

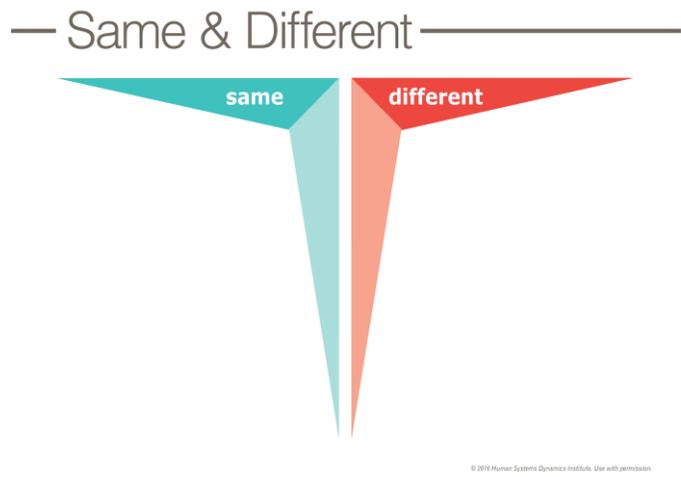


HUMAN SYSTEMS  
DYNAMICS INSTITUTE

## Same and Different

### Description of Same and Different

Same and different is a way to identify patterns in what may seem to be random activity. In our book, *Adaptive Action, Leveraging Uncertainty in Your Organization*, we define patterns as similarities, differences, and connections that have meaning across space and time. When you begin to identify those things that are similar and different in your sticky issue, you begin to name the patterns you see.



---

### What?

You can use Same and Different when a sticky issue has you stuck, unable to move forward. At those times you often lose your ability to discern patterns in the chaos of the moment. Unless you can identify patterns, though, you have no hope of identifying the underlying dynamics that hold you stuck. Using models /methods like Same and Different helps you see realities in your system in a way that informs your decision making and action taking.

### So What?

By engaging in open dialogue about how they are the same as or different from each other, members of your group can gain insights into their relationships and interactions. You can use the model to get to the heart of your challenge. This activity engages you in naming patterns of similarities and differences, identifying unnamed containers in the midst of larger group, and differences that matter, even though they may not be recognized.

Nothing is intractable.

## Now What?

Use Same and Different in your next sticky issue to:

- ▶ Name patterns that keep you stuck and patterns you can leverage for help.
- ▶ Explore the implications of those patterns in the context of your sticky issue.
- ▶ Take wise action to amplify patterns that move you forward and damp patterns that hold you back.

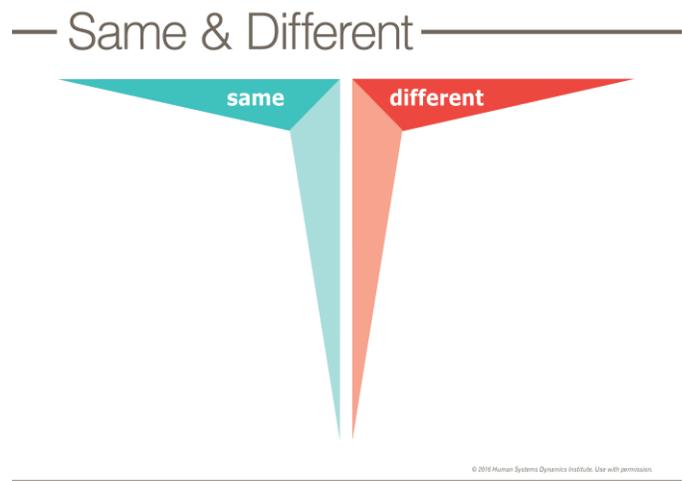


## HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS INSTITUTE

### Same and Different

#### What is the Purpose of Same and Different?

In this activity, individuals use a “T” chart to list the ways they are alike down one side and ways they are different down the other side. In the process, many differences and similarities that are not really important will be identified. What will happen, however, is that at some point, someone will make a statement that “hits a nerve” and the group’s energy will shift. A loud, raucous group will suddenly get very quiet; or a quiet, low energy group will suddenly escalate. This is generally a clue that a truth has been named in a way everyone can recognize.



Working to identify their similarities and differences opens options for action as it identifies potential points of leverage to amplify desirable patterns and/or damp patterns that are less productive.

#### So What Can You Do to Use Same and Different?

You begin by drawing a simple diagram like the one in the image. Then you frame a question about similarities and differences that might influence your wicked issue. Examples include:

- ▶ How is this issue same as and different than it was yesterday (or last quarter or last year)?
- ▶ What are the similarities and differences between this wicked issues and related issues that are less wicked?
- ▶ How would I like the future with regard to this issue to be the same as and different from how it is today?

Nothing is intractable.

- ▶ How do multiple people view the issue similarly and differently?

In answering the question, you brainstorm similarities and differences. Very often, this process itself generates new and innovative options for action. If not, you can focus more closely by asking three additional questions:

- ▶ Which of these similarities and differences have no significant effect on the wickedness of the issue? (Put 0 in front of those.)
- ▶ Which ones make the issue worse? (Put – in front of those.)
- ▶ Finally, which of the similarities or differences make the issue better? (Put + in front of those.)

## **Now What Can You Do to Shift Patterns Toward Greater Fitness?**

These steps may uncover new ways to engage with your sticky issue. If not, then move to action by choosing one of the items and planning action to shift it. You may want to strengthen a positive one or weaken a negative one. You may focus on increasing or decreasing similarities or on increasing or decreasing differences. Whatever you choose, take the action and see what happens. How does your wicked issue transform? Then begin the process again.