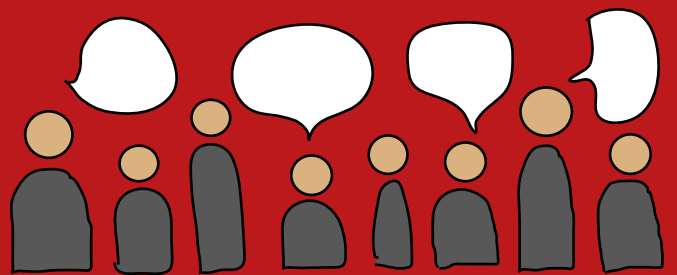


# Facilitation Skills



# Overview

The overall aim of this self-development handbook is to enable you to design and facilitate events.

On working through this handbook you will be able to:

- Explain the role of a facilitator.
- Identify the skills required to facilitate effectively.
- Structure a session to focus on the task whilst working flexibly with a group to help them achieve their goals.
- Use a range of facilitation tools to generate ideas, evaluate situations and aid decision-making in both face to face and virtual sessions
- Make confident, timely and effective interventions in relation to group dynamics and individual participation.

	<b>Content</b>	<b>Pages</b>
Section One <b>Introduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is facilitation?</li> <li>• When to use a facilitator</li> <li>• The role of the facilitator</li> <li>• Core skills of facilitation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questioning</li> <li>• Discussion Leading</li> <li>• Active Listening</li> <li>• Reading the Room</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	2 2 2 3- 7
Section Two <b>Preparing to facilitate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreeing the purpose and outcomes</li> <li>• The structure of the session</li> <li>• Facilitation techniques</li> <li>• Designing the programme</li> <li>• Planning checklist</li> </ul>	8 9 9-13 14-15 16
Section Three <b>Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator supplies checklist</li> <li>• Preparing yourself – handling nerves</li> <li>• Opening the session</li> <li>• Briefing an activity</li> <li>• Energising the group</li> <li>• Managing behaviours</li> <li>• Difficult group situations</li> </ul>	17 18 19 20 20 21-22 23

# Section One - Introduction

## What is Facilitation

The word facilitate comes from the Latin which means to 'make easy'. Facilitation is the art of focusing group energy on a specific goal.

"An individual who enables groups and organisations to work more effectively; to collaborate and achieve synergy. He or she is a 'content neutral' party who by not taking sides or expressing or advocating a point of view during the meeting, can advocate for fair, open, and inclusive procedures to accomplish the group's work" – Doyle

## When to Use a Facilitator

There are several situations in which a facilitator may be needed and some of the most common are:

- When you want to ensure participation and contribution from everybody in the group. With unfacilitated meetings and workshops, there's a high risk of uneven participation across the group. The louder, more extroverted group members take over while other voices do not get heard.
- When it is important to break away from circular discussions and move towards actions or decisions.
- When the issue is complex and the problems are poorly defined. A facilitator can help the group to clarify the issues and develop workable solutions.
- Where there is bias or mistrust within the group it is important to have a neutral person to manage the process.
- Where there are rivalries between individuals or teams within the group and there may be some conflict or disagreement. A facilitator can help to mediate between the different factions.
- When there is a power imbalance in the group and some people may feel intimidated. A facilitator can create a safe and inclusive space for everyone to contribute.

## The Role of the Facilitator

### Facilitators do:

- Collaborate with others to agree the purpose and the desired outcomes.
- Plan and design the session.
- Formulate and agree the ground rules with the group.
- Keep the group focused and manage the time.
- Remain objective and neutral on the content.
- Listen more than they talk, reflect back and clarify.
- Encourage participation.
- Actively support inclusion and ensure gender and cultural sensitivity
- Keep the group energised.
- Remain alert to what is happening in the group and handle difficult situations.
- Stay flexible and offer adaptations to the process, as necessary.
- Assess and manage technology and online meeting tools.
- Visually record the group's discussion or plan for the group to capture their ideas.
- Ensure actions and outcomes are recorded

### Facilitators do not:

- State their personal view about content
- Do the groups work
- Try to be experts

## The Core Skills of Facilitation

### Questioning

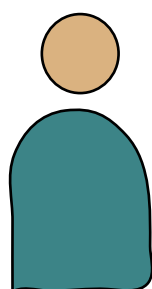
The emphasis in facilitation is to encourage the participants to come to their own solutions, ideas and actions. Questions are the facilitators main vehicle for helping the group to identify, explore, clarify and develop their understanding as well as helping them decide what to do.

'The important and difficult job is never to find the right answers, it is to find the right question. For there are few things as useless – if not dangerous – as the right answer to the wrong question'  
Peter Drucker

The following are examples of facilitative questions:

- Could you tell me a bit more about how that?
- What other ways are there of thinking about that?
- How might those obstacles be overcome?
- Does that make sense to everyone?
- What would success look like / feel like in x months / weeks?
- Have we captured all ideas here?
- Could you define that to me?
- Would this be another way of phrasing what you have said? Rephrase
- How might this work in practice?
- Can you tell me more?
- Is everyone ok to carry on or do you want a bit of a break?
- So, we have heard one view there, is that something that everyone would say that they agree with or are there other opinions?
- What could have improved that situation?
- Can I ask whether you are all clear about the objectives for this session?
- I can see there are a lot of hands still up and I'm mindful of the time, do we stay here a while or move onto x ?
- Who would like to add something?
- I would like to throw this open to the group to comment upon – what are your views on this matter?
- We are short of time, are any of the remaining questions real burners or should we move on to ensure we have time for x?
- What are your thoughts / reflections on ...?
- You seem unhappy with this idea? Do you want to share what you do not like about it?
- What conclusions can be drawn from this discussion?
- So, what are we saying?
- What are the key issues here?

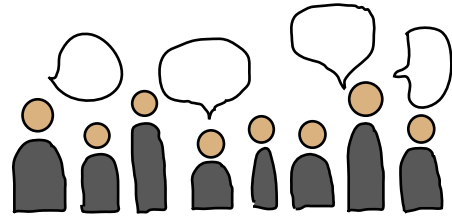
Questions can also be used to check in with the group relatively frequently regarding their interest level and/or understanding of what is happening.



- “Does anyone have any comments?”
- “Any questions at this stage?”
- “Are we making progress here?”

## Discussion Leading

Another key skill of facilitation is the ability to lead a productive discussion that results in ideas and action. The following questions can be used to ensure that discussions are progressed using the stages of the learning cycle.



### Stage 1 – Experience

The facilitator outlines the key objectives for the discussion, how long the item is expected to take and, if appropriate, asks the group to agree how a decision will be reached.

### Stage 2 – Reflecting

This stage involves allowing time to discuss the issue and involves the facilitator asking questions such as:

- What do people think about this?
- How do you feel?
- What views do people have?
- Let's hear some different perspectives on this.
- What do you think the views of your staff are?

It is important that the group are not allowed to jump to solutions at this stage and that everyone gets the opportunity to share their thoughts and views on whatever is being discussed.

### Stage 3 – Concluding

At this stage the focus shifts from general discussion to drawing conclusions. The facilitator may use some of the questions below:

- What conclusions can be drawn from this discussion?
- So what are we saying?
- What is the most important thing for us to deal with?
- What are the key issues here?
- We have several different views here, how can we move this forward?
- What options are open to us?

### Stage 4 –Applying

This stage moves to agreeing what needs to be done.

- How might this help us?
- What are we going to do?
- What are the first steps?
- Who is going to be responsible for that?

## Active Listening

Another core skill of facilitation is the ability to listen on many levels, including listening to the content, the intent, areas of commonality, agreement and disagreement.

However, there are many things that get in the way of us truly listening. The most common barriers are listed below.

### Mind Reading

Have you ever caught yourself drifting away from what the other person is saying, because you have already assumed that you know what they are going to say?

### Advising

Jumping to solutions or advice rather than simply listening.  
Most of the time, when a person is talking, what they *mostly* want is to be listened to and understood.

### Filtering

Filtering means having selective attention to certain types of information and letting your mind drift.

### Rehearsing

Rehearsing means preparing what you will say next whilst the other person is still speaking. This often can result in you saying what popped into your mind which can have a negative effect because interrupting is regarded as quite offensive and aggressive and can trigger a defensive attitude in the other person.

### Sparring

Sparring means being absolute, argumentative, and willing to convince the other about your own opinion being better/ more correct than theirs.

Then your focus is on constructing your next argument, not on the person talking to you. Consequently, you focus on yourself and not the other person.

### Identifying

Identifying means reflecting what the other person says to your own experience. Although this is helpful in order for us to understand the other's point of view and really get into their position, it is also distracting. Simply because you shift your attention away from your speaker and onto yourself.

### Judging

Judging means having already formed a negative opinion of the other person or being critical in your mind about what they are saying.

### Daydreaming

Something the other person said has triggered a memory, image or thought in your mind and then you got carried away on your train of thought.

### Being Right

If being right is obstructing you from listening and therefore communicating properly, this means you are mostly concerned about being right, and there is no way you can be wrong.



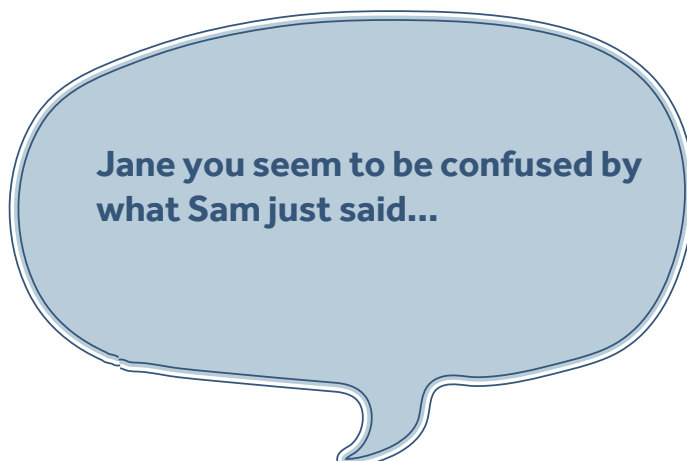
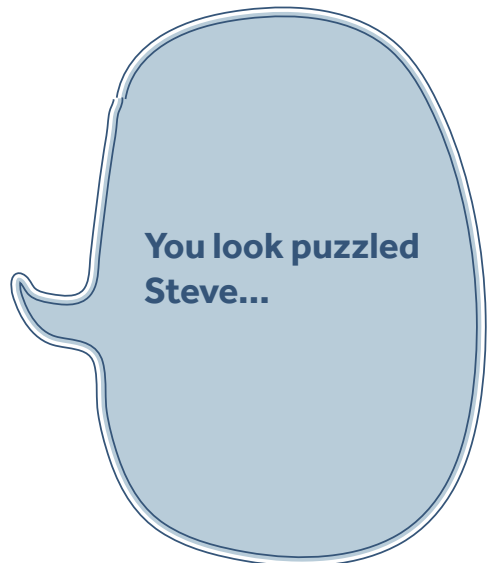
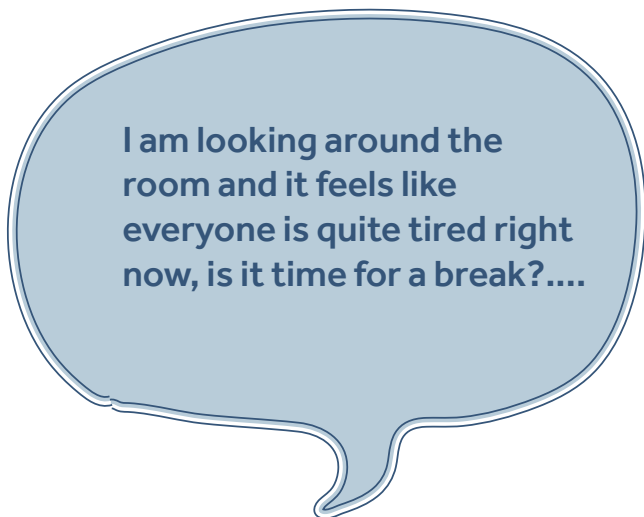
Occasionally re-phrasing or summarising people's thoughts and feelings can demonstrate that you are listening. Check-in with them to ensure that you have correctly understood what they said.

"Shilpa, I think what you are saying is ...?"  
'Have I got that right?.....'"  
"So, to summarise at this stage....., does that feel right to you all?"

The ability to stay silent is also a key part of listening. A good facilitator will be comfortable with silence and allow the space and time for others to share their thoughts and views.

### Reading the Room

Participants will give visual clues to how they are feeling - keep track of people's feelings and feed them back if it feels appropriate:



# Section Two - Preparing to Facilitate

## Agreeing the Purpose and the Outcomes

The first stage of preparation is to define the purpose and the desired outcomes from the facilitated session. These serve three distinct purposes:

- they focus the participants minds on the purpose of the session and allow them time to prepare prior to the meeting/workshop
- they help the facilitator to design the session
- they provide a means by which the success of the event can be measured

### Purpose

The purpose can usually be captured in one sentence and is a clear, concise statement that summarises the overall reason for the event.

Ensure that your purpose begins with a verb - an active, measurable word:

- to agree
- to finalise
- to identify
- to review
- to create
- to assess
- to develop
- to recommend
- to develop
- to implement

### Outcomes

There may be a number of outcomes for the event and they will align with the overall purpose. They are the tangible things that you want to have achieved by the end of the session.

Your outcomes will usually be nouns and will clarify what you want to achieve.

- A list of ...
- A decision about ....
- A set of recommendations for ....
- An agreed statement about ....
- An action plan for ....
- A plan for .....
- A timeline of ....
- A flowchart of .....

For example:

### PURPOSE

To explore how the University can work with local businesses for the benefit of all the organisations

To develop a comprehensive communication plan for the department

To explore the needs of our stakeholders and their requirements

### OUTCOMES

- a list of current challenges of local businesses
- Identify any challenges that the University could help to overcome
- Agree next steps for partnership working

- a review of the existing communication channels
- a list of areas that could be improved
- recommendations for how that could be achieved

- a list of our current stakeholders both internally and externally
- a matrix of their expectations and needs
- an analysis of how successfully they are being met
- an action plan to develop those relationships further

### Reflection

Think about a session you are going to facilitate:

What is the purpose?

What are the desired outcomes?



## Structuring the Session

Most workshops follow a series of stages:

For each of the stages you will need to choose the most appropriate technique to achieve the desired outcome.

Introductions and setting the scene

Exploration of the topic or problem

Exploration of solutions or ideas

Identifying and developing the solutions or ideas

Planning how to put that into action

Reviewing and evaluating the event

## Facilitation Techniques

There are a wide range of analytical and creative tools and techniques that can be used when facilitating a session. A key part of the facilitator's role is selecting the right tool or technique at each stage of the session. It is important to use a variety to appeal to the different styles of the participants in the session.

1

### Brainstorming

Purpose: To generate as many ideas as possible

Process:

1. Define the topic to be brainstormed.
2. Put up the rules of brainstorming.
  - quantity of ideas is more important than the quality
  - ideas should not be evaluated or criticised
  - everything is written down
  - ideas can be developed from other people's suggestions
  - the imagination should flow freely
  - silence is OK
3. The facilitator acts as the scribe.

After an allocated time the list of ideas is reviewed using some agreed criteria and a final list of possibilities is produced.

2

### Future News Coverage

Purpose: To establish a vision for the future

Process:

1. Ask participants to picture themselves and their organisation or team or project a few years in the future. It is running well and is highly successful. What would they hope to see reported in local and national news? What would the headline be? What graphic would accompany the story?
2. Give groups 20 – 30 minutes to produce a chart with the headline, key points of the story and the graphic.
3. Put charts up around the room and ask everyone to walk round and look at them.

If this exercise is used in a virtual environment ask people in their breakout rooms to prepare a radio announcement to feedback to the whole group.

### 3

#### **PMI – Plus, Minus and Interesting Points** (Edward de Bono 1987)

Purpose: to encourage the examination of ideas, concepts and experiences from more than one perspective.

Process:

1. Identify the topic or situation to be discussed.
2. Head three columns with the words plus, minus and interesting.
3. Ask groups to identify all the positive things they can think of without critiquing them, all the negative things they can think of and anything that is interesting. Rather than positive and negative these are simply points of interest.

### 4

#### **Cause and Effect Diagrams**

Purpose: To identify and organise information about possible causes of a problem

Process:

1. Write down the effect of the problem – place this in a box on the left hand side of the page and draw a process line from the right of the page to the box.
2. List all possible causes – use brainstorming to generate as many causes as possible or ask people to put their ideas on post its.
3. Group all causes into categories – possible areas are people, environment, processes, equipment – however any groupings can be used.
4. Analyse the cause and effect relationship.

### 5

#### **Force Field Analysis** (Kurt Lewin 1940s)

Purpose: To identify the driving and the opposing forces when planning change.

Process:

1. Identify the change that is to be made. Carefully describe the desired condition - where do you want to be?
2. Identify the driving forces - these are all the forces that will help achieve the objective. Then identify all the restraining forces – all the things that will get in the way of the change being successfully achieved.
3. Examine the forces - which are strong and which are weak? Which forces are under your control and which are not? Which forces can be influenced and which cannot?
4. To move from the current condition to the desired condition you need to add more driving forces, remove restraining forces or do both. Lewin advises against simply adding more driving forces because this may increase resistance and tension in the situation. Therefore, in this step select several important, adaptable restraining forces and develop action plans to remove them from the field of forces. Look at ways to maximise the driving forces or ways to develop more.
5. Implement the action plans.

## 6

### Reversal

Purpose: To identify ways to improve a situation

Process:

1. Write down the current situation at the top of a piece of flipchart paper e.g. lack of parking at work
2. On the left hand side of the piece of paper list all the ways the situation could be made worse – create as many options as possible.
3. Go through the list again and on the right hand side reverse the options to identify ways of improving the situation.

## 7

### Parking Lot

Purpose: To record items that would divert the group from the current task

Process:

1. Put a piece of flipchart paper on the wall
2. The facilitator or group members can put issues on there that need to be discussed but are not pertinent at the point at which they have been raised.

## 8

### SWOT Analysis

Purpose: To review the external and internal factors impacting on a situation

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
INTERNAL	What do you do well? What makes you unique? What do you do better than others? What do others see as your strengths?	What could you improve? Where do you have fewer resources than others? What do your competitors do better than you? What are others likely to see as your weaknesses?
	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
EXTERNAL	What trends in the external environment could you take advantage of? What opportunities are open to you? How can you turn your strengths into opportunities?	What trends or conditions could negatively impact you? What is your competition doing? What threats do your weaknesses expose you to?

## 9

**Scenario Building**

Purpose: To think and plan for a possible future scenario

Process:

1. What if.....

In your group develop this scenario considering how it would impact on:

- the service you deliver
- who your customers would be
- the way that you deliver the service
- the staff you would need
- the working patterns of staff
- the equipment and building you would need.
- etc...

After 30 minutes you will be asked to present your scenario to the other groups.

## 10

**PESTLE Analysis**

Purpose: To provide an overview of the environment that your organisation is in and identify the factors that might affect the way that you operate in the future

Process:

1. Ask people to think about the external factors that may affect the organisation within a defined time span – say 3 years.
  2. Give people a limited time (15 minutes) to offer developments under each PESTLE heading – limiting the time helps to keep energy levels high.
  3. Make the results of the brainstorm visible – either using flipcharts on the wall or post its or a virtual whiteboard or collaboration tool
  4. Record the factors from the brainstorm that you want to discuss further.
  5. Focus on why each development affects the organisation.
  6. Discuss and agree what new responses developing risks are necessary
  7. Ensure responsibility is assigned to adapt relevant plans and communicate them
  8. Set a date for a report to appropriate groups on the action taken to address the new risks that have been identified.
- Political / legal – influences which arise from political changes, the law, any official rules which govern choices and conduct or professional codes of practice.
  - Economic – influences which arise from monetary, financial or economic issues.
  - Social – influences which arise from human beings and their nature. This could include cultural values, demographic calculations, the modern educational system, customer expectations etc.
  - Technical - influences which arise from scientific, mechanical, or even geological situations. Computer technology, communication systems, automation etc.
  - Legal Implications – the effects any legal and international legislation may have on your area of responsibility e.g. employment law relating to health, data protection, sex, disability, consumer law
  - Environmental factors – the impact of local, national and international environmental issues e.g. sustainability, climate change

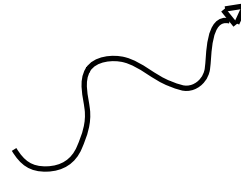
## Some examples of online facilitation tools include:

### Whiteboarding and Post It's

#### Padlet

A free and easy-to-use online virtual bulletin board for individuals to collaborate online.

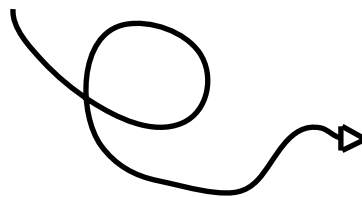
- The UI is playful and intuitive for the creative process.
- You can work with an unlimited number of contributors on your boards.
- Supports several different languages, such as Chinese, German, and Russian.



#### Kahoot

A popular game-based learning platform that provides "kahoots," user-generated multiple-choice quizzes, which can be accessed via a web browser or the Kahoot app.

- Allows you to create exciting quizzes on any topic you'd like. It's easy to engage everyone and put a personal twist on things.
- It has a fun and competitive design.



These are a few examples of facilitation techniques that you can use and the following sources will give you access to many more.

**Tools for success** – a Managers Guide by Suzanne Turner

**The Decision Book** by Mikael Krogerus and Roman Tscappler

<https://www.howspace.com> for more digital facilitation tools

<https://seedsforchange.org.uk/tools.pdf>

<https://commonslibrary.org/facilitation-tools-and-techniques/>

## Designing the Programme

The next step is to design the programme and to decide on timings, activities and resources require. This is led by the purpose and outcomes that you have already written.

### Programme example 1: Research Services Staff Workshop

Mode of delivery – in person

No of participants – 16

Length of session – 3 hours

Purpose : To evaluate the current RSS service and identify how it can be developed further.

Outcomes:

- A list of what is currently working and what isn't within RSS
- A vision of what a high performing service would look like
- A list of possible barriers to achieving the vision and some ideas of how to overcome them

Time	Topic	Content	Resources
20	Welcome	Outline of the purpose and outcomes Agree some groundrules for the session	
30	What is working well and what isn't	Split the group into 3 sub groups and ask them to flipchart in two columns what is working well in RSS and what isn't (20 mins) Put the charts up on the wall and discuss the similarities and differences. (20 mins)	Flipchart paper and pens
30	Visioning	Split the group into 4 sub groups. Imagine the service was running as well as it could and draw it as a car. Put pictures up and ask each group to talk through the features of the car	Brief for the exercise Flipchart and pens
15	Break		
45	Stop, start, continue	To achieve that vision what do we need to stop, start and continue doing Put up three charts headed stop, start, continue – split group into pairs and ask them to discuss this and then add their thoughts to the charts	
30	Action planning	In groups discuss: Are there any quick wins? What are our next steps?	
10	Final round	Go round the group and ask each person for one or two words to sum up how they feel about the session.	

## Programme Example 2: Technical Services Workshop

Mode of delivery – online

No of participants – 8

Length of session – 3 hours

Purpose: To develop a plan for the team for the next 12 months

Outcomes:

- A list of the factors that will affect our team in the next 12 months
- An agreed list of the top 6 areas of priority from that environmental scan
- An action plan to address the most important issues

Time	Topic	Content	Resources
15	Welcome	Outline of the session Check in – ask everyone to choose a gif or emoticon that reflects how you are feeling about today and put it in chat. Go round the group and ask what it represents.	Access to gifs and emoticons
45	Factors that will impact the team	PESTLE Analysis Split the group into two breakout rooms and ask them to complete a PESTLE for the next 12 months. After 30 minutes you will be asked to return to the main group and share the 10 things from your PESTLE that will have the greatest impact on the team	Powerpoint slide with the PESTLE process on it
10	Break	(During the break put the 20 things identified on a virtual whiteboard)	Virtual whiteboard
10	Voting	Using the annotation tool each member of the team to put a tick next to the three things that it will be most important to plan for.	Enable annotation for all
20	Choosing the things to plan for	Group discussion to decide from the ticks on the whiteboard which are the 6 things that the team are going to develop a plan for.	
30	How the plans will be developed?	Split the group into two breakout rooms and ask them to take three issues each and develop an action plan of next steps	
10	Review and close		



## A Planning Checklist

Once you have a draft programme check the following:

Are there a mix of activities that involve the participants moving round and working with different people?	✓
Are there both creative and analytical exercises during the session?	
Is there flexibility in the design, the timing and the choice of activities?	
How many people will be attending? What room layout do I need for the activities in the programme?	
If the session is online or hybrid how will the exercises be run e.g. virtual whiteboard, padlets, polls ....?	
Are there regular breaks built into the programme? For face to face sessions every 90 - 120 minutes for online sessions every 60 – 75 minutes.	
If the session is a full day is there a participative activity after lunch?	
If there are any speakers or other inputs are they followed by an activity?	
How will the group be briefed to ensure that they arrive prepared?	
How are the outcomes going to be recorded and what materials are needed?	
Does the design consider the participants gender, cultural background, learning styles, disability status and English language proficiency?	
Has assistance been sought from specialists or others with specialist expertise in diversity work?	
Are the examples/case studies/handouts free of negative stereotypes or assumptions?	



# Section Three - Implementation

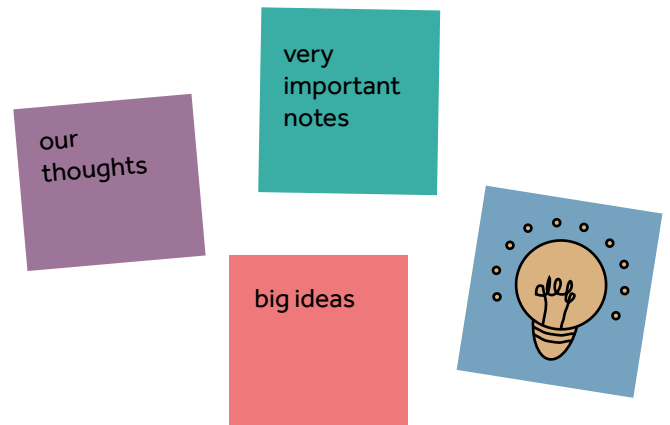
## Facilitator Supplies

Before the session the facilitator needs to consider how the outputs are going to be captured during the session. This is important to:

- ensure an accurate record of what has been discussed and agreed
- help to keep the group focused
- provide visual stimulus for the group

Methods include:

- flipcharts
- post its
- having a note taker
- whiteboard



### Checklist:

Laptop and connectors	✓
Sticky dots	
Flipchart paper	
Flipchart pens	
Whiteboard pens	
Name tags	
Pens and paper	
Post-its	
Blutac	
Postcards or images	
Phone to take photos of flipcharts	

# Preparing Yourself - Handling Nerves

## Before the Session:

- Practice visualisation – spend time picturing how you would like the session to go. Concentrate on visualising success not failure.
- Use affirmations – develop some positive statements to repeat over and over again to yourself e.g. I am ready for this, I do know what I am talking about or I can do this.
- Prepare good notes and visual aids to help you keep a clear structure and to refer back to if you lose your way.
- Anticipate and prepare for questions particularly those that you dread.
- Script the opening five minutes of the session and rehearse it.
- Practice breathing exercises – breathe in through the nose, check for tension in the neck and shoulders, breathe out for a count of 10, then 15 then 20. If you have any spare breath, blow it away before taking your next breath. Be aware of the muscles between the ribs controlling the breath.
- Arrive early and set up before the group arrive. If possible greet the participants as they arrive.
- Have a back up plan if you are using PowerPoint.
- Consider co-facilitating as this can help to reduce nerves.

## During the Session:

- Involve the group as early as possible – ask a question or for a show of hands. This will take the focus away from you for a moment.
- Remember to smile – people will smile back! If you do not smile your nervousness may show on your face and that will make people feel uncomfortable.
- Have water available – this can help to hydrate your throat but is also a good way to pause for a moment.
- Shift your focus – think about the people in the group rather than yourself. Our energy follows our focus.
- Don't be afraid of silence.
- Stay calm - you will need to model a calm and objective presence in the room and part of this is identifying any of your own triggers and having strategies to manage those.



Trigger	How to manage the trigger
I know they are all going to be really resistant	If they are resistant, that's not my responsibility. I will name the resistance and ask them what they want to do about it.
I think there will be different views in the room about what the objectives are for today	That is ok – I will start the session by asking the group to review and clarify expectations.
There are people in the group that are senior to me and know a lot more about what is being discussed, I am worried that they will not think I am credible	My role is to facilitate the process and that is where my credibility comes from today – they are the experts on the content

## Opening the Session

The opening helps to set the scene and ensure that people are comfortable to participate. Participants need to understand what is being asked of them, why they are doing it and the groundrules.

There are several things the facilitator may want to achieve from the opening and it will depend on the size of the group and whether they already know each other.

Generally, the opening will include:

- Welcoming the participants
- Outlining the purpose and outcomes for the session
- Introducing the facilitators and their role
- Introducing participants to each other
- Warming people up so they feel comfortable to participate
- Agreeing the groundrules

### Warming people up

This is often done using an icebreaker which can be effective however it is important to think carefully about the audience and the appropriateness of the activity you want to use. Many people have mixed emotions about 'fun' icebreakers!

Often an opportunity to discuss a question in a small group will be sufficient to relax the group however a list of possible icebreakers can be found through the following link:

<https://www.sessionlab.com/blog/icebreaker-games/>

### Groundrules

These are the principles and behaviours that the group want to underpin the way that they will work together. Although there is no definitive list of what these should be groups may want to agree groundrules about:

- confidentiality
- behaviours within the session e.g. listening, not interrupting, treating each other with respect
- use of phones and other technology
- how decisions will be made
- levels of participation
- respecting the groups time and keeping comments reasonably short and to the point
- role of the facilitator

## Briefing an Activity

### Introduce the activity clearly

- o Give precise instructions and ensure that your wording is unambiguous
- o If it is a complicated activity put the instructions on a handout or a slide detailing each step.
- o Use varied ways to split the group so that everyone gets to work with different people.

### Expected outcomes

- o When introducing an activity tell people how you would like them to feedback at the end of the activity.
- o Do ensure that you have an outcome otherwise people will wonder what the point of the activity is.

### Provide time limits

- o As part of the introduction give people a clear indication of how much time they have got.
- o Ensure that you have allowed some flexibility in your planning so that if people want a bit more time or if they finish early you can accommodate that.

### Be available during the activity

- o Move around the groups as they are working checking that they are staying on topic and have understood the activity.
- o Not everyone is comfortable asking questions so be on the lookout for people that seem a bit confused.

## Energising the Group

A good facilitator is sensitive to the mood and the energy levels of the group and there are a number of ways to re-energise the group if you notice they are flagging:

- Take a break even if one is not scheduled
- Pass sweets or fruit around the group
- If feasible, suggest that people go outside for 10 minutes
- Split into smaller groups to do a task - this can be done in several ways
  - o If you want 4 groups number everyone from 1- 4 and then ask the 1's to become a group, all the 2's, all the 3's and all the 4's
  - o split the group alphabetically
  - o split by month of birthday
  - o split by function or job role

If you are using breakout rooms you can use the manually assign option if you want to split the group in a particular way.

- Use thinking rounds : A Thinking Round is a simple way to give everyone in the group a chance to speak without interruption. You go round the group sequentially and if someone has nothing to contribute they can pass. It is important to stress that no-one should speak out of turn or interrupt until the round is complete. There are four steps to facilitating a round:
  - Decide first what the question is that people will be addressing in the Round
  - Determine the direction of the Round (clockwise, anti-clockwise)
  - Ask for a volunteer to begin the Round
  - Remind people that no-one speaks until the Round is complete

## Managing Behaviours

In this section we will look at ways to manage individual behaviours and when to intervene in the group process.

When deciding how to deal with individual behaviour there are three key considerations:

- Will the action I am taking eliminate or minimise the problem behaviour?
- Will it maintain a climate that is conducive to the group process?
- Will it maintain the self-esteem of the learner?

Although every situation is different there are some general tips and techniques that you can follow.

### Protecting the weak: encouraging the nervous

- Protecting the person. Sometimes a strong member of the group will attempt to push a weaker member's contribution aside. It is the facilitator's job to prevent this happening.
- Do some warm up activities when the group first starts to work together to help people feel more comfortable.
- Establish empathy. Nervous diffident people need encouragement. The leader must provide this by, for example, looking them in the eye, smiling, nodding.
- Provide help. If a nervous person gets into a tangle the facilitator can help by summarising what has been said. Often this can be phrased in the form of a question: Let me see if I have understood you – are you saying that because....?
- Nervous participants can be encouraged to speak by circulating the discussion round the group or by breaking into pairs.

### Managing the dominant

- Establish a procedure in which each person contributes one idea to the topic being discussed and must then wait until every group member does the same before contributing again.
- Turn a dominating person's questions into statements, thus forcing the person to take responsibility for his or her opinions
- Break the participants into small groups, which immediately limits a dominating person's sphere of influence.
- Avoid eye contact.
- Give the person a specific task, such as recording action notes.

### Managing conflict

- Stay neutral and keep cool.
- Listen to what is being said. Do the parties involved have clearly stated but mutually exclusive positions or have they misunderstood each other? The facilitator has to be very clear about what is happening to the two people involved.
- Slow the conflict down. The facilitator can take control, insisting that one person states his case while the other remains silent.
- Draw on others to avoid a battle: If you find yourself being criticized by a participant or in strong disagreement with what s/he is saying, it is often helpful to invite the comments of the rest of the group before commenting yourself. Remember you must maintain your neutrality which means managing your own opinions.

## Encouraging the silent: motivating the uninterested

- Watch the group. Some people have developed their ability to withdraw physically and mentally to such an extent that you hardly notice they are there, particularly if the group also includes several dominant people. The facilitator must be conscious of everything that is going on in the group.
- Ask questions.
- Use silence yourself. Those who facilitate groups should not be afraid of silence. It encourages other people to make contributions and come up with answers.
- Picking up the problem in private. There will be occasions where all efforts to bring someone out in a group do not work. The facilitator may try to find out what is causing the problem by talking to the individual outside the meeting.

## Managing the garblers and ramblers

- Picking the moment to interrupt. It is sometimes necessary to interrupt people like this in mid-flow however facilitators should try to pick an appropriate moment, for example, if they start on a different tack. This makes the intervention less obvious and lessens the possibility of the person feeling they have been squashed.
- Re-phrasing and summarising. Just because someone is inarticulate or long-winded does not mean they do not have something important to say. It is the facilitator's job to extract the important information and present these to the group in a clearer, shorter form.
- Appealing to the person's sense of fair play. 'I'll have to stop you there Jackie, I can see that a couple of other people who want to comment on that point!'

## Difficult Group Situations

An important part of a facilitator's role is deciding when and if to intervene in a situation. Interventions are required when the progress of the group is being negatively impacted and take the group off task.

### 1 Observe the group

Notice any changes in the group or in an individual's behaviour

### 2 Analyse and decide

Is that change impacting the work of the group? Is it something that is just annoying me but does not seem to be affecting anyone else?

### 3 Describe your observations

If necessary, signal that you would like to share something with the group and describe your observation.

### 4 Check for accuracy with the group

Ask the group:

'Would you agree?'

'Do I have that right?'

### 5 Make a recommendation

This can involve asking the group for the best way forward or the facilitator making a suggestion.

## Intervention case studies

### Example one

The group have come together to design an induction plan for students starting next year. The group have been working well for the last two hours and have listed all the things that could be included in the first week.

#### Step one – Observe the group

You see people are beginning to look tired and a couple have started checking their phones. The energy in the room has dropped.

#### Step two – Analyse and decide

The level of productivity has decreased and that is impacting the group negatively, so you decide to progress to the next step.

#### Step three – Describe your observations

'I am noticing that the level of energy has dropped in the room and a few people are becoming a bit distracted.'

#### Step four – Check for accuracy

'I am wondering if it is because you are stuck on the task or if people need a break?' In the discussion that follows people tell you that the task is a lot bigger than they thought and is feeling a bit overwhelming.

#### Step five – Make a recommendation

'I would like to suggest that we take a 10 minute break and then come back and make a list of what still need to be done. We can then decide what can be done today and make a plan for the rest of the work. Does that sound ok?'

### Example two

You are working with a group of staff from across the University to ascertain their views on hybrid working in practice.

#### Step one – Observe the group

You notice that there are a lot of strong opinions in the room and people are beginning to get quite heated.

#### Step two – Analyse and decide

It is clear that people are not listening to each other, and this is resulting in others withdrawing from the discussion, so you decide to progress to the next step.

#### Step three – Describe your observations

Stand up if necessary and stop the discussion: 'I am going to stop you there as I am noticing that there are some strong opinions in the room and not everyone is getting an opportunity to share their views. It is important that we include everyone in the discussion.'

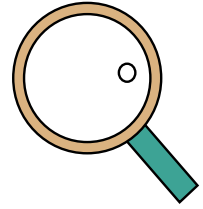
#### Step four – Check for accuracy

'Does that feel like a fair observation?' There is general agreement that it was fair however a lot of people feel there is unfairness in the way the hybrid policy is being applied and that is making them angry.

#### Step five – Make a recommendation

'OK can I suggest a number of things. Firstly, that we establish a parking lot to record any issues that need to be picked up by people outside this room. Secondly, that we split into smaller groups and do a Plus, Minus, Interesting (PMI) (look back to page 10 for more information on PMI) exercise on hybrid working. Thirdly, can I draw your attention to the groundrules we agreed at the start and ask everyone to treat others in their group with respect. Does anyone object to that as a way forward?'

## Section Four - Evaluation



### 1. **Three Questions Approach:**

- What have you liked about the session?
- What would you change about the session?
- What are you taking away?

### 2. **Small Groups:**

In groups of 2 / 3 discuss the key things that stick in your mind about today's session.

### 3. **Message Approach**

Post flipchart paper around the room with various headings and ask delegates to write their messages on the flip charts.

Possible headings:

- A message to the facilitator
- A message to the other delegates
- A message to the venue

### 4. **Action Planning Approach**

- What are the key things you have gained from this session?
- How will you use those when you get back to work?

### 5. **Post Its**

Give each delegate a pad of post its and ask them to write down three things they have liked about the session and three things they would change and stick them on the wall.

### 6. **Evaluation Form**



