

# Being a trusted and authentic conversation partner.

Fruitful intentions for open and quality (research) exchange,  
a handbook.

Checks & Balances  
for fruitful intentions



The dimensions for  
exploring

The Corner  
Stones



- Reading Guide
- Tips
- Glossary

# Reading Guide – Overview of the handbook

The source document ‘fruitful intentions for an open and quality (research) exchange, a handbook’ offers an **action perspective to explore**; in terms of

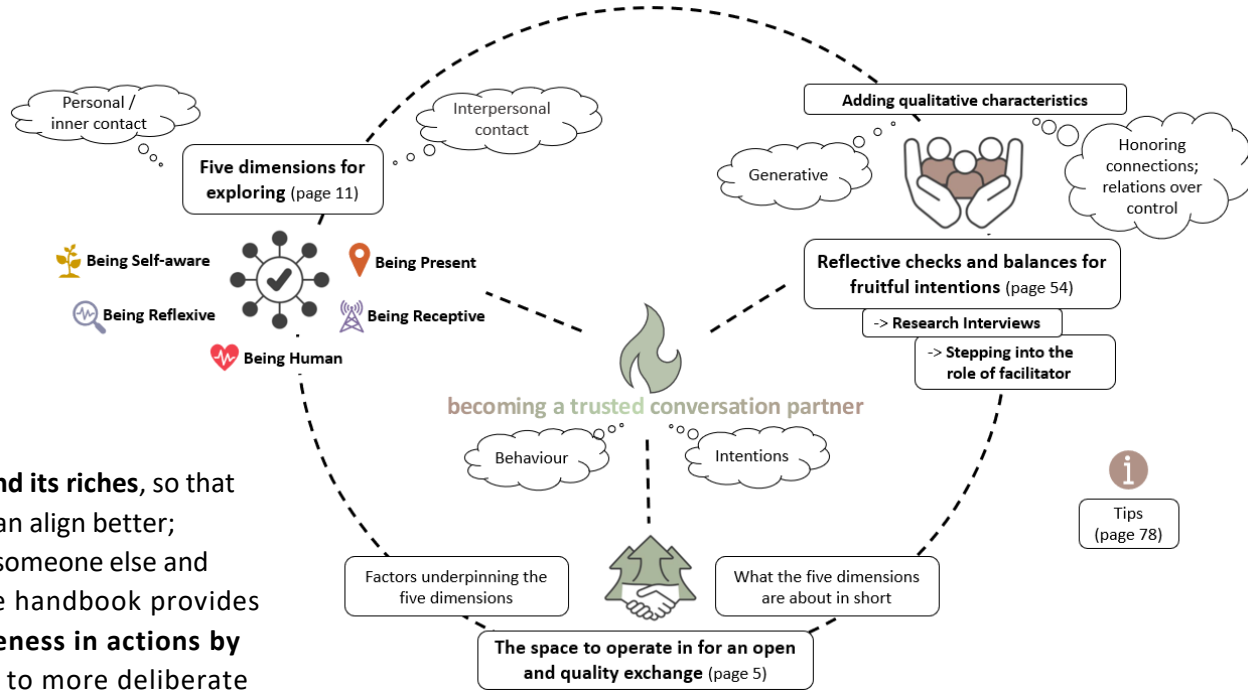
A) adding qualitative characteristics to (research) conversations and dialogue, B) becoming a trusted conversation partner, and C) engaging in reflective checks and balances for fruitful intentions.

It outlines **deeper levels of exchange and its riches**, so that your interactions and their intentions can align better; including exchange with yourself, with someone else and within a group setting. To this end, the handbook provides the possibility of **adding more awareness in actions by combining doing and being** to come to more deliberate and qualitative actions.

The document presents a **long-term perspective** for making different qualitative characteristics your own so that, combined with practice and learning, you can spiral towards greater impact over time.

**Central to the handbook** are five dimensions and their focus areas and pathways for exploration and practicing on personal and interpersonal level. These five dimensions are 1) being present, 2) being receptive, 3) being human, 4) being reflexive, and 5) being self-aware. They are first introduced in short ([page 8](#)), followed by more elaborate chapters that allow for deep dive and exploration ([page 11](#)).

The five dimensions form the corner stones of the document together with the determining factors that underpin them ([page 5](#)).



## Reading Guide

### Reading Tip

### Rationale

### The Corner Stones

### The five dimensions for exploring

### Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary

### Colophon



Furthermore, the handbook makes a start with some guiding checks and balances for fruitful intentions in research interviews and group dialogue in practice ([page 54](#)). This elaboration is based on concrete project questions and practices within Wageningen University & Research (WUR). The checks and balances include several reflective questions to access the 'right' inner attitude for quality dialogue in various dialogical applications and situations.

The document is full of reflective tips, examples and familiar situations. In addition, a special chapter has been set up with concrete exercises and tips for your own application and practice ([page 78](#)).



# Reading Guide

[Overview of the handbook](#)

[Rationale](#)

[The Corner Stones](#)

[The five dimensions for exploring](#)

[Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions](#)

[Tips & Exercises](#)


[Glossary](#)

[Colophon](#)



# Reading Guide – Reading Tip

## In the document you will find:

- Regular text
- Quotes, these are meant to inspire, outline context, provide framing and/or explanation →
- Tips are highlighted by the icon 
- Green Boxes, these provide food for thought, offer deeper dives, sketch familiar situations often combined with tips for adding more quality →
- Supporting theory, models, tools, and images are mentioned under reference
- Brown boxes, these provide explanatory information. →

The real act of discovery consists not in finding new lands, but seeing with new eyes. (Marcel Proust)

**Picture the following examples of real-life situations whilst understanding how the mentioned five dimensions are applied to these contexts.**

- How conducting structured research interviews requires a different approach when in the field and involving stakeholders;
- ...

**A Quality of Being** refers to how one is present and from what state of mind.

- The more open the state of mind, the more receptive and generative one can be; and the easier one can actively search for and be considerate to other perspectives and challenging information.
- The more positive and forwarding the state, the more ...

## The five dimensions for exploring and their sub-dimensions.

The way these are presented, is more about sketching a landscape for own discovery than providing a structured discovery of why, how, and what. Each of the five dimensions begins with an explanatory summary and framing, supported by a few quotes and a brief explanation. After which the sub-dimensions are elaborated by providing focus areas and pathways for exploration and practicing. Supported by reasoning, guiding theory, models, tips, reflection, familiar situations and examples, often in different dimensions.

## The checks & balances for fruitful intentions.

This part of the handbook kicks off with some possible guiding questions to identify the 'right' dialogic space for fruitful intentions. Followed by an elaboration of some application areas. Each area starts with a core framework and some key qualitative features to address. Followed by checks and balances, reflective questions to access the "right" inner attitude and a brief protocol / summary protocol.

# Reading Guide – Rationale

Dialogue is a conversation in which people think together in a relationship, suspend their judgment, and together create something new (new social realities). People who are in dialogue set out to understand the other person’s perspective, even if they don’t agree with it.

Brouwer et al. (Brouwer et al., 2015),

Dialogue is a quality of being, not a method at all. (William Isaacs, author of Dialogue: the Art of Thinking Together)

## Why?

The qualitative features and characteristics of being a trusted conversation partner are often not considered as integral part of methodologically rigorous academic research. This also seems to be the case in our professional careers, where we tend to put aside emotions and become result-oriented. To become better ‘dialoguers’, a different way of being and exchanging is needed.

This handbook, refers to some guidelines to become a trusted conversation partner who provides a safe space for people to share and exchange openly. In such an open setting, you as a conversation partner, will be able to obtain reliable information, create space for disagreement, and better contextualise information. Moreover, you will be more successful in enriching research findings, creating more mutual understanding, and finding better fits.

Being a trusted and authentic conversation partner demands to dive deeper into how you understand and relate yourself and others. The hardest part of developing this attitude is the ‘soft’ work of adjusting mental models, unlearning patterns and learning how to dare to truly be open and receptive to communicative subtleties that occur in the moment.

The handbook explores different required qualities for achieving openness and authenticity in conversations.



Being rationally oriented as well as connecting from person to person. (Figure, Odlens.wordpress.com)

## What?

The document is based on the basic idea that how one sees as well as how one is able to see oneself directly affects how one behaves professionally, in private and in working together. The handbook describes an attitude with many characteristics that you can adopt to have effective conversations. It serves as a source document for translation for certain target groups and specific application areas.

## For whom?

The handbook is meant for researchers and employees who engage in interviewing, conversations and moderation with stakeholders, peers, colleagues, community members, household members, citizens, representatives from civil society, private sector etc. The document is designed to help ask the right questions and create space to move beyond the mere sending and receiving of facts and technicalities; and at the same time understand yourself and others better. The ideas from the document can be applied in 1-on-1 conversations and in group exchanges, in research or in teamwork.

## How?

The document bridges explanations with theory, inspirational quotes, and practice examples, taking into account the importance of initiating an exploratory process of thinking, feeling, and sensing for developing your practical skill set.



## Reading Guide

[Overview of the handbook](#)

[Reading Tip](#)

[The Corner Stones](#)

[The five dimensions for exploring](#)

[Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions](#)

[Tips & Exercises](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Colophon](#)



# Dialogue, being a trusted and authentic conversation partner – The Corner Stones

The handbook identifies five dimensions and their focus areas and pathways for exploration and practicing, on personal and interpersonal level. These form the corner stones of the document together with the determining factors that underpin them.

When we listen with the intent to understand others, rather than with the intent to reply, we begin true communication and relationship building. Opportunities to then speak openly and to be understood come much more naturally and easily. (Stephen Covey)

The real act of discovery consists not in finding new lands, but seeing with new eyes. (Marcel Proust)

If we can't suspend judgment, we end up simply projecting our own movie - our own stream of thoughts, ideas, and concerns - onto a situation rather than shining a light on it. (Adam Kahane)

The five dimensions provide a direction for improving your quality of presence and engaging, and how to use them to benefit the quality of the dialogue and its outcome. In fact, they are also factors of impact for achieving an open and quality exchange.



## The Corner Stones

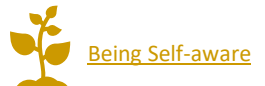
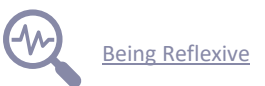
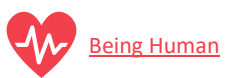
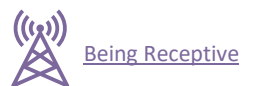
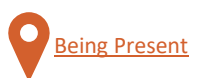
### The underpinning factors

### The five dimensions in short

### Dimensions to explore and engage with to achieve open and quality exchange:

Being Present	Being Receptive	Being Human	Being Reflexive	Being Self-aware
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active Pausing [embodied presence]</li> <li>• Increasing an open mindset [cognitive presence]</li> <li>• Dealing with emotions [emotional presence]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being open to many levels of awareness</li> <li>• Involving in Active Conversation Modes</li> <li>• Using silence</li> <li>• Applying non-verbal communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entering non-violent communication</li> <li>• Being (self-) compassionate</li> <li>• Expressing Transparency, Integrity &amp; Respect</li> <li>• Showing sincere interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting on action</li> <li>• Practicing towards reflection-in-action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing with power dynamics</li> <li>• Learning by doing - gaining trust</li> <li>• Demonstrating self-observation</li> </ul>

Before going into the dimensions and what they entail, the determining factors that underpin the five dimensions are touched upon.



# The Corner Stones – Underpinning factors



## The Corner Stones

### The underpinning factors

### The five dimensions in short



**The following determining factors underpin the five dimensions to engage with to achieve a quality exchange.**

First, a quality exchange depends in part on an open and generative space in which thoughts and creative energy can flow easily. In this space, behavior is a determining factor for people to really feel safe, heard and bridged. Authenticity and truthfulness form an important basis for this behaviour. They play a key role in enabling a dignified and generative exchange. Finally, improving our dialogic qualities also involves combining the two main modes in which the mind operates, the doing and being. As this adds the possibility for mindful actions.

**1. The exchange of knowledge, thoughts and ideas requires an open and generative space in which this can happen.** The quality of such a space depends in part on your ability as conversation partner to create a climate of discovery and to trust in the creative field of the unknown. Both of these conditions appeal to your abilities to let go and let come. Creative energy simply flows (more easily) when questions come naturally, as do the answers. When you are really able to make space for the suspension of interpretation and answers, you clear the way for the art of thinking together. Then transformative perspectives and co-creating new ways can emerge. William Isaacs, author of Dialogue: the Art of Thinking Together, calls this a way of dialogical being, that through conversation uncovers stories behind facts and hidden potential.

**2. With behaviour being a determining factor in creating an open and safe space, behaviour and intention must be in harmony.** This requires you to be aware of how you bring yourself to the conversation, how you position yourself as a conversation partner, and what shows that your intention and behaviour and

communication are aligned. It is also about relationships, with yourself and others, and how these relate to each other. Concerning things like interpersonal interaction, intercultural, interdisciplinary, interconnection, interdependence, inter-being or interconnected-ness, reciprocity, and awareness of how you are part of this and what this is demanding of you.

**3. Enabling and achieving an open and generative exchange depends on authenticity and truthfulness as well.** Its realisation involves an inner attitude that allows you (and those present) to overcome barriers to genuine and open interaction. Furthermore, it is about cultivating engagement approaches and dialogue principles and incorporating them in such a way they become part of who you are and how you act. It then becomes a part of your being and ultimately translates into sincere behaviour that enables a dignified and generative exchange and fosters a shared and expanded intelligence.

**4. Additionally, improving your dialogic quality also has to do with awareness of your mode of mind, that is your mental gear.** The two main modes in which the mind operates are known as doing and being. The doing mode is set up to get things done, aware of how things are and how they should be. It keeps one busy, also mentally. The 'doing' one is more future-oriented, outward-looking and directed towards action and others, the external world. The focus of the being-mode is to accept and allow what is, without giving in to an impulse to change it. When there is a sense of being, there is a greater awareness of the present moment, one is more in touch with the now and feels calm, better centered and anchored.



# The Corner Stones – Underpinning factors

**Although doing and being seem to be contradictory, when both are combined, this adds the possibility of putting more awareness into actions.**

It makes the action more deliberate and improves the quality of the action. Simply by paying attention to 'what' you are doing while doing it and while at that moment being with yourself and what is happening in your personal inner world. This adds a mindful human touch to your professional work that results in effective connections that are able to enrich the outcomes of conversations.

**Adding a mindful and human touch to your actions involves adding a quality of being to your doing.**

This brings more control over your own actions and more awareness into interactions and involvement. You could call it a state of doing from a sense of being. The doing side is relatively easy and can bring quick (behavioral) results. Although the being side is less visible, it does have significant impact on the space in which you find yourself and the quality of the conversation you have. Yet, the being side is much more challenging as it requires

**A Quality of Being** refers to how one is present and from what state of mind.

- The more open the state of mind, the more receptive and generative one can be; and the easier one can actively search for and be considerate to other perspectives and challenging information.
- The more positive and forwarding the state, the more present one is from full attentiveness to and engagement with whatever one is doing at the moment and the better one's quality of being. This state of being mindful leads to mindful observing, listening, and interacting.

that you make time to go a little deeper, and do some pausing and essential inner work before you act. Besides it requires an investment of time to free time and integrate the being component into your way of working. As is with many things, the art of internalisation lies in practicing, learning, experimenting, improving, reflecting, refining, etc.

William Isaacs sees dialogue as 'a *conversation with a center, not sides* ... a way of taking the energy of our differences and channeling it toward something that has never been created before.' This captures both the creation of a common ground rather than taking sides and the channeling of energy to something new. The common ground is about creating a level playing field from acknowledgement that there are, in many ways, many equally important ways of seeing and understanding the world, and channeling this into something new.

In this sense, dialogue is about a finer balancing. So that giving and receiving appropriately, giving space and taking up space, eye for your understandings and needs, yours and those of the other(s), facts and feelings which is similar to external and internal perception, reasoning and human experience or mind and heart, trust and trustworthiness, and so forth, in interaction can bring forth a new reality.

However, it appears not so obvious to give doing and being, knowing and not-knowing, cognitive intelligence and emotional intelligence, equal recognition in professional work and everyday work habits.

- ✓ How do you combine professionalism with being human in your professional conversations? What can you learn from other perspectives?



## The Corner Stones

### The underpinning factors

### The five dimensions in short



# The Corner Stones – The five dimensions in short

## The five dimensions for exploring

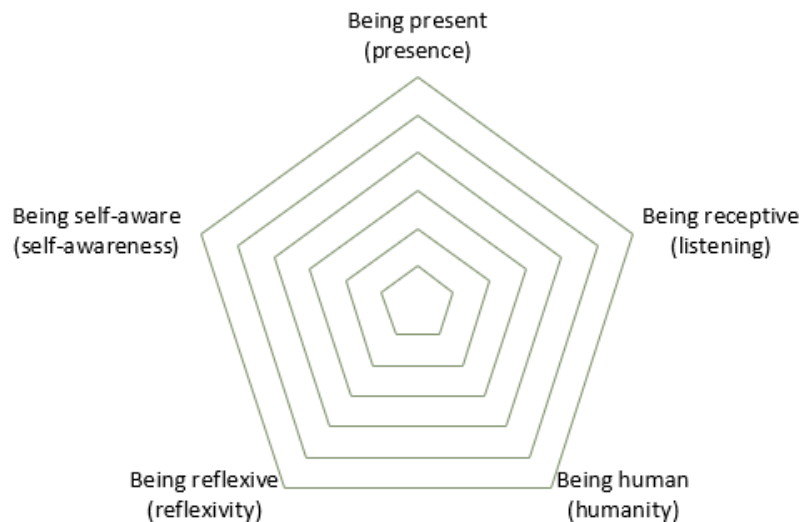


Figure 1, the five dimensions to engage in and pay attention to

**In creating an environment for open and quality exchange the degree of presence, listening, humanity, reflexivity and self-awareness play a role. To improve the quality of a dialogue and its outcome, these five dimensions deserve attention and exploration. 1) being present, 2) being receptive, 3) being human, 4) being reflexive, and 5) being self-aware.**

Together, the dimensions provide guidance what to be aware of and play with in order to get a feel for the basic aspects of quality communication in dialogue. So that, combined with practicing and learning, you can spiral towards greater impact over time.

Their application requires a dynamic approach. Here, the situation, circumstances and the context cannot be seen separately from each other. Quality enhancing factors will differ depending on the context and the setting in which a dialogue takes place, and, consequently,

*Picture the following examples of real-life situations whilst understanding how the mentioned five dimensions are applied to these contexts.*

- How conducting structured research interviews requires a different approach when in the field and involving stakeholders;
- how to get things done when more understanding is needed in order to arrive at a joint plan or action because of, for example, interest at play, agendas, past experiences, intercultural differences;
- how to turn around a conversation when your input is pushed aside or someone blocks making interaction difficult;
- how to make a situation work when there is lack of time or no shared understanding of certain concepts;
- how being aware of your position in the cultural hierarchy is essential to being taken seriously.

which of the five dimensions deserve more attention and engagement, or less.

### **The importance of self-experience and practice.**

For some of us, dialogic qualities such as being empathic, the art of thinking together, and sensing which refers to different levels of observing, come naturally or is something intuitive. They find it easy to read people and situations in the moment and adjust their dialogic behaviour effectively. Whereas others have more difficulties with the less technical and more qualitative aspects. Even though these traits might not come naturally, they can be acquired and appropriated through effective practice, attentive behaviour and self-experiences in both private and work life. Conversations with colleagues repeatedly revealed the importance of self-experience in this process.



## The Corner Stones

### The underpinning factors

### The five dimensions in short





# The Corner Stones – The five dimensions in short

**It is through this learning journey** that you can recognize similar challenges, learn to overcome them, and use the experience for future situations and to help others in similar situations. This can be a challenging process that requires courage. But at the same time, the key to the journey is not just to understand how things work with the mind, but to experience what they are really about and what their effect are in practice, with our senses the heart, ears, eyes, hands mouth and gut-feeling, in action.

## → So, what are the five dimensions about in short?

**Being present** relates to being there while being readily available with full attentiveness. It links to the capacity to be.

- ⇒ Being present refers to connecting with what is happening as it is, and overcoming factors and behaviors that might block the interaction and interfere with a genuine, transparent and open conversation in this particular moment.
- ⇒ It requires bringing your whole self, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, into the interaction without being compelled to act on any discomfort that arises in you. Ultimately being centered is important.

**Being receptive** relates to paying intentional attention to what is being said and to being attentive at different levels of observing. It links to the capacity to listen.

- ⇒ Listening refers to the ability to regulate one's own listening quality, and use it to benefit the quality of the conversation.
- ⇒ It requires understanding and expanding one's listening, connective and probing mode to uncover deeper understanding, dimensions, and meanings.

**Being human** refers to an expression of human nature in communication. It links to the human capacity to connect, even when perspectives diverge.

- ⇒ Humanity has to do with to being authentic, sincere, respectful, empathic & non-violent in interaction. Bringing out the ability to connect and feel connected.
- ⇒ It requires an ability to be with experiences of oneself and others fully; that is physically, cognitively, and emotionally, and in a non-judgmental way.

**Being reflexive** involves a willingness to learn and examine one's own behaviour patterns, assumptions and positioning and how these influence the interaction. Reflexiveness concerns a continuous reflective learning process. Being reflexive links to the capacity to reflect and learn.

- ⇒ Reflection-in-action refers to the ability to see what is happening as it is happening and act on it in such a way that it benefits the effectiveness of the conversation while it is happening.
- ⇒ Reflection-on-action requires taking a critical distance to look back on situations or events, to observe what happened, to analyze context and to reflect on own thoughts, feelings, underlying motives and mental models with the possibility to change one's approach.

**Being self-aware** refers to a self-understanding with regard to how one relates to one's own thought patterns, emotions, experiences, expectations, motives and desires, and this may affect what you do and say. It involves the capacity to observe with the aim to voice, as in expressing self-awareness in word and behaviour.

- ⇒ Self-awareness refers to the conversation one has with oneself



## The Corner Stones

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# The Corner Stones – The five dimensions in short

through reflection and introspection, and the self-knowledge one obtains from this.

⇒ It requires fostering a growth mindset to take on an attitude for continuous learning and growth. Which leads not only to knowing oneself well, but also to gaining larger perspectives, discovering a deeper sense of self and growing awareness on different levels.



## The Corner Stones

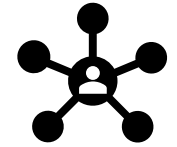
The underpinning factors

The five dimensions in short



# The Five dimensions for exploring

The handbook identifies five dimensions to engage with to achieve a quality exchange. The action perspective of each of the five dimensions is sketched by an explanatory guiding summary and framing. Followed by guiding focus areas and pathways for exploration and practicing on personal and interpersonal level for each of their sub-dimensions.



## The dimensions for exploring

Dimensions to explore and engage with to achieve open and quality exchange:

### Being Present

- Active Pausing [embodied presence]
- Increasing an open mindset [cognitive presence]
- Dealing with emotions [emotional presence]

### Being Receptive

- Being open to many levels of awareness
- Involving in Active Conversation Modes
- Using silence
- Applying non-verbal communication

### Being Human

- Entering non-violent communication
- Being (self-) compassionate
- Expressing Transparency, Integrity & Respect
- Showing sincere interest

### Being Reflexive

- Reflecting on action
- Practicing towards reflection-in-action

### Being Self-aware

- Dealing with power dynamics
- Learning by doing - gaining trust
- Demonstrating self-observation

Being Present

Being Receptive

Being Human

Being Reflexive

Being Self-aware



Being Present



Being Receptive



Being Human



Being Reflexive



Being Self-aware



# The dimensions to engage with – Being Present

Presence refers to being there while being readily available in full attendance and psychological available. It involves connecting with the reality of what is happening as it is and overcoming factors and behaviours that might block a genuine, transparent and open conversation in this particular moment. This requires to bring your complete self, physically, cognitively and emotionally, to the interaction without being compelled to act on any discomfort that comes up in you. For this, being centered is important. Presence also radiates towards those around us. It impacts them.

Only the present moment is real. (Thich Nhat Hanh)

Mindfulness practice means that we commit fully in each moment to be present; inviting ourselves to interface with this moment in full awareness. (Jon Kabat-Zinn)

*‘What is it that I have to let go of; what is the old self that I have to shed?’* This is what Otto Scharmer, author and action researcher on pathways of transformation, considers the most important challenge in developing a full sense of presence.

**Developing a full sense of presence requires** an introspective journey that gives you clarity about what it is that you really need to learn; and what possibilities or space you need to move more fully into.

Being present also goes beyond oneself, it involves being interconnected with those in your surroundings.

For example, presentation coach Rachel Beohm says about this:

“ Presence is by its very nature, including others. It is seen. It is felt.  
It is an inclusive awareness of space and the people in it.

To expand your personal presence, expand your sense of space.  
The more people and space you include, the greater your presence. “

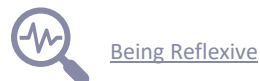
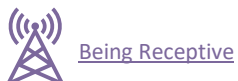
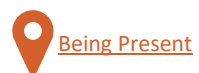


## Being Present

[Active Pausing](#)

[Increasing an open mindset](#)

[Dealing with emotions](#)





# Being Present

## Active Pausing

## Increasing an open mindset

## Dealing with emotions



# Being Present – Active Pausing

Reality is only a reflection of our own intentions, biases, knacks and desires. (Abhijit Naskar)

We have many ways of creating our realities based on the different ways we perceive. (Zamm Zamudio)

**Our attention is easily consumed, deflected or distracted. A simple word can cause distraction for the mind to wander into thoughts, memories, or to-do lists. Causing your attention to be in the past or future, rather than to what is going on right now in the present moment. Active pausing helps you to engage in mindful presence, which leads to mindful observing, mindful listening, and mindful acting. The pausing is about building in moments in which you take a moment to become more aware what is happening between the gaps and actively refocus to what it is you are doing. You can use silence well for this purpose.**

*Recognise those moments?*  
When you just asked someone a question, and the other person starts answering, your mind wanders to your to-do list.  
These are moments you are in the future with the attention, rather than in the now. Often the other person then can see that your thoughts are occupied with something else than the conversation. Here, body language plays an important role.

**To be effective in conversations, we need to be fully present with our body and mind.** This means free from distraction, tension, worrying, chatter, or noise in the head in order to give your full attention to the upcoming conversation. The more attention you have for the conversation, the more you can pick up. In doing so, the more the other feels taken seriously.

**You can think of active pausing as slowing down,** to go faster. It pays off. It prevents disturbance and miscommunication. And, it strengthens the connection with yourself, what you are doing and others. The pausing helps you to voice what is going on, in you, and helps to bring it to the table in such a way it does not get in the way of the goal of the conversation or its effectiveness.

**You can use active pausing to** consciously slow down and take a good breath. To notice where your attention is and refocus. To notice sources of the disturbance in yourself, to help yourself relax, to deliberately suspend, to quickly reflect on what is being said. Or, to do all at once. This is called reflection-in-action.

- Active pausing allows you to:**
- ✓ check on the spot how you pay attention to what is happening inside in relation to what you are doing and be more mindful of this;
  - ✓ set your personal space more often and more consciously. Your personal space refers to the space you need in order to be with yourself;
  - ✓ reflect in the moment on thoughts and emotions, also in relation to how you listen and ask questions;
  - ✓ reflect on what takes you out of the present moment and identify aspects which are diminishing your sense of presence.



[Being Present](#)



[Being Receptive](#)



[Being Human](#)



[Being Reflexive](#)



[Being Self-aware](#)

# Being Present – Active Pausing

## Familiar Situation

You listen to more than one conversation, not giving either of them your full attention. When you feel you are lacking time to listen, when something else is on your mind or when you are trying to keep up with things at once, it is better to create a moment of conversation at a later time where you can be really present and give the other both the attention and recognition this person deserves. “ I have so much going on right now and cannot be fully present with you. Can we postpone to a later moment today when I can give you my full attention? ”

For more reasons for presence blockers in conversation, see Appendix A of Peter Nixon’s Dialogue Gap: Why Communication Isn't Enough and What We Can Do About It, fast (2012).

**How you are present has to do with the ability to notice thoughts, feel emotions, and experience bodily sensations.** By holding space for them and observing as they arise in the moment without reacting to them immediately, you ‘neutralise’ your first impulse. This allows you to calm your body and mind, and calmly acknowledge and accept what is happening. It increases your sense of presence. With practice this awareness becomes a habit and the basis for your interaction.

**Embodied presence.** Being mindful is a state that can be brought on through practice. You can develop mindful presence.

- By being still in yourself, quieting the chatter of the mind, you can open up to a way of being present and listening that cuts through everything. Think of it as calming the surface of the waters of your experience so that you can see what is below in the depths. This is known as **inner stillness**.

- Practice to become present with (conscious) attention to the present moment without judging it. **Mindfulness** implies that you pay attention to your thoughts and feelings without judging them; you let them come and let them go.
- Learn how to change a tensed state of being into relaxed openness. Examine the way you sit and stand, and become more aware of your body and your bodily reaction patterns. Through this you develop **body awareness**.
- Learn to identify and understand your bodily sensations and to use its language in your daily life. Become aware of your inner state and the possibilities of adjusting it. Such body awareness is also referred to as **body mindfulness**.
- When you learn to be present through the body in the above way through moment-by-moment awareness, this brings a grounded sense and physical state of being present. This is called **embodied presence**.



## Being Present

### Active Pausing

### Increasing an open mindset

### Dealing with emotions

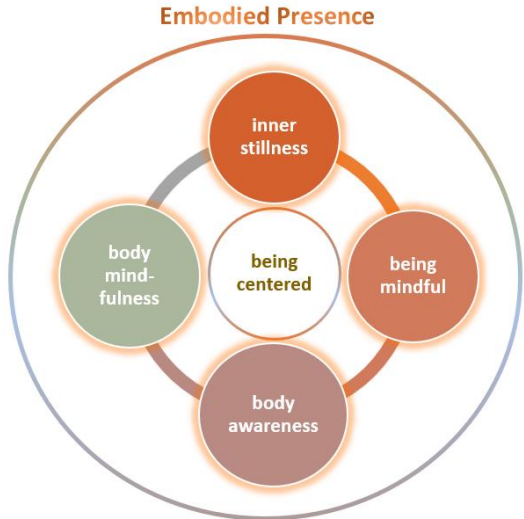


Figure 2, the elements of embodied presence.







# Being Present

## Active Pausing

## Increasing an open mindset

## Dealing with emotions



# Being Present – Active Pausing

➤ From this grounded and calm state of being present physically, you come to a reference point or place where you observe all inside you and all around you, and to which you can return when things throw you off balance. This place of being in balance is referred to as **being centered**.

For tips on exercises for mindful presence, centering, and body awareness, go to [Creating mental space & Centering exercises](#).

**What prevents or diminishes your presence?** You can become more sensitive to what prevents you from being 100% present and having full attention to the conversation by examining your dialogue blockers and surfacing patterns and possible limiting thoughts.

Do you have a pattern here? Can hear when you are no longer present? Are you aware when you are busy with other things in your mind? What is it you need to engage more often in and what do you need to let go? What are limiting thoughts in order to be able to hear what the other person is actually saying? What space do you need to engage in more often?

This enables you to gain more insight and understanding of the flow of your thoughts and emotions - in relation to how you listen and ask questions - as well as what takes you out of the now. For more presence blockers, see Appendix A of Peter Nixon’s Dialogue Gap: Why Communication Isn’t Enough and What We Can Do About It, fast (2012).

**The centering technique** is derived from an ancient martial arts practice in Japan called Aikido, which is often translated as the “harmonious spirit” (Windle & Samko, 1992). Aikido techniques used meditation and breathing exercises from Zen Buddhism to center emotions, harmonize energy, and promote calmness (Lukoff & Strozzi-Heckler, 2017).  
Modern-day centering techniques use mindful breathing to bring attention to one thing at a time, limit mental distractions, and bring physical balance (Rogerson & Hrycaiko, 2002).  
Retrieved from: [www.berkeleywellbeing.com/centering](http://www.berkeleywellbeing.com/centering)

**Holding your personal space.** This refers to the personal space you need to be (with) yourself and avoid losing yourself during the day and conversations. You can become more sensitive to this, by

- sensitizing yourself to your personal space needs, understanding your how’s and why’s, and developing a stronger self-knowledge and sense of self;
- becoming more aware of your bodily response patterns;
- focusing on your circle of influence and learning to take responsibility for what is yours and leave what is the other person's responsibility with the other person. For the Circle of Influence see the Glossary, [link](#).

**In summary:** Connecting with reality, with what is going on right now, starts with being aware of how you are present and where your field of attention is. This gives you the possibility to take a moment to become aware of this and adjust it on the spot. Active pausing involves doing a quick, grounded, reality check. To notice what is happening and refocus to being readily available in full attendance.



[Being Present](#)



[Being Receptive](#)



[Being Human](#)



[Being Reflexive](#)



[Being Self-aware](#)



# Being Present

Active Pausing

Increasing an open mindset

Dealing with emotions



# Being Present – Increasing an open mindset

How you look determines what you see. (Tony Robbins)

This has more to do with looking, listening and feeling differently than with thinking differently. (Jan Bommerez)

**Expanding your mindset is about seeing beyond the system or pattern you take for granted. To go beyond the pattern, you have to add non-rational ways of knowing to your rationality. This requires a capacity to let go and let come. Increasing your open mindset is about practicing a fresh look or blank page.**

**Challenging assumptions, and practicing a fresh look.** You can acquire a generative mode and be open to new options and possibilities by becoming aware of how and when your mental models or emotions influence your perceptions and reactivity. So that you can adapt and let go or neutralise them in the moment. In a sense, this also requires you to park or distance yourself from your knowledge in order to open up to what you don't know.

**Dealing with the unknown.** The not knowing tends to be a very uncomfortable place to be in. Yet it is the most generative there is. The solution here lies in your ability to let go and let come. It lies in acknowledging and observing the discomfort < let it come > without being compelled to act on it < let it go>. So that you can be open again to new possibilities, options and insights <let it come>. Really knowing your underlying worldviews, beliefs, and assumptions also provides an anchor from which you can safely venture into the unknown.

**The generative mindset, shifting to a possibility focus.** Practicing a fresh look also benefits from shifting the focus from having the right answers, a solution focus, to posing the right questions, a possibility focus. See figure 3, where the left shows the picture that emerges when focusing on a solution and having the right answers. In the right picture you still can see how the circled houses on the left

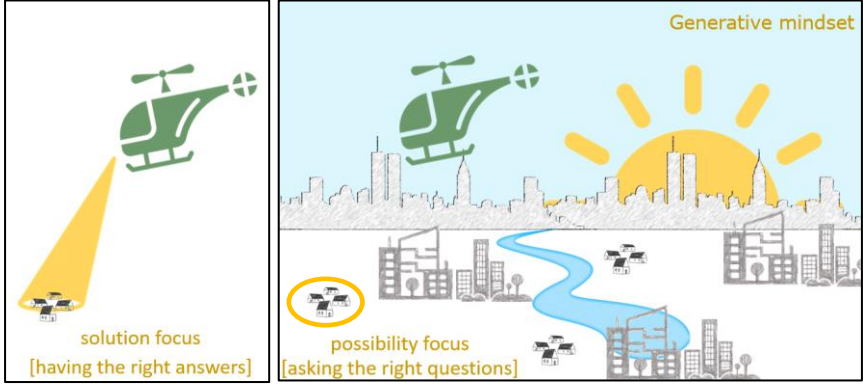


Figure 3. Source: Deep Dive Deep Listening, Task 2 KB project Just Transitions, 11 April 2022, Tossa Harding & Yael van Assendelft

relate to the rest of the landscape it is part of. This is possible when you shift the focus of your mind to discovering the right questions and seeing possibilities. From such a generative state of mind, you can be open to possibilities that present themselves and new information that emerges. See the tip on 'Stepping into the unknown' under Tips & Exercises, too.

The generative mindset also allows you to shift to making sense of information together. And, to add, for instance, qualitative understanding of data or local knowledge and conditions to your research. See more on the [generative mindset](#) in the Glossary.

# Being Present – Increasing an open mindset

**Familiar Situation**

Someone introduces an idea. You think 'here we go again' or 'ah yes, I already know (about) this info'. Unknowingly you will not pay attention anymore to what is said. You start looking for evidence why you already know this or why the idea might not work. This prevents you from hearing new insights or possibilities. You are no longer in the freshness of the moment.

The moment you think 'here we go again' or 'I already know the solution' or 'I already am familiar with this info' is a signal for you to shift your attention to opening up what you do not yet know.

You can help yourself by signaling your thoughts and going on from there. By asking the other person why this idea is important, you shift the focus furthermore to possibilities; this also provides insight from different perspectives.

**Opening the mind, the heart and the will.**

The three openings that Otto Scharmer identifies for listening (2008) are also the three openings that Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer identify to transform systems. They are: 1) opening the mind, 2) opening the heart and 3) opening the will.

Opening the mind to challenge assumptions, opening the heart to be vulnerable and truly hear one another, and opening the will to let go of pre-set goals and agendas and see what is really needed and possible.

Source: The MSP Guide by Herman Brouwer and Jim Woodhill, 2015, p.132

**Practicing intellectual humility.** In her article DEEP LISTENING: practicing intellectual humility in geographic fieldwork (2020, [link article](#)), Nathalie Koch states this involves accepting that we could be incorrect at many levels, whether theoretical, factual, emotional, social, cultural, or political, and seeking out opportunities to change our mind. The difficulty is that what we see is often colored by a lifetime of beliefs and biases.

**Two key capacities.** According to Otto Scharmer (2008) we must develop two key capacities in order to be able to 'uncover this reality': 1) suspend judgment and 2) the ability to listen and see from different positions, called redirecting. Your preferred type of thinking, by the way, also has to do with brain dominance, "With what view do you start a conversation and look at a situation?"

- ❑ Be aware of this, and use brain-stimulating techniques, to bring yourself and others in a creative thinking and deeper listening mindset. It allows you to open to the huge canvas of possibilities, experiences, opinions and perspectives. These together, form the diversity of inclusivity.
- ❑ In a conversation, look together for something you can't find on your own. Don't fall into the trap of thinking what you already know. Acknowledge different truths and different positions; you can be incorrect at many levels. And, look for the unknown, the unexpected, the unspoken, the impossible.



## Being Present

[Active Pausing](#)

[Increasing an open mindset](#)

[Dealing with emotions](#)



[Being Present](#)



[Being Receptive](#)



[Being Human](#)



[Being Reflexive](#)



[Being Self-aware](#)

# Being Present – Learning to deal with emotions

Emotions cannot be separated from facts. In a conversation, it is not about content. It is about identity. (Noelle Aarts)

Emotions are answers to questions you did not know you were asking. (Vera Helleman)



**Emotional presence refers to the capacity to maintain presence and connection in the midst of emotional intensity, whether nice or not-nice. Expanding the mindset through dealing with emotions in such ‘unattached’ way, requires a receptiveness of letting go and letting come without identifying with your feelings; as this prevents emotions taking over and governing your interaction. In doing so, be kind and mild to yourself and others; in other words, be compassionate.**

## Being Present

### Active Pausing

### Increasing an open mindset

### Dealing with emotions

#### A) In relation to yourself

**Emotional presence & Neutrality.** Kirstin Neff, author and pioneer in the field of self-compassion research, refers to mindfulness as a non-judgmental, receptive mind state in which you observe thoughts and feelings as they are, without trying to suppress or deny them. She also indicates that mindfulness requires not to be ‘over-identified’ with thoughts and feelings, so that you are not caught in negative reactivity. Figure 4 shows a way to achieve this. You can call this ‘unattached’ mind state a neutral point for interaction; called neutrality and a meta-skill in the facilitation method Deep Democracy. This mind state is also related to being centered.

**Emotional presence & Centeredness.** Being centered contributes to a basic conversational attitude from which you can observe and act neutrally, yet understandingly and compassionately. It refers to a reference point or place to come back to when situations and emotions throw you off balance; in this state you are connected to how you are feeling and what you are thinking while feeling in control of your experienced thoughts and emotions. This allows you to remain neutral, attentive, and connected in all kinds of situations regardless of what is said or happening.

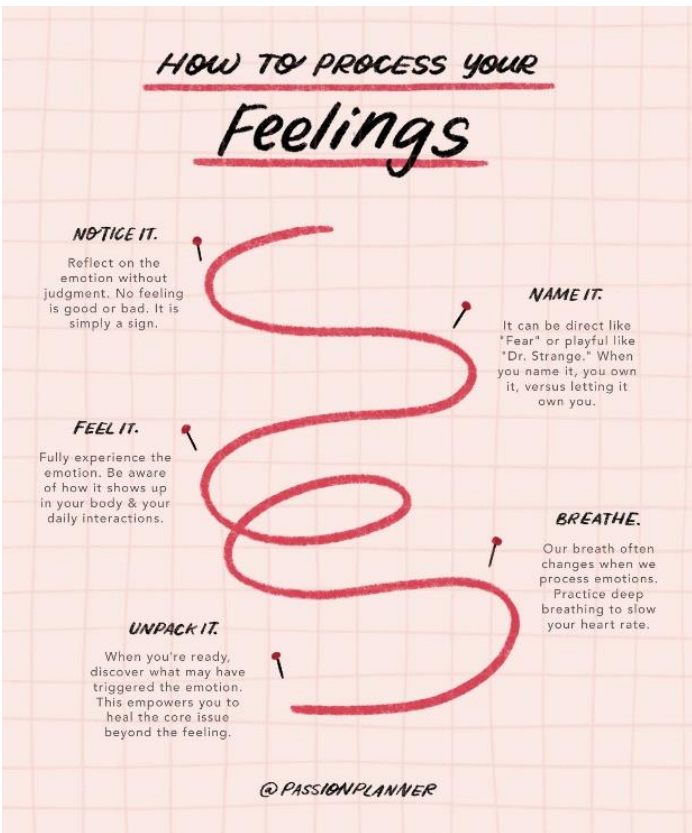


Figure 4, processing feelings



# Being Present – Learning to deal with emotions



## Tips

- ✓ **Become more aware of what you bodily experience during a conversation.** This often provides information that needs to be addressed and examined in the conversation. It provides an entry-point for deepening the conversation.
- ✓ **Learn your own emotional Trigger Points in a conversation.** So that you can prevent them from taking over and blocking the conversation.
- ✓ **Practice mildness and non-judgmentalism for your own thoughts and feelings.** This position helps you to relax in what is felt, perceived and present. And, avoid allowing your emotions to govern your reaction.
- ✓ **Be self-reflective in a mild and non-judgmental way** on things like 'What I notice about myself. What I need to unlearn patterns or unhelpful beliefs. What to pay most attention to in order to let go of an unhelpful, painful or unwanted feeling I observe, and how I feel about what this will bring me. What space to move into more fully.'

## *Familiar Situation – part I*

During the conversation, something the other person says catches you unnoticed. You fold your arms and tension rises in your body. You start to distance yourself from what the other person is saying.

These are signals to yourself that your quality of listening is affected and that an emotion is at play.

## *Familiar Situation – part II*

Help yourself to relax and put your arms next to your body. Do not criticize yourself, be kind. Relax your breathing and exhale profoundly.

You can now indicate what is happening and explain what it does to you, if you want: "I notice that what you are saying touches me. I want to hear/understand it though".

Then, maybe, you can ask the question "what is going on and what moves me like this?" for yourself to answer, with the aim to examine together what is at play. Go on from here.

## **B) In relation to others**

**Emotions often indicate that something matters.** Unsaid things, resistance, and/or distrust cannot be exposed rationally. They have underlying sentiments, history, and feelings with often a certain personal connection, attachment or identification.

To really hear what is going on here and bring to the surface what is being felt, you need to use a non-judgmental and compassionate approach. When emotions surface and run high, don't be startled. It is an indicator that something is happening below the surface, something that matters.

" Sentiments, emotions and feelings, incl. fear and pain, in conversations are not something to avoid. When you look for it and acknowledge it, you can learn to be comfortable with it. "

Gonne Beekman, Deep Democracy training February 2022



## Being Present

Active Pausing

Increasing an open mindset

Dealing with emotions



# Being Present – Learning to deal with emotions

## How to not get caught in negative reactivity?

- ✓ **Learn to deal with emotions in conversations.** In fact, they need to be addressed before you can go back to the conversation. They are invaluable in deepening the conversation. Dare to step into the tension and make them explicit in a non-violent way. See '[Entering non-violent communication](#)', too.
- ✓ **Make underlying norms, fears, assumptions explicit from the awareness that people tend to identify with them.** This way, you are less likely to get caught in negative reactivity.
- ✓ **Learn to deal with tension and unexpected moments:**
  - Voices of judgement, cynicism, and fear cause stress and loss of energy in conversations. These voices cannot be rationally exposed. Dealing with them in a non-judgmental and compassionate way relieves the tension.
  - Tension is an invisible field you don't see that influences openness and transparency. Learn to deal with tension while staying connected and without over-identifying or projecting it onto others. So that you are not caught in negative reactivity.

**In summary:** Develop a position of (non-judgmental) understanding and mildness, and practice self-compassion to become milder and opener to yourself and others. This also helps you in letting go of attachments and/or identifications and in not getting caught up in negative reactivity. So that you can become an open and constructive conversation partner.



If you notice that emotions are affecting the quality of listening in yourself and/or the other, it is time to voice this and to try to disarm what happens.

*For instance*, by saying “I notice that the topic is stirring us up”, indicating what it does to you and probing how this is for the other. You then start to examine together what might lie underneath, find out deeper grounds, and see new positions.



## Being Present

[Active Pausing](#)

[Increasing an open mindset](#)

[Dealing with emotions](#)





# The dimensions to engage with – Being Receptive

Being receptive relates to an act of paying attention to what is said and being attentive from different levels of observing. It involves the ability to regulate your listening quality and use it to benefit the quality of the conversation. This requires understanding and then expanding the attention structures that focus your listening and shape your views. It also requires improving your listening, connective and probing skills to uncover deeper understandings, dimensions, and meanings.

There is a voice that does not use words. Listen (Rumi)

Deep listening is miraculous to both listener and speaker. When someone receive us with open-hearted, non-judging, intensely interested listening our spirits expand. (Sue Patton Thuele)

Many of us find it difficult to really listen to others. Hanlon and Rigney (2011: 2) suggest it is because *'we are mentally too busy' to pause and listen, or 'unwilling or unable to let go', listening only superficially.'* To truly hear the other person with both ears and heart requires emotional intelligence. It is courageous, see the quote by Corine Jansen opposite for some additional inspiration on this.

*"To listen, is to develop an inner silence. You do have to do some deliberate work to cultivate settings inside yourself and with others— where it is possible to listen. In other words, you must create a space in which listening can occur."*

William Isaacs (1999) identifies four practices to build capacity for mastering the Art of thinking together.

Otto Scharmer (2008) distinguishes four levels of listening (see figure 7). The two highest levels allow for expanded listening that goes beyond downloading information, observing patterns and anticipating action opening the door to deeper insights and meanings.

## I'm ready to listen when I can say:

I choose to sit next to you instead of across from you

I am willing to explore the difference that is in front of us rather than between us

I choose to listen to you and ask questions to understand you better

I am willing to examine my own assumptions and judgments

I accept that I will not fully understand your perspective

I can be sincere and curious

I am willing to take responsibility for my part in the conversation

Listening is courageous - Corine Jansen, Chief Listening Officer from 2009-2014 at the REshape Center for Healthcare Innovation at the Radboudumc Nijmegen



## Being Receptive

[Being open to many levels of awareness](#)

[Involving in active conversation modes](#)

[Using silence](#)

[Applying non-verbal communication](#)



# Being Receptive – Being open to many levels of awareness



Dialogue provides a means by which we can learn to maintain our equilibrium. It lets us reconnect and revitalize our emotional capacity because it compels us to suspend our habitual reactions and frozen thoughts. (William Isaacs)

The quieter you become, the more you can hear. (Ram Das)

**Barriers in communication may exist in many dimensions. These dimensions are about more than what meets the eye and apply to different levels of awareness of interdependent visible and invisible aspects - The Iceberg Model of McLelland captures this well (figure 5) where the part of the iceberg below the water line represents the not so obvious, the unspoken and the less conscious components, including one's beliefs, values, self-esteem, thinking styles, experiences. While these are less visible and less tangible elements, they form an important basis and foundation for the visible and tangible parts of a conversation. This means that you need to be attentive to these invisible parts and use probing and sensing to become aware what is going on and what the full picture is about.**

## Being Receptive

Being open to many levels of awareness

Involving in active conversation modes

Using silence

Applying non-verbal communication

In becoming more attentive to deeper meanings, it helps to:

- ✓ **Learn to** 1) recognise situations where something is at play below the water line, due to for example intercultural differences or talking about different things, 2) see what is happening and 3) learn what helps to address the situation constructively and effectively. And to then, 4) act accordingly.
- ✓ **Be oriented in the here-and-now.** This makes it easier to 1) stay focused on what is immediately said and experienced on different levels and nuances. And, 2) to suspend your reactive mode and engage in an open mind, open heart and open will. Being present in the here-and-now is importance since an open mind, open heart and open will require a conscious action to let go of narratives of for example personal preferences, prejudices, viewpoints, position, likes-dislikes, or the need to control the direction or content of a conversation. This letting go allows you to increase your attention span, to explore different meanings, dimensions and perspectives, and to display thinking in a way that lets yourself and others see and understand it. Which brings deeper understandings, unseen possibilities and new perspectives.

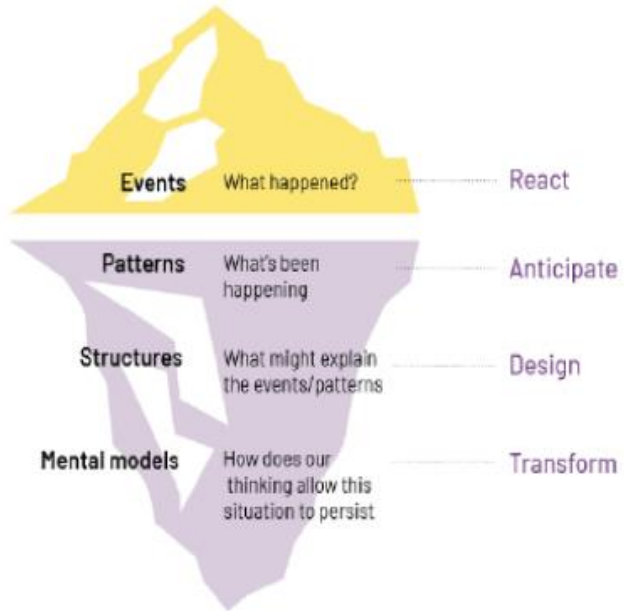


Figure 5, the Food System Decision Support Tool Kit (The Iceberg Model)



# Being Receptive – Being open to many levels of awareness

People do or cannot always express what they mean. If you want to find out, you have to put aside your irritation or your own interpretation, slow down, listen to what is being said and what is not, and keep on asking questions until you find out what is going on.

*A very illustrative example* shared with the author, and probably familiar to parents is that of children who do not want to play outside. What is the underlying reason? What are they not saying? This could be for a reason you least expect.

In this particular case, they did not want to or could not go outside because of the wrong socks they were wearing. By remaining calm, not getting irritated, really listening to what they were saying and continued both asking and checking, the parent found out the real reason.

Figure 6: the relation between being open to different levels of awareness and voices of judgment, cynicism and fear | Source: HuffPost Life, Open Your Mind, Heart, and Will, by Pekka Pirhonen, 2016.

Scharmer (2008) indicates **three different voices that keep us from sensing the present**: judgment, cynicism and fear (figure 6).

- **Voices of judgement** close the mind. Categorising things in right-wrong, yes-no, good-bad, like-dislike, etc. blocks us from letting other possibilities in and questioning beliefs. This prevents us from diving deeper and seeing the facts in a broad perspective. Moreover, it results in an automatic choice of ‘more of the same’ and familiar pathways.
- **Voices of cynicism** block the heart from opening, while often sowing doubt and feeding distrust. Having seen any judgments confirmed by past experiences, we tend to become cynic and make objections, presuppositions, and negative statements. This makes us listen poorly and less empathic. And, it holds us away from feeling.
- **Voices of fear** can block our will and intuitive sides from opening up. With fear, it becomes impossible to let go of the familiar, to allow oneself to not know, and to surrender to discovering any new. This is due to the need to maintain control.

You can overcome interfering voices through mindfulness, awareness and acknowledgement, along with the practice of setting aside your initial reactive mode and letting go in mildness. Along with gentle courage! (Also see [Letting Go Tips](#))



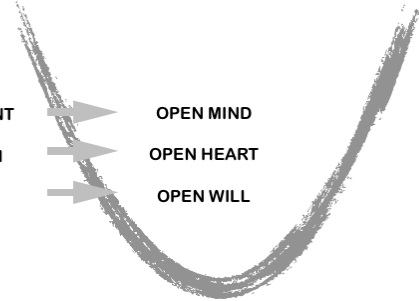
## Being Receptive

[Being open to many levels of awareness](#)

[Involving in active conversation modes](#)

[Using silence](#)

[Applying non-verbal communication](#)



# Being Receptive – Being open to many levels of awareness



## Tips:

- 1. Asking 'Why?'** many times (approximately 5) touches the heart of something (essential). It brings you down to understand the root cause. The Five whys is an iterative interrogative technique used to explore the cause-and-effect relationships underlying a particular problem as well.
- 2. Asking 'What else is there? What else is at play?'** helps to surface additional involved aspects, other relevant perspectives and (hidden) structures. It broadens the view. It encourages thinking processes and invites other voices and positions to be heard.
- 3. A helpful indication for spotting things below the surface:** if something not directly related to the topic being discussed comes up for a third time, it points to something below the surface that needs attention. If this happens, bring the issue to the surface by paying explicit attention to it, resolve it, and only then continue the conversation you were having before.

**Be aware that: 60 percent of communication is non-verbal.** If you listen only to what someone says, you're missing more than half of the conversation. → So, what DO you pay attention to and how?

- If you only open yourself at the cognitive level to what you hear, see and perceive, you are missing deeper levels of communication and information.** This can be about thought processes, feelings, perspectives and deeper motives, lived experiences, how someone looks at you (or not), how someone talks (or not), or even how something small can actually refer to a big issue.
  - Through mindful awareness you can learn to observe and respond to this unspokenness and the unspoken nature of conversation as it is happening. And, see the situation, and the world, through the other's eyes.
- If you open up only to what you want to see or hear rather than what is really happening, said, or experienced, you listen more close-minded.** This undermines generative listening.
  - Through (self-) awareness you can learn to consciously observe with all the senses, including intuition, so you can more easily suspend your reactive mode.
- It is through the combination of being present and consciously observing with all the senses, called 'presencing', that you can connect with all wisdom and available sources, beyond the downloaded knowledge and thoughts.** It allows you to be more inclusive and be open to new possibilities and perspectives.



## Being Receptive

[Being open to many levels of awareness](#)

[Involving in active conversation modes](#)

[Using silence](#)

[Applying non-verbal communication](#)



[Being Present](#)



[Being Receptive](#)



[Being Human](#)



[Being Reflexive](#)



[Being Self-aware](#)

# Being Receptive – Involving in active conversation modes

Suspension is the Heart of Dialogue. (David Bohm)

The word listen contains the same letters as silent. (Alfred Brendel)

**The right questions open the door to dialogue and discovery. They bring to light thinking processes in a way that lets yourself and others see and understand it. Therefore, it is key to engage in active listening modes and asking techniques that stimulate involvement, increase deepening of output, evoke creative thinking, and dig for new insights and multiple perspectives. This sets the stage for a deeper conversation.**

Involve in techniques such as active listening and empathic and generative listening. Learn to suspend judgment and avoid selective listening. In addition, use probing and powerful questions.

### Active Listening

Active Listening is a sense-making or summarising technique that makes the other person feel heard and ensures that you understand what was said correctly. This check can be made by using the same words the other used, by using similar words, called paraphrasing, or by using your own words to reflect back what was said. It gives the other person the opportunity to focus on their thoughts and reflect on what is being said, and you to ask clarifying questions to increase your understanding.

This is important since there can be a big difference between what someone says verbally and what you actually hear as listener. Something said can be understood in many different ways.

People think differently about things and mean different things by them. It requires clarification and explanation in order to get clarity on the involved dictionaries and values.

*For instance, collaboration in writing a report, may mean for some people sitting down to write together and for others sitting down to write separately and then giving each other feedback.*



## Being Receptive

[Being open to many levels of awareness](#)

[Involving in active conversation modes](#)

[Using silence](#)

[Applying non-verbal communication](#)



Being Present



Being Receptive



Being Human



Being Reflexive



Being Self-aware

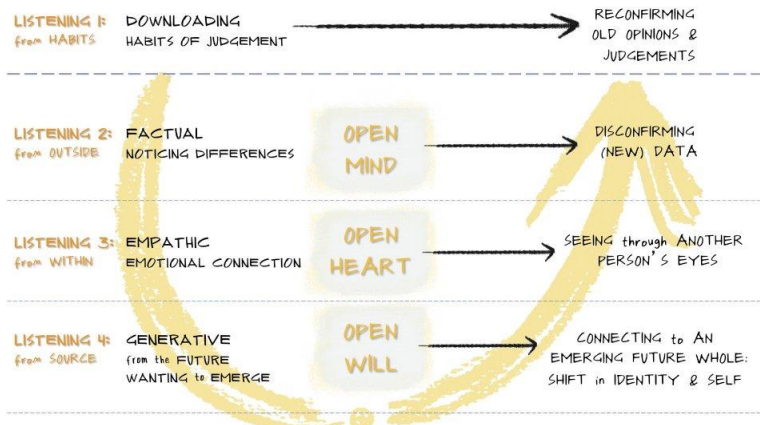
# Being Receptive – Involving in active conversation modes

## Empathic and Generative Listening

Empathic and generative listening, the two deepest levels of listening by Otto Scharmer (2008), figure 7, are intentional.

- Through empathic listening, you develop a stronger understanding of what is being conveyed, both intellectually and emotionally. You then move from looking at facts to seeing and really hearing the other’s story, and taking different positions onboard.
- Generative listening can be described as a dynamic act of co-creation. That provides a better sense of how to shape change and connects with future potential including what you do not know. The MSP Guide (2015) indicates that a generative dialogue invents unprecedented possibilities and new insights and produces a collective flow.

### LEVELS of LISTENING



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Picture 7, the four levels of listening by Scharmer (2008) | The Ubuntu Lab on the four levels of listening, [video](#).

To engage in empathic and generative listening:

- ✓ You have to shift your focus from analysing and searching for solutions and answers to looking for possibilities and hearing what you don't know yet. In relation to the bigger scope and correlations; as is common to systems thinking. You can support the generative mindset this by formulating questions that allow you to look from different positions and perspectives.
- ✓ When you take into account not only what things look like from your own perspective, but also how they look and feel from the perspective of the others, and even from the entire web of the stakeholders and their context, you can become ‘a true advocate for the whole’. You then also truly enlarge your sense of yourself or even your sense of identity.
- ✓ In The Art of Powerful Questions by Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (2003) you can find many examples and tips. Here are two to start with:

- Ask questions that help you see the situation through the eyes of the other person, other stakeholders, the whole, or even the information itself. You might also examine together how things look like far from the situation itself.
  - To really hear potential, identify the important question to ask. ‘What increases the understanding of the whole situation? Where is the (future) potential in this particular situation? What (more) can be learned? What challenges the confirming evidence?’ Also, check for yourself to what extent your questions really point to greater potential and future possibilities.



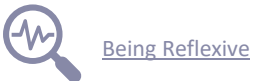
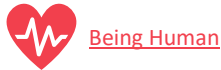
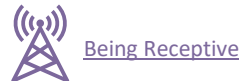
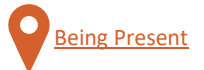
## Being Receptive

[Being open to many levels of awareness](#)

[Involving in active conversation modes](#)

[Using silence](#)

[Applying non-verbal communication](#)





# Being Receptive – Involving in active conversation modes

To conclude;

“ Energy follows attention. Wherever you place your attention, that is where the energy of the system will go. ‘Energy follows attention’ means that we need to shift our attention from what we are trying to avoid to what we want to bring into reality. ”

C. Otto Scharmer Quotes

In other words, focus on what you want to create. This gives so much more positive energy, it is more fun, it opens up and attracts people, and it is action and solution oriented.

## ❑ To suspend judgment and avoid selective listening

William Isaacs (1999) refers to suspending as to observe the judging or criticizing motion to take back into yourself the force you might otherwise put off onto others around you. And, according to Scharmer (2008) suspending judgment is about being conscious of how and when your mental models are affecting your perceptions.

**Suspension involves** an in the moment action based on the ability to let come the judging notion and let go your impulse to react on it.

This mastery also involves understanding and expanding the attention structures that direct your listening and shape your views, and additionally exploring meanings and dimensions together.

It is important, too, to see, and experience that judgments are limiting and reflect only a small part of reality.

Asking questions and trying to really get to the bottom of what others are saying provides a different quality of interaction and a different reality.

*For suspending, it helps to*

- ✓ step back and leave till asked for helps to suspend differences, judgment or opinion in interaction;
- ✓ learn to understand your own thought flows and practice within yourself that you have no judgements so that it becomes suspension in action.
- ✓ Engage in curiosity, as this helps to see with new eyes and shift your focus on posing the right question instead of getting the right answers.
- ✓ Don't let time get in the way. As this puts pressure on the conversation and its harvest. Although this one can be a very challenging one, if you fear or notice time becomes a pressure-point:
  - 💡 1) make it intentionally and act as if you have loads of time and
  - 2) make priority choices you want to go through and ask the priority choice of the other;

*Example “what comes to your mind that you want to discuss or share having seen the invitation?”*
- ✓ Staying mindful gives clarity of thought and by opening up to the mildness of the heart helps to stay out of the trap of judgment.
- ✓ Adapt the attitude that all is good, everything is ok as it is.
- ✓ Be aware that your stories, belief systems, thought processes are different from those of others. And as these influence your behavior, so do they for the behavior of others.



## Being Receptive

[Being open to many levels of awareness](#)

[Involving in active conversation modes](#)

[Using silence](#)


[Applying non-verbal communication](#)



# Being Receptive – Involving in active conversation modes

Hanlon and Rigney (2011: 2) indicate we filter constantly through our internal processes which draw heavily on our experiences and biases or preferences' (ibid: 3).

**Selective listening** means rejection of information, perspectives or opinions as a result of these processes. It is likely to make you more close-minded and undermines generative listening. It also prevents you from hearing finer details and empathic listening, that is putting yourself in the shoes of others. Inner silence helps you to become aware of the before-mentioned internal processes and helps you to practice suspending.

 **Think upfront of some powerful questions** that you could ask and explore to give the conversation an effective turn. Such as, 'What assumptions am I, are we, holding that are key to our conversation? What comes to your mind, if I would say is there something I am, or we are, missing or failing to pay sufficient attention to? What would the answer to this question be when coming from a different perspective or belief system? What would the answer to this question be from the perspective of stakeholder X or Z? What would the answer to this question be from a point far away from the situation itself?'

## *Suspending Exercise - part I*

Think of a situation in which it was really challenging to keep listening to the other and have a productive conversation. Maybe it involved someone who evokes strong reactions and whose perspective is really hard to understand. Someone with strongly opposing views, values or opinions. Can you feel the first reaction this elicits?

- ✓ Go back to things that were said that you really don't understand. Things that you struggle with understanding. And, go back to how this makes you feel and react. Can you feel what is going on with your state of being? What reactions are triggered in you?
- ✓ Then, realise that this reaction is simply a reaction triggered by a series of impulses in you. Be understanding towards this and give it kindness.
- ✓ You can learn not to react to such impulses in action.
- ✓ You can learn to recognise things better by observing the thought process that takes place in such a situation and your emotional reaction together with your physical reaction.
- ✓ If you also practice holding these physical and emotional reactions in yourself and suspending your triggered response, you will learn to return more quickly to giving your attention to creative energy and effective communication.
- ✓ You can help yourself to better recognise and release emotional and physical sensations in your body with an exercise based on the [Jacobson method](#).



## Being Receptive

[Being open to many levels of awareness](#)

[Involving in active conversation modes](#)

[Using silence](#)

[Applying non-verbal communication](#)



# Being Receptive – Involving in active conversation modes

## ❑ Probing and powerful questions

Use probing questions to explore what assumptions or beliefs come into play to support your suspending. Powerful questions have the ability to transcend many boundaries. They are likely to generate engagement, creative thinking, new insights, and open up future pathways and new possibilities. They provoke thoughtful exploration and evoke creative thinking.

One good question can be vastly more significant than offering many partial answers. To this end, it is important, too, to check regularly what assumptions or beliefs are embedded in the way questions are constructed.

✓ Understand the basic architecture of formulating powerful questions, *The Art of Powerful Questions* by Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (2003). Different questions and formulations give different answers.

Does climate change affect yield? Where did it go wrong? How does climate change affect yield? What can we learn from how climate change affects yield and what possibilities do we see?

✓ Also see Appendix 2, Reflection Questions, for inspiration of Reflection methods, F. Gordijn, 2018, page 118, [link](#).

**Vogt et al. (2003) describe a powerful question as one that:** stirs curiosity; provokes conversation; is thought-provoking; brings assumptions to light; invites creativity; generates energy and pushes the group forward; stays with stakeholders; and elicits more questions.

*Suspending Exercise - part II*

✓ Finally, think about what would help you if a triggered situation happens again and what powerful questions you could ask to suspend thoughts and bias and give the conversation an effective turn.

Exercise from Deep Dive Deep Listening, Task 2 KB project Just Transitions, 11 April 2022, Tossa Harding & Yael van Assendelft



## Being Receptive

Being open to many levels of awareness

Involving in active conversation modes

Using silence

Applying non-verbal communication

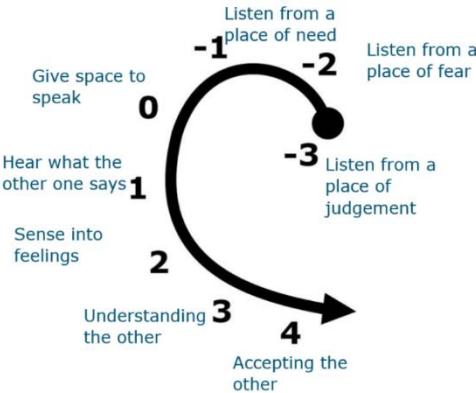


Figure 8, supportive image to different ways of listening | Source: unknown



# Being Receptive – Using silence



To listen, you must slow down. (William Isaacs)

You have only two ears, two eyes and one mouth. You should use them accordingly. (Quote from book The Culture Map):

“ As she is the senior person in the room, I wait for her to call on the me. And, while I am waiting, I should show I am a good listener by keeping both my voice and my body quiet. In China, we often feel Westerners speak up so much in meetings that they do this to show off, or they are poor listeners. Also, I have noticed that Chinese people leave a few more seconds of silence before jumping in than in the West. You Westerners practically speak on top of each other in a meeting. I kept waiting for Erin to be quiet long enough for me to jump in, but my turn never came. We Chinese often feel Americans are not good listeners because they are always jumping in on top of one another to make their points. I would have like to make one of my points if an appropriate length of pause had arisen. But Erin was always talking, so I just kept waiting patiently. My mother left it deeply engrained in me: You have two eyes, wo ears, but only one mouth. You should use them accordingly. “

**The use of silence is a powerful space for making emotional connections and increasing the quality of the conversation. It stimulates curiosity and builds a bridge to more (valuable) input. It helps you to harvest valuable information you would otherwise miss out on.**

## Being Receptive

[Being open to many levels of awareness](#)

[Involving in active conversation modes](#)

[Using silence](#)

[Applying non-verbal communication](#)

### Silence gives you time to take a good long breath and

- ✓ do a quick grounded reality check, called active pausing;
- ✓ take in what is shared, reflect from the four levels of listening (Scharmer, 2008) and then react. This enables to level with the other;
- ✓ take a moment to self-regulate. Calm your breath, to hold your thought, to neutralize your emotion, to ease your bodily reaction, and suspend your reaction;
- ✓ be together in the moment and connect;
- ✓ listen to the silence; let its stillness speak and try to sense what pops up in its moment.



### Tips:

- Use appropriate pausing: avoid being on top of each other.
- Intentionally slow down and slow your pace; take pauses during the conversation; do not avoid silence.
- Keep away from filling in silence, do not respond directly or give in to the temptation to reformulate the question. This encourages the other to elaborate, keep on talking and ponder to go deeper.
- Support this by taking full breathes. Deep breathing is one of the best ways to lower stress in the body and calm the mind. So, you can (re-)focus your attention on being present, listening attentively and feeling at ease.



[Being Present](#)



[Being Receptive](#)



[Being Human](#)



[Being Reflexive](#)



[Being Self-aware](#)

# Being Receptive – Using silence

## When engaging in fact sharing only

Sharing facts with each other, quickly brings you to a dead end. You stay on the level of downloading information, observing patterns and anticipating solutions for action, either convincing or proving. It gives little room for the story of the other, the thinking process and where this person is coming from. Let alone for you to engage in the place the other is coming or speaking from - that is what purpose, interest, or need motivates what the other says and what background underpins it.

→ If you notice, the conversation tends to be(come) mainly fact sharing and finding, take an active pause, use its silence, take some breathes and let the silence do its work. 'What is it that wants to be said? What empowers to reflect on deeper motives and supports interest in the other?'

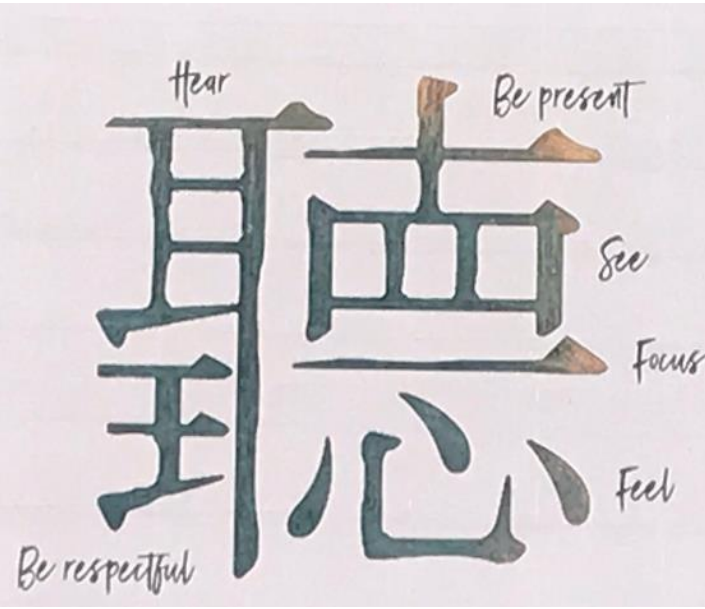


Figure 9, the Chinese character for listening | Source: @RushdaMajeed

Ancient Chinese scholars created the symbol of Ting – to Listen.

Ting explains that listening is a full body and mind experience. Ting is balanced, complex and subtle. Each element provides great insight to listen a little deeper, yet true depth is through the combination of all elements in the process of listening to the words and beyond. “ @RushdaMajeed

Also see the Listening Exercise based on these elements under Tips & Exercises.



## Being Receptive

Being open to many levels of awareness

Involving in active conversation modes

Using silence

Applying non-verbal communication



# Being Receptive – Applying non-verbal communication



Body language is a very powerful tool. We had body language before we had speech, and apparently, 80% of what you understand in a conversation is read through the body, not the words. (Deborah Bull)

The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said. (Peter F. Drucker)

If you can't read the air, you are not a good listener. Quote from The Culture Map:

*“ In Japan, we implicitly learn, as we are growing up, to communicate between the lines and to listen between the lines when others are speaking. Communicating messages without saying them directly is a deep part of our culture, so deep that we do it without even realizing it. To give an example, every year in Japan there is a vote for the most popular new word. A few years ago, the word of the year was “KY”. It stands for Kuuki Yomenai, which means ‘one who cannot read the air’, in other words, a person sorely lacking the ability to read between the lines. In Japan, if you can't read the air, you are not a good listener.”*

**The way people listen, look, talk, move and react expresses and conveys subtle information to what is being said. The ability to be fully present, learning to handle stress and tension in the moment and having emotional awareness helps in reading the non-verbal signals. Make room to read them and check during the conversation how your observations make sense. Additionally, make sure you are attentive to how there is a balance between your own body language, your feelings and what you say.**

## Being Receptive

[Being open to many levels of awareness](#)

[Involving in active conversation modes](#)

[Using silence](#)

[Applying non-verbal communication](#)



**When the non-verbal signals match words, they increase trust and clarity and build rapport.** When they do not, they can lead to misinterpretation, confusion, tension, and even mistrust. Some of the non-verbal expressions and gestures are universally recognized, while others are not common to all cultures and/or specific to a culture or geographic location.

### **Are you curious? Your eyebrows are the best way to show it!**

According to researchers at the University of Pittsburgh, the eyebrow flash is a universally recognized form of greeting and can be found all over the world, suggesting that this gesture is common among all culture.

- Show that you are (actively) listening.** Use body language, engaging sounds or nods, smile, make eye contact. Make space for this.
- Be aware that judgment can also be shown through **non-verbal communication**, unintended:
  - ... sighing, frowning, moving/rolling your eyes, shaking your head slightly, opening your mouth while inhaling because you actually want to say something ...
- Sensitize yourself to recognize the signals that you receive** and their nuances by observing the other person's behaviour, facial expressions, body movements and reactions, words used and not used, what elements (emotions and feelings) may be behind them.



# Being Receptive – Applying non-verbal communication

Furthermore,

- ❑ **Be aware that body language depends on the situation.**

Example: if someone crosses one’s arms, this does not necessarily mean that (s)he is closing/blocking. It might also be that (s)he is more comfortable this way or perhaps is cold.

- ❑ **Develop awareness** of your listening posture, non-verbal habits, how you act, sound, ... and how your own emotions influence you. Also learn to manage stress and tension in the moment.

Remember, that if you are upset, it is very likely you make the other upset as well making a tensed situation worse.



## Being Receptive

Being open to many levels of awareness

Involving in active conversation modes

Using silence

Applying non-verbal communication

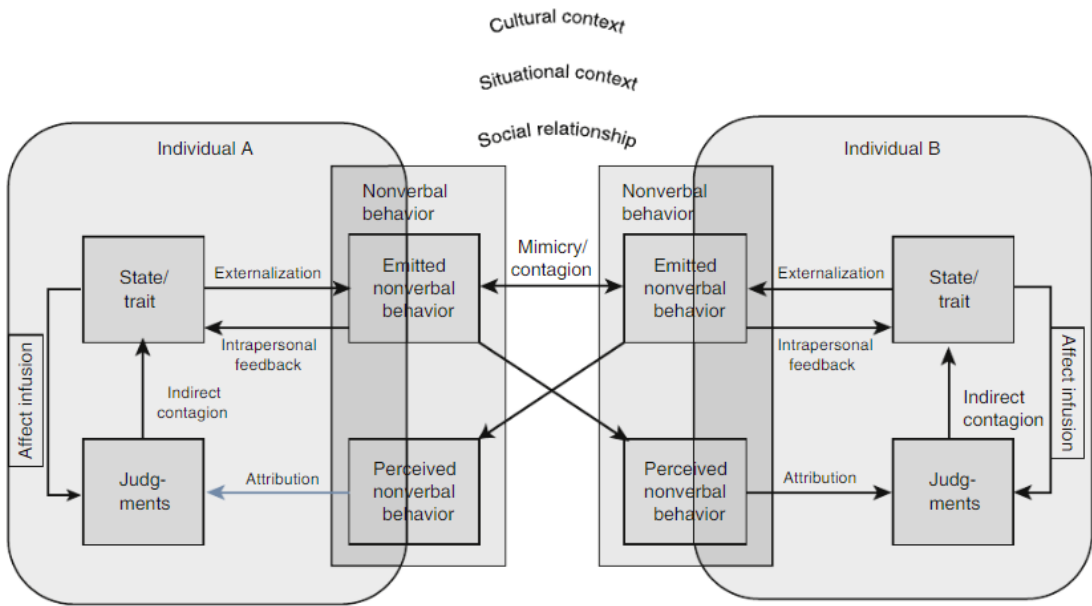


Figure 10, A model of non-verbal communication. Adapted from Hess, U., Philippot, P., Blairy, S., 1999. Mimicry: Facts and fiction. In: Philippot, P., Feldman, R.S. (Eds.), The Social Context of Non-verbal Behavior. Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 213–241 DOI: [10.1016/B978-0-12-397045-9.00218-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-397045-9.00218-4)



# The dimensions to engage with – Being Human

Humanity has to do with an expression of human nature in communication. It refers to being authentic, sincere, respectful, empathic & non-violent in interaction. Which addresses being able to connect and feel connected. This requires the ability to be fully with experiences of yourself and others fully; that is physically, cognitively, and emotionally and in a non-judgmental way. It also comes down to being honest, open, and thoughtful in what you say, in how you listen and how you respond to what you hear; out of respect for yourself and others. In addition, it is about voicing 'what needs to be expressed right now'. And, it involves bringing your full self into the interaction while maintaining connection, even when perspectives diverge.

Safety is not the absence of a threat ... ; it is the presence of connection. (Dr Gabor Maté)

There's just some magic in truth and honesty and openness. (Frank Ocean)

**Brené Brown**, a well-known researcher and storyteller on courage, vulnerability, shame and empathy, refers to Authenticity as the daily practice of letting go of who we think we're supposed to be and embracing who we are, including our social and cultural background and heritage.

**The essence of truthfulness in communication lies in** embracing the willingness to let go of who you think you have to be as well as the vulnerability this requires; to then embrace both as a basis for connection and interaction.

This implies accepting how you are now and moving as you are in the present moment. So that you can respond to what is going on in a respectful and compassionate way, without negative reactivity or loss of energy; and preferably without wearing social masks.



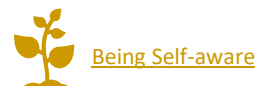
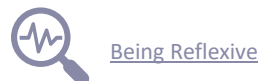
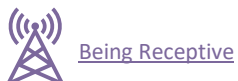
## Being Human

Entering non-violent communication

Being (self-) compassionate

Expressing Transparency, Integrity & Respect

Showing sincere interest



# Being Human – Entering non-violent communication



Both sides of the NVC model: empathetically listening and honestly expressing



- empathetically listening**
- observations
  - feelings
  - needs
  - requests

- honestly expressing**
- observations
  - feelings
  - needs
  - requests

Figure 11, non-violent communication model  
Source : cnvc.org

## Being Human

Entering non-violent communication

Being (self-) compassionate

Expressing Transparency, Integrity & Respect

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**The NVC-model (Rosenberg, 2003 | figure 11) helps you to embrace and facilitate challenging conversations in a constructive and healthy way instead of avoiding them. It helps to face disagreements with heart and curiosity. In such a way that you express things from your personal perspective without pointing fingers or negative reactivity.**

**The NVC-model provides a framework and set of skills to address a wide range of concerns.** The model comprises two parts or roles and each part has four components for communication which ultimately lead to giving and receiving from the heart.

**The challenge of non-violent communication** lies in alternating the processes in balance with yourself and the other person, in order to find each other at the level of needs, and thus establish a joint connection from intrinsic motivation. In this way, addressing a shared human experience or need.

The NVC-model works for relationships to global political conflicts.

*Exercise*

Think of someone that is in your allergy zone or triggers you and try to look at the other with empathy. Imagine or see what it is this person really needs. For instance, the need for respect or being heard.


This provides an empathic way of transforming a judgement into an empathic view and need for ... It generates compassion within yourself, and it brings you to a need you can probably relate to. Making it easier to see that person as a fellow human being and overcome any ineffective response.

Such a conversion is also part of non-violent communication.  
(Inspired by geweldlozecomunicatie.com)



# Being Human – Entering non-violent communication

**In case of giving feedback:** stay close to yourself and make your comments personal, giving back in a descriptive way what you observe and taking responsibility for your positions, opinions and values, rather than being evaluative, offering generalizations, pointing fingers or blaming outside forces.

 **Tip:** The book ‘Atlas of the Heart’ of Brené Brown (2021) provides very helpful definitions of the wide ray of emotions in the human experience. This may help to give words to what it is that you feel.

When emotions take over, take them back into yourself and hold the power that you might otherwise put on others around you. What happens is within you; someone else triggers it. There is no point in blaming that someone else for your anger or frustration.

- Remember, that if you are upset, it is very likely you make the other upset as well making a tensed situation worse.
- Also, when having emotions, it can help to realize that you are not necessarily your emotions, but an entity that observes emotions. In doing so, you can willfully make a decision on how to address your emotions and how to act upon them.

*For instance,*

‘ I notice that what is said bothers me. It evokes in me a feeling of anger/frustration. So, I can't hear you anymore. However, I would like to, though.

Can you give me a second to refocus? Would that be okay for you?

OR, maybe we can think of some different viewpoints on this matter as well and see what this brings? Would that work for you, too?

OR, refocus by asking, what made you think this way about this? / what question would you like to ask me about my view? ’



## Being Human

Entering non-violent communication

Being (self-) compassionate

Expressing Transparency, Integrity & Respect

Showing sincere interest





## Being Human

Entering non-violent communication

Being (self-) compassionate

Expressing Transparency, Integrity & Respect

Showing sincere interest



# Being Human – Being (self-)compassionate

When we're looking for compassion, we need someone who is deeply rooted, is able to bend and, most of all, embraces us for our strengths and struggles. (Brené Brown)

Have the courage to change what you can change; serenity to accept what you cannot change; and wisdom to see the difference. (by the serenity prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr)

**Compassion helps to connect more deeply with both yourself and others. Practicing awareness on (gentle) kindness enables you to engage in empathic listening and deal with emotions, in relation to yourself and others, in an unattached or not 'over-identified' way and without losing yourself.**

**Compassion is highly relevant to emotional presence and generative listening.** Additionally, when opening up to the unknown, it is necessary to be mild to its discomfort. So that you feel less compelled to act on the triggered discomfort and can remain open to possibilities and new insights.

- ❑ **What helps to observe a situation more 'objectively' and without negative or judgmental sentiments, is to practice viewing your behaviour, thoughts, feelings, and situations (and those of others) from kindness or gentleness.**

This enables you to hold the situation in an attentive 'neutral' awareness, a mindful awareness. To acknowledge and observe thoughts, feelings, and reactions without them determining your behaviour.

- ❑ **What helps build an emotional connection with the other person without getting (too) emotionally involved, losing energy, and forgetting yourself, is to be conscious what you can take responsibility for.**

You can only take responsibility for your actions, feelings and thoughts and be open about it. You cannot be responsible for

for some else's. You can however be open and empathic to actions, feelings and thoughts of others without wanting to fix the situation, while being clear on what you can do for someone and cannot/isn't in your scope of influence. For more on the Circle of Influence, see the Glossary, [link](#).

**Self-compassion.** The three main elements are self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. According to Kristin Neff, author and pioneer in the field of self-compassion research.

Compassion is related to emotional intelligence and well-being. Research shows that self-compassion is associated with emotional resilience, stronger self-reflection, great caring / involvement in relationships, and less narcissism.

**Emotional intelligence** refers to the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions and those of others and react to these in an effective and constructive way.

**Emotional presence** refers to the capacity to maintain presence and connection in the midst of emotional intensity, whether nice or not-nice.

# Being Human – Being (self-)compassionate

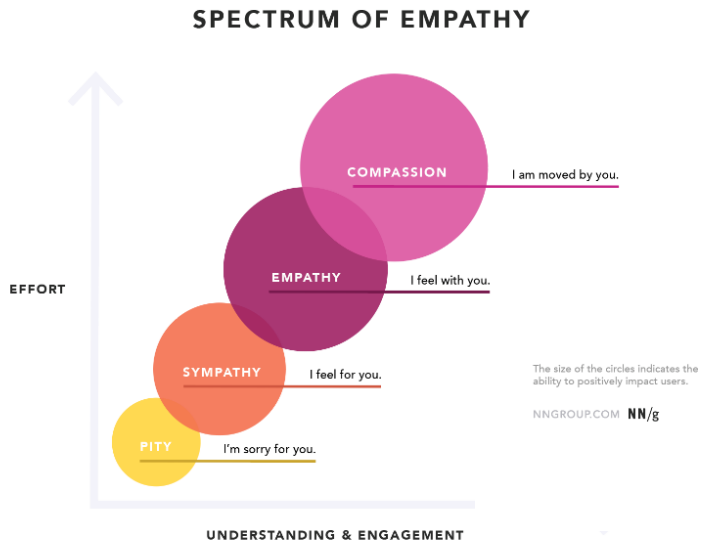


Figure 12, sympathy, empathy, compassion and pity and the related effort towards understanding and engagement. | Source: nngroup.com

**In short, sympathy, empathy, compassion and pity:**

**Sympathy** is aimed at understanding without showing empathy; which is similar to feeling for someone. **Empathy** is aimed at the experience and the ability to put oneself in someone else’s shoes, emotions and needs; which is similar to feeling or experiencing with someone. **Empathy** is the effort of someone who is self-aware and can understand, and even vicariously experience, the situation and emotional state of another person (Baron-Cohen, 2006).

Brené Brown and Katy Davi (2017, October 17). Empathy vs Sympathy Animation [Video file], Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HznVuCVQd10>

**Compassion** is aimed at a kind of gentleness and natural readiness to support someone without losing energy yourself; you could see it as a renewing source of energy that does not run away from the pain or suffering, is not overwhelmed by it and does not pretend that it does not exist but embraces what is openheartedly and holds space for this. Acting with compassion requires to always put the other person first without sidetracking yourself or giving yourself away. Whereas **pity** is empathy seen from one’s own perspective with the pitfall that one starts to feel that same way oneself.

- If you want to speak from the heart, intentionally go to your heart and then say something.
- Remarks such as ‘How annoying for you or I find it very annoying for you’ can leave the impression that you distance yourself from the other. Then connection is lost.
- The same goes for ‘It reminds me of when I ... ’ as this is all about you and not the other. ‘I really hope that you will come out of it’ or ‘That sucks’, better show that you sympathize with the other person.
- ‘I don't know what to say, but I hear you’ or ‘It sounds like you've had a bad day and you probably need a break’, makes the other feel more being heard and understood. Here the connection stays.
- Acting from compassion goes a step further ‘I feel your pain; I can imagine this is very difficult to deal with this all by yourself. Is there anything you need / I can help with?’.
- And, to add the 5th level of compassion of Dr Gabor Maté which is about what you see when you see another being, their negative side and their imperfections or their possibilities and the perfection they are underneath all that, that is their wholeness.



## Being Human

Entering non-violent communication

Being (self-) compassionate

Expressing Transparency, Integrity & Respect

Showing sincere interest



# Being Human – Expressing Transparency, Integrity & Respect

Transparency, integrity and respect are central elements of dialogues. They all refer to the ability to see a person as a whole being and to honour each other's value, humanity, words and potential. This also implies pursuing a certain ethic and way of acting, a reflective sense of responsibility. Something you can refer to as embodied living.

## □ Transparency

“ Openness and transparency about the nature and objective of the conversation is important to manage expectations of participants. Providing clear objectives and explaining the rules and roles of those involved is closely related to creating a safe space. It will also contribute to feeling psychologically safe as it gives people a sense of direction. “ (WUR Dialogue Navigator)

Openness and transparency also extend to being clear about what lies in your power and what not. Furthermore, it relates to the ability to be open about your (inner) world of experience including admitting bias or things you could have done differently.

A lack of transparency results in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity. (Dalai Lama, The Telegraph, 13 May 2012)

## □ Integrity

“ Integrity can be seen as the nature of the dialogue. It demands critical reflection. This cannot simply be contained in ‘internal dialogue’, but also requires accountability or making sense to others as well as (moral) liability or shared sense making. (Integrity & Dialogue, Simon Robinson, journal of dialogue studies, vol 2, no 2)

Your transparency will lead to other people's transformation. (Trent Shelton, School of Greatness Podcast with Lewis Howes)

## □ Ownership

It is never too late to correct or get back on something. Take responsibility for misinterpretation at the spot or afterwards. Hold yourself accountable. Own it.



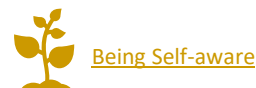
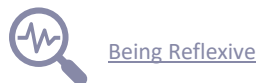
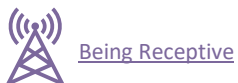
## Being Human

Entering non-violent communication

Being (self-) compassionate

Expressing Transparency, Integrity & Respect

Showing sincere interest





# Being Human – Expressing Transparency, Integrity & Respect

## ☐ Respect

The Golden Check Rule:  
“ Do I treat others as I would like to be treated by them? “

To respect is to see people, as Humberto Maturana puts it, as ‘legitimate others’. True respect enables genuine inquiry. This inquiry involves a search and acknowledgment of what is highest and best in a person and treating them as a being that you can never fully comprehend. In addition, William Isaacs (1999) points out that to come to a place of respect, both for others and for ourselves, means to take seriously that what is happening around you not only exists in others, but also in yourself - however hard it may be to see at the time.

Corresponding with Carl Jung’s indication that ‘everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves’. This can help to see that we are more alike than we are different.

Respect requires empathy, the capacity to anticipate and understand the feelings of others. It requires consideration. (Deborah Norville)

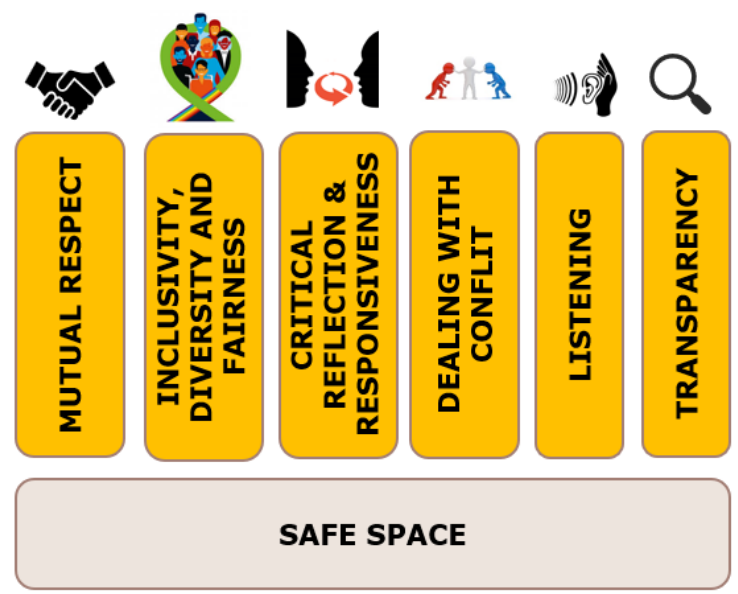


Figure 13, the relation between the building blocks of the WUR Dialogue Navigator & Safe Space.



## Being Human

Entering non-violent communication

Being (self-) compassionate

Expressing Transparency, Integrity & Respect

Showing sincere interest



# Being Human – Showing sincere interest

When pure sincerity forms within, it is outwardly realized in other people's hearts. (Lao Tzu)

**Sincere interest builds bridges. When you move beyond a transactional conversation and relation, you can build on a meaningful interaction and connect with others more easily. According to the Gottman Institute you can predict the health of a conversation in the first three minutes. *The most important part of a conversation is how it starts.***



## Being Human

Entering non-violent communication

Being (self-) compassionate

Expressing Transparency, Integrity & Respect

Showing sincere interest



**Creating space at the beginning to land, to literally check in, can make a big difference for the rest of the meeting.** It helps people to step in and slowly enter the setting for an inquisitive conversation. You can see it as creating your own ritual or icebreaker to start an exchange with.

**Think how you want to start the conversation and remember to:**

- ✓ approach the other as a human being with feelings and dreams rather than object of info for goal getting;
- ✓ be aware of your genuine curiosity hat.
  - What makes you tick? What makes the other tick?
- ✓ Make a deliberate effort to engage in the background and context of the other. Formulate questions that give insight in the emotional world.
  - What brought you at what you are working on? Why is this work important to you? What do you envision? What drives you or inspires you? This also makes it easier to step into the other's shoes = empathic listening.


**Furthermore:**

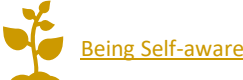
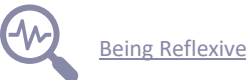
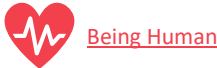
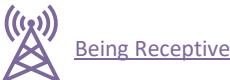
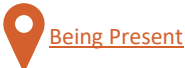
- ✓ A curious attitude helps to move beyond judgments; this includes recognizing and suspending judgments.
- ✓ Vulnerability as strength breaks open a conversation. Dare to share emotional experiences and feelings.
- ✓ Engaging in the expertise and experience of the other makes it easier to step into the other's shoes.
- ✓ A gesture of acknowledgment makes the other feel heard.
- ✓ Being honest in a respectful and compassionate way is not about having the right answers, but posing the right questions.
- ✓ Conclude the conversation with asking if the other wants to add anything, any ideas, thoughts, afterburner or wants to get back on something.

When someone speaks from formality or from being genuinely interested, makes a difference.

*For instance, if you say something in a goal interview that the other person doesn't want to hear as response, so it seems, the ground for further interaction is cut off.*

How seriously does one respond to your answer? How taken seriously does someone feel? *This sensor for sincere interest*, that co-depends on non-verbal communication, cannot be fooled. After all, each of us has an antenna for authenticity.

 **The key** is to meet people where they are, since this is where the most energy is. And, then to use that energy to connect. The rest will flow naturally from here, enabling to go deeper too.



# The dimensions to engage with – Being Reflexive

Critical reflection is a crucial dimension for effective dialogue. It provides an opportunity to learn from your own behavior and also to learn and be open to the value of viewpoints of others (WUR Dialogue Navigator). Being reflexive relates to a willingness to learn and examine your mental models and reaction patterns and how these influence the interaction; as well as to reflect on your own role and the position you take in relation to information and others. With the possibility to change your approach as you go and apply lessons learned.

Time and reflection change the sight little by little 'til we come to understand. (Paul Cezanne)

We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience. (John Dewey)

**Critical reflection comes down to a deliberate choice to** A) examine your own beliefs, judgements and practices during a research process or interview and how they may affect it.

This means that you B) also question your own assumptions, dominant paradigms and patterns of interpretation and reaction, called zooming in. To then C) explore what to do with this knowledge, called zooming out.

In this way, you create a **continuous reflective learning process**, in which reflection on action, by looking back on things afterwards, and reflection in action, by seeing what is happening as it is happening, play a role.

*“ I went for the jugular question. Change starts with the individual. So, the first thing I do each morning is ask myself, ‘Why do I strongly believe what I believe?’ Constantly examine your own assumptions.”*

Nobel-prize winner, physicist Arno Penzias replied when asked what accounted for his success.

Still practicing his questioning discipline today. This type of self-questioning keeps creativity alive (from The Art of Powerful Questions by Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (2003).



## Being Reflexive

[Reflecting on action](#)

[Practicing towards reflection-in-action](#)



# Being Reflexive – Reflection-on-action

Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. (Kolb, 1984, p. 38)

To change your reality, you have to change your inner thoughts. (David Bohm)



**Reflection-on-action enables you to become more aware and to improve future performance by identifying lessons learned and integrating them into future actions. In critical reflection and sense-making, you question what is normally taken for granted and explore what you can do with this knowledge.**

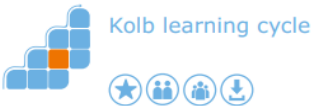
## Being Reflexive

### Reflecting on action

### Practicing towards reflection-in-action

**Requirement.** Reflection-on-action requires taking a critical distance to look back on situations, to observe what happened, to analyze context and to reflect on own viewpoints, thoughts, feelings, underlying motives and mental models with the possibility to voice them and obtain new insights. This helps in getting to the bottom of situations and understanding experiences more in-depth, to keep things that work and take lessons learned to the next experience. Once you keep on doing this critical looking backing and sense-making, being reflexive becomes an integral part of what you do and how you function.

**Kolb’s learning cycle** (figure 14) shows how through exploration, reflection and analysis (zooming in) experiences are translated into concepts and new perspectives (zooming out), which then are used as guides for active experimentation for a subsequent experience (Kolb, 1984). The cycle can be used both for learning from your own experience and to learn from experienced situations - in relation to quality dialogue - that had a great impact on you. For a detailed example, see [Using for training purposes](#).



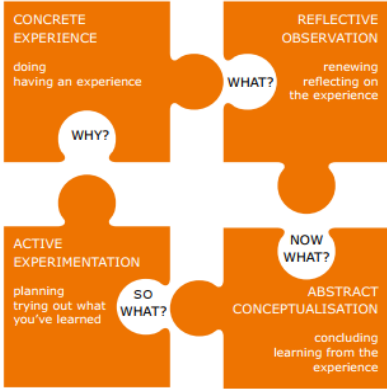
**Method**  
Start with a brief introduction of Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (see page 18). The facilitator can ask who is already familiar with the model, and how they use it. Explain how you use it. We feel it is a useful model to understand both individual learning processes of professionals taking part in a learning event, as well as the different phases the group will go through during the various activities in the learning event.

After explaining the model the group is divided into small groups of about five participants. Either each group discusses all four questions that are part of Kolb’s learning cycle, or every group discusses just one of the four questions.

Use a PowerPoint slide to remind participants of the questions, or give the groups the questions written on a piece of paper.

- 1 What? What were the most important things we did? What happened, what did you observe, hear, etc.? (recapping).
- 2 Why? What surprised or impressed you most, and why? What questions or challenges did you see? What did you agree/disagree with and why? (zooming in/analysing).
- 3 So what? What did you learn or come to realise? What conclusion can you draw or what generalisations can you make? (zooming out, conceptualising).
- 4 Now what? What does this mean if you were to apply this in practice? What could the implications of this learning be for your work and your organisation? Which lessons or ideas can you apply? Which questions do you still have and what actions will you take to explore them? (planning, experimenting)

In plenary, all groups present their lessons learned and their answers to the Kolb questions. The facilitator is checking whether everyone has understood how the experiential learning cycle works.



Experiential learning cycle, based on Kolb (1984)

Figure 14, Kolb’s learning cycle | Source: reflection methods, F. Gordijn, 2018, p.70, [link](#)



# Being Reflexive – Reflection-on-action


- ❑ **The cognitive behavioral model** can help as a tool for organising thoughts and behaviour when looking back at situations through Event, Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour or Good Intent, and Consequences - 1) What happened, describe where you were, with whom and what happened. 2) What thoughts went through your mind? 3) Describe what feeling this evoked in you. 4) What did you do? 5) What happened?

**Post-dialogue reflection is a form of reflection-on-action.** It is about reflecting on what went well and could be improved as well as on lessons learned and what you will take with you to the next dialogue experience. Something that can also be part of a validation session with interviewees to validate and further enrich harvested data. This provides a possibility to take others along in your reflection process and for them to learn something as well.

**Making time to take a critical distance.** Dialogue, according to David Bohm, requires self-examining the presuppositions in our thought patterns and where they come from. As it are our presuppositions and beliefs that perceive, watch and listen, and shape our reality framework. A good reason to take a critical distance to observe and think about, for instance:

- ❑ how you position yourself in conversations and when your mentality and interaction style prevent you from having an open scope and conversation;
- ❑ what blocks effective dialogue and what triggers you in specific incidents; Also look back with the people involved, the stakeholders, in a critical and reciprocal dialogue. And see Appendix A of Peter Nixon’s ‘Dialogue Gap: Why Communication Isn’t Enough and What We Can Do About It, fast’ (2012;

- ❑ how your interaction style might affect the willingness of the other(s) to think along and critically reflect on their individual and institutional assumptions, motives and commitments;
- ❑ your experiences and patterns, both your own and institutional assumptions, motives and commitments, your own narratives and cognitive dissonance, your blind spots, leading narrative or bias, dominant belief system and decision models, ... and how they affect you and the effectiveness of dialogue. Additionally, the MSP Guide (2015) page 70 and 71 provide some supporting illustrative examples of "rules" that help society function and how they define decision-making, norms, and strategies and their supportive actions.

 *Food for thought*

In the article DEEP LISTENING: practicing intellectual humility in geographic fieldwork (2020, [link article](#)), Nathalie Koch states that Deep listening involves A) a critical reflexivity about the subject positions as researchers, as well as B) a suspicion of metanarratives that prevail in the media and academic debates and C) a willingness to question the complicity in reproducing those narratives through the choice of research topics and method.



## Being Reflexive

[Reflecting on action](#)

[Practicing towards reflection-in-action](#)



# Being Reflexive – Practicing towards reflection-in-action

Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves. (Carl Jung)

**Reflection-in-action addresses the ability to see what is happening as it is happening, as conversation partner. Enabling you to be aware in the moment how your mental models and reaction patterns are affecting your openness, interaction and communication. So that you can regulate your behavior more easily on the spot and deploy for the benefit of the conversation.**



## Being Reflexive

[Reflecting on action](#)

[Practicing towards reflection-in-action](#)

**Being reflexive in action implies a mindful reaction.** It means observing in the moment what you think, see, hear and feel and transforming this into an effective response. That is, without being caught up in bias, negative reactivity or any other ineffective or conversation-blocking behaviour or wordings.

**Active pausing can be helpful for this.** Taking a moment to become aware what is happening in you or around you, suspend, and neutralize a first impulse, and then react. Preferably in such a way that it contributes to the effectiveness of the interaction.

Practicing this involves a learning curve that makes you more and more aware of what is happening in the moment and how you can best respond to this in an effective way. Which gradually leads you to reflection-in-action as part of daily (inter)action.

**Moreover, once you understand the preferred communication style you developed over the years, you can learn to adapt** this style to specific situations, improve effectiveness of communication, and level easier with others in the moment itself.

*Can you think of a topic, expression, or action that irritates you?*

Something, very small or large, or someone may irritate you. Perhaps it is the tone in which someone explains things that comes across as patronising, a frown, the immediate dismissal of your input, or being interrupted, ...

Chances are, you are passing on this irritation in your reaction and you are responding from irritation. By training yourself to become aware of the irritation while it's happening, you can step by step begin to suspend and shift to a more constructive response.

*The learning curve* often starts with realizing in retrospect that you were irritated and how it affected the conversation. After which you can bring it more and more into the moment as it happens. Through active pausing, you can learn to hold the irritation and make a conscious choice to respond without the irritation itself; and, engage in a connected conversation. The active pausing can be as simple as counting to ten before reacting.





# Being Reflexive – Practicing towards reflection-in-action

❑ **Triple-loop learning** can be used for deeper learning and reflection, which can help to bring about changes in attitudes, assumptions and beliefs (Reflection methods, F. Gordijn, 2018, p.19 | Figure 15 ). And then, to apply lessons learned. The Triple-loop learning method can support the act of looking at your thoughts and its processes within and how these influence your openness, interaction, and communication.

The three questions, ‘are we doing things right, are we doing the right things, and how do we decide’, can help:

- ✓ To reflect on how you, as a researcher, shape your research and what questions to ask in a dialogue.
- ✓ To engage your conversation partner in a process of reflection and learning.
- ✓ When designing and preparing a group dialogue.



## Being Reflexive

Reflecting on action

Practicing towards reflection-in-action

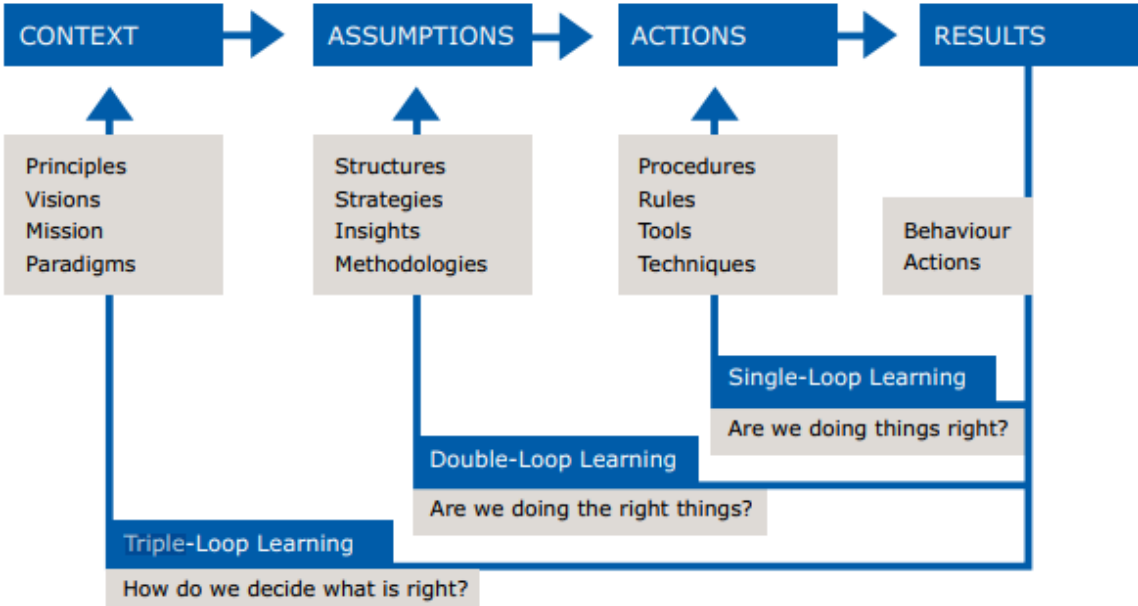


Figure 15, Triple-loop learning model by Argyris and Schön (1974)

**For inspiration**, also see Appendix 2, Reflection Questions in Reflection methods, F. Gordijn, 2018, page 118, [link](#).



# The dimensions to engage with – Being self-aware

Self-awareness refers to the ability to see yourself clearly through reflection and introspection and embodying the self-knowledge you obtain from this. This provides a self-understanding with regard to how you relate to your patterns of thought, emotions, experiences, expectations, motives and desires, and how this may affect what you do and say. Being self-aware implies an attitude towards yourself and a continuous process of being in conversation with yourself. This attitude is about fostering a growth mindset, an attitude for continuous learning and growth.

Every answer can be followed by another question. (Thomas Lloyd Qualls)

Self-criticism keeps people from being kind to themselves. (unknown)

**Knowing yourself is an important factor** in how you think, feel, act, and how you react to your thoughts, feelings, and (re)actions, and in turn how this affects others. From this knowledge it is easier to be aware of how you impact others and you can use this for the better. Understanding yourself better also makes it easier to empathise in such a way that you express understanding and communicate connection. When you are able to see yourself as a work in progress, it becomes easier to continuously learn and improve.

**The Self-awareness theory** is based on the idea that you are not your thoughts, but the entity observing your thoughts; you are the thinker, separate and apart from your thoughts (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). The key is not to judge or (over-)analyse. This makes it possible to embrace and accept everything that is part of you and belongs to you. It is like allowing a picture to emerge while not excluding bits and creating a partially formed or incomplete picture.

**Moving forward with this** is about being in conversation with yourself. Regularly take time to ask yourself how you think and function. This is more about observing than judging or assessing. The key here is to allow for all you think, feel, and notice to happen. To be aware of it, without analysing it. To make peace with the narratives you tell yourself and move to a place of more tranquility and 'neutrality'<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In this context, 'neutrality', is about an observational mode that is able to respond in an unattached way, that is without value judgments, negativity, or getting caught in this.

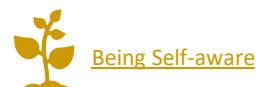
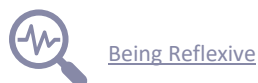
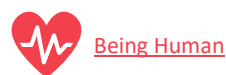
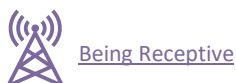
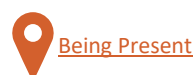


## Being Self-aware

[Dealing with power dynamics](#)

[Learning by doing, gaining trust](#)

[Demonstrating self-observation](#)



# Being Self-aware – Dealing with power dynamics



As we become more reflective, we begin to realise how much our initial perceptions can be coloured by expectations based on our cultural learning and our past experiences. We do not always perceive what is “accurately” out there. What we perceive is often based on our needs, our expectations, our projections, and, most of all, our culturally learned. (Edgar I.L. Schein, 1993)

The difficult thing is that vulnerability is the first thing I look for in you and the last thing I'm willing to show you. In you, it's courage and daring. In me, it's weakness. (Brené Brown)

**Dealing with power dynamics requires the willingness to step into the field of tension with the aim to acknowledge where everyone is coming from, inclusion, and to neutralize (perceived) powers. In addition, it needs engagement in non-violent communication and cultivating an interdependent awareness. Although power can be thought of as positive or negative, it is also a means for achieving goals and this way can be used to bring about change. For more on this latter see the MSP guide for some interesting reflective perspectives.**

## Being Self-aware

[Dealing with power dynamics](#)

[Learning by doing, gaining trust](#)

[Demonstrating self-observation](#)

### *Familiar Situation*

Those first few weeks in your new job, when you are careful to speak up. Trying to behave according to the expected ‘rules of professionalism’; the longer you work there, the more at ease you feel. How nice it is then, in those first weeks, when there is someone who reaches out, invites you to share your experience and what you think and makes a deliberate effort to take your position onboard.

security and determining the sense of status. In doing so, what we perceive is often coloured by a lifetime of beliefs and prejudices. Moreover, we tend to relate the information we hear to our own experiences, without making a conscious effort to recognise where the other person is coming from.

### **Dealing with power dynamics involves the art of acknowledging and transcending the previously indicated:**

- 1. Build conscious awareness:** In the case of power structures, beliefs and prejudices, you really need to be aware of this and how it influences (taking) positions and thus willingness to share openly. People will have different values and points of view, shaped by their past experiences that determine their behavior. Also, be aware of the context in which conversations take place and how your position comes across. In doing so, you should take seriously the influence of cultural norms, subcultures and differences in hierarchy, culturally, politically, historically, organizationally, or economically in relation to power and social structures. Make sure you aware of trades that influence you and



# Being Self-aware – Dealing with power dynamics

how others look at you – such as your origin, skin colour, educational background, cultural norms, values, the heritage of your beliefs and mental models. In addition, be aware of how rank, that is ‘the sum of your privileges’, affects you and others. Finally, recognise and acknowledge how colonial history affects the present time and the present contact, for all of us.

- 2. **Step into the tension:** Often when dealing with delicate issues, stepping into the tension overcomes the fear of confrontation. Learn to do this in a non-violent way and engage in deep and empathic listening. The key is to stay with the trouble from neutrality, that is without getting caught up in negative reactivity or power reflex. Be aware that if you do not step into the tension, dilemmas, fears and other tension triggers will persist. This affects the effectiveness of the conversation. Furthermore, it will continue feelings of not being heard, not being seen, or being excluded
- 3. **Make explicit:** By talking about how to deal with differences and disagreements and addressing underlying assumptions and norms together, you make space to respectfully exchange critical thoughts. To better understand other’s point of view, it is important to talk about where they are coming from. In doing so, you also acknowledge potentially unwanted and unintended effects as well as the fact that there will always be power dynamics at play. You cannot avoid or ignore these. However, you can deal with it in a non-violent way, connecting and inclusive.

It is not always easy to create and sustain the here mentioned awareness and action perspectives. You are not always up for them. Use your intuition here, too, as it usually knows best where there is space to operate in and where there is not.

*A possible responsive action perspective for a 1-to-1 situation, when stepping into the tension :*

1. Stay centered and hold space for yourself, for your identity, values and beliefs. If you can balance your thoughts, feelings and emotions in a non-judgmental and mild way, you are less likely to get caught up in negative behaviour. From this modus operandi, it is easier to make a conscious effort to recognise where the other person is coming from.
2. Now, stay centered and hold space for how the other person defines themselves, not for how you define this person. This comes down to honouring the other person's identity, mental models and beliefs, and so on. And it goes hand in hand with honouring the expression of this, which is similar to honouring voice. To this end, it is important that you can perceive and act from neutrality, that is without getting caught up in negative reactivity or power reflex. This requires you to suspend your judgement and listen and really see from the other’s position. It also requires you to know well where your boundaries are to keep your needs and authenticity at eye as well.
3. The next step is to express acknowledgement of where the other person is coming from. Then, if possible, indicate where you are coming from. Position this next to that of the other person. While honouring the other’s identity and the expression of this; this way you keep the connection and interaction balanced with yourself and the other person.
4. The final step involves, when possible, to search together for a third and safe space where you can find common ground, meet needs and/or agree how to disagree.



## Being Self-aware

Dealing with power dynamics

Learning by doing, gaining trust

Demonstrating self-observation



Being Present



Being Receptive



Being Human



Being Reflexive



Being Self-aware

# Being Self-aware – Dealing with power dynamics

*“ It is in the bringing into question our internalized oppressions that we start to reflect on the ways in which modernity, coloniality, capitalism, patriarchy has wounded us all. Leading us to question dominant frameworks, concepts and ideas. And, it is only through this discomfort that we can find the possibility of creating the fertile ground that could possibly nurture equitable partnerships. “*

Dr Zuleika Bibi Sheik of the Utrecht University pointed out during the Power of Knowledge Event by KIT, 2022 September 1, Opening Session [Video file, 1:08:10 – 1:15:31]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9RLYvyDhxl>.

### Another example

Being a Western educated scientist can feel sensitive in conversations or workshops. As it can bring with it a position of extra authority, an unintended power given to you. The simplest thing to redirect this is being intentional and deliberately shift your attention to looking for the potential and knowledge that the other brings to the conversation.

When you really feel uncomfortable or tense about it, it is best to not let it get in your way and to address things as they are. This can be through upfront addressing it for yourself by articulating it and acknowledging it out loud; this releases the tension on your part. If you feel comfortable enough you can also make it explicit during the conversation by indicating what is going on and how you feel about this. If/when possible, you then can probe how this is for the other person(s).

### Some things to be considerate of:

- Make a deliberate effort to see and recognize where the other side is coming from.
- Engage in supportive communication: express views and opinions while minimizing defensiveness and negativity, and maximizing clarity. To this end, it is wise to
  - detach yourself from identification with your role as an expert. This should be reflected in everything you say and do;
  - be very aware of your own emotions and feelings. For this it is key to stay centered;
  - level with your conversation partner by moving towards where the other is coming from. This will position yourself more next to the other person. For this, avoid positioning yourself below or above the other; since this will encourage hierarchical thinking or condescension. Also, avoid protecting interests and positions. And, make sure your voice matches what you want to say and be aware of your posture;
  - do not be blown away or feel intimidated, do not be led by the power the other person gives you or you them, but stay with yourself and look for an entry point for a sharing about this in a non-violent way. This will reduce distance between you;
  - realise that reactions are not personal, but part of a reaction mechanism. And, acknowledge that addressing tension works most effectively when people involved are not losing face.
- It works best if you find your own way of dealing with tensions. It is a coat you put on and becomes comfortable as you wear it. In doing so, figure out if you are doing what you think others want or what authentically suits you best.
- Keep your circle of influence in mind; focus on what you do have influence over and can take responsibility for and what not. For more on the Circle of Influence, see the glossary, [link](#).



## Being Self-aware

[Dealing with power dynamics](#)

[Learning by doing, gaining trust](#)

[Demonstrating self-observation](#)



# Being Self-aware – Dealing with power dynamics

**Finally**, in conversing with people from different backgrounds, knowledge, viewpoints, position taking and stakes, dissenting opinions are inevitable. Do not let this hamper the conversation, suspend differences, and engage in non-violent communication.

## Tips:

- ✓ It helps to be intentional and see a person as a whole being and for the potential, someone carries within oneself.  
→ This is reflected by asking yourself more often:  
‘What is it that the other can teach me that I do not now know?’
- ✓ The key is to meet people where they are, since this is where the most energy is. And, to use that energy to connect.

*Food for thought*

Isaura Barrera, associate professor at the University of New Mexico and Lucinda Kramer, associate professor at the National University in Costa Mesa, California found in explored interactions during their research work that it is not uncommon for someone who knows very little about someone else’s cultures to establish truly successful relationships with that other person even when they do not have all the necessary cultural information beforehand.

Both are authors of among others the book ‘Skilled Dialogue, Authentic communication and collaboration across diverse perspectives’ (2017).



## Being Self-aware

Dealing with power dynamics

Learning by doing, gaining trust

Demonstrating self-observation





# Being Self-aware – Learning by doing, gaining trust

Knowledge is the beginning of learning; doing is the completion of knowing. (Wang Yangming, a philosopher and thinker from the late Neo Confucian “school of Mind” / “Xin Xue”)

**Learning by doing builds a trust in the process and lifts confidence in that things will work out for the best when stepping into the unknown. It can be described as to moving from being consciously unskilled to consciously skilled. This also applies to building trust in yourself.**

**Communicating truthfully and being open requires a certain trust in yourself.** To be open about where you are coming from, how you feel about that, including the things you have learned from becoming more self-aware, about what makes you insecure, what feels uncomfortable, what elephant you perceive in the room, the frustrations you have, and so on takes courage.

In addition, it takes willingness, or a strong intrinsic motivation, along with authenticity to take action, develop this attitude, and show your true self. Without criticizing or bashing yourself along the way.

### The key-points:

1. Learn to be comfortable with making, admitting, and learning from mistakes and failures.
2. It takes learning by doing that if you are open and communicate truthfully, this will not disrupt the relationship and this is independent of whether you will be accepted. You can then experience that it does actually help build rapport; it helps develop a bond or connection with someone.
3. The key is to practice an understanding in how being open works.



## Being Self-aware

[Dealing with power dynamics](#)

[Learning by doing, gaining trust](#)

[Demonstrating self-observation](#)



# Being Self-aware – Demonstrating self-observation

Self-observation is the door to self-knowledge. (Jan Bommerez)

By training our mind to learn to observe, we start moving into a higher level of consciousness and remember who we are. (Heidi M. Morrison)

**Observations differ from judgments. Observations are what you see and hear instead of what you think, judge or evaluate. Self-observing gives insight in these patterns of thought, emotions and behavior. This also brings insights into the expectations you have in settings and with people including yourself.**

When you let go of conditions (=what you are not), you make peace with your deeper true self (=who you really are). You then expand your sense of self.

## What to do to develop this attitude?

- ❑ Explore regularly how you relate to your patterns of thought, emotions, behavior, and limiting convictions; and what standards you use as a way of judging the validity of them.
- ❑ To voice this, it is important to learn how to listen not only to your internal emotional reactions and impulses or to how you think you should behave, but to yourself.
- ❑ To practice this, become the silent watcher and observe and identify your beliefs.
  - Approach your own narratives from mildness and in a non-judgmental way; dare to be open to them.
  - Practice compassion; this stimulates the ability to move beyond labels, judgments, right and wrong, and to see in yourself what you see in others. It enables to be kinder to yourself and less hard on yourself.

- ❑ In addition, you can invite yourself to work on replacing non-helpful thoughts or beliefs, if you want. Be open, in a gentle and non-judgmental way, to questions such as ‘what do I need to give attention most to? What non-helpful thoughts or beliefs about who I think I need to be, should I let go of? What painful or unwanted feelings do I associate these with? How do they affect my actions? How do I want to use them instead? What is it that I need in order to make peace with narratives I tell myself? What space do I need to step into more fully for this?’ .

*“ Notice how often your attention is in the past or future. Don’t judge or analyze what you observe. Watch the thought, feel the emotion, observe the reaction. Don’t make a personal problem out of them. You will then feel something more powerful than any of those things that you observe: the still, observing presence itself behind the content of your mind, the silent watcher. “ Eckhart Tolle.*



## Being Self-aware

[Dealing with power dynamics](#)

[Learning by doing, gaining trust](#)

[Demonstrating self-observation](#)





## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions

When developing any dialogic application or training an important role should be assigned to intentions, as well as to how these are expressed in the dialogue behaviour. As research by I. Barrera and L. Kramer on Skilled Dialogue and interactions across diverse identities and voices, and research outside of Skilled Dialogue, indicate that intentions that underpin attitudes and behaviors are critical for Skilled Dialogue (Using Skilled Dialogue to Transform Challenging Interactions, 2012).

Retrieved from <https://fpg.unc.edu/sites/fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/presentations-and-webinars/Using%20Skilled%20Dialogue.pdf>.

**To realise fruitful intentions this part of the handbook focuses on guiding checks and balances for fruitful intentions in a given dialogic situation.**

- 1. It sheds light on possible guiding questions (see figure 16) to identify what the dialogic and mindful space to operate in requires in order to ensure an open and quality exchange; including reflective questions to access the 'right' inner attitude for this.**
- 2. Furthermore, it presents examples of adding qualitative characteristics in practice.** All based on concrete project questions and practices within the setting of Wageningen University & Research (WUR) and including checks and balances together with reflexive questions to access the 'right' inner attitude. The elaboration of the practices also served as a basis for the above mentioned guiding questions to identify the 'right' dialogic space to operate in.

The sketched examples of adding qualitative characteristics to research interviews and dialogue in practice concern:

#### **A) Adding qualitative characteristics to Research (semi-structured)**

- Based on the orientation work(shops) for task 2 'Deep Listening Journeys' of the Knowledge Based project Just Transition 2022 (by Tossa Harding & Yael van Assendelft).
- Involving 1) elaboration on key qualitative characteristics,

2) checks and balances when preparing for the interview, including some guiding (reflective) questions, and 3) a brief protocol.

#### **B) Use for Training Purposes**

- Based on a practice that showcases a training approach around the concept of Being a Trusted Conversation Partner for participatory interviews with community members in Ethiopia for the RAISE-FS project (by Herman Snel of WCDI-WUR).
- 1) It outlines the used approach. 2) It provides reflections regarding the notion of trusted conversation partners at the time of the training and after engaging in the field with respondents from different communities. 3) It indicates the learning process that inspired this approach.

#### **C) Stepping into the role of facilitator**

- Based on experience and a reflection track until summer 2023 with Suzy Rebisz as junior facilitator Dialogue Center in terms of application of certain skills and attitude aspects.
- Involving 1) elaboration on key qualitative characteristics, 2) (pre-)checks and balances for a dialogue, including some guiding (reflective) questions, and 3) a summary protocol.
- **And, 4) finally a time pressured multi-stakeholder dialogue session example, the Horti Kigali Declaration workshop – 9 countries, 45 people, 7 organisations (by Simone van Vugt of WCDI-WUR).**

# Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions – General guiding questions

To achieve qualitative exchange in a given dialogical situation comes down to a self-learning and intuitive iterative process in which an important role must be assigned to intentions; after all, these influence the quality of the outcome of interactions. Furthermore, the dialogic space in which to operate depends on the context, circumstances and setting of the specific situation.

The here six indicated steps and key-questions (figure 16) help determine the 'right' dialogue space for an open, safe and quality exchange in a given dialogical situation. They form a logical sequence of assessment, reflective preparation, and learning by doing and adapting future practice.

Crucial is to take onboard the context, circumstances, setting and needs of the particular dialogue situation you are preparing for. As this sets the stage for the 'right' space to operate in. It creates consistency, too, between the situation and what it requires of you and your engagement to ensure quality of the dialogue.

Finally, there is always the element of the unknown and the unexpected in exchanges. This appeals to your abilities to let go and let come. Combined with accepting and trusting the process. In doing so, build on yourself, your intuition, and earlier experiences; be confident that things will work out.

### The six steps and key questions to determine the 'right' dialogue space for an open, safe, and quality exchange (figure 16).

1. Identifying the enabling factors for a quality outcome; → what defines the mindful space to operate in to ensure quality of dialogue?
2. Identifying what intentions and focus the mindful space requires; → which dialogic qualities hold the required space and which key intentions underpin them?

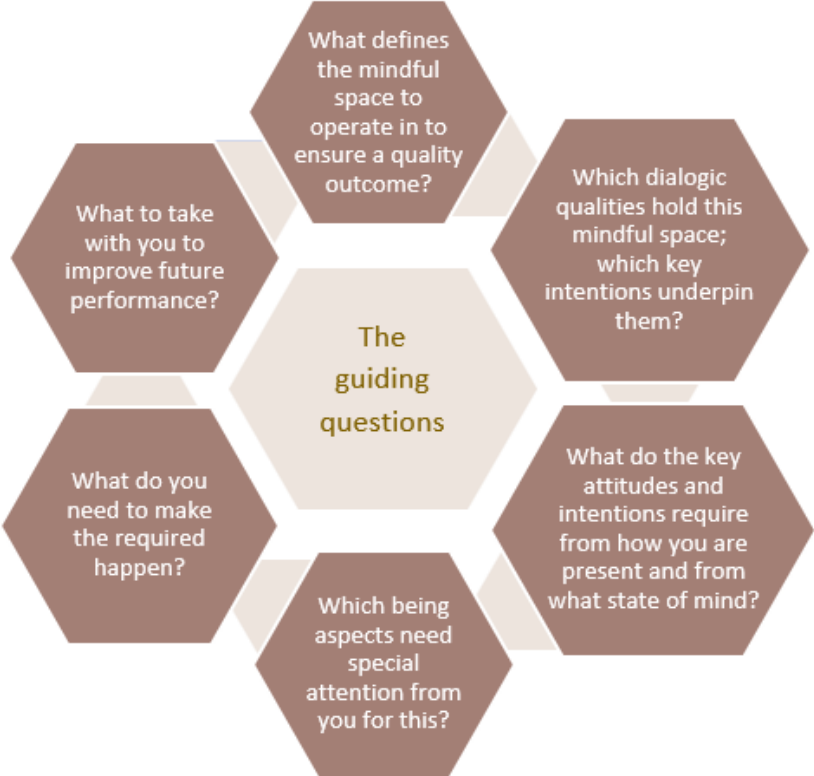


Figure 16, guiding questions to identify what the mindful and intentional space is to operate in to ensure quality of exchange or dialogue.

3. Identifying what the key attitudes and intentions require from how you are present and from what state of mind; → what to notice and welcome during the conversation and what to make room for in yourself with regard to the required key attitudes and intentions?
4. Identifying what then needs special attention from you; → which aspects of the five dimensions do need special focus from you to make the above identified possible?
5. Identifying your needs to make the above happen; → what do you need in preparation and during the conversation?



## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions – General guiding questions

- 6. Identifying lessons learned and take-aways as part of a continuous reflective learning process;  
→ what to take with you to improve future performance?

## What do the questions refer to and what possible answers do they entail?

- 1. Identify the enabling factors for a quality outcome. By answering what defines the mindful space to operate in to ensure quality of dialogue.  
This description has to do with aspects like building rapport, nurturing respect, mutual understanding or deeper understandings, contextual views, taking time, the presence of different perspectives or mental models, creative space, reciprocity or equal input, commitment, establishing trust, ...
- 2. Identify what intentions and focus this mindful space requires. By answering which dialogic qualities hold the required space and which key intentions underpin them.  
The first involves aspects like attention, attentiveness, genuine openness, connection through interest, empathy, compassion or humanity, mindfulness, (deep) listening, inclusiveness, slowing down, safety as in providing a safe space or a climate for discovery, equality of participants and so on.  
The second refers to the mindful action in being open to: one's experiences and knowledge, in giving trust, caring by showing interest or understanding, in recognising that there are many equally important viewpoints, in connecting to one another's perspectives and background, creating common ground - by moving away from seeing differences and looking for what connects -, being open to different human experience sides, ...

- 3. Identify what the key attitudes and intentions require from how you are present and from what state of mind. By answering what to notice and welcome during the conversation, and what what you need to make space for in yourself in order to enable the required key attitudes and intentions.  
Think of suspending bias, self-oriented thinking, first impulses, negative reactivity, your conversational speed, selective listening, a particular fear or discomfort you have, or other. And, receptivity to welcome unexpected reactions or emotions, disconfirming data and/or what you do not know, different perspectives and views, new mental models, ...  
Or, being centered to enable neutral observations and facilitate effective conversations by remaining attentive and connected in all kinds of situations regardless of what is said or happening.  
Or, letting go of control of the direction, content or desired outcome of the exchange, encouraging active contribution or focusing on hearing other voices; to thereby respect what the process needs.
- 4. Identify what then needs special attention. By answering what aspects of the five dimensions need special attention from you in order to make the above identified possible.  
Such as be(com)ing more mindful, allowing mind and heart to work in union to listen with full attention and proper care, staying centered - embodied presence -, giving full space to the other person to talk and welcoming where the other comes from - that is what purpose, interest, or need, or background is motivating someone's speech -, moving away from being focused on a transactional conversation into thinking together in a relationship-oriented conversation, looking for 'what is it that the other can teach me that I do not now know?', shifting from 'we know the solution' to 'understanding and finding answers together', ...



## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions – General guiding questions



5. Identify your needs to make the above happen. By answering what you need in preparation and during the conversation.

This can be about specific supportive exercises, techniques to slow down before and during a conversation, formulating powerful questions, coming up with an appropriate check-in to set the stage for a first connecting and open dialogue-mode, setting up a conversation structure that supports connection, setting intentions upfront, building in moments to really take in what is said and meant, how this makes sense and then respond accordingly - through active pausing and reflection-in-action techniques -, making time for reflection before and after, being kind to yourself allowing yourself a learning journey and to venture into the unknown, blocking half an hour of prep and check-in time for yourself before an interview or dialogue, ...

6. Identify lessons learned and take-aways as part of a continuous reflective learning process. By answering what to take with you to improve future performance.

This is about looking back on situations, reflecting on what went well and could be improved, and doing some sense-making to keep things that work and take lessons learned to the next experience. You can do this by yourself and/or with others involved in the dialogue organization or the actual dialogue. Using divergent thinking and convergent thinking in relation to what happened in the room and how the dialogue process evolved helps with this. As does having a check-in with yourself shortly after the dialogue and building in a self-reflective moment where you look back on situations using the cognitive behavioral model as a tool for organising thoughts and behaviour through 1) Event, 2) Thoughts, 3) Feelings, 4) Behaviour or Good Intent, and 5) Consequences. Additionally, have an exchange with colleagues and review with them, too.

**Finally**, there are many ways to adopt a particular quality of being and it is a personal exploration to find out what works best for you.

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary





# Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions – Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews



## Checks & Balances

“ Systems thinking refers to the ability to view problems and events in relation to whole systems. It is about making sense of complexity. “  
(Brouwer et al 2015; for a video introduction to a food systems approach by Herman Brouwer see [link](#)).

Sense-making is the ability or attempt to make sense of situations by trying to understand connections in complex situations. It involves questioning and analysing experiences, observations, theories, beliefs and/or assumptions with our stakeholders. More specifically, sense-making is the process of creating awareness and understanding in situations of high complexity or uncertainty for the purpose of decision-making. (Kusters, C.S.L. and Batjes, K. with Wigboldus, S., Brouwers, J. and Baguma, S.D. (2017, Managing for Sustainable Development Impact: An Integrated Approach to Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation))

**Adding qualitative features and characteristics for Research Interviews will help you to obtain reliable data, better contextualise information, and create more understanding. Moreover, you will be more successful in enriching research findings and will find better fits. Because you will be able to shed light on what you (both) do not know and what you made sense of during the exchange.**

**To this end, the following key qualitative characteristics are addressed:**

- the strategy of making sense of situations and experiences;
- from finding answers and looking for facts to seeing and taking answers of interviewees at point value as their real felt sentiment and perspective on a certain topic;
- the attentive space to operate in during the exchange.

Adding qualitative characteristics can be applied to Research (projects), such as Review Research and Action Research. Involving the actual research, loopings of feedback, action and reflection, sensemaking of data, approaches and innovative pilots / technical innovations, etcetera.

- ❑ **The strategy of making sense of situations and experiences can be really useful in research interviews to better understand and contextualize findings.** It can help you in understanding how things make sense from the other person's perspective, rather than from your own. This requires that you (1) discover the story behind the other's experiences, behaviours and words, and (2) consider what purpose, interest or need motivate what is being said, (3) what beliefs, values, and background underpin this, and then (4) seek to understand how this all make sense within the given context. (5) It can also be helpful to identify and question what is usually taken for granted, especially assumptions, yours and those of others, about what worked and what did not, why not and what does now. Formulating powerful questions to support the strategy of sense-making is key.
- ❑ **To move from finding answers and looking for facts to seeing and really hearing the other's story and how this makes sense within the whole context, it helps to think of the conversation as a sense-making journey.** During this journey the aim is to gain a new and qualitative understanding of the subject. You achieve this by (1) setting aside preconceptions and what you (think you) already know and (2) by looking for possibilities and what you don't know yet. (3) In relation to the bigger scope and

[General guiding questions](#)

[Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews](#)

[Use for training purposes](#)

[Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator](#)

[Tips & Exercises](#)

[Glossary](#)



# Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions – Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

correlations; as this is what systems thinking is about. This allows you to better see the whole picture and try to become its advocate. To enable this key attitude, it helps to think in advance about what to notice and welcome during the conversation and what to make space for in yourself.

- ❑ **The space to operate in during the exchange should be held by attention, because this is an important differentiator.** The first thing to do is giving attention to becoming (more) mindful before the conversation. This will not only slow yourself down but also clear your mind and open your other senses. Things are more likely to emerge when you can pay attention to suspending and actively pausing during the conversation from a calm but active state of mind. This brings you easier into a generative listening mode. Through thoughtful engagement with the other's point of view, you can then make an effort to acknowledge and understand where the other is coming from. This allows you to search together for deeper meanings and dimensions and include as many relevant perspectives and knowledge as possible. When preparing for an interview, it is really helpful to clear your schedule and make time to activate your generative listening mode.

**What now?** It is not always easy to create and sustain these intentions in interactions. Because you are not always up for ways that support the above-mentioned qualities. And yet, as is with many things, the true art lies in in-the-moment awareness and adaptability-in-action. It lies in discovering and applying new techniques where you give yourself time to experience and try out, and in playing with situations and ways of (re)acting, to gradually learn and deal with what presents itself in the exchange in an increasingly conscious way in the moment itself. In doing so, do not be afraid to follow your gut feeling.

## → Pre-interview preparations

**When preparing for the interview some checks and balances for fruitful intentions provide guidance. They also help to achieve the required qualitative attitude and mindset, as this sets the stage for more deliberate behaviour and quality actions. The here suggested checks and balances can of course be adapted to the particular situation, context, setting, and circumstances of the interview.**

- ❑ The pre-interview Checks & Balances concern:
  - 1) pre-reflections,
  - 2) development of the protocol for the interview, its set-up and practicalities,
  - 3) formulating questions,
  - 4) setting intentions, and
  - 5) activating the generative listening mode prior to the interview.
- ❑ The Brief Protocol provides some guidance for the interview itself.

The protocol and checks 1) to 5) are based on the orientation work(shops) for task 2 'Deep Listening Journeys' of the KB project Just Transition 2022 (by Tossa Harding & Yael van Assendelft).



## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews (semi-structured) – Pre-checks & Balances



**The aim here is to give yourself an anchor from which you can venture into the role of a trusted conversation partner and the generative mindset.**

- A. What are your reflections on the earlier-mentioned three key qualitative characteristics?
- What powerful questions do you need for the interview to support the strategy of sense-making?
  - What to notice and welcome during the interview and what to make room for in yourself to enable the key attitude of approaching the interview as a sense-making journey?
  - What do you need to step into the attentive space the interview requires?
- B. - What are the enabling factors for an effective and active dialogue? Where are risks for this particular interview and how to deal with them?
- What are some crosscutting areas, dilemmas and/or assumptions? Do these need to be made explicit? If so, how?
  - What key-aspects do require special focus and/or intentions from you?
- C. - What are relevant assumptions that might influence the interview and/or can help you to step into the unknown?
- With what view will you start the interview and look at the situation?  
*Really knowing your underlying worldviews, beliefs and assumptions not only makes you more aware on your reality framework from which you perceive, watch and listen. It also provides an anchor for searching for what you do not know.*
- D. Finally, if applicable, voice possible voices of judgement, doubt, concern, worry, fear, or inner criticism you (might) have. To make sure these do not get in your way, acknowledge them without condemning or setting aside negatively and try to let them go. For this, see the [Letting go Tips](#) and [Tips for Setting Intentions](#).

## 1) Pre reflections

## 2) Develop the protocol

Develop the protocol for the interview, its set-up and practical aspects, including how to interpret and translate the findings harvested from deeper listening as well as a format for taking notes and compiling output. And, maybe add a validation session at the end with all interviewees to validate and further enrich the data, and have them participate in a reflection process.

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary




# Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews (semi-structured) – Pre-checks & Balances



**The aim here is to look critically at the guiding questions for your interview and think how you want to start the conversation.** Do a quick scan if and how your questions fit into the basic architecture of formulating powerful questions. Just a few practice sessions will greatly enhance your ability to engage in productive conversations stimulated by dynamic questions. Also see Reflection methods, F. Gordijn, 2018, Appendix 2 - Reflection Questions for Inspiration, page 118, [link](#).

- Rate your questions in terms of their power. Referring to the three dimensions, constructions, scope, assumptions. See if you can spot why certain questions are more compelling than others. Experiment with changing the construction and scope, to get a feel for how doing so changes the direction of the inquiry. Be sure to examine the assumptions that are embedded in your questions and check to see if they will help or hinder your exploration.
- Check the used terminology and used jargon. To stimulate active contributions and avoid bias and miscommunication: which common wordings, terminology and jargon can be re-formulated in a more accessible and inclusive way?
- Check what perspective(s) the question addresses and how the question fits within the context of systems thinking.
- To add more relevant perspectives and knowledge as possible, it can be refreshing to:
  - a) reformulate some questions with the lens of the observational view from a distance, humility and/or empathy, from being an advocate for the whole or the perspective of another stake- or rightsholder;
  - b) add a question that represents other perspectives, voices or rightsholders in the conversation.
  - c) The Six Thinking Hats of De Bono can help here, too, in putting on different thinking hats. Each hat represents a style of thinking enabling to switch roles or voice things neutrally, unattached. See more on this in the MSP guide '[How to Design and Facilitate Multi-Stakeholder Processes](#)' p.73 – 74.
- Write down some possible key check questions and follow-up questions to fall back on.
- To add deeper learning and reflection during the interview:
  - a) you can frame your questions into the Triple-loop learning model, Argyris and Schön (1974);
  - b) additionally you can formulate questions addressing the levels of Listening identified by Scharmer (2008) together with the levels of The Iceberg Model by McLelland in order to address deeper motives and thinking models.

 Remember, the key is to meet people where they are, since this is where the most energy is. And, then to use that energy to connect. The rest will flow naturally from here, enabling to go deeper too.

- So, write down some possible questions for the first chat, setting the atmosphere & connecting.

## 3) Formulating questions

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews (semi-structured) – Pre-checks & Balances



## 4) Being Intentional

**The aim here is to make some deliberate qualitative choice(s) and set intentions to meet these.** Write the intentions down. Say them out loud, too. And, think about what conscious choice(s) you want to make for yourself. What do you want to notice and welcome during the conversation? Some examples,

- To start a blank page very deliberately and practice a fresh look.
- To have a generative mindset and shift to the possibility focus.
- To keep your attention on the conversation and remain consciously present.
- To suspend and listen carefully for what you do not know.
- To redirect, that is to listen and see from different positions, and take answers from interviewees at point value as real felt sentiment and perspective.
- To slow down & let go of the urge to react immediately; that is to work with silence.
- To have a pleasant and meaningful conversation, and move beyond a transactional conversation.

Also see Tips for [Setting Intentions](#).

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary

## 5) Personal check-in

**The aim here is to be aware what the space is you find yourself in and activate the generative listening mode.** To achieve fruitful intentions a well-balanced state of mind is key, as this sets the stage for more deliberate behaviour and quality actions. Therefore, it is important to do a personal check-in 15-30 minutes before the interview. Checklist:

1. Build in a moment to relax, let deadlines and to do's go → unwind.
  - Examine how you are present. Check for yourself, where you are with your thoughts. Is there something in or on your mind that is keeping you from being here? What is it? Feel free to write it down to get it off your mind.
  - Create the 'right' mental space. Observe if you maybe feel resistance or distraction to being here or to doing the interview. Is there an obstacle? Can you pinpoint where you physically feel this? Try to go there, focus your attention to this place and let go any tension.
  - Further clear your thoughts and release tensions through an exercise that best suits you.
  - Center yourself through a breathing, mindful and/or body-activating exercise.
2. Create the intentional space to operate in → remind yourself what the intentions and objectives are. Think what to make space for in yourself to meet these. Are there any assumptions or fears to overcome yourself? What to let go of to step in the 'right' intentional space?
3. Create the fruitful space to operate in → remind yourself of ways to nurture a space and mindset that enable you to establish a generative listening mode and achieve the set intentions and objectives.

Also see Tips & Exercises for guidance and inspiration.



# Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews (semi-structured) – Brief Protocol



The aim of this brief protocol is to provide you(rself) with some guidance for the interview itself. You can of course adapt it to the particular situation, context, setting, and circumstances.

- ❑ Start with a quick exercise for you to ground and go back to the present moment; see Tips & Exercises.
- ❑ Openness and transparency of the dialogue will increase trust and clarify expectations; set clear objectives, rules of dialogue and role of participants & make a deliberate effort to connect with the interviewee and engage in where the other speaks from.
- ❑ Steps to follow:
  - Introducing and some chitchat
  - Why this interview?
  - Setting the scene
    - Example, 'what does the action-oriented research project entail and how is the interview output used?'
  - Guidelines data collection
  - Setting the atmosphere & connecting
    - ✓ Create a space for the both of you to step in and slowly enter the inquisitive conversation
    - ✓ I am .... (who are you? What brings you here in the interview? Why is this project important for you? What is your dream for it? What do you hope for this interview?)
    - ✓ Then, engage in the interviewee and their background. What brought this person at what they are working on? Why is this work so important? What does this person envision? What drives or inspires them?
  - What are the underlying assumptions and uncertainties? (if necessary)
  - The conversation itself
    - ✓ Do not forget to ask (probing) questions to explore what assumptions or beliefs come into play in order to support your suspending
    - ✓ Check from time to time how you sit. Take a good breath, breathe through your belly and back into your body
  - Closing: conclude the conversation with asking if the other wants to add anything, any ideas, thoughts, afterburner or wants to get back on something.
  - Wrapping up, next steps
  - Evaluation / post-dialogue reflection \*

\* **Tip:** Also see step 6. 'Identify lessons learned and take-aways as part of a continuous reflective learning process' of Figure 15, guiding questions to identify the 'right' dialogue space for an open, safe, and quality exchange.

Protocol for the  
interview

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary







## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions – Using for training purposes

“ To feed new information, one must discard unnecessary and obsolete data from one’s brain. That process is called Unlearning. Spending time on unlearning and relearning, benefits everyone no matter what they do. ”

(Aditi NC in an article in the Daily Guardian on the power of Learn, Unlearn and Relearn, August 3, 2022)

Giving up what is no longer useful or relevant comes off easier for some things than others. For example, the process of re-evaluating out-of-date knowledge, facts and figures probably comes easier than reevaluating skills, habits, attitudes and perceptions of ourselves or the narratives we perpetuate. The findings of a research paper on the learn-unlearn-relearn (LUR) model conclude that adopting the LUR model requires a gradual and steady process of strategic transformation. It requires challenging old assumptions and creating newer layers of assumptions. The approach to LUR has to be seamlessly beaded with the firm's line of attack (Tabassum Azmi, F. (2008), "Mapping the learn-unlearn-relearn model: Imperatives for strategic management", *European Business Review*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 240-259).

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/09555340810871437/full/html>

**Adding qualitative characteristics to dialogical research requires** rethinking ways of doing things. Combined with a process of evaluating, letting go of, and upgrading non-helpful and non-relevant stuff. In this learning process, regardless of the learning models and transformative learning techniques you use, and the action perspectives to be addressed, the following aspects require attention:

- ✓ **Acquiring the generative mindset**, to support the shift from ‘having the right answers’ to ‘thinking and understanding together’ and adopting co-creation attitudes.
- ✓ **Using critical thinking**, to encourage changes in attitudes, assumptions and beliefs by challenging assumptions that underpin our mental models and creating newer. The triple-loop learning model of Argyris and Schön (1974) can facilitate this act of looking at our thoughts and the processes within them and how these affect ways of interacting and doing things. By yourself or together.
- ✓ **Adding the being component to the doing** by incorporating simple techniques and exercises that activate all the senses

- ✓ of body, mind and heart. To improve the quality of both presence and action. For some simple exercises, see [Tips](#).
- ✓ **The human touch**, addressing human experiences and how to bring yourself more fully into a conversation.

Finally, as a trainer, ask yourself actively what can you apply more (often) to become a skilled and trusted trainer in relation to dialogic intentions, skills, and attitudes.

**Storytelling can be helpful in** incorporating the four aspects mentioned above into a training material. Inviting others into your world and letting them experience the events of the story goes beyond delivering facts, ‘downloading’ information and expressing reasoning. You enrich them with detail, characteristics, metaphors and expressiveness. With storytelling, you appeal to a different mind state. You activate an open mind and stimulate empathic listening. You then move to a place of deeper presence and co-creation. For these reasons, storytelling has a long tradition with the power to engage, teach, influence, and inspire.





# Using for training purposes – Training approach ‘Being a trusted conversation partner’



oriented themselves on the use of the PRA tools and the guiding questions, they were going to apply in field with community members.

□ As they practiced with the tools, participants were asked to draw from the insights of these initial reflections and draw on them for their work as facilitators in the PRA process. As they started working and practicing with the PRA tools, it became quite clear that they were also including the initial reflections around the role of facilitators as trusted conversation partners.

**Firstly**, there were a lot of questions and doubts that were voiced, about concepts and terminology used in the guiding questions.

→ Participants felt that certain terms and concepts needed to be clarified and framed within the logic of communities and rural households.

**Secondly**, many participants raised questions referring to how to unlearn and not judge on participants answers; but taking them at point value as someone’s real felt sentiment and perspective on a certain topic.

→ As such the researchers were challenging themselves to unlearn, without imposing their expert knowledge, their own pre-conceived assumptions and having open minds to listen, hear and understand respondents’ realities.

**Thirdly**, the involved researchers became aware that some questions of the PRA fell beyond their field of expertise and their research interest.

→ None the less, although they did not always feel comfortable with these topics, they understood that they needed to ask these questions to be able to approach respondents and find

out, from the realities experienced in the field, what key challenges and opportunities farmers and rural households were facing.

**An additional reflection** that emerged from this process was the acknowledged importance to assign specific trusted conversation partners to specific groups.

→ The researchers reflected on the need to have female facilitators guide the PRA activities that were to take place with female focus groups. The group reflected that, within the cultural context of Ethiopia, women would feel more at ease to speak if they were in a group with women and that they would feel more comfortable if they were to be supported by a female facilitator and conversation partner.

→ In addition, the researchers reflected on the possible effect that power dynamics within a group can have. They recognized and acknowledged that their role as trusted conversation partners was to make sure no one in the group took on a position of power, and to make themselves humble and open to hear the opinions of others. Additionally, they recognized that in their roles, they also needed to make sure that in the group dynamic no-one within the group would assume a position of power, considering the influence and impact that would have on the overall group dialogue.

On numerous occasions the researchers voiced their concern regarding the in-depth knowledge required to answer specific topics. They worried that farmers and rural dwellers would not be able to respond to the questions or be able to provide the correct insights. Researchers were concerned that they would not be able to get the right information considering the lack of knowledge from the respondents. The researchers were re-assured not to assume that

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# Using for training purposes – Training approach ‘Being a trusted conversation partner’



farmer households will not be able to answer but to trust and rely on the input that respondents would be able to provide.

- ❑ After engaging with the PRA tools in the field with respondents from different communities, the researchers were asked to share some of their learnings, reflections, feedback regarding the notion of trusted conversation partners.

## Reflections and feedback obtained from the researchers after putting in practice the PRA tools and the insights on trusted conversation partners:

- ✓ All researchers had been positively impressed by the results obtained and the in-depth knowledge and reflexive capacity that they had witnessed and had been shared with them. Researchers had been surprised to see how farmers and stakeholders had been able to respond to different questions that they had previously assumed they would not be able to answer or would not have any knowledge about. Researchers felt satisfied that they had learned so much from the exercises and dialogues and that they had obtained fresh and new insights from respondents.
- ✓ Some researchers felt that they had been able to see rural households’ realities in a totally new light thanks to these open ways of engaging where they were not only looking at aspects related to their academic field of expertise but were taking a more integrated and wholistic perspective relating to respondents’ livelihoods. In this perspective some researchers mentioned that even though they were very close – in distance to these rural realities – they were also made aware of how “distant and far-way” they were from really grasping the complexities of rural livelihoods.

the complexities of rural livelihoods.

- ✓ Some researchers highlighted how they had witnessed power dynamics during certain conversations, where powerful formal or non-formal leaders started to dominate conversation or started to negate certain issues and challenges that had been observed.
- ✓ In other occasions researchers pinpointed that the dialogues where hampered due to the fact that the stakeholders that had been involved did not represent the actual diversity of stakeholders in a particular region.
- ✓ Some researchers also highlighted how they had noticed that their own specific attitudes and presence during the conversations significantly affected the quality of the dialogue. They noticed that by asking probing questions that were open ended and required participants to provide in depth answers. When the researchers themselves provided certain answers or opinions the conversations would draw to a halt.

In varying degrees all researchers were able to apply, practice and experience how their presence and being affected the quality and depth of dialogues either positively or negatively. Researchers had felt they had learned new things, had been able to uncover and delve into topics and questions that they were previously unaware of.

**Participants of the workshops and field activities in turn**, also had voiced an overall appreciation for the approach where they were being asked for their honest opinions.

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



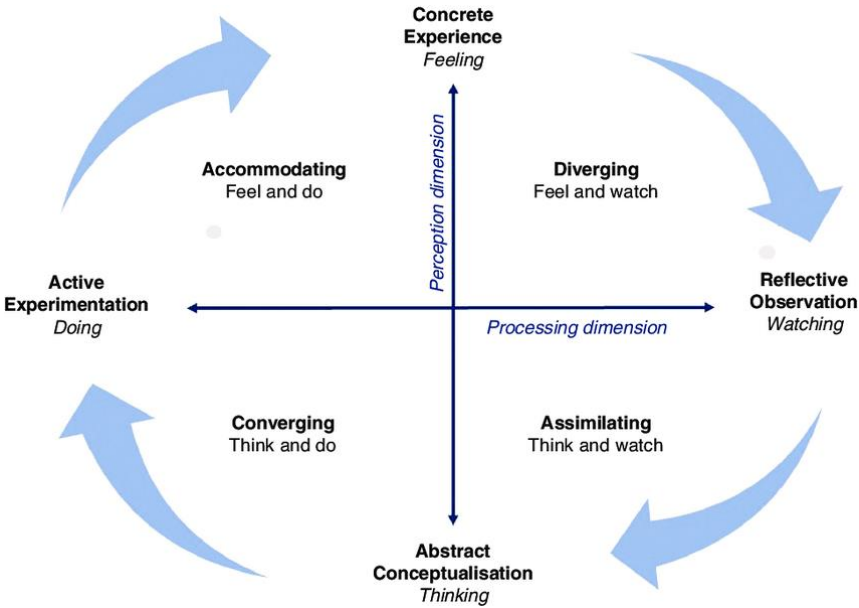
# Using for training purposes – Training approach ‘Being a trusted conversation partner’

## □ The learning process that inspired the exercise was indirectly based on Kolb’s learning cycle (1984)

1. Researchers started with an abstract conceptualization of the key characteristics of a trusted conversation partner. What are the most important things this trusted conversation partner does? What happens then? What do you observe, hear, notice, feel? So what / how do you apply this and what do you learn from it?
2. They were then asked to converge this thinking into the active experimentation with the PRA tools they were going to work with.
3. These reflections and the experimentation provided the basis on which they concretely experienced what it was like to engage in dialogue as a trusted conversation partner.
4. After seeing the results researchers were asked to reflect and assimilate how their attitudes and presence affected the conversation.

For more information, you can contact Herman Snel of WCDI-WUR.

Figure 18, Kolb's learning model. Adapted from McLeod (2015)



## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# Using for training purposes – Practical exercise around Intentional Listening



**This example outlines a possible practical exercise around Intentional Listening using Active Pausing as supportive technique, with the intend to facilitate a reflective conversation around dilemma's being a really good listener. (summer 2022, Sanne Bakker & Yael van Assendelft)**

- ❖ Simple Check-into support Active Pausing and stimulate presence, based on the Tips & Exercises in this handbook, e.g. “How are you sitting here, on the chair; how are you present?” combined with the grounding exercise “Unwinding your shoulders”.
- ❖ In pairs: Storytelling and Listening (2 times 5 minutes) → to bring in a lived human experience element.
  - Take a moment to think and reflect on a situation when you really felt listened to.
    1. Write down some key points from the situation.
    2. What are the most important things this person did?
    3. What made you feel heard and noticed, and why?
  - Then share this by describing the situation and the answers using the full range of facts and senses, hearing, taste, touch, sight, smell, and emotions or energetic feeling; the other just listens to really hear what is said and at the end gives back how the story moves them.
- ❖ In same couple: Thinking together and Listening (2 times 7 minutes) → to actually practice to focus on what the other person is saying and to use active pausing.
  - Topic for exchange: Dilemma's or barriers you face to be a really good listener. Think of a moment when you felt you were not being a good listener. Maybe there are some dilemmas or barriers you faced?
  - Think about this together so you can do things differently next

time while practicing Active Pausing:

- Explanation of Active Pausing
  - 10 seconds pausing: Whenever you want to respond or jump in, take a breath and wait 10 seconds before saying anything. Go back to the intention to understand rather than to reply. Build in some time to slow down and think before continuing the conversation.
  - As Listener: Use the pause to think for a moment. Do I really understand what the other person is saying and means? Can I make sense of it? Then answer and/or ask supportive questions.
  - As Speaker: Use the pause to quickly reflect. What am I noticing about myself, my thoughts, my feelings, my energy, any disturbance that plays up? What new thoughts and associations come up?
- ❖ In same couple: Reflective moment (2 times 3 minutes) -> to do some sense-making together on:
    1. What seems to be the most critical in (not) being a good listener?
    2. What did you come to realise? What is the importance of this for intentional listening for you?
  - ❖ Group Wrap-up in a circle (10 minutes)
    - around the question ‘what will you bring with you to a next dialogue, conversation or exchange?’
    - Step forward to share and the rest also steps forward if one recognizes it.

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary





# Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions – When stepping into the role of a dialogue facilitator



Isaura Barrera, associate professor at the University of New Mexico and Lucinda Kramer, associate professor at the National University in Costa Mesa, California,<sup>2</sup> carried out research on the presence or absence of Skilled Dialogue:

A successful and skilled dialogue can be determined by the degree to which all participants feel acknowledged and honored whilst in interaction. Participants then find their identities, voices, and connections - that is, not marginalized or placed apart from the whole - to be heard by those present.

Barrera and Kramer identify three key qualities of Skilled Dialogue: Respect, Reciprocity, and Responsiveness.

Respect is about honoring identity and boundaries, yours and other's. Reciprocity is about honoring voice, that is the expression of those boundaries, other's as well as yours. Responsiveness is honoring connection - as in all behavior, no matter how diverse, is connected - by responding to the expression in ways that communicate your understanding and affirmation of it. See figure 19. Additionally, responsive interactions focus on the people involved rather than on the identified problem.

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



**Adding qualitative features and characteristics in dialogue will help you better contextualise and create more mutual understanding in participatory and interactive processes. Moreover, you will be more successful in obtaining a multitude of perspectives, enriching findings, and finding better fits.**

**At the same time, the involved parties will experience that their knowledge, experiences, identities, voices, and connections are better honoured. As a result, they will feel less unheard, unseen, or disregarded, left out or marginalised. As for the collaborative part, parties involved will experience that they are valued and working together more as equals.**

The elaboration here addresses relevant attitudes and qualities of presence<sup>3</sup> and engaging in order to facilitate qualitative dialogue.

It offers (1) related key qualitative characteristics, (2) (pre-)checks and balances for a dialogue including some guiding (reflective) questions and (3) some key internal checks and reminders before you start facilitating the actual exchange. These check and balances are created in collaboration with Suzy Rebisz, in her starting role as junior facilitator for Wageningen Dialogues (summer 2022).

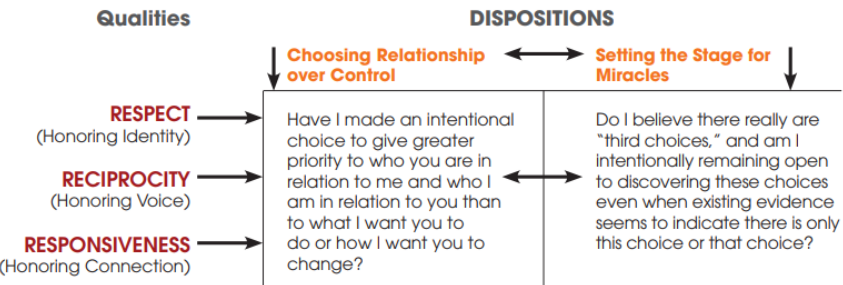


Figure 19: Skilled Dialogue Framework Barrera and Kramer (2009)

<sup>3</sup> in this context, 'qualities of presence' refer to how to be present and from what state of mind to facilitate skilled dialogue as described by Barrera and Kramer.

<sup>2</sup> Barrera and Kramer are the authors of, among others, the book 'Skilled Dialogue, Authentic Communication and Collaboration Across Diverse Perspectives', which introduces a field-tested series of strategies that can transform contradictory interactions into complementary ones, based on years of research.

# When stepping into the role of a dialogue facilitator – Checks & Balances



The following key qualitative characteristics and intentions are addressed here:

❑ **When guiding an exchange process of any kind, it is important to stay centered.** Being centered is about being in a place of balance. This relates to the mental and emotional states, and a modus operandi from which to observe and (re)act. Being centered refers to a basic attitude from which you can observe and act neutrally, yet with comprehension and compassion. This allows you to remain neutral, attentive and connected in all kinds of situations regardless of what is said or happening. Both neutrality and compassion are meta-skills in the facilitation method Deep Democracy and essential to Deep Listening.

Physically, being centered refers to a reference point, from within, where you observe everything in you and around you, and where you can return to when things throw you off balance. It brings a grounded feeling and physical state of being present that comes in part from mindfulness and embodied presence

💡 To give yourself extra support, it helps to think in advance about what you need to facilitate the actual dialogue from staying/being centered - think of the mental and physical state, facilities like type of space, tools that suit your intentions and purpose, co-facilitation, etc. Also see [Figure 2](#), the elements of embodied presence, the text on [Emotional Presence and Emotional Intelligence](#) and [being \(self-\)compassionate](#) and Tips & Exercises.

❑ **Pursuing a skilled and inclusive dialogue as described by Barrera and Walker, requires being self-aware.** Knowing yourself, after all, is an important factor in how you think, feel, act and how you react to your thoughts, feelings and (re)actions, and in turn how this affects others. From this knowledge it is easier to empathize and honor someone else's identity, voice, and boundaries in such

a way that you express your understanding and communicate connection; if possible, at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning.

William Isaacs points out on this that **'to come to a place of respect, both for others and for ourselves, means to take seriously that what is happening around you not only exists in others, but also in yourself - however hard it may be to see at the time'**.

💡 To this end, it helps to think in advance about what possibilities or space you want to move into more - think of space to suspend, to welcome things, to listen, to discover etc. Also see Tips & Exercises.

❑ **In case of co-creating or when thinking together the key for capitalising on expertise and creativity lies in the equality of participants and the level of reciprocity, openness and trust.** It requires a setting in which this can happen freely, as well as an intentional choice. There are techniques and work forms to support this. If the facilitator falls short on embodying the previous four elements (i.e. equality, reciprocity, openness and trust), however, then participants will not feel that they collaborate as equals or think as a collective.

An other enabling factor is the creation of a climate of discovery that goes beyond the mere sending and sharing of information. It is up to the facilitator to set a stage for this in which mindsets can expand, thoughts, and their underlying stories can be made explicit and creative energy can flow.

💡 For this, it helps to let go of control - of the direction, content or desired outcome of the exchange - and focus on the people and everyone's role in the exchange process. Also see figure 19 'Skilled Dialogue Framework Barrera and Kramer'. In support of this, it can help to ask yourself what it is that you need to let go of to make such a space possible. Also see Tips & Exercises.

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary






# When stepping into the role of a dialogue facilitator – Pre-checks & Balances



**What now?** To achieve fruitful intentions a well-balanced state of mind is key, as this sets the stage for more deliberate behaviour and quality actions. There are many ways to adopt a particular quality of being and it is a personal exploration to find out what works best for you.

Besides, it is not always easy to create and sustain these intentions in interactions. Because you are not always up for ways that support the above-mentioned qualities. And yet, as is the case with many things, the true art lies in in-the-moment awareness and adaptability-in-action. It lies in discovering and applying new techniques where you give yourself time to experience and try out, and in playing with situations and ways of (re)acting, to gradually learn and deal with what presents itself in group processes in an increasingly conscious way in the moment itself. In doing so, do not be afraid to follow your gut feeling.

 Dialogues take place from different contexts and settings and come in different shapes and sizes.

- **The WUR Dialogue Navigator** offers many examples of dialogue processes and events, from one-off large multi-stakeholder meetings to series of events. It navigates you through why, when and how to engage with dialogue in research for more impact in society. It shows which purposes conversations can serve, it gives insights in the differences between dialogue and debate, and offers hands-on tools and insightful working principles to organise or participate in effective dialogues, [link](#).
- **Practical steps and tips for the design and facilitation** of a group dialogue process can be found in [the Wageningen Dialogues : Design guide](#) and [the MSP Tool Guide - Wageningen CDI 2017](#).
- Also see, **the six steps and key questions to determine the 'right' dialogue space** for an open, safe, and quality exchange.

## → Design and Dialogue preparations

**Stepping into the shoes of a facilitator requires you to commit to exchange, starting from within. Finding the mindful space to operate in will be a reflective process for any given dialogic situation.**

**To guide this preparatory process in a practical way, a series of reflective questions can be asked and addressed. These questions relate to facilitating a quality dialogue through alignment of intention and behaviour, and to what you need as a facilitator to enable this. They are part of the process and programme design and preparation of facilitation and practicals.**

**The thrust of these checks and balance questions is to find out:**

1. Do we need to improve our dialogue approach and design? [Are we doing things right?]
2. Do we need to change our choices in what we do and how we do this? [Are we doing the right things?]
3. If necessary, address some fundamental aspects about purpose and direction and thinking models: do we need to change the principles, theories, or visions that underpin our approach? [How do we decide what is right?]
4. What now? What does this mean for you and how to be present? What qualitative characteristics and intentions require special attention from you, and what do you need for this?

The pre checks and balance questions concern:

- 1) setting expectations,
- 2) the setting of the dialogue,
- 3) the listening mode of the participants,
- 4) underlying assumptions, thought models and beliefs,
- 5) openness and transparency, and
- 6) some further preparations.

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# When stepping into the role of a dialogue facilitator – Pre-checks & Balances

The below suggested checks and balances can of course be adapted to the particular situation, context, setting, and circumstances of the dialogue.



## 1) Setting Expectations

**The aim here is to align the expected deliverables with the spirit of quality dialogue and its enablers.**

- What is the intention to engage in this particular dialogue? What should be the outcome?
- What does the dialogue need to reflect? What level of engagement is required?
- How can the expected deliverables of the dialogue be combined with the spirit of dialogue?
- Who is participating and how to get enough variety for creativity? How to bring their different worlds together?
- What are the enabling factors for a constructive and active dialogue? Where are risks for this particular dialogue to an open and inclusive dialogue and how to deal with them? What are some crosscutting areas or dilemmas? How do these need to be made explicit?
- What can be done and what is possible, within the available time and the context the dialogue takes place? And what not?

**The spirit of dialogue** is about committing to meaningful conversations, where thoughts can be shared freely and deeper levels of exchange are possible. Here interactions are crafted and facilitated in such a way that involved participants experience their identities, voices, and connections are acknowledged and honored - that is, not marginalized or placed apart from the whole.

The commitment comes down to an intentional choice to be open to perspectives, options, and ways other than your own from an open mind, open heart and open will. And, in facilitating so, to move beyond a transactional exchange and choose relationship over control.

The spirit of dialogue requires a safe space in which the listening and inquisitive mode is activated and can be capitalised in reciprocity.

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# When stepping into the role of a dialogue facilitator – Pre-checks & Balances



## 2) Dialogue Setting

**The aim here is to check whether the design of the dialogue is set for a climate that enables quality dialogue.** In which, for example, mindsets can expand and thoughts and their underlying stories can be made explicit, in which creative energy can flow, in which the listening mode is activated, in which participants can share openly and feel their voice is honoured, etcetera.

- How does the intention of the dialogue match with dialogue set-up and dialogue forms?
- What level of engagement is required? How to set an atmosphere for understanding and deeper connecting?
- How to make the principles, concepts of interpretation, thoughts and mental models that form the background for your dialogue explicit? And how to get people to connect with this? (← this latter is part of setting the scene during the dialogue)
- Which common wordings, terminology and jargon can be formulated in a more accessible and inclusive way to stimulate active contributions and avoid bias and miscommunication?
- What check-in or icebreaker or connective work form to use?



It may help to understand the basic architecture of formulating powerful questions, *The Art of Powerful Questions* by Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (2003)

**The aim here is to think about how to stimulate the listening mode among the participants to achieve quality dialogue.** True listening and true understanding are the gateway to better understanding and to transformative change. A facilitator can foster a climate to move beyond mere sending and receiving of information and into discovery and co-intelligence.

- What techniques can be used to support this space? What quality of being, as in how you are present and from what state of mind, will support this space best?
- How to facilitate the participants to go beyond simply downloading or goal-getting conveying ideas or evidences or convincing?
  - 1) At the beginning for people to land, to step in a dialogical mindset and enter the scene for an open interaction as equals, and
  - 2) during the dialogue itself.
- What else can be done to stimulate being open and making thoughts, experiences and feelings explicit? And, to support contextual listening.
- What are suitable guiding questions to support this?
- How are the dialogue and its work forms contributive to actually creating a new reality, such as new insights and knowledge, new perspectives, new or deeper understandings, new possibilities, new entry-points, new awareness, or deeper meanings? How can these forms become more generative?

## 3) The listening mode

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# When stepping into the role of a dialogue facilitator – Pre-checks & Balances



## 4) Underlying assumptions

**The aim here is to question what assumptions, presuppositions, thought models, and/or beliefs, underpin your approach and that of those involved in order to better facilitate the process and make better sense of the qualitative dialogical outcomes.** According to Bohm (2004), dialogue is about deepening and digging up the assumptions that underlie an approach, opinion or view. Because these may well be part of bridging realities and finding solutions together. In this context, it makes sense to:

- examine upfront current assumptions, beliefs and presuppositions to possibly bring them into the dialogue;
- identify how to make explicit the principles, concepts of interpretation, thoughts and mental models that form the background for the dialogue. And, how to get people to connect with this ← the latter is part of setting the scene during the dialogue;
- determine how relevant it is to the (success of the) outcome of the dialogue to have an understanding of the beliefs and assumptions participants bring to the table; and if so, how to surface them.

## 5) Openness & Transparency

***‘The openness of one creates the openness of the other’.*** The aim of this check is to think about how to stimulate trust and transparency, and set a stage for the required open dialogue-mode amongst the participants. Openness and transparency during the dialogue will stimulate trust and clarify expectations. This requires:

- Conveying clear objectives and defining ground rules for dialogue together
- Stimulating of, for example, a deeper listening mindset, showing empathy/compassion, reciprocity in the exchange or channeling energy to creativity amongst the participants?
- Some stimulating questions or techniques in support of this.

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# When stepping into the role of a dialogue facilitator – Pre-checks & Balances



## 6) Further preparations

- ✓ Formulate some guiding and powerful questions to use and to fall back on during the dialogue session.
- ✓ What are your reflections on the relevant attitudes and qualities mentioned under 'the key qualitative characteristics and intentions' to give attention as a facilitator?
  - What do you need in order to step into the above-described quality of 'staying/being centered' when facilitating the actual dialogue?
  - What space do you want to move into and engage more in order to embody your self-knowledge more fully?
  - What needs special attention from you, personally and as facilitator, to create a space where thoughts and creative energy can flow openly and freely?
- ✓ Think about:
  - The reporting of the dialogue: how to interpret and translate the findings harvested from the dialogue as well as what format to use for taking notes and compiling output?
  - Post-dialogue reflection: how to evaluate the dialogue and reflect on situations? And with whom. Also see step 6. 'Identify lessons learned and take-aways as part of a continuous reflective learning process' of Figure 15, guiding questions to identify the 'right' dialogue space for an open, safe, and quality exchange.
  - Formulate some guiding and powerful questions to use and to fall back on during the dialogue session.

## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# When stepping into the role of a dialogue facilitator – Checks & Balances and Protocol actual dialogue

## → The dialogue it self

**Short checklist;** for the first 3 steps also see Tips & Exercises:

1. The mindful space to operate in → slow down and do a personal check-in; (1) check how you are present, (2) create the ‘right’ mental space, clear your thoughts and release tensions, through an exercise that best suits you and (3) center yourself through a breathing, mindful and/or body-activating exercise.
2. The intentional space to operate in → remind yourself what the intentions, objectives, and expectations are; write them down or say out loud. Additionally add, what assumptions or fears to overcome yourself for this particular dialogue? What deliberate choice(s) do you want to make? What do you need to let go for this?
3. The fruitful space to operate in → remind yourself of ways to nurture a space and collective mindset needed to achieve these objectives and expectations.
4. Then, commit, let go, facilitate, and accept the process <let come>.

**The facilitation itself is an act of balancing and aligning in the very moment of:**

- your own balanced centeredness as a facilitator, and
- the dialogue process and the levels of exchange and dynamics, within the group, together with
- external levels of exchange, the needs, stimuli and interactions of the participants, and
- internal levels of exchange, intentions and behaviour of you as facilitator.

Figure 19 ‘Skilled Dialogue Framework Barrera and Kramer’ identifies two possible dispositions, or core choices/questions, associated with this balancing act.

to be enriched along the way and to add a case by Simone van Vugt



## Checks & Balances

### General guiding questions

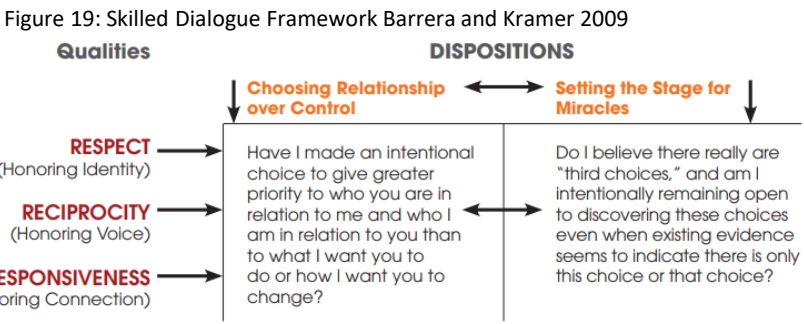
### Adding qualitative characteristics to Research Interviews

### Use for training purposes

### Stepping into the role of dialogue facilitator

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary





# Tips & Exercises

- Effective Listening Exercise, based on the Chinese Character for listening
- Examples for Check-ins
- Going into a conversation relaxed, tips
- Mental space & Centering Exercises, connecting with body and clearing the mind (personal and collective use)
- Letting Go Tips
- Pro Tips, where to begin?
- Reading Tips
  - Compassion
  - Dialogue & Listening
  - Embodied Presence
  - Making multi-stakeholder partnership effective
  - Space for convivial thinking & equitable knowledge partnerships
- [WUR Dialogue Navigator \(wur.nl\)](#) & [Wageningen Dialogues : Design guide & MSP Tool Guide - Wageningen CDI 2017](#)
- Regulating Emotions Exercise
- Setting Intentions
- Stepping into the unknown Tips
- Stimulating the Listening Mode Tips
- Suspending Exercise (triggers)

## Effective Listening Exercise, based on the Chinese Character for listening

- Day 1: focus on using your ears. Use your hearing effectively while listening. Tune in to the tone, tempo, pauses, emphasis and modulation of the spoken words. What do you hear that helps you listen effectively?
- Day 2: focus on using your eyes. Use what you see effectively while listening. Tune in to the speaker's facial expressions, body language, posture, and gestures. What do you see that helps you listen effectively?
- Day 3: focus on using your mind. How do you choose to listen to the words and ideas being shared? Be aware of how your mind approaches the task of listening. Do you approach what is said linearly or relationally? Are you 'open-minded', suspending your judgment and being open to everything you hear? Or, analytical or critical, looking for possibilities and what you don't know, for the disconfirming information or just the confirming info?
- Day 4: focus on using your heart. Use everything you have practiced so far, and open your heart to what is being conveyed. Tune in to the human experiences and emotions of the person you are listening to from the heart.
- Day 5: undivided attention. Finally, combine all the above elements for listening and give your conversation partner your undivided attention.

At the end of each day, write down what you noticed, what challenges you experienced, and what you learned.

- Then: reflect on what you learned and write down what you want to continue practicing in the future to further improve your listening skills.

(Inspired by skillpacks.com)



## Tips & Exercises

[Effective Listening Exercise](#)

[Examples for Check-ins](#)

[Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

[Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

[Letting Go Tips](#)

[Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

[Setting Intentions](#)

[Stepping into the unknown](#)

[Stimulating Listening mode](#)

[Suspending Exercise](#)

[Glossary](#)



# Tips & Exercises

## Examples for Check-ins

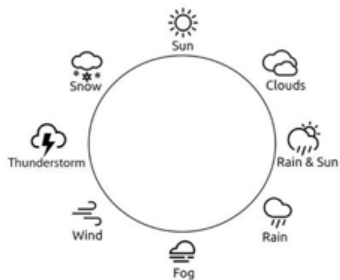
Making time at the beginning for participants to land, to literally check in, can make a big difference for the rest of the conversation. It helps people step in and slowly open up, and move into a different state of mind.

- The more you make this part accessible and energizing, the more you activate a different state of mind.
- The more fun elements you add, the more you stimulate the left side of the brain; and, the easier it is for people to connect with each other.
- If you also add some low reflective elements, you create space for new thoughts to come into being.
- When adding reflection how the exercise done relates to interactions and dialogue and the subject of the meeting/ dialogue/workshop, you start up the conversation in a different connective way. Below a few ideas.

### ❖ 'What is your energy level or the weather like for you?'

Aim: to start a first landing and first connecting, personal and collective.

→ What is the weather like for you for xyz ?"



What was the weather like for you last week?" by Gustavo Razzetti of Fearless Culture Design uses this ... [+]

→ Or, "what is your energy level at a scale from 1 – 10?"

In smaller setting, you can add "you can mention why, if you want to."

In larger settings, you ask people to raise their hand at 1,2, and so on or sun, clouds, and so on, at a relaxed pace. Then, move on to, "is there someone who wants to elaborate a bit on how come? I will start", and then "who recognizes this?". Followed by "who else wants to elaborate a bit?"

In this way you facilitate a natural sharing of things that come up and involving others by asking if they recognize this.

(Exercise of the WUR Deep Democracy training February 2022)

→ Using a token, symbol, picture of posture can also stimulate engagement other than through words.  
For example, choose a picture or make a pose to describe how you feel at this point in time.

### ❖ 'How are you sitting here / how are you present?'

Aim: to support Active Pausing and improve presence, personal and collective.

- Are you sitting comfortably and properly? And relaxed? Are you sitting with a straight back, both feet well on the ground and knees at a 90-degree angle?
- Now, take a moment to focus on how you are present. Feel the chair you sit on, feel your feet on the ground, and check in with your emotions - 'how am I feeling?' - and thoughts - 'where am I with my thoughts? Is there something in or on my mind that is preventing me from being here?' - Is there an obstacle? What is it?
- Let go of this intentionally. Feel free to write it down to get off your mind.
- You can do a quick exercise to support this intention and really let go of tension or obstacles. See the Letting Go Tips.



## Tips & Exercises

### Effective Listening Exercise

#### Examples for Check-ins

#### Going into a conversation relaxed, tips

#### Mental space & Centering Exercises

#### Letting Go Tips

#### Pro Tips, where to begin?

#### Reading Tips

#### Regulating Emotions Exercise

#### Setting Intentions

#### Stepping into the unknown

#### Stimulating Listening mode

#### Suspending Exercise

#### Glossary



# Tips & Exercises



## Tips & Exercises

[Effective Listening Exercise](#)

[Examples for Check-ins](#)

[Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

[Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

[Letting Go Tips](#)

[Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

[Setting Intentions](#)

[Stepping into the unknown](#)

[Stimulating Listening mode](#)

[Suspending Exercise](#)

[Glossary](#)



### ❖ Combination of 'Storytelling and Listening' in pairs

Aim: to start a first connecting and bring in a lived human experience element. (2 times 5 minutes)

- Take a moment to think and reflect on, for instance, a situation where you really felt listened to; the topic can be about a desired feeling or a future desire for something bigger than you. It can also be related to experiences in nature that were rememberable and impactful).
    - Write down some key points from the situation.
    - What are the most important things this person did?
    - What made you feel heard and noticed, and why?
  - Then share this by describing the situation and the answers using the full range of facts and senses, hearing, taste, touch, sight, smell, and emotions or energetic feeling; the other just listens to really hear what is said, and at the end gives back how the story moves him/her.
  - Then, take turns.
- You can wrap-up with a collective sharing of some examples.

### ❖ Some methods to invite people into a more free floating space for new thoughts to come into being

- Free writing, memory game, discuss an object/symbol, reflective meditation, move & talk, talking stick, metaphor map, reflection with images, reflection poem or song, quiz, chair game, ...
- For more, see Choose your tools in Reflection methods, F. Gordijn, 2018, page 80 - 111, [link](#).

### Feeling tensed for a conversation, tips to relax

Going into the conversation relaxed does have a positive impact on how the other person reacts to you. Focus on how to get into relaxation before the conversation, and let go of the cause of the tension for a moment. All these four points can help you before the conversation. Just see which one gives or appeals to you the most.

1. **Thoughts you have** - You may be thinking 'I don't feel like doing this', 'another must do' or 'I know already where this will go'. Or, you may think that the other doesn't feel like talking at all or 'always gives the same reaction anyway'. So, what limiting beliefs do you seem to have for this conversation? What do you need to turn them into a positive direction?

Make time to think about this before the conversation. The little time you invest in this beforehand will pay off during the interview.

2. **Breathing** - Sometimes you can sense from your breathing that you are tense. You can then breathe in and out deeply before the conversation to relax. For example, in a balanced rhythm, in through the nose and out through the mouth. Or, try the breathing exercise under the Regulating Emotions Exercise here. It will make you feel more at ease.

3. **Muscle tension** - You may notice that your back or neck is tight and a bit stiff. Take a walk around the room and consciously throw those shoulders loose. Don't forget other areas as well. A simple loosening exercise or stretching can bring relaxation and get your blood circulating again.

4. **Posture** - What about your posture? Your physical posture has a direct effect on your mental and social attitude. Make sure your legs are on the floor so you can relax and feel grounded. Your arms not crossed but nice and relaxed so your blood can flow, and so can the conversation.

(Inspired by [speelruimtemakers.nl](#))

# Tips & Exercises

**Mental/mindful space and Centering**, connecting with body and clearing the mind - for personal and collective use; also stimulating the listening mode.

## The below lists:

- ✓ Simple quick mental space moments tips
- ✓ Focused breathing exercises
- ✓ Simple one-minute body-activating and centering exercises
- ✓ Simple upper turning exercises, sitting & standing
- ✓ Unwinding tensed shoulders
- ✓ Spine Stretch, well-being exercise
- ✓ Method Jacobson, letting go of bodily tensions
- ✓ Body scan of 10 minutes to let go of bodily tensions

(With special thanks to Katherine Pittore of WCDI-WUR, also yoga instructor)

## Simple quick mental space moments

- **Mind-clearing tip to prevent thoughts from taking over.** Snap your fingers and say 'stop' out loud. Every time you notice that something stays on your mind or keeps your mind busy.
- **Out of the mind, into the body.** When your mind is full with to-do lists or in between meetings, take a moment to
  - focus on the breath and only that (see exercise alongside);
  - rub your hands for 1 to 2 minutes;
  - put your hands on your eyes and feel how your eyes and the rest of your body slowly relax;
  - grounding your feet:
    - focus on how you sit on your chair and how your feet are on the ground; start wiggling your toes and feet; or
    - stand tall, firmly plant both of your feet on the ground, and breathe in and out slowly.Feel how your energy slowly moves down from head to feet.
- **Positive awareness.** When you are occupied with getting things

done and focused on your to-do list, also take a moment to:

- have a mindful coffee or lunch break. Make it a habit to not only drink/eat but consciously enjoy, sip/chew, and taste;
- observe the world around you. Take in details that catch your eye. Make it a habit to not only watch but to truly see;
- remember something you are grateful for in the past 24 hours or less. Make it a habit to be more often thankful for things that make you smile and brighten your day.

**Focused breathing** is the easiest way to slow down and reconnect with the body. It is also very fundamental for centering. Below some simple and quick exercises that advance in technique:

- **For a minute, become aware of how you are breathing**
    - Sit in a chair, place both feet firmly on the floor, with your back straight against the back of the chair. With one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach. You can also do this standing or lying down.
    - Observe the rise and fall of your chest and stomach. If your chest rises but your stomach does not, you are breathing shallowly. Then push your stomach out while focusing on calm breathing. As you shift your breathing to calm and deeper, you activate relaxation in your body. This will make it easier to connect with your bodily sensations.
    - Simply refocus on breathing when you notice your mind wandering.
  - **Active pause to breathe.** If you notice yourself feeling off-centered, tensed, or having a full head, take an active pause.
    - Take a deep breath in, hold it for a few seconds, and then let your breath out. It may help to push gently against your stomach to slowly let all air out.
    - Repeat this as often if you like.
- (Inspired by [www.berkeleywellbeing.com/centering](http://www.berkeleywellbeing.com/centering))



## Tips & Exercises

[Effective Listening Exercise](#)

[Examples for Check-ins](#)

[Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

[Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

[Letting Go Tips](#)

[Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

[Setting Intentions](#)

[Stepping into the unknown](#)

[Stimulating Listening mode](#)

[Suspending Exercise](#)

[Glossary](#)



# Tips & Exercises



## Tips & Exercises

[Effective Listening Exercise](#)

[Examples for Check-ins](#)

[Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

[Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

[Letting Go Tips](#)

[Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

[Setting Intentions](#)

[Stepping into the unknown](#)

[Stimulating Listening mode](#)

[Suspending Exercise](#)

[Glossary](#)



- **Box Breathing** is a powerful breathing technique that can help your breathing pattern to a relaxed deeper rhythm. It improves your focus and calms and clears the mind. It brings you back to the present moment and helps you ground and return to your center. Below a basic, useful outline that can help you get started.

You can do this exercise sitting in a chair, standing, or lying down on your back with one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach.

1. Inhale counting to 4 slowly.
2. Hold your breath for 4 seconds. Try to avoid inhaling or exhaling for 4 seconds.
3. Slowly exhale through your mouth for 4 seconds
4. Repeat steps 1 to 3 until you feel re-centered.

30 seconds of box breathing will help you feel more relaxed and in control.

- **Focused Chest Breathing** (0:17-1:40, [video Max Strom](#))
  - Stand with your feet spread about 1 meter apart and place the hands on the side ribs, not on the front ribs.
  - Make sure the knees are bent slightly (about 6 centimeter) and relax the face completely.
  - Open the mouth and begin the focused breathing with an exhalation.
  - You make the chest to expand and contract sideways with each breath (keep the mouth open).
  - Relax the face even more as you continue breathing (60-90 seconds).

30-60 seconds of deep breathing will help you feel more grounded and in control. It activates relaxation in your full body.

- **Calming Chest Breathing** (8:28-10:28, [video Max Strom](#))
  - Stand with feet spread about 1 meter apart. Make sure the knees are bent slightly; with palms of the hands touching the upper thigh sides relaxed.
  - Exhale
  - Inhale, bringing the arms up straight ahead of you, elbows bent, wrists gently bent upwards, to about collarbone height ( ≈ upward movement of painting).
  - Exhale, gently dropping the arms with wrists down, elbows bent ( ≈ downward movement of painting).
  - Do a repetition several times. Slow down your breath each time you repeat; with the exhales to last longer than the inhales and your arms following the breathing.
  - In this stance you are as solid and permanent as a mountain. Closing with the arms rested on the upper thighs and one more deep breath.
  - Afterwards, you can choose to stand for a minute with both feet together, arms hanging by your sides in external rotation and shoulders down. And, feel what is going on in your body. Slowly breathing and more and more activating relaxation in your full body. (10:28-12:00, [video Max Strom](#))
- **Motion Breathing** goes a step further in combining body movements with breathing, see Max Strom's complete Inner Axis Well-Being 30 minutes video for this, [link](#).



# Tips & Exercises



## Tips & Exercises

### Simple one-minute body-activating and centering exercises

- wiggle your toes while sitting, and stamp on the floor;
- take a few laps in the room and wrap your feet completely;
- stamp your feet on the floor for a few seconds or hop for a while;
- rub your hands against each other;
- shake your legs for a bit;
- jump up and down in the same spot (try to relax the shoulders meanwhile);
- stretching.

### Simple upper turning exercises, sitting or standing,

to activate blood circulation, relax the nervous system, and focus yourself on the combination of movement and inhaling and exhaling.

- **Arm-Chest Side Stretch Sitting** to stretch and support blood circulation.
  - Sit firmly on a chair; both feet firmly on the floor, with a straight back loose from the backrest.
  - Bring your hands parallel to your body. And, inhale them straight above your head.
  - Lean your body to the right side by your waist, while your waist remains straight.
  - Hold this position as you exhale and inhale 5 times.
  - Then turn your body to the other side by your waist as you inhale, while your waist remains straight. Hold this position as you exhale and inhale 5 times.
  - Do a repetition if you like.
  - Bring your hands back straight above your head and lower them as you exhale.

It is not about how far you can or cannot bend.

- **Arm-Chest Side Stretch Standing** to stretch and support blood circulation. (2:55-5:16, [video Max Strom](#))

- Place your feet together on the floor; spread about 1 meter apart. Arms hanging by your side.
- Arm up: you start with your left arm. Inhale your left arm straight up using your side ribs inhalation (make the chest to expand and contract sideways with each breath; keep the mouth open)
- Hold your breath: Then hold your breath.
- Reach: reach up straight, so you stretch your arm and ribs.
- Lean to the side: hold your breath while you lean to the side; push your pelvis the opposite way that you are leaning and turn the chest to the ceiling. With straight elbow.
- Stretch: the top arm, reach over your ear.
- Exhale release.



Picture: Wikihow

- Change sides.
- Do a repetition and stretch the arms a bit more each time you repeat; in total 3 to 4 times.

- **Sideways Arms Swing Standing** to loosen the upper body including the sides and support blood circulation.

- Firmly stand with your legs spread; make sure the knees are bent slightly, relax your pelvis and retract your street leg. Turn your knees slightly outward. Arms hanging by your side.
- Start swinging: rotate from side to side from your waist (from left to right side). Let your arms swing along naturally.
- Continue until the arms swing out wide and hit your middle on both sides.
- Meanwhile, breathe in a calm pace.

### Effective Listening Exercise

### Examples for Check-ins

### Going into a conversation relaxed, tips

### Mental space & Centering Exercises

### Letting Go Tips

### Pro Tips, where to begin?

### Reading Tips

### Regulating Emotions Exercise

### Setting Intentions

### Stepping into the unknown

### Stimulating Listening mode

### Suspending Exercise

### Glossary





# Tips & Exercises

- Change sides (from right to left side).

**Unwinding tensed shoulders** to let go of shoulder tensions and to support relaxed presence. This exercise is low-threshold and great to calm one's presence and activate the listening mode.

You can do this exercise sitting in a chair or standing.

When sitting: sit firmly on a chair; both feet firmly on the floor, with a straight back loose from the backrest.

When standing: stand with the feet slightly spread apart. Make sure the knees are slightly bent.

- 1) Inhale bringing your arms up horizontally besides you on shoulder height. Make a twisting motion with your shoulders from front to back. While doing so, try to make as wide a range of motion as possible; that is, bring your shoulders up to the max and down to the max. In the meantime, breath slowly. Try to keep your shoulders relaxed and low as much as possible.  
Rotate your shoulders 20 times from front to back and then 20 times from back to front. Closing with an exhalation while dropping arms hanging by your sides.
- 2) Option standing only: put the left foot slightly forward. Turn with your right arm moving forward, and count to 20. Breathe calmly. Then turn backward moving, and count to 20. Continue breathing calmly. Now switch, and put your right foot slightly forward. Turn with your left arm moving forward, and count to 20. Continue breathing calmly. Then turn moving backward, and count to 20. Continue breathing calmly.
- 3) Finally, raise your shoulders slowly as high as possible as you inhale and drop them slowly as you exhale. Do this

several times calmly in a row. Try to keep your shoulders relaxed and low as much as possible.

- 4) Notice how the tension slowly reduces while doing this and exhale a few times in a calm pace.

**Spine Stretch** for well-being experience (Cat-Cow yoga exercise)

- Starting Position: place your hands and knees on the ground, aligning your wrists under your shoulders and your knees under your hips. Think of the spine as a straight line connecting the shoulders to the hips. Try to visualize this line from the crown of the head to through the tailbone. While doing this, keep the neck long and relaxed by looking down and outward.
- Cow pose: inhale and put your chest forward by tilting your pelvis back so that your tailbone sticks up and your belly sinks down; meanwhile, pull your navel in. Let the movement flow from your tailbone upward so that your neck moves last. Gently direct your gaze toward the ceiling without tightening your neck.
- Cat pose: exhale and put your chest back by tilting your pelvis forward, with your tailbone down and allow your spine to round naturally; meanwhile, draw your navel toward your spine. Drop your head gently and naturally. Bring your gaze to your navel.
- Repeat: repeat both poses on each inhale and exhale, matching the movement to your own breathing. Continue this for 5 breaths, moving the entire spine.
- Return to a neutral spine after the last exhalation. And, gently breath a few times throughout the entire spine.



Picture: yogajala



## Tips & Exercises

[Effective Listening Exercise](#)

[Examples for Check-ins](#)

[Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

[Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

[Letting Go Tips](#)

[Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

[Setting Intentions](#)

[Stepping into the unknown](#)

[Stimulating Listening mode](#)

[Suspending Exercise](#)

[Glossary](#)



# Tips & Exercises

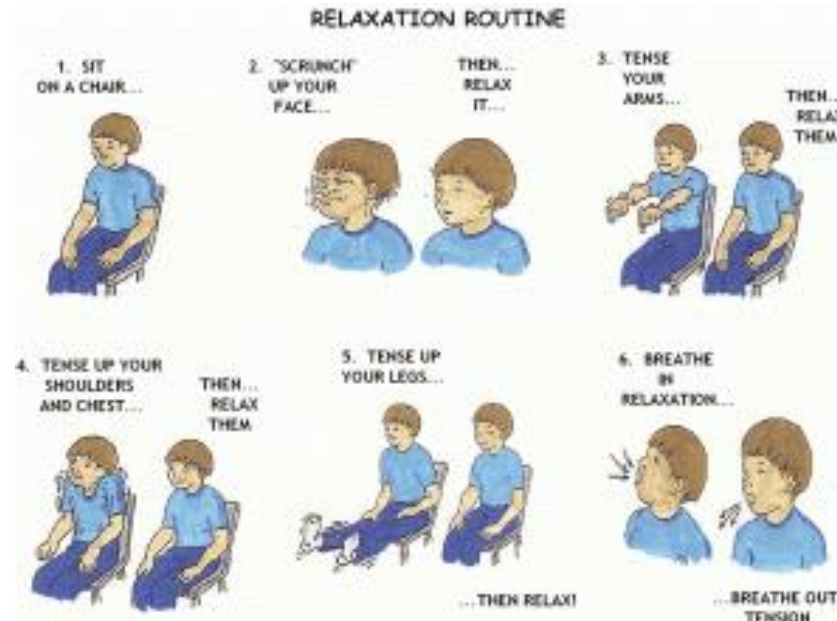


## Tips & Exercises

**Method Jacobson** to let go of any bodily tensions and to support bodily presence. This exercise is low-threshold and great to improve one's presence and stimulate the listening mode.

The method is about:

- Tightening the muscle, while inhaling; Feeling the tension.
- Relaxing the muscle, while exhaling; Feeling the difference.
- Put your feet firmly on the ground, while sitting with a straight back loose from the backrest, or standing.
  - Tighten your feet including the toes, and relax them while exhaling. Try to exhale through your belly.
  - Now tighten your lower legs and relax them while exhaling. Then, tighten your upper legs and relax them while exhaling.
  - Now, tighten your lower back and belly and relax them while exhaling. And, tighten your chest and upper back and relax while exhaling.
  - Tighten your head including neck and relax while exhaling. Finally, tighten both your arms while exhaling.
  - And, tighten your fingers and exhale deeply and relax.
- For more conscious effect:
  1. Tense the muscle in your mind
    - > notice what the thought of tension alone does triggers your thoughts, feelings and body
  2. Inhale – draw your breath down toward the stomach – and tighten the muscle.
  3. Hold the tension for about ten seconds & feel the tension.
  4. Relax the muscle in your mind
    - > notice what the thought of tension alone brings in your thoughts, feelings and body.
  5. Then, exhale and relax the muscle & feel the difference.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a technique that was developed by Doctor Edmund Jacobson as an easy to use stress reduction method. Source & Picture: [Article](#)

- **Body scan of 10 minutes.** A body scan can also help letting go of any bodily tensions and support deeper relaxation.
  - Lie down or put your feet firmly on the ground, while sitting with a straight back loose from the backrest.
  - Eyes closed and breathe.
  - Focus on the breath for some minutes.
  - Then, slowly pay attention to each part of your body from head to toe.
  - If you want, you can zoom in tension, and check in with the underlying emotions (what do I feel here / how does this make me feel?).

[Effective Listening Exercise](#)

[Examples for Check-ins](#)

[Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

[Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

[Letting Go Tips](#)

[Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

[Setting Intentions](#)

[Stepping into the unknown](#)

[Stimulating Listening mode](#)

[Suspending Exercise](#)

[Glossary](#)



# Tips & Exercises



## Tips & Exercises

[Effective Listening Exercise](#)

[Examples for Check-ins](#)

[Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

[Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

[Letting Go Tips](#)

[Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

[Setting Intentions](#)

[Stepping into the unknown](#)

[Stimulating Listening mode](#)

[Suspending Exercise](#)

[Glossary](#)



own and/or the usual.

- Then, check whether you are in the right mental state of mind and right physical state of being to facilitate this.
  - How open are your mind, your heart, and your will actually?
  - Are there voices of judgement, doubt, distrust, worry, or fear that you have or feel?
- Now, hold space for this voice/these voices without condemning or setting aside negatively.
- And, go with your attention to the spot in your body where you feel the related tensions/resistance & feel it.
- Finally, do some focused breathing and/or the Method Jacobson for each part of your body from toe to head.

Also see tips for Setting Intentions and Stepping into the unknown.

## Letting Go Tips

Letting go is something you can only allow yourself. Here, it is important to work with your awareness. This involves allowing yourself to let go of what you want to hold on to, as well as the resistance you experience in doing so. As soon as you go into resistance, the judgmental mind takes over. It then interferes with letting go and shifts to holding-on mode.

Some supportive exercises:

- 1) [Unwinding tensed shoulders](#) – to let go of bodily tensions.
- 2) [Shake your body literally](#) – shake off everything physically for some minutes; let go of stuff mentally.
- 3) [Focused Breathing](#), 1) For a minute, become aware of how you are breathing & 2) box breathing – to focus on calming body & mind & 3) Active Pause to breathe – to breathe through tensions and resistance
- 4) [Method Jacobson](#) – to let go of any bodily tensions and support bodily presence.
- 4) [Combine Method Jacobson with an intention of letting go](#)
  - First formulate your intention in the present tense, using confirmative words
  - Then, go with your attention to the spot in your body where you feel the related tensions / resistance & feel it.
  - Inhale, deliberately hold the tension here for about 10 sec.
  - Relax the muscle in your mind while saying the intention.
  - Then, exhale and say the intention out loud, relax & feel the difference.
- 5) [Setting an intentional space, 'letting go' for ensuring a space of co-creation](#) – to let go of fixed thinking, pathways, structures, agendas, and outcomes.
  - First focus on the intentional choice to remain open to perspectives, options, and pathways other than your own

# Tips & Exercises



## Tips & Exercises

[Effective Listening Exercise](#)

[Examples for Check-ins](#)

[Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

[Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

[Letting Go Tips](#)

[Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

[Setting Intentions](#)

[Stepping into the unknown](#)

[Stimulating Listening mode](#)

[Suspending Exercise](#)

[Glossary](#)



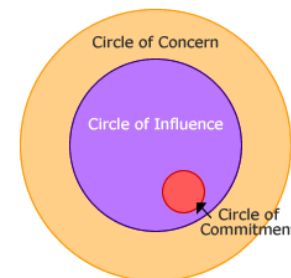
### 3) Be conscious what you can take responsibility for, the Circle of Influence.

**When it comes to tension**, emotions running high, when opening the unknown and the can of worms that may follow. Sometimes this is unavoidable. You can only take responsibility for your actions, feelings, and thoughts, and be open about it.

**You can also** be clear on your scope of influence, what you can do for someone and cannot. You cannot be responsible for some else's thoughts, feelings or situation. You can, however, be open and understanding to actions, feelings and thoughts of others without wanting to fix the situation. This way you engage without losing energy or yourself. It helps in building an emotional connection with the other, without getting emotionally involved.

**Once you forget that** you are not responsible for someone else's thoughts, feelings, or situation, you step outside your Circle of Influence and into the energy drain of the Circle of Concern, of things that you worry about but have no influence on. The circles can help you see where you spend too much time and energy on things that are beyond your control. You can then move from your Circle of Concern to your Circle of Influence by reality checking your concerns. *'Is it really your problem, can you do anything about it? Why are you choosing to let this affect you, what is the real issue – do you know?'*

(Deep Dive Deep Listening, Task 2 KB project Just Transitions, 10 May 2022, Tossa Harding & Yael van Assendelft | Figure and last tip by [www.unfoldconflicts.nl](http://www.unfoldconflicts.nl))



## Pro-Tips, where to begin?

### 1) Not to get lost in the practice.

- Pick the one aspect that you really feel needs to be addressed and/or has the most impact; put it at the center and perhaps link it to some other characteristics as well. (Jan Brouwers, MSP Escape Room 2022 on effective Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships)
- You can also pick one or two characteristics that are close to you and start with those. (Deep Dive Deep Listening, Task 2 KB project Just Transitions, 10 May 2022, Tossa Harding & Yael van Assendelft)

### 2) Letting concerns, resistance, or fear not get in your way.

**When thinking of a worry, fear, concern, or doubt you have,** *"Can you feel what this does with your state of being? What reactions are triggered in you?"*

- Now, ask yourself what is the worst that could happen?
- Observe the answer that comes up. 'How this makes you feel?' Maybe it helps to ask the questions again. 'What is the worst that could happen?' Ask, till you notice you relax more when thinking of the concern or fear.
- Then what? Then ... be kind to yourself. Don't criticize yourself. You are only human. It is humane to have blind spots, to have emotions, to make mistakes. You can learn from them.

**Expressing fears helps in letting go as well.** Articulate it clearly and acknowledge it. With this you can't make it go away, but you can make sure it doesn't get in your way.

(Deep Dive Deep Listening, Task 2 KB project Just Transitions, 10 May 2022, Tossa Harding & Yael van Assendelft)

**Also see,** the Letting Go Tips

# Tips & Exercises



## Tips & Exercises

### 4) Look for the opportunity to reflect and to be heard.

Identify individuals interested in growing deeper and sharing dialogic experiences, and form a peer group. Together you can explore questions, struggles, and tips, and practice in a safe space.

(Tip from [James Galvin and Peter O'Donnell](#), Authentic Leadership: Balancing Doing and Being, & Dialogue Boulder)

### 5) (Un)learning. The best way to explore possibilities is to challenge yourself. Invite others to play devil's advocate over your assumptions and examine your thoughts.

(Tip from LEARN, UNLEARN AND RELEARN - The Daily Guardian)

### 6) 'Change what you can change; Accept what you cannot change. Have the wisdom to see the difference.'

by the serenity prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr

## Reading Tips:

- ❖ Compassion
  - [The Five Levels of Compassion – Dr Gabor Maté | YouTube](#)
  - [Brené Brown: The Power of vulnerability | TED Talk](#)
  - [7 Tips to Improve Your Conversations and Connect with Others | Strive With Me](#)
  - [Fostering High-Quality Connections \(ssir.org\)](#)
  - Some exercises:
    - [Self-Compassion Exercises by Dr. Kristin Neff](#)
    - [3 Self-Compassion Exercises Pack | positivepsychology.com](#) Dialogue & Listening (science-based exercises)
    - Brene Brown, the Atlas of the heart - book
- ❖ Dialogue & Listening
  - [6 layers of deep listening | Blockbusters.biz](#) (the four-layers model by Friedemann Schulz, enriched by Philippe Brailleux with two more layers)
  - [8 Levels Of Listening - Guide 2022 | coaching-online.org](#)
  - [The Art of Dialogue by Noelle Aarts \(wur.nl\)](#)
  - [www.dialoguestudies.org](#)
  - [Dialogue Institute](#), in-depth description of dialogue can be found in the ten Dialogue Principles, formulated by L. Swidler Five
  - [The African Oral Tradition Paradigm of Storytelling as a Methodological Framework](#)

### Effective Listening Exercise

### Examples for Check-ins

### Going into a conversation relaxed, tips

### Mental space & Centering Exercises

### Letting Go Tips

### Pro Tips, where to begin?

### Reading Tips

### Regulating Emotions Exercise

### Setting Intentions

### Stepping into the unknown

### Stimulating Listening mode

### Suspending Exercise

### Glossary





# Tips & Exercises

- Skilled Dialogue: Authentic communication and collaboration across diverse perspectives by Isaura Barrera & Lucinda Kramer - book
- [Skilled Dialogue: Minding and Mining the Riches of Differences \(cadreworks.org\)](#)
- [Skilled Dialogue Revisited - Joining & Harmonising: Diverse Perspectives \(cadreworks.org\)](#)
- Interesting online (excerpt) articles on Dialogue on [Dialogue Boulder](#) on the bottom of the page
- The Culture Map by Erin Meyer - book

## ❖ Embodied Presence

- [Authentic Leadership: Balancing Doing and Being | The Systems Thinker](#)
- One of the teachings used in yoga trainings is Max Strom's inner axis - a hybrid of breathing patterns, movement therapy, Qi Gong, select yoga postures, and visualisation and relaxation methodology, [website](#)
- Some exercises
  - [Max Strom's Inner Axis Well-Being 30-minute class | YouTube](#)
  - [Movement Exercises - Wendy Palmer | YouTube](#)
  - [Wendy Palmer, Brief Intro to LE | YouTube & Recover your center with Wendy Palmer – Leadership Embodiment](#)

## ❖ Making multi-stakeholder partnership effective

- Five Core Principles in Effective Partnering, p. 15 -19 of [Remote-Partnering-Work-Book \(remotepartnering.org\)](#)
- 6 stages of collaboration and what a facilitator does in those stages: [Video](#)
- The MSP Guide, how to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships by Herman Brouwer and Jim Woodhill (2015) - book
- 12 practical lessons for effective consortia, [p. 8 of TPI/BOND study from 2021](#); each of which should be considered when planning to convene, fund or manage any form of multi-stakeholder partnership
- [Difficult Conversations: Authentic Communication](#) by Martha Lasley

## ❖ Space for convivial thinking & equitable knowledge partnerships

- Power of Knowledge Event, 01-09-2022, Opening Session, [link](#)
- Sheik, Zuleika Bibi. 2020. "[Reflective Piece: From Decolonising the Self to Coming to Voice](#)"
- [Using Skilled Dialogue to Transform Challenging Interactions | Isaura Barrera Lucinda Kramer](#) a two-part article describing an approach to diversity that promotes the creation of interpersonal contexts within which the riches of diverse identities and voices—and the connections between them—can be accessed and unimagined options created & [Video](#)
- Leave No One Behind (LNOB) is 1 of the 6 Guiding Principles of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation, [link](#)



## Tips & Exercises

### [Effective Listening Exercise](#)

### [Examples for Check-ins](#)

### [Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

### [Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

### [Letting Go Tips](#)

### [Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

### [Reading Tips](#)

### [Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

### [Setting Intentions](#)

### [Stepping into the unknown](#)

### [Stimulating Listening mode](#)

### [Suspending Exercise](#)

### [Glossary](#)



# Tips & Exercises



## Tips & Exercises

### [Effective Listening Exercise](#)

### [Examples for Check-ins](#)

### [Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

### [Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

### [Letting Go Tips](#)

### [Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

### [Reading Tips](#)

### [Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

### [Setting Intentions](#)

### [Stepping into the unknown](#)

### [Stimulating Listening mode](#)

### [Suspending Exercise](#)

### [Glossary](#)



## Regulating Emotions Exercise

Grounding is an important practice that can help regulate emotions and bring you back into the present moment. Some simple techniques:

- **Shift your focus**, stimulate the blood circulation and reinforce the contact of the feet with the ground by:
  - wiggling your toes while sitting, and stamp them a bit on the floor;
  - taking a few laps in the room and wrapping your feet completely;
  - stamping your feet on the floor for a few seconds or hop for a while;
  - rubbing your hands against each other;
  - shaking your legs for a bit;
  - jumping up and down in the same spot (try to relax the shoulders meanwhile).

- **Box Breathing** is a powerful breathing technique that can help your breathing pattern to a relaxed deeper rhythm. It can bring you back to the present moment, improving your focus and clearing/calming the mind. Below a basic, useful outline that can help you get started.

You can do this exercise sitting in a chair, standing, or lying down on your back with one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach.

1. Inhale counting to 4 slowly.
2. Hold your breath for 4 seconds. Try to avoid inhaling or exhaling for 4 seconds.
3. Slowly exhale through your mouth for 4 seconds
4. Repeat steps 1 to 3 until you feel re-centered.

30 seconds of box breathing will help you feel more in control.

## Setting Intentions

- **General Tip**, formulate your intention in the present tense, using confirmative words. Write down and/or say out loud. After you set the intention, release it.
- **Setting the intentional dialogic space.**
  - Remind yourself what the intentions, objectives, and expectations for the dialogue are; write them down or say out loud.
  - Additionally add, what assumptions or fears to overcome yourself for this. What deliberate choice(s) do you want to make? Ask yourself 'What do I need to let go for this?' Also see the Letting Go Tips.
- **Setting the fruitful dialogic space**

Ask yourself 'How would I like to feel and think during the dialogue? What would I like participants to feel and think? What kind of mindset would I like them to have? Am I in the right mental state of mind and right physical state of being to facilitate this? How open are my mind, heart, and will actually? What does it take/can I do now to get to where I would like to be?' Also see the Letting Go Tips.
- **Setting an intention** from a calm mind and body. In this exercise, first a whirlwind clears the mind and body before moving on to setting an intention.
  - Sit relaxed on your chair, feet firmly on the floor and breathe calmly through your belly. Focus your attention on your belly. You can put your hand on it by placing your thumb on your navel, if you wish. Take time to come to this point.



# Tips & Exercises

- Imagine a white whirlwind above your head. This whirlwind will pass through your body via your head and remove any thoughts, worries and tensions you may have.
  - The whirlwind starts in your head, clears your mind and washes away all thoughts. It will take away worries you have and pass through your arms and upper body. Give the whirlwind the time it needs. No rush.
  - Part of the whirlwind moves further into your upper body and at the same time the other part leaves your arms through the fingertips, along with the tension and worries. Move to the lower body. Again, it takes tensions and worries with it. No rush, take your time.
  - Through the abdominal area and pelvis/hips, the whirlwind moves to your feet, taking all the tension and worries with it. It leaves the body through the toes, along with the tensions and worries. No rush, take your time.
- When the whirlwind has left your body, wiggle your toes and fingers a little to feel your body again.
- Think of an appropriate goal or intention for yourself for the upcoming conversation. And, write it down.

(Deep Dive Deep Listening, Task 2 KB project Just Transitions, 11 April & 10 May 2022, Tossa Harding & Yael van Assendelft)

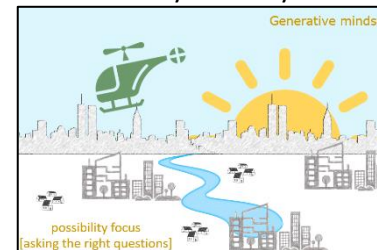
**Setting an intention for a generative mindset** and being more like the sun.

- Sit relaxed in your chair, feet firmly on the floor, and breathe calmly through your belly. Focus your attention on your belly. You can put your hand on it by placing your thumb on your navel, if you like.

- Concentrate on this spot with your breathing and imagine a warm sunny spot in your belly under your hand. If you have trouble imagining this, you can think of the sun, its color, its warmth. Experience your breathing and concentrate on your belly. Relax, once you do this more often it will become easier.
- With your breathing you can begin to inflate the sun, like a balloon, making it bigger and warmer, filling your belly, pelvis, legs and feet, your chest, back and arms, your fingers, neck and head.
- When your whole body is filled with this sunny energy, you can inflate the energy around you. You can make this circle as big as you want. Experience how you begin to feel more part of the whole and become more like the sun. Making it easier to see how things relate within the whole and what emerges here.
- Wiggle your toes and fingers a little to feel your body again.

You can go back to the sunny and generative energy at any time.

(Deep Dive Deep Listening, Task 2 KB project Just Transitions, 11 April & 10 May 2022, Tossa Harding & Yael van Assendelft)



## Tips & Exercises

[Effective Listening Exercise](#)

[Examples for Check-ins](#)

[Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

[Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

[Letting Go Tips](#)

[Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

[Setting Intentions](#)

[Stepping into the unknown](#)

[Stimulating Listening mode](#)

[Suspending Exercise](#)

[Glossary](#)



# Tips & Exercises

## Stepping into the unknown

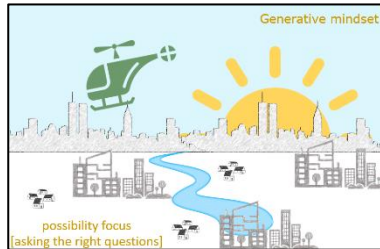
- **What makes stepping into the unknown easier**, is to embrace 'and-and'. As in 'yes', it is possible, and 'no', it is not possible. You stay in the middle of this, when you embrace 'and-and'. Not excluding the 'no' nor the 'yes'; nor focusing your attention on either of them. Both are an option. Each 'yes' involves a 'no'; and the other way around. Both have equal value.

If you zoom in on one part of the landscape, for example the factories you do not see the rest, the existing interrelations, and whole of the landscape.

The sun view however does.

Be like more the sun.

This gives guidance.



- **Really knowing your underlying** worldviews, beliefs and assumptions also provides an anchor from which you can safely venture into the unknown. When you are aware of these, you know both your limitation and your possibility. You know now what to listen for, the dissent voices, the disconfirming information, what you do not know, what triggers you, ...

- **Relinquish your attachment to the known, step into the unknown, and you will step into the field of all possibilities.**

(Deepak Chopra)

(Deep Dive Deep Listening, Task 2 KB project Just Transitions, 10 May 2022, Tossa Harding & Yael van Assendelft)

Also see tips for Setting Intentions and Letting Go Tips.

## Stimulating Listening mode Tips

- **To make the conversational tone and atmosphere of a conversation or dialogue open and human**,
  - 1) you can start with a short, yet powerful, 5-minute exercise that appeals to something playful and based on nature. Especially if you expect it to be a tense meeting because of the various strong opinions that exist and may surface. For example, a defining/funny/funny childhood moment in or about nature. Have the participants take a moment to go back to such an experienced moment. Then, let them share this memory by describing the situation using the full range of facts and senses, hearing, taste, touch, sight, smell, and emotions or energetic feeling. Others simply listen to really hear what is being said and may have the opportunity to give back what moved him/her. After which you start the agenda.
  - 2) You can also bring in a lived human experience based on a situation where one really felt listened to; or on something related to the topic of the conversation/dialogue.
  - 3) Besides it is possible to use Appreciative Storytelling and ask participants to interview each other to gather positive stories about a particular topic instead of focusing on problems. There are several ways to set this up. The MSP guide '[How to Design and Facilitate Multi-Stakeholder Processes](#)'/ '[Appreciative Story Telling](#)' see p. 17-20 for more insight.
- **Do a simple Check-in** "How are you sitting here, on the chair; how are you present?" **combined with the grounding exercise** "Unwinding your shoulders" **to support Active Pausing and stimulate presence.**



## Tips & Exercises

[Effective Listening Exercise](#)

[Examples for Check-ins](#)

[Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

[Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

[Letting Go Tips](#)

[Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

[Setting Intentions](#)

[Stepping into the unknown](#)

[Stimulating Listening mode](#)

[Suspending Exercise](#)

[Glossary](#)



# Tips & Exercises

## Suspending Exercise (triggers)

Think of a situation in which it was really challenging to keep listening to the other and have a productive conversation. Maybe it involved someone who evokes strong reactions and whose perspective is really hard to understand. Someone with strongly opposing views, values or opinions. Can you feel the first reaction this elicits?

- Go back to things that were said that you really don't understand. Things that you struggle with understanding. And, go back to how this makes you feel and react. Can you feel what is going on with your state of being? What reactions are triggered in you?
- Then, realise that this reaction is simply a reaction triggered by a series of impulses in you. Be understanding towards this and give it kindness.
- You can learn not to react to such impulses in action.
- You can learn to recognise things better by observing the thought process that takes place in such a situation and your emotional reaction together with your physical reaction.
- If you also practice holding these physical and emotional reactions in yourself and suspending your triggered response, you will learn to return more quickly to giving your attention to creative energy and effective communication.
- You can help yourself to better recognise and release emotional and physical sensations in your body with an exercise based on the Jacobson method.
- Finally, think about what would help you if a triggered situation happens again and what powerful questions you could ask to suspend thoughts and bias and give the conversation an effective turn.

- [You can also link this exercise to the dialogue blockers](#), see Appendix A of Peter Nixon's 'Dialogue Gap: Why Communication Isn't Enough and What We Can Do About It, fast' (2012).

(Exercise from Deep Dive Deep Listening, Task 2 KB project Just Transitions, 11 April 2022, Tossa Harding & Yael van Assendelft)



## Tips & Exercises

[Effective Listening Exercise](#)

[Examples for Check-ins](#)

[Going into a conversation relaxed, tips](#)

[Mental space & Centering Exercises](#)

[Letting Go Tips](#)

[Pro Tips, where to begin?](#)

[Reading Tips](#)

[Regulating Emotions Exercise](#)

[Setting Intentions](#)

[Stepping into the unknown](#)

[Stimulating Listening mode](#)

[Suspending Exercise](#)

[Glossary](#)



# Dialogue, being a trusted and authentic conversation partner – Colophon

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<sup>4</sup> Wageningen University & Research

Yael van Assendelft et al. (2022). Being a trusted and authentic conversation partner. Fruitful intentions for open and quality (research) exchange, a handbook.

This version concerns a not-edited version.

With special thanks to Cora, Sanne, Herman and Simone for their involvement and engagement in the development of the information. And, a special acknowledgement for the environment at WCDI of Wageningen University & Research. Without which the creation of this particular handbook would not have been possible. The handbook is the result of private time-investment.

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- [Contextual Intelligence \(hbr.org\)](#)
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## Reading Guide

### Overview of the handbook

### Reading Tip

### Rationale

### The Corner Stones

### The five dimensions for exploring

### Checks & Balances for fruitful intentions

### Tips & Exercises

### Glossary



# Dialogue, being a trusted and authentic conversation partner

## Glossary

**Active pausing:** The ability to build in moments in which one takes a moment to become more aware what is happening between the gaps and actively refocus to what it is one is doing. It involves a quick, grounded, reality check, that supports mindful presence and reflection-in-action. Silence is a perfect moment for such pausing.

**Being centered:** This is about being in a place of balance. For mental and emotional states, and as a modus operandi from which to observe and (re)act. Being centered refers to a basic attitude from which one can observe and act neutrally, but with understanding and compassion. Physically, being centered refers to a reference point or place where one observes everything in and around one, and where one can return to when things throw you off balance. It brings a grounded feeling and physical state of being present that comes from mindfulness and embodied presence, among other things. Neutrality refers to the ability to respond in an unattached way, that is without value judgments, negativity, or getting caught in this, regardless of what is said or happening.

The centering technique is derived from an ancient martial arts practice in Japan called Aikido, which is often translated as the “harmonious spirit” (Windle & Samko, 1992). Aikido techniques used meditation and breathing exercises from Zen Buddhism to center emotions, harmonize energy, and promote calmness (Lukoff & Strozzi-Heckler, 2017). Modern-day centering techniques use mindful breathing to bring attention to one thing at a time, limit mental distractions, and bring physical balance (Rogerson & Hrycaiko, 2002). [www.berkeleywellbeing.com/centering](http://www.berkeleywellbeing.com/centering)

**The Circle of influence:** This model was developed by Stephen Covey in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. It helps to focus on what is within your sphere of influence and worth focusing on and what is not. The more one focuses on one’s spheres of influence, the less one will lose energy. In dialogue situations, the model is useful for building an emotional connection with someone without getting emotionally involved. It reminds where to focus one’s energy and where not to. Once you forget that you are not responsible for someone else’s thoughts, feelings, or situation, you step outside

your circle of influence and into the energy drain of the Circle of Concern, of things that you worry about but have no influence on. So, the key here, is to be open and empathize with the other person’s actions, feelings and thoughts without being caught up in this or trying to help the other / solve the situation. That way, one can engage without losing energy or giving oneself away. [Circle of Influence | FranklinCovey](#)

**Embodied presence:** This mode of being present refers to a state of being present through the body through moment-by-moment awareness of feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations and through the possibilities of dealing with them without getting caught up in them. Embodied presence brings a grounded sense and physical state of being present.

**Empathic listening:** This level of listening identified by Scharmer (2008) is about an intentional action from understanding. Through empathic listening, one develops a stronger understanding of what is being conveyed, both intellectually and emotionally. One achieves this by looking through the eyes of the other and moving into the thinking and viewpoint of the other while suspending one’s own assumptions.

**Emotional intelligence:** The ability to understand, use, and manage one’s own emotions and those of others and to react to these in an effective and constructive way.

**Emotional presence:** The capacity to maintain presence and connection in the midst of emotional intensity, whether nice or not-nice.

**Generative listening:** This is the highest level of listening (of four levels) identified by Scharmer (2008). It goes far beyond the downloading, factual and empathic listening levels. At this fourth level of listening, we generate new understanding and insights, not only about the current situation but also about future pathways, Kusters, C.S.L. and Batjes, K. with Wigboldus, S., Brouwers, J. and Baguma, S.D. (2017).

**Generative mindset:** This refers to the capacity to recognize one’s own and others’ inherent strengths, wholeness and sources of intelligence called generative knowledge. The term ‘generative’ refers to a hidden reservoir of strength, resilience and intelligence within us that is inherently resource-generating. The more we connect with this knowledge, the more resourceful we become. Under the right circumstances, our generative knowledge functions as a powerful internal force. The more directly we connect with our generative knowledge, the more grounded, centered and strong we become. And, the other way around. Hence, being attentively present is so important for generative listening. From a generative state of mind, one is able to be open to possibilities that present themselves and other information that surfaces; this is what Otto Scharmer calls ‘let come’. To connect with this knowledge or source, one must let go or park / distance oneself from one’s latent knowledge in order to open to less latent and obvious information. Also see ‘let it go, let it come’ under Glossary. One of the principles of a generative mindset, according to Dr M. Peet who did research and teaching work at the University of Michigan on Generative Knowledge methods, is understanding there are other ways of knowing. Generative Knowledge is part of our embodied knowledge, which is a compendium of personal knowledge gathered through our life experiences. Generative Knowledge is a form of innate ‘knowing’. This knowledge, hidden from our consciousness, facilitates the development of our ‘best self’ and helps us find our way in the world ([The Generative Knowledge Institute](#)). The three openings described by Otto Scharmer for deeper listening (2008) and by Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer to transform systems are 1) opening the mind, 2) opening the heart and 3) opening the will. Opening the mind to challenge assumptions, opening the heart to be vulnerable and truly hear one another and opening the will to let go of pre-set goals and agendas and see what is really needed and possible, The MSP Guide by Herman Brouwer and Jim Woodhill (2015, p.132).





# Dialogue, being a trusted and authentic conversation partner

## Glossary

**Let it go, let it come:** This is a term that Scharmer refers to in his or levels of listening and the Theory U. The ability to let come and let go allows suspending, to let the thought, emotions, bodily experience and your first reactive mode come without being compelled to act on it by letting it go. For the letting go part one has to become conscious of how and when one's mental models or emotions are affecting perceptions and reactivity, and learn to neutralise this in the moment. This helps to acquire a generative listening mode and be open to possibilities that come up. It also relates to letting go of certain patterns and tune into new possibilities that are yet to be born, which is the letting come part.

**Mindfulness:** It refers to the quality or state of being conscious or aware of something. It implies that one pays attention to thoughts and feelings in the present moment without judging them and/or getting caught up in them; one simply lets them come and lets them go.

**Mindful:** It refers to focusing one's awareness on the present moment and whatever one is doing at the moment, free from distraction or judgment, and aware of our thoughts, feelings and bodily sensation without getting caught up in them or identifying with them.

**Neutrality:** This refers to an observational mode that is able to respond in an unattached way, that is without value judgments, negativity, or getting caught up in this. So that one is not caught in negative reactivity and can remain neutral and attentive in all kinds of situations regardless of what is said or happening.

**Powerful questions:** Vogt et al. (2003) describe a powerful question as one that: stirs curiosity; provokes conversation; is thought-provoking; brings assumptions to light; invites creativity; generates energy and pushes the group forward; stays with stakeholders; and elicits more questions. Powerful questions are likely to generate engagement, creative thinking, new insights, and open up future pathways and new possibilities.

**Quality of being:** It refers to how you are present and from what state of mind. The more open the state of mind, the more receptive and generative one can be; and the easier one can actively search for and be considerate to other perspectives and challenging information. The more positive and forwarding the state, the more uplifting and 'higher' the state of being. The more present from full attentiveness to and engagement with whatever one is doing at the moment, the more mindful one is and the better the quality of being.

**Reflection-in-action:** The ability to see what is happening as it is happening. Active pausing supports developing reflection-in-action.

**Selective listening:** Hanlon and Rigney (2011: 2) indicate we filter constantly through our internal processes which draw heavily on our experiences and biases or preferences.' (Ibid: 3). Selective listening means rejection of information, perspectives or opinions as a result of these processes.

**Sense-making:** The ability or attempt to make sense of situations by trying to understand connections in complex situations, and involves questioning and analysing experiences, observations, theories, beliefs and/or assumptions with our stakeholders. More specifically, sense-making is the process of creating awareness and understanding in situations of high complexity or uncertainty for the purpose of decision-making (Kusters, C.S.L. and Batjes, K. with Wigboldus, S., Brouwers, J. and Baguma, S.D. (2017)).

**Storytelling:** It can be used to invite others into our world. Letting them experience the events of the story goes beyond delivering facts, 'downloading' information and providing reasoning. You enrich them with detail, characteristics, metaphors and expressiveness. With storytelling, we appeal to a different mind state. Activating an open mind and stimulating empathic listening to move to a place of deeper presence and co-creation. This can be achieved by describing the situation using the full range of facts and senses, hearing, taste, touch, sight, smell, and emotions or energetic feeling. The topic can

can be about a desired feeling - such as feeling safe, being listened to or being a trusted conversation partner - or a future desire for something bigger than you – Example 'how do you want to leave the world behind for future generations or what do you want the world to look like then?'. It can also be related to experiences in nature that were memorable and impactful.

Appreciative Storytelling: it can be used to encourage participants to take a positive perspective by rediscovering and reorganising what is going well rather than focusing on problems. It surfaces good practice and increases positive sharing and connecting while evoking to a different mind state. It is one of the 60 facilitation tools mentioned in the MSP guide '[How to Design and Facilitate Multi-Stakeholder Processes](#)' by Herman Brouwer and Jan Brouwers (2017).

**Suspension:** This involves an in the moment action based on the ability to let come the judging notion whilst letting go the impulse to react on it. According to David Bohm (2004) suspension is at the heart of dialogue. William Isaacs refers to it as observing the judging or criticizing motion to take back into oneself the force one might otherwise put off onto others in the environment. According to Otto Scharmer suspending judgment is about being conscious of how and when our mental models are affecting our perceptions. Suspending enables a deeper level of listening, interaction and understanding.

**Systems thinking:** The ability to view problems and events in relation to whole systems (Brouwer et al 2015). It is about making sense of complexity.

