

Exercises to use when leading a training on facilitation

Introductions

Ask people what level of experience they have with facilitation. Ask “Who’s facilitated a meeting before?” then “Who’s facilitated 10 meetings before?” and then “Who has facilitated 30 or more meetings.” Keep going until there’s no hands left standing.

Problem generation

Have people form groups of three. Ask people to take turns taking two minutes each “sharing a personal story of a bad meeting you’ve experienced. What made it so bad? Think about the role of the facilitator, the behaviors of participants, the actions or inactions of the group hosting the meeting.”

Ask each group in turn to share one factor they have identified through their story-telling that makes meetings “bad”. Ask the group to give an example. Write the factors on a board. Go through each group until you have a range of examples on the board.

Board

Problem	Example	Solution
No pre-planning.	No agenda was developed or shared with participants in advance of our organization’s day-long strategic planning meeting. We wasted three hours setting the agenda together.	

When possible solutions to these problems are identified through the course of this workshop, fill in this table. You can also return to this table at the workshop’s conclusion and work with the group to identify possible solutions.

Advanced facilitation workshop structure

Get into groups of two. Someone interviews their buddy about one challenge they are facing as a facilitator that they want help with in this workshop. The interviewer’s job is to ask for stories and get the facilitator to explore why this is a challenge. Take turns being the interviewer and interviewee. Give people two minutes each to talk about their challenge.

Post the following questions on flipchart paper to give interviewers some guidance on what questions they could ask:

- What is the challenge you would like to work on?
- Why is this important to you?
- What were some underlying dynamics that created this situation?
- How would you describe the feelings or “vibe” in that moment?
- What do you think contributes to this challenge?

- What strategies have you tried to overcome this challenge?
- What strategies would you like to try?
- What could the group have done to support the facilitator?

Then have each person individually write down their challenge on a piece of sticky paper and post it on a board. Give people a 10 minute break. During this break you – along with some volunteers - collectively group people’s challenges into broader categories. Make it clear that the volunteers are assisting you, but that you get final say. It is important that these pieces of paper are categorized properly.

Categories that might arise include:

- Conflict
- Dealing with disruptive people
- Unclear decision-making process
- Poor implementation of issues
- People feel their voices are not being heard

Randomly assign people into groups of two. You could do this by asking people to number off say from 1 to 6 (if there are 12 participants) and have the 1s get together, the 2s get together and so on. Once people are in their groups explain the exercise.

Tell them they each have 45 minutes to prepare a 25-minute exercise designed to help the entire group “explore and identify solutions to the challenge you have chosen.” Tell the groups they’ll get to pick a challenge from the board.

Also tell them that they’ll be given feedback for about 25 minutes after they have completed their exercise. The feedback will consist of the following four steps:

What did you do well? (Participants and workshop leaders give feedback. Facilitators can only ask clarifying questions in order to understand the feedback.)

What’s some constructive advice or feedback we could give? (Once again, participants and workshop leaders give feedback. Facilitators can only ask clarifying questions in order to understand the feedback.)

Facilitators respond to the feedback they’ve heard.

The group adds to and critiques the solutions identified in the workshop to address the challenge.

Explain to each group that they will have the option to practice their facilitation tools to this group for 25 minutes. Encourage them to try out different facilitation tools. Tell them what decision-making model they are expected to abide by.

Choose a random process to decide the order in which each group gets to pick a challenge from the categories on the board. For instance, you could put each group’s number on a piece of paper, and pull these pieces of paper out of a hat one by one. The order you pull out the numbers dictates the order in which groups choose their categories.

Work actively to support groups as they prepare their workshops. Give constructive feedback if it is asked for. Give extra time if people need it. This process of preparation is an incredibly learning experience.

To choose who facilitates first, ask groups who want to facilitate to put their numbers in a hat; pull out a number. Continue these rounds of facilitation for as long as you wish. Make sure to give facilitators a chance to add or remove their name from the hat before each round. This random process of selection is useful if you don't have enough time for everyone to facilitate, or if there are some people who want to watch others facilitate before they do so themselves.

During the conclusion, quickly review the "tools" that either you or the facilitators used throughout the workshop. Tools might include "Brainstorm", "Spectrogram", "Small groups", "Numbering off", etc.

To evaluate the workshop, start off by having the workshop facilitators critique themselves. Then do a popcorn where participants have the option of sharing something they liked about the workshop, and something they think could have been improved upon, or done differently.

Facilitation resources

Anderson, M; Anderson, S; Hagemeister, M; Scheffert, D (1999) "[Facilitation Resources](#)" (eight volumes) Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and the University of Minnesota Extension Service. Online at:

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/citizenship/DH7437.html>

Dotmocracy guidebook <http://dotmocracy.org/>

Diceman, Jason (2010) "[Dotmocracy slideshow](#)" Online at:

<http://www.slideshare.net/jasondiceman/dotmocracy-workshop-sept-8-2010>

Freeman, J (1071) "[The Tyranny of Structurelessness](#)" Online at:

<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm> Accessed on Feb. 2, 2012.

Lakey, B "[Meeting Facilitation: The No Magic Method](#)" Training for Change, Philadelphia, PA Online at: http://www.starhawk.org/writings/empowerment_manual.html

[Open Space Institute of Canada](#). Online at: <http://www.openspacecanada.org/>

Polleta, F (2002) "Freedom is an endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements" University of Chicago, Chicago, IL.

Starhawk, (2011) "[The Empowerment Manual: A Guide for Collaborative Groups](#)" New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, BC. Online at:

http://www.starhawk.org/writings/empowerment_manual.html

ⁱ Salovey, P., & Mayer, J.D. (1990) "Emotional intelligence" *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, 9, P189.

ⁱⁱ Cherniss, C (2001) "Emotional Intelligence and the Good Community", *American Journal of Community Psychology* (Vol. 30, No. 1, Feb.), P205.