World café

hart voor projecten

Exercise for a project with broad support: bringing together the ideas of many stakeholders

A world café is an interactive exercise in which small groups exchange ideas about a central theme or question in several rounds, in a relaxed, informal setting. In the initiation phase of a project it is ideal for bringing together the different ideas about a project with a variety of stakeholders, and for making choices about the scope demarcation together.

PURPOSE	Sharing knowledge, coming up with creative solutions, increasing involvement, and focusing and making choices together.
WHEN	In the initiation phase of a project.
WITH WHOM	Groups of four to six people per table, with a good mix of backgrounds and expertise. It helps to have a process facilitator at each table.
WHAT YOU NEED	A room with, for example, four to six tables, each with its own theme or question (or flip charts on the wall that participants can sit near). Large sheets of paper or tablecloths, markers, sticky notes, pens and a timer.

HOW TO GO ABOUT IT

Preparation

Describe the core of the project in a few sentences. It works well to phrase it as a question: How can we …? For each table, put one or more components of the project definition on a large sheet, with questions. This layout often works well:

TABLE	QUESTIONS
1. Challenge and impetus	Which problems do we want to solve with this project? What do we hope to achieve? What makes it urgent? Is there a hard deadline?
2. Objectives, results and scope demarcation	What do we want to achieve? Which concrete results (products) and subdeliverables must the project deliver? How do objectives and results relate? Which results might you expect, but are (for now) not included?
3. Users and subdeliverables	Who are our target groups? For whom is each result made? Are more results needed for these users?
4. Constraints: time, money and quality	What is the deadline? How much money is needed, including staff time (hours)? What minimum requirements do we set for the results?

The rounds

Each round takes about ten to fifteen minutes. Give the first round the most time; after that you can shorten the rounds a little.

1. **Round 1.** Participants discuss the theme at their table and write their ideas, insights and questions on the tablecloth or sheet.
2. **Round 2.** Participants move on to another table. The host briefly summarises the previous discussion; the new group builds on it.

3. **Rounds 3 and 4.** Repeat this.
4. **Round 5 (optional).** Participants return to their first table, read the summary of all the discussions and add to it if needed.

Sharing results and making choices

1. **Share the results.** After the last round, the whole group comes together again. The host of each table shares the main insights, ideas and action points, with a short presentation or by hanging up the tablecloths. It then becomes clear where views still differ a lot and where there is already agreement. Sometimes that is enough to close; then agree who decides on the differences and how the participants will hear about it.
2. **Let the group give direction.** It is often useful if the participants themselves give direction on the points where views differ a lot:

   Voting. Give everyone three round stickers to divide over the different proposals.

   Crossing the line. Let someone make a proposal to settle the differences and let the group cross the line. Ask those who stay behind what they need to come along, and have a new proposal formulated on that basis.

TIPS

- Create a relaxed atmosphere, with music, light snacks and drinks.
- Mix the groups: redistribute them after every round.
- Use large sheets, colourful markers and sticky notes.
- Involve everyone: encourage quieter participants and make sure everyone has something to write with.
- Keep an eye on the time with a timer.

NOTES

The world café exercise was devised by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (theworldcafe.com). This adaptation for projects is by Hart voor Projecten.