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**Samoan Circle**

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## Samoan Circle

### Brief Description

From the [Victorian Department of Sustainability and the Environment](#):

"The Samoan circle is a leaderless meeting intended to help negotiations in controversial issues. While there is no 'leader', a professional facilitator can welcome participants and explain the seating arrangements, rules, timelines and the process. As with the [Fishbowl](#) process, the Samoan circle has people seated in a circle within a circle, however only those in the inner circle are allowed to speak. The inner circle should represent all the different viewpoints present, and all others must remain silent. The process offers others a chance to speak only if they join the 'inner circle'."



### History

(if applicable)

### When to use

It is a useful method to promote listening as the outer circle is not allowed to speak, but participants are still free to speak if they move into the inner circle. When participants are tired of a given seating arrangement, the Samoan circle gives a new cohesive vision of the group: everybody sitting in a circle concentrating on the listeners.

For example, I used this method in an office retreat to allow listening by Management to the views of all participants who wished to speak.

### How to use

The facilitator should explain the method very clearly before starting and make sure the outer circle stays quiet.

Discussion topic should be very clear and should lead to a discussion; if not the discussion dries up and nobody wants to move in to talk.

### Tips and Lessons Learnt

- I've found it useful to have a reporting writing up the ideas as they appear so participants have something to look at other than the inner circle. I personally get bored if I don't have a visual to look at.
- I gave very clear instructions of what can be done and not done with working principles. See below
- As facilitator I had prepared a series of 5 questions I wanted the group to discuss. The circle was a bit slow to start but it then worked well with very flawless self-facilitation and replacement of participants in the inner circle.
- Because of time limitation, I gave 10 minutes to each question. We finished with a final topic: 10 minutes for points that had still not been covered by the circle. Participants enjoyed the new layout, I was lucky to have a Samoan colleagues whom I had asked to present the sociocultural context of the Samoan circle in decision making in his home country before we started. He wore national dress to explain this. Participants were changing the inner circle mischievously and were enjoying replacing each other.

- Facilitators should not move within the circles, but outside the outer circle
- No 'clarification' questions from outer circle
- When correctly used with disciplined participants, Samoan circle can run without much input from facilitator(s). When there is nothing much to say, the inner circle is empty ...

Working principles of Samoan circle:

- Outside circle: may NOT talk
- Inner circle: can talk until prompted to retire
- You must enter the inner circle before you talk
- You can enter the inner circle at any time if you want to participate in the discussion
- You can enter the inner circle if you want to stop somebody from talking
- You must finish your point and leave the inner circle when prompted

### Examples & Stories

- [Samoan Circle to discuss knowledge sharing across organizations and networks](#)
- [Samoan Circle to discuss issue between managers of Mexican milling industry with wheat breeders](#)

### Who can tell me more?

- Sophie Treinen (sophie.treinen [at] fao.org)
- Gauri Salokhe (gauri.salokhe [at] fao.org)
- Simone Staiger (sstaiser [at] cgiar.org)
- Petr Kosina (pkosina [at] cgiar.org)

### Related Methods / Tools / Practices

- [Fish Bowl](#)

### Resources

- <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/DSE/wcmn203.nsf/LinkView/CFC5C63CF230313FCA25708800279A6EE8A8160E2DF5E74FCA257091000EDA33> external image moz-screenshot-1.jpg

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Method listening leaderless

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