



Iryna Eihelson
Maksym Ieligulashvili

**DIALOGUE ACROSS
THE CONTACT LINE:
EXPERIENCE EXCHANGE,
PROBLEM SOLVING,
RELATIONSHIPS
BUILDING**



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This handbook discusses dialogue as an approach and a tool for peacebuilding practitioners who will facilitate or organize dialogue processes for the needs of conflict resolution and transformation in society, or for the purpose of increasing social cohesion and implementing social change.

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Authors:

Iryna Eihelson, PhD in Psychology, conflict studies researcher and practitioner, dialogue facilitator

Maksym Ieligulashvili, conflict studies researcher and practitioner, dialogue facilitator

General project management:

Natalia Proskurenko – project coordinator of the CF «Right to Protection»

Maksym Afanasyev – handbook design:

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WHAT A DIALOGUE IS AND WHAT ITS FOUNDATIONS ARE

Since the very beginning of the armed conflict, namely since February 2014, the word “dialogue” has been used many times by virtually all parties to this conflict and those affected by it. And as practice shows, each of the participants put something of their own in this definition and, accordingly, in expectations from this process. Sometimes it was the level of understanding the dialogue as an ordinary conversation between two or several people, sometimes as a political process that had to cover the whole nation or country.

Unfortunately, this practice of vagueness in terms led to misunderstandings or became a means of deliberately diluting the meaning and even discrediting the concept. Some experts even started saying that this topic/activity has actually been “hacked” and it could no longer fully serve peace-building processes.

That is why, in this manual, we decided to rely on the definition, the development of which lasted quite a long time and involved dialogue practitioners who have been working in the field of the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict from the very beginning. So, after long and intense discussions, experts and dialogue practitioners formulated the following definition:

1

DIALOGUE STANDARDS: DEFINITIONS AND PRINCIPLES

[Source](#)

http://ipcg.org.ua/upload/resursi/IMIP-dialogue--Standards-24_03_18.pdf

*it is a **specialy prepared** group process that takes place **with the help of a leader – a host** – and aims **to improve understanding/relations between participants**, and can also be aimed at making decisions about joint actions or conflict resolution in a way that **involves equal opportunity for the meeting participants to express their own thoughts**¹.*

2

Analytical report based on research results DIALOGUES AT THE LEVEL OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN UKRAINE: MAIN TRENDS AND RISKS

[Source](#)

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3167685

It is a kind of checklist that should help both the facilitator and the organizer to ensure quality preparation and conduct of this process. It is also important to note that in this text, as already mentioned, we introduce you to several types of dialogue practices. This is not a classification commonly used by the research community, but rather a manifestation of our focus in the development of the design of the process itself. In addition, this distribution is based on several studies of dialogue practices that took place in Ukraine during 2014–2022.² The manual is based on two practices of long-term dialogue

processes dedicated to overcoming the consequences of the armed conflict in the east of Ukraine. On the one hand, it is an almost three-year process that focused mostly on discussing and clarifying “existential”, value-based themes and rifts in human relations caused by the war. On the other hand, it is a subject-oriented discussion by experts of a wide range of environmental problems that arose in the region as a result of the armed conflict on both sides of the contact line that existed until February 24, 2022.

Given that the manual was created from the perspective of dialogue practice, we will try to maintain the core character of the presentation by taking a comprehensive approach to the structure and design of this process, while adding practical advice or our experience with regard to these two types of dialogue processes into the basic components of the dialogue structure.

Coming back to the idea of a kind of checklist based on the given definition, let's try to break it down into its components.

The first and most important caveat is that dialogue can occur spontaneously, but within peacebuilding activities it is a process that **is specifically and carefully prepared**. By carefully studying all the stages indicated in the corresponding section of this manual, you will see a great many various steps that ensure precisely the dialogic nature of the communication process. Accordingly, there are goals, visions of potential participants, general design components and content options for the meeting or meetings, inter-dialogue activity or other reinforcing/additional actions.

The dialogue format involves a **group process**, so, accordingly, we have to work with different participants who also have different views and assessments of the situation and the subject of the dialogue itself, as well as represent different groups that are interested in the topic of discussion. There are different approaches: from working with small groups to conducting forums of sorts for tens/hundreds of people. Everything depends on the goals and capabilities of the organizers and their ideas about the “theory of change” that should happen as a result of the dialogue. The number of facilitators is determined according to the number of participants. Regardless of the topic or the number of participants, we have established a kind of dialogue arithmetic, which facilitates the planning of the process regarding the number of people involved. That is, 2 facilitators can usually effectively support a discussion process for a group of 12–20 people. For more, you need to scale up the process accordingly and increase the team size.

Conducting the process involves not only its preparation, but also **the establishment of constructive interaction between the participants**, thereby ensuring the realization of the goals of the meeting/process in general, as defined by the organizers and participants. This is necessary in order to make the discussion of complex topics which are sometimes painful for the participants as effective and safe as possible. Accordingly, the facilitator(s) is a person or several people who have professional and expert knowledge and experience in both the development and implementation of processes of this type.

The goal of dialogue is a multi-layered concept, and even where a task regarding a specific topic or potential solution is formally absent, it is actually still present. First of all, it is aimed at improving **understanding and relations between the participants**, expanding their vision of various aspects of the conflict. This includes getting them to be aware of different perspectives on the issue being discussed, the situation, or the participants in the dialogue, because they are the basis of a sincere and deep conversation and discussion. This is the goal that the involved facilitators set and support from the beginning. Everything else depends on the vision of the organizers and the group itself. After all, even super-professional facilitation will not be able to support a high-quality discussion in the absence of the desire and the necessary expert experience in the topic among the participants themselves. We will deal with the specifics of goal formulation and approaches to it in the relevant section below.


It is impossible to ensure a dialogue process under conditions of a rigid hierarchy and dependence of participants on each other or similar relations between participants and organizers or facilitators of the process. To build a truly safe and stimulating space for a sincere exchange of ideas, it is extremely important to ensure the equality of participants during the process itself. This can only be achieved when everyone has an **equal opportunity to express their opinions**, regardless of position, sex or social status. Sometimes the existing imbalance is difficult to overcome within the meetings. Therefore, at the preparatory stage, it is important to take into account and try to include additional support measures or envisage training sessions that would form a common field of knowledge, “level up” the situation with the participants’ understanding of certain processes.

So, after we have determined the key components that support the dialogue process, it is worth paying attention not only to what should be, but also to how it will be ensured.

PRINCIPLES AND RULES: OVERLAPS AND DIFFERENCES

BActing as facilitators of dialogues in different contexts – those focused on solving problems/conflicts and those that work more on value-oriented issues – we always clearly demarcate principles and rules. After all, it is they that give us the tools to help establish constructive and effective communication. At the same time, it is important to understand the key difference between them. This difference is based on several aspects.

Firstly, on the nature of these phenomena. Principles are inherently broader, they provide certain basic, in-depth guidelines, while specific rules are instead a form of implementation of these principles in a specific situation with specific people.



The themes of war, one's own experience or the experience of loved ones being in it, create a very tense and complex space, which first of all requires very careful work with trust and relationships between the participants. Simply defining and recording the principles will not be a panacea if they are simply announced and even formally agreed upon. Under the influence of certain circumstances, people will violate the principles – sometimes unconsciously, and sometimes demonstratively. Accordingly, working with them and thinking about how to bring people back to certain fundamental aspects of organizing the process will be your constant task as facilitators. We reminded them of almost everything, sometimes we held special sessions on what works and what doesn't, what principles are difficult in practice, etc. It is a living and adaptive mechanism that should respond to the general dynamics of the group and the specifics of the behavior of its members. Over time, the participants take ownership of these principles and try to adhere to them, not because otherwise a "penalty" may come, but because they feel how much the principles of dialogue help to build sincere and safe communication.

Secondly, on the variability of their nature. The rules get adapted to the situation. For example, the principle of "respecting each other" can refer to the rule of speaking in turn, which can manifest as a raised hand, a certain object held by the person speaking, a certain word that the participant says when they have finished, etc. Respect can also be expressed by finding neutral words to describe a certain situation that is painful and difficult for the participants, and then using these terms in the process. In both cases, we are dealing with respect and a desire to treat each other with care. The principle is the same, but the rules we agree on can be quite different.

Thirdly, on the aspects of responsibility and "punishment". The rules are oriented towards an external authority, a person or a structure that knows how to do it right and can decide it for the participants, even if these rules are formally agreed with the group. The principles, meanwhile, determine the basic things, approaches to the organization of work, which must be supplemented with certain regulatory points by working together with the group. The rules effectively remove responsibility, while the principles require one to take the process and result into one's own hands, to participate in its creation. The principles provide choice and space in developing approaches to interaction and organization of work, while the rules create boundaries and provide penalties for non-compliance. So, in this manual, we will focus precisely on the principles. Depending on your process, its participants and approaches to design, you can adapt them, add something of your own, think of external forms/rules for participants to follow these principles.



Voluntary participation of all process participants. It is the personal desire, sincere interest of the participants in the topic that is the engine of real participation (as opposed to simulated one). And therefore, the responsibility of all participants (organizers, facilitators and participants) for themselves and the process in general is built on it. This decision is made independently and preferably consciously, based on an understanding of the specifics of the dialogue process itself, its goals, tasks and format. Consent becomes a certain basis, a guarantee that the participants will take responsibility for achieving the goal of the dialogue and ensuring that their participation will be motivated, sincere and honest.

Remember that this principle also means stopping participation in the dialogue for very different reasons. But still, you have to try to build a space where participants have the resources to stay in the dialogue even when it gets difficult. The ability of the participants not to retreat into themselves, even in situations when they hear painful things, will depend on adequate formats of conducting the process, topics and tools of effective communication. Dialogue is built on opportunities to honestly and safely communicate your feelings, reactions and triggers.

One of the biggest challenges for the organizer and facilitator is understanding what the participants are involved in during the group gathering phase. People who participate in dialogue formats that deal with existential topics for the first time are not always fully aware of the process they are joining even after receiving text materials and personal communication with facilitators. Accordingly, the task of the organizers and facilitators consists in very careful and repeated efforts to clarify the goals and tasks, reconciling the demands of the participants, demonstrating the general design and formats for the formation of a truly informed consent.



Confidentiality of the process – starting with the preparatory stage, interviews which are conducted with future participants, the meetings themselves and their results are the “property” of the dialogue group. This is the basis of the personal and organizational safety of all participants in the dialogue, where people are on different sides of the front or the conflict rift. Accordingly, the basic start is based on complete confidentiality and secrecy of the process. But in the future, with the appearance of certain developments and trust, the participants can determine what exactly they would like to make public. The task of the facilitators is to support such discussion and group decision-making regarding certain conditions of confidentiality of the dialogue process.

This is again about visualizing the difference between rules and principles. If during the first meeting the participants insisted on complete secrecy, then at a certain moment, in order to share the thoughts and ideas that occurred to them during the sessions, a “train compartment” rule was proposed, stating that a post on social media should contain a reference not to a specific dialogue process and its participant, but to a fictional chance meeting and conversation on the train, which led to certain ideas, discoveries or thoughts. In the process, the

participants became more and more open and grew ready to join both public events and work on official documents. But this was always preceded by a discussion and a decision about how we were to work with this principle.



Equal opportunities for expression that emerge through the construction of a safe space for discussion. It is important to build it so that everyone has the opportunity to explain their own views, to clarify the opinion or reaction of another with a question. This applies to both verbal and non-verbal communication. Facilitators should also choose formats and questions in such a way that participants do not feel pressured to speak. “Someone has to speak. Make sure everyone has a chance to speak. But this does not mean that everyone is obliged to speak out.”³

3

**ПАРТИЦИПАТИВНІ
ПРОЦЕСИ: ПЛАНУВАННЯ,
ФАСИЛІТАЦІЯ І МОДЕРАЦІЯ
ЗАХОДІВ**

[Джерело](#)

// https://pauci.org/upload/files/GUIDELINE_2_PS.pdf

The creation of such an atmosphere is ensured by the selected format and topics for discussion, the work of facilitators both during sessions and during breaks. In addition, it is important to remember and help participants develop forms of interaction that are understandable for others and safe for them. Therefore, during the sessions, we built a space where communication was based on the aspects listed below.

- Minimize assumptions when listening. After all, our ideas and assessment of what was the cause of a certain decision or motivated it do not always reflect reality. Motives, emotions, the context of the events that the interlocutor talks about are accessible. In order not to waste time on assumptions, we suggested that people clarify the necessary things by asking questions.
- When delivering a story or taking part in a discussion, draw on your own experience where you can definitely act as an expert. Base your opinion on your own beliefs and available life experience. After all, the only person on whose behalf you can confidently speak is yourself.
- Try to adjust your own listening so that its goal is not agreement/disagreement, but understanding. Understanding the situation, a specific person, oneself.
- Leave space to make a pause, don't be afraid of it. After all, it provides time and resource for thinking, accumulating resources in order to go deeper, to understand a situation or a person more clearly.
- Work/apply clarifying questions that add context and understanding, help you to more fully explore a certain topic or situation, to understand more deeply what you have heard. When facilitating and participating in group discussions, it is important to avoid certain leading questions that are primarily aimed at demonstrating or reinforcing your views or positions.



Focus on understanding, not evaluation. Yes, the topic of the dialogue can be quite practical, clearly measurable. But if there is a need to apply this tool, one has to deal with a clearly more complex situation than simply dividing a certain amount of profits or making a decision. Accordingly, we find ourselves in a situation where the parties no longer have the necessary resources and ability to make a certain decision or to discuss the problem independently with the other party. With the help of various tools and forms of work, facilitators work on expanding the very understanding of the situation and each other's motives and improve relations between participants, which accordingly transforms their behavior. During the dialogue, it is critical to first of all reach an understanding of the other person, and not to evaluate them – whether they are good or bad, right or wrong, an expert enough, etc. In fact, the main goal of the dialogue is not to convince others of one being right by imposing one's own views and approaches, but to try to create a space where it is possible to reevaluate certain opinions (visions) through a new understanding of the situation and other participants. It is based on this that participants regain their ability to seek the most acceptable solutions to satisfy the interests of all participants.



Inclusiveness of dialogue. How can bringing together people with similar assessments and experience provide a broader understanding of the situation? Can we determine the right approach to tackling complex environmental problems by measuring only one thing or by involving only a specific group that is linked to or works with the topic? It is from the diversity of voices, selected tools and discussion formats that a space is born, in which it is then possible to sincerely and comprehensively approach work on a difficult or painful issue, and ultimately the opportunity emerges to find new, innovative solutions. Therefore, it is extremely important to involve participants with various experiences and from different demographics, in particular the vulnerable, or those who traditionally fall into the so-called “invisible groups”. We will talk about the features of the selection and recruiting process, the formation of the dialogue group in a separate section.

Inclusiveness is not just about participants. This includes experience, characteristics of facilitators and organizers and selection of topics and tools. This includes the availability and comfortableness of the premises, well-thought-out logistics, taking into account the peculiarities of diet. It is critically important not to reduce it to the mechanical provision of a 50/50 group composition. Based on the goal and topic of the dialogue, you determine the specifics of the composition and design of the process.




Aiming for the balance in the process. Equality, voluntariness, inclusiveness is all means of building a safe space where difficult topics can be honestly discussed. Our status in life and experience, available opportunities and resources, different levels or numbers of representation create traps of imbalance that can significantly affect the course of the process. After all, those who begin to feel their “relative” insecurity or weakness will most likely distance themselves from participation or, on the contrary, will begin to act firmly due

to resistance to the group or the facilitator, because they begin to perceive the process as coercion and manipulation to promote a decision that someone else needs. Therefore, the implementation of this principle in practice will require additional efforts from the facilitators both at the stage of preparation and during the entire process.

This imbalance occurs even when participants in the dialogue have formally equal status, for example as representatives of different non-government organizations or support processes. It can be open and related to experience, resources or generally available opportunities. For instance, during one of the processes, despite the formal equality of representation of the participants, we began to trace the essential difference that the war brought to Ukraine. Residents of controlled and non-controlled territories found themselves in radically different living conditions for 8 years. Accordingly, some of them joined the processes of reforming the country, got access to new social elevators, while others got into a situation of narrowing their own influence on changes to the limits of their own family. All this significantly influenced the level of awareness of one's own actor character and the available tools of influence. This required the facilitators and organizers to select appropriate tools and formats of work, additional means of supporting the participants.



Roles and responsibilities of dialogue **organizers and facilitators**. Let's try to figure out the roles. So, dialogue organizers are persons (organizations) who do not directly conduct dialogue meetings, but can be initiators of the dialogue process. It is they who provide the logistics and conditions for the dialogue. They may also have specific goals and agendas of their own that they would like to pursue through the dialogue. But they should be clear and open for both the facilitator and the participants. A facilitator is a professional who ensures successful group communication across dividing lines. During the process, they help with adherence to the principles of the process, the achievement of the goals and objectives of the meeting or dialogue as a whole, are responsible for the design and work formats that allow the session participants to concentrate on its goal and content. In addition, the facilitator works to build trust and create a safe space for sincere and deep conversation. Accordingly, the focus of their agenda is primarily the group, environment-friendly and efficient approaches to work that would help move towards the group goal. Effective communication, coordinated interaction between organizers and facilitators becomes part of the contribution to a high-quality dialogue and the achievement of its goals, because inadequate support or tedious logistics can nullify even a very powerful process design. On the other hand, excellent living conditions may not add benefits due to a frankly unprofessional approach to building/managing the process or formats that are inadequate for the dialogue.



Given that all participants in the processes we describe have witnessed or been affected by war, it is critical that the organizing and facilitating team consider their own position. It is necessary to consciously and responsibly approach its analysis and determine one's own attitude to the issues/subject of discussion in the dialogue; to analyze personal readiness to work with positions that contradict one's own without influencing them; the ability to prepare and conduct this very process, following the principles outlined in this manual. We will talk in the block on the neutrality of the facilitator about approaches and models that can help with finding one's own position and answers to questions about the acceptability of one's own participation in the dialogue.

As we noted, the principles are definitely certain guidelines, guideposts in the process of developing and implementing the dialogue process. They can be adapted and supplemented, changed and embodied in specific group rules and actions, even rituals. But it is important to understand that in the conditions of working with people who are physically located in different territories divided by an armed conflict, the key reference point is the group, its resources and capacity, the readiness and willingness of the facilitators to lend space precisely for it. For instance, during the first meeting, the group formulated an additional principle – caring for each other. And despite the difficulties, challenges and real pain from questions or discussions, the group tried and oriented itself on this principle again and again, appreciating these mutual attempts to search for and renew meaning.

PECULIAR NATURE OF DIALOGUE PROCESSES AND MAKING A DECISION ON THEIR ADVISABILITY

We have already mentioned that we took as a basis the experience of several long-term dialogue processes implemented by the Right to Protection CF in Ukraine, starting in 2018.

- Value-oriented dialogue of representatives of civil society on both sides of the contact line in Ukraine.
- Group of expert dialogues on reducing the risk of ecological disaster in the east of Ukraine.

Taking into account the specifics of dialogue processes and the already existing proposals for dividing them into “value-oriented” (aimed at a deeper understanding of the person and the conflict situation on different sides of the contact line) and “expert” (aimed at overcoming a certain problem that has worsened due to the conflict), we tried to show a certain difference in their preparation and conduct.

VALUE-ORIENTED	EXPERT
Goal	
<p>The goal of the facilitated process may be left undefined at the beginning and may change during the meeting if new visions on the topic emerge or new developments occur within the conflict dynamics. In addition, it significantly depends on the demand and the capacity of the group. For instance, during these years, it evolved under the influence of time and building trust in the group from simply trying/testing the possibility of a dialogue process of this type to scaling up the gained experience to the general population (in the format of public events), discussing the vision of the future transitional justice, etc.</p>	<p>The goal is determined by the boundaries of the project and adjusted by the group, but without significant change or transformation.</p> <p>In our case, it was the issue of environmental challenges and problems that arose in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as a result of the armed conflict, the consequences of the war for the region’s environment and threats to the health of citizens.</p>



VALUE-ORIENTED	EXPERT
Participants	
<p>Represented by their personalities, personal and professional experience. At the request of the participants, additional expertise may be involved at a certain stage, but this is not a mandatory component of the dialogue process.</p> <p>The selection of participants is focused on achieving a cross-section of society and the diversity of the experience of war and its consequences for people. Gender-age balance is important</p> <p>Selection involves interviews to help identify important and possible topics and safety issues for participants.</p> <p>In the process which became the basis for the description, the target audience was determined to be representatives of civil society who provided various services to the victims, and people of care professions from the controlled/non-controlled territory of Ukraine.</p>	<p>Represented by their expert position, professional knowledge and experience. Expertise in the main dialogue issue is the basis of the process and is mandatory.</p> <p>The selection of participants is focused on achieving a cross-section of expert experience in the topic (for example, environmental issues of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the consequences of the war for the region’s environment and threats to the health of citizens.).</p> <p>Selection involves interviews with participants regarding their professional activities, professional experience, analysis of CVs and previous work, recommendations of the expert community</p> <p>The participation of experts was anonymous, since the circle of such experts is quite narrow, so there is a significant possibility of their exposure and related safety issues, primarily for participants from the uncontrolled territory</p>
Content	
<p>Participants are offered thematic content depending on which topics they consider most significant at a specific stage, a specific dialogue meeting. At the same time, these are topics that the participants are ready to talk about from the point of view of their physical and psychological safety.</p> <p>The focus is on the process and personal transformations based on building interpersonal and group trust.</p> <p>Along with the building of relationships and trust between participants, there was an increasing demand for activities that would allow the group’s experiences to be relayed/scaled up outward, which became both a separate topic and an activity during sessions and between meetings. Inter-dialogue activity also appeared, which made it possible to maintain contact between participants during the pandemic, which made holding face-to-face meetings impossible</p>	<p>Thematic content is created within the framework of thematic expertise, for example in the field of ecology. Topics for discussion during further dialogue sessions are suggested by the moderators</p> <p>The focus is on the result, on the development of decisions, documents, etc. Trust based on complete confidentiality, trust above all in expertise.</p> <p>In addition, case studies were planned, which were carried out by experts during the dialogue. The participants of the process formulated the general methodology and tasks for the research, and then the participants of the dialogue were provided with the results of these studies, which became the subject of discussion during the meetings.</p>



VALUE-ORIENTED	EXPERT
Time and Space	
<p>The long-term process that began before the pandemic (3 multi-day meetings lasting from 3 to 6 days) in different cities in the controlled part of Ukraine was followed by 2 meetings in a mixed online/offline format, several three-hour meetings in online format, 3 three-day meetings in an offline format outside of Ukraine, as well as activities between meetings. Intervals between meetings lasted from 1 to 9 months (at the beginning of the pandemic).</p> <p>For a value-oriented process, the possibility of face-to-face meetings is key, as the online format does not provide enough opportunities to build trust which makes it possible to talk about sensitive, complex, value-based topics and contradictions, traumatic experiences, etc.</p> <p>At a certain stage, mini-groups appear for the implementation of initiatives that are born during the process or for mutual support. Accordingly, it is important to provide a resource for this in the design.</p>	<p>Online meetings throughout the process. It is important to understand that the meetings are held systematically every week or every other week, so there is time and opportunity to work out the recommendations.</p> <p>Meetings take place every week or every other week on Saturdays and last two to three hours.</p> <p>Expert dialogues have been held since 2020. In total, there were 4 separate projects, of which the dialogue process was not completed in only one due to the start of a full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine. Regarding others, recommendations were made and advocacy activities were carried out.</p>
Design and Conduct	
<p>Process design requires preparation before and during each meeting, and is flexible as it takes into account group dynamics between and during meetings, changes in the political, media, and social landscape, etc.</p> <p>The design includes work with the communication component of the group</p> <p>Conduct envisages the involvement of professional dialogue facilitators at all stages of the process.</p> <p>At a certain stage, after the formation of a certain group identity and the expansion of the group demand, a need emerged to attract additional expertise concerning both the specifics of effective communication and work on peacebuilding.</p> <p>To develop effective communication, facilitators and participants focused primarily on the principles of dialogue.</p>	<p>The design envisaged meetings of the participants from the territories controlled by Ukraine with central and local authorities in the field of health care, energy, water supply, etc., as well as the exchange of information obtained and recommendations with them.</p> <p>Accordingly, the design of the process presupposes external communication, interaction with other actors who are interested in working on the topic of the dialogue and its results and developments.</p> <p>Therefore, the design included a broader analysis of the field, the problem itself and available expert experience in this area, taking into account the existing features of intergroup and interinstitutional interaction.</p> <p>Conduct requires the presence of a moderator. A professional facilitator is optional. Accordingly, the design involves a tighter and more repetitive structure and regulations. Interaction is based mostly on specific rules, not principles.</p>

VALUE-ORIENTED	EXPERT
Presence of Inter-dialogue Activity	
<p>Such activity is based on the demand and readiness of the participants. They are the initiators of this process. It was based on this that the project team was providing the necessary support.</p> <p>Form and content are also selected depending on group dynamics and context. They can be aimed directly at the realization of the desire to maintain contacts and connections between participants (the developed format of the remote “Journey”) or realize the desire of the group to convey certain messages to the outside (exhibitions, comic books, educational sessions for people around them, etc.). In addition, they can also feature an educational format, in which the participants wish to jointly acquire certain knowledge/skills that they may need during joint or individual activities.</p>	<p>The basis for the development of the activity is the goals and tasks of the process, its subject matter and the expert capacity of the group, and therefore the focus is primarily on supplementing knowledge regarding the subject of discussion.</p> <p>Accordingly, the key tools of this type of inter-dialogue activity are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actions aimed at filling certain gaps, improving the level of situation awareness, etc.; ● Certain forms of conveying the results of the process to external entities – through closed meetings with the presentation of results/recommendations or distribution of informational materials. Depends on the goals of the process and the context in which they are achieved.

Therefore, dialogue can become a rather versatile tool and means of working with difficult and complex topics. At the same time, it is definitely not a magic wand or a universal tool that can be used anywhere and anytime. As is already clear, we are not supporters of dogmas or rigid rules, but instead base our activities on principles and their adaptation to context, working conditions and flexibility. Therefore, we tried to identify several moments when the use of dialogue is definitely justified, as well as those where it can become ineffective or even harmful.

When should one start a dialogue in general:

- ✔ the solution is not obvious at first glance. If the solution seems obvious, there is a good chance that it is already being implemented in one form or another. In cases requiring facilitation, the search for a solution will require a deeper analysis of the situation and the involvement of a certain number of people with different experiences and expertise;
- ✔ where the organizers and facilitators have an open agenda and are focused on establishing, restoring and maintaining relations between people on both sides of the contact line, wish to help participants understand their personal perspectives and expand their own visions of the situation and its development scenarios;

- ✓ successful problem solving requires a comprehensive understanding of the situation, trust between participants and agreement. A problem/situation requires understanding and acceptance by a certain number of people, and often also a change in their behavior or attitude, agreement on key issues. Without it, even the best solution is doomed to failure.

Dialogue does not work:

- ⊖ where a “right” goal and outcome of the process, predetermined decisions are present that the participants are pushed to choose during this process, because they are already determined by the organizers/facilitators, and the participants are only expected to publicly approve without much discussion, sometimes even just a simulated one. In this case, facilitating a discussion about where to go will not only waste time, but will be on the verge of “manipulation”. Also, the existence of certain legislative framework and resource capabilities can act as additional limitations. In this situation, dialogue can be a means of discussing how to overcome these limitations, but then the group must have enough expert knowledge and ability to work with it;
- ⊖ when the situation or related information is too complex or confidential for participants to understand;
- ⊖ in the case of a high level of violence, safety threats, a certain level of escalation of the conflict, which become a background due to which the participants are neither emotionally nor physically able to participate in the process;
- ⊖ in cases where the participants are not interested in discussing, finding a solution or do not trust each other enough to work on it together;
- ⊖ when limited time and other resources do not allow using an approach based on dialogue facilitation;
- ⊖ as a tool with which it is possible to force the parties to an armed conflict to cease fire or to change the ideological and value guidelines of large masses of people, to reduce hatred within society;
- ⊖ when an organization plans to engage in advocacy for certain political changes, conduct a comprehensive campaign or comprehensive study. Dialogue can become a basis for developing certain recommendations or a vision and broadening understanding, but it is not a tool for activism.

ROLES IN DIALOGUE: WHO ITS EFFECTIVENESS DEPENDS ON

As we have already noted, the dialogue process is based on the involvement of a rather limited list of functions or roles. These are the participants themselves, organizer(s) and facilitator(s) of the dialogue process. In some cases, where the design of the process involves joint work on the research of certain topics, the preparation of joint products or the formation of a common field of expert knowledge or a group on a particular topic, individual specialists may also be involved. In our processes, these were highly specialized experts in the field of ecology and other topics, illustrators, peacebuilding experts, or contemporary art curators.



Facilitator/person(s) who ensure constructive interaction between the participants of the dialogue process, which allows to effectively discuss a complex problem or controversial situation. In the field of responsibility – preparation of the process itself, ensuring/participating in the recruitment of participants, developing the design and content of dialogue and individual sessions, ensuring post-/inter-dialogue interaction of participants as needed. During dialogues, the key task becomes facilitation, direction and, if necessary, reconciliation in communication.

The ability to effectively support a dialogue process usually requires special training and adherence to the principles and professional ethics of a dialogue facilitator, which involves making a conscious decision about their own participation in a specific dialogue process.

In the part devoted to the principles of dialogue, we offered a quite detailed description of the tasks of the facilitator and the means of their fulfilment.



Dialogue organizers are persons (organizations) who do not directly conduct dialogue meetings, but act as direct initiators of the dialogue process and subsequently ensure its conduct. First of all, their tasks are centered around the organization of financing and logistical support of dialogue processes. There are cases when the organizers are not the initiators or customers of the process, they are chosen/coordinated by the facilitators and participants of the dialogue to support it.

In our case, the role of the organizer was even threefold – it consisted in initiating the process, supporting it and participating in the preparation and distribution of the dialogue products. Such deep involvement in the process required not only good managerial qualities (we would like to remind you that the manual describes processes of several types and durations), but also a certain awareness and responsibility. After all, by initiating the process itself, one can fall into the trap of the project approach and try to “squeeze through” certain project tasks. Therefore, the success of the dialogue and the feeling of a certain satisfaction and ability among its participants may depend on a certain distance of the organizers from focusing the participants on specific topics or tasks and at the same time the organizers being ready to pick up and develop their ideas, provide additional financial, expert, advocacy or other resources.

That is why in the processes described in this manual, the awareness and responsibility of the organizers and facilitators has become an extremely important component: both in terms of flexible and adaptive response to changes in the situation and the dynamics of the group as a whole, as well as guaranteeing safety and confidentiality, a certain gradual increase in the desire of the participants to initiate activities or inter-dialogue actions, etc. Dialogue organizers and facilitators who initiate and develop the design and then facilitate the dialogue process and provide the activity that supports the dialogue should be aware of their position and attitude to the issues/topic of discussion in the dialogue; they must be willing to work with views that conflict with their own without influencing them. The success and environmental sustainability of the process will depend on their professionalism and ability to prepare and conduct a dialogue following the principles outlined in this text.



Experts. There are no universal specialists, especially in such initiatives and in such a layered whole of complex topics. Therefore, one should be prepared to look for third-party specialists, which often looks like an especially difficult task. The topics are quite serious and complex, they are worth creating a more general understanding and motivation to explore on one’s own in a rather limited time. Accordingly, the participants may lack real knowledge and expert experience in the declared topics, therefore, on the basis of their conscious demand, one can start looking for specialists. The key point is the informed demand and awareness of the participants, their participation in the formation of the technical task for the relevant specialist or even participation in their selection, the ability of the involved expert to work consciously from a position of neutrality regarding the subject. In our processes, these were, in particular, peacebuilding and transitional justice experts, when the participants realized that further in-depth conversation required them to obtain additional shared knowledge. We also involved curators, playwrights and comic book illustrators in situations where participants were willing and ready to engage in the development of visual tools for certain public expressions. We also involved experts on narrow issues of ecology or the extractive industry, persons engaged in advocacy, and experts in information activities, who were supposed to supplement the information about the situation discussed by the participants of the thematic dialogues.



Dialogue participants. Facilitation is exclusively a group process, especially the facilitation of a dialogue that is thematically and causally provoked/filled with war, because it a priori involves the whole society. Therefore, we have to understand how its conditionally different “groups”/“layers” will be represented in the process. Accordingly, the participants in the process, their knowledge and experience, vision and assessment of the situation are the core component of the dialogue process. The activity of all other participants in this process is based around them, the topics that cover them or around which they are ready to start a conversation. We will discuss their selection and involvement tools in more detail in the section devoted to recruiting.



Monitoring&Evaluation Experts are those who monitor and evaluate the process, its course, effectiveness, etc. Regarding dialogues as processes with an often-non-obvious result(s) in the form of a transformation of vision or relationships, it is important to involve those specialists who will focus not on formal criteria and indicators, but on the essence of these changes.

Despite the sometimes rather large size of the groups and long lists of involved specialists, it is important to work on their synchronization so that the inclusion give a certain synergistic effect and strengthen the feeling of competence and confidence in the participants of the dialogue.

PROCESS DESIGN

Most likely, you are used to hearing the word “design” in the field of high fashion or home decoration. But in its essence, the word “design” fits very organically with the process of developing the basis and content of the dialogue process. It is so because a complex product is created precisely for certain tasks and available resources, with the help of available tools and work principles. And it doesn’t matter whether you’re dealing with a one-time meeting or a multi-year process, the basic design approaches will be focused on a fairly limited list of mandatory components, the details of which will, of course, be significantly adjusted by the context and tasks of the process.

The first step is TO DETERMINE THE NEED FOR DIALOGUE.

In the previous part of the manual, we separately focused on the list of possible tasks and problems for the solution of which a dialogue can work, and also formulated certain reservations regarding its use. Accordingly, the organizer further determines the direction of the future process or its subject matter. In our case of value-oriented dialogues, it was a basic desire to test the very possibility of such a process during a low-intensity armed conflict. And regarding the thematic aspect, getting ahead a bit and based on the possibilities of such processes around value issues, to try and organize expert interaction and discussion of narrow professional topics in the field of the consequences of the armed conflict.

In the event that the organization initiating the dialogue process does not have enough expertise in the field of design of dialogue processes, it is important to start the selection of facilitators, without getting into the content of the dialogue. The sooner dialogue experts can join the development team, the fewer risks or problems can arise during the launch process.

The second step is THE SELECTION OF A FACILITATOR

When choosing a facilitator, pay attention to the points and questions listed below, which can help you find “your” specialist.

- What training in the field of facilitation did the person proposed for the role of facilitator receive?
- Does the facilitator have previous experience with similar processes? Can this specialist share, of course with confidentiality, practical examples and information about their own successful experience?

- Pay attention during communication to how the facilitator acts in general, do you get an understanding or clarification of the situation? Does the facilitator work effectively in clarifying your request, are they neutral? To what extent do you feel that the facilitator is an impartial and non-committed person who has no personal interest in the issues that will be discussed within the dialogue?
- What are the key principles and ethical standards used by the facilitator during work?

The third step is

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT AND PROCESS PREPARATION

After selecting a facilitator, the initiators/organizer of the dialogue and the facilitator usually agree on the division of rights, duties and responsibilities. From our experience, at this stage it is important to agree on several key blocks: organizational issues, division of responsibility boundaries and communication between the organizer and the facilitator; main components of the future design; a portrait of potential participants and the actual goal of the dialogue process.

Therefore, try to use the following list as a kind of checklist for preparation by the organizer and facilitator:

- Jointly determine the purpose of the dialogue and the possible results.
- Agree on the role of the organizer in the dialogue process (the customer will participate as an expert/organizer or party/participant in the dialogue).
- Determine approaches to the confidentiality of the dialogue before, during and after it is held, in particular, the limits and conditions of the disclosure of information about the dialogue.
- Agree on how/when the facilitator will: conduct conflict/situation analysis and preliminary meetings with potential participants; provide the customer with the dialogue design, approaches to logistical preparation of dialogue meetings, reporting forms and focus, etc.;

At this stage, we solved organizational and logistical issues and officially formalized the “relationships” of the team members. At the same time, we already started the development of the design – conducting a situation analysis, finding approaches to the selection of participants and directly developing the design. Since this manual has a separate section on the selection of participants, here we will focus only on the issues of analysis and preparation of the process.

Situation analysis

We suggest focusing on the issues/tasks listed below.

- Study of an issue that requires the organization of a dialogue. Analysis of the consequences/threats/impact of a situation or problem on people’s lives.

- Identification of parties to the conflict: which persons, institutions, groups are involved in the conflict and have an interest in it. In our cases, these are not direct participants, but representatives of groups affected by the armed conflict, people who have the necessary knowledge and experience.
- The subject of the conflict, topics or situations, regarding which a demand may arise from the participants of the future process, assumptions about its thematic content.
- Determination of fields, the degree of involvement of the parties in the conflict, the relations that exist between the representatives of the various parties as a whole and under the existing conditions.

Dialogue preparation

Based on the analysis of the situation, the selection and communication of the participants, the facilitators begin the development of the dialogue process itself, its structural blocks and content. When performing this task, it is important to:

- clarify hypotheses and assumptions, check the results of conflict analysis and possible topics of dialogue with key participants and target groups;
- when formulating the topic of the dialogue, it is necessary to pay special attention to the fact that the name is equally acceptable to all potential participants. This can be done quite simply – by receiving feedback from the people you plan to invite to a dialogue;
- clarification of the venue issue: whether it is accessible and acceptable for all participants. Do all participants perceive it as convenient and comfortable, and most importantly – as safe from the point of view of logistics and staying there.

The fourth step is CONDUCTING A DIALOGUE

Today there are dozens of not merely forms, but methods and approaches to dialogue. In addition, there are also specific tools and means of organizing interaction. Therefore, in this block, we decided to deal with the key aspects that should not be forgotten during the dialogue. So, you need to make sure that:

- during the dialogue, people got to know each other, the goal, principles and format of the dialogue were announced, the role of the facilitator was clarified. When participants get to know each other, it is important to choose the means that will allow them to see people in each other, and not “representatives of views”. If the dialogue is anonymous, then present the framework of anonymity itself and its reasons, or suggest a name that the person would like to use during this process;
- in general, when working with dialogue processes involving people from different sides created by the consequences of an armed conflict, work on rehumanizing the participants for each other is extremely important;

- during the process, a transition was made from the exchange of personal experience and perception to the search for a key vision of the conflict. An opportunity to dive deeper from the surface of the situation appears;
- the information, attitudes, visions of the parties concerning the situation, each other, the problem and its causes and consequences are studied;
- it is determined how the dialogue itself or the solutions developed during it can most fully satisfy the needs and interests of the involved persons.

The fifth step is MONITORING AND EVALUATION

It is definitely inevitable. There are quite a few approaches to the organization of the dialogue process itself and the tools for its evaluation. In essence, this process is focused on several tasks:

- development and application of a flexible system for obtaining feedback and evaluating the event/process itself, developed steps, etc.;
- tracking and analysis of the interaction between the context of the conflict/problem situation and the dialogue process;
- work on a certain guarantee of the quality of evaluation and analysis of dialogue practice with the aim of using its potential for subsequent social transformation.

Understanding the importance of this aspect, we have dedicated a separate section to it as well, explaining in detail the tried and tested tools for our dialogues.

The sixth step is POST-DIALOGUE SUPPORT (optional)

Participants receive some further support in the implementation of developed ideas, solutions and steps, information exchange. Of course, this is based on their demand and desire. Where needed and the necessary resources are available, the dialogue process is adjusted according to the results of monitoring, feedback, review of the dynamics of the conflict/problem situation and analysis of the context. In addition, one can try to build a regular connection with the participants, thus supporting positive changes, their popularization and expansion of the circle of people involved with or informed about the dialogue. Upon a conscious decision of the group about making certain results of the dialogue public – their dissemination according to the agreed plan.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITING

Since the dialogue is a voluntary process, an important issue is the definition of the target groups to be involved in the process, the selection and invitation procedure. In addition, if the goal is, for example, to test the possibility of a value-oriented dialogue or an in-depth expert discussion regarding the search for solutions to an extremely complex problem, which is accompanied by significant uncertainty and danger in connection with the war, then the issue of selection and involvement of participants becomes extremely relevant.

Who exactly should be invited to the dialogue, whose voices and ideas would make this process even more effective? It is from this list of questions that the focused construction of a portrait of future participants begins. We have taken as a basis several key blocks that cannot be bypassed in any process. Of course, if the dialogue aims to discuss a certain narrow, expert topic, these criteria should be supplemented accordingly.

In our case, the generalized criteria for the invitation were those listed below.



Geographic representation: the value-oriented process group was selected in equal numbers from the controlled and non-controlled territories of Ukraine (8 people from each). In addition, it was important that both Donetsk and Luhansk were represented, as well as cities/towns from different regions of Ukraine – both close to the contact line (Donetsk and Kharkiv oblasts, Kharkiv City) and distant from it – Odesa, Ivano-Frankivsk, Dnipro. The same principle was used during the thematic dialogues, only with certain expert specifics



Gender and age characteristics. Regarding the gender composition: the value-oriented dialogue group included 6 men and 10 women aged 20 to 60 (clarify the age limits), since men and women, people of different ages have different experiences regarding the issues of war and its consequences, as well as different visions of the past and future, different needs, different expectations from the situation and from each other. For the thematic dialogues, the expertise of the participants was more important than the gender-age characteristics, so the balance was different there (with a lower representation of women and with an age shift towards 40+).



Professional groups. The main focus of the activities of the potential participants of the value-oriented dialog process was helping the war victims, but the types of involvement and assistance were different – volunteers, members and employees of NGOs, among whom were lawyers, psychologists, social workers, activists, trainers, aid coordinators, etc. The participants also included IDPs and those who lived part of the time in the controlled territory and part of the time in the non-controlled territory. This approach also allowed the par-

ticipants in the dialogue process to see various issues of the consequences of the war in all its complexity. As for the thematic processes, taking into account their subject matter and content from the moment of the start, the process of targeted search for specific specialists who have sufficient information and qualifications to discuss the discussed topics was launched. Given this specifics and narrowness of the professional circle, a snowball format was used, where participants were partially involved in the process of forming the group, offering their ideas about who should and who should not be involved in the process for reasons of personal safety.

LIMITATIONS AND RISKS OF INVOLVEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS.

In addition to constructing an image of potential participants through the prism of who should be involved, sometimes drawing certain red lines will also help define the criteria. In the process of selecting participants, a decision was made about several limitations:

- do not involve employees of the Right to Protection regional offices, as they were the organizers of the process, as well as people who are in a subordination relationship;
- do not involve combatants and ex-combatants;
- do not involve people with radical positions.

During the recruiting process, we formed a certain basic algorithm, which, of course, can be supplemented depending on the type and direction of the potential dialogue.

1. Defining the portrait of the group: what criteria should future participants meet; compiling a list of potential channels and tools for engagement with them.
2. Direct search. In our case, the search was not public. Understanding the safety risks, we searched for participants both among the contacts of the Right to Protection coordinator organization, contacts of facilitators, and through the “snowball” method.
3. Organization of interviews with each of the potential participants. Their goal was to outline the thematic field of the dialogue, in particular to define together with each participant the questions for the “other side”; what they would be willing to share; topics that they were not ready to discuss or that would be difficult to talk about. Also, during the interview, it was clarified how each of the participants sees the result of the dialogue, safety, possible difficulties in the process and motivation to participate in it. It is important to note that some of the topics, which at the beginning the participants marked as those they did not want to talk about, were raised and

proposed for discussion at the meetings by the participants themselves, when a certain trust had already been built and there was a willingness to talk about important but difficult topics with a sense of safety of the dialogue space. Also, during the interview, there was an opportunity to answer both logistical questions and questions about what dialogue was and what its specifics were.

4. Sending the participants basic information about the dialogue, the principles of its conduct and the specifics of the organization.

FACILITATOR NEUTRALITY VS FACILITATOR SELF-AWARENESS

All participants in the dialogue may get the feeling that the discussion is moving in the wrong direction, the “wrong” thoughts are voiced, and in general it is worth changing everything and helping the participants to reach the right decision. It is quite normal when the participants of the dialogues come to have such opinions, but if they occur to the facilitators or organizers of the process, we get a problem. Among professional facilitators and peacebuilding experts, the topic of facilitator “neutrality” is perhaps one of the most hotly debated. The relevance of this ability to maintain neutrality in the process is obvious, because if it is not there, then:

- there is a great temptation to start manipulating the group into the “right” or desired decision or opinion;
- as soon as you stop being neutral, you become part of the discussion and can no longer direct the process;
- if a conflict arises, you cannot stand aside and help the parties resolve the situation, you are a priori marked, you are perceived as one of the parties.

That is why being neutral with regard to the participants, the topic and content, the decisions being discussed, as well as the emotional state of the group helps the group to focus on the topic and content, to be engaged and productive. If, during the dialogue, the participants begin to think or assess that the facilitators or organizers have certain “hidden plans”, their own personal agenda that they are promoting, we can get the challenges listed below in the middle of the process.

- Loss of authority. The facilitator is often perceived as a leader. We are used to the view that the person leading the conversation is the “most important” person in the room. If neutrality is lost, even unconsciously by comments/questions, the process of pushing people towards one’s own vision of the solution is launched. For example, you prefer an idea and start voicing it first or using positive epithets/characteristics. Or you suggest that people pay more attention to the problem that seems most important to you. Or, for example, you don’t allow those who voice the opposite opinion or a completely different topic to express themselves, seemingly not on purpose, but just by forgetting about such people or not noticing their raised hands.

- Disappointment, mistrust, conscious/unconscious opposition to group decisions, or growing disagreement and attempts to sabotage the dialogue process or its outcomes. Participants can accept the position voiced by the facilitator. But they will not feel heard and will not want to implement the decisions made, because they will not accept them as their own. Or they may decide to stop actively participating in the discussions, or even in the process itself.
- From the process host, you become part of it. But once you stop being neutral, you simply cannot direct the process or resolve conflicts. Since then, you are part of the process itself, its full participant.

Accordingly, in the traditional sense, neutrality is a basic competence, characteristic of a facilitator. But the degree of its absoluteness can be expressed in shades and halftones. For instance, there is a maxim about neutrality stating that as a facilitator, you should be as neutral as possible with regard to the content: “I am responsible for the process, and the participants are responsible for the content that will be discussed and generated during the dialogue”. At the same time, in our work, practicing dialogue specifically on the topics of armed conflicts and the field of anti-discrimination, we at a certain moment replaced the word “neutrality” in the work of the facilitator with an awareness of one’s own position and responsibility in the process. After all, it is possible to lack knowledge of the topic, not to be a direct participant in the events, but in value-based processes, both the facilitator and the organizer will certainly risk falling into traps that threaten the loss of neutrality. So, this is a completely natural process, then, with which you can and should work, directing not so much the group as yourself into the reflection of what is happening.

One of the tools that made it easier for us to work on our own awareness of our position in the dialogue process and outside it and helped with the selection of specialists for various activities in support of the dialogue was the “involvement” quadrant. A very simple model, which was shared by our colleague during one of the dialogue facilitation trainings. This scheme is attributed to J.P. Lederach. So, what are the conventional guideposts for the position of the facilitator/dialogue organizer?

	Internal facilitator	External facilitator
Context-engaged facilitator	<p>They know the subject matter, the chronology of the process, and its participants well. But they may have certain “blind” spots and an already established assessment of the situation. They require less preparation time. They definitely have ready contacts with at least some of the potential participants. Most likely, at the beginning, the group will perceive them as having a certain position in the dialogue.</p>	<p>They know the subject well, have a certain position on it. But they are not involved directly in the process of working with conflict, dialogue, so they can have a greater credit of trust in the participants. They can already actively use questions to clarify the topic, ask participants for a certain personal “literacy lesson” as a form of starting interaction.</p>
Facilitator out of context	<p>In situations when a person very well understands the specifics of communication, the situation and actors in general, the subject, etc. But the facilitator does not have an internal position or involvement in the topic. Accordingly, there is a much faster familiarization with the context with the preservation of the problems of “blind” zones and the limited use of questions that clarify the general context. After all, a person must partially understand at least basic things inside.</p>	<p>Colleagues often joke that this is the perfect facilitator. After all, they are as far away from the traps of loss of neutrality as possible. At the same time, they require a sufficient amount of time and other resources to analyze the situation and map it, design the process. Participants may perceive them as very distant and as having little understanding of the context.</p>

Our experience and the specific context of the dialogue determine both the strengths and weaknesses of each of these roles. Accordingly, the effective use of the strengths of each of the positions and the minimization of threats will depend on being aware of them and possible influence on the decision-making processes regarding the dialogue, its design and conduct.

Therefore, by understanding certain aspects that affect the situation in general, the time and demands of the group, as well as understanding the opportunities and threats of each of the positions, we can determine our role in the process, actually achieving combined solutions and being based on absolute neutrality. But in this case, all threats and risks must be worked out very carefully and responsibly, additional efforts and attention must be directed to the dynamics of the group, its concentration on the topic and a sense of responsibility for the process.

DIALOGUE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Evaluating the effectiveness of a value-oriented type of dialogue with its flexible purpose and changes in types of activity is a rather non-trivial task. In the case of the dialogue process we are describing, the evaluation consisted of several stages and used the following tools:

- unfinished sentences about one's attitude to the dialogue, one's feelings and experiences, vision of peace, difficult topics, which the participants anonymously finished at the end of each meeting on cards;
- daily individual reflections of facilitators in written form regarding the process and dynamics of the group and individual participants during dialogue meetings;
- semi-structured interviews with the facilitators and with each of the participants conducted by the evaluators after the first 3 meetings of the first cycle and after the 2nd and 3rd meetings of the second cycle.

The evaluation methodology, based on the Outcome Harvesting method (<https://mdf.nl/mdf-and-outcome-harvesting>), was aimed both at analyzing the effectiveness of the dialogue and its transformative capabilities and at identifying gaps for its improvement. The main topics of the evaluation study were: personal changes in the participants, broadening the perspective and vision, trust, firmness or flexibility of positions, vision of the future, rehumanization, the power of one's own influence on events, capabilities, vision of the results of the dialogue.

It is very important to involve monitoring and evaluation professionals at the very beginning, during the planning of the entire dialogue intervention, as the initial evaluation can be important even before the participants have started the dialogue. In addition, the involvement of evaluators in planning makes it possible to include thematically and meaningfully necessary materials for evaluation in the design of dialogue and individual meetings.

It is also safe to say that in addition to the evaluative purpose of communicating with interviewers, there is another function, that of monitoring participants and supervising facilitators. It turned out that this function was in demand among all participants in the process.

RISKS, PROBLEMS AND DILEMMAS OF THE PROCESS

Traditionally, dialogue experience manuals describe the results of generalized success or experience. The mistake-based approach is only gaining momentum, so in the end, we want to talk about the risks and potential problems. After all, you should not romanticize and universalize dialogic communication, consider it a magical tool for all purposes. Dialogue is a tool that can produce the positive results we wrote about above, but it also can, on the contrary, become a tool for increasing conflict or despair among participants, or even a tool for manipulation, which is definitely not in the interests of peacebuilding. During the implementation of dialogue processes, it is extremely important to be aware of both their strengths and the risks they bring.

While working on these dialogue processes, given their different focuses and formats, we, of course, repeatedly encountered a whole slew of problems. Some were systemic and related to the general situation, some arose as a result of specific group dynamics, trials and errors of the team. They are many, varied, and just as there are no universal exercises or tasks for designing such a process, there are no universal countermeasures to the problems that arise in the process.

That is why we tried to form this block not based on the chronology of problems and our steps, but based precisely on the analysis and certain systematization of the experience gained. So, first of all, we were forced to distinguish what we are dealing with – problems that arise as a result of the realization of certain risks and that can have clear ways of solving and taking into account or dilemmas that do not have a clear answer, because both poles of the situation/approaches have the right to exist, and it is the most successful solutions that are usually sought in the team.

When we deal with the risks that emerge as a result of problems, we have the ability to use the resources available to find solutions to them. And this problem then disappears from our list of tasks. Yes, it can trigger certain consequences, but it's mostly a linear situation with options for actions. So, to speak, the risk of lack of participants can create a problem of poor-quality composition of the group. Based on the portrait of the target group, we can think about what forms and approaches can help us solve this potential problem. If everything is determined correctly, the announcement and recruitment are effectively carried out, then the problem will be eliminated.

At the same time, there are situations when there is no clear solution, and even the list of possible solutions seems insufficient or somehow one-sided. In the team, we decided to call them dilemmas, because there is no clear solution, and our task is to find a balance between two equally important poles. For instance, during the selection of participants, we need people with deep expert knowledge and access to current information about the environment, while their ability to conduct constructive communication, reputation in the respective circle or trust from other participants are secondary. However, there is no clear answer to this question, because a lot depends on the process, our goals, environmental friendliness and safety in its implementation.

So, what were the key issues or risks that accompanied our processes?

- Time. And again time. It will be constantly lacking for preparation, recruitment, completion of the conversation and recording of the result. A careful and realistic approach to planning and managing team/participant time and resources is highly recommended.
- Participants and related force majeure events. The issue of proper representativeness of the group, management of changes in composition and reformatting of the group, partial or complete dropping out of the process – all this turns into constant management and facilitation challenges.
- Confidentiality and safety issues. To guarantee that they are addressed, any public actions are not only proposed, but also initiated by the participants. Yes, one can present them with the available options, but the final decision is up to them. Because if there is a desire to share some development, then a demand to find a good form will appear. We have already mentioned the example of the “conversation in the train compartment” invented already during the first meeting.
- It is necessary to synchronize not only the participants, but also the project team. Especially when various post-dialogue measures and dialogue support measures begin to be added to the dialogue. We need not only to find suitable specialists, but also to coordinate their entry and work with the context, build a connection with participants, etc.
- Black swan – although this expression has a kind of tabloid meaning, it seems that it can best cover the challenges of the pandemic, the closing of borders, the reorientation of the dialogue platform to third countries, which happened to our processes during these years.

Of course, this is not the final list of risks and problems that may befall you during a dialogue. But we tried to show the main sensitive areas. If we talk about dilemmas, there are several that started to accompany our groups almost from the first meeting. Some of them became the topics of dedicated dialogue sessions to help participants clarify and become aware of their attitudes and behavior towards them.

Comfortable atmosphere and sincerity

The dilemma is quite common for real dialogue processes, when people in the group have already built relationships, when there is already understanding, trust, care for each other. So why ask tough questions? Do I really need to say now that all this is mockery and falsehood? After all, we have just restored a balance, haven't we? Do I really want to destroy it? And then the respective "warm bath" of group dynamics grows warmer, reducing the depth of discussions and increasing a certain distancing of the participants from the topic, closing them in a kind of shells. The discussions are becoming more and more neutral and empty, at certain moments even forcing the participants themselves to ask the question: why am I here at all? In fact, this is a challenge for the facilitator – whether to try to open up, to provoke with a certain task or question a painful but frank conversation that is important for the process in general. After all, relevant and sincere statements rarely appear from a comfortable situation, they are the product of painful reflection.

Publicity and safety

Traditionally, dialogues are confidential and closed events and processes. This, first of all, is caused by safety issues for the participants and organizers themselves. After all, these meetings take place after tragic events, when emotional tension is high and dehumanization is inevitable. On the other hand, these processes cannot involve masses a priori, because the technology is based on long-term and deep communication. Therefore, is there any socially significant impact or result from this meeting of two or three dozen people, are such initiatives really necessary? There is a need for publicity, scaling up of results or organization of information and results exchange channels with decision-makers. This will certainly remain a constant dilemma for all involved, but only until a real safety threat emerges. At this point, the dilemma turns into a problem that has only one direction – how to guarantee maximum safety for the participants.

Goal or group

This dilemma has also already been discussed, if perhaps not so directly and clearly. For facilitators of dialogue processes, the state and dynamics of the group and its participants are a key guidepost. But organizers are often forced to follow a project approach with tangible results. And if the project approach begins to prevail, the participants sense these hidden plans and launch one or another countermeasure or sabotage. The same thing happens if the group space becomes increasingly conflict-ridden and dangerous. On the other hand, a clear task for the process itself, an order from the initiator, certain terms that can echo in the process – all these may diverge from group dynamics and the group's readiness to take some actions for the sake of the result. So, what ex-

actly should the team focus on in this process? Where is the limit of acceptable departure in one direction or another? These are exactly the questions you will definitely face during a process similar in design.

Finally, we remind you once again that the list is certainly not final, and the possible options for dealing with the risks/dilemmas indicated in this list are not either. The main thing is to clearly understand the difference: a risk is a linear phenomenon that has a solution, a dilemma is something that will require constant balancing and the absence of a clear, unambiguous solution.

SUPPORT TOOLS FOR DIALOGUE, INTER- AND POST-DIALOGUE ACTIVITY

Any activity that meets the demand of the participants and involves the majority of the group has an important impact that serves several tasks at once. First, it is support and development of contacts established during the dialogue. This is a space that provides opportunities for strengthening rehumanization work, deepening the connection between participants. After all, people communicate, learn something new about certain knowledge/skills, something new about each other, etc. Analyzing more than three years of experience in organizing and facilitating various dialogue processes for different groups and with an emphasis on different topics, we will try to systematize the tested tools.

Firstly, these are measures aimed at educational tasks or filling gaps. Frankly speaking, we incorporated training sessions on the basics of conflict theory and effective communication into the processes of dialogue meetings. This made it possible not only to form a field of common meanings and knowledge, a common experience which ensured a more effective discussion of issues, the opportunity to refer to models, communication schemes or even group memes. Speaking of the subject of this training, we worked with the topics of introduction to conflict studies, prejudice and stereotypes, thinking traps, effective communication tools and working with questions. In fact, it was a block that had to make it easier for the facilitators to manage the process. It was later, with the building of trust, the building of positive group dynamics and the presence of the desire of the group to take certain joint steps or to carry out activities according to their requests, that trainings were developed and even external specialists were involved. The trainings were devoted to the specifics of conducting interviews with people, organizing discussions in minigroups, and basic approaches to peacebuilding.

Secondly, research tasks. Of course, they mostly arose within the dialogue between experts. After all, the process itself was built around the specialists on different sides of the contact line discussing the common problems of ecology and mining operations. Therefore, research and certain measurements became the main and individual work, as well as a subject for discussions. In addition, in cases where the group members at the time of the meeting felt that there was a lack of data or information, they could agree on a specific task and order the necessary research from the group members or agreed-upon specialists. Its results then provided the necessary resource for continuing the dialogue. In the case of value-oriented dialogues, the participants wanted to explore the visions and understanding of reintegration by their milieu. Accordingly, a questionnaire was developed, and the basis for the interview was agreed upon. During the dialogue meeting, the participants could exchange the results of the surveys that were done between the meetings and compare them.

Thirdly, the promotion or advocacy of certain ideas and theses, increasing the visibility of the evaluation of group members. Of course, we've talked quite a bit above about confidentiality and safety for everyone. At the same time, already at the first meetings, the participants began to have questions and ideas about how to scale up the process or at least disseminate its results. An attempt was made to use the jointly-developed ideas to strengthen peacebuilding activities carried out by both the state and civil society. Therefore, there was a need to look for safe forms and tools for conveying these ideas. Taking into account the processes in which the initiators/organizers of this dialogue and facilitators were involved, with the consent of the participants, the summarized proposals and opinions were included in a number of informational documents and [advocacy tasks in the initiatives of the Right to Protection](#) CF. Through the dialogue groups, discussions were held and recommendations were developed regarding [the concept of the transition period](#), which sometimes turned the process into a kind of focus group, where people living on both sides of the contact line were represented. Again, while developing recommendations, the group acted as an initiator of an additional dialogue process, during which the real situation in different territories was clarified, more neutral vocabulary was selected, or points of convergence or separation were determined, which then became topics for subsequent dialogue meetings.

Fourthly, scaling up stories and experiences through art and media. Already during the first meetings, the participants began to ask the question: "what's next?" How can we relay and disseminate our experience and thoughts without exposing ourselves to this or that danger? And not just through the format of an "old-school" press release about the event, but in a way that would conveniently and effectively allow others to get those feelings and think about the questions and dilemmas that arose during the dialogue. That is why, at first quite cautiously, and then with increasing frequency, we began to use one or another form of art, first for reflection, and then for scaling up the thoughts, emotions and uncertainties that arose in the dialogue. Initially, the Capsules exhibition was used, the basis of which was a single object created by a famous artist from Luhansk which remained accessible in the government-controlled territory of Ukraine. The experts involved turned it into a mini-exhibition that was shown in 5 cities and became the basis for local dialogues about the vision of war and peace. Next, the participants decided that it was important to make public, at least anonymously, their transformations during dialogue meetings. Those who agreed to be interviewed became the subjects of the piece about a

series of dialogues⁴... Based on the experience of preparing material for the media, the group launched the process of preparing a comic book, which, through the graphic novel format, would allow not only to reflect on the key changes that had taken place over the course of three years, but also to encourage others to question and reflect.

4

CIRCLES ON THE WATER. HOW DIALOGUE GROUPS WORK WITH PEOPLE FROM THE UNCONTROLLED TERRITORIES. PART 1

[Джерело
https://lb.ua/
society/2021/12/06/500157_
kola_vodi_yak_pratsyuyut_
dialogovi.html](https://lb.ua/society/2021/12/06/500157_kola_vodi_yak_pratsyuyut_dialogovi.html)



Judging from the feedback regarding these materials and the opinions voiced by the audience during their visits to the exhibitions, we understand that the artistic means became a certain pebble that started the avalanche of discussions, emotions, thoughts and actions of people who found strength and resource in themselves with the help of art products to begin to realize and talk about it, analyzing what happened to them and around them, what their position and attitude were, what red lines suddenly appeared where there were none before.

Despite the variety of forms and means, periods of use and tasks, when analyzing the experience gained, we can single out several features of organizing such events that should be taken into account by organizers and facilitators. Some of them are listed below.

- Participant demand/interest is key. If you plan to implement certain steps in the process design, it is important to write them down in as much detail as possible to minimize the risk that the proposed content/form will be irrelevant to people or cause them to strongly disagree and protest.
- These activities are full-fledged parts of the dialogue process. Accordingly, it is completely unjustified on the part of the facilitators to leave them completely to the organizers or the participants themselves. After all, the developments that will take place during the events, the content and the results that the participants will create/achieve can have a significant impact on the overall dynamics of the process and relationships. Even if the format involves working in pairs or mini-groups, it is important to turn the coaching and debriefing sessions into spaces for deep conversation about the experiences and results, gradually weaving it into the dialogue in a wider context.
- They should be based on the involvement of people representing different groups or parties. Even reaching the agreement on the specification or the development of basic materials, which will then be implemented by the specialists involved, provides space for joint interaction and minimizes the risks of excessive competitiveness or accusations that the product turned out to be focused only on the interests of one party.
- We do not always have enough expertise and skills to finalize the products generated during the dialogue. So, as soon as the products become more or less public, there will be a need to refine them. The involvement of such experts must be coordinated with the group, participants must be given the opportunity to ask questions or try a “test” interaction before making a final decision.
- Remember that your products and initiatives that go beyond the boundaries of the group will not end up in a vacuum. All of them will deal with the rather traumatic and triggering experience of being in the conditions of war and losses from it. Because of this, public events and external communication must be carefully prepared from the point of view of interaction with the public and the impact of audience comments and reactions on your participants.



And finally, the dialogue and the developments generated by it, despite occasional practicality and effectiveness, will definitely not contribute to peace if they become propaganda. Both in the design, and in the conduct, and in the finalization of the dialogue in the form of certain products, there should be no promotion of a “simple, single correct” answer. Instead, it’s a rather sophisticated but sincere question-and-thought-provoking tool that allows you to add a dimension you hadn’t thought of, to ask those questions that hadn’t even occurred to you. It should help to find quality questions and generate a sincere desire to understand oneself, the situation, and another person. After all, it is thanks to such clarity and awareness that we can talk about permanent peace and rebuilding.

