

Dilemma:

“I speak a different professional language.”

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:

Eric is a relatively new researcher at DTU, but he is not an engineer. He is deeply focused on his research project and finds that there is a lot of good synergy in his laboratory. In general, his experience is that the section delivers high-quality research.

However, Eric feels like the section could be better at utilizing the different professional abilities there. In his view, he can add value by providing a completely different perspective because of his background. He is convinced that his colleagues feel the same way, regardless of whether they are engineers or have other professional backgrounds. He believes that they could create even better research results by creating more space for each other's different perspectives. At a personal level, he believes it would also help grow his own competences.

However, Eric finds that there is no system in place for cross-disciplinary knowledge sharing. And it doesn't seem to happen spontaneously. Eric struggles to understand what his engineering colleague is saying in their professional language and often catches himself just nodding along. It has started to give him a sense of loneliness and being mismatched. He often chooses not to attend events if they are not directly linked to his own research, as he simply doesn't understand enough of it. He sees so much potential and it is affecting him that it is not utilized. It affects him so much that he is considering looking for a different job that will utilize his competences better. Because right now, he feels like he doesn't belong.

He knows that his head of section is aware of the issue, but he has heard other managers say, "We don't mind hiring someone with a different professional background, but they need to understand what we do."

Eric has learned that in some parts of DTU, they have more success with creating synergy, e.g. by designing programs together or eating breakfast and lunch together to create informal spaces for knowledge sharing. His dream is that they can create a clearer shared goal of exploring what they can achieve together when they use their different competences, as a kind of driving force for creating more inclusion. But how do they get there? Eric has no management responsibility, so how can he help the section put academic diversity into play and become more curious?

Dialogue one:

1 What advice does the panel give?

- [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?"
- "What can you do to understand each other despite different professional backgrounds?"
- "What do you think of the options stated by the person who posed the dilemma?"
- [Feel free to use the data from the boxes 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?"

Affinity bias, or similarity bias, refers to the tendency to favour people with similar interests, backgrounds, or experiences. We tend to feel more comfortable around people who are similar to ourselves. Among other things, this bias can affect recruitment processes.

"It's important to say that not all research should be interdisciplinary. But there are some societal challenges that are so complex that most people would agree that they are best solved by several disciplines joining forces," says Ole Steen, former Dean of Aarhus University, in connection with a 2017 report evaluating a five-year initiative.

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 is the status of interdisciplinary work in your unit?"
- "Do you do anything active to create synergy across professional backgrounds?"
- "Do you experience a reluctance to hire employees with professional backgrounds that are not already present?"
- [Other investigative questions]
- "Is there a part of the advice you gave that you practise in your unit?"
- "What else could you do? At individual, group, and organizational level?"
- "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?"