

READING

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_IN YOUR GROUP PROJECT

During Opening Week, you work together in a team on your project. To take on the project work as a questioning Mind can be helpful in many respects. In the following, you will find small exercises as well as questions that can help you to have good team understanding – particularly when you do not know each other well:

Question

- What do you mean by that?
- Do I understand correctly that...?
- What does xy mean to you? What is your understanding of xy?

Self-questioning

- What is my personal background from which I am speaking (own values, socio-economic background, conceptions of man, self-perception...)? And how does it relate to the background of the other?
- What mood am I speaking from? What feelings underlie what I am saying? Do I want to convey these feelings indirectly in what I say or do I want to communicate them directly?
- Am I open in my questioning attitude and interested in gaining knowledge or do I want to be right?

- Where am I unsure? Where do I want to share incomplete thoughts?

Process questioning

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go, what is the objective?
- What do we require to reach this objective?

THE QUESTIONING MIND IN VISIONING

In the visionary video, as a project group, you work out a vision – i.e. a desirable future state – on the topic of sharing. The development of a vision has many creative parts. A questioning Mind that accepts the openness of creative processes finds it easier to unbind itself from the usual question and thinking patterns and to become creative. What does that mean in concrete terms? The following exercises and questions show it. The nice thing about this is that there are no rules here; there is no right or wrong.

Yes, but? Yes, and?

- In many moments, we tend towards doubting instead of towards acknowledging. For visioning, it can help to encourage oneself to acknowledge and think more deeply by responding to the idea of a group member with the question “Yes, and...?” instead of with “Yes, but...?”, for example: Yes, and what exactly would that then look like? Yes, and what if we also did xyz? This questioning attitude that takes up the idea of another person in order to develop it positively instead of doubting it can sometimes work wonders.

Make a wish

- It is not just when it is our birthday that we can have wishes. When developing a vision, too, the question regarding a very specific wish for the future can help to come closer to one's own ideas of a positive future scenario. To this end, ask yourself the following question in relation to your topic: How are things to be in 2050?

You have a free wish – formulate it in words, record it, create a mind map or create a small sketch. Not all good visions begin in text form.

Questioning the visions

- Aside: What side stages does the vision have? What happens if you shift it to another place or another time? What new ideas occur to you?
- Sensational!: What would be a real sensation connected to your topic or vision? What would change? What would be possible which was not possible before? Let your fantasy run wild for a while.
- No cash no bash?: What would happen if money was not important? Which aspects would be affected, which would not? Which solutions come into question which would otherwise be unthinkable? Wallow in the possibilities (cf. Ebertz 2009)

THE QUESTIONING MIND IN CRITICISM

Criticism and critical thinking are closely connected to the abilities of the questioning Mind. Expressing criticism stresses the questioning of the phenomenon to be criticised in order to understand it, to illuminate it from different sides and then to reach a judgement (see “Critique”). As part of your project work during Opening Week, you will critically analyse a topic related to “Sharing in a Globalized World” and compose a critical commentary on this. Here, the following questions may be helpful to you:

- What is that? What sort of phenomenon is that? What is behind this concept?
- Is that correct? Is that true? Is that really the case? What would we find out if we examined the claim?
- What answers does the text or presentation give to which questions? Can there be other answers to the question?
- How does that work? What happens if...? What consequences does xy have?
- Which questions remain unanswered? Where are the boundaries to your vision/your central idea/your topic?
- Which questions have not yet been asked?

QUESTIONING MIND

People are animals which ask questions: wanting to know something is part of being human and thus also the asking of questions (as philosopher Carl Jaspers, in Zillober 1972). The questioning Mind describes – similar to the Cooperative Mind – an attitude I can adopt to the world and that we want to test together during the Opening Week: an attitude that approximates the world asking questions. But what does that mean in concrete terms? On the one hand, a questioning Mind shows itself in the asking of questions. On the other hand, a questioning Mind lives from the willingness to take on new things without ready-made answers as well as to scrutinise one’s own answers and the things one believes and takes for granted.

First, let us take a closer look at questions themselves. What is the exciting thing about questions? We could give an answer now. This already displays one of the core aspects of questions: Chronologically, they come before an answer. According to the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, questions are also often more meaningful than the answers themselves (cf. Gadamer 1975). They stand for the openness of human thought and at the same time, allow it: “The openness of the asked exists in the undetermined of the answer” (Gadamer 1975: 345). On the other hand, the type of question also influences the view: it specifies what knowledge is being deepened and is indicative of one’s own thoughts and those of other people.

And where does the impulse to ask come from? From knowledge which does not go together with other knowledge; from knowledge which does not harmonise with experience; from missing information that we know is missing. Or from the desire to know something, from the need to want to know. An important catalyst for questions is therefore curiosity. This does not develop in a vacuum, but crystallises on prior knowledge, interests, irritations and the openness for thinking processes which go beyond the available knowledge. A further important trigger for questions is considered to be doubt: Is that really the case? Couldn’t it also be different? Questions therefore go together with the desire to “grasp the thing which grasps us” (Staiger 1967: 10).

Here, the second aspect of a questioning Mind comes into play: the basic openness with which it approximates the world. This openness does not refer only to the encountering of new things that arouse my interest and make me ask new questions. It also refers to the willingness to reflect on my own answers as well as my own thinking and actions. What am I actually doing? Why do I think this way and not differently? What questions remain hidden from me because things are self-evident to me? People ask questions within a framework or a horizon that is mostly unconscious. The framework is set by the world which is familiar to me, i.e. which I as an individual with a particular societal background know of the world. Often, we first notice this framework when we encounter others who ask other questions.

This openness can also mean living with the uncertainty of an answer or even the impossibility of an answer to questions. For example, the question as to what a human is will not be able to be answered so quickly. In 1903, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote about this: “One must have patience with the unsolved in one’s heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked parlours, and like books written in a very unfamiliar language. (...) If one lives the questions, one may perhaps gradually, without noticing it, live into the answers one strange day.” This does not result in no longer scrutinising any questions when searching for an answer. Rather, an openness thus sets in towards the process of acquiring knowledge, which can again produce new questions. For it is the questions which stimulate the activity of thought. In turn, thinking highlights new questions, because “a question is not a hole that can be filled with an answer. A question is an impulse [...].” (Lendle/Rammstedt 2017: 2).

_IN SCIENCE

The university is not just a place where knowledge is produced and communicated, a place of the generation and displaying of knowledge, for example in exams which demand knowledge. Research and teaching require questions – here, adopting a questioning attitude that is open to inspiration is central. Teaching and learning enrich each other with communication and a questioning attitude is their life source. As a central element of the university, questions give a form to curiosity and doubt and are thus fundamental for academic processes.

This questioning basis, together with the social possibilities of a university, contributes to their being able to become an open space for fundamental questions, such as the questions of how we want to live as society and as individuals.

Academic disciplines differ, however, partially essentially in the way, how and which questions are asked. This is a result of different human images, ideals and standards which the disciplines are based upon. Even within one single discipline, very different questions can arise. Here is an example from economics: While neoclassical economics tackles the question of how rational actors maximise their benefits, feminist economics pursues justified gender conditions for economic actions (cf. Exploring Economics).

One task of academics is to make complex questions manageable. Research questions should be framed in such a way that they can produce answers realistically. The question, “how can I save the world?” is never found in a paper as a research question. This question would be more suitable: To what extent could an unconditional basic income promote social cohesion in the European Union?

_IN SOCIETY

A questioning attitude can help to understand different people and their motives for social actions. This is particularly of new urgency in a globalised world, in order to counteract discriminations. Due to digitalisation and global migratory movements, awareness is growing that we share the world with many people – relating is becoming more complex. One cannot directly understand every opinion; One does not share every political attitude. Here, the questioning We – as a political group, community of researchers, etc. – helps to understand social phenomena, to question one’s own values in relation to them and to contribute to shaping society using the knowledge acquired.

The questions themselves also play a central role in this connection. Societies are confronted with questions which result from regional, national and global problem interrelations. These questions are multifaceted and often complex, such as: How can wealth, resources, education and participation be shared as common property and be distributed fairly? How can the climate crisis be mitigated? How can populism and new forms of nationalism be dealt with in a globalised world?

The problems are related, the questions can no longer be handled separately from one another. Also, if this appears as a great challenge, these questions can also be sharpened in a societal exchange so that approaches to solving them arise. However, behind the obviously societally-relevant questions, there is always a crucial aspect which must be considered: What does a specific solution mean? What societal consequences will the suggested solution have? A problem perception and solution also always has a meaning for the question, whoever the person or group wants to be, which asks it. For example, it makes a difference whether I, as an answer to the question of how man-made greenhouse gases can be reduced, suggest to do away with human beings, or whether I work on mechanisms for lower per capita emissions. From the perspective of man, the first solution is out of question. Not all solution options have a clear meaning, but should be reflected upon.

Different societal actors can have very different problem perceptions. Thus, they also ask fundamentally different questions, which manifest themselves in partially conflicting answers, findings and actions. An example of this is the Fridays for Future movement. While pro-lignite companies are asking the question as to how they can generate energy most efficiently from the excavation of lignite, climate activists are asking how global CO2 emissions can be reduced and how the global economic system can be reformed under the premise of climate justice. An open struggle around such questions is central for democracy.

Discussion of these kinds of questions requires the fundamental freedom in society to ask them and be allowed to discuss them. A look back at history makes it clear how vulnerable this fundamental right of freedom of opinion is, such as during the time of national socialism or in the GDR. But even in the present day, we can observe how freedom of opinion and other democratic fundamental rights are being removed, even within the European Union. Questions are powerful: they are indicative of our thinking and thus also of our actions. To be able to ask societal questions is not a matter of course.