

PN-ACL-703



**ACCORD
HANDBOOK
IN
FACILITATION**

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LISTEN

*When I ask you to listen to me
and you start giving advice
you have not done what I asked.*

*When I ask you to listen to me
and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way
you are trampling on my feelings.*

*When I ask you to listen to me
and you feel you have to do something to solve my problems.
you have failed me, strange that may seem.*

*Listen! All I ask is that you listen
Not talk or do-just hear me*

*Advice is cheap: 50 cents will buy you both Dorothy Dix and
Dr Spock in the same newspaper.*

*And I can do for myself; I am not helpless
Maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless*

*When you do something for me that I can and need to do
for myself, you contribute to my fear and weakness.*

*But when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel,
no matter how irrational, then I trying to convince
you and can get about the business of understanding what's
behind this irrational feeling.
and when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't
need advice*

*So, please listen and just hear me, and if you want to talk,
wait a minute for your turn; and I'll listen to you.*

Anonymous



CHAIRING AND FACILITATING MEETINGS

All meetings require skills in chairing. In crisis situations peacemaking and dispute mediation skills are required. However, such dramatic situations are not the only types of meetings requiring mediation or facilitation. As efforts are made to move beyond violence and confrontation in our society, peace-building initiative will be required. Here third parties will be required to bring diverse interests to the negotiation table, facilitate meetings between them, and hold them together in order to allow progress to be achieved in the area of economic development and social reconstruction. It is through such processes that a civil society must be built in South Africa- the regular engagement of people from across the spectrum of groups in communities to address issues of housing, education, health and welfare, urban development, the maintenance of law and order, and local government. These will be often discussions, dogged by historical inequalities, scarce resources, and frustration on the part of the parties. Skills in handling deadlocks and assisting the parties to negotiate and solve problems are every bit important here as in peacekeeping situations, where the intensity of conflict may be higher. Likewise skills of chairing and facilitating meetings are central for mediator dealing with crisis situations



CHAIRING MEETINGS

PREPARING STEPS	
	<p>Is the meeting fully representative of interests?</p> <p>Have the preparatory steps been properly carried out?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Canvassing of parties• Agreed purpose• Prepared agendas• Adequate notice of meeting• Clear time frame• Acceptable venues• Agreement to an acceptable chairperson• Agreement to an acceptable scribe/secretary
FORMAL CONDUCT OF MEETINGS	
OPENING THE MEETING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome parties• Declare the meeting open• Call for apologies• Check that everyone has the agenda and relevant documentation• Establish acceptable ground rules<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ role of chairperson◆ conduct of meeting◆ means of achieving agreement: consensus, majority vote, etc◆ means of recording◆ caucus procedures◆ time frames◆ breaks
DEALING WITH MINUTES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If minutes were taken from a previous meeting, check that everyone has sight of these• Can the minutes be acceptable as an accurate reflection of the meeting?• If not, what changes are required/proposed? Check that these are acceptable to everyone• Are these matters arising from the minutes which are not included under other agenda items?• Add matters arising to the agenda, either under general for discussion after other identified issues or immediately
FINALIZING THE AGENDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there any other matters for the agenda?• Is the order of the agenda item acceptable to everyone?• Close the agenda
MOVING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raise items on the agenda in order and deal with them one by one



THROUGH THE AGENDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask the person who put the items on the agenda to speak on the issues, provide motivations, make proposals to the meeting• Prevent interruptions• When the speaker has finished asked if anyone wishes to raise points for clarification• Open the meeting for discussion• Order the debate• Ask whether speakers have concrete proposal to make• Record alternative/counter/ modified proposals• Vote or achieve consensus on revised proposals as acceptable• List proposal on the table and clarify them• Vote on proposal or achieve consensus on which to adopt• State to the meeting that a proposal has been adopted or rejected to ensure that everyone understands the outcome of the process• Ensure that the scribe has the proposal accurately recorded• Move to the next item
CLOSING THE MEETING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Announce that all items on the agenda have been discussed• Check that this has been agreed by all the parties• Agree on date for the next meeting if one is required• Agree on a venue• Agree on a process and time frame for the compilation and distribution of minutes• Check with all parties who have been assigned tasks that they understand what these are, and confirm commitments to these• If there is no other business, close the meeting

FACILITATING PROGRESS	
ATTEND TO THE ISSUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there too many issues/ is it too complex?• Can the issues be partialised into more manageable elements?• Can the issues be grouped?• Can the issues be ordered/prioritized?• Can the issues be recorded and focussed?• Use process management skills to achieve order, focus• Ensure that identified issues cover everyone's concerns
FACILITATE THE PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure everyone is heard• Prevent interruptions• Call on people to speak if you see they wish to• Check understanding from the chair through paraphrasing: 'are you saying...' Allow exploration of information or proposal: ' does anyone want to respond...• Summarize discussion: ' it seems there are three proposals before the meeting...'



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus discussion/keep on track• Check for common understanding• Identify and respond to emotions• Facilitate caucuses where necessary• Control votes if required• Facilitate consensus between parties• Ensure decisions are understood: repeat/restate
EVALUATE STRUCTURES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is representation unwieldy/ too large• Ask the group how this might be dealt with• Ask whether there are ways of remaining both legitimate and representative but rendering the meeting more manageable• Point out that multi-party meetings have to be tightly controlled whereas smaller meetings allow for greater flexibility in exchange and problem-solving• Consider executive structures for more regular meetings and immediate responses to issues• Consider special task groups, with reportback responsibilities, to work on specific problems parallel to the main work of the group• Clarify mandating/reportback processes where representations is opted for• Seek legitimacy, representivity, manageability, viability
MANAGE ONESELF	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seek understanding before committing to course of action• Remember-the task is bring participants together vs impose own decision• Check whether the group is amenable to suggestions/ proposals/ recommendations from the chair before committing oneself• Don't intervene too early-let parties wrestle with their own problems; this ownership of outcomes• Be a resource• Prepare/research/seek understanding• Concentrate on managing process vs expressing own views• Facilitate face-saving where necessary• Behave in a trustworthy manner• Respect all views• Allow all parties to share views but demand discipline in order that a few do not hijack meetings• Show understanding of emotions



TEN COMMANDMENTS OF MEETING FACILITATION

By Ron Kraybill

1. THOU SHALT BEGIN WITH AN AGENDA THAT ESTABLISHES THE PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF THY ENTIRE MEETING

Post an agenda. The more information participants have about the 'big picture,' the better equipped they are to contribute constructively. The agenda is negotiable throughout, open to addition, deletion, and change of sequence. But it remains the backbone of effective meetings, providing a sense of order, clarity and fairness.

Ideally, planners prepare and post an agenda in advance so participants can reflect on issues. When this is not possible, the facilitator works jointly with the group to develop an agenda at the beginning of the meeting. In either case, the facilitator should list the agenda visibly before the group, and invite comments and suggestions for change.

2. THOU SHALT CENTER THY DISCUSSION AROUND ONE ISSUE AT A TIME. NO OTHER ISSUE SHALT THOU CONSIDER

Like water, many group discussions quickly lap out to become dispersed and shallow rather than centered and deep. Constant vigilance by the facilitator is necessary to keep participants focussed.

To a large extent facilitators maintain focus with punctuation calls which clearly separate each issue from other issues. Punctuation should be so sharp that even lazy participants, of which there are many, know when a new issue takes the floor and when it retires. This calls for a clear introduction of each issue and a conclusion summarizing what has been discussed or agreed upon. Punctuation also involves skillful use of emptiness; a five second pause between issues; a two minute stretch break; a transition phrase from the facilitator such as 'Let's move now to our next item on the agenda.'

Facilitators also maintain focus with brief and gentle response ready for the individual who inevitably drift from center streams. These phrases focus, like all gentle communication, on what the facilitator *wants*, not on what he does not want. 'I'd like to stay focused now on our current issue.' 'It would help if you could hold that comment till we get to that issue on the agenda.' 'That's the item we need to discuss but for now I'd like to set it aside/ add to the agenda/etc.'



3. THOU MAYEST COVET OWNERSHIP OF THY MEETING, BUT THOU SHALT NOT STEAL OR EVEN POSSES IT

Don't dominate. Good facilitators know that more than anyone else present they will dip in and out of the limelight. They often enjoy the power they wield. Yet they recognize the continual temptation to abuse their role by lingering in the limelight or indulging their personal opinions.

If an issue arises on which the facilitator wishes to express personal opinions, he or she should ask someone else to facilitate for that issue. Alternatively, the facilitators should ask permission from the group to 'take off the facilitation hat' occasionally to express personal preferences.

4. THOU SHALT EXERCISE THY LEADERSHIP THROUGH FREQUENT SUMMARY OF THY PARTICIPANTS CONTRIBUTIONS

Summaries of two kinds are effective. With paraphrasing, briefly summarizing what an individual has just said, the facilitator establishes an atmosphere of respect and deep listening. 'From your perspective...' 'As you see it...' 'So your suggestion would be that we...' Especially when confusion and tension is present, this is a powerful skill. Used consistently after each speaker, paraphrasing alone is often adequate to maintain a sense of communication even when emotions run high.

With group summary the facilitator condenses the thrust of comments from numerous speakers. If comments seems to be moving in the same direction, the facilitator summarizes the direction. 'It seems as if there is an agreement among the last several speakers that...' If comments diverge, the facilitators summarizes the different viewpoints. 'Some of us believe that ...Other say that...' Usually the facilitator follows the summary by returning the focus to the group. 'Are we on the agreement on this?' 'What do other have to say on this?' Summaries should occur frequently, always at the end of discussion of an issue, and often several times within issue.

5. THOU SHALT NOT VOCAL PARTICIPANTS TO DOMINATE THY ASSEMBLE. AS MANY SPEAKERS AS POSSIBLE SHALT THOU HEAR

Encourage participation. Be prepared with phrases to gently muzzle the vocally agile and draw reticent members into discussion. 'We'd like to hear especially from those who haven't yet had an opportunity to speak.' 'Lets go around the circle and give each person who wishes a chance to speak.' If you feel they won't be comfortable with it, invite individual to speak. 'Bill, I am curious about what you have to say on this.'

If necessary, interrupt the 'speechmaker' by paraphrasing, and then state your desire to hear from as many people as possible.



6. THOU SHALT HAVE MORE THAN ONE MEDIUM BEFORE THEE TO STRENGTHEN THY COMMUNICATION

People take in and work through information in diverse ways. Any communication which relies on only one of the six senses or a single discussion format is vulnerable to misunderstanding or blockage.

The easiest and most important medium is to add *visuals*. No group of more than five people should gather to make decision without means to write on wall or board. The agenda deserves visual prominence, of course. But different viewpoints become more manageable if summarized and listed before the group. This objectifies discussion; eyes go to the wall chart rather than to opponents. Further, participants can jointly and methodically create a written list of strengths and weaknesses for each viewpoint rather than fight back and forth from one idea to another.

The facilitator should also diversify forums for discussions. Not all persons are equally comfortable with large group discussion. Small group discussions, written questionnaires, personal interviews, or special 'listening sessions' enable a greater number of participants to they have participated in a setting familiar and 'safe' for them personally.

7. THOU SHALT NOT EVALUATE UNTIL THOU HAST FIRST GENERATED

Left to neutral processes, most groups quickly fall into inefficient and bruising approaches to decision-making. The typical sequence is to generate an opinion, react; generate another one, react again. Individuals quickly become attached to their particular suggested solution, and conversation readily degenerates into personal hurt antagonism.

Clear guidance from the facilitator establishes a more effective approach. The facilitator states: 'Lets begin by listing some possibilities. We'll evaluate them in a few minutes.' If someone challenges another person's idea, the facilitator responds: 'Remember John, we will evaluate these later. For now, ideas only. Tell us your idea, John.' Once the list contains the numerous ideas, the facilitator guides in evaluating them: 'OK, we've got several ideas. Let's go back now and look at these one at a time and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.'

8. THOU SHALT VALUE DIVERSITY, YEA THOU SHALT INVITE DISAGREEMENT FOR IN THIS LIETH THE STRENGTH OF THY GROUP AND THE PURPOSE OF THY CALLING

Groups require some basic sense of unity and in the end must reject certain options to make decisions. But paradoxically, groups which value diversity and welcome disagreement find unity easier to achieve in most decisions than groups which discourage differences. If dissidents feel truly heard and respected, they are more willing to set aside their preferences in recognition of the majority. Out of the disciplines of respect and occasional self denial grow strength and self resilience.



By encouraging members to state their disagreements openly and making it 'safe' to do so, the facilitator enables a group to find a unity which lies deeper than apparent differences. The facilitator who seeks a short-cut to unity by discouraging disagreement will end up in a wilderness of hostility.

9. THOU SHALT RESPECT SPECIFICS, LEST THOU DASH THY EARNED AGREEMENT UPON A WALL OF CONFUSION

What specifically will happen next? Who will do what, when, where, and to whom will they report? Failure to work out specifics can easily derail things in the future.

10. THOU SHALT NOT SURPRISE THY GROUP WITH ANY CONCLUSIONS, RATHER THOU SHALT TEST CONCLUSION BEFORE THEY ARE FINAL

The final decision should never surprise participants. The facilitator's job is to enable members to inform others of their preferences and to get a sense of where the majority stands. If voting occurs, enough discussions should already have taken place so that all have a clear sense of group direction. Use a nonbinding 'straw vote' to test where the groups stand and to set the stage for further negotiation. This gives the opportunity for the minority to bring in any additional information or reasoning before the decision is final.

These 10 Commandments do not completely cover a facilitator's concern. For example, a facilitator will also need to pay attention to the setting of the meeting and participants physical comfort. Shape your environment to meet your needs, or it will likely shape your group in ways that hinder communication. Plan regular breaks and throughout discussion be alert to fidgeting or downcast eyes, suggestion the need for a change of pace.



FACILITATING FACILITATION

DEALING WITH UNHELPFUL COMMENTS

Facilitation is a critical part of the development process. Ron Kraybill suggests how to defuse and move past destructive dialogue...

Often a facilitator needs to deal with unhelpful or negative comments from participants. Facilitators can handle these constructively by recognising them as they occur. In the list of commonly heard statements, suggested facilitator responses follow in parentheses. While all the responses below are often useful, sometimes ignoring unhelpful statements is the best way to discourage them.

- **GENERALISING**

"No one cares a bit about how I feel about things." (Please tell us more specifically about who doesn't care about how you feel about things.)

Or "These people are always trying to get us off-track."

(Please give us a specific example so we can understand clearly what you are referring to.)

- **BLAMING**

Strong 'they' or 'you' focus: "They did this and they did that and they're always..."

(Tell us what you would like to see happen in the future." Or, "Tell us about the impact of these events on you personally.")

- **STATEMENTS IN QUESTION FORM**

"Wouldn't you agree it's just downright irresponsible to do something like that without group approval?"

("Sounds like you really felt it was inappropriate." Or, "Tell us how you feel about it." Or,

"My job is to help you express your viewpoints to others here: please help us understand what your thinking is on this.")

- **SPEAKING FOR OTHERS**

"I happen to know that a lot of other people in the group feel the same way I do about this " ("Just speaking for yourself, tell us how you feel about things.")

- **POOR ME**

"I just get so depressed and discouraged when I see what they're doing to our fine group. They don't care what they do to the rest of us and I've lost all hope for change. We're too weak to stand up to them anyway."

("You really feel hopeless about things. Tell us about the point at which you really began feeling the most discouraged ... Tell us about what you would like to see happen in the group in the next year.")



- **SUPER-PARENTING**

"I think what Mary is really trying to say is that the situation is just intolerable for anyone who really cares about the future of this community."

("I'd like to let Mary express for herself what she's trying to say to us.")

- **INTERRUPTING**

(Leader ignores interrupter or simply says, "Sipho, I'd like to hear your thoughts on this, but for now I'd rather not interrupt Mary's comments.")

- **WITHDRAWING**

Member sits silently without participating; sometimes orients body away from the group.

(Leader: I'd like to offer a special invitation to those who haven't yet had the opportunity to speak. "Or, Mr/Ms X, are there any thoughts or comments you'd like to share with us?")

- **CHALLENGING THE FACILITATOR**

(Response: Stay cool, focus on hearing and understanding. "So your main concern is that I haven't ... "Then explain or clarify if appropriate without defending. Recognise the urge to fight back and choose against it.

Model self disclosure: I feel quite uncomfortable with your comments and I'm not sure exactly how to respond. I'd like to approach things in a way everyone respects so I don't wish to simply ignore your remarks. How do others feel about this? Ask for input from others in the group.)

Ron Kraybill is a member of the Centre for Intergroup Studies' Training Department (Reprinted from Conciliation Quarterly)

Ron Kraybill 1994 "Facilitating facilitation: dealing with unhelpful comments."
Track Two 3, no 1 (February): 24.



GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATING SMALL GROUPS

1. Be very clear on your role
2. Seat the group in a small circle all on the same level (in other words, all on chairs or on the floor).
3. Get people to introduce themselves and try to make them feel relaxed.
4. Check if translation is needed and get a volunteer to help.
5. Ask someone in the group to take notes for reporting back later on.
6. Explain how much time you have and how the small group discussion will work, and see if everyone understands.
7. Introduce ideas and questions, don't enforce your views.
8. If necessary, get someone else in the group to do whatever short inputs are needed to get the discussion going.
9. Keep looking at everyone in the group (eye-contact).
10. Be aware of your own voice – try not to talk too much to too loudly.
11. Be aware of the way you approach people in the group, for example, not picking on the same people all the time and asking them what they think.
12. Don't get into arguments or allow them to develop.
13. Allow and encourage different opinions.
14. Don't allow people to interrupt each other.
15. Be firm with dominant people and say that they should allow others a chance to speak.
16. Give people time to think and to explain what they mean.
17. Explain or summarise briefly where necessary, for example, with difficult words or concepts.
18. Check if people understands before going on to the next topic, and allow for any further questions.
19. Use the go around method to encourage participation from everyone in the group.
20. At the end, ask the report-back person to summarise to check if everyone is happy with the report.



HELPING GROUPS MAKE BETTER DECISIONS: PLANNING A DECISION MAKING PROCESS

By Ron Kraybill and Dave Brubaker

Decision-making is part of the life of every group. A group of friends decides what movie to see Friday night. A union must accept or reject the contract offer. A congregation decides whether or not to build an addition to its facility. A nation elects a President.

But while decision-making is a regular, even routine, task of groups, few groups approach it with confidence. Decision-making times are often highly polarized, tension-filled events. Individual members coalesce into factions, with those who support one option or candidate opposing the supporters of another. By the time the decision is made it is generally clear who has "won" and who has "lost." The majority may have prevailed, but the remainder of the group is often disgruntled and non-cooperative.

DECISION MAKING TIMES ARE OFTEN HIGHLY POLARIZED, DECISION-FILLED EVENTS

Fortunately, there are better ways of making important group decisions. Group experiencing difficulty in decision-making will accomplish more by improving their *methods* of decision-making. How the group decides usually matters much more than *what* it decides.

Thus, the first and greatest commandment of good-decision making is *Process Matters More Than Outcome*. People routinely accept decisions they dislike with minimal fuss if they feel they were actively and respectfully involved in the decision process. Members commonly bitterly reject decisions that might seem wise and fair to an outsider if they feel bypassed by discussion. The goal of good decision-making is that participants feel so good about the way the decision was reached that even the minority is willing to support a decision that is not its first preference.

THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT OF GOOD DECISION MAKING IS: PROCESS MATTERS MORE THAN OUTCOME

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD PROCESS

What are the characteristics of a good process?

- The group receives opportunities to shape not only the outcome, but the process itself.
- The process is participatory, involving the persons effected by decisions not only in the final ratification stage but also in weighing alternatives.



- Disagreement is encouraged at all times.
- During the process, multiple options are gathered *before* beginning serious debate.
- Everyone is given time to be heard.
- More than one forum is available for members to express their ideas and preferences. (E.g.' large group discussion, small group discussion, questionnaires, personal inquiry, etc.)
- Surprises are avoided. Occasional "straw voting" or informal polling is used and reported to the larger group so there is time for response from the minority before things are set in stone.
- Leaders are open with information regarding group inferences. Any data gathered from the group about group opinion is consistently reported back.

AGREEMENT ON PROCEDURE

Groups needing to make important decisions must first accept the importance of using a careful, inclusive process to make that decision. Then they should assign someone, preferably a small group, with the responsibility of leadership of the process. The task is to develop and propose a decision-making process to the larger group. Once the process is approved, this committee also co-ordinates execution of the process.

Ideally this committee should represent the diversity of viewpoints held on the issue in question. But its members must understand that their job is to plan and co-ordinate a fair process, not lobby for a favored outcome. They are to be *process advocates*, not outcome advocates.

The chief initial task of the committee is to outline in written form a proposed process, sometimes known as "Agreement of Understanding" or "agreement on Procedures." This proposed process will be submitted to the entire group for ratification before discussions of the issues begins.

Four items deserve attention in planning process: issues, purpose, process and decision rule. (see *Church Fights*, by Leas and Kittlaus). The issue should be specified as people often have differing perceptions of what the real issue is. It is important that everyone agree on what they are disagreeing about before trying to seek solutions. Usually, the issue should be defined as narrowly and specifically as possible.

A Statement of *purpose* should clarify what the group would like to happen as a result of this effort. (Whether that be to reach a decision, to air differing views, or to identify issues needing further work.) The *process* section should indicate what will happen and when, so participants understand how the final process will unfold. Finally, the decision rule should clarify how the final decision will be made, whether by consensus, majority vote or some other mechanism.



AN EXAMPLE OF A GOOD PROCESS

So what does good process look like? Let's look at a real-life example of a group that needs to make an important decision.

The Nicetown Community Center is an organization owned and managed by residents of the Nicetown Community. Since the Center includes a gym and a pool, the community decides several years ago to hire a director to manage the facilities. The first director recently announced that she will step down in six months. The director's resignation is due partly to her frustration over members' differing expectations about the director's role.

GROUPS NEEDING TO MAKE IMPORTANT DECISIONS MUST FIRST ACCEPT THE IMPORTANCE OF USING A CAREFUL, INCLUSIVE PROCESS TO MAKE THAT DECISION

At the last community meeting, members elected four persons to compose a search committee. The members asked the search committee. The members asked the search committee to prepare a proposed process for deciding about a new director. The search committee has done its work, and will present the following proposal at the upcoming September members meeting:

AGREEMENT ON PROCEDURES

- **Issue:**

Need to define expectations and qualifications of a new director for the Nicetown Community Center.

- **Purpose:**

- To provide opportunity for members of the center to express their views on this issue
- To develop a proposal regarding qualifications acceptable to as many members as possible
- To undertake discussion openly, tolerantly and flexibly
- To decide on a new director for the centre

FOUR ITEMS DESERVE ATTENTION IN PLANNING A PROCESS: ISSUES, PURPOSE, PROCESS AND DECISION RULE

PROCESS AND TIMELINE

September 1: Search committee presents proposed process to members, and will answer any questions and make modifications as agreed to by the group.



September 1-30: During the month of September, members will discuss the qualifications for a new director. The search committee will insure that all members have an opportunity for input into the process. During a special meeting, September 19, we plan to offer a panel discussion of the issue followed by small group discussions. We will also distribute a written questionnaire to all members unable to attend that day.

November 1: Based on the results of these discussions and questionnaires, the search committee will prepare a summary and recommendations for the group. The group will meet to decide on the qualifications as proposed by the search committee, and will attempt to reach a decision by consensus. If no consensus is reached, members will decide based on a vote (by hand-raising), with a two-thirds majority required.

November and December: The search committee will carry out a search for a new director based on the approved qualifications. Candidates who meet the qualifications will be invited for a meeting with the Center's executive committee at its January meeting.

February 1: The executive committee will recommend a single candidate to the membership. Consensus will be sought on the candidate, but if consensus is not reached we will vote (by standing) based on a two-thirds majority.

CONCLUSION

Hard work still remains after the "Agreement on Procedures" is approved (as it likely will be.) But groups who begin decision-making processes in this fashion usually find the discussion process less divisive than they anticipated.

A process like this is not appropriate to every decision a group needs to make. But for important decisions, or where feelings are running high, this kind of process helps participants to feel "safe." It also is more likely to produce thoughtful outcomes that truly represent the best collective wisdom of the group.

As a popular oil filter commercial states, "You can pay now or you can pay later." Investing the time up front to plan a good process may avert much costlier conflict later on.

When this more formal decision-making process is not used, groups will still benefit by following the "Stages of Decision-Making" reprinted in this issue. Paying attention to the early stages of planning and generating and evaluating options generally ensures that later negotiation and actually deciding will progress more smoothly.

Investing the time up or front to plan a good process may avert much costlier conflict later on. "You can pay now or you can pay later."

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WHAT CAN GO WRONG: WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Even under the best of circumstances, certain problems may occur. As the facilitator, if you are aware of problems as they arise and are prepared to deal with them, you can usually prevent them from marring the session. There are a number of things you can do when you recognize that a problem exists. One is to do nothing. It is not always possible or necessary for the facilitator to cure every minor ill that the group suffers. You may decide that a particular problem is not serious and if left alone may disappear or be handled by other members of the group.

However, if you judge that a situation threatens the group's functioning, you may decide to take action in several ways. Discreetly dealing with the problem yourself is sometimes the answer. You might do this by taking the individual's involved aside for a private discussion, by changing your own facilitation style, or by changing the agenda. Other times, it may be best to include the whole group in dealing with the problem. You can often get them to do this by describing how you perceive the situation and/or soliciting others to describe their perceptions. This can encourage some participants to suggest solutions. If no one volunteers as solution, you can ask for suggestions, or you can make suggestions of your own. Sometimes just making the group aware of a problem (such as a discussion getting off track) will be enough to get the problem under control.

Don't let problems frighten you. It is very rare for a group meeting to proceed absolutely perfectly and problems are not necessarily indicators of poor facilitation on your part. The facilitator's job is to be cautious of incipient problems and to help the group control them. Following are descriptions of some classic difficulties and some suggestions for handling them. At the end of the chapter is a summary of general principles that should guide you in preventing and handling problems.

WHEN PEOPLE ARE NOT PARTICIPATING OR WHEN THEY APPEAR BORED

SITUATION ONE: One or two people (a small fraction of the group) have obviously dropped out of the discussion, apparently from boredom, although the group as a whole appears to be functioning well.

1. Try to determine for yourself whether this behaviour is being disruptive to the rest of the group. (Is the drop outs staring quietly into space, or blatantly distracting others?) If the behavior is disruptive, the dropout may be expressing some kind of dissatisfaction with the group that he or she has not felt free or able to verbalize. One way of dealing with this immediately is to ask the dropout if there is any comment he or she would like to make.
2. You should refer to this frequently during the meeting both as a way of reminding the group of its progress and as a way of allowing changes in the schedule if feelings have changed.



3. It may be time for a break. Participants' attention spans can only be expected to last two hours, at the most. When people are tired, hungry, or physically uncomfortable from sitting too long, participation will quickly drop.
4. Interjection of humor or something unexpected into the discussion is a temporary way of drawing interest back into the group. Use it to focus attention on to whatever you suspect the real problem to be.
5. You may be working at too complex or too simple a level.
6. People may be afraid of or intimidated by the facilitator or some other person in the group (e.g., a person with a dominating personality). Directing questions toward the rest of the group in the former case, or asking someone else to respond in the latter, may help to break down inhibitions and get the conversation moving. You should watch out that you do not respond to everything that is said, nor should you let anyone else do so.

WHEN PEOPLE COME DOWN ON THE FACILITATOR

- A. (An ounce of prevention is worth) If you have not set yourself up as leader and prime mover at the beginning of the meeting, and if you make it clear that the entire group bears responsibility for whatever happens, it is unlikely that you will be jumped on by the rest of the group. By making your role clear early in the meeting, you provide yourself with a precedent you can refer to if the group forget its collective nature.
- B. Nonetheless the group may attack the facilitator for a variety of reasons, the most common being the use of the facilitator as scapegoat for the failures of the group as a whole. This is potentially a constructive situation so it pays not to be defensive. Let the group vent its frustrations, even give it encouragement, but try to steer comments away from personal attacks and toward particular problems within the group. Then lead the discussion into possible solutions after all dissatisfactions have been aired and emotions have cooled (For example, someone may attack you angrily, saying that you, the facilitator, are responsible for making this a lousy meeting. Others in the group agree, directing their remarks to you personally. Hear them through. Then, rather than trying to defend yourself or justify each of your actions, look for frustrations which you have felt with the meeting yourself. Express these, and discuss with the group how those problems might have been avoided, not just in terms of what you could have done, but also what the group as a whole might have done. Try to make the point that everyone has a responsibility to make suggestions and provide solutions to the common group problems, and that you can help this process only to the extent that others are willing to contribute and cooperate.)
- C. Listen to the criticism of your facilitation and remember them for future consideration. Facilitators are not meant to be perfect – in fact, we do most of our learning from our mistakes. Direct feedback on your role is not always easy to get, and can be valuable



WHEN THERE ISN'T ENOUGH TIME TO DO WHAT YOU HAD PLANNED

- A. This is the most common problem you are apt to encounter. Remember when you plan your agenda that it is easier to underestimate the amount of time needed for a section than it is to overestimate. Make allowances for this by leaving time margins in your plans. Remember to account for the fact that people may be late, that they will probably spend time chatting with each other before they will want to get down to business, and that a few will always extend the breaks beyond the scheduled amount of time.
- B. If your agenda won't fit into the time you have, get the group to assign probable time limits to each section (or estimate these yourself if you are planning exercises, etc.)
- C. Ask that someone in the group be responsible for keeping track of time. You may be too involved to remember to do this yourself.
- D. It helps to prioritize items on a n agenda, dealing with the most important ones first. This makes later curtailment much easier to handle.
- E. Remind the group when time limits are being approached or exceeded. If group members want to continue in a particular area, and this will mean that something else will have to be squeezed out, make the group aware of this so they can make a decision about what to do.
- F. If, halfway through the meeting, it becomes apparent that time will be short, discuss alternatives with the group, such as extending the meeting, scheduling a later one, etc.

WHEN THERE IS MORE TIME THAN YOU HAD PLANNED FOR

- A. There is nothing wrong with concluding a meeting a little early. People usually prefer this to having a session run over its time limit.
- B. Don't try to cover up the extra time with mere "filler" (such as extra long discussions, unnecessary exercises, etc.). If there is something valuable to do in the time which either you or the group can suggest, by all means proceed. (It is always a good idea to prepare purposeful extra items to be used in case there is time, or in case a substitution is necessary.) On the other hand, if you simply drag out the agenda with space filler, the meeting will seem to move very slowly and will lose its sense of momentum; the extra time will be wasted or even counter-productive. Beware especially of discussions which can drag on interminably, long past the point where real information has been exchanged and repetitions has begun.



WHEN ARGUMENTS BREAK OUT IN THE GROUP

- A This is a difficult situation to handle, but the most important thing is to move the discussion away from personalities and toward the actual problem. Try rephrasing the comments made into general questions to the group. It is best to discourage a back-and-forth exchange between the two people and to emphasize drawing others (who are more neutral and less involved in the personal antagonisms) into the discussion. Some specific approaches you might take are:
1. Ask the rest of the group to comment on the exchange.
 2. Restate the issue being discussed with the hope of clarifying it and giving a breathing space in a fast-paced discussion.
 3. Focus a question toward one of the involved parties, asking for more specific reasons for a particular point of view; then ask someone else with an interest in the discussion to comment.
 4. Ask each of the opponents to summarize the other's point of view. Sometimes simple misunderstanding of each other's position is at the base of an argument and by stating the opponent's beliefs, and giving the opponent the opportunity to correct any misconceptions, these misunderstandings can be cleared up.

These suggestions have the advantage of stopping a one-to-one interchange without shifting the topic off the area of disagreement. This is desirable because other members of the group may have an interest in what is going on, but have no chance to enter into the discussion, and because it is best to deal with disagreements openly rather than arbitrarily sweeping them away (assuming this does not involve spending undue time on a subject that is only of interest to a couple of people). Disagreements that are not resolved create frustrations and tend to reoccur later in more virulent form. Serious arguments that are resolved, however, sometimes move the group along significantly.

- B. The seating arrangement can have a subtle effect on this kind of situation. The best set-up would be for the sparring partners to be seated next to each other with the facilitator directly across from both people. This is admittedly hard to accomplish, but might occur during a recess after which people are encouraged to come back to different seats (thus the advantage of informal seating in any session). It is generally best for the facilitator to avoid sitting next to either antagonist, or anyone with whom you may be interacting strongly.
- C Not infrequently, there is someone in the group who seems excessively argumentative, picking minor points in the discussion as opportunities to challenge other people or to engage in lengthy debate. It is quite easy to see how such an individual may become annoying to group members who want to proceed on to other things. So when somebody repeatedly bogs down discussion in petty argument, appeal to the other members of the group as to whether they want to continue the argument or move on. Cutting the person off yourself may be more efficient, but if done repeatedly may cause the person to resent you. By encouraging others to express their wishes, you can reinforce control of the group by its members.



WHEN NOT ENOUGH OR TOO MANY PEOPLE SHOW UP

- A. How many people are "too many" or "too few" is a question of the particular situation. If the group is larger than 15, it generally is difficult to have discussions in which everyone can participate. Exercises often become unwieldy in such a large group as well.
- B. You should prepare for the possibility of a larger or smaller group than you anticipate by selecting activities that can be modified according to the size of the group, or by having alternate activities in mind. When you plan your agenda provide leeway for flexibility in the amount of discussion time, especially if there is doubt as to the size of the group.
- C. When a group is too large (or when there is a clear division in members' interests) you may want to divide the group into smaller discussion groups. This is one circumstance where it is especially convenient to have two facilitators. If you are facilitating alone, you can rove from one group to another, or you can get volunteers from the group to facilitate the smaller sections.
- D. Having a smaller group than anticipated is more of a psychological than a real hindrance. A small group can proceed to do quite well what a larger group was expected to do. But if those who did come exhibit disappointment about the low turnout, it is good to emphasize the positive aspects of the situation to bring people's spirits back up. Start the session with a brief discussion of the reasons for the low turnout, point out what the group still can accomplish, and reaffirm everyone's intentions of continuing anyway. (Or, alternatively, decide as a group to wait for a better time to have the meeting.)
- E. If the group turns out to be quite small, you can work with a much looser structure (although structure should not be abandoned entirely). You will be able to be more flexible and informal and participants will be able to interact on a more personal level.

WHEN FACILITIES AREN'T GOOD FOR WHAT YOU ARE DOING

- A. (Something was said about an ounce of prevention). Again, it is well to prepare for this contingency in advance by finding out what the facilities will be, or better still, visiting them yourself. If another person is making the arrangements, make it clear what you will need in the way of equipment, space, and furniture.
- B. If you show up and things still are not what you expected, consider the options available. Can the furniture be moved around? Can you move to a different location (out-of-doors, somebody's home, etc.)?
- C. Ask the group's suggestions about specific problems such as no kitchen facilities, no movie projector, etc. Can your agenda be revisited in such a way that you can still meet the group's goals for the meeting in the present situation? If not, are people still interested in sticking it out with modified plans?



WHAT DO YOU DO ABOUT YOUR OWN FEELINGS?

While you will usually not find your own feelings to be a problem (more likely they will be an asset: the facilitator is not, nor could be, a detached observer of everything that is going on) there may be occasions when you will be tempted to dominate the proceedings with your own feelings. Since the facilitator is in more of a position to talk freely and exert control than other members of the group. Monitor the discussion to see if other people's reactions are being elicited and responded to. When group members speak, are they addressing their comments primarily to you, or do they include the whole group? The inexperienced facilitator is especially prone to being too active, feeling that he or she must respond to every little hitch in the proceedings with a comment or suggestion. Be patient and give things a chance to work themselves out before you take action.

VOYEURS AND FLASHERS

It may be the specific purpose of a group to bring out the emotional life of its participants and to engage in self-revelations and emotional confrontations between members (as in a consciousness-raising group). However, if the purpose of the session is to exchange information, develop priorities, or some other cognitive or practical goal, unnecessary emphasis on emotional revelation can detract from the aims of the session. If an emotional situation arises as a product of group interaction it should, of course, be dealt with. But revelation for revelation's sake should be avoided. Occasionally someone will attend a cognitive workshop with the expectation of following sensitivity group procedures and will emphasize dramatic emotional displays and will pressure other participants to do the same. If you become aware that a participant is detracting from the real purpose of the group in this way, try to gently get things back on track by pointing out that time is being lost, or by checking out with the rest of the group what kind of subject matter they want to emphasize. It is a good idea to have a private conversation with the person in question when a break in the session allows it. Point out that the individual seems to have different expectations of the session than the other members of the group is causing a distraction.

If the problem involves a number of people wanting to follow sensitivity-group procedures, while a good portion of the group does not, it would be necessary to have a group discussion clarifying participants' needs and expectations and deciding what to emphasize in the session.

WHEN AN EXERCISE FLOPS

- A. There are two ways for an exercise to flop: when the exercise simply doesn't proceed the way it was supposed to; and when it does proceed as it should, but the group misses the point of the whole thing. If you know the exercise well (and you should!) you might realize that faulty instructions, apathetic participation, or some external factor is at fault. Recognizing this, you can provide some insight to the group.



- B. When you realize flops, the first thing to do is to admit it. Point out where your expectations were shot down, find out how others reacted, and discuss why this occurred. Talk about what could have happened. Such a discussion may, in itself, provide worthwhile information. Don't try to double talk your way out of a floppy situation or find significance where there is none. Others will sense your lack of honesty and may be discouraged from being sincere themselves.
- C. Be prepared to switch to something completely different. Hopefully, all the exercises you have prepared are not of the same type. The response to another activity may be completely different.
- D. It could be that the roles played by various individuals were poorly assigned. Allow people to do what they would most like to do; their effort and imagination will be greater in such a case.

WHEN SOME PARTICIPANTS CAUSE INTERRUPTIONS

- A. One kind of interruption is when a participant has a tendency to cut off the current speaker with a comment of his or her own, or detracts from what the group is doing by leading the conversation to an irrelevant topic. Usually, if you diplomatically point out what is happening, the problem will be remedied. However, if the interruptions are occurring in a fast-paced, emotional discussion, some more definite measures may be needed. Suggesting a minute of silence may be enough to cool things off; so may asking people to talk slowly. A classic technique is to use some object, such as a coin, which is passed from speaker to speaker, and only the person with the object in hand is allowed to speak.
- B. Another sort of interruption is caused by people getting up to go to the bathroom, get a drink of water, etc., which, depending on the circumstances, can be very distracting. Having scheduled breaks in the session will minimize this problem, unless the interruption represents boredom or dissatisfaction.

MISTAKEN EXPECTATIONS – WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN MISREPRESENTED TO THE GROUP, OR THE GROUP TO YOU

A. YOU HAVE BEEN MISREPRESENTED TO THE GROUP:

- We assume that during your negotiations with the group, or its representatives, you will have clarified what your function will be and what the group expects of you, but there is always the possibility of faulty communication somewhere in the procedure. When you get together with a new group one of the first things you should do is explain clearly what you feel your role is and what you plan to do. Hopefully, any misconceptions on the group's part or your own will be cleared up at this point, but not necessarily. False expectations can be remarkably tenacious.



- Try to look for signs of mistaken expectations. Are questions being addressed to you about matters on which you have no expertise? Do people look to you for approval at every step? Are people unduly reluctant to give suggestions or participate? Do participants seem confused or resistant to what you are trying to do? Does it seem that you and the rest of the group are going in different directions? If there are signs that the group is expecting something other than what it is getting you should immediately bring your suspicions into the open so the group can clarify what they thought they were getting into. Hopefully, either the group will be willing to accept something different than what they had expected, or you will be able to modify your own plans, or both.
- B THE GROUP HAS BEEN MISREPRESENTED TO YOU.** After working with a group for a short while, you may become aware that you didn't really know what you were getting into. At this point, you have three options:
- You need more information from the group in order to do a good job of facilitating the rest of the session. The group has, for instance, different problems than the ones you had expected, but you need to know more about these before you plan accordingly. Be open about the situation, since acquiring needed information will require either time out of the agenda, or delaying the meeting until after you can do more homework. Taking time out to gather information does not always have to detract from the meeting's purpose. Sometimes a group can profit in its own understanding by defining itself for an objective outsider.
 - There may be occasions when you don't think you can continue to facilitate or function in the group and must drastically change your role. (For example, you are a committed feminist and had been told you would be working with a "women's group"; and the group turns out to be a committee to lobby against the ERA) In such a situation, it would not be fair to either simply walk out or to pretend that no conflict existed. It would be best to explain your viewpoint and what you can or cannot do with the group. If an accommodation can be reached at all, it will be through an honest discussion.
 - You may decide to say nothing. Sometimes you will be surprised by what you find in a group (e.g., they turn out to be a lot more disorganized and unstructured than you expected), but if you can see for yourself how the group is different from your expectations, there will be little point in taking up group time discussing how and why your preconceptions proved wrong. Simply modify your plans according to the new situation as best as you can. This situation is one you will probably know what to expect of an unfamiliar group until you have actually worked with it.



YOUR MATERIAL IS TOO SIMPLE OR TOO COMPLEX FOR THE GROUP

If what you are saying is too simple for the group, boredom will result. If what you are saying is too complex, you can expect confusion and blank looks. Unfortunately, blank looks and boredom look remarkably alike, so it is not always easy to figure out which problem you are dealing with.

Try to be sensitive to how the group is responding to material you use and be prepared to adapt to their level. Following are some things that will help you to be alert to the group's level of comprehension.

1. Ask before doing an exercise if members of the group have ever done anything similar.
2. Begin a session by asking for some history of the group's previous experience, if for some reason you do not already know this.
3. Stop occasionally and ask if the group understands what you are doing.
4. Define any terms you may use in a specialized sense such as "evaluation" or "group process". Avoid using facilitator jargon.
5. Make sure everyone is following you. Responses from the same few people may mean that the rest of the group is far behind or far ahead.
6. If participants are moving at your speed, you can generally see it in their faces and in their level of participation. Nodding heads, interested expressions, occasional questions or comments, are good signs.
7. The type of question asked is best indicator of what the level of comprehension is. People asking you to repeat what you just said, or questions about the terms you are using are signs that you are on too complex a level. Questions that are surprisingly knowledgeable, showing familiarity with what you are just introducing, or incorporating points or terms which you have not yet used, are signals that you are on too simple a level.
8. If only one person is having difficulty comprehending what is happening, or is puzzling over one particular point when the rest of the group is satisfied (you might check this out with the group to make sure your impression is correct) do not take an excessive amount of time dealing with the one person during group time. Don't callously brush the person off, but suggest that since the rest of the group is ready to move on, the two of you can discuss the subject more during a break or after the meeting.

In the same light, don't leave the rest of the group far behind while you have an exclusive interchange with one or two members of the group whose sophistication in a certain area is ahead of the others. Suggest that you return to a discussion that the whole group can participate in.



SOMEONE "FREAKS OUT"

There are many reasons why a group member might have a sudden, uncontrollable emotional outburst. The individual may feel rejected, anxious about personal problem brought out by a group exercise, or disturbed by something that has been expressed in the group. Unlike other potentially lengthy interruptions which threaten the group, the "freak out" cannot be adroitly sidestepped, contained, or delayed until after the meeting. Since the emotions expressed are strong and important ones, they change the whole atmosphere of the meeting and require immediate recognition and response. Of course the actual problem that causes the outburst (whether it be a serious psychological disturbance or a temporary anxiety) cannot be "solved" on the spot. The immediate need is to deal with the urgent feelings being expressed.

- A. The first thing to remember is to stay calm. If the facilitator is relaxed and in control, but expresses sincere concern, it will go a long way to making the atmosphere in the group that of dealing with one member's urgent emotional expression rather than that of an exciting emergency.
- B. The other members of the group, unless they are threatened or frightened by the outburst, will probably be concerned and will feel sympathy for the person who is freaking out. However they may be too embarrassed or uncomfortable in the situation to express their sympathy and support. Awareness of support from other group members will probably be helpful to the person with the problem during the outburst, and will let him or her feel more comfortable in the group after it is over. Don't openly elicit expression of sympathy from others, since this may cause even more embarrassment or discomfort, but allow room for other people to communicate their concern to the individual with the problem. In other words, you should not take command of the situation and brush others aside. You should respond immediately to the needs of the other person in question, leaving room for others to help too. Sometimes there may be someone in the group, a friend, or someone with an intuitive understanding of the person's needs, who will be able to help better than you. Let them.
- C. This is one situation where your concern will be more with the needs of one individual than with the group as a whole. The group should understand if you step out of your role for a minute and "abandon" them. You may say something like, "My concern right now is with David," and then turn your attention specifically to David.
- D. In speaking to the person who is having the outburst, trust your intuition. How you act toward the person, what you say, or what you don't say will be a spontaneous response to the immediate situation. Basically, don't try to minimize the problem or pretend that it is not serious. Recognize that the person is experiencing intense feelings and be accepting of that. Encourage the person to air all of the most urgent feelings until he or she is able to begin to calm down naturally.
- E. In some instances the subject of the outburst will be a private matter and most of the group will not be involved. In this case, the group should go on with an activity or take a break, if the incident has caused a major disruption in the activity. If the person who is upset wishes to leave the room, see if he or she wants you or another person to come along.



- F. On other occasions, the incident will involve the whole group (such as when the outburst is a product of unresolved conflict in the group, or the individual's feeling rejected by the group). In this case, the individual's feeling rejected by the group to deal with the feelings. The incident may be considered part of the process of the group. Your role will still be to give the person your full attention (or allow another participant to do so, if this seems appropriate) as long as it seems necessary. As the person with the problem begins to calm down, start to involve other members of the group, and encourage members to deal with the incident as a group exercise.
- G. At some point, it will be time to return to the original focus of the meeting. When you judge that it is time to do this, as the person(s) involved if they feel ready to go on. Accept that what has happened has affected the group (i.e., don't act as if nothing happened at all), but don't dwell on it after it is over. Treat the outburst as an intense, but natural venting of feelings and go on from there. (If the group has trouble settling down to business at this point, it may be a good time for a short break.)
- H. If the freaking out is treated as a private matter and dealt with apart from the group, participants may not have dealt with their own reactions to the episode and a short discussion of how the group has been affected may be necessary before going back to business.

SUMMARY

Following are some simple principles that are good to keep in mind in preventing problems or dealing with problems that do occur.

- A. Adequate preparation for a group is the best safeguard against serious problems.
- B. Make sure you know what the group expects of you, and let them know what you expect of the group.
- C. Be flexible in your planning; have alternate sequences of items on your agenda, and substitutions in mind.
- D. Don't be too serious when you confront a problem. A little humor can make the situation much easier to handle.
- E. Make sure you have an understanding with the group: they share the responsibility for the meeting. They are free to criticize and are responsible for letting the facilitator know what is going on and what their reactions are.
- F. Be honest with the group at all times.
- G. Try to anticipate problems you might have. Catching them early has many advantages.



SAMOANS, MATCHSTICKS AND FISHBOWLS

HOW TO GET COLLEAGUES TALKING CONSTRUCTIVELY

Organisation often becomes honest nests of antagonistic colleagues at a loss as to how to discuss conflictual issues openly. Ron Kraybill shares strategies for tackling open discussion of conflicting in group settings.

- **CONFLICT SPECTRUM**

Identify one end of the room for people strongly convinced about one idea, the other end for those strongly convinced of the opposite. Ask everyone to take a position somewhere at or between these two points. Then invite individuals to share why they chose their location. This can be taken further, if desired, by then dividing the spectrum into three groups—the two end plus a middle group. Give each group 20 to prepare a list of strengths and weaknesses of their position, and then report the list of the total group.

The spectrum enables quick and tangible groups disclosure, and reduces anxious guessing about what others may be thinking. Sometimes what looked like a polarising issue actually brings the majority of the group to a middle position on the spectrum. Even when the group is divided across the spectrum, people are invariably able to state why they have chosen a particular spot on the spectrum in a spirit far less antagonistic than if they were to simply engage in open debate.

- **INTERVIEWS**

Select and interview one to three individuals from each perspective in the presence of the entire group. The interviewer must be viewed as trustworthy and should relate warmly to each interviewee, using a friendly, conversational tone, listen carefully and frankly paraphrasing. Begin on a personal note, e.g. "Tell us a little about yourself," or, "Tell me what's being happening to you this week," to establish rapport. Then move to the issue at hand. "How do you personally view these issues?" (Encourage people to speak for themselves.) "Tell us what's has been happening here from your own perspective." The interviewer may wish to list views on newsprint or have assistant do so. When finished, the interviewer may wish to turn to the listening audience and inquire if there are any views not yet heard that someone wishes to add. The interviewer should be firm that any speakers must come forward and be interviewed, which keeps discussions manageable.

- **SAMOAN CIRCLE**

This is said to be a discussion devise used in the Samoan Island in the South Seas. Appoint a team of two people for each of the key perspectives or group involved. These people come forward, sit in a circle or semi-circle and discuss the issue at hand. The circle where these group sit should have enough chairs for themselves, plus two to four additional empty chairs. Anyone in the larger group who wishes to participate may do so by coming forward and taking one of the empty chairs. If those chairs are filled, others who come forward may stand behind one of the extra chairs until it becomes available.



After explaining the approach and getting it going, no further intervention is usually necessary from the facilitator. The key to success in a tense setting, the facilitator stresses that all are welcome to participate, but all communications must occur within the circle. This structure works beautifully in many settings as it provides a clear framework to limit and control discussion, but nevertheless allow anyone in the whole group to speak.

- **SMALL GROUPS DISCUSSION**

OPTION A: Issue clarification in small groups- Participants in large groups are randomly assigned to small groups with diverse members. Small groups are given 15-20 minutes to create a list of the three to five most important issues facing the group. A spokesperson is assigned from each group to report in front of the large group, where the issue are tabulated. This approach can be use when the issue and factions are not yet well-defined

OPTION B: Caucus work-The participants in the large group are assigned to small group Caucus made up of people sharing similar views. One way to assign people to caucus groups is by first using a conflict spectrum, which quickly and easily defined people's viewpoints. Use Caucus when people too timid to speak up in front of those with whom they disagree, or when anger is very high, or when issues are fairly clearly defined. , bur people need to check out things with those they agree with before accepting proposals.

OPTION C: Dialogue in Small Groups -- Here the goal should be stated out to find consensus, but rather to document out diversity or to clarify viewpoints. If tension is high. Each group can be ask to move around the circle and hear each person's views, with no discussion until everyone has spoken. You can also develop a small questionnaire for each person to fill up and then share with others in the group.

- **ROLE REVERSAL PRESENTATIONS**

This can be highly effective in moderate level-conflict if used skilfully , but it is 'techniquey' and should be used with discretion. Someone from each side is ask to spend time with people from the other side and then give a presentation summarising the views of the other side. But sure to give the other side a chance to respond. Ws the presentation of their views accurate? Would they like to spend on it in any way?

- **FISHBOWL**

One group sit in a circle surrounded by a larger circle of listeners. Only people in the small circle may speak. If desired, reverse position so those who were listening get to speak too.



- **TOOLS TO MUZZLE BIG TALKERS**

OPTION A: Ground rules- No one speaks twice before everyone has had a chance to speak once.

OPTION B: Matchsticks- Everyone gets three matchsticks. Overtime they speak they must throw a matchstick into the dustbin. When the matchsticks are gone, no more talking.

OPTION C: High Talk Low Talk- A variation of the fishbowl. People who rate themselves High Talkers sit in the outer circle; those rating themselves low talkers take the inner circle. Discussion is only allowed in the inner circle.

OPTION D: Facilitator frequently says: Lets give first chance to people who haven't spoken yet.

- **PROBLEM SEQUENCE**

Discussion is often much more efficiency and less adversarial if approach in stages. First agree on a list of issues or problems. The work with these one at a time, first creating a list of options and then evaluate each option in terms of its strengths and weaknesses

- **CONSOLIDATING ISSUES**

If the list of issues emerging in discussion is long, facilitators should assist in consolidating issues into a few broad heading and help in selecting which issues are key. One easy way to select key issues is to ask everyone to pick the three issues they see as most important. Go down the consolidated list and ask for a show of hands on each issue. How many people has this as one of their top three issues? Issues with the highest number of votes are the one people most wants to discuss.