

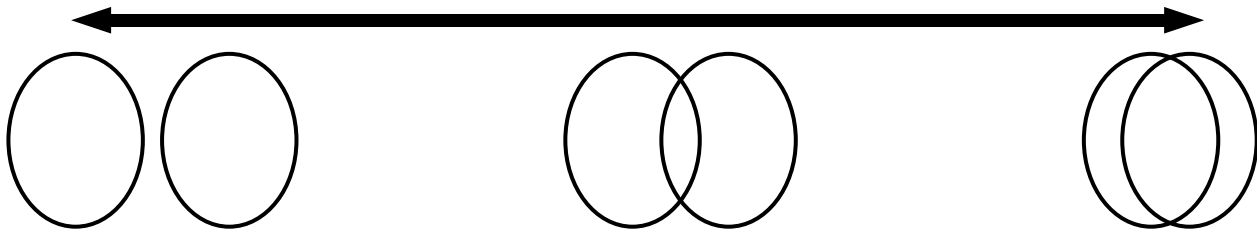
DIALOGUE: A Strategy for Dealing with Conflict

Co-Working Solutions Pty Ltd

Debate

Discuss

Dialogue



Debate, by its very nature, will polarize opinions and create winners and losers

Discussions lead to compromise, a situation where both sides give up something in order to gain something else & no one is happy

Dialogue leads to new understanding of the situation and allows for alternative consensus based outcomes and a greater sense of commitment

The Three Steps of Dialogue

STEP 1

SUSPEND CERTAINTY: Try to understand an issue instead of trying to resolve it

The purpose of Dialogue is not to reach a decision or resolve an issue, but to gain insights about the issue and how people perceive it. Do not seek more than this. This allows you to stay open to changing perspectives, opinions or beliefs based on information another participant shares. In western culture we are action oriented and often quickly move to a decision based on untested and unstated assumptions. Suspending certainty leaves you open to the viewpoints and perspectives of others.

Practical Application:

- When working on a problem with a client or colleague, take time to review the situation thoroughly: listen, uncover intentions and reasoning.
- Ask first: when working on a project or issue, ask others for their ideas first. Listen with the intention of learning something new.
- Ask yourself: what's *not* being said here? and why not?

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STEP 2

CHECK YOUR INTENTIONS: Why do you need to speak?

This concept is at the heart of Dialogue. Always ask yourself, "Why am I saying this, and what motivates me to share this with the group?"

By investigating what motivates us to speak, we can uncover the core feelings, assumptions and meanings an issue might have for us. It can also help to identify any filters we're using to define our world as right and others' as wrong. An easy way to begin checking your intentions is to simply ask yourself. Unhealthy intentions might include power struggles, the need to be right, insecurity, and looking for quick fixes rather than wanting to learn from another person--all of which inhibit true understanding and successful Dialogue.

Practical Application:

Try swapping sides in a conflict situation: List the points you feel the other person would make in their defense. Have the other person do the same for your position. Then ask yourself what assumptions you based these comments on. Test your assumptions with your partner.

STEP 3

EXPLORE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS - and respectfully check others' assumptions.

This is not an easy thing to do. Our own opinions we see as "the truth" while others see their opinions as "the truth" and often our "truths" are at opposite ends of the spectrum. So, what are these assumptions we are using to validate our truths? And at the same time repudiate the other person's? And that often lead us to the poor solutions? And negative attitudes towards others?

Albert Einstein put it nicely: "Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by the age eighteen."

Practical Application:

First test your own. Ask yourself, "what assumptions am I basing this position on?" Then taking great care, and with great tact, ask the other person what assumptions they are basing their positions on. Try a phrase like, "I want to understand what's led us to where we are on this problem. Your comment about Y leads me to believe that you think... Is this true?"

When To Use Dialogue?

A formal Dialogue process isn't always the best approach to take with a group in business; it's another tool in your communication toolbox. However, there are instances that are ripe for Dialogue:

- When there's no alignment on purpose or direction
- When a needed level of commitment for change is lacking
- When a group is stuck and can't seem to move forward

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Also, the group dynamics must be in place for Dialogue to be successful. These dynamics include:

- A leader willing to give up the lead
- A high level of safety with each other
- Someone familiar with Dialogue and willing to coach the group, if needed
- Group members with the patience and desire to learn

Preparing Yourself for Dialogue

Dialogue begins with one person, and that person is you. The next time you're in a situation where there's no alignment on purpose or direction, or a needed level of commitment for change is lacking, or when a group is stuck and can't seem to move forward, ask yourself the following questions to spark the Dialogue process:

- What am I defending?
- What is this about?
- Am I trying to resolve the issue or understand it?
- What filters am I using?
- Am I willing to be influenced?
- Am I willing to learn?
- What am I not saying, and why?

Remember, this is not a forum to judge or respond directly to someone's comment. Rather, it is an opportunity for everyone to listen to and learn from others and from themselves. Reinforce this if another group member challenges someone else's comment--you can't tell another person what he or she feels.

Dialogue is not the time or the place to judge or debate someone's comment or position. It's a time to listen and learn, from others and from yourself.

If you would like to learn more about this or other organisational learning techniques, then contact Co-Working Solutions directly at:

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