

## Group Facilitation Techniques and Methods

When facilitating groups, careful preparation is required to consider the best facilitation group working techniques and methods to help the group achieve their goal.

Listed alphabetically below are some of the best group facilitation techniques to help your team achieve their goal. They are useful to aid idea generation, raise energy and help make group decisions.

You may also find our [tips for facilitating groups](#) helpful.

### 1. **Action planning:**

Action planning is vital for team success. It is a simple and effective technique for gaining commitment for action. It works by carefully recording each action item, as follows:

- 'What' the action point is
- 'When' the action is to be scheduled and the estimated completion date
- 'Who' is assigned against the action
- Progress against the action (leave blank initially)

To save time, it is often best to leave the assignment of action points to the end of the meeting/event. In summary, here are a few key rules for the effective use of action planning:

- Do not nominate an individual for an action, unless he or she agrees to take it on
- Describe actions in precise, clearly understood terminology and with an agreed deadline for completion
- The team must agree that each action is worth doing
- Progress must be tracked and reported on at each meeting or agreed interval

In addition, some organisations use a visual method of tracking progress against their action plans. Typically, these use a 'red', 'amber' and 'green', traffic light analogy. In this context, 'red' means the action point has not yet started, 'amber' means it is in progress and 'green' means it has been fully completed.

See [tips on delegating work](#) for help.

### 2. **Brainstorming:**

Brainstorming is an ideal tool for generating a large quantity of ideas within the group. However, to make brainstorming sessions effective:

- Ideas should flow freely
- Aim for quantity, not quality of ideas

- Record every idea clearly
- Do not criticise or evaluate ideas in the session
- Consider an independent facilitator to the group

In addition, the facilitator should also encourage the team to come up with several 'off the wall' or 'wacky' ideas. These can often stimulate the ideal solution.

See our [tips on developing creativity](#) for help.

### 3. **Energisers:**

Energisers are ideal to raise personal energy levels within the group. Use these, where necessary, at appropriate intervals throughout the day, to re-vitalise the group. You can build up your repertoire of energisers by reviewing training manuals, sharing ideas with colleagues and thinking up your own.

The key principles of using energisers are:

- They should be fun and uplifting
- Make them short e.g. five minutes
- Conduct them with sufficient space
- To be mindful of any potential health and safety hazards e.g. no chairs or equipment in the way
- They are not physically too demanding and that everyone in the group will be able to participate

See our [tips on improving meeting energy levels](#).

### 4. **Flipchart:**

Using a flipchart during a team meeting can provide a creative, yet structured, working environment and bring focus to the group. Here are a few tips for effective flipchart use:

- Place the flipchart at the front of the group
- Ensure you have plenty of flipchart paper to hand
- Stand to the side of the flipchart to ensure everyone can see
- Whilst standing to one side, practice writing on flipchart. If you are right handed you may find standing to the left (facing the flipchart) of the flipchart easier
- Write headings, where appropriate, onto the flipchart to focus the group on the issue or question
- Use clear, bold, large font – ('capitals only' helps some facilitators), to ensure the participants can read easily
- Utilise different colours and bullet points when writing on the flipchart. However, remember that 'red' and 'green' are not helpful for group members who are colour blind.

### **5. Go Wild:**

The 'Go Wild' facilitation method involves writing down 20 ideas beginning with the phrase 'wouldn't it be good if...'

As a result, the group is encouraged to come up with better and more imaginative solutions. To begin with, the statements might be obvious and predictable, but will become increasingly creative and 'wild' as you go on.

For help, try our [group facilitation training](#) (available in the UK).

### **6. Ground Rules:**

First, the facilitator or meeting leader should get the group to establish some 'ground rules' or a 'team code' for group working. Do this at an early stage of the group coming together.

In addition, key principles for setting these ground rules are that they:

- Establish an acceptable code of behaviour
- Provide a frame of reference for group members to challenge constructively
- Help the group gain agreement of what is important
- Are specific enough to be practical
- Do not stifle the groups' creativity
- Remain within the team

So how do you go about setting these group working rules?

We suggest:

- Getting the group and recording feedback on the flipchart
- Asking each individual in the group to summarise their own thoughts on post-it notes, then place them on the board
- If time is short, or it's a single day event, we suggest having some visuals with key words on that represent 'ground rules' or an appropriate 'team code of behaviour' for the day

### **7. Group Review:**

Getting the group to review what they have learnt and gained out of the meeting will help facilitate higher performance. This only takes five to ten minutes. Start by asking three simple questions:

- What did we do that worked well?
- Did anything not work well?
- Should we do anything differently next time?

### **8. Ice Breakers:**

Ice Breakers are ideal to get people interacting early on in the meeting and are particularly helpful for new groups coming together. In addition, they help take the group members mind off the meeting content, whilst concentrating on working with each other in a light-hearted way.

Furthermore, the icebreaker activity will make each group member feel included, and provide a bridge into the meeting itself.

The guiding principles of selecting an icebreaker are that they should be:

- Fun and engaging for the participants
- Short and simple
- Bring relevance to the subject matter of the meeting or training

### **9. Meta-planning**

Meta-planning is a simple technique that encourages individuals to express their thoughts on the issue under discussion. In summary, it involves writing key words onto Post-it notes and then collectively placing and arranging them into sub-groups on a flipchart or wall space.

Ask individuals to quietly write one idea per Post-It note and then place the notes onto a board, sheet of flipchart paper or similar. When all the notes are on the board, you (or one or two members of the group) can then collate similar ideas together and add a sub heading.

As a result, this approach helps to incorporate everyone's ideas and contributions in the shortest amount of time. It also enables the group to come to some quick conclusions.

### **10. Multi voting:**

This technique allows groups to use Brainstorming to generate a long list of ideas. Following this, it is important to narrow down these ideas into a manageable size, for realistic consideration. A selection process involving the whole group then picks the best ideas, to save time.

Here is a summary of the process:

- Once the Brainstorming has been completed, the group reviews the list to clarify and merge similar ideas/options
- Then conduct voting through a show of hands for each option. Alternatively, allow the group to go to the list and mark their choices or use a sticky dot for each viable option. Participants can vote for any number of options.
- The facilitator then counts the votes
- Votes from half of the group, or more, warrant further discussion and debate
- The facilitator will circle or make a mark against each item now worthy of further consideration

- A further vote then takes place based on the reduced list of options, although participants can only vote for half of the remaining options on the list
- Two more rounds of voting are then used to further halve the size of the list
- Typically groups need to have three to five options for further analysis
- Following this, the group then discusses the pros and cons of the remaining options
- Then debate the pros and cons of each remaining option within the group
- Finally, the group then makes a choice of the best option or identifies the top priorities for further analysis and debate

### **11. Ranking:**

Ranking is a decision-making technique that helps the group select the most appropriate and relevant idea. Firstly, you can use brainstorming to generate the quantity of ideas you are looking for. Then the group must determine a selection criterion to use, to guide their personal decision-making process, against a numerical scale.

For example, each person might apply a one to six rating, where six is their preferred choice. Finally, the scores of each participant are then added together to determine the most appropriate and relevant idea.

### **12. Reverse brainstorming:**

If the group is stuck, you could try 'Reverse Brainstorming'. Essentially, this facilitation method looks at the problem you are trying to resolve from a different angle. In summary, it considers the reverse of the problem you are trying to resolve at the time.

For example, the group might look at how to improve business communication. The reverse of this is how to make business communication worse. As a result, participants might suggest:

- Never coming out of your office
- Stop sending out newsletters
- Only communicating by email

Then, once you have the negative list, 'flip' each idea to turn it into a positive. For example:

- Come out of your office and hold more social events
- Publish newsletters on a regular basis
- Only use email when absolutely essential

In conclusion, Reverse Brainstorming can produce some thought-provoking ideas on improving issues.

### **13. Round robin:**

Round Robin is a simple facilitation technique, which aims to raise participation levels and helps define a problem, or issue. Start by asking each person in the group to state their views on the issue under discussion, without interruption.

As a result, the facilitator is then able to get the group to summarise these ideas and views, before the group moves on.

### **14. Structured problem solving/decision making**

There are many different problem-solving processes available, but essentially, most stages follow this structure:

- 1. Define the problem** - Ask each individual to define the problem as they see it, which helps clarify any misunderstanding.
- 2. Present the background** – Everyone should make available all the background information relevant to the problem. This can usually be done prior to the problem-solving session. At this stage, it is critical to highlight any constraints such as cost, timing etc.
- 3. Generate ideas** – this is the 'brainstorming stage'.
- 4. Group ideas** – This is best done by one or two of the team. They then present back to the team at a later stage. Essentially, this stage is about turning the unstructured ideas into an ordered and coherent set of options.
- 5. Choose the idea/s** – The team evaluates the ideas logically, given all the background information. They then select one or more ideas, which they consider practical and effective solutions. The pros and cons for each idea are stated and any 'non-starter ideas' eliminated at this stage.
- 6. Check commitment** – Having determined a short list of potential ideas, the team will need to consider how much commitment there is within the team to each idea and how people outside the team are likely to react.

In conclusion, many of the group working techniques already mentioned are useful at specific stages of the problem-solving/decision-making process. These tips will help you facilitate the team's progress in achieving their goal or outcome.

### **15. Three star rating:**

Three star rating is a helpful visual group decision-making technique using coloured stickers (all the same colour and star shaped).

Start by giving each participant three stars to award against their preferred option or options. The participant then distributes, or splits the stars as they wish. As a result, you have a visual record of the preferred option.

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**16. Working in pairs or trios:**

This is an ideal method of group working, particularly at the earlier stages of a meeting. It helps encourage easy participation and break down any initial barriers. As a result, it is also a good way of helping individuals define the issue the group is working on.

Discussions should last about five to ten minutes before bringing the pairs back together to discuss the issue as one group.

Please feel free to retain a copy of this guide. [Terms and conditions of use](#) apply.

You may find some of our other tips helpful such as:

- [How to Delegate Work](#)
- [Tips for Chairing Meetings](#)
- [Managing Participant Energy in Meetings](#)
- [Meeting Preparation Checklist](#)
- [High Performance Teams Guide](#)
- [Managing Project Teams](#)

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**About the Author**

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