

Fishbowl

Goal

The fishbowl can be used in order to discuss and issue and to conclude about it; also it is useful in case the organiser of a meeting/conference/seminar/workshop wishes to start a dialogue (which is different from a discussion/debate with conclusions).

Method

Three to five chairs are arranged in an inner circle. This is the fishbowl. The remaining chairs are arranged in a concentric circle outside the fishbowl. A few participants either volunteer or are selected to fill the fishbowl, while the rest of the group sit on the chairs outside the fishbowl.

The facilitator introduces the topic (oral, flip chart, ppt) and the participants start discussing the topic. The audience outside the fishbowl listen in on the discussion *but do not speak!* But any member of the audience (outer circle) can, at any time, join the fishbowl. When this happens, an existing member of the fishbowl is tapped on the shoulder and must leave the inner circle. The discussion continues with participants frequently entering and leaving the fishbowl. Depending on how large your audience is you can have many audience members spend some time in the fishbowl and take part in the discussion. When time runs out, the fishbowl is closed and the moderator summarizes the discussion.

This continues until a number of the audience members have spent some time in the fishbowl. Once the final group has concluded, the facilitator closes the fishbowl and summarizes the discussion.

Advantages

1. An advantage of a fishbowl conversation is that it is suitable for large groups.
2. Another advantage is that they do not make any distinction between the speakers and the audience.
3. And this is a method which guides itself.

Attention

1. The facilitator is not a chairperson of the discussion
2. Therefore, the fishbowl participants talk to each other and not to the facilitator
3. Speak loudly, the audience around should also hear what you say!
4. Do not make this discussion your personal show about how good you are working but make it a real discussion/dialogue
5. Avoid monologues of 'eloquent' participants in the inner circle
6. Come up with concrete suggestions about how to proceed.