

The Kaleidoscope

A simple tool to study a complex reality

by Tova Averbuch

The "Organizational Kaleidoscope" was developed by Tova Averbuch in 2007 to support, evoke and disseminate learning with a large group of people. It was first used at the conclusion of a three-day gathering of 250 managers to deepen and integrate learning about organizational perspectives on management issues.

We have shortened the name to "The Kaleidoscope" to acknowledge its use in a variety of settings.

What is The Kaleidoscope?

The Kaleidoscope is a simple tool to study and explore complex reality through simultaneous exposure of real-life events to multiple points of view ("lenses"). Experts who embody their knowledge perform the role of "lenses" in the presence of an actively engaged audience.

Why now?

We are exposed to multiple narratives, diversity, disruption and emergence. Boundaries and definitions become fluid and tentative, changing rapidly with context and time. Some argue and grieve that in this dynamic we lose the depth of thought that comes with and is enabled by "Discipline": a long term commitment to learn, focus, and practice what is rooted in a legacy of knowledge and tradition, ways of conduct, ethics, definitions and boundaries.

The Kaleidoscope was designed to attain depth in the postmodern era of "my opinion and your opinion" by allowing for "multi-disciplinary and intuitive fusion" without losing the deep, rich and differentiated aromas and tastes of the basic ingredients/components.

Seeing the Whole in Motion:

The working hypothesis behind The Kaleidoscope is that we act in a complex reality and thus need a multi-dimensional perspective. If we want to study and know the system we are inquiring into, we need to experience multiple representations of that system (lenses) interacting.

[Tova Averbuch](#)

The Kaleidoscope achieves this through a dialogue among components and dimensions of the system being studied while each component and dimension is embodied in its fullest essence. To create a direct experience and palpable sense of knowledge regarding an organization or community as a whole while in motion we need to combine two perspectives:

- **Vertical perspective** – reflecting the aspects of sameness, reoccurrence, practice, iterations and **time** (usually logical–linear time). The **Lenses** of the Kaleidoscope express this perspective very well as they play the role of “**Disciplines**”, committed to the point of view they represent.
- **Horizontal perspective** – reflecting the aspects of diversity, difference, surprise and **space** (simultaneous and usually interactive). The **Motion** in the Kaleidoscope expresses this perspective very well. Motion is visible through the interaction between steady Lenses (experts) and emergent Lenses (participants).

The paradigm of “Discipline”, as a theoretical and practical frame is an old tradition. The paradigm of “multi-discipline” and “interdisciplinary” as a way to describe and work in the world is more recent. The Kaleidoscope combines the two for a quick, yet deep, inquiry into complex realities.

How does it actually work?

1. Necessary components:

- “*collective*” – an interested audience
- “*real life situations*” – 2-4 people with a burning question who would like to share their story
- “*Lenses*” – 5-6 experts who are willing to share a specific embodied field of expertise through the precision of describing what they are looking at, what do they see from that lens.

Examples: Lenses that served us integrating and exploring management issues with: Open system, industrial engineering, complexity, motivation, leadership. Lenses that served us for supervision to OD consultants: Psychoanalytic stance, Systemic stance, Dialogic stance, appreciative stance, Organizational Culture stance.

- #### 2. Layout: center ring of about 10 chairs: 5-6 for expert Lenses, a seat for the protagonist (who tells his/her story), 1-2 empty seats for emergent lenses from the audience, and a seat for the host. Participants/audience sit in concentric circles around the center ring, like ripples.

3. Kaleidoscope in motion: a person volunteers to share their story. The story is briefly presented by its owner, concluding with a burning question (what s/he wants to gain from sharing the Kaleidoscope). We ask for a volunteer to write down the questions of the Kaleidoscope's lenses and allow the owner of the story to listen without a burden. After the story is heard, the Lenses describe what they will be looking for in the situation/ what questions they are asking, exploring. Lenses are allowed only to be curious, *not offer advice or suggest what should be done*.

Audience members are invited to step into the role of "emergent Lens" if they feel moved to speak from a perspective that is missing and that they feel is essential to that story. As the Kaleidoscope stops turning (usually about 20-30 minutes), the protagonist reflects on his/her thoughts, feelings, insights and then – we move to the next story.

4. Use:

- To disseminate and integrate multi-disciplinary perspectives and knowledge by learning some of the language and perspectives of different disciplines while staying present to the complexity of a system.
- To help an individual and a group create a new vision of reality through a Holographic view of a complex situation.

If you choose to use it I will be very interested to hear about the purpose, the use and how it served you. You can reach me at Tova.averbuch@gmail.com.

Tova Averbuch, MSc, teaches in the Organizational Consulting master's program at Tel Aviv University, Israel. A seasoned OD consultant and pioneer of whole- system and large- group interventions in business and society, she is a leading practitioner of Open Space Technology, co-founded "Oganim—Opening Space for Collective Wisdom," and authored a chapter in *The Handbook of Large Group Methods* (2006) and in *Dialogic Organization Development* (2015).