

Dialogue
in
Context
A NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE



DIALOGUE AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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WHAT IS DIALOGUE?

In philosophy and literary genre, dialogue was simply called *dialog*.

- **The Greeks and Indians** used dialogue for purposes of rhetorical entertainment and instruction.
- **In its technical sense,** the word ‘dialogue’ describes what the Greek philosophers invented and lifted to an art.

Heart and Mind Dialogue

AFRICA:

In Africa, what makes a person is the HEART. This signifies courage to stand against obstacles. A generous heart is open to dialogue. A Warm Heart in Africa signifies kindness to others, even, strangers.

THE GREEKS: identify three minds in dialogue:

Ordinary Minds - that discuss people,

Simple Minds - that discuss events

Great Minds - that discuss ideas

Objectives of Dialogue

Among the general objectives of dialogue are:

- ❖ Persuasion
- ❖ Understanding perspectives, ideas, situations
- ❖ Resolution of conflicts, misunderstandings or disagreements
- ❖ Building relationships
- ❖ Problem solving
- ❖ Learning to acquire insights and useful information
- ❖ Decision making

Platonic Dialogue

The Platonic dialogue had its foundations in the **mime** (the theatrical technique of suggesting action, character, or emotion without words. Only gesture, expression and body movement are used). Sicilian poets Sophron and Epicharmus cultivated this half a century earlier. The works of these writers, which Plato admired and imitated, have not survived, but scholars imagine them as little plays usually presented with only two performers. Plato simplified the form of dialogue to pure argumentative conversation about the year 405-406 BC, and by 399 he had brought the dialogue to its highest perfection, especially in the cycle directly inspired by the death of Socrates. All his philosophical writings, except the Apology, used this form.

Paulo Freire

Dialogue - communication allowed students and teachers to learn from one another in an environment characterized by respect and equality. He was a great advocate for oppressed people who were concerned with praxis, that is, action that is informed and linked to people's values. Dialogued pedagogy was not only about deepening understanding; it was also about making positive changes in the world.

This focus was, making the world a better place.

<http://infed.org/mobi/paulo-freire-dialogue-praxis-and-education/>

Dialogue Today

Today, dialogue is used to help people resolve long-standing conflicts and to build deeper understanding of contentious issues. Dialogue is not about judging, weighing, or making decisions, but about understanding and learning. Dialogue dispels stereotypes, builds trust, and enables people to be open to perspectives that are very different from their own. Dialogue as a “conversation between two or more persons” is an exchange of views in the hope of ultimately reaching agreement. This should not be an argument to win or to prove who is right and who is wrong. In dialogue, a person exercises the right to hold on to an opinion which the person is convinced of.

Dialogue or Monologue

Does the word “dialogue” mean the same thing to the people who invoke it in conversations and negotiations? Sometimes some people turn dialogue to monologue and an assertion of one’s rightness and ego. Some people just want to be listened to as if they have a monopoly of knowledge and wisdom. Some people never allow a partner in dialogue to complete a sentence before they break in or “jump in their throat”.

Dialogue creates a sacred space for an encounter about concerns of human persons in their relationship with God, with the world, and with one another. In dialogue fear, insecurity and pain could give way to trust and love. Protest can only make sense when dialogue has failed.

Talk and Listen

In dialogue, we must learn when, how and where to talk and when, how and where to be silent. Silence is still an active and valid form of dialogue. This does not exclude the right of everyone involved in it to be attentive in listening and to be heard in responding with mutual respect. Dialogue ought to take cognisance of our various heritages from birth, environment and physical trauma one must have suffered in life because these influence the behavioural pattern of the human person. There are some actions that even the actor has no explanation for.

Dialogue and Patience

Patience is very vital in dialogue. There are times you find yourself doing exactly the things you condemn in other people. At other times you are shocked how some people do things that contradict human reason.

St. Paul had this feeling when he encountered himself at the quiet of his life. This inward struggle made him say: “I do not understand my own behaviour; I do not act as I mean to” (Romans 7, 14-25).

Recall our discussion on debriefing and healing of memories.

Human Dignity and Respect

The dynamics of dialogue should take into cognizance the dignity of a partner in dialogue. We should be clear of the subject of dialogue and what we hope to achieve. The ultimate goal of dialogue is to facilitate friendship and equity. We need to be ready to agree to disagree and celebrate the views we have in common. We should be prepared to subdue our ego by not insisting on our demands and conditions for peace and reconciliation. Obedience as in listening and acting with good will and conscience is an essential heart of dialogue.

Ad Gentes – To the World

The fathers of the Second Vatican Council in *Ad Gentes* admonished us to be profoundly pervaded by the Spirit of Christ to converse with those among whom we live so that through sincere and patient dialogue they themselves might learn of the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations.

We should acknowledge the role of prayer in the dynamics of dialogue.

Ad Gentes – To the World

Addressing the representatives of the World Council of Churches in Rome on April 11, 1986, Saint Pope John Paul II said:

“In the final analysis, prayer is the best means by which all humanity can be united. It disposes people to accept God’s will for them. It also affects the relationship of those who pray together, for coming together before God in prayer; people can no longer ignore or hate others. Those who pray together discover that they are pilgrims and seekers of the same goal, brothers and sisters who share responsibility for the same human family, children of the same God and Father. Dialogue must show how much we need each other; therefore, we need to love each other for our own sake”.

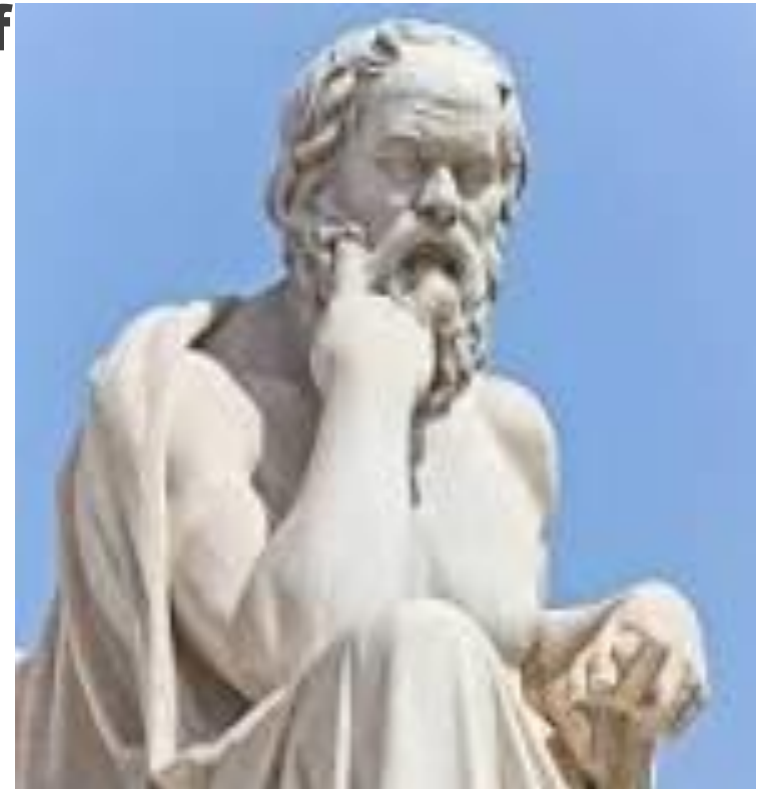
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

- Before we accept any form of information, we should be able to reflect and determine if what we have heard is true, good or useful.
- Some people would come to tell me all sorts of stories about others.
- **Ordinary minds discuss people,**
- **Simple minds discuss events**
- **Great minds discuss ideas.**

SOCRATES' FILTER TEST

Before you say anything ask yourself the following questions:

- **What I am about to say:**
- **Is it true?**
- **Is it a good thing?**
- **Do I really need to say it?**
- **Is it useful?**



Application of the filter test

One day, a man met Socrates and said, wise Sage, I have a report concerning one of your students. Socrates, responded, before you tell me anything, can I ask you some questions? The man replied, sure! Then Socrates asked, what you are going to tell me, **“Is it good? Is it true? Is it useful?”**

The man replied, no.

Well, concluded Socrates, if what you want to tell me is neither **TRUE** nor **GOOD** nor even **USEFUL**, why tell it to me at all?

The man was defeated and ashamed, and said no more.

The Most Important Thing

Socrates believed that:

- **The most important thing is to determine the right direction of action through elimination of misconceptions;**
- **Unexamined life is not worth living;**
- **Truth is something that is lived, not thought or simply known;**
- **Each point of truth leads to the next truth**
- **And he believed in the universality of the inner rational being.**

Effects

Any information that is not well managed can destroy a whole community or an institution. If we are interested in listening to gossips or tales and acting on wrong information, we make those living with us or working with us insecure. Everybody becomes and remains a suspect as long as we keep saying: “I heard that...” “I was told that....” Matured and secure people do not talk or act that way. It is worse when leaders and ministers behave like that and even act on anonymous letters. Very often those who say, “They say”, “I heard” betray their own ignorance and insecurity.

Scriptural Counsel

“Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble” (Proverbs 21, 23). It is therefore very important to “Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit (Psalm 34, 13).

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless (James 1, 26).

For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit (1 Peter 3, 10).

The Tongue

In information management, the tongue must be properly controlled to reflect the character and integrity of the owner. It can be very embarrassing when some preachers because they have the opportunity and privilege to mount the pulpit dish out to the congregation the gossips they have pleasantly listened to. Some use the information they got from uncertified and unverified sources to insult people on the pulpit. It is worse when the preacher is speaking against people of other religions with the intention of causing religious acrimony.

The Tongue

The mark of a gentle and self-confident person depends to a large extent on the ability to control the manner of speech as prayed by the psalmist: “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141, 3)! Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits (Proverbs 18, 21).

In dialogue, information reflects the temperament of a person. How we react to the information can to some extent define the content of our character and maturity.

The Tongue

Even dreams and visions have to be subjected to matured reasoning, examination and a critical testing of the spirit because some people may be manipulated by evil spirits in the form of dreams and visions.

In dogmatic theology dreams and visions are not articles of faith; at best they can be treated as private opinions that must not be imposed on others. Dreams and visions are not relevant in jurisprudence because they do not pass the rules of logic.

Privileged Information

There is information that is a privileged knowledge. Even if the information is true, the question is whether the information is useful for the community or the institution or to the people who are receiving it. Must the information be used, and if so to what extent and to what end? The intention of the informant should always be evaluated. Supposing you are in charge of formation and training of people, how do you manage the information the students tell you about themselves and others. Let us assume that you are aware that a person has committed adultery, do you need to go and tell the partner? If you do, what is your intention and motive?

Privileged Information

Would you be happy if your information, no matter how true, leads to divorce; and disintegrate the family including the innocent children? Will telling the truth here, lead to freedom or destroy the purpose of freedom?

“We all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. Whatever comes out of your mouth speaks of yourself first, and then to others, who will judge you by your words. It is not the person who insults the King at his back that is killed, but the one who relays the insults to the King.

INFORMATION OF 29 MAY 2023

President Bola Tinubu

Fuel subsidy is gone!

- **Was this information useful on the day of the inauguration of the President?**
- **Was the information true?**
- **Was the information good?**
- **How did Nigerians manage the information?**



Information Control Mechanism

- **Control the level of dialogue, input and output of the information**
- **Identify the strategy to evaluate unforeseen consequences**
- **Identify the means to attain positive result like building relationships.**
- **Develop the skill to identify what the informant want to achieve.**
- **Does the informant wants something from you? At what prize?**
- **Are you giving the information under pressure or cohesion?**
- **Do you simply enjoy unsolicited information?**
- **How do you manage people who put pressure on you to just talk?**
- **Are you in control?**
- **Are you induced by monetary gains?**

Information Machine

This can help you define your identity and maturity in dialogue and information management.

- **Have turned yourself into information machine whereby the speech is converted to plain text by the system's input recognizer/decoder and simply executed like an output robot or avatar?**
- **“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who are listening to you “ (Ephesians 4, 29).**

The Black Box Theory

KEEP MY SECRET, SECRET

Some people think that no one can have access to their hidden secrets. Hence, they may be smiling at you while in the depth of their minds, they are thinking of how to eliminate you. In Act 1, Scene 4 of William Shakespeare Macbeth, King Duncan while enquiring about the execution of the incumbent Thane of Cowdor told Lennox, Malcolm, Donalbain and the attendants that “there’s no art to find the mind’s construction in the face. He was a gentleman on whom I built an absolute trust”.

The Black Box Theory Literature

As soon as Macbeth entered, Duncan welcomed him with a sincere appreciation and gratitude: “O worthiest cousin, the sin of my ingratitude even now was heavy on me. Thou art so far before that swiftest wing of recompense is slow to overtake thee. Would thou have less deserved, that the proportion both of thanks and payment might have been mine! Only I have left to say, more is thy due than more than all can pay”.

Ironically, the same Duncan, who just regretted building an absolute trust on a person, embraced Macbeth with all his heart knowing not that he was embracing his actual and real agent of death. The content of Macbeth’s black box was a vaulting ambition for the crown of King Duncan who he would kill shortly. This confirms the Prophecy of Jeremiah that “cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord” (Jeremiah 17, 5).

The Black Box Theory Physics

Isaac Newton, William Gilbert and George Berkeley

Experimenting on physical realities, Newton established that natural phenomena generally follow determinate mathematical laws of motion. Based on this principle, he produced his 'black box' theory of science to explain how things should happen. However, he could not prove why things happen. He could not reach the inner mind of the human agent in the context of cause and effect. Naturally, a stimulus is expected to produce a desired response. While a physical input can produce a desired output, a similar result cannot be reached in dealing with human beings. The density of the human mind led William Gilbert to agree with Newton that science could not go beyond what can be deduced directly from experience. This assertion was also affirmed by George Berkeley in his 1721 *“De Motu, Newton's black-box physics”*

The Black Box Theory Psychology

In Psychology, the black box theory is used to define things according to their functions in relations to exterior appearance and interior behaviour. The observer sees things happening but does not know the sincerity of the action. The content of the *black box* can only be imagined with a set of different outputs. The Psychologist therefore attempts to use the black *box theory of consciousness* to understand the mind. In Psychological therapy, some psychologists have tried to find out the hidden secrets of the human mind through mild electric shock and alcohol therapy.

The Black Box Theory Psychology

It has been discovered that these methods along with persuasion have made some people unconsciously open their black box and reveal the long-stored secrets. Delilah negatively used this method to achieve her selfish aim. She made Sampson drink her fake love and shock him with her “erotic electric”. After Sampson had opened his black box to Delilah, she put him to sleep on her lap and called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair in order to subdue him (Judges 16, 16-19).

The Black Box Theory Philosophy

Philosophy has another way of looking at this theory. Rather than a deliberate attempt to deceive others, a person with this tendency may not even be aware of the reality of his nature. The Allegory of the Cave was presented by the Greek philosopher Plato in his work "*The Republic* (514a-520a)" to compare "the effect of education and the lack of it on human nature". Plato's Socrates explains how the philosopher is like a prisoner who is freed from the cave and comes to understand that the shadows on the wall do not make up reality at all, as he can perceive the true form of reality rather than the mere shadows seen by the prisoners."

The Black Box Theory Philosophy

Socrates ask Glaucon to imagine a cave inhabited by prisoners who have been imprisoned since childhood in such a way that their legs and necks are fixed, such that they cannot move their heads and are thereby forced to gaze at a wall in front of them (514a-b). The only thing that is perceived by these prisoners is shadow. In our world today, many people who claim to be prophets “create God in their own image”, to the detriment of the ignorant followers who have no clue of their hidden agenda.

The Black Box Theory Politics

Jeremy C. Bradley:

*In “Demand Media”, Jeremy made a critical analysis of *black box theory* in politics to uncover the practices of government leaders and politicians in national and international governmental policies and practices. This theory states that the actions of political parties, lobbyists and other government players such as legislators and state governors is most effectively studied by looking at the "inputs" and "outputs" of the political system.*

The Black Box Theory Politics

Judging from the outputs of politicians, the theory discovers that the truth inside the box of the politicians is not perceptible to a person who is not a "political insider". This is more so because of some "cover-up" of government that show the governed only the shadows. The true nature of political systems can be known only by opening or exposing the political box through the enlightenment of the public. Otherwise, it would be difficult for people to have confidence in political systems. Ideally, Polis means city, hence an ideal politician must be real to the citizens in the city.

The Black Box Theory Politics

Some dialogue initiatives keep springing up in Nigeria to proffer solution to the insecurity that has kept the citizens in a “democratic cave”. While many people think that the government is responsible for the insecurity, many others think that the insecurity is one of the contents of the black box of some ethnic, religious and political leaders. No matter how we want to beam light in the shadow of our national cave, the major puzzle is the extent we can go in a society where trust, justice, and peace have become expensive and where mutual suspicion has become cheap and real.

The Black Box Theory Politics

Human beings have been slaughtered, kidnapped, rapped and displaced. What is happening to the police report of high profile Nigerians who are arrested in connection with banditry? When are we hearing the report of what happened to the high profiled political and traditional rulers who have been indicted. Why did the police officer refused to mention their names? Could not our national project of dialogue be a sincere search for the truth that can penetrate the black box of government? Only the “truth will set you free” (John 8, 32). Dialogue initiative that cares about healing and reconciliation must involve honest experts that can open the national black box for the sake of the common good that surpasses any selfish ambition.

CONCLUSION

The National black box in many African countries is unbreakable. Political killings often end up unresolved. This is lack of political will to face the truth that could bring criminals to justice.

If an idle mind is the devil's workshop, then, the idle mind may not be able to manage information. Lack of information management can also kill. We should be engaged in whatever can make us busy. This would make gossip less attractive to the simple and ordinary minds.

CONCLUSION

The average boy or girl who is engaged in cultism, immorality, obsession for material things, unhealthy comparison, bad friends, drug addiction and terrorist activities cannot manage information. Quality education and employment can give adequate incentives to acquire great minds than can move the world with ideas. Nothing is difficult for a willing heart. With a personal and political will, we can be good managers of information.

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