

Dialogue

Dialogue implies both a method of guided conversation in groups, as well as a fundamental attitude in all forms of communication and interpersonal contact.

The Dialogue approach

Historically, the conceptualization of dialogue began with Socrates and Plato. The current application is influenced significantly by the thoughts of the philosopher Martin Buber and the Physicist David Bohm. It was introduced by Peter Senge and his team at MIT in the mid 90's for work in the context of organization development. The book "The Fifth Discipline", which contains a description of this work, has become a classic piece of management literature.

The following are basic elements of dialogue communication:

1. Each individual treats the other with respect and develops a culture of empathetic listening.
2. Bringing one's thoughts, feelings, and intentions to consciousness and expressing them openly.
3. Describing one's own basic premises and offering these for discussion.

These fundamental attitudes have proven themselves as very good conditions for open ended, prejudice free and constructive encounters. Because of that they are ideal, as Senge describes it, for team learning. They are especially useful for the cultivation of a fruitful exchange beyond cultural boundaries. The dialogue approach is a central element of my work even beyond its use as a specific method (see also: [The Dialogue approach](#) and [My coaching approach](#)).

Methodically as developed by Bohm and Senge, dialogue takes place as a conversational process within a group of people. The moderator introduces the method and makes certain that the protective space or container for this process is created and maintained. Special exercises may also be employed to deepen the required fundamental attitudes/needed frame of mind/necessary spirit. The dialogue process may be arranged either as strategic dialogue (with a set topic), or as generative dialogue (without any prior assignment).