

# A Socratic dialogue in 10 minutes

## Introduction

A Socratic dialogue is a conversation in which the participants discuss what their opinions are about their experiences, what reasons they have for it and what these reasons are worth. In discussing this, they listen to each other carefully and they investigate this open and thoroughly. A Socratic dialogue can start as soon as you have an experience where someone has something to say about. This happens almost every moment in life. In a 'formal' Socratic dialogue, you can start with a question that raises a story about such an experience. Some examples of questions :

- When silence is better than talking? – a moment where you stayed silent and you thought it better than talking
- Where does our client-friendliness ends? – a moment where you thought : this is enough
- When is it allowed to lie? – a moment where you told a lie

A good Socratic conversation is a conversation in which the participants:

1. dare to take position on the issue and formulate it (to assert)
2. can concretize their overall findings in demonstrable experiences (to concretize)
3. can deliver good arguments for their points of view (to argue)
4. repeat what they have said and what others have said (to listen)
5. investigate the truth of what is being said and argued about these points of view (to investigate)

A dialogue can last for a few days but you can also do it in a very short time. Here is an exercise that shows you how you can do it in 10 minutes

## Exercise : 'What is this?'

Duration : about 20 minutes overall, with a group of min. 4 max 12 people

Introduction :

1. The facilitator takes an object that looks a bit 'problematic', f.ex. a piece of art or an unrecognizable strange coffee cup.
2. He places the object in the middle of the group and gives the instruction :

"Try to find a common response to the question:" What is this?"

He gives the group about 10 minutes to do the job.

During the conversation: the facilitator

1. doesn't intervene (for beginners)
2. steers on the above items (for trained facilitators )
3. After 10 minutes, the facilitator asks every participant to formulate his or her answer to the question 'what is this'? He points to the literal differences in these statements. Some participants will protest and say for instance : "but if I say a cup, I mean the

same as a bucket.” But you register only the literal words. Having consensus on the answer means that everyone in the group for instance literally says ‘it is a cup’.

4. (for the trained facilitators) The facilitator invites everyone to write down for themselves what they have done or what another participant has done, from the perspective of the above five items.
5. In plenary, he examines why some participants did well on items and others didn't.

There are many variations possible, f.ex. with a external group sitting around a central investigation group with an observation task. After 7 minutes of investigation, the groups switch roles. In a plenary afterward, perspectives on the 5 Socratic competencies are exchanged.