TRACKING CONVERSATIONS

The inability for a group to proceed smoothly through a conversation is almost always due to a failure to stay on one conversation at a time until completion. One of the most important functions a facilitator provides a group is tracking the conversations. All conversations are comprised of threads.

There are 2 important aspects of threads:

1. **The topic**: The subject of discussion
2. **The journey**: The process of talking about a topic in a sequential way. This often looks like the PowerfulWork Conversation Model.

An example of a thread would be a discussion by a group about who might be selected to run a particular project. The "who might be selected" is the topic. The conversation's "journey" might entail: outlining the conversation needed, describing the job requirements, developing criteria for selection, brainstorming names, reactions to the brainstorm, discussing the pros and cons of candidate, a final vote and a plan for how the decision will be carried out. As you can see the journey followed the PW Conversation Model. The conversation had a "thread" which included a topic and a journey.

Meetings generally have an overarching thread or the "big" conversation that the meeting is designed to complete. This might be the achievement of a strategic plan or a final decision on a designated topic or any other super ordinate goal the client has identified. It is typically the goal of the meeting. Within that conversation there may be multiple sub-conversations or threads that need to be completed in order to achieve the larger goal. Conversations then may look like a piece of yarn. A piece of yarn, which in and of itself is a thread, is comprised of several smaller threads. The facilitator's job is to know the desired out come and to help the group move through the necessary conversations to achieve that outcome.

The facilitator's ability to track the conversation gives the group a sense of security. The group, through the facilitator, knows where it is at all times. In essence, the facilitator is providing a structure or map for the group to follow. A powerful facilitator knows what conversations are happening at any given moment and where the group is in the conversation and can help them stay on track.

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PowerfulWork Threaded Conversation Model
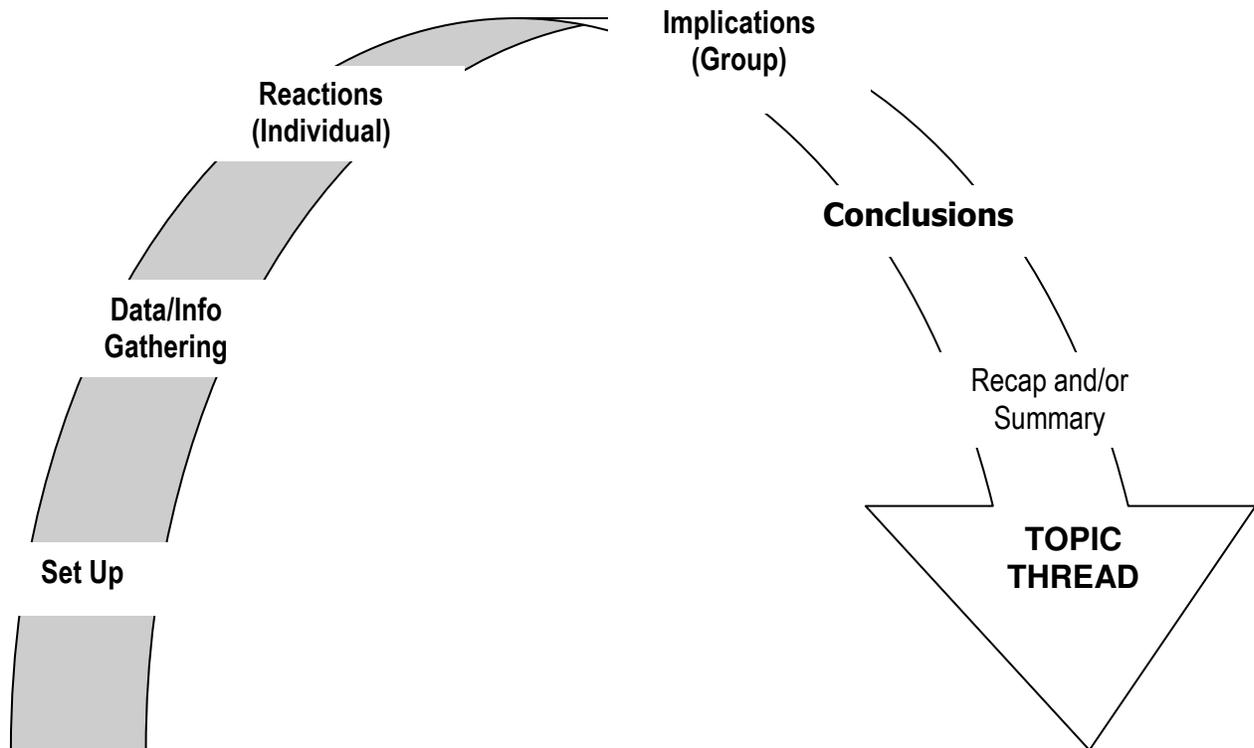
Every conversation follows a natural pattern of human critical thinking.

This pattern includes:

- Set up
- Data Gathering
- Individual Reactions
- Group Implications
- Conclusions
- Summaries

Each topic or subject becomes a "thread," which must be managed by the facilitator.

Understanding how to facilitate these threads will enable you to help groups accomplish "complete" conversations.

PowerfulWork Threaded Conversation Model

Each conversation thread within a meeting will eventually follow the natural pattern of human critical thinking. Designing sessions to align with and reinforce this natural pattern leads to an accelerated work process and less unnecessary conflict.

Set-up:

- The purpose of the thread/conversation is identified and confirmed with the group.
- Time-line, process steps and roles are identified.
- E.g. "The topic up for discussion is 'the selection of a new recorder'"

Data/Information Gathering:

- All facts and information relevant to the thread are shared with the entire group.
- Presentations from outside experts and internal reports may be offered.
- Individuals may present additional data of personal import – as long as it is thread related.
- Opportunities to ask questions and discuss the quality and accuracy of the data.
- E.g. "What do we know about the candidates"?

Reactions:

- Surface individual responses to the data and the facts of the situation.
- Open to feelings, thoughts and opinions.
- Encourage individuals to speak for themselves.
- E.g. "What do you each think and feel about the information we just heard"?

Implications:

- Group level discussion of the significance and meaning of the data and reactions for the group/organization.
- E.g. "What significance or meaning does all this have for our organization"?

Conclusions:

- The group takes decisions.
- Next actions are established.
- E.g. "Can we agree on the best candidate for the job"? Who will notify all the candidates of our decision by tomorrow"?

Recap:

- Thread and outcome are summarized.
- Incomplete and connected relevant issues are identified and scheduled for future conversations, if necessary.
- E.g. "After exploring all the relevant information and implications for our organization we have chosen Jane Doe as our recorder and we have identified clear next steps. Are there any other conversations about this topic that we need to have before we leave today"?

This model applies equally to the *Organizational*, *Meeting* and *Individual Thread level.*