

A P P E N D I X B

Facilitation Tactics

There are numerous tools used by facilitators to generate discussion and interest in a workshop session. To maximize a workshop's potential, it is important for the facilitator to be flexible about the structure of the learning environment. Below is a menu of facilitation exercise tactics, many of which appear in this handbook. You may adapt one or several of them for specific sessions, or you or other participants may have your own additional tactics that will work well with the group. The important thing to remember is that there is no correct path to learning. As long as the sessions meet the “3-e standard”—to be educational, edifying, and entertaining—you are on the road to successful facilitation.

Biographies: Biographies provide excellent examples of the choices people face in life and the decisions they make. In a workshop, biographies allow participants to compare their own life stories and choices to those of others and help them to reflect on their own personal capacities and goals.

Comic Strips and Illustrations: Pictorial representations of what people are saying and doing are a stimulating and entertaining tactic to generate discussion about communication strategies. Even the simplest of drawings can convey complex problems and spark an engaging discussion. Facilitators can present comic strips or illustrations to the group to discuss in teams or all together.

Fictional Stories or Scenarios: Fictional stories or hypothetical scenarios relating to the workshop topics can be told/read and then discussed by the workshop group. Fiction can be less controversial than true events about which group members may have strong and conflicting opinions. For example, rather than referring to a real incident in which a leader or director or employer mishandled a situation, it is often easier to discuss a hypothetical scenario so that comments about fault or culpability do not refer to anyone in the workshop or anyone known to the workshop participants.

Fishbowl Conversations: On occasion, subjects are too complex or too sensitive for a large group to engage in a meaningful discussion. Fishbowl conversations allow for the whole group to participate in the same discussion but avoid some of the pitfalls that occur in a large group. In an actual fishbowl, fish swim and interact in an environment that can be closely observed by those outside the bowl. Fishbowl conversations work the same way. Volunteers from the workshop group, usually from two to six depending on the discussion topic and the size of the overall group, discuss the topic in detail in front of everyone else for about ten minutes. Sometimes group members comment on the ideas of the volunteers and at other times the volunteers finish their conversation and then the whole group holds a discussion

about what the volunteers said and did. Exercises in this handbook can be conducted in fishbowl conversation format as well. In such an instance, a small group of volunteers participates in the exercise in front of the other workshop participants and then everyone joins the discussion of what took place.

Icebreakers and Energizers: The purpose of icebreakers and energizers is to help workshop participants become more familiar with one another and more comfortable talking in a group. Icebreakers are most often used early on in a workshop and at the beginning of workshop sessions. However they can be helpful at any point in a session to relax and redirect group members who might be losing focus or developing mistrust through their participation in a difficult or contentious discussion. Icebreakers and energizers should be non-controversial and easy for all participants. The most common are questions designed to reveal something personal but NOT private and are answered by everyone going around the group. Examples of questions include, “If you had unlimited funds and had to spend the money on a gift for your family, what would it be?” Or, “If you were a plant, what plant would you be and why?” Or, “What is your favorite food or meal and why?” Facilitators should be creative with icebreakers and energizers; they are supposed to be fun.

Journals: Sometimes facilitators ask workshop participants to keep a journal of their opinions about the workshop sessions and about what they have learned. A facilitator may decide to set aside time at the end of each session for journal writing, or she can leave it up to the individual participants to keep a journal at home. In some instances group members may read from their journals at the beginning of each session or at the end of the workshop. However, whether the group members share their journal entries or not should be up to them.

News Items: News items that all workshop participants are familiar with can be useful topics to stimulate discussion. For example, a story that appears in the news about important work a woman politician is undertaking can be used to spark a discussion on the nature of leadership and about carrying out one’s personal vision.

Partners: Very often in a workshop setting there are a number of participants who are hesitant to speak to the whole group. Breaking the group into pairs helps many individuals participate more fully. Once the whole group reconvenes, the comments and ideas of a shy or reticent participant can be shared with the group by her partner. Breaking into pairs also allows for more in-depth and interactive discussion on a given topic. When the group reconvenes, only the key points that arise in the separate discussions need to be shared.

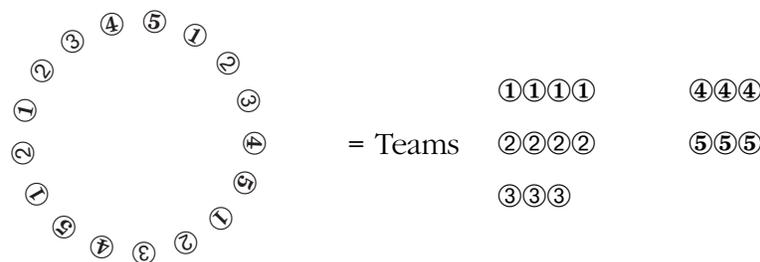
Questions and Answers: The most fundamental facilitation strategy is the process of asking questions to direct group discussion. This method is called “Q & A” or questions and answers. The facilitator’s task is to ask open-ended questions that will expand the discussion. Questions that lead to short or simple answers are not as effective. The facilitator should not ask questions to which she feels there is only one right answer. It is not her role to teach correct information, but rather to let the workshop participants engage in dialogue and draw their own conclusions.

Quotes: To enhance the workshop sessions, participants may be asked to bring to the workshop interesting and relevant quotes from well known personalities, books, songs, religious texts, legal documents, or other sources for the group to discuss.

Role Playing: Role playing allows participants to hear and reflect on viewpoints that are not necessarily their own. Individuals are given roles to play, such as employers and employees, police officers and citizens, doctors and patients, and so on. Either in front of the group or in separate pairs each participant represents one of the roles/characters in a conversation. After talking for about ten minutes, the entire group reconvenes to describe and discuss the conversations.

Teams: Breaking the workshop group into smaller teams enables members to participate more fully in exercises and discussions. The fewer people in a team, the greater the opportunity to participate. There are several ways in which to divide a group into teams. The facilitator may decide to pre-select team members to ensure diversified age representation, professional backgrounds, familiarity with the topic being discussed, or other factors.

- **Random Grouping:** The most common method for team set up is through random grouping. After the facilitator has determined how many teams are desirable, the participants can count off to that number. For example, for five teams, participants each take a number from one to five counting off in order. All the number ones are on the same team; all the number twos are on the same team, etc.



- **Grouping Based on Alphabetical Order of Names:** Ask participants to form a line or circle according to the alphabetical order of their given names, starting with the first letter of the alphabet. Then divide the participants according to the desired number of groups.
- **Grouping Based on Birthdays:** Ask participants to form a line or circle in order of their birthdays, starting with January 1 and ending with December 31. Then divide the participants according to the desired number of groups.

Words versus Thoughts: To demonstrate communication, negotiation, and argumentation strategies, it can be very helpful to present both a speaker's words and her thoughts about what she means to convey. This can be done in writing, with the words of a speaker followed in parentheses by what she is actually thinking. Or participants can engage in role playing where one person states an

individual's thoughts and another person turns those thoughts into persuasive words. For example, two participants might represent the thoughts and words of a young woman trying to persuade her mother to let her attend medical school. The first participant states what the young woman is feeling about attending medical school, including her hopes, dreams, and concerns. The second participant chooses words to convince the mother to allow her to go. The whole workshop group can then discuss the young woman's choice of language and communication strategy. A similar role play of the thoughts and words of the mother would add an additional dimension to the group's discussion. By tapping the imagination of group members about possible scenarios, the words versus thoughts tactic can be adapted for a wide variety of situations that are relevant to the group's work and community.