

The Practice of Dialogue

Purpose: To engage people deeply and personally in their experiences and beliefs so that they learn to think, feel and act together.

While dialogue may lead to decisions, that is not its purpose. By freeing ourselves from the expectation of reaching an answer, the opportunity for innovative responses to difficult issues with aligned, committed support increases.

The Essence of Dialogue



Practices

Listen with intention

Listen to others and to your inner voice. Notice what moves in you when another speaks. Follow the threads of your reactions to uncover your unconscious beliefs and assumptions.

Speak with intention

Be guided by your inner voice, speaking only when called. Speak from your own experience (use “I” language).

Inquire into your own or another’s perspective. (For example: rather than saying “I disagree,” say, “That’s an interesting perspective. Why do you say that?”) Your purpose is to understand, not to convince.

Reflect on what moves in you when listening to yourself and others. Your purpose is to uncover beliefs and assumptions hidden in the normalcy of culture.

The Practice of Dialogue

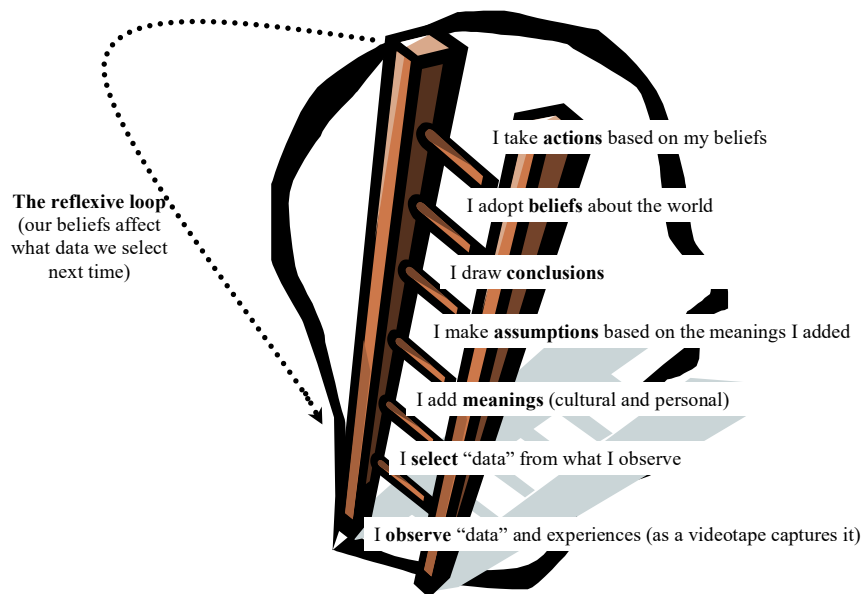
Self-monitor our impact and contribution

Pay attention to the meta-experience. Thinking together engages more than the mind. It is an integral experience, involving head, heart, mind and soul. Bring all of your senses into sustaining a container that allows the many dimensions of any issue to surface and be known.

A Comparison between Discussion/Debate

Dialogue	Discussion/Debate
Seeing the <i>whole</i> among the parts	Breaking issues/problems into <i>parts</i>
Seeing <i>connections and relationships</i>	Seeing <i>distinctions</i> and differences
<i>Inquiring</i> into assumptions	<i>Justifying/defending</i> assumptions
<i>Learning through inquiry</i> and disclosure	<i>Advocating, persuading, selling, telling</i>
Creating <i>shared</i> meaning among many (opening)	<i>Choosing one</i> meaning among many (narrowing)

A Useful Framework



Adapted from Overcoming Organizational Defenses, Chris Argyris (1990, Needham, MA: Allyn and Bacon)