

The Power of Representation

Alternative tool name: Active Listening

Tool Profile

Approximate time needed:
15-20'

Adaptable to online? (y/n):
Possible but not recommended

Context and Purpose

Background literature:

Arias-Arévalo, P., E. Lazos-Chavero, A.S. Monroy-Sais, S.H. Nelson, A. Pawlowska-Mainville, A. Vatn, M. Cantú-Fernández, R. Murali, B. Muraca, & U. Pascual. 2023. The Role of Power in Leveraging the Diverse Values of Nature for Transformative Change. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 64. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2023.101352>

McIntosh, P. 1989. White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack. The National SEED Project - Wellesley Centers for Women. Wellesley College. Pdf available at: <https://admin.artsci.washington.edu/sites/adming/files/unpacking-invisible-knapsack.pdf>

Forms of power addressed:
Structural power

Tool aim:

This tool aims to assist with reflecting on how (non)representation in society conveys subtle messages about whose/ which perspectives are valued, and how this in turn affects our possibilities to contribute to a shared future.

Materials and Setup

Materials needed:
tool instructions & statements (printouts), timer, bell/ sound

Instructions for facilitators:

Important! Please consider the following remarks before beginning with the exercise:

- **Combine it with other tools from our toolbox:** If team is already familiar with each other, they can start with **The Power of Truth** tool. If the team is new, they should start with an icebreaker/personal introduction exercise. For this, we suggest participants fill out the **Manual of Me** and then have a “speed dating” round based on the Manual of Me prompts of their choice.
- **It's personal:** This tool addresses personal questions, and it might feel uncomfortable for participants to share/hear thoughts about their/others' identity (representations). Participants **sharing** their own reflections should be made aware that they are **not** required to disclose anything personal or sensitive that does not feel right for them to share. On the other hand, to achieve

transformative learning, it is key for learners (listeners) to move out of the comfort zone and experience discomfort (“liminal state”). For this reason, *listening* participants are encouraged to (within individual limits) embrace feelings of discomfort resulting from this exercise.

- **Alternative settings:** It is helpful to carry out this exercise in a calm atmosphere. For this, participants may want to leave the room and find a quiet space. However, if they do so, organizers should be aware that they may struggle to follow the instructions as designed.

- **Active listening in pairs (15').**

Note: Remind participants that when the bell rings = change of task.

- **Step 1.** Form pairs and decide which person will be “A” and which “B”.
- **Step 2. (3'):** “A” reflects on one of their statements to person “B”. Say whatever comes to mind with respect to the statement. During this time, “B” may not speak and must focus on listening and understanding.

facilitator rings bell after 3' (sign to change)

- **Step 3. (2'):** “B” must repeat what they heard back to “A”.

facilitator rings bell after 2' (sign to change)

- **Step 4. (1'):** “A” can clarify or expand on what “B” shared.

facilitator rings bell after 1' (sign to change)

- **Step 5: Perform the task again (Steps 2-4) with roles reversed.**

Instructions for participants:

Instructions

Note: bell ringing = change of task

- **Step 1.** Form pairs and decide which person will be “A” and which “B”.
- **Step 2. (3'):** “A” then reflects on one of their statements to person “B” for three minutes. Say whatever comes to mind with respect to the statement. During this time, “B” may not speak and must focus on listening and understanding.
- **Step 3. (2'):** After three minutes, “B” must repeat what they heard back to “A” for two minutes.
- **Step 4. (1'):** Afterwards, “A” can clarify or expand on what “B” shared.
- **Step 5: Perform the task again (Steps 2-4) with roles reversed.**

Person A: Identity reflections

- I have always seen myself, or people like me, represented in my government, in popular media, and in positions of power in my occupation.
- Growing up, I was always surrounded by things made by people like me, about people like me, and for people like me, wherever I went.

Person B: Knowledge reflection

- I can be assured that my knowledge/discipline will be valued and respected in most of my professional interactions.

Additional Resources

Further reading:

Förster, R., A. Zimmermann & C. Mader. 2019. Transformative teaching in Higher Education for Sustainable Development: facing the challenges. *GAIA - Ecological Perspectives on Science and Society*. 28. 324-326. <https://doi.org/10.14512/gaia.28.3.18>

Tool origin story:

This tool is inspired by Peggy McIntosh's *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. With the idea to address structural power and its impact on social identities, hegemony, and knowledge systems, we built on Peggy McIntosh's privilege statements for personal reflections. This exercise has then been combined with an active listening approach that places participants in pairs, where one person speaks about their lived experiences related to representation and knowledge validation, while the other listens attentively without interruption. The listener then repeats what they heard, ensuring that they accurately understand and acknowledge the speaker's perspective.