

Contemplative dialogue

In short

Contemplative dialogue is a form of discussion in which we alternate between writing, reading, listening and quoting each other. This ultimately results in a discussion in which participants seek common themes across their contribution.

Output

The output of this working format is combining the different perspectives of the participants.

Approach: getting to know each other

In this variant aimed at getting the participants acquainted further, you give the participants the following assignment in advance: 'Write a short text (no more than half a page) about a moment in which you yourself or someone else had an experience involving [project theme]. How did this make you feel? Why was that an important moment to you?'

Approach: exploring the practice issue

In this variant, you use contemplative dialogue to explore the practice issue further. In this variant, you give the participants the following assignment in advance: 'Write a short text (no more than half a page) about what you think the practice issue of this project is'.

The working method consists of the following steps:

1. Everyone reads their own text out loud, verbatim (exactly the way it was written down) (20 minutes). Others do not ask questions, but they may ask the reader to re-read a segment.
2. Everyone listens attentively and writes down parts that hit home or inspire. Ask listeners to make short notes when reading, because they'll need them in the writing exercise that follows. This results in 10 lines, starting with citations. E.g. 'Miriam said ... and that hit home for me because/made me think of/made me realise/etc.' (5 minutes). Everyone again writes a text comprised of full sentences that can be read as a running text. It doesn't need to be a masterpiece; anything works.
3. Participants read the output of their second writing exercise out loud, in any order (10 minutes).
4. A group discussion follows in step four, discussing the matters raised on the basis of the following questions:
 - a. What underlying themes, opportunities and problems arise?
 - b. Which differences in points of view come to light?
 - c. What insights are formed?

The process manager or minutes secretary writes these on the whiteboard.

Tips for the manager

- Explain all steps in advance.
- In this working method, it is important that participants write a paragraph and read it verbatim. Ask them not to write down bullet points and improve, but to create a running paragraph and recite it.
- In step two, make sure that everyone gets the opportunity to read their text out loud without this giving rise to discussion. Remind the rest that they will have to quote someone later on, and that they will have to listen carefully and take notes.
- In step three, emphasise that participants start by quoting someone else. They can use two or multiple quotes in their text. This creates connections.
- In step four, take the lead when asking about common themes. Attempt to work towards a conclusion on a practice issue definition.

Bases

Contemplative dialogue gives room to multiple voices and truths and gives rise to deepening. It prevents hierarchy in discussions; everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute. For more information, refer to *Contemplative Dialog · Musework*

Materials

- Assignment in preparation for the workshop, including a theme on which the preparation assignment can be based.
- A table, paper and pens.