

Dialogue

For Meaningful Interaction and Useful Action

Perspectivity originates from the idea that dialogue is needed to achieve meaningful interaction and useful action, especially in complex social situations.

What is dialogue anyway?

Dialogue is having a conversation whereby the participants aim to share and supplement their perceptions on important issues. The main feature of dialogue is the intention of its participants.

The participants have the intention to:

- see the whole beyond the part instead of subdividing a problem into pieces
- seek the connection between the part instead of distinguishing the parts
- question assumptions instead of justifying and defending them
- learn by exploring instead of convincing and selling
- find a shared meaning instead of seeking agreement on one meaning

What to look for?

Dialogue encourages the participants to “open up” the topics of conversation, much like opening a box, in order to broaden the conversation. This will create a multitude of perspectives, opinions and answers; which allows the group to choose the best.

Therefore, dialogue is materially different from discussion or debate, that tend to narrow down the conversation while aiming for one end result, thereby letting useful alternatives go unnoted. The idea is that the quality of cooperation, decisions and results is strongly affected by the way we talk about them.

What are the characteristics of dialogue?

Suspending one’s judgment

We constantly make judgments: beautiful/ugly, safe/dangerous, good/bad etcetera. We cannot not-judge; judging is useful and effective. However, you run the risk of getting “locked-up”, thereby blocking your ability to listen and impeding your creativity and ability to learn. Therefore, it is useful to be aware of one’s judgments and learn to postpone them; let them be for the moment.

Your judgment is not you. If you observe your judgments neutrally, you will be much more open to see and appreciate different approaches and ideas that you would not have thought of yourself.

Abandoning the need for specific outcomes

If you are looking for one specific outcome of a conversation, many possibilities will remain unexplored. Your one solution may not be the best and you even run the risk that the outcome you aim for is no solution for the “real” problem. Exploring the problem and the possible solutions together offers the possibility to find several good answers and choose the best.

Questioning underlying assumptions

We have all developed a way in certain situations to subsequently:

- select data;
- interpret this information;
- base assumptions on it;
- draw conclusions;
- derive beliefs from these conclusions;
- act on the basis of these beliefs.

We do this hundreds of times every day, often subconsciously and everyone does it differently. The pitfall is that we confuse our beliefs with the truth. That leads to misunderstanding and conflict, mainly caused by the desire to be right. Awareness of one’s own thinking and reasoning, making this visible for others and being interested in the thinking and reasoning of others helps to start thinking together and gaining new insights.

Starting and maintaining a dialogue

Some rules of the game:

- focus on shared meaning and learning
- abandon the need for specific outcomes
- listen without resistance
- respect differences
- put position and status aside
- share responsibility and leadership
- address the group
- speak when your spirit prompts you to
- be in the present
- argue and question

