

Tool: Dialogue Interviews

Overview

Dialogue Interviews engage an interviewee in reflective and generative conversation. Their purpose is to develop trust and encourage collective thinking that sparks creativity. Dialogue Interviews can occur with anyone inside or outside your system, in a professional environment or a more personal one.

Application

This tool can be used to prepare for projects, workshops, or capacity-building programs, and can be applied in all phases of the U-process.

Benefits for the interviewer:

- Seeing a topic/challenge/opportunity from a new perspective.
- Connecting to participants in a process.
- Gathering data on the participants' current challenges, questions, and expectations or on current organizational challenges.
- Possibly finding a partner for a future project.

Benefit for the interviewee:

- Increase understanding of the intentions and goals of an upcoming process.

Principles

- **Create transparency and trust** about the purpose and the process of the interview.
- **Practice deep listening.**
- **Suspend your "voice of judgment":** look at the situation through the eyes of the interviewee; don't judge.
- **Access your ignorance:** As the conversation unfolds, pay attention to and trust the questions that occur to you.
- **Access your appreciative listening:** Thoroughly appreciate and enjoy the story that you hear unfolding. Put yourself in your interviewee's shoes.
- **Access your generative listening:** Try to focus on the best future possibility for your interviewee and the situation at hand.
- **Go with the flow:** Don't interrupt. Ask questions spontaneously. Always feel free to deviate from your questionnaire if other questions occur to you.
- **Leverage the power of presence and silence:** One of the most effective "interventions" as an interviewer is to be fully present with the interviewee. Try not to interrupt a brief moment of silence.

Resources

- Bohm, David. 1996. *On Dialogue*. London and New York: Routledge Classics.
- Isaacs, William. 1999. *Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together*. New York: Currency-Doubleday.
- Scharmer, Otto. 2007. *Theory U*, Second Edition, Chapter 17. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Process

Setup

- **People:** Identify interviewees who can help you gain a new perspective on the challenge you are working on.
- **Place:** Dialogue Interviews work best face-to-face. If in-person interviews are not possible, use phone or video.
- **Time:** 30–60 minutes for a phone or video interview or 30–90 minutes for a face-to-face interview. The time required will differ with the context.
- **Materials:** Prepare interview guidelines. Pen, paper, or recording device as needed. Possibly a consent from the interviewee and/or a privacy agreement.

Steps

Step 1: Preparation

- Prepare a questionnaire. We recommend testing the questions with different stakeholders and incorporating their feedback.
- Schedule interviews.
- If the interview will be conducted face-to-face, select a quiet space.
- Research your interviewee and their organization.
- If several interviewers will conduct the interview, agree on roles (e.g., primary interviewer, note taker).

Step 2: Set the Container

Before you meet the interviewee, make time for some quiet preparation or silence. For example, 15–30 minutes before a face-to-face interview, begin to anticipate the conversation with an open mind and heart.

Step 3: Begin the Interview

Clarify purpose, use, and rules of confidentiality. Be aware of your relationship to the interviewee. What is required for them to feel confident and safe? Get their approval for whatever uses you have in mind.

Step 4: Reflect

Take some time immediately after the interview to review:

- What struck me most? What surprised me?
- What touched me?
- Is there anything I need to follow up on?

Step 5: Summarize

After all interviews have been completed, review the interview data and summarize the results.

Step 6: Close the Feedback Loop

After each interview (no later than the following morning) send a thank-you note to your interviewee.