

Holding a crucial conversation

Not all conversations are crucial, and not all crucial conversations are difficult. However, when you find yourself in a situation when you need to have a crucial conversation and finding that difficult a useful model to use might be the STATE Model, based on Vital Smarts. This is the preferred model at the University of Leeds as it aligns well to our values of Integrity and Collaboration in particular.

There are two clear signs a conversation might be difficult. If one or other of the people involved has shifted to a position of 'silence'. This is a state of withdrawal or passivity that indicates a lack of ownership, through feeling threatened or disempowered, where either your or their needs are perceived as of less value than the other person's needs. Or a state of 'violence'. This might include shouting or other forms of aggression that indicates a lack of respect and empathy, through perceiving either your or their needs to be of greater value than the other persons.

The reasons for this sits within our fight / flight reptilian brain. This is useful to remember as it stops us from taking the other persons reactions personally. This is a default approach, not aimed at you specifically.

In terms of hybrid working this could relate to feelings of threat associated with changed patterns of work, changed place of work, health and wellbeing, work / life balance. Or it could be perceived issues around feeling isolated (at home) or feeling micro-managed or not trusted (if having to come on campus). There are myriad reasons why someone might want to, or not want to, work in a hybrid manner, either predominantly at home, on campus, or any combination thereof.

Turning understanding into dialogue



The five steps for helping us share tough messages and holding crucial conversations can be easily remembered with the acronym STATE:

Share your facts Tell your story Ask for the other persons take on things	"What" Skills
Talk tentatively Encourage testing	"How" Skills

Be humble. Create the safety where others can share new ideas or challenge your story.

STATE works through three stages (share your facts, tell your story, and ask for the other persons take on things) but doing this within a humble state where we talk tentatively and encourage testing (ie, where we come at the conversation through curiosity rather than telling).

- The facts – this is what you saw or heard, or the requirements of the role.
- Your Story – this is what you want (often say you need), or what you perceive the need of the role to be.

Your story will lead you to hold certain emotions, and in turn take certain actions (again remember these are likely to be based on your reptilian brain – default thinking). We need to recognise that these emotions and actions are based on our story, not on the facts. But once we

are clear on the facts as opposed to the story, we can start to unpack what the requirements of the role truly are when balanced with the needs of the organisation, local needs and the needs of the person involved.

Crucial conversation might contain these phrases:

Start with the facts. Eg, role expectation, team expectation – as long as these are written or observable.

- “The role requires ...”
- “The team requires ...”
- “It is expected ...”

Tell your story about these facts. Eg, what this leads you to think,

- “This leads me to conclude that ...” (the role needs to be done on campus, or can be done at home, or requires a mixed approach)
- “I’m beginning to believe that ...”
- “I’m starting to think that ...”

Ask for the other person’s perspective. Eg, what their story is,

- “How do you see it?”
- “What’s your view on this?”
- “Can you help me better understand ...” (why they don’t want to work in a hybrid manner, come onto campus, work from home, etc.)

It is also worth remembering that “It’s not my fault!”, “It’s all your fault!” and “There’s nothing else I can do!” are all just stories. A crucial conversation is about opening up dialogue so we can see new options (on both sides) through seeking shared understanding and shared purpose.