

# Web Charts : A Process Outline<sup>1</sup>

*Web Charts*<sup>2</sup> are a useful lateral thinking tool. They are designed to encourage participants to explore either the causes or consequences of a particular situation/action/belief. They are particularly helpful when exploring the **longer term consequences** of the situation. This method suits people with a wide range of different learning styles because it is both a **creative / lateral / visual** tool and very **disciplined / logical / ordered**.

## The Steps in Constructing a Web Chart

1. Develop a hypothesis (eg. *Women are oppressed in Western Society*), or identify an action (eg. *We run a disco as a fundraiser*) and write this in the centre of a piece of butcher's paper. Decide whether you are planning to look at the **Causes** (analysis) or **Consequences** (impact) of the hypothesis. Throughout this handout, examples look at a **Consequences Web**.

*It can be interesting to have two groups of 4 - 6 people working on the same hypothesis - one group looking at causes; the other at consequences.*

2. Identify two possible **positive** consequences that might arise from this situation, and two possible **negative** consequences that might arise. These first four ideas are described as **First Generation Consequences** (that is, possible **immediate** consequences). Write these, evenly spread around the hypothesis, near the centre of the sheet. It is useful to write these in one colour of text.

*Whilst looking at a general hypothesis, you might ask people to apply it eg. the consequences of acting on a belief that Women are oppressed in Western Society on residents of your shelter.*

3. Focus on one of the First Generation Consequences. Imagine that it is the new hypothesis in the centre of the paper. What are two possible **positive** consequences that might arise from this consequence? What are two possible **negative** consequences? List these as **Second Generation Consequences** (that is, slightly longer term consequences) in a different colour of text. Now, do the same for each of the 4 x First Generation Consequences, continuing to use the

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<sup>1</sup> © Copyright Suzi Quixley 1990, 1993, 1995 & 2008 (revised). The 1995 version is a chapter in: Quixley, Suzi (1995) **8 Participatory Training Learning Methods**, ESSQ, Adelaide.

<sup>2</sup> The term *Web Chart* is drawn from a technique outlined in: Coover, Virginia et al (1981) **Resource Manual for a Living Revolution: A Handbook of Skills and Tools for Social Change Activists**, New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, pp 250-253. The authors also describe a couple of variations to the basic method. Whilst drawing on this original concept, the process described here is one which I have progressively developed and refined over the past 20 years.

same colour of text. You have now completed the Second Generation of ideas on your **Web Chart**. You should have at least 16 x Second Generation Consequences.

4. Focus on one of the Second Generation Consequences. Undertake the same process as in 3. above, for each of the Second Generation Consequences. To fully complete this step would produce at least 64 x **Third Generation Consequences** (ie. longer term effects). If this is too much work, it's fine to simply pursue the consequences that interest you **provided that** you explore an equal number of ideas you perceive as positive and negative. Again, you should use a third colour of text for this generation of ideas.
5. You can keep going with this process, *ad infinitum*.

## Maximising the Effectiveness of Web Charts

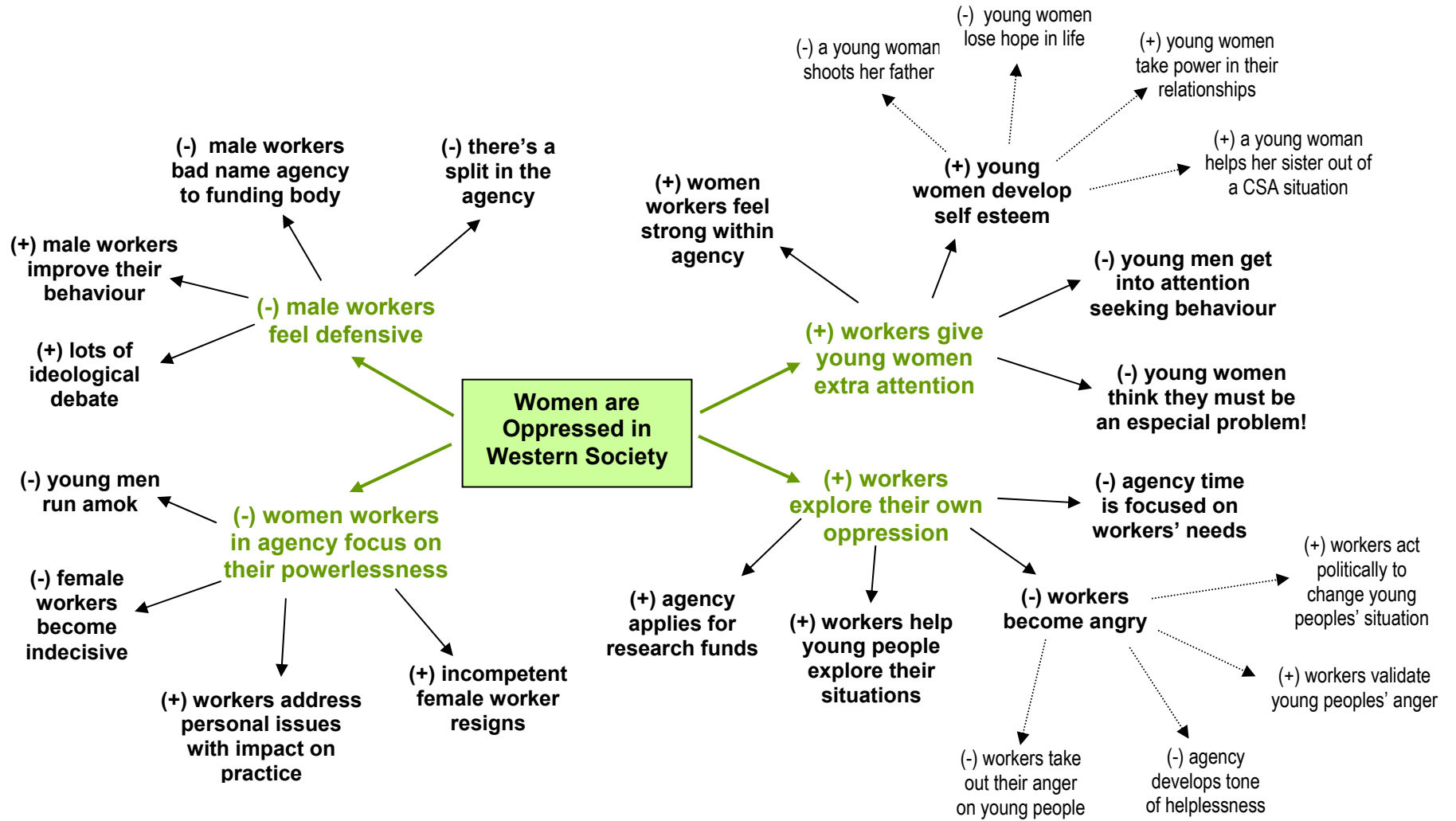
An important function of this kind of exercise is to challenge simplistic *yes/no* or *cause/effect* thinking. Negative outcomes can derive from the best possible motives. Positive outcomes can result from apparently negative situations. **Web Charts encourage participants to look at possibilities, rather than *black/white* answers.** They enable people to explore further the possible implications of their values/attitudes/actions for people they interact/work with. They can provide a context for strategy development - *How can we increase the chance that good outcomes can result from this apparently negative situation? How can I act to maximise the potential with clients I find difficult?*

**In order to protect against linear (*correct line!*) thinking emerging, it is useful to set two rules when constructing a **Web Chart**:**

- If you **begin** a line of thought, it must be finished. (That is, if you cite **one** positive or negative for a particular consequence, you **must** complete this part of the Web, before proceeding.) This means that some parts of the Chart may move on to Third Generation Ideas, whilst other lines of thought are still in the First Generation.
- If you think of **more** positives or negatives than the requisite two for each consequence, that's fine. However, for every additional idea you list, you need an equal number from the opposite perspective. (That is, if the group thinks of 4 possible positive consequences of an idea, they must then **immediately** list 4 possible negative consequences before moving on.)

**The following is an example of how a Web Chart looks. NOTE: It works best if you encourage participants to complete the whole Chart for at least 2 Generations, before beginning Third Generation Ideas.**

## An Example Web Chart



## More Detailed Instructions - Running a Web Chart Exercise with a Group

It looks easy ... but when you examine the number of instructions given in detail, it is evident that anyone running this exercise needs to be well-prepared, and clear about what they want the group to do! (This is particularly because of the way the exercise asks participants to think in a completely new way ... it's a brain-drain!)

### Before Starting the Exercise:

- Demonstrate:
  - Writing equal numbers of +ve's and -ve's.
  - Use of different colours to identify generation of ideas.
  - Using the first thought that comes to mind (ie. it's a brainstorming type of exercise).
  - Continuing with ideas exploration in **multiples/themes** (rather than pursuing single *lines of thought*).
  - Writing ideas physically close - to allow space by the time you need to record 64 ideas!
- Clarify the topic for exploration, including ensuring that everyone understands what it means.
- Explain *Why a Web Chart?* Give a brief outline of different types of thinking and how they work.
- Talk about the different perspectives from which you might think about the topic – individual, social, economic, political, small group/family/community, interpersonal, interagency, funding body, etc.
- Let people express ideas in their own language and from their own **or others'** values base (ie. *some people think/believe that ...* is a legitimate way to generate ideas).
- Clarify that the idea is +ve or -ve according to the judgment of **the person who suggests the idea**. Discourage any debate of ideas ... this is a brainstorm and there's no right or wrong answers.
- Discuss possible different uses for the exercise (eg. planning an essay or report; exploring the possible consequences of client actions during counselling - eg. *I leave home* or *I put my baby into childcare* or *I take medication*; generating new organisational project ideas.)

**Extra Instructions During the Exercise (as required):** Some instructions are saved until this stage, because otherwise there would be too much for people to absorb at the beginning.

- Hurry people along (reinforcing the brainstorming focus of the exercise ... it's important to get as many ideas as possible **before** discussing them).
- Explain that you can't use the same idea twice ... ever!!!
- Outline how to follow a theme for several *generations*, **once you've fully completed the Second Generation of possibilities**.
- Demonstrate what to do when the group has more than two +ve's or -ve's (ie. balancing them out with the same number of counter-ideas).
- Negotiate the use of summarising words by the person recording ideas.
- Suggest strategies for getting past *mental blocks* (eg. trying it from a new perspective - social, economic, etc.; moving the physical location of the group; using *Po Brainstorming*)