

Make it Stick

*Activity Pack*

Advanced Facilitation Skills

**Helping lessons learned in training blend in to become *how we work*.**

**To the Learner Leader…**

This suite of activities has been designed to reinforce the key learning from the **Advanced Facilitation Skills** course. They have been designed to be led by Team Leaders or designated Trainers and do not require training experience, though for best results we recommend that whoever is leading the activities understands the principles of adult learning and has some experience in leading learning activities.

The suite of activities will provide you with up to six months of learning reinforcement. We recommend that an activity is run each month following the Advanced Facilitation Skills course.

When running each activity:

* Ask the group to reflect back on the original course they attended:
* What takeaways they had
* What they have tried to implement
* When revisiting some of these activities for a second time ask them what additional ideas or thoughts they have in applying the concepts and tools in the activities to their job

Each activity will take 10-15 minutes to run depending on the size of the group.

There is one Activity to a page. Each Activity has a brief introduction followed by instructions for the Trainer.

We suggest the following to optimise your learning experience:

* Have the group meet away from their normal workspace
* Make sure mobile devices are switched off so that everyone fully engages
* Make the environment ‘safe’ and encourage everyone to contribute
* Run these activities with everyone standing – try running these outdoors in the fresh air
* Have other team members take the lead and run an activity – this will build confidence and leadership skills
* Don’t be afraid to improvise – the learning needs to be about you and your group so make it meaningful
* When debriefing an activity get the group to reflect on what the activity means for them and what they will do differently or continue to do that underscores the learning points from the activity

**Activities in this pack**

1. Divergent thinking
2. Paradigm shifting
3. Critical reasoning
4. Intervening
5. Countering groupthink
6. Convergent thinking

**Activity 1: Divergent thinking**

**Introduction**

* Facilitation uses a number of techniques to open up the thinking of participants. Here are some common techniques:
* Brainstorming – to rapidly generate a list of ideas
* Small group work – groups discuss and generate thoughts and ideas that extend or build upon an existing idea
* Individual writing – where individuals expand on a topic or idea using their own opinions/thoughts – it is an expression of their own world view
* Gap analysis – where individuals or small groups generate ideas on bridging the gap between current and desired or future state

**Instructions**

Ask the group to bring with them issues they have struggled to explore via facilitation or issues that they feel will be difficult to explore with future groups.

Firstly ask the group to explore how they would apply divergent thinking techniques to the following situations:

* A company has suffered financially and is contemplating making 300 positions redundant. You reach an impasse in a facilitated session where the group feels the only solution to their predicament is to lay off staff.
* A company is looking to expand into new international markets. You are working with the marketing team to determine which products might be better suited to these markets. Many in the team have strong and diverse views about which products would perform better.
* The executive team have come up with a shortlist of ideas on how to merge two parts of their business and need to explore their feasibility in more detail

Now ask participants to raise their own issues and ask the group to provide input into how divergent thinking practices could be applied. Also ask the group to explore any challenges they have faced with divergent thinking.

**Debrief**

Things to explore with techniques include:

* Clarity of instructions
* Pace
* Engagement
* Encouragement of ideas
* Capturing ideas verbatim

**Activity 2: Paradigm Shifting**

**Introduction**

Paradigm Shifting is designed to shift the group’s thinking to consider alternative perspectives by changing the frame of reference. Techniques include:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What’s Unchangeable | 1. Write up the problem/issue for all to see  2. Ask the group to respond with everything that is unchangeable about the problem and record these on a flip chart  3. Ask the group to look at each item and identify the assumptions and biases they may contain  4. Have a discussion with the group about these, then revisit the list and see which of the items may be changeable after all |
| Key Words | 1. A statement describing the problem is displayed for all to see. For example, “We can’t spend money on a system upgrade as we need to expand our physical footprint to accommodate more staff”  2. Ask the group to identify and underline key words in the statement: “We can’t spend money on a system upgrade as we need to expand our physical footprint to accommodate more staff”  3. Focusing on each underlined word or phrase at a time ask the group what questions the word/phrase raises and what assumptions can be challenged |
| Reversing Assumptions | 1. Have participants list assumption about the cause of the problem or connections between parts of the problem  2. Using an assumption selected by a participant, reverse it and brainstorm ideas about how to achieve it. For example, ‘We don’t have the funds” reverses to “We do have the funds”  3. Continue until you have reviewed the key assumptions. Include the promising ideas when generating the solution to the problem |

**Instructions**

For this activity you will need sheets of flip chart paper and markers.

In the highlands of New Guinea, an impoverished indigenous tribe have been approached by a timber company who has offered a lump sum to the tribe in return for rights to clear fell the forest and extract the hardwood timber. Many members of the tribe were in favour of the proposal as the hardwood trees were the only marketable commodity they owned, and they needed the timber company to act on their behalf if they were to make any money from the deal. They could put the money to good use. Local environmentalists heard of the offer and were alarmed as they believed the deal would irreversibly destroy the forest and the tribe’s way of life. The environmentalist group has legal authority to stop the proposal going ahead if they so choose.

Get participants to use each of the paradigm shifting techniques above to explore the dominant paradigms of each group.

**Activity 3: Critical Reasoning**

**Introduction**

Critical reasoning is used by the facilitator and applied to good ideas the group develops to test the validity and robustness of the ideas. The following activities can be applied depending on the nature of the idea and the degree to which potential issues have been explored.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Clarifying evaluation criteria | 1. Firstly, get the group to brainstorm a list of answers to the question ‘What are we trying to solve?’  2. On another sheet use each of the answers from before to develop a selection criterion  3. Break the group into smaller group that discuss the merits of the criteria presented  4. Undertake a voting activity where group members vote for their five most important criteria  5. Tally the result and prioritise the top five criteria |
| Benefits and risks | 1. Use two sheets of paper – ‘Benefits’ and ‘Risks’  2. Group to list the benefits of the proposal on one sheet  3. Group to list risks associated with proposal on second sheet  4. Title a third sheet ‘Ways to reduce risks’. Ask group how risks can be reduced  5. Group decides if the proposal is still a valid option now that the benefits and risks have been discussed. |
| Will this really work? | 1. Group considers the proposal under discussion  2. Group lists the major tasks required to implement the proposal  3. Assign a few people to each task to analyse how the task can be done – is it possible? Considerations are time, resources and costs  4. Group reconvenes and each group working on a task reports on their findings  5. Group overall decides if the proposal still has merit |

**Instructions**

You will need sheets of flip chart paper and markers for this activity and a room to meet in.

Part 1

The group needs to clarify evaluation criteria for the following problem:

“The air quality in the room needs to be improved.”

Part 2

The group applies the “Benefits and Risks” technique to the following proposal to improve air quality

“Remove all windows and doors from the room”

Part 3

The group applies the “Will this really work?” technique to the following proposal to improve air quality

“Remove all windows and doors from the room”

**Debrief**

How do participants see themselves applying these techniques?

**Activity 4: Intervening**

**Introduction**

Intervention by the facilitator is equivalent to holding up a mirror to the participants so they can understand what they are doing and then take steps to correct the problem. The words that you use when intervening are important. Use words that do not put the person down or sound critical. Use the following strategy

* Describe what you are seeing and hearing
* Explain how the behaviour you are witnessing is impacting you (as the facilitator), the process and other people
* Redirect the behaviour
  + Ask what the members can do to ensure the behaviour doesn’t recur (preferred option)
  + If that doesn’t elicit a response make a suggestion
  + If that doesn’t elicit a response be more directive – tell.

**Instructions**

Ask the group to consider what emotions are at play and what they would say then get them to practice saying the words.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Scenario** | **What emotions are at play?** | **Write down what you would say?** |
| George has spent the entire session making barbed comments to the people next to him whenever Julian speaks. Julian is George’s boss. | Spite, hostility, insecure, irritation, anger. | “George, I am going to stop you saying anything further to your colleagues for the moment and ask Julian how he would like you to interact with him for the remainder of the meeting.” |
| An argument over a matter that is outside the scope of the discussion has broken out between Damien and Sue. It keeps being dragged back into the conversation when either of the two people concerned speaks. | Aggression, annoyance (of other members) | “Damien and Sue, I can sense that this matter is important to you both, however it is not part of our discussion. How do suggest we deal with your matter so that it doesn’t impact the rest of the discussion?” |
| Raoul will be having his land resumed as part of a compulsory acquisition by the government. Whenever Raoul speaks he is unable to get his words out without succumbing to his emotions. He is attending the meeting with other members of his family. | Fear, sadness, distrust, powerlessness. | “Raoul, I can see that this debate is affecting you. I can see that you have other members of your family with you. Would you like us to take a short break so that you and your family can discuss who might be best to speak on behalf of your group?” |
| The meeting is being held on the anniversary of the death of several workers who were killed in a plane crash two years ago. The tone of the meeting is very subdued and try as you may you have not been able to get the group to focus. | Grief, sadness. | “I understand that the meeting today falls on the anniversary of the death of your colleagues, many of who you knew personally. I suggest that we stop the meeting to honour them, that we then proceed to do that and that we then restart the meeting after that.” |
| The front-line staff at the meeting are resenting the fact that their opinions have not been listened to until now and believe they were only invited for the executive team to save face in front of the board. | Rage, disgust, distrust. | “I understand that some people are feeling resentful about attending this meeting today. What I would like to understand from you is how we acknowledge those feelings and continue to hold the meeting and focus on the intent of why we are meeting. Does anyone have a suggestion?” |

**Activity 5: Countering Groupthink**

**Introduction**

Groupthink is a mode of thinking that people engage in when ‘agreement seeking’ becomes so dominant in a cohesive in-group that it blinds the group to alternative courses of action. Groupthink can have cultural roots:

* Respect for authority – not cause the leader to lose face
* Conformance – not stand out in a crowd
* Reticence – do not say what you are thinking as it may appear impolite
* Collaborative – do not want to be viewed as uncooperative

Facilitators need to be conscious of groupthink behaviour and call it out when it occurs

**Instructions**

Ask the group how they would respond to each of the following scenarios in the left hand column.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Situation** | **Possible response** |
| You have been advised prior to the meeting that the leader’s view will determine the decision the group takes and that members will only express views that support the leader’s view. | Ask the key stakeholders and the meeting organiser if they will be happy with a meeting where the views of others are not tolerated. Ask why an external facilitator is needed at all. Depending on the response this may be a contract that the facilitator walks away from on ethical grounds. |
| As the session progresses you notice that people are changing their minds on positions they had previously held and have not offered an explanation of why they have changed their minds. | Review the group norms established at the start of the session – are members still being true to what was agreed? Challenge people who are changing their minds without full disclosure – ask the group if they are happy to proceed without full disclosure. Explain to the group what is required for a good sustainable decision to be made. |
| The group has admitted that they are under a lot of pressure to make a decision a certain way as the outcome will determine the future financial viability of a contract. As an outsider you think the decision being made is disastrous as it will only serve them well in the immediate future after which time it will start to have severe negative effects. You have put this to the group and they have universally rejected it. | Restate your reasons why you believe the group is making the wrong decision. Reiterate your role as facilitator and that their decision is their choice and their commitment. Continue to move through the meeting process. |

**Activity 6: Convergent Thinking**

**Introduction**

Convergent thinking represents the clarification of ideas in a facilitation session. It distils all the input from divergent thinking into a form or output that either aids decision making or becomes the decision that is made..

**Instructions**

For this activity you will need a wall or whiteboard on which participants can place sticky notes, several packets of sticky notes.

Provide the following list of statements about television that were generated through a brainstorming activity:

Almost everyone has a TV today

Mobile devices are taking over from TV

Too many channels

Entertainment

Informs people with news

Reality TV

Smart TVs

Violence

Unrealistic programs

Millions of people watch TV

Waste of time

Football

Flat screen

Advertising

Educational

Tennis

Most households have more than one TV

Pay TV is taking over

Romantic stories

Makes me lazy

Average person spends 3 hours a day watching TV

Golf

Insults people’s intelligence

TV on my refrigerator

High resolution

Can watch past programs

Millennials don’t watch as much

Too much choice

* Transfer ideas onto sticky notes
* Place all sticky notes in an accessible area with enough space for then to be moved/grouped. A large whiteboard or wall area is fine for this purpose
* In turn, or a few people at a time place the sticky notes in groupings based on how they feel the ideas relate to each other
* Continue the process until everyone has had sufficient time considering the groupings and moving ideas between groupings if they so desire
* The group then decides on a heading or theme for each grouping

Debrief

* How do participants use convergent thinking techniques in their facilitation?
* What has worked and what has not worked – And why?