



*Institute for Innovation
and Improvement*

The Facilitator's Toolkit

Tools, techniques and tips
for effective facilitation



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Introduction

The Facilitator's Toolkit has been put together to make your life easier. You may be a new facilitator looking for helpful hints or you may have limited experience and want some new ideas to make your sessions more productive. If this is the case, then this guide is right for you.

We have searched through websites and books to find the **best exercises you can use** to make your sessions **more interesting and memorable**. You will find exercises on a number of topics from icebreakers and encouraging group discussion to overcoming constraints and reviewing the session. This toolkit will really help you and your participants to get the most out of the day.

Throughout the toolkit you will come across **top tips for facilitation**. These have been shared by experienced facilitators we work with at the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement. The tips cover all aspects of facilitation including preparation, making sure the venue is set up correctly and even helping you to combat your nerves.

We hope this toolkit will provide you with exercises and tips to make you a more confident facilitator.

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Top Tip



How to use this guide

The toolkit has been divided into a number of chapters, each covering a different area of facilitation.

At the end of each chapter you will find a ‘top tips’ section, identifiable by the following symbol:



**Top tips from
expert facilitators**

Throughout the *Facilitator's Toolkit*, we provide suggestions and details of activities and exercises for you to use during your facilitated events. Some of these are widely recognised and endorsed by expert facilitators and others have been adapted from *The Big Book of Presentation Games*.*

Towards the back of the toolkit you will find a section of top tips provided by our experienced facilitators, which have been split into key themes – including planning and preparing for your event.

We have also included a resources section, listing an array of useful websites and books that you can use to gather more hints and tips.

*Scannell, E. and Newstrom, J. (1997), *The Big Book of Presentation Games*, McGraw Hill Publishers



Chapter 1

Session openers

1.1 Facilitator and participant introductions

1.2 Icebreakers

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1. Session openers

The beginning is one of the most important parts of any session. The session opener will help you to set the tone of the day and put your participants at ease.

In this chapter you will find a number of useful exercises to use when opening your session and a range of icebreakers to be used at the start of the day or when bringing the group back together after a break.

We have chosen exercises that are fun to do and that will get your session off to a great start. Remember that every event will be different, so choose the exercise you feel most comfortable with and is most appropriate for the session you are facilitating.

Don't forget to look at the top tips from facilitators in the know. These are tried and tested techniques that are proven to work.

1.1 Facilitator and participant introductions

Choose from any of the following example exercises to get your facilitated session off to a great start.

Exercise: I'm glad I'm here

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise will help you get your session off to a positive start in a humorous way.

How does the exercise work?

Immediately after the introduction to your session, tell the group that you're glad to be there. To prove it, go around the group asking, "If you weren't here today, what would you be doing that you're glad you don't have to do?"

Keep the answers light and the pace of response fast-moving to maintain the momentum.

How long will the exercise take?

This exercise should take about ten minutes, depending on the size of the group.

Exercise: Getting acquainted

What is the objective of the exercise?

This is a structured exercise that will allow participants to become acquainted with one another.

How does the exercise work?

At the start of the session, each person needs to be given a badge with the following three statements on it:

- My name is...
- I have a question about...
- I can answer a question about...

Give everyone time to complete the statements and then allow enough time for the group to meet and mingle with as many other participants as possible.

What materials do I need?

You will need enough badges to ensure there is one for every member of the group.

How long will the exercise take?

Depending on the size of the group, the exercise should take roughly 15 minutes.

Additional pointers for success

To speed up the activity, give participants a blank badge when they register at the beginning of the session and ask them to write the requested information on the name tag at that time.

Alternatively, you could pre-print the badges with the statements and then ask your participants to complete the statements as they register or while they wait for the session to begin.

Exercise: Introduction by association

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise is a fun and creative way of helping people to remember the names of others in the group.

How does the exercise work?

Start by informing the participants that they will be asked to introduce themselves to the group by standing up, stating their name and associating it with an item they would bring with them on a picnic (or other activity of your choosing).

For example: 'My name is Mable and I'd bring a table'

'My name is Fred and I'd bring the bread'

'My name is Pam and I'd bring the ham sandwiches'



As an alternative, you could ask each group member to select a personal characteristic that will help others to identify them. If the group is particularly poetic, you could do this using rhyme and/or alliteration.

For example: 'I'm Sue with eyes of blue'
'People call me Jovial Joe'

How long will the exercise take?

The exercise will take about ten minutes, depending on the size of the group.

Additional pointers for success

The principle of association is a useful way of helping people to learn and remember. By providing people with old concepts with which they can associate new ones, or by stimulating people to identify their own relevant associations for new ideas, you can help them to recall elements of technical knowledge relevant to your session.

Exercise: The whole room handshake

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise will help participants to meet at least half of the group in a very short space of time.

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How does the exercise work?

Ask the group to form two large circles, one inside the other. People in the inner circle turn and face those in the outer ring then quickly introduce themselves to the person they are facing.

This process is then repeated, with participants in the inner circle moving to the right after each introduction until everyone in the inner circle has met everyone in the outer circle.

The whole room handshake can really help the group to begin to get to know each other by name, role and what they want to get out of the session.

How long will the exercise take?

The exercise will take about ten minutes, depending on the size of the group.

Additional pointers for success

This activity works best with groups of 100 people or fewer.

1.2 Icebreakers

Exercise: Handful of icebreakers

What is the objective of the exercise?

These four quick icebreakers will help participants to become better acquainted and feel comfortable with each other early on in the session.

How does the exercise work?

You will need to decide which of the following four exercises is most appropriate for your group and give the relevant instructions to your participants.

Each of the exercises involves the participants working in pairs.

Icebreaker one: Instruct the pairs to interview each other about one or more of the following topics, depending on how much time is available.

- Three unusual things that have happened in their lives
- Special talents or hobbies they have
- Their two most important responsibilities at work
- The person they most admire in the world
- A colour and an animal that they feel best describe who they are and how they feel

Icebreaker two: Ask the pairs to introduce themselves to each other as they think their best friend would – their likes, dislikes, hobbies and interests, personal aspirations and so on.

Icebreaker three: Get the pairs to introduce themselves to each other with the following information: their name, nickname/shortened name, who they were named after (if anyone) and whether they like or dislike their name. Also get them to tell the group what other name they would choose if they had the opportunity – and why.

Icebreaker four: Arrange all the participants in a circle. Using a tennis ball or other soft ball, throw to one person in the circle and ask them to disclose something unusual about themselves. When they have done this, get them to throw the ball to another person in the circle and repeat this process so that everyone catches the ball. Participants should only reveal their first name on their second catch of the ball.

Do I need any materials?

You will need a ball if you choose to do icebreaker number four.

How long will the exercise take?

It should take about ten minutes, depending on the size of the group.

Exercise: Chinese whispers game

What is the objective of the exercise?

The objective of the game is to pass a message around a circle of six or more people and see how the content of the message differs from the original by the time it reaches the last person in the circle.

It is a simple game to use as an icebreaker and it illustrates in a light-hearted way how easy it is for people to mishear and misinterpret messages. This exercise can be used as a nice lead-in to any session on active listening.

How does the exercise work?

Get your participants to sit in a circle with an arm's length between each chair. Nominate a person to start the game. Without standing up, this person must whisper a message into the ear of the person sitting to their right. The message is only whispered once.

The process continues with each person whispering the message they have heard into the ear of the person to their right until the person sitting to the left of the message originator receives the message. This person then repeats out loud the message they heard whispered into their ear.

How long will the exercise take?

Depending on how large the group is, this exercise could take up to 20 minutes.

Additional pointers for success

Here are a couple of suggested messages from a 1940s book called *The Home Entertainer* for use in the Chinese whispers game:

- It is rumoured that Mrs Jane Honoria Figgiebat, ward of the well-known boxing promoter Jem Shambles, will next week try to break the underwater swimming record for girls of English extraction. Her fiancé, Mr Wallaby the animal dentist, recently fitted seven new teeth to a zoo leopard, which had broken its jaw in a fight with a lion and two llamas.
- There was once a frog named Rudderfuddy who wanted to be a prince. He had a tiny sword and he wore a princely crown. One day he set off to find a princess in the land of Tipplebuckle. There he discovered a castle, swam across the moat and hopped to the top of the tower where he found the princess doing sit-ups. They kissed and in a puff of smoke she turned into a frog!

Exercise: The bingo game

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise will enable strangers to become acquaintances in a non-threatening way.

How does the exercise work?

Using pre-prepared bingo cards or sheets (example provided), ask the members of your group to move around the room asking questions of the other participants until they find a person who fits one of the descriptions shown on their bingo card.

The person who matches the description then signs their name in the relevant square on the bingo card.

As with the normal game of bingo, participants should shout 'BINGO!' if they successfully gather a full row of signatures, whether vertically, horizontally or diagonally.

Do I need to provide any materials?

You will need to provide every participant with a bingo card (see following example).

How long will the exercise take?

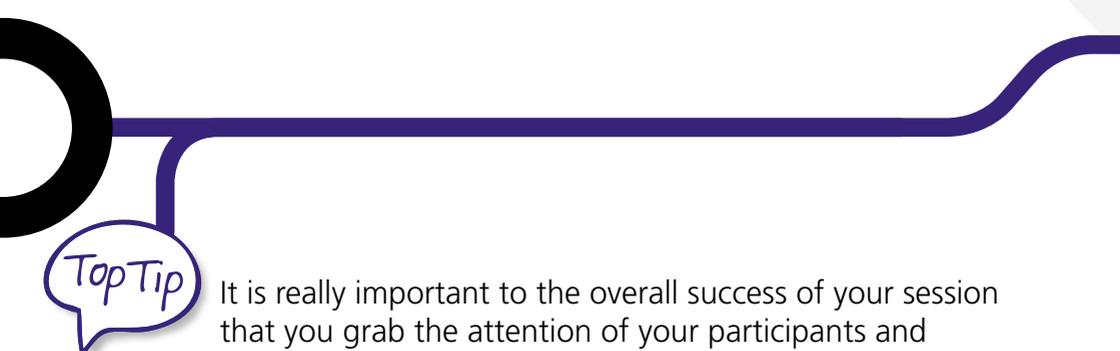
You should allow at least five minutes for the participants to mingle and collect as many signatures as possible.

Sample bingo card

Each square contains facts/characteristics that may relate to one or more of the people in this room. Your task is to mingle with your fellow participants and ask questions in order to match an individual to the information in one of the bingo squares.

If you find a match, ask the participant to sign the relevant box. You can only match one participant to one bingo square, even if more than one fact/characteristic applies to them. As soon as you get a line of signatures (vertically, horizontally or diagonally), alert the rest of the group by shouting 'BINGO!'

Plays football	Drives a sports car	Has children	Likes camping	Speaks a foreign language
Has red hair	Has been to France	Flies a plane	Loves rugby	Hates rugby
Plays the piano	Keeps tropical fish	Free	Likes skiing	Has brown eyes
Is a committee chairman	Can tap dance	Plays tennis	Is wearing pink	Hates sprouts
Drives a van	Can't swim	Has two children	Has a dog	Has attended a national conference



Top Tip

It is really important to the overall success of your session that you grab the attention of your participants and establish your credibility as a facilitator right from the start. Remember the following mnemonic for the opening of your session and you won't go far wrong!

INTRO

- Interest:** Grab people's attention through a personal story or links to a current news story that will spark their interest.
- Name:** Who am I, what is my background and why would you listen to me?
- Timing:** How long, what sections?
- Range:** What will be covered (neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) would suggest you describe what people will hear, feel, see and do)?
- Outputs:** What can people expect to take away from the session?

All of this can be communicated to your group in a short amount of time (less than 15 minutes for a three-day workshop).

You can share the information in any order - the mnemonic is just to help you remember the five steps. The most important thing you can do is remember to smile at the start and relax your shoulders before you say anything!

TIP! Talk to each person in your group and find out one non work-related thing you have in common with them (this only works in small groups because of the time involved).

TIP! Get your group to talk in pairs before introducing each other to the wider group.

TIP! Ask everyone to reveal their birthday and see if you get any matches (there is a 50% chance of a match with a group of 40 or more).

TIP! A good exercise for a small team (12 people or fewer) is to hang a map of the world on the wall and ask the people to pair up, find out where their partner was born and then introduce them to the rest of the group by saying where they were born (the map is not essential but brings a nice visual element to the exercise).

TIP! A really good icebreaker is to ask people to describe something about themselves that nobody else in the group is likely to know. It is always really interesting to hear what people say and people generally seem to like hearing from others and telling their own stories.



TIP! Two truths and a lie is a fun exercise you can run with your group. People write down three statements about themselves – two of which are true, the other of which is a lie. Individuals introduce their ‘facts’ to the group, who then have to determine which are true and which is a lie.

TIP! Song battle is a team game that introduces an element of light-hearted competitiveness. Split the group into two or more teams of five to ten people per team. Select a word that is commonly found in songs such as ‘love’, ‘baby’, ‘rain’, for example. The teams then have ten minutes to brainstorm as many songs as possible that contain the chosen word. Once the time is up, the whole group reforms to compare the teams’ lists. The team with the most songs not duplicated by other teams are the song battle champions!

TIP! Objects and pictures can be put to great use as icebreakers. Randomly choose an object or picture and place it on a table in the room. Ask your participants to spend three minutes writing down everything the picture or object makes them think of. Then spend about five minutes sharing these thoughts as a group. There is usually lots of noise and laughter!

TIP! Sharing something about who you are is a good way for people to introduce themselves and helps other people to remember them. Ask everyone in your group to draw/write on a flip chart:

- A picture – it could be where they are from or what they do
- A significant date – it could be a birthday or anniversary
- A shape – it could be a box, which they always think out of!
- A number – it could be their lucky number

Participants then share and discuss their answers with another member of the group.

TIP! Name ball is a more energetic way of making introductions. Get your group to form a circle and then throw a ball to one of the participants and ask them to shout their first name at the same time as throwing the ball to another person in the circle. Keep going until everyone has caught the ball and shouted their name. This is a very quick and fun way of getting to know people on first name terms!



TIP! The getting to know you session commonly used on corporate induction days is as old as the hills and very effective. Ask your participants to pair up and spend five minutes talking to each other. Then get the group to reform and take it in turns to introduce their pair by way of a short biographical summary. The time allowed for this task can be adjusted according to group size and time available.

TIP! Match the icebreaker to the session. One of the most important lessons you can learn about running workshops as a facilitator is to match the icebreaker to the mood you are trying to create.

For example, the morning of the first day of a workshop is about people feeling comfortable with each other. So you could introduce an icebreaker where people are asked to form an ordered line-up according to who is going the furthest on holiday that year. This task gets people moving around, talking to all the other delegates and mixing with people they don't already know.

If the afternoon of your first day is about creativity, then a great activity would be to hand out puzzle cards asking people to work out how to draw straight lines through all nine dots on a page using no more than five straight lines.

- TIP!** Arrival introductions are a great way of getting to know your group and making them feel welcome. Be available to introduce yourself to people as they arrive, making a special effort to greet people you don't already know in person. Find out their name!
- TIP!** Remember your participants' names! Once people are seated, write down their names against a seating plan so that you can match names and faces. During idle moments, test yourself and fix the names in your mind.
- TIP!** It's all in a picture! A fun icebreaker that works really well for groups that are going to spend a lot of time together is to get everyone to draw an introduction to themselves. It can help if you do your drawings first to show you don't have to be an artist for this task (unless, of course, you are a budding Picasso!).
- Ask your participants to draw both personal and professional information about themselves, then give each person five minutes to share their introduction with the group. At the end of the task, gather together all the drawings and pin them up on the walls for the duration of the workshop. This is especially good if it is a residential course as people tend to start socialising much sooner.

Top Tip

An example of the drawn introductions – people really get to know each other well!





Chapter 2 Group work

2.1 Working in groups

2.2 Encouraging group participation

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2. Group work

Everyone is different. Some people enjoy working in groups whereas others prefer to work on their own. Attending an interactive group training session can be some people's worst nightmare so you need to make them feel comfortable and part of the group.

This chapter covers all aspects of group work. There are exercises to help you split the group into smaller groups, ideas to gather feedback and techniques to encourage people to play an active part in the session. There are also some top tips to help you with your group work.

Training is a two-way process and for it to be successful, participants need to contribute. Using the simple techniques outlined over the following pages will help you get the most out of each participant.

2.1 Working in groups

Exercise: Mixing it up

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise will help you create discussion groups with a good mix of people with minimum confusion, delay or hard feeling.

How does the exercise work?

There are different ways of dividing the group and you can choose from one of the following four approaches:

1. Simply announce to the group that you would like them to break into discussion groups of five people per group (you can alter this number depending on the number of people in your session). When they have done this, give them a discussion topic or task assignment and state the time they have to complete the task.
2. Use the 'count off' method to split your participants into discussion groups:
 - Count the number of people in the room ($=N$)
 - Determine the number of people you want in each group ($=X$)
 - Divide N by X and get the group to count from one up to that number until everyone in the room has a number

- 
- Get participants to gather at a table with all the other people with the same number as them and then explain the task.
3. Pre-assign a number or letter to each person by writing it on their name badge. Then, when you want to break them into smaller groups, simply ask all the 'As' to join together, all the 'Bs' and all the 'Cs' and so on.
 4. Prepare in advance a set of numbered ping-pong balls (with the desired number of 1s, 2s, 3s etc. written on them). Randomly pick out and throw the balls to the participants in the group until everyone has a numbered ball. Then ask people to find others with the same number in order to form discussion groups.

Do I need to provide any materials?

It depends which of the above methods you choose to use to create your discussion groups.

How long will the exercise take?

This exercise should take around five minutes but no more than ten.

Exercise: Let's play cards

What is the objective of the exercise?

You can use this exercise to split the whole group into smaller groups in a creative way.

How does the exercise work?

Ask each person to draw a card from a standard pack of playing cards. If you have less than 52 people in your group, remove the number of cards necessary to ensure you just have enough cards for one per person. If there are more than 52 people in your group, you will need more than one deck of cards.

Depending on the number of people you want in each group, you can use different ways of matching people together according to the card they have. For example:

- To create small groups, ask the group to find others with the same card number in order to form discussion groups.
- To create larger groups, ask people to get together with people holding the same suit of the card (e.g. all the diamonds get together).
- To form two big groups, ask the group together according to whether they have a black or a red card.
- To form groups of around eight people, you could ask everyone with a three or a nine to form one group and all those with two and eights to get together and so on.



There are countless ways of forming groups using this method and participants often enjoy something different to just 'counting off by fives.'

Do I need to provide any materials?

You will need a minimum of one deck of cards for this exercise and depending on the size of your whole group and the smaller groups you wish to form, you may need to take away or add to the number of cards.

How long will the exercise take?

This exercise will take roughly ten minutes to complete but will depend on the size of the groups and how you decide to split them.

2.2 Encouraging group participation

Exercise: Graffiti feedback boards

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise provides participants with an anonymous outlet for their reactions.

How does the exercise work?

Most reaction-based evaluation systems gather data at the end of a session or programme – or possibly even at a future date. The motivation to treat these seriously is lessened by the fact that change will occur too late to improve the quality of the session under evaluation.

An informal alternative, which can help to address this problem, is the use of graffiti boards during the session. Providing the group with poster boards, flip charts or chalk boards will enable them to write their thoughts, observations, reactions, ideas and emotions during the course of the session. This may be done on a relatively anonymous basis.

You could write themes and topics for feedback on the top of the poster boards (e.g. presentation content, facilities etc.) or feedback can be solicited in a totally unstructured way. Either way, by putting up the boards for comment, you are providing an important outlet for people's reactions to your session.



Do I need to provide any materials?

You will need flip charts or poster boards or something similar for people to write on and also pens, markers or chalk.

Additional pointers for success

Questions you could ask about the feedback include:

- How many of you agree with the comment made about...?
- What is the basis for the various comments?
- What steps can we take to improve the situation?

Exercise: Hopes and fears

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise is a simple activity that can help a group reach a shared understanding of projects, tasks and/or roles. By talking about their aspirations and concerns, a group can become more cohesive because individuals can see that others share their hopes and fears.

A skilled facilitator will also use this exercise as a 'reality check' in the event that unrealistic feelings are expressed by the group.

How does the exercise work?

Ask each member of the group what their hopes are for the future of the subject you are discussing.

Each 'hope' is written down and these are then clustered to form groups of similar hopes. Each hope is discussed thoroughly to ensure the entire group understands it. The group then prioritises the hopes and discusses what needs to be done in order to achieve the top priorities.

The same process is then followed for fears. The group may wish to discuss how the worst of these fears can be prevented from occurring. You may want to ask a member of the group to record the significant points from this session, which can then act as an aide memoir at a later date.



Additional pointers for success

If the group you are working with is quite big, you may find it easier to split the group into pairs or smaller groups for this exercise.

Applauding the speakers before as well as after they discuss their hopes and fears can add energy to the session and give confidence to the speaker.

Do I need to provide any materials?

This exercise works well with using big Post-it notes to write the hopes and fears as they can then be moved around and stuck together to form the clusters.

How long will the exercise take?

This will depend on the size of your group but the exercise shouldn't be rushed, so allow plenty of time.

Exercise: Hidden squares

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise will encourage participants to dig deeper into problems and to look at them from a different perspective. It will also encourage people to see not only the whole but also the various parts of the problem.

How does the exercise work?

You will need to give each person in your group a 'hidden squares' drawing like the one shown at the end of this exercise. Ask your participants to quickly count the total number of squares they can see and then get each person to report this number back to the group.

The correct answer to the question is 30: one whole square, 16 individual squares, nine squares of four units each and four square of nine units each.

Do I need to provide any materials?

You will need a drawing of the 'hidden squares' (see the example at the end of this exercise) that the whole group can see. So you could either create this on a large poster, transparency or PowerPoint slide or as individual handouts.

How long will the exercise take?

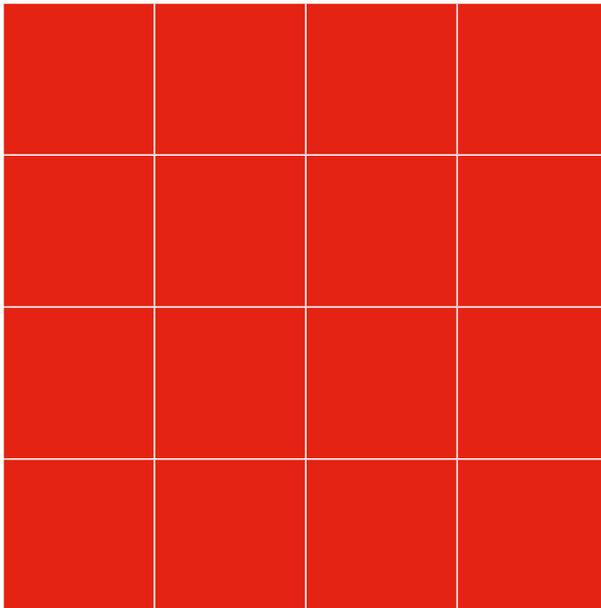
This exercise will take approximately 15 minutes.

Additional pointers for success

When you have revealed the answer to the group, you could continue the exercise by asking:

- What factors prevent us from arriving at the correct answer? (For example, we stop at the first answer, we work too fast and so on).
- How is this task like other problems we often face? (Many parts compromise the whole).
- What can we learn from this illustration that can be applied to other problems?

The 'hidden squares' drawing:



Exercise: How observant are we?

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise will demonstrate that people are often not very observant about ordinary things.

How does the exercise work?

Ask if there is anyone in the group with a non-digital watch that you can borrow for a moment. Once you have a watch, tell the owner that you would like to test their powers of observation. Ask the entire group to silently play along.

Tell the watch owner that, for the purpose of the exercise, their watch has been lost and you have found it – but before you return it, you want to be sure that he/she is the rightful owner. You then need to ask the owner a number of questions about the watch, which could include:

- What is the brand name of the watch?
- What colour is the face?
- Is there any other writing on the face and, if so, what does it say?
- Does the watch display the date and/or day of the week?

If the group is silently responding as the watch owner attempts to vocally answer the questions, the point is made more easily – that most people cannot totally and accurately describe their own timepieces even if they look at them dozens of times a day).



Do I need to provide any materials?

For this exercise to work, you need to have a member of your group with a non-digital watch.

How long will the exercise take?

Approximately five minutes.

Additional pointers for success

At the end of the exercise, you could ask the group:

- Besides me, who else failed this test and why?
- Why are we not more observant? (Time pressure, lack of concern, taking things for granted and so on).
- Have you seen an incident where people have overlooked commonplace things and problems have arisen as a result?



TIP! If **group working** is required, think about how to split people into groups. For example, is it best that they work in existing teams or form new groups in order to share learning across teams?

TIP! Use a '**round robin**' technique when a group is being dominated by one loud voice or where individuals are not participating (this works for groups of less than 12).



Chapter 3

Getting attention and group energisers

3



3. Getting attention and group energisers

Throughout any session you are running there will be times when participants are doing group work and you need to bring them back together. There will also be times when you can see the group is looking a little tired and needs to be re-energised.

This chapter provides some simple and effective ways of refocusing the attention of your group and injecting fresh energy into a group that is beginning to flag.

There are some really fun techniques that will instantly grab the group's attention. The secret is not to be afraid to do something a little unusual: using props such as music or whistles will help to drown out noise and get the group's attention quickly – not to mention saving your voice!

You don't have to stick to the agenda, either. If you feel the group needs a break, take one. Keeping the group alert throughout the session is essential if you are to maximise learning.

Exercise: Mixing it up

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise provides an opportunity for participants to loosen up after a period of intense activity, discussion or passive absorption of a presentation or video.

How does the exercise work?

Pick a time when the group's energy levels seem particularly low. Call a timeout/break from the session and ask the participants to stand up and make sufficient room between themselves in order to move their arms around without obstruction.

Tell the group that they have won the right to be the 'leader of the band' and to direct the renowned London Philharmonic Orchestra for the next five minutes. Having pre-selected and cued up a famous piece of classical music, you should then play the piece and instruct the group to simultaneously conduct the orchestra in time to the music.

Do I need to provide any materials?

You will need a music player and some classical music. You could also provide the group with 'batons' with which to conduct the orchestra.

How long will the exercise take?

This exercise should last for around five minutes so you may need more than one piece of music.

Additional pointers for success

This exercise works best with music that everybody knows, so make your music choice a popular classic (Sousa marches and Strauss waltzes work well). The music should be relatively fast-paced to stimulate energetic conducting and music with varied pace and volume will elicit different conducting styles.

You may like to tell your group that the mock-conducting of an orchestra is believed to be an excellent emotional release and provides a good cardiovascular workout!

You could complete the exercise by asking the group:

- How do you feel now that you have directed the orchestra?
- How many of you are likely to go home and direct music from your own record collection?
- What is there about conducting an orchestra that gives us the permission to wave our arms and move our bodies in such a refreshing way – something we might otherwise not be inclined to do?

Exercise: Don't push me!

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise allows participants to re-energise while keeping them focussed on the task at hand.

How does the exercise work?

Ask the participants to stand up and get into pairs, standing facing their partner about three feet apart. Designate one person in each pairing as 'person A' and the other as 'person B'. Get everyone in the group to place their hands against the hands of their partner – hands should be at shoulder height with palms open and forward.

Now get everyone to press their hands against their partner's hands with firm and equal pressure. Instruct 'person As' to quickly remove their hands – without warning – any time in the next few moments. Then repeat with 'person Bs'.

How long will the exercise take?

This exercise should take between five and ten minutes.

Additional pointers for success

When you have finished the exercise, finish off by asking the group:

- What was your reaction when your partner pulled away?
- What was your feeling when you no longer felt any pressure?
- How many of you 'fell' into your partner's space when they stopped pushing?
- Have you observed situations when people have actually 'gained' by removing some of the 'pressures' we place on others?
- Under what conditions should we 'push' and when should we learn to 'give in'?

Exercise: A read and do test

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise will provide the group with an opportunity to take time out from what they have been concentrating on.

How does the exercise work?

Start by distributing copies of the 'read and do' test to the group (see the example at the end of this exercise).

Ask participants to keep the test face down until everyone has received a copy. Explain that the test will be timed, with three minutes allocated for completion of the task. Then count down to the start of the test with a 'ready, set, go!'

3

Do I need to provide any materials?

A copy of the 'read and do' test for each participant.

How long will the exercise take?

The exercise should take around five minutes to complete, including time to hand out the test.

The Read and Do Test

Can you follow the instructions?

1. Read all that follows before doing anything.
.....
2. Write your name in the upper right-hand corner of the page.
.....
3. Circle the word 'corner' in sentence two.
.....
4. Draw five small squares in the upper left-hand corner of the page.
.....
5. Put an X on each square.
.....
6. Put a circle around each square.
.....
7. Sign your name under line five.
.....
8. After your name, write 'yes, yes, yes'.
.....
9. Put a circle around number seven.
.....
10. Put an X in the lower left-hand corner of this page.
.....
11. Draw a triangle around the X you just made.
.....
12. Call out your first name when you get to this point in the test.
.....

13. If you think you have followed the directions carefully to this point, call out, "I have!"
.....
14. On the reverse side of this paper, add 6950 and 9805.
.....
15. Put a circle around your answer.
.....
16. Count out loud in your normal speaking voice.
.....
17. Put three small pin or pencil holes in the top of this page.
.....
18. If you are the first person to get this far, yell out, "I am the first person to get to this spot and I am the leader in following directions."
.....
19. Say out loud, "I am nearly finished. I have followed directions."
.....
20. Now that you have finished reading carefully, do only those things called for in the sentences numbered 1 and 2. Did you read everything on this page before doing anything?
.....

Note: Please be quiet and watch the others follow directions

Exercise: Alternatives to 'shut up!'

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise can be used to redirect the group's attention to the facilitator following a period of small group discussion.

How does the exercise work?

One of the most effective methods is to depersonalise the process of quietening down the group. In other words, to avoid verbal questions such as 'Will you please quieten down now?' or 'May I have your attention please?', you should find a non-verbal, impersonal device that can act as a cue or signal to the group to refocus attention.

Devices you could use include a whistle, an old-fashioned school bell, an oven timer or a small musical instrument such as a triangle, harmonica or kazoo. You should agree the device and its purpose with the group at the start of the session.

Do I need to provide any materials?

What you need will depend on the device you choose to use to attract the group's attention.

How long will the exercise take?

If it's effective, the device should very quickly redirect the group's attention!

Additional pointers for success

Non-audible signals can sometimes be just as effective in this situation. For years, the Boy Scouts have used the three-fingered salute as an 'everybody quiet' clue. You only need to catch the attention of one member of your group with a signal like this and then the responsibility for spreading the message becomes shared among the group.

Some facilitators choose to play a recognisable theme tune as a way of getting the group's attention while others create cue cards (e.g. red, amber green or three, two one), which they display prominently to the group as a signal of how much time is left before the group must refocus its attention.



TIP! If you want **to regain the attention of the group**, say to them, "For those of you that can hear me, please put up your hand." This visual signal will draw the attention of the entire group and so noise levels will gradually reduce. Alternatively, you could use an audible signal and ask the group, "For those of you that can hear me, please clap once" and then, "For those of you that can hear me, please clap twice."



Top Tip

TIP! Work in the **adult ego state** to engender equality in the group, not superiority! When you need the group to reconvene, place the advantage to the group by saying something along the lines of, “Thank you for your attention. It will be helpful to now move on so that we can meet your needs for the session and cover everything we need to.”

TIP! **Use music** to grab the group’s attention. Depending on the stage of your session and the impression/tone you want to set, choose your music to draw attention to an announcement or point you want to make or something you want to reinforce.



Chapter 4

Overcoming constraints

4



4. Overcoming constraints

This can be a very challenging part of the facilitator's role. Constraints come in many forms. Some people may feel they have 'been there, done that, bought the t-shirt and nothing has changed.' Others may be opposed to change and don't want to learn new things and new ways of learning.

As a facilitator, you need some really good techniques up your sleeve to overcome these constraints and help people get over their objections.

In this chapter, there are exercises that will really challenge people's mindset and will make them confront their own resistance to new ideas and challenges.

This is probably one of the most important elements of facilitation to master because if people are not open to learning, nothing you teach them will have an impact.

Exercise: Resistance to change

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise demonstrates the need for participants to confront their own resistance to change in order that they may achieve the greatest benefit from a training experience.

How does the exercise work?

Tell the group that you have developed a new product that has the potential to be tremendously beneficial to their organisation. A good example to use is the Dvorak simplified keyboard for typewriters and word processors, which reportedly has the potential to increase operator efficiency by more than 40 per cent.

4

Dvorak simplified keyboard





Ask the group to list all the positive reasons why people should stop using the old 'qwerty' keyboard and adopt the new Dvorak system. Then ask the group to predict all the reasons why people will resist using the new keyboard. Get them to categorise these reasons as 'rational' (e.g. too costly, too bulky, wrong size etc.) or 'emotional' (e.g. having to learn something new).

Now tell the group that you plan to introduce them to some new ideas in the session that have the potential to improve their personal and organisational effectiveness. Ask them to predict why they and others will resist embracing the new ideas and get them to draw up a list of positive reasons why they should be open to the new ideas you will discuss.

Do I need to provide any materials?

You will need copies of the Dvorak keyboard to hand out or one large image on display, which can be seen easily by all participants.

How long will the exercise take?

This exercise will take around 15-20 minutes, depending on the size of the group.

Additional pointers for success

Questions that you can ask the group in order to explore resistance to change in more depth include:

- Why do we tend to think that other people (but not us) resist change?
- What can we do to better facilitate change in other people?
- As your facilitator, what can I do to make it more likely that you will accept the changes discussed in this session?
- What will you commit yourselves to do to make yourselves more open to the changes you hear about?

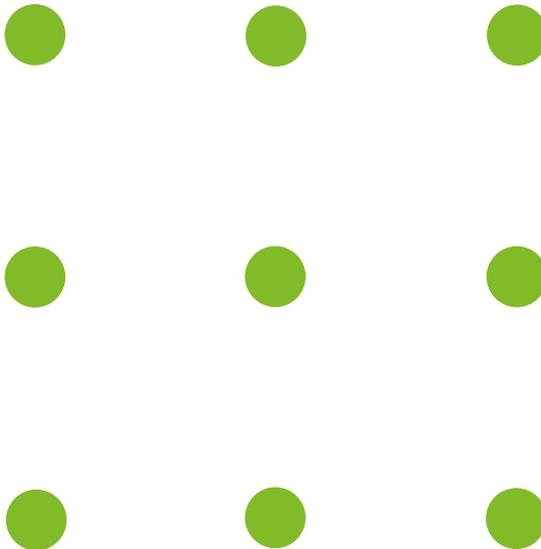
Exercise: The nine dots

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise suggests to participants that their current mindset might constrain their capacity to learn new ideas. The key message of this exercise is to force the mind to expand beyond the self-imposed 'box' created by the nine dots.

How does the exercise work?

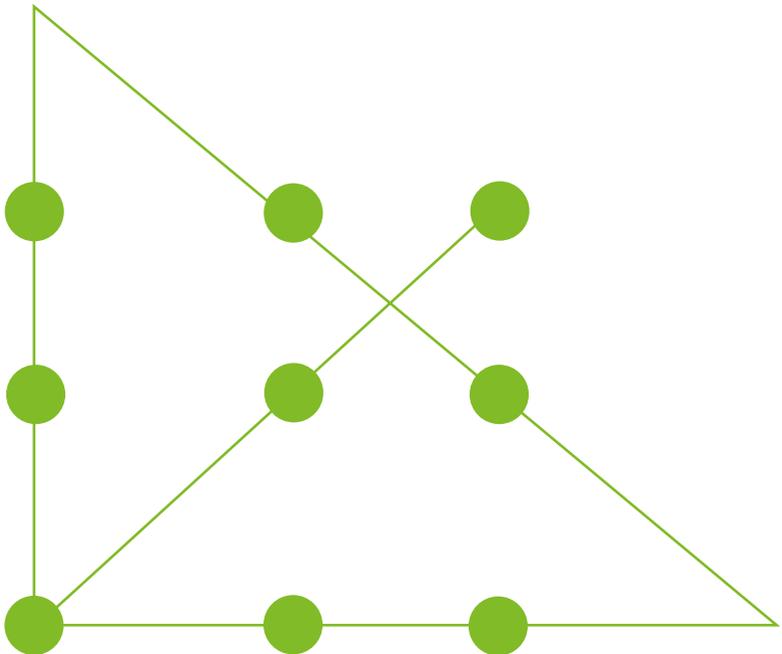
Display to the group the following configuration of nine dots and ask them to reproduce the dots on a sheet of paper.



Ask them to connect all nine dots by drawing four straight, continuous lines, without lifting the pen off the paper or retracing a line. Allow a few minutes for people to think about the task and have several attempts at finding a solution.

Ask how many of the group found a solution to the task and then find a volunteer to come forward and show the rest of the group their solution.

The solution



Alternative solutions

1. The task can also be solved with three continuous lines. The first starts at the top of the dot in the upper left-hand corner and extends through the middle of the upper central dot, down to the bottom of the upper right-hand dot and out beyond that dot. The second line returns through the middle row of dots, descending gradually from right to left and out beyond the middle left-hand dot. The third and final line comes back from left to right through the lower row of dots.
2. A second solution would be to fold the paper so that the three rows of dots are closely aligned. Using a thick-nib pen, a single line can be drawn through all nine dots.
3. A third solution would be to take a paint brush and connect all nine dots with a single sweep of the brush.

Do I need to provide any materials?

You will need to have a way of displaying the nine dots and the solution, such as a transparency or a PowerPoint slide and projector. You may need to provide pens and paper for participants if they haven't already been provided.

How long will the exercise take?

This exercise will take 15-20 minutes to complete.

Additional pointers for success

You could end the exercise with a discussion about the solutions people came up with and the reasons why some people may not have found a way of connecting the nine dots. You could ask:

- What is the impact in our minds of the configuration of these nine dots? (We mentally create a square and try to circumscribe it with the four lines, leaving the central dot untouched.)
- What is the key to solving the puzzle? (Getting out of the boxes that we, or others, create for us.)
- What are the implications of this exercise on this session and our jobs?

Exercise: New directions in learning

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise can demonstrate that prior learning, knowledge, skills and attitudes have a powerful and often negative effect on an individual's capacity and willingness to adopt new learning. It also explores ways to facilitate the process of 'un-learning.'

How does the exercise work?

Present the group with a handout showing a new way of giving directions that you would like them to learn (see following example).

New Directions in Learning

Old Directions	New Directions
Up	Right
Down	Rear
Left	Down
Right	Front
Front	Up
Rear	Left

Give the group several minutes to absorb the connection between the 'old' and the 'new' way of giving directions. Once they have done this, get them to set their handouts to one side and stand up facing the front of the room.

Test them on the new directions by calling out old directions and asking them to point in the corresponding new direction. If you wish to confound them further, line them up in two rows facing each other! Ask people to keep a score of how many new directions they accurately gave.

Do I need to provide any materials?

You will need a handout of the old and new directions or you can display them on a big screen using a transparency or PowerPoint slide.

How long will the exercise take?

Depending on how long you give people to absorb the new way of giving directions at the start, this exercise should take around 15 minutes.

Additional pointers for success

Discuss with the group how you could help them to 'un-learn' the old way of giving directions and therefore better prepare them for learning the new way.

Exercise: Test your constraints

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise gets participants to identify, classify and mentally test which factors are most significant in keeping them from starting or stopping something.

How does the exercise work?

Explain that people are often boxed in by various constraints but that it is our perception of these limitations that creates the most significant barriers and these perceptions need to be explored.

Give your participants one minute to think of something they would like to either start doing or stop doing and another minute to list the things that prevent them from doing so. When they have done this, give them a further two minutes to categorise the constraints as either:

- Realistic and rigid – e.g. upper management edicts
- Moderately firm – e.g. standard policies and practices that are usually unfringeable
- Flexible – e.g. implicit procedures or interpersonal/intergroup relations
- Illusory – e.g. partly based on facts but largely embellished by our imagination

Inform the group that General Electric discovered that over 95 per cent of the constraints identified by its foremen and frontline supervisors were classified as either flexible or illusionary.

Encourage the participants to test their limits and be willing to experiment, take risks and see what happens.

Do I need to provide any materials?

Participants will need a pen and paper for this exercise, so you will need to ensure it is provided.

How long will the exercise take?

This exercise should take 15-20 minutes.

Additional pointers for success

You could discuss with the group:

- What kinds of things did you identify that you would like to start or stop doing?
- What were some of the illusionary constraints that you identified?

You could also provide the group with an action plan for overcoming one of the constraints.

Exercise: Throw your troubles away

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise enables participants to derive several responses to a single problem or concern.

How does the exercise work?

The exercise can be used at almost any time during your session. For programmes that are longer than half a day, this exercise can be used intermittently throughout the course.

Announce to participants that they now have a chance to 'throw away' their problems. Get each person to think of a question, problem or concern about the topic being addressed in the session. (If participants cannot think of a relevant concern, any issue or problem is OK to use for this exercise).

Ask the participants to jot down their concern on a piece of paper then crumple it up and throw it into a container that you have placed in the centre of the room. For larger groups, place several containers around the room.

Once all the participants have placed their crumpled paper in the container, ask one person to pick out a piece of paper and throw it to another member of the group. Whoever catches the paper opens it up and reads the problem aloud.

A three-person team is then formed (the reader of the problem and two others) and given a 30-second 'time out' to discuss possible solutions or answers. During this time, the rest of the group is asked to jot down two or three responses to the concern.

The team then feeds back its response to the group, with contributions from the rest of the group where they can assist. Repeat this process as time permits.

Do I need to provide any materials?

You will need to provide pieces of paper for writing on and crumpling, pens and containers for the crumpled paper to be thrown into.

How long will the exercise take?

You should spend a minimum of five minutes on this exercise but you can expand it as time allows.

Exercise: But I've always done it that way

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise illustrates how easy it is to develop and continue using unconscious habits and it also highlights how there can often be equally effective, alternative ways of achieving the same task or goal.

The exercise also shows how old ways of doing things may interfere with our acquisition of new behaviours and therefore require un-learning first.

How does the exercise work?

Ask one or more of the group (e.g. all those wearing a suit jacket, sports jacket, sweater or cardigan) to stand and remove this item of clothing (assuming they won't become indecently exposed!) Ask them to put the item back on, noting which arm goes into which sleeve first. Now ask them to take the item of clothing off again and put it back on putting the other arm into the other sleeve first.

Do I need to provide any materials?

No – but this exercise will only work if there are people in your group wearing jackets or other outer layers that can be removed for the purpose of the exercise.

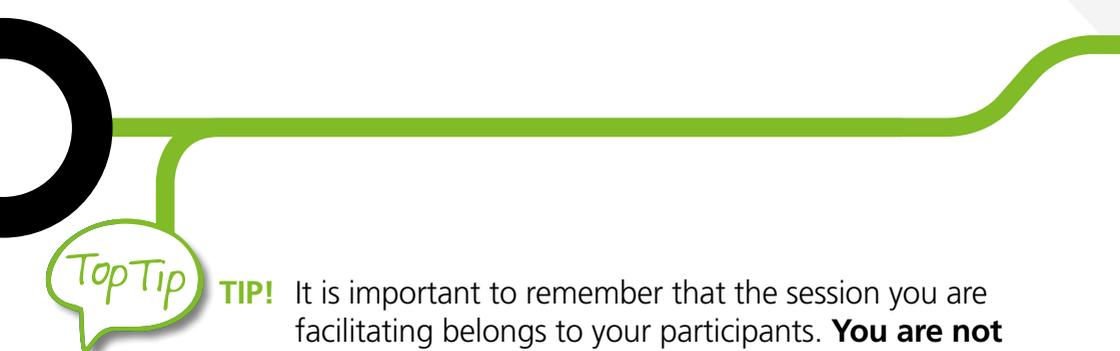
How long will the exercise take?

This exercise should take around five to ten minutes to complete.

Additional pointers for success

You can follow up the practical element to this exercise by asking the participants to share their experiences with the group. You could ask:

- How did it feel to reverse your normal pattern of putting on your clothing? (And how did it look to the people watching?)
- If it felt awkward, why?
- What prevents us from adopting new ways of doing things? How can we make changes without old habits interfering with them?
- How can we open ourselves to change within a programme and accept that there may be equally effective (or better) ways of accomplishing the tasks at hand than the methods we have used before?



Top Tip

- TIP!** It is important to remember that the session you are facilitating belongs to your participants. **You are not there to fix problems;** you are there to guide the group to reach its own conclusions.
- TIP!** You may, either as you start the session or when you raise a difficult issue (the elephant in the room), find that you are not getting an instant response from the group. If this occurs, you must **'hold the space'**. Although it may feel uncomfortable, keep quiet and resist the urge to fill the void. Someone will eventually say something, which will then get a response and the debate/discussion will begin.
- TIP!** Use the table on the next page to help you **deal with difficult dynamics:**

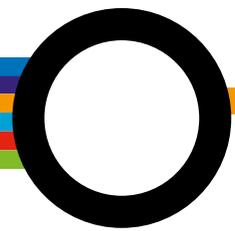
Problem	Typical mistake	Effective response
Domination by a highly vocal member of the group	Inexperienced facilitators often try to control this person. "Excuse me X, do you mind if I let someone else take a turn?" Or, even worse, "Excuse me X, you are taking up a lot of the group's time."	When one person is over-contributing, everyone else is under-participating. To resolve this, focus your efforts on the passive majority - encouraging them to participate more. Trying to change the dominant person merely gives that person all the more attention.
Messing about in the middle of a discussion	It's tempting to try to 'organise' people by getting into a power struggle with them. "OK everyone, let's get refocused." This only works when the problem isn't very serious.	Aim for a break as soon as possible. People are likely to have become undisciplined because they are overloaded or worn out. After a breather, they will be able to focus much better.

Problem	Typical mistake	Effective response
<p>Low participation by the entire group</p>	<p>Low participation can create the impression that a lot of work is getting done in a hurry. This leads to one of the worst errors a facilitator can make – that is, assuming that silence means consent and doing nothing to encourage greater participation.</p>	<p>Switch from large-group open discussion to a different format that lowers anxiety levels. If feeling safe and secure is a major concern, small group activities are very important. Ideas-listing can also work very well when participation is low.</p>
<p>Two people locking horns</p>	<p>A lot of time can be wasted trying to resolve a conflict between two people who have no intention of reaching agreement. People often use each other as sparring partners in order to clarify their own ideas.</p>	<p>Reach out to other people in the group by asking, “Who else has an opinion on this issue?” or “Let’s step back for a minute and see if there are other issues that need to be discussed.” Remember not to focus your attention on the dominant minority but spend your energies encouraging the passive majority.</p>

Problem	Typical mistake	Effective response
One or two silent members in a group of otherwise active participants	Asking “X, you haven’t said much today, is there anything you’d like to add?” may work when a shy member of the group has non-verbally indicated a desire to speak. However, all too often the quiet person feels put on the spot and withdraws even further.	You could say, “I’d like to get opinions from those who haven’t talked for a while.” Breaking into small groups works even better as small groups allow shy people to speak up without having to compete for ‘air time.’
Whispering and side jokes	Facilitators commonly ignore this behaviour in the hope that it will go away. Sometimes it does, but frequently it just gets worse.	With warmth and humour, make an appeal for decorum. “As you know, those who don’t hear the joke often wonder if someone is laughing at them.” If the problem persists, assume there’s a reason. Has the topic become boring and stale? Do people need a break? Or perhaps people need time for small group discussion?

Problem	Typical mistake	Effective response
Minimal participation by members who don't feel engaged with the topic	It would be a mistake to act as though silence signifies agreement with what's being said. And it would also be wrong to ignore these people and be thankful they're not making trouble.	Look for an opportunity to ask the group to have a discussion on 'what's important to me about this topic?' Get people to form small groups and start the discussion. This will give everyone the chance to explore their own stake in the outcome.
Poor follow-through on assignments	Avoid giving ineffective pep talks, ignoring the poor follow-up or hanging the responsibility on a few members of the group.	Get people to do the assignments in teams. Build a report-back mechanism into the process at a midpoint before the assignment is due. This gives anyone having trouble a chance to get help.

Problem	Typical mistake	Effective response
Failure to start and end on time	Don't make the mistake of waiting for the arrival of all the 'people who count' and when it's time to end, don't go over time without asking for consent from the group.	Start when you say you're going to start. (Waiting only encourages lateness). If you must overrun, call a break so that people can 'phone home.' If running over becomes a recurrent theme for you, improve your agenda planning.
Quibbling about trivial procedures	Try not to lecture the group about wasting time or 'spinning wheels'. Don't daydream, doodle and think to yourself, "It's their fault we're not getting anything done."	Get the group to step back from the content of the issue and talk about the process. Ask the group, "What is really going on here?"



Problem	Typical mistake	Effective response
Someone becomes strident and repetitive	Never talk behind such a person's back or confront them during a break and then act surprised when their anxiety goes through the roof when the session recommences.	People repeat themselves if they feel they're not being listened to. Summarise the person's point of view until they feel understood. Encourage participants to state the views of group members whose views are different from their own.
Someone discovers a new problem that no-one had previously noted	You should not respond by trying to come up with reasons why the group should not focus on the new issue or pretend not to hear the comments.	Wake up! This may be what you have been waiting for – a doorway into a new way of thinking about the whole situation.



Chapter 5 Closing the session

5.1 Reinforcing and reviewing key themes and ideas

5



5. Closing the session

This is possibly one of the hardest and most important parts of the session. You want people to remember what they have learnt and to go away feeling they have achieved something.

During the course of the session, people will often need to be reminded of what they have just learnt or they may not think that what they are being taught is sinking in. Quick reviews throughout the session will really help to engage people, making them realise they are learning and that the session is a good use of their time.

This chapter provides you with some quick and easy exercises to help you show the group what they have learnt and what their next steps are. You can do these exercises after each new topic or before and after breaks. Do what works best for the group.

Having a good close to the session will ensure people remember what they have learnt and will therefore be much more likely to put it into practice.

5.1 Reinforcing and reviewing key themes and ideas

Exercise: Jeopardy

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise provides a competitive environment for the reinforcement of material presented in this or previous sessions.

How does the exercise work?

For this exercise, you will need to have developed a series of questions organised into categories according to the material that has already been presented.

Split your participants into two groups. Allow one team to choose a category and then ask them a question from this category. If the question is answered correctly, award the group a point. If the response is incorrect, give the other team a chance to answer the question and steal the point. If neither group can answer the question, they must look it up in the programme reference material.

The first group to accumulate a specified number of points is declared the winner (and some recognition or prize should be awarded).

This exercise is great for repetition of key material, reinforcement of effective learning and provides feedback to the presenter on which points were well-learnt and those that were difficult to recall.

Do I need to provide any materials?

You will need to devise the questions for the groups to answer and arrange any prizes.

How long will the exercise take?

You can spend as little as ten minutes on this exercise or more if time allows. The more time you have, the more course material the group will have the opportunity to revisit.

Exercise: Quickie review

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise provides intermediate review checkpoints on how well participants are retaining and learning the material.

How does the exercise work?

Just before the first scheduled break, suggest to the group that a lot of material has already been covered and to check on what they've learnt so far, you're going to do a quick review. Tell them that before you break for coffee, you need to hear ten things they've learned so far. Then as rapidly as possible, ask for responses. After each one, say, "Thank you, that's one" and so on until ten key points are stated.

At the end of the morning session and just before lunch, repeat the exercise by reminding the group of the content covered and asking this time for seven things they've learned since the mid-morning break. Repeat the procedure before the afternoon break and again at final closure time.

The number of key points to be recalled is arbitrary and entirely up to you to decide.

How long will the exercise take?

It depends on how many things you ask the group to recall, but you should allow at least ten minutes.

Additional pointers for success

Ask the group:

- How many people were surprised by the number of items the group was able to generate?
- What is the value of learning what others consider to be the most important items?
- In what way were people's lists different?

Exercise: The alphabet review

What is the objective of the exercise?

This exercise encourages participants to stretch their minds and their collective memories while demonstrating that a large number of useful things were learnt.

How does the exercise work?

At the beginning of the session, hand out a copy of 'the alphabet review' worksheet (simply a sheet of A4 paper with the letters A-Z written down the page in two columns with space for notes to the side and underneath) to each participant. Ask people to generate at least one significant item (a principle, concept or conclusion) from the workshop for each letter of the alphabet. Tell people to record items as they are introduced to them. This also helps to encourage people to watch for at least 26 key items throughout the session.

You may need to be flexible in allowing for 'creative' spellings or borrowed adjectives to describe a concept (e.g. 'excellent customer service').

Summarise the exercise by asking the group for an item that begins with each letter of the alphabet. People are often surprised by the variety of items identified for different letters.

As an alternative, you could do this exercise all in one go at the end of the session, getting participants to work in groups of three to five people to generate their A-Z of items from the workshop.

Do I need to provide any materials?

You will need enough copies of the A4 alphabet review to hand out to participants.

How long will the exercise take?

If you get participants to record their A-Z items through the course of the day with discussion at the end, you will need around 15 minutes. You should allow more time if you run this exercise in groups at the end of the session.

Additional pointers for success

Ask the group:

- How difficult did you find completing the entire list?
- How many of you were surprised that 26 or more items could be generated so quickly?
- How helpful was it to work in small groups? Does this suggest the value of staying in touch with workshop participants at a later date?



- TIP!** **Ensure people leave with an action plan.** There is no point in all this effort unless you have a plan of action that gives people tasks to complete and holds them accountable for these tasks.
- TIP!** At the end of the session, **get people to commit to actions.** If you have groups that may meet again, one way is to ask each group to write down what they will do differently by when and then ask the groups to swap these and ask that next time they meet, each group challenges the other to see if they have undertaken their commitment.
- TIP!** Be very **clear about the expected outcomes from any group work** and make sure you use the right exercise to get the desired outcome – general discussions don't always get the required clarity and outputs.



Chapter 6

Top tips from expert facilitators

- 6.1 Preparation and venue
- 6.2 Learning styles
- 6.3 Facilitation tools
- 6.4 Managing group dynamics
- 6.5 Updating and reviewing presentations
- 6.6 Different types of questioning
- 6.7 Interactive checklist



6. Top tips from expert facilitators

As we said at the beginning of this toolkit, we asked facilitators who work with us at the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement to provide us with their top tips for facilitation.

You will already have come across a number of their tried-and-tested tips relating to each topic covered. In this section, we have categorised the top tips into subjects including preparing for the event and ensuring the venue is fit for purpose.

Every individual and every group is different. Some tips will work for you and others will not, so choose the ones you feel will help you the most.

6.1 Preparation and venue

Before the session, obtain as much **information about your delegates** as you can, including their name, role and experience. This will enable you to tailor your approach to suit the group and, if necessary, amend your content to maximise the effectiveness, contributions and usefulness of the session. It will also give you an idea of where you may receive challenge and a chance to prepare for unexpected questions.

For presentations, ensure the screen and surrounding light are at the same level as a difference between the two can impact on participants' **concentration levels**.

If you put out less chairs than are actually required, it will ensure that the front seats are filled and makes the event look busy rather than full of empty seats. Obviously have spare seats at the ready so all your participants have somewhere to sit!

For smaller sessions, provide your participants with a list of delegates at the start of the day. This can help people to remember names and **get to know each other**. Large, clearly written name badges are also a great idea.



It is critical to the success of your session that you have considered **your participants' needs**. Can everyone see/hear what you are doing and saying? Is the room accessible? Are the activities and exercises you have chosen inclusive? You need to consider age, gender and religious/cultural beliefs as well as physical and sensory impairments.



Don't pace, use the space! To **keep people's attention**, move between points of interest in the room as you talk but don't pace aimlessly!

Prepare handouts or PowerPoint slides, which **explain the exercises** to your participants. Keep them brief and to the point. This helps to clearly explain what you are going to do and why and is important because people quickly lose interest if they cannot see the point of something. Reiterate the benefits at the end of the exercise and rehearse how you will introduce the exercise to make sure you communicate the arrangements and expectations clearly.

Planning your session

You should **plan a varied session** to keep the group's interest and attention. Include some teaching, some discussion and some activity and ensure a mix of delivery styles (not all PowerPoint) in order to meet as many learning styles as possible.

When planning an event, remember that an hour before lunch is worth two afterwards. In other words, **front load the programme** and make significant progress on difficult topics before lunch to avoid the effects of energies draining away in the afternoon.

Good planning is vital to the success of your session but don't be tempted to cram the agenda. Build some flexibility into your session so that you can allow more time for an exercise or can swap an activity if necessary. Always have backup options for the exercises you have planned as some activities can fall apart if the key people are not present.

Make sure that you plan enough time for breaks as it can take longer than you think for everyone to get a drink, use the facilities and do everything else they have planned to do in the break. **Breaks are a fantastic networking opportunity**, which is another reason to make sure you don't have to cut them short!

During the session

In order to get the best from the group, it is useful to set **some ground rules** that will set the tone and expected behaviour for the session. Although you may sense a bit of a sigh and an 'oh, we're doing the soft stuff' with some groups (e.g. boards), it is worth setting the ground rules because it enables you to hold the group to account for their behaviour during the session. It also protects both individual participants and you as the facilitator (there may be sensitive stuff coming out during the day) in relation to expectations.





Outline your expectations for the day at the beginning of the session. This should include the purpose of the session, what you expect from them as active participants and what they can expect from you as the facilitator. You are not there to fix things: you are the ‘vessel’ there to guide the group to reach their own solutions.

You will need to prepare a structure in order to get the best out of the session but you also need to be flexible with that structure. Your agenda is exactly that – yours – and is not necessarily the agenda the group wants or needs to stick to. If there is a topic that needs more in-depth discussion and will add value to the session, invest the time and let the group explore the issue further. You may not get to where you planned to with the session, but the outcomes for the group may well be just what they needed and will give them ownership to drive things forward.

For creative events, you need to **create constructive chaos** in order to help stimulate thinking, such as forming teams, mixing the teams up and moving people around. For creative thinking to work, you need to ensure your participants are not stuck to their comfortable and traditional ways of thinking.

If you find yourself being **challenged by a member of the group** (in a negative way), stand your group – quite literally. Stand still with your legs slightly apart and fix on that one person.

To help you **combat your nerves** when working with large groups, pick out a person about a third of the way into the room and speak directly to them. This way, your focus will be diverted from your anxieties about the number of people in the room.

If there's too much consensus on a topic, **play devil's advocate** to get people thinking about things from a different perspective.

Stick to the time agreed. It may sound obvious, but once you go over your allocated time, people start to get twitchy and glance at their watches, taking their attention away from the discussion or information that is being shared with them.

If you think you are talking too slowly, the chances are you still need to **slow down your speed of delivery!**

Don't read straight from your presentation slides: they should be used as a prompt, not as a script. Simply standing at the front of the room and reading from your slides is a sure-fire way to lose the attention of your audience!

If you have trouble **getting participants to interact**, say to them, "This is the interactive bit!" It always raises a smile and a bit of laughter and starts people filling the void (Paul Plsek uses this all the time.)

Try to feed in remarks that link to previous presentations or speakers **to show how the themes of the workshop fit together.**

Top Tip

Use people's names as much as you can early on. It is OK to get names wrong the first time right at the start but not after that. Referring to people by name helps to **build rapport** and create a **positive working environment**.

For groups discussing **difficult issues** (such as managing change), introduce quick **'how are you doing?'** checks using pictures. One facilitator we spoke to has a pack of 20+ A6 pictures with all sorts of images including the sun, crowds of people, flowers, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, rubbish bins and birds. When the facilitator asks the group how they are feeling, they have to select a picture that best represents how they feel. Describing why they picked the picture they did makes sharing how they feel easier and more relaxed.

6.2 Learning styles

Be aware that **people have different learning styles** and will be more or less receptive to information depending on the way in which it is delivered. Ensure that your materials incorporate all modalities – **visual, auditory and kinaesthetic** – or you will lose the attention of your participants at different stages throughout the session.

In a large group where you want people to suggest ideas or questions, getting people to write things down on Post-it notes **helps those who do not like to speak out** in a large group setting. It also helps to ensure that the opinionated few do not dominate the session.

6.3 Facilitation tools

Avoiding jargon – the use of jargon and acronyms can be somewhat exclusive if not everybody in the room has the same level of knowledge or understanding. To discourage the use of jargon in your sessions, place red cards on the tables and encourage the group to raise the card if and when they feel someone is talking in a jargonistic or exclusive way.

Silent brainstorming – you can use this method to elicit the thoughts and views of those participants who do not like speaking up when part of a large group. Hand out Post-it notes to your participants and ask them to jot down their thoughts. This exercise is most effective when carried out at the beginning of a piece of group work.

Capturing positive feelings – asking people to recall good feelings about something can really help to lift the mood of the group and keep the atmosphere positively charged.



6.4 Managing group dynamics

Ask people to discuss a point or issue in pairs or threes for five minutes. Then ask each group to feed back one point. This helps to **ensure everyone has their say** – it helps give a voice to those who are not comfortable speaking in a large group and also manages the contributions of those who are more vocal!

Don't take things personally; the session is about them, not you! If there is a challenge then there is also engagement. People challenge when they feel passionate about something. You are the 'vessel' for this passion, not the target.

6.5 Updating and reviewing presentations

A case study from Dr Hugo Minney

“I regularly use benefits dependency networks* for retro-fitting clinical engagement into an existing service improvement initiative – it’s about the fastest way I know.”

“I also took over a clinical engagement course, which I always thought had been a bit too much talking and not enough action. I replaced the presenter (me) with three clinicians (a GP, a hospital consultant and a clinical engagement specialist I found in the National Programme for IT) who each talked about how they liked to be engaged. The lesson was ‘make it real using real people and not just real stories’, which you can do in the NHS.

“The clinicians were fascinated to understand how differently each of them saw the world as well as being very keen to tell managers and service improvement people how to make them feel good. And, of course, the managers and service improvement people felt they were getting authentic advice rather than ‘this boring study shows...’ Of course I wove it together with a bit of me talking about the theory, but the less I talk, the more people enjoy it!”

* www.networks.nhs.uk/uploads/westyorks/bdn_example_isip.ppt

A blue speech bubble icon containing the text 'Top Tip' in white, positioned to the right of the main text block.

6.6 Different types of questioning

Type of question	Examples
<i>Questions to support learning</i> – these questions are used to stimulate thinking and deepen understanding. The team learns from answering the question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What aspects of the situation challenge you?• What excites you?• What do you see as the critical elements?• How does this fit in with the priorities?• What is the aim of this discussion?
<i>Questions to invite exploration</i> – these are open-ended questions that require more depth and reflection. They prompt the group to discover new and creative ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What would that give you?• What stands out?• How would you frame the underlying problem?• How would you define the task?• How else could you look at this situation?

Type of question	Examples
<p><i>Questions to look at outcomes</i> – these questions shift the perspective from problems to solutions. They help the team determine and define objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you want? • How would that look in X months/years from now? • What would be the ideal way to set this up? • What would be a fulfilling means to get there? • What does success look like? • What would someone who handles this kind of issue do? • What if you could start again? • What should you do? • What are the costs/ benefits of each of these ideas? • If you had total control and resources, what might you try?



Type of question	Examples
<p><i>Questions that engage team members</i> – these questions are used to motivate or connect on a personal level. They help the team to understand emotional responses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is it about this that concerns/motivates you? • What makes this important to you right now? • How do you feel about this? • How much control do you have over the situation? • At your best, what do you bring to this situation? • If things are not going well, what happens to you and others involved? • What is holding you back from a way forward?

Type of question	Examples
<p><i>Questions that encourage commitment or action</i> – these questions help the team to move toward change. They help the team become accountable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What option(s) do you choose to take action on? • When are you going to start and finish your actions? • What could hinder you in taking these steps? • What will you do to eliminate these factors? • What support do you need and who do you need it from? • What personal resistance do you have to taking these steps? • How will you deal with internal and external factors? • What commitment, on a scale of 1-10, do you have to taking the agreed actions? What could you do to raise your commitment closer to ten?



6.7 Interactive checklist

You may have wondered how interactive the design of your session needs to be. Using the following model, you can work out how interactive your meeting or workshop needs to be.

Essentially, the higher you score on any event element to the right-hand side of the model, the more likely you are to need to inject some interactivity into the session rather than assuming it will take place naturally and unaided.

The purpose of the event is...

Information dissemination

Information generation



The desired outcome is...

Understanding

Belief



The topic/direction being set is...

Predictable/comfortable

Uncertain/uncomfortable



The group...

Meets regularly

Meets rarely



The participants...

Have shared priorities

Have conflicting priorities





Useful books and websites

This section provides you with a list of books and websites that we have used to put this guide together and also includes other resources that we haven't used but we think you may find useful. Browse these resources to find additional tips and exercises to help make your sessions more productive.

Books

- Bee, F. and Bee, R. (1999) **Facilitation skills**, London, Institute of Personnel and Development
- Bion, W.R. (1968) **Experiences in groups and other papers**, London, Routledge
- Chambers, R. (2002) **Participatory workshops: a sourcebook of 21 sets of ideas and activities**, Earthscan Ltd.
- Evans, M. (2005) **Leading groups: a practical guide**, Threesquare Consulting Limited
- Heron, J. (1999) **The complete facilitator's handbook**, London, Kogan Page
- Honey, P. and Mumford, A. (1986) **The manual of learning styles**, Maidenhead, Homey
- Jannoff, S. and Weisboard, M. (2007) **Don't just do something, stand there! Ten principles for leading meetings that matter**, San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler

- Kaner, S. et al. (1996) **Facilitator's guide to participatory decision-making**, San Francisco, New Society Publishers
- Kindred, M. (1998) **Once upon a group**, 4M Publications
- Kolb, D.A. (1984) **Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development**, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall
- NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement (2009) **A handy guide to facilitation**, NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement
- NHS Modernisation Agency (2004) **Managing change for implementation: the organisational development compendium**, NHS Modernisation Agency
- Rogers, J. (1999) **Facilitating groups**, London, Management Futures Ltd.
- Satow, A. and Evans, M. (1983) **Working with groups**, HEC / TACADE
- Scannell, E. and Newstrom, J. (1997) **The big book of presentation games**, McGraw Hill
- Schein, E. (1999) **Process consultation revisited: building the helping relationship**, New York, Addison-Wesley

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- Schwartz, R. (1994) **The skilled facilitator: a comprehensive resource for consultants, facilitators, managers, trainers and coaches**, Jossey-Bass
 - Stone, D., Patton, B. and Heen, S. (2000) **Difficult conversations: how to discuss what matters most**, USA, Penguin
 - Weaver, R.G. and Farrell, J.D. (1997) **Managers as facilitators: a practical guide to getting work done in a changing workplace**, San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers
 - Williams, D. (1998) **1,000 great quotations**, Northumberland, GNP Ltd.

Websites

- www.institute.nhs.uk/qualitytools
- www.institute.nhs.uk/building_capability/building_improvement_capability (*then click on 'Improvement Leaders' Guides: Introduction*)
- www.impactalliance.org (and type 'facilitation techniques' into the search box)
- www.thiagi.com/tips.html
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/groupthink>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/psychological_projection
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/transference>

What not to do!

In this section you will find a list of tips of things that you are best avoiding if you want your facilitated event to be an all-round success.

Top facilitation tips for terrible meetings:

1. Do absolutely no preparation – you've always been good at 'winging it'.
2. Save your energy by not bothering to cart the boxes of equipment for your facilitated exercises around – you quite enjoy fashioning flipchart paper from loo rolls.
3. Make a real entrance by turning up late to show how important and busy you are – you are, after all, just fitting this in as a favour for a colleague. Maintain your air of superiority by keeping your role as facilitator top secret.
4. Ensure that no-one has a clue why they are there or what they are meant to be doing – having a clear aim to the programme only creates unrealistic expectations anyway. So instead of sending out clear invitations, just make sure that endless streams of people arrive at the start of your session, some for a partnership meeting, some for an exhibition and others for line dancing.
5. Spend enormous amounts of time using your flip chart paper as a weapon to waste time and create confusion.

- 
6. Pay absolutely no attention to the room or its layout, no matter how small, formal, dark or airless. Marvel at the extensive array of pictures, the panelling and the deeply textured wallpaper. Leave hundreds of chairs lying around.
 7. Start late and finish late and don't both to seek consent from the group to overrun.
 8. Pick the most notoriously long-winded speakers you can find. Ensure they are unclear about the theme of the day and what they should talk about. Let them ramble on for as long as they want to.
 9. Cram in as many techniques as possible, ignoring any of those irritating needs such as literacy, language and access. Remember: task is king!
 10. Breaks (and biscuits) are for wimps. Cut them out.
 11. Stick rigidly to your design (if you have bothered to do one) at all times – after all, you are in control.
 12. Pay no attention to how your participants are doing. Set them hugely complicated tasks that cannot possibly be completed in the time available and leave them to their own devices. It is always best to find out how stupid they are after 30 minutes so that you have to start all over again.

13. Make sure that all information recorded onto flipcharts is as illegible as possible. And don't waste your time recording irrelevant rubbish – just write down what you agree with. Try also to record the information with as few words as possible to demonstrate your exemplary summarising skills, no matter how much information you lose.
14. Show that you are a real expert in the subject. After all, you are the only one with a brain and they need your opinions to make the right decisions.
15. Decide who your favourite and most important participant is and who is the most stupid. Nod, smile and encourage the former while punishing and ignoring the latter (especially all those lazy quiet ones).
16. Refuse to allow anyone any time to think or speak – allowing natural conversations and helping people to really understand each other can be dangerously creative and unpredictable.
17. Make sure no-one knows what has been discussed or decided or what will happen next. It is best to decide that yourself after the meeting when you write up the report (from memory).
18. Rush out of the room (leaving flipcharts) the moment you've finished the session.
19. Don't even entertain the idea of getting feedback from your participants (or the person who asked you to facilitate). You are far too busy for all of that...



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The Facilitator's Toolkit was developed to support the one-day course, *A crash course in facilitation skills for quality improvers in healthcare*, run by the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement.

You may also be interested in the Handy Guide to Facilitation, which is one of a series of publications providing the fundamentals for quality improvement.

For more information, visit

www.institute.nhs.uk/fundamentals.

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