The background of the slide is a gradient from orange at the top to purple at the bottom. Overlaid on this is a complex network of white lines connecting various sized white and light-colored circular nodes, creating a web-like structure.

# How to communicate effectively across lines of difference

Dr. Caitlin A. J. Powell

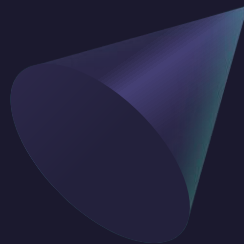
Thomas More University

A small, dark blue, abstract shape resembling a folded corner or a stylized 'D' is located in the bottom right corner of the slide.

# Topics



- Strategies for effective conversations across lines of difference
  - Group and one on one
  - Variety of applications
- Practicing as we go!
- Putting the horse before the cart...



# Strategy 1: Setting group norms

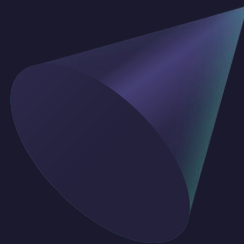
- Starting off with common understanding
- If you have the time at the start of the meeting, write your standards together
  - Culture and context matter!
  - Roles are important to say out loud!

*Think, then share with a neighbor: What are a few good ‘ground rules’ you’d want to see in a group conversation?*



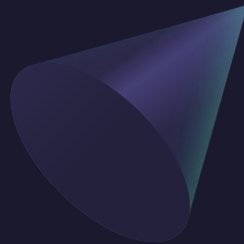
# Strategy 2: Pair and Share

- A great way to break the ice!
- The opportunity to practice helps to ensure no-one is put on the spot
- People who have trouble with ‘thinking out loud’ will be more likely to share their thoughts



# Suggested norms for effective group conversations:

- Listen respectfully and fully
- Assume good intentions
- Remember: for some people, it is personal
- Stand up, step back
- Avoid personal attacks
- You are an expert on your lived experience



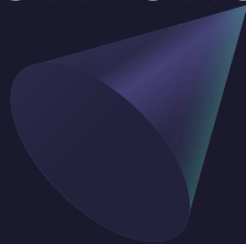
# Cont'd

*When sharing personal experiences...*

- Avoid overgeneralizations
- Use “I” statements

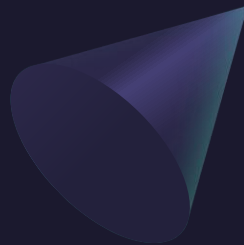
*When listening to others' personal experiences...*

- Believe them!
- Ask questions to learn and to clarify



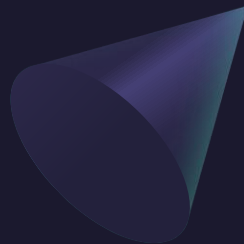
# Other considerations...

- “Ouch!”
- “Nope!”
- “Snap!”
- “We don’t do that here”



# Identifying the challenge

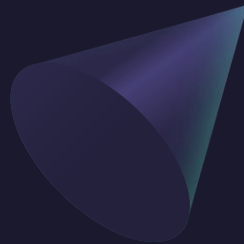
- How might we define lines of difference?
- Why is it sometimes challenging to communicate effectively across lines of difference? What is at the root of this?
- ...What are we afraid of?







*Think, then share with a neighbor:* Think of a good conversation you've had. What characteristics did it have that made it successful?



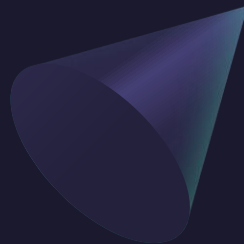
# Strategy 3: Meta-conversation

- Talking about how we talk
- Reflecting on why we may find something challenging gives us a ‘chill’ start and lets us gain some equilibrium
- Identifying our worries humanizes us and establishes good intentions
- Thinking about the characteristics of good communication helps guide the way



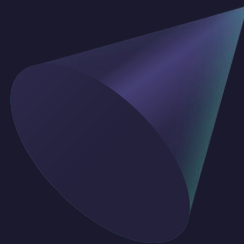
# Listening

- Spend more time listening than you think you should!
- Full attention
- Active signs of engagement and interest
- Rephrasing
- Clarifying questions





# Quality Questioning

- Genuine curiosity
- Goal of understanding and learning
  - Empathy
- You don't know the answer... and want to!
- Value of tone and intent



# Reflection

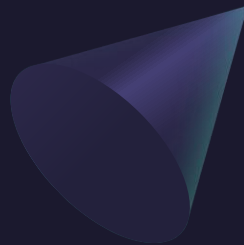
- What kinds of questions or statements stop conversations cold? What kind could open a door?



*Think, then share with a neighbor: What would be an example of a great “door opening” question or statement?*

# Open Questions

- Have a mutual exchange of information by asking questions that explore (and celebrate!) one another's
  - Experiences
  - Perspective
  - Priorities
  - Values
  - Wisdom
  - Strengths



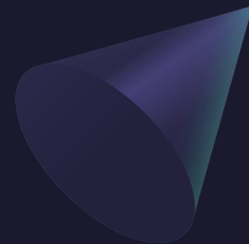
# Strategy 4: Active listening, questioning

- Discover common ground, celebrate unique strengths
- Create opportunity for greater understanding
- Reduce defensiveness
- Plant seeds for positive growth and change
  - ...People are more likely to be open to new ideas when they feel understood, heard, and supported!



# High Stakes/Sensitive Conversations

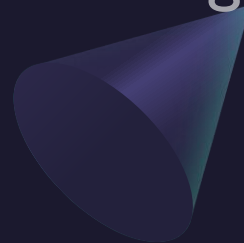
- Emotions and stakes are high
- Opinions strongly differ
- Avoidance, silence, resentment, misunderstanding





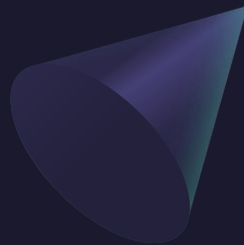
# Strategy 5: STATE

- **S**hare your objective, observable facts
- **T**ell your story
- **A**sk for others' paths
- **T**alk tentatively
- **E**ncourage testing
- **K**ey: willingness to be open to change, balancing confidence and humility



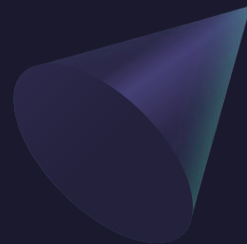
# Strategy 6: Engaging in Dialogue

- Know what you really want ahead of time
- Mutually share information openly, honestly, and candidly
- Use “and” thinking instead of “either/or”
- Establish safety
  - You care about the other person’s best interests and goals
  - You care about them



# Discussing Difference

- Avoidance
  - Paralysis, discomfort, uncertainty, inertia
  - “I don’t want to say the wrong thing, or offend”
- Mindset and assumptions
  - “This is what I’ve heard”
- Value of diverse perspectives and experiences



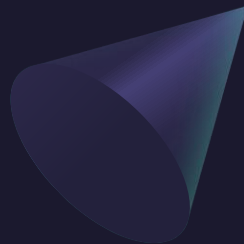
# Discussing Difference: do's and don'ts

- Do
  - Provide a space where a variety of voices and perspectives are encouraged
  - Exercise perspective-taking muscles
- Don't
  - Single out
  - Assume someone is representing their entire group
  - Jump to conclusions



# Strategy 7: Hit Pause

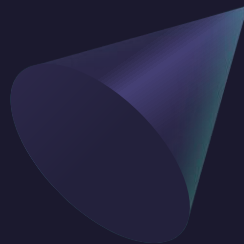
- After hearing a perspective or story from someone that goes against your expectations or assumptions, it's valuable to
  - Pause
  - Reflect
  - Adjust



# Reflection

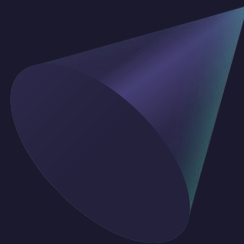


*Think, then share with a neighbor:* What is an example of a time when you've had to adjust your assumptions?



# Strategy 8: Ask a Question, Any Question

- Anonymous, written questions
- Address honestly
- Reduces embarrassment, fear
- Good temperature check about initial assumptions, concerns, beliefs, areas of challenge



# Strategy 9: Diversify your Portfolio

- When we encounter a variety of stories and voices from people who differ from us...
  - We see more complexity in others
  - We have more flexibility in our thinking
  - We have a greater capacity for empathy and understanding
  - We are more capable of providing a welcoming space where difference can be celebrated





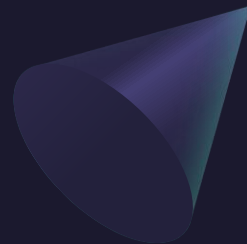
# Closing thoughts



How can you apply these strategies to future conversations?

What are the most vital takeaways?

Any questions?



# Recommended Reading



- Crucial Conversations
- On Becoming a Person
- Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change

