

# Small Talk, Big Deal: Being human in everyday performance conversations

## Webinar 1

Jo	Let's look at our tools first of all because we need to make sure we can communicate. The very first thing we want to do is use the chat room. You've probably got it open already but if you haven't, wiggle your mouse on the screen, you should see the speech bubble and you can click on that and it will open up in the screen for you. Depending upon your screen it might be on the panel on the left or the right or it might be just open it's up to you. Please please make sure you set to all attendees as well as panellists because that way everybody can see the conversation.
	So, the next thing is obviously the social media. What you can do is find convospace on twitter and you can also tweet any of your thoughts or tips that you have so #beinghuman because that's the focus of conversation today.
	Let's have a look who we've got coming up. You know me already, I've been chatting to you this morning. My name is Jo Cook and you can find me on Twitter and LinkedIn and what I do is I focus on webinars and virtual classrooms and I've got a community site you can go and join. But the people we are most interested in today are Sara and Helen. Sara and Helen have put their webcams on so they're waving hello there, they are conversational experts today. They've got experience in corporate roles and working within this space and in consultancy as well.
	I think it's about time we moved onto our agenda so you know what's going on today. Where we are focussing on today is why is it that our performance managers just forget they're human beings and they're supposed to be having a human conversation. Also, we are looking at some research that has been done, really focussing the quality of those conversations and lastly it's all about the practical ideas and we really want you to get involved the whole way through in that chat window with your ideas, thoughts and questions.
	So, lets move over to Sara to get into the content.
Sara	Thank you Jo! So, in terms of today, here at The Conversation Space we know that leaders are needing to build trust now more than ever and really improve those critical conversations and in essence that's what we do at the TCS and I wanted to start with a little bit of a story really about somebody who had a massive impact on me in terms of my performance conversations and some of you who are in the call from KPMG might remember him and that

	<p>was John Bailey. John was a man who really got to know me as a person. He was interested in me as Sara Hope rather than Sara Hope just a senior manager in a big organisation and he really built a connection with me. He was honest, he was human and I think one of you asked actually, what does it really mean to be human and he asked about my family, he knew what my hobbies were, he asked me to share what my vision of my career was, and it made the conversations that were hard to have easier because there was a relationship there and John had a huge impact. He is sadly no longer with us but in terms of me working with KPMG now as a client, he has helped keep that connection open by the conversations we started probably about 15 years ago.</p> <p>So, in terms of being human, it will mean different things to all of us but to me it was connecting on an emotion level, building trust and having empathy with me as a human being.</p> <p>But why do so many managers forget that? Helen.</p>
Helen	<p>Thanks Sara and Hi everyone, great to be with you today. So, we'd like to spend a couple of minutes just speaking about some of the research that sits behind this space. In particular around conversations and the ability to connect with others and then taking that down to performance managers.</p>
	<p>We thought we would do that with a little quiz to get us going. So, the first question for you, what I'd like you to do is go to the chat panel and type in your thoughts</p>
	<p>So, the first question we're going to ask is "what percentage of management problems are down to poor communication? Do you think. So, linking here with Peter Drucker's work. What percentage of management problems are down to poor communication? And Jo's going to let us know what your guesses are when they come through.</p>
Jo	<p>Good question. I'm not really sure on this myself technically I know the answer I've seen the slide but when you were asking me a little bit earlier in the week I'm not sure about this. So what percentage of management problems are down to poor communication? All sort of answers, 100% says Bethany, Christine says 90% so does Kara, Charlotte's similar at 92%. We've got high 80s from Sarah and Eleanor, Evan says 99%. Cecilie says 85%, Chris is 90ish, Victoria says 90 all interesting answers. Helen, what is the answer?</p>
Helen	<p>All very high. Actually its 60% but that does really emphasise and all of our opinions are based on the world we work in about how much this can link with engagement and the desire for people to really be motivated and for us to retain that talent so thank you for those answers. Q2 then, refers to the research that TCS have done, so what percentage of our research participants do you think talked about appreciating and valuing human connection in their conversations at work?</p>
Jo	<p>Ok, so on that last stat, Kara says rubbish, it's got to be higher at least in the United States, we can't communicate! I'm going to disagree with that.</p>
Helen	<p>I'm not getting into that battle, I'll stay out of that one.</p>
Jo	<p>So, what do you reckon guys, use that chat window again, what percentage of TCS research participants do you think talked about appreciating and valuing human connection in their conversations at work? Were going the other end of the scale on this one! 32% says Bethany. Kara, I don't know if you're in a bad mood today Kara or this is just your realism of what you've got. Kara says 10% but so does Eleanor to be fair. Sarah's 38%, Christina's 15%, Charlotte's thinking maybe 50/50 on that, Cecilie at 28%. Chris is very optimistic at 70% and Adam similar a 60%. If you're thinking Jo hasn't read out my number, just make sure you're set to all panellists and attendees so that everyone can see your answer. So, Helen we've got some numbers there what's the actual result?</p>

Helen	So, the actual answer is 88% pleasingly! So perhaps a little bit more optimistic than some of you would have thought there. 88% of the participants that took part in the research really felt that human connection was a critical part of the play. Which is a nice number to see but what it also really tells us is that there is some real data behind that and in essence we are agreeing that the work of Brene Brown if any of you are familiar with that where she states we are hardwired for connection, curiosity and engagement. So, if we are really focusing on that piece and then to start to say what does this mean and if you're interested in the human piece we would really recommend you go and focus on an article that was in the Harvard Business Review recently "why do so many managers forget they're human beings? The link to that article is just coming up on the other chat screen for you. So, if this is a space of interest take a look at that really useful article to explore.
	So, if we now bring this into what it means for performance managers, the question that comes to my mind based on my experience of having been in industry and work in this space for a while, is if we know all of that why do they get stuck in process a lot? That's certainly something I've observed working in industry and seeing that actually the tricky thing of having a real human conversation is a real problem for them, that they really have an issue doing that at times and the process perhaps start to feel a bit of a comfort blanket and we've got some messages coming through but I'd really like to hear your thoughts on why you think that might be and whether or not that's something you've seen as well.
Jo	This is an interesting question. What is it that you are wanting people to think about there Helen?
Helen	Why do you think a lot of our performance managers do rely on the process and forget about being human?
Jo	Is it all about the appraisee? Is it all about the focusing on the deliverables which is important in business?
Helen	Yes
Jo	Is there more? Charlotte is saying fear, what do you think its fear of? Is it the bosses fear of discriminating and not doing it right, I'm not sure, what do you think it is? Bethany is saying stuck in a process to save themselves the trouble, if I just follow the process I don't have to work too hard maybe. Charlotte's saying yes, fear from a policy perspective whatever that is in your industry. Ellen says they need to report to senior management. Christina says its quicker to get through things when you just do process and feeling that a box has been ticked so its something done. Cecilie said agree with Ellen, it's the lack of skills. Chris says process isn't messy people are. Sarah says balancing the deliverable, the business and the personal objectives Charlotte says making sure they do the right thing. Kara said many seem to focus on the bottom line, not showing favouritism or discrimination. Let's face it, being authentic can be hard. Absolutely right. Adam says anything they have to be someone else to manage performance and find it easier to disconnect and Sarah says lack of understanding and skill. Tell us more Helen.
Helen	I would agree with all those personally, I have seen all of these in my time working with performance managers and that fear, that really wanting perhaps if we were to summarise it, to feel in control, to not be exposed, to feel comfortable in what we know and if we're driving the conversation following that process its perhaps easier for us just to do that. We are not saying here that the process isn't important, of course it is, but it's not impossible to do both, to follow that process and really connect. We've seen in the media lots of companies, the GE's, Microsoft, Netflix, are really questioning whether they want such a rigid process, do they want to focus more on a rigid, fluid and ongoing conversations to focus more on that connection and less on the process. If we were to sum this up, Leadership today is about unlearning management and relearning being human and really that's a key for us to see how Conversational Wisdom® can help you achieve that with your performance managers so over to Sara now to talk us though Conversational Wisdom®.

Sara.	<p>Thank you, Helen. In 2016 here at TCS we did a really interesting piece of research across a number of organisations and the one question that we were really interested in is what makes a really great leadership conversation and the report that you can see there in front of you which I think is going to be shared in the chat box as well is around steering conversations and from our research, there were a few things that came up and one of those was about being human and people wanting a different conversation at work. One that moved away from the traditional transactional one to one that was a bit more around connection and being a lot more transformational in many ways as well and there's a lovely quote here from one of the business leaders that we interviewed and you can see that there yourselves. Meetings are about making connections and letting people know we're not in some ivory tower somewhere but that there is a human aspect to it. You can access the report on our website as well but it will give you a bit more flavour of some of the other themes across generations as well. From our research, we have developed our approach of Conversational Wisdom® and there are three core elements to Conversational Wisdom®. Being aware, being human being skilled and I'm going to go through these very quickly for you but again if you want more details do get in touch. In terms of being aware and in the context of performance conversation which is the key one that we're interested in today, helping your performance managers become more aware of themselves and how they show up in those all-important performance conversations. Thinking about what their intent is before they go into their conversation and also reflect back on how well they know their appraisees and what happens in previous conversations so that they can think about the whole holistic piece around how people experience them and going back to my experience of John, he was brilliant at saying summarise what we do in previous conversations and he used that whole piece about himself with such skill it was amazing to experience it.</p> <p>In terms of being human again Helen will pick up more on this in a moment but the whole piece around vulnerability we are seeing more and more of in terms of how people can be willing and courageous enough to say I don't know. I don't know the answer to this but I can help you find out. Thinking about curiosity and asking questions something that again sounds simple but is often quite hard to do and most important as well thinking about building that relationship and as I'm seeing on the chat coming through, if you've got nay questions do add those into the chat room. Is there anything Jo that you're noticing coming up in the threads?</p>
Jo	<p>Mostly me talking at people at the moment, I think they're really involved in what you're saying here and I think it's something that people are going to comment on a bit later when they see a bit more of the model do keep going.</p>
Sara	<p>Brilliant. Lastly in terms of Conversational Wisdom® and being skilled and for those of you who are experienced coaches on this webinar you will recognise and value asking questions, listening. Not just listening to hear the words that people are saying but really listening to understand and again it's a skill that when people get stuck in the process and the doing the listening part can often get left to one side and yet it makes a huge impact in terms of how people experience performance managers. Thinking about the environment and where you have a conversation going into some of these meeting rooms where there's a big table and its all very formal can sometimes have more of an impact than people realise. So, thinking about your performance manager and encouraging them to try other places, other environments, making a walk and talk, maybe sitting side by side someone rather than across a big table. So, with Conversational Wisdom®, we believe that growing that within your performance mangers and supporting them to think about all those different attributes, can play a big part in the whole engagement piece and the impact of performance management conversations.</p>
Jo	<p>Really great that you shared that with us, thank you. So, a couple of things from the chat window, we have Adam Smith has said this has hit the nail on the head for us, very relevant for us right now. That's really great Adam glad that you are here for that. Also, Charlotte says "striking the right balance can be really tough so agree with that one". Bethany really likes to "focus on the environment, that's a really important one". Can make a difference whether your managing people remotely or not, people working in different offices, all sorts of stuff like that. Sarah says "the ones who are most skilled at this just seem so natural at doing it".</p>

	<p>It's how we help those who really struggle with that approach and have always done the same thing and the same approach. Good point there Sarah about help people who maybe don't quite know that they need the help. Cecilie says "you cannot underestimate the effect of the environment, interestingly more and more performance management conversations are being done via a remote method, skype, WebEx, zoom all of those kind of things". Absolutely they are. Eleanor says "conversations happen on the go and managers simply have no time to plan it". So, lets continue with those conversations.</p>
Helen.	<p>Lovely, thank you. All of those points are what we wanted to do in this webinar that we had a good dollop of practical insights of stuff that you might want to start exploring with your performance managers in the interest of really boosting that engagement and building those trust levels. The way we would like to do this is we have a few tips here, things we've observed in the past, but we're not perfect enough to imply that we have all the answers, far from it. We know that all of you on this webinar today have a host of experience as well so we would love it as we are going through a few of these tips in relation to that human section of the wheel that you saw, if you could share your own experiences and Jo will share some of those. If there's too many we will collate them and share them round later on as well so that you've got those ideas. So, the first area that we want to look at is vulnerability.</p> <p>Vulnerability is really as Sara just mentioned is focussing in on how the performance manager is able to be brave, share something of themselves, take some level of risk at times and this isn't just about the big performance management conversations. I know earlier on someone was saying they wanted thoughts about how to have difficult conversations and it is that in part but its also those day to day interactions that we have just as Sara was referring to in her story.</p> <p>So tip number 1 that we want to share is to look at just showing up as themselves and doesn't that sound easy? The reality not necessarily the same I appreciate but one of the ways that can be done is actually to be willing to share stories about yourself, to share some insight about who you actually are and that doesn't need to be life changing extraordinary stories. Sometimes the smallest things, just the insight into your day to day life and some of the things that are worrying you, some of the things that you've learnt, that maybe show your imperfections can be really powerful. That in itself just to be able to get performance managers to think about how they do that would be great. this just doesn't have to be with appraisees. This can be with all people, clients as well to help build that connection. You can also find places to practice on a day to day basis. Doesn't have to be in these high-risk meetings. Could be practising this on a day to day basis if they're more aware. Anything coming through yet Jo that we can connect in or shall I carry onto our second point for the moment.</p>
Jo	<p>You've already answered the question that Adam had which was about how to show vulnerability and get your review on that and that's really good so carry on.</p>
Helen.	<p>The second one is to practice coping with uncertainty. We've observed, again interested to hear your thoughts that we love technology and emails and twitter and WhatsApp and all of those allow us to hide behind, to really rehearse everything that we want to say. Therefore we actually start to lose the ability to be uncertain, to respond in the moment as to how someone might talk back to us about something. So one of the things we really encourage, again need to think how to encourage performance managers to do this, is to think how can they practice on a day to day basis, instead of always emailing, who could they pick the phone up to instead. How could they go and have a conversation with someone or use zoom, skype etc. But practice again, flex that muscle of actually having to respond in the moment to someone rather than being able to have the time to create the perfect response like you might if you were on email. That would be about an idea for vulnerability.</p> <p>So next up then is focussing in on curiosity. So, a fundamental part around being human is to be interested and curious in others and some of the challenges you raised back there earlier on around time, for example, is a big blocker to this, do we always have time to focus in on the other person or are we rushing to the next things and we just want to tell and get the stuff off</p>

	<p>our to do list. We really need to help our performance managers think about how they tune into that curiosity. One of our ideas around this is to think through what are some of the great questions that they can ask. Again, this doesn't need to be rocket science. There can be some cracking very simple, classic coaching questions, "tell me about what else," "how did you feel about that". Some quite simple questions that can open up a conversation and if performance managers can just have those written down in the note book if they need, quick reference points, they're little reminders that nudges them to get into that curious headspace and to actually genuinely ask about the other person.</p> <p>Next up would be thinking through how do I stop before I start solutionising. I've heard an issue or a challenge with this individual and now I want to jump in and start telling them how to fix it. That's not always the right things to do and we all know that so how can we encourage them to stop doing that? One of the biggest things for me again and I know this is easier said than done, but how can they slow down a little so if they going to go and chat to someone can they just give themselves a moments headspace to think about stopping themselves from doing that and actually being more self-aware and to come back to asking those questions. How are we doing Jo before we go onto the next one?</p>
Jo	Good conversation happening. Eleanor asks "do you believe in a check list to help managers prepare?"
Helen	I have two views to that and Sara I would welcome your thoughts as well. My instinctive one is yes perhaps if it's a big meeting and you need to prepare for it. We're not just talking about those big meetings, were talking about those "let's have a chat on the way to the coffee machine" or "how can I check in". In those instances I think its something around giving people those couple of things, 2 or 3 things that they can remember to do like slowing down and then asking a question rather than over complicating it. But absolutely when there's times when you've got to have those big-ticket meetings, they really need to prepare, then perhaps the check list can help.
Sara	I would agree with that and I think it's a balance between the being and how you show up and the doing and the preparation so that kind of head and heart.
Helen	Absolutely. Anything else Jo?
Jo	Eleanor says "thank you Helen" which is absolutely great. "Bethany and I have been having a little bit of a conversation about telling people vs listening, helping vs coaching and the challenge that we have there" and Adam says "we love to fix problems for others". We so do! I could fix anybody else's problems but my own problems? Hmmm.....
Helen	<p>It just being able to try and slow down I think to hear that in ourselves. I'm conscious of time so let's quickly crack on with the relationship. This is the third segment in the Conversational Wisdom® wheel that Sara highlighted earlier. No surprise really, better conversations help build better relationships, help build up better conversations and Sara has demonstrated that with her story earlier around John. So how can we really use these conversations to help us? One of these is a thing we call 'tiny noticeable things' or 'TNT's. Quick little things that your performance managers could actually remember. That they could have in their mind and think what are my tiny noticeable things, because it's a small catchy thing. So, here we mean small things, "saying thank you". We mean remembering that somebody has just come back from holiday, how could we remember that fact and actually see if they had a nice time? How can we wish them good luck when we know they've got a big meeting coming and we want to make sure they know we're thinking of them when we're not there? None of these things need to take up lots of time but they do demonstrate genuine interest and demonstrate care and all it requires is the odd reminder to be able to do that. Tiny noticeable things is our 5th tip.</p> <p>Our 6th which always help with relationships is how we focus in on these regular check ins like we just mentioned. Here I do start to say maybe technology can help because we don't all work sitting next to each other. So how can we use WhatsApp, text, skype to be able to make this just touching in point to help every now and then? Again, those checking in to wish</p>

	<p>somebody good luck, doesn't always have to be a big old meeting, it can be a quick WhatsApp message, job done. But it can be bigger than that as well but using the technology can really help. In this instance I think can help. Those are a few tips. Jo, any others that we want to bring in from the group?</p>
Jo	<p>Got a couple coming through Cecile is saying about "the often-forgotten trick of the power of the pause, many like to fill silence when somebody is just thinking. We should give them that thinking time." Thank you Cecile. Bethany is agreeing that "it's ways to show the people that they are seen and thought about and that's really valuable" and Adam "I really really love this. It's the wait analogy, it's the why am I talking model, so just wait and that's true". Training for communication, coaching, love all of that. Eleanor asks "how regular do you think these check in need to happen?"</p>
Helen	<p>If only there was a magic wand with a simple answer for that! I think it varies. If I think of the people I performance manage, I think there's one of them here today, Hi Ellen. I think it depends. In their career they might be going through a whole lot of big stuff so you do want to be there more for them, checking in and making sure they're ok. Other times they might be absolutely fine and in their flow and therefore you can knock it down a bit. It's being empathetic enough to think what might be helpful for them and not leaving so long that you lose that momentum in that connection. Wouldn't it be lovely that you do both know they've been on holiday and you have some vague idea if where they went rather than it being so long that you don't have that insight. Sara anything you would say on that?</p>
Sara	<p>For me, again, it really comes back to that balance of the informal coffee conversations that just happen and I think they need to happen far more regularly than I see a lot of people doing them but also from a formal point of view making sure that there is a place for those difficult conversations because having objectives and sticking to those and making sure there's a link back to the business as well I think is really important too. So in terms of bringing this conversation to a close, because I am aware of the time, we love this quote here from Margaret Wheatley, "be brave enough to start a conversation that really matters" and in terms of us all her at the Conversation Space our mission is to help anyone that we work with to make a real impact with the conversations that people are having within their business and what better place to start than with your performance manager because they play such a key part in terms of engagement and retention and overall performance within the business and often we get focussed on upskilling them in terms of process and we need to start engaging them more around how to connect at a human level.</p>
Jo	<p>Well that is it everybody that's our half an hour. Hopefully you've enjoyed your lunch. You haven't got sunburnt which is really good so lets definitely continue this conversation with TCS. You can sign up for TCS newsletter if you want to and find out a bit more on their website. You can also look at the next webinar that is coming up and go and find out more about that. That's on Wednesday 19th September and lastly just a huge thank you to all of you for coming today and let me just share on screen the contact details if you want to get in contact for some more information which is our last slide today and we really appreciate your time and conversation and thank you for everything you put in the chat window. You can get in contact with us with stuff that's in the chat window and Sara if you just pop up that last slide we've got our contact details for TCS as well. We really look forward to hearing from you some more. If you want to you can just jump onto Twitter and just say what is it you got out of today. Just share using #beinghuman and you can also follow @convospace. So, until the next webinar, goodbye, thank you and keep cool!</p>
Sara	<p>Thanks everyone.</p>