

MEETINGS THAT ROCK!

By North Star Facilitators



Leading Focused & Productive Discussions

Facilitator Tools for Sharing Ideas in Meetings®

Handout 3



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Introduction to This Competency

Leading Productive Discussions

How is it that with some groups we seem to have no problem having great, satisfying conversations or discussions? Yet with others, we seem unable to draw certain individuals into the conversation or get to the results we want.

With this workshop, we learn how to make every important conversation a naturally flowing one. You will learn how to ask questions that encourage people to offer their honest and deepest thinking on any topic. You will also learn how to care for both yourself and others in regular and difficult conversations. The techniques will help you finish conversations with everyone feeling clearer and more satisfied with how the conversation occurred and what you decided together. The techniques shared here are meant to be used for difficult or important conversations in meetings or any other group situation. They can, however, be shortened or modified for use in casual friend-to-friend or family conversations.

Your first step to leading focused and productive discussions (covered in this workshop) is to understand only 3 things:

1. People appreciate structure. They do their best thinking together if you provide them structure for their discussions.
2. Everyone in the meeting needs several opportunities to add their ideas either verbally or in writing to the whole group or at least to one other person in the group.
3. You can help the group gain remarkable insights or produce enduring decisions in a short timeframe with the use of powerful, open-ended questions.

In this handout, you will have a chance to learn and/or practice:

- The importance of discussion
- Practice where it is safe: Using Open vs. Closed Questions with Family or Personal Situations
- Three specific frameworks for building productive discussion including one that deals with conflict conversations:
- The Technology of Participation (ToP)[®] Focused Conversation method
- Dr. De Bono's Six Thinking Hats discussion method
- Dr. Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication Conflict model
- 100 example questions to get you started
- Tips for Asking Questions to Obtain Dramatic Results:
- Seven C's to setting up important, difficult discussions
- Our favorite "Best on the Market" dialogue resources

The Appendices cover:

- Suggested answers to practice exercises
- Frequently asked questions (FAQs)
- Focused Conversation template
- Comparison of Frameworks

Types of Important and Difficult Conversations

Here are some typical conversation situations that others have noted to me as being difficult or important:

- Interviews or project meetings over the telephone or internet
- Offensive remarks or racial slurs are made openly or in side conversations
- Need to set boundaries with someone in a meeting or in a casual conversation
- People are resistant to the topic being discussed
- Colleagues dealing with an emotional issue or seemingly irresolvable problem
- Everyone is talking and no one is listening
- There are different levels of “power” or authority in the meeting and everyone defers to person perceived to have the most power or only a few members of the group
- Someone interrupts you or others rudely

Exercise 1

1) What are some typical situations you struggle with around discussions in your meetings?

2) What would you **really** like help with in leading productive focused discussions?

Practice Where It Is Safe: Open vs. Closed Questions with Family or Personal Situations

Our society does not model or encourage thoughtful questioning techniques. Our biggest difficulty in western society at least especially is that we ask closed questions. Closed questions encourage the responder to answer with a “yes” or a “no”. We find it helpful to personalize this concept. So let’s begin at home or with people you speak to outside of work.

For example, when a loved one (child, partner, friends, etc.) comes home at the end of the day, you might typically ask them, “Did you have a good day?” This is an example of a closed question. We tend to ask this because (deep down) we want to hear that the day went well for them. The other person suspects this so they usually say, “yes”.

Another way we might ask this question is, “How was your day?” This is an open-ended question. However, most people assume we do not really want to know, so they still answer in short form with “fine” or “ok”. This does not give us enough information to find out more about their day. I find it works well to say instead: “What did you do today?” If the person still responds with a short phrase (e.g., “not much”, or “the usual”, I say: “I really do want to know what you did today. For example, what projects did you work on? Or who did you talk with today? Or, what other activities did you do?” When a loved one answers these types of questions, we get a good sense of how their day was, and what is behind their mood when they arrive home.

Read on to find out how to change your questions to open-ended ones and then how to structure questions to invite open, authentic dialogue.

Note that answering questions that are open-ended encourage the responder to go beyond the brief yes/no. See below for classic closed questions and how these can be rephrased to become open ended.

Closed: Did you have a good day?

Open: What did you do today? Or, what activities did you do today? What was your meeting about?

Closed: Do you all know what is going on here?

Open: What do you know about this situation?

Closed: Do you think it is a good idea to do this?

Open: What ideas do you have to fix this?

Closed: Did you hear what I said?

Open: What did you hear me say?

Closed: Will this help you resolve the situation?

Open: How will this help you resolve the situation? Or, What are the good and bad points in using this idea to resolve the situation?

Closed: Does this mean we will not go on vacation?

Open: What are the implications of this on our vacation plans?

Closed: Do you remember what happened the last time this occurred?

Open: What happened the last time this occurred?

Exercise 2

Write down the 5-7 questions you typically ask of your family or friends when you see them on a regular basis?

What patterns do you see in the questions you ask in these personal situations?

Now think about work, what patterns of questioning do you use there?

What insights have you gained from this reflection?

Any Discussion

The ToP[®] Focused Conversation Method or ORID

The ToP[®] Focused Conversation Method was developed by a not-for-profit organization called the Institute of Cultural Affairs (www.ica-usa.org is the USA office website; www.ica-associates.ca is the Canadian website). They also have offices in over 40 countries worldwide; many of the offices offer training in this tool. On page 33, we also provide you with a blank template to write out context, questions and closure for important meeting discussions. We will use the Focused Meeting discussion Method (also known as ORID) as a frame of reference for the other two frameworks so you can see how all dialogue models really use the same sequencing framework.

This technique in a nutshell

The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) asserts that there are 4 levels to our thinking and that these 4 levels are really the natural way we all think in our heads. Typically, we precede exploring these 4 levels of thinking with some context setting. Typical context setting might include what you are going to talk about, how long you are going to talk about it, why you need the meeting discussion at this time, and an invitation to join you in the meeting discussion. You might also let the group know that you would like to ask them some questions to get started and to help you understand their perspectives on the subject. You then ask a series of open-ended questions that are sequenced into the 4 levels of thinking. At the end of the 4 levels of thinking questions, you may offer next steps and appreciations. The closing of a meeting discussion typically includes a “thank-you for sharing with me” and sometimes, scheduling a time to follow-up.

Why and when to use this technique

Music has discernible patterns; so does our thinking. Your job in creating meeting discussion is to follow a pattern. This Focused Meeting discussion Method framework provides an orderly structured way to help a group move smoothly from A-Z in their processing of a situation or problem. It is important to use this when you have a short time frame or the group culture will benefit from an insightful yet precise meeting discussion. It has hundreds, if not thousands of applications. It is one of the most versatile dialogue tools I have used.

BONUS!! This method can be used in many situations: interviews; a structure for written evaluations; reports; speeches; group problem-solving; evaluating a product or services; family meeting discussions; vacation planning; resolving conflict; or reflecting on an event or situation. Its

structure can be used to design an entire workshop and/or be used as individual segments within a meeting or workshop.

An overview of this technique

The 4 levels or phases noted below represent the way we naturally think if we are not interrupted by someone else's thinking. ICA describes the 4 levels or phases of a meeting discussion as follows. The short form of this framework is called ORID for each of the 4 levels – **O**bjective- **R**eflective- **I**nterpretive- and **D**ecisional. They encourage different types of open-ended questions at each level to achieve the results you (and others) want from the meeting discussion:

- 1. OBJECTIVE Thinking Level:** Gathering or stating the facts, data and perspectives to bring all parties to a common starting point. Typical questions to solve a problem for example, might include (choose 1-3 questions):
 - What do we know about this situation or problem?
 - What did you hear and see that you would like to share with me or others about the problem?
 - What are some of the events that led up to this problem/situation?
 - What happened last time we had a similar problem?

- 2. REFLECTIVE Thinking Level:** Personal responses, feelings, associations, images. Emotional responses are acknowledged and accounted for in the decision. The reflective level can also bring out memories associated with a similar past situation or event. Typical questions to solve a problem might include (choose 2-3 at most):
 - What are the high points of the situation? Low points?
 - What concerns do you have about the issue?
 - What excites you about solving this problem?
 - What was your first response when you heard the news that...?
 - How does this situation/event remind you of anything you have experienced before?

- 3. INTERPRETIVE Thinking Level:** Analysis, meaning and impact of the topic, significance and implications to the group. Judgements are based upon much more data, and taking into account the wide array of perspectives that surface in the previous two levels. Typically more time is spent at this level of the meeting discussion. Examples of questions at this level to e.g. solve a problem are: (use as many as are needed)
 - What have we learned from this information/situation...?
 - Why did this happen?

- What are some of the root issues here?
- What are the implications of this happening?
- What is the value of solving this? What is the value of not solving it?
- How will we be different as a group/company/family if we make these changes?

4. DECISIONAL Thinking Level: Designed to help the group identify actions or decisions. It allows the group to name their relationship & responses to their situation. You may not actually reach a decision but you come to some resolution or end point that brings closure to the topic at this time. Examples of questions to solve a problem:

- What are some ways we can resolve this problem?
- What will you do differently as a result of this situation?
- What is the highest priority?
- What are we committed to do?
- What are our next steps?
- When will we evaluate our progress?

Please review the following resource for a comprehensive overview of this tool and over 100 examples of focused meeting discussions: **The Art of Focused Conversation Method** by Brian Stanfield, available from www.ica-associates.ca or www.ica-usa.org.



Exercise 3

Plan an important discussion you'd like to have with a group in the next few weeks.

A) First, write out the purpose of the discussion – what you hope to achieve as a result of this conversation.

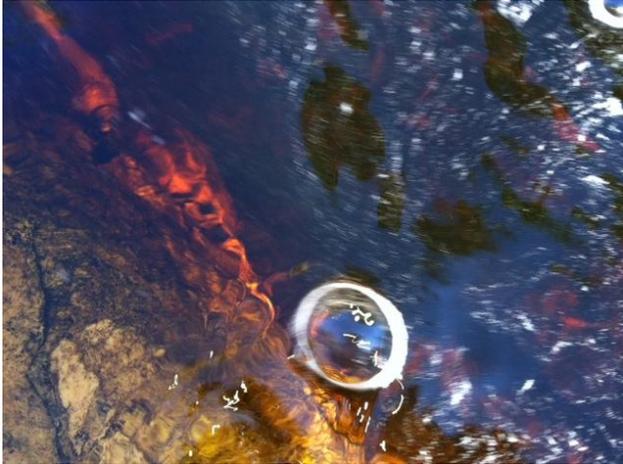
B) Then, draft 2-3 questions for each level. Make sure each question begins with **what**, **how** or **when** to ensure you create open-ended questions. A helpful tool is to write each question on a small post-it note and then arrange them according to the 4 levels.

C) Finally, sequence each question at each level so they flow well together.

Objective Questions Facts, Data	Reflective Questions Feelings, Associations	Interpretive Questions Value, Importance	Decisional Questions Decision, conclusion

Any Problem Solving

Dr. Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats Technique



A second framework I often use to assist groups with some quick, but highly structured thinking about a problem or challenging topic is with Dr. De Bono's Six Thinking Hats technique. It is often done in a quicker timeframe than ORID or the Focused Meeting discussion Method (e.g., 12-30 minutes versus 20-75 minutes). It really helps a group stay focused on thinking creatively and sequentially. It successfully avoids the argumentative or judgemental responses. Rather, it tends to foster very respectful and thought provoking responses.

Dr. De Bono's thinking levels are similar in many respects to the ICA thinking model. Here are the 3 key differences (much simplified):

1. De Bono talks about six levels of thinking. He essentially has broken the Reflective level from the ICA framework into three parts.
 - The positive thinking responses – i.e. the Yellow hat
 - The negative thinking responses – i.e. the Black hat
 - The gut level thinking responses – i.e. the Red hat
2. De Bono encourages the user to mix up the six levels of thinking in any format that works.
3. De Bono does not advocate using any set number of hats in any given situation. You can use 3 hats for a short thinking project or perhaps as many as 10 hats (repeating several hat colors) for a longer thinking project.

This technique in a nutshell

This is a parallel thinking technique that sets out for a group up to 6 different thinking modes to help explore an issue or subject cooperatively. It is called parallel thinking because it forces the group to explore together one mode of thinking at a time. It is done as a timed exercise where the group moves through a pre-designed series of questions, each question focuses on a different way of

thinking about the subject. Each question is based on one of the hat colors as noted in more detail on pages 11-12. In short the hats are: white hat – neutral and objective thinking; red hat – emotional thinking; black hat – gloomy and negative thinking; yellow hat – sunny and positive thinking; green hat – fertile, creative thinking; blue hat – cool, controlled and organized thinking. Each color is chosen very carefully to represent the type of thinking which is taking place. Typically, each hat is assigned a time period of 1-15 minutes of thinking time. The red hat is rarely given more than 3 minutes of time and may be used several times in a typical sequence of thinking. The hats can be used in any sequence depending on what you are trying to achieve.

Why use this technique

Dr. De Bono in his book “Six Thinking Hats” notes below the purpose of the six hats technique as follows:

- Restricts our “ego defence” – that is, we are able to say things we would not normally feel safe to say because everyone in the group is given express permission and encouraged to say out loud what they think which is normally discouraged in meeting discussion. For example, we are invited to say everything negative we are feeling about an issue.
- Directs our attention explicitly to different aspects of a subject matter.
- Allows us a convenient way to switch gears. As a facilitator we can literally ask a group to now, “Stop thinking negatively. Switch your thinking to positive responses now.”
- Releases different chemicals or allows for a different brain chemistry that may stabilize different patterns. In a sense, he says we have a different brain for each different chemical background. For example, we are training ourselves to think reasonably even under intense, emotionally difficult situations.
- Establishes the “rules of the game”. In this case, the rules are a map for thinking brilliantly about a topic.

Page 21-24 lists over 100 great questions you can use for the different “hat” levels, and/or at different parts of your meeting discussion.

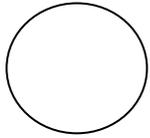
Want More Training?

For further training in this method, contact a certified trainer in Edward De Bono’s thinking techniques.

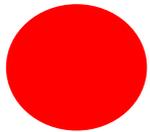


An overview of the six hats

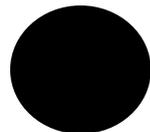
Below is a six hat sequence that generally follows the sequencing of the ICA (ToP) 4 level model (i.e. ORID).



1. WHITE HAT THINKING – Get the Facts: White hat thinking is a direction and a discipline. The thinker attempts to be more neutral and objective in presentation and gathering of information. It is about neutrality. It is often the best starting point in problem-solving. Typical questions might include, “What do we know about the situation?” “What do we need to know?” “What data supports the current thinking on this matter?”



2. RED HAT THINKING – Legitimize the Feelings and Emotions: Red hat thinking makes feelings visible so that they can become part of the thinking map. This thinking tends to be disregarded but disregarding feelings and emotions can end up blocking important decisions if not acknowledged. Often nothing more than acknowledging is needed. Red hat thinking can also incorporate a large measure of hunches, gut feelings, intuitive thinking. It can be used at the end of a meeting discussion also to take a “reading” on a situation and help with the final decision. A typical question is, “What is your gut reaction to this?”



3. BLACK HAT THINKING – Point Out the Cons: Black hat thinking is concerned with negative assessment and cautions. What is wrong with this situation? Why won't it work? What are all the design faults? Black hat thinking may be used to compare against the past or project into the future to see what might fail. In the case of new ideas, always begin with yellow hat thinking first. Atypical question is, “What are all the cautions we need to be aware of?”



4. YELLOW HAT THINKING – Point out the Benefits/Pros: Yellow hat thinking is specifically about positive assessment? What are the good points about this situation? What good will come from taking this approach? Yellow hat thinking is positive and constructive. It can cover the logical and the hopes and dreams. It is concerned with operationalizing and making things happen. Effectiveness is the aim of yellow hat thinking. A typical question is, “What is good about this situation?”



5. GREEN HAT THINKING – Generate New Ideas: Green hat thinking requires creativity and ideas generated in this mode are treated respectfully - all ideas are welcome as a catalyst for the NEW, the bold, the innovative. In green hat thinking the idiom of judgement is replaced by the idiom of movement. Provocation is an important part of green hat thinking. (See also De Bono’s work on lateral thinking). Green hat thinking can be used to generate ways to overcome the cautions outlined in the black hat thinking. A typical question, “What are ways to solve this problem?” or “What are some creative approaches to dealing with the negatives?”



6. BLUE HAT THINKING – Summarize the Thinking: Blue hat thinking is the control hat. It is about organizing the thinking. It is about defining the problem, and shaping the questions. It is about summarizing and drawing conclusions. The blue hat thinker often calls for the use of the other hats. Most often, blue hat thinking is used at the design stage of discussion and at the end of the discussion. A typical question might be, “How would you summarize our thinking?” or “What seems to be our decision on this?”

An example of 6 hat shorter sequencing that does not follow the ORID ICA framework is shown below using only three hats:

- Blue hat:** Focus and define the topic for discussion.
- White hat:** Find out what the group knows about the topic or situation
- Green hat:** Generate ideas to expand the group’s understanding of the topic or create ideas to improve a situation.

Here is a second example using 6 hat longer sequencing (using 8 hats) that does not follow the ORID ICA framework that could be used for problem-solving:

- Blue hat:** Discuss what exactly is the problem (define it).
- White hat:** What information do we have on this problem?
- Red hat:** What is your gut reaction to this problem?
- Green hat:** What are the possible solutions do deal with the problem?
- Yellow hat:** What is positive about each of these solutions?
- Black hat:** What are the negatives or cautions about each of these solutions?
- White hat:** Which solutions match the information we have? Which are not feasible?
- Red hat:** Which solution does your gut tell you is the right one?
- Blue hat:** Which solution shall we choose and what are our next steps to begin implementing this solution?

On the next 2 pages, try out the six hats framework on both a personal and a work situation.

Exercise 4

Subject

You have been asked to help members of a family solve a family problem. The problem is helping an elderly parent (father) be respected but still be safe about their housing situation. They currently live alone and are very independent in spirit but they are now not able to completely function on their own. What can be done?

- 1) First, write the color of the hat.
- 2) Second, create a question. When you have put together your sequence of hats, compare your sequence with our suggested version in the Appendix

Note: Only use as many hats in your sequence to have a reasonable discussion (i.e. you do not need to use 10 steps.)

Purpose of Conversation:

Make sure a senior, disabled family member (father) is in a safe living situation.

Sequence of Meeting discussion

*Suggestions for a sequence of meeting discussion for this exercise can be found in the Appendix on page 25.

1. _____ Hat (e.g. red hat)

Write the question you are probing for here

2. _____ Hat

3. _____ Hat

4. _____ Hat

5. _____ Hat

6. _____ Hat

7. _____ Hat

8. _____ Hat

Exercise 5

Subject

Your group is trying to decide how to solve the problem of low morale in the office. They also have several new team members who they want to be included but not threatened by the discussion. What needs to happen to improve this situation?

As per exercises, create sequence of questions using a unique sequence of hats. When you have put together your sequence of hats, compare your sequence with our suggested versions in the appendix.

Purpose of Conversation: Improve morale in the office.

Sequence of Meeting discussion:

1. _____ Hat (e.g. red hat)

Write the question you are probing for here

2. _____ Hat

3. _____ Hat

4. _____ Hat

5. _____ Hat

6. _____ Hat

7. _____ Hat

8. _____ Hat

Any Conflict

The Non-Violent Conversation Framework



Many of our meeting discussions are about conflict. A third dialogue model comes from Dr. Marshall Rosenberg who has created the Non-Violent Communication Method (www.cnvc.org). Some call it the compassionate communication method. He also uses questions and essentially follows the ICA Focused Meeting discussion method structure (i.e. ORID) but in a conflict situation it has the following differences:

- a) The facilitator uses empathy as the key tone to the dialogue
- b) The individual answers are more inclined to go back and forth between thinking levels.

This technique in a nutshell

The non-violent communication (also called compassionate communication) was created by Dr. Rosenberg to help individuals and groups resolve often long-standing or deeply rooted issues or conflicts. He has used it with tribes at war with one another, in Palestinian-Israeli talks, with couples separating, with children fighting, in schools discussing difficult behavior situations, and many more “high stakes” situations.

Dr. Rosenberg uses the metaphor of the giraffe for the listener. He says the giraffe has the largest heart of any mammal. As facilitator, you can imagine that you are always able to hear the pain beneath a person’s outbursts, accusations or harsh/ violent language. As facilitator, you are always listening for feelings and the unmet needs of each individual or group. You are attempting to help them see that each person is a loving, brilliant person who simply has behaved unskillfully in their attempt to meet unmet needs.

Why use this technique

I often use this technique when groups appear to be “in pain” and judging of group members (blaming, etc.) is happening. When the tension is resolved, you can more easily move onto other important business. It creates an atmosphere of safety.

An overview of the 4 Non-Violent Communication (NVC) levels:

- **OBSERVATION - Objective Level:** What have you observed about this situation? What is the behavior that is challenging? Describe to me as neutrally as possible what you have seen or heard in the group or from individuals that is causing some negative emotions to arise. Rosenberg calls this the “observation” step.
- **FEELINGS - Reflective Level:** What feelings arise for you when you see or hear the behavior or words that are troubling you? Examples of feelings are sad, angry, worried, happy, frustrated, irritated, grateful, uneasy, shocked, disgusted, panicky, etc. Rosenberg calls this the “naming the feeling” step.
- **NEEDS - Interpretive Level:** What needs are not being met that are giving rise to your feelings or the groups feelings? What is important to you that is not happening here? Examples of needs are acceptance, community, consideration, choice, authenticity, protection, safety, play, order, peace, etc. Rosenberg calls this the “identifying the unmet needs” step.
- **REQUEST - Decisional Level:** What would we like the group to do differently that will make things go better for the group? What is our request of the group? What actions are needed to meet the unmet needs and reduce the tension? Rosenberg calls this the “making the request” step.



"Every criticism, judgment, diagnosis, and expression of anger is the tragic expression of an unmet need."

— Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg

Tip:

Use Dr. Rosenberg's method to resolve group tension. It will be easier to move onto other important business because you have created an atmosphere of safety.



Exercise #6: Non-Violent Communication Practice Exercise

Personal Worksheet for Reflecting on a Difficult Situation

Think of someone whose behavior is upsetting or frustrating you and fill out the five parts of this process. We are providing you a personal example because once you've tried this out for yourself it's easier to facilitate this process in groups.

Example of five steps: When you wrote me a note asking if we could have lunch together around 1:00 p.m. and then arrived home at 2:30 p.m. (O), I feel cranky (F) because I need to connect with you (N). I am wondering if tonight you could be home for supper by 7:30 p.m. (PR). Would you be willing to tell me what you heard me say and how you feel about what I asked of you? (AF)

(O) Observation	(F) Feelings	(N) Needs	(PR) Present Request*	(AF) Asking for Feedback
1. One thing this person does or says that you do not like or makes it hard for you.	2. Imagine you are talking directly to this person and describe the feeling that arises when you observe this behavior.	3. Imagine you are talking directly to this person and you are telling him/her what needs of yours are not being met by his/her behavior (e.g., because I am needing...)	4. Imagine you are talking directly to this person and say "I would like you to... or Would you be willing to... (State the request to meet your present needs).	5. Imagine you are talking directly to this person and you are asking for some feedback on how this person heard your request.

Questions to Get You Started

It is helpful to have some pre-identified questions to ensure your creative juices flowing. On pages 22-25 , we provide at least 100 good questions. Feel free to adapt any of the suggested questions to customize them for your specific meeting situation or agenda item. References include ICA’s book on “The Focused Meeting discussion”, Dr. Edward De Bono’s work on “Six Thinking Hats”, Dorothy Strachan’s work on “Questions That Work”, and William Isaac’s work on “The Art of Dialogue”.

The questions below are categorized into six different types of questions. Each category represents either a “Focused Meeting discussion” level or a “Six Thinking Hats” level. To create a focused and productive discussion, take the following steps initially:

- Please use page 29 for the template to do your first practice written meeting discussion.
- Decide on the purpose of your meeting discussion or discussion.
- Based on this purpose, choose 2-3 questions from each of the six categories on the next few pages.
- Revise or adapt these questions to suit your situation.
- Sequence your questions within each level. Assume for now you always begin your meeting discussion with questions with the white hat or objective level and your next set of questions will be at the gut reaction or reflective level, etc.
- Read your questions out loud to yourself to test for flow, clarity and ability to meet your original purpose stated in step 1.
- Enjoy the creativity associated with crafting an excellent discussion guide.
- Hold the meeting discussion.
- Evaluate how well your questions worked after you complete the discussion. Keep a copy of all of your discussion guides because sometimes you can reuse these meeting discussions for different situations.



“We can judge our progress by the courage of our questions and the depth of our answers, our willingness to embrace what is true rather than what feels good.”

— Carl Sagan

The Best Place to Start:

White Hat or Objective Level (Rational, Objective, Easy to Answer)

1. What do you know about this situation?
2. What don't you know?
3. What would you like to know?
4. What is one more thing you would like to know?
5. What key events led up to this situation?
6. What was the sequence of events?
7. When did these events occur?
8. What is the status quo or current situation?
9. Who was present?
10. What did you see?
11. What did you hear? What did you smell?
12. What clarifying questions do you have?
13. What don't you understand?
14. What was said?
15. What were some key phrases or word you read in this report (heard in this presentation)?



This Comes Next:

Yellow or Black hat - Red Hat or Gut Reaction – Some Reflective Level
(Neutral/Emotional/Associations)

16. Where have you seen a similar situation like this?
17. What does this remind you of?
18. What is your gut reaction to this?
19. What images came to mind when you heard (or saw) this?
20. What was your mood during this event?
21. What was the prevailing attitude at the time?
22. Where did you chuckle?
23. What did you find interesting?
24. What was intriguing about this?

Generally Precedes Critical Thinking:

Yellow Hat and Some Reflective Level (Positive/Appreciative)

25. What are you grateful for?
26. What did you appreciate?
27. Where were you proud?
28. Where do we feel successful?
29. What are the pluses of this situation?
30. What were the best moments of this event?
31. What did you especially like about...?
32. What do you feel really good about?
33. What is very encouraging about all of this?
34. Where do you get motivated?
35. What is the best-case scenario?
36. What do we really want to see happening here in the next five years?
37. If we were wildly successful in this project, what would we see, hear and feel happening?
38. What are all the strengths of this solution?
39. What are all the reasons this will work?
40. How will we be better if this happens?
41. What are the opportunities here?
42. What are our talents?
43. What seems easy?
44. What is a “Kodak moment” positive story you could relate to us about your organization?

Black Hat and Some Reflective Level (Negative, Cautious, Critical)

45. Where were you confused?

46. What seems hard?
47. Where did you have a sinking feeling?
48. What is the worst that could happen?
49. What do we need to be cautious about?
50. Where do we need to be extra careful?
51. Where does it feel like we are in hot water?
52. What don't we like?
53. What are we not sure about?
54. What are you scared of?
55. What terrifies us?
56. What dangers might arise if we do this? Don't do this?
57. What are all our weaknesses?
58. Where do we feel challenged?
59. Where are we ambivalent?
60. What red flags get raised for you?
61. Where did you feel like opting out?
62. What are the threats of being wildly successful?
63. Where do we feel vulnerable?

Green Hat and Interpretive Level

(Analysis, Meaning-Making, Creative, Options)

64. What is the meaning behind these words?
65. What are the implications of this (event, situation, policy...)
66. What do you long for?
67. What are the options open to us?
68. What do we need to learn from this?
69. What will be different if we do this?
70. What are the key negotiating points?
71. How will we provide better service if we...?
72. What assumptions are we making about this situation?
73. What is the value of this? Or what is the importance of doing this?
74. What values are we upholding with these practices?
75. Which of our practices demonstrate our values?
76. What is the significance of this action?
77. What is the victory we are looking for?
78. What is our interpretation of this?
79. What really is the problem?
80. What strategies will move us in the right direction?
81. What will make us truly satisfied?
82. How can we measure our success?

83. What criteria will help us know if we are successful or effective?
84. What are the needs that are not being addressed? Which are not?
85. What role could our organization play in this situation/initiative?

Some Part of Blue Hat or Decisional Level

86. How can we celebrate this victory?
87. What are our next steps?
88. What is the commitment I am willing to make?
89. Who do we need to inform of this decision or recommendations?
90. What are our recommendations?
91. What is a catchy title for this plan or project?
92. At what points do we need to evaluate this plan or project?
93. Who will we tell about this?
94. What are our top priorities for the next month, the next year?
95. In the short term, our actions need to include ...?
96. What will be our motivating slogan or image for this campaign/project/program?
97. Who will be responsible for each action step?
98. Who can be our champion for this...?
99. How have we achieved what we set out to accomplish?

Extras:

If you could only do three things, what would they be?

What will you do next week?

What are our conclusions?

How would you summarize what we did today?

What are our decisions?

What is the unfinished business we need to take up next time?

What are the one to two big nuts we need to crack open to solve this challenge?

If we did this again, what would we do differently?

Tips for Asking Questions to Obtain Dramatic Results:

1. Know why you are asking the questions. Have a rational aim (what you want them to know) and an experiential aim (how you want them to feel) for every meeting discussion.
2. Craft good questions using language and words with which both you and they are comfortable.
3. Keep your questions simple – easy to understand – ask only one question at a time.
4. If it is a really important meeting discussion, test out the aims, the questions and order of questions with a representative group first. Then refine.

5. Set the context for the meeting discussion, i.e., tell them why they are having this meeting discussion. Check whether the aims of the meeting discussion meet their needs. Let them know how much time is set aside for this meeting discussion.
6. Try to get everyone to answer the first question so every voice is heard.
7. Ask each question neutrally and use a positive tone.
8. Wait. Be prepared to wait for answers. Be comfortable with silence.
9. Be prepared to repeat the question in a slightly different way if there are looks of puzzlement.
10. Listen to their answers respectfully.
11. Acknowledge each person's input with body language (head nod, smile) or a simple thank you.
12. Suspend judgment. Be as neutral and as encouraging as you can in receiving each person's input.
13. It is not necessary to repeat each person's answer. This can become tiresome. Once in a while, you need to repeat so everyone can hear it. Once in a while, you need to paraphrase so they really hear you "got it". And sometimes, you need to ask them back a clarifying question "did you mean...?"
14. It is not necessary to have everyone answer every question. Let people engage where they wish to be engaged except for the first question, which is about giving them comfort and permission to engage throughout.
15. Be sure you bring some kind of closure to the meeting discussion by saying thank you and letting them know what will happen next.



The Seven C's to Setting up... Important Difficult Discussions

Here are 7 general points for setting up sensitive or difficult meeting discussions:

1. **Clarify** (with yourself and then with others) why you're having the discussion. Is this discussion meant to build relationships, resolve a business problem, agree to an action or decision, motivate the group to action, or become informed? It is helpful to write down what the aims of the meeting discussion are. It helps you become clear about how to structure the meeting discussion and stay focused if emotions get strong. You may have many aims for the discussion both around specific results you want or specific feelings you want the group to share or process. These are as we learned in workshop 2, are your rational and experiential aims (based on Technology of Participation ToP®® methods).
2. **Choose** a good time or appropriate place in the agenda for everyone involved to have this discussion. Allow enough time to complete it.
3. **Consider** what other peoples' needs are and if you are not sure, ask them what is important to them in having this meeting discussion.
4. **Craft** questions ahead of time that help you create an open, inviting atmosphere for dialogue. Make sure they are open-ended and follow a structure. See tips in exercise 3 – top box on page 11. Frameworks for creating questions are described on pages 7-19. Examples of questions at every level of thinking begin on page 20.
5. **Confidence** is key. Think positive thoughts before you start any important meeting discussion. Have confidence in yourself and visualize that this meeting

“An expert knows all the answers – if you ask the right questions.”

--Anonymous

discussion will go well.

6. **Context** will create safety. Tell people a little bit about why you are having the discussion and that you would like to hear their best thinking on a topic. Let them know when you are about to ask a provocative or controversial question with a phrase such as, “Now my next question may require you to dig a little deeper” or “...might sound controversial”.
7. **Collaboration** tone-setting will help. Tell them how you appreciate their willingness to start this discussion. This is especially important when there is tension or conflict.

Exercise 7

Which of these seven steps do you already do?

Which are easy for you to do?

Which do you need help with?

What is something difficult coming up where you could practice these steps?

Conclusion

Leading focused and productive discussions requires practice. After several decades of facilitating, I still write down the purpose of a discussion and the sequence of questions I wish to ask.

The key is to know what you want the group to discover, decide or understand. The way to do that easily is to ask questions that systematically allow the group members to relate to each other in non-confrontational ways. You slow down the thinking process for them just enough for everyone in the group to follow along and contribute when they feel comfortable doing so. In slowing the process down, you actually save the group time in the future by helping them arrive at some new insight or sound decision.



One last tip! Be relaxed, calm and friendly with every person in the meeting discussion.

Our Favorite “Best on the Market” Resources



“Appreciative Inquiry Handbook”, David Cooperrider, et al, 2005.

“The Art of Focused Meeting discussion Method”, Brian Stanfield, Institute of Cultural Affairs, 1997.

“Crucial Conversations tools for talking when stakes are high”, Kerry Patterson, et al, 2002.

“Crucial Confrontations – Tools for Resolving Broken Promises, Violated Expectations and Bad Behavior”. Kerry Patterson, et al, 2004.

“Dialogue – The Art of Thinking Together”, William Issacs, 1999.

“Nonviolent Communication – A Language of Compassion”, Marshall B. Rosenberg, 1999.

“Questions That Work”, Dorothy Strachan, 2001.

“Six Thinking Hats”, De Bono, Edward, 1985.

“Six Thinking Hats Short Course, Advanced Practical Thinking Training, Inc.”, Edward De Bono, 1992.



Your Guide and Author of This Module:

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Barbara MacKay, MS, CPF©, principal of North Star Facilitators, specializes in strategic planning, facilitation, training, and coaching..

Barbara is currently mentoring facilitators from all over the world and cares deeply about passing on the skills to others so the world becomes a just, peaceful and creative place. Barbara strong interpersonal communication skills and experience allow her to work skillfully with a wide variety of participant perspectives. Barbara specializes in helping groups participate, problem-solve, plan and make progress in challenging and complex situations. She has an energetic, respectful style and clear delivery. Her current focus is developing virtual facilitation training so we can make these skills globally accessible. Barbara has worked with 100's of clients from all sectors with her own company since 1995. She provided social, economic and environmental consulting and facilitation services with many cultures throughout Canada from 1981 to 1995.

Barbara is a: Certified facilitator and USA trainer with the International Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA and Canada); Certified Professional Facilitator (CPF) and assessor of other facilitators world-wide with the International Association of Facilitators (IAF); Professional Development Strategic Initiative Coordinator for the IAF for four years; has been an Adjunct professor with University of Oregon (Eugene) (teaching the only required facilitation skills (4 credits) class of all Oregon universities at graduate level in Conflict and Dispute Resolution Studies); an adjunct professor teaching facilitation skills at Portland State University (Not for Profit Management Institute); certified OneSmartWorld™ trainer; trained in Disaster Crisis Intervention for facilitators; certified accelerated learning trainer; trained extensively in: Constructivist Listening and Cross Cultural Communication and Alliance Building; visioning processes; Mind Mapping™; Behavior styles model "Why Are You Like That?™"; and Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI). She is also trained and teaches about Learning Organizations; Organizational Journey (ICA); conciliation; "shifting from positions to interests"; conflict resolution; negotiation skills; anger management; risk communication; training for trainers; and curriculum development.



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Appendix



Suggested Answers to Six Thinking Hats Exercise #5 – “Make sure a family member (father) is in a safe living situation”

1. White - Color of Hat
What have you noticed going on with your father in the last year?
2. Green - Color of Hat
What are some ways you’ve thought of to improve your father’s safety in his living situation?
3. Blue - Color of Hat
How does each alternative fit our father’s needs?
4. Red - Color of Hat
What alternative do we like the best?
5. Blue - Color of Hat
Which do we choose and what is our next step?

Suggested Answers to Six Thinking Hats Exercise #6 “Improved morale in the office”

1. Blue - Color of Hat
What about the morale situation in the office do we want to explore?
2. White - Color of Hat
What have we observed about office morale lately? Or what have we tried already to improve morale?
3. Green - Color of Hat
Why do we think we have a morale problem? (Generate as many hypotheses as possible.)
4. White - Color of Hat
What else might be going on here that we have not thought of?
5. Yellow - Color of Hat
How will we benefit if office morale is improved?
6. Red - Color of Hat
What is our gut reaction to any of the things we’ve tried in the past?
7. Blue - Color of Hat
What is really required to improve the situation? What shall we do?

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) About Discussions

Note: Some of my answers will simply refer back to what you covered in this handout and thus are short!

Q: How do I keep a group on track? (i.e. not get side tracked)

A: *Use one of the frameworks noted in this text. Try the focused meeting discussion method first. Keep asking the same question until you have heard different answers to the same questions from several people, then move on to your next question. The structure keeps people on track!*

Q: How do I help a group come to agreement or achieve closure on the topic?

A: *This is the last level of thinking. Be sure to ask some questions at this last decisional or blue hat level.*

Q: How do I help a group discuss tough issues?

A: *Setting context is very important. You need to create safety but nodding as each person speaks, thanking people for offering answers but not commenting on them yourself. In other words, you act neutrally. Also, you need to ask very objective, non-leading open-ended questions. See examples on pages 20-23.*

Q: How do I help avoid heated arguments?

A: *Be sure to let them know and demonstrate that you will draw out as neutrally as possible all sides of the "argument". You can ask for example: "What other perspectives are there on this issue?"*

Q: How can I focus multiple interests?

A: *Use one of the frameworks of dialogue included in this workshop!*

Q: What do I do when a group has gone through a recent failure or disappointment?

A: *Acknowledge it. For example, "I have heard that you have recently undergone some difficult times. This is what I know about it... It will not be a major part of today's meeting discussion but some of it will need to come up as a way to process it and add to our decision-making. I will welcome that and ask the group if it goes too far in this direction what they want to do."*

Q: How do I prepare a group to reflect on an important event?

A: *This is context setting. Let them know you are doing this. See also points 1 and 6 especially on page 5 for suggestions.*

Q: Why do some people never participate in the meeting discussion?

A: *They do not feel safe in a larger group possibly because they have taken on a pattern of behavior of listener, or because they fear their thoughts will not make a difference. Use a "Round Robin" technique (everyone answers the same question, one person at a time) on an*

easy question near the beginning of the discussion so at least their voice will be heard once. Allow people to submit ideas in writing or break into smaller groups so the quieter ones may feel safer to offer ideas in the small group.

Q: How do I ask provocative questions?

A: *Provocative questions are meant to help the client think more deeply and intentionally about a challenge or issue that they have not been willing or able to address. You want to do this in a way that provokes their thinking but does not put them on the defense. There are several ways to do this. The first step is to build trust with the group you are wanting to move on their issue. Second, you can try questions such as: “I heard you say this...a few weeks ago; and today I heard something similar. Can you tell me more about what is going on here?” Or, you might ask: “What is a question someone from the outside might ask of you if they saw this organization clearly?” Finally, you might simply say, “This might be a naïve question, but why do you do this in your organization?” The key to any question you ask is to maintain absolute neutrality and make sure your voice is full of curiosity and holds no judgment.*

Q: Do I always need to ask open questions? (i.e. ones that don't have a yes or no answer)

A: *Generally yes, because if you ask closed questions you will be perceived as non-neutral. However, I often unintentionally ask closed questions. When I catch myself doing that, I might say, “Oops. I meant to ask that a different way”, then I rephrase to an open-ended question.*

Q: What if people are “all over the map” when we start out the meeting discussion?

A: *Again, use one of the discussion frameworks. It encourages people to start at the beginning of the meeting discussion. If they do not answer your question, you can simply say, “That is helpful. Can you remember to bring up that idea later? Right now, I am hoping everyone will take a minute to “get on the same page”. The question I was asking was....” (Repeat the last question you asked.)*



Template for Planning Your Important “Focused Conversations”¹

Your Conversation Topic and Date:

Rational aims (e.g., product, understanding, decision...):

Experiential aims (e.g., experience, mood, tone, feeling...):

CONTEXT (why have this conversation)	OBJECTIVE (facts, data)	REFLECTIVE (feelings, associations)	INTERPRETIVE (meaning, value, significance)	DECISIONAL (actions, closing)	CLOSING (appreciation and follow-up needed)

¹ Focused Conversation Method was developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs. The USA office is www.ica-usa.org. There are offices around the world committed to community development and participation.

Comparison of the Three Dialogue Frameworks

Framework	ToP Focused Conversation	Six Thinking Hats	NonViolent Communication
Open-ended questions	Yes	Sometimes	Sometimes
Use for	Any situation	Problem solving in limited time	Conflict Empathy
Levels	Four	Six	Four
Sequencing	in order	any order	in order
Time	5'-2 hours 20-30' average	6-20'	30'-2 hours