

## Tool 29: The Wheel of Multiple Perspectives

### Aim of the tool

To help a group see an issue from as many vantage points as possible.

### When to use it?

In the Divergence stage, when it is important to explore and include different perspectives from stakeholders about an issue.

### What is the Wheel of Multiple Perspectives?

The more perspectives on an issue that a group can consider, the more possibilities exist for effective action, say Charlotte Roberts and James Boswell (in Senge et al, 1994, p. 273). The point is not just to look at one or two extremely different perspectives, but to experience as many differences of nuance as possible.

This tool helps to do this. It involves rotating between roles to encourage group members to see an issue from as many vantage points as possible. We describe the simplest version, which involves cards (another version uses a large paper wheel with a circle and spokes, which can be turned on a table). We assume that the tool is used in a multi-stakeholder convening, using tables with maximum 8 people per table.

### Wheel of Multiple Perspectives – Step by step

The tool works as follows:

#### Step 1 – Prepare

Write the name of the issue, project or task on a large card and lay it in the centre of the table. (Example: ‘Combining social, ecological and economical value in National Park X’)

Then write up cards with the names or titles of 6–8 key stakeholders for the issue being explored. Some stakeholders may be present, others not. The stakeholders can be listed through a quick brainstorm, or be taken from earlier stakeholder analysis exercises, if any. (Examples for the above case: local government; environmental NGO; park rangers; park dwellers; farmers upstream of the park; tourism/lodge owners; police; companies with commercial interest in/around park; etc.)

#### Step 2 – Generate perspectives

Distribute the stakeholder cards randomly among the group members. One by one, group members are asked to add to the understanding of the issue from the perspective of the stakeholder on the card they are holding.

Ask participants to picture themselves in the position of this stakeholder, and comment on the issue one by one. A group member receiving the card for eg. ‘Park ranger’ will complete the sentence “From my perspective as park ranger, the critical elements within this situation are...”.

Collect the issues written in black on a flipchart. Collect ideas for leverage in green on another flipchart.

Make a round to allow all group members to share their comments from their perspectives. Group members are not allowed to 'pass'. If someone feels as if they don't understand this stakeholder's perspective, let them ask themselves these questions, playing the role of that person:

- **Time:** What is the time frame I am relating to? When did I become aware of the problem? When will it, effectively, be a non-issue for me?
- **Expectation:** What do I expect to happen, if the project continues as expected? What do I hope to happen? Who expects me to deal with this? What do they want me to do?
- **Examination:** How closely am I willing to examine the problem? From how far away do I see it? What else is connected with this problem as I see it?
- **Understanding:** What do I see about the problem that no one else sees? What is my understanding of the problem? What data is my understanding of the problem based upon?

After the round is completed, collect the stakeholder cards, shuffle them, and distribute them again. As before, people will share comments from the perspective of the stakeholder on the card they received, building on the comments that are already collected on the flipcharts.

Repeat at least three times to allow people to explore different perspectives.

### Step 3 – Working with the perspectives

After some time, you will find that full descriptions of each perspective have been generated. Now, as a team, you can talk through the situation from each perspective after you have reviewed the flipcharts with issues and ideas for leverage. Finally, reflect on the exercise by asking questions such as:

1. What are similarities and what are differences?
2. What did you learn from the other perspectives?
3. How can that inform new decisions/improve our effectiveness?
4. From your perspective: What new thoughts could enhance your capacity for dealing with the issue?

### **Learn more**

This tool has been adapted from:

Senge, Peter, Bryan Smith, Richard Ross, Charlotte Roberts and Art Kleiner (1994) *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*. Crown Business Publishers. Also see <http://tinyurl.com/nbd95l6>