

Tool: 3D Modelling – Systems

Overview

3D Modelling is a physical process that brings multiple perspectives to understanding how a situation or system might evolve. An entire group creates a sculpture (or several, depending on group size) of a current challenge. The process prompts questions from four vantage points, allowing for 360-degree seeing and sensing of an emerging future. The power of the practice lies in participants relying on their hands, rather than on habitual ways of thinking, to discover new insights.

Application

In the context of Theory U, this tool can be used during any phase to create visual displays that explain projects and engage potential stakeholders. The modelling can be applied on any scale.

Principles

- **Create an external view** of a current challenge in order to gain insight from multiple perspectives into some of the systemic factors that are causing it.
- **Sense, surface, and activate inherent possibilities.**

Resources

- Scharmer, Otto. 2018. *The Essentials of Theory U*, Chapter 5. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- This tool is adapted from the Ashland Institute and Cliff Barry's Shadow Work®.

Process

Setup

- **People:** Groups (ideally not more than 5–8 people).
- **Place:** 3D Modelling is best done in person, though with some digital creativity can be adapted for virtual teleconferencing or meetings.
- **Time:** Allow 60 minutes for the process and 20–40 minutes for the debrief, depending on group size. In addition, the facilitators need to set aside time to prepare the room.
- **Materials:**
 - Small tables that allow the group to move around the model and view it from different sides. You could also build the sculpture on a large sheet of cardboard or a large cardboard box.
 - Journals or paper for taking notes.
 - 3D Modeling Kits for each group, with objects to represent different aspects of the system. We encourage you to source the kits sustainably, using materials that you already have. Examples of items to include are: pipe cleaners in different colors; items easily found in nature, such as pine cones, stones, and twigs; playdough or clay; wool, string, and pieces of fabric; small figurines or toys.
 - An assortment of materials is used to symbolically represent the system's forces at play. Anything can be made to represent anything.

Step 1: Orientation (~5 mins.)

- Introduce yourselves and choose a coach and notetaker.
- As a group set your intention what you want to focus on.

Step 2: Sculpt the Current Reality (~20 mins., assuming 3–5 team members)

- Co-create a model that represents the current situation or system that you want to transform.
- One person begins the sculpting process by placing an object on the surface and describing what it represents. Each team member then builds on this first step to co-create the sculpture. Pause between each addition to ensure that everyone understands what has been added and the relationships between the parts.
- Listen deeply to what each person says.

Step 3: Reflect from Four Directions (30–40 mins.)

Reflect on your model from four directions. The group begins on the east side of the sculpture. The coach reads a set of questions aloud, one by one, listening deeply as each person responds. The group then shifts to the next side of the sculpture. **It is important to physically move, to experience multiple perspectives.**

Questions:

1. EAST: Feeling

- *What do you love in this sculpture that ignites your best energy?*
- *What frustrates you?*

2. SOUTH: Truth

- *What hard truths need to be spoken?*

3. WEST: Reflection

- *What assumptions might be underlying this situation?*
- *What systemic barriers lock us into the current state of operating?*

4. NORTH: Purpose/Presence

- *What in this situation is ending, wanting to die, and what is emerging, wanting to be born?*
- *If this sculpture could speak, what advice might it offer?*

Step 4: Adjust the Sculpture (~5 mins.)

Add, remove, and rearrange the objects—informed by each other's ideas—so that the sculpture better represents the emerging future you want to create.

Step 5: Wrap Up (~5 mins.)

- What is the most important difference between sculpture 1 and sculpture 2?
- What was the most important change that shifted the field from sculpture 1 to sculpture 2?
- What might be the most important leverage points for practical next steps?
- Each participant takes a few minutes to journal.

3D Modelling – Systems Worksheet

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- *If this sculpture could speak, what advice might it offer?*

