

Socrates at the marketplace

An exercise in Socratic questioning



This exercise can be used as a philosophical introduction. It enables the participants to exercise the art of questioning in a safe one-on-one setting. But they also get to know each other in the mean time. And they experience what 'Socrates' must have done with his interlocutors.

Target group

The exercise is suitable for small and large groups and can be performed from the age of 10 but is more suitable for young people and adults than for children. It is useful if there is an even number of participants. If that is not the case, then you appoint someone as a "butterfly". He has the task of checking with each group whether everyone is following the instructions.

Objectives

Attitude

1. You have an attitude of not knowing. You are convinced that everything you know may not be true either. And you are willing to re-examine and re-examine all your acquired knowledge and your views and judgments.

2. You are interested in what someone else has to say. A more advanced form of showing interest is that you show respect for what someone says and how he says this. After all, what someone says and how he says that is different from what you think or expect. Another reveals himself in what he says to the group. The fact that this is "always new" and never meets what you had predicted or expected is a constant source of wonder.
3. You are flexible. You are open to question your own thoughts and behaviors. You make a distinction between the person and the thought or behavior. If someone does not agree with you, you do not see that as criticism of the person, only what he says. The flexibility also assumes that you are willing to be confronted with the possible inaccuracy of your own views or the weakness of your own arguments. And you are also willing to confront others with this.

Technique

1. You can formulate a thought as simply as possible
2. You can express yourself clearly (in full sentences)
3. You can express yourself concisely
4. You can distinguish between an idea, a point of view, an argument and an example
5. You can structure a line of thought
6. You can identify and name the assumptions in an argument
7. You can formulate second-order questions (questions about the meaning of a concept, with ambiguous answers such as "makes money happy?") And assess their suitability for a philosophical conversation
8. You hear whether a participant takes a ready-made position or not (yet)
9. You see whether a position is also an answer to the starting question
10. You can reproduce someone's reasoning in your head

Time and material requirements

The exercise lasts approximately one hour. The instructions and the start-up take about ten minutes. Then there are three rounds of 2X3 minutes with a little before and after discussion. All in all 3X 10 minutes. With a little discussion afterwards, you will soon be up to an hour.

Necessities are a notebook for each participant, something to write, space to move and a set of blank cards. Furthermore, a timer / smartphone and a bell.

Instructions

- a) You can initiate the exercise by telling something about Socrates: someone who bothered people in the market / in the public space with questions. His objective was to make them think about what they think is important. You can also tell something about the "midwife" idea. This exercise requires a similar attitude from the questioners.
- b) Each participant writes down a question. It must be a question that he or she would like an answer to at this point in his life or work. It is important that it is a "real" question, not a "for

the game" question. It may be a very practical question, e.g. "Do I have to buy a new car?" or a "bigger" question such as "Should I change my love?" That has no further importance.

- c) The facilitator gives a number of instructions to further improve this initial formulation of the question:
 - i. Make the question as short as possible
 - ii. Make sure that it is formulated openly: it must not contain a hidden answer (eg "don't you think young people are too much on their cell phone?")
 - iii. Formulate the question in such a way that someone who knows nothing about your life or work can still formulate a meaningful answer to this. In other words: formulate the question as generally as possible.
 - iv. Avoid the word "I" in the question and also the word "how".
- d) The facilitator asks the participants to write the question in legible words on an empty card (which they hand out).
- e) The instruction is then: "walk around the room and look for someone. Ask the other person the question that is now on your card. Then continue asking questions for three minutes with the aim of making the other person reflect about what he himself says. Try to use the other person's words in your question as much as possible. You can only ask short, open questions. No other intervention is allowed. Do not introduce a question such as "What I would like to ask is ...". You may also not paraphrase something before you ask a question.
- f) The facilitator does this to someone for a moment! He then has the role of monitoring time. After three minutes, a bell rings and the roles change. If there is no "butterfly" who will take a look at each pair, the supervisor will check whether everyone complies with the rules.
- g) After 2 times 3 minutes the first round is over. The facilitator gathers everyone and asks about experiences about the first time. Here you can - depending on what comes along - ask how the participants ask questions, the types of questions etc.
- h) The facilitator then asks to exchange the tickets. The participants leaves for the second round with the card he has just answered. He may still adjust or reformulate the question if he wishes.
- i) New couples are formed. The exercise repeats itself. The discussion afterwards is also the same.
- i) After the second round and after discussion, the participants exchange cards again and there is again the possibility to adjust the words, to make it more attractive, etc.
- j) In the final and third round, they look for a new partner again and get to know them briefly. Then again 2X a two-minute conversation of 3 minutes. Now, however, an instruction is added: After three minutes, the questioner must be able to retell the conversation partner's

answer to the question and the arguments that the conversation partner has for this in the narrator's words. The facilitator shows it first with a question that he reads from someone next to him and with a random participant. Here it is important that the facilitator shows the difference between a response to a question and an answer to a question. If the conversation partner does not answer the question, the discussion leader must repeat the question until there is an answer.

Example: "What is the added value of children in a family?" Answer: "Having children does indeed bring a lot of change to the family etc ...". Here we do not yet have an answer to the question. The person asking the question may therefore interrupt at the appropriate moment to request the answer and the arguments.

- k) After the first round, the facilitator checks out on a few couples whether they have done their job well. This can be discussed in plenary. Afterwards the roles change with the same exercise.
- l) After round three, everyone sits down again for a discussion. Some questions for the discussion:
 - i. Which question (s) did you remember and why?
 - ii. What do you think you learned in this exercise and where?
 - iii. What does this teach us about the importance of asking questions in daily life?