

Tool: Simulation exercise to understand stakeholders



What can I do with this tool?

This tool helps you to better understand your stakeholders. It is a simulation exercise to jump over Communication barriers. It helps to alert participants about conflicting pressures and the difficulties of making decisions about the sustainable use, management and conservation of natural resources. It helps to understand that there are various alternatives and points of view, in many instances highly conflicting, for a certain topic. Examples can include the use and management of a protected area, a species or a natural element such as water, soil or mineral.

For whom is this tool meant?

For professionals who help implement international agreements on biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development

What knowledge is presumed for using this tool?

To effectively use this tool, it is required to understand Key subjects 1-5 of the [course Strategic communication](#) on [Frogleaps.org](#).

When can I use it?

It can be used when analyzing stakeholders. This should be done in the early stages of a communication project. The sooner, the better! You never start communicating from scratch. Your audiences mostly have been approached before by others or by yourself, sometimes with the same or similar messages as you have. A simulation game is a good way of internalizing beliefs, attitudes and knowledge of stakeholders and target groups. It also is fun practice to do.

Simulation exercise to understand stakeholders

Step 1

Position the exercise in a conservation or sustainability context: what is the complexity of the issue?

Step 2

Provide background information 'To hunt or not to hunt': what is the issue that will be simulated in the exercise, set the stage by telling the story.

Step 3

Give instructions for the exercise: Explain the judgment procedures, describe the roles, divide groups and instruct about timing of the exercise.

Step 4

Play the game and reflect: what is the learning?

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This tool was developed and tested over the years by Dr. Suzana M. Padua from Brazil, IPÊ - Instituto de Pesquisas Ecológicas (Institute for Ecological Research). She graciously consented it to share her tool with a worldwide audience through Frogleaps.

Step 1: Position the exercise in a conservation or sustainability context

Tell the group the theory below or make a hand out of the theory for the group.

The demands for natural resources on our planet are increasing exponentially. The space that human beings occupy never seems to be sufficient, which means that the environment has to be constantly modified to accommodate the changes that this infers. With the growth of cities, the “green areas”, or natural environments, have decreased and become fragmented. The other living species, both of flora and of fauna, have lost habitat and a safe place to live and evolve. Human beings are everywhere! And, this human expansion affects natural resources such as water, air, soil, and other elements that are finite and indispensable for our survival in this planet.

Besides, human beings in general have not behaved ethically with other species and even with other human beings. With an increasing urge for power and domination, the humankind has not demonstrated empathy or respect for other living creatures. Consequently, the human/nature relationship has been characterized by exploitation and not a harmonious integration. We have acted as if we are not part of the web of life.

What happens when human demands are too strong? The pressure has been to accommodate social needs in a much higher scale than to incorporate the environmental necessities. So, natural areas have shrunk over time, especially in the last century. What took billions of years to evolve and result in a rich and diverse environment has been depleted, and many species and even ecosystems are now endangered, all due to human pressure.

One can place police force and have people obey, but experiences have shown that this does not last. People need to understand the value of nature, feel part of the web of life and learn how to celebrate the richness that we have inherited in our planet. Human beings must incorporate values that can lead to the search of greater knowledge and actions that may reflect positive change.

There are many ways to seek alternatives for this kind of awareness. Visits to natural areas are undoubtedly effective, and should be encouraged since childhood in all educational processes. But in classrooms, there are many ways to motivate understanding. Simulation can be one, especially as individuals will need to defend positions and opinions that they sometimes disagree with entirely. They will be obliged to see through the eyes of others and that may help them understand the complexities that are common in real life.

Enjoy!

Step 2: Provide background information 'To hunt or not to hunt'

Tell the group the story or make a hand out of the story for the group.

A protected area, the **Frogleap Natural Park**, is very rich in biodiversity. The threats that occur, however, are constant and have increased with the growth of the nearby city, Frogland. Park guards were anonymously warned that there would be illegal hunting at a certain day, so they spent the night hidden awaiting for the hunters to arrive. This happened at a quarter past midnight, when 3 hunters arrived holding rifles and revolvers. After becoming quiet for a while a deer approached and immediately many shots were heard in a successive rhythm. The Park's guards surprised the hunters who, after trying to argue and defend themselves, were taken into the local prison.

Despite their anger, they hired a lawyer and told very sneaky stories. First, they said that the deer was to feed their poor families. But the lawyer was an expensive professional and it did not make total sense. So, after thorough interrogation the story was not quite as simple. Local politicians had hired their services to hunt a deer and other wild animals for a barbecue they intended to offer for their campaign. This clarified the presence of the lawyer and also the amount of ammunition the hunters had been found with.

Hunting did not only represent a loss for nature, but also for the tourism trade, which is a significant source of income for local people. So, soon professionals from tourism agencies were in the prison, demanding explanations on who were the imprisoned hunters, and why had they been caught killing wild animals.

A local NGO that works for conservation and sustainability was also present, as it has for years been involved in making the **Frogleap Natural Park** become suitable for education and a protected area model. The fact that hunting was still happening was a surprise and a disappointment to them.

The politicians who had hired the hunters did not show up at the jail, but decided to pay for the lawyer, hoping their names would be protected. They did, however, send their assistants to find out what was happening. So, the jail was in a big turmoil in a fraction of seconds! Legal procedures were to follow and this is what this simulation is all about.

Step 3: Give instructions for the simulation

Judgment procedures

After reading to the participants all the details of the case, divide them in groups (I usually count 1,2,3,4... each number signifying a group they will be part of). Then, have each representative of a group pick an envelope that will contain the role they have to play, defending the position that the characters represent. Also, select a small group (preferably composed of odd numbers – 3 or 5) to be the jury. If your group is not too big, have the teachers be the jury, also in odd numbers to guarantee that there always be a majority decision.

After distributing the envelopes, give everyone some time to study the arguments they will use. If you are in a classroom continuously, you may wish to give everyone a couple of days to study the laws that are involved in the case, or the details that pertain to the story.

Encourage everyone to be creative when they defend their positions. This is not an academic exercise, but one intended to touch people and have them understand empathy and the complexity of different issues. They can use graphics, designs, interpretation or any other way they feel can make their points stronger.

The jury and each group will elect a representative (except when they all decide to act together).

When they are ready, the jury can open the session and have each group present themselves. After that the jury can encourage a discussion (the idea is to have them argue, of course with respect) and if it gets too out of control, make everyone come to order. Then, each group can have their representative give a final statement, summarizing their position. After every group has exposed their arguments, the jury leaves the courtroom to decide upon the verdict. They come back when they are ready with the sentence and the arguments they came up with, and the decision they arrived at. If the jury is not in accordance, the majority of the votes that defend a certain position wins (I have used this strategy in many courses over the years, and this never happened).

Hunters

- Great extensions of land are now allocated as protected areas – nothing can be so natural than to hunt in the forests - even though it is forbidden.
- In many parts of the world, including Brazil, most protected areas are located in poor regions, where jobs are scarce and people have little education.
- Many families cannot afford to buy adequate food and thus have little source of proteins to give to their children, so they decide to run the risk and hunt, even knowing it is forbidden. Many also do additional illegal acts, such as logging or other extraction practices.
- As in this case, some risk hunting (or logging – or collecting animals or plants) in exchange for payments, and they often have no idea for what purposes the products will be used for.

Tourism trade professionals

- The region's rich biodiversity has attracted a high level of tourism of people interested in nature.
- The **Frogleap Natural Park** is considered to be one of the most beautiful protected areas in the country, so it can become an example of how to develop a sustainable tourism that can represent gains for all: people (local communities and tourists) and nature.
- Tourism has generated jobs for local people and can even be a source of employment for hunters and other impoverished people who have exploited the environment.

Farmers of the region

- The natural areas that are located in privately owned land are considered to be unproductive, and now the laws forbid deforestation and any other kind of exploitation.
- Hunting should be allowed, especially because in all "civilized" parts of the world it is not forbidden. In fact, the more developed nations have deforested all of their territories and are now encouraging the developing world to keep their natural coverage.
- If hunting could be allowed, farmers would profit by turning their properties into "hunting farms", which would represent a source of income to compensate the forested areas that cannot be cut to become agricultural land.
- Farmers can help finance events that defend new ideas for the region, hunting being one of them.

Local politicians

- The **Frogleap Natural Park** does not represent a source of income to the municipality, as it is a large extension of land that does not pay taxes as other properties do.
- Public representatives have always had power, and the laws were never enforced as they should have been – political power has a tradition of being strong in most parts of the world, and not having to obey the laws.
- Many politicians are also landowners, which means they have power and money.

Local Conservation NGO

- The protection of the **Frogleap Natural Park** has been the NGO's mission for the past decade or any threat that may threaten it mobilizes its members to act immediately.
- The NGO has conducted research that indicates that many species are threatened to extinction, and may disappear if the Park does not exist anymore.
- The Park is the habitat of several endemic species, both of flora and fauna, including a very small frog that leaps in a unique way in the translucent ponds that still exist in the Park.
- Environmental educators have designed projects that turn the endemic frog into a flagship species, to help raise the awareness of local people about the protection of the species and its habitat, the **Frogleap Natural Park** forests.
- If hunting or any other illegal acts occur in the Park, the NGO threatened to conduct an international campaign to expose the irresponsibility of the local politicians and decision makers.

Step 4: Play the game and reflect

Let participants play the simulation exercise and afterwards reflect with the group on what happened. Ask questions: how did it feel to be in your role, what was difficult, what did you learn, what would you do differently in your job after this experience, what will you tell your colleagues?

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