

Sample Protocol for Pre-Meeting Conversations with Participants

Introduction

1. Confidentiality. Tell how what is said on this phone call will be used (For purposes of getting to know the people, the issues, the special contextual stresses, to gain guidance in planning, to gain understanding of what conditions are most likely to produce a successful outcome, and so on) Offer tight confidentiality agreement, and say you will revisit this agreement at end of call. Mention "pass" agreement ("Please just say pass if I ask you anything you do not feel ready to answer or that you simply don't want to answer. All aspects of your participation in this call and in any subsequent meetings are entirely voluntary.") Ask that she or he use the "pass agreement" during the phone interview with regard to interviewer questions.
2. Questions of Clarification about the dialogue as outlined in the invitation.
 - a. What questions, if any do you have about the goals of the meeting(s)?
 - b. What, if any, questions do you have about PCP, about facilitator's roles?

Background

1. What would be helpful for us to know about your current life circumstances, your relationship to the Organization and the topic of the dialogue? Anything else?
2. How were you involved in prior debates and struggles on these issues? How were you personally affected by what happened? What happened that you see as constructive and believe should be continued? What happened that you saw as destructive and to be avoided? In this process, what have you learned about the issues, about the process, about yourself and the others?

Examples of constructive conversations

1. Have you experienced, or do you know about, conversations about X within your organization—at any level—that have been especially constructive? What do you think made this possible?
2. How, if at all, have you been personally or professionally affected by the way differences about X and XY have been discussed?
3. Have you ever felt stereotyped or dismissed by those who differ from you on these issues? If so, how? When? What was the effect on you? Other effects?

Hopes and concerns

1. What could happen during the meeting that would lead you to feel that your decision to participate was worthwhile?
2. What could happen following this meeting that could lead you to be glad you had been part of the group? What "ripple effects" would you hope these conversations might set in motion?
3. What could happen or fail to happen during the dialogue that would lead you to regret you had agreed to participate?
4. What could happen or not happen following the meeting that would lead you to feel that your participation had not been worthwhile? What "ripple effects" do you worry might come out of the conversation?
5. Are there other concerns, mixed feelings, or fears you will bring with you that it would be useful for us to be aware of?
6. Is there anything about your ongoing relationship with any of the other participants that might constrain your speaking candidly? If so, how might we be helpful? [Supply names as needed]
7. What do you most want us, as meeting planners and facilitators, to keep in mind?

8. What are your thoughts about the scope of the conversation? For example, some of those we have spoken to think that a tight focus on X is desirable if the group is to reach any tangible outcome; others think that a broader consideration of XY would include important issues that might otherwise be left out.
9. What needs to be discussed at this meeting? If the group could only consider two or three questions or issues, which ones do you think would be most likely to further the goals of the dialogue?

Dialogue process

1. We will be inclined to ask all the participants to agree to observe some communication agreements during the retreat? Do you have some suggestions about what they should include?
2. What do you think the participants in this dialogue are likely to share? How could what is shared become a resource for addressing your differences?
3. What are the implications of prior efforts to discuss X and XY for the communication agreements participants in the meeting might make about how they work together?

Map

1. We have a pretty good map of conflicts related to X in the US. What do you perceive to be the major sources of strain across the international organization? How are these strains related to more general strains in the world and to the different cultural contexts of different branches in particular?
2. What are the major issues and battle lines? Are there "sides? How many? What voices are devalued or silenced?
3. What does the usual conversation about the conflict focus on? What topics, questions, and/or information are generally avoided or excluded?
4. Are there certain code words or "hot buttons" it would be useful for us to be aware of?
5. What should we be especially careful about in setting up these meetings?

Closing

1. Do you have other thoughts about the meeting or your participation in it? Is there anything we haven't inquired about that we should; anything that you hoped we'd ask that we haven't?
2. Now that you know what you have said in this conversation do you want to change the confidentiality agreement we made at the beginning in any way?
3. Do you have any other questions you want to ask me?
4. Are you aware of other attempts to accomplish goals similar to those of this dialogue in this organization, in relation to other issues? What happened? How do you understand this outcome? In your mind what went right, what went wrong? Can you bring materials about this with you?