

5. Agency

Etymology: 1650s, ‘active operation’; 1670s, ‘a mode of exerting power or producing effect’, from Medieval Latin *agentia*, abstract noun from Latin *agentem* (nominative *agens*) ‘effective, powerful’, present participle of *agere* ‘to set in motion, drive forward; to do, perform’, figuratively ‘incite to action; keep in movement’ (from PIE root *ag-* ‘to drive, draw out or forth, move’ and might also be the source of: Greek *agein* ‘to lead, guide, drive, carry off’, *agon* ‘assembly, contest in the games’, *agōgos* ‘leader’, *axios* ‘worth, worthy, weighing as much’; Sanskrit *ajati* ‘drives’, *ajirah* ‘moving, active’; Latin *actus* ‘a doing; a driving, impulse, a setting in motion; a part in a play’; *agere* ‘to set in motion, drive, drive forward’, hence ‘to do, perform’, *agilis* ‘nimble, quick’; Old Norse *aka* ‘to drive’; Middle Irish *ag* ‘battle’.¹

Suggestions for value-specific questions in VISION dialogues

- In your own words, how would you define ‘agency’?
- What is agency made of?
- How can agency become a friend?
- How is agency related to freedom?
- What kind of fuel does agency need?
- How is it possible to endure agency?
- If agency is overwhelming, how is it possible to moderate it?
- What is the relationship between agency and truthfulness?
- Is agency authentic?
- Can agency be a role one assumes or does agency only exist when it is fully authentic?
- Is agency a battle? How do you prepare for it?
- Is agency a choice or is it obligatory?
- How do you know if you want agency?
- How is agency related to peace?
- How is agency related to autonomy?

Suggestions for exercises and creative activities to inspire a VISION reflection

Circling values: A nonverbal drawing method to dialogue

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Description: This activity allows participants to explore together one value through silent and visual expression, supporting inclusion, creativity, intercultural dialogue, and equal participation. The dialogue is formed on paper rather than through spoken language, rendering the activity accessible to groups with varying language abilities.

Materials needed:

- A value card for each table from the value catalogue
- Drawing paper, preferably A3 or A4

¹ Extract compiled from <https://www.etymonline.com/word/agency>, last accessed 1 May 2026.

- Coloured pencils or markers (optional items include printed pictures without words, and glue, for participants who feel more comfortable working with ready-made visuals)
- A timer
- A quiet space

Step 1: Individual silent drawing (15 minutes).

Each table is assigned one value from the VISION catalogue, such as inclusion, agency, safety, community, belonging, or sustainability. Each participant sits at a table with a blank sheet of paper. For 15 minutes, participants draw the value in silence. Instead of using words or numbers, encourage participants to express the value through shapes, colours, symbols, pictures, or scenes.

The following are example introductory prompts the facilitator may provide to participants before the silence begins:

- If this value had a shape, what form might that shape take?
- If this value had colours, which ones would represent it?
- If the value took place in a specific location, what kind of place would that be?
- Focus on what the value feels like rather than what it literally is.

These prompts help participants approach the abstract nature of values through creative imagery and reflect the nonverbal approaches encouraged in the VISION materials.

Step 2: First rotation (5 minutes).

Following step 1, participants leave their drawings on the table. Each individual moves to the table to their right. They now sit in front of someone else's drawing detailing the same value. Their task is to contribute something to the drawing only if they feel the value is missing an element. They may add lines, colours, shapes, or small details. They may also choose not to add anything if they feel that the drawing already fully expresses or captures the value. None of the details already in the drawing may be removed. This step reinforces respect for others' interpretations and prevents one viewpoint from dominating.

Step 3: Second rotation (5 minutes).

Following step 3, participants move to their right again. They now sit in front of a drawing that has already been modified by two other individuals. Again, they may add something or choose not to. This continues to build a shared and collective interpretation of the value.

Step 4: Continue rotating until everyone returns to their original drawing.

Participants continue rotating every 5 minutes until they return to the drawing they originally created. They now see how others have interpreted, expanded, or reshaped their original expression of the value. This moment often solicits surprise, curiosity, or mixed feelings, and becomes the foundation for the verbal dialogue that follows.

Step 5: Opening the verbal dialogue (10–15 minutes).

Once everyone has returned to their original drawing, the facilitator opens the discussion. The conversation is guided by the drawings rather than personal stories.

Example reflections include the following questions:

- How do you feel seeing how your drawing has changed?
- Which additions do you easily accept and which leave you feeling uncomfortable?
- Did someone add something you never considered for this value?

- Does the drawing still reflect what you initially intended?
- If there is something you want to change, why would you want to make that specific change?
- What does this process tell us about how values change when others influence them?

This discussion helps participants explore how values shift, expand, or evolve when shared in a group setting.

Step 6: Collective reflection (5–10 minutes).

The following example questions can be used to guide the discussion amongst the entire group:

- Do we share the same understanding of this value?
- Where did we differ and where did we agree?
- What can this exercise teach us about living together in a diverse community?
- How might this value support a more sustainable and inclusive future?

This final step mirrors the VISION method's movement from abstract thinking to collective awareness and finally to practical meaning-making within community settings.

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