



Section 1: Why is it so difficult for us—as human beings—to deal with our differences?

Summary of this video:

Talking about our differences—particularly those that involve our identities or values—can provoke a “fight, flight or freeze” response.

Discussion:

Try to recall how you respond when you’re in a conversation with someone who differs from or disagrees with you in some way that’s important to you.

What does it feel like? Can you identify your own impulses to fight, flee or freeze?

Extending the learning:

Within your daily interactions, notice the way in which you respond to differences.

What do you observe about your own tendencies when faced with a difference in identities or values?

Observe the “mirroring” tendency: how your responses affect other people’s responses, and/or how their responses affect yours.



Section 2: How do differences turn into conflict?

Reflections:

- How have you been thinking about the material from the last section?
- What has stayed with you?
- What questions have come up?
- What have you used or applied?
- What else will you investigate or try?

Summary of this video:

When individuals feel that their identities, values or worldviews are being threatened, “stuck” communication patterns can become entrenched and self-perpetuating.

Discussion:

Which conflicts (for example, Israeli-Palestinian) or public conversations (for example, abortion) do you feel strongly about? What values do you hold that you perceive as being challenged or attacked? How do you characterize the people you perceive to be attacking you and your values? How do you imagine they characterize you?

Exercise on Stereotyping

1. Working alone, take a few minutes to think about what stereotypes you imagine others might have of you, based on any aspect of your identity or perspective. Make a list of a few of those stereotypes, not identifying any specific individuals or groups who might have those stereotypes of you, and not worrying whether there is any truth to them.

I think that as a _____, I am viewed as [being like this or believing this, or wanting this]:
_____.

I think that as a _____, I am viewed as [being like this or believing this, or wanting this]:
_____.



I think that as a _____, I am viewed as [being like this or believing this, or wanting this]:
_____.

I think that as a _____, I am viewed as [being like this or believing this, or wanting this]:
_____.

2. Still working alone, take a few minutes to mark

- which of these stereotypes are most offensive or painful to you
- which of these you think are most inaccurate
- which of these you feel are understandable, even if they're painful or inaccurate

3. With a partner or in small groups, take turns sharing (as you're willing) one stereotype that you find painful, one that you believe is inaccurate, and one that you think is understandable.

- How do you understand the parts of you or your experience that make the stereotype painful, inaccurate, or understandable?
- How does your experience of being stereotyped shape your perceiving, thinking, feeling, listening, and speaking?

Extending the learning:

As you walk through your daily life, notice:

- What differences between you and other people do you tend to feel threatened by? How do you respond?
- What do you wish those people could understand about you? Is there anything you wish you could understand about them?



Section 3: How does dialogue help people constructively address conflict?

Reflections:

How have you been thinking about the material from the last section?

- What has stayed with you?
- What questions have come up?
- What have you used or applied?
- What else will you investigate or try?

Summary of this video:

The Public Conversations Project defines dialogue as a structured conversation for the purpose of developing understanding across profound differences. The structure supports people such that they feel safe enough with others in the room to reflect, speak intentionally, listen deeply, understand and be understood.

Exercises:

On threat and perception

Working alone, take a few minutes to think of a time when you felt threatened in an interaction. It could be something that happened at home, at work, in a social or religious setting; anywhere. Put yourself back in the situation: play the movie; remember what was happening and how it affected you. Now take some notes for yourself, because you'll be talking with a partner about your experience in a minute:

- What was the situation?
- How did feeling threatened shape what you paid attention to in the other and in yourself? What you said or held back?
- What might you have missed?



Find a partner and take turns sharing your observations (5 min. each).

Return to the large group and discuss the effects of threat on feeling, thinking and perception.

On empowerment and recognition

In their book *The Promise of Mediation*, Joseph Folger and Baruch Bush spoke of two basic experiences that enable people to move through conflict well: **empowerment**, or the ability to make choices about how their conflict will be managed; and **recognition**, the willingness to understand the other's experience and perspectives. The success, for them, of a mediation, and for us of a dialogue, can be gauged by how much people respond intentionally rather than just reacting, and by how willing they are to listen to and understand the other and their point of view. When designing a dialogue, we think about ways to build in spaces for reflection, choice and mutual recognition.

By yourself (5 min.):

Think of a time when you have been able to make conscious choices in the midst of unsettling conflict. What enabled you to do that? What resources from within yourself, what from the other/s, and what from the context? How can that experience inform your approach to conflict and your design of dialogue?

With a partner (10 min. total):

Share your observations with each other.

With the group (15 min.):

Discuss the barriers to empowerment and recognition in your context, and what you've learned from your and others' experiences about how to get more of it into your conversations, interactions or meetings.

Extending the learning:

As you walk through your daily life:

Notice times when you feel threatened, even a little, by what someone has to say. What happens to your body, perception, thinking, feeling, and speaking? What choices do you have in responding?

Look for examples of conflict that might be helped by dialogue.



Section 4: What thinking has influenced PCP's approach?

Reflections:

How have you been thinking about the material from the last section?

- What has stayed with you?
- What questions have come up?
- What have you used or applied?
- What else will you investigate or try?

Summary of this video:

The Public Conversations Project draws upon family therapy, organizational development, social construction, and a variety of other bodies of knowledge and practice. Its premises are that relationships are necessary for community life; that relationships are created and maintained through conversation; and that every conversation invites participants to relate in some ways and not others. Conversational shifts make relational shifts possible.

Discussion:

Take a few minutes to think about a group or community you're involved in. How do your patterns of talking (or not talking) with each other affect your relationships, and how do the relationships affect the ways you talk with each other, or the things you can talk about? Have you experienced a "stuck" conversation? Have you had an experience of getting "unstuck"? What has made or could make that possible in the context of your group?

Case Exercise: A Public Hearing

A private utility company announces its plan to remove several large old trees from near a power line, as required by law. Flyers invite community members to a hearing. Several members of the company's community relations staff are behind a table. Over a hundred people show up to the hearing and line up behind microphones to speak their piece against the removal of the trees. The company's representatives sit quietly. They appear to be listening; they nod occasionally, take some notes, and thank each speaker. They ask no questions. The comments from community members get more and more angry and accusatory. Speakers start questioning the company's behaviors and motives, and some question the representatives themselves.



Other speakers start attacking each other's statements and positions. One of the company's representatives tries to calm things down but by that point many people have left in frustration and resignation, and those who remain are threatening various actions from civil disobedience to lawsuits. Afterwards, in the local newspaper, one of the company representatives expresses disappointment "that some people got so emotional, they just couldn't be reasoned with."

Think for a few minutes on your own, then brainstorm in small groups: What useful purposes might there have been for the meeting? What behaviors and patterns in this scenario were inconsistent with those purposes? What could have been done to prevent them? What could've been promoted instead, and how?

Extending the learning:

As you walk through your daily life, notice:

- What kinds of things people talk about in different kinds of conversations. What's encouraged or discouraged in different situations, contexts or groups.
- What ways of relating to other people are more encouraged or discouraged in different kinds of conversations.
- What ideas you have for ways to shift what's possible in a conversation.
- Why such a shift might be desirable.



Section 5: How do you build an effective dialogue?

Reflections:

How have you been thinking about the material from the last section?

- What has stayed with you?
- What questions have come up?
- What have you used or applied?
- What else will you investigate or try?

Summary of this video:

Whether a dialogue is one session or many, certain carefully considered components are present: purpose; convening and inviting; participant preparation; social connection; communication agreements; entry and exit rituals; meeting structure; questions; and facilitation.

Exercises:

On beginnings

For groups watching this video series, begin this session with a potluck meal. Talk about things in your life that are not related to the purposes of your gathering. After your meal, talk together about what this kind of beginning makes possible, and what it discourages, in a dialogue.

On mapping

Think of an issue in your organization or community that might be amenable to dialogue. What voices are normally heard? What other voices should be included? If you were organizing a dialogue, whom might you want to include on a Planning Team? What characteristics would you look for? Why?

On being flexible

Read these two brief case examples. Form small groups and take 15 min. to discuss: What is similar about them? How do they differ? Assuming a dialogue is being planned, how might you adapt the Sample Agreements below to suit each group? If you have time, also discuss how you might need to adapt the dialogue structure.



Case A: Ubuntu, an after-school program for urban youth in Boston, has been struggling in the aftermath of funding cuts by the city. The Zing! Corporation has saved the day by taking on significant sponsorship of the program. They also want to be involved in program design and delivery and have ideas for significant changes. This has created friction. Program staff and administrators, who are drawn mostly from the surrounding neighborhood, feel stretched, demoralized and unappreciated. If they have gone to college, it's been to local community colleges. Zing! was a start-up of Harvard and MIT graduates, and the Zing! staff who have volunteered to work with Ubuntu are recent graduates of prestigious private universities.

Case B: The Red Earth Nation tribe in the southwest sits on one of the largest aquifers near a rapidly developing population center. Need for water is rapidly increasing in this growing city while the supply from the Colorado River is declining. A multi-national soft drink corporation is trying to purchase the rights to drill wells and set up a bottling plant on the reservation. Their Executive Team is flying in to meet with the Chief and selected tribal elders. A dialogue session is being held to see if the parties can understand one another better before any negotiating takes place. A dilemma: the corporate representatives easily speak as individuals, while tribal members respond out of collective identity.

Return to the whole group and share what came up; what advice you created; and what you learned.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

How would the dialogue structures and processes out-lined in the video work in your setting? What would you want to adapt, and how?

To help people prepare themselves for a dialogue, what questions might you ask them?

Extending the learning:

As you walk through your daily life, notice:

- How do you naturally adapt to changing circumstances, people, or groups? What enables you to do that: what knowledge, experience, skills, attitudes, etc?
- What situations or types of communication most encourage you to speak? Why?



Section 6: How do you help people prepare for dialogue?

Reflections:

How have you been thinking about the material from the last section?

- What has stayed with you?
- What questions have come up?
- What have you used or applied?
- What else will you investigate or try?

Summary of this video:

A pre-meeting interview with a dialogue facilitator helps participants prepare to have a “new” kind of conversation when they enter the dialogue--one that avoids old patterns. The interview gives participants a chance to tell their story, reflect on their hopes and concerns, become more aware of themselves, and start to take responsibility for the dialogue process. The interview also helps build trust between facilitator and participants, and helps facilitators understand the “old” conversation so they can better support the new.

Discussion:

What is the purpose or mission of the group you are watching this video with? (If you aren't watching with a group, think instead about a group you're part of.)

What do you usually talk about with one another? *How* do you usually talk with one another?

What “new” kind of conversation might you want to have?

What curiosity do you have about each other? What questions might you ask each other to expand your awareness of and appreciation for one another?

In what ways are you already having that conversation—even if only partially—now?

What else might you do to enable that conversation to happen?

How might you prepare yourselves and one another for that conversation?



What might be the effects of having that conversation? *You don't need to actually have the conversation. For now, just think about how you might prepare for it.*

Case Exercise: A Meeting Gone Awry

A manager of a small printing company has been approached by a number of people on his staff with complaints about the sudden closing of a popular product line and re-assignment of staff to new teams. People do not feel comfortable talking with him one-on-one, but he has heard the grumbling about this decision, the process of making it, and consequent intra-staff rivalries “through the grapevine.” The manager is very troubled by these complaints. He prides himself on maintaining a good working environment, free from conflict. He calls an impromptu meeting to “hash things out.” He sends out a memo “inviting” people to this meeting, saying that different “sides” will have an opportunity to “present their cases.” As facilitator of the meeting, he tries to stay neutral but is almost immediately accused of being authoritarian and not seeking input from staff. The meeting devolves into the “same old, same old,” with different staff members making accusations about the decision-making and budgeting process, each describing the other as “having all the power.” The purpose of the meeting is called into question at one point, with one staff member saying to the manager “You’ve already made the decision and we have to live with it, so why bother asking us what we think?”

Your task is to consider how this meeting might have gone differently with different processes for:

- inviting participants
- preparing participants
- designing the conversation
- facilitating the conversation

Extending the learning:

As you walk through your daily life, notice:

What purposes do different conversations (or interactions, or meetings) have? How do you know? Are those purposes explicit or clear to everyone involved? How does the clarity make a difference?



Section 7: Why make communication agreements?

Reflections:

How have you been thinking about the material from the last section?

- What has stayed with you?
- What questions have come up?
- What have you used or applied?
- What else will you investigate or try?

Summary of this video:

Communication agreements are the shared, public commitments by all participants to do specific things (or refrain from doing specific things) in order to have the conversation they *want* to have, which may be very different from ones they've had in the past.

Exercises:

What you already know works

When have you experienced or suggested a communication agreement that has been helpful in a personal conversation or a group meeting? What was it? Why/how did it help?

Take a few minutes and jot some notes. Return to the whole group and share.

Discuss: what does this suggest to you about the qualities/content of useful communication agreements? What do they tend to make possible? To discourage?

Case Exercise: Congregational Conflict over Coal Mining

You are a member of a church in West Virginia. Your endowment has been established and grown over the years by families that have owned and managed the local coal mine. A large portion of your operating budget comes from miners and their families. Though not everyone is involved in mining, the dynamics of the mine are often reflected in the congregation. This is one of those times. The governing body is currently dominated by miners and their family members. That majority has passed a resolution calling for the congregation to make a public “statement for justice” in support of



miners who are striking to demand better working conditions. Mine managers and their families make up a significant minority of the congregation and oppose this resolution. This resolution must be approved by a majority of the congregation in order for it to be publicized. An all-church meeting that was held to discuss the resolution degenerated into accusations (“using scare tactics!,” “exploiting workers!”), the re-statement of hurts and resentments from years past, raised voices, interruptions and contradicting what speakers said. The minister, Rev. Waterston, tried valiantly to control the crowd but eventually brought the meeting to an early close out of fear of the long-term impact of the rising tide of anger in the room. The congregation has been invited to submit ideas to the clergy that could help people talk without fighting. You were there: you saw what happened, and you have some ideas to share with Rev. Waterston about communication agreements

(or “covenants”, as they are called in your church) that might prevent future blow-ups and promote constructive engagement.

Take 5 minutes by yourself to come up with some ideas.

Then form small groups and share what you came up with for 15 minutes. Each group should combine what individuals shared into one set of proposed agreements.

Return and present what your group created. No need to re-state an agreement that a prior group has mentioned.

Extending the learning:

As you walk through your daily life, notice:

What meetings and/or conversations are you involved with during this time period that could use communication agreements? What ideas do you have about what they might be, and what purpose they might serve?



Section 8: What is the purpose and process of invitation?

Reflections:

How have you been thinking about the material in the last section?

- What has stayed with you?
- What questions have come up?
- What have you used or applied?
- What else will you investigate or try?

Summary of this video:

Invitations, no matter what form they take, make clear the purpose and the process of the dialogue in a way that alleviates the fear that people understandably may have about entering into conversation with “the other side.”

Discussion:

Look over the sample invitations provided in the “Learn More” section below. How do these invitations

- Express the purpose of dialogue?
- Describe the process?
- Set up realistic expectations?
- Reduce anxiety?
- Prepare participants for a new kind of conversation?
- Avoid “bias” for or against one side?



Case Exercise: Central Atlantic University and the Beauty Queen

CAU is a small university with students from both liberal and conservative Protestant denominations. The administration invited the speaker for the year's opening convocation: the state's reigning beauty queen, Mary Evering, known for her advocacy for sexual abstinence for unmarried people and for her opposition to the widespread practice of campus bullying and hazing of first-year students by returning students.

The decision to invite Miss Evering was welcomed by many faculty and students who supported the stances she has taken, particularly because of her high visibility. Others protested vehemently, not so much because of her opinions but because of her being a beauty queen. Their concern was the message that, in their view, beauty pageants objectify women, elevating appearance over substance. For CAU to select a beauty queen to address the university felt unacceptable.

A committee of faculty and administrators decided that the controversy offered an opportunity for people on campus to develop practices of open conversation and listening in the face of strong disagreement. They created an invitation to a community-wide event, and you have been asked to consult to the committee about this draft and to make constructive edits.

A good invitation to a constructive conversation will:

- welcome the widest participation possible from the full community
- promote reflection on what kind of conversation they hope to have with others in their community—that is, promote thinking about what kinds of conversational forms and communication are likely to generate the kinds of relationships that they value, that feel right and good to them
- include the thoughtful care and aims of the conveners in structuring a safe-enough format for people to discuss the issues (and their meanings) in a focused, open, and personally connected way
- promote the willingness of participants to listen with openness
- encourage participants to focus on their own life experiences, values and beliefs, and those of the others (as these relate to the issues at hand,) and not on judgments, positions, conclusions, and outcomes
- include larger contexts in their thinking



- communicate the spirit and goals of the proposed meeting (e.g., to promote open speaking, compassionate listening, and greater understanding rather than agreement or resolution of difference)
- be specific enough about wishes and expectations that people who are not interested in this kind of a meeting feel free to decline

When you get the committee's first draft (below), get in small groups to first read through the draft and then brainstorm with each other about what intrigues you, what you appreciate, and what concerns you. What would need to be removed, added, altered, or conceived differently in order for the announcement to fully embody the intentions of the committee as you understand them? You can address any level—from linguistic choices to institutional concerns.

**Campus Conversations about Opening Convocation:
Reflections on the State's Beauty Queen and CAU**

The invitation to Ms. Mary Evering to speak at Central Atlantic has generated excitement. Many faculty and students are eager to hear an inspiring message from a gifted young woman whose spiritual and academic resources are considerable. Other faculty and students have raised questions about the appropriateness of inviting a representative of a beauty pageant to address the university community at one of our main community-wide academic gatherings.

C.A.U. faculty and students are asking questions such as these:

- What is the relationship between events like the beauty pageant and sexism?
- What gender stereotypes pervade U.S. popular culture and how do media (and academia) influence them?
- How should Christians think about being involved in activities like beauty pageants?
- What is the relationship between celebrity and education in the U.S.?
- What kind of speakers are appropriate for a university's academic events?

A group of members of our faculty and staff committed to respectful discussion of controversial issues has designed three opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to explore these questions together.



First, on Thursday, October 2, from 3:30 - 4:30 p.m. in Mason Hall, faculty and staff from across the university will meet to discuss communication guidelines from organizations that work to promote civil public dialogue on controversial issues. The purpose of Thursday's meeting will be to explore how best to talk about "hot" public issues.

Second, after Opening Convocation on October 9, we have invited Ms. Evering to meet over lunch with all interested faculty and staff. This event is scheduled for 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. in the Faculty Dining Room of University Dining Hall.

Third, at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, October 9, in Corwin Auditorium, students, faculty, and staff are invited to a campus-wide conversation about these topics. James Farlow will moderate a dialogue among university faculty and staff members about some of the issues related to this year's convocation, and then everyone present will be invited into this conversation.

All C.A.U. faculty members are encouraged to attend the first two events, and every member of the university community is invited to the public dialogue on October 9 at 7:00 p.m.

Extending the learning:

Have you ever said to someone, or heard from someone, "We need to talk"? What is the response? What is the impact of such a statement on the conversation that follows?

How might you invite someone differently into an important conversation? Consider your purpose, your hopes, the language you use, and how you might invite them to "co-create" the process with you.



Section 9: What are the tools and techniques used to create a reflective, dialogic space?

Reflections:

How have you been thinking about the material from the last section?

- What has stayed with you?
- What questions have come up?
- What have you used or applied?
- What else will you investigate or try?

Summary of this video:

To create the space for intentional communication, understanding, and connection, the Public Conversations approach relies upon: a collaborative stance with participants; a “tight-to-loose” structure; go-rounds; time-limited speaking; pausing; writing; and inquiry.

Dialogue Exercise: Try It On

This exercise will take a little while. It’s intended for you to experience the effects of dialogue structure and techniques from the inside out, without a huge issue pressing on you. Sit in a circle of up to 8 people.

Reflection and preparation

Take a few minutes and think about the beliefs, issues, perspectives that you are most passionate about in your life. Which one, if you spoke of it, would help people understand best what you care about? Write it down.

Now think for a moment about when you have spoken about this before. When has it gone well? What did you hold back or restrain that enabled others to hear and understand you and enabled you to listen so that you understood others better? What qualities or skills did you call on –what did you actively do- that enabled this to happen? What might you restrain and bring out today that would help create a good conversation?



Agreements

Based on what you learned from Video 7, come up with some basic communication agreements for your exercise.

“Opening” Questions

Try out this format for the following questions:

A. Someone read the question aloud while others follow silently.

B. Pause for 2 min. to think of your response. Take notes for yourself on what you want to say.

C. Go around the circle, each person taking up to 2 min. to respond. One way to keep time is to pass a watch. Have the person who just spoke time for the next speaker. When time is up, the timer passes the watch to the speaker, signaling them to wrap up. The speaker then times for the next person, and so on. No questions, no comments; just people speaking for themselves. Pause for a beat between speakers.

D. As you listen to others speak, take some notes. What do you want to especially remember? What are you curious to learn more about? What assumptions do you find yourself making? What questions might you want to ask later? Write them down.

Question One: Briefly name the belief, issue, or perspective that you are passionate about and tell the group about an experience you’ve had that would help them understand why you feel as strongly as you do.

Question Two: What is at the heart of the matter for you about this?

Question Three: What, if anything, are you less sure about within your overall commitment or belief? Are there places where one thing you care about bumps up against another, or are there any gray areas for you within your perspective?

“Questions of Genuine Interest”

Now is the time to look at what you’ve written about what others have said. Take a couple of minutes and scan. Let their speaking sink in, and let the most urgent questions arise from your notes. What do you want to know more about? What assumptions of yours might you check out? Spend 20 min. as a group asking and responding to questions.



Some guidelines: avoid the kinds of questions that “trigger” people and start conflict sequences: trapping, exposing, rhetorical, instructive, judgmental. Do use questions that encourage the speaker to expand what they’ve already said: to go wider and deeper. Aim for “shared airtime” so that as many people get a chance to ask and respond to questions as possible.

Closing

Take 2 min. to think about what you’ve experienced in this brief, structured time together, and ponder this question: “What have you done –or refrained from doing- that’s led to this exchange going as it has gone? What else do you want to say to bring this time to a meaningful close for you?” Take some notes.

After 2 min., someone read the question aloud. Pause. Go around the circle and respond, keeping it brief.

Say good-bye to this experience together.

Questions for reflection and discussion

Use this **worksheet** to note how the following affected a) your thinking, speaking, feeling, listening, connection to others; b) the speaking, listening of others and the patterns and rhythm of the group:

- Reflection and preparation
- Agreements
- “Opening” Questions
- Pausing
- Time limits
- Writing
- Turn-taking
- Asking others, hearing responses, being asked

Return to the group and use the sheet as an opening for discussion about this experience and your understanding of how the tools and techniques of dialogue work, and how they might be used in your setting.

THE PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS PROJECT

Dialogue: A Virtual Workshop



Extending the learning:

As you walk through your daily life, notice:

In what situations and with what people might aspects of today's structured experience be useful?



Section 10: How do questions advance dialogue?

Reflections:

How have you been thinking about the material from the last section?

- What has stayed with you?
- What questions have come up?
- What have you used or applied?
- What else will you investigate or try?

Summary of this video:

Questions in dialogue are thoughtfully designed to encourage personal reflection, elicit curiosity and complexity, and invite fresh thinking and speaking.

Discussion:

What are the effects of different kinds of questions in different contexts?

How often do you ask or get asked “genuinely curious” questions (ie, questions to which the asker honestly doesn’t know, and honestly wants to know, the answer)?

What questions might you want to be asked that would help you to be known or understood the way you’d like to be?

What is the difference between being “known” and being “exposed”?

Exercise: “Door-slamers and Window-openers”

Some questions, when asked, have the effect of “slamming the door” on the conversation, or on the relationship between the asker and the asked.

Other questions have the effect of “opening up a window,” shedding new light, or making possible new ways of thinking or talking about something.

Take a few moments by yourself to consider questions you’ve been asked in your life. Are there particular ones you might call “door-slamers”? Write them down.



What about the question or the way it was asked shut down the conversation? In small groups, take turns sharing, for just two minutes each, characteristics of “door-slamming” questions.

Then take a few moments by yourself to consider questions you’ve been asked that you experienced as “window-openers.” Write them down. Consider what about them felt “opening.” Again, take turns sharing, for two minutes each, characteristics of “window-opening” questions.

Come together and discuss in the large group:

What effects different kinds of questions (or ways of asking the questions) have on ...

- the person being asked
- how the person being asked perceives the person doing the asking
- what it’s possible to speak about
- what it’s possible to imagine for the future

Extending the learning:

As you walk through your daily life, notice:

What questions do you ask of people that seem to either shut down or open up conversation?

What questions do other people ask of you that shut you down or open you up?

Do you notice anything else about the intents or effects of questions? In relationships? In conflicts?



Section 11: What role should a facilitator play?

Reflections:

How have you been thinking about the material from the last section?

- What has stayed with you?
- What questions have come up?
- What have you used or applied?
- What else will you investigate or try?

Summary of this video:

Dialogue facilitation is different from other kinds of facilitation. Dialogue facilitators do much of their work before the meeting, to help prepare participants and design questions to serve the agreed-upon purposes of the dialogue. During the dialogue, facilitators are only as visible as needed to help the participants have the kind of conversation they want to have.

Discussion:

When have you experienced “directive” facilitation, with the facilitator as “the hub of the wheel,” as discussed in the video? What group situations, tasks, purposes call for that style?

When have you experienced more “collaborative” or “supportive” facilitation, as discussed in the video? What group situations, tasks, purposes call for that style?

Have you facilitated in either or both modes? Talk about your experiences.

Case Exercise:

Consult to the Facilitator

Note the context and pay special attention to facilitator behaviors and what they may evoke:

The Chatham Hill Neighborhood Association has convened a group to talk about a recent uptick in violence. While once known as a rough part of the city, Chatham Hill had experienced a decline in violence and a rise in community pride over the previous 5 years. In the past year, however, there have been several tragic shooting deaths that have left people feeling on edge.



There have been many theories and ideas about reasons for this shift. Most involve blaming one or another sector or group in this multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-national neighborhood.

You are a neighborhood resident in the first of what could be several “community conversations”, depending on how this goes. The purpose of this first meeting is to dissolve stereotypes and enable people to get to know and understand one another better. At the end you will talk about possible next steps to take together, if any.

The Association has hired an outside facilitator from a prestigious, university-affiliated firm to run the meeting. You see the agenda for the first time as the facilitator opens the session, explaining “what we will be doing tonight.” She tells you what the Ground Rules for participation will be. The group is asked for a show of hands to indicate that they will obey the ground rules.

The facilitator invites the group to respond to a series of questions. She calls on people when it is their turn. After they speak, she paraphrases what they’ve said in her own words and thanks them for their contribution before going on to the next person. After a couple of rounds of this, she opens the floor for more back-and-forth. She has kept careful mental notes of what people have said. She “primes the pump” by noting a similarity in what two people have said, and wonders if others noticed it as well, and if they would like to comment. The conversation builds on the original stimulus and the facilitator draws people in if she remembers that they had said something earlier that might be relevant to this topic. Other possibilities do not get voiced as the group stays on topic.

As time for the meeting draws to a close, the facilitator summarizes what she has seen, and offers her observation that “the group seems ready to move forward” while thanking you all for your care for your community and your courage in being willing to speak your minds.

You have been invited to a post-meeting de-briefing session to give feedback to the facilitator and the event organizers about what went well and what could have been done more effectively. As you look back on the session,

- What did the facilitator do, or refrain from doing, that might be seen as “directive”? In what ways might those behaviors have been useful? How might they have gotten in the way?
- What did the facilitator do, or refrain from doing, that might be seen as “collaborative”? In what ways might those behaviors have been useful? How might they have gotten in the way?
- What advice do you have for the facilitator? What should she do/refrain from doing in order to be most effective if she works with your group again?



Exercise: Take Your Own Inventory

Take 5 min. by yourself and think about times when you are called on to run a meeting or broker a conversation among friends, family, co-workers, etc. What aspects of yourself tend to get energized and engaged in those situations? Do you find yourself drawn to “taking charge”? To getting things going and then stepping away? Some combination, or something else? What knowledge, skills, and attitudes might you need to gain or strengthen if you want to be more collaborative and “dialogic” in your facilitation?

Now pair up with someone else. Spend up to 10 min. each talking about the above, with special emphasis on the last question. Listening partner: your job is to be present, show interest and draw the speaker out with your questions. At the end of your time together, you each should have some concrete ideas about things you can do to improve your collaborative facilitation skills.

Extending the learning:

As you walk through your daily life, notice:

The different ways leaders or “those in charge” invite people to interact. Note the effects of different styles (eg, “directive” and “collaborative”) on communication and relationships.



Section 12: What special things should facilitators keep in mind?

Reflections:

How have you been thinking about the material from the last section?

- What has stayed with you?
- What questions have come up?
- What have you used or applied?
- What else will you investigate or try?

Summary of this video:

Dialogue facilitators and planners, in collaboration with participants, should consider the importance of cultural context, the balance of safety and risk, and power differences.

Exercise: Identity & Safety in Context

Working alone:

1. Think about something you are really passionate about with regard to politics, values, religion, your personal identity or the identity of others.

Where (home, work, faith community, civic organization, an evening with friends, etc.) and **with whom** (friends, family, co-workers, etc.) could you **most likely** be found talking freely about this passion? What might you say about it and what would you say in that setting if someone asked you why it holds such meaning for you?

2. Now imagine yourself in a different setting, with different people.

- How would the change of setting/people affect **what** you say about this passionate concern?
- What effect would the shift have on **how** you say it?
- What might you hold back on or bring out more in this new setting?



- What factors would you be weighing as you choose what to say/what not to say and how to speak? What aspects of context and people affect your choice-making and expression?

Take 5 min. to write about this.

In small groups:

Each of you spend up to 3 min. talking about what you wrote (as much or as little as you wish to share). Focus mainly on the final point. After all have spoken, take 10 min. together to share your observations about how context affects conversation and what the implications are for adapting dialogue to changing contexts and people.

Return to whole group; small groups share their observations and discuss.

Extending the learning:

As you walk through your daily life, notice:

Ways in which questions, answers and conversations differ in different group and cultural contexts.

Examples of how the flow of conversation is affected by power dynamics.

What does power mean? Who has power? Who does not? What does it mean in the context of a conversation? What are some things you see being done to explicitly and constructively address power issues within a group?

How your customary ideas about dialogue and “respectful conversation” would have to be modified if you were working or speaking with people from another cultural context.