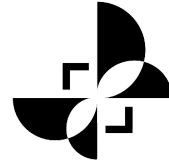


ACROSS DIVIDES

Training Workshops for
Depolarizing Communication



REFLECTORY

SAMPLE EXERCISE/ACTIVITY

(times estimated for a group of 15 participants - extend duration of individual activities depending on the group size)

THE POWER OF DEFINITION

This exercise is designed to get us to re-examine our own assumptions about the meaning of certain concepts that often lie at the heart of polarization. It is meant to get everyone to think, get creative if necessary, and at the same time - loosen their attachment to definitions or understandings of specific terms.

Activity 1: Definitions Game

OBJECTIVES

- To deconstruct and redefine certain core terms
- To explore thinking outside of the box of assumed shared meaning
- To foster creativity and intellectual emancipation

TIME

15 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pieces of paper (one blank sheet per participant)
- Markers & Pens

DESCRIPTION

This activity is divided into two parts:

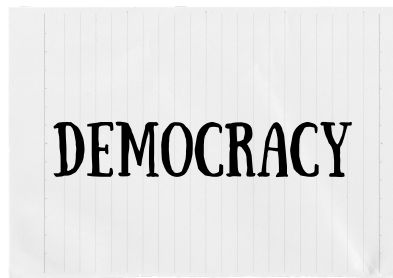
In Part A, trainer /instructor explains the task: each participant takes a word/concept (related to polarization, identity, -isms), and writes 3 different brief/basic definitions of that concept - a positive (sounding) one, a negative (sounding) one, and a neutral (sounding) one.

In Part B, participants complete the task by writing out three definitions of their chosen or assigned key term - positive definition, negative definition, and neutral one.

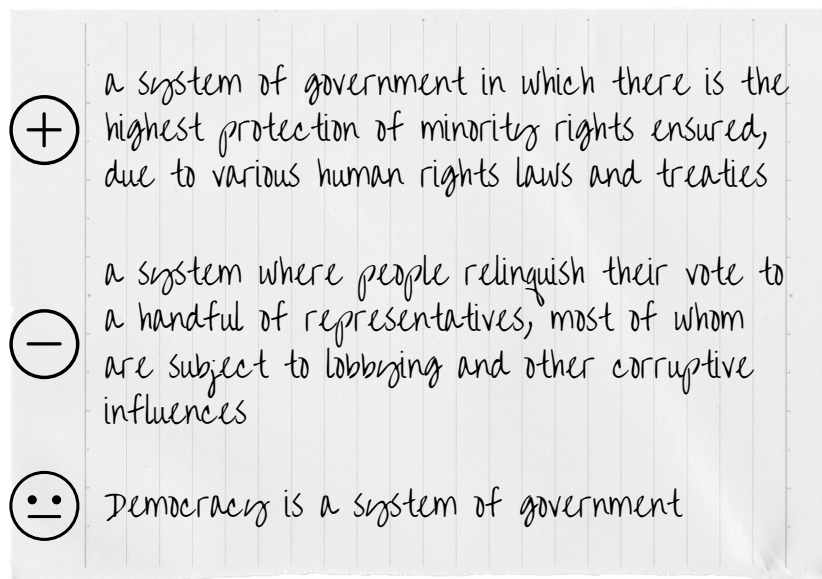
On the following page, you can see an example of a filled-out definition sheet, using the key term 'DEMOCRACY' and defining it in three distinct ways.

THE POWER OF DEFINITION - page 2

Sample of Participant's Filled Out Definitions Sheet



front page
(the side visible to all the participants)



back page
(the side visible only to the presenter /author)

Activity 2: Presentations & Voting

OBJECTIVES

- To get participants engaged and entertained
- To evoke and get participants attuned to their emotional response
- To elicit confusion, surprise, cognitive dissonance

TIME

20 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED

Participants' filled out definition sheets

DESCRIPTION

Prior to participants presenting their different definitions of the same concept /word, the trainer gives the following instructions:

To the participant/presenter: shuffle the order in which you will read out your definitions (i.e. do not always follow the positive-negative-neutral sequence in which you wrote the definitions). Do not announce which type of definition you are reading (conceal whether you are sharing the positive, negative or neutral definition of your assigned/chosen concept).

To the group: as you hear the presenter's definition, vote with your hand, whether you think that was the positive, negative or neutral definition you just heard.



if the definition you heard sounds positive to you, show thumbs up



if the definition you heard sounds negative to you, show thumbs down



if the definition you heard sounds neutral to you, show a circle with thumb and index finger

As the presentations proceed from one participant to the next, the instructor/trainer will need to keep on reminding everyone of the rules, in order to keep up the focus and the engagement of the group. Remind everyone to vote whenever they hear a definition. Remind the presenters not to reveal/disclose the type of definition they are reading.

The instructor/trainer should make humorous remarks where adequate, and foster a positive and dynamic working atmosphere.

Activity 3: Reflection

OBJECTIVES

- To evoke (self-) reflection
- To foster critical thinking
- To build (situational) awareness and intensive personal agency

TIME

10 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED

N/A

DESCRIPTION

The instructor invites a few participants to volunteer how they felt doing this activity. What did they notice, when voting on different types of definitions? Why is it that very often, the group voted differently on definitions they heard? (Why did they sound positive to some, while negative or neutral to others?)

The instructor finishes the activity by alerting participants to the following: words...have an emotional charge. We have the tendency to adopt definitions we hear, without questioning them, and we engage in discussions with people while often having the assumption that our definition of the topic X that we are talking about - is shared (while in fact, many times in disagreements, the understanding or the meaning behind a concept is **not** shared).

Call to action: be intentional about defining concepts at the outset of discussions that may get 'charged'. Bear in mind that 'neutral' definitions can often get you further in conversation and closer to generating a shared understanding with your interlocutor, than strongly positive or negative ones.

Notes:

You can adapt the vocabulary or terminology of key terms that you will be using in this de/construction exercise to the content and context of your own discipline (e.g. Sociology, Psychology, Political Science). The more familiar the terms are to your participants, the more engaging they will find the activity.

Depending on how much direction you wish to exert within the activity, you can either have the participants choose their own key term, or assign them with the terms you want them to focus on.

In case you are struggling with which key concepts to choose, here are some for you to choose from that usually play a role in different polarized discussions, owing to their complexity or controversy associated:

(in alphabetical order)

Amsterdam (or any other town, locality, province)
diversity
Donald Trump (or any other polarizing individual/figure)
Dutch (or any other nationality or citizenship)
feminism
gay
gender
human rights
immigrant
inclusion
man
marriage
minority (as a concept, or you can use specific minority groups)
nation
nationalism
the Netherlands (or any other country, region)
political party (as a concept, or you can use specific parties by name)
politics
race
racism
refugee
trans
university (as a concept, or you can use a specific university)
woman

"The Power of Definition" is an activity developed within the 'Across Divides - Depolarization of Communication' methodology toolkit developed by Dr. Maja Nenadovic, applied in critically reflective and capacity-building workshops.