



Training program for the development of dialogical competence for entrepreneurs



Lifelong
Learning
Programme

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1. COACHING PROGRAMME

Dialogical learning and knowledge creation for entrepreneurs

Dialogical learning and knowledge creation consist of collaborative thinking and doing that are based on creating common understanding. When people learn and create knowledge through dialogue, their actions and behaviour display a dialogic attitude, a dialogic orientation, and the use of dialogic "tools". In addition, their goal is to create something new, to construct an overall view of the present situation. The way they relate to others is genuinely philanthropic and reciprocal. Dialogue is symmetrical, that is, the entrepreneurs spend an equal amount of time talking and listening to others. When they listen, they concentrate and pay careful attention. When necessary, participants suspend their own thinking and are prepared to listen to thinking that differs from their own, as well as to develop thinking further in collaboration with others. Learning and creating knowledge through dialogue becomes possible because the entrepreneurs share their thinking even when it is still under development, openly inquire from others about their thinking, continue from another person's speech in a focused manner, recognise the important expressions in the other entrepreneurs' speech and open them. Dialogue creates an overall view of a given topic, new understanding, which is born as a result of each participant's thinking. Participation in a dialogue involves certain duties and increases the entrepreneurs' responsibilities in various ways. This means that each participant must participate actively and commit themselves to the dialogue, which requires respect for others, caring for others, and reciprocity.

The coaching programme for dialogical learning and knowledge creation for entrepreneurs includes instructions for developing and improving dialogic competence. The coaching programme also includes a description of the steps and levels of developing dialogic competence for entrepreneurs. The coaching process proceeds along these levels one step at a time. The description of levels also represents a model of how to develop dialogical learning and knowledge creation. The main aim of coaching is to help entrepreneurs work in a dialogical manner in various environments.

2. STEPS

Steps, levels and methods of coaching

Dialogical method cards as a key to coaching

The coaching programme consists of methods and actions that pertain to dialogic competence, learning through dialogue and knowledge creation. The so-called dialogical method cards were created to assist in learning these methods and actions. Each method card includes a goal, instructions and questions for reflecting on the thinking caused by the use of the method. In addition, each method card mentions a dialogue scene included in the web service "Deep learning through dialogue". The scene can be used to deepen one's understanding of the dialogical method in question.

The development of dialogical learning and knowledge creation requires practise and a coach. A coach familiarises himself/herself with the dialogical methods, one at a time, so that he/she can start using the methods with the entrepreneurs. Every entrepreneur participates in the exercises where the methods are used. The coach is aware of the fact that he/she practises the method like everyone else. The awareness that every entrepreneur is under development creates a relaxed, positive atmosphere. Coaching and practising the methods is conscious work, during which one becomes aware of how to work in collaboration with others. This awareness means that one is able to observe, reflect on, evaluate and self-regulate one's actions and behaviour in a situation where one interacts with others. When the entrepreneurs gain experience of dialogue, they are inspired and encouraged to continue learning dialogical methods, always proceeding towards the next step and level.

During the coaching four levels, or steps, are used to practise the methods. The steps are called Beginning of coaching (step 1), The level of basic methods of dialogue (step 2), The level of moulding dialogic attitude (step 3) and The level of deepening the dialogic competence (step 4). However, dividing the coaching into levels and steps is only a recommendation for proceeding and can therefore be altered upon consideration. The development of dialogical learning and knowledge creation begins from a so-called beginning step where the entrepreneurs prepare themselves to participate in spontaneous dialogue and collaborative knowledge creation, to observe their actions and behaviour and to think in collaboration with others. In addition, this step is used to create an open atmosphere that helps entrepreneurs trust one another and think together. After this step, the basic methods of dialogue are practised. When one has gained a concrete grasp of the basic methods and can, to some extent, apply them when interacting with others in various dialogues and communities, it is easier to focus on the moulding of one's dialogic attitude. These are methods that help one to truly comprehend the attitude with which one relates to others. It is necessary to point out that the philanthropic and reciprocal nature of one's attitude is the very core and basis of the entire dialogic competence. After practising the basic dialogical methods and the moulding of their dialogic attitudes, the entrepreneurs reach the level of deepening dialogic competence. Gradually and as a result of goal-oriented and conscious practise, dialogic competence becomes a natural part of one's behaviour and actions. It becomes a way of life, a way of being.

2.1 Step 1

Beginning of coaching

The entrepreneurs prepare themselves for dialogic work and for developing their dialogic competence by creating a confidential atmosphere of interaction, by opening a door to conscious observation of their actions, by being more open when sharing their thinking and by opening themselves up for the thinking of others through the creation of common understanding. These actions can be advanced with the help of the dialogical method cards for warm-up (for more information, see www.hamk.fi/diale):

- Spontaneous participation (establishing trust)
- Cultural scripts (awareness of one's actions and behaviour)
- Giving presents (sharing and receiving thinking)
- Perspectives (creating common understanding, not necessarily consensus).

These warm-up methods help the entrepreneurs to get to know one another so that when the collaborative work begins, it can be built upon a foundation where the entrepreneurs trust one another and take one another into consideration.

2.2 Step 2

The level of basic methods of dialogue

The basic methods of dialogue make collaborative thinking and work real on a certain level. In practise this means that every participant participates in the dialogue, everyone's perspective is listened to, it begins to be possible to give birth to new perspectives, and answers to questions are found through inquiry. The actions included in the basic methods are the following: taking and giving a turn, word-for-word reception, listening, awareness of one's preconceptions and assumptions, suspending and regulating the expression of one's preconceptions and assumptions, sharing incomplete thinking, inquiry and weaving a synthesis. The following method cards correspond to these dialogical actions (for more information, see www.hamk.fi/diale):

- Dialogue tickets
- Word-for-word listening
- Imprisoned by preconceptions
- Suspend and wonder
- Let ideas bud and flourish
- The art of inquiry – the power of questions
- Let's weave a synthesis

When the basic methods have been sufficiently practised, the entrepreneurs feel that they have gained an understanding of dialogue and what it means in practise. This is an ideal time to proceed to the next level of the coaching programme and begin the moulding of dialogic attitude.

2.3 Step 3

The level of moulding dialogic attitude

The entire nature of dialogue is based on the dialogic attitude which is continuously moulded by each participant. The actions that display dialogic attitude are the following: symmetric participation, active participation, reciprocal activities and trust, respect for self and others, and open, sincere expression. These dialogic actions can be practised with the help of the following method cards (for more information, see www.hamk.fi/diale):

- Symmetrically
- As equals
- Monitoring my body language
- Without ulterior motives
- Reciprocally

When the entrepreneurs have gained sufficient proficiency in the basic methods and dialogic attitude, they ought to be able to engage in dialogue as well as in collaborative learning and knowledge creation without problems. However, one's dialogic competence can still be deepened further by moving on to the next step. When we proceed to this level, namely the level of the methods that deepen the dialogic competence, creating new understanding and producing creative solutions become more and more likely.

2.4 Step 4

The level of deepening the dialogic competence

The methods that deepen the dialogic competence make collaborative thinking more focussed, help entrepreneurs pay attention to what others say at any given moment, and help to utilise budding ideas beneath the surface and to steer thinking to new directions. The actions that deepen the dialogic competence are the following: stopping and concentrating, staying in another's speech, compact expression, word-for-word continuation from the previous utterance, recognising key expressions, opening key expressions, revealing gaps in thinking and actions, and opening new paths for dialogue. These dialogical actions correspond to the following method cards (for more information, see www.hamk.fi/diale):

- I am present here and now
- Stay a little while
- Reformulate and tidy up
- Make chains
- Catching hot words
- Delve deeper
- Weave a synthesis pearl
- Find the missing pieces
- Ground-breaking inquiries

Mastering the methods that deepen one's dialogic competence requires sufficient knowledge of dialogic attitude and the basic methods of dialogue. Proficiency in the methods that deepen one's dialogic competence makes learning and knowledge creation imaginative and helps to utilise the unique thinking of the individuals of the community.

3. REALISATION

Realisation of coaching

A coach familiarises himself/herself thoroughly with the dialogical methods and the corresponding method cards and plans coaching either by himself/herself or together with the group. Coaching can take the form of training, work shops, dialogue cafés, tutoring and peer guidance in entrepreneurship environments. The coaching begins with the members of the community jointly surveying their current dialogical actions and making their development needs transparent. Coaching helps the entrepreneurs to create a concrete and practical overall view of dialogic learning and knowledge creation. Dialogic competence is constructed piece by piece through practise that takes place with the help of the dialogic method cards, either individually or in a group.

Questions about coaching

When the coaching programme for dialogical learning is carried out, it is important to take the following issues into consideration:

- what is being practised (steps and levels of dialogic competence)
- why does practise take place (to make dialogical learning and knowledge creation truly happen among entrepreneurs; to achieve better results)
- how does practise take place (systematic work that proceeds step by step or work with the help of the method cards that takes place only once or infrequently; new forms of dialogic collaboration are achieved when the various actions described in the method cards are combined)
- when does practise take place (upon the beginning and continuation of collaboration in an entrepreneurship environment, team or work group, during each time when a temporary group meets; conscious and systematic practise and work with the help of the method cards can be discontinued when the entrepreneurs learn and create knowledge dialogically without problems)
- where does practise take place (in the entrepreneurship environment while small/larger groups work, in situations where teams and work groups collaborate, during meetings, in general in various communities where people interact either face to face or online)

4. POSSIBILITIES

Possibilities of coaching in entrepreneurs environments

Entrepreneurship context

When dialogic competence is systematically practised in entrepreneurs environments, the development needs of their activities are revealed. When the coaching has started and everyone has become involved in the development of dialogic competence, people can discuss weaknesses and give feedback openly. Dialogic work during learning processes ought to be

continuously strengthened. Depending upon the situation, more time is given to the work with each method card. The results in the group are observed. A certain amount of time, for example, a day / a week / a month is used to gain proficiency in a certain dialogical action. When the entrepreneurs gain proficiency in this action, another method card is chosen and used as a basis of work for another day/week/month. After this, the entrepreneurs focus on yet another action. As the practise on a daily/weekly/monthly basis continues, previously learned methods are combined. The methods can be applied to learning and knowledge creation in various ways. One example are the methods "Let ideas bud and flourish" and "The art of inquiry" which can be used, for instance, in solving financial problems. Mastering even a single dialogic method already advances collaborative thinking and work and produces something new and unexpected.

Meetings and conferences

During various meetings and conferences, the dialogical method cards enable the entrepreneurs to behave and act in new ways. With the help of the method cards, the entrepreneurs are guided towards acting and talking to one another in a dialogical manner. They can be, for example, guided to employ symmetry, to make undeveloped thinking visible, to ask open questions and inquire more about the thinking of others; they can be asked to use compact expressions, and be guided to become aware of their preconceptions and to suspend them when necessary. The entrepreneurs learn to work in the aforementioned ways so that the dialogical actions that define their work clearly change the work culture and the products of collaborative thinking.

Learning games in entrepreneurship environments

Coaching can also be based on a learning game. When this idea is used, the dialogical method cards function like playing cards. Each card represents a certain dialogical action. Each entrepreneur picks a card which will then be the basis of their work for a certain amount of time. Their task is to work in the situations of collaboration as determined by their card. When a certain amount of time has passed, the cards are circulated, the entrepreneurs pick a new card and start working as determined by this card. When a participant has picked a certain card, they engage in dialogue emphasising the behaviour and actions described in that card; for example, they ask open questions, take and give turns, listen in a word-for-word manner, make chains, share their undeveloped thinking, suspend their preconceptions or begin to build a new perspective through positive wondering. The recipients of each card could also work as guardians of a certain dialogical action during learning and knowledge creation processes. This means that by giving feedback and instructions, they ensure that the dialogical action defined by their card is prevalent in the dialogue and collaborative work.

Creating a dialogical learning process

A dialogical learning process is created together with the entrepreneurs with the help of unbiased open questions; the themes of learning are chosen together, the contents of these themes are defined together, the inquiring open questions related to each theme are formulated together, and the questions are reformulated together into learning tasks which are then organised into a process where various environments are utilised. The themes that



are chosen for the focus of collaborative work are important from the perspective of the learning goals.