



Using alternative methods to engage the public in debates and investigate public attitudes on biodiversity

Subject This poster presents the results of an innovative effort to adapt for usage and pre-test two “values clarification” methods (that have been originally developed for moral education purposes) in order to engage the public in debates on biodiversity issues and investigate public attitudes on the same topic.

Rationale: Lecturing on how to behave or presenting models to people proved to be less effective than teaching and assisting people to make own choices (Lisievic, 2005, Rath, Harmin and Simon, 1966).

Objectives of a Values Grid session

- to collect information on the positions of participants on biodiversity issues;
- to use the information to engage participants in debates on biodiversity issues relevant for the local community
- to collect information on issues related to biodiversity that were relevant for the community
- to clarify participants’ sets of values related to biodiversity

Objectives of a Values Ranking session

- to collect information on choice patterns of participants in situations where protecting biodiversity should be taken into account
- to use the information to engage participants in debates on biodiversity issues relevant for the local community
- to clarify participants’ sets of values related to biodiversity
- to help participants understand that be at first sight
- to develop communication skills of participants many situations are more complex than they appear to in group situations.

Main steps of the Values grid method

1. Coaching and working documents are provided for participants in order to make some group decisions and prepare for the next stage.
2. Participants work individually as instructed
3. Participants split into discussion groups and debate a topic selected from those decided by the whole group as relevant for biodiversity.

Main steps of the Values Ranking method

1. Coaching and working documents are provided for participants in order to structure the events and prepare for the next stage;
2. Participants rank predefined alternative answers to six questions;
3. Moderator and participants review rankings made by 6-8 participants for each of the six questions;
4. Participants split into discussion groups and discuss rankings and motives underlying individual choices.

Conclusions from testing methods

There are some aspects in which both methods **seem to perform better** than the Focus Group method:

1. Engaging participants in debates with values and attitude clarification and change potential;
2. Reliably and cost effectively collecting research data from participants;
3. Cost effective, less complicated and more reliable training of moderators and assistants for deliberative events;
4. Providing a structured framework for aggregating research data at regional and national level for comparative research.



Values Grid session: Discussing positions

Examples of identified issues in one Values Grid session

- Diminished fish resources (both quantity and species)
- Deforestation
- Illegal hunting and fishing
- Diminished pest control
- Reckless use of polluting chemicals



Values Ranking session: Discussing individual rankings of alternatives

Example of question and alternative answers:

1. Should you have current financial resources and predictable future large income, where would you prefer to buy a house?
 - In the central area of a large city.
 - In the area of a mountain or seaside resort.
 - In an area with little or no pollution, nearby a lake or a forest.

Some tips

When comparing the two alternative methods, it seems that while Values Grid method seems to be **equally effective** with all kinds of participants, the Values Ranking method **seems to work better** with more educated, “expert” participants.

References

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