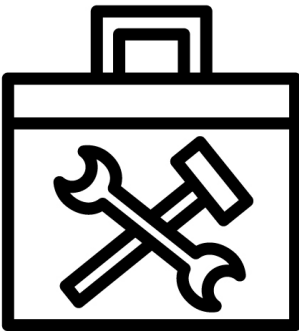


**Seeds for
Change**
In-depth guide



Facilitation tools for meetings and workshops

A compilation of tools and techniques for working in groups and facilitating meetings or workshops.

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Introduction

This is a compilation of tools and techniques that we have found useful for participatory meetings and workshops. We've categorised the tools, but many of them can also be useful in other contexts. Don't be bound by our categories! You might also find it helpful to read our guides on Facilitating Workshops and Facilitating Meetings.

Using a variety of techniques will help a much wider range of people engage fully in your workshop or meeting. We all vary in things like how we take in information most easily, whether we prefer to speak in large groups or small ones, whether we need to move our bodies for our minds to stay active, how much reflection time we need to make up our minds on a topic... Building in a range of different activities will enable more people to stay involved.

At the same time, it is important to remember that not every activity will be accessible to every individual or group. Wherever possible, ask people to give you information in advance about their access requirements. Ask people to be specific about how to make things work for them, rather than you making assumptions. Try to choose tools where everyone will at least have a choice about whether to participate.

Exactly how you set a tool up will make a difference. For example, providing chairs and tables for small group work is likely to work for more people, compared to sitting on the floor!

Even if everyone *could* take part in all the activities you've planned, be aware that not everyone will necessarily want to! Give people a rough idea of what a tool will entail so they can decide how / whether to join in. For example, you could let people know that a game involves some physical contact, or lots of moving around. If people are having personal conversations in pairs, tell them in advance what kind of feedback you will be expecting in the larger group. You could also share *why* you think a particular tool will be helpful, to help people engage.

Core facilitation tools

This is an overview of tools you'll come back to time and time again.

Group agreement

5 minutes - 1 hour to set up; any number of people

It can be useful to start your meeting or workshop by negotiating a group agreement. The aim of the group agreement is to create a safe and respectful space in which people can work together productively.

Essentially a group agreement is a set of statements that set the tone for how people will behave within the meeting or workshop. It might include: “try to understand where everyone is coming from, even when you disagree”; “allow everyone opportunity to speak”; “confidentiality”; “mobile phones switched off, or on silent”. The key thing about a group agreement is given away by its name – it only works as an effective facilitation tool if it's agreed by the group. Agreements can be proposed to the group, but not imposed.

For more information and various ways to apply this tool, take a look at our guide *Group Agreements for Workshops and Meetings*.

Active agreement is a useful addition to any group agreement. Essentially it's an agreement that the group will actively signal their opinion on any given issue. This allows you to ask the group questions knowing you'll get a definite



answer. So for example, you might feel that group energy is low and ask the group if they need a break or are happy to carry on with the next activity or agenda item. If they simply stare at their feet what do you do? Active agreement avoids this. Silent applause (see *Hand-signals* below) can be a useful way of showing active agreement.

Hand-signals

Hand-signals are a technique that can make workshops and meetings run more smoothly and help the facilitator see emerging agreements and common ground. The basic concept is that people use different gestures or shapes with their hands, to communicate some basic ideas in a non-verbal way (e.g. "I want to speak", "I agree", "I don't understand" etc.)

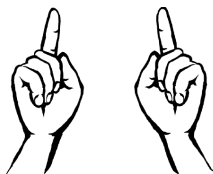
It is important to explain any hand-signals you are using clearly. This makes it less intimidating for someone who's turned up new, and doesn't understand what's going on! It also prevents misunderstandings if people are using the same signal to mean different things.

We prefer to stick to as few hand-signals as possible to limit confusion. Be aware that some hand-signals can be disempowering. For example, some groups use gestures to mean 'I disagree' or 'You've been speaking too long'. Situations vary, but in general, it is more helpful to communicate these messages in words.

We find a few simple signals usually suffice:

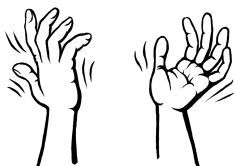


Raise a forefinger when you wish to contribute to the discussion with a general point.



Raise both forefingers if your point is a direct response to a point that's just been made or a question that's just been asked. This allows you to jump to the head of the queue, in front of all those

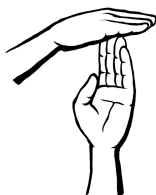
people raising just one finger. For example, if the group is discussing which train to catch, it could be helpful to jump the queue to tell people that the trains are on strike, and you will need to catch the bus. NB: This option can easily be over-used if people don't fully understand how it is different from raising a single hand.



Silent applause - when you hear an opinion that you agree with, wave a hand with your fingers pointing upwards (this saves a lot of time as people don't need to chip in to say "I'd just like to add that I agree with...").



Language - Make an L shape with your thumb and forefinger to request translation, or to ask someone to use simpler language. This can be especially helpful in any multi-lingual group. Some groups use 'C' for 'clarification' in a similar way.



Technical point - Make a T shape using both hands. We've seen this used in a variety of ways by different groups, so always check you have a shared understanding. One use of 'technical point' is to interrupt the discussion with urgent factual information not related to the meeting (e.g. 'Lunch is ready', 'Can someone help me set up the tea urn for the break.'). Another is to jump the queue with a facilitation suggestion, e.g. 'Can we break into small groups for this conversation?'

Take a look at our guide to *Hand Signals* for more examples.

Ideastorms

10 – 30 minutes; 5 – 15 people

A tool for sparking creative thinking and helping to quickly gather a large number of ideas. Begin by stating the issue to be ideastormed. Ask people to call out all their ideas as fast as possible – without censoring them. Impractical ideas are welcome – they can spark more possibilities.

Have one or two notetakers to write all ideas down where everyone can see them. Make sure there is no discussion or comment on others' ideas. Structured thinking and organising can come afterwards.

A variation ...

A roving ideastorm increases the level of participation and gets the group physically moving (if they want to). It also allows you to think of ideas around several different, but related, issues at once. In a roving ideastorm small groups each start at a different 'station' (a tabletop or wall space with a sheet of flipchart paper on it) and have a short ideastorm on that station's topic. You call time and they then move round the other stations ideastorming as they go. (If space is limited, or moving round the room won't work for everyone, the groups can stay stationed at their own tables, and you can move the papers round to them). A short, well enforced time limit will keep the small groups moving from station to station and make this a dynamic experience.

So, for example, in a meeting skills workshop you might want to get some ideas on tools to encourage everyone to participate. One station might be labelled 'reflective thinkers', the next 'shy and quiet people', a third 'power imbalances' and so on.



This format allows the group to share their knowledge and creativity with no 'top down' input from you and no need for a feedback session at the end of the exercise.

A few hints and tips...

- ✓ As people move on to a new topic, they will need to be able to read the ideas of the previous small groups. Make sure groups summarise their ideas intelligibly, and write them clearly.
- ✓ The new group just adds extra ideas other groups didn't think of. This means that they have less work to do as they progress, because most of the ideas will already have been thought of. You can reflect this in the time limits you set. You might give them six minutes on the first topic, five at the second, four at the third, three at the fourth etc.
- ✓ At the end, allow time for the groups to see what has been added to each paper since they wrote on it.

Small groups

Time dependent on task; 3 – 15 people per group

There are many reasons why you may want to split into smaller groups. Large groups can sometimes become dominated by a few people or ideas, stifling creativity and the contributions of others. By contrast, smaller groups allow time for everyone to speak and to feel involved and can be a lot less intimidating. This can increase the energy in the room because more people are more actively involved. It can also make it possible to discuss emotionally charged issues that would be difficult in a large group. The final advantage is efficiency – many topics can be discussed more effectively in a smaller group – for example the details of a newsletter's layout. Similarly, you can cover several different topics at once – with each group taking on one topic or task.

Think about the sort of group you need – a random split (e.g. numbering off) or groups of people with particular experience or skills or with energy for the topic? Explain clearly what you want groups to do. Write specific questions or topics on flipchart paper or a whiteboard beforehand. If you

are going to have feedback at the end, you need to say clearly what they need to feedback and ask them to ensure someone from each group is ready to give the feedback. Giving time for the group to agree on points to feed back helps ensure everyone's views will be represented. Sometimes it is important to hear a full account of each group's discussion, often it is not necessary. Encourage the people giving feedback to be concise, think about setting time limits, or asking groups to feedback key points. Alternatively, you could use the small group time as a way of warming people up on the topic, and invite people to bring key points to the whole group discussion without attempting to represent the rest of their group.



Go-round

1 – 3 minutes per person; 3 – 30 people

Everyone takes a turn to speak on a subject without interruption or comment from other people. Go-rounds are useful for equalising participation and giving everyone some clear space to express their opinion. Allowing people to 'pass' means that no-one feels put on the spot. To keep it focused clearly state what the purpose of the go-round is and write the question on a flipchart where everyone can see it. You can set time limits as necessary.

Paired listening

5 – 15 minutes; 2 people per group

This tool creates a space where everyone is heard, enabling participants to explore and formulate their own thoughts or feelings on an issue without interruption. It can help in uncovering and resolving conflict as well as allowing people to gather and consolidate their thoughts before a group discussion. Listening in pairs is also a good way of developing skills in active listening.

Split into pairs, one person is the listener, the other the speaker. The speaker talks about their thoughts or feelings on the issue that you've chosen. Encourage the thinker to speak first thoughts – that is to speak as thoughts enter the mind without analysing or holding back. This may seem difficult at first – think of it as holding an internal monologue, but out loud. The role of the listener is to give full attention to the thinker without interrupting, questioning or commenting. The listener can provide an attentive and supportive atmosphere through eye contact, body language, encouraging noises, smiles and nods. If the thinker gets stuck the listener may ask open questions such as “How do you feel about that? Why do you think that?” If the listener offers a summary at the end, it can help to check understanding and reassure the speaker that they've been heard. After a set time (one - four minutes is usually plenty) thinker and listener swap roles.

Roleplays and simulations

10 minutes – 3 hours; 5 – 100 people

Both roleplays and simulations are an opportunity to enact a scenario, practice skills around that scenario, and explore emotional reactions to it. The difference is simple. If people are taking on a specific role within the scenario it's a roleplay. If they are exploring a scenario as themselves it's a simulation. In some situations some participants will be themselves whilst others take on roles and interact with them. Simulations are good for practising new skills, or existing skills in new situations. Roleplays help

to understand people's reactions, and can give insights into the thoughts and feelings of people in a different situation.

For example, if you are helping people prepare for a demonstration, you could ask someone to roleplay someone whose journey was delayed by all the people in the street. Spend time exploring what might be going on for this person, and practising different ways of responding. This can be much more powerful than simply talking about how you'd react in different scenarios.

For either a roleplay or simulation, select a situation to be played out. Ask yourself what you want to examine and why. A simple situation is best. Explain the situation carefully, including the groups represented (e.g. police and protesters) and the physical layout. If you need people to take on roles ask them to volunteer– never force people to play a role they're uncomfortable with. Give them a few minutes to get into their roles. Ask everyone who is not playing to be active observers.

The facilitator stops the simulation or roleplay when enough issues have been uncovered, the exercise comes to a natural end or people want to stop. The play should also be stopped if a participant shows great tension or gets too involved. Have a short break, de-role (see below) and then evaluate the exercise.

Evaluation gives participants and observers the chance to assimilate and analyse what has happened and how well they put their skills into effect. Start by asking the players how they felt in their roles. Ask observers for their impressions and then allow discussion. What have people learnt and how will they apply their insights in real life? Discourage comments that tell participants what they should have done. Compliment people for having the courage to participate regardless of how the scenario turned out. These tools are there for learning. Use encouraging language such as "Another option that you might try is...", "Perhaps this would work...", "I learned ... from your tactic and would like to try...". If new insights come up the group might want to try them out in a new exercise rather than talk about what might happen. For more on using roleplay, see our guide *Facilitating Workshops*.

A variation...

Paired roleplay (sometimes called Hassle lines or Parallel Lines) is a quick and simple variation. It is great for getting people to explore their emotional responses to a situation, to look at body language or to prepare for a particular situation such as aggression from the public or the police during a protest or action. As with any role play, make it clear that anyone who isn't comfortable participating is welcome to act as an observer.

Usually, participants form two lines, each facing a partner. The two lines are given roles and a brief scenario and then move towards each other and play their roles. The left line, for example, may take on the role of protesters, the other side of unsympathetic passers-by, making a provocative comment such as "Get a job".

After a short time (30 seconds to two minutes) the facilitator stops the roleplay and asks a few people for their comments, e.g. how it worked and how they felt. Roles can then be swapped and scenarios varied.

(The format of two lines and people moving towards each other at the start can increase the adrenaline, which may help people get into it. For a calmer mood, pairs could simply find a space, and begin when they are ready.)

After any roleplay it's important to provide participants with the chance to de-role, that is to come out of their role and leave any strong

emotions behind. You will need to judge the level of de-roleing required, depending on the intensity of the roleplay. A simple shake, or a few deep breaths may be all that you need. Other options include taking a break, a physical game, or a visualisation that takes people's attention elsewhere (to pleasant memory, for example).



Spectrum lines

20 minutes to 1 hour; 5 - 100 people

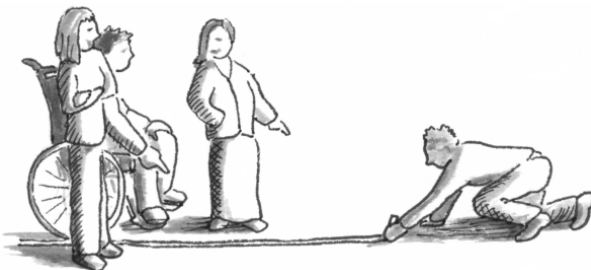
These can help to explore the different views or needs around an issue within the group. It has an element of people moving around, although if chairs are scattered round the room and there's plenty of space, people can sit if they need to.

Start by creating an imaginary or real line through the room (chalk or masking tape on the floor are good for indoor spaces). One end stands for "I agree completely", the other end for "I disagree completely". Outline the issue under debate and formulate it into a statement to agree or disagree with. Ask people to position themselves along the line according to their views. They may try out several spots before making a final choice. Ask them to have a short conversation with the person next to them, explaining why they are where they are. Then invite participants to share their viewpoints and feelings with the group. Repeat this exercise with other statements that explore the issue under discussion and see whether and how people's viewpoints change. You could also use a curved line so that people can see each other.

Be aware that in a situation where people feel anxious about expressing their opinions, then being asked to signal their differences so openly could increase that anxiety. Think carefully before using this tool for a controversial topic. This would be particularly the case in a situations where people got status for particular opinions, e.g. because they were seen as more 'radical' or more 'committed'. This tool can also have the impact of 'stirring people up' on a topic, so think about whether that will

be helpful, and whether you are well-placed to help people navigate any conflicts.

A more straight-forward use of this tool can be to see people's differences



on questions of personal needs and preferences. For example 'I feel more comfortable when I make detailed plans for exactly how something will work,' 'I like to go for the first workable option we think of, rather than spending ages coming up with the perfect decision,' 'If something bothers me, I like to raise it straight away.' These kinds of differences can lead to bad feeling in a group when they are not recognised and understood, spectrum lines can be a helpful way to bring them into the open.

Especially in a large group, spectrum lines can be a good visual way of gauging levels of commitment to particular ideas that are on the table. For example, you have several options which all seem good enough, and you can't work out how to pick one. Try a spectrum line on how keen you are to actually put each idea into practice. This may show up a clear favourite. Or it could be a starting point for discussion, e.g. 'What would we need to change about this idea to increase your level of commitment?'

Plus-minus-interesting

5 – 20 minutes; 3 – 20 people

This is a process that allows the expression of opposing views without generating too much conflict. This tool can be used in the whole group, in small groups or individually. Write the topic across the top of a large sheet of paper. Draw a plus sign, a minus sign and an "I" (which stands for Interesting). Start with the plus and ask people to list anything that they feel to be positive about the topic. Write these without comment around the plus sign. When everyone has had their say move on to the minus sign and list everything that people feel to be more negative. Around the "I" sign list everything that people find interesting, ideas that could be explored further etc. Then move back to the plus sign and start a second round. The first round finds out what's happening with the group. The second round builds upon it. One particular issue can come up in every section as what seems positive to one person could well be negative to the next.

Introductions and endings

Meetings and workshops can suffer if participants feel they haven't had time to build a rapport with the rest of the group. Building relationships and trust with each other will help you use the rest of the time much more productively. For example, more people are likely to participate, the group is more likely to express their differences or explore challenging issues.

Ending are also important. Take time to acknowledge what you've done together, and say goodbye. Where appropriate, share contacts or arrange follow on get-togethers so you can carry on what you've started, or support each other with anything that comes up afterwards. At the very least, people are more likely to go away with a satisfied and positive feeling if they have a sense of closure.

These tools could also be used in the middle of a session if appropriate, but would usually be done at the beginning or end of a meeting or workshop.

Personal introductions

30 seconds – 1 minute per person; 3 – 20 people

Each person gets a chance to introduce themselves in turn. Think what information participants might need from each other.

For example, in addition to names, you might invite people to share whether others should refer to them as he, she, they or another personal pronoun. In the mainstream world it is still common to assume that everyone is a man or a woman, and that we can tell someone's gender identity just by looking at them. Asking about pronouns at the start of a

session is likely to be helpful for anyone whose identity is frequently misread by others. It also starts to build a different culture by bringing mainstream assumptions around gender into the open.

Another important question is about access requirements, or any other information that people need other participants to know in order for them to participate effectively. ("My ears are blocked today, can everyone speak up, please." "I'm keeping my phone on because my child isn't well, and I need to get back quickly if the baby-sitter calls." "I've been having a rough time recently, if I leave the room it will be because I need a bit of space, don't feel you have to come and check up on me.")

Many people will also be more relaxed if they know a bit more information about everyone else in the room, e.g. you could ask each person to explain in one sentence why they've come to the meeting, or how they are feeling today. You can also add less 'functional' questions, e.g. 'What's your favourite vegetable?' or 'Tell us something good that happened to you in the last month.'

Pair Introductions

10 – 20 minutes; 10 – 30 people

Ask people to pair up with people they don't know or know less well. One person interviews the other for three minutes, then roles are swapped. Questions can include the reasons why the person is there and what they are hoping to learn or achieve during the event. The facilitator could also suggest specific themes to be included in the interview.

It is common to then ask people to introduce their partner to the rest of the group. In our experience, this method can be quite 'exposing' for both people. The listener may feel awkward about whether they have remembered right. The speaker may prefer to choose what they say to the whole group, and be concerned about being misrepresented. If you want to follow the paired exercise with a whole group one, you could ask pairs to choose whether to introduce each other, or themselves.

Name games

5 – 15 minutes; 10 – 30 people

There are countless games that help people remember everyone else's name. Here's one example:

The group stands in a circle facing each other. Everyone needs to think of a verb (action word) that begins with the same letter as their name. Have an initial go-round where everyone says what their name is (e.g. Jumping James). When everyone has said what they're called, start off by throwing a (real or imaginary) ball to someone while saying their name and acting out the verb (so you throw a ball to Jumping James, and jump while you say his name). James then throws the ball to the next person, while saying and acting out their name (Laughing Lindsay)... Of course you can run the same game without the verb. In large groups you can add to the challenge and keep everyone on their toes by using several balls at the same time.

People map

5 – 10 minutes; 5 – 40 people

Create a human map to show where people currently live. Indicate North, East, South & West, and allow participants to position themselves to create a map. Ask people furthest away where they are from. Continue with each cluster of people. People can also reposition themselves. In a national or international gathering this can be a helpful way to put people in touch with others who live near them.

A more personal variation would be ask people to decide where to stand based on the place they consider to be their home. Be aware that for many people 'home' will be several places, or no-where, making it hard to decide where to stand! In general, the question of 'where is your home' is likely to bring up very different levels of emotion for different people, so think carefully about whether this is helpful.

Excitement sharing

30 seconds – 2 minutes per person; 3 – 20 people

People share something exciting that has happened to them recently. Examples are: "I've harvested the first peas of the year", "My friend from New Zealand came to visit," "I've got a new job". This creates a lot of positive energy for the meeting and puts people more in touch with each other's lives. You can use this instead of introductions when people already know each other. Make sure people keep it brief. Discourage comments or questions. Don't confuse excitement sharing with announcements.

Feeling sharing

up to 1 minute per person; 3 – 30 people

Ask people to listen inwards and to consider how they feel. Then have a round with people describing in a couple of words or sentences how they feel, for example curious, nervous, tired, excited. This allows the facilitator and the group to tune into each other. If people are tired have an energiser and open the windows. You can use this at the start and then the end of a workshop to see if the workshop has had an effect on people's feelings.

Writing a letter to yourself

5 – 20 minutes; any number of people

This might seem like a strange idea, but it's a lovely way for everyone to take the time to think about what they have learnt through a workshop, and what changes they might make, or steps they might take, in their lives or work because of it. Give everyone some paper, an envelope and a pen and ask them to write a letter to themselves that outlines the main things they have learnt at the workshop, and the changes they would like to bring about. Get them to put their letter in an envelope and address it to themselves. Next collect in the letters. Explain that they won't be

opened but that they will be posted out in a couple of weeks or months. We all know that we often have great intentions of making change but simply never get around to it. However having these intentions, written in our own fair hands, land on our doormats 6 weeks later could be just the reminder we need.

Getting present

up to 5 minutes per person; 3 – 15 people

Sit in a circle so that everyone can see and hear each other. Ask each person in turn to share concerns, distractions and events that are on their mind. For example: "I'm giving a presentation this afternoon and I feel nervous." "My first grand-child was born last week." Ask everyone to give their full attention to the speaker. As facilitator you can help people if they appear stuck. Interventions could include: "Is there any action you want to take?" "Is there anything else you want to say about that?" This tool is suitable for groups that work together closely and where there is a high level of trust.

Personal object game

1 – 2 minutes per person; 5 – 20 people

Sit in a circle around a large sheet of paper. Ask everyone to take a personal item out of their pocket or bag – something that has some personal significance to them – place it on the paper and draw round it with a marker pen. Once they have drawn round it they can put it away again. Then take turns to pick one of the outlines. The person whose outline it is explains what the item is and why it's significant to them.

Workshop gifts

10 – 15 minutes; 5 – 20 people

A contemplative and fun game we've used at the end of workshops. Everyone is given a card with a 'gift' written on it. Everyone then takes

turns to explain what they will do with their gift. Example gifts are: an apple tree whose fruit has the power to grant a wish to whoever eats it, an empty train that can travel anywhere in the world, and a cloak that turns the wearer invisible.

People bingo

10 – 20 minutes; 5 – 40 people

A flexible and gentle icebreaker. Write down a list of questions you would like each person in the group to find answers to from other people in the group. The question can be specific to the session e.g. “What qualities do you have that makes you a good trainer?” or generic “How are you feeling today?” It is useful for everyone to have questions on sheet of paper to carry around and fill in answers as they get them. Each person should only ask one question to one person then find somebody else to introduce themselves to and ask another question. When they have found answers to all their questions they shout bingo and have finished. Ten questions gets people well mixed and a lot of information shared.

Building trust

These exercises aim to build trust in a group by sharing personal stories and feelings with each other, or helping people connect in a less verbal way.

Generally, people learn greater trust if they leave their comfort zone, but don't stretch themselves to the point of panic! Be aware that people will vary massively in terms of which activities bring a helpful level of risk. For example, we all have very different experiences of talking about our feelings, making physical contact or being 'silly' and playful.

Be aware that when a group as whole seems to be comfortable with something, there are likely to be individuals for whom it is more difficult. For example, if the majority is doing a lot of emotional exposure, there will be some people who feel peer-pressured to join in, possibly past a level that is actually helpful for them. As a facilitator, you could try varying the types of risk you introduce in different exercises.

Make sure that the participants have as much control as possible over what risks they choose to take. Let people know what an exercise involves, so they can make an informed choice about whether to join in. If people are sharing personal information, choose open-ended questions where participants can decide what they want to share about themselves. If people are doing an exercise in groups or pairs, encourage them to start with a discussion about how to make it work for them.

Before choosing activities, consider any access requirements that participants have told you about. Trust building exercises could be counterproductive if you set them up so that not everyone has the choice whether to join in!

A journey of discovery

15 – 30 minutes; any number of people, depending on space

Go outside into a garden, park or countryside. Form into pairs. One person closes their eyes, the other guides that person by the hand and takes them to discover natural objects with all their senses apart from sight. Swap roles after a set time. Participants need to be very careful not to abuse the trust placed in them by their partners – it may be very pleasant to touch and smell a flower, but not a thistle! This exercise may work best if people have a bit of time to discuss what kinds of objects they are OK to touch, (e.g. "Please don't give me anything slimy"). A variant some partners could try would be to simply collect objects for each other to explore with their eyes closed, e.g. if they aren't comfortable being led around by the hand.

Trust circle

10 – 15 minutes; 10 – 20 people per group

Ask the group to form a tight circle facing inwards. One person stands in the centre. They allow themselves to relax, and fall backwards, safe in the knowledge that their team-mates will catch them and then 'bounce' them gently round the circle. The tighter the circle, the less risk of accidents! People could start with a very tight circle, and gradually increase the distance they are falling if they become more comfortable. Allow everyone that wants to to have a turn. This can be a lovely, relaxing and enjoyable game that brings groups together, but it obviously carries some risk. This game won't be accessible to everyone - it relies on feeling comfortable being touched, and on people being physically able to catch and hold each other. Think carefully whether it will be helpful for your group.

Trust ladder

10 – 20 minutes; 10 – 30 people

Form two parallel lines facing each other, standing close together in all directions. One person volunteers to go first and stands at one end of the parallel lines and fall forward, crowd surfing style. The group lifts them and passes them down their double line, gently depositing them at the end. They then take their place in the ladder and the next volunteer has a go. Again, consider accessibility requirements before introducing this game!

Mirroring

5 – 15 minutes; any number of people, depending on space

Split into pairs standing opposite each other. One person makes movements, the other tries to mirror them as well as they can. Swap roles. When both have played both roles, they can try to coordinate movements with each other, so that both become player and mirror at the same time. This works best with slow movements and needs a lot of concentration. Try not to talk while playing.



Skilled hand exercise

15 – 25 minutes; 4 – 100 people

Hand out paper and pens. Ask everyone to draw around their hands and to write something they do well into each of the fingers. Split into pairs. Pairs take turns discussing things they do well and how they acquired those skills. This exercise helps people find out more about each other. It may also help some people to get into a positive and confident head space. Be aware though that this exercise could be demoralising for anyone who doesn't value or recognise their own skills! Try giving very varied prompts for things people might consider skills, to give the maximum chance that everyone can think of something to write in each finger! Or if people know each other already, they could draw round their hand and add their name, and then other members of the group could add in their skills.



Picture yourself

20 – 40 minutes; 6 – 20 people

Hand out coloured paper and coloured pens. Ask people to draw or paint a picture that expresses who they are. When everyone has finished ask people to pair up and explain their pictures to their partners. The partners then introduce each other to the group using the picture.

Encouraging discussion and participation

Many of these techniques will help make discussion a safer space for quieter voices. They can also be used to formally explore group dynamics. Other tools already mentioned, such as group agreements and go-rounds are also excellent participation tools.

Parking space

1 – 2 minutes to set up; any number of people

This makes sure all ideas get recorded and participants don't feel like they've been ignored. Whenever anything comes up that's not relevant to the discussion at hand 'park' it in the parking space (a large sheet of paper on the wall). In other words write it up on the paper and deal with it later. This allows you to stay focussed but reassures participants they will be heard. Of course, if you want to avoid people feeling ignored, make sure you do deal with parked items! Consider having a space reserved on the workshop or meeting agenda to deal with parked items.

Keeping a speakers list

any number of people

A tool that's used in conjunction with hand-signals (see *Core facilitation tools* above). It simply involves asking people to raise a finger when they wish to speak, and noting them down in order. They are then invited to speak in that order.

Matchstick discussion

Any number of people

This can be used to place limits on over-eager speakers. It also encourages shy speakers to contribute. Each person is given the same number of matches (one to five matches depending on time available.) Every time someone speaks they give up a match. When someone has used all their matches they may not speak again until everyone else's matches are gone too. Decide beforehand whether people may give their matches to other members of the group.

Talking sticks

any number of people

You can use a stick or a conch shell or almost any other distinctive object. Place the talking stick in the centre of the group. Speakers take it from the centre, say their piece and return it to the middle. Only the person holding the talking stick is permitted to speak (you can set a time limit if necessary). This tool allows people to consider and take their time in voicing their views as they don't have to be afraid that someone else might jump in. It also makes people conscious of when they interrupt others.



Tackling challenging issues

Here are some tools that are useful when dealing with challenging issues in the group. They are designed to bring issues into the open, and help people express themselves and be heard.

Bear in mind that working with conflict requires both skill and experience. One option is to stop the meeting and seek help from experienced facilitators, such as those at Activist Mediation Network – www.activistmediation.org.uk

Feelings meeting

30 minutes – 2 hours; 3 – 30 people

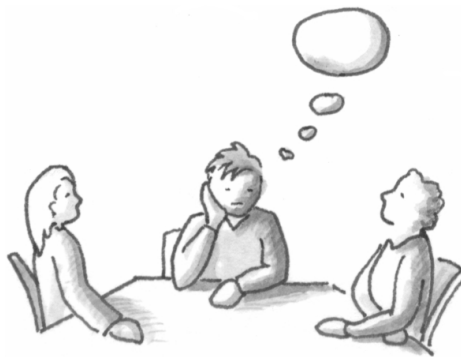
A meeting which is solely concerned with feelings. Many groups hold regular feelings meetings to catch any problems early. Participants do not have to deal with decisions and actions. This allows the group to involve and support members as whole people and to resolve concerns, problems and conflicts before they become too serious. It helps to use tools such as talking sticks or go-rounds to encourage active listening. Encourage people to speak for themselves, rather than assuming that others share their feelings. Begin by asking people about where they are at in their lives outside the group. This will give a context for everyone's reactions when you come on to issues within the group. Listen for what is not being said. Some people and groups find it hard to admit to negative feelings and tiptoe around conflicts. Create a safe enough space so that people feel able to open up.

Sharing withholds

15 – 40 minutes; 5 – 30 people

Withholds are thoughts that we keep to ourselves. They usually have to do with judgements about ourselves, others, or what is happening in the group. For this tool to work there needs to be a climate of generous listening, which may take some time to achieve. It may be helpful if the group commits to putting aside enough time to relax together and do this exercise.

Set up an unstructured round asking people to make statements beginning with: “If I could change one thing in the group it would be...”, “What upsets me about this group is ...”. Do not allow anyone to respond to the withholds or start a discussion. Make sure that everyone has a say – it is highly unlikely that someone is completely happy with a group. At the end of the round, see if any themes have emerged and if anyone wants their issue discussed.



Controlled dialogue

30 minutes – 1 hour; 3 people per group

This tool is helpful when two people find it difficult to listen to each other and understand each other's concerns. Form a group of three, one observer and two speakers/listeners. There are three phases to this form of dialogue – after a set amount of time or points, the group can go on to the next phase:

1. The listener repeats word for word what the speaker has said. Only then are they allowed to answer.
2. The listener summarises what the speaker has said and then answers.
3. When answering the listener addresses all issues and concerns of the speaker.

The observer makes sure participants stick to the format and helps out if necessary. Particularly in the first and second phase the speaker should concentrate on essential points as listening requires a lot of concentration. You can also use this exercise to practise listening and responding skills in the group.

Quick and easy prioritisation

There are several quick and easy methods to gauge group opinion, so that you can get a sense of which issues people have most interest in...

Prioritisation tools help you spot quickly which ideas people think are urgent, important or useful. This is not the same as a majority vote. If an idea matters a lot to one or two people, it is important not to dismiss it without discussion. Rather than automatically dropping the less popular ideas, you could leave open the option for people to explain why they are important and potentially add them back to the agenda.

It can help to keep a record of all the ideas. Even if you don't have the capacity to address them all immediately, they can feed in to later discussions.

Show of hands

2 – 5 minutes; any number of people

Obvious but effective. Run through your list or agenda and get a preliminary show of hands on how important each item is to the group. Those options that have less support are good candidates for being set aside.

Temperature check

3 – 5 minutes; any number of people

Another simple visual tool. Ask everyone to imagine a vertical axis with support for an idea at the top and no support at the bottom. Get them to stick out their hands and raise them along the imaginary axis for support

(the higher the hand the more support) or lower it for opposition (the lower the hand the more opposition). If all the hands are up, you know the group likes the idea. If all of them are on the floor, it's not going to work. If there's a wide range of different responses you have the starting point for a conversation!

This is also called a Thumb Spectrum - in which case people raise/lower just their thumbs.

Fist To five

5 - 10 minutes; any number of people

A more complex version of the show of hands. Group members stick up:

- ✓ Five fingers for strong support and a willingness to lead the proposal forward.
- ✓ Four fingers for strong support, and a willingness to work on it.
- ✓ Three fingers for minimal support, but a willingness to work for it.
- ✓ Two fingers for neutrality.
- ✓ One finger for no support.
- ✓ Fist for no support and active opposition.

Stickers and dots

5 - 10 minutes; up to 50 people

You can achieve the same effect by giving everyone a number of stickers or dots (1-6 usually works). Write up a list of the ideas. Ask people to stick their stickers or make their dots by the item(s) that they consider to be most important for the group to deal with. If you give multiple dots or stickers, people have the choice of 'spending' them all on one item that they feel is really important/urgent, or spreading them across a number of options.

Evaluating ideas

These tools enable you to explore ideas in much more depth, and evaluate how well they will work. In most cases it is useful to remember that your options aren't necessarily limited to the ones that are currently on the table. If you can't decide between two ideas, can you find a new option that combines the benefits of both, and addresses key concerns? You can use these tools to get a better understanding of everyone's priorities, even if you don't end up going ahead with any of the options exactly as they are.

2, 4, 8 consensus

1 – 3 hours; 8 – 40 people

This exercise will take time, but will help a group reach a decision that everyone can live with! Probably not one you'd use every meeting, but useful for the really important discussions. It's usually best to impose tight time limits at every stage of this discussion or it can take ages!

1. Start in Pairs. Each pair discusses the list of options and is asked to agree their top three priorities.
2. Each pair then comes together with another to form a group of four. The two pairs compare their lists of top three priorities and agree on a joint top three.
3. Each group of four comes together with another to form a group of eight. Again, each group takes its two lists of priorities and reduces it to an agreed top three.
4. Repeat until the whole group has come back together. Hopefully three clear priorities have emerged. In the worst case scenario the group has six top priorities and may need to reduce it still further through facilitated discussion or another prioritisation tool.

Ranking

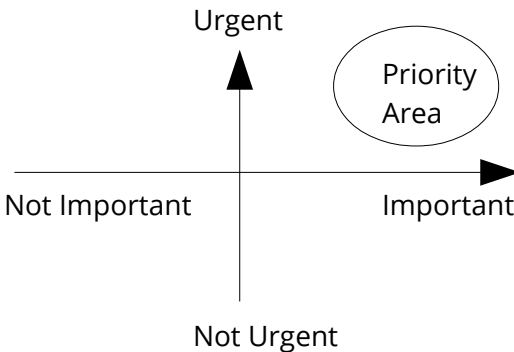
10 – 20 minutes; 5 – 20 people

This is a great technique for using in small groups. Write each option on a card or post-it note and give each group a full set of cards/notes. Set a time limit and ask the groups to rank the options, or reduce the options to, say, three. Having a facilitator in each small group will help. It's also helpful to set out clear criteria at the start – for example: "You've got 15 minutes. We're looking for options that need to be done most urgently, are most important, and yet realistic within our budget. Also we've only got a week to make it happen, so please think about what we can realistically achieve in the time available."

Urgent/Important grid

10 – 20 minutes; 3 – 50 people

A classic time-management tool that can be applied to group prioritisation! You can use this tool on paper, or drawn out on the floor. (If using the floor, it is best to mark the lines using string or masking tape, so that it is easy to see the whole grid. Add labels at the end of the lines to remind people what they mean). The group ranks ideas according to their urgency and importance:



Six thinking hats

30 minutes – 1 hour; 5 – 20 people per group

This tool encourages a group to look at a situation from a new angle. Each 'hat' represents a different way of looking at something. There are a number of ways to do this exercise. For example, individuals within the group can wear different hats whilst the group discuss an issue. Another alternative is that everyone in the group can try on one of the 'thinking hats' for a while, then everyone can put on another one. As facilitator you may want to think about the order in which the group wear the different 'thinking hats'. Below is one possible order for a creative problem solving process. The roles the 'hats' bring give you a chance to thoroughly examine every option and to prioritise or choose the best one(s).



- ✓ White hat: White hatted people concentrate on the facts – what information and knowledge do you know about the situation? What can you learn about the situation from this information? What info is missing? Can you plug the gap? If not can you take it into account when discussing the situation? What can you learn from past trends?
- ✓ Green hat: Green hat people think creatively in a no-criticism, free-form thinking kind of way.
- ✓ Red hat: Red hats are the emotional input of the discussion. They allow themselves to be intuitive and act as much on hunches as fact. They are sensitive to the emotional responses of others in the group.
- ✓ Black hat: Black hatted people evaluate ideas logically, and look for reasons to be cautious.
- ✓ Yellow hat: Yellow hats should think optimistically - looking for the

value in every possibility. What benefits does it bring?

- ✓ **Blue hat:** The blue hat is worn by the facilitator(s). They concentrate on process, calling on the other hats to add in their thinking as and when it's appropriate and making sure that each option is scrutinised from all perspectives. They are neutral, helping the group achieve it's task without trying to shape the decision.

This tool actively seeks out the optimistic analysis, the pessimistic analysis etc., so every idea is thoroughly tested and when the decision is made, it's made on the basis of a creative and thorough process.

Pros & cons

15 – 30 minutes; 3 – 20 people per group

Got several ideas and can't decide which one to go for? Simply list the benefits and drawbacks of each idea and compare the results. This can be done as a full group, or by asking pairs, or small groups to work on the pros and cons of one option and report back to the group. One benefit of this tool, is that it allows you to talk about the drawbacks of particular ideas in a way that isn't too personalised.

You may find that you don't all agree about what is a pro and what is a con. Or perhaps you have very different ideas about which pros and cons are most significant. This can be a good starting point for discussion about what you are trying to achieve, what needs and priorities you have etc.

Plus-minus-implications

15 – 30 minutes; 3 – 20 people per group

A variation of the simple 'pros & cons' technique. It will help you decide between a number of options by examining them one by one.

Create a simple table with three columns titled Plus, Minus, and Implications. In the Plus column write down the positive consequences of the option. In the Minus column write any negative consequences of the action, and in the Implications column write down other possible implications whether good or bad.

As with 'Pros and cons' above, you may find you don't all agree about which criteria goes in which column. Again, this tool can be a springboard for a deeper discussion about your different perspectives.

One alternative is to try scoring the columns, according to how significant a plus or minus something is. Bear in mind again, that people may have different ideas about what score each item should have! Rather than trying to come up with a definitive score for each item, you could think about the scoring system as another way of bringing different priorities into the open. Or measure the 'score' with a tool that allows each person to give their own answer, e.g. using a temperature check (see page 31 above).

Waking up, warming up and winding down

When people stop concentrating or become irritable in a meeting, this could simply be because they've been sitting and listening for too long. A stretch or a game can re-energise people. Games can change the atmosphere in other ways – from lifting the spirits in the group to creating a quieter, more contemplative mood. Be sensitive to the group and individual members – the idea is to relax people, not for them to feel embarrassed or isolated. Don't coerce people into playing games. If people don't feel like playing, they could get themselves a cup of tea or go to the toilet.

It can help to think through what games will be suitable for your group in advance, so that you can meet everyone's access requirements. Sometimes a short break or a pause to stretch can enable everyone to do for themselves whatever they need to do. This may seem less 'exciting' than a game, but could be better than a 'fun activity' that only some people can participate in!

Count to ten

10 minutes; 5 – 20 people

An excellent game for focusing people and getting them to work together. It creates laughter and energy without requiring movement or physical contact. With everyone sitting or standing in a circle, explain that they have to count upwards – set a target (usually 10) if you like.

Only one person can say any one number. If at any stage two or more people speak simultaneously the group have to go back to 1 and start again. Nor can the same person say more than one number in

succession. Some groups will discover a way to 'cheat' (e.g. co-ordinate who speaks using gestures). You could acknowledge their co-operative skills, and then ask them to try again with a twist. For example, ask them to shut their eyes, or turn their backs so they can't see each other!

Rain making

5 minutes; 1–100 people

This is a lovely co-operative game that always brings a group together and lights up people's faces! Ask everyone to gather around you in a tight semi-circle, several people deep. Divide the semi-circle into three groups. Explain that you're all going to create a rainstorm by making four simple sounds in a round. The sounds are as follows...



- ✓ Drizzle – gently rub your palms together to produce a whispering sound.
- ✓ Light rain – move your hands up and down in opposite directions, with the palms brushing against each other, as if you are brushing sand off the palms.
- ✓ Heavy rain – clap your hands together.
- ✓ Hail – cup your palms and clap them against your thighs.

Start off group one on making drizzle. Once that's under way turn and signal to group two to start with drizzle, then group three. Turn back to group 1 and get them to start light rain whilst the other maintain their drizzle, then turn to group two and do the same, then group three. Keep the round alive until all segments are making hail. Then work backwards so that group one stop hailing and make heavy rain, then two, then three, until you work back through light rain to drizzle and then silence!

Green trousers game

10 minutes; 5 – 20 people

Form a circle of chairs, one per person. One person goes in the middle and their chair is taken away. They call out something that is true of themselves like "Everyone with green trousers". Everyone with green trousers (including the person in the middle) then rushes to a seat vacated by someone else. The person left without a seat remains in the middle to call out something else.

As it is described here, this game relies on everyone being able to jump out of their seat and race to another one. This poses some obvious accessibility problems! Even if everyone is able to swap seats, it may still be exclusionary in a group where people move at very different speeds from each other, and the same few individuals are always left in the middle.

Knot game

10 minutes; 10 – 20 people

Stand in a circle, close your eyes. Move towards the centre of the circle with outstretched hands. Find another hand for each of yours. Then open your eyes. Unravel the knot without opening hands.

Involves getting physically close to others, stretching, laughing and problem solving. Make two simultaneous groups if there is a large number of people.

Animal sounds

5 minutes; 10 – 50 people

Participants are blindfolded and assigned an animal. The challenge is to use animal noises in order to meet up with other animals of the same species. Aim to have at least three animals of each species. Releases energy. Loud, fun, chaotic, then gradually order and unity.

Wizards, pixies, giants

10 minutes; 10 – 100 people

A very physical team version of 'Rock, Paper, Scissors'! Sort the group into two teams and explain that each team has to choose one of three options – Wizards, Pixies, or Giants. Demonstrate the action for each choice. Wizards move forward and use their arms to 'zap' their opponents (and of course say "Zap!" as they do so). Pixies bend down low and scurry around in circles quickly whilst chattering to themselves in high-pitched gibberish.

Giants move forward and raise themselves to their full height (arms stretched above their heads, hands clawed) and they roar. Obviously. Now get the teams to huddle together and give them a minute or two to agree their choice. Then they stand facing each other across the room, and on your count of "One...Two..." they take two steps forward. On the count of "Three..." they do their thing, be it wizardly, pixie like or gigantic.

Here's how to score:

- Wizards 'zap' all known Pixies and they fall asleep.
- Pixies scurry round giants legs distracting them.
- Giants overpower wizards by stomping around them.

Play enough rounds for a clear winner to emerge, or until laughing begins to hurt. One variation sees the winning team chase the losers. Any losers that are touched before they get to the safety of their starting point join the winning team. The game is won when one team captures all of the other.



Body part twister

5 minutes; 5 – 20 people

Great for getting people working together and energised, it is physical and needs people to be comfortable leaning on each other. Call out different body parts, these are the only parts of the body the whole group can have touching the floor. Encourage people to work together to find a solution and balance on each other if they need to. For example, to a group of nine people you could call out four bums, two feet, one head, two hands, four knees. Call out the next set of instructions as soon as everyone is in position. Think before you call out combinations or you could call out something that is physically or numerically impossible!

Eye-catching

5 minutes; 10 – 20 people

Ask the group to stand or sit in a circle. People look at ground, then on "Heads up" look into someone else's eyes at some point around the circle. If two people are looking at each other, they must swap places with each other. If anyone moves and no one is looking at them or they sit in the seat of someone who hasn't been looking at them, they are out.

Who am I?

15 minutes; 5 – 10 people

Ask everyone to think of someone they admire who they could answer questions about. This person should be known to most of the group. Keep it a secret. The group asks one person at a time questions about the person they admire until they guess it. The group gets three goes to guess the identity, if they don't get it in three attempts that person wins.

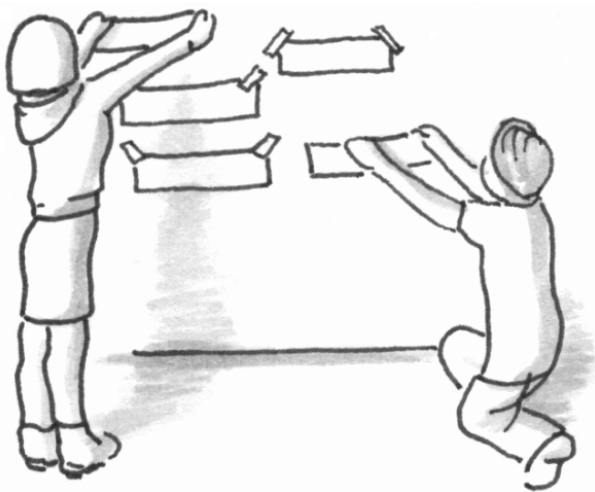
Evaluating meetings and workshops

Evaluation allows us to learn from our experiences. It should be a regular part of our workshops as it give us the chance for honest feedback on the process and content of the event, allowing us to improve in the future. Everyone who participated in an event should be encouraged to take part in its evaluation. Bear in mind that there will be differences of opinion and that it is not necessary for the group to come to agreement on the matter. It is important to point out what was successful as well as what could have gone better. Begin with positive evaluations wherever possible. The structure of the evaluation should be planned carefully – how will you draw out what type of information? Keep evaluations of the process and of the content of the events separate.

Below are some possibilities:

- Have a round where everyone sums up their feelings or ask everyone to write down comments on a large piece of paper.
- Ask everyone to call out two or three high and low points of the workshop.
- Draw up an evaluation questionnaire and distribute it amongst the participants for filling in.
- Ask “What are you taking away from this session?” This rapid review can help people notice what they have learned.
- At the beginning, ask people to write their hopes and fears for the workshop or meeting on post-it notes and stick them on the wall. At the end ask them to take down any hopes that have been fulfilled and fears that have been dealt with or proved unfounded.

- List the expectations that were gathered at the beginning of the meeting. To what extent were they satisfied or changed as the event progressed? Do the same with goals.
- Use a graph on a large piece of paper representing the entire workshop. Each participant, using a different coloured pen, crayon or chalk, draws a line from one end to the other, drawing it above or below a central line depending on how much they have enjoyed/gained from the session.



Facilitation tools for meetings and workshops

A compilation of tools and techniques for working in groups and facilitating meetings or workshops.

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