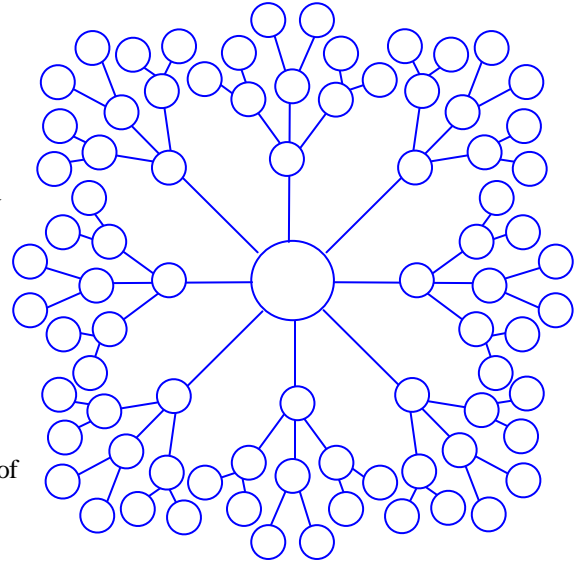


# Introduction to the Implications Wheel

The Implications Wheel is a decision enhancing tool that allows leadership and stakeholders to research the potential implications of a policy change, emerging trend, innovation, strategic goal or objective, or an event that has or might occur in a quick, inexpensive and comprehensive way. The Implications Wheel was developed in the mid-1970's by Joel Barker, who is known for his work as a futurist and a business educator.

## The Implications Wheel Process:

The process used to create a Wheel goes through four primary stages. First, the "center" of the Wheel is drafted giving a description of the issue, goal or change that will be studied. Second, a diverse group of stakeholders is brought together and presented the center description. Third, the group begins to identify the first, second, third, and fourth-order events or things that might happen if the preceding event occurs. These are graphed out on the Implications Wheel diagram that are provided. Finally, the participants are asked to rate the likelihood and desirability (negative or positive) of each implication happening. This can be scored numerically or graphically on the Wheel diagram. Dr. Barker estimates that a deeply developed Implications Wheel can predict 80% to 90% of the potential implications of the center under study.



## What can be studied with the Implications Wheel process?

- \* *Policy Changes*
- \* *Emerging Trends*
- \* *Strategic Goals or Objectives*
- \* *Any Event* that has or might occur
- \* *Innovations*: Testing new innovations and the potential applications of a new innovation
- \* *Mergers*: Between companies and within companies
- \* *Conflict Clarification*: this is not resolution but clarification of points of view and concerns between parties in the non-debatative process of the I-Wheel
- \* *Interdepartmental Involvement*: Engaging all stakeholders in analyzing the implications of new initiatives or major decisions.
- \* *Team Building*: creating deep understanding on the focus center for all members of the team. This allows for roles to be clarified and opportunities to be discussed
- \* *Job Changes*: Exploring the implications of job changes on personal professional and family levels.
- \* *Teaching Tool*
- \* *New Product and Services Discoveries*
- \* *Research Tool*
- \* *Quality Improvement Tool*

## The Costs of doing an Implications Wheel:

The costs involved in using the Implications Wheel are essentially the time of the people doing the Wheel and the payback of using the Wheel can be tremendous. The Wheel process can be used to spot a major negative implication of a new policy or program and be used to redesign or minimize the impact of it before it is implemented. The results of an Implications Wheel create an easy-to-read diagram that simplifies the presentation of the material. The Wheel almost always pays for itself in just the hassles or pitfalls that can be avoided because it helps to spot the negative consequences before they happened and allows the leadership to head them off. Potential positive implications can be identified before they occur and work can be done to ensure that they are capitalized on and benefited from.

## **Time commitment:**

It can take an experienced group 2-4 hours to do an effective wheel on its own or with facilitation a non-experienced group can complete a wheel in 2 to 6 hours depending on the complexity of the Center and how the process is facilitated. Compared to the time it usually takes to gather the kind of information the Wheel produces, it is 10-20 hours faster than any other process like it and therefore significantly less expensive.

## **Participants:**

The beauty of the Wheel is that as few as five and as many as 100 can effectively participate at one time in producing a Wheel. Everyone who is a stakeholder in the implications defined in the center of the Wheel can be a part of the team. Multiple sessions can be held and the results can be added together strengthening the results of each succeeding session.

The Implications Wheel allows all participants to be heard on an equal playing field without getting into a debate as to which single idea is right. In fact, the goal is to gather all ideas and implications so that all can be considered for their potential positive and negative impact and to allow the best decisions to be made. In most instances, you will want participants who have opposite opinions on the policy or maybe negatively or positively impacted by the new innovation so that the results of the Wheel reflect both sides of the potential future.

## **Facilitation of the Implications Wheel Process:**

One of the greatest benefits to the I-Wheel tool is that the results of an Implications Wheel can be easily read and interpreted by leadership and stakeholders who receive only a cursory introduction to the I-Wheel process. Care should be taken to understand that the facilitation of the I-Wheel process takes training and experience to be able to lead groups through the creation of a well developed Wheel. The I-Wheel process moves between divergent thinking and possibility construction and convergent concept and event linkage and analysis processes that can rate the likelihood of occurrence and the desirability of the predicted thing happening. Creative divergent processes are used to explore potential succeeding events and convergent processing, analysis and thinking are used to construct the linking of one order of events to the next order of events and on until the third fourth and fifth order is reached. Finally the facilitator leads a process to merge the work of multiple groups and interpret their results in to a comprehensive final Wheel diagram that carefully interprets all of the work that has been done by all involved. It is this final diagram that is easily used to guide decision-making by the leadership and stakeholders involved. In conclusion, leaders and decision makers who have received only brief instruction in reading and interpreting Wheels easily apply the results of the Implications Wheel process.

## **Results of an Implications Wheel**

The Implications Wheel is a decision-enhancing tool. It will not create a decision for you, though it will deeply inform your decisions as to the potential positive and negative implications of what might happen. More specifically, the Implications Wheel tool will assist you in identifying:

- \* Pathways or bridges you may want to build to beneficial possibilities of the decision, trend or idea being studied
- \* Barriers or supports that you may want to erect or supply to the effected parties of potential negative possibilities or implications of the decision, trend or idea being studied
- \* Crucial additional information needs: What you know and what you need to get more information about.

In summary, the Implications Wheel identifies the potential negative and positive consequences and promotes more thoughtful and powerful decision-making. The Implications Wheel process allows leaders to avoid doing something that is perceived to have immediate benefits and later returns to create long-term negative and unpredicted consequences.

## **For more information please contact**

**Mo Fahnestock, Ph.D.**  
Zobius Leadership International  
394 Bates Ave.  
St. Paul, MN 55106

Mobile: (612) 720-2561  
(651) 771-9127  
fahne001@umn.edu  
Zobius@qwest.net  
www.zobius.net

