

***Open-to-learning Conversations: Background Paper***  
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*Acknowledgment*

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By reading this background paper, you will learn more about the model of effective communication that is the focus of this module. It will enable you to:

1. explain what is meant by an open-to-learning (OLC) conversation
2. understand why such conversations are important
3. reflect on the match between your interpersonal style and the values and strategies involved in an OLC.

The paper includes detailed examples and illustrations from both primary and secondary New Zealand leadership contexts.

***Introduction to Open-to-learning Conversations***

The model of communication that informs this module is that of “Open-to-learning” conversations. At the heart of the model is the value of openness to learning – learning about the quality of the thinking and information that we use when making judgments about what is happening, why and what to do about it. An open-to-learning conversation, therefore, is one in which this value is evident in how people think and talk. Do they assume the validity of their views and try to impose them, however nicely, on others, or are they searching for ways to check and improve the quality of their thinking and decision-making? The former type of conversation is a closed-to-learning conversation, while the second is an open-to-learning Conversation. What distinguishes the two is not what the conversation is about, but whether there is openness to learning about the validity of one’s point of view. We have chosen to use this model of communication in this module because, in its various forms, it has been the predominant model of interpersonal effectiveness used in New Zealand research and development on the relationship aspects of school leadership<sup>1</sup>. It also has a sound theoretical and research base.

***Why Open-to-learning Conversations are Important***

One of the most powerful ways that school leaders make a positive difference to the achievement and well-being of their students is through their leadership of the improvement of teaching and learning.<sup>2</sup> At the heart of this type of leadership is trusting relationships.<sup>3</sup> How can leaders develop trusting relationships while facing up to difficulties in their school and helping staff to do the same? One of the critical determinants of trust is leaders’ ability to deal with difficult issues in respectful ways. Leaders who put off dealing with such issues, or deal with them incompetently, will find it difficult to develop a culture of trust and respect in their school. One critical requirement for the development of trust is the ability to engage in open-to-learning conversations. Some of the skills involved include the ability to: describe problematic situations, listen to others’ views, detect and challenge their own and others’

assumptions, invite consideration of alternative views, give and receive negative feedback, and deal constructively with conflict.

These skills are easy to talk about but often very difficult to put into practice. When New Zealand school leaders were asked <sup>4</sup> to identify the issues that created challenging problems for them, they nearly always indicated people problems. The author categorized the issues as firstly *managing people issues*; secondly, *managing resources for people issues*; and thirdly, *managing personal issues*. Furthermore the leaders indicated that many of the problems were longstanding, difficult to resolve, and had negative consequences that spilled over into other areas of school life.

### ***Why Conversations about Improvement can be Difficult***

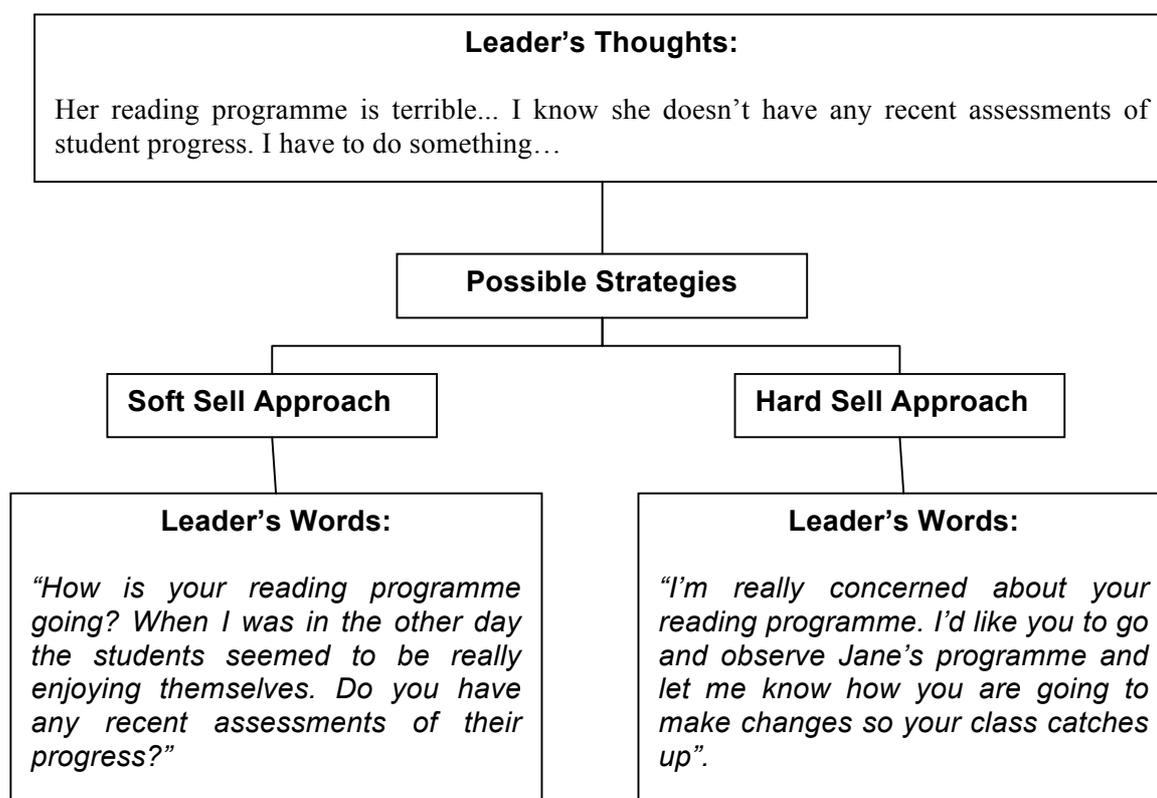
Conversations about the quality of performance are difficult because they have the potential to threaten relationships by triggering discomfort and defensiveness. In the face of such threats, leaders often experience a dilemma between pursuit of their change agenda and protection of their relationships.<sup>5</sup> Leaders may want to address what they see as a performance issue yet believe they can not do so without running an unacceptable risk of increased stress and conflict. In other words, they feel that they can not address the performance issues and maintain relationships with eh staff member. They feel caught between the two.<sup>6</sup>

Research on how New Zealand school leaders deal with such dilemmas shows some typical responses:

Whilst the evidence shows that practitioners are aware of the need for a direct approach to individuals implicated in a dilemma, only a very small proportion suggested this option. The majority of responses were consistent with what is known in relation to facing up to a complex problem – that is, that it is much thought about, advice may be sought, support may be provided but, for a variety of reasons, action is delayed or avoided altogether.<sup>7</sup>

Before we provide some research-based guidance about how to effectively address these dilemmas, we need to explain how they arise. Why is it so common for people to experience a dilemma between addressing the task issues and maintaining relationships? Is the dilemma inevitable or is it a consequence of the values and skills that are often brought to such conversations? Figure 1 provides some clues.

**Figure 1: Two ineffective strategies for dealing with performance problems:**



In both the soft sell and the hard sell strategy the leader has drawn the same conclusions – that the reading programme is terrible. In the soft sell version, the leader does not reveal her evaluation, expects the teacher to reveal her own, and offers “ceremonial congratulations” about student enjoyment. This strategy addresses the person-task dilemma by treating the threat of damaged relationships as more important than the possible threat to the education of students.

In the hard sell version, the leader assumes that her evaluation of the programme is correct, and then instructs the teacher to make some changes. The relationship has been risked in the interest of addressing what the leader sees as the educational problem. In reality, however, while this hard sell strategy is likely to mean that the teacher gets the message, defensiveness and resentment may mean that the task issue is not progressed either.

The dilemma between concern for the person and for the task is irresolvable in both these examples, because the leader leaves no room for a shared or co-constructed evaluation of the reading programme. In the soft sell strategy, the leader discourages debate by failure to disclose her evaluation of the reading programme. In the hard sell strategy, the leader discourages debate by assuming the truth of her views. Neither strategy will produce the type of conversation that is necessary to reach a principled agreement about the quality of the programme and about whether change is needed.

When leaders seek to impose their views rather than invite debate and co-construction, they face the dilemma of how to do so without creating negative emotional reactions. The key to resolving this dilemma is not, as we have seen, to hide one’s own views in the hope that the other party will express what the leader is reluctant to disclose. This strategy is just as closed

to learning as the more hard sell strategy, because the goal is still to win acceptance of one's views without being open-to-learning about their validity. **The key is to change the thinking that leads the principal to assume rather than check the validity of her views.** This means using an open-to-learning rather than a closed-to-learning approach.

***Learning Conversations: The Model***

It is time now to turn to the theory and practice that will help change the thinking that produces or exacerbates the type of dilemmas involved in discussion of many performance problems. The theory that we are drawing on is based on that of Chris Argyris, a social and organisational psychologist who has done extensive empirical and intervention research on the interpersonal effectiveness of leaders in real on the job situations.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1**

**The Guiding Values and Key Strategies of an “Open-to-learning” Conversation**

	Guiding Values	Key Strategies
1.	Increase the Validity of Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information includes thoughts, opinions, reasoning, inferences and feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disclose the reasoning that leads to your views</li> <li>Provide examples and illustrations of your views</li> <li>Treat own views as hypotheses rather than taken for granted truths</li> <li>Seek feedback and disconfirmation</li> </ul>
2.	Increase Respect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Treat others as well intentioned, as interested in learning and as capable of contributing to your own.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listen deeply, especially when views differ from your own</li> <li>Expect high standards and constantly check how you are helping others to reach them.</li> <li>Share control of the conversation including the management of emotions.</li> </ul>
3.	Increase Commitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foster ownership of decisions through transparent and shared processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share the problems and the problem-solving process</li> <li>Require accountability for collective decisions</li> <li>Foster public monitoring and review of decisions</li> </ul>

The three values in Table 1 are widely endorsed but very hard to put into practice in difficult conversations such as those involving giving and receiving tough messages.<sup>9</sup> We call conversations in which these values are actually put into practice “open-to-learning” conversations because each party’s views are expressed openly rather than defensively and such openness increases the chance of detecting and correcting faulty assumptions about each other, about the problem or task, and about what to do.

The validity value is especially critical for school leaders, because their decisions have important implications for others’ lives. Leaders have an ethical obligation, therefore, to make decisions based on high quality information and high quality thinking. Without respect they will not be able to build the relational trust needed to get good feedback about their thinking and to build the collective responsibility and commitment required to improve teaching and learning. With valid information and respectful processes in which people feel heard and have

genuine opportunities to exercise influence, staff are more likely to feel committed to decisions.

We are now able to return to the original task-person dilemma and see how the values of an “open-to-learning conversation” can reduce the apparent conflict between the desire to avoid negative emotion and to address the performance issue. The dilemma in Figure 1 was extreme because the principal thought about the teacher’s performance in ways that were highly judgmental (“her reading programme is terrible”). The principal’s own thinking put her in the bind of either being diplomatic (soft sell) or brutally frank (hard sell), neither of which are satisfactory. Table 2 presents a third more effective alternative in which the leader expresses her point of view in a way that invites the teacher to consider whether her concern is justified.

**Table 2**

**An effective strategy for communicating performance concerns**

Leader’s Thoughts	Leader’s Words	Analysis
When I came into the class I was shocked to see the book levels being used. I suspect the students are well behind where they should be. I must talk to Joanne about how to check this...	<i>“When I came into your class the other day I got the impression from the book levels being used that many of your students were well behind where I would expect them to be. So I thought I should tell you that and work out with you just what the children’s current reading levels are...”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The leader’s concerns are disclosed</li> <li>• The grounds for the concern are disclosed</li> <li>• The leader indicates the concern needs to be checked rather than assumed to be valid</li> <li>• The leader invites the teacher to influence how the checking is to be done.</li> </ul>

This third approach substantially reduces the dilemma because the concern is disclosed in a way that neither prejudices the situation nor protects the staff member from the possibility that change might be needed. Provided that the principal continues to disclose, check, listen and co-construct the evaluation of the programme and of any required revisions, the outcome should be a teacher who feels challenged yet respected. The leader’s thinking does not create an impossible choice between either tackling the educational issue or damaging the relationship.

***The Key Components of an Open-to-learning Conversation.***

There are no rules or step-by-step guides to open-to-learning conversations. This is because the shifts from less open to more open-to-learning conversations are as much about changes in values and ways of thinking as they are about changes in communication skills. Hard and fast rules also do not work because good conversations are responsive to context and to the other person. Despite this, it is possible to identify some of the recurring components of open-to-learning conversations. Table 3 identifies some of these components and shows how a leader might use them in conversations about the quality of teaching.

**Table 3**

**Key Components of an Open-to-learning Conversation about an Issue of Concern**

	<b>KEY COMPONENTS</b>	<b>WHAT YOU MIGHT SAY</b>
1.	Describe your concern as your point of view.	<i>I need to tell you about a possible concern I have about.. I think we may have different views... I realise this may not be how you see it... I'm really disappointed in the art work because..</i>
2.	Describe what your concern is based on.	<i>The reason why I was concerned is.. Yesterday when I was going past your corridor I heard.. If I'm right it's the third meeting you haven't been able to come to.. I don't want parents demanding that their child be shifted. I want to work with you to address their concerns...</i>
3.	Invite the other's point of view.	<i>Pause and look at the other person or say.. What do you think? You haven't said much so far... Do you see it differently? I'm sure there is more to it than what I've said... This time I really want to understand more about your situation... How do you feel about the results?</i>
4.	Paraphrase their point of view and check.	<i>I got three important messages from that...Am I on the right track? You're shaking your head. What have I missed?</i>
5.	Detect and check important assumptions	<i>What leads you to believe that the children aren't yet ready to read? What would be an example of that? What other possibilities are there? How would we know if we are wrong? What evidence do you have about the effectiveness of this math package?</i>
6.	Establish common ground.	<i>We both agree this is unacceptable as it is... It sounds like we see the problem the same way... We both want...but we have different ideas on how to get there... We see the cause of the disruption differently but both want to do something about it..</i>
7.	Make a plan to get what you both want.	<i>How would you like to learn more about the new curriculum requirements..? OK – you talk with your teachers and let me know next week how they explain the results.</i>

**Table 4**

**Explanation of the Key Components of an Open-to-learning Conversation about an Issue of Concern**

<b>KEY COMPONENTS</b>	<b>EXPLANATION</b>
1. Describe your concern as your point of view.	State your concern without presuming that your point of view is “the reality” or is shared by the other person. You can not be open to learning, or expect others to be, if you do not disclose your thinking. Avoid expressing your point of view via a series of manipulative questions that are designed to get the other person to say what you don’t want to e.g., “ <i>How did you think it went?</i> ” when you think it went badly but haven’t said so.
2. Describe what your concern is based on.	Disclose your views along with the evidence, examples or reasons on which they are based. This enables others to understand “where you are coming from” and to help you learn about the quality of your thinking. If you don’t give the grounds on which you hold your views, then it is hard for you or others to check their validity. You then appear to be treating them as obvious and taken for granted – and this is a closed rather than open-to-learning stance.
3. Invite others’ point of view.	If you want to gain staff commitment to a problem-solving or change process you need to learn their view of the current situation and of any proposed change. Respect for others implies openness to their views. Validity is increased if differences are treated as opportunities to learn about the relative merits of each view, rather than as opportunities for persuasion.
4. Paraphrase their point of view and check.	In conversations where issues are complex and uncertain, the ability to paraphrase, summarise and check for accuracy, keeps people emotionally connected and provides some structure to the conversation. The proof of whether or not you have listened deeply to others is whether they confirm that your paraphrase or summary is accurate.
5. Detect and check important assumptions	A key value of open-to-learning conversations is valid information. This value is seen in efforts to detect and correct important assumptions that are being made in the conversation. The goal is to improve the quality of the information and reasoning being used by making important assumptions explicit and checking their accuracy by doing such things as: saying what leads you to your point of view; seeking counter examples, and inviting others to critique your views, as well as express their own.
6. Establish common ground.	When people disagree or are threatened it is important to establish some common ground. The common ground might be based on an agreed process for resolving differences, a shared expressed dissatisfaction with the status quo, expressions of satisfaction with the conversation or relationship, or a shared purpose or goal. The common ground provides the motivation to keep the parties working together.
7. Make a plan to get what you both want.	It is not important who comes up with the plan as long as both parties have an opportunity to contribute and are committed to it.

## *Using Learning Conversations in New Zealand School Contexts*

In this section we discuss three real examples of aspects of learning conversations. All three examples are drawn from New Zealand intervention studies where primary and secondary school leaders have had intensive on the job training in the use of learning conversations.

**1. Clear and Open Disclosure.** We use the first example to illustrate the importance of clear and open disclosure of one's point of view. In the previous section, we discussed the importance of clear disclosure of concerns that one has about others' performance. However, open disclosure of one's point of view is important in many other situations as well. In this next example we look at how a leader discloses their expectations about how staff will complete a task. The leadership context is that of an assistant principal working with her teacher colleagues to examine the progress of their Year One students in reading.

<b>Box 1: From Tentative to Confident Disclosure of Leadership Expectations<sup>10</sup></b>	
An assistant principal in a Mangere primary school which is participating in a literacy initiative regularly convenes her Year 1 colleagues to review the reading achievement of students. The formative evaluators transcribed meeting excerpts as part of their quest to discover the qualities of professional learning communities associated with more student progress. In Part A, Viviane Robinson presents her analysis of part of a meeting that took place in the second year of the project. The analysis focuses on how the leader introduced the meeting task. The actual words of the leader are found on the right hand side in italics, and the analysis on the left hand side. In Part B, Robinson presents her analysis of the same leader's meeting introduction one year later, after she had had some feedback about her leadership style and its consequences for teacher and student learning. These discussions made her realise the impact that serious examination of data could have on lifting student achievement.	
<b>Part A: Literacy leader's meeting introduction prior to training</b>	
Language is tentative:	<i>"I just wanted to just . . ."</i>
This may not deserve much time:	<i>"very quickly go through the latest bit of data"</i>
Serious engagement with the data is voluntary:	<i>"if you don't want it just give it back to me"</i>
The data represent yet another piece of paper:	<i>"I know it's a paper war. . ."</i>
Work on your part is not required:	<i>"You don't have to file it or anything like that at this stage... it's just hand-written."</i>
<b>Part B: Literacy leader's meeting introduction after training</b>	
This is important	<i>"This is a valuable time . . ."</i>
It involves work for teachers but it is crucial work:	<i>"although it is a pain getting it ready for me but it is the only way we are going to make a difference."</i>
Provides direction about what to do:	<i>"I will give it out to you in a minute and you can have a look and see in your class who is below and who is above. . ."</i>
Makes personal connection with teacher – the data is about and has implications for you	<i>you can see in your class...</i>
You may need to do something differently	<i>"and you look especially at the just below ones and think, "What am I going to do to make sure that they are not just below next time?"</i>

The leader acts in Part A as if she has not accepted that she is the leader of the group and that providing clear direction is part of her role. Perhaps her tentativeness reflects her concern about whether or not her leadership will be accepted. An open-to-learning approach, in contrast, would require a clear statement of expectations followed by an opportunity for feedback from group members. In Part B, the leader discloses her expectations much more clearly. Subsequent interviews with the teachers showed that they appreciated the greater focus of the meetings and the help they were given in deciding what to do next to help the target children.

**2. Invite Others' Point of View.** The focus of the second example is explicit requests for others' point of view. Sometimes those points of view involve reactions to what the leader has said or done (feedback). Sometimes they involve opinions about the topic or issue under discussion. When there are large power differences between people, when they fear speaking out of turn, when they lack confidence in the worth of their views, or when there is a history of mistrust between people, leaders may need to be very explicit about gaining those points of view. The vignette in Box 2 was developed from a case involving a year long intervention with a secondary school principal who wished to increase staff commitment to appraisal and professional development through more deliberate and inclusive policy development processes.<sup>11</sup> She made very deliberate attempts to get feedback because she knew that staff had felt that the previous policy had been imposed.

### **Box 2: A Principal Seeks To Increase Staff Commitment by Getting Honest Feedback**

The context for the vignette is a meeting between a secondary principal and her heads of departments at which the draft of a new appraisal policy is being discussed. The principal began the discussion by reading out a summary of the feedback received from staff and then suggested a next step:

**Principal:** *The question is, where do we go from here? After asking the question, what I've tried to do is to present a possible answer.*

The principal has clearly identified her answer as a possibility, not as **the** answer. She then discloses her wish that the involvement of numerous staff in the development of a new policy will change staff's perception that the programme belongs to her rather than to the staff as a whole:

**Principal:** *I would like to believe that staff assumptions about PD [professional development] and appraisal structures being my ideas and initiatives alone have changed to some extent. That really is the assumption I'd like to check, so please help by letting us have some feedback and I'm going to welcome that in a very open and honest way. If people are still feeling that if they approach me with something difficult I'm being difficult about accepting or hearing what you're trying to say I need to know that.*

The principal seeks feedback here on two levels. She wants to know whether staff see the programme as "hers" but at the same time acknowledges that past patterns of interaction may make it difficult for them to give her honest feedback. In other words she has disclosed her views about both the task at hand and about her relationships with staff. After a second request for feedback, two heads of department offer the following:

**HOD1:** *From my point of view, it doesn't matter to me very much where the statement comes from initially, I mean, if you've written it that's fine, that doesn't concern me at all, what only concerns me is two things: first of all what's in it, and secondly what sort of influence we can*

*have upon it if necessary. I think those are the key questions for me. So the fact that you may or may not have written it that's not an issue for me personally.*

**Principal:** *Can I then check, picking up from what John has said, how do people feel about the influence that they may have on the processes?*

**HOD2:** *I think the process is such that I can contribute to it by just coming and discussing it with you, and whatever views I was concerned about I could explain to you knowing that even they would be answered or they would be taken further.*

**Principal:** *Right*

**HOD2:** *I feel that I have been consulted*

The exchange in Box 2 is important because it illustrates how valid information is sought thorough a combination of open disclosure and explicit requests for feedback. In this example, the explicitness was needed to disrupt staff's prior assumptions about the principal's openness to their influence.

**3. Detect and Check Important Assumptions.** If leaders are to act consistently with the values of valid information and respect they need to be able to involve others in detecting and checking important assumptions. The important ones are those that will get us into trouble if they are wrong. For example, assumptions about others' motives, about the causes of a problem and how to solve it and about the best way to allocate scarce resources are all likely to be important. We need others' help in doing this checking, as it is very difficult to detect and correct one's own taken-for granted assumptions. The difficulty lies in our limited information processing capacities, which lead us to perceive the world in terms of what we already know, rather than to engage in the much more cognitively demanding process of checking our reasoning. We frequently act, therefore, as cognitive misers - biased towards noticing that which confirms rather than that which disconfirms our prior conceptions.

This built-in confirmation bias explains why behaving openly with family or with long-standing staff can be so difficult – our preconceptions about who they are and how they behave shape how we select and interpret information about them, and those interpretations further strengthen our preconceptions. We notice the things that confirm our preconceptions and literally do not see or hear those which disconfirm them, unless we have been trained or cued to do so. The vignette in Box 3 illustrates the power of such preconceptions in attempting to resolve a problem with a staff member who is perceived as taking insufficient responsibility for classroom management.

### **Box 3: The Power of Assumptions**

The senior management team of an Auckland secondary school took part in a series of workshops designed to help them better integrate the values of valid information, interpersonal respect and accountability into teacher appraisal discussions. At one of the workshops the deputy principal (Roger) practised how to communicate more effectively with a teacher (role played by Jan) whom he believed did not take sufficient responsibility for behaviour problems in her class. He was frustrated by her expectation that she could send naughty students to him to deal with. In the role-play, Jan has left her class to see Roger about one such student.

**Jan:** *Tom here, was um - just chucking bits of paper up at me as I turned around to write on the blackboard. Now this has happened time and time again as you are well aware of. Um, I sent him out of class last time he had science and this time he's doing it all over again. I just don't know what to do next. And I want him - I want you to deal with him. Um, and maybe to have a word with him and talk to him about the dangers, you know the dangerous aspect of his behavior in the classroom.*

**Roger:** *He's outside now is he?*

**Jan:** *Yes he's just waiting outside your door.*

**Roger:** *Mmm. You don't want to bring him in now and um, go over what's happened with him and me?*

**Jan:** *Well I don't have time, (Roger: Mmm) I've got a class, and they're waiting for me now, so I'd better go back before (Roger: Mmm, you better get back to your class) before something happens.*

**Roger:** *Mmm. Well I'll certainly get him in and um, hear from him. He's a bit of an evasive character. We might have to get together later and together go over what's happened with him, just to get him to own it.*

**Jan:** *Well I've written lots of things in the um - in the Form Book about him. I don't know - you know I'm really at the end of my tether as to what strategies to use for him. And it's just not him in the class, it's the rest of the class as well. The boys in particular.*

**Roger:** *Mmm. So um, Frank's been involved - the Dean - Frank's been involved with - working with this student as well. Yeah I'll - maybe I need to talk with Frank. Um, yeah. OK, I'll certainly yeah, talk with him and um, talk with Frank and come back to you so that we can decide what should be done.*

**Jan:** *OK.*

**Roger:** *Is that alright?*

The extract includes information that both confirms and disconfirms Roger's view of Jan. She confirms his expectations by once again hauling a disruptive student out of her lesson and asking him to deal with the problem. On the other hand, she acts contrary to his expectation by admitting that she was "at the end of her tether" and that she was having difficulties with the "rest of the class as well" - admissions that suggest the teacher saw herself as part of the problem, even though she had little idea of how to contribute to the solution.

In reviewing the video tape, Roger considered whether his preconceptions about the teacher as not taking responsibility led him to ignore, or even not hear, Jan's admissions.

**Roger** *Mmm, yeah. It's just this phenomenon of having almost a cued, self-cued, low-key response. In other words, she's - I tend to categorize her along the lines of someone who will refer students too readily. I have a predisposition - I'm predisposed - might be thinking that this is ah - yeah I've categorized her. I've labeled her. I might be thinking now this is something you should be dealing with yourself.*

Instead of noticing the disconfirming information, Roger has selectively attended in ways that strengthen his stereotype of Jan. This analysis shows how both Roger and Jan are contributing to the problem. After reviewing the video tape, Roger saw the power of his preconceptions about Jan, and how they were counterproductive to his goals of having her take more responsibility for her class.

By explaining what has happened in Box 3 with reference to confirmation bias we can see that there is nothing unusual about what Roger has done. There are many different ways of detecting and correcting assumptions. It is important that leaders develop skills in detecting and correcting important assumptions "on the run" through the use of open-to-learning conversations. This skill is best developed by first analysing recordings of conversations and picking out all the claims that you assumed to be true. It is useful to invite someone else to help you with this, as people who do not share our assumptions are better at spotting them than we are.

People need to access what they expect in important situations and then deliberately look for disconfirming data because confirmation is so much easier to spot. The easiest way to do this is with a trusted partner, because the partner has less of a stake in confirming your expectations than you do. Whenever possible people should write out what they will expect will happen in pending situations, and why it will happen. After the situation unfolds, the way it played out is then compared with the expectations. When people do this, some relevant expectations have been uncovered, they are available for monitoring in the future, and once they have been uncovered, people can now begin to reformulate them, practice the reformulation, and repeat the testing.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Further Learning***

There are a lot of good resources available where one can read more about open-to-learning conversations. Many of them have been written by New Zealand authors. Some of them are listed below.

Another powerful way to learn more is to tape or video record some actual or rehearsed conversations so you get an accurate record of what you actually said. Reflection on your leadership style without records of your actual words is very limited as people do not remember conversations accurately.

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<sup>1</sup> The model I am calling ***Open-to-learning conversations*** is a variation of the model of interpersonal effectiveness developed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon in the 1970s. The work of Chris Argyris was introduced to New Zealand by Viviane Robinson in 1976 and incorporated into research and development on interpersonal effectiveness through her work on learning conversations and collaborative practitioner research. (See Robinson, V. M. J. (1993). *Problem-based methodology: Research for the improvement of practice*. Oxford: Pergamon Press and Robinson, V. M. J., & Lai, M. K. (2006). *Practitioner research for educators: A guide to improving classrooms and schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press). Eileen Piggott-Irvine and Carol Cardno subsequently incorporated Argyris's work into their professional development workshops on productive reasoning, dilemma management and teacher appraisal (See Cardno, C. and Piggot-Irvine, E. (1997), *Effective Performance Appraisal: Integrating Accountability and Development in Staff Appraisal*. Auckland: Longman). Michael Absolum has incorporated Argyris's theory and practice into his work on formative assessment through his emphasis on learning-focused relationships with students. (See Chapter 2 in Absolum, M. (2006). *Clarity in the classroom*. Auckland: Hodder Education). The theory and values that inform all these research and development programmes have their origins in the work of Chris Argyris.

<sup>2</sup> Elmore, R. F. (2004). *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice, and performance*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Education Press; Robinson, V. M. J., Lloyd, C., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership type. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(5), 635-674

<sup>3</sup> Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. L. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation Publications.

<sup>4</sup> Cardno, C. (2007). Leadership learning – the praxis of dilemma management. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 35(2), 33-50.

<sup>5</sup> Argyris, C., & Schon, D. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>6</sup> Cardno, C. (2007). Op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Cardno, C. 2007. Op cit., p. 41

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the most useful for school leaders of Argyris's many writings are Argyris, C. (1993). Education for leading learning. *Organizational Dynamics*, 21(3), 5-17; Argyris, C. (1990). *Overcoming organizational defenses: Facilitating organizational learning*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon; and Argyris, C. (1991) Teaching smart people how to learn. *Harvard Business Review*, 69 (3), 99-109.

<sup>9</sup> For evidence about the capacity of many different types of leader to hold such conversations see Argyris, C. (1983). *Reasoning, Learning and Action*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass. Pp. 41 - 81.

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<sup>10</sup> This vignette is derived from Timperley, H., Smith, L., Parr, J., Portway, J., Mirams, S., Clark, S., et al. (2004). *Analysis and use of student achievement data (AUSAD): Final evaluation report prepared for the Ministry of Education*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Pp. 7

<sup>11</sup> The vignette is drawn from Chapter 7, Robinson, V. M. J. (1993). *Problem-based methodology: Research for the improvement of practice*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

<sup>12</sup> Weick, K. (1995). *Sense-making in organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.(Pp. 190-1).