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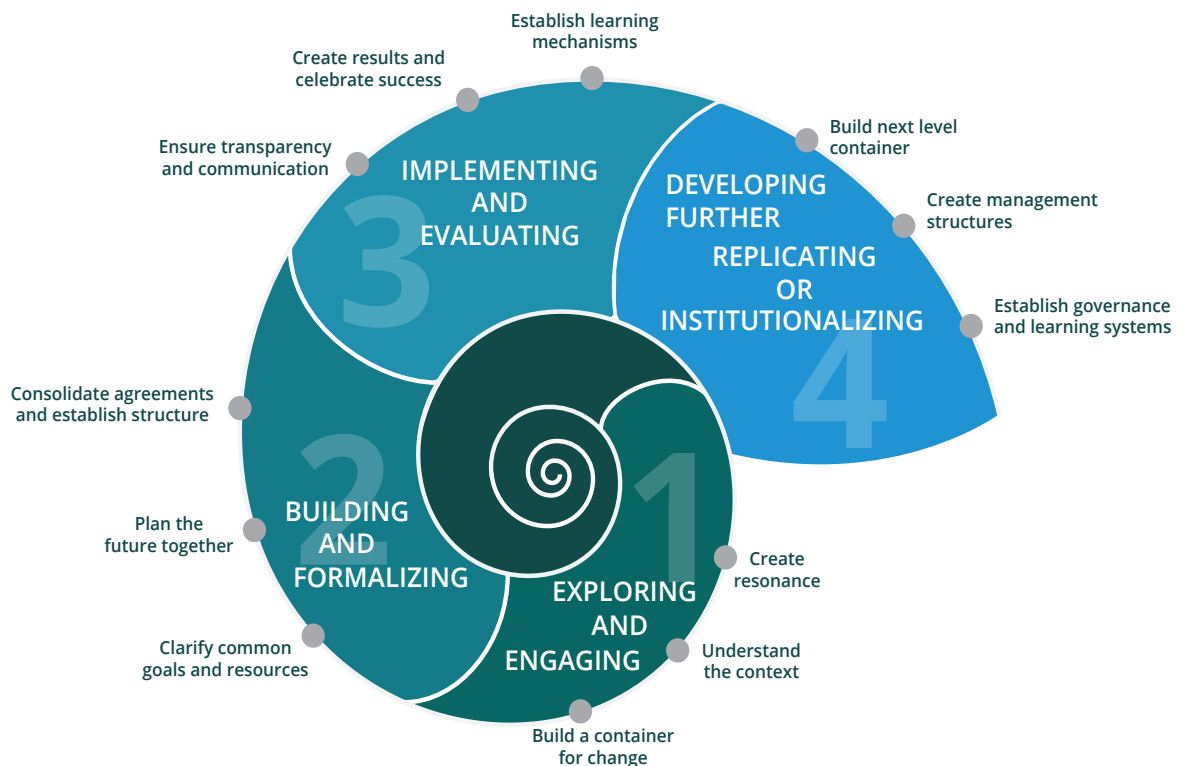
# THE DIALOGIC CHANGE MODEL
## IMPLEMENTING STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUES IN A RESULT-ORIENTED WAY

Working towards a more sustainable world requires bringing together differing world-views and balancing conflicts of interests for responsible business, people-oriented public services and a strong civil society. Solving the complex challenges arising from globally linked problems, conflicts, economic disparities and the effects of climate change increasingly calls for result-oriented collaboration between the public sector, private sector and civil society. Stakeholder Dialogues are a methodology for designing and implementing consultation and cooperation in complex change processes that require different interest groups to be included and integrated.

Well-structured Stakeholder Dialogues can create and cultivate ownership of change towards sustainability. This requires a certain methodological knowledge consisting of process and change management experience, the dialogical approach and self-reflection methods. Bringing together actors with different backgrounds and various interests in a Stakeholder Dialogue require developing one's affinity for dealing with diversity, as well as one's communication and management skills. The Dialogic Change Model presented here allows for the result-oriented, structured planning and implementation of a Stakeholder Dialogue in four phases.

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## THE FOUR PHASES OF DIALOGIC CHANGE

Differentiating of 4 phases in a Stakeholder Dialogue has proven helpful in taking all demands and requirements of the different phases of a dialogue process into account and preparing them adequately.

### PHASE 1: *EXPLORING AND ENGAGING.*

In Phase 1 stakeholders explore the Stakeholder Dialogue's context thereby taking other existing initiatives and the people involved into account. This requires them to understand the external context, the factors that will influence the dialogue, and the dynamics of the complex system that the Stakeholder Dialogue will take place in. Talking informally to selected but relevant stakeholders and opinion-leaders in this phase can help to understand the prospects and potential obstacles for dialogue and change. Central to Phase 1 is building trust, creating resonance and building the case for dialogue and change. So, the quality of an engagement process is the key element in Phase 1. Good relationship management and a broader understanding of the context are crucial. Formal structures for the Stakeholder Dialogue, agreements or defined procedures are not a priority at this point.

### PHASE 2: *BUILDING AND FORMALIZING.*

Phase 2 is geared toward consolidating the system of stakeholder collaboration and formalizing the stakeholders' commitment to change. The objective of this phase is to find an appropriate formal structure to move an initiative forward and to build a stable collaborative system for implementation. Goals are agreed upon jointly, and roles and resources are defined. This usually leads to agreements – the signing of a contract, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), a project plan or a public address in the interest of the change endeavor. The initiative shifts to a formalized process. In more complex Stakeholder Dialogues, there may also be issues of division of tasks, decision-making, resource allocation or internal and external communication strategies.

### PHASE 3: *IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING.*

This phase can be seen as the actual implementation of planned activities and includes the establishment of an internal Stakeholder Dialogue monitoring system to ensure results and learning. Its focus is on creating visible results in a reasonable time frame so that all actors involved can see the success of the Stakeholder Dialogues. If a Stakeholder Dialogue never moves past the stage of discussion and exchange of ideas, it may be a sign that the stakeholders can discuss the issue, but are not willing enough to implement actual change. However, for Stakeholder Dialogues to deliver, it is crucial that stakeholders perceive visible change during the dialogue process; otherwise they might lose interest in the dialogue and in implementing change. So, resultorientation is a key factor for success. The complexity of a process often becomes evident during this phase, sometimes in the form of a crisis. Crisis symptoms may include criticism from external parties, counter initiatives or endless non-productive discussions. The more stability and trusting relationships have been created in Phase 1 and 2, the better such phases of instability can be overcome.

### PHASE 4: *DEVELOPING FURTHER, REPLICATING OR INSTITUTIONALIZING.*

Once a Stakeholder Dialogue has reached the agreed-upon results, the question remains whether an initiative should stop there, or whether it should be further developed. If the desired goal has been achieved, success should be adequately celebrated: participation and contributions of individual stakeholder groups should be acknowledged and appreciated. Many Stakeholder Dialogues terminate successfully after Phase 3. Some Stakeholder Dialogues may want to consolidate their outcomes into sustainable structures. This can mean taking the endeavor to the next level, replicating it at another location, integrating a new issue or further institutionalizing the dialogue on a more formal level. The goals of Phase 4 differ from dialogue to dialogue; they can be, for example institutionalizing a successful dialogue form or using the experience gathered in the dialogue in another process.

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