

Chapter 6. The VISION Process

In this chapter, we outline the different spheres of and elements in a VISION process. In particular, we highlight important elements vis-à-vis the facilitator's mindset and clarification of the objectives, along with considerations related to varying group sizes and the time required for a VISION process. Furthermore, we describe three reflective spheres integral to a VISION process, along with examples of questions used for each sphere. We close this chapter with our recommendations for ending a VISION process.

The example questions for the three spheres have been compiled as a speaking card, which we include as a cut-out in Appendix B. This speaking card, developed as part of the URGE project, is informed by protreptic principles, as well as theories and perspectives from eco-social work, degrowth theories, and collaborative methods of social work. Furthermore, the guidelines and considerations presented in this document are based on the pilot testing of VISION we conducted in the five cities participating in the URGE project.

By way of introduction, we provide several circumstances via which to foster understanding, acceptance, and use of participants' thoughts and values, which rely on guiding questions belonging to what we term '*explaining it*', '*sensing it*', and '*expanding it*' (the three spheres of questions detailed below). These questions might seem rather abstract, whereby some may even seem weird or silly. Thus, it might take some time to get used to using them. Please remember that they are purposefully formulated in this way to help participants in VISION dialogues articulate their thoughts and values more clearly. In addition, they have been formulated in this way to avoid answers that take their point of departure through concrete examples or events that happened in our lives. Thus, the questions are meant to help facilitators and participants avoid psychologising, guiding them to place reflections over attitudes.

The mindset of the facilitator and clarification of the objectives

Regardless of the context in which VISION is deployed, the process consistently upholds the fundamental values derived from protreptic principles. To avoid psychologising, the objective does not focus on revealing any hidden truths. Instead, emphasis is placed on attentively listening to participants' voices and listening with the intent to understand rather than to respond (Gørtz & Mejlhede, 2015; Kirkeby, 2009, 2016). Participants' confidentiality must be safeguarded; and, if a particular theme proves challenging or if participants are hesitant to engage with a specific topic, it should never be imposed upon them. The facilitator must approach this process with an honest, curious, and non-judgmental mindset, avoiding any moralising. Hence, the facilitator is responsible for structuring the dialogue, but does not dictate its content. Moreover, the facilitator cannot ascertain the significance of the values in question for participants, nor can they predict or dictate the direction of the process.

Group size and time

A VISION process can be effectively conducted in pairs, in small groups of three to four individuals, or in larger assemblies. Determining the appropriate group size is essential, taking into

consideration the available resources, any potential barriers or challenges, and the specific needs of the participants. Best practices in social group work suggest that the optimal group size consists of six to eight individuals, which fosters a safe environment and ensures that all voices are heard. Whilst larger groups can also be accommodated, additional considerations ensure inclusive participation from all members when working in larger groups as well.

A VISION dialogue amongst pairs and smaller groups requires a relatively short timeframe, given that it is meant to spark further reflections amongst and within participants, without specifically or definitively reaching a conclusion. Some reflections might not be immediately apparent or conscious, but instead follow later, perhaps even a few days or weeks later. Thoughts and reflections about one's innermost values in the abstract form of a VISION dialogue take time and cannot be forced, such that a gentle opening of reflections is sufficient. Therefore, it is also not possible to outline strict guidelines on the length of a VISION dialogue, since the timeframe will vary and depend on the person and the setting. That said, in what follows we provide approximate timeframes for a VISION dialogue depending upon the size of a group.

In pairs and smaller groups, a timeframe of 15–30 minutes is sufficient for a primarily verbally based dialogue. If creative exercises and activities are also employed, the timeframe can be extended.

In groups consisting of four or more individuals, the process is expected to take between 45 minutes to one hour, depending upon factors such as group size, planned activities, and the specific objectives of the process. Experience with community initiatives (from pilot tests of VISION) indicates that beginning the VISION process with a pair-based check-in fosters a sense of inclusion amongst participants, particularly in larger groups in which some individuals may be more reluctant to speak. In such circumstances, we advise incorporating some of the more creative and less verbally based exercises and activities outlined in the value catalogue in Chapter 9. The facilitator holds the crucial responsibility of consistently inviting all participants into the collective dialogue and, when necessary, managing contributions from those who may assume a dominant role within the group.

In educational contexts, VISION can be combined with training on sustainability, ethics, communications, and advocacy-related topics, as either the basis of a full course or as a part of selected classes.

Chapters 7 and 8 outline further instructions for facilitating group and teaching processes.

The VISION process from beginning to end

When beginning the VISION process, it is important to introduce the method and clarify the role of the facilitator to participants. We recommend using one of these opening sentences (which you can modify to your liking):

- Today, we will try something a little different, as we attempt to find new inspiration about ...
- I would like to try something new today, which can help us get to know each other without revealing things that are perhaps too private or too sensitive to us...
- To spark a dialogue about something that is important to all of us and which we may find difficult to discuss or understand, today we will try a different approach where there are no right or wrong answers.

It is also essential to emphasise that, as with all group processes, the discussions and information shared are confidential and will remain within the group. If somebody wishes to use elements from the process in other places or for other purposes, they must first ask for permission to do so from and within the group.

Spheres and questions in a VISION process

A VISION process moves through the following three spheres: ‘*explaining it*’, ‘*sensing it*’, and ‘*expanding it*’, which we detail below. This process is inspired by the new protreptic, namely the book *Protreptic in Practice* (Gørtz & Mejlhede, 2015) and the three artistic proofs known from classic rhetoric—logos, pathos, and ethos—first presented by Aristotle.

Throughout the entire process, the facilitator acts as a curious companion to participants, seeking to open up or broaden the meaning of the value or concept discussed. The facilitator should practice creating their own questions and using their own words as much as possible, following the principles and key competencies described below. The most important part of the dialogue will always lie in the answers and responses offered rather than the questions asked. Thus, it is key to listen to and follow what participants say, letting go of perfection and the desire to do it right, trusting that the next question will often come naturally. Participants should complete the reflective work, for which short questions are often the most effective. At times, it may even be sufficient to simply repeat what was said last, particularly during the second and third spheres. Silence is also necessary—and at times sufficient—to prompt reflection. Often, this also means that more questions will emerge during the first sphere, with fewer raised during the second sphere, and only a few emerging in the third sphere. During the third sphere, reflections require a slower pace and participants often need more time to choose their words, particularly given that this method of speaking and thinking may be unfamiliar to many.

First sphere: Explaining it (logos)

The process begins with a logical and analytical sphere, exploring the *what*, *where*, *how*, and *when* of a value, including its opposites (what is it *not*, where is it *not*, etc.). These represent basic human cognitive strategies for understanding the world and can, therefore, constitute a good starting point for the process. For variety, and to widen the range of reflections, the facilitator can also be inspired by the logical categories of *substance*, *place*, *quality*, *relation*, *position*, *belongings*, *active*, *passive*, *quantity*, and *time*.

During this first sphere, the role of the facilitator is analytical, creating an overview of participants’ understandings of the concept or value and gathering information for subsequent use in the dialogue. Crucial here is focus on the other/otherness as a purpose, aimed at viewing the value as the other sees it: to expand one’s own presence and to remain open to participants’ moods, vibrations, and ideas without overtaking them. At the same time, critical openness is employed, demanding a critical stance towards what the other says, whilst simultaneously protecting one’s sense of self. The idea is to question fixed and frozen images (such as ‘that is just the way it is’ or ‘it always/never happens’).

Examples of questions for the first sphere: Explaining it

In your own words, how would you describe [...]?
Where does [...] come from?

What is the purpose of [...]?
 What shape does [...] take?
 What is [...] made of?
 Is there a limit to [...]?
 What is [...] not?
 What is the quality of [...]?
 Does [...] have any brothers or sisters?
 How is [...] doing today?
 How is [...] affected?
 How long has there been [...]?
 How is [...] related to autonomy/sufficiency/care/conviviality?
 What is central in [...]?

Second sphere: Sensing it (pathos)

The second sphere focuses on the ambiance that the selected value conveys or embodies, diving deeper into the essence the identified value possesses, exploring its inner elements, such as emotional states, mood shifts, sensations, meanings, and intuitions. During this sphere, the role of the facilitator is to further explore those elements that appeared most significant or meaningful during the first sphere, employing the more intuitive facets of communication and fostering an environment for deeper contemplation. Participants are encouraged to deviate slightly from their normal thought processes, promoting new viewpoints whilst also proceeding with caution. This entails a slow approach, where emotions are gently addressed and ideas are respected and nurtured. No thoughts are deemed incorrect or insignificant—often, the simplest insights can be the most profound. Therefore, it is crucial to have established a safe space which encourages conversation. Furthermore, if discussions become overwhelming or challenging to articulate, the facilitator can steer the dialogue back to a more comfortable space. Occasionally, reflections can significantly expand at this stage, leading participants away from the core value. In such cases, the task of the facilitator is to gently guide participants back to the essence or core of the value.

Examples of questions for the second sphere: Sensing it

How do you sense [...]?
 How do you know if [...] has been there?
 Where does [...] live?
 What mood does [...] bring with it?
 How can [...] become a friend?
 How is it possible to accommodate [...]?
 What states of being can be experienced by giving [...] to others?
 What states of being can be experienced by receiving [...] from others?
 What states of being can be experienced by giving [...] to yourself?
 In what ways can [...] connect humans to one another other?
 In what ways might it make sense to say that [...] has something to do with our relationship to other living species or to the planet?

Third sphere: Expanding it (ethos)

During the second sphere, the aim focuses on meeting or seeking the essence of a chosen value, such as by examining its relation to some of the cornerstones of human relations in ethics, aesthetics, science, politics, and society. Here, the value comes alive and can speak, think, sense,

and vocalise amongst other actions. It may be useful to explore the relationship of the value under discussion to core values such as good, beauty, true, and just, along with freedom. It may also be interesting to examine their opposites or ‘cousins’, such as how the value relates to the values of bad, ugly, false/lies, unjust, evil, the hidden side, disgust, unfairness, poeticism, and its relationship to the universe. The hidden side of a value refers to what can emerge when a value is held unconsciously as a truth or enacted without critical reflection, contextual sensitivity, or relational awareness. For example, values such as responsibility, efficiency, or care may, when not reflected upon, lead to control, exclusion, or exhaustion, not because the values themselves are flawed, but because they are enacted without sufficient reflection or relational attunement.

The facilitator’s role is to relinquish control and create space for organic dialogue, often at a reflective pace allowing participants to explore values more deeply. This can be challenging for participants given the abstract nature of values. Facilitators should simplify discussions, reaffirm that there are no right or wrong answers, and remain vigilant regarding their own biases and emotions. Closely observing participants’ needs and interactions remains crucial to fostering a supportive environment. Facilitators must also allow the process to unfold organically, demonstrating humility by avoiding control and refraining from claiming credit for the dialogue. They should also recognise when discussions reach their natural conclusion, maintaining an openness to further exploration. This approach empowers participants to apply the insights they gain beyond the session.

Examples of questions for the third sphere: Expanding it

Where is [...] headed?
 What happens in the space between [...] and its opposite?
 Is justice/injustice associated with [...]?
 Is [...] for everybody?
 What does truth/a lie say to the [...]?
 When is [...] good/bad?
 How is [...] related to freedom?
 Is there beauty/ugliness in [...]?
 How is [...] related to the stars or the moon?
 What roots [...]?
 Where can [...] take us?
 If [...] could speak, what would it say?

When do you end a dialogue?

The objective of a VISION process is not to reach a conclusion, but to initiate further exploration and reflection. Recognising the appropriate moment to pause involves observing when reflections organically come to a close or when it becomes evident that no additional questions are required or that certain insights may need time for contemplation. At times, silence or a sense of ease may be felt. In fact, nonverbal cues such as expressions from participants’ eyes and their body language, often accompanied by smiling, may indicate to the facilitator that this is an appropriate and conducive moment to conclude the process. We recommend the following for closing remarks:

- This seems like a good place to stop. Thank you very much for all of your thoughts and reflections.
- Okay, we will stop our exploration now. Thank you very much for your time and your honest reflections. Some of you may continue thinking about this process in the back of your mind in days or weeks to come.

- We have now examined the value from various perspectives, and our time is coming to a close. This is consistent with the intended purpose of VISION, where we do not necessarily arrive at a concrete conclusion. I appreciate everyone's participation, and I would like to kindly remind you that our discussions during this forum should remain confidential and only amongst us.

Throughout the process, the facilitator should summarise and repeat what participants have said, keeping track of the dialogue and using their answers as stepping stones for the next steps in the process. VISION ends with a short debriefing, asking participants if there is something that they feel still needs to be said and how they felt about reflecting together in this way. This step is not an evaluation of the dialogue or the facilitator, but a shared reflection of the experience.

If the VISION process is intended to inform advocacy, it can be followed by a summary and a process that can guide participants towards using their insights and shared explorations to raise their voices towards actions. It may be valuable to map the different power positions within the group, using the power cube as a tool (see Chapter 3 on advocacy).

This chapter was about...

VISION can be used to clarify values:

- We position the VISION process as a carefully structured, yet open-ended dialogue method grounded in protreptic principles. In doing so, we outline the key elements shaping a VISION process, including the facilitator's mindset, the clarification of objectives, and practical considerations related to group size and time. Rather than offering a rigid formula, we emphasise attentiveness to context and participants, underscoring that VISION is designed to open reflection rather than produce fixed outcomes or definitive conclusions.
- The role and mindset of the facilitator are central to maintaining the integrity and depth of the process. The facilitator is expected to adopt a curious, non-judgmental, and non-moralising stance, focused on listening with the intention of understanding rather than responding. Drawing on protreptic traditions, in this chapter we stress the importance of confidentiality, respect for participants' boundaries, and avoiding psychologising, whilst clarifying that the facilitator structures the dialogue without controlling its content or direction.
- Practical considerations of group size and time profoundly shape how the VISION process unfolds. VISION can be conducted in pairs, small groups, or larger assemblies, with each constellation requiring different facilitation strategies to ensure inclusion and balanced participation. Whilst small groups allow for shorter, verbally focused dialogues, larger groups demand more time and often benefit from creative or less language-dependent exercises. Across settings, we highlight in this chapter that reflecting on values unfolds at its own pace and should not be forced.
- At the core of the method lie the three reflective spheres guiding the progression of the dialogue. The VISION process moves through the spheres of '*explaining it*', '*sensing it*', and '*expanding it*', corresponding broadly to logos, pathos, and ethos. Each sphere invites a distinct mode of reflection, shifting from analytical description to experiential and emotional exploration, and finally toward ethical and relational expansion, with the facilitator acting as a curious companion who follows participants' expressions closely.

- We emphasise that a VISION process is defined as much by how it ends as by how it unfolds. Ending a dialogue is understood as a moment of attunement rather than closure, recognising when reflection has reached a natural pause and when insights require time to settle. The process concludes with a brief shared reflection and, where relevant, may be extended toward advocacy by helping participants carry their insights forward into action whilst remaining faithful to the exploratory and non-conclusive character of VISION.

Chapter 6 references

- Gørtz, K., & Mejlhede, M. (2015). *Protreptik i praksis: Få væsentlige samtaler til at lykkes* [Protreptics in practice: Making important conversations successful]. Djøf Forlag.
<https://djoefforlag.dk/products/protreptik-i-praksis>
- Kirkeby, O. F. (2009). *The new protreptic: The concept and the art*. CBS Press.
- Kirkeby, O. F. (2016). *Protreptik: Selvindsigt og samtalepraksis* [Protreptics: Self-insight and conversation practice]. Samfundslitteratur.