

Activity 3.6 Anticipating Implications and (Un)Intended Consequences

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Description

This activity offers discussion strategies for groups to use when discussing possible actions and they want to anticipate, assess, evaluate, and prepare for the possibility of unintended consequences.

Learning Goals

- Analyze actions being considered and identify possible consequences in advance of implementing the actions.
- Develop plans for dealing with the possibility of unintended consequences.

Instructions (60 minutes)

<p>Set Up</p>	<p>Prepare for the Activity</p> <p>Select a scenario from the collection of What IF...Scenarios or create your own based on a topic that is relevant for your group.</p> <p>Organize participants into small groups (4-6 ppl).</p> <p>Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.</p>	
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¹ **Citation for this activity:** Jack Byrd (2023). Anticipating Implications and (Un)Intended Consequences. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-3>

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<p>Step One</p>	<p>Generate Unintended Consequences</p> <p>In small groups, ask participants to read through the selected scenario such as the sample scenario below.</p> <p>Sample Scenario: City of Greenmont</p> <p>The City of Greenmont was devastated by a major flood. All of the riverfront was destroyed. The city leaders decided that the need to rebuild the riverfront was an opportunity to upgrade the appearance of the city. Building codes were upgraded. Design standards were created. The Building Commission added aesthetics to one of its decision criteria for approval of new construction or major renovations. A public/private partnership was created to rebuild the city's riverfront. The project was a huge success and became a showcase for how the city could transform its appearance. This led to further changes in the city. Older buildings were condemned and replaced with structures that met the new codes, building standards, and aesthetics.</p> <p>Ask each group to create a bulleted list of all the possible outcomes of the actions described in the scenario being implemented. Remind them to not critique or discuss the list. Instruct them to quickly generate a broad list of possible concerns that come to mind.</p>	<p>10 min</p>
<p>Step Two</p>	<p>Dive Deeper</p> <p>When the groups slow down, ask them to review their lists and combine any common themes.</p> <p>Next, ask them to dive deeper by adding specific prompts to expand their thinking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Level of analysis. What are the possible ramifications at the individual level? Local? Regional? National? Global? ● Time. What are some short term consequences? Long term (50 years)? Multigenerational? ● Stakeholders. Who or what is directly affected by this policy? Who is a non-obvious or less direct stakeholder? Who is an influencer? Decision-maker? ● Environment. What are the environmental costs of this policy? What impact might it have on nature? <p>Facilitator Tip: If the group is having difficulty generating ideas, encourage them to use the Surrounding the Topic Diagram to think of all the different areas that are affected by or affect this issue. Encourage them to think of unlikely dimensions beyond those already shown on the diagram and the possible consequences related to these dimensions.</p>	<p>10 min</p>

<p>Step Three</p>	<p>Assess the Likelihood of Unintended Consequences</p> <p>Ask each individual in the small groups to silently assess the likelihood of each possibility. Use the following rating scale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe this unanticipated consequence is very likely to occur (5 points) • I believe this unanticipated consequence could occur, but it's not very likely that it will (3 points) • I don't believe this unanticipated consequence will occur (0 point) <p>Once each possibility is scored, instruct each group to add up their individual totals to determine which consequences they think are most likely to occur.</p> <p>Facilitator Tip: Another point to consider is that not all unintended consequences are negative. Some might be positive. So, if time permits, participants can also review the full list of consequences they generated and identify which ones are favorable, unfavorable, or a combination of the two. They can also think about whose interests are served or not by each outcome.</p>	<p>10 min</p>
<p>Step Four</p>	<p>Develop Strategies to Prepare for Possible Consequences</p> <p>Ask each small group to select their top 3 possible consequences and generate a list of possible actions that could be taken to prevent or minimize the impact of the unfavorable consequences among their top 3.</p>	<p>20 min</p>
<p>Step Five</p>	<p>Debrief as a Full Group</p> <p>Invite each small group to share the top most probable consequences from their list and the strategies they developed to address the unfavorable ones. Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are there commonalities? • Which unintended consequences stand out? • When can we anticipate unintended consequences? When is it less likely? 	<p>10 min</p>

Reflection Journal

- Why is it valuable to work through this particular process in small groups? What is lost when thinking through unintended consequences in isolation?
- Take a look at your group. What types of perspectives are missing from the group? Try to imagine how someone or some viewpoint not present in your group might contribute to the discussion? Why is group diversity so important in exercises like these?
- Reflect on the following quote "Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful." –Margaret J. Wheatley

Practice Journal

This week, select a policy idea—maybe a local or national topic. On your own, imagine that this policy is implemented. Generate a list of unintended consequences. Next, engage at least two other people and ask them to imagine unintended consequences of this policy idea. How did the additional insights change the initial list? How did asking others expand your own thinking?

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [Identifying Unintended Consequences](#): Byrd, Jack. “Identifying Unintended Consequences.” *Jack Bryd*, jackbyrd.org/messages/i-identifying-unintended-consequences/. Accessed 5 Sep. 2023.

Activity Cluster

[3.5 Seeking Divergent Thinking
\(Surround the Topic\)](#)

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(Un)Intended Consequences