

# Activity 3.9 Practicing Purposeful Skepticism

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## Description

New initiatives are often met with skepticism, which can be unproductive when based upon resistance to change. Purposeful skepticism, however, can be valuable when it opens up thinking and leads to improvements. This activity illustrates how to share skepticism with others in a purposeful way.

## Learning Goal

- Practice asking questions to better understand what is being proposed and to constructively imagine what can be done to improve the proposal.

## Instructions (50 minutes)

<p><b>Set Up</b></p>	<p><b>Prepare for the Activity</b></p> <p>Select a scenario from the collection of <a href="#">What IF...Scenarios</a>, choose one of the sample scenarios shown below in Step One, or create your own based on a topic that is relevant for your group.</p> <p>Organize participants into small groups (4-6 ppl).</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, Cuda Zmuda, and Eric Schmucker (2023). Practicing Purposeful Skepticism. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-3>

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<p><b>Step One</b></p>	<p><b>Review the Scenario</b></p> <p>As a full group, invite a participant to read the scenario aloud while others read along. It may be helpful to share the scenario on an overhead screen if meeting in-person or use the share screen function if meeting virtually. Participants may want to read quietly and have a copy to refer to details later in the activity.</p> <p>After reviewing the scenario, ask if there are any questions.</p> <p><b>Sample Scenario #1: A Study Lab Proposal</b> As enrollment dropped at a major state university, the retention of students became a top priority. An analysis of the retention challenge led to a realization that failures in math and lab science courses were a leading cause of the dropouts. The university had learning centers for these courses but they were rarely used. A focus group with students led to a proposal that all first year students would be required to participate in a controlled study environment four hours per week. Tutoring would be provided and attendance would be monitored and built into the grade in the freshman seminar.</p> <p><b>Sample Scenario #2: EV Recharging Proposal</b> The owner of a high-end townhouse complex wanted to provide recharging stations for the growing number of electric vehicles owned by the townhouse residents. Since the townhouses themselves did not have outlets for recharging, the owner proposed to have a set site area where residents could recharge their cars. Since the number of recharging stations was insufficient for all residents to use at one time, reservations were needed. Also some recharging stations were reserved for specific makes of vehicles. The owner feels this is a viable solution until more residents own EVs to warrant costly retrofits of all the townhouses with outside electric outlets.</p>	<p><b>5 min</b></p>								
<p><b>Step Two</b></p>	<p><b>Generate Skeptical Concerns - Round One</b></p> <p>In small groups, ask each participant to answer the following two questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What assumptions are being made in the proposal or scenario?</li> <li>• What skepticism do you have about these assumptions?</li> </ul> <p>Assign one participant in each group to record the assumptions and the skepticism shared, in the format shown below, on a shared surface that can be seen by all participants.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="402 1619 1211 1829"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="402 1619 808 1665">Assumption</th> <th data-bbox="808 1619 1211 1665">Skepticism</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="402 1665 808 1711">•</td> <td data-bbox="808 1665 1211 1711">•</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="402 1711 808 1757">•</td> <td data-bbox="808 1711 1211 1757">•</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="402 1757 808 1803">•</td> <td data-bbox="808 1757 1211 1803">•</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Assumption	Skepticism	•	•	•	•	•	•	<p><b>10 min</b></p>
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	<p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> Ask each participant to share a unique response to the questions in a round robin fashion until a full list of assumptions and skepticism is developed.</p>									
<b>Step Three</b>	<p><b>Generate Skeptical Concerns - Round Two</b></p> <p>Ask each participant to independently share one response to the following two questions in a round robin style:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What might go wrong with the proposal?</li> <li>• What might be the possible impact?</li> </ul> <p>Instruct the assigned notetaker in each group to record the responses, in the format shown below, on a shared surface that can be seen by all participants.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">What could go wrong?</th> <th style="text-align: left; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Impact</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="border: none;">•</td> <td style="border: none;">•</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">•</td> <td style="border: none;">•</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">•</td> <td style="border: none;">•</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> Ask each group to start the round robin generation of responses for each round with a different participant than the previous round so that each participant can take the lead.</p>	What could go wrong?	Impact	•	•	•	•	•	•	<b>10 min</b>
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<b>Step Four</b>	<p><b>Share Changes to the Proposal</b></p> <p>Invite each participant to independently write down their thoughts in response to the following question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assuming we continue to explore the proposal, what changes would you like to see?</li> </ul> <p>Ask each participant to share one response to the question in a round robin style. Instruct the assigned notetaker in each group to record a brief summary of these responses so that all participants can see each idea.</p>	<b>10 min</b>								
<b>Step Five</b>	<p><b>Share Improvements Needed to Say Yes</b></p> <p>Ask each participant to respond to the group using the following lead in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I could say yes to the proposal if...</li> </ul>	<b>5 min</b>								

<b>Step Six</b>	<p><b>Debrief as a Full Group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you feel about sharing your concerns in this activity?</li> <li>• How did your understanding and feelings toward the proposal change by the end of this activity?</li> <li>• How would you have responded to this proposal if you didn't work through this process? What would your initial response have accomplished?</li> </ul>	<b>10 min</b>
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## Reflection Journal

- How would this process work if the participants were all naysayers? How could they turn their skepticism from being destructive to purposeful?
- Think about your own approach to change proposals and answer the question: What more could I do to become a purposeful skeptic?

## Practice Journal

This week, put into practice your response to the second reflection assignment above and reflect on the challenges you faced.

## Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [Skepticism as a Theory of Knowledge](#): Stone, Jim. "Skepticism as a Theory of Knowledge." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 60, no. 3, 2000, pp. 527–45. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2653812>. Accessed 5 Sep. 2023.
- [Free Will Skepticism and the Freedom of Creativity](#): Caruso, Gregg D. "Free Will Skepticism and the Question of Creativity: Creativity, Desert, and Self-Creation." *Ergo: An Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 23, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.3998/ergo.12405314.0003.023>. Accessed 5 Sep. 2023.
- Explore and learn more about Kurt Lewin's concept of Force-field Analysis.

## Activity Cluster

[3.6 Anticipating Implications and \(Un\)Intended Consequences](#)

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