

My own role in a social change situation

Purpose: a structured active listening exercise to analyse and affirm our existing contribution to social change. Good to use alongside sessions that explore the theory of change. You could do this using the concentric circle method as described below, or simply divide the group into pairs.

Time: 30 minutes

Preparation: clear a space to allow an inner and outer circle of chairs, each circle for half the number in the group. Alternatively, you or the group might prefer to do this exercise standing up. You may want to have something that makes a gentle sound, say a little bell, to mark change times with.

Description of Exercise:

Divide the group in two and ask one group to form the inner circle. Then ask the other group to form an outer circle around them so that everyone has a partner from the other circle. Explain that you will ask some questions and for each one you will give 1 minute for quiet thinking, 1 minute for the outer ring person to speak, then 1 minute for the inner ring partner to speak. Explain that the bell will mark each minute and the person not talking should be actively listening. When the bell goes at the end of the sequence, the outer ring moves round to the next partner for another question.

Ask them to think of a contribution they have made to a social change issue. It could have been a short engagement or a long one, for example signing a petition, years of campaigning, direct action, boycott. Now ask some or all of the following questions:

1. What did I do to support the change?
2. Why did I get engaged/what was touched in me?
3. How did/do I feel about my contribution?
4. In the four strands of change – communication, persuasion, coercion, reconciliation – what was/were my contribution(s)?
5. What level of change was I/we seeking?