

Group/Team development dialogues at AU

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What is a group/team development dialogue (GDD/TDD)?

A group/team development dialogue (GDD/TDD) is a structured meeting between a team leader/manager and his/her group/team which focuses on the group's joint tasks and/or areas of responsibility. The purpose of a GDD/TDD is to reach a mutual understanding of the shared task. The GDD/TDD is particularly useful when working groups, research groups or teams are working closely together for some time and need a common understanding of the task and how to collaborate and can be used as a:

- *pre-dialogue* before the individual staff development dialogues (SDDs)
- *post-dialogue* after the individual staff development dialogues
- way of conducting 'topic-specific' team meetings

Why conduct a GDD/TDD?

As team leader/manager, you can use the GDD/TDD to:

- Strengthen relations and improve communication in a group
- Promote the group/team members' ability to engage in an open and constructive dialogue
- Create a common understanding of the group's/team's core activity, objectives and responsibilities
- Create an overview of the group's/team's combined resources
- Establish learning and knowledge sharing in the group/team

- Increase the group's influence on and responsibility for group development
- Increase the level of well-being and collaboration in the group/team

Can GDDs/TDDs replace SDDs?

When working in the Danish state sector, SDDs are mandatory, and according to AU's staff policy, a GDD/TDD is considered a *supplement* to the individual staff development dialogue (SDD).

As manager, you must therefore be aware that even though you choose to conduct a GDD/TDD, it will still be necessary to conduct shorter, individual development dialogues to ensure that topics which require confidentiality between the employee in question and the manager can be discussed and the individual agreement form is completed.

If a GDD/TDD is conducted before the individual SDDs, the SDDs might be completed in a more efficient way with a higher degree of coordination based on the agreements made in the group/team.

How to conduct a good group/team development dialogue, step by step

Step 1 Preparation

▪ Preparation for good GDDs/TDDs – a checklist for managers

As manager, you are responsible for the development dialogue and you should consider the following questions before you start planning the GDD/TDD:

- What is the overall purpose of the dialogue?
- What would you like to see as the result of the dialogue?
- How should the dialogue be structured to provide the best conditions for reaching results? For example, should the group be involved in the planning and have tasks/roles during the dialogue, or is it you as manager who should be responsible for planning and facilitating the dialogue?

When you have answered these questions, you can start the planning. Pay special attention to the following:

▪ Group composition

When you put the group together, it is important that you consider group tasks, group size and maturity level.

- **Group tasks** – The highest level of commitment and the best dialogue can be achieved when the members of the group work on related tasks and report to the same manager.
- **Group size** – We recommend that a group consists of 4-6 people which will make it possible to have enough time to reach results.
However, we do not recommend to divide a coherent group/unit unless the group/unit consists of more than 10 people. If the group consists of more than 10 people and is divided into smaller groups, it can be necessary to select a dialogue leader/facilitator for each of the small groups. The team leader/manager can then go from group to group or participate in the different groups in turn.
- **Group maturity level** – The group members' level of experience with constructive group dialogues plays a role when considering how to structure the dialogue and deciding how many topics it is possible to cover. If the members of the group do not have a lot of experience with group dialogues and with reflecting on different topics in groups, or if group meetings are

usually characterised by counter-productive discussions or lack of focus and progress, we recommend using a structured dialogue method (see appendix 2).

▪ **Involving the group/team in the preparation of the dialogue**

In some cases, it will increase the level of group/team commitment and motivation if the group/team is actively involved in planning and conducting the dialogue. Whether the group is involved in the preparation work or not, it is important to be very clear about intentions, desired outcome, topics etc. The *IDOART* model in appendix 2 can help you with this.

We recommend that the manager prepares the different items in *IDOART* before the meeting – or that a preparatory meeting is held where the items are discussed and decisions about the items are made.

▪ **Topics, questions and structure**

It is important to select a few relevant topics for the dialogue. If the group is involved in the preparation work, we recommend that you take time to discuss which topics are relevant considering the purpose of the group dialogue. Typical topics for a GDD/TDD could be:

- Cooperation, well-being and job satisfaction
- Future tasks
- Developing new competences/skills/knowledge

When you have decided on the topics, a limited number of questions must be prepared to help you cover each topic. We recommend max. 4-5 questions for a GDD/TDD lasting 1.5 to 2 hours. You can find inspiration for questions in appendix 1.

When you have decided on the topics and questions, it is time to consider the structure of the dialogue – what should be the first topic, and how should you discuss the different questions? A very clear dialogue structure helps if group members are not used to reflecting in groups. Appendix 2 contains several useful methods for structuring the dialogue to ensure that all group members become involved and counter-productive discussions are prevented. You also need to determine how much time should be allocated to the different topics/questions and how you plan to sum up and conclude which future steps to take.

The table below contains the things you need to decide on in connection with topics, questions and structure.

TOPIC Which overall topics do you want to discuss?	QUESTIONS Which questions do you want to use to discuss the topic?	DIALOGUE METHOD How should the dialogue be structured, when you discuss the question?	TIME How much time should be allocated to discussing the questions?	SUMMING UP How do you sum up – who is responsible?	ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES Does anyone have special roles/responsibilities when the questions are being discussed e.g. ensuring that the allocated time is not exceeded or taking notes etc?
Topic 1:					
Topic 2:					
Topic 3:					

▪ Ethical aspects

An important prerequisite for a successful GDD/TDD is trust in the group between group members and mutual trust between management and staff. If the group is involved in the preparation work, it is important to talk about dialogue structure and roles during the preparation phase. If the group is not involved, it is important that the introduction to the dialogue clearly informs the participants about the dialogue structure and the rules.

It is important to create some clear and simple rules which can help to ensure that everyone feels safe and wishes to contribute to the dialogue. Topics such as confidentiality, respecting each other's boundaries, expectations towards the participants, agreements concerning follow-up etc should be discussed before the dialogue begins. A typical set of rules for a GDD could be:

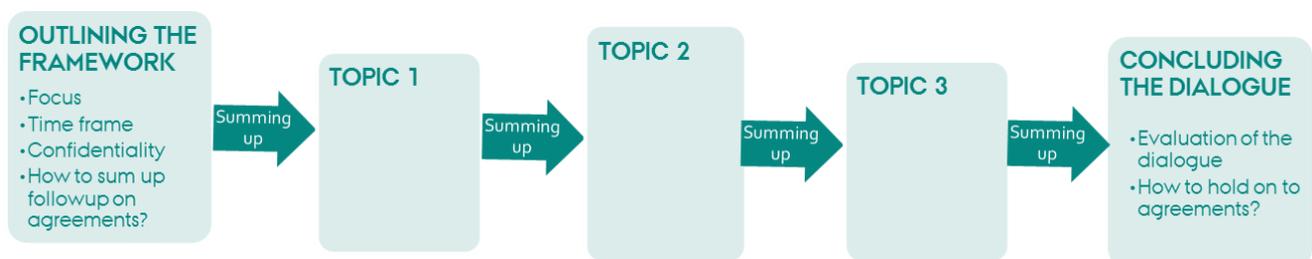
- Participants take turns to talk/listen
- An appreciative focus
- Focus on work
- Possible to take a "time-out"
- Confidentiality

NOTE: When you discuss confidentiality, it is important that you have a clear, common understanding of confidentiality and how you comply with this in practice. You must reach an agreement to make it completely clear what you can talk to others about after the dialogue is over, and what you cannot talk about.

Step 2 The dialogue

A recommended dialogue structure can be seen on the figure below.

1. First, the framework of the dialogue is established. This is typically done by the manager.
2. Then the topics are discussed by going through the selected questions one by one. The topic which is considered to be most time-consuming is placed halfway through the dialogue.
3. After each topic, decisions and future actions will be summed up and written down.
4. When all topics have been discussed, the dialogue is concluded. The dialogue is evaluated and agreements are written down e.g. in the agreement form.



• Introducing the dialogue

Start by introducing the development dialogue and spend 10-15 minutes to make sure that all participants understand the purpose and the structure of the dialogue (topics, time allocation etc). If necessary, you can use the *IDOART* model (see appendix 2) to establish a good starting point for the dialogue.

Note: Make sure to book a suitable room which has the required space and the right facilities.

- **Roles, tasks and responsibilities**

The following roles/tasks will often be required during a group development dialogue.

- *A person responsible for outlining the purpose and the dialogue structure*
- *A dialogue leader/facilitator during the dialogue*
- *A person who keeps track of the time*
- *A keeper of the minutes/person who takes notes during the dialogue*

We recommend that you as manager are the one who outlines the purpose and the dialogue structure. Usually, it will also be most appropriate that you manage/facilitate the dialogue. If you do not have a lot of experience with conducting group dialogues, we recommend that you delegate some of the other roles/tasks to others. For example, you can ask someone to watch the time, so you can concentrate on the contents of the dialogue.

- **Use a positive approach**

In order to ensure a good and constructive group dialogue, it is important to use a positive approach. Find out what works well in the group and which ideas the group has for the development areas you are going to talk about.

This does not mean that you should only focus on the positive experiences. Mistakes and deviations are also a part of everyday life and we can learn from these as well. However, it is important to talk about mistakes and deviations in a constructive way. We recommend that you focus on what you want to change and not on the person who made the mistake. *"Focusing on what we would like will help us create the workplace we want. Focusing on the mistake will make us able to explain what we do not want". (Quote translated from Danish)^[1]*

Step 3: Ending the dialogue – evaluation, agreement form and follow-up

At the end of the dialogue, all dialogue participants discuss how to move forward and which future steps to take. The following questions can be discussed:

- Have any important agreements about development areas been made?
- Should they be written down in the agreement form?
- Who is responsible for follow-up?
- When is the first time for follow-up?
- Where should the agreement form be stored?
- How will it be possible to see that you have achieved the results you agreed on?

The SDD agreement form can be used for this and you can find the form here:www.au.dk/SDD.

- **Evaluation of the dialogue**

We recommend that an evaluation is carried out at the end of the dialogue. The following questions could be discussed:

- What was it like for the group to participate?

^[1] Source: Hornstrup & Loehr-Petersen, 2006 "Udviklingssamtaler i grupper" Jurist- og Økonomforbundets forlag.

- What did each group member get out of the dialogue?
- What did you as a group get out of the dialogue?
- What worked well and what needs to be improved/changed?

- **APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONS FOR INSPIRATION**

GDD/TDD AS PRE-DIALOGUE BEFORE SDD

The questions below can be used for inspiration if you want to conduct a GDD/TDD *as a pre-dialogue before the individual SDDs*. They are divided into the three main themes from the SDD: 1 - What has happened since the last SDD/GDD/TDD? 2 - Well-being and job satisfaction, 3 - Future tasks and competence development. Select the questions which are most relevant.

Main theme 1: What has happened since the last SDD/GDD/TDD? Which tasks have been solved and which results have been achieved?

1. What were the overall themes during last year's SDD/GDD/TDD?
2. What have been the group's/team's primary tasks during the year?
3. Which tasks have been completed successfully/less successfully?
4. What was the reason why tasks were completed successfully/less successfully (professional, personal, social competences or other circumstances within the group)?
5. What has the group primarily learned during the year?

Main theme 2: Well-being and job satisfaction

1. How does the collaboration in the group work?
 - What works well and why?
 - What does not work well and how can that be changed/improved?
2. How does the collaboration between the group and other relevant collaborative partners work?
 - What works well and why?
 - What does not work well and how can that be changed/improved?
3. How does the collaboration with the manager work?
 - What works well and why?
 - What does not work well and how can that be changed/improved?
4. What are the three main focus areas/development areas concerning group collaboration in the year to come?
5. Are there any specific themes/topics concerning well-being that should be discussed in the group?
6. What are you going to do to create a positive development in relation to the theme/topic?

Main theme 3: Future tasks and competence development

1. In which areas do you see a need for the group to develop during the coming year (task performance, collaboration, well-being)?
2. During the coming year, what are the group's tasks (prioritised tasks and any requests for new tasks)?
3. Which competences are required to perform future tasks?
4. Do these competences currently exist in the group?
5. Which competences/new skills/knowledge should be developed within the group (professional and/or personal/social competences)?
6. How should the new competences/skills be acquired, who is responsible and what is the deadline?

NOTE! Remember to summarize the questions/themes during the dialogue and to conclude/evaluate at the end (see page 5).

GDD/TDD AS POST-DIALOGUE AFTER THE SDD

The questions below can be used for inspiration if you want to conduct a GDD/TDD *as a post-dialogue after the individual SDDs*. The questions you choose should address some of the overall themes which were uncovered during the individual SDDs. Select the themes/questions which are most relevant.

Main theme 1: What has happened since the last SDD/GDD/TDD? Which tasks have been solved and which results have been achieved?

1. Has the group experienced any specific work-related challenges the past year?
2. Which group tasks have been completed successfully during the past year?
3. What was the reason why tasks were completed successfully/less successfully (professional, personal, social competences or other circumstances within the group)?
4. Are there any changes that we need to make as a group to succeed even more when solving tasks in the future?

Main theme 2: Well-being and job satisfaction

1. What characterises the collaboration in the group?
 - What works well and why?
 - What does not work well and how can that be changed/improved?
2. Are there any specific themes/topics concerning well-being that we need to focus on?
3. What must be done to create a positive development in relation to the specific theme/topic?

Main theme 3: Future tasks and competence development

1. Which competences are required in the group to perform future tasks?
2. Which competences and new skills must the group develop (professional and/or personal/social competences)?
3. How can the group develop the new competences/skills?
4. Have you made any agreements during the SDDs that you wish to share with your colleagues?

NOTE! Remember to summarize the questions/themes during the dialogue and to conclude/evaluate at the end (see page 5).

GDD/TDD AS METHOD FOR "TOPIC-SPECIFIC" TEAM MEETINGS

A GDD/TDD is a suitable method and procedure to be used in any group/team meeting where you want to discuss a specific topic. It is, however, difficult to give examples of specific questions as the questions depend on the topic you want to discuss. As regards procedure, we recommend to follow the steps below:

- **STEP 1:** Make the purpose of the meeting clear - be specific about the topic
- **STEP 2:** Consider whether the group/team should be involved in the preparation work.
- **STEP 3:** Phrase (e.g. in cooperation with the group) a limited number of questions which can be used to create a meaningful dialogue about the specific topic. We recommend max. 4-5 questions for a GDD/TDD lasting 1.5 to 2 hours.
- **STEP 4:** Plan the structure: What should be the first question? How do you discuss the individual questions (see appendix 2 which contains suggestions for dialogue methods/structure)? How much time should be allocated to each individual question? How to sum up? (see the table on page 3 which lists the things you need to decide on).
- **STEP 5:** Decide on the framework/structure, rules, roles/tasks and responsibilities in connection with the meeting.

Generally, we recommended that the topic(s) you choose, when using GDD/TDD as a method, should relate to the performance of the group's/team's core task or to the collaboration involved in performing the task.

The questions should be phrased in a way that puts focus on the future and on development to make it a constructive dialogue and not a dialogue about problems.

APPENDIX 2: DIALOGUE METHODS

Table 1: Method for preparing the dialogue together and balancing expectations - IDOART¹
<p>I: Intention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the intention behind the GDD and why do you need it?• What is the overall purpose of the GDD? <p>DO: Desired Outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the desired outcome and what should we get out of the GDD? As a group? Individually?• What does each of us expect from this dialogue?• What are the overall objectives of this dialogue? <p>A: Agenda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which topics are important for our group to talk about?• How should the dialogue be structured? <p>R: Roles & Rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the framework/structure and what are the rules of the dialogue?• Which roles exist and do we take turns? <p>T: Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dialogue schedule: Who keeps track of the time? How much time is allocated to each topic? Is it possible to reschedule e.g. if there are any main topics that require more time?

Table 2: Methods for structuring the dialogue
<p>A: The spiral dialogue</p> <p>The spiral dialogue is a valuable tool for group discussions about a shared, relevant theme/question - e.g. during a GDD - where it is important to ensure that everyone gets a chance to express their opinions and thoughts.</p> <p>The method: A spiral dialogue is a simple method which ensures that participants take turns to talk about a specific topic or question which has been agreed in advance.</p> <p>Rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A person is selected to start the dialogue• Then (clockwise or counterclockwise), the participants will each get a chance to talk one by one• Interruptions are not allowed• You can always decide to pass• Try not to talk for too long (to ensure a good flow)• The spiral dialogue stops when everyone decides to pass or after an agreed period of time. <p>Time: We recommend to set a time frame e.g. 10-15 minutes for each topic/question.</p>

¹ The model is freely adapted from: Høier, Hersted & Lausten 2011, "Kreativ procesledelse. Nye veje til bedre praksis", Dansk Psykologisk Forlag.

SPIRAL DIALOGUE



B: Structured dialogue with bridge-building questions

A structured dialogue is also a useful method for group discussions about a shared, relevant theme/question - e.g. during a GDD - where it is important to ensure that everyone gets a chance to express their opinions and thoughts.

The method:

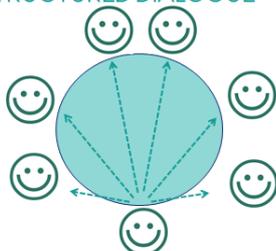
A structured dialogue is a simple method which ensures that participants take turns to talk about a specific topic or question which has been agreed in advance. The point is to get everyone involved and the method offers a way to increase the level of common understanding. By using bridge-building questions as part of the structured dialogue, it is possible to get the participants to relate to each other's ideas, proposals and objections.

Form:

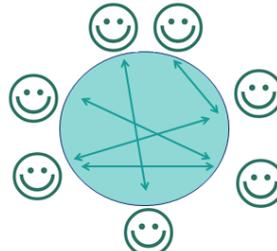
- The dialogue leader starts the dialogue and makes it clear from the beginning that it is important that everyone gets a chance to express his/her views during the dialogue. Anyone with something on their mind can start the dialogue and then the dialogue leader can invite others to continue if they have not been involved in the dialogue already. Alternatively, the dialogue leader can pick a person to start the dialogue.
- If it is appropriate during the dialogue, the dialogue leader can ask bridge-building questions such as:
 - "Joe, what do you think is the most important thing that has been said so far?"
 - "Peter, which of Karen's points do you like best?"
 - "Anne, which patterns do you see in this discussion?"
 - "... So what have we agreed on already?"
- The structured dialogue ends, when the dialogue leader concludes the dialogue at the agreed time, or when you have sufficiently discussed the topics you intended to cover.

Time: It is important to set a time frame for each question/topic.

STRUCTURED DIALOGUE



BRIDGE-BUILDING QUESTIONS



C: Fishbowl

The Fishbowl process can be used to create a dynamic dialogue where all group members become involved and new aspects and development continue to emerge throughout the dialogue.

The method:

"Fishbowl" is a method where a group of people sit together in a small circle. The people in the centre talk about a specific topic/question while the rest of the group sit outside the circle and observe the dialogue that goes on in the "bowl" and reflect and listen (see illustration below).

Rules:

- The group is divided in two
- The two groups take turns to sit in the "bowl" and talk about the specific question/topic
- The participants can switch roles if required
- When the dialogue fades out, it is time to switch to a new topic/question

FISH BOWL

