

Who can change things?

Opportunities for action and influence on different levels

Overview

In this method, participants seek to imagine how change can be effected, who exerts influence and in what way, and what opportunities and obstacles are in place. The aim is to highlight the complexity of change, but also to motivate active participation in it.

To this end, the participants map out a “landscape of actors” in the room. They assume the perspective of important actors who contribute to social change in the context of national states on different levels. They examine opportunities for action and influence on and between these levels and discuss the power relationships which govern them.

Instructions





Preparation

Facilitators mark out four circles on the floor with adhesive tape representing the social levels “Individual” (large circle in the middle), “Politics”, “Companies” and “Civil Society” (smaller circles surrounding it). Moderation cards and prepared paper arrows are laid out.

Instructions

Participants sit on chairs surrounding this diagram. The method is now explained to the participants. It is important to highlight that for the time being, the activity is only about ‘here’ (e.g. UK, Europe) and ‘now’.

1. If permitted by the room size, all participants stand in the large circle labelled “Individual”. The facilitators explain that the activity begins with the individual, e.g. all of us: we live together in a society in which we can assume different roles which we can shape together. For example, we can contribute to change both as private individuals (employees, consumers, voters...), but also as businesspeople, politicians or activists in civil society.

	8-25
	60 minutes
	Markers, coloured moderation cards, paper for arrows
	Participants should already have had some contact with basic criticism of our current economic system and with arguments for social and ecological change. A very large seminar room with space in the middle is needed.

The participants are then invited to choose one of the four levels of action to explore its potential for effecting change. To this end, they either move to the corresponding outer circle or remain in the inner circle if they prefer to explore the individual approach. It is helpful for the groups to be of similar size.

2. In small groups, the participants now discuss the first question displayed on the wall: “What options are available to you/people in this field of action if you want to change something?”
The question can encompass the following aspects: What approach is taken by the actors in question? What do they do as politicians/businesspeople/etc. to change something on a small or a large scale in their field? Depending on the group’s capacity for abstraction, the question can be divided into a) basic forms of action and b) concrete examples.
Participants receive moderation cards on which to write their answers in summarised form. (time limit: approx. 10 min.)

3. The participants then discuss the second question, which is also displayed on the wall: “From your field of action, how can you influence the other actors?”.
For this question, the facilitators distribute the prepared paper arrows. The participants consider how their field of action can exert influence on the others to promote social change. The answers are written on the paper arrows as keywords (time limit: approx. 15 min.).
 4. Participants return to the circle of chairs. The diagram on the floor is now filled in two phases. First, the group which worked at the individual level presents the possibilities for action written on its moderation cards and places them in the circle, followed by the other groups. Comprehension questions can be answered after each group has presented its findings. Once all the cards have been placed in the circles, everyone has an opportunity to add further possibilities for action. In the second phase, the groups present their influence arrows and position them in the diagram.
- › Are the “interests” of nature/the environment represented and taken into account, and if so where? How powerful are these interests? Are the interests of people in the Global South represented and taken into account, and if so where? How powerful are these interests?

Evaluation

Evaluation can focus on the following questions:

- › Are any actors missing? What about churches, science, media, unions, etc.? Can these be included in any of the four levels?
- › How great do you consider the potential for change of each of the various actors to be? What are the crucial requirements for change?
- › How easy or difficult is it to become a part of the different areas, i.e. to be active in civil society as a politician, businessperson, etc.? How could this be made easier?
- › How easy or difficult do you think it is to change something oneself within the different areas? Who holds the power to make decisions in the different areas? Where do you see obstacles or interests that hinder change?
- › What would have to be different to make it easier to implement change in the various fields? Which forms of influence should in your opinion be reinforced, and which should be removed?
- › Where do you see opportunities to form effective alliances between actors? What such alliances are you currently aware of?

Variations	Alternatively, the “landscape of actors” diagram can be portrayed on a metaplan board or whiteboard. The participants then discuss the various aspects in small groups and add their findings to the diagram on moderation cards. Depending on the group, the method can also be applied to regional or global systems.
Tips for facilitators	It is important to emphasise that in the group stage, participants should think from the perspective of the respective actors. It is possible that the participants will experience some difficulty in abstracting themselves from their own situation. The video “The story of Change” (http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-change/) is recommended to facilitators as preparation for the activity. Alternatively, the video can be watched with the participants as an introduction or follow-up to the method. We recommend the following article by Ulrich Brand as preparatory reading (in German): “Gesucht: Ein neues globales Wohlstandsmodell - Sozial-ökologische Transformation braucht progressive Strategien und breite Bündnisse” (“Wanted: a new global model of well-being - social and ecological transformation requires progressive strategies and broad alliances”, http://www.ipg-journal.de/rubriken/nachhaltigkeit-energie-und-klimapolitik/artikel/gesucht-ein-neues-globales-wohlstandsmodell-359/ , last accessed: 13.6.2014)