



# **Rational, Reasonable but Conflicting: Grid-Group Cultural Analysis of 'good' and 'bad' workplace conversational dynamics**

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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## Abstract

We asked interviewees ‘Please describe the best and the worst workplace conversations you have ever had?’ They talked freely and at length.

This study applies Grid-Group Cultural Theory (G-GCT or GGCT) to identify the features of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ workplace conversations, understood and explained as the dynamic outcome of four equally rational yet conflicting, culturally enabled, forms of reasoning (Thought-Styles), here between manager and employee. Each rationality has a different preoccupation and therefore its own evaluation criteria:

*Hierarchical* reasoning is preoccupied with Order and Deviance; success is defined by the steady reduction, control and eventual elimination of deviance. *Egalitarian* reasoning is preoccupied with system change beneficial to all; success is defined by radical transformation of the status quo, even if this takes a long time. *Individualistic* reasoning is preoccupied with efficient competitive elimination of weak proposals. Success should be accomplished quickly with clear winners and losers. *Fatalistic* reasoning is preoccupied with immediate survival. Thus, each Thought Style evaluates nature and time differently.

The existing literature on workplace conversation dwells instead on its functional importance as a mechanism of ‘leader-member exchange’ (LMX), with claimed effects on ‘organisational performance’ and ‘knowledge-sharing’. Several authors emphasise how ‘effective’ and ‘ineffective’ conversations affect organisational success and failure. This literature is naïve, containing common-sense and non-explanatory circular assertions. It fails to distinguish *causes* of good conversation from those qualities which are supposed to *define* good conversation. Terms such as *trust* and *openness* are used imprecisely in ways that suggest unawareness of the cultural derivation of feelings, thoughts and actions. The literature also shows strong and unexamined cultural biases. Researchers’ Thought Styles affect their work in ways that are obvious to a Grid-Group Cultural Theorist.

G-GCT provides straightforward causal explanations for what protagonists say to each other, why they disagree and a clear evaluative framework which we then apply to conversational data generated through several re-enactments of prepared role-plays exploring vexed workplace difficulties. We classify managers’ and employees’ deployment of the four rationalities and plot every conversational utterance graphically, along with the outcomes.

The methodology is original:

- Semi-structured interviews with nine employees from different industrial backgrounds
- Participatory Theatre Research (PTR) workshops with 34 participants including experienced MBA students, other professionals and actors using plausible prepared role-plays, consistent with the kinds of difficulties which interviewees reported
- Graphical representation of what is said in time series and pie charts

The interviews were ‘open-coded’ for interviewees’ ordinary common-sense evaluations of their best and worst workplace conversation experiences. These assisted in developing plausible ‘HR scenarios’ which were role-played by professional actors and MBA students in role as Managers and by volunteers in role as Employees.

Several repeat runs of each prepared role-play were evaluated moment-by-moment using G-GCT using sentence fragments. Third party (focus-group) evaluations of a number of iterations of each prepared role-play are also included.

G-GCT provides a fresh unifying scientific causal theory of conversation in which equally reasonable but conflicting ways of thinking create uncomfortable differences and happy outcomes. Moreover, even when protagonists apply the same Thought Style, the outcome may be unsatisfactory to both.

## **Keywords**

Organisational Communication, Conversation Dynamics, Grid-Group Cultural Theory(G-GCT), Participatory Theatre Research, Workplace Conversation

## **Dedication**

### **Yuzhen Ge (1962-2019)**

My mum who brought me to this world, and taught me to be an authentic and responsible person. Although you did not see me reach this milestone, your lifetimes wisdom and spirit will be forever there to encourage me to keep going.

### **葛玉珍（1962-2019）**

仅以此作献给我的母亲。

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare to the best of my knowledge that this thesis is my original work, unrelated to previous submissions at any institution, except where citations are clearly acknowledged.

Yuemei Ma

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# Chapter 1 : Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

Conversation is an unavoidable feature of management: supposed, but not always ‘a responsible activity between two or more people...sharing thoughts, ideas and aims to achieve a common goal’ (Quinn, 1996; Shotter, 1993). Conversation comprises spoken words, physical gestures, emotions and their expression featuring variations in the speed, volume and intonations of the speakers (Schein, 1993), strategies and techniques. The question of what to say relies on the ability to formulate oral content and the participants sensitivity to linguistic and cultural expectations (Schönfeldt and Golato, 2003). Communicated content helps clarify perspectives and objectives. It is easy to see that communication is intrinsic to organisational activity (Taylor et al., 2000; Gratton and Ghoshal, 2002), indeed it is obvious.

Nevertheless, a Harvard Business report states that 69% of managers do not enjoy speaking to staff (Solomon, 2016), particularly when addressing problems (Farrell, 2015). As many as 37% of managers try to avoid providing critical feedback to employees, fearing their reactions (Solomon, 2016). Lack of communication from management, however, is believed damaging to organisations (Elliott, 2012; Overton and Lowry, 2013), while ‘ineffective’ communication compromises ‘organisational performance’ (Bradley and Campbell, 2016; Couturier and Sklavounos, 2019).

This much is largely known to common-sense. The prevailing literature on workplace conversation explores the role of conversation in the ‘leader-member relationship’, ‘performance dialogue’ and ‘knowledge-sharing’ (Jian and Dalisay, 2017; Mengis and Eppler, 2008; Courturier and Sklavounos, 2019). It is surly a truism that ‘effective communication’ can ‘improve employee performance’, ‘engagement’, ‘commitment relationships’ and ‘job satisfaction’ (Fix and Sias, 2006; Walden et al., 2017, etc) and contribute to ‘organisation leaning’ and ‘organisational development’ (Crumpton, 2012; Ford and Ford, 2008; Mengis and Eppler, 2008; Preget, 2013). By definition, *ineffective* conversation would have either no effects or harmful ones. Just as rhetorical is the claim that managers should be skilled in managing conversation to progress projects, enhance morale and improve outcomes (Allard-Poesi, 2015; Farrell, 2015; Meyer et al., 2017, etc). ‘Effective conversation management’ is also claimed to reduce tensions and stresses (Ford and Ford, 1999; Mccambridge, 2003). A good

conversation improves ease of understanding between manager and employee, in co-creating a contractual and productive relationship (Baker et al., 2005, 2016; Börjeson, 2017; 2018;).

Our criticism is that these claims are based on superficial understandings of how conversation is caused, what animates disagreements (moment-by-moment), why those ‘effective’ to one party will appear dangerous to another and why protagonists who each think of what they say as rational and reasonable, reach impasse. Why is it that what is ‘effective’ and beneficial in the eyes of one party, is simultaneously ineffective or destructive in the eyes of the other? Why the specific preoccupations of the different parties to a conversation? Why talk and why fear talking? What is conversation and what explains the contents?

Work and workplace conversation consume much of our lives, yet few managers have had formal training in ‘communication skills’ (Elliott, 2012) which in any case rarely exceed a day or two. Though conversation is typically essential to organising, key performance indicators (KPI), aptitude- and personality-testing of recruits, reporting systems and data-recording take precedence over the conversational skills of managers and workers (Brown and Reilly, 2009; Couturier and Sklavounos, 2019; Lane and Gorbatov, 2017; Michael, J. 2003; etc.). Note how *procedure* and *formalisation* inform these recommendations.

Over decades, scholars have indeed developed various models of organisational communication, some focussing on the *structure* and *procedures* of ‘effective conversation’ (Baker et al., 2005, 2016; Gibb, 1961; Gratton and Ghoshal, 2002, Mengis and Eppler, 2008; etc.). However, with different reasoning Bradley and Campbell (2016) argue that most conversation, especially difficult conversations, are unforeseen and without warning precluding any planning. Jian and Dalisay (2017) correlated ‘leader-member conversational quality’ (LMCQ) with ‘organisational commitment’ (OC) offering ‘leader-member exchange’ (LMX) theory which recognises that conversation quality depends on both parties in a dyad. In this case the researchers’ reasoning is noticeably egalitarian rather than bureaucratic. Yet most studies *look down*, privileging the senior’s perspective over the subordinate’s. There is still less attention paid to what animates the communicative relationship itself as a subject in its own right. There are important deficits in the literature on workplace conversations concerning:

- the recording, measurement and classification of conversation
- explanation for moment-by-moment dynamic movement in conversations

- what is ‘cultural’ about conversation

### **‘It’s Culture, stupid.’**

This study repairs these specific deficits by exploring how and why dyadic interaction works and by laying out our analysis *graphically*. Grid-Group Cultural Theory (G-GCT or GGCT), founded by Mary Douglas (1970) and co-workers enables us to explain why conversations progress as they do; why protagonists feel, think and act as they do, indeed how feelings and thoughts are enabled. G-GCT also helps us to review and evaluate the existing literature of workplace conversation in terms not just of the ‘Thought Styles’ used by each party to a workplace conversation, but also how writers on workplace conversations have used one or more of the exact same ‘Thought Styles’. A striking feature of G-GCT is that it accounts for the extraordinary heterogeneity of conversations using just the four prototypical rationalities (and hybrids of only these four). As we will see, it also establishes that there is no ‘equilibrium point’ in conversation and that no actor will ‘have the last word’.

What are Thought Styles? We define Thought Styles as *equally rational but conflicting forms of culturally enabled reasoning*. They are universal: available in all places, in all circumstances and for all times, past present and future, world-wide.

G-GCT identifies four such rationalities:

- Hierarchical
- Egalitarian
- Individualistic
- Fatalistic

each of which makes different sense of

- what the problem is
- how to solve it

These four equally rational but mutually antagonistic, exclusive and conflicting prototypical positions (Thompson et al., 1990; Verweij et al., 2006), we will argue, not only *enable* conversation and even *compel* it, but in the case of the fourth – Fatalism – find reasons to suppress it. For reasons that should become clear, the ‘openness’ which many researchers advocate, is treated with deep suspicion by Fatalistic reasoning. According to this reasonable position, openness becomes not a feature of ‘good’ conversation, but of *risky* conversation. In

short, a good conversation judged by the highly specific evaluation criteria of each Thought Style will conflict with the equally clear but contrary evaluation criteria of each of the other three Thought Styles.

Few authors understand that they are of course ‘cultural subjects’ and that their reasons for disagreeing with each other are provided by the same four rationalities that animate the cultural subjects whom they are studying. Researchers of conversations in organisations appear to be unaware of this culturally-imposed condition, from which, what Thompson calls the ‘hermit’ position at the centre of the G-GCT typology (below), a dispassionate vantage point is provided.

We argue that the quality of conversation should not only be judged hierarchically by how well it conforms to procedural rules and its measurable benefits to ‘organisational performance’ from the manager’s official organisational perspective, but also requires attention to the employee’s reasoning from an ‘*upward*’ angle, person-by-person. It follows from a G-GCT analysis that alternative Hierarchical, Egalitarian, Individualistic and Fatalist reasoning is just as available at the ‘bottom’ and ‘middle’ as it is at the ‘top’. Thus, it is not automatically the case that a junior employee will reason differently to the CEO (explored most clearly in one of our prepared role-plays). Moreover, *individuals* will experience conflicting thoughts in their own heads, being in up to ‘four minds’ as to what the problem is and what to do for the best. These changes of mind are difficult to explain with reference to ‘class interests’, ‘personality’, ‘gender’, ‘ideologies’ or ‘biographies’ which imply *continuity*.

We emphasise that each thought style in any party at any scale is dynamic, and it is the dynamic interactions between parties’ thought styles which drive each moment of every conversation, between persons or nation states, hence the swapping of positions observed during conversations and between one conversation and the next.

To establish poly-rational solutions, ideally all four thought styles should enter into workplace conversations, but this requires acknowledgement of the reasonableness of other’s thinking, rather than simple reactive opposition. According to our application of G-GCT, good conversation will involve disagreement (as some authors concede) and tactical movement, and eventually, fresh solutions which no single thought style is capable of thinking without a protagonist – even if that ‘other little voice’ exists in one’s own head.

Our methodological assumption will be here that conversations are measurable and code-able accurately, that turning points (shifts in reasoning) can be identified at the level of utterances,

that these shifts in reasoning can be represented graphically in a way that is easy to read. We do not feel that the direction which a conversation will take next can be predicted, because the number of permutations of any one, two, three and four thought styles and the possible sequences of the dynamic responses of any two parties in a dyadic conversation are very large. However, as well as having universal applications at all scales, the remarkable and straightforward insights which G-GCT brings to understanding conversations and their outcomes have clear and direct relevance to the individual, the dyad (and by implication) to triads and larger groups. G-GCT has the potential for enabling much greater self-awareness of one's own reasoning, but also greater awareness, understanding and respect for the other; contributing to less exasperation. It is not simply 'the other guy and their actions' that is the menace. It's culture, stupid. Through culture, their actions, their utterances, their annoyance and what they do makes sense. However, we will address our Examiners' suggestion that G-GCT may be unscientific on the grounds that it is 'untestable'.

For our research purposes, qualitative open-ended interviews with employees, Participatory Theatre Research (PTR) among MBA students and other experienced professionals and use of Observer Panels, with the involvement of actors, are sufficient to answer our research questions. This is because of the 'scalability' of G-GCT, meaning that it applies equally to all conversations of any group-size and any length. We concede (Fatalistically) that resource constraints mean that it has not been possible to explore conversation at larger scales, such as between a large corporation and its suppliers and customers. But it is an attribute of G-GCT that what can be demonstrated at the small scale can be inferred for larger scales. Indeed most G-GCT research is at larger scales, notably Michael Thompson's work comparing environmental policies internationally.

The employee interviews (below) may be considered preliminary only. Interviewees were invited to describe their 'best ever' and 'worst ever' workplace conversations and from these we can extract a rough picture of what they think of as the causes of good and bad conversations. We analysed these initially *without* using G-GCT, in the usual 'interpretive', open coding the interviews for emergent themes. This so-called 'grounded approach' has been taken by some other researchers of workplace conversation with somewhat imprecise results. What was valuable at that stage was that these recollections of the 'worst' conversations helped us to construct credible and realistic scenarios as the basis for prepared role-plays and actor briefings (also below).



The core evidence was provided by video-recorded iterations of each role-play, for example of the ‘Mike’ role, using different voluntary participants, hence the ‘Mike 1 Conversation’, the ‘Mike 2 Conversation’, etc. and Panel Evaluations of how good or bad each role-player’s contribution to the dialogue had been. These key stages were not open-coded. Instead, all Role-player and Panel utterances were coded using G-GCT, and compared retrospectively with the themes uncovered through prior open coding, which helps to test the relative ‘yield’ of the grounded approach with our preferred theory-driven approach.

Our wider aim is not just to demonstrate the academic advantages of G-GCT, but to

- validate the reasonableness of all parties to conversations
- enable unspoken, forgotten or suppressed reasonings (voices) from both parties in the workplace conversation to be invoked, expressed, heard, respected, appreciated and responded to
- enable thorough re-thinking of what qualifies as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ conversation, going beyond rhetorical writing on conversation
- offer practical recommendations as to how impasse can be addressed (here in HR/Manager Conversations)

One of the deficits in the prior literature is that as well as being naively functionalist, it is also excessively normative, indeed it leaps to judgements about what a good conversation and what a bad conversation is. But it offers surprisingly little about *how* to have a good conversation and *how* to avoid a ‘bad’ one and it is largely unaware of Applied Drama (AD) techniques including Participatory Theatre Research (PTR) which are already in use for addressing vexed problems. Furthermore, it avoids gaining a grasp of the underlying mechanisms of conversation, by which the assertions made in the literature on conversations can be judged. PTR is especially powerful for what it offers managers and employees trying to escape from impasse and reasoning that has got them thoroughly stuck. If implemented, G-GCT affords deep self- and mutual insights for all workplace conversations, potentially reducing damage and widening our listening, understanding and action repertoires.

## 1.2 Rationale

Our interest in this research stemmed from my upbringing in a family business, often having been accused as a child of being ‘too bossy’ and ‘loud’ when speaking to employees, some of whom quit our noodle-manufacturing company, for which their conversations with me have been blamed. It is partly for this biographical reason that we felt that efforts had to be made to better understand others, and to interact in a non-destructive manner.

This author went on to train in Social Work at University prior to transferring attention to Human Resource Management. In Social Work as in HR the critical importance of ‘good conversation’ in relation to clients’ well-being became apparent. Social work trainers are well-aware that the success of interactions with those in different ‘mental states’ requires understanding of the other person’s perspectives in order to then consider how best to respond. The principle which my trainers instilled in their students was that dyadic conversations in social work should be treated as conversations between equals, be respectful and useful to both sides involved. In Grid-Group Cultural Theory terms, these principles demonstrate ‘High Social Solidarity’ and ‘Low- or Moderate Social Regulation’. While this is the official position of Chinese social work practice (and probably most social work practice globally), other positions remain possible, with better or worse outcomes as defined in different possible ways:

- Hierarchical updating and refinement of official procedures (minimising practitioner and client deviance)
- Egalitarian maximising of the happiness of clients with further benefits to a wider circle of third-parties (benefits to all)
- Individualistic innovations and creativity (competitive elimination of weak solutions)
- Fatalistic avoidance of embarrassing official inquiries and service cuts (survival)

My experiences in the family business, and in social work mean that I have an interests in and a way of reading the available literature on the importance and challenges of workplace conversations (Berger, 2008; Taylor and Van Every, 2007). Indeed, social work conversations can be extremely difficult because clients can be in extreme distress and may present great risks to themselves and to others. While workplace conversations can also be critical to health and safety, this author was curious as to whether her social work training might have something useful to offer HR managers / managers. We read the literature on workplace conversations

with this possibility in mind; with the accusations that had been made against me within our family business also in mind.

This research sought to derive a generalisable method for modelling conversations and a measurement technique for analysing and understanding every moment of any conversation based on G-GCT, within the resources available to a PhD candidate. This method could be used to understand where conversation can go from cultural perspective (Goodwin et al., 1999; Franzwa and Lockhart, 1998; Rippl, 2011; Thompson et al., 1990) and what can be changed between manager and employee, with both treated as having reasonings that have value.

There is a case for Hierarchy: social work training provided me with professionally recognised and standardised conversational principles. Do these have relevance to HR and other management conversations? More fundamentally what makes these standards (and conflicting standards) *thinkable*? Are these the only principles that could apply to such conversations? Can workplace conversational quality be improved, for the benefit of employees, managers and organisations, and according to which culturally available definitions could we say that they had been improved?

### **1.3 Research Aim, Purpose and Questions**

Case-based Role-Play (prepared role-play) is used widely in social work training. This is because social work respects the principle that social workers should do no harm to clients and role-play is a safe way for developing social work skills in realistic settings which do not expose trainees to clients directly. The social work profession has also institutionalised the principle that social workers should not be exposed to what can be very difficult conversations without training. Prepared role-plays based on realistic cases are a way of enabling trainee social workers to develop their conversational skills, and to make and learn from mistakes in a safe way. It is also the practice in social work to expose trainee's practice to third-party observation by both other trainees and by experienced social workers, followed by plenary discussion. Conversation is our main resource and we are examined by our trainers and by our student cohort, at least partly on our ability to hold a good conversation as defined by the (evolving) evaluation criteria of the profession. This author was examined in this way.

Prepared Role-play and participatory evaluation originates in theatre. Although Grid-Group Cultural Theory was unknown to us, we have been impressed by its simplicity and comprehensiveness. It offers four definitions which distinguish differences between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ conversation in any context including the workplace and which enable understanding of interacting reasonings (and feelings) and of their outcomes. It is a hierarchical (cultural) requirement bordering on a rule that PhD candidates should set out their objectives formally and this author recognises the value of doing so. Research Objectives provide Examiners and Candidates with a reasonable basis for *Viva* conversations. Our objectives are as follows:

- (1) To identify the reasoning-basis on which ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ conversation can be evaluated as such
- (2) To incorporate and apply G-GCT in support of item (1)
- (3) To ‘operationalise’ G-GCT as an analytical approach to conversation to the point at which workplace conversation can be presented and read straightforwardly

The following questions are tied to these objectives:

- (1) How do staff members engage in and feel about good and bad workplace conversations?
- (2) How can cultural theory (G-GCT) be applied to the evaluation of realistically ‘difficult’ workplace conversations in a way that captures the dynamics involved without loss of data and in ways that are useful to the parties involved?
- (3) Social workers know that a *single* word spoken out of place can be a disastrous tipping-point. Often, but not always(!) we have a ‘sinking feeling’ that we have made a mistake. We also have feelings and thoughts about how a conversation can be pulled back from the brink of disaster. But how and why exactly do momentary interactions affect the course and outcome of workplace conversations profoundly? What is going on? The genders of the parties have not changed from one moment to the next, so gender is unlikely to be the explanation. The occupations of, say manager and junior employee have not changed from one moment to the next, so likewise this is not likely to be the explanation. Personalities likewise. Why precisely that shift in the conversation at precisely that moment?

## 1.4 Structure of thesis

The study presents six chapters comprising the Literature, Research Methods, Findings and Discussion of findings.

Chapter 1, this Introduction provides an overview of the research and the reasons for the study. Some theory has been introduced with a brief indication of its relevance and usefulness along with a biographical explanation of why this research is of interest to the researcher. This has closed with objectives and aims.

Chapter 2, the Literature Review, explores established academic research in the field of workplace conversation and then details G-GCT, in order to identify deficits in the existing literature, offer a specific cultural reading of that literature and to establish the basis for this study. We find the orthodox literature does not advance much beyond lay understandings, is not cumulative and struggles to distinguish the causes of good (and bad) conversation from the definition of good (and bad) conversation. It is interesting nevertheless that the divergent heuristics which established authors offer follow the four thought styles exactly as specified by Grid-Group Cultural Theory, doing so unknowingly. In other words, academic conversations about workplace conversations are explicable through G-GCT.

Chapter 3, Methodology, outlines the approaches adopted and how the techniques are designed to attain specific, accurate and informative classification of results.

Chapter 4 and 5 present the main findings. Chapter 4 summarizes and analyses the interview evidence about past experience of good and bad workplace conversations. Here, given statements are categorised according to what our respondents thought of as better and worse conversations. Here we rely on interviewees' common-sense understandings of what enables good (and bad) conversations and tabulate these, much as the existing literature on workplace conversation does, that is, empirically and with little application of theory. The employees interviewed felt that their 'bad conversations' were mostly the other person's fault – a typical common-sense evaluation. This method was also limited by the practical impossibility of interviewing the other party, for reasons of confidentiality, distance, time and death of others.

Chapter 5, Primary Evidence created through Prepared Role-plays is laid out in detail and classified according to the Thought Styles employed by both parties to each dyad, using G-GCT. It should become clear exactly what is happening at each turn in each conversation in a

way that should also makes sense of those interview findings. As in social work training practice we incorporated third party evaluations. These take the form of ‘outer circles’ who observed each role-playing dyad as they engaged in conversation and were then de-briefed about what they thought of what the role-players had said. These outer circles also questioned the role-players directly about why they had said particular things at particular moments. G-GCT should be robust enough to classify these third-party evaluations just as precisely as to the Thought-Styles (rationalities) that enable them.

Chapter 6, The Discussion and Conclusions summarise and synthesise. Here we urge the direction which future research should take, fresh applications for our theory and methods and acknowledge the limitations of the research we have undertaken.

## Chapter 2 : Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

There are two main parts to the literature reviewed here: 1) prior literature on workplace conversation and existing orthodox models, 2) the literature detailing Grid-Group Cultural Theory (G-GCT), which to our knowledge has, never been applied to workplace conversations. Only very recently, G-GCT has however been applied to ‘organisational silences’. We will not be reviewing the literature known as Conversation Analysis (CA) as this is restricted to the mechanics of conversation (turn-taking, turn-transitional relevant points, etc.) and expressly excludes consideration of the *content* of conversation which is our primary focus.

Prevailing conceptualisation of conversation dwell, particularly on difficult workplace conversations. This acknowledges the importance and *role* (i.e., the putative ‘functions’) of conversation. This enables us to contrast orthodox frameworks and our preferred approach. Thereafter, G-GCT is introduced.

As well as ‘research gaps’ in the existing literature on conversation, the radically enhanced capability which G-GCT brings to conversational analysis and evaluation will begin to become clear. In a nutshell the prior literature is limited because conversation is a *cultural phenomenon*, but most conversational researchers are not *scientists of culture*. Although many of the authors reviewed border on cultural understandings (notably in making what we term ‘Hierarchical’ and ‘Egalitarian’ recommendations) they do so naively, unaware of the culturally-enabled bases for their own reasonings; unaware of what it is that they do not know what they do not know.

We are confident that there is no current literature applying G-GCT to conversation, and we did not arrive at our solution via searching the literature. Our G-GCT solution was emergent. It isn’t there to be found, yet.

### 2.2 Search Strategy

The search engines ‘Google Scholar’ and ‘Baidu’ were used for gathering literature. It took several phases of systematic research to find the most relevant key search terms, with ‘*conversation*’ being the first word to search, expanding from there to cover a wide range of

areas. Most of the papers found under the search term '*conversation*' were very general in scope or non-specific to the subject of study, including papers on daily conversation, conversational theory, or languages used in conversation. In order to uncover the research targets, advanced filtering of results and the narrowing of search criteria were applied, to include '*workplace*' related items, and the prefixes '*org...*', '*work...*', '*employ...*', and '*manage...*'. Alternative techniques were to incorporate terms relating to conversation quality, such as '*good*' or '*bad*', or synonyms like '*beneficial*', '*productive*', '*challenging*', and '*difficult*'. Additionally, in order to understand how conversation is being assessed and analysed, search phrases relating to theory, like '*conversational analysis*' and '*conversational framework*' were used. The initial research efforts toward the literature review covered a 30-year period from 1985-2015, with a later series of searches undertaken to seek out updated publications made between 2016-2020, to ensure that the latest findings are reviewed and incorporated.

At a later stage to the initial literature review, G-GCT was introduced by my supervisor, Dr. Stephen Smith, who has been a long-standing member of the *Annual Mary Douglas Seminar* network. As we described each of the Thought Styles (Voices, Rationalities, Solidarities), this author began to recognise how G-GCT should apply readily to rationalities expressed at the micro scale (i.e., conversations). It may have been Cultural Theorists use of the term 'Voices' (which they use interchangeably with other terms) which provided encouragement.

It was suspected and then 'hypothesized' more formally that G-GCT would give extra, innovative insights into conversation study. Thus, the search terms '*G-GCT*' or '*Cultural Theory*' became involved, coupled with aforementioned key words, like '*organisational*' or '*conversation*', to find the most relevant resources to the application of G-GCT within the scope of the subject of study. Most unfortunately much 'Cultural Theory' contains no *explanation* of for Culture(!) but is merely descriptive. Indeed, Hofstede's work treats 'national cultures' as both *given, static* and that which *persists*. From there it explains conflict as clashes of these unexplained cultures. Our argument was to be that *culture is what drives change* and creates movement in conversations, not as one national culture versus another but at four universally possible Thought Styles. The Hofstedian literature on 'organisational culture' recognises of course that 'conflict' happens and that 'planned organisational change', at least as planned from above is difficult to accomplish as it is usually 'resisted'. Even so, that does not amount to an *explanation* for why change happens when it does, nor an explanation of what animates thoughts and why those thoughts are the way they are.



Throughout several search stages, ‘snowballing’ techniques were used for identifying related journals, papers, and other relevant sources, that had not already been found through the primary search strategy (by following up citations).

Academic literature was the primary focus, however, since the relevance of the research is intended to extend beyond a strictly academic audience, additional sources were not excluded where fitting, such as conference papers and articles from relevant organisations. Such materials were separately sourced through appropriate websites, the reference lists of papers and journals, and through conversation and networking at seminars, conferences and other events. Alike the primary research targets, the same ‘snowballing’ technique was followed to provide suitable sources, helping to advance the search tangentially, in offering additional publications from unintentional though relevant stakeholders. This is akin to picking library books within a similar ‘class-mark’ further along the shelf to the ‘target’ book: browsing.

## **2.3 Conversation in the Workplace**

Perhaps it is obvious that conversation plays a central role in the leadership and management of organisations (Jian and Dalisay, 2017; Holton and Grandy, 2016; Meyer et al., 2017; McCambridge, 2003; Men and Stacks, 2014; Preget, 2013; Svennevig, 2008). Many have attempted to understand how conversation operates and influences organisations, particularly its association with:

- organisation commitment (OC) (Jian and Dalisay, 2017; Lewis et al., 2006; Walden, et al., 2017)
- conversation and leader-member exchange (LMX) (Fix and Sias, 2006; Fairhurst, 1993; Lee, 1999; Mueller and Lee, 2002)

Although these are not the only frameworks ((Baker et al., 2005, 2016; Hoon, 2007, 2016; Gratton and Ghoshal, 2002; Walden, et al., 2017); *et cetera*.

By focusing on the manager-employee dyad, conversation studies suggest that ‘quality’ conversations enhance positive feelings and satisfaction of employees by improving their perception of available support, thus contributing to OC (Van Vuuren, et al., 2007). It is supposed that a wide variety of tasks such as problem solving, leadership, training and role negotiation will be improved if manager and employee understand each other’s utterances in

pursuit of both routine and non-routine work (Fairhurst, 1993). The premise is quite a simple and common-sense one, namely that ‘poor performance’ is one outcome of ‘poor conversation’.

The objection we have is that this premise leaves out the question of how well intentioned conversants can arrive at radically different and conflicting reasons for conflicting opinions, which make continuous agreement all the time most improbable. The problem of disagreement is of course recognised widely because it is so obvious (Overton and Lowry, 2013; Pesarin et al., 2012). As we will see explanations such as ‘personality differences’ and ‘conflicting interests’ are inadequate because:

a) conversants can *disagree strongly* with each other and yet use the *same form of reasoning* (the same thought style)

b) conversants can come to an *agreement* despite arriving at it using *radically opposed* forms of reasoning. Conflicting forms of reasoning can be highly creative

c) conversants can also fail to agree because they are using radically opposed forms of reasoning. Conflicting forms of reasoning can be highly destructive, often called ‘challenging conversations’

We will be suggesting that no conversant is ‘irrational’ but that conflicting rationalities are available to cultural subjects, meaning that sincere protagonists can be equally convinced of the rightness of their (conflicting) reasonings. Indeed, it is these ‘thought styles’ that make conversations possible, animating conversants and conversations, making the conversation feel worthwhile and even urgent.

We will turn first to an array of research on workplace conversation from different angles, including organisational learning, organisational change, organisational commitment and organisational performance. Numerous researchers have developed frameworks and models in attempting to assess conversation. These include Couturier and Sklavounos’s (2019) framework of ‘Performance Dialogue’; Mengis and Eppler’s (2008) framework of ‘Conversation Management’; Ford and Ford’s (2008) ‘Four types of Conversation’. How do these frameworks apply to workplace conversation?

### 2.3.1 Conceptualization of Conversation

Going back to the 1940's, Shannon and Weaver (1949) proposed that the transfer of informative messages through a medium between 'sender' and 'recipient', constituting the 'communication process'. Judging by their terminology, these authors seem to have had radio-communications in mind. The content of what is said seemed to be of relatively interest to Shannon and Weaver, problem conversations being attributed to faults in the quality of transmission and reception. It is a short next step to recognise that communication is an interactive message sharing activity, "*what is said and listened to*" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Zaffron, 1995; cited in Ford, 1999). Conversation comprises an extensive range of acts, from simple statements to complex interpersonal discourse (Boje, 1991), narratives (Fisher, 1987) and arguments (de Vries, 2009; 2010).

The term conversation ranges from the narrow definition of talking to a wider interpretation of conversation representing 'human transactions' (Goffman, 1981). A conversation may be ongoing over time and span numerous participants, exemplified by Wanous (1992) by religion and the socialization of new staff entering an organisation. Conversation is composed of the spoken message or symbols and its theatrics (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), such as facial expressions and body language, along with others forms of expression like song (Ford and Ford, 1999). Conversation may take the form of a monologue, or a dialogue involving two or more participants (Shotter, 1993), the dyad being the main focus of our study.

According to Mengis and Eppler (2008), acts of conversation are constitutive of ourselves, our world and our being. Thus, conversation can contain numerous activities through sharing internal realisations and views through which the social world is interpreted. But what we do not read here is how 'realisations' are formed and why they have the contents which they have.

- Why do we have 'world views'?
- Why one 'world view' rather than another?
- Why do protagonists have different world views, even if they inhabit the same group, or larger organisation?
- Why is one world view antagonistic to another?
- Why does anybody change their mind?

- Why the strong urge to have conversations at all and why do protagonists sometimes become silent?

The orthodox literature recognises that conversations are accomplishments of the social group, follow ‘cultural’ rules, involve ‘information sharing’, and ‘build relationships’ and understandings, which contribute to the co-creation of reality (Goffman, 1967; Levinson, 1983; Mengis and Eppler, 2008). They are also said to develop consistent knowledge and perspectives between the participants, or ‘knowing-from within’ thereby creating content that is unknown to those excluded (Shotter, 1993; Ford and Ford, 2008). Note that this view of conversations as *convergent* conflicts directly with the ‘different world views’ proposition and that these offerings do not really answer the three questions just posed. If ‘world views’ conflict then how is ‘information shared’ and ‘relationships built’? However, we accept the focus on what we could call face-to-face ‘message content interactions’, as opposed to treating conversation as ‘units’ (Levinson, 1983; Mengis and Eppler, 2008), or technical adult accomplishments involving turn taking, interruptions and so on.

Mengis and Eppler (2008) sought to summarise various forms of intra-organisational conversation based on previous research, including simple formats of generative dialogue, such as ‘good conversation’, ‘honest conversation’, ‘powerful conversation’, ‘skilful conversation’, ‘strategic conversation’, and ‘appreciative conversation’. These attribute-labels have a similarity in denoting ‘good’ in terms of ‘*what you say*’, vocal interactions in which relevant information is retrieved from among the parties involved, accomplished by participation, listening, and challenging views (Quinn, 1996; Mengis and Eppler, 2008). There is a clear root assumption here, namely that if all conversations are open, honest, authentic and share the right messages and information, it will be very easy for conversants to communicate and meet their needs, feelings and thoughts, and that the conversation will realise its goals (Farrell, 2015; Meyer, et al., 2017; Thomson, 2011; Walden, et al., 2017). We do not read here how the rightness of information and messages is to be judged (how truths and falsehoods are to be distinguished). The ‘functionalist’ nature of the authors’ writing is easier to see when they describe bad conversation. For example Mengis and Eppler’s (2008) distinguish the ‘good fight’ (constructive and continuous operational control over arguments), as opposed to “*dysfunctional interpersonal conflict*” (Eisenhardt et al., 2000; Mengis and Eppler, 2008), in which control is lost.

According to Franco (2017; 2006), there are five available forms of conversations:

- Dialogue
- Debate
- Persuasion
- Negotiation
- Deliberation

The first four can be used during conflict over opinions or interests: dialogue for sharing perspectives; debate for promoting your case; persuasion for convincing others; and negotiation for confirming agreed actions. Deliberation, the last attribute, is a conversational feature pending action which is not yet forthcoming (Bohman, 1996 cited in Franco, 2006; 2017). The participants state the personal preferences which are the cause of the conflict, yet no matter what form of conversation, the ultimate aim of ‘resolutive conversation’ is action subsequent to agreement. In other words, an ideal is being suggested, based on a classification of diverse observed conversations and a normative commitment to action rather than inaction. There is no explanation as to how protagonists get from a (given) ‘interest’ to an ‘opinion’. Note that many protagonists share what could be said to be an ‘interest’, such as workers faced with redundancy. Some ‘unite and fight’, some ‘stick to the collective bargaining agreement’, some try to ‘cut a deal’ privately. Others give up and ‘hide their heads in the sand’ and all of them have reasons which seem good enough to them.

From the foregoing review of definitions and models of conversation, several key points can be extracted however:

(1) conversations comprise of two (dyadic) or more speakers (private thoughts and feelings are omitted)

(2) participants must be competent communicators (Habermas, 1984)

(3) successful conversations are supposed to advance participants towards their ‘goals’ (Franco, 2017; 2006)

In passing, our observation is that this much is known universally, well beyond the academy. In other words, the literature on conversation is somewhat common-sensical. While there is little to disagree with, it is ultimately uninformative.

### 2.3.2 The Role of Conversation in the workplace

Conversation is recognized to be foundational to organisations: a key process through which staff can share information, re-affirm relationships, form interpretations, clarify values and culture (Berger, 2008). From this clearly functionalist approach ‘effective communication’ within organisations is integral to the construction and development of beneficial employee attitudes, including organisational commitment (Jian and Dalisay, 2017; Jo and Shim, 2005), job satisfaction (Fix and Sias, 2006; Gray and Laidlaw, 2004) and job engagement (Walden, et al., 2017). By ‘functionalist’ we mean analysis which presupposes:

- that phenomena (parts) exist in order to contribute to the well-being of the system of which they are a part
- that once their functional contribution has been identified, then the existence of that part has been explained
- that difficulties arise from ‘dysfunctional’ parts (which call for treatment or removal and replacement by healthy parts) or ‘pathology’ (dysfunctions which are exogenous to the system and which come to infect it, again calling for treatment, isolation or other protective measures)

Functionalist analysis works well in medicine, for example, (enabling organs to be understood according to what they contribute to ‘homeostasis’ and how they are disrupted by pathologies) but as we will see runs into difficulties when applied to cultural phenomena like conversations which are not homeostatic and vary in ‘temperature’ very much, from very quiet to ‘screaming matches’. Only if all is well do effective conversations also improve trust (Börjeson, 2017, 2018; Meyer et al., 2017; Farrell, 2015; Reina and Reina, 2006; Tannen, 1995) and strengthen ties between the employee and both the leader (Fairhurst, 1993; Fix and Sias, 2006; Jian and Dalisay, 2017; Lee, 1999, 2001; Mueller and Lee, 2002) and the organisation (Men and Stacks, 2014; Kim and Rhee, 2011). In return for enriched internal relationships and employee attitudes, productivity, clarity (Allard-Poesi, 2015; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011), organisational performance, organisational learning, decision-making (Baker et al., 2005; 2016; Berger, 2008; Crumpton, 2012; Ford and Ford, 2008; Mengis and Eppler, 2008), as well as overall quality of organisational output and operation (Lewin and Minton, 1986; Schein, 1993; Tucker et al., 1996) are all supposed to follow. Note that many of these qualities are co-constitutive (functional) for each other, such as strengthened ties and employee attitudes. It is difficult to

say which of these presumed homeostatic interdependent functions comes first. These accounts are teleological, of the ‘chicken and egg’ type.

The overall preoccupation with the functioning of the whole is clear: “*conversation is part of the mechanisms through which an organisation is realised*” (Taylor and Van Every, 1999), both in communicating strategic direction and structure, as well as arranging relationships and outcomes, to create realities (Jian and Dalisay, 2017).

Adopting a constructive attitude is deemed (functionally) essential Sanoff (2008), in which a suspension of judgement and an emphasis on honesty and listening are necessary to creating collaborative discoveries and unified participatory agreement (Burr and Larson, 2010) also known as ‘unitarism’. Meanwhile, Burr and Larson (2010) argue that it is unavoidable conflictual interactions and not orderly consensus, that create innovation, if controlled in an orderly way within quality conversation. This idea that conflict can be functional is something we will return to. But how is it ‘controlled’ and kept ‘orderly’?

### **2.3.2.1 Perspective of Leader-Member relationship**

For Taylor and Van Every’s (1999) conversations between manager and employee *should* be daily and are a key part(*sic*) of the organisation’s mechanism. These interactions contribute to the organisation’s culture and results. Walden et al. (2017) found that unobstructed managerial promotion of internal information and feedback improved employee’s engagement and, by extension, their organisational commitment. Men and Stacks (2014) draw attention to other literature emphasising the engagement effects of leader communication approaches, though acknowledging lack of research about the effectiveness of different communication styles. We judge ‘effective’ according to what standards of effectiveness?

Jian and Dalisay (2017) found that ‘leader-member conversational quality’ (LMCQ) influences organization commitment (OC) based on the theory of leader-member exchange (LMX) and social exchange theory. LMX (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) posits that leaders’ relationships with each member of their team, based on a multitude of factors (such as extraversion and respect), varies between employees, and that these better or worse relationships effect employee outcomes. LMCQ, inspired by the ‘interaction richness theory’ (Barry and Crant, 2000), applies to the quality of leader-member conversation dyads in regard to goal accomplishment (Jian et al., 2014). Again, these arguments are clearly functionalist in character,

without being able to say *why* an accomplishment is to be recognised as such. It is not clear why ‘organisational commitment’ should be considered as good, for it overlooks the possibility that an organisation might have a destructive purpose, the pursuit of which might be considered criminal. In other words, by which evaluation criteria is a conversation to be judged ‘good’ or ‘bad’ and how are these evaluation criteria arrived at?

The previous research explored interaction outcomes using LMX with communication style (Fix and Sias, 2006; Lee, 2001) and both quality and quantity of information (Mueller and Lee, 2002; Sias, 2005). It should be noted that functionalism presumes a healthy *equilibrium* state in which the whole system has attained something akin to *homeostasis*.

However, Fairhurst (1993) took a noticeably different approach and came to a very *dynamic* and *heterogenous* view of conversations which we welcome. A comparative study of communicative practices between employees and their managers was made using audio recordings of real-time workplace conversations. Fairhurst (1993) distinguished *twelve* patterns of discourse that could be differentiated into *three* levels of LMX success. Paying attention to each ‘conversational move’, it was found that with higher levels of LMX, associative and cooperative movements happen, such as mutual agreements, due to closer relationships with minimal ‘*power games*’ (Jian and Dalisay, 2017). Lower ranked LMX relationships, however, follow a more disruptive pattern of movement, with various interjections produced by polarised positions that increase power differences (Jian and Dalisay, 2017). The study suggests that leader-member relationships (as well as gender differences, which are beyond the scope of this study) are a) complicated, b) demonstrate many different constructions, and c) that dyadic conversations are highly dynamic in their movements. We agree; but again, pose the same questions as above: Why do we have world views? Why one ‘world view’ rather than another? Why is one world view so often antagonistic to another?

Our point? Answer these questions and those complicated and dynamic introjections, polarisation and heterogeneity should become intelligible.

Fairhurst is supported by Lee (1999) in a study revealing that LMX and expectations of conversation influenced each other. But unlike Fairhurst’s (1993) qualitative approach, Lee (1999) chose quantitative methods to add new insight to the LMX conversational research. High LMX employees were found to self-motivate to meet their positive expectations from conversations with managers, while low LMX subordinates expecting less from such conversations would act in a manner which ensured negative results (Lee, 1999). Positive and



negative *expectations* of what the conversation would bring affected the quality of LMX. If we have a criticism to offer it might be that LMX and the quality of expectations are somewhat tautological. Jian et al. (2014) also examined the quality of leader-member conversation effects on LMX quality, preferring quantitative study of statistical patterns in conversational practices. They found a significant positive correlation between conversation ‘quality’ and ‘commitment’, arguing that this strengthened relationships (Jian and Dalisay, 2017). In other words, studies on LMX and LMCQ seek out the ‘functional’ attributes of specific communicative approaches (Jian and Dalisay, 2017), for the ‘health’ overall of organisations. Unfortunately, although Jian and Dalisay (2017) have suggested the value of high-quality conversation in terms of its impact on employee relationships and by the same token on the wider organization, they offer no practical guidance about how the parties involved should approach conversation in order to attain quality, nor even as to how to *evaluate* conversation. However working in a similar functionalist manner, others have extended research to encompass how conversation influences the relationship between LMX and other variable outcomes including the *quantity* and *quality of information*, the *tactics* employed, and *styles* of communication (Lee, 2001; Fix and Sias, 2006). As we will see later, tactics and style are important features of what we see as *cultural* reasoning, though neither Lee nor Fix and Sias extend their analysis in specifically cultural terms.

#### **2.3.2.2 Perspective on ‘Organisational Performance’**

In a similarly functionalist vein, researchers have inferred healthy (and unhealthy) relationships between conversation and organisational performance as measured by Performance Measurement Systems (PMS) (Bruijn and van Helden, 2006; Malina and Selto, 2001; Tucker et al., 1996). A close reading of the key assumptions behind PMS (especially of its early proponents) finds these to be that

- a) an organisation’s strategic goals can be defined specifically and are additive (non-conflicting)
- b) these goals are definitive and uncontested (they are the unproblematic attributes of a healthy organisation)
- c) goals should be chosen by senior leaders, determined by conversations at senior levels

- d) others (followers) should accept these goals as their own
- e) organisational outputs can be measured against those goals
- f) progress towards one goal can be considered additive to progress towards another goal (what an organisation does ‘adds up’)
- g) the objective of PMS’s is to enable organisations to ‘move forwards’ towards their goals
- h) repeated time-series measurements will track whether or not the organisation is moving forwards, deviating or going backwards
- i) deviance is the principal cause of failure (rejection of goals, substitution with unofficial goals, deviations from targets)
- j) organisations which do not have PMS’s will perform less well than those which do
- k) it is also implicit in early PMS theory especially, that leader-follower conversations will be hierarchical, shaped by goals, for example setting the agenda for Appraisal Meetings

Later advocates of PMSs have extended the reach of PM beyond financial metrics to include non-financial indicators (Kennerly and Neely, 2003), notably Kaplan and Norton’s ‘Balanced Scorecard’ (1996), Neely et al.’s ‘Performance Prism’ (2002) and the ‘Skandia Navigator’ system elaborated by Edvinsson and Malone (1997). Regular assessments will, it is believed, improve even ‘high performing’ enterprises (Ovemomi et al., 2016), the aim being to “*manage through measures*” (Busi and Bititci, 2006) supporting decision making and resource allocation in accordance with the values of *efficiency*, *productivity* and *profitability* (Huarng, 2011). What seems to be missing among these values are *survival*, *innovation* or say, *social justice*. A development of ‘Measurement by Objectives’, repeated cycles of performance measurement and review are meant to enable organisations to make accurate assessments of outputs against targets, improving performance.

However, if we consider each of the PMS assumptions listed above, difficulties can be anticipated in practice. How are metrics to be chosen? What if the successful attainment of a goal sends an organisation into crisis, for example profit maximisation at the expense of plant health and safety or customer safety? What if important activities which are not measured are ignored and even abandoned on the assumption that because they are not counted they do

matter? What if a metric is much less relevant to official goals than leaders assume? What if there are measurement errors, for example introduced by employees ‘gaming the system’ to boost their performance bonuses? What if data is lagged by many months? What if targets are met at all costs? For discussion see Enoma and Allen (2007), Ittner and Larcker (2003), McCunn (1998) and Parker, (2000).

The Global Financial Crisis of 2007-8 demonstrated that extremely high-performing organisations (with the highest *objective and measurable* profit- and growth-rates) were capable of tipping entire sectors into crisis, caused difficulties for central bankers and required bail-outs which will have to be repaid by future generations.

Partly in acknowledgement of what can be considered as ‘dysfunctions’, several authors have attempted to revise and refine PMSs (Bourne et al., 2000; Moullin, 2004; Neely et al., 1995). Indeed, Micheli and Mari (2014) conceded that measurement in the social sciences offers epistemological ‘insights’, revealing contexts rather than unproblematic universal truths (see also Bohm (1980) cited in Couturier and Sklavounos (2019)). There may be hidden dangers in over-reliance on PMS, especially if the information gathered is mistaken for objective correspondence with an ‘external world’ which cannot be known. The argument is that because PMS data is ‘socially constructed’ it should not be mistaken for an objective window on a somehow separate, independent reality. Indeed, later we will be suggesting that *culturally constructed* is a more specific explanation of how understandings are created in a highly dynamic way which cannot attain equilibrium. In other words, no social construction is immune from criticisms of specific and recognisable types of conflicting reasoning which animate conversations.

We do not *disagree* that communication is critical to what happens (Daft and Lewin, 1993; Tucker et al., 1996), nor that the sharing of employee experiences through conversation is valuable to educating others (Courturier and Sklavounos, 2019; Malina and Selto, 2001; Schindler and Eppler, 2003). But while it would seem obvious that *effective* design and communication of PMS improves team outcomes towards targets (Malina and Salto, 2001), and *unsuccessful* communication of PMS negatively impacts organisational strategic targets, such claims are rhetorical and even tautological. It can be said just as well that successful attainment of an unwise target can drive an organisation to destruction and that failure to attain a bad target can save an organisation from disaster. The attainment of ‘cost reductions’ meant that prices were kept lower but also there were too few lifeboats on the *Titanic*.

Our point? Bourne et al., (2000); De Bruijn, (2002); De Bruijn and Helden, (2006) assert that manager-employee dialogue is integral to designing and reinforcing the organisational strategy and culture, and allows for information, experience and idea sharing. But what if managers (or for that matter their direct reports) are involved in a strategy that does not fit the ‘risk season’ which their organisation inhabits (Thompson, 2018)? What if conversations are dedicated to solving an historic challenge that has passed and circumstances have changed? What if conversations ignore emergent problems (the new ‘elephant in the room’) because the PMS is designed to support last year’s strategic preoccupations? What if conversations and goals should have moved on, but have not? How is the *quality* of one conversation to be evaluated in comparison with another one?

Not all advocates of PMS make the assumptions listed a) to k) above. In attempting to connect performance metrics with more distributed conversations, Moynihan (2005) envisions ‘performance dialogue’ focused on meaningful dissemination of the reasons for performance data gathering through participation in systems, integrating PMS measurements with personal perspectives. Performance-based meetings should produce actionable outcomes, add Laihonon and Mäntylä (2017) through the combined participant influences of *experience, education* and *individual understanding* (Wouters and Wilderom, 2008). However, a major criticism of this work is that while it acknowledges that performance dialogues could have some bottom-upwards influence on PMS’s, it stops short of specifically describing how to hold effective performance dialogue, much beyond claiming that meetings should be structured (Couturier and Sklavounos, 2019). While the later contributions to PMS theory are noticeably more egalitarian (allowing for participatory conversations), it remains to be asked why highly profitable and fast-growing organisations such as *Semco* succeed without PMSs and even without arrangements that resemble ‘structures’ at all.

For reasons cultural which will again become much clearer later, performance dialogue, whether formal or informal, is vulnerable to adverse employee reactions, reasoned rejection of goals, compromised relationships which, if PMS theory is right, should entail reduced performance (Baron, 1988; Geddes and Baron, 1997, 2016; Ilgen and Davis, 2000, 2001; Bradley and Campbell, 2016). The welcome analysis of Couturier and Sklavounos (2019) found a variety of recurrent characteristics of performance dialogue, including:

- insufficient role clarity
- insufficient time

- faulty processes
- inaccuracies
- divergent goals
- tensions associated with contrasting communicative cultures

Their solutions follow quite directly from their findings: better allocation of roles, more time, *etc.* Again, as we will see later, evaluations about whether or not enough time is available and about how urgent an issue is will vary radically according to the form of reasoning employed by protagonists. One party to a conversation will feel that time is desperately short and action is needed immediately, while the other party will feel that the same issue is non-urgent and that there is plenty of time for many long conversations before the matter needs to be resolved. One feature of Grid-Group Cultural Theory parties can bring equally reasonable but conflicting rationalities to a conversation... and switch and even swap between these rationalities during the conversation.

Following a case study of managers, Couturier and Sklavounos (2019) propose what we read as a heuristic (rule-of-thumb) model based on an original model by Mengis and Eppler (2008). For effective management of performance dialogue they recommend a four-step process: 1) information-gathering which recognises areas of concern 2) discussion of root causes and actionable resolutions, 3) reviewing specifics and arriving at agreement, 4) determining and implementing the best-fitting practices. What this kind of model does not address is

- what kinds of information is salient to whom and why
- how participants arrive at what they consider to be root causes and why root causes may be disputed
- how agreement is possible
- how 'best practices' are identified and by whom
- how it is decided that the conversation has completed one stage and is now moving to the next

While the simplicity of this four-step heuristic is appealing, we think it underestimates the complex dynamics of conversations and does not qualify as an explanation, particularly of

disagreements. We are not persuaded that ‘Performance Dialogues’ can be made to follow a standard process.

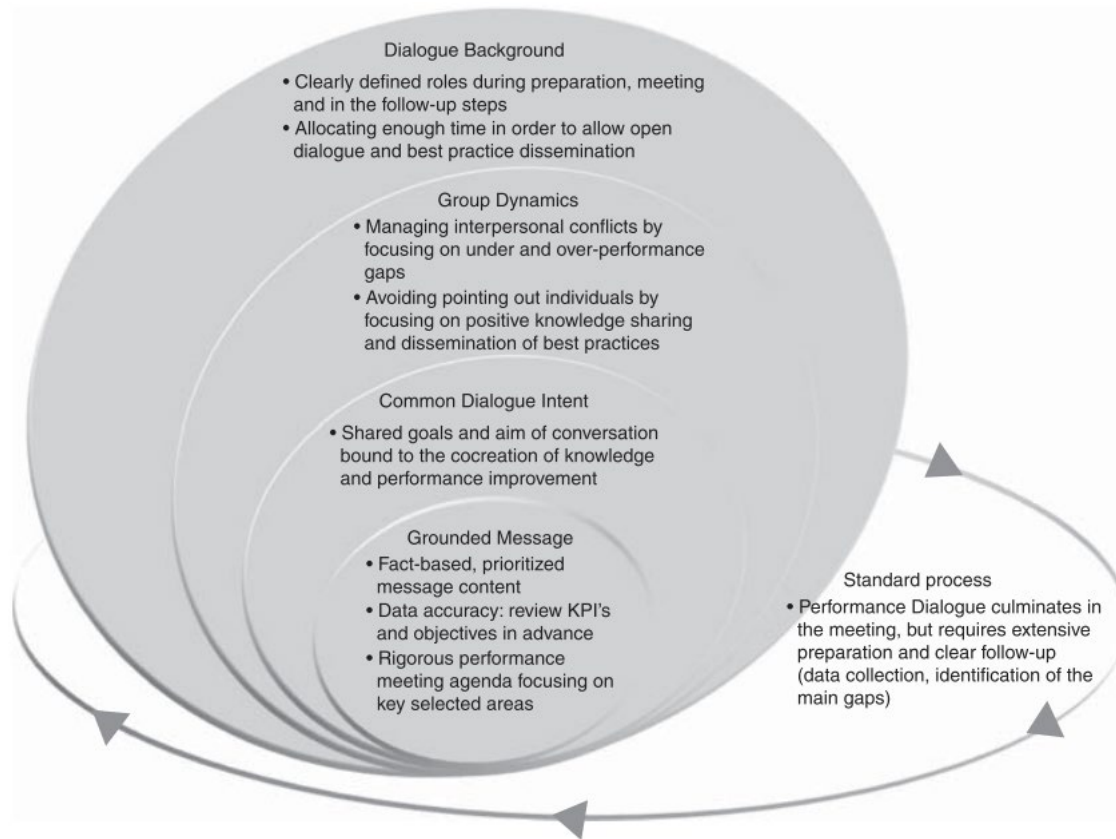


Figure 2.1: Performance Dialogue Framework (Couturier and Sklavounos, 2019)

It is difficult to see why the goals of a conversation will be shared; yet from a review of PMS studies integrative dialogue is seen as vital. We also note that most studies focus on dyadic conversations within a single industry, from which it is difficult to generalise and have little or nothing to say about conversation contents. It is also quite difficult to understand why one layer is placed in front of another, why the surface layer (Grounded Message) is at the bottom or why the ‘orbiting’ arrows go around in the same direction. There is no explanation for why there should be Common Dialogue Intent rather than fundamental conflicts in ‘world views’. It strikes us as improbable that all those present in the same meeting have the same public (and private) intent.

### 2.3.2.3 Perspective of Knowledge

Other scholars working on workplace conversations from within the ‘knowledge perspective’, such as Mengis and Eppler (2008), aim to develop a framework using communication theory to understand and manage conversations in a systematic manner.

Conversation for knowledge sharing and not just for information transmission, enable parties to “engage in interactions to affirm themselves” (Goffman, 1981), and demonstrate their relationships with others (Watzlawick et al., 1967). Through engagement, social context is established (Giddens, 1984) and socially derived knowledge is advanced (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). In other words, interaction enables each party to derive and form their opinions and ideas. We welcome this recognition that opinion formation and relationships are dynamic even if an explanation as to how is missing. But it is not always the case that dialogue is an effective medium for inquiry, learning and new thinking, through which ‘collective intelligence’ emerges (Isaacs, 1993). Again, conversations can but often do not enable sense to be made of actions (Weick, 1979) through use of metaphor, logic, sentiment and expressive ambiguity (Donnellon et al., 1986). And yet again, while dialogues *can* provide for an exchange of messages, clarification of issues, meanings and actions and *may* build better understanding of emotions and behaviour, they *often do not*, especially when the nature of the context is disputed.

According to Mengis and Eppler (2008), “*conversations are a highly flexible, interactive and iterative form of communication, and participants can ask clarifying questions, deepen certain aspects, ask for the larger context of a specific issue, and gradually adapt their communication style and content to the language and knowledge of the vis-à-vis*”. Kotter (1996) suggests acceptance of change also requires communication through which individuals can resolve reservations by knowing the change and learning their roles in the process. But neither of these functional claims made for conversations are a theory of conversation.

Why is it *not* always the case that “*people create shared experiences through conversations*” (Mengis and Eppler, 2008), which reinforce trusting relationships (Harkins, 1999), but on the contrary *antagonises* each other. Are relations integral to sharing (Szulanski, 1996), creating (Von Krogh et al., 2000) and integrating (Eisenhardt and Santos, 2000) knowledge? Why is it *not* always the case that conversations create trust and strengthens relationships by sharing experience or creating knowledge and information conversation (Von Krogh et al., 2000)?

What explains the *scope* and *unpredictability* of conversations, their chaotic quality which researchers have struggled to identify systematically and accurately, despite trying (Mengis and

Eppler, 2008)? Argyris (1996) recognises defensive argument and Ellinor and Gerard (1998) limits on turn-taking which restrict knowledge sharing however while it is difficult to disagree with either claims, it is difficult to see these as adding up to a coherent theory of all conversation and sense-making.

Numerous studies have attempted to identify rules and methods for managing conversations so that they create or integrate knowledge (Baker et al., 2005, 2016; Crumpton, 2012; Ford, 1999; Mengis and Eppler, 2008). Mengis and Eppler (2008) developed on communicative models known as ‘Conversation Management’, for knowledge-intensive conversations within organisations. Six dimensions were offered:

- ‘Communicative Background’
- ‘Group Dynamics’
- ‘Conversational Intent’
- ‘Grounded and Embedded Style’ and
- ‘Mental Models’, which together create
- the ‘Balanced Conversation Process’

Why these features should result in ‘Balanced Conversation’ is difficult to see and it is equally difficult to use these dimensions in order to understand why ‘Unbalanced’ conversations take place. Couturier and Sklavounos (2019) urge that this framework should be adapted for performance dialogue, while agreeing that conversation is a system.

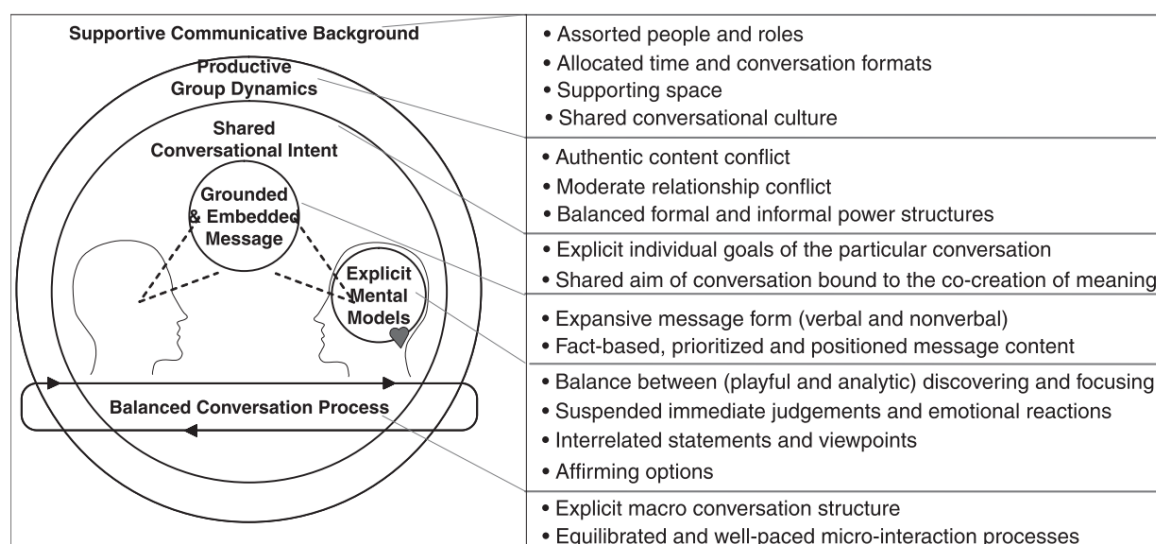


Figure 2.2: A Framework for the Management of Knowledge-intensive Conversations in Organization (Mengis and Eppler, 2008)



Rather than viewing conversation as ‘layers’ orbited by a ‘Standard’ cycle (Couturier and Sklavounos, 2019) Fig 2.1, Ford and Ford (1995) offered four types of conversation, at least within the process of organisational change:

- ‘Initiative’
- ‘Understanding’
- ‘Performance’
- ‘Closure’

Our reading is that this is nevertheless a normative four-stage heuristic of how conversations should go rather than an explanation of why they unfold in the unpredictable ways in which they do and often do *not* end in ‘closure’. Each stage is supposed to have a specific aim (function) contributing to closure (Ford and Ford, 1995), but this action-orientated linear sequence idealizes the handling of complex and difficult conversations. The assumption that planned conversations with intentional targets is, in Grid-Group Cultural Theory terms limited to the hierarchical way of thinking and omits three other equally reasonable, culturally available prototypes and many, many hybrid forms of reasoning, in which one or both protagonists can be in ‘more than one mind’ about what will be for the best.

We are uncomfortable with the depiction of thoughts as originating in given individuals’ ‘heads’ as shown in the diagram above. Yet, we do not meet as pre-cultural beings, out of whose heads conversation is made. As we argue later, thoughts are possible because protagonists are *cultural subjects* blessed with socially enabled rationalities, but not pre-cultural, out of which the social and for that matter, groups and organisation are created somehow bottom up.

Ford and Ford (2008) concentrated valuably on when exactly to apply each type of conversation, *empirically*. This approach represents a definite advance in that it recognises that different types of problems call for different forms of conversation. Their approach has since been used as a tool to create conversational profiles. These take the form of graphs depicting the relative frequency of a manager’s use of each of the four conversation types, enabling subsequent analysis. That is, Ford and Ford captured empirical evidence in the form of transcripts to which content analysis and classifications can be applied.

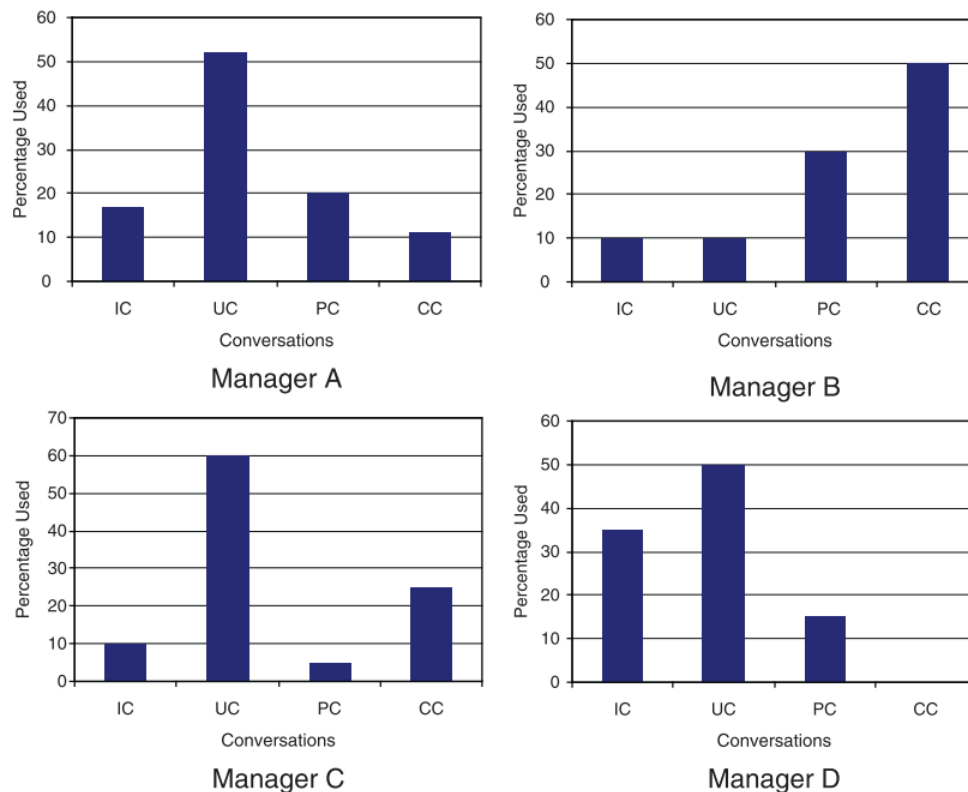


Figure 2.3: Four Illustrative Conversational Profiles (Ford and Ford, 2008)

What is also pleasing here is that ‘conversation profiles’ can be appraised very quickly at a glance in graphical form, making comparisons straightforward. Conversation profiles are a convenient tool for mapping conversation systematically and for comparing these against changes, with indications from Bridges (2004) recording the effectiveness of certain combinations for specific types of conversations. “*The presumption of Conversational Profiles is that language is performative and that what happens during the change process is a function of the conversations in which people engage*” (Ford and Ford, 2008). This identifies the inherent change occurring in a conversation as a feature of research interest, in that conversation is shaped by the representations and purposes of the language used. Although Lewin (1947) is famous for his three stages of change model (‘unfreezing-movement-refreezing’) Ford and Ford may have provided methodological means for understanding the types of conversation entailed at each of these stages. However, we feel that what is also needed is understanding and categorisation of the other party to each conversation. This is needed because conversation is a dynamic process of turn-taking. It seems unsafe to assume that it is the manager who is in charge of the ‘conversation type’ which the other person will

adopt, nor that the type of conversation will be stable throughout even one conversation, let alone later conversations in the same dyad.

### 2.3.3 Quality of Conversation

The questions of how to have useful conversations and why so little effort is made by companies to have them, is raised by Gratton and Ghoshal (2002) who observed that many workplace conversations are “*dehydrated and ritualised*”, lacking in curiosity and thereby failing to access new insights. Some efforts have been made to study and even to categorise the observable characteristics of high-quality and low-quality conversations. Gibbs’s ‘Model of Defensive-Supportive Communication’ (1961) is one such effort, which succeeds in distinguishing and defining good and bad, or supportive and defensive, communicative behaviours. It is a simple two cell model.

Behaviors that promote a defensive climate	Behaviors that promote a supportive climate
Evaluation (assessing, judging, criticizing)	Description (accepting, nonjudgmental understanding)
Control (forcing, dominating, persuading)	Problem Orientation (permissiveness, focusing on task, collaborating)
Strategy (scheming, deceiving, manipulating)	Spontaneity (honesty, genuineness, straightforwardness)
(Emotional) Neutrality (indifference, lacking in care and warmth)	Empathy (perspective-taking, sharing feelings, validating)
Superiority (dismissing, dominating, denigrating)	Equality (participating, disclosing, respecting)
Certainty (dogmatic, foreclosed, single-minded)	Provisionalism (tentative, open, tolerant)

Table 2.1: Gibb’s (1961) Model of Defensive-Supportive Communication (Bradley and Campbell, 2016)

Following almost a decade of group conversation observation, Gibb (1961) wrote that there were six supportive or defensive binary pairs. Gibb noticed that defensive interactions are generally reciprocated, thereby closing down the dialogue, while supportive communication reduces the occurrence of defensive behaviours by building an inclusive climate. This again

strikes us as valuable recognition of the dynamic nature of conversation and we are sympathetic to Gibb's attempt to develop a systematic framework applicable to transcribed conversations.

However, Bradley and Campbell (2016) criticise Gibb's model for failing to "*specify the verbal behaviours indicative of the poles on each dimension*", and for the lack of empirical data showing the "*mutual exclusivity*" of the dimensions. And while there have been attempts at empirical analysis of the Gibb model, notably by Forward et al. (2011) in measuring the effectiveness of all dimensions simultaneously, most studies of good and bad conversations are not so categorical.

### 2.3.3.1 Difficult Conversation

Concerning conflict-avoidance more specifically, Quinn et al. (2010) reported that a fairly limited set of strategies were observable: *accommodation*, *competition*, *compromise* and *collaboration* to be common tactics. In the case of *avoidance* (or silence), the respondent actively refuses to engage with problems, an approach which may succeed if faced with insignificant issues or used as a temporary tactic, or where others are better suited to implement resolutions (Overton and Lowry, 2013). Those affording *accommodation* will tolerate other's needs while sacrificing their own, but this may be effective when they were initially wrong and where the outcome is more important to others, or when an end to conflict is vital and widely beneficial (Overton and Lowry, 2013). *Compromise*, which reduces the scope of both sides' preferred outcomes, and *Cooperation*, which seeks-out a wide range of possibilities for the benefit of both sides, are each used to arrive at a balance (Overton and Lowry, 2013). Meanwhile, *Competition* means asserting opposing views. The authors claim that this is fitting at the outset when conflict is becoming apparent or when a source is disliked by most others (Overton and Lowry, 2013).

This classification (*accommodation*, *competition*, *compromise* and *collaboration*) is a very considerable advance, again for reasons that should become much clearer later:

- they are a methodological advance by being evidence-based using direct observation
- they recognise that different types of conversation have different outcomes

- although no underlying theoretical dimension are offered for the classification, the types correspond very closely to the Grid-Group Cultural Theory typology which has a very clear two-dimensional theoretical basis
- the classification is at least implicitly dynamic because disagreements could develop between advocates of different types of conversation, for example one party who is competitive may annoy another party who is collaborative

But we emphasise that conversation types do not explain the origins (causes) of each of the four prototypes – why they are thinkable. As we will see, G-GCT is able to both:

- explain why protagonists feel, think and act the way they do
- why conflicts happen
- and why it is not possible to arrive at an agreed set of criteria for whether any conversation has been ‘good’ or ‘bad’

The point is that the outcome of one conversation may seem good to one party and at the same time bad to the other, but the above authors cannot explain why this is the case. In our terms there are even ‘cultural biases’ in the evaluation criteria offered by Overton and Lowry and by Quinn et al who do not seem to recognise this fundamental difficulty. We see that they choose ‘the organisation’s’ definition of success as if this counts for more than any other party’s success criteria. Why should the manager’s evaluation have greater *normative* and *analytical* importance than the junior employee’s? What is functional for the organisation might be a disaster for an employee. This research bias hints at an unexamined *hierarchical* cultural bias in these researchers’ minds.

Bradley and Campbell (2016) acknowledge that many workplace conversations are difficult often involving “sensitive topics” and “bad news”; conversations which are not always foreseen without enough advance warning for planning and may be initiated by senior as well as junior employees and by third parties. Examples highlighted by Bradley and Campbell include customer complaints, requests for pay-rises, for transfers and over restructuring. Patton (2017) adds “compensation, performance review, innovation, and strategic implementation” as also difficult. Tesser and Rosen (1975) point out that such cases involve anticipated discomfort, delay and avoidance of difficult content, compounded by poor handling with poor outcomes

(Geddes and Baron, 1997, 2016). These observations, as far as they go, are unobjectionable, but what the literature still seems to lack is explanations for why sincere participants in conversations arrive at radically conflicting differences in their feelings, thoughts and actions, which they think of individually as highly rational, reasonable and desirable... then come the with the ‘negative reactions’ (Bradley and Campbell, 2016; Farrell, 2015; Overton and Lowry, 2013; Patton, 2017). In other words, we ask why differing factual, moral and practical steps come easily to different protagonists, producing

- *distrust, disappointment, frustration, shame, confusion, worry, anger and fear* (Yu, 2011)
- *defensiveness, denial, resistance* (Bradley and Campbell, 2016)
- *conflict* (Overton and Lowry, 2013)
- *impasse, retaliation, accusation and aggression* (Bradley and Campbell, 2016)

Why do these emerge between parties who are entirely sincere, seeking ‘good’ outcomes which they share? Indeed, different and conflicting thoughts and practical proposals arise even when there are *common goals*, (different, competing means to a shared objective) preventing that goal from being reached (Patton, 2017), right up to the point at which implementation is attempted. The route to ‘the promised land’ is often marked by the *fiercest* disputes between protagonists whose aims are *identical*, for example within a political party or religious congregation. Why?

Numerous published articles focus on conflict in conversations but none of them manage to explain all the variations listed above. Thus Allwood (2007) explains that “*conflict is a ‘mode of interaction’ that takes place whenever interacting agents do not share a common goal, but pursue individual goals, possibly incompatible with one another*”. This does not explain conflicts between participants who agree on the goal. Whether caused by clashing attitudes or finite resources Judd (1978) observes that conflicts are disruptive and damaging to others, and accordingly, detection methods have been suggested (Pesarin, et al., 2012), as well as conflict management methods (Overton and Lowry, 2013). What this does not explain is how competing ideas can create optimal solutions that none of the participants could have thought of by themselves thinking alone.

Conflict is often blamed on ineffective, badly managed communication, lack of clarity about expectations and jurisdictions, as well as mismanagement of ‘personality clashes’ and conflicts of interest expressed during conversation, all of which can reduce communication and the exchange of information (Rogers-Clark et al., 2009). The same causes and consequences have also been blamed on inadequate honesty and openness (Farrell, 2015; Meyer et al., 2017; Overton and Lowry, 2013). Note that these explanations do not explain why any party should be less than open and honest or who is to decide how far a jurisdiction extends. A trades unionist urging strike action in an industrial dispute feels they have a right to call the action. The managers may feel that this is an outrageous interference in their ‘right to manage’. There is no lack of clarity about jurisdictions here. What there is in this case is outright disagreement about which party has the right to act in the way it sees as very reasonable.

There are many other different types of cases:

Cautious of receiving negative feedback and relationship repercussions, or for fear of failure to achieve objectives, conversation is often avoided altogether (Patton, 2017). Although having difficult conversations is personally, interpersonally and organisationally challenging, by avoiding difficult conversation, further issues can arise because problems are insufficiently addressed, resentment grows, and insights that could end the difficulties remain unspoken (Patton, 2017). Avoiding difficult conversations risks potential damage to relationships and limits potential innovations, thereby impacting on organisational culture and effectiveness writes Patton (2017) who also notes that through avoidance of challenging communication, the employee, manager and organisation lose opportunities to improve, thus becoming a lose-lose situation for all involved. Bradley and Campbell (2016) conclude that “*communication is a key determinant of organisational effectiveness*”, despite many difficult conversations being ineffectively managed.

It is easy to that it is inevitable that sooner or later, organisations will incur conflicts and require negotiations, however when managers create dialogue, not only can problems be resolved, but the organisation will also gain positive benefits (Farrell, 2015). Moreover, such initiative leadership of communication supports the trusted facilitation of further dialogues (Jo and Shim, 2005) and enhances team and organisational commitment (Stone et al., 1999), improving future outcomes and reducing difficulties. Thus, by putting effort to have difficult conversation, it is the beginning of a trust building dialogue between managers and employees.

But what we still do not find in the literature on conversations is any explanation of why conversations may *just as easily* be:

- secretive, dishonest, defensive and suppressed
- angry and explicit involving disputes about jurisdictions
- competitive leading to organisational innovations
- united in a common cause or disunited about the means to be used in pursuit of a common cause, the same interests and when the protagonists have the same personalities

Authors seem to be content with describing different types of conversations and their various functional and dysfunctional outcomes. A criticism which can be made is that what the literature offers is already known to common-sense observers of conversations. For example, a village elder will know that conversations can be handled in different ways and every person knows that it is sometimes better not say something in case it makes things worse. Nor is any explanation offered for why conversations fall into the types which they show and why conversation occurs.

It is already known widely that conflict can be managed through what researchers call ‘conflict competence’, defined as the development and use of cognitive, behavioural and emotional skills to produce positive outcomes and reduce negative escalation (Runde and Flanagan, 2010), and several models have been proposed on how best to do so. Overton and Lowry (2013) connect ‘crucial conversation’, where emotions and differing opinions are involved (Patterson et al., 2011; 2013) with ‘crucial confrontations’, where staff are held to account (Overton and Lowry, 2013).

Most lay people already use ordinary day language to say much the same thing without reading these sources.

### **2.3.3.2 Effective conversation**

In the same functionalist vein, combining earlier literature, Lee (1999) identifies seven important ‘dimensions’ of superior-subordinate communication, as follows:



- formality
- frequency
- feedback
- openness
- trust
- understanding
- sharing of personal feelings

Lee, like Gibb (1961), Granz and Bird (1996), also identifies features (or categories) which have an observable and significant positive effect in workplace conversations. Others have also sought to investigate differences between difficult conversation and good conversation though the *causes* of good and bad good conversation are sometimes used as *defining measures* of how good a conversation is. For Jian and Dalisay (2017)

- Accuracy
- Coordination
- Efficiency

are measures of workplace conversational quality. If compared with authors cited above it seems that causes and measures swap places in the analyses. Is ‘coordination’ a cause of good conversation or is it a measure of how good a conversation has been? Similarly, Beschorner (2006) regards openness, honesty, promise-keeping responsibility, ethical civility and rationality to *define* good conversation (Thomson, 2011). Could these just as easily be called the causes of good conversation? In other words, the literature is rather circular and does not escape beyond ‘chicken and egg’.

The following claim has this problem: The construction of a harmonious environment is helpful in creating employee expectations of trust, fairness and respect (Overton and Lowry, 2013). Is trust, fairness and respect the *result* of a harmonious environment, the *cause* of a harmonious environment or what *defines* a harmonious environment? Similar criticisms can be made of Reina and Reina (2006) who prioritise three areas of trust. Trust in:

- ‘character’ (faith in the other’s intentions)

- ‘communication’ (being candid or secretive as required)
- ‘capability’ (confidence that promises will be fulfilled)

Are these prior to or the result of good conversation? There is also something teleological (circular) in claiming that trust is determined through the perceived quality of how well a difficult conversation is handled (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Louis, 2007), and an understanding of how to counteract and prevent difficulties through practical means makes the acquisition of trusting relationships easier (Meyer et al., 2017). However, the next claim seems to have a clearer (though still functionalist) arrow of causation running through it: in order to achieve cohesive goals, teams must tolerate disagreements and align coping mechanisms that can allow access to their ‘collective intelligence’ for resolutions (Patton, 2017).

Where honesty and respect are standardized conversation practices, different perspectives can be more readily understood, creating otherwise unimaginable opportunities for making fair decisions (Baker et al., 2005; 2016). What is new about this observation is the way it hints at the *institutionalisation* of arrangement, for example in the form of established customs which might apply in a board room or an official committee of inquiry.

The following source recommends the principle of equal status as a coping mechanism for disagreement. This allows for the “*dynamic nature of status and solidarity unfolding in conversation*” (Baker et al., 2005; 2016), whereby flexibility is necessary because at different times *any* participant might have a uniquely valuable insight to offer which could resolve a problem regardless of their position in the organisational hierarchy. Equal status organisations encourage all members to contribute ideas as they have the potential to excel in a particular problem. Through a dialogue of differing opinions an inclusive inquiry can find logical solutions to otherwise perplexing problems. The authors continue: teams should draw the diverse preferences and viewpoints of participants into the task creating equal opportunities for sharing knowledge and to foster respect (Baker et al., 2005; 2016). Communication affords participants opportunities to comprehend, reduce ambiguity and to create meaning together (Ford and Ford, 2008). Indeed, *Semco* and *Mars Inc.* are famous for having institutionalised openness and equal status in which ‘free speech’ is the expectation bordering on being mandatory.

In our view ‘active listening’ is an outcome of these organisations as *institutions*, the use of empathy when reinterpreting another person’s perspective (Rogers and Farson, 1957 cited in

Patton, 2017), to bolster understanding and curiosity and thereby reduce room for hostile disagreement (Patton, 2017). “Understanding is thus an ongoing inquiry of mutual participation among diverse perspectives” (Baker et al., 2005; 2016) that is that enabled through listening and reconsideration. Conversation is about understanding each other, and through such open yet challenging dialogue, interpretive understanding is formed (Baker et al., 2005; 2016). And again: conversation is a tool with which participants may challenge complex realities, so as to learn through interaction (Barge and Little, 2002), and to provide varied insights. It should be collaborative, educational and empathetic, and leaders should balance their desire to control conversations (Meyer et al., 2017) with a flexible openness to all perspectives. Reading between the lines of these sources we sense that skill itself may be considered an institution. “*The skill of dialogue becomes one of the most fundamental of human skills*” (Schein, 1993) in resolving problems and creating possibilities. It is not difficult to imagine skill-enhancing and skill destroying organisational conventions and having recognised this, the institutionalisation of the other ‘Conversation Types’ is also worth considering, we think.

But to accomplish this we need a clearer and simpler causal framework than the above authors provide.

## **2.4 Grid-Group Cultural Theory (GGCT)**

Cultural theory (or G-GCT) was introduced in *Natural Symbols* (Douglas, 1970) and derives from ethnographic studies in the fields of anthropology and sociology. It has since been adopted in economics, political science and business, undergoing revisions over time (Douglas, 1973; 1978; 1982; Douglas, 1992; Gross and Rayner, 1985; Hampton, 1982; Thompson, 1982; Thompson et al., 1990). It has a wide range of practical applications including climate change, environmental protection and sustainable development (Altman and Baruch, 1998; Koehler et al., 2018; O’Riordan and Jordan, 1999; Ney and Verweij, 2015 ;Verweij et al., 2006; Wexler, 1987); financial risk management (Thompson, 2018); politics (Bellamy et al., 2008; 6, 2014); public administration (Hendriks and Van Hulst, 2016; Loyens and Maesschalck, 2014; Low, 2008; Loyens, 2012; 2013;) and management (Hendry, 1999; Maesschalck, 2004).

## Cultural theory

- 1) is designed to provide a universal typology for classifying, explaining and comparing all cultures, communities and organisations (Altman and Baruch, 1988), for all times and all places
- 2) provides transparent and comprehensive explanations for why individuals, groups and larger entities feel, think and act as they do
- 3) it does this by applying the properties found in four connected categories called variously 'Thought Styles', 'Ways of Life', 'Rationalities', 'Cultural Biases' and 'Solidarities', each of which is derived from just *two* social dimensions, known as 'Grid' and 'Group'
- 4) It is because each of these Thought Styles is a) equally rational b) conflicting and c) effective at tackling different kinds of problems, that disagreements occur, that culture has no 'equilibrium point' and that change happens
- 5) Contrary to most understandings, it proposes that culture is that which changes, indeed that culture is the engine of change

It follows that it should apply to all conversations for all times and all circumstances. Because the above literatures on conversation are themselves cultural phenomena, it also follows that the above authors can all be classified and their thinking explained by Grid-Group Cultural Theory, as we have already hinted.

It proposes that "*an individual's behaviour, perception, attitudes, beliefs, and values are shaped, regulated and controlled by constraints that can be grouped into two domains, labelled as: group commitment and grid control*" (Altman and Baruch, 1998).

It is an entirely cultural (social) model which dispenses with the concepts of *personality types*, *preferences*, or *interests*.

### 2.4.1 Development and Re-formulation

Culture comprises and affects the general collection of attitudes, ideas, practices and values that define a group or population (Haukelid, 2008) and even of the individual. Culture is 'fractal' applying at all scales. Recognizing that anthropology lacked a comparative framework which could accommodate all the observed cultural variations which anthropologists had found, Douglas conceived of a universal theory for classifying cultural diversity (Douglas, 1978; 1982;

Mamadouh, 1999). “*Classification, like symbolising, is the creation of culture*” and vice versa (Douglas, 2007), thus Douglas drafted a typology of distinct cultures according to the general distribution (and logical compatibility) of values to describe the organisation of labour and social culture. This was grafted onto the ‘Scheme of Family Organisations’ (Bernstein, 1971) to plot the typology onto two social dimensions (Douglas, 2007):

- Social Regulation or ‘Grid’ (Strong and Weak Regulation)
- Social Solidarity or ‘Group’ (again varying between Strong and Weak Solidarity)

## **2.4.2 Two Dimensions**

Hendriks and Hulst (2016) explain that the four classes “*result from the juxtaposition of two dimensions of sociality*”. These are described easily and simply as control structure (Grid) and social commitment (Group) (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982, 1983).

The horizontal axis (fig. 2.4 below) provides a scale for ‘Group’, from low to high. High Group, is where roles within social structures are distinguished yet restricted by the demands of the greater social unit into which they are loyally incorporated (Douglas, 2007; Gross and Rayner, 1985). The continuum from ‘Low Group’ to ‘High Group’ describes the extent to which collective behaviours are loyally abided (Douglas, 2007; Vangerven, 2016). To the left, is depicted weak social solidarity and to the right strong social solidarity.

The vertical scale is also a low-to-high spectrum, in this case running from Weak Social Regulation (‘Low Grid’) at the bottom, to Strong Social Regulation (‘High Grid’) at the top. This dimension describes the degree to which cultural subjects’ activity is governed by restrictions (Caulkins and Peters, 2002; Thompson et al., 1990; Loyens and Maesschalck, 2014). The range runs from minimal social constraint and pressures up to comprehensive and binding social regulation (Douglas, 2007).

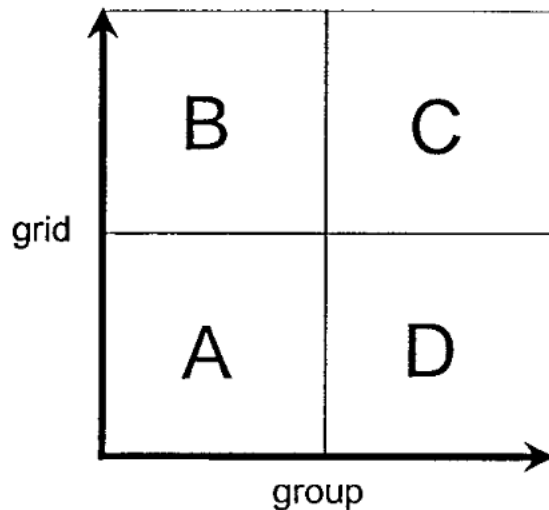


Figure 2.4: The cultural map of two dimensions and four types (Douglas, 1978; Mamadouh, 1999)

Cross-tabulated, the Grid and Group coordinates create space for four pure ‘classifications’ (typological specimens), representing extreme prototypical manifestations of cultural variation (Hendriks and Hulst, 2016) that are polythetic – a collection of grouped but non-essential characteristics (Douglas, 1978; Gross and Rayner, 1985; Hampton, 1982; Mamadouh, 1999) identified by each corner of the framework. These ‘types’ (ie. Thought Styles) are incompatibly opposed and contrasting (Douglas, 2007). Communities and organisations are comprised of a dynamic syndication of these idealized forms (Verweij et al., 2006) whose conflicts create history.

### 2.4.3 Four Thought Styles

Cultural Theory thus outlines four world views of nature and corresponding relations to society (Dake, 1992). These are

- ***Hierarchical***, (high grid, high group)
- ***Fatalistic*** (high grid, low group)
- ***Egalitarian*** (low grid, high group)
- ***Individualistic*** (low grid, low group)

A combination of the contrasting and conflicting forms of reasoning avoids mono-cultural weaknesses (Thompson et al., 1990) and the serious difficulties which result if any one of the

four thought styles attains hegemony, which because of their specific failings, is usually only temporary. Each thought style is confounded by ‘surprises which they cannot solve and which they exacerbate.

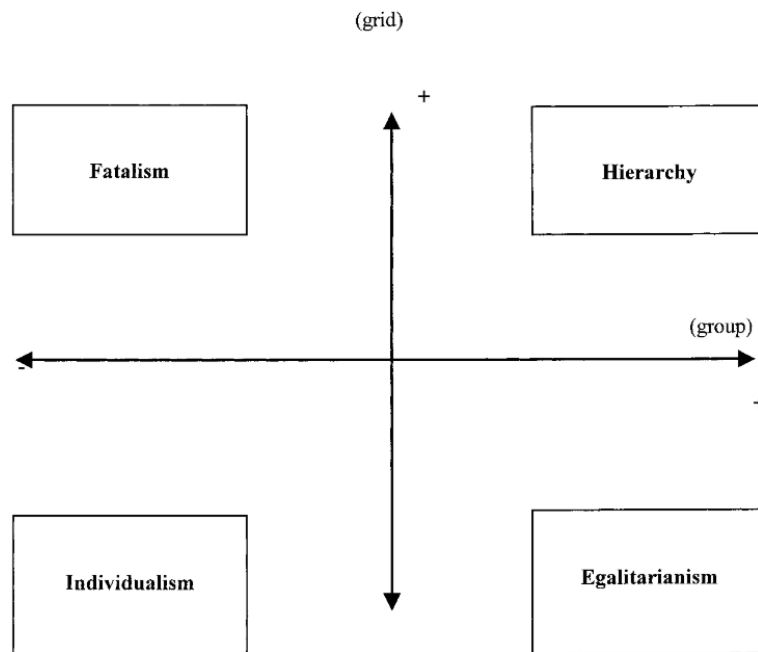


Figure 2.5: Cultural typology using grid-group dimension (Rippl, 2011)

### Hierarchical Thought Style

*‘If you and I stick to the rules, then we can trust each other. The problem is deviance. Eliminate deviance and then all will be well. We need Order. Regulate the Bankers!’*

With strong social regulation and strong social solidarity Hierarchical reasoning favours organised and stratified bureaucracy (Caulkins, 1999; Chai et al., 2009) with the bureaucrat as hero. Here the problem is *deviance* for which comprehensive rules and rule-enforcement is the solution (Grint, 2008; Vangerven, 2016). However obsessive adherence to the rule book fosters ‘rule fetishism’ (Schwartz, 1991; Loyens and Maesschalck, 2014) and reduced innovation (Grint, 2008; Vangerven, 2016). Indeed, the more rules the more deviance is identified. Prisons expand and deviants engage in a cycle of crime that is difficult to break. Hierarchical thought prioritises the system over the individuals it contains, blaming those who deviate from this, yet also becoming vulnerable to misplaced trust in authorities (Mamadouh, 1999) and if the

problem is not deviance then the Hierarchical project – procedural justice – is misplaced. Deviants in high office are a confounding problem.

### **Egalitarian Thought Style**

*‘Nobody should benefit unless everybody benefits. The problem is the system. We must have social justice. Life-chances should not be a post-code lottery. Black Lives Matter! Declare a Planetary Emergency!’*

Lower grid and high group Egalitarian reasoning favours participatory equality through group solidarity (Caulkins, 1999; Chai et al., 2009). It mistrusts imposed norms and thereby challenges the social structure (Schwartz, 1991; Loyens and Maesschalck, 2014). Egalitarian lifestyles are community-based, with blame placed on the system that exists outside of the interpersonal group, in which systemic authority is rejected (Mamadouh, 1999). Suspicion of authority can make Egalitarian movements difficult to sustain as they often rely on rare charismatic leaders leading to succession disputes when the leader dies or leaves. Bitter sectarian and inter-communal disputes can break out between those who propose different means to attaining ‘the promised land’ and if the problem is not an existential threat of harm to all, then the Egalitarian project is misplaced. Fake comrades are a confounding problem.

### **Individualistic Thought Style**

*‘I don’t care about you. My way works for me. Let competition decide which of us is right. The problem is stupidity. Privatisise. Deregulate. Free Markets and Natural Prices Now! I learn so much from mistakes that I really should make some more of them!’*

Low-grid and low-group Individualism values minimal constraints and maximum liberties, seeing de-regulation as the best route to innovative and entrepreneurial activity (Schwartz, 1991; Loyens and Maesschalck, 2014). Winnings belong justly to winners. Viewed especially from the Hierarchical and Egalitarian positions especially, individualism is suspected of being self-serving and risks anarchy (Schwartz, 1991; Loyens and Maesschalck, 2014) without means for returning systems to equilibrium (Grint, 2008; Vangerven, 2016). Environmental destruction is a confounding problem.



## Fatalistic thought Style

*'I don't care about you. What matters to me is my survival. Don't waste time on doomed projects. Avoid risks. Don't fix what isn't broken. Forget about 'promised lands' and riches. Keep your mouth shut. Stay hidden. The problem is naivety'*

Fatalistic reasoning accepts high grid constraints and rejects heteronomy: obligation to others. Here inclusivity is treated with suspicion (Caulkins, 1999; Chai et al., 2009), creating an impersonal perspective fixated on fate. Blame is placed on fate, leaving fatalistic organisation vulnerable to inertia and reluctance to innovate or transform (Mamadouh, 1999). By fostering self-defensive isolation, Fatalistic thinking may instil desperation (Schwartz, 1991; Loyens and Maesschalck, 2014). Secretiveness means that problems are kept hidden until they 'explode'. The kindness of strangers is a confounding surprise.

Note that each of these equally reasonable positions stands in antagonism with each of the others in terms of:

- how the nature of the world is understood
- what the problem is
- what the solution is

Michael Thompson in particular asserts the 'Impossibility Hypothesis' which states that:

- No thought is possible outside of the four Thought Styles

It is our strong claim that inter- and intra- thought style disagreements:

- animate all conversations
- make all disagreements scientifically intelligible
- precipitate change

Because academics are also 'cultural subjects' all academic discussions about good and bad conversation (introduced earlier) are based on one or more thought style:

- advocacy of conversational systematisation overseen by senior officers according to a clear Agenda with a sequence of stages completed within an adequate time scale is *Hierarchical*
- advocacy of equal-status inclusivity overseen by a benign charismatic figure is *Egalitarian*. Here conversations can take as long as necessary to attain change beneficial to all

- advocacy of competitive conversation from which the most effective solutions emerge is *Individualistic*. Time is urgent but much can be learned from mistakes.
- advocacy of ‘being very careful of what to say and when to say it’ and withholding opinion for fear of provoking avoidable attacks is Fatalistic. Time is very short and there is the highest level of risk aversion.

#### 2.4.4 Clumsy Solutions

Among the culturally available thought styles, each offers its distinctive, plausible and rational perspective that exists in contradistinction with the other three (Ney and Verweij, 2015; Verweij et al., 2006). Realisation of what others think helps to clarify and animate one’s own feelings, thoughts and action. Yet while opposing each other, the viability of each thought style is dependent for its life and viability on the three others (Ney and Verweij, 2015), which suggests that an organisation with ‘shared culture and common goals’ – the aim of so many CEOs and writers on organisation(!) - is doomed (Douglas, 2007). Viability grows with all four thought styles working in uneasy concert to create sustainable balance. This ‘polyrational’, diverse, all-encompassing and unstable admixture is referred to as ‘Clumsy’ (Ney and Verweij, 2015).

Free of divergent rational relativism, this clumsy ‘centre-ground’ aim is capable of “*vibrant multivocality*” (Verweij et al., 2006), neurodiversity, through the equal though unsettling sharing of perspectives and solutions. Furthermore, Verweij et al. (2006) describe the intermediate mixture through dialogue, which is “*noisy, discordant [and] contradictory*”, but potentially constructive, as in authentic democracies (Verweij et al., 2006).

Thus, Ney and Verweij (2015) in a study of progressive policy making argue that by “*embracing and mobilizing the plurality of the extended peer community, rather than whittling it down to a monolithic solution*”, complicated challenges can be simplified and better resolved for all involved. They advocate means for enabling all four ‘voices’ (thought styles) to be engaged, noisily if necessarily (Verweij et al., 2006).

Through mutual exposure and responses to different *equally reasonable* cultural perspectives each analysis of what the problem is and each solution to it is voiced and heard without detriment to any particular ‘solidarity’ (Grint, 2010; Vangerven, 2016). ‘Messy problems’ which a) affect many persons b) evolve into different problems when any solution is applied and c) are never solved entirely respond better to poly-rational solutions than from single

rationality solutions which result from enhanced awareness from different perspectives, provide novel neologies (Verweij et al., 2006).

These hypotheses can be connected with the literature describing effective conversations (see 2.3.3.2), in which researchers concede that challenging conversations involving conflicting perspective, indeed offer potential effective benefits.

Thompson's 'Hermit' position at the dead-centre of the G-GCT diagram appreciates the strengths and weaknesses in all four thought styles and Clumsy Solutions are represented adequately by this position. The Hermit is moderately Regulated and experiences moderate solidarity and we suggest is a detached position which develops with maturity and experience. The Hermit has a rare ability to think clumsily.

#### **2.4.5 GGCT: an Efficient and Parsimonious analytical approach to Conversations**

##### **Functions in organisations**

Organizational culture is important to management practices, though organisations consist typically of more complexity than of homogeneity (Hendry, 1999). Indeed management practices are inescapably cultural. Organisations are institutions (or more accurately, bundles of conflicting institutions which are "*purposive and intentionally structured*" (Hendry, 1999), yet cannot be separated from "*the cultures of the societies in which organisations operate*" (Hofstede, 1980). The weakness in Hofstede's proposition is that he offers no theory of culture and treats 'national cultures' as determinate and fixed, which is not the view of Grid-Group Cultural Theory.

The G-GCT framework has (probably infinite) application across industries and institutions at every scale (Thompson et al., 1990; Chai et al., 2009). Kemper and Collins reason that the grid-group matrix is applicable to comparisons between "*classes, occupations and professional groups*" (Chai et al., 2009), and the framework has been used in several professional organisations, including IT. companies and public administrations (Caulkins, 2009; Chai et al., 2009). Although he does not seek to explain cultural variations, Hofstede (1980; 1990; see also Altman and Baruch, 1998) recognises and measures:

- *power distance*
- *individualism*

- *collectivism*
- *feminine/ masculine*
- *uncertainty avoidance*
- *time orientation*

all of which can be contained within the more parsimonious two-dimensional G-GCT typology. The considerable level of interest in ‘organisational culture’ is unfortunately not informed by Grid-Group Cultural theory; for example, Hendriks and Hulst (2016) suggest further research on cultural differences in organizations, to better understand diverse organisational needs. Calls for a ‘shared culture’ and ‘alignment’ with ‘strategic goals’ are, from a G-GCT perspective, naive and seriously mistaken; bound to run into confounding surprises.

### **G-GCT and Conversation**

There is almost no research which applies G-GCT to conversation. However, it is implicit in many typologies including Jung’s *Archetypes* which describes twelve forms of heroism across the dimensions *Order-Freedom* and *Ego-Social* which seem identical to Grid and Group. The ‘Meyers-Briggs type indicator’ (MBTI) and Kiersey temperaments inventory, both based on Jung’s work, also appear to be constructed similarly. G-GCT has however been applied to

- personal relationships (Goodwin et al., 1999)
- silence (Evans, 2008; Loyens, 2012; 2013; Alraies, 2019)
- public interaction (Loyens and Maesschalck, 2014; Loyens, 2016)
- gender studies (Franzwa and Lockhart, 1998)
- sustainable development and ecology (Verweij and Thompson, 2006, Verweij et al., 2006)

Although conversations can take place within one person’s head, for our purposes conversation will be treated as requiring 1) at least two people and 2) with the G-GCT assumption that utterances within a dyad will be derived from the same, different, or more likely, changing thought styles in a dynamic way. This study is going to focus on how each thought style provokes the other thought styles. We will track the thought styles empirically, recording how each protagonist deploys them against the other. One obvious question concerns whether or not the procession of thought styles shows any patterning however the limited time and other resources available to doctoral researchers places practical limits on the number of conversations we are able to analyse.

We are confident, however, that G-GCT is capable of specifying the formal range of rational incompatibilities and comparabilities within dyads, and has the potential for illuminating interventions which may facilitate the clumsy and beneficial free-play of all styles (Chai et al., 2009). We are sympathetic to Rippl (2011) who argues that culture is an aggregate *and* emergent event, reflected in commonalities among individuals (Schwartz and Ros, 1995). Although private thoughts will be animated by the four thought styles, it makes more sense to infer thought styles within relationships, here dyads, from vocalised thoughts.

The established typology set out by G-GCT provides efficient and precise means for analysing conversational utterances as dynamic interchanges between the four equally rational but conflicting forms of reasoning, representing the “*ever-changing positions that are the destinations and points of departure for [that] endless movement*” (Verweij et al., 2006). Verweij et al. (2006) describe the need for conversers faced with alternative approaches to rethink their perspectives and arguments constantly. This suggests rich dynamic complexity, particularly where there is friction between personal, popular and organisational preferences and expectations (all of which are also cultural). Considered against the wider, largely functionalist, normative and descriptive literature on conversation discussed earlier, G-GCT promises insights into the mechanisms of flowing live conversation, identifying and explaining individual’s reasoning behind their chosen strategies and responses. Fortunately, G-GCT has been used to gain insights into policy-making discourses (Bellamy et al, 2008; Grant and Hardy, 2004; Loyens, 2013; Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; 6, 2014), but has yet to be applied to ‘difficult conversations’ in organisations.

Douglas and Wildavsky (1982, 1983) emphasise that one’s world view and risk assessments are made possible culturally, as Emile Durkheim had argued in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) providing the ‘classifications’ required for thought (Stern et al., 1995; Rippl, 2011), and ‘cultural biases’ (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982, 1983; Wildavsky and Dake, 1990). Our interpretation of, and response to, information will be shaped by these biases (Rippl, 2011), however G-GCT makes clear that we are not bound only to one thought style and through dialogue are exposed to all four through which we ‘make our minds up’. Thought style rationalities are the cause of both conflict and insight, as they inform both understandings and disagreements. Indeed, they provide for different risk assessments as to whether or not to argue, to listen or to offer different solutions, all of which require an element of risk. It follows that Individualistic reasoning which carries a high-risk appetite is much more willing to enter dialogue than Fatalistic reasoning which is associated with the lowest risk appetite. It also

follows that the Egalitarian thought style favours the chant, the procession and the demonstration, while Hierarchical reasoning favours dialogue conducted through formal channels.

Thought styles are recognisable from “*the observable behaviour of the decision maker*” (Chai et al., 2009). In risk consideration and decision making, each type weighs choices in accordance with their preferred grid-group position as of that moment and in relation to the problem or opportunity as they define it. Rippl (2011) states Hierarchists will choose to maintain social order, believing in official channels, while Egalitarians desire social orders acceptable to the group, rejecting elite decision-making. Meanwhile, Fatalists are without group identification accepting regulations and circumstances which they regard as unchangeable. Individualists exercise their freedoms, unrestrained by group or grid and see opportunity in risk (Rippl, 2011). From this, it can be assumed that all types of fathom different approaches to conversation and will risk conflict within an organisation when feeling threatened by risks posed by the other thought styles.

Both low grid positions see more opportunities for change while both high grid positions either favour rule enforcement or rule acceptance. The dynamic interplay of all four styles creates constantly alternating cleavages through which the causes of new conflicts and newfound agreements emerge. This is much as we observe at the individual-, household-, neighbourhood-, employment-, industry-, governmental- and intergovernmental scales, for example when ‘Washington’ talks to ‘Moscow’.

One advantage of applying G-GCT over other models of conversation is that what is going on can be recognised and classified with relative ease. It is entirely specific and simpler in ways that formats such as PMS or MBTI are not. G-GCT is parsimonious, providing all necessary information across only two axes, setting out well-defined and thoroughly researched categories which have been confirmed by many observations. Its simplicity makes it attractive in comparison with more complicated models (such as LMX). We object especially to complex typologies such as the MBTI or ‘personality inventories’ which make the mistake of ‘fixing’ participants within a type. In practice actor’s feelings, thoughts and actions *cannot* be read-off from, say their MBTI type, their personality type or their class interest.

Our preference for G-GCT is that of ‘Occam’s Razor’ whereby the simplest theory which has at least equivalent practical application and discovery potential is to be preferred. We seek a model which provides practical and precise evaluations with a high degree of accuracy and

inter-observer concordance (below) which G-GCT should provide, the limitations of which will be noted in the following section.

To conclude, it is recognized that G-GCT affords the most effective available framework for exploring and explaining feelings, reasonings and actions within dynamic conversations. The two dimensions and the four thought styles provide the tool we need to make sense of utterances each exhibiting measurable rationalities. The conflicting categories (or types) should enable us to pinpoint changes in reasoning as they occur in conversation and how they are provoked in one party by the reasoning used by the other party.

### **Emotion and Cognition in relation to G-GCT**

As highlighted in much of the aforementioned literature, difficult conversations are frequently associated with words like ‘anger, fear, shame, frustration’ (Yu, 2011), while effective conversations are linked with ‘trust, fairness, openness, harmony’ (Overton and Lowry, 2013; Reina and Reina, 2006). Based on these generic labels, each effectively relating to the emotional state of the conversation and its participants, it is apparent that emotion is intrinsic to conversations, and likely more so in both in conversations *felt* to be difficult and conversations *felt* to be easy, constructive, joyous, and so on. Although in this study, emotion will not be a core object of focus, as a concept it must be considered, as it leads, at least in part, to the overall complexity and energy of conversation.

Lakoff and Kövecses (1987) cited in Hsiao and Su (2010) highlight the importance of closer study of emotions, promoting the concept of emotion, not only as ‘feelings’, but as being central to cognitive alignment in all social activities. This can be taken to include self-governance of emotion, personal perspectives, idealized behaviour of others, *etc.* Despite many studies on the subject of emotion, it’s exact role in conversation and its relationship with personality and culture remains tenuous. This is especially the case when considering *hyperbole*; that is, intentional use of exaggerated emotions in interactions, which is difficult to account for in unrelated studies, like this one. It is interesting to ask why some conversations are boring to some and exciting to others in the same conversation (Hsiao and Su, 2010).

In simple physiological terms, in accordance with scientific discipline, emotions inspire actions in the individual through spontaneous nervous impulses. Verweij, et al (2015) suggested that there is a strong connection specifically between ‘social theory’ and ‘affective and social

neuroscience'; the latter of which could allow extra evaluation of the former. In short, each aids and advances the other. Combining 'hard science' with social sciences to better understand and direct both fields is likely ripe territory for study (Verweij, et al., 2015). Subjects thoroughly investigated in Neuroscience, regarding emotions, decision making and behaviours, for example, could aid the assessment criteria for social theories and assure compatibility. In fact, according to Turner and Whitehead (2008) cited in Verweij, et al. (2015), Cultural Theory corresponds with Neuroscience in studying our innate sociality and its influence on us, to which we add that sociality will be having effects on our biological substrate, notably traumatic conversations which create 'somatic markers' which trigger the same stress-based fear each time we meet an exceptionally fierce protagonist. The findings in both fields meld cognition, emotions, perceptions and relations as core, interrelated elements of being (Douglas and Ney, 1998), which operate within patterns of constraint. We are, we find, fundamentally social beings and our neurological substrate bends to this. The preferred methods of organizing are not dissimilar in Cultural Theory (G-GCT), to those found to occur in the brain (Bechara and Demasio, 2005) cited in Verweij, et al. (2015). That is, cognitive and emotional models are primarily based on past experience of social trends, and change in response to new and unanticipated social 'stimuli', as in G-GCT where these are referred to as 'surprises'.

Therefore, this connection suggests that G-GCT could be applied to the subject of emotion - including its role in conversation - for further insights, as indeed Perry 6 has argued. 6 (2002) suggested that the approach of Neo-Durkheimian theory can be used for understanding 'the menu of emotion' - the available range of possible accessible emotions in appropriate response to the social setting, and why the menu is so recognisable and familiar: Rules, Collective Struggle, Competition, Survival (also available in combinations of two, three and four 'ingredients').

The two dimensions of Grid-Group Cultural Theory (G-GCT), 'Regulation' and 'Integration' - or Grid and Group, respectively - being the fundamental dimensions by which any social system can be assessed, are key to the theory. As Grid-Group dimensions perceive and reflect situational culture, and fundamentally incorporate all social behaviours, resultantly, it may also underpin the general expression of socially acceptable emotion. Simply put, the range of likely emotions emerge in response to the perceived threats to their Cultural classification, and so Cultural type affects how individuals process and affect others through emotion; indeed the level of threat as assessed by protagonists. For one party it is a risk; to another, an opportunity.



According to 6 (2002) in regard to emotion, the connection between behaviour and ideals are defined in two ‘affect styles’ – expressive and impassive – each opposing emotional lifestyles. Organised as shared emotional life, ‘Expressive’ emotion is direct and publicly powerful. On the other hand, ‘Impassivity’ intends control and appropriate application of emotion subject to ‘feeling rules’ and ‘display rules’ as set out in Hochschild’s highly influential essay ‘The Managed Heart; commercialisation of human feelings’ (Hochschild, 1983; 2003). Some emotions and their expression are reserved institutionally for private or public, informal and formal settings. The author argues that weak social regulation (or low Grid) is associated with the ‘expressive’, and strong social regulation with the ‘impassive’. Furthermore, the combination, or ‘menu’, of available types are practically inseparable from thought and action (or inaction), hence leading to ‘mixed feelings’.

In summary, 6 (2002) argues that the Neo-Durkheimian G-GCT “*recognizes social factors in shaping emotions*”, structured in the form of the primary social organisation, while quietening emotions unfitting to the social situation. That is, the inward experience and outward expression of emotions operate within Thought Styles as institutionalised. Note that by ‘institution’ is meant any source of continuity such as the European Convention on Human Rights right down to a favourite proverb or turn-of-phrase which comes to mind easily. Emotion is a factor in the inherently shifting or phasing nature of Cultural theory, contributing to either reinforcing or disrupting organisations; but to a cultural theorist emotions are culturally enabled, not infinite and *not irrational*.

What then of personality and feelings in conversation?

G-GCT does away with personality typologies – or spectra - and their traits, which suggest more permanence than the highly dynamically responsive qualities of the dimensions (or thought styles) of G-GCT, which instead alter noticeably over very short time periods of as little as split seconds. The author, Perri 6 (2002) emphasises that Cultural ‘solidarities’ (as he calls them) do not reflect Personality type, because social actors possess the capacity to apply *all* Cultural ‘types’, in accordance with surprises and what counts as a surprise.

Social regulation ↑↑	social relations are conceived as if they were principally involuntary impassive trope as affect style tragic view of society ↑↑		
	<b>Isolate</b> <i>Co-ordination:</i> none: all systems are capricious <i>Social network structure:</i> isolate; casual, shallow ties, occasion-bound networks <i>Value stance:</i> personal withdrawal (e.g. from others, social order, institutions), eclectic values <i>Institutions:</i> suspicious of the efficacy of any institutional design <i>World views:</i> fatalism at the bottom of society and despotism at the top of society <i>Blame strategy for power:</i> 'no point' <i>Organisational weakness:</i> tends to be poor in predicting and responding strategically to new situations, shocks, etc (this may not be seen as a problem since the basic belief is that there is little one can do about change) <i>Affect style:</i> contain emotions seen as superfluous for coping, for expression is usually pointless or even dangerous exposure, but volatile <i>Emotions elicited in ritual, when successful in its own institutional terms:</i> irony, ridicule, stoic will to endure <i>Emotions elicited when less successful:</i> bitterness, sense of arbitrariness, opacity and banality	<b>Hierarchy / central community</b> <i>Co-ordination:</i> regulated systems are necessary: unregulated systems need management and deliberate action to give them stability and structure <i>Social network structure:</i> central community, controlled and managed network, strong ties <i>Value stance:</i> affirmation (e.g. of social values, social order institutions) by rule-following and strong incorporation of individuals in social order <i>Institutions:</i> rational, steerage capacity, rule-dominant <i>World view:</i> hierarchy <i>Blame strategy for power:</i> violation of rule and role <i>Organisational weakness:</i> tends to produce brittle systems and networks, vulnerable to unexpected shocks from other solidarities (this may not be seen as a problem since the basic belief is that other solidarities are essentially reactive, and the task is keep systems within bounds where vulnerability can be minimised) <i>Affect style:</i> Stoic, rule-bound, programmatic cultivation of appropriate affect for occasion and institution <i>Emotions elicited in ritual, when successful in its own institutional terms:</i> respectful deference for status, amour-propre for own role, commitment, sense of security; emotional cultivation, refinement, poignancy, sublimation <i>Emotions elicited when less successful:</i> demoralisation, confusion and bemusement at opacity of the opacity complexity of institutions; sense of banality	
Individual autonomy should ⇐			Individual autonomy ⇒ should
not always be held accountable	<b>Individualism</b> <i>Co-ordination:</i> spontaneous, hidden hand: regulated systems are unnecessary or harmful: effective system emerges spontaneously from individual action <i>Social network structure:</i> individualism, markets: open, configurations characterised by weak ties <i>Value stance:</i> affirmation (e.g. of social values, social order institutions) by personal entrepreneurial initiative <i>Institutions:</i> self-restricting, transparent, nonintrusive, guaranteeing basic property rights etc. <i>World view:</i> libertarianism <i>Blame strategy for power:</i> intrusion, disturbance of spontaneous process <i>Organisational weakness:</i> tends to be poor in solving collective action problems (this may not be seen as a problem since collective action problems are not recognised as problems worth solving) <i>Affect style:</i> casual, informal, self-expression, emotional expression as instrumentally beneficial <i>Emotions elicited in ritual, when successful in its own institutional terms:</i> aspiration, excitement, controlled envy for competitive rivalry; 'sentimental education' <i>Emotions elicited when less successful:</i> insecurity, dejection at own defeat, frustration at what seems futile and self-defeating rivalry	<b>Enclave</b> <i>Co-ordination:</i> charismatic, mutual: regulated systems are oppressive – except when they protect <i>Social network structure:</i> enclave, sect, inward-looking <i>Value stance:</i> collective withdrawal (e.g. from perceived 'mainstream'), dissidence, principled dissent <i>Institutions:</i> charismatic, value-dominant, solidaristic <i>World view:</i> egalitarianism <i>Blame strategy for power:</i> failure to protect, violation and pollution of fragile order <i>Organisational weakness:</i> tends to schism in network structures (this may not be seen as a problem because the basic enclave belief is in small, tightly cohesive, internally egalitarian, transparent community) <i>Affect style:</i> Effervescent, charismatic, participative, expression as community-building <i>Emotions elicited in ritual, when successful in its own institutional terms:</i> passionate commitment, passionate rejection of outsiders and those seen as insiders who have betrayed the institution; charismatic emotional leadership <i>Emotions elicited when less successful:</i> schism, burn-out	be held accountable
	↓ heroic view of society expressive trope as affect style social relations are conceived as if they were principally voluntary		⇒ Social integration

Figure 2.6: Variations and combination between both thought style and affect style (6, 2002)

## 2.4.6 Limitations of GGCT

There are criticisms of G-GCT. Newcomers to G-GCT may be confused and irritated by Cultural Theorists' use of different terms. Four 'Thought Styles', 'Rationalities', 'Voices', 'Types', 'Ways of Life' and even 'Solidarities' are each found on different authors' version of the Grid-Group diagram. This throws up the question as to whether these terms 1) mean the same thing conceptually and are therefore interchangeable or 2) whether they represent different concepts. If the same thing then why not standardise on one terminology? If different things then what are the differences? One suspicion is that there is Competitive-Individualism involved in academics' inability to standardise terms, and that this group of scholars would be well served by some Hierarchical disciplining according to a standardised Grid-Group Dictionary of Terms with authoritative definitions. As Grid-Group Cultural Theorists are of course cultural subjects we can expect Egalitarian, Individualistic and Fatalistic challenges to this suggestion.

We note that 'Styles' 'Rationalities' and 'Voices' suggest more *variability* than 'Types' and 'Solidarities' which imply *fixity*. It strikes us as especially inconsistent with G-GCT to refer to 'Isolate'-Fatalism and 'Competitive'-Individualism as 'solidarities' because both of these Thought Styles are defined by *weak social solidarity*. While actors can agree to compete (or 'agree to disagree') and enjoy doing so, the ordinary meaning of 'solidarity' does not really suit fierce competitors. Although competing track and field athletes sometimes hug or do 'fist-bumps' after crossing the finishing line, the essence of racing is to win, not to be friends. Solidarity exists in team sports such as football, but these are typically a hybrid of 'us versus the enemy' plus 'obedience to the manager and team captain'. We reject the term 'solidarities' and prefer Thought Styles each of which occur in changing patterns. Hierarchical passion for Rule Books can change into a passion for Honouring Past Precedence (Customary Law) or for Honouring the Wisdom of the Elders. Not all Hierarchical thinking is the same and so on for the other rationalities.

We object very strongly to 6's terminology, namely 'types'. This word is used extensively in psychology to imply a degree of continuity that is incompatible with the supposition central to G-GCT that change will come sooner or later and sometimes in the next few seconds of a conversation. The extrovert and introvert *types* are supposed to be a permanent feature of 'personality' and last a lifetime, but a protagonist can (as we will demonstrate) switch their form of reasoning several times within a fifteen-minute conversation.

In one case, van der Linden (2016) thought that Cultural Theory brought us into a “*strange tautological loop*”. The author states that people exhibit certain behaviours if they prescribe to a particular cultural type, hence this particular form of cultural thought style leads to the actions they take. In other words, Cultural Theory is being called an assumed ‘configuration-list’, as “*there is a neat correspondence between cultural and individual orientation, the latter taken to be a microscopic version of the former*” (Boholm, 1996).

This criticism we find to be weak. The central assumption of G-GCT is that individuals do not pre-exist culture (society). It is for this reason that individual thoughts and feelings are indeed a microcosm of culture and that ‘How Organisations Think’ (as Mary Douglas put it) is inescapably cultural and easily recognisable to a Cultural Theorist. An organisation can go through changes of mind exactly as an individual actor does because neither an organisation nor an individual is pre-social.

Further criticisms of Cultural Theory are that it is

- “*simply wrong*” (Sjöberg, 1998) as it is lacking empirical evidence
- functionalist (Boholm, 1996)
- cannot be tested, and that it does not explain “*anything*” due to the nature of it being a circular loop in reasoning (Bolhom again). By fitting everything, it may apply accurately to nothing. Bolhom also suggests that to push further from “*rigidity to flexibility*”, Cultural Theory needs to change its methodological strategy from methodological collectivism to *methodological individualism* (i.e., the root assumptions common to Psychology and Economics).

It should be explained that philosophers of science disagree over what qualifies as ‘scientific’. For ‘empiricists’ theory is treated with suspicion as it is believed to be a source of ‘bias’. They assert that ‘Facts Speak for Themselves’ with the clear implication that fact gathering is a passive process and that each new fact will be compatible with all prior facts. Description takes precedence over explanation. For ‘realists’ also known as ‘critical realists’, ‘surface appearances’ are deceptive, as in ‘*Never Judge a Book by its Cover*’. There exist ‘essences’ which lie ‘beneath the surface’ which can only be discovered using theory because such essences cannot be observed directly. The accusation that G-GCT is ‘non-testable’ comes from a position associated with Karl Popper (sometimes called ‘positivism’ which can be described as misleading). Popper used the term Conventionalism. This position argues that the mark of

a scientific theory is that it is vulnerable to empirical refutation. For example, the theory that a guest will be here in five minutes is scientific because if our guest does not come within the next five minutes, the theory is refuted and should be evolved or replaced, thus: perhaps his car broke down and his phone is out of power so he cannot call and tell us. This new theory is disproved if the guest calls to say that he cannot come because he is unwell...and so on. For Popper, as he argued in ‘Conjectures and Refutations’, ‘The Open Society and its Enemies’ and ‘An Evolutionary Theory of Knowledge’, scientific knowledge is an active theory-led process of trial and error, plus error elimination.

We offer the following replies to the above criticisms:

- the argument that G-GCT is functionalist is misplaced because functionalism is a model of static ‘homeostatic’ equilibrium disturbed by ‘exogenous’ events. The fundamental problem faced by functionalists is that change is ascribed to some other domain which exists outside the system being described (i.e., beyond culture in this case). Change is hardly ‘explained’ by treating as if ‘it came from outer space’. In marked contrast G-GCT treats change is entirely ‘endogenous’ to culture. That is, it offers a comprehensive and parsimonious (efficient) explanation for everything within the field of study (i.e., culture). The proposition is that more-or-less everlasting conflict between four Thought Styles precipitates changes which cannot be forecast, because it is not possible to predict which ‘Voice’ will enter and at which point. This is consistent *empirically* with history having no clear or pre-determined direction. We repeat, *change is inherent in culture* which makes it possible and likely. Culture never ceases.
- G-GCT recognises that each form of reasoning has useful properties, but these do not co-exist in a settled relationship with each other. Each Thought Style disagrees profoundly as to whether the existing state is a healthy state. Within G-GCT no state of affairs is describable as healthy or unhealthy at any point. This disqualifies G-GCT as a ‘functionalist theory’.
- The claim of ‘non-testability’ has been addressed by cultural theorists Michael Thompson, Marco Verweij, Steve Rayner, Aaron Wildavsky, and Richard Ellis over decades of focussed research in a wide range of settings, from group interaction to greater organisations. The principle ‘counter-factuals’ of G-GCT are:
  - a) if *history ends* (stops); that is if all problems are solved (as in Utopia)

- b) if history demonstrates *a clear and predictable direction* driven by ‘the dialectic’ (the assertion made by Heraclitus, Hegel, Marx and recently by Francis Fukuyama in his book ‘The End of History and the Last Man’) ...and then stops, as Fukuyama claims at the point at which free-market capitalism and liberal democracy become permanent
- c) if there are no ‘surprises’
- d) if one Thought Style manages to solve not just its own pre-occupying problem (e.g., the Hierarchical solution to ‘Deviance’ through use of Rules) but also solves all the other problems arising within the other three Thought Styles such as the existential threats which worry Egalitarian reasoning; the eliminating of losers (‘dead wood’) which worries Individual reasoning, and immediate survival which is the chief worry of Fatalist reasoning. Another way of stating this as a counter-factual is if single rationality solutions solve messy problems better than ‘clumsy’, poly-rational solutions
- e) if all risk assessments match and are agreed by all actors (consensus)
- f) if a thought occurs which cannot be classified within the typology (known as the ‘impossibility hypothesis’)

In dealing with the question of falsifiability (Loyens and Maesschalck, 2014) (By what counter-factual case could G-GCT be falsified?) Thompson et al. (1990) responded directly by arguing that the theory’s accuracy can be verified by comparing content analysis with the outcomes. In other words, hierarchical reasoning *should* result in a rule and fatalistic reasoning should result in a preference for leaving things as they stand and that ‘if it isn’t broken, don’t fix it. It is surely a severe test of the Impossibility Hypothesis to apply G-GCT to participants from a wide range of backgrounds and regardless of ‘personality type’ and still find that their utterances and different ‘risk appetites’ fit comfortably within the typology.

- Marco Verweij developed 60 testable propositions, later narrowed to 13 prime examples (with Steve Ney and Michael Thompson), to counter the argument that GGCT cannot be tested. Increasing the combined number of Cultural thought styles beyond a singular solidarity improves the range of explanation for more complex phenomena, while anything over the maximum of four explains no more (Thomson, 2021).
- The testability of GGCT relies in large part on predictive risk. For example, upon any group interaction, four methods of doing so emerge, or five, when including the ‘hermit’ position, but not more, suggesting a predictable range of interactive forms. Verweij (2021) has tested these predictions in a variety of methods (result not yet published),

such as “*analysing whether the behaviour of students in a game from game theory self-organises into five types*”, which has so far yielded promising results. In Verweij’s concept, “*if people can only organise in four or five ways, then social scientists should have often stumbled across these in an inductive manner [, and] we found a remarkable degree of overlap between [GGCT’s] typology and other oft-cited social science typologies*”. Further, he argues that “*many case studies that have usefully employed [GGCT’s] typology are further evidence for this prediction*”.

- By extension, approaches to social organisation align with perceptions and justifications of social life. Valid predictions include efforts to resolve social challenges are counterproductive without consideration of all thought styles, since each style is both self-conflicted yet “complimentary and co-dependent” on each of the other cultural solidarities. Thus, it can be found that effective problem solution relies on the inclusivity of all cultural groupings (Verweij, 2021; Thompson, 2021), thereby creating a complete ‘spectrum of light’ that includes all possible positions.
- The criticism that G-GCT lacks empirical evidence is strange. Most G-GCT studies are empirical, that is, take the form of applied research in the form of case studies (Robinson, 2014; 6, 2015; Parrado, 2020), surveys (Gastil et al., 2016; Swedlow et al., 2016), structured observation (Aenne Schoop et al., 2019) which record the “*emergence of alternative [...] perspectives*”. Surveys have been used to detect “*changes in [...] preferences*” over time among the same test subjects. However, neither case study or survey, provide access to real-time participant interactions, instead being limited to a post-event summary (Aenne Schoop et al., 2019). We offer our own research (below) as empirical evidence.

Aenne Schoop et al. (2019) applied ‘structured observation’ to collecting data from sixty-four school students. Those participating in the research discussed in groups five ‘wicked’ social and political problems, including *climate change, child poverty, terror attacks, gun control, and the extreme right*. During debate the authors found that each contribution could be categorised comfortably within each of the four thought styles. Due to these young students having no knowledge of Cultural Theory, there was no chance of incidental manipulation due to prior knowledge. However, Thompson (2018) has also tested G-GCT using the interactions of ‘artificial agents’ in a simulation model of four competing financial risk strategies derived from empirical observations of what Chief Financial Officers do in practice. These strategies

correspond with the four Thought Styles. The model generated no recurring patterns even after scores of iterations. Had stable patterns emerged then the ‘history’ claims which we stated above would have been refuted.

We find that G-GCT has been operationalised using a remarkably wide range of evidence-gathering techniques.

A further criticism is that researchers do not agree on how to define ‘culture’. It would follow that the components of G-G Cultural Theory, only reflects a certain orientation of values. It has been claimed that without certainty about the nature of culture, there can be no certainty of any configurations that it comprises (van der Linden, 2016). This criticism is rather different to the ones listed above. The assertion is that until all cultural theorists agree a definition of culture then the study of culture has failed.

It is difficult to know how to respond to this criticism as nowhere in the social sciences has consensus about anything been attained. Sociologists are united by their disagreements, similarly Economists, Historians, Psychologists, Psycho-Dynamic Theorists and for that matter also Philosophers, Anthropologists. However, a) lack of consensus has spurred study not inhibited it; b) the disagreements which exist in all these fields are categorizable within the four Thought Styles as Thompson has demonstrated in the latter part of his book ‘Clumsy Solutions’. All we can say is that yes, all theory is cultural including theories of culture.

Hofstede and McCrae (2004), in rebutting G-GCT and other taxonomic models, claim that the target of subjective analysis is unclear, be it society, micro-community or the individual (Chai et al., 2009). Experimentation may determine where the G-GCT model applies best, and whether it fails when applied specifically to dyadic conversation. We remain confident that it applies just as well at any scale. Our reply to Hofstede and McCrae is that the scalability of G-GCT is an advantage rather than a problem, and to wait-and-see.

As a broad theory spanning any and every aspect of society (all non-naturally-occurring phenomena) G-GCT is seen by its promoters as neutral and dispassionate (Loyens and Maesschalek, 2014), finding value in each of the four styles of reasoning, allowing for a researcher to accurately assess the subject of study as if from the ‘hermit’ position at the centre of the G-GCT typology. The malleability of the typology makes it easily applicable to interpretive studies across a wide range of fields, making it vulnerable to the accusation of ‘reductionism’ – forcing observations into pre-existing categories.



However, using categories to sort observations is characteristic of all theories as all theories offer classifications. It should be recognised that Grid-Group Cultural Theory is but a theory and is itself a cultural artefact. It will elicit objections from other theoretical positions, notably those which, in G-GCT terms occupy *one* of the available rationalities. For example, classical economics and psychology envisages a world composed of diverse ‘preferences’ and ‘personalities’ constructed bottom upwards out of ‘utility-seeking agents’, (ultimately these are individual preferences. These sciences proceed by classifying too. A science which does not classify is difficult to imagine and most are identifiable according to Thought Style or Styles.

Machiavellian political theory will positively favour *fatalistic* action while Hobbesian political theory favours *hierarchy*. Egalitarian-cum-hierarchical theorists, notably Marxism will be reluctant to abandon their commitment to a theory of history as a process of ‘forwards movement’. All of these theories proceed by harnessing empirical observations to their preferred categories, variously:

- Survival by ‘getting one’s retaliation in first’
- Preservation of Order through Strong Government
- Freedom to Compete resulting in Efficiency and preventing the disasters associated with Tyranny
- Social Justice through Collective Struggle against Reactionary Forces

It should not surprise us that G-GCT will provoke different forms of reasonable (!) but equally hostile reception when it is exposed to different audience-evaluations according to non-G-GCT researchers’ own cultural perspectives (Mamadouh, 1999) and definitions of the problem. This is much as G-GCT would predict. From having twice participated in the *Annual Mary Douglas Seminar Series* held at her old department, we see that Grid-Group researchers are also susceptible to strong disagreements with *each other* as each finds it difficult not to fall back on their own preferred thought style. Indeed, we all struggle to think fully poly-rationally. For example, within the Seminar Series there are Enclaved ‘purists’ who seek to ‘preserve the legacy of Mary Douglas’ against dilution, while others enjoy experimenting with G-GCT to see what new and innovative uses it can be put to. One figure is especially scholastic and demonstrates authoritative encyclopaedic expertise. Many despair (fatalistically) of ever being taken seriously by Economists and Psychologists or receiving the credit which it is felt that G-

GCT deserves. Yet others feel that ‘the day is coming’ and that the academy can be recognized and revolutionised.

Originally intended as no more than a system for classifying and comparing different societies, it is perhaps to be expected that Grid-Group Cultural Theorists have changed their minds about what the theory offers:

- Douglas (1978) initially assumed the scale at which the theory applies was at the level of the individual within their social setting, and that there is permanence in their cultural bias. For her Institutions govern and constrain thoughts and practices
- There is no consensus about whether analysis should begin by measuring the axes (how weak or strong is Regulation and Solidarity as measured?), or by beginning with the four Thought-Styles, by recording what they are saying to each other and recording the reactions which each Thought Style excites in the others
- There is yet to be agreement on what the relationship between the Thought Styles and the dimension really is. Do variations in the strength of Regulation and Solidarity precipitate variations in the strength of each of the voices? Or does the interaction of the Thought Styles move culture along its own two axes? Or, as Thompson seems to argue, that the relationship between Thought-Styles and the Grid and Group Axes is thoroughly dynamic in both directions
- Mamadouh (1999) argues that the unit of applicability is difficult to determine, and that cultural theory instead is suited to comparisons between the elements of any given social system. An alternative treatment of the same observation is to respond with saying that the limits of the application G-GCT have yet to be found and that explorations should continue
- Thompson and Wildavsky argued strongly against the idea of static individual preferences, suggesting that differing biases are adopted in all manner of different contexts and are frequently interchangeable, making the analysis of the theory’s application highly contingent on whatever surprises emerge and whichever turn history takes (and the fresh surprises that it gives rise to. For him, all solutions succeed and all solutions fail depending on circumstances. Solutions which once failed regain their ‘currency value’ and effectiveness, while solutions which are working well will fail

when they are confronted by problems, not least of their own making. These claims are consistent with observations

This said, in our usage, G-GCT applies to the moment-by-moment analysis of reasoned verbal relationships between participants, and not to the individuals themselves. We do not see individuals. We see what Thompson has called ‘de-individuals’, meaning cultural subjects. We see thought-styles, more specifically as they play-out in a workplace context (Mamadouh, 1999).

All researchers risk being tempted to misinterpret data to make it fit neatly within the framework (Lofland et al., 2006; cited in Loyens and Maesschalck, 2014); to make analysis all about ‘utility seeking agency’, or ‘class conflict’ or about ‘personality clashes’ and so on. As a precaution it is advisable to invoke a fifth category; data that is:

- Unidentifiable (because the utterance is too brief or inchoate, of which we found only one example)
- Employs a combination of thought styles where more than one form of reasoning is demonstrated
- If an utterance crosses all four thought styles it might also be classified as ‘hermitic’, particularly if it is dispassionate and builds on a lifetime of experience of excessively militant convictions, has witnessed Hierarchy which tied everybody in Rules to their anger and frustration; Revolutions in which the struggle for good degenerated into recrimination, betrayal and ‘back-stabbing’, Free-Competition which extracted all that nature had to offer, destroying ecologies and witnessed too, those who adopted a ‘bunker mentality’ yet were still damaged by the forces which they feared most

A final apparent limitation is the application of G-GCT to study conversation specifically. This study appears to be among the first attempts to do so, and thus lacks direct references for guidance, compelling the author to assemble a methodology (below) that suits our research questions and that is defensible rather than definitive.

## 2.5 Research Gaps

It has become a fairly recent norm in research to ‘identify research gaps’ and then aim to fill them. This norm has the force of a Rule at present. We accept the institutional force of this Rule in the academy as it stands. Thus:

1) Most studies of conversation in organisations, notably PMS (see 2.3.2.2) are oriented towards the organisation and its managers, without as much consideration for the employee. PMS is dedicated to the attainment of targeted organisational outcomes treated as if they were unproblematic, authoritative and functional, and as if the employee is a source of potential dysfunction.

This conversational process is treated as a supervisory task with a list of objectives rather than an insightful tool for analysis of any number of opportunities and challenges. PMS operates within the parameters of Hierarchical reasoning and risks being deaf to other possibilities. Worse, performance measurement systems and performance profiles do not record conversation in adequate detail, sufficient to explaining the outcomes of those conversations. PMS based analysis of conversations is singularly biased in favour of one way of thinking and in so doing restricts organisations’ repertoire of solutions. It is appropriate only if the organisation’s viability is indeed threatened by deviant activity and it risks mistaking criticism for disloyalty.

2) Much research about conversation is based on participants’ recollection of events, subject to doubly inaccurate interpretive errors. There have been very few studies found in which the researcher witnesses first-hand live conversation data in real-time, through which we anticipate that a greater quantity and quality of data can be recovered. There are various barriers to accessing real time conversations, despite their value to understanding dynamics and outcomes, a problem noted by Jian and Dalisay (2017), who despite this limitation persist with participant recollections of past conversations and their outcomes. As we will see, there is some value to be gained from asking interviewees to describe their memories of their ‘best ever’ and ‘worst-ever’ workplace conversations. However, we will show the limitations of this method and progress to the analysis of different iterations of a limited number of prepared role-plays.

3) There are very few studies which examine the contents shared during a conversation using the direct application of an analytical model. Much research identifying the quality of conversations (see 2.3.2) fixes on the presence or absence of specific functional and dysfunctional features that are often defined very vaguely such as ‘*trust*’ or ‘*conflict*’. These

general terms are extremely imprecise and, studied in isolation, cannot be fully understood without the use of a comparative framework. For example, trust and mistrust, conflict and harmony take on entirely different characters within Hierarchical, Egalitarian, Individualistic and Fatalistic reasoning. Thus, mistrust is *good* and trust is *bad* within Fatalist reasoning which argues *trust nobody especially someone who claims to be your friend*. In other words, most of the sources in section 2.3.2 employ terminology with naïve imprecision.

4) Furthermore, while metrics have been designed for monitoring interactive performance, such as the four conversation types (section 2.3.2), they do not live-record conversational content for moment-by-moment analysis, allowing for inaccurate summing-up of conversations and oversight of the reasonings employed. Bear in mind also that all utterances are reasonable and rational and at no stage will a conversant be ‘mindless’. We note that even Thompson’s case studies tend to aggregate an actor’s reasoning somewhat into the actor’s prevailing Thought Style. We suspect that few actors’ reasonings are that stable and persistent, even over the course of a minute or two. Better then to analyse reasoning shifts forensically, over moderate periods of say, ten minutes to half an hour.

5) With this tendency to over simplify talk by summarising it, we could not find a study which accessed the dynamics out of which conversation is made (emerges) enabling meticulous causal explanation for why conversation occurs and even what conversation is. While this could be done at the highest scale, for example analysing what Washington and Moscow say to each other over a period of thirty years, much of this conversation would be obscured from view (notably what was said in ‘back channels’ and the protagonists’ many changes of mind. And as G-GCT applies just as well to the micro-scale of dyadic workplace conversations, it makes pragmatic sense to do so.

## 2.6 Summary

There is something wrong with the literature on conversation and especially on workplace conversation. Authors readily agree the importance of ‘conversational quality’ but without offering much more than naïve normative functionalist assertions when deciding what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’ conversation. Little if any literature offers causal explanations though the ‘conversation types’ derived from observation are useful.

By applying G-GCT to the earlier parts of this literature review cultural biases can be identified; namely:

- 1) performance measurement systems (PMS) and ‘communication management’ models demonstrating hierarchical reasoning. This does not render them ‘wrong’, but it does establish how incomplete and partial they are. One might say that they only capture ‘25% of the available truth’
- 2) studies on ‘effective conversation’ seem to employ largely egalitarian reasoning. They capture a different 25%
- 3) understandings of conflict and conflict avoidance as described in section 2.3 reproduce what G-GCT researchers would recognise as individualist and fatalist reasoning respectively, but without awareness of having done so. They encompass 50% of what is available to think
- 4) most of the literature described earlier is tautological or perhaps teleological by failing to distinguish the *causes* of ‘good conversation’ from the characteristics which *define* what a good conversation is.
- 5) most of the literature described earlier does not rise above common-sense understandings and rules-of-thumb already known to lay persons. It is obvious that persons who have ‘conflicting narratives’ will end up by evaluating each other negatively (Sims, 2005). What we need to understand is how their narratives are derived, why these narratives have a mutually antagonising and animating effect on each other and why narratives change.

We endeavour to overcome these deficits.

## **Chapter 3 : Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This author was advised to ‘treat methodology as the engine of your research question’. We accepted this *heuristic*. There was a need to study naturalistic conversation in a systematic way within a theoretical rather than common-sense framework. To test how much G-GCT provides, a ‘hybrid’ methodology is needed. One can collect respondents’ evaluations of conversations they have had and conversations they have witnessed, studying what they say in their own terms, sometimes called ‘meanings’. They will have a view, from a position of experience, as to what makes a good and a bad conversation. Then what protagonists say to each other can be examined, and furthermore, an examination of how third parties see these conversations systematically, going beyond common-sense meanings. This will give us a measure of what G-GCT gives us that common-sense does not. It also involves listening carefully and respecting respondents’ description and perspective, by seeing as they see. Our view is that the social scientist needs to be able to reveal what underpins common-sense, in order to offer a deep understanding of what is happening in a conversation.

This is what has been done.

This chapter is organised as followed: section 3.2 begins by presenting a research philosophy and rationale for research approach. Section 3.3 will illustrate research methods (techniques) and design employed in this study. Section 3.4 explains the methods of coding and data analysis. Section 3.5 will address the reflexivity of this research. Section 3.6 will point out the limitation of the data collection. Section 3.7 addresses ethical considerations in data collection. Section 3.8 will summarise this chapter.

### **3.2 Research Methodology**

#### **3.2.1 Research Philosophy: ‘Interpretivism?’**

Research Philosophy is often described as fundamental to determining the course and success of a study, requiring an in-depth consideration of how knowledge emerges and is interpreted (Patton, 2015); even what exactly qualifies as knowledge.

The research philosophy of this study approximates to ‘interpretivism’, only insofar as it acknowledges multiple perspectives of a changeable social reality (Collins and Hussey, 2009; Saunders et al., 2009). Interpretivism is self-described as a departure from ‘deductive positivism’ to describe the intricacies of socialised information and differences between social beings (Saunders, et al., 2009), as opposed to the objective laws of ‘things’ claimed to characterise positivism. Positivists stand accused of preventing an intimate understanding of ‘human experience’, though contemporary positivism can be understood more narrowly as an epistemological preference for testable (and thus potentially refutable) hypotheses. Rejecting the again claimed dispassionate independence of ‘the positivist’ researchers’ position, constructivism as self-described places the researcher within the research process, which in turn is shaped by the researcher (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; 2012). Somewhat reluctantly, because this researcher finds the four Thought Styles within ones own thinking while also recognising them in the research subjects, it could be said that the researcher is an ‘interpretivist’ in this specific sense. However please note that the preferred theory of choice was *not* developed ground-upwards from our data, but adapted and operationalised deliberately within a pre-existing framework. We need to do more than collect and report ‘meanings’.

Interpretivist *techniques* are regularly used for studying human interaction, social exchange and ‘society’ but is defined much more loosely than the definition of ‘culture’ (Burrell and Morgan, 1992; 2017). The researcher interacts with what is being researched because it is impossible to separate what exists in the social world from what is in the researcher’s mind (Creswell, 1994; Collins and Hussey, 2009), of which Grid-Group Cultural Theorists are acutely aware. Therefore, the act of investigating social reality has an inherent effect on it (Collins and Hussey, 2009). This author hesitates in self-identifying as an Interpretivist as a ‘multitude of understandings’ are not thought to exist without clear boundaries in their ‘condition of possibility’. On the contrary, it is argued that there are just *four* prototypical understandings which, while not fixed, provide for enormous dynamic heterogeneity. Further, as will be seen, respondents’ expressed self-understanding of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ conversations does not get us very far, (about as far as the common-sense literature). G-GCT enables *explanations* and a degree of *precision* which respondents and academic researchers of conversation do not attain.

Highlighting the applicability to this research, Bryman and Bel (2015) argue that in constructionism “*the social world is embedded in and shaped through interactions*”. Therefore,



the focus should be on the reflection of insights about participant ‘realities’ that generate a series of understandings (Symon et al., 2018). Yes and no. It is a truism that the social world is socially constructed. There must be more to say about *how*.

Granted, this study explores and interprets the personal perceptions of the participants through narrative analysis, thematic analysis and dialogue analysis. The researcher is included in the sense that they are present during participants’ interactions, in order to reveal and develop interpretations of the range of possible participant ‘realities’. Yet a great deal of subsequent forensic analysis, while respecting entirely the reasonableness of participants reasoning, sought to *explain* the ability to think of these reasonings.

In what is now known as the ‘interpretivist tradition’ which began with Weber’s famous essay linking the ‘Protestant Work Ethic’ and the ‘Spirit of Capitalism, the experience of social individuals provides the fundamental source of interpretivist knowledge (Weber, 2004). Interpretations should be drawn from the social agents ‘concepts and meanings’ (Blaikie, 2010), as well as situational detail (Saunders et al., 2009). Situation and meaning describes the context of socially constructed phenomena, the context being central to participant perspective (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). It is the aim of the interpretive study to understand the variety of views within a shared context and why these positions differ (Gehman et al., 2017; 2018). ‘Why these positions differ’ matters.

Again, yes and no. We find no difficulty in honouring ‘subjective viewpoints’; but we are much more concerned with categorising ‘positions’ and treating each position (Thought Style) as the provocative ‘context’ (condition of existence) for the other Thought Styles. In particular we do not begin with the interaction of ‘subjectivities’ but instead with specifically ‘cultural subjects’ with a specific, well-defined culturally-available repertoire of feelings and thoughts. Our study is not Weberian, but neo-Durkheimian.

### **3.2.2 Rationale for the Research Approach**

The complexities of conversation are presumed easier to understand and interpret, especially as they happen in real-time recordings, through qualitative more than quantitative means. Qualitative approaches also describe the view of social reality being an emergent and ever-changing property of the constructed world (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Ever-changing certainly, we think from one moment to the next, but qualitative? Not entirely: later in this paper,

reasonings are represented *graphically* which is neither wholly qualitative nor wholly quantitative. Indeed, all qualities have quantities, and all quantities have qualities – they are examples of *something* and not just a number. Our study is ‘not positivist’ in the technical sense that it is not survey based.

We are interested in how cultural subjects arrive at evaluations of what is an ‘*effective*’ or ‘*ineffective*’ conversation, an understanding of how conversation is created, varies and shapes outcomes in a workplace context. Therefore, it makes sense to record managers’ and employees’ descriptions of their work experiences. This study only partly explores conversation through participants’ recollections of their experiences, but then elicits conversations within the constraints of prepared role plays which introduce elements of difficulty deliberately.

Unfortunately, textbooks on business and management research methods omit G-GCT altogether. Thus, while it is fair to say that social actors construct social phenomena (Saunders et al., 2007), according to the meanings of those involved (Berg, 2013; 2014), we will argue that those ‘meanings’ are themselves culturally enabled. It is *not* the case that any actor can create any meaning at will. Of course, realities are experienced as ‘personal’ to each individual, based on their reasoning within a given context (Chilsa and Kawulich, 2012), however individuals might be surprised a) that other actors think using the exact same prototypical forms of reasoning that they do and that the individual is not as special and privileged as interpretivists would have us believe. b) Institutions have the same prototypical thoughts as individuals do: Washington thinks; the BBC thinks; Moscow thinks. That is ‘meanings’ are scalable.

In workplace conversation studies the research undertaken failed to present fundamental and clear explanations for how superiors and subordinates interact, and why they interact in those ways specifically. Thus, while “*recognising the subject’s perspective*” (Powell et al., 2011), this study aims to understand the social actors’ as specifically ‘cultural’ more than infinitely ‘subjective’. We do not agree that actors are wholly the authors of their own reasons. There is more to conversation than the rather vague and unsatisfactory assertion of the ‘interpretivists’ that ‘meanings are subjective’.

### 3.2.3 Participative enquiry

To achieve an understanding of the social agents' perspectives and conversational utterances, 'participative enquiry' is adopted in this study.

Participative enquiry principally involves the social actors in the generation and at least partial evaluation of data, through research conducted within their contextual group (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Thus, we involved third-party observation of prepared role-plays as well as inviting participants to enact role plays. Again, textbooks in business and management methodology do not dwell on 'applied theatre' as we have used it (below) and so when an author emphasises the value of researchers developing questions interactively and co-creating research (Traylen, 1994; Reason, 2008), this leaves a lot to be worked out specifically.

We are aware of three forms of participative enquiry - 'co-operative enquiry'; 'participatory action research'; and 'action research' - of which participatory action research is chosen here, in order to understand the context between manager and employee interactions by playing these roles. For pragmatic reasons, this will be paired with 'Participatory Theatre' (PT) as a further research technique, expanded on in the chapter 3.2.4.

It is claimed that individual knowledge provides the productive capacity to shape social action (Quinlan, 2010). However, G-GCT does not treat knowledge as wholly 'individual' and unique to each individual. The 'shaping' of 'social action' is not a matter of the boundless interaction of boundless meanings and understandings. We embrace the proposition that 'knowledge production' is dynamic and that, as both are 'cultural subjects', the same dynamics are found within the interactions between the researcher and the participants (Landy et al., 2001; Lomas, 2005). According to Quinlan (2010), "*knowledge becomes 'actionable' when it is interpreted, placed in context, and acted upon*". Because this claim borders on a truism it is hard to disagree with it. But it leaves out how and why cultural actors understand their 'contexts' differently; act differently in what might appear to third parties as the same situation, and may 'interpret' place interpretations 'in context' and choose *not* to act, or act in radically opposing ways which strike protagonists as eminently reasonable to the point of obviousness.

Yes, the contextual interactive practices of the 'community' allow the exchange and development of knowledge, of which that deemed meaningful to the community reshaped the environment (Quinlan, 2010). But why are 'communities' often divided over what counts as

knowledge; why is what is imperative to one actor of no concern to the next, and why is so much of such ‘reshaping’ an unexpected surprise even to those involved?

To G-GCT it is *not the case that* meaning is independently and individually(!) derived from interactions with an environment, and thus inherently subjective (Mangenda, 2011), because a cultural subject is never distinct from a cultural ‘environment’. It exists within them and outside of them, approximately as water exists inside a fish as outside. We are a culture-based life-form to the same degree that our biology is ‘carbon based’. There is no escaping culture.

In following a participatory ‘Action Research’ approach, the findings and conclusions should be part of a continuous research process paving the way for social change (Greenwood and Levin, 2006). The inherent implication of ‘Action Research’ being, according to Mangenda (2011), that “*valid social knowledge*” stems from “*practical reasoning engaged in through action*”. Yes, we hope that this research enables more ‘reflexivity’ in actors engaged in conversation, notably HR / Management conversations.

### **3.2.4 Participatory Theatre Research**

Forum theatre, modelled by the theatre director Augusto Boal 1960s, affords the audience an opportunity to become involved in a performance with suggestions or acted roles, by interjecting (Babbage 2004; Jackson 2007; Milling and Ley 2000; Nicholson 2005). Through forum theatre, participants are able to enact real issues and practice responses safely, thanks to which it has become the theoretical basis of much theatre-based work in organisations (Rae, 2011). Forum is an *experimental method* for testing-out what solves impasse and what does not. In this sense it is positivistic, but it is also qualitative.

With forum theatre, ‘ownership’ of the theatrical experience was democratized by incorporating the prior knowledge of everyone participating (Rae, 2011), allowing different voices to be expressed (Babbage 2004; Nissley et al. 2004), and to challenge hierarchical structures. It is arguably rather Egalitarian, but incorporates Individual inventiveness competitively, and is Fatalistic in the sense that ‘magic solutions’ are forbidden.

‘Participatory Theatre’ (PT) covers a wide range of drama techniques to represent and examine problems, and typically to test prospective approaches (Quinlan, 2010), and has previously been used in business training, personality testing, and psychotherapy (Cohen et al., 2017,

2018). Participatory theatre techniques enable reflexive and deconstruction through illustrative dialogue (Mangenda, 2011), of particular value to “*narrative and discursive analysis*” (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis, 2017; 2008). We know of no study which introduces G-GCT to PT for the purpose of analysis.

As an interactive social research methodology, PT takes contributions from participants who take turns in *acting* and *directing*, so that participants “*create their own narratives*” and “*embody their own versions of their experiences*” accurately enough, without use of opinion surveys, but in immediate and explicit response to other participants (Erel et al., 2017). Further noted by Erel et al. (2017), and of particular interest to this study, participants are able to devise a range of possibilities and actively change the social landscape experimentally to alter the course of conversation and tone of performance through reactive dialogue. Ideas are evoked dynamically; utterances which participants would have difficulty thinking just by themselves as ‘subjective’ creators of ‘meanings’. By both participating and witnessing Forum Theatre the new possibilities are found quickly among these ‘spect-actors’. Altogether, PT (Forum, Object Theatre, Human Tableaux) provides a collective and accumulative process in which action and reflection advance the practical pursuit of *solutions* to social problems (Ammentorp et al., 2018).

Forum generates improvised but realistic (naturalistic) conversation and we adopted it as a technique for studying real-time interactions between manager and employee roles. To guide the role-play forum theatre was kept in line with the premises of the research: basic background scenarios are provided to elicit challenging dialogue in which actors are free to converse as they choose. Participatory efforts are made by the researcher where necessary to ensure performances resemble professional practices and all ‘magic’ is avoided.

Participatory theatre engages participants in a manner other forms of research could not, making it the ideal candidate for engaging and representative real-time dialogue with participant feedback on why they said what they said when they said it. For its ability to enhance participant guidance of the research direction, PT also fits interpretive study as far as it goes. However, we introduce the further stage of G-GCT analysis afterwards. Participatory theatre serves our research questions, theoretically and practically. (See also Gibb, 2004 on its use in studying ‘corporate communication’.)

Forum provides for interactive agency but also the useful experimental study of *alternative* interactions in search of novel outcomes judged to be improvements as far as participants are concerned (See also Buur and Larsen, 2010). Improvisation allows participants to explore interactive possibilities while identifying patterns, allowing for ‘learning moments’ within the group (Gibb, 2004). Through this unconventionally creative theatrical approach, participants freely articulate generative themes and co-evaluate their efforts to portray and solve a social problem (Erel et al., 2017). They commence with re-enacting prior *difficult conversations* and find ways through them.

Spectators create and witness fresh insights within a specific space-time setting and scenario (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis, 2017; 2008), compared with more commonplace interviews and focus groups, and is inclusive of verbalized and non-verbalized signals, particularly for those without the linguistic or cultural capital to address these more formal methods (Erel et al., 2017).

Certainly participatory, Forum is a form of action research which clearly develops ‘shared knowledge’ among participants, to create change (O’Neill et al., 2005). In these senses it is ‘interpretive’ but under the direction of experienced theatre practitioners (Erel et al., 2017). Typically, Forum Theatre practitioners are not social scientists. In an important sense they provide a more accurate (verbatim), direct form of conversation analysis than is possible by inviting interviews to recall and summarise past conversations as far as they can remember them. It is surprising that interpretivist researchers do not use Forum as their default method, particularly as it enables re-evaluation of perspectives and approaches and extracts more information from each participant is possible through serial interviews with different respondents at different times. Worse still, the literature on ‘workplace conversation’ mostly focus on *one side* of the conversation, most often the exasperated manager and participatory theatre is used rarely if ever except in management training sessions. We need ‘both sides’ of conversations ideally with audience contributions with which the researchers’ interpretations and evaluations can be compared.

For our purposes we needed realistic workplace scenarios explored repeatedly in Forum. We chose role-playing to “*simulate [...] social situations*” to elicit “*imitate reality*” (Cohen et al., 2017, 2018; Mangenda, 2011). Role-play is frequently practised in professional development, for example to develop empathy and ‘active listening’ (Mangenda, 2011) to exploring roles and

allow participants to “reproduce, confront and transform their identity positions” (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis, 2017; 2008).

Role play is chosen here to understand how managers and employees interact in the workplace using their own repertoire of conversational skills and “*subject to the collective critical reflection of the entire group*” following each iteration which renewed understanding is evolved (Quinlan, 2010). Quinlan emphasises participant engagement with understanding, reflexivity on rational discourse, and discursive hypotheses for alternatives; in a “*continuous cycle of group-based activities*” as depicted:

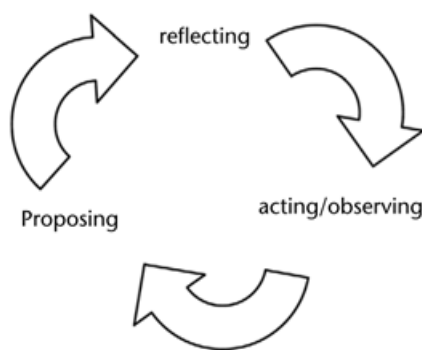


Figure 3.1: Continuous cycle of group-based participatory theatre activities (Quinlan, 2010)

### 3.3 Research Methods and Design

Three phases of data collection techniques are devised: semi-structured interviews recalling ‘best’ and ‘worst’ workplace conversations and devising of scenarios; participatory theatre of scenario-based role plays and forum discussion with audience and role players, with a view to G-GCT analysis of verbatim conversations (Table 3.1).

Research Phase	Methods used	Brief Description
Phase 1	Interview	Semi-Structured Interview used to explore the key elements of opinions on what constituted ‘effective’ and ‘ineffective’ conversations.

<b>Phase 2</b>	Participatory Theatre Research	<p>Events are held to recognise how simulated workplace conversation functions and fluctuates through means of ‘role play’.</p> <p>Following the performance, observers discuss the role-played interactive activity in a social and organisational context based on the researcher’s questions.</p>
<b>Phase 3</b>	Focus Group	<p>Recordings of the role-play conversations are viewed by a professionally-experienced audience to discuss the overall quality of content and outcomes, and to gather opinions on the factors at play.</p>

Table 3.1: Research Design

### 3.3.1 Semi-structured Interview

Minimally-structured interviews began with nine employees from widely different backgrounds with the simple prompt ‘Please tell me your worst-ever and best-ever workplace conversations’. The interviews were thus autonomously enabled (Gioia et al., 2012). Open-ended questioning enables the research participants to think carefully about their answers (Mathers et al., 1998). They would have much to say, especially about ‘bad conversations’, recorded in full with permission, combined with note taking. Little was needed: questions, covering what happened, why the situation occurred (as far as they could tell) and how the conversation went (Yin, 2015), (Appendix IV below).

#### 3.3.1.1 Sampling

Sampling is a means of gaining consistency of data about the given group being studied (Sapsford, 2006). Purposive sampling is used to include participants without randomisation (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Saunders, et al., 2009; Tracy, 2012). Participants are chosen by filtering relevant participant characteristics, to meet the needs of the research topic (Bryman and Bell, 2015). We sought diversity of character, background and input for diversity of recollection (Martínez-Mesa *et al.*, 2016; Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2009). Being non-



probabilistic (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Collis and Hussey, 2014) nevertheless we kept to experienced employees, with detailed experiences prioritised over breadth of coverage (Silverman, 2001). Validity (Bryman and Bell, 2015) was of secondary concern. Qualitative interview samples of between five and ninety are recommended, with smaller samples being narrow and deep (Blair et al., 2006). Nine experienced participants from diverse industries: education, design, social care, construction, and accountancy.

The author sent invitations to acquaintances who fitted the criteria, with a request that they ‘snowball’ the sample within their networks. In total, fifteen prospective participants indicated an interest. Participants were asked to provide their availability outside of working hours. However, due to scheduling clashes, nine interviews were conducted. This sample size and breadth of the interviewees undoubtedly creates some limitations in terms of generalisability; however they did provide a great deal of transcript data for ‘interpretive’ analysis based on the respondents’ own ‘meanings’, without use of G-GCT classification.

Participants ranged from 27 to 62 years of age and five ethnic groups. The profiles of each individual interviewee’s work sector and demographic information are provided in Table 3.2.

Each interview was to last between thirty minutes and an hour, using the same small set of questions. A few spontaneous questions were inserted to pursue particularly intriguing recollections. Notes were taken before and immediately afterwards. Participants completed a consent form (Appendix III) beforehand. A job description and background information were requested at the onset, confirmed in later emails.

Even with a small sample qualitative variability was hoped for (Gehman et al., 2017; 2018). When the interview transcripts were analysed, we restricted coding to recurring themes found only in what had been said; *not G-GCT*.

Interviewees	Work Sector	Job Title	Age	Gender	Nationality
Interviewee 1	Education	Teaching assistant	30	Female	Malaysian
Interviewee 2	Manufacture	Product Designer	31	Female	Chinese
Interviewee 3	Advertising	Designer	35	Male	Nigerian
Interviewee 4	Education	Graphics Lecturer	30	Male	Jordanian
Interviewee 5	Education	Research fellow	31	Female	Bangladeshi
Interviewee 6	Construction	Building Surveyor	27	Male	British
Interviewee 7	Education	Senior Lecturer	62	Male	British
Interviewee 8	Accountancy	Administrator	28	Female	Chinese
Interviewee 9	Social care	Care worker	60	Female	British

Table 3.2: Profile of Interviewees, including background and demographic information

### **3.3.2 Participatory Theatre Workshop**

Participatory (Forum) Theatre workshops were held with 34 participants including MBA students, MBA lecturers, Drama lecturers, Drama students and a diverse demographic of very experienced professionals from different industries. This researcher's Second Supervisor lectures and practices Drama & Theatre, and she offered guidance on use of role plays of manager-employee workplace conversation, each based on one of three realistic scenarios consistent with interviewees' recollections of 'bad conversations' or 'difficult workplace conversations'. Once we had developed three realistic scenarios into 'prepared role-plays' these were used repeatedly in Forum with different role players, but this time with a view to measuring variations in Thought Styles.

Like the employee interviews all role-players and Forum members had prior professional work experience; most were very experienced. MBA participants had been or were currently employed across a wide range of different professional fields and nationalities at the time.

#### **3.3.2.1 Sampling**

As mentioned above, the criteria for selecting participants was

1) an absolute minimum of one year's work experience, and preferable several years of managerial experience to help with playing the manager roles we had prepared. These would have little least difficulty enacting workplace conversation much as they would engage in ordinarily (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). We sought professionals, including team leaders, (successfully) whose work entails conversation inescapably.

2) willing participants who could reach the Brunel campus, to whom we promised an introduction to professional development techniques which they would have had little or no prior experience of.

Early on, we recognised that there could be logistical challenges:

- Hiring high quality AV (video recording) equipment
- Obtaining room-space suitable for Forum Theatre and rearranging the seating

- Bringing participants together at the same time for the duration while fitting around their work commitments

*Several unanticipated challenges were encountered. Firstly, an attempt was made to organise a workshop through an online event organising platform, with friends asked to share invites to their professional network via social media. Unfortunately, only two, previously unknown people, registered for the event, and with the number indicating expected attendance being too low for participatory theatre sampling, the first scheduled workshop had to be cancelled.*

*A change of strategy was needed. This researcher attended a variety of professional development and networking events (e.g., CIPD events and Leadership Development courses) with the partial aim of ‘selling’ our own Forum events which would explore overlooked aspects of difficult workplace conversations through participatory forum theatre.*

*Convincing others proved more difficult than anticipated, as did gathering enough participants together in a big enough Forum and at the same time to fit multiple professional and social schedules simultaneously.*

*After attending a paid training course, it occurred to this author to offer to run participatory research theatre sessions at those trainers’ own training events, but existing trainers were sensitive to the risks and declined. Instead, through a meeting with Dr. Stephen Smith, a request was made to incorporate participatory theatre workshops into relevant MBA sessions at the university where these fitted the program’s ‘teaching and learning aims’. This gave us a large enough, willing and diverse sample of post-experience professionals (an MBA entry requirement), and provided students with authentic learning opportunities and knowledge sharing. Permissions were obtained from the MBA Director of Studies and three Module Leaders who agreed to allow use of their class time.*

### **Group 1: Professionals including Managers and Employees**

Several role-play and response sessions were conducted, all of which were arranged as above with ten participants. A repeat was arranged in modified form for a ‘Communication Skills’ MBA workshop slot with the enthusiastic permission of a very experienced professional trainer, Jon Twomey. In this second session video-recordings of prior role-play conversations were shown to sixteen participants to record their evaluations too.

We ended up with as many iterations of each of the three prepared role plays and as many third-party evaluations as our time resources allowed. The temptation was for more, but I was advised against this, bearing in mind that G-GCT coding would follow.

## **Group 2: Actors**

A small number of actors were also sought for their experience in Participatory Theatre, as this researcher had little experience of PT except during her Social Work role-playing client counselling. Meretta Elliot and Stephen Smith provided guidance in participatory forum theatre and on how it can be used to generate research findings and raise standards, for example in police custody work, prisons and in Occupational Medicine. Meretta is an experienced actor and actor-manager who was willing to participate in the research as a role-player. The involvement of two more actors was also arranged – namely a drama student and a professional actor. This was to give us three participant actors in ‘Employee Roles’ while non-actors filled the ‘Manager’ roles.

## **Group 3: Outside Professionals**

Lay persons can also offer evaluations of workplace conversation and we were interested in their reasonings too. Five non-student professionals were shown selected role-play videos separately and provided feedback exclusively to this researcher which was to be analysed alongside the evaluations offered by participating students, presented in Chapter 5.

Information for each set of participants is set out below:

Groups	Participants	Sample size	Age range
Group 1	MBA students (1 <sup>st</sup> sub-group)	10	26-45
	MBA students (2 <sup>nd</sup> sub-group)	16	25-40
Group 2	Actors	3	22-60
Group 3	Professionals not in Education	5	25-35

Table 3.3: Demographic information of ‘Participatory Theatre Workshop’ Participants

### **3.3.2.2 Procedure**

#### **Role-play workshops**

This stage consisted of observed ‘*Panels*’ involving actors performing ‘*Prepared Role Plays*’; prepared in the sense that a *backstory* was shown *privately* to each participant prior to their performance. The role plays each involve Manager-Employee dyads. Prepared role plays of

triad and larger group scenarios were considered but, although tempting, were rejected because of time-constraints particularly at the coding stage (see below) for logistical constraints and on advice from the supervisory team that this author already had 'more than enough' and that 'there is only so much that a doctoral candidate can accomplish with the time and funding available to them.' 'There is always the future for more research, but don't take on more now!' It had been reasoned (Competitively) that a 'larger sample would make a stronger thesis' but the (Hierarchical and Fatalistic) advice received shifted my thinking into the Fatalistic position.

As stated, three prototypical conversation scenarios of the sort managers and employees are responsible for holding were written and refined before use. They vary in the degrees of difficulty which they present, especially to the manager role-player. The 'managers' and 'employees' participating in the role plays were briefed separately and with different information consistent with the specified scenario. The participants were free to choose their words and manner of presenting themselves throughout and to work off their prepared 'back stories'. Back stories (imagined and actual biographical experiences unknown to the protagonist opposite them) enable fluent and naturalistically role-play, whichever turn a conversation might take. It is typical of workplace conversations that each party has limited knowledge of the other's private and past lives, yet these will enter into their reasoning by degrees.

The Managers in particular were expected to draw on their actual past experiences to enact and embody the role so that their side of the conversation 'rang true'. The audience would also have had their rich biographies which would have entered into their evaluations of the role plays they witnessed, but which of course lay beyond our knowledge. What we saw is consistent with being 'critical friends' of the role players.

Structured discussions were facilitated by the researcher to elicit:

- what each role player thought of self and the other
- what the Forum thought about how well or badly the conversation had progressed and at which points
- what any participant thought could have been done differently

In this way experienced professionals' judgements about 'successful' and 'less successful' conversations were to be elicited.

### **Pilot experience -with supervisors**

Prior to initiating the interviews and role-plays, and recording all necessary data, a test run of each stage was undertaken with my supervisors, as a 'dry-run' check that each stage ought to lead effectively to the next, and that data gathered as planned.

### **Scenario with back story example: Mike (Age 35)**

Notes shown to the manager-actor beforehand read as follows:

*'Mike was a good and experienced employee in your team, and very kind to others. However, recently you heard his team leader complain that he displays anger and bad temper at some employees – more than once - especially at junior employees during work. This behaviour made some employees disappointed and afraid to talk with him. You have noticed that this seems to have made it more difficult for others to complete their work effectively, and this seems to have affected their morale. You are considering having to talk with Mike, to try and resolve this problem, but you also need to be careful and to ensure your position. After all you know that he has a reputation as a good, experienced and considerate worker in the past.'*

The back story shown to the employee-actor, in this case 'Mike':

*'Since his beautiful ex-wife divorced him half a year ago, and took his son away from him, he became lonely. He has been trying to see his son several times, but was prevented from doing so by his ex-wife. Nevertheless, he still hopes that his ex-wife will come back to him despite there being no sign of this happening. He felt very upset. He has taken to drinking a lot after work to reduce the pain that he feels.'*

Note that both briefs are sparse on detail. This is deliberate, allowing participants to talk as if themselves as Mike or his Manager.

### **Role-play Videos Review workshop**

Among an audience of experienced managers (currently in work or an employer-sponsored PT MBA student or self-financed FT or PT MBA student), the above 'Mike' role play (known as

Mike 1) was presented, followed by a plenary discussion about the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ features of the conversation.

### 3.4 Coding and Data Analysis

The researcher later transcribed *all* recordings from the interview, role-play, and role-play review (Forum) phases. This involved reading them again and again while listening to the recordings, editing the transcripts as necessary. This is because for dialogue analysis, accuracy is of paramount importance as mistakes here would compromise G-GCT analysis. Edits were made in places for the purposes of clarity, especially in the role-play transcripts, where there were lots of recurring repeated words and vocalised thought, such as “*well.. umm.. Well..*”.

In analysing the interview transcriptions we encoded each spoken statement with a ‘tag-word’, ‘open-coding’ it with generic descriptors of what is being said, confining ourselves to interviewees’ own evaluations of what makes for good and bad conversations. The ‘cloud’ of open-coding key terms is then reviewed to infer categorical patterns, and is grouped into ‘themes’. These themes amount to clarifications of each interviewees’ own theories of their experiences of good and bad workplace conversations.

The role-play phase transcripts are encoded using G-GCT for each sentence or fragment of sentence if their rationality is detectable. An example would be ‘Why don’t we have a drink?’ [Egalitarian].

The third step encoded reviewer responses for both the found themes and G-GCT, as a method of measuring the differences in the perceived accuracy and variable range between the reviewers and the researcher’s evaluation. All phases of analysis were later reviewed a second time, to eliminate or minimise misinterpretations (and therefore coding mistakes).

For ease of reference, once codes had been assigned to all statements across all phases and reviewed, graphs were made by plotting the codes on the *y* axis and pairs of ‘manager-statement’ and ‘employee-response’ (or *vice versa*) along the *x* axis, in order to chart the flow of conversation. This makes it possible to take in conversation at a glance.

It is often stated that qualitative research is of exploratory studies enabling scanning for meaningful patterns (Seidel and Kelle, 1995). But how? Grounded method defers theory as long as possible, constructing theory out of evidence, so that, having captured salient and summative codes, patterns, categories and theories can be ‘built’ (Saldaña, 2016). In contrast

some insist that patterns can be understood only using “*a set of conceptually specified analytical categories*” (Mishler, 1990), which Mishler argues to be derived deductively or inductively. Strauss and Glaser (2017) highlight the importance ‘sensitising’ data to create a “*meaningful picture*” for *readers* to interpret vividly and sensorially. There is no consensus: analytical qualitative techniques range from the “quasi statistical” and systematic to more nuanced techniques (King et al., 1994; Ryan and Bernard, 2003). It suits our purposes to use:

- Content and thematic analysis for coding and categorising data by themes, particularly of the interviews in search of recurring patterns.
- Narrative analysis of the ‘meaning’ of stories told about workplaces and of the outcomes reported, again as preliminary
- Discourse Analysis and application of ‘conceptually specified’ Grid-Group ‘categories’ to role plays and Forum evaluations

Coding acts on “*most basic element of the raw data*” (Boyatzis 1998). Codes inferred or applied to qualitative evidence ‘translate’ data in accordance with researcher priorities (Vogt, et al., 2014, cited in Saldaña, 2016). However, at least three types of coding are on offer: Open coding; Axial coding; and Selective coding (Bryman and Bell, 2014). Note that as coding is a cultural activity, there ought to be *four* forms according to G-GCT.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that coding consists of more than categorisation. Codes should not reduce the usefulness and applicability of data, but should be an expansive method that preserves the rawness of codes by not departing much from raw data, yet allows re-conceptualization and recombination (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Yet codes should also enable connection between the data and abstract concepts developed from the data by the researcher (Seidel and Kelle, 1995).

The first-stage coding can cover any portion of data, “*from single words to full paragraphs, an entire page or stream of moving images*” (Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña goes on to describe second-stage coding as either equivalent units, analytical notes, or the reconfiguration and further development of the codes in order to shape theory.



In summary, coding connects data and meanings (Charmaz, 2001 cited in Saldaña, 2016), with qualitative coding of transcribed text requiring the assignment of labels to convey meaning and make categoric connection (Punch and Oancea, 2014).

Mixed coding techniques were used in this research, including generic codes found through the literature review, such as conversation-related terminology: ‘openness’, ‘trust’, ‘bullying’, ‘listening’ etc.; and only later codes matching the G-GCT framework: ‘Hierarchical, Egalitarian, Individualistic and Fatalistic’. Meanwhile, this researcher attempted to maintain an ‘open mind’ throughout the coding process, with all but one utterance coded with some thought. To ensure G-GCT coding accuracy, a ‘blind’ second opinion was provided by Dr. Smith. This showed a remarkable degree of concordance approaching 99% agreement between researcher and supervisor, done phrase-by-phrase or sentence-by-sentence, as units. This allows for statement-by-statement graphical representation of manager-employee sentence pairs, numbered (See examples in appendix VI).

### **3.5 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity refers to self-awareness and self-regulation in the researcher (Adkins, 2001), including reflection on their own views, experiences and ‘identity’ that influence the formulation of research questions, research design, data collection techniques and her approach to data analysis (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010; Butcher, 2017; Nightingale and Cromby, 1999; Tracy, 2012; Etherington, 2016; 2007; MacIdntosh et al., 2017).

The notes that follow provide some reflexive understandings of this researcher’s perspective:

Since I was young, I was called a “*bossy girl*”, and that is because I did not always get along well with the employees who worked with us at our family business, a rice noodle factory. Meanwhile, I observed the interactions my father had with staff, and noticed that he would often shout at them. As a child, I thought that is what a ‘boss’ was supposed to be. In many ways my father is a friendly person, and he generally treated employees quite well, often giving them bonuses, gifts and time off from work whenever requested. However, doing these things did not actually build long-term relationships between him and the employees.

Over many years, I saw people come and leave the company, with the shortest period of employment and staff retention being half a day. I still have a very clear memory of that day on which our briefest employee worked with us. It was close to Chinese New Year, and in a

traditional town that means we are extremely busy due to the rushed demand for festive food. Under the pressure to deliver the products on time, my dad tried to teach the employee how to use the machine with an all too brief demonstration, but the young staff member did not fully follow and understand, so my dad got irritated and shouted at him. Indeed, the next morning, the employee told my mum: *“I am afraid that I am not suitable for this job, and I have to go”*. Thus, we lost a potential employee, and we had to look for a new one, creating further difficulties at an already high-pressure period.

For a long time, I was confused as to why my dad’s business failed to expand and improve competitively over thirty years of very hard work. He stringently produced the best quality rice noodles in my hometown, possibly the region, and his products had a great reputation. But ultimately it became apparent that he was not capable, or at least sufficiently skilled, in managing our employees. Thus, expansion and organisational efficiency, despite the high potential of the products, were rendered impossible. I assume that his poor communication and management practices were the primary factor in an otherwise functional organisation.

Of course, I did not realise and make sense of this until I started studying my subject of Social Work at university, where I learnt that the most important thing was ‘how to talk’, and I finally realised that language has two-sides, and can really go either way. That was the point when I realised that when we talk to anyone, it is not just about ourselves, the other side has to be considered too.

This ‘reflection’ had effects on our research:

When I held interviews with the participants, I gave as much freedom as they required to talk for as long as they wished and I was very appreciative that they placed enough trust in me to provide so many useful answers. As my research question was related to the good and bad conversations *they* had had in the workplace, some sensitive topics about unfair treatment, and indeed, being shouted at, were raised which I recognised as familiar. Apart from being a researcher, I could now ‘put myself in their shoes’, and treat them as if almost confiding friends. I felt for many of the situations they recalled. However, it was important also to keep in mind the research objectives. However, because of this, the trust we built during the interviews further motivated me to continue my research.

It was validating when one of the participants told me that what I am doing as an interviewer is what they wanted from their manager: someone to sit with them as equals and listen to their

situation and the difficulties it raises. The barrier between the employees and their manager is something that actually stopped them being close and of course as an impatient member of our family's noodle business, this also offered insight into my own past. Several participants called this barrier "*power*", and all of these interviewees had the feeling that "*power*" is something that stands between the employee and manager. At that point, I decided that my research can go beyond understanding the 'good' and 'bad' features of conversation, to understand the reason behind the concept of 'power' and its effects.

As described, the second phase of research brought 'theatre' into MBA classrooms. It not only gave me the chance to watch participants themselves placed in manager's or employee's shoes and how they could make that role vivid in their mind by also falling into archetypal notions assigned to these positions. Again it 'brought me back' to my childhood, when I saw my dad as the 'boss' type role, and how I copied him in shouting at our employees. However, in the participatory theatre, each of the participants can differ from how they would actually act in their real workplace, and some of them might also act as 'someone else' in their mind. However, the key is that their role-play reflects the range of possibilities when each of us are assigned positions like 'manager' or 'employee'.

PT participants gave themselves with passion; an added bonus of this research, and made me realise how important 'engagement' is to presence in the world. My understanding grows with every interaction in a way it did not at our noodle factory and home. Having doubted myself and my research at times before, interaction with participants clarified that this study and my motives for it were welcomed by others.

On introducing my topic at a ticketed training event, one consultant told me that they "*don't think managers really care about knowing how to talk*". For a young and passionate researcher, that brief conversation with him made me doubt my work for a long time, yet soon after, fortunately I met workshop participants who enjoyed the process and confirmed that "*what you are doing is very interesting, and we are looking forward to reading it*".

Conducting this study has taught me that research is not only about being qualified with a 'Doctorate Degree', but it is also about wider public responsibilities to address problems, even problems not yet known by others to be a problem. I felt responsible for my participants. The trust between researcher and participants is not easy to build, and participants should not only

be our ‘tools’, but also persons to whom we have a responsibility in terms of what matters to them. Both they and I were there, especially because we are troubled by bad conversations.

As my lecturer in Social Work said, “*helping others is helping yourself*”, here by generating new knowledge indeed ‘collaboratively’.

### **3.6 Limitations and Considerations**

Following reflexive evaluation of self it is also necessary to attempt forethought into potential ‘pitfalls’ (risks). There were several:

Firstly, the development of role-play scenario briefs. The background information about the ‘characters’, revealed to the actors playing them, was included as a means of 1) providing minor direction and motivation, and 2) comparing different enactments of the same base scenario, using different actors. The scenarios were consistent with descriptions reported by interviewees in phase 1, many of whom referred to facing problems in workplace conversations due to, in their view, a difficult manager, with poor outcomes. However, scenario writing is vulnerable to the Hierarchical, Egalitarian, Individualistic or Fatalistic ‘cultural biases’ of the researcher. Meanwhile each Forum member will engage through their Thought Styles too. Because the scenarios are explained differently to the manager, who is told professional issues raised about the employee, and the employee, who is reminded of their personal and professional issues, there is also the possibility of differing levels of initial intensity and power balance, in terms of the direction of blame.

Is this a problem – that researcher and participants are inescapably ‘cultural subjects’? We suggest not, once this last observation is known at least to the researcher.

Secondly, the age-old issue of time. Despite exhausting efforts, there was a lengthy delay before the first session. The time-slots within MBA modules could be as short as an hour, which is very tight by the standards of PT.

Thirdly, time limits restricted our ability to offer teaching on ‘good and bad conversation’. Several disengaged from the process as it was not the ‘lesson’ that they had expected, and because the researcher lacked a tutor’s authority as she was also a student.

### **3.7 Ethical Consideration**

From the formulation of the research design to interaction with participants, interpretation and publishing the interpretations, ethical considerations are fundamental (Saunders et al., 2009), including risks to participants and informed consent (Cunliffe and Alcadipani, 2016). Participants must know the purposes of the research and what their participation will involve (Blumberg et al., 2014), after which the researcher must make no changes, maintaining the course of action as agreed in the participatory contract (Blumberg et al., 2014).

A detailed participant information sheet was designed, containing an accurate description of the purposes and how data would be collected and used, including audio-visual recordings, also detailing the right to withdraw at any time without explanation. The form(s) were approved (Hierarchically) by the Brunel Ethics Committee office (BREO), which was mandatory.

The first phase interviews especially required personal accounts of good and bad professional experience, so participant confidentiality was ensured by changing names and omitting references to companies, or any information by which participants could be identified (Blumberg et al., 2014; Queen, 1959). All data collected, including video recordings and transcripts were stored on a PC, backed up on a private hard drive after anonymisation had been applied.

### **3.8 Summary**

In summary, the plan is to measure qualitative conversational content, following three steps of interviews to derive themes, prepared role-plays suitable for PT and audience reviews to expand and compare differing assessments ultimately identifiable as ‘cultural’ as described in the Literature Review, represented below.

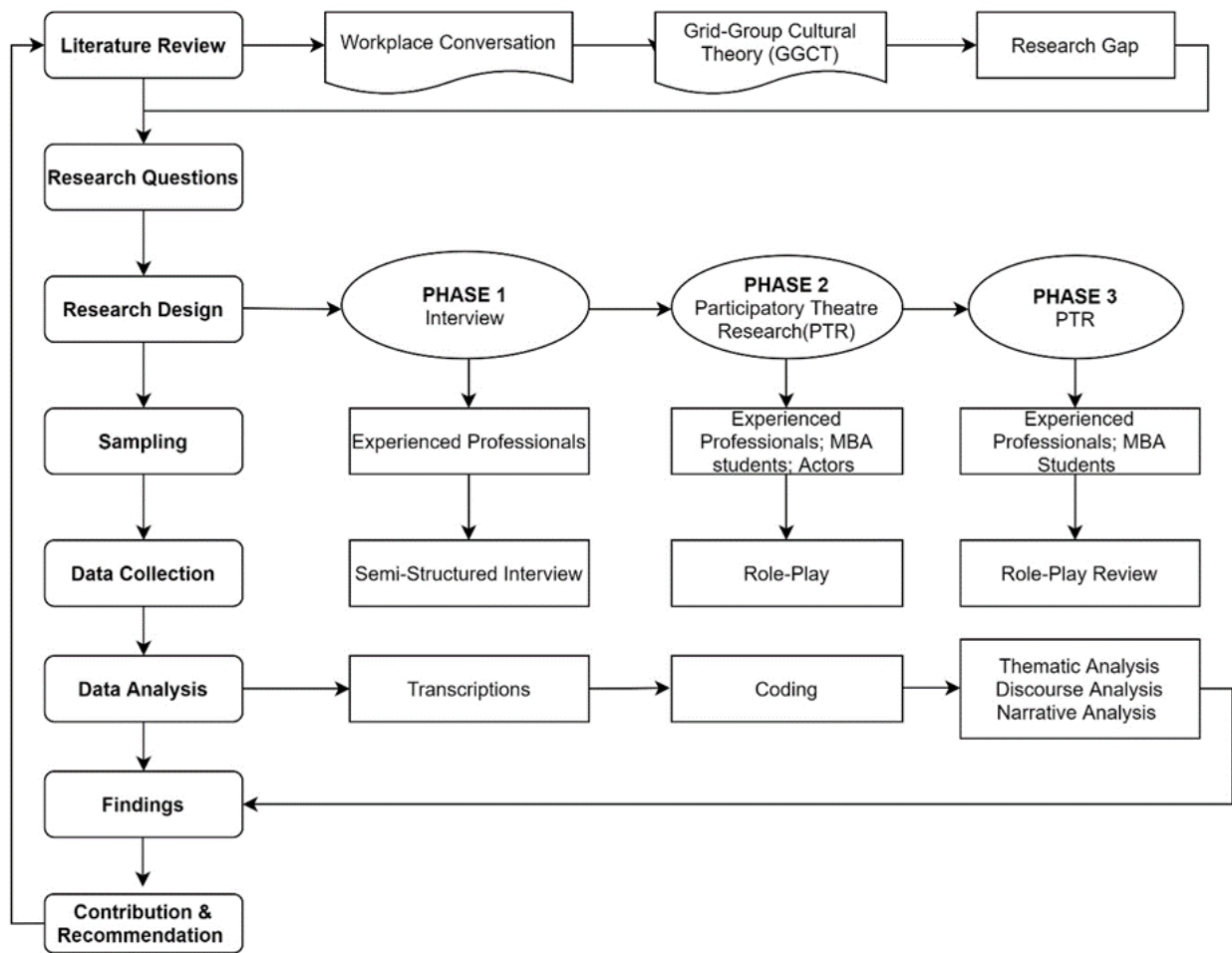


Figure 3.2 Research process diagram

Next, we turn to the outcomes.

## **Chapter 4 : Findings Parts A - ‘Shocked by what he said’**

### **4.1 Introduction and Aims**

This is the first of two chapters (Findings Parts A and B) which taken together present the analysis and findings of three stages of data collection: interviews, role-plays and evaluations, the outcomes of our methodology as described in the previous chapter.

In chapter 2, it was shown that:

- (1) Conversation in the workplace is constitutive of organisational culture (Berger, 2008; Mengis and Eppler, 2008; Crumpton, 2012; Men and Stacks, 2014; Jian and Dalisay, 2017),
- (2) There is a high probability that some conversations in the workplace will be difficult and challenging (Ilgen and Davis, 2000, 2001; Gratton and Ghoshal, 2002; Farrell, 2015; Bradley and Campbell, 2016)
- (3) Poor handling of conversation can precipitate resistance, and damage employee morale, relationships and cognitions (Gratton and Ghoshal, 2002; Farrell, 2015; Bradley and Campbell, 2016; Meyer et al., 2017).

In studying ‘good and bad conversations’ it makes some sense to begin with the ‘native’s’ point of view as a preliminary. However, as we will see later it is possible to apply a robust two-axis, four categories framework known as Grid-Group Cultural Theory (G-GCT) to all conversational utterances, despite the content and dynamic progression of conversations being practically infinite. G-GCT has the potential to take us well beyond a ‘grounded’ approach which relies on respondents’ own common-sense understandings of what enables and prevents good conversation.

First, we present exploratory semi-structured interviews which invited interviewees to recall and analyse their most memorable good and bad experiences of workplace conversations, including their understandings of both their own reasoning and that of the other person involved. These are presented to clarify and extend the literature review, a literature which it has to be said, makes no use of Grid-Group analysis and which remains unaware of it.

This first stage enabled interviewees to speak freely about ‘how conversation works in their workplace’ and their comments were classified according to their own recurrent key phrases

which indicated ‘lack of trust’, ‘anger’ and ‘two-facedness’ as typical qualities of ‘bad conversations’. Conversations which interviewees regarded as good were also retrieved and open coded using the same technique, noting features such as ‘respect’; ‘listening’; ‘encouragement’; ‘belonging’ which again featured in interviewees descriptions.

The aim of this basic phase of the research is to assess how conversations work, the reasons offered by interviewees, the outcomes as they described them and what interviewees feel constitutes a good and a bad workplace conversation.

Understood ‘functionally’, conversation serves to create relationships in which an understanding of information, views and meaning are developed (Ford, 1999; Crumpton, 2012; Men and Stacks, 2014; Jian and Dalisay, 2017; Meyer et al., 2017). However, inherent power dynamics (typically power-imbalances) in workplace conversations can make communicating information, opinions and meanings more challenging. These asymmetries affect the content of staff relationships, including unspoken cultural differences that restrict the conduct and scope of conversations ((Avison and Banks, 2008). These asymmetries are not just a problem for employees. They also affect how much, say, a manager is able to learn from an employee. There is a degree of ‘unitarism’ in our thinking here: our hypothesis that uncovering the features and methods of effective conversations should enable communication, trusting relationships, and at least greater mutual appreciation of values, meanings and information, of some benefit to both parties.

However as should also become clear later, two parties to a conversation may

- a) be applying *equally reasonable, yet conflicting rationalities*
- b) each rationality animates’ (provokes) contrary rationalities
- c) it is this dynamic which pushes conversations towards their conclusions
- d) the same conversation may be regarded as more or less successful according to each of the contending rationalities.

Although we will show that it is not possible to define good and bad conversations definitively, the aim at this earlier stage here is to



(1) Induce a framework fairly directly from respondents' evaluations of the good and bad conversations they have experienced, through which conversation might be assessed categorically

(2) Use the interview data to develop realistic 'difficult' workplace scenarios to be role-played and analysed in a subsequent set of rounds. We saw little need to explore uncontentious scenarios which would present neither party with any difficulties, while 'difficult' scenarios have the potential to produce both 'good' and 'bad' content.

## 4.2 Background Findings

A total of nine participants were interviewed by the researcher without a set time limitation. Interviewees were invited to describe examples of 'good and bad workplace conversations' they had participated in. These interviews were recorded in full with the intent of being transcribed.

Answers were varied, with some interviewees sharing more negative experiences and others being more positively oriented. It was soon noticed that interviewees' recollections tended to dwell on their manager's attitude toward them, though the eight interviews produced a wide range of data on the nature of workplace conversations, from the respondents' points of view. Discovery of what each 'other person' thought was beyond the resources available to us, as most of the conversations had taken place a long time ago and those other persons were no longer contactable. Although no such cross-questioning was attempted, as we will show, our methodology means that we have been able not only to analyse both sides of realistic workplace conversation responses but also extract third party evaluations of them.

Of the nine interviews conducted, *seven* made reference to 'bad conversations', and only four made mention of memorably good conversational experience. Only one interviewee stated they had experienced no bad conversations at the workplace, yet this respondent did refer to difficulties due to their sense of an unspoken power imbalance and of a disrespectful distance.

The recurring topics of what were felt to have been bad conversations were work performance, attitude, hours and pay. Three interviewees also believed they had been regularly bullied by their manager, severely enough to cause two of these three to quit their jobs due to irresolvable impasses. In the third of these extreme cases, it was the manager who quit, after a third party

investigation upheld several complaints and accusations of unprofessional conduct. The headline finding was that good and more especially bad conversations stay in the mind for years, even decades later with serious outcomes for the individuals involved, and implications for their organisations.

Perhaps due to subjectivity, bad conversations were typically blamed on each interviewee's manager's unreasonable approach and inherent manager-employee conflict. Bad conversations were always the other person's fault. In four of the eight cases, the employee had left their job as a result of one or more bad conversations, or because of what we would recognise as the 'organisational culture'. In a fifth case, the interviewee described what they saw as a campaign of victimisation against them and said that without the involvement of a third party, they would likely have been fired or have left their job too.

It is striking that in more than half the cases the respondent felt powerless to stabilize the relationship, and the problem was ended only by leaving the organisation.

The information shared by the interviewees was transcribed and collected together. General descriptors were applied in open coding for every utterance, using a key word or short phrase.

By comparing the applied descriptive codes, four recurring interrelated themes were recognized. It became apparent that utterances divided quite clearly into positive and negative evaluations. The open code descriptors were placed in eight thematic groups which were paired together as polar (good/ bad) binaries. Each category has been given a title which accurately encompasses the generic descriptors it comprises, explored in section 4.2.1.

#### **4.2.1 Elements of Conversation**

Since the recollections offered by the interviewees were based on their direct experiences, although subject of course to personal interpretation and memory, the emergent features can be applied to the categorisation of present-day conversations. With some confidence we can claim that what constituted good and bad conversations up to thirty years ago may still be recognised in conversations today. It was hypothesized that the quality of conversational outcomes is describable by these metric elements, not least because our respondents were looking back at the past from the present. We suspected that what troubled and pleased interviewees today would persist in how conversations and their outcomes are evaluated now.

Importantly, these elements should describe the relationship and the content of what is being said, and the effect of each statement on outcomes.

Of the eight collected categories, pairs of closely related forms of conversational approach were found, of which each constituent of each pair made a better or worse contribution to the conversation. The communicative categories were tabulated (as below) and were found to divide evenly as shown.

Table 4.1 describes all the themes drawn from the interviews, condensed in order to group connections and combinations using single word categories. These elements are paired into better and worse approaches, functioning as interactive binaries that counteract each other in their effects.

<b>Communicative Categories</b>	<b>Positive Trait</b>	<b>Negative Trait</b>
<i>Is it accessible?</i>	<b>Openness</b>	<b>Closure</b>
Descriptive terms:	<i>Accessibility, Flexibility, Welcoming, Friendly, Approachable, Respectful, Investigative, Question, Listening, Daring, Equal, Ideas</i>	<i>Close-minded, Superiority, Rudeness, Unappreciative, Avoidant, Challenging, Ignorant, Stubborn, Unfriendly, Impatience, Unequal, Distance, Refusal</i>
<i>Is it agreeable?</i>	<b>Unanimity</b>	<b>Conflict</b>
Descriptive terms:	<i>Agreement, Patience, Approval, Order, Peace, Calm, Motivation, Solution, Debate, Togetherness, Polite, Solidarity</i>	<i>Disagreement, Aggression, Demand, Argument, Anger, Refusal, Hostility, Bullying, Shouting, Strict, Intimidation, Violence, Clashing</i>
<i>Is it believable?</i>	<b>Trust</b>	<b>Claims</b>
Descriptive terms:	<i>Truth, Faith, Hope, Loyalty, Advice, Empathy, Fairness, Caring, Honesty, Constructive Criticism, Integrity, Reliability</i>	<i>Accusation, Dishonesty, Criticism, Claims, Lies, Mistruth, Betrayal, Jealousy, Envy, Paranoia, Drama, Complaint, Gossip, Agenda</i>
<i>Is it understandable?</i>	<b>Clarity</b>	<b>Confusion</b>
Descriptive terms:	<i>Detail, Understanding, Structure, Initiative, Communication, Explanation, Concise</i>	<i>Uncertainty, Isolation, Confusion, Misunderstanding, Doubt, Miscommunication, Helplessness, Surprise, Unexpected, Complexity</i>

Table 4.1: The elements of conversation, their categoric themes and the connections that bind them  
(Illustrative evaluations of better and worse elements of conversation reported by Nine Interviewees)

#### 4.2.1.1 Is the conversation accessible?

##### Openness and Closure

Like much of the literature on conversation, interviewees' descriptions alluded to the atmospheric 'tone' of conversation, notably whether it is open or closed. Wherever the conversation is welcoming, expansive and free, it is considered 'Open'. Settings and stated attitudes which limit communicative freedom and outcomes are 'Closed.'

Where present at the outset or throughout, an open or closed atmosphere sets the tone and level of difficulty for the meeting, and the likelihood of it progressing with ease or commencing at all. The following extract is useful as a reminder that 'closure' can be practised by the junior partner in an asymmetrical relationship:

*"So, that time I was a bit afraid and hesitant to contact HR. [...] I was thinking that, maybe it could, if I bothered them a lot, or if I say something which is not very expected or professional, maybe it could uh, hamper my offer. [...] Yeah, they might reject. So that fear I had with them."* (Interviewee 5)

(And yet as we will see later, closure in the form of 'sticking to the rules' is welcomed by some as *enabling* good conversation and for rational reasons.)

On the interviewee's own analyses, being 'closed' (as we have paraphrased them) may prevent a conversation from progressing, developing or taking place entirely, often through avoidance of a particular person or otherwise challenging relationship, a difficult situation, or an unwelcoming organisational structure. The fear of rejection is prominent in the above example, seemingly because of a workplace culture in which hierarchical expectations prevent an open – or *"unprofessional"* – conversation.

Sometimes, a choice is made to avoid or minimize communication when doubting a positive outcome from a challenging conversation, fearing or causing repercussions for the relationship and leaving unresolved problems to build up (Patton, 2017), and thus increasing the likelihood of future negative results.

*"I didn't know what to think. Now I think 'what a nasty, nasty thing to say'. Um, um, so that was where the conversation began."* (Interviewee 7)

A conversation may also be prevented from advancing beneficially when there is a sense of restriction, because at least one party prefers the conversation to be shortened or ended, which often causes the other to seek the same premature endpoint, limiting the range of responses and outcomes available. This self-fulfilling prophecy is particularly true when it is the manager who speaks in a closed form, especially, as in the above quote, when doing so at the start of the conversation.

One interview, a designer, recalled their worst conversations to be with a conspicuously hierarchical manager. They stated that the conversation "[was] about the manager wanting to show the power of the employer". As they saw it, this was an outcome of a position taken by the interviewee, who had challenged excessive "bureaucracy" at the workplace. Between a dislike of bureaucracy and the manager's assertion of power, our interviewee felt that conversational openness had been limited and s/he had become avoidant.

*"I don't like his attitude because he just regards himself as the boss."* (Interviewee 2)

Although the employee was called in for the conversation to discuss their 'attitude' and 'role', the way the conversation was handled led to the employee finding a problem with the attitude of management. Both participants ended the conversation holding a negative view of the other. There was impasse, whereas greater understanding of the issues would seem to have been available through more open interaction. Anticipating what we report later, this can be identified in G-GCT terms as the result of clashes between hierarchical affection for power and a fatalistic imperative for survival. *Closure fed and served both parties' preoccupations.* As the conversation as reported featured the manager inferring that the employee was "too young to learn" and an expectation which the respondent believed the manager to have held that employees should limit their role to listening and learning (from the manager) according to their relative positions in the organisation

*"It seems I got too much of my own ideas against the system"* (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee 2 felt they had expressed too many new ideas, demonstrating a degree of openness characteristic of both individualist and egalitarian thought styles. From the interviewee's description of their conversation, the closed culture of the organisation rejected this.

Often ascribed to a ‘clash of personalities’ it may be more accurate to identify logical exclusion of logical alternatives as the difficulty. A logical argument extends or refutes the premise, but importantly, does not allow for alternatives (Barge and Little, 2002) through unwillingness to accept others’ ideas, in this case causing at least one participant in the conversation and probably both to become closed, agreeing only to differ.

*“The outcome of the conversation was that we understand each other well, I think. He knows he couldn't change me, and I know I couldn't change the system. So this is the outcome that we know...we couldn't change.... there are always issues.” (Interviewee 2)*

This statement is reinforcing a fatalistic view that the situation cannot change beneficially and that the conversation might as well be closed.

The above examples were typical of many comments about difficulties interviewees had had in trying to be regarded as a ‘valued team member’. As these last two interviewees saw it, there was inequality between manager and employee, and the manager was comfortable leaving things as they stood; meaning the employee was met by inflexibility, stubbornness, unfair treatment and even rudeness. These and other interviewees developed avoidant tendencies, whether avoiding emotional exchanges, apologising, negotiating or not speaking at all, thereby participating in closing conversations down. There were several mentions of managers having a sense of superiority, which not only shows Hierarchical thinking, but recognises limited opportunities for expansive and perhaps more effective discussion.

*“Um, I'm Muslim, Arabic, and I'm from Jordan. [...] Some people originally from, like Jordan and some of them that come from the other side so this is why this happened.” (Interviewee 4)*

*“So, he affects my emotional life and my lifestyle. When I go back home for example maybe I get nervous, get stressed, you know... And that, as a result, I've just always distanced myself, making me more patient.” (Interviewee 4)*

*“I think it increases my patience because it encourages me to be the same because I know he made the fault.” (Interviewee 4)*

In another example, an interviewee of Arab descent, having worked a wide range of jobs, still feels that racism and religious discrimination on the part of their manager had resulted in closed conversations. This accusation was linked with low trust, curtailing the communicative space

between the parties. The interview said enough to establish that the manager's prejudice was generic and not something particular to him as an individual employee, nevertheless it was highly upsetting. The respondent became closed too, in this case due to fear.

*"I think the outcome was, the conversation made me scared then I just was scared, then I started being more careful of my behaviour more, and my words towards [...] other people within the team. So it creates some kind of feeling of being autocratic with the manager, and makes me feel like I shouldn't be messing about anything about my work."* (Interviewee 8)

Another interviewee's manager was unhappy with their performance, using an internal messaging platform to convey this. The interviewee was disappointed by being sent this message in this way. It was felt that there should have been an invitation to a formal meeting, with an opportunity to discuss and respond verbally, in-person. This resulted in a more distant relationship between employee and manager, constraining future openness indefinitely.

When alluding to openness, respondents expressed a wish for expansive conversation, with open-ended questions contributing a forum for free discussion, encouraging further investigation. Conversation is accessible, open to suggestions and future dialogue. Interviewees were very alert to their conversation partners, and wished for appreciation, in the form of understanding as a minimum.

*"Um, it's like, I mean, whenever I need any help from them, or ask any question, they always welcome me in a good way."* - Interviewee 5

To the proposition that openness is essential to good conversations was added respectful and sympathetic relationships which interviewees felt prompted discussion of views, problems and ideas without trepidation, as colleagues. All nine interviewees enjoyed being able to talk in a free-ranging manner when they felt free to do so, without stubbornness or hierarchical power structures. Openness was associated with questioning and listening without pre-judgement, flexibility and ideas. This is consistent with Ford (1999) who states that "listening is more than hearing, and includes all the ways in which people become aware and conscious of, or present to the world". Openness also allows for clarity, trust and unanimity. Our respondents' common-sense understandings of what openness involved was already suggested by Rogers and Farson (1957 cited in Patton, 2017), that active listening, dissolves misunderstanding, enhances curiosity and avoids ignorance and disrespect.

The descriptors for belief and sympathy, however, were discussed so as to suggest to us that they belonged in a separate category, Trust, as these rely on personal understanding and shared beliefs, and are the paired opposite of critical and accusatory statements.

Key words	Interviewee Quote
Welcoming Approachable	<i>"Um, it's like, I mean, whenever I need any help from them, or ask any question, they always welcome me in a good way." - Interviewee 5</i>
Friendly Environment Encouraging	<i>"...the company has always been very friendly and nice. It's a very nice environment where people encourage other people, which is a really good general environment. And by having a good conversation all come in.." - Interviewee 6</i>
Friendly Accessible Relaxed	<i>"They all are very chill [relaxed]. They are not very hierarchical. And they make you feel like um, you're working with a group of friends." - Interviewee 8</i>
Tolerance Equality Respect Relaxed	<i>"I think the outcome that I wanted and I like, was to feel I'm accepted by the team. And I'm equal to them. And my value is respected and my role is respected by them and we can communicate in a very equal and relaxing way." - Interviewee 8</i>
Tolerance	<i>"Basically, people hire somebody they can work with; not necessarily a highly-skilled person. I mean, you can have a very skilled, and highly-skilled person who can't work with people... You have to have these traits of being able to be a very good team member and very... tolerant of other people's strengths and weaknesses, so that you can work well with people." - Interviewee 3</i>
Tolerance Awareness	<i>"...not necessarily finding their talents, but tolerating their differences. To be tolerant, to be able to work with different characters, different people with different backgrounds. So the most important thing is to open up to different personalities, and just embrace them and tolerate the differences and be in a position to work with them." - Interviewee 3</i>
Interest Equality	<i>"What I like is I can feel equal with them, and that they show they [are] interested in me and they keep asking questions. Not just question me, they are talking about your background, your experience. At least it made me feel I am somewhat important." - Interviewee 2</i>

Table 4.2 : Openness



Key words	Interviewee Quote
Critical Close-minded	<i>"You will always be upset, yes. Because it's, it's not a pleasant conversation. When somebody's saying you, are you doing this wrong, or you should be doing this. But it's all part of the learning pattern." - Interviewee 6</i>
Unappreciated Cold	<i>"And I, and I felt tension from that because it makes me feel like the message is being really cold and he basically just told me off for my behaviour, so that, I think that's a bad conversation." - Interviewee 8</i>
Close-minded Rude Disrespectful	<i>"Yeah, that's one of them, sometime maybe then tension, because behind this problem I think it was racism when the head of department didn't respect where I'm from, so this is why he dealt with me in a bad way." - Interviewee 4</i>
Unappreciated Ignored	<i>"I felt I was overworking, I felt I was spending too much time but they didn't want to consider that payment... I mean, the contract said eight to five... But then I found myself working after five... They didn't want to pay for the extra time I was working." - Interviewee 3</i>
Refusal Impatience	<i>They take it, but generally because they think 'I want to finish this conversation, I don't want any trouble'. Do you know what I mean?" - Interviewee 6</i>
One-sided Arrogance	<i>"He just thought I was too young to work in the company, and I need to learn a lot, but not only about the working content, also learning about the relationship in the company. So this I don't like, and I don't like his attitude because he just regards himself as the boss. Not only like that, you know, it's like he was [a] senior politician... so, I don't like him because of his attitude. He tried to, how to say...to be authority. Too much authority." - Interviewee 2</i>
Unhelpful	<i>"Yeah, but there is always a cliché about HR, um, I mean, most of the time, people especially the staff don't want to talk with HR because they think that they are not very helpful.." - Interviewee 5</i>
Unappreciated Undervalued Limitation	<i>"Um, you need to know this, that there are no possible circumstances or no conceivable circumstances in which you will ever be promoted for your research'... So I was working a ludicrous amount. I was putting in really impossible levels of work that I was doing, and it could not be sustained. I was pushing really, really hard. Um, yeah. I worked too hard, much too hard, and it wasn't getting me anywhere. So it was like running on the treadmill. Like a mouse on a wheel, faster and faster and faster and getting more and more negative for doing that. And still staying in that way..." - Interviewee 7</i>
Limitation Unhelpful	<i>"... sometimes the information, maybe not available to them. For example, some legal advice. Or as an international employee, some visa-related things, which relates to my employment condition. Uh, so yeah, that information I didn't get from</i>

	<i>them... I mean, they don't give that kind of service. So it seems that this information doesn't belong to HR's responsibility. It seems like that.</i> - Interviewee 5
Unappreciated	<i>"...and the bad one... when you're doing something that has not been rewarded by someone."</i> - Interviewee 6

Table 4.3 : Closed

#### 4.2.1.2 Is there agreeable?

### Unanimity and Conflict

As our heading suggests this pairing describes conflict and unanimity in groups, in our case the group consisting usually of a dyad. As we will see more clearly later, the reasoning used at the start of a conversation affects the available space for agreement or dissent. This duality is key to driving the direction of the conversation toward its outcome, including final agreement or further escalating conflicts involving more people. Just exactly how conversations are animated by equally reasonable but conflicting rationalities will be specified later.

It is a surely a truism that conflict is a method of communication that occurs in the absence of shared goals, in the presence of so called 'personal attitudes', incompatible desired resources and 'individual interest', which sow discord within the group (Allwood, 2007; Judd, 1978; Pesarin, et al., 2012). Conflict is a common cause of disruption to both organisations and employees, although through effectively counteracting conflicts, more advantageous results are achieved (Overton and Lowry, 2013). This rather common-sense view of conversation has it that conflict disrupts the otherwise orderly organisational expectation of what is described officially as unity. Overton and Lowry's study indicates that inefficient or unsatisfactory outcomes like staff absence and resignations occur more frequently in high-conflict workplace environments. In this schema a 'culture' in which disorder goes unmanaged means unity is harder to achieve. This is also a truism, in this case begging the question as to who is responsible for 'managing conflict' and how it is to be done. The default assumption that conflict is inherently negative, leading to negative outcome, is however modified by several authors who observe that beneficial consequences can occur if conflict is engaged with and successfully managed (Runde and Flanagan, 2010; McMillan et al., 2013; Overton and Lowry, 2013), attaining unity (unanimity), eventually. Although unanimity and conflict feature

strongly in our interviewees description of good and bad conversations, like the literature, we have yet to find an explanation for why protagonists use the reasonings they do and exactly how conversations are animated. This explanatory deficit will become especially clear when, as we will show, different role-players can take a conversation in radically different directions *even in the identical same circumstances*.

The supposition is that the protagonists in a workplace conversation should demonstrate responsibility, mutual recognition, uphold employees right and be reasonable and measured in expression, thus developing dialogue and resolving core issues, re-establishing order (Farrell, 2015). Interviewees found it easy to see that cultivation of self-awareness regarding one's emotional and unspoken reactions to conflict are necessary to compromise and collaboration and averting avoidance and escalation (Quinn et al., 2010; Overton and Lowry, 2013). But given their grasp of the basic common-sense differences between good and bad conversations, why do reasonable persons find it so easy to end up disappointed and angry with others. Among our interviewees, it was always the other person who was the unreasonable one. Why did they think this?

Their assumption that conflict=poor organisational culture=too many different personalities=diverse attitudes, interests and opinions (Overton and Lowry, 2013), all afflicting the unity of the group towards its objective is naïve in that it offers no explanation for why any of these exist, nor how mutual provocations and concurrences arise.

When it comes to the 'effectiveness' of the outcomes of workplace conversations, it often stated that while emotions cannot be separated, continuous effort should focus on the core issues (Farrell, 2015), regardless of the intensity of emotional reactions on display during conflicts. A neutral environment for discussing and resolving conflicts is developed through mutual respect and shared purpose, requiring group involvement (Overton and Lowry, 2013). What this does not specify is what criteria qualify an outcome as good or bad and whose criteria these should be. What is it that makes unity good and conflict bad? What is the relationship between emotions and conversational dynamics? Why the default assumption that muted or even *emotionless* conversation aids good outcomes?

All but one interviewee spoke with passion about witnessing or feeling strong emotions including anger in themselves and in the other person, aggression again in the other person and the experience of intimidation; all thought of as conflict, disunity, divergence, disagreement

and interpersonal friction. Typically, it was the other person who was described as being unreasonable, not the interviewee. This begs the question as to what reasoning the interviewees were using at the point where the conversation ‘turned bad’ and whether that might have been a cause. It takes two.

The common-sense – and perhaps superficial – understanding is that conflict occurs where there is disagreement within a group and agreement cannot be reached, because of refusal to find common ground and outright aggression, fuelling further conflict polarisation of positions and escalating anger. To agree with others’ opinions or objectives requires, so interviewees believed, a calm ambience of order. Patton (2017) suggests that effective collaboration relies on a willingness to tolerate disagreements, in order to avoid escalation sustained by provocative mutual feedback. While the truth of this claim is easy to grasp, its moment-by-moment dynamics is not presented, nor is there any account of what the pattern of tolerable disagreements will be and what the boundaries are.

*“I had the first job that I had between 2004 and 2009, the differences that we had and conflict that we had...was, you know, the number of hours I was supposed to work versus the payment... I found myself overworking with no paid overtime.” (Interviewee 3)*

In this interview with a Creative Director, the source of disagreement is over fair pay expectations, which had become an often-repeated argument. The employee is adamant in their position that their contract stated specific working hours for an agreed salary, while the manager expected unpaid overtime to be within the employees work ethic. Notice that *both* of these reasons are reasonable. The question is then, why are they thinkable?

*“And, but if I stay longer, I mean, I can't be taking time from my family time to committing to, you know, work that I'm not paid for.” (Interviewee 3)*

This is again reasonable. It is not by being unreasonable or by having ‘different personalities’ that the disagreement took place. Indeed, a different person in the role of Creative Director might have accepted that unpaid hours come with the profession and a different manager might have *insisted* on paying ‘the going rate for extra hours’, in which case the Creative Director might have taken the money offered but without it having any effect on their ‘organisational commitment’. The participants could have been extroverts or introverts in any combination without any effect on the availability of the two radically different outcomes imagined here.

This however is a three-cornered conflict with the reasonable but conflicting principles of family solidarity, contractually specified pay and professional ethics all in play rich with possible further conflicts.

*“And then I decided to leave. So, it didn’t solve any problems. There was no solution. That’s why I decided to leave the company. Yeah, I decided I can’t stand for this.” (Interviewee 3)*

The interviewee reasoned that there was no alternative but to quit, but it would not have been unreasonable to have accepted that nothing could be done and therefore to fatalistically grit their teeth and ‘put up with it’. Employment lawyers and a trade union could have been involved or family time sacrificed, a wide range of reasonable responses to the same circumstances – intolerable frustration, a willingness to fight, acceptance of defeat or acknowledgement that ‘the boss is the boss’ were available alternatives. But in this case, both sides become closed to the other.

*“Yeah, well, I liked my job, and I wanted to stay. But I couldn’t stay based on the pay. So, had we agreed on the numbers... Or at least met halfway... I would have stayed, yeah. I would have loved for the conversation to take a very positive path.” (Interviewee 3)*

Here as in many recollections of ‘bad conversations’ everything turned on what was felt to be a poor wage bargain and an employee placing their personal- above organisational priorities. This was by no means the only kind of reasoning, however. Acceptance and belonging mattered to the next interviewee:

*“I think the outcome was what I wanted and I liked was to feel I’m accepted by the team, and I’m equal to them. And my value is respected, and my role is respected by them and we can communicate in a very equal and relaxing way. So I think that’s some kind of outcome that I liked.” (Interviewee 8)*

Here, the interviewee expresses their positive recollections of working at an accountancy firm, placing about equal emphasis on team membership and respect for her specific role within the hierarchy. Because both of these were met, conversations were recalled as open with positive characteristics.

*“I think the right thing to me is that I’m always patient. I’m always a professional. I will not shout because sometimes I feel if I start shouting [at] him in the same way, then I would be[come] the same man so this is why I avoid, so this is a good thing that be patient and just listen.” - Interviewee 4*

Interviewee 4 sought to preserve their own qualities in the face of provocation, by seeking peace through good-tempered order. Their emotions were kept calm and problems are resolved, even when faced with an aggressive manager.

Here it was not certainty over details that mattered so much as a peaceful space, working calmly. Unanimity can be seen in something as simple as saying ‘yes’, right up to challenging compromises without provoking the hostility of the other person.

*“But the solution he gave it to me was also a good idea. And it didn't cost me anything but time which is a good idea.” - Interviewee 6*

We can infer two forms of unanimity, one that is consistent with egalitarianism and one which involves all-round acceptance of a role within a range of roles each having different levels of seniority (as hinted at with interviewees 8 and 4 above). Unanimity can be about shared goals created and agreed by all, but it can also be about acceptance of an agreed official order according to rules.

Among our interviewees there were different routes to peace. From some interviewees it was important to avert unwinnable conflicts by accepting the status quo, but without liking it, which we can identify as fatalistic reasoning, *averting conflicts which could not be won*. What may have seemed to others as ‘unanimity’ concealed hidden dissatisfaction.

Since egalitarianism, seeks systemic change beneficial to all, this will antagonise fatalist and hierarchical reasoning, fatalism because the ambition will seem unattainable, and hierarchical reasoning, because of belief in the existing order of rules and regulations. However, to individual/ competitive reasoning the point is to triumph over opponents who do not ‘unite and fight’.

Key words	Interviewee Quote
Approval	<i>“With HR... I mean, what I expected, I got it.” - Interviewee 5</i>
Agreement	<i>“But the solution he gave it to me was also a good idea. And it didn't cost me anything but time which is a good idea.” - Interviewee 6</i>
Approval Calm	<i>“Yeah, that's what I wanted to do. So, when I was angry or upset, I didn't show it... Yeah, I controlled my anger, I controlled my frustrations... I spoke to him in a very professional manner.” - Interviewee 3</i>

Calm Respectful	<i>"And I made sure it was not emotional. I didn't show it because I was very professional with it. It was not emotional. It was a very professional thing that I discussed with them. And where we didn't agree it was just said in a very humble, respectable, and very formal, and professional way." - Interviewee 3</i>
Agreement Approval	<i>"... I signed up for English class, which I agree is my disadvantage... it is something that I need to improve on... it's not really about what you want or not. I don't think he meant it in a bad way. It's just he asked you, like, 'do you think you agree with something that I said?' And I said yes. I think you're right as well. But... I agreed with him, because the fact was that I wasn't able to get the report that he liked.... I agreed that he says: "you need to improve English ." - Interviewee 6</i>
Agreement Togetherness	<i>"I agree with your comment that we are all part of the same organisation who want for betterment, right of that organisation, thus we should work together and serve each other well." - Interviewee 5</i>
Calm Awareness	<i>"I understand. This is why I told you I prefer to stay calm. I know myself. When I get angry, I will start saying something not coming from my brain. So I will regret it. It was better if I didn't say this even if he would shout, I prefer to be calm to catch my behaviour. It's better to stay calm. To feel this behaviour." - Interviewee 4</i>

Table 4.4 : Unanimity

Key words	Interviewee Quote
Disagreement	<i>"Yeah, well, I liked my job, and I wanted to stay. But I couldn't stay based on the pay. So, had we agreed on the numbers... Or at least met halfway... I would have stayed, yeah. I would have loved for the conversation to take a very positive path." - Interviewee 3</i>
Disagreement Disapproval	<i>"Yes, he could give me a bit more time to prove myself." - Interviewee 6</i>
Disagreement	<i>"So he may have seen me as the persecutor, whereas I was seeing him as the problem, but I can't answer for him, of course." - Interviewee 7</i>
Refusal Aggression	<i>"So, when I told the head of department, he refused this and he screamed about his situation and he told me, "We should be strict with the student." - Interviewee 4</i>
Aggression Intimidation	<i>"Um, he picked up his, do you remember those things called 'Filofax' as he, he...kept on picking it up and throwing it down on the coffee table. Very aggressive." - Interviewee 7</i>
Disagreement Tension Anger	<i>"...but the worst is if you give him the right to shout, he will keep shouting on you. Which is the worst kind of person." - Interviewee 4</i>

Intimidation Disapproval	<i>“Um, I suppose really I'd wish I'd ... wish I'd confronted her, probably, and told her she was a bully at the time.” - Interviewee 9</i>
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Table 4.5 : Conflict

#### 4.2.1.3 Is the interrelation believable?

### Trust and Claims

We have said enough about Grid-Group Cultural Theory to suggest that it is a powerful way of explaining the dispositions, here of interviewees. Within what they said, the Trust-Claims dynamic can also be inferred, based on protagonists' the evaluation of accuracy and opinion, with 'Trust' being closely connected with *truthfulness* and *supportive empathy*, and 'Claims' reflecting *mistruth*, *complaint* and *dramatics*, also associated closely with *blame and accusations*. These favourable and unfavourable judgements of other participants in conversation, we suspect, will be animated by one or more of the four thought-styles. Does the statement seem honest, relatable and believable, or is it perceived to be falsely claiming untrustworthy information? Given the four rationalities it seems likely that these judgements can take four prototypical forms.

Trust is an issue which interests not only lay persons, but also, as we have seen, the literature on conversation. Both our interviewees and academic authors attribute variations in trust to a range of determinants, including perceived competence, honesty, integrity, respect and authenticity (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). Tschannen-Moran (2004) cited in Meyer et al. (2017) specifically refers to openness and honesty in regard to building trust, though we find that trust also varies with certainty/ uncertainty, and evaluations of honesty/ dishonesty (see also Meyer et al., 2017). By clarifying 'the facts', trust is tied-up with understanding the truths, which G-GCT tells us will appear differently to each thought style according to their diverging preoccupations.

Unaware of G-GCT, Reina and Reina (2006) highlight three (rather than four) determinants of trust:

- contractual or confidence in character
- communicative, expressed as faith in disclosure
- capability, exemplified by trust in promises made.



There is recognition that trust can be reduced through perceived betrayal, and can be restored through demonstrations of the aforementioned trust attributes (Koehler et al., 2018), confirming a relationship between trust and discourse analogous with betrayal. The element of trust deriving from the interview data fits these descriptions, though trust has long been recognised as important to interpersonal and organisational relationships according to psychological and sociological literature (Meyer et al., 2017). The question we pose however is whether these more-or-less common-sense understandings could be deepened. In addition, we suggest that confidence (i.e., a contract) is different to confidence in an actor's character. It is also difficult to see why capability should be placed in the same category as promises made. In other words, Reina and Reina's classification system contains anomalies.

Our interviews are of limited help in this sense, insofar as of course, they exemplify common-sense understanding of self and others. They complained of unwillingness to listen to them (closure), a type of accusation which we were not able to verify because the accusations were usually levelled at protagonists which the interviewees had encountered many years in the past in distant locations and who had since moved to other organisations in any case. What the interviewees do provide is opinions, narrative descriptions and analyses and self-justifications which as we will see later (when we do bring protagonists together), fit the Grid-Group typology remarkably well.

It is clear enough at this stage, however that interviewees were so scandalised and perplexed by their protagonists that they were lost for words as to how to respond, with one interviewee remembering thinking, in response to multiple accusations levelled at him: "*How do I answer that?*" (Interviewee 7). Accusation fed bewilderment and confusion and an acute sense of social or professional exclusion. Well over twenty years later, Interviewee 7 was still trying to 'work out why it happened'. 'Perhaps it was jealousy.' 'In the end there was nothing to do at the time but to leave the organisation, which they did. A senior colleague came to the same conclusion: "*You have to leave*" he said to the interviewee. But by the time of the interview, they respondent wished that they had pushed back at the time and made a formal complaint to HR. In this case, the interviewee believed he would have won and then the manager would have to have left. He was still angry, partly at himself for not trying to go through official channels. "The trouble was that the HR Director was one of his mates!"

Trust was driven out because the associated respectful listening and believing was missing in the face of accusations. Trust in the truth was missing from his protagonist, at least as

Interviewee 7 saw it. What is clear both from this interview and the other seven is that Trust is intrinsic to favourable relationships which meet expectations and engender empathy, sympathy and faith. There were many mentions of loyalty, including accounts of third parties (other staff members) corroborating interviewees' opinions directly to them, one-to-one. Many interviewees referred to feeling cared for, being patiently listened to when they encountered problems in their work and being believed and trusted when explaining their predicaments and discussing how to resolve them. Interviewees trusted managers who showed trust in them, but trust diminished, usually rapidly, when accusatorial claims were made.

However, again there is an obviousness to this conclusion. What is more interesting is why trust can vanish instantaneously but takes years to restore. For example, after a chequered history of conflict in response to accusations levelled against an interviewee, their manager, years after a long series of 'bad conversations' did "*...actually say she regretted how she treated me.*" (Interviewee 9). By showing belated belief and empathy for the interviewee through admission of wrongdoing her new-found trust was reciprocated by her former victim. But why had it been so difficult to apologise? G-GCT could offer four prototypical reasons which, in the absence of the other protagonist we could not test.

The existing literature comes close to recognising these possibilities but without explaining why they are (culturally) available. Trust-based cooperation is determined by mutual recognition of the vulnerabilities of both parties, state Meyer et al. (2017), and is reliant on the individuals' mutual judgements of authenticity of each other (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Sprecher and Hendrick, 2004; Lapidot et al., 2007). The literature recognises that trust may be difficult to accomplish between superior and subordinate due to the inherent hierarchical inequality (Bryk and Schneider, 2002); yet G-GCT posits that trust will come *easily* if both parties believe in hierarchy and obey its rules. It has been suggested that with positional inequality, mutual trust requires the leader to be honest about exposing their vulnerabilities (Meyer et al., 2017). Yet G-GCT posits that this would win Egalitarian 'hearts-and-minds' more quickly than Fatalistic, Individualistic or Hierarchical thinking. Fatalist reasoning has no concern for others. Individualistic reasoning sees competitive advantage over vulnerable persons (and has no respect for hierarchy in any case).

These possibilities are consistent with the self-reported experiences of interviewees who had stood accused by their managers, resulting in several usually irretrievable breakdowns in trust and permanent damage to further conversational and organisational practices. But our point is

that the sheer multiplicity of good and bad conversation surely calls for a systematic treatment that rises above common-sense empiricism.

Here is an example of just such a common-sense claim, namely that protective behaviours may be employed in reaction to the vulnerabilities of perceived embarrassment or threat (Lasky, 2005 cited in Meyer et al., 2017). And: introspection is necessary in the inspection of vulnerable feelings and defensive reactions (Argyris, 1991 cited in Meyer et al., 2017) in order to limit defensive counter-accusations. And: Tsoukas (1991) claiming it is within the moral responsibility of the *individual* to allow their assertions to be open to social challenges according to evidence, thereby aiding recognition of personal culpability. Yes, Yes and Yes. But the non-common-sense question remains: ‘What are the cultural bases for these prescriptions?’ ‘Why are they thinkable?’ ‘Why do they succeed and fail?’ ‘Why should an ‘individual’ feel ready to expose themselves to public scrutiny?’ ‘Why do others hide?’ ‘Why do some feel that accusations should be assessed through a judicial process, others, through collective demonstrations of resistance, others through tests of intellectual or physical strength (including fighting), while others retreat, hide or run away?’ ‘Why do we *disagree* about which of these equally reasonable but different actions is the correct one?’ Common-sense supplies no definitive answer to these types of available questions.

Awareness of vulnerabilities allows individuals to understand their wrongdoing, claim Meyer et al. (2017) and therefore the trust achieved through interpersonal understanding reduces ignorance, counteracting accusations. However, the problem of competing evaluations and strategies applies here too: a vulnerability may be viewed as both positive and negative (Lasky, 2005), a strength or a weakness. Further, a vulnerability can be the object of an accusation and activate escalating accusations. When Interviewee 7 reported for a meeting over an accusation, he was met with further accusations from his manager who accused him of a string of failings in the face of evidence to the contrary. He insisted that there was no wrong-doing to answer for. It would have been far-fetched to expect that his accuser would admit to his own vulnerabilities, though Interviewee 7 suspected jealousy, particularly as his work was to a conspicuously higher standard than his more senior accuser’s work.

Here is another recommendation available in the literature: the integrity of interactions is characterised by honesty and accepting responsibility, including for failures and weaknesses, while specifically avoiding manipulation and withholding of information, write Lapidot et al. (2007) and Avolio et al. (2004). Thus, trust is generated by observed qualities of character

(Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998; Meyer et al., 2017). Admission and recognition of weaknesses is important to trust, while falsification feeds accusations, jealousy and exploitation of high position. These claims are difficult to object to as their truth is self-evident but in what contexts are accusations levelled and in what circumstances can they be set aside? From a G-GCT vantage it can be hypothesized that organisations in which hierarchical and individualistic reasoning prevails, the subjective need for those in senior positions to level accusations against ‘individualists’ who they will see as unruly, will be high. Counter-accusations against ‘the bureaucrats’ are the equally reasonable response, alongside jockeying for advantage between colleagues who share the same level. Our point is that neither top-down accusations nor competitive game-playing and insults towards the bureaucrats are unreasonable or improper. Indeed, they are experienced as right and necessary according to hierarchical and individualistic reasoning respectively. While fatalistic reasoning will treat an expectation of justice, fairness, information sharing, admissions of failure and trust to be naive. From the fatalistic position, the world is cruel and dangerous and to trust someone else is a serious vulnerability in itself.

In other words, the literature-based recommendations in the above paragraphs are reasonable chiefly according to just one or two of the available forms of reason, but not to all of them.

The question arises as to which rationality or rationalities are being used in the next claim, that candid and respectful conversations which incorporate understanding of self and others are central to sharing and learning about other perspectives, making for better informed decision making processes (Baker et al., 2005; 2016), establishing relationships based on reasoning, truth, understanding and empathy within which matters can be discussed openly, agreeably and clearly. A Grid-Group theorist would recognise egalitarian reasoning here which strives for a solution beneficial to all participants. This omits mention of hierarchy (for example different levels of expertise and authority to bring an issue to the table), individualistic and hierarchical reasoning combined (competitive promotion-seeking) and fatalistic exploitation of colleagues who offer information which can then be used against them by others as a form of self-defence.

Given this diversity of ‘common-sense’, although our eight interviewees all recollected falsehoods told against them, judgemental attitudes and accusations we should not assume that all of them shared the same thought style. We know from Grid-Group theory that there will be hierarchical, egalitarian, individualistic and fatalistic understandings of what good and bad conversations contain. These possibilities are multiplied because ‘the other person’ could also

be in one or more of the same four positions and the chances are that their reasoning will be different. There are many possible permutations and equally many ways of disagreeing. For example, Interviewee 7s claim that there was “*no evidence*” of “*supposed*” ‘foul play’ might have got him union support against the hierarchy, if he had asked for it. It could have spurred him on to produce work that was even more obviously better than his boss’, so that his accuser would eventually be exposed as a fool, or he could have ‘gone over the boss’ head’ and demanded an open trial. Bad conversation can exist between 1) Hierarchical and Egalitarian reasoning, 2) Hierarchical and Individualistic reasoning, 3) Hierarchical and Fatalistic reasoning, 4) Egalitarian and Individualistic reasoning, 5) Egalitarian and Fatalistic reasoning and 6) Individualistic and Fatalistic reasoning. In each case there will be opposing narratives, where both participants in a ‘bad conversation’ believe that the other is making unreasonable accusations and that they are in the right. The existing rather common-sense literature on conversation is also confounded because each of the six combinations can ‘flip’ into another one at any point whenever either protagonist changes the terms of the argument (especially if a different form of reasoning might be more promising than their first and that they sense that they are losing the argument). Although interviewees often suspected that their bad conversations were caused by the other person’s personality (personality clashes) note that the four thought styles (rationalities) are cultural rather than psychological and that the force of each rationality can be experienced by anybody. They can feel the force of their own arguments and the force of the arguments against them from any of the six directions listed above.

It is for these reasons that we need moment-by-moment tracing of the reasonings being used in difficult conversations, as presented later.

Nevertheless among our interviewees, some conversations were embedded in what they saw as one long lasting but poor working relationship. For example, in the case of interviewee 7, the same ‘bad conversation’ took place on many different occasions over approximately seven years before he quit. The attacks drove him from what appears to have been individualistic and egalitarian reasoning into fatalism (despite being a union member). Interviewees also spoke about rumours which sowed mistrust and anxiety within their group by creating (likely fatalistic) anxiety and caution over issues of workplace stability and job insecurity, as described by Sudhir (2018).

*Trust* can be defined in terms of confidence in what is said and who is saying it; a conviction that statements are accurate and are sincere in intent. It is a relational concept based on the

integrity of all parties involved. Trust is associated with noble and pleasant feelings. This understanding of what trust means is apparent in the literature and in interviewee's responses.

*Accusation* are associated with untruths and offensive judgements, ordinarily relying on false claims and blame. Accusation is associated with righteous though unpleasant feelings of jealousy, betrayal and even paranoia. Again, these qualities were apparent in both the literature and in interviewees recollections of 'good' and 'bad' conversations. For discussion see Robert Solomon's collection of essays, *The Passions; Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (1993) and *What is an Emotion?* (2003)

We noticed that accusations appear rife in *competitive* and *ranked* organisations, where there are advantages to making strategic criticisms, evading blame and creating accusations in order to attain personal goals within institutions with a pyramid structure. An individualist style of thought operating within a hierarchical pay-grade structure probably represents the *institutionalisation* of competitive accusations and blaming with contradictory effects: selfish claims damage to the group by weakening solidarity, but they also advantage hierarchical organisations in that career ladders can enable talented employees to reach the top. Note that competition for promotion rests on a *hybrid* between individual and hierarchical reasoning in G-GCT terms.

Meanwhile, trust is intended to build and maintain strong social bonds, centred in colleagues believing in each other. Building upon that interpersonal understanding, trust can accommodate constructive criticism and moral advice, based on candid insight into individuals' strengths and weaknesses; working relationships within which no offence is intended or taken. As the literature referred to above claims, criticism is not inconsistent with good conversation.

Trust may be a countermeasure to accusation, but counter-claims and group subdivisions are likely, again as indicated by interviewees. Accusations are linked with and lead to other negative outcomes, particularly conflict arising through diminishing trust, changes of opinions within teams, confusion through misunderstanding of the meaning and motives behind the accusations made, and through inadequate responses to the accusation.

*"The immediate reason was because I was summoned. So the conversation was initiated by this other person, each of the three, three stages in that conversation, the other person spoke first and because he was my Head of School, I had to be there."* (Interviewee 7)

One clear example is related by a lecturer accused by his departmental head early in his career of rarely being available during 'Office Hours'. He protested that this was factually incorrect because he held his 'office hours' without fail. If students came to see him outside these times, particularly when he was out of the office teaching, then this could not be helped. He suspected that it was the colleague with whom he shared his office who had made a complaint. He responded by pointing out that he had a heavy teaching timetable that required him to teach across three campuses so he had to be out of his office for a lot of the time. According to the interviewee, the accuser dismissed this answer saying *"Well that's just your perception!"* This was *"Despite the fact that he set and signed my teaching timetable, so he would know!"* exclaimed the interviewee.

On the next occasion a few weeks later, the same Head of Department stopped him in the corridor and accused him of placing his name as a joint author on several papers he had not written (he had been very prolific that year and was applying for promotion). *"He said, 'You've published quite a lot. Um.... this year. Um, but all your publications are jointly authored. So how do we know that you wrote a single word of any of them?'"* The interviewee was again shocked by the accusation and was only able to 'gather his thoughts' later, thinking that his co-authors could testify as to his contributions. *"In fact"*, he added "I wrote *most* of all my joint-authored articles, because I write well. The other named authors deserved to have their names on the papers because they had contributed in different ways". The accuser walked-off promptly, cutting the conversation short.

Read from a GGCT vantage, this seems to be a case of a clash between rationalities, with a distinctly hierarchical head of school, perhaps also worried by a junior colleague who was much more 'research active' than he, (the accuser), a professor, was. The interviewee, who was a highly collaborative (egalitarian-leaning) researcher shifted his thinking radically towards fatalism:

*"...I thought 'there's no way in which I can survive for the rest of my career to retire from this institution!'... I had one more conversation with the Dean who was the person who let me know that my head of school was [also] speaking against me at the promotion panel, and said: "for this reason I think you should go." But the outcome was that after that conversation I decided, yes, I have to go, I have to leave." (Interviewee 7)*

The contrast he describes between the 'bad conversations' with the Head who lacked trust in him, compared with the Dean with whom he experienced mutual trust through respectful and

realistic conversations, explains the trust the employee developed in himself and how he replaced confusion with clarity about his personal needs. In this way leaving emerged as the most viable response to the accusations.

Following a similar example of a reported campaign against an employee, Interview 9 and a support worker were held responsible for the day-to-day care and finances of disabled individuals, which required frequent documentation and administration. The challenging nature of the communicative relationship had features of betrayal: the manager had completed a form on behalf of the employee and even forged their signature, which alleged false information without the employee's knowledge, as part of a relationship characterised by accusations by the manager against the employee. But this time it was the manager who left:

*"I think it was what I wanted. The right outcome. Otherwise it would have just escalated, I think. It's kind of stopped it in its tracks... The atmosphere changed completely when she left... So that was a good thing as well. The atmosphere at work, all the other staff felt better and the people did."*  
(Interviewee 9)

An interesting outcome occurred following a third-party conversation in contrast with Interview 7, whereby the manager, not the employee, left their position, and the employee replaced them as the new manager. Note the differences but also the similarity with Interview 7, in which the involvement of a third party (in a separate conversation) alleviated the situation, by trusting the accused. But in this second case the resolution led to a more comfortable workplace culture defined by positive communicative elements.

Key words	Interviewee Quote
Belief Confidence	<i>"...I was trusted and I was given responsibility for expanding the MBA program, which I did successfully... I, it's a wonderful experience when other people have confidence in you. Then you're able to do things that you can't do if people say they have no confidence in you. And I got [a] promotion quite soon after that to a senior lectureship, uh, in recognition."</i> - Interviewee 7
Belief Empathy	<i>"...and the lady that came to see me who was her boss, said that she'd never known me acting that way. So I had to have a heart to heart discussion with her about [it]"</i> - Interviewee 9
Belief Honesty Sympathy	<i>"And the good thing that came out of it, is when Lucy came 'round, it was the, like the area manager, and she questioned me and spoke to me and went through all of the things that Jenny said I'd apparently done and she found them not to be true... and</i>



	<i>also my record was, was, um, put down to a false supervision instead of a true one.”</i> - Interviewee 9
Empathy Caring	<i>“I expected it from you as a human to help that student, instead of start shouting and make some stupid, sorry for word, behaviour. So it's better to behave like, in a good manner and to help others.”</i> - Interviewee 4
Faith Expectation	<i>“I won't say it is higher. It's definitely more responsibility and more faith. Definitely.”</i> - Interviewee 6

Table 4.6 : Trust

Key words	Interviewee Quote
Two-faced	<i>“He tries to do it in a nice way, but I don't think it's a nice way.”</i> - Interviewee 2
Two-faced Gossip	<i>“I hate this one. It's really the worst. They smile in my face but when I turn around, I hear how they put, uh, like they spoke about me.”</i> - Interviewee 4
False claims	<i>“... she even said, um, that other staff were complaining about me. And when I spoke to the other staff, because I did make a point of speaking to other staff and they said they haven't spoken to her at all. So again, [it] was like accusations she was making, false accusations.”</i> - Interviewee 9
Judgement	<i>“And at work I wanted to cut my hours and my boss at the time said, “No, you can't cut your hours because you'll end up going back to your husband anyway and your relationship won't last with James (participant's boyfriend).””</i> - Interviewee 9
Paranoia	<i>“He said, ‘You've published quite a lot. Um....this year. Um, but all your publications are jointly authored. So how do we know that you wrote a single word of any of them?’.”</i> - Interviewee 7
Betrayal	<i>“Lucy came to me because she said everything she read didn't describe me at all, the person she knew... And they'd written it all out in an incident report to make it look like Ashley had attacked Emily.”</i> - Interviewee 9
Dishonesty	<i>“... because she'd said that I wasn't turning up for work, well there was no evidence, and it was totally untrue. She also said that I wasn't recording things that I should be recording, which wasn't true because Lucy went through all the documents.”</i> - Interviewee 9
Accusations	<i>“I thought..., ‘How do I answer that?’ He, again, he's calling me a liar even though he has no reason to doubt my honesty. Um, and he said: ‘Well, you would say that, wouldn't you?!’”</i> - Interviewee 7

Envy Sabotage	<i>"I couldn't say 'no' to any of these conversations. Uh, it's very hard to know why he initiated these conversations. My observation would be that I had, I was publishing much more than he was and he was a professor, and I was just an ordinary lecturer, so he might have been wanting to sabotage my career because I was looking good, but I don't know, he may have seen me as a threat to him, uh, because I was research active and teaching active and he was trying to write. You know, if I was being cruel, I'd say he'd been promoted above his level of ability." - Interviewee 7</i>
Jealousy	<i>"But then it got where, [when] I split up really that it all started, but then not long after I'd split up, she left her husband. And a lot of people said she was a bit jealous because she wanted to get out of her marriage, you know?" - Interviewee 9</i>

Table 4.7 : Claims

#### 4.2.1.4 Is the content understandable?

##### Clarity and Confusion

Although we have been offering indications as to how G-GCT can generate explanations for conversations, this section remains more thematic than explanatory. The next 'emergent' theme is clarity/ confusion.

The clarity-confusion pairing as the term suggests, applies to the message given, the criteria being whether the spoken information is understandable and was understood. The information content is either clear or obscure, detailed and specific or general and vague.

According to the testimonies of the interviewees, conversation taking place in what they might call a 'positive atmosphere' creates the opportunity for clarity of shared content, accuracy, an efficient conversation and coordination. Jian and Dalisay (2017) state much the same. Clarity and understanding require an 'open space' helped by unity of objectives and relationship of trust. Clarity can resemble trust, in that both express important messages and may incorporate significant explanation to achieve mutual understanding. However, trust relies on belief in the truth of the situation, incorporates opinions and empathy, and not we argue, the understanding of detail. Clarity is particular and trust is general. Confusion differs from accusation in that it is unintentional, (one does not choose to be confused) and is not self-aggrandizing.

*"So I found it less stressful and less pressure I received from them when they gave me work and explained to me how to do work. So I think that's a good conversation." (Interviewee 8)*

Clarity and detailed accurate, decisive, structured and succinct information enabled a good conversation according to interviewee 8; clarity enabled efficiency and a shared understanding

of facts and objectives – how the job has to be done. This group of coded quotes all feature effective communication, and refer to initiative on the part of the ‘other person’: clarity includes instruction and abundant clear information, countering confusion, reducing misunderstandings by ensuring information is fully understood.

Notice that this view of what a good conversation is *leaves out* space for taking initiative, individual freedom (for the interviewee) or any wish to change the existing arrangements.

Clear communication (clarity) of objective guidance is here expected in a leader, seen as necessary to avert disagreements, and there is literature which also takes this view (Rogers-Clark et al., 2009; Overton and Lowry, 2013). Clarity affords precise communication of information portrayal, ensuring those partaking in a conversation are engaged in a shared understanding of all of the relevant details. Clarity creates structure and certainty in the conversation itself. Here the other person is expected to know what they are talking about and does.

From this way of thinking (but *not* others which value, say, autonomy) it follows that if these qualities are missing, then it is a ‘bad conversation’. Overton and Lowry (2013) describe five magnitudes of misunderstanding as differences of perspective, which are able to escalate with emotional involvement into total conflict if not directly communicated. This gives insight into the interrelationship of what is defined here as confusion with closure and conflict.

There is a certain inevitability to confusion in the absence of clarity, unity and openness characterised by statements that are imprecise and contain unknowns. After the conversation, there is likely to be inefficient outcomes, indeed some but certainly not all interviewee statements reflected a sense of helplessness and isolation when confused. Often surprise and doubts are voiced, as lack of effective informative communication and consequent misunderstanding cause individuals and teams to diverge and end up with unexpected results. Too much confusion, too little clarity in a conversation led some to participants to report doubts and a sense of isolation and continued exclusion.

However, interviewee 7 differed in the sense that a) he was prepared to fill-in missing information for himself, b) he was determined to do the job the way he wanted, and c) relished the prospect of leaving (which he had found liberating):

*"I'm thinking, do I leave? Does he want me to leave? Um, I'm not gonna stop my research."*  
(Interviewee 7)

For him exclusion was an opportunity for a new start somewhere else, away from his boss where he would not be bullied any more, stating:

*"I used to ride a motorcycle to my new job which was much further away. There was this turn in the road. The right turn would have taken me to my old place of work and the left turn took me to my new job. For four years, every time I took the left turn I thought to myself "thank goodness I don't have to go back there ever again!" That feeling was absolutely wonderful!"* (Interviewee 7)

But it is striking that not all interviewees felt like this, especially when clarity was vitally important to their lawful continuation in the country. They simply had to have it:

*"I have had a conversation about my visa with HR and one of the HR admins. She was really nice and helpful, and even I found, sometimes they don't have all the updated information about, like, this kind of visa thing. So, I'm not quite sure that this is, maybe, not their area. But, as an employee, the first contact about my, I mean, especially as an international employee - All that visa is related to my employment. So, I expect those kinds of information from HR."* (Interviewee 5)

It is no more than common-sense to see that confusion occurs when there's not enough available information, and results in uncertainty for the organisation and for the individual. What matters more particularly is the nature of the problem and the participants' evaluation of whether or not it is risky. If the risk is felt to be high then lack of clarity is unbearable, with this research fellow reporting inclusion as a consequence of a necessary degree of openness:

*"Uh, it's, it seems okay. The outcomes [...] made me believe, like, putting more trust on them. Anytime I need any help I can approach them without any hesitancy, right?"* (Interviewee 5)

Future conversations could be looked forward to without fear, with positive outcomes for the individual and organisation expected. But this was certainly not the unanimous view among the interviewees:

*"... Sometimes when they tell you to do something that you don't understand, initially, you still do it. Because of either you trying to get rid of them or you just do as you said, But you don't really understand why you're doing it. Later on you realised why you're doing it."* (Interviewee 6)

This interviewee admits to feeling helpless when there was a lack of clarity, risking them working toward the wrong goals and introducing their confusion in other conversations and activities. They felt they had to press on with their work, hoping for the best, hiding their lack of understanding (confusion) until they discovered for themselves why they were doing it later on (without being told). The risks of a catastrophe seemed high as the interviewee did not turn to conversations with the group, and chose to put up with isolation. It can be forecast that accusations of incompetence are likely. This interviewee seems lucky to have ‘got away with it’.

The extracts we have cited seem to leave open further possibilities. For example we could reason on the following lines that, say: *information communicated with clarity ensures that team members are able to act on their own initiative within all relevant guidelines, thoroughly understood. Precise facts regarding company policy, objective expectations and vital details are integral to operating at maximum efficiency. Confusion, conflict, isolation and accusations make things worse by preventing necessary information from being known, leading to a crisis of leadership, productivity damaging individual autonomy and willingness to take initiatives.*

No interviewee said this! But this case cannot be excluded: relevant *guidelines* within which there is freedom to act according to individual initiative, much as could be expected by academics at universities in their approaches to teaching and research. They might expect to work at their best within principles of professional good conduct which do not have to be written down in order to be known and honoured. When these assumptions are violated profoundly, either by excessive formalisation (bureaucratic monitoring) or when the unspoken understandings are trashed, a transformation takes place:

*“They want to show that this is the good thing that I have deep understanding, like where I come from, my understanding about them. Yeah, it’s good because he makes me know what I want to do in future... Leave the company.” (Interviewee 2)*

*“I think what was good about it was it was immediately clear that I had no future in that department or in that institution... It’s better to know you have no future there than to think you have, then you don’t. So it was quite clear that I had an enemy and he came, came out and he was quite public. I now remember that the first thing he said to me after he became Head of Department was “I called you in because I think it is only fair that you should know that you will **never** be promoted because of your research.” I was completely lost for words” (Interviewee 7)*

Though these interviewees enjoyed their jobs for the intrinsic joy they involved, their managers made it apparent that they did not fit into the organisation, resulting in a clear conclusion for the future relationship between employee and manager. This is a positive outcome following a period of worsening bad conversations, in that it resolves the problem for both parties, albeit not a solution that benefited their organisations. If the employee concludes that they cannot change the system from within the system, leaving (or tolerating bullying) are two rational strategies. But which?

*“I was a bit nervous of having the conversation with [Lucy], and explaining all the things that [Jenny] had been doing actually, not just to myself but to other staff, and she [Lucy] did conclude that [Jenny] was bullying.” (Interviewee 9)*

Here a cautious employee decided to ‘test the water’ by talking to a third party, Lucy, the regional manager. This step led to a change, Jenny being identified as a bully. The introduction of a senior third-party participant who will have had more authority than the bully, had a transforming effect.

Key words	Interviewee Quote
Certainty Clarity	<i>“Uh, basically saying how you’re doing and how you’ve been doing well, you’ve been doing not well, what’s to be improved or blocked. And that was it, the reasons, and it was, was quite good.” - Interviewee 6</i>
Detail Knowledge	<i>“But, but in the conversation in the UK, no matter academic or industrial company, they try to understand more about you. Like, they use additional questions to understand me. Not only just ask you ten questions with different tendencies. But maybe they ask ten questions towards one thing. So make you feel more considered. And also, it’s more effective for the conversation because I may not explain the thing very well about the first question. So I can, additionally, to explain more, to give more information by the follow up questions.” - Interviewee 2</i>
Certainty Initiative	<i>“... I had to overcome that because I needed that information very urgently, so I pushed myself and I talked over that, phone with them. And then it worked. I mean, they speeded up the process.” - Interviewee 5</i>
Knowledge	<i>“It’s kind of, so, if we can [be] aware, I mean, raise awareness, and clarify the HR’s role in an organisation in a better way to the employees or other people.” - Interviewee 5</i>

Initiative Certainty Detail Description Objective	<i>"... because his position... needs, you know, quite responsible so that's why he kind of have a higher expectation, expectation definitely, from you. Because for any big projects like multimillion projects, you need to get everything pinpoint correct. I absolutely understand that. I am trying to do the same as well. It's not that I couldn't do the project report, it's that I kind of the difficult part was build a report that is short enough, yeah, and explain everything. So my report either quite short and did not explain everything, or explain everything and is two pages long, which could be difficult for the contractor to read" - Interviewee 6</i>
Knowledge Initiative	<i>"So that's what they want you to start with and basically build your knowledge and build your confidence. And once you get fully aware or fully capable of that kind of job, then you move up to something like a... flat upgrade." - Interviewee 6</i>
Detail Clarity Guidance	<i>"Rather, um, they kind of like the supervisor of a student, they [...] show you how to do things, um, in a very, um, easy to understand way." - Interviewee 8</i>
Certainty Initiative	<i>"... I would check with him if I have upset him or if my behaviour was considered quite bad by that time." - Interview 8</i>
Initiative Knowledge	<i>"... I need to talk to people for this work and you talk to the people from the letting team, from the service centre. [...] I need to get involved with pretty much the whole company. And if you don't know their names and you are not familiar with them, it could be a bit of trouble." - Interviewee 6</i>
Thorough Certainty Knowledge Awareness	<i>"No, instead of asking one question and not only details, also they can understand the thing from different aspects." - Interviewee 2</i>

Table 4.8 : Clarity

Key words	Interviewee Quote
Unsure Doubt	<i>"...his style is not to just tell me things directly but rather do it in a, in [an] unexpected way." - Interviewee 8</i>
Confused Unsure Guesswork	<i>"But...the result is that I am still confused about what I need to do for the job. The result is, I still didn't understand what the job was about." - Interviewee 2</i>

Confused Guesswork	<i>"...there is a manager of the team. And then there is another person manage me, um kind of, he's like a mentor to me. Um but sometimes I get confused who I should send my work to and who I should explain to." - Interviewee 8</i>
Confusion Isolation Distance	<i>"I guess... There was a miscommunication between me and him around this problem, and it ended with some sort of problem, and uh, I felt there was a shortage between me and him." - Interviewee 4</i>
Unclear Changing Confused	<i>"Yeah, it's not clear what the information they deliver. They said, 'We do everything, and sometimes we just, uh, change everything like we planned last week'. So I just feel very confused, well, they do not inform you at all." - Interviewee 2</i>

Table 4.9 : Confusion

Our analysis of the interviews can be regarded as a preliminary to something more searching and explanatory. It can be seen that interviewees' ordinary common-sense understanding of the 'good' and 'bad conversations' which they had experienced is consistent with the academic literature on conversations. This suggests either a) that the literature is in some sense correct (consistent with the evidence) or b) that the literature it is also largely based on the same common sense which the interviewees already possess independently (without having read the literature), or c) both. These are grounds for criticism of the literature, not because it is wrong, but because it is obvious and uninformative.

We can also see that interviewees describe different causes of good and bad conversations and different solutions to the bad ones. Each of these solutions has common-sense support but this does not explain why when the interviewees had been presented with very similar circumstances, most notably bullying by a manager, they did *not* all respond in the same way. They could:

- ***re-establish good order*** by appealing to a third party higher up the hierarchy, as did interviewee 9 (above). GGCT identifies this as the Hierarchical solution in which 'deviance' is identified and punished by embarrassing Jenny

- ***leave***, recognising that there was nothing that could be done. What is striking about interviewees 7 and 9 is that they both appealed to the hierarchy and yet in the case of 7, the senior third party, his Deputy Dean advised him to leave

Although the following strategies did not feature prominently among the interviews, two more culturally available (i.e. thinkable) solutions are:



- *unite and fight*, by gathering together other victims of bullying and using collective power to drive bullying out of the system, especially with union support
- *out-compete the other*, by challenging them directly, winning and collecting the prize

Grid-Group Cultural analysis identifies these as *Hierarchical*, *Fatalistic*, *Egalitarian* and *Individualistic* strategies respectively of which we find barely any mention in the academic literature on conversation. What is striking about these strategies is that they directly contradict each other. And our most serious conclusion at this stage is that common-sense is not enough to explain why equally reasonable but conflicting ways of thinking and acting exist. Another way of making this point is to ask the all-important question:

*'Why is common-sense so contradictory?'*

### 4.3 Role-play Scenario Design

The interviews conducted were compared for situational similarities in an attempt to identify:

- a) what might be commonplace among the reported experiences of 'good' and 'bad' conversations as chosen by interviewees. The idea that the attributes of good and bad conversation can be induced from respondents' descriptions seem to be quite a common method in conversational research
- b) to compare interview evidence with what the literature says in the form of a running commentary and tabulations
- c) to find empirical examples of the most serious difficult situations which interviewees had found to be highly disturbing

These aims have had mixed results from which certain points do arise. In terms of c) one interviewee was going through a divorce and their boss was getting involved in preventing the interviewee from seeing their own child. While the boss' involvement was deemed overly specific and too unusual to be useful, separation in general was used as a basis for the 'Mike' scenario: an employee who stood accused of failing at work and whose home life had disintegrated.

Interviewees referred many times to long working hours with insufficient compensation, reflecting a common professional scenario. This was incorporated into the ‘Tom’ scenario.

The interviews were very valuable in generating authentic and genuinely difficult ‘prepared role play’ scenarios (see below). We were looking for scenarios that involved difficulty for both protagonists and of course the interviews were of limited help as we did not have access to ‘the other person’. Nevertheless as we will see, we succeeded in eliciting improvised conversations on deep difficulties that role players would need to work hard at in order to find solutions, and which would take time. The most difficult examples given in the interviews were specific enough to inspire highly plausible scenarios for the role-play, thus:

	Problems with Manager	Problems with Group	Problems at Home
Tom	■		■
Tina	■	■	
Mike		■	■

Table 4.10 : Employee scenario table showing a square marker in the problematic social field effecting each character

In terms of item b) above, matching interviewees’ utterances with the literature proved to be straightforward. But what troubles us is that the recommendations about good conversation found in the literature are common-sense and most or all the recommendations could be arrived at by non-academic lay persons. The interviewees’ theories of why things had gone well or badly could be matched with literature which of course, they had not read. This casts doubt on the usefulness and explanatory power of the literature, especially as recommendations on how to avoid bad conversations are *diverse*. The more interesting question which is not addressed by the literature is why there are diverse forms of conversation and *different* ways of repairing bad conversations that have a *lot in common*.

Finally, in terms of item a) above, by keeping one eye on the reported conversation and the other on Grid-Group Cultural Theory, we notice that among all the heterogeneity are some recurring and distinct forms of reasoning which we suspect have dynamic and often provocative effects on each other, bringing *life* to each conversation.

Our major contribution will be to track these conflicting rationalities moment-by-moment as role players strive to analyse and resolve the difficult scenarios they have been presented with,

and to offer clear graphical representation of how protagonists switch rationalities (thought styles) in response to the rationality which the other person is using.

To our knowledge this has never been attempted. This will enable us to answer questions posed earlier which the literature has not answered or has not asked:

- What are the cultural bases for different prescriptions?
- Why are different solutions thinkable?
- How can the same solution (say an appeal to the hierarchy) both succeed and fail? In virtually identical circumstances (say bullying)?
- Why do some feel that accusations should be assessed through a ‘judicial process’, others, through collective demonstrations of resistance, others through tests of intellectual or physical strength (including fighting), while others retreat, hide or run away?
- Why do we *disagree* about which of these *equally reasonable* but different actions is the correct one?

## **Chapter 5 : Findings Parts B - Put yourself in manager's shoes**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, recorded dialogue from the prepared role-plays are investigated to understand how conversations work in organizations. Eleven conversations were improvised by actors based on scenario briefs they were provided with prior to their performance. G-GCT (Grid-Group Cultural Theory) thought styles are then applied to analyse each role play conversation on a statement-by-statement basis. Both parties' view of conversation they had, and spectators from both theatre and video-reviewing will be analysed, and see how conversation can be evaluated from different perspectives. These are further combined with a novel model of good/bad conversation, a set of prototypical cultural attributes as derived and discussed in the previous chapter.

It is intended that by making theoretically-informed critical comparisons, a more thorough understanding of conversation in the workplace can be achieved.

The evidence presented in this section is ordered according to the thought styles studied: Hierarchical, Egalitarian, Individualistic and Fatalistic. All four were displayed in varying amounts emerging dynamically during the role-play dialogues. Some conversations are found to employ similar styles of thought from beginning to end while others pass through a frequently changing range of interplaying styles.

By encoding each spoken statement of the participants to a particular thought style, it becomes clear that the characteristic methods of speech do change throughout conversation in a dynamic yet intrinsically related manner; that these thought styles directly affect one another and the ongoing outcome of the conversation. Conversations are reasonable but participants often provoke different forms of reasoning in each other, hence conversations develop and move.

### **5.2 Four thought styles in conversation**

Each of the four thought styles can be understood as the product of each participant's socio-cultural normalities, guiding the technique of their approach to information sharing. They also enable participants to evaluate the worth of information. The content of their speech is intrinsically connected with their thought styles, producing momentary current perspectives,

end objectives and the means right down to the choice of words and expressive actions, within the course of the conversation. We claim that the evaluation of a conversation as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ is also enabled culturally. There are inevitable ‘cultural biases’ in evaluation criteria.

By encoding each spoken statement by its thought style, it becomes clear that speech rationalities change throughout conversation in a dynamic, usually directly-related manner. Equally reasonable and yet conflicting thought styles directly affect one another and the outcome of the conversation. Most of the participants' statements were found to correlate closely with a specific thought style, with minimal uncertainty between two or more styles. However, some statements are found to be ‘poly-rational’ (employ more than one form of reasoning).

All four thought styles were displayed to varying degrees and dynamics during the role play dialogues, with some conversations found to be following similar styles of thought consistently throughout and others passing through a frequently changing range of interplaying styles. Our aim at this stage is to further define these thought styles when applied to conversation, and recognise correlative trends, discussed below.

<b>Coding Comparison by Each Grid of G-GCT</b>		
Thought Style	Files	References
Hierarchical	11	282
Egalitarian	11	210
Individualistic	10	115
Fatalistic	9	132

Table 5.1 : Coding Comparison by Each Grid of G-GCT

The sum G-GCT results are given in the above table, where Files refer to the number of recordings, and References represent the total number of occurrences of each thought style identified across all recordings. Elsewhere, for clarity, we apply colour-coding to text according to its rationality.

### 5.2.1 Hierarchical Thought Style

Ultimately, across all role plays, the Hierarchical dimension ( $n=282$ ) is the most frequently found style by far. This suggests that workplace conversation ordinarily follows a predominantly Hierarchical thought style, characterized by rank, order and rules, as would be expected of the management position operating within a typical organisation, a predominantly Hierarchical cultural microcosm. Note that Hierarchical reasoning is not unique to persons occupying high position. An appeal to the rules is possible at any level.

#### Scenario: Mike 4

*Manager4: Okay, um, so, do you know why we're having this conversation?*

*Mike4: Not really, no.*

*Manager4: Okay, okay. Um, I wanted to have a conversation with you, because some of your colleagues have raised concerns about you.*

*Mike4: About my work?*

*Manager4: Um, not the work per se, but obviously how they feel about the atmosphere in the office affects, you know, how everything works.*

*Mike4: Right.*

*Manager4: But they- they feel that there's been a sort of personality change, and I have to say I- I've kind of observed it myself. I mean you've worked here a long time. You know, you're a very respected employee. You know, you're a very valued colleague, and you do really good work, but it's been noticed, within the last few weeks, you've, um, you've become less approachable, and some of the junior staff members in particular have felt that you've been quite short tempered with them.*

In this example, in order to understand why the employee's personal behaviour has changed, the manager points out that “*there are concerns*”, c, or a specific concern raised by multiple individuals, about the employee and requests to discuss these further, suggesting rank is required over the apparent disorder, deviance being the main preoccupation of Hierarchical reasoning. Thus, to understand what made this employee change behaviour (deviate) is the main aim of the conversation. It means from the beginning, the manager had been set a task by

the rules and policy of the company to investigate the situation according to his position within it.

Here Hierarchy is animated in the interests of the prevailing ethics, of consistency and of collaboration respectively, as these appear to have been broken.

Underpinning the conversation, the manager makes attempts to solve the employees' problem, acquire a corrective promise from the employee, and to ensure both sides clearly understand what is supposed to be done. From the manager's Hierarchical perspective, these aspects together indicate that the aim of the conversation has been achieved. Mike 4 says 'right'; however this utterance probably has more than one reasonable intention and not just obedient acknowledgement.

#### Scenario: Mike 5:

*Manager5: Right, okay. Well, I'm going to trust you on that and hope that you can get over this and that I'm not going to hear any more complaints.*

*Mike5: Right, thank you. I appreciate that.*

*Manager5: I'd appreciate it if you can resolve this. It all comes on me, I need to, ah, make sure everyone's working effectively together. Okay?*

*Mike5: Right. I think I can definitely deal with that.*

In addition to maintaining the usual orderly format, the hierarchical manager acts to reinforce their duty in others (third parties) to ensure all employees understand what their role is and how it relates to other team roles. In this section, the manager entrusts the employee to meet these standards, while making clear that failure to do so will be met with further hierarchical disciplinary discussion.

#### Scenario: Mike 5

*Manager5: Wonderful. Okay. If there's anything you need any help with, please do come and talk to me. I don't mean to be too bossy with it but I really want this to be sorted soon.*

When discussing more sensitive or personal matters, the hierarchical reasoning is found to be more likely than emphasise a neutral impersonal tone, wary of violating rules further, wording

each intervention carefully and ‘professionally’, because when hierarchy applies, the organisation largely comes before the individual.

#### Scenario: Tina 1

*Manager9: ... you have started, um, dating someone in the office. Um, um, obviously this is a sensitive, um, topic, so, I kind of hope that we can talk about this in a professional way.*

*Tina1: Oh.*

*Manager9: Um, there ... I should say, there are no rules against dating from the office. You can do as you wish. It's, it's-*

*Tina1: I know that. Yeah. I know that.*

*Manager9: Um, yeah, um, and we aren't going to ask you to stop doing that, or to judge you at all.*

However, here the manager shows some discomfort and concern that there is potential disruption that goes well beyond ordinary team practices due to a new personal relationship, and it follows that while the current situation is technically fine, *implicit* rules should be followed or they may need to be enforced through further explicit conversations. One plausible outcome would be new rules forbidding dating.

#### Scenario: Mike 4:

*Manager4: Okay, okay. Um, I mean obviously this is a confidential conversation.*

*Mike4: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know that.*

*Manager4: And, you know, what happens in here doesn't go outside of here. Um, is there anything that is going on in your life that we could support you with.*

*Mike4: Um, I don't know. It's- it's, um ... I guess it's a bit tough at the moment.*

In addition to organisational expectations, the manager reasons hierarchically, summoning ethical rules, to remind the employee everything being discussed is confidential to ensure the employee's privacy. Often, this strong emphasis on professional privacy appears to assist the employee in speaking openly and honestly, thereby transitioning toward a more egalitarian approach. We suggest that by offering protection, fatalistic wariness and the preoccupation with survival is alleviated.



Scenario: Tina 1:

*Tina1: It's just gossip.*

*Manager9: The reason why you weren't told ahead of the meeting is we like to keep things private and confidential, because, obviously, this is a sensitive topic. And, uh, when you come, you know, if you get a memo, "Hey, will you come and see me," et cetera, I don't like to put anything on the memo, just so no one kind of knows what this is about. There's no kind of like paper trail for that.*

*Tina1: Okay.*

*Manager9: So, it's completely private and confidential. So, that's why you haven't. And I appreciate that, you know, it might have been nice to have been told. Um, on the hand of gossip, um, unfortunately, you know, we have people that do talk in a certain way, and not only is this to manage other people's opinions and expectations, it's also to help. You know, you are respected in the office, workplace, as much as they are as well.*

However, since empathy is not especially a marker of hierarchy, when it comes to discussing sensitive or personal subjects, manager 9 seems to show a somewhat 'conflicted' (poly-rational) focus on ethical principles in their speech and chooses words very carefully as a result.

Also, it is worthy of note that by emphasising the confidentiality of the conversation need not necessarily gain the employee's complete trust. From the employee's perspective, it may raise fatalistic scepticism as to why the manager is showing such care about an employee's private life following the complaints.

Scenario: Tina 1

*Tina1: Okay. Can I say something?*

*Manager9: Yeah. Absolutely.*

*Tina1: Okay. So, my personal life is completely separate from the work I do.*

*Manager9: Mm-hmm (affirmative).*

*Tina1: And the work ... I'm very good at what I do.*

*Manager9: You are. Absolutely.*

*Tina1: Okay. I'm very good at what I do. And the team I work with know I am. My personal life is nobody's business but mine.*

*Manager9: Yep. Yep.*

*Tina1: And I, I think this is outrageous that I've been brought into this meeting in this way, on some office gossip, and chit-chat, about what people think they know about me. Regardless of what the truth of this is, it's nobody's business but mine.*

Despite the employee responding defensively and critically about why the manager is getting involved in her personal life, the manager responds by emphasizing that the rules regarding co-worker relationships are not being broken. Hierarchical reasoning is present but without satisfactory resolution, hence Tina 1's annoyance and Manager 9's reticence and abbreviated utterances.

#### Scenario: Tina 1

*Manager9: Um, there ... I should say, there are no rules against dating from the office. You can do as you wish. It's, it's-*

*Tina1: I know that. Yeah. I know that.*

*Manager9: Um, yeah, um, and we aren't going to ask you to stop doing that, or to judge you at all.*

Within the context of a workplace, hierarchical reasoning ought to elicit a universal discipline accompanied by efficient means to deal with any eventuality. However, in practice it is difficult to arrive at unequivocal rules for all eventualities. One party to a disagreement can use a set of hierarchical rules to challenge the other side whose thinking is also hierarchical. What is so interesting about this particular intra-thought style disagreement is that it shows that shared reasoning is no guarantee of a 'happy outcome'. If anything, resolution becomes more difficult, not easier. Both parties hardly dare to state directly what they are thinking: "Umm...Its, its' / 'Yeah. I know that".

#### Scenario: Tina 1

*Manager9: And I do appreciate that. Um, but, unfortunately, in this case, your personal life and your work life have overlapped somewhat. You can agree with that.*

*Tina1: How? Give me evidence. What's the evidence of this?*

*Manager9: Well... the evidence is that you are in a relationship with someone who works with you. So, naturally your work life and your office life have overlapped there. Do you acknowledge that?*

*Tina1: I don't accept that. I don't accept it.*

The word “evidence” is key here. Those using the Hierarchical thought style are honour-bound to base their position on the available evidence within the given rules structure. Unless it can be proven one side is breaching an official policy, the Hierarchical atmosphere provides minimal protection for personal authority. In a scenario like this, the employee repeatedly assumes the same reasoning as the manager, knowing they are not breaching any policy, in order to challenge the manager’s authority and reason for raising the issue. There is concurrence of reasoning here, but without a ‘happy equilibrium’ being attained.

*Tina1: People have relationships all the time.*

*Manager9: They do. Yeah.*

*Tina1: And for all I know, you may have a relationship with somebody you work with. I don't know.*

*Manager9: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).*

*Tina1: And it's life, isn't it? But you keep it separate, and I have kept it separate. I don't bring it into the office. That's my home life. It's my personal life.*

In this particular scenario, the manager concentrates on attempting to bring the employee to agree to an imposition of rules, stating that the “*employee should keep distance from someone who they are dating*”. Although since “*there is no certain rule*” about office dating, the issues raised with manager did not meet the full standards of hierarchical reasoning. Therefore, after pursuing a firmly hierarchical approach throughout the conversation, the manager did not produce the definitive result which either they or their employee set out to achieve. The employee ‘digs in her heels’ in stubborn disagreement while the manager struggles to find an answer. It can’t rest here:

*Tina1: I understand you've got a job to do. But this has been a real shock to me, and I think fine, move his desk, move, you know, move where he is. I'm not moving, but I really feel I want to go home now and I just want to digest some of this. Because, I'm feeling very angry and upset-*

*Manager9: Mm-hmm (affirmative).*

*Tina1: ... and actually, I've got to go back into that room and get my stuff, get my bag and my coat, and I don't even want to do that. Because I'm worried that I will go in there and I will say what I think to those people (colleagues).*

*Manager9: Well, if you want, I can go with you. Um, we can do this together-*

*Tina1: No, because that looks even worse.*

There was a fundamental flaw in approaching the conversation from a hierarchical perspective without the evidential support of rules-based reasons for the meeting, and failure to recognize and respond to the resistance that this provoked. For Tina1 her survival is at stake, reasoning fatalistically that she should run for the refuge of home and avoid the gaze of colleagues.

Unless both participants can subscribe to common rules and principles, the Hierarchical approach will struggle to secure the goals which the manager set out with. We hypothesise that the conversation will not end here and that there are alternative directions it could go. One of these is indicated in the next example below.

### **5.2.2 Egalitarian Thought Style**

The Egalitarian thought style was found to be the second most frequent rationality used in workplace conversation between managers and employees. This form of reasoning is characterized by ensuring all individuals in an organization benefit, all are treated equally, and everyone is taken into consideration. While Hierarchical reasoning is especially sensitive to deviance (with rule enforcement as the solution) Egalitarian reasoning is particularly sensitive to 'existential threats' to all, to be solved through wholesale change.

#### **Scenario: Mike 8**

*Manager8: ...because obviously we want to support you and, you know, we, but we have to support all of our staff.*

#### **Scenario: Tina 3**

*Manager11: I just really meant, are there some ways that we could perhaps think of to make your colleagues feel more at ease or feel more comfortable for the workplace environment? Because, as we've already said the work you do is absolutely exemplary, it's perfect. We also want to make sure that*

*everybody in our office is comfortable. And it's a nice and safe place for everyone to come to work. And that includes you, as well. Because we don't want people gossiping or talking about you and your relationship with James. So I'm just wondering if there's any kind of ways that we could think of today to overcome this.*

From the egalitarian-inclined manager's reasonable point of view, equal support for all employees is their responsibility, thus they want to make sure everyone is cared for equivalently (the High-Group, Low-Grid position). Therefore, they will emphasise the importance of each individual during conversation. In this instance, the manager makes a strong point of being supportive and even repeats that they want to limit damage for all people. Our sense of it is that the manager also wishes to minimise risk to themselves, though this is *implicit* rather than explicit in the next extract:

Scenario: Tina 3:

*Manager11: But obviously, I want to limit the damage because not only should it be a comfortable place for them to work, it should be a comfortable place for you to work, as well.*

This comment is probably 'poly rational' as when it comes to talking about 'sensitive topics'. Here there is Hierarchical awareness that the conversation is not covered by a written rule and the problem cannot be solved this way. The manager is aware that until such a rule is written, they are exposed to criticism even from within the Hierarchical position. So the manager's reasoning shifts towards the Egalitarian thought style, demonstrating consideration of the employee's feelings and defending group harmony.

Scenario: Tina 3

*Manager11: I know, but basically, this is a way to talk about problems we have with each other without doing it face to face and we're able to save each other's feelings, if you know what I mean. Trying to adjust, in a way, they can come talk to us and register with us what they feel. And then we can perhaps, give that to you in a way that is less confrontational, put their words in that sort of way, if you understand?*

*Tina3: Yeah.*

*Manager11: Because no one is upset or angry with you, at all. We're just wanting to make sure that everybody is in a comfortable place.*

*Tina3: Alright, okay.*

*Manager11: Not only you, but like everybody, as well.*

The manager regularly mentions how some colleagues feel for the employee in an attempt to convince them to see eye-to-eye and unite in resolving the issue, without referring to *rank* or *policy*, seeking to reduce the barrier between manager and employee. In addition, the manager speaks on behalf of other staff, representing the group's views, filtered slightly by being in a position of authority.

#### Scenario: Mike 1

*Manager1: Maybe they don't- well obviously if you haven't spoken to them, they don't understand the situation you're in. I mean, you can imagine from their point of view, you went from being one of the most experienced guys there, kind of coaching them, and you know, being a nice, friendly guy. And then all of a sudden, you know, there- there's a change in you.*

*Manager1: And you have to remember that these are- these guys are quite new, they're quite young. They might not know how to handle it.*

The way the manager puts it expresses a wish that the team stays together rather than disintegrates in the light of the complaint from other staffs toward this employee. Manager suggests that the employee begins to think in his less experienced and younger colleagues' angle. By pointing out the employee is the most experienced member compared to his young and new colleague, the manager recognises that this employee is ranked above them.

This reasoning is in tension with that egalitarian reasoning that there should be 'no barrier' among members. Nobody should be above others, but, in a Hierarchical turn, nobody is above the organisation.

*Manager1: And that's why people like me, myself, and your teammates are here, you know, with- just because we're managers, doesn't mean we're not people. We're here to help you out through these tough times. And so is the company.*

In order to reduce resistance to opening up and resolving the issue, the manager (Mike1) makes an innovative suggestion: he offers an invitation to go for a drink, outside of the workplace and work hours, to talk informally. This suggests friendliness and consideration.

#### Scenario: Mike 1

*Manager1: Okay. What happened mate? You used to be like, full of life, life of the party.*

*Mike1: Uh, well it's just- I mean- I meant - I mean, it's yeah. It's- it's difficult. I mean, I'm holding together. I suppose I didn't really tell people, you know. I- I- I mean, yeah.*

*Manager1: Do you want to go somewhere else? Do you want to go grab a coffee away from work? Do you want to do that?*

*Mike1: It's- I've- I've not seen my son in months, and uh, you know, my wife's left me.*

Our reading is that the manager's creative and rather unorthodox suggestion arises poly-rationally from Individualistic as well as Egalitarian reasoning. It will be further discussed in the following section.

By being offered an opportunity to ignore in-work hierarchy and to speak as equals outside work, the employee already begins to explain their personal situation more willingly. This enables a distinct *movement* in the conversation: the sharing of the employee's story is important to the manager's understanding of the root cause of an employee's behavioural changes seen at work. This allows both participants to create an amicable and honest conversation space. This largely but not exclusively egalitarian moment also provides a foundation for further understanding and assistance with future problems.

#### Scenario: Mike 1:

*Manager1: Yeah. How about this, what are you doing tonight?*

*Mike1: Nothing.*

*Manager1: Yeah. I'm free as well, do you want to go for a drink? Let's do dinner.*

*Mike1: Well, yeah. Could do, I guess.*

*Manager1: Yeah.*

*Mike1: It's not a bad idea. To- to- to-be honest.*

*Manager1: Stops you from, uh, yeah. Have someone to talk to, and we'll just have a chat about this. Away from work, computers, everything.*

The manager creates a chance for both sides to talk 'almost as friends', reducing tension as the employee starts to feel more accepting of the manager's reasons for talking.

*Manager1: Oh mate, I'm- I'm sorry to hear this. Did you want to take a bit of time off, or do you want to talk about it? You know the- the company offers, like, an employee program where you can go and talk about kind of personal stuff.*

*Mike1: Okay, well I mean to be honest I-*

*Manager1: Yeah, you don't have to. It's optional obviously, but there's always someone there. I meant, if you felt comfortable talking to me about it, I'm more than happy to hear.*

*Mike1: I mean, thanks I suppose. You know, it's good to have the option there, to- to- to be honest, I think you know, talking these things through is probably a waste of anyway. You know, it's- it's- it's- it's not going to bring her back, is it? so ...*

Without referring to company policy, the manager makes further attempts to offer a range of assistance with a personal touch. Though the employee has yet to accept any offer, they willingly begin to reveal their inner thoughts in detail, barriers between professional and personal overlap are breached and this variant of the conversation can continue toward a conclusion. Indeed, sometimes it helps employees to be reminded that they are on the same team, done so in this case by an egalitarian-minded manager seizing an opportunity for empathy that allows a better understanding of the individual. Both parties know that the manger is still the manager, but here is a manager willing to take an Individualistic risk in order to create an opportunity for movement. Many managers would make no such offer, being unwilling to accept the risks it may involve, yet it remains available culturally.

#### Scenario: Mike 1:

*Mike1: Yeah. Yeah, no. I can understand that you know, I'm a drain on- on the team.*

*Manager1: Oh I- I wouldn't look at it as a drain, mate. Listen, we all go through, like, situations and problems in our life that we have to do on top of work.*

*Manager1: Well, hold on a minute. Let's try it. Let's try it. We'll never know. It might help, it might not. I mean, you can be the judge of that. But let's take that first step together.*

Showing encouragement and unity with an employee is egalitarian. Our cultural reading is that the manager spots the negative connotation of the 'drain' metaphor and sets it aside. The employee is given the right to choose to speak or act as the leader of their personal life, relieving pressure.



Some of this reasoning was also present in Manager 5:

Scenario: Mike 5

*Manager5: Okay. Well, no, absolutely fine, we won't touch on that. But, obviously, I'd love to trust you and believe that you can resolve this issue alone. But I do feel there are certain things we probably ought to be offering to help.*

*Manager5: You are absolutely one of our most talented workers and we want everything to be running smoothly. Is there any kind of issue you'd be willing to talk through with perhaps a professional? We do have a counselling service, if you think it would help.*

*Manager5: Now, I'm not suggesting that you do need to tell me. However, if you're wanting, we could happily go out for a drink, anything like that, something a little more informal, get out of the office for a while if it would help. Honestly, I'm all ears, mate. And I really don't want to see further problems coming through for you.*

The employee is credited with being an important team member and as an individual. Several steps toward a solution are suggested together, reinforcing a sense of team solidarity and support. Satisfaction with the employee's past record is confirmed as the view of the whole team, preserving the potential that still exists in the employee.

Manager 5 attempts to access the issue behind the employee's workplace behaviour without assuming that the explanation is to be found in the workplace. Manager 5 respects the employee's life choices and does not leap to impose any workplace actions or orders. By treating the issue almost as though it were a problem for the manager himself, the employee is invited to sympathise with the manager. The possibility is opened for the employee to share, once the employee's fatalistic wariness towards the manager has been reduced. The employee could confess their worries as a first step towards making changes.

From an egalitarian perspective, the interim objective of this conversation is achieved successfully, but there is recognition of the need for future conversations before resolution is possible.

Scenario: Mike 5:

*Mike5: Well, um, yeah, that, that sounds not bad. Ah, but-*

*Manager5: Yeah?*

*Mike5: ... I promise that, um, you know, to be honest, I confess that I have been being short-tempered for, for quite a while these days.*

*Manager5: Sure.*

*Mike5: So, ah, I promise that, um-nothing much changed for me but just give me some time, um, it's just-*

*Manager5: Sure. Quite happily.*

Here Mike 5 is doing the talking and Manager 5 does not say much. The pattern of turn-taking confers power to the employee who takes some responsibility for it and expresses a willingness to do something, given time. There is a hint of a future-binding commitment here.

### **5.2.3 Individual Thought Style**

The individualistic viewpoint is characterised by competitive thinking; the assumption is that the initiative belongs with the actor rather than to other actors. This is a self-focused style of thought, 1) giving priority to the self and 2) the locus of control is sensed within the self rather than beyond the self. It is this second aspect that separates individualistic reasoning from fatalistic reasoning.

Individualistic reasoning emphasises personalised responsibility even within teams. It is striking that among *eleven* role plays studied, *none* of the managers stuck consistently with the individualistic thought style. For example, Manager 5 is only partially individualistic in reasoning. However, this sample does not prove conclusively that individualistic reasoning may not applied by some managers on some occasions (and at specific moments when this reasoning suits). We also note that in the observed cases, employees reasoning individually got very offended when the managers pointed out the issues raised. A competition then took place as the employees attempted to persuade their managers that the employees' position was the correct version of reality and not the managers':

#### **Scenario: Mike 2**

*Mike2: I don't think I've been very distracted recently. I don't think so...I probably think it's some people just projecting on me, to be honest.*

*Mike2: So, yeah, I mean, everything's fine. I'm just kind of like trying to get on with things, and I think probably the issue that people should be addressing is, like, productivity in general, and like, you know, if ... We'd probably be more proactive, and we could probably get a lot more work done if we could just get on with our work, and kind of like, not call, you know, HR ... No offence, like, but-*

Here, the employee felt annoyed when he heard his colleagues had raised complaints about him. He believed strongly they should focus on their own job, instead of taking an interest in others' work habits. The employee reiterates his belief that work should always come first, and suggests everyone else should be productive, which indicates individualist-competitive reasoning.

### Scenario: Mike 3

*Mike3: Yeah well I think it's time for junior staff members to kind of learn to buckle up a little bit.*

*Manager3: Have you thought about taking some additional training perhaps in your exchanges with people?*

*Mike3: I've been here for 25 years; I don't need bloody training about how to talk to people. I don't need some corporate crap okay. I know how to talk to people, I know how to do my job. I've, for 25 years I've been trying to get people to do their job and, and now at this point in my life, I've come to the end where, like there's got to be a change because it's, it's stressful what we do. We've got a stressful project and it's like I can't sit there and do nothing while the rest of the world passes these people by.*

Once the manager made the recommendation of training, the individualistic employee responded with outrage and made clear their refusal to take any additional course of action. While this response appears fatalistic on the surface, the employee raves competitively about their experience over others and the importance of doing their job properly over team disagreements. This is more than *defensive*, this is challenging the suggestion that he has anything to apologise for.

### Scenario: Mike 7

*Mike7: They, they should, I mean they should be more focusing on their work. Not worry about me what's going on.*

The employee emphasizes that others should be neutral about each other and operate on personal initiative. Instead of paying attention to other people, they should pay more attention to themselves.

#### Scenario: Tina 1

*Tina1: Well. I think that's other people's problems. It's not mine. I've kept... I've been scrupulous in keeping everything separate. Um, and this relationship hasn't been going on for very long.*

In another example, the manager's reflecting on other colleagues' thoughts about the employees relationship provokes and clarifies a defensive and individualist stance, which takes pride in doing a good job. The employee believes they are effectively separating their own personal life from their career, meaning it is not a problem for anyone. Everyone is unique, and the relationship between their colleagues and themselves is about competition, as later stated:

*Tina1: It's in their heads. I can imagine who's been saying this, and I think ... I mean, I just think that they're jealous of me, anyway, and now they're jealous of this, too. And I think it's sort of a personal ... I think it's some kind of campaign.*

According to this individualist reasoning, the team's reason for complaints is because they are threatened by the employees professional and personal capabilities. Tina 1 is competitive. She accuses them of seeing their opportunity to take down a more talented employee (herself) and she pushes back forcefully.

#### Scenario: Mike 8

*Mike8: There's, there's ... Look everything's fine, but I just think that I've reached a place in my life where I'm not taking other people's crap anymore.*

*Manager8: Okay.*

*Mike8: And if other people think that that isn't right, then, you know I don't think I believe them. I just want them to do their job and just stay out of other people's business.*

*Manager8: So if they're not doing their job, is there another way that you could talk to them that might be less distressing for them?*

*Mike8: I mean, I don't understand why, why we have to have this stupid less distressing for them. What about the distress it's causing me having to constantly look out for them and babysit them. These are*

*meant to be intelligent people and they aren't processing anything I say. Like the complaint should be that these people are not doing their work from me. And that, that's where the stress is coming from, frankly.*

In the employee's view, everyone has to show they are intelligent enough on their own initiative to be worthy of relaxed communication and successful teamwork. Their focus should be solely on proving themselves. In other words, everyone has to get on well with their own life.

*Mike8: I think I've changed, but I've changed because I've come to a point. And I've come to a point where some people need to learn themselves. They need to learn how to do it, you know. This is the real world. I'm not taking each other by the hand and holding each other all the time.*

On the surface, the focus on fitting practical rules can appear hierarchical, but in fact it shows a competitive style of thought, saying “*this is real world*”, and that it is not right to have to teach others when they should be strong enough to stand alone on their own two feet.

#### **5.2.4 Fatalistic Thought Style**

Fatalistic thought style presumes very limited scope bordering on predestination. It reasons that this is the nature of the world and therefore that people should be accepting that their circumstances are largely beyond their control (Evans, 2008). They often appear careless, unconcerned and lacking in awareness of the collective, which indeed they are. Avoidance of conflict is also reasonable within the fatalistic position. As with each of the four thought styles, fatalistic reasoning invites and provokes disapproval (Loyens, 2013) in the other three ways of thinking, but especially, we think, on the diagonal opposite, Low Grid, High Group egalitarian reasoning. Fatalistic thinking fosters private (typically quiet) survival while egalitarian reasoning animates loud and demonstrative efforts to change the world. The low grid/ low group position fosters isolation (also known as the ‘Isolate’ position for this reason. It seeks escape from group engagements.

Note that in these recorded role plays, the role of manager rarely demonstrates the Fatalistic thought style and even when it does, it is only momentary. This does not mean such approaches to management do not exist because we can infer that it is concealed through self-protecting silence.

Scenario: Mike 1

*Mike1: Well yeah. There's- there's not a lot of point, is there? But...*

*Mike1: Yeah, well uh, I'm fine. You know I'm- I'm coping. Ob- ob- obviously you know, it's been hard over the last few months. Um, you know. Just feeling a bit lonely, I don't really feel I've got any friends here to be honest, you know.*

*Mike1: No one's listening, you know?*

This employee's prepared backstory is that their wife has left, taking the children; thus, he feels hopeless at home and these circumstances which have overwhelmed their private life, are affecting their work practices. This employee feels unappreciated, isolated and unsupported. It is not unreasonable for Mike to conclude that his sorry situation and his mood will not change.

Furthermore, when the manager shows willingness to listen and understand, Mike meets this offer with *refusal*:

#### Scenario: Mike 1

*Manager1: You don't have to. It's optional obviously, but there's always someone there. I meant, if you felt comfortable talking to me about it, I'm more than happy to hear.*

*Mike1: I mean, thanks I suppose. You know, it's good to have the option there, to be honest. I think you know, talking these things through is probably a waste of time anyway. You know, it's not going to bring her back, is it? So...*

Life seems hopeless, and doing anything to react to this existential situation is pointless. This reasoning is clearly embedded in the employee's mind and with it, his efforts toward the team at work.

*Mike1: Yeah. I mean there's not a lot on my plate, I'm not doing anything, you know. I just sit and have a few drinks at night, and I'm trying to keep hope alive I suppose.*

Consistent with isolating himself, other Mike variants are also not be prepared to listen and accept others:

#### Scenario: Mike 3

*Manager3: Well is it if you shout at them, which you have done.*

*Mike3: I mean, you know the idea about mine, they should just live with it. But in terms of them being concerned for me or whatever, they should stop because I'm not concerned for them like, everybody should just get on with their jobs. We're not here to make friends, we're here to do our job.*

In addition, another 'Mike' stated:

#### Scenario: Mike 7

*Mike7: And um, I, I think life is not fair, you know, um-*

*Manager7: Yeah, what, what happened?*

*Mike7: You, you, you see James. He got his promotion. But for me, I am still in the same position. I work lots, and with this, you know, this silly mates. They just, they just drag me down.*

In reference to Fatalistic thought, Mamadouh (1999) writes “*Fairness is not on the earth*”, a mood portrayed by Mike 7’s comparisons of his own misfortunes against others' achievements. Fatalistic thinkers will readily blame their failure on fate, as though they suffer from bad luck, and dislike this being challenged by seeing others who are doing better than them by their definition of success. Indeed, what explains Mike’s misfortune and others’ success is the same: it is all just a matter of luck.

*Mike7: And, if you were in this sort of situation. You probably will behave more dramatically than me. To be honest, this is a very timely thing. And just don't take it seriously.*

At this stage of the conversation, the Fatalist employee accuses others to ensure his own survival when the manager mentions that they had been shouting.

*Mike7: Yeah, I think I should just keep the same. I don't need to do a lot of change, based on this situation.*

*Manager7: Uh, you just mentioned that you're feeling a bit depressed.*

*Mike7: Right, right.*

*Manager7: Do you think anything could help you, like having a break or something?*

*Mike7: Please, just let me go back to work. That, that will help.*

The employee’s refuge in work is consistent in their Fatalistic approach, mentioning they “*should just keep the same*”, “*don’t need to do a lot of change*”, and ask “*why do I need a*

*break?”*. It holds that there is no need for a Fatalistic thinker to attempt to fix anything that cannot be mended. It would raise futile false hopes. Doing something is therefore worse than doing nothing. Their position remains that people should simply *accept each as they are*, exemplified again by another employee:

Scenario: Tina 1

*Manager:*        *And do you think there's anything that, maybe we can think right now to make that easier?*

*Tina1:* *No, I can't think of anything to make it easier. I mean, in fact, I'm very upset now, and I ... I think I'm just going to have to go home early. I'm going to have to leave early.*

In this case, a discussion about the impact which an employee dating someone from the office is having on the team, the employee feels unable to face the problem. Instead of assisting and compromising to find a solution, or resisting collective pressure, Tina1 leaves the workplace for the refuge of home. This approach will not assist the manager in their objective, nor resolve matters for Tina's co-workers, but these aims are besides-the-point amid fatalist reasoning: the aim of fatalism is run and hide, deferring change and avoiding direct confrontation with her colleagues.

Furthermore, when the manager suggests they move workstation in the office, she stated:

Scenario: Tina 1

*Tina1:* *I don't want to move. I'm not moving. You know, the two people I'm thinking of, are ... They would love, they would love to see me shifted out of this position. They would love to see me punished in some way, and I'm not going to give them satisfaction.*

This is the ‘give-them-an-inch-and-they-will-take-a-mile’ variant of fatalistic reasoning tinged with individual defiance. While running for home and refusal to move workstation may look like very different actions, they share similar reasoning.

### **5.2.5 Overall Thought Style contribution in conversation**

After encoding the conversation transcripts and tabulating the results according to G-GCT criteria, the proportions of thought styles for each conversation can be aggregated into a series



of pie charts, shown below. To our knowledge this is the first such attempt. These charts enable the reader to appreciate the sum of all reasoning's at-a-glance:

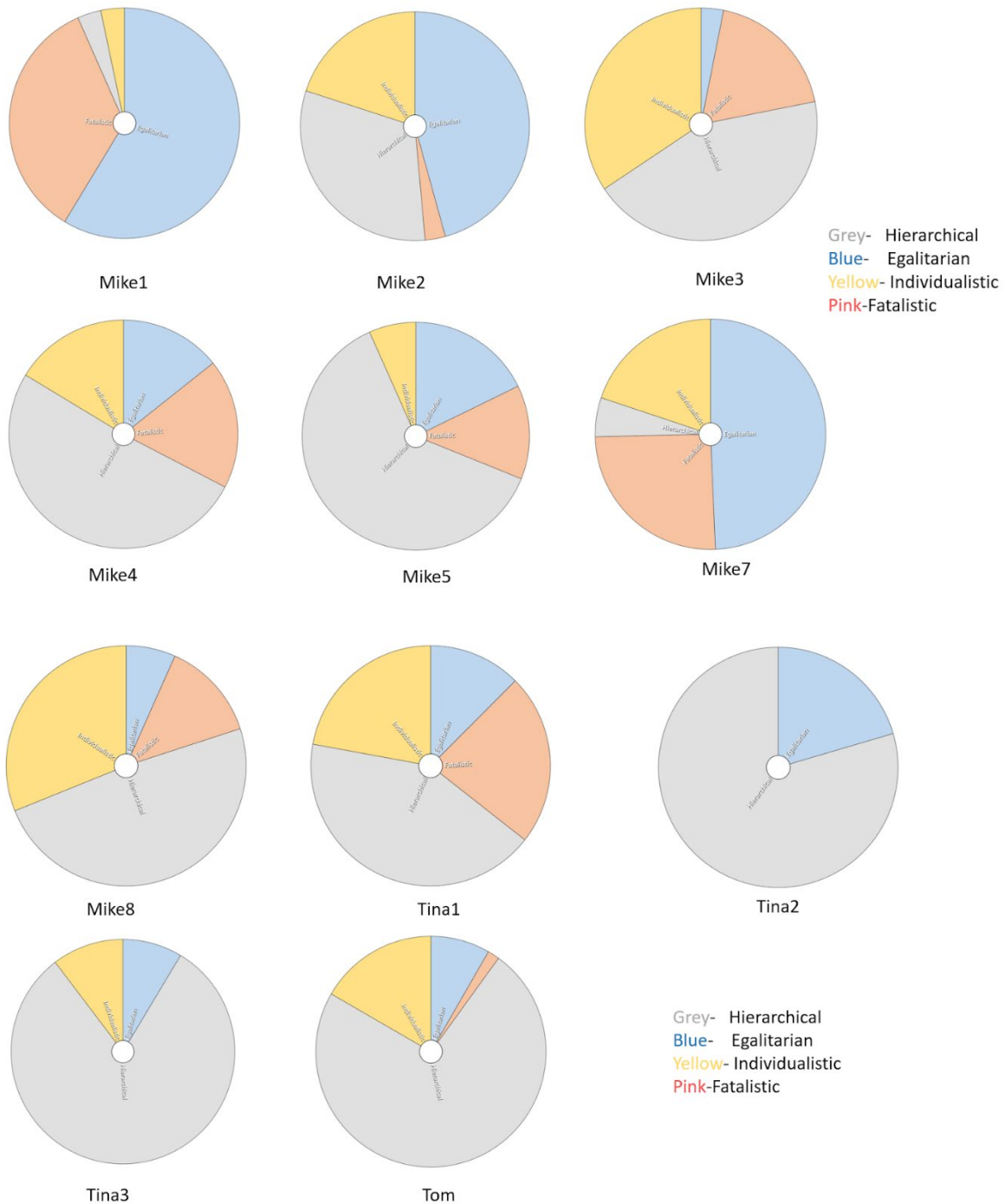


Figure 5.1: Culture in Conversation: combined total percentage of Thought Styles for each conversation

These pie charts provide a condensed overview of each conversation as a whole, named after the employee role and number. The various segments on each chart represent the total number of statements made by both participants per thought style. Although this model of representation is somewhat reductive of the intricacies within a conversation, it does allow for quick, summative insights.

Our first stage was to identify the reasons shown in each utterance. These second stage summative measurements of conversation indicate the overall feel and mood created between the participants. Each of the dyads can now be compared ‘from above’ from which interesting inferences can be drawn<sup>1</sup>:

- 1) Hierarchy (shown in grey) is the most frequent tone found, comprising around or over half of many studied conversations. There are grounds for supposing that a Hierarchical strategy is often met with Hierarchical responses, here comprising more than half of the statements made
- 2) In two of the three charts where Egalitarian reasoning comprises close to half the conversation, Hierarchical thinking is notably for being almost absent
- 3) There seems to be a relationship whereby with higher proportions of Egalitarian reasoning, the share of Fatalist responses also increases. Here we refer to the downward sloping diagonal between the High-Grid/ Low-Group and Low-Grid/ Low Group position
- 4) The share of Individual reasoning seems to be highest when the Hierarchical style is very active. Here we are referring to the upward sloping diagonal between the Low-Grid/ Low-Group position and the High-Grid/ High-Group position. Findings 3) and 4) are consistent with G-GCT which hypothesises that diagonally opposed rationalities are the most pronounced because they represent double disagreements about how much other people matter (heteronomy versus autonomy) *and* about whether or not rules are important to problem solving
- 5) We also find that Individual reasoning is present at a lower intensity in the presence of Egalitarian reasoning. This is also as forecast by G-GCT as these two-lower position

on the G-GCT typology are in agreement that rules get in the way and only disagree over how important other actors are

- 6) No fewer than eight of eleven managers' thinking is concentrated in the Hierarchical thought style. Only three are more inclined to Egalitarianism
- 7) No example was found of Fatalistic reasoning among management, except fleetingly in one case

These last two findings indicate that Low-Group reasoning styles are least likely choices for management level communication, raising the question as to why this is the case. We suggest that this is because managers possess (institutionalised) power due as officeholders

We also see that:

- 8) Employee thought styles varied, with all four thought styles being well represented
- 9) Employees often varied their reasoning throughout the conversation
- 10) Employees favoured styles which were especially the inverse of their managers' styles (moment-by-moment)
- 11) Among employees Individual- and Fatalist reasoning were demonstrated more frequent than Egalitarian reasoning
- 12) The thought style(s) used appear to depend on the employees' circumstances at the outset of the conversation and on their manager's reasoning(s) at the beginning
- 13) Employees' thought styles transition quite often in most enacted scenarios, probably because in these scenarios they represent the problematic side of the meeting. Transitions occur specifically when the manager sticks to one form of reasoning for a period, but which also does not move the conversation toward a positive result for the employee

We draw an important inference from this last finding. It suggests strongly that in a workplace meeting, the employee's thought style is influenced by the managers chosen approach. From

this we can draw also infer that outcomes could be changed if informed by tactical forecasting which places approximate probabilities on the different outcomes of different forms of reasoning. However, we emphasise that *to any form of reasoning there are three culturally available alternative forms of reasoning* (it is difficult to assign probabilities to outcomes) and *even when both parties' reasoning shares the same thought style, (intra thought-style) disagreement is still possible*. The Tina case illustrates this because it is reasonable for both manager and employee to acknowledge that there is no rule prohibiting romantic relationships at this workplace and that it is this deficit which prevents the conversation from advancing. Other intra-thought style disputes can be imagined (Fatalist v. Fatalist, Individual v. Individual and Egalitarian v. Egalitarian).

- 14) It is apparent from the above findings that conversation can be classified, mapped and measured insightfully using G-GCT. However, although G-GCT is both descriptive and explanatory, it is not a predictive theory nor does it specify a cultural 'equilibrium-point'. While G-GCT shows that change will come sooner or later, it is imprecise for the purpose of forecasting which direction a conversation (or any cultural phenomenon) will take next
- 15) G-GCT is an excellent way of deciphering the diachronic dynamics of conversation (it measures movement in conversations), however
- 16) It does not distinguish absolutely a 'good conversation' from a 'bad conversation'. This conclusion can be expressed in a different way: G-GCT explains why what one given thought style will regard as a good outcome will appear as an unsatisfactory outcome (or a disaster) within any of the opposing three thought styles. The charts cannot show with any certainty whether the conversation is considered to result in a good or bad outcome
- 17) However, G-GCT is at least consistent with what is observed in self and in others, namely that no actor is always content all of the time. There is always that tantalising, culturally realistic sense that in one way or another, life could be better than it is
- 18) It is a pragmatic point: we have been unable to find any utterance which does not fit somewhere on the G-GCT typology. This is confirmation of Thompson's 'Impossibility

Hypothesis' which states that it is not possible to think a thought that is not culturally enabled. This is an expression of Emile Durkheim's insistence (elaborated in *The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life*) that it is society that makes thought (and feelings and actions) possible and that no distinction need be or should be drawn between 'society' and the 'individual'.

### **5.3 Dynamic movement of Workplace Conversation; Time-Series Graphical Representations**

As the reader will realise, we have no special methodological commitments. Instead, we use methods that suit the research question 'What is a Good Conversation'? Beside line-by-line classification of a large *quantity* of utterances pie charts are also useful. Still another method is to plot the data of how G-GCT associations change *throughout* each conversation, at which stage and whether (and how) the reasoning used by one conversant precipitate shifts in the reasoning employed by the other conversant's reasoning. In this section we show how this can be done.

Here we plot lines which include shifts as upwards and downwards movements (drawn left to right). The lines show which thought styles are active at any point and at which stage in the conversation, measured by *Sentence Number* for easy reference and to remove potentially confusing factors such as time spent speaking. This creates a simple and speedy way of studying each conversation comparatively. It finds the flow of the conversation, whether it is characteristically stable or dynamically shifting and provides a useful visualisation of why these changes occur in response to the various thought styles. Although the production of these graphs is very time-consuming and involves many iterations in order to attain accuracy, we suggest that the outcome (the graphical representation of conversations) is useful. Here we are more interested in the reasoning(s) being evoked and less in the specific content of each sentence. Note that each thought style can accommodate a vast range of specific utterances and meanings. But it is striking that 'underneath' every dialogue at any scale (whether between individuals or between governments) is a remarkably simple set of four culturally enabled prototypes.

The G-GCT thought styles were plotted statement by statement in consecutive order on a graph drawn as continuous lines running between these data points. The line created for each of the

participants becomes the focus as a visualisation of the changing nature of an ongoing conversation. This method allows for an overview of patterns in the dialogue, with more precision than the above pie charts which consolidate whole conversations into an instantaneous representation. The concept of this graph-making method allows for monitoring of communicative and resolute stability among staff, and quick reference to the stages of the interaction where prominent disagreements occurred.

The four G-GCT types are placed on the Y axis, creating a level-based tracking coordinate for each thought style used during the conversation. Pairs of statements, the manager and employees dialogue of statement and response, are numbered sequentially along the X axis, to be read intuitively as the progression of the conversation over time. Following this fluid representation both *describes and explains* the innate dynamism of G-GCT applied in measured conversation. Again, we will see that G-GCT does not *forecast* the sequence in which one thought style may follow another, nor the moment at which that point will be reached. Although it would be interesting to plot hundreds of conversations across a wide range of institutional contexts, in order to check for cumulative patterns, we doubt that there is any definitive, most frequently occurring linear pattern. There is no reason to suppose that Hierarchical, Egalitarian, Individual and Fatalistic rationalities follow in a particular sequence. What we are confident of is that shifts in reasoning will occur sooner or later.

The point in the conversation graph when participants transition between thought styles, shifting in their approach, indicates a specific statement that is key to the balance and direction of the conversation. Thereby, this is a practical quantitative technique that functions as a brief summary in relying less on specific data and more on the flow of the conversations shape.

To allow for easier reading, the introductory pleasantries of the conversation, such as “*Hi. How are you?*” have not been mapped on these graphs, the lines starting once the main meeting has begun. The chief limitation of the following representations is that the placing of the thought styles on the vertical axis is somewhat arbitrary. (It would be desirable if there was a graphics package that could depict the G-GCT typology in 3D, as a moving frame, showing the ‘volume’ of reasoning being used. The graphs shown below do however prompt the question While it is quite easy to recognise conversations that have not ended in resolution (impasse, more conversations needed), what is it that defines satisfactory *completion* of a conversation, when enough has been said not to need another conversation?

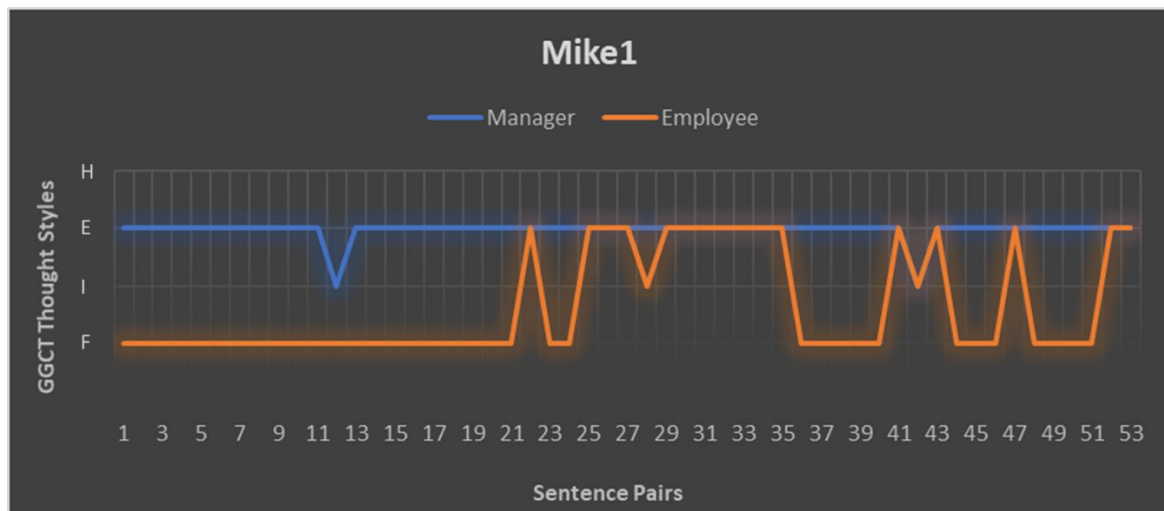
### 5.3.1 Dynamic Patterns of each individual conversation

Since transcripts include large amounts of information, the idea occurred to summarize the conversation in graphic form for a further angle of analysis. The presentation of the graph is concise and informative, making the changes to both parties thought styles easier to understand at a glance, even to a layperson and without access to the transcript, recording, or real-time conversation.

Being based on dyadic interactions, statements made by each party in-turn were grouped into pairs (essentially message and response), and placed along the x axis. These sentence pairs occur in consecutive, chronological order, and so give some indication to the duration in time and the linear flow of the mapped conversation. The y axis represents the 4 cultural thought styles, while the coloured lines track the thought styles used by each participant in the conversation. This allows a representation of the reactive behavioural movements of each party throughout a conversation.

This approach to reflecting the qualities of a conversation, graphed by categories and coupled statements might be well suited to combination with other metric research on prolonged interactions. Specific to conversation, mapping the flow of interactions could use emotional themes, categories of body language, levels of volume or pitch, or the framework derived in the first Findings chapter of this thesis. It may also be useful to add key words at key moments on the graph, to add notes toward a second metric (e.g., body language: *nodding* or *crosses arms*). One idea would actually be to add ‘emojis’, found in social media communication, at points on the conversation graph to represent any observed changes to either actor’s visible cues, avoiding excess wordage from obscuring the graph. Of course, the number of parties represented could also be scaled up or down, to include group discussions or monologue speeches.

In short, the idea and application of this graph is only a starting point for researchers to present dynamism, while allowing an evaluation of the conversation separate to the transcript, thus giving a more mixed-method perspective in order to identify patterns within and between graphs. This indication of general, overarching and underlying trends is no less revealing than assessing the transcripts in detail. Each sentence pair within the conversation can be thought of as a critical point in which there is the potential for change and risk.



(Y Axis: H-Hierarchical, E- Egalitarian, I- Individualistic, F-Fatalistic)-applied to all figures below.

Figure 5.2 : Scenario Graph - Mike 1

This line graph shows how both parties' thought styles change throughout the conversation. This employee is tracked along the lower line. His mood is depressed and faltering during dialogue tending to default to Fatalistic reasoning, while the manager holds a mostly Egalitarian line throughout in response, and appears to make only two changes at 'sentence' 11 and 41. By empathizing with the employees' situation and resultant Fatalist cynicism at work, the manager attracts the employee to share fleeting moments of more hopeful Egalitarian outlook, starting at statement 22, and on two occasions, Individualism. Building on the knowledge acquired by the understanding Egalitarianism, the manager only twice employs informal Individualistic opportunism, suggesting they go for a friendly drink away from work and the team, which helps to distract the employee from their Fatalism and 'breaks the mould' of official hierarchy between the two. While the manager pushes the employee to take action together, the employee returns to Fatalism frequently. Here it is Egalitarian reasoning that produces the insight and agreement between the two over time, coupled with occasional Individualistic solutions which change the tone. The conversation concludes with a common Egalitarian agreement on what step to take next. Though there is momentary resolution, the employees' problems are not solved. Mike 1's reasons have been made apparent and a journey has begun involving his manager which has the potential to resolve at least the employee's mood if not his private life. It is *possible* that work might provide a refuge.



At this point, it is hard to tell with certainty whether the employee's change is in response to the manager's change of approach, although at least it shows the employee's first change appeared immediately after the manager's first change, when the manager applies Individualistic thought, asking him to "*go out for a drink*". The consistency of changes within the three often shared thought styles appears stabilized by the manager's Egalitarian style through understanding and sympathy with the employee's situation.

It is worth to mention that two separate group discussions were held about this particular role-play. The first evaluation was during the theatre stage, we interviewed the actors who played the manager and Mike 1, as well as all spectators present in the forum theatre (first group MBA students and experienced professionals). The second review followed a video of the role-play at a later date, with second group MBA students in the audience.

A variety of views arose about this conversation:

**Mike1 (actor):** *It was fun, as I'm sure you can all tell. It was riveting. Obviously, in trying to role play the situation it's slightly difficult to kind of keep the conversation difficult and to sort of challenge him. To be fair, he's offered a very reasonable thing. Kind of unofficial way of trying to bridge the gap, and that's probably pretty much the right solution. So obviously if I wanted to keep the conversation difficult, and I'm in a difficult mood anyway, it's a challenge to sort of repel him as it were. I think it worked.*

From the employee actor's perspective, because the manager offers him an "*unofficial*" invitation to have a drink after work, it is not easy to refuse, especially as the manager is both his boss and, seemingly, his friend. This approach was also different from what the employee had expected, with the actor later adding:

**Mike1 (actor):** *Well I mean, generally I was expecting it to be much more of a disciplinary probably than anything, and I was slightly surprised to see it turned out to offering to deal with it in other ways. He was trying to give me another chance as it were, and I suppose really in the conversation that's where Mike turns around and it is worth the go, because I'm not in trouble.*

Surprise was deemed key here, with the employee having presumed a "*disciplinary*" type, Hierarchical tone to the meeting. Yet being 'caught off-guard' by the egalitarian and individualistic tactics and poly-rational solution of the managers' rather unexpected encouragement. In the employee-actor's view, he was provided another chance without having to fight for it, making this a conversation that began with a high probability of difficult

challenges, only to be successfully averted by an unexpected approach. Further stated reflections confirm that it is seen to be a good opportunity for him to try and get back to normal.

**Mike1 (actor):** *If he's capable of it, but even if he's not too drunk by that point already or feeling too down, then I think probably, because it feels like a last chance as it were. It's something to grasp onto. There's hope in it, I guess, yeah.*

**Mike1 (actor):** *He's offering a connection, [that's] there at anytime, but more so it's a genuine, or it feels like, an actual friend...*

The solution which the manager offered not only gave him “hope”, but also made him feel there is a “friend”-like feeling there, enabled by the distinctly low-Grid Individualistic and Egalitarian combination.

**Mike1's manager (actor1):** *Yeah that's exactly it, that's what I'm saying everyone, I don't go in with a plan. Because we don't know what he's gonna turn around and say. He might turn around and say yeah, I killed a man last night, I feel bad about it yeah, but I mean it. Yeah, you just bear with it on what they say. It's what I've found easier, but funny enough, I learned these things, from actually seven.*

**Mike1's manager (actor1):** *Yeah, because the teacher when you're seven got a law and it's all about open questions and it's letting them speak. Because you find that that is a human thing. That when it is silent between two people, someone will try and fill that gap. Yeah, to let them speak so like I was quite open and I just sat back and just let Mike speak, just let him speak and then do it based on that. And if you do like the setting so you propose something, then you stop, and you just wait for their response and then you can't prep the response.*

Instead of setting a rule-based plan before the conversation, the manager-actor started with an open mind, and gave the employee the opportunities to speak. He called it “a human thing”, in other words, by caring about the employee’s situation and also affording an opportunity as equals and individuals outside of the workplace, it shows a specifically non-Hierarchical thought style. In this scenario, it appears to be a ‘probably’ effective solution. Although, because the ultimate solution is not achieved within the scenario, the outcome of a further non-workplace meeting is unknown, but shows promise and a positive trend for both actors.

After observing what happened on stage, the spectators joined the discussion:

**Observer2(F):** *I think it's a real good conversation between the manager and Mike. And for me I think if I'm the manager, I would find it is very difficult to start a conversation because I have no idea what happened to a good employee. Especially if something wrong happened to his life, I don't*

*want to make the conversation too private. I don't want to hurt his feelings. So I think if I want to make the conversation go further, I would be very careful about what questions I ask to Mike. Oh, and I think the manager did very good to ask Mike out for a drink, because in that environment maybe in a pub, or any place, Mike will share more because the situation is not so serious. Maybe Mike will talk more about what happened to his life, and what he wants to do. Maybe in the moment he is stuck in the situation. But in the future maybe Mike also wants to make some changes. So, I think it is good for the manager to change the environment of this conversation.*

**Reviewer 7 (F):** *Well, there's quite a subdued vibe at the beginning, where he's quite introverted. Didn't really want to talk, sort of giving one-word answers. And then towards the middle, where the manager started really offering just an informal platform to talk, even threw in some humour, sort of laughter, it kind of was more upbeat. And it did feel like it sort of still ended on quite a subdued note. But there was a little more, like you said, a ray of hope or positivity. And I think it's like when he started to realize that there was a genuine interest shown with the questions. He seemed to want to talk, to get it off of his chest. Which I thought was quite positive.*

**Observer3(F):** *I really like the conversation, as a manager and as an employee and as a manager, my next step would be, yes without having a meal, having a drink, breaking the ice, getting to know your employee better; my next step would be after that, because you can't leave things there, you need to find a solution, a long-term solution for that, so I would go back to the team leader, have a meeting with the team leader; what exactly is happening in the office? Why is it happening? And what is his role? And why is he not diffusing the situation? And I will have separate chats with the other employees as well. Why are they behaving in such a manner with this person? And find out ways how we can resolve the issue.*

The majority views from participants, both those seeing the live performance and those watching the recording, thought it was good conversation. Firstly, most people would feel that to deal with such a sensitive situation would be challenging and they may not know where to start. Secondly, by offering some informality, humour, and to have a drink opened the door for Mike1, and so the manager did well to change the atmosphere of the conversation. Thirdly, by understanding more information about the employee will help the manager to find the longer term-solution, such as speaking with the team leader or have chats with other colleagues, while communicating with the employee and allowing their information to further guide the resolution process. The manager set up this meeting because Mike 1's colleagues raised concerns to their team leader, who in turn raised the concerns with the manager. Thus, it might be a future solution to create 'fairness' and 'understanding' between all parties involved. In the meanwhile, the most important thing is the managers poly-rational flexibility, sensitivity, and

lack of immediacy, which plays an important role in encouraging the employee to be part of the solution, without the threat of high-Grid work-based expectations, for a problem which is recognized to be mostly personal.

As Dr. Smith added his thoughts by responding to the spectator:

**Dr. Smith:** *I think that's so interesting, because there is a hierarchical relationship between Mike and his manager. So it doesn't look like a hierarchy, it doesn't feel or sound like a hierarchy. But it is, really. And Mike's responsibilities are different from the responsibilities of his manager. But I take your point, absolutely. It was done in a level-- kind of way.*

However, differing from the numerous positive views from the actors and many spectators, there were also spectators who raised issues with this conversation, which can be summarised into two groups: one issue relates to environmental setting for the conversation; the other is critical of the inherent risks of the manager's approach.

**Reviewer 6 (M):** *I think this conversation they're having, it's a personal conversation, and it doesn't help in that environment. But it's certain, at the end you see the gentleman who's actually kind of listening to the conversation. But not actually participating in the conversation. So it doesn't help actually, the environment, which the manager should have seen. This guy was sitting at the end, his subordinate. Then there's another woman sitting at the opposite, like that. I think that setup doesn't do well for that kind of environment. For that kind of discussion.*

Though the environment reasoning is not the focus of this research, and the 'unreal workplace' environment was due to the limitation of the setting and the involvement of an audience for the research, the matter of environment is worth taking into consideration in the future. By responding to this issue, whether the manager should have an enclosed office setting for this type of conversation, participants gave differing opinions:

**Reviewer 3 (F):** *No, that would be too formal.*

**Reviewer 7(M):** *I wouldn't.*

**Reviewer3 (F):** *I think it was a really good thing that he's done it informally. So, it's more or less like two friends chatting.*

**Reviewer3 (F):** *If you weren't listening closely, you wouldn't see it as a probing session, or out to find out what was wrong with you. It just seemed like two friends who are having a decent conversation. So, I felt that was really good.*

The opposition would argue the enclosed office setting would be too formal. Arguably there are two voices, one from rule-based viewpoint, the other against rule-based approaches. The other critical views were with the approach which the manager chose:

**Reviewer 10 (M):** *What do you do? If you've got seven employees with different issues, you can't go out seven nights a week, can you? So, it's not very practical, I would say.*

**Reviewer 1 (F):** *I don't know though. If someone is a religious person and they offer them a drink, but maybe--*

**Reviewer 8(F):** *Yeah, I was gonna say, 'cause he said he goes home and drinks at night. And then he offered him to go out for a drink? So yeah, maybe.*

The responses here are varied in angle of insight, but all point to the problem of whether or not the informal ‘out-of-hours’ strategy is “practical”, particularly in regard to questioning the culture of drinking. This is noted to be a quality step, but is impossible in any greater quantity when there are multiple staff members with problems, while such treatment for one staff member may be seen by their team as unfair. Furthermore, some participants raised the role that is played by gender, suggesting that if the manager or employee were female, instead of both being male, inviting the employee to go for a drink could be insensitive and create uncertainty regarding the motives of both parties, even putting both “innocent” parties into risk of further challenges.

**Reviewer 8(F):** *I think it's an interesting question, though. Cause you just think, two guys going out for a drink, even if it's a manager, fine. But given the previous conversation with the manager lady, if they do go out, and there are further complaints, and then they've been out for drinks after work, it could lead to other questions or speculation. Which, although trying to be helpful, is probably not the most secure in terms of potential he said, she said, or manager.*

**Reviewer 8(F):** *Uh...From a colleague's perspective, I guess, if they see them out drinking, the same colleagues that are, if he seemed to be getting preferential treatment there could be speculation. There's obviously the whole appropriate relationship, sexual conduct questions. Even if it's innocent—*

**Reviewer 8(F):** *I think it maybe just opens them both up to that risk.*

Adding to this point about reducing risks, further comment even suggested that “a third party” might help.

**Reviewer9 (M):** *We had this experience earlier. I had the conversation with my worker, just both of us. So we had some problems, no record. So he said, he, at the end, he showed me. So, we had a life*

*imbalance, not a problem. But no people know the conversation between us. Therefore, when next time, I have a conversation with my worker, I will invite the third party. They have people who will come here, who mediate the employees. And sometimes he will reduce the argument, the argument between us, very important. Sometimes, because I and my worker have, even others, they have attitude, and some issues. But the third party, they will stand in a neutral position to analyse the situation. So, it will help reduce some risks. It's very important.*

The participant gave an example of a conversation he had with an employee with unknown problems, and how he invited a third party in following the first difficult conversation. The reviewer here highlights the importance of a party with a “*neutral position*” needed to reduce “*risk*” of argument and bias. In other words, it almost sounds like the “*evidence*” from Hierarchical position in this type of conversation could help.<sup>1</sup>



Figure 5.3 : Scenario Graph - Mike 8

Here, the manager remains Hierarchical, with only a short change to Egalitarian thought for a duration of two sentences shortly after the half way point, at sentence 14-15. Seemingly, the stubborn-like attitude to thought style is mirrored by the employee, who largely remains Individualistic. Both parties attempt to change the course of the conversation by switching approach once, but by sentence 16, a reasonable outcome looks to be felt impossible, as the

<sup>1</sup> Mike 1’ s scenario was discussed with both supervisors. The second supervisor said “*it would not happen in the real work environment*” in response to the manager’s approach. However, after discussing with my first supervisor, he believes that it could happen. Regardless of their individual reasoning, this highlights how different people’s views about an identical conversation are based on their perspectives and experience.

employee accepts Fatalistic reasoning, and the manager makes no further attempt to change accordingly.

This graph is illustrative of a disastrous conversation as far as the parties are concerned. This is a difficult conversation in which an aggravated Individualistic employee disputes the reason for being called to the meeting, and presents their own counter-complaints regarding the contributions of his team, at one stage reminding the manager of his own (Hierarchical) status within the company. The manager maintains an almost exclusively Hierarchical style throughout, but this fails to bring much if any orderliness to the conversation. Eventually, a little Egalitarianism is lightly applied, which the employee accepts regarding the manager's reasoning, but too late to alter the disposition of the employee. The manager returns to Hierarchical reasoning, saying "*this conversation is to try to avoid getting to that point where [someone] makes a formal complaint*". This threat does not produce a constructive turning point. Instead Mike8 becomes detached, and although accepting the managers objective, he is dissatisfied and begrudging. The problem is far from solved for either party nor from any position. The employee alternates between Fatalistic acceptance and Individualistic offers to make changes but on his own terms. The parties end the conversation in opposition occupying the top-left and top-right cells of the typology.

This conversation repeats a commonly recurring pattern whereby a continued management-level Hierarchical line remains throughout almost the entire dialogue with an employee (Mike8) relying mostly on Individualistic reasoning, with the employee being driven by the monocultural Hierarchy toward Fatalism.

During the role-play review workshop, perhaps due to this predominantly Hierarchical line, participants' opinions of the manager's approach are rather critical:

**Reviewer1 (F):**        *I think it was a very hostile environment. She was very confrontational. The tempo was very intense.*

Described as "*hostile*", the rule-based manager was not seen to care much about the employee's feelings, despite the employee in the role-play saying that he is "*upset that I have been called in...*". Instead of asking what happened to him and about his feelings, the manager is straight to the point about the reason why the employee was called in, saying "*some concerns have been raised...*", which characterizes and explains why the "tempo was very intense". It also

creates a blunt and “*hostile environment*” from the beginning, which heightened the differences between the two parties and distanced the already Individualistic employee.

While being asked if the described atmosphere changed at any point, the responses given fall into two parties of opinion. Some thought it changed at some point, and others thought it did not:

**Reviewer 2(F):**           *It changed--*

**Reviewer 3 (F):**           *I think it changed--*

**Reviewer4 (M):**           *It changed after the insurance seasons. And being held to our support for the employees.*

**Reviewer 4 (M):**           *It changed, lost fear in the relationship.*

**Reviewer 5 (M):**           *I think he changed when she mentioned that he's a valuable part of the company and then, you know, they want him and that's when I think he cooled down.*

Obviously, these participants' points suggest that at some point, both manager and employee changed, with some specifically stating that they recognized changes when the manager started to take a “*soft*” approach and resultantly, the atmosphere of “*fear*” was lost. The manager had said to the employee “*obviously, [...] you are a clever man...*”, to which the employee lowers the competitiveness of their position, replying “*Look, I, I, I will not be as tough with them*”.

Another reviewer added:

**Reviewer 3 (F):**           *Initially he was very defensive...I also think when the HR manager offered him assistance for his personal life, because it was obvious that he had underlying issues because the HR manager did say his work, his quality of work used to be really good and then he dropped it in the last few weeks. And they were trying to understand what changes he was going through. He didn't own up to having issues. But towards the end, he let his He had issues, but he would deal with it in his own way. And I feel he became a bit calmer. They didn't reach a compromise at the end, but I felt that he calmed down at the end. He calmed down a bit. He owned up indirectly to the fact that he had underlying issues that were separate from work which could be one of the factors.*

In other words, the employee changed his attitude because the manager showed a soft approach by offering him “*assistance*”, and might also realise they themselves have some underlying issues.

However, other evaluators argued that the conversation did not change:



**Reviewer 6 (M):** *I feel something that, **nothing changing**, that it was in no sense given it stays central, they get these ideas, and this kind of disconnect between the HR and this, the gentleman (employee). And emotionally, actually, there's more from each and emotionally is important. No set up, that's why they could use their, their, their excuse.*

**Reviewer 7 (M):** *There wasn't any positive option. **They didn't change**. And you will notice that when he left, he was in such a hurry to leave. Let's get it over with. That's why he couldn't, he shouldn't, just grab bag and ran. So, if he had been a positive or a good conversation.*

**Reviewer 7 (M):** *Yes. He would have been happy, which I didn't see. The guy was just glad to finish it.*

The answers above point to the employee saying anything to quickly end the conversation, where were it a 'good conversation', they would not be rushing to leave. Actually, the dynamic graph also explains this attitude as the conversation moves towards the end, with the employee becoming Fatalistic, in disagreement finding a way to survive, not striving to find resolution and deeming the conversation untenable.

With the manager seen by many participants to be "hostile" and responsible for the trajectory of the meeting, the manager-actors view is of interest:

**Mike8's manager (actor):** *Um, I mean I think everything. I mean, the table, it is confrontational. I felt as well that [...] as an HR person that I didn't feel that I was very equipped. I felt that, you know, in these complaints I needed to go in, I needed to talk to him, I didn't really think, particularly when he came in and he was kind of really at me, I thought, oh right, okay, let's just **make sure he's aware that**, you know, that we don't want a formal complaint. He doesn't want a formal complaint. But like it says, he wants the outcome. I felt that there was not gonna be enough. There wasn't gonna be this thing where he would say well actually, you know, this is happening and that wasn't gonna happen. And, a bit like him, I thought, okay, so he hasn't thrown the chair across the room. Okay, **he'll go away and think about it**. So **for me with the manager hat on**, I was thinking, okay, he'll go away and think about this at least maybe overnight. So I, or she, I don't think she was really on top of it at all. And I think she hadn't prepared for it as well. So I agree. And I think the confrontation thing. As soon as you're facing somebody across the table immediately he's in the position of I'm having to listen to you and I've got my papers there and I'm talking to you so it sets up that dynamic rather than, as you're saying, you might go and sit with somebody like this and say how are you, you know, what's happening? And have a chat that's not on any formal footing. So this was not well handled.*

**Mike8's manager (actor):** *It could have been a lot worse. And I think, I think he would go away and think about it. But what that would be, and what outcome that would produce I don't know.*

The manager-actor herself thought that the conversation was not well-handled or controlled, with the main reason being the confrontational position between herself and employee. The manager-actor saw the role to require a Hierarchical “manager hat”, with the intention of sternly warning the employee so that they would avoid further complaints, in this sense, the manager had prepared a strategy of sorts to achieve their objective, albeit quite ineffective and, importantly, mostly unchanging throughout. This leaves the manager feeling underprepared, and may help to explain the tactical change of thought style to be sporadic or unplanned, and deployed too late for the employee to accept any great change. Arguably, the employee on the “other side of table” would have a similar feeling, that’s why he showed to be “very defensive”.

Though some participants and actor’s views of this conversation were rather negative, other participants also gave some positive opinions about this being a good conversation:

**Reviewer 7 (M):**        *Yeah, what I was talking about, the listening skills are pretty good. So when ask questions, she was listening. I think there was some compassion going on.*

**Reviewer 5(M):**        *I suppose it was a good conversation for the HR manager because she was able to convey it in a very polite way as she could. But it was not a good conversation for the employee clearly, because he seemed to be uptight and then at the end of the video what impression I could gain was that he just wanted to get out of the topic and then he could only agree to whatever she said. He said, okay then I get the message. And then he just wanted to leave the room. So, it was good and bad.*

These reviews suggest that this was in fact a good conversation, but only for the manager, as she clearly “convey” the messages, and shows “listening” and “compassion”. Meanwhile, from the employee’s perspective, the conversation went badly, because he only wanted to get out of the conversation. Although these participants thought that the manager delivers well-formed information, other participants also argued the aim of the conversation was unclear, and provides “no conclusion” either:

**Reviewer 8 (F):**        *I think the question depends on what the intended outcome was. And it's probably towards, more going to number 4. But it was a conversation which felt like a good starting point for future conversations. But if the **outcome was for one or the other to get some sort of resolution**, then I don't feel like it was because there was **no conclusion**. But it's **not clear exactly what the purpose of the conversation was**.*

**Reviewer 2 (F):**        *I also feel that there's **no clarity** to what the difficulty was about. You know, and there was an assumption around what the behaviour was. And the HR manager didn't actually **outline what is the complaint** about and how they could respond to those sorts of assumptions. He*

became very *defensive*, rightly so, because but I feel there was *no clarity* of what he was called into the meeting for.

The arguments point to possible confusion on the part of the employee, perhaps misunderstanding why he had been called in, with the manager failing to advance the “complaints” without giving “evidence”. This is an opinion given on why the employee was “very defensive” to what the manager said. As a hierarchical manager, by failing to make points with Clarity, Confusion is likely for the employee.

**Reviewer9 (M):** *I say the most important HR manager should provide evidence, solid evidence. What policy, what behaviour. 'Cause from beginning to end, the HR manager just say he had done something to other member, some other people. But she didn't mention what nature, behaviours, what nature of problem. And another thing is, he should ask what she wants, “why you want to, what type of behaviour is good behaviour?” But he didn't say that. So, I don't think he is good at conversation.*

The comments given suggested both parties gave a sufficient amount of information, since the manager did not provide “evidence”, and the employee did not ask for further details or examples about what “good behaviour” was expected of them. Furthermore, the same reviewer mentioned that a “mediator” may be needed:

**Reviewer9 (M):** *If I were manager, first just two people is not good. [...] I would invite another worker to come here. The worker should be mediator. [...] ...between both sides. Very important. Because in this time, they had some fighting. Some people do not witness that...*

Based on this participant's opinion, a good conversation should not only be clearly supported with evidence, but also requires a third party to be involved as a neutral witness. This opinion itself arguably reflects a Hierarchical thought style on the part of the reviewer, to which conflicting opinions thought this approach to be “very formal”.

**Reviewer 8 (F):** *It seemed very formal and impersonal. So I felt like if it was an unofficial, let's just see what's happening, maybe she should have made it more personal, just talk to him as like a person who was interested. Gave actual examples so it felt real, 'cause it felt quite cold and hostile from her part.*

Being “cold” and “impersonal” is given as the problem here, with minimal personal interest in the employee shown, making the employee respond to the perceived one-sided conversation defensively. So one viewpoint argues more rules are needed to reinforce and regiment the conversation, with another perspective suggesting less rules would improve the necessary

interpersonal relationship. Based on their apparent thought styles underlying their views, it seems if these two participants (Reviewer 8 and Reviewer 9) had performed this scenario as manager and employee, the conversation probably would have produced even more conflict, by hosting more emphasised examples of conflicting thought styles with stable reasons deemed rational to them.

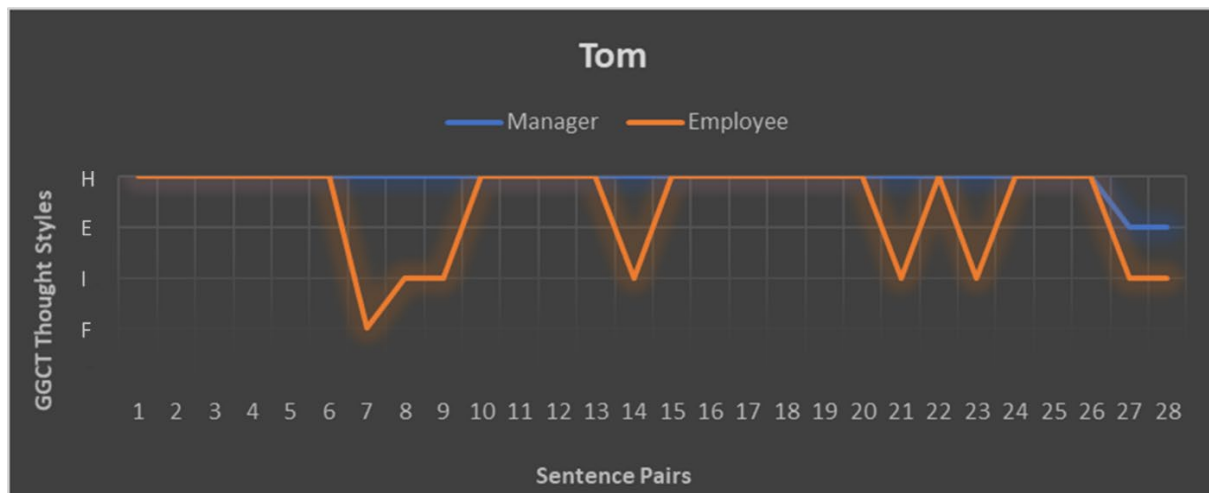


Figure 5.4 : Scenario Graph - Tom

Essentially, this graph shows, from the beginning to the penultimate point, how the manager keeps to the same Hierarchical thought style, while the employees thinking shifts away from Hierarchical thought and back again throughout. The employees changing tactics relates to attempts at negotiation and deflection, often indirect, and mostly reflecting personal Individualistic objectives. The frequent Hierarchical pairing stabilizes the conversation.

From listening to the transcript there were no ‘mood swings’ yet the manager and employee approach the conversation from a different angle, with the employee being noticeably ‘poly-rational’ and the manager more fixed in their reasoning. Both observe ‘professional decorum’ which might arguably be interpreted as a hybrid of hierarchical obedience to formal conventions *and* an element of egalitarian reciprocity. Though largely operating within the Hierarchical style, the employee uses Individual reasoning five times, for example pointing out the importance of their personal situation over their work situation. Offering limited sympathy, the manager maintains a Hierarchical line, thinking that miscommunication may be to blame, while recognising how the employee chooses to work. By registering the employee’s Individual

reasoning and his request to be “*incentivised*”, the manager concurs and this moment seems to keep the conversation largely on a Hierarchical line. However as the transcript illustrates, there is no certainty of a solution by the end of the conversation. The manager attempts to appease the employee’s preferences, mend the gap within the team and between the employee and his personal life, though this is probably being rather optimistic. This scenario presents the distinctly different risk appetites of the thought styles utilized, best recognised by the employee regularly entering and exiting Individualistic thinking to carefully test the extent and rigidity of the manager’s Hierarchical position.

In this scenario, the employee has been arriving late for work, but he was previously reliable. The background information indicates that his family relocated further away from his workplace to be closer to his child’s school. Also, there are some financial issues going on caused him extra stress. These are probably common issues behind difficult conversations in the workplace, but can be approached in different ways. The data shows that the manager remains Hierarchical until almost the end of conversation, similarly to Mike 8’s manager, but unlike the confrontational interaction of the Mike 8 performance, Tom alternates the Individualistic thought style with Hierarchical, not Fatalistic, thought. In Tom’s scenario, in total, over half of the statements are identified as Hierarchical, showing an understanding of each other and the Grid-Group expectations, with the employee-actor opining:

**Tom1 employee (actor):** *I think he was very clear, actually, and I did feel that he was listening to what I was saying. I mean there was a line, he was very firm and the company view and what his expectations were very clear. But I think he was clearly... I articulate that, he could see that I thought maybe there were some issues that perhaps he wasn't made aware of. So I threw that little nugget in there just to, sort of, see how he'd react and to be honest with you I did feel supported. And the fact that he actually listened to some of the issues that were going on for me.*

From the employee-actor’s view, he saw the manager as having very clear “*expectation*” that were in line with the company, and kept to this firm “*line*”. It seems the employee recognised the strength and importance of the managers rule-based Hierarchical tone, and that the manager knows their planned objectives for the conversation. In the meantime, the employee’s responses often matched the manager’s “*clear*” Hierarchical expectations, because the employee understood the ‘rules’, to the point where this pattern of shared cultural style could be tested or manipulated. The employee tactically provided extra information to see how the manager responds, and to make way for personal Individualistic preferences. Asked by the

manager and having rated his work performance as a “six” during the role-play, the employee-actor explained to the researcher:

**Tom1 (actor):** *Because I could have said yeah, I'm 10, I'm wonderful and then he doesn't give you much scope or it's difficult to go anywhere. But if, so clearly I was able to offer that perhaps there were some issues just numerically.*

It would have been clear that the employee knew the rules well enough. Had he given a ‘perfect 10’ score, then the rule-based manager would probably bring some measured guidance to show him; but by rating himself at a 6 proves how much he understand the manager and the rules, and also provided a space for his individualistic challenges to the manager. As he stated:

**Tom1 (actor):** *I felt like he was maybe gonna make some changes and maybe check out things a little bit more and then we might have had further conversation about some more issues. That's how, I certainly left the conversation, feeling like he'd be looking into things and perhaps things maybe would change for me.*

In the conversation, the employee at times described his difficulties in life, such as financial issues, then asking to talk about a pay rise. By applying both Hierarchical and Individualistic combined thought styles, not only does the employee navigate the expectations of the meeting, but also places the problem on a third party and opportunistically requests a pay rise, giving the manager something to think about to the employee’s benefit. As a rule-based manager, he would not agree to the unexpected raise request during the meeting, but as the employee-actor felt it was likely that the manager will further consider it, to be announced in a further discussion. Thanks to frequently sharing the same thought style, the relationship between the two parties was generally amicable and the manager gained an understanding of the points which the employee made, however because the employee held secondary Individualistic reasoning, they were skilfully able to avoid ‘getting in trouble’ and instead convinced the manager to consider the employees priorities. From the very start, this could have been a difficult conversation, but was handled well, particularly by the employee.

**Tom’s manager1 (actor):** *Well, I sort of **discovered the issue about tenacity**, and I felt basically employee's attitude is a bit lacking I can see it from the way they behaved. But that could occur in lots of reasons because, you know, he said it's probably a bad day. I won't judge the people by the first time of looking at. There might be lots of reasons why he just had a really bad day. So I asked, what's the problem? What's the issue? Obviously there's been family reasons and a child, obviously. And also, **the team is not performing**. It sounds like the team is not performing now, because the communication and the leadership it is still lacking. I won't take it just one way because, if I'm in a **manager position** I need*

*to communicate with foresight. You don't really judge. What is actual problem? Not just listen to a peer oversight. But from what I heard, the underperforming of him, is because of, the team is not where he was expected. And obviously he's got into the shit. So, what I'm saying is that, due to his problem... But what we can do is, you do your best. **I'm going to expect you to do your best in your work.** Although the team is under performing, that's down to the manager to sort out. Better communication. Better leadership. Aiming at being more trained. What he says about the economic issue, as a manager I know. Being real, you don't just say to the pay rise. But in term of the that, one of the reasons I said was, I think, as a manager, you need to give hope to your employees. Not only, **you know, you just need to do well and that you keep on that position.** If you do well, if you make the key contributions, then you will get the things that is deserved to you. Which in that case, I think, for the **employer they would work to their best interest for the team.** And then, one, we sort out this warning problem, and the leadership problem then the team **will perform well.***

The manager clearly knows what the employee wants, but in his view as in manager's position, what the employee can receive should be based on their contribution to the team and their own performance. This is the reason why he reasoned to allow the employee to judge his own performance and partially guide the conversation.

**Tom's manager1 (actor):** *Well, I guess, because it's really just how people perform of themselves. People need to judge about their work, because most of the time, people think, 'Ugh! I'm having a really bad day. I'm not doing well' Then, you know you're not doing well, but you're not overthinking why you're not doing well. What's the reason behind it? That's very critical and difficult. That's all I got.*

Based on both the actors' role-play performance and their opinion of their own performance, it shows that it's much easier for both parties who have similar thought styles to handle conversation, compared to those cases where both parties have big contrast to each other. As the spectator's points out:

**Observer 1 (F):** *But I think, in a normal situation, with that approach, it could have gone either way.*

**Observer6 (M):** *I sense there was a risky moment, at the beginning, I thought it could have gone either way. He could have just completely blown up. Like, what?! But he took it quite calm, but he could have turned around. He was seeing through the actual BS because, I spoke to my team leader, I told him that's the reason I'm working off of it.*

**Observer6 (M):** *That was very much a manager's approach, this is our policy, this is the thing. I think, especially with his body language, again, I would have been more keen on getting his buy-in into what we wanted to do, rather than, go down on the, 'Well, this is our policy'. You should be sorting*

*this and that. If he said, no, yeah, I got kids to drop off. That's fine mate. You know what? I'll give you an hour to go drop off your kids, but what you gonna give me? Like that back and forth.*

**Observer6 (M):** *By facing the Hierarchical manager, instead of “blow up”, the employee chose rather calm way. As some spectators also sensed the manager’s approach was a bit risky. As the spectator continues made another point “Just because somebody is in a position of power, doesn't mean that he's absolutely right”.*

**Observer2 (F):** *I've realized that I could tell, the manager is very new and very young. It seems he really want to do his job good, so he asks a lot of straightforward questions. Even at first he ask, 'How is your day?' but it seemed the tempo is too fast. It's like the first three questions is just prepared for the last questions. Like, 'What's wrong with your job. What's wrong with you?'. So, I can feel that, but in this situation... Tom seems a very tough guy, because he has been working in the company for a long time. So, maybe you have to push him a little bit further. Otherwise, yeah... But not for other employees, especially young female employees. Maybe the manager's attitude is a little bit aggressive.*

It sounds almost like the conversation can keep “calm” because the employee was calm, and the employee also knows that is not the way to solve the problem. The employee’s actor added:

**Tom1 (actor):** *...because a lot of people tend to go into defensive mode. So, the blaming of others, or what I've already told him, 'What you are talking about?' That's what I've certainly come across as a manager, some of that defensive behaviour, and trying to almost deflect attention from the actual issue.*

In his view, “defensive” and “blaming” will only “deflect attention from the actual issue”, thus as the spectator said the employee is a “really cool-headed man”. Thus, when he met the similar ‘cool-headed’ and ‘rule-based’ manager, this is probably the right approach. As the manager’s actor further commented on it.

**Tom’s manager1 (actor):** *The way I approach the conversation, it's based on the repeat more method. From my reason, I have met more than a few dozen managers in high places and things like that. And to suit my personality, I think, in work, I work by the book. Management is more about managing people, and their time, and schedule. So, obviously, one, I come up with this issue.*

Obviously for a manager who seems to “work by the book”, his expected behaviour would rather be following the rules, and seems the employee somewhat matched his thought styles, even occasionally changed him. As long as he can bring the employee back to normal, it is likely he will go to check the company guidance, come up with the solution and be prepared for the next conversation.



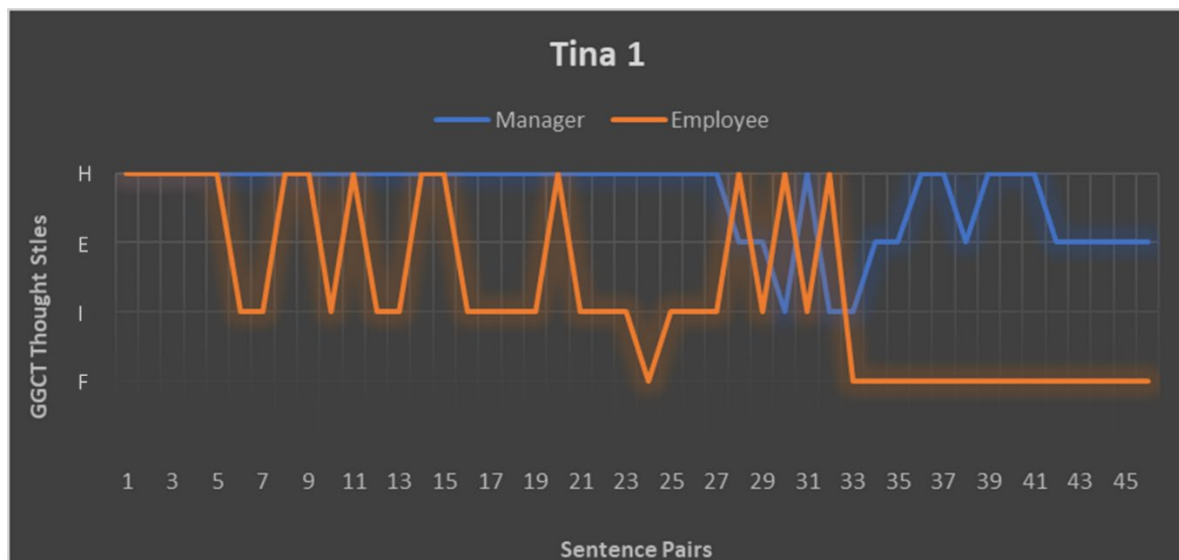


Figure 5.5 : Scenario Graph - Tina 1

The graph shows the employee's repeated, dramatic changes during the conversation, which including three thought styles (Hierarchical, Individualistic, and Fatalistic), until this dynamism suddenly ceases at sentence 33. On the other side of this, the manager stays consistently Hierarchical until sentence 26, having been disturbed from their initial reasoning by the employee's relative volatility.

This conversation is remarkable for the pronounced and frequent shifts in reasonings shown. From the start of the conversation, both participants set about proving their point in the conversation by contextualising it within the rule structure of company policy (or more particularly the gap in the company rule book concerning intimate relations among employees) and reinstating their statuses. Tina1 is convinced, indeed *certain* that she has done nothing wrong, and interchanges between adamant Individual opposition to 'groundless' Hierarchical involvement in how employees might arrange their (private) personal and (public) work lives. It is interesting that Tina 1 utilizes the Hierarchical platform for the purposes of her argument. As the manager attempts to understand the employee's viewpoint relying on both Egalitarian and Individual reasoning for the task, the employee eventually becomes more accommodating and even agreeable, offering and requesting detailed answers. However, there remains a fundamental disagreement, with the manager regularly returning to impose Hierarchical solutions, and the employee eventually becoming Fatalistic, flippant, starts to treat the

conversation dismissively and then demands to go home for the remainder of the day. In the end, there is respectful agreement that both will defer the discussion until another day, confirming that there has been little movement on either parties' objectives.

Throughout, the employee defends their personal independence and right to self-determination, asserts Individualistic rivalry with team members, and alternates aggressively between use the available Hierarchical structures (appealing to the fact that there is no rule forbidding personal relationships at work), asking for "*evidence*" (an appeal to procedural justice) and discussing company "*policy*". By continuing to be overly involved in what's seen by the employee as an independent decision, and for imposing a corrective course of action, the manager pushes the employee into a Fatalistic stubbornness and a strong sense of victimisation. This provides little promise for the following meeting. The manager concedes with an Egalitarian-minded compromise which feels somewhat fair to the employee and at least reduces the risk of escalating conflicts within the team. Our sense of it is that it might not be long before that missing rule forbidding relationships is written. This would satisfy 'the team' but be an incendiary move as far as Tina and her partner are concerned. Resignations could follow, even hierarchically minded court action claiming 'constructive dismissal'.

Compared to the other scenarios, this one probably presents the most personal issues raised in the workplace. 'Office relations' is not an unfamiliar topic in the workplace either, usually not only including two staff members who are in a relationship, but also others are included through means such as gossip among colleagues, and thus the situation can be complicated. Furthermore, from this, by having this type of conversation may be very delicate as well. As the manager actor stated:

**Tinal's manager (Actor):** *That's so hard to circumvent, cause it's such, such, such a personal thing. I think because I'm a man, and she's a woman talking about her relationship with someone.*

He mentions that it is hard to talk about, especially more so as a male manager. He further emphasized he would rather not get involved:

**Tinal's manager (Actor):** *For that kind of issue. The manager because I think, well, male manager. Maybe it's a better way to keep me out.*

It is obvious from the beginning, or even before the conversation starts, that the manager was not prepared for this conversation. However, as this is his duty, having received complaints from colleagues, the manager had to face it regardless. This probably explains why he seems

to have no clue about what to do, and what to say, choosing to stay on a Hierarchical note for a long time. He probably felt protected at least. However, at the same time, there is no such policy about “*not allowing office relationship*” in the company policy.

**Tina 1’s manager (actor):** *Well now, it's interesting because it was somebody who was thinking, "Oh God, I don't know that." And for most people, that would be the case of being, "I hadn't realized people were looking at us and thinking." So I actually, from the HR point of view, I thought, 'cause to begin with, I didn't know what her attitude was gonna be, I didn't know whether you were gonna say to me, "This is none of your business," or "We're getting married," or whatever. And also, because the company doesn't have a policy, so you're in that Gray area where we don't have a policy, but we don't want you to feel uncomfortable.*

**Tina 1’s manager (actor):** *It's hard for me to, then talk to her about it because I don't want to seem demeaning or I don't want to seem, you know, also I can't relate to how she's feeling, as much, maybe. How, I imagine if it was the other way around, she might not be able to relate to how much that I'm feeling because then at least we'd have similar experiences.*

Thus, it proves the manager himself felt it will be a challenge as the approach which he chose compared to the reality of there being “*no policy*” actually creates contrast to each other. It is highly likely he will be struggling in the conversation, especially as the employee actually asked him to show the “*evidence*”. In other words, there was found a fundamental flaw in choosing a mostly Hierarchical thought style to deal with an interpersonal freedom without the protection of a specific high-Grid regulation.

Not only the manager-actor felt the conversation was difficult, but also the employee-actor felt the same, but with a much more personal reasoning, as she was directly seen to be part of the problem:

**Tina 1 (Actor):** *It's so personal. You know, she was like, she was like, first of all it was a shock. And I'm like, "Hang on a minute." This is me? You're talking about me? And then the whole thing of, because the other thing that she was doing.*

“*Shock*” was used to describe the employee’s immediate reaction, and she produced loads of anxious questions in her head, feeling unfairly victimised. However, this surprise could actually cause issues for her both personal and professional life, so the employee was concerned about how to communicate her case, and considered, as a victim, how they have been implicated and to do so to others.

**Tina 1 (actor):** [...] you know, it was almost like my whole professional life had been called into question. But also, I immediately went to my people. I blamed the other people at the office. And there is a history to hating them.

**Tina 1 (actor):** And those people in that office who I hate. Those two women who hate me, they're getting their, you know. So all the office politics kind of reared up for me. Sitting there.

By raising a rational speculation, the employee's actor assumed these colleagues are hateful, and they might affect on her career or life. The presumed innocent relationship issues were brought up with management, and upon realising this could actually threaten her career, she felt the need to fight her side in order to keep her job. Thus, she chose somewhat poly-rational approach, both Individualistic and Fatalistic, and to an extent used in both disagreement and agreement. In the conversation she said her colleagues were jealous. In her view, her and her colleagues' relationship are quite competitive, so predominantly Individualistic.

**Tina 1 (actor):** Yeah, 'cause you were very worried, straight away, "Is it affecting my work? Is my career in danger?" You know, which is what it would be. And, especially someone in a newer relationship, and you're thinking, "Oh no, this can't jeopardize," 'cause also we don't know how keen they are on each other. We don't know if they've got plans, or if it's just gonna end, and then if that's gonna cause problems, we just don't know. Yeah. Difficult though. 'Cause you don't know how they're gonna take, and it's pretty soon, I knew, that she was kind of upset and shocked, that this has been noticed. And you said, "I wasn't aware. I'm sorry and I wasn't aware." And that's very different to somebody saying, "How dare you accuse me of--

Obviously based on this insight about how she felt during the conversation, it is highly likely she went through many possibilities in her mind not only just about her own career, but also referring to her personal life, relationship, social status and her colleagues.

**Tina 1 (actor):** But also, the other thing it made me think is, "Oh my God, is it worth it? Is it worth it?" You know, they're talking about me being in my office. Just for this. And I suppose in my head I was thinking, "I don't know whether this relationship's gonna go anywhere." I mean, I was thinking, "Is it actually worth it "to risk all this?" You know, it felt like, I mean I felt, with my Tina, that probably she could well just break up with him. But then that would cause a problem, because she's already found out people have talked about her. So the office policy, the atmosphere in the office would be terrible. It would just be terrible. And she would probably end up leaving, or something, or other people would end up leaving. 'Cause the Tina I was playing was pretty hard work. You know, she was pretty, "Don't mess with me."

From worrying about personal life and job, to social and company regulations, the employee had to digest a lot of complex information and possible results in her mind during the very short conversation, which might help to make sense of why she changed her thought styles fairly frequently. On the opposite side, the manager also has no clue what to do, but he was actually putting hope on the employee, and hopefully they can work out a solution together.

**Tina 1's manager (actor):** *Yeah, I tried to reach a point where you would say, where you would, well, I got, so I was trying to say, "Let's work the issue out together," if you know what I mean... I was also trying to include you as well so you didn't feel so much of an attack on you, and trying to include you, in like maybe we can then we can reach some kind of solution. Instead of like this is what we're gonna to do. You know, maybe it's like, maybe we can talk about this, and we can find a way around this.*

It kind of explains why he changed his approach as soon as the employee said she wanted to go home because she did not want to go back to the office. The manager started to show he is willing to go to the office with her, perhaps realizing that the unsuitable Hierarchical thought style was ineffective and even insensitive, and changing to a low-Grid combination of Individualistic and Egalitarian reasoning towards the end of conversation.

Due to such a dynamic range of changes throughout the conversation, even towards the end, the trend was still unknown, manager accepted the employee is going home, and was left in an awkward position, having instigated much of the employee's outrage by changing his cultural approach too late. Thus the result of this conversation has many possibilities, as the employee-actor herself suggested several plausible follow-up outcomes:

**Tina 1 (actor):** *So there were different ways it could go but she needed to go home and think.*

**Tina 1 (actor):** *She needed to, actually she needed to go off and have a little cry, I think. And think, "Oh God, how dare they do this to me, those bastards."*

**Tina 1 (actor):** *You know, but--Obviously, somebody a lot younger could react and think, "Oh shit, and I love working for this company."*

**Tina 1 (actor):** *Is this gonna spoil my career? Oh no, and then where, and how keen she is on the bloke would dictate her behaviour.*

**Tina 1 (actor):** *I think the next day, I think she would absolutely go nuts. With this guy. But, I think the next day, she would either go nuts at you and say, "I going to make a complaint about this, whether," or, she would say, "Right, you know," I mean her, the one I was playing, my version here,*

would say, "Ok, this isn't worth it." Yeah. Or, "It is, I'm gonna fight for this. This is a serious relationship and I want everyone to know about it.

**Tina 1 (actor):** *I think normally in this situation, most colleagues will change their attitude, but, as an aside, we will have, that means, maybe some people, why some people don't try. Don't take care about that.*

Though the reviews of this conversation are mostly based on the two directly involved parties, with minimal input from others in the audience, it is almost certain that by approaching this type of value-based conversation on a social issue without a regulatory structure in place, the cultural thought style of the manager will play a vital role in the outcome of the accused employee's response. As the dynamic graphic clearly shows that data spikes occur between Hierarchy and Individualism and give clear indication of lively disputes about whether or not a 'conflict of interest' has been created by Tina1's relationship.

The conversation provides another scenario in which the manager's preference for Hierarchical reasoning in a conversation it is not strategically suited to drives the employee (Tina1) to Fatalism. This is because without the authority of a relevant rule, the manager's Hierarchical position is precarious and waivers, teetering on disaster for several Sentence Pairs in sequence.

These four selected role-play scenarios were presented by analysing dynamic movement graphs of conversation and combined with various audience and actor reviews after the performance. It suggests that by applying GGCT to understand conversation not only presents the thought style of each party hold, but also shows the dynamic pattern of conversation. The remainder of conversation graphs below will only focus on the analysis of conversational dynamics.

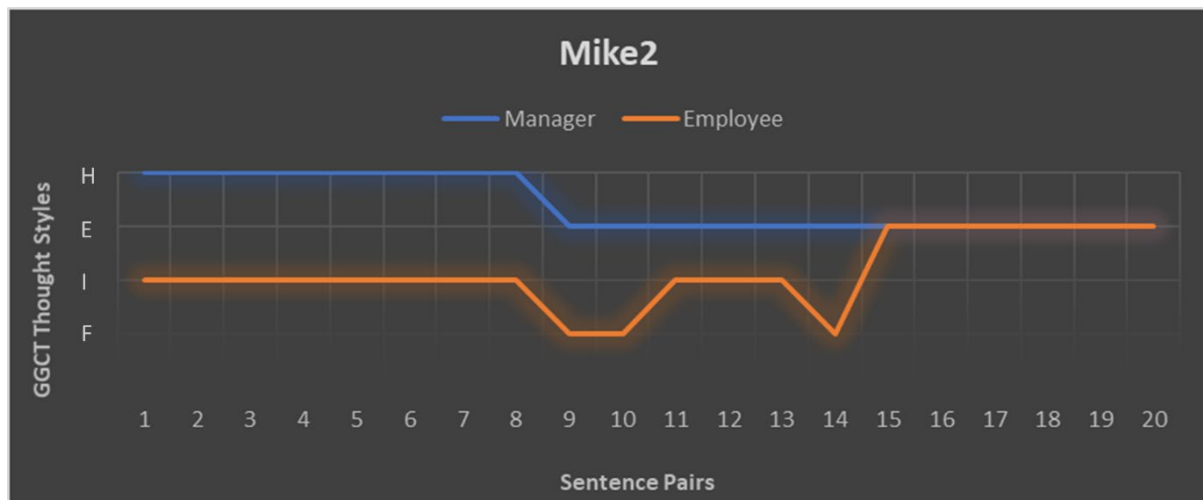


Figure 5.6: Scenario Graph - Mike 2

The graph shows both parties set out with different thought styles - Hierarchical and Individualistic - but ultimately both meet and settle on Egalitarian thought. In this conversation, the employee starts with a self-assuredly Individualistic position denying there being any problem; the manager continues a strictly Hierarchical approach to deal with the reported problem, until around the half-way point at sentence 8, when the manager takes an Egalitarian approach and sticks with it. Importantly, both parties change for the first time in the conversation almost simultaneously, suggesting a recognizable reaction, and with the manager finding a suitable new line of thought, encouraging the employee to change further.

The transition begins at statement 8 when the manager explains that it's "*a confidential meeting*", showing they are willing to listen to the employees' side, and even kindly asking if the employee wants to "*take some leave*", which opens up the dialogue to become more personally focussed, and the employee briefly switches to between Individualism and Fatalism in response. The manager continues with empathetic offers of "*support*", satisfying the employees requirements to be able to present and explain their Individualistic and Fatalistic position, better understand the manager's position, and to reach an Egalitarian outcome that both feel is fair. There is some closure here.

Most interestingly, beyond the halfway-point interchange, the manager holds to their winning Egalitarian approach since the employee now treats the manager as an equal. Thereby the employee declined the earlier Hierarchical aim but having explained themselves in an Egalitarian atmosphere, they gladly accepted an Egalitarian end-result that met the originally

intended meeting criteria. The shape of this graph is worth comparing to the previous graph with its more tentative conclusion. The above example also suggests that the logic of Fatalistic, if not Individualistic dispositions can be altered with the introduction of the Egalitarian ‘voice’.

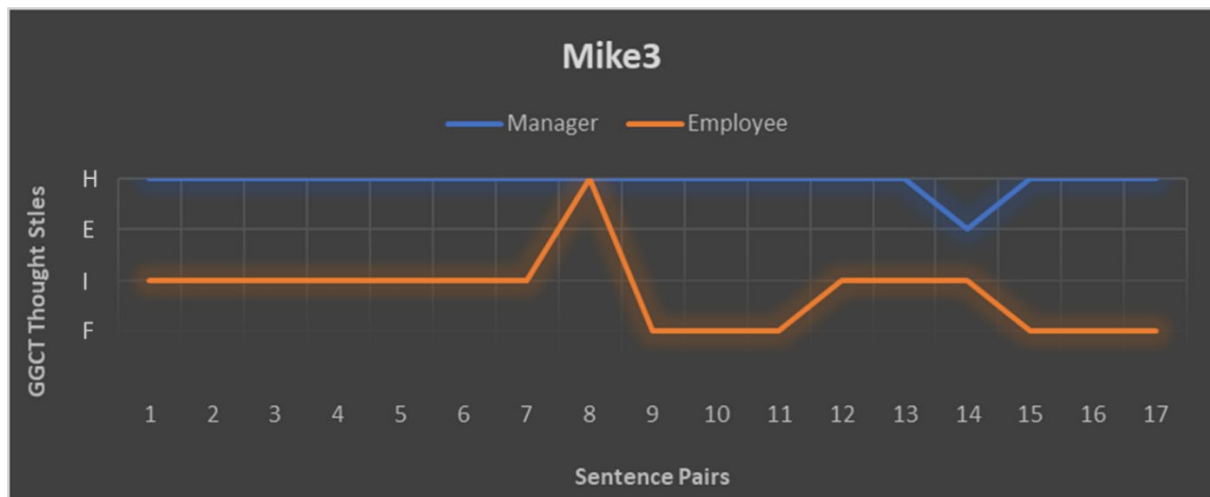


Figure 5.7 : Scenario Graph - Mike 3

In this scenario, an irate employee describes their Individual frustration with being taken away from their work, and is met with a determinedly Hierarchical management style. Even *provoked* by Mike3’s Individual reasoning, the manager holds the Hierarchic ground for almost the entire duration of the conversation, excepting a single Egalitarian statement at sentence 14, which appears to directly affect the employee’s final Fatalistic conclusion. Overall, the graph indicates that the managers unwillingness to shift thought style drives the employee to two recurring Fatalistic phases.

The first momentary change occurs in the prevailing Hierarchical-Individualist dispute when the manager suggests “*additional training*”. Offended, in reaction, the employee leaps from Individualism to reinstating their Hierarchical status, which suggests a clashing Hierarchical pairing. Despite this statement clearly changing the mood of the conversation, it is a change for the worse (as the possibility of resolution is lost) and Mike3 rapidly changes their thinking to Fatalism. The manager does not approach the employee any differently for several turns in the conversation, eventually attempting an Egalitarian approach, after the employee has ‘given up on the conversation’, and encamps in a Fatalistic outcome.



The management strategy of holding a Hierarchical position is common across several scenarios may seem like a ‘natural approach’, given the managers senior position and their responsibility to return the employee to the organisational order as the objective. However, this example shows that if a Hierarchical ‘line’ is not eliciting the hoped-for feedback from the employee, the conversation will not hold steady for long. Though sabotage was not the Hierarchical intent (control and order are the preference), the Hierarchical approach results in an increasingly uncontrollable conversation. Introduction of other voices (or views) might have been more complementary. By the distinct and separate criteria of each of the four thought styles, this conversation was a failure.

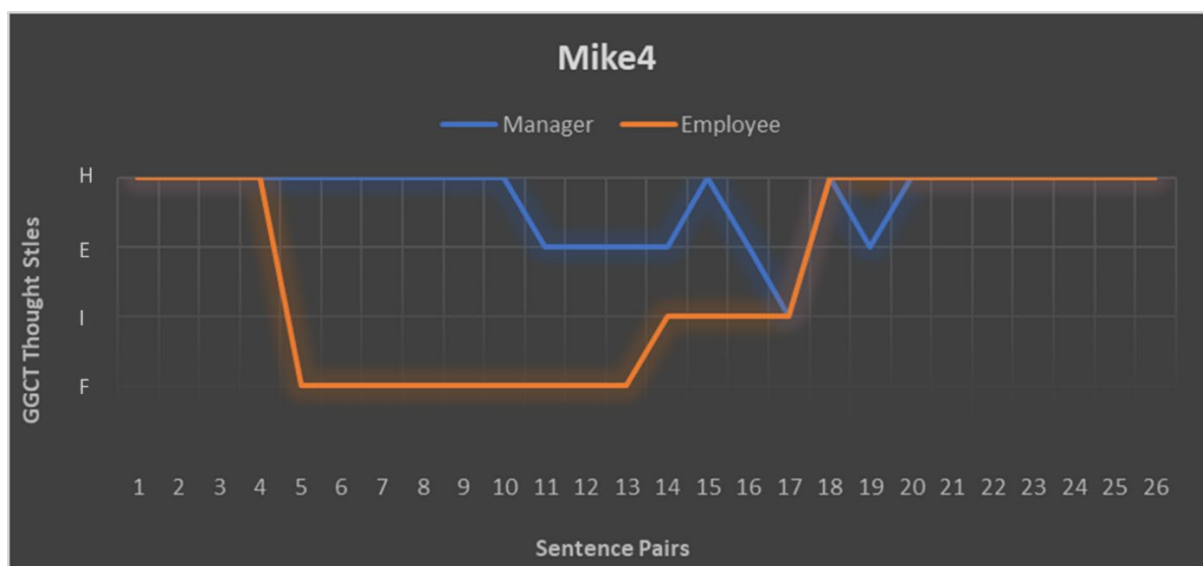


Figure 5.8 : Scenario Graph - Mike 4

This graph shows both parties starting the conversation with the same shared Hierarchical thought style, and despite a moderate amount of dynamism, both ends expressing a Hierarchical thought style too. Shortly into the conversation, the employee deviates to Fatalistic thought, and stays with Fatalistic reasoning until shortly after the manager applies Egalitarian thought at sentence 10. From this point, the employee cycles through Individualistic, then Hierarchical reasoning, followed by the manager, still at times Egalitarian.

The manager in this recording is clear about the purposes of the meeting from the onset, setting out a Hierarchical plan (terms of reference) for what will be discussed. The employee however,

not expecting the meeting, does not provide much information initially and appears intimidated by the purpose of the meeting. Mike 4 is Fatalistically compliant as they remark on the manager's side of the conversation. As the employee touches on the Fatalistic pressures they are under, saying “*things [are] a bit tough, but it’s something I’m trying to work through*”, the manager begins offering solutions and confirms their Egalitarian “*obligations to other staff, [...] to support them too*”. The manager then moves away from their planned objectives, asking with Individualistic thought “*What do [...] we need to put in place, or what do you need put in place, as we go forward?*”, and is met with Individualism from the employee, asking for a tailored solution. Since the employee is content to have their Individualistic terms met, they can compromise by agreeing to update the manager on their progress through further meetings, thereby ultimately returning to fit the Hierarchical approach both had begun with. Although the long-term objectives of the meeting have not yet been met, with some compromise, there are promising signs and this conversation has been conducted with partial successes for both parties.

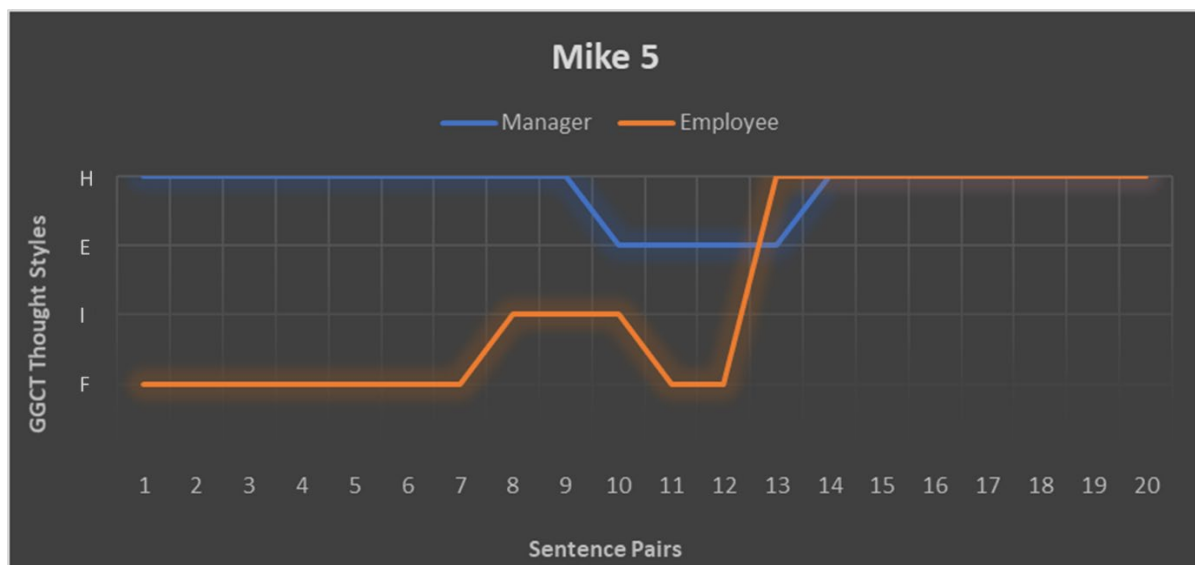


Figure 5.9 : Scenario Graph - Mike 5

In this instance, both parties are shown to start the conversation using different thought styles; the manager using Hierarchical reasoning, and the employee fitting Fatalistic thought. However, the employees change to Individualistic thought at sentence pair 8 seems to provoke the manager to engage Egalitarian thought two statements later, which slowly brings the employee into continued Hierarchical thinking. By this point, a pattern among the graphs can be seen,

whereby Egalitarian statements from managers encourage change within conversations, particularly in response to Fatalistic employees. Thought styles are aligned by the end point of the conversation, as the graph shows.

This meeting begins with an imposing Hierarchical manager, coy about the content and reasons for the meeting, and an employee who at that point does not recognize there is a problem. The one-sided dynamic starts fluctuating once the employee vaguely hints at their Individually and personal problems set apart from work, and the manager responds by attempting to achieve an Egalitarian understanding, sympathizing and offering use of the “*counselling service*”. The manager sympathizes, saying “*we’ve all had our low times. [...] keeping it inside isn’t always the best approach*” and then begins returning to Hierarchical style, stating they “*don’t want to see further problems coming through [...] for you.*”. In response, the employee admits in a professional manner that they are struggling with some personal challenges, saying “*I confess that I have been being [...] short tempered*” and repeating a “*promise*” to work as usual, thus ending the conversation fully prepared to meet their workplace expectations and aware of available assistance. The manager returns to an objective-focused Hierarchical style of reasoning once the employee has settled in the same position, the purpose of the meeting appearing to have been met from a Hierarchical perspective.

The use of Egalitarian reasoning by the manager has the effect of prompting the employee (Mike5) to shift his reasoning in a way that brings the conversation toward a Hierarchical resolution. This is consistent with Thompson’s claim that each thought style has something vital to contribute to the process of solution-finding.

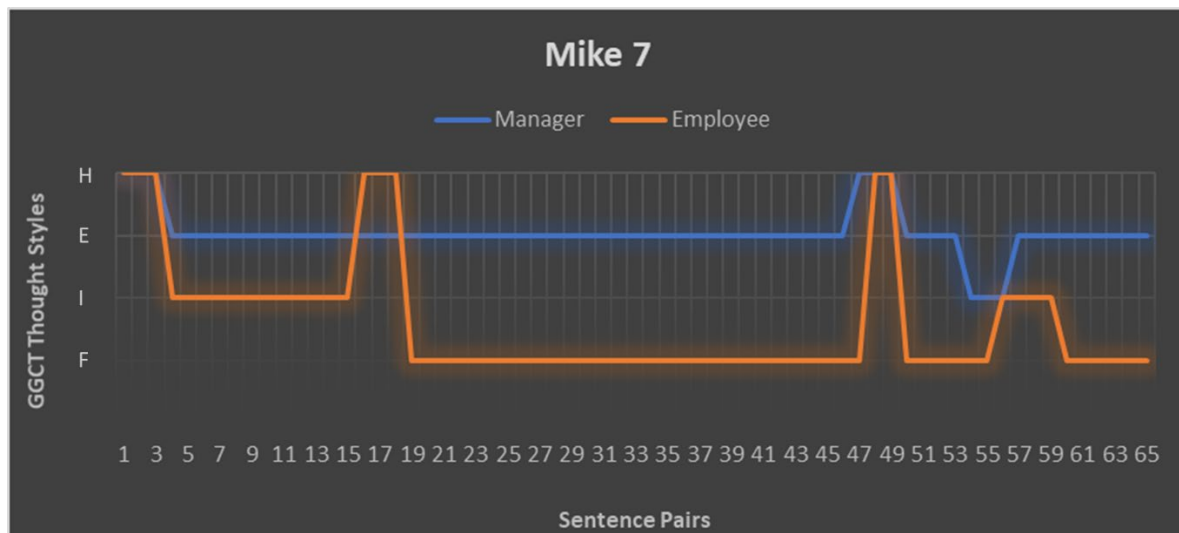


Figure 5.10 : Scenario Graph - Mike 7

This graph shows that this manager favours an Egalitarian approach, mostly maintaining the same thought style consistently throughout. The employee starts out as Individualistic, then shifts among brief Hierarchical thought and then prolonged Fatalistic thought at several key points; sentence pairs 15-19 and 47-50. There is a notable change as the conversation first gets going, as both switch out of their initial Hierarchical thought at sentence 3, and rarely return to the same reasoning. There is clearly a direct relationship between the manager and employees changing thought styles from about sentence 45 and onwards, albeit short and unstable, suggesting attempts to correct course or change strategy.

This scenario features a predominantly Egalitarian manager, respectfully asking personal questions while reminding Mike 7 that he is a “*highly valued team member*”, and encouraging the employee to speak freely. He does so hesitantly do by presenting initially Individualistic opinions. The manager continues their Egalitarian approach, offering their own perspective, finding momentary Hierarchical agreement before asking deeper questions. The employee responds to the strong Egalitarian style with increasing honesty, confiding their Fatalistic sense of hopelessness, and though their position remains Fatalistic by the end of the meeting, the conversation has produced more mutual understanding. With the manager’s here *complementary* Individualism, there is also some agreement on steps toward a solution. Neither participant sees this as a bad conversation. Note that Individual and Egalitarian reasoning is agree that ‘rules are not necessary’ and can ‘get in the way’ of solutions. In this case it matters

less that the manager extends ‘fraternal’ concern for a Mike who has no special ‘need to be loved’.

This provides another example of how Egalitarianism weakens implacable Individualistic rejection of high-Grid ‘rules-based approaches’. Instead of driving the employee (Mike7) into the embrace of Fatalism, the manager persuades Mike7 to unveil his personal situation and enables ‘personalised’, employee-led solutions to Mike7’s satisfaction.

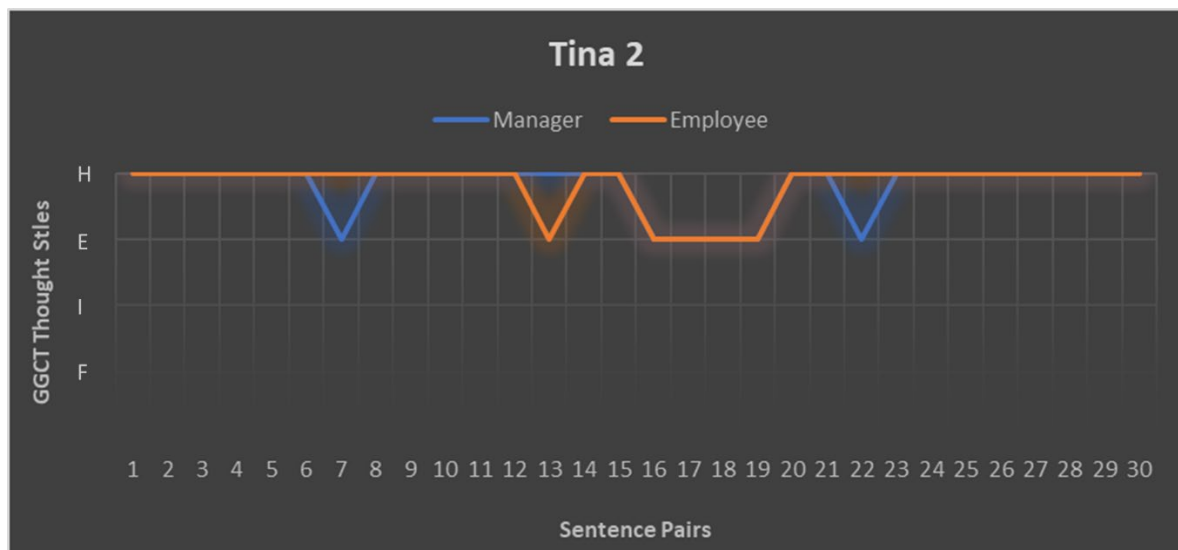


Figure 5.11 : Scenario Graph - Tina 2

This graph describes a conversation with less low-Grid movement than most of those above, with both parties at times briefly utilizing Egalitarian reasoning, but otherwise continuing a Hierarchical trend. After initiating the conversation Hierarchically, each participant puts nearly equal amounts of time into each thought style, almost ‘mirroring’ each other’s input. The reflective movements and entirely high-Group thought styles are suggestive of an interaction with relatively less hostility, at least from a personal (low-Group) perspective. In the end, both parties have the same Hierarchical thought style as in the beginning.

This is an amicable conversation to ‘professional standards’, regularly referring to company and moral guidelines. There is high concordance in the form of reasoning and minimal deviation from it in both participants' approaches. This allows for agreement by the end of the meeting, only needing a review in the future. Note however that from earlier evidence, intra-Hierarchical conflict is a culturally available possibility.

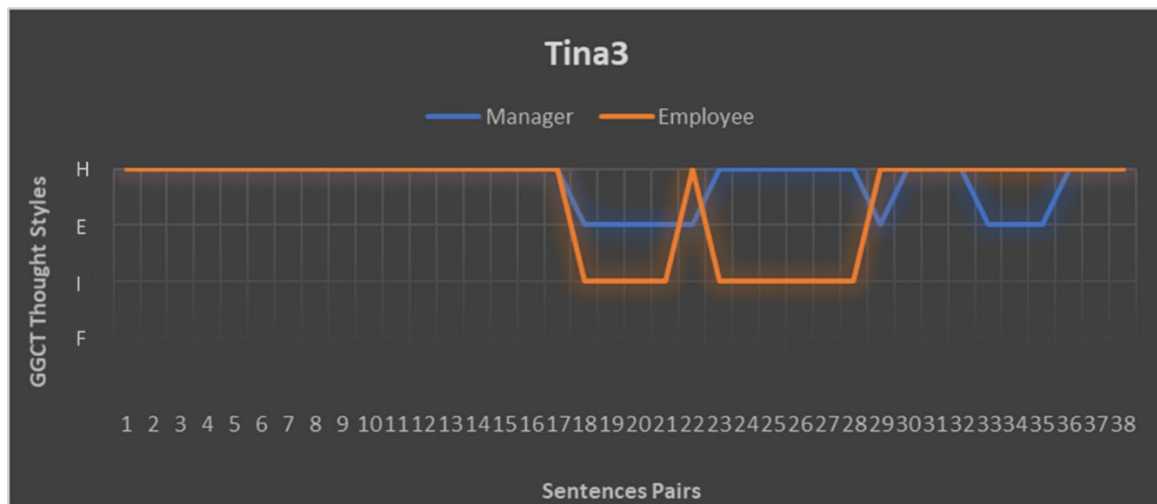


Figure 5.12 : Scenario Graph - Tina 3

This graph shows both parties begin with and hold the same thought style –Hierarchical – until sentence pair 18, when the manager shifts to Egalitarian and the employee responds with Individualistic thinking. It is very clear that between sentence pair 16 and 28, whenever one party changes, the other party follows in changing thought style. Again, a correlation occurs between Egalitarian-thinking manager input and employee thought style converting from either low-Group thought style to Hierarchical thinking. The managers Egalitarian interludes seem to prevent the employees Individualism from continuing or shifting into Fatalism, as seen in previous conversation graphs.

In this instance, the direction of each participant's contribution is closely reactive, often changing in direct response within one statement of the other. The employee's divergence from Hierarchical thought to Individualism suggests a disagreement, coupled with the manager's choice to immediately turn to an Egalitarian reasoning demonstrating some sensitivity. The rate of responsiveness (timing of the procession of rationalities) appears to be key to its successful outcome, with two Egalitarian phases in the manager's reasoning having a significant (non-coincidental) effect bringing the employee back to Hierarchical thought. The manager alternates her/ his reasoning, with dynamic effects on the employee's reasoning. We are beginning to see the value of each party having a 'repertoire' of different thought styles can bring to protagonists. This is consistent with the claim which Thompson makes that plural rationality offers the best chances of outcomes which at least satisfy all parties at least to some degree. A poly-rational solution does not bring everything that each protagonist might wish for but it will bring them something which they value. By the close of the conversation, both parties

reasonings have converged, which generally suggests both parties view the conversation as having a positive outcome.

### **5.3.2 Divining Patterns? A Comparison of Thought Styles in Conversation**

Conversation is never ‘senseless’. When viewing the cultural flow of the conversation, it is apparent that GGCT both describes and explains the dynamism and movement inherent in conversations, even though it does not predict where and when there will be a change of reasoning, nor which thought style will be employed next. The interchange between thought styles creates the history of each conversation, much as it creates history at any scale of social activity. Does history repeat? To understand the communicative interchange and its underlying mechanisms, it may be valuable to identify and compare each participants' opening style at the beginning and to track whether they maintain it to the end, as well as to investigate any critical moments in the course of the conversation where both participants change approach, or for that matter, converge in their reasoning.

From the cases considered here, it would seem when thought styles match, there is less reason found for changing approach in an amicable conversation in which the conversation is yielding what that particular thought style assesses as valuable, or where a winning combination of thought styles was implemented by both parties with the effect of creating movement and reducing resistance.

However, identical thought styles can be shared in dialogue while in disagreement, occurring when both sides are adamant especially as to the legality of their own perspective and when challenging the legality of the other's position. However, usually when the thought styles of both participants overlap, there is less friction, more understanding and the protagonists are perceptibly more happy.

Because the four thought styles are fundamentally conflicting positions, conversational anomalies arise when opposing thought styles are used, inevitably generating further changes of approach until a more stable pairing is achieved. This is one answer to the ‘history’ question. More opportunities for mutually workable solutions arise in conversations where two or more thought styles are engaged. Hypothetically, the most all-round satisfactory outcomes would be most likely when both parties use the full culturally available repertoire (both parties use all four thought styles). This hypothesis carries important training implications.

The future direction and outcome of any conversation is however fundamentally unpredictable, as conflicting views will inevitably be expressed in difficult conversations of contrasting thought styles. This theoretical insight is consistent with our data which shows that even when different role players are engaged in the same brief, the reasoning employed and the outcomes vary quite widely in both scope and sequencing. It is conceivable that by mapping thought styles over hundreds of iterations of the same brief, emergent patterns might be detected. It is an open question as to whether particular forms of reasoning have a better chance of resulting in satisfactory outcomes. If so, then more detailed recommendations could be offered to protagonists. The problem remains that what is ‘satisfactory’ to one way of thinking may be far from satisfactory to another. There seem to be culturally-embedded limits (cultural biases) to such a research programme, though Thompson’s case-by-case evaluation of development projects does seem to reinforce the benefits of having two, three and four thought-styles engaged.

Although our data suggests that when protagonists share a thought style there is less conflict, this is far from being the case always. Moreover, if GGCT is true, use of just one thought style will limit the range of solutions that are thinkable. Uncomfortable conversations may be more productive than comfortable ones. In other words, while single rationality conversations may produce agreement, that solution may disintegrate quickly once it is applied in practice. Either way, the institutional arrangements within which conversations take place would require a lot of design work.

The following Table was compiled for exploratory purposes:

Manager Thought Style	Employee Thought Style							
	Start of Conversation				End of Conversation			
	H	E	I	F	H	E	I	F
Hierarchical	5	0	3	1	4	0	0	2
Egalitarian	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	2
Individualistic								
Fatalistic								

Table 5.2: A Comparison of Thought Style Pairings at different Stages of Conversations



It can be seen from the table above that all managers initiate their meeting from either a Hierarchical or Egalitarian position, yet the majority of employees end on an alternative thought style to that which the manager set out with. This suggests that in most cases:

- most managers lost the initiative, sooner or later
- major conclusions were not reached
- the 'success criteria' associated with the opening thought styles were not satisfied at the close
- only partial agreement was attained (at best)
- important underlying differences remained to be discussed
- that protagonist muddle-through on a roughly 'trial and error' basis

The modelling here shows why there is usually more to be said and that it is difficult for protagonists to be sure that they will ever have had 'the last word'.

The content of the transcripts provides several occasions where all the thought styles came up against a problem which each is specifically incapable of resolving. A good example is in 'Tina1' where a section of the conversation is delayed in a Hierarchical feedback loop which focuses on policy, which though intricate, cannot provide a solution in this scenario. This 'looping' elicits rebellious Individualism as a reasoned response. In several versions of this and the other scenarios, Hierarchical efforts to maintain order within the conversation and to minimize deviance, actually *create disorder* and defiance with every further attempted imposition of hierarchy. The harder hierarchy is pursued the more pronounced is its legitimization failure, becoming self-defeating.

As both are 'High Group' Hierarchical and Egalitarian prioritises consideration of the larger group (the collective). This takes more time than Fatalistic and Individualistic reasoning requires. Hierarchical and Egalitarian reasoning takes time, and a lot of explanation to third parties in order to put any such solution into practice. This means many more rounds of conversation with a widening circle of actors. Bear in mind that at any point these conversations will provoke Individualistic and Fatalistic responses when put into practice. It is not simply a matter of 'effective communication' as the clearer the communication, the more likely it is to provoke contrary reasoning.

It should not surprise us that not one manager fully solved the issues raised, and most arranged further meetings with bare hints concerning how they intended to discuss matters with 'the

team'. Despite affording social inequality, often to the detriment of the cohesive team environment, the rare Individualistic management approaches allowed for personalised suggestions, most notably the suggestion to 'meet outside work for a drink'. The above table is consistent with two broad inferences:

- disrupting the prevailing thought style can change its trajectory in a useful way
- sticking resolutely to one form of reasoning will provoke shifts in the trajectory in any case

Can we draw any other inferences?

Grid-Group Cultural Theory is a formal theory that claims to apply to all times, places and circumstances. The antagonisms between each of the thought styles and the others can be stated formally. To Egalitarian reasoning, Hierarchical, Fatalistic and Individual reasonings all focus on the wrong problem and have the wrong solution. The main problem is social injustice and existential threat (not deviance, individual survival, or the need for intensive competition). To hierarchical reasoning it is all the other thought styles that focus on the wrong problem and offer the wrong solution. The main problem is deviance and the need for clear rules. To Individualist reasoning again, it is the other thought styles that are mistaken concerning what the problem is and what the solution is. What is needed is more competition to sort out winners and losers. To Fatalist reasoning all the other positions are also naïve about what the problem is and how to solve it. What is important is short-term survival and not wasting effort on doomed initiatives.

From these prototypical positions it is possible to read what one thought style will say to each of the others. We need not spell these all out again, however, for example *one* of the Hierarchical complaints against Egalitarian reasoning is that without Hierarchy, social movements will fall apart. A Hierarchical complaint against Individual reasoning is that it is uncaring, selfish and vulnerable to being taken advantage of by deviants. A Hierarchical complaint against Fatalism is that it is excessively pessimistic and very hasty. Each of the complaints from Egalitarian, Individualistic and Fatalistic thought styles can also be read-off the GGCT typology.

We mention this because the criticisms which our protagonist make of each other should fit the forecasts made by GGCT. In our cases:

- There was a direct correlation between Egalitarianism and Fatalism in conversation (the one provokes the other into life)
- There was a clear and conflicting relationship between Hierarchical and Individualistic reasonings
- Whenever a conversation seems to be achieving a degree of mutuality (even if neither side has got everything) managers using Hierarchical reasoning stick with Hierarchical reasoning and draws the employee into similarly Hierarchical thought
- If the conversation is not showing signs of progress, Hierarchical managers push the employee further into Individualism or Fatalism, sometimes temporarily, causing evident unhappiness
- Managers entering an Egalitarian phase managed to draw the employee towards Hierarchical or Egalitarian thinking
- If the manager changes their approach (whichever form of reasoning they are using), the employee is likely to change approach in response, particularly in the middle of the conversation
- Our interpretation is that Fatalistic and Individualistic moments show less patience than Hierarchical and Egalitarian turns. This is consistent with G-GCT which specifies that time is felt to be in short supply on the Low Group (left side of the diagram, while time is felt to be more plentiful on the High Group (right side of the typology)

## **5.4 Combination between GGCT and the Good & Bad Natures of Conversation**

As presented in the last chapter, from categorizing and comparing the answers given during the interview stage, we hypothesized competing cultural definitions of good and bad conversations. Our suggestions would be that *better* conversations result in outcomes that meet more of the aspirations of most or all thought styles and that *worse* conversations meet one set of aspirations (satisfies one thought style) at the expense of causing discontentment to other ways of thinking. However, it may still be worth attempting to identify evaluation criteria

which appeal to more than one way of thinking and ideally to all four or which are at least consistent with the ‘Hermit’s’ vantage point at the dead centre of the GGCT diagram.

What follows is an attempt to do this. In the upper half of the table below we seek to identify ‘positive’ (or ‘better’) elements which would satisfy more than one thought style: *Openness; Unanimity; Trust; and Clarity*. On the bottom half of the table is our attempt to specify ‘negative’ (or ‘worse’) elements: *Closure; Conflict; Claims; and Confusion*.

During the analysis of findings, the researcher recorded, transcribed and classified role play conversations with these elements, to draw comparisons with the GGCT graphs. A feature of GGCT to determine whether a conversation can be considered relatively better or worse is that thought styles cover a wide, indeed infinite range of social activity. If a connection between the prior literature on conversations and GGCT could be established that could open up the attention of existing researchers to a wider set of evaluation criteria. It should be possible to nestle prior theories within GGCT. Because GGCT is claimed to be a universal classification and explanatory system for all cultural phenomena, then it should be able to classify the thought style position of any other theory. This is because social theories do not exist ‘in nature’ waiting to be discovered, but are cultural products. So where do the open/ closed (etc.) evaluation criteria appear on the GGCT typology? By comparing the transcripts of each scenario coded with GGCT it is apparent that there is significant overlap between the evaluation criteria more usually offered by the conventional literature on good conversation and the evaluation criteria specified by GGCT for each thought style.

In other words, GGCT can be used to identify the implicit rationalities contained in prior theories of good conversation. It can be used as a theory of theories.

As can be seen in the chart, below:

<b>Good-Bad (Better/ Worse)</b>	<b>Manager</b>				<b>Employee</b>			
	Hierarchical	Egalitarian	Individualistic	Fatalistic	Hierarchical	Egalitarian	Individualistic	Fatalistic
Openness	9	35	8		5	2	2	
Unanimity	30	5			15	10	2	5
Trust	5	50				15		5
Clarity	100	12			25	7	2	3
Closure	5				8		10	25
Conflict	1	3	1		5	1	40	12
Claims	5				8		20	5
Confusion	3				6	10	5	38

Table 5.3 : Comparison between ‘Good/Bad, conversation criteria in the prior literature sorted by GGCT Thought Styles. All instances extracted from Role-Play transcripts

This uneven distribution of favourable and unfavourable moments (Sentence Pairs) between employees and managers is to be expected as the actors were briefed on prepared roles which presented more difficulty to employees than to managers. Note that the role plays were also prepared to include potential traps for managers, notably ‘Tina’ which places the manager in the difficult position of there being no rule forbidding personal relationships between employees. Overall, more let us say, ‘negative’ contributions were anticipated from the employee and found in the data.

Unfortunately, resource constraints of time (especially the time needed for accurate transcription and coding) and of the availability of role-players (and focus group volunteers) meant that it was not possible to record a larger number of role-plays. But it is striking that even within relatively few rounds, the table shows significantly fewer instances of Fatalist reasoning among the management role players. Similarly, it is difficult to find Fatalistic evaluation criteria mentioned in the prior literature.

#### **5.4.1 Cultural Biases in Evaluation Criteria for Conversations- Hierarchical: *Clarity* and *Unanimity***

The Hierarchical thought style is sensitive to deviance and foregrounds rules, regulations, role clarity (*e.g.*, Job Specifications), rank distinctions and specified working practice as the

prototypical solutions. It follows logically that this style values orderly, dispassionate and objective communication, expressed in unambiguous and specific detail, delivering information both sides can understand. Clarity encapsulates transparency, precision and unambiguous communication of information. Thus, we suggest that *Clarity is intrinsic to the evaluation of Hierarchical statements from a Hierarchical vantage point*, as indicated in table 5.3. This yearning for Clarity also goes a long way to explain the low count for ‘Confusion’ among managers applying Hierarchical reasoning. Ambiguity is to be feared from within this thought style.

Operating within the shared space of an organisation which has an institutionalised Hierarchical structure, the Hierarchical managerial reason favours top-down organisational objectives within conversations, with the target being to create orderly Unanimity. Therefore, it is unsurprising that statements coded for Unanimity were found to also often meet Hierarchical criteria. Hierarchical reasoning among employees would tend towards the same outcome, so Unanimity was common wherever both manager and employee were using Hierarchical reasoning simultaneously. It should not be forgotten that Hierarchical reasoning can be adopted by actors at the ‘bottom’ of organisations. Hierarchically-minded junior staff would see rules as equally protective to themselves as they would be for senior staff, and without reason for deviance, orderly agreement is readily created.

Where the academic literature advocates clarity and disambiguation, the writer is applying to some degree the hierarchical thought style. Structured conversation and role clarity would also be consistent with this form of reasoning.

#### **5.4.2 Egalitarian: *Openness and Trust***

The Egalitarian thought style, being encouraging, empathetic, equality-oriented and outreaching was found to combine frequently with Openness and Trust. The Egalitarian thought style allows for flexibility in the interest of finding a resolution that benefits all parties (i.e., including all third parties). Conversation researchers advocating amicable and unrestricted conversations are applying egalitarian reasoning when they come to this conclusion. These are notably different success criteria to the hierarchical success criteria just discussed.

In regard to the high conversational success rates of partial and predominant Egalitarian managers, it is plausible that Openness was integral to gaining understanding into employee's underlying issues by creating an equal footing in which employees are free to speak openly, and that from the insights acquired, room for Trust was created. Note that in common with Hierarchical routes to 'success', Egalitarian reasoning also favours allowing ample *time* for the development of *long-term solutions*. Grid-Group theorists have noticed that time is perceived as relatively plentiful on the right-hand side of the GGCT typology, while time is understood to be very short on the left-hand (Fatalistic and Individualistic) side of the typology.

However, it was also found that employees drawing on Egalitarian reasoning (or drawn into the Egalitarian position) would ordinarily describe their problems in more detail to Egalitarian-minded than Hierarchical managers, thanks to their mutual recognition of Openness and Trust. This much is evident in the content of what was said. As we have emphasised, thought styles are not fixed 'personality types'. Dynamic movement is not only possible, but also likely. In this regard, Egalitarian reasoning was sometimes followed by Individualistic going beyond formal structures, finding a solution that worked for the individual actor involved and moving rapidly towards finding a pragmatic solution. Any attempt to explain communication styles and content using 'personality types' face a fundamental difficulty: 'types' are fixed or at least assumed to be 'stable'. But it is very clear from the findings that conversations show remarkable dynamism and defy accurate estimations of 'where they will go next'.

Our wider point is that *all evaluation criteria and hybrids, regardless of their diversity and whether advocated by academic or by lay persons, have cultural origins which can be specified exactly using G-GCT*. It is also clear from G-GCT that success criteria such as openness, accessibility, empathy, sympathy, flexibility, peace, patience, friendliness, approachability, caring and respect will be opposed strongly from the Fatalistic position which favours impatience, caution, wariness, mistrust, self-preservation, secrecy and *immediate short-term survival*.

#### **5.4.3 Individualistic: *Claims and Conflict***

Part of the explanation for which thought styles will be used is the understanding of the nature of the situation the actors face. One thought style will be more effective at resolving one type of problem than another. We say '*part of the explanation*' because, according to G-GCT each

thought style is much more sensitive to a particular type of problem than the other thought styles will be. In other words, there is disagreement about the nature of the problem, how to solve it (and about its urgency).

Across all three prepared scenarios, those playing the roles of Tina, Mike and Tom often applied Individualistic-Competitive reasoning, believing at that point that they are right and that the problem which the manager believed was the problem did not even exist. Typically, what they said indicated an ‘internal locus of control’. Their work-life was their business and they valued workplace competitiveness as both the cause and the solution to the so-called ‘problem’ raised by the manager. Individualism was frequently used by employees both offensively (competitively) and defensively (fatalistically) from the outset, placing their own individual priorities before their teams’. The implicit success criteria were ‘Claims’ and their actions instigated ‘Conflict’.

Individualistic and fatalistic statements were critical of others, resistant to managers’ suggestions and quick to deflect blame onto others. The self-focused and competitive element of Claims were found within Individualistic reasoning, with a preference for competitiveness crossing into personal- and performance-rivalry, and in the fatalist position also jealousy and paranoia. Conflict was frequent, especially on the upward sloping diagonal of the G-GCT typology: Individualistic-Hierarchical Sentence Pairings regularly result in heated argumentative discourse. From the Individualistic thought style success means *winning* while for the Hierarchical thought style success means *restoring order*.

From the content of managers’ talk, Individualistic comments (mostly from employees) were perceived as *difficult, challenging, dramatic* or *argumentative*, while Individualistic-reasoning employees felt *unappreciated* and *imposed upon*. The Individualistic group of statements were mostly met with Hierarchical responses which did nothing to unlock the Claims-based, Conflicting or even at times Closed nature of the conversation. Impasse! But not always: Individualistic statements were employed effectively at times to offer ideas on resolving problems tailored to the individual or situation, thereby creating space for Openness, and eventual Unanimity on occasion, thereby having the potential to unlock difficult disagreements, such as Conflicts. G-GCT is thus consistent with our ordinary experience that sometimes organisations get stuck and sometimes they change with surprising speed. ‘Personality-based’ explanations might manage better with accounting for ‘stuck’ organisations, but we do not think they can explain sudden shifts from impasse to change.



#### **5.4.4 Fatalistic: *Confusion and Closure***

Fatalistic thought styles perceive circumstances to be predestined, largely unchangeable, something to be endured and accepted (lived with). In our analysis, Fatalistic reasoning employees commonly presented Confusion (bewilderment) and Closure (without need to change), and in combination with Individualism, Conflict (battle for survival). However, Fatalistic reasoning also readily transitioned to other thought style at times when met with managerial Clarity, Trust, Openness and Agreement, further indicating the dynamic effects of other thought styles on Fatalistic reasoning. The isolation of Closure and Confusion shared a strong relationship with Fatalism for employees in ‘bad’ conversation stages, however with efforts to engage the employee using other forms of reasoning and ‘good’ elements, the helplessness and despair will not persist indefinitely.

## Chapter 6 : Discussion and Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

Participants in conversations say things which they feel need saying and remain silent if they think that is for the best. The ordinary experience of conversation is that we speak or remain silent at least partly depending on what the other party has just said. Conversation contains prompts and has certain mechanics, such as ‘turn transitional relevant points’ which act as invitations to say something. But what there is almost no knowledge of is how the compulsion to say something, and the capacity for saying it, is *caused*. How are the thoughts expressed in the language produced? What animates us?

This study finds that conversation is classified straightforwardly into four prototypical thought styles (or hybrids of two or more of these rationalities). We also find that conversations, especially the difficult ones, show that in most turn taking, what is happening is that utterances express conflicts between thought styles. In other words, what we think of as our own thoughts, private opinions and words are cultural creations. What we think is not especially personal, though we experience them. Conversations which are experienced as difficult can be categorised and explained as thought style conflicts. Conversations that are easy (mostly considered during our interview stage, regarding ‘best ever workplace conversations’) are more likely to be ‘intra-thought style’ encounters, although we need to put limits on this claim (below). Hierarchical-hierarchical, egalitarian to egalitarian, or individualistic to individualistic conversations, for example, will probably be easier than conversations across the diagonals of the G-GCT figure: hierarchical-to-individualistic or egalitarian-to-fatalistic. This is because these positions are opposed on both the Grid and the Group dimensions and are less provocative than differences of reasoning separated on one dimension only; an advantage of the two verticals and the two horizontals.

This idea that (dyadic) conversation is made possible culturally and that culture is the origin of *change* - not continuity - is new to the literature on organisational conversations. In other words, while there may be such things as ‘clashing personalities’ and ‘conflicting interests’ (not studied here), these concepts are not necessary to understanding what is happening in a conversation, we suspect, at *any* scale. Two dimensions and four thought styles are all that is

required, both to have a conversation and to understand how conversation is caused and operates. G-GCT is simple, efficient, and universal in application. We recommend it.

This chapter looks back at the previous two chapters and is supported with parallels drawn between the earlier literature and our findings, followed by a discussion regarding the relevance, implications, contributions and limitations of this study. This chapter also advances methodological and practical recommendations and a future research agenda.

It was the purpose of the thesis to detail and explain the dynamic interactions that take place between participants' universally available thought styles, and thus to explain relationships and outcomes. Our findings support several propositions. The techniques utilized demonstrate that:

(1) statements made in conversation can be classified using the G-GCT framework. Grid-Group classifications can be very fine-grain thus three-word exclamations such as 'We need Rules!' 'Black Lives Matter!' 'You're a Loser!' 'Watch your Back!' are classifiable

(2) common-sense descriptions which respondents *and* researchers use to describe 'good' or 'bad' aspects of conversations, can be treated with much greater precision than previously.

(3) for fundamental cultural reasons, it is not possible for lay persons or academics ever to arrive at a final and universal definition of what's good or bad in conversation. Evaluations are bound to be different for each thought style and it is because conversation researchers have cultural biases, their views about how to recognise good and bad conversations are bound to conflict in the way we saw in the Literature Review

(4) for the same reason there is no end to conversation; no 'last word'. For example, Panel members disagreed strongly about which was the 'best Mike' conversation

(5) although it is tempting to blame the other person as the cause of disputes, the other party is invariable as rational and reasonable as the first party

(6) thought styles can be provoked in *any number of sequences*. This is why conversation is infinite, even for a dyad. From an initial, say Egalitarian utterance, there could be a Hierarchical, Fatalistic, or Individualistic response, or Hybrid responses of between two and four thought styles

(7) It is not unreasonable to say one thing one minute and something else the next, and be ‘in two minds’

From any of those three responses there could be *another three* available responses. The number of possible permutations rises steeply with each exchange within a conversation. G-GCT explains heterogeneity straightforwardly

Nevertheless, our analysis of dyadic conversations shows that in practice participants stick to their own opening rationality for several utterances before switching to another form of reasoning probably when they recognise the weight of the other person’s reasoning

(8) even in conversations that are constrained by a context (in this case limited by a prepared role play), one ‘round’ or ‘turn’ can be played differently from the next. This is very clear by examining the graphical record for each iteration, of say ‘Mike’.

## **6.2 Grid -Group Cultural Theory (G-GCT) in Conversation**

Dialogue is culturally-enabled and therefore exists in a state of flux. The four styles generate an ever-changing dynamic flow as the conversation progresses, instigating contrary but still rational reactions. Dynamism is intrinsic to culture. That is to say, although every thought style is equally rational, each form of reasoning as expressed in conversation animates contrary reasoning associated with the other thought styles. Very much contrary to Hofstede (1980), culture is *not* that which remains constant. Change is endogenous. Culture never sleeps.

It has already been observed that interactional conflicts occur over incompatible ‘goals’ (Allwood, 2007) and differing perspective opinions (Patterson et al., 2011). Agents can have ‘conflicting goals’. This is obvious enough to common-sense. It is the next step which we have taken here; explaining how and why protagonists have goals and why they are different goals. In say, the High Grid, High Group (Hierarchical) position we can infer that it is reasonable to have ‘order’ and the ‘punishment and elimination of deviance’ as the goal, for which clear rules, monitoring and disciplinary processes are the obvious means. Both goal and the means are explicable. In the Low Grid, Low Group position the goal of winning through competitive action free of regulatory constraints is just as explicable. Protagonists will know what their goal is, feel its appeal, and have a strong sense of how to attain it. What they will not be aware of

is why their goal is thinkable and appealing to them. G-GCT is able to explain ‘preferences’ in a way that other approaches cannot do. We do not need to treat the preferences of 7.8 billion human beings as given units out of which households, cities, regions, states and markets are constructed. The world is indeed ‘socially constructed’, but ordered ‘culturally’, rather than by autonomous subjective individual agency. This realisation that private thoughts and international alliances are ‘cultural’ in the same way avoids the ‘structure and agency’ duality which absorbs so much energy especially in Sociology (not discussed here). It is *all* culture at *all scales*, as G-GCT explains. And *institutionalisation*, we suggest, is also present at all scales, from, say, the justice system to a proverb or habit which an individual is attached to.

It is also unsurprising that given their dynamic polarisation, ‘bad’ interactive features and frustration of goals accumulates, to create conversational impasse or to entrench underlying issues (Bradley and Campbell, 2016). Bradley and Campbell are unable to explain the origins of their explanation: why goals exist and conflict.

Although we did not have the resources to run more repetitions of each prepared role play to be sure, we note from our observations that certain pairings of opposing thought styles did seem to feature more than others:

(1) Probably because of constraints written into the role plays, the Fatalistic thought style was frequently enunciated among employees paired with an opposing Hierarchical approach taken by managers, especially, we suspect, if the employee felt the manager would not move. This generated conversational difficulties for both parties, including exchanges which made ‘no progress’. This effect of context on reasoning and then conversation and conversation on reasoning on context is interesting. Perhaps the most embedded impasse is created when parties disagree about what the problem is or disagree about whether there is a problem at all. In place of ‘structure’ perhaps read ‘institution’ here: it is how the Employee and Manager are institutionalised, for example, as described in their contracts, which prevent their reasonings becoming magical and ‘freed from gravity’. Nevertheless, the institutionalisation of Employee and Manager itself shows extreme diversity, say, as between *Semco* where a hybrid of Egalitarian and Competitive reasoning prevails, and *The Bank of England* where the Governor must chose every word with care.

(2) Fatalism was found to either weaken or transition to a different rationality in response to Egalitarian statements. When the other party extends the hand of friendship and compassion, and looks as if they mean it, then it becomes possible to ‘love again’, even after a series of disastrous treacherous relationships, even at the scale of nation states who were violent enemies.

(3) Fatalism had two faces. Pessimistic examples of Fatalism met the standards of ‘Avoidance’ (Quinn et al., 2010). More optimistic expressions of Fatalistic matched what Quinn et al defined as Accommodation and Compromise (Quinn et al., 2010). We identified both as Fatalistic, as both Avoidance and Accommodation-Compromise prioritise survival more than a belief in Rules (Hierarchy), System Transformation (Egalitarian) or Competitive Winning (Individualistic).

(4) None of the participants playing any of the three manager roles ever uttered any statement which we could identify as Fatalistic, either of the Avoidance or Accommodating Compromise sub-types. We checked and rechecked this.

(5) Hierarchical reasoning was most common among managers, probably because this is the most familiar ‘institutionalised’ form of management thinking and action. ‘Managers are paid to manage’.

Hierarchical management style seeks order. In our cases the employee role player responded with a *matching Hierarchical approach* to the dialogue. However, this was not always indicative of agreement, and in some cases, particularly the intimate relationships between colleagues problem was a strategic manoeuvre to take advantage of gaps in the rule book to further the employee’s argument, followed soon after by a switch to an alternative thought style, notably Individualism. Hierarchical management was effective in harnessing the ‘social responsibility’ of management associated with a High Grid-High Group position, but in our research, being high Grid provoked Individualism (and impasse) or begrudging Fatalist surrender.

These cases are interesting as they show that intra-thought style conflicts can arise, for example Hierarchical-to-Hierarchical disagreements over whether there were any relevant ‘official rules’ that applied to the case. If an activity was not forbidden by a rule, then a Hierarchical manager could not sustain the Hierarchical position. The Hierarchical consequence would be to write a new rule to cover the case, which could

have a variety of knock-on consequences. It proved particularly difficult to argue Hierarchically against romantic relationships in the office in the absence of a rule forbidding it. A statement like ‘Show me in the Rule Book where it says I cannot do this!’ is a powerful way of invoking Hierarchy in defence of Individual freedom. (And we can see that a new rule will be written to constrain that freedom.)

(6) Not every manager limited themselves to Hierarchical reasoning. One manager used a clumsy (poly-rational) hybrid of Individual innovation and Egalitarian care for the other, in this case inviting a ‘Mike’ (Mike1) out for a drink to talk things over. The outcome was successful though our Panel of observers were deeply divided on whether this had been a wise move, with one panellist *insisting* that this possibility “*would never happen*” in practice. Appeals to a particular view of ‘nature’, in this case ‘the nature of organisational realities’ are felt to be decisive in those who hold it. But in plenary, the manager of ‘Mike 1’ made clear that from his experience at more than one company, he lived on a ‘different planet’ with equal conviction.

(7) When a form of reasoning stopped working, protagonists would switch. When, say, Hierarchical reasoning appeared to be working well by Hierarchical standards (promoting Order), it was maintained. However, the strength of opinion of Hierarchical managers could weaken when it created irritation in the employee, provoking Fatalistic or Individualistic blow-back, typically towards the end of the conversation. That is, all strategies work and all strategies fail. This explains why there is no consensus among researchers of conversation in organisations (see Literature Review) and perpetual and profound disagreement in Management texts about which way is the best way to manage, and what exactly ‘The Problem’ is.

(8) Hierarchy fails in challenging situations that required a ‘*personal touch*’, thus managers could lower the Grid intensity in an attempt to reach creative, tailored solutions which were generally effective in the sense of being acceptable to both parties. Individualism was found consistently among employees, which provides for self-assurance and personal autonomy (internal locus of control). Individualism justifies competitive ‘eye-to-eye and toe-to-toe’ opposition out of which either outright Individualist victory or Quinn’s ‘Accommodation’ (a Fatalistic outcome) can be created (Quinn et al., 2010). This is empirical confirmation of Thompson’s theory that, contrary to Hofstede, culture is dynamic *not static* and has ‘no equilibrium point’.

(9) Our conversational data showing Egalitarian reasoning by managers had the practical effect of diminishing desperate Fatalistic responses by employees, to which it comes as a pleasant surprise. We found that this strategy is often complimented by a clumsy Hierarchical-Egalitarian steer towards an outcome that is effective for both participants, i.e., a steer towards Quinn's 'Collaborative' outcome (Quinn et al., 2010).

## Summary

Cultural theory is useful for tracing shifting positions in and between individuals, relationships and organisations when applied to conversation, and for extracting the most from even the faintest traces of information within conversations. It provides a highly sensitive measurement system.

In the literature on conversation theory, describing differences between good and bad conversation features widely; yet it is rare, and even impossible to find explanations for what counts as good or bad and how lay persons (or their researchers) arrive at their evaluations. Opinion surveys asking what respondents *think* of as a good conversation would not get us nearer an explanation, but remain descriptive. If the finding was that most respondents think 'trust' enables good conversation, that would not identify why trust matters to them rather than other strategic features, like 'not saying too much', 'being on the same side', 'getting to the point quickly', 'not over-promising' or 'persuading the other person that they were wrong'. It is entirely accepted that conversations are judged as good, having gone well overall, or otherwise bad, but this generic description ignores how the necessary reasoning for the judgement (even of the researcher) is a) thinkable and b) thinkable *and* said in a particular instance. Identifying conversation 'types' ('open', 'trusting', 'matching personalities', 'shared goals', etc.) needs to be accompanied by explanations for their origins (causes). In the absence of a better theory, or one with at least equal precision, we recommend G-GCT prototypes.

So *why* thinkable? In this study, G-GCT has been able to:

- explain why protagonists feel, think and act the way they do
- why conflicts happen
- and why it is not possible to arrive at an agreed set of criteria to determine whether any conversation has been successful or not.



We suggest that this conclusion does not amount to cultural relativism, as the undecidability of what counts as good or bad is explained within the boundaries the G-GCT typology.

In surveying the orthodox literature on conversation, we struggle to find a definitive reason for why a manager's evaluation should have greater normative and analytical importance to the 'success' of the conversation than that of the junior employee. Yet most of the researchers cited take the Hierarchical position as if this was default; similarly the assumption that what is functional for the organisation is functional for the employee. We urge these authors to inspect their default assumption but it is anticipated that they will struggle to explain where their reasoning comes from, at least within their stated models.

Why this author thinks that explanation is better than description will have to wait for another study. This researcher also concedes that the data confirms that G-GCT cannot be used for prediction, although it is made apparent that G-GCT is effective for description and explanation. However, G-GCT explains why predictions are almost impossible in the social sciences except for rhetorical statements that, for example, customers will buy products that meet their needs at a price they can afford from suppliers they trust; which is not especially informative. Where social theories claim some predictive power, they seem to offer predictions that are not much better than common sense. But if one believes social theory must be predictive then G-GCT can itself be accused of being a bit vague. It predicts for example that for 'wicked problems' affecting many persons, poly-rational solutions will be more robust than single rationality solutions. But more work is needed on the institutionalisation of conversations likely to generate poly-rational conversations and solution finding.

However, G-GCT appears to be more useful as it always offers four ways of understanding what the problems are, and four competing problem solutions. No other framework is 1) as simple 2) comprehensive 3) explanatory 4) dynamic 5) or has the same exceptional moment-by-moment precision. No other approach explains more variance.

We re-emphasise that G-GCT cannot establish finally whether a conversation is going well, or going badly. This is because the four thought styles have their own specific evaluation criteria (*Order, Transformation, Winning, Surviving*). Thompson's answer to this is that, as just hinted at: if a solution is found which offers at least *something* valuable to each rationality, simultaneously, then the outcome is 'better' than one which satisfies only one rationality. He has backed this claim through many case studies in environmental policy. As cultural subjects, observers will have their preferred cultural bias or biases of which they should be aware

because they risk biased recording (exaggeration) of the corresponding biases that exist in conversation. This author's self-description places her at the centre of the Grid-Group diagram.

We were unable to find utterances (except for one fragment that was too unclear to categorise) which did not fit within the G-GCT typology. This confirms Thompson's 'Impossibility Hypothesis', which states that it is not possible to think a thought that is not culturally enabled by the four (alone or in combination). This is an expression of Emile Durkheim's insistence (elaborated in *'The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life'* (1912) that it is society that makes thought (and feelings and actions) possible and that no distinction need be or should be drawn between 'society' and the 'individual'.

Differing evaluation criteria were found among third-party (Panel) observers. Some panellists would agree that a particular utterance which they had observed within a particular role play, had been 'right', giving their reasons. But other members of the same Panel who had witnessed the same role play would disagree giving different reasons for classifying it as bad conversational practice. Panel discussions were just as dynamic as the conversations they observed. The next Panel considering the next iteration of the same role play would produce a fresh round of disagreements about what panel members had just seen.

No Panel was unanimous and this is an important finding in its own right, tending to confirm G-GCT.

Conversations move. It is apparent that there is no cultural equilibrium in conversation, as reasoning is reactive, each type a catalyst for the next round. Because either participant in a dyad can take the conversation in a different direction at any point, the flow of conversation is unpredictable, although in analysing retrospective records, each exchange and shift can be mapped and explained.

### **6.3 GGCT and Conversational Dynamism**

*How are Conversational Outcomes Produced?*

#### **Interests?**

All the role plays involved an employee and a manager role; that is one position has less formal authority than the other in a way which sociologists might describe as 'occupational class

differences'. Do the thought styles employed correspond to what could be thought of as the 'class interests' associated with the two roles? Hierarchical thought styles were indeed most frequently employed by managers, followed by egalitarian, then occasionally individualistic, but fatalistic not once. Employees thought styles varied both more widely and switched more frequently, though some employees also employed Hierarchical reasoning at some points. In other words, there appears to be only a weak correlation between 'class positions' and thought styles. Interests do not explain how role players felt, thought and acted, or put it another way, thought style classification is more accurate and more sensitive to shifting conversation than interest classification. Thought style dynamics explain more of the variance than, say 'class conflict'.

We made no attempt to measure the role players' personalities, but we suspect that it would be very difficult to use personality differences (and personality similarities) to explain why one protagonist said what they said at one point while the other said something contrary moments later, or indeed, why each party would change throughout. Personality types are supposed to be more or less stable, but conversation varies greatly.

The tally of thought style instances allows us to infer that:

(10) inter-thought styles conflicts drive conversations more than interest conflicts or personality clashes

(11) when one party persists with one thought style sooner or later the other will switch. Thought style switching is practically inevitable for both parties

(12) in conversations where the manager persisted with Hierarchical reasoning, employees tended to respond using Individualistic reasoning. These positions are diagonally opposed on the Grid-Group Typology and are therefore especially conflicting. These doubly-polarised positions perpetuated what protagonists would describe as conversational difficulties

(13) at least according to our observations, when managers were not fixed on Hierarchy but deployed Egalitarian reasoning too, this was met with mostly Fatalistic employee responses and notably fewer Individualistic replies

We concede that some but not all of the scenario guidelines given to the actor and the other volunteer participant probably nudged the parties into seeing the employee as the problem. We will discuss this in the Limitations section. The role plays were intended to elicit ‘difficult’ conversation and in most iterations complete resolution was not attained though there were instances of partial agreement. Most conversations managed suggestions, minor adjustments, or scope for further future conversations. The aims of each participant’s opening rationality (their ‘success criteria’) at the conversation onset was, except for ‘Mike 1’, not met by the end, nor was a ‘clumsy solution’ (Verweij et al., 2006) achieved. We stress that even when both participants used mostly Hierarchical reasoning this did not enable them to attain resolution. We concede that it is at least *arguable* that the intractability of the problems written into all three role-plays, defeated the parties’ reasoning repertoires.

Nevertheless, interplay of two or more thought styles, though inherently disturbing, managed to attain enough movement to arrive at partial problem resolution, including agreement that the problem needed more time for further consideration. This *explains* Patton’s observation (2017) that tolerance of disagreement is vital to effective conversation. While chaotic (*ie.* unpredictable) exchanges of reasoning provide at least the first steps towards ‘clumsy solutions’ (Ney and Verweij, 2015), given enough time, Fatalistic and Individualistic reasoning is more urgent than Egalitarian and Hierarchical reasoning prefers. In other words, there are cultural biases in deciding how much time should be devoted to solving a problem.

In constructing graphs charting a conversation, it is believed that a greater level of coding detail can be portrayed concisely, providing an efficient overview of conversation than with the ‘conversational profiles’ put forward by Ford and Ford (2008). G-GCT deciphers the innate flux of conversation most effectively. However, it would be difficult to conclude from reading the graphs alone whether the outcomes would have pleased the participants. Further analysis of very large samples of graphs might yield fresh findings, but at present we do not see how.

## **6.4 GGCT and Good & Bad elements of conversation combined model**

*How do staff members engage in and feel about good and bad workplace conversations?*

The analysis confirms that Grid-Group Cultural Theory and the separately-derived Conversational Element ‘themes’ can be applied in concert to classify utterances and in doing

so, create a comparative profile of the qualities of conversations. However, G-GCT is much more precise than the grounded (i.e., ‘Interpretivist’?) ‘emergent themes’ method.

The good and bad elements approach provides a table of qualitative opposites that depict conversation content. Our inferred thematic elements are similar in design to the ‘Model of Defensive-Supportive Communication’ (Gibb, 1961), in that both tables share two sides depicting either more positive or more negative behavioural contributions. We managed to narrow the themes into fewer categories than Gibb. We managed to reduce the number of themes while still fitting the interview data to categorically incorporate all areas of discussion.

Cultural theory (G-GCT) is useful in depicting the nature of conversation and the rationalities at work, but the graphs do not denote whether a conversation is good or bad, objectively. For this reason, some thought could be given to combine both classification strategies into a singular graphic representation and insight. In open-coding hundreds of detailed answers from the nine interviewees, a comparative table of themes was designed. Some of the themes found reflect current literature on the characteristics of good or bad conversation, while other themes, such as ‘Claims’ and ‘Unanimity’ are cited less often.

The findings indicate that:

(14) Perhaps contrary to common sense, Fatalism(!) opened a pathway towards Unanimity, and to a lesser extent Trust, as faith and expectations of the group are generally agreeable and stable, while when confronted by surprises ‘Confusion’ or ‘Closure’ were seen

(15) Hierarchical reasoning appears to enable ‘Unanimity’ and ‘Clarity’ in conversation, although rigidity and emphasis on authority, appears to be linked with conversations that are ‘Closed’. The need to be in command and to blame those below can create campaigns mired in ‘Claims’, in line with Mamadouh (1999). Indeed the co-existence of ‘Clarity’ and ‘Hierarchy’ is perfectly captured in Jian and Dalisay (2017) as *accuracy*, *efficiency* and *coordination*, which they claim as markers of good quality conversation. We assess these concepts as having a Hierarchical bias, and an unnecessarily restrictive definition of ‘good workplace conversation’. The goal of ‘Unanimity’ is consistent with Hierarchy (i.e. High-Group), and prompt disappointment if not attained.

(16) Individualistic thought matches ‘Openness’ and ‘Clarity’, in being *creative*, *motivated* and *ensured* (Schwartz, 1991; Loyens and Maesschalck, 2014). However it also frequently brings ‘Conflict’ and ‘Claims’ to conversations, through individual gain-seeking.

(17) Egalitarian thinking comprises ‘Trust’, with a preference for fairness and understanding personal feelings and involvement, and ‘Openness’, in offering and accepting ideas and opinions contributing to systemic change. As change is not guaranteed this can foster ‘Conflict’ and ‘Confusion’ in conversations. Egalitarianism, specifically ‘Trust’ and ‘Openness’, are, as described by Beschorner (2006) and Thomson (2011), including *ethical civility* and *promise-keeping*. However, these are very far from being definitive features of good conversation.

The dynamic nature of the good and bad elements is an emergent property of counteractive and interactive dynamics, according to cultural theory, whereby employing one approach creates (excites) reactions in opposing approaches.

The study suggests a correlation between bad conversational elements and their G-GCT parallels among ‘difficult’ employees, and a correlation between good conversational elements paired to thought styles among managers. Thus, it is hypothesized that a single framework might be refined for future study. We can claim that the study confirms a correlation between certain cultural thought styles and good or bad elements defined specifically, namely:

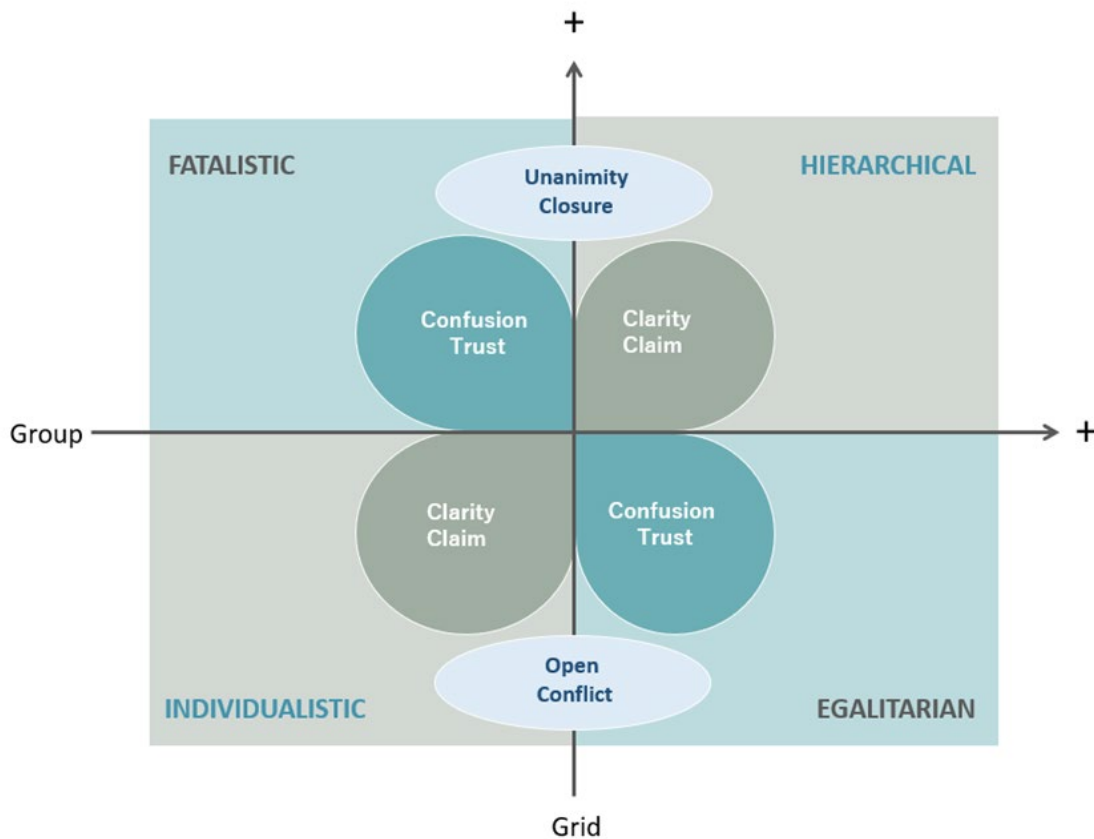


Figure 6.1: Groupings of Good & Bad Elements in relation to GGCT thought styles

The above dispersion of good and bad elements were largely found to fit, in accordance with the thought style employed in the content of conversations. It is fascinating to observe a pattern here: the groupings at the top of the diagram, on the bottom and then on the left and finally on the right show specific overlaps and exclusivity. The low Grid cultural types tend toward Openness and Conflict, while conversely the high Grid types comprise the opposing Closure and Unanimity. Meanwhile, the diagonally opposing types indicate a predicted content of Clarity and Claims, or Trust and Confusion. This is clearly an advance on the prior literature in terms of both insightfulness and method.

It is also possible to speculate on the specific connections regarding the relationships between opposing thought styles and the thematic content types derived at the interview stage:

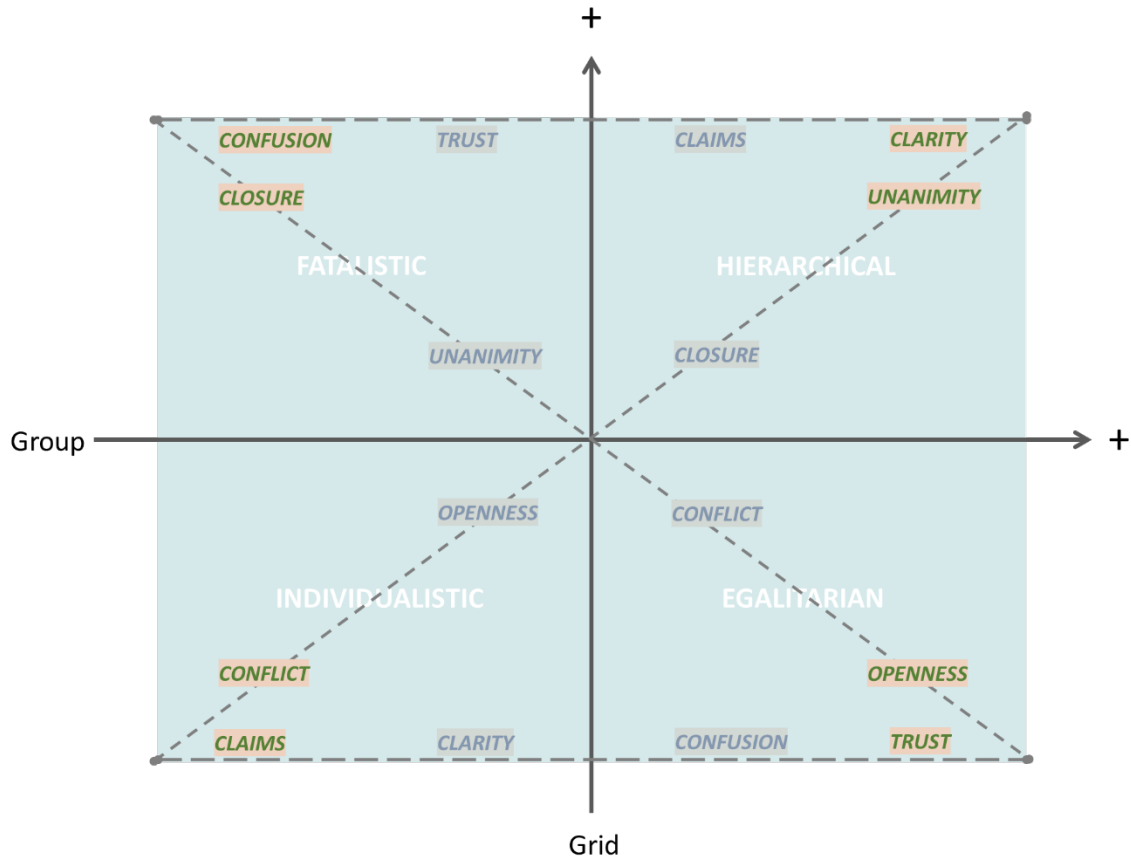


Figure 6.2 : Speculative framework using an overlay of thematic elements showing the diagonal and horizontal cultural connections that have been found with the relevant positive-negative pairings.

The eight themes shown in gold were frequently found to be associated with the corresponding cultural dimension, while the second set of the same themes, shown in grey, are speculated but unproven given the limited evidence collected in this study, for example, there being no instances of Fatalism found among managers, thus we are less confident about the placing of the themes shown in grey.

Since the study produced insufficient data on managerial Fatalism and ‘bad’ elements, at least of these claims represent theoretical associations, placed on opposing dimensions of the cultural relationship. In other words, G-GCT has at least *some* predictive power, or is effective in mapping the limits of possibilities. As there were the least conversational difficulties between Hierarchical-Egalitarian or Fatalistic-Individualistic agents, there are no vertical dotted lines shown, although speculation is possible, such as Claims against the higher-Grid being Egalitarian (Mamadouh, 1999), for a start.

The combination of the thematic elements plotted with their correlating cultural paired relationships, through further study, may provide a balanced web by which conversational



tactics can be better devised and predictions of conversation behavioural patterns improved, while in practice producing positive (or good) results for *both* sides, at least in the sense that both parties get *something* from the conversation which each value; that is, developing tactics.

What is currently clear is that, from the types of communicative relationships and qualities evaluated, there are strong correlations between statements classified by a particular cultural type and certain thematic types, that can provide further insight into the underlying and the public (openly communicated results) of reasonings. We would like to see more work linking claims classified by Thought Style and, either lay, or theory-derived evaluations of what makes for ‘good’ and ‘bad’ conversations (and outcomes). As a convention it may help if protagonists offer their reasoning for their key claims as in ‘Show me where it states that Colleagues Cannot Have Intimate Relationships’ / ‘Because it is unfair to behave as if a Rule exists when it does not and if you create this rule it is already Too Late for myself and my boyfriend and you Cannot Apply Rules Retrospectively’. A default prompt: ‘Why are you saying that?’ might help.

Analysis of the third stage, group evaluations produced by Panels of Observers, confirm that:

- the (common-sense) evaluations made were consistent with the evaluations produced at the first stage interviewees
- with the forensic G-GCT analyses of the ‘difficult HR conversations’.

While good conversation seems to lead to a softening of the extremes in each thought style, the converse is also true: ‘too much’ of one side can provoke extremism in any of the three others. Take for example the use of overly technical terminology, chosen to achieve absolute clarity, but actually resulting in confusion and annoyance. Similarly, references to “*two-faced*” staff were associated with prior Trust-building attempts and treated with suspicion. The outcome may confound ‘the best laid schemes’ in ways that surprise. Emphatic commitment to ‘Openness’ can actually close conversations, through embarrassment and so on. Participants may recoil from disclosures that are too frank protesting ‘Too Much detail!’

Parties to conversations may have tacit knowledge of these principles but it is surely rare for ‘good conversationalists’ to grasp all that is going on and especially the line between a converging and a diverging conversation. Not even conversational experts have grasped these tipping points. For example, the measures of effective conversation proposed by Jian and Dalisay (2017), suggesting that ‘Accuracy’, ‘Coordination’, and ‘Efficiency’ are the three basic

elements which determine the quality of conversation is a serious over-simplification, though consistent with G-GCT as far as it goes.

Gibb's (1961) proposal that the characteristics of good and bad, or supportive and defensive, conversations can be categorised separately in opposing pairs is also largely consistent with G-GCT. By proposing six pairs, communicative behaviour can promote a 'defensive climate' or a 'supportive climate', according to whether conversation participants speak in 'good' or 'bad' manner. G-GCT enables us to see further into what good and bad mean and their specific and plural cultural origins. In other words, the literature contains unexamined cultural biases which are the cause of these normative over-simplifications.

Consistent with Ford and Ford (2008), we noted shifting dynamics in conversations but claim a much deeper understanding of why they exist in the forms they take and at the points they are invoked by protagonists. Instead of simply identifying and collating types of organisational conversation (PMS) or the modes of relationships (LMX), our graphs depict the course of conversations from left to right, point-to-point according to changes in the reasonings associated with each utterance to be assigned; a method which is simultaneously descriptive and explanatory. In doing so it is believed that a far more accurate method of recording communicative 'performance profiles' is created, a method which is simultaneously descriptive and explanatory. These graphs could be extended into time series over several successive conversations to create such profiles. Protagonists might be aided out of an impasse by being shown what conjunctions of reasoning lead to 'Here we go all over again in the same old way!' Furthermore, the metric unit of social thought styles provides an understanding of the rationale and attitudes that explain specific point changes in the dynamics, useful to management and self-improvement. The graphs offer more straightforward and precise representation of what is happening than the vague descriptors used ordinarily.

It is a bold claim but in the thousands of years for which written records exist, no conversant seems to have been able to have the last word on a topic, showing just how great the scope of conversation is. For every 'eternal truth' there is a confounding but equally eternal truth.

## 6.5 Implications

This study may be foundational both theoretically and practically, not least in its use of participatory theatre, a technique that most organisations could adopt and adapt for training purposes, especially to resolve or avoid impasse.

This study is unusual for studying the utterances of both manager and employee, whereas many previous studies focus their observations on outcomes from an evaluative framework that prioritises the manager. We do so without normative commitment to one or other party or thought style.

The ability of G-GCT to encompass the prior literature is also a severe test to have passed successfully. We suggest that through further study our claims can be tested further offering a simple, universal and uniformly applicable framework for future researchers. We think we have here a framework for collaborative research into any area of cultural practice in which conversation occurs; ranging from say, space exploration to conversations about driving skills.

Having offered a universal theory of conversation, we intend to continue collecting data across a wider range of industries and contexts, refining guidance on conversational techniques for navigating difficult points. We have grounds for believing that other forms of PT, (Image Theatre, Object Theatre), could be employed usefully to overcome impasse by bringing several minds to bear on a particular problem viewed ‘in-the-round’, maximising the chances that all four thought styles would come into play. We also suspect that with the accumulation of further studies, that patterns and practical guidelines for a range of organisations and applications *may* emerge. HR managers might choose to have their conversational repertoires extended and develop greater appreciation of the reactions which any form of reasoning will create in the others. They may develop enhanced sensitivity to ‘danger signs’ as well as sensitivity to and appreciation of the reasonings of others. Companies might also choose to maintain a consistent record of conversations that have gone particularly well or badly and have produced identifiably ‘clumsy’ solutions. This would enable better understanding of changing staff relationships, potentially even through use of algorithms, though this is a distant prospect at present, especially given the practically infinite number of permutations (sequences of thought styles).

*If* there are certain sequences which are *significantly* more vulnerable to impasse than others, then relatively little further research should find them. In any case the cultural theory typology

enables standardised mapping of evidence for this purpose. Re-analysis of documented conversations which resulted in catastrophic loss of life, for example, the NASA space shuttle *Challenger* disaster would provide a good starting point for the institutionalisation of risk-reduction([https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=2FehGJQlOf0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=2FehGJQlOf0&feature=emb_logo)).

It also makes some sense to look into the implicit thought styles employed by different members of staff (which they will use without realising their limits). We see little harm in enabling staff to have greater insight into their own reasoning(s) and their impact on their colleagues' thinking and the practical outcomes. G-GCT offers a theory and classification system that is easily taught to lay persons, with beneficial effects for inter-personal, inter-departmental and inter-organisational communications.

## 6.6 Contribution

### Theoretical Contribution

This work progresses beyond the existing literature on conversational quality, by analysing conversations first 'thematically' and then as a dynamic cultural process.

We have purposely re-analysed previous researchers' terminology this time distinguishing different meanings to 'good and bad conversation'. When we analysed what our interviewees meant by 'best' and 'worst' workplace conversations we were able to infer opposing pairs and tabulate these, but G-GCT analysis took us much further in terms of *accuracy*, *precision* and ease of application which in themselves qualify as culturally enabled evaluative criteria associated with Hierarchy (i.e., Expertise).

Conversation is intricate but classifiable for any conversation enabling comparisons both over time within a conversation and between one conversation and another, sentence by sentence and even sub-clause by sub-clause. We see why conversers get embroiled in dynamic reactive exchanges and turning-points during conversation, and how each combination of thought styles affects the outcome. It should be possible to enable conversers to stop thinking that 'it is the "other guy" who is the one who is being difficult'.

Our new method of using graphical representations detailing conversational dynamics at a glance could be useful to many and perhaps all fields. Graphical representation can also take other forms including the ‘Elements of Good and Bad Conversation’, developed in Chapter 4. Several conversations, say about a particular incident, proposal or opportunity can be plotted on a single page, giving an instantaneous view of the cultural state of any activity and its inevitable shifts.

However the time taken for coding and graph creation must be accelerated. We suggest the application of AI for the encoding of conversations, likely making use of keywords and phrases, as well as more quantitative forms, such as pitch and tone (ideally to code for emotion). AI might be applied to transcripts, or in time, to live conversation in close to real time. While manual coding will probably remain more accurate, automated coding should improve in accuracy. We think that graphical representation of conversations has the potential to include many refinements allowing greater descriptive power in the graphs.

### **Methodological Contribution**

We claim a number of methodological contributions:

- We have been able to ‘sequence’ conversations in a way that reminds us a little of ‘gene-sequencing’. There are four thought styles somewhat as there are four amino acids and like the four amino acids, four thought styles allow for astonishing heterogeneity in their expression. However the analogy breaks down quickly as gene-sequences are much more stable than thought style sequences.
- We tried the orthodox approach (examining interviewees’ evaluations of best and worst workplace conversations) in the manner of Couturier and Sklavounos (2019), Hoon (2007) Ford and Ford (2008), Mengis and Eppler (2008) and Jian and Dalisay (2017). We found that this approach provided only rough approximations and, in any case, relied on the accuracy of respondents’ memories of conversations which had taken place up to twenty-five years earlier. We also only had their descriptions and not the other parties’, who were non-contactable.
- Our three-stage methodology includes pilot experiments using participatory theatre for data collection, while working with resource limitations discussed below.

- Though we coded only the *verbal* interactions between ‘manager’ and ‘employee’, the non-verbal interactions captured on video were helpful when it came to coding accuracy, through body language, for example.
- Our three-phase approach allows for a) the collation of themes b) the simulation of plausible and naturalistic workplace conversations c) third-party review by Panels and d) checking for inter-observer coding agreement (which was surprisingly high).

## 6.7 Limitations

Opportunities for representative data collection were limited to interviewees’ recollections, role play simulations, and panel observations of the simulations. We did not negotiate access to ‘naturally occurring’ workplace conversations. The arrangements for hosting the role-plays and their observation by Panels was complex and time consuming. However, we were able to standardise the settings in which the conversations took place and standardise the prepared role plays in a way that enabled us to show just how very differently what was ostensibly the same situation can be played *reasonably*. Indeed we found that, despite their diversity, not a single utterance was found to be ‘unreasonable’ or ‘irrational’.

Previous researchers have referred to the impact of the ‘environment’, and indeed the themes of Openness and Closure have appeared in the literature in relation to what has been called ‘conversation space’. We make four comments in response:

- The meaning of ‘conversation space’ is not well specified in the existing literature. For example, it is merely common-sense to claim that, say, ‘openness’ is restricted by ‘lack of trust’. In our view the implicit conversation ‘space’ made available through the four thought styles is vast bordering on infinite. The space for conversation is created dynamically (or restricted dynamically) by the conversants though within institutionalised constraints. For example, there are a rather wide range of different conventions about how formal an HR conversation should be, how ‘official’ they should be, how long they should be, how they are set up, the language to be used (formal, collegial, competitive, defensive) and where they take place (usually in an officially designated meeting room). Notice here that ‘formal’, ‘collegial’, ‘competitive’ and ‘defensive’ forms of language conform directly and specifically with the four thought-

styles. We claim to have advanced the meaning of ‘conversation space’ beyond common sense.

- In our case, the professional actors and untrained volunteers were given only brief guidelines. They had no information on their company or industry, nor how ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (healthy or toxic) their relationship was. They had to determine the ‘conversation space’ they had and produce a conversation consistent with the brief. The effects of being observed by a panel in the same room are not known except we suppose that there was some pressure to produce a convincing conversation.
- We doubt that any altogether new and undiscovered thought style would be found had the location or briefs been different. Indeed Thompson’s ‘Impossibility Hypothesis’ was upheld because we found no utterances that were not Hierarchical, Egalitarian, Individualistic, Fatalistic or some hybrid of these.
- A noisy crowd chanting outside holding placards which took the side of the ‘defendant’, say, could have had any number of effects on the reasonings employed. More elaborate staging was beyond the available resources.

Although the value of the interview stage was limited, it did assist in the development of the role plays. We took care to vary the level of difficulty by preparing different role plays.

The ‘manager’ players were given less information, limited to a short description of a complaint against the ‘employee’. We provided no background information about their own back story or prior relationship with the employee. Because of this asymmetry in the information provided, most manager performances focused on solving the problem and not on making the conversation difficult for the employee. In other words, it was the ‘employee’ who was the main source of ‘difficulty’. We concede that as written, our role plays engendered an imbalance in the representation of managers and employees, with some probable effect on what was said. Employees tended to use Fatalistic and Individualistic reasoning styles, while managers tended towards the Hierarchical and even Egalitarian.

On the one hand, these tendencies provide valuable data for understanding and resolving disagreements. However, they show only a partial fit with a recurring theme found among the first stage interviews about ‘best’ and ‘worst’ workplace conversations. The interviewees were *adamant* that the ‘worst conversations’ happen when a *bullying manager treats an innocent or*

*well-intentioned employee as the guilty party*. The interviewees all thought that their manager was the problem, whatever their manager thought of them (for which we only have the interviewees' own words).

On reflection the role-play briefs should be revisited and revised to allow both parties to confound the other, though the potential for explosive disagreements might be increased.

Indeed, without so little back-story to go on, 'manager' role players fell back on rather archetypal (institutionalised) reasoning whereby s/he is 'managerialist' (officially hierarchical) or 'collegial' (genially egalitarian). More work on role plays may be needed to elicit Fatalist (suspicious and fearful) managers, desperate to 'cover their own backs' in order to 'avoid trouble'. We saw none of the outrageous treatment reported by interviewees such as bullying and career sabotage which in any case tend to occur over longer periods of time than we could represent.

Another important factor toward accurate analysis, which was missing from this study, would be the inclusion of a 'control group'. Since the role plays were focused on creating challenging conversations, there were no quotidian (ordinary and mundane) conversations. We were not able to compare mundane conversations with our heightened, high stakes conversations.

It is possible that the author's preferred thought styles, her commitment to 'fair play', may have affected the role plays she devised.

During the coding process, it soon became apparent that judging, accurately, the thought style of a very small number of utterances was not possible because the meaning was indecipherable. To find a 'pure' sample that expresses one thought style exclusively was uncommon. Thus, sentences were coded as fragments in which a particular thought style was evident enough. Judgements had to be made about where the beginning and end of a fragment lay and what distinguished it from the adjacent fragments. The Speaker of the Commons in the British Houses of Parliament, for example, shouts "*Order*". Ordinarily this one-word statement would be coded for Hierarchy. But in a rowdy debate it might be desperately Fatalist or an Egalitarian effort to bring in excluded voices. To reduce the element of impurity we suggested:

- A fifth thought style is included, namely the 'Hermit' position, which is a dispassionate position equivalent to an observer who has withdrawn from the world in order to have a more contemplative relationship with it. It would fit the evident use of all four



Thought Styles, though in moderation, rather than as extremes or telling of a fable constructed thoughtfully to be readable in all four ways

- Sentences could be coded in their entirety and acknowledge, say both Egalitarian *and* Hierarchical reasoning if present. This would afford a window into the subtlety of the reasoning transitions through the course of a conversation. But it would come at the price of complexity and difficulties with graphical representation. Whether or not to take these steps is a cultural question. We have taken the Fatalistic and Individual position that ‘time is short and we must get on’ and ‘it isn’t broken so don’t fix it’. The reader may take a different view

A key moment of change occurs in conversations where both actors have continued along identifiable lines before one makes an abrupt, apparently unprovoked but brief shift in reasoning before returning to the previous Thought Style. These cases require further study. They are especially interesting where there is no evidence that the jump was prompted by the reasoning of the other party. A debrief to elicit ‘where that thought came from’ might find that the actor was prompted by other thoughts in their head irrespective of what the other participant in the conversation had said. They may have been paying more attention to their inner conversation than to the other party.

A further concern is the coding of utterances masking, passive-aggression, manipulation, emotional exaggeration, etc., which inevitably reduce the ability of the observer or conversation-partner to precisely categorise the spoken content. This might require the inclusion of a ‘back dimension’ (z-dimension) to distinguish, say the ‘impassive’ and ‘expressive’ dimensions, referred to by 6 (2002), so that ‘tactical’ moves can be recorded.

We coded conversation for what was said (informed by how it was said), but, as our Examiners’ asked ‘What about deliberate deception and manipulation?’ What if one party is laying a trap for the other?

This possibility is acknowledged readily, to which we respond:

- The role play method we used introduced protagonists who did not know each other (an actor and an experienced manager/MBA student in each pairing). The scenarios were artificial (as far as they were concerned) and when the role plays ended they came out of their role and were debriefed by the Panel, which might ‘sniff out’ manipulation (with none being noted). There was no future advantage to play for except perhaps self-promotion in the eyes of the Panel. In short, our principle technique was fairly immune

to deceptive gaming

- As for the initial Interview phase, it is just about conceivable that an interviewee might exaggerate their degree of victimisation to elicit this researcher's sympathy. However, interviewees talked with a passion about the past, without much pausing and we have no evidence to suggest that these streams of recollections were constructed with much if any deliberation
- How does any researcher insure against deception? Opinion surveys are vulnerable to respondents claiming to believe what they think they are supposed to believe. This is a problem in election polling, for example. However similar overlapping questions can be asked in different ways to check for respondents' inconsistencies. As *dynamism* was what we were interested in, surveying was dispensed with in any case
- Yes, deceptions occur. But having analysed interviews and especially the role plays and panel evaluations *forensically* there were, we feel, sufficient markers to indicate particular thought styles and that inauthenticity would be harder to detect without G-GCT as the chief framework of analysis.

It becomes apparent that further correlating cues by which to increase the accuracy of assessing thought style would be beneficial. These could include emotional dimensions, representative body language, gestures and expressions, or compatible categories that describe message content. Specifically questioning the actors and audience, following a role-played conversation, of any apparent attempts to deceive or seem otherwise unbelievable would aid in clarifying this possibility.

We do not know the prior socio-cultural experiences of the actors involved, and can only judge the dyadic conversation between them, in isolation from possible external factors, based on the scenario brief, role-played character and message content alone. However, triadic and larger group conversations could be presented graphically.

In Using G-GCT, or any other framework, to assess conversation, the full complexity of conversation between people must be taken into consideration. While G-GCT appears to have near-universal applicability, not all general features of conversation were taken into account within the scope of this study. One such example would be *moments of silence*, which can mean many things, alter the course of the conversation, and create a window into the inner thoughts of the individual taking a momentary pause, however, there would be extensive study required to accurately assess silence for thought style as Fadia Alraies (2019) has demonstrated. Equally, changes in thought style could be identified through facial expressions or other body

language indicators, which may be judged differently to the words spoken, and may, more than the spoken word, illicit a strong reaction in the respondent. In the case of body language, crossed arms, for example, may help or hinder the identification of thought styles. It may be that crossed arms positioned highly, hint at Hierarchical thought, while coupled with reclining body posture would suggest Individualism, or even show the ‘closed’ gesture of a Fatalist, unwilling to listen to alternative fates. Because body language is a qualitatively different aspect to spoken content, it was deemed inaccurate with more features of background culture and character, and is best studied separately. Meanwhile, encoding conversation in line with the spoken statements allowed a more immediately literal interpretation, giving greatest accuracy at this stage of studying conversation with G-GCT. While the theory is approximately 50 years old, age does not prevent Newton’s Laws of Gravity from continued interest and function. Indeed, we consider G-GCT to be young.

## **6.8 Recommendations**

In this study, the focus was on the content of conversation, and did not dwell on intonation, facial expression, body language, etc., though these helped in classifying the content of the more ambiguous utterances.

Utterances are infused with all manner of content, and the display of emotion in conversation is an especially difficult layer to interpret through the prism of G-GCT. This is because

- 1) due to variations in ‘emotion rules’ and ‘display rules’ (Hochschild 1983; 2003) outward emotion is more difficult to judge and categorize than spoken words and phrases
- 2) hidden intentions may be present.

However, the problem of whether respondents mean what they say is just as much a confounding nuisance in other methods, such as opinion surveys which in any case largely strip out the reasonings that lie behind such opinions.

As our role-players were not known to each other and were enacting a temporary relationship without future consequences – nobody would be fired, face a cut in pay or receive an official reprimand – the point of being deceitful was largely or completely removed. In other words, our chief method (role play) is more immune to deceitful behaviour than perhaps all other

relevant research methods. We concede of course, that the literature on the connection between G-GCT thought styles and reflective emotion is scant.

Although emotions are experienced as if they are unique to the individual experiencing them, particularly in individualistic societies, this is an illusion. Feelings change, but in accordance with the interaction of rationalities that are readily identifiable and which are experienced because they are culturally available, 'fire to ice' included. Thinking is of course emotional, and each thought style will be provoked emotionally by the emotions passing between rational conversants. Each thought style comes with its own emotional repertoire.

Certainly, emotional thinking played no less of a role in the input and outcomes of the conversations studied. Emotions are typically rational too.

There may be hypothetical or potential recommendations for future research in answering the links between Emotion and G-GCT. One approach would be to develop emotions coding using G-GCT. For example:

Hierarchy: Stern, Moderated /Muted Display of Emotions, Search for Satisfactory Resolutions associated with Relaxing. A preoccupation with processual justice. Responsive to orchestral music played 'religiously'.

Egalitarian: Expressive Display of Feelings, playing to the Gallery, Seeks Sympathy but Combative if felt Necessary to change the system, Triumphant. Fondness for anthems and Chants.

Individualistic: Heightened Experience of Emotions, Impatience, Urgency, Combative, Triumphant. Fondness for all forms of improvisation, including jazz solos.

Fatalistic: Resentment, Mistrust and Suspicion, Emotions kept Hidden yet Explosive if Survival Threatened, may seek to 'Get My Retaliation in First'. Most impatient. Breeds Cynicism. Reluctant singers.

Most researchers call for 'bigger samples'. A wider range of role-plays would surely produce wider range of conversational patterns. A larger number of iterations of each role play would also have had a similar effect. A wider range of ages groups, age-differences (e.g., a younger manager and an older employee) gender combination, job positions, industries and nationalities would have some effect on conversation which might eventually be identifiable. What they

almost certainly *would not have done* is revealed previously unknown or uncategorizable thought styles.

Ethnological studies by participant- and non-participant observation are recommended: ‘real time’ observations of ‘real-time’ workplace conversation when (likely Hierarchical) respect for confidentiality allows. As Hoon (2007) suggests, study of day-to day activities help “reveal the underlying micro-mechanism inherent to the conversation”. In the meantime, our readers are now equipped to make these observations for themselves when sitting in meetings of any size. They might keep ‘cricket score tallies’ placing a mark on a blank G-GCT diagram for each utterance according to its thought style. They might also observe and record the effects of their own reasoning on what other people say, increasing their self-awareness and appreciation of others.

Longitudinal studies could be used to observe thought styles and approaches taken by manager and employee over long periods of time. Couturier and Sklavounos (2019) chose to apply a framework for ‘Performance Dialogues’ built on Mengis and Eppler who used it in a pharmaceutical company, with periodic reassessment every three and a half years. However, the thought styles incorporated into the framework would need to be assessed carefully to ensure they were fully poly-rational, which is probably not the case.

We would welcome further research into conversations producing poly-rational solutions to ‘wicked problems’. None of our role plays encompassed wicked problems (affecting many persons and which transform into new problems when any solution is applied). We need ‘wicked’ scenarios.

It is arguable that conversations are driven by ‘personality differences’. The effects of personality could be examined by performing personality tests on role-players and giving different personality combinations the same prepared role plays to enact. However, some comments can already be made:

- Personality is usually claimed to be ‘multi-dimensional’ and its complexity presents researchers with problems. How many of which personality types should be put into the mix?
- Personality ‘traits’ are supposed to have permanence. It is difficult to explain why conversants change thought style (often frequently within minutes) while their personality

remains constant.

- We do not believe that personality maps onto thought styles. In other words, personality is not the origin of reasoning, because the capacity to reason is enabled *culturally*. For example, we see no reason why either Extroverts or Introverts should reason in particularly different ways. And in any case, there are *four* forms of reasoning, not *two* which the 'Extrovert-Introvert' model would suggest. Therefore, while we suspect that introducing personality as a variable would add little though we are open to being proved wrong.

## 6.9 Summary

By interpreting transcripts of conversations we found that:

- 1) communicated content (each utterance) can be classified according to inferred thought styles
- 2) these classifications can be plotted graphically to show each conversant's reasoning and its dynamic effect on the other conversant's reasoning
- 3) the literature on 'effective conversations' is broadly in alignment with the Grid-Group cultural typology, but without authors being aware of this. G-GCT brings much more precision to conversations about conversation

In theory and in use we find G-GCT exceptional for its simplicity (two dimensions), comprehensiveness (probably all conversations for all times and places) and for dynamic explanation of why we feel, feel, think and act differently. We commend its use by researchers, trainers and practitioners.

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# Appendix

## Appendix I - Participant Information Sheet



Brunel Business School  
Research Ethics

### Participant Information Sheet

**Further to my Letter of Invitation I can confirm:**

**The Title of My Research:**

The Art of Good Conversation in HRM; Developing Effective Skills in Handling Conversations between Managers and Employees

**My Identity:**

Ph.D Student Yuemei Ma, Brunel Business School, Brunel University, Uxbridge UB8 3PH

**My Email:** [yuemei.ma@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:yuemei.ma@brunel.ac.uk)

**The Purpose of my research:**

- to identify and explore the differences between 'good' and 'unhelpful' conversations between Managers and Employees
- to do this through the participation of experienced Managers in conversation with Actors playing the role of Employees, in order to identify 'Best Practices'
- to outline relevant and suitable professional training in The Art of Good HRM Conversations'.

**What is involved?**

You are invited to participate in a Focus Group which may run for up to two hours. Participation will be invited to watch several pre-recorded professional conversations between HR and employees.

You will have an opportunity to discuss what you see in these conversations, sharing your evaluations.

All discussions will be recorded digitally. The Recordings will keep securely.

**Participation is Guaranteed to be Voluntary and Confidential.**

Participation is completely voluntary and you will **never** be named in **any** publications written as an outcome of this study. I emphasize: *I will never make reference to you by name as an individual, either orally or in writing.*

You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

This study has been approved by Brunel University Ethics Committee.

***Your participation would be very valuable and warmly appreciated!***

## Appendix II - Approval letter from Brunel University



College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Brunel University London  
Kingston Lane  
Uxbridge  
UB8 3PH  
United Kingdom  
[www.brunel.ac.uk](http://www.brunel.ac.uk)

3 April 2017

### LETTER OF APPROVAL

Applicant: MISS YUEMEI MA

Project Title: A conversation about good conversation; developing effective skills in HRM

Reference: 6278-LR-Mar/2017- 6981-1

Dear MISS YUEMEI MA

The Research Ethics Committee has considered the above application recently submitted by you.

The Chair, acting under delegated authority has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. Approval is given on the understanding that the conditions of approval set out below are followed:

- The agreed protocol must be followed. Any changes to the protocol will require prior approval from the Committee by way of an application for an amendment.

#### Please note that:

- Research Participant Information Sheets and (where relevant) flyers, posters, and consent forms should include a clear statement that research ethics approval has been obtained from the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- The Research Participant Information Sheets should include a clear statement that queries should be directed, in the first instance, to the Supervisor (where relevant), or the researcher. Complaints, on the other hand, should be directed, in the first instance, to the Chair of the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- Approval to proceed with the study is granted subject to receipt by the Committee of satisfactory responses to any conditions that may appear above, in addition to any subsequent changes to the protocol.
- The Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to sample and review documentation, including raw data, relevant to the study.
- You may not undertake any research activity if you are not a registered student of Brunel University or if you cease to become registered, including abeyance or temporary withdrawal. As a deregistered student you would not be insured to undertake research activity. Research activity includes the recruitment of participants, undertaking consent procedures and collection of data. Breach of this requirement constitutes research misconduct and is a disciplinary offence.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Knowles', with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

Professor James Knowles

Chair

College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Brunel University London

## Appendix III - Participant Consent Form



**Brunel**  
University  
London

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

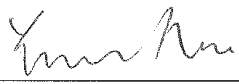

	YES	NO
Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the researcher and you discussed the study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you happy with her explanation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has the researcher promised never to name you when she writes-up her research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you know that you can withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you agree to being recorded?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that the researcher may quote me but without naming me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I agree to take part.

Your Signature:

Name (in CAPITALS):

Date:

Researcher name: Yuemei Ma	Signature: 
Supervisor name: Stephen Smith	Signature: 

## **Appendix IV-Transcripts Example one: Interview questions and answers- Interviewee 9**

1. Can you describe the best or worst conversation you can remember ever having had from any period during your working life?
2. What was the reason why the conversation happened?
3. What was it that was good or bad about the conversation?
4. What was the outcome of the conversation for you?
5. Was this what you would have wanted from the conversation, or was there a different outcome that you would have liked
6. If you could turn back time is there anything that you think you should have said but did not say? If so, can you tell me why you feel it needed to be said?
7. Again, if you could turn back time, is there anything you said which you wish you had not said? If so can you explain why not saying it would have been a good idea?

Researcher: **Okay. Now we're start, so, um, first question. Can you describe the best or worst conversation you can remember ever having had from any period during your work life?**

Participant 9 : Can I change the subject on this one? Can this be a different subject?

Researcher: Uh.

Participant 9 : Or is it all got to be the same subject for each?

Researcher: Uh, it's like a, uh, uh, basically, uh, the conversation that you just mentioned, you can, you can describe as conversation you had, yeah, to me.

Participant 9 : Right.

Researcher: So then.

Participant 9 : Yeah. Sorry, I wasn't sure if it was covering various subjects.

Researcher: Oh, no, no, no.

Participant 9 : Okay.

Researcher: It's, same. Okay. You go.

Participant 9 : Yeah, it was around, uh, 2005 and it was when myself and my husband, Allen, were splitting up.

And at work I wanted to cut my hours and my boss at the time said, "No, you can't cut your hours because you'll end up going back to your husband anyway and your relationship won't last with James( participant's boyfriend) ." (laughs)... so she wouldn't actually let me cut my hours at work-... and I wanted to visit my son at night and spend more time there- with my son, Andrew.

And she said that she would put me on more nights, even more nights.

Researcher: Ah, okay.

Participant 9 : ... to be awkward. So I actually accused her of, uh, bullying, which I feel it was bullying.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9 : And she said that, um, she was gonna put me on more hours, and she said, "You won't ever be able to get to see your son at all because it's up to me. I'm the manager, and I decide what shifts you do at work."

And obviously this made me a bit angry, and I was going to pack my job in at that time but obviously I needed the money so I couldn't pack my job in.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9 : And then her manager came to see me, about a supervision that Jenny had sent in.

at all. And it was supposedly done with me. And it wasn't, it wasn't done with me

**Researcher:** Oh, so it was done with her?

Participant 9 : Yeah. She did it and she wrote the answers in that I gave her, but I wasn't present. So this had to go to the HR department, at xxxx (company name), the company I work for.

And it, it turned out that she was bullying me, without me even having to report it because she'd done a supervision review and she'd asked me all these questions like, "What do you think to your job?" And apparently I'd said things like, "I don't give a stuff." Well, that's not something I would have said anyway, and the lady that came to see me who was her boss, said that she'd never known me acting that way.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : So I had to have a heart to heart discussion with her about it , and she reported Jenny for bullying, my medium manager, and Jenny eventually left.

Researcher: Oh, okay.

Participant 9 : Because she was accused of bullying, but she bullied other people as well.

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : So, um-

Researcher: So, then in this case, so, it kind of you had two parts conversation.

Participant 9 : Yes.

**Researcher:** One part is, with your medium manager?

Participant 9 : Yeah.

**Researcher:** And the second part was with upper manager?

Participant 9 : Yeah. Yeah, how'd, she was the, um, oh dear. What did they call her? I'll come on to that one. It'll come to me in a bit.

**Researcher:** Okay. No problem. So then, do you think ... how do you define those, those, because it's kind of you gave me two separate conversations here. How you define this two conversations? do you think-

**Researcher:** Which one's better? Which one's not?

Participant 9 : I'm not sure. Um, maybe the false accusation of, maybe that's one a better one-

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : ... maybe?

Researcher: Meaning that after-

Participant 9 : Yes.

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : Yeah.

**Researcher:** **So then, do you think what the reason behind ? why this conversation happened.**

Participant 9 : Well ... it's a bit of a long story.

Researcher: Yeah, long, long-

Participant 9 : Strange. Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, the first conversation, why it happened?

Participant 9 : Um. I think she was trying to get me sacked.

Researcher: Sacked?

Participant 9 : I think. Yeah, sacked from work.

Researcher: Ah.

Participant 9 : Suspended. I think that's what she was trying to do. Because she threatened to put me on to capability policy.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : Um, but then, as I say, when Lucy came to see me, she felt I didn't need to go on capability policy because all the things Jenny had stated in this supervision were false.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9 : ... because she'd said that I wasn't turning up for work, well there was no evidence, and it was totally untrue.

She also said that I wasn't recording things that I should be recording, which wasn't true because Lucy went through all the documents.

And she found that Jane was actually bullying me.

And, uh, I think there was possibly a little bit of jealousy involved.

Researcher: Ah, okay.

Participant 9 : I think. That's, you know. That's what everybody else was telling me anyway, all the other staff. (laughs)

Which I didn't kind of think that to start with, I couldn't understand why she was doing it.

I think she was abusing her position actually, of being a manager.



She was, abusing her position.

**Researcher:** Hm. Do you think, uh, what was it? Good or bad about this conversation?

Participant 9 : I think the **bad** thing, um, it shocked me... to think that she could do a supervision that I hadn't even, um, done with her, and she sent it into the company I work for, and they probably would have believed it.

Researcher: Ah, okay.

Participant 9 : And the **good** thing that came out of it, is when Lucy came 'round, it was the, like the area manager, and she questioned me and spoke to me and went through all of the things that Jenny said I'd apparently done and she found them not to be true. And then Jenny was accused of bullying and harassment-

... and she's the one who ended up leaving, and that was good.

Not just good for me but good for all other staffs, because she was actually a bit of a bully.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : So that was the good thing that came about, and also my record was, was, um, put down to a false supervision instead of a true one.

**Researcher:** Okay. Hm. So do you think what was the outcome of that conversation for you?

Participant 9 : Well I went on to become team leader.

Researcher: Oh, okay.

Participant 9 : Um-

Researcher: That's, that's good.

Participant 9 : ... that was Jane's position, actually.

Researcher: Oh, so you went to her position?

Participant 9 : Yeah-

Researcher: After her-

Researcher: she left?

Participant 9 : I did. Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : I went on to be team leader-

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9 : ... and it made me realize that you have to record everything very, very accurately and truthfully, and also treat staff with respect.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 9 : I think that's a very, very big thing.

Researcher: Yes. So you went to takeover her ...

Participant 9 : I did, yeah.

Researcher: Uh, her role.

Participant 9 : Yeah.

Researcher: Her position-

Participant 9 : And I did get that position, yeah.

Researcher: Yes. Then you learned that you should respect other-

Participant 9 : Definitely.

Researcher: ... other colleagues. Yeah.

Participant 9 : Yeah.

**Researcher: Okay. Hm. So then, then, so, other question. Was this what you want, what you would have wanted from the conversation or was a different outcome that you would like to have?**

Participant 9 : Um, yeah, I think it was what I wanted.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : I was a bit nervous of having the conversation with Lucy, and explaining all the things that Jenny, Jenny had been doing actually, not just to myself but to other staff, and she did conclude that Jenny was bullying.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : So, um, yeah. I think it was.

Researcher: So this is, this-

Participant 9 : The right outcome. Otherwise it would have just escalated, I think.

It's kind of stopped it in it's tracks.

**Researcher: Yeah. Okay. Hm. So then if you could go back time, is there anything that you think you should have said but you didn't, but you didn't say. If so, can you tell me why you feel it needed to be said?**

Participant 9 :                Yeah, I think if I could go back in time, I would have reported it myself earlier. Um, as bullying.

Researcher:                Yes.

Participant 9 :                I would have definitely reported it myself and then it probably wouldn't have gone as far as it did. Because I almost lost my job over it if they would have believed her.

**Researcher:                Yeah. So what would you like to say to her, if you can go back time?**

Participant 9 :                Well, I did, actually, have conversations with her after. (laughs) That's a funny thing. She ended up in one of James's flats. (laughing) and she did actually apologize to me.

Researcher:                Oh, okay.

Participant 9 :                Uh, but, uh, yeah, at the time, um, she didn't want to discuss it- because I think she really felt embarrassed about it. I asked her why she'd done that supervision that was unbeknown to me, ... and it was nothing like me at all. None of the answers, I'm sure, I would have given.

Researcher:                Yes.

Participant 9 :                Um ... yes, but ... but years later she did apologize.

Researcher:                Okay, so after years-

Participant 9 :                Yes. She did, when I saw her again. Yeah.

Researcher:                Yes.

Participant 9 :                But that's nothing to do with the job, is it so much?

**Researcher:                Hm. Okay. So again, if you could turn back time, is, is there anything you said which you wish you hadn't said? And if so, can you explain why not saying it would be a good idea?**

Participant 9 :                **Um ... no, I think in my case it's more of I didn't say enough.**

Researcher:                Yes.

Participant 9 :                Uh, I didn't really say anything I regret saying. I wish I'd said things earlier, I would say.

   In a lot of arguments you do say things you wish you'd not said, but no, I didn't in that case. I don't think I actually said enough.

   Which I think she, she did actually say she regretted how she treated me.

Researcher:                Oh, okay.

Participant 9 :                But that's her story, isn't it?

**Researcher:                Yes. Yeah. So from your view, so you, you think you didn't actually ,that the problem here is you didn't say enough?**

Participant 9 :                Yeah, I think that's, that's true.

Researcher:                    Yes. Then, um ... okay. Let me see.

Participant 9 :                I hope I'm giving you enough information.

**Researcher:                    Um, so do you have anything else to say, uh, according to this if you think something else, you forgot to tell me? So, any detail or ...**

Participant 9 :                Um ... she, she even said, um, that other staff were complaining about me.

   And when I spoke to other staff, because I did make a point of speaking to other staff and they said they haven't spoken to her at all.

   So again, that was like, it was like accusations she was making, false accusations.

   Um, I suppose really I'd wish I'd ... wish I'd confronted her, probably, and told her she was a bully at the time.

Researcher:                    Yeah.

Participant 9 :                **Um, yeah, I think I wished I'd told her she was a bully because I'd always helped her out and, you know- been a good s- senior, because I was a senior support worker at the time, and I'd always done a lot of work for her and everything she asked me to do I did it.**

   You know? And I couldn't understand why she made these false claims really.

Researcher:                    Yeah. But is she still trying to accuse you not do your job?

Participant 9 :                She was, yeah.

Researcher:                    Yes.

Participant 9 :                And she even wrote things down in her, we have a communication book at work, and she even wrote things down in there saying that, "um, you know, other staff have complained about you", and they saw it and they said, well, I haven't complained. It was all a bit silly really, a bit, she was abusing her position as a manager.

**Researcher:                    Uh, yeah. Uh, I remember you just mentioned, the other manager Lucy came to talk with, uh, supposed to talk with you but by the end of the talk it was Jenny. Do you know what else she wrote in the report?**

Participant 9 :                About Jenny?

**Researcher:                    Uh, yeah. Jenny. What did she write in the report, and passed to the other manager?**

Participant 9 :                **She did tell me that she'd got to report it and have a word with Jenny about it, and it wasn't long after that, that Jane decided to go.**

Researcher:                    Ah, okay.

Participant 9 : But I think they were going to suspend her because, apparently, she would, she'd been bullying someone else as well.

Researcher: Ah, okay. So-

Participant 9 : Because she used to do shifts at another service, and apparently there was another claim of bullying. They'd actually told her she was a bully whereas I hadn't.

Researcher: Ah, okay.

Participant 9 : Um, and I think because of those two complaints, she had no choice but to go really.

**Researcher: Ah, so basically she, after you, then she received other complaints.**

Participant 9 : She did, very soon. Yeah.

**Researcher: And is that why, the, uh, the other manager came to talk to you?**

Participant 9 : Yeah, I think it was. I think it was all evidence gathering, really.

**Researcher: Oh, so it's not out of the first place, the manager found out this report which Jenny gave to her. It's not true, then she come to talk to you?**

Participant 9 : That's right.

**Researcher: ... it's basically after someone else went to complain about Jenny then the, uh, the other manager came to investigate from you again?**

Participant 9 : Yeah. That's right.

Researcher: Ah, okay. Okay.

Participant 9 : And she was operational manager, that's right.

Researcher: Ah, okay.

Participant 9 : Lucy was... you just said Ops manager didn't you?

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9 : Yeah. Yeah. Oper- yeah, she was. That was the title, Ops manager.

Researcher: Ah, okay, So she'd come to-

Participant 9 : **Yeah, because unbeknown to me there was another case going on at the same time. And when Lucy came to me because she said everything she read didn't describe me at all, the person she knew because I knew her.**

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : And she said she couldn't understand it and when she came to me and said, shown me this supervision. I said, "Well, I haven't even done that supervision with Jenny."

Researcher: Ah, okay. Yeah.

Participant 9 : That's not even true, I, I didn't know anything about it. And she, and she didn't tell me, obviously confidentiality, but it turned out that somebody else had put in a complaint about her at Chatsworth for bullying. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : Yeah.

Researcher: So then, uh, how long after-

Participant 9 : Oh, it was only a matter of weeks.

Researcher: Oh-

Participant 9 : Yeah.

Researcher: ... okay. Only, only a week after-

Participant 9 : I think it was going on before she came to see me. Yeah, and that's what tied them together really.

Researcher: Okay, so then everything just tied together, then they find out she was not the right one there.

Participant 9 : That's right, and she had to go.

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : And then, funny enough, she went to work somewhere else, and she was sacked from there for bullying as well.

Researcher: (laughs) Okay.

Participant 9 : Yeah. I know.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : That's where my sister works, she went to work there, and she was sacked for bullying there.

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : (laughs)

Researcher: Okay then.

Participant 9 : I know. She was a bully so.

Researcher: Yeah. It's, it's a funny case here.

Participant 9 : Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Researcher:** So then the, yeah, okay. I think, if you, do you, do you have anything else to say?

Participant 9 : Probably not around that case. Um-

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : There was lots of things, you know, I mean, I had to speak to her a couple of times because I was senior at the time, and she was team, team leader, and that is to say Lucy was Operational manager and Lucy had to report back to the, um, you know, main, I, I don't know the titles. I always forget the titles. (laughing)

Researcher: No problem.

Participant 9 : The main managers, whoever run XXXX (company name) anyway. And, um, she reported back to them, you see, and they decided to suspend Jenny, but then she went and got another job while she was on suspension.

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : Yeah.

Researcher: She's very lucky then.

Participant 9 : Yeah. It never, it never went on a record so that's the problem. Um, but she, there was other, um, I had to speak to her because the people we support are vulnerable.

And she actually bullied them as well, occasionally.

Researcher: Oh, okay.

Participant 9 : And me and another support worker told her we were going to report her because she bullied a lady on holiday once when we all went on holiday.

Researcher: Oh, who?

Participant 9 : Jenny did.

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : Yeah, she bullied somebody then. Um-

Researcher: Uh, bullied the person she look after or-

Participant 9 : Yeah. Yeah, she was looking after her. She was a lady with learning disabilities, and she was, uh, slightly disabled but obviously, learning disabilities as well, and her name was Susan. And when we're on holiday, me and Sharon, another support worker, we're coming up the stairs in the hotel and we could hear somebody crying and shouting.

Researcher: Oh, okay.

Participant 9 : And we were looking in the rooms and then we went in the bathroom and Susan, this elderly lady, was in her 80s was in a hoist lifted up really high towards the ceiling over the bath and left on her own.

Researcher: Oh.

Participant 9 : And we couldn't understand it, so we wound her down, got her down and she says, "Jenny did it. Jenny did it."

Well Jenny apparently had put her in it, and just left her there.

Which is incredibly bad.

Researcher: Yes. Yes very much, yeah.

Participant 9 : This abuse, but that's what she was like. Yeah.

Researcher: Okay. So then she left this job-

Participant 9 : She left there.

Researcher: ... she still, she still found another job?

Participant 9 : Yeah, she got another job because, because she left XXXX (Company name) before they'd completed the investigation, and it didn't go on to her records.

Researcher: Oh, okay.

Participant 9 : So because there's this thing, is it called POVA? Or something?

Researcher: Uh, I'm not sure.

Participant 9 : Yeah. This is like Protection of Vulnerable Adults.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : And it goes onto their record if somebody's found to, uh, abuse anyone but because I wasn't person being supported, I was another staff member, it probably wouldn't go onto there. But sometimes I wish we had reported that incident earlier because it was totally wrong. You know...

Researcher: Yes because she abused the person who she look after-

Participant 9 : ... massively.

Researcher: ... happened before-

Participant 9 : Yeah. Massively.

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : Yeah.

Researcher: And that's very bad case.

Participant 9 : It is. There's loads of stories around her, yeah, she was a bad, I mean, she wouldn't, um, I went onto, onto shift and we used to support a young girl called Amanda.



Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : She was a nice girl and she used to smoke and all that and Jenny used to tell her she could only have so many cigarettes a day and which again, was a bit controlling really.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9 : But another staff member actually hit Amanda across the face and when I went onto shift. Jenny said to me, "Oh, has Amanda said anything to you?" And I said, "No, why? What about?" She goes, "No, just wondered if she'd said anything this morning before she went to work" to the day centre.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9 : And I said, "No." Anyway, when she came home because I was on shift, and she said, "Emily smacked me this morning." This was another support worker.

Researcher: Oh, okay.

Participant 9 : And her and Jenny were very close, they were both a bit bully-ish.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9 : So I phoned Jenny and I said, "Oh Jenny," I says, "I just thought I better phone because Amanda says that Emily has hit her." She says, "Oh, bloody hell." She says, "I was, that's what I meant this morning." She says, "When I asked you if Amanda had said anything this morning." I said, "Well no, she didn't." She says, "Well, I've done it so that it looks like Amanda hit her, and Susan put her arm up to protect herself."

And they'd written it all out in an incident report to make it look like Ashley had attacked Emily.

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : And I thought, well why would you be protecting staff, you know?

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9 : Just, but she's, she been gone a long time. The atmosphere changed completely when she left.

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : I've got to say that. (laughs)

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9 : You know? So that was a good thing as well. The atmosphere at work, all the other staff felt better and the people did.

Researcher: Now do you think, because earlier I asked you what's the reason why this conversation happened, if any like a personal reason behind it? Do you think it's because you, did you get along well with her?

Participant 9 : Um ... with, with Amanda?

Researcher: No, with Jenny.

Participant 9 : With Jenny? I was okay with her, she was very bossy, which was fine, she was my boss.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9 : But then it got where, when I, it was when I split up really that it all started, but then not long after I split up she left her husband. And a lot of people said she was a bit jealous because she wanted to get out of her marriage, you know? So you don't know, do you?

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : It's, I don't know. I don't like to kind of use that one, you know?

Researcher: Yes. Yeah. Okay. Can I ask you then, you, you mentioned, uh, this happened 2005, uh, how long you have been working there?

Participant 9 : How long I worked there before that?

Researcher: Yeah, before that.

Participant 9 : Yeah, I started there in 2002.

Researcher: 2002?

Participant 9 : Yeah.

Researcher: Okay. So it was about three years.

Participant 9 : Yeah, and she was my manager for, for that time as a support worker.

Researcher: Okay.

Participant 9 : And then I became senior support worker under Jenny-

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9 : ... um, a year after I'd been there in 2002. Uh, 2003, sorry.

Researcher: Okay. I think, yeah, I think that's all the information I want to know.

Participant 9 : Is that everything?

Researcher: Uh ... uh, yes. I think so. Uh, thank you for your time-

Participant 9 : No, that's okay. (laughing)

Researcher: Yeah. Okay. Thank you.

Participant 9 : That's brilliant.

Researcher:

Cheers.

## **Appendix V - Typical Scenarios of the Workplace Conversation**

### **Scenarios 1:**

Tom is an employee in the marketing department of the company. He's/She's been coming in to work late every day recently. His/her team leader has complained to you several times and other employees are also talking about his/her behaviour. Tom is skilled, but his/her recent behaviour lends itself to poor performance and is causing the team delays. You are about to have a conversation with him/her. What will you do?

#### **Back Story- Tom- Age: 38**

Unknown to the manager, Tom has a 7 year old daughter, Emily, who just started her first year at a new school. In order to send his/her daughter to a private school, he/she and his/her partner spent lots of money and energy, so some appreciation in the form of a pay rise would be nice. It was his/her partner who insisted on choosing a private school. They have had to move house to be closer to the school, however, it is further away from his workplace, so he/she has to drive two hours to work every day.

### **Scenario 2:**

Tina is one of member in your marketing team, and you are a director supervising 16 professionals and support staff. In a collaborative environment like this professional need to give work direction to the support staff. However, you heard that Tina has started dating a member of the support staff. Although there is no policy prohibiting dating in the same department, some employees have complained that the two employees are too affectionate at work, and also pointed there seems to be preferential treatment by Tina towards her partner. You are about to have a talk with Tina. How do you approach this conversation?

#### **Back Story- Tina -Age: 32**

Tina has dated many people in these two years, but all separated in the end. Sometimes because she is busy at working, sometimes because she is not satisfied with the person. In some points, she is a hard-working person but bossy at the same time. Since she started to date with the support staff, she founds it is easier. They have a lot of time to see each other, and they have many common topics, the most important thing is the support staff is good at understanding her, and has very good temper.

### **Scenario 3:**

Mike was a good and experienced employee in your team, and very kind to others. However, recently you heard his team leader complain that he displays anger and bad temper at some employees – more than once - especially at junior employees during work. This behaviour made some employees disappointed and afraid to talk with him. You have noticed that this seems to have made it more difficult for others to complete their work effectively, and this seems to have affected their morale. You are considering having to talk with Mike, to try and resolve this problem, but you are also need being careful and to ensure your position. After all you know that he has a reputation as a good, experienced and considerate worker in the past.

### ***Back Story-Mike- Age: 35***

*Since his beautiful ex-wife divorced him half a year ago, and took his son away from him, he became lonely. He has been trying to see his son several times, but was prevented from doing so by his ex-wife. Nevertheless he still hopes that his ex-wife will come back to him despite there being no sign of this happening. He felt very upset. He has taken to drinking a lot after work to reduce the pain that he feels.*

## Appendix VI - Transcripts Example Two: Role plays Scenario and transcripts-Mike 1

### Transcripts with colour coding

Hierarchical- Red

Egalitarian- Blue

Individualistic- Orange

Fatalistic- Grey

Non code - Black

1

Manager1: 00:00 Hey, how you doing man, how's things?

Mike1: 00:03 Fine.

2

Manager1: 00:04 Yeah? What's up?

Mike1: 00:05 Yeah.

3

Manager1: 00:08 Everything okay?

Mike1: 00:08 Well no, you know. Fine generally, yeah.

4

Manager1: 00:12 Yeah? You seem a bit off, mate.

Mike1: 00:16 Well yeah. There's- there's not a lot of point is there, but, um ...

5

Manager1: 00:21 N- not a lot of point in?

Mike1: 00:24 Well it's just everyone's you know, on at me all the time.

6

Manager1: 00:29 Everyone's ... Sorry mate, I didn't catch that.

Mike1: 00:31 They're just on at me all the time, I just-

7

Manager1: 00:31 Oh yeah?

Mike1: 00:31 Yeah. No one's-

8

Manager1: 00:31 Like- like who?

Mike1: 00:33 No one's listening, you know? Well, um-

9

Manager1: 00:37 Tell me, work with me.

Mike1: 00:41 Well have- have- have- have- have you not heard?

10

Manager1: 00:41 No.

Mike1: 00:41 Well I've-

Manager1: 00:46 (laughs), I was literally just seeing how you were doing mate.

Mike1: 00:50 Yeah, well uh, I'm fine. You know I'm- I'm coping. Ob- ob- obviously you know, it's been hard over the last few months. Um, you know. Just feeling a bit lonely, I don't really feel I've got any friends here to be honest, you know.

11

Manager1: 01:03 Okay. What happened mate? You used be like, full of life, life of the party.

Mike1: 01:09 Uh, well it's just- I mean- I meant t- I mean, it's yeah. It's- it's difficult. I mean, I'm holding together. I suppose I didn't really tell people, you know. I- I- I mean, yeah.

12

Manager1: 01:24 Do you want to go somewhere else? Do you want to go grab a coffee away from work? Do you want to do that?

Mike1: 01:30 It's- I've- I've not- I've not seen my son in months, and uh, my- you know, my wife's left me.

Manager1: 01:40 Oh, okay.

Mike1: 01:42 Um ...

13

Manager1: [01:44](#) Have you spoken to anyone else about it?

Mike1: [01:45](#) No.

Manager1: [01:52](#) No.

Mike1: [01:53](#) And you know, it just- it's hard to just get along with everyone here 'cause, uh ... I- I-

14

Manager1: [01:57](#) Is it because they're a bit younger than you then?

Mike1: [01:59](#) Well p- partly yeah.

15

Manager1: [02:01](#) Yeah.

Mike1: [02:01](#) I-fe-fe-feel other people are, um, perhaps putting a bit of pressure on me. That's- that's- that's all.

16

Manager1: [02:06](#) Okay.

Mike1: [02:09](#) You know, and I just I'm just being myself. And I think I'm doing all right, but people are just-

17

Manager1: [02:12](#) Just kind of grand and you're good

Mike1: [02:15](#) That's it.

Manager1: [02:15](#) Yeah.

Mike1: [02:16](#) That's it.

18

Manager1: [02:17](#)

Oh man, I'm- I'm sorry to hear this. Did you want to take a bit of time off, or do you want to talk about it? You know the- the company offers like, an employee program where you can go and talk about kind of personal stuff.

Mike1: [02:32](#) Okay, well I mean to be honest I-

Manager1: [02:35](#) Yeah. It- it- you don't have to. It's optional obviously, but there's always someone there. I can s- I meant, if you felt comfortable talking to me about it, I'm more than happy to hear, I mean-



Mike1: 02:45 I mean, thanks I suppose. You know, it's good to have the option there to- to- to be honest I think you know, talking these things through is probably a waste of anyway. You know, it's- it's- it's- it's not going to bring her back is it, so ...

19

Manager1: 02:54 Yeah but you- I mean, you can't be stuck like this. I mean, you know, you have to work with it, work through it.

Mike1: 03:01 Yeah, if- if- if I can I suppose, you know. I just don't know how, you know.

20

Manager1: 03:03 Yeah. Uh, I mean I'm not going to advise you, because I haven't been through it myself. But I can imagine it must be tough.

Mike1: 03:19 Yeah it is.

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Manager1: 03:19 When was the last time you saw your son?

Mike1: 03:22 Uh six months ago.

22

Manager1: 03:23 Yeah.

Mike1: 03:24 And I've- I have been trying to see him to be honest. You know, it's- it's very lonely without having you know, your family around you. You put a lot of time into them, you know.

Manager1: 03:33 Yeah.

Mike1: 03:35 That's- that's- that's my real job, I guess. It's- it's gone. That's my passion, you know, you know. I- I'm trying to see her and the- you know. She's- she's- she's blocking me no matter what. And uh-

Manager1: 03:44 Yeah. So it's not going smooth at all then?

Mike1: 03:46 No.

23

Manager1: 03:48 Yeah.

**Mike1: 03:53 And- and- and to be honest, you know, I'm struggling to, you know, get along with everyone here, you know. People are complaining that I'm not getting along with them, and I'm- you know, I am- I am trying, but-**

24

Manager1: 04:00 But I mean mate, you- you- you know. Like you've said, I can imagine you've got a lot on your plate. Yeah, trying to juggle with work, and then going home. It's not going to a happy place is it?

Mike1: 04:10 Yeah. I- I mean there's not a lot on my plate, I'm not doing anything, you know. I just, you know. Sit and have a few drinks at night, and I'm trying to keep hope alive I suppose.

25

Manager1: 04:20 Yeah. How- how about this, what are you doing tonight?

Mike1: 04:25 Nothing.

26Manager1: 04:26 Yeah. I'm free as well, do you want to go for a drink? Let's do dinner.

**Mike1: 04:32 *Well, yeah. Could do I guess.***

27

Manager1: 04:40 Yeah.

Mike1: 04:41 It's not a bad idea. To- to- to-

28

Manager1: 04:41 Stops you from, uh, yeah. Someone to talk to, and we'll just have a chat about this. Away from work, computers, everything.

**Mike1: 04:51 *I- I- I suppose. But I mean I- you know. Ob- ob- obviously I'm just worried that people are going to talk, I mean I know a lot of them [crosstalk 00:04:56] ...***

29

**Manager1: 04:55 *Yeah. Buy they- they don't need to know, this is between you and me.***

Mike1: 05:01 It's- it's not a bad idea.

30

Manager1: 05:02 Yeah. Come and get, you know, take your mind off things.

Mike1: 05:09 Yeah.

31

Manager1: 05:09 Yeah, how about that?

Mike1: 05:09 Yeah.

32

Manager1: [05:12](#) Eight o'clock tonight?

Mike1: [05:13](#) Yeah, that would be nice, sure.

33

Manager1: [05:15](#) Yeah. 1966? (laughs).

Mike1: [05:16](#) (laughs).

Speaker 3: [05:21](#) [inaudible 00:05:21].

34

Manager1: [05:21](#) Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. (laughs).

Mike1: [05:28](#) Uh, oh- oh, forget it mate.

35

Manager1: [05:28](#) Yeah, (laughs).

Mike1: [05:28](#) Uh, yeah. No I- that- that sounds a good idea to be honest mate. I mean I, you know. I- I- I-

36

Manager1: [05:32](#) I bet you can do with some time.

Manager1: [05:34](#) Oh mate, listen-

**Mike1: [05:36](#) *I- I- I- I don't want to bring anyone down. But I mean, it's- it's- it is getting a bit hard to cope to be honest. You know, I'm- I'm- I'm getting irritated with people here, and it's- yeah. That- that-***

37

Manager1: [05:42](#) What- what- what- what's irritating you? Is it your- your colleagues, your team leader? What's- what's happening, what ... Is it anything in particular?

**Mike1: [05:52](#) *Well I mean, it's- I mean, ob- ob- obviously the team leader's, you know, put- put forward complaints. And um, you know, obviously the team members are chatting, and- and that isn't helping. I'm- I'm- I'm trying, you know, I'm trying to- I'm trying to keep it together here.***

38

Manager1: [06:03](#) Yeah. Have- have you spoken to any of them about your situation?

Mike1: [06:09](#) No. Not- not- not- not really. And I- I don't think they want to speak to me about it either to- to, uh, you know. It's- e- everyone's avoid- avoiding me I'd- I'd say.

Manager1: 06:19 Maybe they don't- they d- well obviously if you haven't spoken to them, they don't- don't understand the situation you're in. I mean, you can imagine from their point of view, you- you went from being one of the most experienced guy there, kind of coaching them, and you know, being nice, friendly guy. And then all of a sudden, you know, there- there's a change in you.

Mike1: 06:37 Yeah.

40

Manager1: 06:38 And they kind of-

Mike1: 06:40 Yeah, well-

Manager1: 06:41 And you have to remember that these are- these guys are quite new, they're quite young. They might not know how to handle it.

Mike1: 06:50 Yeah. Yeah, no. I can understand that you know, I'm a drain on- on the team.

41

Manager1: 06:53 Oh I- I'd- I'd- I wouldn't look at it as a drain, mate. Listen, we all go through, like, situations and problems in our life that we have to do on top of work.

Mike1: 07:01 Yeah.

Manager1: 07:01 And that's why people like me, myself, and your teammates are here, you know, with- just because we're managers, doesn't mean we're not people. We're here to help you out through these tough times. And so is the company.

**Mike1: 07:15 *It's- I mean that- that's- that's- that's good to be honest, mate. I'm- I'm- I'm not really expecting that kind of conversation, you know. I'm surprised to hear you say that to me. You know, there's been a lot of talk, and I'm hearing things, and it's- you know. It's just getting me down more. But I'm, you know. It's- it's- it's nice of you to be honest, you know, to try and lend a- you know, lend a helping hand. I- I don't think it's going to help to be honest, mate. But I'm-***

42

Manager1: 07:35 W- w- w- well, hold on a minute. Let's try it. Let's try it. We'll never know. It might help, it might not. I mean, you can be the judge of that. But let's take that first step together.

**Mike1: 07:43 *Yeah, all right. I- i- I'll try. I'll see if I feel up to it tonight.***

43

Manager1: 07:50 Yeah? Just, you've got my work number. Just give me a call. I'm here 'til seven anyway, so I was going to pop out afterwards, just let me know.

Mike1: 07:55 Yeah. I'll give that a go, it's not a bad idea.

44

Manager1: 07:55 Yeah,sure

Mike1: 07:55 Yeah?

**Manager1: 08:05 *Do you want to take the afternoon off, kind of clear you head a bit, and then give me a call later on?***

Mike1: 08:09 No. No, no, no.

45

Manager1: 08:09 You okay, do you want to just get-

Mike1: 08:10 No.

Manager1: 08:11 That's up to you.

Mike1: 08:12 I'll get them talking more. No, no, no, no.

46

Manager1: 08:13 No?

Mike1: 08:15 You know, I've got to just put a brave face on it, and I've got to handle this.. I'll- I'll- I'll try. You know, I'll see how I feel tonight.

47

Manager1: 08:22 But can I ask you one thing?

Mike1: 08:24 Sure.

**Manager1: 08:24 *Just any time you feel frustrated, or this is taking a toll on you, or it's just getting a bit too much. Why don't you just come to my office, sit down with me. We'll grab a coffee, and we can talk.***

Mike1: 08:36 Yeah.

48

Manager1: 08:36 Don't- don't let it build up. Don't let it kind of like, you know, muster.

**Mike1: 08:41 *Yeah. I mean ob- obviously I'd say that it's hard. You know, it's difficult when you're not feeling up to it. Don't really want to talk most of the time to be honest.***

49

Manager1: [08:53](#) Yeah. But you know, my door's always open. You're always more than welcome to come in.

Mike1: [08:54](#) All right.

50

Manager1: [08:57](#) Come on, we've worked for what, 20 years together?

Mike1: [08:59](#) Yeah. It's you know, it feels like enough at this point to be honest. But I- [crosstalk 00:09:08].

51

Manager1: [09:08](#) [crosstalk 00:09:08], is work getting a bit too much, or ...

Mike1: [09:10](#) Well it is on top of everything.

Manager1: [09:12](#) Yeah.

Mike1: [09:13](#) It's the only thing keeping me going at the same time, you know.

52

Manager1: [09:15](#) Yeah.

**Mike1: [09:15](#) *There's- there's no life at home anymore. It's ... Yeah.***  
***Okay, we'll give it a try.***

53

Manager1: [09:22](#) Yeah?

Mike1: [09:22](#) Sure.

54

Manager1: [09:23](#) Okay.

Mike1: [09:24](#) It's- it's- it's nice of you to be honest, mate. You know, it's nice to have a friend.

55

Manager1: [09:27](#) Sure.

Mike1: [09:28](#) Yeah.

Manager1: [09:29](#) Sweet. Treat on me. [both laugh]

## Appendix VII - Transcript Example Three: Evaluation questions and transcripts after role play-Mike 1

### A. Evaluation Questions ----After Role Play

#### Questions for each role-player in turn—For actors

1. How did the other person do? Did they do well?
2. What was the 'feel' of the conversation at the beginning and did the 'feel' change noticeably at different points?
3. What do you feel you will do as a result of having this conversation with them ?
4. What do you expect from them as a result of this conversation having taken place?

#### Question for everyone else? -for the rest Observers -

1. Were there any risky moments?
2. Did the conversation have an objective and was it the same for both sides ?
3. Was it a good conversation and for whom?
4. What do you think is likely to happen next?
5. What might you have done differently if you were 'wearing the manager's shoes'?

### Evaluation -Mike 1 -first review -after role play

- Supervisor: Can we get you in here? Just two minutes. Just stay right there Mike, we've got some questions for you. How is it for you?

- Mike1 (actor) It was fun as I'm sure you can all tell. It was riveting. Obviously, in trying to role play the situation it's slightly difficult to kind of keep the conversation difficult and to sort of challenge him. To be fair, he's offered a very reasonable thing. Kind of unofficial way of trying to **bridge** the gap, and that's probably pretty much the right solution. So obviously if I wanted to keep the

conversation difficult, and I'm in a difficult mood anyway, it's a challenge to sort of repel him as it were. I think it worked.

- Supervisor: **So you knew you had a good idea about what the conversation was gonna be about when you were called in?**

- Mike1 (actor) Well I mean, generally I was expecting it to be in a much more of a disciplinary probably than anything, and I was slightly surprised to see it turned out to offering to deal with it in other ways. He was trying to give me another chance as it were, and I suppose really in the conversation that's where Mike turns around and it's worth the go, because I'm not in trouble.

-Supervisor: **Are you likely to take up this offer of going out for a meal and a drink tonight?**

-Mike1 (actor) If he's capable of it, but even if he's not too drunk by that point already or feeling too down, then I think probably because it feels like a last chance as it were. It's something to grasp onto. There's a hope in it, I guess yeah.

- Supervisor: **And he's offering you an open door for further conversations in his office**

- Mike1 (actor ) Yeah

- Supervisor : when you're feeling a bit

-Mike 1 (actor) : Yeah

- Supervisor: You know

- Mike1 (actor ) He's offering a connection, it's there at anytime but more so it's a genuine, or it feels like, an actual friend and that's--

-Supervisor: Cause managers often say that, you can talk to me at anytime

- Mike1 (actor) Yeah



-Supervisor: **Do you feel like that it's probable that you'll take up an offer like that?**

- Mike 1 (actor): It feels sort of by the book, it feels like he's saying it because he has to. But I mean in my view I think I'm sort of desperate which I'm quite willing to take a chance. I'm skeptical that it'll work, and I'm skeptical that he really means it.

-Supervisor: Yeah

- Mike 1 (actor) But I almost haven't got a choice, it's sort of a survival thing. Yeah just sort of a depressive state I guess.

-Supervisor: Mike, I hope you don't mind waiting outside in the corridor

- Mike 1 (actor) : Sure.

- Supervisor: for five minutes? I've got a few questions for your manager.

- Supervisor: I won't be long

- **Supervisor: This is for everybody really. Did the conversation have an objective? And was it the same for both sides? Here we go, that's right.**

-- Mike1's manager (actor ) I'll sit back there

- **Supervisor: Was it a good conversation, and for who? What do you think is likely to happen next? What might you have done differently if you were wearing the managers shoes? Oh by the way I should tell you, as a manager, he's gonna come out for that drink.**

- - Mike1's manager (actor ) : Oh he is, Sweet

- Supervisor: Yeah, yeah And he's likely to come and knock on your office door when anyone's getting a bit frank or a bit much--

- - Mike1's manager (actor ) : Yeah

- Supervisor: **And so, I think your objective has been met because of the incident. Any observations from the floor?**

- - Mike1's manager (actor ) : How is you want it? Written or verbally?

- Supervisor: Both really

- Observer1 (F) Do you want this done as well, sorry?

-Supervisor: I'd like to hear it spoken and

-Supervisor: And written

- Supervisor: Have some notes as well.

-Observer2(F) : **I think it's a real good conversation between the manager and Mike.** And for me I think if I'm the manager, I would find it is very difficult to start a conversation because I have no idea what happened to a good employee. Especially if something wrong happened to his life, I don't want to make the conversation too private. I don't want to hurt his feelings. So I think if I want to make the conversation go further, I would be very careful about what questions I ask to Mike. Oh and I think the manager did very good to ask Mike out for a drink, because in that environment maybe in a pub, or any place, Mike will share more because the situation is not so serious. Maybe Mike will talk more about what happened to his life, and what he wants to do. Maybe in the moment he is stuck in the situation. But in the future maybe Mike also wants to make some changes. So, I think it is good for the manager to change the environment of this conversation.

- Thank you for Yeah

- Pardon?

- Supervisor: With a usual situation in the workplace.

-Mike1's manager (actor1 ) : Maybe do something else than going to have a drink then.

--Observer2(F) : Yeah the manager just change their topics because the information which Mike gave him.

-Mike1's manager (actor1 ) Yeah that's exactly it, that's what I'm saying everyone, I don't go in with a plan. Because we don't know what he's gonna turn around and say. He might turn around and say yeah I killed a man last night, I feel bad about it yeah, but I mean it. Yeah, you just bear with it on what they say. It's what I've found easier, but funny enough, I learned these things, from actually seven.

-Oh yeah?

--Mike1's manager (actor1 ) : Yeah, because the teacher when you're seven got a law and it's all about open questions and it's letting them speak. Because you find that that is a human thing. That when it is silent between two people, someone will try and fill that gap. Yeah, to let them speak so like I was quite open and I just sat back and just let Mike speak, just let him speak and then do it based on that. And if you do like the setting so you propose something, then you stop and you just wait for their response and then you can't prep the response.

- Observer3(F): I really like the conversation, as a manager and as an employee and as a manager, my next step would be yes without having a meal, having a drink, breaking the ice, getting to know your employee better, my next step would be after that, because you can't leave things there, you need to find a solution, a long-term solution for that, so I would go back to the team leader, have a meeting with the team leader, what exactly is happening in the office? Why is it happening? And what is his role? And why is he not diffusing the situation? And I will have separate chats with the other employees as well. Why are they behaving in such a manner with this person? And find out ways how we can resolve the issue.

- Supervisor: This is the first we've said our conversation

-Observer 3(F): Yeah

-Mike1's manager (actor1 ) : But I would be a bit more careful with, maybe yes speak to the team leader--

- Observer 3(F): Yeah

- Mike1's manager (actor1 ): Explain to him to straight about you can't speak to the other employees, because one thing you kept saying over and over again was the others perception which they weren't receiving, and he kept saying that.

- Observer3(F): But these are confidential meetings.

-Mike1's manager (actor1 ): Yeah I know.

- Observer3(F): He doesn't even know this is happening behind the scenes

- Mike1's manager (actor1 ): It's still human nature, because if your behavior changes overnight then he is going to get suspicious, and be like I went into confidence to my manager, and now everyone fucking knows.

- Observer3(F): Depends what conversation happened with the other team members.

- Yeah

-Observer3(F): How you take it forward, what you tell them, what you ask them.

- Mike1's manager (actor1 ): Yeah

- Observer1(F): Maybe, sort of as a follow on to that,

- Observer3: Yeah

- Observer1 (F) Because you kept on talking obviously about the team and the atmosphere, Maybe having a team building event--

- Observer3(F): Exactly

- Observer1 (F) as a sort of group to try and break the ice, cause it may be that they have certain views and perceptions of him, you said that they didn't know what was going on, but getting to know everyone else, perhaps on an individual basis, might help within that team. Trying to find a way for the team to move forward I think would be a good idea as well.

-Researcher: I just have one question: Do you think he was close to Mike because both Mike and his manager, they are male? Is it because they are the same gender, it provides some convenience. It's like if a female manager--

**-Supervisor: Could a female manager say would you like to go out for a drink can I-- would that have a different connotation?**

-Researcher: Yeah so if you are

-Supervisor: It's a good question

-Researcher: his manager

- Observer1 (F) : No, yeah I think gender would have made a difference definitely.

- Researcher: Yeah, so if you are his manager--

- Mike1's manager (actor) : I say it depends on the manager. I've had really, really hard core female managers.

-Researcher: Yeah

- Mike1's manager (actor): Which you know--

- Supervisor: Could have made that up

- Mike1's manager (actor): You had that respect from the straight go, it depends on the manager and I think maybe because I'm younger but I don't think that women or men makes a difference. It

depends on the manager itself, I've had managers that were female who were way stronger than male managers.

- Mike1 (actor) : Hardly ever say it as well in this specific scenario--

- Mike1's manager (actor): Yeah

-Mike1 (actor): When I say I'm lonely and I miss my wife--

- Observer1 (F) Yeah, exactly.

-Mike1 (actor) If a female manager then said would you like to go out for a drink with me.

- Observer1 (F): Yeah

- Mik1(actor): I may you know--

-Mike1 (actor) : Interpret that in a different way, yeah.

- Mike1's manager (actor): But if, the experienced manager they wouldn't have asked you there. Like after you've said that. They would have, you know, built it up. I think it depends on the experience of the manager.

- Supervisor: Very dynamic, very specific. It really does depend.

- Researcher: Yeah, just wondering, as a female manager, how would you approach it? Have you ever think about it?

- Observer3 (F) I would approach it the same way, there's nothing wrong.

- Researcher: So you would still invite him?

- Observer3 (F) Male employee, do you want to go outside somewhere to have a chat or a drink?  
Nothing wrong with that.

- Researcher: How about everyone other than this?

- Observer4 (F) :I liked the way you approached it, I wrote down that you handled the situation very well, I think it's the way that you deliver it. Even if you are female colleague, there is the way you say it and your body language. If it's suggestive then obviously, people will take it the wrong way, but if you maintain a very professional comradery with your employees, then it won't be taken the wrong way.

**- Supervisor: This was very informal, very equal in terms of status, many of you traveled large distances, from very different cultural settings. Would any of you have been very weary of taking a similar approach? To a case like Mikes'? Does this look strange to any of you? Would you have hesitated in taking this approach to managing this problem?**

-Obsergvrr5 (M): It makes us actually not think the approach very well in this situation I would like to think that's the way everyone thinks we should do it, and about the question about males and females, I actually didn't think about it before. They may think differently and take things differently. But yeah, I think if you do the same way you did with a male with a female, you may consider different way.

- Researcher: So Mike how do you feel?

- Researcher: How did you feel man?

-Researcher: If your female manager invited you for a drink or meal?

- Mike1 (actor): Well, I don't know. It may be that, as you said, I might be slightly less inclined to do so, I might be less inclined to open up perhaps. You know, men don't open up their emotions quite as much to than they do to their wife or something, but most women, they might not show as much emotion to. Whereas, having a drink with a male manager, and since you said I have been there for a long time and so on, I assume we have worked together for quite a while. So it may be that we're on a sort of similar footing, that we feel professionally we are sort of at a similar level, I think I may be more willing to open up. Now I'm sure in this case, I'm probably not going to open up. I'm probably quite depressed in this scenario, and I'm a bit cautious of pouring my heart out. But, I do feel it may be slightly more difficult to open up to a female manager, but once again, it depends how they said it. It may be that I feel that, I don't mean to stereotype the genders here, I feel that they are more caring, that they're more intrigued, and have more empathy towards my situation. I

think I'd be as likely to go out for the drink, and take the chance of a distraction, and a bit of hope with either gender, almost any age probably I might feel a bit ridiculed if it's someone younger or someone who's in a very happy relationship or something. But generally, I think it'll be fairly similar, it's just the effect or the kind of things we'd discuss might be slightly different. I think it was the right solution that you suggested, and I think it's kind of what you need.



## Appendix VIII - Transcript Example Four: Evaluation questions and transcripts by watching recorded video -Mike 1

### Questions

1. What was the feel at the beginning of the conversation, and at what point did it change?

*(Atmosphere, Tempo, Dynamism, Peaceful/Hostile)*

2. Was it a good or bad conversation? For whom and why?

*(Observations, Critiques, Reasons)*

3. What would you, as a manager have done or said differently?

*(Specifics, Changes, Strategies, Skills, Techniques, Ideas)*

4. What was the Outcome (or Outcomes) and what do you think/ feel about it?

*(Aims, After-effects, Predictions)*

### Mike1 -Evaluation-Focus group3

-Supervisor: Okay. **The same four questions, really. And shall we take them straight away? What was the feel at the beginning of the conversation? And at what point did it change, if you felt that it changed?**

-Reviewer 7 (M) : The guy was very depressed in the beginning. He had given up, I assume. But towards the end you could see that he had some positive feelings, that he was willing to work on it, and he was, He changed his, because of the empathy that he was given, I guess, he was ready to work on it.

- Supervisor: So there's the beginnings of hope.

-Reviewer 7 (M) Beginnings of hope, yes.

- Supervisor : Okay. Although he is in a deep hole.

- Yes.

- Supervisor: And he did explain quite a lot about that.

- Yeah, he did.

- Researcher: Any other idea?

- Reviewer 7 ( F ): Well there's quite **a subdued vibe at the beginning, where he's quite introverted.** Didn't really want to talk, sort of giving one word answers. And then **towards the middle**, where the manager started really offering just an informal platform to talk, even threw in some humour, sort of laughter, it kind of was more upbeat. And it did feel like it sort of still ended on quite a subdued note. But there was a little more, like you said, **a ray of hope or positivity.** And I think it's like when he started to realize that there was a genuine interest shown with the questions. He seemed to want to talk, to get it off of his chest. Which I thought was quite positive.

- Researcher: Any more ideas?

- Supervisor: **What was good or bad about the conversation? And for whom, do you reckon?**

- I thinking what's good and bad is the setting was--

- Researcher: Yes.

-Reviewer 6 (M): I think this conversation they're having, **it's a personal conversation**, and it doesn't help in that **environment**. But it's certain, **at the end** you see the gentleman who's actually kind of listening to the conversation. But not actually participating in the conversation. So it doesn't help actually, **the environment**, which the manager should have seen. This guy was sitting at the end, his subordinate. Then there's another woman sitting at the opposite, like that. **I think that setup doesn't do well for that kind of environment.** For that kind of discussion.

- Supervisor: And there was the lawnmowers going on constantly outside. Which of course they do. Why do universities have lawns? Because it means there's always lawnmowing noises all summer long. So that's, just technically the setup is not ideal, is it?

- Reviewer 6 (M): Yeah, the setup I don't think is the best.

- Supervisor: But that happens. Any other senses of whether this was a good or bad conversation? And for whom?

- Reviewer 8 (F) : I thought it was a good, for the manager. And effectively, he wasn't saying a lot, but he was saying enough to try and coax information just around, "Are you okay? "Do you want to talk about stuff?" And I think he recognized it probably wasn't the best environment, so he offered an alternative, saying, "Well would you like to go for a drink?"

- Supervisor: Yeah.

- Reviewer 8 (F) : And he didn't seem to be giving advice, or saying everything would be all right. He was literally just probing for more and giving that platform. Which I think, at the time, was probably what the colleague needed. And it then gave the opening to say, "Actually, "this might be a good idea in the future," or whatever. Which is why he was open to it. So I thought from the manager's perspective, that was quite good. In terms of how he let it flow.

- Supervisor: **Yeah, the manager got a lot of information from that setup, that was withheld with the previous and might well get some more, as well, were they to change the timeframe a little bit. Okay. Any other thoughts on the outcome? Is there anything that you would do differently in the manager's position? Besides finding a better environment for the conversation, changing times. Do you think a more official setting would have been better? In an enclosed office? And perhaps inviting Mike to the manager's office? Summoning him there?**

Reviewer 3 (F) : No, that would be too formal.

- Supervisor: No, that wouldn't work?

- Reviewer 7(M): I wouldn't.

- Reviewer 3 (F) : I think it was a really good thing that he's done it informally. So it's more or less like two friends chatting.

- Supervisor: Yeah.

-Reviewer3 (F) :If you weren't listening closely, you wouldn't see it as a probing session, or out to find out what was wrong with you. It just seemed like two friends who are having a decent conversation. So I felt that was really good.

**- Supervisor: I think that's so interesting, because there is a hierarchical relationship between Mike and his manager. So it doesn't look like a hierarchy, it doesn't feel or sound like a hierarchy. But it is, really. And Mike's responsibilities are different from the responsibilities of his manager. But I take your point, absolutely. It was done in a level-- kind of way.**

-Reviewer3 (F) : Level field, yes.

**- Supervisor: We've lots of references to working for 20 years behind there--**

- 20 years.

**- Supervisor: and being friends. And even referring to the company as a source of support and so on. He was very careful not to use the word counselling. So he said something, I think he said, was it employee program?**

-Reviewer3 (F) : Yes.

**- Supervisor: Which I thought was much better than saying, "We can arrange counselling for you, Mike." Oh, no, counselling is a toxic word, almost, really. So I thought there were little details in the conversation that were well chosen, really.**

- Reviewer8 ( F) I also thought the next steps were quite good. Even though he sort of left it on the colleague to call him, to say, "I finish at seven," this is a distinct point in time where we can have a conversation. I thought that was quite good, rather than say, "Let's have dinner," because probably neither of them would actually go forward and do that. But as a clear next step in the conversation, which I thought was quite good.

- Supervisor: So something's going to happen that evening, even if it isn't going out for dinner.

- - Reviewer8 ( F): Yeah.

- Supervisor: It might be cocktail or a beer or something else.

- Researcher: Yeah.

- Supervisor: So there is a stage two. There's a continuation for tonight. Well, they both survived. Yes.

- Supervisor: There's no threat of chair-throwing here, there's no--

-Researcher: Yes.

- Supervisor: Feeling of insecurity on the part of the manager or of Mike.

**-Researcher: Just I'm kind of interested, if you were manager, would you do trying this manager's approach? Do you think there's any risk ask a colleague out for drink as the HR manager?**

-Reviewer 10 (M) : What do you do? If you've got seven employees with different issues, you can't go out seven nights a week, can you? So it's not very practical, I would say.

-Reviewer 1 (F) I don't know though. If someone is a religious person and they offer them a drink, but maybe--

- Reviewer 8(F) : Yeah, I was gonna say, 'cause he said he goes home and drinks at night. And then he offered him to go out for a drink? So yeah, maybe.

**- Supervisor: A bit of a risk, there. Do you think this line of inquiry would have been different if Mike's manager would have been female? And saying, "Do you want to go out for dinner? "Do you want to go out for a drink?" Or doesn't it matter, their genders--**

-Reviewer 3 (F) I think it depends on the relationship that they have.

- Supervisor: Yeah.

-Reviewer 3 (F): 'Cause if it's someone that they've been buddies, they've been friends all along, and they used to do that in the past, there wouldn't be an issue.

-Reviewer 3 (F): Wouldn't be an issue.

-Reviewer 3 (F): It just depends on what sort of relationship they have.

- Supervisor: Sure, sure.

-Supervisor: Yeah.

-Reviewer 8(F): I think it's an interesting question, though. 'Cause you just think, two guys going out for a drink, even if it's a manager, fine. But given the previous conversation with the HR lady, if they do go out, and there are further complaints, and then they've been out for drinks after work, it could lead to other questions or speculation. Which, although trying to be helpful, is probably not the most secure in terms of potential he said, she said, or HR.

- Supervisor: What sort of accusations do you think might start flying?

-Reviewer 8(F): Uh...From a colleague's perspective, I guess, if they see them out drinking, the same colleagues that are, if he seemed to be getting preferential treatment there could be speculation. There's obviously the whole appropriate relationship, sexual conduct questions. Even if it's innocent-

- Supervisor: Yeah.

-Reviewer 8(F): I think it maybe just opens them both up to that risk.

- Supervisor: Yeah. Uh... the company, a suggestion came out earlier of a third party, a union representative, was your idea. Do you think that would have been helpful in this situation or would it have made the conversation more difficult?

--Reviewer9 (M): We had this experience earlier. I have the conversation with my worker, just both of us. So we had some problem, no record. So he said, he, at the end, he showed me. So we had a life imbalance, not a problem. But no people know the conversation between us. Therefore, when next time, I have a conversation with my worker, I will invite the third party. They have people who

will come here, who mediate the employees. And sometimes he will reduce the argument, the argument between us, very important. Sometimes, because I and my worker have, even others, they have attitude, and some issues. But the third party, they will stand in a neutral position to analyse the situation. So it will help reduce some-- It's very important.

- Supervisor: The smallest group you can have is a group of two, a dyad. Adding a third person to it,

--Reviewer9 (M): Yes.

- Supervisor: makes an enormous qualitative difference to the nature of the conversation.

--Reviewer9 (M) : Yeah.

- Supervisor: I think you're right, there. Any more questions or observations tonight?

- Researcher: I just had a good question, but I--

- Supervisor: Yeah.

- Researcher: Suddenly forgot.

- Supervisor: It'll come back. This happens to me when I'm in the middle of teaching, of course. I want to present a takeaway for you. And I've never done it in five minutes flat. But I'm gonna try and do that. And if I could hand these out.