

**WHEN CONVERSATIONS GET HARD & MEETINGS GET STUCK:
A PRACTICAL WAY FORWARD**

Monday, March 30, 2026
10 - 11 AM PT / 1 - 2 PM ET



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TODAY'S PRESENTERS



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LOGISTICS

- We're scheduled to be together for the next 60 minutes
- We do not have a formal break scheduled during this presentation
- Take care of your needs and those in your care
- We encourage you to silence the things that ding, ring and buzz
- Use technology to help keep you in the "room" today
- We will make all slides available to you following the presentation
- 1 CAE credit is available for participating in the live program only



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WAYS TO PARTICIPATE ON THE ZOOM PLATFORM

- **Q&A:** Use the Q&A function to submit questions for the facilitators.
- **Chat:** Feel free to connect with other attendees via chat.
- **Reactions:** Use reactions to communicate non-verbally.
- **Captions:** Captions are available — turn them on anytime.
- **Recording notice:** This session is being recorded. Please avoid sharing confidential information.
- **AI notetaker:** Please refrain from using an AI notetaker during this session.

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TODAY'S AIMS

RATIONAL AIMS

- Identify observable patterns that occur when conversations get hard or meetings stall
- Understand common reasons why groups get stuck and decisions feel fragile
- Learn practical, structured approaches to guide dialogue
- Demonstrate facilitation strategies that provide clarity and shared understanding

EXPERIENTIAL AIMS

- Build confidence in applying structured approaches in your own meetings or group contexts
- Feel more capable of fostering productive, respectful, and inclusive conversations
- Build awareness of the dynamics you/your group engage most in during difficult conversations

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AGENDA

1 WHAT WE OBSERVE WHEN THINGS GET HARD

2 WHY CONVERSATIONS GET STUCK

3 ANCHORING QUESTIONS

4 GROUNDING: A RESET WHEN EMOTIONS SPIKE

5 THE ORID METHOD

6 REFLECTION & CLOSE

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SCENARIO

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YOUR TURN

Imagine a board discussing dues increases. One member jumps to solutions. Another member challenges assumptions. Someone else says we're talking in circles.

PLEASE CONSIDER:

- What behaviors do you observe when a conversation like this gets hard?
- Share 1–2 observable signs in chat.



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WHAT WE OBSERVE WHEN THINGS GET HARD

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OBSERVABLE BREAKDOWN PATTERNS

 PEOPLE ARGUE	 JUMPING TO SOLUTIONS	 FEW VOICES DOMINATE
 PEOPLE SHUT DOWN	 CIRCULAR CONVERSATIONS	 ASSUMPTIONS AREN'T NAMED

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EXAMPLES



GOVERNMENT

A city team discussing a new policy keeps looping on community complaints vs. budget limits; people start debating solutions before agreeing on the actual problem they're trying to solve.



ASSOCIATION

A member committee planning an event jumps straight into logistics (dates, speakers) while others are still trying to clarify the purpose—leading to side conversations and repeated backtracking.

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DIAGNOSTIC CHECKLIST



Before moving ahead, slow down to determine:

- ✓ Are all the right people in the room?
- ✓ Are we talking about the same thing?
- ✓ Are we solving the right problem?
- ✓ Do we have the same set of facts?
- ✓ What assumptions are we treating as facts?
- ✓ Has everyone had a chance to speak?
- ✓ Is anyone disengaged or checked out?
- ✓ Are emotions rising (in myself or others)?
- ✓ Is there pressure to decide fast?
- ✓ Are we going in circles?

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WHY OBSERVATION MATTERS

Observation *is* intervention. Noticing and naming what's happening in real time helps groups regain shared understanding without adding pressure or control.

- Conversations need structure, not force
- Naming can be disarming
- Noticing without judging builds trust
- Naming patterns helps groups see themselves more clearly
- Reflection can slow things down in a productive way
- Clarity often starts with stating what is already present

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” — James Baldwin

WHY CONVERSATIONS GET STUCK

BLENDING 4 PARTS OF A CONVERSATION AT ONCE

WHAT WE KNOW

HOW WE'RE FEELING

WHAT IT MEANS

WHAT WE SHOULD DO

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EXAMPLES



GOVERNMENT

A leadership team reviewing program data begins proposing solutions while others are still interpreting the data. Concerns are raised but taken as resistance, making the conversation personal and harder to reach decisions people trust.



ASSOCIATION

The board agreed to launch a new member program but as planning began, some members had concerns about time and priorities and stayed silent. Others misread the disengagement as lingering tension and tried to fix problems that didn't exist. Misunderstandings grew, resentment built, and progress stalled.

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YOUR TURN

Consider these 4 parts of a typical conversation:

1. Knowing >
2. Feeling >
3. Meaning >
4. Deciding

SHARE IN CHAT

- Which part often feels like it's given the **MOST** attention in groups you're in?
- Which part often feels like it's given the **LEAST** attention in groups you're in?



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ANCHORING QUESTIONS

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ANCHORING QUESTIONS

To untangle a stuck or tense conversation, pause and ask:



WHAT WE KNOW
 What do we know?
 What are the facts?



HOW WE'RE FEELING
 What reactions, feelings, or needs are present?



WHAT IT MEANS
 What does it mean?
 What options are available to us?



WHAT WE SHOULD DO
 What's our next step?
 Who will do what by when?

GROUNDING: A RESET WHEN EMOTIONS SPIKE

4-STEP RESET WHEN EMOTIONS SPIKE

1. OBSERVE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Identify: 4 things you can see or hear.

Purpose: Brings your attention back to the present moment.

Example: "I see my laptop, my blue notebook, and my favorite pen; I hear a bird through the window."

2. ASSESS YOUR STATE

Identify: 3 things about your current focus, energy, or tension.

Purpose: Helps you tap into your emotional state without judgment.

Example: "I'm feeling rushed, my mind is racing, and I need to slow down."

3. CLARIFY PRIORITIES

Identify: 2 priorities that matter most right now.

Purpose: Re-centers you on what's actionable instead of the emotional spike.

Example: "I need to respond calmly to this email" or "I want to stay focused in this discussion."

4. TAKE ONE ACTION

Choose: 1 small step to reset and engage effectively.

Purpose: Anchors you in readiness to act rather than react.

Example: "I'll take a slow breath, reread the agenda, or jot a quick note before responding."

RESOURCES

There are lots of resources available to support emotional spikes in conversations; following are just a few we regularly recommend:

FEELINGS WHEEL

A visual tool that helps you identify and name what you're feeling with greater precision.

NEEDS WHEEL

A companion tool that connects your feelings to the underlying human needs driving them.

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

A framework for expressing yourself honestly and hearing others without blame or judgment.

COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

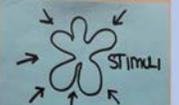
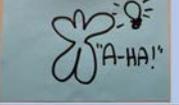
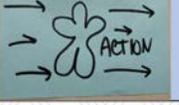
Shared expectations a group establishes to guide how they'll engage with one another.

THE ORID METHOD

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FOCUSED CONVERSATION

Objective	SENSES <i>(see, hear, taste, touch, smell)</i>		What?
Reflective	HEART <i>(emotions, memories, associations)</i>		Gut?
Interpretive	HEAD <i>(meaning, value, significance)</i>		So what?
Decisional	ACTION <i>(resolutions, decisions, do something)</i>		Now what?

The approach used today draws from the Focused Conversation (ORID) Method, part of the Technology of Participation (ToP) facilitation methodology developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA).

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■ ■ ■ WANT TO GO DEEPER?

- What conversation in your work is most in need of untangling right now?
- Is this a skill you'd like to develop further?
- We offer additional training on this and related topics; scan the QR code to let us know you're interested.



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REFLECTION & CLOSE

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CHAT REFLECTION:

NAME 1 UPCOMING CONVERSATION WHERE YOU'LL USE SOMETHING FROM TODAY.

Just for yourself, jot down the following:

- What's the context?
- When is it happening?
- Which approach from today will you try first?



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LET'S STAY CONNECTED!

CONTACT US VIA EMAIL:
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OR FIND US ON LINKEDIN 



The slide features a large, stylized graphic on the right side composed of overlapping circles in teal, orange, and white. Inside these circles are photos of business professionals in a meeting. The text is on the left side of the slide.

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