



Methods for Change

Hands-on engagement and learning with Ketso

Dr Joanne Tippett, *The University of Manchester*

Fraser How, *Ketso trainer and facilitator*

Dr Amy Barron and Dr Laura Pottinger,
The University of Manchester

Corresponding author

Dr Joanne Tippett

joanne.tippett@manchester.ac.uk

Hands-on engagement and learning with Ketso



Ketso is a physical tool for creative engagement and learning that promotes effective participation. This hands-on kit is designed to make it easier for anyone to run an effective and engaging workshop. The word 'ketso' means 'action' in Lesotho, where Joanne Tippett invented the toolkit in the mid-1990s. Built around a metaphor of growth, the physical kit is based on the imagery of a tree, consisting of a trunk, branches and colourful leaves, which participants write on, then add to the felt workspace. This physical kit is animated with a series of questions and processes to share ideas. Ketso is a catalyst for discussion, enabling people to learn from each other and see different perspectives. Using the kit makes sure everyone's voice is heard and helps to structure effective thinking.

Ketso can be used in a range of settings, from one-to-one and small group discussions, to large workshops with hundreds of people. This participatory toolkit has been used to engage stakeholders in contexts as diverse as the environment, health and wellbeing, community development, education and business. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this face to face toolkit has been [adapted for use in in remote and hybrid settings](#). Each person has their own individual kit and develops ideas before discussing them in digital breakout rooms. Pictures of the completed Ketso felts can be shared via tools such as Padlet. Ketso Connect is also being used as a method to encourage student engagement and structure work on assignments in [higher education](#).

Hands-on engagement and learning with Ketso



How does Ketso create or contribute to change?

Ketso can be used, and can facilitate change, at any stage in a project. In the beginning, Ketso can be used to get a better sense of different stakeholders' views, priorities and resources, laying the foundations for change. Change continues to unfold because of the mutual learning emerging from the dialogue that Ketso encourages. As a tool for social learning, Ketso facilitates understanding of the bigger picture and opportunities for change. A frequent comment is that using Ketso uncovers a clearer sense of existing assets and resources. It helps people see new ways to make more effective use of what they already have, such as by working in partnership.

Encouraging people to understand different perspectives can lead to change, because it helps to build bridges across heterogeneous groups. This can lead to synergistic benefits, sometimes with links forged in addition to the main focus of the workshop. Ketso Connect has already enabled people from over 25 countries to work together in a hands-on and visual way, sharing ideas online. This has great potential for facilitating learning across national boundaries, without the climate change impacts of flights to bring people together in a workshop space.

The sense of empowerment created through active involvement in the research means action is more likely to be taken. The process of using Ketso builds capacity amongst participants, as the act of using the kit develops skills in creative thinking, effective communication, group work, and action planning. The physical artefact of Ketso, with its coloured leaves for different kinds of questions, branches to cluster ideas around themes, and icons for participants to highlight priorities, means that key issues and

opportunities become more apparent. This ability to create a synopsis of findings, coupled with the skill and capacity-building amongst participants, can facilitate organisational and strategic change.

What ideas or concepts influence Ketso?

As a method, Ketso sits within a participatory and action-orientated data gathering framework, which is about building ideas together for change. Inspired by Robert Chamber's work on Participatory Appraisal, Ketso is designed to ensure everybody's voice is heard. Participatory data gathering involves the researcher working with participants to explore issues that are of interest to them. The action orientation is inspired by Paolo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Asset Based Community Development, which seeks to recognise and build on existing resources and assets in the community in any change process. Feedback from users in over 80 countries shows that the Ketso toolkit helps participants to clarify priorities and develop ideas for action.

Ketso is built on [three pillars of effective coproduction](#) (developing ideas and taking action together, coupled with shared responsibility & decision-making) which were synthesised from this theoretical grounding and decades of experience running workshops. See the Top Tips below, and the creative output for this guide at aspect.ac.uk/m4c to learn more about the pillars. As the discussion is facilitated with a hands-on kit, the participants develop their thinking both as individuals and as a group, move ideas around and are able to find patterns amongst them. The process, in and of itself, gathers and structures data.

Hands-on engagement and learning with Ketso



Why might I want to use Ketso?

- Designed to make running an effective workshop easier, the physical pieces of Ketso guide the facilitator and participants through the process. All of the pieces rinse clean in water and can be used again, in many different ways.
- Ketso Connect is designed to be used in [remote workshops](#). This innovation enables people to use the tactile and visual toolkit to gather their thoughts before sharing them via video link, which encourages deeper thinking and reflection. The fact that everyone is using the same physical toolkits in their own spaces helps create a sense of cohesion, despite physical distance. It can also be used in [hybrid meetings](#), where some people are in the same room or space, and some are joining by video link.
- Ketso is an innovative way of making sure everybody has their voice heard in a discussion. The interactive and participatory nature of the kit means participants who would not normally speak up, those with different languages, or who experience learning differently, can actively participate.
- Using Ketso can lead to unexpected insights. Ketso structures the thinking process so participants are able to gain clarity in their thinking. As the kit is highly visual, it is possible to see how ideas cluster around particular themes or 'branches', and links between ideas can be identified.
- Ketso can be used as a prompt to ask deeper questions and foster collaborative analysis. The tactile nature of the kit means that participants and researcher can do the analysis together. The visual representations created during the workshop can in turn be analysed further, used to ask additional questions and engage with participants about the findings.
- Ketso helps to foster genuinely ethical research by being of use to the participants as well as the researcher. The collaborative discussions facilitated by Ketso help the participants learn from each other. They gain something from this process, because it often sparks ideas for action and collaboration.
- The data created by using Ketso can be turned into a structured synopsis of findings for an organisation, revealing key ideas such as: what is going well (and should be kept in any change process), challenges and ways to overcome them. Participants use coloured icons to highlight priorities, so it is easy to identify key points for sharing.

Hands-on engagement and learning with Ketso



Step by step guide to using Ketso:

The Ketso kit includes:

Leaves – for each participant to write or draw their ideas on. There are different colours for different kinds of questions, with an underlying metaphor of growth, which can be adapted to suit different purposes. The leaves rinse clean and are reusable.

Felt workspace - a tree, with a centre piece like a tree trunk that is the focus, a reminder of what the workshop is about.

Branches – that spread out from the central focus. The branches represent different themes, or aspects you want to consider and help to structure your thinking. Participants can cluster their ideas on leaves around the branches, where they best fit.



Exploring a dementia-friendly society, with people living with dementia, their carers and service providers

1. Preparation: purpose and framing of the workshop. To get the most out of the workshop, it is important to be clear about why you are doing it. Think through the following questions to develop a good plan: What do you and your organisation hope to get out of the workshop/s? What kinds of people are you thinking of inviting? What do you think they would like to get out of

the workshop? Ideally you would include potential partners and stakeholders in this early scoping stage – What are we trying to do together and why?

2. Work out the practicalities. The ideal length for a Ketso workshop is 1.5 - 2 hours. This length of session allows you to go through several different stages of developing ideas, plus a warm-up, table swap, break and feedback at the end. The general rule of thumb is to allow 10 - 15 minutes per stage (e.g. green leaves – creative thinking). In an online workshop with Ketso Connect, we suggest allowing 2 - 3 minutes for people to write ideas down for each stage, then breakout rooms of 10 - 15 minutes to share them, preferably then with a few minutes to share ideas back in the plenary digital space.

The ideal number of participants per Ketso felt at a table, or in a digital breakout room, is 5 – 6 (maximum 8). You can have as many tables or breakout rooms as you need for the group size, and it is possible to run very large workshops, with hundreds of participants at once, as the kit itself provides the structure and guides participants through the process.

3. Plan how the elements of Ketso be used in the workshop. Envisage Ketso as a bit of hardware that lets you run different applications, or ways of running workshops. This encompasses the centrepiece on the felt as a main focus, a sequence of questions and activities using different coloured leaves in sequence, and themes relating to the main focus represented by branches spreading out from the central trunk.

Hands-on engagement and learning with Ketso



4. In the workshop itself, give a clear introduction of both the aims and the process at the beginning. Be clear what the purpose of the workshop is, what will happen with the outcomes, and how participants will receive feedback. Introduce each piece of Ketso and its associated process one step at a time. For instance, introduce the idea of writing on leaves with a simple warm-up exercise, shared on one of the small plain felts (or with a top idea or two shared verbally in a digital breakout room if running an online session). In the second stage of leaf writing, introduce the idea of using the colours to ask different kinds of questions, leaving the felt and branches covered with the small felt used for the warm-up exercise until participants have developed leaves ready to share.

5. As you go through the workshop, give people time on their own to develop their ideas before they share them, and repeat this process for each stage. Once people have written some ideas, you can uncover the main felt and introduce the branches, and ask participants to share their ideas. One person shares one idea, then goes around to the next person to share an idea, placing the leaves on the felt as they are shared, pointing at whichever branch where they best fit. Leaves can be moved around to create clusters and show connections between the ideas.



Developing a vision for nature recovery in the Carbon Landscape with community members



An example of Ketso in social science research

The Carbon Landscape

Dr Joanne Tippett, The University of Manchester
and Fraser How, Ketso trainer and facilitator

Ketso was used to build a partnership and engage with communities to inform a successful bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2017 for the £3.2 million [Carbon Landscape Project](#). The different coloured leaves were used to find out what was already working and what mattered to people in their landscape, as well as to develop creative ideas for how to make the area better for nature and people (using the metaphor of growth). The branches were used to help structure this questioning process, stretching the thinking to include landscape issues, community concerns and different ways to bring diverse groups along with the process. Keeping the colour coding for questions consistent across workshops over time, and for different workshops and stakeholders, made it possible to synthesise the ideas and find key patterns.

Ketso has subsequently been embedded in the community engagement of the Carbon Landscape Project to engage new audiences (e.g. 35 workshops with schools, community

and youth groups, and local authorities and other public sector bodies). Significant land improvement projects have been delivered on 18 key sites, underpinned by a programme of stakeholder and community engagement using Ketso.

Ketso has played an important role in allowing extensive stakeholder engagement in the challenging context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as a Partnership Manager at Natural England explains: *"We are using Ketso to explore national community engagement standards for Nature Recovery Networks. We have been able to carry on with this engagement despite the pandemic, engaging with 150+ people online, using the new Ketso Connect to develop our understanding of the potential reserve in more depth than would have been possible with digital tools only... Using the toolkit builds capacity in project officers and participants to really engage with community members in meaningful dialogue. It helps all participants to think beyond their local patch."*

Hands-on engagement and learning with Ketso



Where else could Ketso be used?

Partnership working and coproduction of change

Using Ketso allows for more inclusive engagement across a diverse range of participants, and it can be used in a range of ways, from patient and public involvement, to engagement between service providers and people with lived experience, to involving community members in developing plans for their local area. It can be used in contexts such as climate change planning, as in the city of Alameda, California, a low-lying city threatened by rising sea levels, where *“Ketso created an engaging and inclusive process for community members, which resulted in hundreds of community-sourced ideas generated in a relatively short amount of time”* (Climate Change Co-ordinator, City of Alameda) .

Ketso facilitates participation with marginalised groups and enables a deeper understanding of their lived experience and needs, leading to improved plans and processes. For instance, SeeMe Scotland adopted Ketso in 2014 to engage 200 mental health service users, carers and providers to develop a national strategy to tackle mental health stigma. Engagement using Ketso has now been extended to hundreds of additional participants. *“The most useful aspect of Ketso is giving people without power a voice”* (SeeMe’s Programme Manager).

Organisational effectiveness and learning

Ketso can help improve the working arrangements of a range of organisations. It has been used in project planning, change management and organisational learning. For example, Trafford Housing Trust uses Ketso to improve its services based on customer feedback: *“Our Anti-Social Behaviour service’s key performance indicators have been redesigned based on customer feedback gathered [using Ketso], and our development arm is using customer feedback to refine the houses it builds...In the past we’ve just used post-it notes and pens, but Ketso made it much easier to structure the focus group and to record and analyse the discussions.”* (Head of Business Intelligence, Trafford Housing Trust).

Ketso can bring a range of voices into guiding organisations’ activities. Wageningen University’s Centre for Development Innovation use Ketso in project work in Africa and Asia to develop new ways to teach landscape management: *“A key aspect of Ketso that is different to other tools is its ability to consolidate ideas into something that can turn into a finished product that actually has an impact...it’s like a translation tool”* (Senior Advisor, Global Landscape Forum).



Top tips

- 1. Hear everyone's voice.** Make sure everyone has a way to make an input via a pen and leaves. Give people time on their own to develop their own thinking before sharing their ideas, and repeat the pattern of 'think, then share, then discuss' for each new stage of developing ideas in the workshop.
- 2. Structure effective thinking and creativity.** Think about the questions you are going to ask, and the sequence to ask them in. A key way to encourage productive dialogue is to start with the positive. Encourage participants to reflect on what is going well, what resources they already have (brown leaves). Then go on to think of future possibilities, including how to make more effective use of these resources (green leaves).
- 3. Link information across time and place.** Take time to think about what you are trying to achieve and gain clarity about the purpose and focus. Consider what you already know about the topic, and how you will use and share the new information that will be developed. During a workshop, clarify priorities and actions to be taken.

Hands-on engagement and learning with Ketso



Further reading

- Ketso 'How To' Resources
- Ketso used to gather young people's views on employment support
- Using Ketso in research with students who identify as learning differently
- Returning Knowledge to the Community: An Innovative Approach to Sharing Knowledge about Drinking Water Practices in a Peri-Urban Community
- Creativity and Learning – Participatory Planning and the Co-Production of Local Knowledge
- Where to lean the ladder of participation: a normative heuristic for effective coproduction process
- Hands on Engagement with Ketso

To reference: : Tippet, J. Barron, A. Pottinger, L. How, F. (2021). 'Hands-on engagement and learning with Ketso' in Barron, A., Browne, A.L., Ehgartner, U., Hall, S.M., Pottinger, L. and Ritson, J. (eds.) *Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems*. Manchester: Aspect and The University of Manchester.



To read about more exciting social science methods, the full range of *Methods for Change* 'how to' guides can be found here