

Dilemma:

“How much should I interfere with student group formations?”

Each group has a host.

This dilemma card is for the host and contains:

- A host guide
- A dilemma
- Fact boxes
- A question guide for dialogue one and dialogue two

Host guide As a host, your role is to facilitate a good, constructive dialogue where everyone gets to speak. Your role is not to participate by sharing your own perspective, but you are welcome to put your perspective into play by phrasing it as a question (“What if they ...?”).

Try to be curious (“Why do you think that?”) and investigative (“What if they react differently than you assume?”).

Aim to make it safe for participants to say or share something vulnerable by making it clear that different perspectives are welcome and that everyone should be respectful.

The dialogue is divided into two parts.

The first part is about giving advice to the person who posed the dilemma, and the second part is about the theme of the dilemma from the perspective of the panellists and their experiences at DTU.

On pages 3 and 4, you will find questions and data, which you can use to qualify the dialogue.

After reading this guide and skimming the question guide, please read out the dilemma to the panel. Give them a moment to reflect on the dilemma. Then initiate dialogue one.

Dilemma:

We have received a dilemma from Susan, who is a lecturer at DTU and wants the panel's opinion. She has noticed that at the start of the semester, students have a tendency to form groups with people similar to themselves. She wants to support DTU's goal of using diversity to gain more perspectives at the table, as it—in her experience—creates better results.

However, she seems to be up against strong intuitive forces pulling people towards the 'safe' and easy choices. For example, international students often form groups with others from the same country, and equally often, ethnic Danes form groups together and so do ethnic minorities. There is even a tendency towards forming groups with people of the same gender.

She wants to challenge the students by introducing a few requirements for the group formation, e.g. requiring that the groups must be made up of:

1. Different genders
2. Different nationalities
3. Different ethnicities.

However, she fears that this is overstepping the boundaries. Especially for the third requirement regarding ethnicity, because there is a difference between having come here from Pakistan to study at DTU (nationality) and having grown up in Denmark and having an ethnic Pakistani background—but she sees the issue happen in both groups. This leads to another dilemma, because by mentioning ethnicity, she is indirectly creating 'otherness', and perhaps she will—inadvertently—create exactly the kind of grouping that she is trying to avoid.

She has a colleague who is seeing the same tendencies but solves it by forming the groups in advance herself instead. In this way, she ensures diversity, but the students are deprived of ownership of the process.

Furthermore, she has observed that the homogenous grouping also happens during the breaks, which impacts the sense of community among the students, as many don't get to know each other.

She is convinced that diversity in the groups will make a difference—for the long-term well-being of the students as well as for the results—but what is the best way for her to promote diversity?

1

What advice does the panel give?

Dialogue one:

- [Start by hearing each panellist's thoughts on the dilemma so everyone gets the chance to speak from the start]
- "What could the underlying cause(s) for the dilemma be?"
- "In terms of DEI, we talk about 'bias blockers' as a tool to avoid doing what we usually would. What are the pros and cons of the bias blockers suggested by Susan?"
- "What do you think of the options stated by the person who posed the dilemma?"
- [Feel free to use the data from the box to boost the discussion]
- [Other investigative questions]
- "We have to come up with an answer, but you don't all have to agree. What does each of you think the person who posed the dilemma should do?"

"A lot of research suggests that 'opposites attract' is a myth. In fact, we find similarities so appealing that the tendency is visible across cultures. Because similarities are associated with attraction, it makes sense that individuals in long-term relationship are similar in many ways. This is sometimes known as assortative mating. The term is also used to describe the way people tend to find a partner with a similar level of education, financial situation, and appearance. We can assume that the same mechanisms apply to group formations."
(Metanalysis from 2013 by psychologists Matthew Montoya and Robert Horton)

2 Dialogue two:

What do you do, and what could you do?

This part of the dialogue focuses on the panellists' own experiences at DTU.

Start dialogue two by telling the panel that the focal point is still the theme of the dilemma, but now they should look at the conditions in their own unit as well as considering other solutions.

Please note that dialogue two may be a bit more sensitive. Aim to create a safe and respectful space for everyone. The goal is still not to agree on everything, but to learn more about each other's perspectives.

- "Do you recognize the dilemma or parts of it, either on a personal level or through observation?"
- "What ways of facilitating group formations do you know? Which ones do you prefer and why?"
- "How can you help ensure as much diversity as possible in the groups? And how can you help ensure that the groups benefit as much as possible from diversity (inclusion and equity)?"
- "Is there a part of the advice you gave that you practise in your unit? If yes, what? If no, would that be possible?"
- "What else could you do? At individual, group, and organizational level?"
- [Other investigative questions]
- "What will each of you take with you to your unit, either as a point of attention or as possible solutions related to the theme of the dilemma?"