

Activity 3.4 Developing Comfort with Ambiguity

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Description

This activity is designed to encourage participants to grapple with “no win” situations. Through discussion, participants will explore seemingly simple moral dilemmas which will actually expose the complexity of decision-making.

Learning Goals

- Develop an appreciation for complexity and ambiguity. Participants will move beyond simplistic “good vs. bad” binary thinking.
- Practice developing arguments for particular actions.

Instructions (50 minutes)

Set Up	<p>Prepare for the Activity</p> <p>Select a single or set of moral dilemmas from the What IF...Moral Dilemmas Collection or create your own moral dilemmas relevant to your group. For the dilemma(s), also generate three “monkey wrenches” or twists, which add new variables or alter the dilemma in some way with the aim of getting participants to reevaluate their initial choice.</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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¹ **Citation for this activity:** Jack Crittenden (2023). Developing Comfort with Ambiguity. 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>Step One</p>	<p>Put Initial Reactions on the Table</p> <p>Provide the moral dilemma as a handout or on a shared screen so that participants can review it together and at their own pace.</p> <p>In small groups, each participant should read and then react to the dilemma. Record or take notes of initial reactions, such as “I’d do this...This is wrong...You can’t act that way, etc.”</p> <p>Get all views on the table without discussion or critical examination. All participants need to offer an initial suggestion as to what they would do in this situation.</p> <p>Facilitator Tip: Prepare for participants to ask for more information. Do not provide additional information. The dilemma is deliberately vague and is designed as a “no win” situation. That’s why it is a dilemma. Anticipate that participants will be reluctant to take a side or share a position. All participants must express an initial position. Recognize that it is uncomfortable but must be done.</p>	<p>10 min</p>
<p>Step Two</p>	<p>Discuss the Dilemma</p> <p>Open up the discussion. Participants can ask each other questions. They are invited to make a case for their position and explore the positions of others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What’s wrong with doing X? Why is doing Y the right thing to do? • Why would someone oppose Y? • Which values are informing your position? <p>Facilitator Tip: Push past emotional reactions and opinions and try to help participants form arguments. For those who refuse to move off their position or see the position of others, ask them to articulate and defend the opposite view.</p>	<p>10 min</p>
<p>Step Three</p>	<p>Introduce Monkey Wrenches</p> <p>When the discussion begins to slow down, reach consensus or an impasse, initiate a lightning round of “monkey wrenches.”</p> <p>Introduce these one at a time. After each new monkey wrench, invite brief discussion and poll participants. Has this new information forced you to change your position? Why?</p> <p>Facilitator Tip: If the discussion is going well, don’t feel like you have to introduce all three monkey wrenches.</p>	<p>20 min</p>

Step Four	Debrief as a Full Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did it feel having to take an initial reaction to the dilemma? • How does this activity help you to empathize with decision-makers? • How, if at all, did your initial reaction to this dilemma change over the course of the discussion? What helped you to change your mind? Or, what helped you to solidify your initial reactions? 	10 min
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Reflection Journal

- Reflect on the following statement: “A true dilemma is a situation with options for action in which choosing one action leaves undone or on the table another action which should also be taken.”—Jack Crittenden
- How important was it to discuss this dilemma with others? Could you have had a similar conversation in your own mind? What benefit, if any, did discussion contribute to your understanding of the issue?
- What role did values, assumptions, and experiences play in this discussion? What would it take to reach a universal agreement about this particular dilemma?

Practice Journal

This week, select a moral dilemma and share it with a trusted group during a casual gathering time (family dinner or lunch with colleagues or friends). Practice the process (getting ideas on the table, diving deeper with questions, and then introducing a monkey wrench). Describe the discussion and your experience facilitating it.

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [The Problem with Binary Thinking](https://henneindave-75991.medium.com/the-problem-with-binary-thinking-92bc4a138da1): Stein, David. “The Problem with Binary Thinking.” *Medium*, 22 Dec. 2018, henneindave-75991.medium.com/the-problem-with-binary-thinking-92bc4a138da1. Accessed 3 Sep. 2023.

Activity Cluster

3.4 Developing Comfort with Ambiguity

[2.2 Embracing Contradictions](#)