

UBS Wolfsberg  
Dialogue working notes of a session

These notes by Richard Field, the developer of the dialogue process, give in explicit concrete detail an example of how he facilitates dialogue processes – with an MSc HRM group. They could be useful for people who want to institute their own dialogue processes.

**Dialogue at SHU**

Dialogue held on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May  
Location: Stoddart Building, SHU

**Preparation:**

**Why?:**

**Contexts (where + where not used):** Use in this group discussion to test my understandings of dialogue to date

**Identity (who would and who would not want these skills):** HR Masters Degree students with Prof. David Megginson watching over us

**Values (What is and is not important to you, about you, about what this new skill gives):** This could give a new insight into each of the group member's behaviours in meetings

**Beliefs (what you may and may not believe about this new skill):** This may help in resolving a key question created by the group

**What?:**

**Concept (what it is):** A process for gaining greater understanding, and perhaps meaning, of others and oneself within the group.

**Principles (why it works):** By suspending one's own beliefs and listening to others, and oneself, with a non-judgemental attitude, one may not only understand better but also perhaps gain new learnings.

**Process (how it works):** Roll out the process in three parts, inputting additional information and eliciting new learnings between each part

**Procedure (how to do it, step by step):**

1. After forming an agreed question, the group to discuss the issue
2. Brainstorm: what went well; what could have gone better; and what action, if any, they intend to take to ensure that the next session is better. List learnings. Then input both a 'way of working' (Dixon 1998) and any initial observations upon how their behaviours might be enhanced
3. Group again discuss the issue
4. Brainstorm: what went well; what could have gone better; and what action, if any, they intend to take to ensure that the next session is better. List learnings. Then input 'stages of dialogue' (Isaacs 1999) and any further observations upon how their behaviours might be enhanced
5. Group again discuss the issue
6. Brainstorm: what went well; what could have gone better; and what action, if any, they intend to take to ensure that the next session is better. List learnings and what each participant is going to do because of their learnings
7. Then, for the whole session, brainstorm: what went well; what could have gone better; and what action, if any, they intend to take to ensure that the next session is better. List learnings
8. If group finish too soon, then input 'perceptual positions'?

**How?:**

Place chairs in a circle  
 Use a flip chart and projector  
 Sit outside group and observe  
 Time-keep

**So what?:**

1. Finally, ask each participant to think of ways in which this could be used by them
2. Share these suggestions in groups of four, and add to one's own ideas where appropriate
3. Share learnings in the main group
4. Thank the group for their trusting

**The dialogue meeting:****Why?:**

**Contexts (where + where not used):** All agreed to participate, in fact, this was a great opportunity to clarify their thinking on criteria they needed for assessing each other the following week

**Identity (who would and who would not want these skills):** Nine HR Masters Degree students for a period of two hours

**Values (What is and is not important to you, about you, about what this new skill gives):** This was not discussed, suffice it to say that this was a most opportune time for the group to progress this issue

**Beliefs (what you may and may not believe about this new skill):** Again not discussed

**What?:**

**Procedure (how to do it, step by step):**

1. **After forming an agreed question, the group to discuss the issue**

- A statement rather than a question was rapidly agreed upon:  
'To devise a fair and consistent set of criteria to enable us to assess each other within a group context'
- Twenty minutes was spent discussing and writing on a flipchart the beginnings of a set of criteria

2. **Brainstorm: what went well; what could have gone better; and what action, if any, they intend to take to ensure that the next session is better. List learnings. Then input both a 'way of working' (Dixon 1998) and any initial observations upon how their behaviours might be enhanced:**

went well	better	action
Good idea	Devise the process before starting	Agree on a process, then we use it
Almost finished two criteria	Agree the criteria before starting	Review as the first thing we do next
Agreement on how to proceed reasonably quickly	Fast	
Everybody listened to each other		
Enthusiastic		
Air time for everybody - if they wanted it	<b>Learnings:</b> 1. Brainstorm the words 2. Public recording - on flipchart - gives a 'softness' to the focus	
Lots of process proposals		

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<p>My feedback:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Slow down!</li> <li>2. Build more on each others' proposals, bring in those not contributing, less overtalking</li> <li>3. Supportive of each other, lots of laughter, great enthusiasm!</li> </ol>
<p>My input:</p> <p>Use Doris Adams' simple set of guidelines:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Speak for your own experience (use 'I' not 'we', 'you', or 'people').</li> <li>2. Practice 'generative listening' (i.e. listening to learn from the other).</li> <li>3. Suspend judgement when listening to the other</li> <li>4. Avoid 'cross-talk' - talk to the whole group Rather than another member of the group</li> <li>5. Give up advice giving and problem solving</li> <li>6. Let silence create spaces for reflection between each person's speaking</li> </ol>
<p>Own observations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Whilst asking them to slow down, I was racing through my presentation</li> <li>2. In fact, if it had not been for the courage of one participant - in agreeing that we needed to slow down because she missed much of what was going on - the second session might not have progressed as it did</li> <li>3. Interesting how, in discussion, the group acknowledged that they had been overtalking and focusing on the task and not including everyone in the process</li> </ol>

### 3. Group again discuss the issue

4. **Brainstorm: what went well; what could have gone better; and what action, if any, they intend to take to ensure that the next session is better. List learnings. Then input 'stages of dialogue' (Isaacs 1999) and any further observations upon how their behaviours might be enhanced:**

went well	better	action
Honesty	Didn't refer back to our previous actions agreed	We need to summarise
Started with basics	Didn't cross-reference	We need to agree a framework that everyone is comfortable with
Slower	Didn't come to a conclusion	We need to commit to it

Listening		Agree some rules
Silences		
Reflection		
Negotiation		
Everyone contributed		
Saw different styles	<b>Learnings:</b> 1. To stand back + check the foundations 2. What is not being said 3. Understood better others' thinking processes 4. Slowing down allowed reflection 5. It took a conscious effort 6. Ann's courage - to share her feelings	

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My feedback: 1. Starting to build 2. Commenced by including then reverted back
My input: 1. Phases of dialogue (Isaacs 1999)
Own observations: 1. As the group observed, those who had taken the lead in 'round one' now took a back seat. 2. My feelings are that this was in part because they didn't want to start conflict, rather than any agreement with the process 3. Some feelings began to be shared, and others listened 'in stillness' to their colleagues' openness 4. Personally, I found it hard not to get involved. to encourage them to complete their task. Interesting and not unusual.

##### 5. Group again discuss the issue

6. **Brainstorm: what went well; what could have gone better; and what action, if any, they intend to take to ensure that the next session is better. List learnings and what each participant is going to do because of their learnings:**

went well	better	action
Lots of questions	Lost focus of question that needed to be answered	
Acknowledged feelings in ourselves + others	Timekeeping	
Silences		
Laughter		
Started exploring others' thinking		
	<b>Learnings:</b>	
	1. Give the next cohort this exercise to do at the start of their period. So that they know the criteria upon which they will be measured	

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My feedback:  Thank you for participating
My input:  None
Own observations:  1. Team committed to completing the task - took half an hour longer than planned 2. Group beginning to work more effectively as they make room for everyone's views 3. More time was ideally needed - on the other hand 'this is the real world' where time allocated is whatever it is.

4. A smashing group - I give them all 70%+

7. **Then, for the whole session, brainstorm: what went well; what could have gone better; and what action, if any, they intend to take to ensure that the next session is better. List learnings**

Ran out of time

8. **If group finish too soon, then input 'perceptual positions'?**

No way!

**Review:**

**Why?:**

**Contexts (where + where not used):** Use in this group discussion to test my understandings of dialogue to date **Done**

**Identity (who would and who would not want these skills):** HR Masters Degree students **Great group**

**Values (What is and is not important to you, about you, about what this new skill gives):** This could give a new insight into each of the group member's behaviours in meetings **Only time will tell, the time ran out for me**

**Beliefs (what you may and may not believe about this new skill):** This may help in resolving a key question created by the group **A resolution was arrived at**

**What?:**

**Learnings upon reflection:**

1. It was a real bonus that DM identified the area for discussion (issue) before the meeting. It increased the time for dialogue.
2. Dialogue is a subtle process and should not be underestimated
3. One feels as though one is doing nothing, as the facilitator. Which leads to a wish to get involved. Yet there is so much going on if only one will be still
4. The phases of dialogue touched upon by the group are so much like Tuckmans' (1965) stages of teams
5. How much difference would it have made if the group:
  - Worked together
  - Had spent more or less time together
6. What a great privilege to have been with the group and David. A real learning experience - as well as being fun!