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## **Dialogue**

### **A note for consultant to help use Dialogue in an organization.**

*Please add ideas from your experience in this note.*

#### **How to get a helicopter view on Dialogue?**

Go to Wiki: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogue>

#### **David Bohm defined the basics of Dialogue to serve in an organization**

The physicist David Bohm (1917 -1992) was an American-British quantum physicist who contributed to theoretical physics, philosophy of mind, and neuropsychology.

Go to Wiki: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohm\\_Dialogue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohm_Dialogue) :

*Bohm has introduced the concept of a dialogue stating that dialogue can be considered as a free flow of meaning between people in communication, in the sense of a stream that flows between banks.*

*These "banks" are understood as representing the various points of view of the participants.*

*In practical terms, a Bohm dialogue, twenty to forty participants sit in a circle for a few hours during regular meetings, or for a few days in a workshop environment. This is done with no predefined purpose, no agenda, other than that of inquiring into the movement of thought, and exploring the process of "thinking together" collectively. This activity can allow group participants to examine their preconceptions and prejudices, as well as to explore the more general movement of thought. Bohm's intention regarding the suggested minimum number of participants was to replicate a social/cultural dynamic (rather than a family dynamic). This form of dialogue seeks to enable an awareness of why communicating in the verbal sphere is so much more difficult and conflict-ridden than in all other areas of human activity and endeavor.*

*Participants in the Bohmian form of dialogue "suspend" their beliefs, opinions, impulses, and judgments while speaking together, in order to see the movement of the group's thought processes and what their effects may be.*

*"...it may turn out that such a form of free exchange of ideas and information is of fundamental relevance for transforming culture and freeing it of destructive*

*misinformation, so that creativity can be liberated." David Bohm*

### **Are there different levels of dialogue?**

Otto Scharmer – Theory U – defines different stages of Dialogue

- 1 – Downloading. Talking nice. Politeness
- 2 – Seeing. Talking through debate
- 3 – Sensing. Reflective dialogue. Inquiry.
- 4 – Presencing. Generative dialogue. Flow.

### **Examples of dialogue in organizations:**

- Help a team solve a relational problem.
- Slow down tension and stress with dialogue groups.
- Solve tough problems.
- Learn how to solve tough problems (while solving them at same time).
- Executive committee basic way of working (the dream!)

### **What are the signs of a culture of dialogue in an organization?**

- Decisions are taken after considering the ideas and opinions of people concerned.
- Dialogue sessions are formally organized.
- The vision is elaborated in a way that permits to members of the organization to contribute to it.
- People daily work at ease in complex situation.
- Meetings are closed with sharing observation on the way of working together in that meeting and in future ones.

### **I as individual, or my team, my organization, what can I/we expect from a Dialogue?**

- Address an issue with a variety of view points.
- Discover an image of myself/our team/our organization through the representations of others.
- Create, recreate, preserve the creative tension.
- Follow a living process.
- Identify my/our own mental models.
- Understand the individual and collective hidden processes.
- Explore defensive routine of people.
- Create a climate of relaxation.
- Tell the truth.

### **What can Dialogue give to the world?**

“Never forget that a small group of committed people can change the world. In fact, it’s the only thing that ever has”. Quote from Margaret Mead.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret\\_Mead](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Mead)

*For Peter Senge – The Fifth Discipline - The discipline of team learning starts with ‘dialogue’, the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine ‘thinking together’. To the Greeks dia-logos meant a free-flowing if meaning through a group, allowing the group to discover insights not attainable individually.... [It] also involves learning how to recognize the patterns of interaction in teams that undermine learning. (Senge 1990: 10)*

*The notion of dialogue that flows through The Fifth Discipline is very heavily dependent on the work of the physicist, David Bohm (where a group ‘becomes open to the flow of a larger intelligence’, and thought is approached largely as collective phenomenon). When dialogue is joined with systems thinking, Senge argues, there is the possibility of creating a language more suited for dealing with complexity, and of focusing on deep-seated structural issues and forces rather than being diverted by questions of personality and leadership style. Indeed, such is the emphasis on dialogue in his work that it could almost be put alongside systems thinking as a central feature of his approach.*

True learning organizations are a space for generative conversations and concerted action which creates a field of alignment that produces tremendous power to invent new realities in conversation and to bring about these new realities in action. Fred Kofman and Peter Senge, *Communities of commitment, Organizational Dynamics*.

Strategising depends on creating a rich and complex web of conversations that cuts across previously isolated knowledge sets and creates new and unexpected combinations of insights. Gary Hamel, *The Search for Strategy*, Fortune.

Dialogue is the central aspect of co-intelligence. We can only generate higher levels of intelligence among us if we are doing some high quality talking with one another. Tom Atlee, *Co-Intelligence Institute. The Tao of Democracy*

I’m suggesting that there is a possibility for a transformation of the nature of consciousness, both individually and collectively, and that whether this can be solved culturally and socially depends on dialogue. That’s is what we are exploring. David Bohm, *On Dialogue*.

Our human existence is one in which we can live whatever world we bring about in our conversations, even if it is a world that finally destroys us as the kind of being that we are. Indeed this has been our history since our origins as languaging beings – namely, a history or creation of new domains of existence as different networks of conversation. Humberto Maturana and Greda verden-Zöller. *The Origin of Humanness in the Biology of Love*.

Peacemaking. See Adam Kahane using Dialogue to work on tough international conflicts in the world

### **How Dialogue is different from other kinds of communication?**

According to Dialogue a Proposal [Bohm, Factor, Garrett], the Bohm kind of dialogue should not be confused with discussion or debate, both of which, says Bohm, suggest working towards a goal or reaching a decision, rather than simply exploring and learning. Meeting without an agenda or fixed objective is done to create a "free space" for something new to happen.

A dialogue is a reciprocal conversation between two or more entities. It is an effective means of on-going communication rather than as a purposive attempt to reach some conclusion or to express some viewpoint(s).

Conversation is more of purposive attempt to reach some conclusion or to express some viewpoints(s) among two or more entities.

Conversation is a form of interactive, spontaneous [communication](#) between two or more people who are following rules of etiquette. See more: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conversation>

### **Bohm vision of a Dialogue session**

No predefined purpose, no agenda, other than that of inquiring into the movement of thought, and exploring the process of "thinking together" collectively. This activity can allow group participants to examine their preconceptions and prejudices, as well as to explore the more general movement of thought.

*David Bohm:*

*Dialogue is really aimed at going into the whole thought process and changing the way the thought process occurs collectively. We haven't really paid much attention to thought as a process. We have ENGAGED in thoughts, but we have only paid attention to the content, not to the process. Why does thought require attention? Everything requires attention, really. If we ran machines without paying attention to them, they would break down. Our thought, too, is a process, and it requires attention, otherwise it's going to go wrong.*

*In such a dialogue, when one person says something, the other person does not, in*

*general, respond with exactly the same meaning as that seen by the first person. Rather, the meanings are only similar and not identical. Thus, when the 2nd person replies, the 1st person sees a Difference between what he meant to say and what the other person understood. On considering this difference, he may then be able to see something new, which is relevant both to his own views and to those of the other person. And so it can go back and forth, with the continual emergence of a new content that is common to both participants. Thus, in a dialogue, each person does not attempt to make common certain ideas or items of information that are already known to him. Rather, it may be said that two people are making something in common, i.e., creating something new together.*  
(from *On Dialogue*)

*It seems then that the main trouble is that the other person is the one who is prejudiced and not listening. After all, it is easy for each one of us to see that other people are 'blocked' about certain questions, so that without being aware of it, they are avoiding the confrontation of contradictions in certain ideas that may be extremely dear to them. The very nature of such a 'block' is, however, that it is a kind of insensitivity or 'anesthesia' about one's own contradictions. Evidently then, what is crucial is to be aware of the nature of one's own 'blocks'. If one is alert and attentive, he can see for example that whenever certain questions arise, there are fleeting sensations of fear, which push him away from consideration of those questions, and of pleasure, which attract his thoughts and cause them to be occupied with other questions. So, one is able to keep away from whatever it is that he thinks may disturb him. And as a result, he can be subtle at defending his own ideas, when he supposes that he is really listening to what other people have to say. When we come together to talk, or otherwise to act in common, can each one of us be aware of the subtle fear and pleasure sensations that 'block' the ability to listen freely?*

### **How to organize a dialogue session?**

- Manage the number of participants. 20 to 30 or more is not an issue.
- Manage the place. Observe what participants can see, noise. Pleasant atmosphere? Presence of nature?
- Manage the organization of people in the room. Typically a circle, any participants can see all

others and no special place for leader or host.

- Manage time. Do not launch a dialogue session with lack of time.

### **What are the inner conditions of the dialogue?**

1. *The group agrees that no group-level decisions will be made in the conversation. "...In the dialogue group we are not going to decide what to do about anything. This is crucial. Otherwise we are not free. We must have an empty space where we are not obliged to anything, nor to come to any conclusions, nor to say anything or not say anything. It's open and free" (Bohm, "On Dialogue", p.18-19.)"*

2. *Each individual agrees to suspend judgement in the conversation. (Specifically, if the individual hears an idea he doesn't like, he does not attack that idea.) "...people in any group will bring to it assumptions, and as the group continues meeting, those assumptions will come up. What is called for is to suspend those assumptions, so that you neither carry them out nor suppress them. You don't believe them, nor do you disbelieve them; you don't judge them as good or bad...(Bohm, "On Dialogue", p. 22.)"*

3. *As these individuals "suspend judgement" they also simultaneously are as honest and transparent as possible. (Specifically, if the individual has a "good idea" that he might otherwise hold back from the group because it is too controversial, he will share that idea in this conversation.)*

4. *Individuals in the conversation try to build on other individuals' ideas in the conversation. (The group often comes up with ideas that are far beyond what any of the individuals thought possible before the conversation began.)*

### **As a facilitator what are the ideas to express to start a dialogue session?**

- Tell participants the expected benefits of dialogue (see above)
- Tell participants the rules of Bohm dialogue (see above).
- If appropriate propose common rule of confidentiality on what is said in the session.
- Verify the well-being (bien-être, pleasure to be in here and now) of participants. Why not start with a silence/meditation moment? Why not start with physical relaxation?
- Give time limit.
- Start with a theme.

- Wait for participants to start

### **Dialogue killers: What can happen that may slow-down or stop dialogue momentum?**

- Someone offers to clarify the debate with a powerpoint presentation.
- One or several have fear to express themselves.
- People don't talk personally (personal experience; facts).
- People enter in monologue. There is no room for questions from other participants.

### **As a facilitator, how to behave in a dialogue session?**

- Give the initial theme or reason of the session.
- Help group observe where the debate is focusing, how it evolves.
- When someone is openly out of Bohm rules, make it visible and recall the rules of dialogue.
- Be aware of dialogue killers in the session.
- Observe who is silent; invite to join.

### **As a facilitator, how to close a dialogue session?**

- Ask participants about their new ideas, new ways of acting.
- Ask participants about their observation on the quality of the session.

### **Other Processes using Dialogue in Organizational Development**

- World Café,
- Future search,
- Open space,
- Co-development,
- The ladder of inference,
- ... and some more processes,
- But don't call every meeting a dialogue!

### **Key models good to have in mind when facilitating Dialogue session**

- NLP
- Inference ladder
- Systemic thinking
- Mental models
- Communication process
- Non violent communication
- Breathing
- Meditation

- Coaching attitude

**Good to read to learn more on Dialogue**

- see references at wiki Bohm Dialogue: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohm\\_Dialogue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohm_Dialogue)
- see references at wiki Dialogue: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogue>
- Adam Kahane, Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities
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