

Understanding the Kitchen Table Conversation

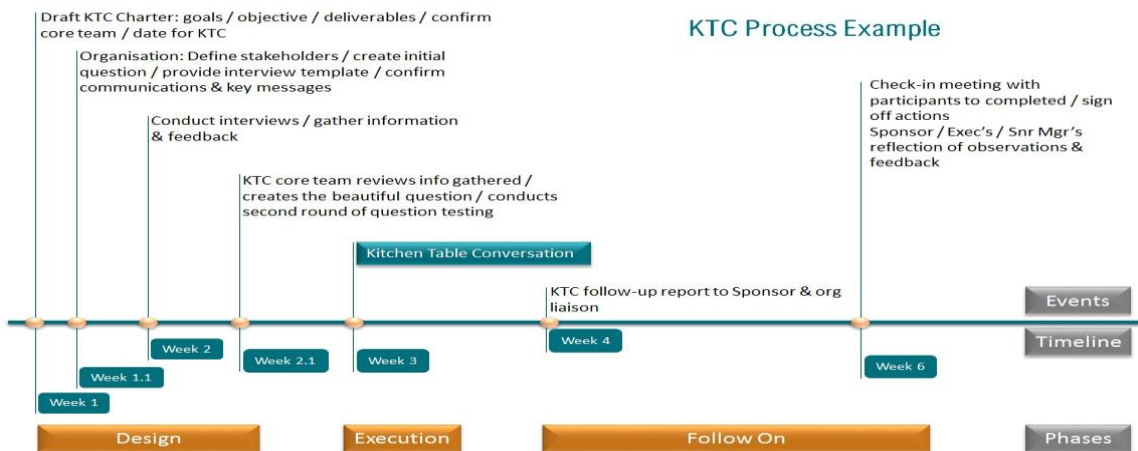
Although Kitchen Table Conversations (KTCs) can be applied to a myriad of situations and used to focus energy to achieve a variety of goals (see chart 1). Kitchen Table Conversations work because they adhere strictly to a process that is designed to build engagement and energy around the question.

Kitchen Table Conversations are used to....	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Generate ideas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Create ground-breaking discoveries b. Brainstorm mutual opportunities c. Identify program development opportunities d. Create or develop themes for action plans e. Design/assess sustainable business practices f. Develop performance metrics 2. Conduct research: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Share/identify issues, challenges & concerns b. Conduct stakeholder research c. Gather feedback on the customer experience d. Create a strong platform of understanding during strategic planning 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Clarify information: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Define value-add b. Assess product mix effectiveness c. Pinpoint/create understanding of industry trends d. Identify significant trends Pinpoint differentiators e. Drill down into important topics 4. Engage audiences: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Engage stakeholder groups b. Define or improve the customer experience c. Improve customer service

Process Phases

The process of designing the Kitchen Table Conversation is an interesting mix of vigorous project management blended subtly with standard organizational development practice & principles. While the KTC process meticulous follows project and/or event design and management principles, above all, the KTC process is guided by the principles of respect, inclusion, collaboration, authenticity, self-awareness and empowerment. The process steps can differ in time to implementation and structure depending upon the size of the group but general steps include:

1. Contracting with sponsor and organisational liaison
2. Initial Fact Finding and question development with core team
3. Stakeholder Assessment with representatives impacted by the presenting issue (including advanced Coaching Sessions with core team)
4. Initial Interviews, assessment & Interventions for question refinement and stakeholder engagement
5. Kitchen Table Conversation(s) (each, usually 2 hours)
6. Report & next steps, including an assessment of the KTC(s) (this is usually a meeting with the sponsor and organisational liaison but can include core team members)



Keys to Success

There are 3 elements that we view as critical to the success of any Kitchen Table Conversation: Engagement, The Beautiful Question, and Boundaries & Guidelines.

Boundaries & Guidelines



The reason KTCs work so well is that clear boundaries are established at the beginning of the process. We use a very specific script that empowers and sets clear expectations and boundaries for the interaction. During the Initial phase of the process the core team is reminded of these general elements that run across all Organizational Change interventions. The:

- ... **needs of the stakeholders:** It is important to pay particular attention to ensure full consultation and fact finding is conducted. Without engaging all stakeholders, your Kitchen Table Conversation will not be as successful as it could be.
- ... **need to cooperate:** Collaboration & cooperation are integral to the success of the Kitchen Table Conversation. A small group or even 1 person can throw off question development and design. Remember to ask, “who needs to be involved in this design work?”
- ... **need to set clear expectations:** The KTC process is collaborative and depends upon all doing their part. Clear expectations around deliverables, support and outcomes, transmitted to the core team is integral to success.

The Beautiful Question

No two questions are ever exactly the same but here are a few example categories that they can fall into:

- ... Understanding the customer experience
- ... Changing attitudes / expectations around services or products
- ... Project or program integration
- ... Accountability and responsibility sharing within or between groups
- ... Customer interaction and optimization
- ... Barriers to development / understanding
- ... Need for innovation
- ... Process or department integration
- ... Reorganization or rebranding
- ... How culture shapes the way the organization works
- ... Organizational structure and its influence on collaboration and decision making



Engagement

The focus of all KTC activities is to ensure optimal engagement of all stakeholders. During the design phase, question(s) refinement is used to engage key influencers and to prepare for the follow-through that will ensure the needed results. It is also used to test hypotheses and dispel assumptions.

- ↳ Testing the question and gathering feedback before the KTC is a primary strategy for gaining engagement for the KTC event
- ↳ Publishing the questions before the event is important so that participants have time to think about their answers and feel that they can thoughtfully interact with others around the table
- ↳ Calling everyone to action before closing the KTC allows work to continue and momentum to be sustained

