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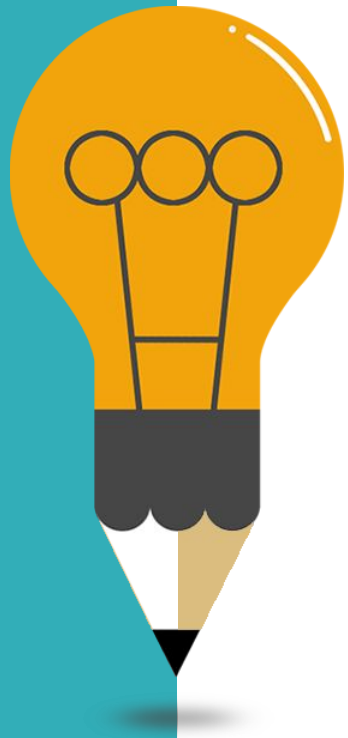

- **CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE**
- Module 7

FRAMEWORK

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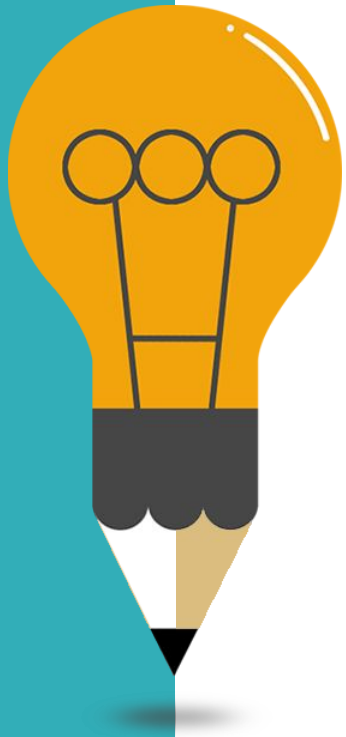

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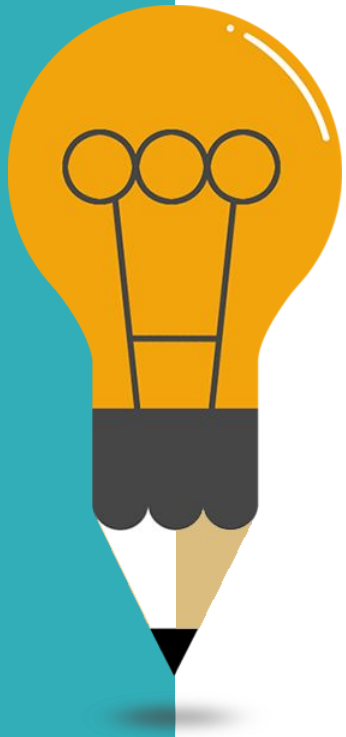

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Introduction

Dialogue – the meaningful and meaning-creating exchange of perceptions and opinions – is one of the methods people most frequently turn to when addressing conflictive issues. Approaches like mediation and negotiation, often used to work out differences on a political and social level, incorporate elements of dialogue. There are numerous counter-voices that call for reform and moderation, for inclusive institutions, for participatory development approaches, new ‘social contracts’ and religious and cultural tolerance that instead of resorting to exclusion and violence, these voices would rather opt for dialogue as a constructive means to [balance] competing interests.

The question of how to prepare for and set up successful dialogues remains pressing and intriguing to practitioners and scholars alike in social conflict management and everyday life.

What is Constructive Dialogue?

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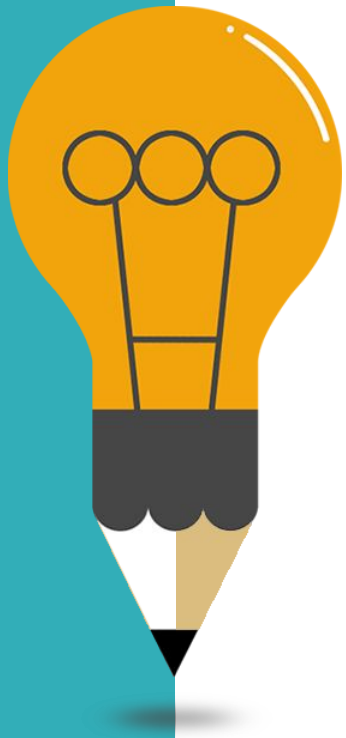

“Constructive dialogue is a form of conversation in which people who have different values, beliefs, and perspectives seek to build new ways to understand and interact with each other, even as they sustain commitments to their own principles and perspectives. The format is ideal for discussing important, complicated issues that can divide people.”

Constructive Dialogue Institute

What is Constructive Dialogue useful for?

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Developing mutual understanding

Is the act of striving to better understand others' views while feeling that others are striving to better understand yours.



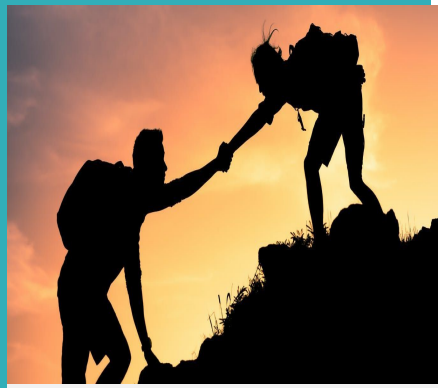
Enrichment of people own perspective or worldview

Clarify their differences, discover common ground



Offers possibility of future collaborative action

Even that may have previously seemed impossible



Is not about persuading others or winning an argument; and it is not about proving the other side wrong

While these may be reasonable goals for other forms of conversation.

Constructive Dialogue

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- Five Principles
- Good Practices
- Key Concepts
- Dealing with DIfficult situation
- Facilitation Tools

> *"The modern meaning of dialogue has its origin in antiquity and the Middle Ages. The term is now primarily defined as a conversation between two or more people characterised by openness, honesty and genuine*
> *listening. Taken from the Greek diá and lógo, it can be interpreted as the "flow of words" or "meaning" created by more than one person."*



Five Principles of Constructive Dialogue

Planning and Facilitate a dialogue process

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01

Let go of winning

Approaching a conversation like a zero-sum battle, where one side wins and the other loses, sets up an adversarial dynamic that will lead the other person's defenses to go up. This dynamic minimizes the possibility of learning, and it often damages relationships. Recognize that by striving to win, you are actually setting yourself up for failure. Instead, try entering conversations with curiosity and the goal to understand. You will find it can be contagious.

02

Share your story and invite others to do the same

Research from psychology and political science consistently demonstrates that people rarely change their minds about deeply-held beliefs because of facts. Rather, sharing stories about personal experiences can be a powerful way to open up new paths of understanding. Focus on discussing issues through your own experience of them – why an issue is important to you or how an issue affects you. Try to draw out those same insights from others.

Five Principles of Constructive Dialogue

Planning and Facilitate a dialogue process

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03 Ask questions to understand

Expressing curiosity through questions is a powerful way to deepen a conversation. But questions can shut down dialogue as easily as they can promote it. Think about the difference between, “How can you possibly think that?” and “Can you tell me more about what led you to this view?” The first likely puts someone on the defensive, while the second may open up a new avenue of conversation. Be intentional about asking nonjudgmental questions that invite meaningful reflection

04 Acknowledge the role of emotions

Often validating someone's feelings about an issue can provide a spark that builds into trust and mutual understanding. It is not always easy, though. Imagine acknowledging someone's strong emotions about a view you really oppose – this can feel quite unnatural. Doing so does not mean you're endorsing their view, but rather, it acknowledges the very real feelings they have and makes them feel heard. This can build trust and may lead them to be more open to your perspective.

Five Principles of Constructive Dialogue

Planning and Facilitate a dialogue process

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05 When possible, seek commond ground

Common ground can be found in a variety of places – from small things like shared interests to large things like shared goals or agreement that a particular value matters. Small or large, the connections that common ground creates can be building blocks for forging strong relationships and identifying additional points of connection.

Resources:
Constructive Dlalogue Institute, Basics of Dialogue Facilitation, Norbert Ropers

What is Constructive Dialogue?

Good Practices for a Constructive Dialogue

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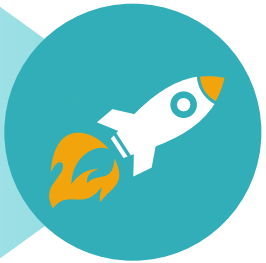
01 Adapt to the size of the Dialogue groups

02 Setting the spaces for dialogues

03 Provide Refreshments

04 Provide Strong listening, reframing & summarising skills

05 Pay attention to Time management



10 ways to have a better conversation | TED

Celeste Headlee: 10 ways to have a better conversation | TED - YouTube

Key Concepts in Constructive Dialogue

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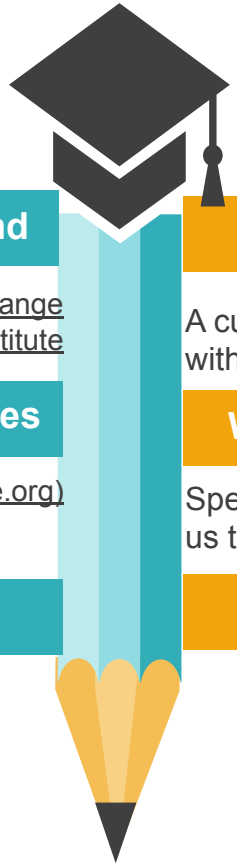

Explore the inner workings of the mind

The elephant, the rider, and the path – A tale of behavior change
Rare (2:02) | Constructive Dialogue Institute

Uncover the roots of our differences

Perspectives Key Concepts PDF (constructivedialogue.org)

Cultivate intellectual humility

The willingness to acknowledge the limits of our knowledge and the possibility of being wrong

Challenge the culture of contempt

A culture where people feel and show contempt (anger mixed with disgust) for people they disagree with

Welcome diverse perspectives

Speaking to people who see things differently from us helps us to overcome our natural human limitations

Being a good listener

Being a good listener, School of Life, (4:57) |
Constructive Dialogue Institute

Fishbowl

A “fishbowl” is a tool to allow a smaller group of persons involved in a dialogue to form an “inner circle” within the larger “outside circle”. The participants in the inner circle talk to each other, while those in the outer circle are listening. The advantage is that particular topics can be addressed in more depth in a smaller group. The method can be used for talks within one party to make others aware of the broad spectrum of opinions within that party (intra-party) or for inter-group conversations with only a few representatives. An “open fishbowl” has one empty chair in the inner circle which allows one outsider at a time to come into the circle. A “closed fishbowl” has no empty chair

World Café

The “World Café” dialogue concept was made popular by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs in 1995. According to its name, a room is set up like a café with people sitting in small groups around tables. The starting point has to be a clear purpose which is broken down into various sub-themes which are addressed at different tables. The participants are invited to join any table according to their interest, to connect to people, to share experiences and ideas and to generate new collective wisdom. Some of them might stay at one table while others connect to more than one table. This method can be particularly helpful at the beginning of a session with a large group to understand complex issues, their inter-connectedness and to prepare a more systematic separation of the subgroups needed for consensus-building

Paraphrasing

The facilitator listens to what has been said and restates it in his/her words. The purpose is to put it into context or to clarify implications or misunderstandings which have not been mentioned. Sometimes parties are more prepared to listen to a third party concerning an argument than when the same argument is put forward by their opponents

Facilitation Tools

All good dialogues require a specific combination of tools. The choice of tools depends mainly on the purpose, mandate, timing and context of the dialogue.

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Reframing

Reframing is a basic tool for facilitating conflictual issues: Statements with a hostile or biased message are reframed to become acceptable for the opponents (also called “detoxification”).

Example: "You must be crazy to think that I would accept an outcome in which you would continue to exploit my region". Reworded: “I would like to explore options that would allow your region to receive a fair share of the country's revenues”

Summarising

Long statements by participants are shortened by the facilitator to emphasise their essence. At the same time this procedure allows the facilitator to paraphrase and reframe some of the content

Questioning

Open questions
Closed questions,
Systemic questions,
Circular questions.

“Love the questions themselves, as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.”
Ranier Marie Rilke

Facilitation Tools

Various other aspects need to be taken into account, including the size of the group, its cultural background and the power differentials within it, as well as very practical aspects such as the location and facilities where dialogue sessions take place. Facilitation tools include how facilitators communicate with participants and how to organise general group communication.

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Dealing with difficult situation

When dialogues deal with protracted conflicts

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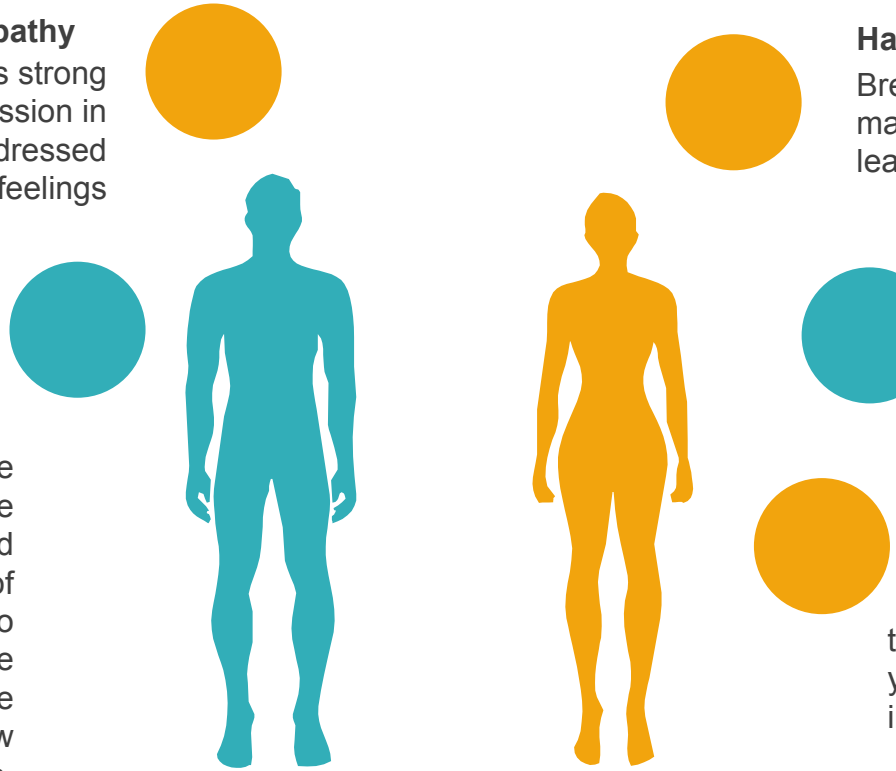
First-aid empathy

Participants who express strong emotions, anger and aggression in particular, should be directly addressed by voicing their feelings

Remind participants of the principles and ground rules of dialogues

a question can be asked: “Are we still in a mode of dialogue with each other, or how would you describe this mode of communication?” In order to remind the participants of the ground rules agreed upon at the beginning, or to introduce new ones.



Have creative breaks

Breaks can be used to engage with the main protagonists and mitigate or at least de-escalate the controversy

Establish a sound knowledge base accessible for all participants

Take self-care measures

Be prepared to stay grounded when the situation heats up. To prepare yourself for staying calm and acting intentionally – rather than reactively

Dealing with difficult situation

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01

Embrace Conflict

The key to design and facilitate a constructive dialogue among the conflicting parties, is providing situations in wish they can share their perspectives, interests, and concerns, and explore possible solutions together. Conflict is inevitable in any public engagement process, especially when dealing with complex and controversial issues. However, conflict does not have to be destructive or divisive. It can also be an opportunity for learning, understanding, and collaboration.

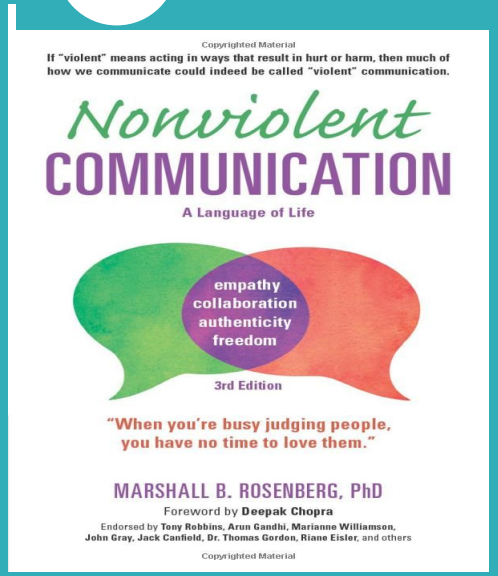
02

Nonviolent Communication Practices

The book by Marshall Rosemberg addresses the theory of sentences structure, avoiding victimism and judgement enhancing mutual understanding.

03

Words That Matter



Words have the force of action and become virtues in and of themselves. The words we use shape how we understand ourselves, how we interpret the world, how we treat others. Words are one of our primary ways to reach across the mystery of each other. As technology reframes the meaning of basic human acts like making and leading and belonging, the world needs the most vivid and transformative universe of words we can muster, words with power that convey real truth.

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Conclusion

Constructive dialogue resolves critical issues, offers solutions, raises awareness: the correct use of words improves the quality of relationships because it encourages participation and purposeful dialogue. Constructive dialogue helps to stem conflicts that are generally present not only in private but also in professional relationships, in the community and societies.

> *Words are windows or walls*
>
> *Marshall Rosenberg*

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- https://constructivedialogue.org/assets/Perspectives-Key-Concepts-PDF.pdf
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOX79tmDox4&t=2s This short video illustrates the pitfalls of groupthink, focusing on how it may lead groups to make ethically questionable decisions.
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- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1vskiVDwl4&t=195s In this entertaining and informative video, writer and radio host Celeste Headlee provides ten useful tips for avoiding arguments and having more productive conversations.
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