evolve and that's ok. Keep people informed.
- Rhythms and patterns allow people to relax, knowing what to expect.

8. Launch it! Be biased towards action.



- Waiting until the perfect, most elegant solution will keep you out of the game today.
- Balance immediate action with policies and structures that provide resistance free, long term solutions.
- *Example: Drew began early conversations about race with Black male leaders when he and Lori noticed they were struggling. They quickly moved to organization-wide conversations to open the doors for a higher-trust organization. Long term solutions are allowed to evolve.**

9. Brand the effort.



- Naming the effort gives people language for how to refer to the change or initiative
- *Example: PCI named their ongoing conversations Meaningful Conversations, and their big launch, Justice July.**

**For each element I've used an example from [Rise Leaders Radio Episode #15: How to Talk About Race at Work](#) with Drew Clancy, President, and Lori Bishop, Chief People Officer (CPO) at Publishing Concepts (PCI).*