



Module 2: World Café Dialogue Approach To Creative Thinking

WORLD CAFÉ DIALOGUE: Where does it come from?

In 1995 a group of business and academic leaders met at the home of one of them to discuss a specific topic in a large circular setting, when it started raining, people broke out into smaller groups to find cover.

Conversations went on in smaller groups, and the participants started taking notes on the paper tablecloths. Spontaneously they started moving around the tables and found out that recollecting the results from the different discussions allowed to identify patterns in their thinking.

World Café got its name because it imitates a café setting where small groups (4 or 5 people) are all conversing together around tables.

For which purposes it is used?

The goal of the technique is to see different views and drill into new ideas related to one or more challenges, but it can also be used to think critically about a particular context, circumstance or situation. It is especially well-suited for larger groups.

The participants gather in clusters of small groups and engage in conversation about an issue that matters to them or some work they are trying to do together. It is an ideal way to find out what a group is thinking and feeling about a topic.

WORLD CAFÉ DIALOGUE: Implementation

There are several design principles which should be considered:

- 1. Set the context:** think carefully about what you want to achieve, as knowing the purpose of the activity will allow you to select the elements needed to realise the goals, e.g., what questions will be most relevant, what sorts of results will be more useful, etc.
- 2. Create a hospitable space:** you need to create an environment in which the students feel safe and comfortable, inviting them to think, speak and listen creatively. The physical set up of the classroom can contribute to create this type of environment.
- 3. Use powerful questions:** this type of questions attract collective energy, insight and action. Depending on the aim and time available you can focus on one single question or use progressive questioning to deep-dive into them through several conversational rounds.
- 4. Encourage all to contribute:** it is important to encourage all students to participate actively and contribute providing their perspectives and ideas, however you should also allow someone who merely wants to listen to do so.



5. **Connecting different and diverse perspectives:** the moving around the tables, an integral part of the technique, increases the possibility for new insights and ideas as students carry key ideas across the tables and exchange perspectives.

6. **Listening for patterns and insights:** the quality of the listening taking place during a World Café is a key factor (if not the most important one), as it allows to detect patterns and get a sense of a connection. Encourage your students to listen to what is not being spoken, apart from what is being shared.

7. **Share collective discoveries:** the last phase is the process is called “harvest” and is the process of making the pattern of the World Café and the contributions visible to all. Ask the students to reflect and think about the questions and conversations that went on in the smaller groups and what has been reflected on the graphical representations. Ask them to share their thoughts and insights with the rest of the group.

Tips and tricks

There are alternative methods, depending on the time available and age of the participants, for instance, instead of moving the groups around in a specific order and keeping the groups stable across the session, one could allow that the students choose which sub-theme or table they want to join. In this way new groups are formed continuously. This approach, however, is only advisable when working with older students.

Another option is to ask participants not to speak but write down (or draw) their ideas and points concerning the discussion, they can either write their own or react to the one of a participant. This approach works better in a setting where the students are younger, or not used to open discussions. It can also work better when there are not sufficient students, capable to take on the role of hosts.

Sources:

<https://theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>

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