

Activity 4.3 Understanding Perspectives on a Continuum¹

Description

This exercise makes visible a range of views on an issue as well as how hard it is to take on the view of someone else. It can also help participants become aware of how strongly held views can lead them to be dismissive of the views of others.

Learning Goals

- Help to identify how we read the world through views which exist on a continuum and not as a binary.
- Practice understanding what it might mean to take on the view of someone else.

Practice (70 minutes)

Step One	<p>As a group, all participants stand in a long line, side-by-side, i.e. on a continuum, with the rest of the participants. One end of the continuum represents position A and the other represents position B.</p> <p>Tip: Before beginning the activity, to make it easier for participants to move around/visualize, use masking tape and paper signs to mark a letter for each position and lanes on the floor for each place in the continuum (refer to this Continuum Map).</p> <p>On one end of the room/space, draw a large “A” on a piece of paper and tape it onto the floor to represent position A and, on the other end, draw a large “B” on a piece of paper and tape it onto the floor to represent position B.</p> <p>Take 6 sheets of paper, and write “Strongly Agree with A”, “Agree with A”, “Somewhat Agree with A”, “Strongly Agree with B”, “Agree with B”, “Somewhat Agree with B” on each sheet respectively.</p> <p>Tape these sheets of paper down in between the position A and position B signs, so in the end, the sheets mark lanes in the following order: Strongly Agree with A, Agree with A, Somewhat Agree with A, Somewhat Agree with B, Agree with B, Strongly Agree with B</p>	2 min
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¹ **Citation for this activity:** Janice McMillan (2023). Understanding Perspectives on a Continuum. In Hartman, Britt, & Byrd (Eds). *The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/module-4-culturally-responsive-collaboration>

	Use long pieces of masking tape to create a lane for each position.	
Step Two	<p>Statements will be read indicating two very different positions on one topic, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you A) rather eat a burger OR B) eat a veggie wrap for lunch? • A) Development is about the alleviation of poverty OR B) Development is about the increasing of people's capabilities • A) Freedom means having choices OR B) Freedom means being left alone to do as you like <p>As each statement is read, participants take a moment to think about where they want to stand and then move along the line to indicate their feelings about it. Standing at the ends indicates having the strongest feeling, standing closer to the middle indicates that they still agree with the position but feel less strongly about it. Try not to stand directly in the middle i.e. have no view or claim they are neutral on a topic.</p> <p>Participants will not be justifying their positions just yet - rather, they are encouraged to remember their thoughts about the statements for the next step of the activity.</p> <p>Tip: Often one can start with fun statements and work towards more serious ones. Also, it is useful to think about statements that link to the topic of the group gathering. This first round might include approximately 5 choices.</p>	10 min
Step Three	<p>The next set of statements should be tailored to the area of concern for the group. For example, take the topic of "development."</p> <p><i>Read the statement, think about your opinion, and move to that end of the continuum:</i></p> <p>If you were the head of the United Nations, would you A) prioritize projects focused on the provision of medicines, OR B) prioritize the education of young girls and boys?</p>	3 min
Step Four	<p>With the rest of the participants standing in the group on the continuum, <i>discuss with each other</i> why you are standing where you are. Even though you are all standing in the same place, you might be there for very different reasons.</p>	10 min
Step Five	<p><i>Share back to the full group</i>, switching back and forth from one end of the continuum to the other as opinions and responses are shared.</p>	10 min
Step Six	<p>If participants feel swayed by an argument on the opposite side from where they are standing, switch positions. For those who switch, offer a brief explanation of what persuaded them to move on the continuum.</p>	2 min
Step Seven	<p>Repeat the activity with another statement, for example:</p> <p>If you were a starving and politically oppressed citizen, would you rather be given food daily or the right to vote?</p>	3 min

	<i>Move to the end of the continuum that you feel strongest about.</i>	
Step Eight	<p>This time as you discuss with your new group, <i>develop an argument for the opposing view.</i></p> <p>Wow. That's right. It's a surprise twist in the instruction. What are folks on the other end of the spectrum thinking? What argument would they put forth to explain why they are on this end of the spectrum. You will have to think from their perspective. Put forth the strongest argument for the opposing view.</p>	10 min
Step Nine	<p><i>Share these perspective-taking arguments back to the full group,</i> taking turns between the opposing groups. As you hear what is shared, feel free to move if you feel swayed by the other's argument.</p> <p>Tip: Make sure your group takes your discussion far enough to come to a firm conclusion about what you believe. Clarity-seeking questions and examples can aid in this.</p>	10 min
Step Ten	<p><i>Debrief.</i> As a large group, share your thoughts on the following questions (relevant to the topical area of discussion):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it easy to say what development is and what it isn't? Why? • When thinking about what should be prioritized in terms of development, what factors influenced your decisions in the last two activities? • Do you think big development organizations or states consider the same factors? What other factors might they take into consideration? 	10 min

Reflection Assignment

- How did you experience taking a point of view and being asked to articulate it versus another view? Think about not just your thought process, but what you felt as well?
- If you changed your view, what did you take into account in making the change?
- What is important to think about in terms of having strong views on issues of importance? And in the context of collaborative discussions?

Practice Journal

This week, think about an issue that you feel strongly about. Write the strongest argument you can for the opposing perspective. Do this in good faith. Try your best to understand and defend the opposing perspective. After writing this up, reflect on what you learned about yourself and the other perspective.

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [Ernesto Sirolli's TED Talk](#)