

9. ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

 Target group: Anyone	 Group size: 10-20 participants
 Duration: 90 minutes	 Type of activities: Drama exercises Active involvement
 Resources: Check Exercise 3	 Atmosphere needed: Fun

Aim



To develop participants questioning skills to help them understand the underlying needs and interests that people have.

Learning Outcomes:

- To get to know what types of questions exist.
- To get to know which questions to ask to understand the underlying needs / interests and feelings / emotions.

Intro to the workshop (5 min)

Welcome the participants. Explain the workshop, the aim and brief agenda.

EXERCISE 1. "DARK STORIES" (10-15 MIN)

For this activity you do not need any special materials. Just create a space and divide people into two teams. If the group consists of fewer than ten people, do not divide them into teams. Separate the teams

a little. If there is a need, give participants paper and pencils. Summarise all answers on a flipchart.

Each team will be asked to unravel the true backstory of an event that the game leader (facilitator) will describe. The teams will try to find out what has happened during the “Dark Story” by asking questions of the game leader, who can only answer YES or NO. No open questions or descriptive answers are allowed. If the game leader answers YES to a question from one team, that team is allowed to ask another extra question. Otherwise, the teams must take turns in asking questions. There is no strategy imposed on the work of the team but it is advised that participants ask many questions and the whole process is kept dynamic. If the participants struggle, the game leader should give them some extra clues and advice.

The conclusion of the story that the game leader gives in the beginning is: *“He parked his car near a hotel and lost all that he had in one second”*. The task for the participants is to find out how it happened. The correct answer that they need to unravel is: *“He was playing Monopoly with his friends and put his car-shaped pawn on the hotel-field that belonged to another player. Thus, all that he owned in the game, was lost”*.

Result

Participants have practised asking questions that open up new perspectives.

EXERCISE 2. THEORY INPUT ABOUT QUESTIONS (15 MIN)

Present a short input about different types of questions using the “Types of Questions” sheet that you will find below.

Introduction to question types

Asking the right questions at the right time is one of the most powerful tools to resolve conflicts. Questions help us to understand what really

matters, gain perspective, evaluate our position and come up with solutions. It is important to understand what types of questions exist and which type will help you get the information that you need. Why do we ask questions? Questions do not exist solely to gain information from another person but also to help that person understand him or herself better. So it is important to know why you are about to ask a question. Remember that questions are important, but they do not always have a straight answer and sometimes the value lies not in the information (facts) you receive but in the process itself, in the conversation.

Step-by-step

1. Brainstorm about the different types of questions and why we ask them.
2. Give participants time to think and write their suggestions on the flipchart.
3. Present the theory sheet about different types of questions.
4. Connect theory with real life by telling a story that shows how important it is to ask the right question.

Ideas to help:

Before the workshop starts, it is a good idea to print out, or at least prepare some examples for different types of questions.

Types of Questions

Open

What is important to you here?
What have you already tried to resolve this?
How do you feel about this?
What would a good solution look like for you?
Is there anything else?

Closed

Do you want X?
Have you tried talking directly?
Does this make you feel angry?
Would X be a good result?

Understanding What Matters – Systemic Questions

- Who is involved? Who else?
- Who makes the decisions?
- Who is responsible?
- Who is affected by any decisions?
- What has been done so far, and by whom?

Understanding What Matters – Provocative Questions

- Could there be something completely different going on here?
- Is this really about what it is about?
- Are your expectations unrealistic?
- What have you done to cause this problem?
- What are you doing to make sure that everything stays as it is?
- How are you benefiting from this conflict?

Questions that Shift and Gain Perspective

- Can you put yourself in the other party's shoes? How do they feel?
- What would a third – uninvolved – party say about this situation? A child? Another boss? Your partner in love? An independent expert? A judge? A priest?
- Imagine you are on holiday, miles away, on the beach with your friends. What does this the problem look like from there?
- Can you put this all into perspective? How important is it in relation to other things in your life or your business?

- What do you think this is going to look like two weeks / a month / a year / five years from now?

Evaluative Questions

- Asking about alternatives: You have a choice between A and B. Which is better? Why?
- Evaluating with a scale: On a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 standing for “not at all important” and 10 for “essential”, how would you rate your different interests / options here?

Paradoxical Questions

- How could everything just get a lot worse?
- What would you have to do to make things worse?
- Imagine the worst possible outcome? Is it really so bad?

Solution and Resource Focused Questions

- Think of everything you can do to resolve this satisfactorily?
- How have you managed to deal with this so well so far?
- What will your first step be?
- What resources do you personally have – in yourself – to help resolve this?
- What resources are there elsewhere – other people, institutions, etc. – that can help resolve this?
- Imagine you have solved this problem – what happens then?

The MIRACLE Question (for advanced questioners, based on Steve de Shazer)

Imagine you sleep really well tonight, you go to bed early, you read a little, it is nice and warm in bed. You sleep deeply and wake up refreshed. Tomorrow morning you wake up, and a miracle has happened. You open your eyes, the world looks different. Your problem is gone. The miracle is that everything is good. Everything is resolved, all questions are answered. You are satisfied. You are happy.

- How do you know that a miracle has happened?
- Who else notices?
- How do you feel now? What has changed?

EXERCISE 3. "GUESS WHO" (30 MIN)

This activity needs extra preparation. The following characters will play a role in the exercise: main facilitator, actor who will be the Mysterious Person, timekeeper/helper (optional), and participants.



Extra Resources/Materials

Flipcharts, A4 paper, pens, several markers or pencils (this is not compulsory but it is better for visualisation). Additionally, you may prepare a costume for the Mysterious Person (Wilson ball, wooden sticks, blanket to hide a person, face paint).



Instruction

1. Summarise the previous parts of the workshop and explain to the participants that now they will be able to test how effective they are in asking the right questions. Introduce participants to the concept of a simulation game, which is based on role-play and acting out a fictional scenario.
2. The goal of the game is to find out the story and identity of a Mysterious Person that is hidden somewhere from participants' sight (preferably – another room). The Mysterious Person is currently facing a difficult problem that participants need to discover. In order to do that, participants will be divided into groups and each one of them will be given a special code of conduct that they need to follow.
3. Divide the participants into 3 teams - the perfect amount is 3-7 people per group (if you have more people create more teams). Each team will have the opportunity to meet with the Mysterious Person and find out as much as they can from him/her (and what is the problem he or she is facing). During the meetings, each team will be allowed to ask only one type of questions:

Team one = Closed (Yes / No answers);

Team two = Provocative Questions;
Team three = Questions that shift perspective.

4. The game will have three rounds in total. In the beginning of the exercise, each team will be given 5 minutes to prepare and write down questions they want to ask. Then the first group will leave the room and meet with the Mysterious Person for 2 minutes. After them groups two and three will follow, each having the same amount of time for the meeting. After round one, participants will be able to meet with the Mysterious Person again during rounds two and three. When one group is in the meeting, the other ones have the time to re-evaluate their questions and plan for the next steps. They should use all the time they have to ask their questions and find out as much as they can about the Mysterious Person and the problem he/she is facing.
5. After all the rounds are finished, give participants 5 minutes to put on a flipchart all they have learned from the Mysterious Person – and then present it to the other groups.

Suggestions for variety:

- Every team has their question type until the end;
- Every team gets to try all of the question types, one-by-one;
- Teams could be based on the type of information they can find out, for example, only find out facts / feelings / solutions.

The facilitator/s can help the participants to come up with the right questions in order to reach the goal. If necessary, give suggestions to help the participants navigate to the answer.

The actor's task – “Mysterious Person: Robinson Crusoe”

The actor's main task is replying to questions as if he or she is alone on an island (like Robinson Crusoe (book) or Tom Hanks in Cast Away (film)). The actor will be in another room, somehow hidden from the participants. Relying on the story from the book and the film, the actor

will answer questions from the teams. After the interview, the actor will come to the participants and tell his/her story. To help even more, the actor can dress up as the character.

Result

Participants know which type of questions produces which type of answers. They will understand the difference between open and closed questions, questions with intent, suggestive questions etc. The teams will see that the information and picture that you get is different depending on the types of questions we ask.



Debriefing (10 min)

The main part here is to analyse the work done so far, but especially in the last exercise.

Create a cosy atmosphere; if it is possible, sit down on cushions.

Structure:

- Have a warm up round about the exercise, using one word that describes participants' feelings now.
- Summarise each activity generally, using ideas from participants. Reflect on the agenda, what was important. Ask them about how is it all connected as one workshop; is there an overall connection?
- Remind the participants about the objectives of the workshop.
- Ask participants to say what they will take away from the workshop based on knowledge they now have.