Dialogue

Most people were taught to explore problems in a defensive mode, rather than one of inquiry. The main focus of dialogue is to seek meaning. The diagram below illustrates the difference between defending one’s position and seeking meaning (Isaacs, 1999, p 14).



In the process of dialogue, participants learn to “think about their thinking”.

When faced with a problem, they are encouraged to examine their own belief systems to see how their views of the world may be impacting their ability to explore new possibilities. Because people are reticent to explore their own thinking processes, they often keep their underlying feelings and true beliefs hidden from the group. They feel threatened by what might be an unpopular belief or one leading to some level of embarrassment if admitted (Aygris, 1990, pp. 25-66). When analyzing problems and especially failures, the managers often do not admit mistakes or explore the basis for their own thinking around a given situation. For this reason, teaching managers to use a dialoging process was a challenge for most organizational change agents. If the belief systems were the problem and dialogue was the answer to solving the problem, the challenge was difficult and often career limiting for the change agent. For that reason, efforts to implement a dialoging process often failed.



**DIALOGUE EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT**

5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_0

**INTENSELY**

**MODERATELY**

**CLEARLY**

**GREATLY**

**FAINTLY**

**NONE**

**To what degree did you experience an emotional response to the story?**

**5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_0**

**To what degree did you experience a bodily response to the story?**

**5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_0**

**To what degree could you identify the origin of your feelings?**

**5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_0**

**To what degree could you identify your own assumptions?**

**5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_0**

**To what degree did you withhold information about your feeling and thinking from others?**

**5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_0**

**To what degree where you able to withhold judgment while listening to others’ thinking and feeling about the story?**

**5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_0**

**To what degree did you come to an understanding of others’ thinking and feeling?**

**5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_0**

**To what degree did you “see” differently after engaging the story with the group?**

**5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_0**

**To what degree were you able to identify an application of this new understanding to your work?**

**5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_0**

References

Argyris, C. (1990). Overcoming organizational defenses: facilitating organizational learning. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Ellinor, L. and Gerard, G. (1998). Dialogue: rediscover the transforming power of conversation; New York: John Wiley and Sons, 104-105.

Gabriel, Y. ((2000). Storytelling in organizations: facts, fictions, and fantasies. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gabriel, Y.(1995). The unmanaged organization: stories, fantasies and subjectivity [Electronic version]. *Organizational Studies,* 16(3), 477-501.

Hansen, C., & Kahnweiler, W. (1993). Storytelling: an instrument for understanding the dynamics of corporate relationship. *Human Relations*, 46(12), 1391-1409.

Isaacs, W., Dialogue and the art of thinking together; New York: Doubleday, 1999.

Kleiner, A., & Roth, G. (1995). Learning histories; assessing the learning organization. System Thinker, 6(4), 1-5.

Kleiner, A. (1996). Age of the Heretic, New York: Double Day.

Kotter, J. (1995). Why transformation efforts fail, Harvard Business Review, Mar/Apr, 59.

Oshry,B. (1995). Seeing systems: unlocking the mysteries of organizational life. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Senge, P. (1990). The fifth discipline: the art and practice of the learning organization. New York: Doubleday

.