

*Search Conference and Dialogue--Processes
for Dealing with Community and
Organizational Conflict Through Discovering
Common Ground*

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**History of Organizational , Management and Communityand Strategic
Planning and Development**

1900: Experts Solve Problems

1950: Everybody Solves Problems

1965: Experts Improve Whole System

2000: Everyone Improves the Whole System

Phases of Strategic Planning and Change

Designing and Planning the Process

- * Where the change and process are decided upon.

Designing the Strategic Plan

- * Where the Strategic Plan is developed.

Implementation

- * Where the plans are transformed into actions.
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Search Conference Tasks

- * Reviewing the Past: Local to Global
 - * Assessing the Present: Local to Global
 - * Exploring the Future: Local to Global
 - * Exploring Prouds and Sorries
 - * Creating a Future Vision
 - * Engaging in Action Planning
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Search Conference Beliefs, Assumptions & Values

- * Ordinary people have knowledge of the real world and can organized this knowledge without experts.
 - * Creating shared perceptions of reality is critical to understanding the colorfulness of a turbulent world.
 - * Creating shared perceptions create a new context for creating the future and action plans.
 - * People can create their own futures.
 - * People want opportunities to engage their bodies, minds and hearts.
 - * People prefer cooperation to competition.
 - * Equalitarian participation supports more productive and effective conferences, visioning and action planning.
 - * Effective and successful change arises from involving all stakeholders in the design, development and implementation process.
 - * Diversity ought to be respected, appreciated and valued.
 - * Ordinary people can self-organize and perform tasks without facilitators.
 - * Designing the conference and change process is as critical as conducting the session and implementing plans.
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Search Conference Conditions for Success

- * Broad Spectrum of Views
 - * Open System Exploration
 - * Future Focus
 - * Peer Participation, Tasks and Roles
 - * 16 Hours of Work Sessions Across Three Days
 - * Full Participation & Attendance
 - * Public Action Commitments
 - * Healthy Conditions
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Suggested Principles for Supporting Dialogue

Dialogue is not a discussion. Discussion can be imagined as a ping-pong game with participants hitting ideas back and forth to win. Participants tend to talk at others. There tends to be a real or imagined hierarchy. Participants have numerous issues and ideas that tend to be undiscussable, non-negotiable and untouchable.

In dialogue, a person treats others as equally important beings. They talk with others. They respect each person as unique. They ask questions, listen to responses, and provide feedback.

A dialogue takes place for the purposes of mutual learning and creativity. A dialogue involves a flow of communications, possibly resulting in understanding and new meaning from creating new knowledge. In a dialogue, one can begin from a certain position. However, this position is

flexible and can change. The spirit of an dialogue is creative, neither competitive nor hostile.

The likely outcome of an dialogue could be a New Theory. A theory is a set of assumptions about the world directing action and behavior. Everyone has theories. For example, many people hold the theory that people are only motivated by monetary rewards.

It is important in a dialogue that all facts, feelings and insights are recognized and not disregarded because they do not conform to one's theory. It is also important that no point of view be written in stone. When a person becomes angry about another's position, the assumption(s) causing the feeling must be explored. When the core assumption is discovered, it needs to be compared with the facts and the views of others. Often, people assume that their assumptions are a part of their personality. This is not necessarily true. Many assumptions are learned.

It is important that each person involved in a dialogue explore their own assumptions. This needs to be done by assuming or role playing the position of the other to gain an understanding and not to discredit or discount the other.

The outcome of a dialogue is not necessarily consensus. To often, the idea of consensus and team spirit involves a group of people who already share a common set of assumptions. When a disagreement or facts contrary to the group's theory are presented, the presenter is perceived as not being a "team player" and his or her point of view is disregarded. This is not a dialogue. In a dialogue, a new idea is explored. One likely result is the creation of a new theory. This is the spirit of true community and democracy, not groupthink, conformity and authoritarianism.

The following are principles for supporting dialogue.

* Suspend your assumptions. Most people tend to take a position and defend it. In groups, this creates polarization. Dialogue does not require you to suspend your position but to be open to hearing the position of others. Also, dialogue encourages examining the assumptions and beliefs upon which your position is based rather than defending them.

* **Support a Spirit of Inquiry.** Explore the thinking behind your's and other's views and beliefs. The purpose is to create fresh insights and support creative intelligence amongst group members. It's not a contest or game of winning. Asks such questions as "What leads you to believe that's valid?" and "What are the beliefs, values and assumptions upon which your idea or view is based?"

* **Be Colleagues and citizens.** Dialogue is best facilitated when all members live the words of Thomas Jefferson presented in the Declaration of Independence. "All people are created equal." That means leaving your hierarchical position and professional credentials at the door. We are all citizens in a dialogue. That means each has a gift to express.

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