

Make it Stick

*Activity Pack*

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 **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 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. Asking ‘starting’ questions
2. Creative reframing
3. Encouraging participation
4. Dealing with challenges
5. Facilitating virtually
6. Six Thinking Hats

**Activity 1: Asking Starting Questions**

**Introduction**

The opening question of a facilitation session can set the tone for the rest of the session. If necessary, write it down (verbatim) so that you can refer to it. The trick in asking an opening question is to paint a picture for the person or the group to whom the question is addressed. Compare the following:

Question 1

What would be the main steps involved in recruiting in your company once these budget cuts come into effect?

Question 2

Imagine that you are recruiting a new person into your company from the initial posting of the job through to the interview process and the induction or onboarding of the new person. Now visualise all the tools and the network of people that you need to use to get the recruitment done. Now overlay this vision with the idea that some of those tools and resources may not be there for you next time you recruit and think how you will still be able to get the job done. What would these steps look like now?

**Instructions**

Ask each participant to bring with them a facilitation topic and before coming to the session have them write their opening question for the group.

At the start of this activity go through the two different question types above and discuss the merits of the different approach.

Now ask each participant to re-evaluate their opening question and rewrite it more descriptively.

Then ask each participant in turn to state their topic and read out the two versions of their starting question.

Finish off the activity discussing the importance of pre-planning what you are going to say so that you have a more engaging session.

**Activity 2: Creative Reframing**

**Introduction**

Creative reframing involves challenging beliefs and assumptions. It works particularly well when there are polar views in a group based on a different understanding of an underlying belief or assumption. The facilitator’s role is to get the group to imagine the reframed view and tease out its merits. Here is a list of examples:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Perceived Problem** | **Reframed Problem** |
| Its them | It’s all of us |
| It’s a problem | It’s an opportunity |
| Our goal is unachievable | We don’t have our goal broken into realistic steps |
| Our product won’t sell | We are selling our product to the wrong people |
| We don’t have enough resources | We are wasting the resources we have |
| We need to gather more input | We need to pay more attention to the input we are already getting |
| Our employees are incompetent | Our employees don’t have enough time to do a quality job |
| We don’t have enough money | We haven’t figured out how to find new sources of funding |

**Instructions**

Ask people to bring along an intractable problem or major facilitation impasse they have experienced.

Work through the list in the Introduction with the group. Ask them to reflect on the merits of reframing their thinking.

**Option 1**

Consider the following scenario:

The executive management team in the company you work for has announced that unless productivity improves and the cost of the widgets your company produces comes down by 40% within the next 12 months the company will need to close. The group can decide the following:

* What ‘widgets’ the company makes
* What the current cost is
* How the widgets are currently marketed and sold
* What the current state of the market looks like

The group then applies the reframing technique to different aspects of the problem as perceived by the group.

**Option 2**

Take any of the intractable problems that participants brought with them and use the reframing techniques to challenge the dominant thinking.

**Activity 3: Encouraging Participation**

**Introduction**

The following techniques (adapted from Kaner 2007) encourage understanding and participation among group members.

**Paraphrasing** – restating the speaker’s words back to them in summary form if necessary. Repetition reinforces the point for other listeners and indicates to the speaker that you have understood her/him.

* “Let me see if I have understood you correctly…”

**Drawing out the point** – which is encouraging a speaker to add to/clarify a point particularly when the point being made is vague, incomplete, confusing or off track

* “Could you please explain a little more of what you mean…”

**Mirroring** – a formal type of paraphrasing that repeats verbatim what the speaker says. It can build trust and demonstrate the neutrality of the facilitator.

* “Let me repeat what you want me to record here …”

**Encouraging** – build on what has been said to encourage further ideas and discussion

* “What else haven’t we explored here yet?”

**Balancing** – capturing alternative views

* “Does everyone agree with this perspective…?”

**Acknowledge feelings** – showing empathy is a powerful way to build understanding and free people to talk.)

* “It sounds as if you are worried where this might be heading. Am I right?”

**Linking** – link ideas and statements to previous ideas and statements. This helps to maintain focus and relevance. Paraphrase then ask the speaker to link it to the topic.

* “How does your comment link to what we are discussing? Can you help us make the connection?”

**Instructions**

You can use one or more topics of conversation. Have a facilitator baton that each participant holds for two minutes. They are to facilitate the group’s conversation and use one or more of the above engagement techniques to keep the conversation moving. They then hand the ‘facilitator’ baton to a new member of the group who then facilitates for two minutes, and so on.

Suggested topics:

* A vegan diet is inevitable
* Politicians should be forced to retire after five years
* We have become enslaved to technology

**Activity 4: Dealing with Challenges**

**Introduction**

There are numerous challenges that may arise when facilitating a group.

**Instructions**

For each of the challenges listed below (left hand column to be read out in turn) ask the group what would be the wrong way and then the right way to deal with each challenge.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **The Challenge** | **The wrong way to deal with it** | **The better way to deal with it** |
| Domination by a group member | “Excuse me, Mr. Q, do you mind if I let someone else take a turn?”  Or, even worse, “Excuse me, Ms. Q, but you’re taking up a lot of the group’s time…” | When one or two people are over-participating, everyone else is under-participation g. So, focus your efforts on the passive majority. Encourage them to participate more. Trying to change the dominant participants just sends even more attention their way. |
| One or more people are distracting the group with immature antics | Try to “organize” people by getting into a power struggle with them. Raise your voice if necessary. Single out the individuals who seem to be the ringleaders. | Often a break is the best response. People become undisciplined when they are overloaded or worn out. After a breather, they will be much better able to focus.  Alternatively, ask for advice: “Is there something we ought to be doing differently?” |
| Low participation by the entire group | Assume that silence means consent. Don’t ask whether everyone understands the key issues an d agrees with what’s being said. (That just wastes time unnecessarily.)  Praise the group for all the work that’s getting done, in the hope that flattery will motivate more people to participate. | Always be suspicious of low participation. Dependency, anger, or fear are often factors in play. The group, however, may not want to surface those feelings. If not, shift from open discussion to a format that lowers the anxiety level. Work in small groups, or build a list, or try a highly structured activity. |
| Two people engaged in an argument | Put the focus exclusively on the interaction between the two disputing parties, as though no one else in the room has an opinion on the issue at hand.  Or, treat the two like children. “Come on, you two, can ’t you get along?” | Reach out to others: “Who else has an opinion on this issue?” or “Are there an y other issues that need to be discussed before we go too much further with this one?”  Remember: When the majority is passive, focus your attention on them, not on the over-active few. |
| A silent member not participating | “Mr. Z, you haven ’t talked much today. Is there anything you’d like to add?” This may work when a shy member has nonverbally indicated a wish to speak. But all too often, the quiet person feels put on the spot an d with draws further. | “I’d like to get opinions from those who haven ’t talked for a while.”  Breaking into small groups works even better, allowing shy members to speak up without being pressed to compete for airtime. |
| Quibbling about trivial procedures | Lecture the group about wasting time and “spinning our wheels.”  Space out, doodle, and think to yourself, “It’s their fault we’re not getting anything done.” | Have the group step back from the content of the issue and talk about the process. Ask the group, “What is really going on here?” |
| A member becomes strident and repetitive | At lunch, talk behind the person’s back. Tell the person-in-charge that s/he must take more control.  Confront the person during a break. When the meeting resumes, raise your eyebrows or shake your head whenever s/he misbehaves. | People repeat themselves because they don’t feel heard. Summarize the person’s point of view until s/he feels understood.  Encourage participants to state the views of group members whose views are different from their own. |

**Activity 5: Facilitating Virtually**

**Introduction**

Virtual meetings are becoming commonplace as the way business is conducted and advances in technology change. Increasingly people are not in the same place at the same time when a meeting is to be held. This can be due to more people working from home, hot-desking, decentralised work places, flexibility in work hours, business being transacted on global scales where staff are scattered across several countries. Technological improvements mean videoconference meetings can be run in real time with little interference. The challenge for the facilitator is how to effectively facilitate in a virtual world and still achieve a quality result.

**Instructions**

Discuss with participants how they would perform the following facilitator activities when facilitating virtually:

* Run a brain storming activity
* Record the conversation of the session
* Vote to rank alternative options
* Have an inclusive conversation
* Run De Bono’s six thinking hats
* Encourage participation
* Deal with challenging behaviour
* Deal with a situation when you are virtual and the group you are facilitating are together in person.
* Maintaining engagement

Debrief

* What experience have the group facilitating virtually?
* What have they found has worked well for them?
* What have been some of the challenges they have had to deal with? (in addition to those that have been discussed previously)

**Activity 6: Six Thinking Hats**

**Introduction**

Edward De Bono (1985) developed a technique for expanded or lateral thinking – Six Thinking Hats. The technique is particularly useful in grappling with an issue or decision making as it allows the group members to consider their issue from different perspectives.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Hat | Perspective | Focus |
| White | Neutrality | Focus on facts available. No assumptions or judgements. |
| Black | Negative | Focus on flaws, weaknesses and cons. Negative judgements. |
| Yellow | Positive | Focus on benefits and opportunities. Positive judgements. |
| Red | Feeling / Emotion | Focus on instinctive or ‘gut’ reaction. No justification given. |
| Green | Creative | Focus on alternatives and possibilities. Provocation of ideas. |
| Blue | Process Control | Focus on how the above process is progressing. Typically carried out by facilitator. Concerned with the process as opposed to the outcome. |

The hats are applied in the following sequence:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | Sequence |
| Identifying Options | Blue, White, Black, Green, Blue |
| Option Selection | Blue, White, Yellow, Black, Red, Blue |
| Planning | Blue, Yellow, Black, White, Blue, Green, Blue |
| Problem Solving | Blue, White, Green, Red, Yellow, Black, Green, Blue |

**Instructions**

This activity will work best if you have six different coloured hats for people to wear.

Assign a De Bono hat to six participants. The blue hat (facilitator) is to run the session. Attempt to run as many sessions as possible so that each participant has the opportunity to wear the blue hat. Suggested scenarios are:

* Planning – planning an event
* Problem solving – who should be in the pool of people to have their work hours reduced because of budget cuts?
* Identifying options – where should the workplace hold their Christmas party?
* Option selection - who is best placed to assume the CEO role in the company?