CONVERSATION NOTE*

Change at the Speed of Trust: Advancing Educational Opportunity through Cross-Sector Collaboration in Louisville

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Overview

A conversation case is a story about how a person or group of people who dealt with challenges or opportunities they faced. It is based on desk research and interviews with key actors, but does not provide analysis or conclusions. It is written from the perspective of the protagonist(s), and designed to raise questions and generate discussion about the challenges the protagonist(s) faced.

A case-based conversation is a way to anchor a discussion about general topics in a concrete example. It can bring a case to life and enable discussion participants to place themselves in the shoes of the case protagonist(s), and it can allow participants to surface a variety of perspectives. This note is designed to help you run a conversation about this case, "Change at the Speed of Trust: Advancing Educational Opportunity through Cross-Sector Collaboration in Louisville."

Role of a facilitator

The role of a facilitator is to structure the conversation with a clear beginning and end, ensure an equitable conversation, and keep the group focused and on topic. Think of the conversation you're leading as being broken into three distinct segments: exploring the case, diagnosing the collaborative challenges, and formulating takeaway lessons.

Some facilitation tips and tricks to keep in mind…

BEFORE the discussion
Make sure everyone takes the time to read the case and (optional) fill out worksheets to prepare themselves for the case discussion. If you choose to use the attached worksheets, make sure you bring enough printouts for all participants. When setting up the room, think about situating discussion participants where everyone can see each other and you. Designate a notetaker, as well as a place where you can take notes for the whole group to see (ex: a flip chart or white board).

Give yourselves at least 60-75 minutes for discussion of the case and takeaways, and make sure you have a clock in the room and/or an assigned timekeeper. You can also explain that you might interrupt participants in the interest of keeping the conversation going.

DURING the discussion
Encourage debate and sharing of opinions, and state very clearly that there's no right or wrong "answer" to the case. Be careful not to allow one or two people to dominate the discussion, or dominate the discussion yourself.

If you find the conversation is getting too heated, or too bogged down on a particular question or issue, consider allowing participants to talk in pairs for a few minutes before returning to full group discussion. Don't worry about reaching consensus, just make the most of this opportunity to practice thinking and learning together!

Case Synopsis

At the turn of the 21st century, Louisville, Kentucky, found itself in the middle to the back of the pack among peer cities along a number of key measures of prosperity and quality of life. Since then, two consecutive mayors have advanced collaborative efforts across sectors to increase students' college and career readiness and address the city's significant achievement gap. This case tells the story of how that effort evolved under the leadership of Mayor Greg Fischer into an effort to effect system change in education from "cradle to career" through wraparound services and scholarship guarantees for graduating high school students.

Conversation Plan

Part 1: Exploring the Case (20-30 minutes)
The goal of this part of the conversation is to review the case from the point of view of the people involved. Suggested questions:

- Who are the primary stakeholders for the Cradle to Career/Louisville Promise Initiative?
- What problem is the cabinet trying to solve?
- What do cabinet members seem to agree on?
- What do they disagree on?

Part 2: Diagnosing Collaborative challenges (20-30 minutes)
This part of the discussion should allow participants to analyze the challenges the collaborators in Louisville faced and the choices they made. Suggested questions:

- What are the primary challenges this group faces?
- Is the group moving too quickly, too slowly, or at the right pace? Why?
- Is the collaboration focusing too much on quality, speed, or consensus, at the expense of the other two?
- What would you do to ensure the success of the cabinet's efforts going forward?

Part 3: Formulating Lessons (15-20 minutes)
This part of the conversation focuses on the lessons of the case that participants will continue to reflect on and apply to collaborative challenges in their work. Suggested questions:

- What is similar about the challenges you are facing in your collaborative work?
- What other challenges do you face in this work?
- What kind of trade-offs are you making?
- What kind of action or leadership will support progress?

Appendices:
- OPTIONAL Worksheet 1: Trade-Offs in Collaborative Enterprise
- OPTIONAL Worksheet 2: Assessing your Collaborative Challenges

Worksheet 1: Trade-Offs in Collaborative Enterprise

In every collaboration, the goal is to come to some kind of consensus about desired ends and means, and move as quickly as possible to a high-quality outcome. This kind of work is challenging, and as a result, there are often trade-offs between quality, consensus, and speed.

Please circle which **two** you think the collaborators in Louisville have focused on, at the expense of the third:

Quality
A robust collaborative
approach to solving the problem

Consensus
Stakeholder inclusion and
agreement on desired outcomes
and preferred means

Speed
Moving fast enough to deliver
results in the short term

Worksheet 2: Assessing Your Collaborative Challenges

Use this worksheet to apply the same critical thinking you applied to the case to your own collaborative enterprise.

1. Where do you think your collaboration stands in terms of the quality, consensus, and speed of its efforts? Which of the three has been most overlooked?

2. What do you think you and your collaborators agree on most?

3. What are the primary challenges you and your collaborators are facing?

4. How will you know if your collaboration has been successful?