



## **KARELIAN COFFEE TABLE DISCUSSION** (Paradigm-stretching methods)

The coffee table discussion is an informal and open discussion method that creates a safe and relaxed environment for sharing knowledge and experiences within a Community of Practice. It also serves as a peer learning environment where participants can freely share their experiences and perspectives. The discussion takes place without formal structures, although the discussion themes and questions are predetermined together with the participants.

The aim is to promote collective learning, peer learning and empowerment within a health and care Community of Practice specialising in environmental issues. This method is useful for discussing challenging or emotionally charged topics where it is important to share and listen to different perspectives.

### **What is required:**

- Creating a relaxed and open atmosphere: participants need to be willing to share their experiences and thoughts confidentially. The facilitator acts as a storyteller, creating a "stage" for the discussion. The Karelian coffee table can be set up in any space; it is an agreement between the participants.
- Collaboration skills: the goal is active listening and interaction without participants feeling pressured to provide "correct" answers.
- Good facilitation: the facilitator's role is to support the discussion, keep it manageable, and ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate.

**Level of difficulty:** 1-2. The method is easily approachable and suitable for various group discussions. It does not require special skills from participants, but the facilitator must be able to create an appropriate discussion atmosphere and a storytelling "stage" where the discussion takes place.

**Time required:** 30-60 minutes, depending on the breadth and depth of the topic. The discussion can continue longer if needed.

### **Materials:**

- This method requires a space where participants can gather to discuss.
- "Staging": the facilitator, in the role of a storyteller, welcomes participants to their kitchen. The facilitator creates an imaginary Karelian coffee table with simple theatrical acts, such as setting the table with a tablecloth and a coffee set.

**Participants:** 3-15 people. The number of participants can vary, but the method works best in relatively small groups where everyone has the opportunity to participate in the discussion. Alternatively, a few people can discuss while others listen.

### **How to use:**



1. Preparation of facilitation: The script for the discussion is agreed upon in advance between the participants and the facilitator. Plan the questions and think about who to invite to participate in the discussion. Consult with people with expertise in your community.
2. Facilitation of the discussion: Start by creating an atmosphere for a relaxed, open and confidential discussion. The facilitator's role is to keep the discussion flowing without excessive steering.
3. Reflective summary: Finally, the facilitator can ask the participants who listened to the discussion what they heard in it.

### When to use:

- At the beginning and end: This method works well at the beginning and end of environmental development projects, when aiming at a common understanding or sharing of experiences and lessons is desired.
- Handling sensitive themes: It is excellent for discussing emotionally charged or personal themes where it is important for participants to share their views without fear of judgement.

### Why to use:

- Strengthens peer learning: The method enables the sharing of knowledge and experiences among members of the Community of Practice.
- Develops reflection skills: It strengthens active listening and understanding of diverse perspectives.
- Safe space for handling sensitive topics: The method creates a space where people can share their experiences related to development of environmental practices in a respectful atmosphere.

### How to document:

- Notes: The facilitator can take notes on the key highlights of the discussion, keeping in mind that the most important thing is to create an atmosphere of being present.
- Recording or video: If appropriate, the discussion can also be recorded or videoed to revisit it later and summarise it.

**The roots of the method can be found here:** The coffee table discussion is based on the idea that emphasises Edward Soja's (1996) concept of third space, creating a temporary space where different cultural views and ideas meet, similar to Jeffrey Goldfarb's (1997) concept of being around the kitchen table. It involves free, safe, critical discussion around the kitchen table without the threat of organisational control. The coffee table discussion utilises Leena Kurki's (2008) theory and practices of sociocultural animation, which suggest that sharing knowledge



within a community builds community-based awareness and thus strengthens a Community of Practice specialising in developing green transition related activities.