

Facilitation

Being able to facilitate a discussion is being able to draw out the ideas, insights, perspectives and genius that exists in the team you are working with, while keeping the team focused on achieving their desired end goal. Below is a list of techniques you may want to try with your team to promote divergent and convergent thinking, as well as tips for how to overcome typical facilitation challenges that many facilitators encounter.

Facilitation Techniques

Technique	When to use
Nominal Group Technique	When topic is sensitive and you want to allow people to raise issues without feeling judged
Form of NGT (where people read their own answers)	In safe environments: allows for independent thought, but then gives everyone a chance to contribute. Good for creating equality in contribution
Agile/Scrum questions	Ideal for retrospectives
Shout out	To get people connecting with the topic or if there is a finite list that you want to group to get to (creativity and diversity of thought is not needed)
Break away into smaller groups	If your group is quite big and you want everyone to get a chance to speak but you do not have time to go around the room. If the sharing is personal and there isn't a right answer
Debate: ask people to come prepared to debate a topic	Good for important topics where you want people to do additional research, and form an argument for both sides to avoid bias
Collect data via a survey and then send it out to the group to reflect on	Use this to get discussion going in the groups. May need to use something like NGT in addition to the survey
Popcorn style vs going around the room	Popcorn style allows people to speak when they are ready. So those who feel confident to speak up first do, and it allows time for others to formulate what they want to say and speak when they are ready
Experiential activities with debrief at end	Help people see their blind spots and learn in a safe environment. Ideal for teaching new concepts in a practical way
Activities that get people moving around and creative (drawing on flipchart, completing lists around the room, standing on imaginary lines as a way of voting/demonstrating a point of view)	If people have been sitting for a while and you want to get them moving. Movement stimulates blood flow, which is good for cognitive functioning.
Role playing	Help people practice, see blind spots, and/or can help to better understand how an individual is interpreting a situation
Templates: Use based on what the need. Eg:	
Problem redefinition	Why and what's stopping us (to ensure that people are solving the right problem)
Lateral Thinking tools	To spur creativity and innovation
Team charter	To get everyone on the same page regarding team needs
MECE the problem	Analysing a problem into its smallest components to know how to solve it
Appreciative Inquiry	Positive psychology: Focusing on a successful story to work out how to get there
Pre-mortem	Anticipating what could go wrong to prevent failure

Facilitation Challenges

Challenge	Typical mistake	Effective response
Dominant contributor	Ask them to keep quiet and let others speak	Don't try to change them, but rather encourage others to speak up. If there are two people with opposing, unrelenting ideas, ask others what their opinion is on the topic. Or take a step back and double check that there aren't other issues that need to be addressed in which case this must be parked for now.
Goofing around	Try to control their goofing around	Understand the problem. Do they need a break? Have we gone off topic? Does it feel like we are focusing on the wrong thing? Does person feel unappreciated?
Low participation	Assume that we are making good progress and continue as normal	Understand the problem: Is the group size too big/threatening? – break into smaller groups Does the group know how to contribute? Look at questions you are asking Is the group struggling to connect with topic? – do an energising connection exercise to get them involved OR explain why this is important and allow people to raise concerns
Quibbling about trivial procedures	Blame them for being trivial Lecture the group about wasting time	Step back from the content or issue and work through the process. Ask the group what is really going on here?
Someone is repeating the same info	Talk about them behind their back. Ignore and move on	Normally this happens because the person doesn't feel heard. Summarize their points and create a way for them to feel heard. Acknowledge opposing views – potentially write them down. Discuss if NB. Park if not NB
Well into project and new problem that hasn't raised	Come up with reasons why that hasn't been noted	Acknowledge and embrace it. It may just be the thing that saves your project
Poor follow through	Ignore it or give a pep talk. Give extra responsibility to others	Assign tasks and get agreement that people will do it. Talk about consequences Build in a report back process before assignment is due At start of meeting, people give an update and track progress. Address areas of concern
Failure to start/end on time	Wait for everyone and then go overtime without discussing it	Start on time and others need to catch up when they get in. Waiting encourages lateness. If you must go overtime, ask group if they can or at least allow them to manage after meeting commitments
Side conversations	Ignore it and hope it will go away	With warmth and humour, make an appeal for decorum