

6 Steps to a Structured Organising Conversation

▪ 1) Introductions

Introduce yourself, be confident and set the context for the conversation. Most of you will know the coworkers you'll be having these conversations with, so the important thing here is being honest that you want to talk with them about the upcoming strike dates. "Some of your coworkers are really committed to improving on the last round of industrial action, we're trying to talk to everyone in the [department / school] about the upcoming strike dates at the end of the month."

- Who we are
- Why we're talking to them

▪ 2) Issues & Agitation

Figure out what issues are important to your coworker through open ended questions about how the pension cuts and Four Fights issues impact your colleague. "If you could change one thing at work overnight, what would it be?" Always focus on the specific issues your colleague has raised. The goal is to first find out what matters to your colleague, then agitate your colleague about the way things are now, have your colleague acknowledge that changes need to be made, and get your colleague committed to making these changes. Not all the examples below will be relevant to each of your colleagues, so use your best judgement.

- Have you seen how much of your pension you'll be losing? I'm set to lose x%
- How did it feel when they announced the pension cuts?
- Do you see yourself staying in academia with the way things are going?
- What kind of university do you think your students deserve?
- Do you think it's fair that the vice chancellors are causing so much disruption to students by refusing to even negotiate?
- What's it been like working on a casual contract?
- How is your salary keeping up with the rising cost of living?

▪ 3) Vision & Education

This is about raising your coworkers' expectations of what they deserve at work and communicating that to win, they will need to a) participate and b) bring other colleagues & community members with them. Communicate the plan to build this kind of strength. "If only a vocal minority of staff take strike action, will we be able to cause the disruption necessary to win? Will Universities UK take us seriously? In 2018, we forced them to make some concessions on pension cuts, but only through large & disruptive strike action. We will only have enough leverage if a large group of us are standing together, which is why I wanted to chat with you about this." Education is also the technical stuff about what a strike is (withdrawing your labour, not answering emails, not rescheduling teaching), why Swansea UCU is able to take this action (balloting), how strike pay works (Fighting Fund), etc.

▪ 4) Call the Question

Will you join me and [your coworkers / specific people in the department] in taking strike action from March 28 to April 1?

****Note on finances** - a good open ended question that isn't too intrusive if someone gives financial reasons for being unable to participate is "what kind of support do you need in order to join us?" Sometimes it's something really small, or well within the ability of you & your colleagues to provide. As with everything, use your best judgement in broaching these topics with your coworkers.

▪ 5) Inoculation

This is just what it sounds like. You give the worker a little bit of the "poison" they will hear from the employer. If the worker expects to hear the university say that strike action is ineffective and just hurts students, they'll be less surprised when they hear it. This reduces some of the anxiety for the worker once it happens, and it builds your colleagues' trust in their union. "What do you think your students will say when you tell them that they're striking? What do you think Paul Boyle will say about this upcoming round of industrial action?" **The key here is to get your colleague thinking about the university's motives** when they say things like that, which is undermining industrial action. "The university is going to say that going on strike is pointless, and all it does is hurt our students. There will be disruptions to students, but the truth is a strike is entirely avoidable if Universities UK would negotiate in good faith with us. Any industrial action is a result of their choices to force dogmatic and ideological cuts on us at the bargaining table."

▪ 6) Work, Assignment

It might seem counterintuitive to delegate tasks to someone who has just committed to taking strike action! But this is important for two reasons. The first is that it shows to your colleague that their participation is important. The second is that it builds long term capacity. You can ask a coworker to talk to someone they have a good relationship with. "Is there anyone you can talk to about taking strike action?" You can also make plans to meet them on a specific picket line, or make a picket sign about an issue they've raised. "It's great that we were able to have this chat today. I'm so happy you've committed to [joining us on the picket line / talking to so-and-so / making a picket sign about x. Can I touch base with you next week to [talk some more details about the picket dates / see how the conversation went]" The task must be clear and specific, and you should always follow up. Follow up is another way of indicating to your colleague that what you're asking them to do matters.

If a colleague is a hard no on strike action, you can still make an ask of them. "It's great we could have this chat today, and I really appreciate you sharing your [concerns / objections / fears] with me. Can you commit to not covering the work of colleagues who are taking strike action?" etc.

▪ Bonus - Leave the door open

Not everyone you talk to is going to commit to joining you or be supportive of what you're trying to do. If 80% of your colleagues committed to joining the next days of strike action (which would be absolutely fantastic, and perhaps unprecedented!), that still means that 1 out of every 5 people you talk to is going to tell you no. Regardless of what a colleague says about these upcoming strike dates, it's important that you ask them about what they'd be willing to do in the future. Ask them - "what would winning look like? What are you prepared to do to get there?"