

## **Matching dialogue using inner images**

### **Name of tool:**

Matching dialogue using inner images

### **Title, first name and surname of author:**

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### **Short description:**

In “matching dialogue using inner images” the participants of the workshop establish a link between their personal professional development and the development of their team or company. To do this they intuitively activate their respective *inner images* in respect to the past, the present and the expected future. In *dialogue* with colleagues they exchange ideas on how their own motivation, needs and desires *match* the demands and development of their team or company.

### **Duration:**

1 – 2 hours (depending on the need for an introduction and how comprehensive the discussions are).

### **Areas of application:**

This method is most important during the starting phase of a workshop, a project or the reorganization or restructuring of company units. Ideally it should be initiated before problematical forms of discussion of the matter concerned and confrontation with the other functionaries take root.

This method can also be applied at a later time during the course of the project, in order to further clarification and cooperation between those concerned beyond the factually definable and controllable surfaces, for example. Over and above its direct

effect, this method can generally promote a multi-layered and trusting culture of dialogue.

### **Aims/Use:**

A matching dialogue using inner images helps all concerned to form an impression of the developments of a team or a project on the one hand, and on the other also to examine whether these developments match one's personal career development and the symbols of future activities and roles. We start on the assumption that this match is of decisive importance for self-motivation and self-control, for creative achievements and their interplay. This is even more valid the less the projects can be planned through or the less the leader can keep an eye on all essentials.

In complex situations the formation of relationships and processes of coordination are so complex that they evade purely conscious control anyway. This necessitates intuitive, finely coordinated control.

Working with inner images promotes inner communication and gathers each individual's inner strength. At the same time, it strengthens intuitive, creative interplay between those concerned, that is, the production and maintenance of a joint force field.

The activation of inner images and metaphorical communication make effective intuition in the background of the processes into an integral part of professional communication culture in a company.

As a culture-forming measure, working with inner images enables constructive interplay between conscious-methodical and unconscious-intuitive communication within the organization even over and above the current question of matching.

### **Detailed description:**

In the following the example of a workshop in the framework of a project called "New orientation of the personnel function" is utilized to show how the matching dialogue can be staged with the help of inner images.

We are looking at a technology company with lots of European sites. The workload of the personnel managers at these sites will be relieved considerably by a new structure, and they need to find their place in new functions which should entail more

elements of personnel development, participation in projects of change and the procurement of consultation services and coaching in the various fields.

At the time of the workshop, the necessary organizational changes are already under way. In information meetings those responsible for personnel matters have already been instructed of the necessity of new orientation in the main areas of competence and activities, as well as of conceivable options for their own development. At present we are looking at the first day of a workshop in which the features of these new roles at the various sites and the necessary new orientation and further qualification of the personnel experts are to be compiled together.

*The organizer is the present Head of Human Resource Development together with the HR Director. Both clarify that they are backing the upcoming changes all the way and wish to enable the personnel experts a good transition to meaningful repositioning in the company. They see this process as a professional opportunity for those involved and as a further development of the company's organizational culture which necessitates multi-layered self-clarification and authentic talks.*

### **Step 1: Explanation of a matching dialogue using inner images**

The consultant firstly explains the concept of matching and the usefulness of a dialogue using inner images. He visualizes and explains the following formula for competence:

*Competence in organizations = role competence x competence in the professional field x matching*

In relation to our practical example, the introduction might proceed as follows:

*"Whether you will be able to cope with the changes and challenges concomitant with the 'new orientation of personnel functions' fundamentally depends on the three factors role competence, competence in the professional field and match. The multiplication of the single factors points to the fact that your competence in the function assigned to you can gravitate towards zero if just one of the three factors is not very pronounced, even if the other two factors are high. So if, for example, the match is not right, professional training alone will not bring an increase in competence.*

*The subject matter of so-called 'matching' is your professional function in the field of tension between the organization and your personality. The question is, then, in how far the expectations placed in you currently and in the future fit your personal motivation, values and skills. The concept of 'matching' emphasises the idea that for competence and match in professional situations it is always also important, apart from the usual quality criteria, whether every individual's own essential elements of satisfaction are given in professional situations. If someone wanted to be an engine driver as a child, it makes a difference which of the following inner pictures he connected with it:*

- 1. 'My engine and me – no-one knows it like I do!'*
- 2. 'My stoker and me – two comrades travelling around the world!'*
- 3. 'All the people who rely on me. I'll get you there safe and sound.'*

Activating and comparing such inner images enables an intuitive grasp of whether developments in a team or organisation fit the developments (also the spiritual development) of the people working there. Quite often there is not much “matching” to start off with. With the help of inner images a dialogue of adjustment can be started and may contribute to the necessary clarification of whether an employee may be able to develop his full competence in a different function and what kind of support he might need to accomplish this. So here questions of professional personality development and organizational development coincide.

The consultant can heighten understanding of the connection between inner images and the question of matching by means of further examples. This gives rise to an identification effect in the listeners and prompts inner search processes (“jumping on the bandwagon”).

Examples:

- “Here we have an account manager who became manager of the customer service station and now spends all his time at his desk in the office and in meetings. But his inner images show people in the middle of a full if somewhat chaotic life.*
- There we have a (female) manager who transferred from the female dominated textile production to the male-dominated field of textile marketing because of her smart ideas. Now she is going to seed and doubting her aptitude for this field. Her inner images all show communities of women who are all fond of each other.*

- *Here we have a manager in a world organization for machine tools. He suffered a loss of competence that neither he nor his superiors can find a reason for. For years he was working full of energy and successfully as production manager and later as works manager. Because of reorganization within the company he is now responsible for a particular part of the production process in several locations distributed all over Europe instead of for all areas in one location. This was in effect a promotion, and he fulfilled all prerequisites for the job. However, he didn't understand himself better until he took a look at the kaleidoscope of his inner images. All of them pointed to him as the head of a local community. Because of the reorganisation the spiritual fit between himself and the organisation got lost."*

At the end of his theoretical exposition, the consultant introduces the participants to an exercise on a matching dialogue using inner images. To this end he distributes a worksheet containing an exact description of the single steps in the process (questions, behavioural instructions, time structure). It is useful to talk about all three steps with the group first, answer any questions and be present during the exercise in order to further clarify if necessary and to present the individual steps.

The consultant asks each participant to find himself a partner. When partners are allowed to find each other, the threshold to getting involved in a sensitive, multi-level conversation is not so high. When the desired culture of conversation has been established in the dyad, it is easier to transfer it to larger groups. In addition, when there is free choice the ones who are a little unwilling at first can get together. Objections raised in advance are respected, but the consultant requests that the participants first get into the experiment and then discuss what the point of it was.

## **Step 2: Activating inner images**

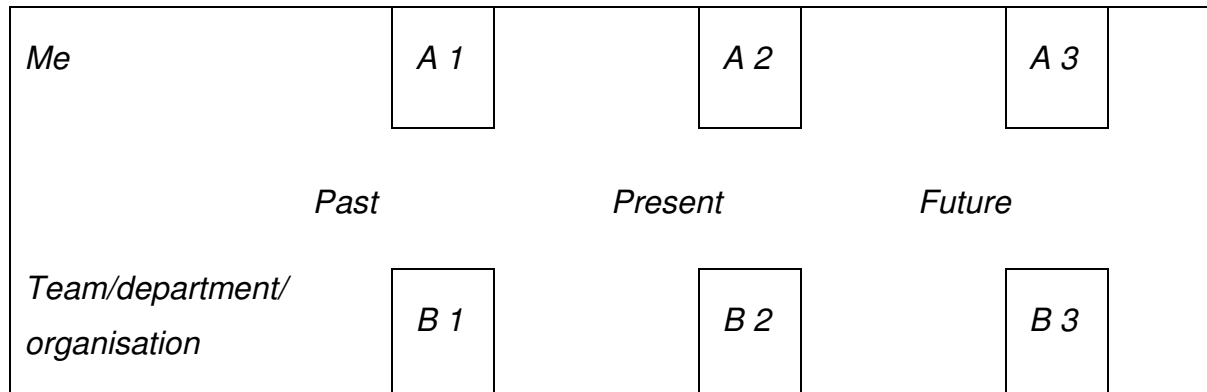
The worksheet contains the following instructions:

The consultant instructs the participants: *"Please work on your own at first and follow the instructions on your worksheet. You have ten minutes for the first step. If you are finished before then, please stay in the room and wait quietly until your colleagues have finished as well."*

The participants now spread out in the room and follow the instructions and questions on the worksheet:

- *Choose a team, department or organisation you are in contact with.*

- *In inner contact with whichever you have chosen, let images/scenes arise and intuitively choose three about you and three about the team/department/organisation.*
- *Place these images next to each other to form a collage:*



**Fig. 1: Collage of my inner images**

- *Choose **three images about you** and answer the questions:*
  - A1: *Where do I come from in my professional development?*
  - A2: *What characterizes my present working life?*
  - A3: *Where am I going? What developments are in line?*
- *Choose **three images for the team/department/organisation** and answer the questions:*
  - B1: *Where does this team/department/organisation come from?*
  - B2: *What characterizes the present development?*
  - B3: *Where is it going? What developments are in line?*
- *Look at A1 next to B1, A2 next to B2 and A3 next to B3 inwardly and let yourself be stimulated:*
  - *What connections do you see?*
  - *Are the developments moving towards each other or away from each other?*

If you sense that the participants are unsure whether they can fulfil the supposed expectations, it may help if you point out that people react very differently to this exercise, which is absolutely in order. The differences in peoples' personal styles are actually helpful information that can be utilized for mutual understanding. When working alone, some people only discover a few inner images, but then get into the

exercise when talking about it and are often quite surprised about the wealth and unexpected relevance of the images.

### **Step 3: Exchanging inner images**

When all participants have finished their individual work the consultant can present the next step: *“Now please get together with your partner and find a quiet place enabling an undisturbed exchange. You now have the opportunity to tell each other about your perceptions. The exchange should take place along the lines of the instructions on your worksheet. Refrain from evaluations and discussions. You have 15 minutes each per person. Please both watch the time so that each person has the chance to experience the exercise for himself.”*

The instructions on the worksheet are as follows:

- *Tell your partner which team/department/organisation you are dealing with.*
- *Present your images (images of yourself and of the team/department/organisation). Your partner listens and pays attention to his own reactions. He then tells you what images and reactions your report arouses in him. (Keep in mind: his ideas are speculative. Whether they mean anything to you is entirely up to you.) Just exchange – no discussion!*
- *Questions for the partner while listening to the description of the images:*
  - *What images arise for me?*
  - *What do they solicit in me?*
  - *What additions / contrasts occur to me intuitively?*

The consultant stays in the background. He only intervenes if he has the impression that the participants are getting into discussions about content in defiance of the instructions. He may remind the participants after 15 minutes that they should now begin the second round.

### **Step 4: Reflection**

When the dialogues on inner images have been completed the partners evaluate the exercise with the help of several questions. They have 15 minutes to do this.

The questions on the worksheet are:

- *What do my self-images tell me about the type and quality of the relationship between me and the team/department/organisation when put in contact with my team (department/organisation) images? What role do I have/play here?*

- *Where do I experience consistence – where do I experience inconsistency, possibly even conflict?*
- *What do the images tell me about my own development, about the development of the team/organisation and about the interplay between these two worlds? Can this be summarized in an image, motto, song or anything else?*

### **Step 5: Going over the exercise**

The consultant can invite the participants to talk about their experiences in the plenary session. Participants often deal with this invitation differently. Some may describe their initial scepticism and difficulties in understanding the instructions or their intention. Others report that what the exercise brought was very interesting, if not quite tangible. Some participants are really touched by the intensity of the experience, others are all churned up inside as a result of the unusual discoveries.

After the exercise it is important to accept everything equally and to record as little as possible as a result or define it as a conclusion. Far more important than definable answers are the interior search processes that have been initiated, which usually continue and bring to subsequent processes a different kind of sensitivity for each other and permeability for what is hidden in the background. Sometimes the participants themselves or the organizers tend to activate “education control” contrary to this kind of learning and ask after a premature classification of what has been experienced and the conclusions. This disturbs both further search processes and the openness and willingness to communicate that have been created.

The exercise has gone well if the interest in “reports” is not great because the processes themselves were satisfying and are still continuing.

### **Prerequisites/Knowledge:**

It is often helpful for a process consultant to support the process. However, the tools can also be used independently by experienced project leaders or change managers. What is decisive is whether this person can personally convey the culture behind the process and that the invitation is not a complete contradiction of the usual culture. It is important that the key figures in this mutual project take part in this communication. Previous psychological training is not absolutely necessary, but may sometimes be an advantage. If the participants are not pushed to more intensity and intimacy than they themselves choose, no more stress occurs than in everyday professional life. A



climate of encouragement, curiosity and friendly and respectful relations with one another is important.

**Comments/Experiences:**

The exercise has been presented here between partners. It can also be designed as an exercise for a small group of participants. Additionally, it is possible to carry out the activation of inner images in a plenary session as guided fantasy and follow it with an exchange between partners or in small groups.

The organizers themselves might also conduct the theoretical introduction to the “matching dialogue”. Participants often find it easier to get into this very personal work when encouraged (plausibly!) by the system itself and not by a consultant.

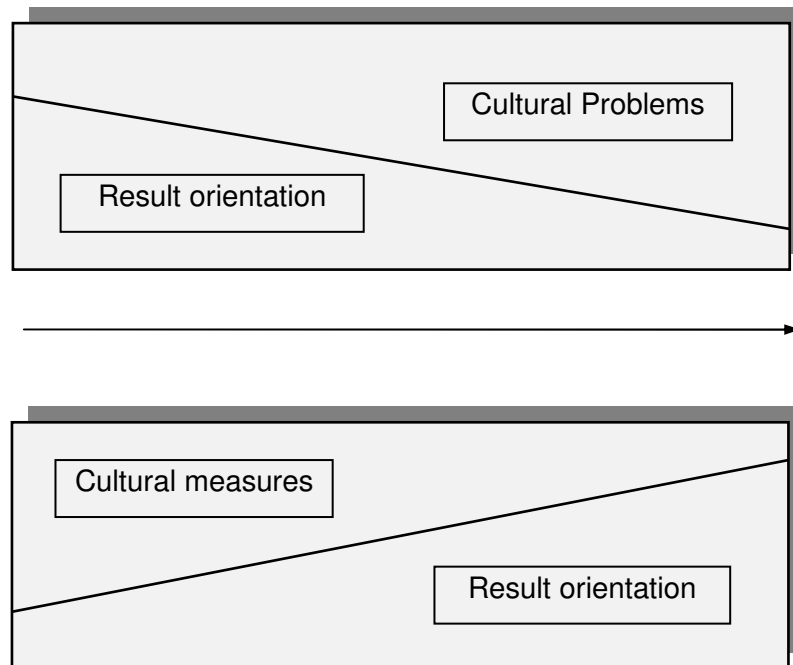
You can usually tell that the exercise is beginning to take effect when the exchanges become more intensive and when people start talking and the atmosphere relaxes.

On the whole, the contents of the exercise are quite likely to appear dotted about here and there in subsequent measures. Far more important are the processes going on below the surface and the quality of further discussions. It is difficult to define atmosphere, and yet it is perceptible for everyone. In the same way it is difficult to operationalize culture and culture is described quite fuzzily or attached to small examples. But everyone notices whether you are on the right track or not.

Elements of matching dialogues using inner images can be interspersed in your further work or activated again and again as additional levels of conversation in order to maintain the culture of conversation and to continue to include elements of what is in the background as well as personal elements.

You can also repeat the matching exercises as they are or in adapted forms. Sometimes people initially fear that nothing new will come out of it or they have a slight resistance to getting involved again. But we have seen that after overcoming this scepticism or listlessness new aspects arise in inner experiences and in the conversations. To enable this it is helpful to do the exercise with new partners and in different group combinations. When different people come together, different experiences are created, and this makes the kaleidoscope richer and consolidates the network of relationships

If habit or project pressure lead to doubt as to whether the time necessary for this method will be used meaningfully when planning such a measure, the following diagram describing its benefits is often helpful:



*Fig. 2. Result and culture orientation in organisations*

Starting from generally available experiences, we can argue that teams often rashly consider themselves workable. After a certain period X, problems in coming to agreement may arise, subversively hidden behind unfruitful discussions. Result orientation then suffers from “cultural problems” (see above diagram), and then it is often difficult to get a grip on them. For this reason it is useful – particularly from the perspective of result orientation - to invest right away in a satisfying work culture, oriented on the subject but initially without being under pressure to show results (see diagram below).