

METHOD

STINKY FISH

Area of CoP Activity: Building Relationships
Taking Action as a Community

CoP Lifecycle Phase: Inquire
Design
Prototype
Sustain



CoP Success Factor: Community Interaction
Mutual Culture, Value, Belonging

EIGE Step: Step 1: Getting Started
Step 6: What comes after the GEP

Group Size: Up to 30 people

Difficulty Level:

Time Needed:

Facilitator Preparation:

Participant Preparation:

Description: A short method to enable people to share concerns and anxieties to create openness and clear the air. The stinky fish metaphor is used to illustrate that if you keep negative thoughts and feelings but never talk about them, the ‘stinkier’ it gets. By putting your ‘stinky fish’ on the table, people can relate to each other, break the ice, get more comfortable sharing, and uncover areas for learning and development.

More Information: www.liberationist.org/uncover-the-stinky-fish-canvas/
www.toolbox.hyperisland.com/stinky-fish

STINKY FISH

NEW

Short description

The humorously labelled Stinky Fish is an incredibly versatile activity that can be incorporated into any brainstorming technique, 1-2-4-All, or used in its own right (similar to the Four Quadrants), both face-to-face and online. The purpose of this method is to get people talking about problematic issues that trouble them, which they would not normally discuss openly. Silent problems are often carried around in people, but no one has the courage to address them. However, if the issues are not addressed and remain ignored, they may become more complex to resolve, or even block the goals the community is trying to achieve.

ADAPTABLE
ONLINE

When to use

The idea behind the metaphor of the stinky fish is that the longer you keep something unpleasant and keep quiet about it, it becomes more and more rotten. This activity will be helpful in situations where you are aware of past conflicts, failed projects, resistance to change, a lack of resources and support, or perceptible negative emotions within the community. Paradoxically, people may feel more comfortable sharing their worries, anxieties, uncertainties, and angsts with strangers than with their institutional peers. For external workshops, this canvas can be introduced early on, however for a group of people based in the same department/institution ensure that there is enough trust and commitment to retain confidentiality.

How to

A: Brief description

The Stinky Fish method in this toolkit is based firstly on individual reflection, and secondly, allowing the participants to open up and share their concerns, anxieties, angsts, grudges, and uncertainties with the whole group. Once the stinky fish is out in the open, you may wish to follow up this activity with inviting the participants to come up with antidotes and solutions to the biggest or most recurring issues reported.

B: Detailed step-by-step guide

1. Explain the process. Distribute one template per person or email a copy of the template to the participants in advance and get them thinking beforehand. Ask the participants to explore and share their individual worries and concerns about the future/project to start a dialogue and try to confront or overcome these uncomfortable issues. You can do this as part of asynchronous prep, or just conduct it during the session. The questions in the template are predefined, however you may wish to consider other questions depending on your context. Alternatively, you can leave it completely unstructured, and provide no questions, just ask the participants to think about their negative thoughts and fears in general. In all cases, ask the participants to write only a few words or a brief phrase inside the fish. At this point, they do not need to get into too much detail. (10 min)
2. Once all participants have written their stinky fish, sit in a circle (if meeting face-to-face), and ask each participant to share their stinky fish with the rest of the group for no more than a minute each, until all participants have shared. At this stage, do not allow interruptions, but let only one person speak. If you are meeting face-to-face and the group is uncomfortable sharing their issues (e.g., close colleagues, etc.), you could put together a gallery of all the stinky fish on the wall, and invite the participants to explore the issues. (max. 1 minute per person)
3. It is important to thank the participants for opening up and sharing their anxieties. This activity in itself might break the ice and make the participants realise that other members have similar stinky fish, so they are not alone. As a follow up you may want to invite them to collectively select the top three most recurring/important issues and come up with antidotes and solutions through another activity.

Additional ideas/ information

Another option would be to use a collectively editable whiteboard (e.g., Mural) to all participants to add their inputs onto the Stinky Fish canvas. Next, ask each participant to elaborate on their sticky note in the whole group.

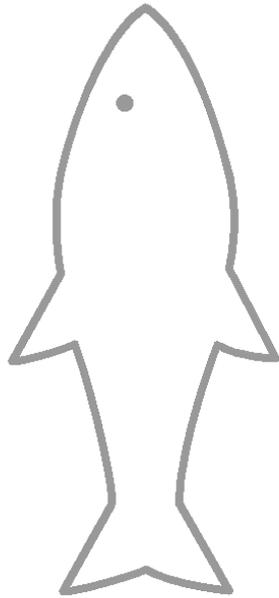
Template:



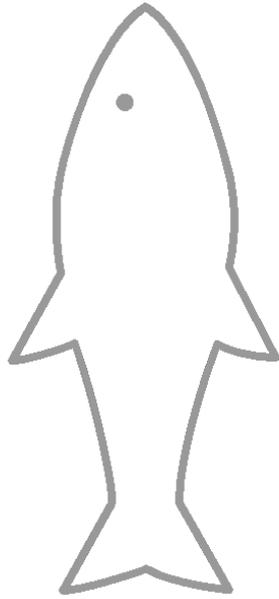
Template

STINKY FISH

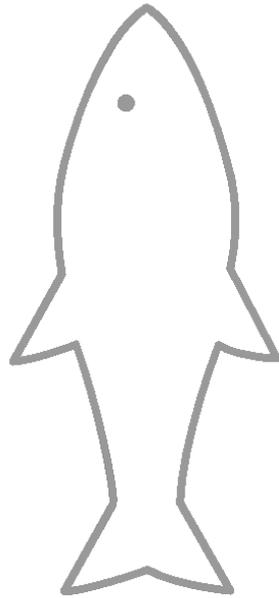
What are your uncertainties?



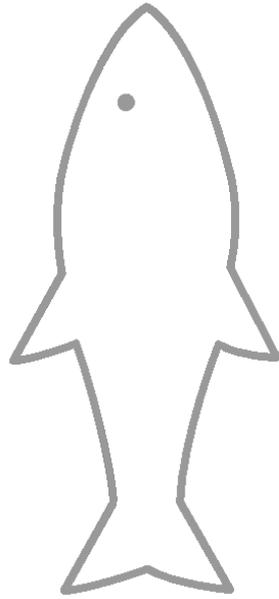
What are you afraid of or worried about?



What are the past unresolved issues?



What is everyone thinking but not saying?



REFERENCES

Razzetti, Gustavo 2019. Uncover the Stinky Fish. Available from: www.liberationist.org/uncover-the-stinky-fish-canvas/.