

SEVEN PRINCIPLES

Applying the World Cafe method to solve workplace problems



**NORASYIKIN
SHAIKH
IBRAHIM**

EVERY day we encounter problems that need to be resolved. Some say it is how you perceive the problems, some just think and think very hard — just to make it disappear!

Typical solving method in a workplace can sometimes be ineffective and boring. Therefore, finding new methods is encouraged by leaders.

The World Café approach that was invented by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs is intended to build a secure, supportive atmosphere that includes participants in many rounds of small-group interaction to deliberately com-

municate viewpoints on a subject.

This method is easy, effective, and scalable model in facilitating large group discussions. It can also be changed to suit a wide range of needs. It can be said that this method is a great way to boost the office environment to become more productive and fun.

Based on works by Molina and Keplinger, the world café method has seven principles to be followed. They are creating a comfortable and accommodating space; analysing important questions; motivating participation from everyone involved; linking different people with different ideas; listening and capturing trends, perspectives and more in-depth questions together; showcasing every collected knowledge; and, sharing findings that have been collected.

First, a group of colleagues or stakeholders will sit on a table of four or more (one as a host and the rest as ambassadors). Each table will then be equipped with

large papers and pens.

Once everyone is ready, discussions will start. Feel free to ask any questions and write down all relevant points on the paper clearly. The reason for arranging a small number of seats is because it is easier to hear everyone's opinions comfortably in a smaller group.

Everyone is welcome to participate. The discussion is set for 20 minutes and once the timer goes off, only the ambassadors will move to a new table and work on the assigned topic on that table for another round of 20 minutes. Repeat this process until the ambassadors have gone to all tables in the room.

When your colleagues move around tables, more notes will be written down and as a result, common ideas and patterns will emerge. Once the process is complete, everyone will then gather and with their notes from all tables pasted on to the wall, new discussion shall be initiated and eventually synthesis of new dis-

covery in finding the solution to the problem.

The approach was used to facilitate discussion among 61 staff members (of different grades) from 11 Academic and National Library Training Cooperative (ANLTC) libraries.

With the theme "New Spaces and New Models for Frontline Services", each participant was asked to write, draw and doodle their ideas regarding the changes of the frontline desk.

New emerging themes were observed, such as a need for customer care in the context of new users. This helped the staff of ANLTC libraries to improve and overcome the challenges of front desk services.

Again, the World Café method will push all boundaries to help your working environment be more successful.

The method is a simple, yet compelling way to approach a problem because it allows groups of all sizes to engage in constructive dialogue.

From the examples given, this method promotes collaborative learning from many perspectives. Therefore, this technique is suitable for creating an improved working environment.

Malaysia has always participated in World Cafés on pharmacy community services, which aims to foster Good Pharmacy Practice (GPP) around the world.

This participatory approach is always backed by a very supportive environment of contributing ideas and engagement among all participants.

In Intan, this method has been used in training trainers as part of capacity-building for lecturers. In conclusion, although it might take slightly more time, but this method is useful in creating a more effective and productive work environment.

syikinibrahim@intanbk.intan.my

The writer is senior training consultant, Clustre Innovation, National Institute of Public Administration (Intan)