

METHOD THE WORLD CAFÉ



Area of CoP Activity: Learning and Developing Practice
Creating Knowledge

CoP Lifecycle Phase: Design
Launch
Grow

CoP Success Factor: Community Interaction
Knowledge Production and Access to Knowledge

EIGE Step: Step 4: Implementing a GEP

Group Size: Large groups (12 people or more)

Difficulty Level:

Time Needed:

Facilitator Preparation:

Participant Preparation:

Description: The World Café aims to facilitate collaborative dialogue and knowledge and idea sharing in a creative way through conversation by creating a café ambiance of small groups sitting around tables. After a specified time, the participants move to a new table, apart from the table host, who then recaps the previous conversations to the new table participants. As a result, the following discussions are cross-pollinated with the ideas from previous conversations among other participants. At the end of the process the main ideas are summarised in a plenary session and follow-up actions are discussed.

More Information: Slocum, N. 2003. Participatory Methods Toolkit: A Practitioner’s Manual. http://archive.unu.edu/hq/library/Collection/PDF_files/CRIS/PMT.pdf. www.theworldcafe.com

THE WORLD CAFÉ

Short Description

The World Café aims to facilitate collaborative dialogue and knowledge and idea sharing in a creative way through a living network of conversation and action. As the name suggests, the facilitator creates a café ambiance of small groups sitting around tables, which encourages participants to discuss issues and questions. After a specified time, the participants move to a new table, apart from the table host (one host per table), who then recaps the previous conversations to the new table participants. As a result, the following discussions are cross-pollinated with the ideas from previous conversations among other participants. At the end of the process the main ideas are summarised in a plenary session and follow-up actions are discussed. The event lasts a few hours – a minimum of four hours and a maximum of an entire day, depending upon the topic and ambitions of the project (Slocum, 2003: 141).

When to use

When you want to:

- engage large groups (>12 people) in an authentic dialogue;
- generate input, share knowledge, stimulate innovative thinking and explore action possibilities around real life issues and questions;
- engage people in authentic conversation – whether they are meeting for the first time or have established relationships with each other;
- conduct in-depth exploration of key strategic challenges or opportunities;
- deepen relationships and mutual ownership of outcomes in an existing group;
- create meaningful interaction between a speaker and the audience.

Avoid when:

- you already have a determined solution or answer;
- you want to cascade one-way information;
- you are creating detailed implementation plans;
- you have fewer than 12 people (instead, use a dialogue circle, council or other approach for authentic conversation).

How to

A: Brief explanation

This method facilitates the participants to explore a question by discussing it in small groups in several repeated sessions of 20- 30 minutes. Participants change tables after each session to cross-pollinate their discussions with the ideas generated at other tables. The event is finalised with a plenary, where the key ideas and conclusions are summarised.

B: Detailed step-by-step guide

- Seat four (five max) people at small Café-style tables or in conversation clusters.
- Set up progressive (at least three) rounds of conversation, approximately 20 minutes each.
- Engage questions or issues that genuinely matter to your life, work, or community.
- Encourage participants to write, doodle and draw key ideas on their tablecloths (and/ or note key ideas on large index cards or placemats in the centre of the table).
- Upon completing the initial round of conversation, you may ask one person to remain at the table as a “table host” for the next round, while the others serve as travellers or “ambassadors of meaning.” The travellers carry key ideas, themes, and questions into their new conversations, while the table host welcomes the new set of travellers.
- By providing opportunities for people to move in several rounds of conversation, ideas, questions, and themes begin to link and connect. At the end of the second or third round, all of the tables or conversation clusters in the room will be cross- pollinated with insights from prior conversations.
- In the last round of conversation, people can return to their first table to synthesise their discoveries, or they may continue traveling to new tables.

- You may use the same question for one or more rounds of conversation, or you may pose different questions in each round to build on and help deepen the exploration.
- After at least three rounds of conversation, initiate a period of sharing discoveries & insights in a whole group conversation. It is in these town meeting-style conversations that patterns can be identified, collective knowledge grows, and possibilities for action emerge.¹

The World Café activity can – with good planning and preparation – be adapted to use in an online meeting. This activity is quite time intensive it might be a good idea to split this up into two sessions: The first session for the group work and the second session for the sharing of insights, discoveries, and ideas that the groups have developed. Instead of having different tables for the groups, in an online meeting breakout rooms are needed. To always move one person from one room to another takes time and the groups as well as the regrouping should be planned beforehand, so it is important to know how many people will join the meeting. It is also helpful to assign the groups names or labels (e.g. colours) to avoid confusion. Additionally, the ambassadors and host can put a post-it on their shirts so that everyone knows who is who. Instead of using a big poster or tablecloths in an online meeting, virtual whiteboards (e.g. via Miro, Mural, Vispa or GoToMeeting) can be used. If that's not possible, then the host of a group can be the person writing down the inputs from the ambassadors and then sharing this with the group. As a meeting space Zoom, GoToMeeting, Zoho Meeting Whereby, Braincert, Samepage or BigBlueButton can be used.



¹ Adapted from: www.theworldcafe.com.

REFERENCES

Slocum, Nikki. 2003. "Participatory Methods Toolkit: A Practitioner's Manual." Available from: http://archive.unu.edu/hq/library/Collection/PDF_files/CRIS/PMT.pdf.

World Café. 2019. Available from: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>.