



# Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together

*By William Isaacs*

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Dialogue provides practical guidelines for one of the essential elements of true partnership--learning how to talk together in honest and effective ways. Reveals how problems between managers and employees, and between companies or divisions within a larger corporation, stem from an inability to conduct a successful dialogue.

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## **Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together By William Isaacs Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

Modern conversation is a lot like nuclear physics, argues William Isaacs. Lots of atoms zoom around, many of which just rush past each other. But others collide, creating friction. Even if our atomic conversations don't turn contentious, they often just serve to establish each participant's place in the cosmos. One guy shares a statistic he's privy to, another shares another fact, and on and on. Each person fires off a tidbit, pauses to reload while someone else talks, then fires off another. In *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, Isaacs explains how we can do better than that.

Isaacs, who is Director of the Dialogue Project at MIT and a consultant to major corporations, including AT&T and Intel, believes that corporate, political, and personal communication can be a process of thinking together--as opposed to thinking alone, and then trying to convince others of our positions by refusing to consider other opinions, withholding information, and ultimately getting angry and defensive. This is not pie-in-the-sky, let's-all-hold-hands-and-sing stuff. He offers concrete ideas for both listening and speaking; for avoiding the forces that undermine meaningful conversation; for changing the physical setting of the dialogue to change its quality. The outcome, he says, can be quite different from the traditional winner-loser structure of arguments and debates. Businesses can make more reasoned decisions, and thus earn more money. Governments can create peaceful resolutions to seemingly intractable problems. (For example, Isaacs cites secret conversations between Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk in South Africa, which occurred over a number of years, while Mandela was still under arrest and led to a new framework for their country.) And, although this is a book primarily geared toward managers, even married couples can learn a few new ways to communicate. --*Lou Schuler*

### From [Booklist](#)

Isaacs is a colleague of organizational learning guru Peter Senge and one of the founders of MIT's Organizational Learning Center. He also directs MIT's Dialogue Project, on which this book is based. Isaacs argues that organizational learning cannot take place without successful dialogue. Dialogue is conversation that encourages collective observation and thought, enabling groups to think beyond their members' individual limitations. Isaacs posits an "ecology of thought," which is typically constrained by habits that are known and felt but never discussed. Those habits can be revealed only through dialogue that permits inquiry, confrontation, and clarification. Only then can habits be changed and new possibilities explored. Isaacs examines the processes that constitute dialogue and shows what encourages and what discourages dialogue, what happens when dialogue is introduced into difficult settings, and how to manage the changes within oneself that are necessary to become an effective participant in dialogue. *David Rouse*

### About the Author

Isaacs is the director of the Dialogue Project at MIT and a lecturer at the Sloan School of Management.

PETER M. SENGE is the founding chairperson of the Society for Organizational Learning and a senior lecturer at MIT. He is the co-author of "The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook, The Dance of Change," and "Schools That Learn "(part of the Fifth Discipline Fieldbook series)" "and has lectured extensively throughout the world. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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