AARHUS UNIVERSITET

DIALOGUE MEETING METHODS A-E

PREPARING AND CONDUCTING DIALOGUE MEETINGS

The purpose of the dialogue meeting

After reading the reports, discuss what you want to achieve through the dialogue meeting. The purpose of the dialogue meeting must be clearly defined before dialogue meeting methods can be chosen.

The purpose of the dialogue meeting may for example be:

A. To present the reports and (anonymously) select the focus areas which the unit/department (Aarhus BSS, HE and ST)/school (Arts) will be working on (see method A for inspiration).
B. To provide the employees with an opportunity to enter into dialogue about how they read the reports, what their expectations are, and what their concrete ideas for working with the psychological work environment are (see method B for inspiration).
C. The department (Aarhus BSS, HE and ST)/school (Arts)/unit as a whole prioritises the three main focus areas, defines goals for each focus area and develops suggestions for initiatives (see method C for inspiration).
D. To ensure employee ownership of initiatives to improve well-being, because the employees create a their own meaningful action plan in groups (see method D for inspiration).
E. To elaborate on data and/or focus areas through group dialogues (see method E for inspiration).

The methods may be combined to serve more than one purpose.

Balancing mutual expectations

It is important to balance expectations with the employees concerning follow-up as this is the basis for constructive dialogue meetings based on trust and subsequent actions that improve the work environment.

As a general rule, before the meeting, you should clearly communicate who has planned the meeting, its purpose and intentions, and what concrete results it should produce. By the same token, the facilitator of the meeting should end the meeting by explaining the next step in the process.

Choice of method

The next step is to choose what method to use for the dialogue meeting. If you 'just have a meeting the usual way', producing new perspectives and initiatives may be difficult. For this reason, this guide is intended to inspire you by providing examples of possible methods. The descriptions are not prescriptive, and the methods can be adjusted to suit your needs and wishes. The choice of method depends on the purpose, the number of employees and the situation in the unit.

Introduction

The facilitator of the meeting should open the meeting by briefly sketching out the purpose of the meeting, the intentions behind it, and what results the meeting is intended to produce.

The facilitator describes 'where we are now' and 'what has happened since the last meeting'. If this is the first dialogue meeting after the publication of the reports, an overall summary of the results of the report should be presented (all three reading approaches can be applied).

Dialogue meeting methods A-E

Dialogue meeting method A: Presentation of reports and selection of focus areas

Time: 1 hour Participants: 30-300 people Facilitator: required experience None Participants: required experience None Materials Index cards and pens This method is particularly suitable for medium-sized or large groups, and is a good way of getting everyone involved. The method requires that the participants listen to and evaluate one another's ideas in a way that quickly provides an indication of which ideas are most important for the participants to continue working on.

Introduction (5 min.)
The facilitator of the meeting should open the meeting by briefly sketching out the purpose of the meeting, the intentions behind it, and what results the meeting is intended to produce.

Presentation of the reports based on the three reading approaches (15 min.)
The manager and the local occupational health and safety and liaison committees have agreed on how the reports are to be presented based on the three reading approaches: focus on major problem areas (classic approach), low-hanging fruits, and focus on what already functions best.

The university-wide themes selected by the senior management team, HSU and HAMU should also be described.

Ideas on cards (5 min.)
In response to the presentation of the results of the reports, each participant writes down their best idea for a focus area on a card, perhaps containing a text of this nature:

*My best idea for how we can achieve the best possible psychological work environment is:*__________________

Card switch (1 min.)
All participants turn their cards upside down and walk around exchanging cards with one another for about one minute – the idea is to exchange cards with as many people as possible. This is done to make the cards anonymous, which makes the evaluations less personal. In this way, all of the proposals become the shared ideas of the entire group and are evaluated on the basis of their relevance.

Evaluation (15 min.)
When the facilitator gives a signal, the participants pair off. Each pair considers the two cards they are holding: How good are the ideas? Seven points should be divided between them, so that the sum of the scores assigned is 7 (for example 0-7, 2-5, 3-4). The participants write the scores on the respective cards. This should be done five times in quick succession, and between each round, participants should exchange

cards with random colleagues, so that each pair gets new cards each time. Each card can collect a maximum of 35 points.

Conclusion (9 min.)

The facilitator asks which cards have the highest scores: Does anyone have a card with 35 points? 34? 33? (There is usually a positive response at around 28 or 29 points.) Count down until the +/- ten cards with the highest scores have been identified and write the winning ideas on a flip chart.

Wrap-up (5 min.)

The facilitator thanks everyone for their contributions and wraps up by addressing the following points:

1) What has come out of the meeting today (which focus areas have been identified)
2) What happens next. How what has been agreed will be followed up on. How the next steps in the process will take place.

After the meeting, the cards should be hung up in a prominent spot and transcribed to an electronic medium to facilitate sharing and follow-up activities.

Dialogue meeting method B: Dialogue between employees and generation of ideas for focus areas

Time: 1 hour

Participants: 8-200 people

Facilitator: required experience If there are many participants, the facilitator should have some experience with process facilitation.

Participants: required experience None

Materials Post-it notes and pens as well as a sufficient number of markers.

This method is a good way to get everyone involved throughout the meeting, which creates positive energy and support for the initiatives. At the same time, it facilitates the concretisation and crystallisation of the focus areas for different participants to speak together and then attempt to organise the ideas that have emerged individually, without speaking together.

Introduction (5 min.)

The facilitator of the meeting should open the meeting by briefly sketching out the purpose of the meeting, the intentions behind it, and what results the meeting is intended to produce.

Short meetings (15 min.)

The facilitator now invites everyone out on to the floor, where participants pair off. The facilitator asks the participants to discuss the following question briefly in pairs:

If we are to follow up on the description of us that comes out of the psychological WPA report, what is the most important thing we should do? What focus areas can improve things for us the most?

After five minutes, the facilitator stops the participants. The facilitator now asks the participants to find a new partner and discuss the same question. This can be repeated. The facilitator may wish to assist the participants, so that everyone finds a new partner quickly in each round.

Silent idea presentation (20 min., depending on the number of participants)

Each participant is now given three minutes to write the two or three ideas they find most important down on Post-it notes. The ideas are then put up on a wall – in silence. As the participants are putting up the Post-it notes, they should try to group the ideas that belong together into focus areas. Participants are allowed to move each others' notes.

Dialogue about the focus areas (15 min.)

Now participants should be given a chance to discuss the ideas for focus areas as a group. Participants who wish to comment on the various ideas should do so standing, in order to contextualise and elaborate on them. The facilitator might ask questions such as: *Can you say something about why this is a particularly important focus area? What do you hope doing what you propose here can bring us?*

Wrap-up (5 min.)

The facilitator thanks everyone for their contributions and wraps up by addressing the following points:

1) What has come out of the meeting today (which focus areas have been identified)

2) What happens next. How what has been agreed will be followed up on. How the next steps in the process will take place.

The results should be documented and hung up in a visible place or published after the meeting.

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Dialogue meeting method C: Prioritisation, ideas for initiatives and group action plan start-up

Time: 2 hrs. including break

Participants: 6-40 people

Facilitator: required experience Experience with process management and prior selection of a number of focus areas based on the three reading approaches.

Participants: required experience None

Materials Flip charts, Post-it notes, markers (half the number of participants) and pens

The exercise facilitates prioritisation of pre-selected focus areas, the development of ideas and deciding on action plans. The method makes it possible to involve all participants in developing the most important ideas, and the payoff is motivation to continue working with the selected initiatives. If you choose this method, the meeting planners and the management must be prepared to support the initiatives that are chosen.

Introduction (10 min.)

The facilitator of the meeting should open the meeting by briefly sketching out the purpose of the meeting, the intentions behind it, and what results the meeting is intended to produce.
Posters with a number of proposed focus areas should be made in advance (preferably formulated as goals). These should be hung on the walls of the meeting room so that everyone can see them. The posters could be made by a working group of employees from the unit who have asked their colleagues to identify what important areas are pointed out by the report. The focus areas can also be identified using method A or B.

If a specific number of focus areas is the desired result, this should be named during the introduction (for example, 'The five focus areas that get the most check marks are the ones we will choose to work on going forward'.) This also applies if a particular framework should be taken account, for example constraints of time, resources or finances, so that participants do not propose ideas that will have to be retracted or rejected afterwards. The facilitator can either explain the framework in the introduction or announce that all ideas are subject to final approval after the meeting.

The selection of focus areas and the (re)formulation of goals (10 + 10 min.)

The first 10 min.: Participants pair off and discuss the proposed focus areas as they walk around looking at the posters. Each pair has a marker. Before the ten minutes are up, each pair has to check off the three focus areas they think are most important to prioritise.

The final 10 min.: The posters that have been given the most checks are left hanging. The others are taken down. The facilitator explains what will happen to the proposals that are taken down (will they be put up again at another time, or will they be thrown out).

The focus areas on the remaining posters are formulated as positive goals (what we want to achieve).

Ideas for concrete initiatives (15 min.)

The participants remain in their pairs and walk around looking at the remaining focus areas/goals again. Each pair has a block of Post-it notes. In this round, they write down their best ideas for concrete initiatives on Post-it notes and put them up on the relevant focus area posters. For example, if there is a poster with the focus area 'keeping a civil tone', participants can put Post-it notes on it with their best ideas for what has to be done to achieve that. For example, 'Next week, everyone does their best to keep a civil tone at meetings and in working relationships. When the week is up, we discuss what changes have resulted from this focus on 'civil tone'. What had the greatest effect?'

Presentation of initiatives and categorisation (30 min.)

All participants now walk around to the selected posters with focus areas and initiatives. Each poster should receive equal time (for example 10 minutes per poster). All initiatives related to each poster should be presented, and it is the facilitator's job to identify similarities, overlap, and differences, as well as to categorize the initiatives as they are presented. The facilitator should ask the participants to assist with this during the presentations, so that everyone contributes. It is important to respect the intentions of each contributor. Otherwise, motivation can easily be transformed into resistance.

Decision-making process with action plans (15 + 10 min.)

The first 15 min.: Now, the participants can go over to the focus area they are most interested in contributing to. Their task is to decide on a short, clear action plan with agreements on who is to do what, when and how. If the faculty/the administration has a greed on a standard action plan format, this must be used.

The final 10 min.: After 15 minutes of work, the facilitator visits each group and asks them in turn to present the concrete initiatives they propose for their focus area to the entire group.

The facilitator might ask questions such as: *Which initiatives can be launched tomorrow? What needs to be achieved within the next month? What binding agreements do we need to make with one another? Etc.*

Wrap-up (5 min.)

The facilitator thanks everyone for their contributions and wraps up by addressing the following points:

1) What has come out of the meeting today (which focus areas and initiatives have been identified)
2) What happens next. How what has been agreed will be followed up on. How the next steps in the process will take place.

The decisions and agreements should be documented, and all decisions and proposals should be made available electronically or hung up in a visible spot after the meeting.

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Dialogue meeting method D: Action plan development in groups – as individual meeting or in connection with dialogue meeting methods A, B or C

If the focus areas have been clarified and formulated as goals (for example, at a previous dialogue meeting or by a working group), method D can be used at a dialogue meeting to begin developing the unit's action plan, so that the employees take ownership of the actions that are to improve the work environment. Method D can be used in direct continuation of the other methods. The method helps create interest in and ownership of the action plan, because the employees can recognize their own words in the description of the focus areas and proposed initiatives. See the section below as well: III: **Writing an action plan**

Time: 55 minutes - 1 ½ hours Participants: 10-60 people Facilitator: required experience Focus areas and goals must be formulated in advance. An action plan format must be decided on in advance, for example a template for the faculty/the administration. Participants: required experience None Materials Any materials produced in advance, A4 paper, 1 marker and laptops containing the action plan template (one for every five to six participants). If there are only 10-20 participants, a single laptop can be connected to a projector, so that the entire group looks at and writes in the same action plan template.

Introduction to the meeting and the selected focus areas/goals (10 min.)

The facilitator of the meeting should open the meeting by briefly sketching out the purpose of the meeting, the intentions behind it, and what results the meeting is intended to produce.
The facilitator explains the selected focus areas: What are they, why and how were they selected.

Division into groups (5-10 min.)

Each of the most important focus areas that will be included in the action plan should be written on a piece of paper as a headline. The pieces of paper and any related material about the focus areas from a previous meeting (Post-its, posters, etc.) are placed on separate tables. The participants go over to the table with the focus area they are most enthusiastic about working with. There should be 4-8 participants at each table. If there is a focus area no one has chosen to work with, this should be announced, and the participants should be given an opportunity to choose again. If there are still no participants who choose the focus area, the issue is assigned a lower priority and is not included in the action plan at this time. Similarly, if there is a table with only one or two participants, this should be announced, and participants should be allowed to either move to or away from the focus area table.

Working with the action plans (35 min.)

There should be 4-8 participants at each table. Each group chooses a minute-taker. It is essential to stick to the template and complete all fields. The group works together to complete the action plan through dialogue, drawing on any existing material. If desired, the group may choose a moderator to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and that the timeframe is respected.

Wrap-up (No. tables x 10 min. + 5 min. or 5 min.)

The exercise can conclude with presentation of the group's work to the entire group (approx. 10 min. per table) or by collecting the action plans. The facilitator thanks participants for their contributions and wraps up the meeting:

1) What have we gotten out of today's meeting?
2) What happens next: The action plans will be merged into a single action plan, fine-tuned and sent to all participants for consultation.

Dialogue meeting method E: In-depth discussion of data through group dialogue (spiral dialogue)

Time: 1 ½-2 hours, depending on objective and group size

Participants: 4-10 participants

Facilitator: required experience Preferably experience with group dialogue

Participants: required experience To achieve the desired results from the group dialogue, it is a good idea to involve the participants in preparing the meeting, for example in relation to the choice of themes/questions or focus area to be explored through group dialogue. As a minimum, the participants should be informed in advance about the objective and the format of the meeting, the themes or questions, as well as the ground rules for the group dialogue (see below).

This method is a good way of getting everyone actively involved, and is particularly suited to drawing out different perspectives on the concrete situation behind the numbers in the reports. The method requires a certain degree of trust in the group as well as structured facilitation of the dialogue.

Practicalities: Make sure the meeting takes place in an appropriate room where participants can work without interruption and with room for everyone to sit around the same table and see one another clearly.

Introduction (10 min.)

The facilitator gives a brief introduction to the objective of the meeting and the intentions behind it. It should be explained clearly what the result of the meeting will be used for and to whom the result will be communicated (where relevant). In addition, the method and the ground rules should be reviewed, as the framework for the meeting.

The method

The participants are first given an opportunity to reflect on the most relevant results from the WPA. Next, they take turns speaking, and participants are not to speak out of turn or interrupt one another. A participant may give up his or her turn. No one may speak for too long at a time. The dialogue continues as long as there is time, or until everyone gives up their turn. Agreeing on a timeframe (15 minutes for example) for each theme or question can be a good idea, depending on the number of participants and what is felt to be appropriate. A maximum of 3-4 questions is recommended depending on group size.

The facilitator should agree with the group on how time is to be managed and how the various points made are to be recorded after each round, for example by taking notes during the dialogue.

At the outset, the facilitator should clarify whether s/he will participate in the dialogue. If the facilitator participates, s/he should be the last to speak in each round.

Ground rules

Examples of good ground rules:

- That everyone should participate actively, but that it is ok to give up a turn.
- That everyone should have an open, receptive attitude.
- That everyone should communicate respectfully.
- That it is OK to change your mind during the dialogue.
- To make an agreement on what can and cannot be shared afterwards.

Dialogue on selected questions (1 hr. for example)

The facilitator introduces the selected questions (perhaps writing them down in advance on a flip chart or whiteboard).

If the group dialogue is to centre on a previously agreed focus area, relevant questions might be:

- We have decided that _____________ (well-being, for example) is a focus area. How would you describe ___________ (well-being, for example) in our unit right now? What already works well? And what could be changed for the better?
- Where and in relation to what should our ___________ (well-being, for example) be improved?
- We score relatively low on _____________ (‘workload, stress and loneliness’ for example). What do you think is our greatest challenge in relation to this theme?
- In relation to the last round: Where do you think we should focus our efforts to improve this? Are there low-hanging fruits we can pick in relation to __________________ (‘workload, stress and loneliness’ for example).
- What goals should we set for ourselves in relation to ______________ (well-being, for example)?

The group dialogue can also focus on questions such as:

- What numbers in our WPA do you think are the most important for us to do something about? Where can we most quickly achieve a marked improvement with an effect on our work environment? And is there anything that calls for urgent action?
- What do you think it means that the overall assessment for _____________________ (‘workload, stress and loneliness’ for example) is ____________ (state the assessment). What might be behind this?

The facilitator opens each round by asking the next question and by giving the floor to the first participant. The facilitator should also thank the group when time has run out, or when/if everyone gives up their turn.

It is a good idea for the facilitator to encourage participants to respond to and comment on other participants’ contributions where relevant when it is their turn to speak.

Wrapping up the group dialogue (15 min.)

At the conclusion of the group dialogue, the facilitator wraps up with questions such as:

- What are the most important points that have emerged today in relation to our discussion of the selected questions?
- What is the next step?

Finally, the facilitator should thank everyone for their contributions, as well as recapping any agreements about what can be shared with whom afterwards decided on in the ground rules.

In addition, it can reinforce the group’s learning process by giving all participants one minute to reflect on ‘What have we gotten out of speaking together in this way?’ and asking them to share their thoughts with the rest of the group afterwards by taking turns saying one sentence out loud, either clockwise or counterclockwise as in the group dialogue.