



different than starting with a focus on a particular idea or belief and trying to build a community around that.

When we put an idea at the centre, the tendency is to see the other as an object or as a means to an end. Conversations will likely remain shallow and defenses high. When we start with an acknowledgement that we are a community and that we need to understand each other in order to live well together, we move from what Martin Buber called an "I-it" relationship to an "I-you" relationship.

Feelings of resentment, or even anger, may be experienced at this stage. Keeping the focus on relationships will help. This means continuing to apply the skills we started to learn in the first stage. It also involves practicing suspending judgements long enough to truly understand perspectives. Having participants come together as fellow citizens rather than in professional roles or as representatives of interests is especially important in the early days of engagement.

Questioning Together

Asking a question opens the space for possibilities. Or as Hans-Georg Gadamer says, "To be able to question means to want to know, and to want to know means to know that one doesn't know." Questions have the power to take the conversation to new depths.

It is not a simple thing to ask a question. We so often use questions with didactic or rhetorical intent – to test or lead someone to the knowledge that we already "possess." In dialogue, questions spring from curiosity and mutual exploration. Recognizing that we don't know is the first step to growth. It opens up the opportunity to think together. Asking "good questions" can create the space to look at a concept from different angles and can lead to a deeper understanding of that concept.

People need time to explore different perspectives within their community. Closed questions, those that elicit short factual responses, do not provide much opportunity for people to explore these different perspectives. Open questions, on the

other hand, stimulate thinking, open up possibilities and are essential for dialogue. Spending time exploring open questions together builds mutual understanding and provides the foundation of community.

Acting Together

Not all dialogue leads to consensus or action. Success can be as simple as creating the environment for people to talk and think together. When we take time to explore the values, perspectives, and experiences that make up the community, new possibilities emerge. This new awareness helps individuals and groups make better decisions.

Dialogue nurtures the environment for good decision-making. But dialogue is not simply the first step in the deliberation process. One might say, dialogue precedes, underpins and permeates deliberation. Dialogue is not just an activity we engage in to make a decision. It is a way of being with one another. It is an ongoing cultivation of curiosity.

Better understanding of values *within* the community leads to better decisions *for* the community.

