

Constructivist Facilitation Top Ten

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Facilitation needs consideration, guidance and perspective to support others

1] Co-create the agenda

At the start of the session ask participants what they would find worthwhile talking about? If the list is too long, help consolidate by asking for their guidance on preference. Encourage participants to initial their top three topics and then you know who wants to talk about what.

2] Gain permission to facilitate

Explain your role from the start. This will make it easier to intervene and move the conversation on when the group needs it. Ask everyone's permission to move the conversation on if you feel they are drifting. As facilitator your primary role is to aid the conversation rather than to provide answers, but participants can ask your opinion too.

3] Use the facilitation modes

Presentation: Transmission of information. Keep it short and clear. Allow opportunity for discussion.

Breakout: Small group discussion. Allow ideas to emerge in a safe setting. Chance to engage with content from the presentation. Create representative summary to bring back to the whole group.

Guided Q&A: Explore content or questions to be asked. More exposed than breakouts. Use for less difficult conversations. Go to confident speakers if no one asks a question. Invite contributions from people who haven't spoken.

Guided plenary: Strikes balance between in-depth conversation and group participation. It is a more advanced technique in which facilitator creates a safe space for a two-way conversation in front of the audience. Facilitator fields questions from the audience and puts them to the interviewee. Aim is for individual not to feel exposed.

4] Be strict on process

In facilitation we control the process but not the content. Having enabled the participants to establish the agenda or priorities, be strict on how you want to facilitate the conversation. Participants will be looking for you to be in control of the session, and you can do this through the process.

5] Use Catalytic Style

As taught by my colleague Nick Zienau at Intelligent Action, this style of listening, asking quick questions and offering short summaries is good for Q&A and guided plenary. It helps draw thinking out from the person you are speaking to without injecting your own ideas. It can help unblock thinking.

6] Let the group guide you on progress made

It's the group's agenda, so refer back to the agenda and ask them how much progress they think they are making. They can help you decide where to turn the conversation next. If individuals in the room had identified certain topics you haven't reached yet, ask if they still think they are relevant - the topic may have been covered in their breakout room.

7] Laugh, name the feeling in the room

In facilitation mode you are riding the conversation with the participants, rather than working from a pre-defined script, so you will be responding to things as they happen. To be authentic, name what is happening, name how you are feeling and your participants will trust you. You can deal with most problems if you stay open about what is happening.

8] Bringing in contributions

Don't ask a newly assembled group difficult questions in the open. You need to build the confidence of the group to participate. Early on, start the groups talking to each other in breakout rooms. Invite participants to bring back something from the breakout that they can share with the whole group. Only later can you ask open questions to the whole group. If there are some people over-contributing, say "I'd like to bring in some different voices."

9] Using chat

This from my colleague Nick Francis at Imagine Engineering. After an online breakout session, ask everyone to write a comment about what they talked about in the chat box. You then have both a record of the ideas that came up, and an easy way to ask individuals to say more about something they have written.

10] Don't slip back into presentation mode

Tell-tale signs that you are slipping back into presentation mode:

- You have a slide for every part of the session
 - You are scripting the session
 - Success is that you have got your point across rather than the group has had a worthwhile conversation.
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