

# Talk vs Action

Last September, we designed and facilitated a kick-off in Zurich for an organizational change initiative within a global corporate IT division. The meeting was large (200 leaders participating) and complex (both logistically and content-wise), one of the hardest with which I've ever been involved. It succeeded because our design was strong, Kristin's facilitation was skillful, and our client was exceptionally competent.

As evolved as I found this particular client, I still noticed some old-guard mindsets. The biggest was around the value of meaningful conversations. When we were developing our evaluation form for the meeting, one member of the client team objected to an open-ended question about what the participants liked most about the meeting.

"They'll just say, 'We loved the conversations!' like they always do," he remarked.

Basically, he was suggesting that we already knew people loved the opportunity to talk with each other and that the real value of these meetings lay elsewhere.

Perhaps we all do know that people love the opportunity to talk with each other. But that's not how we typically design meetings. In a past life, I worked at a media company that organized lots of traditional, panel-heavy conferences. I always looked at the evaluations, and I always saw the same thing: People loved the hallway conversations, and they wanted more of them. And yet, the conference organizers never, ever responded to that feedback. They could not fathom that the actual value of the gatherings were those conversations.

Skillful means is about holding tensions. Conversations that don't result in actions are anemic. However, denigrating conversations because they are not themselves actions is

tremendously misguided. All too often, organizations are suffering because they don't value meaningful conversations enough, and they don't create the space for those conversations to happen.

Sure enough, when we got the evaluations back, participants overwhelmingly cited the opportunity to talk with colleagues around the world as being the most valuable part of the meeting. The ongoing challenge is finding ways for that conversation to continue to happen.