

Facilitation Techniques Examples

Avoiding Groupthink

Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people in which people strive for consensus within a group. In many cases, people will set aside their own personal beliefs or adopt the opinion of the rest of the group. People who are opposed to the decisions or overriding opinion of the group as a whole frequently remain quiet, preferring to keep the peace rather than disrupt the uniformity of the crowd. The typical symptoms of groupthink are:

- Group cohesiveness is viewed as more important than individual freedom of expression
- The group operates in an insulated atmosphere
- Group leaders demonstrate impartial behavior
- There is no standard method in place for evaluating ideas and decisions
- Members' social backgrounds and ideology are homogenous
- The group is under a lot of stress to perform
- The group has experienced recent failures
- There is excessive difficulty placed on the task of making a decision, such as a moral dilemma

Irving Janis, a social psychologist credited as the first to develop the idea, developed eight steps for avoiding groupthink:

1. Require everyone in the group to evaluate ideas critically
 - a. Asking the group to take a quiet moment to jot down both pros and cons of ideas that have been submitted before they are discussed
2. The leader of the group should not express their opinion
 - a. Leaders have a big influence on others and timid employees will think twice before dissenting with the leader's opinion or submitting an idea that is better
3. The group leader should consider being a no-show
 - a. Body language is nearly impossible to hide and often leadership doesn't have to say anything for people in the group to know how they feel about a topic
4. Consider a team approach if the group is large
 - a. Consider randomly dividing folks into smaller groups to work on the same problem
5. Thoroughly examine all alternatives
6. Get an outsider's perspective
 - a. Assign each member a task of getting an outsider's opinion
7. Consult an outside expert
 - a. If a project or solution has components that run outside the expertise of the group, consider inviting an outside expert to a meeting to participate in the discussion of the group's proposed solutions
8. Select one person at random to be the devil's advocate at each meeting
 - a. Once meeting attendees are all present, draw straws to see who will serve as the devil's advocate for the meeting
 - b. The person who is chosen will be charged with "thinking like an enemy" and countering all popular ideas and opinions in the meeting in order to encourage healthy debate and test the strength of opposing arguments

References:

Avoiding groupthink: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_82.htm

8 simple steps to avoid groupthink in meetings: <https://highfive.com/blog/8-steps-to-avoid-groupthink>

How to recognize and avoid groupthink: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-groupthink-2795213>

Facilitating Brainstorming and Prioritizing Issues for Consensus and Decision Making

Brainstorming is a way to generate ideas within a group setting. It is usually used in the beginning stages of a project, where the possibilities for the project are not clearly understood or defined.

Seven tips for successful brainstorming sessions:

1. Keep it short
2. Keep it small
3. Clarify the problem to solve
4. Set a clear agenda
5. Have the group prepare individually
6. Facilitate the meeting
7. Consider alternatives to a meeting

Testing for consensus and prioritization is often done at the close of the meeting, there are several useful techniques that can be used to determine if the group has reached a consensus:

- Ordering – Simply placing the ideas in priority order on the board is a good quick way to agree on importance – a variation is to have the group do this in silence at first, to identify debate-worthy areas
- Dot voting – quick technique using scarcity to clarify personal commitment
- Impact/Effort Matrix – timeless sorting method for short /medium/long term plans
- Thumb vote – powerfully simple indication of agreement: Thumbs up indicate agreement and support for the goal; Sideways indicates neither agree nor disagree and will vote with whatever the group chooses; Down indicates that the individual doesn't support the goal

References:

How to organize a successful brainstorming session: <https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/business-strategy-planning/innovate/pages/how-to-organize-successful-brainstorming-session.aspx>

How to run a brainstorming meeting: <https://www.lucidchart.com/blog/how-to-run-a-brainstorming-meeting>

Facilitation Toolkit Activities for Closing: <https://facilitatingagility.com/2012/06/17/facilitation-toolkit-activities-for-closing/>

How to Facilitate Prioritization and Build Consensus Quickly: <https://mgrush.com/blog/facilitate-prioritization-moscow/>

Facilitating Opening and Closing of the Meeting

A strong opening will get meeting participants engaged from the start, which leads to better and more productive meetings. Suggestions for a productive start include:

- Start the meeting with a fun icebreaker

- Tell a story or share an insightful quote
- Make the purpose of the meeting clear
- Be specific about the purpose of each agenda item
- Reiterate the ground rules and meeting norms
- Head off bad behavior

Without an effective closure process, participants may end up confused and frustrated because they are not able to say what is on their minds. This may cause negative effects to the participants and ultimately, to the outcome of the agenda. Four tips to ensure an effective close to the meeting:

1. Add the meeting's closure to the agenda – allot the final five minutes of the meeting for the meeting close
2. Quickly run through the outcomes and acknowledge if the desired outcomes have been achieved – get commitment for the tasks assigned and target dates for completion
3. Encourage everyone to communicate and use open-ended questions including, "Is there anything you want to add before we conclude the meeting?"
4. Take note of the key takeaways

References:

Leading Meetings Effectively – How to Start and End a Meeting: <https://www.getminute.com/leading-meetings-effectively/>

4 Effective Ways to Close a Meeting: <https://www.andmeetings.com/blog/post/4-effective-ways-to-close-a-meeting>

7 Ways to End Every Meeting on a Positive Note: <https://www.inc.com/peter-economy/7-effortless-ways-to-end-every-meeting-on-a-positive-note.html>

6 Things You'll Hear in an Unprepared Meeting
<https://managementhelp.org/blogs/facilitation/2014/02/04/6-things-youll-hear-in-an-unprepared-meeting/>

Using a Chat Waterfall During a Virtual Meeting

The goals of a chat waterfall during a virtual meeting include surfacing the wisdom and expertise of the group and advancing collective understanding.

Instructions:

- Split the group in half. For example, by first letter of their last name: A-M is Group 1, N-Z is Group 2.
- Prompt Group 1 to type into the chat box without yet hitting "enter" in response to the prompt. (e.g. what's one idea you have as a potential solution to this challenge?).
- Once you've given them time to type, have them hit enter all at the same time ("on the count of 3."). This creates the waterfall effect in chat where everyone's responses come in at the same time.
- Everyone then has time to read everything that Group 1 wrote, before the facilitator instructs them to write responses (in the instance of ideas, these responses can be "yes and-ing" things that Group 1 wrote), and then has them hit "enter" at the same time. Everyone then has time to read everything Group 2 wrote.
- Switch roles.

References:

Chat Waterfall <https://www.sessionlab.com/methods/chat-waterfall>

Facilitating Meeting Discussion

Tips for leading effective discussions:

1. Create an inclusive environment for the meeting participants
2. Keep the discussion constructive and positive
3. Encourage participation

The “Round robin” option is a technique for generating and developing ideas in a group brainstorming setting. It relies on an iterative process building off consecutive contributions by each participant. The advantage of a round robin session is that it encourages contributions from all participants, even those who typically remain silent. The basic structure of a round robin session:

- Start with a central theme, question, or issue which the facilitator identifies for discussion
- Arrange the participants in a circle or around a conference table
- Participants begin by considering the question
- One participant is selected to lead off the process by offering a single thought or reaction
- The other participants remain quiet during his or her answer
- Once this first participant is finished contributing, the participant sitting directly to his or her right contributes an additional point, idea, or thought
- Working clockwise around the circle, each participant either speaks or writes a single idea - ideally one which has not yet been mentioned - until a full circle has been completed or the time reserved for the exercise has passed
- During this period, the facilitator records insights and central points raised
- The session then concludes with a group discussion

References:

Facilitating Meetings: A Short Guide (Seeds for Change):

<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/shortfacilitation>

Tips on Facilitating Effective Group Discussions: <https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/teaching-learning-resources/teaching-resources/classroom-practices/learning-contexts/discussions/tips>

Round Robin Brainstorming: <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/round-robin-brainstorming.htm>