

About this Tool

This tool will help you to:

- Anticipate challenges a new initiative might face.
- Understand why an existing initiative has stalled.
- Make sense of conflict that's occurring in/around the initiative.

Context

This Tool can be used in these phases of the Collaborative Change Cycle:

- ✓ The Readiness Runway
- ✓ Building the Foundations for Change
- ✓ Creating a Shared Vision for Change
- ✓ Scaling Up for Systems Change
- ✓ Achieving Transformation

And is relevant to building these enabling capabilities:

- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Community
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Measurement

TOOL

How to Explore an Adaptive Problem

We want to
explore and understand
a problem in our community.

Effort Level

Variable – Depending on Group Size

Developed by CFI, based on the adaptive leadership body of knowledge.
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How to use this tool

The tool consists of five steps, moving from individual reflection to action planning. It can be used by a single individual (e.g. in a peer coaching session), by a pair (e.g. 2 people wanting to make change in a community, or 2 people involved in an initiative), or by a group of people (e.g. a Leadership Group).

Step One: Explore the Challenge – Individual reflection activity – answer the questions below.

Step Two: Explore Different Perspectives – individual reflection activity – answer the questions below.

Step Three: Test and Refine Your Thinking – pair discussion activity – each partner talks through their answers to Step Two, the partner asks a series of extra questions to support reflection, and then the partner shares any reflections they have based on what they have heard.

Step Four: Sharing insights – if you are working with a large group, bring the whole group back together to share insights.

Step Five: Next steps – identify what extra information you might need, and plan next steps based on the insights gained from completing this activity.

1. Explore the Challenge

Each person participating in the exercise should complete this step on their own.

Briefly describe a problem you are experiencing where your current reality doesn't match up to your hopes or values. You could use this process for a big picture issue (e.g. lack of school readiness among children in your community) or to address a problem in your initiative (e.g. people have stopped coming to meetings or aren't implementing the shared agenda).

1. What is the problem you are trying to solve? Try to be specific. For a deeper dive on understanding simple/complicated/complex or technical/adaptive, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7oz366Xo-8> (The Cynefin Framework).
 - a. What are the technical (simple or complicated) elements of the problem?
(These could include lack of resources, need to skill up the workforce, need to develop practical tools).
 - b. What are the adaptive (complex) elements of the problem?
(These could include power dynamics, different values, competing agendas and priorities).
2. What has already been done to address this issue?
3. What actions have you taken to address this challenge?
4. What are the perspectives of other stakeholders involved in this issue?

(If you need to do a deeper dive into the perspectives of other stakeholders, have a look at the tool Mapping Stakeholder Dynamics).

5. Why does this challenge matter to you?
6. What benefits would it bring to you and/or your organisation or community if progress was made?

2. Explore Different Perspectives

We all have our usual ways of making sense of a problem or opportunity. We call those ‘default interpretations’. Our aim here is to look at the problem or opportunity from different perspectives, to see if that gives us new ideas about how to make progress.

Each person participating in the exercise should complete this step on their own.

Version 1: Default interpretation

- Describe the challenge/opportunity as you normally talk about it with a colleague, friend or community member.
- What is your theory on why you haven’t already resolved this problem?
- What do you think is contributing to the gap between your current reality and your hopes?
- Let’s say you could snap your fingers and the problem would suddenly be solved. What other problems might emerge?

Version 2: An alternate perspective

- Describe the challenge/opportunity as it looks from the perspective of another person involved, preferably someone who sees things differently to how you see them, or someone who is resistant to your ideas about how to move forward.
- When do you notice the resistance or disagreement happening? Are there partial points where you disagree?
- What can you learn from their perspective?

Version 3: How am I part of the problem?

- Describe the challenge in a way that shows how you yourself may be contributing to the problem. It’s important that we can each see how we *might* be contributing to the problem.
- If a security camera was watching you, what would it see you doing?
- What is a more critical (less noble) explanation of what you are doing? How might the person you chose for Version 2 describe what you are doing?

3. Test and Refine Your Thinking

Talking through our perspectives can help refine our thinking. Hearing feedback from others can also shift or further develop our thinking. This step should be completed in pairs.

- Briefly describe the 3 versions to your partner.
- They can ask questions to help you further develop each version.
- After describing the 3 versions, they should ask you the following questions:
 - What did you notice about the 3 versions?
 - What did you learn from that exercise?
 - What is working well in your role?
 - What could you do differently in the future?
- You should then ask your partner to share any observations they have about both the challenge and your role in it.
- When that process is complete, swap roles.

4. Share Insights

If you are completing this as a large group, the whole group should come back together and each pair share insights about what might be happening/might happen in the future, what is working well and what could be done differently in the future.

5. Next Steps

Working in either your pair or the whole group, develop an Action Plan, identifying:

- What extra information do we need (e.g. do we need to get input from some of our stakeholders to better answer these questions)?
- What is currently working well that we should keep doing?
- What might we need to change in our approach?
- What new things/approaches might we need to add?