



Stakeholder Dialogue Interviews: In today's world, we need to work collaboratively with a diverse array of stakeholders with different agendas and drivers. Through stakeholder dialogue meetings - as either one-on-one stakeholder interviews or group discussions - we can encourage a healthy collaborative relationship to form by exploring any concerns and potential for synergies in a relaxed, conversational way.

This meeting is an opportunity for trust to develop while any initial apprehensions or tensions can be eased through listening, empathy and receptive sharing. It is important that we enter such an initial meeting with an open state of mind - a learning attitude rather than a fixed agenda or specific outcome in mind.

So, in preparing for the meeting, we try not to load ourselves up with lots of questions (as useful as this may seem) as lots of questions may make others defensive or suspicious. Rather, we have some main areas sketched out that we would like to explore. The most important thing is to spend adequate time just before the interview cultivating stillness within us so that we are in a receptive, open state of mind for the meeting. According to stakeholder dialogue specialist Joseph Jaworski, up to an hour of meditation prior to the meeting is highly recommended, within which we let go of any pre-defined goals or desired outcomes and simply relax so that we are present, conscious and receptive for what will emerge in the meeting. Then we undertake the meeting in an open and flowing way, following the natural flow of where the conversation takes us, letting go of preconceived outcomes or objectives and instead creating a good foundation for future dialogue and collaboration. Let's take a moment here to explore qualities that can enhance this heartfelt dialogue.

Dialogue recognizes the importance of conversation as a listening, feeling, learning, sharing dynamic. The famous quantum physicist David Bohm in his later years became passionate about the benefits of Dialogue as a way to enhance the richness of human communication, and he formulated an approach to Dialogue which has since been adapted and enhanced by several practitioners.

Based on their extensive experience of working with Dialogue, Chris Laszlo and Judy Sorum Brown, in their book *Flourishing Enterprise*, provide some guidance:

- Begin with a powerful question, for instance, 'What draws you toward the goal of becoming a regenerative business?'
- Shift from knowing to wondering, it is OK to be uncertain, to question and explore as this opens up exploratory ground, rather than holding-on to preconceived definitive perspectives;
- Shift from statements to thought-provoking questions that draws out interest in the other;
- Shift from certainty to curiosity, develop a genuinely curious interest about the topic and what is emerging, letting go of any pre-conceived notions about what is right or not;
- Speak only for ourselves and about our own experience, from a grounded heartfelt presence of where we are right now;



- Resist the temptation to get sucked into to-and-fro 'tennis match' debates, exploratory questions can help dissolve a debate;
- Listen (inside and out) with intense curiosity while suspending our assumptions, giving up the ego-need to hear ourselves speaking or hear someone agreeing with what we have said, and notice any internal tensions forming in ourselves without allowing them to disrupt our dialogue;
- Allow for silence, silence can be productive and generative while allowing us to take in what has been said and let-go of urges to react;
- Listen generously and deeply;
- Seek and welcome difference without getting sucked into debate, as difference sharpens our collective exploration and learning;
- Speak with a fresh voice, resist saying what we might normally respond with, remaining silent if need be until we have something genuine to offer, and do not interrupt others;
- Bring 100% of ourselves with complete attention and presence, letting go of distractions and frustrations.