



45-60 MINUTES

Reflective Listening and Values Surfacing

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*Adaptation note: This activity was adapted from the “Inspirational Reflective Listening Activity Guide” created by [Project VOYCE](#)

Activity Rationale and Aims

Aims

01. Identify shared values and implications for collective work
02. Establish community and build connections among team members

Rationale

Our lived experiences and histories impact how we show up for the work that we do and the values that guide that work. This activity is oriented around telling individual and/or collective stories and locating values within them. When we make our values explicit, we can be clear about how we individually and collectively understand and enact change.

This activity leverages the power of shared story-telling as a medium for fostering connection, self-awareness, empathy, and communication. This activity helps to illustrate what a certain value means to a person and can help avoid misunderstandings or assumptions of shared meaning, because the stories told provide concrete examples of the value(s) in action. The reflective listening skills developed will also help collaborators become more inclusive speakers.

Activity Summary

Collaborators will take turns sharing stories about facing a personal or professional challenge or making a change in their life and listening reflectively. The Reflective Listening activity involves collaborators working in groups of four, assigning roles to themselves.



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In Person Steps

Whole Group

1. Facilitator introduces the activity, breaks large group into pairs, and has team members choose starting roles. (5 mins)
 - a. See [roles reference sheet \(handout 1\)](#)
2. Facilitator provides the prompt: a personal or professional challenge or making a change in one's life (see modification notes for additional prompts). (2 minutes)
 - b. What was it like as the Storyteller to hear each Listener's reflection of your story (facts, feelings, and values)?
 - c. What did you learn as a Storyteller or a Listener that will help you engage more fully as a member of this team?
 - d. Did anything surprise you, if so, why?

Dyads

3. Listeners review feeling & values list (handout 2) while Storyteller decides what story to tell and jots down key points. (3-5 mins)
4. Storyteller shares their story. (5 mins)
5. Listeners wrap up jotting their ideas down. (1-2 mins)
6. After the Storyteller has finished their story, each Listener shares what they think they heard about the facts, feelings, or values defining the story. (2 mins for each Listener)
 - a. This open sharing allows the entire group to appreciate the complexity of saying what we mean and hearing what was said.
7. Repeat steps 3-6, with Listeners and Storytellers switching roles.
10. Come back as large group for share-outs.
 - a. 1-2 minutes per group.
 - b. Have as many groups share as time allows.
11. Facilitator distills the commonalities and shares with team.

Small Groups of 4

8. Have each dyad join with another dyad.
9. Engage in small group dialogue, with the following prompts:
 - a. When participating as a Listener, how did it feel to reflect back your impressions to the Storyteller?

Facilitator Preparation

IN PERSON MATERIALS

- Paper and pen

HANDOUTS OR SLIDES

- [Roles reference sheet](#) - handout 1
- [Feelings & values reference sheet](#) - handout 2

Facilitation Tips

- The activity’s comprehensive approach is best for groups committed to a longer-term collaborative effort.
- Facilitators can assign Storyteller and Listener roles or have collaborators pick roles randomly depending on the facilitator’s knowledge of the group. The facilitator also floats between small groups and jots down what they hear to inform the synthesis process in step 9 above.

Modifications and Virtual Adaptations

- When working with a larger group, not every small Storyteller/Listeners group will have a chance to share out during the Large Group Debrief section. You can have them all drop reflections into a shared Google Doc to capture the feedback; Ask to hear from however many groups time allows. If carrying out the activity in person, collect a shared notes doc from each group.
- Prompts can be modified to serve the purpose of the group, some suggestions are:
 - “Tell your life story.”
 - “Share your experience in school.”
 - “Talk about how you ended up in your profession.”
 - “What is a place that you know well and that knows you well?”
- The prompt could also be adapted to be about an institution, community, or research project, for example, “what is the history of your school?” It is important that the prompt is somewhat open-ended so that the narrator can tell the story that arises for them.
- If conducting this activity in a virtual environment, the facilitator can have each dyad share out keywords from one category (feelings, values, facts) to create a word cloud to represent the whole team’s stories.

Commitments to Equity and Wellness

Wellness exists in relationships and that requires listening at multiple levels. This activity supports team members in strengthening listening skills and expanding their awareness of listening to include multiple levels: facts, emotions, values. The shared and rotating roles of listener and storyteller promote equity by ensuring that multiple voices are heard. Sharing personal stories helps to bring lived experiences forward as a form of embodied expertise. Making these experiences visible and discussing how they inform feelings, values, and ways of collaborating can mitigate traditional power structures where some forms of expertise are recognized above others and values are not made explicit.

Additional Reading

Bang, M., Faber, L., Gurneau, J., Marin, A., & Soto, C. (2016). Community-based design research: Learning across generations and strategic transformations of institutional relations toward axiological innovations, mind, culture, and activity. *Mind, Culture, & Activity*, 23(1), 28-41.