

Navigating Uncertainty: A dialogue model to navigate uncertainty towards better solutions for sustainability challenges

A short introduction

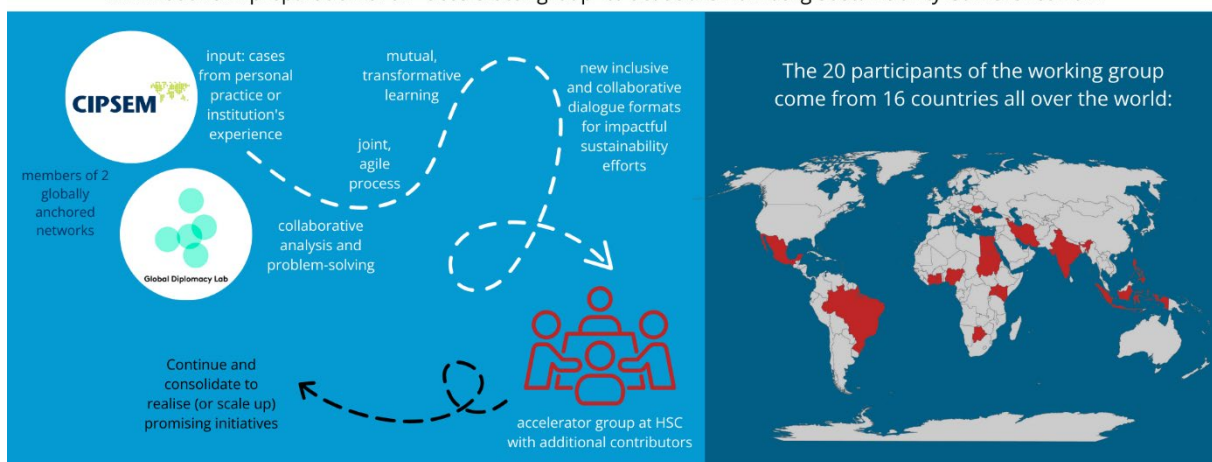
Are you deeply moved by a sustainability challenge in your professional or private surroundings, characterized by uncertainties and conflicting interests? And are you ready to invest more time and effort to tackle them but need guidance to figure out how to overcome barriers to cooperation with others, identify root causes of the challenge, and uncover new opportunities for action? Do you feel ready to move **from 'thinking alone' to 'thinking together'** along key questions like “Where are we now? Where do we want to go? What are the leverage points for interventions? And what could a possible process look like?”?

What if we embraced a dialogue model that sees diversity as a strength? One that values inclusivity, collaboration, and co-creation as essential for tackling complex challenges? From our experience, many practitioners and decision-makers lack the skills to facilitate truly inclusive learning and co-creation processes. We also know that they also have busy schedules and little time for extra activities. We are convinced that they would benefit from a **low-barrier dialogue model supported by clear guidance without requiring extensive training**.

A year ago, CIPSEM, the TES Academy of the German Environment Agency (UBA) and the Global Diplomacy Lab (GDL), together with CIPSEM and GDL alumni from all over the world started developing a **replicable dialogue model for local applications in sustainability-related issues** which was showcased at the Hamburg Sustainability Conference in October 2024¹.

Navigating Uncertainty: Diplomacy and Sustainability Actors Forging New Alliances

An initiative in preparation of an “accelerator group” to act at the Hamburg Sustainability Conference 2024



¹ https://tu-dresden.de/bu/umwelt/cipsem/ueber-cipsem-news/news/cipsem-auf-der-hamburg-sustainability-conference-2024-vorstellung-eines-innovativen-dialogmodells-fuer-globale-zusammenarbeit?set_language=en

The flexible and accessible dialogue model is designed to help challenge holders navigate uncertainty. It incorporates **a systemic perspective** and the broader context of the challenge, providing a holistic understanding of the involved stakeholders and their relationships. The model emphasizes a pragmatic approach: solutions don't need to be perfect to start. By encouraging action based on **"good enough to start" insights**, it helps avoid the pitfalls of over-analysis and inertia.

The dialogue model can be applied to **use cases** that are current, concrete, and important, and in which you are a key player or decision maker. They may target these or similar impact areas:



During the development of the dialogue model participants identified **core principles** how to design and start a collaborative process. These dimensions **frame the attitudes** for the whole dialogue process and selection of appropriate tools for concrete activities:

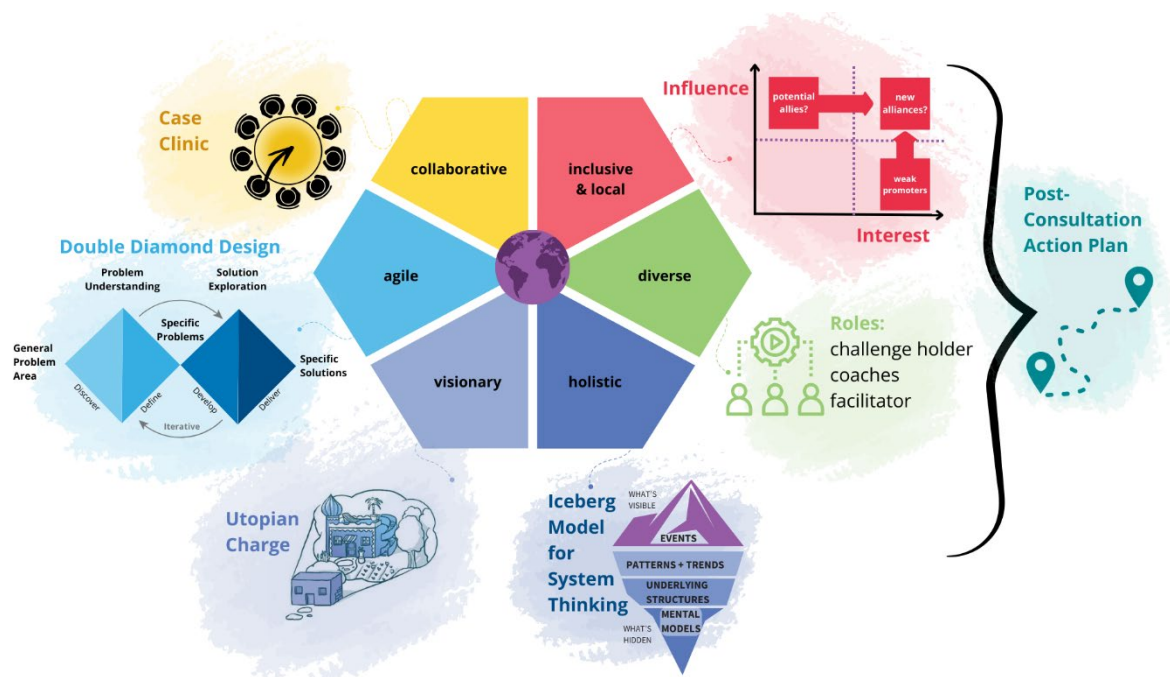


The development process behind the dialogue model is truly interactive, promoting joint knowledge production and transformative learning. By embracing active collaboration and shared insights, we identified novel approaches that can tackle barriers to global cooperation, focusing on real-world cases proposed by the participants.

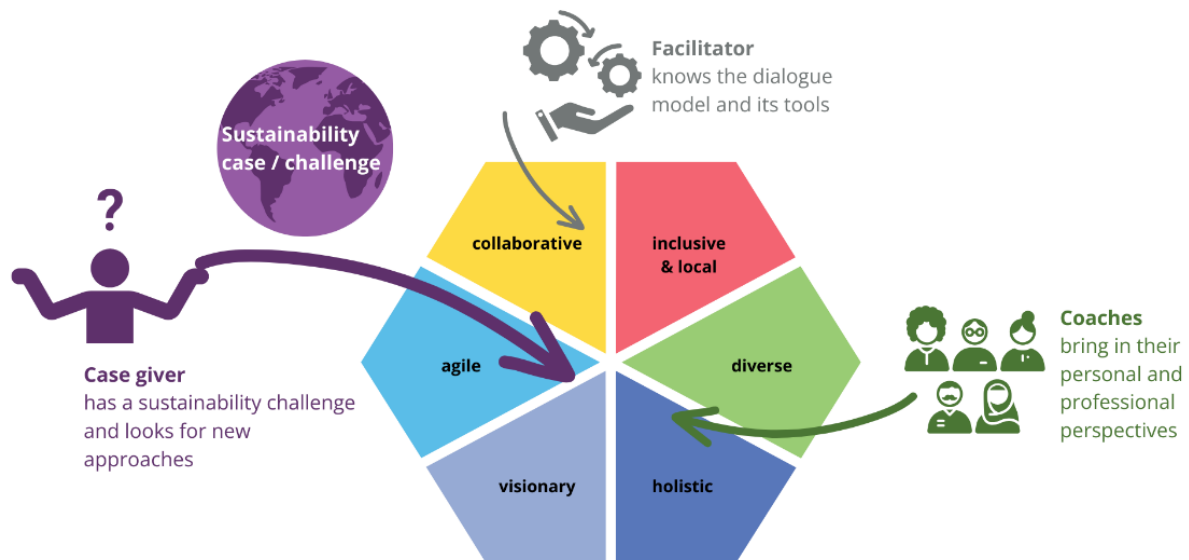
To achieve such outcomes the following guiding questions are used in the context of the tools:

- What systemic patterns impact the success of initiatives, which are critical for identifying key strategies, designing effective process architectures, and making collaboration work?
- Which actors are missing from the conversation?
- Which (different) approaches and specific competencies do actors bring, and what is needed to build new alliances?
- What are the blind spots and missing links?
- How do differences influence (political) behaviour?
- What common practices exist, and how they might be applied to the case?
- How can conflicts be addressed to overcome them?
- How could a new “normal” look like - a preferred future beyond current constraints?

The toolbox is an assistant in planning collaborative sessions around the sustainability challenge. It helps to select elements and tools that are most relevant to your specific case, with due attention to the core principles of the dialogue model. Each tool serves one of the dimensions:



To move from “thinking alone” to “thinking together” and apply the tools in an agile, inclusive and collaborative way, roles and responsibilities need to be clarified as follows:



The **challenge holder** is the **initiator** of a process and the person who represents the sustainability case and gives relevance to it. The challenge holder should be a key player/decision maker regarding the case and open to questioning their own assumptions and embracing new perspectives.

The **facilitator** is a person who knows the dialogue model and its tools already or is willing to learn by practice. She or he will take the **neutral role** to guide the group through the process and its meetings in cooperation with the challenge holder. This person does not do all the work, but mainly plans, organizes, and facilitates it.

Coaches form a diverse group of **engaged individuals** and bring their valuable personal and professional perspectives, even if they are not technical experts in the sustainability issue. However, coaches often have their own sustainability challenges that they are working to address (e.g. in another country or region), and by contributing to the discussion, they can also gain new perspectives and ideas that can be applied to their own situations.

How much time is required?

The application of the dialogue model is intentionally flexible to accommodate different contexts. It can range from a one-time 2-hour online session focused on a single case and tool, to a three-day in-person workshop or a series of 3 to 4 online meetings spread over several weeks. The exact format depends on the type of challenge, the availability of participants, and the possibility of meeting in person. A shorter timeframe helps keep the process focused and prevents it from stalling. If participants remain actively engaged, the dialogue can naturally be extended.

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