Business Process Reengineering (BPR)
Center of Excellence (CoE)

U.S. Army Shared Services Center

Socratic Questioning
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Course Description

The Socratic Method provides an approach for effective dialog between two or more parties to further understanding and knowledge sharing. In Business Process Reengineering (BPR) or improvement methodology, the Socratic Method provides a standard approach for defining the problem statement, capturing process information, gathering data or measures and discussing ways to remedy a problem or improve a practice.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the Socratic Method and its common uses
- Brief history of Socrates
- The four communication challenges to effective dialog
- The six types of Socratic Questioning
- Ability to facilitate an effective dialog using the Socratic Questioning approach.

Slide 1

Socratic Method

Slide 2

[Introduce]
- As an improvement expert – much interaction occurs with subject matter experts at all levels of an organization
- An important skill is acquiring understanding from various individuals or group to achieve a number of outcomes, e.g.
    - Identifying the problem statement
    - Capturing and assessing the current situation
    - Gathering data – coaching people on what to measure
    - And gathering ideas for improvement actions
- The Socratic Method provides an approach on effective dialog to further understanding

[Purpose]
- A basic form of questioning formulated as tests of logic, to help a person or group discover their beliefs, definitions (logos) and generally shared characteristics about a topic.

[Common Uses]
- Nearly every tool in the BPR / LSS / CPI tool belt requires gathering information and creating understanding

[Benefits / Pitfalls]
- Exposes the Truth
    - The truth is the truth
    - How we talk about the truth is clouded by our intent, knowledge, experience and biases

- The method helps to break down those barriers
- Creates shared understanding through respectful dialog.
- Creates simplicity
    - All topics are complex until a level of understanding is achieved
- Can be irritating
    - Consider someone always asking why, how come, or I don't understand
- Sow discontent: assure everyone is heard and all perspectives are accommodated
- Open to dialog: if someone doesn't participate, this method is not useful
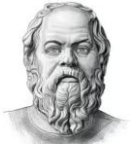
Socrates Introduction
Slide 3

[Introduce Socrates]

- He was born within the period of years ranging 470 to 468 BC in Alopeke and belonged to the tribe Antiochis. His father was a stonemason (sculptor), his mother a mid-wife. He was married and known for an 'undesirable' temperament. His wife, Xanthippe, bore him 3 sons.
- He started as a sculptor and frequented workshops near the city squares to talk with the merchants.
- He participated in city government (as part of a civilian council of 500) and was an overseer of debate.
- Eventually falling out of favor with prevailing public opinion and questioning the collective notion "might makes right", he annoyed enough of and the wrong people in his mission to improve consideration of justice and pursuit of goodness, which may have been the cause of his execution.
- Trial: One day during the year 399 BC, Socrates went on trial and was subsequently found guilty of both corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens and of impiety (not believing in the gods of the state), and as a punishment sentenced to death, caused by the drinking of a mixture containing hemlock (a poison).

[History of the Socratic Method]

- In the second half of the 5th century BC, sophists were teachers who specialized in using the tools of philosophy and rhetoric (speaking with the intent to convince or persuade) to entertain, impress, or persuade an audience to accept the speaker's point of view.
- Socrates promoted an alternative method of teaching focused on "the curious questioner" – which became known as the Socratic Method.

[Socratic Circle or Seminar]
- A Socratic circle or seminar is a teaching approach based on the Socratic Method.
- It uses dialogue to understand information – utilizing a systematic approach to examine a topic through Q&A
- It is not a debate, it's belief is all thinking comes from asking questions
- Its goal is to connect prior knowledge to new knowledge helping participants work together to construct meaning and arrive at a conclusion.

Reference
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socrates
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socratic_method
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socratic_questioning
http://changingminds.org/techniques/questioning/socratic_questions.htm
https://www.slideshare.net/ecemkaragulle/socratic-questioning-46767878
Socratic circle: http://www.corndancer.com/tunes/tunes_print/soccirc.pdf

https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/criminalinvestigation/chapter/chapter-9-interviewing-questioning-and-interrogation/
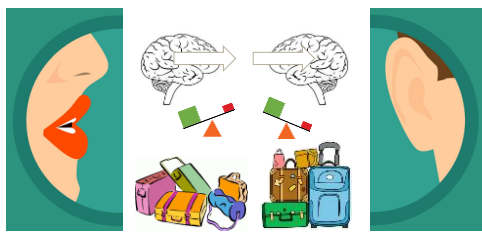
Effective Dialog Challenges

Slide 4

[Introduce]
- Our method is based on two or more parties having a dialog.
- Let's explore some filters or barriers that can hinder and help the dialog.

[Challenges]
- Intent – often referred to as an agenda; everyone has a purpose their striving to achieve during a dialog. The purpose may be explicit or implicit. We or they may be trying to not have an intent – however the conversation is being had for a purpose.
- Knowledge – our education and things we've read or gleaned bring knowledge that can be useful in furthering the discussion or cloud our interchange.
- Experience – we bring lessons learned around the topic. If not specific to the topic, we often think in metaphors or like experiences.
- Bias – Stereotypes, categorization and/or opinions can be useful to shorten learning time. They can also be destructive and stand in the way of a healthy exchange. Bias isn't necessarily bad – it's always better to recognize our biases and bring them to the surface to demonstrate transparency and a willingness to learn.

[Images]
Speaking/Listening (Split and Cropped): https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1448083 - CC0 Public Domain, Free for personal and commercial use No attribution required
Luggage Clipart: https://melbournechapter.net/explore/luggage-clipart-heavy-suitcase/ - free clipart; http://greentral.com/luggage-clipart-history-clipart/luggage-clipart-pretty-luggage-clipart-free-travels-clipart-clipart-panda-free-clipart-for-teachers/ - free clipart
Brain: https://mbtskoudsalg.com/explore/brain-clipart/ - Free download
Balance Bar: generated within this PowerPoint.

Effective Dialog Approach
Prepare for the Discussion
Slide 5

[Research]

- Always do the homework before the dialog
- Consider what can be learned in advance?
    - What do you know about the topic
    - Do you have shared knowledge or background?
    - What sources can be read in advance?
    - What can be provided from others participating in the dialog?

[Gauge the Audience]
- Research your audience – what can you learn in advance, e.g. LinkedIn, milSuite, etc.
- Establish common ground via shared experiences, skills, goals, etc.
- Benefits: discuss the bullets

[Discussion Goal]
- Some common discussion purposes are described in the bullets.
- Solicit other goals from the class and discuss

Use Socratic Questions during the Discussion
Slide 6

[Introduce]
- Introduce the types of questions that can be asked
- We will offer more questions by type in the next few slides

[Conceptual]
- Getting others to clarify their thinking and explore the origin of their thinking
- 'Why do you say that?', 'Could you explain further?'

[Assumptions]
- Challenging others' assumptions
    - 'Is this always the case?', 'Why do you think that this assumption holds here?'

[Rationale or Reasoning]
- Providing evidence as a basis for arguments
    - 'Why do you say that?',
    - 'Is there reason to doubt this evidence?'

[Perspective]
- Discovering alternative viewpoints and perspectives and conflicts between contentions
    - 'What is the counter-argument?',
    - 'Can/did anyone see this another way?'

[Implications & Consequences]
- Exploring implications and consequences
    - 'But if...happened, what else would result?',
    - 'How does...affect...?'

[Questioning the Question]
- Questioning the question
    - 'Why do you think that I asked that question?',
    - 'Why was that question important?',
    - 'Which of your questions turned out to be the most useful?'

[Image]
https://www.slideshare.net/ecemkaragulle/socratic-questioning-46767878

Conceptual Questions
Slide 7

[Describe]
- A meaningful exchange starts with a mutually understood context (or frame) for the discussion.
- Work to create the context 'picture' using the bulleted list of questions.

[Example]
- Use an audience appropriate 'context' to make the point, i.e. a shared experience, or the topic for the discussion, etc.
- Ask and answer one or more questions to give the students a flavor of what they might be looking to learn.

Image:
http://www.csiro.au/education/crestquiz/concept.html

Understand Assumptions

Slide 8

[Describe]
- Understanding assumptions is a difficult area to probe.
- If done well, it can lead to a deeper understanding of 'what's underneath the topic'
- If done poorly, it could result in a very short conversation.
- Always reinforce what you hear from the participants to demonstrate you understand what they're saying.
- Use Covey's 5th habit – seek to understand, then to be understood. Focus on the "seek to understand" portion.

[Example]
- Use the example from the Conceptual questioning and extend.
- Ask and answer one or more questions to give the students a flavor of what they might be looking to learn.
- Don't be afraid to show your own biases.

[Image]
Reasoning Stack: Assumptions in Critical Thinking, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfM5-pY5YXs

Discover Rationale
Slide 9

[Describe]
- We rationalize information to support our assertions – hence creating an important need to expose such reasoning.

[Consider]
Aesop's "Fox and the Grapes" fable:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fox_and_the_Grapes

The fox who longed for grapes, beholds with pain
The tempting clusters were too high to gain;
Grieved in his heart he forced a careless smile,
And cried, 'they're sharp and hardly worth my while.'

Cognitive dissonance
Rather than admit his failure to reach the grapes, the fox rationalizes that they are not really desirable. One commentator argues that the story illustrates the state of cognitive dissonance. The fox is taken as attempting to hold incompatible ideas simultaneously, desire and its frustration. In that case, the disdain expressed by the fox at the conclusion to the fable serves at least to reduce the dissonance through criticism. Jon Elster calls this pattern of mental behaviour "adaptive preference formation".

[Questions]
- Select a few questions to discuss and/or provide examples

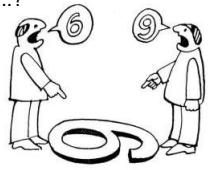[Image]
"My teacher hates me" - https://www.instituteofclinicalhypnosis.com/rationalization/

Gain Perspective

Slide 10

[Describe]
- Self-awareness is a key to best utilizing the line of inquiry
- Helping people understand that we see the world though our own eyes or lens is a good step to deeper understanding
- If you are familiar with the 6 sigma concept of a Measurement System Analysis (MSA), it's a good way to help people understand the notion.
- MSA is built to assess our ability to trust the measurement system we're using to make decisions.
- It builds on the idea, that there is the Truth, and our ability to see the Truth, e.g.
    - When a speed sign tells us we're are traveling at 35 mph, is that accurate? Does it match what is on our speedometer?
    - And if both instruments are inaccurate, or not precise, we may be traveling at a different speed altogether.
- We use our lens like a measurement instrument in interpreting the situation around us, i.e. seeing the Truth.

[Example]
- Use the example from the Conceptual questioning and extend.
- Ask and answer one or more questions to give the students a flavor of what they might be looking to learn.

[Image]
https://tbkconsult.com/practical-guide-personal-freedom/assumption/

Expose Implications and Consequences
Slide 11

[Describe]
- Impact (usually positive) and consequences (usually negative) is a good way to explore a topic by taking it to its logical conclusion.
- If appropriate, using the WIFM (what's in it for me) concept can be useful. It helps to personalize the discussion to the participants every day understanding.

[Example]
- Use the example from the Conceptual questioning and extend.
- Ask and answer one or more questions to give the students a flavor of what they might be looking to learn.

[Image]
https://totaluptime.com/minimize-risk-maximize-availability/

Question the Questions

Slide 12

[Describe]
- How often have you been asked a question that has nothing to do with what people really want to learn?
- These questions explore why the person is asking the question in the first place.
- What are they really asking?

[Example]
- Use the example from the Conceptual questioning and extend.
- Ask and answer one or more questions to give the students a flavor of what they might be looking to learn.

[Image]
https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/create-security-question-guess/

Discussion Tips
Slide 13

[Emphasize]
- Sufficient preparation; it is always a good idea to do your "homework". The better prepared, the more likely the discussion will be successful.
- Habit 5; as mentioned earlier, see to understand by giving back to the originator what your heard so that she agrees that you understand.
- Always clarify; if you're confused, most likely others are as well. Clarify so that everyone understands to the same level.
- Single thread; people will take you down many rabbit holes, try to stay on a thread. If its impossible, take good notes so that you can explore each thread as completely as possible.
- Not personal; don't make comments about the originator or you – stay focused on the idea or perspective (that is based on something outside of the originator's mind) and stay away from "my opinion" or "my conclusion".
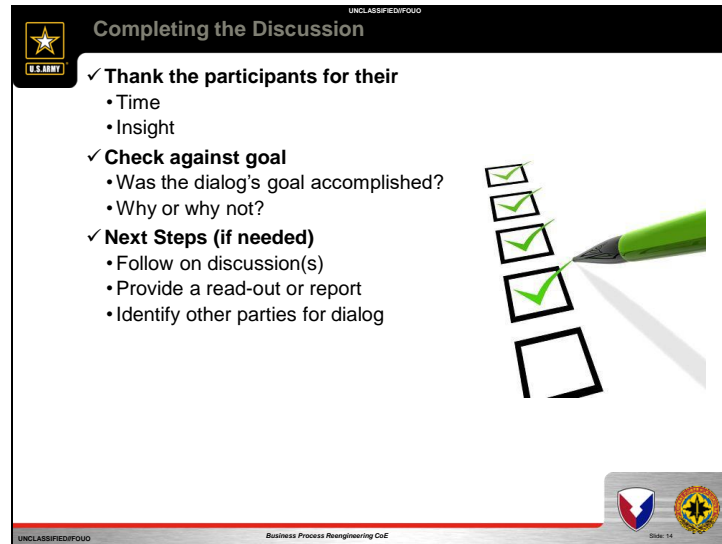
[Image]
Source image linked to a dead site. The image was discovered using Bing search:
https://www.bing.com/images/search?&q=tips&qft=+filterui:license-L1&FORM=IRFLTR

Complete the Dialog
Slide 14

[Wrap Up the Discussion]
- Be aware of and grateful for the participant's contributions.
- Check in to see if the planned goal was accomplished – learn from the experience.
- If follow ups are needed, schedule them.
- Provide documentation so that others' can read about the experience.
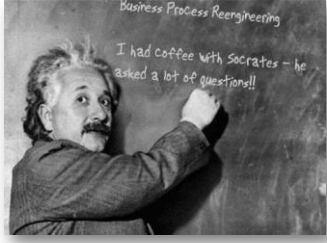
[Image]
Public domain license, search for 'check list':
http://completetri.com/wp-content/uploads/checklist.jpg

Learning Check-in

Slide 15

[Summarize the Session]

Socratic Method Summary

- Who recorded Socrates' method(s)
  - Plato and Xenophon
- Why is this method better than simple memorization or rote responses?
  - Provides deeper learning and understanding
- What are the types of questions?
  - Conceptual or Clarification
  - Understanding Assumptions
  - Understanding Rationale or Reasoning
  - Questioning Perspective
  - Discussing Implications and Consequences
  - Questioning the Questions
- How do you know a good dialog was accomplished?
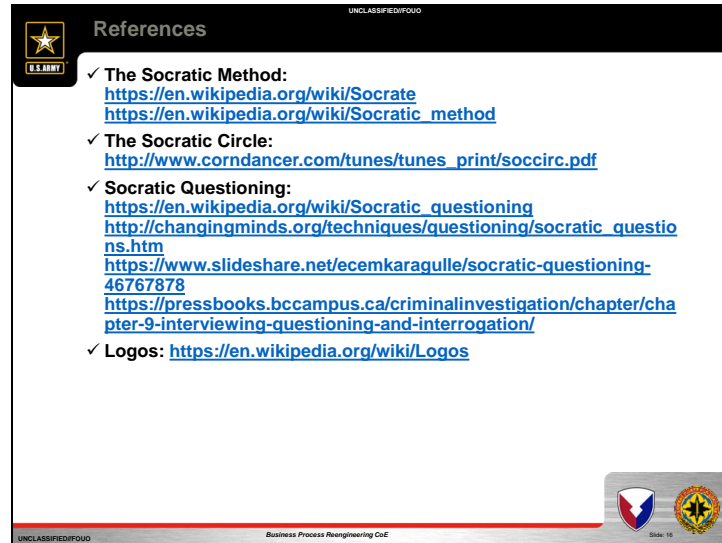 - Accomplished the dialog goal

[Thank You]
- Thank the class participants for their time
- Circle back on the established learning objective(s)
- Provide time for questions.

Einstein tool
http://www.hetemeel.com/einsteinform.php

References

Slide 16