

Time

45 minutes

Goal or purpose

- To test or illustrate the breadth of opinion within a group.
- To identify what makes an effective action.
- Can be used to test or develop specific proposal for effective nonviolent action that the group can agree on.

How it's done/facilitator's notes

Spectrums are a useful tool for exploring the breadth and depth of opinion within a group, on a wide variety of issues.

Spectrum

Identify a space where group members can place themselves along a line. The two ends of the line represent polar opposites; 'agreement/disagreement', 'I would/I wouldn't'. Present a clear statement or scenario, and ask people to stand in a place on the spectrum that represents how they feel about it. Make it clear that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, just different opinions, and that it is important to listen to each other and try to understand each others' perspectives. Ask participants to explain why they have stood where they are; encourage brief, snappy responses. If the group is large, invite participants to discuss with those near them why they have chosen to stand where they have; this helps everyone to participate and voice their position, even if there isn't time to hear everyone in the full group.

Cross spectrum

A variation on the spectrum is the 'cross spectrum'; effectively, two spectrums on different axes. A good example of how the cross spectrum can be used is by labelling the ends 'violent/nonviolent' and 'effective/not effective', and going through a range of action scenarios; participants have to decide to what degree they think an action is violent/nonviolent, and effective/ineffective.

The facilitator makes a cross (+) on the floor with a ribbon, rope or masking tape, large enough to make a grid that the group can stand on. Write 'nonviolent' and 'violent' on opposite ends of one line, 'effective' and 'not effective' on opposite ends of the other. (Instead of tape, you can simply put the words on paper on the four walls of the room.) The facilitator presents an action scenario, and asks people to stand in a place on the grid that represents how they feel about it (for example, nonviolent but not effective). As above, ask participants to say why they stood where they did.

If the purpose of this exercise is to create an effective nonviolent action for a specific situation, the facilitator and participants should make suggestions that move people towards the nonviolent and effective ends. The facilitator should make a list as people identify what is needed to make the action more effective and nonviolent. (i.e. training for all the participants, good media work, etc.)

- The facilitator should ask questions to get the group thinking deeply – use examples that might be controversial! Useful points to try and draw out of the group might be; whether language or words, environmental damage, or property destruction (such as a ploughshares action, or graffiti) should be thought of as violent.
- Participants might be tempted to immediately move into a discussion after the first person has explained why they have stood where they are. Watch for this - if it happens, ask participants to complete the sentence “I am standing here because...”

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