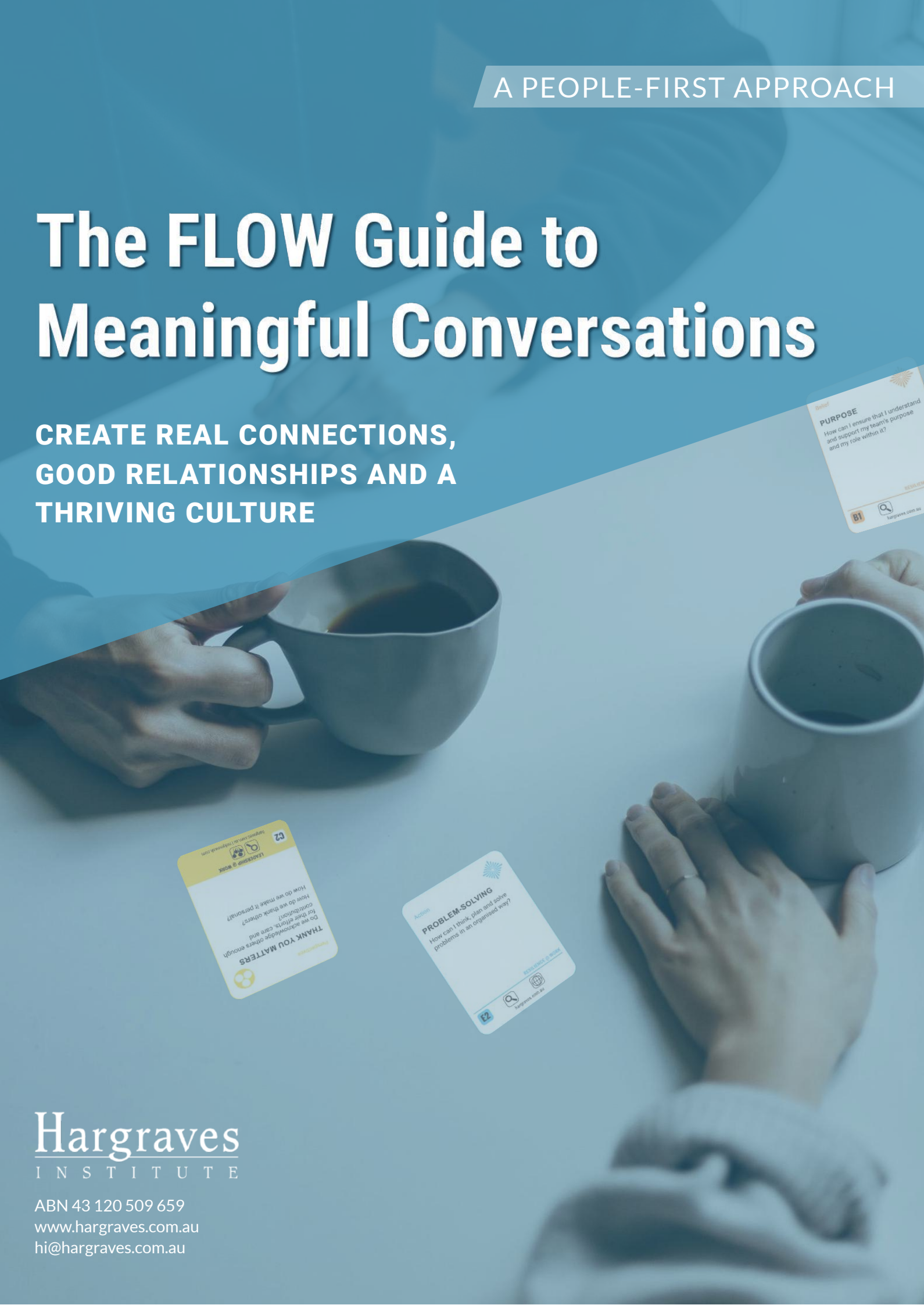
A PEOPLE-FIRST APPROACH

The FLOW Guide to Meaningful Conversations

CREATE REAL CONNECTIONS, GOOD RELATIONSHIPS AND A THRIVING CULTURE



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Why do you need FLOW Conversation Cue Cards?

The secret to successful organisations, teams, committees and boards is how people treat each other, that is, the culture. Culture is created through quality relationships, which are forged through healthy conversations.

But sometimes, conversations at work just don't flow. FLOW Conversation Cue Cards stimulate meaningful discussion between colleagues, team leaders and team members, coaches and coachees, and more.

FLOW Cards work because they:

Provide a shared purpose and focus for discussion.

Let's work out what we can do about this together.

Give permission to raise tricky issues because you choose the cards you want to talk about.

This really matters to me.

Offer the right words when it's difficult to pinpoint the problem.

I didn't know how to say it.

Ask open questions, which beg creative discussion.

How can we do better?

Encourage side-by-side conversations where everyone is equal.

I hear you, and you hear me.

This guide will help you prepare, conduct and follow up on work conversations to make real connections, build good relationships and create a thriving culture.

Get ready for some great conversations!

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How to prepare

When you're planning a conversation at work, it's important to think through the details to create an environment where genuine connections happen, and relationships grow.

Don't have FLOW Cards? See page 10.

To build **Trust**, create an environment where individuals feel safe to be themselves and respectfully say what they feel without fear of ridicule or condescension.

A Sense of Belonging means that people feel valued and heard. To build rapport, look for common bonds. Be aware of personal blind spots when dealing with people who are different.

Focus on **Engagement**, ensuring individuals feel you are open to their ideas and insights and working towards a common purpose. Reach out and respond constructively; be reliable.

To prepare for your conversation:

1. **Plan**
   Who will the conversation be with?
   Why are you meeting? Is there a clear purpose?
   How will you meet? What resources will you need?
   What is the desired outcome?

2. **Materials**
   What are you going to focus on? (This will influence what materials you'll need.)

3. **Design Your Process**
   One-on-one conversation
   On your own
   With your team
   With other leaders

4. **Actions and Next Steps**
   Agree and commit to an action plan

5. **Reflect**
   On opportunities to improve

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1. Plan

Use these guidelines to think through your conversation plan.

Who?
- A member of your team
- Your coach or mentee
- Your team as a group
- Your manager, leader or supervisor
- Other teams
- Event attendees

Why?
- Regular team member check-in
- Performance check-in
- Coaching call
- Idea generation
- Wellbeing check
- Ice-breaker

Desired outcome(s)?
- Ideas
- Performance improvement
- Information
- Wellness check
- Connection and relationships

How?
- In-person
- Online
- In a group or team
- Or on your own.
- At an event or conference

When and where? Online or in-person?

Once you've decided on the details, share any required resources with participants well beforehand so they can ponder. For example, give them a pack of FLOW Cards or share digital cards*.

When can you use FLOW Conversation Cue Cards?

ONE-ON-ONE
In pairs or a small group

ON YOUR OWN
e.g. coaching yourself, preparing for a performance review, planning

WITH YOUR TEAM
e.g. a team conversation, Team Day, Planning Session, collaboration activity, kick-starting a project team, silo-busting

WITH OTHER LEADERS
to focus on improving systems & practices across the division or organisation e.g. Leadership Session

** To support delivery at scale, a full set of drag & drop digital images is available when you order 50 or more packs of FLOW Cards.*

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2. Materials

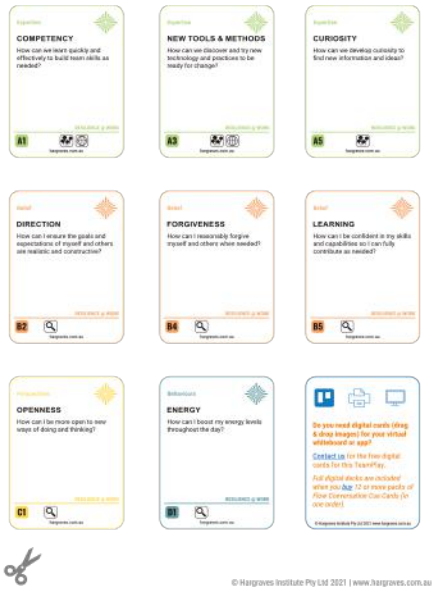
What materials will you need?
This depends on what you are going to focus on.

FOR EXAMPLE:

A particular topic?
Leadership (WE) or Resilience (ME)

A category?
Expertise, Belief, Perspectives, Behaviours, Actions, Culture, Relationships, Infrastructure

A curated selection of cards?



Or the whole pack?
Both topics, deliberate or random selections.

1 pack, 2 topics, 8 categories, 3 groups...countless conversations

3. Design your process

"Focusing on cards takes the attention from individuals/self-absorption."

ONE-ON-ONE'S AND FEEDBACK CONVERSATIONS

1. Agree which topics, categories or groups you will explore.
2. Read those cards and identify the ones most relevant to you. Choose 3 or 4.
3. In your one-on-one, share why you chose these cards. (We suggest a maximum of 4 cards each per conversation.)
4. Remember to develop an Action Plan from your conversation.

Make sure each participant has their own FLOW pack so they can think about the questions before your one-on-one.

For Coaching/Mentoring Programs

Agree on a schedule of FLOW coaching or mentoring sessions. For example:

- **2 sessions:** One topic per session *(Leadership, Resilience)*
- **8 sessions:** Both topics, one category per session *(Expertise, Belief, Perspectives, Behaviours, Actions, Culture, Relationships, Infrastructure)*
- **16 sessions:** One topic, one category, per session.

Follow the One-On-Ones process to deliver your coaching/mentoring session.

Don't have FLOW Cards? See page 10.

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3. Design your process

ON YOUR OWN

Find the 24 cards (single deck) or 48 cards (both decks) with this icon.

1. Read these cards. Select all those you think are most important for leadership and/or resilience in your workplace.
2. From your selection, identify the cards most relevant to you in your current work situation.
3. Choose 4 to 8 of these cards as questions/areas you need to work on.
4. Write down actions you can take to address these areas.

Prioritise according to "I can do this..."

- Now
- Over the longer term
- With support from other people

Use the cards when preparing for your next performance review to start a conversation about what you need to move forward.

FLOW Template

Use the template in any FLOW session to help think through the issue.

Question	
Category	
Tell a story to explain why it matters to you	
What is the impact on you and others?	
Do you think it matters to others? Why?	
What can we do about it?	

Repeat the process periodically to welcome newcomers, realign your team, identify new priorities etc.

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3. Design your process

WITH YOUR TEAM

Find the 24 cards (single deck) or 48 cards (both decks) with this icon.

1. Individually, read all these cards. Select those you think are most important for leadership and/or resilience in your team.
2. From your selection, identify the cards most relevant to your team's current work situation.
3. Break up into pairs to compare and discuss your choices. In your pairs, agree on 3 or 4 cards as questions/areas you think your team needs to work on now.
4. Come back together and, as a team, review all selected cards and choose 4 to 8 for your team to address.

Agree on actions for the team. Prioritise according to "we can do this..."

- Now
- Over the longer term
- With support from the organisation.

In A Face-To-Face Workshop

Share cards from one pack or one topic around the group so each person receives multiple cards. Ask them to choose the cards which are important to them. Then have each person share what their chosen cards mean to them. Swap cards for continuing conversations.

"Change your team from being passively managed to be actively participating."

Don't have FLOW Cards? See page 10.

Repeat the process periodically to welcome newcomers, realign your team, identify new priorities etc.

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3. Design your process

AS AN ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP ACTIVITY

Find the 24 cards (single deck) or 48 cards (both decks) with this icon.

1. Individually, read all 24 cards. Select those you think are most important for leadership and/or resilience in your organisation.
2. Consider the current context. From your selection, identify the cards you think are most relevant to your department/division/organisation.
3. Break up into pairs to compare and discuss your choices. In your pairs, agree on 3 or 4 cards as questions/areas to address at a strategic level.
4. As a group, review all selected cards and choose 4 to 8 priorities for your organisation.
5. Agree on actions.

Prioritise according to "we can do this..."

- Now
- Over the longer term

Consider the cards that team members have selected in previous sessions. Can you identify trends or broader issues?

For All Leaders And Teams

Design and deliver a feedback campaign across multiple teams and locations where teams use the same cards in sequence. Collate and analyse data on which cards are selected and why to develop a deeper understanding of your current work culture.

"The Cards make it easy to have better conversations and listen to my staff about what matters to them. The clever coaching questions are clear and help me make people feel safe to express their voice."

Repeat the process periodically to welcome newcomers, realign your team, identify new priorities etc.

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4. Actions & Next Steps

Developing an action plan is critical.
It sends a message that the conversation was important, voices were heard, and outcomes were valued.

We suggest you:

- List the group's questions in priority order.
- Ask participants to nominate which question they want to work on.

For each question, agree:

a) Who is responsible for leading action? (Accountability)
b) What are the next steps and milestones? (A Sense of Progress)

Organise a follow-up session for each priority question.

What if you don't have FLOW Cards?

Developed in collaboration with Ricky Nowak, Leadership Expert and Coach, FLOW Conversation Cue Cards utilise our Better Questions Approach.

Each deck reflects the open questions from the Leadership@Work and Resilience@Work Deep-Dive Question Tools (canvases). These QTools can be found in the related toolkits, which are available to download via our website.

What's the difference?

We use **QTools** (deep-dive canvases) for individual and team activities. Developed through extensive research, they can be set as homework, form part of a feedback session, or used as a team-building activity. They can also bring a unique element to client projects, especially when customised or shaped through employee feedback and interviews.

FLOW Conversation Cue Cards are tactile and visual. Easy to share, shuffle and exchange, anyone can use them for in-person coaching, feedback conversations, group activities and workshops. They also add a hands-on element to hybrid team activities, workshops and group activities.

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5. Reflect

> *We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience.*
>
> (John Dewey)

Reflection is critical. It helps us to make sense of experiences by linking to what we already know, finding uses and highlighting gaps.

Reflect on your conversation as an opportunity to improve collaboration:

A sense of progress motivates people to keep going. The feeling that you are both moving forward with an overall direction or goal and regular, constructive feedback.

Competence comes when individuals feel supported to perform at their best.

Encouraging people to have control over their work develops **autonomy**. Hierarchies operate so that those at the top of the structure have autonomy and those at the bottom have almost no control. Teams allow much more distributed control among members; however, in many cases, these opportunities are not realised. Good conversations help individuals identify opportunities.

"I found the card/gaming method was a great way to collaborate and innovate by free-thinking. It allowed people to open up and get to know each other more rapidly compared to verbal/virtual only."

***FLOW* Conversation Cue Cards**
Because conversations at work don't always flow easily
Order Now

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Other Ways to Use FLOW

Online

Make sure everyone has their own pack or access to digital cards via your preferred whiteboard.

Select one category and ask each person to choose the cards which are important to them. Then, taking turns (to get everyone talking), have each person hold up or highlight one chosen card at a time and share what that card means to them. Swap categories for continuing conversations online.

** To support delivery at scale, a full set of drag & drop digital images is available when you order 50 or more packs of FLOW Cards.*

For People-Leaders

Select one topic or category to discuss in your next team meeting and share those cards. Have team members choose the cards that are important to them. These cards form the foundation for team discussion during the meeting.

For HR Leaders

Use the cards to better understand culture and diversity across teams and locations.

Consulting With Clients Or Customers

Share the cards from one pack, topic or category and invite your client or customer to choose one or two cards that resonate.

At A Conference

Use FLOW as an ice-breaker. Engage large groups through fun and insightful activities.

Share random cards and invite participants to:

- Find others with a card from the same category and introduce themselves.
- Form random groups based on common card numbers, letters or categories.
- Introduce themselves to the person sitting next to them and spend a minute discussing what their card means to them.

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Tips for positive conversations

The most important thing is to **be genuinely interested** in the person you're talking with. Ask **good questions** and really **listen** to the answers.

Take turns in the conversation so that each person has equal airtime. **Embrace differences** and build on commonalities. **Assume the best** of the other person. If you disagree, ask questions to better understand their point of view.

Remember, you'll be talking about opinions and feelings, so don't dismiss the other person; try to see things from their perspective.

Before The Conversation

- Make sure you've scheduled enough time.
- Find a suitably comfortable space if it's in person.
- Check your technology if it's online.
- Prepare the cards or digital cards (online).
- Share links, cards, and templates.
- Frame expectations about the conversation so that participants are comfortable.

During The Conversation

- Build rapport.
- Set a duration and explain the purpose.
- Be kind.
- Listen.
- Acknowledge.
- Ask questions to probe and better understand.
- Give participants time-don't rush them.
- Be open.
- Agree on follow-up actions.
- Tell them to contact you if they think of anything else.
- Thank them for their time.

After The Conversation

Take action to show that the conversation mattered. For example:

- Write a thank you note or email and confirm agreed outcomes.
- Agree on a time to follow up.
- Reflect.

Organising a conference?
A customised, branded box is a cost-effective, unique gift or giveaway for participants.

Contact us

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Hargraves Institute

Hargraves Institute is Australia's first innovation consultancy founded on community and collaboration. Through a proven approach, tools, and services, we help you make change happen.

Our People-First Innovation and Tools Approach focuses on people skills to improve relationships and culture in organisations. Through coaching, training, and facilitation, we empower individuals with the tools and knowledge they need to succeed - developing confident leaders, thriving teams and high-performing organisations.

Since 2006, we've been researching and developing tools and programs to help individuals, teams, and organisations collaborate in healthy and productive ways. FLOW Conversation Cue Cards incorporate our proven approaches, including:

Hargraves' Collaboration Model
Our collaboration model and research reflect the six elements that underpin healthy collaboration: Autonomy, Competence, A Sense of Progress, Belonging, Trust, and Engagement. Use the framework to pinpoint areas for improvement, start feedback conversations and identify strategic needs.

Hargraves QTools
Listening is important, but first, you must ask the right question. Our open-ended question tools and cards will help you explore a variety of topics, including leadership, resilience, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, innovation and digital collaboration. These question sets give people permission to raise issues safely and plan actions with an open mind and in good faith.

Serious fun
We incorporate some "serious fun" in all our offerings to create a mood that makes it easy to learn from mistakes and try new things. The fun part: engaging people in fun activities builds stronger relationships, creativity and innovation. The serious part: participants focus on real issues and leave committed to action.

Draw on our experience to deliver a unique approach with real benefits –
for you, your team, and your organisation.

Contact us to explore the benefits of a people-first approach

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FLOW Conversation Cue Cards were developed in collaboration with leadership expert and coach, Ricky Nowak.

RICKY NOWAK LEADERSHIP IS INDIVIDUAL