

Dialogue Ethics

Ethical Criteria and Conditions for a Successful Dialogue between Companies and Stakeholders

Prof. Dr. Christoph Stückelberger,
CEO and Founder of Globethics.net, Geneva/Switzerland
Professor of Ethics at the University of Basel/Switzerland

Corporate Social Responsibility CSR is to a great extent based on dialogues on ethical issues between different stakeholders such as CEO's of companies, investors, trade unions, media, NGO's, governments, international governmental organizations, academic researchers, religious communities etc. Different actors represent different kinds of dialogue such as an investor's dialogue, a consumer's dialogue or a multi stakeholder dialogue. Different objectives and strategies lead to different forms of dialogue such as explorative dialogue, learning dialogue, confrontational dialogue or a dialogue which aims at common action.

An ethics of dialogue can be developed from different angles and philosophical and religious concepts. Only three are mentioned: The philosopher Martin Buber described the "dialogical principle"¹ in the 1920ies with a profound anthropology of the relation between "I and thou"². The modern Discourse Ethics, as formulated by Jürgen Habermas³ and others, is basically an ethics which develops values and ethical consensus in rational discourse through dialogue. Dialogue ethics is also broadly developed in interreligious dialogue⁴ and ethics which aims at deeper understanding of faith based world views and convictions. In the following article, we concentrate on dialogues between representatives of companies and stakeholders, often called stakeholder dialogues.

For the last 25 years I have been involved in dialogues between companies and different stakeholders such as CEO's, advisory councils, NGO's, churches and investors from local to global level, from SME's to global leaders, from Fair Trade initiatives to the World Economic Forum. In the following contribution, criteria and conditions are developed in order to make dialogues on ethical issues between companies and stakeholders fruitful, successful and ethically responsible. This will be done throughout the following steps: 1) experiences, 2) three cases, 3) a typology, 4-9) value-based ethical criteria for dialogues.

¹ Buber, Martin: Das Dialogische Prinzip, Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1979, 4th ed.

² Buber, Martin: I and Thou, first German edition 1923.

³ E.g. Habermas, Jürgen: The Theory of Communicative Action, German 1981, English Beacon Press, 1985.

⁴ E.g. Ucko, Hans (ed.) with Venema Charlotte and Hentsch, Ariane: Changing the Present, Dreaming the future. A critical Moment in Interreligious Dialogue, Geneva: WCC 2006.

1 Experiences

All economic activities are an integrated part of a society and stay in manifold interactions with all sectors of society. The economic actors therefore remain in constant relationship, communication and – visible or invisible – “dialogue” with the stakeholders. The producer has to recognize the needs and wishes of the consumer, the trader the rules of the legal environment, the consumer the health and environmental implications of the consumed products, the governments the implications of economic activities on all aspects of society. This broad interaction and communication between stakeholders becomes more structured when it comes to conflicts and – often as a result if it – to formalized dialogues.

The communication between economic actors and society is as old as business: From the critique of prophets against unfair trade practices 2500 years ago (reported in the Old Testament of the Bible, Ezek 27:3-28:19) to the Reformer John Calvin’s dialogue with the traders in Geneva on ethical interest rates 500 years ago and to today’s global debates about the effects of the subprime crisis on our societies.

Today, stakeholder or multi-stakeholder dialogues have been developed mainly as an answer to serious conflicts between companies and NGO’s or governments and NGO’s in the extracting industries, mining industries, energy or infrastructure sector, often around issues of environmental damage and social conflicts with indigenous people (Shell with Ogoni in Nigeria, dams in different parts of the world, mining in Australia, Mekong River Basin etc.). Mainly International Companies and international NGO’s or national development institutions participated in developing common solutions. The 1992 “UN Conference on Environment and Development” in Rio and its follow up with the UN “Commission on Sustainable Development” CSD⁵ as well as the “World Business Council for Sustainable Development” WBCSD⁶ and a new dialogue paradigm among NGO’s and their success in fair trade cooperation played a constructive role. They often led to voluntary solutions such as codes of conduct.⁷

My own experiences in dialogues on business practices during the last thirty years are manifold: I am a member of the group of experts of the “Dialogue Group Churches-Companies” between Church Leaders and CEO’s of famous International Companies based in Switzerland such as Nestlé, Novartis and Credit Suisse. In my doctoral thesis I analyzed in a case study the dialogues in the 1970^{ies} between Swiss Companies and action groups on boycott of investments in South Africa. As director of the development agency Bread for all I participated in different dialogues on conflicts in developing countries in sectors such as food, textile or IT. I initiated Fair Trade Initiatives developing common projects, codes and CSR controlling mechanisms. I am member of the Board of Experts for CSR of a global Swiss bank. For the last eight years I was President of the Board of Directors of the global microfinance Institution “ECLOF International”. The challenge was to implement ethical values in the microfinance business. In the following contribution, these practical experiences and their ethical reflection are combined.

⁵ See the evaluation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs ECOSOC: Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: Learning from the UNCSO Experience. Background Paper No. 4, DESA/DSD/PC3/BP4, 2002.

⁶ World Business Council for Sustainable Development: Stakeholder Dialogue. The WBCSD’s approach to engagement, Geneva (<http://www.wbcasd.org>. 13/04/08).

⁷ See Utting, Peter: Regulating Business via Multi-stakeholder Initiatives: A preliminary Assessment, in NGLS UNRISD: Voluntary Approaches to Corporate Responsibility, Geneva, 2002: UN NGLS, 61-130.

2 Two Cases of Dialogues on CSR

Let us start with a short description of two different cases of dialogue on Corporate Social Responsibility CSR:

2.1 *Confrontational: Banks on South Africa*

Apartheid in South Africa led in the 1970ies and 1980ies to world-wide boycott efforts against companies investing in this country. Non governmental and church related boycott campaigns, international (UN-) and bilateral governmental decisions have been broadly debated and remained very controversial. In Switzerland, not only pharmaceutical and other industries, but especially the financial sector was under pressure. Swiss international banks have been criticized for contributing to the prolongation of the apartheid system by financing the economy of the apartheid regime. The Churches in Switzerland as well as abroad have been divided on this issue too. Mission societies, church related development agencies and many parishes supported the boycott, church leaders and the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches started a human rights program with a series of dialogues as an alternative to boycott.⁸

In this context, between 1986 and 1989, a series of five confidential dialogues were organized between ecumenical Church representatives (Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches FSPC, its development agencies Bread for all and HEKS, the Swiss Catholic Bishops Conference and its development agency Catholic Lenten Fund and Justitia et Pax) and the three biggest, leading Banks in Switzerland Schweizerischer Bankverein und Schweizerische Bankgesellschaft (today together UBS) and Schweizerische Kreditanstalt (today Credit Suisse).⁹ The organizations were represented by their top leaders.

The Churches rejected Apartheid as sin and worked towards sanctions. The Banks resisted this and insisted on continuing their relationship with the white regime by arguing that it would have more effect in overcoming Apartheid than sanctions. The dialogue was stopped in 1989 when international banks under the lead of Swiss banks agreed on a debt restructuring with South Africa. The international positions on strategies how to overcome Apartheid in South Africa were very polarized and still ideological at the end of the cold war. In this environment, the dialogue was and remained a confrontational dialogue without progress by accepting the other viewpoints or agreeing on common actions.

2.2 *Co-operational: STEP in the Carpet Industry*

Another example of a dialogue on Corporate Social Responsibility emerged around the issue of child labor in the carpet industry. The author was directly involved as an initiator of the dialogue. In Germany in about 1993, church related aid agencies under the lead of Bread for the World started a campaign against child labor in the carpet industry especially in India. The campaign heavily accused German importers of being co-responsible for child labor since they continued to import from such producers. The organization "Rugmark" was built up in order to press the importers to

⁸ Peter, Hans-Balz/Loosli, Dorothea: Les relations de la Suisse avec l'Afrique du Sud. Perspectives d'éthique sociale, Etudes et Rapports 59 de l'Institut d'éthique sociale de la FEPS, Berne 2004; Zürcher, Lukas: Gute Dienste in Südafrika – Die Südafrikapolitik des Schweizerischen Evangelischen Kirchenbundes zwischen 1970 und 1990, Bern 2003.

⁹ Weber-Berg, Christoph: Salz der Erde oder Spiegel der Gesellschaft? Studie betreffend der Haltung des SEK im Kontext der "Bankengespräche" zum Thema Apartheid in den Jahren 1986-1989, Bern, ITE-Verlag 2004;

change their attitude. The campaign led to a confrontational situation, in which the importers tended to maintain their position.

In Switzerland in 1995, as the director of Bread for all I studied the possibility of taking the campaign up while learning of the blocked situation in Germany. We first analyzed the Swiss market of hand knotted “oriental” carpets through a market study. We found out that about half of the market was in the hands of two big importers. In addition, an association existed which guaranteed good quality and worked against dumping prices in the sector. On this basis we decided not to lead a confrontational campaign against the companies importing these carpets but to invite them first of all to a dialogue. Bread for all explained to them that child labour was not acceptable and that we would plan a campaign comparable to the one in Germany if there was no other option, but insisting that we would prefer to agree on a common solution for child labour free carpet imports based on the model of Fair Trade. All sides could win: the companies with an innovative “clean” product, the producers by reducing child labour and the development agencies by helping to strengthen human rights by reducing child labour.

After a first phase of lack of mutual trust – the companies suspecting that the agencies did not understand the hard market reality, the agencies feeling a lack of willingness on behalf of the companies to look at child labour reality. But from a confrontational dialogue it developed into a very co-operational and at the end even action oriented dialogue: after one year of hard discussions both sides created together the foundation “STEP – fair trade carpets”.¹⁰ The private sector agreed to buy in future only carpets free from child labour, providing additional social incentives, higher salaries and respecting environmental standards. They also agreed to pay an additional fee of 5 Swiss Francs per m² carpet, which would increase over the years, in order to pay the monitoring costs of the foundation and its projects such as schools for the carpet factory workers. A coalition of agencies agreed to guarantee independent controls and to identify and help establish the development projects. The Swiss Ministry of Economy agreed to give a start up support to create the foundation. All parties agreed that the author, representing Bread for all, led the foundation as president. STEP exists since 1996. Today, over 50% of all hand knotted carpets sold in Switzerland are certified by STEP. Control offices exist from India to Morocco, from Pakistan to Iran.

3 Typology of dialogues

The two examples show the diversity of stakeholder dialogues on CSR. The type of dialogue very much depends on the context, the actors, the sector, the culture in a specific society and the objectives. Different actors and dialogue parties can have different objectives in the same dialogue. The following typology distinguishes alongside objectives, actors and settings.

3.1 *Different Objectives*

Explorative dialogue: The parties try to find out more about each other, their respective behaviour, objectives and background in order to prepare the own strategy or other steps of dialogue. The objective is not yet the achievement of common results but to explore procedures as well as space and time to manoeuvre. In diplomacy or business, explorative dialogues are often used to prepare next steps of intensified dialogue.

¹⁰ See www.stepfoundation.ch

Learning dialogue: The parties, or at least one of them, want to learn from the other in order to have a deeper understanding of its background, context, reason of behaviour and action. Learning is a goal in itself and must not lead to common positions, agreements or action. A learning dialogue avoids winners and losers. It often uses an inductive methodology based on sharing experiences rather than the deductive approach based on theories. A learning dialogue normally increases confidence.

Testimonial dialogue: One or different parties give testimonies¹¹ about their experiences or viewpoints. The goal is not to learn from the other but to make the own position and conviction clear and therefore also to define the frame and space for manoeuvre for common positions. The confession of faith or conviction or the encounter between a victim and his/her perpetrator are often forms of testimonial dialogue.

Revealing dialogue: one or different parties analyze a situation or a problem through analytical methods in order to show or prove facts, reasons and correlations of which the other parties are not aware or see differently. This analytical dialogue reveals a specific perspective of a problem, such as the view of oppressed.¹²

Dialectic dialogue: The parties do not look for consensus or unanimity but encourage the respect for and acceptance of dialectic contradictions. These cannot and must not be overcome but reflect the dialectic structure of reality and truth and is an expression of freedom.¹³

Confrontational dialogue: One or different parties aim at sharpening their position during the dialogue, increasing confrontation where necessary, up to the point where it is justified to interrupt or end the dialogue and to use other means and strategies to defend ones interests.

Negotiating dialogue: The concerned parties aim at reaching a solution and a common agreement, often as a result of a longer process and with preliminary phases of explorative, learning or confrontational dialogues. A good part of political conferences, business negotiations or conflict solutions between companies and trade unions are negotiating dialogues. The precondition of this kind of dialogue is that the parties already accept each other as negotiating partners.

Action-oriented dialogue: The parties aim at common activities e.g. to solve a problem with a multi-stakeholder initiative, a private public partnership or other forms of joint commitment. An action-oriented dialogue is normally not the beginning of a dialogue, but the late fruit and result of a process of explorative, learning, confrontational and negotiating dialogues.

Public relations dialogue: One or different parties aim at using this dialogue not for changing perspectives or attitudes, but for public relations in order to gain or regain goodwill among the broad public or specific stakeholders. The real target groups are not the dialogue partners but the public opinion, often through the media, or stakeholders such as investors.

¹¹ In New Testament terms, the greek word martyria is central and means testimony.

¹² The revealing dialogue was a method of Paulo Freire, the famous Latin American liberation pedagogue, influenced by the liberation theology, to reveal mechanisms of oppression and injustice. Freire Paulo: Pedagogy of the Oppressed, New York: Seabury Press 1970.

¹³ See e.g. Goldschmidt, H.L.: Freiheit für den Widerspruch, Schaffhausen 1976.

3.2 *Different Actors*

Different actors have different power structures and different dialogue instruments.

Governmental Sector: Governmental actors from local to international level have – in principle – the monopoly on the use of force and are in this respect always in a specific position during dialogues. In democracies they depend on the opinion of the population and therefore always measure the dialogue in the light of the reaction of parties and people.

Private sector: For profit actors always have to consider the effects of dialogues on short- and long term income, reputation in the public and motivation of their personnel.

Nongovernmental sector: Not for profit actors have to consider the effect of dialogues on their respective constituencies, donors and the coherence to their goals.

Monothematic interests: some actors like governments have to defend very diverse interests, other actors such as a group of investors or consumers are monothematic and very focused on their interests.

Multi-stakeholder: In multi-stakeholder dialogues, one or different parties aim at bring together all or most parties involved in or concerned by a specific conflict or problem. The mixture of different types of actors such as advisory councils, NGO's, churches, investors, companies, unions, development agencies, governments, academic researchers makes dialogue extremely rich and at the same time demanding by bringing together very different dialogue cultures.

The size and kind of power as well as the power relations between the different parties and actors are often very different. One actor might have a lot of financial power, an other will have political power, a third will have moral or educational power. The objectives can also be very different. Whereas a company might consider a multi-stakeholder dialogue as a learning or explorative meeting while preparing the decision of the company¹⁴, an NGO might hope to be able to come to common decisions.

3.3 *Different Levels and Settings*

Different **levels** of dialogue - **from local to international, from bilateral to multilateral** - represent different types. A confrontational dialogue in the local neighbourhood where all know each other and share their daily life is different from a multilateral intergovernmental dialogue with military power structures.

Different **settings** have a great influence on the type and character of a dialogue: **Voluntary or forced dialogues, public or confidential dialogues, direct or indirect dialogues, mono-cultural or cross-cultural dialogues, verbal or nonverbal-symbolic-action dialogues.**

¹⁴ So the definition of WBCSD: "Dialogue is about communicating with stakeholders in a way that takes serious account of their views. It does not mean involving stakeholders in every decision, or that every stakeholder request will be met. It means that stakeholder input should be acknowledged and thoughtfully considered. It is about giving stakeholders a voice, listening to what they have to say, and being prepared to act or react accordingly. Though dialogues are, in effect, simply meetings, it is important to remember that they provide a powerful tool to listen and learn more about stakeholders. They also offer a mechanism to share one's own thinking and to maintain and/or strengthen relationships." World Business Council for Sustainable Development: Stakeholder Dialogue. The WBCSD's approach to engagement, Geneva, without year (<http://www.wbcd.org> 13/04/08).

4 Fundamental Values for Dialogues

Dialogue ethics is much more than a technique. Dialogues are deeply rooted in the anthropology and the worldview of persons, groups and institutions: How much should others count in developing my own opinion and orienting my decisions and actions? Which features of the other's situation am I supposed to take into account?¹⁵ What is the value of the other compared to the own (as an individual or a group)? Is the truth found in Holy Scriptures or scientific analysis interpreted by experts or/and in its common interpretation in dialogues? What is the value of hierarchy and authority in relation to people's participation? Some values without state of being completed may indicate the direction:

Human dignity: Every human being has its inalienable dignity, independent of characteristics such as race, sex, religion, colour, language or age and independent of capabilities and status such as wealth and education. Even a painful dialogue with murderers, torturers or terrorists has – ethically speaking – to be built on this presupposition that the dignity of each human being is inalienable because it is not given to human beings by human beings but exists before human activity. In Christian terms it is a gift of God the Creator to every human being as his/her creation.

Equality/justice: Accepting this dignity of everybody is the fundament of the equality of human beings and of mutual respect as precondition of every dialogue. **The Golden Rule**¹⁶ which is broadly accepted throughout cultures and religions as well as in Kant's Categorical Imperative, is a core expression of the fundamental value of equality of all human beings and a central aspect of the ethical foundation of dialogues. It underlines the importance of taking the other into account in my own decision, according to the Golden Rule even as much as my own opinion.

Freedom of thoughts, convictions, behaviours and actions is another core value for an ethics of dialogue. One may have the right or even obligation to force somebody to do something or to abstain from doing something, but then the decision is not based on dialogue, but order. Dialogue presupposes the possibility to express an opinion in a free way – even if at the end the decision is in the responsibility of somebody else.

Participation is the logical consequence of the mentioned values. Participation does not mean that everybody every time everywhere can say anything. Participation means the right to bring the own point of view into the debate linked to and limited by rules of competence, appropriate time, place etc.

Sustainability means to enable a life in dignity for today's generations as well as for future generations. In order to be ethical, dialogue has to take into account the value of sustainability. The time factor is an ethical factor. To dialogue on climate change for decades in order to avoid necessary decisions and actions is not an ethical dialogue.

Unity in diversity follows as a consequence of the mentioned values: Accepting the human dignity and equality (as equal rights and obligations) of everybody leads to a profound conviction of unity of humankind. The values of freedom, participation and sustainability lead to a profound respect of diversity as a gift for the whole creation

¹⁵ Klempler, Geoffrey: The Ethics of Dialogue. Paper given at the Shap Conference, Philosophical Society of England, 26 February 1998. <http://klempler.freeshell.org/articles/dialogue.html> (13/04/08)

¹⁶ Broad literature is available. As a communitarian approach see Etzioni, Amitai: The New Golden Rule. Community and Morality in a Democratic Society, New York, 1996: Perseus Books.

and a beauty of humanity. Combining unity in diversity leads to dialogues which look at common convictions while respecting diversity where fruitful and helpful.

5 The ethics of compromise

Dialogues normally imply – at least the decision oriented dialogues - being prepared to accept compromises. A compromise is a process whereby, voluntarily or under pressure, interests are balanced so as to achieve parts of clashing interests while both parties agree not to achieve their respective aims in full. Is a compromise ethical or not and under which conditions?

Different types of compromises can be distinguished:

- a) Two areas: A social compromise entails the balancing of interests between social groups, companies, governments, etc. An ethical compromise weighs up values, rules or ethical instances.
- b) Three levels: With an intrapersonal compromise, a human being attempts to weigh up various values internally. Interpersonal compromises are made between people, institutional compromises between institutions.
- c) Two qualities: A tactical or false compromise does not involve any material decisions; instead, a formula is agreed upon which can be interpreted in different ways. A genuine compromise, however, paves the way for a feasible solution, with both parties relinquishing part of their claims.
- d) Two intensities: A democratic compromise is a contractual compromise of balanced interests. Brotherly/friendly compromises are based on the consensus of communities with similar objectives. However, these are prone to "repressive brotherliness" exercised by the authorities of such communities.
- e) Two schedules: A distinction can be made between provisional and definitive compromises.

The ethical justification for compromises, like the justification of their rejection, varies a great deal according to the theological or philosophical approach that is used. Compromises can be justified or rejected in terms of responsibility ethics, peace ethics, different anthropologies and views of society. The ethical justification or rejection of a compromise depends on the quality of the compromise.

Compromise guidelines can help to identify its quality. Ten such guidelines are offered as part of a dialogue ethics¹⁷:

1. A compromise can be justified if it constitutes a means in the process towards ethical values and aims. It thus corresponds to possibilism, which always strives for the best possible solution. It is constantly enlivened by ethical aims.
2. A compromise must be rejected if it is seen as a definite state of value in itself. An ethically acceptable compromise is thus distinct from pragmatism, which refrains from the realisation of wide-ranging aims.
3. No compromise is ethically acceptable without recognition of and basic aspiration to fundamental values and especially human dignity. However, compromises are

¹⁷ See Stückelberger, Christoph: *Global Trade Ethics. An Illustrated Overview*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002, pp.32-35; idem: *Vermittlung und Parteinahme. Der Versöhnungsauftrag der Kirchen in gesellschaftlichen Konflikten*, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1988, pp. 496-501.

admissible and necessary when it comes to value judgements and to the social implementation of fundamental values.

4. As a rule, ethically acceptable compromises are provisional compromises made with the intention of replacing them with ethically better compromises at a later date.
5. As a rule, a compromise should be of advantage to the various parties involved. However, it should provide the weaker parties with more advantages than the stronger parties, in the sense of the fundamental value of commutative justice.
6. A compromise is good if it helps settle conflicts. It should not be made when it covers up conflicts. The time of the conclusion of a compromise is at its ethical best when, in relative terms, the conflict can be carried out best.
7. Exceptionally, a compromise that works faster but is worse with regard to the attainment of the aims involved must be preferred to a better compromise if this serves to prevent the sacrifice of human or animal life.
8. Since a compromise that has been established in public enjoys a democratic basis, it is usually ethically better than a compromise that has been worked out at the exclusion of the public.
9. The rejection of a compromise can be justified if a compromise which must be regarded as ethically unacceptable (e.g. according to guidelines 3 or 6) would only serve the reinforcement of misanthropic power, such as the legitimisation of a dictatorial government through economic activities.
10. Not all areas of conflict allow compromise. The rejection of compromise is ethically imperative if a compromise destroys life and basic necessities, or does not lessen the danger with which they are threatened.

6 Limits and Abuse of Dialogues

Better talk than shoot. This wisdom corresponds to the respect of human life and dignity. Nevertheless, a dialogue is not per se and in any case positive. It is an instrument and not a goal in itself. As there may be rare non negotiable issues, there are moments where a dialogue is not the right instrument to solve a conflict or a problem. A dialogue can be abused in manifold ways, e.g. to avoid decision and action or to continue unethical practices as long as the dialogue goes on. Participants in an ethical dialogue are constantly critically looking out for possible abuses.

7 Dialogue or/as/after Pressure?

Human decisions and behaviour are influenced by arguments and convictions, but also by power and pressure. Powerful pressure is ethically not negative, as long as it is a non-violent pressure. It can on the contrary be an expression of responsibility to move things where it should move from an ethical perspective.

Dialogue is often seen in opposition to pressure. Some argue for dialogue to avoid other pressure, others are against dialogue in order to use other means of pressure. Is dialogue an alternative to pressure, a form of pressure or a result of pressure? All three options are a reality. A media or NGO campaign e.g. against unethical practices of a company often provokes and leads to a dialogue. Other dialogues are toothless and endless alibi talks. Communication by confrontation can be an ethically justified or necessary strategy – as long as confrontation is not an end in itself, but again led by the core values mentioned. A targeted provocation can be part of the dialectic

of communication and human progress. This can be shown in different ethical traditions. Targeted provocation as a beginning of dialogue was practiced e.g. in biblical times by symbolic actions of prophets or by Jesus' action in the temple against some traders which led to a dialogue on the relationship between economy/business and faith.

8 Conditions for Ethically Successful Dialogues

To summarize these different aspects, dialogues are ethical and ethically successful if they respect the following ten aspects and rules¹⁸:

- to reflect and respect fundamental **values** mentioned
- to reflect and respect human **virtues** such as truthfulness, transparency, respecting rules and agreements
- to allow the participants of a dialogue to **define themselves** in their identities and goals (which is an expression of the value of freedom and dignity)
- to clarify at the beginning the **objectives** and **character** of the dialogue and the composition and characteristics of the participating **actors**
- to clarify in the first phase the **definition of the problem**, linked to the **limitation or de-limitation of the themes** to be discussed or negotiated. To agree on some elements of a common perception of the problem is already a core success of each dialogue
- to refuse the idea (ideology) that each dialogue is positive but to find the **setting of a dialogue** at the right time in the right place with the right people on the right subject with the right objectives
- to accept that **confrontation** can be an instrument of communication and conflict resolution and to distinguish between creative and destructive confrontation
- to analyze the **power structure** of a dialogue and its participants and to expose this analysis where necessary
- to be aware of the **limitations** of each dialogue and reflect the combination with other instruments of conflict resolution
- to agree on an ethical **information policy** about the dialogue which respects the fundamental values, allows to build trust by confidentiality, public participation and progress by transparency.

¹⁸ Another way to define success of a dialogue is done by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development on stakeholder dialogue:

"10 keys to success: 1 Allow enough time for planning, planning and more planning; 2 Start thinking about the longer-term engagement process early and consult your stakeholders on how or if they want continued communication; 3 Be aware of and manage expectations: yours and theirs; 4 Be realistic: do not start what you cannot finish; 5 Focus on quality not quantity: participants should be invited on the basis of their credibility and ability to be thought provoking; 6 Keep away from public positions and slogans: as soon as possible shift the focus of the dialogue to specific interests and values, 7 Acknowledge genuine differences, everyone should make an effort to share perspectives, listen and learn; 8 Be prepared to be as open and transparent as possible; 9 Aim to build joint ownership for actions towards change to be taken following the dialogue; 10 Be flexible and open to improvisation in the program based on stakeholder desires." (World Business Council for Sustainable Development: Stakeholder Dialogue. The WBCSD's approach to engagement)

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