

Axis of influence series:



Voice:

toolkit to
encourage
facilitation

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1 Purpose of the toolkit

This Toolkit is part of the Voice Resource Pack. It is a resource to support Voice facilitators to deliver Voice sessions with groups. It provides:

- ideas on methods which may help groups work in participatory and inclusive ways
- support for facilitators to recognise and challenge discrimination
- feedback from other Voice facilitators around what works

2 Participatory and inclusive

Good discussions depend on people being able to share their ideas and experiences in ways which include, rather than exclude; it is rare to have a good inclusive discussion, where everyone joins in, with more than 4 or 5 people. The bigger a group, the more likely it is that a few people will take up the space and be the talkative ones - whilst the others (often the majority) leave them to it.

Sometimes groups get stuck in patterns - with the same people taking on the same old roles - and this can make it hard to move on as a group. Listening and communicating needs to be worked at - it doesn't just happen by magic!!

There are ways and means of encouraging people to discuss and share ideas and experiences - trainers and facilitators use them all the time. This toolkit hopes to shed some light on these simple tools and techniques.

Informal approaches work well when you want to engage interest and enhance communication. The hallmarks of informal events are openness in format, style and physical arrangements.

For example, if chairs are placed in straight rows with a speaker's table facing them, a more formal atmosphere may result - the physical

environment puts barriers against interaction and people are at a physical and psychological distance from 'the speaker'. If chairs are placed in a horseshoe shape with the speaker's table in the gap, the distance between the participants and the speaker is reduced and communication is likely to be encouraged. Similarly, if chairs are grouped around small tables (known as 'cabaret style') this tends to promote interaction between participants.

Placing a table between yourself and the people you are speaking to gives off a message that you are not readily accessible. Conversely, if you sit in front of the table nearer to the people you are speaking to, you give off a message about rapport, closeness and being accessible. You will also find it easier to make eye contact with people.

It is useful to know the following around how people learn and remember things:

People remember:

10% of what they read

20% of what they hear

30% of what they see done

50% of what they read, hear and see done

70% of what they read, hear, see done and explain to someone else

90% of what they read, hear, see done, explain and do themselves

From Shay McConnon: presenting with power 2005

So, the more people actually work on something together, provide their own interpretations and explanations, the more they will remember. This has direct implications for how a group of people hold discussions and work together.

Facilitation is a set of values as much as a way of working. It values everyone's input and creativity, builds consensus and energises a group. It is a process that helps clarify what is important and where there is energy for change. Facilitators:

- Design processes for before, during and after a session with a group
- Moderate the process and govern the pace: notice when people are flagging
- Help the flow of the meeting by judicious use of tools, techniques and interventions
- Make constructive, honest inputs
- Enable and empower the group to reflect on what they say and do
- Offer feedback on how well things are going
- Energise when necessary

3 Methods, ideas and activities

The following are a selection of tried and tested methods, ideas and activities to use with groups to encourage ideas, discussion and

prioritisation. Where it is useful we have provided web links for more information.

Mapping: *visual tools*

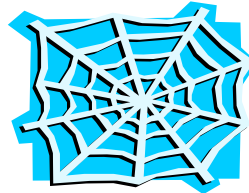
Organisational mapping

Brainstorm or provide names of organisations: Council, School, Work, Health Service etc. Use flipchart and big pens to draw maps and spidergrams, roadmaps and timelines of how people feel that these organisations relate to them.

Roadmaps: using a road as a visual metaphor

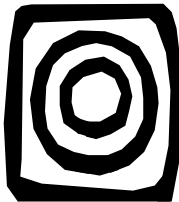


Spider-grams: using the shape of a spider's web to visually show links and the relationship between things



Power mapping

Select categories of life e.g. home, school, work, town, country etc. Use circles of power with 'me' in the middle and those I feel most 'influential' about closest to me, moving outwards.



Timelines: literally a line on a piece of flipchart paper which spans a period of time - write in the key dates or milestones

Pictures and symbols: *visual tools*

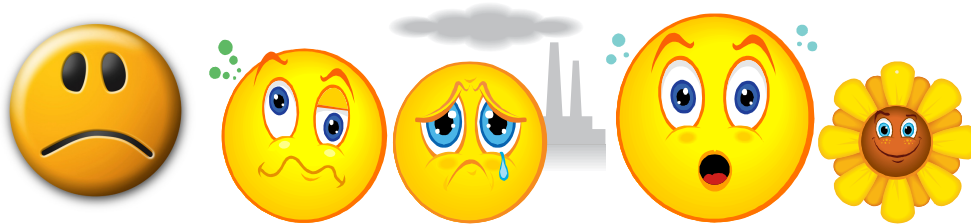
To explore how people are feeling try using pictures and symbols - people often feel much more comfortable with these than they do with words:

Tree jelly babies (worksheet in Appendix one)

Weather symbols: grey cloudy, bright sunny, foggy, lightening



Faces and expressions: a range of smiley, sad, shocked, surprised



Message tree:

NB this works very well with children

Draw an outline of a tree on a large sheet of paper and cut out leaf shapes from coloured paper (or use leaf-shaped post-its). Give people several leaves and ask them to write the comments you want from the session onto the leaves and then come and put them on the tree. (Tip - Have bits of blu-tack ready for them if they are using paper).

Suitcase stickers:

Draw a suitcase on a large sheet of paper and give out different coloured and interestingly shaped post-its. Ask for comments to be written and stuck onto the suitcase that you'll be taking away with you. This could also be used to find out what messages and/or information people take away with them after an event.

Graffiti wall:

Draw a brick wall onto large paper and put on wall. Encourage people to write comments onto the brick wall when they want to. You could also provide post it notes for this purpose.

Thinking hats: Edward de Bono

Each of the '6 Thinking Hats' is a different style of thinking. It can be useful for people in a group to adopt one of these to see an idea, topic, issue or problem through different 'lens'. These are explained below:



White Hat:

With this 'Thinking Hat', you focus on the data available. Look at the information you have, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and either try to fill them or take account of them. This is where you analyse past trends, and try to extrapolate from historical data.



Red Hat:

'Wearing' the Red Hat, you look at the issue or decision using intuition, gut reaction, and emotion. Also try to think how other people will react emotionally, and try to understand the intuitive responses of people.



Black Hat:

When using 'Black Hat thinking', look at things pessimistically, cautiously and defensively. Try to see why ideas and approaches might not work. This is important because it highlights the weak points in a plan or course of action. It allows you to eliminate them, alter your approach, or prepare contingency plans to counter problems that arise. 'Black Hat thinking' helps to make your plans 'tougher' and more resilient. It can also help you to spot fatal flaws and risks before you embark on a course of action. 'Black Hat thinking' is one of the real benefits of this technique, as many successful people get so used to thinking positively that often they cannot see problems in advance, leaving them under-prepared for difficulties.



Yellow Hat:

The Yellow Hat helps you to think positively. It is the optimistic viewpoint that helps you to see all the benefits of the decision and the value in it, and spot the opportunities that arise from it. 'Yellow Hat thinking' helps you to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult.



Green Hat:

The Green Hat stands for creativity. This is where you can develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas.



Blue Hat:

The Blue Hat stands for process control. This is the hat worn by people chairing meetings. When running into difficulties because ideas are running dry, they may direct activity into 'Green Hat thinking'. When contingency plans are needed, they will ask for 'Black Hat thinking', and so on.

You can use Six Thinking Hats in meetings or on your own. In meetings this tool has the benefit of defusing the disagreements that can happen when people with different thinking styles discuss the same problem.

Icebreakers

Introductory Ice Breakers

Introductory ice breakers are used to introduce participants to each other and to facilitate first conversation amongst the participants.

The Little Known Fact: Ask participants to share their name, role in the organisation, length of membership, and one little known fact about themselves.

True or False: Ask your participants to introduce themselves and make three or four statements about themselves, one of which is false. Now get the rest of the group to vote on which fact is false.

As well as getting to know each other as individuals, this ice breaker helps to start interaction within the group.

Interviews: Ask participants to get into twos. Each person then interviews his or her partner for a set time while paired up. When the group reconvenes, each person introduces their interviewee to the rest of the group.

Problem Solvers: Ask participants to work in small groups. Create a simple problem scenario for them to work on in a short time. Once the group have analysed the problem and prepared their feedback, ask each group in turn to present their analysis and solutions to the wider group.

Tip: Choose a fairly simple scenario that everyone can contribute to. The idea is not to solve a real problem but to "warm up" the group for further interaction or problem solving later in the event.

Group Building Ice Breakers

Group building ice breakers can help people to start working together more cohesively towards shared goals or plans.

The Human Web: This ice breaker focuses on how people in the group inter-relate and depend on each other.

The facilitator begins with a ball of wool. Keeping hold of one end, pass or throw the wool to one of the participants, whilst introducing yourself (name and role in the organisation). Once you have made your introduction, ask the person who received the ball of wool to pass it on to another person in the group. The person handing over the ball must do the same and the process continues until everyone is introduced.

To emphasise the connection amongst the group, the facilitator then pulls on the starting thread and everyone's hand should move.

Ball Challenge: This exercise creates a simple, timed challenge for the group to help focus on shared goals, and also encourages people to include other people.

The facilitator arranges the group in a circle and asks each person to throw a ball across the circle, first announcing his or her own name, and then announcing the name of the person to whom they are throwing the ball (the first few times, each person throws the ball to someone whose name they already know.)

When every person in the group has thrown the ball at least once, it's time to set the challenge - to pass the ball around all group members as quickly as possible. Time the process, then ask the group to beat that timing. As the challenge progresses, the team will improve their process, for example by standing closer together. And so the group will learn to work as a team.

Hope, Fears and Expectations: Best done when participants already have a good understanding of each other. Group people into 2s or 3s, and ask people to discuss their expectations for the event or work ahead, then their fears and their hopes. Gather the group's response by collating 3-4 hopes, fears and expectation from each pairing or threesome.

Brainstorm also called 'quick think' or 'thought shower'

Short description

The facilitator sets a topic and asks the group for comments, ideas, feelings and views. These are all written on flipchart with no judgements made initially. This is used as a basis for discussion and reflection

What could you use this method for?

- To set the scene for group discussion \ decision making
- It is a way of looking at all the options before settling down with the most relevant and appropriate

When would you not use it?

- When you had already established what you were going to do
- With a group of very mixed abilities

Potential problems or issues in using this method

- Equal opportunity issues - communication skills and visual needs
- If everyone doesn't feel comfortable with saying things in front of others
- Some people are more vocal than others

Resource implications

Flipchart paper and stand

Brightly coloured pens

<i>Ideas café</i>

Short description

3 or 4 people working together at tables with different questions posed to each table. Using half - or full - sheets of flipchart paper per table each group makes notes in response to their particular question - for 10 minutes.

Stop them all - keep people sitting where they are and move the sheets of paper around so that people get to consider a different question and add to what is there. Repeat as necessary.

When all tables have considered all the questions, give the original papers back to tables and ask them to read all the comments and prepare a short summary for the rest of the group.

Variations:

- When you move the paper move one person with it so they can explain the notes to the next group
- Get people to move instead of moving the sheets of paper, if you want to raise energy levels
- Use paper tablecloths for people to write on rather than flipchart paper

What could you use this method for?

Sharing ideas on specific topics or question

When would you not use it?

When people have literacy issues

Any potential problems or issues in using this method?

- If someone is visually impaired, they will require a verbal narrative
- If there are too many questions people get tired and it will take a lot of time
- You need enough space in the room to move about

Resource implications

Large sheets of paper (or paper tablecloths) and pens

Index cards

Short description

Give index cards to individuals or pairs, ask them to write the issues/problems the group is focusing upon, on the index cards - one per card. These are then gathered in, shuffled and spread out (with the writing visible) - either on a large table or on the floor (if people don't have back problems and are able to bend down). The group is asked to position the cards according to the emerging themes, grouping them together in any way which makes sense to them.

Pairs or small groups take a theme to work on - to suggest ways forward - and report back

Variations:

Once people have written their issues on the cards, gather them in, shuffle them and redistribute them, asking people to consider what is written on the card and then write a response, strategy, comment, way forward on the back. These are then grouped on a large table (or floor) similar to the above

What could you use this method for?

- Gaining a group view of an issue or problem
- Sharing perspectives and links between issues and topics
- Strategising and action planning
- Illustrating how barriers can be broken down / that there are ways forward
- Identifying where issues arise from

When would you not use it?

- When people have literacy issues
- When you only have a very small group (less than 6 people)

Potential problems or issues in using this method?

If someone is visually impaired, they will require a verbal narrative

Resource implications

Index cards and pens

Splitting the group up...

Into pairs.....

Two people discuss \ debating a set topic \ issue \ question and then reporting back to a larger group, OR

People in pairs write on post-its and then put onto joint flipcharts and everybody reads the comments.

What could you use this method for?

- Pairs can also be used to complete a set task such as a role play or mock interview with clear instructions and timescale
- For discussion of more personal or sensitive areas where large group discussion is not useful
- For people to really get to grips with their own experiences and reflect upon them with prompting from one other
- Where people are reticent in larger group discussions
- Where people are from different backgrounds, cultures or professions to share and ask questions of each other
- Getting people to work with different people throughout a session

When would you not use it?

- When everyone needs to hear the same things
- When everyone needs feedback from each other

Potential problems or issues in using this method

- There is not the benefit of whole group exchange
- Need to timetable in feedback time
- Personalities - people want to work with the other person \ congruency of the pairs
- People reinforcing each other's prejudices or being too confrontational and defensive
- People lobbying their idea to the other - the hard sell can be uncomfortable to experience
- Does the facilitator eavesdrop to ensure equality of exchange?
- Clear timing framework - each person gets same amount of time

Resource implications

Space to talk, not overheard \ being distracted by other groups discussions
Post-its and flipchart paper

Into twos to fours to eights...

Start with pairs who each have a similar focus for discussion, and after 10 mins, they link with another pair to make a four. Their task now is to share thoughts from each pair and to come to an agreement on the points. Now these combine to make eights and the same process is gone through. So each group of 8 should be able to present points in agreement and points of difference.

What could you use this method for?

- Reaching some shared understanding of what is a priority
- Reaching group decision
- Finding the range of difference on particular topics or issues
- Gaining a wide view of options to an issue

When would you not use it?

When time is short and the room is small

Potential problems or issues in using this method

Some people dominate discussions

Resource implications

Space and time

Rounds**Short description**

Each group member has the opportunity to give a response to the question asked by the facilitator. Group members can opt not to respond. All group members respect the right of each member to respond.

What could you use this method for?

- Giving some basis for a further debate or discussion
- Used as a voting process or making choices
- Introduction of a new group
- Airing opinions
- Seeing how the group differs on a topic
- Evaluation
- Opening up a group - getting everyone to speak

When would you not use it?

- With a very new group
- Around contentious issues
- If there is conflict or tension in the group

Potential problems or issues in using this method

Puts people under pressure to speak

Could be a one sided discussion unless followed up by open debate

Some people taking too much time - give a time limit?

Resource implications

Acoustics need to be good

Carousel**Short description**

- Two circles - (an inner and outer) with pairs across the two circles facing each other - this can be done sitting or standing
- The pairs (one from the inner and one from the outer circles) have up to 2 mins to discuss the issue or focus, at which point the outer circle partner moves clockwise to greet the next person on the inner circle

- The timekeeper moves people on after 2 minutes until either all outer circles have spoken to all inner circles or, if the numbers are too large for this to happen, they have spoken to five or six others
- All the inner circle form a group and all outer circle people form a group and the 2 groups discuss what they have heard and said and generate a summary of key points or action
- The 2 groups feedback their perceptions and agree joint meanings and ways forward

What could you use this method for?

- An opportunity for people to talk to a large numbers of others about a specific topic
- To air views on important issues
- To generate some energy into a discussion

When would you not use it?

- When there is little time
- When a decision requires further information

Potential problems or issues in using this method

- Puts people under pressure to speak
- Mobility problems - make sure people with mobility problem are in the inner circle
- Can be exhausting if people listen properly to lots of people

Resource implications

- Space
- Enough people to make 2 viable circles plus a timekeeper

<i>Sentence completion</i>

Short description

Open ended questions where people can fill in their own views\ ideas \ opinions. This can form the basis for a discussion or small group sharing of responses

What could you use this method for?

- Evaluation
- To find out people's opinions etc
- Good for evoking 'soft data' especially assumptions and level of understanding
- Good to start a debate on contentious issues

When would you not use it?

- The start of a course

- Where you think it would not be good for some views to be aired publicly in the group
- Where people have difficulty writing or reading

Potential problems or issues in using this method?

- Literacy levels
- Visual disabilities - need to make sure all questions are read out one at a time?
- Discriminatory remarks being made
- People's levels of understanding being ridiculed

Resource implications

Paper and pens

Something to lean on to write

Careful preparation of the sentences - clear enough to have no ambiguity

Small group discussions

Short description

Exchange of ideas and information with a small group of people

Three \ four \ five people

The facilitator splits up a larger group in order to bring back together for sharing of the discussions in the smaller groups

Hearing back from smaller groups is generally useful if it is important for the larger group to have an idea of the themes and issues that have been discussed in smaller groups. Some general prompt questions are:

- What did you learn from doing that activity?
- What was interesting?
- Did anything surprising emerge from the discussion?
- What do you know now that you didn't know before?
- What are the two key points that emerged in your discussion?

What could you use this method for?

- As a vehicle for other learning methods such as Quick Think
- Different questions to each group or the same questions to all groups - the pros and the cons of each
- When people want more time to talk than is possible in a larger group
- To split up cliques developing in the large group
- To 'share out' a dominant person throughout a session

When would you not use it?

- To start off a session
- If there is no opportunity to bring back the reflections \ findings
- When everyone needs to hear the same things

Potential problems or issues in using this method

- Sometimes the same people always feedback
- Getting into deeper and more personal conversations - sometime feeling awkward - how to relate this back to larger group
- No one to facilitate the small group
- Go off at a tangent - the small groups set their own agenda
- Different groups work at different speeds - some will be waiting whilst others finish - give realistic time limit
- People feeling rushed or bored

Resource implications

Space to talk, not overheard \ bring distracted by other group's discussions

Time to do it properly

4 Equality issues

Equality issues go to the heart of working with groups if we work in ways that encourage inclusion and participation. In terms of facilitation, there are three elements to consider:

- facilitating cross cultural communication
- ensuring access to the sessions, the interaction and materials
- challenging difficult behaviour and managing difficult situations

4.1 Facilitating cross cultural communication

Cross cultural communication can be a challenge to facilitate as there can be many opportunities for miscommunication and misunderstanding to occur.

"In a world as complex as ours, each of us is shaped by many factors, and culture is one of the powerful forces that acts on us. Anthropologists Kevin Avruch and Peter Black explain the importance of culture this way: *"...One's own culture provides the 'lens' through which we view the world; the 'logic'... by which we order it; the 'grammar'... by which it makes sense."* In other words, culture is central to what we see, how we make sense of what we see, and how we express ourselves. As people from different cultural groups take on the exciting challenge of working together, cultural values sometimes conflict. We can misunderstand each other, and react in ways that can hinder what are otherwise promising partnerships. Oftentimes, we aren't aware that culture is acting upon us. Sometimes, we are not even aware that we have cultural values or assumptions that are different from others'!

Six fundamental patterns of cultural differences - ways in which cultures, as a whole, tend to vary from one another - are described below. The descriptions point out some of the recurring causes of cross-cultural communication difficulties. As you enter into multicultural dialogue or collaboration, keep these generalized differences in mind. Next time you

find yourself in a confusing situation, and you suspect that cross-cultural differences are at play, try reviewing this list.”¹

- **Different communication styles**
The way people communicate varies widely between, and even within, cultures. One aspect of communication style is language usage. Across cultures, some words and phrases are used in different ways. For example, even in countries that share the English language, the meaning of “yes” varies from “maybe, I’ll consider it” to “definitely so,” with many shades in between
- **Different attitudes to conflict**
- **Different approaches to completing tasks**
Some reasons include different access to resources; different judgments of the rewards associated with task completion, different notions of time, and varied ideas about how relationship building and task-oriented work should go together
- **Different decision making styles**
- **Different attitudes towards disclosure**
In some cultures, it is not appropriate to be frank about emotions, about the reasons behind a conflict or a misunderstanding, or about personal information
- **Different approaches to knowing**

4.2 Ensuring access to the sessions, the interaction and materials

Provide expenses for involvement

- Will people be out of pocket due to their involvement and how can you reimburse people if they are volunteering their time? (e.g. expenses for childcare or travel costs, developing expense claim forms, having systems to pay cash on the day)

Use appropriate and accessible locations

- Are events and activities held in venues that are physically accessible and at times and locations that are appropriate to the people taking part?

Timing of events

- What day of the week or time of day are you thinking about? Office hours may be convenient to some but not for others
- Have you considered religious timings of festivals and services?

¹ *Marecelle E. DuPraw is a former Program Director at the National Institute for Dispute Resolution in Washington, DC. Marya Axner is a consultant in leadership development, cross-cultural communication, and gender equity. Study Circle Resource Center in Pomfret, CT. Copyright © Topsfield Foundation.*

Venue details

- Can you provide clear maps and directions showing local transport information, car parks and parking costs?
- For some disabled people building plans or access routes can be useful, as is reserved accessible parking for people with blue badges.

Health and safety

- Are meeting places well lit, safe and near to public transport?
- Inside the venues make sure that emergency exits work and are not blocked.
- Do you always know who the First Aiders are and how to reach them in an emergency?

Refreshments

- Are the food options acceptable to people present? A common solution is to provide vegetarian food to avoid complex choices around meat.
- If there are different types of food available, then food labelling needs to be clear and unambiguous.

Induction loop system and public address systems

- Have you checked if the venue you use has an induction loop fitted? Most modern buildings should have these as standard in rooms. Check if it works!
- Make sure you let people know if there is an induction loop in advance.

Translation

- Check if it would be useful to provide materials translated
- Check what form or style of community language would work best in the particular context.
- Check if people require signers or sign language interpreters to be present.
- Identify suppliers of any specialist services which you may need

Written information

Text style and format

- The chosen font should be easily readable with clearly defined letters and clear spacing between the letters. Sans Serif fonts, such as Verdana, Arial and Helvetica are widely used.
- Text should, as a rule, be no smaller than 12 point.
- Underlining of large volumes of text should be avoided.
- Text written in all capitals is difficult to read and it may be distracting to the reader.
- Avoid the use of italics for large sections of text; consider using bold instead

Colour and contrast

- There should be a good contrast between the font colour and background colour. Using cream paper rather than white can increase the readability of a printed document as the glare is reduced.
- If the document is to have a coloured background, use a single solid colour rather than textured or patterned.
- White text on a black background will appear thinner than the same weight of font in black on a lighter background. You may wish to use a heavier font to compensate for this.
- White text on a dark blue background is particularly legible for many people.
- Use of pink, red or green paper should be avoided. If coloured paper is required, use pastel blue or yellow. For example, a dyslexic person may prefer black or dark blue print on a pale blue or yellow background.

Layout and structure

- Text should be left-aligned on the page.
- Paragraphs should not be centralised or justified as uneven inter-word spacing could lead to 'rivers of white space' being formed in the text, reducing legibility.
- Avoid using long blocks of continuous text; break it up with smaller paragraphs and headings. This will also help the reader navigate the text.
- Where appropriate use bullet points and lists instead of large volumes of text.
- URLs (website addresses) in a printed document should not be hyperlinked, as this will result in them being underlined and reduce readability.
- Short, concise sentences of less than 20 words are more readable.
- Single idea sentences improve clarity.
- Where applicable, include the main idea in the first sentence of the paragraph. Use the following sentences to expand the main point.

Language

- Use clear language, and keep text as concise and straightforward as possible.
- It is important that 'Jargon' and 'acronyms' are avoided at all costs
- Avoid using too many words and overly long or complex words.
- Use concepts and terminology consistently throughout the document.
- Avoid using slashed constructions such as 'a and/or b', instead, use 'a or b or both'.
- Consider putting consultation documents through the Plain English process.

Plain English Campaign: online free guides to writing plain English

www.plainenglish.co.uk/guides.html

NIACE have developed a tool, which is now on the NIACE website that will help you to establish the "readability level" of any text instantly. There is

also a downloadable leaflet which will help you to interpret the readability score given, and provide more information about how to present text so that it is easier to read. You can find both the readability calculator and the leaflet here: [Readability | NIACE](#)

5.3 Challenging difficult behaviour and managing difficult situations

Views, beliefs and opinions about the world

Shape behaviour and attitudes stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination

Facilitator's role is to....

Set the tone of the interactions

Challenge prejudices and discrimination

Question assumptions and 'throw away' remarks

Select relevant and appropriate course materials

The facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed, but should be prepared for the discussion. This means understanding the subject, being familiar with the materials, thinking ahead of time about the directions in which the discussion might go, and preparing questions to help further the discussion.

- Be prepared
- Set a relaxed and open tone
- Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere
- Well-placed humour is always welcome, and helps to build the group's connections
- Establish clear ground rules
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood
- One person speaks at a time
- Monitor and assist the group process
- Keep track of how the group members are participating - who has spoken, who hasn't spoken, and whose points haven't been heard
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups to examine a variety of viewpoints or to give people a chance to talk more easily about their personal connection to the issue

- When deciding whether to intervene, lean toward non intervention
- Don't talk after each comment or answer every question; allow participants to respond directly to each other
- Allow time for pauses and silence. People need time to reflect and respond
- Don't let anyone dominate; try to involve everyone
- Make sure the group considers a wide range of views. Ask the group to think about the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of looking at an issue or solving a problem

Managing discussions

Keep discussion focused on the session's topic. Straying too far could cause each session to lose its value. A delicate balance is best, don't force the group to stick to the topic too rigidly, but don't allow the discussion to drift.

You could have a flipchart on the wall with a picture of a park on it - if issues arise which are outside the scope of the session ask people to write them on this flipchart - to 'park' them. These can be used by the group to plan future discussions.

As the 'leader', you have considerable power which should be used only for the purpose of furthering the discussion and not for establishing the correctness of a particular viewpoint. Staying neutral and helping the group to do its own work are central to good facilitation. This takes practice and attention to one's own behaviour:

- Act as if you are neutral; practice neutrality
- Encourage and affirm each person
- Explain your role
- Be aware of your own "unconscious" behaviour
- Resist the temptation to step out of the role of facilitator

Conflict can be productive if disagreements are managed well. Keep the disagreement narrowly focused on the issue at hand. Since everyone's opinion is important, participants should feel comfortable saying what they really think - even if others find it hard to hear.

Pauses and silences can be helpful as people need time to think and reflect. Sometimes silence will help someone build up the courage to make a valuable point. You may find it helpful to count silently to 10 after asking a question.

You are not the expert or "answer person". Let the group decide what it believes and correct itself when a mistake is made. Asking, "What do the rest of you think?" is helpful. The facilitator's main task is to create an atmosphere for democratic deliberation, one in which each participant feels at ease in expressing ideas and responding to those of others.

Facilitators do not “teach” but instead are there to guide the group’s process. They do not have to be an expert in the subject being discussed, but must know enough about it to be able to ask probing questions and raise views that have not been considered by the group.

Common strategies for managing difficult situations

Some participants are too quiet, possibly shy....

- Create an opportunity for each participant to contribute
- Be an active listener: listening carefully will set a good example for participants and will alert you to potential conflicts
- Try to draw out quiet participants, but don’t put them on the spot
- Make eye contact - it reminds them that you’d like to hear from them
- Look for non verbal cues that indicate participants are ready to speak
- Frequently, people will feel more comfortable in later sessions and will begin to participate
- When someone comes forward with a brief comment after staying in the background for most of the study circle, you can encourage him or her by conveying genuine interest and asking for more information
- It’s always helpful to talk with people informally before and after the session.

Some participants are too loud and overbearing....

Do not allow the aggressive, talkative person or faction to dominate.

If you allow this to happen, the aggressive will dominate; you may lose control, and the more polite people will become angry and frustrated.

- Be firm about saying, “I think you’re referring to X...maybe we can talk more about that at a break. Right now, we need to move on.”
- You must intervene and set limits
- Limit your eye contact with the speaker.
- Remind the group that everyone is invited to participate: “Let’s hear from some folks who haven’t had a chance to speak yet”
- If necessary, you can speak to the person by name: “Charlie, we’ve heard from you; now let’s hear what Barbara has to say”
- Be careful to manage your comments and tone of voice- you are trying to make a point without offending the speaker

The group loses focus and direction....

- Keep an eye on the participants to see how engaged they are, and if you are in doubt, check it out with the group. “We seem to be going off at a tangent, do you want to stay with this, or move on to the next item?”
- If a participant goes into a lengthy digression, you may have to say: “We are wandering off the subject, and I’d like to give others a chance to speak”

Someone gives false information or participants get caught up in a dispute about facts...

- Ask, “Has anyone heard of any different information?”

- If no one offers a correction, offer one yourself
- If no one knows the facts, and the point is not essential, put it aside and move on
- If the point is central to the discussion, encourage members to look up the information before the next meeting.
- Remind the group that experts often disagree

Tension or open conflict in the group.

- Address it directly and remind participants that disagreement and conflict of ideas is normal
- Explain that, for conflict to be productive, it must be focused on the issue: it is acceptable to challenge someone's ideas, but personal attacks are not acceptable
- Interrupt personal attacks, name-calling, or put-downs as soon as they occur
- Establish ground rules that disallow such behaviour and that encourage tolerance for all views
- If you have set up some ground rules for discussions, you should review these and feel free to note when those rules are being "broken."
- Appeal to the group for help; if group members have bought into the ground rules, they will support you
- As a last resort, consider taking a break to change the energy in the room. You can take the opportunity to talk one-on-one with the participants in question

The following are based upon an exercise done as part of a training the trainers course on roles in groups as depicted through animal metaphors suggested by *Training for Transformation* handbooks.

Dealing with the fish character: someone sits with a cold glassy stare, not responding to anyone or anything

How might a facilitator feel?

- How could I encourage this person to participate without causing them embarrassment? If I force the issue I may lose them and I must be sensitive to their predicament.
- I must be approachable
- Am I putting over what he\she expects to learn?
- Are they out of their depth - in the wrong fish tank?

Action

- Ask if they are comfortable in the group - may be best done privately
- Try to evoke their opinions \ views
- Try to assess their level of understanding
- Is the course \ topic relevant to them
- Seek a way of bridge building between the topic and their experiences
- Use ice breakers to include the person

Dealing with the Frog character: croaks on and on about the same subject in a monotonous voice

How might a facilitator feel?

- Worried - must get the right balance between this person and the rest of the group
- They may have something useful to say and may clam up and take umbrage if challenged
- Impatient and irritable
- Challenged by the situation

Action

- Set a time limit after which intervene - could be your own private time limit
- Point out if the speaker is going off track
- Break in and name another group member to speak - ask what they think?
- If ground rules have been discussed - instigate a review to get people to speak about the group
- Some compulsive speakers are nervous and would welcome an interruption

5 Tips and tricks from other Voice facilitators

This section draws upon the experience of a group of Voice facilitators. It provides some useful and specific ideas and suggestions to consider when planning and carrying out Voice sessions and workshops with groups.

How the pilot facilitators felt afterwards:

- A real energy burst - wanted to do it again!
- Inspired
- Overwhelmed by how unwieldy it can feel at times
- More confident

Firstly, it is important to clarify what being a facilitator means; that facilitators are not trainers and this is not 'training'. Facilitators definitely don't have 'the answers'. Facilitators are there to ensure the group gets the best out of the precious time they have and to ask questions to make them think and talk with each other in a constructive way.

Co facilitation

Two facilitators (co-facilitation) can often enhance the experience - for the group - for the quality of information arising and for the facilitators themselves.

- One facilitator did one bit and the other one took over half way to add a variety of voices and spread the load

- We acted the story out - so one of us asked questions and the other responded to illustrate the different steps
- Good to reflect with someone after the session (co-facilitating is essential!)
- Pair up with an experienced facilitator if possible
- If you cannot pair up with another facilitator, try to work with someone from the network who is more vocal - so they can help everyone else reflect - and give them the responsibility for hearing the others in the network
- Get to know your co-facilitator's foibles and strengths

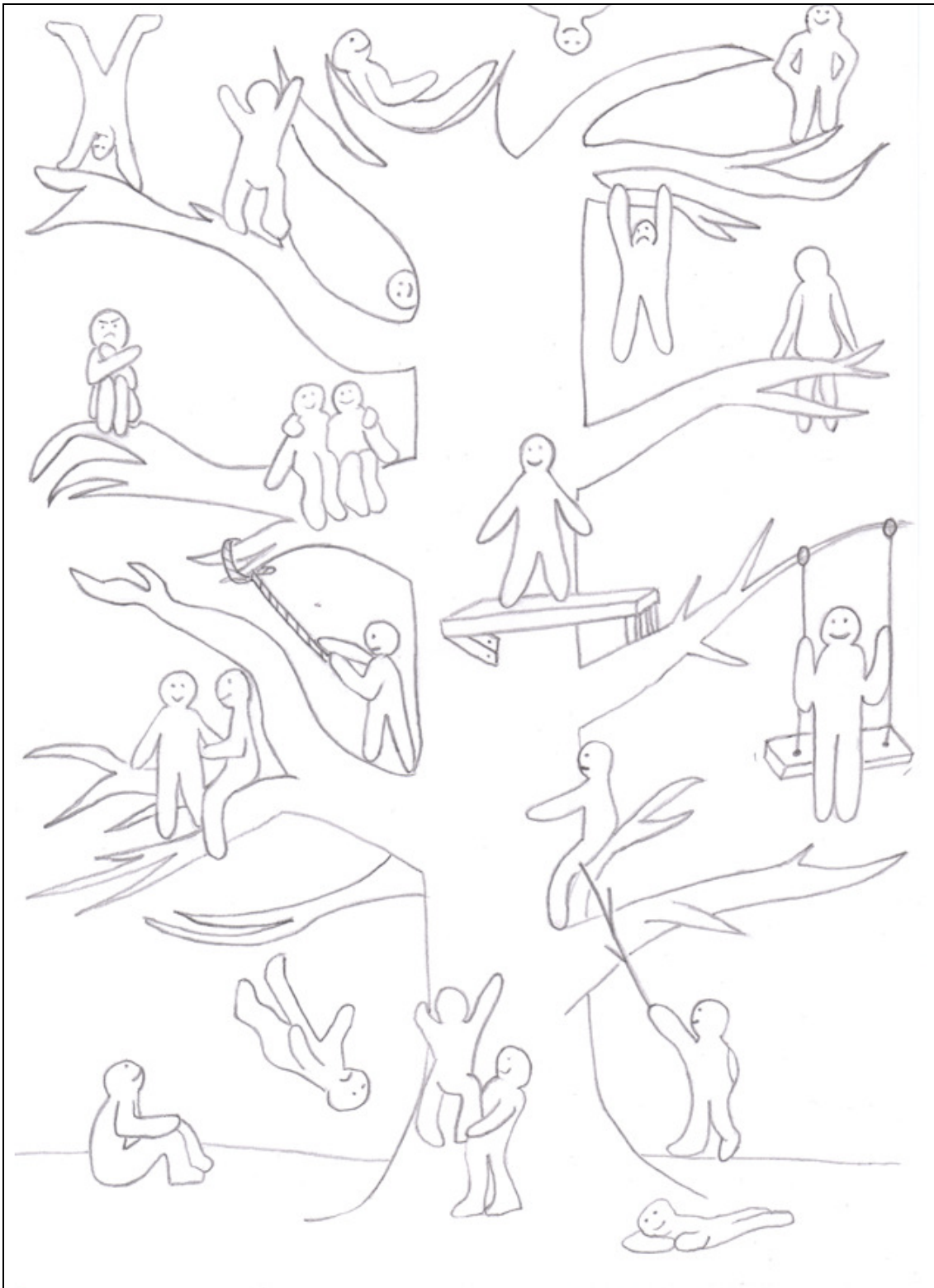
Planning

- The time of the session can have an impact - evenings can't run over - in the daytime people seem to be a bit more flexible
- Need to plan the session thoroughly
- It was better not knowing the group - easier to work with them
- Need to take good notes to inform the next session planning
- Need to know Voice inside out - you can use it more flexibly if you are comfortable with it

In practice

- We went quite slowly and recapped and explained
- We had to sort out the pairs - they couldn't do it for themselves
- For people with visual impairments - need to concisely describe what people are looking at
- Use slides as an aide memoire - with notes underneath (some people didn't know you could do that with PowerPoint)
- Different ways of doing the 'run up the steps': on the floor, on a table, on the wall, with facilitators - or not
- Use snakes and ladders to describe the movement up and down
- Challenge inappropriate behaviour

Appendix one: jelly baby tree



Taken from www.trainerbubble.com