

THE ART OF FOCUSED CONVERSATION

"ICA's Focused Conversation Method can help people reflect together on just about any subject. It can help people resolve an office quarrel, develop a strong marketing strategy, share reflections at a friend's birthday party, or discuss a movie."
(Stanfield, R., 2000, p. 17)

The focused conversation uses questions at four levels:

1. **The objective level** - questions about facts and external reality
2. **The reflective level** - questions to call forth immediate personal reaction to the data or internal response, sometimes emotions or feelings, hidden images and associations with the facts. Whenever we encounter an external reality (data/objective) we experience an internal response.
3. **The interpretive level** - questions to draw out meaning, values, significance, and implications
4. **The decisional level** - questions to elicit resolution, bring the conversation to a close and enable the group to make a resolve about the future.

There are many advantages to using this method:

- It is extremely versatile, which means that it works well with groups of strangers, as with long-term colleagues. It works with people of mixed backgrounds and ages.
- The process has a way of sidetracking politicking and powerplays. It pushes people to be creative rather than critical.
- This method applies a structure to the thinking process, which prevents a conversation from drifting aimlessly along. It saves time by reducing meeting times through a disciplined group thinking process.