

ARIZONA CIVIC TRAINING – ACT!

Dialogue An innovative form of communication that supports the creation of shared meaning. Through the intentional suspension of judgment and the exploration of assumptions, the participants are asked to both reflectively listen and speak their truth, engaging both the heart and the head (the thinking and the feeling.)

Use to:

- ❑ To create shared meaning among participants with diverse perceptions and opinions in lieu of or prior to other means of communication such as discussion, debate, or problem-solving.
- ❑ To explore thoughts and feelings about a paradoxical situation or circumstance as opposed to a problem that can be solved.
- ❑ To establish a “level playing field” or platform and a basis for creatively moving into problem-solving, decision-making, or action.

Timing:

Circles of dialogue can be anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the complexity and size of the group, the questions being explored and scheduling. It is best if a series of sessions can be sustained regularly in order to surface assumptions and opinions safely.

Preparation:

- ❑ It is important to craft a question that represents the concerns or context that is to be addressed. The question may be prepared ahead of time with input and agreement with the group or it can be created with the group at the beginning of the dialogue session.
- ❑ It is possible to prepare the question in such a way that it considers the paradox of a particular situation or context. Example: How might we create sustainable environments in the face of the great demand for economic growth, short term profit margins and reporting cycles?
- ❑ Introduce that the key to dialogue is the ability to suspend judgment and to reflect both upon what is being said in the group, as well as, what is being thought or felt internally by each participant.
- ❑ Encourage a spirit of exploration and discovery. Create the understanding that if a group can create shared meaning, it can provide a platform for creative thinking and problem-solving.

Implementation:

Dialogue can be used on a continuing basis until the group feels that they have examined enough assumptions, perceptions and opinions to create shared meaning. The group should be 10 or more participants, because a group of 5-9 people can usually “adjust” to each other too easily. Diversity is important and the group should include sufficient representatives of various sub-groups in order to create a “micro-culture.”

Debrief:

Ask the group: What are the key learning points that emerged in dialogue? What assumptions were challenged? Where did judgment occur in your own mind and what did you notice that impaired your ability to listen effectively? Did anyone shift their own opinion or perception based on what was shared by others?

Resources

- ❑ Staffing
 - One person to facilitate the group, as opposed to lead. After a group feels comfortable with dialogue a facilitator may be unnecessary.

- ❑ Equipment
 - Chairs and a flipchart.

- ❑ Space and room set-up
 - Set up chairs in a circle.
 - Choose a room that is small enough to create a contained feeling of safety and closeness and that will be free from interruptions or noise.

- ❑ Budget
 - Cost of facilitator and the time invested by participants.

Documentation:

Major thoughts and ideas can be recorded after the dialogue sessions or at intervals between rounds of participant sharing.

Hints:

Encourage participants to slow down and speak deliberately. Participants can speak in the sequence of the circle if there is a concern that a few individuals might dominate the discussion.

Please contact Gloria Sandvik at 480.425.0890 or 858.792.6469 or gsandvik@infinet-is.com, if you are interested in facilitation, training or coaching in the dialogue technique.