

Spaghetti junction

SPECIFIC ISSUE/S: Any kind of issue

PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES: To clarify understanding of a problem and its causes prior to strategising.

LENGTH: 1-3 hours

GROUP SIZE: Any, but the number working together should be no more than 8; so there may need to be sub-groups

GROUP CHARACTERISTICS: Any kind of group or sub-group that has come together on a particular issue.

FACILITATOR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS NEEDED: No knowledge needed; low level facilitation skills sufficient

RESOURCES NEEDED: Spaghetti Junction example

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Identify the problem

Make sure that participants have a clearly defined problem that they wish to analyse. If not, allow enough time for the group to define a problem that concerns them — they need to develop a shared sense of what the problem is and be able to articulate it in one short, clear and specific statement, for example the problem is that:

The government is not legislating to reduce overall carbon emissions.

Time spent reviewing how the problem is stated is invaluable. The group needs to ask itself, 'Is this the clearest, most specific statement of the problem that we can come up with at this time?'

2. Brainstorm quick answers to the question

Take a large sheet of paper, the larger the better, (or use a whiteboard and photograph the work when completed) and turn the statement into a question. Write it in the centre of the sheet.

e.g. *Why is the government not legislating to reduce overall carbon emissions?*

The group needs to choose someone to be the scribe. That person will need to be able to write quickly, paraphrase accurately and identify similarities in statements.

Ask participants to brainstorm their answers to the question.

After each answer, the facilitator asks, 'well, why is that?'

Answers might include:

Because the government assumes it has a mandate

'well, why is that?'

Because we are not objecting strongly enough

'well, why is that?'

Because not enough people realise that this is happening

Continue asking 'why' and getting as many explanations as you can to each new, 'well, why is that?'

When duplicate or similar answers are given a line is drawn to connect the similar answer/s.

You end up with an analysis of the problem — a spaghetti junction (so called because of the way the work looks when the exercise has been completed). e.g. see Spaghetti Junction diagram

Note: During this process do not allow explanations, justifications or comments on each other's suggestions. If the group keeps stopping and arguing about perceptions then split the group because the purpose is not about shifting each other's viewpoints.

3. Identify factors as the basis for developing a strategy

The resulting spaghetti might seem overwhelming because of the complexities that have been identified.

There may be 30 factors that all contribute to the problem and many may seem outside the group's influence or control. Emphasise that any factors that the group can shift are going to help solve the problem.

The group should identify the easiest, the most relevant, or the ones that interest them the most and make a list of these. These then form the basis for strategising.

FACILITATION TIPS: This is a tool for analysing a problem as defined by those in the 'lived situation,' preferably a group that has been brought together by a particular issue. It is not a strategising exercise—it identifies the problem and why it exists as the basis for future strategising.

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