

REFLECTIVE CITIZENS



Artist Laura Sorvala records the work of the Effectiveness in Action group (2013-14), capturing unconventional perspectives with an unusual reportage style. Credit: Liz Orton.

Reflective Citizens: Some Creative Tactics for Communities

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Well-chosen reflection is an important part of being creative. There is plenty of evidence that considering actions from more than one perspective allows people to make greater imaginative leaps and provides the learning to underpin decisions (e.g. see Donald Schön's work).

The following ideas are drawn from several Connected Communities projects that explored how we make change in the world around us. They were devised as reflective techniques, to make it easier to learn fast about what works and how it can be improved. They were tested with people from many walks of life. They seem to work across many types of project. And they are presented here as inspiration to experiment with how to be creative. They should work well with some of the other ideas in this Variety Pack.

Article continues overleaf.

Making distinctions

Bring groups together that have something in common, but not too much. This is particularly successful when you can spend some time discussing your experience with people from different countries or different parts of the country, as meeting others is a great way to start noticing the things you take for granted in your neck of the woods. By deliberately exploring similarities and differences, you start to work out what is welcome and successful about what you do normally and what might be changed. Even better, learning what other people take for granted may suggest to you a way to make the changes you want to see, or at least what the conditions for change might be.

Making mischief

Another technique for getting perspective is to invite a joker into the pack, especially if you have people who are likely to get stuck in positions from which they do not want to move. Elect an 'agent provocateur' or 'critical friend' who has permission to ask difficult questions, turn suggestions upside down, show silly videos and take ideas to their absurd limit. It helps if the person in this role is light on their feet, tactful, slightly outside the main group and specifically invited to be a little different in their thinking. Without an introduction, other people may wonder why they are being so awkward!

Making media

A third way to reflect together is to use video or audio recordings to capture moments in your neighbourhood and then study them. Things always seem different when you play them back and, once everyone has got over the horror of hearing and seeing themselves, it is a chance to notice what might not be apparent normally. If you make a whole series of recordings spread out over time, you have the perfect means to chart developments in your area and decide to what you want to give your attention. It also makes a fascinating legacy of fashions and how we were living our everyday lives in the moment that it was captured.

Further reading

How we made it happen: Recommendations
<http://howwemadeithappen.org/research-results/>
Schön, Donald A. (1983) *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*, Basic Books, New York.

There are some ideas about how to use audio at the blog howwemadeithappen.org/research-results/.



Groups from around the country meet near Oxford to explore Stimulating Participation in the Informal Creative Economy (SPICE, 2011). Credit: Ann Light.