



DIALOGIC ENGAGEMENT

A facilitated introductory course
to discover the Mode of Dialogue

and its relevance to
your work and life...

PARTICIPANT FIELD GUIDE



Academy of Professional Dialogue
accredited course



DIALOGUE PUBLICATIONS

The Firs
The Square
Chipping Campden
Glos GL55 6AL
UK

First Published in the UK by Dialogue Publications 2021

All rights reserved

© Academy of Professional Dialogue, 2021

Typeset by Ventures in Design

ISBN: 978-1-9161912-6-6

www.aofpd.org

DIALOGIC ENGAGEMENT

A facilitated introductory course
to discover the Mode of Dialogue

and its relevance to
your work and life...



HOW WELL DO WE TALK AND THINK TOGETHER?

We are taught basic skills at school, like how to read and write (literacy), and how to count (numeracy). Surprisingly, we are not taught how to talk and think together (articulacy). We just pick that up from those around us, and we probably seldom stop to review how good we are at talking and thinking with other people. This is unfortunate because our success, and that of our organisations and communities, is dependent on how well people talk and think together. When we decide to do things that affect other people, we need to talk with them and think about the wider consequences of our actions. If we don't we keep tripping each other up. That is frustrating, and it limits how effective we are in our everyday work and in our lives in general. To improve our experience of working with others, a good starting point is to consider the ways in which we talk with others.

AN INTRODUCTION TO DIALOGUE

This introduction to Dialogue provides you with an effective framework for recognising, understanding and changing the way people talk and think together. You will be able to make immediate use of this learning to enhance your own participation and for the benefit of those around you. The purpose, structure and dynamics of Dialogue are introduced in a way that reveals when and how Dialogue may be the best way to think with others. With practice we anticipate you will be better equipped through Dialogue to help resolve complex and fragmented situations.



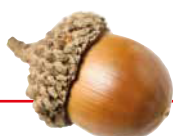
FACILITATED LEARNING

This facilitated course is an opportunity to get a taste of Dialogue and how different from other ways of talking and thinking together. Two Professional Dialogue Practitioners accompany you on an experiential consideration of seven different Modes of discourse, and a Certificate of Participation is provided on completion. During the course we not only talk about the Modes, but we engage in each of them in a participatory way. The benefit of this approach to learning is that the more enquiry and self-discovery there is, the easier it will be later to recall what was learned.

This Participant Field Guide provides you with a review of all the Modes, including the typical dynamics and structure of each one, and the skills and misuses that can help and hinder their effectiveness. Each Mode involves a different kind of engagement, and thereby enables different possibilities. This is an opportunity to recognise and understand the Modes, and to learn how to use them well.

DIALOGIC MODES

Two of the Modes involve Dialogue, and these Modes are particularly important in complex or ambiguous situations, where people hold a variety of perspectives and opinions about what should be done and by whom. Such situations are often best described as fragmented, and fragmentation is surprisingly common in all our lives – in fact, it is pervasive in all communities and organisations around the world.

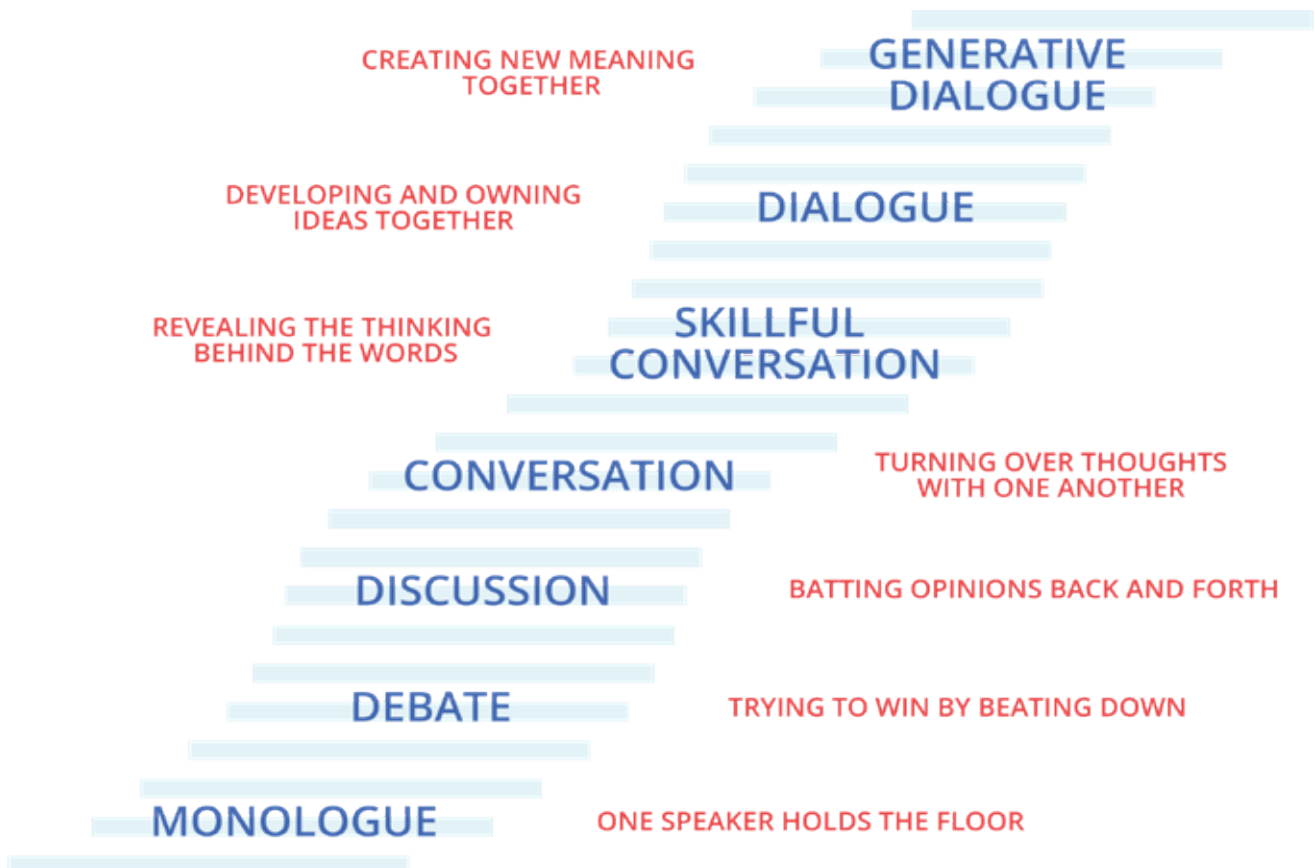




MODES OF ENGAGEMENT

The Modes describe how we engage with one another and the nature of the exchange or discourse, not the content of what is said or being talked about. We will explore seven Modes, and when we are talking and thinking with others, we are always in one or other of these Modes. All of them are needed, and none is better than any other.

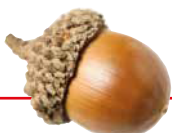
Seven Modes of Talking and Thinking Together...



STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS

Each Mode determines a different kind of engagement through a distinctive structure and dynamic. The Modes enable different types of engagement between those involved, and we can start to notice if we are in the best Mode of engagement for what we are trying to do. Using the right Mode for the work at hand will lead to better results. If things are not working so well, we have a choice, and probably need to change to another Mode. The aim is to understand all seven Modes and how to use the most helpful one at any given time.

MODE	STRUCTURE	DYNAMIC
MONOLOGUE	One person holds the floor	One-way delivery
DEBATE	Us and them	We are right - You are wrong!
DISCUSSION	Loose	Anyone can speak about anything
CONVERSATION	Temporary and interpersonal	Pursuit of common interests
SKILLFUL CONVERSATION	Rigorous enquiry	Support and challenge
DIALOGUE	Common topic Each speaks to all	Understanding not persuading Incorporating all voices
GENERATIVE DIALOGUE	Emergent Containing not constraining	Unfolding and enfolding





MONOLOGUE

Monologue is the most rudimentary and commonly used Mode for running meetings. It requires everyone to follow one speaker's thoughts. This Mode has a fine history in the form of storytelling, and before writing was commonly available, oral history (delivered in the form of a Monologue) was essential to retain an understanding and appreciation of one's heritage and social identity. This was gradually replaced by oratory and speeches, which are a more personalised version of history. As our world and lives have become more mechanised, Monologues have become more technical, explanatory, instructional and directive. As a result, there has been a proliferation of Monologues that may or may not be relevant to the audiences they address – although the socially polite response is for the audience to appear to be attentive even if they have little interest in what is being said.

STRUCTURE: *One person holds the floor*

The speaker has authority and control throughout the Monologue. The seating is generally arranged so that everyone can see the speaker, but each another. The speaker can accept or refuse interruptions that are generally prefaced by raising one's hand, as first learnt at school. In frustration, people may heckle to try to gain the floor from the speaker.

DYNAMIC: *One-way delivery*

The speaker is the focus of attention and determines the pace and duration of the Monologue. Speakers like Monologue because they are in control and can prepare what they want to say in advance. If they are repeating other people's thoughts they may use notes, slides or posters to remember what to say. Audience participation is typically restricted to a shorter question-and-answer session under the control of the speaker.





ENGAGEMENT: *Transactional*

Specific information is passed from the speaker to the audience.
The better the speaker knows their audience the more effective the transfer.

OUTCOME: *The speaker knew, now the audience knows*

The benefits of Monologue are that:

- a) large numbers of people can be addressed at the same time
- b) everyone present hears the same thing at the same time
- c) people hear for themselves, not a second-hand version of what was said

GOOD USAGE:

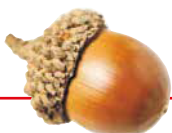
Monologue is good for telling everyone (but not for hearing from them) so it is ideal for announcements, speeches, marking symbolic change, instructions and expounding a particular point of view. People appreciate a Monologue when they want to know what the speaker has to say.

POOR USAGE:

Monologue is poor for consultation because it does not draw out the listeners' thinking but requires everyone to follow the speaker's thinking. A boring meeting is one where you don't want to know what is being said, and it feels like a waste of time. Beware of serial Monologues disguised as Dialogue.

A DEVELOPMENTAL STEP...

When you are the speaker, try listening to yourself, to what you are saying, to what you are thinking, and to the room as a whole as you are speaking. This gives you access to the meaning that is developing whilst you are speaking. This is radically different from playing a 'tape recording' of your past thoughts. See what you discover about the pace of thinking and of previous thought.





DEBATE

Debate is generally more energetic and more engaging than Monologue. It is also more complex because you not only advocate your own views, but you also dispute and rebut the opposing views. This requires following your own line of thinking as well as following the ones you are opposing. Debate has a fine tradition of providing due process for decision-making, with the more convincing arguments winning the favour of the decision-maker, or winning the most votes in an assembly. Party politics has gradually reduced the quality of Debate to rhetoric, since the voting is often predictable. As a result, Debate has become divisive rather than inclusive, reinforcing the identity of sub-cultural groupings rather than leading them to understand and accommodate one another. The argumentative overtones have become more and more dominant in Debate in recent times.

STRUCTURE: *Us and Them*

Orderly Debate has a clear proposal or 'motion' and two opposing groupings – one is for the motion (agrees) and the other is against it (disagrees). This divides the room into 'us' and 'them', and the two groupings are usually seated facing (or confronting) one another. They take turns to make their case and to oppose the other's arguments.

DYNAMIC: *We are right – You are wrong!*

The aim is to win. The method is to 'beat down' which is the root meaning of the word Debate. It takes the form of 'I am right and you are wrong', to which the response is 'No – I am right and you are wrong!' The heat can rise significantly as the process develops, so most assemblies appoint a controlling impartial 'speaker' to provide order.





DISCUSSION

This is the Mode where people are batting ideas back and forth – a bit like table tennis, but less structured and with very loose rules. It can be fast and superficial, enjoyable and inconsequential. Discussion is derived from the same root as percussion, and it is a bit like tapping the surface to sense what is underneath. This is an efficient and participatory way of canvassing views and making a prompt call on which way to proceed. You can reach a decision without going into depth, like determining ‘roughly how long before we should meet again?’ It could be ideal for checking the items on an agenda – whereas within each agenda item you would expect to be in a different Mode to go into much more depth. The strength of Discussion is its lightness and speed; the weakness is that it does not achieve alignment or commitment. If Discussion is used to address complicated issues where competing stakeholders have not revealed all their interests and concerns, then the superficial decisions made are liable to unwind as the implications become more evident to everyone.

STRUCTURE: *Loose*

Discussion is undemanding and often dominated by a few people – whilst others may not speak at all or even be that attentive to what is being said. It is often scattered with speakers needing to gather attention, perhaps through gesture or humour. It lasts as long as it lasts, and it is not considered impolite to drop in and out of a Discussion.

DYNAMIC: *Anyone can speak about anything*

Because the structure is so loose, and anyone can introduce what they choose, the direction can and often does change abruptly from one speaker to the next.





ENGAGEMENT: *Temporary and superficial*

OUTCOME: *Non-binding decisions*

The process by which a group of people reach a decision varies in different contexts and situations. When multiple Discussions are used to sound out the position of different participants, this may give a sense of where agreement might be found. The alignment of needs and interests required for methodical decision-making, however, needs a different Mode. Changing the Mode when needed is an important skill.

GOOD USAGE:

Discussion can be highly participatory and inclusive, and it is good for engaging people, reaching a quick but superficial decision, or agreeing what to talk about. It is ideal for social engagement, such as at a barbeque or picnic, and the quips, banter and repartee one hears between colleagues entering or leaving work provide a comfortable sense of being noticed, acknowledged and belonging. Discussion can turn the boredom of waiting into fun.

POOR USAGE:

Like Monologue, Discussion can be overused in work meetings. The superficiality of the Mode can obscure things rather than progressing activities. When the group drops into Discussion, it may appear to have addressed the business at hand, whilst not actually doing so. At the close of the meeting people have different ideas about what was decided, and everyone probably knows that actions agreed in Discussion are unlikely to happen. Although it might have seemed faster, this Mode may require things to be reconsidered and so actually takes longer.

A DEVELOPMENTAL STEP...

Discussion is superficial, but it does give a sense of belonging. Try getting marginal individuals engaged by saying what they might say if they spoke, and watching their response to be sure not to cause offence.



Acknowledgement: P Garrett, J Ball



CONVERSATION

At the mid-point of the seven Modes is Conversation, which is the most versatile of all. The root meaning of the word is to “turn things over together”. In Conversation people turn over their experiences and ideas together. This is an informal, participatory, engaging and undemanding activity than can yield surprising pleasure and outcomes in a short space of time. Because Conversation is naturally flowing and adaptable, it makes it possible for people to bridge differences easily – enabling a young boy to engage with an elderly woman; an executive with a shop floor worker; unqualified with professional; manual with intellectual; organisational function ; function with operational line and so on. Conversation is inherently suited to building relationships and sharing personal experiences of what is happening in any situation. For good health everyone should spend at least half an hour a day in Conversation... Before infants can talk, they enjoy Conversation! If old people become isolated they start to lose their minds and die from the lack of Conversation.

STRUCTURE: *Temporary and interpersonal*

How long a Conversation lasts is entirely dependent on the extent of common interest and the energy to continue – it could be an exchange of two sentences or last for half an hour. The fact that it could end at any time gives a curious vitality to the engagement. The participants meet as peers, despite their obvious differences – in fact the greater the differences the more surprising and enjoyable the Conversation can be.

DYNAMIC: *Pursuit of common interests*

The essential dynamic is to find what interests you have in common. Within those common interests, the differences add colour and energy. We may both enjoy football or movies, but the different football teams we support or the movie stars we admire will bring us closer to each other's worlds. First, we find what we have in common – it may present itself in our clothing, demeanour, or whatever – and then we follow the thread of wherever this takes us.





ENGAGEMENT: *Relationship building*

OUTCOME: *Personal connection*

The essential human interaction takes little time and results in a personal sense of closeness. It involves recognition, a sense of shared direction, and evokes interest in participating in a common endeavour.

GOOD USAGE:

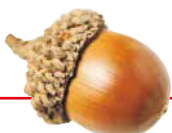
Conversation is not only an important social skill – it is also a strong asset in the workplace. Leaders can develop a rapport with any of their staff through an appropriate short Conversation. Colleagues can understand one another beyond their business roles. Through Conversation we understand the victories people are celebrating and the losses they are suffering without making an imposition of any kind.

POOR USAGE:

Conversation can be used to avoid facing the issue at hand. You may go to see your boss to request a decision, have a great Conversation about each of your weekends, but leave no closer to the decision you sought, because you were in the wrong Mode. Conversation is essentially reciprocal. If one withholds whilst enquiring of the other, this can become prying to tease out information. That is against the spirit of Conversation and can cause lasting damage.

A DEVELOPMENTAL STEP...

Try starting the Conversations you habitually avoid because you doubt that you have anything in common with the other person. Genuinely ask the beggar how he is, the rude official if she is OK, or ask to see the manager to compliment rather than to complain.





SKILLFUL CONVERSATION

Skillful Conversation has a more defined structure than the free-flowing Mode of Conversation for individuals or groupings of people. In Conversation you give your thoughts about whatever comes up and try to say them in a way that makes sense to others. With Skillful Conversation there is a significant addition - you reveal and explore why you hold the views you hold. There is a rigour to recalling what you have seen, read, heard and been told – and what assumptions you made about the situation and the context. This tests your logic and reasoning, and the implications of what you believe. It pushes on the framework underlying your past and future decisions. So, this is an essential Mode for clarity in sense-making and decision-making. You may notice how much you appreciate colleagues who are good at Skillful Conversation, and able to draw you and others into this structured Mode. This is an essential Mode for working meetings. It does depend on who is involved, and it does have strong analytic and reflective features that can be overplayed to avoid reaching a tough decision.

STRUCTURE: *Rigorous enquiry*

It takes time to focus attention on the situation under consideration, and to understand how views and opinions have been formed and sustained. Stopping before some kind of resolution has been formulated would feel unsatisfactory.

DYNAMIC: *Support and challenge*

The reliability of the information you have seen and heard, the assumptions inevitably made, your logic and reasoning, the certainty of your views and opinions, and the implications of holding such a disposition are amongst the features to be tested through support and challenge. Ideally these are suspended (held openly) rather than defended.





DIALOGUE

The two Modes of Dialogue, described in the next two sections, are quite different from the other Modes. Rather than being a means for the individual to hold sway (as in a Monologue) or for one group to win (as in Debate), the aim here is for everyone to benefit. The essential nature of the activity is inclusion. We want to include the views and experiences of others in a way that creates a common understanding. The root meaning is drawn from logos, which is the word or 'meaning', and dia which means 'through', as a diameter is a line through the centre of a circle. Dialogue seeks to find a common meaning through and amongst a group of people. Participants work with each other, contributing to the Conversation rather than giving the answer, so that what emerges is created and owned by everyone involved. It soon becomes apparent that a particular set of skills is required, or people will revert to other Modes. People need to listen, rather than dismissing other's views out of hand, to be genuine without being certain they are right, and to respect each other's intentions. This leads to a common sense of identity and purposeful stewardship of the individual and collective worlds. Dialogue is a significantly under-used Mode. Most cultures have a history of social Dialogue with forums like the English town moot hall, the South African indaba and the State Senate, but they have largely devolved into arenas for negotiation or Debate.

STRUCTURE: *Common topic – Each speaks to all*

There is no dominant seat in the Dialogue, and everyone needs to be able to see and hear everyone else (unlike Monologue, where everyone needs to see only one person, namely the speaker) so a circle of chairs is ideal. The topic, theme or concern of the Dialogue guides the direction as different perspectives are revealed.

DYNAMIC: *Understanding not persuading – Incorporating all voices*

This is a highly participative Mode. People concentrate on everything that is being said and how it is changing the understanding in the room and in themselves. They attend to the overall movement or flow of meaning. As they speak they address the whole group rather than speaking to individuals interpersonally.

Acknowledgement: P Garrett, J Ball





ENGAGEMENT: *Inclusive and transparent*

OUTCOME: *Common understanding*

This is an ideal Mode for cultivating a common understanding and a common sense amongst multiple stakeholders. People transparently suspend their views for common enquiry. A sustained Dialogue creates genuine alignment. It lays the ground of a common context that aligns the many decision made each day.

GOOD USAGE:

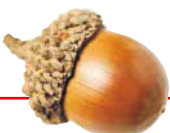
The spirit of Dialogue is to work with people, not to do things to or for them. The intention is to understand rather than to convince, enabling an idea or proposal to be worked on together, with everyone's contribution being incorporated into the developing thinking. This results in collectively owned outcomes, without selling answers to get 'buy-in'. The involvement or representation of everyone affected by the consideration is needed as a sound basis for sustainable decisions.

POOR USAGE:

By nature, Dialogue is open and transparent. The antithesis is a covert and exclusive consideration led by strong personal agendas. One can misuse Dialogue by deliberately or inadvertently leaving out key individuals and sub-groupings who are affected by the topic under consideration. Also, it may appear to take longer to use Dialogue than to tell people what to do, although thinking together at the outset is invariably more efficient in the long run.

A DEVELOPMENTAL STEP:

Within and without? Try listening to words spoken by others as if they were being said by you yourself. Find the part of yourself that would say what is being said if it could, and consider how you may be including or excluding that part of yourself.





GENERATIVE DIALOGUE

Dialogue has a topic to address within a specific situation. Generative Dialogue, on the other hand, has far greater reach and can also address the context that surrounds the situation. This is a step back from the existing patterns of relationships, into the ground out of which those relationships arise. So, this is the emergent Mode, for generating the kind of environment that enables whatever needs to take form to do so. It requires collective presence (being fully present) and attention to the potential opportunity inherent in the moment. To the degree that people free themselves from their personal and collective agendas (their wants and ambitions), they can enter a different space. In these uncharted waters, are simple but highly innovative solutions that were previously elusive, and the essential spirit of fellowship, citizenship and communion. This Mode can shift paradigms.

STRUCTURE: *Emergent – Containing, not constraining*

Generative Dialogue is the least structured of the Modes, enabling the potential in the moment to emerge in its own unique way on each occasion. It requires greater personal discipline and largeness of character to participate in a Generative Dialogue, without pre-defined boundaries or an agenda, than it does to operate in a rule-bound space. Releasing the rules (not complying or fighting against them)...

DYNAMIC: *Unfolding and enfolding*

One might wonder what one would talk about if there is no pre-set topic or agenda. With Generative Dialogue you make a start and find out. An agenda may emerge and change as feels right, and it is only at the end that one could really say what the agenda was. As you reveal your emerging awareness, and enfold what you hear from others, a current or direction emerges that takes the Generative Dialogue wider and deeper at the same time. The relationship between the immediate process and the general nature of what is happening in the organisation or society becomes evident in significant ways.





ACADEMY OF PROFESSIONAL DIALOGUE CERTIFIED COURSES

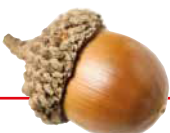
On completion of Dialogic Engagement you will be issued with a Certificate of Participation by the Academy of Professional Dialogue. A sequenced programme of further courses is available from the Academy to enable you to develop the professional skills and understanding that will be of value to you in any organisational or social setting. For details, please check the Academy's website: aofpd.org. Participation in these courses will benefit those who apply to become an accredited Professional Dialogue Practitioner, thereby being authorised to deliver the Academy's educational courses.





DIALOGUE PUBLICATIONS

Dialogue Publications was founded in 2017 to make Professional Dialogue materials available internationally. The editors release an annual publication entitled *The World Needs Dialogue!* (hardback and e-book), covering the Working Papers considered by Members at the Academy's annual conference. Other publications include books authored by Academy Members, as well as supporting materials for all educational programmes and courses accredited by the Academy.





THE ACADEMY OF PROFESSIONAL DIALOGUE

The Academy is an educational non-profit charity that promotes and inspires the international use of Professional Dialogue for the benefit of society. The primary aims are to inform people about the practice of Professional Dialogue in organisational and social settings, to acknowledge the work done by skilled Dialogue Practitioners around the world, to provide professional affiliation and to develop the field of Dialogue into a profession.