

Strategic Cooperation

Working together in research & planning

A Flower-Bunch of Methods

Typical problems that may occur in interdisciplinary group work:

- subgroup forming
- communication problems and misunderstandings due to different (scientific) languages/terms
- disagreement on the approach and goals due to different professional cultures and habits
- unstructured working by lack of interdisciplinary communication from the start
- hardening of stereotypes, groupthink and dispute
- questioning the interdisciplinary approach

... plus all the difficulties that can arise in group work anyway.

*Why do we need interdisciplinary cooperation?
gives the answer:
"Problems can never be solved
by the same level of thinking
that created them."*

In the Beginning:

In the beginning of an interdisciplinary project focus on:

- bringing participants together and enhancing communication,
- supporting critical thinking,
- cherishing the different perspectives,
- seeing the underlying „Big Picture“ and the larger contexts of social life,
- reducing stereotypes and distance between subgroups,
- fostering insight in other professions and
- finding a commonly understood language

Method 1 - Azimov's Story:

Life in the future is different. You don't have to learn, you are selected for a special job, you get the upload of all required information right into your brain, and you can start working. Some selected individuals do not get any upload. They have to study, read, work hard for their education and development. Why this? There has to be someone gaining new knowledge and designing the uploads!

The story explains the importance to reflect critically about learned and supposedly "set" contents, and of involving other perspectives. It clears the way for change, new ideas and cooperation and makes participants proud to be involved in this process.

Method 2 - The Big Brainstorm:

New land! A new planet has been discovered. The conditions on this planet seem to be very similar to those on earth, but it is completely inanimate. Build science teams and define the steps necessary to make life possible like it is on earth. What information do you need?

The game lets small groups come together and promotes contact and communication, especially if disciplines already mix. It gives them a first little goal, that is to run through a thought from beginning to end, and then to present the findings. By their own reflection participants recognize the larger contexts of social life, the importance of different professions, the necessity for exchange between science and practice, and the central role of interdisciplinary cooperation. The awareness arises (or can be mediated) that all action is directed towards a common goal, that is creating and providing good conditions for humans and life itself.

Method 3 - Stereotypes!:

What stereotypes are there concerning your own profession / group?

The different subgroups report the stereotypes that exist towards their own group. This shows firstly that the stereotypes, that are usually exchanged behind closed doors, are well known, secondly, that the members of the group have a giggle on them and thirdly, that they are willing to reflect on them.

The knowledge of these "own stereotypes" is a first step to taking distance towards them. This for example allows participants to identify some „group-behavior“ as an undesirable part of an unwritten code of conduct, and restrict or divest themselves of it. (Some stereotypes may also be positive, so keep them!)

The consequence is also a willingness to approximation, because people rather want to be perceived more as an individual than as part of a group about whose negative behaviors participants just laughed together. The naming of stereotypes openly in the group reduces the distance between subgroups.

Method 4 - The strangers Eye:

Different images are shown. Each one carries content that is strongly linked to the knowledge of the individual subgroups. Let these contents, which are thought to be self-evident by one group, explain by the other group. Afterwards the 'knowing' explain the contents and realize their difficulties in explaining familiar things to another group in 'simple terms'. Alternate or rotate topics, so that no one appears ignorant.

Participants recognize that their own knowledge is not self-evident, that they themselves have knowledge gaps in respect of the other profession, and that misunderstandings are therefore likely to appear.

In the Middle Section:

In the central part focus on:

- anticipating and reducing problems evolving from group-work
- strengthening trust and cooperation
- widening horizons
- concretizing the task
- reducing inner distance to the task
- opening up space for visions and dreams
- including needs, diversity and time as important dimension

Method 5 - The Spiral:

Difficulties in the course of group work are common and normal. To prepare the participants, offer information and discuss the typical problems that can arise.

Participants learn about ways to deal with such problems and discuss possible solutions. This enhances the handling of problems and reduces them or even hinders them to come up.

Method 6 - Meeting the Genie:

You are walking through the planning area, suddenly you find an old bottle. You swipe it off to read the label, there appears the genie of the bottle! She promises to realize all your wishes concerning the task right here and now. What would you answer to the genie in respect of the given task, if wishes would be realized immediately? What would you wish, if it was concerning yourself and your personal situation? (Example: Planning a new district: What if you and your family were to live here?)

The hitherto abstract look at the problem is concretized in an almost painful manner. The inner distance to the topic that often does not affect participants directly is recognized and reflected. A mixture of fantastic vision and wildest dreams with the promise of immediate implementation releases creativity and provides new ideas. The idea that one's own desires are fundamentally different from those of other people is challenged, the scale of individuality is put into question. The personal and specific view changes the perspective from the expert to the person concerned.

Method 7 - The Prescription Glasses - physical interaction:

Participants receive a number of glasses, that imitate different kinds of visual disabilities. (There are multiple other interventions possible! Just choose one adequate to the task.)

A physical "putting oneself in the position of others," a physically tangible change to another situation shows the participants how widely their own perception is influenced by small changes. This shows the restrictedness of our own perception!

In addition, there is the opportunity for participants to interact physically (in this case by guiding the „visually restricted person“ by the non restricted person), which builds trust and usually is fun. Participants are often pleased by the interruption of the routine of sitting and listening.

Method 8 - Needs across Lifespan:

What needs do children, teenagers, young adults, middle-aged, elderly, women, men, people with disabilities have? Different fictitious stakeholders should 'have their say', different needs should be articulated. Try to name those needs and assign them to the different phases. Which ones are central, which can be grouped?

Participants recognize that they are experts of their current stage of life, hardly remembering the passed ones and knowing very little about the ones to come or those that can not be experienced. The importance of keeping the different needs in mind and including time and diversity as crucial dimensions in the task is mediated.

Towards the End:

Towards the end of an interdisciplinary project focus on:

- thoroughly understanding the findings and conclusions
- defining, describing, presenting
- realizing responsibility
- getting in contact with external evaluation
- recapitulation of the process
- appreciation, celebration and farewell

Method 9 - Science Slam:

Build small groups, focus on the main contents and transfer them into another dimension of mediation, such as theater, film, music, poetry. (Presentation with external audience.)

Event with high information density and fun factor!
Participants gain deeper understanding of their own findings by transforming them into another medium and the conscious anticipation of listeners from other disciplines and laymen.

Method 10 - Flashlights:

What is important to us? What do we learn from the process? Reflect and evaluate the entire work process. What are the cornerstones in your own learning process? Where there difficulties, what could be done better? What are we proud of?

Participants reflect the whole project and their own learning process. They sum up and take over a more distanced point of view. In this discussion, participants learn about their own and the others' opinions and insights.

Method 11 - Exhibition / Public Event:

Describe the working process, define main statements and findings and transform them into a universal language. Try to address the perspective of practitioners and laymen. Use images, graphics, text, enhance communication on various levels.

An exhibition or public event acts as a common goal, all participants work together towards it. They get in touch with the public, experiencing the reactions of the population. By representing the results, participants take over responsibility for the group's recommendations.

Method 12 - Closing party:

Let's have a party!

A physical and clearly defined end of the working process. Appreciate the joint effort and celebrate. View results, praise, be proud, laugh and enjoy, say goodbye.