



**O-CITY PROJECT**

**MODULE IV.1 INTERPERSONAL SKILLS**



Erasmus+

Project funded by: **Erasmus+ / Key Action 2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, Knowledge Alliances.**

## 1. Lesson Document

Lesson 3 Topic 2 Active listening

### Asking Questions and attitude while listening

#### Introduction

Conversation is a human social activity that structures our interactions with others. It is a multiple way street, where each participant should be able to express feelings. The quality of our conversations, despite external elements of our environment that we cannot control, depends mostly on our attitude while listening and the relevance of our answers. It is about asking the right questions and going in depth in the topic if we desire to achieve productive results (see lesson 2 of this same topic).

Once this lesson is completed and approved, learners will be able to:

1. Ask relevant questions as part of our listening practice.
2. Review other basic tips of active listening.

In this lesson, we will learn how to focus our attention on a message and make sure that we understand and interpret it properly.

#### 1. **Tips to become an active listener.**

##### a. **Be curious, about your environment, about others.**

Curiosity is the desire to know or learn about something. With curiosity, you show interest for your environment, and especially for what people around you have to say. You must enter a conversation with an open mindset, encouraging others to talk about themselves and their experiences. You should listen to them with the intent to understand what they say and know more about it, and not just to reply. You will improve your relationship and increase the degree of trust.

##### b. **Stay focused.**

Your attitude during other's speeches determines your level of concentration. You need to produce a mental effort to remain focused on what is being told. For this, you can apply small tips:

- Silence other thoughts that you might have in your mind. Try to forget about other personal issues for a moment. The practice of meditation, or mindfulness techniques, can help you in this exercise.
- Maintain the eye contact with your interlocutor, so as to foster closeness.
- Reformulate in your head what is being said.
- Don't rush: for instance, avoid preparing mentally your answer while your interlocutor is still talking, you might lose important information. Don't interrupt.

And of course, avoid other distractions. It is just not the right time to look at your mobile phone.

### **c. Ban prejudices**

Do not try to end other people's sentences. Do not fill in the blanks by yourself in other's speeches. If some information is missing, do not assume that you know how to fill this part. Otherwise, you will instil your own perspectives and judgements in others speeches and skew the original essence of the initial message.

### **d. Ask**

Asking questions will help you to make sure that you understand correctly what is being said and interpret it in a way without filling by yourself the above mentioned blanks in the speech. It will provide clarity and foster mutual understanding. It is a way of checking your comprehension, and to go deeper in a topic.

We can distinguish 3 main types of questions:

- Yes/No questions That will be useful for small clarifications and make sure that a message is well understood.
- Wh- Questions: what, who, where, when etc. That are used to place the context and develop a subject.
- Choice question, that are useful to close a debate and decision taking.

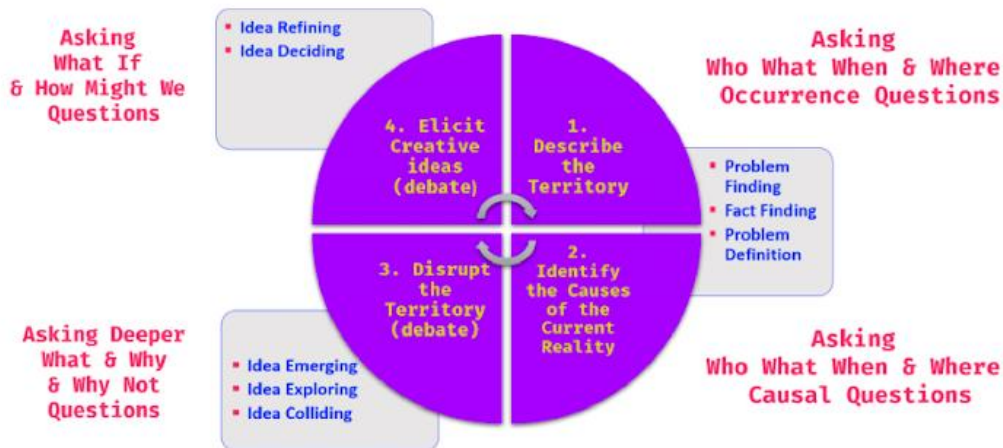
Asking specific and relevant questions is not an easy exercise. This is why the next section will be dedicated to this topic.

## **2. The art of asking questions**

When listening carefully, you will naturally improve the relevance of your questions. As you are more focused on what the speaker is saying, you can respond back with accurate inputs and push the conversation further.

Besides, Janet Sernack used the 4 levels of conversation developed by Otto Schamer’s (see lesson 2) to propose an enquiring and conversing model for generative discovery. It relies on the principle of asking questions emerging from the listening activity, and that support the understanding of our environment:

The 4 Step Cycle of Generative Discovery



Source: <https://janetsernack.com.au/generating-discovery-for-innovation/>

**a. Step One – Elicit a description of the territory.**

This first step is about setting the ground, or environment of the topic approached in the conversation. It is about the description of factual elements that surround our topic and drawing a picture of the situation. The focus is then on:

- Fact finding.
- Identification of problems.

This requires us to listen deeply so to identify “what *is*” in the given territory. It is a basis to understand the environment and build empathy toward it.

For this step, questions will have the type “who”, “what”, “when”, “where”.

**b. Step Two – Identify the causes of the current reality:**

In this second step, we proceed to an immersion in the territory to deepen our understanding. In this step, we also identify the positions diverging and / or converging. The focus is then on the definition of the problem.

For this step, we will ask more casual questions, still using “who”, “what”, “when”, “where”, but taking care of not jumping into action.

### **c. Step Three – Disrupt the territory.**

In this new step, we enter into the area of debate. We shift from the descriptive questions toward the disruptive ones. It is good at this point to install a debating process, where we can eventually be provocative to foster the emergence of hidden ideas. The focus is then on:

- Ideas Emerging
- Ideas Exploring
- Ideas Colliding

The objective is to create a productive energy that will free the creativity of participants. For this, we need to make sure that we have reached a satisfactory level of trust among the participants, so they feel confident enough to share their ideas and are open to constructive dialogue.

For this step, we will ask disruptive questions by asking deeper “what”, but also “Why” and “Why not”.

### **d. Step Four – Elicit creative ideas.**

This last step is intended to create deeper conflict and disagreement for the generation of a provocative and creative debate. The focus is then on:

- Idea Refining
- Idea Deciding

This step is made to achieve the maximum potential of the interaction and extend the range of inputs and possible outcomes. We now consider new possibilities under the scope of hypothetical events.

Therefore, in this step, we will ask disruptive questions from the type “what if” and “how might we”.

## **Conclusion**

Asking relevant questions is an important tool that comes in support to the active listening process. Asking the right question at the right time will help you to elevate the level of conversation and reach better results and creative solutions.