

The Dialogue approach

By Christiane Seehausen, senior
adiviser Nansen Center for Peace and
Dialogue, Norway

A definition of dialogue

“

Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn.

Each makes a serious effort to take others concerns into her or his own picture even disagreements persists. No participant gives up her or his identity, but each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims that her or she will act differently toward the other

(Democratic Dialogue, a handbook for practitioners, 2007)

Dialogue versus Debate

DEBATE

Goal: To win

- Convince
- Argue
- Look for the weak argument

- Hunter
- Moral Judge
- Make opponent insecure
- To change opinion is a sign of weakness
- Confronting language

DIALOGUE

Goal: To understand

- Explain
- Listen
- Look for the strength in the opponent
- Self-discipline
- Tolerance
- Make opponent feel safe
- To change opinion is a sign of maturity
- Supportive language

The purpose of dialogue is:
to address complex social problems
and conflicts

The participants of a dialogue are:

The community/society that creates the problem
and who have to be part of the solution

The dialogue process is:

Open and inclusive, allowing the building of trust,
necessary to create solution, development and
coordinated actions



Dialogue is based on the following principles:

- **Inclusiveness:** Everyone who is part of the problem should be involved in the dialogue process.
- **Joint ownership:** Ownership is the key for every successful change. Without ownership changes remain a superficial exercise.
- **Learning:** Dialogue is not about the physical act of talking, it is about minds unfolding. Dialogue creates an opportunity for learning through self reflection. People realize that each only has a little bit of truth.
- **Humanity:** Dialogue creates a safe and trustful space, where we can see each as humans with feelings, emotions, intentions and desires.
- **A long- term perspective:** In dialogue the focus is on the underlying patterns of relationships and behavior from which the conflict, problem emerge. Working at that level is what creates the possibility of change, and it takes time.



How does dialogue work?

- Dialogue offers individuals and communities a variety of benefits.
- Dialogue affects three distinct but interrelated parts of our humanity: our intellect, emotions and spirit

Intellect

- Dialogue exposes people to different ways of seeing the world
- People have an opportunity to rethink their understanding and knowledge of an issue, event, or a group of people
- We get the possibility to recognize the potential validity of different viewpoints



Emotions

- Dialogue prompts greater emotional understanding of others and one's self
- Sometimes dialogue helps people to identify resentments they have unknowingly carried toward individuals or groups
- Dialogue can expand people's empathy for others



Spirit

- Dialogue facilitators foster, at a minimum, a basic level of human caring for all of its participants
- The sense of caring can expand people's sense of community connectedness
- This caring approach can be described as the “spirit” of dialogue



How does dialogue effect`s us?

Individually

- Personal reflection and clarity
- Empathy for others, specially those we perceive as an “outer group”
- Increased understanding of different “truth”

Groups and community

- Reduced divisions by reflecting on our shared humanity and common ground
- Building sense of community by sharing experiences
- Improved communication
- Collective analysis for developing change processes



When is dialogue useful?

IN DECISION MAKING
PROCESSES

FOR TALKING ABOUT
CHALLENGING AND
CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS

IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

IN PREVENTING
POLARISATION AND
EXCLUSION

Preconditions for a dialogue process

- Be sure that there is no immediate decisions need to made- dialogue is about discovery and mutual understanding
 - Relatively balanced power
 - Similarity in perceived language capacity
 - Enough time for preparations – depending on type of dialogue
-
- An impartial/multi partial trained facilitator
 - Safe and neutral physical space
 - Analyse the situation to prevent any harm done by the process
 - Be prepared for a long term commitment



The phases in designing a dialogue process

- **Phase 1:**
 - **Establishing common intentions and norms**
- **Phase 2:**
 - **Sharing experiences and perceptions**
- **Phase 3:**
 - **Getting aware of differences and disagreements and commonalities**
- **Phase 4:**
 - **Exploring possibilities for further steps in the process**

A photograph of three people laughing in a meeting room. In the foreground, a woman with grey hair, wearing a red patterned shirt, is laughing heartily, holding a pen and a notebook. Behind her, a woman in a blue jacket is also laughing. To the right, a woman in a purple top is laughing. The room has a whiteboard and a window with blinds. The text "Thank you!" is overlaid in white, with a white brushstroke underline.

Thank you!