

Tool 57: Synthesis

Aim of the tool

To summarise what has been done and achieved in a joint articulation.

When to use it?

Commitment stage, when decisions should be made, and actions need to be agreed upon. At the end of events to mark results and help each other summarise the main issues. However, also during earlier events you might want to summarise what has been so far (see for instance tool 40 Document and Summarize).

What is a Synthesis?

CDI believes that MSP facilitators should be able to apply various participatory short synthesis methods, that allow at the end of an event to summarise what has been done and achieved. Depending on the process and situation (Are people tired at the end of the event? How much time do we have? Can we combine individual and group methods? How will we record what comes out of the synthesis?) they can decide what would be the best tool. Tools for summarising help participants to remember insights and be clear on agreements. There are short quick ones like one-minute elevator pitches, creating a drawing or poster, or choosing a metaphor, to help participants represent what the MSP means to them or how they see their own role.

Again, as with each tool, when needed adapt it to the situation and process. For instance, some cultures have stronger appreciation for more formal procedures at the end, checking also in text on the screen what has been done and what has been agreed upon. In another cultural setting you might better choose for a more informal way and apply a tool with less plenary time.

We only refer here to two short synthesis tools that can be applied at the end of a workshop or other MSP event.

Short participatory tools to make a summary at the end of a MSP event

1. Most significant elements for synthesis¹: Individuals, pairs, quartos, plenary

This is a method to help participants reflect and formulate the synthesis themselves. The process starts individually and ends in plenary with a group discussion. The different steps include:

Step 1: The facilitator asks to reflect on the main points to be included in the synthesis

Step 2: Participants think about their ideas what should be included in the synthesis

Step 3: Then the participants talk with one other person (their neighbour) and together they select one or two points for the synthesis

Step 4: Then they talk with another pair and decide as a group on one or two points

¹ Inspired by Most Significant Change: http://betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/most_significant_change

Step 5: Ask the groups to write down their main points on meta cards and bring to flip chart

Step 6: Main facilitator clusters cards while groups arrive at the flip chart with their cards and writes key words for each heading

Step 7: Briefly discuss in plenary the headings of the clusters and have one or two examples for each cluster.

Material: flipchart, meta cards and markers

An advantage of this tool is that when participants do not know the group so well, they do not have to share their idea with the whole group immediately. Participants first get a chance to think for themselves and thereafter share with a few other people. This increases the sense of safety, and gives them a chance to connect with those people more deeply. A disadvantage is that you need a bit more time for this method because you have several steps and people tend to talk long with each other. Time management!

2. Mapping the main issues of the summary in a mind map

You can make a mind map with the group and visualise it on the screen. Put “SUMMARY” as main heading central and add the branches as participants bring in topics. Ask people to reflect on the learning experience they had and develop a mind map. Check each time if a new branch should be made or if people prefer a sub-branch as part of topic already presented in the Mind Map. You can also make a mind map with follow-up actions they would like to undertake inspired by the learning experience they had.

There is a wealth of software available for mind maps, for example: Mindjet, MindMeister, iMindMap HD, SimpleMind, Mindomo, Mind Mapping, MindMaps Lite, MindMemo, Mind Map Memo, MindBoard, etc. Mind mapping tools are improving as they integrate web-based solutions with tablets and desktop computing platforms. All of these applications offer a free version that let you explore mind mapping.

Material: Laptop with software or tablet with a mind map app (practice beforehand!)

This is a nice and visual way of structuring information, reflecting and brainstorming. Of course it can also be done on a flip chart!

Learn more

CDI has published a manual for facilitators and trainers with guidelines on 25 reflection tools, which can be downloaded for free [here](#).

More tips on how to choose mind-mapping software? Check this list:

www.lifehack.org/articles/technology/15-best-brainstorming-and-mind-mapping-tech-tools-for-every-creative-mind.html