

The samoan circle essay example

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



One of the most fascinating examples of team group engagement is called the “ Samoan Circle”; here, a meeting is conducted without any leaders (State of Victoria, 2014). The overall goal of the technique is to allow a more equitable and egalitarian approach to solving problems, particularly ones that are controversial. No leader is present, but professional facilitators can be employed in order to get the process started (State of Victoria, 2014).

This technique is not dissimilar to the Fishbowl process, wherein the group is divided into two circles, one circle enveloping the smaller, inner circle.

However, unlike the Fishbowl technique, the inner circle is the only group that is permitted to speak; this is leavened by having representatives of all perspectives on the given argument being present in the inner circle (State of Victoria, 2014). People in the outer circle can speak, but only if they move into the inner circle.

The overall purpose of the Samoan circle is to allow small groups to discuss controversial issues in a manner that allows all sides to be heard in a systematic and respectful manner. This eliminates the charged language, arguing and animosity that often occurs in contentious meetings, without the need for a leader to be stressed out about the need to control meetings (Aggens, 1983). The origins of the Samoan circle lie in the observation that Samoan and other Pacific Island communities have a similar discussion format that is open-ended and without a leader to impose their bias on the entire talk (Aggens, 1983). These general principles are carried over to the Samoan circle, believing that having calm, ordered statement of grievances by a certain few representing each position would provide a sense of discipline and calm for the discussion.

There are several situations in which the Samoan circle would be the most appropriate way to resolve the conflict. The circle works best in groups of medium or slightly larger size; about 10-30 people involved in the conflict is ideal for an effective Samoan circle (State of Victoria, 2014). To that end, situations where a small to medium group is having trouble being engaged with each other, or coming to odds with major decisions in a community. Groups with substantial issues with each other, whether personal or profession, could use a leaderless Samoan circle format to air out their grievances. Situations where members of groups are openly contentious and argumentative, such as animosity between co-workers, benefit from the Samoan circle, as the format forbids them from talking over one another and stopping the other from having their voice heard.

Other situations in which the Samoan circle would work are instances where individual leadership of a group has led to animosity and conflict; group work situations where others have what they feel are equally valid, yet oppositional ideas to the leadership can use the Samoan circle to provide an even handed outlet to voice their opinions and ideas without judgment or immediate shutdown. Public and private organization meetings are very good for this, as it opens up discussion in a more democratic way, without the pressure of a leader to potentially judge or think poorly on discussion. When public proposals are controversial, a Samoan circle can be used to allow each side of the controversy to be spoken aloud and confronted when everyone is making their respective decisions. Issues such as allotment of budgets, personal group dynamics, and the direction of community-conducted projects are perfect for Samoan circles, as they are contentious

issues with many different perspectives on them, with the potential for overlapping conflict and stress without an ordered structure for letting everyone speak.

The Samoan circle carries with it many strengths and advantages. For one, as previously mentioned, it is a fantastic way to deal with controversial issues. People are allowed to express their views freely without fear of being interrupted or otherwise shut down by existing leadership; this allows devil's advocate arguments or changes in the status quo to be introduced in the smoothest and least confrontational way possible.

Samoan circles are also advantageous in that they prevent arguments from becoming too polarized; the ordered, one-at-a-time way in which everyone speaks and is allowed to speak prevents the ability for someone to become heated and angry, and interrupt someone else (State of Victoria, 2014). This can often start a chain reaction of events that gets people angry, makes them take things personally, and soon the argument becomes not about the actual subject, but about defensiveness and argumentativeness. With the Samoan circle, the focus stays on the issues at hand, and each perspective is stated clearly by each individual in the inner circle so that it can be appropriately voiced. The sense of self-discipline and patience it instills in a group is wonderful for calming these kinds of tensions (Vermeulen, 2014).

Another thing that is good about the Samoan circle is the ability to involve a large number of people in a controversial issue (State of Victoria, 2014). With contentious issues, it is possible that some perspectives fall by the wayside because they cannot shout clearly enough over the overlapping noise of an argument; the Samoan circle forces each perspective to see the light of day

in an equitable way. This also allows perspectives to be more accurately elucidated upon, and in greater detail, which can help to comprehensively define questions and explore them (Vermeulen, 2014).

Despite these benefits, there are some weaknesses and detriments that can get in the way of achieving true progress. For one thing, Samoan circles have the potential to stall or monopolize arguments; despite their ostensibly democratic way of dealing with discussions, it is possible for those in the inner circle to get wrapped up in their own version of the perspective, making it harder for those in the outer circle to enter the inner circle to have their voice heard. Even the most patient, orderly method of group interaction needs that ultimate piece of inspiration even after everyone has said their piece; Samoan circles do not promise that inspiration for solving a problem, as everyone could still elaborate on their perspective and still not come to an agreement.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, the circle leaves those in the outer circle at a disadvantage. The inner circle effectively speaks for the outer circle, and it can be difficult for the outer circle members to elegantly enter the inner circle and bring up points that the inner circle representative is failing to mention (State of Victoria, 2014). In essence, the Samoan circle is a great tone argument, but terrible in bringing about a sense of closure to an argument (i. e. actually solving the problem) (Vermeulen, 2014).

Furthermore, it can hard for bigger issues to be served appropriately by the Samoan circle, as the limited avenues for discussion make it difficult to delve into details and expand on the issues present. The circle is best used for simple discussions of specific issues within small groups; this is where the

most good can be done.

Looking at specific examples of how the Samoan Circle technique was utilized, it is clear that the technique itself has the potential to be useful and productive. Gauri Salokha wrote about an instance in which they used the Samoan circle to “ encourage knowledge sharing across organizations and networks” for their small group organization (Salokha, 2014). In this instance, a group of about five individuals sat in the inner circle and discussed these issues, while the outer circle of several dozen people sat outside and watched the discussion occur without speaking. The objections noted in the circle were myriad: people were nervous about developing new ideas due to the fear of maintaining an idea after it was proven to be cumbersome (like a website or mailing list) (Salokha, 2014). Others pointed out the contradictory nature of asking people to do things, but their not being willing to perform those actions, leaving a gap in understanding. Some other objections to the Samoan circle revolved around the ability for people to leverage their “ personal relationships and social networks to gain participation” (Salokha, 2014). The winning arguments seemed to be ones informally and implicitly made, without outright saying what they were thinking. Those in the circle seemed to not really notice the people in the outer circle after awhile; that being said, the feeling of conversation that occurred between the inner circle participants made confrontation and conflict much less likely to occur. People on the outside missed the prospect of a facilitator or moderator, but enjoyed the discussion that they got to listen to. Still, attempts at entering the inner circle were awkward, as their motivating factor for entering the conversation (e. g. the topic they were

interested in) had already changed by the time they got in the circle. All in all, there were some interesting bits of feedback from Salokha's example of the Samoan circle – they found that the monopolizing of the conversation that was previously feared did not happen, since it is possible for anyone to “tap anyone out” (Salokha, 2014). Observations after the fact included the need for important questions to be presented, i. e. not wasting everyone's time on non-critical issues that are of importance only to you. At the same time, the Samoan circle is great for raising hard questions and bringing heretofore unknown issues to the surface. With practice, they can get better at the Samoan circle and leverage its attributes to more productive discussion (Salokha, 2014).

In conclusion, the Samoan circle appears to be a highly effective form of group communication among small groups with controversial issues to discuss. It keeps the conversation limited to a select few, which limits mob thinking and heightened emotions, as well as keeps the perspectives equitable and clear so all sides can be heard. While there are problems that happen with regards to a greater sense of outer circle involvement, there are enough positives to make the Samoan circle a worthwhile exercise to engage in.

References

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