

# Facilitating Participatory Workshops

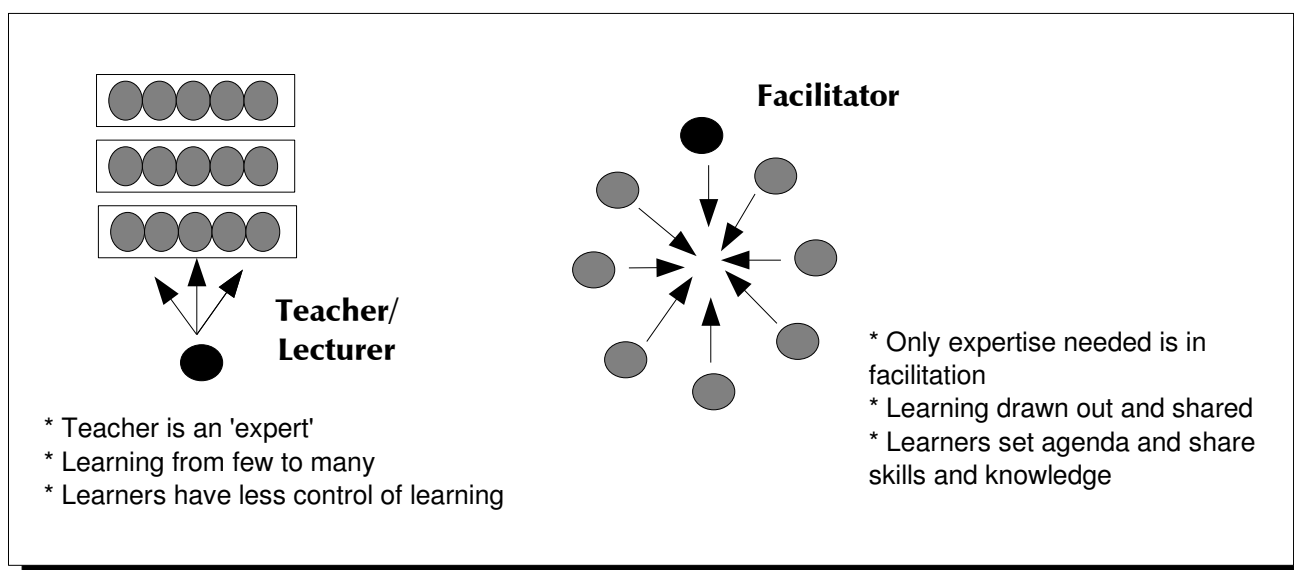


"Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember.  
Involve me, and I will understand." Confucius, 450 BC

Many of us are asked to run a workshop, a skill share or training session from time to time. Often we resort to the safe ground of a presentation or a full group discussion. These techniques reflect how learning is often done in the formal education sector. But these aren't necessarily the best ways for learners to gain the information and skills they are looking for. Participatory learning, in which learners are directly engaged in their own learning, is more empowering. People remember more if they are actively involved in their own learning. This briefing provides some information, ideas and tools to help you facilitate interactive, dynamic and fun workshops. You may also find some of our other briefings useful including *Facilitating Meetings*, *Facilitation Tools for Meetings and Workshops* and *Tools for Interaction*.

## The role of the facilitator

What is your role in a workshop? Are you there to teach? To lead? To train? Or to facilitate? Teaching is probably what many of us are used to from our time in school or college. One person, the teacher has some knowledge and they are trying to encourage everyone else to learn it too. A facilitator helps the group to learn by creating a supportive environment in which learning can take place. The main difference is in how you see yourself in relation to your learners. Do you see yourself in control of their learning, or are you there as a resource, with them in control? It's a power dynamic. If you're there to serve your learners, you're a facilitator.



## Why participation?

In part, its pragmatic. Participatory learning draws on theories of how adults learn best. We learn best when we are actively involved in our own learning, thinking through our own conclusions, relating the learning experience to our own values, beliefs, and previous experiences. We also learn best when the learning is linked to real life experiences, where we can use and test new skills, and receive feedback on our performance. All adults have a wide range of experience and can help each other learn. As a facilitator you can encourage the sharing of this experience, making your workshops more effective. Participatory learning also reflects the important values of collaboration and co-operation.

A facilitator in a participatory workshop creates a supportive environment in which learning can take place. Participants explore their own experiences and those of others, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and share their knowledge, skills, ideas and concerns. The facilitator supports the learning process of the participants by facilitating this exchange of ideas and experience between the participants. And if appropriate, you can still offer your expertise and experience, if that is what's best for the group's learning, as long as the group is clear that they don't have to accept the offer!

The key to facilitating participatory learning is how you see yourself in relation to your learners. Do you see yourself in control of their learning, or are you there as a resource for their learning, with them in control? It's a power dynamic. If you're there to serve your learners, you're a facilitator.

## Co-facilitation

Facilitating a workshop takes a lot of energy. A good way to make things easier for yourself, and improve the quality of the workshop is to ask someone to co-facilitate with you. This might mean simply asking someone to take on a particular role in a particular exercise – time-keeping for example, or welcoming late arrivals, or it could mean working together with someone throughout – to prepare, deliver and evaluate the workshop.

There are a lot of advantages to working together with another facilitator. It can make the prospect of running a workshop less daunting if you are new to it, and is a good way to share your skills if you are an old hand. It provides variety for the participants, as your different facilitation styles will change the pace and tone of the activities. Two heads will also invariably come up with a more varied workshop agenda and will help when you need to adapt the workshop on the spot. Having someone else to facilitate with means you don't have to be actively facilitating all the time which helps to maintain your energy and concentration, especially useful in a long workshop. And there will be someone to evaluate with at the end and to give you honest feedback.

Co-facilitation isn't always straight-forward and easy. It can be a real test of your communication skills. Successful co-facilitation depends on creating an environment of trust and mutual support. It can be helpful to decide who will lead on a particular exercise, so that you don't cut across or undermine each other, but instead give support where its needed.

In large or long workshops its worth thinking about having a practical co-ordinator, someone responsible for the venue, equipment, refreshments and notices. The co-ordinator can also gather people together to start on time.



# How people learn

Before you start planning your workshop, it helps to give some thought to the ways in which people learn. Understanding how people learn is key to providing them with a good learning experience. Whole libraries could be filled with different theories on this subject. Below, we have laid out a few of the ideas and pointers. It isn't an exhaustive survey of current theory about how people learn, but it covers what we find to be the most useful in practice for facilitating our workshops.

## Learning styles

There are many theories about how people learn (their 'learning style'). They all agree that different people learn in different ways. Some people will be able to absorb what you are saying if you stand at the front and lecture them. Others will gain new skills and knowledge best by trying things out for themselves. This doesn't mean you have to cater for every learning style at every point of the workshop: the key is to offer a mix of activities and exercises in your workshop.

### Visual, Auditory and Tactile Learners

This learning styles theory refers to the way in which we access information – how it enters our brain. Many of us have a preference for one of these 'learning styles': visual, auditory or tactile, which tells us how we best take in (and also give out information) in a learning context. Though we may have a preference, most of us can take in information by any of these sensory routes, but a few of us have a very strong preference for one style.

**Visual Learners** learn by looking. They like to have a clear view of workshop facilitators or lecturers, and are sensitive to facial expression and body language. Pictures, charts, graphics, videos, and colours are all useful tools to help visual learners learn. They may well like to take notes (to turn auditory information into information they can see).

**Auditory Learners** learn from listening. They learn best from lectures, discussions, talking through ideas and listening to other people. They are sensitive to tone of voice, and to underlying meanings in people's speech. They may well prefer to read information aloud (to turn written information into information they can hear) and respond well to music and other sounds. They can also be easily distracted by unnecessary noises.

**Tactile Learners** learn by doing, moving and touching. They learn best from a hands-on and active approach. They struggle to sit still for hours on end. They respond well to movement-based activities like games, spectrum lines, hassle lines and roleplays, even changing seats will help tactile learners maintain concentration (see our briefing Tools for Meetings and Workshops for more information).

Most traditional workshops lean heavily on auditory (presentations, discussions) or visual (power-point, slides, flipcharts) methods of learning. Adding some movement-based activities to your workshops will make learning easier for some participants. Making sure that your agenda has something for each of these learning styles will increase learning.

### Activist, Pragmatist, Reflector and Theorist learning styles

These four learning styles are about cognitive processing – how we process learning in the brain. They aren't an alternative to the auditory, visual and tactile learning styles. The two systems work together. It's important not to assume your workshop participants are purely one or another style. In reality we're all a mixture, but many of us do have a dominant style.

**Activists** are quick, creative thinkers. They like to engage with an exercise for a short while and with considerable enthusiasm, and then move on to a new experience. They learn well from interacting with other people and like to be centre stage. They thrive on being thrown in at the deep end, often being the first to put their hand up to offer an answer or volunteer for a role. They can feel restrained by structures and policies. Activists are an open minded lot, but their thinking can lack strategic considerations.

**Exercises** that are more passive or involve working alone will not engage the activist. Nor will work-

shops that repeat the same activity over and over again. Precisely defined instructions may restrict their creative thinking. Ideastorms and hands on interactive learning will suit the activist best. They will enjoy short roleplays, especially those that put them at the centre of attention. Long presentations of set ideas will cramp their style! Those with an activist preference will be happy to break the ice in the workshop, and be willing volunteers for your exercises. The challenge for facilitators is that their input can sometimes dominate the workshop.

**Pragmatists** want to take the theory and see if it works in practice. Like Activists they look for new ideas, but also for a chance to try them out and experiment with them. Send a Pragmatist on a course and they'll come back desperate to implement the new ideas that they've just learnt. Because of this they don't like long open-ended discussions that don't seem to be getting to a practical point. They are innovators and problem solvers. If they can't see the obvious application, reward, or relevance of an idea they may not engage with it. If there are no practical guidelines for how to do an activity, Pragmatists will learn less well.

Exercises that have a clear link between the theory and how it can be applied will best engage the pragmatists. They don't respond well to abstract exercises where it isn't clear how it relates to their life or work. They will appreciate a clearly stated rationale for doing any given exercise. Pragmatists will benefit from being given an opportunity to try out and experiment with an idea, and from being given a "how to" model that they can use in their practice. Learners with a strong pragmatic style can be a challenge for facilitators. If they're asked to do an exercise and activity they may be reluctant until they understand why they're being asked to do it, and what practical purpose it serves. They respond best to some explanation at the beginning of an exercise about the purpose or application. The debrief of an exercise is important as this is where they can see how to use the skill or knowledge.

Reflectors are slow to make up their minds, needing time to ponder an idea and take on board many points of view. They will think deeply about any given subject before making a decision or forming an opinion. Their thinking will be based on sound analysis, and the thorough collection of information. They may sit back and observe discussion rather than engaging in it which can lead to them being thought of as shy, quiet, aloof or even bored. However this is how they do their learning and they will usually be far from bored – getting great satisfaction from observing others.

Reflectors learn from activities that involve the sharing of ideas, such as discussion groups, and from observation. They appreciate thinking time and having a chance to review activities. They don't like tight deadlines, being given insufficient information, being thrown into an activity with little warning, or being made the centre of attention. Similarly they like to consider and reach their own conclusions, so don't like being told how things should be done or being rushed through a series of activities. It can help them if levels of high activity are punctuated with breaks or debriefs where the reflector can evaluate what they have learned. Whilst they may need more time, they can be a valuable resource for facilitators. If you can make them feel comfortable and unhurried, they can provide good summaries and balanced judgements of discussions and activities.

Theorists are logical people who like to take information and turn it into step by step systems and theories. Theorists have a disciplined approach to any situation, they like to know the who, what, why, when and how of things. They like analysis and getting to the heart of the information – what are the basic assumptions or principles behind an activity? They are, therefore, good at asking relevant and probing questions. They can be very serious and don't always deal well with flippancy, subjectivity or lateral thinking exercises.

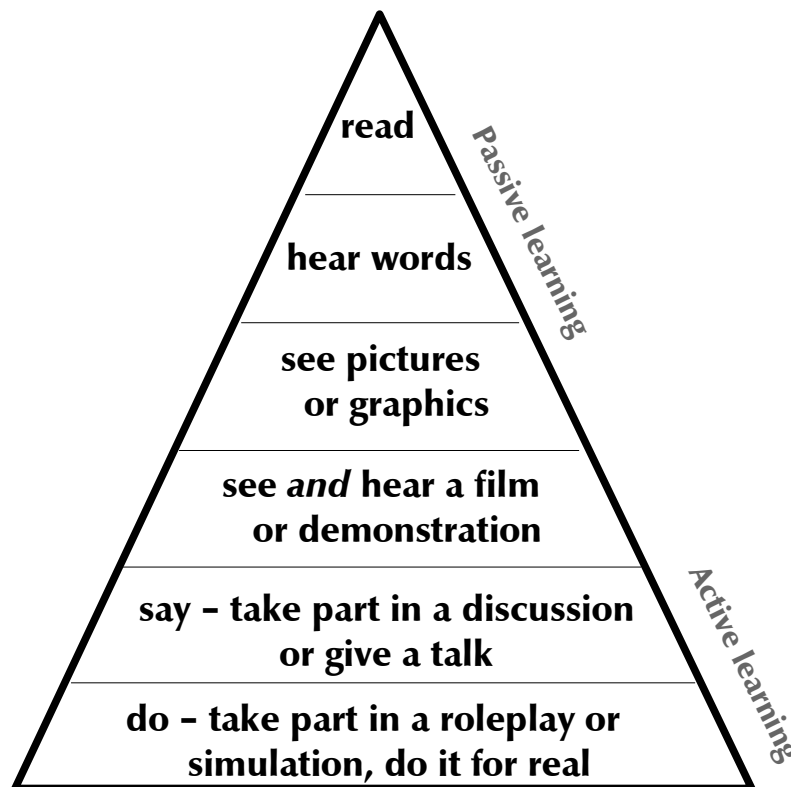
Theorists like being intellectually stimulated with concepts, systems and models. They like activities that give them a chance to methodically explore relationships between the ideas and the events. They will be interested in ideas for ideas sake, and unlike the pragmatist, don't need the relevance or urgency to hold their attention. They like clearly structured activities and debriefs. They will appreciate lots of background reading e.g. fact sheets, handouts, references, reading lists. They might struggle with activities that have no sound theoretical background, or are more concerned with emotions and feelings. They won't like being asked to make decisions without being given a context, concept or policy. If you need someone to put an activity or exercise into context, draw on your

more theoretical learners.

To maximise your participants' learning, try to ensure that your workshop agenda includes a mix of exercises that will cater to each learning style. It isn't necessary to cater to all learning styles all of the time in the workshop. But for the key points of learning, you may need to design an exercise that incorporates a little of each style. Remember also that your own learning styles will impact on your agenda design! If you are strongly activist you may naturally favour workshop activities that suit activists, leaving the reflectors and theorists in your workshop struggling to learn effectively.

## What learners remember

We tend to remember more of what we have learned when we are actively engaged in our learning and when we engage more of our senses. The diagram below gives a useful guide for determining the most effective techniques for remembering information. For example, the least effective way of learning is to listen to a lecture, or read a book, the most effective to experience it directly, or through participating in a simulation or roleplay.



If participants are to remember more of what they've learnt then they need to be as involved as possible in the learning process. Don't simply present information – back up your words with visual props, such as demonstrations and video clips, to increase the chance of the information moving into the memory. Better still, get participants involved in saying what it is they are learning. This can be as easy as facilitating a discussion, asking appropriate questions, asking participants to report back from a small group discussion, or ideastorming. And for maximum learning, practice the skill using simulation, roleplay or by providing opportunities for to use the skill for real soon after the workshop finishes.

The cone is just a general guideline – the effectiveness of any method of learning will differ depending on our preferred learning styles. What we want to remember, and how often we put the information into use, will also impact on how well we remember something.

# Preparing for a Workshop

## Aims and expectations

To be effective you need to have a clear idea of what you hope to achieve with your workshop. Sometimes this will come mainly from you – you may know what key information or skills you want to offer participants. Sometimes the workshop will be in response to requests from the participants. Before you plan the workshop, you will need to think about what you hope to achieve, the aims, and also find out what the participants want from the workshop.

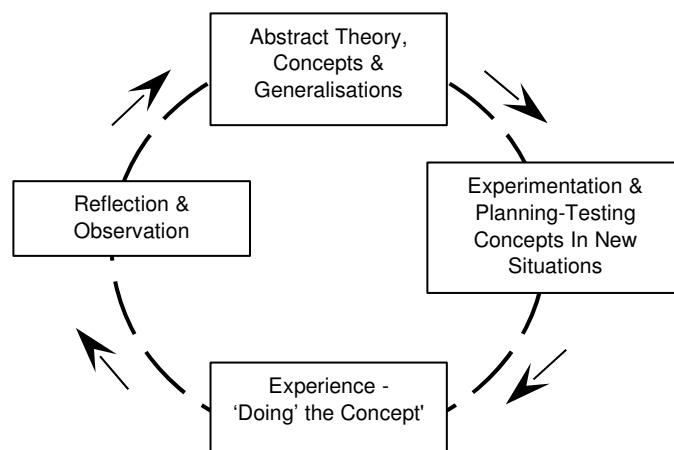
To find out about participant expectations, you could ask the organiser or consult participants in advance e.g. using a questionnaire, or build an ‘expectation check’ into the introductory section of your workshop. However, don’t raise hopes that you will change the prepared agenda to suit the participants’ expectations if that’s not possible. With practice you will become better at quickly adapting your agenda to respond to the group’s expectations and needs. In a longer workshop you may be able to check that you’re meeting expectations at the end of the first day, or after a lunch break to see if you’re on track. See our briefing *Tools for Meetings and Workshops* for ideas on how to do this.

## The Experiential Learning Cycle

You’ve decided what outcomes you want from your workshop, so now you need to design a workshop agenda that delivers them. By following the experiential learning cycle you can be sure that your learners will get a full learning experience and that the learning moves into their long term memory.

The experiential learning cycle has 4 stages. We often give people new theories/concepts in our workshops (‘Abstract Theory’), but that’s not enough for good learning. Workshop participants then need to work out the relevance of the theory to their own situation and have a chance to test how the theory might apply (‘Experimentation & Planning’). We already know that practice makes perfect, so some ‘Experience’ of the concept is vital. Finally ‘Reflection and Observation’ ensure the learner has understood the concepts and applied them correctly.

The four stages of the experiential learning cycle:



The learning experience can start at any stage in the cycle, but for learning to be complete, and deep, the learner needs to pass through each stage in a particular order. We often start a workshop with an exercise where we invite participants to 'Reflect' on a relevant experience that they have had outside the workshop, before we launch into any new theory. For example, in a media skills workshop, you could start by asking participants to share reflections on what, in their experience, makes a good media interview. From there you can move on to a session on the theory of interview techniques, and then through the rest of the cycle.

It’s also possible to concentrate on just a few stages of the cycle, e.g. ‘Abstract Theory’ and ‘Experi-

mentation & Planning,' if you know that all the learners will soon undertake a real experience of those concepts and will have the time to reflect on it. In our media workshop example, you could concentrate on the theory of interview techniques and then on planning an interview. After the workshop, participants could give a real interview and then participate in a debrief in which they reflect on how the interview went. This provides a full learning cycle, even though only 2 of the 4 stages happened in the workshop itself.

The experiential learning cycle provides a valuable yardstick against which to measure your workshop agenda. If it doesn't fit the cycle, it probably doesn't provide a complete learning experience.

## Agenda planning

By preparing an agenda (sometimes called a session plan or running order) in advance you can make sure that you can cover a realistic amount in the time available, as well as taking into account the different ways that people learn. A well-prepared agenda can make a big difference to your confidence, because you go in knowing you've thought things through in advance. It's also likely to make the experience more enjoyable and productive for participants.

Working out your aims is the first step in planning an agenda. You will also need to think about the overall structure of your workshop, how the different activities or exercises will work, as a whole, to deliver your desired learning outcomes. You will also need to think about the detail of how each exercise will work. Does every exercise have a good reason for being there? Maybe you like the exercise, but does it serve a clear purpose in the particular context?

Some points to consider when planning your workshop agenda:

Make sure the different learning styles of the participants (not just your own learning style!) are being catered for by using a mix of exercises and activities.

Vary the pace and style to maintain interest. Get participants saying and doing as much of the learning as possible, not just seeing and hearing it.

Include a suitable mixture of theory, planning, practical and experiential, and reflective activities, in the right order to complete the experiential learning cycle.

Take into account natural highs and lows in energy. Make sure you include plenty of breaks and, if necessary, opportunities for food and drink. Energisers are also helpful for boosting concentration, especially just after a meal.

Ensure that the workshop taken as a whole follows a structure that will achieve your desired aims.

Include some reinforcement (see below) to move learning into long term memory.

Think realistically about what you can cover in the time you have. It can help to build some flexibility into this. Think, for example, about which exercises are less important and easiest to cut if you are running over time.

End on a positive note. Use a high energy activity that brings together everything the participants have learned. Alternatively, run a "where do we go from here" session where everyone looks for something positive from the workshop and decides how they will implement it. Or run an uplifting game at the end to wrap up the workshop. An alternative is a period of reflection at the end to allow for the learning to sink in.

Handouts are a good way way to help people remember what they have learnt. Sometimes these will be comprehensive documents, at other times a summary of the key points of the workshop. Sometimes you may just want to give people some pointers as to where they can find more information.

## Reinforcement

Reinforcement is about helping move participants' learning into long term memory. You'll know yourself that unless you use a skill, you often lose it, or at best get a little rusty. Reinforcement helps avoids this. It can be as simple as asking "can you describe this using an example?" during a workshop. Or it can be a formal reinforcement activity, like a quiz on the second day of a two day work-

shop to reinforce the learning from the previous day.

Some ideas for reinforcement are:

Setting **homework**

Giving a **handout** or a reading list

**Repeating the training**, possibly to a more advanced level

**Applying the learning** – in other words learners doing the skill they've learnt

**Skill-sharing** – passing the skill on to others

**Applying the skill in new situations**

A **quiz** or **game**

**Questioning** – “Is that always true?”, “Can you give me an example?”

Giving **feedback** on practice sessions

## Practical preparations

Here are some thoughts on practical preparations that can help make your workshop participatory, focused and enjoyable:

**The workshop space** should ideally be comfortable, with plenty of natural light, air circulation and you can control the temperature. It should be set up to encourage participation, a circle of chairs works best– everyone can see each other and there is no automatic hierarchy in a circle. If you are planning to use technical equipment such as computers or a projector check that it works beforehand, or have an alternative up your sleeve in case it doesn't. Are you competing with any other noise? Will you be disturbed by other users of the building? Some venues have restrictions on where and how paper can be stuck on the walls – if you're intending to stick things on the walls, check first.

**Refreshments:** make sure there's food and drink to suit the group. Don't forget vegetarians and vegans, those with food allergies, or religious or cultural needs. Having tea and coffee slows a workshop down, so if you want it short and focused, it might be best to give it a miss, or wait until afterwards. Having said that, in a longer workshop, don't be tempted to ignore breaks. People don't learn effectively when gasping for a drink, or desperate for the toilet.

**Workshop times:** will people have to skip a meal to attend? Falling blood sugar leads to irritability and lack of focus, so have snacks on hand and plan to take breaks where needed. Will people need to leave in a hurry? If so make sure all important discussion or information is at the start of the meeting, or make extra sure you finish on time. How do the start and end times fit into public transport timetables if people are travelling to the event? How long is the session? Will people be able to concentrate for that length of time? Can you achieve the desired learning in the time you've got? What happens if you start late or take longer over some exercises than planned?

**Access:** consider how to make your workshop accessible to everyone. Check whether your space is suitable for those in wheelchairs or with other specific access needs? There are other access issues you might need to consider. If English isn't everyone's first language, or there are participants with hearing impairments you may need translation or signing. Even if this isn't available you can make a big difference by thinking carefully about your choice of words, using visual aids, and encouraging people to ask if they don't understand. Check whether everyone can hear what you are saying. Maybe the room acoustics are poor, or maybe someone is hard of hearing and may need to see your face so they can lip-read. Equally, check that everyone can see your visual aids. Is the writing large enough? Do you need large print versions of your handouts. Also see our briefings *Access Issues at Meetings* and *A Facilitators Guide to Making Meetings Accessible*.





# Preparing to facilitate

Be aware of your own limitations when delivering any kind of workshop. Check in with yourself (and your co-facilitator if you have one) before the session and make any changes you need to suit your mood and energy levels! Look after yourself – make sure you keep blood sugar levels up, and drink enough water and liquids.

## Confidence

The more confident you are as a facilitator, the safer the learning environment you create. The natural authority that comes with confidence gives the skills or information you're imparting a greater authority too! How well you know your material is important, but there is more to confidence than this. The basic rules of communication tell us that people get the strongest signals about how confident you are from your body language, then the tone of your voice, and lastly your choice of words. So no matter how good your flip charts and handouts, or how well you know your material, you need to look and sound like you have confidence in the group, and in any skills and information you're delivering.

In addition to good preparation, here are some other ideas for ways to boost confidence:

**Visualisation:** Think of a situation where you felt confident and then try to remember what that felt like. What does it feel like to be confident? Can you feel the effect it has on your body language? Can you hear the sound of your voice speaking confidently? Now walk into your workshop – with that body, and that voice.

**Mental Rehearsal:** a powerful tool for learning and for building confidence. Tell yourself you are confident and you are going to perform successfully. Now think through each step of the successful facilitation of the workshop. See it going well – dynamic, interactive, enjoyable... see yourself in there confidently facilitating all that enjoyable learning.

Other ways to build confidence are to practice the workshop out loud, maybe in front of a mirror or give your workshop to friends and ask for feedback. Some people like to memorise the first few things they will say in the workshop to help them get through their initial nervousness.

Practice some deep breathing before you start or some voice exercises (tongue twisters or scales). Get participants involved as quickly as possible in the workshop with energisers and introductory go rounds etc., if they are warmed up and more relaxed then you will be too. It will quickly feel like a two way conversation, rather than the spotlight being on you presenting.

Co-facilitation can also boost your confidence. By working with another facilitator you have the advantages of mutual support, a wider range of experience to draw on for planning and also to deal with any problems that emerge, and another person to help evaluate and debrief the workshop afterwards. All of these enable you to learn, develop your skills and grow in confidence more quickly.

Keep your own performance in perspective – is it necessary to be perfect? Making mistakes is an important part of becoming a better facilitator. Accept that mistakes are inevitable and commit yourself to learning from them. Bear in mind that participants won't be aware of most of the mistakes you make, and won't mind if they do notice. Being confident doesn't mean being an expert. You can still throw questions out to the group, feeling confident that they will help you find the answer. You can still make mistakes, confident that the group will forgive you, and that the workshop will continue and be successful. Confidence is not perfection!

# Key workshop facilitation skills

This section gives an overview of some of the key skills that will help you facilitate a good workshop. Every workshop is different, so not all these points will be relevant.

Remember the group is your most significant asset. As well as checking that you're meeting their expectations, use the group to solve any problems. If a session isn't going as smoothly as planned, if energy levels are low, ask the group what they want to do about it (but have some suggestions up your sleeve). Never be afraid to admit your fallibility, and move on to the next exercise, if the group aren't engaging with the current one!

## Creating a safe space for learning

Participatory workshops can be a great place for learning, as you can balance offering challenging activities for your participants to learn from, with a space and relationships which feel safe enough for people to fully participate, try new things, and give and receive honest feedback.

At the beginning of your workshop you can help the group develop an agreement that sets the tone for how people will behave in the workshop e.g. respecting others opinions, allow everyone an equal opportunity to speak (see our briefing *Group Agreements for Workshops and Meetings*). This is a good opportunity to ask the group to think about dominating or discriminating behaviour, and ask for help in preventing problems arising later. You can also help create a safe space by making sure people know that they are being listened to and their contributions valued. Being confident and welcoming will also help a lot.

## Active listening

Active listening is a key facilitation skill. It's about pro-actively listening to what someone is trying to communicate, whilst trying not to project our own thoughts, judgements and expectations onto them. It helps participants feel they have been heard and their contributions are valued. In workshops it helps us to hear participants' expectations, and hear what they need from the workshop. It can be as small as hearing the participants' needs for a break, or their frustration at a difficult exercise, or it can be a much bigger problem such as the workshop not meeting expectations, or conflict between participants.

### To actively listen:

Create a **safe atmosphere** for the speaker (See *Creating a safe space for learning* above)

**Show that you're listening.** Be aware of your body language. Signs of listening are: leaning toward the speaker, an interested facial expression and maintaining good eye contact. Facial gestures and small movements such as nodding our heads show interest and support. Avoid signs of impatience such as looking at your watch, even if you know that the activity you're in the middle of is in danger of over-running.

**Give yourself mental space.** Stop thinking about how you want to respond and focus on the speaker.

**Use verbal cues** to draw out the speaker's thoughts. This might involve asking appropriate questions ("how did you feel about that?", "what happened then?"), or make appropriate comments ("tell me more", "uh-huh").

**Summarise** and restate what's been said. We can show people that we've heard them properly, and understood their point, by rephrasing the core of what they said and offering it back to them. It's important that we don't simply parrot their words, but show that we've understood any emotion or key concepts they've expressed e.g. "It sounds like you feel frustrated that the workshop isn't covering the topics you expected." Summarising is also an effective way to check whether we've understood them. Offer the summary tentatively – use phrases such as: "What I hear you saying is... is that right?", "Would it be fair to say that you feel...?". If we restate in bold terms such as "So you

feel that..." or "You believe..." and we're wrong, not only do we show we haven't been listening, but we risk offending the speaker by misrepresenting them. If we offer a tentative summary and get it wrong it gives them the opportunity to correct us. Summarise succinctly – boil things down into one or two short sentences. This is essential if your summary is going to clarify a situation and move things forward.

### **Examples of when active listening can be helpful in workshops:**

One of the most frequent uses of active listening in workshops is when you are writing down participant's thoughts and ideas on a flipchart or whiteboard. For example, at the end of a small group exercise you might ask for feedback from each group and write it up. If you don't listen and you accidentally misrepresent what someone has said, not only is their idea lost, but they may well be offended. If you're unsure check with the person making the contribution that the wording is right. These moments also challenge you to be succinct. You may need to summarise someone's two sentence contribution into just a few words that can easily be written up. (For more on active listening see our briefing: *Active Listening*).

Sometimes you'll find yourself faced with a participant who is causing disruption in your workshop. They may not even be aware of it, but left unchecked it could impact on the whole group. Active Listening can help you to discover what the underlying issue is, so that you can deal with the root causes of the problem and not just the surface symptoms.

Sometimes a participant constantly interrupts to make their point, or returns to the same subject over and over, even though the discussion has moved on. These can be signs that the participant doesn't feel they've been heard and had their opinion or idea valued. Taking the time to actively listen and to offer a tentative restatement

of their point can be all that is needed to make them feel listened to and valued.

Summarising a rambling speaker can also be useful to help clarify their contribution to the discussion. Not everyone can be concise. Some of us use speaking to shape our thoughts. Some of us lack the confidence to commit to a clear idea or opinion and this is reflected in the way we speak. The whole group may be confused by what the speaker is actually saying. Listen, and then offer a summary of the rambling speaker's contribution. Not only might this clarify the contribution for the rest of the group, it can also clarify it for the speaker as well!

### **Asking questions**

Questioning is a technique often used by facilitators during workshops as an alternative to presenting information and giving answers. Asking the group you're working with a question, or series of questions can enable them to find their own solutions and puts them in control of their own learning. It increases:

**Depth of learning:** By having to work out the answer for themselves workshop participants learn more deeply. A series of well chosen questions enhances learning and encourages a depth of thinking that a presentation doesn't often achieve.

**Interaction:** Asking questions throws the spotlight back onto the group. It asks participants to think through the answers for themselves. It creates more interaction, and can lead to a higher quality of discussion. This has the added

benefits of keeping people more engaged, energised and of suiting more learning styles.

#### **Asking questions – an example:**

You want to help an inexperienced group gain some skills at giving media interviews. You could give them a presentation on top tips for interview technique. Or you could ask them questions:

"Think of an interview you've seen or heard recently – did the interviewee come across well? ... Why? What made the interview a success? ... What was it about the way they spoke that made them sound so authoritative? ... Anything else? ... What did they do that was less successful? ... What do you think might have worked better instead? OK, so to summarise, you think that a good interview...."

## How to ask questions

Here are some strategies for ensuring your questioning gets good results:

**Have a clear aim.** What learning are you trying to achieve? Ask questions that reflect this.

You can't always predict where questioning might take you, but **have a few questions prepared** to get you started.

**Start with a broad question**, then focus in with more specific questions.

**Choose the right words.** There's a big difference between "How did you feel?" and "What did you think?". Do you want participants to discuss emotion and experience (the first question), or ideas and opinions (the second question)?

"**What**" questions ask for specific descriptive replies whereas "**why**" questions can sometimes be harder to answer as they require an analysis of the situation e.g. "What happened" as opposed to "Why did that happen?" So if people are struggling with a "why" question, reframe as a "what" and this may help you move forward.

### Draw on people's existing experience

to help them find solutions to a problem – "Does this remind you of anything that you do in your everyday life? What strategies do you have for dealing with it in that context? How might those be applied here?"



## How not to ask questions

There are circumstances in which asking a question can be the wrong approach, or we can ask a question in an inappropriate way:

**Not enough thinking time** – give your participants time to think before expecting the answer!

**Putting people on the spot** – think twice before asking a question of a specific individual when you could just as well ask it to the group. Some people find being put on the spot very stressful.

**The 'right' answer** – if you're looking for a very specific answer, be very careful about asking your question. There are several dangers. Anyone that answers and gives you a 'wrong' answer may feel disempowered or stupid, and you may come across as saying "I know the right answer (and you don't), aren't I clever?".

**Leading questions** – if questioning is useful to get people thinking for themselves, then asking a

**Use open questions** when you want to open up and explore issues. Use them to draw people out and to let participants direct what is to be discussed. Open questions cannot be answered by a simple "yes" or "no" answer. They start with words such as "Why...?" or "What happened?"

**Closed questions generally invite a "yes", "no" or "don't know" answer.** But there is a place for closed questions when you want to clarify points, get information quickly or when you want to deliberately restrict options, for example "Would you like to stop now, or go on for another 15 minutes?" excludes the possibility of going on for more than 15 minutes. Whereas the open question: "How much longer do you need?" could leave you carrying on for another hour or more! Closed questions can also be useful to shape a subsequent open question.

**Find value in the answers** the participants offer you. You can always use more questions to bring people back on track, or offer your own ideas

directly. If the question is open-ended, then be clear that what you are offering is just your interpretation and not necessarily the right answer.

leading question can undermine the whole point as it suggests the answer you want to hear and can seem patronising too. Phrase your questions carefully. You might not always get the answer you hoped for – find the value in what you get, and use other questions to bring you back on track.

**Rhetorical questions** – if you're going to ask rhetorical questions (questions to which you're not actually expecting an answer), be clear that that's what you're doing. Otherwise you'll confuse people, and they'll be nervous about answering future questions.

**Too many questions** – asking too many questions can feel like an interrogation, balance this with some information and then ask another question.

## What to do when you don't get an answer.

Have a Plan B in case your prepared question is met with silence. Have an idea of what you might ask next to provoke an answer or to take the group deeper into an issue. (For more on asking questions see our guide: *Using Questions in Workshops*).

**Break the issue down:** If you don't get a response to a broad question, break it down, ask a series of specific questions. If "What have you learnt about communication?" doesn't get you anywhere, ask, "What happened in the roleplay when you were approached by the 'police officer'?"; "What was it about the way you were approached that made you feel that way?"; "Was it just the way they spoke to you?"; "OK, so you think that their body language was important? How important?" and so on.

**Ask a broader question:** Sometimes when you

start with a specific question you won't get an answer. Try going back to the big picture before returning to your specific line of inquiry. Broad questions can warm people up for the specific learning, and give them time to reflect.

**Rephrase:** When a question doesn't get an answer try asking it again using different wording. Avoid just repeating the same question. The chances are that if the participants couldn't (or wouldn't) answer it the first time, they're not going to do so just because you say it again!

## Giving feedback

As a workshop facilitator you might give feedback to your participants during or at the end of an activity e.g. roleplay, simulation. Giving feedback is a skill in itself, so here's some tips: (For more on giving feedback see our guide: *Giving and Receiving Feedback*).

Remember your **feedback is about helping your workshop participants learn**. Make sure any feedback is given in that spirit.

**Be honest.** There's simply no point in saying "that was great!" whilst thinking "that was awful!" The person receiving feedback won't learn anything and will make the same mistakes in future, thinking they're doing a good job.

Always **start with the positive** – everyone needs encouragement and affirmation. Giving positive feedback first helps make us more receptive to being told what could be improved. Many of us aren't very good at recognising our own abilities, so it's important to tell people what they are doing well and what their strengths are so they can build on them.

**Don't shy away from the negative.** We can also learn from reflecting on mistakes. In a workshop, you might ask your participants to critique each other. They are less likely to feel comfortable offering incisive negative criticism, so that role will often fall to you. Don't be afraid of it.

**Be specific.** Rather than making general comments such as "that was brilliant" try to pinpoint what the person did that was brilliant (or awful) and what effect it had on you. So, for example, rather than "You did quite well", try "It looked like taking notes was really helping you summarise what people were saying." This high-

lights strategies that other members of the group could try out for themselves.

**Follow negative feedback with suggestions** for ways it could be done differently. For example, "I think people may feel you weren't listening because you were looking down at your page. Perhaps you could just note down key words, making eye contact with the speaker in between.

**Own your feedback** and accept that you can only ever speak from your own perspective. You're in no position to make universal judgements. Begin with "I" or "In my opinion".

If you're giving feedback to a group, **direct comments at named individuals** where appropriate. We learn better when feedback is made relevant to us: "Joe, I found it very helpful when you asked the group if they were clear on the subject for discussion. Josephine, you complimented Joe well when you reminded them that they could use handsignals to answer the question." Individual feedback and reinforcement has been found to be more effective than feedback given to a group as a whole.

**Limit your comments to criticising what people did and not who they are.** There's a world of difference between saying "you didn't do that very well" and "you're useless".

Giving unskillful 'negative' feedback ("No, you're wrong", "Don't be stupid") can block learning.

## Facilitating roleplay, simulation and teambuilding games

Roleplays, simulations and games provide an important 'experiential' element to your workshop. They allow participants to actually practice the skills/issues they've been exploring and then to reflect on them, and that's vital if they're going to have a complete learning experience in the workshop. A workshop is also a safe space to practice new found skills and to receive feedback. It doesn't matter if people make a mistake in these practice sessions.

**Roleplay** – in roleplay a scenario is chosen and participants are asked to act out different roles that are relevant to the subject matter and specific aims of the workshop e.g. roleplaying the police, the media, members of the public or clients. One important aspect of roleplay is that participants get an opportunity to see the scenario from a different perspective which can result in a greater empathy with the experiences of others.

**Simulation exercises and team building games** – In this type of exercise, participants 'play' themselves and try out new found skills or explore existing skills.

There are three stages to facilitating effective experiential learning activities: the set up, running the activity and the debrief.

**1. The set up** – you will need to clearly explain the scenario (and possibly the geography of the space) to participants and ask for volunteers for the various roles. Its a good idea to give role players a bit of time to get into character. It can also help to give them a role card with a short description of their character, e.g. their key concerns or issues, or some examples of the kinds of thing they might say, or to give a quick briefing. Ensure you give appropriate health and safety warnings if the activity is likely to get physical. Not everyone likes these kinds of activities (especially roleplay), so its important to make it clear that participation is voluntary and that there are useful observer roles for those that prefer.

**2. Running the activity** – announce the start of the activity and allow the action to run until either you have got all the learning out of the activity, participants have run out of steam, you run out of time, someone is becoming distressed, the action is getting a bit tough and injuries look likely, or there's a natural moment to break. In very intense activities you may need to use a whistle to stop the action as people may be so involved they don't hear you shout.

When you stop the activity give people a chance to recover before you start the debrief. Some activities are very physical and people may need to get their breath back and replenish their blood sugar, or get a drink. They may also need to get out of role and let go of any strong emotions (see De-roleing section below).

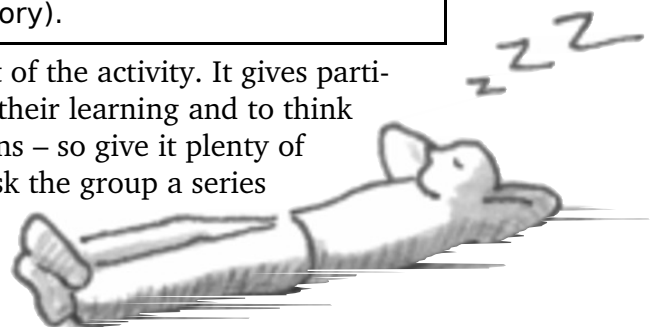
### De-roleing

After a roleplay it's important to provide participants with the chance to de-role, that is to come out of their role and leave any strong emotions behind.

You will need to judge the level of de-roleing required, depending on the intensity of the roleplay. This may mean a 10 minute break for a more intense roleplay, or a quick shake, or a few deep breaths may be all that's needed. Other options include: an interaction with the other participants which helps them get back to reality (e.g. saying 'Hi', you're name, and something about you), a physical game, a visualisation that takes people's attention elsewhere (e.g. to a pleasant memory).

**3. Debriefing** – this is probably the most important aspect of the activity. It gives participants a chance to reflect on their experience, to process their learning and to think about how they will apply the learning in real life situations – so give it plenty of time. Rather than just allowing a free-for-all discussion, ask the group a series of questions that will help them get the best learning from the experience. If it's useful write up the debrief.

To get the best learning out of the roleplay experience



start the debrief by asking questions that encourage the group to reflect on their experience – what they saw and how they felt. Start with broad questions and then move on to more specific questions. This stage is important as it allows participants to express any strong emotions that came up during the activity. Follow this up with questions that help participants to interpret or analyse what they saw or felt. Examples of questions you might ask include:

### **Step 1: Observing/Reflecting**

What happened?

What did you observe?

How did you feel?

### **Step 2: Interpreting/Analysing**

What made you feel that way?

Follow this up with questions that help to draw out the general principles (ie the intended learning) from the exercise and finally with questions that help participants see how they might apply the learning in a real situation. You might ask:

### **Step 3: General Principles**

Can you see any themes emerging here?

What principles are at work here?

What does this suggest to you about...?

How does this experience help you understand...?

Is that what you expected?

Why do you think that may have occurred?

What did you learn?

What could have been done differently?

What would you do differently next time?

Would that have made you feel any different?

### **Step 4: Applying the learning**

How might this help you in the future?

How do you think you could put these ideas into effect?

What criteria would need to be in place for this idea to work?

What possible problems do you need to be aware of?

Where do you go from here?

## **Flipchart facilitation - using visual aids**

You'll often find yourself standing in front of a flipchart, overhead projector (OHP) or whiteboard. Here are some guidelines for using them:

Ask if everyone can see the writing. If not move the OHP or flipchart, or ask participants to move.

Talk to your group not to the paper! It's better to pause whilst you write than lose what you're saying in the process. You could ask your co-facilitator or a participant to write for you.

Check before using green or red pen – some people are red/green colour-blind and have trouble distinguishing one colour from the other.

Write in lower case letters – the eye finds it easier to read them from a distance. And of course, write big enough!

When writing up comments, use your active

listening skills to accurately summarise and restate the comments made. Make sure you check with the person who made the comment, as you may have misunderstood, which could cause offence!

Don't show any favouritism – value all contributions equally and write down everything. If there's a reason why you're not writing something down (because it's already on the paper, for example, or it's incorrect) explain it to the group.

Use headings, they help us build mental associations, so we can remember and 'file' our learning appropriately.

## Facilitating problems in workshops

A workshop can involve unexpected and difficult situations that you'll need to deal with. Sometimes these are unforeseen practical problems e.g. a lack of natural ventilation. At other times they're down to the behaviour of individual participants, for example, dominating individuals or the cynic that shoots down every idea, or even the whole group. In most cases designing an interactive workshop agenda and facilitating it in a way that allows everyone to participate will keep everyone happy from the start, and problems shouldn't arise.

### Dealing with disruptive behaviour

Whenever you're dealing with a 'difficult' participant, it's vital that you remember that the problem is their *behaviour* and not them as *a person*. It's also important to realise that they're rarely deliberately making life difficult for you. The chances are, that at some level, the workshop isn't meeting their needs.

We all bring a number of needs with us, whenever we work in a group. Most of them are quite simple, and rather obvious. We need to feel that we are being treated fairly. We need to feel valued. We need our expertise and experience to be valued. We need our ideas and opinions to be heard. We need to feel part of a group. We need to feel like we're getting something useful done. Whenever you face a problem, listen out for the underlying needs. Then find a facilitation tool that will help meet these needs. If you're ever unsure – ask the group what the problem is and actively listen to the answer!

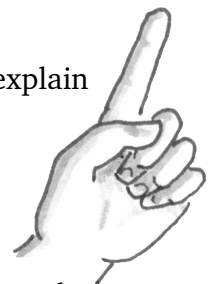
*For example lets look at one common problem – dominating behaviour:*

In any group there are those that talk a lot so that others struggle to get a word in edgeways. As a facilitator committed to everyone's learning and participation you might need to deal with domination, whether deliberate or subconscious. So what's happening? Often you'll be witnessing the activist learning styles doing their thing – thinking (and therefore speaking) quickly, and hogging the limelight. Sometimes it may be due to existing power structures in the group – some people holding more senior positions (formally or informally). Perhaps there's a deficit of knowledge in the group – only some people know enough about the issue to feel confident to get involved. Of course it could be because you're facilitating only to your own learning style, or to one style within the group, accidentally alienating others from the process.

*So what can you do? You could:*

Be clear at the start that you want and welcome everyone's participation. Acknowledge that some people speak more than others and appeal for self restraint. You could formalise this in a Group Agreement that sets the tone for what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour (see briefing *Group Agreements for Workshops and Meetings*).

Use handsignals to create an orderly queue for contributions. Then tweak your queue to ensure it's not just the same people getting to speak. If you do this, make sure you explain why.... “Thanks to those of you with your hands up, but I just want to give those who haven't spoken at all a chance to speak before I come to you....”



Use small groups to give more people the chance to contribute and break up existing power dynamics. If you're feeding back from small group work, ask for a new reporter each time.

Encourage everyone to contribute with welcoming and open body language and good eye contact.

Have a go-round to give everyone an equal space to express themselves. However, be careful not to put anyone on the spot. Make it possible for people to pass and say nothing if they really want to. Ensure those who need more thinking time aren't asked to speak first.

Give the activists something to do to keep them busy, e.g. get them writing up on the board or



flipchart (but make sure they do it accurately).

Make sure that everyone has a chance to get informed in advance of the workshop – circulate a reading list in advance. If you can't do this, get everyone up to speed early through presentation or by bringing out the knowledge from those who have it.

Vary the tools you use to create a pace and range of exercises that suit everyone at least some of the time.

Ask the group directly for new contributions, for example: “We've heard from some people already – let's go to those that haven't spoken...”, “Would anyone that's not contributed yet like to say anything”.

### **Working with an unresponsive group**

Firstly, check whether they really are unresponsive. It's possible you've got a room full of reflective types that simply work at a slower pace than you'd planned for. Then think about all the other possible factors. Do you need to take a break, open a window to get some fresh air or do an energising game?

Maybe it's the exercise that you're doing. Have they understood what they're supposed to be doing? Have you given them a rationale for doing it, so that the pragmatic types can engage with it? Or perhaps it simply isn't working and you need to move on to something else? In all of these cases ask the group! Is everyone clear on what we're doing?, Is this exercise working for you? If not we can easily move on.

If there's no energy for an exercise you might need to face the fact that you're not meeting the expectations of the participants – that what you have planned is not what they want to do. This may require you to negotiate with the group – ask them what they were expecting and make some changes on the spot!

Of course it could just be Friday afternoon, or Monday morning. Blast them with your full repertoire of games – sooner or later they'll crack and start enjoying themselves, then they're all yours and the learning can begin. You could try selecting icebreakers that are relevant to the learning you want to take place anyway.

### **Working with a sceptical group**

So you've got a group that's sceptical about the subject of this particular workshop? What do you do? Firstly, check your group's expectations near the start of the workshop. Hopefully that will let you know that the workshop you've prepared is relevant to this group. If it raises any issues, at least you know what the differences between your plan and their expectations are, and can change things accordingly.

Secondly, make it clear what's in it for them. What advantages will the workshop bring them? Is it more knowledge, better exam results, simply an hour or so of fun?

Thirdly, assume you've got a room full of Pragmatists who want to know exactly how each and every exercise is applicable to their real experience (and that includes the icebreakers) – give them a clear rationale at the start for undertaking each bit of your workshop. If you can't (because, for example, the exercise needs them to come at it with an unprejudiced mind) explain that to them and make it clear that the rationale will become obvious.

Acknowledge the scepticism – don't just ignore it and hope it'll go away! You can be explicit – “I know some of you aren't sure how this workshop will help, but go with it for now – other groups have found it really valuable. Don't forget you'll get a chance to tell me what you think at the end. If you've got questions, or are unsure of anything at any stage, just ask me...”.

Trust in your workshop – you've checked that it meets all the needs of a good learning experience. You evaluate regularly, so know what works and what doesn't. Be confident – this isn't easy when faced with scepticism – but do it anyway!

## **Expecting a large group, getting a small one!**

It's not uncommon to plan a workshop for 12 people and then find that only 6 show up on the day. Do whatever you can, in advance, to establish an accurate assessment of who will be there. If you think the numbers are at all unrealistic or vague, plan for half the number showing up. Check out in advance that your agenda will still work with 4, 6 or whatever. Assuming that you decide to go ahead with the workshop, what can you do?

On the positive side, a small group can mean a more intimate and interesting workshop – there's the potential for everyone to have more of a chance to speak and contribute, so see it as an opportunity and not a crisis! In many cases you simply need to mentally rework some of your numbers – e.g. 2 small groups instead of 4 or groups of 3 not 6.

But maybe you'd planned an exercise that you just don't see working with this number of people? Go back to the aims of the exercise – what were you hoping to achieve? How can you achieve those ends with this number of participants? It may mean you have to fall back on more traditional methods, such as ideastorms, go-rounds and discussion – so what? As long as you keep the energy of the workshop up, you'll get away with it.

The worst thing you can do is let the numbers deflate your enthusiasm. It will show and will infect the workshop! Don't sit there and say "Well, we were going to do this really interesting exercise, but since no-one could be bothered to show up, we'll have to do this ideastorm instead"!

You might need to sit in with the group more, and use questioning to elicit the breadth and depth of learning you were hoping to achieve through sheer weight of numbers (20 people ideastorming are likely to come up with more ideas than 5).

## **Disclosure**

It's not uncommon for a participant to either be reluctant to share 'personal' information with a group, or to blurt out unnecessarily personal details in an inappropriate context. This can cause embarrassment for the individual and the group, and throw you, the facilitator, off your stride. You can influence how and to what extent participants offer disclosure.

### **If you want to prevent or limit disclosure in a group....**

Give clear instructions at the start of the workshop or exercise – "please don't say anything that you aren't comfortable for this group to hear", "don't give away information about yourself which may make you feel vulnerable"

Give an example yourself, setting the tone for the type of information you want to share

Work in a bigger group – people will be more reluctant to share intimate information in a larger group

Move people on to new tasks and new groups regularly

Limit the room for interaction by using less interactive tools, such as lectures or slideshows

Ask for facts not opinions, and use non-emotive language

### **If you want to increase the amount of disclosure in a group....**

Get the group to work in pairs, and allow them to choose their own partner

Work in smaller groups – people will be more prepared to share intimate information with smaller groups

Use icebreakers that encourage intimacy and trust

Give an example yourself, setting the tone for the type of information you want to share

Run a longer training session to build trust, residential trainings are especially useful in this regard

Make it clear in advance that people should be prepared to take some risks

Have any necessary support systems in place

Ask people what they "feel" and not what they "think"

## Evaluating the workshop

Evaluating the workshop with the group is very good practice. It helps you check that the workshop has met their expectations, and it gives you some ideas to improve the workshop. Build at least 5 minutes evaluation time into each workshop agenda. Don't just evaluate the content. Ask questions about the quality of your facilitation, whether you met expectations, the length of the workshop, the pace etc. You can also ask if there are other workshops the group would like. Here are three common evaluation tools:

**Evaluation Form** – prepare a form that has room for comments and maybe room to score different aspects of the session. The evaluation form takes a bit longer to fill in, but you can glean more information than with other methods. Remember to phrase the questions neutrally. Encourage people to fill it in straight away, or you will never get it back. Take lots of biro's with you – that way no-one has an excuse not to fill it in there and then!

**Go-Round** – simply go round the group asking everyone to say one thing that worked well, one that didn't (or equivalent positive/negative questions). This shouldn't feel compulsory for participants, and you shouldn't get defensive if the workshop comes in for criticism. Accept the comments and move on to the next person. See our briefing *Giving and Receiving Feedback*.

**Pie Chart** – draw a large circle and divide into slices. Each slice can then be marked to represent different exercises, expectations, quality of facilitation or anything else you want evaluating. Everyone grabs a marker pen and puts a small cross in each slice. The nearer the centre of the pie they place their cross, the higher they score that section. This is quick and easy, and very visual – trends become apparent from a quick glance!

You might also want to look at our briefings: *Facilitation Tools for Meetings and Workshops* and *Tools for Interaction*.

## Further Reading

### Books

**Participatory Workshops: a sourcebook of 21 sets of ideas and activities** By Robert Chambers. Excellent resources drawn from a wide range of meetings and workshops. Available for free, in draft form at:

[www.unssc.org/web1/programmes/rcs/cca\\_undaf\\_training\\_material/tot05/resources/fun21sourcebookforfacilitators.pdf](http://www.unssc.org/web1/programmes/rcs/cca_undaf_training_material/tot05/resources/fun21sourcebookforfacilitators.pdf)

**Training for Dummies** By Elaine Biech. Good resource to support ongoing learning. Lots of tips and techniques for existing or would-be facilitators

**Making Workshops Work** By Rob Yeung. Short, but good quality summary of workshop facilitation techniques

### On the Web

[www.trainingforchange.org](http://www.trainingforchange.org) excellent resource for all social change facilitators

[www.lastfirst.net](http://www.lastfirst.net) Last-First networks: "Tools for change in your community and your world"

[www.wilderdom.com/games](http://www.wilderdom.com/games) wide selection of 'games' and activities to complement and support learning, including links to other resources

[www.mycoted.com/creativity/techniques](http://www.mycoted.com/creativity/techniques) lots of creative thinking and planning tools

[www.gdrc.org/icm/ppp/pl.html](http://www.gdrc.org/icm/ppp/pl.html) a selection of participatory learning techniques

[www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com) a good source of relevant tools and articles

## Planning Workshops

### Do:

Start with your aims – what you want to achieve from the workshop – and pick exercises to meet them. Don't start with your favourite exercises and let that dictate your aims!

Be realistic about the time it takes to run through the agenda. If in doubt overestimate the time any given exercise will take

Evaluate your workshop and modify your agendas in the light of experience.

## Setting Up Exercises

### Do:

Be clear on the purpose, timings and nature of the exercise

Check with the group that they have understood the exercise

Reinforce instructions with a handout/flipchart if need be. Would a list of questions to consider during the exercise be useful?

Make yourself available for questions during the exercise

### Don't:

Carry on regardless if you're not clear in your own mind

Be afraid to restate the instructions, or call a halt if it's not working

# Key Training Skills

## Answering Questions

**Do:** Throw questions back to the group – “That's a really good question! Does anyone have an answer to it?”. Don't forget you can do this even if you do have the answer! Letting the group answer its own questions helps enhance the learning.

**Don't:** Make it up. If you don't know, say so.

## Being Flexible & Responsive

### Do:

Prepare in advance to avoid having to write the whole agenda on the spot! But also be ready to adapt it if you need to. Ask your participants what their expectations are (you could use a questionnaire in advance, or a simple go-round at the start of the workshop), then if you've missed something important, during the next break modify your agenda to deal with it.

If you are meeting a very specific set of objectives, make them very clear in advance, reducing the chances of someone attending the workshop with the wrong idea.

Co-facilitate – it doubles the facilitation experience in the room, and enhances the possibility of being able to respond to unexpected situations. On a practical note, one facilitator can carry on whilst the other prepares an exercise to meet any unanticipated needs.

Identify in advance which parts of your workshop you can adapt or cut out if time becomes an issue. Presentations take less time than interactive exercises, so you might need to adapt sections to keep them shorter. Prepare yourself mentally for this possibility!

### Don't:

Pretend you can adapt your workshop on the spot if you can't! If you can, put the group in touch with facilitators that can meet their need and offer to send handouts/web links that will answer their questions. Then ask them to bear with you for the rest of your workshop, and tell them what the benefits will be.

Worry if you can't be flexible – flexibility comes with experience and confidence, and involves being willing to make mistakes. If you're new to training, no one can reasonably expect that of you!

## Presenting Information

### Do:

Make it clear if, and when, you're taking questions (otherwise an unsolicited question can throw you off your stride)

Present at a pace that balances the time pressure of your agenda, and the needs of more reflective/active learners

Support the verbal with visual props and vice versa to reinforce learning

Remember the importance of tone of voice, eye contact and body language as well as the words you use

Talk to the whole group, not just those directly in front of you, and speak clearly!

### Don't:

Misrepresent yourself as an expert if that's not the case

Assume that the presentational bits of the agenda are boring and rush them or seem apologetic – some people thrive on them!