



The World Café

PURPOSE The World Café is a conversational process that generates new ideas and explores action possibilities around real-life issues and questions.

DESCRIPTION The World Café engages people in conversations around questions that matter in their organizations or communities. It is a simple yet powerful methodology for accessing the collective intelligence of any group. Participants share their ideas and hear the ideas of others through rounds of purposeful conversations that create shared meaning and shape individual and collective behavior. Café conversations “draw on the quintessential processes by which people around the world naturally think together, create shared meaning, strengthen community, and ignite innovation.” (J. Brown et.al. *The Change Handbook* p. 181)

The World Café involves as few as a dozen or many more participants. Conversations can range from about one hour to several days and even longer depending on the issues and questions being explored.

PREPARATION Before facilitating a World Café, make sure you have carefully considered the following questions:

- What is the purpose for engaging in this conversation?
- How will we make the space welcoming and physically comfortable?
- Have we chosen a focus question that is clear, connected to purpose, and meaningful to participants?
- Will the focus question evoke a sense of possibility rather than constrain participants’ ideas?
- How will we ensure full participation and diverse perspectives?

INSTRUCTIONS

<p><i>Step 1: Organize people in small groups</i> Groups typically include 4-6 people who gather around a small table.</p>	<p>sibility engage participants in ways that uncover new insights and spark innovation.</p>
<p><i>Step 2. Select a host</i> Each group picks a host who agrees to remain at the table throughout the rounds of conversation and to introduce new arrivals to the conversation that is unfolding.</p>	<p><i>Step 4. Hold the first round of conversation</i> Multiple conversations occur simultaneously around the same question or other questions related to issue at hand. As they talk, participants write down key ideas or images on chart paper placed at each table. Each round of conversation lasts twenty to thirty minutes.</p>
<p><i>Step 3. Introduce the focus question</i> Questions that are clear, connected to purpose, meaningful to participants in practical ways, and evoke a sense of pos-</p>	<p>[continued on next page]</p>

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INSTRUCTIONS *continued*

Step 5. Hold successive rounds of conversation

Participants are invited to change tables and join conversation groups with new members. The host remains at each table and shares with new arrivals an overview (images, insights and questions) from the prior round of conversation. As the conversation continues, encourage participants to look and listen for patterns, insights, and deeper questions. The World Café typically involves three rounds of conversation.

Step 6. Harvest the dialogue

Participants return to their first conversation groups. The process is concluded with a whole group dialogue about the café process and what emerged from the table conversations. Observations, ideas and action possibilities are charted and made visible to all participants.

APPLICATIONS

We have used The World Café for setting in motion and sustaining large organizational changes such as helping stakeholders find shared meaning and purpose in the mission of school district. We have also used the process for more focused tasks such as generating potential probes for a school district's baseline assessment of literacy assets and determining possibilities for gathering data from multiple stakeholder groups. Regardless of the scope of the conversation and number of participants, The World Café is a powerful tool for organizational learning and change.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Internet

For more information about The World Café process and its many applications worldwide, visit www.theworldcafe.com

References

Brown, J., et al. "The World Café" in *The Change Handbook: The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems* by Holman, P, et al. eds. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2007

Brown, J., D. Isaacs, and the World Café Community. *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005