



# “The Big Conversation”



The aim of *The Big Conversation* was to ensure employees across this travel company participated in conversations with their manager and team about the company’s objectives and strategy. We wanted every employee to emerge with better understanding of, and excitement about, the direction of TUI UK & Ireland, and their role in achieving it.

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## *The need and the opportunity*

TUI UK & Ireland forms part of one of the world’s leading leisure travel companies, flying more than 5.5 million customers each year. It was created following the merger of two of its best known brands, Thomson and First Choice in 2007.

TUI UK & Ireland has a vision to *Make Travel Experiences Special* and three strategic goals: to deliver earnings of £200m on a turnover of £4billion sterling, to achieve employee engagement scores of 80% and to reach customer recommendation scores of 65%.

TUI believes that the holiday begins not on arrival but from the time people first start thinking about their choices and that the total experience – from first interaction with the company to returning home - is important.

The TUI leadership team believed that every employee, customer-facing or in support roles, played a key part in contributing towards the business’s financial success. They also recognised the importance employees placed on working for a travel company. The business needed to feel like a “fun place to work” with colleagues supporting each other.





However, employee research showed that awareness of the company's goals was very weak: 80% of employees could not name even one of the goals; and one in three could not name any of the three goals. In addition, nearly one-third of employees said they could not openly express their opinions. If TUI UK & Ireland was going to achieve its goals, everyone in the business needed to understand them and see how they could contribute to them.

## 2

### *The challenge*

TUI UK & Ireland has a dispersed workforce of 18,000 people, many working in retail outlets and overseas.

We needed to create an intervention that would build understanding of the business strategy and relate it to the needs of numerous teams operating in very different roles and environments. We also needed to create a process that would address the issue of communication being too one-way. If we wanted people to contribute, we needed a style of communication that invited them to do so and displayed the kind of friendly, conversational culture that was important to business success.

## 3

### *Goal and objectives*

The overarching goal was to build “line of sight” between the activities of individuals and teams and the strategic goals of the business. We wanted a process that would enable people to “get it”: “I see how I fit and what I can do to help”. In support of this, we aimed to:

- Bring to life the company goals and help people understand the strategy.
- Help people understand how they and their team contribute to the business strategy.
- Encourage people to express their views about how to achieve the strategy at a local level.
- Build confidence in the future of the business.





## 4

### *The solution*

To achieve these objectives, we needed team-based conversations focused on the business strategy. We wanted a unifying approach to reflect the fact that every employee contributes to the customer's experience but we also wanted people to have local conversations that were meaningful to them. We decided to create a colourful 'Big Picture' - a visual representation of the company strategy that also looked fun to reflect the nature of the business. There would be one picture to reflect that everyone was working together towards shared goals. Pictures also have the benefit of being very memorable. We coached the leadership group to role model the delivery of the conversations throughout the business.

## 5

### *The Big Conversation*

Co-creation of the picture was as important as the final image. We held sessions with each functional team and they populated the draft with their content. Based on this, we developed a sketch of four islands representing where we have come from, where we are today, delivering our strategy and our vision. We took this to employee forums and invited feedback from every function to develop and test the emerging imagery.

We took a draft to the CEO and his colleagues. During this conversation we found the team making key decisions about the future prompted by the emerging picture – the picture itself was compelling the leaders to be clear and unified about future direction.

We coached seven members of the executive group on how to use the picture as the basis for a conversation about direction and strategy. The CEO talked through the big picture with the group of 70 executives and, breaking into groups of 10, the seven coaches took them through the picture and role modelled how it could be used.

Each function, working with a communication partner, developed its plans to conduct *The Big Conversation*. Every manager would be a participant in a conversation before being a facilitator. Meanwhile, we finalised the managers' pack including a short video from the CEO positioning the work and talking about what the picture meant to him, soft and hard copies of the picture, guidelines to using it and simple notes for action planning templates. We included a soft copy that broke the picture down for those few locations where the use of the big picture would not work and managers needed to use PowerPoint and telephone briefings.





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*Results*

The key metrics against our four communication objectives are:

- 87% said *The Big Conversation* brought to life the goals and helped them understand the strategy.
- 95% said they now understand how they and their team contribute to the business strategy.
- 90% said they were encouraged to express their views during their big conversation.
- 84% believe the business has an exciting future. In addition:
- 90% of managers said the big picture had been an effective tool for communicating strategies and goals to their team.

Following *The Big Conversation* more than one in two people can name all three strategic goals. 62% of these people got the exact numerical target for each goal. (compared with the audit result from October 2010 where just one in five people could name one business goal, and one in three could not name any).

*The Big Conversation* advanced understanding throughout the business and directly supported the achievement of the strategy. The business is on target for its goals, and it delivered record profits in the UK as a result of increased sales of differentiated and exclusive products, with online being the biggest channel. This is particularly impressive given that one of TUI's major UK competitor's saw its shares fall by 95% during the same period.

*The Big Conversation* helped to:

1. Build employees' understanding of the purpose and direction of TUI UK & Ireland and how they, whatever their role, supported it.
2. Engage people in a new way in talking about the business, encouraging them to take ownership for performance.
3. Broke away from traditional top-down strategy communication to a much more discursive, exploratory approach getting away from jargon and 'death by PowerPoint'.
4. Build leaders' confidence in communicating with their teams about strategy.
5. Create more of a one-company ethos despite the varied activities within the business.

*The Big Conversation* has delivered against its goals with measurable hard and soft business performance results. It has been a key enabler that has helped TUI UK & Ireland continue to perform well despite geopolitical and environmental challenges.



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The Big  
Conversation  
Company

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We work for clients throughout the UK and Europe. To find out more about us, or to discuss an issue or a need, please call us in the first instance.

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