

# Activity 2.2 Embracing Contradictions

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Last Updated 08/27/2023



## Description

Contradictions can be helpful. They can help us to see complexity and develop flexibility of thought. Most issues (and people) contain contradictions. Instead of being stumped by contradictions, this activity encourages participants to lean into this discomfort and develop a “paradox mindset.”

## Learning Goal

- Learn how to identify contradictions and frame them in a way that embraces complexity and encourages flexible thinking.

## Instructions (50 minutes)

<p><b>Set Up</b></p>	<p><b>Prepare for the Activity</b></p> <p>Organize participants into pairs or small groups (3-5 ppl).</p> <p>Share the <a href="#">Contradiction Template</a> as a hand out or invite participants to draw this chart on a piece of paper.</p> <p>Before beginning this activity, <a href="#">play the following clip from the movie Catch 22</a> as an introduction to contradictions.</p> <p>Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.</p>	
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<sup>1</sup> **Citation for this activity:** Jack Byrd and Shannon Wheatley Hartman (2023). Embracing Contradictions. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-2>

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<p><b>Step One</b></p>	<p><b>Play with Contradictory Statements</b></p> <p>Invite participants to discuss the following statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have to spend money to make money.</li> <li>• You have to be cruel to be kind.</li> <li>• Don't get in the water until you learn to swim.</li> <li>• This sentence is a lie.</li> <li>• Can you promise not to make any more promises?</li> <li>• I'm a compulsive liar.</li> </ul> <p>Each sentence is a paradox or contains some sort of contradiction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite participants to discuss how they make sense of these contradictions.</li> <li>• How do you feel when confronted by contradictions? Energized? Stumped? How do you reconcile these opposing ideas?</li> </ul>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>
<p><b>Step Two</b></p>	<p><b>Reflect on Personal Contradictions</b></p> <p>Next, encourage participants to think about internal or personal contradictions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the <a href="#">Contradiction Template</a>, invite each participant to generate their own list of contradictions.</li> <li>• Ask them to share these lists with their partner or group.</li> <li>• Discuss: How is it possible for us to contain these contradictions? What does this tell us about ourselves?</li> </ul>	<p><b>20 min</b></p>
<p><b>Step Three</b></p>	<p><b>Discuss Contradictions in Policy</b></p> <p>In pairs or small groups, explore one of the following topics. Discuss policies related to this topic and how they may seem contradictory or even a paradox, depending on how you think about the topic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirmative action</li> <li>• Policing</li> <li>• National security</li> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• Environmentalism</li> <li>• Welfare</li> <li>• Gun Control</li> </ul>	<p><b>20 min</b></p>
<p><b>Step Four</b></p>	<p><b>Debrief as a Full Group</b></p> <p>After thinking about contradictions from three different levels (statements, personal, policy), discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What have you learned about contradictions?</li> <li>• How might contradictions or paradoxes help you to see issues in a new way?</li> <li>• How might paradoxes help you to question assumptions?</li> </ul>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>

## Reflection Journal

- Reflect on the following quote: “The test of first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” –F. Scott Fitzgerald
- What effect, if any, did writing down and sharing with others your own internal contradictions have on how you understand yourself? Or, how you understand others?
- When we think about policies, why is it helpful to think about them from a lens of contradictions? What does that offer?

## Practice Journal

This week, practice embracing contradictions in your daily life. Identify one personal contradiction. Describe it as a superpower. Next, identify one practice or ritual in your life that is a paradox. How does this paradoxical practice impact you? How does it affect others?

## Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [Contradictions and Creativity](#): Berliner, David. "How our contradictions make us human and inspire creativity." *aeon*, edited by Sam Dresser, Aeon Media Group Ltd., 7 Dec. 2006, [aeon.co/ideas/how-our-contradictions-make-us-human-and-inspire-creativity](http://aeon.co/ideas/how-our-contradictions-make-us-human-and-inspire-creativity). Accessed 25 Aug. 2023.
- [Paradox Mindset](#): Heracleous, Loizos and David Robson. "Why the 'paradox mindset' is the key to success." *BBC*, 11 Nov. 2020, [www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20201109-why-the-paradox-mindset-is-the-key-to-success](http://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20201109-why-the-paradox-mindset-is-the-key-to-success). Accessed 25 Aug. 2023.
- *Catch-22* (film): *Catch-22*. Directed by Mike Nichols, performances by Alan Arkin, Bob Balaban, Martin Balsam, Richard Benjamin, Filmways and Paramount Pictures, 1970.
- *Catch-22* (novel): Heller, Joseph. *Catch-22*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1961. Read or watch *Catch-22* and discuss the primary paradox: “In order to be grounded, I have to be crazy. And I must be crazy to keep flying, but if I ask to be grounded it means that I am not crazy anymore and I have to keep flying.”

## Activity Cluster

2.2 Embracing Contradictions

[3.4 Developing Comfort with Ambiguity](#)