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Tips for Trainers: card sorting on the ground

• Introduction

Writing on cards and sorting them into lists, categories and relationships is becoming a common method in participatory training, workshops and practical analysis. It allows all participants (providing they can write) to share their ideas and wishes, usually anonymously, with others.

In the classic traditions, a facilitator arranges the cards on a wall or board, asking for suggestion and comments from the group. Often the facilitator stands while the others sit. This can be slow and tedious and the facilitator may 'facipulate' the process.

Instead, facilitators are now increasingly using the ground, finding it quicker, more fun and more democratic.

• Objectives

To enable all participants to express and share their ideas or wishes - for example, for a workshop agenda, questions to be asked, recommendations for action, principles to be followed, words to describe relationships... and to group these.

• Preparation

Have enough cards or pieces of paper (A4 torn in two is a good size) and marker pens (not pens which write small). A few larger cards of a different colour can also be useful.

Ensure that there is enough ground space big enough for the cards and for sorters.

• Time

5 minutes for preliminaries and then 5-20 minutes for writing individual cards, and 5-20

minutes for sorting, giving a total of 15-45 minutes, depending on topic and numbers of people.

• Procedure

- Clarify the purpose and procedure (paired or small group discussions can help thinking before writing);
- Invite all individually or in small groups to write down on the cards with a separate card for each idea/question/wish etc.;
- Cards are thrown down on a large open space with plenty of room;
- All take part in sorting and grouping the cards on the ground. More cards can be added;
- As cards are grouped, write the title for each grouping boldly on a different sort of card. Put these cards down as markers;
- Invite checking and changes; and,
- Stick the results up on a wall for all to see.



• Comments

This method encourages the democracy of the ground. The process is non-threatening, encourages all to take part and gives joint ownership of the outcome. It can be fast. Those who care most can have their 'say' even

if they normally say little. It is a good icebreaker at the start of a workshop as a means to setting the agenda.

If very many people (say over 50), or very many cards (say over 120) are involved, it may be best for a few participants to sort them while the rest continue with something else.

Beware of cards written early in a process being given too much importance later on when the thinking has moved on. Deletions and rewriting may be advisable.

• **Variant**

To promote discussion and move towards consensus, participants can walk around and turn over, or put a sticker on, any card they disagree with or think should be reviewed. These can then be displayed and discussed one by one. The other cards can be taken as agreed. (This method was used in May 1994 in the process which led to 'Sharing Our Concerns and Looking to the Future'. *PLA Notes 22*, pp 5-10).

Source: Robert Chambers, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.