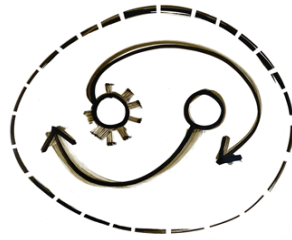


# DIALOGUE INTERVIEWS



## OVERVIEW

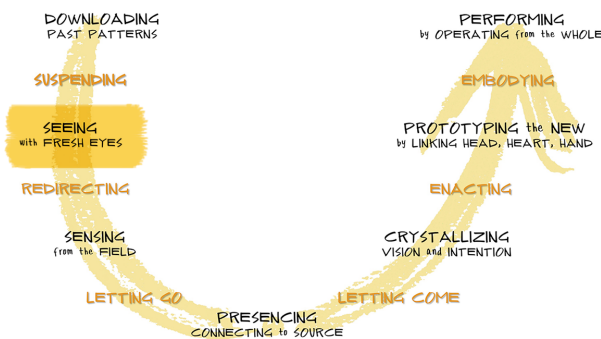
Dialogue interviews engage the interviewee in a reflective and generative conversation. This tool can be used to prepare for projects, workshops, or capacity building programs.

Dialogue Interviews:

- Provide insights into questions and challenges that the interviewees face
- May help you to find partners for a project
- Prepare participants for to an upcoming event
- Begin to build a generative field for the initiative you want to co-create

## PURPOSE

To initiate a generative dialogue that allows for reflection, thinking together and some sparks of collective creativity to happen.



*Dialogue Interviews can be used in all phases of the U-process. Most common use is during the preparation phase.*

## 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 important 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 – and not to interrupt a brief moment of silence.

## USES & OUTCOMES

Dialogue Interviews are used to prepare for projects, workshops, capacity building programs or change initiatives.

Dialogue interviews:

- Provide data on the participants’ current challenges, questions, and expectations or on the organizational current challenges
- Create increased awareness among participants or within an organization about the upcoming process and how it might serve their needs and intentions
- Increase the level of trust between facilitators and participants that helps to create a generative field of connections
- Use with...Mindfulness Practice, Stakeholder Interviews

## EXAMPLE

Ursula Versteegen, who co-developed this method with Otto, describes one of her experiences:

“A while ago, I had a dialogue interview with Walter H. For me the toughest challenge in a dialogue interview is when I have “to jump off of the bridge.” The moment of pushing myself off the safe ground into a total “presence” is the most laborious moment of the interview, and I am really scared when I sense it building up. But once I have dared to jump and have overcome my inner reluctance and clumsiness, it’s the most effortless, beautiful way of being.

“Walter is an engineer in a global car company. ‘I knew at age ten,’ Walter started off, ‘that I wanted to become an engineer, working with cars. As a kid, I spent more time in junkyards than on playgrounds.’ For more than a decade he had been working as a quality expert in different positions and plants. When Walter spoke about cars he was enthusiastic: I enjoyed listening: ‘Everyone linked arms with me right from the beginning. I was given responsibility early on.’ I could almost touch his pride about building good-quality cars.

“‘For a few weeks now,’ he continued, ‘I’ve been in HR/Industrial Relations. It’s an exotic country for me. There is a huge list of things’—and he started reading the list—‘that I am responsible for now: work organization; reorganization; leadership organization in plants; unions; health management; sick-list reports; health maintenance; occupational safety; aging workforce... My challenge is: How do I convince people in the plant to participate in health management? How do I negotiate with the unions, sell them our concepts? How can I make decisions without formal authority about the people who need to comply with all of these rules?’

“After he had read that list to me, I felt funny. It took me a moment to realize that my energy level had dropped from one hundred to zero. Why was that? What had happened? Listening to him while he was continuing to speak about his challenge, I noticed that he had changed as well. His voice had become more formal, he was talking much faster, the manner in which he was talking felt more distant, closing up and maybe even more decisive and resolute. My listening was dropping off. It sounded as if he had shifted from the nice, enthusiastic hands-on production guy into the role of a formal bureaucrat who knew exactly what all these plant people needed to do. I felt distant, too. I asked him about his stakeholders: ‘Who would be the most critical people to talk to and get different perspectives from on your new job?’ I was silently hoping that the stakeholders would tell him what I felt I couldn’t. ‘Oh, I have done these already,’ Walter quickly said, ‘I told my stakeholders what my responsibilities were and asked them for comments.’

“I saw myself standing on the bridge, and I knew I had to jump to make a difference. But an incredible inner gravity was holding me back. Part of me said, ‘Tell him why his way of doing stakeholder interviews is useless.’ The other, the scary part, said, ‘Open your heart. Allow him to change

you.’ In that moment a memory was welling up in me: not long ago, when I was working at the headquarters of a pharmaceutical company, I had been in exactly the same situation as Walter. I had to convince business units and production sites of lots of conceptual positions, statements, and ‘to-dos’ that didn’t relate to my own experience. The more useless I felt, the more my communication style changed from learning to teaching or instructing them.

“I jumped: ‘While I’m listening to you, I’m starting to wonder about the difference between working for a plant and working at headquarters.’ I heard him nodding. Our distance started melting. I slowed down, speaking out of the inner place of the lost and useless person I felt to be at the time: ‘I don’t know whether and how this experience may be relating to you at all.’ I talked as if I were walking on tiptoes, waiting for the right words to come, not knowing what the next word would be. ‘When I, in my case, asked people from production what they needed me for, their answer was ‘Honestly, Ms. Versteegen, we don’t need you at all for the things you’re doing right now, we’re sorry to tell you.’

“Silence. I could hear a pin drop. But the silence was pure energy. I heard a sound of very deep relief, and then Walter said, ‘That is exactly what they told me.’ In that moment, the whole conversation shifted. I asked him, ‘Before, you had mentioned that one of your key learnings in production was that things always appear to be different when you look at them from the outside, as compared to when you’re looking from within. How does that learning apply to your situation now?’

“Time slowed down. Finally he said, ‘Well, one interview was different. It was the one where I spoke to a production head who I know well and respect a lot. I wasn’t talking to him as an industrial relations person, I spoke to him as if I still was a peer, in my former role of also being a production head. He said, ‘Walter, as a corporate person you’re bringing answers to questions I don’t have. But I have a lot of questions and issues that I need your help on as a peer practitioner, to help me find new and innovative answers.’”

Then Ursula asked him, “Why could he say that to you?” Walter replied, “I guess I put myself into the shoes of my colleague, looking from production to corporate. In the other interviews, I was looking from the outside, corporate, into production.”

## RESOURCES

C. Otto Scharmer, (2009) *Theory U: Learning from the Future as it Emerges*. Berrett-Koehler: San Francisco.

W. Isaacs. (2009) *The art of thinking together*. Currency and Double Day: NY.

D. Bohm. (2204) *On Dialogue*. Routledge Classics: London and NY.

## SET UP

### *People and Place*

- Dialogue interviews work best face-to-face. If not possible, use phone interviews.

### *Time*

- 30-60 minutes for a phone interview.
  - 30-90 minutes for a face-to-face interview.
- Both figures are estimates and need to be adjusted to the specific context.

### *Materials*

- Use the interview guideline (questionnaire), but feel free to deviate when necessary.
- Use a paper and pen to take notes. Sometimes use a tape recorder.

## PROCESS

### SEQUENCE

1. Preparation:
  - a) Define/revise questions to adjust to the specific context and purpose.
  - b) Schedule interviews.
  - c) If the interview will be conducted face-to-face, find a quiet space.
  - d) Get information about the interviewee and her or his organization.
  - e) If several interviewers will conduct the interview agree on roles (primary interviewer, note taking).
2. Before you meet the interviewee allow for some quiet preparation or silence. For example, 15-30 minutes prior to a face-to-face interview begin to anticipate the conversation with an open mind and heart
3. Begin the interview. Use the interview questionnaire on next page as a guide, but depart from it to allow the conversation to develop its own direction.
4. Reflection on the Interview. Take some time immediately after the interview to review:
  5. What struck me most? What surprised me?
  6. What touched me?
  7. Is there anything I need to follow-up on?
8. After all interviews have been completed, review the interview data, and summarize results.
9. Close feedback loop: After each interview (by the following morning) send a thank-you note to your interviewee.

### SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. Describe the leadership journey that brought you here.
2. When have you faced significant new challenges, and what helped you cope with them?
3. Describe your best team experiences. How do they differ from your other team experiences?
4. What top three challenges do you currently face?
5. Who are your most important stakeholders?
6. On the basis of what outcomes will your performance be considered a success or a failure - and by when?
7. In order to be successful in your current leadership role, what do you need to let go of and what do you need to learn? What capabilities do you need to develop?
8. How will you develop your team? What do you need from your team, and what does your team need from you?
9. Nine to twelve months from now, what criteria will you use to assess whether you were successful?
10. Now reflect on our conversation and listen to yourself: what important question comes up for you now that you take out of this conversation and into your forward journey?