

Chapter 26

The BEEHIVE: Method to Explore Alternative Futures



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26.1 Introduction

The BEEHIVE is a method designed at Performatory (Breda University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands) to foster transformative change in real-life contexts. It builds on Transformative Social Innovation and aims to explore possible futures “beyond reform” by addressing the root causes of the challenges at hand and exploring alternative transformative future possibilities together.

The framework builds on a process-based approach to change, taking the time and inviting participants to understand the current situation, experiment and experience vulnerabilities, uncertainties, and complexity, and be open to potential losses of existing interests and related pain (Andreotti 2021). Transformative change might occur through ongoing experiments in new relations and be supported by reflexive monitoring (Aviles JR 2023). The Beehive framework has four phases.

1. Break the Sky: Decide on the challenge that speaks to you from the world. Identify and invite the “system” into the room, including those “whom it concerns.”
2. Open Time: Creating time–space for participants to step out of routine and develop a shared understanding of their challenges and desire for changes.
3. Find What Gives Life: Encouraging participants to identify and appreciate elements from the previous step that contain energy and offer hope and possibility.

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4. **Build New Relationships:** Co-designing new relationships among all involved to develop innovative ideas and methods for alternative futures.

26.2 Transformative Potential

The latter three phases contain six spaces. The six spaces of the participatory process foster a comprehensive understanding of a topic and encourage all involved to engage in creative and transformative problem orientation. The last two spaces especially challenge the participants to explore (more-than-human) relational connections, creating a deep understanding of the values and beliefs foundational to our positions (Framings) and using beyond-rational analysis (Beings).

1. **Imaginations space:** Participants start by individually envisioning their initial ideas on solutions to the challenge, which can be defined by the researchers or the community/organization. These initial ideas are rooted in tacit knowledge based on personal experience, intuition, empathy, and compassion and offer the basis for later reflection on the transformative potential of alternatives.
2. **Doings space:** Participants critically assess all the stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in the challenge and describe their concrete activities and relations. By going back and forth, the participants will discover more actors.
3. **Organizings space:** Consider the organizational and institutional settings that shape the challenge, as well as the various scales at which these conditions are established and reestablished within the societal context.
4. **Knowings space:** Participants explore the knowledge and skills available to the stakeholders. Critical evaluation helps identify the knowledge and skills that may have been overlooked.
5. **Framings space:** Understanding the various worldviews, values, beliefs, and mental models of those involved. Exploring the narratives driving all these perspectives might offer insights into alternative discourses that can open new directions.
6. **Beings space:** In the final space, participants delve into ways of knowing that go beyond the rational. They explore embodied, spiritual, and emotional experiences that raise awareness of what's happening and invite consideration of different directions. This phase transcends pure rationality and adds a deeper dimension to the overall understanding of the challenge.

After Break the Sky, the three phases contain these six spaces. Participants work in these spaces, preferably in pairs or small groups, in diverse orders, and they are invited to revisit spaces multiple times. The comprehensive exploration of these spaces empowers a shared and holistic understanding, paving the way for the next phase. It supports reframing the challenge and offering a starting point to "Build new relationships" around concrete experiments exploring potentially transformative directions.

The BEEHIVE methodology fosters transformative journeys by uncovering previously invisible interconnections, leading to a deeper understanding of challenges. It encourages novel collaboration, openness to all voices, and receptivity to new ideas, catalyzing innovative solutions and transformative change.

26.3 Application of the BEEHIVE

The BEEHIVE method is versatile and applicable to brief 2-h sessions up to multi-day collaborations to explore alternative futures. Its four phases support identifying future directions and defining, implementing, and monitoring concrete projects. If time is limited, progressing through the first three phases (Break the Sky, Open Time, and Find What Gives Life) can help identify future directions and guide the next steps. Below is an example of a 3-h session.

26.3.1 *Break the Sky (Preparation)*

Begin by exploring the value of a complexity-based approach to the challenge. For instance, use the Cynefin framework (see references) to distinguish between simple, complicated, *complex*, and chaotic problems. If applicable, invite stakeholders from across the system, including those directly affected by the challenge, in addition to experts, policymakers, and academics. Ideally, 10–20 participants collaborate to have diverse perspectives available.

26.3.2 *Open Time*

Prepare the space by mapping the visual on the floor. Ensure it is large enough for participants to move around, and provide large post-its and pens for adding ideas.

- Start by welcoming participants and explaining the BEEHIVE approach. Elaborate on the challenge (from Break the Sky) and invite everyone to develop a deep understanding and explore future directions collaboratively in this session (15 min).
- Next, participants enter the Imaginings space to write down their initial ideas for solutions to the challenge silently. Allow time for initial questions. Once the post-its are shared, everyone reflects on the diversity of inputs (15 min).
- Participants then visit the other spaces in pairs or small groups and leave post-its on the floor. There is no set order for visiting the spaces. By sharing, the participants affect and are affected by others. Multiple rounds encourage interaction and reflection (30 min).

- When energy drops, share insights as a group. Each participant is invited to give meaning to the inputs. The participants will already have experienced the change in their perspectives (as shared at the start in the Imaginings space). This will inspire new ideas and the need to add more contributions. Allow participants to go to the diverse spaces again (20 min).
- Finally, the participants collaboratively select in an open dialogue the most relevant inputs that could contribute to exploring regenerative futures. And importantly, following these efforts, the participants collaboratively reframe the challenge generatively (20 min).

26.3.3 Find What Gives Life

The participants move to the generative phase itself.

- The selected inputs are mapped in the respective spaces of the BEEHIVE: Find What Gives Life. Starting from the reframed challenge, participants explore the findings in pairs again and add more thoughts to the spaces (except for the Imaginings space) (20 min).
- As the final step here, participants move together to the Imaginings space to generate multiple ways of addressing the reframed challenge in dialogue (20 min).
- This generative phase ends with collaboratively selecting the most inspiring transformative future idea (10 min).

26.3.4 Build New Relationships

In the final phase of the approach, the participants use the diverse spaces again to design a prototype for approaching the challenge holistically. They also share ideas on how to prepare for implementation. Finally, they consider how to monitor the outcomes reflexively in the future (30 min) (Table 26.1).

Table 26.1 Method overview

Main purpose
To collaboratively find pathways to alternative futures
Gained competences
Develop competencies concerning system intelligence, deep listening, using the power of language, and mobilizing cocreation
Educational setting
Applicable in both formal and informal settings; preferably bringing “the whole system” related to a real-life social practice into the room, especially giving voice to “whom it concerns.” To gain an understanding of the tool, learners can use it in a formal learning setting

(continued)

Table 26.1 (continued)

Space requirements/restrictions
The application of the method requires the physical space to map the BEEHIVEs (at least: Open time and find what gives life) on the floor. The space needed depends on the number of participants; the participants need to have the space to walk around in the spaces of the BEEHIVE, leaving post-its or other signs in the spaces. It can be executed indoors and outdoors
Resources and necessary materials
Map the BEEHIVE with adhesive tape to the floor. Each axis of the BEEHIVE is seen as a BEESPACE To support the participants, put prints of the core concepts (doings, organizings, ...) in the respective SPACES of the BEEHIVE Participants require a pen and post-its to write down their thoughts to leave these in the spaces
Number of participants
Ideally, 10–25 diverse participants join a session as the methods aim to make participants work collaboratively, exploring alternative futures
Facilitator competences and skills
The facilitator needs to have experience to manage the dynamics of the group, inviting participants to interact in open ways with one another and with the contributions of participants. The facilitator also needs to have strong system intelligence
Participants’ skills/age/competences
If the diversity of the group is large enough, then there are no special requirements for the skills/competences
Duration
A minimum of 2 h is needed. The duration of the application in real-life practices can be at multiple lengths, from a minimum of 2 h to spanning multiple months

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