



**Collection of exercises:
'Broadening Our Horizon
- Tackling Polarisation
and the Climate Crisis
Together'**



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Let's get started

To make sure your workshops are successful, please find below a few tips that might be useful.

- Set a few ground rules before starting the workshop, such as
 - Mute yourself when you're not speaking (if online)
 - If you're comfortable with it, keep your camera turned on so we can create an environment in which people can see each other's faces (if online)
 - Let's make this a space for curiosity
 - We're here to understand, not to persuade or judge
 - Listen carefully to one another and hear each other out
 - We are different, and we are open to each other's perspectives
 - Ask if there's something you don't understand
 - Take part, though it's okay to pass
 - What is said in this space stays here
 - Mutual respect, tolerance and curiosity are our guiding principles
- Be as open and empathetic as you want your participants to be
- Before every exercise, check in with your participants if they have any questions and feel comfortable doing the exercise
- Make sure to provide space for a round of reflections after each exercise and at the end



Icebreakers

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Icebreaker #1: Personal object



15 minutes (depending on number of participants)



10-15 participants



Online and offline



Involve participants actively in the workshop and let them get to know each other in a fun way.



Let participants introduce themselves by saying their name, pronouns (if they like) and what brings them to this workshop (if applicable). Ask them to pick a personal object and explain how it describes or relates to them. If the workshop takes place in person, invite them to bring something along in advance.

Icebreaker #2: Group stretching



10-15 minutes (depending on number of participants)



Variable, ideally no more than 15 participants



Online and offline





Involve participants actively in the workshop and boost energy levels by making them get off their chairs and move.




Start with showing a short stretching exercise, ideally requiring participants to get up and move. Any stretching exercise that can be done without tools is possible. Afterwards, ask participants to show exercises for others to follow. Depending on the number of participants and available time, you might want to pick only a few participants.


Icebreaker #3: One common thing

 15 minutes

 Variable, ideally no more than 20 participants

 Offline

 Enable participants to get to know each other, explore beyond what they already know about each other and create a sense of community.

 Ask participants to go around the room and find one commonality with each person they talk to. The key is, participants cannot share the same commonality with anyone else. If everyone in the room works for the same organisation, that commonality would not count.

Icebreaker #4: Mood board



15 minutes



Variable, ideally no more than 20 participants



Offline and online



Gage a feeling for the energy level and mood of participants to react and adjust the tone of the workshop accordingly. Make participants reflect on how they feel and create an open atmosphere.



Show a [mood board](#) (this one or something similar) and ask participants to explain what number they chose and why. Keep in mind that not everyone might want to share how they are feeling, that is fine. If nobody wants to start, do so yourself and be the first to open up.

Group exercises

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Group exercise #1: Exploring polarisation and ideological bubbles



45 minutes (30 minutes group work, 15 minutes reflection)



15-20 participants



Online and offline



Hear from participants what they mean when talking about polarisation and ideological bubbles and identify what assumptions, expectations and beliefs everyone brings to the table.



Participants work in groups of 4-5. Ask them to share their thoughts about the following questions in 2-3 minutes. The person with the longest hair starts. Importantly, this is not a conversation. Participants should let each other speak and listen. There is no right or wrong. Once every participant has shared their thoughts, a group discussion can (but does not have to) follow. Afterwards, make sure to open the space for reflections.

- What do you understand when you think of polarisation and ideological bubbles?
- Do you think society has become more polarised and if so, why?
- Can you remember incidents of polarisation within your friends circles or organisations?
- How do you react in situations in which the debate is highly polarised?

Group exercise #2: Listen, really listen



30 minutes (15 minutes group work, 15 minutes reflection)



15-20 participants



Online and offline



Talking is silver, listening is gold. Showcase that conversations and dialogue are not only made up of talking, but to a huge part of listening. Curiosity is key in really listening. Enable participants to experience the safe space that is needed to share thoughts, opinions and ideas in an open and honest way.



Participants work in pairs. The person with the biggest ears starts by making a 2 minutes statement about the climate crisis, their opinion on causes and solutions. If the person speaking needs time to gather their thoughts, this is completely fine. The other person is supposed to listen without asking questions. Afterwards, the person who listened reports back and the person who spoke can react to what is reported, focusing on whether it was correct, complete or mixed with other opinions. Listeners can use phrases like “Am I hearing or understanding you correctly...?” or “Is it correct that you think that...?”, while the participant who talked can rephrase or refine what was said. Afterwards, participants switch roles. Both rounds are about 5-6 minutes each. Once everyone has completed the exercise, make sure to open the space for a round of reflections.

Group exercise #3: Understanding our nervous system



20 minutes (10 minutes group work, 10 minutes reflection)



15-20 participants



Online and offline



Understand our nervous system and how it impacts our ability to make sense of the world around us and open up to new perspectives. When we are in danger, we have the instinct to flee, fight or freeze. Oftentimes, our vision narrows and we have a tunnel vision. When we are in a state of safety and stillness, our vision widens, we notice things we did not notice before and become more open to new perspectives.



Participants work in pairs. They are asked to take turns to answer below questions. Each participants has 2 minutes to share their thoughts and feelings for each question. Once each of the participants answered both questions, they can go into a short round of reflections. The person with the shortest ring finger starts. Once everyone has completed the exercise, make sure to open the space for a round of reflections.

- When I'm in a situation where I feel safe/comfortable, my body/mind feels...
- When I am in a situation that feels dangerous/uncomfortable to me, my body/mind feels ...

Group exercise #4: Let's talk climate crisis



45 minutes (30 minutes reading and group work, 15 minutes reflection)



15-20 participants



Online and offline



Become aware of our own reaction, express our opinion in a respectful way and understand what exactly we agree/disagree with and why. Train our ability to reason for our position and strengthen our listening skills.

To put our nervous system into a state of safety, invite participants to do a short exercise of polyvagal theory: “Take 3 deep breaths and make a sound when breathing out. Feel how you become aware of your body and how you get into a state of calmness”. Afterwards, ask participants to read a controversial article ([for example this one](#)), invite them to be aware of their responses and note them down. Once everyone read the article, put participants into breakout rooms of 2-3 people and ask them to talk about below questions. Afterwards, make sure to open the space for reflections.



- What's your first reaction to the article? Do you agree or disagree?
- What do you exactly agree or disagree with? And why?
- What disagreements come up within the group? How do you navigate these?

Group exercise #5: Role-playing difficult conversations I/II



45 minutes (30 minutes group work, 15 minutes reflection)



15-20 participants



Online and offline



Get into a conversation with someone we do not agree with. Explore how to navigate difficult conversations, take on someone else's point of view and understand the value of mutual understanding vs. consensus.



Participants work in groups of 4 (ideally). 2 participants role-play a difficult conversation. They choose the roleplay, distribute the roles and take a few minutes to prepare themselves. Afterwards, they hold a 10 minutes dialogue bringing forward their role's position on and solutions to the climate crisis. Importantly, this is a conversation. The other group member(s) act as observer(s) and asked to note down their observations and insights. Afterwards, participants switch roles to make sure they do two different role-plays with different observers. Afterwards, make sure to open the space for reflections.

Group exercise #5: Role-playing difficult conversations II/II

The role plays and roles they can choose from are:

- **Ecological modernization & systemic change**

- Role 1: A scientist in their 30s arguing for ecological modernization, e.g. demanding the creation and management of ecosystems to maximise both biodiversity and human well-being in the face of rapid environmental change mainly through technology
- Role 2: An environmentalist in their 20s advocating for systemic change, e.g. asking policy-makers to change the entire economic system as the root cause of overconsumption and the climate crisis

- **Coal worker & climate change advocate**

- Role 1: A worker in their late 20s with a family working in a coal mine in a rural area whose livelihood depend on coal, e.g. arguing that without coal, thousands of people will lose their jobs and ability to support their families
- Role 2: A well-educated climate change advocate in their early 20s with liberal values living in a big city who can easily change jobs, e.g. demanding policy-makers to immediately transition to renewable energy to protect the climate



Group exercise #6: Setting goals



30 minutes (15 minutes group work, 15 minutes reflection)



15-20 participants



Online and offline



Invite participants to think about where and how they can apply the tricks and tools they learned in their organisations, families and friends to create an environment that is open and safe for people to share their thoughts, and to tackle the climate crisis in a collaborative way.



Ask participants to take part in an exercise imagining themselves in the future and setting goals for how they want to implement what they learned. Tell them below story. Once everyone has opened their eyes, give them a moment to process or write things down and make sure to open the space for a round of reflections.

Envision your 90th birthday party, get a comfortable position in your chair and close your eyes, take a deep breath and feel you're totally present here. Open up to everything you're feeling at this moment. Focus on your breathing. Imagine you managed to move forward in time, being 90 years old, visiting your 90th birthday party. You're free to decide where you are, inside or outside, and imagine how the place looks like. A friend or relative who means a lot to you, dead or alive, comes to you. Decide what you want this person to remember you for. What did you do to build trust, open up and engage in dialogue? What did you do to tackle polarisation and the climate crisis? What do you want this person to say about you? Imagine, the person says it. Even if you think you've not lived up to what you want them to say, let them say it anyway. Make note of what you want the person to say. Come back and write it down. Does it inspire you to take action in your organisation, family and friends? Does it inspire you to be the change you want to see?

Homework

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Homework #1: Exploring polarisation and ideological bubbles further



60 minutes



Variable, ideally 15-20 participants



Online and offline



Dive deeper into what polarisation and ideological bubbles mean to the participants and what assumptions, expectations and beliefs they bring to the table.

Assign 3-4 people to on group and ask them to meet at least once (between the workshops) to reflect on below questions. Make sure to provide some space for reflections at the beginning of the following workshop.



- Do you think you are part of an (ideological) bubble with regards to the climate?
- Why do you think you are and remain in it?
- What ideologies do you think your bubble holds?
- What other (ideological) bubbles do you see yourself confronted with?
- Why it is important to break out of these bubbles generally and with regards to the climate?

Homework #2: Adopting a reverse media diet



30-60 minutes



Variable, ideally 15-20 participants



Online and offline



Practice stepping out of ideological bubbles and take notice of our reactions to content we do not agree with.

Ask participants to adopt a reversed media diet, meaning they unfollow who they usually follow working on the climate and start following people and organisations with opposing views to their own. For example,

- If you normally follow conservative organisations like the [Conservative Environment Network](#), follow [Extinction Rebellion](#)
- If you normally follow progressive news outlets (like [News Media Europe](#)), follow more conservative news outlets (like [The European Conservative](#))
- If you normally follow/left news outlets (like [POLITICO](#), [Bloomberg](#) or [The Guardian](#)), follow right news outlets ([The Washington Times](#) or [Daily Mail](#))
- If you normally follow progressive opinions leaders like [George Monbiot](#), follow people like [Candace Owens](#) or the other way around



They should note down how this makes them feel and what they experience/notice. Make sure to provide some space for reflections at the beginning of the following workshop.

Homework #3: Picking brains



60 minutes



Variable, ideally 15-20 participants



Online and offline



Pick participants' brains for additional exercises on how to overcome polarisation.



Assign 3-4 people to on group and ask them to meet at least once (between the workshops) to brainstorm some ideas for exercises on overcoming polarisation. Ask them to note down their ideas on a piece of paper, Miro board or the like. Ideally, the exercises are as concrete as possible, contain information on number of people, setting (online vs. offline) and are explained in a concise way. At the end of the workshop series, you could collect them all and send them as a follow-up. Make sure to provide some space for presentations at the beginning of the following workshop.

Tips and tricks for holding difficult conversations

- Enter the conversation with the idea to reach mutual understanding rather than consensus or trying to teach something
- Try to consider the situation from the other person's perspective and be as open as you want to the person to be
- **'Speaking is silver, listening is gold'** - Try to understand and not to think about your response while someone is sharing
- Be ready to be asked difficult questions that might require you to think deeply about your own motives, values and positions and to say 'I don't know' when asked a question you don't have a reply to - **Remember that not knowing is not a crime, but a virtue**
- Take care of yourself by knowing and setting your boundaries
 - Know when is the right moment for you to hold a difficult conversation
 - Step out of a conversation when it starts overburdening you
 - Take measures to calm yourself down by breathing, getting water, sleeping on it for a night
- Think about solutions together, even though you think you already know - **Actually, thinking about solutions together can create something even greater than what each of you individually had before**
- Try different ways of communication
 - Questioner: Understand experiences, assumptions and fears
 - Challenger: Challenge the other person's opinion with a statement or question
 - Storyteller: Talk about an experience, value, thought or anything that made you come to agree or disagree
 - Observer: Provide the other person with space to express themselves



Keep in mind that we navigate difficult conversations in different ways, there's no blueprint to what works best.

Have fun!

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