



## **Dialogue Community of Practice Evaluation**

In supporting the development of individuals and their work towards public services transformation

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## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the impact of the Dialogue Community of Practice (DCOP) in supporting the development of individuals and their work towards public services transformation. The evaluation was undertaken during April – June 2016 and authored by M J Laidig, in response to a call for tenders by NHS National Education for Scotland (NES) in early 2016.

The DCOP is one of the Scottish Leaders Forum work streams supporting public services transformation. The strategic statement for the DCOP is 'to enhance the quality of relationships through conversation to improve what matters most to us.'

The specific objectives of the DCOP are to:

- Provide opportunities for people to learn about dialogue practices and become more skilful in conversations to transform public services
- Provide opportunities for people to practice and incorporate dialogue as a leadership intervention to shape culture and deliver change within complex and unpredictable environments.

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) and NHS Fife lead the design and co-ordinate the different aspects that make up the portfolio of the DCOP activity. (A review by community members in June 2014 has informed the most recent activity.)

A range of qualitative approaches were used to obtain evaluative data e.g. telephone and face to face interviews, learning logs, newsletters, online questionnaire, digital stories, presentation slides, reflections of consultants both internal and external, participant responses, frequency of use of resources. This data was analysed for key themes and patterns to generate recommendations on the further development of the DCOP. To inform the recommendations there is a discussion of some of the strategic issues.

The extracts from the data, in particular from interviews and focus group reflections and comments, have been de-identified to retain the anonymity of participants.

## 2. Executive Summary

The opening priorities of the new Government have clear implications in terms of how Ministers, Government and wider public service partners are being asked much more explicitly to work in collaboration. The Dialogue Community of Practice, as part of Workforce Scotland, contributes to supporting a more participative form of government. Some of the signs are challenging, and the context and strategic request seem very clear:

*'There is a need for a seismic shift in the coming years to tackle issues that cannot be solved in isolation. Addressing problems like climate change and the number of children living in poverty requires changing the nature of our conversations. If we keep holding the same conversations we have always held we will continue to have the same outcomes we have always had.'*

Making the sort of shift identified above depends on the quality of our culture, which depends on the quality of our relationships, which depends on the quality of the conversations our people hold. Everything happens, after all, through the ability to dialogue. Dialogue therefore plays an important role in how people engage in conversations to get to the root of complex issues. In difficult situations in the workplace dialogue can help differing opinions and perspectives to be expressed and heard, allowing those present to think and act differently together. Consensus is built throughout.

The main findings of this evaluation are that participants gained a heightened sense of self-awareness whilst engaging in dialogue practice. Their ability to connect and support teams and groups both large and small, often dealing with complex or strategic issues in different ways, had developed and was continuing to develop. There is a need to bring more focus to the use and application of technology to maximise investment to ensure a broader impact Scotland wide. Synergies with other Workforce Scotland offerings have been identified and an expressed need from the DCOP respondents to continue to develop and create opportunities to share the learning to enhance the quality of relationships through conversation in complex and unpredictable environments.

During this review the DCOP is seen by all of the participants, including the OD practitioners, HR and Scottish Government, as playing an important and significant role in the future of Workforce Scotland. The DCOP experiences documented in this report comprise many elements of dialogue learning and interventions providing significant lessons and insights for this approach to be carried forward to enable integrated service provision and public services transformation in Scotland.

### 3.0 Recommendations

On the basis of the evidence reviewed 11 recommendations are detailed below. These recommendations are intended to strengthen and enhance the already significant energy, enthusiasm and impact of the DCOP. In the framing of the recommendations the reflections of a number of the informants were drawn on and, where appropriate, elaborated and suggestions aligned to other global dialogic interventions, organisational learning and available technology applications and tools used by other organisations. The recommendations cover 4 main areas to be addressed. 1) Synergies 2) Technology, 3) Practice Groups, 4) Ongoing learning

**Recommendation 1:** Opportunities for synergies linking dialogue practice with other programmes and burgeoning initiatives in Workforce Scotland to be exploited.

**Recommendation 2:** Greater use of technology to support DCOP is made including audio/video streaming of live Master class sessions, and these to be uploaded to Workforce Scotland website to allow those not able to attend access to the material and to facilitate local sessions at their place of work with groups using the streamed or recorded material. Master Class notes could be made available to facilitate the local conversations. A coherent social media strategy to be designed to support the DCOP that incorporates Facebook groups, live streaming, twitter, etc.

**Recommendation 3:** Practice groups are extended to support the ongoing development of capacity in the wider system in the practice and application of dialogue. Practice groups should be reframed, refocused and redirected.

- a) All dates of the practice group sessions over 6-month or 10-month period to be published, with sufficient lead-time for interested participants to sign up along with dates (start and cessation dates) being recorded in a central diary.
- b) Practice group leads to compile a biography including areas of interest and dialogue experience/approach to be included on the website to introduce the practice group. An explicit link to dialogue roadmap can be made.
- c) Virtual dialogue practice groups are created with fit for purpose technology to supplement the practice group face-to-face meetings. This should align with the social media strategy.
- d) Offline container approach to be introduced as a practice model. Dialogue practice group facilitators to participate in regular joint reflective sessions to deepen their practice and pick up issues or patterns that are showing up, allowing them to flex and learn from their approach.

**Recommendation 4:** A 'dialogue in action' practitioner group be piloted with the specific purpose of supporting practitioners who have identified a project they are working on, so as to support and develop their practice whilst delivering a piece of work.

**Recommendation 5:** A dialogue development roadmap is created for internal practitioners to enhance the dialogue practitioner profile, facilitate learning and practice in dialogue, to build confidence and offer a sense of progression for the individual recognising their experience.

**Recommendation 6:** Dialogue material be created and made available for download. The material to include (i) reading lists, (ii) webinar/video footage of master classes, case studies, interviews, dialogue in action workshops, facilitation, etc., (iii) Written case studies (iv) 'how to' guides with workshop overviews, tips, suggestions, models, practices, (v) framework that details building blocks of dialogue practice. The introductory Dialogue workshops to continue and to be made available across Scotland including front line staff.

**Recommendation 7:** The Master class series to continue with a name change more representative of the ethos, and aligned with the principles of, Dialogue. The DCOP should explicitly ask the wider community for nominations to invite speakers to the Master class series allowing their contribution, voice and interest to be heard.

**Recommendation 8:** Large DCOP gatherings be organised annually to enable those participating in dialogue to make connections, share experiences, and show-case their work. Further inquiry into levels of interest on running additional dialogue session offerings be made e.g. (i) deep dive Master class sessions undertaken twice a year, (ii) summer schools programme – to contribute to the DCOP community.

**Recommendation 9:** Case studies demonstrating impact, including both qualitative and quantitative metrics, be created made available for download. Case studies to be compiled/gathered in different media forms and to be made more widely available for DCOP to share and learn from e.g. video, audio, slide, text.

**Recommendation 10:** A bank of experienced dialogue practitioners is identified creating a cross-functional pool for the broader public sector community to draw on.

**Recommendation 11:** Cross sector and external organisational learning work placements be investigated and offered to DCOP practitioners to deepen their understanding of dialogue interventions in other sectors, to bring back organisational learning to the wider community.

## 4. Dialogue Community of Practice (EVALUATION AND REVIEW)

### 4.1 Practice

Opportunities for developing self, reflection on practice and building a toolkit of dialogue practice tools, skills, models and experience are key to supporting effective dialogue interventions. Drawing on personal learning logs from practice group participants, online questionnaire responses and interviews conducted with a range of respondents, including members of the Scottish Government, offered numerous and varied evidence of personal development and deepening practice. The themes that emerged are detailed below. There are further discussion questions arising from the evaluation outlined in section 6.

**Increased Self-awareness:** There are a great many examples of increased self-awareness offered from learning logs and during reflective interviews. A range of experiences were given from deeply acknowledged ‘*ah-ha*’ moments to recognition in the moment of how ‘*they showed up*’ and impacted the group or the conversation they were part of. There was an understanding that the ability to change the nature of conversations could take place through understanding preconceived mental models, and changing patterns of behaviours. ‘*My ability to listen more deeply, greater awareness of own responses to conversations, understanding others’ perspectives and drivers, which influence my preferred ways of working and communication*’ were all offered as examples of self-awareness. “*I’ve been helped to be more resilient in a particularly demanding year, to notice the perceptions that follow a feeling. To be more choiceful about how to act on them. I have been attempting to reduce my over identification and inquiring with others into what is a ‘good enough Public Servant’ and avoiding moving to under identification.*” The opportunity to notice in the moment and take a different action was a theme that ran through out the interviews.

**Developing practice:** The practice groups and Master class series were seen as a key highlight for many, offering the opportunity to both develop their dialogue practice and engage with interesting material. ‘*Being part of an experienced practice group and now facilitating one is helping to deepen my own practice and requiring me to get better at noticing and bystand patterns in conversation in the moment. I’ve also continued to integrate other models / thinking alongside dialogue and structural dynamics.*’ Taking time together to listen more deeply to one another and themselves was a powerful learning practice.

**Approach:** For many the DCOP activities allowed reflective time to consider their approach to conversations and how they show up or change the nature of their response ‘*I continue to use dialogue to reflect and adapt my approach in conversation to attempt to make these more purposeful. I have also been actively working to model the move from monologue to dialogue and*

*generation at a personal level.'* The DCOP offered the opportunity to recognise that other approaches were valid and could be more effective.

**Meaningful conversations** Dialogue is the means by which humans make meaning together. *'Having been introduced to the KIBP (Kantor Institute Boundary Profile) and Kantor's work amongst other things, I have been able to use this knowledge to have better and more meaningful conversations with people. Through understanding the structure of communication and how differing perspectives and mental models are formed, choices on how to respond can be made. 'I have also been able to use the theories to understand some of the conflicts that arise in meetings and conversations I am part of, and to seek to change these for the better.'*

**Reflective:** Taking time to be more reflective on intention and impact showed up on a number of occasions in interviews and in learning logs. *'I have been reflecting with my dialogue supervisor on the impact of my interventions to learn how to be more impactful as an OD specialist, specifically focusing on my questions to the group.'* *'It has also helped me to understand from another perspective the drivers which influence my preferred ways of working and communication.'*

**Dialogue Practice with others:** Knowledge and understanding of the theory and practice of dialogue was present and a thirst for further experience and knowledge showed itself. *'I have increased my knowledge and understanding of the theory through practice. Explicitly using and referring to dialogue and explaining it so people can see and use it too. I have participated in a practice group to deepen my knowledge. I've valued hearing how others teach the dialogue concepts and have integrated some of their different approaches into mine.'*

**Coaching and supervision:** Some informants with coaching experience had supervision in place and chose to reflect on their coaching practice taking the opportunity to reflect on how dialogue could impact their interventions. *'I have coached staff from a different organisation and gained skills and insight into a different public sector approach. I have also extended my reach and dialogue approach through active support for internal restructuring and resulting staff churn. I have been reflecting with my dialogue supervisor on the impact of my interventions to learn how to be more impactful as an OD specialist, specifically focusing on my questions to the group.'*

**Break through results:** The introduction of dialogue frameworks into existing team structures produced break through results. *I have been working with teams using a dialogue frame to my work. These teams have been multi-agency/profession and the work has been to support the integration of health and social care or community planning partnerships. Dialogue is a good intervention because it breaks through the convention of speaking through the Chair and hierarchy.'*

**Design and Delivery of Dialogue Sessions:** There were a number of practitioners who have gone on to design and deliver their own dialogue sessions with success. *'I have delivered introductory sessions on Dialogue and Structural dynamics to both small and larger groups (up to 30 people) plus delivery of the Kantor Baseline profile. Through this I have had to teach the concepts and illustrate with real examples from my work and the work of the participants. Some have created their own bank of material on theories and models to draw on, both for themselves and for others. 'I have built up a bank of resource material for each of these sessions so I believe I am competent in teaching the models and underlying theories in a way that people can see how to work with dialogue.'*

**Sharing the learning:** A number of informants thought that sharing their learning with others had deepened their own understanding and practice of dialogue. *'I have really enjoyed teaching the concepts to interested public sector workers. Being part of an experienced practice group and now facilitating one is helping to deepen my own practice and requiring me to get better at noticing and bystander patterns in conversation in the moment. I've valued hearing how others teach the dialogue concepts and have integrated some of their different approaches into mine.'*

**Synergy and connections:** Several of the informants were active members of other activities offered through Workforce Scotland and the Scottish Government 'Public Service Facilitators Network – facilitating the emerging future workshop.' Some had made the connection to dialogue whilst others had not. *'I have also attended U-Lab theory groups and see the difference it makes by opening up to sense and feel dialogue when having everyday conversations. Integrating the two approaches gives me greater insights in to the power of meaningful communication and following result.'*

**Models and practices:** Many noted that dialogue was part of a repertoire of skills, models and practices that they drew on during design and delivery of interventions. *'I've also continued to integrate other models / thinking alongside dialogue and structural dynamics'* It was not always easy to separate out what dialogue was versus, for example, Appreciative Inquiry or conscious listening.

**Awareness of Dialogue practice range:** Some interviewees had not appreciated that dialogue had a range of applications, protocols and applications around facilitation, coaching and change. *'I had not made the distinction between being a facilitator and a dialogic facilitator'*

**Other comments:** For a few, little or no practice development had taken place, having had little ability to participate in learning sessions *'due to restrictions on travel.'* For others, though there was initial interest in dialogue the format of sessions they had attended *'did not land well.'* Reasons given *'were too much theory, not enough theory, too fluffy, apparent lack of structure'*

## 4.2 Impact

Capturing impact is dependent on the particulars of each specific dialogic intervention, of which there are many across the landscape reviewed. Many informants did not see dialogue as a stand alone practice, and could not always apportion clearly the contribution dialogue had played without referring to the other models and tools they had applied e.g. active listening, appreciative inquiry. Teasing the intervention apart and attempting to apportion an impact value may be worth exploring further. On the other hand, it may be deemed that recording that *'dialogue played a significant part'* in how the overall intervention succeeded is sufficient evidence in and of itself. It can be seen, then, that measuring impact when practitioners are consciously drawing on dialogue alongside other practices and methodologies, models, tools, experiences can become quite difficult.

Participants offered examples of successes using and drawing on dialogue practice. Included below are a range of themed examples representative of the many responses that have been shared. It has to be noted that for some *'It's difficult to attribute any of my work to my participation in the DCOP as I was a dialogue practitioner prior to this DCOP.'* Whilst for many others it was clear how the application and intervention of Dialogue as a practice and methodology brought significant changes to the nature of conversations and outcomes that were held.

An emerging theme throughout the interviews conducted was just how difficult some practitioners found it to offer definitive dialogue impact examples or to articulate fully what they were when asked. As the interviews continued a pattern emerged of how a practitioner had shown up on the day in a meeting or workshop and on reflection appreciated that just by being in the room, in dialogue terms their presence impacted the session. There were instances described as small changes *'the impact of dialogue in the life of a young person, who until that point had been through a series of children's charity communication sessions. Introducing a dialogue stance enabled the child and the family to move forward in a positive way'* Another perspective offered on the same intervention was seen as *'not being successful'*, highlighting different understandings of what "success" means in this context.

**States of readiness for change:** In one case study, perspectives were playing out as the practitioners were holding different versions of what 'success' looked like. One practitioner was happy with what were termed 'small successes' whilst another reflected that an intervention had 'not been successful' with a change in leadership during the project and the lack of senior team buy in.

**Ripple effect:** It was suggested that it was *'not easy to capture the longer-term ripple effect of dialogue in action.'* Dialogue operates at an adaptive model level. On a number of occasions

informants were clear that their had been an impact on relationships, in meetings or groups. It was more difficult for them to articulate and quantify just what the impact had been.

**Enhanced Team working relationships** Many HR/OD experienced informants reported more powerful and successful ways of enhancing team working. *‘Dialogue has given me a new way to share what I am noticing about how the team is intersecting - I realise that I was a disabled bystander but by becoming familiar with the ‘move, oppose, follow, bystand’ model it has helped me to frame my thinking and be able to offer constructive feedback.’*

**Group work:** *‘I have used a dialogic approach with a number of groups I have worked with. For example, I worked with a leadership group who have struggled to discuss and implement changes in their area, as previous discussions have been somewhat adversarial in nature. I introduced the concept of dialogue and thinking together to achieve a shared outcome rather than a series of individual outcomes. We talked about not holding a position and building positively on points rather than criticising and shooting down ideas’*

**Building Capacity:** *‘I facilitated a dialogue practice group, which has enabled OD spread the use of dialogue, to support new integrated health and social care teams develop. The people I worked with, have noticed an improvement in their engagement with carers groups and staff engagement.’*

**Leadership programme:** *‘Linking this to a leadership programme that I facilitate, works well for participants, as does the wider local leadership programme that offers a common language and consistency.’*

**Organisational Change:** *‘we took the Chris Rodgers material (from the Master Class series) and it informed our organisational change programme; we also had Chris Rodgers come to speak to two of our executive team about working with complexity. To sum up impact? I would say: broadening senior leaders’ perspectives’ on how change ‘happens’ and enabling us to talk about and to try and work with emergence and complexity as well as having plans and expected outcomes.’*

### 4.3 Support

The Dialogue Community of Practice has offered various opportunities to increase dialogue learning and practice opportunities. 3 components have been specifically reviewed through learning log reflections, questionnaires and direct interviews with informants;

- I. **Master class**
- II. **Practice Group**
- III. **Other Support**

#### I. Master Classes

Master class feedback based on learning logs, interviews and questionnaire responses suggested overall that the audience who had attended had enjoyed the content, the presenters and the topics. *'I attended the entire Master class series, and they all worked well because of the rich content of the speakers and resources/slides they shared'* Two interviewees who had not attended had heard 'good things' and were aware that models and information shared on the days had been brought back to the different teams and groups. For example one speaker was invited to attend the Scottish Government and present his material, with the insights and models informing one of their change initiatives.

**Quality of Speakers and topics:** The quality of the speakers and topics that led the Master class series were considered to be of high calibre and challenging, stimulating and useful. *'The speaker was excellent - liberating to understand the madness within systems and the behaviours it generates'*. Many respondents encouraged the DCOP to continue the Master class series *'Continue with the quarterly Master Classes presented by high quality speakers.'*

**Name:** The name 'Master class' was highlighted on many occasions as not aligning with the practice of dialogue or the approach that the presenters had taken on the day. *'The name Master Class feels more like a lecture than a dialogue group'*. This was not how the speakers had designed the day, only the name of the series. There was also some reflection on whether the name played a part in some people attending in the morning and leaving around lunchtime. *'The name does not frame the day well'* and *'there was a sense of the day trimming down in the afternoon session.'* There is no evidence to substantiate that to be the case. It is noted as it arose on several occasions as a reflection of what might be, rather than what was.

**Attendance:** Some had found it *'tough'* to take the time out to attend the Master class sessions. For some the dates did not work with their schedule, *'the one Master class I did get to was very useful but I didn't make the others because of time pressures'*. Others found that despite highest

intentions it was hard to take the time out of their daily work with changing priorities. *'I have only attended two in the last year, due to diary constraints.'* Others had team members attend on behalf of the team bringing the material back and then sharing with the team members. *'Keep up the DCOP - great way to learn. Perhaps offering us little group master classes on-site?'*

Several interviewees suggested *'holding a day in the diary for an event no matter how interesting, was hard to do.'* One interesting idea put forward was to *'hold two sessions each year, over 1.5 – 2-days with a deeper dive into the topic.'* *'Committing to 1-5 – 2 days to explore a topic more in depth could be seen as more supportive and worthwhile requiring commitment to attend. It's potentially more likely that holding two days is easier.'* Another suggested *'What about running a summer school on dialogue?'*

**Ongoing energy and interest in Dialogue:** Energy and enthusiasm was observed in the room for the Master class sessions and when the room was asked to *'put their hand up if this is your first time?'* often up to half the room raised their hand.' The reflection was offered as an example of interest, enthusiasm and energy for dialogue in the community.

**Large Gatherings:** There was some reflection on what had been lost in the creation of the Master class series and *'the loss'* of the earlier larger *'gathering'*. Some had gained great energy on the day from the larger events and a number suggested that these should be re-established with a view to re energising the DCOP. *'The previous 'gatherings' had more energy and opportunity to dialogue with many different agencies.'* There was a perception from some that the master class sessions had attracted a *different audience* than the larger gathering. *'There were different attendees at the earlier gatherings than at the Master classes – more OD/consultants, less managers and breadth of organisational representation'.*

**Shared Learning:** There was felt to be a loss of awareness of what people were doing in the larger system, how learning was being applied without the larger events taking place. For some this allowed for greater visibility and networking opportunities and to feel connected to the wider community. Creating the conditions to enable shared learning and connectivity for some was seen as a useful role for the DCOP to play.

**Master class Structure and dialogue:** For many, the small group dialogues at Master class sessions worked really well. *'These brought additional insights and mixed groups to talk about issues.'* For others, the Master Class structure had not allowed the opportunity to *'Integrate larger scale dialogue into the Master Classes.'* Some expressed small group dialogues had worked very well whilst others not as effectively as they wanted and felt *'there has not been a focus on dialogue, which I would have preferred there to have been'* and *'Didn't feel the space for dialogue was there.'*

**Technology and virtual materials:** A common theme emerging from a number of those interviewed and respondents to the questionnaire suggested better use of technology would benefit the DCOP. *'Keep up the great speakers - any chance of live streaming for those of us more remote or working P/T?'* Others suggested *'Make more use of technology to enable larger numbers of people in various locations to learn about the core concepts (e.g. use webinars - more efficient than large gatherings)'* and *'electronic link ups to Master classes where appropriate would be good (or recordings to view afterwards?)'*.

Some informants spoke of colleagues who had attended Master Class sessions and other dialogue events and just did *'not get it'* or *'land well'*. Some of the sessions had felt to be *'without structure'*

## II. Practice groups

Building on the Way Forward for DOCP of June 2014 a number of practice groups were established in 2015. Those expressing an interest were identified by their level of experience of dialogue and assigned a group. Lead facilitators were identified and assigned. The groups were initially composed of 6-8 participants. A conference call was held to set the scene for the practice groups and a learning frame was suggested.

**Value of Practice groups and availability:** For many the values of having the network of practice groups available felt of great value and there was an explicit request for more availability. *'The continuation of practice groups, as an opportunity to build skill and capacity.'* Others asked that the offering be expanded regionally beyond just the central belt. *'Develop Practice Groups in the North and North East of Scotland.'* *'I want my team to continue to grow their knowledge and practice of dialogue and the smaller groups are a great way of doing this rather than in larger groups.'*

**Isolation:** At times there could be *'a sense of isolation'* in the bigger system and through the gatherings along with practice groups supported the sense of belonging to a larger connected community.

**Enhancing Practice:** For some, the role of the practice groups when working well offered a sense of ongoing support, connectivity and real opportunities to practice and learn. *'Having a safe place to practice skill.'* *'Skills practice at SPS - great mix of staff, practical focus and personal validation of skills.'* *'The three practice groups I have either led or been part of recently have all worked well because people used Left Hand Column to share their most challenging conversations. This meant everyone learned about the impact of dialogue and the power of reframing the situation.'*

**Practice Group Leads experience:** The experienced practice group leads were drawn from both internal and external consultants. For some it was a rewarding experience *“Facilitating a practice group was a very rewarding experience, observing changes/learning in the group”*.

**Group size and attendance:** The number of participants attending a practice group numbered 3-6 in any one session. In many group sessions, 3-4 people attended. *‘More and bigger practice groups.’* This caused both practice group leads and participants to feel a sense of loss and disappointment when often the same people did not make each session. *‘I enjoyed being part of an experienced practice group - albeit it was only for a few sessions and there was inconsistent attendance, but really valued time and space to explore concepts further with other interested parties and an excellent facilitator.’* This was experienced by a number of informants as disappointment and the request for people to commit to attending. There was some *‘personal frustration’* expressed by some practice group leads over group member attendance. It was experienced as the practice group *‘not feeling like a priority’* to be present at.

**Learning Together:** There was appreciation of the time and space in a practice group when concepts and theories together with practice could be experienced and explored. *‘Been very helpful to learn together and get support and challenge from a small peer group with shared interest around this approach. I am now facilitating an experienced practice group this year.’*

**Naming of groups:** The naming of various groups *‘Experienced practice’* or *‘Apprentice to dialogue’* was for some ill defined. It was easier to understand what constituted a group of people new to dialogue. In the naming of the more experienced or advanced group it was less clear both for others not in the group as well as the leading the group. *“What does it take to be included in the experienced group? Am I experienced enough or not?”*

**Accessibility:** For many the opportunity to be part of a practice group was welcomed. *‘Liked working as a geographic group of practitioners’*. For some finding a group to be part of and attending a group was challenging. Various reasons including the timing *‘Unable to attend due to organisational restrictions.’* The dates not working *‘Half of these were arranged during school holidays and so I only managed to attend 1 in the end.’* to a practice group not being available locally in their area were given. Some were frustrated at not understanding how to access booking a place at a practice group *‘Can’t we have the dates and groups on Face book?’*

**Practice group meeting:** There were a number of challenges highlighted by the Practice Group Leads that they and the practice group members worked with. (i) Dates were difficult to coordinate with busy diaries of group members, (ii) attendance was mixed with some groups not always having the same people at the sessions through changing work priorities or holidays, (iii) active numbers in the group for some dropped as low as 3 (iv) venues were in different locations for

some, making finding and parking an added tension (v) the appropriateness of the eventual meeting space was not always conducive to dialogue practice group meetings. *'I spent a fair amount of time in administration, co-ordinating diary dates, places to meet and managing who would and would not be attending'*

**Practice Group Learning:** When the Practice groups were formed an initial conference call was held with the leads. It would appear that this was the only time the practice group leads were in conversation together. The opportunity to reflect together on how the practice groups were coming together, attendance, material offered, learning's and practice support were therefore not available to inform possible refocus or redirection of the groups.

**Contracting up front:** Where contracting up front was agreed, the informants reported the group held well to it. For some this was not always the case and on reflection more robust contracting at outset, revisited in the course of the engagement. It may have served the group and the members better. For some group participants the purpose of the group was not always clear. Several mentioned that the practice group had been powerful for them as it allowed them to apply the learning from the group in real time on a project and to reflect in the practice group.

**Consistency of approach by practice group leads:** Each of the group leads brought a wealth of experience of Dialogue to the groups they led. What emerged was the richness of the approaches and personal experiences of individuals that enriched each of the practice group sessions. *'The Group was very well facilitated with a great balance of subject expert/facilitator and group participant.'* Matching participant needs may or may not have found the practice group they were allocated to useful for their own area of interest.

**Dates for Practice groups to meet:** Agreeing dates and times to meet, proved challenging for all of the practice groups. Various reasons were raised including *'mirroring the organisational norms that the group members were part of'* and themes emerged. This contributed to some groups having inconsistent participation where the challenge of meeting together proved difficult and as a result group attendance fluctuated and declined over time.

### **Other Support**

**Cost:** There was an appreciation of the fact that the Master Class series and Practice group participation was provided by the DCOP at no cost to participants. *'I am really pleased and grateful to NES much looking forward to the learning and growth I know will come from this.'* *'That funding has been provided to allow this Group to continue to meet for six sessions during 2016.'*

#### 4.4 Insight

**Technology:** Better use of technology has been highlighted through out the review as an area to explore. Technology is available and used by many organisations effectively, making good use of time, resource and costs. *'Make more use of technology to enable larger numbers of people in various locations learn about the core concepts (e.g. use webinars - more efficient than large gatherings).'* Some suggested *'Creating more virtual materials'* and *'Video animation - I use this resource and the other articles regularly to help people 'get' dialogue.'*

**Dialogue Skills Development:** There was an appetite from all who were involved to develop their skills in dialogue *'An introduction session (practice groups are a great idea, but not practical unless local)'* with a range of ideas and topics expressed. *'Dialogue and Mediation, BPP, Dialogue & Teams, Partnerships and Alliances have all been a very live part of my leadership focus this year. Having the focus of regular meetings and a framework to continue progress. Look at boundary spanning explicitly and how dialogue works with that and develop their practice'*

**Dialogue practice:** There was energy to deepen dialogue practice *'I would appreciate dialogue practice on a topic of interest, using some of the methodologies, e.g. concentric circles', trust in the workplace and the UK culture, productivity and making savings, cultural differences in working across countries and what we could learn. Create space for real dialogue Less input and more space for different conversations, then space to reflect on the conversations and do this over a few months on a topic so the topic gets deepened and the reflective practise on ourselves becomes deepened.'*

**Front line Workers:** Whilst it was helpful to have OD/HR staff attend in their capacity of supporting the organisations, some interviewees thought giving the skills to a broader group of front line workers would be helpful. *'Finding ways of supporting introduction of dialogue practice and developing skill in front line workers too. Currently many of those attending work in policy or OD and HR.'*

**Practice Groups:** Many were interested in greater access to, and the continuation of, practice groups *'More practice groups - they seem to work well'*. The size of the groups was noted for attention *'More and bigger practice groups. Small groups are challenging when members are unable to attend'* and the desire for the offering of practice groups to be more widely available was requested *'Develop Practice Groups in the North and North East of Scotland'*. *'Focus on some of the challenges participants face to develop innovative thinking'*.

**Connectivity and shared Learning:** The opportunity to learn together emerged as a key theme *'Sharing the learning from the various groups so we learn from each other'*.

**Dialogue Road map:** A few informants asked that the progression of the dialogue practice be more explicitly outlined. *'Provide support for Practice Group members to develop their knowledge and expertise through provision of accredited programmes'*.

**Synergy:** Informants were aware of, and some very active in, other networks and were curious how dialogue related to them and could be integrated in support of them. *'Integrate dialogue community of practice with other creative interventions/ networks e.g. U-lab'. 'Dialogue is not a stand-alone approach. The opportunities for community inclusive dialogues around a whole range of issues and structures is where the future lies.'* *'Within our group we are setting goals for our individual learning needs which will be supported within group Development, perhaps linked to the new complex facilitation community, on using dialogue in facilitation.'*

**Audiences to attract and include:** When considering dialogue gatherings and the Master Class series, inviting along a wider range of participants and senior leaders was thought to be useful to include. *'Continue to encourage a wide range of participants. Invite senior leaders from the Scottish Government to come and experience a dialogue on a topic of their choice'*

**Dialogue in Action:** Many respondents asked for external examples of where dialogue had been introduced and had impact. *'I would like to hear more from people who are using dialogue effectively in organisational change Have this available on Knowledge network.'*

**Senior Leadership Impact:** *The senior leadership support, practice groups, action learning, training and an opportunity to work with a live issue, all contributed to the success.*

**Supervision of dialogue practitioners:** There was a request from some to have a *'Focus on supervision for dialogue practitioners to develop their own practice and quality-assure interventions with teams.'*

**Network of experienced Dialogue Practitioners:** Sharing knowledge and accessing experienced dialogue practitioners was suggested to *'Enable experienced dialogue practitioners to offer to support/ facilitate practice groups across the country. The local communities of practice have been a great way of establishing relationships across agencies.'*

**What is Dialogue:** For some, understanding what Dialogue was still posed some questions. *'Keen for the focus of the DCOP to be on 'doing' rather than understanding.'* It was suggested that the opportunity to articulate dialogue in action more effectively beyond the theory would be helpful. *'Throughout the first year I attended 8 different sessions and as I hadn't moved my thinking beyond dialogue being a theory of how conversations are structured. I stopped attending as I couldn't justify investing further time.'*

## 5. Conclusion

The Scottish Government has called for a more participative form of government. The Dialogue Community of Practice, as part of Workforce Scotland is well placed to support and facilitate that change. Everything happens, after all, through the ability to dialogue. Conversations can be dynamic, interactive, and inclusive. They evolve and impact the way people connect, engage, interact, and influence others, and that in turn enables communities to shape reality, mind-sets, events, and outcomes in a collaborative and participative way. Dialogue can contribute significantly to the transformation for the Scottish government, public services and the citizens of Scotland that is being requested.

The DCOP can be the connector of the many synergies identified across the wider system. The energy, enthusiasm and appetite for learning about and participating in dialogue for more meaningful conversations appeared strong through out the review. Many respondents from across the public service landscape are highly supportive of the DCOP and encourage them to find innovative and creative ways to continue to develop their offerings.

Participants frequently highlighted the need for Senior Leaders to be visible sponsors with participation from across Scottish Government and public services. This was recognised as essential by many participants, not only to changing the nature of the conversations held but also in authorising time to reflect, share learning and take action together. More sophisticated use of technology also requires greater focus and resource to support the realisation of a Scotland wide impact. This is not an endorsement of carte blanche spending on technology, but a suggestion that limited resources should be better targeted.

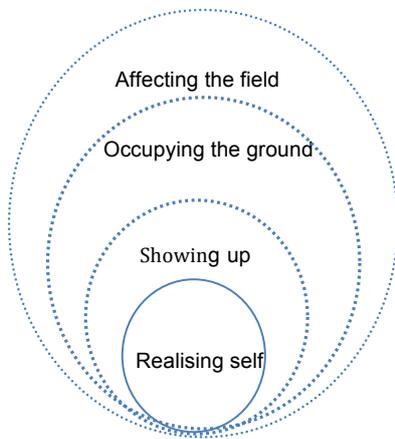
The development of a dialogue practitioner roadmap would allow modules to be created that could broaden understanding and expand experience particularly within the OD and HR community. Being alert to opportunities to work across Scotland with different agencies would encourage sharing and cross fertilisation of ideas and practice. The areas could include facilitation, coaching, employee engagement and cultural change.

What clearly stands out in this review is that the DCOP audience have varied interests, skills, experiences and ongoing support, ranging from short introductory video clips on dialogue to longer, more theoretical introductions to dialogue. Some want more virtual material whilst others want to meet in large gatherings. 'One size' does not fit all of the DCOP.

Finally, harnessing the energy and enthusiasm that has been generated by the DCOP over the last 3 years, and explicitly connecting with groups seeking to bring about change, will contribute to changing the nature of conversations that are taking place across Scotland.

## 6. Discussion:

Some strategic questions arose that may merit further discussion that are arising from this evaluation.



*Dialogue Associates 2004*

### **Container based developmental model**

A helpful framework to consider some of the strategic questions is to use a developmental container based model. It is clear from the evaluation of the DCOP that development on an individual level is being realised. There was evidence of wider organisational and community-based impact identified by practitioners.

The broader questions for discussion are:

1. Is there a need for a deeper reflection on the impact of dialogue with the client population on the support and nature of dialogue interventions? How far will you go?
2. Is it important that dialogue is formally identified or named as the model for impact? Should it be part of the OD/HR communities overall tool kit to be applied in response to a clients needs? Dialogue shows up as already being valued as a model for change with more value to come.
3. Is there an opportunity to embody dialogue practice and principles by the OD/HR participants of the DCOP? Should they be good or getting better at Dialogue? Is the real nut to crack - the ongoing development of dialogue practice in the OD/HR community to up skill in dialogue practice?

## Appendix I: Terms of Reference

The objective of the review is to:

- ▶ Evaluate the impact of the three elements of Dialogue Community of Practice activity over the last 18 months
- ▶ Identify the exciting and challenging issues facing public services over the next three years and consider how dialogue might be of benefit. Continuing to shape the Community of Practice – Identify the best type of support needed over the next three years to enable people to use dialogue in their work to transform public services (people new to the practice of dialogue and people more experienced in using dialogue). Specify the training, networks and practical support needed to develop individual and collective dialogue practice.
- ▶ Review the delivery and the appropriateness of the design and content relating to the three elements of the Dialogue Community of Practice. Make an assessment of the immediate impact on participants and their subsequent actions (shift in thinking or behaviour). The three elements of the DCOP to be reviewed are: -
  1. Education – Master classes and resources (i.e. digital stories, newsletters and presentation slides) - Data source: learning logs for each master class, participation lists, participant responses and frequency of use of resources
  2. Personal practice – Practice development groups - Data source: participant reflections
  3. Consultancy – working with teams and systems - Data source: reflections of consultants and sponsors

To examine from the perspective of all relevant stakeholder: -

- ▶ Specifically review the format for networking and sharing learning as a community of dialogue practitioners: - what helps, what hinders and what can be done to enable the sharing of learning and practice to support people using dialogue to improve relationships through conversation around issues that matter most to them over the next three years.

The evaluation will need to collate information from various sources including: -

- ▶ Use the routinely gathered data as the primary source of evidence and build on this by designing, administering and analysing feedback from an on line questionnaire to be distributed to Drop members and sponsors to look back and look forward and understand the key issues where dialogue may improve relationships and ultimately the culture which supports public services transform.
- ▶ Conduct telephone interviews with a few (up to 10) stakeholders to inquire more into the specific support individuals and teams are looking for to help their work with dialogue to enhance the quality of relationships through conversation to improve public services.
- ▶ Provide a report including findings and conclusions on how the Dialogue Community of Practice contributes to public services reform and make recommendations about the focus of the DCOP activity over the next three years to address the needs identified.

## Appendix II: Methodology

The Dialogue Community of Practice evaluation comprised a series of broadly sequential phases of qualitative research. Data collection commenced March – early June 2016. Telephone contact with the evaluation sponsor to review progress and to discuss emerging themes was conducted throughout.

The terms of the evaluation (See Appendix I) required the perspectives of a range of participants in the DCOP to be documented particularly in respect of:

- The development of their practice
- The impact
- What's working well
- What could work better
- Recommendations.

The wealth of data generated by the range of methods permitted cross-checking, consistency, correction and validation of information.

**1. Content Analysis:** learning logs, newsletters, digital stories, presentation slides, participant responses, frequency of use of resources. Learning logs were made available, Newsletters, digital stories, presentation slides. All were analysed systematically.

**2. Interviews:** reflections of consultants both internal and external

Scot Gov	=5
NHS NES	=1
External Consultants	= 4
Internal Consultants	= 9
Other	= 2

**3. Focus Groups:** = 2 (16 participants)

**4. Analysis of online Questionnaire responses:** = 16

## **Appendix III: Selected Research Instruments**

The approach to all face to face and telephone interviews was dialogic in nature, framed by some open inquiry questions allowing the respondents to reflect and inquire of themselves on their practice, the impact on the people around them and the resulting shifts and changes that had taken place.

### **Dialogue Practice Group Lead interviews – internal and external consultants**

The conversational inquiry of the dialogue practice group leads was reflective in nature allowing free flow of dialogue to occur. The nature of the reflection with each allowed the lead to reflect on the group, their practice and experience of facilitating the group and the models and materials they had introduced to the group. The core questions addressed during the interviews were:

#### **What was your experience of facilitating the groups?**

- How did you become involved?
- How were the groups formed?
- What models did you apply or introduce to the groups?
- How many of the group participants had completed the KIBP or KBP?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What have you learned about yourself in the process?
- Any other comments or reflections to offer?

#### **Scottish government interviews**

- What was your experience of the DCOP and what it offered?
- Can you tell me your experience of the DCOP and the role if any you have played?
- Can you tell me about your experience of the Master class series?
- Can you tell me about your experience of Dialogue Practice Groups?
- What one or two things would you suggest to Sharon and the DCOP to do or to continue doing?

#### **DCOP stakeholders**

- What has been the personal benefit and stretch for you?
- How did you/have you managed regression (follow through) if there is/was any?
- How did you agree what the criteria of impact and/or success of dialogue as a practice in Midlothian would be? Who has or needed to acknowledge the shift in Midlothian?
- What advice or suggestions would you offer the DCOP for the next 3years?

#### **Online Evaluation Questions**

1. Practice - Can you give an example of how you have developed and deepened your dialogue practice in the last 12 months? What have you done differently or changed?
2. Impact – What successes have you had by using a dialogic approach? Please offer a short narrative of an important impact, outcome or change, which has come about as a result of your participation in the Dialogue Community of Practice.
3. Support - What worked well for you personally and why?
  - Master class
  - Dialogue Practice group
  - Other
4. Feed forward- Please offer 2-5 suggestions for the next phase of the Drop? What would you find helpful to deepen your practice and impact?
5. Insight - Please add further insights and reflections on the Dialogue Community of Practice.

## **Peer Dialogue Practice Development Group**

- What has changed in you and what impact is this having?
- To what extent do you feel you have developed in this capacity?
- Impact - Please share an example / story from the field. Please give a short narrative of something you did differently and the outcome.
- What worked well for you, personally, and why?
- What could have been done differently and why?
- Would you recommend participating in a peer dialogue practice development group to others? If so, what words would you use to do this? If not, what are your reservations?
- Please feel free to add any further comments or reflections on the Lothian programme.
- What are your personal goals for developing your understanding and work with dialogue?
- What are you learning about how you are in conversations?
- What actions have you taken as a result of learning about dialogue approaches?
- What are your reflections on your practice?

## **Practitioner Group Review**

- What did we do well? What might we have done differently? What else might we want to explore? What are we consciously committing to practice between sessions?
- What issues might best be served by a dialogue approach?
- What leadership and management processes/forums would benefit from dialogue?
- What might you hope to gain from using dialogue in your organisation?
- What are my goals for developing through dialogue?
- What am I noticing about myself in conversation?
- What actions have I taken and what reflections do I have?

## **Dialogue Practise Group**

- Review of our sessions. What has gone well? What could have been different? How do we need to develop next? What responses am I having?
- Impact on the wider system
- What successes have you had by using dialogic approaches?
- What is changing as a result of your intentions?
- What are you gaining or losing?
- Any other Reflections?

## **Acknowledgements**

To be able to bring a report of this nature to fruition a collaborative and co creative effort is required with people finding time in their diaries to contribute and to be prepared to reflect together. There was generosity of thinking and supportive, creative suggestions with a willingness to notice what at times was challenging. For this reason, it is appropriate to pay particular mention to those who took that time to contribute.

Firstly recognition of the practice group lead facilitators who kindly took time to reflect on their personal experiences of leading the dialogue practice groups and on their own dialogue practice. The reflective conversations that time afforded, were open and inquiring in nature on what had happened and what the potential was for the Dialogue Community of Practice as it moved forward. There was a real sense of what was yet to come for the DCOP. Interest, enthusiasm and energy were in abundance.

Appreciation is extended to all those who took time to complete the online questionnaire. The quality of the responses was extremely helpful and informative taken alongside the large body of work that has been generated through newsletters, digital stories, presentation slides and the resources available for community members to draw on and apply.

Lastly a big thank you to Sharon Millar and Tricia Boyle who authored the evaluation to inquire how best to support local services in the next 3 years.

## Attachment I: Impact

Area of Practice	Outcome and Impact
Building Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Support for new integrated health and social care teams to develop</i></li> <li>• <i>Improved engagement with carer groups and staff engagement.</i></li> <li>• <i>Offering short Dialogue workshops</i></li> <li>• <i>Taking difficult conversations forward.</i></li> </ul>
Different outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Greater awareness of others perspective before making decisions</i></li> <li>• <i>Supporting group to focus on the complexity of an issue</i></li> <li>• <i>Less blame</i></li> <li>• <i>Greater self-awareness of own 'stuckness' that enabled ability to offer constructive feedback to others (teams)</i></li> <li>• <i>Introduced the concept of dialogue and thinking together [B Issacs] to achieve shared outcome</i></li> <li>• <i>Understanding the balance between advocacy and inquiry has helped two community groups to move forward in their work from stuck and at odds with other bodies.</i></li> <li>• <i>Dialogue was core to my model of practice and the integration of additional thinking/models has enabled teams (I work with) to inquire into their individual and collective experiences of working together.</i></li> </ul>
Dialogue practice development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Supported group thinking around their communication and actions with the models and theories in mind that made a difference to the outcomes.</i></li> <li>• <i>Helped frame thinking to offer constructive feedback.</i></li> <li>• <i>Integrated other models thinking (Master Class series) into practice model in working with internal clients in NHS.</i></li> <li>• <i>Enabling individuals to inquire into differences, notice judgements</i></li> <li>• <i>Better quality conversations</i></li> <li>• <i>More confidence to deliver workshops</i></li> <li>• <i>Enabling shared sense making</i></li> <li>• <i>Moving group meetings successfully from monologue to dialogue</i></li> <li>• <i>Producing more creative conversations and novel ideas.</i></li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Linking dialogue models to a leadership programme</i></li> <li>• <i>Offering a common language and consistency.</i></li> <li>• <i>A leadership group implemented changes in their area, as previous discussions have been somewhat adversarial in nature.</i></li> </ul>

## Attachment II: Lothian Dialogue Practice Areas 8<sup>th</sup> June 2015

Area of Practice	Evidence of impact and measurement for impact
Incorporate dialogue in management role – stay in ‘break open’ longer	
Integrated Joint Board Guide – Phase 2 Sept 2015 onwards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guide reflective practice</li> <li>• Possibly use of BPP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proof development PDPs feature the need to develop conversation or inquiry skills or other wider demonstrates a greater awareness of self</li> <li>• Looking at aspects from the Diagnostic Tool at the current state, then look again 6 months – what have they noticed about themselves?</li> </ul>
Facilitated conversations for managers Inquiry Bystand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Record within HR the number of facilitated conversations taking place (and area) and receive report back as to whether this has been concluded successfully.</li> <li>• Guide to be updated to replicate dialogue terminology where appropriate to support managers with this within of thinking</li> <li>• Facilitated conversations guide to be updated following session to recreate dialogue models/terminology (particularly inquiry/advocacy and Kantor 4 speech actions)</li> </ul>
Children’s services – participation to improve services /ideas generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee involvement in conversations – temperature check – maintain involvement / comfort with change</li> </ul>
HR & OD Team – Business Partner techniques Videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build self awareness re advocacy/inquiry (measure feedback) like MBTI (use language to relate to speech actions).</li> </ul>
Supervision – tailored dialogue	Questions about uses of dialogue practice – initially: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff coming back with further questions, wanting more information</li> <li>• Use of humour around the 4 speech actions within the team</li> </ul>
Management Group – What to do with the management team around dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual acknowledgement from each service manager that the issue of importance and consequences of lack of action.</li> <li>• Evidence of ideas for action followed through</li> <li>• Changes in levels of staff engaging with mandatory training.</li> </ul>
Facilitator ‘Pool’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase use of dialogue terminology</li> <li>• Service/team reference point where there is a common understanding of work objectives</li> <li>• Understanding of how dialogue works when having reflective conversations</li> <li>• More effective service delivery and great feedback for HR/OD skills and interventions</li> <li>• Whole systems change</li> </ul>
Team framework – Animate Dialogue in specification for work Identify Pilot group or team – Summer Reference group Toolkit – include dialogue components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogue models and materials feature in the toolkit</li> <li>• Dialogue approach evident across all ‘modules’</li> <li>• Evaluation to include enquiry around impact of dialogue and conversation</li> <li>• Train facilitators in speech action</li> </ul>
Public Partnership Forum for H&SCI Empower patients, service users, carers & voluntary representatives Voluntary reference group shape issues for MT to deliberate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience of being listened to and able to influence</li> <li>• More explicit attention to how views/ concerns of service users/carers and voluntary organisations influence decision making (i.e. are the solutions different)</li> <li>• Understanding of service users/ carers and voluntary organisations about the reason for decisions about service design</li> </ul>