



Circles of Influence

Brief Description

Circles of Influence is a method of visually representing the influence of those contributing directly and indirectly to a project. The diagram can also be used to represent the relationships of stakeholders (project personnel, target group, funding bodies and other relevant collaborating partners) with each other. Strategies for strengthening the participation of stakeholders who so far only peripherally take part in decision-making processes can be developed on the basis of this depiction. The *Circles of Influence* are based on the *Levels of Participation*. A further advantage of this method is that projects can clarify how decision-making processes unfold and who contributes to which decisions. This allows (for the first time) reflection on the collaboration's current condition (actual state) and how it could look in future (target state).



Prerequisites

- Those in charge of the project are prepared to critically reflect on stakeholder participation.

Scope

- As an instrument to determine the degree of participation of all involved in the various stages of a project (needs assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation)



Process Overview

1. Choosing the topic.
2. Listing relevant stakeholders.
3. Distributing stakeholders in the diagram (actual state).
4. Redistributing stakeholders in the diagram (target state).
5. Planning for the strengthening of participation.

Resources Required

Time:

By using *Circles of Influence*, both the current degree of stakeholder participation as well as ideas for strengthening the participation of those who are so far only peripherally involved can be worked out within an hour.

Personnel:

Workers can apply *Circles of Influence* by themselves. It is, however, more productive to include the perspectives of various stakeholders in the development of the diagram (see *Further Advice* below).

Materials: Two sheets of paper with one *Circles of Influence* diagram on each.

Other Costs: None.

Working Steps

1. Choosing the Topic

The object of the exercise is chosen. For example, a collaborative partnership, an entire service organisation, a department, a specific project or an individual intervention could be considered.

2. Listing Relevant Stakeholders

Which stakeholder combination is important for the success of the health promotion or prevention activity is decided. Over and above target group, funding body and the project or service organisation, other important (potential) cooperating partners may be considered (e.g. politicians, charitable foundations, public authorities, other service organisations etc.). The names of stakeholders are listed, i.e. names of organisations/groups or, where available and also relevant, the names of individuals from these organisations/groups.

3. Distributing Stakeholders in the Diagram (actual state)

The individual stakeholders are placed in the circles of the diagram. Those stakeholders who are indispensable in making decisions about the activity are placed in the innermost circle. The further away stakeholders are from the centre, the weaker is their influence on decision making. The titles and respective descriptions associated with each concentric circle assist in placing stakeholders. This builds up an image representing the actual state of stakeholders' decision-making authority compared to one another.



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4. Redistributing Stakeholders in the Diagram (target state)

The next step consists of visually representing the target state: which stakeholders should be involved in which decision-making processes? A second diagram is developed in this step.

5. Planning for the Strengthening of Participation

The final task is to consider what must happen to move from the actual state to the target state. The primary question is what one can do oneself, or what one's organisation/group can do to achieve the target state.

Please Note:

- *Circles of Influence* has been devised as a method to represent the collaboration among stakeholders from various organisations/groups. It is also conceivable to apply it within an organisation in order to reflect on internal decision-making processes.
- *Circles of Influence* is about representing participation in terms of degrees of decision-making authority. Stakeholders may be very strongly involved in project activities without substantially contributing (or being allowed to be contributing) to important decisions. This is often the case for service users.
- Whether one is already aware of the way decisions are made will at the latest become apparent when distributing stakeholders on the diagram for the first time. Planning, implementing and evaluating projects in the field of health promotion and prevention do not happen as one clearly structured procedure. Who has a say about what, and when, often has to be reconstructed for this exercise. A first important interim outcome may be to reflect upon which formal and informal decision-making processes are running and who influences them. These insights create transparency and as such are a prerequisite for stronger participation: decision-making authority can only be shared when it becomes clear who exercises it in the first place.

Further Advice

- The *Circles of Influence* can also be designed as an interactive group process by using psycho-drama methods. The diagrams of the actual and targeted states are dramatised: the "protagonist" (the person whose work is being depicted) chooses people to represent the various stakeholders. The Circles of Influence are marked on the floor and each "stakeholder" assumes his/her position. The protagonist then instructs each "stakeholder" as to what kind of stance to assume and gives them an appropriate line of text to say to reflect the experience of the real stakeholder being depicted. The dynamics between stakeholders in decision-making processes are acted out in this way in order to gain new insights about them.
- Individual stakeholders (e.g. a project team) can use *Circles of Influence* to depict the participation of all involved from their point of view.
- The method can also be used in collaborations between stakeholders. It may be helpful to convene e.g. target group, funding body and project representatives to clarify the delegation of decision-making authority. Independently developed circle diagrams can show different perceptions of the decision-making processes and serve as the basis for a clarifying conversation. It may also be the foundation for collectively strengthening the low levels of participation of some stakeholders.



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Further Reading and Links:

Ulrich Deinet, Marco Szlapka, Wolfgang Witte (2008) Qualität durch Dialog. Bausteine kommunaler Qualitäts- und Wirksamkeitsdialoge. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

(Ulrich Deinet, Marco Szlapka, Wolfgang Witte (2008). Quality through Dialogue: Building Blocks for Local Dialogue on Quality and Effectiveness. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag. (In German))

Trojan, Alf (2004) Nachhaltige Gesundheitsförderung durch Partizipation. Gesundes Österreich. http://www.fgoe.org/hidden/downloads/Magazin/GOe_204_35-50.pdf

(Trojan, Alf (2004) Sustainable Health Promotion through Participation. Healthy Austria. http://www.fgoe.org/hidden/downloads/Magazin/GOe_204_35-50.pdf (In German))

Peter Soppa (2004) Psychodrama. Ein Leitfaden. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

(Peter Soppa (2004) Psychodrama: A Guide. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag. (In German))

Continue with:

- [Levels of Participation](#)
- [Collaboration](#)

Weblink:

- Psychodrama (Wikipedia) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychodrama>