

# Pathways through the Forest of Tenflections: A Guideline

## Description

The exercise aims to help groups discuss and share their experiences and feelings surrounding 'tenflections'. It can be most useful when setting out to achieve a group goal, as it can help realise, understand, and resolve tenflections within a group. Hence, the tool opens up a safe space for discussing the 'grey area' between contrasting perspectives, worldviews, emotions, ideas, or decisions. Ultimately, this tool can contribute to more inclusive, open and safe conflict resolution and collective decision-making.

## tenflection

[ten-**f**lik-shuhn] • Noun

The feeling of being torn between important but seemingly opposite worldviews, approaches, interests, ways to go, values or emotions. • *"Should I take climate action or slow down my lifestyle? I feel tenflected..."*

The leaf is a powerful metaphor for the dichotomy of tenflections. Drawing on other traditions such as yin-yang, the two sides of the leaf represent two contrasting emotions towards a central (root) idea. The leaf seeks for both sides to be in balance to provide sustenance. The same goes for the goals we strive for. We each have tensions within ourselves that we must balance to accomplish our tasks. Without understanding and balancing these, the root of our idea will not be able to become the mighty oak.



This tool is flexible and can be modified by the participants. However, it is suggested that the instructions in *italics* are followed to generate a positive outcome. It can take place with or without a facilitator and be followed in the time span of an hour or over the course of several days. Each group is different, and thus how you follow these instructions is up to you. Proceed with an open mind.

## Preconditions

- ★ Having identified a joint goal or desire
  - Example: "As a group we want to work towards a decision on X", or "We want to explore how we take part in the Sustainable Good Life"
- ★ Open and trusting relationship between participants
- ★ Optional: a facilitator can be appointed by the group who can help guide the process (not the content)

## Materials

- ★ An open (floor) space
- ★ Pens and/or markers
- ★ Paper
- ★ Post-its
- ★ Tape
- ★ Optional: strings

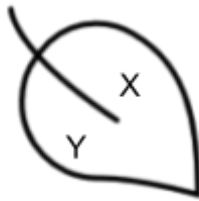
## Guideline step-by-step

Note that there are currently no time limits at the steps. Choose what works best for your goals or within your available time slots.

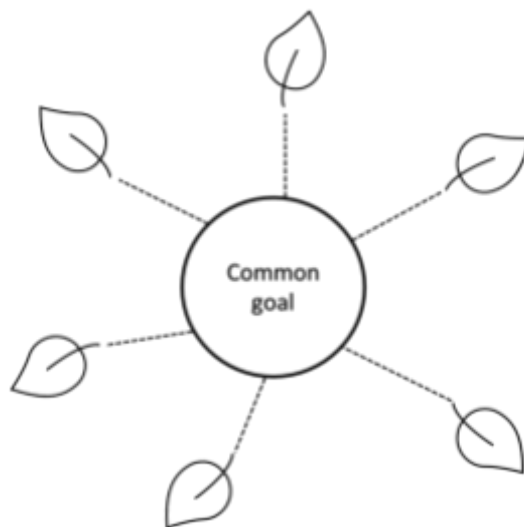
- 1) *Check-in*
  - a) Why is everyone here today and what is your shared goal or purpose?
  - b) How does everyone feel?
    - i) Example: everyone can pick a type of weather that represents their current mood
  - c) Optional: Do a trust or icebreaker exercise.
- 2) *Harvesting the potential tenflections on the path to the joint goal*
  - a) Gather (individual) tensions that people feel regarding the common goal on pieces of paper or post-it notes.
  - b) Cluster and interpret the emerging tenflections.
    - i) Focus on the most common/universal themes or particularly explicit tenflections. Identify the (seemingly) opposite feelings or actions as put forward by the participants.
  - c) Name the tenflections.
    - i) Choose names or phrases that are clear to everyone in the group for the proceedings of the exercise. Example: "slowing down" vs. "taking action/control" or "personal autonomy" vs. "communal interdependence".
- 3) *Prepare the tree of tenflection*
  - a) The trunk of the tree represents the joint goal or desire of the group, the leaves represent the tenflections (see image).



- b) Write down the identified tenflections on the leaves (one on both sides of the midriff of the leaf, e.g. 'X' and 'Y'). The leaves can be big (e.g., to stand on for a more substantial visual embodiment) or smaller according to the space you have available.
  - i) Optional: use tables or stools to place your leaves on.



- c) If using the floor, connect the leaves to the trunk on the floor (optionally, use tape or string to be able to move leaves 'in' or 'out' of the tree trunk).
  - i) Make sure the leaves leave enough room for comfortable conversation of various people at one leaf without interfering with conversations happening at other leaves.



#### 4) *Talking through the tenflections.*

The goal is to simultaneously have an open conversation at each leaf about that specific tenflection. Participants can move around between leaves or stay at one according to their preference.

- a) Determine a fixed amount of time to spend on this part of the exercise.
- b) Describe the three roles participants can take up during this part of the exercise:
  - a 'parrot' (active participant and contributor at one or more leaves);
  - a 'bumblebee' (moves between conversations and participates in several conversations);
  - a 'butterfly' (observes and listens).
- c) Appoint a person per leaf to take notes on the conversation and/or facilitate the conversation (optional: add an extra someone to take notes).
- d) Make notes on the tenflection leaves about the insights and themes that are discussed.

#### 5) *Harvesting the tenflections*

- a) Go back to the group setting and report back from each leaf.
  - i) What touched you?
  - ii) What surprised you?
  - iii) Are there any recurring themes or clear oppositions?
  - iv) Is anything still missing on the leaves?
  - v) How can we meet each other in the middle of the leaf?

6) *Check-out and closing*

- a) Together, summarise the findings.
  - i) Do your findings reflect the common goal or desire set at the beginning of the exercise?
- b) Discuss reasonable next actions and solutions.
  - i) Is everyone comfortable with the proposed solution(s)?
  - ii) Optional: schedule a follow-up session (on a specific tenfliction) or do a conflict resolution exercise to talk through a particular (unresolved) tenfliction further (some inspiration: [Het Maorigesprek](#), [Deep Democracy](#)).
- c) Check-out exercise to reflect on how the exercise was experienced.