

Ketso: A New Tool for Extension Professionals

Abstract

Extension professionals employ many techniques and tools to obtain feedback, input, information, and data from stakeholders, research participants, and program learners. An information-gathering tool called Ketso is described in this article. This tool and its associated techniques can be used in all phases of program development, implementation, evaluation, and analysis and can be particularly effective in engaging audiences. Examples of how Ketso has been used to conduct needs/interests assessments, brainstorm and generate ideas, and organize and plan are shared.

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Introduction

Extension professionals use a range of techniques and tools to obtain feedback, input, information, and data from stakeholders, research participants, and program learners (Rowntree, Wittman, Lindquist, & Raven, 2013). This article describes an information-gathering tool called Ketso that can be used in addition to conventional data collection methods, such as interviews, questionnaires, opinion and online surveys, pretests and posttests, and focus groups (O'Neill, 2004). This tool and its associated techniques "can be used in any situation when people come together to share information, learn from each other, make decisions, and plan actions" (Tippett & How, 2011, p. 4). In addition, I share examples of how Ketso has been used to conduct needs/interests assessments, brainstorm and generate ideas, and organize and plan.

The word *ketso* means "action" in the Sesotho language of the African country of Lesotho, where the Ketso idea was first conceived and developed. Ketso has been identified as part of the *participatory action research* family of social science methodological techniques (Tippett, Handley, & Ravetz, 2007). Ketso as a tool kit "is a hands-on kit that enables people to think and work together better" (Tippett & How, 2011, p. 4) and is a "workshop in a bag" (www.ketso.com/learn-about-ketso). A typical Ketso tool kit (see www.ketso.com) is comprised of a large felt mat with four quadrants, a

grid mat, different colored plastic "leaves" and icons backed with Velcro, flexible "branches" for organizing leaves, and marking pens with water-soluble ink for writing responses and ideas on the leaves (see Figure 1). These items are attractive, tactile, and movable and can be reused after the water-soluble ink is washed off.

Figure 1.

Ketso Mat with Leaf Clusters



How Ketso Can Be Used

The Ketso tool kit can be used in countless ways, settings, and situations across Extension program areas (i.e., agri/aquaculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development). Below are three ways colleagues and I have used Ketso to obtain feedback, input, information, and data from stakeholders, research participants, program learners, and each other.

Group Needs/Interests Assessment in Data Collection

Ketso can be a useful tool in conducting needs/interests assessments in community settings with groups of people. In such situations, Ketso can be facilitated much like a focus group interview is; however, it is much more interactive because everyone has a "voice" (i.e., pen and leaves) with which to contribute to the process. Participants are engaged in the assessment process by a skilled facilitator who asks carefully crafted questions that guide the collection of information about

participants' needs and interests related to a familial, community, or societal issue.

In 2014, colleagues and I used Ketso to conduct three needs/interests assessment events with approximately 60 fathers and their adolescent children to understand family strengths and challenges, nutritional needs and wants, and community assets and deficits. The purpose of doing so was to determine unique programmatic needs of participants and to gauge their level of interest in the programming we intended to develop. What we learned from participants was invaluable in getting to know their community; their racial, cultural, and familial preferences; and what we as project leaders needed to do to tailor the program to their needs and interests. Ketso was interactive and engaging for both the youth and the fathers because it felt more like a game than does a traditional focus group interview with self-sticking notes and flip charts.

Brainstorming and Idea Generation

Ketso is an ideal tool for brainstorming and idea generation. Because the Ketso tool kit contains various different-colored leaves, icons, and branches, it encourages participants to use these different objects to creatively express their ideas. In addition, after ideas are written on the leaves, the group can discuss the ideas to identify trends, themes, or unique suggestions generated by participants. The leaves can be picked up and moved around the mat to form leaf clusters to assist in organizing ideas.

During two day-long meetings in 2015, I facilitated (and was a participant in) two brainstorming activities with colleagues in which we generated a list of possible activities that could be done with youth and parents. The brainstorming was structured around four broad curricular themes, which guided us in generating ideas. Different leaf colors corresponded with different types of activities; brown leaves were used for parent-only curriculum activities, green leaves were used for parent-youth dyadic activities, and yellow leaves were used for youth-only curriculum activities. To start, we took a few minutes on our own to brainstorm activity ideas, which we wrote on the leaves and placed in a designated quadrant of the mat. Then we discussed each idea as a group. This discussion allowed each person to hear the reasons for and potential uses of each activity. This discussion stimulated additional ideas from group members, which also were written down. Finally, the leaves were placed in clusters by theme, and the information was recorded in a database. We augmented the brainstorming by audio recording our discussion for later use and analysis.

Organizing and Planning

The Ketso tool kit also can be used for organizing and forming plans for future action. For instance, also in 2015, I facilitated a Ketso activity with three groups of colleagues, serving in an advisory function to administrators, in which we organized data collected previously via an online survey. These data were responses from Extension educators around the state regarding local trends and professional development needs. Using Ketso leaves and icons, the three advisory groups summarized and organized the data into five priority areas. The data were captured in a database and delivered to administration to assist with strategic planning in the coming year.

Conclusion

Given the recent emphasis among Extension professionals to practice community-based participatory research (Tritz, 2014), Ketso is an ideal tool for collecting feedback, input, data, and information in an engaging, unique, and inclusive way. It can be used in all phases of community engagement work: engaging in joint problem-solving discussions, brainstorming ideas, developing and implementing action plans, monitoring growth, evaluating outcomes, and making needed refinements.

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